

The Nanda Devi National Park



Nanda Devi, India's second highest peak, is also revered as a goddess and sanctuary by the Bhotiya people

Nanda Devi was declared a game sanctuary in 1939 on the recommendation of the British-American expedition of 1936, the first to reach the summit of Nanda Devi. The area became popular, especially post-independence, becoming a favourite destination for mountaineers. The inner area of the sanctuary is bowl-shaped, with only one access route from the village of Lata. The rim of the bowl is studded with peaks, making the area one of the richest in terms of wilderness. Relentless assaults on these peaks severely damaged the flora and fauna. As a result, the area was declared a national park from 6 November 1982. With the notification came a complete ban on tourism and grazing in the area. In 1988, the Nanda Devi National Park (NDNP) became the core zone of the newly designated Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve (NDBR) under the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme. The area was also declared a world heritage site for natural biodiversity in 1992.

The total area of NDBR is 5,861 sq km, with a core zone of 625 sq km. Twenty sq km of the core area is pasture and 65 sq km is forested; the remaining areas are rocky or snow-covered. During the notification process, a special meeting was held chaired by the then Chief Secretary of State for Uttar Pradesh. The impact of the restrictions came up for discussion during the meeting. Provisions for alternative grazing sites were suggested along with recommendations for an in-depth study to understand traditional grazing rights and concessions. The loss of employment opportunities in Lata and other adjoining villages were to be compensated for by generating employment opportunities in plantation and other forestry activities. The plantations were intended to fulfil the fuel and fodder requirements of the local communities. As a follow-up to the meeting, orders were issued for an immediate



Women descending the core zone

ban on tourism and grazing within the core zone.

Severe protests were staged against the notification and the seizure of traditional rights (Himachal Times 1983). Promises made during the notification to the communities affected were not fulfilled and resentment started

brewing among them. In the absence of impact assessment studies and clear rehabilitation guidelines, designing rehabilitation measures became the domain of divisional forest officers. Also as a result of the restrictions on tourism, expeditions began to focus on lesser peaks situated around the rim of the sanctuary. This provided a small income to the villages along the new routes, but the economies of the villages of Lata, Reni, Paing, and Tolma were severely affected. The villages not affected by grazing restrictions started collecting taxes to allow the cattle from affected villages to graze in their territories during the summer.