



AAC Publications

Kangchung Nup, Northwest Face

Nepal, Mahalangur Himal—Khumbu Section

On April 23, Toshiyuki Yamada and I stood together on the summit of Kangchung Nup (6,043m) after the first ascent of the northwest face. The feeling was the same as when I climbed in the Japanese Alps for my first time: The surrounding mountains were just so beautiful.

Five years earlier, Toshiyuki had asked me to go to the Himalaya, but at the time I was struggling to make a living in Canada, trying to master English, and busy with my Association of Canadian Mountain Guides training course. He asked me again every year. It was just an excuse on my part, but I had never heard of anyone who had just become a guide at the age of 40 going to the Himalaya for a new route. However, in 2020, COVID-19 changed everything. I lost my job during the pandemic, and like many others had a hard time going through the “tunnel,” but it did give me time to think about the rest of my life. I replied to Toshiyuki that I would go to Nepal with him in the spring of 2022.

We needed a good objective that we could climb in reasonable safety, and we chose Kangchung Nup for several reasons. First, because Japanese snow usually bonds quite well, some Japanese climbers have misjudged dry continental snowpacks; I’ve lost a couple of friends to avalanches in Alaska and the Himalaya. Therefore, we looked carefully for a line that didn’t have overhead hazards or a big avalanche start zone. We also wanted to have a Plan B, so we looked for a face that had more than one option for a line. Finally, the ice and mixed climbing we expected to find on Kangchung Nup looked similar to that in the Canadian Rockies—my favorite activity—and Toshiyuki and I both had climbed 6,000m peaks, so we knew we could function well at that altitude. To be honest, if I wanted to climb in Patagonia, I’d be living in Squamish and climbing on granite.

Bistari, bistari. I remembered a Sherpa telling me to go “slowly, slowly” during a past trip to Nepal, and this time I got the message. Whenever anything went wrong on the approach, we just said *bistari* and let nature take its course.

We took five days to reach Gokyo from Lukla. Global warming had made glacier travel difficult, and our porters couldn’t make it past Gokyo with heavy gear. We abandoned the idea of establishing a base camp closer to the mountain and decided to climb it in one push, Gokyo to Gokyo.

While acclimatizing, we saw that the true north face, attempted in 2019 by Jim Hall and Paul Ramsden from the U.K., was too dry. A Czech team had attempted the far right side of the wall, the northwest face and northwest ridge (see AAJ 2015). We decided on a gully system between these two attempts that had been tried in 2016 by Yasushi Yamanoi and two friends. The gully leads to a permanent icefield below the summit that could form a big avalanche start zone; however, at this time of year it had little snow and posed minimum threat.

Before starting, we climbed the original route from the south up to 5,500m and slept one night there. [The first ascent of Kangchung Nup was by Edmund Hillary and other members of the 1953 Everest team while acclimatizing for the main event.] During acclimatization, the weather was typically clear in the morning, then clouds would build to produce snow or rain showers in the afternoon. With a forecast for similar weather, we left Gokyo on April 21.

On that first day we approached along 5km of broken glacier and steep moraine to the base of the

route. Next day, we made a late start and climbed only 400m of snow and ice (50°), with a few steeper steps. We stopped at 3 p.m. to bivouac at 5,500m, below the crux section. We set out at 4 a.m. on the 23rd and I took the first block, climbing fantastic mixed terrain, largely at M4, with a crux of M5, and some amazing sn'ice. After five pitches we reached an icefield, which, although not technical, was tiring and calf-burning. A few hundred meters higher, we reached a shoulder on the northwest ridge.

After a quick photo break, with great views of Cho Oyu and Gyachung Kang, we climbed a loose headwall (three pitches, 5.6) and then traversed the summit ridge. The latter was exposed and far longer than we had anticipated, taking us to the summit at 4:30 p.m.

We decided it would be safest and easiest to descend to the south from the col between Kangchung Nup and Shar. After rappelling eight rope-lengths on the north side of the ridge leading down to the col, we reached the flat glacier at 11 p.m. and stopped. It was a cold night, but we had warm hearts. Next day, we descended on known ground and got back to Gokyo at 2 p.m. Our 900m route was ED1 M5 AI4.

– Takeshi Tani, Canada

Images



The northwest face of Kangchung Nup and the April 2022 route.



Toshiyuki Yamada at the second bivouac (5,500m) on the northwest face of Kangchung Nup. Behind lie Gyachung Kang (7,952m, far left), Hunchi (7,029m, immediately left of Yamada), and Everest (far right).



The gully system in the middle part of the 2022 route on the northwest face of Kangchung Nup. Below lies the Gyubanare Glacier. The ice gully visible on the left side of the image was followed by Czech climbers in 2014. They abandoned their attempt at around 5,900m on the northwest ridge.



The thin mixed gully system in the middle of the northwest face of Kangchung Nup.



Toshiyuki Yamada on the upper northwest face of Kangchung Nup, with the big peaks of Cho Oyu (left) and Gyachung Kang behind.



On the upper section of the northwest face of Kangchung Nup, heading toward the northwest ridge.



The loose upper northwest ridge of Kangchung Nup.



Toshiyuki Yamada on the summit ridge of Kangchung Nup.

Article Details

Author	Takeshi Tani
Publication	AAJ
Volume	65
Issue	97
Page	
Copyright Date	2023
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions