

Manali, Himachal Pradesh  
**India**

# Chillin'

Manali is a great escape from the intense heat and dust of the plains during monsoon and is just a sweet place to kick back and relax while eating some good food!

Over the past five years I have been heading back to the hill town of Manali.

Set in some of the most amazing surroundings, Manali has become a very popular resort for both Indian and international tourists. For the Indians it is one of the main honeymoon destinations made famous by numerous Bollywood films being shot on the Rohtang Pass – the main route to Leh and Ladakh.

By Steve Brooks



For kayakers it is the gateway to some of the best Himalayan rafting.

To the north over the Rohtang Pass is the valley of Lahaul, which has the Chandra, Bhaga and the mighty Chenab Rivers. To the south the Beas makes its mark on the Kullu Valley all the way down to the Punjab and the plains.

# Mountain

Beas Gorge  
**India**



# During the past five years I have been trying to get hold of information about the Beas Gorge below the town of Mandi.



Unlike other popular areas of India such as Ladakh and Uttarakand (Ganges, Alaknanda and its tributaries) there is not a lot of information about Himachal Pradesh' rivers and maps are somewhat erratic and rather outdated!

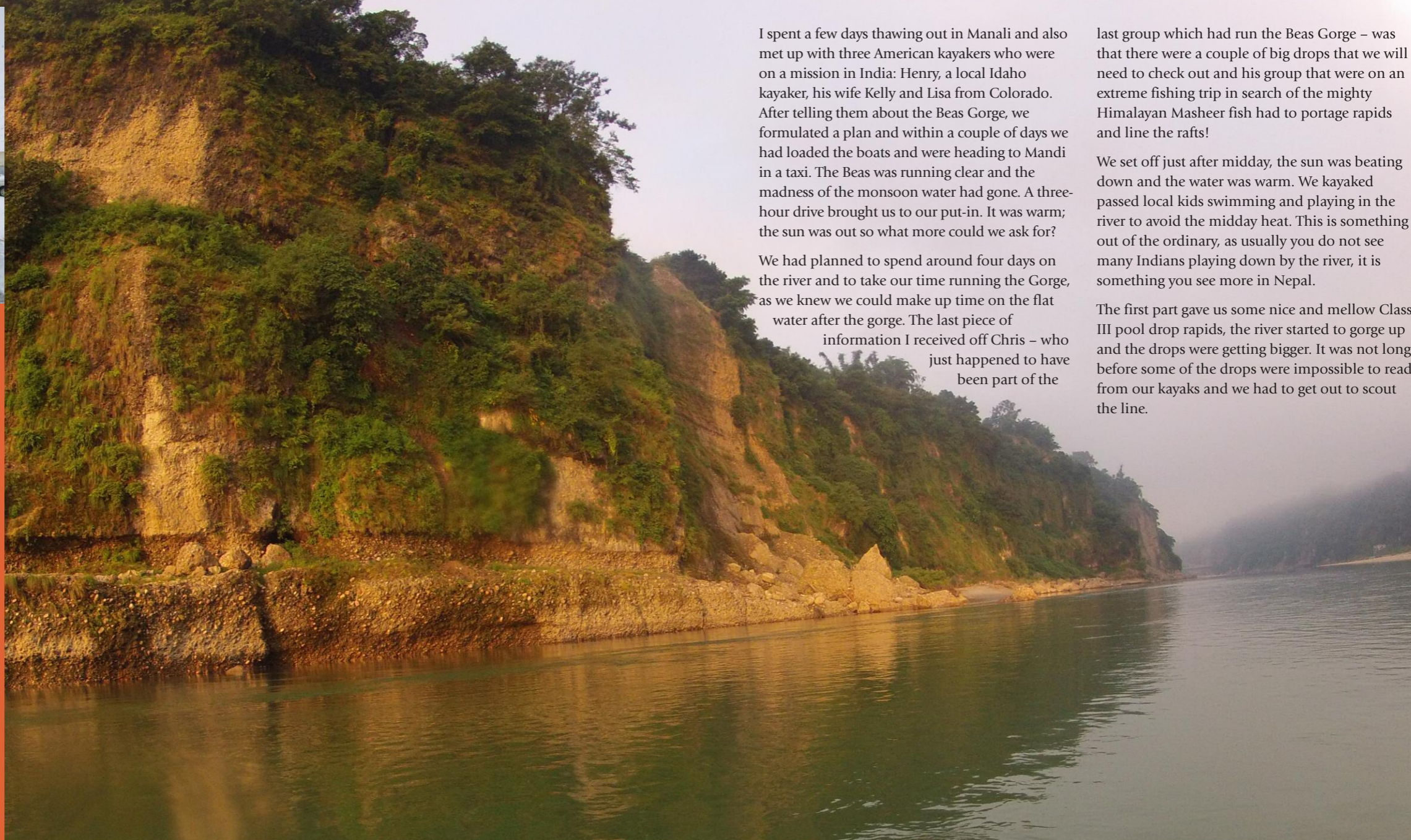
I had heard about the Beas Gorge being a Class V epic with a relatively short window for it to be run. Also you can probably count the amount of river runners that have been through the Beas Gorge on one hand, in fact the last known descent of the gorge was over 15 years ago!

I had just led a successful expedition on the Tsarap Chu and Zaskar Rivers in Ladakh, commonly known as the Grand Canyon of Asia. By chance a good friend of mine was in Leh with his jeep so rather than trying to suffer in a rickety old bus over some of the highest driven passes in the world, I persuaded Bob to put my kayak on the roof and head for Manali.

With storm clouds brewing over the Karakoram Mountains in Pakistan we decided to head off as soon as possible. What was supposed to be a nice two-day drive over some of the most spectacular scenery the Himalayas has to offer ended up being an epic of all proportions!

We got caught by heavy snowfall just on the other side of the Baralacha La Pass and spent a night and an extended morning in a Dhaba (a stone wall building with a tarp as a roof that is used while the road is open to feed and keep the convoy in trucks heading to Leh in tea).

We ended up being only the tenth vehicle into Manali after the storm and considering roads were closed due to landslides, avalanches, snow, rain and wind that was a pretty good effort.



I spent a few days thawing out in Manali and also met up with three American kayakers who were on a mission in India: Henry, a local Idaho kayaker, his wife Kelly and Lisa from Colorado. After telling them about the Beas Gorge, we formulated a plan and within a couple of days we had loaded the boats and were heading to Mandi in a taxi. The Beas was running clear and the madness of the monsoon water had gone. A three-hour drive brought us to our put-in. It was warm; the sun was out so what more could we ask for?

We had planned to spend around four days on the river and to take our time running the Gorge, as we knew we could make up time on the flat water after the gorge. The last piece of

information I received off Chris – who just happened to have been part of the

last group which had run the Beas Gorge – was that there were a couple of big drops that we will need to check out and his group that were on an extreme fishing trip in search of the mighty Himalayan Masheer fish had to portage rapids and line the rafts!

We set off just after midday, the sun was beating down and the water was warm. We kayaked passed local kids swimming and playing in the river to avoid the midday heat. This is something out of the ordinary, as usually you do not see many Indians playing down by the river, it is something you see more in Nepal.

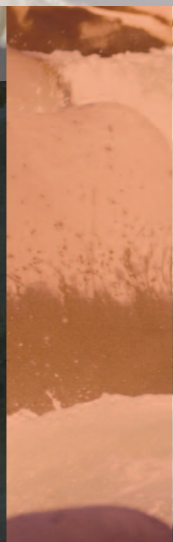
The first part gave us some nice and mellow Class III pool drop rapids, the river started to gorge up and the drops were getting bigger. It was not long before some of the drops were impossible to read from our kayaks and we had to get out to scout the line.





The moves were getting harder to make and we had to **punch** some

**huge waves** and **big holes**



## With polished boulders and rocks

all around it made for some great backdrops to the white water - which was now rising in intensity. We kayaked under a new bridge - our first navigational point, and then came a second older bridge built by the British many years ago.

This bridge was on its last legs and it was going to be a matter of when and not if it would finally collapse into the river. The river Rana came in from river right pumping the volume up and just below the confluence we decided to make our first camp on the left deep in the gorge. With the final rays of sunshine pushing through the gorge we set up camp and put the kettle on!

It was certainly warm that night, I really did not need my sleeping bag until the early hours and then it was just a case of dragging it over me. The mist was hanging around in the morning giving us a great atmosphere to the upcoming white water. By the time we packed away our kit and had

run the first rapid next to camp the sun had burnt through the mist and the sky was a deep blue.

The rapids were getting bigger; though the river was pool drop in character we now had to scout over huge rocks to find our lines. The moves were getting harder to make and we had to punch some huge waves and big holes. One rapid of note started with a drop over a kicker wave followed by a big move over to river left to avoid some nasty holes and boils before hitting and punching the final hole at the bottom of the rapid.

I ran first and got pushed around all over the place but managed to stay upright and get to a position where I could eddy out and set up my camera. Henry nailed the line and with his fully laden boat he just blasted through the bottom hole.

The girls were next and had mixed results but they both nailed the bottom hole! We were still keeping up our guard and rightly so as the rapids became longer and the lines narrower. Our journey through the gorge was going well and with the thought of two big drops that the fishermen portaged in our minds we were taking everything in our stride.

It was not long until we came to a new road bridge high above us. This was the third bridge and marked the end of the gorge! Just as the bridge appeared from nowhere around the corner the same could be said about the white water. It just mellowed out to class II with a lot of flat in-between, though the current was always taking us along at a good pace.

The climate had changed and we found ourselves in lush, dense vegetation. The Beas was now taking on more of a jungle character that you would expect from kayaking rivers in Ecuador! As far as the eye could see was trees and jungle, we started to look at the pristine sandy beaches to see if there were animal tracks around.





We passed some beautiful waterfalls coming into the river, a couple of temples with pilgrims bathing by the side of the river, a huge water/mining project and finally a sweet wave! We decided to make camp that night and were visited by local fisherman. They did not seem to have much of a catch, which was a bit surprising considering how many fish we had seen jumping out of the river in search of a meal. Just before one little drop a fish nearly landed on my spray deck!

The following day saw us arrive at yet another bridge, this time we were some 20km above Sajampur. We stopped and I headed up to the road in search of a taxi. I had a bit of a strange reception by the road. I do not think they have seen many tourists and especially those dressed for kayaking. Still the English wine and beer shop was open for business, actually selling whisky and a local brew that I could only compare to as rocket fuel or some kind of alcoholic drink that was sure to make you go blind! Still they said they could organise a jeep and told me to wait for 20 minutes.

Just how long is 20 minutes to an Indian? That was the question, usually anything over ten minutes means something long but believe it or not after what was a relatively short time our jeep turned up. We were on our way back to Manali.

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It had been an amazing trip, though only three days it was well worth the short drive (for Indian conditions) to get there. Henry, Kelly and Lisa were looking north and wanted to run the Chandra. I had ran the Chandra the previous year and after the warmth of the Beas Gorge I did not fancy freezing cold nights in the Lahaul Valley, so I decided to head back down to the warm waters of the Beas and to kayak two previously un-run rivers that fed into the Beas Gorge – the Rana and Binwa rivers alone.

## Steve Brooks

Steve has clocked up a fair few kilometres of white water so far in his career. In fact he has paddled in over 16 countries, on five continents including first descents along the way!

In the summer you will find Steve at his home near Landeck, Austria where he has been running a successful kayak school and guiding service for the past couple of years. When the Autumn sets in and with the weather getting colder and rivers drying up, Steve heads with his kayak to sunnier climes, always looking for that piece of river heaven. He seems to have found it in South America and the Indian Himalayas!

For more info check out: [www.gokayaking.at](http://www.gokayaking.at) and [www.stevebrooks.at](http://www.stevebrooks.at)