



Chhopa Bamare, First Ascent by Southeast Face and South Ridge

Nepal, Rolwaling Himal

In February and March, John Kelley (USA) and I were in the northwestern Rolwaling to attempt the first ascent of Chhopa Bamare (6,109m, 28°3'28.67"N, 86°5'23.08"E), the highest of a group of peaks on the Tibetan border northwest of Lamabagar village. [Editor's note: During the previous winter, Kelley had attempted the same mountain alone via the east ridge. He traversed the previously unclimbed eastern summit, but then found difficult snow-covered rock on the final section to the main summit; this was too time-consuming, and he retreated. That same season, Kelley also made an impressive solo attempt on the unclimbed southeast ridge of Omi Tso Go, retreating a few hundred meters from the top.] **This was reportedly the snowiest winter for 25 years in this area, and it took seven days from Kathmandu to reach base camp instead of our anticipated three. The bus got stuck on the way to Lamabagar, and two of our three porters would not continue as soon as they saw a few centimeters of snow on the trail, forcing us to ferry all the food and gear for a 30-day expedition. From base camp, we only took the minimum gear to high camp, but this still took us three more days.**

We started our climb at 2 a.m. on February 22. The weather forecast told of a few days of clear weather and no snowfall, but we would soon find out that it was completely wrong. We began up a rocky buttress, following a snow gully and then some mixed climbing (M4), before reaching and then traversing a glacier to the base of the southeast face. We arrived here at 6:30 a.m., just before sunrise.

Hundreds of meters of WI3 followed, and we simul-climbed all of this. Around 4 p.m., light snow started to fall. We kept climbing until 5:30 p.m., when snowfall became too intense to continue. Small avalanches came down the face, and with nowhere to bivouac, we cut a very small ledge (only just enough to stand on), attached ourselves to an anchor, and arranged the tent as a bivouac bag over our heads. Standing up in the cold, with spindrift rolling overhead, made for a long and sleepless night. Quite exhausted the next morning, we could only do a few pitches before snow began to fall again and we bivouacked once more on the face, though this time on a larger ledge.

On the third day, John made a very long lead of M3/M3+, over rocks covered by 50cm of unconsolidated snow. It led us to the top of the southeast face, where at last we could see the summit. We moved along the ridge and put up the tent around 150m below the top, thinking we could make an attempt the following day.

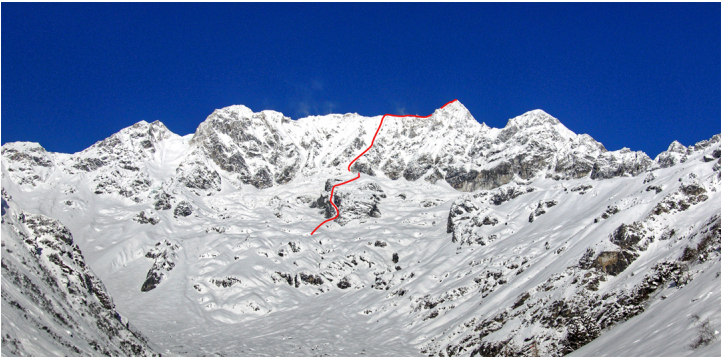
However, the weather turned bad, with heavy snow and strong winds. We were stuck on the ridge at almost 6,000m for three nights, unable to leave the tent. On the following morning, almost out of gas and food, we were readying to descend when the sun started to shine. We rushed up to the summit, reaching it after a few hours of climbing. It was February 28, the last day of the Nepalese Himalayan winter season.

The next day we made 18 rappels down the southeast face and reached our high camp after seven days on the mountain. We dug through one and a half meters of new snow to find the rucksack we had left with food and gas. On our way down to base camp we discovered the entire valley had been hit by avalanches. When we arrived at the campsite, there was no trace of our tent, sleeping bags, or any other gear. The following day we ran down to the nearest yak herders' encampment. They welcomed us in typical Nepali style and fed us plenty of dal bhat.

We named the route Seto Hi'um (1,100m, TD M4 WI4), which means "white snow." It is a good climb with many pitches of WI3/3+. There are still a number of potential new lines to be climbed on this face, as long as conditions are conducive.

– Benjamin Billet, France

Images



The east side of Chhopa Bamare (6,109m). The route of the first ascent, in late winter 2019, is marked. On a solo attempt the previous winter, John Kelley climbed the far right skyline ridge, over the rounded summit (Chhopa Bamare East) and up the final ridge toward the main summit until time constraints forced a retreat.



John Kelley during the rappel descent of the southeast face of Chhopa Bamare.



The southeast face of Chhopa Bamare. The route of the first ascent climbed the couloir that slants right (hidden in the lower section), beginning from the top of the obvious snow cone at far left.



John Kelley climbing mixed ground on the southeast face of Chhopa Bamare.



John Kelley on the southeast face of Chhopa Bamare during bad weather on the first day.



Looking southeast from Chhopa Bamare. The sharp peak in the right foreground is a mountain of 5,946m also sometimes called Chhopa Bamare (or Chhopa Pamare). In the center is Gaurishankar, while to the left is the twin-summitted Menlungtse. Distant left again is the Everest group.



View along the south ridge of Chhopa Bamare from near the summit. The high point along the ridge is an unnamed subsummit of the Chhopa Bamare massif.

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