



Bhala, Northeast Face And Ridge; Tupendeo, Southwest Pillar; Maha Dev Phobrang, East Spur Via Te

India, Kishtwar Himalaya

In September, Swiss alpinists Dres Abegglen, Thomas Senf, and Stephan Siegrist returned to the Kishtwar Himalaya to attempt Bhala (Spear), a Matterhorn-like peak they had seen during their 2014 expedition (AAJ 2015). Bhala lies on the western rim of the Kaban Valley, which flows southwest into the Chenab Valley, a little east of Atholi. Base camp was established close to the foot of Bhala, and on September 12, in excellent weather, the three reached the col on the northeast ridge, where they bivouacked. Next day they climbed an obvious ramp up the 700m northeast face and ridge to the summit, which they gained at 3 p.m. Despite the aesthetic beauty of the mountain, the rock quality was extremely poor. Maps give the altitude of this summit as 6,000m, but the team recorded 5,900m, naming their route Copa-Kaban.

Back at base camp, the weather became more unsettled, with regular afternoon storms. The team's attention was now held by Tupendeo (a.k.a. Druid, as coined by a 1981 British expedition), a spectacular pointed peak that had nearly been climbed in 1992. In the early afternoon of September 18, the three reached a bivouac below the southwest pillar. They fixed a couple of pitches that day, and the following morning set out for the summit. Contrary to their experiences on Bhala, they found some of the best rock climbing they had ever encountered at altitude, completing their 800m route by 1:30 p.m., and returning to base camp at 9:30 that night. They climbed 21 pitches with difficulties up to 6a/b, recorded an altitude of 5,700m, and named the route Deokhal.

Poor weather pinned them down for a week at base camp, after which they set off for their third objective: Maha Dev Phobrang. This had previously been attempted in 1984, when it was known as Mardi Phabrang (see note below). Conspicuous on the east spur of this mountain is a 200m tower the Swiss called Te ("Crystal" in Hindi). After a bivouac on the east spur on October 1, they reached the east face of the crystal-shaped tower and climbed it in four excellent pitches up to 5c/6a. As it was only 2 p.m, they rappelled the far side of Te and climbed snow slopes (up to 60°) to reach the main summit of Maha Dev Phobrang at 3.30 p.m. They measured an altitude of 5,900m. They were back in base camp by 9 p.m. and have named their route Chaprasi. Siegrist remarked, "The biggest superlatives don't even begin to explain the conditions we had on this mountain—it was quite simply unique."

Lindsay Griffin, with information from **Stefan Siegrist**, Switzerland

Editor's note: In 1984, Tommy Curtis, Mark Miller, Simon Richardson, and Sean Smith (U.K.) attempted Mardi Phabrang by the northeast pillar. Approaching from the southeast, they climbed a 450m couloir to a col on the ridge at the start of the difficulties, but bad weather never allowed further progress. Richardson later soloed the first ascent of Tupendeo II (ca 5,600m), a snowy summit to the north of Tupendeo, climbing to the col between the two and then following the south ridge. In 1992, Jon Bamber took Richardson's recommendation and went to the Kaban Valley to attempt both Tupendeo and Mardi Phabrang. Bamber and partner acclimatized by making the second ascent of Tupendeo II, then attempted the southwest face of Tupendeo, reaching a point estimated to be less than 200m from the summit when Bamber's partner, in the lead, dislodged a large rock that almost severed Bamber's leg. He lost a lot of blood through a massive compound fracture, and it took six days to get him off the

mountain. (He was on crutches for four years, but still does a little rock climbing and a good deal of competitive running.) Siegrist found a belay plate on the mountain, which is believed to have belonged to one of the 1992 British team. Spear (Bhala) appears never to have been attempted before 2015; Richardson wrote after his first trip to the Kaban in 1981 that the rock in that quarter was visibly very bad.

Images



Bhala (Spear) from the north. The first ascensionists climbed the left skyline.



Bhala or Spear from the southeast. The first ascensionists climbed the right skyline, the northeast face and ridge.



Stefan Siegrist on the second pitch of the superb southwest pillar of Tupendeo.



Tupendeo from the Kaban Valley to the southwest. (1) 1992 attempt. (2) Southwest pillar (Deokhal, 2015).



Maha Dev Phobrang (a.k.a. Mardi Pharbrang) from the east-northeast and the route of first ascent over the top of Te (Crystal). The main summit is hidden behind Te. A 1984 British expedition attempted the right skyline ridge.



Stefan Siegrist on the fantastic granite of Te's east pillar.



Descending from the summit of Maha Dev Phobrang with Te in the foreground. To the northeast, the highest peak visible in the distance, left of center, is Kishtwar Kailash. To the left it is possible to make out the small black pyramid of Cerro Kishtwar, and left again the larger pyramid of Chomochior.

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