



Miscellany

2020-21

ANNUAL JOURNAL OF THE HIKING CLUB



"

License to Thrill

Years later you'll only remember the stories and the people.

Many Adventures, one family

It was the highest moment of my life, quite literally.

A New Kind of High

Wall Climbing can only be described as ecstasy.

"



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INDEX

01 Editor's Note

03 Use your legs!
By Prithvi

05 A New Kind of High
By Gregory Joseph

08 Many Adventures,
One Family
By Mawia Rokhum



10 License To Thrill
By Aman Kumar

14 A Trek Amidst
Uncertainty
By Shubham Meena

21 Types of Knots
By Saransh A. Kumar

23 Rucksack Essentials
*By Nancy Nixon &
Yashasvi Chaudhary*





3 Must Watch Documentaries

27 The Mountain Within
By Swaswati Das

29 Free Solo
By Hazael Hanuk

31 The Dawn Wall
By Gregory Joseph

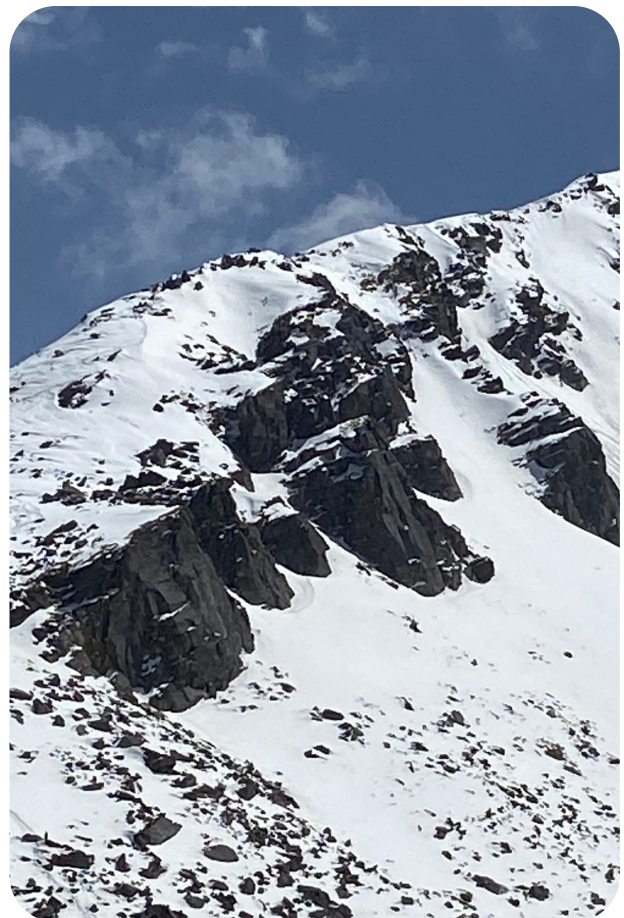
Treks you cannot afford to miss

36 Har ki Dun
By Ananya Kumar

38 Rupin Pass
By Gregory Joseph

40 Mandani Valley
By Ananya Kumar

42 Goechala
By Gregory Joseph





Editor's Note



There are moments in every HC member's college life which they cherish. These include receiving a free fall from the 11 meter wall we all venerate, jamming to rock songs around a bonfire in the middle nowhere at a height of 5000 m, playing card games that some of us still do not understand fully to this day and partying away all your worries at the HC flat. To the unacquainted starry eyed first years, let me assure you that this club is like no other. It's an escape from your



usual mundane college routine, an escape infused with all sorts of adrenaline pumping adventures, an unquenchable thirst for thrill and, god willing, sweet memories that you will look back at fondly. It is a family that you come to share your good times and bad, and becomes so closely-knit, that it becomes the hardest to say goodbye to, so we never did. Even after a year of graduating as the "Covid batch" and having no activities at the wall, the love for the club comes out through games of Pictionary and meeting other ex-Hiking Club members on our individual expeditions to the mountains. Suffice to say, you can remove the person from HC but you can't remove HC from the person.

Through our annual journal, Miscellany, we want to share our delightful experiences at the club. We hope that this ignites a fire in your soul to be part of the crazy world that this club is. We hope you find your happy place here, just like so many of us did. For our past members, we hope this journal brings back the fond memories you made here.

As Editor in chief, I would like to thank all the members of the club that contributed to the journal. From lovely cartoons to beautiful photographs to heart-warming articles, none of this would have been possible without you all. I would also like to thank our Staff advisor, Dr. Rohit Mathew, and the Principal, Prof. John Varghese, for their valued guidance and support.

*Tanya Ghai
Sponsorship, Publicity Head & Editor In Chief
Hiking Club (2020-21)*





Use your legs!

Prithvi



'I could top that thing easily!' was the first thought that popped into my head when I saw the climbing wall at St Stephen's. A few weeks later as I hung from what felt like 20 feet off the ground, I realised I may have underestimated it a bit.

I admire rock climbing greatly because it is one of those sports that demands you to be well rounded to perform. Strength isn't worth much if you don't know how to place your



feet. Technique won't take you far if you haven't first plotted a route in your mind, and aside from possessing all those qualities when your arms are burning and your legs begin to buckle you need the mental rigour to push on. Plus the adrenaline rush you get climbing up the side of a mountain seems like quite the added bonus. That's why when I heard that the Hiking Club was having its first meet for the semester I was super excited for my first climb. I skipped over to 'The Wall' and met Tanya (who taught me a fair bit about the right technique), Nathan (who belayed for my first climb) and Jacob (who took my intro while I was dangling from a rope 80% up the wall). After running 10 rounds and getting briefed on the rules I was ready to start 'Climbing Now!'. 'Climb on' affirmed Nathan and I leapt up not having the slightest clue that my legs were just as important as my arms. With technique that was the exact opposite of efficient I hobbled up the first few panels but as I reached the 7th panel my arms started burning up. It was at this point that I was reminded of the existence of my limbs when Tanya

yelled at me to use my legs and I slowly climbed up further till the 8th panel where I learnt that it was a good idea to plan my route beforehand because I had no inserts within reach to grab onto. I was stuck until Tanya helped me re-route and climb up till the edge of the 8th panel. It was at this point that my hands decided they would no longer be subjected to such torture and as I reached for the insert on the 9th panel I lost my grip and fell off. Except I didn't fall, I just dangled a few metres off the ground thanks to Nathan and his belaying, which I had pretty much forgotten about. That's when Jacob took my intro mid-air and I realised two things; firstly, that I wasn't very comfortable with heights and secondly, that the aura of the hiking club was so warm and familial that I'll definitely be climbing again. And again. And again!

Ever since then I hurry over to the wall every time the hiking club announces that they are 'Climbing



now' and I'm really grateful to have met seniors like Tanya, Jacob, Lael, Nathan, Angus, Anysha & Shayanak who've been nothing but helpful and supportive. Due to the state that the world is in right now I didn't get to climb nearly as much as I wanted to but more importantly I couldn't interact with my seniors as much which is why I hope they keep coming to the wall whenever they get time out of their busy schedules. It's thanks to them I still look at the wall and think to myself 'I could top that thing, but not easily!'



A New Kind of High

Gregory Joseph



My first climb at the college wall was a high I had never experienced before. My debut to the wall was on the 5th of March this year. I was petrified at the beginning, but still decided to give it a shot.

As an equal blend of fear and excitement pumped through my veins, I was asked to wear the harness which I somehow managed and was briefed on what precautions to take before the climb. I messed up by forgetting to communicate properly with my belayer and as a result, was told to climb again. This time I aced my first step, and with adrenaline pumping through my arms, I pushed every move and slowly picked up pace. I saw myself reach a higher point than the previous climber. I didn't see myself climbing to the 8th panel on my very first day, but I did end up doing it. The team below cheering you on gives you an exquisite feeling, making you want to go higher than you are. I felt my hands give up, and the next second saw me freely falling to the crash pads below, which was another experience altogether. Later that day I met some new people, who were proud of the



sport they trained for, and heard daring stories about experiences that I wished myself to be a part of someday in the future.

One thing I absorbed from the sport was the fact that there is always a blind trust between the climber and the belayer, and the minute communication between both of them is like an example of true friendship. The Hiking Club along with adventure, represents the strong

bond between the members that made me feel more emotionally attached to the sport than any other sport I have played in my entire life. Ever since my debut, I've been to the wall, more often than I can count. Each day I sailed through the progress and saw myself improving each time I made my climb. Climbing tests your body's limits. It lets you set your goal and pushes you to break them every time, and more importantly, wall climbing can only be described as ecstasy.







Many Adventures, One Family



Mawia Rokhum

Coming to St. Stephen's College, the one and only expectation I had was competing against hundreds of academically excellent students that have given their all to get here. I was never a front runner in my class and never driven by what is considered 'conventional', so naturally I was extremely shocked when I made it into the college. Obviously, I haven't experienced college even to half its potential due to the pandemic and haven't been able to enjoy campus culture, 'intros' and the societies and clubs to their full extent. While going through my messages, I came across a group chat named "Hiking Club Family" and wondered why it was called that and what made this 'a family'. Being an outdoor lover, I joined immediately.

Initially I wondered how *this* club would manage to keep anyone interested and occupied during a pandemic. To my surprise, they did. Through social media, they ensured that we were active in our own towns and cities and somehow even managed to make it fun for us first years. I hadn't really interacted with



any Hiking Club member or senior up until the club finally organised a climbing session at IMF. Having climbed several times during middle school and reaching the top, I was excited to see how high I'd be able to get now. Underestimating the climb, I just went for it. Needless to say, I was drained. The seniors weren't just going to let us go though. They pushed us to our limits and motivated us to go higher until our bodies could no longer function. I couldn't reach the top several times and I thought I'd be discouraged.

However, the surge of adrenaline pumping through your veins is motivation enough to climb the wall again and again until you're completely worn out. The feeling of knowing you tried your best is extremely liberating and that's what the wall did for me. I cannot wait to finally try out the wall at college once the pandemic situation eases!

Then came the night of the trek with these people, now this was an experience. I was one of two first years who went on a trip with seniors

whom I had barely interacted with and some who I had never even seen or heard of. I was pretty anxious at first but as we ascended and descended the mountains I understood why they named the group "Hiking Club Family". I could see how much they all cared about each other, how much they valued each other and how much they respected each other. I ascended the mountains with strangers and descended the mountains with family. They all made sure it was the highest moment of my life, quite literally.





License To Thrill

Aman Kumar



After the absolute misfortunes we faced for the past two treks with bus breakdowns, dead chachas, and snowstorms, this year's Pangarchulla trek going smoothly was nothing short of a blessing. With that, my name was finally changed from AKCC (Aman Kumar 'Camp Coordinator') to the all respected AKTC (Aman Kumar 'Trek Coordinator').

This trek was important for all of us, given our last year being spent almost completely in isolation from the outside world (at least for the responsible ones). The days of acquiescently banging thalis and sitting inside were behind us and we

looked to the trek as something to rid us of the internal somberness.

For me, this trek was about perseverance, understanding the mountains, the stories, the people, and of course, screaming *Kobeyeee* at the top of our lungs. Never forget the *Kobeyeee*, because Alcea's interviewer definitely won't, nor will the guide; some say he still wakes up to those sounds and becomes stupider every time.

The perseverance bit came when Franco, Reji and I began feeling dizzy, our legs began to buckle, and we didn't know how much more of this we had to bear till the peak. That added to the lying guides saying "Thodi door aur, bus, sirf 100m."





a little further, only 100m)” gave us false hope and we thought “chalo”. It was Jacob and my last trek (at least as students from college), so we had to make it to the top, and Kevin said “If you all do it first, I’ll do it” and went. Little did we know there were about 25 more of those ‘100 meters’ left. We went as slowly as we could, sinking into the snow every step of the way, going along a path made by an absolute madman (from our very own Hiking Club). Eventually we made it close enough to see some of the group at the top which gave us the energy to pull through the last stretch. With not enough energy to actively talk or participate in the group activities I just sat down and soaked it all in: the view, the people, and the Kobeyee.

The ever menacing winds at the top, relentless even after the difficult climb, the annoyingly long descent and the melting of the snow causing our legs to sink even further tell us that the mountains are not forgiving and don’t care about you: they were here a long time before you, and will remain for a long time after. They are constant and self serving. What makes a climb an experience are the people. The stories. The trek wouldn’t have been a trek without vatnasaayam or “oh yeah now I got it, Soumil Saxena” or making snow slides or discovering 3 skulls or Kundu stopping for an hour to help an HC member and without hesitation peaking in 45 minutes or the random dance sessions in the middle of nowhere or kathhhhorori or

dissing K-pop. Years later you'll only remember the stories and the people. The camaraderie when they stayed back instead of leading when you were having difficulties, when they generously shared their trail food even though they had nothing left for themselves, when they chose to accompany you on the way back when you realised you couldn't go

on, when they offered to carry the bag when it was your turn, these are all small things that are immeasurable on the mountain and teach you more about your friendships and the real nature of the people you surround yourself with. All of this to me, is why I choose to put myself through the physical rigor, and will continue to do so for years to come.







A Trek Amidst Uncertainty



Shubham Meena

“The world is not a solid continent of facts sprinkled by a few lakes of uncertainties, but a vast ocean of uncertainties speckled by a few islands of calibrated and stabilized forms.”

~Bruno Latour

Uncertainty defines human life. It is the elixir which keeps us from drowning into an existential crisis day in, day out as we have little clue what tomorrow brings. It keeps us in constant self-doubt while we try to decode every situation in our own unique manner. We keep looking for certainty, and comfort ourselves with the thought of it, even though in our subconscious we know it will always be uncertain. The current pandemic might be the perfect analogy for uncertainty. Since its inception it has made us adapt and evolve to it, in

manners that we are completely unfamiliar with. Connecting with friends virtually and coping with stress in confined spaces, the pandemic has changed the world to a point of no return. Uncertainty brings out the best and worst in human beings, with varied emotions and reactions to different situations, as perspective is contingent on circumstances. We make sense of stories in retrospect, even though they pan out on their own, so as to create and present stories which make sense. I have tried to do the same.



The Pangarchulla trek was right from the start (the bus stop near Green Café) till the end (somewhere in Vijay Nagar), a trek amidst uncertainty. The day we began was around the time when the signs of the second wave of the pandemic had begun to show. Border checks were becoming mandatory, partial lockdowns were deliberated. No one was sure how things would pan out, I even imagined the group locked down in some isolated area, the thought of which I decided to call a beautiful tragedy. Gulling was our first campsite and it was the day we did things we pictured ourselves doing on a trek, from setting up our camps to collecting firewood, from singing and dancing around the bonfire (the instructor tried his level

best to make us enter our tents early but the view from campsite prevailed in this battle) to ending the day with mindless laughter and conversations under the moonlight. By the time we reached Khullara everyone had their minds set on how to go about the summit day. Encountering snowfall here was a welcome sign that we would have clear skies the next day. We started for the peak after 3 hours of sleep and a breakfast consisting of Maggi and lemon tea, which would certainly count as one of the most disastrous starts for summit day. It took us around nine hours to reach the summit. Our journey included constant thoughts of giving up, sleeping at the most welcoming rock and finishing our trail food every time we stopped to catch our breath





during this excruciating climb. We weren't able to make much sense of how to feel upon reaching the peak. As sleep deprived as we were, we managed to sit down on the nearest rocks we could find at the summit. We tried to shout as loudly as possible upon reaching, but nothing more than the feeblest of voices came out. I wondered whether this was what achievement looked like, a tough climb during which you focus on the target and upon reaching it, start reminiscing about the journey up to that point. The descent part was simple, all we could do was wonder how we had climbed up in the first place. Upon reaching the camp we just searched for two things: food and rest. Maybe this whole experience could be what some call 'living in the present'.

On contemplating the trek after reaching the camp, the thought struck me that one wrong step could have proved fatal. Death was so near, and yet so far. It was ever present, yet I never felt more alive. Did I conquer the fear of death? Absolutely not, although it wouldn't be unfair to say that I did make a step towards making my peace with this imminent fear. The sea of mountains made us realize how small our problems are, that we indeed are nothing but specks of dust in this vast universe, as Sagan would like us to believe. The paradoxical feeling which mountains provide, of observing and giving a shot to finding the meaning of life, and simultaneously discovering the meaninglessness of it, is probably why they remain a mystery that we keep trying to figure out.

Not having access to a mobile network since departing Gulling was another revelation in itself. Frantically running towards those who found a connection momentarily to send a message across to your loved ones that you are safe, is when you finally realize what matters to you and where your priorities actually lie; which we keep ignoring in routine circumstances. On regaining access after descending to Joshimath (from where we started the trek), I switched on the Internet and I saw every

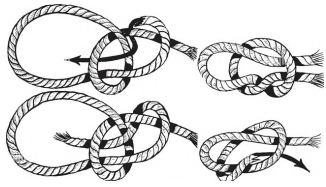
notification which came my way in a different light. Instead of just a message, I saw the person behind it. Instead of a missed call, someone's concern or effort to connect. I responded to things in a mindful manner, now aware of the temporary nature of things and of life itself. It might have finally made me aware of the irony of choosing the most beautiful flowers during a funeral, as we forget to choose the same during a lifetime. After all, we can blame it on uncertainty.





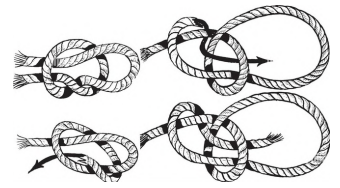






Types of Knots

Saransh Alexander Kumar



Overhand Knot:

The Overhand Knot or Thumb Knot is the smallest, simplest and most commonly used knot. It is used as a stopping knot, for example, to prevent the end of a rope from untwisting. When tied at the end or standing part of a rope, this knot prevents it from sliding through a block, hole, or another knot. It can also be used to increase a person's grip on a rope.

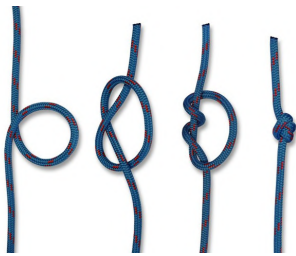


Image Source: handymariner.com

Double Figure Eight Loop:

A double figure-eight loop, (also known as bunny ears, or a dog eared loop) is a type of knot that forms two parallel loops and resembles the figure-eight loop.

A variation of this knot exists, known as the double figure-eight follow-through that creates another loop below the bulk of the knot, a feature that is useful for clipping safety ropes into.

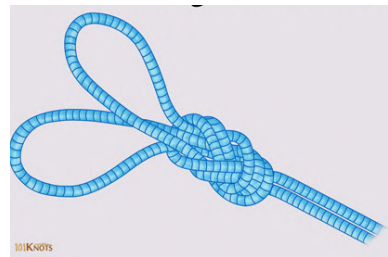


Image Source: 101 knots

Single Figure Eight Loop:

The Figure Eight Loop is one of the best known and most widely used of all knots. It is probably the safest and quickest way to form a loop at the end of a rope. It is comparatively easy to tie and it stays tied. Its disadvantages – it's difficult to adjust and cannot easily be untied after loading – tend to be outweighed by its general usefulness.

Yosemite Bowline:

This is an alternative method of finishing off the Bowline to give a more compact and secure tying-on knot. In some countries climbing organisations insist that it is the only safe and recommended way to finish off the bowline knot. This turn of the working end adds a significant measure of safety to the Bowline in times where the knot is to be used for life support.

Fisherman's Knot:

This knot is also used in climbing to connect two ropes together. You can use it with two lines of similar or different diameter.

Although the fisherman's knot can be used with strands of almost any diameter, including rope, it's most effective on strings, twines, and other thin strands – hence, why it's so popular with anglers.

Better yet, this knot is quick, simple, and easy to tie. It basically consists of two overhand knots, each tied on a separate length, combined together with a slight variation.

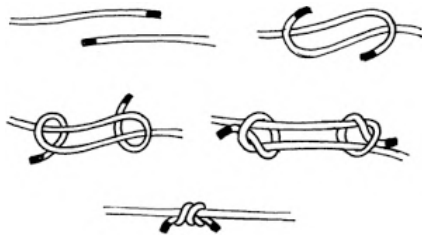


Image Source: scoutwiki.scouts.org.za

Barrel Knot:

The Barrel Knot is a useful knot that can be used on its own or as the beginning for other knots such as the Double Fisherman's Knot or the Blood Knot (though the blood knot is quite different).

The barrel knot is a friction knot that will tighten on itself as you pull or on the object that you have tied this knot around. It will not slip if tied properly.

Munter Hitch:

The Munter hitch, also known as the Italian hitch, Mezzo Barcaiolo, or the Crossing Hitch, is a simple adjustable knot, commonly used by climbers, cavers, and rescuers to control friction in a life-lining or belay system. To climbers, this hitch is also known as HMS, the abbreviation for the German term Halbmastwurfsicherung, meaning half clove hitch belay. This technique can be used with a special "pear-shaped" HMS locking carabiner, or any locking carabiner wide enough to take two turns of the rope.



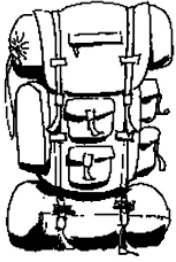
Image Source: cmcpro.com

Clove Hitch:

The Clove Hitch is another widely used knot. It is quick and easy to tie using the end, or the middle of the rope. This knot is often used to start and finish lashings and to fasten a rope to a timber, post, etc. The Clove Hitch is an easy knot to untie even after a load has been applied.

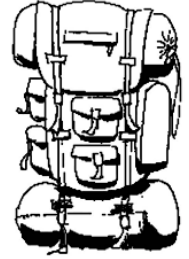


Image Source: eoceanic.com



Rucksack essentials

Nancy Nixon & Yashasvi Chaudhary



While packing a rucksack, the two main considerations you need to sort your gear by are how much the items weigh and how regularly you will be using it. The aim is to put together a pack that is balanced effectively. A packed rucksack should sit comfortably on the back without affecting your center of gravity. As for the size, a 65L rucksack is pretty much ideal for moderate treks. Rain cover is a bonus.



DOs

1. Roll your clothes; an army roll is the most efficient way.
2. Save shoes until last.
3. Remember all personal items - medication, feminine products, toiletry, deodorant. No point carrying soap and shampoo.
4. Mandatory Documents - aadhaar card, negative covid report and vaccination certificate.
5. Adequate layering - depends from trek to trek.
6. Headlamp instead of a hand torch is always preferred to have your hands free for other activities.

DON'Ts

1. Don't pack too much - only what is absolutely necessary
2. Don't get packaged food
3. If possible, avoid tampons or sanitary pads; instead, you may consider carrying menstrual cups
4. Don't procrastinate packing till the end. Get done with it as early as possible
5. Don't forget to get a walking stick, it is foldable and can be easily fit in the rucksack
6. Do not carry expensive belongings

HOW TO PACK A RUCKSACK



(1) MEDIUM WEIGHT ITEMS

PUT THINGS THAT YOU MAY NEED QUICK ACCESS TO AT THE TOP OF YOUR BAG. (FOR EXAMPLE, TORCH & FIRST AID BOX)

(2) HEAVIEST ITEMS

PUT HEAVY THINGS (LIKE FOOD & COOKING EQUIPMENT) TO YOUR BACK AND BETWEEN YOUR SHOULDER BLADES AS IT ALLOWS YOUR HIP TO TAKE THE WEIGHT AND NOT YOUR BACK.

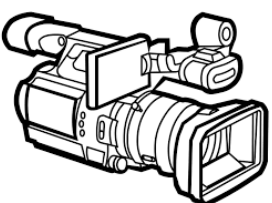
(3) LIGHTWEIGHT ITEMS

PUT LIGHTWEIGHT ITEMS THAT YOU USE OFTEN SUCH AS TOWELS AND CLOTHES AWAY FROM YOUR BODY. THIS HELPS MAINTAIN THE BALANCE OF WEIGHT CLOSER TO YOUR BACK TO EASE COMFORT AND STABILITY.

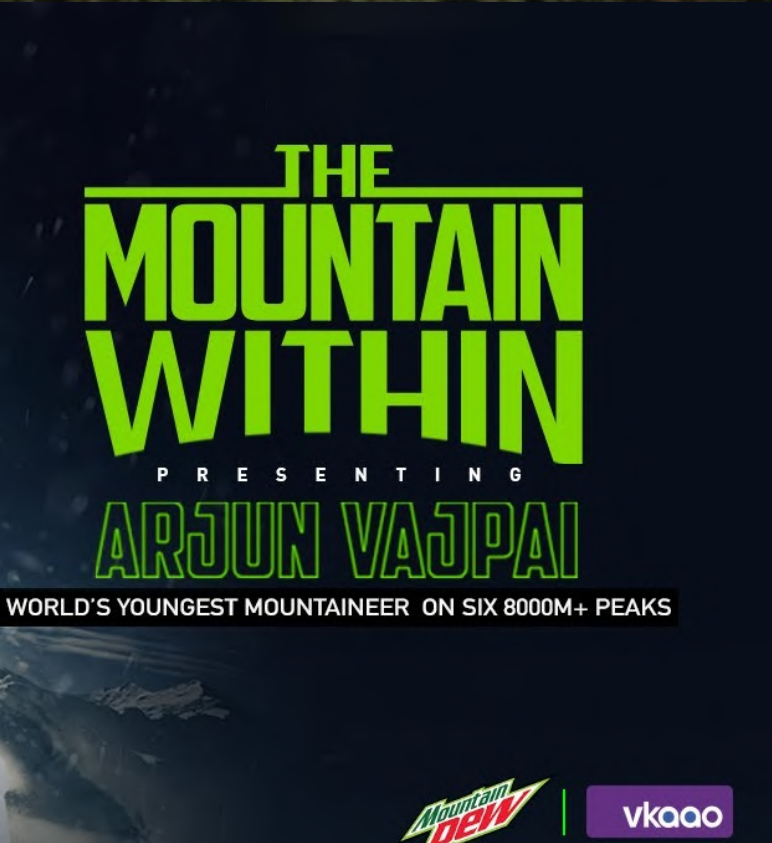
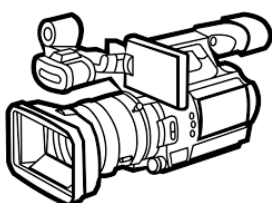
(4) LEAST USED ITEMS

THE VERY BOTTOM OF YOUR RUCKSACK IS THE BEST SPOT FOR LEAST USED ITEMS SUCH AS YOUR SLEEPING BAG, PILLOW & SLEEPWEAR. THESE WON'T BE NEEDED UNTIL YOU SET UP CAMP SO THEY CAN EASILY SIT AT THE BOTTOM OF YOUR BAG.





3 MUST WATCH DOCUMENTARIES





The Mountain Within

Swaswati Das



Set amidst some of the highest mountains in the world, this documentary follows a 27 years old mountaineer, Arjun Vajpai from Noida whose passion lies in the harsh, snow-clad mountains that quite literally makes one feel on top of the world. It is often said in the mountaineering world that you don't summit the mountain, the mountain chooses you to summit it. This indeed seems true when we hear of Arjun Vajpai summiting the Mt. Everest at the mere age of 16.

This 51 mins-long documentary chronicles the journey of Arjun right from when he summited the Mt. Everest in 2010 to his recent expedition to summit the mighty quality increase proportionately in each of his successive expeditions. This narration is interestingly woven

around interviews of people close to Vajpai, including his parents, close friends and instructors, who share their side of the story, thereby adding a personal touch to it. It beautifully portrays the challenges and obstacles that a mountaineer faces in order to summit some of the highest points on earth. The screenplay follows a chronology from Vajpai's first ever expedition to his struggles at various other mountaineering expeditions such as the one at Cho-Oyo, where he survived a near-death experience, to Mt. Makalu- a mountain that he spent four years trying to summit. An interesting story that is worth mentioning is Vajpai's realisations during his time in Mt. Makalu. Vajpai reminisces losing one of his team members and friends in that expedition. It was at this loss of a friend that he realised that his and everyone else's life has an expiry date to it and that life's clock is ticking away and that this inevitable end is not under our control. It was Mt. Makalu that taught him to live and do justice to every moment that he is alive. Arjun's aim is now to attempt history by being the youngest to summit the fourteen 8000+



Source: www.sevensummitreks.com

Kanchenjunga, the third highest peak in the world, at 8,586 m (28,169 ft)



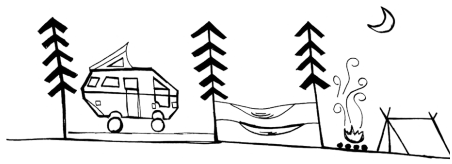
Source: www.vice.com

Indian Mountaineer Arjun Vajpai feeling one with nature at 8000 metres above sea level

mountain peaks of the world, thereby finishing off the Grand Slam of Mountaineering.

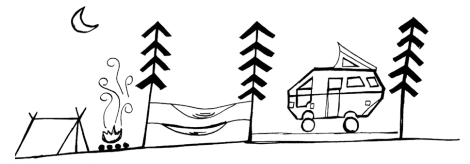
My major takeaway from the documentary was the realisation that an activity as difficult as this, not only require great physical but even greater mental strength. When you see Arjun Vajpai, sitting from across you in the screen, you not only see a mountaineer talking about his experiences but also notice a much wiser being in his personality; and rightly so, for when you experience a near-death situation or when you constantly have to remind yourself

that its either do or die- you emerge tougher and stronger than ever before. Therefore, when Vajpai says, “I tried to climb the mountains outside, to climb the mountains within”, you know that the mountains have redefined people like Vajpai. This great documentary tells us about a person amongst our own-a man in his 20s who has dared to live life extraordinarily. This is a story about a bold, courageous person with an undying enthusiasm to conquer the highest mountain peaks of the world, henceforth finishing off the aforementioned Grand Slam in style.



Free Solo

Hazael Hanuk



The documentary *Free Solo*, recipient of Academy Award for Best Documentary, directed by Jimmy Chin, Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi briefly marks a period of one year before Alex's climb to El Capitan and also films Alex's successful attempt to climb El Capitan on 3rd June 2017.

The very beginning of the film starts with an interview of Alex where the interviewer put forward a statement "One little mistake and you fall and die" and Alex smiles and answers "Yeah, I mean, it seems like u understand it pretty well." That indicates how positively Alex handles pressure. The film marks Alex's dream to free solo El Capitan, one the most impressive and extremely difficult rock climbing point, it shoots briefly about his planning and his practice sessions with his climber friend Tommy Caldwell and the filming crew.

The film gives its viewers an overview of Alex's relationship with his mother, his girlfriend and his friends and the impact climbing has had on his relationships. Sanni McCandless, a sensitive yet

supportive lady who once came in to one of Alex's sessions without knowing anything about him and then eventually went on to be his girlfriend. It captures two injuries that Alex went through while practicing and the way he recovered. As for his own worries: at one point in the film he submits to an MRI,



Alex Honnold free soloing El Capitan

Source: www.shop.jimmychin.com

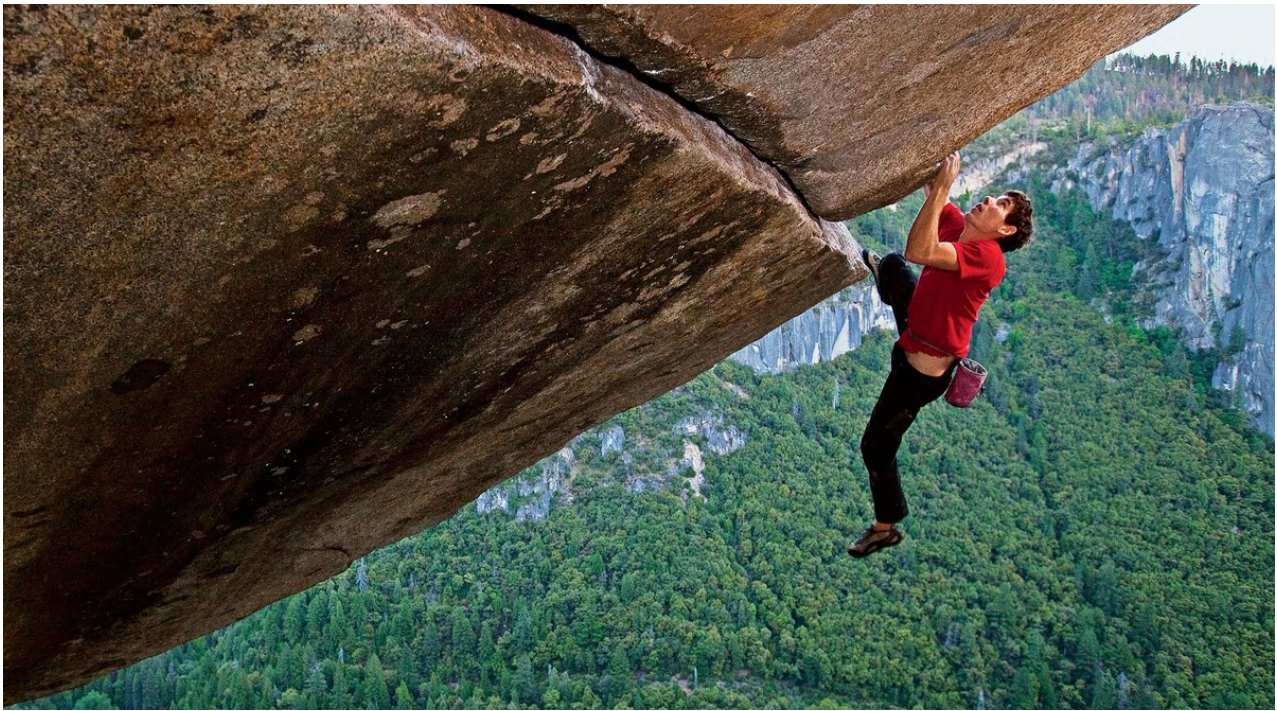


Image Source: www.theatlantic.com

Still captured from the movie: Free Solo

which reveals that his amygdala—the portion of the brain responsible for the fear impulse—doesn't show a lot of activity.

The final twenty minutes of the film records Alex's dream climb. And this twenty minutes is what I would say was the most intense, jaw-dropping part of the film. The climb is captured pitch by pitch which marks the excellence of the filming team. Moreover since Alex always

wanted his own space and any external factor would highly influence on his climb, the team made sure there were no distractions caused by them. The film includes the entire shot of Alex crossing Pitch 23, The Boulder problem which was the toughest part of the climb, then there goes Pitch 31, The Final Pitch, Alex Honnold, the first person to free solo El Capitan. The film ends with Alex's reunion with Sanni. It is indeed an incredible documentary.



The Dawn Wall

Binit Tete



As students what do we do to release ourselves of the all the world? Do we meditate or do we read books? Few of us choose to escape life itself for a brief moment of time. And so did Tommy Caldwell but not in a very conventional way. Tommy was not a very bright student as his teachers would often say. His mind was barely vacant for the routine life. To help him grow, his father (a former teacher, professional body builder, mountain guide and rock climber) used to take him on little adventure treks when he was as little as six. Wherein they would climb the hills and camp under the bright shining stars. That's when the obsession for mountains started. The obsession was fuelled when he outperformed all his competition in Snowbird Climbing Competition in 1995. His climbing career took off.

