



Lalung Valley, Unnamed Buttress, Mahalaya

India, Zaskar

During September, Spandan Sanyal and I joined our friends Jon Griffin and Tad McCrea (both USA) for an expedition to the Lalung Valley. Base camp was established after a three-hour hike from the road over the Pensi La. The altitude was 4,150m and the area pleasant, with flat, grassy camping spots and a flowing stream.

Just southeast of our base camp was a peak of around 5,200m, with a northwest-facing granite buttress rising from 4,200m to around 4,800m. The buttress finished on a ridge running northwest from Peak 5,200m and appeared to offer promising lines on good granite.

On September 20, Spandan and I left base camp at 8 a.m. After one hour up steep, loose talus we reached the base of a groove system that cut through the central section of the face. The climb began with a smooth, blank slab of 15m (UIAA V/V+). This led to easier ground, where we continued by simul-climbing with spaced protection.

After 200m the face steepened and I started to lead an initial block up a series of dihedrals. The first 60m pitch (VI+) offered excellent bridging, while the second, also 60m and VI+, gave strenuous laybacking. Spandan took over and led a demanding, 60m, run-out pitch in a thin, delicate dihedral (VI+). Above, we shortened the rope, did a couple of 30m pitches of V/V+, and then moved together, reaching the top of the buttress at 3 p.m. We named our 550m route Mahalaya (VI+), as the 20th was Mahalaya day, marking the beginning of the Durga Puja festival. Natural gear had been used throughout, and we both freed every pitch.

The ridge leading up toward the summit above was long and alpine, and would have taken us considerable time. As we had no bivouac gear, we elected to descend from this point, downclimbing the ridge with a couple of short rappels near the base. Two hours over treacherous terminal moraine saw us back at camp, 12 hours after departing.

– Korak Sanyal, India

Images



The new route Mahalaya on an unnamed northwest-facing buttress below Peak 5,200m in the Lalung Valley.



Korak Sanyal on the strenuous layback pitch (VI+) of Mahalaya in the Lalung Valley.



Spandan Sanyal on a run-out pitch (VI+) on Mahalaya in the Lalung Valley.

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