



AAC Publications

Panbari, South Ridge, Attempt

Nepal, Peri Himal

Leon Hiro Davis, Andres Marin, and I had planned on climbing Panbari (6,905m) for quite some time. It had been on my radar ever since the first ascent a decade earlier (AAJ 2007). A photo of the jutting south ridge was simply too much to resist—it was one of the most beautiful unclimbed features I had ever seen.

The three of us arrived in Kathmandu, having realized just one day before that a French team (Thomas Arfi, Damien Tomasi, and Fanny Tomasi-Schmutz) had their sights on the same objective and would be on the exact same schedule as us. We made plans to meet up for dinner in Kathmandu, and it was quickly apparent that we would all get along well. It was a tough situation, since both teams wanted to be the first, but we agreed to work together for as long as we could. Throughout the hike to base camp and subsequent weeks of acclimatization, we all became good friends.

Both teams held their cards close, but when we all felt acclimatized, it was agreed that we should work almost as one cohesive team. The Americans would be on one rope and the French on another, but each would assist the other and hope for a total success.

Conditions in that part of the Himalaya were exceptionally dry in late 2017. There was not so much as a speck of snow below 6,000m. All of our photos showed gullies choked with old snow low on the mountain, but we found these same gullies to be completely dry and choked only with steep talus and shifting boulders. In mid-October, on our second trip up a major gully (after a gear cache and initial reconnaissance), we had a very close call with rockfall at about 5,100m. The six of us were in close proximity when a volley of rocks came crashing down from an adjoining wall. They peppered all around us, but miraculously no one was injured.

We continued up the gully and eventually joined the lower ridge. The rock quality (although granite) was horrendous. I would step on a large slab and the whole thing would teeter-totter over the void.

Both teams camped at around 5,400m, and the next morning the French quickly decided (rightly) to descend. We chose to stick around and consider moving forward. The rock ahead looked just as bad, and there were many spots where we would be terribly exposed to rockfall. We witnessed a few incidents and made the call to descend soon after the French.

There are many mountains that I fail on and fill me with a desire to return. Panbari is not one of them. Perhaps in radically different conditions (much more snow) it would be a different story, but I am happy to let this one go. [This expedition was funded in part by an AAC Cutting Edge Grant.]

– Clint Helander, AAC

Images



The south ridge of Panbari showing the attempted line and high point of the American and French teams. The summit of Panbari (6,905m) is the more rounded top to the right of the top of the south ridge.

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