

UNSCALED NORTH FACE OF YANGRA KANGRI

Approach to Ganesh Himal from Tibet, China

Kinichi Yamamori

Yangra Kangri (7429m) soars on the border of China and Nepal and is known as the highest peak of Ganesh Himal in Nepal. This main peak in the mountain massif was first attained from Nepal side by Raymond Lambert of Switzerland, Ms. Claude Kogan of France and another person on October 24, 1955. However no second ascent has been accomplished till today.

In a joint expedition with the China Tibet Mountaineering Association, The Himalayan Association of Japan (HAJ) succeeded in the first ascent of Labuche Kang (7367m) west of Cho Oyu in 1987. In the spring of 1995, a leader of the Chinese members of the 1987 expedition, Cheng Tianliang, proposed a new joint climbing in 1997 to Yangra Kangri, which was in an area closed to foreigners, as a commemorative venture to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the first ascent.

In response I immediately accepted his offer in principle, but proposed to include in the plan the ascent of the unclimbed Ratna Chuli (7035m) that is located on the national border. In the meantime, however, Ratna Chuli was first ascended by a joint expedition of Nepal Police and Shinshu University, Nagano Prefecture, on October 14, 1996. Now the northern side was taken into consideration as a practical route for Yangra Kangri.

Reconnaissance in 1996

I flew into Lhasa at the end of September to join the Tibetan member, Gaya (45). To make an access to Yangra Kangri from the north, we must go westwards on the northern side of Tingri to Xixabangma, cross the Ma La (5234m) down to the Kyirong Zangbo, upper stream of the Bhote Kosi River and go down the stream further 50km southwards. On September 29 bad news came to us at Kyirong County that there was no roadway on the northern side of Yangra Kangri. Topographical maps indicated that we were not too far away from the destination. However, for lack of time, we gave up the northern side approach and decided to look for a possible route along the Sanji Glacier on the southern side. From Kyirong County to Kyirong District our Jeep ran along a road on the river bed. The District, 2795m above sea level, was a quite different world that was surrounded by green forests unlike the County (4127m) we had just left several hours before.

Here in the District a surprising incident occurred. Past 10:00pm, officers of the public security agency suddenly came to us and seized my passport. On the following day they notified us at the frontier guard office that we were not allowed to go further beyond the

District. They claimed that the permit was a forged one and my Chinese maps were not authentic. One hour's hard negotiation and protest finally led to a compromise that my passport would be in the custody of the office and that no photographs should be taken on the way ahead. Accompanied by four porters employed here, Gaya and I continued to go down the left bank of the Kyirong Zangbo River southwards. Many workers were engaged in road construction for motor transport. Then, after walking down for five hours we crossed a stream to the right bank at 2026m by means of a bamboo cage hung from a steel cable. Then we ascended a steep trail for twenty minutes to Jangzon village at 2400m.

On October 1 we continued up a forested area but it began to rain in the afternoon. From the highest point of 3970m we descended to a river bed at 3480m and camped there. In the rain Galya went to the Lado La (4632m) that led to the Sanji Glacier, but he was unable to see the mountains in the vicinity from the pass because of bad weather. Otherwise, we could have had a look of the southern side of Yangra Kangri. We were forced to return. Part of the road under construction was damaged and washed away by heavy rain, leaving only hard rocks. We had to make a detour on the mountain side, and arrived at the Kyirong District on October 5.

Reconnaissance in 1998

The reconnaissance of 1996 blessed us with a welcome "by-product" - a magnificent panoramic view of Himalaya from the Ma La (5234m). In the panorama we identified Kabang Peak (6717m) on which no information had been available at all. The alluring profile of this peak deeply enchanted me and led me to organize a reconnaissance team in the fall of 1998. At the same time we planned to conduct exploration of the northern side of Yangra Kangri that we had given up in 1996.

On October 26 our three members arrived at Ruka on the left bank of the Kyirong Zangbo River after having completed the reconnaissance on the Kabang Peak. On the 27th Yoshihide Higami and Yasuo Ota went up the Rama Pu, a stream that flows through the right bank, for finding a route to a point on the northeast ridge of Yangra Kangri. They attempted to reach the Pawu Glacier on the northern side, but marsh and bush impeded their progress to the ridge. However we brought back a lot of useful information.

Climbing in 2001

The main party of five members led by Yamamori left Lhasa on September 15 and spent a night at Shekar, traveling via Xigatse and Lhaze. On the 16th we proceeded to Tingri

and then to Nyalam, where we joined three members who had come from Nepal. Having acclimatized ourselves to high altitudes, we drove on the 18th north of Xixabangma by two jeeps and one truck and crossed the Ma La (5234m) down to Kyirong County where we stopped for the night. On the following day we continued the drive for about 60km southwards down to Ruka (3050m) on the Kyirong Zangbo River. In Ruka there were a timber mill and accommodations for workers repairing roads. We stayed there until the 23rd to look for a route to BC. In four days we studied the route up to Lachang Co, a planned BC site and built a bridge over the Rama Pu. However, as we could not prepare and maintain a trail to BC, we had to establish BC in a forested place on the other side of the Rama Pu.

On September 24 we departed from Ruka. Porters were mainly villagers of Rama and Xoiboga on the left bank of the Rama Pu. But we eventually had to trouble workers of the timber mill. There were 51 porters in all. Passing through forests and marshes on the left bank of the Rama Pu and then crossing the bridge installed by the expedition members we got to the first-planned BC site. If the trail was better, a single day caravan trek would have taken us to Lachang Co at 4400m from the Rama Pu. In that sense the northern side of Yangra Kanri may allow for an easy approach. We maintained a route to Lachang Co and set up C1 there. Porters carried 500kg of gear and supplies to C1.

September 30 was the start of climbing activity. At about 6100m the northeast spur that came from the east ridge was divided to east and west. We chose the eastern (left) side for our route. In two hours from C1 we reached the glacier end, from which the climbing route traced up the snow face, making a detour around a rock tower. The tower was seen from the glacier end to the upper left. On October 9, C2 (5350m) was set up beneath a rock wall that looked like a glass. The critical pitches commenced here.

We climbed two pitches of the glass-shaped ridge and followed the snow ridge, which became extremely thin and narrow. After a treacherous part of the snow ridge had been negotiated with utmost care, we climbed a point beneath a hanging glacial zone. On October 18 we set up C3 (6000m) in a flat place, whose location was carefully selected in consideration of possible avalanches.

From C3 we chose as a route a huge snow wall that extended straight up to the east ridge. However, we were greatly troubled by numberless crevasses and differences in the snow wall level. As ropes and snow bars ran short, we had to reuse ropes that had been once fixed. As we advanced to the border of China and Nepal, cold and strong wind was prevailing. We decided to set up C4 on the 22nd beneath the east ridge on the border. However, the support activities were too slow for us to prepare for attacking the summit. As a result, we had to abandon the ascent of Yangra Kangri. On the 24th C4

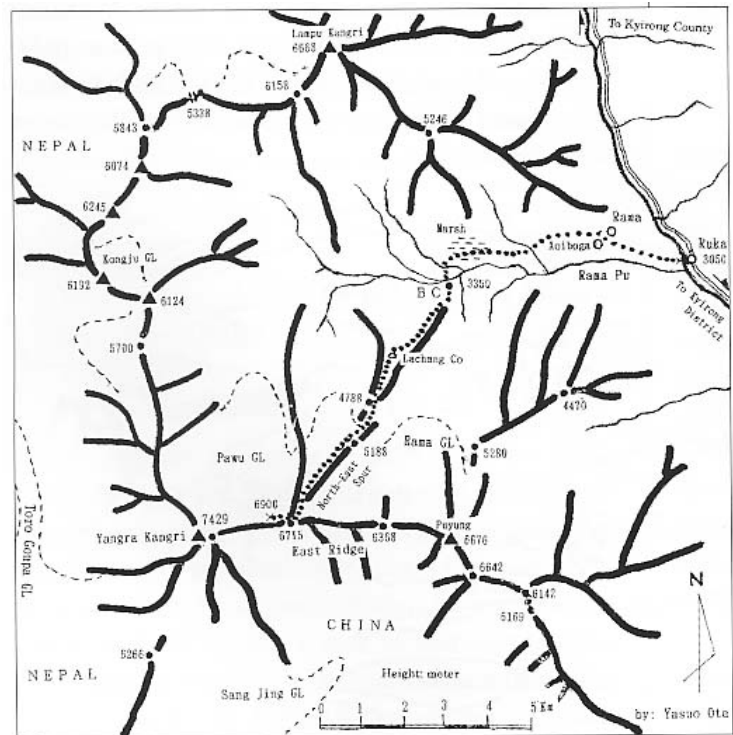
(6860m) was set up just beneath the ridge and four members remained there. On the 26th, even though ropes and pitons had been used up, they continued to advance but were forced to stop at 6900m, the highest point that party reached.

Despite our failure to reach the summit, all the elderly party members are satisfied with such a large-scale and ambitious challenge, without support by high porters, that would have involved an ascent of 3000m (difference in height) from C1 (actual BC) to the summit.

Leader: Kinichi Yamamori (57), Dy. Leader: Yoshihide Higami (57), Climbing Leader: Hideki Sato (53), Members: Masakatsu Tamura (59), Kunihiro Sato (58), Yasuji Moriyama (51), Yasuo Ota (48), Seiko Mantoku (47)



Yangra Kangri (right) and Puyon (left), a view from Ma La (Kinichi Yamamori)



Yangra Kangri, a view from C1 (Hideki Sato)

