

make another attempt the next day. However, the wind only blew stronger and the sky became overcast, so the pair broke camp and descended to base. All members were back in Kathmandu on the 22nd. The Spanish route to the top of the south face had been repeated, but the summit was not reached. However, this party proved that climbing Himalayan giants in winter by a very small team is indeed possible.

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*Labchi Kang Group, first ascents.* Duncan Chessell's Australian-Icelandic commercial expedition, which was successful on Cho Oyu, putting three out of its four members and two Sherpas on the summit over two days in mid May, first acclimatized on one of the neighbouring Labchi Kang summits. Also known as Labuche Kang and Choksiam, the main spine of the Labchi Kang Group lies northwest of the Rowaling and has three summits over 7,000m. The highest, Labchi Kang I (7,367m) was first climbed in October 1987 by a joint expedition from the Himalayan Association of Japan and the Tibet Mountaineering Association. Seven Japanese and eight Tibetans reached the top via the west ridge. Labchi Kang II (7,072m) was first climbed in April 1995 by all 10 members of a Swiss expedition. However, these high summits are surrounded by over a dozen unnamed peaks above 6,000m. Chessell had a permit to explore and climb in this area, so set off from Cho Oyu Base Camp with full mountaineering gear and 14 days food. The team first walked west up a valley that had no visible signs of previous human visit in the upper reaches. This valley led to a glacier and eventually a col at ca 6,400m, on which the climbers established a camp. They stayed there four nights and climbed two peaks on opposite sides of the col. One required eight pitches of moderate snow/ice climbing to reach the ca 6,800m summit. Both peaks were thought to be previously unclimbed. The team then returned to Base Camp.

This trip provided interesting and excellent acclimatization for Cho Oyu and as it took place on the lee (eastern) side of the Labchi Kang Group was much more enjoyable than struggling with the early season gales that plagued the northwest flank of Cho Oyu. While this deviation meant that the climbers arrived at Cho Oyu Advanced Base well after other expeditions, they were, together with another multi-national team, the first to summit (on May 11). They established only two camps on the mountain; the first at 6,400m and Camp 2 at 7,100m. On the 11th the summit was reached at 2:35 p.m. and Camp 2 regained by 6:30 that evening. The following day two more climbers from the same expedition, Anna Svavarsdotter and Tshering Bhote, also reached the top, with Svavarsdotter becoming the first Icelandic woman to climb any 8,000m peak. Tshering Bhote is an instructor with the Nepalese Mountaineering Association and was trained in Scotland. He recently came top of a six-week course at the Chamonix Guides School and hopes to eventually become a full IFMGA guide.

Acclimatizing on other peaks prior to an ascent of a high altitude mountain is more expensive and harder to organize, but is has been shown effective and there are many peaks in Tibet that can be added to an existing 8,000m permit for only a little more money, providing both share the same Base Camp. All team members on Chessell's expedition found this a much more enjoyable experience than ferrying loads on Cho Oyu.

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