

# **ANNAPURNA 1, South face, Ueli Steck, 8-9 October 2013**

By Rodolphe Popier

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One of the very few in-depth studies, unpublished in its entirety so far, about the climb of Ueli Steck was led by Andreas Kubin, former Chief Editor of Bergsteiger for 25 years. This study is primarily based on his work, checking again his own conclusions and completing it with my own findings. Eberhard Jurgalski originally suggested me to do that study.

I didn't contact Ueli Steck regarding any facts on Annapurna 1. Results here are pure results of my own factual analysis, based on various sources presented in the media.



*The entire Beghin/Lafaille route, as meant to have been finished by Ueli Steck in the night of 8-9.10.2013. Details were produced by Ueli Steck during his meeting with Andreas Kubin.*



**SOME PRELIMINARY CONFIRMED FACTS:**

**“High point”** marks the highest witnessed point of Steck by all ABC members “late in the afternoon” on 8.10.2013. It’s at footstep of the *“Lafaille couloir”*, slightly right from it.

**“Snow cave area”** is the crevasse/bivouac location at approximately 6850m of 8.10.2013. After having searched for a suitable place at the foot of the headwall, and being too harassed by spindrift showers, Steck descended 100m meter down to find this sheltered bivy location.

**“Descending”** marks the place at approximately 6500m where Steck was witnessed the day after (9.10.2013) in the morning.

Photo by Dan Patitucci. The middle face in the afternoon of the 8.10.2013

## FACTS EXAMINATION & ANALYSIS

### 1/ Objective indirect elements of proofs

In the absence of any direct objective proving elements (GPS, images), few indirect elements of proofs were presented in the medias and further analyzed here.

### 11/ Lights

#### ➤ Sherpas statement

A major argument so far in favour of Steck's ascent had been presented in an **article published in March 2014 in "Le Monde", written by Patricia Jolly**. Having separately contacted Tenji Sherpa, who speaks English, and Ngima Sherpa in Khumbu through a French interpreter, Laurence Shakya, it appeared that both had witnessed Steck's headlamp during the night.

*Ngima Sherpa: "We had no radio contact with him, explained the assistant cook, but **from the base camp, with the backing**, I was able to follow his ascent because of his headlight. Around **11:30 pm**, he was just **below the summit** (that Steck claims to have reached an hour and a half later) but I cannot estimate exactly what was the altitude. I woke up at **2 am** and I understood that he was **descending** because the light went downwards." (English version sent to Miss Hawley mentioned 2h30 am instead of 2am)*

*"Tenji Sherpa, base camp expedition manager, is providing other details:" **From the advanced base camp, that is closer to the face than the base camp, we could not see him continuously. (...) We could see his headlight then. I saw him at midnight just 200m below the summit. Don and myself, we went to sleep until around 4 am and, we both saw him descending. We went towards him. His face was very red, he looked very tired but (he seemed) happy and very excited.**"*

In a further email conversation between Steck and Tenji forwarded to Andreas Kubin, Tenji similarly stated:

*"I assured to her Ueli summited Annapurna there is no doubt and I saw light near the summit about 200m and also our kitchen staff Ngima Dawa saw the headlight when climbing and descending because our kitchen staff he checked many time in night and he said he saw your headlight near the top when climbing and descending and I told to her about all the fact and she found you have summited Annapurna."*

Summary: both stated to have seen lights, Ngima on his own at 11h30pm with Steck somewhere below the summit at an uncertain altitude, then Tenji with Don at midnight with Steck 200m below the summit, then Ngima on his own at 2am showing Steck descending.

It has to be recalled that Tenji Sherpa summited Everest with Ueli Steck without oxygen back to 2012. In 2016 they climbed together Cholatse's north face and are preparing an Everest – Lhotse traverse for Spring 2017.

It has to be noticed that Steck uses that argument to defend his climb, whether during conferences (New York Explorers Club 4<sup>th</sup> November 2014, on VIMEO) or more recently in "l'Humanité" (22 Février 2016):

- Votre ascension de l'Annapurna en 2013 reste marquée par une polémique sur sa réalité parce que vous n'avez pas pu ramener de preuves de votre présence au sommet.
- On a même dit que j'avais payé un des sherpas de l'expédition pour qu'il dise qu'il avait vu la lumière de ma frontale au sommet... Mais, le milieu de la montagne est fait de jalousies, tu dois l'accepter. Alors, est-ce que je dois retourner à l'Annapurna avec un GPS pour faire taire des gens qui racontent des conneries, je ne crois pas. Je dois simplement me blinder.

### ➤ Contradicting other members statements

Despite such testimonies that are seeming plausible at first glance considering Steck's timing, some elements tend to contradict that version.

First, it has to be mentioned that Ngima was also at ABC that night, not in Base Camp as mentioned in Patricia Jolly's article. It was confirmed by the cameraman Jonah Mathewson. So the wall perspective introductive comparison of Tenji is irrelevant.

Second in Tenji's own account, he implicitly mentions him and Bowie to have been together watching the light at midnight and that they went back to bed just after (0h30-1h30?) until 4am. But consulting **Bowie's own report** ("*The view from my seat*"), Bowie never mentions anywhere to have seen such lights with Tenji that night:

*"I woke up a few times during the night- **the first around midnight**- and peered out of my tent at the face above. In the darkness I could see the clouds had lifted and the summit wind banners were much smaller- and the blowing snow had declined dramatically. I also noted that temperatures were significantly colder than our prior trip up the face. I felt much better about Ueli's safety and fell back asleep. The next morning I awoke just after first light to the sound of activity outside the tent, **hearing Tenji's voice** (who had come up from base camp the day before) **and Dan discussing if they could see Ueli. I heard them say they could see him down-climbing, so I immediately got dressed and exited the tent**".*

\*\*\* It has to be recalled here that **nothing would likely have been seen at the beginning of the evening, which was meant to still be cloudy after the wind had vanished shortly after sunset (17h45)**. As Bowie just states here: "*In the darkness I could see the clouds had lifted and the summit wind banners were much smaller- and the blowing snow had declined dramatically*".

After that, consulting the **Patitucci report (Klettern)**, there's also no mention of any light at all, instead:

*"When waking up in the morning of the 9th of October, Tenji just said "I dreamt Ueli summited last night"*

Asked again about that, Dan Patitucci confirmed: "*No, when I got up in the night, I saw no headlamp. I went out at least twice. **Tenji, a Sherpa friend who was with us, went out on his own as well, and Janine, my wife, once with me.***" The last time together with his wife is shown on the picture below at 6pm. Note the captions in which there is nothing dealing with lights watching, but instead, searching some sign of life up there. Note also that the conditions are still very windy even at base camp (prayers flags) as well as on top of the mountain, which is still in the clouds and wind.



PatitucciPhoto  
31. Oktober

As I edit images from Annapurna I'm stumbling on to some powerful memories. This is Janine in Advance Basecamp the night Ueli Steck was climbing the south face. We couldn't sleep and so stayed up searching the wall, hoping to see something. Finally, in the early morning we spotted him climbing down from the summit, a night we'll never forget.  
— mit Janine Patitucci.



*During the night of Ueli's ascent, Janine stands outside the tent hoping to get a glimpse of Ueli.*

**Jonah Matthewson**, the cameraman, was sick that night and stayed in his bed, therefore unable to see anything.

In **Alpinist 45**, Steck himself reports what Don said to him:

*"Immediately, Tenji's face joined my own, and together we took in the wall as he announced, "My dream was that Ueli stood on the summit last night"...Then as the morning's first light moved down the face, a line appeared on the final snow slopes. From near the summit, I followed it down to where it began, exactly where Ueli had hoped to exit the wall. "Tenji, is that a track on the summit?" Wait! There...Ueli is downclimbing...We burst*

*out of the tent and yelled for the others to hear, "Ueli is on the way down!" Don and Jonah's tents zipped open and groggy faces appeared to begin their own search."*

⇒ That third version confirms Patitucci Kletterer's version **that Tenji said to Don he had dreamt Steck was on summit that night, not that they saw any lights together in the night.**

Sadly no one really noticed what exact time he went outside each time and if he was accompanied. In that sense, one can note the 2 confusing versions of the **morning after 4am:**

- in **Alpinist 45** : Bowie wakes up with Tenji who tells him about his dream, then wakes up Patitucci
- in **Bowie's** : Patitucci is already awake, before him, discussing with Tenji!

Matthewson confirmed, however, that there was no conversation at all in the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup> of October in which Tenji (or in a less manner even Ngima who didn't speak English) stated he had seen any lights that night.

⇒ If having seen lights together with Tenji that night, **why didn't Bowie mention it to the others, if not during the night, at least in the morning?**

⇒ As Kubin remarks, if such a thing had happened at any time in the night, with such a small group, **why wouldn't there have been a real tumult or some basic discussion of it?**

⇒ Imagining that both Sherpas had seen it separately from the other members, **why didn't they mention it to the others after 4am the following morning?**

Instead, in Patitucci and Bowie's report, it's stated that ABC team didn't know at all where Steck was in the morning. With Sherpas and members working like every morning, some were searching indeed for Steck at the top of the face before they discovered him descending below his bivy site (Alpinist 45).

⇒ If Sherpas had seen the lights and Ngima had seen Steck's light descending at 2am, **why didn't Ngima tell Tenji, and then to anyone who then, would have known that they didn't need to search for Steck, at least above the headwall?!!** **It seems here that everyone carried on as every day before, knowing nothing about any lights seen during the night...**

After they discovered him downclimbing at about 6500m on morning of the 9<sup>th</sup> of October, Bowie watched his Satphone to find a **SMS** sent by Steck in the night (not mentioned in his own report but in Patitucci's for **Kletterer** and also confirmed later by Jonah Matthewson - see part 4.1 for further details): (translated in German for the article) "*bin zurück in camp 2. Lange Nacht durchgeklettert. Esse etwas, dann steige ich ab*". That SMS did not tell in fact if Steck had reached the top or not. "*Doch die Frage blieb offen : hatte er den Gipfel erreicht?*"

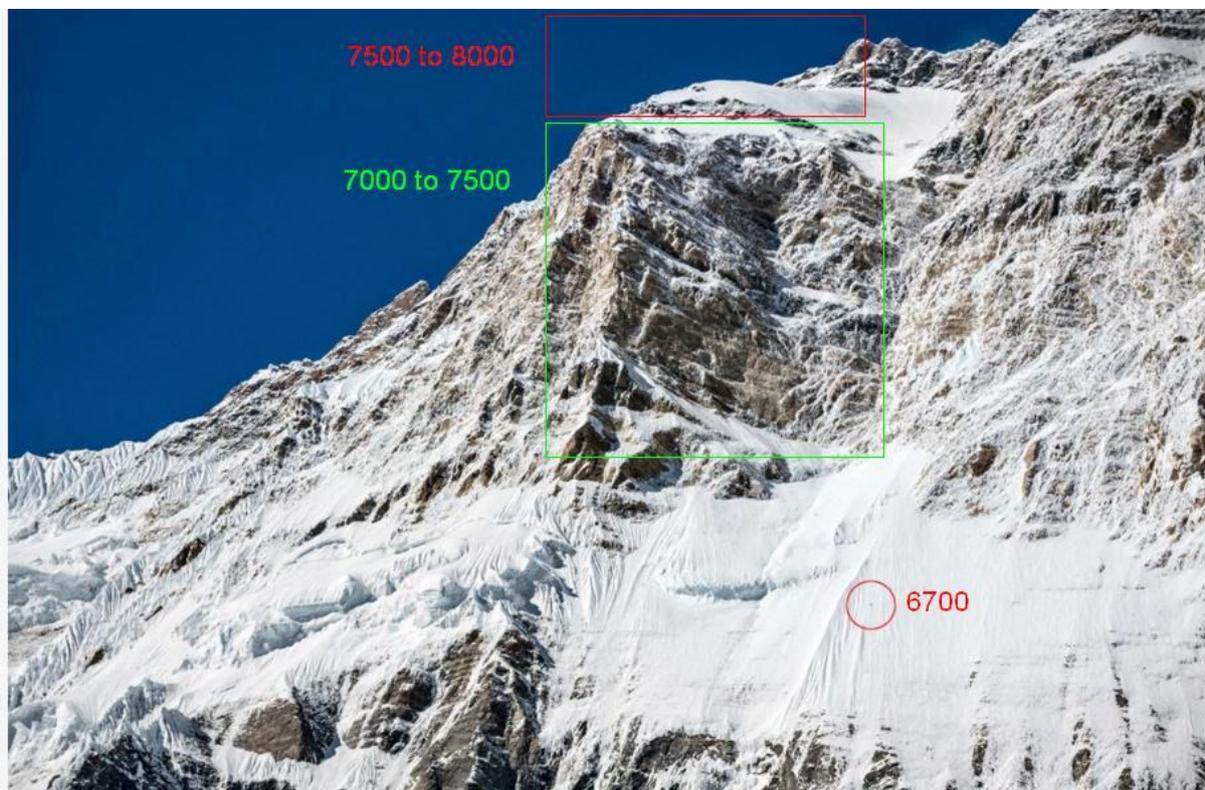
The reproachful attitude of some commentators about the lack of skills of Patitucci to conduct night time lapse photography (that he alleged not to know how to do in some interviews) thus becomes nonsense: **why would he have taken out his camera to do so,**

**knowing that he saw nothing?** Surely he would have awakened the cameraman if something had happened! All those intricate and obscure facts are quite well summarized in Le Monde: “ *Mais à ceux qui reprochent à M. Patitucci une sorte de complicité passive pour n'avoir pas « documentée » l'ascension de son « ami », ce dernier rétorque : « Depuis plusieurs jours, le vidéaste — qu'avait emmené avec lui Don Bowie et qui disposait d'un long objectif — souffrait de problème respiratoire. Il avait emporté ce matériel avec lui dans sa tente dont il n'est pas sorti la nuit de l'ascension. .... Par ailleurs, à ce moment-là, j'ignorais comme tout le monde — si Ueli grimpait ou s'était arrêté. Tenji, mon épouse, et moi-même étions dans la même tente et nous nous sommes levés pendant la nuit à tour de rôle, principalement pour vérifier où en était la météo. Je n'ai personnellement pas vu la lampe frontale d'Ueli, et je n'ai jamais demandé à Tenji s'il l'avait vue, car à notre lever au petit jour, Ueli était déjà bien redescendu et ce n'était plus le sujet. Il avait réussi et nous allions rentrer.»*”

\*\*\* Supposing finally, that the Sherpas' statement to be true, one has to notice that from the ABC perspective and without any specific optic material in night time, the view of the headwall clearly overwhelms the one of the upper face, meaning any potential headlamp seen in the upper headwall may have been taken for one below the top! Moreover, the very final summit ridge can't be seen from that ABC's point of view.



*Ueli getting ready to head down from Annapurna Advance Basecamp after his successful solo ascent of the South Face.*



Ueli Steck, circled, climbing the South Face of Annapurna.

## 12/ Tracks

It was first commented that tracks had been seen in the morning above the headwall below the summit ridge:

Montagnes Mag (14.10.2013) : « *Au soir du premier jour d'ascension, elle aperçoit Steck une dernière fois avant la nuit, il a creusé une grotte de neige au pied de la bande rocheuse avant de disparaître dans les reliefs de la montagne. **Le lendemain, une trace est visible dans les pentes sommitales depuis la sortie de la bande rocheuse et progresse vers le sommet.*** »

Steck mentioned in an interview for Berner Zeitung (published on 18.10.2013):

<http://www.bernerzeitung.ch/sport/weitere/Was-beweist-in-Zeiten-von-Photoshop-ein-Gipfelbild/story/30073485?track>

“-Ohne Kamera gibt es auch kein Gipselfoto. Woher wissen wir, dass Sie tatsächlich oben waren?

*Das weiss niemand, ausser ich. Aber es waren ja vier Leute im Basislager, die haben mit Fernrohren jeden meiner Schritte verfolgt. **Am Tag danach konnte man die Spuren zum Gipfel sehen.***”

Alpinist 45: “*Then as the morning's first light moved down the face, **a line appeared on the final snow slopes. From near the summit, I followed it down to where it began, exactly where Ueli had hoped to exit the wall. "Tenji, is that a track on the summit?" Wait! There...Ueli is downclimbing...***”

Patitucci also told me: “*In the morning of his descent, **I thought I saw a track near the summit ridge. There was a lit line.** Later, when I described it to Ueli he said where I saw the line was not where he went, and for him, **where he was, the snow was hard up. I would not have seen a track.** Who knows what I saw... an avy crown? I don't have photos after - we packed up and left.*”

According to **Andreas Kubin** who discussed that point with Steck: “*Later it turned out, that the trace was the crown of an avalanche*”.

⇒ **Why did Steck present it first as an implicit evidence in the Berner Zeitung?**  
**Why didn't he and his teammates take time to confirm it there?**

Comparing pictures on the afternoon 8.10 and about midday of the 9.10, graciously lent by Jonah Matthewson, one can already see the sun effect damage on the snow covering icy slopes and rock cliffs, many of it being already drought. In particular, for the headwall, it seems that the snow/icy veneer is still prevalent in the part below the ramp, but above, it's already much darker than the day before.

But looking above the headwall, one can't conclusively see any tracks, except two lines in the snow, one east below the ridge (marking the exit of the British route) and one continuing horizontally towards the right below the false bifid eastern foresummit of Annapurna. According to Steck's own words reported to Kubin and to Patitucci, he had met with hard snow conditions on that part so didn't believe it could be his. By the way such linearity is not likely to look like human tracks.



One can also see two little snow marks straight below the summit ridge exit, one big and one smaller, to the left joining to the footstep showing a "V" form. Both are definitely too large to be the tracks of a single man (could be the size of Goûter tracks on the normal route of Mont Blanc!), or it would have involved a massive/hard fight in deep snow. Looks more like small, moist snow avalanches.

### **13/ Remnant of passage found by second team on the route**

Graziani and Benoist repeated the Steck line 2 weeks after him. During their meeting, Steck asserted to Kubin that Graziani found some of his tracks at 7300m (quoting BMC – Lindsay Griffin article). Having personally provided Lindsay with the material from the interview that I made with Graziani in Kathmandu for the Himalayan Database (ANN1-133-02), it appears that Graziani wasn't certain of that.

*“Graziani observed some clear evidence of his [Ueli Steck's] climb around 6700m (holes in the ice from the ice axes, and steps cut into the ice/snow for the feet), and then at 7300m (less clearly, but his own mind was not that clear at that stage of his climb).”*

Asked again about this on the 26.02.2016, he answered: *“No, I didn't find traces at around 7300m, I believed to have seen an ice\_ axe anchor but this is very vague. **I can say I saw no traces at all which can prove his ascent.** Moreover, between his ascent and ours, 15 days passed with a good storm in between.”*

## 2/ Timings and conditions

The following analyses are based on Steck's own reports recollection, in order to try to estimate plausibility of his proposed scenario.

### 21/ A 21<sup>st</sup> century speed ascent!

#### 211/ A global lack of precision in the produced data

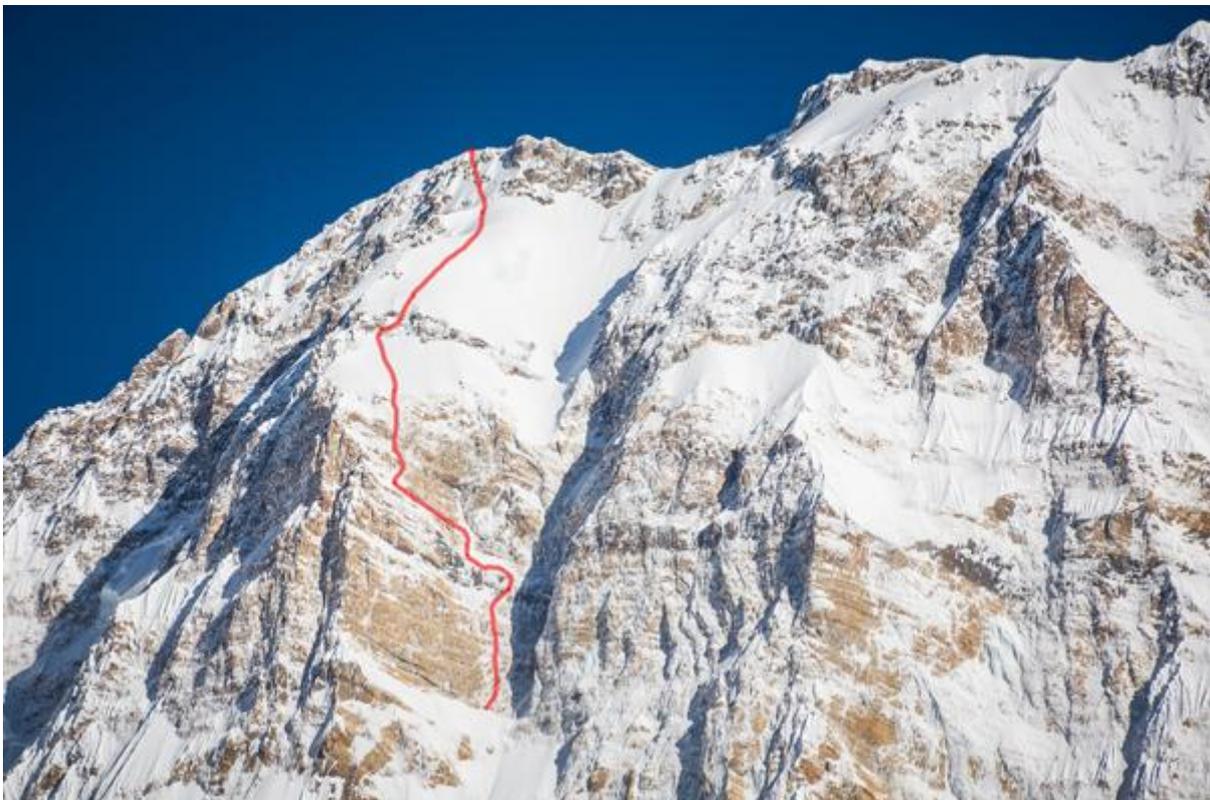
Steck was using a "Suunto Ambit 2S Graphite" during this expedition, a GPS watch model whose data can be downloaded onto private computers. However, no data would ever come out of it (did he take it? Logically yes, as he first mentioned having measured the summit altitude thanks to his altimeter), nor from his SAT Phone (along with the model, allows to collect some GPS points. Could he do so with the model he had? Which one did he have?).

Crosschecking various reports documenting the ascent of Steck, separately asking Patitucci and Matthewson about timings and route details, it has to be noticed that no one was able to collect any real precise data for the days of 8 and 9 of October. Therefore, several points remain to be precisely accounted for.

Ueli Steck's official basic main time details can be found here (please note the large presence of speed comparison elements; measurement unit in m/h – elevation gain per hour):

<http://www.uelisteck.ch/de/item/22-details-annapurna.html>

Routendetails zur Annapurna



Oct 8. 5.30 ABC 5000 meter

Oct 8. Nachmittag 7050m Felsband; suchen nach einem geschützten Platz. Spindrift (kleine Lawine) , verlust von der Kamera und einem Daunenhandschuh. Absteigen.

Oct 8. Pause auf auf ca 6850-6900m. Wasserkochen Essen im Gletscherspalt.

Oct.8 Sunset weiterklettern, ohne Rucksack ( 60m/6mm Reepschnur, 5 Haken, 1 Eisschraube. 11 Getränk, Riegel)

Oct 9. Ca. 1.00 am Summit Sofortiger Abstieg

Oct 9. 9.30 back ABC 5000 meter

Höhenquoten:

Ende Felsband 7550m

Anfang Felsband 7100m

Bergschrund 5650m

Advanced Basecamp 5000m

Camp 1 6100 Meter

Ungefähre Angaben Aufstieg Meter / Stunde

Pause 6850-6900 bis Gipfel = 158 m/h

Bergschrund 5650 Felsband 7050 = 200m/h (inkl Pause umpacken im C1)

Im Vergleich:

Peuterey Grat Mont Blanc

Aufstieg 5500m / 11 h = 500m/h

Grandes Jorasses Colton McIntyre Route 500m/h

Eiger Nordwand 600m/h

Matterhorn 550/h

Vergleich zu Kilian Jornet

Matterhorn 1277m/h

<u>Some space/time elements recollection :</u>		
Don Bowie	Bergschrund to C1	<i>We all took pictures and video of Ueli climbing up the lower wall, <b>and in an hour and a half or so he crested the rock spur, traversing left at the height of C1</b>. Once I knew he had safely reached our stash of gear and the tent platform, Dan, Jonah and I descended the glacier back to ABC.</i>
Ueli	Late afternoon schedule	<i>Since I did not find a protected place I started to descend. 100 meters below I found a crevice. It turned out to be a perfect bivouac place and I could place my tent sheltered from wind and spindrifts. Now I ate and drunk a lot. <b>In the meantime the sun had gone</b>. And everything calmed down. This I noticed also the evening before from ABC. And it was again exactly the same. <b>Fast it darkened and it was calm</b>.</i>
Montagnes Magazine 399	Late afternoon schedule	<i>"16h30: having found no proper shelter place but only spindrifts, Steck begun to downclimb to a better place until he found the crevasse"</i>
Himalayan Database	Late afternoon schedule	<i>He climbed up the face to 6950m, but there was no place to bivouac so he went down to 6800m in a crevasse for shelter from the strong wind that had blown up.</i>
D Patitucci	Late afternoon schedule	<i>I'd say it is reasonable that he was at the band at 15, then disappeared in the clouds less than an hour later, when he went in the crevasse and the clouds closed up.</i>
Ueli	Pause at C2	<i>Approx. one hour after I reached the bivouac I continued my climbing.</i>
Ueli	Pause at C2 return	<i>I rested for as long as it took to boil water</i>
D Patitucci	First time seen from ABC in the morning	<i>On the morning of 9 October, I first saw him at about 6500 meters - I think... when we met him on the glacier we paused for about 20 minutes before continuing down to ABC.</i>
D Patitucci	Pause on the glacial down	<i>told me they had 20 min pause halfway on the glacier (1h far from the ABC) and that they first saw him at 6500m that morning (2nd rock band).</i>

✓ **Duration of the pause on the way up, at C1?**

Where he sorted his gear before going further up. He left here his sleeping bag + big rope, and took with him his tent, stove, and a 60m, 6mm rope.

✓ **Exact time reaching the highest point below the headwall?**

One can note the timing of 15h at the Felsband as indicated officially by Steck and confirmed so by Patitucci. But it seems not in accord with Bowie's own account of Steck gaining the headwall "*as the sun set behind the Fang*", after "*darkness fell*" ...

***Darkness fell on the wall and after losing sight of Ueli** I suggested that he had either hunkered down for the night to descend in the morning, or had found a safe place to wait out the spindrift avalanches caused by the summit winds before continuing up.*

***Just before the sun set behind the Fang** we watched as Ueli gained the headwall and disappeared into the rocks just right of the bottom of the central "Lafaille" couloir. A few minutes later he reappeared again and began down climbing to a small band of ice features, descending around 50-100 vertical meters. He then stopped, and through the lens we could clearly see him hacking at the face with his tools."*

**The sunset is meant to have happened around 17h47 on the 8.10.2013.** But without any time statement from Bowie or the other ABC members, it's hard to deduce what precise time Steck gained the headwall to reappear "a few minutes later", and beginning to downclimb...Unfortunately, neither Patitucci nor Matthewson noticed any exact timing while photographing Steck, being more occupied with realizing the images than looking after details.

Steck told Manu Rivaud in **Montagnes Magazine 399**, "*16h30: having found no proper shelter place but only spindrifts, Steck began to downclimb to a better place until he found the crevasse*". If accepting it as fact (as it is the only time mention of that moment that I have ever found) it means that Steck would have spent 1h30 from the time he reached the headwall before downclimbing? One has to note the previous timing elements described in the same article: "*15h: spindrift at 6700m and loss of the camera*".

⇒ **This, added to the account of Bowie, would tend to prove that Steck gained the headwall later than 15h, perhaps 16h or even later, until he began to downclimb at 16h30?** In fact, it has to be added that Steck didn't apparently make any sort of long traverse from his high point while searching for a sheltered place to bivouac, but went down "a few minutes later" (Bowie) to the bivy place.

⇒ **Before he did his 1h bivouac pause, nothing specified also about how much time he took, hacking snow/ice to enlarge the hole/crevasse, indeed preparing his bivouac.**

✓ **Time starting from the bivouac for the summit?**

There's nothing mentioned in either Steck's official website versions (see part 123/), in his official details in the aforementioned page, nor in the AAJ or Alpinist45. It's represented as 18h in the Himalayan Database, but in other like Montagnes Magazine 399, it's 18h30 or even 19h for Andreas Kubin.

In any case, sunset appeared at 17h47 that evening, so it all fits since Steck was meant to leave when full darkness/night was established. It was equally determined after the wind had stopped, **so how much delay between sunset, full night and wind decrease?**

✓ **Time and duration of the pause in the night when returning to his bivouac?**

In **AAJ/Alpinist 45** accounts it was meant to be around 4am, but in **Montagnes Magazine 399** it's 4h30am. For **Andreas Kubin** it was between 4 and 5h30am...In both of his accounts published on his official website, there's no mention at all of that, instead: "*Noch im Dunkeln bin ich bei meinem Zelt auf 6'850 Meter*" ...

After that, the duration of the pause was meant to have lasted "as long as it took to boil water" ...

✓ **Exact time when seeing first Steck descending on the 9.10.2013?**

Steck was witnessed from ABC at approximately 6500m (6600m for Kubin) going down that morning, but it's impossible to get any time statements from ABC members. It's known that sunrise occurred at 6h06am that morning, so was there enough light 30 minutes earlier (Kubin mentions 5h30), so that they already could observe him ?

✓ **Time at the Bergschrund?**

The trio of Dan, Don and Tenji Sherpa was already on his way to meet Steck when he crossed the Bergschrund. From Advanced Base Camp, Ngima mentioned in Jolly's article that he stopped watching Steck around 8am after he believed him to be safe - what could correspond to Steck's arrival to the Bergschrund? On his side, Matthewson doesn't remember any precise time...

## 212/ A speed overview essay

TIMING DETAILS RECOLLECTION (8-9 october 2013)								
	Alt	Alt	Delta	Time	Time	Delta	Rythm	Including :
Witnessed	5000	5750	750	05:30	8h	2h30	300	
	5750	6100	350	8h	9h30	1h30	233	15/30 min pause at C1?
	6100	7000	900	9h45	15h	5h15	171	
	6100	7000	900	9h45	16h	6h15	144	
	5750	7000	1250	8h	15h	6h45	185	If 15 min pause C1
	5750	7000	1250	8h	15h	6h30	192	If 30 min pause C1
	5750	7000	1250	8h	16h	7h45	161	If 15 min pause C1
	5750	7000	1250	8h	16h	7h30	166	If 30 min pause C1
	7000	6850/6900	100	16h30	17h-17h30	100/150m	NR	SCHEDULE from 3pm to 5h/5h30pm?!
NOT WITNESSED, NIGHTCLIMB	6850	8091	1241	18h	01:00	7h	177	1h bivouac pause at bivouac
	6900	8091	1191	18h	01:00	7h	167	
	6850	8091	1241	18h15	01:00	6h45	183	Having not much precise altitude/time estimations, average value arbitrarily chosen to be representative here is : $6850/6900 * 18h18h30 = 6875 * 18h15$
	6875	8091	1216	18h15	01:00	6h45	180	
	6900	8091	1191	18h15	01:00	6h45	176	
	6850	8091	1241	18h30	01:00	6h30	190	
	6900	8091	1191	18h30	01:00	6h30	183	
	8091	6850	1241	1h	4h	3	413	
	8091	6900	1191	1h	4h	3	397	
	8091	6875	1216	1h	4h15	3,25	374	
	8091	6850	1241	1h	4h30	3,5	354	
	8091	6900	1191	1h	4h30	3,5	340	15>30min pause at bivouac ?
	6850	6500	350	4h30	5h30	1	350	
	6875	6500	375	4h30	5h30	1	375	
6850	6500	350	4h45	5h30	45min	466		
Witnessed	6500	5750	750	05:30	8h ?	2h30	300	time at the bergshrund?
	5750	5000	750	8h?	9h30	1h10 (1,16)	646	20 min pause on glacier
	6500	5000	1500	5h30	9h30	3h40	409	

BERSHRUND :	Ueli 5650m. Benoist 5750m. GE ca 5800m. FINN MAP 5760m		
FELSBAND :	Ueli 7050m. Benoist 7000m. Graziani 7050/7070m.		
ABC :	Ueli 5000m		
Camp 1 :	Ueli, Benoist : 6100m		
Bivouac crevasse :	Ueli 6850/6875m		
SUNSET (8.10) :	5h47pm (264° W)		
MOONSET (8.10) :	at 8h13pm (249° WSW)	at 6h30pm, altitude 19° / heading 235° SW	waxing crescent moon
SUNRISE (9.10) :	6h06am (96°E)		
<b>ALMOST NO NATURAL LIGHT AT ALL BETWEEN 6pm on the 8.10 and 5h30am on the 9.10</b>			

BEST STATS ESTIMATION FOR SUMMIT CLIMB	V 5750 - 7000	7h30/7h45	161-166 m/h	Considered him to arrive around 4pm, which seems more fitting (could be even later). Knowing he was 233m/h from Bergshrund to C1 and said to have climbed slow to economize his energy after between C1 and bivy place (150m/h for that part if topping headwall at 4pm...moreover meeting with spindrifts from 6600m)
	V 6875-8091	6h45	180m/h	I retained an average value of 6875m bivy (6850/6900) and 18h15 departure time (18h/18h30). Means him to be lightly faster onsighting ED ground night time (with traversing itinerary) than in daytime in D/TD direct ground.
	V8091-6875	3h15	374m/h	I retained 4h15 return time (4h/4h30). <b>Amazing descent speed, even faster than for official Shisha</b> (338m/h between 8027-7100 knowing long ridge first then 300m of proper technical downclimb. WARNING : if considering his Shisha summit as questionable, one has to notice his possible other descent speed would be 169m/h for the Pungpa La's descent, where he was meant to be tired...)
	V6875-6500	1h	375m/h	I retained 5h30am timing proposed by Kubin in absence of any statement from ABC members. <b>In this hypothesis, whatever helped to fit "at best", it means he is descending as fast during day than night, whatever technical difficulty he meets with.</b>
	V6500-5000	3h40	409m/h	Not knowing his time at the Bergshrund, may be likely than he went much faster once below it and less above...
Conclusion				<i>Homogenous rythms up and down, whatever altitude differences, day/night time, even with greater technical difficulties to cope with during the night...And as for Shisha 2011, a continuously increasing rythm up and down (less drastically here than for Shisha however).</i>

Please note that the official Steck timing for the summit climb from the bivouac (158m/h) is wrong. It means that Steck would either have had to start at 17h10 (if bivouac at 6850m:  $1241/158=7,85$ ) or at 17h30 (if bivouac at 6900m:  $1191/158=7,53$ ). **In both cases, it means that a departure before sunset does not fit with the whole scheme** (by the way, he himself never noted his own start time). It's instead 180m/h, in my best estimation.

Please also note that official timing for the first day's ascent from the Bergschrund to Felsband is also wrong, being in fact quite inferior than 200m/h: **161>192m/h (if 4pm>3pm)**. If timing at Felsband is still unknown, it could even be later than 4pm so the speed could "fall" to 150m/h.

**On the way up**, Steck's timing for the whole route ascent is:

- **2341m** (5750-8091) /
- **14h30** = 17h (from 8am to 1am) – 15 min (pauseC1) – 2h15 (arrival Felsband to start from bivy place, 16h-18h15),  
= **161m/h**

It's logically less than on (easier, even less direct) Shisha 2011 official (183m/h).

On the way down, his timing is impossible to calculate exactly because there is no timing info for the Bergschrund.

Further factors to be considered: the **180m/h night time climbing speed towards the headwall**:

- Comparison with standard speed of Steck : he has **never been so fast at this altitude, even with less difficulty, except on his official 2011 Shishapangma ( $\geq 300\text{m/h}$  from 7300m)**.
- Difficulties of the headwall (M5-6), although meant to be in excellent conditions, as the upper part was meant to have been in hard neve snow.
- Climbing with one outer glove on two (changing it when "bare" hand too cold) knowing it was a very cold night (in CBA at least said Don Bowie).
- A night without moon (waxing crescent hidden behind the face from 18h => Patitucci's picture, and moonset at 8h13pm) and contradictory testimonies about light...

Same about the **3h15 or so descent time to his bivouac**, where it implies:

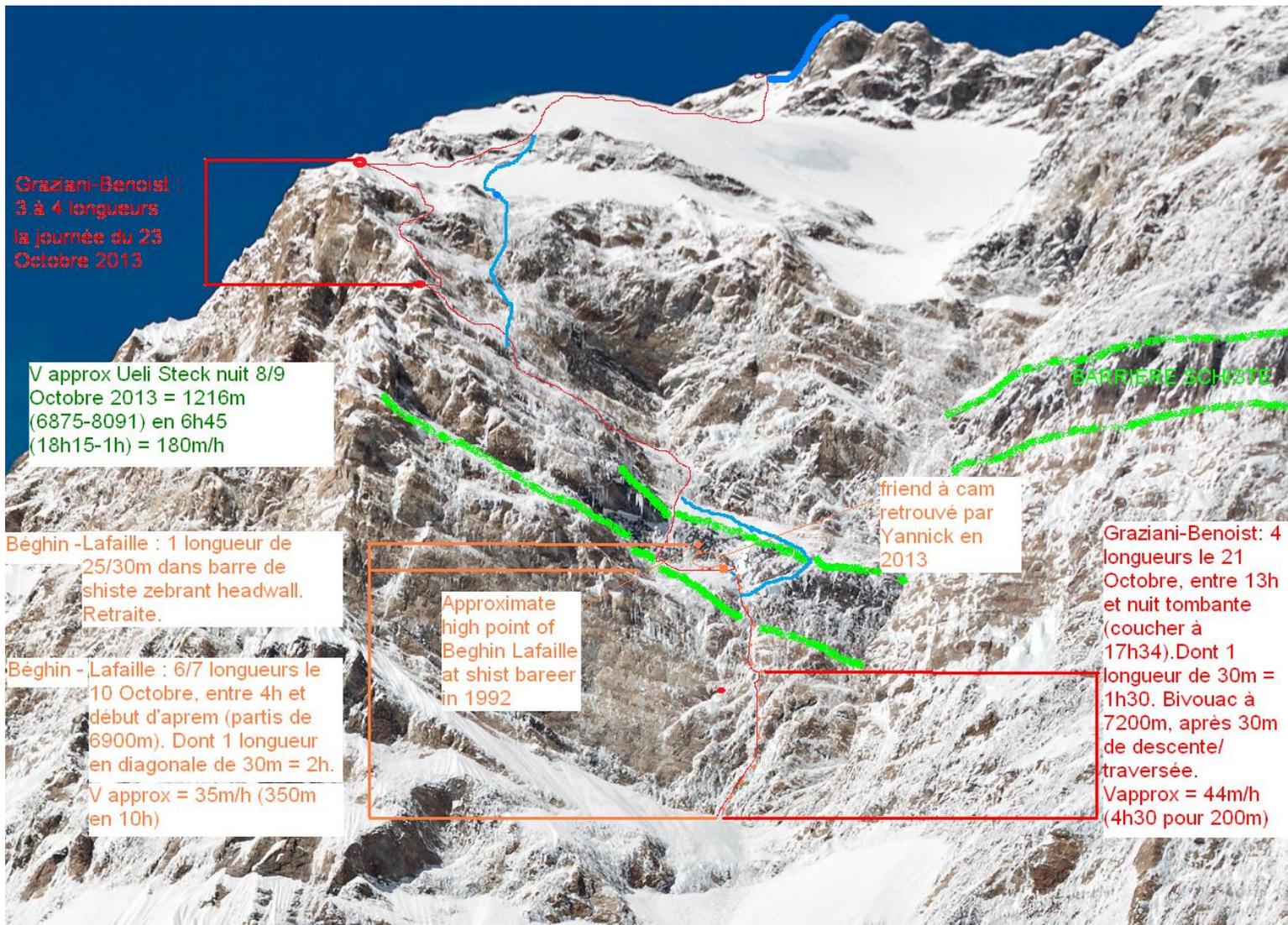
- Technical, exposed, solo downclimbing in the headwall, with one outer glove on two.
- 8 Abalakov abseils in the headwall with his 60m 6mm rope in cold night conditions\*.  
⇒ It means that even if considering his superior speed in the easier higher part – that the average effective speed is significantly higher than 400m/h for that upper section!
- All that with little/no use of the headlamp clearly witnessed.
- Comparing with few previous descent chronos of Steck, it's by far the fastest ever.

\*\* Dealing with coldness and night weather conditions, in his first official version, Steck said: *"The thin air at 7000m is not yet death zone. At this height I could move quite easily. **Only the cold was a problem**".*

In AAJ/ALPINIST 45: “(UP) *Although the cold was a **little tiresome**, a kind of happiness filled me: I was climbing on, and I felt at home (...)* (DOWN) ***The cold stiffened my hands, and I kept having to warm them.***”

**\*\*\* If considering the hypothesis he climbed the headwall:**

<b>BEST STATS ESTIMATION FOR HEADWALL CLIMB</b>	V 5750 - 7000	7h30/7h45	161-166 m/h	Considered him to arrive around 4pm, which seems more fitting (could be even later!). Knowing he was 233m/h from Bergshrund to C1 and said to have climbed slow to economize his energy after between C1 and bivy place (150m/h for that part if topping headwall at 4pm...moreover meeting with spindrifts from 6600m)
	V 6875-7500	6h45	92m/h	I retained an average value of 6875m bivy (6850/6900) and 18h15 departure time (18h/18h30). Means him to be much slower night time onsighting ED ground (with traversing itinerary) than in daytime in D/TD direct ground, even "economizing".
	V7500-6875	3h15	192	I retained 4h15 return time (4h/4h30). If considering his Shisha summit as disputed, one has to notice his real descent speed would then be 169m/h for the Pungpa La's descent, where he said to be tired...Here it's faster in harder ground by night, but Steck didn't mention to be tired at all.
	V6875-6500	1h	375m/h	I retained 5h30am timing proposed by Kubin in absence of any statement from ABC members! In this hypothesis, whatever helped to fit "at best", Steck can drastically accelerate in less difficult ground with day light.
	V6500-5000	3h40	409m/h	Not knowing his time at the Bergshrund, may be likely than he went much faster once below it and less above...Speed fitting with the approximative morning descent beginning from the bivouac, moreover including glacier easier part and pause on it.
	Conclusion			<i>Rythm change during night time clearly appearing, despite a still very fast but plausible descent rythm if comparing it to the Shisha's reconsidered one.</i>



- **Considering the approach to the headwall:**

**1992 team** needed 2 days to reach the base of the headwall. Starting to climb the face on the 8.10 to bivouac at 6500m, the next day (9.10) at 6900m.

**2013 team** needed 2 days to reach the base of the headwall. Starting on 17.10 from the Bergschrund to 6050m bivouac, then next day (18.10) to 6700m bivouac where the pair waited 19,20.10 for better weather conditions.

**2013 Ueli Steck** needed a single day to reach the base of the headwall, with an **average speed of 176 m/h** from 5750m to 7000m, between 8am and 3h30pm (C1 pause deduced). This observed speed corroborates with other validated stats of Steck below 7000m, on Nuptse for instance in 2015 with 213m/h (between 5300 and 6900m in 7,5h on the British route of the south face).

- **Considering the headwall:**

**Both teams of 1992 and 2013** needed one day or more to overcome the first 7 pitches of the **headwall to the schist barrier** (between 7000/7050 and 7250m).

Both teams meeting with an extreme 30m pitch demanding 1h30 to 2h of effort to the leaders.

Speeds were very comparable, despite a 20 year gap: 35m/h for 1992's rope, 44m/h for 2013 (both teams had drier conditions than Steck).

2013 team needed 2,5 effective days to overcome the headwall itself, when Ueli Steck needed approximately 6h45 to overcome the same headwall plus the highest part, nighttime.

2013 team needed 7 hours from its 7550m bivouac to the top (between 4 and 11am), representing a speed of **77 m/h**.

**Considering that Steck's speed logically decreased in the technical part of the headwall, then he logically went faster above.**

Knowing both 1992 and 2013 teams could only climb at best at 44m/h in the beginning part of the headwall in clear sky, daytime conditions; even in better conditions, climbing solo (meaning faster) but in the night time (with lights not fully confirmed to have been observed...), **could Steck really go more than 3 times faster than his colleagues?**

Let's say 3 times faster than the Graziani Benoist team: 132m/h. It means that to compensate, Steck would have needed to climb at 228m/h in the upper part, meaning just as fast as at the beginning of the face the day before, but this time above 7550m, at nighttime and after matching the headwall... It also means that if going any slower than 3 times the pace of Graziani/Benoist, his speed would have needed to be even faster than the day before, meaning greater than 228m/h (scenario: if only 2 times faster than them : 88m/h headwall => 272m/h above it!).

All things considered, it means that Steck would have needed to go at least 3 times faster than his friends to overcome the headwall and the upper face in "reasonable speed proportions".

(CAUTION: present scenarios do not consider the 125m between 6875m bivy and the headwall base at 7000m, but its impact seems somewhat insignificant for the calculations)

- **Considering descent time from the top to the bivouac:**

Steck's descent time from the top to his bivouac (8091m to 6900m) is 3h (1h to 4h AM, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of October 2013), with 8 abseils for the whole headwall. This is an unprecedented descent speed in Himalayan history for such extreme ground.

Graziani/Benoist needed 2 days\* for the same section, abseiling the whole headwall. (\* 8091m to 7400m, from 11am to the end of the afternoon on the 24.10.2013 ; 7400m to 6900m in 7h on the 25.10.2013.).

## 22/ Atmospheric and mountain conditions comparison

- **A windy night on the 8,9.10.2013 ?**

An important argument presented by Ueli Steck from the beginning was that the wind decreased after he had hidden in his crevasse to wait for the spindrifts to stop. He also mentioned in his New York conference that his weather forecast told him (while in the crevasse => he had his Satphone there) the wind would calm down during the night.

ABC members could see the strong winds that evening (can be seen on Patitucci's picture with his wife watching the face). Bowie also mentioned that the wind calmed down during the evening - at least in the ABC, despite the temperatures were very cold that night.

However, not far from there, Graziani and Benoist had a windy first night for their acclimatization stay on the peak 6505m (night of the ascent of Steck), whereas they hadn't much during the second one.

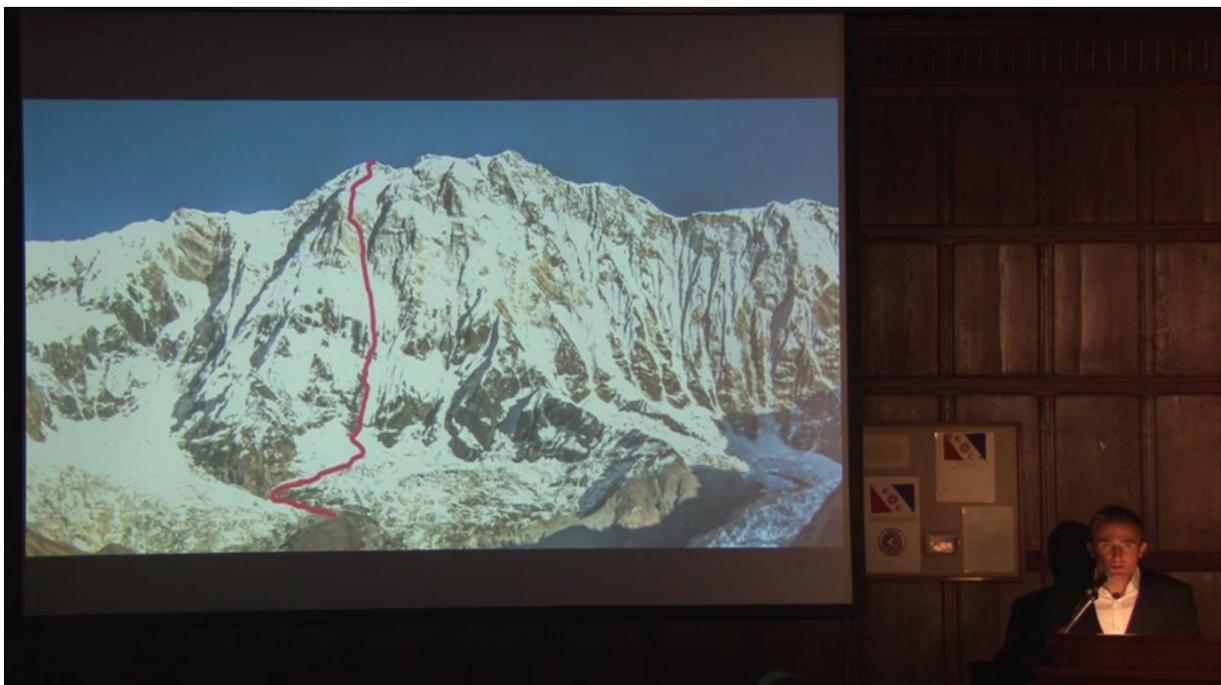
Yan Giezendanner, mountaineering meteorological forecast engineer based in Chamonix, despite he cannot provide archive of this weather forecast, reminds that he expected 70km/h North East wind for that night. If it was really so, the route used by Steck, lying in a southeast direction, could have been potentially sheltered from the wind in the headwall itself. But why not mention any wind on the upper slopes above the headwall, or even more when reaching the top?

Don Bowie's accounts tend however to conclude that the wind had stopped at midnight, himself "feeling secure for Ueli's safety". At least in the base camp it was so, despite a bitter cold.

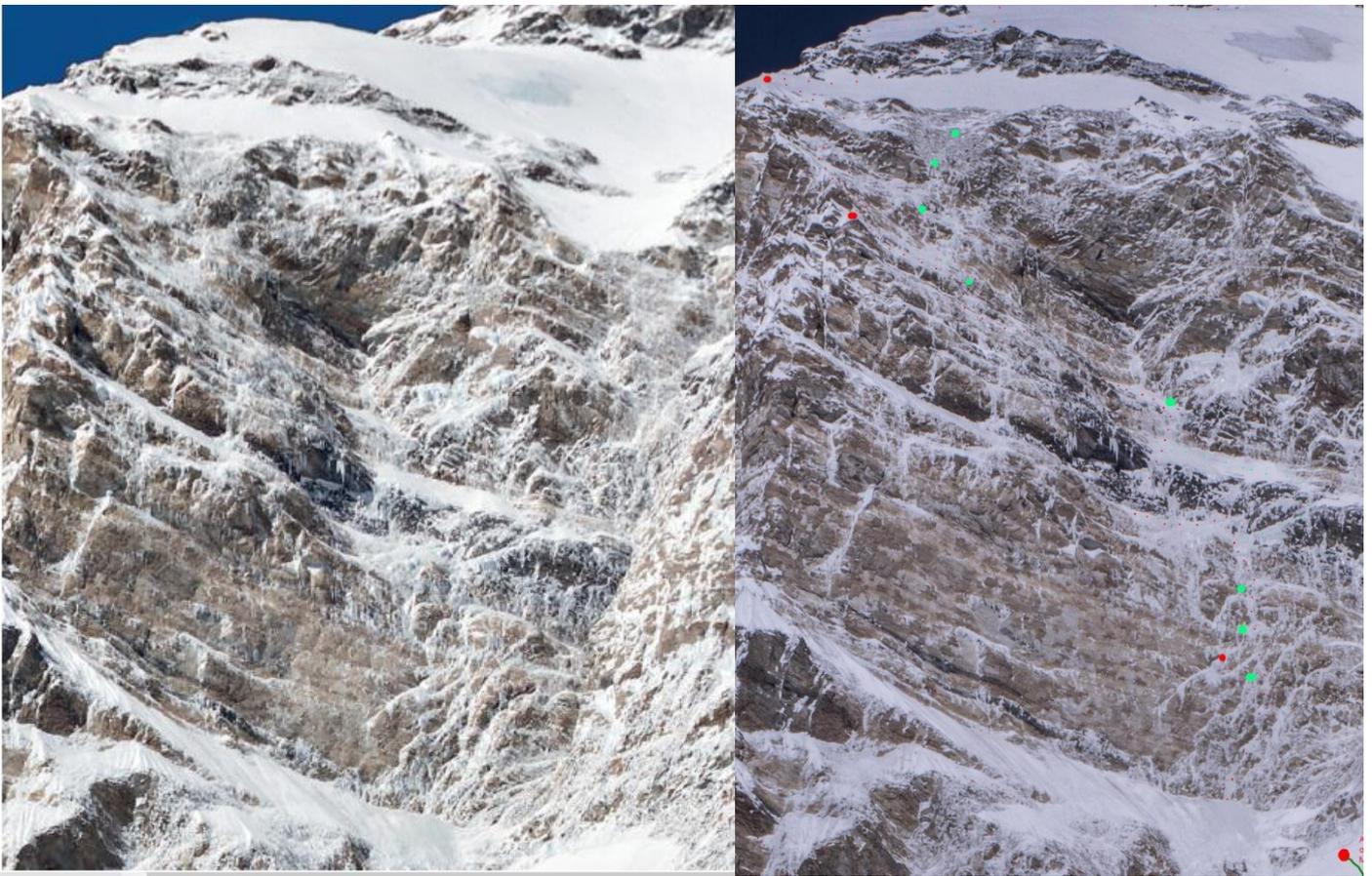
- **"Exceptional" snow conditions?**

A major argument presented by Steck from the beginning to explain his exceptional ascent was the consistently exceptional conditions found in the headwall, meant to have provided a thin, perfect snow layer on it. Then hard snow for the upper part, between the top of the headwall and the summit.

One can hear the same argument during the New York conference in November 2014, where Steck even mentions "snowy conditions" (58'15") in the headwall: *"You see, there was all the way to the rock, there was like **this layer of snow**, and basically what happens was like : 2 days ago it was really warm and it snowed, so the snow was sticking to the rock, and now the temperature was just dropping, so **the whole snow was frozen**, so it had this nice layer of snow which I can climb on the rock, and I knew, that's my chance to climb this face, so I have to keep moving in the night"*.



The picture presented here is Jonah Mathewson's. It's a time-lapse shot from base camp on October 10th at sunrise, between 6 and 7:30am, meaning 24h after the ascent. It was later shown almost everywhere to present the route (including on the 14.02.2014 during Steck presentation in Chamonix). **Zoomed and with such luminosity properties, it effectively looks as if everything is white in the headwall!** However the reality of the zoomed headwall during 8 October in the afternoon and the morning after (9.10.2016) tend to show a rather different vision:



Comparing both pictures, one can see the ice lines to be well formed, **but does it seem like plastered with snow?** The proper exit, meant to be covered by a thin ice neve layer, looks almost grey the day after and generally less plastered than the remnant of the route...

It seems the white color disappeared in the early morning hours, the whole thing looking slightly greyer on the 9.10, as if a previous powder snow layer covering the whole mountain had been sublimated that morning. Could consolidated frozen snow melt in just a few hours? The layer would have to be definitely quite thin... By the way, one has to note that in the evening beginning of the 8 of October (Patitucci's picture), an eastern wind was blowing snow from the entire summit ridge and Steck himself had to hide from spindrifts, which obviously couldn't come from anything other than powder snow - not consolidated snow. What about the upper slopes receiving that same snow from East/Northeast and the exit corridor to the summit ridge?

Looking carefully at Matthewson's picture of the morning of the 9.10.2016, the exit corridor to the summit ridge shows 3 small, moist snow slides...hard to believe that this section was also hard snow the night/day before?



Above conditions on the 21.10.2013, when the French attacked the headwall. It looks drier in comparison with Steck pictures, even though the perspective is from the very base of the wall. In comparison, follow some zoomed excerpts of Patitucci's clichés from the same base of the wall, shot on the 8.10.2013 in the afternoon: seemingly whiter but that much (a recent light snow fall could produce same effect)?



Further comparison of the ice condition can be attempted between the Mathewson picture of the 9.10.2013 (zoomed to the 200m headwall first part) and main attack of the French on the 21.10.2013. It shows better ice conditions for the Swiss.



In conclusion: at first glance, it looks like Steck had better ice conditions than the French. Enough to downclimb solo more than half of the headwall at night time? On the other hand, impossible to retrace anything about the so-called exceptional “little snow neve” conditions that the Swiss alleged to have found in the headwall and presented in his conferences.

### **3/ Accounts and contradictions**

#### **31/ A new official German version following the 2014 Piolets d'Or award**

I first studied the English official version, which was published on 19.10.2013. But after, comparing it with the German version, whose publication date was similar, I couldn't believe what I read: in one version, very few facts. In the other one, many details provided, some clearly jumping out, like the description of the summit configuration (part 23). Was it possible that this version could have been later added, not corresponding in fact to the publication date shown? Although doubting that possibility, I asked an informatics friend, who quickly explained that this kind of procedure is extremely easy to do. That same day, this friend could eventually sort 3 different official versions : 1 in English, which wasn't modified, and 2 in German, the first one being perfectly similar to the English unchanged one, the second German version being the one puzzling me.

##### **The English version:**

<http://www.uelisteck.ch/en/item/17-9-oktober-2013-gipfelerfolg-an-der-annapurna-suedwand.html>

##### **The first German version:**

<http://web.archive.org/web/20131019142832/http://www.uelisteck.ch/de/item/17-9-oktober-2013-gipfelerfolg-an-der-annapurna-suedwand.html#.VnQLX1ThDIU9>.

Oktober 2013: Gipfelerfolg an der Annapurna Südwand

##### **The second German version:**

<http://web.archive.org/web/20150402181352/http://www.uelisteck.ch/de/item/17-9-oktober-2013-gipfelerfolg-an-der-annapurna-suedwand.html>

After a few crosschecks based on the publication date of these various versions, my colleague could verify that **the second German version had been published sometime between the 29.03.2014 and the 2.04.2015**. One has to remember that the 29.03.2014 is nothing other than **Piolets d'Or 2014 recipients of the award day announcement**, that year being Ueli Steck and Ian Welsted/Raphael Slawinski. If it's impossible to prove that Steck may have published that new version the same day he received the award or soon after, it seems rather strange anyway to find this precise date coinciding with it.

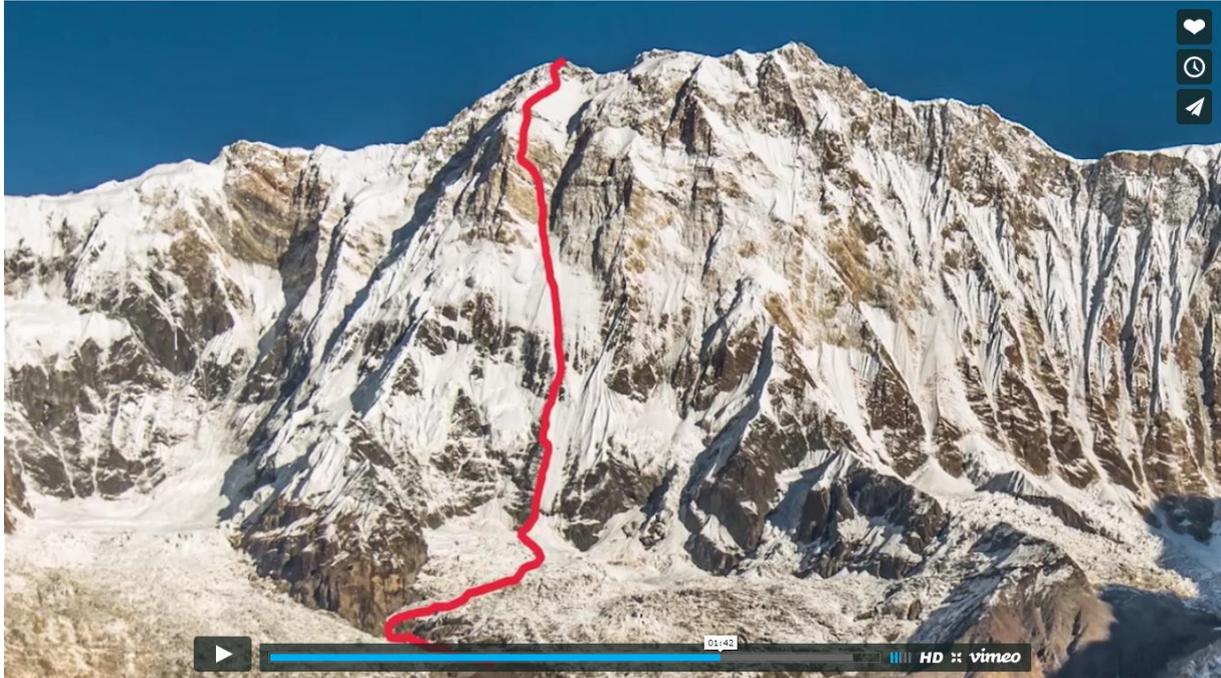
**This concluded, some questions have to be raised:**

- ⇒ **Why not modifying the date of publication if changing most of the content and present an almost perfectly detailed version?**
- ⇒ **Why presenting this version 6 months after the climb and not immediately after it?**
- ⇒ **Why not also do it in English? Maybe to respond towards the critics, who mainly came from the German world?**

In comparison, one has to keep in mind the Talung report of the Ukrainians, who in 2015 did the first ascent of the NNW spur (awarded by Piolets d'Or 2016): published soon after their climb, it's a proper topoguide. And those climbers, not even having similar means as Steck for communication, managed to produce it by themselves.

## 32/ 4 different summit accounts

At first, one could notice **wrong route drawing ending at the wrong top**. This for instance in Patitucci official video:



Same in **Montagnes Magazine 399**, here also the route drawing ends at the wrong eastern Annapurna1 foresummit. **In fact the real summit isn't located to the right when exiting, but 300m further west (left on the picture) on the ridge.**



In his very first official report, Steck also mentioned:

*"When I reached the summit ridge I could hardly believe it. It was night, the sky full of stars and the ridge going down in front of me. **With my altimeter I checked everything very carefully, I followed the ridge and I knew: I was on highest point.**"*

<http://www.uelisteck.ch/en/item/17-9-oktober-2013-gipfelerfolg-an-der-annapurna-suedwand.html#.UI418CR9dL9>

Further corroborated in **Klettern**, as Patitucci described the very first account of Steck on the glacier: ***“Auf seiner Suunto-Uhr prüfte er die Höhe, die 100 Meter höher als die höchste Gipfel der Annapurna anzeigte. Er war ganz oben.”***

Knowing the very complex geography of the summit ridge of Annapurna 1, it's **almost impossible to believe that someone can find the real top thanks only to his altimeter on a dark night**, since any bump on the 300m long horizontal like summit ridge can lead you to believe you're on the highest one. Even during daytime, clear sky conditions, many get caught by this complex configuration. Moreover this mention: *“and the ridge going down in front of me”* just makes no sense: where could be this ridge be going down when the south face exit is just above the saddle? Looking at the south face exit notch/saddle?

From the 29.03.2014, date when he was awarded with his second Piolet d'Or, a **new German version** would appear on the website of Steck, without similarly replacing the English one. In that new German version, the Swiss would include much more details. This notably concerned the summit of Annapurna:

*“Das Gelände steilt langsam wieder auf, die letzten Meter auf den Grat sind wieder etwas steiler, ca. 60. Ich traversiere auf dem Grat nach links. Es ist flach hier oben. Der Grat steilt auf, ich gehe weiter und erreiche eine Wächte (corniche). Ich schalte die Stirnlampe ein (j'allume la lampe). Weit vor mir ist eine weitere Wächte. Bereits eine habe ich traversiert. Ich kann keinen höheren Punkt erkennen. Es ist Nacht, der Himmel voller Sternen als vor mir der Grat wieder runter geht. **Ist das der höchste Punkt? Ein komischer Gipfel, ein flacher Grat mit 3 Erhöhungen, ich stehe auf der 2. Erhöhung.**”*

**This precise description, which has almost nothing to do with the first one, but which was published on the same website for the same date of publication, doesn't include altimeter use anymore, but it's clearly mentioned that Steck can recognize 3 main cornices, stopping on the second one (as Stephane Benoist did).**

**How possible is it to believe that Steck could have recognized such a complex configuration during a dark night? Why no longer mention his altimeter, when at first this method to find the real top was meant to be sure enough? Why add these details?**

There's a good chance that Steck borrowed that description from the Internet. In that sense, GHM published a detailed account of the summit ridge area in 2013 (Author : Jean-Jacques Prieur). I am still working on that topic in 2017 and discussed in private with Benoist about that matter back in January 2014. Asked about it in February 2016, he says he doesn't remember having talked with Steck prior to the 14.02.2014 evening in Chamonix but was indeed very surprised to hear his own terms used by the Swiss that evening. Same for Graziani who didn't discuss with him anything about the summit section but doesn't believe he could describe anything during a dark night.

**\*\* It has to be mentioned that Steck, obviously providing a correct description of the summit area in his second official version, still didn't know to use it correctly afterwards (if considering it to have been published at the 2014 Piolets d'Or winners announcement day): in a conference in November 2014 (New York Explorers Club), he was still showing the first Patitucci line ending in the wrong place (right hand after south face exit).**

<http://vimeo.com/112107837>

\*\* It has to be noted also that Steck mentioned to Manu Rivaud to have stopped at the summit ridge itself when exiting from the south face (MM399) during their meeting of 28.10.2013. **So there are actually 3 different summit versions!**

\*\* **If you add the wrong summit draw on Patitucci's picture, it ultimately becomes 4 different versions!**

⇒ **Which version is the good one?**

Stopping at the second cornice isn't obviously the same than stopping at the south face exit or the eastern foresummit... Finding the summit thanks to the altimeter on one hand, describing 3 cornices as if in a clear day sky on the other, both of these versions meant to have happened during a dark night...

### **33/ 2 versions for the camera's loss**

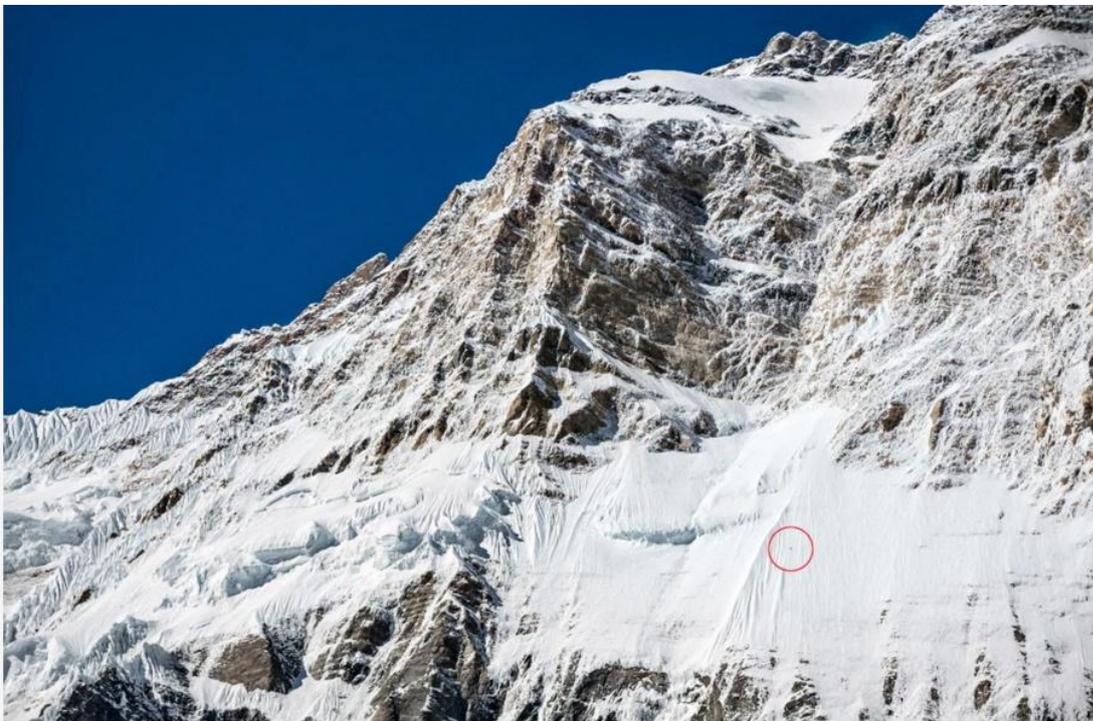
➤ **First version: at 6700m at 15h?**

In **Montagnes Magazine 399** : ***"15h : bousculé par un spindrift, Ueli perd un sur-gant et son appareil photo, vers 6700m.*** » « *L'histoire de l'appareil photo perdu : une histoire de sangle trop courte, un appareil à détacher pour s'en servir, une avalanche qui demanda à l'alpiniste de se raccrocher à ses piolets des deux mains...* » « - *Alors Ueli, ce headwall, c'est raide comment ? demandais-je après que nous ayons éclairci cette histoire d'appareil photo perdu.* »

In **Alpinist 45**: ***"Higher up, I photographed the face, so I could keep the image as a map. As a heavy flow of spindrift swept over me, I grabbed on to both of my ice tools"***. As in version lightly modified in **AAJ**:

***"Higher up, as I photographed the face, a heavy flow of spindrift swept over me and I grabbed onto both of my ice tools, dropping my camera and one of my gloves. From then on, I had to climb in my lighter gloves. Above 6,800 meters I climbed inside a thickening cloud..."***

These versions, adding to the fact Steck mentioned spindrifts to have begun from 6600m in his first official version (*"from 6600m I had to cope with wind and spindrifts"*), show the 6700m spindrift occurrence to be plausible. **However, it doesn't fit much with the idea of taking some distance with the wall to picture it? Moreover, why didn't team member, who were watching at that time, saw the even occurring?**



Ueli Steck, circled, climbing the South Face of Annapurna.

