

"But we need to start at 4 am," he warns.

Excitement is back in the camp. We all get busy rounding up the personal equipment like harness, carabineers, et al.

THE CLIMB - SUMMIT RIDGE

We start at the appointed time of 4 am. The climb is toilsome and gets a bit risky when loose rocks start rolling down, just when we are about 200 m short of crest of the summit ridge. It takes a steady climb of three hours to reach the ridge top to have a magnificent spectacle of the entire Garhwal Himalayas before us.

The walk on the summit ridge of Nakurche is a painful one. One has to continuously climb up and down the many small pinnacles that dot the ridge while keeping an eye out on the steep slopes leading down both sides.

After an hour of arduous labour, we reach a 100-ft tall rocky pinnacle. "The way downwards is risky," informs Vinod over the radio.

"Can't we take the side route?" I ask. "We have to take the downward route to avoid risk," Vinod crackles back.

It is already 8.30 am and any such detour would add at least three to four hours more. The weather is predicted



PHOTO: KUNTAL JOSHER

to be nasty after 12 noon. I have to take a call.

"We should go down guys. Some other time," I tell the team. We are perhaps less than 300 m far from the summit.

We set the customary cairn and perform *pooja*. As I look along the ridge ahead, the pass over the Northern Chorgad Glacier to Baspa valley is clearly visible. We originally intended to crossover to Chitkul had we been successful in crossing over the South Col into the Chorgad valley.

On the right is the boundary of the Nelang watershed that gave birth to the Jahnavi. We witness the headwaters of Jadung Gaad, a highly inaccessible and desolate place strewn with crisscrosses of myriad glaciers. Slightly to its right are the extreme northeastern borders of Nelang — ThagLa and Tsang Chok La, barely visible.

Straight ahead, between Chorgad glacier and Jadung headwaters, the giants of Himachal-Reo Pargial and Leo Pargial visible and so is Rangrik Rang.

In the 4'o clock direction, our view

DEHRADUN SHATABDI
 TRAIN NUMBER
 (12017)
 FREQUENCY
 DAILY
 Delhi (DEP)
 17:00
 DEHRADUN (ARR)
 09:55



PHOTO: ARUN NEGI

A jubilant team poses for photographs after managing a safe descent from the summit and a view the mountains circled by a sudden rainbow

was blocked by a massive rocky mountain adorned with many rocky spires. We name it the Hawamahal peak.

To our left, the view is mesmerising. The whole set of ranges binding the Upper Taknore Patti are visible — Shrikanta, Gangotri, Auden's Col, Jogin, Thalaysagar, Bhrigupanth, Shiving, Meru, Satopanth, Chirbas, DeoParvat, Shri Kailash and far in the distance, Zaskar giants Mt Kamet and Mana. It is as if someone offering all the Garhwal giants in a single platter. I, like a hungry

traveller, feeding my eyes. Some journeys satisfy your adrenaline thirst, but some bring you close to your spiritual being. A sense of satisfaction engulfs me. My team and I have discovered a valley that has been neglected for years. It's a valley where history and Nature have a story to tell.

BACK TO THE PAVILION

The way down requires a bit of rappelling and lowering down. The sun is getting harsher and the snow softer. After much struggle, the entire team

glissades for almost 500 m and all of us reach back the camp safely.

By evening, it's clear that the weather is indeed turning for the worse. It is clear to us that we have to exit the valley as soon as possible before the rain strikes with full fury.

The next day, we have an uneventful but long walk back over the moraines of the Janak Glacier. Around 11 am, while resting near the Tower Peak campsite on our way to Janak Taal, we observe an interesting spectacle in the sky. There's a bright round halo of a rainbow around the sun. While we get busy clicking pictures of this, Joshi, one of the older Nepali porters says, "This isn't a right sign. When we see this rainbow, weather gets bad."

Only later we realise how correct he was when the freak cloudburst over Kedamath on June 15 created an unprecedented and unfortunate disaster. Probably the blessings of Lal Devta saved us.

