



Drangnag Ri, Southwest Ridge, Bizipenak

Nepal, Rolwaling Himal

Mikel Zabalza led an expedition of the Spanish Alpine Team to the Rolwaling in 2017 (AAJ 2018). The following year he returned with a group of friends to attempt the unclimbed southeast ridge of Drangnag Ri (6,757m).

Base camp was established in the village of Na at 4,150m, after which Iñaki Arakistain, Alberto Fernández, Joseba Larrañaga, and Zabalza, all from the Basque country, headed up the Rolwaling Glacier, eventually acclimatizing by summiting a small peak at the glacier head, on the border with Tibet. [This is likely Peak 5,965m on the Schneider map—6,010m GPS—which was first climbed in 1955 by Alf Gregory's expedition; see AAJ 2017.] Inspecting Drangnag Ri, they discovered conditions were much drier than anticipated, so they changed their goal to the southwest ridge, a much longer route but with little in the way of objective danger. They placed a camp at 5,000m, below the ridge, then walked the 12km back down to Na to wait for good weather.

On October 15 they returned to the camp and the following day set off up the route. They moved around the west side of the toe of the southwest ridge, then climbed through an icefall to a glacial terrace on the northwest flank, from which they gained the ridge via a steep 150m ice slope. They bivouacked on the crest at 5,700m.

On the second day they climbed over a dome-like tower, after which a horizontal section took them to around 6,100m on the crest, where the main difficulties began. From here to 6,600m the climbing was sustained though never extreme, with sections of ice at AI5, rock to V, and mixed terrain. (One vertical ice pitch was situated at around 6,500m.) They bivouacked at 6,350m, and on the 18th continued to the point on the crest where, in 2005, Paul Hartmann and Bruce Normand exited from the west face to the left, after making its first ascent; Normand continued solo to the summit (AAJ 2006). The Basques continued up the crest to the top, finding the last 200m to be psychologically very hard due to cold temperatures and wind gusts to 70km/hour.

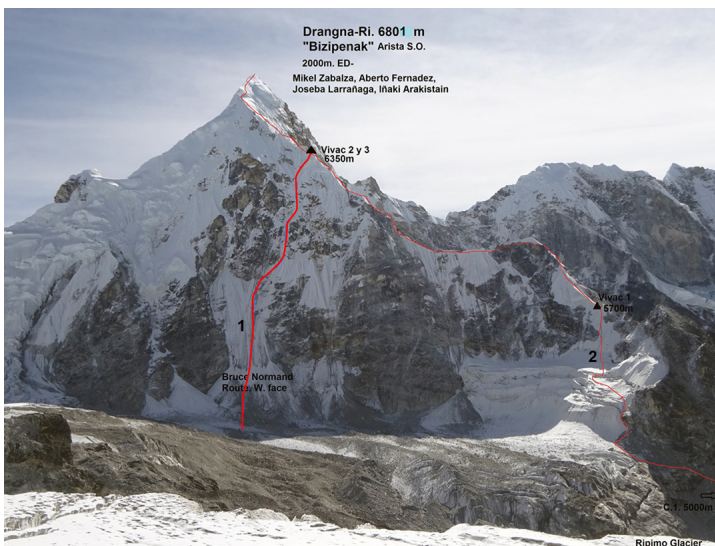
That night they were back at their top bivouac, and over the following two days, after much rappelling, traversing and downclimbing, returned to Na. The team named the route Bizipenak (ED-), which means "experiences" in the Basque dialect. From the toe of the ridge, the route is more than 1,500m high but involves significantly more climbing. The highly experienced Zabalza, for whom this was the 37th mountaineering trip outside Europe, felt it was one of the most beautiful routes he had climbed in the Himalaya.

– Information supplied by **Mikel Zabalza**, Spain

Images



Mikel Zabalza at the start of the difficulties at around 6,100m on the southwest ridge of Drangnag Ri. The Basque team climbed onto the ridge below via the steep snow and ice slope to the right.



Drangnag Ri (6,757m) from the west. Left: The route climbed in 2005 by Paul Hartmann and Bruce Normand; Normand went to the summit alone, once the party had reached the southwest ridge. Right: The 2018 Spanish route, Bizipenak, up the southwest ridge. The mountain was first climbed in 1995, by an international team, from the east.



During the descent of the southwest ridge of Drangnag Ri at 6,300m.



Joseba Larrañaga and Iñaki Arakistain at 6,500m on the right (south) flank of the upper southwest ridge of Drangnag Ri.



Mikel Zabalza on the southwest ridge of Drangnag Ri, with the Rolwaling Glacier below and the two big peaks of Chobutse (6,686m, left) and Kang Nachugo (6,737m).



Mikel Zabalza at 6,400m on the southwest ridge of Drangnag Ri. In 2005, Paul Hartmann and Bruce Normand exited onto the ridge from their route up the west face at a point more or less identical to where the Spanish had their top bivouac. Normand then continued alone up the terrain shown in this picture to reach the summit.

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