

About Manaslu summit topography

8000ers.com



Manaslu from the southeast

1. Introduction

Manaslu (8163m), the eighth highest mountain in the world, has gained a lot of popularity among climbers in recent years. In just 6 years from 2013 to 2018 it was climbed more times than in all the previous years since the first ascent in 1956:

Year	Ascents
1956-2012	785
2013-2018	947
Total	1732

Recorded ascents for Manaslu (source: Himalayan Database)

Good accessibility and the lack of major technical difficulties on the normal route make it a popular choice and the introduction into 8000m mountaineering for many.

Despite the many ascents there is general confusion about the summit area with fore-summits being mistaken as the main summit and reports about controversial/false summit claims in the media and on climbing blogs.

See for instance:

<http://adventureconsultantsblog.com/claiming-false-summits/>

<https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/climbers-dont-have-to-stand-atop-it-summit-mt-manaslu-nepal/>

<https://www.markhorrell.com/blog/2016/how-to-verify-manaslu-summit-claim/>

The hazy summit topography at one of the most climbed 8000ers requires a deeper look. This report is an attempt to shed light on the true summit topography of Manaslu. The nature of this report is purely educational and non-commercial.

2. Summit topography



Picture 1 (photo: Paulo Grobel)

Picture 1 shows the upper reaches of the northeast face of Manaslu with fore-summits and main summit.

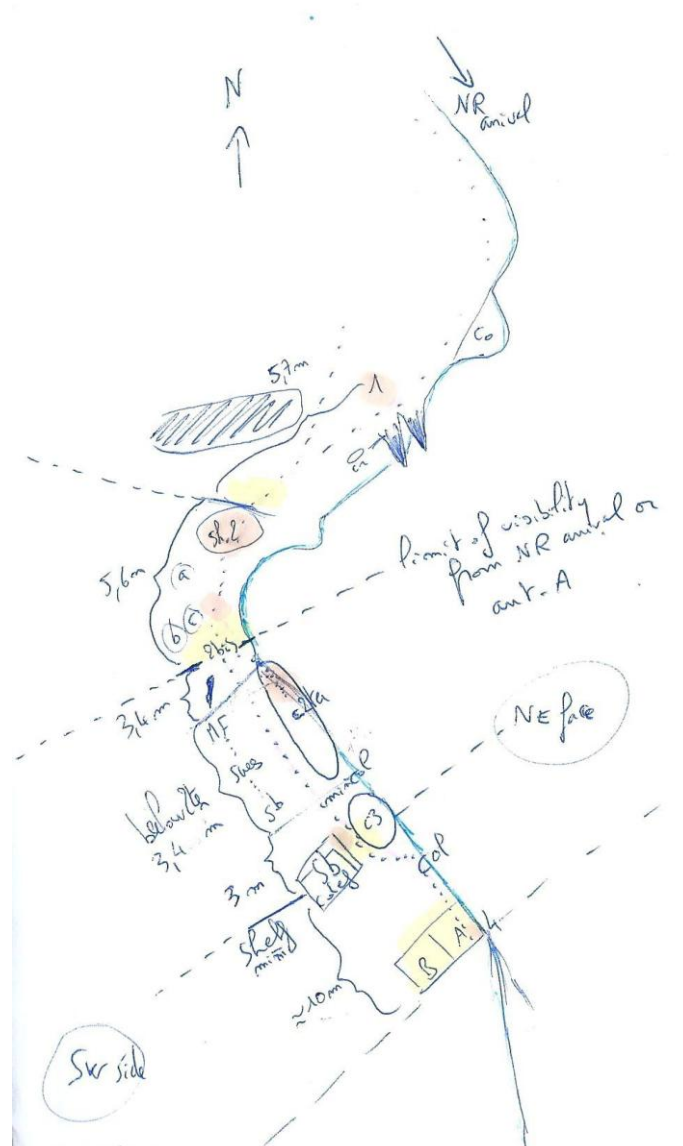
- a,b,c,d,e are lower fore-summits
- 1 is a rock pinnacle often used as an anchor for the fixed ropes
- C2 and C3 are upper fore-summits/cornices on the final summit ridge
- 4 is the main summit
- Monkey face (MF) is a rock formation just underneath C2
- Square blocks (SB) are two different rock formations, one on the ridge between C2 and C3, the other one just underneath C3



Picture 2 (photo: Guy Cotter)

A close-up view of the final summit ridge with climbers on the main summit, taken from below near the normal route of ascent.

The final summit ridge (C2-4) extends in a northwest-southeast direction. It is roughly 20m in length. The altitude difference between C2 and 4 is approx. 3-6m. Two small notches (cols) separate C2 from C3 (~1m deep) and C3 from 4 (5-6m deep) on the final summit ridge.



