



AAC Publications

Telthop, Northwest Face and Southwest Ridge

India, Ladakh

Telthop (6,185m) is situated north of Leh and is accessed via the Kardung La (at 5,350m the highest motorable road in the world) and Nubra Valley. This is an area of considerable political and military sensitivity, given its proximity to the still disputed Pakistan and Chinese borders. Therefore, the majority of peaks above 6,000m require an X visa from the Indian government, and the expedition must be accompanied by an Indian Army LO.

The first obstacle in obtaining an X visa is to convince VFS Global, the company outsourced to provide visas, that such a visa exists. There is no X visa status on the drop-down menu, and hence an application is not directly possible. Once they have been convinced to issue an X visa, an expedition then needs a letter of permission from the IMF, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Army to climb its proposed peak. In 2014 most expeditions to this area were refused permission due to heightened military action.

Once through Delhi and the IMF briefing, and now accompanied by the LO, the expedition will take the short flight to Leh, where two or three days should be allowed for acclimatization. Then it's over the Kardung La to Hundar, the access village for this area.

In 2010 we planned to attempt Telthop but were thwarted by bad weather, which destroyed the bridge over the river issuing from the main Thanglasgo valley. This bridge, now repaired, gives access to a steep and sometimes narrow valley rising southeast, with high mud and rubble cliffs on either side. A traverse of this valley in wet conditions would not be advisable, and the river, although not large, has to be crossed and recrossed, sometimes with no bridges. Three days of trekking, with an ascent of 1,500m, took us to our base camp in a wide, green valley at 4,800m. From here a line of five peaks extends to the south: Telthop is the highest and most southerly peak in this range (older maps confusingly mark this peak farther northeast).

A four-hour journey, with a further 300m of ascent, over moraine brought us to an advanced base at 5,100m. Above, lay the glaciated northwest face of Telthop, bounded by the north and southwest ridges. Both ridges are steep in the upper section and broken by rocky steps. Access to the Telthop Glacier and face is difficult by any means other than a steep snout.

We decided to climb the snout, cross the bottom of the glacier to the southwest ridge, and follow it, avoiding rocky steps on the steep snow to the left. We left camp at 1 a.m. and climbed 250m up steep moraine and then 130m of 70° hard ice on the left side of the snout to reach a level section of glacier at ca 5,500m.

Our route to the ridge looked to be heavily crevassed, and as dawn broke we saw the ridge to be steeper than anticipated and very heavily crevassed in the upper section. So, we opted to climb the northwest face direct and then access the ridge higher up, just below the rocky steps. This proved feasible, and after 500m of weaving through crevasses and climbing good, hard snow up to 70°, we were able to gain the ridge at our intended spot. Rocky steps were avoided by climbing 80° snow slopes, and after a final climb on steep and loose rock, the summit was reached at around 10:30 a.m. by Matt Barnsley, Roland Chuter, Bob Shiels, and me (all U.K.), Chuck Boyd (USA), Dawa Narbu Sherpa, Tashi Phunchok Zangola, and Liaison Officer Virender Singh (all Indian), and Phujung Bhote (Nepal).

In descent we reversed the route to the point where we had accessed the ridge, then dropped down steep and extremely loose rock/scree slopes to the glacier under the southwest face. This eventually gave access to the valley above our camp, to which we returned around 5 p.m. Given the remote nature and the sustained steep face climbing, we gave this route an overall grade of D.

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Images



Base camp at 4,800m. Peaks visible lie on the ridge north of Telthop are around 6,000m and unclimbed.



A typical river crossing on the approach to base camp.



The final scramble up loose rock to the summit.



En route to base camp, looking north to peaks on the far side of the Shyok River.



The northwest face of Telthop.

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