

**Seasonal Stories  
for  
the Nepalese Himalaya**

**1985-2014**

**by Elizabeth Hawley**

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## Spring 1985: A Very Successful Season

A more successful mountaineering season than usual has just ended in the Nepalese Himalaya for the spring of 1985, but the price was a somewhat higher than usual death toll, according to results reported by climbers returning to Kathmandu from the mountains.

Only 26 expeditions came to climb in Nepal this spring, the lowest number for any springtime since 1979, but 18 of them reached their chosen summits and thus produced a success rate of just over two-thirds. The normal rate of success is roughly 50 percent.

Amongst the successes were some particularly notable ascents:

- World famous mountaineer Reinhold Messner of Italy and his team-mate Hans Kammerlander, also Italian, accomplished the first successful climb of the seldom-attempted northwest face of Annapurna I. Then, while they were in area, they went on to scale Dhaulagiri I by its normal route in just three days, giving Messner a total bag in his remarkable career of 12 of the world's 14 mountains that tower more than 8000 meters above the seas.
- Japanese alpinist Noae Sakashita and his compatriot Masayuki Ariake made the first ascent of the west face of Ama Dablam in the Everest region, a face that is perhaps equally as difficult and dangerous as the northwest side of Annapurna I but considerably lower.
- On Everest itself the first Scandinavians ever to conquer any 8000-meter peak were six Norwegians including their leader Arne Naess. Their highly successful expedition via the standard South Col-southeast ridge route sent the largest number of climbers to the top of the world from any single Everest team, a total of 17, including the oldest person ever to stand on this summit, a 55-year old American, Richard Bass, plus one professional Nepali climber, Sungdare Sherpa, the first person to make his fourth ascent of Everest, and another Nepali professional, Ang Rita Sherpa, the first to scale it three times without the use of any artificial oxygen.
- Eleven men from a Swiss team led by Rudolf Meier became the first mountaineer to reach the highest of several summits of Ohmi Kangri, a little-known mountain in a remote part of north-eastern Nepal about as high as Ama Dablam, a bit over 6800 meters.
- The first Hungarians and the first Romanians ever to come climbing in Nepal succeeded in sending their nationals to their respective summit goals, Hiunchuli and Gurja (Gurja Himal). Both more than 7000 meters high, but both teams suffered fatal accidents.

A total of eight men lost their lives on Nepalese mountains this spring – two Hungarians, who are believed to have been blown off their feet by fierce winds on Himalchuli, one Romanian struck by a falling rock or block of ice on Gurja Himal, one Austrian killed by an avalanche on Manaslu, a Yugoslav who fell while descending

from the west summit (called Yalung Kang) of Kangchenjunga, and one member of each of the season's three Japanese expeditions on Ama Dablam, Gurja Himal and Gaurishankar, all of whom fell to their deaths.

The eight men who died were a small percentage of the 297 men and women who went climbing in Nepal in the spring, but at 2.7 percent of the total they were more than the normal percentage of about 1.7 percent.

Why? In three cases, those of the Japanese on Ama Dablam and Gurja Himal and the Yugoslav on Yalung Kang, men who were killed fell while they were coming down from their summits, at a time when climbers are approaching exhaustion and tend to be less cautious in their euphoria over success and their return to familiar ground.

For the two nationalities climbing in Nepal for the first time, two Hungarians on Himalchuli and the Romanian on Gurja Himal, no full explanation is possible since so surviving members witnessed their accidents. Would men who had had more experience of the Himalaya have been able to have avoided the circumstances that led to their deaths? Their teammates do not think so.

The star climbers of Himalayan mountaineering who came to Nepal this spring, highly experienced men, all survived although not all of them were successful.

Messner, the supreme star of the Himalaya, who has never used artificial oxygen during his career, the only person to have scaled more than eight of the 14 giant 8000-meter mountains and to have scaled Everest entirely alone, not only survived but moved closer to his goal of climbing all 14 8000ers by the end of 1986. His only unconquered 8000ers are Makalu, which he plans to attack next winter, and Lhotse, programmed for the following autumn.

Britain's best-known mountaineer, Chris Bonington, crowned a distinguished Himalayan career with his own ascent of Everest at the age of 50. He has led numerous historic firsts on formidable routes including the first ascent of Everest's great southwest face in 1975. Now he at last fulfilled a longtime ambition to go to the top himself. He climbed with the successful Norwegians.

One star whose luck did not hold was the United States foremost mountaineer John Roskelley, who like Messner led a small group without Nepalese Sherpa climbers or bottled oxygen. His team's bid to scale the north face of the highest summit of Kangchenjunga faltered and died of in the face of strong shifting winds and the failure of the climbers to acclimatize to high altitudes.

Another unsuccessful small party on a giant mountain, the French climbing couple Maurice Barrard and his wife Liliane, got so close to Makalu's summit they felt they could almost touch it, but when they tried to ascend the very last 35 or 40 vertical meters on two successive days, the winds were so fierce at that very high altitude they could not stand up and they had to descend.

Two Japanese expeditions came to Nepal with high ambitions to conquer a multiplicity of mountains, but neither succeeded fully because of fatal accidents. Sakashita's team was making fine progress in early May after having reached three out of four summit goals, Everest neighbors Cholatse, Tawoche and Ama Dablam, but then Makaoto Ishibashi fell to his death descending Ama Dablam. The fourth

mountain on their program, Cho Oyu, which Sakashita and Ishibashi had planned to climb alone, was never attempted.

The other highly ambitious Japanese team, which was led by Shoichi Kobayashi, planned to scale three mountains, Gurja Himal, Churen Himal, and Dhaulagiri VI. But after Kobayashi was killed when he fell while descending from Gurja's summit, the surviving members went home without trying to climb the other two peaks.

For mountaineers from some eastern European countries, climbing in Nepal is a hazardous undertaking in more ways than one. Not only are there the objective dangers of the mountains, but also there are problems arising out of the attitudes of their governments' bureaucrats. No Czechoslovaks came to Nepal this spring although these highly competent and experienced Himalayan climbers have recorded historic feats here. It is said that the Czechoslovak government concerned by the deaths of two of its citizens last autumn on Everest and Dhaulagiri I decided to withhold permission for teams to come here this spring.

The exact results of the first Romanian expeditions to Nepal are not entirely clear, and this too may be attributable to home government attitude. When the Nepalese tourism ministry's liaison officer with the Romanians reported their Gurja Himal summit results, he said that the successful summiters were Marius Marcus and two other Romanians, whose names were not mentioned, plus two Nepalese. Why did he not give the names for the other two members? Talking at length with Nepalis familiar with the expedition, the explanation emerged that before being permitted by the Romanian authorities to leave for Nepal, the team had to promise they would succeed in climbing their mountain. Then when one member was killed during the climb, according to these informants, for only one Romanian to have gotten to the summit was not sufficient success: it was necessary to report that three Romanians had succeeded.

Mountaineering is a very complex activity.

## **Autumn 1985: An Unpropitious Mountaineering Season**

“I have never in my life seen such avalanching as was coming off Dhaulagiri!” exclaimed the well-known Austrian alpinist Peter Habeler, a highly experienced Himalayan climber, after he had very early abandoned all thought of scaling that giant peak last autumn.

Habeler’s prudence and good luck prevented disaster on his brief climb on Dhaulagiri I, but other expeditions in the Nepalese Himalaya in the 1985 autumn season were not so fortunate. Snowfall in the northern regions of Nepal was as much as 50% above normal, and the resulting death toll was one of the highest ever recorded in a single Nepalese climbing season.

Altogether 18 men died while climbing on expeditions in Nepal from September to November. Two were killed in falls. But probably ten, perhaps 12, were victims of snow avalanches, and four more men, all of them Indians, died of exposure when a snowstorm stranded them in a high camp on Everest. (It is necessary to say “probably” and “perhaps” because no one knows definitely what happened to two parties of Polish and French climbers who were alone high on their mountains, Ganesh IV and Makalu II, and who completely disappeared.)

Deep snow even on the approach routes to some mountains prevented two expeditions from ever reaching the sites of their base. A Scottish team for Annapurna III and Frenchmen who were to attempt Baruntse never climbed at all.

Four other expeditions found snow conditions so bad that they managed to do very little actual climbing. Habeler and Michel Dacher of West Germany, who had planned to climb Dhaulagiri I together, were amongst these. The others were Austrians and West Germans led by the German alpinist Fritz Zintl for Manaslu North; two Swiss, Jean Troillet and Pierre-Alain Steiner, trying to scale the difficult northwest face of Annapurna I; and a group of French doctors led by Dr. Phillippe Paumier who scarcely got above base camp on Annapurna IV.

However, not all climbs in the autumn of 1985 ended in disaster or frustration. Three Japanese mountaineers made the first Japanese ascent of 8201-meter Cho Oyu, the last 8000er to be successfully scaled by anyone of their nationality. Japan thereby became the second nation to have sent its climbers to the summits of all of the 14 mountains that tower more than 8000 meters. West Germany was the first.

The ascent of Cho Oyu was accomplished on 3 October, before a series of cyclonic storms blew up, by an expedition of just four Japanese led by Ken Kanazawa up the most common climbing route from the west. They used no bottled oxygen and had almost no Sherpa help.

Two other 8000-meter mountains were also “conquered” in the autumn. Makalu was climbed on 1 October by all members of the team of four Italians and one Spaniard under Sergio Martini’s leadership via the normal northwest route. They too climbed without artificial oxygen and were accompanied by only one Nepalese climber.



On 30 October, after the cyclonic storms, seven Japanese from a 12-member expedition led by Kuniaki Yagihara went to the summit of Everest by the standard South Col route. One of these summiters, Norboru Yamada, did his entire climb without supplemental oxygen. It was his second ascent of Everest; he had made his first in the winter of 1983, when he did use "bottled air." (In July 1985 Yamada had scaled K-2 and had then become the first person ever to reach the tops of the four highest mountains in the world, beating out Reinhold Messner who has not yet managed to scale Lhotse, the fourth highest.)

The first and second ascents of Himalchuli North Summit were also accomplished last autumn by the first two expeditions ever to attempt this 7371-meter peak, a South Korean team led by Lee Kyu Jin on 27 October and five days later by Poles under Wieslaw Panejko's leadership.

A Spanish expedition led by Joaquim Prunes made the first traverse of 7031-meter Saipal, a seldom-climbed mountain in western Nepal, on 24 October. After a route had been pioneered and camps established along the west ridge, and six members had reached the summit this way on 22 October, two others, Jorge Angles and Antonio Bross, did an alpine-style ascent of Saipal's southwest face and descended the ridge route.

A strong 11-member Polish expedition under the leadership of Janusz Majer made a sustained effort without Sherpas or artificial oxygen to achieve the first ascent of the formidable south face of 8516-meter Lhotse. But despite the skills and determination of such star alpinists as Jerzy Kukuczka and Krzysztof Wielicki, they abandoned their bid on 1 November after having gotten to 8200 meters. Deep snow, high winds, the difficulty of their route and finally exhaustion combined to defeat them.

Of the 47 expeditions that managed to reach the bases of their mountains last autumn, 32 are believed to have been defeated in their climbs. Fifteen ascents are confirmed; three Poles who disappeared on Ganesh IV and are thought to have been swept away by avalanching, may actually first have reached their 7052-meter summit, and no one knows whether two Frenchmen who remained high on 7678-meter Makalu II after their teammates had left the mountain were successful or not before they too disappeared.

By contrast, the autumn of 1984 also saw 49 expeditions arrive in Nepal but nearly half of them, 23 in number, were successful, and the total number of deaths amongst climbers then was only five foreigners and one Sherpa, or just 1.3% of all men and women who climbed above base camps.

The normal death rate on expeditions in Nepal is about 2.7%. But the 1985 autumn death toll of 16 foreigners and two Sherpas comprised 3.6% of all climbers; for foreigners alone, the rate was 4.3%. And these 1985 figures do not include two members of a successful Dutch expedition to Makalu II who are listed as lost in the extremely deep snow they must have encountered after they left base camp at the end of their climb; they were trekking back to Kathmandu alone, and searchers could find no trace of them.

The autumn of 1985 brought to Nepal the first Greek mountaineers ever to climb in any of the Himalaya, a group of ten under the leadership of Mike Tsoukias. Their adventure ended in tragedy when two of their members were killed by an avalanche on the east face of Annapurna South on 22 October.

Most alpinists who come to Nepal in the autumn season hope to complete their climbs before the middle of October so that they do not have to battle the fierce jet-stream winds that can be expected to start blowing by the third week of October. But in 1985, after an unusually heavy monsoon had dumped much greater amounts of snow than normal on the mountains right up to the end of September, three quick cyclones came out of the southwest and then the southeast from about 6 to 20 October and dropped more snow still. The result: only five expeditions reached their summits before the middle of October; one of these managed to succeed in a short lull between cyclones. The other ten successes came after the 16th and six of these were as late as the 30th of October and on into early November. Amongst these last were Japanese who moved quickly up Everest at the end of October after a very large Indian army expedition had exhausted themselves and lost five lives during the periods of heavy snowfall in the preceding two months, and a group of 12 Italians, Austrians and Frenchmen who swarmed up neighboring 6812-meter Ama Dablam by the normal south ridge route in four parties from 30 October to 3 November, followed by a Canadian member of their group, Roger Marshall, who raced up their fixed ropes alone on 4 November.

But the generally unpropitious autumn of 1985 will be best remembered as the time when base camp tents were buried in two to three meters of snow and men could not safely move on their mountains for week after week. It was a season when even highly experienced Himalayan climbers like Habeler and Dacher, Kukuczka and Wielicki, had to give up and go home. And a season when 20 climbers never went home.

## Winter 1985-86: Several First Winter Ascents

The winter of 1985-86 brought an unusual amount of snowfall, as well as the normal fierce winds and extremely low temperatures at very high altitudes, to the Nepalese Himalaya. Nonetheless this season was the second busiest winter in expedition mountaineering in Nepal since the Himalayan kingdom opened its peaks for winter climbs in 1979, and it was far more successful and a safer season than the busiest winter, that of 1984-85. Despite the failure of all three expeditions on Mount Everest and world-famous Reinhold Messner's inability to bag his thirteenth 8000-meter mountain, half of the 16 teams that came to climb did succeed in reaching their summit, several first winter ascents including that of mighty Kangchenjunga were recorded, and three very small parties achieved notable successes in alpine-style on Ama Dablam, Manaslu and Dhaulagiri I.

By contrast, the 1984-85 winter months, December to February, saw only three confirmed summit successes for 19 expeditions' efforts, and five of the 178 men and women, both foreigners and Nepalese, who did any climbing died in the mountains that season. In the more recent winter, only two of 166 climbers perished, making a low death toll of 1.2% instead of 1984-85's 2.8%. Still, two men did die last January. The mortal illness of an outstanding Polish alpinist, Andrzej Czok, and the fatal fall by a younger Japanese with less Himalayan experience were tragic events.

1985-86 winter's success rate of 50% is about average for a winter season in Nepal, and that all attempts to scale Everest failed was also not unusual for wintertime. Indeed on Korean team nearly did manage to climb to the top of the world. On 22 December Kim Jong-Ho and Park Dong-Seok of Korea University's expedition battled their way to 8500 meters up the normal route via Everest's southeast ridge. But there they finally abandoned their struggle and turned downwards when it was three o'clock in the afternoon and they had been climbing too slowly to be able to reach the 8848-meter summit and return the same evening to the shelter of their highest camp at 8000 meters.

During this expedition's attempt on Everest they came across a grim reminder of the price that is sometimes paid by mountaineers trying to reach the highest point on earth. They discovered the body of an Indian who had been one of four to die from exhaustion and exposure the previous autumn at their own 8000-meter-high camp.

Another South Korean expedition made the first attempt ever in winter on Everest's formidable southwest face, which has seldom been successfully scaled in any season. They reached a high point of 7700 meters on two different days in mid-January, but neither time did anyone sleep there at the proposed site for their fifth high-altitude camp. And on the west ridge, a feature of Everest that is perhaps even more exposed to jet-stream winds than the vast southwest face, the third Korean Everest expedition of the season had so many tents torn apart by the wind, and the climbers became so exhausted by their battle against the elements, that they never got higher than 7100 meters. Their route also has never seen a successful ascent in winter.

The four successes that were the first were achieved in wintertime took place at the very end of December and in January on Gaurishankar, a difficult 7134-meter peak that had been successfully climbed only twice before in any season; and 6800 meters high in the Everest region, Kangtega and Tawoche. Poles made the Kangchenjunga ascent, while the other three firsts were scored by some of the numerous South Koreans. But both deaths of the season occurred on these mountains: Everest “conqueror” Czuk died on Kangchenjunga and a Japanese named Atsuyoshi Kadomoto on the joint Japanese-Korean effort on Tawoche.

The season’s other most noteworthy climbs were probably those on Ama Dablam, Manaslu and Dhaulagiri I. On 6812-meter Ama Dablam, a near neighbor of Everest, American climber Carlos Buhler and Canadian Mike Kennedy spent seven days on its northeast face, a side of the mountain never before attempted by anyone in any season. Their pure alpine-style ascent was achieved with no fixed ropes, no prepared camps and no Sherpa helpers up a face that called for what they described as “delicate climbing.” They successfully surmounted very steep rock covered by a thin layer of ice, and they reported that his face would be too dangerous to attempt in spring or autumn, when there would be great danger from falling rock and seracs. Since, they said, “there was no possibility of survival” if they had tried to descend the face, they made their way down from the summit on 7 December by way of the standard south ridge route, a route they were not familiar with but where they found fixed ropes left in place by previous expeditions.

On 8163-meter Manaslu, two Japanese, Noboru Yamada and Yasuhira Saito, required two summit pushes to succeed in their own true alpine-style ascent in the first half of December. High wind and extreme cold drove them back from 7200 meters on their first try for the top on 9 December, but five days later the wind had abated somewhat and they were successful this time despite the long distance from their last bivouac at 7050 meters. And at the same summit they found a matchbox that had been left there by compatriots on 11 May, 1956, members of the Japanese expedition that had made the very first ascent of Manaslu.

For Yamada, Manaslu was the sixth 8000-meter mountain that he had successfully climbed, and in scaling this giant he became the fifth person ever to “conquer” three 8000ers in a single year, having climbed K-2 in July and Everest (in his second ascent of the world’s highest) in October. His other outstanding mountaineering achievements include being the only person to have scaled the world’s four highest mountains.

Another impressive small-party achievement was the first winter ascent of the east face of Dhaulagiri I. Three Swiss, Jean Troillet, Erhard Loretan and Pierre-Alain Steiner, climbed 2000 meters of the great face in a single day, bivouacked that night, 7 December, at 7700 meters, just 100 meters below the point where their line met the northeast ridge, and next day followed the ridge to the summit. They were back at their previous day’s bivouac site at 5700 meters that midnight. They had been so confident of very quick success in their summit push that only one of them bothered to take along a sleeping bag, and none of them took food although they did carry fuel and Ovaltine bars. For Loretan it was his eighth 8000-meter summit.

On 11 January two Polish climbers were making the first winter ascent of lofty Kangchenjunga at the same time that another member of their expedition was collapsing with acute high-altitude sickness. Jerzy Kukuczka and Krzysztof Wielicki completed the group's oxygen less ascent of Kangchenjunga and thereby gave Wielicki his fourth 8000-meter summit and Kukuczka his tenth - only Italy's Reinhold Messner with 12 8000ers to his credit, has scaled more. But unknown to these two summiters, their teammate, Andrzej Czok, who had successfully climbed four 8000ers including Everest via a new route in 1980, fell victim to the desperately thin air at extreme altitude, and by ten o'clock that night was dead of pulmonary edema after having been carried part way down the mountain side that afternoon.

The man who had gained the most 8000-meter summits did not manage to bag his 13th, and it appears that he must hurry if he is not to be overtaken by Kukuczka, who is three and a half years younger than he and who planned to climb three more 8000ers in 1986. In January Messner went to Makalu with just one climbing companion, Hans Kammerlander. But by 12 February Messner had admitted defeat. They had gotten to 7500 meters on the normal northwest route three days earlier, but had been driven back by fierce winter winds and such thick cloud-cover on the route above that they could no longer see where they should be climbing on the green ice. Then came several days of heavy snowfall. Their climb was finished; Messner had again been unsuccessful on Makalu, and the mountain had still never been scaled in winter.

But Messner said he hoped to return later in 1986, the 42nd year of his life, to finish off both of the 8000ers he has yet to conquer, Lhotse as well as Makalu, which are not far apart. This would enable him to keep ahead of Kukuczka in the race to become the first person ever to stand atop all of the world's 14 8000-meter mountains. It would also clear his way to concentrating on his new absorbing interest, filmmaking.

Other bids to scale 8000ers last winter met with mixed results. Two Czechoslovaks, Dusan Becik and Jaromir Stejskal, members of a six-man expedition that also included Americans and Canadians, did a very rapid light-weight ascent of Cho Oyu in the first days of December. But a large Bulgarian team trying to make the first winter ascent of the main summit of Annapurna I got no higher than 7300 meters on its seldom-climbed, windswept south face during 11 weeks ordeal, and Japanese mountaineers got scarcely any higher than Messner and Kammerlander in their own bid to scale Makalu. In all, only four of the ten expeditions on the very highest Himalaya in Nepal managed to get to the top. Winter's terrible winds and minus 40 or more degrees Celsius temperature are still extremely powerful adversaries.

## Spring 1986: A Season of Mixed Results

The mountaineering teams that came to assault 24 lofty Himalayan peaks in Nepal this spring had very mixed results. Slightly more than half failed to reach their summits, and one did not even make any climbing attempt at all after an avalanche killed two of their members on the approach to their mountain. But a few teams did manage to make notable successes.

Most of the 18 expeditions that failed blamed frequent heavy snowfall, especially in western Nepal. But one of them was refreshingly candid and said that their own inexperience on such huge mountains was the actual cause of their failures.

And there were this spring, as in almost every climbing season, some tragic deaths. The toll of six, however, was low for the total number of climbers who came to Nepal.

The man most pleased with his own personal success could well have been the 47-year-old Swiss alpinist Marcel Ruedi, who bagged his ninth 8000-meter on 5 May in cloudy weather as he became the first Swiss ever to reach the summit of Cho Oyu. Ruedi's goal is the same as that of world-famous Reinhold Messner of Italy and a highly successful Polish mountaineer, Jerzy Kukuczka: to be the first person ever to gain the summits of all the 14 giant mountains that tower more than 8000 meters above the seas. Messner has reached 12 of them and will try the last two, Makalu and Lhotse, this autumn. But Ruedi and Kukuczka, who has "conquered" ten, are coming up fast behind him and one of them - or even both - might well pass him in this race.

Climbing swiftly with Ruedi to the top of Cho Oyu was Austrian Peter Habeler, 43, for whom Cho Oyu was his fourth success on an 8000er. His second was the first ascent of Everest without the use of any artificial oxygen, the historic feat he and Messner accomplished together in May 1978.

The western climbing approaches to Cho Oyu's summit were unusually busy this spring with altogether 14 men from three separate expeditions scoring successes and making the first Yugoslav and first American ascents as well as the first Swiss ascent. But only two more teams on any of Nepal's other 8000ers were successful. A large expedition of West Germans and Austrians on the normal northeast-ridge route up Dhaulagiri I sent five of their 15 members including leader Guenther Haerter to the summit on 3 and 5 May, and on 4 May two Japanese and two Nepalese Sherpas "conquered" Lhotse via its standard route up the west face. The Japanese leader, Masaaki Fukushima, was one of the successful men.

But those were all who succeeded on these great peaks. Germans and Austrian on Manaslu, Americans on Makalu, Yugoslavs on Dhaulagiri I, Britons on Lhotse Shar, Japanese, Poles and an Austrian on Everest, Australians on Kangchenjunga, and Italians and Bulgarians on Annapurna I - all were unsuccessful.

On Annapurna I, both the Italians on the normal north face route, who got no higher than 6200 meters on their dangerous face, and the Bulgarians, who climbed significantly higher, on the formidable south face, blamed constant snowfall and resulting avalanche danger for their failures. But Bulgarians had been besieging

Annapurna I off and on since last December, and it is likely that exhaustion and the effects of being at high altitude for a long period of time also contributed to their defeat. In any case, they got to 7550 meters in May, just 250 meters higher than they had reached in February.

A smaller party of only five young Australians gained an altitude of 8400 meters on Kangchenjunga via its standard southwest face route. They climbed without any Sherpa helpers or bottled oxygen. "We can't really blame the weather," Leader Michael Groom said later about their turning back 186 vertical meters below the summit. None of them except Groom had ever climbed in the Himalaya before, he explained, and "and I myself didn't know what to expect at that height."

Similar caution caused the American leader of another small expedition on Makalu (8463 meters) to turn back when he had reached 8100 meters alone on its rocky north face. "I had never been higher than 7500 meters before," Ned Gillette said, "and after the Sherpas said they didn't like rock and had stopped climbing with me, and I came to a very steep section, I decided it was wiser to turn back myself. I didn't know how well I could handle the altitude, and I was all alone."

On mighty Everest, two expeditions met defeat on the Nepalese side of this border peak. Two Poles and an Austrian were unsuccessful in their very small party's bid to scale its long, steep, difficult west a slightly larger team of four Japanese with seven Sherpa helpers on the normal route to the southeast ridge were turned back by unfavorable snow conditions on 10 May at the impressive height of 8600 meters.

The main purpose of the Japanese effort on Everest had been to put the first woman on the highest point on earth without the use of any artificial oxygen. But their expected woman summiter, Miss Taeko Nagao, 30, was ill at the time of their final summit and was unable to take part. However on the other side of the mountain, from Tibet, another woman did succeed: Miss Sharon Wood, 29, from Canada, achieved the first successful climb of Everest's west ridge from the northern side when she and a male teammate, Dwayne Congdon, also a 29-year-old Canadian, reached the summit on 20 May. They used bottled oxygen for the final part of their ascent, as had Miss Wood's five female predecessors to the top of the world, but she was the first woman from the Western Hemisphere to stand atop Everest (the other women had come from Japan, China, Poland, West Germany and India), and the first woman via the seldom-climbed west ridge from either the northern or southern sides.

Back in Nepal, perhaps the spring season's best climb from a mountaineering point of view was the success of a French army expedition led by Lt. Col. Jean Claude Marmier on a very difficult, seldom-attempted mountain not far to the northwest of Everest, the little-known peak called Gyachung Kang, at 7952 meters very nearly an 8000er. The only other time this mountain had ever been attempted was 22 years ago, when Japanese succeeded in making the first ascent. Now in mid-May a total of six of the 11 French members including Marmier went to the summit after pioneering a new route up the southwest pillar, a route that was sometimes vertical, almost never less than 60 degrees in its steepness.

Another impressive climb was that of two young Italians from the South Tirol, Alois Brugger, 26, and Kurt Walde, 23, alone on an Everest neighbor, 6812-meter

Ama Dablam. They scaled the steep west face, a face that is dangerously threatened by a hanging glacier which killed a New Zealand climber in the autumn of 1979. Brugger and Walde did not spend days on the face under this danger as the New Zealanders had: the two men began their ascent from the bottom of the face at 2:30 a.m. on 15 April and moved so rapidly that they were on the summit eight and a half hours later. They then descended safely via the normal south-ridge route.

This pair on Ama Dablam and a successful Polish expedition that pioneered a new variation of the western route up Cho Oyu were two of only four teams that managed to reach their summits this spring without any Sherpas to help in making their climbing routes and move supplies up the mountains. Ten other expeditions without Sherpas helpers failed, and it seems likely that besides the bad weather, a factor contributing to the low rate of success this season was this high proportion of teams without Sherpas, 47 percent of them. Fifty six percent of all teams failed, but 71 percent without climbing Sherpas did so. Several of the parties who did not succeed said after their climbs that they wished they had Sherpas share the climbing with them.

If success rate this spring was low - but not dramatically low - the death toll was mercifully also low. Four men lost their lives trying to scale their mountains, and although any life is a high price to pay for mountaineering, these four represented only 1.3 percent of the 299 men and women, foreigners and Nepalis, who climbed above their base camps, a fatality rate that is half the normal 2.6 percent in the Nepalese Himalaya.

Three of those killed, a South Korean who was descending from his successful ascent of 7751-meter Dhaulagiri II and a West German and an Austrian who were climbing Manaslu, were believed to have fallen to their deaths. The fourth, an American on Makalu II, died of illness probably related to high altitude problems.

In addition to these losses, two members of a West German expedition were killed by a massive snow avalanche that struck while they were still approaching the site for their base camp in early April for an attempt on Tilicho. The surviving members of this group cancelled their climbing plans following this disaster and went trekking around the Annapurna massif instead.

Not the best of seasons, this spring of 1986, but not the worst of them either. And the next climbing season in Nepal, the autumn, promises to be rather more lively with Reinhold Messner trying to finish the 14 8000ers, a large European expedition assaulting both Lhotse and Everest, and a Norwegian child actress leading an expedition to an unclimbed peak, 6820-meter Cheo Himal.



## **Autumn 1986: The Himalayan Race Is Won**

Himalayan mountaineering is not ordinarily considered to be a highly competitive sport. But last autumn's climbing season in the Nepalese Himalaya had much of the drama of World Cup Final when the race to be first to conquer all of the world's 8000-meter mountains was finally won by Italy's Reinhold Messner by the relatively narrow margin of 14 to 11. By the end of the season the runner up, Jerzy Kukuczka of Poland, had increased his own score from 11 to 12. The next man, Swiss Climber Marcel Ruedi, had scored ten and then tragically died the very next day, and a younger Swiss, Erhard Loretan, had suffered the first failure on any 8000er in his career following a fatal fall by his climbing partner on what Loretan had expected would be his own tenth 8000er.

Last autumn was the first autumn season since 1980 in which no one reached the summit of Everest. There were however more positive firsts that season also. Japanese climbers achieved the firsts ascent of a 6553-meter western Nepal summit named Tripura Hiunchuli (formerly known as Hanging Glacier). The first expeditions to any Himalayan peaks from Colombia and Israel came climbing in Nepal, and while neither of these was successful, both reached altitudes of over 7200 meters on 8163-meter Manaslu and 7678-meter Kangchungtse (Makalu II) respectively. And several ascents were made on previously unclimbed routes.

Altogether 48 expeditions tested their skills and luck in the Nepalese Himalaya during the season. They ranged in size from a massive 50-member Royal Nepal Army group of climbers doing the final part of their mountain-warfare course by assaulting 6920-meter Tukucho near Dhaulagiri I (17 men reached the top), and 25 Western European mountaineers assisted by 16 Sherpas unsuccessfully attempting the standard route up Everest, to several three-man teams climbing on other giant 8000-meter mountains with varying degrees of success.

The big Everest expedition got bogged down in bad snow conditions after an early bid to reach the summit on September 25 was halted at the south summit, itself an impressive 8763 meters above sea level. Leader Fredy Graf of Switzerland, French alpinist Serge Koenig and Chuldim Dorje Sherpa turned back after getting to the south summit because they were moving too slowly through deep snow despite using bottled oxygen to reach the top of the world at 8848 meters and return safely the same day to the shelter of their last camp at the South Col (8000 meters). None of the expedition's climbers managed to regain this high point later in the season. Nor did a much smaller French party get even this high, although their leader, Eric Escoffier, did reach 8600 meters without artificial oxygen while climbing behind members of Graf's expedition two days later.

While Everest climbers were making unsuccessful bids in late September to gain their lofty summit, Reinhold Messner was moving up nearby Makalu, an 8463-meter peak that had defeated him on two previous expeditions, most recently the previous winter. Following the normal route via the Makalu Col, he and fellow South Tiroleans Hans Kammerlander and Friedl Mutschlechner stood atop Makalu on

September 26, and Messner had now bagged his 13th 8000er. (For Kammerlander it was his sixth.)

Then less than three weeks later Messner and Kammerlander went to the summit of Everest's immediate neighbor Lhotse, another mountain Messner had unsuccessfully attempted to scale twice before. On October 16, a day of strong winds that pinned climbers elsewhere in Nepal in their tents, the two men went to the top of Lhotse pushed by winds up the couloir on the standard west-face route.

Now at the age of 42 Messner had conquered all 14 of the 8000-meter mountains, the first person ever to do so and very probably the first person to set this as a definite goal. After he had been to the summit of Kangchenjunga in May 1982, and had already scaled the two higher mountains, Everest and K-2, he decided he would finish off all 14 by the autumn of 1986. At that time he still had five more mountains to go.

Messner had had his first 8000-meter success on his very first venture into the Himalaya when he and his brother Guenther climbed Nanga Parbat in June 1970. Without ever making use of artificial oxygen throughout his remarkable Himalayan career, Reinhold went on to show a whole generation of Himalayan climbers what it was possible to achieve and to inspire them to go on beyond his own achievements. He made the first ascent of Everest without any bottled oxygen with Austria's Peter Habeler in May 1978, the first solo ascent of any 8000er only three months later, and the first – and so far only – solo ascent of Everest itself in August 1980. When he scaled Kangchenjunga in May 1982, he became the first person to succeed on the world's three loftiest mountains, and when that same summer he climbed Gasherbrum II and Broad Peak he was first to scale three 8000ers in the same year. His second ascents of Gasherbrum II and Hidden Peak (Gasherbrum I) with Kammerlander via new descent routes in June 1984 marked the first unsupported continuous traverse of two 8000ers.

Now he was the first to do all the 8000ers. "Now I am free!" he exclaimed with great joy and satisfaction when he returned to Kathmandu in October. Now he was free, he explained, to do other climbs that caught his interest anywhere in the world and at any altitude, to explore and climb in uncharted areas of the Bhutanese Himalaya, to make a feature film in Patagonia, to follow up his encounters in Tibet last summer with creatures he suspected might prove to be the elusive yeti (abominable snowman) upon further investigation.

The ambition to scale all the 8000ers still drives other mountaineer. The man most likely to be next to finish all 14 of them is the 38-year-old Polish climber Jerzy Kukuczka, a quiet, much less flamboyant person than Messner but a man of great determination and drive who gained his first 8000-meter summit, Lhotse, in 1979 and succeeded before Messner did in scaling the world's six highest mountains.

On November 10, two full months after he had established his camp at the base of Manaslu (8163 meters), this single-minded Pole finally got to his twelfth 8000-meter summit after long, patient waiting for snow conditions to permit a safe ascent. Making a series of bivouacs on a previously unclimbed route up the east ridge of Manaslu, he and fellow Pole Artur Hayzer conquered their mountain without any

help from bottled oxygen and descended the northeast face. Theirs was the first ascent of any 8000er during the month of November, a month that is notorious for fierce jet-stream winds. It was Kukuczka's second 8000er in 1986, and he had hoped to scale Annapurna I, another 8000er not too far away, also by a new route in the very same month. But the Nepalese tourism authorities refused to extend his climbing permit beyond the officially fixed date for the end of the autumn season, November 15.

Another mountaineer who aspired to scale all the 8000ers and who had already done nine of them was Marcel Ruedi, a Swiss who was nearly 48 years old. He took time off from his butcher's business to fly quickly to Makalu as a member of a predominantly Polish expedition led by Krzysztof Pankiewicz.

He planned to do a total of no less than three 8000ers in the single season and thus to compete with Kukuczka to become the first mountaineer ever to score successful ascents of four 8000ers in one year, a goal that Messner had had in 1982 but had failed to reach. Ruedi had climbed Cho Oyu in May 1986, and he proposed to join Escoffier's team and climb both Everest and Lhotse after Makalu.

On Makalu he succeeded in climbing. He and Krzysztof Wielicki from Poland climbed without supplemental oxygen on the normal northwest route and were on the summit two days before Messner and his teammates. But Ruedi had been showing signs of not having acclimatized to high altitude, and he moved more slowly than Wielicki. In his descent alone from the summit, he must have become increasingly ill from the lack of oxygen, for unlike Wielicki he did not manage to return to their tent that evening. In fact he never returned; the Messner summit party found him sitting frozen to death, a victim of high altitude and high ambition.

Erhard Loretan, a 27-year-old Swiss, was full of confidence when he left Kathmandu in early October for his tenth 8000er, 8201-meter Cho Oyu. Only a month earlier he had accomplished a phenomenally fast climb of Everest from the Tibetan side. He had never failed on any 8000er he had ever attempted. Now he planned to forge a new route on Cho Oyu's west face in alpine style with just two Swiss teammates.

But when he and Pierre-Alain Steiner were doing well and had reached 7200 meters of Cho Oyu on October 20, Steiner somehow lost his footing and plunged 600 meters down the mountainside. It was impossible to evacuate him, and he died of multiple injuries three days later. Thus ended in tragedy Loretan's bid to scale the mountain.

Other mountaineers did succeed on Cho Oyu. Two Japanese, Nobuo Shiraishi and Etsuro Hino, made a rapid alpine-style ascent alone on the normal route from the northwest after their expedition had been unable to gain the east ridge. Another fast alpine-style ascent of an 8000er by a small party was accomplished by three Italians, Sergio Martini, Fausto De Stefani and Almo Giambisi, in a three days push from 5000 meters up the north face of Annapurna I, a feat all the more striking because of the failure of three French expeditions on the same mountain in the same season.

Two of the French Annapurna teams blamed dangerous snow conditions and avalanching seracs for their lack of success, but the third one, a small party of three Frenchmen and two Sherpas led by Henri Sigayret, probably failed because of disagreement between the leader and the strongest climber, Patrick Gabarrou. At the end, Gabarrou was left alone with one Sherpa to climb a new line on the mountain's northwest face, and after gaining a ridge at about 7900 meters at the top of the face, they also abandoned the climb.

Another new face route was climbed by Poles on Dhaulagiri I, but they too were not on a direct route to the summit and did not go for the top. Under the leadership of Eugeniusz Chrobak, they climbed a line up the 8167-meter mountain's south face but then gave up the climb when they reached the south ridge at 7500 meters.

Other new routes were put up by Japanese on Chamlang (7319 meters), two Scotsmen on Pumori (7161 meters) and Yugoslavs on Ama Dablam (6812 meters). And on October 17 Noriyuki Hata, Katashi Tokimoto, all Japanese, plus Ang Phuri Lama achieved the first ascent by any route of Tripura Hiunchuli via its northwest ridge.

Less than half – about 40% – of the 49 expeditions in Nepal last autumn reached their summits. Like the Europeans on Everest, many teams said the frequent snowstorms throughout September and much of October, followed by fierce winds in October and November, had spelled defeat for them. The winds that pushed Messner and Kammerlander up Lhotse made their descent more difficult, but they did get to the top; on other mountains these same winds destroyed tents and stopped climbing completely. They could indeed even be fatal. Loretan believed it was a great gust of wind that blew Steiner off his feet and sent him to his death.

Altogether 13 mountaineers died last autumn. Five of them like Steiner fell to their deaths, three including Ruedi died of altitude sickness and on Everest, two men, Simon Burkhardt from Switzerland and Gyalu Sherpa, were killed by an avalanche and collapsing seracs.

No one knows what happened to the other three who died. They simply disappeared without trace somewhere on Himalchuli North (7317 meters). They were two West Germans, Wolfgang Weinzierl and Peter Wauer, joined by an Italian, Guenther Eisendle, who was originally expected to go with them only to base camp.

On October 15 these men left their second camp to pitch camp 3 at about 6500 meters and go on to the summit from there. But that night and all the following day there was heavy snowfall and a lot of avalanching, and the only surviving member of their expedition, Siegfried Reiter, also a German, who had not joined them in climbing above camp 2, speculated that they were struck by a fatal avalanche. But he did not know; he found no trace of them. All that is certain is that they never returned to camp 2.

The 13 climbers who perished represented 2.7% of the total number of men and women who climbed on expedition last autumn. This is the usual percentage of fatalities in the Nepalese Himalaya. Mountaineering can be a competitive sport at times. It is almost always a dangerous one.

## Winter 1986-87: First Winter Ascent of Annapurna I

Most mountaineers who come to the Himalaya to attempt the very highest of the world's great peaks do not choose to climb in the bitterly cold months of winter. But there is one highly successful climber of 8000-meter mountains, Jerzy Kukuczka of Poland, who does not seem to mind winter weather. In snow showers and cold winds early last February, he successfully scaled his 13th 8000er Annapurna I with a fellow Pole, Artur Hajzer. When he returned to Kathmandu from two weeks of climbing without the use of any artificial oxygen, Kukuczka's fingers were numb from the cold and from a lack of oxygen, but he had a big smile on his face as he spoke of how very happy he was at his latest success.

Kukuczka's ascent of Annapurna I with Hajzer via the north-face normal route was the first successful climb to that mountain's highest summit in wintertime, the first Polish ascent of the summit in any season and the only success last winter on any 8000-meter peak. Six other teams tried, but the two Swiss climbers also on Annapurna I, two groups of South Korea, and a pair of Japanese climbers on Makalu all failed to reach their lofty summits.

Indeed of the 13 expeditions that climbed in Nepal's Himalaya during the winter of 1986-87, only three besides Kukuczka's team succeeded on any mountain, and these reached two much lower summits, Pumori (7161 meters) and Lobuje West (6145 meters), both in the Everest region.

Thirty-eight-year-old Kukuczka, who works as an electrician in Katowice when he is not away on his many mountaineering adventures, now has to his credit four winter ascents of 8000-meter mountains, including Kangchenjunga, and all were accomplished without the help of "bottled air." No other climber has scaled so many 8000ers in winter. By contrast, world famous Reinhold Messner, who last October became the first and so far only person to "conquer" all 14 of the world's 8000ers, has never succeeded on any of them in wintertime, although he has made such attempts on two, Cho Oyu and Makalu.

Kukuczka's immediate goal is to bag his 14th and last 8000er in the spring of 1987, when he plans to climb Xixabangma (Shishapangma) in Tibet. Then what does he propose to do next? "Rest for one year," he replies.

Perhaps one factor in the low rate of success last winter was the small size of the teams. Not since the winter of 1981-82, when only five expeditions came to Nepal, had there been so few climbers, both foreign and Nepalese, in the mountains, with an average of just six per group. (In 1981-82 the average was five). Eight teams last winter had no Sherpas at all to help them with their climbs. The season's largest party, one that reached 8300 meters on the difficult, wind-exposed southwest face of mighty Everest, consisted of only five Koreans and nine Sherpas. Five of last winter's team had only two members each.

However team size was clearly not the only factor. Kukuczka's expedition of six Poles needed no Sherpas for success, nor did the two two-man teams that sent men to Pumori's summit in mild early December weather. Weather certainly was a

factor, and there were others as well. The attempt on Everest's southwest face was abandoned after a Sherpa, Tsuttin Dorje, 21, plunged to his death at least 800 meters down the face, and the season's other fatality, that of a Polish climber, Jacek Klincewicz, 34, who fell about the same distance on Himalchuli, put an end to a Polish expedition's attempt to make the first winter ascent of their 7793-meter mountain. Other much smaller teams decided to give up when one or two members became sick.

The Pumori ascents were accomplished on the previously unclimbed east face. First up were two 28-year-old Japanese, Hiroshi Aota from Niigata and Yoshiki Sasahara of Tokyo, who took a mere three days to pioneer a route up the face and reach the summit on December 3, when the weather in Nepal is not really winter weather at all. As they were descending to base camp on the 4th, an American, Todd Bibler, 34, from Boulder, Colorado, whose climbing partner was ill, began a solo ascent of the face and managed to complete it in just two days. This was the first solo success on Pumori's east face but not on the mountain by any route.

Seldom-attempted Lobuje West was scaled so quickly by a Korean expedition's advance party that when the team's leader and other climbers arrived at their base, they learned that the mountain had already been "conquered" and all tents and other gear had been brought down. In this first winter attempt and first Korean attempt on Lobuje West, five men, Deputy Leader Park Jae-Hong, Choi Sang-Hyun, Sim Sang-II, Rinji Sherpa and Mingma Nuru Sherpa, had gained the summit on January 30, only the third day after they had pitched base camp.

The first Korean attempt on Dhaulagiri I however was not so successful. Chung Sang-Kiun and Ang Dorje Sherpa, climbing the normal route up the northeast ridge without any bottled oxygen, turned back on Christmas Day in the face of fierce cold winds. They had only 142 vertical meters more to climb to get to the summit, but it was nearly 3:00 p.m., their fingers and toes were beginning to freeze, and they were more than 600 meters above the shelter of their highest camp.

On Makalu, a mountain never successfully scaled in winter, a two-man expedition of Noboru Yamada and Yashuhira Saito quit at a high point of 7500 meters on the southeast ridge because of strong winds, thick low clouds making visibility very limited, and light snowfall. It was only the second week of December, but they decided to go home because of the bad weather, their tiredness, dwindling food supplies, and another factor that can defeat such a tiny team: they needed other people to talk to about new topics.

So only four of 13 expeditions chalked up summit successes. There was in fact a 14th group that went into the mountains with a climbing permit from the Nepalese government for Manaslu North (7157 meters). They were a party of 13 Japanese led by Toshio Imanishi, president of the Japanese Alpine Club and the first man to set foot on Manaslu's main summit in 1956. But they took their permit with no intention of doing any actual climbing. Mostly an elderly group, they used it to enable them to go into the Manaslu region, which is normally out of bounds to foreigners, to mark the 30th anniversary of the first ascent of Manaslu.

This use – misuse? – of a climbing permit to gain access to restricted areas of Nepal is coming to be a regular occurrence, and most times there is not the mitigating

circumstance of an historic mountaineering anniversary to celebrate. Western European commercial organizations obtain permits for trekking groups who want to enter areas that other trekking agencies' clients cannot visit; in these cases, it is the exploitation of a business advantage over the competition. But it also means that men and women who really want to climb may not be allowed to do so because someone else already has the climbing permit.

## Spring 1987: High Tension on Cho Oyu

Spring 1987 promised historic ascents of some of the world's greatest mountains in the Nepalese Himalaya. Ambitious climbing plans on 8000-meter peaks included the first solo ascent of the north face of Kangchenjunga; the first traverse of the three lofty summits of Lhotse; the first successful climb of the entire great south wall of Lhotse; new routes on Everest and Manaslu. Furthermore, on the Chinese side of Everest, which bestrides Nepal's northern border with Tibet, a solo ascent was to be accomplished on a direct line up the mountain's huge north face.

Alas, all of these grand plans came to nothing, and the Everest soloist tragically lost his life. As the season progressed, it turned out that the major drama actually was international tension amongst Americans, Chileans, Western Europeans and Chinese on Cho Oyu, another giant border peak not far to the west of Everest.

Tension arose when three climbing teams went to essentially the same route on the west side of Cho Oyu without knowing well in advance that anyone else was going to be there. Two teams, Americans and Chilean, received permits from the Nepalese government for the south and southwest sides, but from the start each actually intended to follow the so-called Tichy route, named for the pioneering Austrian mountaineer who led the first ascent of Cho Oyu in 1954. The Tichy route lies mostly on the Tibetan side of the mountain but is easily accessible from Nepal across the unguarded border. The third expedition, composed of 29 alpinists from Austria, Switzerland, West Germany, the Netherlands and the U.S., did have permission for this route: their permit came from the Chinese authorities, and they were accompanied by a Chinese liaison officer.

The Chileans and the Americans had some friction in Kathmandu before they set out for the mountain. The South Americans felt that they were the only team from Nepal's side who were authorized to be anywhere near the Tichy route, but they finally agreed in Kathmandu to let the North Americans come on the route too if they paid part of the Nepalese government's peak fee. According to the Chileans, the Americans agreed to this but never kept their part of the bargain. Finally, when these two parties got onto Cho Oyu and encountered the Europeans from Tibet, new differences arose. The Europeans and their Chinese official objected to the presence of unauthorized climbers, and this in turn led to Chilean annoyance at the Americans, who they believed had been unnecessarily provocative by pitching a camp right under the noses of the Chinese and Europeans.

Despite all these disagreements, some men did manage to scale Cho Oyu. Two Chileans and two Nepalese Sherpas accompanying them succeeded in going to the summit on 29 April together with two Swiss, Fredy Graf, 50, an architect from Zurich, and Jos Wangelier, a mechanic from Horw. It was Graf's fifth 8000-meter summit and Wangelier's second. For the Chileans, whose summiters were the four-man team's 25-year-old leader, Mauricio Purto, a physician from Santiago, and Italo Valle, 27, a violinist who also lives in Santiago, it was the first Chilean ascent of any 8000-meter



peak, and they were the first from their country ever to have climbed in Nepal. For the Europeans on a commercial expedition, it was a series of successes in which altogether 13 members reached the summit over seven different days, the last on 12 May. But for the Americans, there was failure to get higher than 7600 meters.

The Americans laid a substantial part of the blame for their failure on the Chinese, who they believe confiscated their sizeable cache of food, fuel and other essential supplies at their advance base camp on the Tibetan side of the border. Whoever actually stripped their camp, its disappearance in early May while it was unoccupied put an end to their climb, which had already been badly hampered by wind and snow.

