



The Himalayan News

A NEWSLETTER OF THE HIMALAYAN



NOVEMBER 2017 ISSUE 2

**ON THE NAMING OF THE
UTTARAKHAND MOUNTAINS**
Bill Aitken



**FORTY YEARS OF THE OCEAN
TO SKY EXPEDITION**
Michael Dillon



**VITTORIO SELLA – MOUNTAIN
PHOTOGRAPHER**
Sujoy Das



**THE MAKING OF THE LUKLA
AIRSTRIP**
Bhanu Banerjee



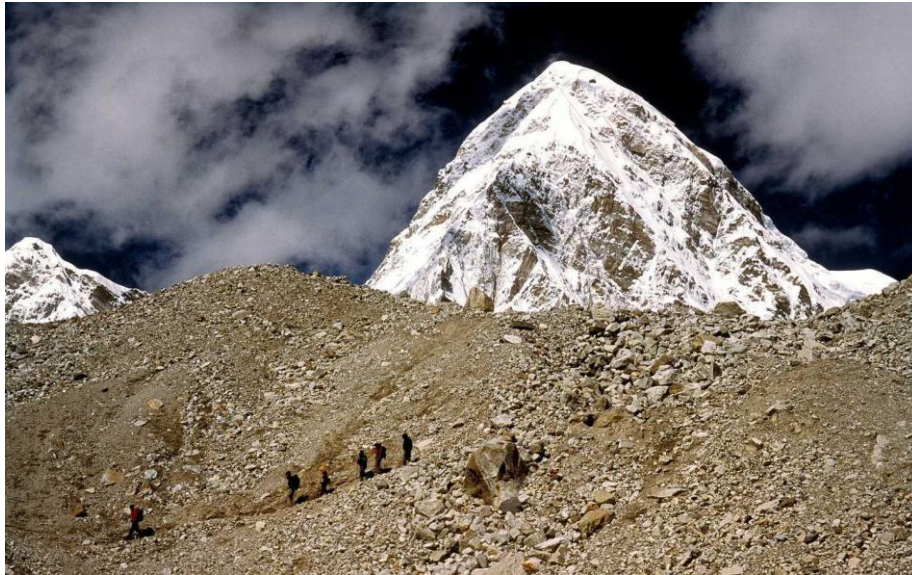
**OVER THE TOP – A FARCICAL
ACCOUNT OF CLIMBING EVEREST**
Persis Anklesaria



BOUQUETS AND BRICKBATS
Feedback from our Readers



EDITORIAL



With great pleasure, we welcome you to the second issue of The Himalayan News.

Changing weather patterns around the world continue to wreak havoc and none more so than in the Himalaya where the peak trekking season of October has been plagued with rain and bad weather. In the Eastern Himalaya, the monsoon retreated around mid October. In Nepal, the flights to Lukla in the Everest region were repeatedly cancelled leaving thousands of trekkers stranded at both Kathmandu and Lukla. The post monsoon stability in the weather has taken place in November leading one to believe that the seasons are being progressively pushed back. As we write this editorial, news has just come in of the unprecedented air pollution in Delhi leading to schools being closed and residents being told to stay off the roads. One wonders if we have any solutions to these catastrophic problems which threaten our planet?

In this our second issue, respected author and chronicler of the Garhwal, Bill Aitken presents a fascinating account of the naming of the Uttarakhand peaks. Michael Dillon was part of Sir Edmund Hillary's Ocean to Sky expedition forty years ago. In his essay he goes down memory lane, to capture the essence of this great expedition. Vittorio Sella is perhaps one of the greatest mountain photographers of all time- using primitive equipment in difficult conditions he captured classic images of the mountains that remain unparalleled even today. Bhanu Banerjee was part of Sir Edmund Hillary's search for the Yeti expedition in 1961 and he presents here a first person account of the building of the Lukla airstrip which has now become the gateway to the Everest region. And finally, avid trekker and photographer Persis Anklesaria with many visits to the Everest region presents a tongue in cheek account of climbing Mount Everest!

We wish you all the very best for the coming winter season.

Sujoy Das
Rupamanjari Biswas
Editors

ON THE NAMING OF UTTARAKHAND HIMALAYAN PEAKS

Bill Aitken



Nanda Devi –Photo by Suniti Dutta

Central to the vista of Uttarakhand snow peaks seen from Binsar is their sovereign mistress Nanda Devi alluring whether seen frontally from Kumaun where her two unequal peaks predominate or side - on from Garhwal where the singularly beautiful main peak rears solo from the Rishi Ganga gorge.

Being in Dev Bhumi the names of the Uttarakhand peaks answer to Hindu mythology. Who named Nanda Devi and when is lost in Hinduism's hoary past. It can be deduced the name giver was a male pundit with a poetic bent and erotic regard for the female mystique who probably had darshan of Nanda Devi from Kumaun where the twin peaks (especially from the Johar valley in the east) rise in splendid symmetry. The name Nanda Devi (she who arouses *ananda*, the bliss of being) happens to be more familiar to the scriptures of Bengal known for detailing the enchantments of the Devi.

Those peaks rising in close proximity to the goddess Nanda were apportioned symbolic names for their attendant significance. Nanda Ghunti (the bridal veil) sits in front of

the goddess while her taller neighbour Trisul (situated SW) declares by its trident outline to be the divine insignia declaring Nanda Devi's husband as Lord of the Snows. Recent mountaineering expeditions penetrating less accessible areas to smaller outcrops in the vicinity of the Devi have had the handle "Nanda" attached to them.

That peak names can change (or be corrected) over the years is seen in the demotion of the name Latu Dhura a former front line peak shown on the Schlagintweit map of 1857 as occupying the summit of Nanda Devi East. Because of his deep roots in folk memory Latu survives as the herald of Nanda Devi and leads her famous Raj Jat pilgrimage every twelve years. Perhaps it was this vanguard status that once earned him a seat on the front row. A clue to the prankster Latu's enduring place in folklore may lie in his portrayal as a tired pilgrim who mistaking a pot of daru for Ganga jal decides to polish it off regardless. Latu devta's name lapsed into the colonial 'Nanda Devi East' until recent years when Nainital sentiment began actively promoting the name of princess

Sunanda (younger sister of Nanda Devi) as fit to occupy the eastern summit.



Trisul from Pangkot- Photo Suniti Dutta

To the east of Nanda Devi stands perhaps the most distinctive peak in the panorama, the flat topped yet beautiful wedge shaped summit of Nanda Kot, the fortified place of the goddess. Known locally as *Ban Katiya* (the "axe blade") this is the peak most easily recognisable by the locals to whom most snow peaks seem alike by their aloof and forbidding nature and hence are all referred to as "Kailash." Further east is the remarkable even run of Panch Chuli the so-called five "cooking stalls" of the gods inevitably associated with the retirement to the Himalaya of the battle weary Pandava brothers heroes of the epic Mahabharat.

The Pandavas ardent in their devotions disturbed Shiva in Kedarnath who took the form of a buffalo to try (unsuccessfully) to conceal himself from their attentions. Village devotees queuing outside Kedarnath temple still reverently touch the testes of Nandi the bull before entering the main shrine. After being challenged over his dharmic loyalty to his dog, the senior brother Yudhisthira stood firm and both man and dog were allowed to ascend to heaven via Swargarohini ("the pathway to heaven") the last peak visible in the Uttarakhand panorama.

The initial high peaks of the Garhwal section marching westwards are magnificent in profile none more so than Chaukhamba the dominant four square fortress of ice. Its largely concealed neighbour Neelkanth

"Shiva's blue throat" (from having swallowed the poison of Samsara to save his devotees) is the scintillating summit beetling above Badrinath. Another concealed towering peak is Dunagiri whose summit was plucked off by Hanuman for the healing herb growing on it to save the life of Lakshman brother of Lord Ram. The polished granite column of Dunagiri's reclusive neighbour Changabang ("the shining mountain") believed to be entirely hidden within Nanda Devi sanctuary can actually be detected from the Mussoorie - Tehri road.

The peaks of Ghori Parvat ("the horse faced") and Hathi Parvat ("the elephant faced") are best viewed from the Kuari Pass, where their likenesses to animal heads are easily identifiable. In the early 1960's following the penetration of the motor road and the increase in Hindu nationalism after the Chinese invasion of 1962 orthodox missionaries from the plains have sought to pass off Ghori as "Gauri" Parvat and pseudo-Sanskritise Dunagiri as "Dronagiri" (guru of the Pandavas.) Likewise plains administrators renamed Chheena Peak in Nainital fearing it referred to China. The colonial memsahibs ferried to the peak on horseback imagined 'Chheena' meant a view of China! In fact "chhina" is a topographical term in Kumauni to indicate a saddle, as in Bare Chhina and Dhaul Chhina.



Bandarpunch & Kalanag – Photo Suniti Dutta



Dunagiri from the outer Nanda Devi Sanctuary –
Sujoy Das

A striking peak and amongst the most challenging with its Shark's Fin ridge is Thalay Sagar (named after the myth of the "ritual churning of the ocean"). I seem to remember this luminous peak once went by another name ("Spatik Prashtwan"?) no longer in evidence. Bordered on the east by the Jogin group (presumably named after penitent yogis) to the west lie the Gangotri peaks guarding the source of the Ganga. The name given to the solitary Bhrigupant refers to the ancient rite of ritual suicide later banned by the British. Formerly candidates for this once meritorious leap of faith signed their name on the wall of Gopeshwar math which suggests

they visited Badrinath (the deity of preservation) first. Jaonli on whose slopes the students of the Uttarkashi Nehru Institute of Mountaineering train and the peerless Srikant ("dearest of visions") spike the westward march where Banderpunch ("the monkey's tail") and its taller neighbour Kala Nag ("black peak") begin to mark the tailing off of the Garhwal run of peaks.

Politics as well as religion plays a role in nomenclature not to mention the ego of mountaineering administrators. In 1968 the highest peak of the Tirsuli massif (known to the British as 'Tirsuli South') was overnight renamed Hardeol ("the temple of Shiva") causing many later expeditions to assume Hardeol had ceased to be part of the Tirsuli massif. This led to the fatuous situation where several different peaks are claimed to be the third prong of a non-existent trident. The three 7000m peaks of the Tirsuli massif form a triangle hence the trident ascription is poetic or allegorical.

Inevitably the naming of peaks invited macho posturing as when colonial surveyors displaced the benign "Mother Goddess of the World" with the name of their departmental chief, the cantankerous misogynist Colonel George Everest. That nomenclature is still being juggled to facilitate high level back scratching is revealed in Romesh Bhattacharji's letter to a famous mountaineering journal questioning the appropriateness of a Dravidian religious name bizarrely apportioned to a Ladakhi peak which coincidentally happened to be the name of the dignitary who sanctioned a successful expedition to it.

40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE OCEAN TO SKY EXPEDITION**Michael Dillon**

Country boat on the lower Ganga

Let us travel back to 1977. The Indian Prime Minister was Morarji Desai. The cricket star was Sunil Gavaskar. The population was half of today's - just 650 million. And several million of them would make a special journey to the Ganga to watch the jet boats go by. The Ocean to Sky expedition was bound to capture India's imagination. It travelled through its heartland, along its holiest river. It was led by Everest hero Sir Edmund Hillary, in curious boats called jet boats.

Jet boats were a New Zealand invention. Instead of a propeller, water is forcefully pumped out of the stern propelling the boat forward. Thus they have a shallow draft and a better chance of climbing the treacherous rapids of the Upper Ganga. That was the expedition's aim, to travel the Ganga from the ocean to as close as possible to her source. On August 24th 1977, three jet boats bobbed in the surf at Ganga Sagar as a priest broke coconuts on their bows and blessed each expedition member. Most were New Zealanders including Hillary's son Peter, and jet boat drivers John and Mike Hamilton, the son and grandson of the inventor of the jet boat. The other jet boat would be driven by

mountaineer Jim Wilson, who'd make up in bravery what he lacked in skill.



Mingma Tsering, Capt M S Kohli & Waka Attewell

Indian members were Liaison Officer Maj. Bridhav Bhatia, Harish Sarin, Capt. Mohan Kohli and Cmdr. Joginder Singh. Prem Vaidya and BG Deware from the Govt of India Films Division were there too, along with two Sherpas. I was the sole Australian, in charge of the filming.

Right from the start the gods smiled upon us. The surf grew ever more powerful and there was a danger our 2500 kilometre expedition might just cover 25 metres. But our boats leapt over the breaking waves and soon we were in the Sundarbans where the gods kept smiling upon us. We actually saw two tigers,

both times from the safety of our jet boats rather than when we were knee deep in mud trying to haul our boat into deeper water. “Even the tigers have come out to see Sir Hillary” exclaimed a newspaper headline.



Hillary on the jet boat Ganga

People came out as well. An estimated million people watched us pass through Calcutta. It was overwhelming; we could hardly see the banks for the people. It was also empowering, to know we were doing something so culturally special and we too started to see our journey as a pilgrimage. A gate of Farraka Barrage was opened to let the jet boats through to the broad reaches of the Ganga, whose beauty was enhanced by sand carrying country boats with huge colourful sails.

Each day we’d stop at a river town to be refuelled by a major sponsor, Indian Oil, and at each town a Service club had been pre-selected to refuel us as well. In one town the Lions had been chosen to have us for lunch, and the Rotary Club, so enraged they’d missed out, stormed the lunch.

Dinners were a different matter. We’d pull into the river back, sometimes near a village, sometimes totally alone. We’d pitch our tents, have a simple meal and embrace the beauty of our surrounds.

On we went, day by day. Sometimes the river was kilometres wide but yet just centimetres deep, its shallowness hidden by the muddy water. We’d go from thirty kilometres an hour to zero in seconds, aground on a hidden mud bank. After one sudden halt I noticed my

camera was no longer in my hand. I found it on the cabin floor, thankfully undamaged. Varanasi was a special stop, particularly for jet boat driver Jim Wilson, whose life had taken more twists and turns than his jet boat. He’d once been a Christian Minister but had turned to Hinduism and done a Doctorate in Hindu Philosophy at Benares Hindu University. Jim made sure our expedition had a Puja on the holy ghats to replenish our much needed store of karma. For Hillary, the magnificent ceremony had an immediate impact. Two years earlier he’d lost his wife and youngest daughter in a plane crash and was still regaining the will to live. But something changed during that Puja. His heavy heart became lighter and his mind filled with positive energy.

Just beyond Rishikesh we struck our first rapid. It was a monster, like sailing on a huge sea in a very small boat. All three boats made it up but it was a frightening foretaste of what might lie ahead.

But even here in the hills, the Ganga would surprise and comfort us with its beauty and tranquillity. There’d be long flat sections with no one to watch our progress but goats and goatherds. And then the rapids would begin again, some so awesome that we’d need to pull up, go ashore and recce the best way through.



The author filming near Rishikesh

Some of our greatest battles happened close to mountain towns. Right below Rudraprayag was a treacherous rapid and the steep mountain town became transformed into a

giant stadium. The whole town was there, even the shopkeepers, unworried about their empty shops, because they knew the thieves were here as well, watching the jet boats. Bets were being laid by the townsfolk and it seemed those who said we wouldn't succeed might well be right. But all boats surmounted the rapid to great cheers.

By now the jet boats, through word of mouth and press coverage, had assumed almost legendary status, particularly in the hills where the only boats some may have seen were inflated buffalo hide boats or the kayaks of a Czech Expedition that had all drowned just weeks earlier. Our boats were "magic, they could leap twenty, no thirty feet", effused one newspaper.

If only they could.

Just before the town of Nandaprayag it was all over for the jet boats. An insurmountable waterfall blocked our path. "Edmund Hillary has failed" proclaimed that same newspaper. But we'd always known we'd eventually have to abandon the boats and continue on foot. Our Indian members went to Goumukh while we walked to Badrinath via Kedarnath and Hemkund. We then climbed to a high camp just below a beautiful snow peak, Akash Parbat (~5800 m) . I got to share a rope with Hillary, who despite being almost sixty was carrying as heavy a load as the rest of us. But exhaustion and a too rapid rise in altitude brought him to the brink of death with cerebral oedema.

We had to act fast. One of us ran to the valley to summon a helicopter and the rest of us bundled him up as best we could and dragged and carried him down more than a thousand metres to thicker air. Late in the afternoon a helicopter could be heard but low visibility prevented it landing. Next morning we were awoken by a whole platoon of elite Indian mountain soldiers who'd come up to help him the rest of the way down. This, and the sudden arrival of a helicopter, left us all emotionally overwhelmed, seeing Indians, who'd taken our expedition so to heart, playing such a vital role in saving Edmund Hillary's life. We felt a sense of oneness with India that has never left us.



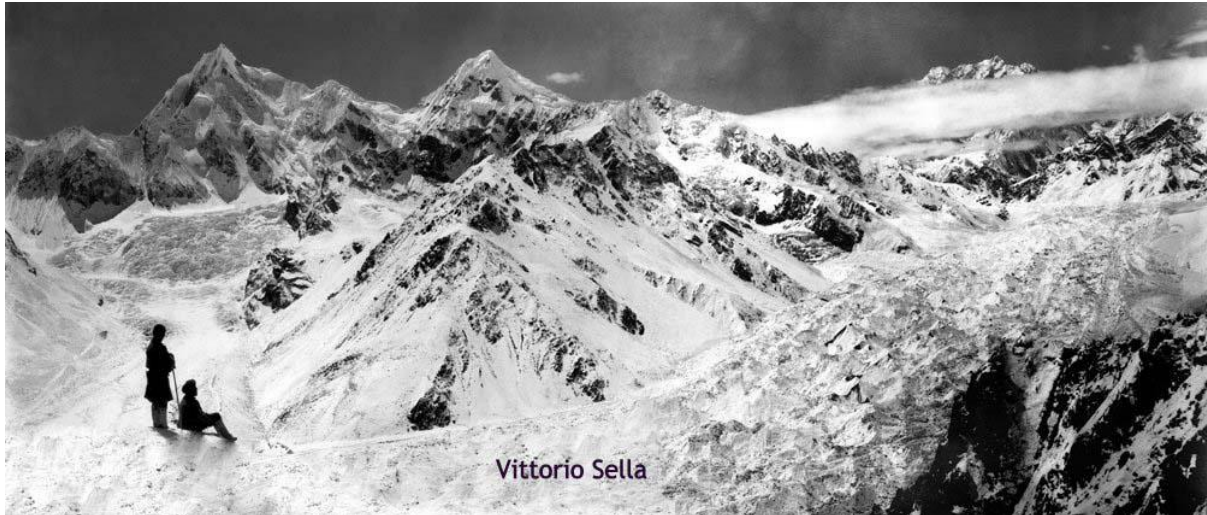
Hillary climbing to Akash Parbat High Camp

After a brief stay at Bareilly Military Hospital, Hillary recovered completely.

