

# Annapurna I South Face 2003

– Meiji's last 8000m Peak –

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What meaning do you find in climbing mountains? Some super-human alpinists may chase unclimbed huge walls of Himalayan giants by the alpine style, in order to challenge the margin of human power. Good for them if successful at all risks! Meiji's spirit is in enjoying high-grade mountaineering experience, sharing it among fellows who belong to its Club consisting of Meiji University Mountaineering Club and Robata-Club composed by its graduates. The Club members always intend to do safe and sound climbs which are firmly supported by systematic trainings being conducted among its members. Spiritual unity obtained through such a continuous exercise would sustain a strong confidence in your mountaineering when you undertake it together with the group members. The Club association itself may result in a true fulfillment of your human-like feelings and through which you would be given the real enjoyment much more than those given from individual physical satisfaction. Why don't you change your motivation to mountaineering in such a way?

Therefore, we have been aiming at scaling all 8000m peaks by our fellow members since a long time ago, and now the last one, Annapurna I left as the final target. This goal-setting originates from the framework of climbing method taken by the Club since its foundation 80 years ago: that is to strengthen physical power for the climbing more than to polish technical capability, and to nurture high spirits not to give up the summit even in adverse conditions more than to learn techniques for high-grade crag and ice. The modern trend is said to climb "light and fast". To hell with it! We always will follow the steady-going way. Group mountaineering of that sort is just the tradition of Meiji. Therefore, we forget about showy climbs such as those relying on too much artificial aid or those to seek after the fame on targets of unclimbed but only boast of risky elements, and instead we have tried to make really orthodox endeavors to climb all the 14 eight-thousanders one by one. This was initiated by Naomi Uemura, a member of Robata-Club, to ascend Everest in 1970 although it was not made as the event by Meiji but as a member of Japanese Alpine Club Expedition. Since then up to 13 peaks were attained by 2002, and we formed a team consisting of members who are all summiteers of some of 8000m peaks in order to finish this series with Annapurna I in 2003.

The best route to scale Annapurna I is via its south face in view of avoiding uncalculated risks from avalanches. In the previous year after the success of Lhotse we made a reconnaissance climb of the south face up to its wall base, and confirmed our confidence to scale it through the 1970 British route. The short record of our 2003 expedition was as follows:

March 15<sup>th</sup>: We joined with Sirder Pertemba and all Sherpas in Kathmandu. Pertemba was also with us on Manaslu and Lhotse, whom we always regard as the best partner.

March 29<sup>th</sup>: After approach march up to Machapuchare B.C. suffering from rain falls everyday, we established B.C. at 4200 m having repeated 6 times load carries by 36 porters. Then, rope-fixing work was started under continued snow falls coming every afternoon.

C1-C2: We had to go through a concave snow wall, exposed to avalanche when the sun came out, but somehow avoiding them. As "ascender" might cut the rope when avalanched snow would heavily push it, we could not use it.

C2-C3: Mainly snow or ice walls but not technically difficult. Even in still continued bad weather, we could climb there as scheduled.

April 26<sup>th</sup>: Reached such a “Flat Iron” 7150 m. Thereafter, due to deteriorating weather, all once evacuated down to BC. So bad climate we faced that there we even had a 60 cm snowfall in a night. As the British team reported, the clouds coming up from the valley below always overshadowed the sky and the snow used to hide morning clearness every days. (Luckily enough, however, the only one day without snowfall was our summit day!).

May 6<sup>th</sup>: We restarted the climb. C2 was deeply hidden in the snow, and it took us the whole 2 days to dig out tents in the snow 3 m below.

May 12<sup>th</sup>: We got through the 100m Rock wall above “Flat Iron”. Very unsound rock of V grade. Remaining fixed rope helped us to find the route. Pitched C3 on snow wall above the Rock. But just as we could cut out only a small shelf by 1m wide or so, it was nearly like a forced bivouac to stay there. We had to stay there on bended knees without sleep at the previous night before the summit bid. May 16<sup>th</sup>: Started at 3:00 a.m. and reached the snow field below “Mini Rock Band” around 7:00 a.m. From there a long knife-edged snow ridge continued through where we somehow negotiated with much struggle, and then finally we attained the summit ridge around 2:00 p.m. By good luck fairly good weather continued during the climb. One small peak after another, and while embarrassing to identify which should be the highest, at last we came up to the top at 2:40 p.m.

Returned to C3 late at 8:00 on that day, and on 16th went down to BC taking more than double time than usual due to desperate fatigue, but now we finished all our activities on the mountain without any accidents and mostly taking the lead by ourselves during the climb.

Surely we have to admit our luck in various respects assisted us in this success, but it may be reasonably modest for us to be insistent that the victory was created through our Club’s spirits and orthodox practice nourished through a long time experience.



