

# Damavand (5680 meter)

## North face route, July 21 - 23, 2004

**D**amavand is the highest mountain peak in Iran. It is almost 900 meters higher than the Mont-Blanc. It is an extinct volcano and like Mount Fuji in Japan, which it resembles, has a lot of symbolic value in the Iranian epic culture.<sup>1</sup> Damavand was first climbed by the British climber W. Taylor Thomson in 1837.

For my part I climbed (and skied first time in 1979 or 80 with my climbed it two more times on the don't remember the precise years) route two years ago.

Resembling a massive cone, sides. There are at least 5 with at least one shelter on the Western, Northern and Eastern, .



*The shelters are indicated by red circles*

### 1. The Southern Route

This is "the standard" route. It has one called "Bargah Sevom"<sup>3</sup>, literally: the third royal resting place — probably because when people started the climb from the low valley on the Haraz road this was indeed the third resting place. shelter at about 4100 meters which is

### 2. The North-East Route

It has one shelter at about 4400 meters which is called Takhteh Fereydoun<sup>4</sup>, literally: Fereydoun's Throne.

### 3. The Western Route

It has one shelter at about 4000 meters. It is called Simorgh<sup>5</sup>.

### 4. Northern Route

It has two shelters. Described in this report.

### 5. The Eastern (and other various routes / ridges)

It has no shelter.

\*\*\*\*\*

There was a long weekend coming, so I thought it would be a good idea to climb Damavand from yet another route.

Three weeks before the climb I went to "inspect" the area with Marco D. We got all the necessary information and climbed effortlessly to the first shelter, which is at about 4030 meters.

On July 24, 2004 Majid S and I drove to the base camp town of Nandal<sup>6</sup>. We arranged for a mule to take our equipment and the next morning we climbed practically straight to the second shelter, which is called the "5000 meter shelter", but it is actually at only about 4630 meters.

Starting at about 7 am from an altitude of about 2950 meters, we reached the second shelter at 2:30 pm. On the way, we stopped once for ½-hour en route to the first shelter and then for a little over an hour at the first shelter itself.

The mule (which was actually a horse!) had a lot of trouble on the last 200 meters to the second shelter. Majid and Esmail S<sup>7</sup> who were about ½-hour ahead of me had to unload the mule and carry the equipment up by hand!

I was tired, so I passed up the food and socializing with a couple of other climbers that were already at the shelter and went to sleep.

down) the South face in winter the beloved cousin Fery A<sup>2</sup>; then I same route during the summer (I and once again the North-Eastern

Damavand can be climbed from all "standard" routes that I know of, four way: Southern, North-Eastern,



*Fery A. in Geneva (1998)*



*"Conquistador" at shelter 1*



*Shepherd, Majid, Esmail and I . Damavand behind us in clouds.*

<sup>1</sup> Damavand is very often referred to in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh which is the most famous Iranian epic poem.

<sup>2</sup> Fery A was foremost a great human being and a friend. He was a professional level skier and mountaineer. He died at the age of 56 in Geneva unable to fulfill his dream of coming back to Iran and climb / ski once more here.

<sup>3,4</sup> The name, as in many cases around Damavand, is reminiscent of the Shahnameh.

<sup>5</sup> Name of a mythic large bird in the Shahnameh.

<sup>6</sup> It is the base camp town for the North-Eastern and Northern route.

<sup>7</sup> The mule driver.

At these altitudes, you rarely really sleep; so I was hearing the conversations and especially at about 5 pm the heavy snow storm together with thunderstorms and high winds whose sound was amplified by the shelter's metallic structure.

At 5:30 pm Esmail shouted:

**“I am going down, my horse is going to freeze to death!!!”**

We managed to quickly give him some of the equipment to take back and on his way down, he was.

Majid and I stayed another ½-hour hoping that the storm would pass but it did not. At 6 pm we decided to pack-up and “rush” back to the first shelter before dark. We made it slightly before dusk.

It turned out we had made the right decision because the weather did not improve and it was still snowing / raining when we woke up the next morning to go back to Nandal and then on to Tehran.

A party of 28 climbers, including 3 women, was stuck on the way to and back from the summit the day before. We were all worried about their safety since some of them had to spend the night at the second shelter without sleeping bags and some were still “lost” until late at night. Earlier, Majid observed some of them with binoculars close to the summit at 5 pm! To be so late at that altitude and still have to come back is of course very dangerous (I was going to say crazy). A small incident can become a tragedy. This time fortunately with a lot of luck everybody finally made it home safely.

On the way back we stopped at the shepherds' lodge for yoghurt, cream, honey, etc... Do I have to say excellent?

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Some practical information:**

1. Nandal is on the left, off the Haraz road at the 125 km sign. Most anyone in the area can direct you to it. It is better to have a 4WD vehicle to get there but Paykans<sup>8</sup> can also make it!

2. The Salehi family is the local mountaineering “mafia” and can organize sleeping quarters in Nandal, guides, mules and even porters if required. They are well known locally and here practically anyone can direct you to their “headquarters”.

3. Don't even think of taking mules to the second shelter. It is impossible and they will let you down sometimes before reaching it.

4. The climb, for what I call “normal” climbers, can be done in two ways:

a) First day to the first shelter with mules carrying the equipment and then the next day start very early in the morning straight to the top with a short “breakfast” rest at the second shelter.

b) Day one to first shelter as above, day 2 to second shelter and day 3 to the top. This is the ideal “luxury” way of climbing this route.

J-M Houtcieff

Proofreading: Assisted by Fred G  
Layout: Assisted by Massoud G



*The shepherds' lodge with “D” in the background.*



*Esmail, daughter, niece and Mr. Salehi senior.*



*At the shepherds lodge with Marco and Salehis.*



*Salehi Jr.*

<sup>8</sup> The standard Iranian family sedan which has been made, practically unchanged, for the past 40 years!