

We were both totally worked and had been completely out of food for four days. After much deliberation and weighing every possibility we decided to forgo the summit. We put all the gear together in two huge loads and headed down.

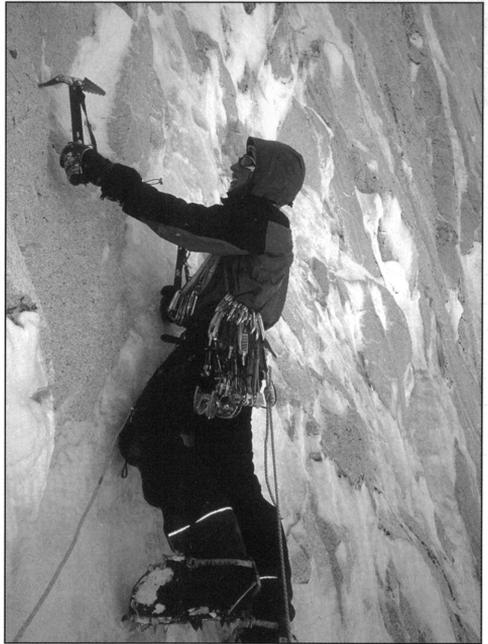
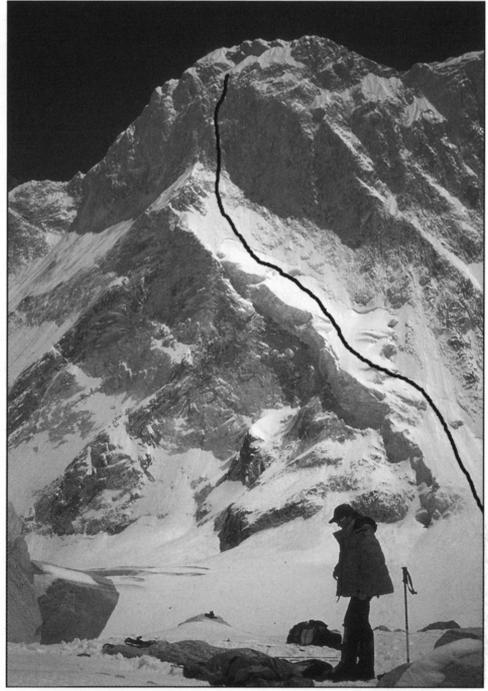
Depender surprised me with an amazing birthday cake he had made the day before. He had written my name in white icing and we celebrated a fantastic climb and adventure consuming the delicious cake under the stars with a circle of snowcapped peaks surrounding us. I looked over at John and smiled; he gave me a big hug, and all was right in my little alpine world.

SUE NOTT

## KUMAON

*Panch Chuli II (6,904m), ascents and tragedies.* In one of the worst avalanche tragedies in the history of Himalayan mountaineering nine members of an Indo-Tibet Border Police team to Panch Chuli II (the highest of the Panch Chuli Group at 6,904m) in the Kumaon region of the Indian Himalaya were killed while descending the mountain on September 20 after a successful summit attempt. While exact details are not known, the team appears to have climbed the southwest ridge, the route of the 1973 first ascent by 18 climbers from another ITBP expedition led by Mahindra Singh and repeated in 1992 by three Indian members of an Indo-British expedition jointly led by Chris Bonington and Harish Kapadia. The 1992 party found the approach through the icefall to the upper Balati Plateau below the ridge objectively dangerous.

The 2003 ITBP team was attempting the mountain before the end of the monsoon, reported to be comparatively heavy last year. The members reached the top early in the morning of the 20th and were involved in



The north side of Kalanka, with the Nott-Varco attempt shown. *John Varco*  
John Varco, high on the route. *Sue Nott*

the accident at around 12:30 p.m. the same day. A series of helicopter searches eventually discovered the bodies, which were brought down to base camp. All the climbers involved were very experienced mountaineers and several had been to Everest. Among them Sunil Dutt Sharma had climbed Kangchenjunga by the northeast ridge (1991) and Everest (1993), while Sange Sherpa was one of only two people (the other being his brother Kusang) to have climbed Everest from all three sides: from the south via the South Col and southeast ridge; from the north via the North Col and north ridge; from the east via the Kangshung Face. Four of the victims are reported to have been Everest summiteers.

The ITBP has produced many accomplished climbers over the years and has been responsible for a great many significant first ascents in the Indian Himalaya, so it is truly unfortunate that the two worst avalanche incidents in India have involved its members. In 1995 an ITBP expedition to Saser Kangri lost 13 of its climbers in an avalanche when they were descending in bad weather from the summit camp.

Within a month of this accident the peak was climbed again by the Indian Army, this time from the eastern side (exact route unknown but the peak was climbed via the northeast ridge by an Indian Gorka Regiment in August 1991 and again the following month via the east face by members of the Kumaon and Naga Regiment). During the descent from the successful summit bid on October 4, a fixed rope snapped, leaving one member killed and four injured. All were from the Kumaon Regiment.

LINDSAY GRIFFIN *and* HARISH KAPADIA

## SIKKIM

*New icefall climbing.* In 2004, Adam George, Philippe Wheelock, and I (all from Colorado), with assistance from Kelsang Phuntsok and Tashi Sherpa from Sikkim, Carlene Grant from Canada, and Andreas Prammer from Austria undertook what we believe to be the first waterfall ice climbing in Sikkim. Research by Philippe Wheelock confirmed no other attempts at climbing ice in Sikkim, and local residents also reported that no other ice climbers have been seen. With the assistance of local guide and outfitter Kelsang Phuntsok, owner of Wisdom Travels, Wheelock made an initial reconnaissance of northern Sikkim, where plentiful ice was discovered in the Lachen and Yumthang valleys. Ice conditions varied but was found to be best at elevations between ca 3,200m and 4,600m. Indian military presence along Sikkim's north border makes winter road access very convenient and possible. Wheelock climbed a 75m, WI3 icefall in the Lachen valley with local Tashi Sherpa and Canadian climber Carlene Grant, who was traveling in the area.

Upon the arrival of George and me, the team set out for Yumthang Valley, where the ice was found to be in better shape. We were joined for a short time by Prammer. We based ourselves in the village of Lachung and made day trips to the higher Yumthang valley, where ice and we found mixed routes of varying length and difficulty. We put up 10 routes here, ranging from 60-180m in height with difficulties WI3 to WI5, including one partial mixed line at M4-M5. The largest concentration of climbs was found ca 4,300m in an area named the Terma Wall. This contained the highest quality ice and has potential for 20 routes arranged in two tiers.

Scope for longer and more difficult routes exists in the Yunthang valley. Last winter was reported to be warmer than normal and could account for many of the routes being poorly