



AAC Publications

Kangchung Shar, North Face, Attempt

Nepal, Mahalangur Himal, Khumbu Section

On October 15, Simon Yates and I descended from Renjo Pass and arrived in Gokyo. The place was fully packed with guided trekking groups, and there was a nonstop, rescue-insurance-fueled helicopter shuttle to Lukla, continuously evacuating stricken tourists. We spent a day in Gokyo getting organized, and on the 17th left with porters for the maze-like moraines of the Ngozumba Glacier. We set up base camp (5,000m) in a high and pleasant ablation valley on the north side of the junction of the Ngozumba and Gaunara glaciers, with an inspirational side-on view of Kangchung Nup (a.k.a. Kangchung West, Cholo, or Abi; 6,043m) and Kangchung Shar (6,063m).

Our objective was the unclimbed 1,000m north face of Kangchung Shar. Simon had taken striking photos of unbroken ice lines draping this face a number of years back. However, the 2016 post-monsoon season had been very dry, and we were disappointed when an initial reconnaissance revealed that the north face was exceedingly lean compared to Simon's photos. The bottom third was completely melted out, and the ice lines in the upper two-thirds were discontinuous. After some debate we changed our target to an indirect couloir line on the right side of the face, aiming to gain the col (Kangchung La, 5,637m) between Shar and Nup. From here we would proceed up the northwest ridge.

We finalized our acclimatization over the 21st and 22nd, and on October 24 bivouacked on the rather inhospitable moraine rubble of the Gaunara Glacier, below the face. We set out early next morning and ascended a zigzagging line to the base of the couloir. There was a house-size chockstone blocking midway progress, which required some Scottish 5 mixed to negotiate. As we got higher the gully widened, but what we thought from afar would be enjoyable névé turned out to be thin, brittle crust over deep, unconsolidated sugar snow. This considerably slowed our progress. We reached the col in the afternoon and established high camp on the northwest ridge.

On the morning of the 26th, progress was again frustratingly sluggish due to poor snow conditions. We had brought five screws in anticipation of an ice and névé line, but never placed any of them, seeking occasional rock gear instead. By late afternoon we reached a notch in the ridge at about 5,820m. There was still a fair distance to go, and since we had no bivouac gear we decided to start rappelling and downclimbing to our high camp, which we reached just as daylight was fading.

– Paul Schweizer, Alpine Club, U.K.

Editor's note: Although neighboring Kangchung Nup (6,043m) was first climbed by Edmund Hillary and various members of the 1953 Everest expedition during the acclimatization period before the great ascent, Kangchung Shar does not appear to have been climbed before November 1984, when it was soloed by Franci Knez (Slovenia) and later in the same month by Trevor Pilling (U.K.). Both climbers reached the Kangchung La from the south and followed the northwest ridge to the top. There are no reported ascents starting from the north. Various sources document Charles Evans and Sherpas making the first ascent of Kangchung Shar in the post-monsoon of 1953 (Evans stayed in Nepal after the Everest expedition). However, his is a different "Kangchung Shar," a peak of 5,837m south-southeast of the main group, on the ridge just north of the Nire La.

Images



Kangchung Shar (left) and Nup from the Guanara Glacier. The Schweizer-Yates line as far as the Kangchung La is marked. The climbers progressed about 200m up the northwest ridge before turning back.



The Schweizer-Yates line on the north side of the Kangchung La. The northwest ridge of Kangchung Shar faces the camera.



The upper north face and northwest ridge of Kangchung Shar.



Simon Yates in the couloir on the first day on the north face of Kangchung La.

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