



Sita Chuchura West, Southwest Face and Northwest Ridge Attempt

Nepal, Dhaulagiri Himal

Tiphaine Duperier in front of the unclimbed northeast face of Dhaulagiri II. Photo by Boris Langenstein.

From September 16 to October 16, I was in Nepal with my best companion Boris Langenstein to attempt Dhaulagiri II (7,751m). This mountain, located in the Dolpo region, northwest of Dhaulagiri I, has only been climbed four times, the first in 1971 by an Austro-American expedition that climbed the northwest face to the Dhaulagiri II-III col, then finished up the southwest ridge. It has a magnificent northeast face that is unclimbed. Our goal was to ski it.

A wonderful five-day trek took us to the village of Mukot Gaon at around 4,000m, north of Dhaulagiri II, where we made our base camp. On September 26 we checked out an approach to the Humbuk Glacier below the northeast face, which proved to be complex, delicate, and exposed. To examine a different possible access, and also to acclimatize, we set out on the 29th for a six-day trip. From Google Earth we had spotted a col of around 5,780m on the long northwest ridge of Sita Chuchura. This mountain east of Dhaulagiri II has three tops along its horizontal summit ridge: east summit, 6,611m; central summit, 6,662m; and west summit, 6,622m. The east summit has been climbed four times (the first in 1970), with all expeditions following the east-southeast ridge and not continuing to the higher central summit. Crossing the col from the Mukot Glacier to the northeast and descending to the southwest would land us in the high basin of Humbuk East Glacier, close to the foot of Dhaulagiri's northeast face.

On the 30th, from a camp at 5,000m in the Mukot Valley (28°47'57.30"N, 83°27'1.71"E) we climbed to the col. At times we thought we would never make it. Difficult ground that connected ledges and couloirs led to a finish up 50° slopes with some rock climbing. The col itself proved too sharp to pitch a tent, so we camped 50m down on the far side.

The route followed to reach the col on the northwest ridge of Sita Chuchura in 2022. Up left is the flat-topped summit; the east summit is on the left, and the higher west summit on the right. Photo by Tiphaine Duperier.

Above us lay the summit of unclimbed Sita Chuchura West (6,622m), and we thought we'd give it a try. We attempted to follow the northwest ridge from the col but hit a dead end. We retreated to the col and descended its southwest slopes to camp at 5,380m. We saw a line on the southwest face, between seracs and rock walls, which would lead for more than 800m to the upper northwest ridge. Given the poor snow conditions, this seemed the safest option, and next day, October 2, we climbed it to the ridge, the ambience being well beyond our expectations.

Unfortunately, the weather was bad, with wind and cloud, and having progressed up the ridge to 6,420m, we decided it was not safe for us to continue. We turned around and made a wonderful ski descent back to the 5,380m camp. On the 3rd we descended below the northeast face of Dhaulagiri II and used our route of September 26 as the exit to our "loop" above Mukot Gaon.

Once in base camp we received a report of seven days' bad weather, with significant snowfall above 5,000m. The possibility of making any further attempt disappeared. Landslides punctuated the return, and most trekking groups in the region were evacuated by helicopter. Back in Dunai, the capital of Dolpo, there was the option of taking a plane, but as all flights were full for the next few days, we continued walking and eventually found jeeps further down valley.

Failure on this mountain was an important experience in my mountaineering life. The size and complexity of the northeast face make it a high-level objective. Perfect snow conditions will be necessary. But it is grandiose, and the area is magical. I can't wait to go back!

— **Tiphaine Duperier, France, with additional material from Rodolphe Popier, Himalayan Database**

Images



The unclimbed northeast face of Dhaulagiri II.



The route followed to reach the col on the northwest ridge of Sita Chuchura in 2022. Up left is the flat-topped summit; the east summit is on the left, and the higher west summit on the right.



Boris Langenstein on the ascent of the southwest face of Sita Chuchura West, a thin line between

rock walls and seracs.



The line ascended and skied on the southwest face of Sita Chuchura West.



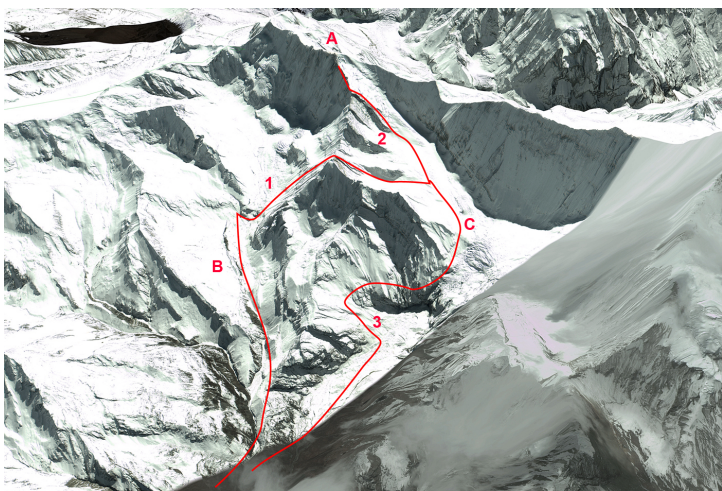
Tiphaine Duperier in front of the unclimbed northeast face of Dhaulagiri II.



Tiphaine Duperier skiing below seracs in worsening weather during the descent of the southwest face of Sita Chuchura West.



Tiphaine Duperier ascending the southwest face of Sita Chuchura West. Part of the northeast face of Dhaulagiri II is visible behind.



(A) Sita Chuchura West. (B) Mukot Glacier. (C) Humbuk East Glacier. (1) Ascent to Col 5780m. (2) Ascent of southwest face and northwest ridge to 6,420m. (3) Descent to Mukot Gaon.

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