



Parchamo, West Face; Tengi Ragi Tau, West Face Attempt

Nepal, Rolwaling Himal

After a seven-day trek with porters, Tino Villanueva and I arrived at our 5,300m base camp below the west face of Parchamo (6,279m). We had planned on objectives a little further up glacier, but the new snow that fell in mid-October and caused deaths in the Annapurna region still had not settled. Trying to walk through deep drifts over a boulder-covered glacier is really not much fun.

After scoping the west face of Parchamo for a couple of days, we made a recon mission to the start of the technical difficulties, giving our bodies a chance to acclimatize. On our fourth day after arriving at base camp we set off to attempt the previously unclimbed face. We felt confident the line would go and decided to travel light, taking only one 60m rope. The route involved 1,200m of technical climbing with difficulties to AI4 M5. It started with firm névé, water ice runnels, and solid granite. However, as is often the case in the Greater Ranges, the real difficulties began high on the route, with deep trail-breaking through faceted snow over steep ground. We topped out after 12 hours of mostly simul-climbing and summited in the dark.

With building winds we descended the standard route on the north ridge, as planned. Gusts of more than 40 mph and ambient air temperatures nearing zero made the descent rather more full value than we had hoped. On the rounded portion of the ridge we dropped a little onto the east flank in hopes of escaping frostbite-inducing gales coming from the west. This was counter-productive, as the east side cliffed out and we had to regain the crest to continue our descent. We wandered back into base camp around midnight on Halloween, but still had enough energy for a little celebration the next day.

After a couple of days' rest while watching the west face of Tengi Ragi Tau (6,938m), it looked like there would be a gap in the winds. We geared up and headed for this previously unclimbed face. However, the strong winds did not abate, and blowing snow was causing an almost constant avalanche down the approach dihedral. We decided we needed at least 48 hours for the face to settle.

To make the most of this waiting period, we opted to get lower in order to recover fully from Parchamo, so without further delay began the trek down to Thame (ca 3,810m). This involves crossing the Tesi Lapcha Pass (5,755 m), then descending 2,000m into the Khumbu Valley. No small feat, especially to reverse, but we still had over two weeks left in the trip. We fortified our camp, packed up our bags, and headed to moderate elevations, with hopes of feeling strong again.

After our much-needed break, we returned over the pass to base camp, and after two days walked to the foot of Tengi Ragi Tau's west face. This time winds were borderline, but we decided to have a closer look. We battled a steady stream of face-numbing spindrift for hours on the lower face, but by midday the winds had dropped and our progress was steady. Calf-burning front pointing characterized the start of the route, while a few pitches offered exciting mixed steps and thin water-ice slabs. The most engaging pitch involved feet cutting out with only a knifeblade for pro.

As the sun was setting, Tino popped onto a snow ledge just wide enough for our tent. We had arrived at our first planned bivouac, beneath a slightly overhanging wall at 6,200m. All night we could hear objects whiz past; fortunately, only small ones bounced off our ultra-thin tent.

Our second day started with a series of traverse pitches across a ribbon of alpine ice, and progress

was again quick until we came to an unconsolidated convex roll. We tiptoed below and climbed a couple of loose rock pitches to bypass it. We reached our second planned bivouac site—the highest spot we felt we could sleep—with a little light left. Above was a rock band and the final exposed summit snow slopes; we were 400m below the summit. However, the spot felt too exposed to objective danger for us. We debated and then agreed to go down.

We had been planning this trip for two years, and the face had become something of an obsession; it was hard to turn away after climbing more than 1,500m. In a little over eight hours, about 25 60m rappels brought us down to the base of the wall. Our anchors of slung blocks, Abalakovs, and stoppers had been of varying quality.

Once again the Rolwaling had served up exciting objectives, valuable learning experiences, as well as a big old slice of humble pie. We would like to thank the AAC for supporting us with a Lyman Spitzer Award.

Alan Rousseau, AAC

Images



Tino Villanueva on the west face of Tengri Ragi Tau.



Alan Rousseau at the first bivouac on the west face of Tengri Ragi Tau with the Drolambau Glacier and the east face of 6,771m Takargo behind.



The 2014 route on the west face of Parchamo. The left skyline (north ridge) is the standard ascent route.



Alan Rousseau working through mixed terrain low on the west face of Parchamo.



The attempted route on the ca 1,900m unclimbed west face of Tengri Ragi Tau. Both the left skyline (north) ridge and right skyline (south) ridge have been attempted but remain unclimbed.



Alan Rousseau above 5,000m on one of the hardest pitches encountered during the attempt on the west face of Tengri Ragi Tau.

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