

Attempt on North Ridge of Tengi Ragi Tau

JAC Senior Expedition 2004

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Tengi Ragi Tau (6,943m) is one of the peaks of the Seventh Goddess in the Rolwaling Himal and its pyramidal peak can be seen from Namche Bazaar, located on the north side of the Tesi Lapche La in Nepal. When the Government of Nepal opened this mountain in 2002, the Japanese Alpine Club (JAC) planned to organize a Senior Expedition to this mountain in pre-monsoon 2003. Tengi Ragi Tau was selected as an ideal target for seniors who wished to climb a virgin peak with such prerequisites as easy approaches, appropriate altitude and a manageable route for seniors without oxygen support. This mountain, however, was climbed for the first time via the South East face (Tesi Lapche La side) in December 2002 by a Japanese party, as reported in the Japanese Alpine News, Vol. 3. Nevertheless, Tengi Ragi Tau remained unchanged as the target for the JAC Senior Expedition 2004 because of the unclimbed route via the North Ridge. The party was composed of six senior members, who were 59 years old on average, with six climbing sherpas and four kitchen staff members.

Approaches

On the 17th April, after spending three days of acclimatization at Thame, we took a trek along the Bhote Koshi, and then went into Langmoche Khola at Mingbo village. From Langmoche, a half day's walk led to a place in a vast valley. There, just above Dig Tsuo, there was a glacial lake, which caused floods almost 20 years before, destroying villages along Langmoche Khola. With another half day's walk on the 18th April, we arrived at our base camp site at around 4,700m, below the glacial moraine descending from the pyramidal peak of Pamalka (6,344m). Our sherpas set up Camp-1 (5,300m) on the 21st April at a site just beside the mouth of the glacier between Pamalka and Langmoche Ri, but it snowed daily at BC. This regular snowfall hindered the start of the route above C-1 as well as acclimatization.

Camp-1 to Camp-2

On 25th April we set off from BC in snowfall to extend a route above C-1, and next day reached a saddle at 5,800m between Pamalka and Langmoche Ri. The route from C-1 negotiated the glacier up to a rocky section located far below the saddle. Then, we escaped this rocky section by traversing just under the solid rock face until a prominent couloir leading upward to the saddle appeared. Concerned over the risk of avalanches, we took a route on the right side of a ridge. This ridge section had loose rocks which obliged us to fix several ropes in a zigzag way until we came out to the snow slope leading upward steeply to the saddle between Pamalka and Langmoche Ri. When we first reached this saddle on 27th April the neve was in perfect condition and we pitched Camp-2 there. Langmoche Ri (approx. 6,600m) rose awesomely steeply from the other end of an easy snow slope which continued from C-2. This sharp crest of Langmoche Ri on the North Ridge was anticipated as the most difficult obstacle for us.

Bad weather at the col

During the 29th and 30th April we tried to further a route along the West ribs which sharply dropped from the top of it. But this route was abandoned because of knee-deep snow at the easy slope from C-2, and waist to chest-deep snow at the point from where we tried to haul ourselves up to the

West ribs. We actually opened a route in deep snow, but next morning our efforts were reduced to nil due to strong winds bringing a lot of snow. The saddle between Pamalka and Langmoche Ri seemed to act as a funnel for winds from the Rolwaling Himal side. During the night of 30th April, the wind was so strong that we could not go out of our tents and nobody could sleep well. As the next morning again started with a chilling strong wind, all team members and sherpas retreated to BC.

Final point reached at 6,250m

On 3rd May, we set off from Base Camp to open an alternative new route to tackle Langmoche Ri directly along the flank just below the top. Arriving at C-2 on 4th May, however, strong wind again stopped our further progress. After overnight winds, it dawned calm next morning on 5th May, so we started trail breaking, this time along the highest part of an easy slope which fortunately led us to crusty parts. Then the slope led steeply upwards to a point at 6,100m, from where we climbed a couloir located in the middle of the snow flank of Langmoche Ri. Even at a steep angle of about 60 degrees, we progressed smoothly along the route with five fixed ropes. Beyond this couloir which became increasingly steep, thin ice-covered slabs appeared above at 6,250m. A young sherpa tried to negotiate this difficult section for almost one hour while we were exposed in the couloir to continuous blasts of chilling spindrift avalanches, but finally gave up. Our Sirdar also tried to tackle these slabs for a while, but came back with discouraging words, saying that he could not manage those icy slabs because pitons could not be placed. We had to climb down to C-2.

Ironically, the weather was ideal on 6th May. We looked up to where we had reached the day before and found that the ice-covered slabs were so big that we felt it would be very difficult to escape danger below the slabs on either side. These slabs, due to continued bad weather on previous days, almost formed a part of the snow flank, being completely absorbed in snow. Continued bad weather had made them indistinct. Now, we were short of ropes and food for another attempt. We wanted to find a possible route on the east side of the flank even with the limited ropes and food remaining at C-2. But our sharps were completely discouraged with these failures on the West ribs and the technically difficult couloir route. We had to admit that our physical competence was inadequate to establish another route by ourselves without support from the sherpas, which was not forthcoming.

Issue

Thus, our party of seniors failed to achieve the primary objective of opening a virgin route, highlighting the issue of choice for senior climbers: either attempting to climb unexplored mountains, or compromising, by joining so-called “Commercial Expeditions”. In the latter we would find it difficult to gain the true achievement that can be derived from the basic principle of alpinism.

On 10th May, we cleaned the site of our base camp for returning to Lukla.

Members:

- Leader Ryouzai Nakahara (61)
- Climbing Leader Masayoshi Fujii (57)
- Climbing Members Minoru Tsubakuro (61)
Isao Iguchi (59)
Yoshimoto Naruse (57)
Hisa Naruse (57)
- Climbing Sherpas Six men

