



AAC Publications

Nupla Kang, South Face and Southwest Ridge

Nepal, Mahalangur Himal, Khumbu Section

In 2017, Garrett Madison led a commercial expedition that made the first ascent of Tharke Kang (6,710m), a summit on the northwest ridge of Hungchi (7,029m), just southeast of the Nup La (5,848m). The expedition trekked from Lukla to a base camp at around 5,200m by the Gokyo Fifth Lake, and then used a helicopter to fly over the difficulties of the complex icefall of the Ngojumba Glacier to the broad glaciated pass of Nup La on the Tibetan border, near which they established an advanced base (AAJ 2018). This use of a helicopter to circumvent difficult or dangerous terrain raised eyebrows among some in the climbing community, who considered it an unsporting departure from the norms of Himalayan first ascents [see also the note below].

In the autumn of 2018, Madison employed the same tactics to make the first ascent of Nupla Kang (6,861m), just northeast of the Nup La. On October 31 the team was flown from Gokyo Fifth Lake to the Nup La, where they set up advanced base. The flight also allowed an aerial reconnaissance of a proposed route up the southwest ridge.

On November 2, Ang Phurba Sherpa, Pasdawa Sherpa, Kam Dorjee Sherpa, Tashi Sherpa, and Lakpa Dendi Sherpa, with Ingvild Settemsdal (Norway), Joshua Miller, Kristin Bennett, Ben Veres, and guides Madison and Sidney Pattison (all USA), left camp at 2 a.m., crossed the upper West Rongbuk Glacier, and climbed the south face of Nupla Kang to reach the southwest ridge at around 10 a.m. The climbing on the face had been arduous due to hard snow and ice at 40–60°, similar to the Lhotse Face on Everest, but generally steeper.

Once on the ridge, fixed ropes were placed and the climbing became precarious along the exposed, corniced crest. The first team members arrived on the summit at around 11:10 a.m. The weather was clear and calm, and the intersection of three ridges provided a flat area on which the team could stand, the first such spot since they left camp. They then downclimbed the summit ridge and made many rappels on the face to reach the glacier.

– Lindsay Griffin, with information from Garrett Madison, USA

Editor's Note: Asked to respond to criticism of the use of a helicopter to ferry the team to the Nup La, avoiding about 650 vertical meters of difficult glacier travel, Garrett Madison said he considered this part of the approach to the mountain, akin to flying to the Kahiltna Glacier to climb Denali. More importantly, he said, "We chose to take a helicopter...for one reason, to avoid the dangerous icefall section of the Ngojumba Glacier. Climbing through this section would require many hours or days exposed to significant objective hazard, both for our foreign climbers and also our Nepalese staff. We wish to reduce the exposure to this risk because we care about their safety. I lost Nepalese staff in the Khumbu Icefall in 2014 and prefer not to experience that again."

Images



Nupla Kang, the snowy peak behind and right, seen from the west. Most of the 2018 ascent route is hidden by the foreground ridge (the northwest ridge of Tharke Kang), as is the Nup La, where the climbers began their ascent. The chaotic Ngojumba Glacier is in the foreground.



On the southwest ridge of Nupla Kang during the first ascent. Hungchi is the high point up and left from the climber. Hungchi's right (northwest) ridge has a pronounced top up and right from the climber. This is Tharke Kang, and the 2017 route of ascent followed its right-hand ridge. The flat white of the upper West Rongbuk Glacier, and Nup La, lie below, and on the far right can be seen the chaotic icefalls of the Ngojumba Glacier. In the distance are peaks of the Rolwaling.

Article Details

Author	Lindsay Griffin
Publication	AAJ
Volume	61
Issue	93
Page	322
Copyright Date	2019
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions