

Surely the need for a military presence will not endure forever. When that happy time comes, and the Siachen is free of permanent human presence, the area could then be turned into a national peace park. Then the glacier can be given whatever time is needed to recover from the rude treatment it suffered while it was in the front line of battle.

AAMIR ALI, *Himalayan Club, adapted from The Himalayan Journal*

*Chong Kumdan I (7,071m), southeast ridge.* On August 20 at 4 p.m., Marlin Geist, Donald Goodman, Chris Robertson, and I, with Sherpas Nima Dorje, Pemba Norbu, and Ming Temba, completed a new route on Chong Kumdan I. Our route climbed the southeast ridge to its intersection with the main east ridge, which we followed to the summit. This was the second ascent of the peak. The first was made in 1991 by an Indo-British expedition, jointly led by Harish Kapadia and Dave Wilkinson. We appear to have been the first expedition to this area since 1991.

The approach to Chong Kumdan is from the Nubra Valley, which lies north of the famous Khardung La. This region is sandwiched between Pakistan-occupied Kashmir on the northwest and the Aksai Chin area on the northeast. The approach to the mountain is along the historic Silk Route to Yarkand over the famous Saser La (pass), a route known as the "Skeleton's Trail." We used 50 horses to carry nearly two tons of equipment and rations across the Saser La (5,375m) and two major glaciers (Aqtash and Thangman). The horsemen from Ladakh were of tremendous assistance in finding a way across the glaciers' ice and rocks. The Shyok River ("river of death") brought the expedition to a halt at the other end of the Thangman Glacier. The river blocked the route for the horses, so we carried loads from here.

Our main ambition had been to climb the virgin peak of Chong Kumdan II (7,004m). On reaching base camp, we explored a route through the South Chong Kumdan Glacier, only to be faced by huge gaping crevasses, towering seracs, and penitents. The top snow layer had disappeared, due to global warming. The ice was bare and exposed, and it was dangerous to travel the glacier with the equipment and rations required. So we shifted focus to Chong Kumdan I, which minimized glacier travel. The route on Chong Kumdan I involved 45° to 55° ice for 400m to the crest of the southeast ridge. We fixed 500m of line on this section. We then followed the crest of the southeast ridge for a few hundred meters to 6,450m, where we established Camp 2. The 20° to 30° slopes were underlain by hard ice. We spent nearly four hours excavating tent platforms. From Camp 2, we climbed the remainder of the ridge to where it intersects the east ridge near 6,800m. Above Camp 2 we fixed four ropes and continued the route past several gendarmes, passing a cornice on the right at the top of the slope. This part of the climb could be made without fixed lines, as the slopes were moderate: a maximum of about 45° near the intersection with the east ridge. Due to poor snow, it took more than five hours to negotiate the last section to the summit.

One of our Kumauni support staff, Anand Ram, passed away on August 10 due to altitude sickness at the Saser Brangza Army Camp. Our Sherpa Sirdar, Ang Tashi, took ill on August 15 at Camp 1. He was accompanied down to ABC by expedition members on the 16th. When there was no improvement in his health, despite being provided bottled oxygen and medication, he was evacuated by helicopter and hospitalized at Hundar, where he recovered. Tashi had been climbing regularly at high altitude, had climbed Everest, and was one of the fittest Sherpas around.

DIVYESH MUNI, *Honorary Secretary, Himalayan Club, India*