



AAC Publications

Hongku, East Ridge, Attempt

Nepal, Mahalangur, Barun Section

Luis Stitzinger on the east ridge of Hongku. At the far end of the ridge is the snow pyramid of Hongku Chuli. To the right is the broad massif of Chamlang. In back on the left is the great pyramid of Makalu.

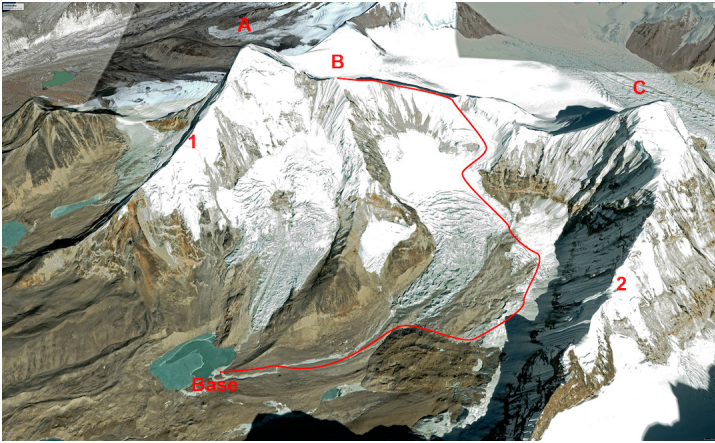
Hongku (a.k.a Hongu, Hongku Chuli Nup, or Sura Peak, 6,764m, 27°49'34.7"N, 86°58'37.6"E) has been climbed on several occasions via the southwest ridge (1,200m, D), and on at least one occasion by the northeast face (AAJ 2020). Its climbing history is unclear, but the first ascent, from the north, was likely made by the 1954 Hillary expedition to the Barun Valley. It was certainly climbed via the southwest ridge in 1983. However, it seems most probable that the long and sharp east ridge remained unclimbed. In early November, German guide Luis Stitzinger attempted the east ridge alone after his wife and climbing partner, Alix von Melle, developed a respiratory infection.

The pair had acclimatized by climbing Mera Peak (6,461m). After this they trekked up the Hongku Valley as far as Seto Pokhari (5,200m), then up the East Hongku Glacier to a base camp by the second lake at 5,510m. On November 2, as von Melle rested in camp, Stitzinger crossed the foot of the south spur of Hongku, moved up to the head of the East Hongku, and climbed southwest-facing slopes to the crest of the east ridge at the lowest point between Hongku and Hongku Chuli (6,833m). He camped just below the crest in a crevasse at 6,150m.

The next day he progressed along the sharp and airy arête, passing Point 6,367m and over many snow bumps and rock gendarmes (mainly exposed snow and ice climbing with some UIAA III-IV), to reach the junction with the south spur, a point he called Junction Peak (6,582m on HMG-Finn map]. The ridge ahead was barred by several tall, steep, and difficult gendarmes, and to continue he would have needed both a rope and belayer. (These obstacles were completely unexpected, as they had not been visible from base camp.) Stitzinger reversed his route and arrived in base camp the same day.

— Lindsay Griffin, AAJ, with information from Rodophe Popier, Himalayan Database, France, and Luis Stitzinger, Germany

Images



A) Hongku from the south with the route attempted in 2022 by Luis Stitzinger: up the East Hongku Glacier and along the east ridge as far as (B) "Junction Peak." (C) Hongku Chuli. (1) Southwest ridge (1983). (2) Southwest ridge, probably first climbed in 2021.



Seen from the west: (A) Makalu; (B) Hongku; (C) Hongku Chuli. (1) southwest ridge (1983). (2) The arrows mark the approach to the east ridge followed by Luis Stitzinger in 2022. The east ridge itself is more or less hidden in this picture by the south spur. (3) Southwest ridge, probably first climbed in 2021.



Luis Stitzinger on the east ridge of Hongku. At the far end of the ridge is the snow pyramid of Hongku Chuli. To the right is the broad massif of Chamlang. Immediately to the left is Tutse (Peak 6) and left again the great pyramid of Makalu.



Approaching the sharp east ridge of Hongku. The summit visible at the left end is Junction Peak.



Luis Stitzinger on the east ridge of Hongku with Makalu behind.



Alix von Melle at base camp on the East Hongku Glacier. (A) Hongku, with the southwest ridge descending toward the camera. (B) Junction Peak; the skyline descending to the right is the south spur.

Article Details

Author	Lindsay Griffin
Publication	AAJ
Volume	65
Issue	97
Page	340
Copyright Date	2023
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions