

descend the west ridge. Although their route did not reach the summit, it joined an existing line, and the climbers have called it Ramro Chaina. Difficulties were about M6+ and WI6.

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Although the following event took place in the winter of 2006, it was such a notable tragedy that we include it in this Journal.

MAHALANGUR HIMAL - MAKALU SECTION

Makalu, winter solo attempt and tragedy. The well-known French mountaineer, Jean-Christophe Lafaille, 40 years old, vanished on January 27, 2006, while attempting to make an entirely solo ascent of Makalu (8,485m), the world's fifth highest mountain. The highest he is known to have reached is 7,600m, where he pitched his small red tent on the 26th [after almost six weeks on the mountain—Ed.] and from which he set out alone for the top early in the morning of the 27th. He reported his departure by satellite phone to his wife Katya in France. This was expected to be the first of several reports to her that day, but he never made contact with her or his base camp staff again. [Lafaille had remarked that he felt really up to it, despite the fact he hadn't been able to sleep, due to altitude and cold (down to -30°C). The forecast predicted slightly changeable conditions, with summit wind speeds possibly reaching 40-50km/hour—Ed.]

A helicopter search of the mountainside took place on February 4. Searchers included his wife, her brother, and Veikka Gustafsson, a Finnish mountaineer who had climbed with Lafaille and knew from his own ascent of Makalu the route Lafaille was following. They saw the tent but no other trace of him. The search team left a tent with sleeping bag, stove, food, fuel, and a few other necessities at base camp, in case he did manage to return alive. But Gustafsson knew there was no hope for Lafaille's survival, and thought he understood exactly what had happened to the Frenchman.

Ten years previously Gustafsson had climbed the same (Normal) route that Lafaille was. He had two climbing partners, Ed Viesturs and Rob Hall, but led most of the final part to the summit. He found numerous treacherous crevasses and fell into three of them. He was always belayed and emerged unscathed. Gustafsson is convinced the Frenchman fell into one and became fatally trapped.

Gustafsson considers Lafaille to have been "one of the world's greatest climbers." If he had succeeded, Lafaille would have been the first person to climb Makalu in winter. He had already attempted the mountain unsuccessfully in spring 2004, in an earlier solo bid by a different route, approaching the mountain from Tibet over Makalu II. Makalu was one of only three 8,000m peaks he had not yet summited.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, *AAC Honorary Member, Nepal.*

Editor's note: beginning with Renato Casarotto's Italian expedition in January 1981, there have been 11 winter attempts on Makalu, which remains the only Nepalese 8,000m peak not to be climbed in winter, despite serious attempts by the great Polish winter specialists. While nearly all teams encountered good snow/ice conditions, higher up the mountain they found progress impossible in fierce winds.