Ueli Steck at about 6700m shot by Patitucci from ABC in the afternoon of the 8.10.2013.

- **Second version: 7000m after having searched for a bivouac place to bivouac at the foot of the headwall?**

In fact, to Andreas Kubin, Steck mentioned and drew the Spindrift trajectory which hit him about 7050m (7000m in conferences, 6950m to Graziani), this before going down to bivouac. I added in dotted green the logical itinerary of Steck after having been stopped by spindrift showers in front of the headwall, at the foot of the Lafaille couloir.



That version could quite well match **Don Bowie's** own following description of the late 8.10.2013 afternoon:

***“By later afternoon he neared the bottom of the headwall, but the summit winds had picked up dramatically and spindrift avalanches began streaming down the face***

**everywhere.** We could see Ueli through the 500m lens and Jonah was able to periodically capture short video clips through breaks in the clouds.

Darkness fell on the wall and after losing sight of Ueli I suggested that he had either hunkered down for the night to descend in the morning, or had found a safe place to wait out the spindrift avalanches caused by the summit winds before continuing up.

**Just before the sun set behind the Fang we watched as Ueli gained the headwall and disappeared into the rocks just right of the bottom of the central "Lafaille" couloir. A few minutes later he reappeared again and began down climbing to a small band of ice features, descending around 50-100 vertical meters. He then stopped, and through the lens we could clearly see him hacking at the face with his tools."**

Ultimately, here is what Steck says in his second **new official German version**:

**"Der Aufstieg unter das Felsband ist problemlos, alles Firn. Ab 6'600 Meter habe ich etwas Wind und Spindrifts. Ich bin bis unter das Felsband geklettert bis auf 7'050 Meter. Hier will ich das Zelt aufbauen und abwarten bis der Wind etwas nachlässt. [...] Ich finde keinen geeigneten Platz, ich beschliesse wieder etwas abzustiegen. Bevor ich absteige will ich noch ein Bild machen von dem Felsriegel. So, dass wenn ich in der Nacht eventuell weiter steige, ich auf meiner Kamera eine Übersicht habe.**

*Ich schlage meine zwei Eisgeräte tief in den Firn. Mit den Steigeisen probiere ich etwas einen grösseren Tritt zu machen. So, dass ich etwas bequemer stehe. Ich bin 1'300 Meter über dem Bergschrund, stehe auf einem Tritt. Ich ziehe meinen rechten Daunenhandschuh aus und hänge ihn an eines meiner Eisgeräte. Der Fotoapparat ist an meinem Klettergurt. Die Schnur an dem ich ihn gesichert habe, ist zu kurz, ich hänge den Fotoapparat aus und mache ein Bild. Bevor ich ein zweites mal abdrücke, bricht von oben Schnee auf mich ein. Ich ergreife nur noch meine zwei Eisgeräte und probiere mich festzuhalten und warte. Hoffe, dass es endlich aufhört. Ich merke wie sich der Druck zwischen mir und der Wand aufbaut. Er wird immer stärker und nach einer Weile nimmt er wieder ab. Mein Körper zittert. Das war knapp! (...)100 Meter weiter unten finde ich einen Spalt."*

In fact, that final official version seems quite convincing in connection with Bowie's own description. **But why not publish that account first? And why have two different versions for that episode?**

In its first official version, the episode was inserted while beginning to describe the climb of the headwall without any time precision:

*"A couple of hours before at daylight I wanted to photograph the headwall in order to have an overview picture at night. A was hidden by a spindrift. I could only get grasp my ice gear in order not get knocked out of the wall. In this way I lost one of my down glove and my camera was thrown out of the wall. Now I had to climb with my finger gloves. The down glove which was left I wore once at my left hand and then at my right hand - depending on the cold of each hand."*

That first description a posteriori only leaves me to think that this part was artificially added to the whole story content, when if the 6700m version was the actual true one, he could have simply inserted it here...

\*\* Eventually, the loss of the camera can raise a question: **how could Steck orientate himself night time in the headwall without his camera's pictures?**

In Alpinist 45, Steck mentions before starting for the headwall "***A silvery line of ice and firn crossed most of the headwall—it seemed it would be possible to find the way.***" Not mentioning at all the loss of pictures as a possible handicap for the night.

In **Patitucci's Klettern** article, no mention of the camera's loss at all but instead mentioned: "***Um sich zu orientieren, hatte sich Ueli die Wand von Photos, die er zuvor gemacht hatte, genau eingeprägt***".

To Kubin, Steck mentioned he was using the **Petzl "Tikka RXP" model of headlamp**, which allows 10h of battery autonomy (the exact night time duration of the climb) and set in "save battery" mode can generate a 2m light (7 lumen) or automatically switch to a 70m one (80 lumen). Graziani thinks this power may have been sufficient to find his way throughout the headwall difficulties nighttime.

### **34/ A varying number of abseils**

In his first official version, Steck completely avoided describing the headwall downclimb:

*"I spent not even 5 minutes up there before I started to descend. I was still full under tension. My goal was to reach the Bergschrund. Then everything would be fine! Tenji, Don and Dan meet me at the glacier. They had followed me the entire time while I was climbing. Now they came towards me. Tenji had a Coke, bread and an apple for me."*

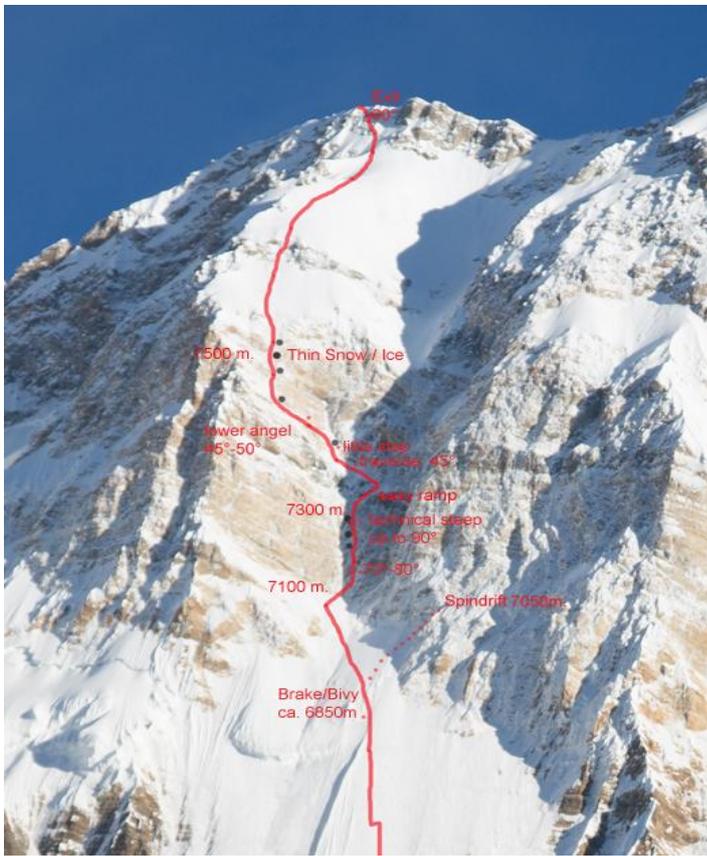
In the second official one, everything clears itself:

*"Ich verbringe keine 2 Minuten da oben, bevor ich anfangen abzusteigen. Ich will wieder weg von hier, so schnell es geht. Jetzt hat sich meine Situation im Kopf wieder geändert, ich will wieder runter, sofort! Ich sehne mich nach dem Bergschrund. Ich finde es überhaupt nicht gut hier oben zu sein, wie komme ich wieder runter? Es ist nicht ganz einfach die Spuren zu sehen. Der Firn ist hart. Die Ausstiegsrinne klettere ich Rückwärts ab. Ich habe die Lampe ausgeschaltet, es ist dunkel. Jetzt kann ich wieder Vorwärts gehen. Das kleine Felsband, das die grosse Schneefläche durchtrennt muss ich wieder Rückwärts abklettern. Jetzt muss ich ziemlich gerade runter. Es fühlt sich kontrolliert an, ich habe das viel gemacht. Absteigen in anspruchsvollem Gelände, trotzdem wäre ich jetzt froh, wenn ich schon unten wäre. Ich muss mich konzentrieren. So viel es geht abklettern. **8 mal Seile ich an Sanduhren ab.** Den Rest klettere ich ab. Ich ziehe die Reepschnur direkt durch die Löcher, so benötige ich keine Schlingen. Das Beste ist, die Sanduhren vertikal zu machen, so kann man das Seil relativ einfach abziehen. Noch im Dunkeln bin ich bei meinem Zelt auf 6'850 Meter."*

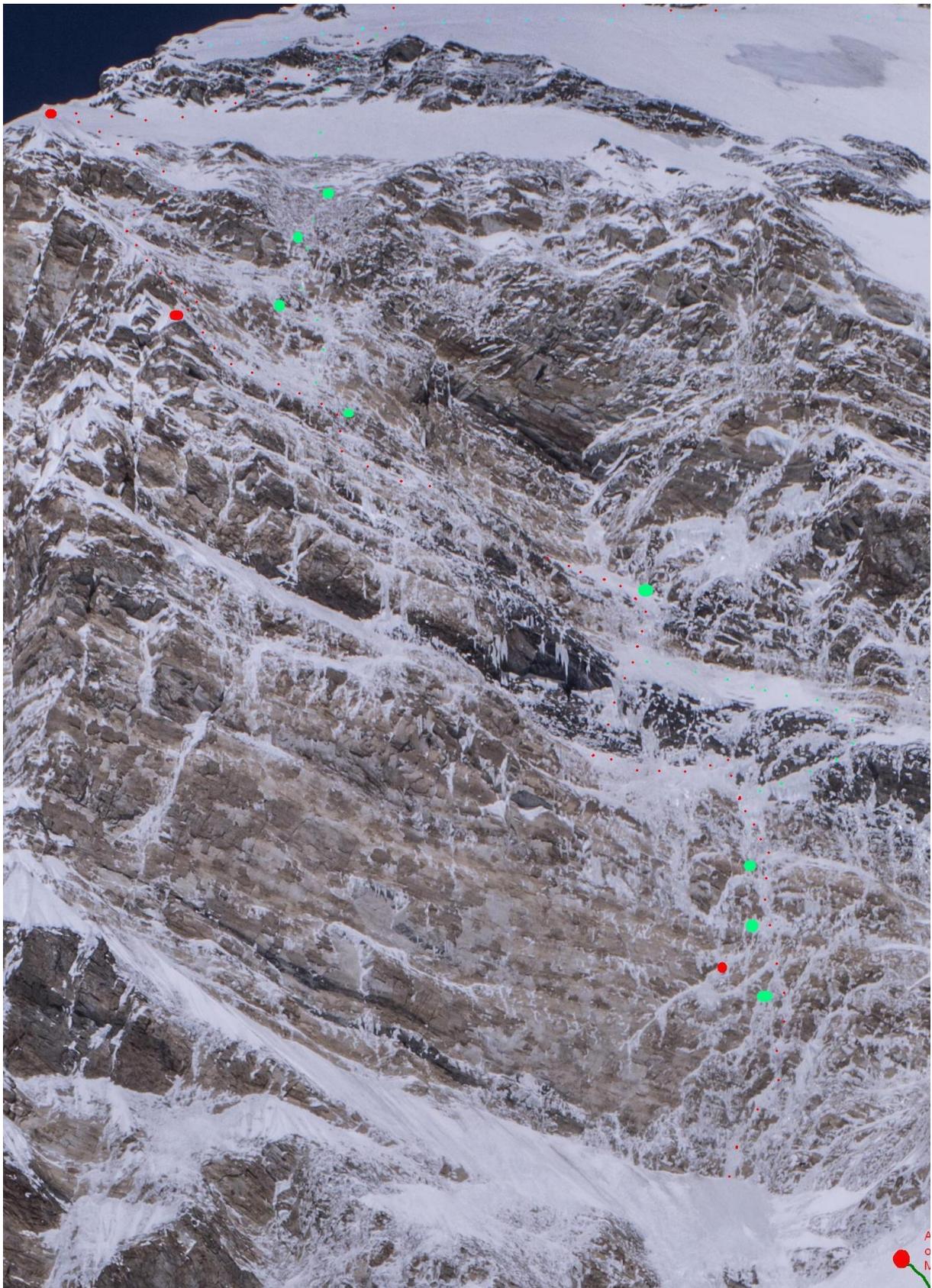
In **Montagnes Magazine 399 (page 23)**, it's mentioned however: "*Descente immédiate en désescalade et **10 courts rappels dans le headwall***".

