



Peak 5,470m, Yaari Couloir (Not to Summit)

Pakistan, Karakoram, Panmah Muztagh

The aim of our small Belgian expedition was to make the first winter ascent of Lukpe Lawo Brakk, the highest of the Snow Lake peaks. [Lukpe Lawo Brakk (6,593m) was climbed, possibly for the first time, in 1989 by a British expedition via the west ridge. New Zealanders climbed the southeast ridge two years later.] Steven Maginelle, Jean-Francois Spelmans, and I planned to approach the mountain on skis with sleds, and employed porters from Askole to take us to a base camp at Shatung (4,138m, 35°52'34.77"N, 75°42'47.20"E), before the Biafo Glacier. Once above base, we had around eight days to reach Snow Lake, climb the mountain, and return.

Unfortunately, before setting out for the glacier, there was a period of very heavy snowfall, which meant that we were unable to progress any faster than 1km/h. We decided to opt for a nearer objective. On December 10 we skied to the foot of Peak 5,470m (Polish Wala map), which forms the cornerstone between the Uzun Brakk and Biafo glaciers. A long couloir on the south-southwest face, beginning from the Biafo at around 4,172m (35°53'7.54"N, 75°43'11.74"E), led up to the southeast ridge.

We climbed this couloir for around 1,000m, taking the right branch above 4,890m. There was no ice but mixed snow and rock at 40–45° with a few sections of 50°, and we graded it AD. At 5,170m, and around 10m below the crest of the ridge, the snow became hip-deep and unstable. It felt very unsafe, so we turned around and descended. It had taken one hour from camp to reach the base of the couloir and 7.5 hours to climb up and down it. We called it the Yaari (Friendship) Couloir.

After this we explored possible routes on Shatung Brakk, the small peak above (and northeast of) base camp. During this time, we could see that by taking the left branch of Yaari Couloir it should be possible to ascend the east-southeast face of Peak 5,470m, where there appeared to be a glacier. We also climbed partway up the south-southeast flank of Dongbar Peak (6,282m, no recorded ascent). There are a number of possible routes to the summit, but the southern flanks are composed of unstable rotten rock.

Our quest for a winter climb transformed into a deep respect for how the locals survive the harsh winter conditions (we recorded -20°C at base camp), and we left them with some of our clothes, food, and money.

— Sofie Lenaerts, Belgium

Images



The route attempted in December 2020 on the south-southeast flank of unclimbed Dongbar Peak.



In the lower Yaari Couloir with the snow-covered Biafo Glacier below.



Winter in the lower Biafo. Looking west from the foot of Yaari Couloir at high 5,000m peaks, the highest (distant left) being an easterly top of Ghur.



The Yaari Couloir from the south-southwest, rising above the lower Biafo Glacier.



The Yaari Couloir from the west, rising above the lower Biafo Glacier.

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