

Nepal

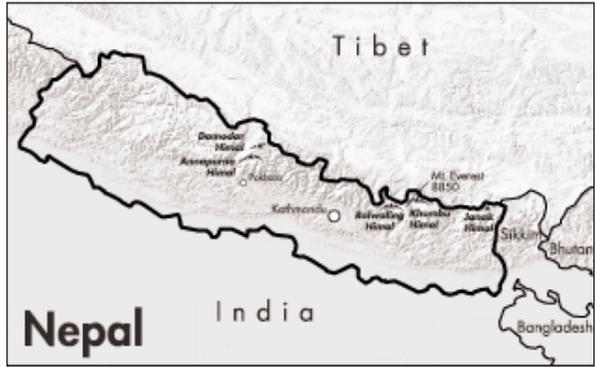
Travel update for Nepal, spring

2005. Tourism arrivals in Nepal continue to plummet due to increasing violence surrounding the growing Maoist insurgency, and the February 1st royal takeover of political control of the country. According to the Nepal Tourism Board, tourist arrivals during the spring climbing season are down 34 percent from last year. The country continues to be crippled by frequent transportation strikes and blockades of urban areas by Maoist guerillas.

In a bold move that brought intense scrutiny from the international community, Nepal's King Gyanendra seized control of country and the Royal Nepal Army in what has been equated to a "bloodless coup." The King cited great domestic instability and the inability of the democratic government to properly address the Maoist insurgency as justification for his actions. He vowed to quickly restore peace to the country and to put an end to the civil war, which has now claimed over 11,000 lives. Since his takeover, scores of human rights activists and protesters have been arrested, and Nepal now tops the list for the highest number of kidnappings and disappearances in the world.

Despite the growing conflict, tourists have not been deliberately harmed by either Maoist insurgents or security forces thus far. A well-publicized exception to this occurred when a Russian expedition was attacked by Maoists armed with homemade grenades as they traveled toward Tibet for an attempt on Everest from the north. Two climbers were injured, and the attack was credited to the fact that the group was traveling unaccompanied during a known national transportation strike. For trekkers and climbers, paying "taxes" to local Maoist factions along popular trekking routes has become commonplace across the country, and trekkers in the Everest region have become accustomed to encountering security forces on their frequent armed patrols.

In summary, travel to and around Nepal is still very possible and relatively safe. Mountainous regions of the country—especially the Khumbu valley leading to Everest—are quite removed from the civil conflict, as are the tourist centers of Kathmandu. Travelers need to be prepared for frequent and inconvenient hassles such as transportation strikes, vehicle searches, tightened security, etc. Travel outside of popular trekking routes and during times of civil conflict should also be avoided. The political situation in Nepal is, like other places in the region, becoming increasingly unstable and could potentially become dangerous. Travelers should do their homework before they travel abroad, register with their embassy, and be prepared to change plans at the last minute.



MUSTANG REGION

DAMODAR HIMAL

Gaugiri, second ascent of southwest ridge. On August 27 Austrians Johannes Mihatsch, Anna and Edmund Wirbel, together with Guna Bahadur Tamang and Pisail Tamang made the fourth overall ascent of Gaugiri (6,110m) but the second ascent of the original route up the south west ridge climbed in May 2002 by Peter Ackroyd and Jim Frush. This peak lies more or less on the Mustang-Tibet border well north (15-18km) of the main area of the Damodar.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, *AAC Honorary Member, Nepal*

Peak 6,350m, first ascent. Although he had a permit to climb 6,110m Gaugiri, Kiyoshi Ishii from Japan did not attempt the mountain. Instead he moved further east and climbed an unnamed peak over the border in Tibet. The ascent of this 6,350m summit was made via the east ridge on July 7 with Kumar Rai and Panima Sherpa.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, *AAC Honorary Member, Nepal*

Chhiv Himal (6,650m), first ascent; Saribung (6,328m), second ascent, new route. Four members of the Japanese Alpine Club, Student Section, made the first ascent of Chhiv Himal (6,650m) on September 18, 2004. On the following day, all five members of the expedition reached the summit of Saribung (6,328m) via a new route; it was the second ascent of the peak.



Chhiv Himal's north face. The route followed the left skyline. *Kenichiro Kato*

The Kingdom of Mustang is a frontier region that well preserves an old form of Tibetan Buddhist culture. The Damodar mountain group is located in the eastern part of Mustang. At Ghami, our caravan shifted away from the main route, instead heading toward the east, following a tributary of the Kali Gandaki. After crossing three passes over 5,000m, the magnificent Damodar Himal appeared. It had been a nine-day trek from Jomson (including one rest day).

With Khumjungar Himal (6,759m) as the main peak, the group of mountains encircles the Namta Khola glacier in a horseshoe formation. One wing of the mountains heads in a northeast direction toward the border with Tibet. The newly opened Chhiv Himal (6,650m) is an independent (and previously unclimbed) peak located in the southeast area of Khumjungar Himal.

The expedition was comprised of team leader, Takeshi Wada (23), Chiba University Alpine Club. Deputy-Leader: Takeo Yoshinaga (23), Waseda University Alpine Club. Team Members: Kenichiro Kato (23), Rikkio University Alpine Club; Yuko Shibata (22), Gakushuin University Alpine Club; Mitsuhiro Kosei (19), Waseda University Alpine Club. The ascent was planned and executed with no assistance from climbing Sherpas.

On September 8, we set up the Base Camp (5,250m) at the end of the glacier that flows northeastward from the foot of Chhiv Himal. We made Camp 1 at 5,650m, on September 11. To reach C2 from C1 it is necessary to cross the glacier, which is about 1km wide at the crossing point. The whole glacier field was filled with seracs, some of which were 20m tall. As the sun rises, the bottom part of Pk 6,225m became dangerous because of the frequency of falling rock from the ridge. In addition, the snow plateau that leads to the west face of Saribung was potentially dangerous with hidden crevasses. Therefore, we made Camp 2 on the col (6,170m) between Chhiv Himal and Saribung, on September 15.

The northwest face of Chhiv Himal is shrouded with snow due to the strong wind, while its eastward side is rocky. Our route was on the ridge that came down northeastward from the peak. It continued for three roped pitches to a four-pitch 60° snow wall. On top of the wall the ridge became flat and continued to the summit. At this point (6,450m), we returned to C2. On September 17 all five team members started from C2. We continued along the gentle upper ridge, which became knife-edged and developed a cornice. At a 6,610m top, with almost all our snow pickets and fixed ropes used and the weather becoming worse, we returned to C2.

On September 18 four team members retrieved some of the fixed ropes for use on the final ridge to the summit. From 6,610m the party carefully followed the knife-edged ridge of snow, which was sometimes elusive in a whiteout. At 13:15 four team members reached the broad snow stance of the summit: the first ascent of Chhiv Himal. We had fixed approximately 850 meters of rope.

On September 19 all five team members left C2 to the summit of Saribung along the south [west] ridge. As the south face of Saribung is fortified by rock walls and several crevasses, we proceeded carefully, fixing seven pitches of rope. At 12:30 all five team members had made the second ascent of the peak, via a new route. The first ascent of Saribung was made by Americans Jim Frush and Peter Ackroyd in 2003.

KENICHIRO KATO, *Rikkio University Alpine Club*

**Adapted from Japanese Alpine News, TAMOTSU NAKAMURA, Editor*

Unnamed peaks 6,084m (Namy) and 6,130m (Yury), first ascents. I got a permit for Gajiang (6,111m), as it attracted me strongly. It soars like Machhapuchare in a less-frequented area of Damodar Himal. However, this peak had very steep slopes. In spite of four days of exploration (October 20-23), I could not find any viable climbing route, so I gave up the plan [Mr. Kato is reported to have reached ca 5,600m, but still some considerable distance from the summit, on the south east ridge after first attempting the north ridge]. Instead, I was able to climb two unnamed peaks, 6,084m and 6,130m respectively.

Unnamed peak 6,084 (I called it Namy Peak) October 24-26: The snow-covered Namy Peak is located to the south of Jomson Himal and is the highest in this area. We went from BC to Labse Khola to the north and set up ABC (5,000m) at the end of a glacier. Then we set up C1 at 5,200m on the right of the moraine. There we could see the mountain ridges extending to the top. On the way, we stopped using the climbing rope under a cornice, and plodded in the knee-deep snow. On the summit, I had my picture taken with Gajiang in the background. I measured the location of this mountain using GPS. I saw Pokarkan, which I first ascended two year before, to the east. The date of arrival at the summit: October 26. GPS data: 28°49'18.8"N, 84°08'14.1"E; H 6,094m.

