

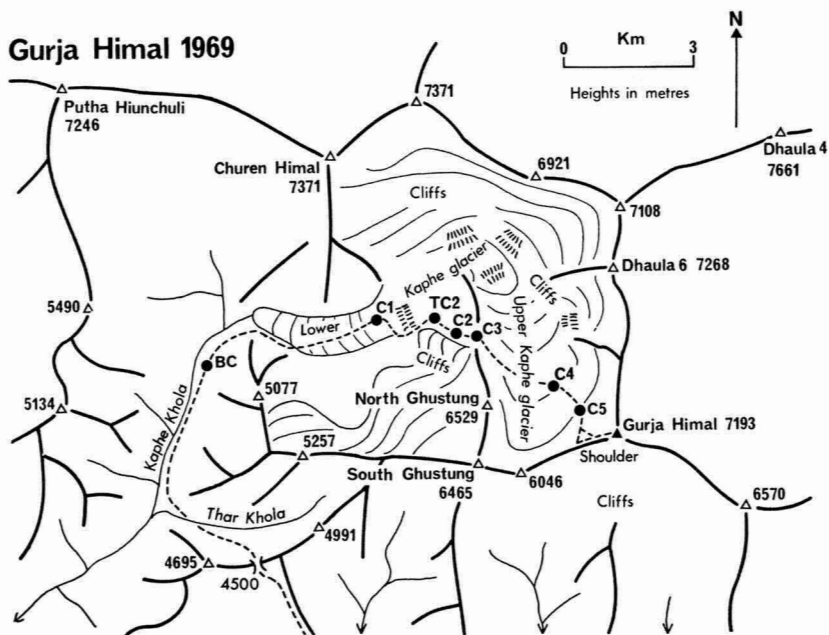
Gurja Himal: first ascent, 1969

Yoshimi Yakushi

After the long period of waiting during the years 1965–8 when Nepal was closed to mountaineering expeditions, we at last, in mid-1969, received permission to attempt our second choice, Gurja Himal, 7193 m, that autumn.

Gurja Himal, known locally as Dhaulashri, is the lowest of the Dhaulagiri range, and has, consequently, tended to be overlooked by the various expeditions in favour of the higher peaks of Dhaulagiri itself, Churen Himal, Putha Hiunchuli, and so on. It looks impressively steep from the south, so we decided to use the rather long (12–13 km) approach from the west which James Roberts had taken in 1962 and 1965 (*A.J.* 68 188–97, 71 75–88 and 73 113–14), to the upper basin of the Kaphe glacier. The lower part of this route had also been visited by various Japanese trekking groups more recently, as far as the Base Camp of the 1965 R.A.F. expedition

Although we had a great deal of help in Nepal from Indra Man, Govinda Man, and Amrit Prasad Serchans of the Thakalis, who had been among my best friends since my first visit in 1965 (*Sangaku* 1967 83–100), we suffered very



12 Gurja Himal, showing the route of the 1969 Japanese party Sketch map based on material supplied by Yoshimi Yakushi: heights consistent with Dr Harka Gurung's 1968 1:250,000 map 'Annapurna and Dhaulagiri Himal'