Summit ridge sketch map

An important factor to keep in mind are the very differing conditions at the top. Perhaps unequalled by any other 8000m peak, the summit area of Manaslu varies in appearance depending on the snow conditions.

Conditions high up the mountain encountered by post-monsoon expeditions may be totally different than those in pre-monsoon. Sometimes the main summit is a rock tower, the summit ridge a rocky ridge with only small cornices. At other times, the summit may be completely covered with snow, the whole ridge snowed in with no rocks visible, sharp cornices, the notches completely filled with snow.



Picture 3 (source: <https://www.himalayanexploration.com/tours/manaslu-expedition/>)

The last metres to the upper fore-summit C2 on the normal route of ascent. The final summit ridge with the main summit lie beyond C2 and are not visible from this point of view. To the right the lower fore-summits a and b.

The ridge makes a bend of almost 90° at the upper fore-summit C2, from a southwesterly to a southeasterly direction (see sketch map above). C2 is the “limit of visibility” for mountaineers on the normal route of ascent. Approaching from below they are not able to see any terrain beyond C2, let alone the true main summit (compare pic. 3 & 4). The fact that the true main summit is not visible for a large part of the normal route may have played a role in the summit confusion and in the recent tendency of climbers “summitting” near C2.



Picture 4 (photo: Ralf Dujmovits)

A close-up view of C2 in dry conditions. Again no terrain beyond C2 visible from this point of view.



Picture 5 (source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfzbaRzovm0>)

The climber reached the prayer flags below C2 in autumn 2014. Now the view extends to the final summit ridge beyond C2. Sharp cornices are formed on the ridge. We can see the cornice at C3, Manaslu main summit is just hidden behind. Ngadi Chuli appears in the centre background, the Himal Chulis in the south are completely hidden by the ridge.



Picture 6 (source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9W9iNNn4nl>)

Picture 6 is from autumn 2013. There is more snow than on the pictures above and the climbers were able to set foot on the final summit ridge. They are standing somewhere in between C2 and C3. Now the Himal Chuli range is visible in the south.



Picture 7 (source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9W9iNNn4nl>)

Another picture from the same expedition, this time a slightly higher perspective. The snowy main summit is now visible at the end of the ridge, the Himal Chulis visible in the background, the whole summit area covered with snow.

The pictures above show the summit zone in snowy conditions. In fact, pictures 5-7 were taken in autumn / post-monsoon seasons.

The summer monsoon in Nepal brings huge amounts of snow to the high Himalaya, covering the whole summit area and forming large cornices on the ridge between the main summit and upper fore-summit C2. The snow conditions in autumn make it virtually impossible for post-monsoon expeditions to reach the true main summit.

Autumn expeditions usually end their ascents somewhere in between 1 and upper fore-summit C2. The exact location always depends on the prevailing snow conditions and the fixed ropes of the commercial expedition operators. As seen in pictures 6 & 7, in some cases teams were able to climb beyond C2, ending their ascent in between C2 and C3. However the majority of teams in autumn “summit” below C2 (picture 5).

The following picture shows the main summit of Manaslu in totally different conditions. It was taken during the Japanese first ascent in May 1956:



Picture 8 (photo: Toshio Imanishi)

The photographer is standing on C3, the main summit is a rock tower, largely free of snow. Compared with picture 7, the summit looks almost unrecognisable. The view is towards south and both Himal Chuli and Ngadi Chuli can be seen in the background (compare with pictures 6 & 7).



Picture 9 (photo left: Toshio Imanishi, photo centre: Ed Viesturs, photo right: Guy Cotter)

Gyaltsen Norbu Sherpa (in May 1956), Veikka Gustafsson (in April 1999) and Donald Baldry (in May 2012) are standing on the true main summit. They all summited in spring / pre-monsoon seasons. Relatively small amounts of snow at the summit area made it possible for them to cross the final summit ridge and reach the main summit.



Picture 10 (photo: Stipe Božić)

Viktor Grošelj is standing on C3 in May 1984, the main summit just behind. Note there is a notch in between C3 and 4. Good view south towards the Ganesh and Himal Chuli ranges.



Picture 11 (photo: unknown; Mario Panzeri archive)

Mario Panzeri on C3 in May 2009. Similar perspective as in picture 10.

Pictures 12 and 13 show the reverse view from the main summit to the upper fore-summits and rock pinnacle:



Picture 12 (source: Dina Štěrbová: Touhy a úděl, p. 37)

Picture 12 was taken during the first women ascent of Manaslu in May 1974. The photographer is standing on the main summit, the view is towards north. C2 and the ridge between C3 and C2 are hidden by C3.



Picture 13 (photo: Guy Cotter)

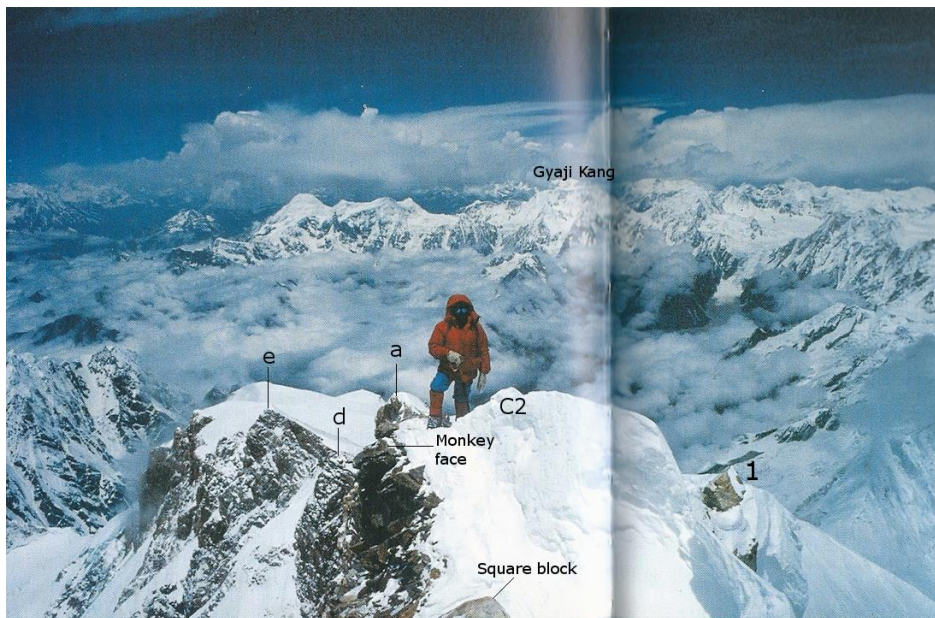
A similar view from May 2012. Now we can see MF and climbers crossing the ridge in between C2 and C3.

Both photos were taken in spring seasons. The col in between C3 and the summit is largely free of snow. In the dry conditions the climbers were able to descend into the col and climb to the main summit.



Picture 14 (photo: Gianni Goltz)

Renzo Corona just above MF at C2 in May 2002. The photographer late Gianni Goltz is standing in the vicinity of C3. The lower fore-summits below are visible as well as SB on the ridge in between C2 and C3. Gyaji Kang is visible in the north.



Picture 15 (photo: Marcel Rüedi)

A similar perspective. Erhard Loretan at C2 in April 1984. Note the dry conditions often prevailing in April and May. Cornices on the summit ridge are rather small and large parts of the rocky ridge are exposed.

3. Conclusion

Nowadays the large majority of expeditions to Manaslu take place in autumn, after the monsoon in Nepal.

From 2013 to 2018, only a total of 4 (!) ascents were recorded in spring seasons, compared to 943 recorded autumn ascents in the same period of time:

2013-2018	Spring	Autumn
Expeditions	18	189
Ascents	4	943

[Expeditions and ascents for Manaslu 2013-2018 \(source: Himalayan Database\)](#)

The strong tendency towards autumn climbs on Manaslu is paradoxical considering the snow conditions at the summit in the post-monsoon. With the statistics above in mind, and considering the conditions climbers meet at the summit in autumn, this means that the main summit of Manaslu is hardly climbed anymore.

With the knowledge of the topographical summit features outlined in this report, questions arise that are relevant for mountaineering historians, record-keepers and chroniclers of Himalayan ascents, as well as the ethics of mountaineering as a whole.

Such questions include:

What should be considered a summit success?

Only the true summit?

A “tolerance zone” including fore-summits?

How to define such a tolerance zone?

How to deal with past ascents that lacked today’s knowledge?

How to deal with past ascents that evidently didn’t reach the true summit?

Should there be a distinction of collectors (14x8000) and non-collectors?

Those questions are relevant too for other 8000ers with complex summit topographies (Annapurna I, Dhaulagiri I).

Acknowledgments

8000ers.com team, Eberhard Jurgalski
himalaya-info.org, Günter Seyfferth (https://himalaya-info.org/manaslu_panorama.htm)
Himalayan Database team, Richard Salisbury

Paulo Grobel
Guy Cotter
Himalayan Exploration (<https://www.himalayanexploration.com/tours/manaslu-expedition>)
Ralf Dujmovits
Tomáš Haničinec (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfzbaRzovm0>)
Takayasu Semba (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9W9iNNn4nI>)
Toshio Imanishi (†)
Ed Viesturs
Stipe Božić
Mario Panzeri
Dina Štěrbová
Gianni Goltz (†)
Marcel Rüedi (†)