



AAC Publications

Barnaj II, North Face of East Summit

India, Zaskar

After a day's drive from Leh, Will Harris, Callum Johnson, Tom Seccombe, Dave Sharpe, and I made a six-hour walk to base camp on the west side of the Hagshu Glacier. On arrival, it was obvious conditions were extremely dry: The monsoon appeared to have failed, leaving little ice on the surrounding peaks. One day later, there was a massive snowfall of 30–60cm, with probably more higher up. This transformed the mountains and made our acclimatization a slow process. We climbed and camped on the hills east of base camp, reaching an altitude of 5,700m.

On September 29, after a rest at base, Tom and I carried gear to an advanced base (at around 4,700m) on moraine opposite the north face of Barnaj II (approximately 33°34'45.93"N, 76°22'50.99"E). The day after, Callum, Tom, and Will set off to try the east face of Chiring, which appeared to have possibly climbable ice streaks. [Chiring's elevation is variously quoted up to 6,300m, though the most accurate Survey of India Map of this region has it only at 5,980m.] Meanwhile, Dave and I walked up to advanced base with the intention of climbing the north side of Barnaj II via a direct ice line to the summit visible from this camp.

Both parties returned to base camp on October 1. Callum, Tom, and Will had experienced heavy overnight snowfall and were forced to move their tent for fear of avalanches from the face above. Dave and I had climbed 300–400m of the initial ramp that leads to the ice gully on Barnaj II, but Dave was struggling to breathe due to illness.

After two rest days, Callum, Tom, and I headed for Barnaj II. Dave and Will stayed an extra day before leaving to attempt Barnaj II from the south. Sadly, on their approach it became apparent that Dave was not fully recovered, so they turned back.

Close to the summit of Barnaj II East, looking along the ridge to Barnaj II North (main summit). From Barnaj II North, the ridge continues left, falling and then rising to a prominent rock tower (with cloud behind) that is most likely the central summit, reached by Japanese and Americans. Photo by Tom Seccombe.

On the 7th we left advanced base and simul-climbed for most of the day, traversing right, off the gully line, to bivouac below a small serac. On the 8th we climbed harder mixed pitches and lovely ice to reach the ridge at 6,000m. On day three we climbed west up the ridge, negotiating several more mixed pitches until reaching the east top (6,303m) at around midday. We discussed the possibility of traversing to the unclimbed north summit (the highest of Barnaj II's three tops), but snow conditions, incoming weather, length, and commitment (possibly two days of additional climbing) convinced us to descend. We reversed the route, rappelling entirely from Abalakov anchors and leaving no gear, to reach our advanced base at 10 p.m. We've named the route Seracnaphobia (1,600m, ED M5 AI4).

— Matt Glenn, U.K.

Historical Notes on Barnaj II and Chiring: Barnaj II was attempted many times during the late 1970s and early 1980s from the Barnaj Nala (valley) to the south-southwest. (Common map heights are 6,290m for Barnaj II and 6,250m for the lower I. However, both peaks are believed to be higher, with II probably above 6,400m.) In the early days, several parties reached the south summit of Barnaj II, and one, a Japanese team in 1980, reported progressing to a higher central summit, noting that the north summit was the highest. The central summit also was likely reached in 2014 by Americans Tim Dittmann, Seth

Timpano, and Jared Vilhauer, who climbed the southeast face. The main north summit remains unclimbed.

Chiring has three tops in relatively close proximity, the south top around 15m lower than the other two. There is a vague possibility the mountain was climbed from the north in 1980 by a French team, who referred to it as La Schal. That same year, British climbers Chris Griffiths and Chris Lloyd certainly attempted it from the upper Hagshu Nala to the southeast. After several bivouacs, and above the technical difficulties, the two were close to the summit when Lloyd's axe ripped and he fell down the southwest face to the Chiring Glacier. In 1987, climbing the south ridge from the upper Hagshu Nala, Roger Brookes and Andy Dunhill (U.K.) reached the south top, where they discovered an old sling, which did not originate from the previous British team.

Images



The upper north side of Barnaj II, showing the general line of the 2022 ascent. (E) East summit. (N) North (highest) summit.



The north face of Barnaj II East, with the two bivouacs of the 2022 ascent marked.



Callum Johnson on the upper east ridge of Barnaj II East, high above the Hagshu Glacier.



Close to the summit of Barnaj II East, looking along the ridge to Barnaj II North (main summit). From Barnaj II North, the ridge continues left, falling and then rising to a prominent rock tower (with cloud behind) that is most likely the central summit, reached by Japanese and Americans.



Looking west from Hagshu. (A) Chiring. (B) Sickle Moon. (S), (C) and (N) the south, central and north summits of Barnaj II. (E) Barnaj II East. Marked are the south ridge as far as the central summit, climbed in 1980 (though the south summit had been reached on several occasions previously) and the 2014 American route on the southeast face to central summit.



Barnaj I (left) and II, with the south ridge of Barnaj II descending toward the camera.



Barnaj I (left) and II from the west at sunset. The so-called south summit of Barnaj II, reached several times in the 1970s and early '80s, is the shoulder where the rocky south ridge on the right becomes a horizontal snow arête.



Chiring and the upper Chiring Valley from the southwest. The 1987 ascent reached a small summit at the top of the obvious snow slope, just right of the main summit.



Traversing through seracs to reach the upper ice gully on the north face of Barnaj II East. The Hagshu Glacier is below.

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