



AAC Publications

Lalung I, East Ridge, and Other Routes

India, Zaskar

Our all-female expedition of Ana Baumgartner, Urša Kešar, Patricija Verdev, and I (all from Slovenia) headed southwest from near the Pensi La with 18 porters on August 26 to climb in the Lalung Valley.

We had thought that our base camp would be at around 5,000m, but we soon realized this was unrealistic. After just three hours of walking, we found an excellent site at 4,100m, with clean running water. We checked higher locations but found only dirty water and unsuitable terrain. Our main goal was Lalung I and neighboring peaks, and the low base camp would add an extra day to the approaches.

Connection (1,400m of climbing, VI-) on the north-northwest face of Peak 5,332m. Photo: Anja Petek. The day after our arrival, we explored higher up the valley. It took an entire day to make a 20km round trip on moraine and glacial terrain, and, as the weather was poor, we didn't see much of the higher peaks.

On August 31, Patricija and I climbed a new route on a granite north-northwest face not far from base camp. This buttress, which starts at around 4,200m, lies on the south side of the valley and rises to Peak 5,332m (Google Earth altitude; 33°51'28.47"N, 76°16'35.45"E). [A route had been climbed previously near the center of this face, ending at around 4,800m on the northwest ridge, by Indians Korak Sanyal and Spandan Sanyal; see AAJ 2018.] The new route Connection (VI-) took 15 hours and involved around 1,400m of climbing.

Before moving up to an advanced base camp at 4,800m, we had a nighttime visit from a bear that sniffed around our tents for food. All four climbers were happy to relocate to a bear-free advanced base. Urša had difficulties with the altitude, however, so she and Ana returned to base camp, where they and our cooks and liaison officer had to deal with a full-on bear saga. After more than ten nighttime visits, resulting in Patricija's tent being ripped, heaps of food stolen, and the toilet tent demolished, they managed to scare off the bears with fire and enjoyed a few peaceful nights.

During this period, Urša and Ana climbed two more new routes on the north-northwest face of Peak 5,332m, ascending the right side of the face and finishing on the northwest ridge. On their first route, Bear Camp (800m of climbing, V-, eight hours), climbed on September 10, the two were hit by a snowstorm near the top of the face, forcing a long traverse right to the ridge. The second route, Calm Before the Storm? (670m of climbing, V+, six hours), climbed on the 13th, followed the planned line directly to the ridge.

Lalung I (6,243m) from the north. The peak was traversed from left to right, up the long east ridge and down the west ridge and north face. Bivouacs are marked. Photo: Patricija Verdev.

Meanwhile, on September 9, Patricija and I left advanced base for the east ridge of unclimbed Lalung I (6,243m, 33°45'35"N, 76°14'13"E), camping a little way above the start. We'd had a forecast for a good weather window, but a snowstorm on the 10th forced us to set up our tent in the middle of the day and sit out the weather. The storm lasted all the next day, but the 12th dawned clear and we climbed late into the night.

Day five on the ridge required even more determination, and it wasn't until 1:30 a.m. that we settled down for a rest, not far below the top, having climbed the final difficult mixed pitches. In a moment of carelessness brought on by fatigue, we lost our tent poles to the wind and slept in bivouac sacks. The next morning was foggy with diffuse light, making it hard to navigate the remaining terrain to the summit. After some snow slopes, we reached the top at 9 a.m. on the 14th.

We proceeded with a long descent down the west ridge and then five rappels on the north face to reach the glacier at 6:30 p.m. It took another eight hours to reach advanced base. Next day, we descended to base camp. Just before stepping off the moraine, we saw three silhouettes—Ana, Urša, and Freni, our liaison officer—who brought smiles to our tired faces. We named our route Here Comes the Sun (M6+ AI5+). It gave around 2,000m of climbing.

Although the bear situation had calmed, we agreed it was best for both us and the animals if we left as soon as possible. We walked out on the 17th to the village of Tungri.

—Anja Petek, Slovenia

Editor's Note: A good map and description of this area were published in AAJ 2019. The only documented previous attempt on Lalung I was in October 2022 when Innes Dean, Tim Elson, and Alex Mathie (U.K.) inspected the north ridge from the Lalung Valley, finding the ridge composed of frozen soil and loose rock (AAJ 2023).

Images



Patricija Verdev on day three of the first ascent of the east ridge of Lalung I.



Lalung I (6,243m) from the north. The peak was traversed from left to right, up the long east ridge and down the west ridge and north face. Bivouacs are marked.



Anja Petek on the east ridge of Lalung I during the first known ascent of the peak.



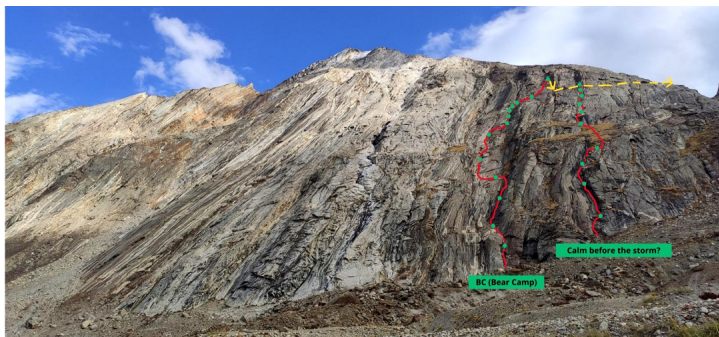
Patricija Verdev following a mixed section on the second day of the ascent of Lalung I's east ridge.



Ana Baumgartner on the north-northwest face of Peak 5,332m, Lalung Valley.



Connection (1,400m of climbing, VI-) on the north-northwest face of Peak 5,332m.



The right side of the north-northwest face of Peak 5,332m and the routes Bear Camp and Calm Before the Storm? Two prior routes ascended this face near the center of the photo: Mahalaya (2017, farthest left) and Connection (2024).

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