



Saraghrar Northwest II, Southwest Pillar, Alpine-Style Ascent

Pakistan, Hindu Kush

In August 1982, after attempts by Spanish climbers in 1975 and 1977, a third Spanish team, comprising seven members led by Joan López, made the first ascent of the southwest pillar of Saraghrar Northwest, reaching an indistinct top on the northwest ridge that the Spanish named Saraghrar Northwest II (ca 7,150m).

Starting a little above 4,900m, this was one of the longest rock routes in the world and was graded VI 75°. The team fixed ropes to near the top of the major rock difficulties at over 6,000m, after which the leader, along with highly accomplished alpinists Nil Bohigas and Enric Lucas [who just two years later would achieve the groundbreaking first ascent of the south face of Annapurna Central], made a push for the summit. After four bivouacs, they reached Northwest II and elected to descend from that point. (Their 30-minute film can be seen at MountainFilm.com.) The higher summit of Saraghrar Northwest (ca 7,300m) would have to wait until 2021 for a first ascent, via the northwest face (AAJ 2022).

In the summer of 2023, Catalans Oriol Baró, Bru Busom, Guillem Sancho, and Marc Toralles first attempted the complicated rock pillar left of the 2021 route on the northwest face. They reached 6,000m, fixing a little rope, but two days of heavy snowfall forced them down. They decided instead to attempt an alpine-style ascent of the 1982 Catalan Route, aiming to complete it to the main summit.

Beginning on July 20, it took them two days to climb to 6,000m, whereupon it snowed all night. The rock next day was either covered in verglas or wet. They only gained another 300m. On day four they had reached 6,750m when they received a forecast that the weather would be bad on the following day. Baró and Sancho decided to retreat and equip rappel anchors, so the other pair could make an efficient and speedier descent. (They also removed some ancient fixed rope.)

Busom and Toralles continued that day to 7,000m and hunkered down for the expected storm. Fortunately, it never materialized. The next day the two reached the top of Saraghrar Northwest II, where they found the snow on the ridge leading toward the main summit in awful condition. Progressing too slowly, they turned around and descended, reaching the bottom of the face on July 25.

The 2023 team found over 2,000m of technical climbing, which changed from pure rock to more mixed terrain above 6,400m. They rated the ascent 6c M6 70°.

—Lindsay Griffin, AAJ

Images



The Saraghrar massif with the northwest summit marked. The main summit is to the right. The Catalan Route, leading to Saraghrar Northwest II, is shown. The arrow marks the start of the 2021 first ascent of the northwest face, leading to Saraghrar Northwest (ca 7,300m).

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