



AAC Publications

Ghandarbha Chuli (6,248m), southwest face and west ridge

Asia, Nepal, Annapurna Himal

Formerly known as the Gabelhorn, Ghandarbha Chuli (a.k.a Gandharva Chuli) lies on the ridge connecting Annapurna III (7,553m) to Macchapuchhare (6,993m), nearer to the latter. Before 2013 there had been no official attempt. The peak could only be attempted by a foreign team if it forms a joint expedition with Nepalis, so including cooks and helpers our expedition comprised two Romanians, Cristina Pogacean and I, and eight Nepalis. We reached base camp (3,857m GPS), at the confluence of the Modi Khola and the river that runs north from Singu Chuli (Fluted Peak), on May 2.

Next day with three Nepalese companions, Pogacean and I made advanced base camp at 4,338m GPS on a grassy shoulder leading toward the glacier, on a ridge below the 'Tower'. The following morning Pogacean and I left before 4 a.m. and after circumventing the Tower, climbed moderate mixed ground, over unconsolidated snow and loose rock, up the left flank of a southwest-facing spur. At 2 p.m. we were hit by an electrical storm that produced heavy snowfall. We continued to make upward progress, eventually stopping around 10 p.m. to spend an uncomfortable night in a half-erected tent at 5,438m, more or less on the crest of the spur.

We left at 10 a.m. next day, after a night of snowfall, and decided to move up to a better campsite and evaluate snow conditions. After four-five pitches, but well below the point where the spur meets the west ridge at a triangular rock buttress, we were able to dig a proper ledge for the tent (5,586m GPS) and spend a day appraising the situation. Avalanches fell down gullies to either side.

The weather cleared during the night, and we left at 3 a.m. on the 6th. We avoided the triangular rock buttress on the right, via a difficult traverse on unconsolidated snow overlying hard ice, to reaching the west ridge. From there we followed the crest, which proved quite sharp in places, to a large cornice formation, where a steep snow pitch (75° at the exit) gained its flat top.

From this point, the final section to the summit took an unreasonable amount of time given the distance, increasing afternoon wind and the consequential spindrift slowing us considerably. The final slope steepened gradually from 55° to 65/70°.

Following discussions in Macchapuchhare base camp between our cook/sirdar and locals, the latter appeared somewhat unhappy about the idea of our ascent on the "sacred mountain" (as they seem to see Ghandarbha Chuli as just an appendix of Macchapuchhare). We therefore made a conscious decision not to set foot on the very top, as a sign of respect for local community beliefs. At 4 p.m. we stamped out a small platform one body length below the highest point. The GPS recorded 6,302m. Leaving behind Nepali and Romanain flags attached to a snow stake, we regained the tent at 10 p.m.

Next day our return to advanced base camp was tedious but uneventful. We left behind three titanium pitons and several cordelettes at rappel stations, and a couple of pitons on the traverse below the Tower, which had now turned to mud. Camp was reached at 8 p.m.

On the morning of the 8th we were greeted by three of our Nepalese team, who helped us pack, descend to our base camp, then onward to Macchapuchhare base camp. Here we discovered that the locals had not been thrilled on hearing the news of our ascent, but they remained reserved rather than hostile. We did our best to assure them that the top remains untrodden, and although they did not

warm to us, we feel we made the best compromise. We began the walk out to Pokhara the following day.

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Images



Cosmin Andron on the west ridge. (A) Annapurna South (north summit). (B) Varaha Shikar (The Fang). (C) Annapurna. (D) Kangsar Kang (Roc Noir). (E) Tarke Kang (Glacier Dome). (F) Singu Chuli (Fluted Peak). (G) Tharpu Chuli (Tent Peak).



The southwest face and west ridge of Ghandarbha with camps marked.



Cristina Pogecian on the west ridge. The steepest section was alongside the first large cornice.

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