



Historic Summer: Kim Chang-ho's Four Solo 6,000-meter First Ascents in 2003

Pakistan, Hindu Raj and Karakoram

Kim Chang-ho, who died in 2018 at the base of Gurja Himal in Nepal, was perhaps the most accomplished mountaineer from Korea, noted for high altitude ascents such as a south-north traverse of Nanga Parbat, Everest sea-to-summit without oxygen, and first ascents of Batura II and Himjung. However, less well known outside Korea is his solitary exploration of the mountains of Pakistan from 2000 to 2004. The following report details four first ascents of 6,000m peaks during the summer of 2003, when Kim was 33 years old, and is based on his unpublished journals and articles for Korean magazines.

LITTLE PAMIR: DERD GROUP

During a 2000 trip to this area, Kim had seen an outstanding unclimbed peak of 6,225m to the north of the Chapursan Valley. It was named Dehli Sang-i-Sar on the Japanese Miyamori map (Mountaineering Maps of the Karakorum and Hindu-kush, 2001). This name was coined during a 1927 Indian survey expedition, but according to Kim, who consulted a knowledgeable villager, the hyphenated "i" is inappropriate and the peak should be simply Delhi Sang Sar, which means "a peak with a rock in the middle." The mountain lies very close to the Afghan border and just to the east of Sakar Sar at 36°53'51.02"N, 74°18'51.29"E.

Most of the Chapursan Valley can be accessed by road in a day's drive from Gilgit. Kim reached the Chapursan village of Zuda Khun (3,350m) and set off on July 15 with one porter, ascending the valley southeast of Dehli Sang Sar. The same day he reached 4,600m, where he set up camp.

At 9:30 p.m. on the 17th, he left the tent and by 4:45 a.m. had reached the east summit at 5,815m. Kim continued along the east ridge of the main top until a steep icefall, which was unstable in the morning sunlight. He took a shivering rest until it got dark, hoping for better conditions. At 7 p.m. he resumed climbing but still found the snow unstable. He turned back and regained camp shortly after midnight.

Descending to Zuda Khun, Kim took two days' rest before returning to his camp. He left this at 6 p.m. on the 22nd and, following the same route as before, reached the main summit at 3:30 the following morning, where he left a small wooden object with a yellow sling as proof of his ascent.

Kim continued to explore the region, leaving Zud Khun on the 25th with two porters and a Japanese hiker, none of whom had any previous alpine experience. On the 28th, they crossed Yuksh Goz Uween Pass (5,208m; this was Kim's name; cartographer Jerzy Wala refers to this as Wyeen Col). This pass links the Kit-ke Jerab Glacier to the northwest with the Yuksh Goz Glacier, leading to the Batura. Kim's party headed down the latter and eventually arrived in Passu on the 31st. Kim believed this was the first crossing of the pass.

HINDU RAJ: THUI RANGE

On August 6, Kim left Gilgit for the Ishkoman Valley and the village of Ghotulti (2,512m). With the help of local porters, he hiked to the eastern end of Atar Sar Lake (a.k.a. Atro-Sar, 3,820m) in the Mahthantir Valley, where he was fascinated by the view of a triangular summit—unclimbed Peak 6,189m—which lay to the northeast.

From the lake he moved north up a side glacier to establish a high camp at 4,550m. At 1:20 a.m. on the 17th, and after one previous attempt on the summit, Kim left this camp and climbed steep snow, rock, and ice on the south face to reach the west ridge at around 11:40 a.m. Here, he dug a snow hole and rested until 4 p.m., when he continued the ascent. Surmounting a difficult rock wall and then a series of sharp sections on the crest—at one point falling when a cornice collapsed, only to be caught by a protruding rock underneath—he reached the summit at 6:10 p.m. He left a sling as proof of ascent and returned to his camp on the following morning. He returned to Ghotulti the same day.

