

# Ascent of Naya Kanga

## 17th October 1995

### F.D. Smith

In the summer of 1994 a number of Y.R.C. members attended the funeral of a much loved friend, Frankie Waterfall, the wife of our member Sidney. It was here that the seed was born, Albert Chapman, my good friend of forty years, and my wife Elspeth conspired, the result was that I placed my name on the Clubs meet list for Nepal in October 1995.

Reading much literature on the area it appeared that there was a possibility that some of the trekking party might attempt Naya Kanga, a spectacular 19180 foot (5846 m) snow peak designated as a trekking peak. It was described in Bill O'Connors book, 'Trekking Peaks in the Himalaya' as PD Alpine grade and well within my own capabilities. It had the attraction of being one of the hardest of the trekking peaks.

Our expedition from Kathmandu started with a bus ride to Chautara a village of 2000 people 12 kilometres north east of the capital. It was good to get away from the polluted air and the fly-infested butchers' dens and the disgusting squalid rivers. The journey was to say the least exciting, as it twisted and wound round the mountainsides. Many times the road disintegrated into mud 12 inches or more deep or over huge stones or deep ruts. The landscape held our interest, we saw deep ravines, waterfalls, picturesque groups of houses and wonderfully terraced farm land not unlike the wine terraces of Switzerland but with cereal crops.

On arrival at Chautara it was great to see 16 tents already erected and two

mess tents complete with tables and chairs. Tea and biscuits were provided, preceded by what was to become a ritual hand washing in a solution of permanganate of potash. Having settled into our individual canvas homes we were next provided with bowls of hot water to wash away the dust and sweat of the journey; such unexpected luxury.

The chosen route to Naya Kanga was far from a normal trekking route, it took us broadly up the Chyochyo Danda (ridge) through many small hamlets like Orkin, Chang Samparphu and Nasem Pati to the holy lakes at Pach Pochari 14650 ft, the site of many Hindu and Buddhist pilgrimages. We might have been in the Lake District were it not for a prayer flag and the dilapidated roofless buildings.

On our first rest day Motup our 'Malla Trek' leader, a remarkably well educated and interesting Ladakhi and I were charged with exploring the route ahead with a view to crossing into the Langtang valley via the celebrated Tilman Pass West. The prospect of getting the porters up to the pass and down a possible steep snow descent was not good, though it was the clear aspiration of two of the trekkers. After four hours of hard and steep ascent keeping pace with an extraordinarily agile and fit sherpa, we were still quite a way from a sighting of either the col or the Linshing Glacier, the mist descended and light rain fell. It was with some reluctance that we had to advise the trekkers that Tilman Pass was probably impractical.

The following day we returned to Nasem Pati then southwest to Yarsa at 6000 feet before a spectacular crossing of the Indravwati Khola (river) and finally heading northwest to Ripar on the Yangri Khola at 6900 feet. The route took us through leech

infested paths, though weird moss covered and enormous rhododendron trees often draped with beautiful hanging moss. It took us up and down ridges losing and regaining two or three thousand feet with each ridge, Our remarkable porters, some carrying two of our bags each weighing in the region of 45 pounds plus their own sacks moved with remarkable balance along the narrow track, down steep mud slopes, or on rocky ground and most had either bare feet or wore flip-flops.

The next stage was along the Thorika Danda, but as none of the support party had any knowledge of the area, a local man was engaged by the sirdar to lead us through a very complicated terrain including an incredibly steep gully. How the table carriers coped was truly amazing. We had three camps at 13000 feet, 15000 feet and 16000 feet with views of the Yangri Khola as it wended its way towards our objective, the Ganga La, a pass 16800 feet which would take us into the Langtang Valley and for me, nearer to my objective, Naya Kanga.

