



## AAC Publications

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### **Ama Dablam, West Face, Chegi**

Nepal, Mahalangur Himal, Khumbu Section

Steep rock on the west face of Ama Dablam. Photo by Nikita Balabanov.

**In the autumn, Nikita Balabanov and I started a long-term project on Makalu, aiming to establish a new route in alpine style.** Before departing for Nepal, we assessed the odds of success for our first go at just five to ten percent. And, as usual, the mountains had their own agenda. Two days after we reached base camp, a storm delivered 1.5m of heavy, wet snow. Trekking to advanced base camp (5,700m) became a two-and-a-half-day ordeal in high-altitude boots rather than a single day in running shoes. Our plans for Makalu unraveled quickly.

Nikita mentioned a mixed line he'd spotted years ago on Ama Dablam's south face. Skeptical but intrigued, I agreed we should check it out. What followed was anything but simple: a grueling trek over Sherpani Col (6,100m) and Amphu Lapcha Col (5,900m) in unseasonably snowy conditions. Finally, we arrived at Ama Dablam base camp.

The south face? Bare rock. No ice, no mixed line. Our attention shifted to the west face—a spur on the left side. A quick internet search confirmed there were no prior ascents of this line to the northwest shoulder. [The lower part of the line identified by Balabanov and Fomin appears very similar to one started by a team of Korean climbers in 1988; they escaped left to the northwest ridge just below the steep rock bands in the middle of the face and descended. However, during their first two days on the face, the Ukrainians reported they did not see any old ropes, pitons, or other signs of previous climbers.] After a rest, we set off on October 27. That night, we bivouacked at 5,100m below the glacier.

Above the bergschrund, at 5,500m, the real climbing began. Mixed terrain, well-frozen early in the day, turned treacherous by afternoon as water streamed down the face. Progress slowed, and when we found a good snow mushroom at 5,800m, we stopped early, at 2 p.m., to bivouac there.

Day two brought a rock barrier at 6,000m, with challenging moves requiring bare hands. By late afternoon, we reached the northwest ridge, bivouacking at 6,200m. Here we joined the 2000 British route, which we more or less followed to the top.

Snowy ridges above the shoulder tested our patience on day three. The leader climbed unprotected pitches of sugar snow, then dug a cave and sat in it for a belay stance. Another bivouac followed at 6,400m. Day four featured ice gullies on the headwall, culminating in a couloir. Rockfall delayed progress until nightfall, when temperatures dropped and conditions improved. By late evening, we reached a serac bivouac 50m below the summit.

On the morning of October 31, we summited Ama Dablam (6,812m). Clear skies, no wind, and—rare for this iconic peak—no other climbers. We descended via the normal route, navigating the chaos of commercial teams, and returned to base camp that evening.

We named our partial new route Chegi (1,600m, ED M5 AI4 80°) in memory of a friend of Nikita's killed in Ukraine. Despite the setbacks on Makalu, we discovered beauty and purpose on a peak we'd never planned to climb together.

—Mikhail Fomin, Ukraine/Slovenia

## Images



Nikita Balabanov climbing on Chegi, west face of Ama Dablam.



Steep mixed ground on the west face of Ama Dablam.



Steep rock on Chegi, the 2024 route up the west face of Ama Dablam.



High on the northwest ridge of Ama Dablam, the finish to the new route Chegi on the west face.



The line of Chegi on the west face and upper northwest ridge of Ama Dablam. The 2024 route may have shared ground with part of a Korean attempt in 1988 on the lower face, and it mostly followed

prior routes above the shoulder. Other routes on the west face are not shown.

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