

with three 60m rappels. We have to remake our tracks down the glacier and arrive back at base camp the following day—the day that Mick and Chris summit. The A team had made it, whilst the B team were going home with their tails between their legs.

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Editor's Note: The photo in AAJ 2003, p. 134, which also appeared on the front cover of the Japanese Alpine News Vol. 2 (2002) is Menamcho (a.k.a. Chakucho), not Kajaqiao as captioned.

The first ascent of Kajaqiao (6,447m) by Mick Fowler and Chris Watts via the west face to upper north-west ridge (ca. 1,100m and Alpine TD) is reported earlier in this Journal.



An aerial view of Birutaso (ca. 6,650m) from the southeast. The route of the first ascent above Camp 4 is marked. The fluted pyramid in the right foreground is the slightly higher, unclimbed, Qang Dhen (6,691m), while the Lawa Valley is visible at the top of the picture. *Sean Waters*

Tanghla East did its best to wear us down with bad weather and snow conditions, but in the end we got lucky and on November 5 summited Birutaso, via the east ridge, which we accessed from the southern flank. We reached the top at 10 p.m. in very cold and windy darkness. After a long discussion we decided to avoid an error-prone descent by making an unplanned and chilly bivouac buried in impossibly loose snow at ca. 6,530m, just 20m below the summit. We groveled to the top again next morning in order to get a few better-illuminated photos.

It was the end of a long effort. We arrived in the Lawa Valley on October 6, made our base camp at 4,000m on the grounds of a local monastery, and spent the first 10 days trying to avoid bears and work out the best access route. At this stage it became apparent that we were trying to reach the wrong peak. The 6,691m mountain named Birutaso on Tamotsu Nakamura's sketch map is in fact a peak called Qang Dhen and lies on the south side of a large cirque, not visible from Punkar village. Birutaso is on the northern side of the cirque, visible from just above the village, and seems to be around 6,550m. It became apparent that the best means to access the mountain was over a high pass (dubbed Choirboy Col) below the peak Ura Drajhmo (6,060m). A much, much shorter and easier route above Kangpo Tso (lake) was thwarted by 600m of impenetrable rhododendrons. We reached Choirboy Col directly from the Lawa Valley not far above Punkar Village.

Conditions were a little trying; on only two days during the expedition did it not snow.

Birutaso (ca. 6,550m), first ascent. After the last-minute permit fiascos that stymied an attempt to reach the Lawa Valley in 2004, Jo Kippax and I were apprehensive about how our 2005 attempt would work out. However, the permit process and access to the valley proved to be easier than expected, although we still didn't get permit confirmation until four days before leaving.

The Lawa Valley is a stunningly beautiful place, but access from the valley to the peaks turned out to be a tricky business. The Nyanchen

This reduced us to double and triple carries through knee- and thigh-deep (sometimes deeper) snow on our single push above advanced base. At steep sections through the icefalls we resorted to shoveling our way forward at a pitiful pace. We were avalanched in Camp 1 and then realized we had to drop 500m to round an icefall before beginning the traverse towards Birutaso. It took 12 days to reach Camp 4 in the cirque (about four km from base camp, as the crow flies). From here we made an attempt on the upper part of the route.

The summit was about 900m above Camp 4 and our route reached the upper east ridge via a couple of large couloirs that got progressively steeper and consisted of 10cm of rotten snow over bullet hard, dinner-plating, green ice. Once on the ridge less steep ground held deep avalanching snow on a series of large steps that led up to the summit cone. We climbed the first part of this final section in an evening alpenglow but ended with desperate wallowing in steep, bottomless snow. The last pitch to the summit consisted of just-in-balance, technical shoveling, creating an unconsolidated trench more than head-high up 65° snow: the only way to make upward progress. We felt the overall route was probably Alaskan Grade 5.

The Nyanchen Tanghla East is gob-smackingly beautiful, with thousands of incredible unclimbed peaks, unexplored glaciers, and unknown valleys, all covered in deep snow. Access from the valleys to the névés is not particularly easy, and it seems that high precipitation and deep snow is not uncommon.

The expedition received grants from The New Zealand Alpine Club, Mount Everest Foundation and the NZDF. More information can be gained from www.summitfootprints.com.

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HIMALAYA

Pts. 6,473m ("Free Tibet") and 6,063m ("Bochánek"), possible first ascents. Zdeněk Červenka, Čestmír Lukeš, and Irene Oehninger from the Czech Republic climbed two peaks close to the end of the long chain of mountains that runs northwest from Xixabangma over Kangboqen (a.k.a. Gang Benchen). The two summits lie at more or less the same location as a peak marked Tsalung (6,640m and south of the Tsalung La) on some maps. They are approximately equidistant from the Kyirong (a.k.a. Gyirong) to Saga road and the normal Nyalam to Saga road used to access Xixabangma north side base camp. They are clearly visible from the latter road where



There are still many easy virgin peaks in Tibet awaiting the explorer. On the left is the line followed by the Czech team to make the probable first ascent of Free Tibet (6,473m) in the Baka Kangri. The peak to the left is almost certainly unclimbed. The line marked on the right leads to the summit of Bochánek (6,063m), climbed by the same party. *Cestmír Lukes*