

OSAMU TANABE

The West Face of Nemjung, Alpine Style

The Shinshu University Peri Himal Expedition 2009



The West Face of Nemjung, seen from the base camp.

Nemjung 7,139m is the highest peak of Peri Himal, Central Nepal. The mountain has pyramidal shape and looks difficult from every direction. In fact, despite 16 attempts had been made during 1963–2008, the mountain was climbed only once in 1983, by the Hirosaki University Expedition via the East Ridge. We, Shinshu University Academic Alpine Club had made the first ascents of nearby Gyaji Kang (7,038m) in 1994 and Ratna Chuli (7,035m) in 1996. Both ascents were made by approaching the Phu Khola Valley, on the west side of the massif. Therefore we were familiar to the West Face of Nemjung and thought it would be possible to climb the steep snow/ice face in alpine style.

Ascent of Himlung Himal

Our club decided to send an expedition in autumn 2009 to commemorate the 60th anniversary of its foundation. Our aim was; to climb Himlung Himal 7,126m for acclimatization, then to climb the West Face of Nemjung and to traverse Himjung 7,092m and Himlung Himal in alpine style.

We approached the Marsyandi and Phu Kholas and established base camp at 4,800m on the left bank of the Pangri Glacier on 18 September. We followed the 2004 French route on the Southwest Spur to the West Ridge of Himlung Himal with fixed ropes and camps.

Though our plan was delayed for a week due to heavy snow fall for three days, during 5-7 October, we successfully made the summit on 14 and 15 October. The summiters were; Nobusuke Ohki, Shin Egawa,

Prakash and me, the leader on 14 and Michihiro Kadoya, Yasuhiro and Hiroko (f) Hanatani on 15. To our regret, Tokihiro Takizawa and Taichi Fujimatsu were unsuccessful.

After a few days' rest, we made a reconnaissance to the South Face of Himjung which was our starting point of the traverse. There, we found the face was in surprisingly dry condition. Enormous ice and snow which covered the face had been almost disappeared and we only found bare rocks. It was completely different view from our photographs which was taken from Gyaji Kang 15 years ago. We aborted to climb the face and to traverse both peaks. We're forced to concentrate for the West Face of Nemjung.

Nemjung in alpine style

We had to wait better conditions for over a week at base camp. The whole massif was dominated by the strong winds. Finally we set off our base camp on 27 October. Yasuhiro Hanatani, Michihiro Kadoya, Nobusuke Ohki and me carried 25 kg of heavy pack each which contained six days of food and fuel, a small tent and climbing gear.

It was a 12 km of long distance to reach the bottom of the west face at 6,000m and took us two days of scrambling on the rocky and glacial terrain. We made a bivouac at 5,300m below the icefall after negotiating lower rocky section that day. Next day on 28, we reached the bottom of the wall and fixed all of our four ropes to prepare the route.

On the third day after jumaring for four pitches, Hanatani led the wall inclined 40 to 60 degree. He dared to lead every 60m pitch with one or two protections to keep the speed. The alpine ice was covered with 10cm of firm snow and the condition was perfect. Tanabe and Ohki followed by jumaring and while the former belayed Hanatani on the next pitch, the latter made an anchor (V-thread) for the descent. Kadoya followed with his heavy pack. The four continued steadily though, we couldn't steal out of the face before dusk.

Strong winds and intense colds suffered us after sundown and we feared the frostbite in case of being forced standing bivouac on the face. We continued under the moonlight and could finally emerge onto the



R to L; Nemjung 7,139m, Himjung 7,092m and Himlung Himal 7126m from the base camp.



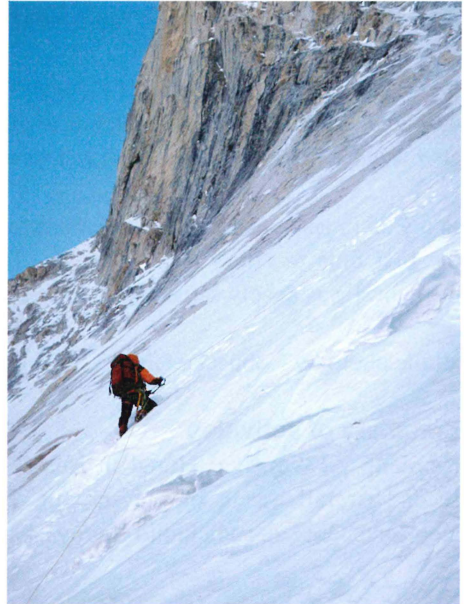
Attack camp (C2) on the West Ridge of Himlung Himal.



Approaching to the west face. The route takes a sunlit face.



Climbing in the lower portion of the face.



Hanatani leading the upper west face.



Climbing on the final summit ridge.



L to R; The author, Kadoya and Hanatani on the summit, with the flag of the university.

summit ridge at 9:00 pm after climbing 18 pitches (by 60m of rope) from the bottom of the wall. We dug a platform and pitched our small tent at 6,840m.

Next day on 30, we finally negotiated the long and complex summit ridge to reach the summit. The summit ridge was heavily corniced for final 150m and we had to traverse a lot of flutings just below the ridge crest. It was difficult to protect properly on such a terrain and sometimes Hanatani had to lead a pitch without any protection for a full length of the rope.

Though we had made the second ascent by a new route in light-and-fast style, there was no joy of the success. We only thought of the safety of the descent. We're completely exhausted to continue descent that day and spent one more night in the tent at the last bivouac.

It was cold in the morning of 31 October. We rappelled the route using V-threads which we had made during the ascent. It took us five hours to gain the starting point of the face. We returned to the base camp after another 12 km of long descent and were greeted by the members who patiently waited us in the camp.

In my 25 times of expedition to the Himalayas, including many 8,000m summits and new routes, it was the first time to climb in alpine style. Though the West Face of Nemjung was technically not so difficult, I was deeply satisfied to climb a beautiful line on an unclimbed face with good friends.

all the photo by Nobusuke Ohki.

Summary of activities

Nemjung 7,139m, Peri Himal in Nepal; the first ascent of the West Face in alpine style and the second overall ascent of the summit, 27-31 October 2009, Osamu Tanabe, Yasuhiro Hanatani, Nobusuke Ohki and Michihito Kadoya (Shinshu University Academic Alpine Club).