



AAC Publications

Brammah II, South Face and Southwest Ridge

India Kishtwar, Himalaya

In 2011–12, Kishtwar National Park reopened after a nearly 20-year hiatus. Before then, the area had seen very little activity, but the potential for unclimbed lines and mountains has drawn a number of expeditions over the last few years. We were also excited to explore this dramatic part of the Himalaya.

Jeff Shapiro and I contacted friends Damian and Darcy Mast, who were in Kishtwar in 2012. Their images, as well as the mystery of the region, intrigued us, and we discovered an area for which we could get very little information: the Kijai Nala drainage. This drainage leads to a cirque between Brammah II (6,425m) and Arjuna (6,230m). After extensive research, we were able to discover a few Polish reports, mainly describing the horror of the approach. Google Earth images revealed two amazing-looking peaks. We had to go.

Access was prolonged and difficult, but we eventually established base camp seven kilometers short of where we had planned, thrilled, by that time, to get our gear even that far. We then explored the area, each day hiking more than 15km to acclimatize and search for peaks. It was incredibly warm and the lower portions of the mountains were dry. We focused our attention on the south face of Brammah II, since its base was at a higher elevation.

Bad weather intervened, and it was late September before we began our push for Brammah II. With heavy packs and difficult terrain, it took us two days to reach the base of the face. There were two obvious lines, but the incredibly warm temperatures eliminated the path we initially had chosen, and we shifted our attention left to a less objectively hazardous route.

Jeff and I were on the go at 3 a.m. on September 27. We needed to get through the initial mixed section before the sun came out and the mountain started coming apart. Conditions were favorable, and we made quick work of the lower face while a dramatic lightning storm illuminated the sky. By the time the sun reached us, we had a straightforward mixed snow, ice, and rock face above. Tired from the great heat and altitude, we slowly made progress up the wall. After 13 hours I climbed onto the southwest ridge and found a great bivouac site. With pounding headaches from the altitude and dehydration, Jeff and I watched the sun set over one of the most magnificent landscapes either of us had ever witnessed.

The next morning, September 28, we were up early. With less elevation to gain, I was anticipating a shorter day. However, we still had the crux to come. [Editor's note: At this point they were on the right flank of the southwest ridge. This ridge was used in its entirety in 1975 by a Japanese team to make the first ascent of the mountain. A similar route was repeated in 1981 by a Dutch team. The slightly lower Brammah I (6,416m), situated further northwest, was first climbed in 1973 by Chris Bonington and Nick Estcourt and has been repeated several times since.] **The shallow mixed corner above turned out to be relatively straightforward—far more enjoyable than difficult.** Some barehanded rock climbing and dry tooling kept us smiling as we climbed through the rock band.

We were now near the top of the true south face in worsening snow conditions. I looked at my watch and anticipated a summit time of around 5 or 6 p.m. We continued to simul-climb through mixed terrain, inching our way to the summit. I led through on the final 60m, and at 6:30 p.m. we were both on top, enjoying a spectacular view as the sun dipped to the horizon.

There wasn't a hint of wind as we began to descend. We made around five rappels to get off the upper south face and onto the lower ice slope, where we chopped seats in the ice and settled in for the night. Lightning storms over the flats of India kept us mesmerized as we drifted in and out of sleep. The next morning we threaded the lower face, reaching the glacial basin before the dangers brought on by high temperatures reached us.

It was another day and a half before we were back at base camp and soaking up what we had experienced. The trip was filled with so many hurdles and unknowns. We took each one step at a time and solved problem after problem without worrying about the overall goal. We named our route Pnuma (1,300m, VI AI4 M5). We sincerely thank the Mugs Stump Award and Copp-Dash Inspire Award for helping make this amazing experience a reality.

– Chris Gibisch, AAC

Images



Jeff Shapiro on the right flank of the upper southwest ridge of Brammah II during the second day of the 2016 ascent. The original 1975 Japanese route followed this ridge from its base.



During the approach to Brammah II, Jeff Shapiro takes in the view toward the west faces of the various spires that make up the Arjuna group. Some, reaching 6,000m, are still unclimbed.



The south face of Brammah II (6,425m) and American route of ascent. On the first ascent of the mountain, in 1975, the Japanese climbed the entire left skyline ridge, approaching from the far side.

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