



AAC Publications

Pangbuk North, Northeast Face and Southeast Ridge

Nepal, Rolwaling Himal

AFTER SPENDING almost 20 hours studying the pictures of the west face of Lunag Ri, I thought I'd finally found the line, which cleverly avoided objective hazards and verticality. It also seemed very blue, the sort of blue of which every mountaineer visiting Nepal dreams. Maybe I should have worried about the falling barometric pressure? Maybe I should have suspected something from the repeated rumbling above camp?

After sweating and stumbling, Pierre Sancier and I managed to establish a foothold on the Lunag Ri moraine, where we saw the evidence left by the anticyclone that had persisted across this part of Asia for a month. Instead of our long-anticipated ice flows on the west face, we saw flood waters similar to the Arve River through Chamonix in spring. After a few seconds of contemplation we switched to plan B—from a west face to a north face, from Lunag Ri to Pangbuk North (6,589m, although mistakenly 6,748m on the HMG-Finn). The unusual heat in the Lunag cirque appeared to have left Pangbuk North unscathed.

In 2009, a French-Nepalese-Swiss team tried to summit Pangbuk North via the northeast face and southeast ridge, but turned around at about 6,150m after exiting the face at a notch on the southeast ridge. [The leader of this team claimed the first ascent of the mountain and attempted to name it after a corporate sponsor.] In 2013 the peak was climbed via a direct route up the northeast face (AAJ 2014). We decided to try to finish the 2009 route, which would involve very steep snow on the ridge immediately above the notch and would give us a full 1,000m to express ourselves between the bergschrund and the summit we now coveted.

At 3 a.m. on October 18 we could still hear Lunag Ri's west face groaning, yet everything seemed quiet on Pangbuk North. We crossed the bergschrund at 5 a.m., the altimeter reading 5,450m. Shortly after, we reached the constriction at the bottom of the face, post-holing in soft snow. As the sun rose I had to take off my pack to climb the first block of vertical ice; I trailed a thin rope to haul the bag once I passed the crux. Spindrift was falling, making it seem as though I was breathing through a Ziploc bag. At the same time my fingers started to lose sensitivity, and when I reached the belay I was panting. By the time the steepness gave way to a long snow slope it was 7 a.m. The altimeter showed only 5,600m—a long way to go if we were to reach the summit that day.

Three hours later we reached the last section before the ridge, finding 200m of beautiful ice. It was 10 a.m. and falling rock was beginning to ricochet close by. We took the most sheltered path; the pitches were interesting and varied. On the last pitch of mixed climbing we found pieces of fixed rope from the 2009 team. At the snow-covered notch, I took a quick glance at the ridge above and was temporarily demoralized: 400m to go and the next pitch looked really steep. Since Pierre was only interested in attempting this mountain as a second, I had agreed in advance to lead the entire route, and the idea of climbing the almost unproctectable snow pitch above the notch made me stop and think. When Pierre arrived at the ridge, we decided we'd stay the night there—after I'd led the 80° snow above and fixed our two ropes.

Somehow we managed to overcome the difficulties, return to our tent, rest well, and leave at dawn the following day. We ascended our ropes, after which the ground eased to 60°. At around 9 a.m., after traversing a gorgeous snow-covered ridge, we reached the summit and were treated to a breathtaking panorama over Tibet and four 8,000m peaks. The pleasure of witnessing such scenery left us

blissfully happy. That night we rappelled 1,000m to reach the base of the mountain. To have been able to climb this elegant, logical, and technical route gave us tons of satisfaction.

– Max Bonniot, France

Summary: First complete ascent of the northeast face and southeast ridge of Pangbuk North in the Rolwaling Himal, by Max Bonniot and Pierre Sancier. The route was named Tolérance Zéro (1,100m, ED-WI5 80°). This report was translated by Fanny Deplace.

Images



Pierre Sancier on the steep lower section of the southeast ridge above the notch.



Pierre Sancier on the summit ridge. Behind him the continuation of the southeast ridge ends at Peak 5,777m. To the left the Lunag Glacier flows into the Nangpa Glacier; to the right is the Pangbuk Glacier. The Everest-Lhotse group and Makalu are on the far left.



Pangbuk N 6589m

Népal / Khumbu
Massif des Lunag



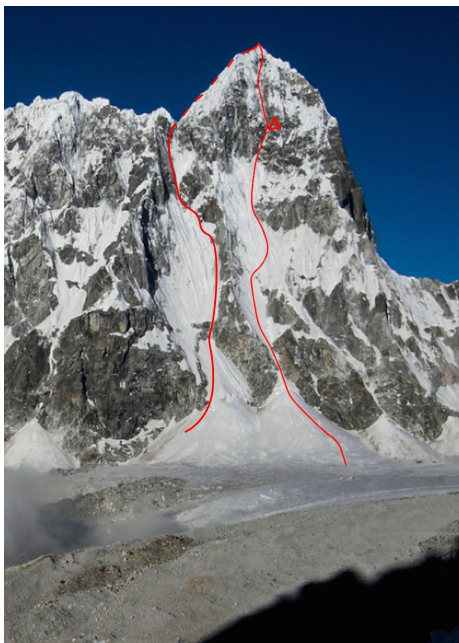
Max Bonniot / Pierre Sancier



18 et 19 octobre 2017

Voie «Tolérance zéro»
1100m ED- (W15/ 80° Neige)

Photo topo of the new route Tolérance Zéro on Pangbuk North.



Pangbuk North from the northeast with (1) Tolérance Zéro (2017), and (2) Purgation (2013), the two routes on the peak that reach the summit. Bivouac sites are marked.



Max Bonniot leading out of the notch on the southeast ridge of Pangbuk North. The next 120m would comprise mostly unprotectable snow.



Max Bonniot on the lower section of the northeast face of Pangbuk North.



Max Bonniot just above the notch on the southeast ridge of Pangbuk North during the rappel descent near the steep, unprotectable snow the two had climbed earlier.

Article Details

Author	Max Bonniot
Publication	AAJ
Volume	60
Issue	92
Page	332
Copyright Date	2018
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions