

21. Paul Figg and Malcolm Bass looking worn after 10 days on Vasuki Parbat. (*Rachel Antill*)

Summary: An account of the first ascent of the west face of Vasuki Parbat (6721m), Garhwal Himalaya, by Malcolm Bass and Paul Figg. Descent by north-west ridge; 4 to 13 October 2010, 1600m, rock-climbing of Hard Severe (loose), mixed climbing of Scottish VI. Expedition members: Patricia Deavoll, Malcolm Bass, Paul Figg (climbers), Rachel Antill (artist), Satyabrata Dam (liaison officer), Chandar Singh Negi (cook), and Shankar Thapa (assistant cook).

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The ascent was one of six climbs shortlisted for a *Piolet d'Or* in 2011.

DEREK BUCKLE

In The Realm of The Bear and Snow Leopard

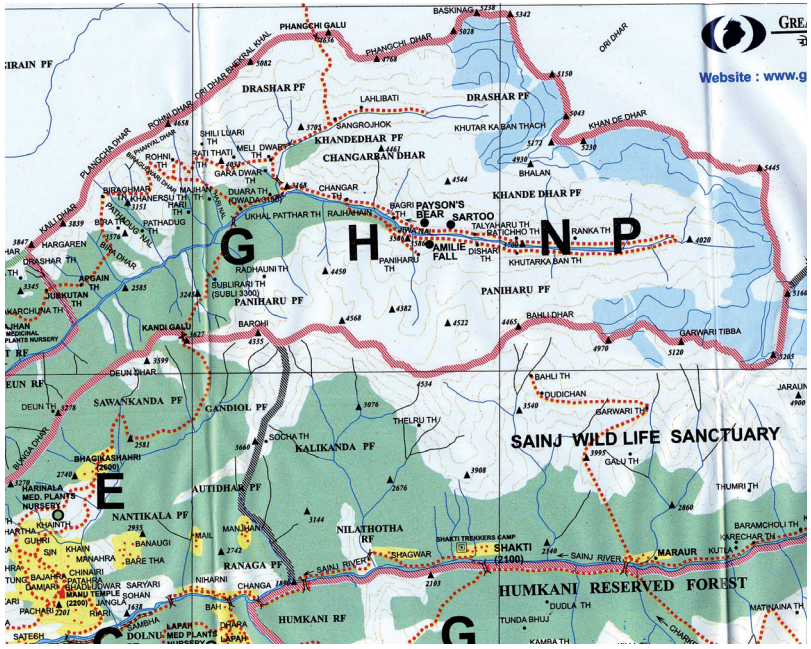
Most national parks positively teem with visitors but one of India's more recent additions, the Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) does not fit into this category. Created in 1984, the park comprises a total of 1171 km^2 including its eco buffer zone. Prolific wildlife has attracted trekkers and bird watchers, but difficult access limits the aspirations of all but the very hardy to easier valleys such as that of the Sainj river to the south. While searching for a suitable venue for a joint expedition with the Himalayan Club in 2010, Harish Kapadia suggested that we should explore



22. Laura Millichamp arriving on the ridge of Snowcock Point. (*Derek Buckle*)

the remote Jiwa Nala region of the GHNP. In contrast to more peripheral areas, this valley has not previously attracted mountaineers and only the valley floor is well known. Prior to the establishment of the park, local villagers occasionally exploited the valley for grazing and for medicinal plants but neither is now permitted.

The Jiwa Nala is one of the three watersheds that comprise the GHNP - along with the Sainj and Tirthan further south. It is confined by steep mountain ranges to the north and south and by a glaciated, crenulated cirque to the east. A steep-sided, forested valley restricts entry from the west. Thus, the upper reaches of the Jiwa Nala can only be accessed via the southern Kandi Galu pass (3627m) or the northern Phangchi Galu pass



23. Above: Jiwa Nala region of the Great Himalayan National Park. *(Map courtesy GHNP).*



24. Google map of Jiwa Nala showing key locations.



25. Mike Cocker post-holing his way towards the summit of Tribulation Point, 5125m. (*Derek Buckle*)

(4636m). Both passes involve arduous four-day treks from their respective road-heads in Neuli or Pulga. Detailed maps are not officially available for this area, but the GHNP does offer a free electronic map on its web site that clearly shows the glaciated eastern head of the valley and indicates an array of peaks rising to a little under 5500m. Recently published Google Earth aerial photographs are even more informative and convinced us that considerable exploratory mountaineering opportunities existed.

Unfortunately, long before detailed planning got underway both Martin Scott, who had been intimately involved with the early discussions with Harish, and the Himalayan Club found that they were no longer able to participate and it became exclusively an AC expedition.

Following our arrival in Delhi in late September a four-hour train journey on the Shatabdi Express, during which we were continuously fed and watered, took us through the vegetated Indian plains to Chandigarh. From here an eight-hour drive through increasingly mountainous country led to the regional town of Kullu, close to the National Park headquarters. After a brief stay in Kullu we left early the next morning to take the comparatively short but winding road to Neuli on the Sainj river from where we started the four-day trek to our proposed base camp in the Jiwa Nala.

At Neuli we joined an enormous caravan of helpers: five Sherpas who would help establish camps and maintain BC, and a veritable army of 40 porters – comprising 29 Sherpas from Kullu and the remainder, including two guides, from Neuli. Needless to say, organising the group took some time and it was not until after 1pm that our entourage set off for Bhagi-



26. Derek Buckle all smiles having reached Tribulation Point. Snow Leopard Peak is in the background behind Derek. (*Mike Cocker*)

kashahri, the last village in the buffer zone. Following a well-defined wooded path it took around four hours to climb the 900m to Bhagikashahri. This area is famed for its medicinal plants and one in particular, cannabis, was freely growing in abundance. A colourful local puja, complete with litter-borne gods, drums and wind instruments, was underway as we arrived at which we were readily accepted spectators. However, the local children appeared more interested in us than the festivities, but perhaps they had seen something similar many times before.

This part of Himachal Pradesh is characterised by incredibly steep-sided valleys causing problems for both crop cultivation and habitation. With level land at such a premium we camped on the school playground but dismantled the tents during the day so that the space could be returned to its normal use. Leaving Bhagikashahri we walked through a mass of shoulder high cannabis before climbing steeply through deep forests of conifers, holly oaks, rhododendrons and deciduous trees to reach exposed open ground leading to the Kandi Galu pass. It was a magnificent effort on the part of our porters to ascend 1500m over such awkward terrain and a relief to get our first glimpses into the lower wooded reaches of the Jiwa Nala. A steep but relatively short descent from here led to our second camp near to the hut at Sublirari Thach (3350m). Machetes would have been useful to clear the 10 ft-high nettles and other plants for our tents although the Sherpas found that ski poles performed the task almost as well.

Descending steeply the next day the scant track gradually became less wooded as it neared the river, but it was evident that this was not a frequented route and we were grateful to have a local guide. Crossing to



27. Mike Cocker on Snow Leopard Peak, 5365m. (*Derek Buckle*)
28. Derek Buckle descending the rock chimney on Sentinel Peak. (*Mike Cocker*)



the Jiwa Nala's northern side, a considerably better path led to our third camp close to a bothy at Dwada Thach (3200m). It was here that the local porters returned to Neuli while the Kullu porters continued upstream past the Surtu glacial pond to the site of our base camp at Ratichho Thach (3725m: A on the satellite map). The valley bottom now assumed a glaciated U-shaped appearance rather than the steep-sided V-shape encountered below. Most visitors to the Jiwa Nala venture no further than the glacial pond, but judging by their abundant spoor Himalayan bears frequently do.

Base camp afforded good views of the icefall and glaciated cirque at the head of the valley, but these did not suggest which objectives to tackle or how to get to them. For this we made a foray up the slopes to the south, first fording the river before climbing a steep, grassy couloir to an undulating plateau. From a rounded knoll at 4315m a long lateral moraine (visible in satellite pictures) could be seen leading easily to the icefall from where we hoped to gain access to the upper glacier and its surrounding peaks. On 3 October we trekked easily up this lateral moraine to an extensive boulder field, stampeding a herd of 30-40 wild goats in the ablation valley to our left as we did so. With several potential sites for an advanced base camp available, and an encouraging route to the glacial plateau to the left of the icefall, we deposited a stash of technical gear before returning to BC.

With the help of three of our Sherpas (Lobsang, Tsering and Cheddar) we established ABC1 (4623m: B on the satellite map) two days later at the foot of the icefall and close to a prominent rock buttress. After a cold, clear night all bar John climbed the steep glacier on its left side (true right) close to the striated buttress under which we had camped to arrive at an extensive glacial plateau surrounded by a crenulated cirque of 5000m peaks. From here a southerly traverse led across the bergschrund to a steep snow slope to the right of a prominent col. With no easing of the gradient, Mike manfully led by post-holing the way to a compact airy top (5125m Alpine PD) that we have tentatively called Tribulation Point (C on the satellite map) on account of the effort required to get there. From here a route onto the upper glacier seemed possible by taking a steep snowy couloir immediately to the right (due north) of the upper striated rock buttress above ABC1. We returned to ABC1 intent on attempting this the following day.

After another cold night, on 6 October Drew, Mike and myself again ascended the lower plateau before turning north to climb the obvious 40° couloir we had noticed previously. This terminated in an undulating upper snow plateau surrounded by a continuation of the headwall cirque. Several climbing opportunities were evident, but we chose to turn southwest towards a pronounced rocky summit on our left which rose immediately above ABC1. An exposed upwards traverse led to a short (4m) rock chimney and the airy summit (5140m, PD+). Despite changing weather, which unfortunately obscured the panoramic view, we did notice several sets of snow leopard prints, and our next climbing objective. We tentatively called this Sentinel Peak (D on the satellite map) on account of its commanding position over the Jiwa Nala. After a short abseil in atrocious weather we returned to camp by the same route.

