



AAC Publications

Upper Darcha Valley, Goat Peak (6,080m GPS); Para Handy Ridge

India, Himachal Pradesh

In 2012 the Scottish Zanskar Expedition attempted a couple of unclimbed 6,000m peaks in the Namkha Tokpo (AAJ 2013). One succumbed, but the other (G22) showed an unexpected lack of consideration. However, a potential route up the south face was spotted, and in June 2013 much of the same team (Rob Adams, Bob Hamilton, Steve Kennedy, Andy Nisbet, and I) returned to attempt an ascent from the Himachal Pradesh (as opposed to Zanskar) side of the range. We went a little earlier in the year for improved snow conditions, and spent June 12–July 1 at or above base camp.

The approach included a three-day walk from Zanskar Sumdo, where we watched a new track being bulldozed over the Shingo La. Heading north up the Darcha-Mayar valley, we hung a right at Kuddu and continued for a couple of days up a valley that was used for grazing but apparently had seen no other mountaineers. It hadn't seen many cartographers either: We established base camp at the foot of an unclimbed, unnamed 6,000m peak that was not marked on one of our maps, despite being only a day's walk from a well-used trekking route.

A reconnaissance of the southern side of G22 showed it to be an undertaking that would require a few days. Then it started to snow. Weather systems that caused havoc in Uttarakhand also made it possible for us to build rather large snowmen at base camp.

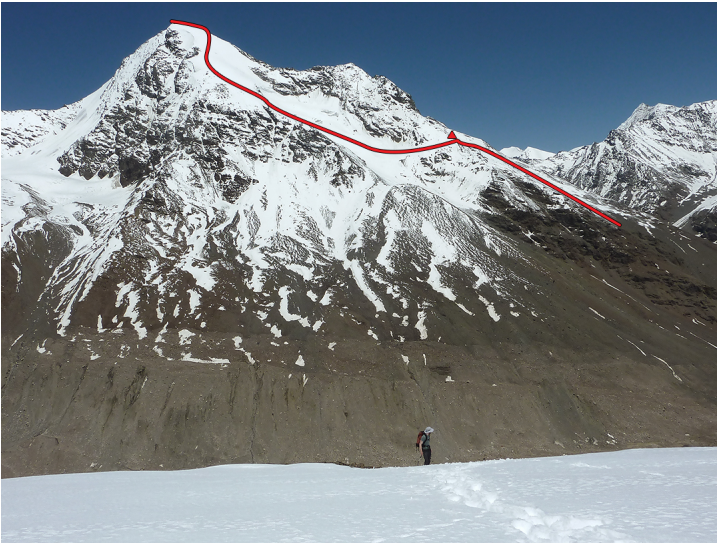
When the weather finally cleared, a time shortage made the proximity of the 6,000m peak above base camp irresistible. We established an advanced base camp at 5,200m on the south ridge, and the following morning crossed the glacier to reach the southwest ridge, which we climbed on crusty but safe snow (up to 50°) to reach the sharp summit at 6,080m (PD). We named the summit Goat Peak in honour of the 60th birthday of the Goat of Barten (Andy Nisbet, who lives in the Scottish village of Boat of Garten).

With time now running out, we turned to a very attractive ridge west of base camp, on the other side of the river. Profound cultural discussions led us to name the ridge after Para Handy, a character from a series of short stories published in a Glasgow newspaper in the early 20th century. The first top ascended, by the two that had to return to work (Adams and Kennedy), was named McPhail's (ca 5,450m). This was followed by Dougie (ca 5,390m), Sunny Jim (5,200m), and Vital Spark (5,150m, all named from the same series). These were climbed from base camp on various days by the other members, all at PD to AD, generally on snow with some rocky steps.

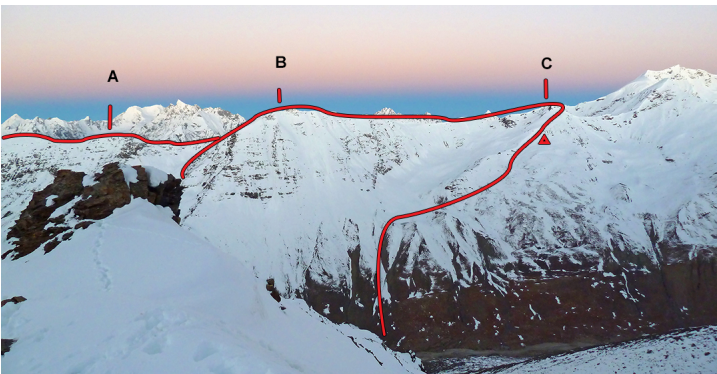
Hamilton, Nisbet, and I then made a couple of attempts on a summit with map height 5,930m, southeast of base camp. The summit block bore a remarkable resemblance to the Inaccessible Pinnacle on Skye. Unfortunately, melting snow produced substantial rockfall. Thwarted, we returned to base camp to finish the whisky before the arrival of the porters.

Susan Jensen, Scottish Mountaineering Club

Images



Goat Peak, showing the line up the south ridge and southwest ridge.



Para Handy Ridge from 5,200m on Goat Peak. (A) Sunny Jim. (B) Dougie. (C) McPhail's. Vital Spark is off-picture left, and an unclimbed 6,030m peak off-picture right.



Looking southwest from Goat Peak down the approach valley. The high peak left of center is Ramjak (6,318m), a challenging summit southwest of the Shingo La, first climbed in 2002 after many attempts.

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