



AAC Publications

Recon: Nepal's Wild, Wild West

Mountain Exploration Along the Northwest Frontier

FAR NORTHWESTERN NEPAL has, until recently, been the area of the country—and indeed of the Himalaya in general—least explored by mountaineers, with the exception of parts of Bhutan and of Arunachal Pradesh (Assam Himalaya) in India. From the western fringes of the Dolpo region westward to the village of Hilsa, south of Gurla Mandhata (7,694 meters), the Nepal-Tibet frontier runs about 225 kilometers. Along or close to this border are approximately 93 peaks over 6,000 meters, of which, as of early 2019, 36 had been climbed and 57 remained unclimbed. The peaks between 5,750 meters and 6,000 meters (many of which are extremely interesting and more technical than the higher mountains) are so numerous that I have not tried to count them.

The overview that follows reflects my experience from researching and undertaking 12 expeditions and travels in Nepal's wild west, from my first trip in 2007 to Kanti Himal, at the east end of this zone, to an expedition to the Takphu Himal in the far northwest in 2018. The area covered is confined to the border mountains of Nepal's Karnali Pradesh province, and specifically to the northern districts of Mugu and Humla. With a few exceptions, most of these peaks lie on the frontier with Tibet.

This article does not include Dolpo, which lies to the east of Mugu, nor Jumla further south, in which lies Kanjiroba and which had been visited in the 1960s by prolific explorer John Tyson and others. Nor does it cover Dharchula, further west, which was visited by Tyson and Bill Murray, and in which lie the 7,000-meter Api and Saipal peaks, both climbed in the 1960s. Much more has been written of these areas than the frontier mountains 50 kilometers or so farther north.

The initial Western exploration of this region involved various parties in the mid-1800s and early 1900s searching for the source of the Brahmaputra River (Yarlung Tsangpo), which rises in Humla and flows north and then east and south some 2,900 kilometers through Tibet, India, and Bangladesh. (See Section 5 below.) Afterward, very few visitors arrived, even after Nepal was opened to mountaineering in the early 1950s. The region was very hard to reach, and without any 8,000-meter peaks and few 7,000ers to attempt, mountaineers focused elsewhere throughout the 1950s, '60s, and '70s.

The first climbing expedition to the region was in 1983, when a Japanese women's team approached Kubi Kangri from Tibet. Nepal opened more peaks to foreign climbers in the 1990s and early 2000s, but only a few teams from Japan responded, as described below. The Maoist insurgency from 1996 to 2006 kept most foreigners out of the area. In 2007, I made my first of many trips. Nepal opened 104 new peaks to climbing in 2014, about a third of which were in the west, bringing more climbers to this area, though the numbers are still paltry compared with the well-known mountains farther east.

All of the mountains mentioned below are, at present, completely closed for climbing from the Tibetan (north) side. They only can be accessed from Nepal. A list of open peaks is available from the Nepal Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation ("the ministry"); permits are required to attempt mountains over 5,800 meters.

Access to these mountains starts with getting to either Simikot or Gamgadhi. The jump-off point for the first three sections below is the township of Gamgadhi, which now can be reached by road, at least when not blocked by landslides, or by air in a Twin Otter plane flying from Nepalgunj, on the India border, to Rara Lake (a.k.a. Talcha). Travelers then proceed on foot toward Mugu, three and a

half days away, following the Mugu Karnali Nadi east and then north, passing the confluence with the Namlang Nadi flowing westward from the Dolpo. For sections 4 through 8 below, approaches begin with a flight to Simikot.

The sections in this article are arranged from southeast to northwest along the frontier. All heights for permitted peaks are quoted from the Nepal ministry's list; other elevations are from the official HMG-Finn 1:50,000 map series. With some exceptions, I have confined the climbs described here to first ascents or first attempts. I have used the Tibetan word "La" for mountain passes. "Khola" in Nepal is the word for valley or river. "Lek" is the common name given to subranges between the high Himalaya and middle hills in Nepal.

SECTION 1: YALA LA TO KOJI LA

KANTI HIMAL (a.k.a. RONGLA RANGE IN TIBET)

29KM ALONG THE BORDER; 3 CLIMBED 6,000M PEAKS; 14 UNCLIMBED 6,000M PEAKS

This sector is attainable from Mugu (from the west) by mule trail over the Chyargo La. The traveller should head east some six kilometers south of Mugu village, into the Chham Khola and over the Chyargo La (5,150m). This is a particularly wild area that can only be accessed over the Chyargo La post-monsoon—or indeed during the monsoon. A longer journey would be from Shey Gompa to the southeast; this certainly would not be possible in early spring. Both sides of the Yala La are within Shey Phoksundo National Park.

Just north of Yala La (5,414m) is unclimbed Yara Chuli (6,236m, 29°41'22"N, 82°49'44"E), now an open peak on the Tibet frontier. (The Tibetan name is Sur Lung Kangri.) The ministry lists it as being in the "Palchung Hamga Himal" of Dolpo and suggests a caravan route from Shey, but such ministry approach routes largely should be disregarded.

Westward two kilometers from Yara Chuli is an unclimbed 6,293m peak on the true left bank of a major icefall descending from Tibet into Nepal's Chyandi Khola. On the true right bank of that glacier, at 29°43'09"N, 82°47'55"E, is unclimbed Changdi (6,623m, Tibetan name Lalung; the Finn map marks this peak as Chandi without a "g"). This peak should not to be confused with the Chandi Himal, 100 kilometers farther west. To access Changdi, an open peak, from the south, a formidable icefall must be overcome. Routes on the south face look uninviting but possible. Other-wise, the east ridge from the Tibet border, above the icefall, would certainly be feasible if you could get there. Lalung (Changdi) was first photographed from the Tibet side in 1997 by a Japanese expedition making a reconnaissance of the highest peak in the Rongla Range, known as Kaqur Kangri (6,859m) to Tibetans.

But before we get to Kaqur Kangri, which lies four kilometers to the northwest of Lalung, there is another unclimbed border peak on the Nepal open list, close to the west of Lalung, named Kaipuchonam (6,329m, 29°43'32"N, 82°47'00"E). The Kaipuchonam Khola running up to it from the Chyandi Khola seems unexplored. A further two unclimbed 6,000-meter peaks (6,093m and 6,218m) form the border just east of Kaqur Kangri.

In October 2002, a Japanese expedition led by Toyoji Wada approached from Tibet and made the first ascent of Kaqur Kangri (6,859m) via its east ridge. This peak is also known as Zazi Kangri (Chinese) or Kanti Himal (Nepalese). Kanti Himal is an open peak in Nepal, although quite technical and threatened by serac hazard, and it is unclimbed as yet from the Nepal (south) side. A reconnaissance was done by Sadao Yoshinaga's expedition in autumn 1998, but no safe route could be ascertained on the 1,800-meter south face. (Note: On Google Earth, Kaqur Kangri is incorrectly labeled Kubi Kangri, which is a peak far to the west in the Changla Himla; it is also incorrectly stated as such on Wikipedia.)

A kilometer to the northwest of Kaqur Kangri is another unclimbed peak now on Nepal's open list named Myung Thang Kang (6,449m). This peak is hard to attain from the Mayonithan Khola, to the immediate south of Kaqur Kangri, and is probably best approached from the Koji Khola, leading up to the Koji La, farther west.

Onward to the west are three not particularly prominent unclimbed 6,000-meter peaks, the most interesting of which is a 6,014-meter peak on a promontory just a kilometer from Kaqur Kangri's 1,300-meter west face. The next permitted peak westward is Takla Kang (6,276m, 29°45'40"N, 82°41'43"E). Again, the caravan route suggested by the Nepal ministry to access this peak, via the Takla Khola, is incorrect or at least a convoluted and long way around. It is easier from the Koji Khola.

The border now runs a little north and northeast toward the Koji La (5,495m, 29°49'35"N, 82°42'52"E). There is another prominent unclimbed 6,273-meter peak and then a further two unnamed peaks (6,030m and 6,095m). We then arrive at Koji Kang North (6,275m and on the open list) and Koji South (6,159m). These lie on either side of the Koji La and were both climbed in 1997 by the Japanese, led by Yoshinaga, in pursuit of a route to Kaqur Kangri, prior to its first ascent in 2002. The routes taken were the obvious ones running up from the pass in opposite directions.

The Koji La was an important trade route in old times between Mugu and the Changtang ("north country") of Tibet. It is now infrequently used except, we were told, by smugglers. I led a trip to Mugu and the Koji Khola in 2007 with Nick Colton, Luke Hughes, and Phil Wickens, trying to find a route to Rongla Kangri (see more on this peak below). We climbed a peak just under 6,000 meters near the pass leading to Tibet's upper Rongla Glacier, which had never been visited before.

SECTION 2: KOJI LA TO NAMJA LA

KANTI HIMAL (a.k.a. RONGLA RANGE IN TIBET)

31KM ALONG THE BORDER; 9 CLIMBED 6,000M PEAKS; 3 UNCLIMBED 6,000M PEAKS

The Namja Khola is the main valley route that runs north from Mugu village and serves all the peaks of the Koji Khola, the Kojichuwa (Kojichwa) Khola, and on up to the border at the Namja La (4,907m). All the main summits lie to the east of this khola, though to the immediate west, at 29°44'46"N, 82°28'20"E, is a natural rock arch that was first photographed by Ed Douglas on a trip with me in 2009. In 2018 a team led by Anna Torretta attempted to climb the arch but without success (see p.309).

From the Koji La (5,495m), the Tibet frontier runs northwest, then west, and then back north. The major peak on the border close to the Koji La is Rongla Kangri (6,647m). This peak gives its name to the whole range, from a Tibetan's point of view, and its main summit lies completely within Tibet. Rongla Kangri's south summit lies on the Nepal border and is itself a permitted peak in Nepal now named Kanti East (6,516m). The first ascent of both Rongla peaks was made by Bruce Normand, solo, in November 2018 by the northeast face of Kanti East and thus by the linking ridge from the south summit to the main summit of Rongla Kangri.

The next 6,000-meter peak that forms the border, Peak 6,275m, also was climbed by Normand. Immediately west again is a smaller, unclimbed summit (6,272m), followed by another summit soloed by Normand in 2018: Churau (6,419m, 29°50'06"N, 82°38'25"E). This mountain is incorrectly named Kanti on the HMG-Finn map.

Any traveller who remained in the main Namja Khola north of the entrance to the Koji Khola would arrive in only three kilometers at the entrance of Kojichuwa Khola, a remarkable valley with some serious objectives. In 2008, Spanish climbers reconnoitered Kojichuwa Chuli via the Kojichuwa La

(5,550m), and the next spring two of them and several others returned to attempt Mugu Chuli, which they found too threatened by seracs and avalanches.

I had done a recce here with Ed Douglas and Nick Colton in spring 2009, just after the second Spanish visit, and climbed a sub-6,000m peak on the khola's true right bank. Also on the true right bank, at 29°49'10"N, 82°36'59"E, is spectacular unclimbed Peak 6,047m and another peak about a kilometer northeast at 6,137 meters.

After this trip, we shared with British mountaineer Mick Fowler a safe technical line we had seen on the west face of Mugu Chuli (previously called Gojung, but Mugu Chuli is preferred). This is the 6,310-meter peak some three kilometers further north again from Peak 6,137m. Mick and Dave Turnbull climbed the 1,100-meter face in 2011, descending to the north over a peak called Kojichuwa South (6,264m) and thus making a second first ascent. (This is now a permitted peak.)

North again is another inspiring and unnamed mountain (Peak 6,259m), also unclimbed. Finally comes the permitted but unclimbed Kojichuwa Chuli (6,439m), which lies a kilometer north again. This was attempted via the northwest ridge by a team led by the prolific explorer Tamotsu Ohnishi in 2009 and then by another Japanese team in 2010; the latter reached a northern foresummit but did not continue along the corniced ridge to the main top.

Between here and the Namja La the frontier ridge is of no great interest, more or less part of the Tibet plateau, with no peaks attaining the 6,000-meter mark. The nearest thing to it, six kilometers south of the pass along the frontier, is a mountain called Kaptang (5,965m). This is a permitted peak first climbed in 2009 by Ohnishi and two others, via the north face.

The Namja La (4,907m) is a route much used by Bhotia (Tibetan) traders, probably the busiest pass until you reach the Lapche La far to the west. The author saw 80 laden yaks arriving into Mugu in a single day in 2007. Some 13 kilometers into Tibet was an area that trucks could reach and where transshipment onto pack animals occurred. Now vehicles can get as far as the pass and some way down into Nepal, but not all the way down to Mugu. At Mugu itself, being at just 3,000 meters altitude, yaks go no lower and mules, horses, and sheep take over as pack animals. This 3,000-meter line is approximately as low as yaks tend to go all along northern Nepal and therefore as far as most Tibetan traders go. Thus the "Bhotia line."

SECTION 3: NAMJA LA TO KANG LA

KANGLA HIMAL

17KM ALONG THE BORDER; 2 CLIMBED 6,000M PEAKS

The Kangla Himal boasts just two 6,000-meter peaks (counting one away from the actual border.) It is a wild area of the Tibet frontier oriented mostly west-east. The first reconnaissance was Sadao Yoshinaga's trip in 1998 following his team's recce of Kanti Himal's south face. North of Mugu, they passed northwest into the Take (Takya) Khola and over a col at 5,100 meters into the Gorakh watershed. They continued to the Kang La itself but not further into Gorakh Himal except a little way up the Kangla Khola. They descended past the grazing grounds of Bholbihan and to Nepka, the only significant village in the Take Khola. It seems they were the first foreigners into the village. Here the Take Khola becomes the Loti Karnali Nadi, and two days down from here it joins the main mule trail from Jumla to Simikot.

In the area just north of the 5,100-meter col mentioned above are two sub-6,000-meter peaks that were climbed by a German expedition (Nettekoven, et al) in October 2017. These were called Sunkala Topi (5,865m, unofficial name) and Lek Fett (5,767m).

The sole 6,000-meter peak on the frontier in this sector is Kangla Kang (6,130m, called Pratibandhit Lek by the German expedition), which lies at 30°00'17"N, 82°25'15"E. I had attempted to get to this peak in spring 2015, along with Phil Bartlett, Nick Colton, Ed Douglas, Crag Jones, and Skip Novak, but encountered the worst spring snow for at least a decade and could not get farther than the Bholbihan Khola (see Section 4 below). In late May 2017, I returned and set up an ABC on the Kang La (5,358m, 30°00'49"N, 82°24'19"E) and attempted the northwest ridge to 5,700 meters but was defeated by endless poor weather, snow, and wind. That fall the German expedition completed our route.

An impressive nearby peak in this sector is Bhandar Lek (6,024m, 29°49'26"N, 82°17'50"E), east of the Loti Karnali Nadi. Bhandar Lek is an unofficial name that appears on Google Earth and is unlikely to be the local name.

In December 2016, American climber Jack Bynum walked solo from Simikot without porter assistance via the Margor La to Nepka (the same route taken by the author in 2013; see below) and on to a base camp near the foot of the mountain's north-northeast spur. From here to the summit was about 2,500 vertical meters. Bynum soloed the peak, often exposed and quite technical, in three days and traversed the mountain by rappelling nearly 1,500 meters down the southwest face, landing back in the Loti Karnali Nadi, the last two days without water due to lack of fuel. This was a very notable ascent.

SECTION 4: KANG LA TO BHOLBIHAN ICEFALL

GORAKH HIMAL

18KM ALONG THE BORDER; 0 CLIMBED 6,000M PEAKS; 5 UNCLIMBED 6,000M PEAKS

This is the least accessible of the northwestern Himals. There are two access points. One is via the Kangla Khola, which would bring the traveller to only one of the main summits, Gorakh Kang, and is unlikely to yield a safe route on that peak in any event. The other is via the Bholbihan Khola (see below).

Starting at the Kang La (5,358m), the next border peak two kilometers west is Ngomodingding (6,133m). It is unclimbed, not on the permitted list, and with a reasonable route only from the Tibet side. This has been referred to as Kangla II, but that is incorrect. The mountain's name is Tibetan and was referred to by Swedish geographer Sven Hedin during his travels in Tibet from 1906 to 1908.

Some four kilometers further west is Gorakh Kang (6,254m), unclimbed and on the permit list. Although it gives its name to the range, it is by a short margin *not* the highest peak in the Gorakh Himal; that honor goes to Asajya Tuppa (see below). Gorakh Kang's Tibetan name is Absi, again mentioned by Hedin. As this peak is not accessible from Tibet, it would have to be tackled via the icefall at the head of the Kangla Khola and then up the west face, or else via the same face from the Bholbihan Khola.

All other peaks in the Gorakh Himal can only be accessed by way of the Bholbihan Khola. The author and others made the first reconnaissance into this khola in 2013. The route to this and all points west of here is via Simikot and its airstrip, which is reached from Nepalgunj by Twin Otter plane. From Simikot, the Karnali River is followed and thus into the Loti Karnali Nadi to Nepka village. We were the second foreign party to visit Nepka, after Yoshinaga in 1998, and thus the first Westerners there. This is an extremely poor region with few porters available; the men that may be hired likely will be very badly equipped.

From Simikot to the mouth of the Bholbihan with mules is an eight-day trek through, at times, some fine primary forest (although it should be said that deforestation is a real problem in Nepal, whether in or out of a national park). The Bholbihan itself is impossible to access with mules, and even with a

few porters from Nepka the going in 2013 was extremely taxing over boulders covered in lichen and roots and through thick thorn bushes. Once through these difficulties, the valley opens into fairly easy going, and after 14 kilometers you reach the snout of the Bholbihan Glacier.

At this base camp, a cwm emanates from the northeast and a view can be had of the wide south face of the next 6,000-meter peak (and highest of the range): Asajya Tuppa (6,265m). This is unclimbed and on the permitted list. Its Tibetan name is Muchung-Jungu. There is a col at about 5,400 meters at the base of the mountain's southeast ridge, giving rise to a glacial basin within Tibet; this basin links with the col to the east marking the head of the Kangla Khola, mentioned above. From these border cols, Asajya and Gorakh could possibly be climbed.

Asajya has a west peak (unnamed) at 6,055 meters, and two kilometers on again is a peak at 6,088 meters (HMG-Finn map height) that I unofficially named "False Gorakh" because it has been called Gorakh incorrectly on some maps. Its Tibetan name is Muchung-Tseung. This brings us to the Bholbihan icefall and the west end of the Gorakh Himal and thus to the east end of the Changla Himal.

SECTION 5: BHOLBIHAN ICEFALL TO CHANG LA

CHANGLA HIMAL

38KM ALONG THE BORDER; 4 CLIMBED 6,000M PEAKS; 15 UNCLIMBED 6,000M PEAKS

The two peaks immediately west of the Bholbihan icefall are firstly the unnamed Peak 6,198m and then Langtachen (6,284m). Neither is on the permitted list, and both are unclimbed. It would be a convoluted but possible journey to reach Langtachen's north face, which is in Tibet, via the Bholbihan icefall. In the post-monsoon of 2012, the author, along with Phil Bartlett, Nick Colton, and Ed Douglas, tried to get to the west face of this peak via the Luruppya Khola. This was reached from Simikot via the lower Dojam Khola, from where the rest of the Changla range is accessed. The Luruppya was probably the most beautiful valley we had ever visited in Nepal, heavily forested with great oaks, wild and magical. After some days this brought us to Langtachen's west face, on which we were disappointed to find no reasonably safe route.

The whole of this section along the Changla Himal and the Chandi Himal further west comprise the headwaters of the Yarlung Tsangpo (which becomes the Brahmaputra as it flows into India). Discovering the exact source for this mighty river impelled various foreign expeditions to roam southwestern Tibet as early as the mid-1800s, and the approximate source was known by 1900.

In 1906, Sven Hedin accomplished possibly the most scientific study of the source by measuring flows at the Kubi Tsangpo's confluence with the Chemayungdung Chu, some 12 kilometers northwest of present-day Laru township. Hedin found the largest flow was from the Kubi Tsangpo, originating from the Changla Himal (Kubi Kangri), and he named this as the source of the Yarlung Tsangpo. Nevertheless, the Chemayungdung Chu (river) is a longer stream by some 30 kilometers, originating in the Chandi Himal (Angsi Glacier) and is backed up by Tibetan tradition as the source, which the Kubi Kangri glaciers are not. Therefore, despite its lesser flow, the longer Chemayungdung Chu is now the accepted source of the Yarlung Tsangpo, being the furthest point upstream from the estuary in the Bay of Bengal. (The most concise work on this whole matter, discussing whether a river's source is defined by length, flow, or tradition, was written by the Indian ascetic and explorer Swami Pranavananda as a result of extensive travels in the region in 1936 and '37.)

But we diverge from our border travels. The range now bends north from Langtachen with the border passing over three unnamed and unclimbed peaks (6,202m, 6,122m, and 6,223m) before landing on Gave Ding (6,521m, 30°07'32"N, 82°09'56"E). Hedin gave the name Gave Ting to a nearby peak, but this lies four kilometers to the east and entirely in Tibet.

In 2011, along with Nick Colton and Ed Douglas, I attempted Gave Ding after making the first recce into the south fork of the Lachama Khola (off the Chuwa Khola, the main drag to the Chang La and thus into Tibet). This south fork took us into the unknown country to the south of Gave Ding and then to the Luruppya La (5,200m), linking to the Luruppya Khola, mentioned above, which we subsequently explored. We attempted Gave Ding's south ridge via a steep couloir gaining the ridge but were forced back by bad weather at around 6,000 meters.

The first ascent of Gave Ding was by Mick Fowler and Paul Ramsden in 2015 by the north face. This is probably the most impressive climb attained in the whole area to date—more technical than either Jack Bynum's route up Bhandar Lek or indeed Fowler's fine route on Mugu Chuli. There was some 1,500 meters of climbing over five days on very steep mixed ground, followed by a day of rappelling. They rightly received a Piolet d'Or for this climb. Another quite distinct 6,045-meter unclimbed peak forms part of the long west ridge of Gave Ding.

Kubi Kangri (6,721m, Nepali name Lachama Chuli and Chinese name Kubi Dongdong) is the next peak to the north and the second-highest covered in this article, after Kaqur Kangri. This was the goal of the 1983 all-women's Japanese expedition who were the earliest visitors to the Lachama Khola and the north side of Gave Ding. At that time, this peak was misidentified, due to earlier maps, as Changla peak, which is in fact up near the Chang La itself. The Japanese were unsuccessful, and it has to be said to their credit that the Nepal side of the range hereabouts is unrelentingly steep with no obvious good routes.

Kubi Kangri's only ascent was made in 2007, from the Tibet side, by a Japanese expedition led by Atsushi Senda and Toyoshi Wada. (This is the trip that also made a reconnaissance of Langtachen and an attempt on Gorakh Kang/Absi). The Kubi Kangri ascent was by a straightforward route up the southeast face and east ridge. The peak is now on Nepal's permitted list along with its northern summit, Lachama North (6,628m), which is still unclimbed.

The border carries on north for another kilometer to a prominent unnamed and unlisted peak at 6,581 meters. From here to the important trading pass of Chang

La, the peaks are all unclimbed and difficult of access on the Nepal side, easier on the Tibet side. The border first heads west then northwest, with some seven unnamed 6,000-meter peaks: Peak 6,233m and then a significant peak of 6,506m, followed by 6,391m, 6,122m, 6,210m, and 6,133m, this latter at 30°13'29"N, 82°07'39"E. The border range is then uninteresting for about five kilometers before passing over Peak 6,222m and landing on Changla (6,563m, a.k.a. Chema Yungdung) and finally onto Changla's distinct west summit at 6,162 meters.

Changla was also explored by the Japanese women's expedition of 1983 and then visited in autumn 1998 by Tomatsu Ohnishi. His six-man team made the first ascent of Changla's west summit via the north ridge and west ridge. In late September 2010, Changla's main summit was climbed by another Japanese team, led by Hirofumi Kabayashi, from the north.

SECTION 6: CHUWA KHOLA TO LIMI VALLEY

NYALU LEK (HIMAL)

40KM SPAN; 6 CLIMBED 6,000M PEAKS; 9 UNCLIMBED 6,000M PEAKS

We now momentarily diverge from the Tibet frontier to look at the Nyalu Lek, a large group of mountains about halfway between Simikot, to the south, and the border to the north, along with associated peaks to the west, all the way to Ardang (a.k.a. Chyoro Ri) on the south bank of the Limi Valley. Geographically, rather than politically, this is the main Himalayan divide. It is truly arid, and anywhere to the north of the Nyalu La (30°09'48"N, 81°42'26"E) is Trans-Himalayan in nature.

The closest 6000er to the west of the Chuwa Khola, approached by the Lor Khola, is a peak called Chhamsacka (6,246m), which lies just 16 kilometers north of Simikot and was photographed from the east by the author in 2011 from Gave Ding. I then did a recce of it from the west (via the Hepka Khola) in 2015. The first ascent was in autumn 2016 by Becky Coles and Simon Verspeak via a fine route on the east ridge. Some fixed rope and tent platforms were found by them from an unknown previous attempt. (They heard another name for the peak, Lasarmu La, which sounds rather more like the pass to the north of the mountain, running into the Thanmuche Khola on the Hepka side.) Immediately west is fine unclimbed Peak 6,028m. The Hepka Khola is the next south-to-north valley west of Simikot, and it is surprising to me that no climbers seemed to have travelled farther up this valley than Hepka village prior to 2015, when I did my reconnaissance. This khola would give access to Peak 6,028m and to the south side of Nyalu Lek itself.

The north side of the Nyalu Lek, which is much more glaciated than the south and has better potential climbing routes, can be accessed either via the Nying La (5,448m, 30°13'29"N, 81°53'07"E), again off the Chuwa Khola, thus going counter-clockwise from Simikot, or over the Nyalu La, thus going clockwise. Both approaches end up at the snout of the Nyalu Glacier in the upper Nyalu Khola.

Looking south from above the Nying La, you can see Peak 6,065m, which a French team climbed by the south face in autumn 2018 and unofficially named Phasang. South from there are two peaks at 6,084 meters and 6,022 meters. In September 2017 a Japanese team climbed the latter from the west and called it Lore Peak for its proximity to Lore La; they measured the altitude at 6,080 meters. The east end of the main Nyalu ridge is Peak 6,150m and then Nyalu Lek itself (6,265m), the highest of the range. Some two kilometers westward, fine Nying Himal (6,140m) sits at the far west end of the group. All these are unclimbed and unlisted.

There are three more unclimbed 6,000ers to the west of the Nyalu (Nying) Glacier: Peaks 6,098m, 6,010m, and 6,053m. Also in this area, Peak 6,194m was climbed by the French team in 2018 via the southwest face and west ridge, and was unofficially named Limi Koti.

The last two peaks accessed from here have both been climbed; both are just north of the Nyalu Khola. The first is Aichyn (a.k.a. Ashvin, 6,055m), which was climbed by a Japanese team in very early September 2015. French guide Paulo Grobel, who had got to know the area well, and his party were en route to do just the same thing and met the Japanese returning. Disappointed, they made the second ascent of the mountain (also via the west ridge) three weeks later. The day before, they made the first ascent of Aichyn North (6,025m), only just south of the Chandi Himal (Section 7).

There is one 6,000-meter peak to the west of the Nyalu La, and this is Ardang (6,034m), which is on the permitted list and as yet unclimbed. Paulo Grobel had designs on this peak in 2013. His group made a reconnaissance of the Phupharka peaks, just west of the Nyalu La, and had wanted to climb Aichyn that year but were thwarted by heavy spring snow. Instead they headed across the Phupharka country and over into the Limi Valley to Halji monastery and back. They hoped to climb Ardang during the return leg of this interesting journey, but bad weather persisted.

In autumn 2017, Mark Bielby and Emily Ward attempted Ardang without success, but did climb a nearby peak below 6,000 meters.

SECTION 7: CHANG LA TO LAPCHE LA

CHANDI HIMAL (GANGLUNG IN TIBET)

40KM ALONG THE BORDER; 2 CLIMBED 6,000M PEAKS; 9 UNCLIMBED 6,000M PEAKS

We are back now on the Tibet frontier. This region is very dry and windy—in essence the traveller is on the Tibetan Plateau, at only a little less than 5,000 meters, anywhere west of the Chang La or north of

the Nyalu La.

In fact, this Tibetan-feeling area of Nepal once officially lay in Tibet. Maps of the Survey of India in 1930 show the border from Changla to Nalakankar drawn some 18 kilometers farther south than today's frontier (where the Nyalu Lek range lies). Early maps gave the name Changla to the mountain in the position of today's Kubi Kangri (that is, south of today's Changla), and Nalakankar to a peak within the Takphu Himal, south of present-day Nalakankar (Section 8). In 1961, the border demarcation agreed between China and Nepal drew the line farther north, and eventually the Nepalese opened two peaks to climbers along the new frontier, using the new names Changla (Section 5) and Nalakankar, thus reinforcing that they controlled access to this area and not the Chinese.

But let us continue westward along today's frontier. Just west of the Chang La are two unclimbed, unnamed peaks of 6,030 meters and 6,254 meters. The next peak is the highest in the Chandi Himal—not Chandi itself but Kananu Pukari (6,256m, Tibetan name Ganglung Kangri). Less than a kilometer south of it is another unnamed peak (6,171m). Then, four kilometers west on the border, is Chandi itself (6,142m). This unclimbed peak is on the permit list and lies north of the Nin Khola, which runs parallel to the border. If we continue along the frontier, there is an unnamed 6,022-meter peak, and then a 6,024-meter peak, and finally Peaks 6,069m and 6,025m, which are the last 6,000ers, as the border runs, for the next 45 kilometers. In 2013, Guy Wilson and other climbers from the U.K. climbed Peak 6,204m and attempted Peak 6,069m unsuccessfully.

Just south of the border here, and south of the Nin Khola, is Changwatang (6,130m), which is on the permit list. This peak lies only four kilometers north of "Aichyn North," climbed from Nyalu side by Paulo Grobel's team in 2015, as mentioned above. Changwatang was first climbed by Tamotsu Ohnishi and party in late June 2000, and it was also climbed in 2008 and 2011.

There is an unnamed 6,076-meter peak three kilometers west of Changwatang which is unclimbed. From here to the Lapche La is 25 kilometers.

SECTION 8: LAPCHE LA TO HILSA

NALAKANKAR HIMAL (INCORPORATING TAKPHU HIMAL)

50KM ALONG THE BORDER; 10 CLIMBED 6,000M PEAKS; 2 UNCLIMBED 6,000M PEAKS

The Lapche La (5,018m) has a motorable track running over from the Tibet side and then south through the upper Limi Valley and over the Nyalu La, and which may soon link with Simikot. One day roads may in turn link with Gamgadhi. Whatever the pros and cons of roads, this will inevitably spell the end of any ancient forest on the Nepal side of the Nyalu mountains.

From the Lapche La west to the Nalakankar La, just 12 kilometers south of Lake Manasarovar in Tibet, in the most north-western point of Nepal, is a distance of 25 kilometers. The border to this point undulates in typical Tibetan high plains fashion at between 5,000 and 5,700 meters. After the

Nalakankar La, the border bends more or less due south, and eight kilometers on is the peak on the permit list called Nalakankar (6,062m), climbed by Ohnishi in 2000 from the south; they also ascended the east face of Nalakankar South, a kilometer south, at 6,024 meters. To the southeast are two peaks, 6,042 meters and 6,055 meters, the latter climbed in 2018 (see report here).

The final group of this overview is the Takphu Himal, overall a part of the Nalakankar Range, straddling the east and west sides of the border. If you count peaks in this group that lie entirely in Tibet, there are nine mountains over 6,000 meters in the Takphu Himal. Takphu North (6,142m) is the northernmost and is on the Nepal permit list. This was climbed in October 2016 by a German Alpine

Club (DAV) expedition.

The next 6,000er is unnamed Peak 6,153m at the far back of the glacier leading to Takphu North, climbed in 2016, just prior to the German expedition, by a Japanese team led by Tetsuji Otsue.

The next peak to the south in the main range is Takphu Himal (6,395m and on the permit list), which was climbed in October 2018 during an expedition that I led. In all, our team of five climbed seven peaks in this area, six of them first ascents—many of them solo by Bruce Normand. (See the expedition report.) Among them was Til Kang (6,369m), which shows itself from Til village, dominating the head of the valley. South of the peaks we climbed is Kandumbu (6,219m), which remains unclimbed. Finally there is one more unclimbed peak (ca 6,180m) within Tibet, to the west of Kandumbu.

The border now runs for 10 kilometers southwest and inexorably downhill to Hilsa village at 3,640 meters on the Karnali River, one of the gateways for devotees to Mt. Kailash in Tibet.

About the Author: Julian Freeman-Attwood lives on the edge of Snowdonia, North Wales. He has led or participated in some 35 mountaineering expeditions, usually to attempt unclimbed 6,000-meter peaks. The author would like to apologize to any persons or expeditions inadvertently omitted from this overview.

Images



Seen from above Yala La, to the southeast, are Lalung (left), Peak 6,293m (center), and Yara Chuli.



Lalung Kangri (6,623m) from Tibet to the north.



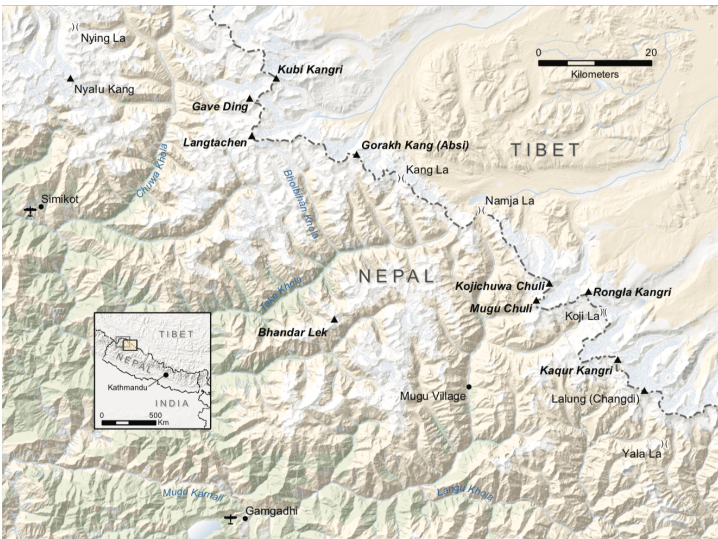
Rongla's south top (a.k.a. Kanti East, left) and Rongla Kangri (6,647m) seen from the Koji La. The first ascent in 2018 climbed the left side of the snowy face on the south peak and then continued along the ridge to the main summit.



Rongla Kangri (6,647m, center far back) and Rongla's southern top (Kanti East) in front of it. Peak 6,275m is at right and Churau far right. Kojichuwa South (6,264m) in foreground.



View south from the Tibetan Plateau to the frontier with Nepal, spanning from Dolpo (left) to Chandi Himal.



This map covers the areas of Sections 1 through 5 (the eastern areas) in this article. Access to the areas in the east is through Gamgadhi and Mugu. Access to the areas farther west is through Simikot.



Seen from the northwest, Kaqur Kangri in the Kanti Himal is high and behind, with Peak 6,095m and Peak 6,030m in the right foreground.



Seen from Peak 6,419m: Kaqur Kangri (6,859m) is the high peak in center; Myung Thang Kang (6,449m, unclimbed and on the permit list) is left and in front of Kaqur; and Lalung is right of center.



Pack animals headed north past Mugu village.



Looking southwest from Rongla Kangri over the top of Kanti East (6,516m, Rongla's southern summit, the snow dome in right foreground), with fluted Peak 6,273m in the center and Takla Kang (6,276m) in the distance to the left of Peak 6,273m.



The south face of unclimbed Peak 6,273m.



Koji Kang North (6,275m, left center) from the Koji La.

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