

climb for older mountaineers. However, younger members of the club were strongly encouraged to participate. Unfortunately, none were able to take enough vacation to come, so the final team comprised Eiichiro Kasai (64), Tooru Mita (64), Tadao Shintani (61), Hisashi Tanabe (74), Shaw Watanabe (64), Teietyu Yakuwa (69) and Yoochi Yamakawa (67). Because of our ages we had physical checks in a low-pressure chamber at the training facilities of the Self-Defense Air Force, Tachikawa Base.

Our arrival in Lhasa coincided with the end of celebrations for the 40th anniversary of the foundation of the Tibet Autonomous District. Lhasa had been transformed into a totally clean city with flags streaming everywhere, and the southern road to Shigatse tarmacked as far as Nakartse. In 2004, when we made our reconnaissance, it took two full days to reach Nakartse from Lhasa by way of Shigatse. Now the road via the Kamba La was very pleasant, and we were in Nakartse after a drive of only a half-day from Lhasa. The following day, September 13, we set up base camp close to the road on the north side of the mountain. Although we had a distant view of Kaluxung from there, we couldn't see the top.

Good weather prevailed, our acclimatization was almost perfect, and no one complained of bad headaches. We established three camps on the mountain, the highest at 6,150m. Although we were ready for a summit bid on the 21st, bad weather intervened and we returned to base camp. However, as the weather improved on the 27th, we all climbed back up to Camp 3. With our time in the area nearly up, unless we got a spell of fine weather in the next 24 hours, we would have to abandon the climb.

At 5:00 a.m. the next morning the sky was clear and starry. Kasai and Shintani left at 7:30 and after climbing a gentle slope, they jumared four fixed ropes on a steeper section and continued to the summit, arriving at 11:30 a.m. There they enjoyed a fine panoramic view of the vast Tibetan highland and the large Himalayan peaks that straddle the Bhutan and Nepal borders.

The ascent went very smoothly, considering the average age of the expedition members, 66. No one became sick, mainly due to our thorough acclimatization program and a stock of good food and equipment. We made it a rule to take all our garbage from every campsite and collected other trash around the base camp area.

With the opening of the railway to Lhasa and the development of infrastructure, such as roads, tunnels, and bridges, Tibet will become a major tourist destination. It is therefore important that we all embrace the concept of clean climbing, so the natural environment of Tibet can be preserved.

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*Editor's note: Kaluxung, a broad plateau-like massif with a steep western flank, lies 11km east-southeast of the more popular Noin Kangsang. A picture appears in the CMA's photographic reference, Immortal Mountains in the Snow Region.*

*Kula Kangri and Jiexiang, attempts.* During April and May our small team attempted Kula Kangri (7,554m). Stephen Chaplin from the U.K., Laila Ojefelt and Lars Svens from Sweden, and I from Australia were the only people on the mountain, which has only had three previous ascents [all by the west ridge: 1986 Japanese, 1994 Austrian, and 1997 Spanish—Ed.].

We left Kathmandu on April 13 and on the 19th reached the village of Monda north of the mountain (ca. 4,200m) and the official Chinese Mountaineering Association (CMA) base



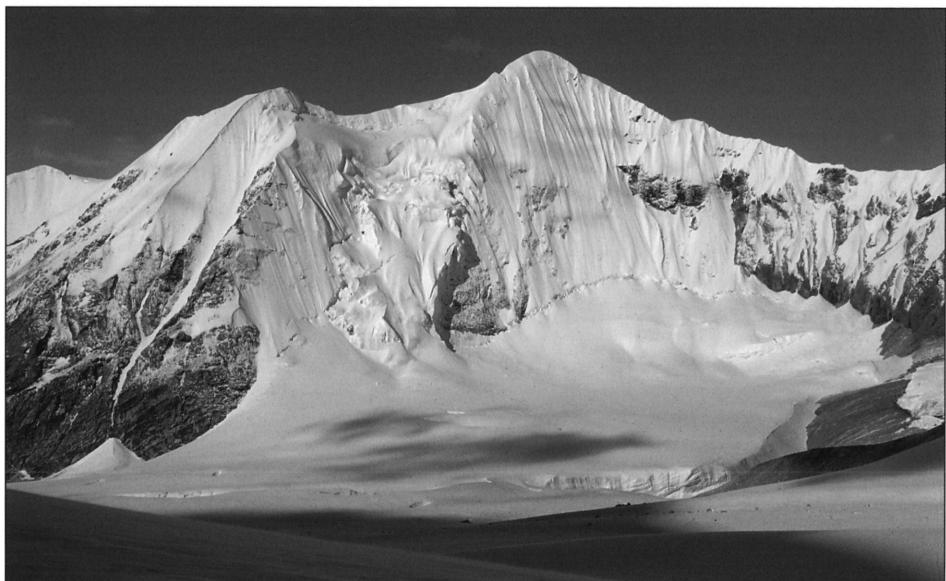
Kula Kangri (7,538m) from advanced base camp to the north of the mountain at 4,800m: (1a) is the original 1986 Japanese route up the west ridge, which short-cuts the initial section, (1b) is the route attempted by parties in the last few years. It rises directly from the Jiexiang-Kula Kangri Col (ca. 5,800m), where Camp 1 is normally sited. The positions of Camps 2 (6,300m) and 3 (6,900m) are marked. *Damien Gildea*

camp. On the 22nd we left the western end of the village (a separate place that we believe is named Pesa Tsun), as have other expeditions, and walked for five hours to advanced base camp at 4,800m. Typically, until then the weather had been good but on our arrival it began to snow lightly, which proved an omen for the next month. By May 3 we had established Camp 1 on the north slope of the Kula Kangri-Jiexiang col (ca. 5,800m), a site obviously used by previous expeditions. The route to this point had been fairly straightforward, with almost no crevasses on the glacier but plenty of calf-deep snow and nice views north to Nojin Kangsang (7,191m) and the Tibetan plateau.

After waiting out more cold and snowy weather, we started the west ridge on May 9, fixing some rope to 6,200m. We decided to fix because of the length of the ridge and a perceived need to carry quite a bit of food and gear, though none of us had climbed in this style before.

Though we later went beyond that high point, attempts to go farther up on the ridge were rebuffed by a surprisingly cold wind and generally poor weather. We often had a few hours of good weather early in the morning, but by 11:00 a.m. or so it turned bad again. Nights were cold, often with light snow until just before dawn.

On May 12 Chaplin and I attempted unclimbed Jiexiang (6,676m). We ascended to the col, moved a little south, then turned back west into a bowl beneath the east ridge, and climbed severely crevassed slopes with deep snow to gain the crest of the ridge around 6,000m. After moving up the ridge in poor visibility, we camped at 6,220m on easy snow slopes. The weather cleared but gave a cold night, -22°C inside the Bibler. An early morning start on the 13th got us up easy ground to 6,330m on the ridge, in close sight of the serac band not far below the summit. However, while we were taking a brief rest and re-sorting gear, clouds poured over from the southwest, the wind picked up, and the weather went from fine to bad in less than 10 minutes.



An unnamed and unclimbed 6,211m peak south of the Jiexiang-Kula Kangri col and ca. 15km inside the Chinese border. *Damien Gildea*

Negotiating the traverse around the upper seracs did not appeal to us in such weather, so we retreated in white-out conditions, avoiding our crevassed route up by going directly off the end of the broad ridge, coming out a few hundred meters north of Camp 1. [The only known previous attempt on Jiexiang took place in October 2004, when Ludovic Challeat's commercially organized French expedition attempted the east ridge on skis to a little over 6,000m—Ed.]

On the 14th we all ascended to our high point on Kula Kangri but were faced with more high winds, so we retrieved our gear and ropes and descended in defeat. On the 18th I attempted a small peak above the true right bank of the glacier on the long northwest ridge of Kula Kangri. A long approach over loose boulders and scree, followed by deep snow and strengthening winds high on the west ridge, forced me to turn back in the afternoon at ca. 6,100m, still some distance from the summit. We returned to Kathmandu on the evening of May 23rd.

Having not seen other climbers or expeditions since entering Tibet a month earlier, we were shamefully overjoyed to discover the dismal failure of so many other teams on big Tibetan peaks. It seems only those desperate enough to hang in at Everest could outlast the poor weather, which cleared in the first few days of June.

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