

British 2018 Janhukot Expedition

Summary

The primary aim of this expedition in May / June 2018 was to make the first ascent of Janhukot¹ (6805m) in the Garhwal Himalaya, India.

Janhukot lies near the end of the Gangotri Glacier close on to the west side of the Chaukhamba mountains. It has a long history of interest and attempts stretching back to its first viewing during a 1930's Austrian/German expedition. Various teams have attempted to climb the mountain. The last, closest attempt was by Malcolm Bass and Simon Yearsley in 2014 who reached a high point of 6640m.

The expedition consisted of three British climbers, one British film maker, one Liaison Officer and 4 Indian support staff.

The expedition was blessed with mostly good weather (except summit day) and was successful in its goal. As part of the expedition a series of films will be released by a company called Coldhouse Collective on behalf of PERTEX hoping to encourage the next generation to explore the Greater Ranges.

Expedition Members

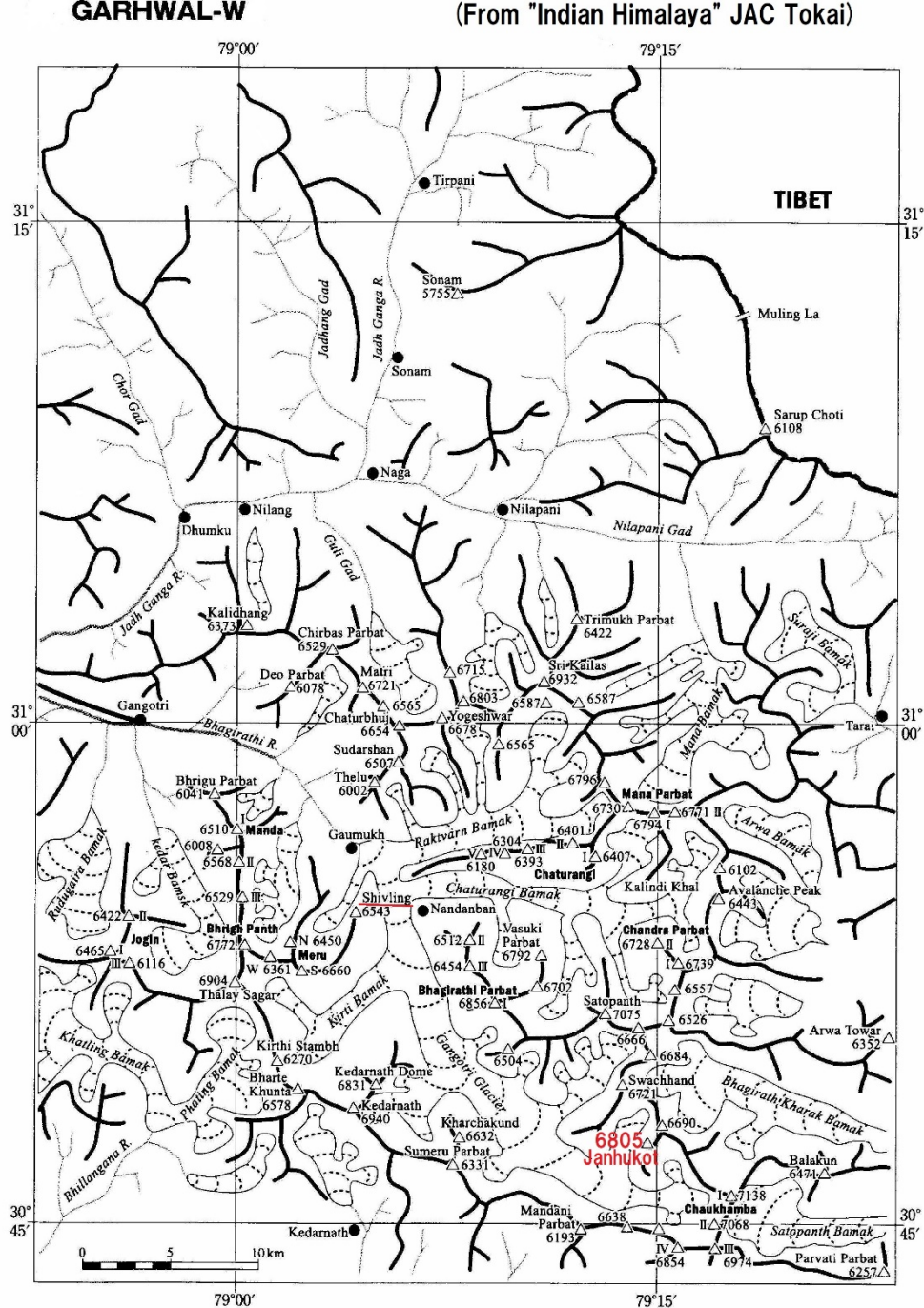
Mr Malcolm Bass (Leader)
Mr Paul Figg (Climber)
Mr Guy Buckingham (Climber)
Mr Hamish Frost (Photographer)
Mr Vikram Ghiyal (Liaison Officer)
Mr Anoop Tamang (Rimo Expeditions Sirdar)
Mr Santabir Sherpa (Chef)
Mr Pemba Sherpa (High Altitude Porter)
Mr Hari Singh (Cook's assistant)

Climbing History of Janhukot

The mountain first came to the attention of recreational mountaineers during a prolific Austrian/German expedition to the Gangotri Basin, (Schwarzgruber, 1938) they did not attempt to climb it. Although details are scarce there are reports of two expeditions to the mountain before 2004, one by an Austrian team in 2002 (unable to reach the mountain due to bad weather) and one by team from West Bengal in the 1980s. The next attempt was in 2004 by a joint British / New Zealand team attempting two different lines (involving Malcolm Bass and Paul Figg) on which Pat Deavoll and Marty Beare reached the South Ridge via the broad and serac threatened couloir on the West Face, before turning around.

¹ Janhukot has been referred to as Jannuhut and Jankuth in previous reports however according to Anindya Mukherjee (Indian Mountaineer and Explorer) Janhukot is the more acceptable and usual spelling.

GARHWAL-W (From "Indian Himalaya" JAC Tokai)



Location map showing Janhukot in relation to Gangotri and the more well known Shivling and Bhagirathi peaks

Permission and other administrative issues

Initially the team had applied for permission for an attempt on the South Face of RIMO III. To reach the peak one has to travel a short distance up the Siachen glacier and this involves passing through the major Indian Army base at the snout of the glacier. It is this fact that has understandably prevented many prospective expeditions from gaining permission to access the Terong or other Siachen tributaries. We made our application through the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF) with the support of our Indian agent in the usual way. Unfortunately, our application was turned down by Military Intelligence with no reason given. Having applied and been rejected two years previously, the expedition was prepared with a suitable Plan B, Janhukot, which both Malcolm and Paul had attempted before. In order to expedite the process, an application was submitted for Chaukhamba I, the nearest open peak, switching target with permission of the LO once on the glacier.

The Plan

The expedition had various phases:

- UK phase. Get permission. Get the right kit and people together.
- Fly to India with all our kit.
- First Delhi phase: briefing by IMF
- Road travel to Gangotri.
- Walk in to BC on Gangotri glacier
- Acclimatise on Kedar Dome, above Base camp.
- Establish ABC higher up Gangotri glacier.
- Climb route and descend.
- Disestablish ABC.
- Walk out to Gangotri.
- Road travel back to Delhi.
- Second Delhi phase. IMF de-brief. More eating and drinking.
- Fly home.

The Trip

We arrived in Delhi on the 14th May, having flown with all our kit as excess baggage (except for some local food purchases). We met our agent, Mr Motup Chewang Goba and Liaison Officer, Mr Vikram Ghiyal at the Indian Mountaineering Foundation as part of our induction brief. It was pleasant to note that the procedural side of the briefing went very smoothly, mostly thanks to the good reputation of RIMO Expeditions our in-country provider. Of note, we were informed that satellite phones are now permitted on expeditions to India, provided they are sourced locally through the in-country provider.

Once completed, we went for our shopping trip, with the only real concern being to find a suitable coffee maker for which we searched high and low without success, this had the potential to cause a major blow to the expedition morale.

Over 16-18 May we travelled by road to Gangotri stopping at Rishikesh and Uttarkashi. Much to the expedition's surprise and delight, we were able to find a small coffee pot in a small side road store. Morale shot back up.

The overall altitude profile is very steep in order to get to the Gangotri Glacier, therefore we determined to ease ourselves in as best as possible, this included an extra day at Gangotri (3100m) which we used to have a gentle acclimatisation walk towards Thalay Sagar gaining 800m.

The next day, 20th May, we proceeded to our first camp at Bhojbas (3800m) having gathered the porter team and distributed loads. There was one more stop at Kharapathar (4400m) prior to establishing Basecamp (4400m) at the base of Kedar Dome high on the lateral moraine.

Having planned plenty of time for our trip, we felt no need to rush into further acclimatisation and used a couple of days to rest and recuperate at Basecamp getting used to the new altitude. Of note, during this initial phase our cook's assistant was unwell, probably with a form of altitude sickness so he was escorted back to Gangotri to be replaced by another.

On the 25th May, we departed for our acclimatisation climb on the slopes of Kedar Dome (6940m). This mountain is highly appropriate for this purpose, being relatively easy to reach, once over the moraine snout, and of limited difficulty. On past ventures onto the Gangotri glacier teams have often established camps up the glacier in order to acclimatise which require significant load carries and reduction in rest and recuperation time at Basecamp.

We had planned a three-day trip aiming to get to 6000m. In reality, weather played its part and changed the plan. We initially camped at 5000m, using the tiny expedition tent for the three of us for the first time. This allowed us to sort out our routines and ensure that we were as efficient as possible. The next day we moved up to 5500m, established a campsite, and then gained another 200m prior to returning to the tents. That afternoon there was heavy snowfall which continued through the night. The next morning, we took the decision that the effort required to trail break would outweigh that gained by the extra height, so we turned around and headed back for Basecamp. We felt that once recovered, this acclimatisation plan was sufficient for the main climb.

Once back at Basecamp, we were planning on two day's rest before heading up the glacier to ABC. We were getting regular weather reports over our Inreach device from the UK via SnowForecast.com (Shivling 6000m). This was not overly reliable and had to be taken with a pinch of salt, however it was predicted that there would be a big snowfall on 31st May, which would have been our first climbing day, so we delayed a day. As it happened the snow did not materialise, but we felt better in the knowledge that had it appeared, the mountain would have had a day to stabilise prior

to us starting to climb. We used the time to refine our plans and logistics, aiming to minimise weight whilst remaining with sufficient clothing, equipment and food to be able to maintain the pace of a demanding Himalayan climb.

We started up the glacier on 1st June: initially the walk is very pleasant taking the grassy lateral moraine with a very gentle incline. However, once at the end of the meadows, there was significant angst trying to get down to the glacier with the usual path no longer existing and requiring the majority of the group to backtrack to find a safe way down. It was then a couple of hours on hard moraine, very undulating, slippery and unpleasant prior to getting on the snout of the glacier proper. This section seems a form of Rite of Passage in order to be allowed onto the glacier and the magnificent mountains and views to be had higher up.

Janhukot is a remote peak (part of its allure) and the ABC sits at a distance of around 18km from BC, therefore we broke it down into two one day journeys. Once on the glacier, the going was much easier, the glacier being mostly dry and not requiring us to be roped up. We stopped overnight next to a large erratic boulder hoping for shade as well as water for cooking and drinking. The next day we continued towards the mountain, only seeing it for the first time by mid-morning. We camped at the confluence of the Gangotri and Maindani glaciers under the South West Buttress of Janhukot (5000m).



The lower slopes of Janhukot showing the sloping rampline taken and first and second bivvy spots. Photo Hamish Frost

That afternoon, we went to scope out the approach to the climb, there were a few options, but in order to ensure minimum time being lost in route finding in the dark, we decided to approach via the obvious snow funnel threatened by seracs above. However, we reasoned we would spend minimum time in the line of fire and approach very early in the morning.

Therefore on 3rd June at 01.30 we commenced our approach and were soon over the bergshund, up the funnel and over onto the unthreatened ramp line taking us up the South West Buttress. The plan was to continue as far as the 2014 expedition, day one, bivvying under a large overhang high on the face. Throughout the climb that day, we continued to solo, with the climbing never being harder than Scottish Grade III, except one final short section of Grade IV. With Malcolm and Paul, both having been there before, they were keen to recognise features to ensure they were on the right track, never quite being certain. Guy, having the luxury of no previous experience, was happy that upward progress was being made.

The climbing continued well, until nearing the bivvy site, when the final rib that needed to be crossed required a small abseil. With the lack of recognition and definite knowledge that an abseil was not required last time, tensions remained high, however we pressed on. Once over that rib and up the next one, the vista opened and the bivvy site was close at hand. It would appear that this time, we took a right hand option on one of the gully lines not taken last time, but leading eventually to the same spot.

The bivvy was small, suitable for two and certainly a squash for three. Having finished climbing at 0900, the rest of the day was spent recuperating, sleeping and chatting.

The next day, we started climbing at 0700. The nature of the climbing was very different requiring either pitching or moving together. This had the requisite effect of slowing our progress considerably. We spent the day on the buttress looking up towards the South Ridge wishing we were there. We had the plan to attempt to get towards the 2014 Day 2 bivvy site, however, knowing it was a poor site, we would look out for anywhere that was suitable. By mid afternoon, it was apparent that we were not going to make that amount of ground. After a particularly hard grey ice pitch, we were all keen to stop and it was lucky that we spotted a potential site, slightly off to the left of our proposed route, which we made in another pitch.

The site was well catered with running water and suitably protected, again, however it would have been more suited for two people than three. Having a bright idea between us, we decided to use some of the rock debris to build up the platform, unfortunately we laid the rock end up instead of flat, causing the outside tent occupant to lay for the evening on an equivalent of a bed of nails.

Next morning, we set off knowing we only had about 100m of vertical to gain the South Ridge and accepting that the climb to the summit would take four days instead of three. We continued upwards and by late morning passed the 2014 bivvy site and continued on. After several more pitches on the ridge we reached a small false

summit, which finally gave a view towards the actual summit and the ridge Castle feature which had stopped the 2014 team.

By this time the weather had started closing in and was becoming stormy. Not knowing what was ahead, we dithered on the decision of where to build our bivvy, initially choosing the very exposed knife-edge ridge, but as the static started to build, we decided better of it and moved together along the ridge to a potential site under the Castle. As we got there it became apparent that this was not going to work, however 50m below the end of the ridge was a palatial scoop, which with a quick abseil, became our comfortable and safe bivvy site for the next two nights.

Having now made significant progress and having viewed a potential way around the Castle, we went to sleep feeling moderately confident that we could potentially summit. Therefore it was slightly annoying next morning to wake early to find heavy wet snow falling. We decided to wait the weather out, hoping it would shift through quickly – it didn't. With limited food and the nature of the tiny tent, the option to wait for 24 hours was less than appealing, so by 0700 we set off in very Scottish conditions of mist and drizzle.



The upper portion of Janhukot with the summit still out of sight, the bivvy spot for 3rd and 4th nights is below the rock tower by Malcolm Bass. Photo Guy Buckingham

We started with a rising traverse on a steep snow field towards an area we had previously spotted which we thought might allow progress. With the mist, it was

difficult to be sure we were in exactly the right position, however by close inspection of a photo taken the day before, we felt we were on the right track. The route took us through a large crag area winding an ice, snow and mixed route back towards the ridge. By mid-afternoon, we had found our way back on the South Ridge with the prospect of only a long knife-edge ridge between us and the summit. The weather at this stage was still poor with visibility low. We set off up the unprotectable and corniced ridge line and after about an hour thought we were close to the summit. Malcolm led the final pitch, taking us to the top and the weather cleared in order for us to see we had reached the top.

After an emotional 30 minutes, we started heading down the ridge line the way we came and the line of our ascent to the bivvy site, We had taken the time to fix abolokov threads on the way up, which meant for a speedy descent. By 2100 we were all back at the bivvy site, struggling to do the simplest of chores and were soon in bed.

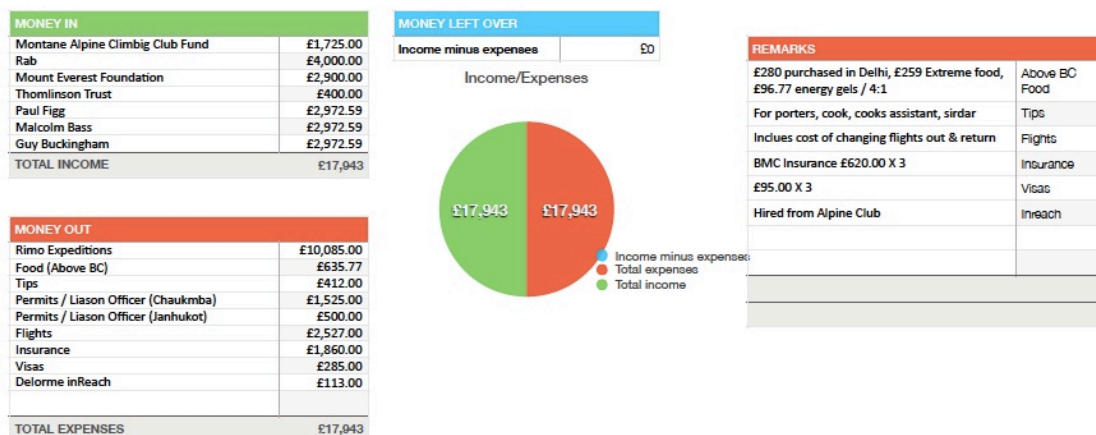
The next morning (7 June) we reversed the knife edge ridge above us and soon were back on the South Ridge conjunction with the SE ridge which we followed by 5 abseils down to a notch. It was then 2 abseils and a lot of down climbing down the East side of the mountain to the large col. From there we roped up for glacial travel and wound our way down the glacier towards ABC. Conditions were very difficult as there had been significant snow melt, this meant the closer we got to ABC the more times we fell through holes and gaps. We arrived back in the late afternoon, glad to have food waiting for us to cook.

The next day, we packed up and headed out aiming to make the long journey to BC in one day. Luckily some of the support team came up above the moraine to meet us and help with the load carry in order to help us back. It was quite a relief to be back in BC, eating proper food and having a bit of luxury.

The next few days were involved in sorting photos, writing reports etc and attempting to get porters back up early in order to clear back out to Gangotri.

Accounts

Budget for Janhukot 2018



Notes on Accounts

Rimo Expeditions were our Indian agent. These costs cover road travel, accommodation, Indian member wages, porters, food, fuel, tent and BC kitchen equipment hire.

RAB refers to a RAB grant which we were proud to receive for the expedition.

The Mount Everest Foundation, and **The Alpine Club** both generously gave us grants towards the cost of the expedition. The **Alpine Club** Grant, known as the **Montane Alpine Club Climbing Fund**, is supported by **Montane** and is only available to members of the Alpine Club.

Personal contributions refer to the contributions of the 3 British members.

Support for the expedition

Expeditions to the greater ranges are inevitably expensive and would be untenable for climbers without huge private means if it weren't for the excellent grants available to support British alpinists attempting new routes and first ascents. The grants strategically prioritise new routes and first ascents, and this focus enables the UK, a country with no glaciated mountains, to maintain a proud reputation as a major alpine climbing nation. This plays its part in creating a strong national culture of outdoor pursuits which benefits health and wellbeing, and supports a vigorous outdoor pursuits economy. The Mount Everest Foundation, and Montane Alpine Club Climbing Fund grants are both of this type. We are extremely grateful to all three bodies. The Thomlinson Trust also provided us with a grant.

RAB generously supported us by providing superb clothing, tents and sleeping bags. Malcolm is sponsored by Montane, La Sportiva, and Petzl.

Report compiled by Guy Buckingham, The Alpine Club.

