

account of the odyssey appears earlier in this journal.

*Loinbo Kangri, Ascent, and Qungmo Kangri, Ascent.* It was reported that a joint Chinese-Korean expedition managed to make the first ascent of Qungmo Kangri (7048m) in the Trans Himalaya north of the Manaslu-Annapurna region of Nepal. On October 7, Wang Yon-Feng, Jung in-Kyu, Cha Jin-Chol, Moon Young-Soung and You Seok-Jae climbed the mountain, followed by Lee Shoong-Jik and Cha-Yo-Han on the 8th. The team then turned its efforts to the first ascent of Loinbo Kangri (7095m). On October 23, Cha Jin-Chol (China), You Seok-Jae and Bang Jung-il (Korea) summited via the northeast ridge. (*High Mountain Sports* 175)

*Jumo Ganker, Attempt.* It was reported that Huw Davies and John Town (U.K.) attempted Jomo Ganker (7048m) in the Western Nyanchen Tangla Range in Central Tibet in late July and August. They were hoping to make the first western ascent of the mountain by following the line of the other two ascents up the south face. They reached 5900 meters; the weather was unsettled throughout their climb. (*High Mountain Sports* 186)

*Sepu Kangri, Attempt.* There is a range of mountains in Tibet comparable in length to the entire Swiss Alps that remains almost unknown. The eastern section of the Nyangla-Qen-Tangla Shan lies barely 300 kilometers north of the Himalayan frontier crest, stretching across a remote area of central Tibet. This land is sparsely populated yet fertile, a tract of forested valleys coursing through the Tibetan plateau. Its peaks range from gentle hills of around 5000 to 5500 meters in the north to a range of dramatic, steep, and difficult ice peaks in the central and southern sectors. There is a pattern of inhospitable weather throughout most of the warmer summer months, with much fresh snowfall. Sepu Kangri (6690m), at 30.9°N 93.8°E, is the highest summit.

This mountain region northeast of Lhasa, loosely called the Sino-Himalayan axis by explorers earlier this century or sometimes referred to simply as the Tang-La, is the source of three great rivers of Asia, the Yangtze, the Mekong and the Salween I. We reconnoitered the northern side of Sepu Kangri in the summer of 1996, finding a route south from Diru into the valleys leading to the glaciers of its north face. In a separate journey, we also visited the southern side of the range.

For the local people, the principal summits of the Sepu Kangri massif are Sepu-Kung-Lha-Karpo, The White Sky God, the highest, and its immediate neighbor to the east, Bon-Che-Dadhul, Sepu's Son. Yu-Yi-Metok, The Turquoise Flower, or Sepu's Daughter, is a stark 6800-meter pyramid west of the main peak. There are six other summits with Tibetan names. These peaks are sacred; the Samda monastery, an 800-year-old Bonpo fortress shrine presently housing 40 monks, is a day's journey below them. Our view from base camp was hard to reconcile with a comment from one of our own elders at the Alpine Club before we left: "Really, there are no mountains of any interest in that area of Tibet."

For our hosts on this expedition, the China Tibet Mountaineering Association (whose cooperation could not have been better), this area also remains a relative blank on the map. Like much of the Himalayan crest, good maps doubtless exist, but are still restricted for military use only. The whole region remains firmly closed to foreigners. Our own journeys were the product of lengthy negotiation. The file of correspondence, commencing with a photo taken from a Chengdu-Lhasa flight one early morning in March, 1982, tells a story of despair, hope, disappointment, giving way to encouragement, commitment and, finally, travel, to this remarkable area.

We reached base camp on April 30. On our recce in August the year before, I had identi-

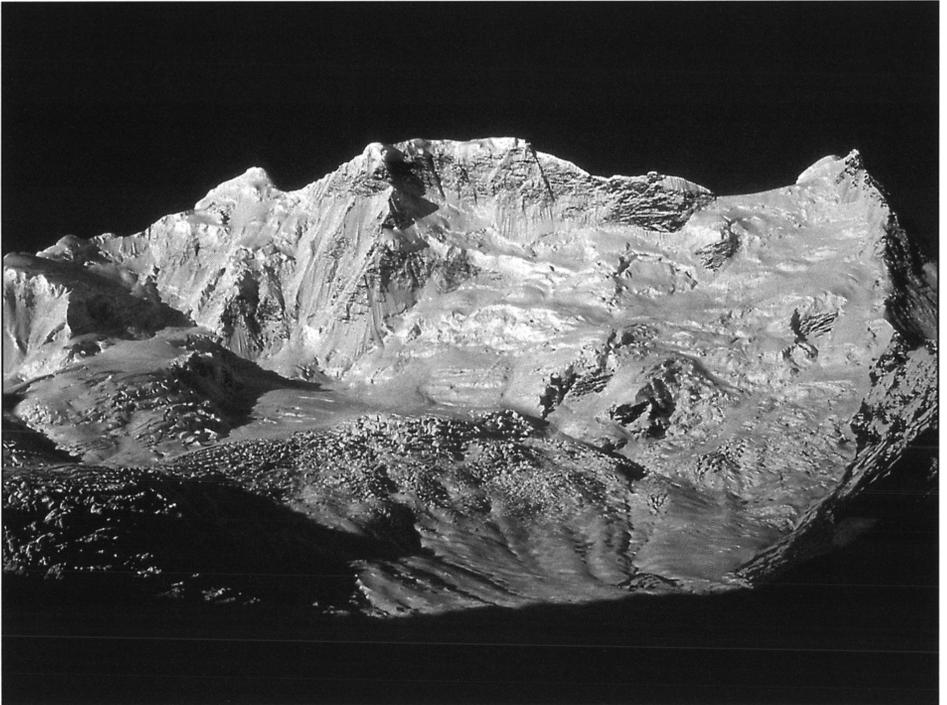
fied the northeast ridge of Seamo as the most feasible route up the mountain, but we wanted to have another look before committing ourselves. That afternoon, John Porter, Charlie Clarke, and Jim Lowther climbed a 5600-meter hill to the north of base camp, while Jim Fotheringham and I visited the hermit who had lived for four years at the foot of the valley leading up to the northwestern end of the main peak of Sepu Kangri. After talking with him and receiving a blessing, we walked on over a frozen lake and up a snow-covered moraine to catch a glimpse of a possible route up to a col immediately north of Seamo Uylmitok. Jim thought there might be a route from this col onto the much easier angled west face of the mountain.

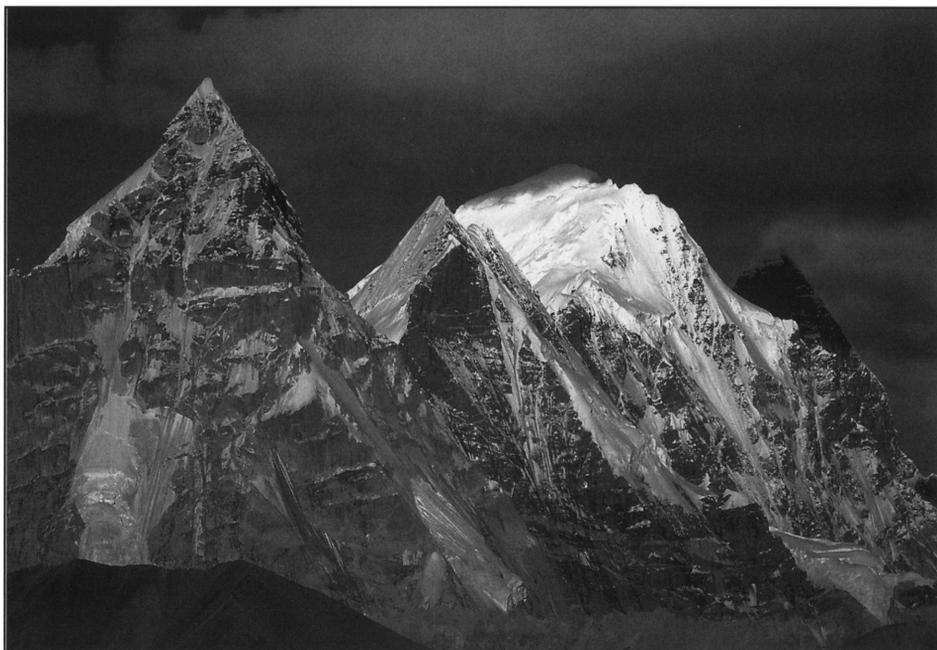
A couple of days later we made a recce in force, camping on the glacier on the night of May 4 and the following morning carrying heavy sacks with camping equipment and a couple of days' food.

Even in the cold of the early morning, we broke through the crust that covered the deep soft snow. It was an exhausting process, with Fotheringham trail-breaking all the way up to the col 700 meters above. The weather was windy with flurries of snow, a pattern with which we were to become all too familiar in the coming weeks.

Early that afternoon we reached the col, only to find it was a knife-edged, gendarmed ridge with a startling drop on the south side to a glacier far below. The view along the ridge wasn't encouraging, for it seemed to run into the northwest ridge of Seamo Uylmitok, with a steep drop onto the glacier to the south and a ferocious icefall to climb behind the peak. The following day we returned to base and decided to focus on what we named the Frendo Spur, the ridge leading to the summit of Seamo Uylmitok, but with the prospect of taking the easier ground on the face itself, which was glaciated.

We established Camp I on some rocks on the glacier below a large snow bowl leading up to a diagonal gully-cum-gangway that seemed to give a safe route up to the foot of the





*The Sepu Kangri massif, with Sepu Kangri on left, in a photo taken from the 1996 reconnaissance.*

SIR CHRISTIAN BONINGTON

Frendo Spur. We made our first foray on May 10, when Fotheringham led a desperate pitch on steep mixed ground in a bottleneck that barred the way at the bottom of the gully. Beyond this the angle dropped off, but the following morning we very nearly turned back when Porter was engulfed in a spindrift avalanche generated by high winds and flurries of snow on the face higher up.

