

## India

**Overview.** First ascents, high peaks, exploration, and challenging climbs by Indian mountaineers: all were part of 2008 in the Indian Himalaya, a year that will be remembered for energetic climbs and generally settled weather.

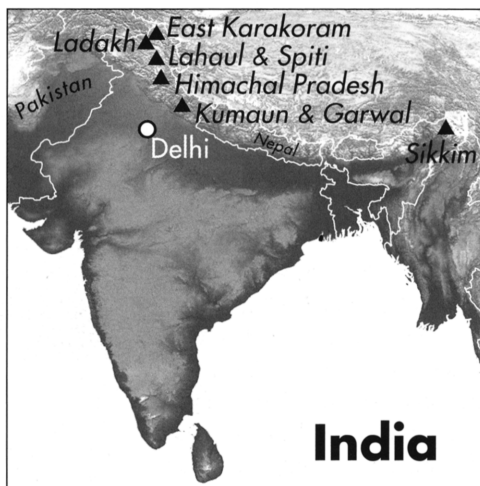
Sixty-five foreign expeditions visited the mountains. Since the IMF opened a liaison office at Leh to collect fees, Stok Kangri has become its most profitable peak, with 21 official foreign ascents. Add to this ascents by Indian teams and unauthorized climbers, and this peak will go into the books as the most climbed mountain above 6,000m. The

area of Kishtwar, once a paradise of challenging mountains, has been closed for many years due to terrorism in Kashmir. A British-Canadian-American team tried to approach Kishtwar Shiveringling from the north, crossing the Umasi La, but a small incident en route scared their porters, who then refused to carry loads over the pass. According to the porters, terrorists were watching. Kishtwar will have to wait till things improve.

There were 57 Indian expeditions during the year, and some completed excellent climbs. A small team from Bengal reaching the summit of Thalay Sagar, till now the preserve of strong foreign teams. Tirsuli West was climbed for the second time by an Indian expedition. This high peak had defeated several strong teams. Maiktoli via the south face, Srikanta, and Manirang were other high peaks climbed by Indians. This is a welcome sign, and we hope that a new breed of young Indian mountaineer will continue to climb without fixed ropes and Sherpa support.

There were also expeditions climbing in new areas and opening new valleys. Irish teams explored Gramang Bar in Kinnaur and climbed in the Debsa valley of Spiti. Two Indian teams took on the unclimbed Nya Kangri and Plateau Peak. Both are challenging summits in the East Karakoram and will need strong teams to achieve success. A British team took a historic trail, exploring an approach to the Zemu Gap (Sikkim) from the south, intending to traverse the pass. Their route over the high Guicha La to the Talung Valley was not without difficulties. But the icefall beyond and approaching bad weather stopped further movement. This is a worthy project, and hopefully a team will return to reach the Zemu Gap for the first time since H. W. Tilman.

HARISH KAPADIA, *Honorary Editor, The Himalayan Journal*



**Fast track permits.** 113 Himalayan peaks were pre-cleared for 2009, meaning that obtaining permits should only take two–three weeks. You still need to fill out an application and other formalities, but now you can arrive on a tourist visa, so the hassle is quite reduced. These 113 peaks include some of the plums like Shiveringling, Meru, Bhagirathi, Satopanth, Thaley Sagar, Nanda Devi East, Trisul 1, Nanda Kot, Nilkantha, and Chaukhambha in Uttarakhand; Nun, Kun, Pinnacle, White Needle, Z1, Z3, and Z8 in Zaskar. In Himachal Pradesh most of the peaks from CB 9 to 35, White Sail, Papsura, Deo Tibba, Menthosa, and Phabrang are included, among many

others. We are now trying to reduce some of the other restrictions, such as use of GPS and satellite phones, and availability of detailed maps.

MANDIP SINGH SOIN,  
*Ibex Expeditions, India*

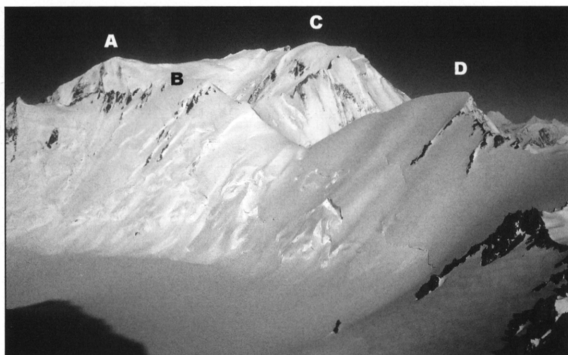
## EAST KARAKORAM

*Chong Kumdan II (7,004m).* The isolated Chong Kumdan Group was explored in 1991 by an Indo-British expedition that climbed 10 peaks, including the first ascent of the highest, Chong Kumdan I (7,071m). This team approached along the Shyok River and then west up the long Chong Kumdan Glacier. During the expedition joint leader Harish Kapadia investigated an approach to the Nup La (ca 6,250m), the col at the head of the glacier immediately south of Chong Kumdan II. Huge crevasse fields barred his way, making an approach to CK II both difficult and long. A later foray to the north side of this peak showed no easy route, and it was the only major summit in the group not attempted.

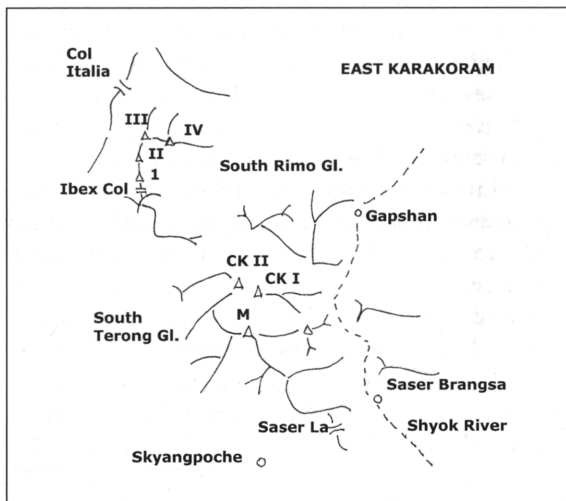
In 2007 an Indo-American team visited the Chong Kumdan Glacier, with CK II as its main goal. Again huge crevasses and towering seracs barred access to this unclimbed peak and the team turned to CK I, where they made the second ascent, by a new route (AAJ 2008).

That same year I led a commercially organized expedition to Mamostong Kangri (7,516m), a peak south of the Chong Kumdan Group, making a successful ascent from the south. I realized that from Mamostong base camp there was a long but feasible glacial route north, crossing several high cols, which would lead to the Nup La and south ridge of CK II. In 2008 I decided to put this idea to the test.

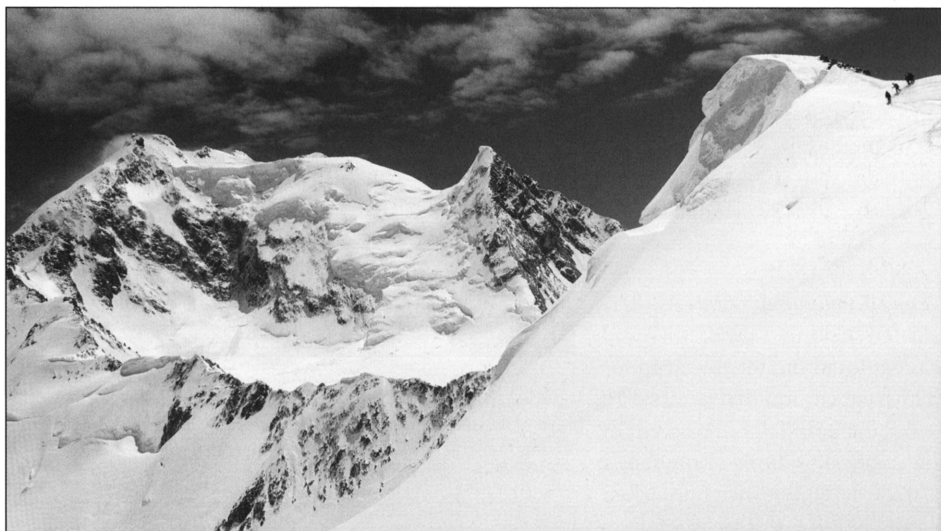
At the beginning of August our team left the 4,900m Mamostong base camp and with the help of high-altitude Ladakhi porters moved slowly but continuously toward our goal. After nine days we had crossed one unnamed col to the South Terong Glacier, traversed north, and crossed a second pass to gain the upper reaches of the Chong Kumdan Glacier. From near the second col we climbed a previously virgin summit of more than 6,000m, naming it HMI Peak.



Looking west from Chong Kumdan I. (A) Chong Kumdan Mont Blanc. (B) Chong Kumdan III (6,670m: unclimbed but attempted to within 70m of the summit by the ridge connecting with Kichik Kumdan). (C) Chong Kumdan II (7,004m): the French team made the first ascent by the left skyline. (D) Kichik Kumdan (ca 6,640m). *Lindsay Griffin*



Map of the Chong Kumdan region. *Lindsay Griffin*



Reaching the summit of HMI Peak (6,000m+) on the first ascent. Behind and to the east are Mamostong Kangri (7,516m, left) and Mamostong Kangri II (7,023m). *Paulo Grobel*

(The Indian members of our expedition came from Darjeeling's Himalayan Mountain Institute.)

At this point most Indian mountaineers and the porters returned, leaving four French and two Indians to continue toward CK II. Eleven days after leaving base camp, we placed Camp 8 (6,550m) above the Nup La on the south ridge of CK II. On the following day all the team (Indians Samgyal Sherpa and Konchok Thinless and French Sebastiano Audisio, Bernard Meurin, Dominique Ravot, and I) reached the southernmost of the ridge's four summits, which we named Chong Kumdan Mont Blanc. The following morning, day 13 from leaving base, Audisio, Ravot, and I crossed another summit (Cima Daniela) to reach CK II's main summit.

Descent was rapid, and in two-and-a-half days we all reunited at Mamostong Base Camp. Although the technical difficulties were modest (AD for the final section, with the steepest part being below the Nup La), it was a committing journey through complex, often delicate terrain. Our practice of a slow but steady ascent from base camp, where relatively small daily height gains allow good acclimatization, seems to be paying off.

PAULO GROBEL, *France*

*Nya Kangri, south ridge, attempt.* In June and July the Himalayan Club sponsored Vineeta Muni, Rajesh Gadgil, Rajan Rikame, and me in an attempt on the beautiful unclimbed snow and ice pyramid Nya Kangri (6,480 m), at the entrance to the Arganglas Valley. Since 2001, when I first visited the valley, Nya Kangri has been high on my list. As we flew in to Leh clouds hung ominously over the region. We stayed a night at Tegur before starting our approach march on June 19. For three days 11 horses carried our food and equipment to base camp at Phonglas (4,600m) on the true right bank of the river. Light rain accompanied us on the walk in, while it snowed higher on the mountains. With the south ridge as our objective, we reconnoitered a route to advanced base, which we placed at the snout (5,400m) of a small glacier originating from the south face. A 700m gully on the southeast face led to the crest of the south ridge. It proved a challenge to find a route up this gully that was safe from constant rockfall coming