



AAC Publications

Khang Karpo (Ripimo Shar), Northeast Face, Tiny Changes

Nepal, Rolwaling Himal

For Ethan Berman, Lin Oosterhoff, Andrea Sanchez, and me, it was our first visit to the Himalaya. For three weeks in autumn, we trekked around the Khumbu, with Namgyal Sherpa as our guide. Due to a dental infection, I had to bail from below the Cho La at 4,600m and pay a visit to the highest dental clinic in the world. Despite my initial reservations, the Namche Dental Clinic was well staffed and clean, complete with tea service in the waiting room. This saved me from having to fly out to Kathmandu. In excellent English, the local dentist confirmed my suspicion of an infection and prescribed antibiotics. He explained he could perform a root canal, but he wanted the infection to decrease before doing so. During my many visits to the clinic, Ethan prepared our final purchases in Namche with Namgyal's help. I eventually had two root canal treatments, and then we set off for a 4,900m base camp in the Chhule Valley, arriving on October 14.

Ethan was recovering from some flu-like symptoms, which I promptly took over. Having a sinus infection while acclimatizing is not ideal, but we made it to 5,850m during a four-day round trip. We'd had trouble finding good objectives for acclimatization without crossing the border into Tibet, so during our second acclimatization phase we opted to climb the first snowfield of our intended line on the northeast face of Khang Karpo (6,646m) to around 5,900m. Despite spoiling our "pure" alpine-style ascent, this reconnaissance greatly aided us during our first Himalayan climb.

Our main attempt started on November 4. After a bivouac below the face, we re climbed the snowfield, bivouacked again at 5,900m, and the next day arrived at the first rock barrier. After looking at the face for the last three weeks, we thought we had picked the right line. "I'm going up this way, it looks like Cascade Falls!" I exclaimed to Ethan, referencing the famous WI3 multi-pitch ice route above Banff. As it turns out, climbing a Cascade Falls above 6,000m is significantly more exhausting. My cold toes allowed me to climb only 30-40m pitches before I either ran out of our seven screws or I got so cold I had to belay.

Drangnag Ri (6,757m, left) and Khang Karpo from the east. The northeast face of Khang Karpo is visible in profile. Photo by Maarten van Haeren.

After several of these pitches, we reached the end of the ice, and a gully-switch was required. At this point, we were far removed from our intended line, but the climbing remained moderate. After a few more pitches of snow and ice, we located a snow mushroom beneath a short, steep rock roof. We were quickly able to fashion a ledge that would hold 95 percent of our bivouac tent, and were able to sleep comfortably before summit day. However, we were both slightly anxious about the altitude, 6,300m, a height record for both of us.

We left our tent and bivouac gear and set off next morning for the top. Having already ruled out the other two descent options, because they either lay in Tibet or involved treacherous objective hazards, we were now planning to descend our route. Ethan started the morning with another pitch of moderate ice. The relief from not having to carry heavy bags was very welcome. After several more pitches we reached simul-climbing terrain, and after a few more rope lengths I heard a wild wolf howl. I knew Ethan had found an exit from the face. Tears were flowing before we had even climbed the mountain, though it was clear we were only 40 vertical meters of walking from the summit. We briefly basked in windless sunshine at 6,600m, and after taking a belay to cross treacherous crevasses, we walked a short distance in the sky to a lonely summit on the border of Nepal and Tibet.

We rappelled to our camp at 6,300m and on the 7th rappelled to 6,000m then downclimbed to the bottom of the face. We named the route Tiny Changes (1,200m, TD+ M5 AI4).

— Maarten van Haeren, Canada

Editor's Note: This is possibly the sixth ascent of Khang Karpo. It was first climbed indirectly from the Chhule Valley, in 1952, when Tom Bourdillon and Ray Colledge, from Eric Shipton's expedition, crossed the Menlung La at the head of the valley into Tibet and climbed Khang Karpo via the north face, making one bivouac. A similar line was repeated in 1955 by Peter Boultbee and Denis Davis. Later ascents have approached up the Rolwaling (Ripimo Shar) Glacier to the south and climbed the west ridge (twice) and south-southeast ridge.

Images



Tiny Changes (2022), the first ascent of the northeast face of Khang Karpo.



Drangnag Ri (6,757m, left) and Khang Karpo from the east. The northeast face of Khang Karpo is visible in profile. Drangnag Ri has not been climbed from this side, though the first ascensionists (1995) climbed the east ridge (visible), approaching from the south. Behind and to the right, the pointed snow peak Menlungtse rises above the Menlung La.



Seen from Khang Karpo, the setting sun catches the summits of (A) Pasang Lhamu Chuli (7,350m), (B) Cho Oyu (8,188m), (C) Gyachung Kang (7,952m), (D) Hungchi (7,029m), (E) Everest (8,850m), (F) Lhotse (8,516m), and (G) Makalu (8,485m).



Ethan Berman climbing mixed terrain at around 6,100m during the second day on the northeast face of Khang Karpo.



Ethan Berman climbing the crux of Tiny Changes on Khang Karpo: hollow WI4 at around 6,400m.



Ethan Berman standing at a windless sunny perch at around 6,600m on Khang Karpo and about to follow the final pitch through crevasses. (A) Pangbuk Ri (6,625m on the HMG-Finn; 6,716m on the Schneider map; thought to be nearer the Schneider altitude). (B) Lunag Ri (6,895m). (C) Pasang Lhamu Chuli (7,350m). (D) Cho Oyu (8,188m).

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