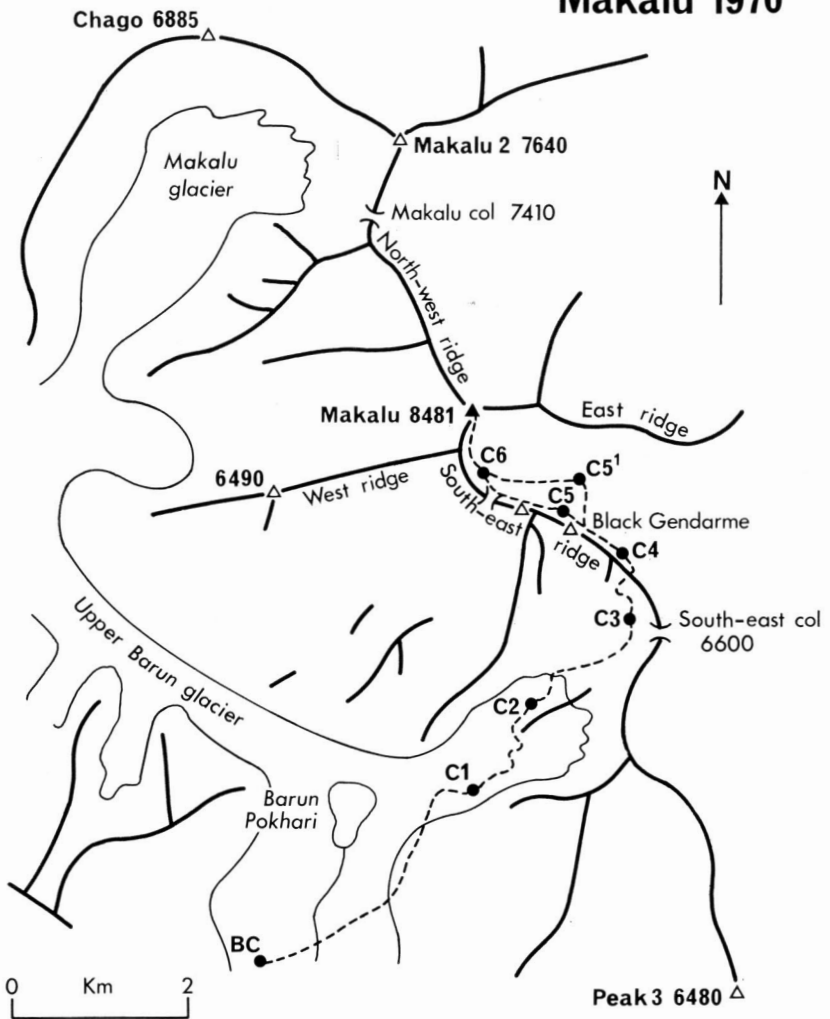


# Makalu 1970



Map 2. Sketch of Makalu massif, based on information supplied by the expedition

# Makalu—the first ascent by the South-east ridge

**Makoto Hara** and **Masao Asami**

The main party of fifteen members of the Japanese Makalu Expedition, 1970, having left Tokyo on 14 February, arrived in Kathmandu the following day. There they joined three other members who had come earlier.

On 20 February, we flew from Kathmandu to Biratnagar and drove into Dharan Bazar within the day. Our approach march started on 22 February, but because of an unexpected shortage of porters, the party had to be divided into two groups. The main group went ahead with 380 porters, while the other caravan of sixty porters followed the first group three days after.

The first group arrived at Sedoa, the last village, on 4 March, and the next day were joined by the second group.

The mountains in the direction of the Shipton pass viewed from this village were still covered with heavy snow. Both American (1954) and French (1955) parties crossed over this pass in late March, and reported a hard time. And we were trying to get it over in early March! Some difficulty was therefore expected.

The first preparation for crossing over the pass was to recruit porters in this Sedoa district. For the second, there came up a need for a supply of shoes for those porters who would have to walk in the snow. Fortunately, we were able to buy 300 pairs in a large village (Khandbari) alongside the caravan trail.

On 9 March, the main group departed from Sedoa with 160 porters, leaving behind four members and five Sherpas to continue the recruitment of porters.

The main group walked up to the ridge at 3400 m on 10 March, but found themselves in a blizzard around midnight. This blizzard continued all the next day, so that we started worrying about the porters. On 12 March, there were occasional lulls and all the porters fled back to their village, leaving us and the Sherpas and the loads in the storm. It was four days before it calmed down.

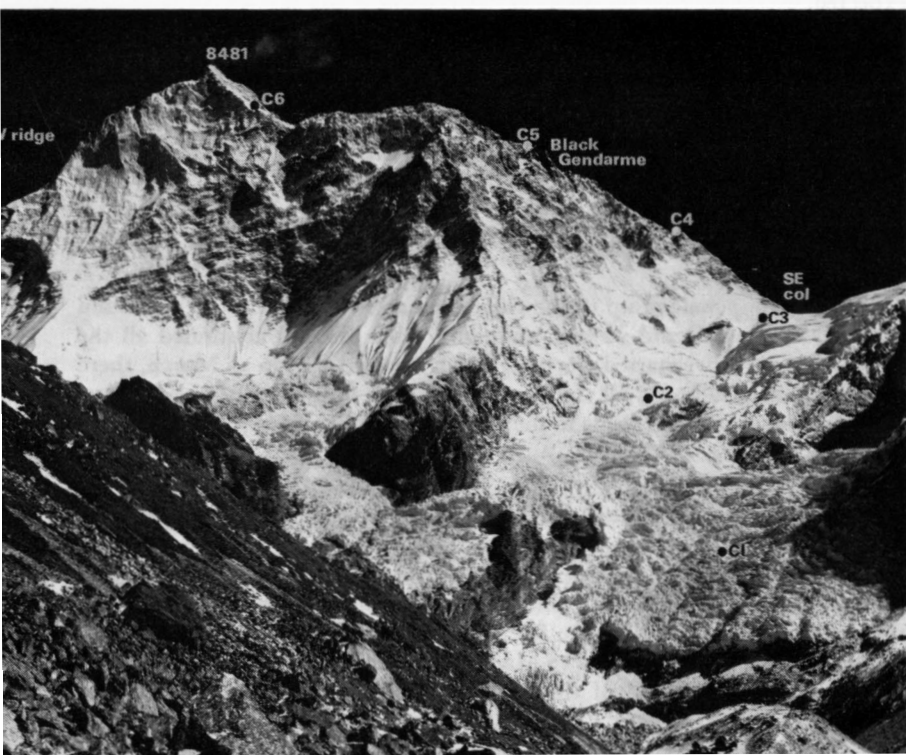
On 14 March, a second attempt was made on the Shipton pass. Ropes were fixed here and there on the snow-covered ridge for the porters. First, we had the porters move over the pass to the other side, the forest area, empty-handed, leaving all the loads behind at a depot near the pass, and then had them come back to the depot to fetch the loads over. The members also did carries with the porters. It was 17 March before the main party finally crossed over the pass. One-third of the loads was left alongside the trail. It was

essential for the main party to reach Base Camp and start mountaineering activities as soon as possible. Matsuura and Asami were in charge of the transportation of the left-over cargo.

On 20 March, Onoe and three other members were assigned to go ahead with one Sherpa and four porters. Reaching the Barun glacier on 22 March, they established Base Camp there at the altitude of 4700 m. On 24 March the main party arrived, so that all but two members were now at Base Camp. The approach march had taken thirty days. Base Camp was located in an open valley which commanded a whole view of the South face of Makalu.

Reconnaissance of the ice-fall went ahead immediately. On 27 March Camp 1 was placed at 5300 m in the ice-fall and on 30 March Camp 2 was set up at 5900 m where the ice-fall ended. On 1 April Camp 3 (Advance Base) was established at 6500 m right under the South-east col.

9 *Makalu from Base Camp.* This and next three photos: S. Shirahata





10 *Climbing the  
duralumin ladder  
below Camp 4*

The work up to Camp 3 had been done so smoothly and fast that it was natural for some members to think of a possible ascent to the summit within the month, April. However, close above Camp 3 route exploration suddenly became difficult. The steep slope running up to the ridge was located just about the height where people would normally get high-altitude sickness. Many of the members, afflicted on the slope, had to retreat. Finding it impossible to climb straight up to the rocky ridge, we opened a route traversing to the left on to it. Ropes were fixed on all the slopes, and thenceforward we used jumar ascenders.

On 18 April trial climbs were attempted to the ridge by the six climbers from Camp 3. They tried both rock-wall and snow-wall in two teams, and the snow-wall team reached the ridge successfully. On 19 April two members went up to the ridge by the previous day's route and discovered a spacious site for tents on the dome. This was the only flat place on the South-east ridge, with room for ten tents; there was a steep snow-cliff on the north (Tibet) side.

On 24 April Camp 4 was established on the dome at a height of 7100 m. Twenty-three days had passed since Camp 3 was set up. It was about this time that we, at Base Camp, examined our supply system and reorganised it to improve the efficiency.

The snow-ridge upward from Camp 4 starts with an easy, smooth slope and then runs into a difficult, knife-edged ridge; farther up rises the rock-wall of the Black Gendarme, the worst obstacle we had yet encountered.

At first, Camp 4 reported that it would not be too hard to climb over this wall, but we only surmounted this obstacle after seventeen days of desperate attack in strong gusts of wind.

On 11 May the pair of Tanaka and Ozaki, who crossed the Black Gendarme for the first time in windless, sunny weather, discovered a small rock-cave on the ridge and set up Camp 5 there at a height of 7500 m. Ropes were firmly fixed, even inside the cave. The next day they climbed up to the saddle over a peak of 8000 m and decided to site Camp 6 there.

The route from Camp 4 to the saddle was not only difficult but so long that most of the Sherpas could not pass the Black Gendarme. The two members who reached the saddle beyond discovered an easier route coming from the glacier on the north side up to the saddle. Hara, acting leader, ordered Kawaguchi and Goto at Camp 4 to investigate the northern glacier. They started downward from the point where the snow-ridge ran up to meet the knife-edged ridge, and explored a new route down to the northern glacier. Their reconnaissance of the glacier revealed two facts: first, it would be far easier to reach the saddle by way of the glacier than to go over the Black Gendarme; and secondly, it also looked easy to climb from the glacier up to the East ridge on the opposite side, so if a switch of route could be made to the East ridge, there would be a good possibility of a far easier ascent by this route than by the South-east ridge; however, this was nothing but a guess.

Now, a question arose as to whether or not we should make a change of our attack route. On 13 May we discussed it over the walkie-talkies among the various camps. The weather had been fine and windless since 8 May, and the monsoon was just about setting in. Sticking with the South-east ridge route might possibly result in a failure, but nobody had any positive assurance of the East ridge route, either. Acting leader Hara made a final decision that we should ascend by the South-east ridge as originally scheduled but that the new route on the glacier should be used to carry loads instead of the route over the Black Gendarme.

On 15 May a new Camp 5 was placed on the glacier, at 7300 m. On 18 May Kawaguchi and Goto, along with two Sherpas, having stopped overnight at Camp 5, went up to the saddle from the side of the glacier and established a new Camp 6 at a place about 100 m higher on the ridge. The altitude was 7850 m.



11 *Climbing the snow face above Camp 4*

12 *Knife-edged ridge running up to the Black Gendarme*



There now occurred an unexpected accident: their walkie-talkie broke down. During the two days of 19 and 20 May, they explored a route on the rock-wall from Camp 6 toward the summit and fixed ropes up to approximately 8100 m, but we had no way to communicate with them. On 19 May another pair of members, who had left Camp 5 for Camp 6, had to turn back on account of high-altitude sickness. The Kawaguchi team, without having any support from Camp 5, continued their reconnaissance and fixed rope above Camp 6 continuously for the two days. Food stocks became low, and still nobody came up to Camp 6 on 20 May. The monsoon had already been with us for twelve days, and it was snowing heavily every day. Unable to contact Base Camp, Kawaguchi made his own decision to attack the summit the next day.

On 21 May the pair started up from Camp 6 at 4.30am and made for the summit, each carrying an oxygen bottle. Their oxygen ran out completely at 8.30am, but they continued climbing without it. The weather worsened in the afternoon, and on the ridge toward the summit it was blowing hard and snowing heavily. Although they climbed until 6.45pm and actually came close to the summit, their accumulating fatigue finally overcame them. Kawaguchi saw a summit-looking peak approximately 300 m ahead, but having been deceived by peak after peak, he could not be certain that it was the true summit. Consequently, he decided to turn back at a point well over 8400 m; in fact, what they saw ahead was indeed the summit.

The pair came down to 8300 m and bivouacked in a snow-cave dug out on the ridge. Meanwhile, the pair of Tanaka and Ozaki, departing from Camp 5 in piercing wind, arrived at Camp 6 in the evening and informed Base Camp that Kawaguchi and Goto were missing. On the night of 21 May neither returned to Camp 6 and at Base Camp we judged that they had had a fatal accident. There was depression at all the camps throughout the night.

On 22 May Tanaka and Ozaki went up the ridge in order to check the ropes fixed above Camp 6 by the Kawaguchi team and to search for the two missing members. They soon found them staggering down. At 6.30pm Kawaguchi and Goto were brought back to Camp 6 by Tanaka and Ozaki.

On the same day, Ichikawa and Asami, going over the Black Gendarme, were moving from the old Camp 5 to Camp 6. They were not passing through the new Camp 5, on the glacier side, because their purpose was to climb up to the summit all the way along the South-east ridge. They toiled up through the heavy snow-fall, and got into Camp 6 at nightfall.

Here there were only three bottles of oxygen and, since the exhausted Kawaguchi and Goto consumed one of these for their recuperation, only two were available for our next day's use. The Sherpas who had descended to Camp 3 were so exhausted that we could not expect them to climb back again with further supplies. In addition, there was little food and fuel left at intermediate camps. According to the judgement of Base Camp, the next day was our last chance to attack the summit. Everyone prayed for good weather.

On 23 May Tanaka and Ozaki, after only one hour's sleep, left Camp 6 at 2.30am with one oxygen bottle each; Ichikawa and Asami helped them prepare for the departure. Fortunately, the weather turned out to be fine, with a star-spangled sky overhead. This day, while the pair was making the attempt to the summit, we started our rescue operation for Kawaguchi and Goto, who had gone snow-blind. Ikuta, Mingma Tshering and Lhakpa Tshering were sent up from Camp 5. Koshiyama, along with Ang Nima, starting up from Camp 4, made it to Camp 6 within the day, carrying two oxygen bottles and a small portion of food. From Camp 3 Yoshihara, Karma and Dorje moved up into Camp 4 for the purpose of rescue.

The pair heading for the summit came near the last part of the rock-wall at 8300 m at 5.00pm, and there their oxygen ran out completely. Both men had been consuming approximately 1.5 litres of oxygen every minute. They kept on climbing without oxygen and reached the summit of Makalu at 7.10pm. They came down through the moonlight and got back to Camp 6 at 3.30am on 24 May. Ichikawa and Koshiyama had been standing by for the third attempt to the summit, but little stock was left in the lower camps. The weather began to deteriorate and Base Camp ordered all members to evacuate the mountain.

### Conclusions

Our ascent took sixty-nine days from the establishment of Base Camp to the evacuation. This ascent was attained twenty-three days later than our original schedule. We had planned to send six or eight climbers to the summit, but in the end only two reached it. This was a long, toilsome traverse of a Himalayan ridge running over a 8000-m peak, then going down once, and again up to the summit of 8481 m. In addition to the difficulties, the South-east ridge is over 10 km long altogether, so that supplies could only be moved forward slowly. At Base Camp, a great deal of work went into the supervision of this supply operation, and Matsuura and Onoe, who were in charge, gave up their parts in the mountaineering.

There was a spell of fine, windless weather for six days from 8 May, but we were not able to make it to the summit during this period. The actual ascent was done in a lucky fine weather spell after the monsoon started.

We used 5000 m of fixed rope, and jumars were extensively used by the load-carriers. We used triple-boots made in West Germany. The total number of oxygen bottles was 100, mainly used for sleeping. The crew of twenty-five Sherpas was a little too small for this scale of expedition, and we should have had at least thirty-five of them.

On the other hand, the sixteen expedition members were too many, the number should have been ten to twelve. This successful ascent was brought about by superhuman efforts, the iron-solid unity of the members, and much good luck.

SUMMARY Japanese Makalu Expedition, 1970. M. Kumazawa, Y. Itoh, M. Hara, Y. Ichikawa, H. Tanaka, Y. Ozaki, M. Matsuura, N. Onoe, Y. Kawaguchi, T. Goto, M. Yoshihara, M. Hasegawa, A. Hashimoto, M. Koshiyama, H. Ikuta, M. Asami, S. Shirahata, H. Tani, Mrs. N. Nakaseko, Miss Y. Ashiya, Mingma Tshering (Sirdar of porters). Ascent: 23 May Makalu (8481 m) by the South-east ridge, H. Tanaka and Y. Ozaki.