Now the views were becoming more and more spectacular with the majestic snow peaks coming into our vision. We descended the northern slopes and were surprised to discover that there was no deep soft snow that we had been led to expect. Descending about 1000 feet or so, Albert, Ian, Derek and I along with Motup and a young sherpa, Kazi, headed for a level glacier to our high camp. Three porters and two sherpas arrived before us and erected four tents, two for the climbers and Motup, the other two for the rest of the party. A meal was prepared and we retired to our sleeping bags. Unfortunately Albert developed a back problem and had to pull out of the final assault.

It was a 5 am start for the day, and after a quick breakfast we roped up to cross the glacier at 6 am. Motup, myself and the President on one rope and Kazi and Ian on the other. Although crevassed we did not have any problems. Snow level had changed drastically since Bill O'Connor wrote his account. We then ascended a shallow rock gully which is usually a snow couloir to gain the snow boss and the series of ridges that would take us to the summit.

The slope was probably about 50 plus degrees; the snow was fairly soft but harder underneath in places. There was always a danger of windslab but fortunately it never developed. The rarefied air, however, did have its effect; we were only managing about twenty paces before each brief halt, but we were making progress. Bamboo cones collected on route through the vegetated areas were left a convenient intervals to enable us to return in safety should it become misty. The mist descended even before we had reached the final snow pyramid.

It was 1.30 pm when we eventually reached our objective, the easterly summit, the true summit was about 30 feet higher connected by the most slender of snow ridges that I have ever seen, falling on either side at perhaps 80 degrees. It would certainly have been foolhardy to have attempted to cross it and certainly it would have taken many hours to force a crossing. Motup had clearly decided that it was not sensible even to try, we concurred.

It was misty by now and photographs would be disappointing but we took the obligatory group shot before returning by the same route. I was not looking forward to the descent as the snow would have deteriorated. Derek lead off with Motup at the back

safeguarding us. The flag cones were a great help, several times Derek was relieved to see the next one ahead. It took just 2 hours to reach the rocks again. Motup thought we might save an hour by going straight down instead of returning via the glacier and risking crevasse difficulties.

The way down was over huge jammed boulders or loose scree, this was made more difficult as it began to snow. Motup and I went ahead to find the easiest route but it became increasingly hard and slower. Dusk was quickly replaced by darkness, time was moving on apace by 10 pm we decided that enough was enough and elected to bivouac. I found a suitable huge boulder to shelter under and we settled down for the night.

Motup was some way away looking for an easy descent and Kazi decided to join him as he did not have any extra clothes. Derek and Ian were not too happy with their situation but my own experience of being benighted in the Alps helped me to treat the situation with less anxiety. Hourly time checks were requested and eventually it was 5.30 am, it was now light so we decided to make a move.

Hardly had we been going half an hour than we were met by Norbu a remarkably conscientious young



sherpa with a teapot of hot lemon covered with a towel. Norbu had in fact been up on the ridge at 11.00 with hot drinks for us. But returned as Kazi had advised him that we were alright and that we would not have wanted him to risk injury joining us.

Kazi and Motup carried on down and reached the camp at 4.30 am very tired. Clearly we had made the right decision in staying put. Back down at the camp we were fed and as a treat the three of us shared a large tin of mangos. And so to our sleeping bags for a deep one hour sleep before the walk down to the Langtang Khola and on to Kyangjin and the Gyalisham Gompa. The path was extremely pleasant through beautiful woodlands and with superb views of the shapely Lantang Lirug and its neighbours. For the first time we saw trekkers, during the past two weeks we had only seen two Germans and two Spaniards.

Our return to Kathmandu was along the Langtang Khola through many picturesque villages, passing prayer walls and gompas to Syabru and on to Dunche for our final camp and a hectic bus ride to the capital. A remarkably competent piece of driving on quite impossible roads, negotiating oncoming vehicles with vital precision and in some places on non-existent roads. The whole expedition gave us fulfilment, it gave us time to reflect, it was a period of strenuous and sustained activity, a clear bond had developed between trekkers, sherpas and porters. We would all return home changed and more tolerant individuals.

Ian Crowther, David Smith and Derek Bush  
with Naya Kanga in the background