

SAMURAI DIRECT

KAZUYA HIRADE & KEI TANIGUCHI

Kamet (7756m) is the second highest mountain in the Garhwal Himalaya, India, after Nanda Devi. It was first climbed in 1931 by Frank Smythe's British expedition via the Purbi (East) Kamet glacier, Meade's col and the north-east ridge. It was then the highest summit ever climbed.

Our objective was the formidable south-east face that rises almost 2000m from the head of the Purbi Kamet glacier. Though in view of every party that has repeated Smythe's original route, the only known 'attempt' on the face was by John Varco and the late Sue Nott in 2005, and this was abandoned without setting foot on it due to bad weather.

We first tied on a rope together in 2004 in the Karakoram when we climbed a spur on the north-west face of Spantik (7027m) and the west face of Laila Peak (6200m) near the Gondokoro La. Next year we climbed variations on the east ridge of Muztagh Ata (7546m) in Xinjiang and a partial new route on the north face/north-west ridge of Shivling (6543m) in the Garhwal.

Naturally we thought that once we had climbed the face of a 6000m peak it would be possible for us to attempt a face on a higher mountain. After examining many photographs, we decided on a line up the obvious discontinuous couloir that cuts the centre of the south-east face of Kamet.

In the meantime we each bagged two 8000m peaks: Manaslu and Everest for Taniguchi and Gasherbrum II and Broad Peak for Hiraide. Now we thought we were ready to attempt a face at high altitude.

We established our base camp at 4700m at the confluence of the Raikana and the Purbi Kamet glaciers on 1 September. Acclimatization was done in two stages. On 4th-7th we made a

roundtrip to the foot of the face at 5750m and determined that avalanche danger was not too serious in the couloir. On 10th-16th we climbed the normal route to 7200m above Meade's col, reconnoitring and caching food and fuel at 6600m for our descent.

As we could not afford to refer to expensive weather forecasts regularly we instead received the daily forecast for Joshimath via our satellite phone¹. We deduced that it would be fine on Kamet when the wind blew from the south-west in Joshimath and there would be bad weather when it



58. The south-east face of Kamet with route and bivouacs marked by Kazuya Hiraide.

1. Asked at the Piolet d'Or ceremony about the apparent change in Japanese mountaineering from siege style to alpine style, Kei Taniguchi said that for her and Giri-Giri Boys it was a matter of necessity. 'We are not rich. We cannot make the big expeditions. We just do it the simple way.' Taniguchi was the first woman to be awarded a golden ice-axe.

blew from the north / north-east. Thus we remained in base camp and let the snowstorms of mid-September pass through. Meanwhile our friends on nearby Kalanka were forced to sit out storms for three days at their bivouac high on the north face.

We reduced our gear and provisions to the minimum, preparing food and fuel for four days and taking just one sleeping bag, which we shared. In fact it took us seven days to climb the route though we never worried about our provisions.

Finally the weather cleared on 25 September. We departed from base camp and plodded through deep snow on the glacier. It took twice the time of our earlier foray to break trail in the fresh snow which was more than a metre deep at our glacier camps. Fortunately we found our cache had remained dry under the deep snow though the tent was half broken. We established advance base at 5900m at the foot of the face on the 28th.

The climbing began next day under a clear blue sky. Crossing the bergschrund and up a left-slanting gully, we simul-climbed most of the lower section of the face and roped up at the upper snow patch. We reckoned the route would have three cruxes. Our first day ended at the base of the first crux at 6600m as planned. It took us one hour and a half to dig out a small ledge.

On the 30th we climbed mixed terrain of loose rock and ice. The south-facing wall caught full sunshine in the morning and this released frequent spindrifts and falling stones. This continued even in the night. We bivouacked at 6750m on a tiny snow ridge that felt a little bit better than the previous night.

Next day we reached the second crux. From our reconnaissance we had assumed this to be the hardest section of the whole route; and it proved harder than our estimate, up loose, mixed terrain. We were already at 7000m and the altitude was sapping us. We couldn't complete the section in a day and had to bivouac at 7000m, only halfway up the section. It was already midnight when we crawled into our small refuge to sleep.

After a short, cold night, we were welcomed by a clear sky. Only two pitches of mixed climbing remained to finish the second crux. Then, above two pitches of snow slopes, the enormous third crux confronted us. It was much bigger than we expected. We decided to bivouac early at 7100m and rest in preparation for the next day. We had to massage our chilled toes.

On 3 October we completed the third crux. It consisted of one pitch of rock and ice and three pitches of ice before entering the 'banana couloir' at 7250m. We were intent on climbing the couloir next day, however we couldn't reach the summit and made our sixth bivouac on the snow ridge at 7600m. Only 150m remained to the top.

A vivid red sky to the east greeted us on our seventh day, 5 October. We were grateful to have been favored with such a long (eight days) spell of fine weather. We emerged easily onto the final snow slopes and veered right of the ridge above our bivouac. At 10am we reached the summit and looked out over a fantastic 360-degree panorama of the mountains of the



Garhwal Himalaya.

We descended to the cache at 6600m that day and regained our base camp before dawn on 8 October. Our adventure was complete and we left base camp two days later. It was time to go home.

- 59. Kei Taniguchi and Kazuya Hirade.

Summary: An account of the first ascent of the south-east face of Kamet (7756m) in the Garhwal Himalaya, India by Kazuya Hiraide and Kei Taniguchi, 26 September – 7 October 2008. *Samurai Direct* 1800m M5+ AI5.

BUSHIDO

Yusuke Sato

Kalanka (6931m) is one of the peaks that comprise the outer rim of the Nanda Devi sanctuary and lies just to the east of Changabang in the Indian Garhwal. The first ascent of the mountain was made by Ikuo Tanabe's four-member Kamiichi-Hosokai expedition from Japan in 1975. They approached the Rishi Ganga gorge, crossed over Shipton's Col to gain the col and climbed the west ridge. The summit was reached by Noriaki Ikeda, Tsuneo Kouma, Kazumasa Inoue and Tanabe on 3 June. Two years later a 14-member Czechoslovak expedition, led by Frantisek Grunt climbed the right side of the face to the col between Changabang and Kalanka and



- 60. The north faces of Kalanka (left) and Changabang showing the Japanese line.

repeated the west ridge. Jozef Raconcaj and Ladislav Jon reached the summit on 20 September.

Over the last decade, the north face direct had been attempted several times by some of the world's strongest climbers and yet still remained unclimbed when we three Giri-Giri Boys, Fumitaka Ichimura, Kazuaki