This was to be the weather pattern in the days to come. It was usually cloudy and windy first thing in the morning, clear for a short time in the middle of the day and then deteriorating into cloud and snow in the afternoon. It didn't give much time for climbing.

It took us two days to push the route up to the crest and this provided a perfect site for Camp II with a snow hole and room for a tent. Fotheringham and Porter moved up on May 14 and started pushing the route out, initially on the crest of the spur, but as it steepened they cut out through a corridor between serac walls to get onto the main face, reaching a height of 5850 meters. Lowther and I moved up to the camp on the 15th and continued working on the route on the 16th. There was undoubtedly an element of danger in going up the face, as there was a huge quantity of snow and the ever-present risk of avalanche. We felt that the unsettled weather combined with this threat justified the use of fixed rope. The weather was still far from perfect, starting the day with snow squalls but clearing up around midday. It took us about three hours to reach the high point, and we then shared the lead up a series of snow fields, pulling over bergschrunds and only occasionally getting ice screw belays.

As we gained height we could see there was a ramp leading out to the left end of the col, but I, leading the final pitch that day, cut back to the right to get an anchor in what seemed a stable serac wall immediately beneath the Frendo Spur, thus making it relatively free of avalanche danger. We decided this would make a good site for a third camp and, at 6050

*The Sepu Kangri massif. Sepu Kunglha is the highpoint of the massif. The pointy peak on right is Seamo Uylmitok.* SIR CHRISTIAN BONINGTON

meters, a jumping-off point for an alpine-style push for the summit.

That night we were full of optimism, but the following day, the weather seemed unsettled once again. We decided to return to base camp for a couple of days' rest while we waited for the weather to settle and then make our bid for the summit.

It wasn't to be. On the night of May 19, half a meter of snow fell at base camp. Much more must have fallen on the face. It snowed off and on for the next ten days with the mountain almost continually hidden in cloud. We were prepared to extend the expedition but there was no sign of an improvement in the weather and in the end we were very lucky to have a single clear day to rescue the equipment we had left at Camp II. We started our descent from base camp in a violent blizzard the following day.

Although the continuous bad weather had been frustrating, the area is so beautiful, our neighbors, whom we got to know well, so kind, and the team itself such a well-balanced one, none of us felt depressed as we walked back down to the road head. We were already planning our return in 1998.

SIR CHRISTIAN BONINGTON, *Alpine Climbing Group*

*Shishapangma, Attempt.* The main goal of the Slovenian Shishapangma 1997 autumn expedition was to climb the British route on the Shishapangma's southwest face. Besides that, we planned an alpine style ascent and a ski descent from the top across the British route. After two nice weeks when we put up the first and the second high camps on the British route, a period of bad weather forced us to give up on an alpine-style climb. The highest point, at about 7200 meters, was achieved by Blač Navranik, Mira Zori and Sandi Vaupoti. They were just about to put up the third high camp when the sudden snowstorm forced them to descend to the lower camps. In the following days, when there was no end to bad weather, we finished the expedition, and the last members left base camp on October 15.

FRANCI SAVENC, *Planinska zveza Slovenije*

*Shishapangma.* It was reported that Goran Kropp (Sweden) led a 12-member expedition to Shishapangma on which Renata Chlumksa became the first Swedish woman to climb above 8000 meters and Cyril Destremau managed to make the first snowboard descent from the Central Summit all the way to base camp. (*High Mountain Sports* 180)

*Gaurishankar, Northeast Ridge, Attempt.* Gaurishankar (7134m) lies on Nepal's northern border with Tibet; it is visible from Kathmandu on the northeastern horizon, and it was once thought to be the world's highest mountain until the British Survey of India made more careful measurements. All climbing attempts until this autumn on this rugged mountain were made with permits from the Nepalese government, for the Tibetan/Chinese authorities did not open it to mountaineers until a few years ago. A British attempt led by Don Whillans in the autumn of 1964 did go around from Nepal's southwestern side to the northwest in Tibet and reached 6700 meters before avalanching turned them back. Since then no one had repeated this approach; in fact, the mountain is seldom climbed from any side.

In September, two well-known Japanese mountaineers, Yasushi Yamanoi and his wife Taeko (who was known by her maiden name, Taeko Nagao, until she married Yamanoi recently), went onto the northeast ridge but were quickly turned back at 6300 meters, where the ridge became very narrow and steep and numerous mushrooms blocked the way. It was not possible to escape from the ridge because of extreme danger on the north face from many falling seracs, so they abandoned their attempt on September 23. They thought the climb might be possible in colder weather in mid-October, but they do not recommend attempting