

# THE PLATEAU

MAY 2012

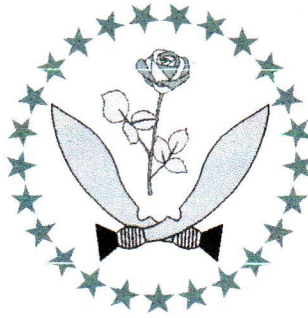
## SIKKIM HIMALAYA

D E A T I L E D R E P O R T



**Pauhunri peak, on Sikkim (India)-Tibet (China) border from The Plateau.**

*Expedition dedicated to memory of Lt. Nawang Kapadia*



LT. NAWANG KAPADIA

"The World is a fine place and worth fighting for"

--(Ernest Hemmingway)

Nawang Kapadia, born on 15-12-1975, studied in the New Era School and the St. Xavier's Boys' Academy in Bombay. He graduated as a Bachelor of Commerce from the Jaihind College. He joined the family cloth business for a year. But since childhood Nawang had a desire to join the Indian army. He trekked extensively in the Western Ghats and in the Himalaya. He visited the Siachen Glacier during an expedition and met many army officers, which helped him to make up his mind to join the army, specially the Gorkha Regiment.

Nawang joined the prestigious Officer's Training Academy, Chennai, in August 1999 and was commissioned as an officer on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2000. He joined the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Gorkha Rifles, and he was proud to be amongst them.

He was posted to Kupwara in the troubled valley of Kashmir where he participated in operations. While rescuing a jawan comrade Lance Naik Chitra Bahadur he was killed by a single terrorist bullet at 1110 hrs on 11-11-2000, on Guru Nanak Jayanti day (*kartik* full moon). He was cremated with full military honours at Mumbai on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2000. Nawang leaves behind his grieving parents Geeta and Harish, brother Sonam and many friends in Mumbai and in the army.

His soul will Rest in Peace having achieved what he wanted to in service of the country.

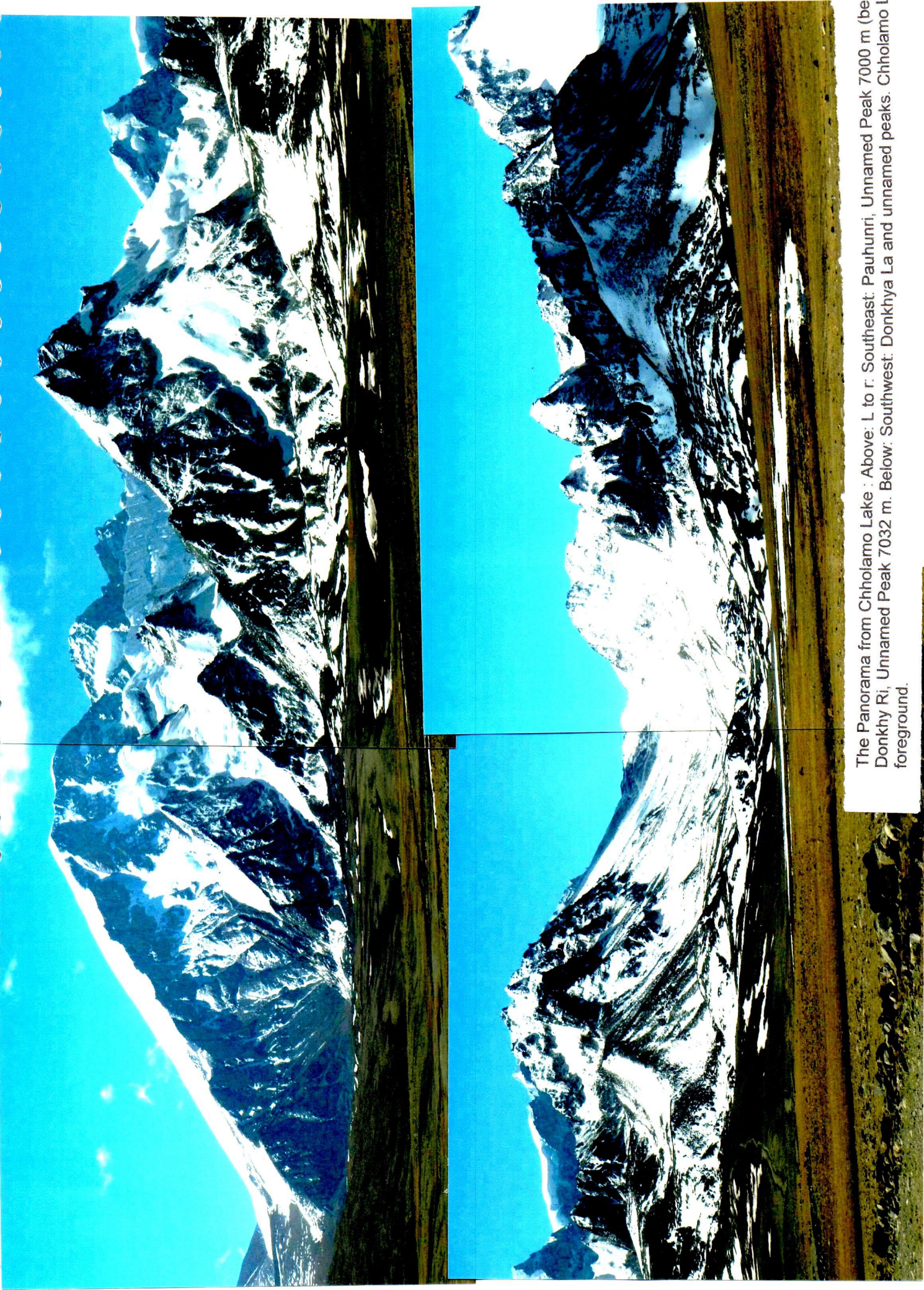
Web memorial [www.nawang.com](http://www.nawang.com)

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"It is foolish and wrong to  
mourn the men who died.  
rather we should thank God  
that such men lived"

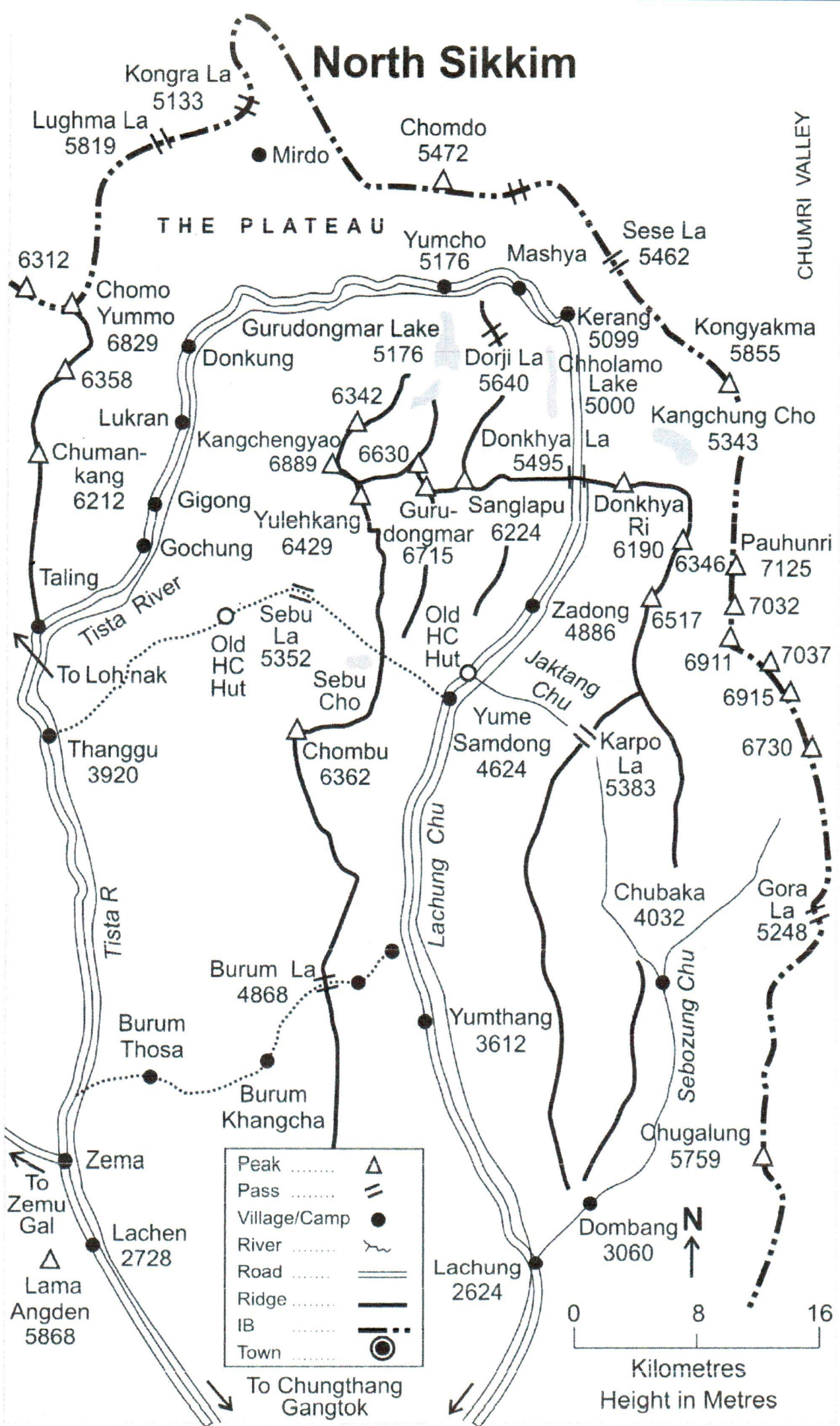
General George S. Patton, Jr

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The Panorama from Chholamo Lake : Above: L to r: Southeast: Pauhunri, Unnamed Peak 7000 m (behind), Donkhy Ri, Unnamed Peak 7032 m. Below: Southwest: Donkhya La and unnamed peaks. Chholamo Lake in foreground.

# North Sikkim



# THE PLATEAU

## Mountains of Sikkim-China Border

HARISH KAPADIA

(2012)

This was my fifth visit to the mountains of Sikkim. As a young student I was part of the training course of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute in 1964. The mountains of west Sikkim, like Kabru, Rathong, Pandim and host of others were attractive to my young eyes. I returned in 1976. No sooner Sikkim became a state on India two us, Zerkis Boga and I obtained permits and roamed the valleys for more than a month in the northwest Sikkim, covering Zemu glacier, Lhonak valley Muguthang, Lagnak la, Sebu la and returned via the Lachung valley.<sup>1</sup> I returned a few times to Darjeeling and Sikkim valleys visiting the Singalila ridge, lakes of lower Sikkim and surroundings of Gangtok and Kalimpong. If you stretch the area to the south, I made several visits to Darjeeling and nearby hills over the years. Moreover in Sikkim the approach to different valleys is so varied that it gives a feeling of trekking in different Himalayan zones.

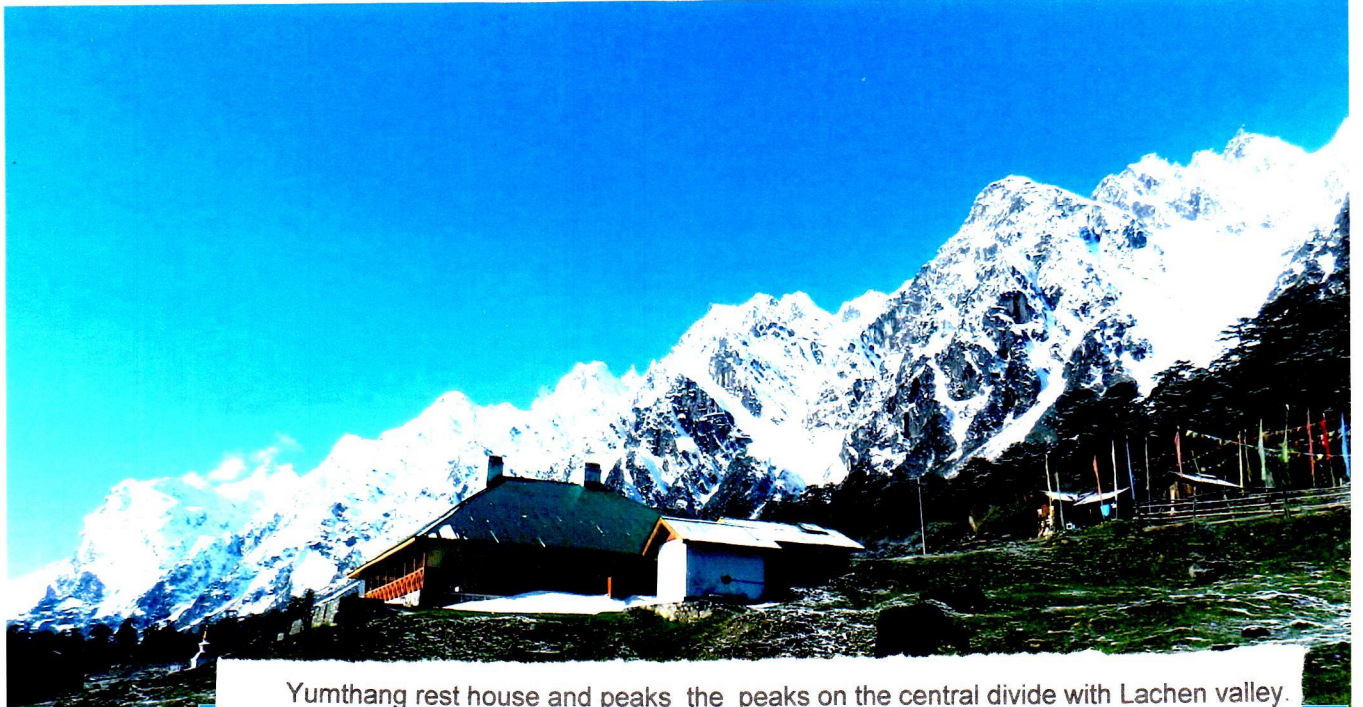
In no other country on earth can one find such a variety of micro-climates within such a short distance as Sikkim, declared the eminent English botanist and explorer Joseph Hooker in his *Himalayan Journals* (1854), which documented his work collecting and classifying thousands of plants in the Himalaya in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

*In the shadow of the Himalayas*, by John Claude White, 1883-1908. (Reprint, Mapin Publishing, Ahmadabad, 2005, p. 50)

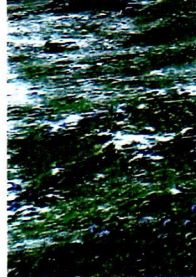
But one prized catch had escaped me- the northern-most valley of Sikkim near the China (Tibet) border. Known as 'the Plateau', this area contains some of the highest (after the Kangchenjunga group) and most beautiful peaks. This area was visited by several early explorers but after the 1962 India-China war it was highly restricted, especially as in later decades Chinese tried to assert themselves in these valleys. To its east lies the Chumbi valley which drains the Amo chu. It was through here that much trade with Tibet was carried out. The Younghusband Mission to Tibet passed through this valley 1903-1904. The early Everest expeditions either passed through the Chumbi or across the high passes of Naku la or Karpo la on the west of the Plateau. These early climbers, with spirit and stamina, climbed few of the high peaks on their way back even after months spent on Everest.

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<sup>1</sup> *High Himalayan Unknown Valleys*, by Harish Kapadia, p. 156. (Indus Books, New Delhi, 2001). Also *Himalayan Journal*, Vol. 35, p.181



Yumthang rest house and peaks the peaks on the central divide with Lachen valley.



Peak 7032 m from south, Yumthang.

It was a few political officers, posted to the Darbar of the Chogyal in Sikkim by the British, who travelled to remote parts and recorded their journeys. Claude White at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was a well travelled man. F. M. Bailey and F. Williamson explored the area between the two world wars. Experienced botanical explorers and naturalists F. Kingdon-Ward, F. Ludlow and George Sherriff added much to the knowledge of the northern Sikkim. Amongst the climbers Dr A.M. Kellas stands out. He made six expeditions to Sikkim between 1907 and 1920 and made many first ascents. He was especially active on the Plateau, and in 1910 alone he climbed 10 peaks above 6000 m, all first ascents. He had special attraction to the highest peak on the Plateau, Pauhunri (7125 m).

In August and October, 1909, Dr Kellas attempted Pauhunri in two separate attempts, reaching within 100 m of the summit. Not to be defeated, he returned in May-June 1910 and Pauhunri yielded to his efforts and was climbed in a five day struggle from 13 to 17 June. All these efforts were on the northeast face, approached from the Chumbi. His route was repeated by C.W.F. Noyce (24 September 1945) and French climber R. Walter (24 September 1949). After three decades an Indian army team (Col. V.Y.Bhave) made an ascent from the Plateau and northwest face (20 September 1983) and was repeated by a team of para military forces (Sonam Wangyal) on 1 November 1989.

Three of us, Atul Rawal, Vijay Kothari and I arrived in May 2012 to trek in the north Sikkim area and the Plateau. We were all above 65 years in age and were supported by our dependable three Kumauni porters. At first we had to acclimatise to the altitude to reach the Plateau, as the average height is almost 19,000 ft. However, with such strong winds, it is not possible to stay long enough to acclimatise. Hence we entered the Lachung valley first.

### **Lachung, Dombang and Borum la**

Half a day of travel on a rough road from Gangtok brought us to Lachung which was at grips with tourists, or what they call 'Package travellers'. A group is offered a 'package' to start from Kolkata, travel overnight by train to Siliguri and drive to Gangtok. The following day is a long drive to Lachung. On the third day this horde drives up to what is known as 'Zero Point' (at foot of Donkhya la), rambles for half an hour on snow, returnsto Lachung, and remarkably, ahead to Gangtok same evening. On the fourth day they drive to the railway station and return by night train back to Kolkata. In between they see a monastery or two and do some shopping! We were amazed at their stamina, lack of time and no curiosity to see anything more.

Lachung was a small village, now with a few hotels and many guest houses. It was well spread out and with strong army presence as several routes from here lead to the border between Chumbi valley and China. There was no trace or memory of the Scottish missionary Miss Doig, who had spent decades here and was well known to the early expeditions.

After about five kilometres a road bifurcates east to the Dombang valley. It is a long valley, almost parallel to the main Lachung valley. One side are the steep slopes to the border with Gora la (5248 m), once an easy pass to the east. The ridge between

the Dombang and Lachung valley, 'the Dombang ridge', contained several peaks, not higher than about 5800 m but attractive. The Dombang valley was thoroughly explored by Trevor Braham in 1949 with M. Hruska, a Czech climber. They selected to go in November, facing the cold but hopefully enjoying clear weather, a rarity in Sikkim. With them was the famous Sherpa Ang Tharkay. 'Ang Tharkay's reputation was founded, I think, not on his natural qualities as a mountaineer, but also on his ability as a manager. The confidence and trust which he inspired gave one the comforting assurance that if a solution to any problem existed he would find it.'<sup>2</sup> After reaching the foot of Gora la, they followed a smaller tract to the northwest over the Karpo la (5383 m). They followed the Khangkyong glacier and found a way to the Plateau via Donkhya la. 'The Plateau was almost two miles deep, it was surrounded by a row of five peaks, two over 23,000 feet and the remainder over 22,000 feet.....'<sup>3</sup> This was a fine exploration of an alternate approach to the Plateau. We were to see these peaks and the 19,000 foot pass reached by him from the north soon.

Our association with the journey of Trevor Braham continued. We spent two delightful days at the forest rest house at Yumthang, after passing the rhododendron sanctuary. This vast open ground is surrounded by sharp rocky mountains to the west and the Dembang range to the east. If developed, this ground can challenge any climbing centre in the world.

The trek to Borum la (4883 m) starts about three kilometres ahead of Yumthang. A board had been put up at the junction with Lako chu, encouraging tourists to walk, '1.5 km to Hot Springs'. We went up a well made path which soon disappeared and, for at least 15 kilometres where the valley ended, there were no hot springs. After a camp the trail entered a narrow valley and led to the small lake almost near Borum la, fed by the Borum glacier. In 1949, Braham could not cross the lake and we were confronted with the same situation.<sup>4</sup> We were well advised by the army not to cross Borum la as the trail on the west, towards the Lachen valley, was destroyed by the earthquake in 2011. The earthquake was about 10 km below the surface and the areas, even ancient monasteries, near the epicentre were left relatively untouched. But it was far away areas like this Lachung-Lachen ridge that bore the full force. Anyway reaching the pass was all that we desired and an acclimatised party now returned to Lachung and thence by road to Lachen for the second part of our trek.

## The Plateau

(The Giagong Valley) is a desolate, windswept spot lying in the centre of a gorge between Chomoimo (*Chomo Yummo*) 23,000 feet on the west, and Kangchenjau, 24,000 feet, on the east, and is a veritable funnel up which the wind always howling. I managed, however, to find a fairly sheltered spot for my camp and stayed a few days. One day I climbed a hill to the west called Tunlo, and from the top I had a magnificent

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<sup>2</sup> *Himalayan Odyssey*, by T H Braham, p. 54-55. (George, Allen and Unwin, London, 1974)

<sup>3</sup> Braham, *ibid.* p. 56

<sup>4</sup> Braham, *ibid.* p. 60





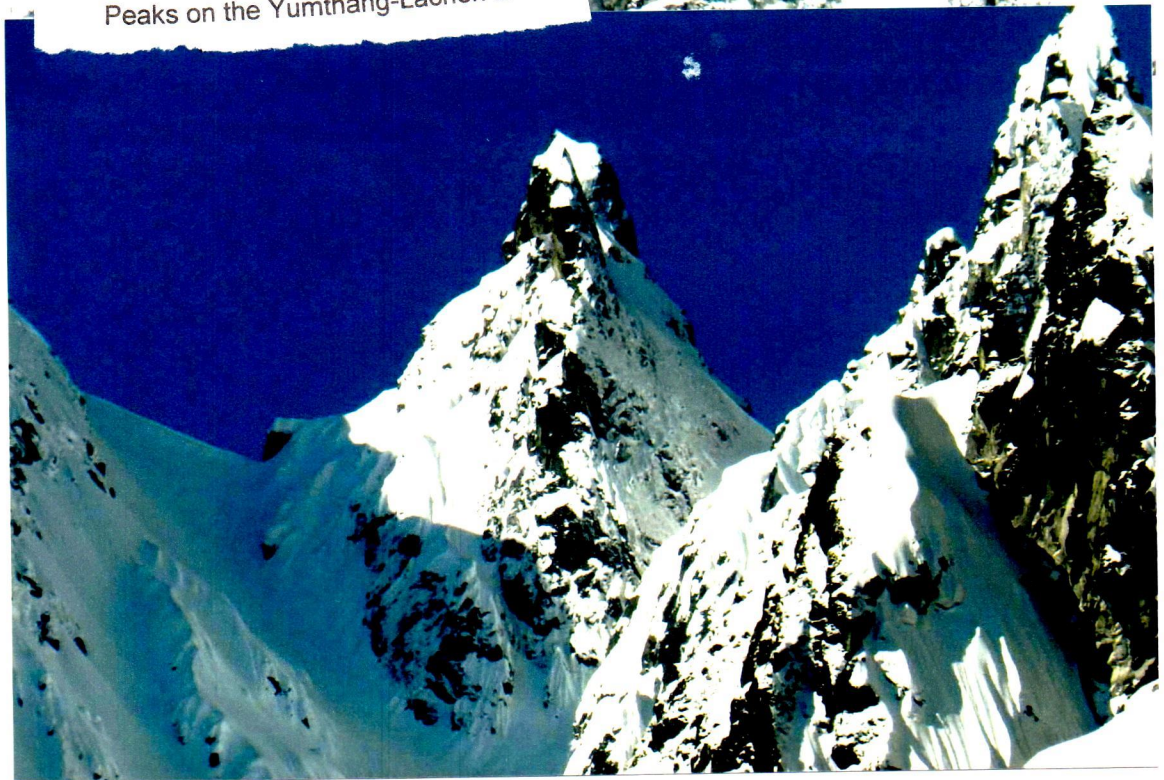
Unnamed peaks: On Dombang divide (above), pinnacles

on Yumthang-Lachen divide centre and below.





Peaks on the Yumthang-Lachen divide.



view to the north Sikkim up to the rounded hills forming the watershed and the true boundary. Looked at from this elevation, the scene is a most desolate one truly typical of, and only to be found in, Tibet: with the exception of the valley immediately below me, nothing was under 18,000 feet, without shrub, much less a tree, to be seen, and the wonder was how the large flocks of sheep scattered about, numbering perhaps 10,000 or 12,000, found enough grazing to keep them alive.

*In the shadow of the Himalayas*, by John Claude White, 1883-1908. (Reprint, Mapin Publishing, Ahmadabad, 2005, p. 63)

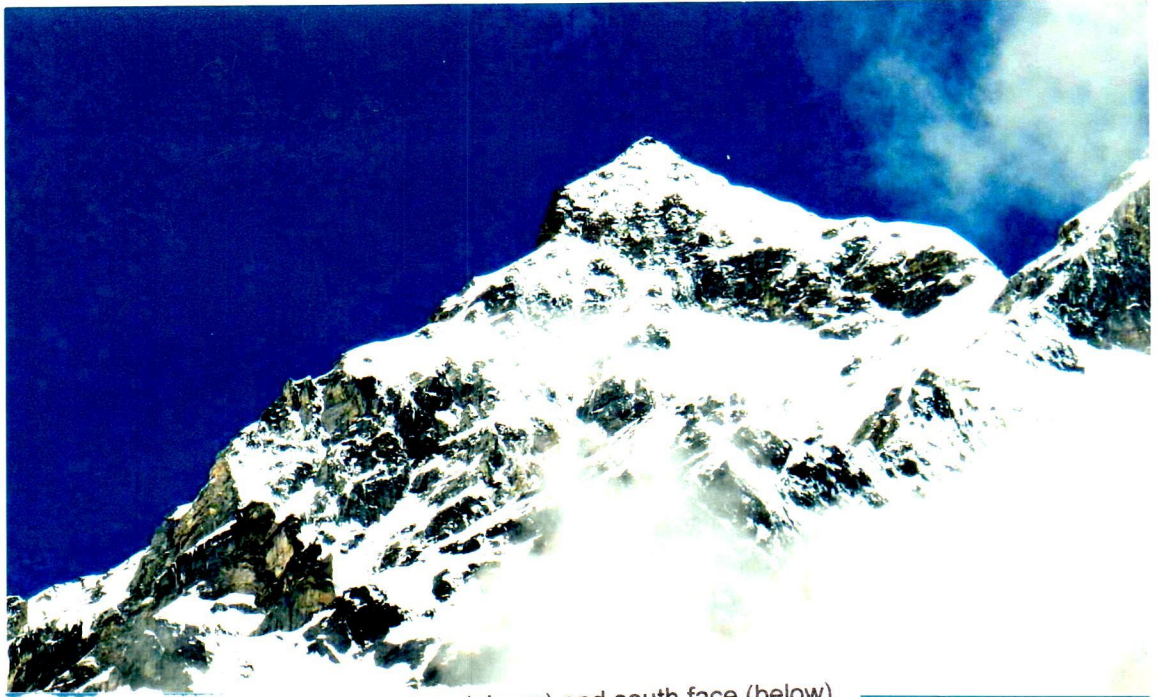
We were heading to the Giagong valley, described by White. In fact we were to make a sort of base camp at Giagong to visit the Plateau twice. But first we spent two days at Lachen, which I had visited in 1976. It had changed completely of course and all my enquiries about my old memories bore no fruit. The old monastery was now fully renovated stood next to a modern hotel. There was no sign of family of the famous guide Kondup lama who had accompanied me. He was as legendary as Tensing Norgay Sherpa, undertaking several journeys to Everest via Tibet with him. No one remembered the Scottish Mission at Lachen. The old forest bungalow where I had spent wonderful days, was surrounded by hutments and was now turned ugly, and into a non-functional radio broadcasting station. I had seen the log book here where most early Everest team members had signed, and some signatures were missing on return entry, of those who had perished on the mountains. There was sign of this log book at any forest establishments till Gangtok. The system of 'Phipun' (village headman) was prevalent but now it was an elected post within the village.

Mountain scenery was to change rapidly in next two days. Driving to Thango we had first views of twin Lama Angden peaks 5868 m, first climbed by A.J.M. Smyth and Wing Commander Ford in September 1942. Soon the southern view of the peaks on the Plateau emerged, looking like a hug block of snow clad peaks of Gurudongmar and Kangchenjau. Both these peaks have a long history.

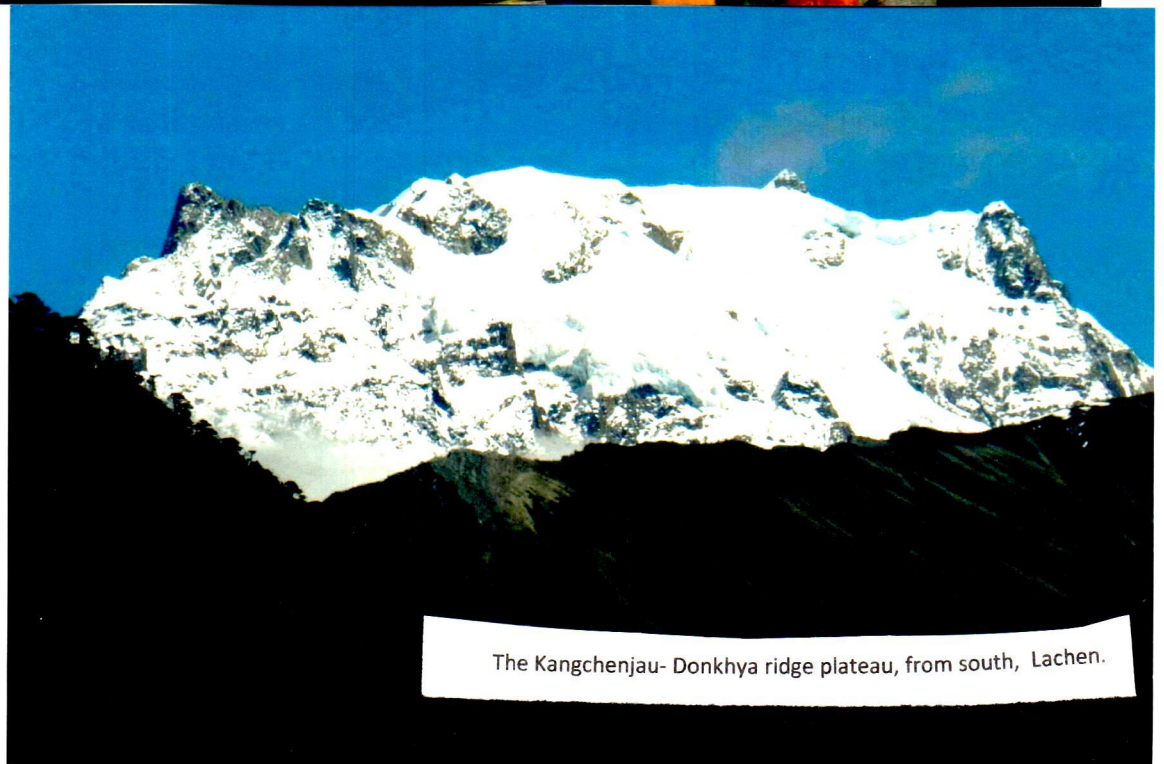
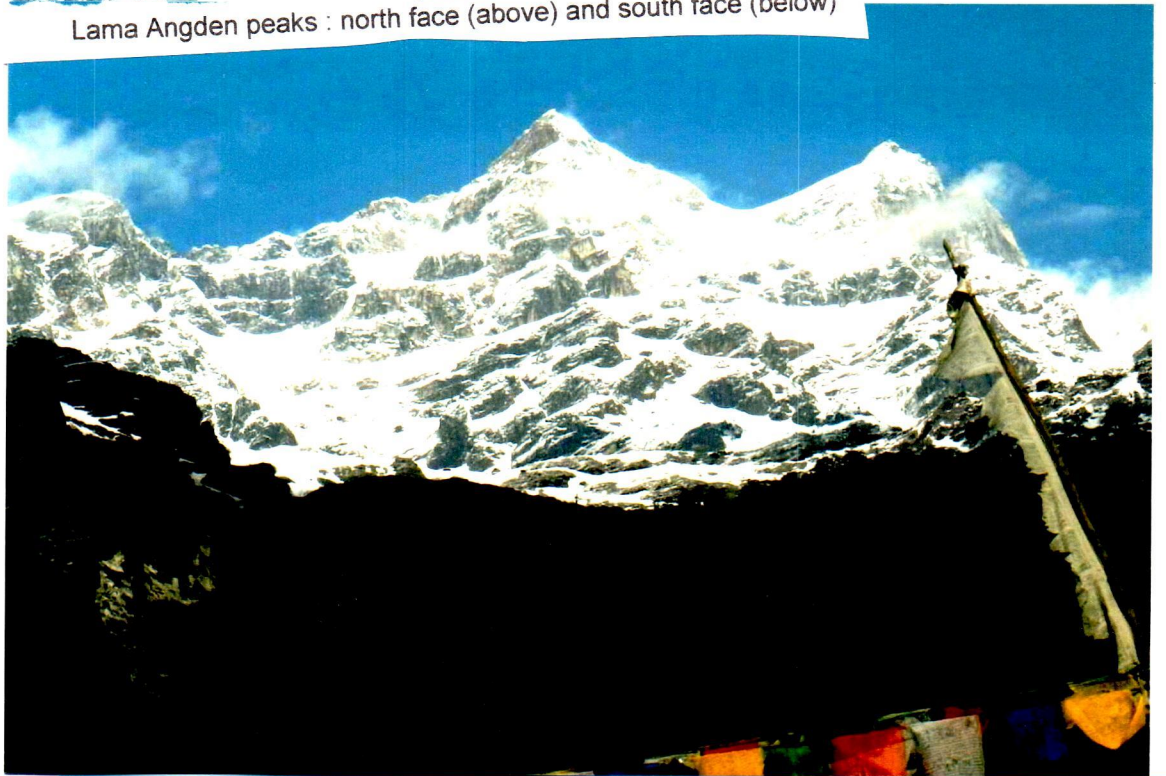
On his return from Everest in 1936 Eric Shipton and E.G.H. Kempson separated from the main party to enter the Plateau from Kongra la (5133 m). On 1 July, in a long day push, two of them made the first ascent of Gurudongmar (6715 m), by reaching a col from the shores of the lake to climb the steep west ridge. The second ascent was made only in 1991 when a para-military force team (G.T.Bhutia) climbed it on 3 October, along with nearby Sanglaphu (6224 m). Kangchenjau (6889 m) was Dr Kellas' territory. In August 1912 he reached a col from Sebu la and reached the upper rocks. He turned to the north ridge from here to reach the summit plateau and the top. The other creditable attempt was made by Trevor Braham in 1949. The mountain also killed four Indian climbers in an avalanche in 2005. Dr P.M.Das a well known mountaineer died on these slopes.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> While attempting the summit, the party was hurled down in an avalanche and got entangled in the ropes they were tied to. In all five climbers died on the spot and two survived with serious injuries. Those who died were Dr Paras Moni Das, Inder Kumar, Ms. Nari Dhami (these two had summited Everest recently), Dawa Sherpa and Dawa Wangchuk, instructors from mountaineering school at Gangtok. Dr P. M. Das was a high



Lama Angden peaks : north face (above) and south face (below)



The Kangchenjau- Donkhya ridge plateau, from south, Lachen.

We spent the first night at the Giagong camp of the Indian army. In fact winds were so strong that it would be a major effort to set up small mountaineering tents. Next morning we walked towards Tunlo, a small hill in the west, which was mentioned by White. There were some yak herders camped there and the view of the vast plateau was rewarding. In the distance we could see remains of a *sangar* (rock wall) built by Tibetans to protect themselves against any invaders. We passed this wall next day.<sup>6</sup>

Kangchenjau rose fearfully in the east with huge blocks of ice hanging on its face. On the west was Chomo Yummo (6829 m). Both these and their surrounding peaks were to be seen all along till we turned east on the Plateau. Chomo Yummo straddles on the ridge between the Giagong valley and the Tibet border broadly. The attempt by T. H. Tilly with Ang Tharkay in 1945 from Donkung, and the northeast approach, failed. Then came Dr. Kellas again! In 1910 he climbed the northwest ridge to make the first ascent. In 1986, this peak was to suffer an assault by 39 summitters from an army team (Maj. Gen. P.L. Kukrety). They fixed ropes till the top and all climbed up- a far cry from the ascents by Dr. Kellas.

To our west was Chummankang (6212 m) earlier known as Laschi. Leaving luggage with the legendary Karma Paul, Bill Tilman and his Sherpas climbed this rather gentle peak. It was rainy season so route finding was complicated and they could hardly see any view. But Tilman turned that to virtue and wrote: 'The great disadvantage of the monsoon period of seeing neither where one is going nor the surrounding scenery is compensated for in small degree by the surprises and shocks occasionally administered by a momentary lifting of the clouds, and by the fun of guessing where one is. A journey in this season can also be recommended to those who enjoy discomfort'.<sup>7</sup> We were soon heading for the Plateau. Little ahead at Donkung a bifurcation led to Mirdo, which is known as the 'Finger area' due to the border jutting out like a finger on the Tibetan plateau. This was the route of early expeditions to Tibet, going across Kongra la (5133 m). But then this area was 'sensitive' due to the Chinese designs. We were fortunate to be permitted to spend some wonderful time on the Plateau which is strictly regulated after the India-China War of 1962.

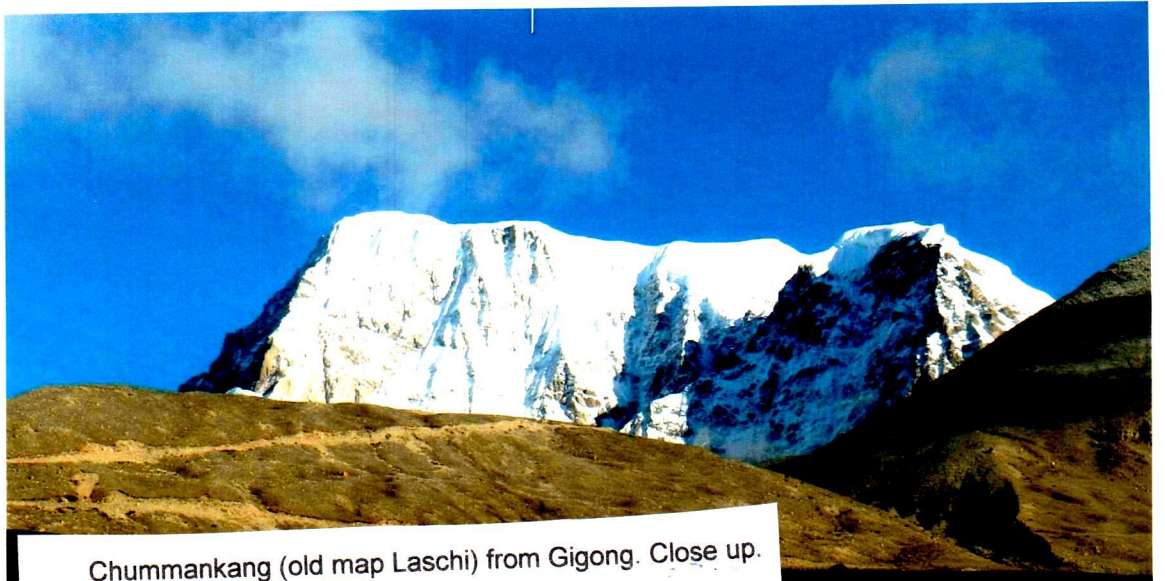
The Plateau was vast and wild, more than anything we had imagined. As we passed Yumcho plains (with a small lake), wind, which explorers had called 'a veritable curse', was starting to build up. Travellers were glad to lie down in some hollow or crouch behind stones so as to be out of wind even for a few minutes! The Gurudongmar lake (5176 m) was sublime with deep blue water and white peaks of Gurudongmar and Kangchenjau formed the backdrop. There were tourists visiting fleetingly and praying at the temple built by the army, this was the grand finale of their 'package'! Our next aim was the high Dorji la (5640 m). Vast number of peaks opened to view from here and the scene was best described by White. 'There is something exhilarating in these high altitudes, the tremendous expanse of snow around gives a feeling of freedom not experienced at lower elevations, while there is always a

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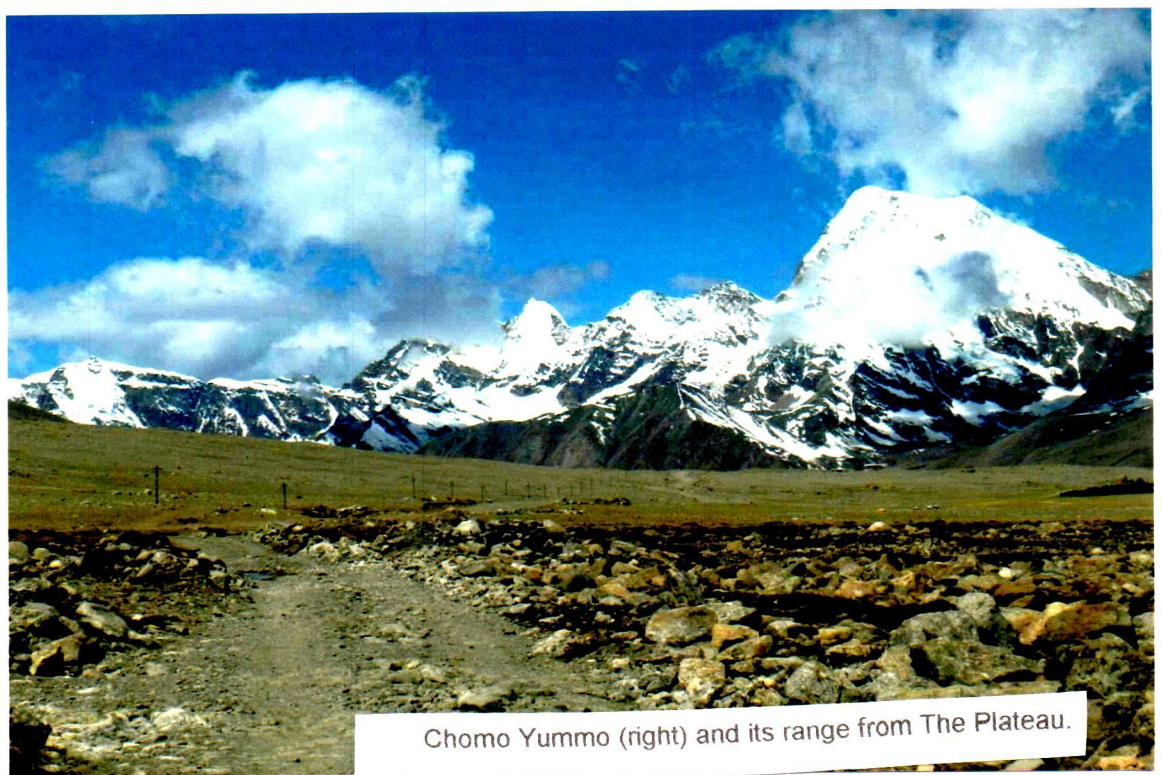
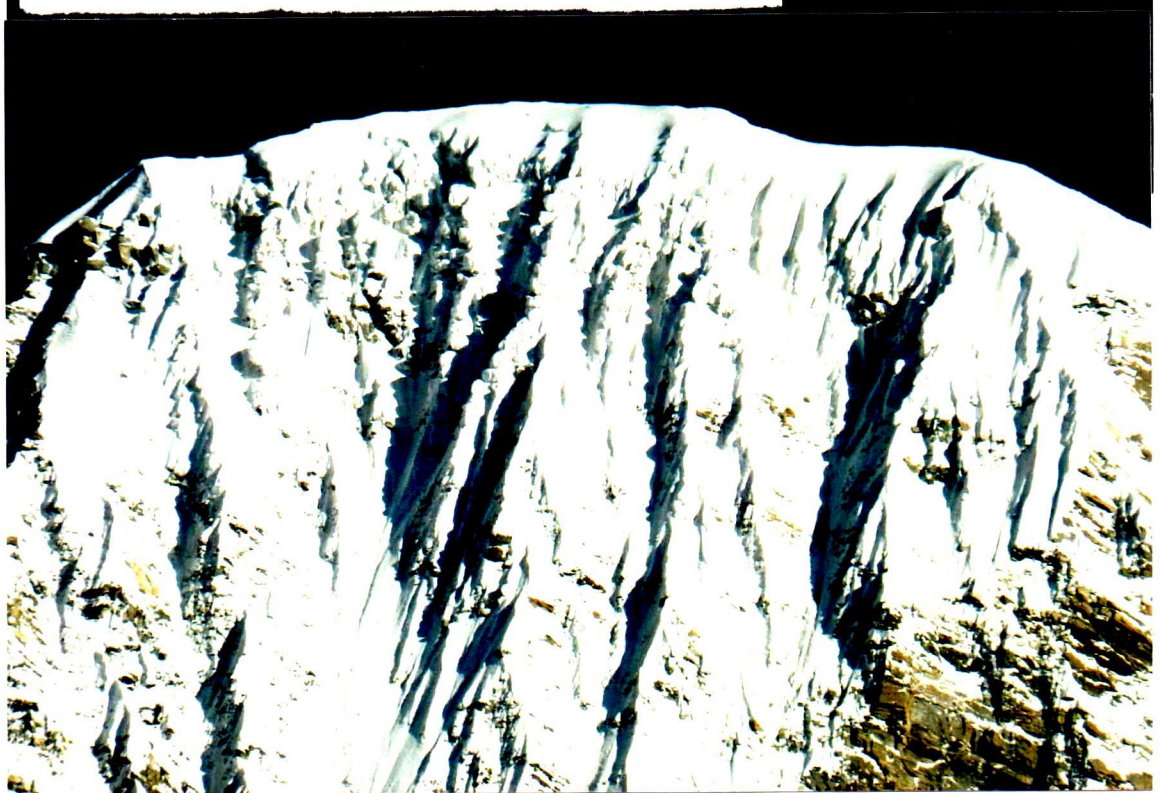
ranking police officer and a well-known climber. Obituary of Dr P. M. Das in, *Himalayan Journal*, Vol. 62, p. 270. Also see details in the *Himalayan Club Newsletter*, No. 59 (2006), p.7.

6 'About a mile north of this camping ground (Giagong) are the remains of the wall built by the Tibetans as an obstruction to the British Mission to Tibet in 1903-04.' *Tours in Sikkim* by Percy Brown, p.128 ( W. Newman and co., Ltd., Calcutta, 1944).

7 'Laschi and the Zemu Gap' by H.W.Tilman. *Himalayan Journal*, Vol. XI, p. 148.



Chummankang (old map Laschi) from Gigong. Close up.

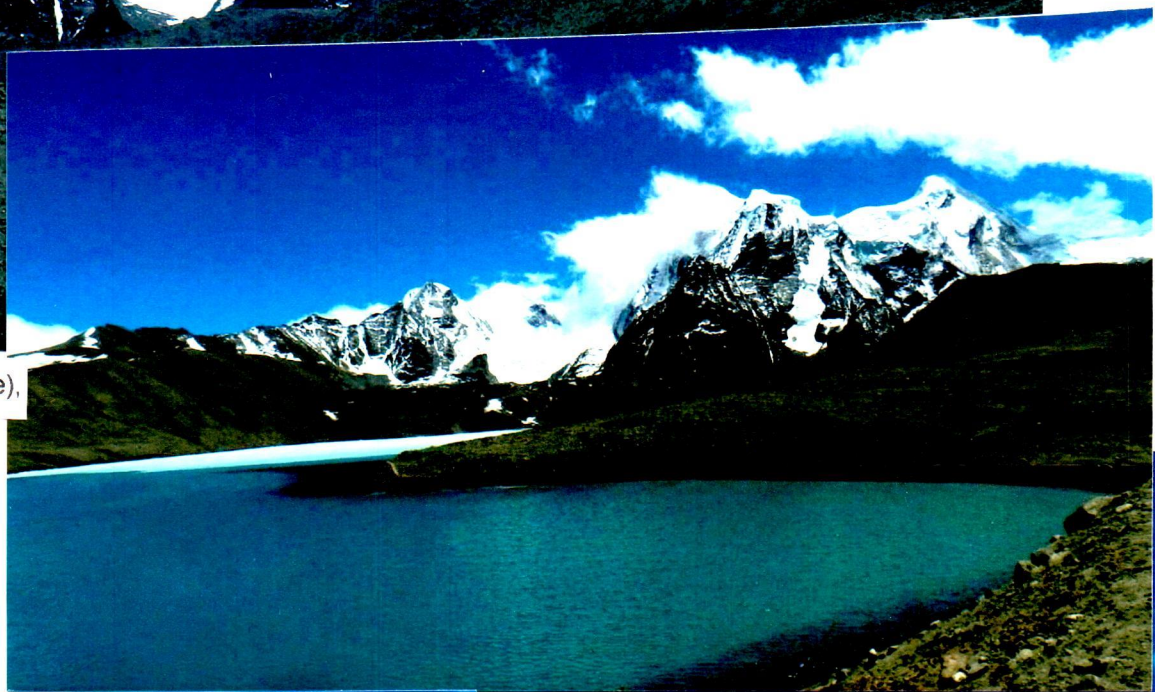


Chomo Yummo (right) and its range from The Plateau.

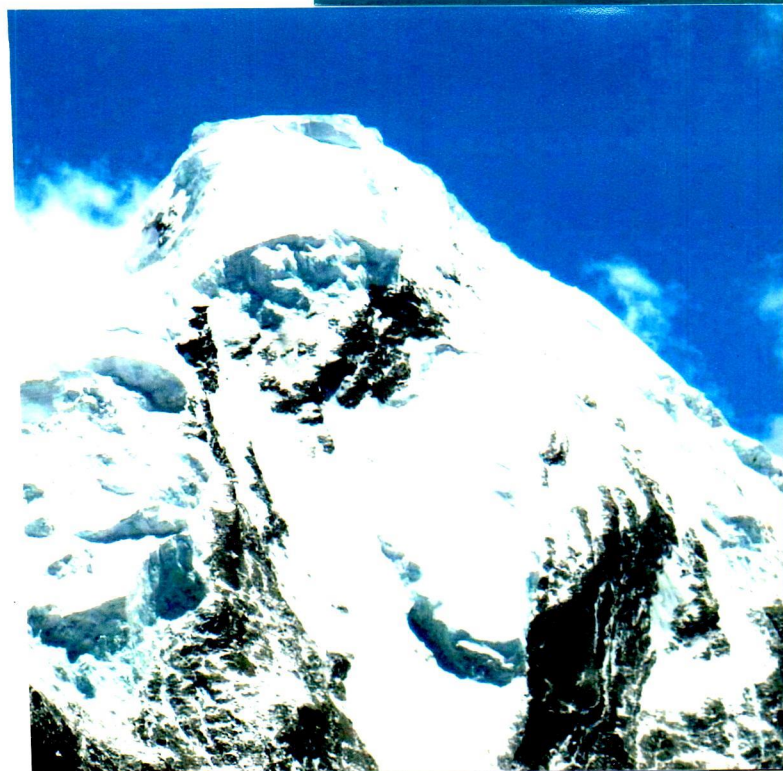


Chommo Yummo north face (above) and Kangchenjau from The Plateau.





Gurudongmar peaks (above),  
the lake, temple and  
close up of peak





fascination in arriving at a summit of a mountain, (or a pass) particularly when the unknown is on the other side.' (*Italics mine*)<sup>8</sup>

As we turned towards south, looking towards Kerang, the mountain scene that we had come looking for opened in front of us.

It is one of the most remarkable landscapes in the world, and alone worth the journey to see it... Cho Lhamo is in front, beneath the feet of the spectator, beyond is a desert with rounded hills. Further away, range after range of mountains, some of them covered with snow, extend to a distance the eye cannot appreciate. The total change of colour and form from the valleys of Sikkim, the utter barrenness, the intense clearness of the atmosphere, produce such an effect as if one were grazing upon another world in which the order of this is no longer preserved, where a tropical desert is seen amongst snow-capped peaks, beneath the unnaturally clear atmosphere of the arctic regions.

(Blanford, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1871. p. 407)

The Donkhya la (5495 m) was in front of us, flanked by peak Donkhya Ri (6190 m) and Sanglapu (6224 m). The southeast was dominated by Pauhunri (7125 m) and its five satellite peaks were leading to the south on the ridge dividing the Plateau and the Chumbi valley. These peaks were: 7032 m, 6911 m, 7032 m, 6915 m and, 6730 m, all unclimbed and unattempted. This would be one of the highest wall separating two valleys.

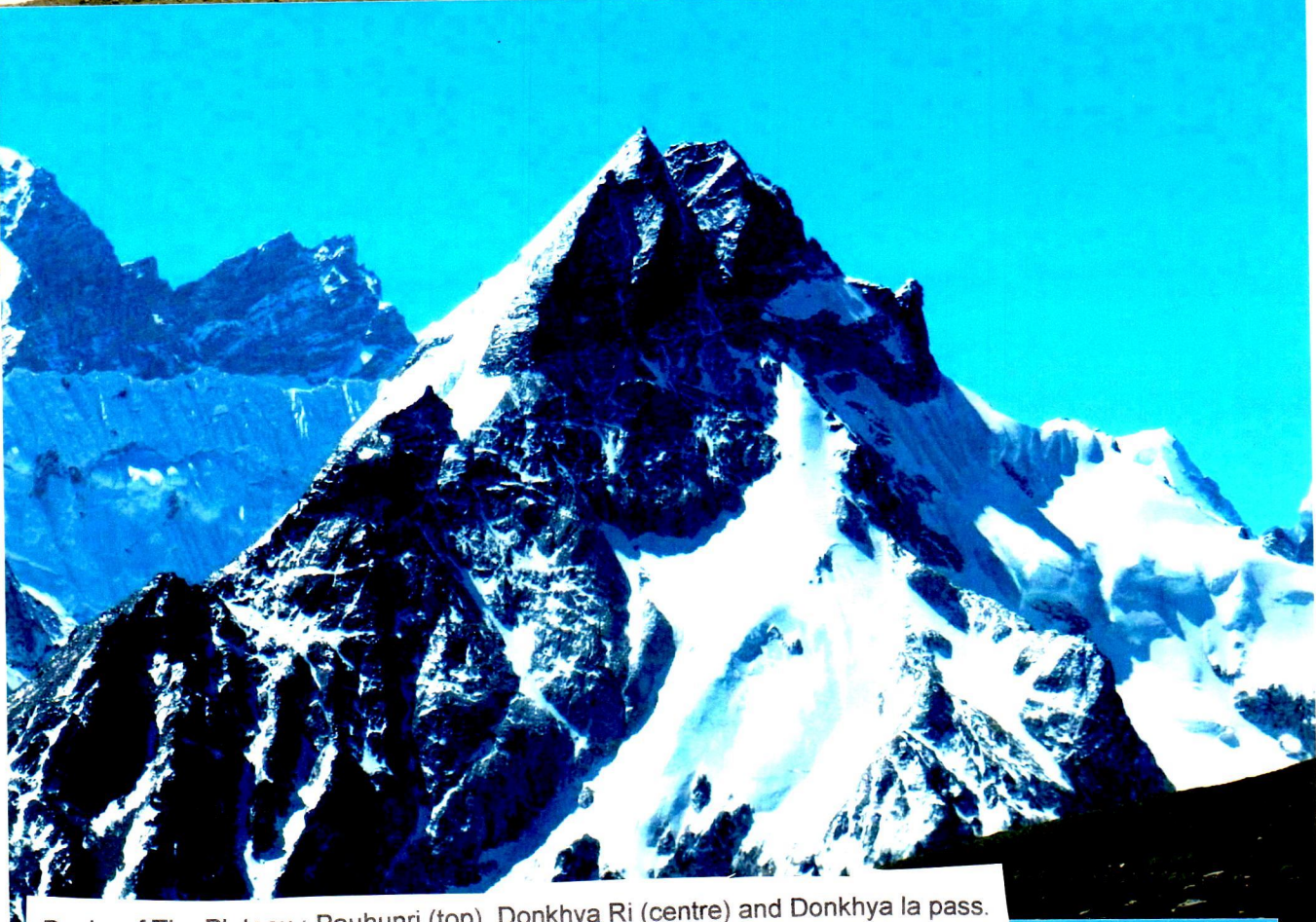
Cho Lhamo (or Tso Lhamo) had many attractions. Birds from Siberia and Russia come here during summer. There is much wildlife and vegetation. It is reported that geologically the Plateau is important. 'Messers G.B. Gourlay and J. B. Auden spent October and early November 1934 on a visit to north-eastern Sikkim. At a height of about 17,300 ft, they found a series of highly fossiliferous shale and limestone, the preliminary examination of which suggests that these beds are Triassic in age. This find is important in that these Tso Lhamo beds fill the gap between Lower Permian Lachi beds first found in 1933 by L.R.Wagner when on the Everest Expedition, and the Jurassic system which has long been known to cover so much of Tibet.' (Kenneth Mason, Editor, *Himalayan Journal*, Vol. VII, p. 139-141)

The Tibetan frontier ran to our north for a long distance, a high ridge with passes of Kongyakma (5605 m), Sesse la, (5462 m), Chulung la (5447 m) and ending at the 'Finger area' and pass of Kongra la (5133 m). The famous Kampa Dzong, where Dr Kellas was buried, was about 35 km from here. Thus Kampa Dzong was closely related to the mountains of Sikkim.

Just before reaching Kampa Dzong, Dr Kellas died of heart failure. He had been ailing since the march through the Chumbi valley. He had strained his heart during the previous year on Kamet and Narsing (19,128) and in the early spring of

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<sup>8</sup> *In the shadow of the Himalayas*, by John Claude White, 1883-1908. (Reprint, Mapin Publishing, Ahmadabad, 2005, p.69- 70)



Peaks of The Plateau : Pauhunri (top), Donkhya Ri (centre) and Donkhya la pass.



1921 in camps over 20,000 feet on Kabru. The country between Phari and Kampa Dzong, mostly above 16,000 feet was now too severe for him. He was buried on 6 June (1921) on the slopes of the hills south of Kampa Dzong facing the mountains of Sikkim, which he alone had climbed.

*Abode of Snow*, by Kenneth Mason, p. 157 (E. P. Dutton & Co., New York, 1955)

If there was a high, windy and desolate frontier anywhere, it was here. One could see a hint of Tibetan borderland of Chumbi valley. 'It was a magnificent afternoon and the view over Tibet was glorious. The power of sun's rays at this height in the very clear atmosphere was extraordinary, and I have never before or since felt it in the same way'- again to quote White.<sup>9</sup> We were on the shores of the Cho Lhamo lake though it had much snow on it but the location and surroundings were so beautiful that we forgot the strong wind and remained there in silence for some time.

The final word should belong to John D. Hooker, who, having seen most parts of the Himalaya pays the ultimate compliment to the Plateau and Cho Lhamo:

I doubt whether the world contains any scene with more sublime associations than this calm sheet of water, 17,000 feet above sea, with the shadow of mountains, 22,000 to 24,000 feet high, sleeping on its bosom.<sup>10</sup>

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Members: Harish Kapadia (67), Atul Rawal (64) and Vijay Kothari 69

Period: May 2012

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<sup>9</sup> White, *ibid.* p. 70.

<sup>10</sup> Brown, Percy, *ibid.* p. 129



Peaks of The Plateau :  
Unnamed peak 7000 m (left top),  
Peak 7032 m (centre),  
Kangchenjau East face (below)



# North Sikkim

HARISH KAPADIA

(1976)

IT ALL began on a Sunday morning. Zerksis Boga and I were asking each other. Where to this year? Suddenly Sikkim was thrown open to Indian mountaineers. By a coincidence, I was reading a book on Sikkim and that helped us to make up our minds on a long trek to North Sikkim. We trekked to Green Lake (4940 m) and crossed four high passes—Tangchung la (5150 m), Thieu la (5212 m), Lung-nak la (5035 m) and Sebu la (5852 m), in all covering 240 km.

We reached Gangtok, still uncertain about the inner-line permits, as there were no precedents on procedures available. Four days of hectic activity of telegrams and telephones to Delhi followed. At last, Mr. H.C. Sarin, the President of The Indian Mountaineering Foundation, came to our rescue and we were allowed to proceed. We were the first mountaineers in the region after a closure of 15 years.

Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim, to Chungthang (1561 m), a 96 km journey, was covered in 12 hours in a crowded bus. Next day, amidst pouring rain, we reached Lachen (2728 m). We arranged for 9 Tibetan porters, with Kondup Lama as a guide-cum-Sirdar. He was middle-aged, but very thorough and knew the area like the back of his hand. These Bhotia porters were a great asset. They were sturdy in build and noisy in manner.

At Lachen dak bungalow, going through the Visitors Book was like a glance through mountaineering history. There was mention of all the expeditions to Kangchenjunga and of the pre-war expeditions to Everest. These Everest expeditions passed through from Lachen in March and returned by late August. Sadly, in the return entry, some names were missing of those who had died on the mountains.

## ***Zemu Glacier and Green Lake (4934 m)***

Six km ahead of Lachen, at Zema, the route to Zemu glacier turns to the west. On a small bridge, we crossed the Zemu Chhu, which was to be our constant companion from now onwards. Soon, we ran into a difficult route over landslides, for 13 km making our progress slow. We were to encounter this kind of terrain almost throughout, as Zemu Chhu had swept its banks during the floods of 1968. By late afternoon, we reached Tallem where the Lhonak Chhu from the north meets Zemu Chhu. We camped on a little clearing as it poured down all night. Next day, we had the first view of Kangchenjunga (8598 m). Even at a distance, it appeared majestic in form and bold in outline. We crossed a small bridge to Jedang and climbed up to Shobuk. This route is a walk in paradise. We passed at least twenty different kinds of rhododendrons, varying in colour from white to the deepest red, and in height from trees of 6 m to shrubs of not more than a foot. We were particularly lucky in that so many varieties were flowering at the same time. After leisurely climbing, we descended to Jakthang at the bank of the river, exactly opposite the valley leading to Kishong la.

Next day, we crossed a small bridge over Thomphyak Chhu, where we met a Lepcha shikari, who had possibly crossed over from Kishong la (5208 m). He looked bewildered and seemed like a figure wandered out of an earlier world, where man

was closely allied to nature. He disappeared after giving us a long stare. After the bridge, the original route has been washed out by floods and it is boulder-hopping all the way to Yabuk (3978 m).

On the 13th, we made a late start with cloudy weather, wind blowing ceaselessly and the terrain getting more rugged. We passed three long moraine fields, looking like deserts, past the Rest Camp (4570 m), to camp at about 4730 m.

It cleared for a while in the morning. In the front was Siniolchu (6887 m), tilting against the sky, lifting its silver spear. There is no other mountain that can equal Siniolchu in beauty and boldness. Douglas Freshfield, who had seen many mountains on earth, spoke of it as the most beautiful peak in the world and the most superb triumph of mountain architecture. The impression it made on us was indelible. We made a delayed start for Green Lake, which was rather close and which we reached in 8 hours. The Green Lake proper has disappeared after the floods. We camped at (4935 m) on open ground.

15 May started with a thick fog and wind. We decided to hold the fort for the day and we literally had to hold on to our tent poles as it turned into a strong blizzard by late afternoon. The mist lifted only next day, revealing to us, for the first time, walls of the great amphitheatre at the head of Zemu glacier. We were face to face with Kangchenjunga, the highest peak in India and the third highest in the world. 12 km away, it rose to a height of 8000 m above us in a broad line of cliffs of terrific steepness.

After drying our equipment and having a quick lunch, we decided to move up 600 m above us for better views. This we did in the next 4 hours, trudging in snow and on rock. We were rewarded with a grand panorama of the Kangchenjunga divide and distant Chomolhari in Bhutan.

We were down the next day for lunch and divided ourselves in two parties. Boga, with a porter, started off towards the Nepal Gap glacier. He could observe the Nepal Gap, the Zemu Gap and the glacier system to the north. I, with another porter, descended to the bed of Zemu glacier and proceeded towards its junction with the Twins glacier. The Zemu glacier has receded almost to the base of the Kangchenjunga wall and it was an all-moraine walk with many small green lakes. It is said to pose a big threat to Sikkim, as when it melts or pours heavily it can cause unprecedented havoc through floods.

That evening, we lit a huge camp fire and sat around watching the colours of the sunset. We noticed, more than once, a peculiarity referred to by Sir J. Hooker, the false sunset in the east, where a glow, as strong as that of the sunset appears as a separate source of illumination. We saw a magnificent full moon, with Kangchenjunga radiating the glow. The romantic beauty of the landscape was almost beyond belief.

### ***Tangchung la (5150 m)***

On the 18th, we moved down to a little below Rest Camp. We were now to follow the high level trade route of old days, now out of use. It follows via Kishong la, Tangchung la, Theu la and Naku la into Tibet. We started climbing steeply towards Tangchung la. The Bhotia porter has, through practice of generations, become so indifferent to the angle of his track, that he prefers a ladder path to any reasonable zigzag, even when heavily laden. Many a time, we lost the path and had to resort to maps, as our guide was also repeating the route after a number of years.

All along the route, we came across what appeared to be cairns marking the route. On closer approach, they proved to be plants, stalks of the giant rhubarb *Rheum nobile*. The plant measures 45 inches in diameter at the base of the cone and is about the same height. We crossed Yakjuknamteng ground and reached the pass over rocky terrain and strong winds.

The Tangchung la is a broad, but not deep gap, guarded on both sides by rocky eminences. One of the neighbouring crags has a curious resemblance to a large bird. The summit, east of the pass, Tangchung Khang (5303 m) could be easily climbed when free of snow and would afford a grand panorama. In the north, was Thieu la (5212 m) separated from us by a gulf of 900 m.

On the other side, was a steep descent in deep snow. We passed three lakes and then the last slopes of thick scrub of juniper and rhododendrons. We camped at Theulacha, after crossing the river Thomphyak Chhu.

### ***Thieu la (5212 m)***

20 May dawned cloudy and it was snowing till noon. As it cleared a little by late afternoon, we decided to climb up to the pass and camp there. We followed a steep ridge, flanking a nala and then crossed three long boulder-filled fields to camp 33 m below the actual pass. We were up and about early next day and climbed up to the pass. A magnificent panorama opened in front of us. On the northeast was Lungnak la (5035 m), Khangchengyao (6889 m) to the north, Naku la (5270 m) leading to Tibet and the proper continuation of the trade route we had been following. To the northwest, was Chorten Nyima (6927 m). To the south, the tips of the peak of Zemu shot up over the white shoulders of the intervening ridge of the Tangchung la.

We descended to Lango to meet our first yaks. We lunched luxuriously on a hillock looking over a spread of wide valley, gravelly and flat. We were in Lhonak. There are no trees, no rhododendrons, no shrubs, except for a few stunted junipers, no turf, only sparse grass, good enough for yaks. The slopes below the snow were brown and yellow, the flats, pale and grey. We crossed the long wind-swept plateau to Teblhe and Muguthang (4520 m) after fording the ice-cold Langbo Chhu in knee-deep water. Muguthang is a place of nine winter months and its July snowstorms are proverbial. It is a land of moraine and a monument of diminished glaciers.

### ***Lugnak la (5035 m)***

From Muguthang, we turned to the east, off the trade route we were following. In two hours of gentle climbing, Charub Chho (lake) was reached. The angle steepened from here onwards, with soft snow. Two steep climbs led us to a sharp depression in the ridge, which was the pass. Lugnak la was first crossed by White, the political officer in 1895 and again by Dr Kellas in 1910, who pronounced it as too difficult and dangerous for laden porters. On the other side, the slopes were as a rule so steep that, though we often plunged above our knees, gravity helped us to get forward. A long descent led us to the valley floor to Chhoptra bridge ahead to Thangu (3920 m), where we had a day's rest.

### ***Sebu la (5352 m)***

From Thangu, we decided to move northeast to Sebu la, leading into the Lachung valley. The terrain ahead was a huge plain with mud and water, climbing up gently. We camped near the ruins of the Himalayan Club hut, in the company of a yak-herd.

SIKKIM

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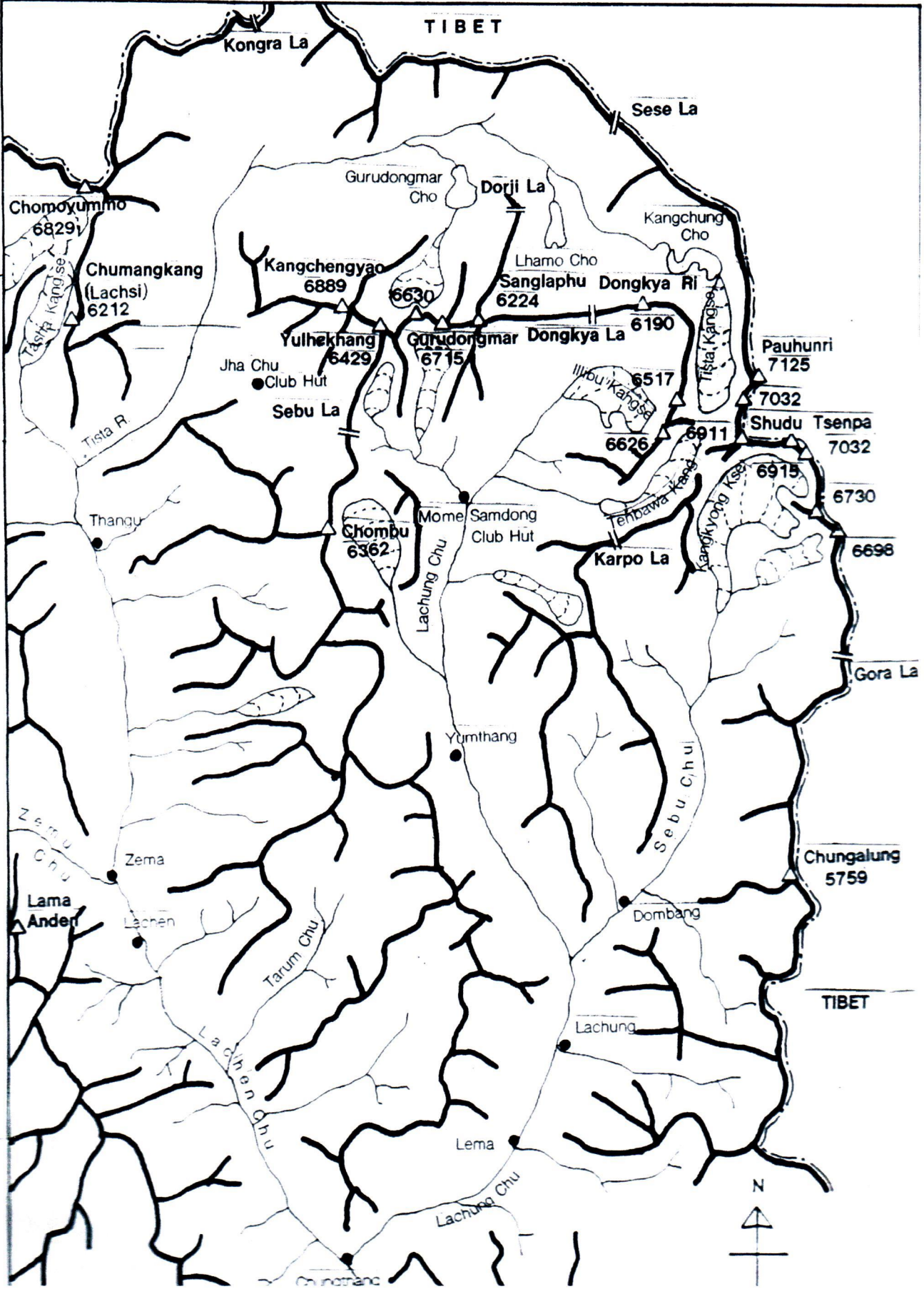
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We made an early start on the 25th. The route followed a steep scree slope till we reached the snowline, deep with fresh snow. For the first time, the sturdy porters started complaining. Boga led off on a small rock wall and fixed ropes to haul up the loads. Looking behind, we could see the whole Kangchenjunga divide. After an hour of trudging on snow, suddenly the worst of Sikkim weather came to our rescue, as clouds started rolling in with strong winds. This consolidated the fresh snow enough to restore some confidence in our porters. Soon we were scrambling up on all fours. At the top, it was difficult to locate the pass exactly and we were now waiting for a clearance in the weather. After an hour, we hit the correct pass and went down steeply on the other side to Sebu Chho. The upper lake, surrounded by the icefall of Chombu peak, caused havoc in 1950, through floods. By late evening, we were comfortably settled at Mome Samdong hot springs (4624 m).

In bright sunshine, we walked down to Yumthang, with excellent views of Donkya Ri (6190 m) and Pauhunri (7125 m). Yumthang dak bungalow is the biggest and the best in the region, with hot springs nearby. We walked through the most beautiful countryside to Lachung, where we 'surrendered' to the army hospitality and a lift back to Gangtok via Chungthang.

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Members: Harish Kapadia (31) and Zerkisi Boga (30)

Period: May 1976

# SIKKIM HIMALAYA

## A brief climbing and exploration history

**Soli S. Mehta and Harish Kapadia**

SIKKIM HIMALAYA is one of the more physically accessible sections of the Himalaya—within four days from Calcutta, the traveller can be among the mountains. In the records of exploration and climbing in Sikkim the names of Sir Joseph Hooker, the great botanist explorer, Douglas Freshfield and Dr. A.M. Kellas (eminent climbers of their day) stand out as having opened the western eyes to the beauty of the area and for calling attention to the possibilities of trekking and climbing of every degree of severity.

After the reconnaissance surveys under Hartman and Tanner which were completed in the 1870s, the country soon opened to travellers and explorers. Between 1888-96 Major L.A. Waddell made several journeys, although his book is of greater interest to ethnologists.

Claude White also travelled extensively as Political Officer between 1889-1902. Amongst his travels, the more important were the ones in 1890 when he crossed the Guicha la and descended the Talung valley to the Tista river, becoming the first person to investigate the gorges between the Pandim and Simvo groups. His other major journey was up the Zemu glacier, to about 5340 metres. When stopped by bad weather, he diverted over the Thieu la into Lhonak where he was barred by the officious Dzongpon of Kampa Dzong who claimed that the Thieu la was the frontier between Tibet and Sikkim. However after the 1902 Sikkim-Tibet boundary mission, White was to travel further afield—at the way up the Chorten Nyima la.

In 1899, Freshfield, along with Prof. Garwood, the brothers Sella and Sherpa Rinzin Namgyal, made his 'high-level' tour so interestingly described in his *Round Kangchenjunga*. He first traversed the Zemu glacier and camped east of the Green Lake (which, alas, has disappeared today—presumably drained when its blockage gave way). Bad weather foiled his attempts at investigating the approaches to the Nepal Gap and the Zemu Gap. He therefore crossed into Lhonak via the Thieu la, crossed the Jongsang la onto the Kangchenjunga glacier (in Nepal) and made a thorough study of the 'Pyramid', 'Tent' (now Kirat Chuli) and 'Nepal' peaks from the west. From the village of Kangbachen, he passed through Ghunsa and Tseram and re-crossed into Sikkim via the Kang la to Dzongri, whence he visited the Guicha la.

1883 was the year in which the first serious climbing began in Sikkim. The climber was W.W. Graham who, with two Swiss guides climbed Jubonu (5936 m), south of Pandim. He pronounced Pandim itself to be 'quite inaccessible owing to hanging glaciers', then proceeded to climb a mountain which he claimed was Kabru—that too in three days from a camp at 5640 m (18,500 ft) apparently by its southeast face. This ascent excited considerable controversy, with the various experts arguing for and against the claim. The most generous conclusion suggested that he had climbed Forked Peak (6108 m).

The first serious attempt on Kabru (7338 m) was made twenty-four years later in 1907 by Rubenson and Aas, two Norwegians, who approached their goal from the Rathong Chu and attacked the icefall between Rathong and the Kabru Dome. Five days of hard route-finding over the highly crevassed icefall brought them to the easier 'snow flat' (that can be seen from Darjeeling), whence they attempted the north summit (7338 m). The first attempt failed because of a late start and intense cold. The second time they tried from a higher camp, but once again the cold delayed their start and they gave up at about 7285 m. During the descent Rubenson slipped but was held by Aas (five of the six strands of the rope having broken under the strain). Frostbite to Aas' toes put paid to further attempts and the peak remained unclimbed till 1935 when C.R. Cooke succeeded in reaching its north summit.

Some major ascents were made in the Kabru Group by the Indian army team in 1994 (Col. H.S. Chauhan). Spending long time in the region a well-acclimatised and large team with resources made the first ascents of Kabru South (7317 m) and Kabru III (7395 m).

Kabru North (7338 m) was also climbed. It was after many years that this high group received vigorous attention.

No climber has enjoyed himself and travelled so extensively in the Sikkim Himalaya as Dr. A.M. Kellas. Unfortunately for the climbing fraternity he wrote hardly any detailed descriptions of his climbs. He first visited Sikkim in 1907 and then returned in 1909, 1910, 1912, 1920 and 1921. During 1907 he concentrated on the Zemu glacier, attempted Simvo with alpine guides, all three attempts being beaten back by bad weather and snow conditions. He also failed to reach the Nepal Gap in the two attempts made. In 1909 he attempted Pauhunri (7125 m) twice but was beaten back by storm and snow. He also visited the Langpo and Kangchenjunga glaciers, crossed the Jongsang la into Lhonak, reached high on Jongsang and climbed Langpo (6954 m). He tried for the Nepal Gap again, but was defeated near the top by a snowstorm.

The next year (1910) he returned to the Zemu and reached but did not cross the Simvo Saddle and the Zemu Gap. On his fourth attempt he at last reached the Nepal Gap, except for a small rock wall at the summit. He then crossed the 'Lhonak pass' into Lhonak and climbed high on Langpo to reconnoitre the summit of Jongsang, then crossed the Chorten Nyima la and climbed Sentinel Peak (6490 m) and finally dashed off to climb Pauhunri, which he did in a five-day struggle, and put the finishing touches to a most eventful season by climbing Chomo Yummo (old spelling is Chomiomo) (6829 m) after reconnoitring its various approaches. His 1912 visit was devoted to exploration of the different approaches to Kangchengyao (6889 m) and he eventually reached the summit plateau from the north. He was believed to have been the first European to cross the Sebu la, connecting the Lachen and the Lachung valleys. He was back in 1920 and climbed Narsingh (5825 m). The following year he worked out a new route on the icefall of Kabru, hoping to use it later. He returned to Darjeeling only a few days before starting on the first British Everest expedition; alas, he died on his way through Tibet with the party.

One of the better documented journeys into Lhonak was that of G.B. Gourlay who, with E. Eversden, managed to escape the heat of an October in Calcutta in 1930 to travel extensively in Lhonak.

Earlier that year (1930), the International expedition led by Prof. G.O. Dyhrenfurth had not succeeded in its attempt on Kangchenjunga from the north-west (Nepal) side. But the strong team of climbers, at their fittest after their struggle at altitude, engineered a route up and over the Nepal Gap. As the rest of the expedition worked its way slowly down the Lhonak valley to Lachen, E. Schneider climbed Nepal Peak (6910 m) by himself from the Gap. Then the remaining fit mountaineers crossed the Jongsang la into Lhonak and made the first ascent of Jongsang (7483 m) after gaining the north ridge (3 and 8 June, 1930). Schneider and Hoerlin, who were first up Jongsang, travelled on to the northern boundary with Tibet and climbed a high peak on the border.

One of the earliest traverses of the Passanram and Talung valleys was made by Dr. E. Allwein and H. Pircher, members of the second unsuccessful German expedition to Kangchenjunga in 1931 (led by Paul Bauer). During the expedition, Allwein and Breuner had already ascended Sugar Loaf (6455 m). After the expedition disbanded these two, along with three Sherpas, climbed up to the Simvo Saddle (between Simvo and Siniolchu), hardly an easy route out of the Zemu glacier, and descended into the Passanram valley. Their journey through miles of twisted rhododendron thicket, complicated by an inaccurate map, gave them a harrowing time before they emerged into the Talung valley and eventual habitation.

In 1932 G.A.R. Spence and J. Hale attempted Chomo Yummo.

Almost during the same period Capt. G.H. Osmaston, along with friends, visited Lhonak over the Lugnak la, and made an unsuccessful attempt on Fluted Peak (6084 m). Then the party visited the Chorten Nyima la and fixed accurately the position of Sentinel Peak, first climbed by Dr. Kellas in 1910. On the way back Osmaston and his cousin entered the Zemu valley by a snow gap, Kellas' 'Lhonak Pass', four miles east of Kirat Chuli (Tent Peak), and from Yangthang, Osmaston proceeded alone over the Kishong la past the Talung monastery to Mangan. A pleasant month's holiday from Calcutta.

Lhonak in the days before the second world war was fast becoming a popular climbing area and, as the members from the two Kangchenjunga expeditions enjoyed the climbing in the valley, so the British climbers returning from Everest in 1933 chose to relieve their tired limbs on the lesser but by no means easier heights in Sikkim. Thus, Shipton and Wager crossed over from the Lashar plains into Lhonak over an unidentified pass which they named Lhonak la (first crossing) between the Jongsang and Lhonak Peaks. From here, Shipton climbed Lhonak Peak (second ascent) to the north of the col.

G.B. Gourlay and J. B. Auden spent the October/November of 1934 in northeast Sikkim. In spite of the wind and cold they took a lot of photo-graphs and sorted out some of the inconsis-tencies in the Survey of India maps.

One of the more interesting climbs in the mid-thirties was C.R. Cook's first ascent of Kabru in November 1935. He correctly predicted the more stable but colder weather conditions of the post-monsoon period as being the most suitable for Sikkim. G. Schoberth, six Sherpas and Cooke ascended the formidable icefall that guards all approaches from the east, under the slopes of the Dome. Once fully stocked in the relative safety of the upper terrace, which took them a good three weeks, they made rapid progress diagonally up the south face to reach the north summit in good order—a more successful repetition of the Norwegian attempt twenty years earlier.

Sikkim in 1936 was again a happy hunting ground for climbers and trekkers. The Germans (Paul Bauer) in preparation for Nanga Parbat (1937) visited the Zemu glacier with Karl Wien, A. Göttner and G. Hepp. Their first attempts were on the eastern summit of the Twins (now Gimmigela) (7005 m) and yet another shot at Tent Peak (now Kirat Chuli) (7365 m), both beaten back by dangerous snow conditions, though they once again climbed Nepal Peak (6910 m) en route to Tent Peak. But a most satisfying climb was Siniolchu (6887 m)—one of the loveliest peaks in all Himalaya—by Wien and Göttner. Before leaving the region, Bauer, Göttner and Hepp climbed the western of the two north peaks of the Simvo massif (6587 m).

The same year Shipton, Warren, Kempson and Wigram, returning from Everest, entered Sikkim over the Kongra la and, from a camp on the nearby lake, Shipton and Kempson climbed Gurudongmar (6715 m).

Meanwhile, Tilman ('with some unexpected time on my hands') potted around the southern approaches to the Zemu Gap and came away suitably chastened. This is by no means a recommended short cut into the Zemu glacier from Darjeeling.

The *Himalayan Journal* Vol. IX printed photographs, and noted the completion of the Himalayan Club hut at Mome Samdong. It was planned to build a similar hut on the Lachen side, enabling travellers to traverse the Lachung and Lachen valleys (over the Sebu la) without the use of tents. The second hut was subsequently established and the system worked admirably for a few years until the end of World War II, but neglect and disuse brought the facility to a sad end.

Kirat Chuli (old Tent Peak) (7365 m) continued to evade the most determined efforts—its armoury comprised soft and wind-slab snow and fierce winds. In 1937 Schmaderer, Paidar and Grob spent six weeks in the Zemu investigating the approaches to Kang-chenjunga, during the course of which they had a shot at Tent Peak and the Twins, but were beaten back. As a consolation they made a fine second ascent of Siniolchu.

Later that year John Hunt with his wife and C.R. Cooke spent October/November in the Zemu. They too had their eyes on Tent Peak. As they reached the ridge south of Nepal Peak, the wind smacked them with full force. Hunt bravely soloed up the western summit of Nepal Peak (only thirty-five metres below the main summit) before the sheer threat of being lifted off his feet by the wind persuaded him to return to the safety of the lower and protected heights. Cooke then led an exploration to the North Col of Kangchenjunga, Hunt reached Nepal and Zemu Gaps, and the party climbed Keilberg, a look-out peak just above Green Lake. They also crossed the Twins-Sugar Loaf ridge from the Nepal Gap glacier onto the Twins glacier—a remarkable feat. Finally Cooke left the Zemu over the Simvo Saddle and

was lucky enough to chance on a relatively easier trail through the rhododendron jungle down the Passanram and Talung valleys to Mangan.

Another Everester returning from Tibet broke slightly newer ground. Naku la is a pass lying west of Chomo-yummo and is used by Tibetans grazing their sheep along the Chaka Chu on the Sikkim side. Tilman, in 1938, followed this route into Lhonak, crossed over a col into the Tashi Chu and made the first ascent of Lachsi (6212 m). Having reached Thangu in the Lachen valley, he diverted into the Zemu, and made the only recorded crossing over the Zemu Gap, across the Tong-shyong and Talung glaciers and over the Guicha la into the Parek Chu, Dzongri and back to civilisation—this crossing was more of a mountaineering feat than mere trekking and, from its description, hardly to be recommended.

Kirat Chuli (Tent Peak) eventually allowed its first ascent in 1939 by Paidar, Schmaderer and Grob, who took the traditional route, over the top of Nepal Peak and reached the summit by tricky and dangerous southwest ridge (29 May, 1939).

In July 1945, Harry Tilly climbed Chomoyummo (6829 m) and in September of the same year Wilfrid Noyce climbed Pauhunri (7125 m). Both were accompanied by Sherpa Angtharkay, and both were second ascents of peaks climbed by Dr. A.M. Kellas.

Sikkim continued to be the favourite area for treks and short mountaineering holidays during the war years and after. The maps still appeared to contain errors, but one by one these were put right by the keen members of the Himalayan Club—Trevor Braham in 1949 cleared some uncertainties in an area south of Pauhunri and discovered a 'hidden col' from the plateau at the head of the Kangyong glacier to the valleys to the west and eventually into the Lachung valley, near Mome Samdong. His attempt on Kang-chengyao by Kellas' 1912 route was beaten back by the lateness of the season (November), the chill of the winter winds and lack of what we today recognise as thermal protection. A real pioneering bit of work.

In the early fifties, Sikkim began to receive its first set of geographical restrictions, particularly for foreigners, and gradually with the deterioration in the Indo-Chinese relationship, the flight of the Dalai Lama and the Indo-Sikkimese Treaty where the defence of Sikkim fell to India, permission even to Indian nationals became restricted in certain areas, mainly around the border passes into Tibet. Expeditions needed greater preparation and took longer to obtain permits beyond the Inner Line and mountaineering activity became restricted to teams from the Armed Forces. Eventually, around 1961, all but the small area of Western Sikkim was closed to everyone except Army personnel.

It was in 1975 that members of the Indian Air Force and the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (A.J.S. Grewal) attempted Talung from the Guicha la and Talung glacier. Whilst the approach from the Sikkim side was peppered with avalanches and hanging glaciers, it was considered advisable to make serious attempts only from the Yalung glacier in Nepal. Attempts at reaching the Zemu Gap from the south were barred by large crevasses a few hundred feet below the saddle.

In 1976 Harish Kapadia and Zerksis Boga were the first civilians in fifteen years to be allowed into the north, the playground of the past. They repeated some of the popular routes: to Green Lake, over the Thieu la into Lhonak, over the Lugnak la to Thangu, over the Sebu la to Mome Samdong and back to Chungthang.

Since then, most expeditions have been around the east Rathong glacier, the valley used by the students of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute at Darjeeling. The usual targets are Frey Peak, Forked Peak, Kokthang and Kabru Dome. Rathong has been climbed by Indian pre-Everest expeditions and Arm teams in 1964 and 1987, but always by the western approach, from the Yalung glacier.

In 1979, a Calcutta based club was given permission to attempt Pandim (6691 m) and Guicha Peak (6127 m), both considered holy and therefore hitherto out-of-bounds—that is when the powers-that-be wanted to say 'No'. In the days when Sikkim was an independent Protectorate of the Indian Government, there used to be some consistency in the summits that were regarded as holy and therefore not open for climbing. They approached Pandim by

trying to latch onto its north ridge from the Onglakthang glacier, but bad weather and lack of sufficient time forced them to return from a few metres short of the saddle on the ridge. The ridge connecting Guicha Peak and the Guicha la was deemed an unpromising route to the summit of Guicha due to snow conditions.

The same year Sonam Wangyal (Everest summitter, 1965) led a team from the Sikkim Police to Siniolchu and the ascent was by more or less the same route as its two previous ascents in 1936 and 1937. A brave effort and a successful one over a heavily comiced and broken ridge connecting the summit with Little Siniolchu.

After considerable wrangling, permission was given to another Calcutta team in 1980 to climb Lama Anden, first climbed by Wing Cdr A.J.M. Smyth in 1944. Led by B. Nayak, their route lay over Kishong la and the ridge connecting the pass to the summit. That this obvious route is not plain sailing was made quite clear to the team who had to retreat from fairly near the top owing to shortage of time and some error in route-finding.

Peaks to the north are still 'Armed Forces Territory'. Thus Gurudongmar (6715 m) was climbed from the northeast by an Assam Rifles party led by Norbu Sherpa in 1980,<sup>26</sup> forty-four years after its first ascent by Shipton and Kempson.

The following year a team from Bombay (sponsored by the Himalayan Club) attempted Kabru Dome, a peak that looks far more easy than it actually is. For a start it is defended by an icefall that is extremely tricky, then comes the final badly broken ridge with several false summit like bumps, and the highest point, at the far end of a wide arc, is sufficiently exposed to test the skill and endurance of the hardest climber. Instead of attempting the normal icefall, they sought out a gully which gave them direct access to the ridge south of the peak. The gully too turned out to be a mini-icefall in disguise and, after some valiant attempts at getting through, they were forced to withdraw.

Yet another I.M.F.-sponsored pre-Everest expedition, led by Col D.K. Khullar, climbed Kabru Dome by the regular icefall route in 1982.

The same year Sonam Wangyal led a successful Sikkim Police expedition to Lama Anden, but his account in the *H.J.* Vol. 39 is surprisingly bereft of even the most elementary detail of route.

Lama Anden was also climbed by an Indian Artillery team led by Lt Col Kuldip Singh in 1984. A good effort that culminated in success after taking some risks through an avalanche-prone route.

Chomoyummo was climbed in 1986, this time by a pre-Kangchenjunga team from Assam Rifles. A route from the northeast was selected. This was a mass ascent with a vengeance—a total of thirty-nine climbers reached the top in three summit groups on 27, 28 and 29 October, 1986.

Rathong was again a target for a Gurkha Rifles team in 1987. Led by Maj K.V. Cherian they vainly tried the approach from the east Rathong glacier. But after overcoming the horrible icefall, they found their way totally barred from the plateau-like amphitheatre that is surrounded by the peaks of Kabru and Kabru Dome. Learning their lesson, they then crossed over the saddle between Rathong and Kokthang into the Yalung valley taking the route of previous ascents, a fine west ridge that guides the climber to the summit which they reached on 24 May, 1987.

Kokthang (6147 m), lying across the pass south of Rathong, has been claimed by several expeditions. Its serrated summit ridge comprises several humps, giving the impression of summits. An Army team (Maj Rana) in 1961, a ladies' expedition (Miss Pushpa Athavle) in 1966, another Army expedition (Maj K.V. Cherian) in 1986 and a Doon School team (Dr. S.C. Biala), plus a team from Assam in 1988, have all reached subsidiary points on the ridge while the true summit at its northernmost end remains inviolate.

In the early nineties the Government of Sikkim changed rules. They demanded additional peak fees and insisted on a second liaison officer to accompany the teams. This was a most unfair practice and the Himalayan Club took a lead in protesting against this rule. Now the fees are collected by the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, avoiding the bureaucratic

delays and only one liaison officer accompanies the team. There is some relaxation in the rigidity about the issue of permits and some expeditions have been allowed in the sensitive areas as long as they could pay. Kirat Chuli, Siniolchu and Chummankhang East were either attempted or climbed.

One of the important expeditions to visit Sikkim was led by Doug Scott in 1996. They explored approaches to Chombu and Chomoyummo, crossed Donkhya la and finally climbed Chombu East (5745 m). Several other peaks were attempted. They brought back excellent pictorial record which should be most useful for this otherwise restricted area.

Kangchenjunga (8586 m), the only 8000er in India, was climbed from the eastern approaches. Since its first ascent by this route, several teams have climbed the mountain.

(From book: *EXPLORING THE HIDDEN HIMALA* Soli S. Mehta and Harish Kapadia.  
(Published by Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1988)





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Peaks of The Plateau: The Panorama from Chholamo Lake : Above: L to r: Southeast: Pauhunri, Unnamed Peak 7000 m (behind), Donkhya Ri, Unnamed Peak 7032 m. Below: Southwest: Donkhya La and unnamed peaks. Chholamo Lake in foreground.