



AAC Publications

Jannu, East Face to South Ridge

Nepal, Kangchenjunga Himal

The Russian route Unfinished Symphony on the east face of Jannu. The climbers descended the French route, behind the ridge to the left. Photo by Dmitry Golovchenko

Jannu (Kumbhakarna, 7,711m) has four established routes, but the east face remained unclimbed. Our expedition to attempt this face comprised Sergey Nilov (Russia), Marcin Tomaszewski (Poland), and me, together with a documentary film crew led by the Polish director Eliza Kubarska. The winter was very snowy, and after arriving in Ghunsa by helicopter, we had to use a much longer, alternative route to base camp on the Yalung Glacier. This cost us much time and a considerable part of our acclimatization period.

The day after arrival at base camp, we set off to find a way to the Jannu plateau (Jannu Southeast Glacier) below the face. We discovered the only safe route to be a 300m rock buttress, and began fixing this on March 12. That day we climbed around nine pitches, most of which Marcin led. Next day Sergey and I added another three pitches and reached the plateau. When we returned to base camp, Marcin explained that he'd decided to quit the attempt. Lack of acclimatization, his impression that the wall was in dangerous condition, and the fact that he didn't feel comfortable within the team were his main reasons. Both Marcin and Eliza offered their full support and helped us take gear to the plateau, where on the night of the 15th we enjoyed a nice meal together.

On the 16th, Sergey and I spent the whole day crossing the convoluted glacier with packs of 20kg each. We camped at 5,525m, near the base of the main east face. Next day we tried to work through the icefall. There was no easy way, and often we came to dead ends. Heavy snow began at 2 p.m., and as soon as we found a safe spot (at 6,100m) we stopped. It was at around this altitude that the only other expedition to attempt the face, a Korean team in 2011, retreated when one member fell into a crevasse and broke some ribs.

On the 18th, fresh snow in the icefall made conditions worse, and then it began to snow again in early afternoon. We stopped in another safe spot, sheltered by a huge ice block, at 6,316m. We missed the alarm on the 19th and didn't wake up until 6 a.m. It took three hours to leave, and again it started to snow at 1 p.m. We were now on our planned leftward-slanting line up the face toward the headwall, where we found a rock wall at 6,513m and spent three hours building a sheltered tent site below it. Next day there was snowfall from early morning on, but we managed around six pitches in poor visibility before making a ledge at 6,654m on which we could fit half the tent. That night it snowed a lot, and we had to dig from time to time.

The 21st dawned sunny, at last. One of our tent poles had broken, so while Sergey fixed it, I dried out our clothes and sleeping bags. Sergey did a great job leading that day: The angle was 60–70° and the rock was covered by fresh snow, requiring difficult mixed climbing. At 3 p.m. we found a small ledge at 6,771m and decided to stop. That night we used our last tea bag. We also decided not to climb the headwall to the right, directly toward the summit, but to follow the continuation of our line to the south ridge and then continue up the original 1962 French route to the top. The French route would provide our only descent, as reversing our route was now far too dangerous.

Sergey Nilov on the last pitch of the day on March 27, near the top of the Russian line on the east face of Jannu. Photo by Dmitry Golovchenko

Next day we reached 6,923m. The morning had been sunny, but the ground was steeper. Then came

the usual midday snowfall. We spent two or three hours preparing a ledge on a small snow ridge before erecting the tent.

The weather on the 23rd was great—sunny all day. The ridge felt close, so we climbed until late into the night, reaching 7,127m. We finally got to sleep at 2 a.m. Over the next two days, the fresh snow, poor protection, and afternoon snowfall meant we progressed slowly. On the night of the 25th, at an altitude of 7,279m, the weather was awful, and the news from our radio contact with base camp was that it would get worse. We didn't move all day on the 26th, the biggest challenge being not to eat to preserve what food was left.

On the 27th we continued. The wall became very steep, an average angle of 80°. We still found fresh snow everywhere, and the ice was bad, full of holes like cheese. At dusk Sergey found a nice gap between rock and ice, and we set up a good bivouac inside. It was my 36th birthday, and base camp sang me celebratory Polish songs over the radio. It was at that point Sergey showed me his feet, with a few black dots, the first signs of frostbite. We needed a minimum of one more day to reach the ridge. The decision on what to do next was simple: We would forgo the summit and descend the French route.

On the 28th we could finally see the ridge above us. Sergey made a long traverse across a very steep snow face, climbed up another steep pitch, and we were there. The height was 7,412m, and after an hour's rest we started down, bivouacking that night at 7,380m. It had been 13 days since we left Marcin and Elena at the plateau camp.

Dmitry Golovchenko looks back at the summit of Jannu from the Throne glacial plateau. The two climbers topped the east face (opposite) on the right-hand ridge, just below the rocky summit cap, and descended the snow and ice face on this side to reach the plateau. Four days of descent still remained. Photo by Sergey Nilov

On the 29th, during a day of good weather, we descended to the large glacier plateau of the Throne, where we could camp in a luxurious crevasse at 6,995m. Eliza had moved around to the Yamatari Glacier to assist us, and on the 30th she tried to talk us down. We had to cross over some small peaks (the Dentelles Ridge and Tête du Butoir), then reach the Col des Jeunes, from where we could descend to the Jeunes Glacier. However, we were forced to stop at 6,508m, as it was snowing again and we couldn't see where to go. On the morning of the 31st, we ate our last pack of noodles, but this day managed to downclimb until 4 p.m., reaching an altitude of 6,050m before losing our way in the cloud and deciding to stop.

The following day was April Fools, but we were serious. We needed to get down that day. We found a way to the col, then down to the Jeunes Glacier, which would have been straightforward were it not for fresh snow and the fact we were far from fresh. Unfortunately, we were stopped by a big crevasse and had to spend the night at 5,884m.

The morning of the 2nd dawned fine. We quickly boiled water and ate a piece of chocolate we found at the bottom of the haul bag. Then we tried a way much farther right, made two rappels, and later two more, and found ourselves on easy terrain. We were now constantly in touch with Eliza and her team, telling them we were close. At 1 p.m. it began snowing, but we just kept going. We reached a rock barrier and were arranging an anchor when we heard voices. A 45m rappel and we were on the Yamatari Glacier, met by Eliza, her sound technician, and two Sherpa assistants. They had brought tomato soup, boiled eggs, fresh chapatis, tea, vitamins, and even a bottle of Coca-Cola. From the Jannu plateau, we had spent 18 days on the mountain. The ca 1,950m route is Unfinished Symphony (ED, 80+°).

– Dmitry Golovchenko, Russia

Images



Sergey Nilov on the rock wall climbed to approach the Jannu Plateau (Jannu Southeast Glacier).



Dmitry Golovchenko looks back at the summit of Jannu and the upper part of the French Route from the Throne glacial plateau.



Sergey Nilov mixed climbing on March 21 at around 6,750m on the east face of Jannu.



Sergey Nilov on the penultimate pitch of the east face of Jannu, climbing very steep snow at over 7,300m, nearly two weeks after starting the climb.



The Russian route Unfinished Symphony on the east face of Jannu. Part of unclimbed Jannu East is to the right. The upper part of the right skyline ridge falling from the main summit is followed by the original route on the north face, climbed by Japanese in 1976.



Sergey Nilov during the first ascent of the east face of Jannu.



Climbing down to the plateau of the Throne on the second day of the Russians' descent of the south ridge. (A) Tso Kang North (6,309m). (B) The Dentelles Ridge, catching the evening sun. (C) Col des Jeunes. The Russian climbers had to traverse over the Dentelles to reach the col and descend to the glacier below. (D) Tso Kang South (6,100m). (E) Boktoh (6,142m).



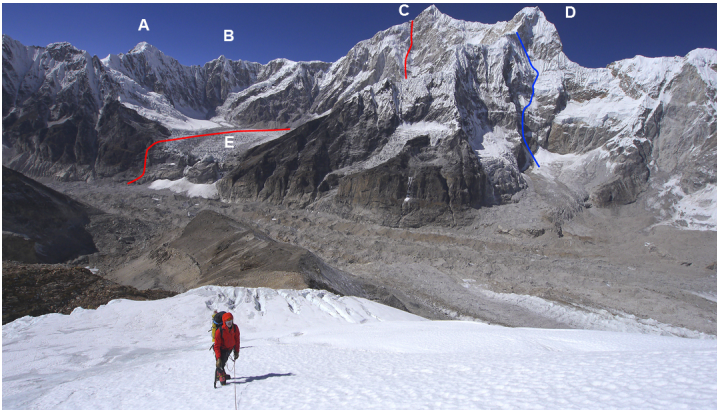
Sergey Nilov on the last pitch of the day, March 27, near the top of the Russian line on the east face of Jannu.



Sergey Nilov tops out on the south ridge of Jannu, 13 days after reaching the Jannu plateau at the foot of the east face.



Looking down the east face of Jannu. The icefall approach is visible in upper right.



Looking west from the lower slopes of Talung. (A) Tso Kang North (6,309m). (B) Tête du Butoir (ca 6,500m). (C) Jannu (7,711m) with the line of the Russian route, Unfinished Symphony, including the initial rock buttress above the Talung Glacier to reach (E) the Jannu plateau or Jannu Southeast Glacier. (D) Jannu East (7,468m), showing the best attempt to date on its east face, reaching 7,100m (Furlan-Pockar, 1992).

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