

India Kayaking Expedition 2008



Introduction

After a previous Imperial college expedition in the summer of 2006, it became apparent just how much untapped potential for kayaking there was in the Indian Himalayas. So 2 years later, with a new team; this time mainly comprising of Imperial College Canoe Club members. An expedition was planned to kayak some of the rivers that had never been kayaked previously and others that had only been kayaked by handful of people.

The Team

Patrick Clissold Expedition Leader, Age 22. Imperial College 4th Year MEng Mechanical Engineering. Has over 13 years kayaking experience. Grew up on the rivers of North Wales has paddled all over the UK and Europe (France, Austria, Germany, Arctic Sweden, Corsica, Pyrenees, Norway) also was the leader of the The Zanskar, The Grand Canyon of Asia, Himalayan Kayak Expedition, 2006, and took part in the Four Boarders expedition in 2007.

Tom Haywood Age 19. Imperial College 1st Year Chemistry. Started paddling 9 years ago in the southwest of England. Kayaked all over the UK and many European countries including France, Austria, Slovenia, Switzerland, Norway, Croatia and Montenegro.

Ralph Evins Age 23, Graduated from Imperial College 2007. Kayaked extensively in the UK, also all over Europe and also in Canada.

Tim Burne Age 26. Graduated from UCL 2005 Member of Imperial College Canoe Club. Has been kayaking for over 20 years. Kayaked previously all over Europe, Canada, Peru, Africa, India and Kyrgyzstan.

Adam Holland Age 22, Graduated from UCL 2007 Member of Imperial College Canoe Club. Has been kayaking in France, Austria, Germany and other European countries.

Tom Laws Age 21 Final year of Chemistry and Bangor University. Kayaked extensively in the UK, particularly in North Wales. Organizer of the Student Boata-X and the SlopeJam in France.

Dave Goadby Age 22 Final year of Electrical Engineering at The University of Manchester. Kayaked all over the UK, kayaked a number of times in the Alps and also Norway.

Delhi

Adam, Ralph and Tom H arrived in Delhi and were met at the airport by Patrick and Dave. We got our stuff together and headed off to a guest house in Parhargang. After a terrifying taxi journey to the guest house (one of the scariest journeys of the whole trip) we decide to have a quick look around the area to get an initial taste of Indian culture. The next day we had a lie in to catch up on some sleep and then headed off to the Airport again to pick up Tom Laws. As soon as he had stepped out of the terminal building, we headed off to the bus station for the long gruelling 10 hour journey up to Missouri in Uttaranchal. The 1 day in Delhi was plenty long enough and it was really nice to get out of the city, even if it was by an extremely uncomfortable bus.

Uttaranchal

After the long bus journey we found a cheap hotel, got all of our gear unpacked and with a quick look at our map we decided that our first river would be the Yamuna. We had no idea weather it would go this time of year but what we found was a right gem. Some classic medium volume class IV. A great warm up, but at the same time a wakeup call as to just how big some of the rivers are in the Himalayas. In all we spent two days on the river in bright sunshine and warm water, perfect and pretty unusual for the Monsoon season. We bumped into some quite interesting wild life along the way including an 8 ft long snake! Lots of monkeys and thousands of huge fruit bats which were all an amazing experience. For this river we decided to take minimal kit in our boats; just a change of clothes and a sleeping bag, because we knew that there were some small towns along the river which we could stop at over night.

Following on from that we took half a day to catch our breath and stock up on food before heading to the next valley over, the home of the Tons...We had heard vague rumors that the

Tons might be paddled or rafted, but had no real info on the river, so we picked some put-ons' and take outs, booked the taxis and away we went. Arriving after dark, all we could hear was the thundering roar of water, and by torchlight we discovered an enormous mess of white water. Fortunately daylight showed us that we had got lucky and camped within 50m of the bottom of a monstrous 2km long rapid. Luck was with us, and other than a couple of portages it all went nicely with some fantastic big volume grade III/IV, despite it still being early in the day we decided that we had covered a greater distance than we had expected, so made the decision to make camp at the next nice spot we saw. We soon found a lovely little spot to camp with lots of fire wood and nice soft ground. Overnight the rain brought the river up to a much more intimidating level, and combined with the early morning mist we made slow progress before stopping at a foot bridge to inspect the next large rapid. We were then approached by two men in military uniforms who



insisted that we were breaking the law and that we must leave the river. Not wanting to cause any more trouble we politely agreed and started the long walk up to the road. Despite the inconvenience, from the look of the next sets of rapids while standing on



the bridge we were quietly pleased to be told to get off.

Menali

We arrived in Menali very early in the morning after yet another very long and very uncomfortable bus journey, so uncomfortable in fact, that some of us decided that it would be better if we tied ourselves on top of the kayaks on the roof and got a few hours sleep up there. During the drive up the final valley to Menali it just started to get light, this allowed us to see the river Beas which is what we planned to paddle over the next couple of days, we were horrified to see that the river was a seething, chocolate brown, raging mess that would without a doubt, result in a very unpleasant experience to put it lightly. Putting this to the back of our minds we decided to concentrate on more urgent matters of finding the final member of our team (Tim Burne) who was meant to be meeting us out in Menali. After a few quick emails and a lot of running around a strange new town we found him in the internet café next door to us.



That afternoon most of us were far too tired to even think about kayaking; however Tom L, Dave and Tim were keen to go and run the small, low volume, short tributary to the Beas that runs through Old Menali. Thinking that it was only going to take them half an hour at the most a couple of us decided to stand on the bridge in town and wait for them to get some photos. After waiting nearly an hour we were getting slightly concerned; and very fed up of waiting in the rain. We got back to the hotel and told the others, just as we were about to all walk up the river in search of them, we were met by a very excitable Dave asking for 15Rs to pay their Tuc-tuc driver. It turned out that the river was a lot steeper and harder than at first inspection requiring much more time than thought. Dave later pointed out that it was in fact one of the hardest rivers he had ever actually paddled.

That evening was Patrick's birthday, even though Patrick himself was suffering from a bit of 'Delhi Belly' we celebrated none the less by sampling some of the local cider and apple wine.

The next morning we drove down the Beas a couple of kilometres where the river got progressively less terrifying in these levels, looking for a suitable place to get on. Tim, Ralph, Adam, Dave and Tom L decided to put on at the next bridge we came to, Patrick and Tom H however had a gut feeling not to get on (maybe it was the cider from the night before). Patrick and Tom H decided to drive down a bit further and get on about 5km downstream where we would all meet. After waiting for about an hour and a half, Patrick and Tom decided that the rest of the group must have walked off, and as there was a jeep waiting at the bottom of the river, the best idea would be to paddle down to it and then drive back up looking for the rest of the group. Paddling in a 2 is never advised as if someone swims; it is very unlikely that the other person will be able to safely recover the person and all of their kit. However it does certainly add a unique rush to running a river and means that you are a lot more focused and cautious. Patrick and Tom's run down proved to be an excellent class IV/V trip with no problems at all. The others however had a different story to tell. Once arriving at the bottom Patrick and Tom H got in one of the jeeps and drove up the river looking for the others. About 15km upstream (just below where Patrick and Tom H put on) Tim and Ralph were found walking up the road, they hopped in and they told us that the others had got out further upstream. It turned out that the section they got on proved to be a lot more challenging than first thought, Adam had a swim after spending some time

in a rather large hole and decided to walk off with Dave and Tom L. The others carried on down stream. They came to a rapid that needed inspecting so Tim hopped out to have a look. Next thing he knew he saw his brand new kayak with £1000 worth of DSLR camera in the back floating away downstream, after the boat had slipped off the rock on which he had left it. He quickly called Ralph over, jumped in his Ralphs boat and chased his own boat solo for 3km down the big volume, messy class IV. After finally getting his boat out he got to the road just as Ralph pulled up in a Taxi which he fortunately had money for. I think the moral of the storey was to go with your gut feeling even if it is hangover related.

The following day we drove downstream to inspect a river called the Parbati, however after a quick inspection by road decided that the bottom section was some of the most horrendous whitewater we had ever seen and we were not allowed any further up as we didn't have the correct permits for that valley. Still keen to paddle Tim, Adam and Tom H decided to do a different short low volume tributary to the Beas called the Phojal. All went well and it was nice to get back on a steep, low volume, British style river. We arrived at the last rapid and decided to get out and have a look at it. We were insight of the bridge and as Adam was tired and didn't like the look of this last rapid he decided not to paddle it. Tim ran the rapid first with little issues. Tom H then got on and ran the rapid; however on the last drop Tom H hit a rock in the middle of the flow sideways. The force of the water pinned the hull of his boat against the rock with his head under water. Not hanging around to see what would happen he pulled his deck, got out of the boat and swam to the side as quickly as possible; luckily his boat and paddles were rescued by some locals who were watching from the bank before they were washed into the Beas.

The Spiti Valley (The true exploration)

After another long uncomfortable jeep ride over a mountain pass that can only be very loosely be



described as a road we finally arrived in Kaza in the Spiti valley. From research done before we left, we failed to find any information on any previous kayaking that had been done in the area, so we decided to make it our aim to explore as many of the rivers as possible. The Spiti valley is in the monsoon shadow, so all of the water in the rivers is from glacier fed. This means that most of the time it's nice and sunny but the water is still very cold.

During the drive down the valley from the mountain pass we crossed a number of tributaries with potential to be kayaked, one however looked particularly promising, the Gyundi. From the road all we could see was the river flowing out of a fairly deep gorge; however it had plenty of water in it so looked paddleable and almost certainly a first descent. We were dropped off at the bridge early afternoon, which was about 1km up from the confluence with the Spiti. We spent the remainder of the day trekking back and forwards across the scree covered mountain side high above the river, gradually carrying our kit further upstream,

which at an altitude of around 3800m was extremely exhausting and hit us hard. As it began to get dark we looked for a place to camp, the best spot we could find was a small patch of ground that was almost flat and made up of slightly smaller rocks than the surrounding areas. All of the effort that day however was worth it just for the stars that night, the fact that we were at such altitude and the nearest town that had street lamps was probably over 150 miles away made them totally indescribable. After a very uncomfortable night sleep we got up at sunrise to carry on the walk upstream. At about midday we reached a cage and cable over river which locals use as a means of crossing. By this point most people were fed up of walking and decided that they would put on the river here as above didn't look particularly interesting. Tom H and Tim however decided that they wanted to carry on walking up stream; a small track was visible about 100m up the cliff on the opposite bank. They crossed the river and started making their way up to the path; an hour later they finally reached the path after a tiring walk/climb up the cliff in the sweltering heat. Walking along the path, the cliff side gradually became steeper and steeper making it impossible to climb down to river level, they decided to carry on in hope that there would be a better place to get back down and finally onto the river, however after a further hour of walking they came across about a dozen men with picks and spades still digging the path, they were very nice and extremely amused by the sight of them. Reluctantly they turned back and eventually got on the river a mere few hundred meters above where the others had put on. The river started fairly easy with about a kilometre of class III before dropping into a tight gorge that had a few nice class IV drops in it. The later start paid off for Tom H and Tim however, because in the couple extra hours that they were walking, the sun was at its hottest so increased the glacier melt and significantly raised the river level. In the end it took us most of 2 days to walk into the river and less than an hour to paddle. Discussing it later we decide that we probably wouldn't go through it all again, but it was defiantly a good experience. We also realised just how much effort you sometimes need to go through in order to get a first descent.

From the confluence we then carried on down the Spiti the remaining 20km to get back to our base in Kaza.



The next river we paddled was the Lingty; we had briefly inspected it the day before and decided that it was good to go. We got a jeep to Lalung early in the morning which is about 10km from the get out. However it looked to us like the good stuff was in the next 5km upstream. After a lot of haggling with local porter we decided that we were too cheap to hire them so once again shouldered our boats and started walking upstream. This walk was far easier as we were at river level the whole time and there was even a path! As we walked up, the river was first class III, then class IV and a short section of nice class V, above which was a horrendously steep boulder filled section that we decided wasn't worth looking above. Once we put on the first km was fairly pushy and harder than it looked from the bank. From then on it eased off in to nice easy class III with stunning scenery all around us.

When we got off the Lingty we got straight in a taxi and headed up the Pin valley which flows into the Spiti opposite to the Lingty. We knew that one of its forks had been paddled before but from what we understood the other was yet to be explored. We drove up as far as the road went and after a word with

a friendly farmer decided to camp in his field as it was starting to get dark. In the morning we awoke to find that we were of great interest to the farmer's children and found that they loved our

chocolate powder that we put in our porridge, after giving them a small tub of it, we were repaid with not much short of a sack of peas from their garden, which were extremely nice. We headed



off down to the river which turned out to be a lot further away than we first thought. Once we finally arrived at the riverbank and put on we found that the water was fairly tame but extremely cold, we seemed to spend the first 10km before the sun came up with our paddles above our heads trying to keep our hands dry for as long as possible. The little information that we did have on the river, or at least the bottom part of it, was that the scenery was absolutely stunning, and it certainly did not disappoint, the rock formations were incredible,

with massive folds in the layers of rock and the dramatic fault lines that cut through them.

Once we reached the confluence with the Spiti again we decided to have some lunch and try to warm up a bit. Our next plan was to carry down from here until we reached the town of Tabo on the Spiti. The next 10-15km started off extremely flat, boring, shallow and slow moving, we were starting to wonder what we had let ourselves in for as we predicted that Tabo was still another 30km away. Almost out of nowhere though, the river narrowed and the speed of the water picked up. It quickly turned into fantastic, big volume class III with lots of big waves and big holes to avoid. After a few km of this the river stepped up another gear into bigger steeper more committing class IV with some must make lines; this was the kind of stuff that we had really come for. It turned out that the river made us get a bit too carried away and it occurred to us that it was getting late and we should have reached Tabo by now, we found some locals on the river bank and asked them how far Tabo was and they told us that it was 10km back upstream, we then had to walk up to the road and flag down a lift to get back up to the town with all of our kit.

We spent a couple of days in Tabo sorting out permits and inspecting the lower sections of the river. We also tried to inspect a river called the Para Chu but unfortunately the Tibetan border was only 2km upstream and it was the first day of the Beijing Olympics so the Indian army unfortunately wouldn't let us go any further.

Once we had all of the necessary permits and information we needed we decided that we would carry on down the Spiti, we split up into 2 groups, Tim, Dave and Tom H deciding to run the 10km down from Tabo to where we got out before, as this was the best section of the river so far. And Patrick, Adam, Ralph and Tom L decided that they would get a jeep down and put on where we took off a couple of days before. The top section was just as good as last time; if not a bit better due to there being a bit more water in the rivers. The rest was slightly easier but a lot more spectacular with high gorge walls and more incredible rock formations. We reached the road bridge at Sundo to find Patrick, Adam, Ralph and Tom L sitting by the road waiting for us. As it turned out, the army decided that the permits that we had spent 2 days getting were not sufficient for us to carry on downstream after all so we had to get out here. From here we got a jeep back up to Kaza to collect all of our equipment we had left there, picked up our new tailor made shirts that we had been measured for before we left and had a celebratory dinner primarily consisting of Mo-mos.

At this point Patrick and Tom L had to head back home to start basic training with the Navy and begin teacher training respectively. The rest of us however decided to head up to the Kashmir region to carry on the Paddling.

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