

Skier Sets Sights on Sultan Lango

Contributed by Gwen Cameron
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Jonathan Mingle and his partners are preparing for a journey to Zaskar, India, where they hope to make the first ski descent of Sultan Lango (5827m) and coordinate a humanitarian project in the area.

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|sultan| title=|Sultan Lango as viewed from the west-northwest. The proposed ski line follows the sloping ridge to looker's left and then down behind the ridge out of sight. The final destination is Stongde La, to the northeast (left) and not visible in the photo. [Photo] Jonathan Mingle}images/stories/erik/news/sultanlango-1.jpg{/rokzoom}

The American Alpine Club has announced the winner of the 2010 Zack Martin Breaking Barriers (ZMBB) Grant. This winter, recipient Jonathan Mingle and his partners will journey to Zaskar, India, where they hope to make the first ski descent of Sultan Lango (5827m) and coordinate a humanitarian project in the area.

Sultan Lango, located 10 miles east of Padum in the Zaskar region, is a rounded peak carved by a hanging glacier perched on its summit. Mingle and a team of employees from the Zaskar Ski School (ZSS), one of the only backcountry ski schools in the Himalaya, plan on making their descent down the northeast face to Stongde La pass where they will ski down the valley to the village of Stongde. In addition to being challenged by avalanche hazards and winter temperatures that can drop to -35 degrees, the team also expects to find no comfortable spot for their advanced camp, from where they will acclimatize and prepare for a summit push.

"The trip is intended to function as a training and learning opportunity for senior skiers from ZSS, and offer a chance to practice avalanche assessment together and demonstrate safe mountain travel techniques," Mingle said.

While the peak's accessibility and gentle contours make it an attractive objective, Mingle also chose Sultan Lango for its significance to the town of Kumik, where he will base a series of humanitarian ambitions. The glacier and snowfields on Sultan Lango's flanks have been receding for decades, leading to chronic water shortages. In the wake of a failed attempt to re-route water to the village, residents of 40 homes in Kumik were forced to relocate closer to water sources.

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|sultan| title=|Sultan Lango as viewed from the west-northwest. [Photo] Jonathan Mingle}images/stories/erik/news/sultanlango-2.jpg{/rokzoom}

In hopes of improving living conditions in the village, Mingle and his partners will design and construct a demonstration home with passive-solar heating and cooking in Kumik. Mingle says he expects that successful completion of the project will reduce lung disease caused by burning dung to heat homes and also will minimize the manual labor required to gather and dry the manure. He aspires to work with the villagers to gain an understanding of their needs and concerns and collaborate with them to construct prototypes of homes that are cost- and energy-efficient, clean and comfortable, culturally acceptable and easy to replicate and modify.

Though Mingle is optimistic about the project, he recognizes that "sustaining the operation will take a lot of patient, respectful collaboration, data collection and refinement of the design to improve the chances of wider adoption of cleaner cooking and heating systems."

Sources: Jonathan Mingle, inclined.americanalpineclub.org, eseries.americanalpineclub.org