

TAMOTSU (TOM) NAKAMURA

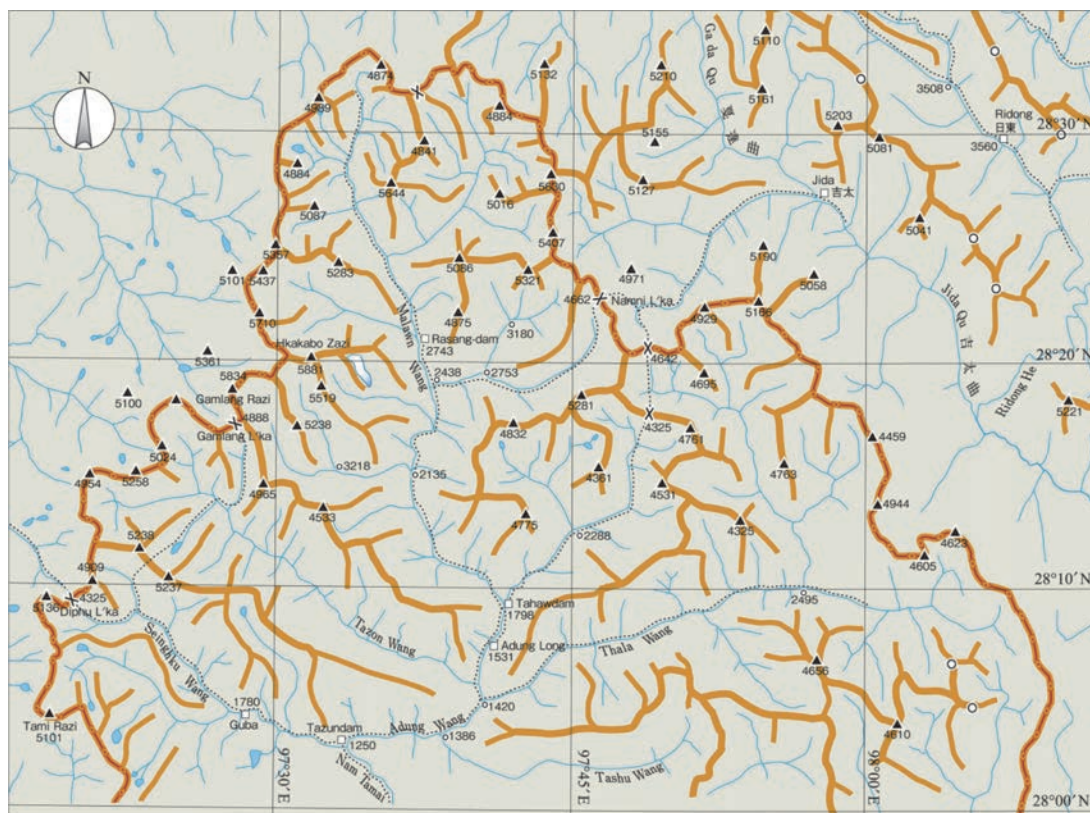
Veiled Mountains in North Myanmar

Hkakabo Razi and Gamlang Razi on Rohit-Irrawaddy Divide

"Where in all the world is to be found scenery comparable to that which awaits the explorer and photographer in northwestern Yunnan Province, China and in the vastness of Tsarung, in southeastern Tibet?"

Few have been privileged to climb the towering ranges separating the mightiest stream of China. The whole region, so geologists tell us, was once one vast, high plateau, now intersected and eroded by some of the longest rivers in the world."

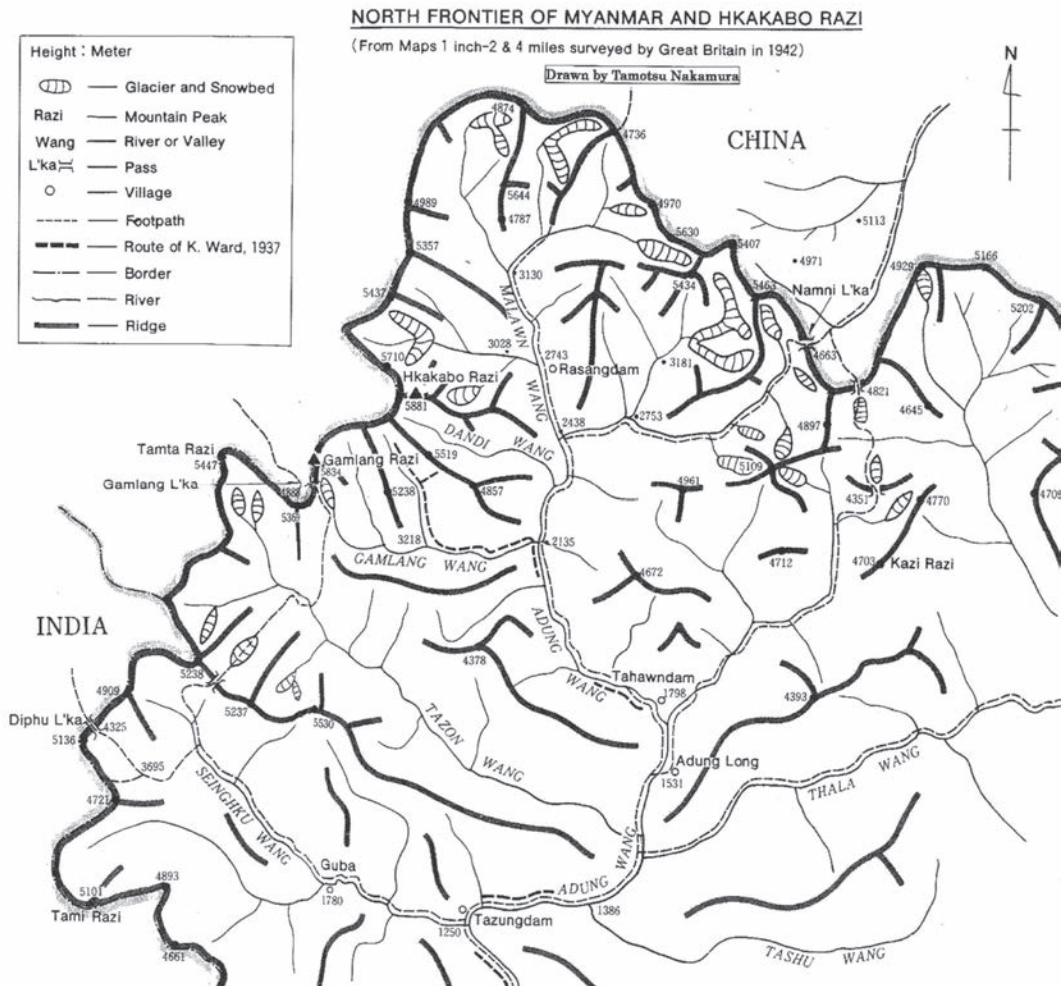
(Joseph Rock, National Geographic Magazine, August 1926).



Map drawn by Tom Nakamura

(This map was drawn being based on Russian topographical map 1:200,000 and maps surveyed by Great Britain in 1942 shown in the following page)

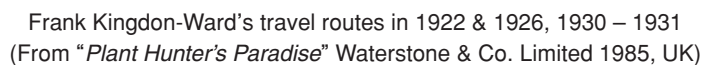
The Irrawaddy and its tributaries have their sources in the mountain range (Chinese name: Dandalika Shan) that spreads over 200km along the border of China (Northwest Yunnan–Southeast Tibet), Myanmar and India. There are two peaks higher than ca. 5,800m which includes Hkakabo Razi 5,881m having been assumed as the highest mountain in Myanmar. There are many small glaciers and snow beds. Hkakabo Razi was first discovered and its height measured by an Indian surveyor in 1923. A plant hunter, Frank Kingdon-Ward is a pioneer to have first explored the mountains in North Myanmar. In 1931 Kingdon-Ward tried an access to the mountains from the Burmese side and in 1937 he reached the upper Adung valley to find climbing routes.

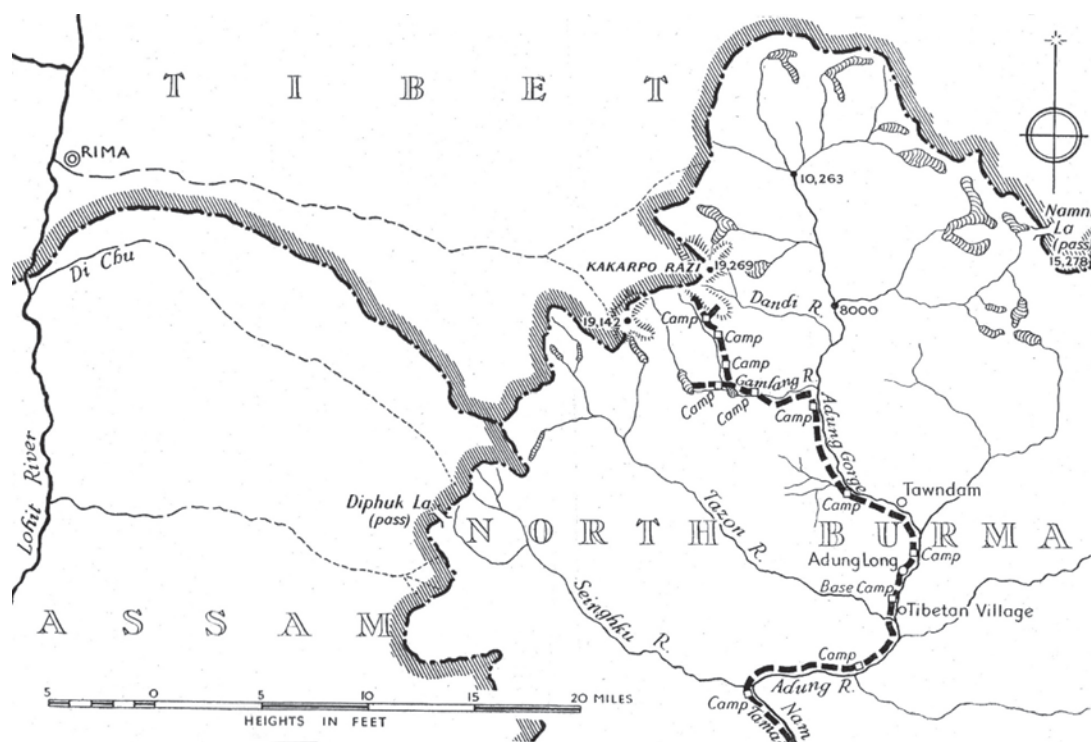


From Maps 1 inches-2 & 4 miles surveyed by Great Britain in 1942

Author's Route 1930-31 =====
 " " 1922 & 1926.....

Scale of Miles





Frank Kingdon-Ward's travel route to Hkakabo Razi in 1937
(From "Burma's Icy Mountains" Jonathan Cape, 1949, London)



Hkakabo Razi

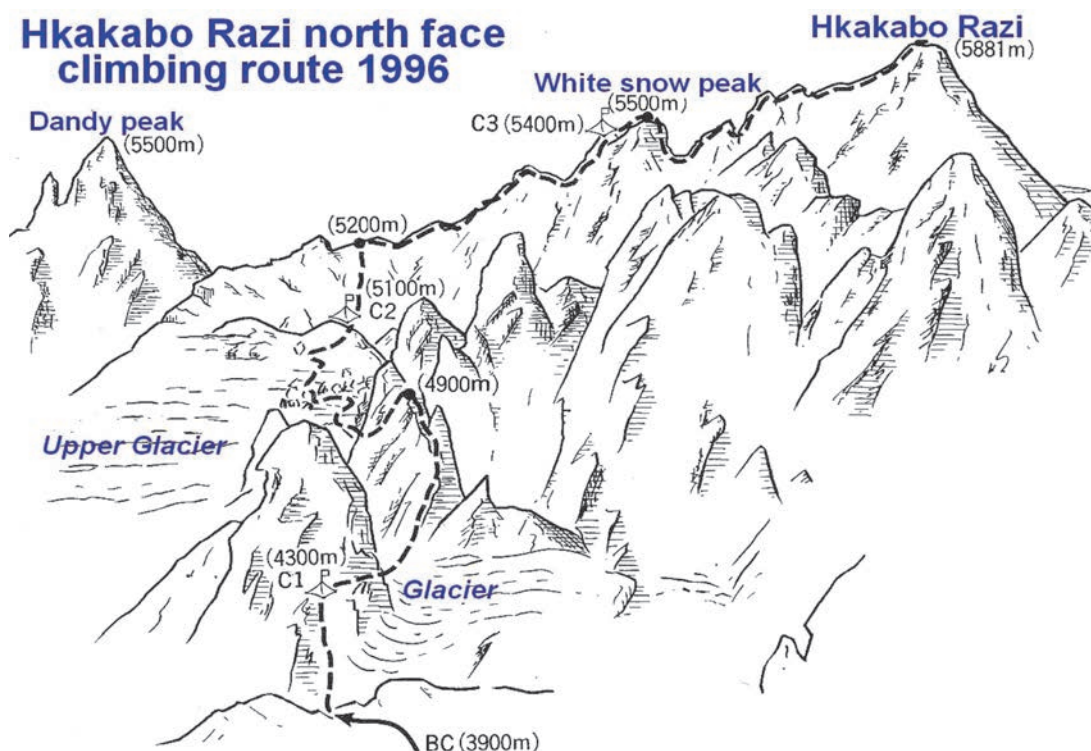
Photo by Shota Kanazawa

Hkakabo Razi has only ever seen one ascent. This can be attributed to both the politics of Myanmar and the utter remoteness of the mountain. The region was closed to foreigners until 1993. It wasn't until 1996 that Takashi Ozaki of Japan made the summit via a climb of the north face of the mountain.

This was after one scouting mission and one failed attempt made by Ozaki in 1995 and early 1996. Ozaki recorded the height of Hkakabo to exactly match that of a British Survey map from circa WWII confirming the altitude to be 5881 meters, or 19,295 feet. This altitude is more consistent with Russian survey maps and modern day Google Earth that put Hkakabo Razi's summit altitude slightly lower than Gamlang. Alas, similar to Gamlang, someone needed to stand atop Hkakabo to solve the mystery.

In September 1996 Takashi Ozaki made the first ascent of Hkakabo Razi with a local villager, Nyima Gyaltzen (AKA "Aung Tse"). The route taken is on the north face then west ridge of the mountain in the upper Adung valley. The footpath was not maintained.

Ozaki wrote in his book published from Yamakei Publishers Co., Ltd. in 1997 "one of the most difficult and dangerous mountains in the world". For this successful ascent Ozaki was awarded the first "Naomi Uemura Prize for Adventure" .



Takashi Ozaki's 1996 route of the North Face of Hkakabo Razi
(Photos of Ozaki's expedition are shown in the last three pages)

In August of 2013 a joint Myanmar-American expedition made the first ascent of Gamlang Razi. Current digital analysis put this peak at 5850m, and Hkakabo Razi, previously thought to be the highest peak, at 5758m.

The expedition attempted to confirm that Gamlang Razi is indeed the highest peak in Myanmar. This is only the second foreign climbing expedition to the high peaks of Myanmar since Frank Kingdon-Ward and Takashi Ozaki. The summit team includes four Americans and two Burmese, Americans Andy Tyson (expedition leader), Molly Tyson, Chris Nance, and Mark Fisher and Burmese Win Ko Ko, and Pyae Phyo Aung.



Panorama: Gamlang Razi – Hhakanbo Razi

Photo by Andy Tyson



Gamlang Razi main peak 5834m (left) south peak (right) Photo by Andy Tyson

In autumn of 2014 two teams challenged Hkakabo Razi. One is from Japan sponsored by NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) and the other is from USA being sponsored by National Geographic. The both teams failed to summit Hhakabo Razi. In summer of this year, on August 31, two Burmese climbers disappeared during a summit bid on Hkakabo Razi. A massive rescue effort was made for two months, but they were not found.

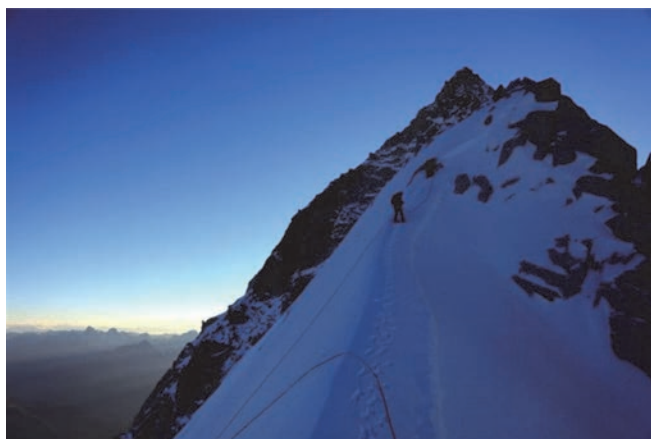
The Japanese party of three climbers, Hiroaki Kuraoka (leader), Kazuya Hiraide and Kenro Nakajima, departed from Yangong on September 12 and started a caravan of 240km from Putao through subtropical rain forest on September 15. BC was set up at 4,000m on October 12. They took a route on the west ridge from the northern side. C1 was placed at 5,000m on October 16 and C2 was at 5,400m on October 21. The west ridge was too long to reach the summit. On October 23, they gave up an advance at about 5,670m due to an impassable large gap on the ridge. They returned from C2 to BC on October 24.



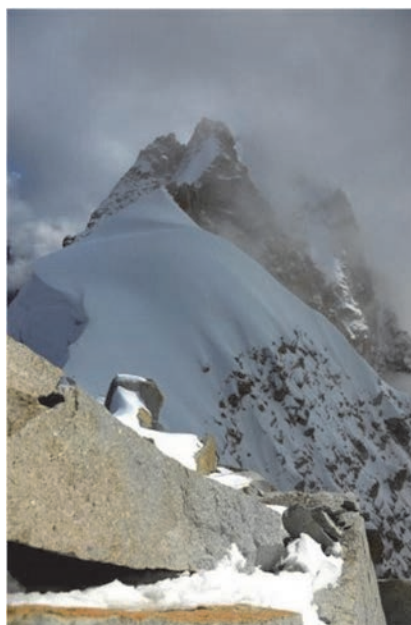
Hhakabo Razi north face, left snow peak is summit. © Kenro Nakajima



Japanese route: from center to west ridge (left) © Kenro Nakajima



Climbing the west ridge © Kenro Nakajima



West ridge © Kenro Nakajima

The American team members were Hilaree O'Neill (expedition leader) Cory Richards, Mark Jenkins, Emily Harrington, Renan Ozturk and Taylor Rees to attempt an ascent of the west ridge via north face of Hkakabo Razi. They hoped to secure an accurate GPS reading from the summit to lay to rest the question of Hkakabo Razi's place as the highest mountain in South East Asia. They established BC at 4,023m on October 30 and a couple of days later C3 was set up at 5,547m on the west ridge. Three climbers, Renan, Cory and Mark continued further push toward the summit, but they had to retreat from a point at 5,742m where Mark Jenkins could finally see the entire route to the summit. The terrain ahead would require one more bivy.

1996 Ozaki Expedition (Photos from Book 1997 of Yamakei Publishers Co., Ltd.)



Top of Hkakabo Razi seen—white peak in center



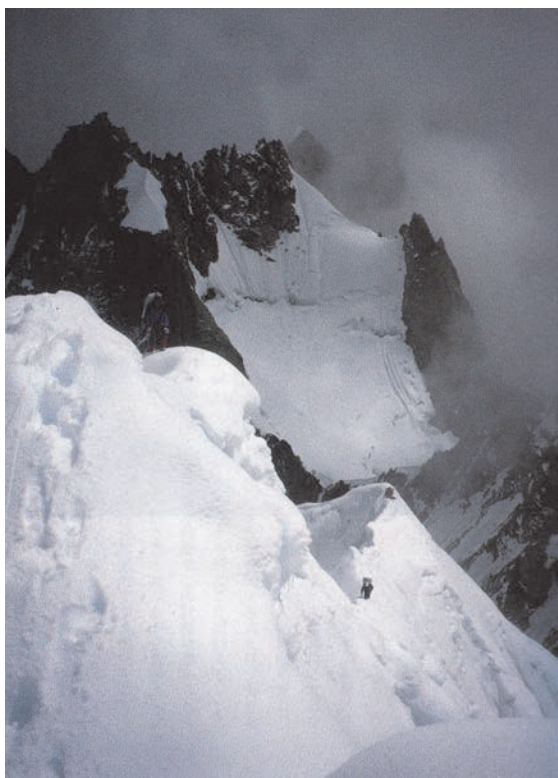
Climbing couloir being exposed to avalanche



Col on large rock ridge seen upward



On the summit of Hhakabo Razi
(left – Nyima Gyaltsen, right – Takashi Ozaki)



Carefully ascending snow ridge



Climbing 40m wall in glacier