



AAC Publications

Nilgiri North, West Face and West Ridge, Attempt

Nepal, Annapurna Himal

The west side of the Nilgiri massif, showing the attempted route on the west ridge. Behind, the highest point of the skyline ridge is Annapurna I. Photo by Takuya Mitoro.

In the fall of 2018, Tatsuya Aoki and I attempted the north face of Nilgiri North (7,061m, 28°41'21.22"N, 83°44'38.96"E), the highest of the Nilgiri peaks, retreating from 5,900m. We followed the original 1962 route up the rocky spur on the right side of the face to around 5,600m, then traversed left across a large hanging glacier until directly below the summit. This traverse was badly threatened by serac fall. We started up the face above, but the steepness, difficulty, and lack of reliable protection turned us back.

We returned in the fall of 2024, this time to attempt the west face, which, as far as we are aware, had never been attempted or even approached. First, we had to follow a valley from the Kali Gandaki to reach a 5,400m plateau below the face. No photos showed the valley floor, so we were unsure whether this was practical, and we wouldn't know if the face itself was possible until we were directly underneath it.

On October 1, we reached a yak-grazing pasture at 4,000m and established our base camp. For further acclimatization, we decided to climb to the 5,400m plateau. However, we were dismayed to find the way blocked by a steep rock wall capped by a serac barrier. Eventually we discovered a sheltered crack line on the right side and climbed this to where we could finally see the west face, which looked technically difficult and also full of avalanche runnels. We therefore decided instead to climb up left to a col on the west ridge at 5,900m and follow the ridge crest from there.

We began our attempt from base camp on the 9th, camping for the first night at 5,000m. We expected the route to the col to be straightforward, but we had to overcome much brittle rock. As we neared the ridge, the winds intensified, and we cut out a tent platform that was only just sheltered from the force.

The following day, the 11th, we climbed the crest to 6,200m, around the same height as the 1962 route reaches the ridge from the north face. We finished the difficult climbing the next day and arrived at 6,600m, having battled strong wind the whole time. In this section, we found one old piton about 25cm in length [most likely placed in 1962 by Lionel Terray—see below]. Around 400m of snow climbing remained, but Tatsuya was now suffering badly from the altitude, and we had to go down.

Although I am not satisfied with the result, we had a good climb on a facet of the mountain where there was no previous information. Someday, climbers will reach the top via the west face. It would be great if it was us.

—Takuya Mitoro, Japan

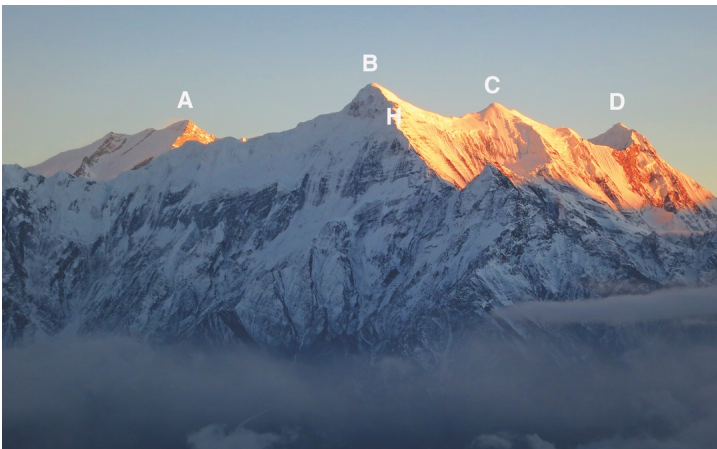
Notes on the Nilgiri Peaks: The Nilgiri massif, north of Annapurna, comprises four tops: Nilgiri North (the main summit, 7,061m), Nilgiri Central (6,940m), Nilgiri South (6,839m), and a small subsidiary top on the long east ridge of Nilgiri North called Nilgiri East (6,698m). All have been climbed, but none more than a handful of times. The first ascent of Nilgiri North, the highest peak, took place in October 1962 when French alpinist and guide Lionel Terray led a small Dutch team (the first from this country to the Himalaya) up a difficult route on the north face (70° on ice flutes) to reach the west ridge between

6,200m and 6,300m. Terray, brothers Holger, Paul, and Peter van Lookeren Campagne, and Wangdi Sherpa reached the top. Their route is unrepeated.

Images



On the west ridge of Nilgiri North with the 5,400-meter plateau beneath the clouds below.



Evening sun on the Nilgiri massif. (A) Annapurna I. (B) Nilgiri North (the mountain's main top, 7,061m). (C) Nilgiri Central (6,940m). (D) Nilgiri South (6,839m). The west ridge of Nilgiri North divides sun and shadow, with the somber north face, partially climbed during the first ascent of the mountain, to the left. The 2024 attempt reached the west ridge from the opposite side and continued up the crest to a high point (H) at about 6,600 meters.



The west side of the Nilgiri massif, showing the attempted route on the west ridge. Behind, the highest point of the skyline ridge is Annapurna I.



The first obstacle to reaching the west face. The rock wall was climbed via a crack on the right.



At 6,600 meters on the upper west ridge of Nilgiri North. At this point the climbers decided to turn back.



Climbing through the rock barrier to access the west face of Nilgiri North.



Piton found above 6,300 meters on the west ridge of Nilgiri North, likely placed in 1962 by the expedition led by Lionel Terray, which made the first ascent of the mountain.

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