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The Northeast Face of Teng Kangpoche

A Brief History of the North Face

Teng Kangpoche (6487m or 6500m) lies just to the west of Kwangde (Kongde Ri, 6187m) in the Rolwaling Himal. It has a broad north face which rises some 2000m above the Thame Khola Valley. Though, the mountain was opened for foreign expeditions in 2002, the summit had already been climbed in 1984 unofficially by the south side by Trevor Pilling and Andy Zimet from UK.

The North Face is divided into the Northwest and the Northeast faces by the stunning Central Pillar. The first attempt to the face was made by the French climbers in 2002 whose exact line is still unknown.

Nick Bullock from UK made two unsuccessful attempts on the face in 2003 and 2004. He first soloed the Northeast Face and emerged onto the East Ridge at 6350m in November 2003 though he failed to get to the summit. He christened his route "Love and Hate" (D+/TD-). Next year he climbed another line on the Northwest Face with Nick Carter. Their route called "Edge of Darkness" (TD+/ED1) emerged onto the West Ridge at 6400m. They again failed to get to the summit.

The Canadians made the first serious attempt to the Central Pillar unsuccessfully in 2006. John Furneaux and Matt Maddaloni reached a high point of 5800m at the base of the headwall in nine days' capsule style attempt. They rated the line ED3, 5.11 A1 and WI6 M8.

Therefore the whole north face had never been completed to the summit when we (Hiroyoshi Manome and me) applied the permission to climb the mountain by the north. But in April 2008, half a year before our departure, it was climbed by Ueli Steck and Simon Anthamatten from Switzerland by the Northwest Face just to the right of the Central Pillar. They christened their route "Checkmate" (IV A0 M7+).

The Northwest Face

We had to choose another line to the left of the Central Pillar. It had been attempted by the Japanese duo—Minoru Nagoshi and Hitoshi Matsushima in the spring of 2005. They climbed the lower slabs of the Central Pillar up to 5100m though they could not dare to step into the Northeast Face due to frequent avalanche dangers.

We became motivated strongly when we had succeeded in the second ascent of the Shark's Fin of Meru, Garhwal Himalaya in 2006. We sought for "steeper and more beautiful line" in the Himalayas since then. "What's next?" was our regular conversation whenever we met together. And we finally found out the North Face of Teng Kangpoche among numerous images being shown by our friend.

We once had thought that the mountain being still unclimbed though, we had to realize it had been already climbed. And moreover, we had been informed that the North Face was also climbed in April by the Swiss duo. But it was no problem for us since our aim was to find out and to climb a new route by ourselves.

Nine days after departing Japan, we reached our base at Tengpo Lodge. We could see the vast north face through the window of the lodge. Every morning we saw the face and observed our line and thought how to climb it. Was it possible? How was the condition of lower slabs? Did they have any crack in it?

We acclimatized on nearby Palchamuche (Palchamo) during 31 October and 3 November. On 9 November, we gave a try to the lower slabs after three days' rest at Thame. Though, it had some cracks, we had to run out in the crux of the day. We returned to the lodge after gaining 5050m and fixing two pitches of ropes in the crux.

Three days later on 12th, we launched the final push to the summit and bivouacked at the rock terrace at 5100m. Next day, we made a good progress on the snow and ice faces. We found a tiny snow terrace at 5650m and made a comfortable bivouac there. It was rather higher than our expectations.

Next day on 14th, we estimated that we could get to the summit in a day and started with lighter equipments leaving sleeping bags and thermoses. The upper ice face turned out to be bigger than our optimistic view and the altitude considerably slowed our progress. The sun was set too early and we forced to find a bivouac site in the darkness. It was 8:00 pm when we dug out a small ledge for the third bivouac at 6150m.

The Summit

It was unexpectedly cold and we could hardly sleep without sleeping bags. We decided to resume climbing before sunrise. As we started at 3:30 am, TV-set large ice blocks suddenly came down along our line. It seemed came down from the upper serac walls. But we couldn't stop climbing as we were so high on the wall and the summit was so close to us.

We were never aware of how long we ran out in the darkness. We cautiously passed the upper serac wall by the sunrise. The summit ridge looked leaving far behind. Already six hours passed after our departure of the bivouac. We decided to speed up by simul-climbing on the final section. Suddenly, I heard Manome crying "This is the summit ridge. The top is at the point-blank range!"

The summit was a cone of fragile sugar-snow and we had to touch it being belayed each other at the lower snow col. It was 10:45 am when we began descent. The snow was so soft to make any anchors useless. We had to use the summit cone itself as a big snow bollard making counter-rappel by our 80m of rope.

We made swift rappels for 12 hours and gained the bottom of the face at 0:30 am next day. We continued our descent and an hour later, toasted with beer and coke at the lodge. It was a happy ending of our two years' dreams for the adventure. Once returned to Japan, we resumed our regular conversation "What's next?"

Summary of Statistics:

Nepal, Rolwaling Himal, Tengkangpoche (6487m), the first ascent of the Northeast Face "Moon Light" (1900m, ED) and the second ascent by the whole north face of the mountain, 12-16 November 2008, Yasushi Okada and Hiroyoshi Manome.



Above/The Northeast Face of Tengkangpoche. Okada-Manome's Moon Light and their bivouacs are marked by a red line. A yellow line to the left indicates an attempt by Kenji Arai and Hiroaki Nagato in the same season.
Opposite top/Climbing on the initial ice, 180m and 80 degree.
Opposite bottom/Carefully going around the serac wall to get to the East Ridge.

