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Deosai : Land of the Giant

Salman Rashid, Nadeem Khawar

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Deosai : Land of the Giant Salman Rashid, Nadeem Khawar
Deosai has long kept an aura of mystery. Long before the first European explorers ventured into this high altitude plateau, vague knowledge of its existence was current in the plains of the Indian subcontinent. Thence the word had been carried by the nomadic Gujjar cow herders who fattened their animals on the rich summer grasses of this vast uninhabited tableland. The Gujjar accounts wafted from person to person to become a confused tale of a plateau stretching flat, unbroken and treeless from the mountains north of the capital of Kashmir all the way to the deserts of Tartary. The myth was finally broken in the 1830s. The earliest Europeans, both Britons, William Moorcroft and Godfrey Thomas Vigne, were over-awed by its sheer desolation. Both also noted that Deosai was inhabited by large numbers of Tibetan brown bear. Though the elusive snow leopard, fox, wolf and ibex prowl across it, it was the easily seen bear that became the signature species on the plateau. But over the years all was not well for the bear. It became commonly believed that a diet of some of the bear s body parts could cure sexual impotence, or that its body fat rubbed on arthritic joints could rejuvenate them no matter how worn out they might be. The result was a slow but systematic purging of the species. By the late 1980s, only a handful of bears survived. That was when the protagonists of this book began the conservation effort to bring back this precious animal from the brink of extinction. Their efforts paid and there has been an increase in the bear population. But even though programme is now in the hands of the government, the bears still look ahead to an uncertain future. Deosai: Land of the Giant tells the story of Deosai, its geography and history as well as the heroic effort of bear conservation and the establishment of a national park on the plateau. This publication of this book symbolises the hope that the effort begun in the late 1980s will not go waste and that future travellers will see groups of bears roaming on Deosai without persecution.

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