And to his dying day, whenever he was asked what had been his most memorable expedition, he'd always say. "It was the time I went by jet boat up the Ganga".

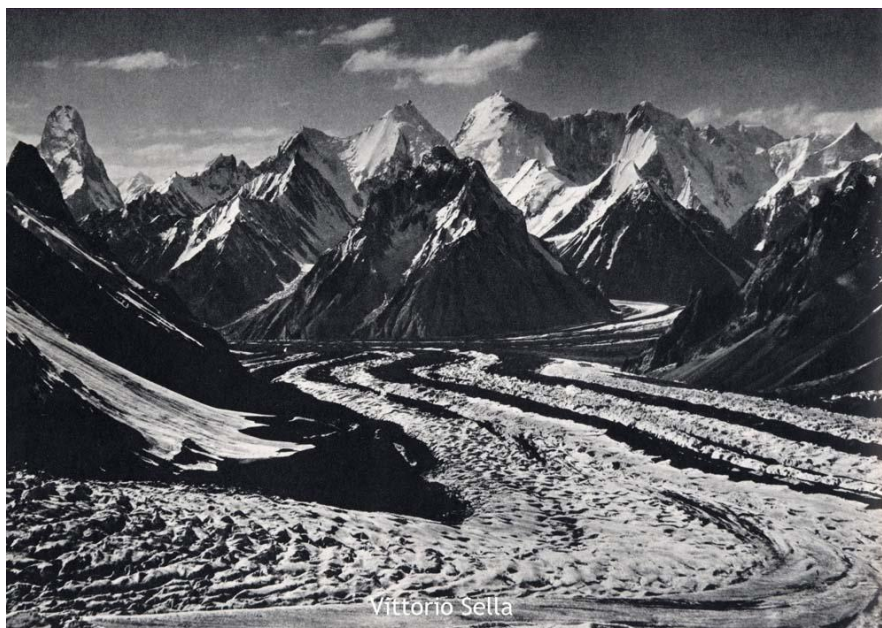
VITTORIO SELLA | MOUNTAIN PHOTOGRAPHER

Sujoy Das



Siniolchu and Kangchenjunga from the Zemu Valley

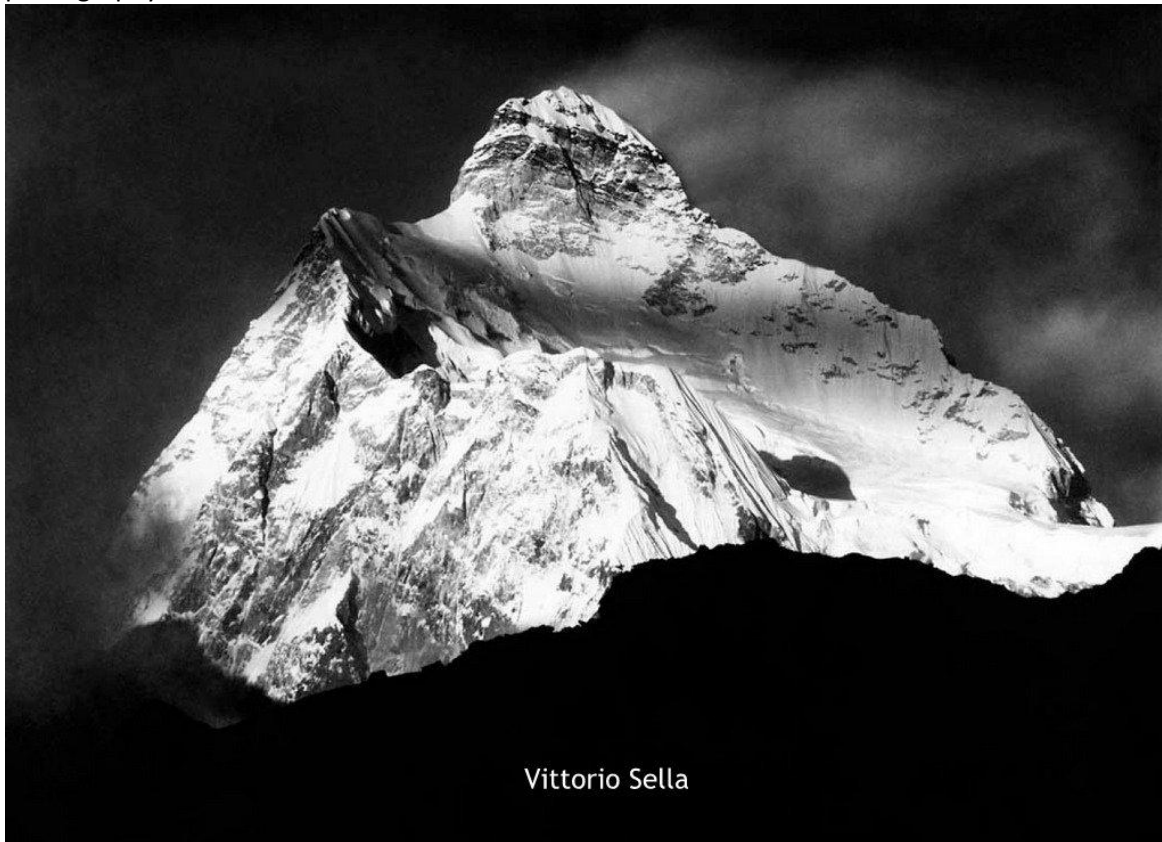
23rd September 1899. A forty year old Italian photographer is standing on the Zemu Glacier in Northern Sikkim at an altitude of around 15,000 feet below the massive north east face of Kangchenjunga. It is five o' clock in the morning, dark and bitterly cold. His large tripod is sunk in almost three feet of snow. It has been snowing for almost four days. From the north, a chill wind is blowing across the Green Lake plain biting into his tweed jacket. But Vittorio Sella, the legendary mountain photographer, is undaunted. He mounts his large forty pound plate camera on the tripod and slowly pans it away from that sheer face of the third highest peak in the world. Sella carefully frames his photograph, inserts the two pound film plate and waits for dawn. And, as the first light touches Siniolchu, one of the satellites of Kangchenjunga, Sella presses the shutter to capture possibly the finest view of one of the most beautiful mountains in the world.



Mustagh Towers in the Baltoro

Born in 1859 in the village of Biella, Italy, Sella photographed mountains in four continents: the Russian Caucasus, the Saint Elias Range in Alaska, Mount Ruwenzori in Africa, Kangchenjunga in the Himalayas and K2 in the Karakoram. His father was a textile merchant and young Vittorio worked in his father's factory for some time as a chemist until his passion of mountains and photography got the better of him. Sella's passion for the mountains was possibly transmitted to him by his uncle Quintino Sella who was the founder of the Italian Alpine Club. From 1880 to 1893 young Vittorio climbed and photographed in the Alps completing the first winter ascent of the Matterhorn in 1882 and the first winter traverse of Mount Blanc in 1888 for which he received an award from the Royal Geographical Society, London.

Sella's work in the Alps caught the attention of the Duke of Abruzzi, a keen mountaineer and explorer. In 1897 Sella was invited by the Duke to an expedition to Alaska where he photographed the Saint Elias range of mountains. He participated in two further expeditions with the Duke. In 1906 he went to the "mountains of the moon" Ruwenzori in Africa and in 1909 to the Karakoram where he documented K2 and Chogolisa with rare finesse. The expedition to Chogolisa set a new altitude record of 7500 metres (24,600 feet) which remained unbroken until the British expedition to Everest in 1922. Unfortunately, the Duke was forced to turn around just 150 metres below the summit due to bad weather. Interestingly Chogolisa I remained unclimbed until an Austrian expedition summited the peak in 1975. Sella's photograph of the Duke and his guides climbing the Chogolisa icefall with enormous seracs about to topple over their heads remains one of the classics of mountain photography.



Vittorio Sella

[Jannu from Chunjerma](#)

In 1899 Sella embarked on his most ambitious expedition accompanying the British mountaineer Douglas Freshfield on the first ever circuit of Kangchenjunga. The trip which started in the monsoon successfully mapped the region around Kangchenjunga for the first time and with Sella's brilliant

photographs serves as an archive for future generations of explorers even today. The expedition was struck by very bad weather which caused unseasonal snow in the Zemu valley (Northern Sikkim) and despite all odds Sella was able to continue to photograph right through the snowfall.

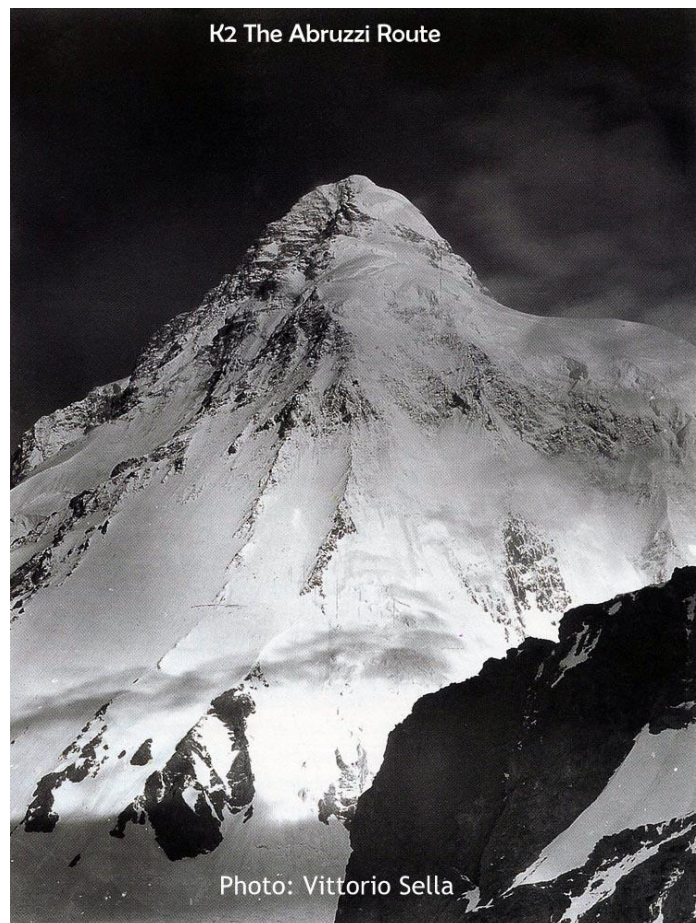
Many of the great mountains in the world were first photographed by Sella: K2 swirling in monsoon clouds, avalanches thundering off Mt St Elias, the peak of Ruwenzori shining over the great African plains, Jannu towering over the Chunjerma pass in Eastern Nepal, Kangchenjunga from the Green Lake plain in North Sikkim.

In 1935 at the age of 76, Sella made one last attempt to climb the Matterhorn which proved unsuccessful. He died in Biella in 1943 at the age of 84.

In his memory, the Italian Alpine Club set up the Vittorio Sella Hut at an altitude of 2588 metres among the mountains of the Grande Paradiso range. The hut is frequently used today by both climbers and photographers. The highest peak on Mount Luigi di Savoia in the Ruwenzori range was named Sella Peak in his honour.

Sella's work has been printed in a large format book "Summit: Vittorio Sella" which is possibly the most important reference work for his photographs. Lodovico Sella, a descendant of Vittorio has set up the Sella Foundation in his hometown Biella which has the largest archive of Sella's photographs.

The legendary landscape photographer Ansel Adams wrote: "Knowing the physical pressures of time and energy attendant on ambitious mountain expeditions, we are amazed by the mood of calmness and perfection pervading all of Sella's photographs. In Sella's photographs there is no faked grandeur; rather there is understatement, caution, and truthful purpose... Sella has brought to us not only the facts and forms of far-off splendours of the world, but the essence of experience which finds a spiritual response in the inner recesses of our mind and heart."



THE MAKING OF THE LUKLA AIRSTRIP

Bhanu Banerjee



Lukla airstrip 1960s

“If you can stand to keep your eyes open, the view out the airplane window during landing at Lukla Airport will stay with you forever.” Ella Morton

After spending over three months in the Rolwaling valley between 15,000 and 21,000 feet, Ed Hillary had called off expedition's search for the yeti (1960-61). We were now acclimatizing in the Mingbo Valley at 15,000 feet in preparation for climbing Mt Makalu without using oxygen equipment.

At that time large numbers of refugees were crossing the border from Tibet in order to escape from Chinese troops. The Red Cross had an aircraft with an outstanding high altitude performance and the ability to be operative off very small airstrip - but there was nowhere in Khumbu for it to land. Could Hillary recommend a suitable area? There were the long slopes in the little valley above

Mingbo and we agreed to co-operate on building a strip there.

The expedition members put a team of men on to leveling the site at 15,000 feet chopping off the frozen clumps of snow grass, filling the holes, and rolling away the large boulders. When the strip had been cleared to 400 yards, the first landing was made - and the aircraft damaged its tail wheel on a rock and had an unscheduled stay of some days while being made airworthy again. Work on the strip continued for some time and we finally enlarged it to 500 yards and generally improved it as far as possible.

The increasing number of foreign expeditions was having its effect and the Sherpa's themselves were developing a powerful desire for education and medical care. Hillary was committed to helping them achieve their wishes. He found the 16 day walk from Kathmandu with porter load of equipment rather time consuming and tedious. The answer was to use a STOL (Short takeoff or Landing) aircraft.

Jim Wilson was investigating a possible location near the Dudh Kosi river below Chaunrikarka when he was approached by a group of farmers from Lukla village located in a small valley at an altitude of 9,500 feet. They had some land for sale and thought it would be suitable for an airfield - a rather astonishing suggestion from mountain men with little or no experience of flying. Investigation showed that they were right, Lukla was on a gently sloping fan facing to the south. Above it were 20,000 feet peaks but approach from the South was unhindered and the local weather experts predicated light and steady winds up the valley - a prediction that has proved remarkably accurate.

Good arable land was at a premium in this area. Hillary chose a total of six acres. One third of this was in rough pasture; a third of this was in heavy scrub; and the last third in good potato fields. This stretch of land was far from flat and from bottom to top had a rise of over 100 feet. It was divided into terraced fields with drops between them up to six feet or more. As the expedition had no earth moving equipment, every shovel of dirt would have to be shifted by hand.

The work started by hacking out the two acres of out brush. With fifty men and women on the job the brush was soon cut down. But digging out the network of roots was a much more laborious business. Very soon 160 men were engaged working hard on the job, each receiving the premium of Nepali Rs.6/- per day.

By the end of two weeks the general form of the airfield was taking shape and things were speeded up by using four simple ploughs, pulled by two cows each, to loosen up the surface so that it could be more readily shoveled into baskets. All the dips were filled with tons of earth and every hillock was chopped up and removed.

Negotiations with the five owners of the land were completed. An impressively official document was written out in Nepali by the expedition's Liaison Officer Mr. Rai who was also Deputy Superintendent of police when carrying out his usual duties. Each document acknowledged receipt of the appropriate money and made it clear that the land was becoming property of the Nepalese Government - for this was the agreement made in Kathmandu. Each man signed with his thumb print as none of them could write. For six acres of land a total of Nepali Rs. 6,350/- was paid.



Lukla airstrip late 1990s

The pressure of work now intensified. The first flight would soon be arriving and time was getting short. Don Mackay obtained a colossal piece of timber, twenty feet long one foot square to be used as a grader. A rope was attached to each end, and then two cows hitched onto each rope. But alas for this grand idea of mechanization - the cows persistently headed off in opposite directions and the timber remained stationary. Men had to take the place of the cows and this was much more satisfactory. With a dozen laughing and cheering Sherpa's pulling at each end of the

timber it was dragged backwards and forwards and up and down, the field compacting and leveling at the same time. However, the top surface of the field still appeared rather soft. Fifty odd Sherpa's linked arms and stamped their way backwards and forwards across the field. Sherpa dancing involves a great deal of vigorous stamping and, before long, a very festive mass dance resulted and the earth received a most resounding thumping. The field was now ready for the first landing. The airfield was now 1,150 feet long and 100 feet wide clearly marked by painted boards. The grade was one-in-ten, quite steep for an airfield –but the surface was excellent. All together Hillary paid a total sum of just over Nepali Rs.20, 000/- for land and labour.

The morning of October 26th was fine and clear. Two civil aviation representatives, perhaps with memories of Mingbo airfield, were coming in on the first flight and their judgment would be final. The windsock was drooping down under the negligible wind breathing up the line of the airfield above, the icy summits were rigid against a blue Tibetan sky. By 8 AM, sherpas were gathering for the occasion and it was the sharp ears of a Sherpa who first heard the dull roar of the engine and pointed out a black speck approaching rapidly up the great gorge of the Dudh Kosi river. In a clamor of sound the aircraft circled overhead then the plane wheeled and with flaps down swung towards the bottom of the strip. Hillary held his breath and watched as the wheels touched in a brief cloud of dust - and then was coasting to a rapid halt. It took full power for the plane to taxi up the hill to the end of the runway and swing to a stop in a whirl wind of dust. The cheerful smiles and friendly waves

of the crew and passenger gave little doubt that the Lukla airfield was now in commission - almost four weeks to the day since work had commenced.



Lukla airport today

Lukla quickly became one of the major airports of Nepal. Over the years thousands of tourists, trampers and expedition members have flown into the airfield and vast quantities of freight.

Stephen Reginald, founder and Editor-in-chief of Gear Junkie, reports his Lukla experience live from Nepal and Everest Base Camp for Expedition Haves brands - "All anecdotes on safety aside, the airport at 9000 feet can be physiological upsetting. The strip is essentially a thin line of tarmac set on a valley's edge. Landings are bumpy and fast, the pilot braking hard to stop as the plane drifts uphill towards a wall. Takeoffs are even more dramatic: Thrust the motor, say a prayer, and point the plane down the airstrip that dead-ends at a drop into the valley below. The engines whir. The wheels leave the ground, and the pilot points the plane towards oblivion ahead. "

OVER THE TOP – A FARCICAL ACCOUNT OF CLIMBING EVEREST**Persis Anklesaria**

The author on the trail to Everest Base Camp

Arms raised, wind-curling flag in one hand and axe in the other, one foot on the summit, head in the clouds, I am Hillary! Mallory famously explained that he climbed Everest 'because it was there'. Others waxed eloquent --- 'ultimate challenge...', 'primal desire...', 'pinnacle...', etc. Blimey, heroic stuff! ED, my guide and I, we're off for the jolly good views!

Day 1, Khumbu Icefall, 18,000 – 20,000 ft., (5-8 hours.)

Up at the crack of dawn for the 2,000 ft. climb across the Glacier, a river of shifting ice and collapsing avalanches. Hurricane winds threaten to toss us into crevasses opening and closing at whim and our rickety ladders rebound like trampolines. One false step, the slightest loss of balance, it's down, down, down into the abyss.

ED's no help! Screams above an unimaginable din, "Hang onto those ropes, keep running, icefall's collapsing...". Seriously, hard work this. As I approach the middle of the ladder, the conspiring winds, bouncing me up and down are giving me the willies.

It's cold, windy, white, white, white, I mean snow everywhere!

Manage to Camp 1, almost disabled, forgettable day! Traitor's strutting around like a posh goose in his new down jacket, bringing me cups of steaming tea, nattering about stupid things, while porters bang pots and pans cooking us a dinner. All I hear is the howling winds toppling the ice pillars.

Day 2, Western CWM, 20,000 – 21,000 ft., (4-7 hrs.)

Slept like a baby, back from the dead, the CWM--- a cakewalk! This flat glacial valley is a furnace as the sun's rays bounce off surrounding snow-covered slopes that melt and rot into a swamp. I fish out my Rs. 100/- Crawford Market glares and plaster on my UV sunblock.

Many hate the CWM, but I? I love the 40degrees, the slush and filth! Make it in record time, ED's tripping over himself to keep up.

That evening, sitting round the fire, feasting on cans of baked beans, ED, says admiringly, "You walked like Hillary today!"

I say, "You too Tenzing".

Day 3, Lhotse Wall, 22,300 – 26,300 ft., (5-8 hrs.)



Copyright The Ascent of Rum Doodle

Today is the day of the axe, technical skills! Attached to fixed ropes, using axes to cut steps, we scale the mile-high, ice-blue Lhotse wall.

Just as I'm battling a rocky bulge, an urgent, "Persis, Persis", it's ED, "...your shoelaces are undone". Anyone tried tying laces on the South Face of Lhotse? Tough! As I get tangled in old and new ropes and hold up traffic, the weasel below me is cursing and pulling faces.

With winds having gone into a lunatic spin I hear almost nothing.

Evening.

We set up Camp on the South Col, a wasteland of compacted ice, rocks and debris, dotted with the colourful tents of several expeditions.

Out in space at 26,000 feet, you can clearly see the curve of the earth with giant Lhotse, Kanchenjunga and Makalu in the distance. While I'm enjoying the views enormously others have collapsed in dysfunctional heaps. ED says at dinner, "Get some sleep, Persis. If we get a clear summit-window tonight we'll push for it." I'm hugely excited but, don't see any window, ED's hallucinating?

Camp 4, The Death zone, 26,000 ft., (8-12 hours)

Nightfall.

Weather's cleared, winds' dropped, sky's dense with stars, we have the light of 1000 moons, can't help getting lyrical!

ED mutters nervously, 'Window'! I strap on my oxygen mask, flip the valve, switch on the headlamp as we step out into the freezing night with hundreds of others.

Time: 9pm, temperature: 25 degrees, altitude: 26,000ft, oxygen: 40%.

Attaching ourselves to the fixed ropes, we begin climbing, one gasping inch at a time.

Our assault on Everest has commenced.

We are entering the land of the spirits. Air is thin and freezing, we are gasping, hearts pumping, moaning and grunting we crouch over our axes. Every now and then someone detaches himself from the ropes mumbling that he's turning back, others drop dead still attached. Annoyed, I step over an army of stiffies wrapped in fluorescent suits with glazed eyes.

Soon everyone is dead or dying, and I'm head of the line with ED muttering, "I'm *blown away* by your skills, Persis"! On cue, a fierce gale shakes the mountain and I plead with him never to repeat those words.

On the Balcony, a flat ledge, we pause for breakfast --- a few gulps of oxygen --- stagger

to a slender fin of rock, the Knife Ridge, and labour up the Hillary Step, narrow, sharp and steep.

Trouble! Out of the fog and savage winds, appear a group of Pakistanis. A brawl ensues; pushing, shoving, sulfurous abuse flying in both directions. I might be small but I can beat that rottweiler Arnab Goswami. Pulling off my mask I snarl into the closest ear, "Give us back K2", and watch them shrivel under my murderous glare.

The whole bunch take the aerial route, keel over, tumble into Tibet and the national anthem rings in my ears. Probably the lack of oxygen did them in, but tomorrow's headlines will surely scream, "Indian Wins All Out War on Hillary Step".

The summit is just above us now, looking cocky as hell against an aching blue sky. Her distinctive snow plume blasts us with powder-snow.



Copyright The Ascent of Rum Doodle

ED's in a bad way! I think he's dying and going straight to heaven. I encourage him to stay on his feet, tell him he's at the movies and should respect the anthem, but all he manages is, "You're there Persis, you're there". One last puff, he sinks to the ground, resembling a crumpled snowman, his down

jacket in ruins. ED taught me mountains and photography, looked after me like a nurse, I have a lump in my throat.

Wailing winds bring me down to my knees, hallelujah! But now's no time to trip or cry. With the strength of a million legs and the lungs of a million bagpipes I march to conquer.

A few more agonizing steps and I'm standing on the summit. Mount Everest, 29,035 feet, 8850 meters, 5 miles up in the sky. Date: 27th April 2017. Time: 6.01 am. The national anthem is deafening, the lump in my throat dissolving!

The summit is mighty crowded with flags. I make way for mine by pulling out the Pakistani banners, sit on the little snow-bench, and take in the gob smacking views. Puffy clouds racing in every direction make me giddy. I'm confusing the giant Makalu with our very own Kanchenjunga. Ahead, I recognize the great bulk of Cho Oyu, but beyond that, miles of unexplored, unnamed peaks bounce about in scoops of swirling ice cream. How I wish ED was here to help with names!