As Laura was still feeling the effects of altitude, and John continued to suffer from knee problems, Drew, Mike and myself left at 3am the next day in intensely cold conditions to attempt the dominant peak to the north (right) of the upper plateau that we had visited earlier. Following our previous tracks made the couloir easier, but Drew in particular suffered on the northerly snow traverse above by continuously breaking through the fragile crust. Encouraged by Mike and I on either end of the rope he was rewarded for his effort by leading up the left-slanting mixed ramp which terminated in a fine snow crest and eventually a tiny rocky summit (5365m, AD). The views, extending over a multitude of unclimbed peaks, were tremendous. Having seen many more snow leopard tracks we tentatively called this Snow Leopard Peak (E on the satellite map). We returned to ABC1 with all three of us post-holing across the upper plateau having decided that in the little time left we should explore other parts of the valley.



29. Laura Millichamp on the summit of Snowcock Point, 4890m. (*Derek Buckle*)

Dismantling the camp on 10 October we rejoined John and Laura at BC where the immediate plan was to investigate access to the peaks north of the valley. Setting off in two groups the next day, Laura and Mike climbed the broad couloir immediately above BC while Drew and I elected for another promising couloir a little further east. Both routes led to extensive, complex, waterless boulder fields with no obvious camping areas and no attractive mountaineering objectives within easy reach. We did, however, see several large raptors, an inquisitive pica and significant deposits of both goat and bear spoor. At 4600m Drew and I called it a day, but not before noticing that the lateral moraine to the west of the prominent triangular buttress a little further up the main valley led to another interesting, glaciated cirque to the south.

After relocating to ABC2 (F on the satellite map) at 4020m, all five of us followed the broad ridge of the second lateral moraine until reaching the glacier. The commanding spur leading south from the triangular buttress appears to offer some interesting climbing, but after leaving Drew and John to admire the view we carried on westwards over the glacier until it was

possible to climb steeply to a small col overlooking the Sainj valley. From here a short easterly climb up a snowy arête led to a small rocky top where we could all sit *à cheval* to admire the view (4890m, PD). We tentatively called this Snowcock Point (F on the satellite map) on account of the flock of these birds that we disturbed near the summit. After returning to ABC2 we descended to BC the following day in order to prepare for the four-day trek out to Pulga in the north.

With the timely return of our porters on the 15 October we departed the next morning to descend first to Dwada Thach where we had camped on the way in. A steep ascent from here then led to our next camp at Lahl-ibati (3892m) before spending a very long day crossing the Phangchi Galu pass to camp in a meadow above Pulga at 2960m. The steep snow-covered descent from the pass caused some problems for the local porters but to carry heavy loads over such difficult ground for more than 10 hours was a Herculean effort on their part. After a relatively short drop down to Pulga we travelled by car back to Manali and Kullu before returning via Delhi to the UK.

It had been a real privilege to be the first mountaineers to visit such a pristine area as the Jiwa Nala. Once away from the valley floor we were always in uncharted territory and the mountaineering opportunities at all levels of difficulty are vast. The rock is a mainly a coarse mica-schist, which may be of dubious quality for climbing, but we saw few rockfalls, other than those in obvious detritus gullies, and even on steep ground the snow was stable during our stay. Climbing opportunities exist both to the north and south of the upper Jiwa Nala although sites for high camps are limited by the absence of water and the bouldery terrain.

Summary: In September-October 2010 five Alpine Club members, Derek Buckle (leader), Mike Cocker, Drew Cook, John Hudson and Laura Millichamp, visited the Jiwa Nala region of the Great Himalayan National Park. Various team members explored the glaciated upper reaches of the valley making first ascents of four major points on the crenellated eastern cirque. These were provisionally named: Tribulation Point (5125m), Sentinel Peak (5140m), Snow Leopard Peak (5365m) and Snowcock Point (4890m).

Maps: A detailed map can be purchased from the GHNP Office at Shamshi, Kullu, Himachal Pradesh, India or downloaded free from the National park's website: **www.greathimalayannationalpark.com**

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DAVE WYNNE-JONES

Heat and Snow

Ski mountaineering in the Kullu Valley



30. Dave Wynne-Jones nearing the top of the Rohtang chute with the road over the Rohtang pass and the east face of Beas Rikhi (aka Dashaur peak) in the background. (*John Kentish*)

Arriving at Delhi in April with temperatures of 35 degrees and a ski bag on one's shoulder has to feel a bit odd, although the taxi driver seemed to accept it as yet another example of western eccentricity. Driving up to the Rohtang pass from Manali that oddness seemed less obvious until we noticed the age and condition of the skis and boots at the roadside stalls and that the 'fashionable' one-piece ski suits on offer were clearly local knock-offs. John H's eyes focussed on a particularly colourful display: 'That orange one I've got to have!' I refused to be drawn. We were soon to learn that even in Manali there is only a hazy grasp of the concept of skiing.

A year or two ago, I had been intrigued to learn of a guidebook to skiing