

In April 2009 my climbing partner Jim Broomhead and I were in Nepal to climb Ama Dablam (6856m) and Cholatse (6440m). We succeeded on the first but failed miserably on the latter.

We climbed the classic SW-ridge of Ama Dablam in pure alpine style with a 36 hour single push from camp 2 to the summit and back. The climbing was really good with everything from pure rock climbing on excellent granite to ice and mixed and of course ridge climbing. The route was fantastic except for all the old fix ropes left behind by siege style expeditions. In one place I counted 14 ropes next to each other, partially frozen into the face leaving them useless and impossible to remove. In my opinion the use of fixed ropes should be banned by the climbing community. The problem is that a popular mountain like this attracts people that are not capable of climbing it in alpine style. Anyway the quality is so good that the route is worth doing even with all that garbage on the route.

We then headed over to Cholatse to attempt the Swiss Direct on the north face. There had been no precipitation since September, so there was barely any ice on the face compared with earlier pictures we had seen of the face. The first 1000 metres of climbing was a couloir that was usually a pure ice climb, but now it was very bare giving some serious mixed climbing. The rock was compact gneiss that had few cracks for protection and the ice would only take 10 cm ice screws in the best places, so this meant tedious and slow climbing. On top of that there were several avalanches that were channelled down the couloir as well as rock falls.

On the first day of climbing we only got 500 metres up, but managed to find a safe bivy site under a small overhang. After having chopped a small ledge that we could sit on in the 70 degree ice slope Jim started to assemble the stove, so we could melt some snow, but suddenly he dropped something. It was a gas canister and it was the only one we had brought along on the route! We briefly

discussed continuing without the stove, but with at least three more days to the summit it was an unrealistic idea. We had to go down even though it was a frightening thought considering the poor protection we had found on the way up. So we settled in for an uncomfortable night sitting on the ice ledge. At dawn we pack down the bivy at the first sign of the sun in the horizon. We managed to put in some decent anchors only by sacrificing half of our rack on the descent, including brand new ice screws and pitons, but the ice wasn't even thick enough for abalakovs!

Ironically we found the lost gas canister right where we got down on the glacier, but we were both too mentally exhausted by the descent to even consider going up again. Unfortunately we had to catch a plane from Lukla a few days later and did not have enough time to rest and give the face another try, but never the less it had been a great learning experience and we were very pleased with our expedition in Nepal.

Ueli Steck has compared Cholatse to Eiger in Switzerland and we tend to agree. The climb could be very good with more ice on it and perhaps such conditions are found in the post monsoon season. So for anybody who is up for trying the Eiger of Nepal I can recommend giving this route a try.



Jim on the slabs before the 'Red Tower' pitch.

/Kristoffer Szilas