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Patal Hiunchuli (6,434m), north face, attempt and tragedy

Asia, Nepal, Annapurna Himal

The Choongbuk Alpine Federation Rescue Team, led by Park Yeonsoo, consisted of 10 members. They split into two groups and from August 27 to October 8 attempted the west- northwest ridge and north face of Hiunchuli in the Annapurna Sanctuary. Avalanches, rockfall, rotten crevasses, and bad weather forced them to abandon their attempts on the ridge.

Instead, they placed a campon Tharpu Chuli (Tent Peak, 5,663m) directly opposite, used it for observing and photographing the north face, and chose a detailed line of ascent. They hoped to reach the summit in four days.

On September 23 Min Junyoung, Park Jong-sung, and Park Soo-hwan left base camp and bivouacked as planned in a crevasse at 4,900m. The following morning they left for the face, while the remaining members established an observation site at 4,700m. At 10 a.m. the climbing party radioed that Park Soohwan was coming down, as he didn't feel he was in good enough shape for the climb. The remaining two continued and that night radioed that they had made a second bivouac at 5,350m. On the morning of the 25th the two men again radioed base camp to say they would be taking the right-hand couloir to reach the snowfield above and that both were in excellent condition. This was the last contact from the pair; bad weather engulfed the mountain, and sight of the climbers was lost. When nothing had been heard by 8 a.m. on the 26th, Kim Dong-hwa and Park Soohwan returned to the observation site, where they noted the weather was now even worse and avalanches were increasing. They returned to base camp at noon, and the team decided to contact friends in Korea for assistance. A helicopter arrived the following morning, and Park Soo-hwan accompanied the pilot on a search of the face and summit area. A second flight scoured the upper face and west-northwest ridge. Over the next three days Kim and Park, with Sherpa assistance, searched the base of the wall but found no trace of the missing climbers. On October 5 the expedition members agreed there was no possibility of the pair still being alive, and further searches, which had been financed by Cheongju City Hall and the climbing community in Korea, were abandoned.

Min Jun-young had made a possible first ascent of Jikji Peak (6,235m), Pakistan, in 2007 [AAJ 2008, p. 350] and a new route on the northwest face of Spantik (7,027m) in 2009 [see elsewhere in this Journal]. The latter, climbed in alpine style, constituted revolutionary progress in Korean alpinism. Min's loss has come as a great shock to the Korean climbing community.

(Translated by Peter Jensen-Choi).

Editor's note: The only previously known attempts on this face were by Slovenians. In spring 1994 Tadej Golab and friends tried the northeast face, leading to the 6,005m east summit, but were forced down by poor weather and stonefall. They came back in the autumn but found the face too dry. In October 1995 Golab returned to the line with Tomaz Jeras and Dusan Polenik. The three climbed the initial 300m rocky section at UIAA VI/VI+ and A2, and continued on snow and ice, including a 50m pitch of 85° and a difficult serac barrier, to reach the east summit. Jeras remained there while the other two continued toward the main summit. However, they were thwarted by bad snow. Most of the 1,200m route (Terra Nostra, ED2) was climbed unroped, and they descended with only five rappels.

Images



Hiunchuli from the northeast. The pointed subsidiary summit on the long east ridge (left skyline) is the east summit (6,005m). The 1995 Slovenian Route climbs triangular rock and ice wall below the east summit, facing camera. The proposed Korean line followed the broad depression to the right, at first on vague rock and ice rib between two couloirs, then up right, and finally back left through serac barriers to the summit. The west-northwest ridge forms the right skyline and leads toward Annapurna South.

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