A silver streak of light appears low on the horizon, the sky begins to leak pink and orange, temperatures rise, and I begin to thaw. As the glow spreads across the eastern horizon and the dark and sleeping valleys of Nepal stir and rise, lyrical again, I place one foot on the summit, raise my wind-curlled cell for selfie time, and awake.

Good morning everybody, I'm hungry!
Tonight K2?

BOUQUETS AND BRICKBATS

Capt. M.S. Kohli

I am delighted to go through the maiden edition of the HIMALAYAN NEWS. My heartiest congratulations to you all for the excellent initiative. When I visited the Himalayas first in 1955 there were only a handful of visitors to the Himalayas. Looking back I feel humbled in introducing Trekking in the Himalayas in 1968 and opening the doors of HMI to women in 1971. I feel happy to see growing interest in the magic and majesty of the Himalayas. I wish more and more people who wear Himalayan adventure on their shoulders to read THE HIMALAYAN NEWS.

Tamotsu Nakamura

I congratulate for publishing the first issue of "The Himalayan News" submission of abundance. Thank you so much for taking up my article on South Tibet. The future of Kolkata base activities must be promising. I would be happy that The Himalayan News would maintain reciprocal relationship with the Asian Alpine E-News that I am promoting.

Mandeep Singh Soin

Wonderfully put together - keep it coming :)

Peter Atanasov

Thank you very much for this fantastic edition. I wish you heartily success in editing and publishing it.

Bill Aitken

Thanks for the inaugural newsletter with its stimulating wide ranging content. There is something singular about the name of your trust which is underlined by the inspirational logo of the soaring overview. With the demise of KK Guha's feisty monthly your quarterly should provide a much needed creative and objective understanding of the Himalaya and its threatened environment. Free, intelligent and passionate comment ought to be welcome in any healthy mountaineering situation. All good wishes and Vishnu Strides for The Himalayan.

Dong-Soo Kim from Seoul

I greatly appreciated your great work of The Himalayan News. It will be much helpful for me in my work in Korea.

Pratik Mukherjee

The Himalayan Newsletter was awesome. Bhanu Banerjee's article touched me profusely.

Uddalok Gupta

A wonderful mission well put. Look forward to the mountains rolling before us on your pages. Particularly liked Col. Balwant Sandhu's quote. Best of luck, and to the high winds!

Michael Dillon

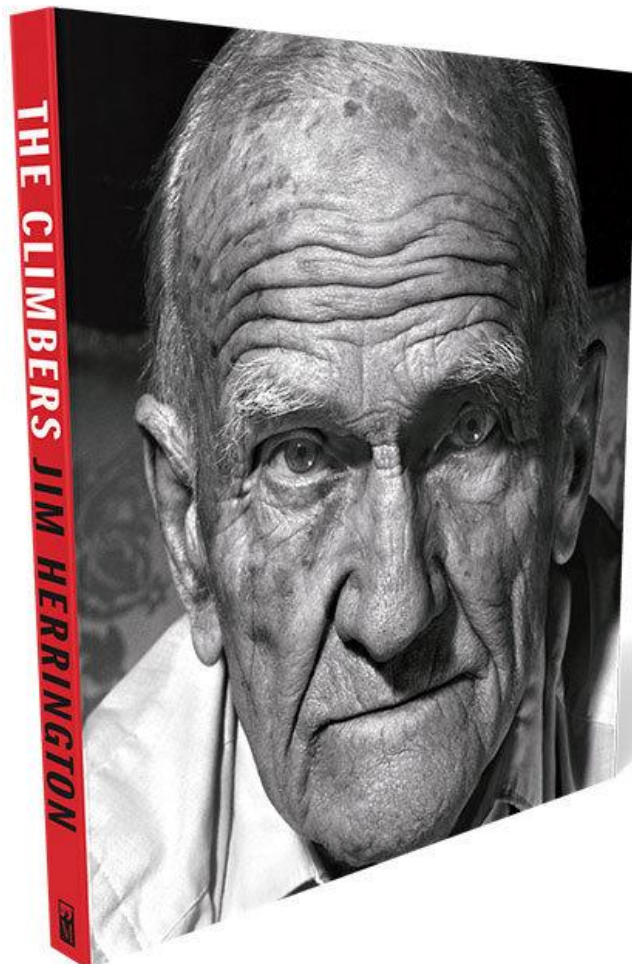
What a fascinating and informative publication. Bhanu's article was gripping.

Garry Weare

Good to hear from you and was very impressed with your first newsletter - congratulations would be more than pleased to contribute to your newsletter in the near future congratulations to all responsible.

NEW BOOK RELEASE

WINNER OF THE BANFF MOUNTAIN BOOK FESTIVAL GRAND PRIZE 2017



For nearly two decades, professional photographer Jim Herrington has been working on a portrait series of influential rock and mountain climbers who, from roughly the 1930s to 1970s, used primitive gear along with their considerable wits, talent, and fortitude to tackle unscaled peaks around the world. Inspired by the Sierra Nevada routes he'd been climbing for more than a decade while living in Los Angeles, Herrington set out in the 1990s to photograph the range's pioneering climbers.

The next two decades had the North Carolinian globe-trotting from California to Kathmandu to capture the world's "Golden Age" alpinists, including Beckey, Cassin, Messner, and Robbins, who had defined the sport earlier in the century. Herrington managed to achieve this alongside his day job photographing stars like Willie Nelson, Mick Jagger, and Dolly

Parton.

"The portraits in *The Climbers* document in searing detail many of the preeminent founders of the sport," said Banff Mountain Book Competition jury member, Ian Welsted. "Now aged beyond their most active years, the visible mortality and frailty of the subjects alerts us to a reality often glossed over by the dominant cult of youth in adventure sports. As survivors of intense experiences, the effects of lives spent in pursuit of extremes is made obvious. Jim Herrington renders in images captured on nostalgic black and white film a simulacrum of the subjects' groundbreaking spirit. He adds: "We are fortunate to benefit from this effort by a photographer renowned for his portraiture of musical stars. For at a time of explosive growth and public recognition why should the luminaries of climbing not receive this rock star treatment, as revealing and gritty as it may be?"

- ***From the Banff Mountain Book Festival 2017 Press Release***

To join our mailing list please send an email to
thehimalayan2017@gmail.com
and mention "SUBSCRIBE" in the subject line