



AAC Publications

Phungi, First Ascent, via West Spur and South-Southwest Ridge

Nepal, Peri Himal

View from the 6,200-meter camp on Phungi. The summit is the tiny, rounded snow top to the right and behind the rocky top. Photo by Fumiya Yokomichi.

In post-monsoon 2022, three young Japanese climbers—Goto Kisuke, Adachi Masaki, and Kagami Taichi—attempted the west spur and south-southwest ridge of Phungi (28°49′48.29″N, 84°24′0.12″E), an unclimbed 6,524m peak southeast of Ratna Chuli, on the border with Tibet. The three Japanese retreated at around 6,150m in deep snow. [This peak was opened for climbing in 2014 and should not be confused with Phungi Himal (6,538m), which lies east of Manaslu and was climbed in 2017; see AAJ 2018.]

In the fall of 2024, our team of young Japanese university alpinists—Taiyo Ashizawa, Takuma Inoue, Masahiro Nakazawa, Ryoya Odaka, and I—completed the first ascent of Phungi by the same route that was attempted two years earlier.

Japan's alpine climbing population has declined in recent years because most university students tend to prefer fun, safe, and reasonably priced pastimes. However, there are still those of us who have a passion for alpine climbing. Fortunately, several universities with a history of mountaineering still have alpine clubs where students can join and learn climbing techniques.

For many on the team, this was the first visit to the Himalaya. We acclimatized gradually, reaching our 4,700m base camp on September 21, via the Phu Khola. We were initially pinned down by heavy snowfall but subsequently established Camp 1 at 5,000m and Camp 2 on the west spur at 5,500m. On October 3, we felt ready to make a summit attempt.

We started out under a new moon, the faint glow of dawn and the dim moonlight illuminating the spur. We were full of anticipation, but the mountain seemed intent on testing us, presenting one obstacle after another. The brittle rock on the west spur demanded every ounce of our skill, courage, and luck, as we climbed through treacherous terrain to 5,800m. We overcame a snow face to reach what we thought from below would be the south summit, but it was not. Instead, we were faced with a vast field of crevasses.

We camped for the night, and the next day, with both body and spirit worn thin, set off for the top. At around 6,200m, we came upon a seven-meter ice arête, followed by a 15m drop that would require a rappel. As we'd left our fixing rope behind, retreat seemed the most sensible option. During the descent, we discovered, to our surprise, that the west spur was much safer than we remembered.

The west side of Phungi (6,524m) with the route of ascent on the upper west rib and south-southwest ridge. Photo by Fumiya Yokomichi.

After three days at base camp, we made our second attempt. Rested and better acclimatized, we reached Camp 2 in only four hours. On the 11th, we climbed the west spur in just an hour, and by 6:30 a.m. we reached our cached gear on the south-southwest ridge. We continued up the crest to a small col at around 6,200m and set up camp in a relatively sheltered spot.

Leaving this camp at 4 a.m. on the 12th, we roped in two teams. The rappel beyond the ice arête proved straightforward, but the rocky ridge that followed crumbled beneath our hands. Compared to

the west ridge, I guess it wasn't too bad. However, the snow arête that followed was terrifying. Takuma and Ryoya, who were head and shoulders above the rest of us in climbing ability, took the lead alternately in this section. We eventually reached a wider snow slope, from where we could see a rocky peak, which we believed was the summit. However, when Masahiro reached it, he shouted down, "This isn't the summit, but let's keep moving, because there are no crevasses." I shouted back "yo shiya" ("hell yeah!"), the tension in my chest finally easing.

We arrived at the true summit at 12:19 p.m. "Whoo!", I yelled, even though my head was pounding. Takuma was shouting with joy continuously, as if he had forgotten how painful it all was. We spent 10 minutes, then turned to go down. "We're not done yet," Ryoya reminded us, but we were all aware of that. By 6 p.m. we were back at our high camp, physically drained but elated.

Early next morning, Masahiro, Taiyo, and Takuma ascended a top at the south end of the ridge, dubbed Phungi South (6,342m), while Ryoya and I headed down. We debated about leaving some gear at Camp 1 for a later collection but decided to make a single, heavy journey to base camp. As we all struggled along the rocky trail beneath enormous packs, Takuma looked at us and muttered, "It always ends like this." But the pain in my shoulders and legs was nothing compared with the pride swelling within my chest.

—Fumiya Yokomichi, Japan

Images



On the final section of the south-southwest ridge of Phungi (6,524m). The summit is behind the rocky tower.



The 6,200-meter col camp on the south-southwest ridge of Phungi, looking toward the summit.



The west side of Phungi (6,524m) with the route of ascent on the upper west rib and south-southwest ridge.



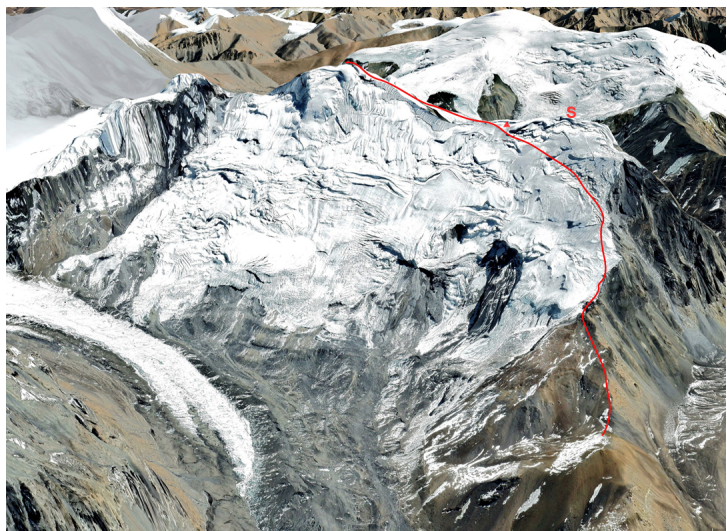
View from the 6,200-meter camp on Phungi. The summit is the tiny, rounded snow top to the right and behind the rocky top.



Looking east from the Nagoru peaks. Ratna Chuli is the high peak on the left, while Phungi is the broad summit on the far right with the serac-torn west face.



Looking west from the summit of Phungi. Behind the climber is the Annapurna Himal; beneath is the valley of the Phu Khola. The right skyline is the Nepal-Tibet border, with the high peak Ratna Chuli.



The approximate line of the first ascent of Phungi (6,524m) by the west spur and south-southwest ridge. The high camp at 6,200 meters is marked; (S) is the Phurbi South, climbed during the descent from the summit.

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