



Harischandragad Fort, Kokankada, Left Route (changed route, almost free ascent)

India, Sahyadri Range

Kokankada is the ca 600m concave cliff, over 1.5km in length, on the southwest side of Harischandragad Fort (Maharashtra). It is the most scenic natural formation in the Sahyadri. In December 1985 a team from Mumbai made the first ascent of the south face via the Left Route. Eight climbers and a support team spent 17 days, using fixed rope and placing stainless steel 8mm bolts (only the second time bolts were used in the Sahyadri), before reaching the top. A 45m overhanging section was completely bolted and climbed on aid, though on other sections aid was undoubtedly employed. This was the first big wall climbed in the Sahyadri, and a fine performance, given the equipment available in India at the time.

We first tried the line in February 2012, retreating from a height of ca 200m. The technical difficulties were high, but there were other factors like extreme temperatures, strong winds, rotten rock, continuous rockfall, poor protection, scorpions, and poisonous snakes.

On our second try we decided to approach from the top (easy walking), rappel the route, place minimal protection, and then climb the face with few bivouacs. On the morning of January 17, 2014, Rohit Vartak, Sharad Chandra (photographer), and I started down the wall, finding old ring bolts and a few rotten slings. We soon realized there had been dramatic changes in the route in the 28 years since the first ascent. Big vertical cracks had become completely choked with falling rock and debris, and now formed wide overhanging chimneys. Several old bolts were observed up to 10m inside the line, and there was much loose rock at the top of every pitch. Using a power drill, we placed 24 bolts.

The following morning we started from the base, having left rope fixed on a few pitches to aid photography. It was a hectic day, as we climbed most of the crux pitches before sunset. That night the weather changed dramatically, becoming cold and windy. My fears of rockfall were well founded, as I received a direct hit on the forehead at 3 a.m., while at the bivouac. Next day we finished the remaining pitches in burning sunshine, reaching the top at 4:30 p.m., only the second party to do so. We used aid on a total of 18m, and felt many pitches were now 6c/7a, with cruxes 7a/7b. Most of the original, bolted, 45m wall, one of the least damaged sections of the route, was climbed free.

The month prior to this I was on a rock trip around Maharashtra with Sujay Kawale and photographer Jacob Skogheim. At Angeneri Fort, 30km from the famous pilgrimage city of Nashik, we cleaned and bolted a 60m overhanging line on the northwest face, formed of the best quality basalt. We spent the first day placing 23 bolts, and on the second climbed it in two pitches at 7a+. High Ambition is the first multi-pitch sport route opened in the Nashik region, and there is huge potential for more.

Samiran Kolhe, India

Images



The south face of Kokankada showing Left Route (1985/2014).



Samiran Kolhe clips a pre-placed sling on a short but extremely loose chimney. It was not deemed possible to place any other form of protection, and without the sling a slip would have resulted in a ground fall.

Article Details

Author	Samiran Kolhe, India
Publication	AAJ
Volume	56
Issue	88
Page	345
Copyright Date	2014
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions