



AAC Publications

Cheepaydang, South Face and Southwest Ridge

India, Kumaun Himalaya

In September and October I led a multinational team to the Adi Kailash range of Eastern Kumaun. This massif is wedged between the Kali Ganga, Darma Ganga, and Kuthi Yankti valleys, and between the Nepalese and Tibetan borders. The range contains at least eight peaks exceeding 6,000m. The mountain called Adi Kailash (Little Kailash) is lower, at 5,945m. It is a peak of religious and mythological significance, with close topographic resemblance to holy Mt. Kailash, 110km to the north in Tibet.

The only approach currently permitted by the Indian Mountaineering Foundation and the Uttarakhand state government follows the Mansarovar-Kailash pilgrim trail from Darchula, up the Kali Ganga gorge, then northwest to Kuthi village, Jolingkong base camp, and Parvati lake. Inner Line permits are required. Although a road is slowly being pushed up the gorge, the trek is still over 60km and takes three days.

Prior to 2002, the only known mountaineering in the region had been undertaken by members of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police. The 2014 expedition was the fourth I have organized to this area (see AAJ 2003, 2005, 2007). In 2004, we climbed to within 15m of the sacred summit of Adi Kailash, and in 2006 we climbed the higher parent peak of 6,120m, naming it Ishan Parbat. Several sub-6,000m peaks also were ascended during these expeditions, but by 2014 no other 6,000ers in the range were known to have been climbed.

We established base camp at 3,990m in the Nama Valley, 5km southwest of Kuthi village, and reconnoitered the extensive Nama Glacier cirque. The weather was fine, but conditions on the south faces were abnormally dry. Fierce seracs and icefalls deterred many approaches, and we focused our interest on the mountain known to local Kuthi people as Cheepaydang (Peacock Peak). Cheepaydang has three summits, the central being the highest, with a knife-edge ridge linking them and a tremendous 1,000m north wall. Above the Nama Glacier on the south side, a slanting snow-ice couloir offered the safest line of weakness.

On October 2-3, Michael Page, Gordon Scott, and I ascended the gully system, finding snow/ice to 60° and mixed climbing to Scottish IV. We made a summit camp/bivouac at 6,160m on the crest of the southwest ridge. On the 4th we made a short ridge traverse (AD) to the summit, which we measured at 6,220m. We descended the gully system the following night, making eight 60m rappels from ice threads to gain easier ground, and returned to base camp on the 6th. The overall difficulty was D.

Cheepaydang is estimated to be the second-highest summit in the range. The highest is known as Brammah Parbat (ca 6,321m), 2km north of Cheepaydang. To the south of the Nama Glacier lie beautiful and difficult Rajay Jue (6,178m) and the snow massif of Peak 6,196m. South again are the Sela peaks (named Yirjenagung on early maps). These form an impressive wall of 6,000m-plus summits with a pyramidal isolated peak to their southwest. The Sela peaks would be best approached from the Darma Valley to the west, but at present Indian authorities do not permit access via this route, even though the Sela area lies outside the Inner Line and in open trekking country.

Apart from administrative complexity, the main deterrent to further development is the bad quality of the underlying rock, a bewildering layering of compressed mudstones tilted to a near-vertical stratification. Nonetheless, this is a beautiful and remote area for exploratory climbing.

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Images

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