



Meru South, Southeast Face

India, Western Garhwal, Gangotri

On May 13, the team of Simon Gietl (Italy), Mathieu Maynadier (France), and Roger Scha li (Switzerland) completed the first ascent of the southeast face of Meru Peak. Their route, which ended on a minor summit on the long, gently inclined ridgeline of Meru South (ca 6,600m), was climbed in alpine style at M6+ A1. They completed an objective that had been attempted by expeditions in 1985 (British), 1988 (Japanese), 1989 (British, to 6,300m), 1998 (British, also to 6,300m), and 2001 (Basque).

This was Maynadier and Scha li's second attempt, having climbed to within 200m to 300m of the top in the fall of 2019 with Seán Villanueva O'Driscoll (Belgium). Continuous snowstorms forced them down.

The 2023 expedition also seemed to be under a bad star, with persistently adverse weather. The numerous snowstorms had one advantage: The team was able to use touring skis on the lower mountain and thus saved a lot of energy. However, fresh snowfall also meant the ascent from Camp 1 to Camp 2, which was effectively the team's advanced base camp, became increasingly prone to avalanches, and the approach to the col at the base of the east-southeast spur, directly below Camp 2, was made tricky by a heavily melted glacier, with challenging route-finding through a labyrinth of crevasses.

On the final push, the three left Tapovan base camp (4,300m) on May 10 and climbed directly to Camp 2 (5,800m). This was particularly exhausting for Maynadier, who was fighting health issues. During the next day, Gietl and Scha li moved climbing equipment up to the first rock band, making a track through the steep snowfield. After depositing some gear, they returned to Maynadier, who had used the day to recover.

On the 12th, all three left camp at 3 a.m., and by 11 p.m. they had reached an exposed snow mushroom at around 6,400m, where they bivouacked. After a short and far from comfortable night in a two-man tent, they set off for the top. They found the remaining climbing intense and time-consuming, at times having to clear the rock of half a meter of fresh snow before placing protection. There was no usable ice for screws, and they had to contend with the usual dangers, including falling cornices. In addition, they knew their weather window would be brief.

A little below the north-northwest ridge, they were halted by steep rock but discovered a route through it via a unique ice tunnel. Three spectacular pitches, climbed in icy wind, led to the ridge, from where another 200 vertical meters over steep snow and ice took them southward to their high point, which they reached at around 9 a.m.

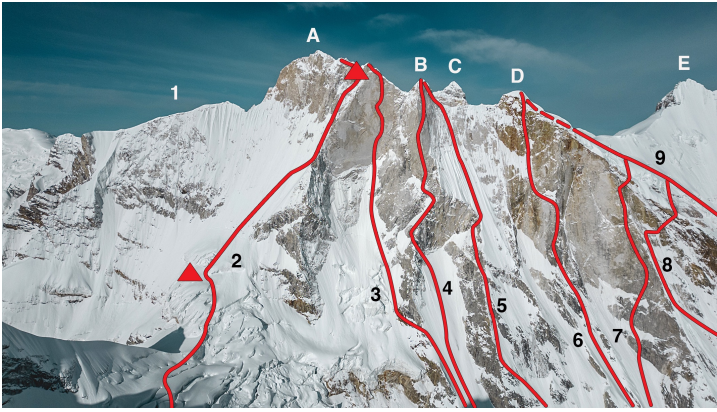
This point, to be precise, was the previously unclimbed central top between the main summit of Meru South (ca 6,660m, first climbed by a Japanese team in 1980 via the south-southeast ridge) and the north top of Meru South on the long and almost horizontal summit ridge (first climbed by a Korean team in 2008 after an ascent of the northeast face).

By downclimbing and rappelling the route, the 2023 team was back in base camp the same day. Their route gained 800m above Camp 2. They called the route Goldfish, a tongue-in-cheek reference to the

nearby and famed Shark's Fin route on Meru Central.

– **Lindsay Griffin, with information from Roger Schali, Switzerland**

Images



A) Meru South. (B) Meru Central. (C) Top of Thalay Sagar. (D) Meru North. (E) Meru West. (1) Southeast ridge (1980). (2) Southeast face (Goldfish, 2023). (3) Northeast face direct (2008). (4) Shark's Fin (2011). (5) Northeast face (Babanov route, 2001; other lines not shown). (6) East face (Kundalini, 1994). (7) Aurora (1988). (8) Broken Wing (1988). (9) Northeast face and north ridge (1980).



The approximate line of the upper section of Goldfish on the southeast face of Meru South.



Above the first rock barrier on the southeast face of Meru South.



Roger Scháli leads the crux pitch of Goldfish, while climbing through the first rock band on the southeast face of Meru South.



Simon Gietl and Mathieu Maynadier on belay in the middle of the first rock band on the southeast face of Meru Central.



Simon Gietl entering the crucial tunnel near the summit ridge of Meru South.



The snow mushroom bivouac close to the summit ridge on the southeast face of Meru South.



Simon Gietl high on the southeast face of Meru South, with the Gangotri Glacier below. The flat-topped distant summit—the highest peak left of center—is the 7,000er Satopanth.



Seen from Meru, the southwest ridge of Shivling West (rock spire) climbed by an Australian team in 1986. Behind is the main summit.

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