



## AAC Publications

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### **Janhukot: The First Ascent of a High Gangotri Peak**

India, Garhwal Himalaya, Gangotri

**SUNDENVAN, THE LATERAL moraine meadow under Kedar Dome, is the highest base camp site on the Gangotri Glacier. I have probably spent more months living there than most of the summer-resident blue sheep.** It has become a place of great peace for me over the years, so it was with mixed feelings that I left it in late May to walk 18km up glacier toward Janhukot (also spelled Janahut or Janhkuth, 6,805m). However, I was happy to be accompanied by Paul Figg, who had been down this road before, and Guy Buckingham, a Himalayan veteran reveling in his first trip up the Gangotri. Hamish Frost had joined the expedition to take photographs and video, our LO Vikram Ghiyal fancied a walk, and Pemba Sherpa was helping Hamish with the filming. We took it easy, spreading the approach over two days.

I first encountered unclimbed Janhukot looking rather fearsome in a photograph in Rudolf Jonas' account of the prolific 1938 Austro-German expedition to the Garhwal. It looked then like the type of mountain I had no chance of climbing. The 1938 team maybe thought the same, as they climbed only nearby peaks. Atanu Chatterjee, Sushanta Majumder, Dibya Mukherjee, and Prashanta Roy from West Bengal were bolder, making an unsuccessful attempt in 1989. I saw the peak with my own eyes in 1995, as we made our way up the Gangotri to attempt Chaukhamba I: It looked no less formidable in real life. Heavy snowfall repelled a 2002 Austrian team.

By 2004 I was feeling more confident in my ability to get up big mountains, and Marty Beare, Andy Brown, Pat Deavoll, Paul Figg, and I gave it a go. Pat and Marty climbed the broad gully on the right side of the west face to reach the long south-southwest ridge, where altitude sickness forced a retreat from about 6,400m. Andy, Paul, and I retreated in bad weather at around 5,800m on the mixed southwest buttress right of the gully.

Bryan Hylenski, with friends from the USA, India, and Korea, attempted the mountain in 2010 and 2011. They climbed from the east side, where an icefall gives access to a high glacier cwm from which the south-southwest ridge can be gained. They reached about 6,500m.

Simon Yearsley is always up for a long approach, and, as a veteran of our 1995 Chaukhamba attempt, knew what he was letting himself in for when we teamed up in spring 2014. We had a superb trip, coming close to climbing the mountain via the southwest buttress and south-southwest ridge. We reached the crest of the latter at 6,400m, and after a bivouac made the mistake of thinking we could leave our tent and reach the summit in one day. That day faded at around 6,640m, and by the time I got back to the tent I had frostbite in both thumbs and one finger. Despite the lack of summit and minor operations on my digits, I remember this as a great trip, because we climbed so high in such a remote place (AAJ 2015). Bryan Hylenski was back in 2016, this time with John Miller. The mountain was very dry and they retreated from the Beare-Deavoll gully.

On June 3, 2018, as Paul, Guy, and I started up the Mandani Glacier at 1 a.m., headed toward the toe of the southwest buttress, things didn't feel easy. However, as soon as we crossed the bergschrund, everything changed. We came alive in the cold and swirling spindrift, and briskly soloed the lower 700m, intermittently guided by my fallible memory, to a well-protected campsite at around 5,900m, where we stopped before noon.

Over the next two days, with a bivouac at 6,200m, we climbed a series of hard gray ice pitches and joined the south-southwest ridge. An approaching electrical storm sent us into a dither, but we spotted a perfect campsite in a snow bowl just 40m down the west face. That night, comfortably ensconced at 6,500m, we felt optimistic.

In 2014, I had faced hard mixed climbing at 6,600m on a bastion we dubbed the Castle. Our plan now was to traverse the west face below this troublesome obstacle and then follow a twisting gully through a series of buttresses back onto the ridge. We were not pleased to wake to cloud, snow, and even rain. We delayed, then decided it was just like Scotland, and set off into the murk. We fumbled our way across the traverse until we bumped into some rocks, then picked what we hoped was the right gully. Several anxious pitches followed, but our aim was true and the gully ran to the ridge, which vanished into the cloud.

False summit followed false summit. The ridge was narrow and corniced, the visibility poor. We moved together—it all felt very serious. Then Guy, leading, stopped on a rocky spur and we gathered there. Something about the next rise looked different, although we couldn't see beyond. Paul and Guy encouraged me to take the lead, just in case this was the one. For the first 20m it was just more of the same: mist, cornice, soft snow. But then there was a steepening, gray ice, the need for an ice screw, then another, then the ridge dropping away beyond.

Hours later we sat in the dark on our packs outside the tent in the snow bowl, our kit and ropes strewn about us. Clouds had cleared from the peaks just minutes after we reached the summit, and now it was a still, starry night. Safe and at rest, all alertness had gone, and we were slapdash and clumsy as we melted snow and brewed. We would spend the next day reversing most of the south-southwest ridge, then rappel and downclimb the east side to the high eastern cwm, and finally slog back round the mountain in the afternoon heat. But that was all for tomorrow. For tonight all we had to do was eat and sleep.

**Summary:** First ascent of Janhukot (6,805m) in the Gangotri area of Western Garwhal, by the southwest buttress to upper south-southwest ridge (1,700m, ED1 Scottish IV), by Malcolm Bass, Guy Buckingham, and Paul Figg (U.K.), June 3–7, 2018.

– **Malcolm Bass**, Alpine Club, U.K.

## Images



Paul Figg making the last moves up the south-southwest ridge to the summit of Janhukot.



Malcolm Bass (lower) and Paul Figg (belaying) on ice pitches below the south-southwest ridge of Janhukot.



Paul Figg (foreground) and Malcolm Bass start their descent of the south-southwest ridge of Janhukot in the afternoon sun. Mandani Parvat (6,193m) rises out of the cloud behind.





Malcolm Bass and Paul Figg on the south-southwest ridge of Janhukot during day three of the ascent. Below is the Gangotri Glacier, while behind are (A) Mandani Parvat (6,193m), (B) Kharchakund (6,612m), (C) Kedarnath (6,940m), (D) Kedar Dome (6,831m), (E) Thalay Sagar (6,904m), and (F) Meru (6,660m).



Malcolm Bass and Paul Figg on the south-southwest ridge of Janhukot in worsening weather during day three of the first ascent.



Night view of the southwest buttress of Janhukot (1,700m, ED1 Scottish IV) with the three camps shown. The upper south-southwest ridge is much foreshortened and partially hidden in this view.

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