



AAC Publications

Nubra Valley, New Ice Routes

India, Ladakh

This trip originated through my friendship with the American-Canadian mountaineer Carlos Buhler. Carlos has been visiting Spain for years during his autumn holidays, and we often climb together in the Pyrenees, where I live. Carlos told me about his Nubra Valley climbs in March 2020 and about Rigzin Tsewang, an enthusiastic Ladakhi mountaineer and driving force behind ice climbing in the area (see AAJ 2021). I contacted Rigzin through social networks, and he very kindly invited me and a group of my friends, the explorers of new icefalls around the world, to visit the Nubra Valley. We made a 15-day trip in February 2023, during which we were able to repeat most of the classic falls and contribute five of our own first ascents.

On February 2 we went to the pretty Chugyud cascade, the bottom of which had already been climbed by Rigzin and his friends. On the top, a narrow corridor continues upward, reaching a wall with three frozen waterfalls. We climbed the steep flow on the left for 50m, and then climbed two variations on the 35m second pitch: David Graells and Jordi Vigatà on the right, and Javier Sánchez, Joan Picola, and I to the left. Respecting the local custom of naming ice routes after the valleys and canyons in which they are located, we agreed with Rigzin on the name Nubra-Spanish Chugyud (85m, WI5).

The next day we made attempts on other icefalls that we could not complete due to the ice conditions. Pere Montasell and Jesus Almarza had to abandon their attempt after an 8m fall by Pere that fully activated the shock-absorbing quickdraw that held him.

We managed to complete one of the jewels of the valley on February 5: Juniper Tree (85m, WI5+), a delicate fall of ice with a slender upper tube that revealed the great volume of water that runs through its interior. This route was completed by Graells and Vigatà.

Over the next two days, we climbed two new routes in the Changlung valley: Changlung Left (125m, WI3+), climbed by Almarza, Guillermo Velasco, and Juampi Sabbione; and Changlung Right (180m, WI4+), climbed by Graells, Vigatà, and myself.

We descended from all of our routes using Abalakov (V-thread) anchors, leaving nothing behind.

The climactic route was put up by Graells and Vigatà on February 8, creating what might be the longest water-ice route yet climbed in India: The Masri Gyad (480m, WI4+). The two stopped 25m below the top of the ice line after a block of ice hit Graells' face, which caused significant injuries and a difficult evacuation down the icefall and subsequent transfer to a hospital in Leh.

I would like to highlight the kindness and attention of Rigzin and his team, both during the climbing days and in helping with David's accident. We can only say many, many thanks.

– **Rafa Vadillo, Spain**

Eastern Karakoram Bolting and Rock Climbing Project: In July 2022, Rigzin Tsewang teamed up with IFMGA guide Tendi Sherpa from Nepal, along with Ladakhi guides Tsewang Namgyal and Stanzin Wangial, to establish eight bolted routes on granite cliffs near Tongsted (Stongstet) village. The idea was to demonstrate the rock climbing potential of the Nubra Valley. The eight routes, all one or two pitches,

range in grades from 4a to 7a+. For more information about the project and the routes, download this PDF.

Images



An attempt on the first ascent of the Gyalpo Kesar icefall was abandoned after three pitches because of continuous ice avalanches.



Photo-topo for the Changlung Left ice climb (3 pitches, WI3+).



Photo-topo for Changlung Right (3 pitches, WI4+).



David Graells during the first ascent of The Masri Gyad (480m, WI4+).



The access corridor followed to reach Nubra-Spanish Chugyud, above the lower Chugyud icefall.



Map showing locations of ice routes climbed in February 2023 in the Nubra Valley.



Impressive unclimbed rock walls on the opposite side of the valley from Nubra-Spanish Chugyud.



Javier Sánchez climbing the first pitch of Nubra-Spanish Chugyud.



Jorge Vigatà during the last pitch of The Masri Gyad, right before falling ice caused an accident that forced the climbers to retreat after nearly 500 meters of ascent.



Jorge Vigatà on the second pitch of Changlung Right.

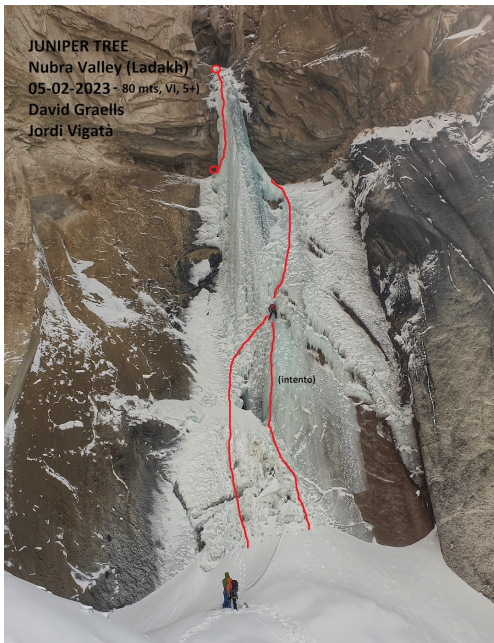


Photo-topo for the new route Juniper Tree (2 pitches, WI5+).

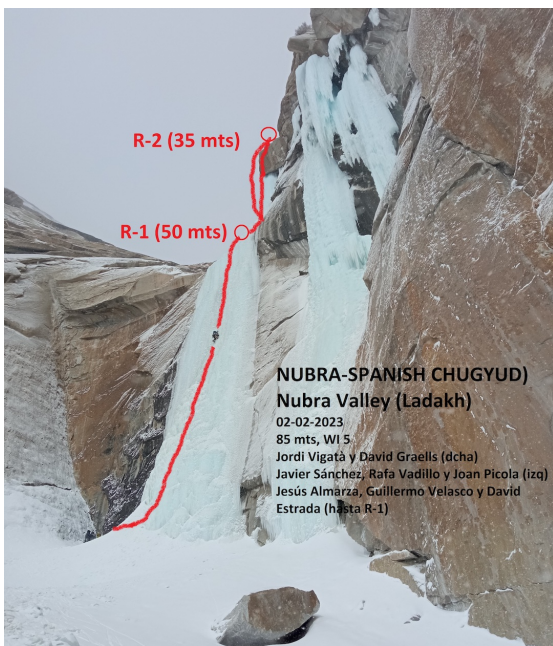


Photo-topo for Nubra-Spanish Chugyud.



Rafa Vadillo climbing the lower icefall of the Chugyud drainage.



Rafa Vadillo on the first pitch of Changlung Right during the first ascent.



THE MASRI GYAD
480 mts, WI 4+
08/02/2023
La ascensión: David Graells y Jordi Vigata
Posiblemente la cascada más larga de la India

Photo-topo for The Masri Gyad (480m, WI4+), a candidate for the longest pure water-ice route in India.



The tube-like upper pillar of Juniper Tree.

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