



## AAC Publications

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### **Langpo South, South Face and Southwest Ridge; Kirat Chuli, Attempt**

India, Sikkim

**On October 20, Rushad Nanavatty and I completed a likely new line, Lungta (820m, 70° ice), up the south face and southwest ridge of Langpo South (6,857m, 27°50'22.43"N, 88°12'5.57"E). This appears to be the second reported ascent of the peak.**

After camping below the face at about 6,040m, we climbed to the summit unroped, curling slightly left of the southwest ridge as we neared the top. Keeping the rope stashed kept us moving and warm on a very cold day. We descended the same day, hugging an icefall to the skier's right of where we had come up. This descent line, directly below Langpo La, appears to have been used by the first ascensionists in August 1939. It offered a fast way down, with convenient ice anchors in serac walls, but the overhead hazard would have been significant during an ascent. We were lucky to fit in the climb during a short break from the jet stream that occupied the summits.

Rushad, Matt Zia, and I had spent the prior month in the Changsang Glacier valley, acclimatizing and attempting a line on the stunning north face of Kirat Chuli (7,362m; this and the Langpo peaks lie on the long ridge running north from Kangchenjunga that forms the border between Nepal and Sikkim). Originally named Tent Peak and still officially called this in India, it was renamed Kirat Chuli in the 1980s by the Nepalese and appears so on most maps.

We were drawn to Kirat Chuli after seeing a photo taken in 1993 by Yoshio Ogata. The mountain was reopened to climbers in 2019 after years of being closed, part of a broader closure due to local cultural and religious concerns, particularly among the Lepcha people. Despite the recent reopening of many peaks and the construction of new roads by the military, small climbing teams in North Sikkim still face significant logistical hurdles of permits and load-carrying.

Kirat Chuli was first climbed in 1939 by the same accomplished German-Swiss team from Munich that later summited Langpo South. They followed Kirat's southwest ridge from Nepal Peak (7,168m). At least five other parties have since attempted the mountain, all reportedly from the west (Nepal) or south (Zemu Valley). The mile-tall shield of the north face seems out of place amongst the other grandees of North Sikkim, arrayed like a lacy receiving line to Kangchenjunga, aloof as the moon. Unlike the metamorphic dross to the north and east, Kirat Chuli's north face features about 600m of vertical granite, with several ice-filled weaknesses that access fluted snowfields and the northwest ridge.

With assistance from mostly Rai porters from near Darjeeling, we established a base camp at 5,300m in the last vegetated part of the valley that drains the Changsang Glacier into Goma Chu. Climate change has caused the glacier to retreat over two kilometers since 1989, forming a long meltwater lake above the old terminal moraine. Since 1975, the surface area of lakes like this in Sikkim has increased over 90 percent, threatening people downstream with potentially catastrophic outburst floods.

We acclimatized above yak pastures intermixed with alpine blossoms: clusters of blue gentians, pink knotweed, blood-red stonecrops, the leathery burgundy of *Cavea tanguensis*, and the woolly mass of *Eriophyton wallichii*, huddled oddly in the talus like an alley cat with matted fur. A Himalayan griffon circled above us one afternoon as we post-holed below Langpo South. We also saw two snow leopards and a wolf.

The post-monsoon weather turned early this season, with high winds and cold temperatures arriving and staying in early October. We had two moderate snowstorms accompanied by high winds. During our attempt, protection on some pitches was negligible, limited alternately by thin, hollow water ice and blank slates of rock buried under vertical snow, resulting in slow, tenuous leads. Frigid temperatures, steady spindrift, a lack of adequate bivouac ledges, and a layer of brittle, wind-driven snow formed a bad combination. (Based on what we saw, conditions are prone to be poor.) We retreated after a bivouac and two days of hard climbing, rappelling our line off naked Abalakovs and several pin anchors.

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— **Spencer Gray, USA**

## Images



Langpo South from the south-southeast. The red line is the 2022 descent, more or less beneath the Langpo La. The blue is the ascent route.

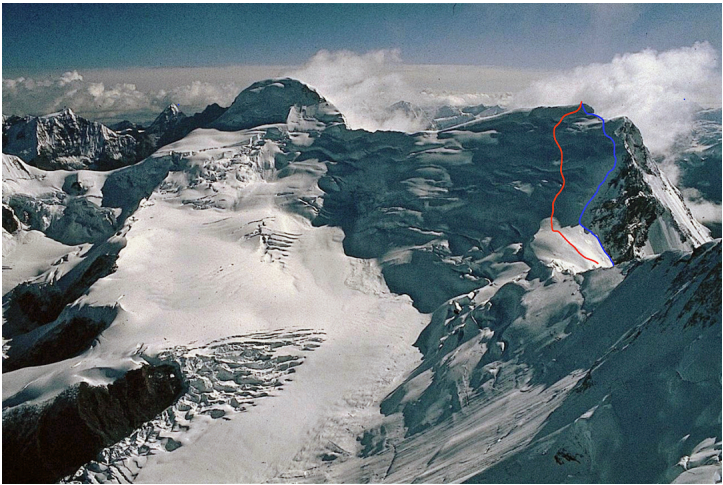


Langpo South seen from the Langpo Glacier to the south-southeast with the 2022 route of ascent.



Looking south from Langpo South along the frontier ridge to (A) Kirat Chuli, (B) Kangchenjunga, (C) Jannu, and (D) Pathibhara Chuli.





The southwest ridge of Langpo South seen from Pathibhara Chuli. Blue marks the 2022 ascent and red the descent to the Langpo La. The higher summit on the left is Langpo North (6,954m).



The north face of Kirat Chuli (7,362m) reflected in the Changsang Glacier lake to the northeast. The 2022 attempt is marked.



Rushad Nanavatty on the north face of Kirat Chuli during the 2022 attempt.



The lower north face of Kirat Chuli and the 2022 attempt.

## Article Details

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