

OSAMU TANABE

# Lhotse South Face Winter Ascent JAC Tokai Section—Dream has come true



Overall view of the Lhotse South Face  
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Readers might recall the first attempt in December 2001 published on the JAN (Japanese Alpine News) vol. 2 April 2002 and the second challenge in 2003 on the JAN vol. 5 May 2004. Many of alpinists paid a keen attention to the ambitious venture. Late Bradford Washburn wrote to the past JAC president, H. Ohotsuka “----- I am particularly interested by announcement that a Japanese team is planning an attack on the great South Face of Lhotse during the coming winter. Be sure to report to me about the results!! October 15, 2001” In 2003, we attained as high as 8250m. We called it near ascent.

A Japanese proverb says that success would come for the third time. In December, 2006, we could achieve the complete ascent of the South Face in winter. However, there had been a hard way before us. When we were defeated in 2003, I felt personally that I would no longer come back to Lhotse. It would be possible to draw climbing tactics, but falling rocks are too dangerous. The fact that no accidents took place in the previous two attempts on such a crucial route is to be much appreciated. I told myself that we might be proud for and satisfied with safety climbs. I was very much afraid that we could not do the third attempt without fatal accidents. I asked myself “Can I never climb this face again?” Frustration caused regretful tears, and I noticed that I had wanted to really climb the south face so attracting.

In 2005, I joined an expedition from Gunma Pref. Mountaineering Federation to Nanga Parbat and shared enthusiasm with a member, Noriyuki Kenmochi. This occasion triggered the third challenge. We soon resumed moving forward to the Lhotse South Face. Fortunately six strong and experienced climbers gathered. We increased numbers of climbing Sherpas from 15 to 18. A powerful team was organized to ensure the success. A team of the Gunma Federation had succeeded in the first winter ascent of the southwest face of Everest in 1993.

On September 3, 2006, the team departed from Japan first for Xishabangma, where the members were acclimatized to high altitude and trained for climbing. In spite of heavy snow, all the members reached to the main summit 8,027m on October 9. After a rest in Kathmandu, we entered BC at 5,200m on the right bank of the Lhotse Glacier. There we met a Korean party led by Lee Choongjik. They were very friendly and of a good nature. We decided to conduct a joint operation on the south face, and accordingly route paving work was made together. 6,000m ropes were brought in and 5,700m ropes were used.

The south face that I saw after three years was guarded with much snow because of heavy snowfall in the autumn.

On November 18, we started climbing and on the 21st C1 was set up on the same spot as 2003 at 5,900m. Thereafter the onset of wind bothered the members. The wind was not as fierce as in mid winter but it was strong enough to blow out Senda and Yamamoto 10m away near 6,800m on November 28. The two climbers did not fall down as they were protected by fixed ropes, but it was very difficult to advance. The strong wind caused powder avalanche, and subsequent falling rocks often attacked Sherpas who were ferrying up the loads. Casualties of Sherpas which happened in succession reduced important resources and potentials. Irrespective of facing such hardship, however, on December 1, C2 was set up at 7,100m and on the 6th a provisional C3 was placed at 7,300m. On December 7 we could overcome a difficult pitch on the rock wall above the provisional C3, but the strong

wind of the following day stopped our activities for five days. Pre-winter ceased on the Christmas day in normal year, and afterward a cold and violent gale of winter starts to blow and makes climbing impossible. In the beginning, therefore, we judged Christmas was a time limit. But our climbing speed was so slow that we were much delayed and forced to postpone the time limit for continuing climbs. Fortunately monsoon season lasted longer in 2006 than normal year, and consequently winter came later too.

Climbing started again on December 13 onward. One of reasons for the failure in 2003 was considered to be location of C3 which was set up 150m lower than having been planned. In the 2006 operation, Tanabe party consisting of Yamaguchi, Ngawang Tenzi Sherpa took charge of route paving to C3 and steadily got the route advanced to 8,000m. On December 21, long waited C3 was established and Senda party consisting of Kenmochi and Pema Tsering Sherpa commenced an assault to the summit. Collaborating with An Chiyong of the Korean party, they ascended forward. At that moment I estimated that three days climb would take us to the summit, and I hoped the Japan-Korea joint team to finish the first winter ascent of the Lhotse South Face. Senda party chose a route different from that of 2003. They entered a couloir which went up to the left shoulder to the summit. They gained height step by step but reached only to 8,200m in three days. Time constraint let them give up continuing climb. Korean also kept pace with Japanese. Tanabe party consisting of Yamaguchi, Pemba Choti Sherpa took over Senda party.

On December 26, the first day after the take-over, Tanabe party climbed up to the upper part of the couloir 200m away from a point where Senda party returned. We found an old fixed rope left in the couloir. It was a big surprise as I thought that nobody ever climbed the couloir and naturally never imagined of forerunners. The last part of the couloir was a vertical rock wall of 20m with no cracks which was impossible to break through. The forerunners' footsteps disappeared here. I believed that the couloir would be a feasible route to the left shoulder of the summit. But actually it was a dead end. The only possible line seemed an apparently fragile rock wall on the left side of the couloir. This wall led to the summit ridge and we must once descend and again ascend the ridge in order to stand atop. That was an exhausting toil, but there remained no alternative option. To be prepared for the next day, after having advanced by 50m pitch along the left side of the couloir, we returned to the camp.

On the 27th Yamaguchi opened a route boldly traversing the fragile wall. We continued to climb. When we finished an extremely difficult push on snow face which was nearly vertical and made of snow like glass-powder, we found ourselves on the summit ridge at 8,475m. Everest with snow streams was viewed just in our front. The time was 15:35. At last we accomplished the complete winter ascent of the Lhotse South Face. It was a moment when I was deeply touched and my dream came true. There still remained about 200m to the summit in horizontal distance from a point where we stood on the ridge. We must have descended and again ascended the ridge, if we had adhered to the summit. We had no surplus energy to do so and returned from there without hesitation.

Now I recollect the hard but enjoyable days inspired by the giant wall. The Lhotse South Face was a Goddess to have warmly kept a close watch and protected us from dangers. During the three times expeditions, nobody was lost and suffered from frostbites. No single finger was lost. We were not merely fortunate, but the Goddess blessed

and led us to success safely.

Our route of 2006 largely detoured around a rock wall at 8,200m which reportedly Tomo Cesen had climbed in 1990. The party which ascended the upper part of the couloir is supposed to be Slovenian team having challenged in 1981.

Expedition members:

General Leader—Noboru Onoe (63)

Leader—Osamu Tanabe (45)

Deputy-leader—Atsushi Senda (32)

Members—Katsuhito Fujikawa (41)

Noriyuki Kenmochi (37)

Takahiro Yamaguchi (33)

Toshio Yamamoto (32)

BC Manager - Goro Takenaka (46)



Route paving above C1. (Yamakei Publishers)



View from near C2. W face of Makalu is seen far away. (Yamakei Publishers)



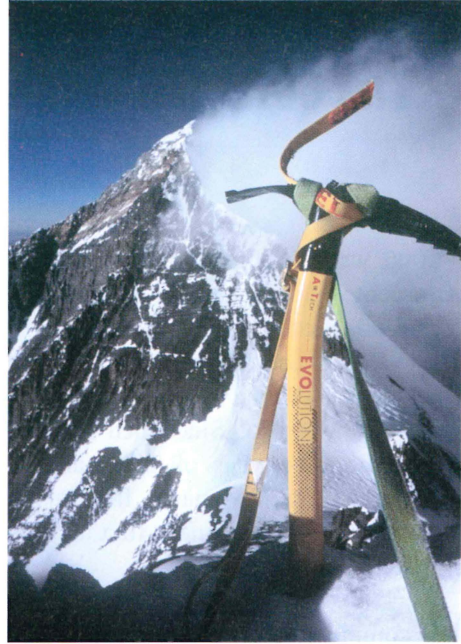
Climbing the upper part of couloir at 8,300m (Yellow rock wall in the uppermost of the couloir was detoured around to the left.)



Traversing fragile rock wall at 8,350m to detour around the uppermost of couloir to the left



Yamaguchi leading a push at 8,470m just beneath the summit ridge



Everest viewed from the summit ridge at 8,475m after finishing ascent of the south face



Top of Lhotse viewed from 8,400m just beneath the summit ridge