



Mugu Valley, Peak 5,467m and the Mugu Eye (the Arch), Attempts

Nepal, West Nepal

Inspired by a photo in AAJ 2018, and thanks to a Grit and Rock Award, Cecilia Buil (Spain), Ixchel Foord (Mexico), Spanish photographer Dafne Gisbert, and Anna Torretta (Italy) traveled to the Mugu Valley. They used a helicopter to fly from Nepaljung to Mugu Village, thereby saving around a week of trekking. Their goal was the first ascent of Peak 5,467m (29°44'46.80"N, 82°28'20.10"E), to the northwest of Mugu Village. This summit is the highest in a small range of jagged rock peaks known as the Khela Danda. On the ridge just to the north of this top is a spectacular rock arch, clearly visible from the valley and referred to as the Mugu Eye.

In October the climbers established base camp at 4,200m and an advanced base at 5,050m, below the rock couloir falling from the arch. The weather was generally clear but windy, with low temperatures (-9°C at base).

An attempt was made to climb directly to the arch, but the couloir was deemed too dangerous due to rockfall, and it was too cold to use rock shoes. After a snowstorm covered the wall, Buil, Foord, and Torretta opted for Plan B: a wider, south-southeast-facing couloir to the left, leading more directly toward the main top. Climbing for one and a half days, with a sheltered bivouac on the wall, the three reached a height of 5,370m, approximately 100m below the summit, before poor rock quality, strong winds, and intense cold forced them down. To that point they had overcome difficulties of 6a A1 M5.

They spent nearly nine hours descending the couloir, making short rappels to avoid dislodging copious loose rock or getting the ropes stuck. The team returned by walking out to the nearest airport at Gamgadhi, then flying to Kathmandu.

– Lindsay Griffin, from information provided by Anna Torretta, Italy

Images



(A) The spectacular rock arch below the north-south ridgeline of the Khela Danda, northwest of Mugu Village. The main summit lies up to the left in cloud. (C) is the couloir attempted in autumn 2018.



Panoramic view toward Kanti Himal, looking generally northeast. (A) Peak 6,313m, just east of the Tibetan border. (B) A peak (ca 6,600m) northeast of Kanti Himal and entirely in Tibet. (C) Kanti Himal (6,850m). (D) Peak above 6,400m, well into Tibet. (E) Chandi (6,623m). (F) Swaksa Kang (6,405m).



Seen to the southeast of Mugu Arch, Peak 5,335m in the Mugu Dada is likely to be unclimbed.



Anna Torretta near the base of the east-facing couloir leading to the Mugu Eye on an initial attempt.



In the south-southeast couloir leading toward Peak 5,467m above the Mugu Valley.



The Khela Danda seen from the northwest. This photo, which shows the arch on the ridge to the left of the highest summit, was taken by one of the inhabitants of Mugu Village. Crossing a pass (4,962m) immediately north of the range allowed Mugu villagers to do business with those in the next valley to the west. Jigme,



The east side of the Khela Danda with the conspicuous rock arch (the Mugu Eye) visible to the right of the main summit. The attempted route toward Peak 5,467m in 2018 is shown. The previous year, two Germans inspected this area for possible routes but they realized they had too little gear for any serious rock climbing (AAJ 2018).



Anna Torretta on the right flank of the south-southeast couloir during an attempt on Peak 5,467m in the Khela Danda, Mugu Valley.



Cecilia Buil starting a pitch of less than perfect rock on the right side of the south-southeast couloir of Peak 5,467m, Khela Danda, Mugu Valley.

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