



AAC Publications

Shivling, Northwest Ridge and West Face

India, Western Garhwal, Gangotri

In May our five-member expedition planned to attempt two routes on Shivling (6,543m). Rainer Treppte and I (German) wanted to try a new route on the left side of the northeast face, while Niels Delenk, Henning Stoll (both German), and Heiner Heim (Switzerland) would climb the normal route up the west ridge and prepare the descent for Treppte and me.

We stayed at base camp for three weeks, during which we had a constant fight with snowfall—a meter of fresh snow fell. As India strictly prohibits the use of satellite phones, we had no contact with the outside world and therefore no forecasts. We made a few unsuccessful attempts on the northeast face, always thwarted due to storm and avalanche danger. Just before our departure, I decided to try a speed ascent of the mountain with Delenk, and opted to repeat my 1996 route up the west face—a line I had vowed never to do again.

Compared with Shivling's other flanks, the west face is relatively low angle, but, unfortunately, it is overhung by a huge, broad serac barrier. A low-relief, mixed ridge—the west face normal route—rises to the middle of the serac barrier, and was followed in 1974 to make the first ascent of the mountain. In September 1996 I had arrived with three other climbers, planning to make the second ascent of the east ridge (Bettembourg-Child-White-Scott, 1983). However, the team dynamics were not right, and we gave up the idea [later in that same month John Bouchard and Mark Richey made the second ascent, in alpine style].

In the last week of the expedition I studied a route on the west face that would give a rapid ascent to the summit. Rainer Picher and I left base camp and made a bivouac under the northwest ridge. After four hours' rest we set off on our new line, which climbs part of the northwest ridge, then the west face to the serac, before making a rising traverse left to the upper northwest ridge and main summit. It took eight hours. We rested 30 minutes on top and descended to base camp the same day. Due to the lengthy exposure to the serac, I swore I would never repeat this route.

Nonetheless, I started toward the west face with Niels Delenk in the afternoon of May 27. Hampered by fresh snow, we had reached only 5,200m on the approach to the northwest ridge crest before we stopped to bivouac. The weather began to clear and the temperature fell to -25°C. After a few hours' rest we began to climb, finding it tricky to negotiate snow-covered slabs in the dark. However, we were in good shape and changed lead often. It was possible to follow my 1996 line, and we moved fast from rock pillar to rock pillar to minimize the objective danger. At 10 a.m. we reached the summit and then reversed our route all the way to our bivouac site. That same evening the other three members arrived, and we slept there together. The following day they followed our track and also reached the summit.

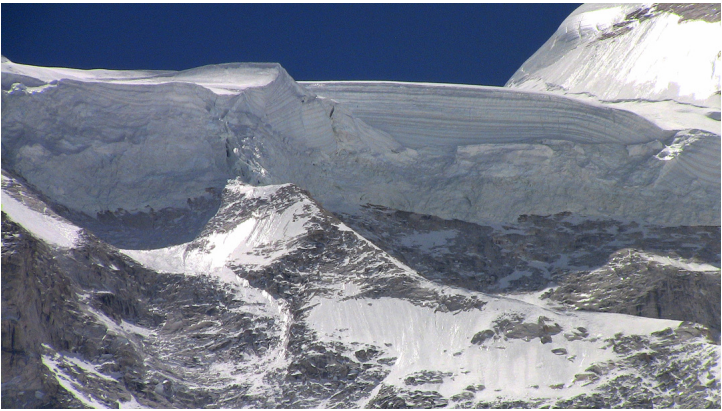
The steepest ice on this route is 60-70°, with some mixed ground at M4/5. However, while the technical difficulties are not high, the route is exposed to the giant serac for a significant distance, and is only suitable for a speed ascent. It's a mental challenge for fast climbers.

-Walter Hoelzler, Germany

Images



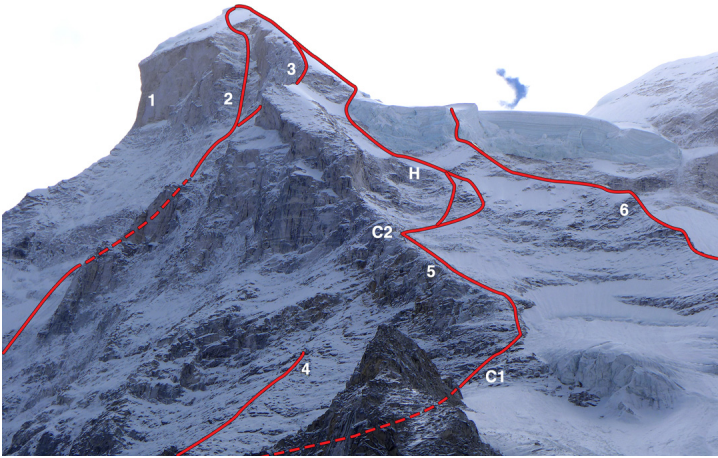
Moving up the west face with the huge serac looming above.



The giant serac barrier on the west face of Shivling. Top right are ice slopes leading toward the lower, southeast summit. The gently angled ridge, coming in from the right and leading to the center of the serac barrier, is the normal route.



Moving fast below the huge serac barrier on the west face of Shivling.



Shivling from the northwest. (1) Top section of north pillar (German-Swiss, 2000). (2) Czechoslovak Route (1987). (3) Japanese Route (2005). (4) Portuguese attempt (2014). (5) German Route (1996 and again in 2014). (6) West face, normal route (Indo-Tibet Border Police, 1974). (C1) Portuguese camp 1 at 5,550m and (C2) at 5,800m. (H) High point of second 2014 Portuguese attempt, following the blue line variant.

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