



AAC Publications

Nilkanth, Southeast And West Ridges, Attempts

India, Central Garhwal

Jason Thompson and I received a Mugs Stump Award and a Lyman Spitzer Cutting Edge Award to attempt the unclimbed south face of Hathi Parbat (6,727m). Unfortunately, because of its proximity to the Chinese border, a permit was denied, and instead we opted for the unclimbed southeast ridge of Nilkanth (6,596m). This long and tortuous ridge was attempted six times between 1937 and 1992. It is 2.7km long, has seven pinnacles, and a 100m granite slab that must be overcome before one can reach the final summit ridge.

In September we met Caro North, the third member of our team, in New Delhi, then traveled to Badrinath, from where we trekked three days to a base camp on the Panpatia Glacier at 4,100m. The weather was quite unstable for the first 10 days, and temperatures were unseasonably warm, so the precipitation was typically wet snow, which would melt quickly in a few hours of sun. During this period we established an advanced base at 5,000m. When the weather cleared we set off for the ridge.

The first 300m of climbing was on very loose rock and faceted snow, making for slow going. After a full day we decided the ridge was too dry for safe progression. We regrouped and laid plans to attempt the southwest face, which Slovenians had hoped to climb in 2001 (AAJ 2002).

In good weather we first decided to climb the west ridge, which would form our descent route. On October 7 we established an advanced base at 5,100m, below the southwest face, and started up the ridge early on the 8th. With the dry season producing lots of loose rock and no ice, the climbing was more demanding than we had expected. There was much tattered fixed rope from a 2007 Calcutta expedition, which we did not use. At ca 5,600m we established an uncomfortable bivouac and continued to climb the next day. By around 4 p.m. we had reached 6,400m on the summit ridge, after climbing for 13 hours, and we were hit by a strong storm. All three of us felt electrical shocks. Continuing was not an option, and despite a large amount of falling rock, stuck ropes, and a crushed helmet, we safely made it back to base camp on the 11th.

While we were disappointed not to summit, our mission of scouting the descent route had been a success. Unfortunately, the weather now began to shift, and our window of opportunity grew smaller. After a number of days of continuous snow and a grim forecast, we knew our trip was over. We would've loved to have climbed Nilkanth via a new route, but failure is part of climbing. Most importantly, we all made it home safely, and for that I am grateful. Without the support of the grants this trip would not have been possible.

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Images

Article Details

Author	Anne-Gilbert Chase
Publication	AAJ
Volume	58
Issue	90
Page	327
Copyright Date	2016
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions