

*Gangotri, Meru South, northeast face direct.* At 4:30 p.m. on July 13 the sky finally opened for three Korean climbers standing at the top of the northeast face of Meru Peak (6,660m). Three instructors from the Extreme Riders Alpine Club, Kim Se-jun (38), Kim Tae-man (35), and Wang Jun-ho (36), probably the outstanding big wall climbers in the country, had completed a new direct line up the face, the headwall a continuous 90-110°. They named their route Gate to the Sky. Other members of the team were Ju Wur-yeong, Kim Hyeong-wook, and Son Jung-ho.

The expedition established advanced base below the wall at 5,000m, then for 10-days fixed 1,800m of rope over 34 pitches of moderate slopes (50-60° rock, snow, and ice) to Camp 2 below the headwall. They then hauled 120kg of gear and provisions to this site and retreated to base camp. The weather remained unsettled, and both time and provisions began to run short. Unable to wait much longer, they resumed climbing in less than favorable weather and on July 3 juggled the ropes to Camp 2, rested for two days, and minimized their gear for the wall above.

On July 5 Kim Sae-joon led the first pitch on the headwall in a capsule-style push to the top. The climbers bivouaced in a two-man portaledge and a hammock but only used 200g summer sleeping bags. Rationing food, the three survived primarily on chocolate, three or four sweets a day, and a meal at night. Nevertheless they eventually ran out and on the final three days of the ascent ate nothing. In addition, they only saw the sun on two days.

The climbing was far more difficult than anticipated. They spent nine days reaching the top from Camp 2, climbing 510m (10 pitches) on the headwall. The granite was often fragile and rockfall horrific. Twenty hours were required to aid past the 50m A5 technical crux, on the second pitch above Camp 2, but the greatest obstacle was another 50m section at 6,200m. The climbers nicknamed this A4 section "ED," for Extreme Danger. It took two days to overcome this section, where they were forced to pry off a large piece of rock in order to make progress.

The three climbers reached the ridge just below and right of the most northerly of the points that make up the near-horizontal summit crest of Meru South. [Editor's Note: their GPS read 6,660m, the same as the official height of Meru South. However, it seems generally accepted that the main summit of Meru South is at the southern end of the ridge, reached by Japanese in 1980 during the only ascent of the mountain to date. Photographic evidence would seem



The northeast faces of Meru South (6,660m, left) and Meru Central (6,310m). (1) The new Korean route, Gate to the Sky, which reached the most northerly top of Meru South. The highest summit is generally accepted to be at the southern end of the ridge. (C2) The campsite below the headwall (the latter seen in profile on p. 364 AAJ 2007). (2) The American attempt on the east pillar: the Shark's Fin. Their high point was the best to date on this most coveted objective. *Jimmy Chin*

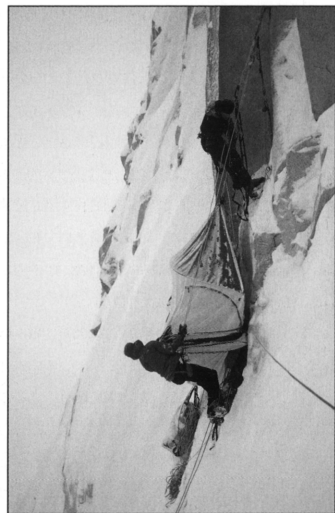
to confirm this, as does Glenn Singleman, who BASE jumped the northeast face from a point a little higher than the Korean exit but didn't visit the unclimbed northerly summit, which the Koreans eventually reached, just above him. He noted that the highest summit was 500m further south and ca 70m higher.] The return to base camp required two days, with an overnight in Camp 2. The weather worsened rapidly after the climbers arrived at this camp, making it precarious to remove all rope and gear without putting their lives in jeopardy. However, they managed to clean 800m of line. Three pitons, 20 bolts, and 17 rivets were left in the route. Gate to the Sky took a total of 22 days to open and was graded VII, A5 5.10.

The expedition donated 150 books to the village of Indo Dasuda (five days walk from base camp at Tapovan) during their return to Delhi, and they have plans to build a library for this village. The Indian Government and Gangotri National Park plan to prohibit trekkers from using the Gangotri-to-Tapovan trail for five years, so the path can be reconstructed. In addition, the Park may prohibit the entry of any group organized by an agency that does not provide a satellite phone.

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*Gangotri, Meru Central, east pillar attempt.* Conrad Anker, Renan Ozturk, and I left Delhi on September 6 hoping to make the first ascent of the east (or northeast) pillar of Meru Central (6,310m)—the feature known as the Shark's Fin. After several days' travel and a two-day trek to Tapovan base camp, we carried loads to an advanced base at the bottom of the route. We began climbing on September 16 with a two-person portaledge and 10 days of food and fuel. We planned to climb the route in a single push, so once we left the ground, we continued to our high point without coming back down, using a hybrid alpine/big wall style.

The initial part of the route consisted of steep snow and ice. After two days we were hit by a storm that pinned us on the ridge for five days in the portaledge, while avalanches tore around us. The storm dumped more than two meters of snow. We eventually resumed climbing, halving our limited rations. Progress was slowed by cold and the amount of snow and ice covering the rock and filling cracks. We spent almost 10 days on the face before arriving at the base of the overhanging prow. It lacked any real crack systems, so we were forced to climb difficult aid up to A4 with long sections of hooking and thin beak placements. Several leads took five or six hours, and the average daytime temperature hovered around 0 F. After several days of "mind riot" climbing, we ran almost completely out of food and fuel, and by our 18th day on the face had no option but to make a final push for the summit. Running on fumes—for over a week we'd had only three spoonfuls of oatmeal each for breakfast, two energy bars and half a liter of water during the day, and a single bowl of mush for dinner split three ways—we climbed 500m with Conrad leading thin, poorly protected ice and mixed terrain. Here, 150m short of the summit, we were stopped by an overhanging gendarme, which we had neither the time nor energy to climb. We'd climbed the Fin to the final ridge but did not summit.



Creative camping on the east pillar of Meru Central. Jimmy Chin