

# Three women and a river

Finally we were in Rishikesh, the yoga capital of the world and home to many creatures that were looking for direction or had found a new path. We had just completed an epic 14-hour journey taking all sorts of backroads, driving in and out of valleys, over ridges and pretty much all of it on dirt roads.

**Feature and photos by:** Steve Brooks. **We said our goodbyes to Chris; he was heading down to the Kali River and the annual Masheer Fishing Competition. For us it was another eight-hour jeep ride up to Nandaprayag. The monsoon had been kind to the Ganges River basin this year and so our journey was rather uneventful!**

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The heat was now becoming manageable the higher up the valley we headed and the environment was also changing to high alpine meadows with Cypress Pines lining the side of the river. Finally we were at the put-in.

Our team consisted of two American girls from Colorado, Kim and Annie plus Ute, my wife and myself. Ute is an Austrian and I suppose you can call me that too, though I do hold a British Passport. I have known Annie for years, we had kayaked the amazing Cotahuasi Canyon in Peru together back in 2008 and when she said that India was her next mission then we just had to come along!

### A sweet wave

Sorting out our equipment and packing it into our kayaks brought a small crowd of kids to the side of the river. With not much else to do for the rest of the day they decided to watch us and to see if any action was going to come. Well they were not disappointed! While we were packing we just could not keep our eyes off a sweet wave in the middle of the river.

After quite sometime surfing this big glassy green wave in our loaded boats we waved goodbye to Girish, our jeep driver, and the kids and set about heading down the river for an hour or so.

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It was mid-October and the Alaknanda was still taking a lot of water down from the mountains out to the Ganges, which for us was great. Big, warm water was in order after spending the beginning of October above 3,000 metres! The river was certainly big and we had some huge waves that just kept coming.



Above: Ute Heppke from Austria.



Above: The girls.



Above: Annie Quathamner from Colorado.



Above: Alaknanda camp.



Above: Kim Grant from Colorado.



Above: Shivanandi accommodation.





**Above:** Scouting the river and morning yoga.

A little further down brought us to our first main rapid. Full of holes it was a case of dodging a couple, riding the rooster tail and plugging the last one! Next came wave after wave, all read and run it was just a roller-coaster ride. Each time you looked back or out in front you saw a different team member as either you were in the trough and could only see a huge green tongue or as you reached the peak of the wave half the team were in different troughs, these were big waves!

### Notorious for leopards

After a big set of waves the river started to bend and on the right hand side it looked as though there was a secluded sandy beach behind a bunch of rocks. Perfect, with a stream running down we could not have asked for a better place to camp. The only exceptions were the leopard footprints all over the beach!



This whole area is notorious for leopards, though we have never seen one ourselves, we had heard the stories and there is even a book about one that ate a lot of villagers! So with camp made we then turned our attention to the driftwood and making sure we had enough for the night!

There were certainly a few rumblings in the forest that night but we were all still there the next morning and it was time to pack up and head back down the river.

We were expecting a long day, we had camped just above Langasu and it was still quite a way to Karnaprayag. However, the river was still pumping and everything down to Karnaprayag was just read and run big volume. A couple of holes needed to be avoided but the lines were there and it took us just one hour to reach Karnaprayag! Just below the confluence of the Pindar River came our first scout of the day. We had seen this on the drive up and for once in a very long time it actually looked harder from high up on the road! A crowd grew and soon we had half the town watching us from the road bridge high above.

The scout was probably the hardest part; it was right where the locals held their funeral pyres! With hair, ashes, burnt pieces of wood and clothing we tip-toed alongside the river to check the line. A few more holes to be avoided which pretty much summed up this river! The girls dropped in while I positioned myself on a large rock, camera at the ready.

All went well and we continued down to where the river started to gorge up and were kayaking some great read and run class IV rapids. Gauchar came an hour later and we met up with Shalabh and his team. Another scout observed the river going into a huge hole in the middle, punching a strong diagonal wave was our only option so with my camera at the ready the girls dropped in.

Within an hour we reached Shivanandi, our base for the next ten days and it was time to kick back, relax and drink some tea!

What a river the Alaknanda is! ♡

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## Steve Brooks

Steve has been living in Austria for well over a decade and now runs a Kayak School from his home just outside of the city of Landeck in the western part of Austria (when the skiing has finished!). Offering kayak courses and guided trips the Kayak School's knowledge of the local rivers and area is second to none! Throughout the summer Steve is on the river, be it coaching, guiding, running different sections, looking for waves and play-spots or trying to get that killer shot. In the Autumn, Steve heads to India to run some of the best white water the Himalayas has to offer. It is all about having fun on the river!



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