



AAC Publications

Phaalkan Meenaar, Southwest Pillar and South Face

India, Western Garhwal, Gangotri

Wadim Jablonski on the upper (south-facing) headwall of Phaalkan Meenaar. Photo by Ondrej Huserka.

At 5 p.m. on October 16, after three days of climbing, Wadim Jablonski (Poland) and I reached the top of a previously unclimbed rock tower of 5,602m in the Kedar Tal (valley), which rises to the south of Gangotri town. We named the summit Phaalkan Meenaar ("Falcon Tower" in Hindi). Falcon was the nickname of Andrzej Sokolowski, a Polish climber and guide who died in the Tatra in September 2022.

Conditions in the Gangotri were really hard during the autumn. The monsoon lasted for an unusually long time and surprised us with large amounts of snowfall. Our original plan was a new route on the north side of Thalay Sagar (6,904m), but after arriving in base camp at the end of September, we could see this would be highly dangerous. Avalanches fell from surrounding walls during the entire time of our acclimatization. Our only chance of climbing anything would be steep rock, and the tower we chose had a southwest-facing rock pillar starting from the valley floor. It is situated on a long ridge descending west from a subsidiary summit between Manda I (6,510m) and II (6,568m).

Our biggest challenge was the approach, as we had to transport our gear across deep loose snow. We avoided the lower, loose pillar by following a couloir on the left (west) side, then made a rising traverse to the crest via steep and dangerous, snow-covered mixed ground. This brought us to a notch below the lower of two headwalls. Moving around to the right, we made a comfortable bivouac below the lower wall and fixed three pitches on the southwest pillar.

Next morning, we started jumaring and hauling, experiencing all the usual problems with a stuck haulbag. The temperature was perfect, neither too hot nor too cold for rock climbing. After our three, previously fixed pitches, we climbed a fourth at 6c+ before reaching an extremely loose tower. Fortunately, while everything was covered in snow, there was no ice. The next two pitches took five hours, as Wadim managed to find a way through this crumbling terrain to reach a bivouac site at the base of the upper headwall at 10 p.m.

Our last day was a fight through the upper headwall. We left the haulbag at the bivouac site, hoping to return before dark. After traversing right along a break, we climbed the center of the south face in five pitches. The rock was steep and sometimes brittle. We didn't believe there would be a feasible line to the summit until we were high on the wall, but in the end a 6c+ slab, with a final section through extremely fragile black slate, took us to a short snow slope, which we followed to the summit boulder.

The descent was tedious. Four rappels took us back to the haulbag, by which time it was dark. We opted to descend a gully to the west of the pillar, and the slabby ground caused problems, but we eventually reached easy terrain, followed this down to the valley floor, and stopped there at 1 a.m. on the 17th to bivouac. We named our route Gangotri Gambling (600m, 18 roped pitches, 6c+ M6 A0).

— **Ondrej Huserka, Slovak Republic**

Images



Gangotri Gambling on Phaalkan Meenaar, situated on a long ridge descending west from a subsidiary summit between Manda I (6,510m) and II (6,568m).



The snow-plastered north face of Thalay Sagar in the autumn of 2022.



Climbing on the southwest pillar of the lower headwall of Phaalkan Meenaar.



Base camp in the Kedar Tal. Directly above the left edge of the purple tent, the prominent rock tower of Phaalkan Meenaar catches the sun. High up to the right is the snow ridge connecting Manda I to II.



Wadim Jablonski on the upper (south-facing) headwall of Phaalkan Meenaar.



Ondrej Huserka climbing solid cracks on Gangotri Gambling, the southwest pillar and south face of Phaalkan Meenaar.



Traversing steep and dangerous ground to reach the first bivouac on the southwest pillar of Phaalkan Meenaar.

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