

First ascent of Churen Himal

Ryozo Yamamoto

Members of the Academic Alpine Club of Shizuoka, Japan climbed the main peak (West Peak) of Churen Himal (7371 m) and the Central Peak (about 7371 m) on 28 and 24 October 1970 respectively. The following is a brief description of our expedition. We first planned to climb Churen Himal in 1963, but the expedition unfortunately did not materialise until 1970. During that period, however, we participated in the Academic Expedition to Colombia in 1967, organised by Shizuoka University, and made successfully some first ascents in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in Colombia. In 1969, the Government of Nepal lifted the ban on mountaineering in the Himalaya and officially announced that they would re-open their doors to the mountaineers of the world. As a result, the permission for our trip to Churen Himal was granted in August 1970.

The mountaineering history of Churen Himal dates back to 1954, when James Roberts first approached the group from the north through the Kaya Khola. In 1962, a Japanese party reached a height of about 5750 m in an attempt from the Kaya Khola, by almost the same route as that taken by James Roberts in 1954. On the other hand, James Roberts pioneered the southern area of Churen Himal for the first time from the west along the Kaphe glacier in 1962 and the Royal Air Force Expedition to Dhaula IV passed over the same routes in 1965. After the end of the Nepal Government ban, the first party to Churen Himal was an Italian expedition led by Paolo Consiglio in the post-monsoon of 1969. They tried to take a steep western ridge to the main peak, but only reached 6500 m, because of the insufficient time. At the same time, a Japanese party to Gurja Himal led by Yoshimi Yakushi succeeded in reaching its summit on 1 November. During the pre-monsoon period of 1970, two parties established base camps at the foot of the Kaphe glacier. One was of a Japanese party to Dhaula VI, the other of a Korean party to Churen Himal. Later, a rumour was spread that the East Peak was attacked by the Korean party at the end of April.

Among the possible routes to the summit, we decided to take the south or south-east approach ascending from the west along the upper Kaphe glacier. On 9 September 1970, our six members arrived at Kathmandu. The team consisted of the leader Takashi Serizawa (46 years old), Manufacturing Engineer; climbing leader Ryozo Yamamoto (31), Industrial Engineer; Atsushi Oishi (32), University Researcher; Masayoshi Fukui (31), High School Teacher; Kozo Hasegawa (28), Chemist and Eiji Doma (23), College Student. Seven Sherpas from the Himalayan Society were Ang Nobru as a Sirdar, Pemba Gyalzen, Zangbu from Namche, Dawa Sunder from Chaurikharka, Thendi from Thame, Nima Norbu from Pangboche and Wangyal as a cook.



42 *The west face of Churen Himal seen from Kaphe Khola. This and next two photos: R. Yamamoto*

Two days after arrival at Kathmandu, the party were fortunately able to fly on to Pokhara by a chartered flight. We left Pokhara on 12 September, accompanied by forty-three porters with wages of fifteen rupees a day. After four days trekking, we reached Beni, and took on another three porters to carry local provisions. On 19 September, all porters were replaced in Muna, except five of those from Pokhara. As a result, good progress was made in our trekking from Muna onward, and we arrived at Gurjakhani on 21 September. On 24 September, a wonderful view of Putha Hiunchuli and the West face of Churen Himal was before us after thirteen days of trekking. The Base Camp was set up at 4100 m, the same place as the Italians in 1969. There was also a Base Camp near us of the Fukuoka party aiming at Dhaulagiri IV. As our arrival at the Base Camp was slightly behind schedule, we had to carry loads hurriedly to the higher camps. Camp I was established on the following day at the height of 4750 m on the Kaphe glacier, where we found a safe route onwards towards the summit.

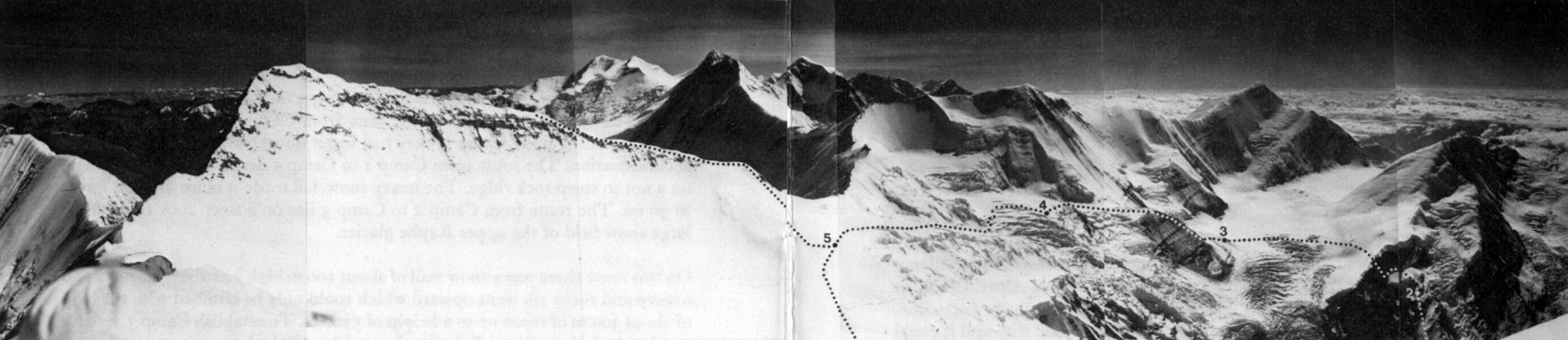
So, we decided to select the small rock ridge to Gustang North, the so-called 'Toyama Route', up to the height of 5700 m. Oishi and Doma left Camp 1 in

the morning of 1 October and established Camp 2 on the same day at the height of 5300 m. Camp 2 could be clearly seen from Camp 1 through binoculars. After the setting up of Camp 2, they had to get down owing to the insufficient acclimatisation. The route from Camp 1 to Camp 2 lies in the séracs area and on a not so steep rock ridge. The heavy snow-fall made it more difficult for us to go on. The route from Camp 2 to Camp 3 lies on a steep rock ridge and a large snow field of the upper Kaphe glacier.

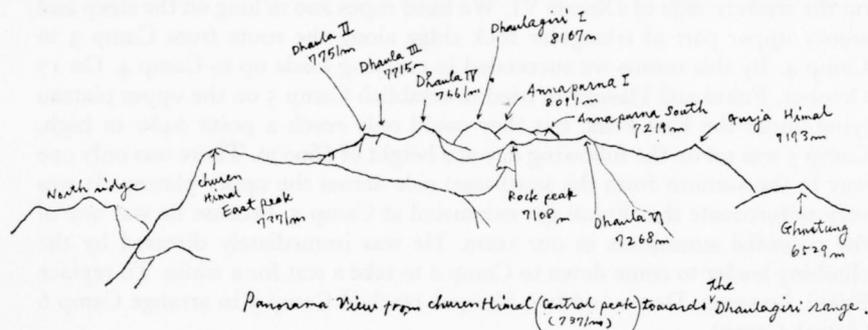
On this route there was a snow wall of about 100 m high just above Camp 2 and a steep and rocky rib went upward which could only be climbed with the help of about 300 m of ropes up to a height of 5700 m. To establish Camp 3, a party consisted of Yamamoto, Fukui and two Sherpas had to cross a large snow plateau. Camp 3 was set up at 5650 m at the foot of the West face of Dhaula VI on 5 October and Camp 4 at 6200 m on 11 October by Fukui and two Sherpas on the western side of Dhaula VI. We fixed ropes 200 m long on the steep and snowy upper part of triangular rock ridge along the route from Camp 3 to Camp 4. By this means we succeeded in carrying loads up to Camp 4. On 17 October, Fukui and Hasegawa tried to establish Camp 5 on the upper plateau lying under the East Peak, but they could only reach a point 6480 m high. Camp 5 was set on the following day at a height of 6600 m. There was only one way to the summit from the south-east side across the upper plateau. It was very unfortunate that Fukui got exhausted at Camp 5, because he was one of the potential summiters in our team. He was immediately directed by the climbing leader to come down to Camp 2 to take a rest for a while. To replace Fukui, however, Doma and two Sherpas reached Camp 5 to arrange Camp 6 (Attack Camp).

Three days after arrival at Camp 5, Camp 6 was established at a height of 6800 m. The news from Camp 6 was very encouraging. Between Camp 5 and Camp 6, ropes 400 m long were arranged for descending from the upper plateau down to the bottom of the cirque of the East Peak. Both the first summit party consisting of Fukui and Hasegawa, and the second party headed by Doma left Camp 4 in the morning of the 22nd. Both parties reached Camp 5 in the evening of the same day. It seemed to us that everything proceeded as had been scheduled. On 23 October, the first summit party supported by two Sherpas moved to the highest camp. Fukui and Hasegawa left Camp 5 at 5am the following morning as the first summit party. The weather was excellent, and the summit attack was carried out in fairly good conditions. The party reached the top ridge at 10.40am. After crossing it, they climbed a snow ridge of about 50 m before stepping on to the summit of the Central Peak (about 7371 m) where they stayed for half an hour. They had mistaken the Central Peak for the main peak (West Peak). Observing that another peak (West Peak) was of the same level as the Central, they returned to Camp 6. On 26 October, a second party consisting of Doma, Sirdar Ang Norbu and Zangbu again reached the summit of Central Peak by the same route.

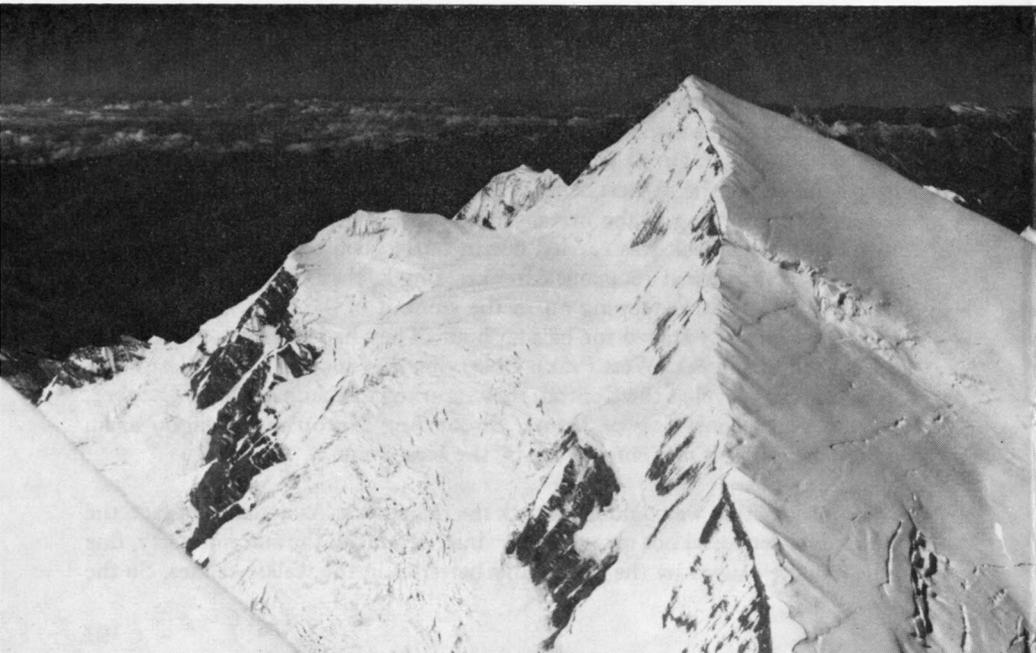
It was unlucky that we could not attack the main peak. As a matter of fact, the climbing leader could not give adequate instructions to the summit party, due to the trouble caused by the lack of dry batteries in the walkie-talkies. So the



43 Panorama towards Dhaulagiri from Churen Himal (Central Peak)



44 Putha Hiunchuli from the summit of Churen Himal (Central Peak)



climbing leader after observing the second summit party's activity through his binoculars, left Camp 4 for Camp 5 on the 24th in order to reorganise the attacking programme to the main peak. As a result, the third summit party consisting of Hasegawa and Ang Norbu left the highest camp at 6am on the 24th. Making a long traverse of the South face of the main peak, they climbed directly to the top and stepped on the very summit of Churen Himal at 11.13am on 28 October 1970. The summit was like a spear-head. As the provisions in the higher camps had been used up, we had to give up the idea of attacking the East Peak from Camp 5.

On 31 October, all members were back at Base Camp. The party returned to Pokhara on 13 November, and reached Kathmandu safely on 17 November.

Note. The news of the ascent of the East Peak of Churen Himal by a Korean Party on 29 April 1970 is in doubt in many respects, as a result of our careful study of the statements made by the Korean Party. The report regarding these doubts has already been published in Japan. Our detailed account of the attack on the main peak of Churen Himal clearly reflects that many doubtful points still remain in the Korean story.

SUMMARY Himalaya, Churen Himal, Academic Alpine Club of Shizuoka Expedition, 1970.

24 October; Central Peak (7371 m), first ascent by M. Fukui and K. Hasegawa. 26 October, second ascent by E. Doma, Ang Norbu and Zangbu. 28 October, West Peak (7371 m) first ascent by K. Hasegawa and Ang Norbu. (For a map of this area see *A.J.* 76 228).