

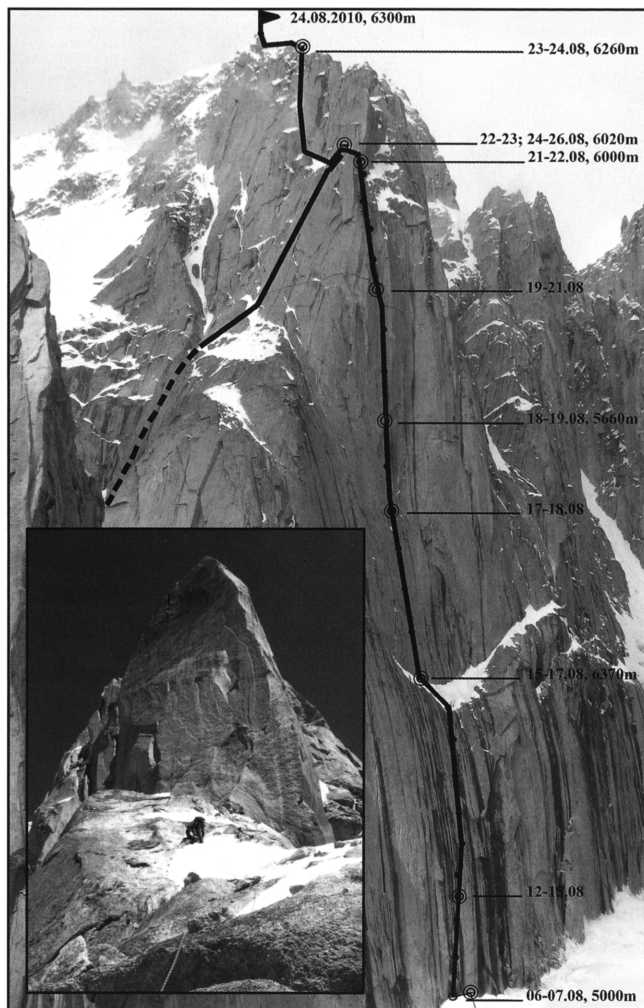
Looking north at K7 group; K7 (6,934m) highest summit on right. (A) Pt. ca 6,300m. (B) K7 West (6,615m). (C) Pt. 6,736m. (D) K7 Middle (6,858m). (1) Luna (UIAA VII+ A2, 1,400m, Cesen-Sisernik-Hrastelj, 2008), with its high point at just over 5,700m. (2) Southeast face (2,000m, 5.11a WI5, Anderson-House-Prezelj, 2007). (3) Southeast Buttress - Russian Route and high point. Marek Holecek

K7 West (6,615m), southeast buttress, not to summit. We arrived in the Charakusa with no single plan, but were quickly captivated by the beautiful southeast buttress of K7 West. We saw that this sheer wall, which begins at 5,000m, could be logically divided into three sections. The first third is very smooth and capped by a snow-covered, outward-sloping terrace. Consequently, it is wet. Leading to the center of the terrace is a long slanting crack, breaching a series of overhangs. In the middle third we could clearly see a series of wide cracks, most of which looked possible to free climb. The upper third of the buttress has a large, icy corner-chimney, overhanging in the lower part. We felt this would probably be the crux of the climb.

Our main goal was to climb to the top of the buttress, which we estimated to be 1,000-1,100m high. Above, a long mixed ridge with gendarmes led to snow slopes below the summit. Climbing this is practically a separate ascent, and, for us, did not seem a logical option. We made our first attempt on August 6, climbing the first three pitches on aid. They were extremely wet due to high rainfall, which we weren't expecting at this altitude. That night, at the foot of the wall in our portaledge, we were nearly washed away by a torrential downpour. Water came through the fly and we were soon flooded. Eventually, we took a knife and made several extra holes in the floor, to let out the water. A falling stone ripped through the fabric, injuring an arm. Next morning we retreated.

On the 12th, having proved ourselves fit by playing an international soccer match with Americans and Italians, we started again, with an extra flysheet from one of our tents. On the 15th we reached the terrace at 5,370m, having climbed eight pitches up to A3.

The first two pitches in the wide cracks of the wall above were almost as difficult; vertical,



Russian Route and high point, southeast buttress K7 West. (inset) On the upper section of K7 southeast buttress, above the big wall section. Supplied by Anna Piunova, mountain.ru

the crest at 6,260m, where we bivouacked. The following morning the weather began to deteriorate. We climbed to a big gendarme at ca 6,300m, and decided to call it a day. It was the 22nd and this was our summit. We made a difficult descent to the portaledge, and then took a further two days to reach the base of the mountain. On the first we made 18 rappels west into a big glacial amphitheatre and bivouacked in a rima. On the second we climbed down to the bottom of the amphitheatre and then made nine rappels to the glacier. Our emancipated bodies barely carried our rucksacks, but fortunately we were met by our sirdar and his son, who helped us down to base camp.

with a large overhang in the middle. Then the wall became less steep and much drier, so we were able to free climb sections. Six pitches above the terrace we reached the icy overhanging corner. It was cold, damp work inside the chimneys, and when a large cam popped and hit me hard in the cheek, it was too painful to smile again until the end of the climb. On a five-meter section, bypassing a chockstone, we had to hand drill a few holes, the only time on the route we used drilled aid. Four days and eight pitches took us to the top of the wall.

We were now rewarded with two fine days, and spent the first studying the upper part of the face and a descent route, after which we moved onto the left flank of the ridge, and placed our portaledge at 6,020m. Next day we set off with only the fly, a stove, and three-days food. We climbed the left flank of the ridge, overcoming sections of difficult mixed terrain, until reaching

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