

Araniko Chuli – Mustang Himal again in 2002

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In the summer of 2001, I explored the mountain range west of Lo Manthang and Chharang with an objective of commencing topographical research in this area and climbing an unnamed peak of 6270m (GPS: FN29 08 41 E83 46 56) - (#1). From here I expected to have a look of Araniko Chuli, 13km away to the WNW. However the peak was hidden from sight being interrupted by the complicated ranges. I knew later on that an altitude of the peak had been revised to 6034m on the new topographical map of Nepal (1/50000, 2002. No.2983-15, ARANIKO CHULI).

This mysterious peak is situated at the northernmost rim of the range between Lo and Dolpo on the Nepal-Tibet (China) border. It had long drawn my attention not only for the height, 21,650ft (=6599m), shown on the Indian 1 inch to 1 mile map (1963, 62), but also for its strange name of an isolated and uninhabited highland. My concern was further enhanced by the fact that no foreigners had ever seen this peak, nor photographed it, and that the name Aruniko Chuli is obviously not a local Tibetan name. I wondered why the surveyors of Survey of India had given the peak such a strange Nepalese name. Aruniko (or Araniko) is the name of a famous artist or architect born in Nepal who lived in a later half of the 13th century. He went to Tibet with the 80 Nepalese artists to design, to make statues and to decorate a large number of Buddhist monasteries in Tibet and China.

In this research trip I planned to approach to the peak of Aruniko Chuli from the Dolpo side to find it on the border. Two Nepalese friends, Ang Purba and his wife Pasang Diki (Thame) accompanied me with their own aspirations.

On July 3, our small expedition left Jomsom at Kaligandaki in a small caravan with five pack animals. We marched to Sangda village along a historical route that a Japanese priest, Sharmana Ekai Kawaguchi had taken 102 years ago. He was the first foreigner to have entered Tibet and reached to Lhasa through Nepal.

After crossing Geba La (GPS 4920m N28 54 904 E83 36 269), we followed another trail toward the north along Lhanhimar Khola that leads to a northern nameless pass (GPS 5607m, N28 58 200 E83 25 585).

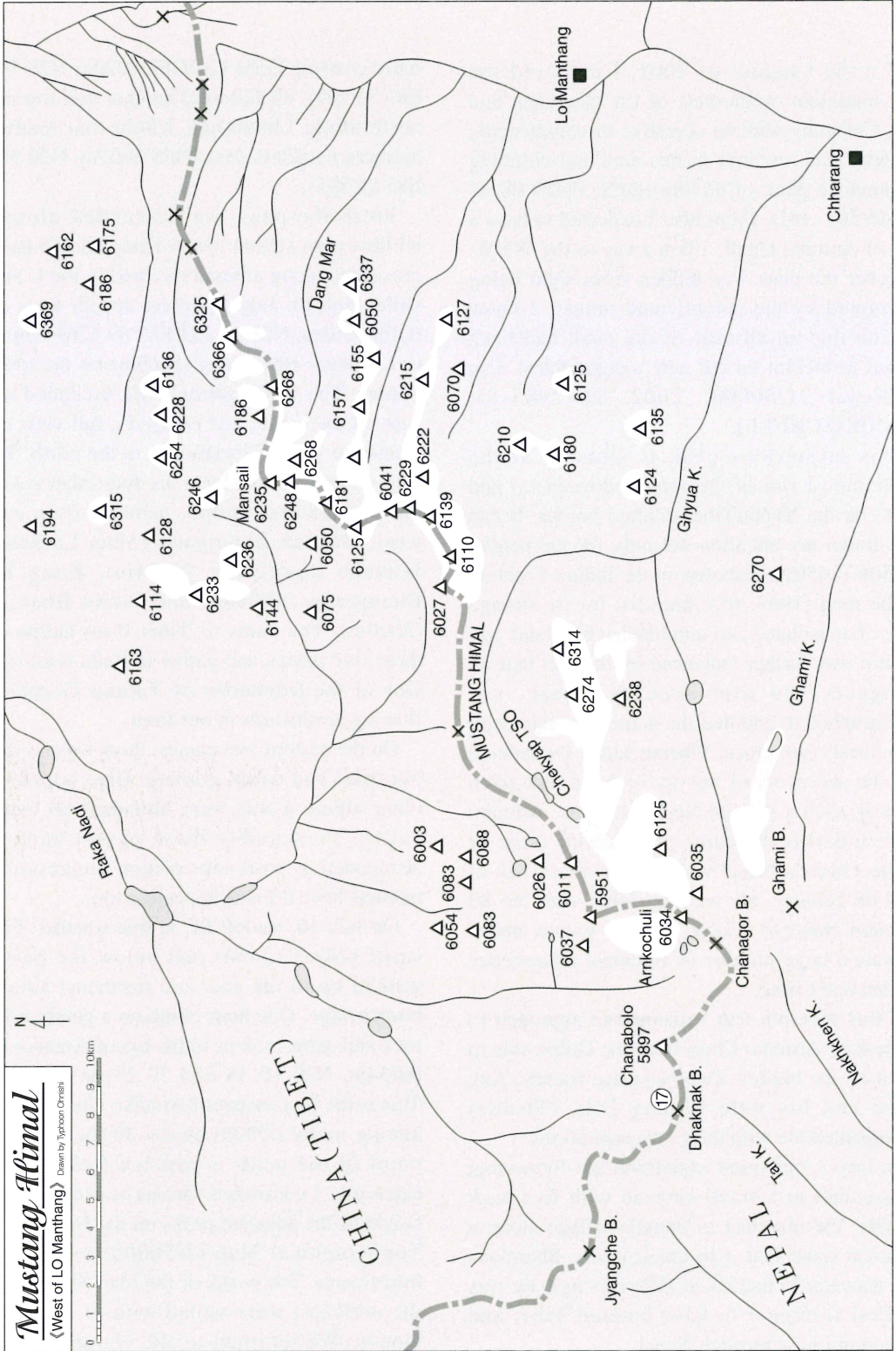
From the pass, we descended along the northwestern stream (Sano Kiraphuk Khola). We proceeded along a broad riverbed in the U shaped valley and on July 8 we set up our base camp (GPS 5562m, N28 08 453 E83 39 526) very close to Chanagor Bhanjyang (5665m) on the northern border. The next morning, we ascended to the pass on the border and enjoyed a full view of the landscape of the Tibetan side to the north. To the west and northwest, there are four other passes in the northeastern Dolpo, namely, from east to west, Daknak Bhanjyang (Sena La 5465m), Jyanche Bhanjyang (5534m), Kang Kung Bhanjyang (5564m), and Pindu Bhanjyang (5600m). The paths to Tibet from Dolpo cross these five passes and gather at Raka Nadi (river). One of the tributaries of Yalung Tsampo was flowing northwards in our front.

On the eastern two passes, there was no sign of transport and cattle grazing. Blue poppies and other alpine plants were abundant all over the valley. Presumably these passes have been abandoned as road construction progressed. Old markets have been disappearing too.

On July 10, we left BC in fine weather. From a small pokari (pond) just below the pass, we walked up to the east and northeast along the border ridge. One hour climb on a gentle ridge of rock and snow took us to the top of Araniko Chuli (6034m, N29 10 35 E83 39 25) at 10:30. AM. This is the first ascent of Araniko Chuli. We were among many 6000m peaks. From the highest point of the peak, a vast ice field extended eastwards. I confirmed various bearing values and height of the adjacent peaks on the Nepalese New Topographical Map (1/50000) using survey instruments. The peaks of the Man Shail group to the northeast were veiled with of the summer clouds. We returned to BC via another route

Mustang Himal

(West of LO Manthang) Drawn by Tiphon Omata



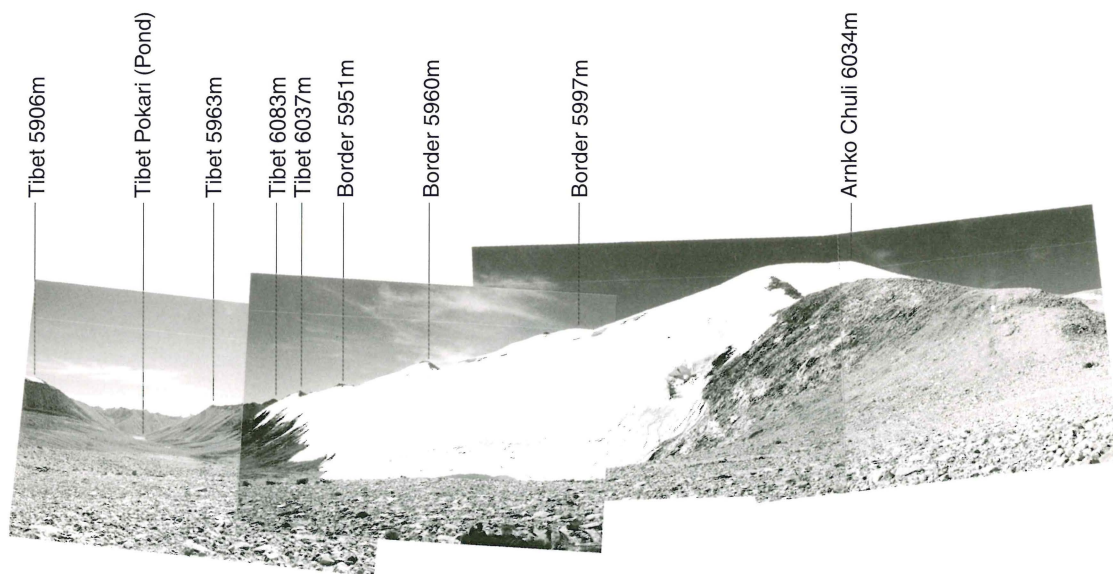
straight down a scree slope of the S face of the peak. Unlike the Tibetan side (north), there remains no snow in the S face. We finished our research and climbing around Aruniko Chuli in three days, following an old direct path to Mustang from Chharka, via Ghami Bhanjyang (5740m) to Ghami. On the way from the highest pass to Ghami, we suffered from fierce hail and rainfall.

The second stage of activity in Damodar Himal started from Ghami. The base camp (N28 56 50 E84 12 22) was set up at the northern foot of Saribung (Selibung or Soribung) (6327m). We followed a route via Chharang, Dhi, Yara and Nakkali Damodar Kund, a sacred place for Hindus. The detached party had already pitched in advance a high camp at 5720m (N28 55 05 E84 10 35) on the northwest glacier of Kumlung

North Peak (6378m). In the central part of this huge glacier, there are the two highest peaks of Damodar Himal which are dominant over the neighboring peaks. They are Khumjungar Himal (6759m) and Chhiv Himal (6591m), both of which were climbed by The Himalayan Association of Japan in 1983. Although the advance party attempted Saribung, they were unsuccessful due to a sudden onset of bad weather.

We continued the topographical research in this area, the east glaciers of Bhrikuti Sail (6361m) and north of a nameless high peak (6899m) in the east, and then returned to Pokhara via Jomsom.

(#1) The Himalayan Journal – Volume 58, 2002 and Supplementary Papers to Japanese Alpine News Vol.2, 2002.



View of Tibetan side from Chanagor Bhanjyang (5665m) toward north. [Rake Nadi (river)]