



AAC Publications

Chugimago (a.k.a. Chukyima Go), West-Southwest Ridge

Nepal, Rolwaling Himal

Mike Arnold (USA), my client Tim Wheeler (U.K.), and I arrived at Lukla on October 5. We acclimatized in the Khumbu and used the Tashi Lapsa pass to reach the Rolwaling, reaching the village of Na on the 18th. During our time in the area, a group of Italians established a via ferrata on the dangerous section of rock just below the Noisy Knob camp (5,000m) on the Rolwaling side of the Tashi Lapsa. A refuge is slated to be built there next year by Austrians.

The forecast called for deteriorating weather starting on October 28, and we hoped to be in position to attempt Chugimago (6,258m) prior to then. We moved up to the vicinity of Yalung Ri base camp on the 21st, and the same afternoon I made a solo ascent of the east ridge of Yalung Ri North (5,634m) to see what type of route it might be for guiding. It had difficulties up to 5.7 or 5.8 on several sections and plenty of loose scrambling. With some traffic, the route would offer a nice alternative to the more popular Yalung Ri. The only sign of activity on the peak seemed to be a lone cairn near the summit. [The first ascent of Yalung Ri North took place in 1952, though the exact line is uncertain.]

On October 22, Mike and I carried a tent and equipment to the base of the west-southwest ridge of Chugimago, establishing a camp on the rocky ridge running south from Peak 5,794m. The following day, all three of us moved up to this camp with more equipment. We spent the next two days climbing nearby lower summits, all of which had seen recent activity, and watching the weather for an improving trend in the winds, which had been quite strong.

On the morning of the 26th, Tim stayed in the tent while Mike and I went for a single-push attempt on Chugimago's west-southwest ridge. We had previously scouted a 250m ice gully on the northwest flank of the lower crest, which would allow us to bypass the very broken rock and a tower at the start of the ridge.

Leaving camp a little before 5 a.m., we walked across the glacier and started the gully at 5,600m. By 7:45 a.m. we had reached the crest of the ridge, where we decided to cache one rope and some ice screws in an effort to move faster. The climbing above looked predominately moderate, with the difficult sections on broken rock.

For the next three hours we took turns leading in blocks, mostly staying on the crest. Low on the ridge, we came across a cache of six pitons, a few carabiners, and a Tibloc, all rusted; we estimate these dated from the early 2000s (and we later used the old pitons for rappel anchors). By 11 a.m. we had reached about 6,000m and decided to stop and melt snow for water. At this point we felt we could leave the stove for our return, and as we also felt the terrain would be mostly snow or ice, we left the rock rack and carried only four ice screws and two snow pickets. This ended up being a mistake: We had underestimated the difficulties of the upper mountain.

As we traversed the ridge, our height gain seemed minimal for the amount of climbing. Most of the time we moved across mixed terrain, and having some additional gear would have been nice. Nearing the last few hundred vertical meters, the ridge steepened and various steep ice pitches appeared to require more screws than we carried. Instead, we traversed right onto broken rock, which led to easier ice and eventually the summit ridge. This traverse was over horribly fractured rock, which at times overhung and had teetering blocks. Without rock gear it required focus and confidence.

Near the top of the rock we gained solid ice, where a good screw gave us confidence to continue moving right on a series of ledges. Several more pitches of AI3 led to the summit ridge, where afternoon clouds began to obscure most of the views we had so far enjoyed. It was 3 p.m. when we reached the top, where three ridges intersected and there was barely room for the two of us to stand. Two minutes later we began the descent.

We knew much of the terrain would need to be downclimbed. Just as the last rays of sun were dropping into the horizon, we reached the cache where we had left the stove and rock gear. We had barely stopped to eat or drink since the last time we were here, and both of us were hungry, thirsty, and ready to take a small break.

The rest of the descent passed without much difficulty. I pulled some loose blocks onto myself and later dropped the V-threader during the second-to-last rappel in the ice gully. We reached camp at 9 p.m., rating our ascent ED1/2 (5.7/8 AI3+).

Next day we packed camp and descended to base camp. On the 28th, while Mike moved some equipment down to Na, Tim and I climbed Yalung Ri. Both of us were tired from so many consecutive days of movement but also pleasantly surprised by the quality of the climb. As we descended, snow started to fall, and it was clear we had squeezed in our last objective just before the weather turned.

– Kristoffer Erickson, AAC

Images



High camp on the south ridge of Peak 5,794m with Chugimago behind. The gully approach to the west-southwest ridge is marked, as is the 6,000m point (C) where the stove and rock gear were cached. For lines on the northwest face, see AAJ 2017.



Negotiating loose, blocky terrain on the west-southwest ridge of Chugimago during the descent.



Mike Arnold high on the west-southwest ridge of Chugimago, with Ramdung (5,930m) behind.



Mike Arnold tackles a rock step on the lower section of the west-southwest ridge of Chugimago.



Kristoffer Erickson on the west-southwest ridge of Chugimago. The big peak in the distance is Gaurishankar, while the summit on the far right is Kang Nachugo. The foreground peak, across the glacier above Erickson, is Peak 5,794m.



Kristoffer Erickson on the west-southwest ridge of Chugimago.



Chugimago New Route

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