



AAC Publications

Karnak Valley, Hanuman Wall, Monkey Business

India, Ladakh

With a Grit & Rock Award, my wife, Christina Pogacean, was due to attempt H17 in Zaskar, and I came along on a solitary mission and in support. However, shortly after arriving in Padam, Christina's partner fell ill and had to return home.

Indian friends offered us the kind invitation to join their trip to the Karnak Gorge, south of Kang Yatze in Ladakh. This amazing limestone canyon at over 4,000m is home to the 2007 Chabloz-Chardonners-Chevieux-Quirici-Scherrer route Samsara is Nirvana (650m, 7b obl), described as a bolted climb of 16 pitches on magnificent gray limestone. The Indians hoped to make the second ascent.

The rock and ambience of the area reminded us of the Taghia Gorge in the Moroccan Atlas. We were a bit worried that our rack, intended for granite, would not take us all that high on a limestone face, forcing us to fall back on attempting the run-out Samsara. We spotted a line [the base is at approximately 33.591351°N, 77.473961°E] and set out on the morning of September 4, with Christina leading the first block and both of us carrying 30-liter packs with food, water, rain gear, shoes, and sleeping bags. Throughout the route, we had to make difficult choices between the best available climbing (and there was lots of it, largely on very compact rock) or more protectable options on mostly friable limestone. Generally, we compromised.

The first two pitches ascended a beautiful, compact face, and the climbing continued to be good for the first half of the wall. Above, progressively poorer rock made for difficult route-finding and careful handling, so as to not drop blocks onto the belayer or rope. After 10 pitches it was dark, and the two pitches that followed were loose. Above, I took the lead on ground that was anything but enjoyable. Not far below the top, we called it a day and rappelled to the first prayer of a ledge, where we managed to excavate a perch in rubble and bivouac for the night. A nice fire down in the valley made us wonder what we were looking for up here.

Next morning we regained our high point, and Christina set out to finish the final pitch to the ridge. Two meters below the crest, we decided our physical integrity was of more value than anything else, so we built an anchor and descended. Ten rappels, one stuck and cut rope, and some scrambling saw us back at the riverbed.

For any interested parties, do not climb our last two pitches, but instead avoid the final white wall by exiting to the left. It might also be possible from somewhere on the ridge to rappel the far (west) side. A few rappels and some scrambling should see you on the main trekking path. Back at our tent, we wondered about the good karma that granted us two days of fine weather, just perfect for some Monkey Business (14 pitches, from ca 4,200 TO 4,700m, 6a+).

Kumar Gaurav and Madhu CR (India) reached the top of Samsara is Nirvana, freeing all the pitches but not in a continuous ascent.

– Cosmin Andron, Romania

Images



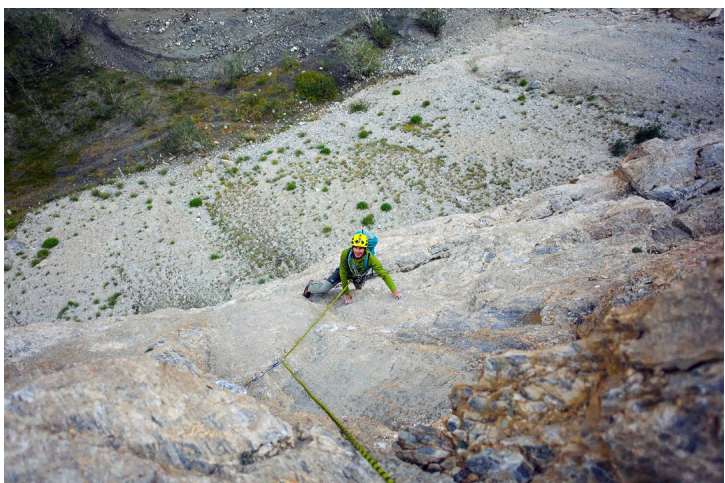
Belayed by Christina Pogacean, Cosmin Andron leads pitch three (30m, 5c) of Monkey Business, Karnak Gorge.



Monkey Business, Karnak Gorge, Ladakh.



The view northward across the river from high on Monkey Business in the Karnak Gorge. It should be possible to create a route of almost 1,000m on this peak.



Cosmin Andron follows pitch one (40m, 6a) of Monkey Business, Karnak Gorge, Ladakh.

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