



Ben Ditto points a finger at The Indian Beauty, the first route to reach the summit of Pt. 5,394m, Manikarin Spires. *Pat Goodman*

northeast ridge from the col at its base. The climbing, both up and down, was straightforward, and no rappels were needed.]

Brandon Lampley, U.S.

KULLU

Manikarin Spires, Peak 5,394m.

Most international climbing trips start with a picture that inspires a dream. Janet Bergman, Ben Ditto, Freddie Wilkinson, and I made plans to explore the Manikaran Spires, which flank the wondrous Parvati Valley, because the previous year Freddie and I saw a postcard tacked to the wall of a tourist shop in Manali. All we could learn

from the shopkeeper was the name Manikaran Spires and that the photo was probably taken near the holy village of Manikaran. Research back in the U.S. revealed that the area had apparently not been visited since the 1980s, and no technical rock climbs had been reported from the southern side. This signified to us that an alpine playground, laden with jagged summits and formidable granite walls, was virgin. We gathered supplies in Manali and hired a jeep to drive us the six hours to Kasol, which locals told us was a bigger, more comfortable place to stay than Manikaran and only a few miles distant. Here, we encountered local farmers from Manikaran who knew the terrain well and confirmed that no climbers had ventured into those mountains from the south side.

To call the approach steep would be an understatement. Our new friends guided us up the mighty hillside east of the Brahmganga River, through a small community and big marijuana fields. The latter should be reason enough for would-be adventurers to seek local guides; tourists have disappeared in this area. We were stopped by heavy rain a day's walk from base camp (we were told it would take three or four) and hiked back to Kasol to ponder and drink beer.

After a few days the weather forecast was in our favor and we ventured back up the slopes without our guides. We made base camp in two days and promptly scoped the glory line up the middle of a large rock wall on what we believed to be Peak 5,394m. Leaving camp at 1:30 a.m. on September 29, we made it to the base of the wall in three hours and discovered the glory line was much too wet from seepage. Settling for the line of weakness, we were forced to grovel up the left portion of the face via snow and ice-covered cracks and ridges for a few thousand feet. We bivouacked on a nice shoulder 1,000' below the summit. The next day we waddled through more waist-deep slush around the southeast side of the summit tower, then up nice dry rock pitches, followed by an exciting unprotected boulder problem to the summit. We reversed mostly the line of ascent and made it back to camp by 9:00 p.m. on the 30th. We believe our route, Indian Beauty Queen (V+, 5.10 A0 with sections of 50-60° slush slopes) to be the first to reach the summit of Peak 5,394m.

PAT GOODMAN, AAC