

Mustang Expedition of JAC Students' Party 2004

First Ascent of Chhiv Himal (6,650m) in Damodar Himal, Nepal

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Four members of the Japanese Alpine Club Student Section to Mustang, Nepal, made the first ascent of Chhiv Himal (6,650m) on September 18th, 2004. On the following day, all five members of the expedition reached the summit of Saribung (6,328m); it was the second ascent of the peak, but via a new route.

1. The passage to a hidden Himalaya

Located in the northernmost part of central Nepal, the Kingdom of Mustang is a frontier region that well preserves an old form of Tibetan Buddhist culture. The Damodar mountain group is located in the eastern part of Mustang. To reach it we followed the main trading route to Lo Manthang, the capital of Mustang, as far as Ghami. The old trading route first follows the broad riverbed of the Kali Gandaki, then at a point near Kagbeni it goes into a gorge area to enter the territory of the Kingdom of Mustang. At Ghami, our caravan veered from the main route and headed toward the east, following a tributary of the Kali Gandaki. After crossing three passes all exceeding 5,000m, we suddenly saw the magnificent group of mountains of the Damodar Himal. It was a nine-day trek from Jomson (including one rest day).

With Khumjungar Himal (6,759m) as the main peak, the group of mountains encircles the Namta Khola glacier in a horseshoe form. One wing of the mountains extends northeast towards the border with Tibet. The newly climbed Chhiv Himal (6,650m) is an independent (and previously unclimbed) peak located to the southeast of Khumjungar Himal.

Team Members

Leader : Takeshi Wada (23), Chiba University Alpine Club
 Deputy-Leader: Takeo Yoshinaga (23), Waseda University Alpine Club
 Team Members: Kenichiro Kato (23), Rikkyo University Alpine Club
 Yuko Shibata (22), Gakushuin University Alpine Club
 Mitsuhiro Kosei (19), Waseda University Alpine Club

2. Description of the Climbing and Exploration

On September 8th, we set up the Base Camp (5,250m) at the end of the glacier which flows northeastward from the foot of Chhiv Himal. From BC we went up along the moraine on the left side of the glacier and made Camp 1 at 5,650m on September 11th.

To reach C2 from C1 it was necessary to cross the glacier, about 1km wide at the crossing point. The left bank of the glacier was deeper than the rest. The whole glacier field was filled with seracs (ice blocks or towers), some of which were 20m tall at their highest points. The glacier was followed by a moraine band flowing down from a 6,225m peak in northeast to southwest direction. We took a route along this moraine band (10m in width) toward the upper field. As the sun rose, the bottom part of the 6,225m peak became dangerous due to frequent falling rocks from the ridge. In addition, the snow plateau that led to the west face of Saribung was fraught with hidden crevasses. Therefore, we set up Camp 2 on the col (6,170m) between Chhiv Himal and Saribung, on September 15th.

<Chhiv Himal>

The northwest face of Chhiv Himal is shrouded in snow due to the strong wind, while its eastward side is a rocky structure. Further away a cornice develops towards the northwest. On September 16th we had to set the route to Chhiv Himal. We worked in two groups: one advanced the route to the summit and the other carried up the equipment and provisions to C2. The route to be taken was on the ridge that came down northeastward from the peak. To reach the ridge we first descended from the col about 10m, then climbed a 15m steep mixed wall. On the ridge we followed a snowy razorback that had rocky features on its east side. It continued for the length of three rope pitches until we were faced by the massive base of a snow wall that had a rather steep face of about 60 degrees. It took four pitches to climb that wall. Fortunately the snow condition was sound. On top of the wall the ridge became flat and led to the summit. At this point (6,450m), we stopped the advance for the day and returned to C2.

September 17th

All five team members started from C2 to climb Chhiv Himal. It only took three hours to reach the top of the snow wall as against nine hours on the day before. From there we continued along the gentle ridge and fixed some ropes here and there.

The sharp ridge with a developed cornice leading to the 6,610m peak turned out to be the critical point. When we reached the 6,610m peak, almost all our snow pickets and fixed ropes had been used. The weather becoming worse, we decided to return to C2.

September 18th

Four team members started from C2 to the peak. On the way we retrieved some of the fixed ropes for use on the final ridge to the summit. Unfortunately the visibility was poor because of the fog. From 6,610m the party carefully followed the knife-edged ridge of snow which was often indistinguishable in a whiteout. Finally at 13:15, after following the snow ridge for two more pitches, the four team members reached the broad snow stance of the summit (the first ascent of Chhiv Himal) The total length of the ropes we fixed was approximately 850m.

<Saribung>

September 19th

All five team members started from C2 to the summit. The route selected was the south ridge. As the south face of Saribung is fortified by rock walls and several crevasses, we proceeded carefully, fixing seven pitches of rope before we reached the summit (snow wall — snow ridge — traverse of an icy snow wall — a gentle ridge).

By 12:30 all five team members made the second ascent of the peak, via a new route.

As the base snow layer was icy, we used a lot of ice screws to make anchors. As we approached the summit, the inclination became milder to a point where a gentle snow slope appeared.

The ascent was planned and executed with no assistance from climbing Sherpas.

First Ascent of Saribung 2003 - a report from AAC members

American Alpine Club Cascade Section Chair Peter Ackroyd, Board of Director Member Steve Furman, and Past President Jim Frush, made the first ascent of 6328m (20,760 ft) Saribung (Selibun) in the Damodar Himal north of the Annapurnas in October.

In 2002, while making the first ascent of 6110m Gaugiri further north in the range, Peter and Jim gazed to the south and viewed a handsome range of mountains that, to our knowledge, had been little explored much less climbed. Saribung is located much more in the center of the range and was therefore more inaccessible.

We flew from Kathmandu to Honge, in the Manang Valley on October 2, 2003. From there we dropped down valley to the village of Chame, then north on our journey up the Phu Khola. Steve and Jim had explored the Phu Khola in 2000 and had made the first ascent of an unnamed 6152m peak a couple of days northeast of the last village, Phu. We had no idea of what the upper valley might present. The map indicated a trail that ran up to the border, but the maps are notoriously unreliable.

A guide with horses was hired in the village of Phu to lead us to the upper part of the valley and he showed us a high route that was not on the map. We reached the Khamjungar Khola and the edge of the Bhatchauk glacier in a couple of days. As far as what might lie up the Bhatchauk glacier, our “guide” had no information. There was absolutely no reason to go up there as there was no grazing. A few peaks above this valley have been climbed from the north and the west, never from this side, and we were without question the first foreign group to traverse the glacier's eight-mile length and perhaps the first humans to set foot there.

After several days of exploration of the glacier and its nasty moraine, we finally sighted our objective - Saribung - only visible above base camp. Base camp was on a very cold, flat spot on the glacier at 5360m and received no more than six hours of sunlight a day.

A few days later, we established and occupied a high camp on the edge of the moraine below Saribung at approximately 5700m. Our day moving up to stay at the high camp was punctuated with an early morning evacuation of a porter with pulmonary edema. He was evacuated from Phu by helicopter a couple of days later and recovered completely.

On October 15, we negotiated the lower ice fall and began encountering difficult snow conditions. We reached the north col and could see into the heart of the Damodar range. Steep unconsolidated snow, interrupted with crevasses and breakable crust, caused us to take some eight hours to gain the last 600 vertical meters. When the peak steepened to 70-80 degrees near its summit it became difficult to gain elevation. We attempted the last few pitches to the top by the northeast ridge but could not make progress and were required to finish up on the steep headwall at the top of the north ridge. The view from the top was incredible with monstrously twisted summits and glaciers all about us, the Annapurnas and Dhaulagiri to the south. To the north we could make out last year's peak, Gaugiri.

The descent was largely unremarkable and we were soon headed out to Kathmandu down the Annapurna circuit trail to Besi Sahar. The only incident was a close encounter with Maoists who

entered one of the villages we stayed in. To avoid conflict we were awakened in the middle of the night and took flight out of the village, avoiding all conflict with the Maoists.

This was our fourth trip to the Range in four years, and each one has produced at least one first ascent of a 6000m peak.

Jim Frush, Peter Ackroyd and Steve Furman



The north face of Chhiv Himal 6550m viewed from moraine zone on the glacier



The southwest face of Saribung 6328m viewed from the ridge to the summit of Chhiv Himal



