



# 2016 Jangpar Wall Expedition

## MEF REPORT

Ian Dring | December 2016

## Contents

1. Summary.....	2
2. Acknowledgements.....	5
3. Itinerary.....	5
4. Maps.....	8
5. Route Descriptions.....	10
6. Blog Articles.....	18
7. Team Bios.....	50
8. Equipment/Food/Medical.....	55
9. Logistics/Miscellaneous.....	60
10. Budget.....	61

## 1. Summary

### 1.1. Location

India Himalaya

Miyar Valley, Lahaul Himalaya

Himachal Pradesh

### 1.2 Climbers



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John Crook



Dave Sharp



Ian Dring

### 1.3 Support Team



**Gajendra Deshmuke**  
IMF Liaison Officer



**Heera Singh**  
Base Camp Manager, Cook  
and Support Porter



**Chetan Pandey**  
High Altitude Porter and Base  
Camp Assistant



**Mansi Pandey**  
Representative Himalayan  
Run & Trek Pvt. Delhi Based  
Logistics Support

### 1.4 Summary of climbing activities

A party of four, Dave Sharpe, John Crook, Martin Moran and Ian Dring, operating in two climbing teams made full use of a very stable weather to complete lightweight alpine style ascents of 3 unclimbed summits by high grade technical mixed and rock routes.

Dave and John's main objective was a remote and unclimbed North Face of Peak 6267 situated beyond the Kang La Pass some 30km from Base Camp. Martin and Ian opted for the North Spur of Peak 5755 located at the Junction of the Miyar and Jangpar Glaciers.

The team arrived in the Miyar Valley on the 19<sup>th</sup> of September 2016, establishing Base Camp at Dali Got on the 21<sup>st</sup> September.

Dave and John with the help of high altitude porter Chetan Pandey wasted no time in establishing their Advanced Base Camp high on the Miyar Glacier from where they completed an acclimatisation climb and second ascent of nearby peak 6036m. On the 27<sup>th</sup> September, they set off, heading first for the Kang La pass

(5450m) and then crossing to the northern side of the chain to access their objective situated in the Temasa valley. They then spent the next six days completing the first ascent via a challenging, direct mixed route on the north face. 'Transcendence' (1200m, Scottish 6, ED2) tackles the steep, vertical corners in the lower, central half of the face before heading up and right to the upper wall. The team spent two days on the face itself and summited at 8pm on the 1st October from where they returned to their Advance Base the following day. The peak was named 'Raja Peak' – meaning King in Hindi a suitable name for the area's most prominent peak. The total distance covered from Base Camp to Base Camp was around 70km. High levels of fitness, good acclimatisation and the ability to climb very quickly assured success.

After this route and still with some time still left over they managed to make another first ascent lower down the valley on the Jangpar Glacier to produce 'Last Chance Saloon' (1300m, Scottish 4, TD-) The 5780m peak was named 'James Peak' after Dave's nephew.

Martin and Ian were also successful in climbing their main objective over six days, summiting at 6pm on the 1st October. Their route 'Crocodile Rock' (1300m, VIa+, ED) was a high quality sustained technical rock climb. There was no evidence of any previous ascents and they suggest the name Marakula Killa – The Citadel of the Goddess Marakula. Marakula is an ancient local Devi (goddess) for the people of Lahaul. The 1000 year-old temple at Udaipur in the Chandra Bhagar valley at the foot of the Miyar valley is dedicated to her.

## 1.5 Summary of First Ascents

Dave Sharpe, John Crook	<p><b>'Raja Peak'</b> (6267m) via North Face – 'Transcendence' (1200m ED2, Scottish VI); Dave Sharpe and John Crook (Location: Ladakh and Zaskar South 665000, 3680300). Descent via South Ridge – 1st October 2016.</p> <p><b>'James' Peak'</b> (5780m) via North Face – 'Last Chance Saloon' (1300m TD-); Dave Sharpe and John Crook (Location: Ladakh and Zaskar South 668500, 366050). Descent via North Face – 7th October 2016.</p>
Martin Moran, Ian Dring	<p><b>'Marakula Killa'</b> (5755m) via North Spur – 'Crocodile Rock' (1300m ED, 21 Pitches between III and VIa+); Martin Moran and Ian Dring (Location: N 33° 4' 10", E 74° 47' 39'). Descent via West Face -1st October 2016.</p>



## 2. Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following organisations and individuals for their generous support:

Financial support	The Mount Everest Foundation
Equipment Sponsorship	Mountain Equipment (Contact Duncan Machin) RAB (Contact Anna Clark) Lowe Alpine (Contact Rachel Brine)
Loan of specialist equipment	Dave Williams
Equipment Trade deals	Lyon Equipment
UK Based Support	Sandra Dring Alistair Yarwood
MEF References	John Codling Andy Nisbet

## 3. Itinerary

### 3.1 Base Camp

17 <sup>th</sup> September to 19 <sup>th</sup> September:	Delhi to Road Head at Khanjar via Manali, Rohtang Pass and Udaipur.
20 <sup>th</sup> September to 21 <sup>st</sup> September:	Trek to Base Camp along the Miyar Valley. This was established at Dali Got (approx. 4100m), near to the Snout of the Miyar Glacier.



### 3.2 Dave Sharp's, John Crook's Activities

22<sup>nd</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> September: Establish ABC (4860m) -with help of Chatan Pandy



25<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> September: Acclimatisation ascent to summit of Peak 6036 via South East Ridge (and reconnaissance of the descent of Raja Peak)

27<sup>th</sup> September: Cross Kang La pass (5450m).

30<sup>th</sup> September to 1<sup>st</sup> October: Ascent of Raja Peak via 'Transcendence' – Chatan re-stocks ABC during this time with food supplies (two carries).

2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> October: Return to ABC.

4<sup>th</sup> October: Return to Base Camp.

6<sup>th</sup> October: Establish ABC (4320m) on Jangpar Glacier.

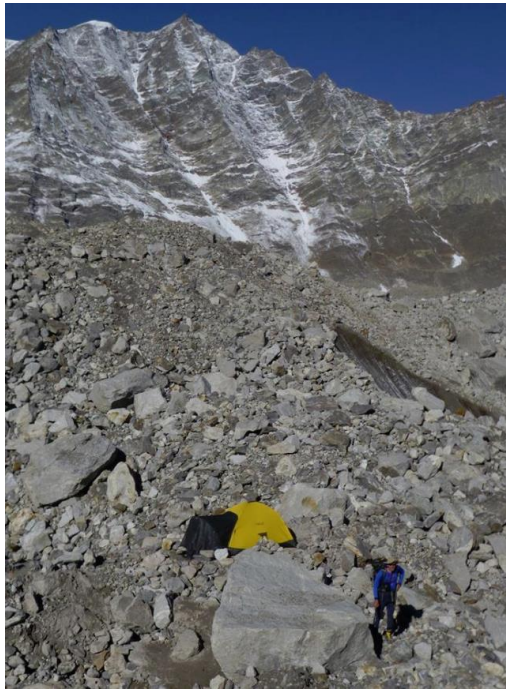
7<sup>th</sup> October: First Ascent of James Peak via 'Last Chance Saloon'.

8<sup>th</sup> October: Return to Base Camp.

10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> October: Return to Delhi.

### 3.3 Martin Moran's, Ian Dring's Activities

22<sup>nd</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> September: Establish ABC on Jangpar Glacier with help of Heera (4320m).



25 <sup>th</sup> September	Establish equipment cache at base of route.
26 <sup>th</sup> September to 1 <sup>st</sup> October:	First Ascent of Marakula Killa Via 'Crocodile Rock'.
2 <sup>nd</sup> October:	Martin returns to Base Camp.
3 <sup>rd</sup> October:	Ian returns to Base Camp (opted to bivouac when safe ground was reached in approaching darkness).
3 <sup>rd</sup> October	Chetan and Heera clear ABC.
6 <sup>th</sup> to 8 <sup>th</sup> October:	Return to Delhi

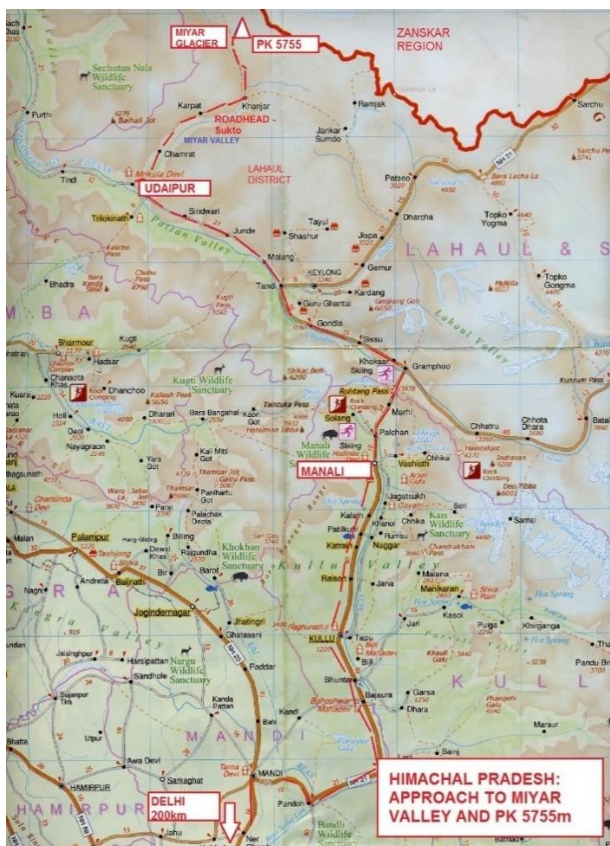


## 4. Maps

### Map 1: Overview

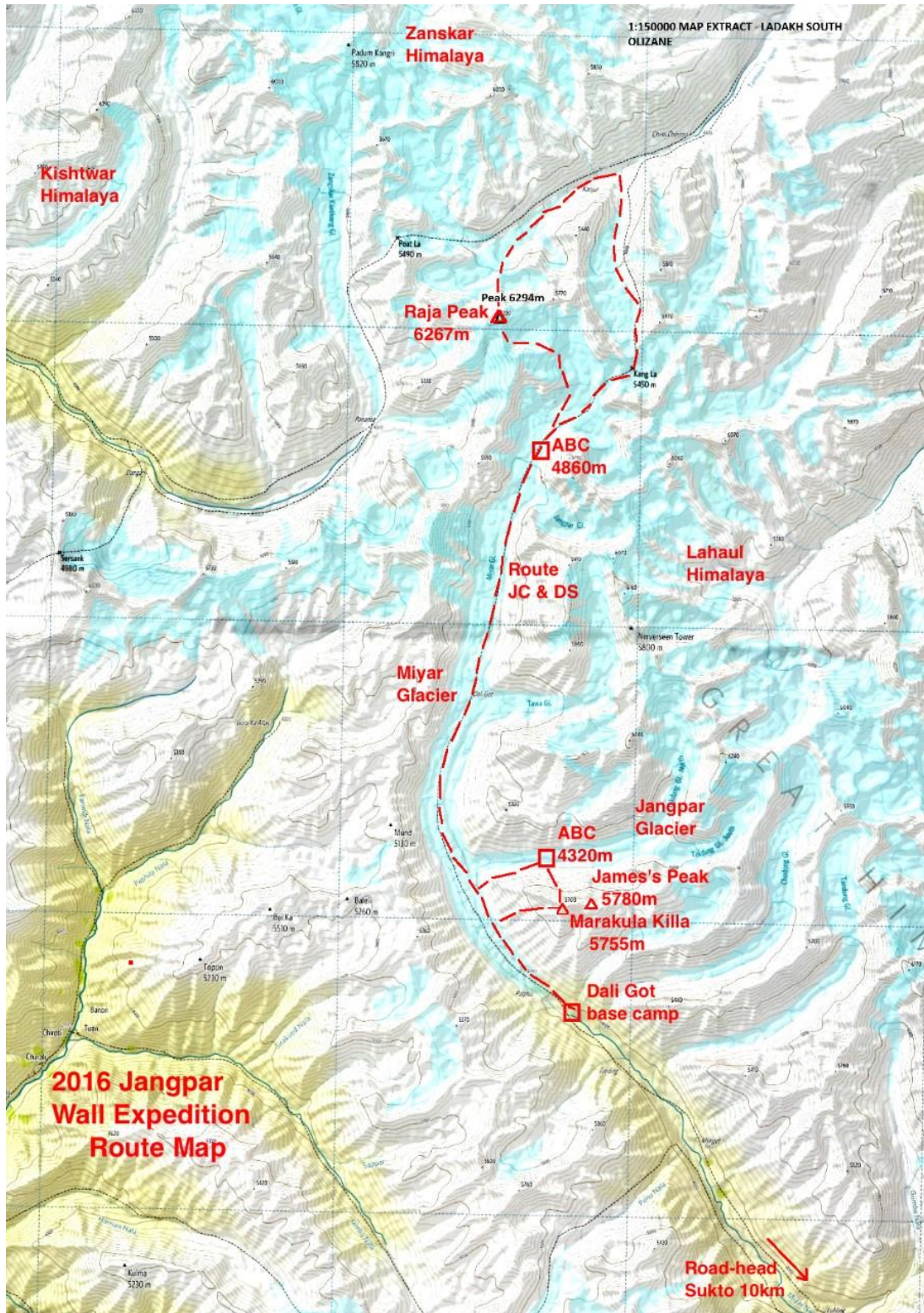


### Map 2: The Approach



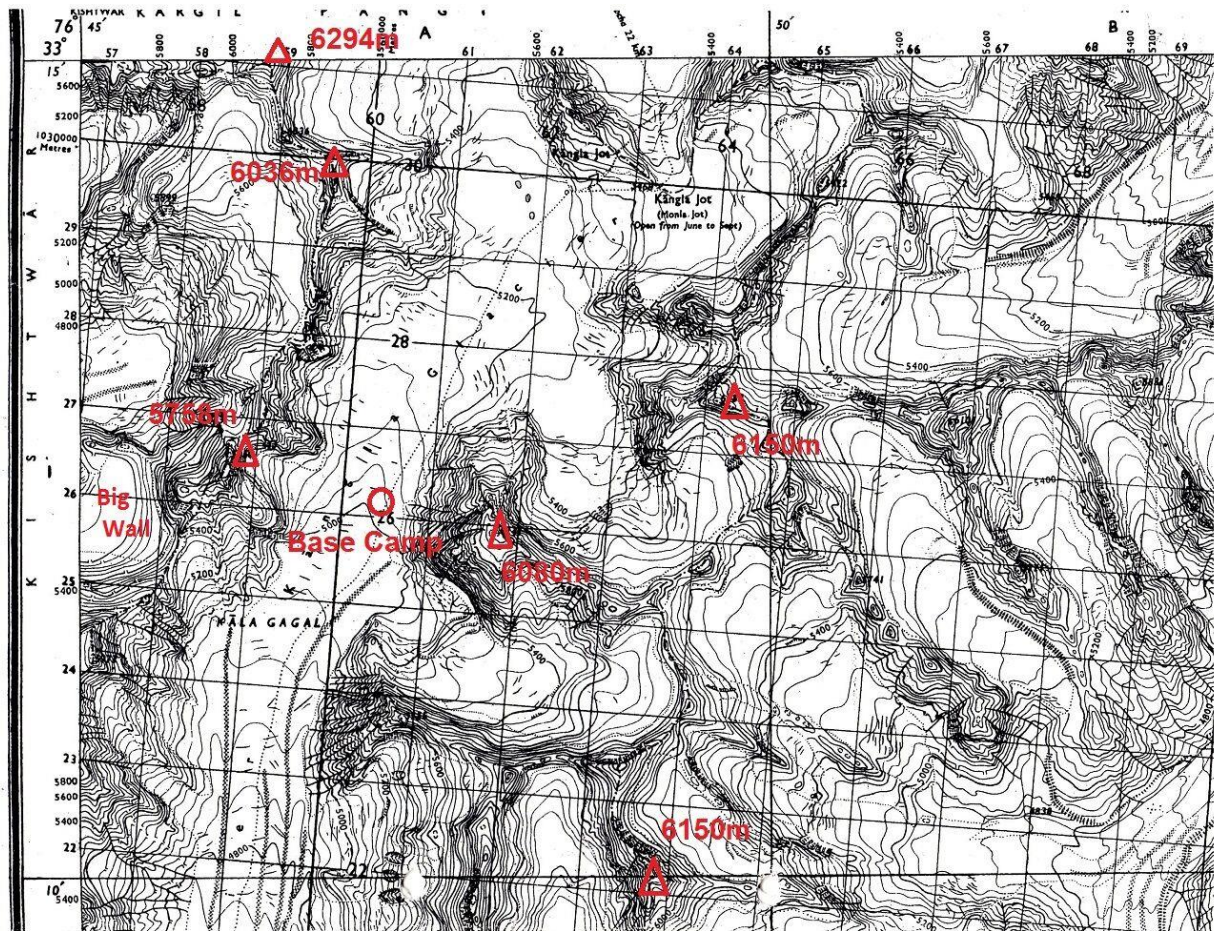


**Map 3: Miyar and Jangpar Glaciers**





**Map 4: Upper Miyar Glacier showing position of Dave and John's ABC and acclimatisation peak (6036m)**



## 5. Route Descriptions

### **Raja Peak 6267m (by John Crook)**

Location: Ladakh and Zaskar South 665000, 3680300

### **Transcendence (ED2 Scottish VI 1200m)** -see photograph below

Start over the central bergschrund between the 2 seracs at ~1/3 height. Climb the couloir to the obvious rock wall, the "The Giant's Ankle", after ~150m. Move left in to a chimney, before escaping back right on steep ice. Follow the wide couloir to reach the line of steep snow and ice corners, "Canon Corners". Climb these corners for 3 pitches as directly as conditions allow (1st pitch crux, thin), to reach the large snow ramp splitting the face at 1/3 height, "Giant's Belt".

Traverse right ~100m to belay at the right side of the vague left trending ramp system, "The Giant's gut". Follow a series of goulottes, ice steps and chimneys

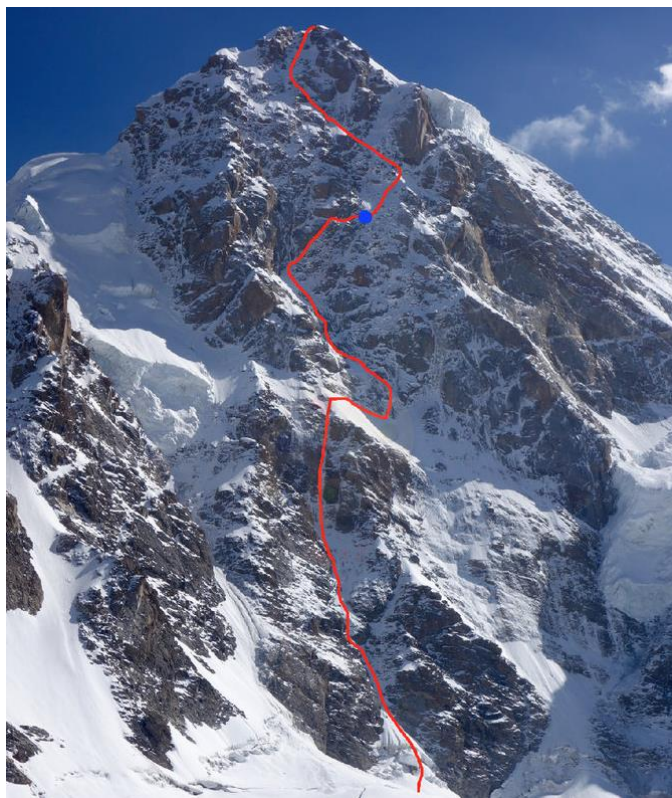
up this ramp system for 3 pitches to reach the large open snow bowl, “Belly of the Beast” (obvious bivi sites).

2 right trending ramps start from high in this bowl. The first ascent party climbed the lower of these 2 ramps for 50m to reach a bivi (sitting bivi for 2 / lie down for 1), before descending to gain the higher ramp. This provides more interesting climbing, leading in 2 long pitches to a lying down rectangular wall. In prime conditions steep grooves may be able to be gained to the left or, more likely, a very exposed traversing pitch right, “Tux Traverse”, leads to another snowfield. Head for the top right corner of this, before climbing up and left below the large vertical rock wall, “The Giant’s Ear”.

Pass beneath another large rock wall to reach a goulotte come chimney escaping from this area. Climb this before moving left and overcoming a bulging corner, “The Giant’s Lip”. Climb up and left for a pitch, possibly passing both steep and delicate steps to reach the final ice field. Follow this for 100m between 2 guarding rock walls, to gain the ridge just West of the summit.

#### **Descent (PD+):**

From the summit descend the South ridge for about 250m, before down climbing / rappelling the ice face from the East of the ridge to reach a ramp descending to the glacier. Cross to the extreme East of this glacier to reach dry ice.



**The Line of Transcendence, the blue marker indicates the bivouac site**



**James' Peak 5780m (+/- 70m) (by John Crook)**

Location: Ladakh and Zaskar South 668500, 366050

**Last Chance Saloon (TD- 1300m)** – the route can be clearly seen behind the North Spur of Marakula Killa in the cover photograph of this report.

Start at the extreme right of their N face, below a ridge to the right of the largest seracs. Climb up the right of this ridge, before crossing it to reach the ice face just right of the seracs. Climb this (hard ice) to reach the snow above and move left to reach the left hand wide couloir. Follow this large lightening fork couloir passing the 1st rock barrier on it's right, before moving left below the steep headwall, to reach a shoulder where you may be greeted by the sun.

Traverse left over several snow crests, until overlooking a large couloir. Climb 2 easy mixed pitches up left to reach steeper ice in the couloir. Follow the couloir, until almost level with the rocks coming down from the far left of the large cornice above. Follow ice to the right of these rocks, until forced left up steeper ice (hard) to reach the ridge. Follow this West to reach the East, higher, summit. The first ascent party traversed to the West summit (beware of the large cornice).

**Descent:**

From the notch between the 2 summits make several rappels (about 6), until below the steep ice pitch. The couloir may now be down climbed, apart from one rappel about half way down.

NB: Although this couloir presents some danger as a funnel for cornice / serac collapse, it has the potential as a logical easier line to the summit (~D).



**The Line of Last Chance Saloon (Red) and the descent of the North Face (Blue)**



### **Marakula Killa 5755m (by Martin Moran)**

Location: Miyar valley, Lahaul Himalaya, Himachal Pradesh. N 33° 4' 10", E 76° 47' 39"

The rock bastion lying immediately north of Dali Got base camp and bounding the junction between the Miyar and Jangpar Glaciers is given altitude 5755m on the Survey of India 1:50000 map. The mountain is linked to a matching twin-summit of c5760m to its east, and the pair are divided by a big gulch in their southern flanks. The upper 600m of the south Face of Pk 5755m is formed of slabs and ribs of smooth rock. A prominent pinnacle of 5350m on the South-West Ridge was climbed by a British party in 2004 and named the Lammergeier Spire. Despite the accessibility of the mountain there were no records of any ascent to the summit prior to 2016.

The West Face is a complex jumble of ribs, slabs and canyons. The North Spur of the mountain is an eye-catching line guarding the entrance to the Jangpar Glacier. To the left of the spur the true North Face of Pk 5755m is an awe-inspiring sweep of compact slabs, steepening to a 300m headwall which is split by several tenuous icy faults, one of the most impressive of its kind in the world.

### **North Spur via Crocodile Rock (ED, 1300m (21 pitches between III and VI+)**

-see photograph below.

The stepped North Spur of the peak is one of the finest lines in the area, catching the afternoon sunlight in views up the lower Jangpar Glacier. The spur offers a classic alpine-style challenge, with high quality and variety of rock climbing and considerable commitment above half-height. The rock is high-grade metamorphic, compact and slabby in stratification, mainly gneiss, and granitic in places. The north-facing aspect means that the spur is slow to clear after snowfall and projects a serious ambience. To borrow a phrase from the Fowler lexicon "not many routes compare".

The first ascent was greatly facilitated by a light snowfall two days before commencement of the climb. This provided a reliable supply of water for a multi-day attempt, and only complicated the climbing on the crux Eldorado slab. A heavier cover of dry snow would render the climb all but impossible.

In Spring, there are likely to be large snowfields in the flanking couloir to provide a water-supply, but the crest should be dry and climbable during a spell of good weather.

In the drier conditions of post-monsoon in Sept-Oct, subsequent ascents would be best undertaken in faster lighter style. As far as the base of the Badile tower the climb can be quit by a couple of abseils down into the couloir system on the right (west) side. With a detailed description and certainty of the descent-line on the west flank, a well-acclimatised team could plan a two to three-day ascent, starting with 2-3 litres of water per person, carrying a much-lighter rack and relying on ice and snow patches on the north side of the ridge near the top for replenishment.

Approach: from Dali Got base camp in Miyar Valley (4000m) follow a shepherds' trail on the east lateral moraine crest of the Miyar Glacier for 4km to the corner junction with the Jangpar Glacier (cairns). Descend the gravel moraine wall for 100m and climb the surface of the Jangpar Glacier to find a site for an advance base camp (meltwater ponds). The foot of the spur is at 4450m 2km up the south side of the glacier (4-5hr with load).

Access: The lower crest spur can be gained either: i) from the couloir on the right side (smooth rock step and exposure to rockfall, then easy grass and boulder slopes); or ii) by a vertiginous loose gravel barrier on the left side (as on first ascent). Scramble up boulders on the crest to a good bivouac site in a roofed recess under the 1st rock step (4630m).

**Route Description:** Go up right of the step (II+) and climb boulder and scree slopes for 120m trending left up a couloir (II) to a prominent shoulder at a steeper step - the Choocha (rodent) Buttress. From a belay 5m above the shoulder climb a complex pitch out right, traversing 10m then up diagonally to gain a fault of brown rocks with plant cushions (55m, sustained IV). Continue up the fault with awkward bulges (IV+) to gain easier cracks and a good rock spike at the top of the step (45m).

Walk 15m along a terrace to a shoulder under a deceptively easy-angled slabby step – the Bosigran Slab. Climb a fine pitch direct up the right side to the top of the step (55m, IV+) (good bivouac site just beyond).

Scramble 80m up the crest to the next, much bigger, step – the Badile. A smooth initial wall is split by a crack – The Craw. Climb this (V) and move out right to a good spike belay on easier slabs (30m). Go up right and climb slabby grooves and cracks just right of the crest (III/IV) to a spillikin belay (60m) at a shoulder on the crest. Work a line just right of the crest (IV+), moving into cracked grooves. Follow these (III+) to a small shoulder on the crest with flakes (60m). Go diagonally up right for 15m (IV) then trend back left on slabs towards the crest (sustained IV/IV+, 2 PR). Traverse right to belays on an undercut flake under the steeper final tower of the buttress (60m). Traverse right for 10m, then follow a series of grooves close on the right side of the buttress heading for a large perched block (sustained III+, poorly protected). Belay just above (50m). Continue for 25m on broken rock (II+) to a notch just beyond the top of the step (good bivouac site).

Climb round right to the base of a steep tower with projecting summit block – The Yardarm (30m, III). Move to the left side, exposed above the north face, and climb a series of ledges and overlaps, moving back right to belay on the crest (20m, IV+). Go up left again through a bulge (IV) and traverse back right to a rock cleft cutting through the top of the tower (15m).

Go through the gap, descend 10m (II) and scramble 20m across blocks (possible bivouac site) to the base of the main gendarme on the spur – The Flaming Tower (visible on Google Earth).

Go up a chute on the right side of a preliminary tower (20m, III+, loose). From a belay on the crest climb a short cleft and move left into a diedre system on the left side. Climb the steep corner to lose stacked blocks (IV+), swing left (1 PA), move up on left and swing back up right to gain jugs at the top of the corner (V+, possibly snowy). Belay on the crest 5m above under a belt of smooth slabs – Eldorado (55m).

Climb the slabs moving left after 12m (crux, A0, then VIa+, then IV+, 5 bolts in situ, very sketchy if snow on rocks). Gain good anchors at blocks directly under the Flaming Tower (20m). Climb a brown corner moving right into a fault which leads to the notch on the right side of the tower (30m, IV).

A remarkable section of clean granite arête follows – Le Petit Grepon. Make a steep move up the arête on the right (1PA or VIa) (bivouac ledge on north side on left). Continue up the edge, finishing at a little pinnacle. Fix a sling and swing 2m down to a ledge and block belay (25m, III+). Traverse a gangway on the left side of the next gendarme and belay on the crest below a pronounced smooth tower (20m, III).

Go down left for 3m on the north side to gain the Off-Kilter Cracks, a line of gangways hugging the left side of the tower with big exposure. Climb two pitches of 25m (V, then V with 1PA, possibly mixed), pulling steeply out right on sharp brown rock to gain a shoulder on the crest under another smooth tower (bivouac ledge 5m down on west side).

Go right into a couloir of broken rock running up to a final wall (60m, II then IV, probably mixed). Move up an easy fault and out right to belay under a short sharp flake in the final wall – the Razor Face (15m). Climb the flake and struggle into the niche above, then swing out right to emerge on to boulder-fields on the crest of the WNW Ridge of the peak at c5600m (15m, V). Surplus kit can be stashed here for collection on descent.

A steep tower bars the upper section of the WNW Ridge. This could be climbed direct by a right traverse along a break at one-third height which leads into a dihedral (probably IV+/V).

Alternatively, as on the first ascent, follow a traverse line for 200m across the West Face on gravel ledges with one pitch of III and short descent of II+ to gain a diagonal weakness of broken rock outcrops with gravel ledges. Follow this for four pitches of 50m (II/III) to gain the South-West Ridge 20m below a forepeak (bivouac site). Cross the forepeak and narrow connecting ridge (one step of III) to gain the summit dome. A simple slabby pitch (55m, II+) gains the summit crest at 5755m.

### **Descent – West Face**

Reverse the route back over the forepeak and make six 30m abseils down the weakness in the W Face (short abseils best to avoid rope snags), then reverse the traverse back to the WNW Ridge. A bizarre and spectacular tower bars descent of the WNW Ridge crest. The W Face is a vast fan of white slabs and

screes, steepening into a funnel at 5000m. Descend the right edge (as viewed facing out) of the face for 350m in a gully line close under the bizarre tower (two abseils and scrambling), keeping out right to stay on weathered rock. At c5100m go out right to the crest of a broad bouldery ridge. Scramble down the crest for 100m and go over to the right edge where the ridge steepens into a vertical buttress.

Make four 60m abseils down the buttress and the slabs below, aiming for a little tower in a notch on the ridge. Scramble down 50m and go left through the notch to gain a long uniform grass and gravel slope, which runs diagonally down left for 300m to meet the base of the funnel in the W Face at c4600m (running water).

Cross the funnel and continue

diagonally down left to meet the tracks on the lateral moraine of the Miyar Glacier (stone hut at a grassy levelling). Follow the moraine trail back to Dali Got (1 ½ hr) or turn right and follow the access route back to the advance base in the Jangpar Glacier (2 – 2 ½ hr).



The Line of Crocodile Rock



## 6. Blog Articles

### 6.1 Miyar Valley Expedition, India 2016 (by Dave Sharpe)

For well over a decade now I have been reading books by the likes of Fowler, Bonatti, Messner and House about their incredible experiences in the Himalayas. I have bookshelves full of them. When I was thirteen and beginning to climb regularly I went to a slideshow by Simon Yates (of Touching the Void fame) at Wilf's Cafe in Staveley. I say slideshow and not lecture because with an audience of no more than twenty and set in a very intimate setting one winters eve, I was witness to an incredible couple of hours of talk and slides that undoubtedly stirred something deep inside me. That night at the end of the evening I bought a signed poster off Simon titled 'The Latoks and Ogres from the East' that I can still remember clear as day. I have known for as long as I have been climbing that one day I too would gravitate towards these climbs and seek my own experience when the time is right.

Being part of the British Mountain Guides network has a lot of advantages, not least being able to easily communicate with and be 'kept in the loop' about up and coming trips and what members are up to. It was one wet February afternoon when a post came through our Yammer network (think Facebook for Guides) that stood out from the rest. Martin Moran (Himalayan legend and fellow BMG member) was planning a trip to a remote corner of the Indian Himalaya and was after reliable folk to come along. We asked him some obvious questions (the sort Himalayan virgins *would* ask) about routes in the area and likely conditions. We received the reply below:

*Dear Dave and John,*  
*I have attached pics of the N Face of PK 6294m. The face height is 1200m. The mountain is so far unclimbed as far as I know. It's the pivotal peak of the area geographically. The easy route will be from the top of the Miyar Glacier up the south-east face - looks about AD. I organised but didn't participate in a trip to try and climb the easy route in 2015 but it was somewhat disastrous. The team never got to the bottom of it. They got bogged down and demoralised by several days of bad weather lower down the Miyar Glacier. You could reach an advance camp-site at 5000m in a day's walk up dry glacier from the Jangpar side glacier. To get to this N Face from here would be a real mission - totally committing. You'd have to go over Kang La (5400m), down to 4500m at Khanjur in the Temasa valley, then up the Tidu Glacier to the base of the face at around 5000m - all technically easy but long and rough. I did all this on a guided trip in 2011 which is described in my Higher Ground book. If anything went wrong on the face and you couldn't get back over Kang La you'd be stuck on the wrong side of the Himalaya. You'd have to go out to Padum in Zaskar (about 20km to a road). Then it is a major road journey via Kargil to Leh (300km, 2 days). From Leh you could fly back to Delhi.*

*This has all the ingredients of a complete adventure. In 2011 we saw no-one for 10 days – no shepherds or trekkers in these valleys at all.*

After a bit of to-ing and fro-ing, working a time frame and calculating some finances, myself and regular longtime climbing partner and fellow Aspirant BMG John Crook thought it too good an opportunity to pass up. If you are a dedicated alpinist and you receive an email like this off someone like Martin, the answer is YES. He had us hook, line and sinker. The Himalayas were on!

Fast-forward to the end of the following summer and three months working in the Alps has left me hill fit but chomping at the bit for some personal climbing. The now usual a lot to do / not enough time to do it in ensued, but soon enough I'd driven back to the UK, packed the necessities, fed the cat and was on my way to India.

Now having read so much about a place before you can't help but have certain preconceived ideas. I have heard on more than one occasion India to be described as 'THE most vibrant mix of sights, sounds and smells on the planet; a sensory overload' and on first inspection Delhi did not disappoint. The usual Western-priced rip off taxi fare saw us deposited at Delhi YMCA, our accommodation for the night after a round-the-houses approach with what was essentially a cab driver who had no idea where he was going. All good fun to start the trip. Here we would meet Martin and Ian the following day. Guess it could have been worse, at least we got ripped off with a smile...

The following day was spent largely sorting out kit, packing and re-packing and buying any last minute essential items. All this taking place in-between bouts of sweating profusely in the intense, afternoon Delhi heat, with a trip to the local market sealing the deal as experience of the day. I was grateful I had shopped for the obligatory essentials before I left the UK, however enjoyed accompanying John whilst he played the customary game of haggling for his life over a few Rupees for items he didn't really want anyhow.

*'Hello my friend. You want t-shirts, you want watches?'*

*'No, not really'*

And so it continued.

Now in nearly every book I have read about trips to climb in the Indian Himalaya the IMF is mentioned. The *Indian Mountaineering Federation* is the point of reference for teams coming to spend time in the high mountains of India and place for teams to meet their assigned Liaison Officer along with getting the legally required pre-ordained permit to climb. Again the place had taken on an almost mythical status (funny how you build things up in your head) so it was great to finally go there and see for myself. The building was nothing like I imagined, grander and with a brilliant climbing wall in the well-kept grounds. It turned out Martin is somewhat of a celebrity around those parts and had agreed to do a lecture for them that evening. We met Ghadjhi (our Liaison Officer),

sorted the necessary paperwork and then enjoyed a fine evening at Martin's talk with great hospitality shown to us from officials at the IMF.

A long journey by bus led us up, out of the manic chaos that was Delhi and North away from the accompanying mosquitos to cooler climbs. It was good to see Delhi but after even just a couple of days I had no desire to remain there and was keen to get going. Now India has close to 150,000 deaths on its roads each year and quite frankly from what I saw I'm surprised it's not more. Mental does not even come close. Why bother staying on the correct side of the road when there's space in the other lane or waiting to overtake at a suitable place when you could just do it now? A very interesting and different way to think about driving indeed and thankfully not one I will be importing to Cumbria's roads.



**Our transport for the next couple of days (YMCA Doorman not included)**

Manali is a town of two halves. Manali itself; a busy, bustling typical Indian community set high in the hills and Old Manali; somewhat quieter, more expensive and obviously better set to cater for the whims of Westerners like ourselves. Old Manali was thankfully our base for the night. it was a good chance for final preparations before heading over the Rohtung Pass the following day

and we took full advantage of what was very likely to be our last taste of this level of comfort for a while.

Early the next day and we were off over the near 4000m Rohtung Pass heading ever closer to the Miyar Valley. Having never been to India before the experience was all new, different and very enjoyable. Sweet tea is something it appears you must like when travelling around India. Every stop is a tea stop and even if you order coffee and they agree to it in principle (unlikely) you'll probably get tea anyhow. Save yourself the time and just order tea to begin with would be my advice. That way at least everyone will know where they stand.



### Top of the Rohtung Pass

Soon enough we made it to our accommodation for the night; a homestay in a very small village at the road head of the Miyar Valley. This gave us an invaluable opportunity to sample real, rural Indian life first-hand and see just how



warm and friendly the local people were. Put simply their life is basic but seemingly very happy. I felt they had a light-hearted contentedness with what little they had with a focus on the true necessities in life. Here we were well catered for and after a few too many fresh Chapattis and a more than comfortable nights sleep we started our walk the next morning along the flat-bottomed valley. Our party consisted of myself, John Martin and Ian, our support

team of Gajendra, Heera and Chetan as well as six horses and two horse men.



The next two days were spent like this, nudging ever closer to our own camps but very much enjoying the walk (with some bouldering thrown in). I felt like a child in a sweet shop with so many unclimbed peaks towering overhead. How lucky we were to be here.



River crossings are something you just have to get used to on these trips. The more remote an area the less likely it is to have bridges where and when needed and after all, that's what we came for. Glacial flows are in fact even colder than they sound and careful route choice along with a quick immersion and exit seemed to be paramount for limiting the pain.



**There comes a time in a man's life when you realise you just need to man up. That point for me was wondering how I was going to get across this river when this lad turns up barefoot and carries his horse across. It was only a small horse but still...**





On arrival at our base camp (BC) we wasted no time in packing up and getting ready to move further up the glacier. Our 'A' plan was adventurous, extremely long and full of uncertainties. To help we had paid a little extra to get assistance from a high-altitude porter (Chetan) to make our plan look a little more likely and to be able to maximise our time in the hills. As it turned out Chetan was a total legend and brought so much more than badly

needed resupplying and help load carrying. Leaving BC to establish advance base camp (ABC) our loads were massive, 25-30kg each. We had been told to skirt the left bank of the glacier but after several hours it became apparent this was in fact not the best way and proved to be even harder work than anticipated. We did a solid 7 hours like this with peaks and troughs of incredibly loose moraine over fifty metres high before hitting dry glacier where we camped for the night. Tough day in the saddle.



Throughout this day Chetan followed casually and I would often ask him how he was getting on.

“How you doing Chetan?”

“Good” came the reply. “I just follow you”

Delivered light-heartedly yet meaningfully every time with a huge smile and despite the fact it had now started to snow. Good man!

It feels my recent ongoing training as a Guide has made me much more aware of how others are doing around me in the hills. I recognise instantly if it is cold and someone isn't wearing gloves, they have not eaten, or are slowing down. I notice the same awareness in John too.

Days like this are what the iPod shuffle mode was made for. Thanks to Oasis, Leftfield, The Prodigy, Hot Chip and many more for helping me through the highs and lows. I am forever in your debt.

ABC established and after a night there Chetan left us and made his way back down to BC with an agreement to come and restock food after a week. It felt ever so slightly more isolated when Chetan left, just the two of us remaining. Although slow we were making progress. It felt great to finally get to ABC (felt like a mission in itself) as from here we would be able to travel a lot lighter and soon the climbing would begin in earnest.

Bad weather hampered us the next day (one of only two days on the whole trip) so a tactical rest day was called for and when we awoke to blue skies the following morning we began our acclimatisation on a nearby 6036m peak. The



peak had been climbed once before in 2007 (only to find this out upon our return, thinking we were doing another first ascent) but we spent two days on its South-East ridge along with a stunning bivi at 5600m. Although not particularly technical, the ridge made a brilliant acclimatisation peak and gave us a superb vantage point to inspect our likely descent of pk. 6294. The day was incredible with clear blue skies, warm temps and light winds. If *this* was what climbing Himalayan summits is all about, then I want more! We descended back to ABC to relax for the rest of the day and with the weather still looking good packed leisurely with a plan to leave the next day for the main event.

Our 'A' plan had been suggested to us by Martin whilst we were thinking of possible objectives for the trip. The best idea when heading on these expeditions is to come with a LOT of plans and objectives and bring everything you think *may* be needed for 99% of eventualities. This way when expedition life gives you lemons, you can make lemonade and change and adapt and still get something done. It is a very long way to head and get nothing done. 'A' plan was big. Part of the enrapture of alpine expedition climbing for me (and alpine climbing in general) is the unquantifiable nature of and often huge level of uncertainty associated with it. I have a tendency to search for certainties in life (and there aren't many) so this is a pill I have learnt to swallow over time in both life and the mountains. We had some numbers (we even had a map to see us to our peak and back, even if it did turn out to be wrong) but *actually* how far was it and how long would it take? Did we have enough food? These constant ponderings along with the accompanying natural anxiety over the unknown technical difficulties, weather (out of our control beyond our own assessments) and other logistical and technical wonderings are an integral part of the experience. Years ago, (I'm talking ten or so) I could so easily get psyched out by such a big route. 'Over 1000m of climbing?' or 'How hard?' Now though I have learnt to handle these uncertainties. I have climbed routes of close to two-thousand meters in length and jumped on (and capably retreated in horrendous weather from) even bigger. I have climbed Scottish grade VIII 8, and although not the strongest rock climber in the scheme of things I can keep going for a really, really long time. Time served in first rock climbing about the Lakes then Scottish Winter, followed by an alpine apprenticeship has given me these tools. And I can suffer. This means I no longer need to focus as much on natural uncertainties and I believe I will be fine whatever happens.

Before you have actually done something on a trip it is all just hot air and to be honest not even worth mentioning. I could be off to solo hard new routes on the South Face of Annapurna (stand aside Ueli), but until I'd done it and was safely back at BC it's all just hot air and dreams in the making. I often think as expeditions as being 9/10 experience and (hopefully) 1/10 climbing. How will it play this time? After what can only be described as an absolute suffer-fest on my last trip to Alaska we were due some good fortune.



The next afternoon we were off. First stop was back up the glacier heading to the Kang La pass, crossing point to the north side of the range. This was by now a slow, familiar walk and although still heavy, our bags felt light after the load carrying to ABC. I wondered weeks before we set off on this trip what it would feel like if we got to the pass. It was a pivotal point of commitment for our plan, the point where any onward movement northwards would be inextricably linked with deepening commitment to our goal and the way back becoming more and more involving. If we commit and can't make it over our objective for any reason what would we do? Climb a different route back over somehow? Walk back around? Maybe neither? We hit the col and had decided to camp on top to further aid acclimatisation. We were treated to an incredible night under one of the best skies I have ever seen. We lay in our tiny two-man bivi tent with the door open and watched the sky chatting like we were down the pub. You really get to know someone when partnered on a trip like this. I saw a good ten shooting-stars then dozed off. The next day we felt great despite a cold night and we continued down steep, firm slopes heading to the Jangpar glacier. On from here each step of the journey from the col began to feel more and more liberating and like we were doing what we had come here to do.

From dry glacier to wet-snow line then back to dry glacier. We were *travelling* through the hills. Down we went. All the time the ground was broken and extremely rough. The Himalayan chain is still rising and so that makes the boulders and more recent rockfalls much more unsettled. The ground is not like



adventuring around the Lakes. Big, loose, boulders, huge loads and long journeys make for problematic journeys for the unprepared and unaware. I fell badly four or five times over the trip and it felt like it could have had consequence. A broken leg out here would be problematic to say the least. By the end of the trip tho despite these setbacks I felt a much greater understanding of the moraine. It's inability to move under its own stream; being pulled and pushed in all sorts of directions, it's precarious positioning. What happens when your iPod runs out on day six whilst on a load carry through this ground? You think about shit like this.

We rounded the corner of the Temasa Valley and caught a first

glance of or peak. Martin wasn't lying. It was massive, sheer and by far the biggest around. What a hill! I couldn't help but feel a little intimidated initially but with the appearance of more and more useable features on the face and it looking like it could actually be in quite good condition I relaxed into it. By end of play that afternoon we had made it to a campsite across the valley from our peak, a perfect vantage point of the subject of so much thought these last few months. Again on a dry glacier, it felt a minor luxury to have streams running nearby and not have to melt snow. The whole place (at this altitude) felt so much more hospitable than Alaska. Butterflies and Bees were all around along with the usual alpine Chuff's and it really set the scene. Our plan was to spend twenty-four hours here to rest, observe the face and generally just prepare ourselves for what was to come. We had brought a pair of binoculars to see if we can work out a route on the face. Were those corners ice or snow? We would soon find out.

Now John likes his food and apart from carrying it so far, it was nice to have plentiful supplies the day before a big route. A rare treat indeed. Fed, hydrated and relaxed was how we left the penultimate bivi site before getting on the wall. We found a way through a maze of crevasses over to our final bivi site beneath and a little way from the prospective beginning of our route.

Now in the very early morning with all the aforementioned anxieties about such an endeavor, the last thing you want to be worrying about is finding your way to the correct start of your route. Experience has told me this. It is worth (in my opinion) putting a track in the day before so you don't end up wasting precious minutes at a very bad time of the morning and preventing you from getting a good start on your route. If there is no moon to light the way even with a very good head-torch it can be confusing to say the least. This done along with other final preparations like water bottles filled and into sleeping bags (to prevent them from freezing) and another check of the proposed route and it was time to bed down.

The alarm always goes off too early, or too late. It is never on time. So much of alpine climbing is about timing and discipline. The alarm goes off, you get up. It snows you put your hood up. It blows like hell and you spend the extra time guying the tent out. If you don't none of these things will likely be catastrophic, however each will lead to a gradual decline in performance and if it goes on long enough you will pay. On this occasion 2:30 was our nemesis. With a track already in and water ready for the morning brew the routine for departure is simple and takes 45 minutes.



I lead off and John follows when the rope goes tight. I decide the Bergschrund looks different in the opaque morning light and head further left than planned. The 'Schrund apron is slab, slab over sugar snow. The slab is deep and a pain for travel but not a threat at this stage. Upwards, rightwards, up some more. It is on terrain like this when I wish I was following. I look at my watch. 4:26am. The avalanche prone gully is quiet. This is good. I gamble on the snow above being firmer and more useable when I will need it most. I place a screw and assess it. It is good. I move on up and onto the face proper. John follows.



We move together for several hundred feet. This is a very efficient way to move on moderate terrain in the hills and can really eat up the ground. The climbing is easy and there is protection. I have very little interest in moving roped together with anybody with no protection on any type of ground. The threat from anything falling and knocking either climber off is real and the consequences up here dire. We climb up a little more and John takes the lead. We use one rope for now and I carry a second in my pack. John climbs to where the climbing looks to get harder and makes a belay. I climb to join him. John is keen to continue and we begin to get out the second rope. In the change from one rope to two and early morning confusion I drop my belay device. Balls. *"Here's to practicing my Italian-hitch for the next thousand meters"* I think. We realise neither of us saw it drop too far and decide to investigate. It has stopped on the firm sixty-degree snow just fifty meters below. I could drop it again a hundred times and I don't believe it would stop there once. With the face still yet to claim its first swag and back in the game belay wise, John moves off up. I am not a religious man though with enough of these well timed fortunate happenings I wonder if one day I could be. Deep down I doubt it.

The next pitch is much harder and John climbs up the main gully line before the ice gets too thin, then out right for the sanctuary of rock and the protection it offers. I am left at a hanging belay. The belay is good but in the post dawn space and getting hammered by spindrift (to become a regular feature of the face from then on) for the next two hours I get cold and struggle to follow the pitch. People love the pictures and accompanying tales but if they could see me now they would think we are mental. Is this how I choose to spend my 'holidays'? It would appear so. We could have gone to Majorca sport climbing in the sun or maybe Kalymnos. I've heard Crete is lovely this time of year too but no, we came here. I

am however happy to be here despite the immediate situation. John puts in a solid, inventive lead and climbs what turns out to be the route's crux. I join him for my time on the sharp end and continue on slightly easier ground. The spindrift is really bad (Point Five Gully on a bad day type bad) and I place more gear than usual to compensate. I chase the sun which is now hitting the face above us just a little too slowly whilst moving steadily upwards all the time.

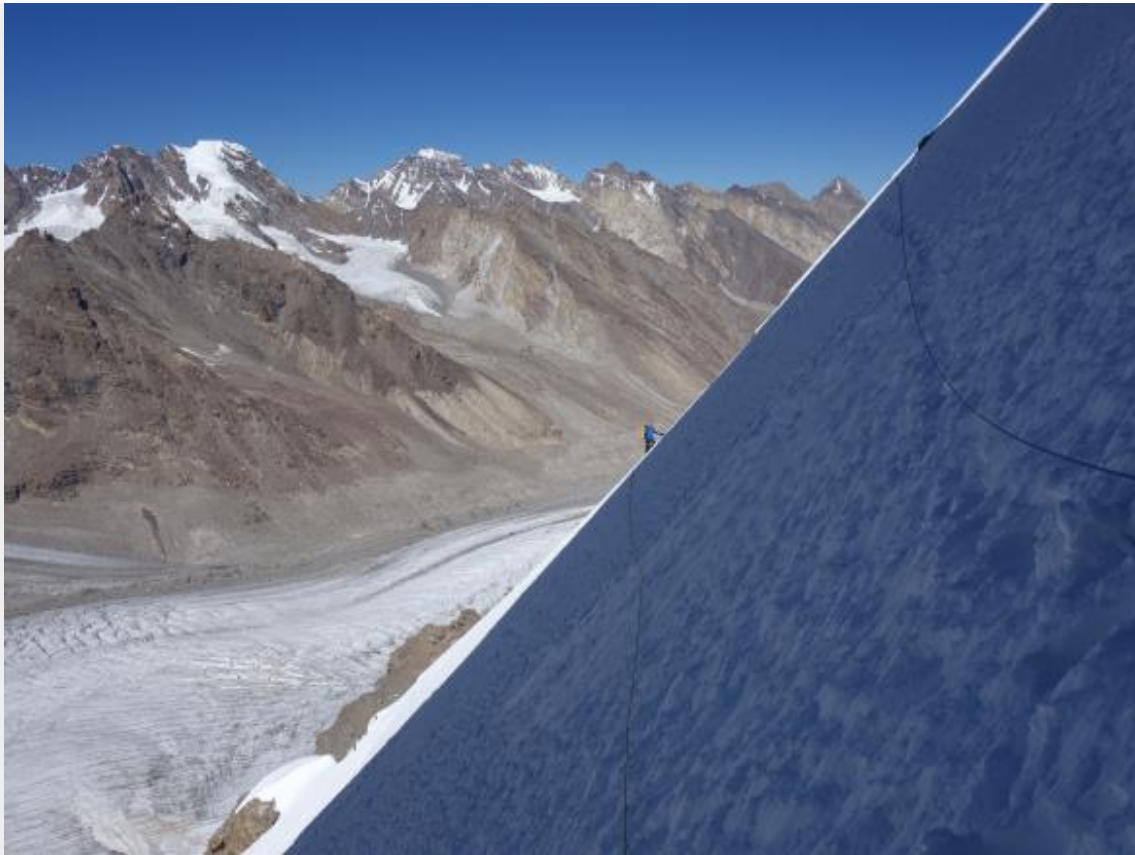
We emerge on the mid-way snow ramp above the lower third of the technical difficulties. It felt great to have been able to climb our ideal line to this point, the stand-out route so far. From here we traverse right for circa 150m to a point where we can gain access to the upper face. The traverse though easy features crossing of some vast, open slopes and with protection limited in the compact granite care is still needed to continue moving together. It is very often on such 'easy' ground like this where one's guard is dropped and accidents can happen. The attention required when climbing like this is significant and a constant and I see this as my own form of meditation. Meditation with consequence.



**John on the crux pitch**

The high Himalayan sun beats down relentlessly and is intense beyond belief. In just a few minutes temperatures can soar from minus figures to stifling, along with it all the changes solar radiation brings to the alpine party. Increased spindrift and snow movement, along with wet insulation and the ever-constant never quite warm enough toes. This is an environment where a lack of discipline will be punished. Can't be bothered to put your hood up? You'll pay for that eventually. And still the spindrift pours.

The incessant spindrift is now both a continuous and well accepted feature of our day. We look to climb where the ice is best, but this invariably leads us to climb up the same runnels down which the spindrift chooses to descend and we fight for prominence. Despite the good weather I am glad to be climbing in full hard-shells. If properly managed it is so much easier to stay dry in the spindrift and also means I will not need to carry them on my back or stop to put on these layers. With these already on this is one less thing I need to think about.



**The vast mid-way slopes**



We look to climb as direct as possibly linking snowy corners and the now drooling tongues of ice. John is going steadily and I follow as best as I can, now



back in to pitching mode. Goulotte after goulette of beautiful ice now lead us in a slow, arching line up left. The time is 4pm and it will be dark in a couple of hours. We both recognise the need to find somewhere to spend the night and the suitability of the ledge John has belayed on. We decide to push on to capitalise on the daylight with John remaining in the lead. Two hours later and with no good bivouac ledge in sight we realise maybe it would have been better to stay put at the last ledge. The joys of hindsight. John fixes the rope at his high point and descends forty meters back to the small ledge I am on. I have been preparing it now for fifteen minutes and it's looking good. We won't get the tent up but we have space for both of us to sit up comfortably, space for kit and good anchors. The Himalayan sun drops below the horizon and the temperature

plummets. We have climbed for 16 hours straight today and melt snow to produce the much-needed water to begin our recovery. Everything is going very smoothly and the mood is good. We have only 1.5 days of food left though along with 2 days of gas so need to summit tomorrow. With this in mind we drift off.

After a fitful night's sleep we awake to another perfect morning. The process of getting going again after a night sitting on a small ledge on a high peak is harder and more time-consuming than you might think. A dropped stove or boot shell here would really complicate things. We are both very aware of this and take the necessary time to avoid these problems. The sun hits us and helps with this. We have decided we are going to have another look at finding a direct way through the top half of the face and for this will have to abseil down and across for a rope length first. Are we mad to be spending time descending trying to find a better, harder line? I don't think so. I ascend to the top of the fixed rope and replace the anchor with something we can leave. I then re-fix the ropes and descend down and across to under the main steepening head-wall. I build a belay and John joins me. He has the rack and so sets off. We swing leads taking it in turn climbing pitches all around Scottish 4/5 heading for an obvious, large rectangular wall diagonally to our right. We had spied this as a key linking feature when checking out the wall from below and hoped it would grant us access to the final third of the wall. I belay here and stare across at what awaits. The climbing looks quite a lot harder, maybe Scottish VII or VIII. John joins me and it is apparent straight away we are thinking the same. It would be good to have a go, however it looks technical and time consuming and protection looks very limited. With only a day and a half's food still left and very aware of our isolated position we

reluctantly decide to leave the direct and continue heading right to find a way through.



Keeping to 'pitched' climbing John leads off. The next pitch is long and traverses around to the right out of sight. This pitch is reminiscent of the 'Traverse of the Gods' on the Eiger 1938 route, being easy but in an amazingly exposed position and again with protection only good where most needed. After this pitch the angle and exposure relent and

we begin moving together again.



### **Traverse of the Gods**

It is very hard when you are the first people to try and climb something and have nothing to follow to know where to go and what to head for. Instinct built up over twenty years of route finding on routes helps but invariably is not always the answer. We are very keen to climb as direct a line as possible but need to be wary of time constraints, limits on our supplies and the very real danger of having an accident on the face. This could turn what is so far a relatively straight-forward climb into something much more involving and needs to be avoided at all costs.

Upwards again we go. We have an option to head right to escape the wall up a huge gully and associated ramp line. The gully has a vertical bounding right wall and the ice looks in good condition. After this we think we would be out on to the North-West shoulder and could continue more easily up and over the mountain. As an option it is tempting but we continue up the middle of the face as much as we can still seeking our direct line. John finishes his 'block' and I take the lead leftwards across first across easy slopes then straight up into a steep runnel. Twelve hours into day two and progress is now beginning to slow. We haven't drank enough water and my muscles are now beginning to cramp badly. I diligently spend the extra time protecting the pitch like a form of compensation for my acknowledged weariness and move on up using the bounding side walls to rest when I can. The climbing remains first-rate with protection ample for the weary. Up and left I head to belay below an overhanging step. I belay from a screw you could hang a house off and a small wire. John climbs to join me.

*"Fancy it?"* I ask.

*"Can do"* comes the reply.

We switch bags to keep the lighter of the two with the leader and John heads off. The overhang is very short and ultimately easier than it looks however I was happy to relinquish the lead and give my cramp a chance to subside. I feel the first rays of the day soaking into me and warming me all over. Here at the belay and well protected from the spindrift under overhanging walls it is a nice feeling though I know it will not last long. The rope pulls and yanks me out of my wandering thoughts, back to the wall. It goes tight and stays tight, my sign to climb. I have climbed with John extensively now over the last seven years and you typically become very tuned in to being able to tell what the other person is doing, when you are on belay and generally what is happening out of sight and earshot on the other end of the rope. This way shouts can be kept to a minimum.

I climb up to see John belayed next to the final steeping below the summit slopes. It looks like there is still a few hundred meters to go but this is likely the last of the steeper pitches. John think it looks easier to traverse low down to my left and I begin to head across. The rope work is a nightmare and the extra faff and complicated nature of what I am trying to do soon outweighs any benefit. After a lot of expended energy I finally emerge level with and on the other side of John. Now at over 6000m and having been constantly on the go for the last eight days this really was not the desired result. Lesson learnt: Keep it simple, stupid.



I belay John up. He joins me as one by one then last light of the day is extinguished on the distant peaks like candles being blown out on a domino stack. Back to moving together again John leads on up, steadily and placing ample protection to counter the now growing feelings of tiredness and altitude. The ridge crest looks to be only one hundred meters away but turns out to be more. I follow taking out the protection John has put in.

We are moving steadily but surely. One screw followed by another. A cam. Two nuts, another screw this time tied-off, another nut. And so it continues. It is pitch-black by the time I hit the ridge. This is now a section of the route we have not seen before and to my dismay the ropes lead off in



a huge arc continuing the ridge line. Where is the summit? I follow with heavy legs over another two false summits until I see the faint glow from John's torch. It is stationary and I conclude he must be on the top. Ten steps at a time in-between rests I climb to join him. I look around in all directions just yards from John in an effort to clarify there is no more up. There isn't. It is 8.06pm.

I have been fortunate enough to sample a lot of different types of summits over the years. Some are joyous, some are casual and some are truly celebrated. The ones that have made a real impact on me though are those that have been the culmination of months of work and have remained in the balance, uncertain until the final point. They are not like in the movies, no 'Vertical Limit' style celebrations here. There is no greeting party and no salvation. Just continued slabby snow accompanied with a brisk North-westerly and a feeling of thank fuck. We have reached the top but this is only half the job and now we need to get down. More than half of accidents happen on the descent. It is a time when you are most tired and it is easy for the unsuspecting to believe the hard work is done and drop their guard. If anything it can very often be the opposite.

Ten minutes on top is enough. We share a warm embrace, snap the obligatory summit shots and head off down. The snow conditions have improved and the going is now good. We un-rope and quickly loose three hundred meters in height descending the South Ridge to a col. Happy with our position, we decide to camp. It is now 9:30pm and we have been on the go for seventeen hours. We get the tent up and stove on in-between bouts of me trying to throw -up. There is however nothing to bring up and so I continue my sickly demise. Headache tablets and a cup of tea will have to do. The late night snack of champions in the alpine world. When I finally lay down it feels good and eventually the salvation of sleep takes me.

Another cool but faultless morning dawns. I feel better, so does John. We are tired but on good form. We both feel for the first time on this route the effects of the last week of cold conditions on our hands and feet and notice the now familiar dulled sensation of frost nip in our digits. Even writing this in my living room sat here with the fire on they are still not right. Occupational hazard? Maybe so. We wait for the sun to warm us before getting out of the tent. In the mean time we each drink litres of tea. The tea bags have broken and grit sits in the bottom of the pan but it makes little difference now. We pack up and begin to make our way down steep slopes on the opposite side of the col heading for the South side of our mountain. It is early in the morning and there has been a good freeze which now renders the South facing slopes stable enough for our needs. It will not stay like this for long. We rope up and I lead the way around the cornice and off down the hill. I feel the effects of the previous weeks' effort straightaway and realise it will not be a fast day. Steady will do. Glad to have continued stable weather and good visibility for this descent I thread my way in and out of crevasses and seracs heading towards ABC all the time. We are on a wet glacier with varied snow and are diligent to take the time to add extra length to the rope between us as needed to protect us from the slots. The next few hours see us continuing our weaving line in and out of the features, back now onto the previously inspected descent spied from our acclimatisation peak and accompanying recce. At noon we hit dry glacier.

Me and John had by now spent a considerable length of time together and had not been more than 60m away from each other for several weeks now. The more time goes on the more the trusty iPod is brought into use on the long walks in and out. Hours would pass without a word, only those spoken by the Beach Boys or Basement Jaxx. Over the next few hours we continue down to ABC stopping only briefly to pick up some kit left at a stash along the way. We arrive back around 4pm and are relieved to see Chetan has kept his word and brought food. Job done.

We spend a day at ABC relaxing and recuperating. It feels good to do nothing and switch off. We decide to head down to BC for a proper rest and a chance to find out how Martin and Ian got on before they depart in a couple of days. Essentially our plan was to stash our kit lower down the Miyar Valley towards the Jangpar glacier ready to come back up to try something else after a few days of luxury.

It was great to get back down and see everyone and get some real food. We have been living on boil in the bag type meals and Smash / cous cous for a couple of weeks now and it was beginning to wear thin. Turns out Martin and Ian had succeeded on their A plan, establishing a high-quality technical rock route up their proposed spur ([link at the bottom to Martin's blog](#)). Charlie and Annette had also succeeded in climbing their route so it was good success all round. It was great to catch up and see how the last couple of weeks went. That and eat fantastic pizza from Heera the cook.

Two days later and it was time for Martin and Ian to depart. Me and John had arranged to stay on a few days and were still keen to head back up. We waved them off and began our slow ascent again back to where we had stashed our kit. The last couple of weeks had taken its toll and we were both feeling pretty tired by now. I also felt a slight change in group dynamics with all the rest of the expedition leaving and heading back home with only me and John heading back up to into the mountains to try something else. It felt like we had already done what we came to do and I would have been happy leaving it at that and chilling at BC if I'm honest. Still though John was psyched and I was keen enough and so on we went. We got back up, collected our gear and began to head East over very challenging moraine once again until we found a suitable flat-topped boulder where we could spend the night. Water was not plentiful around here and so we collected what we could where we could and bedded down for the night.



Our plan was an early start and quick, light-weight day hit on a line spied up the face. Up at 1:30am and off shortly after. It was all automatic by now. We had no option to put a track in the previous afternoon (it was on a dry glacier) and we spent quite some time locating the correct line of ascent in the darkness. Our line consisted of easy slopes to around half height which we soloed, followed by a traverse across East to hit some mixed ground and then finish up a gully line and summit slopes. The day was all technically pretty easy and the view from the top predictably amazing. There are some incredible mountains around here, what a place! After a traverse of the mountain to ensure we had 'topped out' (it wasn't certain we had gained the highest point initially), we began our descent abseiling from the

mid-way col. The ridge was sunny and warm and it felt pretty cold getting back onto the North side of the mountain for the descent. Eight abseils and a lot of down climbing saw us down and off the face via easy gullies. Another really good day out followed by tea and medals back at our bivi boulder!

All that was left then was for a casual descent back down to BC the next day. We now knew the way very well and despite the heavy loads knew it was our final carry and so it didn't matter. I wandered out with the iPod now back on shuffle and The Verve's 'Lucky Man' came on. What an apt and fitting song to be walking out to, on what had been such a successful expedition.



On arrival in the mountains of Northern India the colours had been fantastic as the area had clearly started to usher in the change of seasons. Warming yellows and auburn reds, darkening shades abounded which really set the tone for an atmospheric walk-in. Now on the walk out and fast forward three weeks the mood has changed considerable and much less leaves remain. Those still intact darker still with the colder temps and dropping snow line. The local people are out working in their droves and where there was silence before busy, relentless, time-restricted work was happening everywhere. Hay stacked eight meters high and securely fastened down on roofs. Fields ploughed, final produce gathered and prepared as surely only remote Himalayan villages knew how. Winter was coming and the village elders knew it.

Since I have been back I have had some time to reflect and things haven't quite been the same. The world appears to have taken on a slightly different persona in my absence and things feel a bit different. All we did was go away on a climbing expedition and it (largely by chance) ended up going really well, but it really feels like a turning point in my climbing career. Did we really head to a remote part of the Himalaya and smash out two first ascents including one via a 1200m North wall over six days, spending two days on the wall and all largely unsupported over a trip of 60+km? It is beginning to sink in that is exactly what has happened and the door now feels open for the next step up. This moment has been 20+ years in the making. That's up and down, successes and failures, life doing its level best to get in the way. Done with expeditions? I haven't even started yet. I am aware however that in making this statement I am confining myself to at least several months in camps, grim times in tents, some brutal hill time and suffering above and beyond what has come before.



## 6.2 Crocodile Rock (by Martin Moran)

***“But the biggest kick we ever got, was doing a thing called the crocodile rock.”***

On every climb where high altitude plays a disorienting role, a banal but catchy tune becomes fixed in the synapses and replays itself *ad infinitum* through each grueling passage.

I am groveling desperately up a 65-degree wall of gravel above the Jangpar Glacier at 4500m. The aim is to get established on a magnificent rock spur which cleaves the north face of an unclimbed peak of 5755m altitude. Ian Dring and I are shifting a large rack of hardware and five days' supplies of food.

I spotted this line glowing in mellow evening light in 2011 while leading a group up the neighbouring Miyar Glacier. The spur rose in a series of sweeping steps to a cluster of pinnacles then disappeared in misted summit buttresses – 1300 metres from toe to top. You never quite forget a line like that. When I dragged out my picture and sent it to Ian he was enthused.

Our last venture together was 25 years ago, almost to the day, on the granite walls of Gangotri. It had been a resounding success. Apart from Christmas cards we had barely kept in touch since. We live 700 miles apart, but you should never wholly abandon a reliable climbing partner. So, here we were, reaffirming our partnership with the dubious baggage of 118 years of joint life experience.

Now, on this seminal first day of our attempt, Elton John had chosen to intrude on my happiness and I wouldn't be able to shake him off for the next week. I must have made some subliminal link between the spiny crest with its reptilian supporting slabs and this 1970's pop oldie. I'd never liked it even when it first came out. Elton was already getting past his best...



**Ian and a lot of gear at the bottom of the route**

We did not expect to be “hopping or bopping” in the next few days. Our crocodile rock would be a more sedate engagement, and at this moment of commitment, our steps collapsing in freshly-exhumed glacial till, we longed to touch solid rock of any sort.

By mid-afternoon we had installed ourselves in a roofed recess at the first step of the spur. Rock bivouacs are not the joyous affairs you might imagine. To make a level flooring for two pairs of buttocks and shoulders we had spent two hours shifting slabs and pointing the gaps with soil and gravel, but now we stretched out and savoured the reward of the evening sun. A recent snowfall had filled shady crevices with dry powder to give us ample liquid resource.

The Jangpar (or junction) glacier is the most impressive of four off-shoots from the main Miyar valley. The walls and spires here rise to 6300m and would give anything in Alaska a run for its money. Yet, this climbers' Eldorado had only been discovered a decade earlier. A British party in 2004 was the first to map the potential and only two or three teams had visited since. Progress in technical Himalayan climbing at the super-alpine level between 5000 and 6500m has proceeded at a snail-like pace, despite the exploits of the likes of Mick Fowler. There is still so much to discover, so much to do.

By the middle of day two Ian and I could already be confident that our spur was in virginal state. Only the high-living Himalayan marsupials had ever scampered around these slopes. Their footprints weaved around the snow-patches, mocking my attempts to apply some rigour to the first technical pitch. To find sharp holds and protection cracks I had to take to the steeps and avoid the slippery snow-choked slabs, tempting though they were. With the encumbrance of a 15kg load and little hope of outside assistance in event of injury, every step has to be protected and measured. You scan the rock for the next sure resting point, and only then make upward commitment. A huge rack dangled from my harness, double sets of wires and cams, a dozen pegs, peg hammer and a plethora of slings. Loose blocks formed the greatest hazard. On the second pitch I committed to a bulge only to feel the crucial block of support shift under my weight. Ian was directly below. For a few seconds I shifted into desperation mode, and cleared the obstacle with aid of smaller supplementary holds. Panting and squirming I lodged myself in the next niche. I reckoned that bit as IV+ in standard.

Grading Himalayan rock pitches is objectively impossible. You try to make fair equivalence with Britain and the Alps, but how can one be consistent when the body is so much more stressed? Anyway, IV+ in Chamonix parlance is a good UK VS in standard.

The exhaustion of getting self and sack up big 50 to 60 metre pitches makes the concept of through-leading redundant at these altitudes. By the time the second climber reaches the leader's belay he too is exhausted, and the leader has acquired just sufficient recovery to continue up front.

However, on reaching the top of the Rodent Buttress Ian possessed sufficient *compos menti* to take over the lead. He donned his rock shoes to tackle the next slabby step and we added one mountain boot each to our loads. The step looked barely 20 metres high, but Ian ran out the full length of our 60 metre lines to reach the next levelling.

“Just like Bosigran in Cornwall,” he enthused, and sure enough it was a wonderful VS pitch, made especially challenging for me in my stiff alpine boots.

A long blocky ridge rose to the next buttress of the spine. This step marked the end of escapable preliminaries. The slabby scales and sweeping curvature of this step were reminiscent of the Piz Badile in the Bregaglia Alps. We reckoned it to be some 200 metres in height. With a couple of hours of afternoon sunshine at our disposal we decided to climb the first pitch of the Badile, fix our ropes and then descend to a bivouac ledge. A smooth vertical step barred access to the wall. Ian had added half a dozen bolts and a hand drill to our provisions in case we encountered a brief section of impossibility, but as we neared the step a thin hand crack materialised right in its centre.



**Ian leads the Craw - the grade V crack at the start of Badile Buttress (day 2)**

With a setting sun illuminating his outline against the shaded crack he romped up the step, and we returned to our sacks confident of a quick start in the morning. While Ian excavated I went on a snow hunt. The nearest supply lay three metres down the far side of the arête where an alarming precipice had developed. Having fixed our ropes on the crack above I had to abseil over a 300 metre void

on our 6mm abseil cord, cup and bag in hand, then scoop up 8kg of dry snow grains for our night's succour. The experience was a foretaste of the exposures to come higher on the route where an assemblage of gendarmes studded the crest. The most impressive was an orange twin-topped monster that we had identified in planning inspections on Google Earth.

Ian was still building foundations when I returned with my snow bags. I joined in with earnest relish and dropped a stone on my finger-end, instantly creating a large blood blister on my pad. We tried to wear gloves for as many operations as possible but already the rock mica was impregnating our skin and cuticles, making dextrous manipulations painful and difficult.

The Badile was my leading day. From our high point three rope-stretching pitches of IV and IV+ took six hours, just like the Badile North Ridge but without the bolt runners and anchors. Complex route-finding, cunning protection placement and a couple of hammered piton runners featured. By mid-afternoon I was bridging up a fourth pitch of compact grooves, easier technically but without much protection. Yet for all the tension of the enterprise this was real progress and the notion of enjoyment was firmly established. Elton's backing track romped along with me without the usual irritation.



### **Ian seconding grade IV slabs on Badile Buttress (day 3)**

I reached the top of the Badile at 4pm and leant over the arête to a revelation both terrifying and magnificent. The north wall of our peak plunged beneath in a sweep of compact slabs broken here and there by a smear of watery ice. The boiler plates steepened into a monolithic headwall, broken by four tenuous fault-



lines, each holding tiny smears of ice. I had never seen anything quite so far beyond good and evil. Yet this was a peak well under the 6000 metre threshold that is deemed worthy of most Himalayan endeavour. Correct your misconceptions! A brave and patient team might come here when ice is thicker and create one of the wildest climbs in the world. For our benefit this exposure would be our constant companion from here onwards. We hacked out another stone plinth for our third night at the rock-face and got sat down in time to see the sun set behind the prodigal spear-head of Shiva peak 20 miles away in the Pangi valley.



### **Peak Shiva in the Pangi valley viewed at sunset from our 3rd bivi ledge**

The next obstacle was a squat gendarme with a large projecting yardarm of rock as its crown. A frontal assault looked fierce. Ian had spent the night in psychological preparation for a hard lead, but discovered gangways and ledges on the exposed north flank, which pegged the grade to a maximum of IV+. We breached the yardarm in two 20 metre pitches, waltzed down a chimney in the continuing slabs and scrambled over to the base of the flaming orange tower.

The tempo of the route ramped up another notch. How pleasant those first two slabby days now seemed. Ian battled up a rude chute of perched blocks. He circumvented the largest of these only to knock a smaller stone on to it from above. The impact was sufficient to detach the block and a hundredweight of stone came crashing down past my stance. Either one or both ropes could have been severed. In the event one of our protection slings was sliced but the ropes remained intact.



### **The crux towers of our route after a snowfall two days prior to our attempt**

The next pitch had a real *nordwand* ambience. Our terminology was now of dièdres and dihedrals, laced with a coating of powder snow. For 15 metres Ian plugged steepening jams up a crack line until a stack of loose sheafs forced an aid move into the groove on the left. After a long pause for acquisition of courage, he swung back up right to clasp jams and jugs back on the arête. We were now into the austere realm of V+.

Each day the sun would wheel overhead through the morning blinding our upward vision but by 1pm the rays settled in more kindly oblique fashion on the western flank of our spur. I emerged from the V+ exertions to find Ian perched astride a bolster with a distinctly downcast mien. The flaming tower was still 50 metres above and in the interim a belt of hoovered slabs barred further progress, devoid of protection cracks and coated with slivers of snow as it eased back in angle.

*"Looks like a 6a slab here,"* he lamented, his tone indicating that he had no immediate intention of climbing it.

*"Ah but I guess this is why we've brought the bolts. I'd love to lead it,"* I lied, *"but you're the one with the know-how..."*

Ian was already tired from some fine leads that day. His reluctance was understandable, and he knew from long-past experience in Yosemite and Greenland that it can take 20 minutes to hand-drill a single bolt in high-grade gneiss.

I settled to a four-hour vigil, while Ian summoned some new determination and commenced the sequence of 'tap and turn' with hammer and bit. With a couple of hundred taps, a hundred turns and several pauses to blow the dust out of his hole he had fashioned a 12mm lodgment for the first bolt. He reached for a tiny rawl-plug from his little bag of accessories and smashed bit and plug into the cavity. He screwed a hanger into place and after half-an-hour we had a couple of metres of advance.

As bolts number two and three went into place I watched the acrobatics of a trio of ravens and a flock of flitting rock-creepers amongst the surrounding towers.

Ian reached a tiny ledge where he could stand in balance:

"There's another foothold a few metres up. I'll free-climb the next section," he announced.

A dramatic burst of progress left him perched 3 metres above his last bolt.

"E2, 5c, that was," he said.

Just as the angle of rock eased, the flecks of snow intervened. The snow masked any ripples in the rock, but if Ian brushed the snow the grains would sift down to his existing footholds, causing an immediate skid.



### **Ian tackles the crux pitch with his 5 hand-drilled bolts**

By 5pm and the waning of the sun, he was 12 metres above me, unable to guess which way to go. Having blunted one drill-bit he was in process of drilling our final attachment. Not wishing to murder the impossible we had played the gamble of taking only just sufficient bolts to get us out of a short-term impasse. Now we had

no more. Ian lowered off and we abseiled 30 metres to a rock ledge for the night. I installed Ian in a rock crevice floored with snow. He faced 12 hours of incarceration, shoulders squeezed and doubts churning in his mind. I curled foetally around a projecting boulder outside the crevice, bum projecting over the edge, but reckon I had the better deal.



#### **Ian in his bivouac crevice after his 4-hour lead on the slab**

Ian had given his all. It was my turn to find a solution come the dawn. We perched on the cusp of failure.

I was convinced that but for the snow the climbing above the last bolt could be no more than IV+. In the cold dawn I jugged up the rope to Ian's high point. After forays both left, right and up, I decided on going left. The situation now resembled a winter slab on Lochnagar. I felt a tingle of familiarity at this hint of Scottishness. I knocked in a tiny beak, tensioned two metres left, scraped out a flared slot and smashed in a wired nut with my Nomic axe. I could now see some hairline cracks three metres higher. With that objective I could commit and padded cautiously to this sanctuary. Having placed a solid knife blade peg I swiftly progressed to block belays directly under the tower. We had lost half a day but the climb was back on track.

Ian jumared the rope dragging my sack behind him, and I continued up a more conventional pitch to gain a slim notch between the Flaming Tower and the continuing ridge crest. From a distance this next section had appeared smooth and exacting, but instead we discovered weathered golden granite with a patina of grey lichen blooms in perfect replica of the Chamonix Aiguilles. Our mini-



Grepon traverse swung across the tip of one pinnacle then sidestepped along a gangway under a second. The afternoon sun smiled benignly and for one glorious hour we no longer felt shackled by either loads or route-finding stress.

At 4.30pm we reached an abrupt smooth tower. I switched to big boots and dropped into a line of cracks on the north side. The style switched instantly to Scottish mixed with exciting swings and precise edging along an oblique weakness high above the north face. This was no place to fall. I knew that I would plunge three metres before Ian felt any pull on the rope.



**Ian swings across a gendarme on the mini-Grepon traverse (day five)**



**Martin In the grade V "Off-Kilter" cracks (end of day five)**

A second pitch in this vein brought increasing choking of the holds with snow. A weird and desperate off-width flake brought me to a bulge and snow-covered slab. There was no relief in sight and the light was beginning to fade. I used an aid point to get over the bulge and noticed that we could get back to the crest by dint of an impending crack on sharp brown rock. With two strenuous heaves I clasped my fingers over the arête and hauled myself into a golden flood of sunset light. Five metres down the opposite side a jumble of boulders indicated a sure bivouac site. Our luck was in again!



### **Peaks of the Jangpar Glacier at sunset on the 5<sup>th</sup> day**

The nights were now much colder. We had dispensed with several items of gear to speed our progress, and were now dependent on a single can of gas. Dinner was brief. I was increasingly plagued by leg cramps, and my 300gm fill sleeping bag was stretched far beyond its 2-season rating to keep me warm.

We were now very close to the junction of our spur with the WNW Ridge of the mountain. This ridge was adorned with spectacular and bizarre pinnacles. There was no way we could descend it and we were resigned to reversing our route. Tomorrow was the crucial day to reach the top and begin our descent. Food and gas would last no longer.

The end of my tether was reached at 9am the next morning. In respect to my greater winter climbing experience Ian suggested that I lead up a snowy couloir towards the final barrier wall of our spur. I put on our single set of crampons for the task. Grade II turned into grade IV after 45 metres and the rope drag became horrendous. I felt my exhaustion from yesterday's leads. The crampons weren't working on the slabby rock, so I took them off and struggled into a niche just as rope, patience and strength ran out.

Ian took over and headed for a razor-sharp flake crack in the headwall. With a fierce tussle he stood up on the flake and squeezed into a recess. Then he swung out right to emerge into blessed sunlight on the WNW Ridge. The spur was complete.

We had expected a continuation of knife-edged excitement, but instead found ourselves on a broad bouldery ridge. The summit looked to be 150 metres above. A big tower barred a direct route, but I immediately spied a way to avoid this by a broken slabby ramp to its right. We did not demur. There was no time to lose were we to reach the top by nightfall. We dumped stove and food and took half a litre of liquid each. Expecting a forced bivouac somewhere near the summit Ian took his sleeping bag but dispensed with belay jacket and bivouac sack. I dispensed with sleeping bag but took my jacket and sack. Such economies might seem ridiculous viewed from sea level, but every pound saved was crucial to success.

The next few hours were torrid. The sun beat on our backs without mercy. We plodded across an undulating traverse on loose gravels then took belays as the ramp steepened. All senses and spirit were dulled to stupefaction. I gasped for breath at every step. Normally at altitude there is a tingling across the forehead as a little fresh oxygen is forced round the circulation. Today there was nothing. I was sapped.

Ian made four leads before a ridge crest became defined to our right.

"Let's just get on to that and see where we are," I pleaded.

At 4.30pm we clambered on to the crest and saw an eastward panorama for the first time on the climb. Ian declared our stance to be a five-star bivouac site, allowing for some preliminary stone-masonry. The first priority was to get to the summit before darkness. We dumped the overnight kit and one rope and climbed 20 metres to a top. Alas, this was merely a forepeak. The crowning dome rose on the far side of a linking arête, perhaps 200 metres away.

Now knowing what remained, our spirits rose. The arête was loose and primitive. We realised that no-one had been up this peak from any side before. From a belay at the base of the dome I led out the rope to the top, and triumphantly hammered in a proprietorial piton. Who says that climbers aren't conquistadors at heart?

We couldn't have picked a grander time to be there. The jagged peaks and walls of the Jangpar cirque glowed in the sunset. The shadowed trench of the Miyar valley stretched 20 kilometres to our south, and a hundred pointed peaks arrayed the western horizon over Kishtwar. I knew I would never climb them but that's fine with me. Others surely will.

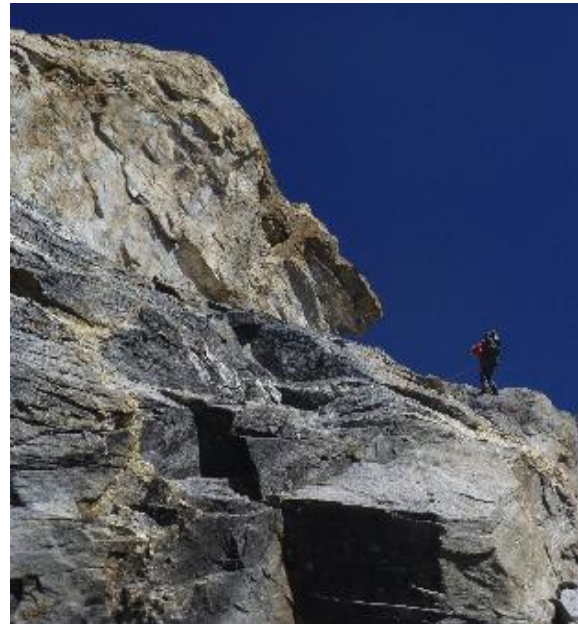
We regained our kit on the forepeak deep into the night. I swung a large tombstone slab into horizontal pitch and laid my mat down. I had two mouthfuls of liquid left in my bottle, mixed a rehydration tablet and took the most glorious gulp of salty fizz. It was a blessed relief to stop. I instantly dropped into a stupor only to wake after five minutes with raging cramp in my thigh. There would be no real peace for the next ten hours.

My bivouac sack was icy and clammy to the touch. I kept my feet in the air to avoid any contact. Whenever I dozed off the disturbing dreams of altitude

assailed me. I rejoined my affair with Nicola Sturgeon, which had begun with us walking hand in hand in Kelvingrove Park in 2014. Whenever we got smoochy she would turn on me with a non-stop harangue on the merits of Scottish independence. I would wake in a cold sweat. Ian said I had spent half the night moaning. Ecstasy, this was not! In lucid passages Elton would rock along, but I still couldn't recall all the words. It eventually became more comforting to stick my head out of the sack and confront humanity's impotence against the eternal wheel of the Universe. Hour by hour Orion moved across the sky and at 5am the first pale band of hope appeared on the eastern horizon.



**6pm 1st Oct : at the summit**



**Abseil on our descent of the West Face**

We let the sun warm our bones for half-an-hour and at 7.30am commenced an abseil descent. Discovery of a massive canyon of screes and slabs in the mountain's western face had completely changed the logistics of descent. We would chance our arm down there rather than reverse the intricacies of the spur. This meant the loss of several items of gear that we had left on lower bivouacs. A listing on Ebay for my salopettes and rock shoes will appear in due course – collection only! Base camp was 1700 metres below. My knees winced at the prospect. This was definitely a double-Diclofenac day.

To minimise the chance of rope snags and tangles we made a series of short abseils on a single rope down the broken face. By 11am we regained the cache of kit on the WNW Ridge, and brewed drinks of fruit squash and herbal tea with the last of our gas. Then, we made our commitment to descend the West Face. There could be no turning back.



My anti-inflammatory dose must have been working. I felt a spring in my knees, unknown for many a year, and pushed ahead. I could tell that Ian was somewhere behind by periodic bursts of a cough that had plagued him since arriving in India 18 days earlier. We skirted down gullies under the bizarre tower then made two abseils to gain scree fields. The face narrowed into a funnel of powdered white slabs, tempting but deadly. We had to put all our apples into the rocky ridge to our right. At 5100m we were able to traverse out to its bouldery crest. A big drop loomed below. I scrambled to the brink and spotted a ramp of grass and gravel some three hundred metres down. Out came the ropes and all the abseil cord we could muster. On each 60 metre abseil we took greatest care to avoid rope jams, leaving a karabiner as a pulley on every anchor. At 5pm we reached the hallowed ground of turf and wild sheep tracks. A week of stress lifted from our brows. We coiled the ropes and plunged towards the shadowed gulf of the Miyar Glacier.

How, over the past days, I had longed for something beautiful, melodic or grandiose to replace the 'crocodile rock' refrain. As I skipped the dusty slopes and the line of evening shadow rose to meet me this miracle transpired. Elton disappeared, his platform boots and outrageous spectacles banished forever to the margins of consciousness. In his place I was enveloped by the gorgeous languid adagio from Beethoven's 4th symphony. Where on earth did that come from? Tears of joy welled. When I further realised that I might just reach base camp for tea and finger chips that evening, a triumphant march took over. Ian made a bivouac by the first running water. I charged onwards into the dark night, convinced of my invincibility and now humming the trumpeted finale of Beethoven's 5th.

Two hours later, our cook spotted my head-torch as I stumbled, lost and demoralised, among the mountainous moraines under the glacier snout. He guided me home and I finally got my poke of chips!

## 7. Team Bios

### **Martin Moran**

Age: 61

UK IFMGA/BMG Guide

He was brought up on Tyneside, and developed a boyhood love of mountains into his professional career. After teenage backpacking trips in the Lake District and Scotland he learnt the skills of rock climbing and went on to climb some of the great faces of the Alps, including the North Faces of the Les Droites and the Eiger and Mont Blanc's Peuterey Integrale, plus difficult solo ascents on the Piz Badile, Chamonix Aiguilles and Aiguille Verte.

After becoming a British Mountain Guide in 1985 he and his wife, Joy, moved to Lochcarron in the North-West Highlands of Scotland and set up their climbing school.

Alpine courses became a major part of the guiding year with summer operations based in the beautiful Swiss village of Evolene for 20 years from 1994 to 2014. In 1992 the business branched into Himalayan expeditions with a trip to a 6667m Gangotri peak, the first of over 40 adventurous treks and climbs across the Indian ranges, many of which have recorded first ascents.

Among Martin's personal 'firsts' in the mountains are:

- First round of all 277 Munros in a single winter in 83 days, 1984/85.
- First non-stop self-propelled traverse of the 4,000 metre peaks of the Alps with Simon Jenkins, in 52 days in 1993.
- Record-breaking run across the Cuillin Ridge of Skye in 3 hrs 33 mins in 1990 and 50 successful traverses with clients.
- Over 100 new climbs in the mountains of North-West Scotland, including major grade VIII winter ascents such as Beinn Bhan's "Godfather".
- 14 first ascents in the Indian Himalaya with clients.
- First British ascent of the Vettisfossen, Norway's highest single-plunge waterfall, in 2010.

Himalayan Mountaineering Record:

1983: 1st ascent W Ridge of Bhagirathi I (6856m) (ED1) – Gangotri range

1991: 1st ascent Bhrigu Pathar (6038m) by NE Pillar (ED1, VII) – Gangotri range

1993: 3rd ascent and 1st in Alpine-style of Panwali Dwar (6663m) with clients (D+) – Pindari Glacier, Kumaon

1995: 1st ascent S Face of Nanda Kot (6861m) with clients (D+) – Kumaon

1998: 1st completed traverse of direct route from Badrinath to Kedarnath temples

1999: Ascent of Kalanag (6387m) – Banderpunch range, Western Garhwal

2000: 1st ascent of W Ridge of Nilkanth (6597m) with clients (TD) and 2nd ascent of mountain – Badrinath Garhwal

2001: Ascent of Nanda Ghunti (6310m) in Nanda Devi range

2004: 2nd ascent Chiring We (6559m) – Ralam Valley, Kumaon

2005: Attempt on Kamet (7756m) with clients – reached 7650m

- 2006: Little Kailash – 1st ascent of Little Kailash II – Ishan Parbat (6120m) – Kuthi Yankti, Eastern Kumaon
- 2007: 1st ascent W Face of Gangsthang (6170m) with clients (D) – Lahaul, Himachal
- 2009: 1st ascent of Changuch (6322m) by NW Ridge (D), crossing of Traill's Pass – Kumaon
- 2011: 1st circuit of Kang La-Poat la-Sersank La passes in Lahaul range, Himachal and 1st Ascent Eva's Peak (6117m) (AD)
- 2013: Leader on successful expedition to peak Nun (7135m) – Jammu & Kashmir range
- 2014: 1st Ascent of Cheepaydang (6220m) with clients (D), Eastern Kumaon
- 2015: Attempt on 1st ascent NE Ridge of Nanda Devi East to high point of 6865m

### **John Crook**

Age: 30

IFMGA/BMG Aspirant Mountain Guide

John grew up in the Peak District in the shadow of the Kinder outcrops and has always been a keen outdoor enthusiast. For the last 14 years climbing has been his passion. John has built his life around this passion, currently training as a British Mountain Guide.

First and foremost he has always been drawn to adventure and this is what he has strived for most in all areas of his climbing. This is reflected in the ascent of numerous Grand Courses both in the Alps and further afield (20 as classified in the BMG scheme), several significant big walls, and first ascents of adventurous traditional lines both in the UK, Patagonia and Peru.

In the Alps John has ascended classic alpine routes such as the 1938 Route on the Eiger (ED2), Schmidtd on the N Face of the Matterhorn (ED2) and the Colton Machintyre on the Grandes Jorasses (ED3); Central Pillar of Freney (ED1) and the Peuteray Integrale (ED!, 4500m). Further afield ascents have included several 6000m peaks such as Illampu (TD, 6372m) and the W face of Huayna Potesi (TD, 6050m), Bolivia; Ranrapalca (TD, 6162m) and Alpamyo (TD-, 5947m), Peru. Also Alpine routes in the Canadian Rockies such as Slip Stream (ED1, WI4, 900m), Snowdome.

Whilst in Patagonia John had success on Cerro Standhart leading the Exocet Chimney (WI5+, 700m) and was involved in the successful self-rescue of his climbing partner, who broke their patella high on the Super Canaleta on Fitzroy.

In 2014 /2015 John returned to the Avellano Towers in Chilean Patagonia to attempt the 1<sup>st</sup> ascent of the 1000m granite wall of the South Avellano Tower.

Big walling experience includes ascents of: The Nose, El Capitan; a quick 10 hour ascent of Half Dome NW Face in Yosemite; La Esfinge (7A 800m to 5300m summit), Cordillera Blanca; The Grand Wall at Squamish; the Scenic Cruise in the Black Canyon, Colorado; L'Exir Adastorouth (ED3, 7A, 450m, Grand Capucin); The Gervasutti Pillar (TD+, 800m). This has been complemented with ascents of weird and obscure crumbling desert towers deep within the canyons of Utah such as The Pixie Stick (5.11, possible 1<sup>st</sup> free) and Captain Pugwash (5.10+) in Canyonlands National Park, Utah.

Several phenomenal 1st ascents were also made on the 250m high columnar Basalt Tower of The Pyramid in Chile in 2014. The best of these was The Ultimate Basalt Experience (4\* E4, 150m)

Some of John's most noticeable achievements in UK climbing have been new routing. Ascents of routes such as White Hot Spider (E4, 120m, Mingulay) and The Ager Sanction (E4, 120m, Mingulay) stand out, as well as the final new route on Ben Nevis of 2015, The Gothic Edge VII7. Comprehensive winter climbing experience <VIII

### **David Sharpe**

Age: 31

IFMGA/BMG Aspirant Mountain Guide

Dave has been fortunate enough to be born and raised in Kendal on the outskirts of the Lake District. From an outdoor orientated, active family Dave began walking at an early age and it was here at the age of 10 he was first introduced to climbing through the scouts. From here Dave progressed into a much more pro-active climber spending all his spare time at the newly opened Kendal Climbing Wall and then moved on to climbing outside first in the Lakes, then with trips further afield to N. Wales and Scotland.

This was the point when Dave really began to see the potential of the mountains and climbing. After several seasons winter climbing around the Lakes and Scotland Dave had the opportunity to head to the Alps for his first season at the age of 16 for a month long trip. The trip was successful and very eye-opening with several four-thousand meter summits and was to set the path for the next 15 years of his life.

During this next period Dave has racked up extensive UK rock climbing experience leading up to E3 in summer and grade VIII in winter. At the time of writing Dave has climbed over 50 British winter routes between grade V and VIII in a wide range of climbing venues with a total route list into the hundred's.

