

sor at the prestigious ENSA (National School of Skiing and Alpinism), where he had worked for over 30 years. The leader of the Nepalese staff was an experienced Sirdar, Iman Gurung, who had summited Everest twice, most recently in May this year, as well as Cho Oyu twice.

It is easy to be wise after the event, and some people questioned the wisdom of the base camp's location, as it was surrounded by 35-40° slopes. One porter reportedly suggested that the camp be moved to what he considered a safer location downhill, but his proposal was not acted upon.

A noted French climbing instructor, Jean Coudray, who came to Kathmandu after he had discussed this subject with previous Kang Guru leaders, noted that the team had placed its base camp at the normal site. "In this area there is no place for base camp that is completely safe; there is no safer site than the one everyone has used." Furthermore, he pointed out, there had been continuous heavy snowfall for many hours. The result was a powder-snow avalanche, which is the worst kind, because it can travel at 200+ km/hour down a slope of 30° or more, and its target is impossible to predict: it can often shift direction.

Kang Guru is situated in the Manang region northeast of Annapurna. It lies east of Pisang Peak, which is favored by climbers preferring a lower mountain and less bureaucratic red tape for a permit. In recent years Kang Guru has been a favorite of some French commercial expedition organizers. The approach route goes through colorful mountain villages. It apparently was considered safe; as mentioned above, only one climber had died on the 27 previous expeditions, and that occurred two decades ago.

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*Editor's Note: this disaster is second only in terms of single-avalanche death toll to the 1990 accident on Pik Lenin, where 43 climbers were engulfed in a camp. The heavy storm responsible for this accident also trapped many nearby Annapurna Circuit trekkers, some of whom were eventually evacuated by helicopter.*

*Gyajikang, second ascent and first complete ascent of west ridge.* A primarily French commercial expedition led by Paulo Grobel to 7,047m Gyajikang made the second recorded ascent of the mountain, via a partial new route, the West Ridge Integral. The first ascent of the peak was made in October 1994 by a large Japanese-Nepalese expedition (joint leaders Taichi Fujimatsu and Gupta Bahadur Rana), which put no less than 17 people on the summit. The team fixed 1,500m of rope on the northwest spur, which they climbed to reach the west ridge at 6,600m. The summit area was so vast that, according to one Japanese member, it would have been possible to play football.

Grobel's expedition approached from the south and established base camp at 5,200m, then set up Camp 1 at 5,700m, close to the foot of the west ridge. After passing an initial section of crumbly rock, they established two more camps before reaching the broad but crevassed summit plateau. They crossed the plateau to the highest point, gained on May 2 by Grobel with Maxime Blanc, Yves Exbrayat, Michel Gayton, and Jerome Jarry (all French), and Nicolas Hougardy (Belgian). They fixed the steepest section, 35-40° slopes above Camp 2, with 350m of rope. They estimated the overall grade of this potential Himalayan classic to be IV/PD+

*Information provided by PAOLO GROBEL from his website*

*Editor's note: On September 26 seven Japanese led by 70-year old Shigeyoshi Kido, with three other members over 60, and seven Nepalese reached the summit via the northwest ridge, for the third ascent. It is believed they followed the 1994 original route.*