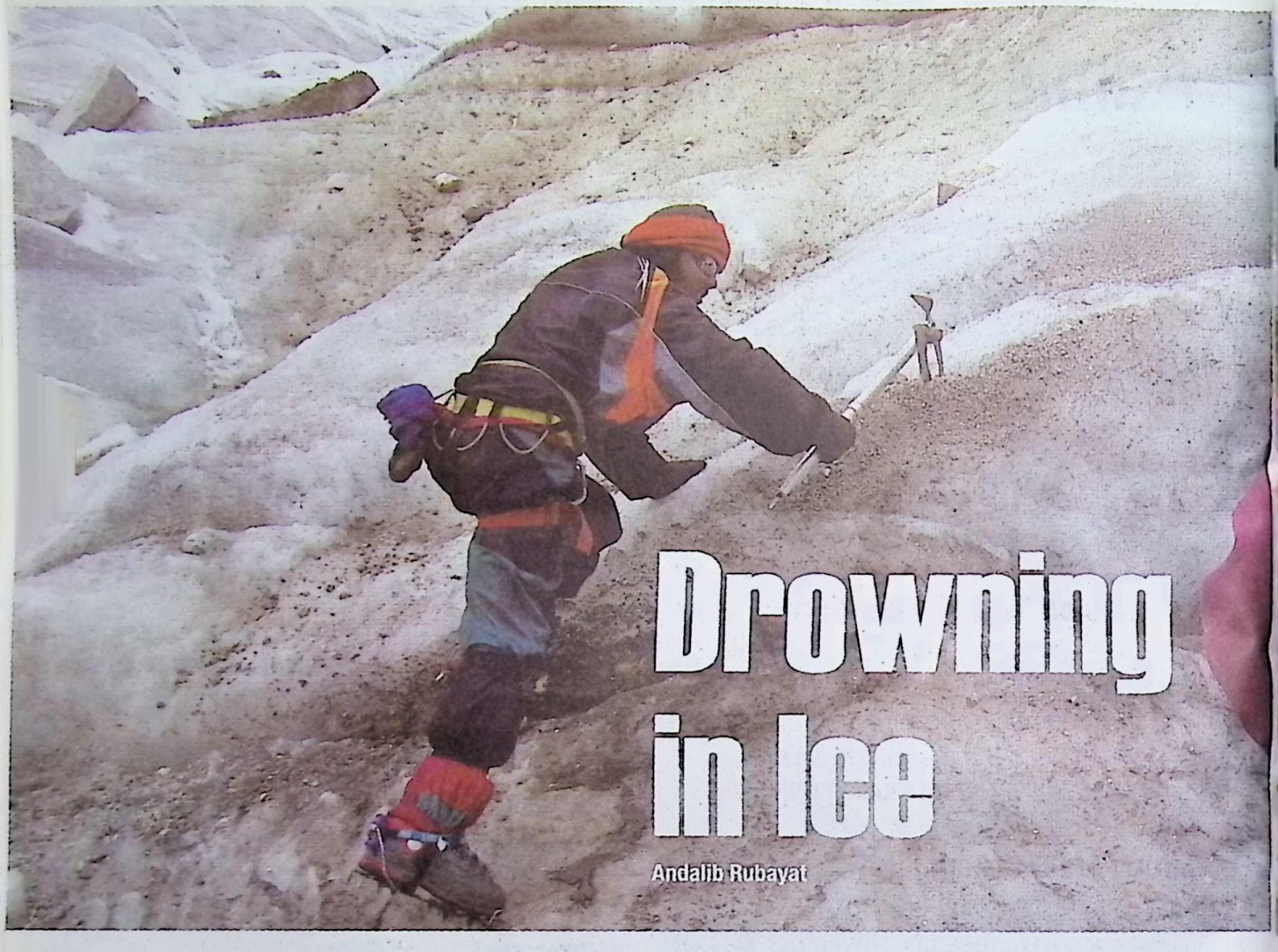


Drowning in Ice

Andalib Rubayat

MAY be I am dreaming; may be not. Everything is white around me. Surrounded by the peaceful world of boulders, and framed by the Himalayas, this is more than just a trek; it is for me a pilgrimage to one of the most remarkable adventures on earth. A large, slow-moving river of ice, right under my feet. After beating up compacted layers of snow with crampons for one full hour we have reached Rathong Glacier, situated in West Sikkim. The source of Rangeet and Tista River flows from Rathon Glacier.

Glaciers are moving mountains of ice and Glacier ice is the largest reservoir of fresh water on Earth, and second only to oceans as the largest reservoir of total water. Glaciers cover vast areas of Polar Regions but are restricted to the highest mountains in the tropics.

Reaching Rathong Glacier was not easy. We had to complete a long training period of rock climbing, mountain hazards and physical fitness at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute. Then we started our trek from Yuksum the first capital of sikkim. Destination was to reach Bakhim which is located at 9000 feet above sea level and 13 km from Yuksum. We started our trek at 6am and after 6 hours of walking uphill with the clouds we finally reached Bakhim at about 12 o` clock. We stayed at Bakhim for one day for acclimatization and started moving again for DZONGRI. DZONGRI is the meeting place of man and mountain gods at an altitude of 13300 feet. After a gentle climb through rhododendron forests to a mountain ridge, we dropped down to the village of Tshokha and continue to Phedang. After crossing Phedang heavy rain started to fall and it became difficult to climb. The 16 kg rucksack on our shoulders started to absorb water and it became heavier. After reaching DZONGRI everyone was exhausted so we camped near a river bank.

Next day we continued through grassy fields with Mountain God in constant view. Soon the Kanchenjunga range appeared and we came to Bikbari, lined with many stones. We descended to a river bank for taking a short break. We followed a steep and narrow trail up river. From the high spots there were wonderful views of the Ghunsa Khola below. The path ascends steeply and after struggling hard with rocks and boulders we finally arrived at the Chaurithang Base Camp (14600 ft) an area used for summer pasture. The place offers enchanting views of Kotang, Rathong, Kabru, Fork, Chandra