

and then followed a rocky shelf, establishing Camp 2 (5,135m) at the snout of the glacier. June 19 was our summit day and initially involved moving westward on a broad glacial shelf and climbing a 100m 40° ice wall to the ridge. Seven hundred meters of snow led to the fine summit pyramid. As the clouds drifted in and out, we had an occasional glimpse of the fearsome-looking north face of Phurbi Chachu and a set of pinnacles at its eastern end, which we dubbed The Coolin Towers. The grade of our route equated to Alpine PD, and descent, following our route of ascent, was straightforward, with even some judicious glissading to ease tired legs.

“On June 21 we cleaned the area around base camp and bagged our tins to be carried down by yak, taking care to leave the camp as we found it. Then we finished our expedition with a trek up to the base camp under Xixabangma’s southwest face. Here we found huge amounts of garbage left by recent winter expeditions. The piles of rubbish and debris were quite recent (winter 2004) and even included car batteries, which had been dumped next to the lake in the middle of the camp. They had been discarded together with large piles of plastic, unwanted gear, and gas canisters. It is unacceptable to leave camps in such a state.”

Jo is right. It is quite unacceptable. Over the years there has been much informal discussion as to who is to blame for this type of execrable behavior. American and Nordic expeditions are often contrasted, favorably, with those of other nationalities. Sometimes the blame is laid at the door of the growing commercial expedition industry, but the more I visit the Himalaya, the more I come to the opposite conclusion: amateur expeditions often leave much more rubbish than commercial trips, possibly because commercial ventures have a vested interest in keeping their sites clean for future clients. At this camp site the most recent offenders had left a calling card; a bleached yak skull signed by members of the Italian-Polish winter expedition. The marker pen had been left alongside.

VICTOR SAUNDERS, *Chamonix, France*

*Gaurishankar, northeast ridge attempt.* The noted American mountaineer, John Roskelley, and his son Jess aimed to make the first ascent of Gaurishankar (7,134m) from its Tibetan side. The mountain defeated them as it had at least three earlier attempts from the north. [Although Don Whillans 1964 British expedition approached the Tibetan side of the mountain from Nepal and attempted the north face to northwest ridge, the northeast ridge was not attempted until 1997, when Japanese, Yasushi Yamanoi and his wife Takeo Nagao, climbed the ridge to 6,300m, at which point the way ahead looked steep, narrow and highly corniced. They retreated. The following year another Japanese team with the same objective failed to reach the base of the mountain—Ed.]

On a clear day the mountain is visible from Kathmandu on the northeastern horizon and was thought to be the world’s highest mountain until the British Survey of India made more careful measurements. The first ascent was made from Nepal by John Roskelley himself in May 1979 via the southwest face, the feature seen from Kathmandu. However, the main summit (Shankar) of Gaurishankar has only been summited twice since Roskelley’s success.

The Roskelleys were unable to get very far in their efforts on one of its northeast ridges, of which there are several. Their ridge comprised unstable rocks, “like a house of cards” and some of these had huge icicles hanging from them. John and Jess gave up at only 5,450m due to the dangerous terrain and the difficulty of the climb, which appeared to get worse the more they ascended.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, *AAC Honorary Member, Nepal*