10 or 8 abseils?

According to Andreas Kubin, for whom Steck drew 8 belays on a photo (black dots on the photo below) during their meeting, Steck would even have told to Stephan Siegrist, whom he once met after the expedition in a climbing indoor wall : "*I did 4 or 5*" ...



Black points indicate the ultimate 8 abseils locations as drawn by Steck for Andreas Kubin.



Yannick Graziani later considered (Pioletts d'Or 2016 ITV) you need **at least** 10 abseils to descend the headwall with a single 60m 6mm rope. On the next picture, I reported the black dots of the aforementioned Kubin document which indicates the abseil belays of Steck (and marked by him). One has to note that 8 rappels of 30m each equals 240m for a headwall that is almost 550m high (7050 to 7550/7600m), **meaning that Steck would have had to at least downclimb more than 260m on his own – at night: more than the half.** Graziani also noted that there was no particular difficulty for Belay 5 (middle one of the middle traverse) unlike the very base of the face, which is already a very demanding climb from the very beginning, yet all abseils are concentrated on the upper part (in fact 90m abseils for that first 200m part).

\*\* Regarding these abseils, Andreas Kubin also remarks that the climbing conditions were thin neve ice conditions, meant to be how Steck could overcome most difficulties of the typically mixed ground of the headwall: **“how is it possible to install Abalakovs in such thin snow/ice conditions?”** Some mountaineers suggest, however, that he may have used a slightly different line for descent, finding some more iced-up places to install them.

Were these approximations due to a natural imprecision character (“communication problem” as raised here and there) or denoting *in se* a deeper lack of knowledge about the facts? When it approaches clear contradiction, vagueness can legitimately become an option for doubt...

## **4/ Further miscellaneous points**

### **41/ The SMS / Sat phone**

Patitucci wrote in **Klettern**: *“Wir begannen unsere Morgenroutine, kochten Wasser, packten Rucksäcke, bereiteten Uelis Lieblingsspeisen zu. Wir würden ihm über den Gletscher entgegengehen. Dann erklärte Don aufgeregt : “Ich habe eine Sat-Phone Nachricht von ihm von letzter Nacht. Sie lautet ,Bin zurück in Camp 2. Lange Nacht durchgeklettert. Esse etwas, dann steige ich ab”. **Doch die Frage blieb offen : Hatte er den Gipfel erreicht ?”***

**Bowie** wouldn't mention that SMS episode at all in his own report...However one has to note that neither Bowie in his report, nor Patitucci in **Klettern**, definitively knew about Steck's summit before they met him on the glacier. => **Why not say summit already in the SMS? It could sound more like “I have done something” than a success...**

However, in a later article published in **Le Monde** (Patricia Jolly), Patitucci would state: *“C'est alors que Don Bowie a branché son téléphone et y a trouvé un SMS émis du téléphone satellite **qu'Ueli avait laissé dans le trou où il s'était abrité avant le sommet**. Ce message datait de plusieurs heures auparavant et **disait qu'il avait réussi le sommet**. »*

One has to note the wrong statement of Patitucci here, since in **Klettern**, the SMS didn't mention Steck having been on top. **However, that explains quite well why Steck stated to Kubin he didn't have his Satphone with him that night, having left it at C2 also with his bag... => Why not take at least that in case of success, knowing he didn't have a camera with him anymore?!**

Steck would announce to the Press and his friends his success during the next night, as he answered to Yannick Graziani's SMS *“G fait le sommet en solo cette nuit”* that same night.

## **42/ In an almost “Olympic shape” after a 28h climb**

Following his descent from the face, Steck and his 3 companions reached the ABC at 9h30am (picture showing Steck going there in front of his mates).



*Ueli descending the glacier at the base of the South Face of Annapurna immediately following his solo ascent.*

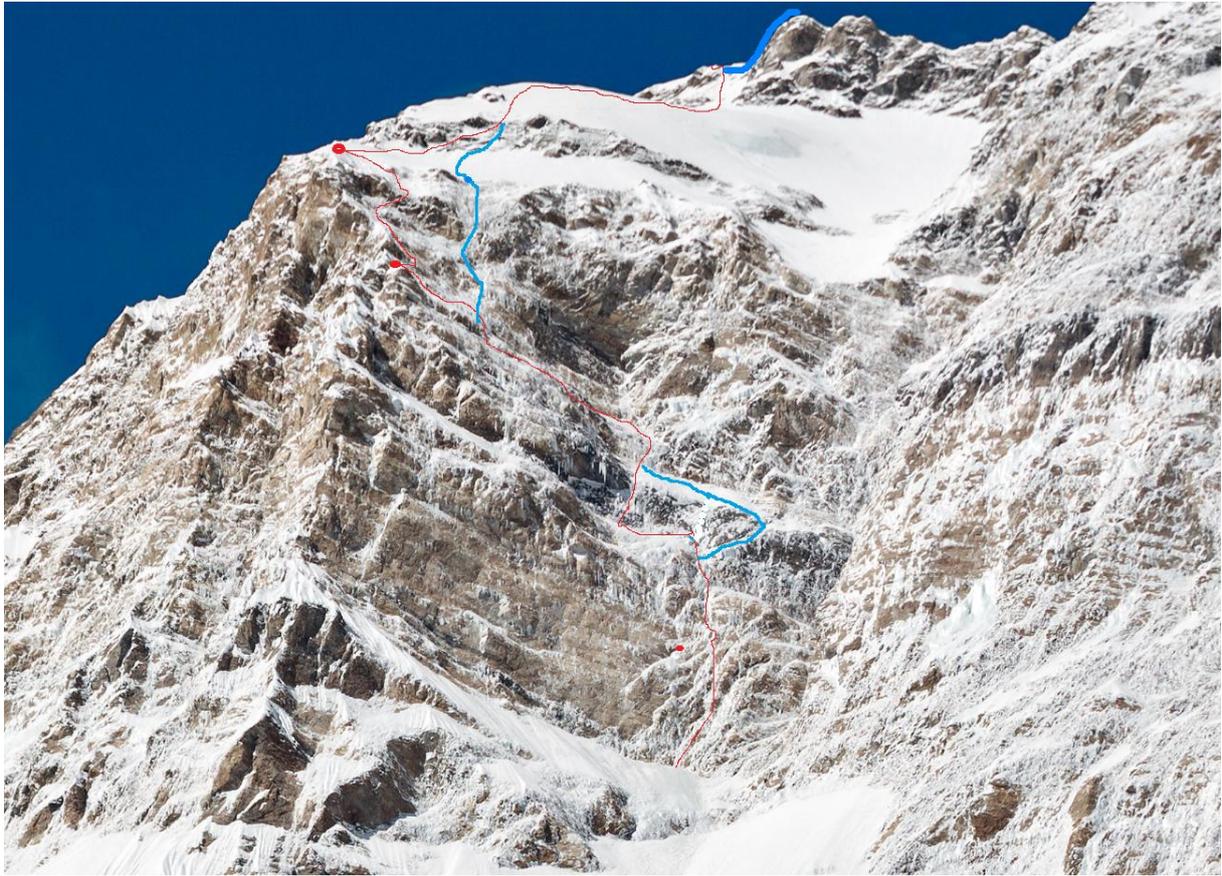
At that same time, Steck decided to return to the BC, even proposing next day (10.10.2013) a running session to Dan Patitucci in the morning, just as usual. Extracts from Klettern:

*“Als wir das ABC erreichten, fragten wir, ob er sich hinlegen wolle. “Auf keine Fall, wenn ich jetzt anhalte, bekomme ich Krämpfe. Wir müssen ganz runter ins Basislager” Das Basislager war grässliche vier Stunden Fussmarsch entfernt, der Weg führte über fast senkrechte Grashänge, einen Alptraum-Eisfall und fünf Kilometer Geröll. Mit frischen Beinen ist das die Hölle ,aber wenn du 28 Stunden unterwegs warst und 3500 Höhenmeter auf und 4000 abstieg bist, ist das noch mal etwas ganz anderes (.....) Es war Ueli, der mich weckte. Tatsächlich, es war Zeit, laufen zu gehen, Zeit, sich weiter zu bewegen.”*

Jonah states: *“We did not stay at ABC the day Ueli returned. He rested a while, ate and we broke camp and hiked back down to base camp. I was amazed that he had the stamina for that”.*

On the 11.10.2013, as Graziani and Benoist were coming down from their acclimatization session and expecting to meet him, Steck had already left the BC, running straight to Pokhara that day...

## 43/ Headwall details discussed with Graziani & Benoist



Headwall of the Beghin/Lafaille route. Red is the exact route taken by Graziani and Benoist. Blue is



the combination taken by Steck marked by myself, with lower and upper variants plus wrong summit arrival. Red points indicate the bivy places of Graziani Benoist team, which needed 3 days to overcome the headwall. Photo: Stephane Benoist.

| Shows 2 main different hardest sections separated by the main snow ramp. Drawing made by Steck for Andreas Kubin. Note that the "exit 60°" section route drawing(traverse from left to right) isn't logical, Graziani noticing it should go instead straight to the saddle.

Later in **Chamonix**, **Steck** had a long talk alone with Graziani (15 days after their own climb), then another one with both Benoist and Graziani. Considering the headwall section, Graziani and Benoist heard some statements leading them to believe that Steck had made it. (Nothing written came from these conversations, and also they didn't use pictures to describe their itineraries during these both meetings).

Shortly after his climb, Steck also mentioned to **Manu Rivaud** on the 28.10.2013 to have crossed, on the whole headwall section, only 15 to 20m perfectly vertical ground, which was later confirmed by the French as correct (MM399). Despite some variations in their respective routes, which eventually happen to be globally the same, Graziani later confirmed that info to me.

During **Piolets d'Or 2016**, Graziani further explained to me some details about his first conversation in Chamonix. At one stage Graziani was explaining to the Swiss that they exited from the lower headwall by a 40m left traverse on an initial ramp, avoiding the possibility of a straight steeper section on thin ice veneer: Steck immediately mentioned that he had taken that exact one, speaking of a veneer in perfect ice/snow conditions. This episode would provide the impetus for Graziani to believe even more Steck had likely made it, this based on the intrinsic difficulty of the passage and the repeated assumption of Steck that he had had much better conditions than the French. However, Graziani would discover afterwards that they weren't speaking about the same veneer, Steck instead mentioning to have taken a left to right option at that stage instead of the French option (the French later found this less logical than their own choice by the way...not considering it to be such an "easy ramp"). Misunderstanding? In fact both just spoke about the route without comparing it on a proper picture.