



AAC Publications

Danphe Shail, First Ascent by Southwest Face

Nepal, Palchung Himal

Just open a map of Dolpo and look at the far top, along the Nepal-Tibet border. There are very few peaks named, but one of them is Danphe Shail (6,103m, 29°40'18.38"N, 83° 0'29.10"E). When approaching Upper Dolpo, a pointed summit can be seen from afar, and many trekkers refer to it as the Dolpo Matterhorn, due to its striking resemblance to the Zermatt icon. In 1909, Ekai Kawaguchi, a Japanese monk who traveled through Dolpo to Tibet, referred to it in his book, *Three Years in Tibet*, as "the mountain as a guide." (Lost in a storm, Kawaguchi was eventually able to find his way after glimpsing this mountain from a distance.)

However, what nearly everyone has seen is not just one summit but two—they are so close that it is easy to be confused. The sharp, Matterhorn-like pyramid lies entirely in Tibet and is 6,430m. It may be called Palchung Hamka. In front is a lower snow dome, which at first looks like a snowy shoulder of Peak 6,430m, but is in fact a separate summit, on the border, with easy glaciated slopes leading to its top. This, according to both altitude and the coordinates on the Ministry of Tourism list, is Danphe Shail.

The mountain was brought onto the permitted list in 2002, and the great Japanese explorer Tamotsu Ohnishi planned to try the peak in the summer of 2011. However, during the long approach, insect bites infected his feet and he was unable to make any attempt on Danphe Shail. In the spring of 2016, an expedition led by Ian Wall (U.K., resident in Kathmandu) reached the valley leading north to the mountain, establishing base camp at 5,347m and advanced base at 5,519m, south-southwest of the peak. Storms and appalling snow conditions prevented much progress, however, and the high point was achieved by a group of Sherpas who went up to 5,690m in bad weather. The team waited at base camp, hoping for an improvement in the weather, and eventually, when time ran out and it was no longer possible to make the 13-day trek out of the mountains, they evacuated by helicopter.

For us, the weather was perfect. No cloud and no wind—just pleasure. This was the icing on the cake of an inspiring journey to Upper Dolpo to try to witness the ancient Bön culture. Despite the long march, it was a privilege to visit the last village before the mountain, Ku (29°32'6.11"N, 82°56'44.92"E). From there to our base camp at 5,040m, which we reached on October 3, it was a great wilderness experience.

We established advanced base at 5,750m on the 4th and then climbed to the summit and back to base the following day. Climbing in five separate pairs, and reaching the top, were Laurence De Fleurian and Dhan Magar, Bernard Vallet and Etienne De Fleurian, Jean-François Males and Etienne Principaud, Anil Rai and Deepen Bothe, and Sonia Baillif and Paulo Grobel.

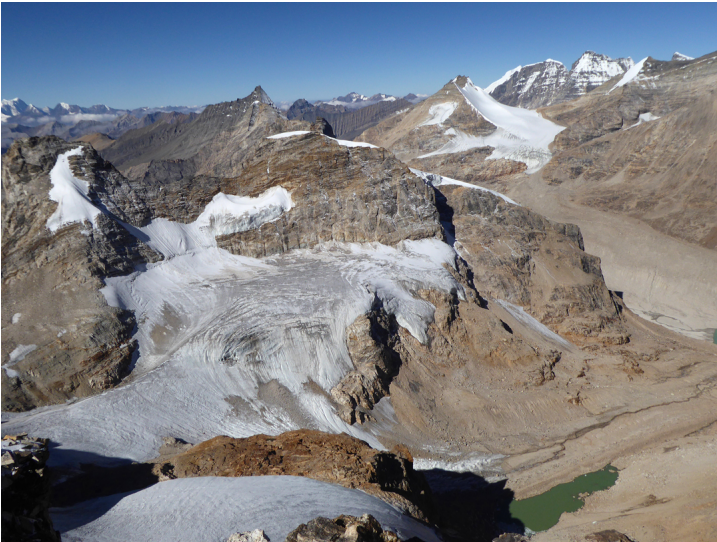
Danphe Shail offers a beautiful pretext to go far to the north, and combining that with a return crossing to Mugu and Rara Lake will surely help promote the western region of Nepal as a climbing destination.

– Paulo Grobel, France

Images



Peaks of the Kanti Himal, farther northwest along the Tibetan border from Danphe Shail.



Unnamed, unclimbed peaks rising to around 6,000m on the Nepal-Tibet frontier, immediately west of Danphe Shail.



On the summit dome of Danphe Shail. In the far distance are peaks of the Dhaulagiri area.



The glaciated slopes of the snow dome Danphe Shail and, above, the south face of Peak 6,430m, entirely in Tibet



The Dolpo Matterhorn, or Peak 6,430m, seen from the southwest. What appears as a snowy shoulder down to the right is in fact the separate summit of Danphe Shail (6,103m).

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