Unnamed peak 6,130m (I called it Yury Peak) October 29-30: The peak, snow-capped on the southern side, is at the dividing point of the Labse Khola Massif. From ABC (5,000m) we followed the moraine on the left and reached the foot of Yury Peak. We climbed the rock ridge between a waterfall and a valley, then followed the valley and went up 100 meters to a gully on the left side. Then we set up C1 (5,480m) on a flat ridge at the top of the gully. Looking up from C1, we caught a glimpse of the white snow on the summit beyond on a rock ridge. Above C1 there was a steep slope of 25°-30°, with small rocks and little snow. My feet slipped many times on the rocks, but I carefully climbed, minding the falling rocks. 200 meters below the summit there was much snow, but I managed to reach the top. There was little space there and only one person could stand. From the top, I was able to see Jomson Himal in the south and, in the north, Khumjungar Himal, which is the highest mountain in the Damodar area. We took pictures and measured the location of this mountain using GPS, then returned to C1. The date of arrival at the summit: October 30. GPS data: 28°51'12.2"N, 84°07'23.1"E; H 6,143m. The team: Leader: Koichi Kato (63); Sherpa: Pasang Tamang (36).

KOICHI KATO, JAPAN

**Adapted from Japanese Alpine News, TAMOTSU NAKAMURA, Editor*

Purkhang, first ascent. A large Japanese team and its Sherpas made the first ascent of Purkhang (6,120m), which lies in the Purkhang Himal south west of the main Damodar across the headwaters of the Labse Khola (west of the Teri La). The expedition climbed the west ridge on August 16 with Satoru Endo, Hiroyasu Hatsushika, Yuichiro Ishihara, Teruyuki Iwasaki, Chizuko Kono, Teruaki Kubo, Kazuko Takano, Hiroshi Yumoto and Sherpas, Ang Kami, Da Chhemba, Geru, Lhakpa, Ongchu and Pem Tenji.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, AAC Honorary Member, Nepal, and TAMOTSU NAKAMURA,
Japanese Alpine News.

MANANG REGION

Purkhang, first ascent. In the summer, a Japanese party was successful on Purkhang (6,120m) in Manang district north of a popular so-called trekking peak, Chulu West. Of its 11 members, eight, plus six Sherpas, succeeded via the west ridge on August 18. Above their only high camp at 5,450m, they first had to cross numerous crevasses—they used a ladder to negotiate one—surmount an icefall, and, at 5,700m, climb a 100-meter high 65° ice wall. They had a long summit day: they left high camp at 3:40 a.m., were on the summit at 2:45 p.m., and returned to high camp at 8:00 p.m.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, AAC *Honorary Member, Nepal*

ANNAPURNA HIMAL

Annapurna Central Summit, ascent. A Russian, Boris Korshunov, whose age has been reported as between 68 and 70, set out from the top camp on the Standard (French) Route up the north face of Annapurna on the 28th May. However, he slanted up left too early on the long snow plod to the summit and arrived by mistake at Annapurna's Central Summit (8,051m). Although he was disappointed, he is perhaps only the 15th person to reach this summit, making the sixth overall ascent (three Germans on the first ascent in 1980 via a line on the North Face left of the Dutch Rib, two Poles in 1981 via the South Face, two Spanish in 1984 also via the South Face, two Swiss in 1984 via the East Ridge, and one Korean plus four Sherpas making the first winter ascent via the Dutch Rib in December 1984; on their repeat of the East Ridge in 2002, Inurrategi and Lafaille traversed below this summit on the north flank). He is perhaps the only person to reach this top via the French Route.

PAMARI (LAPCHE KANG) HIMAL

Lapche Valley, reconnaissance. In order to find a place that is utterly unknown and to satisfy my curiosity, I decided to visit the unfrequented Lapche Valley, a small but independent mountain group located roughly 100 km northeast of Kathmandu. It lies between Jugal and Rolwaling Himal, or more specifically between the rivers Bhote Khosi (Po chu) and Tamba Khosi (Lapche Khola). Likely no serious attempts have been made to climb any peaks here, probably because the tiny 6,000m peaks of this region were not considered worth climbing. Long ago Kenneth Mason wrote a few lines on the existence of Lapche Kang in the classic book on Himalayan exploration *Abode of Snow*, but nothing more. Available maps include those from the Nepalese survey bureau and the AfvH's series, both in 1:50,000 scale. The former, we discovered, is relatively correct in its details; the latter is less reliable. Both are outdated in some points, e.g. the main path along the valley was partly on the opposite side, the glaciers have shrunk considerably, etc.

The way to Lapche Khan in the confined area surrounding Lapche Khola valley, actually starts at Lamabagar, one full day drive from Kathmandu through Charikot up to Singati (a terrible dirt road in its final part), followed by two days' walk along the trekking route to Rolwaling. From Lamabagar on a wide alluvial flat, you can look ahead to a huge narrow gorge geographically isolating the upper area. This area's cultural isolation later became clear. Visitors, such as alien mountaineers, are an encumbrance to them, and even the notorious

Maoists have been shut out from this high valley area, which is an exclusive autonomous locality.

We were a five-man party, all aged over 60, with the assistance of two Sherpas and 14 porters. Our target peak for our April-May expedition was located at the head of Phurkum Khola, a tributary of Lapche Khola. Two major peaks surround this bleak valley: Jobo Bamare (5,918m) and Chomo Pamari (6,109m). They are named on the maps and are known to some extent, and we suspected them to have been climbed already. But on close examination both of these beautifully shaped peaks look difficult, only fit for expedition-style climbs. We wanted a relatively unknown peak that could be easily climbed in a short period. Just from map-readings, we focused on a 5,811m peak at the junction of the ridge where Chomo Pamari stood and the branch ridge extending to Jobo Bamare. After three days' march from Lamabagar, we saw that this virgin mountain was a nice triangular snowcapped peak easily accessible through mere glacier climbs.

Little can be said about our climbing, however, because we were interrupted at C1 by a group of villagers and monks who came up from Lapchegau, the main village in this area. They insisted that nobody was allowed to climb the sacred mountains within their territory, and they said that sinful people who tried to violate the mountains' divinity must pay a financial penalty. We had confirmation that the Nepalese authorities allowed our mountaineering trip in this area within the framework of our trekking permit, but it seemed this region was half a half century behind, and too remote for such logic to hold. Eventually we gave up and did not go higher than circa 5,300m. Afterward we visited Lapchegau Monastery to negotiate a return visit for climbing.

There we found ourselves "back to the future." It was possible to communicate with people on mutually understandable basis. We received a friendly welcome (as we had paid a discounted penalty) by some monks and villagers, including a monastery staff member well educated in India who was renovating the Monastery backed by an international foundation. Thanks to his assistance, we learned that they were ready to accept tourists for pilgrimage purposes, and also other visitors could freely walk around and climb any peaks in their domain. The condition was only to show respect by holding a Puja and paying a decent donation beforehand, as otherwise they believed calamities would follow. So, it was an error in our procedures that made them lose face. This seems to confirm the fact that mountaineers have been seldom seen here.

We enjoyed this still-primitive valley country with somber villages and people living in traditional Tibetan style, with nothing for visitors like shops and lodges, and many splendid mountains above. There are five tributary valleys stretching to surrounding ramparts of mostly 5,000m class peaks. Each would be a good place to set up a base camp from where one could ascend virgin summits less than 1,000m elevation from the valley bottom. There are only three peaks over 6,000m in addition to the two already referred to; the highest one (6,065m) of the Ralin Himal group is a marvelous white massif. I do not hesitate to pick it as the new target for my next visit.

What a nice experience to have roamed around such remote mountains located near the old approach route to Mt. Everest but well behind the crowded realms of Everest today.

KEI KURACHI, *Japan*

**Adapted from Japanese Alpine News, TAMOTSU NAKAMURA, Editor*

KHUMBU REGION

ROLWALING HIMAL

Chekigo attempt. Opened in 2002 as a trekking peak, 6,257m Chekigo, which lies east northeast of Beding in the Rolwaling Valley, was attempted by a French commercially organized party in 2004. After the usual problems with Maoists, they were able to reach about 6,000m on the summit ridge of this fine, fluted snow and ice pyramid. Chekigo has no recorded ascent but is thought to have been climbed by a route of around AD+ in standard. It was first attempted as long ago as 1955 by Alf Gregory's Merseyside expedition.

Tengi Ragi Tau (6,943m), north ridge, attempt. Tengri Ragi Tau is one of the peaks of the Seventh Goddess in the Rolwaling Himal; its pyramidal peak can be seen from Namche Bazaar. When the Nepal government opened this mountain in 2002, the Japanese Alpine Club (JAC) planned to organize a Senior Expedition to this mountain in pre-monsoon 2003. Tengri Ragi Tau was an ideal target for seniors who wished to climb a virgin peak because it features easy approaches, an appropriate altitude, and a manageable route for seniors without bottled oxygen. This mountain, however, was climbed for the first time via the southeast face (Tesi Lapche La side) by another Japanese team in December 2002. The party was composed of 6 senior members, who were 59 years old on average, with 6 climbing Sherpas and 4 kitchen staff.

On 25th April we set off from base camp at around 4,700m below the glacial moraine descending from the pyramidal peak of Pamalka (6,344m). Over the next week we reached C2 at the saddle between Pamalka and Langmoche Ri, but were blocked by deep snow and high winds. On 3rd May, we set off from base camp to attempt an alternative new route. Arriving at C2, however, strong wind again stopped our upward progress. On 5th May we started trail breaking, this time along the highest point on an easy slope, which fortunately led us to crusty parts. Then the slope led steeply upwards to a point at 6,100m from where we climbed a couloir located in the middle of the snow flank of Langmoche Ri. We progressed smoothly along the route with five fixed ropes, following this couloir which becomes increasingly steep until thin ice-covered slabs appeared above at 6,250m. A young Sherpa tried to surmount this difficult section for almost one hour while we were exposed in the couloir to continuous blasts of chilling spindrift avalanches. Our Sirdar also tried to tackle these slabs for a while, but climbed down with discouraging words, saying that these icy slabs could not be managed because of the impossibility of piton placement. Knowing not what to do next, we climbed down to C2.

We wanted to try to find a possible route to the east side of the flank even with the limited ropes and food remaining at C2. But our Sherpas were completely discouraged with these failures on the west ribs and the technically difficult couloir route. Unhappily, we realized that our physical competence as seniors was not strong enough to establish another new route by ourselves without support from the Sherpas, which was not forthcoming.

On 10th May, we cleaned the site of our base camp for the return journey back to Lukla. Leader: Ryouzai Nakahara (61); Climbing Leader: Masayoshi Fujii (57); Climbing Members: Minoru Tsubakuro (61), Isao Iguchi (59), Yoshimoto Naruse (57), Hisa Naruse (57).

MASAYOSHI FUJII, *Japan Alpine Club*

**Adapted from Japanese Alpine News, TAMOTSU NAKAMURA, Editor*

Langmoche Ri (6,811m), attempt. Langmoche Ri lies northwest of the Khumbu village of Thami. Two Americans, William (“Rusty”) Escapule and Tom Togami, first went to acclimatize on nearby Parchermo. There had been heavy snowfall for two days just before they got there, and the day after their arrival a huge avalanche swept nine people—three Americans, three Frenchmen and three Nepalis—down its north face. Escapule and Togami joined in the strenuous rescue effort. They were now very tired when they went to look at Langmoche Ri, and besides, the snow conditions were too dangerous to try for the summit. They made no attempt to go above base camp, but it is a “beautiful mountain, a great mountain to climb.”

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, *AAC Honorary Member, Nepal*

Tangi Ragi Tau South (Pahamlahaka) ascents and possible new route. Although they were unable to make any serious attempt on their main objective, the North Pillar/Face of Teng Kang Poche, a group of young French climbers were able to achieve several ascents on Tangi Ragi Tau South (aka Pahamlahaka: ca 6,187m), which lies on the opposite side of the main valley.

At the end of October Jean-Marc Clerc, Martial Dumas and Erwan le Lann climbed the south ridge with two bivouacs. This gave ca 1,700m of climbing up a fine rock ridge in its lower section, finishing with 500-600m of easy snow/mixed. The French found difficulties up to 6b+.

This route was first climbed in October 2002 by Radek Lienerth and Alexandr Toloch, who also took three days, named it Like a Dhal Bhat, and found the difficulties to be ED1 VII- and 75°. This pair from the Czech Republic then descended the south east ridge in its entirety, taking about six hours and estimating the grade as Alpine D+. It is thought the French also descended this route.

Later, Maxime Belleville, Philippe Coudray, Julien Herry, Nicolas Potard and Xavier Vimal made the probable first ascent of the south west ridge, which they likened in style to Route Major on Mont Blanc. From a bivouac at the foot, they first climbed rock at F4 and 5, made another bivouac at ca 5,800m, crossed steps of 80°-85° with the steepest section just below the summit and then made a third bivouac on the descent of the south east ridge. The route was named Le Sourire de Migma (after a local trekking lodge proprietor).

LINDSAY GRIFFIN, *Mountain INFO, CLIMB magazine*

MAHALANGUR HIMAL

Teng Kang Poche, ascent of the north west face (not to summit), Edge of Darkness. On October 22 British climbers Nick Bullock and Nick Carter left the tea-house at Thengbo situated approximately five hours west of Namche Bazaar, making a bivouac at the base of the ca 1,600m unclimbed north west face of Teng Kang Poche (6,500m). Teng Kang Poche is a striking mountain situated between the more well know peaks of Parcharmo and Kwangde. The north west face is massive, resembling the Droites North Face in the Mont Blanc Range

The two set out at 2 a.m. on the 23rd having already tested the initial snow cone for avalanche risk. Previously on the trip, while attempting to complete Bullock's solo route from 2003, Love and Hate on the north east face, the pair triggered two avalanches at 5,400m and had

to make a careful retreat. This proved an intense 12-hour outing, which neither climber wished to repeat.

Finding the snow conditions acceptable, they continued to climb through the night, simu-soloing, and following a deep runnel furrowed by spindrift and hemmed in by rock-walls. The runnel had regular steps of Scottish Grade III and was interspersed with snow slopes of Scottish II, much resembling Tower Gully on Ben Nevis but on a grand scale.

At the top of the runnel section the slope opened out with patches of névé, deep snow and powder. The steep steps increased in regularity. These steps were approximately 65°-70°, with the average angle of the face at approximately 50°-60°. A slight left to right line was followed.

At daybreak the pair continued a more direct line following much the same type of ground as below. The weather at this point was very cold and clear, causing some concern. Even with the warmest boots and gloves, feet and fingers had to be constantly warmed to reduce the risk of frostbite.

At 12:30 p.m., a height of 5,900m had been reached; 1,300 meters of climbing in 10 hours. Above, the summit ridge was 300m away but with what appeared to be steeper, more technical ground above, and with no obvious place for a bivi site, they decided to take an early finish and cut a ledge in the top of a snow fluting. At 3pm they settled down for a rest and some food. Neither carried a bivi bag but they had a prototype single-skin Pertex bivi tent supplied by Outdoor Designs.

At 7 a.m. on the 24th the two started to climb and the angle of the face increased immediately, approximately 70° on average. Rock belays were sought to the right of the line, although due to the compact nature of the rock these were difficult to find. The climbing also became more tenuous with the increase in angle and the snow took on a very Peruvian feel. Protection on lead was virtually non-existent. Occasionally a driven-in ice hook or a dug out ice-screw could be placed if the ice, covering steep slabs, was thick enough. Lengthening sections of 80° powder-covered, hard-ice now had to be climbed (Scottish IV). The grade of the climbing had no real relevance at this point, as within seconds of climbing one of the steep sections, hands and feet were wooden, making the whole experience more interesting. A race for a rest point where frozen digits could be re-warmed became the crux of the pitch. A long, rising traverse right, (approximately 50m beneath the summit crest) was led by Carter at a grade of Scottish IV 80°.

Bullock led the final pitch, which consisted of much digging, chopping, burrowing and levitation. (Ungradable and one for the Peruvian connoisseur: 85°). He finished on the crest of the west ridge in the dark at 7:00 p.m. Carter joined Bullock and the pair cut a shelf/cave beneath a mushroom, completing the task at 8:30 p.m. The height was 6,210m and this final 300m of climbing had taken 12 hours.

Through the second day it had become obvious that the west ridge was going to present some very special techniques to try and forge a way onto the summit proper, which stood approximately 1 km away (and now clearly visible from the bivouac, as they were higher than the lowest point of the west ridge). With this in mind the pair decided to leave this joy to some other more deserving party.

After a particularly cool evening the descent was started at 7 a.m. on the 25th. This was virtually the same line as that used in ascent. The top half of the face was descended by rappel, with rock, ice and snow anchors all utilised. The weather chose this point to turn, causing some concern as large powder avalanches poured down the face. (Bullock was buried by one such avalanche while hanging from the end of the abseil rope, having unconnected from the end and about to start down climbing).

Fortunately the snow abated but the slopes now gave cause for concern, as they were freshly loaded with powder snow. The bottom half of the face was down climbed with speed, and it was with relief that the two safely reached the base, 12 hours from starting their descent, at 7 p.m. An overall grade for the route, Edge of Darkness, was thought to be TD+/ED1 Scottish 1V, 1,600m.

NICK BULLOCK, *United Kingdom*

Pasang Lhamu Chuli (Jasamba, Cho Aui) (7,351m), attempt. A six-member Slovenian team led by Uros Samec went up a new line on this mountain just south of Cho Oyu. Although it is officially called Pasang Lhamu Chuli, it used to be known as Jasamba or Cho Aui, and has been successfully climbed twice from its west side. This autumn's group attacked it from the south, up the southeast face to the south ridge.

Their route presented technical difficulties in the mid-section of the face above a big snowfield; here they encountered rock and thin ice leading to a 60° couloir, which in turn led to the summit ridge. The first part of the ridge was also a problem: it was narrow, covered with snow, in one section badly corniced, and was 90° at its beginning. But three members, Rok Blagus, Samo-Matijja Krmelj and Samec climbed the face, pitched a camp there and two days later, on October 24, were on the summit.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, *AAC Honorary Member, Nepal*

Nangpai Gosum I new route; Dazampa Tse, first ascent. In the middle of October Slovenian expedition made first ascent of Nangpai Gosum 1 (7,351m) or Pasang Lhamu Peak from the southeast (Nepal side) and also made first ascent of Dazampa Tse (6,295m).

Slovenian team (Urban Azman, Tadej Golob, Uros Samec, Samo Krmelj, Rok Blagus, doctor Zare Guzej and me Urban Golob as expedition leader) set up Base camp near Sumna glacier, one hour from traditional way of yak caravan from Tibet over Nangpa La to Namche Bazar. On the same place was also Base camp of American team in 2002 when the southeast side of the mountain was an objective. However, Americans found themselves in the crossfire during acclimatization near Nangpa La and went immediately home without really trying the mountain. On October 5, two days after reaching base camp, ABC (5,555m) was established at the foot of the southeast face. In the time of unpredictable weather a party of Uros Samec, Samo Krmelj and Rok Blagus acclimatized twice in the chosen route on southeast face because there are no easier mountains suitable for acclimatization in the neighborhood. On the first acclimatization they climbed to 6,100m, slept there and equipped rappels for more easy descent from summit push. On October 17 after period of bad weather (when I had to leave the Base Camp because of pneumonia and went home) they reached 6,400m, slept in the tent and go back to Base Camp next day. On the 22nd they went for summit push from Base Camp and next day they started from ABC at 1 a.m. One long day they needed to climb to the south ridge (6,650m) and rested there one day in the tent and look for the route on complicated ridge. On the 24th they started from their tent at 2 a.m. and reached the summit at 9 a.m. in high winds and very low temperatures. Almost immediately they turned back descended to tent and continued their

way down to ABC. They reached the foot of the southeast face at the evening making 19 rappels from the ridge. They named their ascent *Slovenian route VI*, 5 M, 1550 meters.

Meanwhile, on the 18th another party of Tadej Golob and Urban Azman climbed the southwest face of Dzasampa Tse (6,295m), south of Nangpai Gosum 1. They started from the south col at 6 a.m. and reached the top after almost seven hours of mostly unroped climbing on slopes of 55°-65° and one mixed pitch of 40 meters. They named the first ascent route as *Mali princ* and rated it at TD+, 5 M, 600m.

Until our expedition there was just two ascents of this highest peak of Nangpai Gosum group. First ascent was made by Japanese expedition in 1986 on northwest ridge starting from Tibet and in 1996 when an international expedition made the integral northwest ridge starting the climb on Nangpa La.

URBAN GOLOB, *Slovenia*

Losar waterfall, one-day ascent. In February Conrad Anker and I did what may be the first one-day ascent of the famous “Losar” waterfall across from Namche Bazar in the Khumbu. We bivouacked at the bottom of the valley and climbed the 2,400-foot waterfall in 16 hours round trip. After hearing stories from many parties that told of strong climbers having trouble on the descent, we opted to take 70-meter ropes and rappel. The plan worked perfectly. Most of the climb is less than vertical with a couple of burly vertical pitches at the end. We didn’t do any simul-climbing on the technical terrain, and I was pretty sick at the time; so it is reasonable for any solid team to go for a one-day ascent—provided they are efficient with installing V-threads to get down.

TOPHER DONAHUE, AAC

Ama Dablam, crowds on normal route. In the view of many, there were too many people on Ama Dablam (6,812m) last autumn. Some Ama Dablam teams were very small with just a member or two and perhaps one Sherpa. And not all of the 29 expeditions were on the mountain at the same time—they were spread out over a month—but they did bunch up at times. Two expeditions consisted of 30 and 31 members each; the larger one, led by American Dan Mazur, was assisted by nine Sherpas.

Mazur’s expedition sent a total of 38 people to the top over seven days. On a single day, October 24, which was just when a number of other parties were also summiting or trying to, this team put seven members and three Sherpas on the summit.

Henry Todd, the British leader of the second largest team, had 30 members and two Sherpas in his party. The members arrived at base camp and left the mountain at different times, and of his 19 successful members, plus two Sherpas—who went to the top three times—18 summited on six different days between October 26 and November 17. He said he tried to minimize the impact of his sizable group by, for example, not pitching tents that would be left empty much of the time while taking up space badly needed by other climbers, and by having his members summit in relatively small numbers each day. Furthermore, his team was based at a camp apart from others’ bases. Finally, when some of his members arrived at Ama Dablam, other expeditions had already moved off the mountain.

Nevertheless, there were complaints. At one bottleneck a German team’s leader and

Mazur's deputy leader attempted to speed up the progress of slow clients by hauling their rucksacks up by rope. This problem greatly delayed the German team's arriving at the second and third camps. Also, an American climber was almost been hit by a falling rock loosened by a climber above him. His own group could not pitch a second or third camp because no space was available; they were not only ones who had to skip a camp, usually camp 2, sometimes making for debilitating long summit days, and long waits at the mountain's bottlenecks.

The leader of an international expedition, Luis Benitez from the U.S., summarized the general situation on Ama Dablam in harsh terms: "too many teams were not led properly or responsibly [and] too cheaply." He said that some teams' Sherpas took food, fuel, and even a set of crampons from others' tents for their own members. One leader reportedly apologized for the stolen crampons, but others were apparently unaware of what their Sherpas were doing. Benitez says that the Nepalese tourism ministry must restrict the number of Ama Dablam permits it grants in a season because the mountain is getting so overcrowded that it has "almost reached critical mass." However, the government is most unlikely to act on his advice, since the fees are a major source of its foreign exchange earnings, and foreign climbers' expenditures are extremely important to their Sherpas, to the trekking agencies who assist teams, and to the many lodge keepers in mountainous areas.

In contrast, there were nearly twice as many teams on Cho Oyu (8,201m) but they did not have this kind of crowding problem. There was a lot more space, with none of Ama Dablam's narrow-ridge bottlenecks to confront them.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, *AAC Honorary Member, Nepal*

Everest, north face, new route. Elizabeth Hawley's account of the Russian new route on the north face of Everest, along with commentary from Yuri Koshelenko, a team member, is in the Tibet section of this AAJ.

Everest, 2004 summary. During spring 2003, in the 50th anniversary season of Everest's first ascent, a record number of men and women had turned up to climb to its summit, and it was assumed that the numbers would decrease after that. Wrong assumption. The number of teams was slightly less, but not the number of climbers. In May 2003 a mere 260 people, foreigners and Nepalese, men, women, and one 15-year-old child, stood on the summit of Everest, and on a single day, May 22, 114 people summited. In 2004 the overall total rose considerably, to 319 people. However, they were more evenly scattered over various days this time, with just 61 on the busiest day, May 16.

Last spring's Everest teams also exceeded those of a year ago in a tragic way: the number of climbers' deaths. Last year, only three people died, all of them men and two of these were Sherpas. This year no Sherpa perished, but seven other climbers, including two women, did: five had just been to the summit, another was trying to rescue two of these summiters, and the seventh collapsed while struggling to surmount the final 150 meters to the top. On the North Col route were a Bulgarian, Hristo Hristov (who was one of his country's best mountaineers and in 2003 climbed a hard new route on the north face of Thalay Sagar); another Bulgarian, Mariana Maslaova, who never reached the top; two South Korean summiters, Jang Min and Park Mu-Taek, and Baek Joon-Ho, their leader, who climbed up from their highest camp to save them and then also died; and a 63-year-old Japanese woman, Shoko Ota (the second oldest

woman to reach the summit). The only death on the South Col route was the American summiter, Nils Antzana.

There were only two teams on Everest last autumn: Dutch and Ukrainian. Both were on Tibet's standard route via the North Col, and both were unsuccessful due to too much snow and not enough fixed ropes. A major problem for these Everest climbers was that there was nobody else around: there were none of the big commercial expeditions that come in the spring, with numerous Sherpas to establish the route by fixing hundreds of meters of rope most of the way to the top.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, AAC *Honorary Member, Nepal*

Everest, uncommon events on standard routes. In the spring a Greek expedition sent one climbing team to the north side and another to the south to carry to the top their flags of the 2004 Greek Summer Olympic Games. They were the first Greek expedition ever to attempt Everest, and both parties succeeded in planting their flags at the highest spot on earth.

Another team on the north side had a novel sendoff. It was the first to go to Everest from the Indian navy, so the Indian defense minister, George Fernandes; the navy chief of staff, Admiral Madhvendra Singh; the expedition leader, a submariner, Commander Satyabrata Dam, and the 13 other expedition members got into a Russian-built submarine and submerged to a depth of about 75 meters in the Arabian Sea for the official launching ceremony.

Sherpas on the normal climbing route from the Nepalese side included one with a prosthesis on his leg, and another who claimed a new speed record in his ascent. Nawang Sherpa, 32, lost his left leg below the knee in a motorcycle accident six years ago, but that didn't prevent him from getting to the top of the world this spring with an American, Thomas McMillan, who had arranged for him to have a high-quality U.S.-made prosthesis fitted three years after his accident. Nawang went to Everest last year and climbed as far as camp 2, testing his artificial leg. Now he was back, and with McMillan and three other Sherpas became the second amputee ever to reach the summit. (The first was an American, Tom Whittaker, who summited six years earlier, but Nawang had lost much more of his leg than Whittaker had.)

The speed climber was Pemba Dorje, who claims he raced up the 3,500 vertical meters from base camp on the Khumbu Glacier to the summit in only 8 hours and 8 minutes during the night of 20/21 May, climbing entirely alone and using artificial oxygen only above the last camp at 7,900 meters.

For this 27-year-old climber, it was his third ascent. He was now well acclimatized: he had just made his second ascent by the same route on the morning of the 16th in the company of a Swiss, Rupert Heider, and two other Sherpas. Furthermore, he said, he had spent about six months training intensively in Kathmandu before arriving at base camp on April 7. Nearly every day, he had cycled at least eight kilometers and jogged from one edge of the city to another; he had also gone rock climbing.

The announcement of this astonishing feat was received with some skepticism and was immediately challenged at base camp. In a satellite telephone interview with a newspaper reporter in Kathmandu, Lhakpa Gelu Sherpa renewed a controversy they had last year. Pemba Dorje made his first speed-ascent last spring and reported then that it took him 12 hours and 45 minutes to climb from bottom to top. Lhakpa Gelu said four days later that he himself had just spent only 10 hours and 56 minutes to do the entire ascent. Pemba Dorje charged Lhakpa

Gelu with lying and insisted that it was he who had made the fastest ascent. Lhakpa Gelu countered with evidence to support his own timings, and after investigation, Nepal's tourism ministry concluded that this man's claim to the record was valid. This spring again, the ministry was looking into the validity of a speed-climb claim and in the meantime was not revealing which specific details they were trying to check, nor what information he had given them.

Some details do seem to merit looking into since, unfortunately for him, no one else was on the summit with him—indeed, no one else was on the summit at any time on the 21st—so there was no one to confirm what time he was there or any other details. Pemba Dorje said that when he stood on the summit at 2:00 a.m. that day, he saw lights from two or three headlamps of climbers coming up from the Tibetan side. Based on his knowledge of that side from the first time he had climbed Everest, he judged these climbers to be a little above the highest camp, which is normally at 8,300m.

But there are two problems with this: there almost certainly were no climbers above that altitude at 2:00 a.m.; on the 21st there was one man, a Bulgarian searching for his missing teammate, and he was there at around 5:30-6:00 a.m., when it was no longer dark. And even if there had been someone, that person could not be seen from the summit, according to others who have climbed to the top themselves. They explain that a small ridge not far below the summit obscures a view of anyone in the 8,300m area of the north side.

The skepticism that was voiced when the news of Pemba Dorje's ascent broke was not based on these factors, which were not generally known, but on the question of whether anyone could lop four and a half hours off his own elapsed time of a year before. He said he had put himself through a rigorous training regime, but could that have cut his time by one-third? [His ascent was later ratified by the Ministry of Tourism.—Ed.]

One record that no one disputed was set by a well known modest Sherpa, Apa, who in the spring achieved his 14th Everest ascent at the age of 42. His nearest rival, Chuwang Nima Sherpa, who is five years younger, scored his 11th success last spring. Apa may not be unusually fast, but he is very strong. He has said that he does not climb Everest to set any kind of record, but to earn good money to support his family by doing the only kind of work he knows.

Another record in number of ascents was set by an American, Gheorghe Dijaurescu, who has acquired the habit of climbing Everest in the spring via the standard Tibetan-side route [his wife, 31-year-old Lhakpa Sherpa, also reached the summit to become the only woman to have climbed Everest four times—Ed.]. He became the only non-Sherpa to have gone to the summit every year for six consecutive years.

A useful permanent improvement to the standard northern route was a new ladder placed at the bottom of the Second Step at about 8,600m. It was installed by an expedition led by Russell Brice, a leader of teams on this route every spring. His ladder is wider than the old one, which was put there by Chinese climbers in 1975, and significantly longer. The old one was four or five meters long; the new one is eight meters.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, *AAC Honorary Member, Nepal*

MAHALANGUR SOUTH

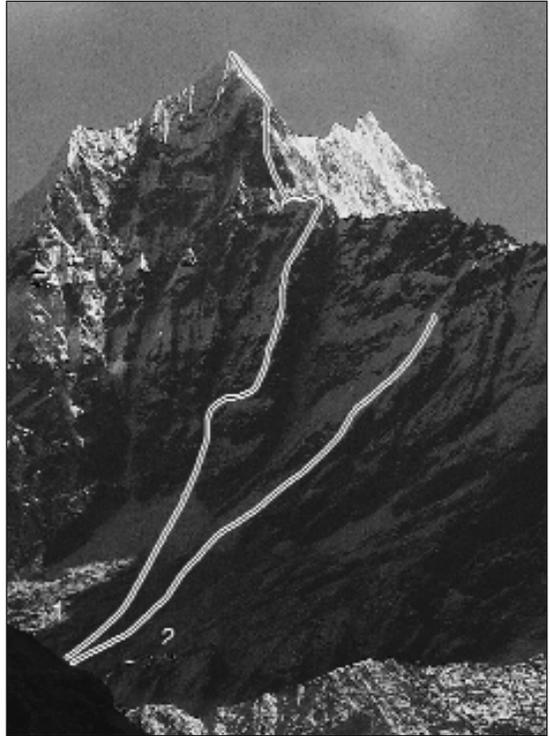
Kusum Kanguru (6,367m), south ridge, new route attempt. From the 10th of November until the 21st of November Young Chet and I from Alaska attempted to climb the “Dream Pillar” [see Venables’ note to follow] on the south ridge of Kusum Kanguru. We were star struck when we first learned of a huge shining granite pillar at 6,000m in such a spectacular location. The pillar was rumored to be of top quality. Young Chet and I were rearing to go.

The “Dream Pillar” line was first climbed by Stephen Venables and Dick Renshaw (with Brian Davison as far as the crest of the south ridge on their first attempt), in November 1991. In 2000 American youths Bart Paul and Fredrick Wilkinson (both 20 years old) climbed a new route to the top of the “Dream Pillar,” bivvied, and descended the next day due to high

winds on the summit ridge. They were no more than a couple hundred meters from the summit. Since then, the only other groups I’ve heard of attempting this aspect were a Slovenian team and an American team on the southwest face. The Slovenians gave up on their original new-route line in the middle of the face, and then turned back low on Venables’ line due to constant rock-fall. About the Americans, I’ve only heard rumors from the local villagers that they succeeded. Needless to say, this side of the mountain has seen hardly any traffic, and this became painfully obvious when our guesstimate of two days to base camp up the Thado Khosi valley turned into five days of ridiculous bushwhacking through extremely thick and cliffed-out bamboo forest. Luckily we had a guy who knew the way, because otherwise it would have taken a lot longer. Future climbers should take with them a local who knows the whole way to base camp.

We arrived at base camp with only six days left for climbing before our flight home. A day spent watching the face revealed the same problem faced by the Slovenians: constant rockfall. Due to the face’s aspect and T-shirt weather at 5,000m, the lower portion of our chosen line (the Venables route) was too risky for Young Chet and I unless we did the preliminary pitches in the night and reached the arête a quarter of the way up to the pillar before 9:30 a.m., when the sun reaches the face.

The next morning we climbed the snow slopes to the start of the technical climbing, only to find that there was still rock falling from the face, just not the huge blocks-of-death seen and heard from our base camp a mile away during the sun-baked hours. These were smaller fist-sized



Kusum Kangri's north face, (1) “Dream Pillar” (Renshaw-Venables, 1991). (2) Chet-Poacher, 2004 attempt. *Shakey Poacher*

stones falling with quite a bit of velocity. Sadly we abandoned our main objective and dragged our heels back to camp. The Dream Pillar loomed above us like a T-bone steak dangling in front of a dog's face, just out of reach. We spent the rest of the day scanning for an alternate line. With three days left we hurried out of camp early the next morning and started up our new line. We climbed some nice mixed terrain onto easy snow, but the sun beat on us and our packs were too heavy. We were not moving fast enough, so we descended the next day and missed our flight anyways.

This aspect has a lot of potential. All of the lines look high quality and fun as hell. You just have to manage the rockfall better than we did, which means move faster, climb strategically, and maybe go during colder times of the year. We saw a bunch of sick water ice in the area.

SHAKEY POACHER, *Alaska*

Stephen Venables (now president of the Alpine Club) comments: "Dream Pillar" was the title editor Ed Webster gave to the article I did for Ascent (1997, AAC Press). Now it seems to be THE DREAM PILLAR. It was a lovely bit of rock climbing, but let's not overstate the case. My intention in 1991 was to climb the southwest face direct, but we were deterred by rockfall. Hence the sneaky line up the side, leading to the south ridge. The rockfall WAS bad at the bottom of the face, but, apart from the first few pitches on our route, which we did at daybreak, we were completely safe. Perhaps global warming has made this face worse, like so many others around the world? Perhaps it is time for winter ascents. The southwest face direct would be a great route. Our route was also a very nice climb—good mixed climbing, some beautiful rock climbing, and quite a mushroomy snow/ice ridge to finish. And a truly spectacular summit. Some "trekking" peak! As to the approach: I think we were the first people to cut a trail up the valley, but it took three days, not five.

MAHALANGUR EAST - BARUN SECTION

Baruntse North (Khali Himal) (7,057m), north face, Ciao Patrick. It was very, very difficult. We gave it all we had, and finally we reached our goal. The north face of Khali Himal, or Baruntse North, is big, vertical, dangerous, and intimidating. We knew that we would have to use all of our capacities and strength to succeed on that face. For four days we struggled against the wind and the cold through a mixed climb of ice and rock. For four days we were three people sleeping in a two-man tent. We never managed to find a good place for camp, and we slept with our legs hanging out in the void. We used ice screws, rock pitons, ice axes, cams, and nuts to climb the complicated wall, but the real challenge was the wind and the cold. We had 120 km/h wind blowing during the



Baruntse North, north face. (1) Czech route (Leiternann-Otta-Pekarek, 1994). (2) Ciao Patrick (Moro-Tassi-Urubko, 2004). (3) Descent route for both parties. *Simone Moro*

entire climb, even on the summit. We were very happy to reach our summit through this new route. Next, we spent 12 hours rappelling on single ice screws 20 times.

We called the route *Ciao Patrick* in dedication to the recently perished climber Patrick Berhault. He was our friend and now our legend. Details: 2,550m, of which the last 1,350m were in alpine style [the height of the northwest face itself is ca 1,500m]. Three camps. Difficulty of M6+, often on bare rock and loose gravel. The maximum difficulties on rock; 5+/6. The maximum difficulties on ice; between 70° and 90°, thin ice covering granite plates exposed to northwest. Three intermediate camps and four bivouacs. Summited on May 4 by Simone Moro, Bruno “Camos” Tassi, and Denis Urubko. Descent 12 hours, with 20 full double rappels on the wall.



Camos Tassi and Denis Urubko on the cold north face of Baruntse North. *Simone Moro*

SIMONE MORO, *Italy*

MAHALANGUR EAST: MAKALU SECTION

Makalu, southeast ridge integral attempt. In spring a 14-member British Services expedition hoped to climb the south east ridge integral and arriving at the usual 4,700m base camp on April 8, first investigated the south east glacier approach. However, recession had made reaching the first ice fall too dangerous and they opted for the longer route over the lower continuation of the ridge, which bends south and runs down the east side of the Barun Valley opposite base camp. This was first pioneered by Doug Scott on his three major attempts at an Alpine style traverse of Makalu in the early 1980s and involves crossing Peak 6,260m and then Peak 6,825m before a long and almost horizontal snow arête leads to the South Col.

The team placed Camp 1 at 5,700m, from where they pushed out the route to the crest of the ridge at ca 6,100m, the last 200m fixed with rope. An intermediate camp was established at ca 6,100m on the far side of the first peak, while the team, with a little Sherpa support, fixed more rope above. Snowfall either hampered or completely curtailed progress toward 6,825m during the entire latter part of April and it wasn't until May 7 that Camp 2 was established close to the South Col and ca 200m below the summit of 6,825m. By the 10th, ropes had been fixed to 7,100m.

Strong winds then made progress difficult but on the 15th Camp 3 was placed at 7,300m. The next few days saw more rope fixed up the 45°-50° ridge leading to the Black Gendarme but around the 20th there was snowfall, burying the ropes. Although acclimatized and poised for a summit attempt, time was running out and as conditions now seemed relatively unstable, the team members made the decision to abandon the route on the 24th, having reached a high point of ca 7,500m.

COLIN SCOTT, *United Kingdom*

Makalu, southeast ridge ascent. After they had abandoned their attempt on the northeast ridge from Tibet, reported elsewhere, Frenchmen Yannick Graziani, Christian Trommsdorff, and Patrick Wagnon decided to try the southeast ridge. It had been in sight during their attempt on the northeast ridge, looked less laden with snow and by that stage was known to have a British party in-situ, fixing ropes. Packing big sacks, they walked up the straightforward glacier southeast of Makalu, crossed the ca 5,500m col on the frontier between the end of the true southeast ridge and Peak 6,100m (immediately northwest of 6,477m Peak 3), then descended the far side in the direction of the Standard Barun Base Camp. Before reaching this, at a height of ca 5,250m, they climbed to the lower continuation of the southeast ridge. Two days after leaving their Tibetan Base, all three were at the British Camp 1. Here, they joined forces with the British climbers, helping to fix ropes up to 7,300m, where Camp 3 was installed around the May 14. Relations between both teams were good from the outset and by the 15th the three French had descended and were walking all the way back to their Tibetan Base Camp to enjoy a good rest.

They were not back at Camp 1 until the 22nd (approximately 12 hours travel from their Tibet Base Camp). The following day they climbed to the British Intermediate Camp, where the weather promptly turned bad again. Trommsdorff and Wagnon decided to descend to Base for two nights but Graziani chose to wait. All three were united on the 25th and as the weather looked promising, they moved to Camp 2 the following day. The day after they reached Camp 3 (7,300m) and proceeded to dig out a tent left from nearly three weeks previously. It had not snowed for four days and conditions seemed good with little or no risk of avalanche. In the back of their minds was the hope that they could complete the route in a single push from here and traverse the summit, descending the Normal Route via the Makalu La.

On the 28th they moved up the ridge (ca 55° with a final mixed pitch) to 7,600m, where a descent can be made to the Eastern Cwm. Here, they first called for a weather forecast, were told the next three days would be fine, and then climbed down to the snowy amphitheatre, leaving 150m of rope fixed to safeguard their return. Underfoot conditions in the Cwm proved quite good and they moved up to camp at 7,600m.

During that night the wind approached 100km/hour and as they had only brought the inner tent and two sleeping bags between three, it was grim. Fortunately, at sunrise the wind stopped. Leaving at 9:00 a.m., all three reached the back of the Cwm at 7,800m (and one kilometer from the tent) in two hours. The weather was excellent and the temperature relatively mild as they climbed up to the rimaye at 8,050m with Graziani, who was moving strongly, in the lead. Here, Trommsdorff turned back, leaving the others to continue. The slope above, deep snow over slabby rock, was strenuous and at 4:00 p.m. Wagnon turned back from a height of ca 8,250m. Graziani reached the ridge, then overcoming a 30m rock step (about III), continued up the corniced arête to arrive at the highest point around 4:30 p.m. A grueling and even more strenuous descent followed, until at 8:00 p.m., just before nightfall, he regained his two companions in the tent. Next day, the 30th, all three made an exhausting climb down to the British intermediate camp, finding most of the ropes and their small cache of food and equipment had been removed. After a hard night, Base Camp was reached in heavy rain. The trio then had to make two hard days' walk back over the frontier to Kharta, in order to be on schedule for their flights home. This would appear to be the first time the lower south east ridge has been continued to the summit but the entire crest, super-integral, has yet to have an ascent.

PATRICK WAGNON, *France*

KANGCHENJUNGA REGION

JANAK HIMAL

Janak (Outlier Peak) (7,044m), attempt. In November two members of a Romanian team led by Constantine Lacatusu were the first to climb on to Janak above the upper plateau of the Broken Glacier. This summit west of Jongsang was referred to as Outlier Peak by climber-explorers of the early 20th century. Their plan was to scale this peak north-northwest of Kangchenjunga on Nepal's border with Tibet via its southwest ridge, but they managed to get no farther than a rock tower close to the bottom of the ridge.

On 11 November, three weeks after having established their base camp at 4,800m, Lacatusu and his climbing partner Ioan Torek made their bid to reach the summit from their third high camp at 6,200m. They climbed all day 300 meters up the right side of the tower and then gave up this line: they were now in a serac area with powder snow and impossible to fix with rope, so they returned to camp. The next day they attempted the tower's left side, moved up beneath overhanging seracs, and reached 6,400m only to find again impossible powder snow. They abandoned the climb.

Lacatusu summarized their attempt: "the first part of Janak was technical, and we climbed that, but the second half was dangerous and we didn't climb that." The technical part was "very nice" and he and Torek "would like to come back and finish what we started." Next time they would have more manpower and more rope to fix.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, AAC *Honorary Member, Nepal*

Dome Kang (Domekhan) (7,264m), first attempt. On Nepal's border with Tibet, a six-member team of Spaniards were the first people to attempt a route on Dome Kang [see note below]. Its official name is Domekhan. Led by Carlos Soria, they made their base camp on April 18 at Pangpema, the normal base campsite for climbers going to Kangchenjunga's north face, and approached Dome Kang from the south via the Jongsang Glacier, working their way over a difficult unsettled rocky area, and pitched their first high camp 14 km from and 800m higher than base, at 5,350m. Their aim was to reach the summit via the mountain's east-southeast ridge.

They did gain the ridge, but were unable to follow it all the way to the summit. Their second camp was placed at a col, known as Jongsang La, on the ridge at 6,100m. They managed to move from there westward toward the summit, but finally stopped at 6,650m exactly one month after they had arrived at base. Now the clouds moved in covering the way ahead, and snow started to fall. And their time was running out.

From the Jongsang La the dge was a very complicated mixture of rock, snow, and broken pieces of ice, making it impossible to keep to the crest. They sometimes moved on the ridge itself, sometimes on its south side, and sometimes on the north side's big hanging glacier.

On May 18 they realized that they did not have sufficient time left to spend four or five days more to solve the last 600 meters up to a plateau. They want to come back in 2005 to solve this problem and finish the climb to the top. They plan to follow the same route, but they will give themselves more time to do it.

Editor's note: In 1930, after reaching the summit of Jongsang Peak (7,483m), Gunter Dyrenfurth persuaded Lewa Sherpa to walk across the plateau and climb the south summit; 7,442m Dome Kang. Recently Dome Kang (officially opened by the Nepalese Government in 2002) appears to have been assigned to a lower (7,264m) snow dome east of the original Dome Kang, a little way down the latter's east southeast ridge leading to the Jongsang La. This difficult ridge above the La, attempted by the Spanish, was also visited in 1983 (Slovenians) and 1998 (Irish), who both noted it was far from straightforward.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, AAC Honorary Member, Nepal

KUMBHAKARNA HIMAL

Jannu (Kumbhakarna), east face attempt and history. Jannu, also known as Kumbhakarna, not far from Kangchenjunga, has a forbiddingly precipitous east face, which Slovenians seem to have become obsessively determined to scale. Its main summit is 7,710m, while its east face tops out on the east summit at 7,468m. Nearly every team that has aimed to climb it has been Slovenian. None has yet succeeded.

Tomaz Humar, 35 years old, had demonstrated his exceptional abilities in earlier climbs in Nepal on Ama Dablam and Nuptse in Khumbu, Bobaye in the far west of Nepal, and—most notably—solo on the south face of Dhaulagiri I in 1999. This season his goal was to make the first ascent of Jannu's east face all the way—and to do it solo. But he had to abandon the effort at 7,000m where, in its present condition, the face had gotten “harder and harder, riskier and riskier as I went higher and higher.”

Before tackling the face, Humar acclimatized to 6,000m on an east pillar with his Croatian friend, Stipe Bozic. Then to the face. But the face was “totally different” from what he had seen in pictures of the 1992 attempt: now there was black ice and above that many big mushrooms covered with powder snow, which made them very dangerous.

His ascent from advance base camp at 5,400m lasted for four days. On the first day, October 27, he crossed a high glacier shaped like an amphitheater where powder snow avalanches were falling constantly and depositing chest-deep snow, and where there were very deep crevasses, many at least six meters wide. But one was a mere two meters wide, and this he jumped across. Then to get out of this area of avalanche debris, he started up an ice and rock debris pillar at the southern end of the face, up 30 meters on an overhanging section with a series of dangerous and difficult obstacles where he was hit hard by an ice “candle” that luckily did him no damage. He bivouacked at 6,000m late that afternoon.

His second bivouac the next day was only 200 meters higher. Here he had to climb a system of overhanging rock cracks 20 meters high. He climbed up inside them and then over onto the outside. They were like polished granite and gave very little friction, and it was impossible to affix a rope. This was a “very risky” area, he said. Next came a number of mushroom ridges, a “nightmare” of ups and downs past mushrooms and avalanches. At 6,200m he found a narrow rock ledge and bivouacked there, half hanging over the edge.

On the 29th, Humar was finally able to climb very fast and in six hours had scaled a face of 80°-90° and then had to work his way up a very thin couloir covered with black ice under powder snow, which he laboriously cleared away. Each side was a huge balloon of powder snow and at the top of it were cauliflower cornices.

Here he fell three times but carried on, then traversed 20 meters to the right side on a mushroom to end up bivouacking at 6,850m in a snow hole that he dug deep into a mushroom

on a ledge. He left his gear here and tried to find a route beyond, but he could gain just 25 meters in four hours. He returned to his snow hold and spent a very cold night there; 100 km/hour winds were blowing “very fresh air” into it and down his throat. But he was confident that next day he would be able to reach the shoulder on the southeast ridge, which leads to the top.

But “a nightmare came early in the morning [of the 30th] when I tried to reach this shoulder” only 20 meters above but “unreachable” through the mushrooms. He could find no way past them in five attempts up different couloirs and mushrooms. After four and a half hours of these futile efforts, he gave up at about 7,000m.

