



## **Kawagebo Range: Success on Cogar Lakpa**

China, Yunnan Province

**In February, after making the first ascent of Chola II in northwestern Sichuan (see report [here](#)), Marcos Costa, Kyle Dempster, and I headed to the Kawagebo Range, following up on a reconnaissance that Marcos and I had made in 2014. This range, also referred to as Meili Xueshan or Kang Karpo, lies in the far northwest corner of Yunnan province, forming the border with the Tibet Autonomous Region, and is most famous for the beautifully fluted, triangular peak of Mianzimu (6,054m).**

This area's highest summit, unclimbed Kawagebo (6,740m), is the second-most sacred mountain in the pantheon of Tibetan Buddhism, after Kailas, and in 1991 was the scene of an infamous episode in the history of mountaineering and Sino-Tibetan relations. The Chinese authorities granted climbing permission to a joint Chinese-Japanese expedition, over the strenuous objections of the Tibetan community. The matter was resolved only when an avalanche took the lives of all 17 of the members, and the peak has been closed for the past 15 years.

Hidden far to the north end of the chain is the second-highest peak, Cogar Lapka (6,516m GPS; attempted twice by Americans, AAJ 1993 and 1994). Joined by Garrett Bradley (USA), we began our approach from 2,100m, near the Mekong River—not for nothing is this known as the Deep Gorge Country. We spent our first morning in discussion with the villagers and local police at the last settlement, where Garrett's excellent Mandarin and skillful diplomacy saw us through. We then hiked steep and little-used trails through thick, mixed forests of bamboo and conifers, camping for the first night by the river. On the second day we moved above treeline, crossing summer yak pastures and unused settlements, and sleeping high on a small, icy glacier.

The third day of approach involved soloing up loose snow and ice gullies to 50°, with significant stonefall threat, to gain a 5,500m col between Nairi Denka (6,379m) to the southeast and Peak 6,260m (estimate from Google Earth) to the north. From there we gained a further 200m by climbing north along the ridge toward Peak 6,260m, but then had to downclimb and rappel 150m to the glacier below the east face of Cogar Lapka, finally placing a camp at approximately 5,650m.

The following morning was clear. We moved rapidly to climb the northern edge of the glacier basin to the col between Peak 6,260m and Cogar Lapka, with a view to climbing the upper east ridge. (None of the possible east face routes was remotely safe.) Getting to this col (ca 6,050m) required climbing ice to 60°, and we were greeted on top by howling winds and a descending whiteout, which drove us back to camp.

The next morning was again clear, but since Garrett was too tired and Kyle was too tired of the constant objective dangers, only Marcos and I left camp. We regained our high point and continued up the minor cornices and occasional crevasses of the east ridge. The dramatic views to Peak 6,260m and over the Kawagebo Range soon were blotted out by incoming clouds, which denied us the hoped-for views into southeastern Tibet.

The terrain pushed us to the north side of the ridge and into deeper snow, where Marcos opted to cross a bergschrund with an extremely athletic move through an overhanging ice bulge, and was then left trying to haul my sorry carcass up this feature while anchored only by his legs sunk into the snow (causing him to contemplate the value of the belay knife). This turned out to be the last difficulty,

beyond which a final slog up a low-angle ridge brought us to the summit crest, which we mapped out by braille in the whiteout, recording 6,516m by GPS. To our knowledge this is the first summit climbed in the entire Kawagebo Range.

The descent was uneventful, a snow stake taking the teeth out of the overhanging bulge. The storm abated above the col, giving us evening views of Peak 6,260m, and night fell as we were V-threading down the ice face below the col in renewed snowfall. Kyle and Garrett shone some light to guide us in. The next morning was wildly windy as we climbed back out of the glacier basin and descended the stonefall-threatened face to the glacier. We slept that night in the yak pastures at 4,000m, walked out the next day, and thawed out with a few days of spring rock climbing in the valley floors.

Bruce Normand, China

## Images



Unclimbed Peak 6,260m from above, seen from the east ridge of Cogar Lapka.



Bruce Normand on the windswept east ridge of Cogar Lapka, with unclimbed Peak 6,260m behind.



Bruce Normand on the upper east ridge of Cogar Lapka, with the summit almost in sight.



View south along the Kawagebo Range, with Kawagebo itself at left.



Unclimbed Nairi Denka (6,379m), viewed from the shoulder of Peak 6,260m.

## Article Details

Author	Bruce Normand
Publication	AAJ
Volume	58
Issue	90
Page	364
Copyright Date	2016
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions