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Kugti Pass has been on my agenda for several years. The following description in Gary Weare's (Lonely Planet) "Trekking the Himalayas" is what originally enticed me to this area. While the Kugti pass is the most regularly crossed path over the Pir Panjal between Brahmaur and Lahaul, it is by no means easy. Even the Gaddi shepherds regard the pass with caution and will not lead their flocks across until the weather is clear and settled. The Himalaya mountains rise out of the Deccan Plateau in this region as a series of ranges roughly in a NW-SE direction. The first range that I crossed took me from a small town called Utralla across the Dhauladhar Range and Jalsu Pass in particular to the small village Nayagram. I intend to talk about this trek in a separate post.

This description begins when I leave from Holi on the 23rd of June crossing the Pir Panjal Range and until I reach Udaipur on the 28th June 2011. It is described over two posts. This first post takes you to the beginning of the trek where the official trekking starts namely Hadsar.

When I first arrived in Nayagram I had thought that I might stay. But my enquiries led me to believe that no accommodation existed. Actually I asked for a hotel which probably didn't exist but I am sure someone would have befriended me soon enough. Actually that did happen when I stopped at what looked like the most popular provisioning store in the village. It looked like they were having a roaring trade whereas the few other stores around with similar provisions looked empty. Well it soon became apparent as the owners and family extended a warm welcome to me. I started to share a bottle of beer with my new found friends and lots of fried nibblies to go with the drinks. (I don't drink beer normally but after today's trek I needed something a little different to sweet tea or mango juice) Well the manager said I could sleep on the floor of his shop but I declined as I reckon a few creature comforts were needed to perk me up for my next trek. So I caught a shared taxi down the valley in which the Ravi River flows to a small town called Holi. Actually after what comforts I had enjoyed on this first trek Holi seemed luxurious. The PWD resthouse run by the government had an enormous room just for me and the rest of the building seemed extremely empty although the manager claimed I couldn't go upstairs as government officials were coming. Didn't bother me though as after I had had a good meal in town, some fresh fruit, a haircut and then hobbled back to the room I just wanted to get to bed. I really mean hobble as what had been the last day of my first trek had been extremely long and exhausting.

The next morning I caught the Public bus to Brahmour. I think only one bus runs to either Chamba or Brahmour each day and returns in the afternoon. Just before I got on the bus I met a small transport taxi operator named Nika. Nika suggest I stay at his homestay where they had one extra room. Duly noting this down I settled down to a rather crowded bus journey to Brahmour. Fortunately I got on the bus early enough so that I had a seat. Standing is no fun as you can't even see out and your head is permanently bent over.

The trip down the valley is much like many other bus journeys that I have experienced in the Himalayas of India. Essentially you say your prayers and hope for the best. The drivers are generally good but I certainly wouldn't want to drive on these roads. The views into the valley are often amazing and you constantly wonder how so many people can grow crops on such steep mountainsides and often on small terraced handkerchief sized plots. Just getting up and down the hillsides I am sure would be too much for most westerners.



The junction of the Ravi River

The Ravi River continues to flow in the direction of Chamba. However the bus makes a right hand turn at the junction of the Budhil Nala river. On the map this looks like a small tributary but is actually a very fast and noisy river which I can verify as I had to sleep next to it in Hadsar.

Brahmour is quite a big town well endowed with educational facilities and famous for the Hindu temple area in the middle of the town. This temple area is a very pleasant place to congregate. All the locals seem to use it and the schools radiate off it. Particularly noticeable is that no motor traffic is allowed here.

As it happened I was tired when I got there and still in-firmed after the ordeal of my first trek so I decided to check out Nika's place. Nika wasn't home yet but his wife sent a boy to guide me and I was soon settled in a nice room with views down the valley. (200rupees/night I think). It was good also to get everything off my back and it left me time to wander around the town and to go to the Internet shop right next to the temple complex.



The Hindu temple complex

Not many Indian or foreign tourists at this time of year. Not sure why as the climate was lovely. Much building is going on at this time of year. I imagine many of these projects take many years as

the summer season is so short and country people are either easily distracted or have other responsibilities such as getting the crops and other necessities done before the weather turns cold again.

I only stayed one night in Brahmour. This was a mistake as I was quite tired but I had thought that Hadsar would also be nice. You see Hadsar is also the setting off point for treks to Mani Mahesh lake. This little trek probably can be done in two days and is one which Hindus make a pilgrimage to each year. But nice as my room was I guess I felt little overwhelmed by my hosts. you see they offered to cook dinner and thus make a little more money. It seemed like a good idea except their access was through the kitchen window attached to my bedroom. When I first moved in I didn't understand this arrangement and peculiarities seem to me much a part of the normal pattern of living in India. But it did infringe on my privacy having people climbing in an out of your window. It actually became worse when I suggested it might be more convenient to use the interconnecting door and go out through my entrance door. Obviously the logistics of this venture were still being sorted out but I really felt a need for a little more privacy.



The view from my room in Brahmour

I had also been sorting out how I would get a porter or guide or both. I was sort of basing my experience on my Laddakh adventure done the previous year. Rates in Laddakh on the Darcha/Padam trek seemed from memory to be cheaper. I had met one chap downtown who looked quite good but I balked at his price. Nika also offered but again I think it was a money thing as he didn't look to be the trekking type.

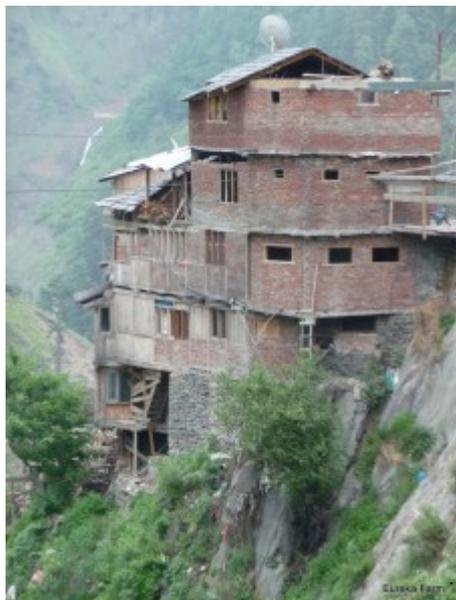


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The next day I had another walk around town and in particular the area around the Hindu temples. I also tried getting on the internet but alas it wasn't working and again when I came back later. The main feature of this beautiful day was to sit somewhere in the temple square and watch the kids parade and get ready to go into the classrooms. The kids all assemble for school in the temple area in various groups depending on which school they belong to. They then go through a series of military exercises to the accompaniment of drums with a bit of singing thrown in. It is quite therapeutic watching these children being so dexterous. Maybe that's what eventually motivated me to get my bag and hit the road again; this time for Hadsar.

Its not a great distance to Hadsar so I didn't expect it to take long if I caught a shared taxi or a bus. Going downtown however I found that there were no buses and the taxis wanted to charge me a private rate. So I decided to walk out of town and let fate sort things out. I remember clearly that this little saga didn't go well. I was worn out, the rucksack and extras were causing me grief and worse of all there didn't seem to be any traffic. About the time I trekked down and around the town with a deep gorge to my left a couple of tractors came down the road. Some school kids got a lift in the trailer and sat alongside the driver on the tractor as they passed me. One of the girls must have taken pity on 'Uncle' and told the driver to stop and pick me up. I wasn't going to argue with that suggestion. But I paid for it with all the bumping and my condition I wasn't enjoying this experience at all.

Eventually this lift came to an end. The tractors were part of the workforce working on the road and I took off again on foot. Eventually one of the taxis I had met earlier stopped and now offered me a share taxi at a considerably reduced rate which gave me some justification for the stubbornness that I had shown earlier in my failed negotiations with the taxi drivers at Brahmour.



The room at the bottom, front is mine

So I arrived towards evening in Hadsar. Not much of a town just a number of dwellings & shops often at roadside level all perched on the side of a gorge with a very noisy river running past. Even the food looked uninviting and eventually I settled on an omelette. My hotel room was mixed in with the rubble of extensions and airy with lots of cracks through which you could ponder during the night just how safe the building would be if it had a nudge by nature. Before retiring I asked if anyone was interested in being my guide. Eventually it settled down to two guys coming with me. One guy was experienced and would be the guide and the younger one would act as a porter. There wasn't a lot of choices and as it happened we walked each day much longer than would have been normal. To bed then exhausted and the next morning at 7am we would meet at the local dhaba and then start.

Day1 of the trek: Just about to cross the river and then we follow a 4 wheel drive track for a few k's. We are still below the tree line and beautiful deodar trees are all around us. No traffic and road is pretty rough. Fortunately it still doesn't reach the village of Kugti. Much of what you see can best be explained by the photos.

our team ready to start trekking



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Meta data

Camera / Type	DMC-TZ11
Aperture	F 4.5
Focal Length	11.3 mm
Shutter speed	1/60 sec
Date / Time	June 26, 2011 7:16 am

I will add to this but will publish what I have written and look forward to hearing whether you like these sort of stories. Double click any of the photos and you will see them a lot better.

[go to first day of trek](#)