



AAC Publications

Makalu, First Ski Descent

Nepal, Mahalangur Himal, Makalu Section

On May 9, Adrian Ballinger (USA) made a ski descent of Makalu (8,463m). Ballinger summited by the normal route (northwest ridge) at 9 a.m., along with Sherpa climbers Dorji Sonam and Pasang Sona, using supplemental oxygen. From the top, he downclimbed about 15m of technical ridge to avoid climbers making their way to the summit, then put on his skis. He skied partway down the French Couloir but had to rappel 60m over a cliff band; he also rappelled a couple of short passages (with skis on) in a rock band at around 6,800m.

Ballinger kept a hand on fixed ropes a couple of times while skiing over blue ice and took “mental breaks” clipped into anchors. “It’s hard to overstate how firm and exposed some of the skiing was,” he said. “I look forward to the day when the mountain is skied in better conditions and in a better style than mine.” Ballinger ended his descent at the snow line at about 5,900m, for a total descent of 2,570m. He reached this point at 7 p.m., 11 hours after leaving the summit.

Ballinger had previously attempted to ski Makalu twice, in 2012 and 2015, skiing from about 7,400m and 7,600m, respectively. He has skied Manaslu from the true summit (2011, with Sergey Baranov) and Cho Oyu (2013, also with Baranov, and 2016 with Emily Harrington).

— Dougald MacDonald, AAJ, with information from Adrian Ballinger

Images

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