Pumori, ascent, attempt, and tragedy. There were two events during the autumn on 7161m Pumori that were noteworthy for entirely different reasons. The good news was the successful ascent by the first Iranian women mountaineers to come on any expedition to the Nepalese Himalaya. The team was led by Zerefeh Rahimzaddeh and comprised 11 members, eight of
whom were women. The three men were: an experienced Himalayan climber, Jalal Chesmeh Ghsabani, whom they wanted for his expertise; the team's doctor, whom they needed as they knew of no woman doctor who climbed; and a civil servant who never moved above base camp and got extremely bored, but whom they had to take as their chaperon.

Three of the women successfully reached the summit on October 20 via the Normal Route up the southeast face to the east ridge. The summiters were Leila Bahrami, Mitra Nazari, and Farhondeh, together with Chesmah Ghsabani and three Sherpas. The Sherpas stopped trying to open the route at two quasi-vertical sections above the col on the east ridge because they thought the women would not be able to manage such difficulty. However, the women insisted, ropes were fixed, and the party of seven went to the top in a 10-hour summit day.

The Iranians had no accidents, but a team of 10 Basque mountaineers was not so lucky. These climbers were also on the Normal Route, but never summited. On October 19 five young alpinists, Iñaki Aiertza (27), Javier Arkauz (22), Benat Arrue (22), Aritz Artieda (23), and César Nieto (23), perished when seracs above them collapsed and the resulting avalanche carried them 600-800 meters down the face. This side of the mountain has a long history of avalanches that have resulted in fatal consequences and for this reason the Iranians never occupied a camp at the top of the southeast face, as the Basques and many other climbers before them had done. The avalanche hit the Basques when they were just 50 meters above their camp, which they had pitched at ca 6200m.

Elizabeth Hawley

*Kangtega, east pillar, first ascent, winter ascent.* The most interesting climb of the winter 2001-02 season was a new line followed by a trio of Frenchmen on Kangtega, 6779m, a peak in the Everest region southwest of Ama Dablam. Christophe Profit, Olivier Besson, and Andre Rhem made a rapid alpine-style climb of the east pillar to 6400m from a base camp at 5000m on the Hinku Nup Glacier.

Their pillar had never been attempted before, and for the first two days they encountered no very great difficulties. But above their second bivouac at 6300m, after they had moved another 100 meters to the shoulder, serious problems arose. The pillar ended at the shoulder, and now seracs threatened from above. Straight up from the shoulder were not only dangerous seracs, but also a difficult rock step with mixed rock and ice in some places. They decided to make an easy traverse to the normal route on the southeast face, went to the top from there, and descended the face.

Elizabeth Hawley

*Editor’s note: Their original intention had been a direct line up the north face to the left of the one climbed by Valeri Babanov. However, conditions were too snowy, so they moved to the unclimbed pillar that marks the left side of the face climbed by another French team in 1998 (AAJ 1999). The three first acclimatized on the Normal Route up the Southeast Face, where they left a camp at 6000m to aid their descent. On the first two days they climbed some delicate mixed ground and steep rock steps with difficulties up to 5+ /6a. On the third day they were unable to climb through the big serac barrier below the summit slopes, as the ice was so hard their picks would not penetrate. Instead they made a dangerous traverse left beneath it to gain the southeast ridge. They descended to their pre-placed camp for the night and on the following day climbed up for seven hours to the summit (December 5). It took them just six hours to descend the Normal Route to their base camp.*