



AAC Publications

Kyajo Ri, West Face, Way of the Dragon

Nepal, Mahalangur Himal

The 950m west face of Kyajo Ri and the new Russian line, Way of the Dragon. Photo by Dmitry Rybalchenko

From October 2 to 9, Russian climbers Ivan Osipov, Dmitry Rybalchenko, Vitaly Shipilov, and Andrey Vasiliev, on their first trip to Nepal, made the first ascent of the true west face of Kyajo Ri (6,186m). This face had been the goal of several expeditions, including a Slovenian team in 2008 who attempted the central couloir with the aim of passing the headwall to the right. None had made much progress.

Bad weather prevented a flight to Lukla, so the four Russians traveled by jeep to a point 8km past Phaphlu, and then, in three days, carrying all their own food and equipment, walked the remaining 75km to Lunghden (a.k.a. Landen, 4,360m) on the west side of Kyajo Ri. They established base camp there on September 19.

The next few days were spent carrying gear to an advanced base at 5,000m, below the west face, and attempting to study the wall in the brief windows that appeared through rain and mist. The locals told them that in 2014 a large section of the headwall had fallen off, the largest section being 150mx150m. However, the team thinks most of the visible scarring was due to a more recent event, as it was evident a considerable amount of rock had fallen since spring 2018, when Marek Holeček and Zdenek Hák, who climbed the west flank of the north ridge, photographed the west face headwall (see AAJ 2019). Continuing stonefall was evident, and the Russians were uncertain what to do, but further study convinced them a line on the right side, between the central depression on the left and a large hanging icefall to the right, was safe enough.

On October 2, after the weather had improved, they reached the foot of the face at 5,200m and started climbing, hoping to top the first 200m steep wall that night. They did not carry portaledge, so were relying on finding ledges big enough to take tents. However, they were unable to make it, so instead fixed three ropes and went down to advanced base for the night. The climbing had been mainly A2–A3.

On the 3rd they regained their high point and by a combination of mixed climbing and aid reached 5,430m, where they spent the night. There were no real tent ledges on the entire route, so each night's site had to be excavated in snow patches lying on slabs.

The next day they reached 5,550m after difficult mixed climbing over compact, thinly snow-covered slabs set at 60–70°. On the 5th the snowy slabs continued. These were interrupted by several vertical steps and two sections of A3. That night was spent at 5,700m.

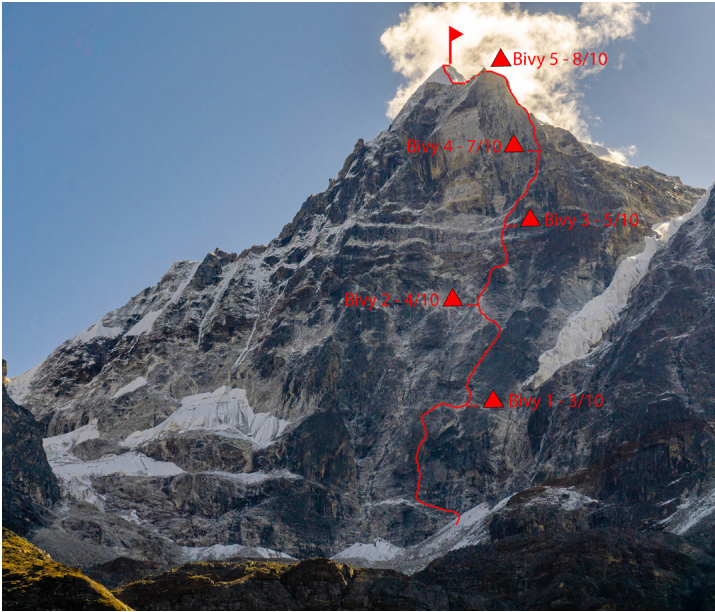
On the following day, the team chose to try a more difficult and aesthetic line than planned, directly up the headwall. The rock was poor, with many loose blocks and few protection points. Eventually, they decided to bail, leaving one piton, and instead headed up right for two pitches on hard mixed and dry tooling, finishing with an A2/A3 corner. They returned for a second night to the 5,700m bivouac.

The next two days gave the hardest climbing: A3/A3+ followed by easy mixed to a bivouac at 5,830m, then big cracks, loose rock (5c A3+) to their final bivouac at 6,050m, the top of pitch 27 of the route.

On the 9th they climbed easy snow for 200m to the summit, reaching it at 9 a.m. They descended the peak's normal route to the Kyajo Glacier, where they slept on the moraine. The route had required the full gamut of climbing techniques, including the use of rock shoes at 6,000m. They named the route Way of the Dragon (950m, ED2/3, 5c A3+ and mixed).

– **Lindsay Griffin**, with information supplied by Anna Piunova, Mountain.ru, Russia, and Rodolphe Popier, Himalayan Database

Images



The 950m west face of Kyajo Ri and the new Russian line, Way of the Dragon.



The west face of Kyajo Ri. The huge rockfall scars are clearly visible on the left side of the triangular headwall.



Looking across the headwall on the west face of Kyajo Ri, with rock scars visible.



Difficult snow-covered slabs on the west face of Kyajo Ri.



Negotiating steep, powder-covered rock on Kyajo Ri during the first ascent of the main west face.



An aid pitch on the steep west face of Kyajo Ri during the 2019 ascent.

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