

# ROADS TO DRIVE

To the Sach Pass and the Pangri Valley



NOW GO DO IT...



## 1 GET THERE

Carry basic spares, puncture repair kit, a compressor running off the battery, water, food, sleeping bags. The roads are broken and sometimes the crumbly edges easily collapse under the weight of a car. The road is also very, very narrow and while there's very little traffic on it, you might need to back up to let oncoming traffic pass. Do this very cautiously. You'd rather get a scratch or two on the bodywork than fall off the edge.

## 2 STAY HERE

In Dalhousie, it is imperative that you stay at Teddy's Lodge. Teddy Singh, who runs the place, is a fount of valuable information and will gladly find out about the road ahead. Go to <http://teddyslodgedalhousie.com>. Else, Bairagarh, Killar, Cherri and Udaipur all have decent Public Works Department (PWD) Guest Houses and these cost ₹500-700 per room per night. An obliging chowkidar will also rustle up a basic meal for you.

## 3 DO THIS

In Dalhousie, request Teddy Singh to take you for one of his splendid walks. Carry a stove and some basic supplies with you if you're really fussy about food because besides Maggi noodles, omelettes and dal rice, you really don't have any other choice. Near Udaipur, visit the magnificent Triloknath Temple. If you're going to Spiti, camp for one night at Chandra Tal.

## THE CAR



The Toyota Fortuner 4x4 is ideal for this road. It's torquy, and with that cushioning suspension, you can do a brisk pace even on very bad roads. And it's comfortable enough to sleep in.

### Stuff you need to know

It's an isolated area; driving after dark not advised. Carry car papers and personal identification for all passengers. Ask about road conditions ahead.



### Oh dear, I've crashed

Stay with your car. flag down a passing car for a lift. DO NOT GO WANDERING OFF ON FOOT. Get a lift to the closest police checkpoint.



**H**imachal Pradesh is all about Himalayan splendour. Drives through this state are resplendent with mountain views and snow-capped peaks. For anyone fond of road tripping in the mountains, HP is the state to head to.

While most of its roads have been developed for tourism and are smooth and black top, there are some secluded ones whose sole purpose is connectivity. These are meant to give remote villages access to more developed areas and are just about motorable.

One such road goes from Dalhousie to Keylong via the Sach Pass, through Pangri Valley via Udaipur. It used to be a cart track and while Google Maps doesn't show it yet, Lonely Planet's India and Bangladesh Road Atlas shows it as a walking track. It was made motorable by widening the road a bit and then running a road roller over it. In effect, most of it is just a path made of

compressed stones. It also connects the Doda region of Kashmir to Chamba and Lahaul. From Dalhousie to Chamba, take the tourist trail along the Kalatope Bear Sanctuary and Kajjjar. At Chamba, follow the route to Tisa and Bairagarh - SH33. After this last hamlet, 87km

**'It's as if the entire area is standing still on some fragile truce - everything can go mobile any moment'**

from Chamba, the road starts to get really wild. The first glaciers come to view 20km later at the Satrundi checkpoint where every car and its passengers are videographed for security reasons. The road reaches the summit of the range that

is the Sach Pass, 19km later. At 4412m high, this is one of the most dynamic passes I have crossed in the Himalayas. Dynamic because there is constant movement, either a dribble of sand coming down the mountainside or some rock tumbling on to the road or ice breaking off a glacier. It seems as if the entire area is standing still on some fragile truce and everything can go mobile any moment.

This is the reason why camping at or near the summit is discouraged. The first *dhaba* and checkpoint after the pass come up at 11km and basic meals like Maggi noodles and omelettes are available here. If it's needed, you can pitch a tent hereabouts.

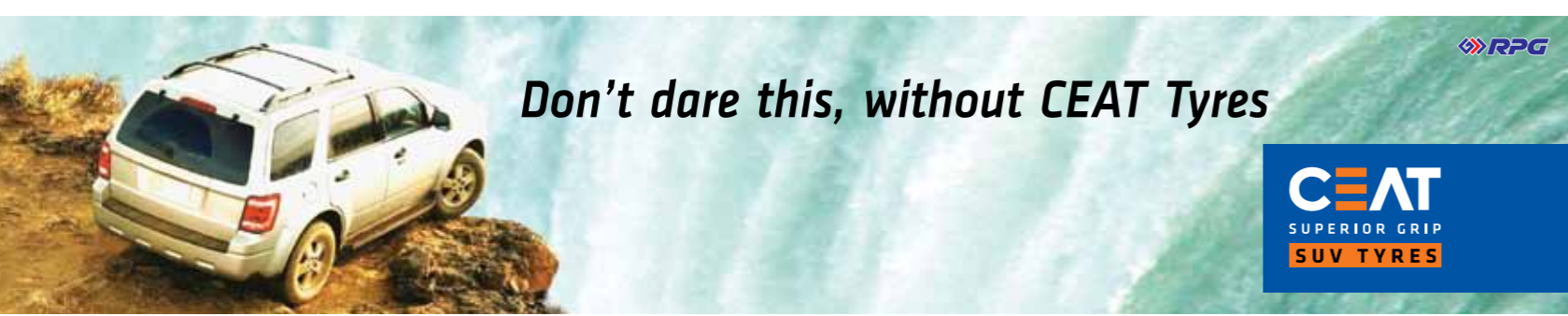
This is also the start of the Pangri Valley, which is a very narrow valley with almost vertical mountainsides. The first town is Khillar, which is 31km from the *dhaba* and will take at least four hours to get to because the roads are broken and very rough. The scenery is absolutely stunning

and there's a good chance of seeing wildlife. Driving during twilight close to Khillar, I saw a black panther dash across the road.

The next and very beautifully located town is Cherri, 10km from Khillar (it'll take one hour to do this 10km stretch). The PWD guesthouse here has got prime location and is definitely worth staying in. The road improves a bit after Cherri, and by the time you get to Udaipur - 65km away - it's smooth black top. From Udaipur, it's once again a scenic run through mountainsides and potato plantations to Tandi, 50km away. Tandi is on the popular Manali - Leh highway, where you'll encounter the most traffic of the drive.

Three options here - head north towards Leh, or south over the Rohtang Pass to Manali, or - what I consider the best option - south to Gramphu, 40km from Tandi, turn left towards Kaza, do the entire Spiti and Kinnaur loop and finish at Shimla.

**Words & photography: Rishad Saam Mehta**



Don't dare this, without CEAT Tyres



Don't dare this, without CEAT Tyres

