

LOPCHIN (KANGRI GARPO II)

ASIA, TIBET, KANGRI GARPO MOUNTAINS

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In the autumn a joint expedition from the Alpine Club of Kobe University (ACKU) and the Mountaineering Association of China University of Geosciences (Wuhan, CUG) made the first ascent of Kangri Garpo II (KG II, 6,703m on old Soviet maps, 6,805m GPS). Lying a little northwest of Kangri Garpo I or Ruoni (Bairiga, 6,882m), KG II is the second highest summit in the Eastern Kangri Garpo mountains, and the only one of more than 30 6,000m peaks to have been climbed.

The expedition comprised two Tibetans and eight Chinese led by Dong Fan and seven Japanese led by me. Nine members were students. After a three-day, 920km drive from Lhasa to Lhagu and an additional one-day walk, we established base camp on October 18 in a moraine valley close to the snout of the north tongue of the Ata Glacier (4,320m, N 29° 13.17', E 96° 49.19'). Ten porters, who each ferried loads seven times, quickly established a deposit camp at 4,400m, below the first icefall.

It was obvious there had been little snowfall during the summer and early autumn, which was unusual. Trekkers and climbers who have visited the region in October and November report heavy snowfall and frequent avalanches. The Kobe University attempts on Ruoni in 2003 (AAJ 2004) and 2007 (AAJ 2008) were defeated by bad weather and excessive snow. These expeditions reported 40-50cm of fresh snow each night for periods of three or four days. In contrast our expedition experienced a maximum of only 10cm on the glacier, which was quickly melted by strong sunshine. Although we had only two perfect days and over 20 snowy ones, no snow accumulated on the glacier. This had its good and bad points: glacier travel was relatively easy, but higher, where temperatures remained lower, deep snow on the ridges made for hard work and dangerous conditions.

Advanced base was sited on the 22nd at 4,660m, above the first icefall and crevasse maze. This site experienced wind-blown snow, as deep as 130cm, deposited from the south tongue of the Ata. In contrast, when we established Camp 1 (4,890m) on the 29th at the confluence of the three upper glacier forks, we placed the tents on bare ice. Above we fixed 600m of rope through the second icefall and placed Camp 2 at 5,680m.

On November 5 five members left Camp 2 at 3:30 a.m. under a full moon. Strong wind, deep snow, and difficult crevasses slowed progress, and three returned. Deqing Ouzhu and Ciren Danda, Tibetan students with the CUG, continued up the southeast ridge of KG II and reached its summit at 1:18 p.m. in a mist. Above the col on the main divide between Ruoni and KG II (we refer to these two peaks and KG III as the Three Ata Sisters), the ridge was wide and gently angled to ca 6,300m. Above, it became steeper (average of 40°) and covered with deep, soft snow; not difficult but avalanche prone.

In the meantime, four Japanese had established Camp 3 on the col at 5,910m and prepared to climb next day. However, it remained windy and snowy, but on the 7th they had a lucky break, with a clear and relatively calm day. Koichiro Kondo and Masanori Yazaki left Camp 3 and reached the summit at 3:36 p.m., returning after dark at 8 p.m. Later, after consultation with the village leader of nearby Rhagu, we agreed to name KG II Lopchin (Lopchin Feng in Tibetan, Lou bu qin in Chinese), which means “male white hawk.

