



AAC Publications

Peak 5,794m and Parchamo, Historical Ascents and Encounters

Nepal, Rolwaling Himal

The west face of Peak 5,794m points toward the camera. The original Scottish route climbed the right-hand ridge. The vast face behind is part of the west face of Chugimago. Photo by Domen Kastelic

In autumn 1996, a small group of friends and I climbed in the Rolwaling Valley. In addition to adventures on new routes, we had other memorable experiences, some of which were so remarkable that it is hard to explain their occurrence through coincidence alone.

First, the climbs. Starting from Na, we set a high camp within striking distance of an unnamed peak at the edge of the glacial plateau leading to the trekking peak of Ramdung (5,930m). [This is Peak 5,794m, first climbed in 1952 via the south ridge; see AAJ 2015.] On October 30, Chuck Yax and I climbed eight pitches up the prominent west-facing couloir through steep, unstable snow that we avoided whenever possible by climbing the firm rock of the gully wall. A ramp promised access to the summit, but the snow was chest deep and felt ready to slide. With headlamps on, we rappelled the route and staggered back to our tent 14 hours after leaving.

In November, Kili Sherpa and I climbed 15 pitches up the left side of the west face of Parchamo (6,279m), as recorded in AAJ 2020. The recent discovery of my topo and write-up of the climb, along with a recent photo of the face, add some important clarity to that 2020 account. Contrary to what I recalled, the route is in much the same condition today as in 1996, being composed more of rock than snow. Following an excellent rock pitch off the glacier, nine of the subsequent pitches were mixed climbing, weaving up a line of runnels and rock sections to 5.7. We called the 12th pitch Stairway to Nirvana, as it followed a unique series of stacked blocks. From there it was 60° snow to the intersection with the standard route on the north ridge. We descended from there.

Shortly after our arrival at base camp, we had a series of chance encounters with climbers who seemed to have stepped directly from the pages of Himalayan mountaineering history into this secluded valley. It began with meeting a very fit-looking Jean Jacques Asper, who was a member of the 1952 pre-monsoon Swiss expedition to Mt. Everest that nearly made the first ascent.

Next came an equally energetic group of older trekkers from the U.K.; one of them introduced himself as Mike Westmacott, then the Alpine Club president. It dawned on me that we were in the company of members of the successful 1953 British Mt. Everest expedition.

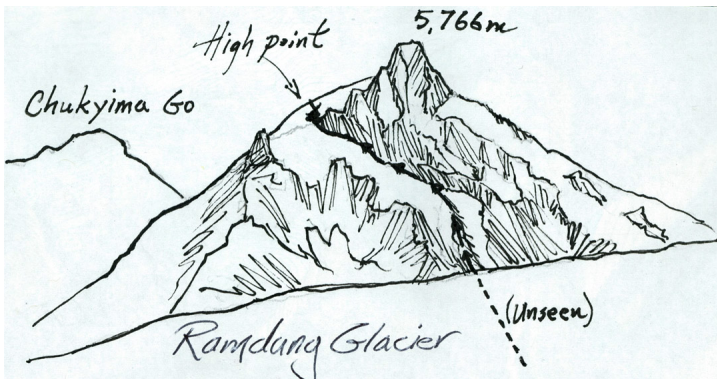
Finally, while on our way to high camp, a white-haired gentleman carrying a wooden-shafted ice axe descended toward us. We discovered the climber was Dennis Davis, whose account of 19 first ascents in the region during the 1955 Merseyside Expedition [including the first ascent of Parchamo] was the reason we had decided to come to Rolwaling. It seemed so improbable to be meeting, in a remote corner of the Himalaya, not only the heroes that first inspired me to climb but also a man who was the inspiration for my current expedition. Dennis explained that he had journeyed to Rolwaling to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the expedition. The ice axe had made its return as well.

– Tad Welch, USA

Images



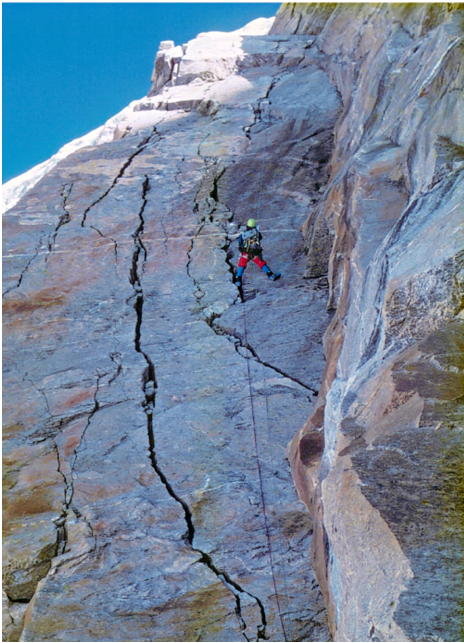
The west face of Peak 5,794m. See topo for the 1996 attempt.



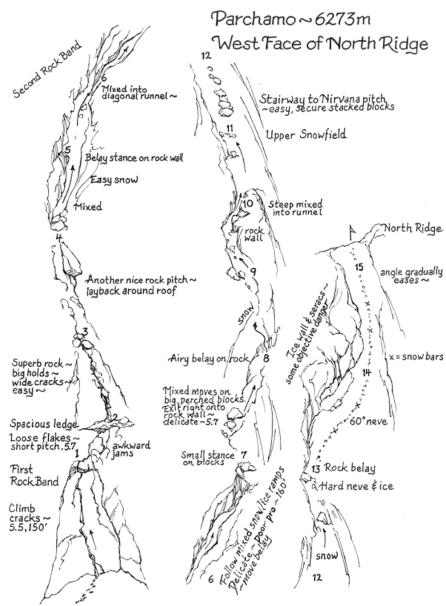
Peak 5794 Topo



The west face of Peak 5,794m points toward the camera. The original Scottish route climbed the right-hand ridge. The vast face behind is part of the west face of Chugimago.



Kili Sherpa and the first pitch of the American-Nepali route on the west face of Parchamo.



Parchamo Topo



Returning from the foot of the west face of Peak 5,794m.

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