

# Trango Tower

J. V. Anthoine

Our arrival at Base Camp was accompanied by a violent snow-storm which proved the ideal setting for paying off the porters—we stood in a large tent drinking tea while they stood outside! After 10 frustrating days of strikes, go-slows, moaning and pilfering, it was a pleasant change to have the whip hand. The walk-in had been preceded by a 2-week delay in Rawalpindi, where but for the hospitality of the British Club with its bar, pool and air-conditioning, we would have probably flown home or gone to Nepal. A 7-day wait in Skardu—flour had to be milled—completed the list of delays, so that before we had even seen our objective we were nearly a month behind schedule. We were left with a mere 2 weeks to climb the route.

The morning after our arrival the cloud lifted a little to reveal an easy couloir leading to the foot of the hard climbing. If this had been realised beforehand, the porters in one day could have saved days of sweating up and down under huge loads. After a couple of days, however, Barker and Potts were established under a boulder with enough gear to start the climb proper.

During the stocking up of the Boulder Camp we had the opportunity of looking at our objective. From the camp it rose in a near vertical sweep. A slight concavity at half height accommodated a small snow-field where it was hoped to place a camp. From the snow-field the face above appeared to be at an angle of between 85 and 95 degrees. Barker and Potts commenced roped climbing (insurance policy no longer valid!) at 5000 m and on the first day succeeded in fixing 5 rope-lengths up steep ice and mixed ground. One of these pitches was especially fine, a very steep ice corner led by Barker with his customary 2 runners. The following day, Boysen and MacNaught Davis carried on from the previous high point with Boysen leading. Once again, 5 pitches were fixed and once again one pitch was particularly memorable, a bulging rock wall liberally glazed with ice.

The angle had now lessened, so Brown and Anthoine creaked up the fixed ropes and across the central snow patch to where the face steepened rather ominously. Using logic only gained after years of experience and peril they decided against proceeding up the wall and settled for digging out an ice cave. Discussion that evening revolved around whether Brown could charge a royalty on the use of hand jams and how the fees could be collected.

The lead was now taken up by Barker and Boysen. During the following 2 days they fixed only 5½ pitches. The rock was superb; solid and at a high enough angle even for Boysen, who enthused over beautiful jamming and delicate wall climbing. Although at only 5950 m, the effort was considerable even though pegs were used fairly liberally and so while Boysen rested on the third day, Anthoine and Barker took over the lead—the other members had by then returned to Base Camp to await the arrival of the porters.

Boysen reckoned that the next section would turn out to be quite easy 'Probably V Diffish.' After a pitch of more or less continuous aid climbing it was reasoned that Boysen was either a brilliant climber or an accomplished demoraliser—he happens to be both! Another pitch and a half of mixed aid and free climbing followed and the day was rounded off with a series of grip-free abseils to the ice cave for brews and stew à la Boysen.



*16 Trango from 4000 m. Photo: J. V. Antboine*

The high point reached was only 250 m or so from the summit and at dawn the following day Anthoine and Boysen set off up the fixings with the idea of perhaps reaching the top; but it was one of those days. After a few rope lengths a badly iced-up rope was encountered. It took Boysen over an hour to scrape small sections clear enough to use his jumars. Anthoine then proceeded to take almost as long, as being somewhat stunted he found it impossible to reach the cleared parts of the rope. From the previous high point Boysen led a magnificent free pitch, consistently hard from start to finish. This was followed by an equally impressive lead over iced-up bulges to the foot of an overhanging 12 cm crack and with nearly 5 hours of daylight remaining, hopes were high. Unfortunately, they only had two 5 inch bongs and Boysen was forced to resort to mainly free climbing. He would do a short sprint, bang in a peg and then descend to remove the lower one; and so on. Eventually he reached a point only a few feet from a ledge that led to the foot of the final chimney. He was preparing for a free rush to the ledge when his knee jammed.

His first reaction was to stack 2 small bongs in the crack for protection. He then started a series of contortions coupled with the odd grunt, groan or blasphemy—the knee remained firmly lodged. As the stacked bongs were pretty useless, he decided to place a bolt in the wall above to get some upward leverage. Anthoine had the bolting kit on the stance below, and because they were separated by a single rope it took a considerable time to get the kit to Boysen and even more time to explain how to use it! After a couple of minutes of hammering, a tinkling noise announced the flight of the bolting tool to the glacier below. A bolt was placed in the partly drilled hole, tied off and then used to support another series of contortions—once again the leg remained jammed. Boysen then tried battering on his boot with his peg hammer, but still no movement. By then the situation was rather serious; he had been stuck for nearly 3 hours, had no bivouac equipment and there was no way Anthoine could get to him without another rope. With less than an hour of daylight remaining it was decided that Anthoine should descend to the ice cave to alert Barker who could take bivouac gear and food up to Boysen. Anthoine would descend the 1850 m to Base Camp (it would only take 2 hours) and the others could take bolting gear, pegs and rope the following morning up to Boysen. He had abseiled only a few hundred feet when a shout from above informed him that the leg was out of the crack. Minutes later Boysen joined him minus a trouser leg, which he had cut off with a peg, and with hands covered in blood. His left knee was swollen and gashed and his emotional state was most apt for the occasion; they descended to the ice cave.

It was soon realised that the attempt was finished. The climbers needed rope, pegs and food and replenishments were below at Base Camp. To descend, rest and re-stock the ice cave would take a considerable time and the porters were due the following day for the walk out.

Trango Tower is still unclimbed, but next year—given some fine weather, reasonable porters and a thin legged leader it will probably go.

Members: Mo Anthoine, Bill Barker, Martin Boysen, Joe Brown, Ian MacNaught Davis and Dave Potts.