



AAC Publications

Kangchung Shar, North Face and Northwest Face/Ridge, Ada's Heavenly Traverse

Nepal, Mahalangur Himal—Khumbu Section

The Kangchung peaks taken in October 2015 with their north faces in profile. Kangchung Nup is nearer the camera. The Czech route on Kangchung Shar and bivouac site are marked. The rappel descent was further to the right on the upper face, and after regaining the tent the team descended south through the col between the two peaks. Photo by Martin Klestinec

After an enforced “rest year” in 2020 due to COVID-19, I was motivated to return to alpine projects. However, the situation with the pandemic was not favorable in many parts of the world, so I made modest plans. Kangchung Shar (6,063m) and Kangchung Nup (6,043m) are two beautiful mountains, a bit like two Matterhorns side by side but 2km higher.

After arriving in Kathmandu in April, my fellow Czech and old friend Jaroslav Banský, nicknamed Banán (Banana), and I purchased a permit for Kangchung Nup. It has a beautiful north face and had been attempted by, among other teams, Czech climbers.

In the spring, Nepal was completely lacking tourists. Most lodges were closed, but those that remained open were even more hospitable than usual. During the approach everything went well; I felt great, less affected by altitude than usual. However, before reaching Gokyo, I came down with a headache and diarrhea. We spent two days in a lodge at Gokyo watching snow fall. Banán and I then left our trekking group and through deep snow eventually arrived on the Gaunara Glacier, where we established base camp below the north face of Kangchung Nup.

I spent the next two days at camp with a sore throat and weak body. The clock was ticking. We only had food for six days, and the weather was about to worsen again. If we didn't try the following day we would have to give up. We changed our plans and decided to climb Kangchung Shar (27°59'00"N, 86°44'16"E).

In the morning of April 27, my legs were shaking, but I didn't feel sick. In 1.5 hours we reached the bottom of our proposed route, which would take us to the broad 5,637m col between Kangchung Shar and Nup. [This line was first climbed in 2016 by Paul Schweizer and Simon Yates, who reached the col and progressed a little way up the northwest ridge of Kangchung Shar before retreating. Kangchung Shar's first known ascent was in 1984, by Franci Knez (Slovenia), who reached the col from the south and continued up the northwest ridge. For further history, see AAJ 2017.] **I quickly lost power while climbing, and Banán ended up leading the most physically difficult pitches and breaking trail through deep snow.** At 2 p.m. we set up camp just east of the col. From here we had a superb view of Himalayan peaks, but the faces looked terrible—dry with hard ice. Our continuation route, up the tapering northwest face, had been climbed before, but conditions now were completely different.

Next day we began at 5:30 a.m. The initial, moderately angled glacier slope was highly avalanche prone. Fortunately, the terrain steepened and there was far less snow over the hard ice. This snow provided no support, so our calves burned with frontpointing. The top seemed close, but it was well guarded by several pitches of difficult mixed climbing. Everything was so much harder due to loose snow in corners and over slabs, and reached the summit around midday.

At around midday we reached the summit. I had never experienced such difficult climbing before in the Himalaya. After a few photos we quickly began to descend, rappelling to the initial glacier slope. We had not noticed how warm it had become. Whoom! The slope settled: If it slid, there was little chance for us. We reached the tent and decided to pack it and descend the easier original route on the south face of the mountain. Locating the route quickly, we partially downclimbed, partially rappelled to the bottom, then continued until we reached civilization at Dranang, where we arrived just before dark. What a day!

On the following day we returned to Namche Bazar and met our trekking companions. The picture was not a happy one. Most were ill like me, and half could not fly back to Europe due to having a positive COVID test.

The time for expeditions was not yet right.

Ours was the first complete climb of Kangchung Shar from the north and the first north-to-south traverse. We named our route Ada's Heavenly Traverse (TD+) in honor of the ex-chief of the Czech Mountain Rescue Service, Banán's uncle, Adolf Kleps.

— **Zdenek Háek, Czech Republic**

Images



The Kangchung peaks taken in October 2015 with their north faces in profile. Kangchung Nup is nearer the camera. The Czech route on Kangchung Shar and bivouac site are marked. The rappel descent was further to the right on the upper face, and after regaining the tent the team descended south through the col between the two peaks.



Kangchung Shar with the imposing unclimbed north face to the left. The Czech route of ascent is marked. (C) is the camp just east of the col. Zdenek Háek



Zdenek Hák climbing the lower section of the northwest face on day two.



Jaroslav Banský mixed climbing on the northwest ridge of Kangchung Shar.



Mixed climbing high on the northwest ridge of Kangchung Shar.



Zdenek Hák on the first pitch of the north face of Kangchung Shar.



Zdenek Hák descending the broken icefall of the south face of Kangchung Sar.



Zdenek Háek rappelling the top section of the northwest ridge of Kangchung Shar.

Article Details

Author	Zdenek Hák
Publication	AAJ
Volume	64
Issue	96
Page	290
Copyright Date	2022
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions