



AAC Publications

Kabru South, West Face

Nepal, Kangchenjunga Himal

Diamonds on the Soles of the Shoes, the first ascent of the west face of Kabru South. To the right is the line attempted by Serbian climbers in 2004. The peak to the right again is Rathong (6,682m). Photo by Peter Hamor.

The Kabru group lies south of Kangchenjunga on the Nepal-Sikkim border. The south peak of Kabru (7,318m) had received only one confirmed ascent: In 1994, a large Indian Army expedition climbed from Sikkim via the Kabru Glacier, finishing up the north ridge. Kabru South has the distinction of being the most southerly 7,000m peak in the world. Our goal was the unclimbed 2,800m Nepalese (west) face.

On April 18, Romano Benet and I (Italy), Bojan Jan (Slovenia), and Peter Hamor (Slovakia) set up base camp in Ramche (4,610m), close to the last tourist lodge on the Kangchenjunga south-side trek. Next day we walked to Oktang, across the Yalung Glacier from the face, left an offering to the gods, then continued across the glacier to the foot of the mountain.

Our plan had been to complete the line attempted in 2004 by a Serbian team. They started the west face with a difficult rock wall—"the most insecure wall we have ever been on"—climbing a very loose 500m couloir to a camp at around 5,200m. Subsequently, they reached a point a little below 6,000m in an icefall, where unstable weather, avalanche risk, and eventually an accident to the leader forced them to abandon the expedition.

Now we could see that the "icefall" had become a waterfall and the couloir continuously raked by rockfall. We needed creative eyes to find a new line, which requires both experience and talent, and it was Romano and Peter who discovered a feasible route farther left.

After establishing a depot at 4,700m, we tackled the first barrier of seracs in poor weather, making Camp 1 on April 27 at 5,100m. The same day, we reconnoitered the seracs above and found a better place to camp. On the next day, we moved the tents a couple of hundred meters higher to the new site and then returned to base camp in heavy snowfall. On May 4 there was a weather window, and we regained our tents and climbed up to 5,600m, before again being forced down by heavy snowfall.

Early on May 9, we began another attempt. Despite so many days of snow and strong wind, we found our two tents at Camp 1 undamaged. The following day, we climbed above the seracs and made Camp 2 in a safe location at 5,700m. The same day, we inspected a route through a second serac barrier and returned to the tents for the night.

On the 11th, we continued through a second serac barrier and found a safe spot for our Camp 3 at 6,200m. Although it looked like blizzard conditions on the ridge above, it was calm at this camp and our weather forecast was optimistic. At 4 a.m. on the 12th, we set out for the summit, still 1,100m above us, in windless conditions.

After a dangerous section of crevasses, we reached "The Funnel," where the steepest climbing began. Swept by days of strong winds, the slope was blue ice at 60° or steeper, with a short, mixed section. We finally arrived at "The Balcony," just below the summit rock pyramid, and from there the going became easier, on hard-packed snow.

Peter reached the summit ahead of us, at 4:30 p.m. Once we all were on top, we started down immediately. The descent, from many Abalakov anchors, took many hours. At 1:30 a.m. on the 13th, we decided it would be wise to stop and bivouac, using a huge ice cave at 6,400m. In the light of our torches, the ice around us shone like it was covered in diamonds.

We were away by 5 a.m. and soon regained our tents at Camp 3, where we could get warm, drink, and recover. The following day we descended to base camp.

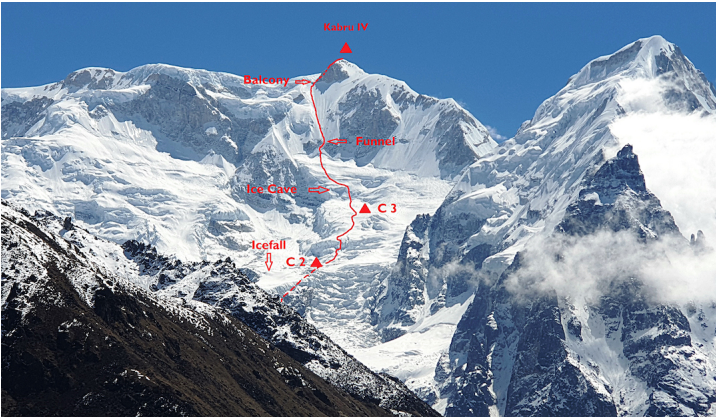
We felt our line had been logical, and it was climbed in a lightweight style with no fixed ropes, fixed camps, or external assistance. However, in bad snow conditions it would be dangerous. We named the route Diamonds on the Soles of the Shoes (2,800m, D+ 60°), modifying the Paul Simon song title as the diamonds were on all of our soles.

– Nives Meroi, Italy

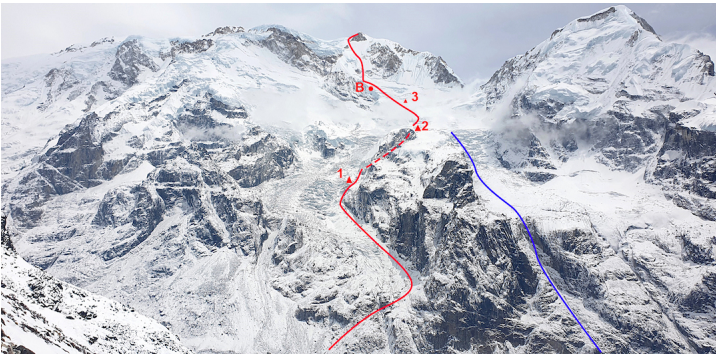
Notes on the Kabru Group: The Kabru peaks have been attempted rarely, and the nomenclature adopted for this collection of high tops on a 2.5km-long summit plateau has proved confusing over the years. Some sources list four peaks (Kabru I to IV). Logic would either dictate an implied geographical definition from north to south or in descending height. However, essentially there are only three defined tops in the Kabru massif, which are perhaps best named, from north to south: Kabru (7,412m on HMG-Finn and other maps, 27°38'03"N, 88°07'06"E); Kabru Central (not marked on the Finn map but 7,338m on the Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research map, 27°37'22"N, 88°07'02"E); and Kabru South (7,318m, HMG-Finn map, 27°36'29"N, 88°06'41"E). A 1994 Indian Army expedition climbed all three peaks, making the first (and only) ascent of Kabru in addition to Kabru South.

The 2023 ascent of Kabru South, only the second, appears to have been the fourth attempt, and the first successful, on any of the Kabru peaks from the Nepalese side. Officially, before 2003, none of the Kabru summits was on the Nepalese government's list of permitted peaks. Kabru South was added in 2003, but the main summit did not appear until 2014.

Images



The Kabru massif from the west showing the 2023 route to Kabru South (7,318m). The main summit is toward the left edge of the picture, while Kabru Central is hidden to the east on the far side of a plateau. The summit on the right is Rathong (6,682m).



Diamonds on the Soles of the Shoes on the west face of Kabru South (7,318m). To the right is the line attempted by Serbian climbers in 2004. The peak to the right again is Rathong (6,682m).



Romano Benet and Nives Moroi on the ice face above the Funnel on the west face of Kabru South.



Near the summit of Kabru South, looking north-northeast across the vast Kabru plateau to Kangchenjunga.



The view to the south from Kabru South, looking along the Sikkim-Nepal divide to Rathong (6,682m, far right) and Kokthang (6,148m, behind it and to the left). Unfortunately, cloud prevented a clear view eastward to the main peaks of Sikkim.

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