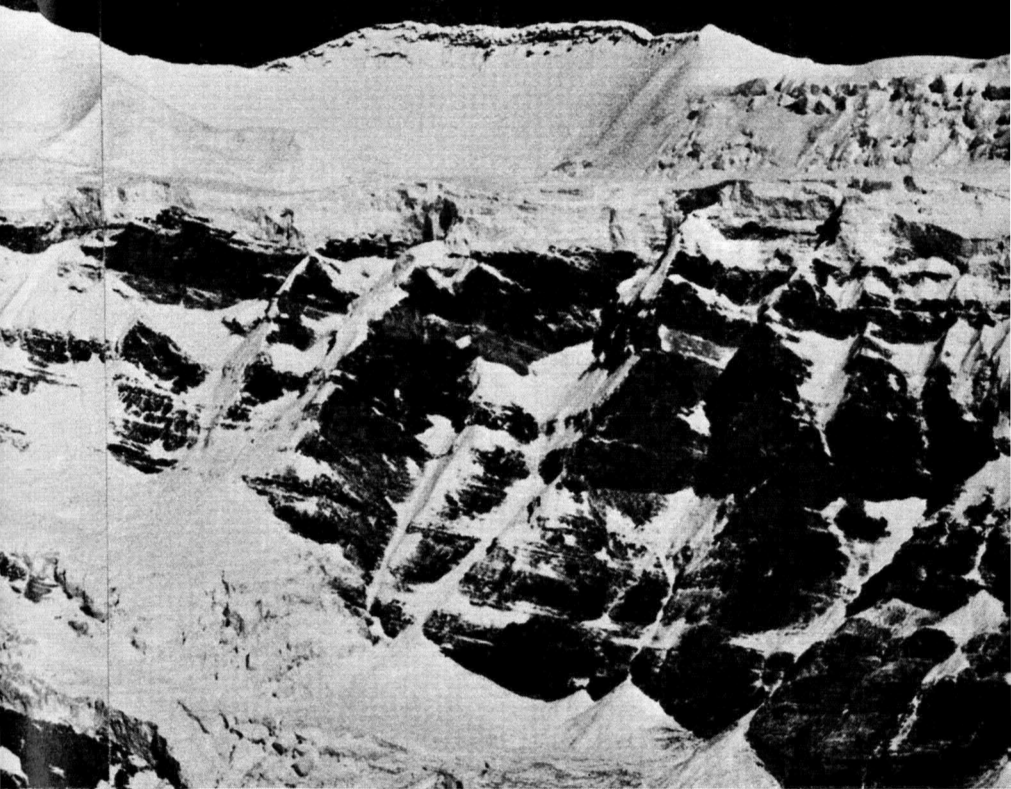
Putha
Hiunchuli
7246m

13 *The East face of Churen Himal from Camp 3* This and next photos: Yoshimi Yakushi

serious delays stemming largely from the late arrival of our equipment in Kathmandu. As a result, although we arrived in Nepal on 28 August, we were not able to leave Pokhara until 21 September and arrived at our Base Camp at the end of the side moraine of the Kaphe glacier (4100 m) on 4 October, after a very wet and tiring approach, including crossing the Budzunge Bara Pass (4500 m) in a snow-storm.

Porters of Gurjakhani call this area 'Dhuptel'. It has a most bracing Alpine atmosphere, overhung as it is by Churen Himal. Moreover, the rainy season seemed to have ended, for the weather was generally fine from now on. Mountaineering activities were begun towards Gurja Himal the following day. Some members who had stayed at Pokhara and Gurjakhani arrived at our Base Camp on 7 and 8 October, bringing three sheep and several hens with them, besides the rest of our baggage. For the first time since leaving Japan our team was reunited.

On 9 October we set up Camp 1 at 4750 m at the foot of the first ice-fall. Making our way slowly along an ablation valley on the left bank of the Kaphe glacier, and across a big lateral moraine, we descended on to the glacier. From here we progressed without difficulty. With few crevasses to hinder us, we took four



hours between Base Camp and Camp 1, but later reduced the time to three hours or so. Close to our Camp 1 we found the remains—canned powder, juice, and coffee, ground sheets, and so on—of the R.A.F. 1965 expedition's Glacier Camp.

Just above Camp 1 lay the first barrier, an ice-fall of about 100 m in height, with gaping crevasses and tottering séracs. We avoided a direct ascent, like the R.A.F. expedition, and traversed the glacier towards the right of the ice-fall where there were some exposed rock slabs on which we placed 150 m of fixed rope. There we found also some old ropes and pitons. This route, taken by Roberts in 1962, was still open to danger from ice-avalanches coming down from the side-glacier falling directly from the slopes of Ghustung Himal. At the edge of the debris of the side-glacier, a temporary Camp 2 at 5000 m was set up on a level site safe from avalanches on 14 October. The side-glacier which had been the route of the R.A.F. expedition to their higher camps, looked more complicated than in 1965, owing to the drier conditions and larger crevasses. We decided it was too dangerous and difficult, so from temporary Camp 2 we pioneered a new route through the flank of the North ridge of Ghustung Himal on the left of the side-glacier.

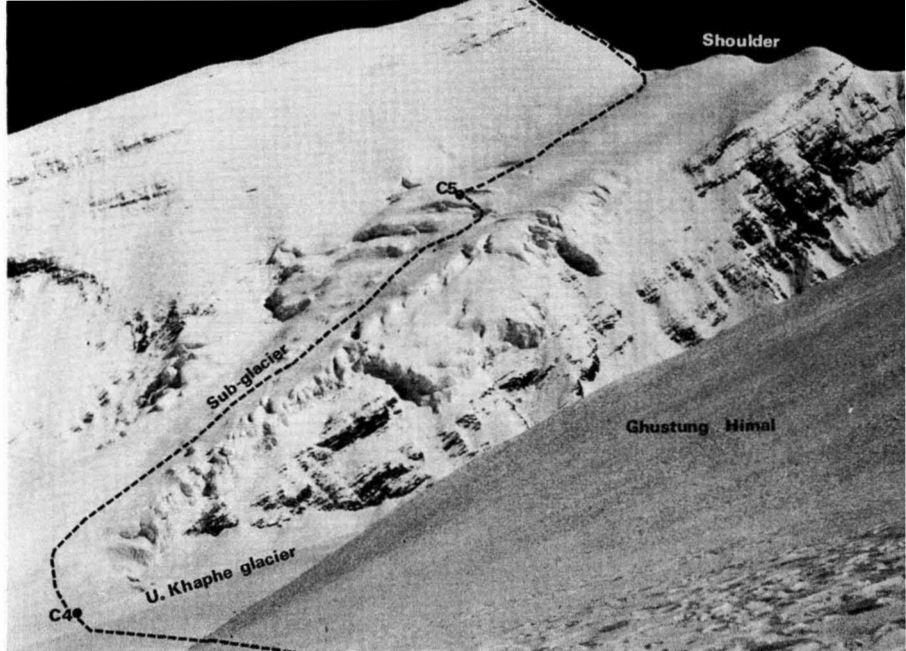
The Italian Churen Himal expedition led by Paolo Consiglio arrived on 15 October, accompanied by more than 100 porters, and set up their Base Camp



C3

C2

Side glacier



15 *Gurja Himal from the West* showing the route from Camp 4 to the summit. Note: for 'Khaphe' read 'Kaphe'

14 *West slope of the North ridge of Ghustung North* showing the route between Camps 2 and 3

within a short distance of ours. In the course of conversation, we learned that they had not been able to get a plane to take them to Dorpatan, so they had been considerably delayed in reaching their Base.

At last Camp 2 was pitched on a small rock terrace at 5300 m on 18 October, and the temporary Camp 2 dismantled. Above Camp 2 much steeper slopes of snow and rocky ribs led up to Camp 3 at 5750 m on the ridge of Ghustung North [14]. We were safe from avalanches there, but we fixed 1200 m of rope, and on 20 October two of us and a Sherpa reached the ridge. Camp 3 was set up at this point, and was finally occupied on 22 October.

The West face of Gurja Himal was now revealed, and the route to the summit lay before us [15]. We first planned to reach the top either from the col between the unnamed peak (so-called Dhaula VI) and Gurja Himal, or from the col between Ghustung South and Gurja Himal. But looking at this West face, we saw that the sub-glacier diverging from the Upper Kaphe glacier offered a better route to the Western Shoulder of the summit. Camp 3 commanded a clear view of the ridge between Dhaula VI and Gurja Himal and of the basin of the Upper Kaphe glacier. We also observed two routes to Dhaula VI. One was by way of a subsidiary ridge leading to the ridge connecting Dhaula VI and Gurja Himal. The other was by a ridge running south-west from Dhaula VI

itself. The east glacier of Churen Himal formed two wide terraces on its upper part, from which avalanches frequently fell directly on to the Lower Kaphe glacier, obviously very dangerous [12].

From Camp 3, the route to Gurja Himal went round the foot of Ghustung North, and then descended slightly into the upper basin of the Kaphe glacier. We had to re-ascend again to get out of the basin. On the 3 km crossing the conditions were such that the leader sank into the snow knee-deep, and sometimes even up to his waist.

A route was made to the site of Camp 4, 5900 m, pitched in the basin on 24 October. I decided that we should open an all-out attack on the following day, seeing that the site of Camp 4 was now decided and that another camp would bring the party within reach of the summit. During the days before and after the 24th all the members, as well as the Sherpas, had taken a rest in rotation at Camp 1 or Base Camp, preparing for the final assault.

The first attacking team, composed of S. Kanayama, H. Sakai and Tenzing Girmi Sirdar, with two Sherpas in support, set out for Camp 3 from Camp 1 on 26 October, and the next day established Camp 4 in the glacier basin. With a little snowfall in the afternoons we were lucky in our weather conditions, but were still worried about the risk of strong winds from the west. It was now the end of October.

Other members and Sherpas shifted the necessary loads to Camp 3 from Camps 1 and 2 at a high speed, and on 29th October the whole party was gathered together at Camp 3. This we turned into the Advanced Base Camp, while the first team of three occupied Camp 5 at 6500 m on the sub-glacier of the Upper Kaphe glacier, and at the same time the supporting team of Sherpas continued preparing the route, reached a height of 6750 m, and then descended to Camp 4.

On 30 October the first team set out for the summit. Although helped by fine weather, they had to turn back after reaching the Western Shoulder, 6800 m, of Gurja Himal [15-16] defeated by the deep snow and extreme cold. In addition, they were tired with the work of establishing Camps 4 and 5. This same day, M. Nukui and Ang Tharkey, on the other hand reached the summit of Ghustung North (6529 m) to find the view obscured by clouds. Two members and one Sherpa, comprising the second team, went up to Camp 4, and the following day changed places with the first party.

