



## AAC Publications

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### **Hagshu, Northeast Face and Traverse**

India, Kishtwar Himalaya

**The north face of Hagshu (6,657m) looks an immaculate climb, and our expedition to its north face started much like any other expedition. Lots of research and Mick Fowler's prodigious organizational skill meant that permits were in place nine months before we were due to depart. With flights booked there was nothing to do but sit back and anticipate another Himalayan adventure.**

A week before we were due to depart, our agent informed us that another expedition had left the Indian Mountaineering Foundation the day before with a permit for the north face of Hagshu. Much emailing ensued to little effect, and none the wiser we set off for India. In Delhi the IMF apologetically confirmed they had accidentally given the Slovenian team of Ales Cesen, Luka Lindic, and Marko Prezelj a permit, but had since notified them that they must leave the mountain before we arrived. Feeling confused but hopeful that the matter would be resolved when we reached base camp, we made the journey to Hagshu via Leh and Kargil.

On arrival at base camp, we met Luka Lindic, who had been expecting us and knew of our intentions on Hagshu. With his partners out of camp on a reconnaissance, he admitted they had received the instruction from the IMF to leave the mountain before our arrival at base camp, but had chosen to ignore it. Following the withdrawal of their permit to Mukut Parbat, several weeks before they departed for India, they were in need of a last-minute alternative, and an online search had highlighted our planned expedition to Hagshu. Although they knew nothing about the mountain, they clearly presumed that it must be worth climbing if we were planning to go there. [See Luka Lindic's report for the Slovenian account of the permit acquisition and decision to climb Hagshu.]

Not sure how to proceed, and with the rest of his team out of camp, we decided to press ahead and acclimatize on a nearby peak. Hopefully we could discuss the matter with the entire team on our return. Unfortunately, on getting back from our acclimatization trip, we had the dubious pleasure of watching the trio climb the north face.

Nevertheless, determined to make the best of the situation, we turned our attention to the northeast face of the mountain. The route was good and quite hard through the central rock band, but lower down was subject to more objective danger than we would normally accept. Clearly our judgment had been clouded by a determination not to follow others. Footsteps on the summit were a new experience for us.

We returned from India determined to put the whole matter behind us. However, the subsequent award of a Piolet d'Or to the team for climbing the north face again raised the issue of ethics in alpinism. Ethics are not just about the physical issues of bolting and fixing ropes, but also about behavior toward one's fellow alpinists and the so-called fellowship of the mountains.

We wasted an entire year's planning and were extremely disappointed by the frank admission of what we consider a breach of ethics from our fellow alpinists. Expeditions have reported their objectives before departure for many years, in order to raise support, highlight sponsors, and make other climbers aware of their intentions. Typically, it's been part of expedition mountaineering to respect this, and we had not had one of our routes so blatantly poached before. We feel that the behavior of the other team lacked respect and integrity, and should not be held up as an example of what

**alpinism is about. No matter whether it is a good climb or not.**

**- Paul Ramsden, U.K.**

[Editor's note: Subsequently, the IMF held an official enquiry into the Hagshu incident and quoted from their rules that it "reserves the right to allot a particular peak to more than one expedition in the same season, and that the route/face allowed may be same or different for each expedition." However, the IMF agreed that until its rules were suitably revised, it would be instructing its staff as follows: (a) If more than one permit is issued in the same season to a particular route on a peak, each expedition would have a clear separation of seven days at base camp. I.e., it is expected that one team will have left base camp seven days before the next arrives. (b) Special requests for reservation of "first ascent routes" would be entertained on a first-come, first-served basis, provided a special application is made to the IMF. If the request were accepted, confirmation would be given, in which case there would be a "validity" date by which the peak fee must be deposited. The IMF is currently redoing all of its forms and guidelines, and it is unclear how long it will take before the above guidelines are made public. In addition, the government of India is proposing to lift the ban on satellite phones, as confirmed by the president of the Adventure Travel Operators Association of India, which was responsible for pushing this policy change. However, it may take some time before these new regulations pass through all the government bureaucracy.]

## Images



Paul Ramsden on a thinly iced passage during the first ascent of the northeast face.



Paul Ramsden on the traverse from north to main summits of Hagshu.



Mick Fowler negotiates steep mixed terrain on the northeast face of Hagshu.

## Article Details

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