



## AAC Publications

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### Phungi Himal: First Ascent by Southeast Face

Nepal, Manaslu Himal

**Some years ago, Anatoly Moshnikov commented, “I have already climbed that route in my mind, should we do it in reality?”** I can’t recall the mountain to which he was referring, but I remembered his words. They perfectly suited Phungi Himal (6,538m): I’d climbed it many times in my mind, but in 2017 I got the chance to compare dreams with reality.

In October 2010, Anatoly and I visited the Dana Khola, which rises below the southern flanks of Phungi Himal and Thulagi (7,059m), during a long exploratory trip to Nepal. From what we saw, we concluded that it would be best to first climb Phungi Himal, during which we could make a good inspection of Thulagi, with all its secrets and traps. Then, acclimatized, we could make a double: two unclimbed summits in the same area. But life turned out differently. In October of 2011, Anatoly died in the Altai mountains. Thulagi was finally climbed, after many attempts and two fatalities, in 2015 (AAJ 2016).

In 2017 I wanted to try a peak from my old secret stash. I discussed Phungi with Alexey Lonchinsky, whom I’d met at the Bezengi Camp in the Caucasus. On October 15, our small team of two climbers and Dandy the cook reached base camp at 3,655m in the Dana Khola. For two days the visibility was bad, but when we were finally able to see the mountain, we were surprised by how dry it was compared with seven years ago. We would have to find a different route from the one Anatoly and I had scoped.

Although not obvious from afar, a line on the southeast face now seemed the best option, starting with a couloir right of the summit fall line. We began early on the 26th, but rockfall was immediate, and we had to use the buttresses on each side for cover. We climbed mainly snow flutes, occasionally having to overcome the vertical back walls of crevasses. The couloir led to a groundhog-shaped rock below the narrows where we planned to bivouac. It was only 12:30 p.m. when we reached the groundhog, but rocks were flying down the narrows, so we chopped a sheltered site and pitched the tent.

Leaving at night, so as to reach a safe spot above the narrows before the rocks began flying again, we climbed ice and mixed for four pitches to the narrowest section, where a steep icefall led to the central ice flutes on the southeast face. Rockfall now was less of a problem. The face gradually got steeper as we approached the east ridge, and near the top we found a sheltered bivouac site below a serac, off the line of the route, at around 6,300m. We’d climbed almost 1,000m of ice that day (20 pitches from 60–80°), so were pleased with progress.

On the 28th the weather began to deteriorate. By 10 a.m. the temperature had dropped abruptly and it had started to snow. Nearing the east ridge, delicate icicles hung onto vertical blocks of snow. I’d faced this before while climbing Nuptse East in 2003: One wrong move and the structure breaks, leaving you feeling like a butterfly whose wings are frozen to the surface, holding the rest of your body above the void!

The last pitch to the ridge was intense. There was a strong wind, the cold was harsh, a cornice broke underneath me, and the metal gear I carried was making threatening sounds from static electricity. I retreated to a sort of crevasse and moved along it for a couple of pitches below the ridge.

Eventually things calmed down and we gained the crest in fresh snow. The angle was easy, so we trampled out a tent platform (ca 6,500m), left our gear, and went up to the summit, which we reached at 4:30 p.m. Next day we packed the tent, retraced our steps to the summit, and then went down the unknown west ridge. The weather deteriorated quickly, just like the previous day. With no visibility, our first three rappels were very much into the unknown. Then we circumvented a rock wall at around 6,100m, and even though we were eager to get down, our gut feelings told us to stop and wait for better conditions before continuing through the dangerous icefall.

Next morning we resumed the descent, and after three rappels found ourselves in a less steep part of the icefall. We moved together from then on, and although we couldn't make it all the way to base camp that night, it wasn't important. We'd managed to accomplish our goal. I dedicated the ascent to Anatoly.

– Yuri Koshelenko, Russia

## Images



Looking almost west from the southwest face of Phungi after descending through the icefall. The prominent high peak is Annapurana II (7,937m), while the rounded, dome-like summit on the left (at the far end of Annapurna II southeast ridge) is Lamjung Himal (6,983m).



Alexey Lonchinsky on the east ridge of Phungi.



The convoluted icefall negotiated by the two Russians during their descent from the summit of Phungi.



Alexey Lonchinsky moving up to the summit of Phungi Himal for the second time before beginning the descent of the west ridge. The large summit in the center is Manaslu (8,163m), the distant multi-



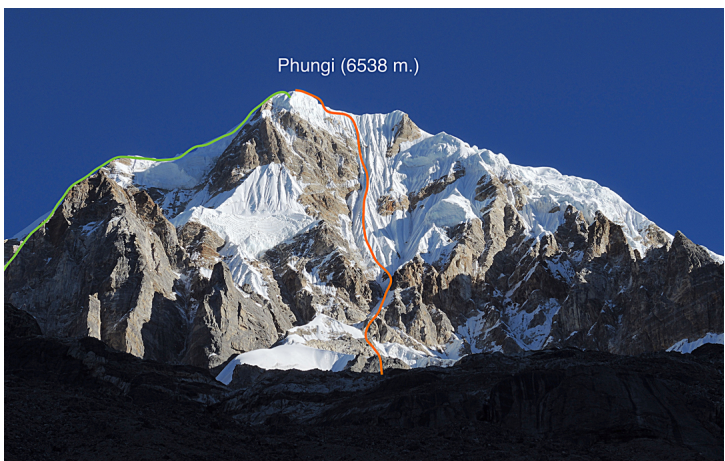
summitted peak to the right Ngadi Chuli (Peak 29, 7,871m), and just in front of this is Thulagi (7,059m).



Alexey Lonchinsky in the narrows above the first bivouac on the southeast face of Phungi.



The southeast face of Phungi. Bivouacs are marked.



The southeast face of Phungi showing the route of ascent on the southeast face and (to the left) the west ridge and southwest face descent.



The west face of Thulagi (7,059m) seen from the bivouac below the “groundhog rock” on the southeast face of Phungi.



First ascent of Phungi Himal

Article Details

Author	Yuri Koshelenko
Publication	AAJ
Volume	60
Issue	92
Page	319
Copyright Date	2018
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions