



AAC Publications

Ghamubar Zom V, First Ascent, via Northwest Ridge

Pakistan, Hindu Raj

Returning to base camp after eight days on Ghamubar Zom V, it felt like months since we had left. It was such a long adventure.

Three years earlier, I'd learned about this huge massif in the Hindu Raj through various publications, including the AAJ. Ghamubar Zom (a.k.a. Dhuli Chhish, 6,518m) has five summits, and the entire north face had not been climbed. Only the middle and highest points had been summited, in 1973, by an Italian team climbing from the south.

Approaching from the north, Kei Narita, Yuu Nishida, and I reached base camp (3,380m) in late August, one week after leaving Japan. We didn't require a liaison officer or cook, and so, after depositing our bags at the campsite, our porters and sirdar returned home, leaving the three of us to spend a month there by ourselves. We like this simple style.

It soon became obvious why the north side of the massif remained unclimbed. Climate change and the resulting glacial melt have left huge seracs hanging menacingly from the ridges and walls. The only safe and feasible line was the northwest ridge of Ghamubar Zom V (6,400m). It is a massive ridge: almost 4km long and gaining 2,000m vertically from the col at its foot, with a steep mixed headwall and a complex, 1.5km snow ridge above the technical crux. It appeared both challenging and adventurous, a perfect alpine-style objective for us.

As there were no easy mountains nearby for acclimatization and poor weather was predicted to arrive soon, we quickly began our attempt. At that point we had only climbed to 4,700m, the day after our arrival at base camp.

We placed our advanced base camp on the ridge, 200m above the col. Beyond this, a long, nasty, jagged ridge gave many pitches of 5.5 to 5.8 and M3 to M5. We tried to progress simultaneously, but the rope often got snagged. The ridge steepened into a mixed headwall above 5,400m, and we managed to climb through this and continue to 5,700m, but Nishida developed altitude sickness and we bailed. After descending to base camp, we continued down to the village of Darkot to rest for about a week. Unfortunately, the food there was bad, and we all had diarrhea.

Our agent, who until then had been very quiet, suddenly informed us that he needed to end our expedition within a week, because there had been a terrorist attack at the border with Afghanistan. Although far from being fully recovered, we rushed back to base camp for another attempt. When you're at the mercy of an agency, you don't always get to climb at your own pace.

On September 16, we returned to advanced base at 4,600m. The rock on the lower ridge was very unstable but bonded with snow and ice; the first crux on this day was a super-tough 60m of M5. Above this, we simul-climbed again for around 15 rope lengths with minimal protection, having to trust each other completely. We stopped for the night at 5,400m, below the crux mixed wall.

This 100m headwall looked like the rock section of Andromeda Strain in the Canadian Rockies. Two scary mixed pitches on fragile rock, followed by a dry-tooling pitch up 5.9 terrain, led to a final wall of better rock that proved to be one of the highlights of the route. Although this headwall was the

technical crux of the climb, the long ridge above would be the mental and overall crux, both on the way up and coming back down.

Complicated ridge work brought us to a campsite at 5,750m, just above our previous high point. It took us more than two hours to excavate a platform, as the “snow” ridge turned out to be tough blue ice.

We left at 6 a.m. the next morning, and at 12:30 p.m., after climbing extensive 50°–70° blue ice, we reached a flat spot at 6,090m. We decided to leave our bivouac equipment there and head for the summit.

Passing under a serac, we continued up the ridge toward what appeared to be the top. We were dismayed to discover a false summit—the highest point was much farther away. We kept going, traversing more blue ice and climbing steep snow, to reach the true summit of Ghamubar V, at 6,400m, at 5:30 p.m., just as the sun was setting. With maximum focus, we downclimbed toward our bivouac gear and reached it, exhausted, at 9 p.m.

The next day, more traverses across blue ice awaited. Finally, near the top of the mixed wall, we could start rappelling. Nishida had a lapse in concentration that caused him to lose balance and pendulum against the side wall of the ridge; fortunately, no bones were broken, but his sunglasses were cracked and his eyes bloodied. During one rappel, rockfall chopped one of our ropes, and fortunately I noticed it before it was too late. We camped that night at 5,560m.

On the 21st we reached advanced base, having found the descent of the lower ridge as difficult as the ascent. On the 22nd, lightheaded due to fatigue, we hiked down the 1,200m of rough ground to base camp.

We had left only 20m of rope slings, one nut, and one piton on the mountain. From the col at the start of the ridge, our route was 2,000m and 5.9 M5 70°. We found it more taxing and more fulfilling than the Moonflower Buttress on Mt. Hunter in Alaska or the **north face of Ausangate in Peru (see report on p.194)**.

— Yudai Suzuki, Japan

EARLIER EXPEDITIONS TO GHAMUBAR ZOM: In 1973, Italians Carlo Platter, Silvo Riz, and Ludovico Vaia climbed to the 6,518m main summit of Ghamubar Zom via the southeast ridge. This summit also was attempted in 1990 and 1992 by Japanese expeditions, via the south ridge, starting from the Chhelish Glacier. The first year they reached around 6,200m, but in 1992 they discovered that a big serac, which they had previously circumvented, had collapsed, and they were unable to get above 4,500m.

Images



Suzuki_Ghamubar_NWRidgeTwo

Ghamubar Zom V (6,400m); the northwest ridge, climbed in 2023, is along the right skyline. The camps along the ridge are shown; advanced base camp and the 4,400-meter col at the base of the ridge are off picture at far right. Ghamubar Zom's main summit is farther to the left.



Photo-topo of Ghamubar Zom V and the route of the first ascent: the northwest ridge.



Simul-climbing on the lower northwest ridge of Ghamubar Zom V.



Kei Narita negotiates a chossy pitch on the 100m-high mixed wall.



Close to the end of the technical crux section of the northwest ridge of Ghamubar Zom V.



Yudai Suzuki dry-tooling a 5.9 finger crack on the northwest ridge of Ghamubar Zom V.



Moving toward the end of the rocky section on the northwest ridge of Ghamubar Zom V.



On the 1.5km snow/ice section of the upper northwest ridge of Ghamubar Zom V.



Traversing a chossy rock section during the descent of the northwest ridge of Ghamubar Zom V.



The Ghamubar Zom massif seen from the north. The 2023 ascent to Ghamubar V starts a little to the right of the edge of the image and finishes on the summit (S).



The northwest ridge of Ghamubar Zom V seen from the southwest.



Kei Narita, Yuu Nishida, and Yudai Suzuki on the summit of Ghamubar Zom V. Behind the ridge continues east to the main summit.



Ghamubar Zom seen from the southern approach.

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