



Hunku (6,119m), possible first ascent; Chamlang (7,321m), north face, attempt

Nepal, Mahalangur Himal, Khumbu Section

Post-monsoon in Nepal was frustrating, to say the least, with five weeks of the most stable weather that Nick Bullock and I have ever experienced. However, we got completely shut down on a direct line up the unclimbed north face of Chamlang by high winds at altitude.

After 10 days acclimatizing in and around the Hongu Valley, a trip to the West Col (6,200m) on Baruntse, and another to just over 6,000m on Chamlang's west ridge, we stashed gear below the face and returned for our attempt a few days later, during the first week of November. The face appeared to be in perfect condition, with steep ne?ve? and one-swing placements. The weather was good, and we felt well acclimatized. But though we were sheltered low on the face, we began to get hammered by spindrift and we could see massive plumes of snow blowing above us, just where we'd be digging in for the night. It didn't look inviting. We decided to descend, call our attempt a reconnaissance, and wait for a good forecast and lull in the wind.

It never came, and over the next three weeks our forecasts gave a minimum wind speed of 70 kph at 6,000m, and over 100 kph above 7,000m. As it blew straight across the face, and the temperature was -20°C or below, we felt the risk was unjustifiable.

During one day when there was something of a lull, eager to get something done, we made a possible first ascent of 6,119m Hunku, north-northeast of Peak 41. [Brought onto the permitted list in 2002, Hunku appears to have had no official ascent prior to 2012.] As you walk up the Hongu Valley, below the east face, Hunku looks like a pile of choss. However, halfway along, like an oasis in the middle of a desert, a continuous broad snow couloir leads directly to the summit. Fueled by the hope we would find ne?ve? similar to that experienced on Chamlang, we left base camp at 5 a.m. After a two-and-a-half-hour approach and a further hour floundering through deep, unconsolidated snow, we reached the first steep section and, thankfully, bomber ne?ve?.

The climbing wasn't technical, just really fun—the way it should be. A couple of short steeper bits led to a final fluted section where we belayed one ice pitch to avoid bad snow. Flutings led straight to the summit and a stunning panorama. The couloir was around 600m and D—think a shorter, easier version of the Swiss Route on the north face of Les Courtes. We descended from ice threads and, lower down, rock gear. Sixteen hours after leaving base camp, we were back. With strong winds still forecast at altitude, we made the decision to bail a week early, and started our four-day trek back to Lukla.

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Images



Hunku from the north, with the line of ascent marked.



The unclimbed north face of Chamlang. This, the main summit of the Chamlang massif, has been climbed five times; three from the south, and two via the west ridge/face (right skyline).



Nick Bullock in the east face couloir during the first ascent of Hunku.



Partial panorama from summit of Hunku. (A) Peak ca 6,450 m at the end of Baruntse's south-southeast ridge. (B) Makalu II. (C) West Col (6,135m). (D) Makalu with west face/ridge pointing toward camera. (E) Hongu (6,764m; Pt. 6,770m Schneider Map). This peak has certainly been climbed by (1) the south ridge at D. (F) Hongku Chuli (6,833m, formerly known as Pyramid Peak and thought to have been climbed). (G) Chamlang East (7,290m). (H) Chamlang Central (7,235m). (I) Point 6,440m. (J) Chamlang Main (7,321m).

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