

Sikkim, mountaineering associations, regulations, fees, and permitted peaks. The Sikkim Amateur Mountaineering Association (SAMA) was founded in 2001 and recognized by the Sikkim Home Department in 2003. It is a small but growing association that aims to promote mountaineering and provide training for local people, as well as protecting the mountain environment. It advises the Home Department on issues concerning access to the mountains and the opening of more peaks for local people and visitors. In addition, it runs training programs for the Sikkim government. We found its assistance invaluable in arranging mountaineering permits with the Home Department and for undertaking the logistics of getting us to base camp. Its members include experienced mountaineers who are competent instructors. The current president is Kunzang Gyatso Bhutia (kunjong_gtk@yahoo.com); the vice president and treasurer is Sagar Rai (southspur@yahoo.co.in). Sikkim Holiday Tours and Treks works closely with SAMA and is a reliable tour operator (www.sikkim-holidays.com; sikkim_holidays@yahoo.com).

Visitors to Sikkim are required to have an Inner Line permit. Indian missions abroad are authorized to issue a 15-day permit, which can be stamped in your passport when you obtain your visa. It is also possible to get a 15-day permit from the Sikkim Tourist Office in Delhi, Kolkata, or Siliguri. A permit will be issued on the spot if you present copies of passport and visa details, along with two passport-sized photos. Moreover, if you arrive at Rangpo, the state border, without an Inner Line permit, the Tourism Officer stationed there can issue a permit, valid for 15-days, allowing you to enter the state. In Gangtok you can extend the permit for two further 15-day periods.

Climbing in the Chaunrikiang Valley means entering the Kangchenjunga National Park. Foreigners are required to register at the park headquarters in Yuksum and pay a fee: 250R for the first six days in the park and 50R per day thereafter. Within the park are basic wooden shelters, providing floor space, at the main overnight rest spots on the trail and also tent sites. A caretaker resides at each campsite and collects the fees: 50R per person per night at the shelters or 30R per night to pitch a tent.

The Home Department of Sikkim has designated five newly opened Alpine Peaks to encourage small expeditions. They are:

West Sikkim:

Frey Peak 5,830m (Chaunrikiang Valley)

Tinchenkang 6,010m (Thansing Valley)

Jopuno 5,936m (Thansing Valley)

North Sikkim:

Lama Wangden 5,868m (Lachen)

Brumkhangse 5,635m (Yumthang)

The peak fee is relatively modest at \$350 US for a team of four. The regulations for climbing these peaks can be found at <http://sikkim.gov.in>. Go to Government and click on Old Gazettes. Then click on 2006, and the gazettes for that year will appear in a PDF document (http://sikkim.gov.in/asp/Misc/sikkim_govtgazettes/GAZ/GAZ2006/GAZ2006.pdf). Go to page 90 and the gazette dated March 29, 2006, which contains application forms, guidance notes, and fee schedules.

It should also be noted that under the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act 1991 and the State Government's Notification No.59.Home/98 dated 26.10.1998, certain peaks are classified as sacred, and the "scaling of the sacred peaks" is banned. These peaks include Kangchenjunga, main, south, and west summits; Narsing; Kabru (a.k.a Gabur Gangtsen), north and south

summits and Kabru Dome (but see the report earlier about a recent ascent of Kabru North by an Indian expedition); Pandim; Simvo; Goecha Peak; Fork Peak; Paohunli; and Siniolchu.

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ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Dibang Valley, retracing Bailey and Morshead's journey to the Yonggap La. Few trekkers and explorers have been deep into the Arunachal valleys, due to difficulties and restrictions. The Dibang Valley in eastern Arunachal Pradesh is deep and thickly wooded. Tibet lies to the north and east, while to the west is the Tsangpo Valley. In the past three years we have visited the neighboring valleys of Kameng, Subansiri, and Tsangpo. In late 2006 we traveled farther east to the Dibang.

The Yonggap La is a pass on the northern border (the McMahon Line). Both this and the adjoining Andra La lead to the Tibetan region of Chindro. Almost due north of the Andra La stands Kundu Potrang, one of the three holiest mountains in Tibetan religion (the others being Kailash and Takpa Shiri), which the pundit Kinthup had reached on a pilgrimage during his search for the place where the Tsangpo flows into India. Now that the Chinese have restored religious freedom, many Tibetan pilgrims visit this area and perform circumambulations. Ian Baker has reached this peak from the Tibetan side (see his book *The Heart of the World*). The first forays into the Dibang were British punitive expeditions, but the first explorers to reach the passes at its head were the British army officers Bailey and Morshead. In the spring of 1913 they were unsuccessful in crossing the Andra La but did traverse the Yonggap in pouring rain. In Tibet they traveled west towards the Tsangpo Gorge and after a long journey through forbidding terrain, eventually reached Bhutan, from which they gained the Indian plains. Their survey work during the arduous journey formed a basis upon which Sir Henry McMahon drew his famous line in 1914, demarcating India and Tibet. (This border is still disputed by China, which claims the entire region of Arunachal. The dispute was one of the reasons for the 1962 Indo-China war.)

On November 10th, our team of Capt. Sandeep Dhankar, Lt. Gen. (Retired), R.K. Nana-vatty, Vijay Kothari, Rajendra Wani, and I reached Anini at the head of the Dibang Valley, intent on following Bailey's route to the Yonggap La. Via the Mathun Valley and Mipi we reached Basam, where our difficulties began. The trail continued northwest above the Yonggap River through thick jungle, with steep ascents and descents, and in many places it had to be cleared through the dense bamboo forest. Camps were in small clearings. In deteriorating weather we reached the Yonggap La on the 22nd.

As we returned from the pass to our last camp, a fierce freak storm hit the area. For the next five days there was heavy snow accumulation, prohibiting any movement. As rations ran out four porters deserted the party and made a dangerous escape down-valley. We were in contact with the army via radio, and, when a break in the weather occurred on the 27th and the cloud lifted for six hours, the Indian Air Force sent two Cheetah helicopters and evacuated us to Anini. It was a stunning display of flying in difficult conditions through the narrow valley. Three days later the four porters also returned safely.

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