

Changabang

CHRISTIAN BONINGTON, *Alpine Climbing Group*

MARTIN Boysen, Dougal Haston, Balwant Sandhu, Doug Scott, Chewang Tachei and I reached the summit of Changabang (22,520 feet) at four P.M. on June 4. This was the culmination of three weeks of intensive effort, first through some of the wildest and most beautiful country I have ever seen to reach the foot of the mountain, and then on the mountain itself.

We left Delhi on May 4, travelling by truck through Rishikesh (of Maharishi and Beatle fame), and then by way of an incredible roller-coaster road, along spectacular gorges and across huge cliffs, to Joshimath near the Tibetan frontier. We were sharing the road with thousands of pilgrims on their way to Badrinath, most holy of Hindu shrines. We were the first Europeans allowed into this area for twenty years.

On May 9 we left the road just below the small village of Lata and started our approach march. We followed the Rishi Gorge, a route first discovered by Bill Tilman and Eric Shipton in 1935. This dramatically beautiful region was so difficult that it took us over ten days to cover twenty miles. A shortage of porters meant we had to ferry much of the equipment from stage to stage, using goats to carry the grain and rice.

Base Camp was established on May 20 on the side of the Rhamani Glacier, up which we walked the following day for our first close look at Changabang—surely one of the most spectacular rock peaks in the world. From where we stood on the Rhamani Glacier, it was a giant tooth of grey granite, veined with ice. The route from this side was out of the question. Moreover, the weather pattern was against us, for it started snowing around midday every day. The rocks were permanently plastered with ice and snow. The only hope seemed to be in the back. This entailed crossing a very steep and difficult col of 19,500 feet to get to the upper part of the Changabang Glacier. From there we hoped to climb the great south face of Kalanka to reach the col linking Kalanka with Changabang, where a knife-edged ridge led to the summit.

On May 23 Boysen and Scott tried to reach the col barring the way to the Changabang Glacier. Eric Shipton had, in fact, got to this point from the Changabang Glacier with comparative ease but had reported the Rhamani side as very steep. Boysen and Scott followed a steep snow ramp to the foot of a sheer rock wall leading to the col. Every crack was jammed with ice and they were forced to turn back, abseiling down a steep ice gully and leaving ropes in place. Next day they bypassed the difficulties by climbing a big hanging glacier which led to the crest of the ridge, and then following the ridge over a series of tooth-

PLATE 36

Photo by Doug Scott

**Dawn light on CHANGABANG's east
side seen from the Rhamani Glacier.**



PLATE 37

Photo by Doug Scott

**Boysen, Haston and Bonington in front
of Changabang.**



like gendarmes to the col, where they dropped a rope. After a long and difficult day, we now had a route to Shipton's Col, but it entailed a thousand feet of steep jūmaring on ropes which became iced every night.

We decided to ferry all the needed gear to the top of the col. Then all the members of the team who were fit would pick up gear at our dump and carry heavy loads down to the Changabang Glacier. We would make a single push to the summit, bivouacking on the way up, without the security of fixed ropes or a back-up party.

Unfortunately, two members of the team, Kerim Kumar and Ujager Singh, were sick, but the remaining six set out early on May 31 to cross the Shipton Col, establishing camp at the head of the Changabang Glacier. We had to wait there for three days and had very nearly run out of food when, at last, on the evening of June 2 the weather showed signs of clearing. It was necessary to climb the face by night since the snow was too unstable once the sun had softened it. We were fortunate in having synchronized our summit assault with the full moon.

Setting out at 9:45 on the night of June 2, we plodded up in brilliant, yet bitterly cold moonlight across dangerous avalanche areas and then up a snow ramp which led to the upper part of the face. There were several ice walls and some very thin snow over hard ice.

We reached 21,000 feet at eight A.M. Very tired, we camped on a platform below a stable ice wall and rested all day. The following morning at two o'clock, we set out on our summit push, starting up a steep ice pitch and continuing up a long snow slope to the Changabang-Kalanka Col, which we reached at dawn. From there a knife-edged ice ridge snaked its way up to the summit of Changabang. It took all day to climb it and we finally reached the top at four P.M. Getting back in the dark was particularly nerve-wracking. It was 10:30 that night before we got back to our camp—an 18-hour day and one of the hardest I have experienced in the mountains.

Our expedition had been tremendously successful, not only in climbing terms but also in human relations. The team, drawn from two different countries, got on extremely well together and built friendships which will outlast that rather ephemeral moment of success on reaching the summit of a mountain.

Summary of Statistics:

AREA: Garhwal, U.P., India.

FIRST ASCENT: Changabang, 22,520 feet, June 4, 1974 (Bonington, Boysen, Haston, Sandhu, Scott, Tachei).

Bagini Peak, 20,423 feet, May 30 (Scott, Boysen).

PERSONNEL: Christian Bonington, *Co-Leader*, Martin Boysen, Alan Hankinson, Dougal Haston, Douglas Scott, *English*; Kerim Kumar, Balwant Sandhu, *Co-Leader*, Dr. D.J. Singh, Ujager Singh, Chewang Tachei, *Indians*.