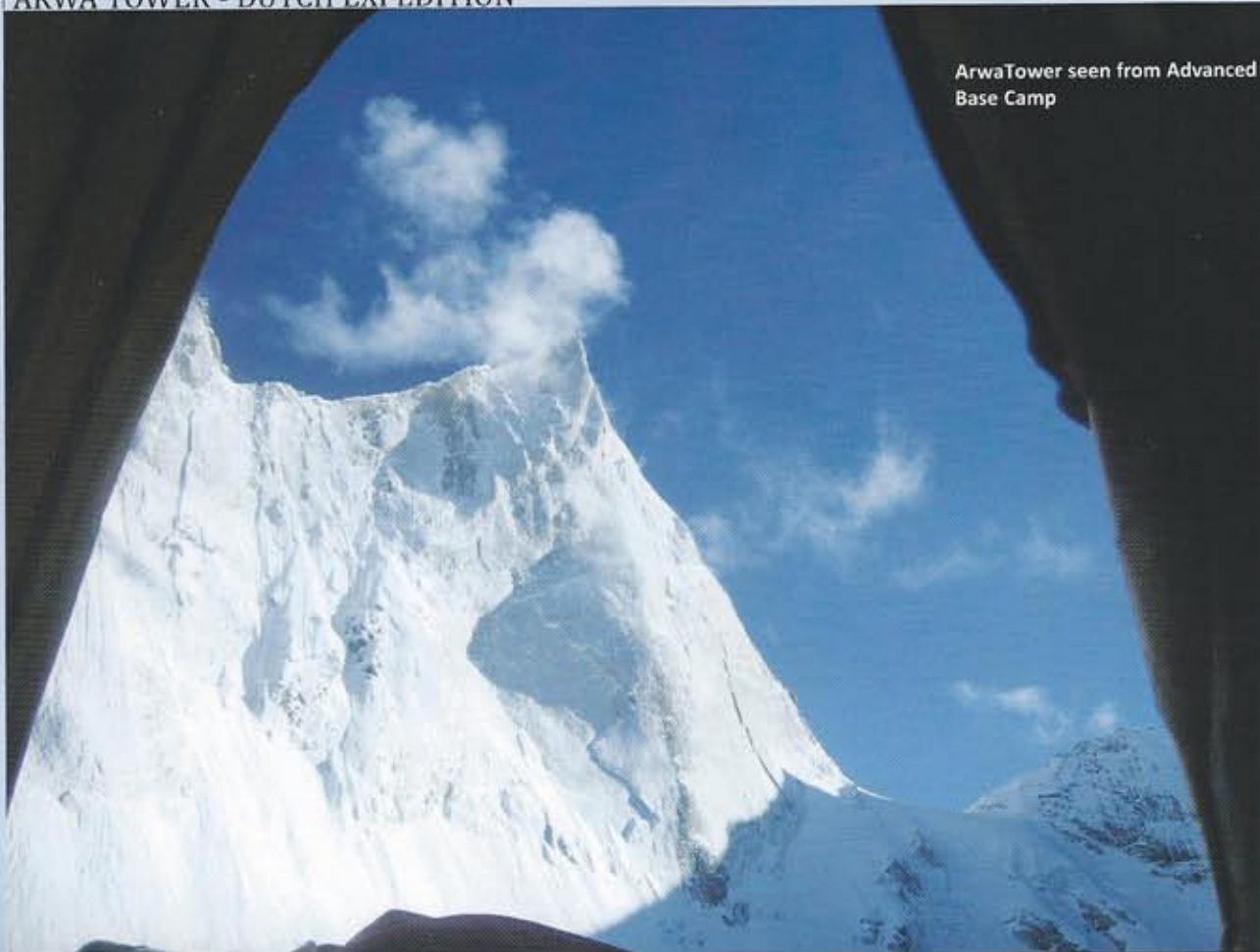


ArwaTower seen from Advanced  
Base Camp



Arwa Tower (6352m)  
Garhwal Himalaya, India  
E.A. Mick Fowler and Steve Sustad,  
May 14, 1999  
(VI 5b A3 Scottish V/VI, 1000m)

NE Face - Lightning Strike  
E.A. Stephan Siegrist,  
Thomas Senf and Denis Burdet  
May 31 - June 7, 2007  
Grade: VI M5 5.9 A3  
(in demanding mixed terrain) 1000m

Base Camp: 4350m  
ABC: 5300m  
Notes: Climbing on the wall,  
capsule style



# ARWA TOWER DUTCH EXPEDITION 2010

By Bas van der Smeede

Arwa Tower in Garhwal Himalaya is one of the three Himalayan peaks in the Arwa Group - the other two are Arwa Crest, and Arwa Spire, all in the Chamoli district of Uttarakhand state, in northern India. The three peaks lie close together and share a base camp in the Arwa Valley, at an elevation of 4,350 m (14,270 ft) - a three day trek from Badrinath. Because of their close proximity to the border with Tibet, these peaks have restricted access, and have not been climbed often, until recently. Their steep, rocky face remains a challenge for climbers.

Arwa Tower, the highest of the group (6,352 m / 20,840 ft), is a needle-like tower on the East Ridge, flanked by steep unclimbed walls. It was first climbed in May, 1999 by the British-American team of Mick Fowler and Steve Sustad, via the Northwest Face. Fowler's photograph of the unclimbed, until

recently, northeast face of the Tower appeared on the cover of the American Alpine Journal in 2000. There have been only a handful of ascents since the Northwest Ridge was established. In May 2002, an eleven-member French expedition led by Antoine de Choudens climbed Arwa Tower by two different routes: a first ascent of the south face, and a new route on the northwest face. It was in June 2007 that the Swiss team of Stephan Siegrist, Thomas Senf and Denis Burdet pioneered the iconic northeast face of Arwa Tower (6352m). They called their route Lightning Strike - a route mostly to the left of the prow on the icy, steep, 3,300-foot / 1000 metre high granite face. This year, in May 2010, a five-member Dutch expedition attempted to climb the stunning, demanding, and challenging Arwa Tower. This is an account of the 5-member climb by Bas van der Smeede.

Expedition Date: May 2 - June 16, 2010

Location: Arwa Valley, West Garhwal Himalaya, India

Climbers: Bas van der Smeede Saskia Groen  
 Vincent van Beek Jorg Vegter  
 Remy Klaasse

also had to chase Swiss Air for our luggage. Fortunately, we had sent our climbing gear weeks ahead of our arrival. The other problem we faced was that of getting gas canisters. The Government of India no longer allows the import of this item. However, IMF helped us out on this front and later that night our luggage arrived as well - and we set off for Badrinath early next morning - on schedule!

A two-day-long beautiful bus-ride through the north Indian countryside brought us to Joshimath, a small town where we



Bas leads the 5th pitch on the route

## JOURNEY TO BASE CAMP

We flew out of Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam on May 2, hoping to climb the remote and challenging Arwa Tower - a peak in Garhwal Himalaya, India. We landed in New Delhi, only to find out that Swiss Air had not loaded our luggage at Zurich Airport. Our first day in Delhi, therefore became a little stressful. We were scheduled to leave for Badrinath the following morning, and wanted to spend our limited time in Delhi organising supplies for our expedition, but we now

had to break our journey for a couple of days to complete some bureaucratic formalities. When we finally reached the quaint and tiny settlement of Badrinath, a Hindu pilgrimage site on the banks of Alaknanda river, we had our first night of camping. The next morning our porters stood ready to carry our supplies and equipment to the military camp at 4000m. We began walking the distance of 14km to the camp but after an hour or so Saskia, who had been unwell, could not carry on. She and Vincent decided to stay behind while the rest of us carried on to the camp - an easy hike along



High camp at the rock bastion at 4700 meters

steep trail. An army officer very kindly offered to bring Saskia and Vincent in his Jeep to the camp.

The porters left for the base camp the next morning and we followed a day later. The hike to the base camp was about 5km. It was, at first, a sunny day but later and further into the Arwa valley the wind became stronger and the first clouds came rolling in. The weather however soon changed for the worst. Only a kilometre from the base camp, we were surrounded by thick clouds and snow began to fall. It was a chilly welcome to the Himalaya. Jorg, who was the fastest amongst us, together with the cook set up the tents at the base camp - we all had private tents in the base camp, where we were to spend 4 weeks.

## SETTING UP THE HIGH ALTITUDE CAMPS

After three days of acclimatization at the base camp we were ready for our first hike to the glacier - an hour's hike into the valley, then a steep hike up through the snow into a couloir, which leads to the glacier (5000m). The snow conditions here were difficult - a hard top layer atop snow so soft and deep that with every step we sank into it down to our hips. On some parts we even had to go on our hands and knees. After a day of rest we set forth to set up the Advanced Base Camp (ABC), a 3-hour walk from the couloir, just beneath the North col Arwa Tower. We left a haul-bag with climbing gear behind and descended to 4700m, where we camped for the night. Unfortunately, Jorg had to go down due to a migraine attack.

The next morning, we packed up one tent and left one behind for emergency, and began our climb to the ABC (5300m) where we camped for the night. The views from ABC were breathtaking and stunning. We took lots of pictures and after a good night's rest we went down to the base camp, where we rested for a couple of days and then headed up again to ABC and spent another night there. The next morning we set off for the next stage of

the climb - to set up Camp II at 5800m. Saskia and Remy felt unwell and decided to return to ABC. Vincent and I carried on. We had to negotiate an ice-covered flank for 60m - a condition we had not expected and had therefore left behind our ice axes and drills. We managed to climb the flank and placed fixed rope for future use. Remy, who was not feeling well at all, returned to the base camp the next day, while the rest of us proceeded to Camp II at 5775m.

## THE FIRST ATTEMPT

In what was to be our first attempt at Arwa, Jorg and I started as the first climbing team followed by Saskia and Vincent, using jumars, as the hauling team. After a

precarious traverse across an icy snowfield on steep rocky plates, I made the first belay - the start of the route to the summit. Here we changed our heavy mountain shoes for the lighter climbing ones. Jorg was the first to climb the first pitch of the route on the North West column. We chose a different start to our route, about 5 metre to the right of the one planned originally. This seemed better protected and was also snow-free. However, very soon our feet began turning cold. We had made the mistake of starting to climb before the sun had reached the rock-face. The temperature was therefore too low to climb the first stage. I had just joined Jorg at the belay when the weather took a turn for the worst. There was no other option than to abseil down and leave a fixed rope behind. We spent another night at the ridge at 5775m and went down to the base camp at first light.

### THE SECOND ATTEMPT

After a couple days of well-earned rest we set off once again for ABC. The weather alternated between 2-3 days of good weather followed by a 3-day bad weather stretch, with lots of snow. This time we planned to use the good-weather window and hike to Camp II in a day, and then use the remaining two days of good weather for a summit attempt.

Jorg did not accompany us this time, because of his migraine. Remy, too, felt tired and exhausted by the time we reached the couloir and also returned to the base camp. This meant that it was up to the remaining three to make this expedition a success.

But when the team arrived at ABC, the weather again took a turn for the worst, and it snowed incessantly for three days. We could not see the mountains around us. All we could hear was the sound of small avalanches, so we decided to turn back to the safety of ABC, where we lay ensconced in our tiny Bibler tents, playing cards and eating. Finally, the

next morning brought us clear blue skies. Quickly we climbed up to Camp II and reached just in time before the clouds came rolling in.

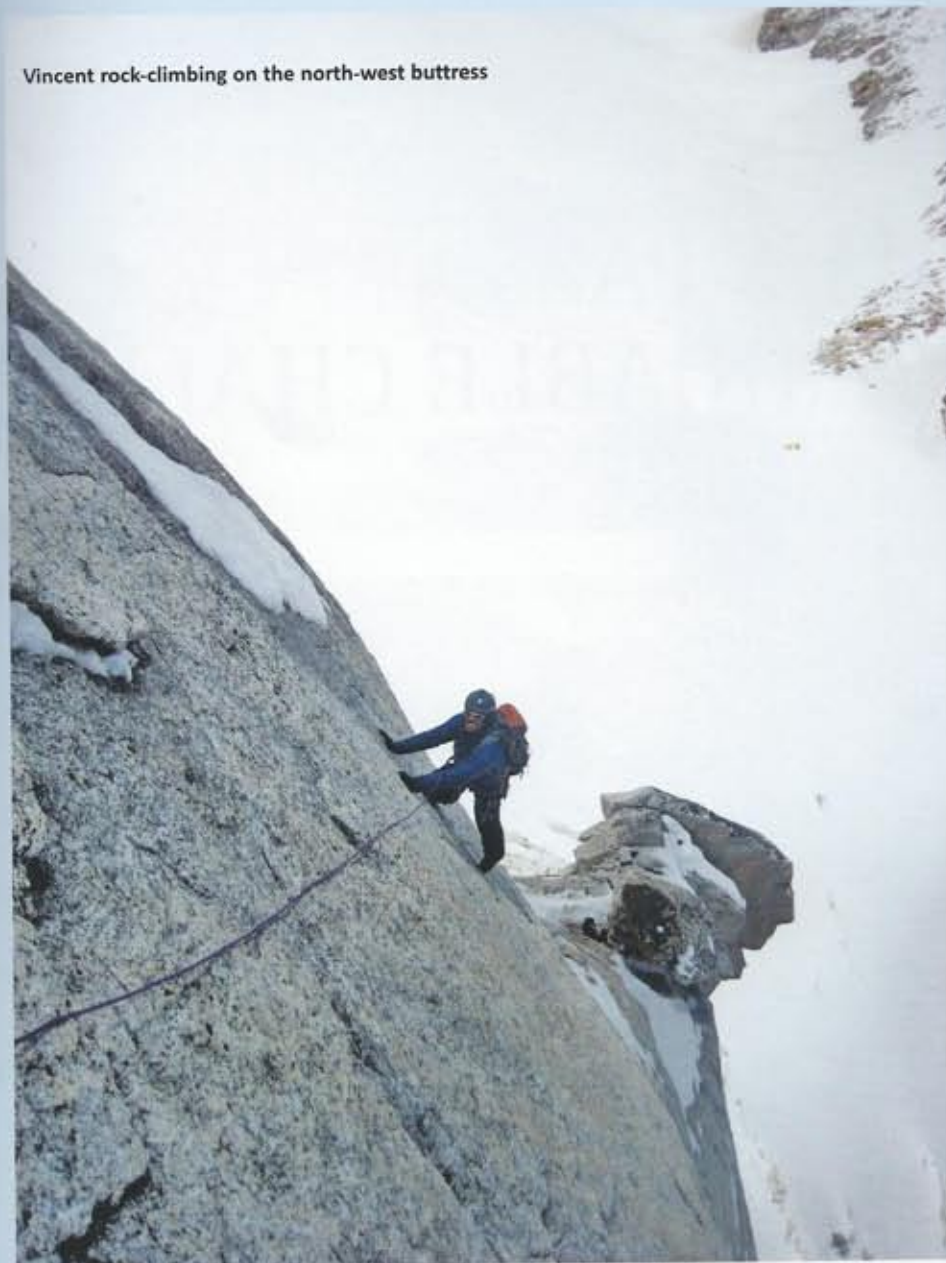
This time we waited for the sun to hit the rock-face, and used the fixed ropes we had left behind earlier to go to the first belay. Saskia and I were the climbing team and Vincent followed with the haulbag.

The next pitch brought us to a tiny frozen snowfield. I tried to avoid the snowfield, but did not succeed in doing so. Carefully, I kicked little steps in the snow with my climbing



The couloir that gives access to the high glacier

Vincent rock-climbing on the north-west buttress



shoes and made my way through the snowfield, above which was a crack where I placed a big cam.

The pitch got tougher again - very steep with ice in the cracks. We had to use a technique called artif climbing, which slowed our progress, in fact too slow for the pace we had planned. In the afternoon I ran into further difficulties. At the end of the crack was a big snowfield and I saw no way of climbing any further. While going down I fixed more ropes for the next attempt the following day. Though Vincent also gave it a try, he too stopped at the same point. At six in the evening we went down to the camp for a good night's rest, but instead woke up not feeling too great. Vincent had problems with his back from carrying the haulbag and Saskia and I had not recovered well either.

### THE THIRD & FINAL ATTEMPT

We pursued our goal of reaching the summit and jumared to the last point reached, but unfortunately the route was just as difficult as before and the progress slow. By late afternoon we had only reached 6000m and realised we were running out of time and food. And more importantly the weather was taking yet another turn. This is not what we had hoped for, but there was no other option than to return.

The next morning we left for the base camp, taking with us all that we had brought up and leaving nothing behind on the mountain but our desire to climb Arwa Tower. We gained a lot of experience and had lots of fun, and could not have gained this experience without the help of our sponsors, family and friends. And of course the IMF and Himalayan Run and Trek.