

*Editor's Note: Japanese attempted the big north northeast ridge in 1981 and returned in 1989 to climb it from the East Karayalak Glacier for the second ascent of the mountain. In 1984 a four-man American team climbed the smaller rib of snow and ice to the right and continued direct to meet the upper section of the 1981 British Route on the west ridge at over 7,300m, where they retreated in deep snow. It was this rib that the St. Petersburg team climbed last summer, moving left onto the snow slopes above the lower north north east ridge, then finally reaching the summit from the left.*

*Later, another Russian team from Krasnoyarsk led by Nikolay Zakharov first appears to have attempted the north northeast spur (Japanese Route) to the left but then gave up and joined a third team from Moscow (led by Jury Hohlov), which was trying a variant to the St Petersburg line. Both teams summited, making the fourth and fifth ascents of Kongur. These two expeditions branched left from the American line at around 6,100m to reach the summit directly via the right side of the broad snow slopes above the lower north-northeast ridge. The Krasnoyarsk Route differed slightly from the Moscow line. The last Russian team of three reached the top on August 23. Despite attempts in 1998, 2000, and 2003, the Original British Route remains unrepeatd.*

*Kongur East (7,300m), ascent to 7,300m and proposed name for highpoint on east ridge of Kongur (7,719m). Kongur is the main summit of the Kun Lun range, in the southwestern part of China. It is a complex massif with a long span of elevations over 7,000m running west to east. The only direct access to the main summit is from the north or the south. From the west or the east, climbing on Kongur tackles difficult and long ridges eventually leading to the top.*

Kongur has been climbed only five times. The first attempt took place in 1981 by an English team led by Chris Bonington, which climbed a difficult ridge on the south side without reaching the top. A second effort led another strong party (Bonington, Boardman, Rouse, and Tasker) to the top via the west ridge, which is easily reached from the western slopes via the southwest rib but involves a long stretch at high altitude and a technical section on a sharp rocky ridge just before the summit. The second ascent was made by a Japanese team from the Kyoto Karakoram Club, led by Ryuichi Kotani, which climbed a prominent and difficult ridge in the center of the north face in 1989. In 2004 three separate Russian expeditions climbed from the north, as reported elsewhere. Since the south face is huge and bordered by slopes prone to avalanche danger, what remained for us was the east ridge. Thus, during the 100th anniversary celebrations of the Club Alpino Accademico Italiano (1904-2004), an expedition was organized to climb Kongur via the northeast side of the mountain, where a prominent ridge (northeast) leads to an intermediate summit at 5,975 m, which is connected to the upper plateau by another long stretch of ridge (east) ending at an elevation of about 7,204m as marked on the Chinese map. We had a good picture from Daniel Waugh, who trekked a few times around the mountain. From this a relatively safe line was identified, although the first part was not yet clear.

The expedition team included Armando Antola, Donatella Barbera (doctor), Giovanni Ghiglione, Massimo Giuliberti, Carla Marten Canavesio, Claudio Moretto, Ezio Mosca, Beppe Villa, and myself as team leader.

We met our liaison officer in Kashgar on July 20 and had a first look at the impressive east ridge of Kongur. What you see from Kashgar is only the upper part of our climb, above 5,800m. Base camp was set on a green valley bordering the Tugralkuluxi Glacier at about 3,850m, on July 22. Operations started immediately. In about one week we placed camp 1 at 4,600m, fixed ropes through the steep (60°) slopes leading to the ridge, and placed camp 2 at 5,600m. Weather condi-



Above the rock step on the east ridge of Kongur. *Mauro Penasa*

tions were strange, with high temperatures during the day, and usually snowfall during the late afternoon and night. The mountain was deeply snow-covered and in general conditions were wet.

A first attempt to reach the first peak at 5,950m was frustrated by bad weather. This waste of time forced us to climb in alpine style from camp 2.

On August 7 we camped at the foot of the east ridge of Kongur at 5,800m after descending the 5,950m peak; the 1,400m upper part of the ridge was impressive. The next two days were passed climbing relatively easy ridge slopes in deep snow, up to a rocky tooth at 6,600m. It took half a day to climb past this difficult section on rotten rock and unconsolidated snow. We could not fix more than one rope on the difficult stretch, thus there was no chance to place a higher camp. On August 11, at 17:00, Giuliberti, Villa, and I were at the end of the ridge, at about 7,300m on a small elevation that we called Kongur East, higher with respect to the point marked 7,204m on the Chinese maps. Having no experience with snow caves and in worsening weather we decided to put an end to our adventure.

This route, although long and challenging, is mostly safe and protected from avalanches. From BC it is 3,600m of vertical gain (due to a 200m loss below point 5,975m) with a much longer development. Unfavorable snow conditions were experienced regardless of the weather: almost every night a 10-20 cm snowfall kept the slopes difficult for climbing, and even during sunny days the snow was never transformed into more comfortable terrain.

From the highest point reached, that is from Kongur East, an additional climbing day would be required to reach the main summit at 7,719m. It is a long stretch (about 3 km), but only 400m have to be gained and snow conditions on the upper and windy part of the ridge are much better. We entitled the route “Ridge of the Centenario CAAL,” in commemoration of this important event. We have asked the Xiniang Mountaineering Association to have the name Kongur East added to the official maps.