On 1 November T. Saeki and Lhakpa Tenzing, with N. Ito in support, set out from the camp, followed the tracks of the first team and reached the Shoulder

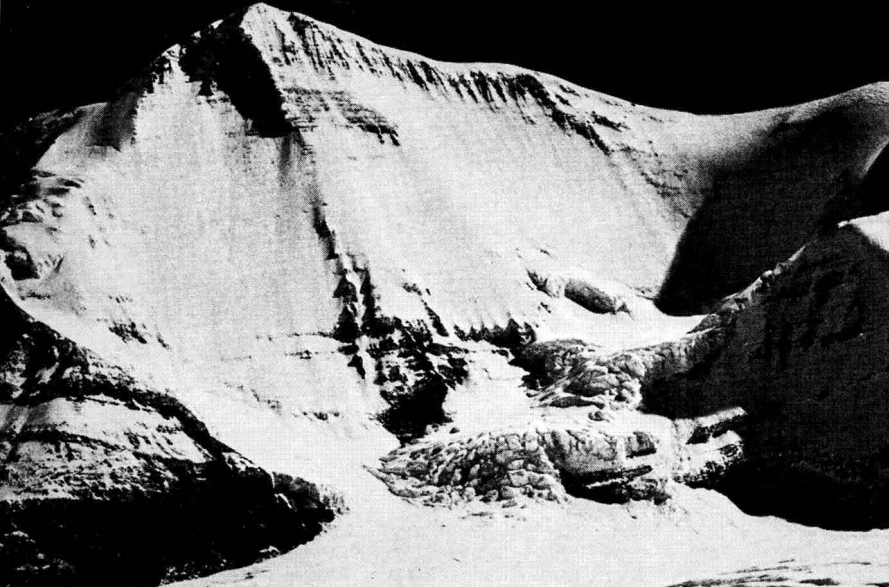


16 *Gurja Himal from the south-west* The Col at the extreme left is between Gurja Himal and Ghustung South

after 2½ hours' going. From the Shoulder they began climbing along the ridge to the summit, using a climbing-rope of 40 m which the first team had left behind, and keeping a little below the crest of the ridge on the north side, where the snow was hard and in good condition. Ito started from Camp 5 later than the other two; he watched their movements on the ridge from the Shoulder and then turned back from there to camp. From noon the sky clouded over and snow fell. At about 1.30pm the two stepped onto some small rocks and then climbed on to reach the summit. The snow stopped and the sun shone for some time. After six hours' climbing from the Shoulder they had reached the top of Gurja Himal: it was 2.45pm. The altimeter pointed to 7050 m.

Through gaps in the clouds they caught glimpses of the tent of Camp 3, of the ridge extending to Dhaula VI, and the sanctuary of the Konaban glacier just below the top of Dhaula IV; to the south they saw the chain of ridges and slopes extending from the Budzunge Bara Pass to Gurjakhani. Had it not been for the clouds, they would have had an even better view. The men on the summit took photos with two still-cameras and a 16 mm cine-camera, stayed there for twenty minutes, and then began to descend. They drove a piton into a rock just below the summit as evidence of their visit. On the way down they left the ridge for the steep snow-slopes and made their way direct to Camp 5. At 5.40pm they got back to the tent, where Ito was waiting for them.

It was misty and snowy in the afternoon, with the result that those at Camp 3, having seen the two climbers just below the summit at about 2.30pm, could not follow their further progress to the top. Moreover, something was wrong



17 *Dhaulagiri VI from Camp 3*

with our wireless sets and, without any communication between us, we could not know whether or not they had succeeded in the ascent. But we had a firm belief in their success, and the second team descended to Camp 3 next day.

With the high camps taken away, all the members and Sherpas were down at Base Camp by 4 November. On gathering together at Base, we were fêted by the Italian expedition with many toasts of Scotch whisky, and we wished them success. The Gods must have been with us, for, during the days just after our success, we noticed snowdrift-like plumes on all the ridges caused by the bitter west wind. Had we been one day later our attack might have failed.

One of the party went down the valley to Gurjakhani with two Sherpas to arrange for porters to come and take away our Base Camp. Thirty porters came and we all left on the afternoon of 8 November. Marching along our inward route we reached Gurjakhani next day, where a festival called Tiwal was being held. We stayed there for two days because we had to employ the villagers as porters to Pokhara, at a cost of Rs. 125 per man.

On 12 November we left Gurjakhani with thirty-two porters on a perfect day: weather so different from on the approach march. It was quite an exhilarating trek. On 19 November Pokhara was reached, and on the next day our expedition ended at Kathmandu.

SUMMARY Nepal Himalaya. Tomari Mountaineering Club expedition. Ghustung North, 6529 m = 21,419 ft. Fourth ascent 30 October 1969. M. Nukui, Ang Tharkey.

Gurja Himal, 7193 m = 23,599 ft. First ascent 1 November 1969 by Upper Kaphe glacier and West ridge, T. Saeki, Lhakpa Tenzing. Other members: A. Inouye (correspondent), N. Ito, S. Kanayama, H. Sakai, K. Shimoda (T.V. cameraman), Y. Yakushi (leader).