

Report on Four Peaks of Papua Expedition

IMG guide, Dan Zokaites, and long term IMG client, Anthony Nightingale, accompanied by Anthony's friend, Neil Sunderland, and two experienced Indonesian guides, Steven Drive Liwe and Brury Sondakh, set off on 10th February 2013 to climb four peaks of Papua: Sumantri, Carstensz Pyramid, Ngga Pulu and East Carstensz.

Anthony, who had climbed Carstensz Pyramid with Eric Simonson 12 years ago, had put together this trip primarily to experience the glaciers of Ngga Pulu and East Carstensz, before they disappear (estimated to be within 10-20 years) and to climb the other peaks in this area.

Under our original plan, we hoped to hike through the Grasberg Mine area but that proved impossible to arrange so we elected to helicopter in straight from Timika at sea level to Base Camp at 4,200 meters.



This gained us time but led to some acclimatization problems. The first day on arrival was taken very easy to acclimatize, with just Anthony and Steven taking a short hike

Unfortunately, our third Indonesian colleague, a Papuan, developed signs of more serious altitude sickness and needed to go down the mountain on our second day.

The first night proved eventful when the camp was subject to a heavy snowfall, collapsing the tarp spread over some of our tents.



But this was soon remedied in the morning and we enjoyed some great views of the mountains covered in snow.



The second day (11th February) we trekked up towards the Ngga Pulu glacier and left a few items high on the trail (ice axe, crampons and water bottle) to ease the load next day.

Dan was always very insistent that we try to carry as little as possible in our packs though he was unable to comply with this himself since he usually carried the climbing gear and rope!

We had planned to set off at 0500 on the third day (12th February) for our climb to Sumantri and Ngga Pulu which are two separate peaks at either end of the Ngga Pulu glacier. In the event it was raining hard and we delayed our departure till 0600, finally deciding to set off anyway. So, with an umbrella stuffed between the rain jacket and the back pack to leave hands free for the trekking pole and for negotiating the rock, we departed, taking a path around the lakes till we came to the passage up the hill to the glacier where we had climbed the day before.



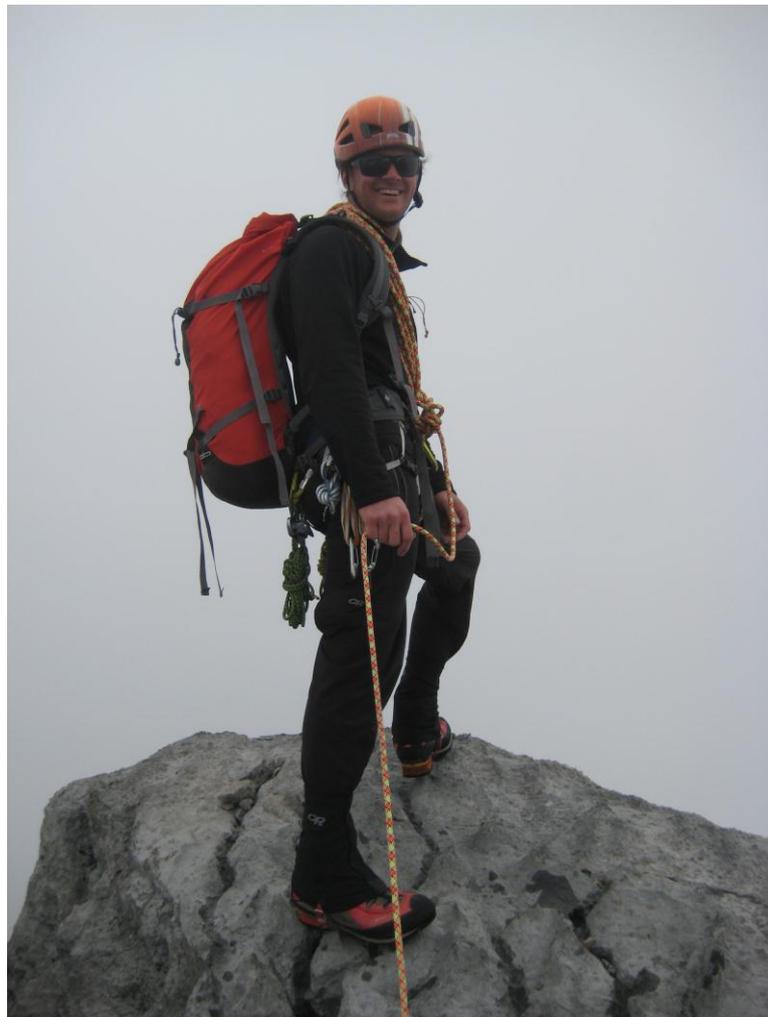
In the event, with Neil still feel the effects of the altitude, only Dan and Anthony proceeded on to the glacier, heading first towards to Sumantri, a rock summit.

There was a steep entry to the glacier but we benefitted from the recent snowfall and our footing was secure.



We soon roped up, however, and proceeded to cross the glacier towards Sumantri. Dan had downloaded from the internet recent photos of the mountain dating from 2010 but as we neared the peak, we could see that already conditions had changed. Instead of the snow leading comfortably up to the rocky outcrop we needed to climb, we found we needed to negotiate an awkward route of mixed snow and rock before we were able to reach the base, where we took off our crampons.

Dan then led the way up a relatively straightforward rock climb, belaying Anthony on certain sections, till we reached the summit, a height of 4,870 meters, arriving it at 1200.



We realised that we had taken too long to manage both Sumantri and Ngga Pulu in one day so started down the glacier. The snow had softened considerably and we felt the steep sections could pose some danger so decided to leave the glacier earlier, heading for some rocks on our right, well above our original entry point.

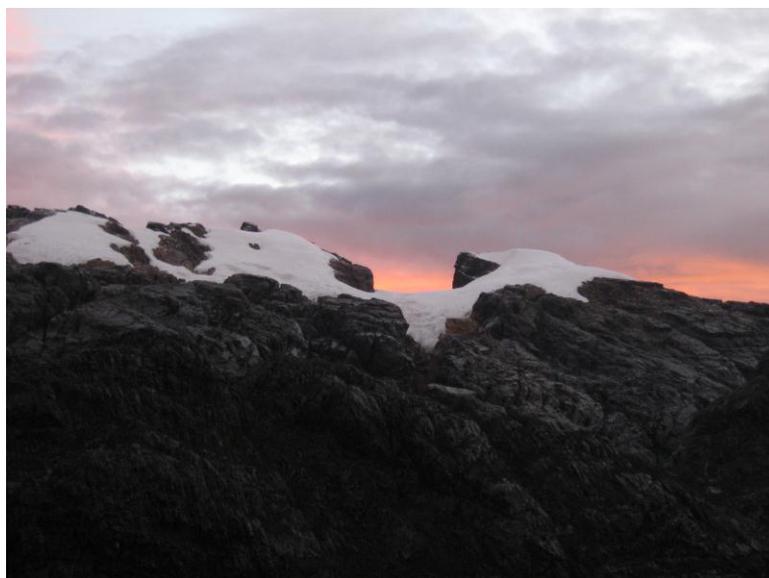
Luckily, there was a relatively easy way off the glacier and our luck held for quite a while as we found our way down through the rock, sometimes solid, sometimes with a lot of loose material. But eventually we came to a point where we could only proceed through a rapell and so Dan, after searching for a while for a secure anchor point, sacrificed three pieces of protection to secure our escape.



We were soon down and on our way to join the path to camp which we reached at 1600, making ten hours overall for the climb.

Following this exercise and still working on our acclimatization, Dan, Anthony and Neil took a rest day while Steven and Brury went in rather dismal weather to explore the route to Ngga Pulu. We decided then that Dan, Steven and Anthony would bring forward our climb of Carstensz Pyramid and tackle that next.

We again awoke at 0300 to heavy rain but decided anyway that we would set off for the mountain so at 0435, just as the rain ceased, we left camp. As we reached the wall, we were rewarded by some great early morning views across the valley to Ngga Pulu.



Much of the ascent was with attachment by jumar to the fixed rope but we mostly climbed the rock rather than hauling ourselves up. Eventually, we reached the “Tyrolean Traverse” which had not been there when Anthony climbed the mountain in 2001.



Despite good instruction from Dan, this proved quite tiring and complicated on the way up. Fortunately, it was much easier on the way down. With help by Dan and Steven, Anthony managed both this and two tricky steps on the route to the summit, arriving at 1145 at an altitude of 4,884 meters.



We were soon descending by a series of rappells. It was now raining heavily so we took the descent slowly and carefully, reaching camp some 13 ¾ hours later at 1820.



Another rest day to recuperate seemed a good plan to Anthony while Dan went with Brury and Neil to explore the route to the glacier on East Carstensz.



The second to last day of our trip (16th February) was planned for Ngga Pulu. Unusually the rain stopped quite early in the night and at 0545, Dan, Steven and Anthony set off, wearing just two layers on top, together with climbing pants and rain pants. As we had experienced the glacier on the Sumantri climb, we decided to use the rock route reconnoitered by Stephen and Brury two days before.

It was a pleasant morning and we climbed relatively swiftly with some scrambles and walking over slanting slabs.



Near the top of the climb, there was a fixed rope but we found there were plenty of good hand holds and foot holds and we did not use it. Eventually, we reached the rock summit and paused to fix our crampons.



A further 100 meters or so across the glacier, we reached the snow summit at 0935, calculating the height as 4,840 meters.



Ngga Pulu, according to our Indonesian guides, is the mountain whose Indonesian name is Puncak Jaya (Mount Victory in Bahasa Indonesia) though on internet sites, you will often see this name used for Carstensz Pyramid. The story is that when the mountain was first given this name in the 1960s when Indonesia took over Papua, Ngga Pulu was the highest of the surrounding mountains because then the glacier was much higher. Now the Ngga Pulu summit is definitely lower than Carstensz Pyramid and on our estimates lower than Sumantri too. In a few years' time, the rock summit will be higher than the snow summit.

We returned from the peak of Ngga Pulu to camp by 1203, taking a total of six hours and 18 minutes, the first time we had beaten (comfortably) our estimate for one of the climbs. Just two minutes before we reached the camp, the heavy rain began again.

On our final day at 0550, we set off for the peak of East Carstensz, which we had earlier thought would be the easiest and quickest of the summits. This proved not to be the case. It is very seldom climbed, even less than Sumantri. One of our Indonesian guides, Brury, had come close to the summit 12 years ago but since then conditions had changed.

Dan's reconnoiter of the glacier two days earlier had indicated a steep and icy entry and we elected again to try to negotiate a mainly rock route around the glacier rather than walk up the glacier itself.

The route out of camp begins in the same direction as the way to Carstensz Pyramid but then meanders up and down along a hillside until it moves sharply upwards over broken ground and some awkward scrambles to emerge at a high point from where you can see a ridge and the glacier.



Neil, now feeling much better and much stronger, came part of the way with us and found a comfortable place to wait while Dan, Brury and Anthony continued in the direction of the summit.

Since it is rarely climbed, we were not sure if we were achieving the best route and indeed, with visibility not that clear, we did not know whether a near peak was the real summit or one that we could see more dimly in the distance. Dan climbed the near peak and pronounced it was 12 meters lower than it should be, so we pressed on, sometimes going up and over and sometimes around the intermediate hills.



Eventually, we came to a small snowfield which we crossed by digging deep boot holes (though we had carried ice axes and crampons all day) and were soon beneath the summit. A short climb, belayed by Dan, took us to the top at 1150 which we calculated to be a height of 4,820 meters.



After reaching our 4th peak we descended rapidly to camp, stopping just once to pick up Neil. As usual, in the early afternoon, it had begun to rain heavily. Although we made an excellent time on the descent, the long route up meant we returned to camp just at 1520, after a total trip of 9 and a half hours.



Early next morning, beginning at 0630, since our loads were strictly limited, we helicoptered off the mountain in three groups to spend a welcome day relaxing in Timika before heading our separate ways.

