



Ama Dablam (6,812m), showing the line of the Korean attempt on the northeast face to north ridge. The 5,200m ABC lies at the start of the northeast spur. Camp 1 is at 5,700m and Camp 2 at 6,100m, with the high point on the north ridge reported to be ca 6,400m. The 1985 Buhler-Kennedy route climbs the central rib to the left, forcing a way through the huge capping seracs before traversing right to finish via the final section of the north ridge. The left skyline is the east ridge climbed by Georges and Hubert in 1983, while the right skyline is the northwest ridge climbed by Cartwright and Cross in 2000. The north ridge descends toward the camera before slanting down right from a point a little higher than the level of C1. *Lee Young-jun collection*

*Ama Dablam and Himalayan conditions.* The Himalaya appear to be getting drier, so relatively easy mountains are becoming technically more difficult with more exposed rock and more danger from unusual avalanching. Ama Dablam (6,812m) is no longer the mountain it was before November 2006, when a huge mass of ice broke away at ca 6,500m, above Camp 3, swept six climbers in their tents hundreds of meters down the mountainside, and buried them in a mound of avalanche debris.

According to Giampietro Verza, a mountain guide who knows the area well and who led a small Italian team to Ama Dablam during the spring, the ideal area for Camp 3 is still exposed to ice avalanches, and the large serac on the final ice slope is dangerously fractured. Sherpas are refusing to camp under it, and to scale the mountain directly from Camp 2, without the usual third high camp, makes the final summit climb not only too long for many climbers but also more dangerous. "The mountain remains the desired one for many

climbers, but now you have to consider that this beauty is demanding more," Verza remarked.

Fourteen teams attempted Ama Dablam's standard southwest ridge during the pre-monsoon season. For the first time since the spring of 1996, not one succeeded. Too many days of snowfall was the explanation given by some, but more said that bad snow conditions on the route caused them to abandon their climbs at altitudes between 5,900m and 6,100m.

The only success on Ama Dablam this spring was achieved by two Americans who were looking for difficulty. Aric Baldwin and James Cromie found it on their ascent of the northeast spur and north ridge without Sherpas. They slept on the summit, waiting for daylight so they could see if anyone had made the top via the southwest ridge, with which they weren't familiar. No one had, but they managed to descend safely.

In the autumn there were 56 teams on the standard route. Some skipped Camp 3; others pitched what they called Camp 2.7 or 2.8. Still other teams established a camp at the traditional altitude, 6,300m, but as far to the right of the avalanche path as possible.

The leader of a commercial expedition who used the old Camp 3 site was Luis Benitez,

an American leader of a multi-national group. He explained that if his clients had tried to summit from Camp 2, a large proportion of them would never have made it. They were not strong enough to go that distance up and back in one day. A Korean team did skip Camp 3. They left Camp 2 at 6,100m at 3 a.m. and were on the summit 15 hours later. They stayed there half an hour and did not get back to Camp 2 until 1 a.m. the next day.

Benitez, who has led groups on Ama Dablam before, was not happy about the continuing danger of falling debris. Not all leaders agreed with the degree of his concern, but he felt “the hazard level is now significantly higher,” even if Camp 3 is skipped. He believed that “clients need to be made aware of the increased hazard because of the seracs threatening the route.” There was an ice avalanche while his members were in Camp 3. They were far enough to the right of the seracs’ path not to get hit, but they “felt the blast” from the falling ice. “The whole Dablam is calving, and eventually all of it will come off,” he said.

In the meantime, until all of it has fallen off, perhaps the southwest ridge should not be used by commercial teams. But another route will require a higher degree of technical skill. Pumori, also in the Everest region, used to be included in commercial organizers’ offerings, but its southeast face came to be widely regarded as avalanche-prone, and there were fatalities. Few venture on it now. The mountain’s safer ridges present technical challenges not suitable for commercially organized groups.

In the spring some climbers returning from Cho Oyu, the least difficult of the world’s 8,000m mountains and for that reason an extremely popular one, reported that it too is becoming harder technically. The mountains, like their glaciers, are changing.

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*Editor’s note: Ama Dablam’s rarely attempted northeast spur to north ridge was first climbed in 1981 by Australians Lincoln Hall, Andy Henderson, and Tim McCartney-Snape, after an attempt by an ill-fated British expedition in 1959. It was possibly not repeated until 2000. In their alpine-style ascent Baldwin and Cromie climbed from base camp to ca 5,850m, the point where the northeast spur joins the north ridge, on April 12. On the 13th they climbed to 6,100m and on the 14th, in poor weather, to 6,150m. On the 15th they bivouacked at 6,250m and on the 16th, when they met some technically difficult terrain, at 6,350m. On the 17th they fixed climbing ropes through the crux pitches above and returned to their bivouac site for the night. On the 18th they made it to 6,450m, 6,500m on the 19th, 6,590m on the 20th, and 6,700m on the 21st. On the 22nd they bivouacked on the summit. Two days later they reached the site of Camp 2 on the Normal Route and the following day reached the valley. Both were slightly frostbitten after their prolonged effort.*

*Ama Dablam, northeast face to north ridge, new route attempt.* A Corean Alpine Club expedition led by Cho Yu-dong, with Cha Gyeong-ryeol, Choi Dong-ryeol, Choi Young-sik, Jang Byeong-wook, Kim Dong-gyu, Park Seok-hee, and Yang Byeong-ok, reached base camp on October 26 at 5,000m below the northeast face of Ama Dablam. They established advanced base on the 29th at 5,200m. Choi Dong-ryeol and Park Seok-hee pushed the route to 5,800m, and the team placed Camp 1 at 5,700m on November 3. The following day Cha, Choi Young-sik and Jang reached 6,000m, and later Choi Dong-ryeol, Kim, Park and Yang climbed onto the crest of the north ridge at 6,100m, where they discovered a old deadman of French manufacture. All members descended to base camp on November 10 due to deteriorating weather. They rested here