

## Nepal

*Recent changes in regulations.* New regulations coming into force during 2002 were generally very beneficial to the mountaineering community and particularly to those climbers wishing to try lightweight ascents of new routes and virgin peaks. The most significant changes are as follows:



- (a) A Liaison Officer is generally no longer required for peaks below 6,500m.
- (b) No climber under 16 is permitted
- (c) Permits are no longer granted only for a particular season, they can now be obtained for any time of the year.
- (d) The outdated letter of approval from the national mountaineering federation of the country of origin of each expedition, or from the embassy of the country, has been waived.
- (e) New payment rates have recently been fixed at: sirdar Rs400, high altitude porter Rs300, base camp staff Rs300.

*New peaks for the autumn of 2002.* To coincide with the start of the post-monsoon season 2002 the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation announced that the following 13 mountains were being added to the existing list of peaks permitted for foreign expeditions. The new peaks are a strange mixture, comprising not only high, serious, technical, and remote peaks, but also lower altitude mountains that eminently fit the category of “trekking peaks.” A number of these have already been climbed—some, like Mera South (an easier, subsidiary snow dome of the popular Khumbu trekking peak) on many occasions—while the formidable Nemjung has already been attempted by more than a half-dozen foreign teams over the last 15 years. The new peaks, progressing roughly from east to west, are listed below. Notes as to their location are given in parenthesis.

## KHUMBU

*Mahalangur Himal South*

Naulekh 6,240m

"Mera South" (Mera East) 6,064m

*Mahalangur Himal North*

Changri Shar 6,811m

Changri West 6,773m

Lungsampa 6,100m

## LANGTANG

*Langtang Himal*

Ghenye Liru 6,571m

## MANASLU

*Peri Himal*

Nemjung 7,139m (7,140m)

## MANANG

*Purkhung Himal*

Khatung Kang 6,484m

## DHAULAGIRI

*Mukut Himal*

Tsartse 6,398m

Tashi Kang 6,386m

## DOLPO

*Palchung Hamga Himal*

Danfe Sail 6,103m

Kangfu Gaton (Kanta Gaton) 5,916m

Kanjiroba Himal

Norbu Kang 6,005m

At the same time the Nepal Mountaineering Association was given 15 new mountains to add to its list of Trekking Peaks, bringing the total to 33. The fees associated with these 15 new peaks are: one \$500 permit for expeditions with up to seven members; an extra \$100 per person for teams with over seven members up to a maximum of 12 members, above which a second permit will apply; a \$250 deposit will be required for all 33 peaks as a garbage/environmental bond, which should be refunded on the basis of satisfactory report, jointly signed by the team leader, sirdar, and climber. Fees for the original 18 peaks remain unchanged. Many of the new peaks, such as the technical Cholatse, have been demoted from full expedition status and are indicated by a \*. Yala Peak and Chhukung Ri, although new to any official list, have been climbed by many people over the years.

*The new peaks, listed roughly from east to west, are:*

## KANGCHENJUNGA

*Khumbhakarna Himal*

Bokta Peak\* 6,143m

## ROWALING

*Rowaling Himal*

Chekigo\* 6,257m

## KHUMBU

*Mahalangur North*

Chhukung Ri 5,550m

Lobuche West\* 6,145m

Cholatse\* 6,440m

Nirekha Peak\* 6,159m

Kyazo (Kyajo) Ri\* 6,186m

Machermo 6,273m

Phari Lapcha 6,017m

*Mahalangur South*

Abi\* 6,097m

Ombigaichen\* 6,340m

## LANGTANG

*Jugal Himal*

Langshisha Ri\* 6,427m

*Langtang Himal*

Yubra 6,035m

Yala Peak 5,732m

## MANASLU

*Manaslu Himal*

Larkya Peak\* 6,010m

## ROWALING HIMAL

*Tengi Ragi Tau, first ascent of newly opened peak.* In the spring of 2000 I saw Tengi Ragi Tau (6943m) for the first time while we climbed Parchamo (6,279m). It strongly attracted my attention, but it was a forbidden peak according to our guide. In 2002 the Nepali government released 103 mountains, including Tengi Ragi Tau. Since the Hokkaido Mountaineering Association celebrated its jubilee in the same year, we organized a celebration expedition to Tengi Ragi Tau. From Parchamo the southeast face had looked unclimbable and it seemed wiser to search for an easier route on its west side. Our conclusion based on maps and information then available was that one of the two rock ribs on the 1,600m wall might be feasible, and our plan was prepared based on that assumption. On November 26 the five members with five Sherpas and four kitchen-staff. established BC at 4,800m at the snout of Thyagb Glacier. On reconnaissance, those rock ribs drawn on maps were an illusion. What to do? To make sure we climbed something, we all ascended Parchamo and returned to BC on November 11. During this time I began reconsidering the seemingly unclimbable southeast face of Tengi Ragi Tau. Looking closer, we discovered a sharp ridge stretching up from around the middle height at the center of the wall. At least it should be safe to follow it.

After an earlier reconnaissance, on October 15, Onda, two Sherpas, and I extended the route through the steepening snow slope and we finally reached the rock ridge. Luckily snow conditions were not bad and the weather was fine. On the 17th we pitched C1 at 6050m. Takahashi and two Sherpas continued to fix the route up the ridge to 6400m, spending two full days, then we all retreated to BC for a rest. On the 23rd, the summit team consisting of Takahashi, two Sherpas, and myself left BC. We left C1 at 3 a.m. the next day and climbed up through a fluted ice wall, but the face was so complicated that we were forced into an impossible passage at about 6750m, still 200 meters below the summit. We rappelled down 200 meters and then tackled a left-leaning gully. After climbing it part way, we decided to follow the gully on our next attempt. We left the gear in place and descended to BC.

Strong winds blew during the following three days, and on the 28th we returned to C1. The next day Onda, Morishita, and two Sherpas departed C1 at 3 a.m. Huge mushroom-shaped cornices hung from the main ridge down to the wall. The gully led beneath the cornices but it was not easy to get through the mushroom to reach the main ridge. Fortunately a narrow slit between cornices allowed them to break out onto the ridge. It was such a thin ridge that they looked down Drolambau Glacier below their feet to the opposite side. The summit was just 250 meters ahead, but there was only enough time to descend to C1.

Again strong winds continued to blow during the following few days until at last the summit day came. On December 4, Takahashi, two Sherpas, and I left C1 at 3 a.m. Hard wind from the west howled on the main ridge. We could not stop shivering even in down-filled jackets and anoraks. We were afraid of being blown off, but this might be our last chance. Determined to reach the top, we attacked one cornice after another until two hours, 30 minutes later we reached the summit. Looking back over the ridge, Parchamo seemed such a small hill! And of course we enjoyed an enormous panoramic view of Gaurishankar, Tibetan frontier ranges, Everest, Makalu, etc.

We climbed down the 1,600m wall to BC that day, and on the following day (Dec. 5), Onoda, Morishita, and a Sherpa made the second ascent from C1 and returned to BC on the

6th. It must have been the last chance for the season, as desperate winter gales began to blow.

KOICHI EZAKI, *Hokkaido Mountaineering Association* (translation by Kei Kurachi)

*Teng Kang Poche, pre-monsoon attempts.* Taking advantage of the recent addition to the permitted list of peaks of this splendid 6,500m mountain on the ridge west of Kwangde, the French Alpine Club chose Teng Kang Poche as the venue for an expedition comprising several well-known guides and 14 young alpinists from the CAF's "Excellence Group." The expedition divided into two groups; one attempting the mountain from the difficult north side above the Thame Valley, while the second would try the easier but more remote southern flanks. Both hoped to make the first official ascent.

In recent years a number of parties have attempted to get permission to climb the magnificent granite north pillar of Teng Kang Poche or the more icy northeast face, both well-known and clearly visible Khumbu objectives, but it wasn't until 2001 that the peak was brought on to the official permitted list. It is not certain who were the first ascensionists of Teng Kang Poche, though the mountain was certainly climbed in 1984 via the east ridge from the Lumding Valley by the late Trevor Pilling and Andy Zimet.

The southern slopes of Teng Kang Poche lie toward the head of the remotely situated and largely uninhabited Lumding Valley, reached via a high pass from the main valley of the Dudh Kosi. The French arrived at their 5,100m base camp by a lake below Kwangde in early April. However, considerable snow fall and warm temperatures did not allow much progress and after reaching around 5,900m on both the south ridge and east ridge during the middle of the month, the climbers decided all possible routes were too dangerous and gave up.

On the north side the second group started up the easier lower section of the impressive north pillar, then moved left on to the northeast face. Again, poor weather prevented success and a high point of 6,100m was achieved.

LINDSAY GRIFFIN, *High Mountain INFO*

*Teng Kang Poche, northeast Pillar attempt, and Tengi Ragi Tau South, south ridge.* Our expedition lasted from October 1 to November 8. We went to the Khumbu at this time because during our autumn visit there the previous year we had enjoyed very good weather. However, 2002 was rather different. ' and looked at the north side of Teng Kang Poche (6,500m), the face was covered by



The still unclimbed northeast pillar of Teng Kang Poche (6,500m), from Thengpo. Phil Wickens



The north face of Teng Kang Poche from the northwest. Phil Wickens

snow with very little rock showing. We split into two teams. Jaro Dutka and Martin Heuger from Slovakia started immediately on a direct line up the northeast pillar. This is a magic line on very steep rock, but now it was all covered in snow. Alexadr Toloch and I decided to wait and attempt a line up the left side of the pillar, which was not so steep and therefore offered a better chance of an all free ascent. However, each day a few more centimeters of snow fell. In the end both teams failed after 500-700m of climbing at an altitude of 5,450m. Unstable snow covered steep rock slabs and made progress dangerous. Jaro and Martin climbed difficulties from III to V+ and gave up on the October 20, we from III to V and finished two days earlier. We also found equipment abandoned by the French team earlier in the year.

After a couple of days rest in base camp, Alexadr and I went to try a beautiful rocky ridge on Tengi Ragi Tau. This led up toward the 6,180m South Summit, the smallest in the Tengi Ragi Tau massif. The ridge faced south and we began our ascent in the afternoon of the 21st and took two days to reach the summit. During the climb the weather was very sunny but a strong wind blew from the northwest. The latter wasn't a problem in the lower section, as we were protected, but after the second bivouac it hit us directly. Fortunately, the climbing from this point was easier with more snow and ice. We joined the southeast ridge and continued up this to the top, reaching it at 2:00 p.m. on the 23rd. The view was beautiful but we were concerned about our descent of the southeast ridge. The snow was not as good as it had been on our south ridge but we managed to descend quite quickly. A couple of rappels put us on the small glacier at the bottom and continued on down to bivouac in grassy meadows, reaching them at dark. We named our 1,700m route Like a Dhal Bhat, because it was a very beautiful route, and graded it ED (VII- and 75°). The ascent took 20 hours climbing time and the descent (grade D+) six hours.

After this we only had time to climb the Normal Route on Parcharmo before returning home, but maybe we will come back, as Teng Kang Poche is a fantastic granite monument.

RADEK LIENERTH, *Czech Republic*



The north face of Kwangde Lho (6,187m), showing, left to right: Extra Blue Sky (Beauguey-Profit-Rhem-Ruby, 1996), Nakagawa (2002), Breashears-Lowe (1982), Mandala (Lorenzo-Munoz, 1985). Hiroyuki Nakagawa

*Kwangde Lho (6,187m), new north face route.* Koji Ito and I made the seventh ascent of the north face of Kwangde Lho, by a new route (ED+ M5 WI6). After spending six days climbing 37 pitches, we reached the summit of the 1,150m face on December 13. The north (Hungo) face of Kwangde Lho was first climbed by Americans David Breashears and Jeff Lowe in 1982, and repeated by a British party in 2001. The route Extra Blue Sky of Kwangde Shar (6,100m) was climbed by the French in 1996, by the Czechs and British in 2000 and again by British in 2001. In addition, a Spanish team succeeded in 1985, while in 2001 a Czech team put a new direct finish on the 1989 American route of the north buttress of Kwangde Nup (6,035m)—see *AAJ* 2002.

We began climbing from an advanced base camp, near 4,900m on December 8. Despite frequent snow showers and poor ice conditions (we only got screws in on one pitch), we completed nine pitches before digging out a bivy in a snow wall. The next day we did six pitches, beginning with two VS WI6 pitches on 70° to 80° very thin ice where protection was almost impossible. Our third day on the face we did seven more pitches, ending with a bivouac at a dihedral. We enjoyed good ice on just one pitch—the fourth—but suffered with the usual bad conditions for the other six.

Day four began with a S WI5, 70°-80° pitch (plus a little at 90°) where protection was difficult, followed by a S M5 WI6 with dry-tooling on thin and discontinuous ice. After five pitches, we found a comfortable bivy under a rock roof. The next day we climbed toward the right on bad 50°-70° fluted snow and ice, trying to follow a ridge leading to the summit ridge. But we ran into an unclimbable slab, then descended a rock band (M5) to a 70° hammock bivy, after a total of six pitches that day.

On our sixth and final day, we began by traversing left to get back onto ice, then went up and right on discontinuous ice that was M5 in two places. The snow conditions were even worse below the summit ridge, where we topped out at 6,050m.

We began our descent with three diagonal rappels down the south face, followed by a downclimb to the glacier on the south side of Shar, where we bivied. The next day, we walked southeast on the glacier to a point near the lowest col between Shar and a nameless peak, then descended to the Namche side. We reached the moraine after seven raps and more down-climbing, then bivied again on the east side of the northeast ridge. The next day, December 15, we finally descended to our advanced base camp by detouring around the northeast ridge.

HIROYUKI NAKAGAWA, *North Japan Climbing Team (translated by Tamotsu Nakamura)*

## ANNAPURNA HIMAL

*Annapurna I traverse.* Unquestionably the best climb of the season was the Annapurna I traverse by Jean-Christophe Lafaille and Alberto Inurategi. They were members of a six-man expedition jointly led by Inurategi and Ed Viesturs. They had no Sherpa climbers with them at all, so the members did the work together to make the route, pitch the camps and stock them with supplies as far as their third high-altitude camp at 7,100m, nearly 100m below the summit of their eastern-most peak, Glacier Dome (now officially known as Tarke Kang). They had no bottled oxygen with them.

Viesturs climbed beyond camp 3 westwards along the ridge until 7,300m, but went no farther. He judged the avalanche risk unacceptable and was worried about the problem of returning from Annapurna's summit by the same long ridge. He descended to base camp and remained there for the remainder of the climbing period.

Lafaille and Inurategi remained to continue alone. On May 14, they left camp 3 at 6 a.m. and moved along the sawtooth ridge. It had a steep and technically difficult section up to the summit of the 7,485m (24,557') peak known as Roc Noir (Khangsar Kang). They took three hours to surmount the last 250m-300m to the top; here the incline was 55° – 60° with a rock band running across it and bad powder snow. From here, they had only two alternatives, according to Lafaille: to retreat from the top of Roc Noir back the way they had come, or to continue west. It was not possible for them to descend the north or south faces, both of which were very steep; the distance down the north face was too great, while on the south face there were numerous unacceptably dangerous seracs and cornices.

They elected to continue west from Roc Noir by traversing on the north face between 20m and 100m below the ridge depending on the snow conditions. Sometimes they could walk along it with a pole, sometimes it became a very steep (65° – 70°) snow face which involved very technical climbing and some rappelling. At 4 p.m. they bivouacked at about 7,500m, the average altitude of this part of their traverse. They had climbed more than four km. from camp 3.

On the 15th they went back onto the ridge for about a kilometer and then, at about 7,700m, they crossed again down onto the north face, where all the snow was very good and firm whereas the ridge had become only bare rock. However, they did have some technical ice and snow climbing to do. They now were actually on the huge expanse of Annapurna I, and they bivouacked at 7,950m at the top of a couloir below its east summit. They stopped their

traverse at about 3 p.m. because they knew it would take them hours to chop out enough space to stay for the night. That afternoon Lafaille also spent some time fixing 100m of rope above their bivouac site for the next day's climb.

On May 16 they completed their east-west traverse. The route now lay along a steep rock face that was technically very difficult. They had trouble finding a route here. About 40m below the east summit (8,026m), they moved westward along the north face. They crossed the middle summit area on the face and joined the normal north face route at a couloir at about 7,800m, climbed up the couloir, and at 10 a.m. were at last on the main 8,091m summit (26,545'). Half of their grand traverse had been done.

Now to get down safely. After half an hour on the top, they started out on their west-east return traverse. They took a different line on the face from the one they had just been using because they were very tired and the snow conditions were not good. In the middle of the afternoon they returned to their bivouac tent, stayed there an hour, then moved to a lower altitude to make a new bivouac on a small plateau at 7,400m. They were very weary, and there was no food and little cooking gas; their supper consisted of some biscuits with milk tea.

On the 17th they continued their return climb. They were still very tired, but at their bivouac of the 14th found their cache of food and gas; they spent two hours to have some food. Then back to Roc Noir and camp 3, which they reached at 4 p.m. Here there was a proper camp with a tent and more food, and they could be more relaxed. The next day, they descended all the way to base camp at 4,000m, where they arrived at the end of that morning.

Throughout their remarkable climb, they had used no bottled oxygen and experienced no accident or frostbite. "I was very happy," Lafaille said about his success on Annapurna after three previous attempts and his "bad experience" on its south face 10 years ago. (In October 1992, he and the noted French alpinist Pierre Beghin had been attempting an alpine-style ascent of the south face when Beghin fell to his death. Lafaille's difficult solo descent developed into a growing nightmare when a falling rock shattered his right arm.)

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, *Nepal*

## DAMODAR HIMAL

*Gaugiri, first ascent.* Jim Frush (then-president of the AAC) and I went exploring for an obscure 6,110m (20,046') peak called Gaugiri, which is in the Upper Mustang district northeast of the Annapurna massif on the Tibetan border.

We had an idea of roughly where the peak was from a trip to Mustang in the fall of 2001, but no one had ever attempted to climb the peak and there were no photos or description of it or its exact location. This was the first permit issued for a peak under the new regulations, and the first ever in Upper Mustang. It was one out of the list of 103 newly opened mountains, many of them unknown to mountaineers, ranging in altitude from 5,407m (17,740') to 7,349m (24,111'). Eighty-three of them are between 6,000m and 7,000m high. As we set out for Gaugiri from Kathmandu in mid-May, we didn't know whether we would be tackling something that was technically difficult or an easy walk uphill. But first we had to find it. We had the latest 1:50,000 maps, produced in 2000, from a detailed Finnish Meteorological Institute survey, but even these maps proved to have put some significant lakes in totally the wrong place, which caused us some problems. However, we found Gaugiri and

were pleased to discover a southwest ridge that would definitely not be just a trek to the top and decided to climb it.

From our base camp at about 5,400m (17,700'), we set out at 7:30 a.m. on 28 May in relatively good weather after some days of snowfall, and quickly reached and ascended the ridge. Most of it was covered by good snow, with some loose rock in places. Some sections were quite steep (45° – 55°). Unaccompanied by any Sherpas, we were on the summit at 1:20 p.m., stayed an hour enjoying the view, and were back at base late the same afternoon. It is a fun, classic route with no great difficulties. Our total time out from Jomosom was 20 days.

The mountain dominates its area as the high peak on a long southeast ridge. Its summit, on the border with Tibet, has dramatic views of the giant 8,167m Dhaulagiri I to the southwest, a wide panorama of Tibet to the north and east, and a range of glaciated 6,000m–7,000m peaks to the south.

PETER ACKROYD, AAC

*Pokharkan, first ascent.* Sherpa Panima Lama (51) and I (61) made the first ascent of Pokharkan (6,346m) on October 31. We climbed the north ridge via a route that is not highly technical. I selected this route because the south face is a difficult rock wall. Sherpas Pemba Cherin (58) and Suba Maju (55) were also part of our team. Pokharkan is northeast of Annapurna near the Tibetan border at latitude N24°48', longitude E84°13'. It is one of 103 new peaks that the government of Nepal opened to climbing in 2002.

We left Kathmandu on October 10, via Besidsal and Naru Khola, and set up base camp at 4,850m, north of Nagoru (4,500m), on October 19. From BC, we followed a moraine up a gentle ridge, and set up C1 at 5,360m, two days later. One week later, we set up C2 on a ridge at 5,700m, with the summit hidden from view. On October 30, we established C3 above a steep snow face, at 6,050m. The next day, Panima Lama and I reached the main summit, at 6,346m. The summit is really two peaks 100m apart, which are about the same height. So we climbed up a steep gully to the top of the left peak first, and then climbed the right peak too. We departed from base camp on November 3, and returned to Kathmandu via Thorang La and Pokhara, arriving on November 11.

KOICHI KATO, *Japan* (translated by Tamotsu Nakamura)

*Pokharkan, first ascent of the south face.* The Alpine Club Damodar expedition was led by Steve Town with Dick Isherwood as deputy. Other members were David Baldock, John Fairley, Toto Gronlund, Martin Scott, Pete and Sara Spillet, Bill Thurston, and myself. Our Sirdar and climbing Sherpa was Kaji, the fastest man up Everest. We approached along the Annapurna Circuit as far as Koto, from where we struck off north toward the Tibetan border and into the spectacular Naur gorge of the Phu Khola. Three days later we reached the village of Phugaon and began a reconnaissance of Pokharkan, which proved to be a far more complex mountain than the maps suggested.

A very long ridge running southwest from the summit to a pass west of Phugaon (which Tilman crossed in 1950) turned out to have several difficult rock steps. The southeast ridge, though shorter, also looked rugged, with a deep saddle between what we came to call Pokharkan Southeast (5,700m) and what was, in effect, the southeast ridge of Pokharkan II (6250m). The

east face of Pokharkan II appeared to have a straightforward snow/ice route winding up around serac barriers, so we established base camp at 4,800m below this face. By then illness and the bitter cold had persuaded David and Steve to leave, so Dick took over the leadership. A close encounter with a snow leopard had nothing to do with their decision.

Advanced base was established in a deep saddle at 5,300m, with a view to out-flanking the southeast ridge and gaining the east face. From this point Toto and I climbed Pokharkan Southeast. Vestigial tracks indicated that one of the French or Belgian expeditions, unsuccessful with their attempts at the main summit earlier in the season, had made the first ascent. From the summit we could see that the east face was feasible, but had doubts that the top we could see was the true summit. However, from the saddle it was possible to access a huge high glacier bay below the south face, and our Sherpa team, inspecting this approach, came back full of enthusiasm. We therefore placed another camp at 5,600m in the glacier bay. At this point the Spilletts became ill, leaving only six of us to attempt the summit.

We set off from our high camp on November 17 but very soon Dick succumbed to the chest infection that had troubled him for some time and was forced to descend. A glacier ramp led to serac barriers at 5,900m, where I was lucky to be able to lead a 10m pitch of steep ice, about Scottish 3. This proved to be the crux of the route. Above a second ice cliff another glacier ramp led easily to the southeast ridge at about midpoint. Buffeted by strong winds, we climbed the ridge to the summit of Pokharkan II. Here, John, Bill, and Toto descended, while Kaji, Martin, and myself continued across a saddle towards the main summit approximately one km. distant. We reached the 6,350m top and a fantastic viewpoint at 2 p.m. There appeared to be no tracks or other conclusive evidence of the mountain having been climbed previously, although we had understood in Koto that a lone Japanese with a Sherpa team believed he had climbed it just two weeks earlier from the north. A Sherpa's description of waist deep powder snow had influenced our decision to make the ascent from the south. In two hours we regained our tents and the following day descended to base camp. The consensus was that the route equated to Alpine AD+.

DAVE WYNNE-JONES, *The Alpine Club*

## MUSTANG HIMAL

*Arniko Chuli, first ascent and survey.* In the summer of 2001, I began topographical research of the mountains west of Lo Manthang and Chharang, and made the first ascent of Arniko Chuli (6,034m). Arniko Chuli is at the northern edge of the range between Lo and Dolpo, on the border between Nepal and Tibet. I was attracted to this mysterious peak for its height, its strange name, and because no foreigner had ever seen it. The Indian surveyors gave the peak a Nepalese—not a Tibetan—name. Aruniko (or Araniko) is the name of a famous artist from Nepal who, in the latter half of the 13th century, went to Tibet to design statues for Buddhist monasteries.

I planned, along with two Nepalese friends—Ang Purba and his wife Pasang Diki (Thame)—to approach Aruniko Chuli from the Dolpo side. On July 3, we left Jomsom at Kaligandaki with five pack animals, and walked to Sangda village along the historical route taken by Sharmana Ekai Kawaguchi—a Japanese priest, the first foreigner to reach Lhasa from Nepal, 102 years ago.

After crossing Geba La, we followed another trail north along Lhanhimar Khola to a nameless pass. Then we descended along a northwestern stream, Sano Kiraphuk Khola. On July 8,

we set up our base camp very close to Chanagor Bhanjyang (5,665m), on the northern border. The next morning, we climbed the pass on the border, and were rewarded with a good view of the Tibetan side.

West and northwest of us, there were four other passes in the northeastern Dolpo: Daknak Bhanjyang (Sena La 5,465m), Jyanche Bhanjyang (5,534m), Kang Kung Bhanjyang (5,564m), and Pindu Bhanjyang (5,600m). The trails from Dolpo to Tibet cross these five passes and converge at the Raka Nadi River. We also saw one of the tributaries of Yalung Tsampo, flowing north. On the eastern two passes, there was no sign of activity nor cattle; blue poppies and other alpine plants were abundant. Presumably, these passes have been abandoned as roads have been built. Old markets have been disappearing too.

On July 10, we left base camp in fine weather. From a small pokari (pond) just below the pass, we walked east and northeast along the border ridge, and after an hour of climbing a gentle ridge of rock and snow, we were on top of Araniko Chuli, surrounded by other 6,000m peaks.

From the highest point, a vast ice field extended east. I confirmed various bearings and elevations of nearby peaks on the Nepalese New Topographical Map (1:50,000), using surveying instruments. But to the northeast, the peaks of the Man Shail group were hidden by clouds. We returned to base camp by another route: straight down a scree slope on the south face of Araniko Chuli, where, unlike on the Tibetan side, there was no snow. Then we finished our research and climbing around Aruniko Chuli in three days, by following an old path directly to Mustang from Chharka, via Ghami Bhanjyang (5,740m), to Ghami.

The second stage of our activity in Damodar Himal started at Ghami. We set up a base camp at the northern foot of Saribung (Selibung or Soribung, 6,327m) following a route via Chharang, Dhi, Yara, and Nakkali Damodar Kund (a sacred place for Hindus). Another party had already pitched a high camp, at 5,720m, on the northwest glacier of Kumlung North Peak (6,378m). In the central part of this huge glacier are the two highest peaks of Damodar Himal: Khumjungar Himal (6,759m) and Chhiv Himal (6,591m). They were both climbed by The Himalayan Association of Japan in 1983. Although the other party had attempted Saribung, they were unsuccessful because of sudden bad weather.

We continued the topographical research in this area—the east glaciers of Bhrikuti Sail (6,361m), and north of a nameless high peak (6,899m) in the east—then we returned to Pokhara, via Jomsom.

TAMOTSU OHNISHI, *Japan (translated by Tamotsu Nakamura)*

## MAHALANGUR HIMAL (KHUMBU)

*Nuptse, south pillar attempt.* The Nuptse International South Face Expedition (a.k.a. the Slo/Can/Am—emphasis on Slo) was concluded at the end of May, 2002. Team members were Marko Prezelj (Slovenia), Barry Blanchard (Canada), Stephen Koch (USA), and myself (also USA) as leader. In support was Barry's wife Catherine Mulvihill and our wonderful cook, known to us as Prakash.

We arrived in B.C. on April 15. Basecamp was on the western side of the Lhotse Nup Glacier, about a two-hour walk from the small village of Chukung. We spent about two weeks acclimating and all members climbed to 6,800m on the 1961 British route—the route of first ascent. On the last trip up that ridge Stephen Koch had a small mishap with a snow cornice

which dropped on him from a height of 50cm (really) and tore his medial-collateral ligament on his right knee. Stephen left for Thailand four days after this incident.

The three remaining members stayed healthy long enough to see the season's good weather spell. Barry, Marko, and I started up an untried route in the center of the face between the '61 route and the often-attempted-not-yet-completed south pillar route. We left B.C. early the morning of May 15. We soloed to about 5,400m, and then belayed the ensuing 400m-450m to establish a bivy site at approximately 5,800m. That first day offered excellent mixed climbing on fine granite up a very natural and objectively safe line. For all of us this day was the best of the trip—the quality of the climbing combined with the joy of discovery made for an exceptional day in the mountains. The second day on the route saw five more belayed pitches of moderate mixed terrain that led to easier climbing. We then unroped and climbed to 6,600m. The third day we climbed to 7,200m and bivied in the bergshrund at the top of the south face névé.

Marko and I continued with the ropes and rack a bit higher on the ice face to 7,300m. This eventually proved to be our highpoint. On the fourth day we woke up to windy and much colder weather with a lot of black clouds down valley. We spent the day in the tent and woke to the same weather on the fifth day at which point we elected to descend. We downclimbed to 6,500m where we joined the '61 route and continued down now-familiar terrain to reach B.C. at 9:30 that night. Nuptse East, 7,804m, is still unclimbed.

We are happy to report that Stephen didn't require surgery and his MCL is apparently healing up nicely. We saw no Maoist insurgents, though we heard many rumors and the steets of Thamel were strangely quiet without normal tourist volumes.

We had originally proposed to attempt the route in a single-push variation of alpine-style. Upon climbing on the lower '61 route and trekking two days to the west to get a view of the summit rockband, we collectively decided that there appeared to be too much hard climbing up high (between 7,300m and 7,600m) to make that approach feasible. We switched to "classic" alpine style, carrying a bivy tent and



Top: Routes and attempts on Nuptse's south face. Left to right: the British route, the Slo-Can-Am attempt (2002), and the line of most previous attempts (originally by Lowe-Twight). Left: Acclimatizing on Nuptse's British route. Right: A good day on the Nuptse south pillar attempt, with Makalu behind. Marko Prezelj (3)

two sleeping bags in addition to our food/stove/fuel/clothing. Having climbed to 7,300m on the face I would elect to use the same “classic” approach if I were to attempt the route again.

STEVE HOUSE, AAC

*Everest, summary of the spring season, questions on the use of bottled oxygen and sedan chairs.* Altogether 46 teams sent 155 people to Everest’s summit this spring. Seventy-seven of them reached the summit on May 16—61 from the southern side in Nepal and 16 from Tibet. But the spring of 2001 still holds the record with 50 teams, 182 summiters, and 88 on top on a single day (May 23). Of the 155 summiters in 2002, 66 men and one woman had made ascents in previous years, so the total of first-time summiters was 88.

The high number of summiters on the Nepalese side of Everest on May 16 forced one of them to wait 56 minutes at the top of the fixed ropes on the Hillary Step before he could resume his descent—it took that long for ascending climbers to get off the ropes.

Among the various firsts in 2002 were the first Armenian summitter, the first Hungarian, the first Basques living in France, and an American who believes he was the first cancer survivor on Everest’s summit. There was also the first person to scale the mountain 12 times: 40-year-old Apa Sherpa. And there were the oldest man and the oldest woman.

One would think that the question of who is the oldest person to reach the summit would be quite simple. Until this year, that distinction belonged to an American, Sherman Bull, who was 64 years old last spring. On May 17, 2002 the title passed to Tomiyasu Ishikawa, a 65-year-old Japanese. Or did it? Another climber who was also on the Tibetan side of the mountain, Mario Curnis of Italy—only 26 days younger than Ishikawa—has put forward his claim to the title on the grounds that he is the oldest to have climbed to the top, which he achieved on May 24. No one doubts that Ishikawa did arrive at the summit, but his Sherpas, according to Curnis’s fellow summitter, Simone Moro, carried him up the final 50 meters to the top. Furthermore, Curnis returned from top to bottom on his own two feet. An Austrian who also was on Everest, Wilfried Studer, said that he saw Ishikawa being carried down the mountain on the back of one Sherpa while breathing oxygen through a tube from a bottle on the back of another. This reputedly took place from Ishikawa’s first high-altitude camp at 7,000m (23,000') all the way down to base camp at 5,200m (17,000'). Ishikawa needed other help during the ascent as well. Another climber on the mountain, New Zealander Russell Brice, reported that on the Second Step ladder Ishikawa had the help of three Sherpas: two were immediately behind him and placed his feet on each rung while a Sherpa in front pulled him by a short rope.

Ishikawa had made extensive use of artificial oxygen. By his own account, he started using it on his push for the summit at about 7,500m (24,600'), and continued using it sleeping and climbing above there. And not all of it came from his own supply. A different Japanese expedition had to abandon their own summit bid on the 18th and descend from 8,500m because they were told that Ishikawa “was in big trouble” 200 meters above their summit party, and their Sherpas had to carry more oxygen up to him.

Is this use of Sherpas to pull or carry a climber, and this use of considerable amounts of artificial oxygen, really mountaineering? Four climbers on the Tibet side said they used absolutely no bottled oxygen throughout their time on Everest. A few commentators take the view that only four people, rather than 155, should be credited with ascents this spring. They believe that after Reinhold Messner and Peter Habler proved in May 1978 that summiting

Everest and safe and sane returns do not require oxygen, only climbs without bottled oxygen should actually be counted as successful.

No problem exists about who is the oldest woman atop Everest. That record was set in May 2000 by a 50-year-old Pole, Anna Czerwinska. This spring a Japanese woman 13 years older than she, Tamae Watanabe, went to the summit from Nepal's southern side on the busiest day, May 16. Her use of bottled oxygen was confined to climbing from her camp 3 at 7,300m (23,950') to the top and back to 7,300m plus sleeping two nights in camp 4 on her ascent and descent.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, *Nepal*

*Cholatse north face new route attempt.* The Korean Alpine Club Cholatse Expedition led by Kang, Sung-woo departed from Seoul August 24. Team members were as follows: Shin, Dong-seok, Cho, Yu-dong, Ji, Jeong-deuk, Hong, Sung-woo, Hwang, In-sun, Kim, Chae-ho, and Lee, Young-joon, and myself.

We fixed ropes to 5,200m but were plagued by the weather during the entire expedition. The most paralyzing conditions occurred from September 21 until September 29, when we were inundated by heavy fog conditions, tent-bound by a deluge of rain, and left to ponder the thunderous sound of avalanches as the heavy wet snow blanketed base camp. Clear weather finally allotted us only time enough to clean the fixed lines, pack up ABC, and head down to Lukla.

Future climbers should note that the Shangri-la Trekking Map of the Khumbu region confuses the locations of Arakamtse (6,423m), Cholatse (6,440m), and Tawoche (6,542m). Aramkatse has been labeled as the mountain that should be Cholatse.

PETER JENSEN-CHOI, *Korea*

*Nagpai Gosum, Chinese military encounter.* My partner Jeff Lamoureux and I traveled to Kathmandu on September 5 to attempt a new route on 7,350m Nagpai Gosum. We discovered three different names for the mountain: Nagpai Gosum I, Cho Aui, and Pasang Lhamu Chuli. The third of these names was given after the death in 1993 of Pasang Lhamu Sherpa on her descent from the summit of Mt. Everest. The peak is now usually referred to by that name. The peak had three previously recorded ascents. One team ascended in 1986 from the north gaining the prominent north west ridge to the summit. The second and third teams followed the entire northwest ridge from its base near the Tibet-Nepal border in 1996.

On September 11 we flew to Lukla to begin our trekking route via Namche Bazaar, Tham, and Arye before arriving at basecamp. This is the standard trade route eventually crossing the Nangpa La on the border between Nepal and Tibet. On the 16th we arrived at our planned basecamp on the Sumna Glacier at approximately 5,100m.

Early on September 20 we left our basecamp to trek up toward the Nangpa La and have a better look at the planned descent route. After an hour or so of walking we had almost arrived at the yak herder's post of Lunag (approximately 13 km. south of the Tibet border) when we encountered someone in a military uniform carrying an A.K.-style firearm. He seemed startled by our presence and told us to sit down on the ground. He spoke a few words of English. Through motioning and broken words he told us he was Chinese military and repeatedly pointed at his uniform's emblems. He asked for food and water, which we gave him. Despite the strange encounter we continued up the valley.

After another hour I saw a different individual 100m in front of us dressed the same as the first. He jumped behind a large boulder when he saw us. We tried unsuccessfully to make verbal contact with him, but he did not come out from behind the rock. We were uncomfortable with the situation, so we turned around and headed back down the valley to the south. As we returned to Lunag we encountered the first individual again where we'd left him, and again we gave him food and water. We kept walking down valley for 10 minutes until we heard a shot. A little while later another bullet passed within feet of our heads. The two men were together, shooting at us from about 100m behind. We began to run but soon realized we couldn't continue with our packs on. After ducking behind a large boulder we ditched our packs and continued on. The two men continued to follow us firing shots at us. We ran for 45 minutes until we were able to hide for three hours in a side valley before returning to basecamp.

When we reached basecamp, our sirdar and local cook felt we must return to Namche Bazaar that night, so we packed up and hid our basecamp equipment. We traveled through the night and reached Namche the next afternoon, where we reported the incident to the military and to the police.

Two days later we returned to the site of the incident with the Namche police chief. En route we met a Tibetan refugee who had crossed the pass the evening before our shooting incident took place. He told us he crossed the pass with a group of approximately 20 other Tibetans but had been left behind because he was too slow. He also indicated that he was in our vicinity when the shots were fired because he could hear them and knew there were two foreigners in the area. He had been left near the 5,700m pass for three days without food or water and was making his way down toward Namche Bazaar. At the incident site we recovered shell casings that the police chief took back with him. We were able to recover all of the items from our base camp, however we were not able to recover our backpacks or their contents. Our liaison officer then requested we return to Kathmandu to report the incident to the Ministry and request a credit for our royalty to be used at another time. We also met with the U.S. Embassy and discussed the incident with the Consular General. We give a great thanks to the AAC Helly Hansen Grant for the support of the grant. We have yet to decide whether we will attempt this expedition again.

DAVID MORTON, AAC

*Khumbu, Nagpai Gosum I, background on the encounter with Chinese soldiers.* David Morton's experience was the first incident of this kind ever to befall any mountaineers within Nepalese territory. On the other side of the border not far from the Nangpa La were the tents of Cho Oyu expeditions' advance base camps. One of the leaders who was there at the time, Russell Brice, a New Zealander, explained some background to the incident. Three soldiers of the Chinese military—the People's Liberation Army (PLA)—were searching for a group of about 20 Amdos, Tibetans from northwest Tibet. Since the Nangpa La is an important escape route for Tibetans fleeing their country (usually to pass through Nepal to join the Dalai Lama in northern India), a unit of the PLA is permanently posted close to the Cho Oyu base camp on a highway.

The three soldiers found a woman lying down near the pass; she probably was a decoy, for when they went to look at her closely, they were unexpectedly attacked by Amdos, who hit them on their heads with rocks and stole two of their guns before escaping across the pass into Nepal. The three soldiers, two of whom were Tibetans themselves while only one was Han Chinese,

chased after them the next day. The night after that the two Tibetan soldiers came back across the Nangpa La and slept in one of Brice's advance base camp tents. They had no sleeping bags, warm clothing, or food.

On the third day, 15 to 20 more soldiers arrived at advance base camp looking for the same group of Amdos. Some searched the moraine, some went to the Nangpa La and returned to advance base. Three of them spent the night in Brice's tent and the rest slept in tents of a joint Japanese-Chinese/Tibetan women's Cho Oyu expedition. Next day the soldiers went back to their encampment near the road.

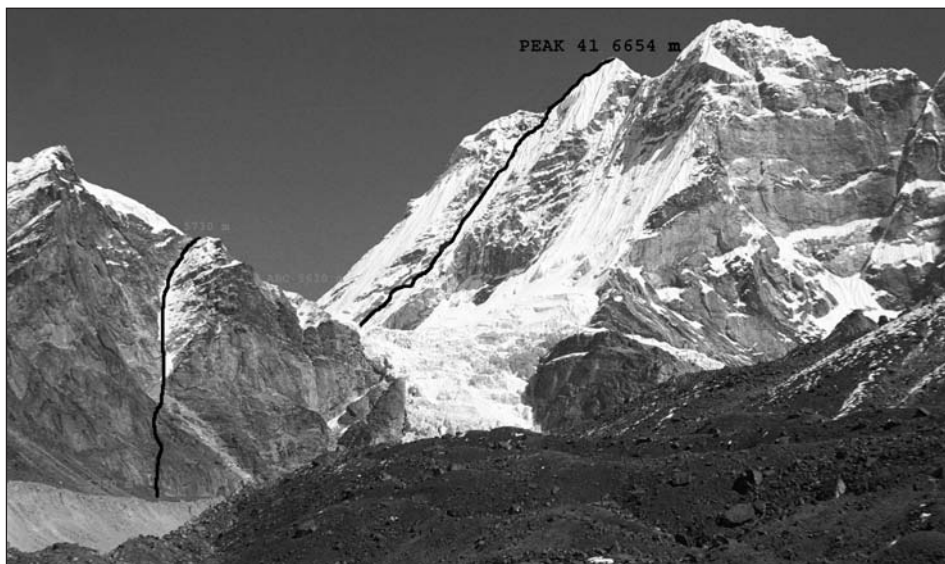
Later that morning shots were heard at advance base camp. They were fired by the Han Chinese soldier from the original trio who was now crawling, dragging himself through the snow and firing to attract attention. Brice, his Sherpas, and some Tibetans employed as Sherpas by the women's expedition went to investigate and brought the unfortunate soldier into camp. Brice speculates that the two Americans had been shot at by Amdos in crossfire with the PLA men.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, *Nepal*



Better conditions finally arrive high on Peak 41. Urban Golob

*Khumbu, Peak 41, first ascent.* In the middle of October a Slovenian expedition of six climbers made the first ascent of Peak 41 (6,654m). After an acclimatization on Mera peak, Ales Kovac and Bostjan Jezovsek found a reasonably good approach to the great plateau below the west face of Peak 41, and climbed the rock slabs and a snow gully left of hard broken icefall. Next morning they started to climb the west face but after 150m they went back all the way to base camp due to the bad weather. After a week-long period of bad weather the party of three climbers—Matic Jost (the leader of expedition), Uros Samec, and I—set out from base camp and reached the great plateau. Next morning (October 15), we started to climb at 3 a.m. and found quite bad snow conditions on the wall because of very soft snow. The bad conditions forced us to climb near rocks, so we could make better belays. Because of the bad conditions and more steep terrain in the upper part of the wall (60°–80°), and the windy and cold weather, we needed 19 hours of continuous climbing to reach a small col left (north) of the summit, where we bivouacked at



Peak 41 (6,654m), showing the route of its first ascent. The lower left is a snow gully, behind the ridge is a plateau, and looming above is the west face. Urban Golob

6,500m. Next morning, still in cold wind and terrible snow conditions, we needed another hour and a half to climb the exposed ridge (50°–65°) above the west face and reach the summit of Peak 41 (6,654m). After several abseils and downclimbing, we reached our tents on the plateau below the face that evening.

The same day (October 16) the other party (Ales Kovac, Matej Kovacic, and Bostjan Jezovsek) reached only 6,000m on the north ridge due to very soft snow. They rested the next day on the plateau and on October 18 they went on the face and climbed a new route to the right of our party's line. When they reached the same col left of the summit (6,500m) at 4 p.m., they were caught by a strong snow storm, so they went down immediately. After some problems with avalanches on their descent, they successfully reached the tents on the plateau late in the night and the next day came down to the base camp.

After four previous unsuccessful expeditions to Peak 41 (Japanese, Finnish-American, New Zealand, and Finnish), the Slovenian expedition managed to climb two new routes on the west face of Peak 41 and reached the summit of the virgin mountain. Both of the routes are 1,000m high (from the plateau) and rated at V, 4 or TD+ (55°–80°) with a climbing approach to the plateau (500m, 40°–70°), so all together 1,500m of climbing. For more information, visit: <http://41.ice-climbing.net>.

URBAN GOLOB, *Slovenia*

*Kyajo Ri, first recorded ascent of newly opened peak.* Sitting at home in front of the computer for a week with a broken leg can be a wonderful source of inspiration. So it was for me in January 2002. The Nepalese government had just opened 103 new peaks for climbing. My wife, Véronique Marché-Wilson, and I chose Kyajo Ri (6,186m), only three long days' walk from Lukla. Kyajo Ri is the highest point in the massif that rises to the north of Namche Bazaar, only 20 miles west of

Everest. Talking about our plans among friends soon had Julien Ferrera, Laurent Beurel, and Véronique's brother Vincent Marché joining in (all French).

We set up base camp a little above Machhermo village. After the puja ceremony we set off up the steep rocky slopes at the end of the cwm to establish camp 1 at the foot of the east face, 5,200m. The next day we gained access to the glacier lying at the foot of the east face via a 40m mixed step, climbed the glacier to the rimaye, and overcame a 100m mixed step to reach the southeast col and camp 2.

October 20, 1 a.m., -20°C, full moon. We set off, only to return four hours later, unable to find a way through the south face to the southwest ridge. A quick tea, and Vincent and I headed off again, this time losing altitude to reach the Kyajo Glacier, south of Kyajo Ri. By 8 a.m. we'd reached the southwest col at 5,700m. Roping up for the first time, we could see a glistening 50° ridge of snow and ice leading to the summit. A few steeper sections (60°–65°) promised sport along



The unclimbed northeast aspect of Kyajo Ri. The 2002 route on the south flank is left of this rocky face. Duncan Wilson



High on Kyajo Ri, where the glacier gives way to rock. Duncan Wilson

the way, especially where a rock buttress appears near the top.

