



The north face of Kwangde Lho (6,187m), showing, left to right: Extra Blue Sky (Beaugey-Profit-Rhem-Ruby, 1996), Nakagawa (2002), Breashears-Lowe (1982), Mandala (Lorenzo-Munoz, 1985). Hiroyuki Nakagawa

Kwangde Lho (6,187m), new north face route. Koji Ito and I made the seventh ascent of the north face of Kwangde Lho, by a new route (ED+ M5 WI6). After spending six days climbing 37 pitches, we reached the summit of the 1,150m face on December 13. The north (Hungo) face of Kwangde Lho was first climbed by Americans David Breashears and Jeff Lowe in 1982, and repeated by a British party in 2001. The route Extra Blue Sky of Kwangde Shar (6,100m) was climbed by the French in 1996, by the Czechs and British in 2000 and again by British in 2001. In addition, a Spanish team succeeded in 1985, while in 2001 a Czech team put a new direct finish on the 1989 American route of the north buttress of Kwangde Nup (6,035m)—see AAJ 2002.

We began climbing from an advanced base camp, near 4,900m on December 8. Despite frequent snow showers and poor ice conditions (we only got screws in on one pitch), we completed nine pitches before digging out a bivy in a snow wall. The next day we did six pitches, beginning with two VS WI6 pitches on 70° to 80° very thin ice where protection was almost impossible. Our third day on the face we did seven more pitches, ending with a bivouac at a dihedral. We enjoyed good ice on just one pitch—the fourth—but suffered with the usual bad conditions for the other six.

Day four began with a S WI5, 70°-80° pitch (plus a little at 90°) where protection was difficult, followed by a S M5 WI6 with dry-tooling on thin and discontinuous ice. After five pitches, we found a comfortable bivy under a rock roof. The next day we climbed toward the right on bad 50°-70° fluted snow and ice, trying to follow a ridge leading to the summit ridge. But we ran into an unclimbable slab, then descended a rock band (M5) to a 70° hammock bivy, after a total of six pitches that day.

On our sixth and final day, we began by traversing left to get back onto ice, then went up and right on discontinuous ice that was M5 in two places. The snow conditions were even worse below the summit ridge, where we topped out at 6,050m.

We began our descent with three diagonal rappels down the south face, followed by a downclimb to the glacier on the south side of Shar, where we bivied. The next day, we walked southeast on the glacier to a point near the lowest col between Shar and a nameless peak, then descended to the Namche side. We reached the moraine after seven raps and more down-climbing, then bivied again on the east side of the northeast ridge. The next day, December 15, we finally descended to our advanced base camp by detouring around the northeast ridge.

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ANNAPURNA HIMAL

Annapurna I traverse. Unquestionably the best climb of the season was the Annapurna I traverse by Jean-Christophe Lafaille and Alberto Inurrategi. They were members of a six-man expedition jointly led by Inurrategi and Ed Viesturs. They had no Sherpa climbers with them at all, so the members did the work together to make the route, pitch the camps and stock them with supplies as far as their third high-altitude camp at 7,100m, nearly 100m below the summit of their eastern-most peak, Glacier Dome (now officially known as Tarkekang). They had no bottled oxygen with them.

Viesturs climbed beyond camp 3 westwards along the ridge until 7,300m, but went no farther. He judged the avalanche risk unacceptable and was worried about the problem of returning from Annapurna's summit by the same long ridge. He descended to base camp and remained there for the remainder of the climbing period.

Lafaille and Inurrategi remained to continue alone. On May 14, they left camp 3 at 6 a.m. and moved along the sawtooth ridge. It had a steep and technically difficult section up to the summit of the 7,485m (24,557') peak known as Roc Noir (Khansar Kang). They took three hours to surmount the last 250m-300m to the top; here the incline was 55° – 60° with a rock band running across it and bad powder snow. From here, they had only two alternatives, according to Lafaille: to retreat from the top of Roc Noir back the way they had come, or to continue west. It was not possible for them to descend the north or south faces, both of which were very steep; the distance down the north face was too great, while on the south face there were numerous unacceptably dangerous seracs and cornices.

They elected to continue west from Roc Noir by traversing on the north face between 20m and 100m below the ridge depending on the snow conditions. Sometimes they could walk along it with a pole, sometimes it became a very steep (65° – 70°) snow face which involved very technical climbing and some rappeling. At 4 p.m. they bivouacked at about 7,500m, the average altitude of this part of their traverse. They had climbed more than four km. from camp 3.

On the 15th they went back onto the ridge for about a kilometer and then, at about 7,700m, they crossed again down onto the north face, where all the snow was very good and firm whereas the ridge had become only bare rock. However, they did have some technical ice and snow climbing to do. They now were actually on the huge expanse of Annapurna I, and they bivouacked at 7,950m at the top of a couloir below its east summit. They stopped their