



AAC Publications

Loinbo Kangri, South Face; Phola Kyung, Southeast Face

China, Tibet, Transhimalaya, Gangdise Shan

Heading for the summit of Loinbo Kangri after a new route on the south face.

Liu Junfu and Zhou Song climbed two new routes in the Loinbo Kangri massif, about 400km west of Shigatse, during a 15-day trip to Tibet in September. The massif's highest summit, Loinbo Kangri (7,095m), is the high point of the Gangdise Range and had two prior routes: the northeast ridge (first ascent of the peak, in 1996) and the north-northwest face, climbed in 2016. Liu and Zhou approached the peak from the south side.

On September 12, they left their base camp at 5,500m and, after picking up previously cached gear, reached the glacier below the unclimbed south face of Loinbo Kangri, where they camped at 5,750m.

Next morning, they set off at 6 a.m. At 6,000m, above the initial snow slopes, they entered mixed terrain where they could simul-climb with solid intermediate protection. However, as the day warmed, the two were subjected to rockfall from the spur above and to their left. They headed up right to reach a névé slope, then climbed a direct line between the rockfall-threatened area to the left and seracs high to the right.

When they reached around 6,800m, the sun dropped behind the spur to the left and the temperature plummeted. They crested the spur, leveled a bivouac site, and spent the night at close to 7,000m. Hoping to get up and down the route in a day, they had not brought a tent but did have a stove and a thin sleeping bag as well as down clothing. It was a miserably cold, shivering night.

The two got on the move again once the morning sun had hit the ridge. Deep, soft snow made the traverse avalanche-prone, and the two belayed in such a way that if the leader fell down one side, the second would be able to jump to the other. They were at the summit at 9 a.m.

Returning to the point where they had reached the spur, they made one rappel from a snow anchor, then downclimbed 18 pitches, reaching the bottom of the face at 3 p.m. and base camp at midnight. The 1,300m route was graded WI3 M4 70° snow.

On September 15, Liu and Zhou drove to Shigatse to recuperate and wait for the next weather window.

Returning to base camp on the 18th, they set off the following morning toward the elegant pyramidal Phola Kyung (6,530m) and reached the bottom of the southeast face quite quickly. They planned to follow a couloir directly toward the summit. [The peak's first ascensionists, in 2006, climbed a couloir on the far right of the southeast face to reach the east ridge, then a further four pitches up the crest to the top.]

The couloir was pronounced in its upper section, and as Liu and Zhou were reaching this point, at around 6,150m, they experienced some rockfall. Unable to place a screw in the thin ice, they traversed right to a rock spur. They belayed one pitch, then simul-climbed over snow-covered slabs. The penultimate pitch proved to be the crux: a strenuous thin crack in a dihedral.

After reaching the summit at 4 p.m., they began their descent of the same route immediately. They

made seven rappels and regained the glacier at 6,000m, reaching base camp at 9 p.m. The 500m route had maximum difficulties of 5.9+.

– **Xia Zhongming, Germany**

Images



The south face of Loinbo Kangri (7,095m) with the new route climbed in September 2023. A cold bivouac was made at the point where the route exits onto the summit ridge. The original route (in 1996 by a joint Chinese-Korean expedition) followed the ridge on the right.



The east ridge of Phola Kyung and the line of the 2023 route on the southeast face.



Seen from the southeast are Phola Kyung (6,530m, center) and part of the south face of Loinbo Kangri (7,095m).



The southeast face of Phola Kyung (6,530m) with (1) 2023 Liu-Zhou route and (2) original 2006 route by a multi-national team.



On the south face of Loinbo Kangri during the 2023 ascent. Most of the smaller peaks behind are unclimbed.



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On the upper southeast face of Phola Kyung during the 2023 ascent.

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