

Much like the rest of the route, the descent was epic. Suffice to say we were laughing hysterically when we finally made it to the glacier after two days of rappelling on barely any food, and then discovered that our advanced base—tent, food, and fuel—had been buried by the storm. We open-bivouacked on our final night. We agreed that overall it was one of the most difficult climbs any of us had ever been on, and certainly one of the greatest adventures of our climbing careers. We left with a lot more respect and admiration for each other, and the mountain.

JIMMY CHIN, AAC

*Gangotri, Vasuki Parvat, west face, attempt.* Paul Ramsden and I were turned back high on this year's objective, rarely climbed 6,792m Vasuki Parvat in the Indian Gangotri. Poor weather and cold foiled our attempt on an aesthetic line up a steep mixed pillar toward the right side of the unclimbed west face.

Our first problem, as usual, was bureaucracy. Peaks in the area now need not only permits from the Indian Mountaineering Foundation but also from the local Uttarakhand Government and Forestry Commission. The next problem was weather. While we made a speedy approach to base camp at 4,900m in the Vasuki Valley, once the tent was set up, a storm raged for 48 hours, after which only a few centimeters of roof remained above the freshly fallen snow.

Apart from making conditions on the mountain a trifle difficult, a major by-product of all this fresh snow was that it stopped us acclimatizing to any decent height before making our attempt. It was also impressively cold, the cook remarking that monsoons had increasingly been leading straight into winter. But when clear skies arrived, it was either go up or pack up. So up we went.

Starting up the face all slow and sensible, we had climbed to around half-height on day three and were beginning increasingly technical ground. By day five we were moving too slowly and getting more and more wobbly. I could feel my toes suffering cold damage, and Paul's feet were cold even in his Everest boots. At one point, using a bare-hand undercut for 30 seconds produced a frostbite blister. On the morning of day six, two-thirds of the way up the face at 6,400m, we concluded that lack of acclimatization was taking its toll. We may have been above the most technical part of the face, but things were likely to go horribly wrong if we continued. The descent, which involved another bivouac, was made more exciting by a rock ripping through the tent fabric and smashing into the hanging stove.

Named after the shape of Vasuki, the famous king of snakes, the 6,792m summit lies immediately east of the better-known Bhagirathi Group. Despite many references, all likely stemming from a single source, that the Indo-Tibet Border Police first climbed the mountain in 1973 (no route description given, or at best extremely vague), the IMF does not recognize this ascent. The only ascent described in detail took place in 1980, by Japanese via the east face and east ridge. However, the IMF fails to recognize this ascent too, presumably because no permit was issued and the ascent was therefore unofficial.



The west face of Vasuki (6,782m), showing the line of the Fowler-Ramsden attempt. Mick Fowler

MICK FOWLER, *Alpine Club*