



AAC Publications

Mansail, North Face

Nepal, Mustang Himal

The timing was perfect. A team of female students from the Japanese Alpine Club was planning an expedition to the Himalaya, just as Nepal opened more than 100 new peaks.

The women chose three of these newly opened peaks in Mustang: Mansail (Mansail, 6,235m HMG-Finn), Mansail South (6,248m), and Mustang Himal (6,195m). The students were Eri Hasegawa, Yukiko Inoue, Kaho Mishima, and Mariko Nakamura. I was asked to accompany them as technical adviser. I was excited, as I had never been to Mustang, nor had I been on an expedition with students who had little mountaineering experience.

There is little information about this area on the border with Tibet, and we had to imagine what our peaks would look like by using maps and Google Earth. How was the access? What were those faces like? How difficult would they be?

From Lo Manthang we traveled through wilderness, crossing several streams and rivers, and, higher, passed through a gorge with boulders that may never have been touched. We constructed many cairns so we could find our way home. On September 20 we established base camp at 4,900m, and on the 25th, 20 days after leaving Japan, made Camp 2 at 5,685m by the stream flowing from the Nyamdo Glacier snout.

Once on the glacier we crossed several crevasses until we could finally see Mansail. The south face was a steep slab of rock, so we crossed a col on the east ridge to reach the glacier, which rose to a point relatively high on the north face. There was a crack system and the angle was easier than on the south flank. Unusually for Mustang, it began snowing heavily and turned the upper climb into a mixed route. We made full use of snow stakes, ice screws, cams and nuts, which made the route far more of an adventure for the girls.

At 1 p.m. on the 29th we reached a summit. It was perhaps a little lower than another close by, but we felt it was neither here nor there to continue any further. It was snowing heavily, and once back on the glacier we were faced with white-out conditions and deep snow accumulation. I was quite happy to find our camp through the white curtain. Continued snowfall stopped any further activity in these mountains.

Although I had visited the Himalaya on several previous occasions, this time I had wonderful new encounters: a protected Tibetan Buddhism culture; the colorful Mustang stupa; strange Edelweiss at 4,000m and an equally strange plant at 5,000m; the mummified body of a small animal (possibly snow leopard) at 6,000m; and a formation of demoiselle cranes flying south just as the monsoon finished.

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Images



Mansail from the east with the approximate line of the Japanese first ascent marked.



Camp 1 at 5,500m on the approach to Mansail.



Japanese women on top of Mansail in poor weather.

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