



Kanamo, First Winter Ascent

India, Himachal Pradesh, Spiti

Kanamo (The White Lady, 5,974m, 32°22'11.24"N, 78°5'12.06"E) lies to the northeast of Kibber, once dubbed the highest inhabited village in the world reached by road. (Various altitudes, to 4,270m, are cited.) It lies in the heart of Spiti, a region with primarily Buddhist culture and traditions. The area experiences up to seven feet of snow depth between November and March, making it one of the country's prime destinations for winter sports and wildlife activity. Spiti was the venue for the Piti Dharr Ice Climbing Festival in 2019 and 2020 (AAJ 2020). In summer, Kanamo is a straightforward and popular trek, but winter brings heavy snowfall and a long approach march, so during this season the mountain had never been attempted. [Editor's Note: One of the main reasons for enhanced winter activity in Spiti is that the road through the valley is increasingly kept open to provide all-year access to strategically important regions. Lahaul is another area to gain winter access recently, due to the opening of a new tunnel under Rohtang Pass.]

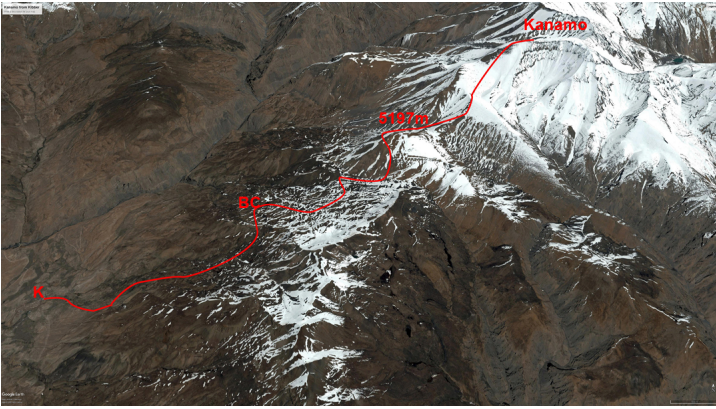
In February, I organized 26 members of the Snow Saboteurs, a specialized military mountaineering team, for an attempt on Kanamo. We arrived near the Kibber village monastery on February 23, and over the next couple of days established base camp at 4,700m, four hours' walk above the monastery at 32°20'41"N, 78°02'24"E. Twelve members then planned a summit attempt on the 27th, followed the next day by another 12 members. Unfortunately, the weather turned bad, with heavy snowfall and poor visibility. The forecast predicted medium to heavy precipitation for three to four days, so we retreated to Kibber to enjoy the traditional tribal festival of Dachang.

March 1 promised to be a good day for the second attempt, and we decided to try it directly from Kibber as one team. With four members unwell, this left a team of 20. We started out at 3 a.m. Through light snowfall and a moderate wind, we reached our previous base camp at 5:30 a.m. From there to Point 5,197m, the valley had four feet of soft snow, finishing with a short rise up scree and verglassed boulders. From Point 5,197m, the route drops 100m to a saddle. This had to be crossed roped and with care, due to the large snow deposition. From the saddle, we climbed up to the west-southwest ridge, fixing a little rope in places. On the shoulder, the snow depth was six to seven feet. The weather was now good, with bright sunlight and moderate wind, and in another two hours, at 1 p.m., after a long and tiring ascent on scree overlaid with thin, soft snow, we reached the summit. The GPS measured 5,981m.

By 8 p.m. we were back in Kibber, having dismantled base camp en route. Summitters were Ajay, Bittu, Chandrakant, Nitin Mittal, Durga Dutt, Kuldeep, Dinesh Kumar, Ravin Kumar, Sanjeev Kumar, Suresh Kumar, Akash Masgin, Mukesh, Champa Phunchog, Jwala Prasad, Pyarlal, Naveen Kumar Sharma, Pranam Singh Rana, Bheem Sain, Rinchen Sonam, and me as expedition leader.

— Jay Prakash Kumar, India

Images



The route of the first winter ascent of Kanamo from Kibber (K) via base camp (BC), and Point 5,197m.



Descending from Kanamo after the first winter ascent. The flanks of the Spiti Valley can be seen in the upper background.



Kanamo's south face from the village of Langza in the Spiti Valley. The summit, reached in March 2020, is marked.

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