The going was delicate in places, the ice thin and porous. Climbing together with two tools each, occasionally placing the deadman for protection, we took the rock buttress at 6,050m in order to avoid the rotten snow-ice as it steepened to over 70° above. We traversed east across the buttress then followed its right edge up a steep snow field to reach the summit in three pitches. From the sharp snow arête on the summit an impressive view extends in all directions, from Everest to Thamserku and Cho Oyu. After an hour on the summit, we began our descent at 3 p.m, leaving a string of prayer flags fluttering in the slight breeze.

Night soon fell and the temperature plummeted to -25°C. Our toes suffered a little frost nip but the full moon and the sight of bobbing headtorches coming to greet us soon warmed our spirits. We were back in camp 2 by 9 p.m., happily reunited with our friends just as a violent wind storm began. The next day's 1,200m descent to base camp would be long. Route Information: southwest ridge, named En Tente Cordiale. Location: Latitude: 27° 58' 03", Longitude: 86° 40' 58". Altitude: 6,186m (according to Schneider Map 'Khumbu Himal 1:50,000').

DUNCAN WILSON, U.K.

*Nuptse East 1, south face pillar attempt.* Snow conditions made climbing very difficult for a noted Russian mountaineer, Valeri Babanov (37), in his unsuccessful attempt at a solo ascent of a pillar on the south face of Nuptse, the lengthy mountain that stands immediately south of Everest. His aim was to make the first ascent of one of its eastern summits, which presents such difficulties that it was described as "only for Babanov" by Vladislav Terzyul, a highly successful Ukrainian climber who has summited 12 of the world's fourteen 8,000-meter peaks, including Dhaulagiri I last autumn.

Babanov arrived at his base camp on the Lhotse Nup Glacier at 5,200m on September 19, but new snowfall and avalanches prevented him from starting up the mountain until the 29th. His original plan was to fix 500m of rope on the lower part of the pillar, then go to acclimatize on the 1961 British south face route to an altitude of 6,900m before making his push for the top of the pillar in three or four days. He said before leaving Kathmandu for this climb that he expected it to be "the most challenging climb I have ever done." He would have to scale a vertical distance of 2,500m (8,000') from base camp to his goal, the summit known as Nuptse East I, which is 7,804m high on Nuptse's east ridge and only 57m lower than the main summit. Approximately 600m to 700m of Babanov's route would be highly technical, and then big snow mushrooms presented themselves above that.

Babanov had no official permit to climb the 1961 South Face route in addition to his pillar, so he devoted himself entirely to the pillar. He spent days moving up and down the pillar fixing 1,000m of rope until his supply was exhausted. He calculated that he would need to fix 200m more to overcome the steepest section, known as "le Diable" (the Devil), before attempting to go for the summit. Babanov reached an altitude of 6,300m at the bottom of the Diable on October 26, four weeks after he had begun his attack on the pillar. He now had no more rope and "was very, very tired," strong winds had started blowing, and he had other commitments elsewhere. So he abandoned the climb. He wants to return next autumn but not solo. He would like one friend to come with him, partly so he would not have to carry all the rope and other gear needed for this very technical route.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, *Nepal*

*Numri first ascent.* Numri is south of Cho Polu and east of Chukung village. The 6,677m mountain was first climbed by a German team led by Olaf Rieck in November. The seven-member expedition established their base camp at 5,140m on the Imja Glacier south of Island Peak. They made two camps above that. From camp 2 in a snow cave at 6,185m, three climbers (Rieck, Carsten Schmidt, and Lydia Schubert) ascended the west face to the summit on November 7. Their team had no Sherpas climbing with them, but they did fix a total of 800m of rope in sections above 6,000m. There was considerable danger from avalanches on the face, and one member's backpack was struck by a chunk of falling ice when he was at about 5,900m, but he was unharmed. Slightly higher up, a large part of a glacier broke away with a loud crash, but again no one was hurt. The climbers had problems with deep snow in several places along their route and a lack of good anchors; the average steepness was 30°.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, *Nepal*

*Ombigaichen, first recorded ascent of newly opened peak and first winter ascent.* Ombigaichen (6,340m) is one of the new trekking peaks authorized by the Nepal Mountaineering Association in 2002. Our expedition consisted of Charles Burr (U.K.), Jo Cleere (U.K.), Marlies Sanders (The Netherlands), and myself as guide, with the assistance of Nepalese, Gyenye Lama, Ekka Rai, Syrendra Tamang, and Sonam Yeltsin.

We arrived in Kathmandu from Europe on November 12, flew to Lukla and trekked to Ama Dablam base camp, arriving on the 19th. Here, we spent two days in acclimatization and reconnaissance before moving up with yaks to camp at **ca 5,000m**. Half a day of load carrying by all the team across the debris of the Nare Glacier saw us established at our 5,200m base camp near an icy stream. Ama Dablam's south face was to our northwest, while Ombigaichen lay to the north-east. The shortest and most logical route to the summit was the south ridge from the Mingbo La. This was because access to the La was relatively straightforward (a 200m snow/ice slope at 50°) and it would enable us to place a tent at ca 5,800m, leaving just under 550m of climbing to the top of the mountain.

We made our first attempt on November 30. Above the La a delightful snow arête led to the "first gendarme." This was turned on its rocky right flank to reach a second snow arête leading to the "Snow Saddle." Above, a steep snow/ice slope rose to a series of gendarmes, all turned on their extremely loose, rocky, right flanks. A final steep 20m wall led to the "first notch." We left this section fixed.

Our second attempt took place on December 3, when Charles Burr, Sonam Yeltsin, and I were successful. On reaching the La we found that our tent had been destroyed by strong winds over the previous two days. Fortunately, we were able to locate the inner tent about a kilometer away across the glacier, and piecing together a couple of poles, managed a tolerable if short night.

Above our previous high point a short vertical rock arête led to more mixed ground and the **Agsecond notch** below the summit block. The last three pitches were spectacular and included a long (45m) steep pitch on completely rotten, loose shale interspersed with extremely unstable snow/ice mushrooms and an overhanging mushroom to finish. Several car-size blocks of ice fell during the climb, crashing noisily down the southeast face. The route was Alpine AD/D in standard and in common with nearby Ama Dablam, summiters were rewarded with superb views of Everest, Lhotse, and Makalu. Extensive research, using all the normal sources, failed to reveal any previous recorded ascent of Ombigaichen

We noted that the southwest face would give a superb 800m snow/ice climb at around 55°. The Hunku (southeast) side looks loose and complex in the lower half, though the upper face is mainly snow/ice at 50°. The east ridge is the logical finish of the southeast face, while the west (Ama Dablam) ridge looks unattractive, with a number of overhanging snow obstacles. We were unable to properly observe the north (Chukung) face of the mountain.

Late autumn/early winter is normally an excellent period for climbing the lower peaks of Nepal. The main problem for us was the two days of high winds, which completely destroyed the tent on the Mingbo La, and the cold, which produced overnight temperatures of -20°C at the La. To conclude, there is huge potential in Nepal for new routes and new peaks between 6,000m and 7,000m but many of the new trekking peaks will be technically harder than the expedition peaks. For more information and photographs of this expedition see [www.basecamp.co.uk/climb.html](http://www.basecamp.co.uk/climb.html)

VICTOR SAUNDERS, U.K.

## JANAK HIMAL

*Tinjung attempt, Pandra and Danga first ascents.* The Danish Janak Himal Expedition comprised Allan Christensen, Bo Belvedere Christensen, Jan Mathorne, and myself as leader. All had made several expeditions to the Himalaya previously, most recently in spring 2000 to the Polish Route on the south pillar of Everest. We planned to fly to Ghunsa by helicopter to save time and avoid both monsoon and terrorist problems, but at the last moment permission was refused by the Nepalese Government because the police station at Ghunsa had been bombed earlier in the year. Instead we used the usual approach from Suketar, arriving at our 4,785m Lhonak base camp on October 1. Our journey had been hampered only by the monsoon and rumors of Maoists.

We decided first to attempt the peak generally considered to be Danga I (6,355m). This had been attempted by Chris Bonington's expedition in 2000. But at the col between the main summit and a subsidiary peak christened Danga II (6,194m), this team turned right and followed the southwest ridge to the latter summit. However, it quickly became clear to us that the new Nepalese map calls the higher summit Tinjung and the real Danga lies more to the southwest.

On October 4 and 5 we established a camp just below the glacier at 5,450m and inspected the glacier to 5,900m. On the 6th we left camp early and followed Bonington's route to the col. From here we ascended the Southeast ridge of Tinjung to a foresummit (GPS reading 6,137m: N 29° 49.803', E 87° 59.473'). So far the climb had been on steep, unstable monsoon snow at a standard of Alpine D-. The real summit lay to the north, appeared to be 100m – 200m higher and required crossing a long mushroomed ridge with loose snow and rock. It looked dangerous, so we retreated to base camp, where the weather also took a turn for the worse (the weather was generally poor for the first half of the month but improved considerably after).

On October 9 we established a camp at 5,250m on the moraine where the Lhonak Glacier splits. At this point I turned back due to a fever and throat infection. The other three continued up a side glacier southeast of Pandra (eventual GPS reading 6,673m: N 27° 51.897', E 87° 59.547') to see whether the attractive south face of this unclimbed mountain was feasible. After a bivouac at 5,500m it started to snow, so they returned to base camp. On the 14th Alan, Bo, and Jan returned to the bivouac and continued next day to a second at 5,700m, above which



Pandra (GPS 6,673m) from the south, showing the line of the first ascent. Bo Belvedere Christensen

they saw a couloir leading out of the glacier basin towards Pandra. Starting at 4.a.m. on the 16th the three climbed the 500m couloir (55° max) and the ridge above to the upper part of Pandra's south face. They continued up steep and partially loose snow (some dry-tooling in parts) and at 6,500m reached a plateau above some seracs and below the final pyramid. The latter gave straightforward snow climbing and the well-defined summit was reached at 1 p.m. After down-climbing the summit pyramid, they began a series of rappels to above the couloir, then descended the latter to arrive at the bivouac site after sunset. The climb was rated TD- and was felt to be good apart from the lack of belays.

With only a few days remaining it was decided to attempt the peak we are now sure is the real Danga. It is a well-defined but complex snow and ice pyramid standing at the head of a side valley that leaves the main trekking route between Ramtang and Lhonak. On the 19th we spent a long day walking down toward Ramtang, then up the stony side valley and onto a complex glacier, where we bivouacked at 5,200m. On the 20th all four of us started up the glacier rising north to Danga but at 5,450m I was again forced to turn back due to continued illness. The others continued over increasingly complex terrain to a snowy ramp, which gave access to the upper part of the mountain. Good alpine snow climbing led to the summit, which was reached at mid-day (GPS reading 6,238m: N 27° 49. 023', E 87° 58. 598'). The route was about D in standard and the same night we were all re-united in base camp. The mountains north of Lhonak still hold many possibilities for first ascents and new routes but future parties should be prepared for long and stony approaches.

HENRIK JESSEN HANSEN, *Denmark*



Pandra (GPS 6,673m) from the south, showing the line of the first ascent. Bo Belvedere Christensen

*Maoist encounters spring season commentary.* Insecurity for people throughout Nepal due to an armed rebellion by Maoists, who have become especially active in the more remote areas of the country, was encountered separately by two teams, one Swiss and the other Spanish and Italian, on their treks in April to Makalu base camp. It is not certain whether the teams met genuine Maoists or Nepalis posing as rebels. In any case they were stopped by armed men who demanded money and cameras. No one was injured in these incidents, but they were certainly not pleasant experiences.

The six-member Spanish-Italian expedition, led by Edurne Pasaban from Spain, had their encounter before they had reached Tashigaon, the last village on the trail to Makalu. Here six young men or boys armed with rifles, pistols and grenades, took Rs.5,000 (worth about \$64) and a camera from each member.

The Swiss were just two men led by Norbert Joos, and they were stopped at Tashigaon itself. The Nepalis carried rifles but were not in Maoist uniforms; they demanded from each person Rs.10,000 plus one camera. They produced handwritten receipts, but the Kathmandu trekking agency helping this team told Joos that real Maoist receipts are issued on printed forms and rubber-stamped, and that they had probably been robbed by some other people.

Trekking groups in remote areas of Nepal, notably in the far western hilly regions, have occasionally also been forced to surrender money and cameras to armed men claiming to be Maoist insurgents. As a result, the number of trekkers has dropped in recent seasons, especially this spring. Could climbers, too, go elsewhere in the future? Could the number of people dreaming of standing on the top of Everest decide to make their bids from Tibet, despite the fact that many prefer to climb from Nepal?

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, *Nepal*

*Maoist encounters fall season commentary.* There were encounters by two expeditions, one in the Kangchenjunga area in far eastern Nepal and the other in the west on their way to Putha Hiunchuli, which is sometimes called Dhaulagiri VII. These teams were stopped by armed Nepalis who may have been Maoist rebels fighting against the constitutional monarchy with the aim of replacing it with a “people’s republic,” or they may have been just bandits taking advantage of the well-known presence of Maoists in those areas.

The Putha Hiunchuli team of ten Austrians led by Gunther Mussnig were stopped when they were approaching their mountain from the north in late September at a village named Kakkot by about 25 local people whom Mussnig called “Maoist-friendly.” They refused to let the expedition enter their Kaya Khola (valley), where base camp would be established, unless they were paid Rs.100,000 (equal to about \$1,280); when the Austrians refused, they were kept at Kakkot for a day and a half. They were not freed until Rs.67,000 were handed over.

In eastern Nepal, a predominantly Slovenian expedition for Ramtang Chang (called Chang Himal in the new list) (formerly known as Wedge Peak) and Kiratchuli (Tent Peak) near Kangchenjunga were similarly held up. Their leader, Gregor Kresal, and another member flew by helicopter to their base camp with the team’s funds while the other 10 members trekked toward the mountains from the Taplejung airfield. One day’s trek north of the airport at Chhiruwa village, they were stopped by four armed men who villagers thought probably were Maoists. The men said they knew the team had paid the Nepalese government \$3,000 for their climbing permits, and demanded a payment of this sum plus their own “tax” on each member. The climbers explained that they had no money since all the funds had gone ahead by helicopter.

After being locked up in a small lodge for a short time, their captors reduced their demand to a total of only Rs. 8,000 (\$103), but the team could not meet even this price. They were allowed to proceed on their way to base camp but were told they would have to pay on their return trek to Taplejung. This expense was avoided by the entire expedition’s chartering a helicopter out of the region from a village well north of the airfield. The cost of avoiding Taplejung by hiring a helicopter to Kathmandu was \$6,500, whereas they would have had to spend only about \$2,000-\$2,500 to trek to the local airfield and fly by a scheduled fixed-wing flight from there.

These expeditions’ encounters were not the first by mountaineers in Nepal. The earlier ones occurred in the autumn of 2000 to a Spanish Manaslu team, and in the spring of this year to two Makalu expeditions, one Swiss and the other a joint Spanish-Italian party. No doubt they will not be the last, but it is most unlikely that any teams in the immediate Everest region will be affected, at least in the next few years.

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