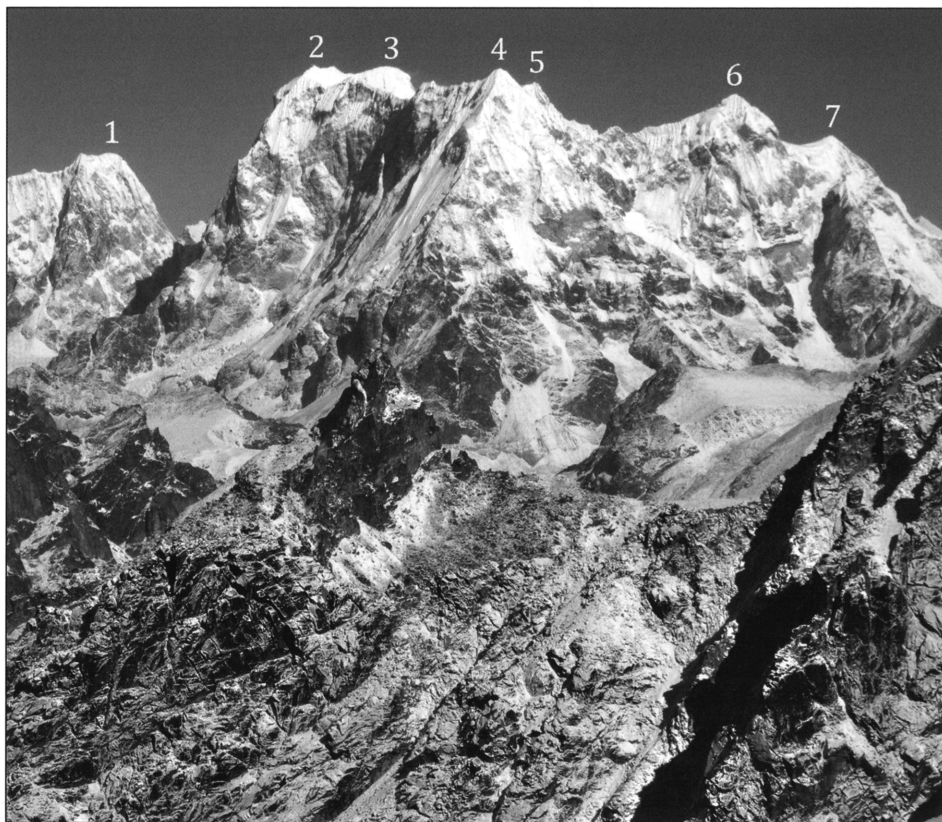


JOBO RINJANG

The alpine-style first ascent of a little-known Nepalese peak.

JOE PURYEAR



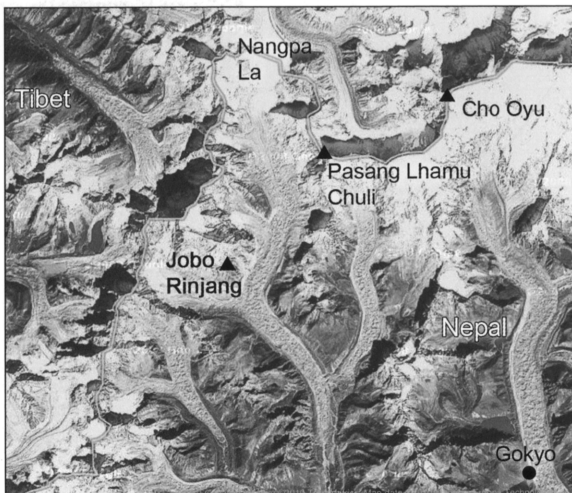
The south and east flanks of the Lunag massif, as seen from Kyajo Ri. Proposed names: (1) Little Lunag, 6,492m; (2) Lunag I, 6,895m; (3) Lunag II, 6,891m; (4) Jobo Rinjang, 6,778m; (5) Lunag III, 6,795m; (6) Lunag IV, 6,781m; (7) Lunag V, 6,550m. Joe Puryear

It was cold and clear on the summit, without a breath of wind. Unlikely conditions, considering where we were. Laid out before us were the iconic peaks of the Nepal Himalaya. Mountains you dream about while growing up. Mountains I had already seen from the valley bottoms. But now, through the lean air above 6,700 meters, I gained a whole new appreciation. Lost were the lush green jungles, the sprawling juniper and rhododendron forests, and the tiny Sherpa

villages sprawled across the hill-sides. From up here it was all raw mountains of ice and rock, and we were the first people to view them from this perch.

It was October 2008, and David Gottlieb and I stood atop Kang Nachugo (6,735m). It was the first time we'd summited an unclimbed peak together in Nepal, and we were beginning to recognize the vast potential that remained, even among these well-explored mountains. In the distance to the north, rugged peaks framed the seemingly endless Tibetan Plateau. Gaurishankar, Menlungste, Cho Oyu, Gyachungkar, Pasang Lhamu Chuli—many peaks we could easily identify. But one monstrous massif stood out, and we had no idea what it was. It was shorter than the surrounding giants, but its bulk and steep vertical relief on all sides were impressive. On its western edge a series of pointy summits jutted along the Nepal-Tibet border. And spurting to the east was a solitary pyramid, connected to the main massif by a knife-edge ridge over two kilometers long.

"What the hell is that?" David exclaimed. I was asking myself the same question. Our desire to identify and explore this peak was now second only to getting off Kang Nachugo safely. Four months later, we'd be back in Nepal.

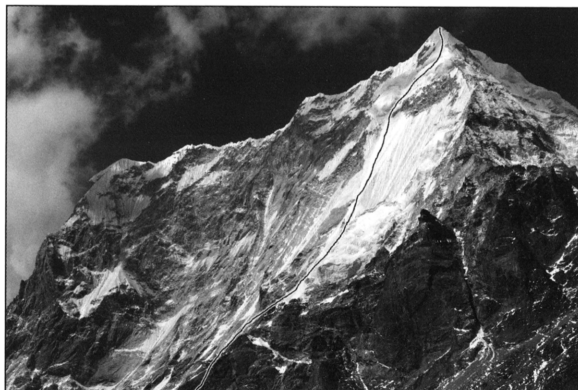


In Nepal there are around 60 unclimbed peaks for which permits can be obtained. Lists of these peaks are widely available. The tricky part is sifting through this information to find worthy independent summits. Many of the "peaks" are small sub-summits or BORs (bumps on a ridge). And, unsurprisingly, many are labeled with the wrong elevations, coordinates, and even names.

We found several different names for the pyramidal mountain we'd seen from Kang Nachugo. After much research, including talking to locals, we concluded that Jobo Rinjang, elevation 6,778 meters, was as close as we were likely to come to a definitive name. More important to us: Although Jobo Rinjang had been attempted at least once (by a Swiss team in October 2008), it was still unclimbed.

In early March we spent three weeks in Nepal acclimatizing for an alpine-style attempt. First we completed a grand trekking loop through the Khumbu region, crossing Renjo La and Cho La, and hitting five points over 5,400 meters. Next we climbed the southwest ridge of Kyajo Ri (6,186m) in a one-week roundtrip from Namche Bazaar. From our high camp on Kyajo Ri, we got a splendid view of Jobo Rinjang, about 18 kilometers to the northwest.

A week later we commenced the two-day trek north from Thame to the remote outpost of Lunag. Old, dilapidated stone huts hinted of perhaps better times. Lunag is the first place where Tibetan traders coming over Nangpa La can find meager shelter and graze their yaks. But we



David Gottlieb and Joe Puryear climbed the 1,700m south face of Jobo Rinjang with one bivouac, high on the face. After two nights on the summit, they descended by approximately the same route. The south ridge (right foreground) and southwest pillar (far left) were attempted by Swiss-Nepali teams in 2008 and 2009, respectively; see *Climbs and Expeditions*. Joe Puryear

found it empty and desolate, as the border between Tibet and Nepal had been temporarily closed.

We spent the next several days exploring this magnificent area. Just to the west of Jobo Rinjang is a string of peaks lining the border with Tibet. Given that the nearby village and the glacier below the south side of the massif are named Lunag, we have proposed that this chain be called the Lunag Massif. The highest peak (6,895m) is on the south end of the chain; this we've dubbed Lunag I. We've called the prominent points farther north Lunag II, III, IV, and V. Jobo Rinjang,

attached to Lunag I by a two-kilometer ridge, rises above the 1.5-kilometer-wide confluence of the Lunag and Nangpa La glaciers.

Nearly all of the Lunag Massif, including Jobo Rinjang, was a chaotic mess of steep, disintegrating rock and precariously perched ice. Only one line seemed the least bit sane: a beautiful swath of ice on the south face of Jobo Rinjang, gaining nearly 1,700 meters.

On April 20 we left the relative comfort of Lunag and headed across the confluence of glaciers—an endless maze of huge, shifting boulders teetering on steep ice walls—toward the foot of Jobo Rinjang. From the moraine, the glacier looked like a war zone, as dust from falling blocks hung in the air like smoke, and explosions boomed across the valley. With our heavy packs, the four-kilometer trek was arduous, but by late afternoon we'd settled onto a small patch of sand in a nook between boulders for a few hours of rest.

Gazing up at Jobo Rinjang, we studied the looming ice cliffs bracketing our proposed line. At one point the behemoth on the right let loose a spectacular show. Cool, it completely missed our route! We guessed the left cliff would drain left. As for the multiple rock bands streaking across the upper route, we assumed—mistakenly—that because they were well above 6,000 meters they would remain frozen and stable.

We could not see any safe bivy site in the middle of the face. Although we felt that we could mitigate the rockfall dangers while moving, we didn't want to risk pitching a tent without shelter. Nor did either of us have the inclination to chop blue ice for several hours for a cramped bivy. Banking on our four weeks of acclimatization, we decided to aim for the top of a hanging glacier high on the face in a single push; we assumed a bench and bergschrund there would provide a safe and comfortable night's rest. But nearly 1,400 meters of calf-burning blue ice stood in our way.



A true alpine start was in order, and so, after only a few hours of anxious sleep, we awoke before midnight. I was first out of camp and began stumbling through huge boul-

ders in the dark. Looking down, I would catch glimpses of David's faint headlamp meandering along the moraine's edge. The moraine gave way to steep, fine scree and then slabby rock, which we cautiously soloed. Eventually we reached a little ledge at the base of the first ice swath, where we donned crampons and watched the sun rise.

It had been a particularly dry winter and spring, and abnormal amounts of ice showed on the high peaks. On Kyajo Ri we had expected the southwest ridge to be an easy snow trek but instead were treated to 12 pitches of alpine ice. Under different conditions, our icy route on Jobo Rinjang might be easier than we found it; on the other hand, we enjoyed the security of good ice screws for protection and belay anchors.

For the first few hours, the climbing was monotonous. Starting at around 45 degrees, the ice quickly ramped up to 55 degrees. I led the first simul-climbing "pitch" of 400 meters, and, after a short break, David swung into the lead. We crested a small roll, and the angle backed off a little as we headed into the gut of the mountain between the two ice cliffs. Suddenly a rock the size of a beer cooler sped past us, sounding like a helicopter as it skimmed over the surface of the ice.

"Holy shit, did you see that?" I yelled.

David's reply was unemotional, a simple "yeah." My mind raced. But quickly I realized he had already understood our situation. Keep going up. We'd get out of danger quicker if we continued up. David turned back to the ice and continued kicking away.

I leaned back from the anchor and studied the route above. All I could see were bands of stacked boulders and blocks. As I followed the rest of David's leading block, I kept my head up, scanning for projectiles so he could concentrate on the climbing. We hugged the steeper ice on the far left of a wide gully, hoping to avoid debris. Several other blocks flew by at a distance, and smaller samples whizzed by our heads. By the time David's block was up, my neck was as tired as my calves.

It was now early evening, and we were level with the base of the hanging glacier. The ice was turning to sn'ice, and protection was becoming harder to find. At times we climbed with no pro between us. Darkness fell as we entered runnels leading through the ice cliffs. I crossed one runnel and used the slot left behind in the snow as my only protection. A fast-moving storm had enveloped the mountain, and soon it started to snow. In a daze I just kept plodding, looking for anyplace we could dig in. I hadn't seen David in over an hour—the darkness, storm, and terrain hid the glow of his headlamp. I had to assume he was still on the other end of the ropes that trailed behind me.

Finally I reached a bergschrund and followed its outer lip until it widened enough that we could excavate a flat bivy site. I hauled in the ropes as David wearily plodded toward me. It was around 11 p.m. We had succeeded in our push.



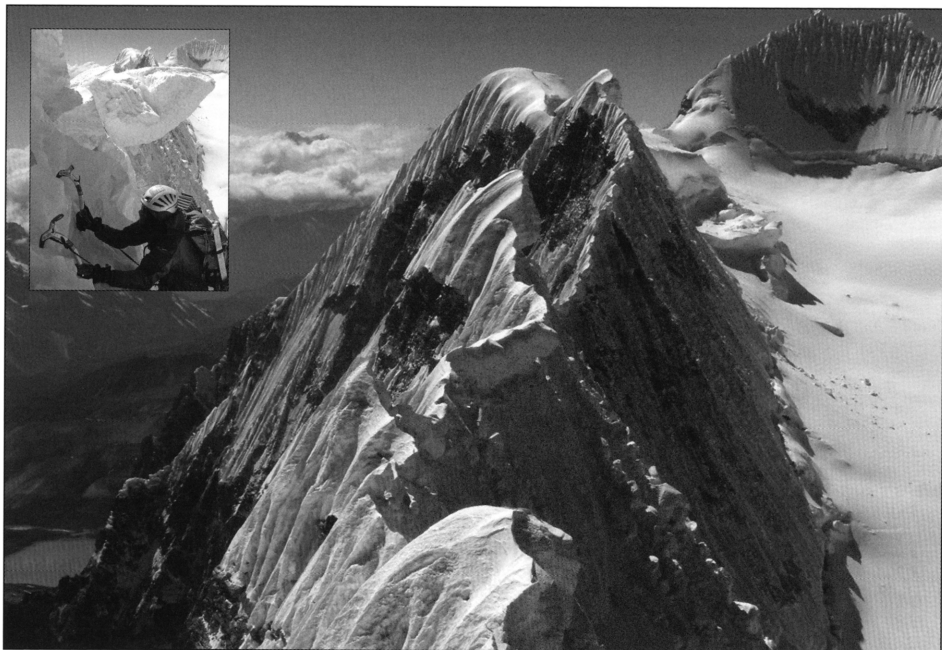
Gottlieb arrives at the bivy (6,500m) at 11 p.m., 21 hours after starting. *Joe Puryear*

Cold, soaked, and completely spent, we dug a small platform and settled in for a long night of melting water. “I’d register that as definitively one of the harder days of my existence,” David murmured through steamy breath. It was still snowing heavily. Toward morning, however, the snow tapered off, and we awoke to clear skies. Our position was exposed, but we were safe now from falling rocks. We slept in and waited until the sun swung around and warmed us. We knew this would be a shorter day—we were only about 300 meters from the top.

In late morning on April 22, David led out from our high perch, moving right and down around the bergschrund. On 45-degree firm snow, we made quick progress until we reached another bergschrund below a fluted headwall. Since no anchor was possible, David launched right up the steeper ground, and we continued to simul-climb with no pro, crossing sugary flutings. Soon, though, the terrain rolled over and David was reeling me onto the summit. As on Kang Nachugo, our partnership and strategies had proved successful. Even better, we had spent 100 of the past 200 days together and were still best friends. We stood on top and took in the surroundings—once again an entirely new vista unfolded.



We reveled in our success, but we were not happy with the idea of descending the dangerous route we’d climbed, and we were keen to explore more of the massif. Our plan now was to descend the west ridge of Jobo Rinjang toward the Lunags, try to link other peaks, and hopefully find a different descent route. We had carried a week’s worth of food and were only on day three away from the Lunag settlement. We pitched our tent right on the summit, the safest and flattest spot we had encountered in a few days.



After a night on top of Jobo Rinjang, Gottlieb and Puryear attempted to traverse the two-kilometer ridge west toward the main Lunag massif, but warm temperatures and fragile cornices turned them back. *Joe Puryear*

The clear weather was holding, but it was cold and windy. Our ultra-light tent was battered all night. The next day we packed and descended toward the Lunags. The ridge was racked with huge cornices, and snow conditions were awful in the warming air. When the way along the ridgeline was no longer feasible, we debated rappelling to the north in hopes of finding a way around.

“Are you sure you want to go down there and pull the ropes?” David asked cautiously.

“Let’s just not rap off anything we don’t want to lead back up,” I replied.

And that’s what happened: After three rappels, we reached another dead end. Before long we were back at the ridge. After half a day of trying to pick our way across the ridge, we had to accept that it was too dangerous in these conditions, and so we returned to the summit of Jobo Rinjang, where we camped for another night on the summit.

Now we had to descend the way we’d come up, which would expose us to rockfall for most of a day. In the morning we downclimbed to the southwest, putting us in line with the gully we had ascended between the two ice cliffs. After several ropelengths we reached a patch of blue ice, where we sank the first of many V-thread rappel anchors. With each V-thread, we pulled the climbing rope through the hole instead of tying tat through it, thus leaving no trace of our descent or ascent.

After 20 rappels we started downclimbing again. The ice was turning to slush, and water ran down the surface. At one point rocks smashed into the terrain around David, nearly wiping him off the face, but he escaped unscathed. Finally down on the moraine, we wearily made our way back to our tiny bivy on the glacier, and the next day commenced the arduous journey back to Lunag. Our desire to explore the world’s unclimbed mountains had strengthened, and our next expedition was already developing in our imaginations.

SUMMARY:

Area: Rolwaling Himal, Nepal

Ascent: Alpine-style first ascent of Jobo Rinjang (6,778m) via the south face (1,700m, 75°), David Gottlieb and Joe Puryear, April 21–24, 2009. The team descended by approximately the line of ascent.

A NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

After 15 years of climbing as often as he could in Alaska, Joe Puryear has turned his focus to unclimbed peaks of the greater Asian ranges. Born in 1973, Puryear lives with his wife in Leavenworth, Washington, where he works in writing, photography, and graphic design. He writes: “I thank the American Alpine Club for giving us the Lyman Spitzer Cutting Edge Award for our climb of Jobo Rinjang. It truly made the difference in helping us follow our dreams of exploration.”



David Gottlieb (left) and Joe Puryear on top. Joe Puryear