

“Searching for Geographical White Spots - First Ascent on Himalayan Summit”

Michal Apollo – Institute of Geography, Pedagogical University of Cracow, Poland

Phil Varley – United Kingdom

Marek Zoladek – Institute of Geography, Pedagogical University of Cracow, Poland

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Together we planned an expedition to Miyar Valley in a remote part of Himachal Pradesh close to Kashmir border in the Indian Himalaya¹. Michal and Marek had both climbed a virgin summit in Miyar Valley whilst on expedition in 2006² and gained good knowledge of the area. We planned our trip for the month of August 2012, apparently the best time to climb in the region.

We started our expedition at New Delhi Airport. We met in the morning on 4th of August 2012. Marek and Michal flew from Poland and Phil came from UK. We decided to go straight to the Himalayas. After a 16 hours bus ride from Delhi, we arrived in Manali, a major town in the south of the Himachal Pradesh region and a gate way to the Himalayas. We planned to stop here to arrange transport further towards our objective as well as buy food and fuel supplies for a possible 3.5 weeks in the mountains. While we were here we also used the time to rest and eat as much food as we could. Three days later, fully rested and wielding hundreds of kilos of food and climbing equipment, we moved up to the notorious Rhotang Pass in our TATA “jeep”, which we hired privately for the journey. After 8 hours heading down the Chandra River valley system we arrived at the town of Udaipur, built on the junction where the Miyar Valley meets the Chandra River. After a quick stop we headed into Miyar Valley, which lies on a northeast axis towards the Kashmir Boarder. The road up Miyar Valley is under constant development and we managed to drive 9km to Sukcto Village where we spent a night in a local B&B accommodation. We planned an early start for the full day trek into base camp. However, did not start until 11:00 am. We were keen to do the hike in 1 day. After 9 hours trekking we reached base camp, and with the uses of our headlamps, we found a nice flat area with grass for our tents. Base camp is situated at 3950 meters at the foot of the Miyar Glacier. We rested for several days and ac-

climatized whilst paying interest in other potential unclimbed objectives and their current conditions. We were ready to go up and advanced our base camp but were experiencing some unstable weather and waited for the rain to subdue. Three days later, after having packed our gear several days earlier, we set off on the 2 day load-carry to our Advanced Base Camp. Our haul bags, full of food, and an extensive climbing rack capable of tackling big-wall-style objectives, weighed in excess of 45 kg. From basecamp we headed initially east out of Miyar Valley on a steep moraine slope, which would take us up to the Tawa Glacier. After an afternoon of very steep heavy load carrying we joined an Australian/American climbing team for the night in their advance base camp at 4450 m. This was the last place with running water and even some alpine plant life and grass to relax on. We were halfway to our ABC in altitude but the moraine covered lower Tawa Glacier was ahead. In this place we needed a day to apply our scientific research skills and produce some data for their university. Michal is a specialist in human impact in the high mountains and Marek is doing research on glacier activity. We made some experiments and Phil was helping in this research. The next day was the hardest day of the trip for us. We spent 8.5 hours jumping from one moraine boulder to another, slowly moving up the glacier. The ice was only visible in places and the terrain was not relenting in what we can only describe as extremely awkward. We eventually arrived at base camp only a few kilometers up the Tawa Glacier at 4850 meters. Still on moraine but now the upper part of the valley and its many majestic towers of rock were now visible and inspiring. We were still 10 km from our objective but this was a previous high camp for our expedition in 2006 when we climbed virgin Masala Peak 5650 meters.

We woke on the 20th August 2012 for our attempt having woke up the previous night to a thick sheet of low level cloud

¹ The three climbers (M. Apollo and M. Zoladek from Poland, and P. Varley from UK) met whilst climbing in the remote mountain range Huayhuash in Peru. They shared a basecamp for several days and became good friends keeping in contact.

² M. Apollo and M. Zoladek in August 2006 (*Miyar Himalaya Expedition 2006*) had a successfully climbed on virgin pass (St. Christopher Pass 5690 meters) and virgin peak (Masala Peak 5650 meters) [American Alpine Journal, 81, vol. 49, 2007, pp. 360-362]. Line to Masala Peak was repeated by 5 members of Czech Republic team in 2011.

we had decided to put the attempt back 24 hours. Now the weather looked good and we made a hasty breakfast and mentally prepared ourselves for the full day ahead. After a 20 minute hike down the moraine onto the bare glacier we still had 10 km ahead of us over much more manageable hard ice. The last 3 km of this became more soft snow, up to knee deep and even slush in places, this being the hottest month of the year. We reached the foot of the ice field at around 6am, cooked food and filled water bottles. Shortly after, with the rising sun in our wake, we headed up a steepening ice field to the foot of the couloir. The team started up the couloir in symul-climb-style, finding an old peg from the polish attempt 6 years previous. The couloir was generally 70-80 degrees at its steepest with an interesting waterfall section. We had followed it up for about 200 meters before taking an opportunity to get onto the face. Michal brought both climbers up and Phil prepared to lead off on the rock section. We had expected more ice on the face and we decided to climb up through a rock section on the left side from the couloir. Phil started on very loose snow strewn sections of broken slabs. At the end of the second pitch whilst traversing toward the ridge on a ledge, we saw an opportunity to head up a face of what looked like much better quality rock and a possible route to the summit. This turned out to be slightly harder than thought and we encountered the crux pitch in mountain boots at about "S" with a couple of moves of run out "VS" (5.7+). The rest of the days climbing went well at "Diff-S" (5.6). We ran out in total, 8 full-length pitches before topping out in a rocky couloir just short of the summit. We were on the summit shortly after reaching 5890m. It was 4 pm and we were keeping a close eye on a thick band of clouds moving towards us. Phil left a 1 pence coin and everybody took various photos. Thirty minutes later we set up the anchor to abseil straight down to the end of the 7th pitch where we retrieved our bags we dumped earlier. Night was closing in fast and the weather picked up quickly. Strong winds turned into heavy snow as we struggled to find good piton placements for the abseils ahead. We decided to descend towards the couloir. After the second abseil we were off the route we had ascended earlier, but knew we would eventually hit the couloir. Unfortunately we were coming across some areas of very unstable rock and pulling the wet ropes became a dangerous ordeal. Whilst pulling the rope at the third station some rocks broke loose above. Everybody hugged the rock but while Marek was selflessly busy trying to protect Michal he took a fist sized rock straight in the side of the temple. This looked like a painful blow but Marek bravely lead the rappels all the way down.

This was fast turning into a small epic and conditions were not relenting. After the third abseil we finished up on steep broken rock ledges with No where to set up an anchor and still no clear sign of the couloir. We managed an un-rope down climb to a break where we sacrificed a cam and got to yet another poor loose ledge. From here we could occasionally see the couloir and worked out we would reach it after the next rappel. As Marek lowered down from the anchor we heard the crack and crash of a large piece of ice breaking off and cartwheeling down the colouir from somewhere above. Safe ground was not at the end of the rope and the evenings ordeal was not over yet. Hand railing the left side of the couloir we reached the point where we had earlier traveled out of the couloir to start the dry part of the climb. Balancing on the tight uncomfortable sloping ledges trying to find shelter from potential ice rock fall. It had now been 24 hours since we woke and started the non stop effort to the summit. Coming down had quickly become the crux and all our efforts were concentrated on reaching the glacier. On the 6th rappel we started finding the pitons Michal and Marek used to bail off their first attempt, where the weather turned them back 6 years previously. Their previous high point was the start of our rock climb and the pitons they left were a sign of the decent soon relenting. The weather had come down a lot and the slope angle started to relent. Soon we were at the trekking poles and apart from the wet ropes that had become jammed, the decent was nearly over.

Michal soloed back up the slope to free the ropes. We were on the glacier by 4 am with the 10 km trek back to advance base camp the only thing keeping us from our sleep. Thankfully the bad weather was over. We cooked some food and did our best to drink some warm snow water. Then we dragged ourselves back to camp. Unfortunately the deep snow had not hardened but eventually we arrived back at base camp at around 6.30 am. The days efforts had taken 27 hours from start to finish.

Two days later on the 23rd of August, we feared the weather was possibly changing. We heard about people having difficulties getting down the moraine-strewn glacier after a dump of snow. Food supplies were getting low so we decided to make our move towards base camp. We aimed to do the long awkward retreat in the day and we were surprised the haul bags still felt extremely heavy. Later that day we rolled into the base camp in Miyar Valley. Two days we were back in Sukcto Village and then after a 7 hour drive we reached Manali. We celebrated the climb in town and officially finished the expedition.

We named our summit Forgotten Peak (5889 meters) and our ca 650 meters route Never Ending Story (UIAA V+ WI4).

Miyar Valley 2012

International Polish/British Expedition

Michal Apollo

Institute of Geography, Pedagogical University of Cracow, Poland, apollomichal@gmail.com

Phil Varley

United Kingdom, philvarley@hotmail.co.uk

Marek Zoladek

Institute of Geography, Pedagogical University of Cracow, Poland, herrmagen@poczta.fm