



Pandra, East Face, Attempt

Nepal, Janak Himal

Kei Taniguchi and I established base camp for our attempt on Pandra after traveling three days by bus and eight days on foot from Kathmandu. In the fall of 2002, three Danes made the first ascent of Pandra via the south face (TD-), recording GPS measurements on the summit of 6,673m, 27°51.897'N, 87°59.547'E (AAJ 2003). The "official" height (HMG-Finn map) is 6,850m. The Danish climb was the first known attempt on the mountain and the only attempt until 2016.

Options for base camp were limited due to lack of water, but we settled on a site at 5,130m on the east bank of the Lhonak Glacier. On November 1, after four days' rest, we began reconnoitering the mountain. Next day we reached a flat terrace and small lake named Pokari (5,550m) on the map, lying directly opposite the east face of Pandra. We set up advanced base at this point, and the next day climbed halfway up a peak behind camp, overnighting at 5,830m to aid our acclimatization. On the 4th we made a reconnaissance of our proposed descent route, north of the summit, by following the upper Chabuk Glacier to around 6,000m. On the 5th we returned to base camp, where we rested until the 10th before leaving for our attempt on the east face. It now only took a day for us to reach advanced base.

On November 11 we crossed the Chabuk Glacier, moved up to the start of the east face, and began climbing at 1 p.m., shortly after the sun had disappeared over the shoulder of Pandra. We followed a prominent, rightward-slanting snow and ice ramp for four pitches and set up camp for the night. Next day Kei led through a vertical ice wall, which we found hard for bodies that were not warmed up, then continued on snow up a succession of couloirs, until we were forced to stop and spend two hours hacking away ice below a rock wall in order to get a tent platform.

On the 13th we continued up a wide couloir (50–60°) of good névé, passing a number of large holes in the snow that were obviously made by rockfall. The angle steepened to 70° and the snow turned to ice. At 1 p.m. we reached a ridge and decided to stop for the night. We pitched the tent and then fixed one rope length above. The next morning we continued up the ridge in fine weather, but strong winds caused powder avalanches. It soon became extremely difficult: A large cornice overhung a very steep drop to the right, while the left flank was formed of loose sugar snow. There was no protection, and when I'd finished my pitch and brought up Kei, I said to her that there was no way we could ever reach the summit, even with our best efforts. To my surprise Kei immediately continued, traversing onto the steep north flank. My body got colder and colder at the belay, and by the time I had reached Kei my mind had gone and she agreed to go down.

We made six rappels down the face to reach the northern part of the Chabuk Glacier, close to the point we had gained during our reconnaissance. On the 15th we regained base camp at 9 p.m. Our defeat had largely been due to the state of my mind, and I soon regretted having abandoned the attempt. I mentioned this to Kei. At first she seemed angry, but soon proposed that we return in the future to the unclimbed mountains of eastern Nepal. I was delighted to hear her generous and encouraging statement. Sadly, it was not to be. Pandra would be Kei's last trip: Within a month of our returning from Nepal she died in a fall from Mt. Kurodake in Japan.

Junji Wada, Japan, supplied by Tamotsu Nakamura, Asian Alpine News

Images



Junji Wada traversing on the north face on Pandra.



The east face of Pandra. (1) The attempted ascent in 2016. (2) The descent to the upper Chabuk Glacier.



Kei Taniguchi climbing above the bivouac site on the fourth day of the attempt on Pandra's east face. The upper Chabuk Glacier is visible below left.



Kei Taniguchi in the lead on the fourth day on Pandra. The convoluted nature of the ridge above the climbers onto the north face.

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