

it to the left. A man wiser than us once said there's a fine line between clever and stupid, and indeed there is. We dead-ended and, wilting under our too-heavy packs, gasping under too-thin air, and melting under too-warm temps—in other words, suffering from simple lameness—we retreated from about 19,000' and descended the basin to the west (where Steve House's 2004 solo goes).

We realize that opinions vary on what constitutes a new route (such as joining an existing line or reaching prominent landmarks), but we do have some standards. As we whimpered back to camp, it seemed quite clear to us who got the better of our little exchange with K7.

Of note, farther right on the east face were some spectacular-looking ice lines. The bottom portions, however, were gushing waterfalls while we were there, and though we stayed in the valley another 10 days or so after our attempt, a ton of snow fell and we never ventured back up to the east face.

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*Farol East, solo first ascent; spire below K7 West, first ascent.* Louis-Philippe Ménard and I had big plans for the Charakusa Valley, but LP was injured when we attempted the south buttress of Farol Central during acclimatization, and he had to depart for home on September 8. With nothing better to do, I stayed to see what the weather would bring.

On September 11 I returned to the tent we had left at the base of Farol more than a week earlier. My goal was a narrow ice line on the southwest side of unclimbed Farol East (ca 6,350m). Due to the orientation of the route, I had to stop in the extreme afternoon heat and bivy as soon as I reached the summit ridge. After an early start the next day, I stood on the highest summit I'd ever been on by noon, alone in the middle of the Karakoram under a sky without even the sign of a cloud.

Over 1,300m above the glacier, with only 50m of 6mm cordelette for rappelling, I didn't have any time to lose. At 9 p.m., soaking wet from an extended session of canyoneering, and with barely half of the cordelette left, so frozen it could have stood by itself, I was back to the security of my tent.

On the 17th, a day before the porters were to arrive for Vince Anderson, Steve House, and Marko Prezelj, Marko still had energy to burn. I joined him to go see what the pillars on the south face of K7 West had to offer. Without having previously scoped any particular line, our attention was caught by a shallow dihedral and crack system that sliced through the south face of the farthest east pillar. [See photo on p. 74 for the location of this pillar.]

At 7:30 a.m. we were throwing on rock shoes. After about 100m of unroped climbing, we did 15 pitches of interesting steep rock. Perfect overhanging hand cracks, steep dihedrals, mostly 5.10 or 5.10+. At 5 p.m. the summit was still a few rope lengths ahead, but it seemed so close that there was no way we were bailing. At 8:30, after three more pitches and a few meters of aid, we were on the top of the buttress (900m, 5.11 A0). We hadn't reached any real summit, and the formation that we climbed hasn't got a name. But we left in the morning with the goal of reaching the top of that pillar with only a single light pack between the two of us, and we had attained our goal—and that was as satisfying as reaching any other summit of the Charakusa or any other valley.

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