



Nanga Parbat: First Winter Ascent

Pakistan, Western Himalaya

At 3.17 p.m. on February 26, Simone Moro (Italy), Muhammad Ali Sadpara (Pakistan), and Alex Txikon (Spain) stepped onto the summit of Nanga Parbat (8,125m) to make the long-awaited first winter ascent. Before the 2015-'16 winter season, which in the Northern Hemisphere conventionally runs from December 21 to March 20, a total of 31 expeditions had attempted Nanga Parbat in winter. Six more teams arrived for this winter season, and two of these eventually combined forces to make the successful ascent.

Although more of a reconnaissance than a serious attempt (Nanga Parbat had not been climbed at that time), the first foray onto the mountain in winter conditions occurred in 1950, when a three-man team of British mountaineers established a couple of camps on the Rakhiot Face in December. When he started to suffer frostbite in the toes, Robert Marsh descended, leaving his companions William Grace and John Thornley in a tent at about 5,500m. They were never seen again.

The Poles, those doyens of Himalayan winter mountaineering, started the ball rolling again in the 1988-'89 season. This and most subsequent expeditions failed to get above 7,000m. The best effort until this year came in early February 1997, when a Polish team led by the father of high-altitude winter mountaineering, Andrzej Zawada, established four camps on the standard Kinshofer Route, from the highest of which two climbers made a push for the top. Zbigniew Trzmiel reached a point only 250m below the summit before turning around.

In January 2016, Sadpara and Txikon, along with Adam Bielecki and Jacek Czech (Poland) and Daniele Nardi (Italy), began work on the Kinshofer Route, fixing rope and establishing camps. Moro and fellow Italian Tamara Lunger were operating as a separate team, trying to complete the 2000 Messner-Messner-Eisendle-Tomaseth line to the summit. They found it too dangerous and at the end of January joined forces with the Kinshofer team, who by now had fixed rope to 6,700m.

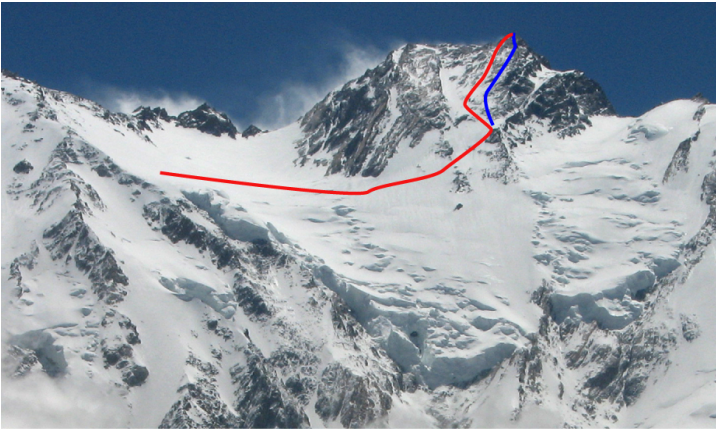
Bielecki, Czech, and Nardi left the expedition for various reasons, and after a long period confined more or less to base camp due to high winds, the remaining four started their summit push on February 22. On the 25th they reached Camp 4 (7,200m). Next morning Lunger was ill and vomited, but gamely started with the other three.

Climbing unroped, they reached the steeper face below the summit, where all but Sadpara continued up the normal route in the couloir. The Pakistani mountaineer, who had climbed the Kinshofer Route in 2008 and 2009, opted for rock to the right, feeling it less taxing than an icy couloir. They kept in sight of each other, but about 100m below the summit Lunger took the difficult decision to give up: She now was extremely fatigued, her body was in pain, she was very cold, and she did not want to jeopardize team success. Lunger descended without assistance, but approaching Camp 4 fell while crossing a crevasse and slid 200m, fortunately with no consequence. After returning to Camp 4 from the summit, on the 27th the team brought down all equipment from Camps 4 and 3, and on the 29th went back up from base camp to remove Camp 1 and all rope up to 5,500m.

This climb makes Moro the only person to have completed four first winter ascents of 8,000m peaks. The other three are Xixabangma (8,027m) in 2005 with Piotr Morawski; Makalu (8,485m) in 2009 with Denis Urubko; and Gasherbrum II (8,035m) in 2011 with Urubko and Cory Richards. Of the 14 8,000ers, only K2 now remains unclimbed during winter. Moro has stated openly he won't be trying.

Lindsay Griffin

Images



The lines followed on February 26 to complete the first winter ascent of Nanga Parbat. (Red) Line followed by Simone Moro, Alex Txikon, and Tamara Lunger (not to top). (Blue) Line followed by Muhammad Ali Sadpara.

Article Details

Author	Lindsay Griffin
Publication	AAJ
Volume	58
Issue	90
Page	296
Copyright Date	2016
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions