



Bhagirathi I, Southwest Face Variant To West Ridge, Attempt

India, Western Garhwal, Gangotri

Christina Pogacean and I had planned to attempt the southwest face of Chaukhamba II during our honeymoon. However, through reasons beyond our control we could not get porters and staff anywhere near our proposed base camp, toward the head of the Gangotri Glacier. Forced to change objective, and with Bhagirathi I (6,856m) as the nearest feasible option, we decided to attempt its southwest face. Unfortunately, we had little idea of existing routes on Bhagirathi I. We opted for what appeared to be a ramp on the far left side of the face, leading to the foot of the obvious tower on the west ridge.

On September 27 we moved up with heavy sacks to find that the ramp was in fact a wide opening between two walls. The approach up scree was long and arduous. We climbed a pitch of IV, then made a semi-hanging bivouac sheltered from rockfall. Next day we continued up the weakness but were forced to resort to the time-consuming strategy of climbing short pitches and hand hauling the two sacks, as we negotiated several small overhangs. We bivouacked early as clouds moved in, and that night it was windy and snowing. Next day brought sunshine for a few hours and we reached the big tower on the ridge. To this point the maximum difficulties, climbed in rock shoes, had been around UIAA VI+. The good rock had been rather rounded and run-out, while protectable cracks were loose—we weaved a line in and out of these options. The tower above looked far more demanding, our sacks were trashed, and we were not equipped to aid. At 2 p.m., when the weather deteriorated once more, we bailed down our line of ascent. Next day a blanket of fresh snow covered the glacier, and we felt grateful not to be higher up, hanging in our harnesses.

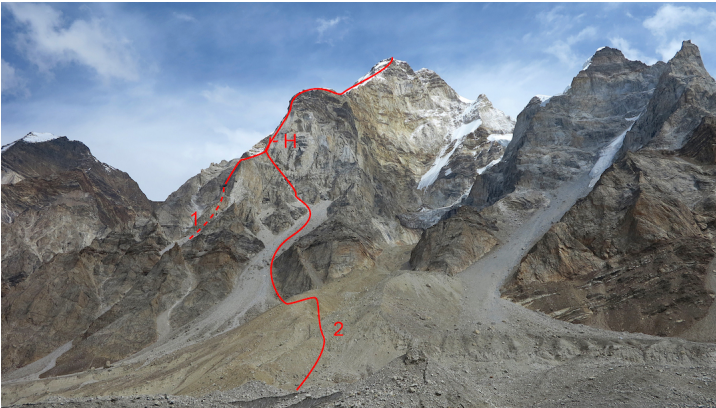
The first ascent of the ca 2,200m west ridge was achieved by a British team in 1983 (AAJ 1984). They climbed free at VI until close to the top of the big tower, where a storm forced them to aid the final pitch (A2). On the second ascent, by New Zealanders in 1988, the tower was climbed free at 5.10 (AAJ 1989). The Austrians who repeated the ridge in 1998 also climbed completely free, with several pitches graded VI+ (AAJ 1999). It had looked much harder. Had we known this at the time, would we have pushed further? Comfort given by the accessibility of what lies ahead can never be underestimated.

-Cosmin Andron, Romania

Images



On the west ridge of Bhagirathi I, below the tower. The high point was the top of the first compact pillar (below the vertical red/orange streak).



Bhagirathi I from the southwest. The top of the west face of Bhagirathi III is visible at left. (1) West Ridge (1983). (2) Variant start (2014) and high point (H).



Cosmin Andron climbing on the southwest face.



Cosmin Andron surmounting a tight overhang on the southwest face.

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