



AAC Publications

First Ascents of Sunkala Topi, Lek Fett, and Pratibandhit Lek

Nepal, Western Nepal, Namja Laguja Danda and Kangla Himal

SUPPORTED BY the German Alpine Club, Nils Beste, Bernde Emmerich, Franz Friebe, Harry Kirschenhofer, and I flew to Jumla in western Nepal at the start of October. From there we drove 10 hours to reach Gamghadi, north of Jumla, and then trekked for five days, heading east up the Mugu Karnali Nadi and then turning north into the Mugu Khola. Shortly before the Namja La on the border with Tibet, we turned northwest into the Takya Khola (Takya Valley), where we set up base camp at 4,666m (29°55.262'N, 82°20.214'E). We were now beneath the highest peak of the Namja Laguja Danda, a small range between the Kangla Himal in the west and Kanti Himal in the east. The Namja La appears to be an actively used pass for trade between Mugu and Tibet, judging by the Lhasa beer and Chinese Budweiser cans found along the way.

On October 12 we established a high camp at 5,148m (29°55.246'N, 82°30.367'E), southwest of the highest summit, which we would subsequently name Sunkala Topi (5,865m). We awoke next day to the bad news that Harry felt unwell and would not be accompanying us. The rest of the team set out at 6 a.m. and climbed northeast up a ridge and through a maze of scree and boulders to a plateau. A rocky ridge then led us down onto the glacier that drapes the south flank of the mountain between the west and south summits.

We slanted up across this glacier to reach the crest of the south ridge of the main peak. After reaching a false summit at 5,856m (29°55'39.67"N, 82°31'12.25"E), we saw that the actual top, just to the north, would involve a difficult crossing. Nils was the only one to take up the challenge: He downclimbed, overcame a horizontal crevasse, and finished up a knife-edge to the true summit. Clouds and strong wind denied a decent panorama, but a glimpse to the west gave a brilliant view over the Kangla Group, where three pyramidal peaks above 6,000m caught our attention.

On the 14th we left the Takya Khola and crossed a pass into the western Chawarsing Khola (Chawarsing Valley). Shortly below the pass we camped at a lake (ca 4,800m), and from here Nils decided to try the border peak of Lek Fett (5,767m), the summit immediately north of the pass. His plan was to traverse rock and scree on the southwest face to a scree couloir that would lead to the northwest ridge.

He set out at 8 a.m. on October 15, finding the frozen scree difficult to handle and taking two hours to climb 600m to the ridge. To avoid the further inconvenience of rock towers on the crest, Nils descended to a relatively benign glacier basin on the far (northeast) side. It led to a 50° névé slope, which he climbed for 150m to regain the ridge at around 5,550m. A wide snow crest led easily to the summit (5,767m, 29°56'55.11"N, 82°29'45.94"E), which he reached at 11 a.m. The crux had been crossing the open bergschrund between the glacier and the 50° slope.

A clear blue sky presented a beautiful panorama. To the east lay Sunkala Topi and to the west the unclimbed N3 (ca 5,850m from contours on the HMG-Finn map); farther to the west lay the seductive pyramid peaks of the Kangla Himal, and, more distant, unclimbed peaks of the Gorakh Himal.

That same day, we descended the Chawarsing Khola into the Take Khola and camped at the high meadow of Take Kharka (4,200m). On October 16, Nils, Franz, and I left this camp and entered the Kangla Khola. After 6km another valley branches northeast toward the Kang La on the Tibetan border. I felt weak thanks to a respiratory infection, and rather than slow down the other two, I decided to quit.

They continued another 3km to a campsite in a side valley at about 4,700m. Their goal was Pratibandhit Lek, the high peak immediately east of the Kang La. This pass is used for trade, and there is a good path on the southeast side of the valley, avoiding the glacier. In contrast to what is shown on old maps, there is no glacier to cross to reach the pass.

The two left camp at 4:45 next morning and walked the 4km to the pass (5,400m). They then ascended scree, snow, and mixed terrain for 300m to reach the northwest ridge of Pratibandhit Lek at about 5,700m. This ascent was 55° and corniced, with steep drops on both sides ("more impressive than the Biancograt on Piz Bernina"). This ridge led southeast for 2km to the summit (6,130m, 30°00'13.63"N, 82°25'14.31"E). Observations from the top, and on Google Earth, indicate that Pratibandhit Lek is the highest peak of the Kangla Himal. However, since various peaks have similar elevations, further ascents (particularly of Kangla II) are needed for confirmation.

Another day of perfect weather gave a fantastic panorama over the Kangla Himal's unclimbed peaks. West of the Kang La is the unclimbed pyramid that we dubbed Kangla II (on the Japanese sketch map it is referred to as Ngomo Ding-Ding, 6,133m HMG-Finn) with a beautiful snow and ice northeast ridge. Behind lay unclimbed summits of the Gorakh Himal, including the impressive pyramid of Absi (a.k.a. Gorakh Kang, 6,254m). To the east the view stretched as far as Kanjiroba (6,883m), and to the southwest as far as Saipal (7,031m).

We completed the expedition by walking out to the west to Simikot.

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Images



A short distance above Mugu village, in a side valley to the west, lies Mugu Arch, with the main summit at 5,430m. It was first noted in 2009 by a British expedition. The east face is shown. Germans Nils Beste and Bernhard Emmerich briefly explored the peak in October, finding that the serious rock climbing began at 4,800m. They soon realized they had too little rock gear for such a climb or a rappel descent.

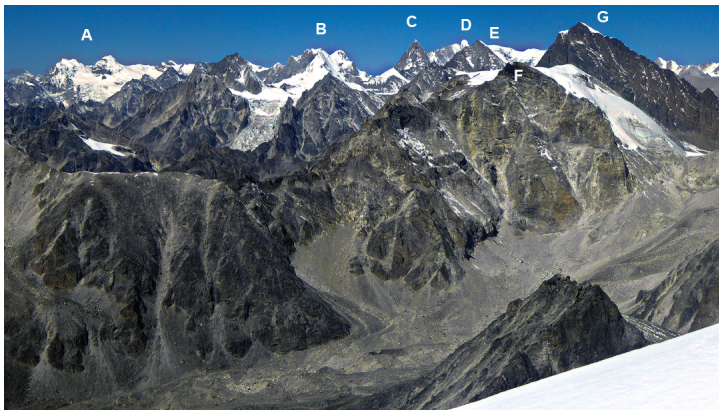


The unclimbed Absi (Gorakh Kang), 6,254m, seen from Sunkala Topi to the southeast.



Franz Friebe on the northwest ridge of Pratibandhit Lek. The Kang La, below and behind, gives passage between Nepal (left) and Tibet (right). (A) Unnamed twin peaks at the head the Bholbihan Khola, the objective of a 2017 American expedition. (B) Asajya Tuppa (6,265m). (C) Absi (6,254m). (D)

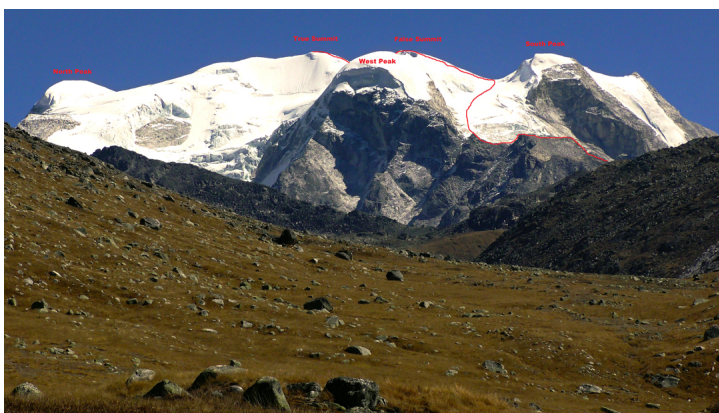
Kangla II (Ngomo Ding-Ding, 6,133m HGM Finn). (E) Lachama (a.k.a. Kubi Kangri, 6,721m).



The view west and northwest from Lekh Fett. (A) Unnamed twin peaks at the head the Bholbihan Khola, the objective of a 2017 American expedition. (B) Asajya Tuppa (6,265m). (C) Absi (6,254m). (D) Lachama (a.k.a. Kubi Kangri, 6,721m). (E) Kangla II (Ngomo Ding-Ding, 6,133m HGM Finn). (F) N3 (ca 5,850m). (G) Pratbandhit Lek (6,130m GPS). The first-ascent route up the northwest ridge is hidden behind.



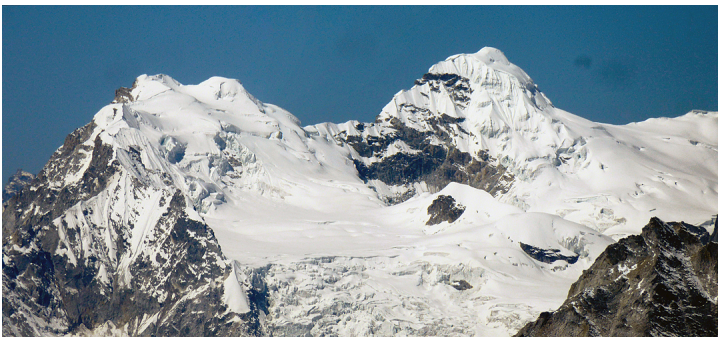
Nils Beste during the first ascent of Sunkala Topi (5,865m), with the pass of Namja La in the background.



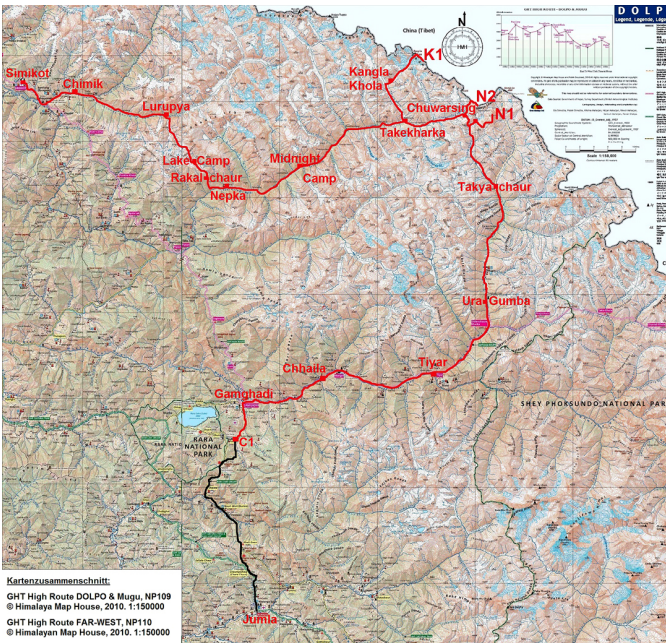
Sunkala Topi (5,865m) seen from the Take Khola to the southwest, with the route of first ascent marked.



Nils Beste reaching the sharp true summit of Sunkala Topi for the first ascent.



Unclimbed twin peaks above the head of the Bholbihan Khola.



The trekking route of the 2017 German expedition into the border mountains of West Nepal, heading north from Gamghadi and then exiting to Simikot after making three first ascents. N1: Sunkala Topi. N2: Lekh Fett. K1: Pratbandhit Lek.

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