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

in the Kullu valley of India. I eventually tracked it down on the author's website and acquired a copy. The book described a wealth of possibilities to get off the beaten track on ski and experience a real remoteness. In 2010 I organised a trip to the area for the Eagle Ski Club although the majority of the participants were also AC members. The long day's drive to Manali eventually put us at the heart of the skiing potential of the Kullu valley, described in CR Spooner's guidebook, but we began to realise that the heat experienced in Delhi was indicative of an early spring thaw and much of



31. Camp 2 in the Munsiary region with the East face of Rohtang Ri in the centre background. (*Dave Wynne-Jones*)

the potential would remain just that. A reconnaissance of the Solang valley suggested we would be doing a lot of walking, carrying our skis, to access what looked to be very thin snow cover. A foray above Gulaba brought us out onto rolling whaleback spurs where clouds of cabbage white butterflies, bright against the dark cedars below, looked for all the world as if they had been blown out of the very snow like living spindrift. There were impressive views but without any attractive mountaineering objectives. Also the ski runs down tongues of snow between trees looked unlikely to last more than a day or two, which would soon mean a steep mudslide back to the road. With continuous snow only likely above 3500m, we would have to go high and that meant the Rohtang pass.

Hiring a big jeep for the team and our kit looked like it had been a waste of time when we encountered a roadblock at Mahi around 3000m. However, despite the discouragement of a brusque NCO, the redoubtable JR Negi, who is i/c mountain rescue in the area, checked out our kit and authorised our access to the pass. Unfortunately our driver lost his nerve

amongst deep ruts about 300m below the pass and left us to walk the rest of the way, assuring us that he would be at Beas Nala for the pick-up in four days' time. We trudged up the muddy road, shortcutting the hairpin bends on snowy tracks, until there was enough snow to skin on to the pass. Striking off from the barely cleared road, the team skirted a knoll and came upon an ideal campsite hard up against a rounded bluff with melt-water dripping off an overhang. We lost no time in setting up the tents and getting



32. Dave Wynne-Jones skiing the Rohtang chute. (*John Hayward*)

a brew on before turning in for an early night.

Our objective for the following day was Rohtang Ri, to the east of the pass. We skinned up snow slopes to the ridge bounding the northernmost little bowl that nestled under a cornice above the west face. There the steepness and condition of the snow suggested skis should be stashed before we booted up the increasingly rocky ridge to a cairned subsidiary summit. From there it was simple step kicking, and some post-holing, skirting the obvious massive cornice above the north face, to reach the main summit at 4697m. Afternoon cloud was beginning to bubble up so we quickly reversed the route to our ski depot and slid off the ridge onto the headwall of the bowl beyond. That led on down the north-west aspect of the west face until we cut back left via steep faces and over minor ridges to reach the campsite just before the first flakes of snow: a wonderful ski descent.

John K's health issues kept him in camp as the rest of us headed west for what was described as Dashaur peak by Spooner, although official maps gave it as Beas Rikhi. Steep skinning led to 4350m on the north face before

we decided the angle was just too much and booted up. It was a glorious day but the penalty was that, even on this northerly aspect of the mountain, the softened snow would collapse, thigh-deep, at times. A large square cairn on the skyline had encouraged the idea that we were not far from the summit ridge but when we reached the cairn the summit ridge was still a good way beyond. We continued to kick steps, and sink, until we reached it. There a surprise awaited us: where the ridge narrowed and steepened to a series of exposed gendarmes a solitary but substantial mani stone had been placed, staking a Buddhist claim to this airy height. We climbed on to the highest of the gendarmes and took a break for lunch, enjoying the vista of snow peaks stretching into Lahaul.



33. John Hayward descending from the unnamed 4805m peak with Lee Johnson and John Kentish higher up the snow ramp in the background. (*Derek Buckle*)

John H and Lee had carried their skis as far as the mani stone and their reward was an exciting descent, carving bow-waves through soft snow to where Derek and I had left our skis. Then we launched ourselves down the north face, all the way to the point that the army had reached in their efforts to clear the road over the pass. While we were reattaching our skins a couple of officers turned up for a chat and told us that they were a month ahead of schedule in clearing the road: more evidence of global warming. We skinned back to camp to celebrate with John K.

Breaking camp next morning, we traversed easily east towards the Rohtang chute on increasingly steep ground until we found a break that allowed us to enter the chute at about one third height. We skied down to a rock island where all our camping kit was unloaded and stashed. The Rohtang chute is an extraordinary couloir that plummets directly between parallel rock walls from a break on the south ridge of Rohtang Ri. We were lucky to be able to skin to within about 50m or so of the top before having to carry our skis, but there were some tricky kick turns getting there and that top 50m was 50 degrees in places. The view over the knife-edge ridge revealed lots of scope for another camping trip although our thoughts were already focussed on the intimidating descent that we had just climbed. One by one we dived down the chute, regrouping in stages to ensure nothing untoward occurred in what turned out to be a brilliant descent, linking long sequences of swooping turns between the rock walls on snow that was a little heavier than perfect but still great fun.

Back at the rock island we reloaded our sacks and skied much heavier snow, following the river, down to gain the snowfields at Beas Nala. There we threaded our way through the day trippers, full of excitement at their first encounters with snow, to meet our car.

Two rainy days of temple visits in Manali and we were back at Beas Nala having braved the crazy hairpins and traffic jams as holiday crowds fled the heat of the Punjab to play in the snow. At Beas Nala families wandered in ankle-length fake furs while the braver souls clicked into skis and were pushed off on gentle inclines by local 'entrepreneurs' who ran to catch them before they fell over. On the higher fringes a skier with more idea made cautious turns before climbing back up on foot for another go. We drew curious stares as we shouldered our packs and skinned steeply up the Sagu Nala past a waterfall waiting to unload the last of its fans and pillars of ice. Above, the snowed-up bed of the river that fed it led to a steep open chute that in turn led to a high bench below the peaks that we hoped to climb. We camped in a snow depression at 3960m in what Spooner describes as the Munsiary area.



34. Derek Buckle and Dave Wynne-Jones on the summit of unnamed peak 4375m with unnamed peak 4805m left and Khrei Ra Jot 4575 right in the background. (*John Hayward*)

It was impossible to ignore the sharp pointy peak in the distance, given 4805m on the map, although it entailed more than 3km of skinning across the high bench to reach its slopes. And what slopes! We gamely zigzagged up until the angle defeated our efforts to stay on ski, whereupon we strapped the skis to our packs and booted on to reach a snow ledge where the cornice curling from the ridge to our right met a sudden snow step at the base of the summit pyramid. There we left our skis and climbed up the step to gain a snow ramp left of a rocky spine falling from the summit. A short scramble led from that to the summit rock platform with a treacherous hollow cornice hanging over the precipitous north face. There was time to catch our breath and take in the view back towards the east face of Rohtang Ri and east towards 6000m peaks, Deo Tibba and Indrasan.

We scrambled back down to the skis. John H skied off the step and Lee

skied off the cornice as an aperitif for an adrenaline rush that we all shared skiing down the face we had climbed. A sporting descent to camp quickly completed our day.

Another fine day saw us skinning up towards Khrei Ra Jot, a double-summit exceeding 4500m on the long ridge to the east. A steep couloir led to a small bowl below the col between the peaks where we left the skis. A rocky scramble up the broken ridge of the higher summit included a delicate slab that proved interesting in ski-touring boots before we gathered on the pleasantly sharp summit. Derek and I tackled the short snow slope and earthy rock ridge to the lower top although there did not seem a lot of point to it. The snow showed a tendency to slide so we spaced our runs carefully on the descent. Not carefully enough as it turned out because Lee began to catch Derek up and his attempt to take a less direct line led to the release of a small slide. It may have been small but still had enough mass to sweep Derek off his feet as he skied straight into its path. No harm done, but a few choice words were exchanged.

Our last day also dawned fine for a rapid skin up to a nearby 4000m peak we had scoped out on the previous day. The sun was taking its toll on the snow though and we preferred to trust ourselves to grassy rakes sodden with melt-water rather than the suspect snows of the couloir we had started to ascend. The slopes eased above, before a steep icy ramp led to the final summit at 4375m. A traverse further north on the descent led to another couloir with a less southerly aspect that proved a safer, if steeper option before a fast and fun run down the familiar return to camp.

It was much warmer and cloud was building so we packed up as quickly as possible and returned to Beas Nala along the line of our ascent of three days' earlier. The snow was turning to slush and proved challenging with packs still heavy with camping gear, but the only mishap was when Derek fluffed a turn in the steepest part of the chute and found himself hanging upside down from the buried heels of his skis. His attempts to recover resulted in his rucksack heading off down the slope for me to intercept while Lee skied over to give him a hand. Good teamwork! Back at Beas Nala, amongst the madding crowds, bedraggled white butterflies lay dead on the dirty snow as heavy drops of rain signalled an imminent downpour.

Rain stopped play for our remaining days in the valley so we drove out early enough to organise a visit to the Taj Mahal on our return to Delhi, rounding off our visit to India with the classic tourist experience that somehow remained an anticlimax.

Summary: An account of a three-week ski-mountaineering expedition to the Kullu valley in India in April 2010 with ascents of Rohtang Ri (4697m), Beas Rikhi (aka Dashaur peak, 4631m), Khrei Ra Jot (4575m), an unnamed peak of 4805m and another of 4375m. Party: AC members, Derek Buckle, John Kentish, Dave Wynne-Jones, and ESC members, John Hayward and Lee Johnson.

ANDY HOUSEMAN

More Than You Can Chew?



35. Nick Bullock approaching the first bivvi at 6000m, Day 1 (*Andy Houseman*)

Bent over my axes, I threw up in the snow – 'Not now!' I silently screamed. We'd both managed to keep well on the trip so far. What if I blew our only weather window? Standing in the dark silence, I shouted up to Nick, dreading his reply. It came without hesitation or the slightest note of anger: 'No worries youth, we can go down and give it a few days.'