



## AAC Publications

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### **Kishtwar Kailash, Southwest Face**

India, Himachal Pradesh, Kishtwar Himalaya

The start of this trip was particularly stressful, as the political situation in Kishtwar had become tense following the deaths of several people in a protest. As a result, our permit was only confirmed a couple of days before we were due to arrive in Delhi. But a permit we did get, and a few days later Mick Fowler, Mick Morrison, Rob Smith, and I found ourselves in India.

One of the conditions of our permit was that we travel to the road head at Gulabgarbh without passing through any Kashmiri towns or cities. This left only one real option: go via Manali using the new Udaipur to Atholi link road. Most climbers have traveled along impressive Himalayan roads, but this one is in a different league! My video of one frightening section went viral from Mick's Facebook page, getting over a million hits.

The approach to base camp requires four relatively big days, the first two on the popular pilgrim route to Machail, then two more up the Dharlang Nala, where we placed base camp an hour short of the Chomochior valley.

Kishtwar Kailash (ca 6,451m, Google Earth) is one of the highest mountains in eastern Kishtwar. We had spotted the peak the year before, when we climbed the north pillar of Shiva, getting good views of the south and east side of Kailash all the way up the route.

However, before arriving at base camp we weren't quite sure how we were going to climb it. Base camp gave us access to the south, west, and potentially northern sides, so we combined reconnaissance with our usual acclimatization outing. Unfortunately, almost every time we were in a position to view the mountain, the weather was poor. By the time we returned to base camp a week later, we had only managed to get partial views of the most feasible line on the southwest face.

While the route itself looked climbable, there were big questions about how we would get to the foot of the face. The poor weather forced us to commit to an approach that we hadn't clearly seen. Easy access to the west side of Kailash is prevented by serac bands and steep rock walls. Fortunately, we spotted a small couloir that sneaked over a ridge on the south face, and gave access to a col just above the serac band. We left base camp on October 4. It took us two days to reach this col, with all the usual issues of poor rock and scary glacier travel.

From the col we were in position to start the climb proper. Our planned line linked a series of snowfields via gully and chimney lines through very steep rock bands, a bit Eiger-like in nature. As this was a southwest face, early starts and early finishes would be the order of the day. Fortunately, the steep sections through the rock bands turned out to be reasonably sheltered from sun until midafternoon, so we managed to make reasonable progress each day. But once the sun did hit it was incredibly hot, and we were forced to stop and cut a ledge almost straight away. Day four proved to be the crux: a very steep and occasionally overhanging gully section, poorly protected mixed passages, bad rock, and ice bulges.

We managed to pitch the tent almost every night, even if much of the tent floor was hanging in space. The weather was perfect all the time we were climbing, and particularly good on the summit day. We arrived at the top on day six, October 9, the last pitch proving particularly challenging with very poor

snow and rock. But it was all worth it for the first ascent of a very fine summit. The 2,000m route was ED, Scottish VI. The descent took two days, using Abalakovs all the way.

Unfortunately, Mike and Rob had not succeeded on their attempt of a nearby unclimbed peak. Winter arrived the day after our return to base camp, with snow falling all the way down to the valley.

Paul Ramsden, Alpine Club, U.K.

## Images



Kishitwar Kailash from the upper Chomochior Glacier to the west, with ascent route and bivouacs four, five, and six.



A foreshortened view of Kishitwar Kailash's southwest face with route and bivouacs.



Mick Fowler tackles a steep ice section on day four of the first ascent of Kishtwar Kailash.



The unclimbed eastern aspects of Cerro Kishtwar (6,155m GPS) and Chomochior (6,322m, map height), seen from Kishtwar Kailash.

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