

Peaks on the ridge west of Lugula seen from the north. (A) Bhrikuti (a.k.a. Bhrikuti Shail, 6,361m). (B) Tir Hawa La (ca 6,200m). (C) Himso Himal (6,337m). (D) Shelka Kangri (6,358m). In 1952 de Hults followed the broad, rounded snow ridge falling gently north from Bhrikuti's summit to make the mountain's first ascent. *Paulo Grobel*

Bhrikuti (6,361m), north ridge and new information on first ascent. Bhrikuti is a Buddhist goddess. It is also the name of a Nepali princess, and the wife of the famous Tibetan emperor, Songsten Gampo. In addition, it is the name of a small summit in the Damodar Himal, deep in the confines of Nepal and Tibet, between Mustang and Phu. For a long time, its location and the story of the first ascent were unclear. This was partially

due to there being no decent map of the area—but mainly because it was difficult to pinpoint the peak when looking from Mustang to the north. After an ascent of Bhrikuti's south side in the spring of 2005, and two traverses between Mustang and Phu, I returned again with a group in spring 2010. We reached Damodar Kunda, a group of small, sacred lakes that are wrongly marked on the HMG Finn map. We were there primarily to make a previously unexplored trek to North Mustang and the village of Samdzong. This would require us to play a few games to deal with border crossings.

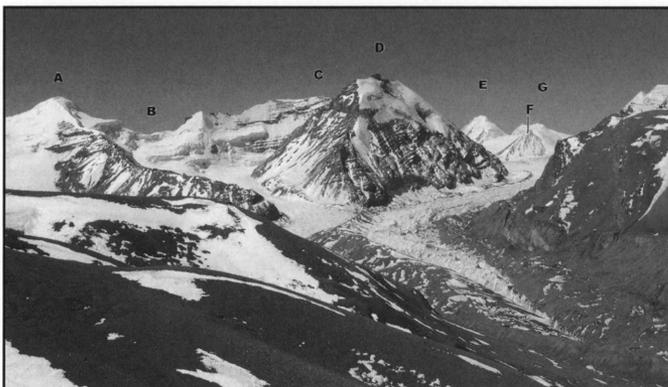
Climbing Bhrikuti from the north is very easy; you can even take mules to a camp at 5,800m. Nine of us reached the summit by a route of Himalayan grade II/F. However, our climb was mainly a means of getting a glimpse into this hidden corner of the massif, in particular Lagula (6,898m) and the Tibetan side behind Chako (6,704m). In order to avoid future confusion, we have decided to name the small neighboring summits and landmarks: Himso Himal (6,337m, after the Himalayan Society); the Tir Hawa La (after Tirawa), the ca 6,200m col between Himso Himal and Bhrikuti; and the third and highest summit of this group, Shelka Kangri (6,358m), which is the Tibetan name of Michel Peissel, the French explorer and ethnologist, who has written around 20 books on his Himalayan and Tibetan expeditions.

During a previous trip to Phu, I learned an amazing story about Alfred de Hults, a passionate hunter who visited Nepal in the early 1950s. Later, thanks to de Hults's grandson Luc-Emmanuel, we were able to get in touch with Alfred and his family in Belgium. Here is what he told us.

After having searched for snow leopards deep inside the Kingdom of Lo, de Hults made his way back through the Phu valley. Not wanting to return empty handed, he used his boundless energy to climb a beautiful, snowy peak of more than 6,000m, which he named Bhrikuti. At the time he was constantly occupied with thoughts of a woman, with whom he had fallen deeply in love. He even had problems sleeping at night. This young Nepali woman possessed a radiant, almost divine beauty. But he had to keep his feelings to himself, because Bhrikuti was also the daughter of King Thribuvan.

Once back in the king's court, he told of his adventures in the mountains between Mustang and Phu, his random summit climb, and the name he gave to the mountain. The old king was no fool, well aware that his daughter had appeared particularly happy ever since Alfred returned. Far from condemning this improbable relationship, the king congratulated the young couple and offered them his blessing.

Alfred married Bhrikuti in a formal ceremony, which must have been kept discreet, because we couldn't find any record of this marriage in the royal archives. The young couple settled in India, where de Hults became a successful businessman. Later, they relocated to Belgium, where the beautiful princess converted to her husband's religion, as was the norm. They lived there happily and had several children, enjoying a humble existence.



Peaks west of Bhrikuti seen from the northeast. (A) Shelka Kangri (6,358m). (B) 6,118m pass. (C) Kumlung Himal (6,365m). (D) Unnamed (two summits: Northeast 6,378m and Southwest 6,380m. This is more a shoulder of Kumlung than a separate peak, as it appears in this photo. It was attempted from the west by Paulo Grobel, who reports the rock to be atrocious.). (E) Pt. 6,505m. (F) Belvédère d'Alfred (6,226m). (G) Pt. 6,420m (possibly climbed by a French ski team). *Paulo Grobel*

This correspondence with our new Belgian friend allowed us to lift any doubts regarding the first ascent of Bhrikuti. It had indeed taken place on April 18, 1952 via the south face by Alfred de Hults, solo. Alfred told us that he arrived at the summit at 11:25 a.m. after no great difficulty. He stayed there under sunny skies for more than half an hour, admiring the view and thinking about his distant Bhrikuti. There is only one photo, now in very poor condition, which attests to his story. In 2005 we had simply repeated Alfred's route.

Now all that remains for us to do in the Bhrikuti group is to traverse all the summits from Bhrikuti to Kumlung, or put up more difficult lines on the south side of Bhrikuti.

PAULO GROBEL, *France, translated by Todd Miller*

ANNAPURNA HIMAL

Singu Chuli (6,501m), south-southeast face to south ridge. On November 3–4 Cas van den Gevel and I climbed the south-southeast face of Singu Chuli. We reached the south ridge at 6,350m but found the crest above so heavily fluted and corniced that we deemed it too dangerous to continue to the summit.

Our base camp was placed at 4,500m on the approach to the normal route on Tharpu Chuli (5,663m) from the south-southwest. From here it took one-and-a-half days to reach the foot of the face. We climbed to the col on the ridge separating Tharpu Chuli from Pancha Chuli to the north, where we spent the night. On November 3 we followed the crest of the ridge north until it became steep and rocky. At this point we descended the east flank (one rappel at the bottom), crossed the glacier, and climbed up to the foot of Singu Chuli. Due to the middle and right side of the face having large seracs, we opted for a line on the left, very close to that climbed by Slovenians in 1995.

The same day we climbed the first 300m of face, bivouacking at 5,900m. The next day we reached the crest of the south ridge and descended to our bivouac. The route was TD/TD+ with ice up to 90°. From there it took two days to return to base camp, first southeast down the West