Dave has climbed 28 4000m European Alpine summits and amongst these climbed such classic north faces as: 1938 Route Eiger North Face (ED2), Schmidtd Route Matterhorn North Face (ED1), Les Ginettes North Face



(ED1), Supercouloir Direct (ED2) East face Mont Blanc du Tacul, Grandes Charmoz North Face (TD, with Colin Haley) and over 10 other Grandes Courses in the Alps. Add to this a whole host of alpine experience accrued over 15 years of time spent in the Alps and you will see his knowledge is vast.

Dave has visited and climbed / skied in New Zealand on remote peaks and active volcanoes and has also travelled and climbed in The Andes, with an ascent of Tuqllarahu (6032m) and other trekking peaks.

Dave is now an Aspirant British Mountain Guide and firmly set on spending as much time as possible climbing and having adventures in the mountains both on a personal and professional level.

### **Ian Dring**

Age: 57

Social Enterprise Business Development Manager

Ian has been climbing for 50 years. He started at the age of 7 before sit harnesses were invented, instead using hawser ropes tied directly around the waist. MOAC nuts was regarded as innovative and there wasn't a micro cam in sight. Aid climbing was still fashionable particularly in the winter months. These archaic skills were developed and put to good use on some early ascents of some Yosemite big wall nail-ups. He has had several careers none of which have involved the great outdoors.

Expeditions: South Face Kedardome, Gangotri, -not successful.

1st ascent Bhritgu Pathar (6038m) by NE Pillar (ED, VII) – Gangotri range with Martin Moran.

South Greenland - first ascent Nalumasotoq Towers (E5 A2).

Denali West Rib - not successful.

Alpine: Western Alps: Many alpine routes to ED (e.g. American Direct Dru; NE Spur Les Droites; Gerversutti Pillar; N face Piz Badille; solo ascents in the Dolomites etc.).

Caucasus: Ushba; Elbrus.

Kenya: Ice Window, Diamond Couloir.

Big Walls: Yosemite: Pacific Ocean wall; Mescalito; The Nose; Washington Column; N Face Half Dome; Leaning Tower.

Alps: Big Overhang Cima Ovest.

Rock Climbing In Western and Eastern Europe, USA and Jordan to E5 6b.

Approx. 60 new routes in UK, Bulgaria and Malta up to E4 trad and 7b sport

Ice Climbing:	In Scotland and Canada up to Scottish VII, new Scottish winter routes with Martin Moran e.g. "Ayatollah" VII,7 Fuar Tholl.
Related activity:	Ski Mountaineering in Western Alps and Norway; Sea kayaking expeditions including East Greenland.

## 8. Equipment/Food/Medical kit

### 8.1 Crocodile Rock Team

**Hardware:** In likelihood that the mountain was unclimbed and in expectancy of descending the whole route, the first ascent team carried a large rack of hardware. This is summarized below:

Ropes	Two 60m ropes: i) 9.1mm Beal Joker (single specification); ii) 8.2mm Beal Ice Line (twin specification)
Boots	One pair of rock shoes (shared) was essential for lead climbing on slabs at grade IV and above. Otherwise the team climbed in light weight standard La 'Sportiva Batura 2' boots, suitable for alpine climbing
Quick Draws/carabiners /slings	12 light weight quick draws (6 long, 6 short) 4 screw gates 12 light weight carabiners 3 x 2.4m Slings, 2 x 4.8m Slings
Nuts/Cams	1 set of RPs to size 5 2 sets of Rocks or equivalents to size 13 Camp Carvex Hexantrics 8,9,10 Metolius cams 00 to 3 1 set Camalots/friends 0.5 to 4; 2 each size 1,2
Pegs/Aid	i) Blades (S, M, L x2); ii) 4 Lost Arrows (S x2, M, L); iii) Angles (0.5" x2, 0.75" x1, 1"x1); iv) Leepers (M x2) 2 Bat hooks 2 Sky hooks 2 Peckers

Ice Gear	<p>One Petzl Nomic axe with hammer head and one set of Dart mono-point crampons were taken for mixed conditions high on the climb</p> <p>Two 19mm Black Diamond ice screws (not used)</p> <p>N.B The Nomic was used for dry tooling on occasions</p>
Ab Cord	40m of 6mm
Bolt kit (hand drill)	<p>Light weight Petzl M8 Bolt driver</p> <p>Raumer Action Hammer with integral M8 socket (doubled as peg hammer)</p> <p>Six Petzl Cheville 8mm self drill bolts and wedges</p> <p>Six Petzl Coudee Hangers</p> <p>N.B There was a definite knack to placing the bolts, over driving caused premature blunting of the cutting edge</p>
Other	<p>Nut brodler</p> <p>Rope Men (4 off)</p> <p>Petzl Mini-Traxion for hauling</p> <p>Belay devices x2</p> <p>Head Torches x2 (and spare batteries)</p> <p>Swiss Army Knife x2</p> <p>Cameras x2 (Including Sony DSC-TX30)</p>
Helmets	<p>Black Diamond Half Dome</p> <p>Petzl Meteor</p>
Harnesses	<p>Petzl Sitta</p> <p>Black Diamond Bod</p>
Rucksacks	<p>Rab Expedition 70+ (70 litre) – removed internal frame and padded waist belt to reduce weight</p> <p>Lowe Alpine Attack (45 to 55 litres)</p>
Cooking/Water	<p>1 MSR Reactor Stove (1 litre pan)</p> <p>5 x 220g cans Gas</p> <p>Sporks</p> <p>Large plastic mugs x2</p>

	<p>Platypus Water carriers for use during day 1 liter x2</p> <p>Platypus Water carriers 2 liters x2 (not used)</p> <p>Stuff sacs for gathering snow</p>
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**Software/Food:**

Sleeping Bags	<p>Mountain Equipment (ME) Helium 600</p> <p>ME Helium 250</p> <p>N.B temperatures dropped to around -10 °C, the 600 was comfortable, the 250 was not, although the latter was much lighter</p>
Bivi Bags	<p>ME Borealis Bivi</p> <p>ME Ion Bivi</p>
Sleeping Mats	<p>Mammut Alpine light weight</p> <p>Standard foam Karrimat – cut down</p> <p>N.B Additional piece of foam used inside sleeping bag to place between cold spots</p>
Clothing	<p>ME equipment:</p> <p>Citadel Jacket</p> <p>Arête Hooded jacket</p> <p>Eclipse Ziptee (with hood)</p> <p>Matrix 190 crew</p> <p>Eclipse Pant</p> <p>Tupilak Pant</p> <p>Compressor Pant</p> <p>Powder stretch Balaclava</p> <p>Pinnacle Mitt</p> <p>Other:</p> <p>Marino wool socks and base layer</p> <p>Hollow fill booties for bivi</p>
Gloves	<p>Super Alpine Glove (worn most of the time including for rock climbing)</p> <p>Pinnacle Mits</p>



Sun protection	Sun glasses x2 and spare Head/neck scarf Factor 50 Zinc total block
Hygiene	Alcohol hand gel
Food/drinks	Drinks for 6-7 days: Tang, Teabags (fruit), Sugar, Milk, electrolyte tablets for day drinks Food for 5 days: Cuppa Soup Oat cakes, yeast paste Muesli/Ready Brek Cous-Cous, Noodles, Cheese, Tuna (decanted out of tins) Instant Custard Clif Bars, Choc Bars, Peanuts/Raisins(5kg)
Medical kit	Dressings, Plasters, Bandage, Altitude Drugs, Ciproxin and Amoxyl Antibiotics, Tramadol and Codeine Painkillers, Eye-drops  N.B No significant medical issues arose. Ian had some altitude related head-aches for which he took some paracetamol. He had a persistent cough throughout the trip and took a course of Erythromycin in the hope of avoiding a chest infection.

**To ABC only:**

Tent	Rab Latok Mountain 2 with extension porch
Other kit	Walking Poles x3 Charger pack with solar panel to recharge (sun light not sufficient to re power direct from solar panel) i pads etc. Water filtration kit (Sawyer) – useful for collecting snow melt – much more palatable than glacier melt

## 8.2 Transcendence Team

Equipment	<p>Rack: 5 cams, 15 wires, 10 draws, 10 screws, 1 stake, slings, 1 pecker, 2 pegs, 2 x 60m half ropes</p> <p>Tent: RAB Mountain</p> <p>Sleeping bag and foam mat each</p> <p>Jet boil and 1 x gas canister</p>
Clothes (provided by RAB):	<p>Waterproofs</p> <p>Power stretch bib</p> <p>Synthetic jacket</p> <p>Down jacket</p> <p>Fleece, balaclava,</p> <p>Thin and thick gloves etc.</p>
Route food:	<p>1 x dehydrated meal each</p> <p>Trail mix</p> <p>6 x cliff bar equivalents</p> <p>Some gels / cliff shots</p>
Medical Kit	<p>Included: painkillers, dressings, antiseptic, Diamox, Nifedipene and Dexamethasone, Paracetamol and 2 antibiotics, finger tape.</p>

## 8.3 Base Camp

Equipment	<p>Large canvas mess tent large enough to sleep 3; seating and table, 2 paraffin cookers, paraffin lamps etc.</p>
Food	<p>Food and kerosene purchased by staff in Manali from lists provided by team members; some specialist items brought from UK (e.g.: a few freeze-dried meals, cous-cous, cans of tuna, yeast paste). Staples included: flour, tea, sugar, eggs, oats, rice, lentils, pasta, spices, ketchup, vegetables, cheese, peppers etc. Remaining food at the end of the trip was given to local village at road head</p>
Medical kit	<p>A full medical kit was kept at base camp (weight 8kg) with wide range of drugs and suture kit; the climbing teams took</p>

individual modules with essential drugs and painkillers on the routes
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## 9. Logistics/Miscellaneous

**Logistics support** was provided by:

Himalayan Run & Trek Pvt. Ltd.

T- 5, Manish Chamber, Plot No. 6, L.S.C. Block – B

Mayur Vihar Phase – 2

Delhi - 110091

India

Email: [hrtindia91@gmail.com](mailto:hrtindia91@gmail.com)

Ph: 91-11-22772700

HRT organised: The employment of the support team; The travel to and from the road head and; The horses to BC; the supply of BC equipment and BC provisions. (Martin has a Store in Delhi at HRT which reduced the amount of equipment that we had to bring from the UK).

**Travel:** Members booked their own flights from London Heathrow to Delhi with British Airways and Virgin Atlantic, the latter having a more generous baggage allowance. Three members of the team applied for e-tourist visas which allow a 30 day stay in India. Members held cash in both Rupees and Dollars.

**Horses:** These can carry up to 60kg each – loading best left to the very experienced horseman who know the capability of each of their horses. Overnight camps must be arranged so that the horses can forage and have access to drinking water.

**Acclimatisation:** Climbing in the Miyar Valley presents particular challenges. The road head is at approx. 3900m with a gentle climb over 25 km to BC at approx. 4100m. Therefore if any altitude related issues occur then it is difficult to descend quickly. There was a fatality in another party at the time of the expedition; the climber passed away in their sleep at their ABC at 4,900m. It is not clear if this was altitude related.

**Water:** Supplies on many of the rock routes in the area present a problem, with most non-northern orientations being predominantly dry. For Crocodile Rock we were fortunate in that there was a moderate snowfall 2 days before the ascent, which remained in place because of the northern aspect, giving plentiful supplies of water.

**Insurance:** All team members were covered by Global Rescue (<https://globalrescue.com/>) – This will repatriate after an accident, but does not cover: i) A stay in local hospitals (if stabilization is required before repatriation); ii) Search and rescue; iii) Standard travel insurance. Some members also had

Austrian Alpine Club (AAC) insurance to cover local hospital stays. Note If climbing above 6000m, AAC require an additional premium.

## 10. Budget

ACTUAL COSTS:	
<u>Travel:</u> 4 return flights UK-Delhi + extra baggage charges	£2,200
10 seater Minibus Travel – Delhi-Manali-Sukto (return)	£1,490
<u>Peak Fees and Visas:</u> IMF Peak Fees + L. Officer charge (\$1450)	£1,050
Additional Peak Fee Raja Peak (\$250)	£210
Visa Fees (4 x £45: 30 day eTVisa)	£180
<u>Food and Stores:</u> Mountain Food brought from UK	£150
Food purchased in India	£760
Gas and Kerosene	£150
<u>Support Staff:</u> 1 Cook and 1 High-altitude Porter	£1,080
Horses – up journey to BC 10 horses 4 days + Sirdar	£330
Horses – down journey to road-head 9 horses + Sirdar	£300
<u>Insurance:</u> Members Global Rescue annual membership x 4	£960
Staff Insurance	£160
<u>Accommodation:</u> Delhi 3 nights YMCA Hostel x 2 rooms	£260
Manali 2 nights x rooms + staff rooms	£220
Urgos – home-stay 1 night	£80
<u>Equipment:</u> Ropes: 1 Beal Joker 1 Beal Iceline	£190
Tents, Rucksacks, Clothing – sponsored by RAB and Mountain	£0
Hire of Base camp mess tent and kitchen equipment	£160



<u>Sundry Costs:</u> Indian Tour Operator 10% Commission and 4.5% Sales Tax	£1,050
Meals and Drinks in Delhi and on road journey	£800
Staff and Driver Tips	£400
Taxis and local transport in Delhi	£100
Pre-trip Administration in UK and in Delhi	£120
<b>TOTAL COSTS</b>	<b><u>£12,210</u></b>
Cost per member	£3,052
<b>INCOME:</b>	
MEF Grant	£2,900
Member's Contributions (£2,327 each)	£9,310
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b><u>£12,210</u></b>
N.B Cost Budgeted in MEF Application (3 person team)	£10,520