

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.

Acknowledgements: The team would like to thank all who helped make the climbs possible, notably, The Mount Everest Foundation, Berghaus, Black Diamond, Thermarest, MSR and Cascade.



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

not uncommon. As the porters, encumbered with heavy loads secured only by a headband, nimbly made their way across I hoped that when my turn came I wouldn't be found wanting. Ironically, in the event, the only person who fell into the water was Dawa, this time loaded with a large rucksack. I thought for a moment he was lost, but laughing all the while he managed to hang onto the handrail and was quickly hauled to safety.

We were here by default. Our original objective had been a mountain in eastern Spiti, however its proximity to the Tibetan border made this politically sensitive which, combined with other unforeseen complications, caused us to change our plan. It was that Himalayan authority, Harish Kapadia, who suggested, as an alternative, the mountains north-east of the bustling town of Joshimath. A joint Alpine Club (AC) and Himalayan Club (HC) expedition had reconnoitred the area in 2007; looking at photographs



Dawa slipping off the log bridge into the Semartoli river. (Derek Buckle)

from this trip the north-west face of unclimbed Barmal (5879m) had caught our attention so we obtained permission for this peak and the exploration of other unspecified objectives. After an interesting three-day trek we established basecamp, on 21 September, at Raj Kharak (3815m), a short distance below the terminal moraine of the Semartoli glacier. It is common with many of the lesser-known regions of the Himalaya the geography and nomenclature of the area is vague and poorly documented. We had understood the valley to be called Kagbhusandi, the name used by the earlier AC/HC expedition, but our maps had the Kagbhusandi Gad (river) located in an adjacent valley running westwards down towards Joshimath and, as the origin of the river we were camped next to was the Semartoli glacier, it seemed to us that Semartoli is the appropriate name for the valley.¹

This area lies immediately south of the well-known Valley of Flowers and shares the same approach from the roadhead at Gorvind Ghat. However, in contrast to its popular neighbour, and despite being described as a trek on some maps, the Semartoli appears to be rarely visited by anyone other than shepherds and occasional pilgrims on their way to the sacred lake, Kagbhusandi Tal.² To the north-east the valley is dominated by Hathi Parvat (6727m), first climbed from the north side by an Indo-Tibetan Border Police team in 1963.³ To the south-east, at the head of the valley, are Otika Danda (5782m) and Barmal (5879m). On the west, the valley is



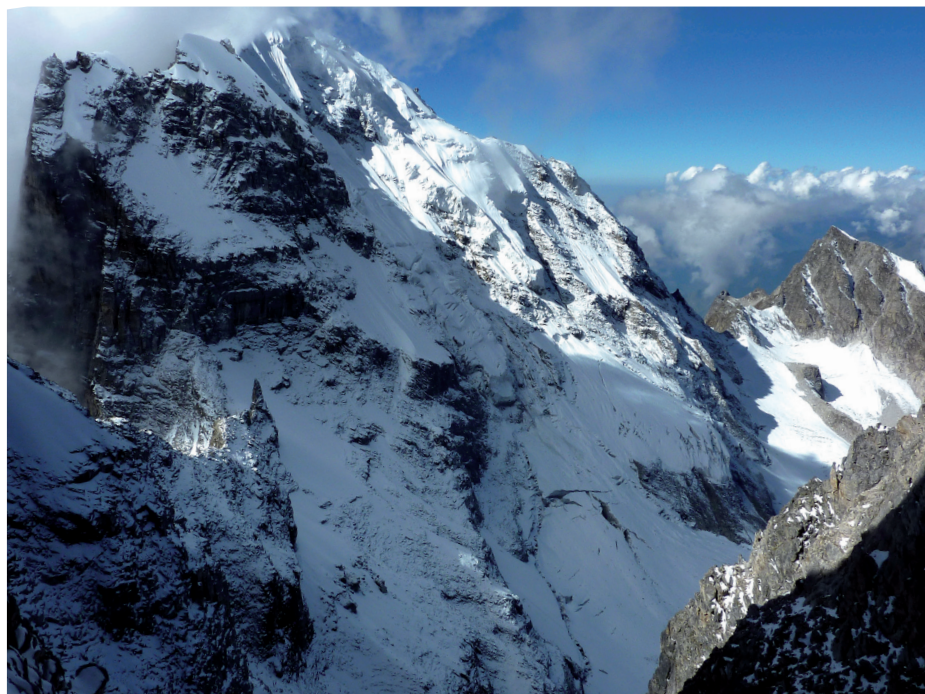
On the summit ridge of Kagbhusandi Parvat. (Michael Cocker)

enclosed by a ridge of jagged peaks, around 5000m in height, breached by the Kankul Pass (4680m). Otika Danda had been climbed by the easier-angled glaciers on the north side but, to our knowledge, the only other peaks that had been ascended in this area were those climbed by the 2007 expedition described in the 2008 *Alpine Journal*.

We needed to get a clear view of Barmal and the upper half of the Semartoli glacier so, with the aid of our sirdar, Uden, two Sherpas, Dawa and Mingma, both of whom had summited Everest twice and our helpful liaison officer, Anurag, we carried loads up to a high camp at 4505m. It was around this time that one of the Sherpas lifted our expedition leader's rucksack and, with a large grin, dismissively estimated its weight as 'only 5kg' after which the subject of this appraisal, much to his chagrin, was frequently addressed as '5kg'.

Barmal was not the undertaking we had anticipated. There was far less snow on it than in the photographs we had seen and large séracs overhung much of the north-west face. The only safe approach appeared to be from a col at the head of the glacier where a ridge continued up to a band of vertical cliffs, above which more broken ground and easier-looking snow led to the summit. On 24 September, four of us went up to the col (5008m) to get a better look at the ridge and cliffs above but could see no reasonable way through or around these. A couple of days later the rest of the team made a further inspection but returned with the same impression. For several days we speculated over possible lines but it was obvious to all of us that Barmal was going to be too difficult and committing for a team of our age and experience.

In the meantime, on 25 September, Derek, Stuart, Paul and I climbed the 5301m peak to the north of the col via an obvious gully on the south-



For another day: North-west face of unclimbed Barmal from Otika Danda.
(Michael Cocker)

east face. The lower part of the gully was unpleasantly loose but above this good scrambling on snow-covered rock took us to the exposed summit ridge, where we roped up. The ascent took a little over five hours and we thought it about Alpine PD+. A second ascent was made two days later by John Kentish and Mike Pinney. This peak, as far as we know, hadn't been climbed before and, as we later discovered, it dominated the head of the valley containing the Kagbhusandi Gad. We therefore thought it appropriate to call it Kagbhusandi Parvat.

During this ascent Derek and I noticed a couloir on the west face of Otika Danda. Unfortunately we couldn't see the top of this but thought it might continue to the summit ridge giving us a chance of ascending one of the significant peaks in the area. On 27 September, we rose at 2am and started climbing the couloir at first light. There was a steep entry pitch but above this it was mainly firm snow that gradually increased from 40 to 60 degrees. By 10am we had climbed around 800m, but during the ascent it had become clear that the head of the couloir was enclosed by an intimidating rock wall, with no sign of the snow ridge above. We climbed one pitch up the rock but quickly realised that if we continued we would almost certainly have to bivouac. Not being equipped for this, we decided to retreat. This proved to be a providential decision for, just after we had exited the couloir and regained the glacier, an avalanche of rocks swept over the ground we had recently descended. In addition the sky had become overcast and by the time we got back to camp a hail and thunder storm had set in that lasted several hours. Several inches of snow accumulated, but the next day was

cold and clear so we dismantled the high camp and returned to the valley.

After this we split into two teams. Stuart, Jo and Paul went up the valley to the south of the Kankul Pass and established a camp below a small glacier. They left heavily laden, carrying all their own equipment. On 1 October they ascended the glacier to an obvious col where they turned south and continued up a snow-covered rock ridge to reach a 5210m summit (Alpine PD), which proved to be the second peak on the jagged ridge running north from Kagbhusandi Parvat.

Derek, John, Mike and I set out intent on the prominent 5855m summit on the ridge between Hathi Parvat and Otika Danda. There was some confusion because one of our maps called this Danesh Parvat but another attributed this name to a lower peak further north, closer to Hathi Parvat. Two members of the 2007 expedition had climbed the lower peak (5379m) believing it to be Danesh Parvat but the weight of opinion now is that this name belongs to the higher summit.⁴

With the aid of the trekking crew, we set up a camp by a small lake in the ablation valley on the true right side of the Semartoli glacier and next day ascended the complex glacier beneath Danesh Parvat. Dawa and Mingma helped with the load carrying and we established a second camp at 5010m above a rognon, impressively set amidst a maze of crevasses with fine views of Otika Danda, Barmal and the peaks on the far side of the valley. Beyond, in the distance, were Chaukhamba, Nilkanth and a host of unidentifiable summits in the Gangotri range.

The following morning, 2 October, we set the alarm for 5.30am and

Derek Buckle in the Otika Danda couloir. (Michael Cocker)





Mike Pinney ascending the couloir on Point 5515m. (Michael Cocker)

continued up the glacier as a rope of four. Two couloirs led towards the summit ridge, but being close to the mountain it was difficult to see which of these gave the better line. We picked the easier-angled one to the north and moving together soon arrived at a col on a ridge between two rocky summits. The peak to the north was the one climbed by the 2007 expedition. The peak to the south, we now realised, lay between us and Danesh Parvat. There was a steep descent on the far side of this, which we could now see led to the head of the first couloir. It was obvious that we wouldn't be able to reach the main summit and get back to camp II in a single day, so we continued up the snow-covered ridge to Point 5515m (Alpine AD) – the peak to the south between us and the main summit of Danesh Parvat. We returned by the same route and were back at camp early afternoon. Dark clouds were massing and within an hour we were engulfed in a thunder and lightning storm that put down several inches of snow. The weather was still unsettled next day and, as there was little enthusiasm for another attempt on the summit, we packed up and returned to basecamp.

A further excursion was made up the valley immediately west of basecamp with a view to climbing a peak to the south of the col (4760m) at the head of the valley. From a high camp a team of five scrambled up to the col but found the ridge above this loose and dangerous and soon retreated. By this time even the indefatigable Derek had had enough and the only



Summit ridge of Danesh Parvat from Point 5515m. (Mike Pinney)

ones with energy and enthusiasm for further exploration were Stuart and Mike Pinney who, on 7 October, from a camp close to the Kankul Pass, climbed Peak 5120m (Alpine PD-), the third on the ridge running north from Barmal.

The porters returned to base camp on 7 October and next day we all crossed the Kankul Pass to start the three-day journey back to Joshimath. We had spent 16 days exploring the area and, although we never set foot on our original objective, we all felt that the expedition had been enjoyable and worthwhile. The area holds considerable future potential for committing and technically difficult Alpine style ascents but limited opportunities for more modest endeavours.

Footnotes

1. Using the names Semartoli and Kagbhusandi to identify these two valleys is technically correct but the whole area is generally known as Kagbhusandi.
2. Marked Kankul Tal on the map but commonly referred to as Kagbhusandi Tal.
3. Hathi Parvat means Elephant Mountain.



Camp II on the Danesh Parvat glacier, with Barmal in the background.
(Derek Buckle)

4. Subsequent correspondence with Harish Kapadia has confirmed that peak 5855m is Danesh Parvat.

References

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Summary: An account of the 2012 Alpine Club expedition to the Kagbhusandi region of the Garhwal Himalaya. Members: Derek Buckle (leader), Joanna Campbell, Michael Cocker, John Kentish, Paul Padman, Mike Pinney, Stuart Worsfold. John Temple trekked as far as basecamp then followed a separate agenda.

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DIDIER JOURDAIN

Playing The Spice Game



The GMHM group's route *Spicy Game* on Kamet's 2000m south-west face.
(GMHM Collection)

There exist mountains that we think are too high, too difficult, and too inaccessible. Kamet, for me, was just such a mountain, until I saw it for the first time. That was in 2009, during an expedition to Mukut Parbat¹. The walk-in to Mukut Parbat caused us to pass right beneath Kamet's very impressive south-west face, 2000 metres of ice and granite. I still have a very fond memory of this first encounter.

Kamet (7765m) rises in the Central Garhwal. It is the third highest peak in India but the highest one that you can legally climb; the Indian side of Kangchenjunga and Nanda Devi are banned for religious and political reasons. The first ascent of the mountain in 1931 by Frank Smythe, Eric Shipton, R. L. Holdsworth and Sherpa Lewa was an historic event as it was the highest summit in the world to be reached at that time – a record that held for the next five years. Smythe and his companions completed the route prospecting by Charles Meade up the north-east ridge.

¹ Mukut Parbat (7242m) was first climbed in 1951 by a New Zealand party including George Lowe who died on 26 March 2013 and whose obituary appears in this *AJ* on page 397.