



AAC Publications

Languta-e-Barfi, South Face, Attempt

Pakistan, Hindu Kush

Getting to Languta-e-Barfi (Langua-tai Barfi, 6,827m) was an organic process. Originally, Chris Todd and I intended to approach the mountain from the north via the Wakhan Corridor in Afghanistan. But by chance we discovered Languta-e-Barfi hadn't been climbed from Pakistan, so we decided to try it from the Rosh Gol Glacier. Few expeditions have visited the Rosh Gol, and none had previously reached the head of the glacier. [The team exploring farthest up the glacier, a 1967 German expedition, made the first ascent of a peak of nearly 6,500m, off the ridge connecting Languta-e-Barfi with Koh-e-Langar, which they named Languta-e-Barfi South].

For at least half of the 14-hour drive from Islamabad to Chitral, we had an armed police escort, which changed like clockwork every 20 to 30km. Two armed policemen accompanied us all the way to the start of the walk-in, and again on the return journey, proof that the Pakistani government is taking foreigners' welfare seriously. We reached the tiny village of Zondangram on June 25. Two long days' walk got us to Kotgaz (4,250m), the site of our base camp for the next month. It was a stunning place, with views up the glacier to Languta-e-Barfi and Koh-e-Langar (7,070m). To the west was Udren Zom (7,131m) and Shakhawr (7,116m), and to the east Saraghrar (7,349m).

A couple of days later Chris and I started our acclimatization in earnest, climbing a rocky ridge on Saraghrar to 5,000m. This gave a fantastic view into the upper Rosh Gol Glacier and south face of Languta-e-Barfi. After a rest day we tackled the 15km moraine bash to the base of the mountain, spending two nights at our 4,750m advanced base. We also climbed the initial broad gully of our chosen route to ca 5,200m, only to be chased down by afternoon avalanches and rockfall. To avoid this threat, we determined to get most of our climbing done by lunchtime.

On July 8 we trekked to advanced base for the second time, and the following morning were up at 3 a.m., intent on reaching Camp 1 at about 5,500m, where there appeared to be a flat spot on a small subsidiary ridge to the right of a big gully. It took a couple of hours to reach the base of the gully. We moved up the right-hand side and, when the snow softened, took to the ridge itself, climbing loose rock to a point just below 5,500m. In early afternoon we dug a tent platform and settled in. Next day we climbed the gully to where it narrowed and steepened, and made camp, again in early afternoon, on a perfect site at the top of the ridge we had been following the day before.

We made a 1 a.m. start on the morning of July 13, intent on reaching the crest of the southwest ridge. We climbed to the head of the gully (now narrow and steep) in the dark, then took a leftward-trending lead up some ice, which put us at the bottom of snow slopes leading up to the ridge. At 3 p.m. we found a great campsite on the ridge—the Afghanistan-Pakistan border—in a small alcove at 6,130m, with views across to Koh-e-Langar and Saraghrar to the east, and to Shakhawr just to the south of us. Because we had climbed over 700m that day, we decided to take an acclimatization day before trying for the summit.

After a day of rest, we were away by 1 a.m. in a temperature of -25°C. Straight away we found deep snow. At daybreak (5 a.m.) we reached a flat spot on the ridge where we had fantastic views down onto the Shakhawr Glacier in Afghanistan and the Wakhan Corridor.

The terrain steepened and we were climbing in deep snow laid over black ice. At around 4 p.m. we reached a spot high in a gully between a rock spur and a small ice cliff. At this point we were really

struggling to move forward—we figured we were only a couple of hundred meters from the summit, but it would probably take us another four to five hours. The weather was deteriorating, and we could only see a few meters ahead. Going on meant a night out in bad weather. We made the decision to turn around, arriving back at camp sometime in the evening, assisted by our GPS.

On the 15th we downclimbed over 1,000m to the base of the initial gully. It was very arduous, and we were so tired we could easily have made a silly mistake. We arrived on the glacier sometime around 9 p.m. and immediately made camp, ate the last dregs of our food, and crashed for the night. Next morning we headed off for base camp, 20km away. At one point Chris said, "I hear voices!" I said, "You are imagining things," but next moment our staff, Hayat, Naseerudin, and Irshadul, appeared over a mound of moraine, very glad to see us.

Ours was one of the few expeditions to the Hindu Kush since 9/11, and the only expedition in 2014. The people we dealt with (Tirich Mir Travel and the police who traveled with us) had nothing but our best interests at heart, but sadly we saw no other tourists or climbers. We can only encourage others to take advantage of the hospitality we encountered, and the fantastic mountains of the Hindu Kush. We would like to thank the New Zealand Alpine Club, the Shipton-Tilman Grant, and the Mount Everest Foundation for aiding our trip.

Pat Deavoll, New Zealand

[Editor's note: Languta-e-Barfi was first climbed by Poles in 1963 via the west spur to northwest ridge, and twice in 1973 via a different approach to the northwest ridge. There has been no known ascent since. For a photo from the Afghan side, see AAJ 2012.]

Images



Pat Deavoll at Camp 3 (6,130m) on the southwest ridge with the Koh-e-Langar group behind.



South face of Languta-e-Barfi and the New Zealand attempt.



Pat Deavoll looks into Afghanistan from the southwest ridge of Languta-e-Barfi. Across the Shakhawr Valley lie (immediately to her right) Koh-e-Keshnikhan (6,755m), and to its right Koh-e-Auar (6,183m).



On the Rosh Gol Glacier with Koh-e-Langar to the east and part of the Saraghrar massif behind.



The southwest face of Shakhawr (7,116m).



Chris Todd descending from the southwest ridge; upper Rosh Gol Glacier below.

Article Details

Author	Pat Deavoll, New Zealand
Publication	AAJ
Volume	57
Issue	89
Page	272
Copyright Date	2015
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions