

**North Ridge Bhandar Lek (6024 m) Solo First Ascent**  
**Snow to 65 degrees, M3, 5.7, ca 7000 ft**  
**Humla District Far West Nepal | 29°49'26.95"N 82°17'50.16"E**

Having only soared around the nameless unclimbed mountain on Google Earth, it was wild crossing the river into the winter-shadowed valley beneath the north face. The North face of what I'm calling Bhandar Lek (Peak 6,024m), what some locals call Dhaule, and what most in Northwest Nepal have no name for, is split up the middle by one long ridge roughly 7,000 ft from base to summit.

I had been walking for ten days with a seventy pound pack from Simikot along the Great Himalayan Trail over Margor Lek Bhanjyang Pass (4037m) to get to Mathillo Pali and a local trail to Nepka, through villages that rarely if ever have seen foreigners. Each village offered full welcome, everyone running to meet me and tick tick ticking in disapproval at my shredded trail runners and astonished that I was alone and spoke semi-fluent Nepali.

Each day I would meet a new friend on the trail to talk, who would often laugh at me — *foolish bideshi for not hiring a porter* — and each evening I would set camp on their roof in the village to eat with them by their fire, explain each piece of ice climbing gear, and growl-laugh with the children circling my tent after dark sing-songing the only english they knew: *what is your name?*

The far-western Himalayas have been largely unexplored by foreign climbers because they're absurdly remote and, by Himalayan standards, are quite small. Few mountains in Western Nepal reach above 6,000 meters and only a handful reach 7,000. Bandar Lek is part of the Kangla Himal.

From Nepka I walked up Take Khola Valley. This same valley was accessed only once before by a team of six foreigners (Gorakh Himal Expedition 2015) heading to climb other 6,000 meter peaks in the area, but they were turned around by heavy spring snow.

After two days rest, I started up the ridge with a 30 pound pack and scrambled up rock 2,500ft to snow line. I watched the first winter storms tumble by without every obscuring the blue above. That night, I perched the tent on a large freestanding boulder. I so wished for wings to take me back to basecamp. The whole climb I was chanting *connection, connection, connection*, and picture-wheeling through the people I call home.

Day two brought technical rock and a 1,000 ft traverse on steep snow to switch ridges. On either side of the knife, seracs avalanched, but the ridge itself was safe. I set my bivy on a body-width section of ridge such that my tent overhung free air a foot to either side of me.

In the morning, wrecked, I counted fifteen steps and a five minute rest on repeat through the last of the technical ridge, in and out of a bergshroud, and to a dead-tired dug-in camp at 19,500 ft.

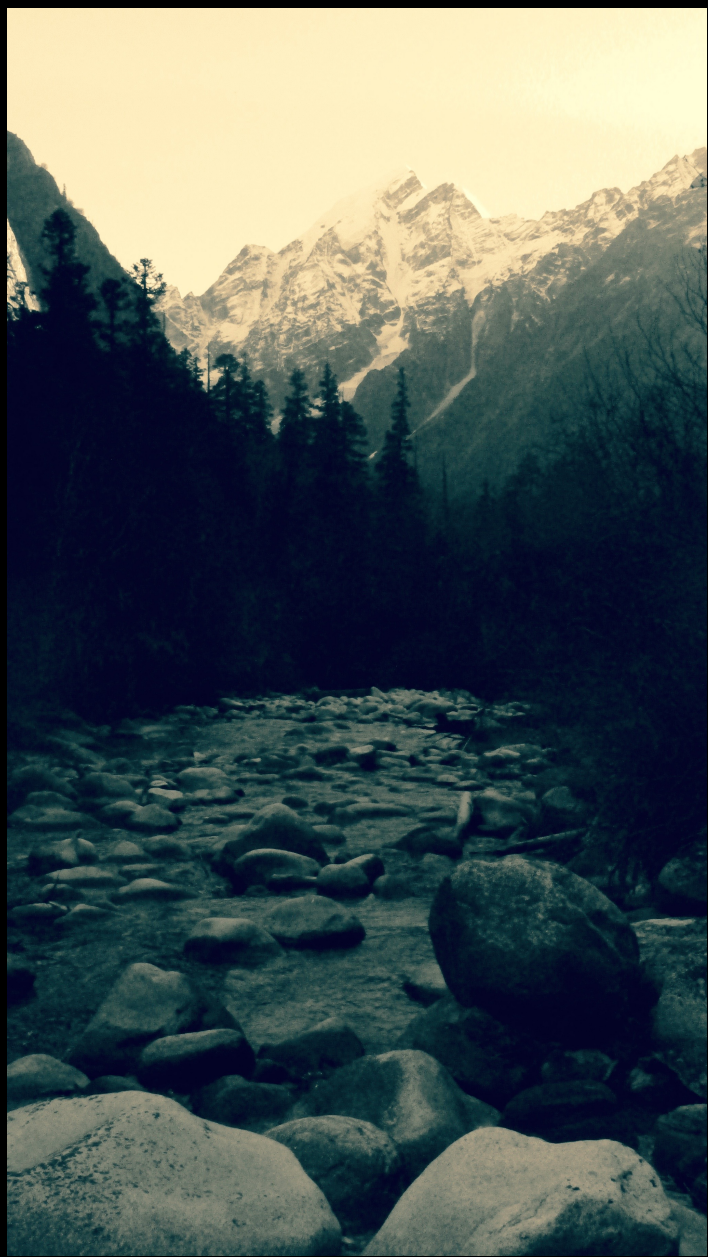
That night, I watched the mountain's shadow stretch across the valley, and the sun-glow stretch across the deserted shepherd's field far below, Take Khola, North into Tibet, West over Saipal. The fifty dollar sleeping bag from Thamel held up after all.

Two more bergshrunds and I sat on top saying my mountain prayer for the thousandth time that trip: *mother mountain, father mountain, brother mountain, sister mountain, genderless mountain, I come to you in loving kindness, humility, and respect and ask for your safe passage.* From the summit, I guessed and headed down the other side of the mountain into an unknown valley. 7,000 ft of down climbing and rock and ice rappels with a 40 meter rope through a wall of chaos brought me safely, gratefully, to the bottom. After six days on the mountain and two days with almost no water for lack of fuel, I slurped in the snowmelt stream for a good long while in preparation for a six day walk out to Gamgadhi and a five day bus ride back to Kathmandu.

Far West Nepal is still full of opportunity for new climbs of five and 6,000 meter peaks. Hopefully future parties will opt for light, self-sufficient, and culturally aware adventures that support the local communities they visit on the way into the epic and wild mountains of our dreams.

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