
DICK ISHERWOOD

Nepal 2005

I am indebted to Elizabeth Hawley, Lindsay Griffin, Bruce Normand, Oliver von Rotz, and Ueli Steck for information included in these notes.

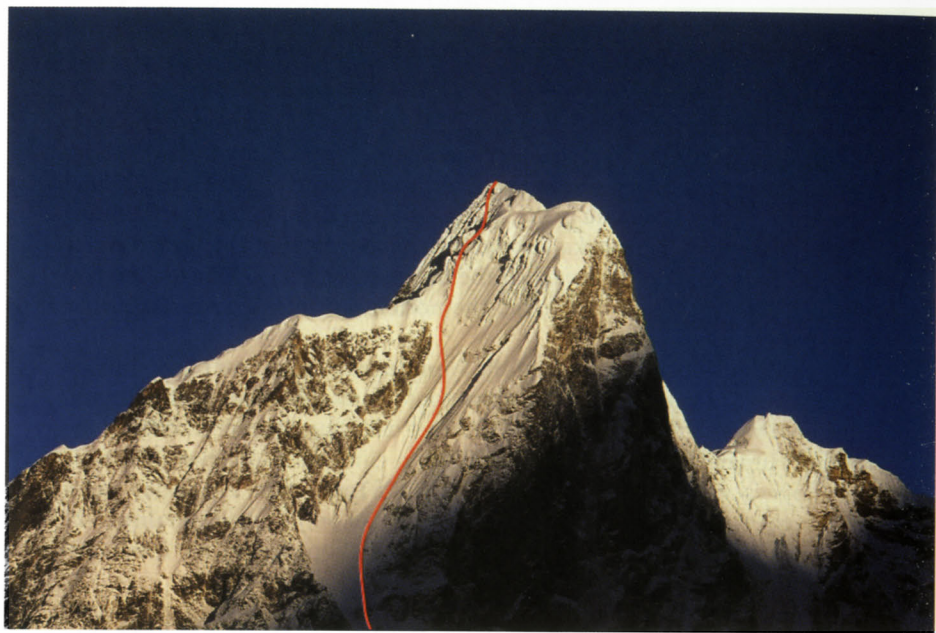
Continuing political unrest in Nepal ensured that the overall pattern of mountaineering activity seen in recent years continued in 2005. Many parties went to Everest, Cho Oyu, the other 8000m peaks and Ama Dablam, but relatively few to the more outlying areas, and several of these encountered Maoist rebels, usually demanding money.

The spring season on **Everest** was marked by unusually bad weather and by forecasts that seem to have been further off the mark than usual. Out of no less than 101 groups, only 53 were successful, compared to 54 out of 64 in spring 2004. It is perhaps a sign of the times that a 50% success rate on the world's highest mountain is considered unusually poor. Most summit climbs were made in very late May or early June, two or three weeks later than the normal peak traffic time. Of these, 21 were made by the original *South Col* route and 32 by the *North Col*; there were no new routes. A Czech party attempted the *Japanese Couloir* but retreated from 7100m. The single autumn attempt was unsuccessful – no one has climbed Everest in the post-monsoon season since 2002.

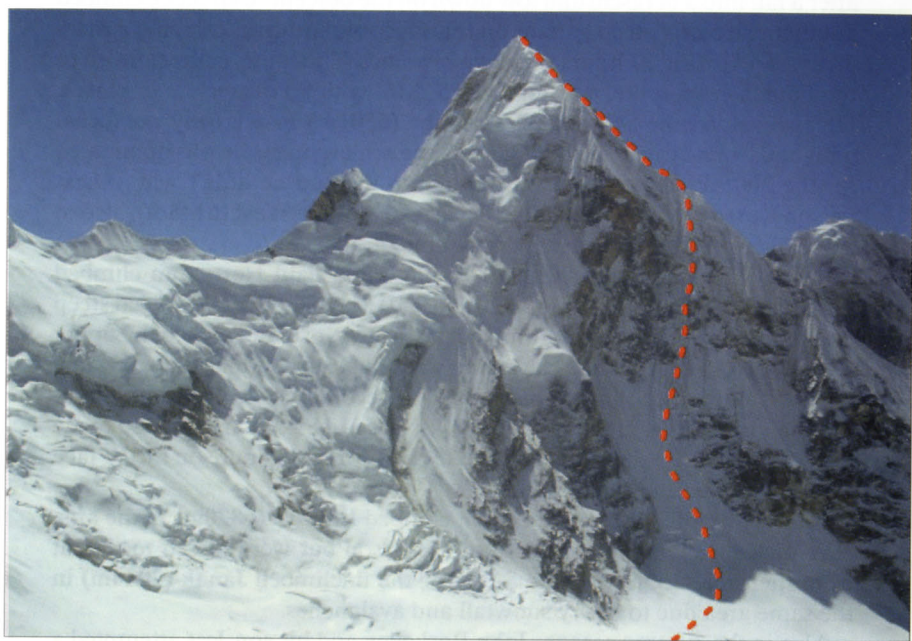
In the category of comic firsts on Everest, two Nepalese were married on the summit and a South African became the first black person to climb it twice, while the mountain also saw its first Mongolian, Bhutanese, Montenegrin and Muslim female ascents. Apa Sherpa climbed it for the 15th time and continues to regard Everest as just a well-paying job. A French helicopter pilot claimed to have landed his *Ecureuil* on the summit and even got out for the view; this got him into some trouble with the Nepalese Government.

Alan Hinkes reported an ascent of **Kangchenjunga** by the original *Yalung Face* route to complete his fourteen 8000ers, and was rewarded by the British Ambassador with a garden party. However, what is good enough for HM Diplomatic Corps is not always good enough for the climbing community and some doubt has been cast on whether he reached the top. Of course no one steps on the actual summit of Kangchenjunga.

Of the other 8000m peaks, **Cho Oyu** had nine pre-monsoon and 37 post-monsoon ascents, mostly from Tibet. **Dhaulagiri** had four ascents by its NE ridge, and several failures, mainly in the spring. **Annapurna** was climbed once, by a multinational party on its N face, which included Ed Veisturs



156. Ueli Steck's route on the south-east face of Taweche. (*Ueli Steck*)



157. The west face of Drangnag Ri. (*Oliver von Rotz*)

who thereby also completed his set of 8000m peaks. On the same expedition a fall of ice killed Christian Kuntner and injured Abele Blanc, both of whom were also on their final 'achtausender'. A Spanish expedition reached 7600m on the W Pillar of Makalu in the spring. In Tibet Ralf Djumovits, Gerlinde Kaltenbrunner and Hirotaka Takeuchi made the first south to north traverse of Shisha Pangma. They reached the main summit on 7 May via the SW face (*British route*) and descended the normal north side route with four bivouacs in total.

In the Phu Khola area north of the Annapurnas a Japanese party climbed **Gyajikang (7038m)** by a possibly new route on its SW ridge. In the autumn this area was sadly the scene of the worst climbing disaster to date in the Nepal Himalaya. A French party of seven climbers and eleven Nepalese employees were killed on **Kangguru (6981m)** when a powder snow avalanche struck their base camp. This peak had only had one fatality in 27 previous attempts, and the camp was apparently placed in the usual site. Not much Himalayan climbing is risk free.

Several more technical climbs were done on lower peaks. Two Korean climbers made the first winter ascent of the N face of **Cholatse (6440m)** in January 2005 by a very steep variant to a previous French route. They had three bivouacs on the ascent, and both were injured and severely frostbitten after a fall into a bergschrund low down on the descent. Ueli Steck climbed another extremely steep variant on this face solo in April, carrying a mere 6 kilos, and taking 37 hours with two bivouacs. The route, a direct finish to the French 1995 route, was graded F5, M6, with 90 degree ice in places. He also soloed the SE face of **Taweche (6501m)** in a largely nocturnal nine-hour round trip in late April. For these achievements he was nominated for the 2005 Piolet d'Or award, though in the end he didn't win. A six-person Korean team climbed the SW face of **Lobuje West (6145m)**, also in April, using some fixed rope on rock up to grade 5.8.

In the Rolwaling valley Bruce Normand and Paul Hartmann climbed the W face of **Drangnag Ri (6801m)** on 9-10 May. The route involved steep ice climbing to WI5 with brief mixed passages. Normand soloed the upper SW ridge from a bivouac as Hartmann was unable to continue due to cramp. This was a new route and probably only the second ascent of the mountain. Normand and other members of his Swiss-based expedition team also made the first official ascent of **Chekigo (6257m)** by a direct route on the W face from a camp on the Menlung La.

Andrej Stremfelj and Miha Haban climbed **Dzanye (6870m)** in the area NW of Kangchenjunga in the autumn season but were forced to retreat from their main objective, the S face of the unclimbed **Janak (7044m)** in the same area due to heavy snowfall and avalanches.

Also in the autumn season, John Roskelley and his son Jess attempted a ridge on the NE (Tibetan) side of **Gauri Shankar (7134m)** but retreated from around 5450m on very loose rock.