



AAC Publications

Nanga Parbat, Austro-Canadian Northwest Buttress, First Ascent

Asia, Pakistan, Western Himalaya

After a year of research, we agreed on a plan to attempt the virgin northwest buttress of Nanga Parbat (8,125m). Our group of close friends included Austrians Günther Unterberger, Hans Goger, and Sepp Bachmair, along with the two of us. We joined a big group of climbers from the OeAV (Austrian Alpine Club).

We arrived at Diamir base camp (4,250m) on June 17. After acclimatizing with our friends on Nanga Parbat's Kinshofer Route, the five of us prepared for our new line, which we hoped to climb in pure alpine style: no fixed camps, no fixed ropes, no porters, no oxygen, as light as possible. We only took two tents, three ice screws, two pitons, 50m of 7mm static rope, four ultralight ice axes, two technical ice axes, 12 gas cartridges, and two stoves.

Leaving base camp on July 7, we walked up the Diamir Glacier and then turned left up the Dama Glacier. We walked two more hours along the base of the northwest wall and installed our first bivouac in a safe site at 5,300m, below the 900m couloir that we needed to climb to reach easier slopes on the northwest buttress. The "Göschl Couloir" is a hidden gully between the Czechoslovak Route (Belica-Just-Zatko-Zatko, 1978), to the right, and the Dama Glacier route, to the left (Eisdendle-Messner-Messner-Tomaseth, 2000, climbed to 7,500m).

We followed the left side of the gully. After crossing the bergschrund, we climbed 150m at 50°, followed by an ice section of 20m at 80°. (Three of us scrambled on rock to avoid the steep ice.) After about 700m of hard snow, we reached a 200m, 60°–65° section of blue ice covered under 10cm of snow. On this "Rousseau Ice Wall," we used our rope for the first time. We placed our second bivouac at 6,300m, about 100m past the exit of the couloir.

Continuing up the northwest buttress, we had to fight very deep snow and strong wind. On the third day, we climbed a 50° slope left of a gigantic serac ("Bachmair Serac") to reach the "Kölblinger Col" between two giant pinnacles at 6,600m. We continued to the right of the second pinnacle on easier but crevassed ground. A long snow slope led to our third bivouac (6,900m) on the flat but windy "Goger Plateau."

We had hoped to continue up the northwest buttress to 7,400m and then traverse right to the Bazhin Basin. Late in the morning, we reached a steep rock section of the ridge. After some hours of scrambling and route finding, we realized our best chance to reach Nanga Parbat's summit was to traverse at 7,250m to Camp 4 on the Kinshofer Route. After the very exposed "Unterberger Traverse," across 50° deep snow, we reached a rock ledge from which we could see Camp 4 and Nanga Parbat's summit pyramid for the first time. We quickly descended to the campsite at 7,100m, having explored 2,300m of new ground without leaving any trace of our passage. Finally, we had made it to safe ground, but our celebration was brief.

At around 9 p.m., we received a distress call from our liaison officer in base camp. The base camp crew of Go Mi-sun from Korea was requesting help. Go was climbing with six other Koreans and one of our Austrian companions, Wolfgang Kölblinger. This group had reached the summit at 7 p.m. in bad weather and was trying to descend to Camp 4.

Three Pakistani porters from our Kinshofer group started up with warm drinks, oxygen, and a rope. The two of us (Göschl and Rousseau) followed them at 3:30 a.m. After one and a half hours, just before sunrise, we came across Go and the rest of the Korean team. We asked if they needed help, but they declined and continued down without serious troubles. We asked about Wolfgang, but they hadn't seen him since they'd reached the summit together.

Now with big sorrow, we rushed to the summit of Nanga Parbat, hoping we might find Wolfgang. After discovering his backpack and ice axe at 8,064m, we reached the summit at 11:30 a.m. on July 11. From tracks in the snow, we discovered that Wolfgang had fallen to his death in the direction of the Mummery Rib. Goger and Bachmair, two of our partners from the new route, also reached the summit later that day; Unterberger turned around before the summit with a headache. All of us descended safely to base camp the next day. We were the last ones to descend Nanga Parbat that year. A helicopter could find no trace of our friend.

Images



The Austro-Canadian Northwest Buttress of Nanga Parbat. The new line joins the Kinshofer Route at high camp.



Climbing the initial 900m couloir.

Article Details

Author	Gerfried Göschl, Austrian Alpine Club and Louis Rousseau, Canada
Publication	AAJ
Volume	52
Issue	84
Page	0
Copyright Date	2010
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions