

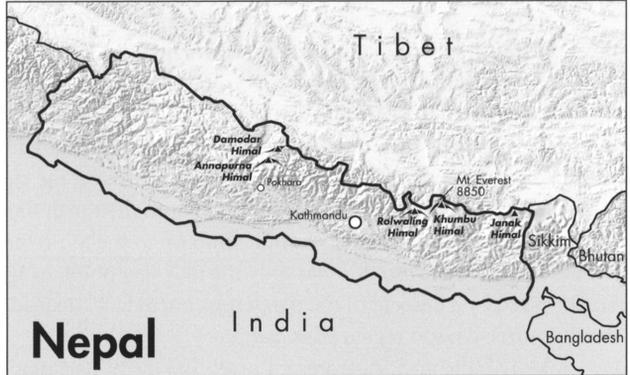
Nepal

ANNAPURNA HIMAL

Annapurna I, east ridge, third ascent. One of the most notable accomplishments of the season was the second two-way traverse of the east ridge of Annapurna I (8,091m). When the well-known Polish climber, Piotr Pustelnik, organized his four-man team for this task, he was well aware of the difficulties they would confront on this huge ridge, which starts from Tarke Kang (a.k.a. Glacier Dome, 7,193m) in the east and runs westward over Roc Noir to the three 8,000m summits of Annapurna. However, he did not anticipate the addition of two not-so-highly skilled Tibetans on his permit and the problems one of them would present.

The first ascent of the east ridge, which resulted in an elegant traverse of Annapurna, ranks with some of the most significant events in the history of Himalayan climbing. The ridge was first attempted by Germans in 1969, and again in 1981 by a Swedish team, the latter getting as far as the East Summit of Annapurna. Both approached via the West Annapurna Glacier and the east side of the col north of Fluted Peak. In September and October 1984 a six-man expedition entirely formed of Swiss guides, established four camps from the South Annapurna Glacier, climbing to the col between Fluted Peak and Tarke Kang from the more difficult but less dangerous west side, then, in common with the Germans and Swedes, up the ridge above to Tarke Kang itself. The highest of the four camps, at 7,100m, was situated just below the summit of Tarke Kang. On October 6, Norbert Joos and Erhard Loretan constructed an igloo at 7,490m just beyond the summit of Khangsar Kang (a.k.a. Roc Noir, 7,485m), a pointed, snow-plastered rocky tower situated on the east ridge of Annapurna and first climbed in 1969 by Germans, Obster, Schubert, and Winkler, via the east ridge from the South Annapurna Glacier. The Swiss pair then descended to base camp at ca 4,200m.

Bad weather intervened but on the 22nd four of the team, Ueli Bühler, Bruno Durrer, Joos, and Loretan headed up from Camp 3 toward the igloo. Bühler and Durrer returned from Khangsar Kang, but the other two spent the night in the igloo, then on the 23rd climbed along the ridge, over the East Summit of Annapurna (8,047m) to the col between the latter and Annapurna Central (8,061m). There, at ca 8,020m, they made another igloo and spent the night inside sheltering from violent winds. On the 24th they climbed over the Central Summit to reach the Main Summit at 1:30 p.m., more or less following the crest throughout. That same day they set off for a committing on-sight descent of the north face and bivouacked at ca 6,800m. The following day they negotiated the Dutch Rib with just one ice screw and a 50m rope, and bivouacked at 5,000m. On the 26th they reached the standard base camp for the Normal Route on the north side of the mountain, where they met an expedition attempting Nilgiri. However, the other Swiss members had no news as to their whereabouts or possible success until they were all reunited on November 4 in Kathmandu.



The ridge saw its second ascent in the spring of 2002. Five climbers fixed the rock spur above the South Annapurna Glacier leading to the col between Fluted Peak and Tarke Kang. The team then established their Camp 3 at 7,100m just below the summit of Tarke Kang. From here Veikki Gustafsson, Alberto Iñurrategi, Jean Christophe Lafaille, and Ed Viesturs set off in alpine style for the summit. Gustafsson and Viesturs retreated before reaching Khangsar Kang but the other pair continued. Above 7,700m they found the ridge to be stripped bare of snow by the wind, and quite tricky. They dropped onto the north flank and traversed below the East and Central summits until they could climb up to the Main Summit via the last section of the Normal Route. However, this was only the half way point, as Iñurrategi and Lafaille had never been inspired by a descent of the dangerous north face. Instead, they reversed the route, taking a further three days to regain base camp.

Like Lafaille and Iñurrategi, Pustelnik's party had neither bottled oxygen nor Sherpa support. First they acclimatized on Cho Oyu, then on May 6 went to their base camp at 4,130m at the southern end of the Annapurna Glacier for their push to the Main Summit. After having made three more camps and two bivouacs, three members, Pustelnik, his compatriot Piotr Morawski, and Slovakian Peter Hamor, set out on May 21 from their bivouac at 7,700m for the three summits.

Tagging along with them was a Tibetan, Luo Tse, who had twelve 8,000m summits to his credit. However, all of these had been achieved with much bigger teams than his 2006 group, which comprised just two members and one Sherpa. All four crossed the East Summit of Annapurna and reached the col beyond. Onward progress looked very daunting and it took some time before the team found a practicable route down a 100m ramp on the north flank that would take them toward the Central Summit. By this time it was 4 p.m. and it was obvious that reaching the Main Summit and returning to their top bivouac would take them well into the night. At this point Pustelnik realized Luo Tse had become partly snowblind, badly dehydrated, and had no headlamp.

So Hamor went on alone, rejoined the ridge, gained the Central and Main summits and then bivouacked at 10 p.m. on his return, somewhere between these two summits. In the meantime Morawski and Pustelnik were struggling to get the Tibetan down to their last bivouac, which they eventually reached at 5 a.m. on the 22nd. The Europeans' trials were still not over: by the time they reached their last fixed camp, they had been without food for four or five days and were completely exhausted. They gave no thought to another attempt and went home.

The two Tibetans and their Sherpa stayed. They rested and then report succeeding on their second attempt in windy and cloudy weather. They reached the top on June 4 but had no visibility. However, Luo Tse is certain they reached the Main Summit because he had already seen it from the East Summit during in his first attempt with Pustelnik.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, AAC Honorary Member, Nepal

Cho Oyu 2005 - blood samples at very high altitude. In the autumn of 2005, the Anglo-Irish Xtreme Everest Expedition to Cho Oyu (8,188m) undertook a number of ambitious scientific projects at high altitude. The seven-man team, which comprised Roger McMorrow (leader) with Vijay Ahuja, Nigel Hart, Mick O'Dwyer, Paul Richards, George Rodway, Piotr Szawarski and I, completed work on the effects of supplemental oxygen on well-acclimatised mountaineers during sleep, exercise, and treatment inside a portable hyperbaric chamber (a.k.a. Gamow Bag).