



AAC Publications

Barnaj I, North Buttress, Attempt; Barnaj II, Southeast Face

India, Kishtwar Himalaya

Funded in part by the Lyman Spitzer Award, Tim Dittmann, Jared Vilhauer, and I reached the Kishtwar Himalaya from the north in mid-September. We shared our base camp (4,400m) on the east side of the Hagshu Glacier with Slovenian and British teams. Our goals were the unclimbed Barnaj peaks.

For the first 10 days we acclimatized on a couple of previously unclimbed 6,000ers close to base camp. These gave straightforward snow climbing. We then set off for our primary objective, the north buttress of Barnaj I (ca 6,300m). There were a number of elegant weaknesses on this 1,500m face, and we opted to skirt the left side of the lower face before entering a deep chimney system that appeared to cut into the center of the mountain. The chimney posed the biggest question, as there was no spot on the glacier from where we could see clearly into it.

Starting with four days of food and fuel, we climbed 600m of beautiful ice, the upper half a brilliant gully system with several sections of AI4 and one long section of vertical ice (AI5). We bivouacked on a sloping snow slope, and the next day continued a few pitches to the base of the chimney at ca 5,730m. The climbing above looked incredible, with much steep ice, but the chimney was subject to constant rockfall, and after waiting most of the day for direct sunlight to leave, we decided we simply couldn't justify the risk. We started a series of 20 rappels down the route.

With only a few days left we made an attempt on the southeast face of Barnaj II (ca 6,400m). This line was not as technical and we made a single push, climbing 1,500m of snow, easy mixed, and relentless 60° ice, until after 14 hours Jared clawed his way through the cornice and the three of us reached the summit ridge at ca 6,250m, with an hour of daylight remaining. The terrain above appeared to be an unaesthetic pile of vertical choss, and without bivouac gear we decided to go down. Before starting the descent, we climbed to an arbitrary high point on the ridge at ca 6,275m, from which we enjoyed stellar views of the entire Kishtwar Range just as the sun was setting. Twenty-eight rappels got us to the glacier. We reached camp at sunrise, 26 hours after setting out.

This region holds beautiful, steep mountains, with essentially no non-technical peaks. Although the logistics are expensive, we would highly recommend this area for "Alaska-like" climbing at moderately high altitudes.

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Images



On the north buttress of Barnaj I.

Article Details

Author	Seth Timpano
Publication	AAJ
Volume	57
Issue	89
Page	318
Copyright Date	2015
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions