

We had little food, and our fuel supply was down to a half a gaz canister. During the harrowing descent, we were nearly wiped out by yet another avalanche as we crouched at the top of a 70m ice cliff. But we managed to pick our way down the treacherous slopes.”

Across the valley an 11-member Italian expedition was attempting a new route on the east face of Nanda Devi East (the line Pete and I had planned to attempt). On their approach to the mountain a Hindu Holy Man asked the climbers to stop and make a puja ceremony for the mountain. They didn't stop. The Hindu said one of them would die on this trip. The day we were hit by the avalanche, the Italian team abandoned their route and 600m of fixed rope. Next day, just before leaving the valley, the 41-year-old leader, Marco Dalla Longa, an accomplished mountaineer, rose at sunrise to see Nanda Devi East in full glow. That morning, in full view of the mountain he'd grown to love, Dalla Longa fell unconscious and collapsed. During the subsequent night he died of what was afterwards diagnosed as a stroke.

A week later Pete and I were 200m below the summit of Nanda Devi East (7,434m), after having climbed for four days up the south ridge. I was at a hanging belay when the wind picked up, the snow started falling and the temperature quickly dropped. We had one 7mm rope, one cam, one picket, some stoppers and screws, and half a can of fuel. We had talked about “signs” the mountain might give us if she didn't want us “standing on top of her head” (as the head priest at the Nanda Devi temple had said). This seemed to be it. When fully committed to the descent, it was a bummer to see the weather improve behind us. Dwindling food, fuel, and energy precluded making another summit attempt.

After a visit to the Rishi Ganga and the taking of some water samples, we made it back to Delhi in time for terrorists to detonate three bombs. Two of them were in street markets around which we had wandered the day before. We watched the chaos from TVs in the airport, waiting to fly home.

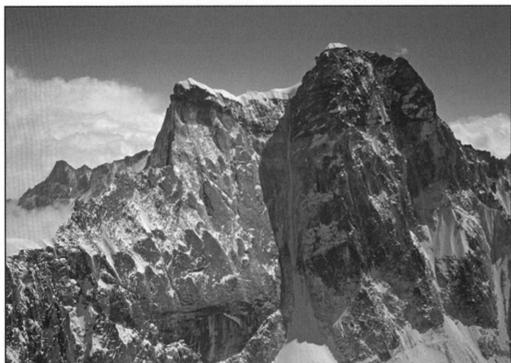
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SIKKIM

Western Sikkim, Lama Lamani North, first ascent, northwest flank and west ridge; Tinchon Kang, third ascent. In a 20-day round trip from Gangtok, between March 15 and April 3, we made three excursions on peaks in the Thangsing Valley of western Sikkim. Climbing with us were Kunzang Bhutia and Sagar Rai. The trip was an outcome of a trek to the popular Goecha La in the autumn of 2004, when we met Bhutia of the Sikkim Amateur Mountaineering Association. Both Bhutia and Rai are experienced young mountaineers who are active



Lama Lamani North (ca. 5,650m), western Sikkim, showing the route of the first ascent, up the northwest face to west ridge (AD+, Bhutia-Clyma-Payne-Rai). *Roger Payne*



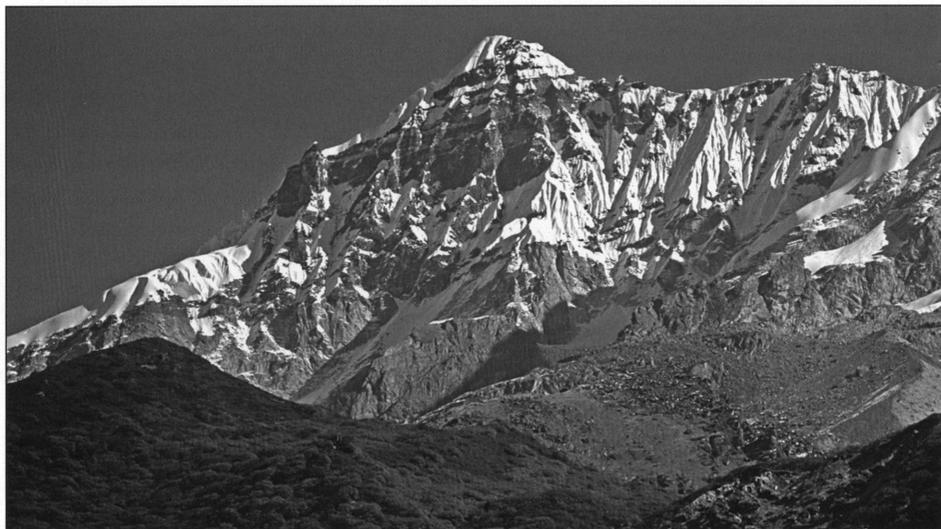
An unclimbed peak due east of Lama Lamani. *Roger Payne*

in providing training for local guides and teaching rock climbing to young people in Sikkim.

After the standard trek from Yuktsum to Thangsing, we reconnoitered and acclimatized on Tinchin Kang (6,010m). We followed what we believed to be the original route of ascent, climbed in 1998 by an Indo-British military expedition with fixed ropes and camps. Deep fresh snow made progress on the rocky wall below the northwest ridge slow and precarious. Having reached 5,100m on

March 21, we decided to return to our valley base the following day.

After a rest and delay due to bad weather, we set off on the 25th to make a reconnaissance of the unclimbed Lama Lamani group. On the 26th we traversed from the northwest side of the group to the south ridge to look for a possible line of ascent. There were strong winds on the ridges and fresh snow underfoot. On the 27th we moved up to a position under the northwest flank of the mountain, which seemed to offer the best route of ascent. Next day we made a pre-dawn start and by 10 a.m. had made the first ascent of the north summit of Lama Lamani (ca. 5,650m). The climbing on the northwest flank and west ridge had been around AD+, mostly over snow, with rock steps and a good icy ridge. It was windy and cold on the crest, but the views were exceptional. We descended by the same route, doing some rappelling, and reached base that evening.



Tinchin Kang (6,010m) in the Thangsing Valley of western Sikkim. All three ascents of this peak have used the northwest ridge (left skyline). The first ascensionists, an Indo-British military expedition in 1998, approached the crest via the south flank facing the camera. The succeeding two parties gained the crest from the far side (north flank). On the third ascent, which was the first in alpine-style, the two-person party rated the route Alpine D. *Roger Payne*

After a day's rest just the two of us set off for an attempt on Tinchon Kang. Due to cloudy conditions we had not gotten a good view of the glacier on the northwest side of the mountain, yet despite previous glimpses of apparently threatening serac barriers, we decided to try this approach. We understood the northwest face had been climbed the previous autumn by a group sponsored by the Himalayan Club, Kolkata (*AAJ 2005*, p. 379). Strong winds limited progress on the first day, and we stopped to camp at 4,850m, near the start of the glacier slopes. Next day, in cold and windy conditions and deep snow, we reached the crest of the northwest ridge (junction with the 1998 route) and camped just below it at 5,400m. Despite appearances, the glacier route had not been threatened by seracs.

Next day, April 1, we made a pre-dawn start. Again we had to face deep snow and cold temperatures, but no wind. Getting onto the bottom of the rock wall was delicate (around UIAA IV- but probably easier when snow-free). Two fixed ropes were in place on the wall and led toward, then through, a short chimney with loose rock. Above, we reached the crest at the top of the wall. We now faced an ice wall and couloir. (On a previous trip Bhutia and Rai had reached this point but turned back because they lacked good ice-climbing equipment.) We followed the couloir, which was in good condition, for 150m and then exited onto the upper snowfields. Straightforward snow slopes led to the final summit pyramid, which we climbed on the west side to avoid a wide bergschrund. We reached the summit just before 2 p.m. Alas, warm air and clouds blew in from the southwest and obscured the view. On the summit were two snow stakes and the top of a fixed line that was otherwise buried. We removed one of the snow stakes as a souvenir for our friends at base camp.

The weather improved during the descent and allowed excellent views. We downclimbed and made three rappels to descend the rock wall. We reached our previous night's camp by 6 p.m. but, because the walkout was due to start the next morning, continued on down to reach base camp at 11 p.m. These two climbs, each made in three-day roundtrips from a base at Thangsing, demonstrate the potential for alpine-style climbs in West Sikkim.

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JULIE-ANN CLYMA AND ROGER PAYNE, *Switzerland*

Northern Sikkim, Chomoyummo, attempt and accident. In September the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF) organized a high-profile expedition to Chomoyummo (6,829m) on the Tibet border. The nine-member team was led by the hugely experienced Dr. P.M. Das, Vice President of the IMF, and included two Everest summiteers and four experienced Sherpas.

While attempting the summit, seven members were caught in an avalanche. As they were swept down the slope they became entangled by the rope to which they were all tied. Five died, while two survived with serious injuries. The climbers who perished were Das, Inder Kumar and Nari Dhami (both of whom had summited Everest), Dawa Sherpa and Dawa Wangchuk from the Sonam Gyasto Mountaineering School at Gangtok. Details are sketchy, as the leading members died on the mountain.

Dr. Das was the Honorary Local Secretary of the Himalayan Club for Punjab. Hailing from Guwahati, Assam, he was a brilliant police officer who had won medals for bravery during the days of Punjab militancy. He had participated in 33 mountaineering expeditions, among