



Apobrok Great Pyramid, Attempt and Tragedy

Pakistan, Karakoram, Masherbrum Range

In 2021, Takayasu Semba and Shinji Tamura attempted Bondit Peak via the northeast spur, retreating from 5,400m due to high avalanche danger (AAJ 2022). They returned to the same line in 2022, and this time almost reached the summit; later that same year, their route was completed by a team from Hungary (AAJ 2023).

The two Japanese returned for a third time to the area in August 2023, on this occasion to attempt a 5,940m peak in the adjacent valley to the northwest. On Jerzy Wala's Polish sketch maps, this peak at 35°21'44.53"N, 76°14'29.49"E is referred to as Apobrok Great Pyramid, Apobrok Peak being an alternative name for Bondit Peak. (Wala refers to the Bondit Glacier as Apobrok Central Glacier and designates the glacier running north from Apobrok Great Pyramid—by which the Japanese approached from the Kande Valley—as North Apobrok Glacier.)

On August 10, Semba and Tamura established Camp 1 at 5,030m, on a flat spot just above the start of the rocky northeast ridge. The following report from Semba is provided by Ibrahim Koto, their in-country agent.

"We planned to check out the route up the ridge on the following day and return to base camp, but in case we were delayed, we took two days food to [Camp 1]. We left this camp at 6 a.m. on the 11th and climbed a steep snow ridge to reach rock. The way ahead looked to be fragile climbing, so we left crampons and continued. At this point we checked the radio, only to find the batteries had no charge. At 5,400m we decided to turn back.

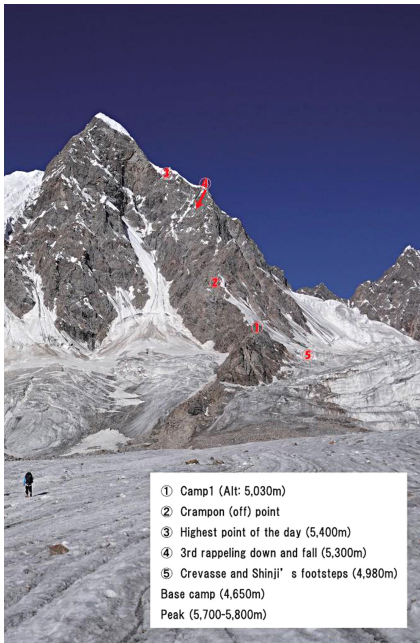
We made two 60m rappels before traversing a slope and setting up a third rappel at around 5,300m. At approximately 2 p.m., Shinji placed a piton and began to rappel. When I saw it move, I shouted to Shinji, who stopped 10m down from the anchor, where there was a good stance. He took off his rucksack and began to set another rappel point, and subsequently asked me to rappel to him. I did so, but after five meters the piton ripped and I fell. Shinji, who was not belayed, tried to grab me, but we both continued falling. After around 60m, I was brought to a halt by the ropes jamming. Shinji was approximately 8m below. We were both injured, but I managed to climb down to Shinji. He had no idea where he was, and there was blood inside his helmet. He complained of bad pain in his chest and face. I gave him water and covered him with my down jacket. Telling him not to move, I sent an SOS with my inReach device, left my rucksack with food and clothing, and descended to base camp. Time was of the essence, and as the base camp staff knew that we had taken two days of food, they might not become concerned for some time.

"I arrived in camp at 4:30 p.m., and we called a team of strong porters from the lower villages. They left at night to attempt a morning rescue. However, at 8 p.m. a light was spotted just above the site of Camp 1. We assumed Shinji was moving and expected to find him at that camp early next morning. Sadly, he was not there. A search lower down, close to the glacier at ca 4,980m, discovered footsteps going into a crevasse. One of the team was lowered 20m into the crevasse but was unable to descend any further due to a narrowing. An ice screw with Shinji's initials was discovered close to the crevasse. Next day I was lowered into the hole and found the insides very soft—it would be easy to fall deeper and deeper. Further searches found nothing, and eventually I was flown to a military hospital in Skardu."

Tamura was a mountain guide in his mid-50s; he had lived and worked in Zermatt for more than 30 years. Among many ascents, he had climbed Everest four times and Cho Oyu three times.

— **Information from Nathan Dahlberg, New Zealand**

Images



The 2023 attempted route up the northeast ridge of Apobrok Great Pyramid and location of rappelling accident. The main summit is out of view to the left.



Base camp on North Apobrok Glacier below Apobrok Great Pyramid, with the 2023 attempted route. The main summit is far left, although the top of the rocky pyramid is only perhaps 100m or less lower. The peak in the distant right is unnamed.

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