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# ACROSS THE GREAT DIVIDE

*Avilash Bisht makes his way down the Panpatia Col, negotiating slushy ice and channels of snowmelt*

CROSSING THE CREVASSE-RIDDEN PANPATIA GLACIER AND THEN THE GREAT HIMALAYAN WATERSHED TO CHART THE SHORTEST ROUTE BETWEEN THE BADRINATH AND KEDARNATH VALLEY SYSTEMS.  
TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY **SANKAR SRIDHAR**



## KHIRAO GANGA VALLEY

*Right: The Khirao Ganga at sunset. The river marks the trail up to Panpatia for the first two days of the trek, its frothy waters a hint of the steepness of terrain to come.*

*Below: Members of the team walk up past blooming rhododendron bushes stunted by the lack of oxygen just below the treeline.*





# THE PANPATIA GLACIER

*Porters make their way up the moraine on the lower Panpatia glacier. Progress is slow and painful on this stretch, with patches of snow offering some relief from the endless sea of loose rock and boulders.*



# UP THE PANPATIA

*Clockwise from below: A seasonal snowfield at the base of the Panpatia icefall offers glorious views of Neelkanth and other higher peaks to those who are willing to trudge up the ridge behind it. During our stay there, we alternated between taking in the views and worrying about the underground streams that were chewing through the snow throughout the day; Sundar, our guide, leads the lung-busting climb up the flank of the Parvati icefall. Its treacherous terrain was made doubly dangerous and thrilling by bad weather; and the Mingma brothers and Ang Dorjee, the Sherpas in our group of climbers, set out across the upper Panpatia icefall to scout the way forward. To the right of the frame rises Neelkanth.*





## TO THE OTHER SIDE

*Right: Ang Dorjee shows us how he feels, now that we have crossed the Panpatia Col (hidden by the black outcrop of rock in the background), and by the prospect of heading out of the realm of snow and into flower-filled meadows in the next couple of days.*

*Below: Roped up as a precaution against slipping into crevasses hidden by snow, the expedition marches across the Panpatia snowfield. Ringed by towering peaks, the snowfield is a dream to walk across on a clear day. Its nighmarish avatar came to the fore on the second day when we battled mad winds and blinding snow, with not so much as a pebble to hide under.*





## MADHMAHESHWAR VALLEY

*Left: The Madhmaheshwar Temple. Also called Madhyamaheshwar, this is one of the most atmospheric and remote of the Siva temples of Garhwal.*

*Below: On the way to the village of Ransi further down the Madhmaheshwar Ganga valley are a series of waterfalls that offer the perfect excuse for a much-needed bath before greeting humanity once again.*



## THE INFORMATION

### THE TREK

**Day 1:** Cross the Alaknanda by a suspension bridge from the **Khirao roadhead** on the road from Joshimath to Badrinath. A short walk brings you to the campsite, in a clearing right above the confluence of the Khirao Ganga and Alaknanda.

**Day 2:** Trek to **Shepherd Camp**. A gradual ascent brings you to Khirao village. The village wears a deserted look in summer as most residents either move to the higher meadows with their sheep or are busy in their terraced farms. From the village, a steep climb brings one up to the treeline. A traverse on the grassy slopes brings you to your campsite.

**Day 3:** Trek to **Snout Camp**. It's a short walk all the way up to the snout of the Panpatia glacier. The snout is an easy 10-minute walk away from the campsite.

**Day 4:** Trek to **Moraine Camp** (4,300m). This is a relatively long day of gradual height gain. The never-ending moraine tends to get a bit monotonous but it's a joy to weave across patches of snow to ease progress and add variety

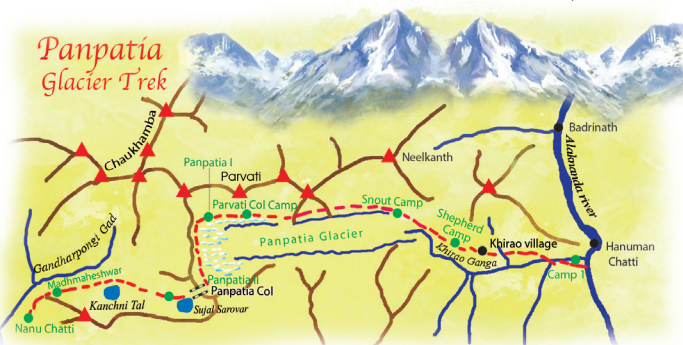
to the walk. There's a real risk of spraining the neck looking up at the magnificent peaks all around. Neelkanth and Parvati loom large on one side and a heavily crevassed glacier drops almost vertically to the other. Here you can catch your first glimpse of Chaukhamba.

**Day 5:** Rest day.

**Day 6:** Trek to the base of Parvati Col. It's a short but steep walk that brings you closer to the Panpatia snow field. The campsite is just below the **Parvati Col**.

**Day 7:** Trek to **Panpatia Snowfield Camp I**. A steep climb brings you to the edge of the terrace from where the only way up is through a steep snow and rock gully. It's wise to fix ropes to negotiate this passage and enter the domain of pure snow. A series of gentle humps gives way to the Parvati Col and the Panpatia icefield—a huge plateau of snow ringed by lofty peaks. Chaukhamba rises in all its glory and, with some luck, you may also catch a view of Nanda Devi.

**Day 8:** Trek to **Panpatia Snowfield Camp II**. It's a short day of walking



across fairly flat ground. Rope up as there are crevasses.

**Day 9:** Across the **Panpatia Col** (5,260m) to **Sujal Sarovar** (4,750m). A short climb from the camp brings you to the watershed, beyond which is a vertigo-inducing descent that leads to Sujal Sarovar, the campsite.

**Day 10:** Trek to **Kanchni Tal**. A few metres above Sujal Sarovar is a small pass from where it is a steep descent through snowy slopes and boulder zones to Kanchni. Beyond the small Maindalla tal is another traverse through the boulders that leads to Kanchni. The meadow overlooks the

Madhmaheshwar Ganga.

**Day 11:** Trek to **Nanu Chatti**. It takes about 3-4 hours to get to **Madhmaheshwar temple** beyond oak forests. From here, a paved trail rolls all the way to the roadhead at Ransi. It's a leisurely walk through a forest to camp at Nanu Chatti, a small settlement of summer homes for people from Gaundhar village.

**Day 12:** Walk to **Ransi** and drive to Chopta.

### TREK OPERATOR

I used the services of White Magic Adventure Travel ([whitemagicadventure.com](http://whitemagicadventure.com)) ■ SANKAR SRIDHAR

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