So at 1:00 that afternoon, he packed up his gear and headed down, found a way through fog, and after 4:00 p.m., through falling snow. He fell five times on rock pillars, and at one place below had to jump two crevasses. He could not follow his own tracks because avalanches had filled them in, but he managed to arrive safely at advance base camp after nightfall in six hours’ descent. He spent the night there and was down at his base on the 31st.

He said that he has no plans to go back to Jannu’s east face again. He would not declare the route to be impossible, but it is simply too dangerous in its present condition.

Like Humar, all of the earlier teams on the east face had no Sherpas or bottled oxygen with them, but not all actually did any climbing, two for tragic reasons. The Slovenians’ first bid was made in the spring of 1991, when the two members attained an altitude of 7,050m, then gave up because of a combination of bad weather, frost-nipped toes, exhaustion, and no more gas for cooking. In the following spring, a three-member team moved over toward the left and reached 7,100m, at a point where the face meets the southeast ridge; they then turned back safely. But that autumn one member of a six-man party on their approach to base camp went for a swim in a river, slipped, and drowned; his teammates never went to the mountain.

In the autumn of 1993, two of a three-member group got to 6,800m, then abandoned the climb because of dangerous avalanching. In 1996 both members of a two-man team disappeared without trace during their acclimatization climb on nearby Kabru; fog closed in around them and they were never seen again. In the spring of 1998 eight members waited for weeks at the bottom of the east face for constant avalanching to cease, but finally abandoned hope and actually did no climbing. Four years later, four other Slovenes spent two weeks at advance base camp just beneath the face, where fog obscured the face and soon snow began falling; avalanching sent them home, too.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, AAC *Honorary Member, Nepal*

Jannu, north face, new route summary. The historic climb in the Nepalese Himalaya during the pre-monsoon season was the successful ascent and descent by a direct route via the north face of Jannu by a Russian team (with one Kyrgyzstani member) led by Alexander Odinstov. This was the first ascent of the north face direct. A Yugoslavian (now Slovenian), Tomo Cesen, claimed to have accomplished this solo in one continuous push from base camp in the spring of 1989, but after his account in the following year of having summited the south face of Lhotse solo was discredited, there has been grave doubt about his Jannu success. In any case, by his own account, he did not descend the face but came down the less difficult northeast ridge instead.

Since 1975, nine expeditions had been on this extremely steep (80°-90° in places) face of 7,710m Jannu, which is officially known as Khumbhakarna, in addition to Cesen’s one-man effort. The ninth was led by Odinstov himself last autumn, when his eight-member team

reached 7,200m and then abandoned the attempt because of snowfall, strong wind, and the low temperatures found on the north sides of Nepalese Himalaya peaks in autumn.

This spring Odinstov returned with 11 members besides himself. Six of these men had been with him in 2003, and they now had more experience of the route, knew a better site for their base camp, and understood which places were especially exposed to falling rocks and ice.

Without using any bottled oxygen or Sherpa help, they moved slowly upwards, Odinstov reported, using a total of about 75 ice screws and 300 rock pitons to fix about 3,375 meters of rope; in some sections the rock was bad enough to require two and even three pitons at a single place. To make a place for camp 3 at 7,000m, they had to work in shifts of three members for eight hours per shift, working in relays cutting ice and removing stone, for four or five days. Their slow progress was also due to the impossibility of climbing this face with mittens on their hands, but going without them meant their fingers became very cold, so every two meters—or sometimes even less—they had to pause and rub their fingers to get them warm again.

They had arrived at their base camp on the Jannu Glacier at 4,700m on April 3. They pitched their highest camp, a second camp 4, at 7,400m on May 14. Now for a rest and then the summit push. But then Jannu was hit by a prolonged period of snowfall and strong winds, so it was not until the 26th of May that their first members reached the top.

Two members, Dmitri Pavlenko and Alexander Ruchkin, left the 7,400m camp at 5:00 a.m. on the 26th, finally gained the summit at 3:00 p.m. and returned to camp at 6:00 p.m. The final 70 meters was rock covered with dangerous powder snow, and the top itself was a difficult snow cornice.

Three more Russians, Sergei Borisov, Gennady Kirievskiy, and Nikolai Totmyanin, followed them on the 28th, and were able to move much faster since the way had been opened by the first two summiters. Next day, as they descended all the way to base camp, they cleared the mountain of all their tents and contents, plus as much fixed rope as they could recover—a lot of it was stuck in snow that had melted and then refrozen. [For a complete account, see “The North Face of Jannu,” by Alexander Ruchkin, earlier in this Journal.]

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, *AAC Honorary Member, Nepal*

KANGCHENJUNGA HIMAL SOUTH

Kabru IV (7,318m), west face attempt. A Serbian expedition may have been only the third to make a serious attempt on the Nepalese flank of the Kabru Range. The team, led by Dragan Jacimovic, set up Base Camp at ca 4,600m on the moraines of the Yalung Glacier northwest of 6,682m Rathong and then fixed the initial, dangerous section of the previously unattempted West Face. This begins with a difficult rock barrier, which they climbed via an objectively threatened 500-600m gully. Camp 1 was placed above this section at c5,200m but in the unsettled weather of late April a large serac fall swept the bottom part of the route and destroyed the fixed ropes in four places. Just after the ropes were replaced another huge powder avalanche from high on the mountain hit a large rock, beneath which Camp 1 was situated, and rumbled on down the route. The following day, the 4th May, Jacimovic was pushing out the route to a proposed site for Camp 2 on the glaciated slopes above, when at around 6,000m he fell from a steep serac wall, hurting his shoulder. The Serbian leader was the driving force behind the expedition and with him out of action and the route obviously unsafe, the remaining members abandoned further attempts.

The first and only ascent of this peak occurred in May 1994, when Major A Abbey's Indian Army expedition repeated Reggie Cooke's route to Kabru III, and then traversed to both Kabru II (their Kabru III) and Kabru IV (their Kabru South).

Climbing fatalities in Nepal. Besides the seven deaths on Everest, two other climbers died last spring: American Jay Sieger and Ukrainian Vladislav Terzyl. They had gone to the top of Makalu together and were beginning their descent. Sieger apparently died when his head struck some rocks, but the body of veteran 8,000m summiter Terzyl was not found, so what caused his death is unknown.

No deaths occurred in summer, and remarkably few deaths occurred during the autumn: only one on Cho Oyu and two on Annapurna I. Cho Oyu has a history of very few fatal accidents: only 35 climbers have perished on it—an extremely small death toll considering the thousands of men and women who have been on the mountain and roughly 1,500 who have reached its summit. But this autumn a young Spanish Basque, Xabier Ormazabal, climbing independently and going for the summit alone, died while he was descending after having reached at least 8,100m and perhaps the top.

Another independent climber, Eloise Barbieri from Italy, had become acquainted with Ormazabal and was the only person who knew much about his movements. She watched him through binoculars as he went for the summit on October 13, a very windy day. He was entirely alone on the upper reaches of the mountain while the weather worsened. She saw him reach the summit plateau at about 8,000m, disappear out of sight for an hour and a half, and then reappear. This time span is fully consistent with his having reached the highest of several small peaks before coming back into sight, which he did at 1:00 p.m. Two hours later he had descended about 200 meters and then sat down for an hour, resumed his decent, but now moved down only a few meters at a time, intermittently falling over. At 5:30 p.m., when night fell, he had descended to about 7,700m. On the next day, falling snow made it impossible to see anyone or anything from afar; on the day after that, the 15th, when he had not come into camp, a searcher went up to look for him. His body was found at 7,550m.

The only others to die this autumn were two Japanese who were killed by avalanche on the notoriously avalanche-prone north face of Annapurna I, 8,091m and the world's tenth highest peak. The mountain has the worst ratio of deaths to summits of any of Nepal's eight 8,000ers: 56 people, including this Japanese pair, have died on it, and more than half of these (29) were on the north face, while only 131 climbers have ever reached the top.

The Japanese who died were a four-member team's leader Michio Sato and teammate Hideji Nazuka, who were at 6,200m on October 10 when a big block of ice suddenly broke loose from the glacier on the feature known as the Sickle, fell onto a sloping snowfield, and set off a major avalanche. This mass of snow and ice carried Sato and Nazuka 500 vertical meters with it. Their bodies were recovered an hour and a half later.

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