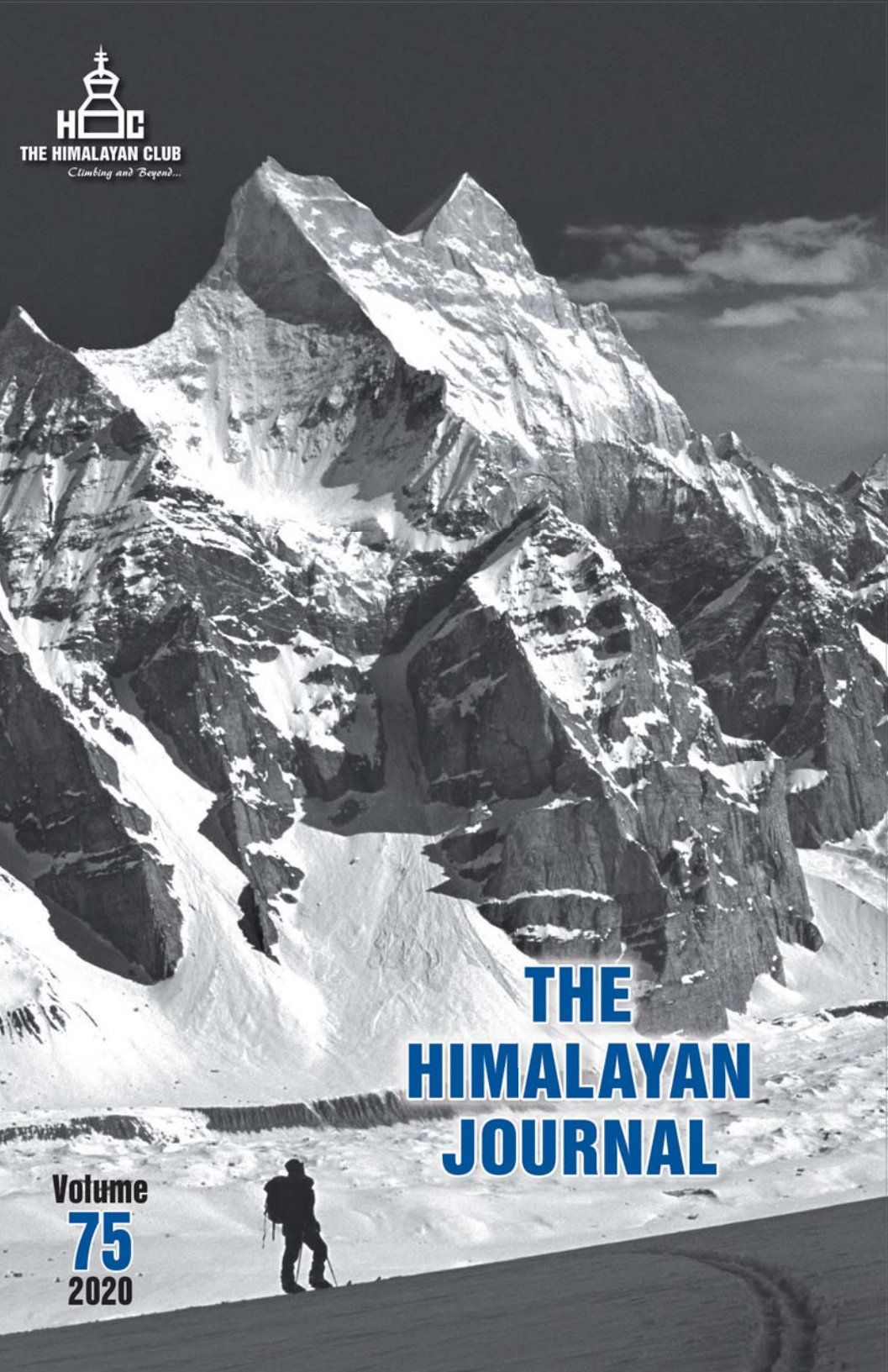
THE HIMALAYAN CLUB

*Climbing and Beyond...*



# THE HIMALAYAN JOURNAL

Volume 75
2020

# The mighty Himalayas cover more countries than any mountain range on earth.

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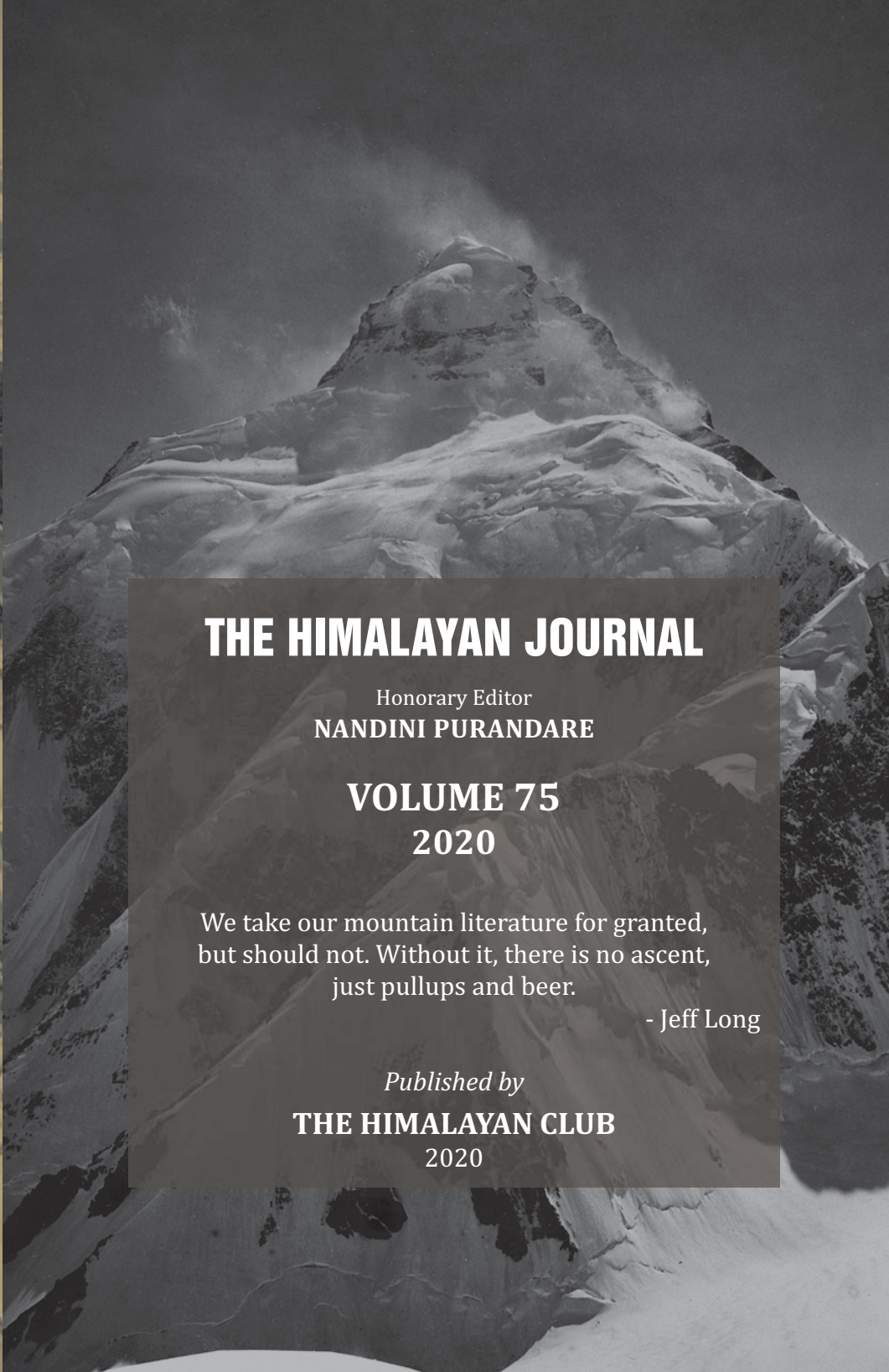

# THE HIMALAYAN JOURNAL

Honorary Editor
**NANDINI PURANDARE**

## VOLUME 75
## 2020

We take our mountain literature for granted,
but should not. Without it, there is no ascent,
just pullups and beer.

- Jeff Long

*Published by*

**THE HIMALAYAN CLUB**
2020


# THE HIMALAYAN JOURNAL

(Published since 1929)

*To encourage and assist Himalayan travel and exploration,*
*and to extend knowledge of the Himalaya*
*and adjoining mountain ranges*
*through science, art, literature and sport.*

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# CONTENTS

## Articles

## Expeditions & Explorations



## Nostalgia



## Book Reviews

## In Memoriam



**Cover:** Shivling

Hywel Lloyd on ski high on Kedar Dome during our four man 'capsule-style' attempt in May 1994 to make what we understood would have been the first ski ascent of the peak. Within two hours of taking this picture we were fighting the fiercest storm I've encountered in the Himalaya which lasted for six days. Such are mountains!

The peak on the Shivling ridge is Shivling East—the first ascent was by Sir Chris Bonington and Jim Fotheringham in 1983.

Credit: John Cleare / Mountain Camera

**Back cover:**

Nanda Devi (7816 m) West face from Joshimath. This unclimbed stupendous rock face will attract many super rock climbers, when Sanctuary is open to mountaineers. Rising from about 4600 m on Dakhhini Rishi Glacier (South Sanctuary) it goes up about 3200 m to the summit of the peak.

Photo Harish Kapadia, from Lt Nawang Kapadia Collection

**Frontispiece:**

This aerial photo of K2 was taken by Dianne Roberts, expedition photographer on the American K2 expedition in 1978. On 6th and 7th Sept, 1978, a 14-person team worked together to get four members to the summit, becoming the first Americans and third team in history to do so. Even 42 years later, it remains among the most notable achievements in American mountaineering history. American mountaineer Jim Whittaker's wife - Dianne Roberts - took some incredible photos and we are lucky to get one.

Credit: Diane Roberts / Chris Harles

**Background - Title Page :** K2 in the evening from Camp VIII on staircase (from the East), (HRH Duke of Abruzzi, 1909)

Credit: The Alpine Club

**Background - Contents Page 1, 2 & 3: K2 from Windy Gap, (Vittorio Sella, 1909**)

Credit: The Alpine Club

NOTE : ALL PHOTOS ARE BY AUTHORS UNLESS OTHERWISE MENTIONED

# GUEST EDITORIAL

When I took over the editorship of *The Himalayan Journal* from Soli Mehta in 1975, he presented me papers and contacts that would prove useful. His wife Meheru advised me, "Do not gather papers as Soli has done, our house is full of them". Among these, I found an exchange of letters between Soli Mehta and one Mrs Mavis Heath from Kenya. She lived alone on a farm, after the passing away of her husband. She had read almost every word in *THJ* volumes, as I gathered from her letters. I continued corresponding with her. A few years later, she inquired when the next volume of *THJ* was likely to be published. "My doctors have advised me against reading anything for more than an hour or two each day due to my failing eyesight. And I want to preserve my 'eyesight time' for the Journal". This showed me the importance of the Journal and the committed readers we had, apart from climbers.

The Journal has always had its share of troubles. During the initial years under Kenneth Mason, there was not much serious climbing happening. He used his contacts as a surveyor to set the tone for covering explorations and many other aspects like geology, botany, *shikar* and related experiences in the Himalaya. During World War II, the Journal had to stop publication, and soon thereafter, with Indian independence in 1947, many Britishers, the main preserve of the Journal, migrated back and except for a few handpicked enthusiasts, the Journal was at a loss for volunteers. There was a 'farewell' editorial and soon a 'back to life' editorial, during this period. Trevor Braham was roped in as an emergency editor and he soon handed over the reins to the first Indian editor Dr K. Biswas.

Again, a major crisis confronted the Journal when the next editor, Soli Mehta was faced with a lack of volunteers and support while he published from Calcutta where he was posted. But this spirited Parsi continued to wage a lone battle; procured articles, edited and published volumes of *THJ* and posted it to the entire membership. This took a heavy toll on the Club's finances and new ideas to generate income were introduced. For ease and continuity of operations, the Club shifted its headquarters to Mumbai and the Journal continued under Soli Mehta. Once, I saw his wife, aunt and daughter, packing the Journal for posting and then he carried the lot in his car to a post office for dispatch. The Journal was always a voluntary effort, completely dependent on the commitment of the volunteers.

As Soli was transferred to Sudan and later to Nigeria, I was roped in and luckily with, perhaps the most experienced editor in India then, R E Hawkins, of Oxford University Press. He introduced many changes, due to which *THJ* became a professionally edited publication. We published successive volumes for one and half decades between us. Soli Mehta and R E Hawkins both died within three weeks of each other in late 1989. I continued their work for the next two decades producing a total of 35 volumes. When the time came to retire, I handed over the editorship to Rajesh Gadgil, who was later succeeded by Nandini Purandare and she continues with the endeavour.

As the Journal publishes this volume—the 75th, a major milestone, we must look to the future. Some frank and fresh thinking is required. The membership of THC is falling and alongwith that, readership and volunteers to work. The editor has been waging a brave battle single-handedly to bring out publications year after year. Rising costs over the years have been further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. With most businesses being majorly affected, advertising support on which *THJ* finances are dependent, have fallen this year. It begs the question — what about an online publication to reduce costs? Will old eyes like mine enjoy reading this Journal on a screen? The pleasure of holding a printed volume and flipping through its pages is incomparable. But then, like all the difficulties that the Journal has faced since its inception, this one too shall pass.

We are hopeful that climbers will soon be active, and the ranges will be well visited. The goodwill of 75 published volumes, the efforts of the editors and the wishes of its readers like Mrs Heath will sustain us. After a long silence, I received a letter from her son saying that she had peacefully passed on and one of the main items that she had donated in her Will was a full set of *THJ* to a library in Africa!

During the British Rule, The Governor General would send an annual report to England ending with a positive statement. I can say the same for *The Himalayan Journal* today.

"It is alive, well and rules (*publishes*) Ok" (word in italics, mine).

HARISH KAPADIA

Editor Emeritus, The Himalayan Club
September 2020

# EDITOR'S NOTE

The first quarter of 2020—Enter the novel coronavirus; the COVID-19 pandemic.

The world from March to now has changed rapidly; the mountains are resting, the earth is rejuvenating…the future as we know it, is quite uncertain. It has been a hard but rewarding process to make adjustments, to understand what is important and to realise that the difference between wants and needs is so subjective. It has also been a time to introspect about our relationship with the mountains; whether a change in a mountaineer's approach to peak bagging is possible, whether the post war industrial era hangover approach to mountaineering is gradually moving towards its natural demise.

But these thoughts are for the privileged.

For in our pursuit of leisure, we have created a chain across the world that we need to think about; a chain of thousands of mountain communities. These communities support our hobby, our passion, our need to be out there. Suddenly the rug has rudely been pulled from under their feet as their livelihoods are snatched away. This year and the next and probably the next, will be very hard while we tourists, climbers and hikers ponder existential questions. The Himalayan Club and indeed other organizations have been thinking about it, offering immediate help and relief as well as alternate employment ideas. But as always, more needs to be done.

It is on this sombre thought that I put forth the landmark 75th Volume. It is also with another thought. As we stand on a threshold of a changing world, it is necessary to take stock and to look for stories of connection, rather than narratives of division. These are more important today than ever before.

So here are some stories—of legendary mountaineers Gurdial Singh, Joe Brown and the Duke of Abruzzi, of dream journeys and best expedition reminiscences; of historical climbs and of course, of young wildlifers, natural historians, conservationists and safety specialists.

In the expeditions and explorations section we have stories of landmark climbs like the first ascent of Link Sar, a fantastic line

on Kyo Zom, an attempt on Chombu in remote Sikkim and the last minute climb on Menthosa. We also have maiden explorations in the Satti valley, Pakshi Chu gorge in Spiti and Tanmu Col—the separator between Spiti and Lahaul.

We have tributes to legends such as Trevor Braham, Nalni Jayal and Meher Mehta, pillars of THC who departed during the year, having led meaningful and robust lives.

I am indeed grateful to John Cleare, Harish Kapadia, Diane Roberts, Chris Harle and The Alpine Club for the astounding photos they so readily shared with me.

Finally, I hope we can keep the print edition of the *THJ* alive as long as we have the likes of Mrs Heath alive amongst us.

While dedicating this Volume to support staff, porters, cooks, guides, HAPs, transporters, muleteers, those who run wayside restaurants, camps, homestays and hotels, my request is—let's do what we can to pull them through this crisis.

NANDINI PURANDARE

September 2020

A high altitude lake near Tsela on the Bailey Trail

# ARTICLES

Guru above Kala Pathar

11

# Training the UIAA Way

Steve Long

*The federation currently represents member associations in 66 countries, promoting the growth and protection of mountaineering and climbing worldwide, largely through the work of its specialist commissions.*

The soft patter of fluffy snow settling on the tent roof had gradually muffled all other sounds. Occasionally, a faint whinny could be discerned from one of our pack horses, or the muted screeches of choughs, calling their own name. I snuggled down inside the cocooning sleeping bag and dozed peacefully for a few more precious minutes, postponing the decision. Suddenly a white hole rent the tent entrance as the zip was eased open, and the irrepressible Nantuk, our Zanskari guide thrust a steaming mug of chai through the entrance. The moment had arrived, morning was here.

Outside the tent, the world had retreated into a monotone, enveloped by mist. Snowflakes squalled diagonally through the gloom. A taut ground rope secured the line of pack horses, browner shades of grey; some punctuated by crimson tape bridles. Neck bells clanged as they scuffed the ground clear with their hooves or as an occasional scuffle broke out. Somebody had carved 'good morning!' and a smiley face through the snow on the mess tent roof. The horseman appeared,

Jordan

checking the line. His gamcha (scarf) matched the colour of the bridles, under an olive gilet (sleeveless jacket). Nantuk translated for me: "He says the horses cannot cross the pass today". Our journey appeared to be ending prematurely.

We were camped high at Shang Phu, nestled behind two shepherdess' huts built of mud bricks, straw and yak dung. Our destination was the monastery village of Matho, but to get there we needed to cross the Shang la at 4900 m. The previous evening, the shepherdess had shown us how she made yoghurt and cheese, insisting we tasted some. Now she was watching the show unfold. Her grin revealed a single tooth, but still her smile was beautiful.

The team gradually assembled in the mess tent. Working through chapatis, fruit and omelettes we unfolded a map and examined the terrain on either side of the pass. Could we persuade the horseman and the cook to attempt the crossing, or was it out of the question? It was a pivotal moment and the success of our expedition was hanging in the balance.

You may well be thinking that this sounds like a typical mountain expedition, and I'm kind of hoping that you are. Because, you see, this was no ordinary journey—this was the climax of a UIAA training project, piloting a combined personal skills and leadership programme. Our trainers were an international team comprising two English, two Nepalese, one Cypriot and one Indian trainer, all bringing different life skills and cultures to the table. We were all committed to the concept that context is essential for training mountain leaders, and this mini-crisis was the perfect case in point. Our trainees were all competent seasoned local leaders, but none had experienced the difficulty of making a risk-management decision involving such complex opposing factors; group dynamics, support logistics, changing weather, slippery slopes. Concurrently, we were working alongside an Austrian team from Lech to continue and extend a rescue training programme for the Zanskar region.

Eventually a group consensus was reached; we would strike camp and head for the pass; but be ready and willing to turn back if conditions did anything other than improve. They then needed to persuade the support team to fall in with the plan. When the tattered flag-strewn cairns finally loomed through the mist above the long zigzagging climb, the relief and joy was as palpable as any summit moment. We

slithered down towards Matho Phu as the clouds gradually burned away and the snow turned to slush. Even for the most experienced students and trainers, our journey had turned into an adventure, where the outcome is uncertain and requires the traveller to dig into their personal reserves. I call this 'consequential learning'—it's experiential learning, but moreover decisions have real consequences and mistakes involve a degree of hardship or disappointment (although as trainers it is our responsibility to minimize the risks of the third possible consequence—injury or emotional trauma).

Context is key to training for leadership and teaching in mountaineering activities such as hiking or climbing. There is of course some cognitive learning required, but even this can be wildly misplaced if the candidate does not have the relevant experience required in order to process the information. An example that I remember vividly was one of our students on the first Mountain Leader course that we delivered in Nepal, with the long-term aim of helping the Nepal Mountaineering Association create a practical qualification for trek leaders. The candidates had all completed the government-required Nepal Academy of Tourism & Hotel Management (NATHM) course, but this is largely classroom based. After a day learning basic map craft in the fields and paths around Kakani (a few miles north of Kathmandu) he expressed horror that everything that he thought he knew about navigation was based on a misunderstanding. A few courses later he is now the official path mapper for one of the major cartographers in Nepal—but only after completing training courses set on real treks in summer and winter. We were glad that NMA accepted our recommendation that later phases of the training and assessment have to include a multi-day journey, and in turn NMA was subsequently rewarded when the scheme graduates were granted the coveted aspirant membership of the professional Union of International Mountain Leader Associations (UIMLA) in 2019.

Sahyadri

## The UIAA

The UIAA was founded nearly 90 years ago. It has a French acronym but because its working language is English it is now generally known as the International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation. The federation currently represents member associations in 66 countries, promoting the growth and protection of mountaineering and climbing worldwide, largely through the work of its specialist commissions. The Training Panel is a sub-committee of a Commission named 'Mountaineering' but perhaps more accurately comprehended as the 'spirit of adventure' and the balance this requires between risk management and human aspiration—which is rather a mouthful! Nowadays, training is treated identically to a commission but retains the benefits of a diverse membership. We also collaborate closely with the other commissions in order to keep abreast of developments in equipment, healthcare, environmental protection etc. For the last decade the Training Panel has had a close working relationship with the Petzl Foundation, a charity focussed on risk management and the conservation of ecosystems with difficult access. Sponsorship from this organization has allowed us to pilot and develop courses in partnership with member federations.

The UIAA first established minimum standards for qualifications back in 1993, so they are nothing new: however, we subsequently realized that progress was held back by a misnomer that led to confusion in many countries: we rebranded from 'Training Standards'

Leh

to 'Qualification Labels' in 2016 and have never looked back. The biggest lesson for the original development team back in the 90's was that the standards needed to focus on the process rather than the minutiae of syllabus content; the scheme needed to work for every culture and rural environment—whereas in 2016 we realized that 'training' implies an emphasis on the teaching input rather than the outcomes. Therefore, we articulated a working definition of a mountain qualification based on three requirements—governance, quality assurance and technical competence. Anybody can run a training course—but not necessarily a good one! By contrast, establishing a qualification is a big responsibility, and the delivery of training courses is only a small part—in fact some countries only conduct assessment, and post-qualification training. We believe that this is a lost opportunity, but it's their choice.

Once a candidate has submitted themselves for peer testing of competence, they expect affirmation to remain in place at least for as long as they retain that competence—and they also expect the governing body to inform the climbing and hiking public about the qualification. This requires commitment, intellectual investment and of course longevity: a training committee representing a range of stakeholders, a syllabus and prospectus, containing published requirements for entry, assessment and revalidation, scope of the award, a complaints procedure…the list goes on. The awarding body also bears a responsibility to ensure that standards are maintained between courses, and that the qualification remains fit for purpose by conducting periodic reviews. Although the standards are aimed primarily at voluntary leaders and instructors, the risk management differs little for professional work, so some associations use these qualifications as the foundation platform for their membership. UIAA accreditation does not extend to the additional elements required for a professional association, such as code of conduct, Professional Standards and Disciplinary committees etc. and it certainly should not be perceived as entitling anybody to work outside the country that awarded their qualification, unless specific member organizations have entered into a formal agreement on behalf of their members.

## The first UIAA Training courses

We were delighted to return to Leh, because Ladakh had been the location for our first multi-national training courses back in 2010.

Working in partnership with the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, Rimo Expeditions, ABVIMAS and sponsored by Petzl Foundation and their Indian contacts,those pilot courses had proved that shared standards made it possible for a multicultural group of instructors to work collaboratively, albeit with a course director 'floating' between sessions or at least leading practical plenary sessions. Instructors had to be capable of working through a translator and be willing to compromise over specific techniques—putting favoured 'hobby-horses' aside. It was a challenging but rewarding month, highly energizing for the trainers, who like the candidates, had volunteered to embark on a learning curve. As an experiment, this project had mixed success: in retrospect the course for national centre staff should have followed a different, 'train the trainers', syllabus—but we found a reasonable compromise under the circumstances. Sadly, it would be a decade before we could make further progress in India, as the concept of governing qualifications described above does not seem to be within the remit of the primary UIAA member organization.

The success of the course in Leh prompted the Petzl Foundation to ask us to help rekindle a leadership programme at a training centre in Kakani, in the foothills north of Kathmandu. Our mission was to help the Nepal Mountaineering Association develop a qualification for trekking leaders that might eventually meet the standards of the UIAA's Mountain Qualification Label, to be verified by an independent inspection. As in much of Asia, there was no shortage of training initiatives—but a shortage of peer-assessed programmes with quantifiable learning outcomes for trek leaders, by far the largest sector of the mountain tourism industry. This time the relationship with the national federation was more carefully negotiated, and contracts duly signed. So began a six-year journey, working with dozens of stakeholders; including the Nepalese National Mountain Guides association, various agencies (including TAAN, NATHM, SNV), and government officials including a succession of tourism ministers, all under the watchful eye and support of the Nepal Mountaineering Association. Initial misconceptions were soon overcome, and within a few seasons all the courses were following our 'consequential learning' model by climaxing with a real trek. For myself the high point, literally, was a winter crossing of the Ganja la (5130 m) for a train the trainer course, which demanded step cutting across icy slopes to access Helambu valley. This technical pass is rarely traversed

in winter, so a long traverse across 30 degree snow slopes several kilometres later came as a surprise that could easily have forced an about-turn if the weather had deteriorated—you could be forgiven for thinking that this seems rather similar to the incident that opens this article, but with the benefit of hindsight I would now recommend access from the Helambu side, in order to avoid the potential to be caught out with a high altitude pass blocking the only escape route. Every adventure is a potential learning experience—but only if you reflect upon it…

Fast-forward, and the qualified mountain leaders in Nepal are now eligible to join a professional association that has recently attained aspirant membership of the Union of International Mountaineering Leader Associations—until recently monopolized by European members. One of our first students, Vinayak Jay Malla, springboarded from the course onto the Mountain Guides training programme and is now a member of the professional International Mountain Guides community—it was no coincidence that we brought him in to work on the course in Leh, closing the circle.

During the intervening years we have worked with organizations in Jordan, Mongolia, Turkey, Hong Kong to help develop leader and instructor training. However, when the Jordan project ended abruptly due to staffing changes at the Tourism Board, we realized that our candidates had ended up with nothing to show on paper for their commitment. If a national organization does not introduce qualifications, we were powerless to issue anything beyond course reports. This was what prompted us to develop skills certification that instructors holding accredited qualifications can deliver; naturally these are a subset of the skills, knowledge and awareness required by a leader, who carries the added responsibility of caring for a group. Now, all our candidates can gain a meaningful certificate based on a syllabus, contact hours and practical delivery requirements regardless of the evolution of any national qualification programme. This has enabled us to extend the programme into countries that have keen individuals but as yet no representative organization, for example Kenya.

This year we closed the circle more tightly, when our original sponsors from Mumbai asked us to deliver a trek leadership course in Sahyadri to coincide with the Annual Seminar of the Himalayan Club. Yet again we were humbled by the enthusiasm and commitment of


Leh

the candidates, and captivated by the terrain. The course organizers and instructors overcame many challenges and obstacles to set a blueprint for potential development throughout India. But then the Covid-19 pandemic arrived and the world changed for ever. Who knows what the future will bring for our training programme? Watch this space, because we will return!

## Summary

The UIAA conducts highly recognized mountain leadership courses and who better to write about these than Steve Long. Ladakh had been the location for their first multi-national training courses back in 2010. Apart from Ladakh and Nepal, the UIAA have conducted these certification courses in different parts of the world such as Jordan, Turkey, Mongolia, and Hong Kong. They were in Lonavala near Mumbai in early 2020.

## About the Author

Steve Long is President of the UIAA Training Panel and is a member of the International Federation of International Mountain Guides Associations (IFGMA). He works as technical officer for Mountain Training UK and Ireland (MTUKI) and has been a keen climber and mountaineer for over 40 years, with ascents in every continent including a handful of new routes and first 'free' ascents. He lives in the heart of Snowdonia, surrounded by hills and sea cliffs. When he is not climbing or teaching much of his time is spent gardening or watching wildlife.

One of the many bridges made of locally-sourced bamboo and cane near Maliney

14

# Conserving Chadar

Bhushan H. Sethi

*The main philosophy and approach is via continued education / sensitization of actors in the landscape. All actors should be updated on required best practices.*

This narrative is a subset of a formal submission made to the Leh District Administration in September 2019, towards improving the Chadar experience and its sustainability.

Chadar—the frozen river—for centuries, people of the Zanskar valley as far as Padum and beyond have used it to walk to Leh markets as there is no road access in winter that connects the valley with the outside world. Over the last two decades, it has developed into a trek that commercial tour operators promote and is truly a unique experience.

Given the effects of global warming, the strength and thickness of ice of the Chadar varies each year. Besides climate change another set of factors that greatly affect the Chadar landscape are human pressures and side effects of trekking, namely footprint density, human waste decomposition and dissemination, garbage dumping and removal etc. This affects the flora, fauna, sustainability of Chadar and the greater Zanskar valley landscape.

For the majority, the Chadar trek starts off at Bakola and ends at the Nerak waterfall. Few continue to stay at Nerak village, Lingshed or head all the way to Padum. However, less than 50% of enrolled trekkers are able to complete the full Chadar experience.

During my 2019 walk to Nerak, there were a few places where the ice was badly eroded. At places, over a foot deep water pools had formed due to excessive footfall and heavy sledging used for carrying supplies. In areas of weak ice walking first crushes it to small glass cubes. Thereafter footfall and sledging over the already crushed ice and the warmth of the day turn it into a water pool. This churn makes the volume of water large enough to maintain its relative warmth. So much so that it doesn't completely solidify when overnight

temperatures plummet to under 20 and then the footfalls continue the next day.

This is because the number of people is much in excess of the ice's carrying capacity. Eventually, these pools totally breakdown. Trekkers then have to climb and walk over rocks for 100+m creating a severe safety hazard.

Also one notices a significant percentage of trekkers do not have any outdoors experience : no Himalayan exposure, no experience of being exposed to low, let alone sub-zero temperatures, no orientation on what it meant to be on a trek, expedition or how to conduct oneself with regards to safety or environmental challenges.

The Chadar to Nerak waterfall walk is about 30 km with three overnight camps en-route. The absence of tree cover is obvious. The surrounding mountains have sparse to non-existent wood even at higher elevations.

Trekkers crossing water channel/pools created due to excess human footfall

Therefore severe restrictions on campfires and laws prohibiting tree-felling are essential.

As one alights from the vehicle where the road ends at Bakola, the density of people makes it seem like this must be the largest congregation at this elevation. Trekkers, porters, support staff and people for related activities. Teams move to the river ice below immediately and carry on with repacking, trek readiness, food, thus dumping a lot of waste.

This prep on Chadar ice takes up to two hours for each team. These activities could as well be carried out at the road level above, away from the ice and river. Groups can come down eventually to practice ice balancing for a few minutes before starting the actual trek.

On this trail there is lack of wild animal activity except jackal tracks. They come scavenging at night for food, garbage, plastics and human waste. Deer tracks start appearing only near Nerak waterfall as human footfall drop significantly. For the 5% continuing to Lingshed and Padum, after Omah snow leopard tracks are seen, some even frozen in the old ice surface below the fresh surface.

High altitude desert

Roadhead

It is important to ensure there is no open defecation. Canids are known to look for feces with certain enzyme content to derive nutrition. It is easy to get infected if human waste or garbage is around, even a little subterranean waste covered by sand / mud can be easily dug out. Bathroom tents should be far away from water.

As one nears Omah after Nerak numerous deer tracks appear and multiple paths crisscross the ice indicating that this is wild terrain. After the Lingshed junction off the Zanskar snow leopard tracks also increase. I could measure up to three fresh snow leopard tracks crisscrossing human tracks. There was an adult snow leopard track with a younger one in tow indicating breeding females. On my walk thereafter to Lingshed, I came across a pair of juvenile Ibex running down the mountain slopes. On our return just a few villages after Padum a pack of three Himalayan wolves crossed.

## Towards Sustainability

The district administration is aware what a Bollywood movie did to suddenly boost Pangong Tso tourism. It was an ecological disaster. To prevent Chadar from going the same way these issues must be

Human and snow leopard tracks after Nerak on Chadar

discussed and suggestions implemented. The main philosophy and approach is via continued education / sensitization of actors in the landscape. All actors should be updated on required best practices. Leave no Trace needs to be strictly followed, by tourists and by agencies, mandating strict enforcements.

Ladakh is uniquely positioned for promoting sustainable tourism development as compared to the rest of India as tourist movement is administered using Inner Line Permits. Globally, natural preservation areas also grant a fixed number of daily permits to control land use and avoid above mentioned problems. This combined with sensitization of local communities and operator associations can be leveraged to develop sustainable and clean tourism infrastructure.

Government agencies and commercial operators involved in overseeing/regulating safety of people and environment in any area must consider organizational leadership training. Relevant training courses from an organization like 'Leave No Trace Centre for Outdoor Ethics, U.S.A.' (www.lnt.org) or the 'National Outdoor Leadership School in India and U.S.A.' (NOLS) will go a long way to evolve Ladakh's outdoor experience for all.

Leave No Trace Centre's Seven Principles are environment friendly practices for various kinds of ecosystems and have robust training programmes for people and organizations that function in the outdoors. Trekking in Ladakh would benefit by following the frozen ecosystem processes.

## Summary

Bhushan Sethi sets out to study the climate change and human impact on the immensely popular Chadar trail in Ladakh. He has made several useful recommendations to the administration and summarized his thoughts for *THJ*.

## About the Author

Bhushan H. Sethi wears many hats—he is a global technology consultant, Goodwill Ambassador to Project Tiger and adviser to several conservation networks and NGOs for conservation sensitization, actions and sustainable best practices. His passions include travelling, mountain expeditions, wildlife photography, adventure sports, sailing and antiquities. Although he left India for the US 25 years ago, at heart he is and always will be a Mumbaikar.

Photo Feature

# Chadar

## Aditya Arya

Aditya Arya has been an explorer, trekker and a professional photographer since the 1980s. He devotes his energy to photographic conservation having honed his skills and knowledge on preservation, restoration and archiving.

He is the founder and force behind Museo Camera—the only Photography and Camera Museum in India. With more than 3000 rare and iconic cameras and other equipment, this museum traces the history of photography from the 1870s to the Digital Era.

In this photo feature, while on a much needed break, he walked on the Chadar, photographing her wearing lights of different hues, altering shadows of different sizes and playing hide and seek with light on the frozen landscape.

The feature underlines Bhushan Sethi's cry for emergency measures to cover this spectacular river bed.

Dorje Lakpa setting off up West ridge

# 1 First Ascent of Link Sar

Mark Richey and Steve Swenson

*As I said goodbye to Link Sar in the fading light, I thought how lucky we were, an amazing team of friends on one of the most breathtaking summits in the world!*

From 31st July to 8th August 2019, Graham Zimmerman, Steve Swenson, Chris Wright and Mark Richey made the first ascent of Link Sar (7041 m) in the Central Pakistani Karakoram via its 3400 m southeast face. Having been the objective of at least nine expeditions, the first ascent of this peak has been a highly sought-after prize for the climbing community. The team is calling their route starting from Advanced Base Camp, the Southeast Face (M6+ WI 4 90°, 2300 m). But the grade does a poor job of portraying the challenge of this route that Karakoram veteran Swenson calls "one of the most complex and difficult routes I have ever climbed."

Swenson originally attempted the route in 2001 with George Lowe, Joe Terravecchia, Steve Larson, Andy Tuthill and Eric Winkleman. It was an amazing opportunity for the team since the face lies very near the contested border between Pakistan and India (known as the Actual Ground Position Line or AGPL), and the eastern aspects of the mountain had not been permitted since the mid-1980s when the Siachen conflict broke out. The team did not make it very high on the peak, but it inspired Swenson to return, and he made repeated attempts over the following decade to get another permit for the peak but was denied.

Over the ensuing years, several attempts were made on the peak's western aspect via the Charakusa valley. In 2015, Swenson and Zimmerman, along with Scott Bennett, made the first ascent of nearby Changi Tower (6500 m) via its north ridge (M6 5.10 A2, 1200 m) starting from the Nangmah valley and over a pass onto the upper Lachit glacier. From that climb they looked over into the Kondus valley and caught an excellent view of the massive southeast face of Link Sar, supplying more information and motivation to attempt the mountain.

Climbing to Camp 2

Kondus valley

In 2017, it looked like the area was once again opening to climbing, and Swenson and Zimmerman were finally given a permit to access Link Sar's southeast face. They also invited Wright on the expedition as he and Zimmerman had formed a strong partnership in the mountains of Alaska. During this two-and-a-half-month expedition, the team experienced atrocious weather, and after multiple attempts reached only 5900 m. Despite their failure to climb the peak that season, the team discovered a route that threaded its way through much of the face's immense complexities and objective hazards.

In 2019, the three climbers, alongside Mark Richey, with whom Swenson won a Piolet d'Or in 2012 for the first ascent of Saser Kangri II in the Eastern Karakoram, returned to the southeast face. They departed their homes in the United States on 4th June. The approach to the peak is made via the Kondus valley and then up the Kaberi glacier. A road runs adjacent to the glacier and up to same BC at 3600 m as was used in 2001 and 2017 where they arrived on 10th June.

The Kondus valley is one of the deepest in the Karakoram and its walls are precipitously steep. On most 7000 m peaks, a nearby easier

6000 m peak would be used to acclimatize before starting an alpine style ascent of the primary objective. But no such peak exists in the Kondus, so the team was forced to use the lower portions of their route on the southeast face for acclimatization. To help with this, they set up an ABC 1100 m above BC. To establish this camp, the Americans hired five local porters to carry loads up a via ferrata of fixed ropes they established to ensure safety along a series of easy, but exposed, low 5th class slabs. From the top of these slabs that rise out of the Kaberi glacier, the route traversed up large beautiful alpine meadows to ABC.

The team established ABC on 5th July, but they were forced to wait for conditions on the mountain to improve. The 2018-19 winter in the Karakoram was one of the snowiest on record, making the mountain very dangerous. This fact that was emphasized by a size 3 wet slab avalanche that came within 100 metres of ABC on 7th July. Thankfully, the weather in early to mid-July was clear and very warm which allowed for conditions to improve. On 15th July they followed the 2017 route up steep glacial and snow terrain to Camp I at 5200 m.

Link Sar

Climbing above Camp III

Two days later Chris and Graham led the crux technical section up ten pitches of sustained M6+ and a snow ridge to reach the top of a broad 600 m high rock wall flanked on both sides by active seracs. Climbing at night to avoid the intense heat at this elevation and aspect, they reached Camp II at 5900 m and the high point from two years earlier. After spending a couple of nights at this altitude the team considered themselves sufficiently acclimatized to attempt the route.

On the morning of 31st July, the team started their alpine style ascent starting from ABC at 7:30 am. During the cool morning hours, they climbed back to Camp I where they spent the afternoon resting before repeating the lower crux of the route that this time was in very warm, wet and subsequently challenging conditions. Arriving at Camp II around 9:30 am, they once again stopped to wait out the heat of the day and rest after climbing through the night.

The following morning, they departed just before dawn. Above the second camp was a serac barrier that had changed significantly from 2017 and presented a greater cause for concern in terms of overhead

Climbing above Camp III

hazard and ability to circumnavigate. Luckily, the team found a way around the righthand side of the wall that involved minimal exposure and well-formed WI 4 ice climbing. Following easier terrain, the team found themselves at another large and safe bivouac at 6200 m, situated below the final difficult band of mixed rock and ice climbing.

At this point, the team hunkered down for a forecasted 36 hours of bad weather that arrived in the mid-afternoon of 3rd August, their third day on the route. On 5th, at 3:00 am, they departed in weather that was still poor, relying on the clearing that was forecasted. An hour above camp, they were forced to wait for the weather to improve before starting up the technical mixed climbing that was above. In order to stay warm and out of the blowing snow they dug a snow cave and sat inside until 9:00 am when the weather finally cleared, and they were able to continue. Three excellent pitches of ice and mixed ground led to a large snow fin that involved five pitches of challenging and unprotectable snow climbing and one pitch of steep but solid serac ice. At sunset, they reached their last bivy site at 6700 m.

Starting at sunrise on 6th August, the team left their tents and launched for the summit. An excellent pitch of alpine ice led to the top of a corniced ridge they started traversing. Two pitches along the ridge, Graham triggered a small slab avalanche, a part of which poured over the belay where the rest of the team was standing. The volume of the slide wasn't large enough to harm the belay, but it did sweep Graham off his feet and he fell for about 30-40 m down a gulley and over a small cliff. The lead ropes rope caught him and fortunately he was not hurt and climbed back up to rejoin the team. After spending some time to regroup, they decided to continue, but Chris took the lead again given that Graham was shaken by his fall. Three more pitches of challenging snow climbing intermixed with short sections of ice and mixed terrain and steep unconsolidated snow led to a final belay 50 m below the summit. But the nature of the climbing gave the team little confidence in their ability to reach the summit, even though it loomed just overhead.

In the final few feet to the summit Chris gave the lead to Mark who recalls that final pitch. "It was late, and Chris had led all day in a tremendous effort but now he had stalled out in steep, shoulder deep

Camp IV

snow just 15 m or so below the summit of Link Sar. Steve yelled up, 'It's probably a giant cornice; we may have to call it good!' Chris wasn't convinced, instinctively he felt the summit loomed somewhere just above, but he couldn't figure out how to climb any higher. Graham was dug into a huge hole with his body providing the only belay and spoke to the team, 'Mark has a lot of experience with these kinds of dangerous mountains. I want him to go up and have a look.' Chris downclimbed quickly to the belay, we swapped ends and I stripped down to my shell and no pack to be as light and nimble as possible and then climbed to Chris's highpoint about 12 m up. A single screw, just above the belay, provided the only protection.

"I began digging upwards, two m deep in places, in a big arc, chimneying against the trench walls. I was terribly frightened the snow might collapse under my feet and I would tumble over backwards, hurtling 25 m to that one screw. Fresh on all our minds was the horrifying avalanche that swept Graham for a 30-40 m fall just a few hours before. I feared also that I was indeed climbing up a huge cornice and any moment I could break through and plunge over the other side of the mountain.

Sensing danger at the belay, Steve furiously dug in, searching for a V thread to secure us all. Still I made progress, sweating through my


Route photo from Matteo

base layers as I inched upwards towards a faint horizon of snow. After what seemed an eternity, the slope began to stiffen, the angle laid back, and I could get to my knees and wriggle upwards. And then it was over! I stood up on perhaps the most amazing summit I have ever reached. It was about three m wide by seven long and perfectly flat, but vertical or overhung on all sides. A massive spike of granite pierced through the snow just a few feet below to confirm we had


arrived! I was overcome with emotion, relief to have survived and overjoyed to be finally on the summit of Link Sar. I screamed down, "I'm on the fucking top!" A short pause of disbelief was followed by an eruption of cheers from my companions and "is there room up there for us". There was plenty and soon we all stood on top of Link Sar and hugged and screamed and marvelled at our spectacular position and the dazzling alpenglow bathing the Karakoram in orange light. I

Advanced Base Camp

was so happy to reach the summit and for my companions who had worked so long and hard for this mountain. We spent less than an hour on top as it was getting dark, a cold wind had picked up and we had a long way back to our high camp. As I said goodbye to Link Sar in the fading light, I thought how lucky we were, an amazing team of friends on one of the most breathtaking summits in the world!"

On 8th August, nine days after departing, the team arrived back at ABC. The descent had taken three days due to the challenge of making anchors in the bad snow conditions and the need for the team to once again wait out the heat of the day lower on the mountain.

This first ascent of Link Sar had taken a maximal physical and mental effort from the entire team. It required all their collective experience and strength. Their democratic, discussion-oriented decision-making process was the key element that enabled them to reach the top and safely descend from this elusive and beautiful summit.

Finally, it is important to note that the expedition was undertaken adhering to strict environmental standards, deep respect for the communities local to the Karakoram, and the carbon footprint incurred by the expedition has been calculated and will be offset (with the help of Protect Our Winters).

The team would like to first and foremost thank their families and friends for their support in this endeavour. They would also like to thank their sponsors and those who provided them funding for the expedition that includes: The American Alpine Club, The Mount Everest Foundation, The British Mountaineering Council, and The New Zealand Alpine Club.

And finally, they would like to thank those in Pakistan who helped them make this trip happen, namely Nazir Sabir Expeditions, Alpine Adventure Guides, Captain Umair Tariq and their dear friends and local staff, Hajji Rasool, Nadeem and Fida Ali.

## Summary

Graham Zimmerman, Steve Swenson, Chris Wright and Mark Richey made the first ascent of Link Sar (7041 m) in the Central Pakistani Karakoram via its 3400 m southeast face. This was an alpine style light weight expedition during July – August, 2019.

## About the Authors

**Steve Swenson** splits his time between Seattle and Canmore with his wife Ann. He has been climbing for over a half century, including ascents of K2 and Everest without supplementary oxygen, and the first ascent of Saser Kangri II with Mark Richey and Freddie Wilkinson in 2011 which won a Piolet d'Or. His book, Karakoram, Climbing through the Kashmir Conflict won the Kekoo Naoroji Book Award for Himalayan Literature in 2019. Steve is an honorary member of The Himalayan Club.

**Mark Richey** began rock climbing in 1973 at age 15 in the Quincy Quarries of Massachusetts.

He has made over 30 expeditions to the greater ranges of the world with a focus towards technical alpine style ascents and exploratory climbing. Marks expeditions have taken him from remote Fjords in Greenland to desert rock towers in Ethiopia and some of the least visited mountain ranges of Nepal, Peru, Tibet, India and Pakistan.

Mark lives in Massachusetts with his wife Teresa where they own and operate Mark Richey Woodworking, a firm specializing in the design, manufacture and installation of high-end woodworking throughout the country. Mark is an honorary member of The Himalayan Club.