



AAC Publications

Changabang, West Face, Second Ascent with Substantial Variations

India, Eastern Garhwal

Changabang seen from the Bagini Glacier to the north. The west face route more or less follows the right skyline. In 1976, Peter Boardman and Joe Tasker approached Bagini Col, the low point in the ridge, from the far side to start their ascent of the west face. The 2022 team climbed the broad, right-slanting snow couloir to reach the crest of the ridge before it steepens into the west face. Photo by Daniel Joll.

James Hobson, Daniel Joll, Kim Ladiges, Tim Macartney-Snape, and I, all members of the New Zealand Alpine Team, arrived in Delhi on April 5. Our goal was the west face of Changabang (6,864m), first climbed by Britons Peter Boardman and Joe Tasker in 1976, before most of us were born.

Days later, we established base camp at around 4,600m next to the Bagini Glacier. Kim, Dan, and I got to work the next day, shuttling loads 10km up the glacier toward our planned advanced base.

Each day, we woke before dawn and took advantage of the overnight freeze to carry as much as possible before it got too warm. The moraine was covered in deep snow; air pockets would collapse, causing us to fall in up to the waist. It took eight days to establish advanced base.

On the 19th, we crossed the bergschrund at around 5,550m and fixed all five of our ropes to a point about 100m below the left end of the ridge leading from Bagini Col to the foot of the west face. [This approach to the west face was steeper and harder than climbing to Bagini Col, but it avoided having to ferry haulbags and portaledge for 400m to 500m along the ridge traverse. Boardman and Tasker reached this ridge easily from the Ramani Glacier on the opposite (south) side.] We then headed to base camp for two days, the only rest days we'd have before starting the main face.

We did not anticipate getting a weather window for the entire climb, so our plan was to climb through the typical pattern of clear mornings and afternoon "crap-outs," sometimes being forced to stop by mid-day. For this, more gear, food, and gas would be needed, leading us to opt for a hybrid climbing style, with limited rope-fixing. Not knowing whether we would find tent sites, we also took portaledges.

On the 25th, Dan, Kim, and I reached the crest of the ridge and camped at 5,950m, the junction with the Boardman- Tasker route. We had planned to rest here for a day because we had gained so much altitude, but as we all felt good, we fixed our ropes to 6,150m to get a head start.

The following day was bitterly cold, but we made good progress, getting all the gear to the base of the section dubbed the Barrier by the first ascensionists. While I set up the portaledges, Dan and Kim climbed above on what was to be the only day without an afternoon storm.

On the 28th, another cold and windy morning, we made quick progress up the ropes, above which Kim led two tricky free and aid pitches, traversing below roofs and a feature known as the Guillotine, until close to the base of the Icefield. Bad weather rapidly developed, and before we could prepare, we were in the middle of a lightning storm. That night Kim's ledge broke and he had a bit of an epic, with gear and boots soaked.

Next day it was my turn to lead, and although the Icefield didn't look far away, I had to climb blank

slabs to reach it. Progress up the Icefield was much easier. Using one portaledge and a tent, we found a good bivouac at 6,370m, the highest point we would use a portaledge or haul.

The morning of the 30th was yet again windy and bitterly cold. Dan did a great job finding a route through the corner systems above, and we fixed three ropes. We could now see the Horns, a prominent feature near the start of the summit ice slopes, and decided that the next day we would continue in lightweight alpine style.

After we regained the previous day's high point, with enough food and gear for one night out, Kim set off up high-quality ice runnels. We followed these for a few pitches, but they were gradually taking us left toward the Horns and we needed to go right. A corner trended right, but we couldn't see into it; when Kim got there, he found an awesome pitch of steep ice barely a body width wide. By the time we were all at the top of this, it was snowing. The ground above looked promising and was leading right toward the summit icefields, so we continued.

After two more pitches, Kim said he could see a feature dubbed the Keyhole by the first ascensionists, as well as the summit slopes. It was now late in the day and we needed a spot for the night, which we eventually found beneath a boulder at around 6,550m. Using an ice hammock, we pitched the tent, decided it would be okay, and settled in for the night. Sometime later, Kim woke us to say the tent was slipping off the ledge. We gave up on sleep and started brewing and drinking water in preparation for the day ahead.

It was my day to lead, and we left at first light, wearing all the clothes we had. We followed a mixed corner system (M3/4) between two major rock buttresses, and after three pitches the angle decreased. Over the past few days, we had often taken a different line from the original route, but on this day I think we followed the Boardman-Tasker throughout. Though low-angle, the last section was so icy that we continued to lead pitches right to the summit, which we reached around mid-day.

We quickly turned to the descent and made it back to the bivouac using Abalakov anchors for rappels. It was now 2 p.m., and although there were snow showers, we decided to continue down to our last portaledge camp. It felt risky—a stuck rope during the afternoon storm would have caused an epic—but it went well and we reached the camp at dark.

On May 3 we got an early start, as a large storm was forecast for the afternoon. We all felt sluggish, and the descent would now be more complex with the addition of portaledges and a haulbag. We ended up leaving a rope fixed at the top of the Barrier, as it turned around corners and never would have pulled from below.

By the time we reached the ridge at the bottom of the wall, the storm was full-on. The face leading down to the glacier was enveloped in spindrift avalanches. Our patience was wearing thin as we descended to the top of the first pitch above the bergschrund, where we had left our snowshoes. These were now completely buried, and I dug but found no sign. Dan suggested placing a snow stake for an anchor and continuing down. As I was digging the anchor, I felt something in the snow. With dumb luck, I had dug exactly over our snowshoes.

We reached advanced base just after dark, happy and relieved to be off the mountain—it was now possible to put something down without fear of dropping it. On the 4th we made the arduous descent with enormous loads back down to base camp.

— **Matt Scholes, Australia**

Images



Matt Scholes jumaring on the west face of Changabang. Behind is the northwest face of Saf Minal (6,911m). The central spur of Saf Minal was climbed in 2004 by Ian Parnell and John Varco to make the second ascent of the mountain.



Daniel Joll climbing above the Icefield, nearly halfway up the west face of Changabang.



Kim Ladiges belayed by Matt Scholes just below the Icefield on the west face of Changabang. By the end of this pitch, the team would be in a full-on electrical storm. Daniel Joll



Traversing under the roofs of the Barrier during the second ascent of the west face of Changabang.



Kim Ladiges climbing above the camp on the crest of the ridge at the start of the west face of Changabang. The team approached by climbing the slope below the yellow portaledge.



Daniel Joll belaying on the lower west face of Changabang, with the sharp ridge below separating the Ramani (left) and Bagini glaciers.



The west face of Changabang from the Ramani Glacier with the snowy south face of Kalanka to the right. Tim Macartney-Snape



The 2022 line on the west face of Changabang. The pointed peak behind is Kalanka.



The north face of Changabang seen from the upper Bagini Glacier. The west face route more or less follows the right skyline. The 1998 route up the north face climbs partway up the corner system on the left before breaking right and climbing the wall to the summit. The corner system, exiting left at its top, was first climbed in 1996 during an attempt by British climbers.



Changabang seen from the Bagini Glacier to the north. The west face route more or less follows the right skyline. In 1976, Peter Boardman and Joe Tasker approached Bagini Col, the low point in the ridge, from the far side to start their ascent of the west face. The 2022 team climbed the broad, right-slanting snow couloir to reach the crest of the ridge before it steepens into the west face.



Looking down the long Bagini Glacier toward base camp. (A) Peak 6,504m. (B) Peak 6,635m. (C) Tirsuli West. (D) Tirsuli. (E) West face of Hardeol. (F) Saf Minal.



Looking west from high on Changabang toward Dunagiri. One year before his Changabang ascent in 1976, Joe Tasker (with Dick Renshaw) made the first ascent of Dunagiri's southeast ridge (the spur slanting down left from the summit, in front of the snowy south face) in an alpine-style 11-day round trip. The flat-topped peak to the right is Phurba Dunagiri.

Article Details

Author	Matt Scholes
Publication	AAJ
Volume	65
Issue	97
Page	317
Copyright Date	2023
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions