

Makalu's South Ridge¹

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IN 1965, when the Makalu expedition of the Tokai Section of the Japanese Alpine Club was planned for the first time, it had to be canceled because the government of Nepal banned mountaineering in the Himalayas. The people who were then the core of the project turned to Aconcagua and in 1966 successfully climbed the south face.

In January, 1968 news came that the Nepalese government would soon open its mountains to foreign climbers. Our Makalu plan was immediately reorganized for 1969. However, the Nepalese delayed and we had to give up the full plan for 1969. We decided instead to send out a reconnaissance party with the mission of acquiring the mountaineering permit from the Nepalese government.

The reconnaissance party consisting of five club members, led by M. Matsuura, arrived in Kathmandu on February 24, 1969. Matsuura spent a full twenty days persuading the Nepalese and finally got the permit on March 13. The party left Dharan Bazar on March 19. After checking the conditions of the Shipton pass in the middle of the long caravan trail, they arrived at Barun Pokhari, Base Camp, on April 6. Staying there until May 9, they climbed to 21,325 feet on Makalu's south col as a reconnaissance.

The main 1970 expedition had a powerful team made up both of the best members of the Tokai Section of the Japanese Alpine Club and of other climbers recruited throughout the country. Financial circles in Nagoya strongly backed us with funds. We had multiple scientific purposes as well, such as research in high-altitude medicine, geology and serology. We were divided into two groups; the mountaineering group was sent out in the spring, while the geological survey group went in the following autumn. The commander general of the scientific expedition was Dr. Masao Kumazawa. The leader was Dr. Yohei Itoh (a member of the American Alpine Club — *Editor*). They both joined us for part of the approach march to Makalu. Makoto Hara was the mountaineering leader

¹ This route was attempted by the California Himalayan Expedition in 1954, which reached 23,200 feet. See *A.A.J.*, 1955, 9:2, pp. 7 to 24.

and Yukihiro Ichikawa assisted him as leader of the summit attackers. The total number of the mountaineering group was 18, consisting of 16 climbers, 1 photographer and 1 reporter of the *Asahi*. We had 25 high-altitude porters.

On February 20 we flew from Kathmandu to Biratnagar and drove to Dharan Bazar. Our approach march started on February 22, 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 60 porters followed the first group three days later.

On the long, hot, toilsome approach march along the Arun river we replaced porters when necessary. The first group arrived at Sedoa, the last village, on March 4 and the second group, the next day.

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 in late March and yet had a hard time. A great deal of hardship was naturally expected. The first problem was to recruit porters in the Sedoa district. Persuaded by the members and Sherpas, porters started showing up one by one. The second problem was a supply of shoes for those porters who would be walking in the snow. Fortunately we were able to buy 300 pairs of sneakers in a large village, Khandbari, down the caravan trail.

On March 9 the main group departed from Sedoa with 160 porters, leaving behind four members and five Sherpas to continue the recruitment of porters. They hiked up to the ridge at 11,150 feet on March 10, but by midnight found themselves in a hard blizzard. When this storm went on and on all the next day, we started worrying about the porters stuck in the face of danger. On March 12, the weather improved a little, and all the porters fled back to their villages, leaving us and the Sherpas with the loads in the stormy mountains. The snowstorm ended four days later.

On March 14 the 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 unloaded over the pass to the other side, the forest area, leaving all the loads at the depot near the pass. Later they went to fetch them. We carried loads with the porters. It was on March 17 that the main party finally crossed the pass. We left a third of the gear in the hands of the second group. It was essential for the main party to reach Base Camp and start mountaineering activities as soon as possible. Matsuura and Asami took charge of the transportation of the leftover cargo.

On March 20 Onoe and three climbers went ahead with a Sherpa and four porters. Reaching the Barun Glacier on March 22, they established Base Camp at 15,400 feet in the bright valley which commands a view of

Feet	Meters
27,825	8481
24,247	8000
25,755	7890
25,427	7750
24,607	7500
23,299	7100
21,654	6600
21,326	6500
19,357	5900
17,389	5300
15,120	4700



CLIMBING ROUTE OF MAVALU BY THE SOUTH-EAST RIDGE

the whole south face of Makalu. On March 24 the main party arrived. It had taken us 30 days for this approach march.

Immediately we proceeded to reconnoiter the icefall for the route safest from avalanches in the middle of it. On March 27 Camp I was placed at 17,400 feet in the icefall and on March 30 Camp II at 19,350 feet just above it. On April 1 Camp III (Advanced Base Camp) was established at 21,325 feet right under the south col.

Progress up to Camp III had been so smooth and fast that some of us started thinking of a possible ascent to the summit within the month. However the route right above Camp III suddenly turned difficult and some of the climbers were seriously affected by the altitude. Finding it impossible to climb straight up the rocky ridge, we traversed to the left along the ridge. Ropes were fixed on all the slopes and from there we started the use of Jümar ascenders.

On April 18 six climbers made a simultaneous reconnaissance from Camp III on rock and on snow. The snow-wall team got to the ridge successfully. On April 19 two went up to the ridge and discovered a spacious site for tents on the dome, the only flat place on the southeast ridge big enough for ten tents, at the edge of a steep snow cliff on the northern (Tibetan) side. On April 24 Camp IV was established on the dome at 23,300 feet. It was 23 days since Camp III had been set up. The reasons why it took so long were the altitude, the difficult route preparation, the strong west wind, in which the Sherpas were unwilling to move, and the lack of carrying power. Up to Camp III it is essential to carry many loads in a short time, but we did not have enough Sherpas.

The snow ridge upwards from Camp IV starts with an easy, smooth slope and then runs into a difficult knife-edged ridge and finally into the rock wall of the Black Gendarme, the worst obstacle we had ever encountered. Though the first report indicated that it would not be too hard, actually we barely made it over this obstacle after 17 full days of desperate attack in strong gusts of wind. On May 11 Tanaka and Ozaki went over the Black Gendarme for the first time in windless, sunny weather and discovered a small rock cave on the ridge and set up Camp V in it at 24,600 feet. Ropes were firmly fixed even inside the cave. The next day they climbed up to the saddle over a peak of 26,250 feet. They decided to site Camp VI there.

The route from Camp IV to the saddle was not only difficult but so long that most of the Sherpas got stuck at the Black Gendarme. Tanaka and Ozaki discovered an easier route coming up to the saddle from a glacier on the north side. Hara, acting leader, ordered Kawaguchi and Goto at Camp IV to investigate the northern glacier. They started downward

from the point where the snow ridge above Camp IV ran up to meet the knife-edged ridge and found a far easier route down to the northern glacier and up to the saddle. It also looked easy to climb from the glacier up to the east ridge on the opposite side and to switch to the east ridge. After considerable talk over the walkie-talkies between Base Camp, Camp IV and Camp V, Hara made the final decision that we should ascend by the southeast 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 May 15 Camp V' was placed on the glacier at 24,000 feet.

On May 18 Kawaguchi and Goto, along with two Sherpas, having stopped over at Camp V', went up to the saddle from the side of the glacier and established Camp VI about 100 yards up the ridge from there. The altitude was 25,750 feet. There unexpectedly their walkie-talkie broke down. On May 19 and 20 they explored a route on the rock wall from Camp VI toward the summit and fixed ropes to approximately 26,600 feet, but we had no way to communicate with them. On May 19 another pair of climbers left Camp V' for Camp VI but had to turn back on account of altitude sickness. Food stocks got low and yet nobody came up to camp VI on May 20. The monsoon had already been with us for twelve days and it snowed heavily every day. Being unable to contact Base Camp, Kawaguchi on his own responsibility decided to attack the summit the next day.

On May 21 Kawaguchi and Goto left Camp VI at 4:30 A.M. and headed toward the summit, each with one oxygen bottle apiece, which ran out at 8:30. They kept on climbing without it. The weather got worse in the afternoon and on the summit ridge it was blowing hard and snowing heavily. At 6:45 P.M., nearly exhausted, Kawaguchi saw approximately 300 yards ahead of him a peak which looked like the summit, though he could not be sure. Consequently he decided to turn back. They stopped well over 27,550 feet and, in fact, what they saw ahead was the summit.

The pair came down to 27,225 feet and bivouacked in a snow cave dug into the ridge. Kawaguchi had hallucinations and thought he was seeing fellow-members of the expedition. Meanwhile Tanaka and Ozaki, departing from Camp V' in a piercing wind, had arrived at Camp VI on the evening of March 21 and informed Base Camp that Kawaguchi and Goto were missing. At Base Camp we had a dread fear of a fatal accident.

On May 22 Tanaka and Ozaki went up the ridge in order to check the ropes fixed above Camp VI by the Kawaguchi team and to search for them. They soon found their fellow climbers staggering down. By 6:30 P.M. Kawaguchi and Goto had been escorted back to Camp VI by Tanaka and Ozaki.

That same day Ichikawa and Asami, going over the Black Gendarme, were moving from Camp V to Camp VI. They did not go past Camp V' on the glacier side, because they wanted to climb to the summit all the way along the southeast ridge. Toiling through a heavy snowfall, they got to Camp VI at nightfall.

There had only been three bottles of oxygen at Camp VI, but exhausted Kawaguchi and Goto had to consume one for their recuperation. Two bottles were all we had available for our next day's use. The Sherpas who got down to Camp III were so exhausted that we could not expect them to climb back to Camp VI. There was little food and fuel left at either Camps V' or IV. The next day would be the last and only chance for us to attack the summit.

On May 23 Tanaka and Ozaki, after a short nap of an hour, left Camp VI at 2:30 A.M., each with an oxygen bottle. Ichikawa and Asami helped to prepare for the departure. The weather was fine and Makalu was under a star-spangled sky. While this pair was making its summit attempt, we started our rescue operation of Kawaguchi and Goto, who had gone snow-blind. Ikuta, Mingma Tsering and Lhakpa Tsering were sent up from Camp V'. Koshiyama and Ang Nima made it up that same day from Camp IV with two oxygen bottles and a small portion of food. From Camp III Yoshihara, Karma and Dorje moved up to Camp IV to help with the rescue.

The pair heading for the summit came near the top of the rock wall at 27,225 feet at five P.M. and there their oxygen ran out. Both men had been consuming about a liter and a half every minute. They kept on climbing without and stood on the summit of Makalu at 7:10. They descended through the moonlight and got back to Camp VI at 3:30 A.M. of May 24. Ichikawa and Koshiyama had been standing by for a third attempt, but few supplies were left in the lower camp line. The weather began to deteriorate. Base Camp ordered all members to evacuate.

It had taken us 69 days for our ascent from the establishment of Base Camp to evacuation. This ascent took 23 days more than planned. After all, this was the toilsome traverse of a Himalayan ridge, which ran over an 8000-meter peak and then went down before rising to the 27,825-foot summit. Aside from the difficulty, the southeast ridge was some six miles long. At Base Camp Matsuura and Onoe organized the difficult problem of supply, giving up their chance to climb.

We fixed some 16,500 feet of rope. We used German triple boots. The total number of oxygen bottles was 100, used mainly for sleeping.

The crew of 25 Sherpas was too small for this scale of expedition. We should have had at least 35. On the other hand, the 16 expedition

members were too many the number should have been 10 to 12. The success in the ascent was brought about as the result of many superhuman efforts, the iron-solid unity of the members and much good luck.

Summary of Statistics:

AREA: Eastern Nepal.

NEW ROUTE: Makalu 27,825 feet, by the Southeast Ridge, May 23, 1970
(Tanaka, Ozaki).

PERSONNEL: Masao Kumazawa, commander general; Yohei Itoh, leader; Makoto Hara, mountaineering leader; Yukihiro Ichikawa, Hajime Tanaka, Yuichi Ozaki, Masaji Matsuura, Noboru Onoe, Yonosuke Kawaguchi, Toshihiro Goto, Masakatsu Yoshihara, Masaru Hasegawa, Atsutaka Hashimoto, Masao Koshiyama, Hiroshi Ikuta, Masao Asami, Mrs. Naoko Nakaseko, Miss Yoko Ashiya; Shiro Shirahata, photographer; Hisamitsu Tani, Asahi reporter. Liaison officer, G.C. Thakur. Of the Sherpas Mingma Tsering, Karma, Dorje, Lhakpa Tenzing, Ang Nima, Dawa Tenzing, Lhakpa Tsering and Ang Norbu were particularly good. However, Lhakpa Tsering fell to his death on Peak 29 in the post-monsoon.

