



## AAC Publications

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### **Starikatchan, First Ascent, via West Face and South Ridge**

India, Ladakh, Zaskar

Tess Smith on the south ridge of Starikatchan during the 2022 attempt, when the climbers got within about 100 meters of the summit. Photo: Alan Goldbetter.

**The last bit of light in the sky faded quickly as we arrived on the summit of Starikatchan (5,904m). The wind swirled around us, and for a moment we sat, shivering, taking it all in.**

In 2019, Tess Smith (USA) and I began our obsession with Starikatchan (H7 on the Sakamoto sketch map, 33°30'45.81"N, 76°43'29.58"E), west of Padum in Zaskar. We made our first attempt from the east, turning back due to poor conditions and unstable weather. We returned in July 2022 and tried to complete our line on the east face, then attempted to climb the south ridge via a line on the west face. Both attempts brought us heartbreakingly close, but the summit eluded us (AAJ 2023).

On July 13, 2024, we left our modest base camp at 4,600m in the Shimling Tokpo and reached the bottom of the west face. Climbing an obvious gully and ridge system at 2nd and 3rd class, we reached a bivouac spot just below the col on the south ridge, where the technical climbing would begin. The following day we climbed 300m of moderate slabs before reaching the crest of the ridge, where we either traversed or avoided gendarmes and crossed much moderate rock and snow to reach a headwall. Here, we found a perfect 5.7 splitter basking in the sun. It led to the top of the wall, and three short pitches took us to the peak's highest point, atop a griffon's beak-like formation. Visible were twinkling lights from the Doda (Stod) Valley villages to the east, some 2,000m below our perch.

After a few rappels in the dark, we bivouacked below the headwall and the next day reversed our route to a final five-star luxury bivouac at the bottom of the west face, where we were treated to an incredible view of the Starikatchan skyline meeting the Milky Way above.

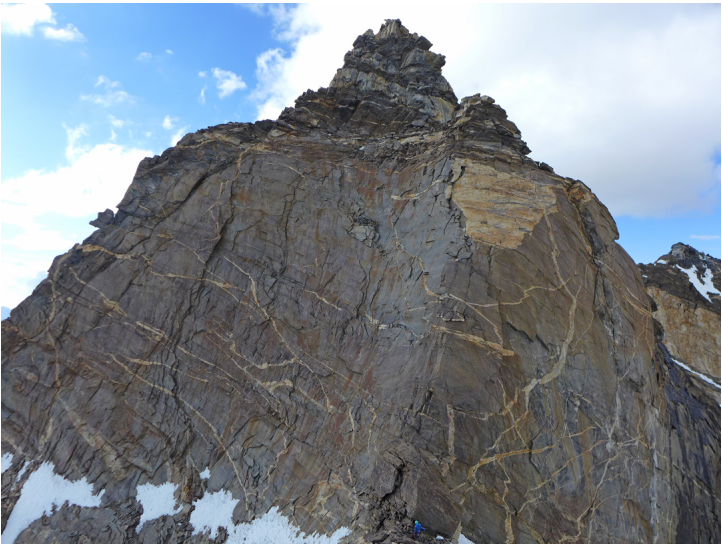
Our 800m route was V 5.7 A1 40°. We would like to give special thanks to Matic Jošt for his inspirational report about this area in AAJ 2017, and to our lovely hosts at Skitpo Travel, whom we have the privilege of calling friends.

**—Alan Goldbetter, Finland/USA**

## Images



Toward the end of the first day on Starikatchan, Tess Smith approaches the bivouac spot near the top of the west face. The col that marks the start of the south ridge and the technical climbing on the first-ascent route is directly above her.



The final headwall on Starikatchan (5,904m). Tess Smith (in blue) can just be seen at the base.



Alan Goldbetter on the headwall of the south ridge of Starikatchan (5,904m). The high point visible up



to the left is the summit.



Route of first ascent of Starikatchan (5,904m) via the west face and south ridge.



Looking down the Shimling Tokpo at Starikatchan and the upper part of the 2024 first-ascent route on the south ridge. The ridge was approached by the west face, beyond the foreground ridge marked by a black line.



Tess Smith on the south ridge of Starikatchan during the 2022 attempt, when the climbers got within about 100 meters of the summit.

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