

However, I think because the HAPS were available, there was a tendency to carry up more equipment than necessary.

As in 1977, we were a good team with entertaining companions upon whom we could rely in all circumstances. Adequate supplies of Scottish-sourced alcohol and general good all round mateyness led to some enjoyable evenings at basecamp and elsewhere.

On the walkout, Steve, Susan and I visited Phuktal monastery, four miles off the main track. The monastery appears to rise out of almost vertical crags; its sense of isolation and powerful spiritual atmosphere made the visit a moving experience. Our arrival, around midday, coincided with the release of a number of young monks around 12 to 14 years old from morning classes. As a former teacher, I was pleased to note a few of them relieving the presumed tedium of lessons by whipping each other with their traditional scarves as they tumbled down dangerously steep steps. Yet the incursions of modern life cannot be far away. The road-head will soon be only a few miles distant. Modern communications will follow. Will life in the monastery then have the same attractions for these young men?

On reflection, I feel enormously fortunate to have experienced Zaskar in 1977. It is not for me to judge whether the lives of the inhabitants have been improved or disadvantaged by the subsequent changes. Doubtless many Zaskaris will embrace the opportunity to watch the Indian TV version of 'I'm a celebrity... etc.' And I would not myself turn down the advantages of electricity or indoor plumbing.

The essence of remoteness that shaped the Zaskaris' way of life is diminishing. Selfishly, for those of us who enjoy a long journey through mountainous terrain, it has also become much harder to make a lengthy, uncontrived journey out of necessity to reach an objective, or to simply make an interesting expedition from a natural starting place to a logical destination. For all that, as our Scottish Zaskar expedition found, it is nevertheless remarkable how much untrodden ground remains in the mountains of India.

Summary: an account of the Scottish Zaskar Expedition to the Giabul Nala area of Zaskar, Jammu and Kashmir, India, in August 2012. First ascents of Shan Ri (c5750m) and Scottish Ri (c5850m [G23]) by Susan Jensen, Bob Hamilton, Steve Kennedy and Andy Nisbet; and of Mama Ri (6150m) by Geoff Cohen and Des Rubens. All three peaks climbed on 17 August 2012.

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Details of the 1977 expedition are in Collister R, AJ83, 206-7 (1978) and a full report of the 2012 expedition can be found under 'Zaskar' on the MCofS website.

MICK FOWLER

The Prow of Shiva

Paul Ramsden and I were ready to go. Permits had been granted, tickets bought and bureaucratic hurdles overcome. Pre-expedition excitement was building. Then, the month before departure, we received an e-mail from Andrey Muryshev, leader of one of only two expeditions to have enjoyed a good view of our intended objective, the north-east pillar, or Prow, of Shiva (6142m) in the Indian Himalaya:

'Frankly I cannot imagine how you will do it... It is c700m of climbing after the col and it is north-west side [sic] in October – all the rock will be frozen. From the other hand, the ice will be scarce as the buttress is very steep. So it will be very hard dry tooling and very hard protection. I saw your route on Siguniang – it is much easier.'



Shiva from the Miyar valley – 'something rather special'. (Andrey Muryshev)

In addition, Bruno Moretti, leader of an expedition that had had a good view of the east side in 2010, had already suggested that the rock was likely to be terrible.

All in all it didn't paint that positive a picture. But the photos Andrey and Bruno had kindly shared with us spoke for themselves. Shiva is an isolated 6000m peak in the Pangri District of Himachal Pradesh. Bruno felt the Prow stood out as the best line in the area and Andrey's e-mail ended by saying he thought it was 'inspiring'. That was good enough for us. I did



Roads are being blasted ever further into the Indian Himalaya, making access easier for mountaineers. (Mick Fowler)



Walking in past the village of Twan, highest settlement on the approach trek. (Mick Fowler)

wonder if we were up to it, but loose rock, difficult climbing or whatever, the line was such that we had to give it a go.

Pangi District borders Kashmir and troubles in the region had until recently impeded access. However the political situation had improved, and with roads being blasted ever further into the Indian Himalaya, mountains such as Shiva have become accessible in 30-day trips from the UK. To further ease matters, in 2012 some economy flights came with a free 46kg baggage allowance. Times have certainly changed since my early trips to India when the first couple of days would be spent enduring bureaucratic misery retrieving freighted equipment from the Delhi customs warehouse. With a 46kg allowance all our equipment fitted easily in the hold and with mountain gas cylinders now available in India life is certainly a lot easier than it used to be.

We were a team of four, with Steve Burns and Ian Cartwright completing our number. Late September saw us in Delhi, marvelling at the new competition-standard climbing wall at the Indian Mountain-



Paul Ramsden negotiating the icefall en route to the foot of Shiva. (Mick Fowler)

earing Foundation building before heading off on a night drive to the 'honeymoon town' (as our liaison officer called it) of Manali in the Himalayan foothills. From here it was a long day's drive over the Rhotang Pass and then along a remarkable road down the Chenab valley to eventually turn off and reach the roadhead at the small village of Saichu. As far as we knew, we were only the second mountaineering expedition, after Bruno Moretti, to visit this valley.

The weather seemed set fine, and as water levels were low we had understood it would be possible to use mules or horses to carry our equipment all the way up to a basecamp at 3900m below the east face of Shiva. As ever though, planning on Himalayan trips has to be able to cope with a little flexibility. The first day was idyllic, trekking through grazing pastures and deciduous forests, but by evening the valley forked and it had become clear that the fork we needed to follow, the Tarundi valley, was so full of dense, shrub-like bushes that the horses could go no further. Porters were summoned and by a combination of portering and us load carrying basecamp was established in a fine spot just above the bush line. Above us Shiva was in full view with the Prow looking even more inspiring than we had anticipated. We had clearly come across something rather special. Moreover, through the binoculars it did seem as if the rock on the steep section might not be as bad as we had been led to expect.

First though we had to acclimatise. An unclimbed 5500m summit on the ridge leading north from the Prow offered an obvious objective at just the



Ramsden nearing the top of the snow ridge leading to The Prow. (Mick Fowler)

right height. The views from the top were mouth-watering. We could see that there were a few uncertainties about getting onto the crest of Shiva and up to the foot of the steepest section but the most interesting discovery was that the Prow itself really did appear to be composed of quality granite with occasional good cracks. It was one of those objectives that we both knew we would have to come back to if we didn't get up this time.

Back at base camp, Brittam, our cook, and Devraj, the kitchen boy, were probably the finest we have ever had on a trip. However after a rest day during which we were fortified with large quantities of fine food it was time to get used to a diet of small quantities of mountain rations and live off blubber accumulated over the year since my previous Himalayan exertion (two years in Paul's case).

After tackling the complex glacier approach we pitched our little tent at the foot of the east face. The obvious first difficulty was getting over a bergschrund to establish ourselves in couloirs leading to the crest at the point where it steepened towards the Prow. Juggling with job, family et al means that I only manage one mountaineering expedition per year and it always takes a pitch or two to settle back into the swing of things. Being an east face, an early start was necessary; I am found me experiencing a harsh re-introduction to mountaineering, tackling a vertical shale wall with a slanting, overhanging wall of iron-hard ice sat on top. I certainly felt fully exercised by the time I pulled out into an ice runnel on the slope above.



Ramsden aiding a section to leave the balcony bivouac (bivouac 4) on the lower third of The Prow. (Mick Fowler)

At home in England I had envisaged that it would be straightforward to gain the crest of the buttress below the Prow. In reality though the angle of the approach face was considerably steeper than I had expected and the combination of awful rock and powder snow made for sections of tricky, poorly protected climbing. The amazing variation in the snow, depending on the direction of the slope, added further to the challenge, with north facing areas being covered in remarkably deep and remarkably steep powder.

'It's rubbish here. Just a collapsing knife edge.'

Paul was in the lead and his comments were not encouraging.

We had reached



Looking down to Ramsden belaying during a hard pitch on day 5. (Mick Fowler)



Above: Mick Fowler climbing in afternoon snow on the central section of The Prow, day 5. (Paul Ramsden)

Left: Ramsden enjoying the spindrift at bivouac 5. (Mick Fowler)

the ridge at 9am, just as the snow was beginning to soften badly.

An interval followed during which I could pick out some energetic *a cheval* activity going on as Paul moved slowly to a slightly more amenable spot. By the time he had brought me up, the Ramsden face was smiling.

'It's soft right the way down. Could be good for the tent.'

And it was. By about 10am a section of the knife-edge had been flattened, the tent pitched and a belay of sorts constructed around a large snow bollard. It looked as if the rope would probably cut right through it like a cheese wire if put under any strain but that was not the sort of thought that we wanted to clutter our minds with as we lay relaxing and reading our books for the day. Above us the soft snow ridge looked challenging, but the mixed buttress which started perhaps 150m above us looked to offer



Fowler relishes the view – upper section of the Prow, day 6. (Paul Ramsden)

perfect, safe climbing in a position of the kind Paul and I scour the Earth to find.

By mid afternoon the following day the soft snow was behind us, we were underway on the Prow proper and had reached a small balcony just on the east side of the crest. Below it the ground overhung steadily for at least 500m while round on the cold north-west side the way was barred by a completely smooth 75-degree rock slab with an intermittent thin covering of *verglas* and powder. The one possible way onwards was up a fault line above the balcony. This overhung to begin with, crossed the crest after 10m or so and then disappeared under *verglas* and snow sticking to the slab. Paul and I prefer to carry our sacks wherever possible but this was clearly one of those possible 'stopper' pitches where a sackless leader was called for. I watched nervously as Paul aided the overhang and moved more precariously on up the fault line. Looking around there really wasn't anywhere else obvious to go. Bolts could solve the problem but we both feel strongly that they have no place in exploratory mountaineering.

We were right on the crest of the buttress and if we couldn't do this pitch then that could well be the end of our attempt. All our dreams would end here. My heart was in my mouth as Paul moved up round the crest but he just kept on going. Brilliant! The fault line clearly continued in some way up the slab and eventually the shout came for me to follow. The fault did continue but in a distressingly thin manner. It was a fine lead by Paul and it left us with a good feeling. We had agreed to explore this section in the afternoon and return to bivouac on the balcony ledge but it still felt strange to be leaving the sacks and following the pitch without being weighted down by a sack. We tend to climb strictly with alternate leads and with



Ramsden descending the south-east ridge. The descent continued to the lowest point and then dropped off to the left. (Mick Fowler)

enough daylight remaining it seemed sensible for me to lead another pitch even though this would leave us with two pitches to jumar in the morning. And we both hate jumaring. It feels unethical somehow; all that hanging about on ropes instead of climbing.

We seemed to have timed things just right. Every morning the sky was clear and the weather glorious and every afternoon it clouded over with a gradually increasing amount of snow. It was very cold but the morning sun was great for thawing us out and infusing a sense of great happiness. The day above our nose-to-tail balcony bivouac was one of the finest I have enjoyed in the mountains. Out there on the crest of the most eye-catching feature in the area, the climbing started with absolutely perfect ice-choked granite cracks and continued with memorably thin ice on steep slabs which were not unlike a lean day on the harder slab routes on Ben Nevis.

Late afternoon we reached a ledge sufficient for another nose-to-tail bivouac and the possibility of lying down for a sound sleep with a perfect view from our bedroom. People sometimes ask me why Paul and I never go for the headline grabbing objectives on bigger mountains. Here on this wonderful climb in a rarely visited part of the Himalaya we had our answer. Shiva was giving us everything that we could possibly want from our mountaineering – an unclimbed magic line, visible from afar, going straight to the summit of the mountain, an interesting new area for us, no-one else around, a great approach and a traverse of the mountain with

an unclimbed descent route in prospect. And all possible whilst still leaving enough time out from our full time jobs of health and safety adviser (Paul) and taxman (me) for family holidays.

The next day was our sixth out from base camp. A few inches of snow fell in the night and it was gradually dawning on me that a descent down our line of approach up the east face would be unpleasant to the extent that, whatever lay ahead, it was better to persevere than descend. More thinly iced slabs followed by wonderful ice grooves and intimidatingly steep mixed pitches finally led to a snow band beneath the last overhanging wall which guarded access to the summit. From what we had seen through Paul's binoculars, the band led rightwards round the crest to steep snow and a way of avoiding the final wall. Snow was falling as I headed off rightwards round onto the north-west side. But luck was against us. A gap in the ramp presented a challenge that would obviously require aid and be time consuming. I retreated forlornly to an increasingly cold Paul. There was no way we were going to get up that evening and we had to admit that an ice-choked chimney splitting the headwall was looking a more promising option for the morning.

Squeezed under the final wall was the one ledge on the entire Prow where we could half pitch the tent. Much of the floor overhung space but getting the poles in makes such a difference. Shielded from the heavy overnight snowfall we enjoyed a comfortable night and were ready to tackle the chimney first thing in the morning on day 7. It gave a fitting finale and from a cosy niche belay at the top I soaked up the weak rays of the morning sun and the glorious view as Paul led off out of sight up towards a short ridge leading to the cornice. It fell to me to break through and enjoy the curious sensation of being able to walk around on a flat area. Paul came up and a summit hug was in order.

A descent of the unclimbed south-east flank ended nine wonderful days in the mountains. It had been a fantastic trip and we had completed a climb that we already knew would soak us in retrospective pleasure for many years to come.



The Prow of Shiva. The Fowler-Ramsden line basically goes straight up the arête. (Mick Fowler)

Summary: An account of the first ascent of The Prow of Shiva in the Pangi District, Himachal Pradesh, India, by Mick Fowler and Paul Ramsden, 5 - 13 October 2012. The ascent was recognised with a Piolet d'Or at Chamonix in April 2013. Whilst Fowler and Ramsden were on Shiva, Steve Burns and Ian Cartwright made the first ascent of Pt 5437 (Russian map), the highest peak on the east side of basecamp in the Tarundi valley.

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Basecamp at 3900m, towards the head of the Tarundi valley. (Mick Fowler)



The team at basecamp: (l to r) Fowler, Ramsden, Ian Cartwright and Steve Burns. (Mick Fowler coll)

Lindsay Griffin adds:

Although the first ascent of Shiva has been widely reported as taking place in 1988, correspondence with Tsunemichi Ikeda of the Japanese Alpine News reveals that the mountain was first climbed in 1973 by an expedition from Rikkyo University Alpine Club, led by Shigeru Suzuki. This team climbed the south ridge, with Noritoshi Kato, Toshiki Takeuchi, and Namgyal Sherpa reaching the summit. The second ascent took place in 1975, when a Toyohashi Alpine Club expedition, led by Hiroaki Kaneda, established three camps on the south-west face and south ridge, the highest at 5700m. From here Kaneda, Koyo Kawasaki, Yoshifumi Ogino, Takaharu Suzuki, and Yoshinori Yatsu climbed to the summit. A third Japanese expedition, this time a women's team led by Junko Tabei (first woman to climb Everest), climbed the mountain in 1988, following the previous line. An Indian team repeated this route in 2002 to make the fourth ascent.

MICHAEL COCKER

The AC Semartoli (Kagbhusandi) Expedition



North-west face of Otika Danda. The obvious couloir is the one climbed by Cocker and Buckle. (Michael Cocker)

I held my breath as Dawa Sherpa shinned out to the unattached end of a log precariously projected over the roaring torrent of the Semartoli river. A slip would mean almost certain drowning; Dawa was not attached to anything and would instantly have been swept away. Yet he moved confidently and in a few moments managed to grasp the rocks on the far side and secure the pole.

We were in the lower reaches of the Semartoli valley in the Garhwal Himalaya, on our way to basecamp. The old bridge had been washed away by recent monsoon rains; if we were to proceed any further we had to build our own. Two more logs were worked into position, lashed together with a climbing rope and a handrail constructed with the remaining length. Crossing a Himalayan river is rarely a trivial undertaking and accidents are