



## **Kangchenjunga, Northwest Face and North Ridge, Variants**

Nepal, Kangchenjunga Himal

**In the pre-monsoon season Adam Bielecki (Poland), Artem Braun and Dimtry Sinev (both Russia), Alex Txikon (Spain), and former Kazakh but now Russian citizen Denis Urubko had planned a new direct route up the northwest face of Kangchenjunga (8,586m).** Prior to their attempt they intended to acclimatize thoroughly on the north ridge, the original 1979 British-French line on this side of the mountain.

After arrival at base camp on April 20 a few days of observation showed regular and notable serac fall on the proposed new line. "One year it may be possible, but not this year," Urubko said. They switched their main objective to the north ridge, establishing Camp 1 on the glacier at 6,000m.

On the 29th Bielecki found a difficult but safe line to reach their proposed site for Camp 2 at 6,600m on the northwest flank. At that time the team was unaware that this line, to the right of the original route followed by the 1979 British-French expedition to the north col, had been climbed in 1983 by a Bavarian group. Above Camp 2, where the Bavarian route heads off right up the northwest face, this year's team opened a new 450m variant, following a leftward slanting route on steep snow and ice slopes.

The team established Camp 3 on the crest of the ridge on May 8. To reach this point they had climbed 20 pitches, fixing the entire wall with 1,000m of rope. On May 9 they fixed their last 250m of rope to 7,300m and sent a message to Kathmandu to request a little more rope. This duly arrived, and the team began to tackle the next obstacle on the ridge, the Castle, a 150m rock step giving access to the upper snowfields. On the 17th Bielecki and Txikon climbed through the Castle, avoiding the normal couloir, which they deemed too avalanche-prone, by three long new pitches on the rock to the right. The crux, led by Txikon, was rated M5. This section also was fixed and Camp 4 placed at ca 7,650m. All team members slept there and began a summit push on the following day.

Bielecki, Sinev, and Txikon set off with bivouac gear, planning to traverse the mountain. Braun and Urubko left later but decided the slope was too dangerous and went back to Camp 4, hoping to follow the tracks of the other three the next day. Carrying bivouac gear slowed the party in front: It took them until 4:30 p.m. to break trail to 8,350m, where they decided it was simply too late in the day to continue. They regained camp after 22 hours of hard effort, with Txikon suffering from frostbite in his thumb and needing help to reach the tents. Bielecki had a very bad cough.

At first it they decided they all would go down the next day, but during the night Urubko had a change of heart. Leaving at 5:10 a.m. on the 19th, he followed the track past the high point and reached the summit at 9:40 a.m. At the col above the pinnacles he dropped about 8m onto the southwest flank and followed the standard route to the top. He thus became only the second man to climb both the north and south sides of Kangchenjunga. "My limit without oxygen is normally 8,500m, but here I felt perfectly well," he reported. Urubko regained Camp 4 a little after midday, and all members were back in Camp 1 that night, reaching base camp the next day.

Later, Bielecki (accompanied to Camp 1 by Urubko) attempted a solo attempt, but retreated due to too much snow. Braun and Simev went to the south-side base camp for the normal route but abandoned it after three days of continuous snow.

The team left all fixed rope on the mountain. They found conditions very dry on the upper slopes: At 8,200m they discovered the body of Atsushi Shiina, in the same sitting posture in which he was left in 1998 by his Japanese partner after Shiina died during the night of an open bivouac while the two were descending from the summit.

While some of Urubko's new routes on 8,000m peaks, such as Cho Oyu and Broad Peak, have been more difficult, he felt the north ridge of Kangchenjunga to be the hardest existing route he'd climbed. Bielecki found it technically more difficult and demanding than K2. Lamentably, the team left all their fixed rope on the mountain.

**Lindsay Griffin**, from information supplied by Denis Urubko, Russia, and Rodolphe Popier, The Himalayan Database, France

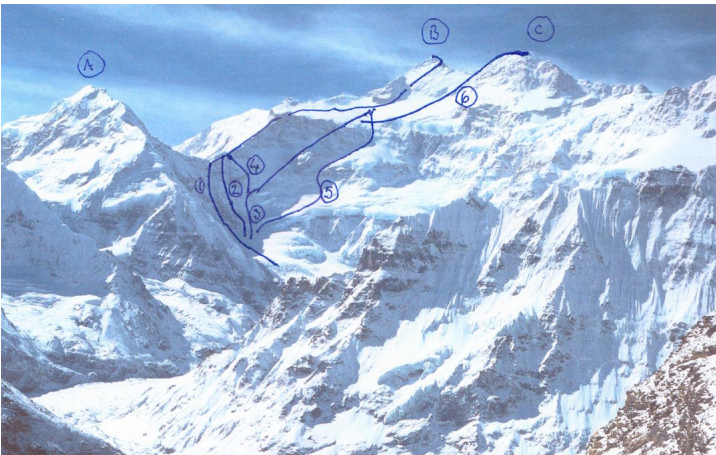
## Images



The party sets off across the snow slopes of the upper northwest face on the first summit attempt.



The northwest face of Kangchenjunga after heavy snowfall.

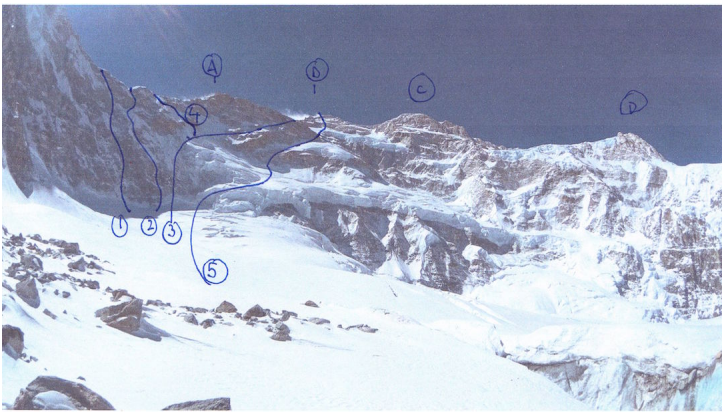


The northwest face of Kangchenjunga after heavy snowfall. (A) Gimmigela Chuli. (B) Kangchenjunga Main. (C) Yalung Kang. (1) British Route, 1979. (2) American-Canadian, 1985. (3) Bavarian Route (to 7,900m only), 1983. (4) Polish-Russian-Spanish, 2014. (5) Japanese Route, 1980. (6) Slovenian Route to Yalung Kang (starting up 3). Not marked is the 1982 Italian-Nepalese ascent, which is closer to the crest of the north ridge in the upper section.





The northwest face of Kangchenjunga from the glacier plateau immediately below.



The northwest face of Kangchenjunga from the glacier plateau immediately below. (A) The Castle. (B) Kangchenjunga Main. (C) Yalung Kang. (D) Kangbachen. (1) British Route, 1979. (2) American-Canadian, 1985. (3) Bavarian Route (to 7,900m only), 1983. (4) Polish-Russian-Spanish, 2014. (5) Japanese Route, 1980.



Alex Txikon on the northwest face at 6,200m.

## Article Details

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