For us non-climber folks free climbing is rock climbing with bare hands. Harness and ropes are attached after every point to ensure safety.

The documentary hosts two rock climbers: Tommy Caldwell and Kevin Jorgenson. The documentary

follows the adventures of Tommy Caldwell's life, including the remarkable true storey of when he and a group of climbers, including his wife Beth Rodden, were kidnapped in Kyrgyzstan by militant Islamic terrorists. This incident, as well as the stunning manner by which they were able to flee and survive, would leave a lasting impression on him and, in many ways, propel him to the documentary's title ascent.



Source: www.npr.org

Free climber Kevin Jorgeson rests in a portaledge during his ascent of El Capitan's Dawn Wall in 2015.

We also witness how he handled losing half of his index finger in a table saw accident, which might easily end any professional climber's career. However, Tommy Caldwell has known only one thing throughout his life: rock climbing and continues to pursue it with the same exuberance and rigour, not letting this loss put him down whatsoever.

Later in the documentary, Kevin Jorgeson, Tommy's endeavour partner, is presented to us. Kevin's participation in the climb becomes its own tale, resulting in some of the documentary's most dramatic and electrifying moments.

Each part of the story is introduced in a way that the climb is interspersed

with personal stories. The creators flawlessly blend history into the physical act of the endeavour, answering the questions you were going to ask and giving soul to the climb's body.

As the drama reaches its climax, you truly feel as though you are standing in the meadows cheering them on. At this time, the media begins to report on the endeavour, and the rest of the world begins to watch with bated breath to see what will happen. As we join the characters in pushing past the why and how, into the doing the impossible, the drama and tension are wonderfully constructed.

Even if you aren't a rock-climber you'll find yourself glued to your seat.



Tommy Caldwell climbing on the Dawn Wall route of El Capitan in Yosemite National Park during his successful attempt in 2015

Source: www.sidetracked.com





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TREKS YOU CAN'T

Source: www.himalayasadventure.in



Source: www.thrillophobia.com



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Source: www.himalayanhikers.in



Source: www.insider.in





Har ki Dun

Ananya Kumar



Burrowed up at the splendid peak of Fateh Parvat and surmounting a height of 3,566 m from the sea level, Har ki Dun is one of the most sought-after treks in Garhwal Himalayas. Although Har ki Dun is not ideally favoured for beginners, it is often said, if you find a path with no stumbling block, it probably doesn't lead anywhere worthwhile. Har ki Dun gives a glimpse into high altitude treks but takes a lot of preparation. The gradual ascents and descents make you aware of your stamina and the innumerable waterfalls, streams, willows and woods are an utter delight to one's eyesight.

What is so special about this trek you ask?

Sky above, earth below and peace within. The Har ki Dun valley offers majestic panoramic views of the Himalayan Peaks like Swaragarohini- I, II and III, Bandarpoonch, and Black Peak. The views of the Ruinsara Peak are also visible from the valley. The valley is also known as the Valley of Gods and is wrapped with legends, myths, and beliefs. Interested in birdwatching? Har ki Dun valley is a paradise for birdwatchers. Another reason to do this trek is the beautiful campsites. The campsites at Sankri, Taluka, and Har ki Dun are the most scenic campsites to pitch your tent and to stay between the dense forests, snow-capped mountains, and majestic views of the valley along with the river Tons.

Source: www.indiahikes.com



The whole valley is flushed with bright yellow, blue and white flowers during the summer, whereas during the winters, the entire valley is covered with snow which makes the trek more testing and venturesome.. The trail rewards you with captivating and enchanting views of mountain ridges, glaciers, ancient temples, alluring caves and rustic hamlets.

Principally, the nine-day Har ki Dun trekking expedition, starts from the capital of Uttarakhand, Dehradun. The trek from Dehradun to Sankri goes through charming villages of Purola, Nainbagh and Naitwar, taking around seven to eight hours. Situated at an elevation of 1950 meters, Sankri is the base camp of the trek that offers astounding vistas of the quaint Himalayas. leading to the final destination: Har ki Dun.

Source: www.trekkinginuttarakhand.com





Rupin Pass

Gregory Joseph



If there is a classic trek in India, it has to be the Rupin Pass. This trek is like an orchestra, building up momentum with surprises in scenery every hour or so. With every step, the trek throws up a new vista to see, a new scenery to unfold. Quite suddenly too! The surprises begin right from your first day of trekking.

When, around 20 minutes into the trail, you see the Rupin River make an appearance, fanning out into a wide bed below you. And it doesn't stop here. From here, the trail takes you through hanging villages and then quite suddenly, it plunges into a deep pine forest. That's not all. The trail then meanders through glacial meadows, snow bridges, glacial valleys, snow fields and hundreds of waterfalls.

That being said, this is a moderately difficult trek. You cover almost 10 km every day and the terrain is quite tricky. The climb to Rati Pheri from Upper waterfall and the steep ascent to Rupin Pass through the gully at 15,380 ft require very good lung power. Rupin Pass trek is hiked over a period of 7 days (including drive to and from the trek, buffer, and acclimatization day) in the Himalayas. The trek begins at a remote village of Jiskun and ends at the village of Sangla in Himachal Pradesh. That way it is a very unique trek that starts in one state and ends in another.

The lower waterfall campsite is probably one of the most exquisite Himalayas has to offer. Snuggled at the bottom of a perfect "U" shaped glacial valley – it lies on the bed of a lush green meadow.

The Rupin gully is a half tube cut out of the mountain side. When you first see it from the trail, the sight of the near-vertical climb is enough to make your heart stop. The climb is of 200 metres, on a steep snowy flank through narrow rocky confines of the mountain.

There are mainly two seasons when you can do the Rupin pass trek – Summer and Autumn. During summer, the trek can be done from mid-May to the end of June. While in autumn it can be done from mid September to mid October.

These are the best times to do the Rupin pass trek.





Mandani Valley

Ananya Kumar



It is rightfully said that, “In all things of nature, there is something marvellous.” Likewise, the Mandani Valley Trek is one of the most exquisite and aesthetically pleasing treks that are known in India. Mandani Valley is an isolated, pristine, exceptionally beautiful and offbeat location in the Western Garhwal regions of Uttarakhand and is considered to be a challenging trek. It is a part of a lost trail within the picturesque Kedarnath wildlife sanctuary that connects two famous Hindu shrines, Badrinath and Kedarnath, connecting the Madmaheshwar trail to Kedarnath at Chorabari Glacier, the origin of the Mandakini river.

The Mandani Valley Trek is steeped in Hindu Mythology, with many mythological stories associated with this trek. According to one legend, the mighty goddess Durga killed the demon Mahishasur and buried him in the earth at this place. The legend further states that she took the shape of the rock and decided to sit on him forever. The temple erected to celebrate this story is visible in Mandani Bugyal near the Usha River.

The 10-11 day trek is for adventurous or experienced trekkers. The trek starts from Ransi village, 20 kilometres from Ukhimath and ends in Gaurikund after visiting Kedarnath Dham. During the trek you will get the best views of the Chaukhamba Peaks, the Mandani Peaks, and the YOUNBUK, Bisali, Mahapanth, Sumeru and Mansa group of peaks. The trek passes through numerous forests, meadows, streams, glaciers, rocky terrain, passes and cols. The best time for this trek is pre-monsoon and some post-monsoon months. During the month of Saavan in the lunar calendar (middle of July), local villagers and devotees take up a pilgrimage to the Mandana Bugyal by taking a statue of Goddess Mandani and installing it at the temple located at the Bugyal.

Though a lesser-frequented trek, Mandani Valley Trek pledges to be an experience of a lifetime. If you are a daring and audacious adventure junkie who holds immense appreciation for nature's charm and elegance, this trek is a must.





Goechala

Gregory Joseph



The biggest reason to do the Goechala trek is the grand views of big mountains that you see. You don't just see one summit — the Kanchenjunga — but 14 other big summits. That's a lot for any trek — especially as close to the eyes as on the Goechala trek. It is no wonder that trekkers consider Goechala to be the closest to the big mountain treks of Nepal. Before we dive into the details about Goechala trek, here is a little backdrop of why Goechala is well-known among trekkers all over the world: While the trail to Goechala is an old one, it wasn't always so famous. The change came about during the Nepalese Civil War which lasted from 1996 to 2006. Disturbances in Nepal during this time shut the country to trekkers. Suddenly trekking to the highest mountains of the world was out of bounds. It was a huge blow to the trekkers who frantically started looking for alternatives. At that time, Goechala emerged as the closest solace. The trail promised a brilliant close-up to the third highest mountain of the world and offered breathtaking views of the Singalila range from the Dzongri top.

One of the biggest highlights of the Goechala trek is the sunrise seen on the Kanchenjunga range. Even though trekkers are not allowed all the way to the actual Goecha Pass, the view from View Point 1 and Dzongri is worth every sweat.



Source: www.indiahikes.com



Source: www.indiahikes.com

The trail to Goechala is blessed with rhododendron forests. And come spring-summer months of April and May, they burst to life with pink and red flowers. It's an enormously pleasing walk through the wooden-log trails of these jungles!

The Samiti Lake is another big attraction on the Goechala trek.

There are two distinct seasons for the Goechala trek – April-May (Spring) and October-November (Autumn). Witnessing this trek in only one season is like getting to know just a part of it. That's because the trail is set in the

Kanchenjunga National Park, which houses some vibrant varieties of flora amidst its mossy forest. And the forest changes colours in different seasons. So, in different seasons, the entire colour palette of the trek changes. Even the way the trek lights up, changes with the seasons. While spring is known for its romantic, dreamy look, autumn is loved for its sharp views.

Goechala is a high altitude trek that takes you beyond 15,000 ft and is safe where the trail is concerned, which is well laid out and wide. The trek is, however, long and strenuous. It also climbs quickly. Having prior experience of trekking in the

Himalayas helps accustom you to hardship. Having basic knowledge about Acute Mountain Sickness greatly helps in dealing with altitude issues you may face on the trek.

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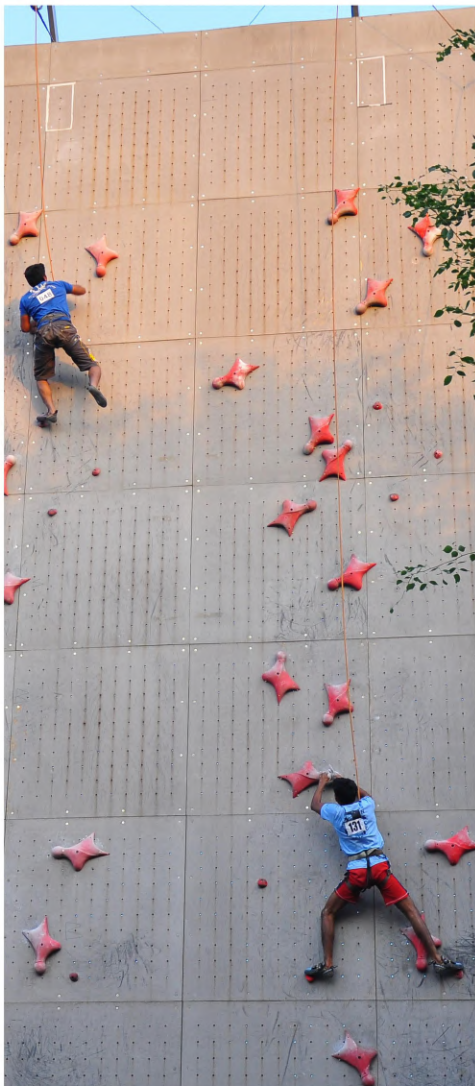
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