



## AAC Publications

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### **Kullu, Ali Ratni Tibba, Southwest Pillar; Manikaran Spires, Peak 5,394m, East Pillar; Peak 5,200m, North Face**

India, Himachal Pradesh

Laura Tiefenthaler (left) and Jana Moehrer take a short break: The fine rock pillar to the south above Tiefenthaler is the Obelisk. The aiguilles visible lie south of the Pass of the Obelisks and some were climbed by British teams in the 1960s and '70s. Photo by Raphaela Haug

**At the end of August 2019, Franziska Dünßer (team doctor), Veronika Hofmann, Jana Möhrer, Dörte Pietron (team trainer), Laura Tiefenthaler, and I traveled to the Malana Valley, southeast of Manali, as the last stage of the German Alpine Club's three-year program for young female alpinists (DAV Expeditionskader). We originally wanted to visit the Zaskar Valley, but due to the Kashmir conflict we had to reorganize our expedition two weeks before departure.**

Our new goal was Ali Ratni Tibba (5,490m) and the Manikaran Spires. It is not clear how many of the spires remain unclimbed, but one of the highest, Peak 5,394m, was climbed in 2008, via the south face, by Janet Bergman, Ben Ditto, Pat Goodman, and Freddie Wilkinson from the USA. We decided to go to the north side of the spires, because this would also allow access to Ali Ratni Tibba. However, we had very little information, since the last expedition from the north may well have been in the late 1970s.

We flew to Delhi and from there took a car for 16 hours to Naggar. From there we walked for four days over the Chandra Khani Pass to our base camp at the end of the Malana Valley, just before the entrance to the side valley leading south toward the northwest side of Ali Ratni Tibba and the north side of the Manikaran Spires. It took a fifth day to cross the river and set up base camp on a perfect meadow at around 3,360m (32.1262751°N, 77.3850667°E). It would be better and faster to drive to Malana village, from which it is possible to reach base camp in one long day (or two days if using horses to carry equipment; however, the last bridge is not passable for horses and it might be better to hire porters instead).

We established an advanced base at 4,700m on a glacier plateau between Ali Ratni Tibba and the Manikaran Spires. All of our climbs started from this camp, which became increasingly hard to reach as melting snow exposed crevasses.

During our five-week stay, we had a lot of unstable weather, with daily precipitation, including some thunderstorms, and only one week of "climbable" weather. Temperatures were quite warm at the beginning, when the freezing level was far above 5,000m. However, by the end we were measuring -4°C in base camp. There was a lot of rockfall and approaches were quite difficult and dangerous. We would recommend visiting the area earlier in the year in the hope of finding colder temperatures and better conditions in general—but keep in mind the monsoon season. There is good rock climbing potential in the area, especially on the north face and northwest pillar of Ali Ratni Tibba, as well as the north face of the so called "Obelisk." We found it impossible (it would require a sort of via ferrata) to reach the South Malana Glacier from the end of the Malana Valley: It is a very steep gorge with a raging river, but might be possible earlier in the year, when the entire gorge is covered by snow.

We climbed three peaks during our stay.

Hofmann and Pietron climbed one of the Manikaran Spires—Peak 5,200m (approximately

32°5'13.54"N, 77°23'40.39"E)—from the north via a glacier hike and some easy scrambling. The GPS gave an altitude of 5,120m.

Ali Ratni Tibba was climbed in a day (September 9) via a partial new route up the southwest pillar to join the original route on the peak in its easier upper section. Moehrer, Tiefenthaler, and I completed the ascent, which we called Flying Backpack (600m, 6a). The GPS recorded an altitude of 5,410m.

On September 12, Hofmann, Moehrer, Tiefenthaler, and I climbed a new route up the east pillar of Peak 5,394m (approximately 32°5'20.07"N, 77°23'24.96"E), which we named More Rice (420m, 6b+). Our GPS recorded a height of 5,320m.

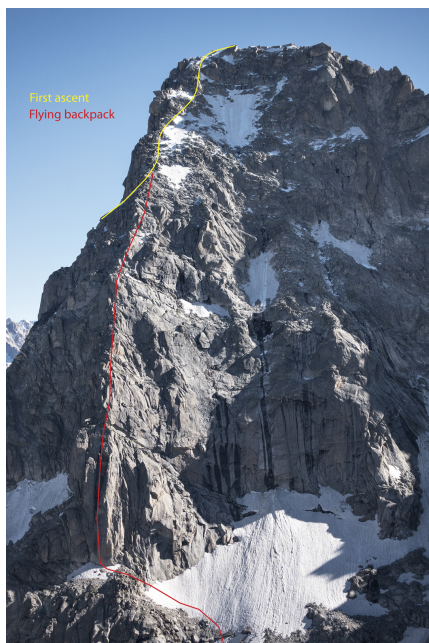
— Raphaela Haug, Germany

**Notes on Ali Ratni Tibba's Climbing History:** The early climbing on Ali Ratni Tibba was somewhat dominated by climbers from the U.K. After reconnaissance in the 1960s by at least two British expeditions, Fred Harper and Margorie-Anne Harper, Dave Nicoll, and Chris Radcliffe made the first ascent of the peak over two days in May 1969, climbing a north-facing snow ramp below the west face to reach the west ridge, which they followed (snow, ice, and UIAA IV) to the summit, with one bivouac (around 1,500m, D+/TD-).

In June 1971, Geoff Moss and Sonam Wangyal established a camp below the south face of Ali Ratni Tibba, having approached up the South Malana Glacier to the east of the peak (which they discovered was locally called Dharmtula). Here, they discovered a relatively straightforward line linking snow patches across the south face to reach the upper southwest ridge. It took only three hours to reach the summit. This route was repeated the next day by two more members from the same British expedition, and again in June 1973 by Pat Gunsun, Ivor Hellberg and "Bronco" Lane from a British Army team (the fourth expedition to summit the peak).

Earlier in June 1973, Adrian and Alan Burgess, Bob Dearman and Bob Toogood climbed the 1,200m west face at TD+ (UIAA V+ A1 Scottish IV), making two bivouacs on the ascent and one on the descent of the west ridge. Later, Dearman and Steve Chalkeley climbed the 300m west-facing couloir to the Pass of the Obelisks, south of the mountain, and from there ascended the southeast ridge to the summit. The climb took four days overall and was graded D+/TD-.

## Images



The southwest pillar and the September 2019 route Flying Backpack on Ali Ratni Tibba. The yellow line shows the upper part of the original 1969 route up the west ridge (more or less on the lower left skyline). The 1971 route, climbed in snowier conditions than shown, starts toward the bottom right edge of the image and slants left up the south face to join the upper section of the southwest ridge.



Peak 5,200m at the eastern end of the Manikaran Spires and the route of the 2019 ascent.



Peak 5,394m in the Manikaran Spires and the 2019 route More Rice on the east pillar.



Peak 5,394m from the southwest and the line of the 2008 ascent.



Jana Moehrer high on the southwest pillar of Ali Ratni Tibba.



Looking at Jana Moehrer and, further down, Laura Tiefenthaler above all the hard pitches on the southwest pillar of Ali Ratni Tibba. The upper reaches of the Ali Ratni Tibba East Glacier are visible around 600m below.



Early in the morning on the southwest pillar of Ali Ratni Tibba. Jana Moehrer belays Laura Tiefenthaler on one of the first difficult pitches.



Above the hard pitches on the southwest pillar of Ali Ratni Tibba. Laura Tiefenthaler (left) and Jana Moehrer take a short break: The fine rock pillar to the south above Tiefenthaler is the Obelisk. The aiguilles visible lie south of the Pass of the Obelisks and some were climbed by British teams in the 1960s and '70s.



Raphaëla Haug leads one of the hard pitches on the first ascent of the east pillar of Peak 5,394m.



Veronika Hofmann following one of the hard pitches of the first ascent of the east pillar of Peak 5,394m.

## Article Details

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