After discussion with the villagers, he suggested the peak be called Atar Kor (kor means “peak” in Sina, the local language). The Miyamori map of the area identifies this peak as Suj Sar Southwest.

On the 22nd, with the help of one porter, Kim left Ghotulti for unclimbed Peak 6,105m, deep inside the Chhantir Valley at 36°40′46.88″N, 73°54′28.55″E. Where this valley splits, the pair moved northeast into the Haiz Gah Valley, in which Kim established a base camp at 3,400m.

After several days exploring the surrounding area and making a high camp at 4,590m, Kim left this camp at 9:40 p.m. on September 2 and climbed through a complex, crevasse-ridden, yet stable icefall to reach the Haiz Glacier plateau, which he followed to below the southeast face of Peak 6,105m. Climbing another steep section of ice, he reached the south ridge at 3:10 a.m. on the 3rd. It was now snowing, but Kim continued up the ridge, surmounting 300m of hard ice and a long, mixed, corniced summit ridge, to reach the top at 6:10 a.m.

In blizzard conditions, Kim waited on the summit for 1.5 hours, hoping the weather would improve. When it didn't, he reversed his route, in the process losing his glasses. At one point he fell but was able to self-arrest. He regained base camp at 2:30 p.m., where he cooked a remaining handful of rice before returning to the village. Again, he consulted with the villagers over a name for the peak and decided on Haiz Kor [the Miyamori map calls it Kho-i-Haiz; it is unnamed on the Wala maps].

MASHERBRUM MOUNTAINS – HONBORO/HONBROK GROUP

On September 10, Kim arrived in the village of Khasumik (3,280m), the largest settlement in the Thalle Valley. His objective was the coveted first ascent of Honboro (6,459m and possibly still unclimbed). According to Kim, the name of this peak was erroneously modified on Jerzy Wala's maps; the original name, he believed, was a Balti compound word: Honbrok (hon meaning wild animal, and brok high pasture). Honbrok also appeared in John Mock's *Trekking in the Karakoram and Hindukush* (2002), and more recently has been given as an alternative on Wala maps. On the 14th, after exploring the Khasumik Valley to the northeast and the Thalle Valley to the west, Kim walked up the Bukma Valley (northwest of the Khasumik; Bukma is the name used on all current maps, but see below for an alternative) and camped at 4,050m. During a few days of rainy weather, he reconnoitred the steep, broad northwest face of Honbrok, then moved camp to 4,545m.

Just before midnight on the 17th, Kim left his camp and started up the steep, mixed west face between Honbrok and an unnamed 6,200m summit to the north. He likened the 900m wall to the north face of the Eiger. Kim used a 6mm back rope on the difficult parts and left one piton on the face. The crux was probably a two-meter overhanging section.

After several sections of taxing dry-tooling, he emerged onto the north ridge of Honbrok at 5,570m. It was 10:40 a.m. and one glimpse of the continuation up the crest, with its many dangerous cornices and mushrooms, convinced him to abandon the attempt.

Instead, he turned north toward the unnamed peak, with the aim of traversing the summit and downclimbing a 1,200m couloir on its north face, leading to the upper Bukma Glacier. He dug a snow hole and waited for darkness to fall and provide better conditions. Exhausted, with no bivouac gear and a small amount of fuel that quickly ran out, he shivered away the night, and only resumed climbing in the warmth of the following morning.

Deep snow led Kim to the summit at 12:30 p.m. on the 19th, where he repeated his summit ritual of leaving a sling. [The Polish climbers who made the second ascent of the peak in 2007 found this sling.] He christened the peak Bakma Brakk, as, after his usual consultation, he found this more appropriate than Bukma.

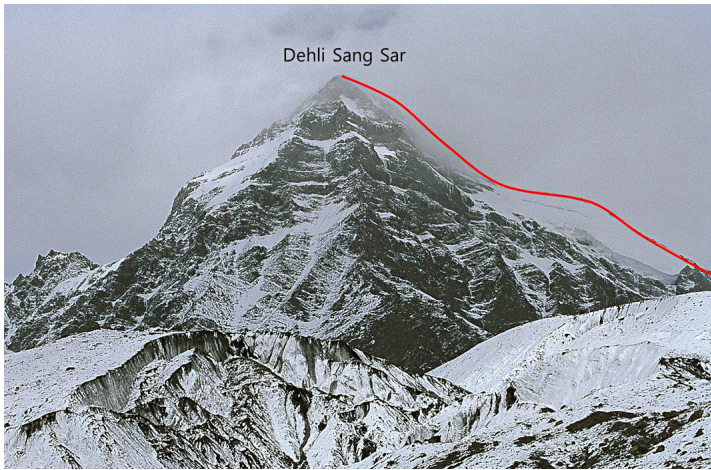
Kim returned along his ascent route for around 50m and then downclimbed directly to the upper Bukma Glacier, at one point being narrowly missed by an avalanche. He descended the glacier and 200m of difficult icefall (which took three hours) to regain his tent at 10:30 p.m.

Exhausted yet still enthusiastic, Kim had no intention of finishing his 2003 season just yet. On the 21st, he made the first crossing of the Khasumik La (4,835m), from the Bukma to the Khasumik Glacier, and walked down to Khasumik. A couple of days later, he became the first person to reach the Bukma La (5,250m) on the north side of the Bukma Glacier, overlooking the East Ching Kang Glacier. His plan was to descend this and then cross the Aling La into the Aling Glacier, eventually reaching the Hushe Valley. A four-day snowstorm put an end to this project.

Kim returned to Skardu, extended his visa for another 45 days, and for the next month explored mountains north of the Braldu River. While in Skardu, he discovered a Japanese expedition postcard suggesting that Honbrok, the main goal of his 2003 trip to Pakistan, might have been climbed already in July 2000. However, this possibility remains to be confirmed.

– Oh Young-hoon, Korea

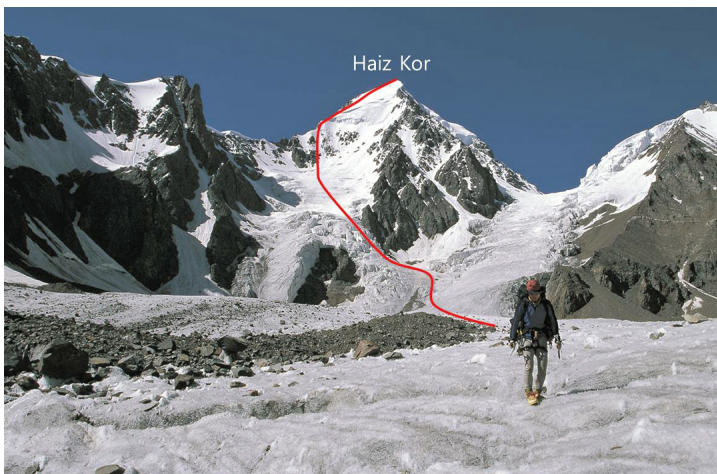
Images



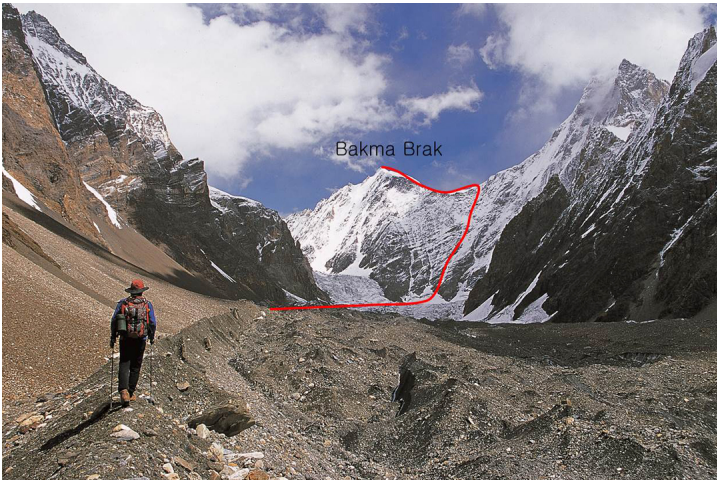
Dehli Sang-i-Sar seen from the southwest, showing the general line of Kim Chang-ho's solo ascent along the upper east ridge in 2003.



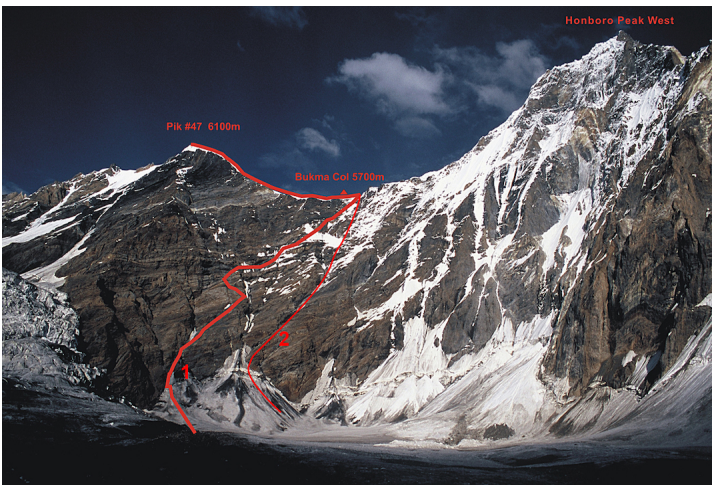
Kim Chang-ho's solo route up the south face and west ridge of Atar Kor in 2003. Only the top half of the face is visible.



Kim Chang-ho's 2003 route of ascent of the southeast face and south ridge of Haiz Kor.



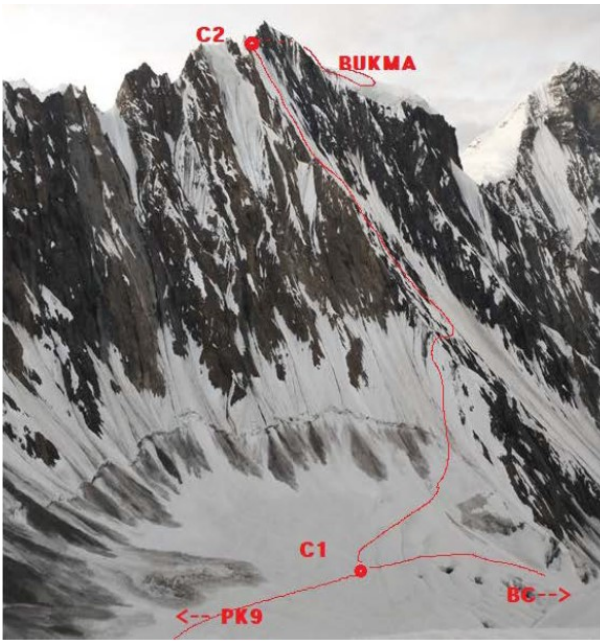
Bakma Brakk and Honbrok from the southwest, showing the line soloed by Kim Chang-ho in 2003 for Bakma Brakk's first ascent.



Taken during a 2007 expedition, this photo shows (1) Polish climbers' route to the col between Bakma Brakk and Honbrok (west summit), and (2) the 2003 line followed by Kim Chang-ho.



Looking up the Bukma Glacier at (A) Bakma Brakk, climbed by Kim Chang-ho in 2003, and (B) Honbrok.



Cho Byeok-rae, who was on the Bukma Glacier in 2019 and 2022, feels that this photo shows the possible descent followed in 2003 from the top of Bakma Brakk, based on Kim's description.

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