

British Sersank 2016 expedition

Supported by
Berghaus

approved by
Mount Everest Foundation
British Mountaineering Council
Alpine Club

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LOCATION

Sersank lies at the head of the Sural Valley, a side valley on the right bank of the Chenab Valley, Himachal Pradesh, India. The North Face of Sersank drains into the Dharlang Valley, but was accessed from Sural via the Sersank Pass (5,000m), an ancient trade route which is still occasionally traversed by trekking groups.

TEAM

Climbers: Mick Fowler, Victor Saunders.

Cook: Devraj

Liaison Officer: Sanju

Agent: Kaushal Desai

BUREAUCRACY AND LOGISTICS

We were required to obtain 'X' visas for Sersank. These are usually reserved for sensitive areas, often near the Indian frontier. The Indian visa system is rather inflexible and glacially slow, so when the visas arrived with the wrong dates, shortly before departure, it was cheaper and simpler to change our flights than risk further confusion. Arriving in New Delhi early on 15 September we were able to complete the IMF briefing meeting and take the overnight 'luxury' bus to Manali the same day. Manali is the home town of our excellent local agent Kaushal Desai who organised transport, hotel bookings, porters and base camp services for us. After one night in Manali, there was the 12 hour drive over the Rhotang Pass to Lahul and the Pangri Valley, arriving 12 hours later, somewhat shaken by the deteriorating road, at the road-head village of Sural Butori (3400m) where we had one night 'home stay' with a local family.

Kaushal had intended to use donkeys to move the equipment to base camp, but none were to be found, and we ended up with 15 local porters. Two days trek through the pretty Sural Valley brought the team to a base camp at 4390m in the alluvial flats below the South Sersank Glacier. The return to Sural Butori on 7 October took just one day, and another 'home stay' night in Sural Batori, a long day in the minivan to Manali, a night there, another overnight 'luxury' bus, a flying visit to the IMF to drop off the debriefing documents and the home bound flight on 10 October, and back to work on Tuesday 11 October.

SUMMARY OF CLIMB

The team spent four nights and five days climbing the North Face of Sersank, and another two days completing the route to the summit and descending to base camp. The route was found to be about Alpine ED2 in grade with some pitches of Scottish 5.

The first two days were spent slowly battling up rock buttresses covered with a thick blanket of powdery snow. It was possible to erect the BD Firstlight tent for the first three bivouacs. Day three saw the route transition from snowed up rocks to steeper but excellent ice climbing. Day four had steep ice and poor bivouacs. On day five the team was able to follow snowed up ramps with mixed climbing to an exciting exit through a wall of cornices and another poor bivi on the south side of the mountain. On day six the south face slopes led to the summit rocks, and then the top. From basecamp the summit looks like a steep rock tower, but it proved to be easy mixed ground. From the summit there was a quick descent to the upper part of the South Ridge and finally a comfortable bivouac. Day seven was spent down climbing and rappelling the maze of seracs and crevasses in the lower portion of the South Face glacier, reaching base camp at the end of the day. After two days waiting for porters, it took just one long day to walk down to the road head at Sural

Butori.

ACHEIVEMENTS

First ascent of Sersank 6050m

New route on 1000m north face

First traverse of Sersank

WEATHER

The expedition was at or above basecamp from 18 September to 8 October. There was period of three days of poor weather during the acclimatisation period, 22 to 24 September. During the climbing period 28 September to 4 October the team experienced a period of exceptionally good weather with low winds, clear skies and cold nights. The Meteo Blue weather-data site shows October to be a particularly dry month <<http://tinyurl.com/jzbdjmh>> and would be recommended for this kind of climb.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS

Sersank (also known as Shiva Shankar and Shiv Sankar) was attempted at least 4 times before 2016. In 2001 and 2005 Italian parties climbing from the Saichu Valley reached a shoulder on the the South Ridge which they called Sersank West. (2) In 2007 a British team lead by Chris Bonington (1) made an attempt on the peak, (also based in the Saichu Valley) and the following year a Japanese team based in the Sural Valley reached the base of the summit block (3) by the South West face, but did not continue to the top because they said they had been told it was a holy mountain. We made extensive enquiries in Sural Butori, the nearest village to the mountain, without finding this interdiction.

(1) 2007 July. Bonington et al. <<http://tinyurl.com/zh7bsd>>

(2) 2005 and 2001 Italian ascents of Sersank West, a point on our descent route. <<http://tinyurl.com/zxqwk7g>>
<<http://tinyurl.com/zshrtr5>>

(3) 2008 Japanese attempt to summit block <<http://tinyurl.com/h7qvxlh>>

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Berghaus for supporting the expedition,

Martin Moran for providing trekking information and photographs of Sersank.

Kaushal Desai <www.above14000ft.com> for providing a friendly and efficient local agent service.

EXPEDITION LOG

date	activity	Max altitude	o/night
14/09/16	Flight from BHX		plane
15/09/16	IMF meeting & overnight bus to Manali		bus
16/09/16	Manali activities: meet agent and staff, shopping	2000	Manali Hotel
17/09/16	Mini-bus to Sural Butori	3400	Homestay
18/09/16	trek to half way camp	3800	trek camp
19/09/16	trek to base camp	4300	base camp
20/09/16	R&R, repacking	4300	base camp
21/09/16	trek to acclimatising camp under Sersank La	4700	base camp
22/09/16	trek to Sersank La	5100	base camp
23/09/16	trek to acclimatising camp	5300	base camp
24/09/16	trek to unnamed peak	5400	base camp
25/09/16	trek to base	4300	base camp
26/09/16	rest day	4300	base camp
27/09/16	cross Sersank La to Sersank glacier	4900	tent
28/09/16	to tent bivi on 1 st spur	5200	tent
29/09/16	to Col bivi	5400	tent
30/09/16	Frendo to Ice Hose	5600	tent
01/10/16	Ice Hose to Sub Banana field. Ledge bivi	5800	bivi
02/10/16	Banana Field, Cornice, South Face bivi	6000	bivi
03/10/16	Summit, to descent bivi	6050	tent
04/10/16	Sersank Glacier to base camp	4300	base camp
05/10/16	rest day	4300	base camp
06/10/16	rest day		camp
07/10/16	trek to Sural		Homestay
08/10/16	to Manali, mini-bus		hotel
09/10/16	to Delhi night bus		bus
10/10/16	to IMF debrief & Airport		plane

MAPS & PHOTOS
Himachal Pradesh

Manali to Sural Butori



North Face with bivouacs marked

Day 4, bewildering route finding at the headwall

