



Gurja Himal, Base Camp Tragedy

Nepal, Dhaulagiri Himal

Sometime between the evening of October 10 and the following day, five Korean climbers and four Nepalese staff were killed at their 3,800m base camp below the south face of Gurja Himal (7,193m). This included the team leader, one of the world's most accomplished Himalayan climbers, 49-year old Kim Chang-ho. The other fatalities were Rim Il-jin, Jeong Joon-mo (who was only trekking to base camp), Lee Jae-hoon, and Yo Young-jik, together with Nepalese staff Chhiring Bhote, Lakpa Sangbu Bhote, Phurbu Bhote, and local porter Natra Bahadur Chantel.

In 2017 the highly experienced Kim had made a reconnaissance of the area to select the best place for a base camp from which to attempt the first ascent of the south face of Gurja Himal. His choice was close to the foot of the face. The expedition had approached via Gurja Khani village. A guide had remained here with an ill Korean trekker and was expecting the whole team to return to the village by noon on October 11. When they didn't arrive and no contact could be made with base camp, the guide walked up to within a few kilometers of camp, from where he spotted a body. Next day remnants of clothing and equipment were found scattered 200m–500m below the camp. There was no snow anywhere, but the grass had been flattened, and trees below the camp had been broken.

The face above the site has deep, narrow canyons and watercourses near the bottom, and the supposition is that the wind blast from a large serac avalanche high on the face was funneled through these canyons, causing a catastrophic effect at base camp.

Kim's many high-standard first ascents have been recorded in past editions, available at the AAJ website. He also was the first Korean to climb all the 8,000m peaks without supplementary oxygen, and he set a record for completing this achievement in the shortest time. Gurja Himal was first climbed in 1969 by Japanese and then six times subsequently, all via an approach from the north.

– **Lindsay Griffin**, with information from Oh Young-hoon, Korea, and Rodolphe Popier, The Himalayan Database, France

Images



The vast south face of Gurja Himal with large serac barriers clearly visible toward the left side.



Gurja Himal from the east with the Korean base camp site marked.

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