



Himlung East, West Ridge; East-West Traverse of Himlung Himal

Nepal, Peri Himal

I live right below La Meije in the Ecrins Massif of France, and it is a pleasure to be able to traverse such a peak in the Alps or in other ranges. Traversing a high summit is like opening the door to a new world. At the point where the trip is normally a success—the goal of the expedition—you are only partway through. Everything is different and interesting.

On the high summits of the Himalaya, only a few top climbers play this challenging game: The Mazeno Ridge on Nanga Parbat is one of the masterpieces of this decade—an inspiring success. I wondered what traverses might be possible for ordinary mountaineers in Nepal. After many expeditions to Himlung Himal by various itineraries, I felt confident to try a big journey at altitude, traversing this accessible 7,000er via a previously untrodden ridge, carrying more than four days of food.

Our plan was to climb the normal route up the northwest ridge of Himlung Himal (7,126m), without fixed ropes, put a high camp just below the summit, then climb over the top with food and all our gear and continue to unclimbed Himlung East (6,932m). The latter is a recently opened (2014) peak on the frontier with Tibet, on the ridge that leads north toward Ratna Chuli. We would then continue down this north ridge, over several tops, including Phu Kang (6,694m). [Opened in 2003, this peak is still unclimbed, though it was the goal of a 2008 Swiss expedition that found no accessible route to the summit. It is not to be confused with the 6,767m peak Phu Kang Go, which lies well to the southeast, a little northeast of Panbari Himal, and was first climbed by Paulo Grobel in 2011.] **We planned to carry on to the vicinity of Peak 6,566m, where we would descend the ridge west and eventually reach the valley north of Himlung Himal, so completing a “horseshoe” route.**

It was a strange climb. We established five camps on the northwest ridge of Himlung Himal, the last on a flat shoulder at 7,050m, northwest of and not far from the main top. It was higher than our eventual goal, Himlung East. We arrived at this camp at 11 a.m. on May 7; the previous day, two members of our group, Jean-François Males and Karma Sherpa, had reached the main summit. However, the weather on the 7th was not good. We had spent a lot of time acclimatizing so we could live safely at 7,000m and now our schedule was tight. More importantly, the weather felt too unstable to commit to the full traverse. Reluctantly, we made the decision to make Himlung East our primary goal.

On May 8, Isabelle Guillaume, Jangbu Sherpa, Rajan Bothe, and I left camp and skirted the summit of Himlung Himal by the northern slopes to reach the east ridge, which was narrow at first, and which we descended to a col. We then ascended the west ridge of Himlung East to its summit, completing the first ascent. On the return we climbed up the east ridge of Himlung Himal and over the summit, so making the first ascent of this ridge. That same day, five other members of the group reached the top of Himlung Himal. By the time we had returned to camp the weather was poor again, but, fortunately, next morning the cloud level rose and we were able to make our descent safely.

The ridge over Himlung East is fantastic and the continuation north is still there to be done. For more information visit <http://www.paulogrobel.com/himlung-traverse/> and <http://www.paulogrobel.com/himlung-2017-traversee/>.

Images



Régis Bardet close to Camp 4 (6,850m) on the northwest ridge of Himlung Himal. The high peaks behind lie on the Tibetan border to the northwest. Ratna Chuli (7,035m) is almost directly above the climber's head, and Lugula (6,899m) is farther left.



Isabelle Guillaume and Jangbu Sherpa descending the east ridge of Himlung Himal (summit visible behind) en route to the first ascent of Himlung East.



Camp 5 on Himlung Himal at 7,050m, looking north-northwest to unclimbed summits on or close to the Tibetan border, southeast of Ratna Chuli



Looking up the northwest ridge of Himlung Himal. In 2016, a Grobel-led expedition climbed new routes on the somewhat convoluted slopes to the right (see AAJ 2017). The summit far right is Himjung (7,092m).



Christian Hurgon approaching the northwest ridge of Himlung Himal, with the northeast and north faces of Gyaji Kang (7,074m) behind.



Looking north from Himlung East along the frontier ridge, with unclimbed Phu Kang (6,694m) in center middle distance.

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