



INDIA

I spent quite a few seasons safety kayaking in Nepal – it is also where I learnt to guide. On our days off, we would chill out at Tea Time, drinking chai and watch the world drift by. It was here that I heard of one place in India that resembled Pokhara but on a different level. It lays on the road to the Tsarap Chu and the start of one of the Himalayas best self-support kayaking expeditions. The name of this place was of course Manali.

By Steve Brooks

Steve Brooks on his home river the Rosanna, Austria



The first time I visited Manali was in 2008

I appeared with a kayak, which seemed to draw a lot of attention to myself as there are not many kayakers that visit Himachal Pradesh. Now that you can fly up to Ladakh, most kayakers prefer to base themselves out of Leh rather than suffer the brutal bus journey up and over the Rohtang and Baralacha La Passes. Since 2008 I have been coming back to Manali year after year and slowly kayaking and exploring rivers in Himachal Pradesh. One that had been in my sight for a long time was the Parvati River. It has been run a fair few times, I know of four descents or sections paddled and we had checked it out a few years ago on Royal Enfield Bullets. But as with everything in Himachal, it is difficult to judge just how much water you need in the river!

Ute and I had just finished kayaking with Harry over in Uttarakhand and had road tripped back to Manali via the Yamuna and Tons Rivers, it was



Traditional houses in the Parvati Valley in Himachal Pradesh, India



The stunning mountain scenery of the Pir Pinjal mountain range at the end of the Parvati Valley, Himachal Pradesh

the last week of October and I decided to put in at Jari and kayak solo. We got an early start (7am is early for Manali), Pinku our taxi driver was ready to go. Ute would be coming along to get some shots from high up on the sketchy road as it weaves its way in and out hugging the cliffs way above the river. She would also try and get to the bank as much as possible depending on how fast I was running the river.

We found a great place to put-in and reluctantly the police checkpoint let us through as we confirmed we were not on our way up to Malana but instead taking a right after the bridge. The usual crowds started to gather up on the bridge as I put-in.

I was straight into a rapid under the bridge and as I tucked in and punched the first hole it was good to be back on the river again. The rapids were now flowing nicely one into the other. It was great read and run class IV (IV+). A couple of rapids made me get out of my kayak to take a look and all the way to Sarsardi Bridge I only portaged once. The current was always pushing me along and with the background views of snowcapped mountains and crystal clear blue skies, I could have thought I was on the Marsyangdi River in Nepal in 1998!

The character of the river started to change and as the walls closed in the river started to steepen

The Parvati River in Himachal Pradesh



Ute met me at the bridge and since I was doing well for time, I made the decision to enter the gorge. The character of the river started to change and as the walls closed in the river started to steepen. The rapids were getting more serious and I was now having to negotiate some hard whitewater. As I came to a bend in the river and what looked like a box canyon I stopped and took a look to see a 600m rapid consisting of two river wide monster holes. I managed to portage over the rocks on river right and continued making some progress running quite a few class V chicken lines! As the gorge started to open out again, I could see another bridge where Ute was again waiting for me. It had taken me three hours to run the main gorge.

I was offered the chance to take-out at Chhamarhan but with just a few more kilometres to go until I reached the confluence of the Beas I pushed on. I entered the second gorge and as I went to scout on the left I just hoped it would not be as full-on as the previous one. The entrance looked tricky and you could not see if there was a tongue through the two holes on what was the only line on far right next to the wall. By now I had a feel for the river and decided that the line would go. It certainly did and what came next was some great class IV read and run and the exit of the second gorge.

Steve working his way through another rapid on the Parvati River



Steve talking with Pinku at the put-in of Jari for the Parvati River



The river had now lost its gradient and was a mellow paddle for the last kilometre or two all the way to the confluence. I was elated and extremely tired. The Lower Parvati had taken it out of me but I left with some great memories of a river of whitewater; stunning backdrops, ancient villages and a culture and lifestyle that has not really changed that much over the years. I will certainly be heading back to the Parvati to kayak again, hopefully as soon as this year. Now you can see by what I mean progress is slow in kayaking and exploring the rivers of Himachal, as you keep wanting to head back to rivers such as the Parvati, Chandra and of course the Beas Gorge!

Steve Brooks

Steve is now running a successful kayak school in Austria. It is the perfect training ground and the ideal step into running bigger volume rivers in the Himalayas. When the rivers start to drop along with the temperature in Austria, you can find Steve leading, kayaking and exploring India's northern rivers, he has also spent many seasons working, guiding and exploring the rivers of Peru and Chile.

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4265m



Chandra

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