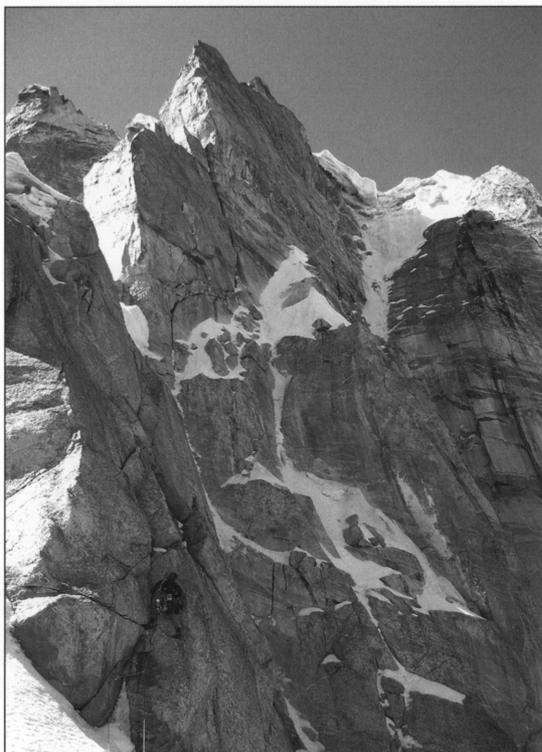


On their second, final attempt the Ukrainians used this ramp to short-cut their ascent. They reported continuing to the summit in a five-day push. The trio seems to have climbed at least 58 pitches to the top of the rock, at 5,400m, above which a difficult, dangerous snowy ridge, with snow mushrooms and menacing cornices, and hard ice and difficult mixed climbing up to M5, led to the summit. Chaplinsky reported finding that on the way down, one of these large formations, beneath which they had traversed on the ascent, had fallen off in the intervening time. Later they stated publicly that they climbed the route completely free at 7a or 7a+ and placed no bolts on the ascent, though three or four for rappel anchors. The team was nominated for the Piolet d'Or. But did they really climb the route free and did they really reach the summit? Kelly Cordes takes up the story.



Day three on the north ridge of Shingu Charpa (5,600m). Kelly Cordes starting up the 40th pitch. There are still a few more difficult pitches before reaching the summit ridge. Josh Wharton

*Shingu Charpa, north ridge, attempts and deception.* In July, sitting in the gorgeous Nangma Valley base camp,

I hacked up nasty chunks of something laced with blood, stricken with who-knows-what. My ultra-strong and ultra-capable partner, Josh Wharton, paced away the time until I recovered enough to try again.

We'd made an attempt that failed when I fell sick one-third of the way up Shingu Charpa's 1,550m north ridge, a stunning-looking and highly sought line for which we received generous, greatly appreciated support from the Lyman Spitzer and Polartec Challenge grants. Unfortunately, the route largely consisted of vegetation, closed cracks, serious runouts, mud, and loose blocks. We retreated via a descent gully that comes in from the east to meet the ridge. A team of three Ukrainians (Igor Chaplinsky, Andrey Rodiontsev, and Orest Verbitsky) had failed on an earlier attempt and retreated down this gully. As I blew our weather window recovering, we watched them return to retry the route, skipping the bottom third of the route by coming up the descent gully and continuing up the north ridge. We lost sight of them as they turned the summit ridge onto the side facing the village of Kande.

After a week out, they returned to camp triumphant, and we offered them our sincere congratulations. They were friendly and kind, with Orest remaining mostly silent, Andrey speaking a little, and Igor talking a lot, eager to tell us about their success. Despite our personal disappointment, we were happy for them. So it goes.

A couple of weeks of rain followed. Near the end of our trip we got a brief window and punched it. We again started from the very bottom, because we wanted climb the whole thing. Josh and I climbed 45 pitches in three days and spent a fourth descending (Aug 18-21), all free/clean on lead to 5.11+ (second jugging with the pack). We shivered through the nights due to our weight-obsessed-no-bivy-gear idea, which made sense in the sun at base camp. It was real climbing from beginning to end, with the technical crux coming in the middle, as we expected (thus Josh's leader block). The route offered little in the way of good climbing and the piles of garbage left by the Ukrainians didn't help (we carried off some of their mess). But the positioning was spectacular, the views immaculate, and the feeling of freedom wonderful. Like it always is.

Early afternoon on day three, we realized the inadequacy of our setup; the white stuff up high was solid ice, not snow. With ultralight boots for the leader, sneakers for the second, strap-on aluminum crampons for both, and one-and-a-half ice axes, it felt too dangerous. In retrospect, perhaps we could have made it work, but what the hell, the thing had already been climbed. So we thought. Maybe we'd have pushed harder, maybe not. I don't know. The cliché we strive for, to climb for only ourselves, dictates that our decisions should be our own. Indeed they should, and so we made our call to bail some 60m vertical and perhaps 150m horizontal from the summit. No excuses, we failed.

As we left Kande, the villagers, who have an unobstructed view of the peak, were certain that the Ukrainians did not summit either. We brushed it off, trusting the word of the Ukrainians.

I like to think that the mountains and the travel—especially to places like this, where people live impoverished lifestyles yet overflow with human warmth and kindness—bring humility and perspective. Someone would truly have to lack integrity to lie about something like climbing.

Once home, I e-mailed the Ukrainians to again offer congratulations. Only “the legendary” (as one Eastern journalist called him) Igor Chaplinsky responded, gregarious as usual and reminding us: “Please accept my regrets that you haven't made it to the top. As I have already told you in the base camp the most difficult and unexpected part of the route is the one closer to the top.”

Indeed, often the top is the hardest, and we didn't make it. Neither did they.

Igor Chaplinsky ceased contact when I politely asked about his “all free” reports on websites and his first-hand account in *Alpinist* magazine. I thought it odd because, in base camp when he made that claim, Rodiontsev promptly corrected him, saying they aided 50m or 100m, which seemed clear to us while watching through binoculars. Plus, I saw a photo on a Russian website, clearly showing the leader standing in aiders. Also, in photos and reports Chaplinsky consistently drew a continuous route line from the bottom, omitting mention of their final-go shortcut. Huh? That's a third of the route. WTF? It had us curious, but what could we say without sounding like whiners?

Additional questions emerged, but I optimistically dismissed them to the language barrier. In camp Igor Chaplinsky had proudly proclaimed “no bolts!” But Josh and I wondered about the shiny bolts we saw high on the route, higher than anyone but the Ukrainians are known to have reached. Then, in one of Chaplinsky's write-ups he mentioned placing bolts. Huh (again)? Also, in photos he sent me, he drew their line ending beyond the summit, at a far-side sub-summit. From some angles, if you haven't done your homework, it looks like the real summit. Chaplinsky was probably just in a hurry and sketched it in quickly. Whatever. It felt like Josh and I were saying that a lot.

Igor Chaplinsky and Andrey Rodiontsev attended the Piolet d'Or ceremony. Their nomination seemed surprising, considering their shortcut. But maybe nobody knew, since Chaplinsky wasn't up front about it and drew a continuous line on all the posted photos. But anyway, the PdO? Whatever (again.) Cool, go for it guys, have fun.

Orest, the young guy who we sensed was the team's rope gun, couldn't take it anymore and finally came clean. He didn't go to the PdO ceremony, saying he stayed home because they had not reached the summit, stopping 100m below and—contrary to the hype—that they therefore “had no moral right to be among the nominees.” While he could have been honest a bit earlier, once the ball gets rolling, especially with him being the youngster alongside two older and “respected” climbers, this couldn't have been easy.

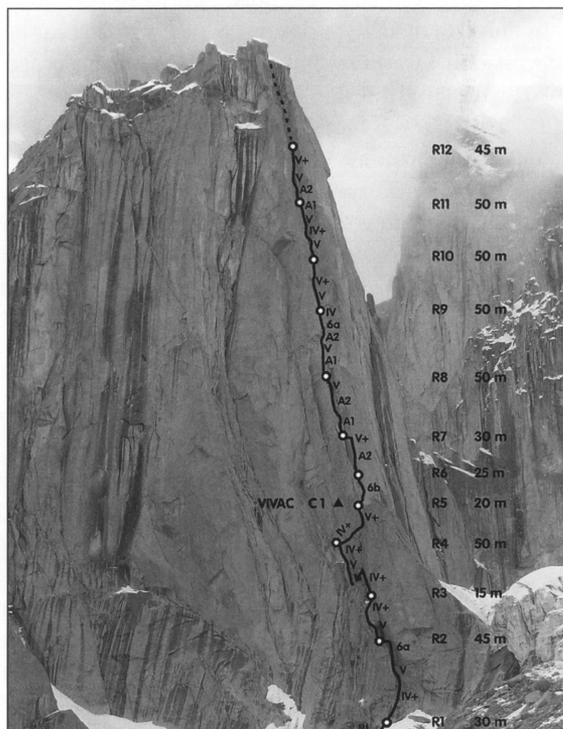
In contrast to his initial demeanor, Igor Chaplinsky stopped replying to, at the least, *www.mountain.ru*, *Montagnes*, *Alpinist*, and *Climb* magazines, and the *AAJ*. I hope they enjoyed their 50 grams of fame before Orest had the courage to speak up. History tends to forget the corrections, the after-the-fact details, favoring the now-sexy hype. So it goes, good for them. The north ridge of Shingu Charpa remains unclimbed.

Yes, I know, it's just climbing. And so I have to wonder: If you can't even be honest about this, then what else in life do you lie about?

KELLY CORDES, AAC

*Changi Tower, attempt.* Previously unreported from 2005 is the ascent, but not to the summit, of a previously unclimbed line up the east pillar of one of the formations that makes up the Changi Tower. Jordi Comas from Barcelona, Oriol Ribas, and I from Andorra reached the Nangma Valley in July 2005. In the 24 days that we were in the valley, there was much rain and snow, and it was only possible to climb on 10. After placing a camp near the base of the wall, we fixed 200m of rope and then made a second camp at the foot of the upper pillar. We spent six nights on the face to complete our 12-pitch climb. However, we didn't reach the summit. On the last day we were hit by a savage storm when only 50m below the top and were forced to descend. We grade the route TD+ 6b A2.

XAVI BONATTI, *Andorra*



The incomplete Andorran-Spanish route (TD+ 6b A2) on the east pillar of an unnamed rock formation that forms part of the Changi Tower massif, Nangma Valley. *Xavi Bonatti*