



Chugimago, West Face, Via del Tronko and Tragedy

Nepal, Rolwaling Himal

In mid-October, David Suela and Felipe "Tronko" Valverde from Spain climbed a hard new ice and mixed line on the west face of Chugimago (Chukyima Go, 6,258m), between the 2014 Hennesse-Kastelic line (the original route on the west face) and the 2015 Mucic-Strazar route.

The Spanish pair made one bivouac at the foot of the face, a second above two-thirds height, and the third on the summit ridge at an altitude of around 6,150m. Next day, October 19, they tried to climb the sharp crest southward to the summit, but snow conditions were so poor they retreated. The plan now was to descend their route by rappel. Finding a suitable anchor on the ridge was difficult, and the pair cut a large snow bollard. At around 10 a.m., Valverde set off first. The anchor failed, and he fell the full length of the 800m face, taking the ropes with him.

Suela was now completely stranded on the crest of the ridge. He still had the bivouac tent and a little climbing gear, but without ropes and a partner he couldn't move.

Also operating in the Rolwaling at the same time were the experienced Spanish climbers Sonia Casas Torcida and Mikel Zabalza. They had given a radio to the pair climbing Chugimago and agreed to rendezvous with them at 5 p.m. that day. Very fortunately, it was Suela who was carrying the radio. Once they heard of the tragedy, Casas and Zabalza immediately tried to organize a rescue helicopter, with the help of Alex Txikon in Spain and their own agency in Kathmandu. In worsening weather, they were able to arrange for two helicopters to fly the next morning, one to pick up the body and the other to rescue Suela, which they managed to do from the ridge with a long line—a fine display of flying in a snowstorm and poor visibility by the Nepalese pilot. Within minutes after the rescue, the mountain was cloud covered.

The route has been named Via del Tronko in memory of Valverde, and has fairly sustained difficulties, with around 18 pitches up to M6 85°.

– Lindsay Griffin

Images



The new Spanish route Via del Tronco on the west face of Chugimago. The bivouac on the face, and on the summit ridge, are marked.

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