



Chandi Himal, First Ascent via Southeast Ridge

Nepal, Chandi Himal

Chandi Himal (6,142m) seen from upper Nin Khola to the south. The 2023 ascent route finished up the right skyline ridge. Photo by Matt Powell.

Kevin Bialy (USA), Jaime Irazo (Spain), and I arrived in Kathmandu on April 29 and reached Simikot on May 5. Our objective was unclimbed Chandi Himal (6,142m, 30°21'31.67"N, 81°56'57.59"E).

[Technically, the Chandi Himal begins at the Changla La and runs west along the Nepal-Tibet border, with the highest summit (6,256m) referred to by its Tibetan name, Ganglung Kangri. Chandi Himal is the highest peak in the western part of this range.]

Apart from my own efforts, there have only been two expeditions—both British—planning to attempt Chandi Himal. The 2013 expedition managed to climb Peak 6,024m at the far western end of the Chandi Himal range before early season snowfall forced a premature departure. The 2022 team was unluckier, only able to establish their advanced base camp before the arrival of a huge storm. While we were more fortunate, our expedition was unable to evade Nepal's coldest, snowiest spring in 30 years.

We enjoyed a leisurely nine-day trek up the Chuwa Khola and Nin Khola valleys before establishing base camp on May 14 at 4,815m. Deep snow prevented the pack mules from traveling any higher.

After a rest day, Kevin, Jaime, Pemba Sherpa, Kinga Sherpa, and a porter left at 9:15 a.m. on a bluebird day and established advanced base at 5,365m. I had reached this point on a previous attempt in the fall of 2021 (the trip was aborted due to dysentery), and then it lay on bare ground; now it was under two meters of snow. Kevin, Jaime, and Pemba remained at advanced base while Kinga and the porter returned to base camp, arriving at 4 p.m. (A non-climbing accident before the trip limited my activity to base camp.)

The following day dawned clear and calm, and Kevin, Jaime, and Pemba went about 200m higher, to a point where they were able to determine that the southeast ridge of Chandi Himal was feasible. However, both Kevin and Pemba were experiencing headaches, and Kevin decided he would descend to base the next day.

On the 18th, Kinga and two porters set off from base camp at 5:15 a.m. After arriving at advanced base, the two porters continued with Jaime to establish a high camp, with Pemba following shortly after. Kinga and Kevin descended to base camp.

Jaime radioed us in base camp at 12:15 p.m. with the news that high camp had been established at 5,740m, a summit attempt was planned for the next day, and that the two porters were headed down.

Next day, Jaime and Pemba radioed at 5:20 a.m. to say that they were departing for the summit and that the weather seemed to be improving. Although it was clear and calm at base camp, we could see that conditions were significantly worse up high, and that visibility was very limited.

At 9:45 a.m., an excited Pemba radioed that he and Jaime were on the summit. He said there were very high winds but that they would take pictures and a panoramic video to prove their arrival. They had initially climbed the east face and accessed the southeast ridge just above a cliff band. They then

followed the ridge to the summit. Jaime assessed the difficulty at F+. The two spent around an hour on the summit, their Garmin GPS unit giving a reading of 6,143m, while an older eTrek model indicated 6,153m. At 11:30 a.m. they were back in high camp.

With the help from our porters, the entire team was in base camp by midmorning the following day. No equipment or rubbish was left on the mountain or at base camp.

– **Matt Powell, USA**

Images



West of the upper Nin Khola, at $30^{\circ}11'4.33''\text{N}$, $81^{\circ}58'29.32''\text{E}$, these dramatic spires rise to 5,642m (HMG-Finn map) and are very unlikely unclimbed.



Chandi Himal (6,142m) seen from upper Nin Khola to the south. The 2023 ascent route finished up the right skyline ridge.



Looking south down the main Nin Khola valley from below the 2023 base camp. The distant peak on the left is the highest top of a series of dramatic spires that rise to 5,642m ($30^{\circ}11'4.33''\text{N}$, $81^{\circ}58'29.32''\text{E}$). The closer summit on the right is Peak 5,575m at $30^{\circ}12'17.07''\text{N}$, $81^{\circ}56'29.57''\text{E}$.



Looking southwest from just above advanced base, with Peak 5,895m (left) and Changwatang (6,130m) in the distance.



Descending from advanced base, with Changwatang (6,130m) in center left and Peak 5,988m in center right ($30^{\circ}20'52.55''N$, $81^{\circ}55'59.54''E$).



Looking across the glacier basin east-southeast of Chandi Himal to the Ganglung Kangri massif (6,256m). While Chandi and Ganglung Kangri are both along the Nepal-Tibet border, most of the glacier is fully in Tibet.

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