



AAC Publications

Chugimago, West Face

Nepal, Rolwaling Himal

After visited Rolwaling in 2013 (AAJ 2014), I headed back with new objectives. This time my partner was Sam Hennessey (U.S.), with whom I'd climbed in Yosemite. Despite the rapid growth of tourism in Rolwaling, with numerous trekking parties, the number is small relative to the Khumbu. The result is an authentic cultural experience in this traditional Sherpa land. There are also many interesting peaks and virgin faces.

On our approach we met a local who remembered me from the previous year and arranged accommodation for us in the house of an elderly Sherpa couple. This was our base camp, and we enjoyed greater comfort and better cuisine than at Na Goon (4,200m), the location of the last lodge before the mountains. Sherpas in the higher villages of Rolwaling do not kill animals, even though they eat meat. We brought dried meat with us, but just before we reached the village a bull killed a yak, and on this visit our dinners were exceptionally rich in meat.

Our goal was Chugimago (Chukyima Go, 6,258m) and to acclimatize we went to the Ripimo Shar Glacier and its eponymous ridge, from which we could see various mountains and observe climbing conditions. We then spent three days below Chugimago, to examine the west face, and we also climbed Yalung Ri (5,647m), which gave an excellent view of the face. In the first two weeks of our stay the weather remained unstable, with clear mornings and cloudy or snowing afternoons.

Once we got a forecast for a three-day weather window, we set off and pitched our tent below the face. We were then surprised by light snowfall, so rather than soak our tent before beginning the climb, we moved beneath an overhanging boulder. Early next morning we started up the face in the dark. On the first part we met deep snow; the middle section provided excellent alpine ice and mixed, while fine fresh snow on the upper wall slowed us down. We eventually reached the north ridge and pitched our tent before sunset.

Next morning only 150m separated us from the summit, but because of the sharpness of the ridge, drifted snow, and a few rocky sections, it took three hours. From the top we could see other aspects of the mountain, and it was clear Chugimago is technically demanding on all sides. We returned to our tent, descended our route, and made it back to base camp that night. We completed the ascent and descent of the 900m route over October 11–12, and graded it 90° M4.

After we arrived in the valley, it snowed for three days (the same time as the tragedy on the Annapurna Circuit). We stayed another two weeks, hoping to make an attempt on another objective, but when the forecast showed no long-term improvement, we decided to go elsewhere: Sam traveled south to the jungle, while I explored the Ganesh region. But that's another story.

Domen Kastelic, Slovenia

Editor's note: Chugimago was first brought onto the permitted list in 2002. When sorting out formalities with the ministry in Kathmandu, Kastelic and Hennessey were informed that the mountain was unclimbed. Until recently, the first ascent had been credited to a Scottish party in 1952 led by Tom Mackinnon, which also claimed first ascents of the now popular trekking peaks Yalung Ri (5,647m) and

Ramdung (ca 5,925m). Study of the vague reports and sketch maps—but useful photos—in their journals of the time reveal that their third summit was not, in fact, Chugimago but instead Peak 5,794m (**see also AAJ 2013**). Chugimago was reportedly attempted in the 1970s—on one occasion a German team retreated 200m below the top of the north ridge. While Chugimago's location makes it likely it would have received unauthorized ascents, these would have been relatively technical and none have been reported.

In addition, although it is clear the Scots made the first ascent of Ramdung, they did not ascend Yalung Ri, but rather the rocky summit Yalung Ri North (5,634m). The second ascents of Peak 5,794m and Ramdung were made by Alf Gregory's 1955 expedition. To avoid further confusion, heights quoted here have been taken from the HMG-Finn map.

Domen Kastelic, Slovenia

Images



Domen Kastelic on the west face of Chugimago.



The west face of Chugimago (left) and Peak 5,794m from the ascent toward Yalung Ri.



Sam Hennessey climbing through the mixed section of the west face of Chugimago.



Sam Hennessey on the upper north ridge of Chugimago. On the opposite side of the valley is Kang Nachugo; Domen Kastelic and Santiago Padros climbed the large southwest face in 2013. The smaller peak to its left is Chekigo; the south face was climbed in 2014 by a Spanish expedition. The far distant peak immediately right is Ripimo Shar, from which the Ripimo Shar Glacier runs down to the main valley.



On the upper north ridge of Chugimago.



The west face of Chugimago, with the American-Slovenian route. In the foreground is Peak 5,794m.

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