The Chinese did more than remove the Americans advance base, if indeed they did that. On April 25, when four Americans were moving up the mountain from advance base, one of them, leader Robert Watters, a 40-year-old professor of geological engineering from Reno, Nevada, who had been the last to leave their camp, heard shouting from below and went back to investigate. He found himself confronted by two Chinese officials at the camp. He waved to his three teammates to continue on up while he turned his attention to the Chinese request for his permits from the Nepalese authorities. After he had handed over these documents and then, on their demand, his passport, he was told by the Chinese to follow them down, apparently to go to a People's Liberation Army camp near the Europeans' base. As the trio descended, Watters suddenly turned away from top trail the two Chinese were following ahead of him, and he hastily crossed back in Nepal, abandoning his passport and permits. (The other Americans descended a few days later in a snowstorm and did not meet the officials.)

Watters was not the only person to have his documents seized by the Chinese. Two of the Chileans found them at one of their camps and handed over their Nepalese permits when the Chinese gave urgency to their order by pulling out their knives.

It seems likely that the Chinese government will draw the attention of the Nepalese authorities, with whom they have cordial relations, to these violations of the border. The Europeans' leader, Marcus Schmuck, 62, from Salzburg, has already lodged a protest. The Nepalese probably will ban Watters and Purto - perhaps their teammates - from climbing again in Nepal for several years, and they may also stop granting permission to climb Cho Oyu from its southwestern side if not from all sides in Nepal.

As if all this taking place on Cho Oyu was not enough, there are reports of still another party on the same route without authorisation from any government. They were said to be two Frenchmen, one of them Jean Clemenson, who already successfully climbed the Tichy route in September 1984 at the age of 46 as a member of a predominantly Spanish expedition. These two totally unauthorised climbers are said to have got no higher than 5800 meters because of bad weather.

The Americans and French on Cho Oyu were by no means the only climbers to fail this spring. Indeed the season was an unusually unsuccessful one. Of the 27 expeditions that came to Nepal from 19 nations to scale 20 different mountains, just six succeeded in reaching five summits, the poorest success rate for any spring season

for ten years and the least successful for any season of the year since the winter of 1984-85. However, at the same time it was an unusually safe season with the death of only one of the 250 climbers in Nepal (and only one other amongst those of the Tibet side of Nepal's mountains). This was the lowest fatality rate in Nepal since the winter of 1981-2. Very probably these two low rates are related: precautionary retreats in the face of dangerous snow conditions, instead of suicidal assaults regardless of weather, may well have saved the five or six more lives that would have been lost at the normal death rate of about 2.6% in the Nepalese Himalaya.

Many teams put the blame for their failure on frequent heavy snowfall. As a 26-year-old French mountaineer from Lyon, Eric Escoffier, explained succinctly after his small team could not scale the great unconquered south wall of Lhotse: "It snowed every afternoon and avalanched every morning." His party never actually set foot on the face.

Fierce winds also contributed to defeat for climbers on the very high peaks. Twelve French army men led by Capt. Alain Esteve, 34, from Chamonix, came to Nepal with grand plans for the first ever attempt of a traverse at extreme altitudes of Lhotse's three summits, all well over 8000 meters above the seas. But strong winds greatly slowed their progress, and it became clear to Esteve that such ambitious ideas were beyond the capabilities of a team with relatively little experience on very high mountains. In the end, just one of them, Yves Tedeschi, 26, an infantry sergeant who is a mountain guide at Chamonix, got to the 8400-meter summit known as Lhotse Shar on 20 May, five weeks after they had begun climbing. None of them tried to traverse the mountain.

On the cold north face of Kangchenjunga, still another Frenchman tried to make climbing history. But Eric Monier, 20 a doctor from Susville, abandoned his bid to achieve the first solo ascent of this face when he had reached 7350 meters altitudes, 1236 vertical meters below his summit, after four days of climbing, because his feet were freezing. He expected to require the amputation of the ends of several toes as a result of this frostbite. The boots he had been wearing on Kangchenjunga had protected his feet very well at -25 degrees C. In the European Alps; he apparently had failed to take sufficiently into consideration the effects of high altitude as well as low temperature on the flow of oxygen rich blood into the feet.

On Mount Everest, six mountaineering teams struggled against deep snow and terrible winds on various routes from the Nepalese and Tibetan sides. Not one of them succeeded in reaching the top of the world, but two Americans and a Swede, who were from two expeditions assaulting the summit from the North Col across the north face to the west ridge, did reach less than 200 vertical meters from their goal before the wind and the technical difficulty of the final part of their climb drove them back. They were a member of the first Swedish group ever to try climbing Everest, Lars Cronlund, 33, a railway engineer from Upplands Vasby, and two mountain guides from Washington State in the U.S., Eric Simonson, 32, and Edmund Viesturs 27.

The would-be Everest soloist never got so high. Roger Marshall, a 45-year-old mountaineer and writer on mountaineering subjects who lived in Boulder, Colorado, U.S.A., but had Canadian and British citizenship, had an obsession for solo ascents

of the world's greatest mountains and had gone to the summit of Kangchenjunga from the southwest face alone in October 1984. Now he was making his second attempt in less than one year to "conquer" Everest in the first solo ascent of his chosen route, a route he called the "super-direct" which runs straight up the north face via two major gullies known as the Japanese couloir and the Hornbein Couloir.

Marshall got no higher than 7850 meters. It appeared to those watching him from below that altitude sickness forced him to turn back well below the summit and probably this was also the cause of his fatal fall of about 200 meters down hard blue ice. His neck was broken, and he now lies buried in a crevasse near the bottom of the Everest face.

It was bad weather combined with the great difficulty of their route that forced a pair of Polish mountaineers, Krzysztof Pankiewicz, a 29-year-old chemical engineer from Lodz, and Ludwik Wilczynski, 39, a mountaineering instructor from Bydgoszcz, to abandon the new route they were trying to make up Manaslu's unclimbed southeast face. And constant battles with fierce gales exhausted and finally defeated a 23-member Czechoslovak expedition led by Ivan Galfy, 53, a mountain guide from Stary Smokovec, who had hoped to put up two new routes on the vast southwest face of Everest.

However, while expedition after expedition reported failure, the toll in human life was unusually low. The only death amongst the 250 climbers in Nepal was that of a Spaniard, Andres Ferrer, 29, from Alicante, who fell 300 meters down the north face of Annapurna I. Like Marshall's death on the Chinese side of Everest, Ferrer's fatal fall may have been caused by high-altitude sickness.

Nonetheless there were some successes. Besides the "conquests" of Cho Oyu and Lhotse Shar, there was the achievement of three Americans and three Nepalis who managed to reach the summit of Makalu via the normal western route. On other standard routes on two much lower mountains, Americans and Greeks successfully climbed Ama Dablam in the Everest region, and Japanese got to the top of Langtang Ri, north of Kathmandu. But on the whole, the major news of the season was not mountaineering achievements but chilly international relations.

## **Autumn 1987: “It Was Either Snowing or Blowing”**

### **A Difficult Climbing Season**

“After the big snowfall, we went up again to camp 2, but at first we couldn’t find the camp because an avalanche had covered the whole area. After two hours of probing the snow, we found tent one meter, 80-centimeters down. The next day we found two more tents, but all were completely broken. We had to go down.”

“When I got to camp 2 after the storm, there was no camp. All my really warm clothing, my food and other essential things were under very deep snow or blown away by the storm. So the climb was finished.”

“It snowed for 48 hours. When we went up again a few days later, it took us till eight o’clock in the evening to reach camp 2, and then we had to spend three hours digging out our sleeping bags. It took us all the next day to dig out the camp, and on the day after that, when we tried to go on up to camp 3 in very deep snow, we found an avalanche had wiped out all our fixed ropes on an ice cliff. This was the last straw because we didn’t have any more gear to fix new lines.”

“After they pitched their tent for camp 4, the wind was so strong that night it drove powder snow right through the tent’s walls, and small pieces of ice ripped the tent’s fabric. The tent was destroyed and they had to go down the next morning.”

“All season long it was either snowing or blowing.”

These are typical accounts of what happened to many of the mountaineering expeditions in the appalling weather conditions they encountered in the autumn climbing season that has just concluded in the Nepalese Himalaya, and they explain why an unusually low proportion of teams were able to score successes.

On Mount Everest no team reached the top of the world. New Zealander Peter Hillary, the 32-year-old son of the mountain’s first conqueror, Sir Edmund Hillary, led his second expedition in three years in his bid to reach the 8848-meter summit as his father had done 34 years ago. But he went no higher than 7320 meters because, he explained, he saw no point: fierce winds above, clouds rolling in and the barometer falling told him it would be impossible to go all the way to the top.

He said that the two members of his four-man team who did go higher than he “are extremely lucky to have survived.” Kim Logan, 34, from Queenstown, Otago, New Zealand, and Michael Rheinberger, 46, from Parkville, Victoria, Australia, managed to reach about 8080 meters by way of the mountain’s south pillar, but then were buffeted by winds suddenly gusting up to 320 kilometers per hour (200 mph) that tore their tent apart and left them with frostbitten fingers and toes, Logan’s especially seriously.

On another Everest expedition, two Europeans, Reinhard Patscheider, 30, from Graun, South Tirol, Italy, and Thomas Schlicher, 26, of Altaussee, Styria, Austria, on a different climbing route to the southeast ridge, succeeded in reaching 8400 meters before they were defeated by deep snow and terrible wind. Patscheider later

attempted a ski descent from about 8000 meters, but in this too he was unsuccessful. He fell and badly injured his shoulder.

Everest, which bestrides Nepal's northern border with the Tibet region of China, remained unconquered this season from all sides. It has not been climbed successfully from Nepal since October 1985, when seven Japanese stood on its lofty summit. The last people atop Everest from the Tibetan side were two Swiss in August last year.

But not all mountaineers in Nepal this autumn were defeated by the winds and the heavy snowfall. Fifty-six teams set out to scale 32 Nepalese peaks. Although three did not manage even to reach the base of their mountains because of deep snow, of the 53 that did attempt to climb, 17, or one-third, of them were successful. (Normally about half of all teams succeed each season.) A list of noteworthy achievements of the season would include the following:

- The first woman from the Western Hemisphere, and only the second woman from anywhere in the world, on the summit of the world's seventh highest mountain, Dhaulagiri I. Miss Kitty Calhoun, 27, from Bellingham, Washington, USA, led a very small party to success on October 16, just two days before the start of the big snowstorm, without the use of any artificial oxygen or help from Nepalese Sherpas.
- The first Dutch attempt on 7710-meter Jannu in the Kangchenjunga region of eastern Nepal in the first Dutch ascent, achieved by a previously unclimbed route up the north face. Three members of a six-man team were successful: the first was Edmond Oefner, 29, from Sassenheim, alone from their highest bivouac at 7250 meters on October 11. Two days later, Rudolf de Koning, 37, from Utrecht, and Ger Friele, 29, of Amsterdam, followed him to the top. But the price paid by de Koning and Friele for their success was even greater than that of the Australians: during their descent, they fell hundreds of meters, apparently hit by an avalanche, and their bodies were found at the bottom of the face.
- Also on Jannu, a successful pair of Frenchmen, Pierre Beghin, 36, from Le Sappey en Chartreuse, and Erik Decamp, 33, from Champ pres Froges, in an alpine-style ascent of the north face in four days from 5600 meters to summit on October 25 without accident or frostbite.
- The first autumn ascent of 6979-meter Leongpo Gang (also known as Big White Peak) by South Koreans on a new climbing route via the west face to the west ridge. In the first Korean bid to scale this mountain northeast of Kathmandu, two Koreans, Kim Soo-Hyeon, 21, from Janghung, and Lee Jeoung-Hoon, 23, of Jeoungju, with Sherpas, Da Gombu and Ang Temba, reached the summit on September 27.
- A new high-altitude record for Spanish women climbers set by Miss Maria Mercedes Macia Armengol, 31, from Mataro near Barcelona, on Lhotse Shar, the 8400-meter southeastern summit of Lhotse. Although she did not reach Lhotse Shar's summit – none of her expedition did – she got to 7800 meters,

450 vertical meters higher than the Spanish women's record she herself had set in May 1984 on the same peak.

Miss Marcia's eight-member team suffered the worst fatal disaster of the season's expedition. It was during a search for four missing teammates that she went so high on the mountain. The group's leader, Antoni Sors Ferrer, and three other members, Sergio Reinaldo Escalera Fernandez, Francisco Porrás Cerda and Antonio Quinones Torres, were found dead at the foot of Lhotse Shar, apparently the victims of a slab avalanche caused by fierce winds.

Another particularly tragic death was that of a 19-year-old Frenchman, Jacques Saint-Martin from Aureilhan, who had been climbing on Kangchungtse (also called Makalu II), 7678 meters, on a 10-member expedition. He had become exhausted and had left the mountain, trekking down to rest in a village several days from base camp, when he collapsed and died alone. His body was later found by some passing French trekkers.

Two more climbers died this season, a Japanese from a very sudden illness while on an expedition to Manaslu and a Pole struck by an avalanche in the early stages of an assault on the unclimbed south face of Lhotse, bringing the total of deaths to nine. Nine too many, no doubt, but not a high proportion of all the 437 climbers, foreign and Nepalese – in fact slightly lower than the average 2-5 per cent for a season in the Nepalese Himalaya.

Amongst the unsuccessful climbers were two bold men who tried to make solo ascents of 8000-meter mountains. They were a Japanese, 29-year-old Hiroshi Aota from Nou in Niigata prefecture, who was so horrified by the constant avalanching pouring down the south face of Dhaulagiri I that he went no further than his advance base camp at the foot of this vast unclimbed face, and a West German, Hans Eitel, 42, of Heidelberg, who climbed Cho Oyu alone to about 7400 meters after the three men he had expected to join him had dropped out. But then he gave up when he judged that the route had become too difficult and dangerous for him to push on by himself.

Another notable failure was that of a strong team who attacked the so far unconquered south face of Lhotse, Everest's giant neighbor. They were eight Poles, two Italians, a Briton and a Mexican, and they made their way to a point only 216 vertical meters below the summit, the highest altitude anyone has gained on this formidable face. They were ultimately defeated by the wind and the exhaustion of men who had fought wind and extreme technical difficulties for 50 days.

Another cause of failure amongst these commercially organized groups is the very rigid timetable they are committed to. One cannot programme the number of days on which a huge snowfall will make climbing impossible. Indeed one French group never reached its mountain, Baruntse in the Makalu region, because deep snow on the approach route would have required spending extra time going around the impassable areas, and the group's schedule did not allow for this time. They were the second group in three years organized by the same Chamonix guide who could not reach Baruntse because of tight schedules.

In addition to these parties, there were three other commercial groups who had been granted climbing permits by the Nepalese government and were officially reported to have failed in their climbing bids when they had actually done no climbing at all and had never intended to do any. These were two groups from West Germany and Denmark, who were permitted to climb Manaslu North, and Italians with a permit for Api. These mountains are located in areas where foreigners are not allowed to go except on mountaineering expeditions, which are accompanied by government-assigned liaison officers. So in order to visit these areas, the agencies that organized their travel obtained climbing permits, and the groups' leaders then gave false reports about climbing failures after they had left the restricted areas.

Reminder of a failed expedition of serious mountaineers of decades ago came to light this season when an unsuccessful team was on Kangchenjunga. Some Australians found an old-style climber's ice axe marked with the name of Guenter Dyhrenfurth, who was the Swiss leader of a European attempt to scale this vast mountain in the spring of 1930, 20 years before any 8000-meter mountain was conquered. The old-fashioned long wooden shaft had broken in two and the pieces were found in two different places.

The Australians also found what they believe is probably the body of Chettan Sherpa, a climber on the 1930 expedition who was killed by an avalanche. The body they found was small boned and dressed in pre-war clothing. History was discovered as well as made this autumn.

## Winter 1987-88: Some Historic Ascents

A solo ascent of an 8000-meter mountain is a most impressive achievement in the mildest of summer weather, and until early this year only six men had climbed such lofty mountains alone, none in wintertime. Then this February came the claim of the first solo ascent of any 8000-meter mountain in winter when a Spanish mountaineering and skiing instructor reported he has just scaled Cho Oyu entirely alone from a camp near its base.

The winter of 1987-88 in the Nepalese Himalaya also saw the first winter ascent of Everest without bottled oxygen, the first winter successes on two high 7000-meter peaks and the first winter climb of the formidable south face of Annapurna I. It also brought a climbing ban on five Americans who completed their “winter” before the season had officially begun.

Altogether nine summits were gained by the 13 teams from eight nations who came for winter climbs, a success rate well over the average 50% for a simple season. And this was achieved in relative safety with only two deaths amongst the 145 men and five women who went climbing, less than half the normal rate of fatalities on climbs in Nepal, which is about 2.6%

Winter climbing is no picnic, and Himalayan winters especially mean plummeting temperatures that freeze hands and feet, jet-stream winds that knock a man over and send large rocks flying through the air, and a severe lack of oxygen at great altitudes that makes every movement a major conscious effort and can indeed cause death. This winter in Nepal was no exception, but there were periods of relatively favorable weather.

“I did it!” Fernando Garrido, 29, from Barcelona, exulted when he returned from Cho Oyu, 8201 meters high west-north west of Everest, with his historic claim of having successfully soloed the huge mountain in winter. But he had not been confident of his chances of success before leaving Kathmandu for his climb. He had said then: “Sometimes I think it’s too much, I can’t make it. Sometimes I think I will make it. I will see.”

Garrido took five days for his lonely ascent, beginning on February 2 from a camp at 5850 meters on a glacier near the foot of the mountain’s western slopes. On February 6, in cold and very windy weather, at 6:00 p.m. when the daylight was fading fast, he stood on the summit, according to his account. He describes the top of Cho Oyu as looking like the rim of a volcanic crater, and to make sure he had reached its highest point, he says he went all the way around this rim before descending that night to 7600 meters to bivouac in a sleeping bag he had left there.

He also almost certainly was the first person to solo Cho Oyu in any season – three German climbers have said they made solos of it on various dates since 1979, but their accounts are not accepted by the experts – and he hopes to do more solos of 8000-meter peaks in future. “I don’t like to climb with other people,” he says.

On Everest, a tough 48-year-old Nepalese mountaineer, Ang Rita Sherpa, on December 22 made his fourth climb to the top of the world without the help of any



supplemental oxygen. He is the first person to climb this vast mountain in winter without oxygen and the first and only person to scale it a total of four times without this important aid. He returns to Everest in the spring season for an attempt to make his fifth Everest ascent – but so does the only other person to have been to the highest point on four times, Sungdare Sherpa, 32.

Ang Rita climbed Everest last winter via its normal southeast ridge route with an expedition of seven South Koreans and six other Sherpas, and expedition that was the seventh South Korean group who had tried to climb Everest in winter and the first of them finally to succeed. With him to the summit went one of its Korean members, Heo Young-Ho, 33, from Jecheon, the 192nd person to have reached the top of the world, for whom this was his third 8000-meter summit. (Ang Rita has ascended a total of four 8000ers.)

Like Garrido, these two Everest conquerors spent their summit night out high on their mountain, well above the shelter of their last camp, in their case at 8600 meters. They did not even have sleeping bags to keep them warm, but they were lucky enough to encounter only light winds that night and suffered only very slight frostbite.

It was a Japanese expedition that accomplished the first winter ascent of the great south face of Annapurna I. Four of the team's 13 Japanese climbers surmounted the face and gained the 8091-meter summit on December 20, but only two, Noboru Yamada, 37, from Numata, and Teruo Seagusa, 30, from Tokyo, returned alive. The other two fell to their deaths the day of their summit conquest: Toshiyuki Kobayashi, 22, from Kiryu, is believed to have slipped in a patch of bad snow, while Yashuhira Saito, 34, from Nagoya, for whom this had been his third 8000-meter summit, dropped from exhaustion.

The two 7000-meter mountains that were successfully scaled this season for the first time in winter were Ngojumba Kang, 7743 meters just east of Cho Oyu, and Langtang Lirung, which stands 7234 meters north of Kathmandu. Three Poles achieved the first winter ascent of Langtang Lirung on January 3 while two South Koreans became the first winter conquerors of Ngojumba Kang more than five weeks later, on February 11.

The first summit gained by any of the season's 13 expeditions was in fact reached before the official start of the winter climbing season as fixed by the Nepalese government. The authorities set limits on the spring, autumn and winter seasons in which climbing is permitted, and the first day of the winter period is December 1. But the summit of Ama Dablam, a popular 6812-meter satellite of Everest, was reached on November 23 and 26 by five out of six members of an American team including its leader, Miss Annie Whitehouse, 31, from Boulder, Colorado.

They were asked by the Nepalese tourism ministry to justify their pre-season ascents. They explained that it was because of their anxiety for their own safety in unstable weather, which threatened to produce dangerous snow conditions, that they raced to complete their climb and leave the mountain quickly. This did not satisfy the authorities: on February 22, a week after the season had officially ended, the tourism ministry announced that because they had broken Nepal's climbing regulations, Miss

Whitehouse and her successful teammates, Todd Bibler, 35, Eric Reynolds, 35, Alexander (Sandy) Stewart, 35, and Clay Wadman, 22, all from the U.S. state of Colorado, were banned from climbing any Nepalese mountain for the next five years. A mountaineering success can bring a bureaucratic defeat.

## Spring 1988: A Contrast in Everest Climbing Styles

The contrast was startling. A massive expedition went to Mount Everest this spring with 252 members and a budget of probably \$7 million to spend on climbing and live television coverage. At the very same time there was another team of just four men whose funds probably totaled no more than two or three percent of that amount. Both succeeded.

The little one, composed of two Americans, one Briton and a Canadian, put the British climber, Stephen Venables, on the top the world by a new route up the vast east face of the mountain, a face which had been scaled successfully only once before. The huge expedition of Japanese, Chinese and Nepalese sent 14 members to the summit by the two easiest routes on Everest that had been conquered before them by a total of nearly 150 men and women. The big party got the television coverage and a series of gala victory celebrations in three nations' capitals while the little group quietly went their separate ways home.

This spring's drama on Everest further included an Australian success to celebrate their country's bicentennial year by mounting the first ascent on any route from Nepal's southern side without Nepalese Sherpas to help them to carry supply loads up to the high camps, and a sustained but unsuccessful bid by Britons to make a rare conquest of the west ridge. And, to give the enormous Asian expedition their due, they completed the first traverses ever made on Everest from north to south and vice versa on the exact date, May 5, fixed months in advance by their Japanese leaders and financiers, while five days later one of their Nepalese members, Sungdare Sherpa, made his own Everest history when he became the first person ever to stand at the highest point on earth for his fifth time.

There were other springtime achievements as well amongst the 34 expeditions from 20 nations of Europe, North America, Asia and Australasia that went climbing on 17 Himalayan peaks within Nepal or on its borders, with more than half of the groups on peaks over 8000 meters. Although there was not one woman climber on Everest, some of these other accomplishments were triumphs by women:

- A 25-year-old gym teacher from Appenzell, Switzerland, Miss Ursula Huber, became the first Swiss woman to scale any 8000-meter mountain as she stood atop Manaslu.
- When three Indonesian men got to the summit of Pumori, the first climbers from their country to scale any peak more than 7000 meters, the only woman on their team, Miss Veronica Moeliono, also 25, did not make it all the way to the top, but she did manage to become the first Indonesian of her sex to attain a height of 7000 meters.
- The first Dutch women's expedition anywhere outside Europe succeeded in reaching their goal, the east summit of Chamlang, but did not try to make the 10-kilometer traverse onwards to their mountain's slightly higher main

summit. On two successive days, five of the six members went to the 7290-meter east summit.

However the season's greatest successes were scored by men, and notable amongst these was the first traverse of Makalu, by Marc Batard, a 36-year-old French mountain guide from Les Houches, Annecy. On April 27 he stood atop this 8463-meter giant peak, having reached that point alone and without the use of any artificial oxygen at extreme altitudes to surmount a difficult and seldom-climbed route, the west pillar. He then completed his traverse alone by descending the normal route on the mountain's northwest side.

Batard claims this as a solo ascent, and indeed he had no climbing companions from the time he began his summit push at the foot of the pillar on April 26 until he descended to a German team's base camp and ate breakfast with them on the 28th. But he had had help in preparing his route of ascent: two Nepalese, one a Sherpa and the other a member of the Gurung tribe, had helped him to pitch two small camps and had carried the 2000 meters of rope which he fixed along the pillar to make his ascent quicker and safer. Furthermore during his descent Batard was helped in finding his way over unfamiliar terrain by marker flags and tents that had been placed along the standard route by the Germans and by an Italian expedition who were also attempting to climb this side. (Unfortunately none of these other alpinists was able to reach the summit.)

Other mountaineers disagree with Batard's designation of his climb as a solo effort. "It was the first traverse of Makalu and in a very good style," says Reinhold Messner, but he does not consider it to have been a solo ascent when other men had worked with Batard while putting in the route and when a large part of his descent route had been made by others. Norbert Joos, a Swiss climber with important Himalayan achievements of his own, agrees: "It was not a solo climb, but it was a great thing anyway. My congratulations to him. He is very strong."

Batard now proposes to put his strength to an even more dramatic test in September this year in a bid to climb the entire standard southern route on Everest – after much of it has been prepared for him by teammates – in 24 hours from base camp to summit and back to base camp, a vertical distance of about 3450 meters or almost 3.5 kilometers at an average altitude of nearly 7000 meters. He hopes to be joined in this novel feat, which mountaineering purists are already calling a stunt, by the man with the most Everest ascents to his credit, Sungdare Sherpa.

Another achievement this past spring was that of a slightly larger team of men, Peter Habeler of Austria (who in May 1978 with Messner made the first oxygen-less ascent of Everest), Carlos Buhler of the U.S. and Martin Zabaleta, a Spanish Basque living in the U.S. The three men succeeded together in scaling the rarely climbed north ridge of 8586-meter Kangchenjunga, without recourse to bottled oxygen. Buhler became the first American to reach the summit of Kangchenjunga.

This trio managed to survive a snowstorm that raged on their summit day, May 3, and continued the following day. It dumped a meter of fresh snow and saw them desperately descend the mountain in severe avalanche conditions. "The final

section on the ridge was very tricky with real windslab danger,” Buhler said later in Kathmandu while nursing his frostbitten toes.

Nonetheless he felt “we were very lucky in our timing. If we had gone up to camp 3 [at about 7300 meters] on the 3rd of May [two days later than they did], we would have been swept off the mountain [by an avalanche that destroyed the camp that day]. If we had tried for the summit one day later, we would never have made it and we would not have been able to get off the mountain. We would have been stranded like the people on K-2 two years ago, when so many of them died.”

A large team of 21 Indian climbers led by Vasant Limaye was also on the Nepalese side of Kangchenjunga, which bestrides the Indo-Nepalese border. As non-army men they were not permitted to climb the mountain in their own country because that side is a restricted military area, so they came to Nepal and attempted the normal southwest-face route. They had had no previous experience at great altitudes, and they did not gain the summit. But they put up a tremendous battle – one of two deputy leaders, Sanjay Borole, actually died of exhaustion complicated by hypothermia during their efforts – and they succeeded in getting one member, plus two of the nine Nepalese with them, to the considerable height of 8450 meters. Several other members reached at least 8000 meters, the first Indian civilians ever to gain that altitude.

A European group of climbers who in recent years have been making a series of attacks on 8000-meter mountains, formerly called Quota 8000 but now known as Esprit d'Equipe, moved from the Karakoram to the Nepalese Himalaya this spring. A seven-member team led by Benoit Chamoux of France succeeded in scaling the south face of Annapurna I.

Chamoux had earned a reputation in the Karakoram for extremely rapid ascents of 8000ers, but he did not use that tactic on this spring's ascent. He climbed along with his teammates, one of whom, the Czechoslovak member, Josef Rakoncaj, became the first from his country to conquer Annapurna I. They followed the 1970 Bonington route for the most part, but unlike the 1970 British expedition made their ascent without any artificial oxygen. In the autumn they are scheduled to go to Everest from the Tibetan side, next year and in 1990 to two more 8000ers each year.

Six teams went this spring to Cho Oyu, one of the huge Himalaya that form Nepal's northern border with Tibet, and four were successful. One of the fortunate ones was a 27-member West German, Austrian and Dutch group led by Guenther Haerter of West Germany who first sent 15 members to the top of nearby Xixabangma (Shishapangma) inside Tibet and then put six men atop Cho Oyu in alpine style. They had become well-acclimatized to high altitude during their Xixabangma climb and now had no need for fixed camps, Sherpa helpers and bottled oxygen for climbing.

When members of Haerter's team reached their fourth bivouac site at 7300 meters on Cho Oyu in late May, they found a tent with somebody in it, a man with the hood of his down jacket pulled over his head, slumped over what appeared to be his backpack. They had been told by Tibetans that there was a dead Japanese in a tent on the mountain, and they assumed that this was he despite the fact that his

clothing and equipment had been made in Italy and Switzerland. They gave him a brief glance and left him undisturbed.

It was only after they had left Cho Oyu that they learned the body must be that of a Swiss alpinist, Stefan Woerner, whom some of them knew. Woerner was a 38-year-old Zurich marketing consultant and tour operator who had helped to organize one of this spring's other Cho Oyu expeditions. His three teammates had thought he was beginning to show signs of altitude sickness before his summit day, they said on their return to Kathmandu, but Woerner was determined to stand atop Cho Oyu in his fourth ascent of an 8000er. He succeeded on May 11, and returned safely to the tent at 7300 meters.

But the morning after his success, when he tried to get ready to go down to base camp, Woerner couldn't get his boots on, and his speech was confused. The effects of high altitude without the use of any artificial oxygen were all too clearly preventing him from descending under his own power. There was only one other member still in camp with him, Heinz Zempsch of West Germany, who decided to leave him in the afternoon to descend to base camp, where the other two, including expedition leader Gerhard Schmatz of Neu-Ulm, West Germany, now were, to get their one bottle of oxygen and perhaps help from the others.

Zempsch reached base camp late at night the following day and next morning, May 14, started back up the mountain alone with the oxygen and other gear. But unfavorable weather including heavy snowfall and avalanche danger made him turn back at 6500 meters. The bad weather continued for the next two days; only on the 17th could another member, Hans Engl, also German, try to go to Woerner; he got only 200 meters higher than Zempsch had been before another storm stopped him. He was back in base camp on the 18th. By now the yaks that had been ordered to take them and their baggage away from Cho Oyu had arrived, "so we had to start on the 18th," Schmatz explained in Kathmandu. "We took down the kitchen tent and at 10:30 in the evening we reached the Chinese base camp at Kyetrak."

When other mountaineers heard this saga they debated whether Woerner's teammates, only three men with no Sherpas to help them, should have made a combined effort to reach their desperately sick friend, or whether Zempsch should have wrapped him in the tent and tried to drag him down the mountain instead of leaving him, or whether the tactics of the climb were flawed with two men in base camp when another known to be showing signs of impending illness was high on the mountain without substantial support. Perhaps at the core of these discussions is the familiar question of whether the policy of each-man-for-himself is proper on these very high Himalaya.

The four-man team who made the remarkable oxygen-less ascent of Everest's east face from Tibet could well have been the subject of such a debate themselves, but all of them survived. They were able to find a line up a previously unclimbed buttress, which they have called the Neverest (Everest/Never-rest) Buttress, that provided a direct route to the South Col, and here they came to the normal route from the south side up the southeast ridge. They reached the Col on May 10 and pitched their small tent there at nearly 8000 meters.

One of the four, the Canadian, Paul Teare, who lives in California, realized he was developing altitude sickness, and next morning he descended the whole east face entirely alone. He reached their advance base camp safely in seven hours and recovered swiftly. Meanwhile the other three spent the day at the Col waiting for the winds to lessen and were finally able to set out for the summit at 11:00 that night.

In the lead was Stephen Venables, 34-year-old mountaineering writer and lecturer from London, who plodded on and on up the southeast ridge and finally found himself at the highest summit in the world at 3:40 the following afternoon. His two friends, expedition leader Robert Anderson, an American who lives in New Zealand, and the team's other American, Edward Webster, from Colorado, had turned back in the deteriorating weather, and they took refuge that night of May 12/13 in a tent that the tri-national team had left at 8300 meters. Venables had to spend the night out without shelter when he could not find the way back to the South Col in the misty weather; he made his unprepared bivouac at a point which was about 200 meters above the tent his friends were in.

On the 13th Venables caught up with the other two and all three reached their tent at the Col, where they rested for the remainder of the day and the night before beginning their very slow descent of the face. It was not until the 17th and 18th that they separately managed at last to get down to advance base camp, delayed by new snowfall and their own exhaustion, starved for food and liquids and frostbitten.

Venables had realized when he set out from the Col for the summit that he was beginning to have no feeling in his toes. He took the conscious decision to carry on anyway; he may lose the tips of five frostbitten toes. Webster, a professional photographer, had taken great pains to get his shots just right, and he will probably lose the ends of five fingers. Anderson suffered milder frostbite. But all of them did manage to get down the world's highest mountain alive.

There could be no debate over anyone being left anywhere on their mountain by the Chinese-Japanese-Nepalese Everest team, for there were too many camps and climbers and walkie-talkie radios and oxygen bottles and support staff at the two base camps, one on the north side and the other on the south, for that. In addition three nations' governments and climbing establishments were involved in their climb, detailed planning had been done months in advance – the Japanese climber who would make the first north-south traverse had already been chosen well before departure from Japan – and the expedition's tri-national commanders, sitting in Peking, could radio instructions to their climbing leaders on the scene. In fact, with an elaborate command structure, a small village of support personnel (cooks, doctors, interpreters, radio operators) plus television and newspaper journalists and technicians at each base camp and 176 people climbing above their bases, it is a wonder that the whole enterprise did not collapse of its own weight before the mountain could be climbed successfully.

But collapse it did not, and no doubt a large amount of credit goes to the two Japanese climbing leaders, Tsuneo Shigehiro on the north side in Tibet in charge of progress via the North Col and the northeast ridge, the classical route of the first British efforts in the 1920s and 1930s, and Gota Isono managing the climb from Nepal

in the south via the South Col and the southeast ridge, the route pioneered 35 years ago by Hillary and Tenzing. Fourteen men succeeded in gaining the summit, nine from the north and five from the south, on May 5 and 10. Six of them descended the opposite sides from which they had come up.

First on the top on May 5 were the north-south traverse team of one man from each of the three nations, Noboru Yamada from Japan in his third Everest ascent, Lhakpa Nuru Sherpa (also known as Ang Lhakpa) of Nepal, and a Tibetan, Cering Doji, representing China. They waited an hour on the summit, but when neither the south-north traverse party nor the television crew for live telecasting from the top of the world had appeared, they began their descent of the southern route, the first people ever to cross Mount Everest from one side of the Sino-Nepalese border to the other by way of the summit.

As they were about to make their way down the southeast ridge, which Yamada had climbed twice before, the first member of their so-called support team, meant to be bringing them fresh supplies of oxygen, arrived at the summit; these three men later descended the route they had climbed. The Chinese in this support party, Li Zhixin, the only non-Tibetan amongst the four Chinese citizens to make it to the top, had not actually carried out his support role, for he had brought oxygen only for himself. Apparently, it was politically necessary for at least one Han Chinese (an ethnic Chinese, not of a minority race like the Tibetans) to stand on the summit, and to ensure this, Li had not burdened himself with an extra bottle for anyone else.

Last to arrive at the top from the north side were the three-man Japanese television crew whose live telecast from the highest point on earth, the first ever achieved in Everest climbing history, was the reason Nippon Television Networks Corporation had put up millions of dollars' worth of financing for this expedition. The arrangements for the television coverage were most elaborate with tons of costly sophisticated equipment including a satellite dish at the northern base camp and a specially devised climber's helmet with a very light camera attached. Unfortunately the summiting cameraman had forgotten to bring along the helmet: the camera actually used on the summit was a more conventional hand-held unit.

The day's last arrivals at the summit were the south-north traverse team of two Tibetan Chinese and a Nepalese Sherpa, and as they reached the top the cameraman was able to show to the watching world their last slow, tired steps. They had had to make their way with considerable effort through deep snow on the southeast ridge.

After May 5's major successes from the expedition's commanders' point of view, the double traverse of the mountain and the first live television pictures from the summit, the leadership decided that the men poised for subsequent ascents should be instructed that the climb was over. The leadership wanted to call a halt while the safety record was so good – no accidents, no frostbite and no serious illness except for the fatal heart attack of a base-camp doctor whose death was not related to the climb. But this decision was greeted with dismay by Japanese climbers, who had paid to come on the expedition and were ambitious for their own summit successes, and by Nepalese Sherpas keen to set more records for the number of times they had been to



the top of the world. The Japanese climbing leadership on the spot managed to keep discipline amongst their compatriots, but six Nepalese on the south side rebelled – it was their country after all – and made their own summit bid on May 10. Two men succeeded; one of them was Sungdare Sherpa, who became the first person ever to conquer Everest five times.

The summiters and their leaders were showered with congratulations, awards and victory celebrations in Kathmandu, Peking and Tokyo. King Birendra of Nepal bestowed high decorations on them, Chinese premier Li Peng and the acting prime minister of Japan, Keizo Obuchi, received them at gala functions. Their success had been a great historic mountaineering achievement, it was said, and a glorious contribution to international friendship. “It is an historic feat and an example of human success in conquering nature,” said Mr. Obuchi. A Nepalese government minister noted that “the feat coincidentally marks the 35th anniversary of the first ascent of Sagarmatha [the Nepalese name for Everest]. If in 1953 with the success of human beings on Sagarmatha, mountaineering history was written, today the joint expedition has added yet another chapter by achieving the unique feat of traversing the peak simultaneously from the southern and northern sides. ... The success of this expedition is the tale of the indomitable human spirit and the coordinated work of all the members from China, Japan and Nepal.”

But was it really a magnificent accomplishment? Sir Edmund Hillary, the 1953 conqueror, seems to dissent. While the expedition was getting underway in March, he expressed a strong lack of enthusiasm for its goal: “A double traverse is not very impressive. ... I think it’s a massive undertaking and I personally think a singularly unattractive one. You’ve got hundreds of people milling around on the mountain, and it’s not all that big a deal climbing the easiest two routes and descending the easiest routes already prepared. They’re spending more money on the expedition than anyone has ever spent before. Maybe that’s the most unusual aspect of it. ...”

“Mountaineering traverses are certainly highly regarded only when a party climbs up one route and descends a side of the mountain they don’t have a prepared route down. ... I find it extremely difficult to get the least bit excited about this massive traverse, and I think this would be the attitude of most climbers throughout the world. We all know the Nepalese climbers can climb it, and all they have to do is trundle down the other side. ... I think mountaineering is at its best when the people involved have raised the money themselves, planned it themselves and climb it themselves. I find the whole project basically unattractive. I’m just glad we climbed Everest 35 years ago when we didn’t have all this hullabaloo going on.”

What Hillary will think of Marc Batard’s proposed race to the summit and back in 24 hours is not hard to imagine.

## **Autumn 1988: Dramas in the Highest Himalaya**

Most of the drama in the Nepalese Himalaya during the autumn of 1988 took place on the eight giant 8000-meter mountains in that great range of peaks. In fact, about three-fifths of the 60 teams that came climbing came to attack these huge mountains. As costs of international travel and peak permits rise, increasing numbers of climbers seem to be forced to seek financial sponsorship from businesses not directly related to mountaineering (two computer manufacturers sponsored Everest expeditions this autumn), and this in turn can mean that funds are available only for attempts on the great mountains that are more widely known or can be more easily dramatised.

In order to raise private funds or government support, and to gain general attention, it further helps if one is attempting something spectacular: to scale Everest within 24 hours or make the first alpine-style ascent of its vast southwest face, to be the first black, or the first woman unaided by artificial oxygen, on the top of the world, to make the first ascents of the south face of Lhotse or of Cho Oyu's north face, or to be the first person from any nation to parapente from the highest point on earth. All these feats were attempted in the autumn season, in most cases successfully, although sometimes with fatal results. But some of them were not so much mountaineering as attention-and-fund-getting stunts.

The 24-hour ascent of Everest might be considered an example of this. Marc Batard, a 36-year-old French mountain guide from Megeve, near Chamonix, in need of funds for a series of Himalayan adventures he had planned, announced that he would undertake the fastest round-trip ever made on Everest by climbing from his south-side base camp, set at an altitude of 5350 meters, to the 8848-meter summit via the Hillary route, and then back to base camp, all in just 24 hours. This would be 19 hours faster than the existing speed record set in August 1986 by two Swiss, Erhard Loretan and Jean Troillet, who ascended the north face in 38 hours and slid back down the mountain on their bottoms in only five hours.

To achieve his Everest goal, Batard first made a quick trip up Cho Oyu with Sungdare Sherpa in late August-early September. This ascent was not for the pleasure of scaling the world's sixth highest mountain but for gaining acclimatisation at very high altitudes for his Everest effort to follow. Then he came very quickly from Tibet (they had been on the normal route approached from the north) to Kathmandu, helicoptered into the Everest area, and on 8 September, exactly one week after he had stood atop Cho Oyu, Batard was pitching his camp at the foot of Everest. (Sungdare had dropped out of the plans for Everest.)

Before Batard's arrival at the place where all Everest base camps are pitched for climbs from Nepal's southern side of this giant border peak, other teams had already established their own bases and had been making the climbing route to be shared amongst several parties including Batard through the treacherous Khumbu Icefall, which is just above base camp, and on above it. In addition, eight Nepalese climbers were there to help Batard to break trail above the other teams and otherwise

assist him on his climb, for this was not intended to be a solo ascent like the historic success in August 1980 of Reinhold Messner, who climbed entirely alone on the north side in two and a half days up and a day and a half down. (But like Messner, Batard never uses bottled oxygen.)

Batard began his first attempt to get to the summit of Everest on the evening of 11 September, but he turned back at about 8000 meters the next afternoon when he and his two Nepalese companions found the snow too deep to make further quick progress. It took the persistent Batard two more sorties to gain success: his third try began from base camp at 5:00 p.m. on 25 September and ended at the top of the world at 3:30 p.m. the next day in the footsteps of Frenchmen, Koreans and Nepalese who had gone to the summit before him the very same day. (Some French summiters were still there when he arrived.) He was back in his base at noon on the 27th – and left it only two hours later for his return to Kathmandu and on back France.

Batard had not accomplished his 24-hour return trip, but he still he had managed in 23 1/2 hours to achieve the fastest ascent of Everest. He attributed his failure to make the entire climb within his fixed time to the fact that he had not recovered his normal strength after his second summit attempt on 14-15 September. This had been very nearly successful and had taken a large toll of his strength: he had gotten to a mere 30 vertical meters from the top, he said, and he had been confident he could have climbed all the way up, but he had become so exhausted by breaking trail in very deep snow that he feared he would never survive the descent. On his third and successful ascent ten days later, Batard was still so very tired that he now found himself unable to retain any food or drink while at altitudes above 8000 meters.

When beginning his autumn climbing, Batard said that his real goal was to finish it in October with the first ascent of the great unclimbed south face of Everest's neighbor, Lhotse, and to do this solo. But when he returned to the Himalaya from France after his run up Everest, "I decided quickly I was too tired, it was too much for me to climb this face, I needed a long time to recuperate." He scarcely did any climbing at all on Lhotse this time, but he said he hoped to return in a few years if no one else had scaled the vast wall in the meanwhile. (In the spring of 1989 Reinhold Messner is scheduled to lead the next attempt to conquer the face, which several years ago he described as a difficult problem to be solved only in the year 2000.)

So was all this mountaineering? Or was Batard raising funds and getting himself known as the immensely strong climber at the highest altitudes that he undoubtedly is? With his race up Everest, he had knocked off four 8000-meter summits in just under ten months: Dhaulagiri I in early December 1987, Makalu in the following April (in what he called a solo ascent but others do not), Cho Oyu on 1 September and Everest on 26 September. He was the first person to have conquered four 8000ers in such a short period of time. (Loretan and a fellow Swiss, the late Marcel Ruedi, reached four 8000-meter summits in ten and a half months in 1983-4.) And Batard was the first person to have made a traverse of Makalu. His strength, determination and ability at altitude certainly cannot be disputed, whatever the assessment of his Everest climb.

Strength, determination and ability were also displayed this autumn in the first alpine-style ascent of the formidable southwest face of Everest by four of Czechoslovakia's best alpinists. But was their climb suicidal? And can a climb be described as successful if one man does reach the summit but all four die in the descent?

At 3:00 a.m. on 14 October, four men, Jozef Just, Dusan Becik, Peter Bozik and Jaroslav Jasko, set out from their team's camp at the bottom of the southwest face at 6450 meters equipped with the inner lining of one tent, two sleeping bags, two 40-meter climbing ropes, four ice axes, two ice hammers, three small cameras, one light video camera, a cooking stove and gas, food for three days – and nothing more. No one before had ever tried to scale this steep face without any established camps, fixed rope, bottled oxygen and Sherpa helpers to carry loads and set up box tents.

The Czechoslovaks' progress on the Bonington route proved to be slower than expected because of unforeseen technical difficulties, and on the third day they had to bivouac below the south summit; one member, Becik, was now sick and exhausted. Nevertheless on the fourth day they continued on up because they felt they could not descend the couloir they had exited. On the 17th of October they headed towards the south summit, which all of them apparently reached, and Just managed to gain the main summit at 1:40 that afternoon.

The four then began to descend the southeast ridge, but they never gained the safety of other expedition's tents at the South Col (8000 meters). In their last radio contact, Just reported at 5:30 p.m. that three of them, including himself, were having serious trouble with their eyesight because of the effects of having been so long at very high altitude, but they were making their way towards the Col all right.

They were never heard from again, and Americans at the Col a half an hour or so later could see the entire route to the south summit but no sight of anyone there. Had they fallen through a cornice? Or were they later blown off the ridge and down the steep east face into Tibet by the fierce winds that sprang up that night and shredded four tents down at the foot of the southwest face? Had they taken unwarranted risks because they were under great pressure to make a notable mountaineering achievement that would enable them to obtain their government's permission to leave their country again for future climbing in the Himalaya?

The authorities in Prague reacted with dismay at the deaths of four of their ace mountaineers on Everest plus three more Czechoslovaks in the same month on two other Nepalese peaks, Annapurna I and a nearby mountain, Tilicho. The season's surviving Czechoslovak climbers of course grieved at the loss of their friends, and one Czechoslovak who had made a fine ascent of Dhaulagiri I earlier in October said his alpine club's membership had lost so many of its very best alpinists, he wondered whom he would find in the near future to climb with him to a very high standard of mountaineering. They also feared a possible ban by the Czechoslovak government on any expeditions going out soon to the Himalaya. Indeed messages reportedly went out from Prague not long afterwards to all Czechoslovak climbers around the world instructing them to stop their climbing immediately.

Czechoslovakia was not the only country to lose a first-rate alpinist. Ramiro

Navarrete, a 38-year-old climber and writer from Quito, said by his teammates to have been Ecuador's best mountaineer, plunged to his death on 17 October after having reached the east summit of Annapurna I by a new south-face route the day before.

Navarrete's death made a tragic ending for an otherwise highly successful expedition led by the distinguished Polish alpinist, Jerzy Kukuczka, who himself also gained Annapurna I's east summit (8026 meters) by a slightly different new route via the south face to the east ridge. Kukuczka had of course already scaled the main summit of Annapurna I in his series of conquests of all the world's 8000-meter mountains, but he had returned to the mountain because, he explained, "it is a famous face and I like to make new routes."

The first black did not make it to the top of Everest, but the first American women, Stacy Allison and Peggy Luce, did. Perhaps the first woman from any nation without the help of artificial oxygen did too: Lydia Bradey, 27, a mountain guide from Christchurch, New Zealand, says she did, climbing from the South Col up the southeast ridge by herself without a watch to tell her what time it was and with a camera that was frozen. But grave doubts have been expressed by her teammates, who left the mountain on 14 October, the day she claims to have reached the summit, and by Spanish climbers who met her near the south summit and later at the South Col on her summit afternoon and evening.

The Spaniards say they encountered Miss Bradey below the south summit as she was moving up very slowly on her hands and knees; she says she was on her feet and going reasonably well. The timings given by her and the Spaniards for her return to the camp at the South Col are rather different; the Spaniards' timing, if correct, would mean she could not have gotten all the way to the main summit.

"It is simply not possible that she made the summit," the leader of her New Zealand party, Rob Hall, has stated. "Above 8000 meters without bottled oxygen, people have often suffered from hallucinations." "I was resting below the south summit day-dreaming," acknowledges Miss Bradey, "but then I realised I was losing a lot of time and I moved on again. I know I got to the top."

Miss Bradey's case is made more complicated by the fact that she was climbing on a route for which she and her fellow New Zealanders had not received permission from the Nepalese government, as all mountaineers are required to do. She can be banned from entering Nepal or climbing in the country, or both, for up to ten years if the authorities decide to take action against her for violating their regulations. The leadership can also be punished in this way. Perhaps in an attempt to lessen the length of the ban she fears she may receive, Miss Bradey gave a written statement to the Nepalese government in which she said that she might have confused the south summit for the main one. No one besides Lydia Bradey – and possibly not even she – may ever be sure whether she did or did not stand at the highest point on earth.

Several new climbing routes were put up during the autumn. Two were the ones at the eastern end of Annapurna I's south face made by Kukuczka's 11-member expedition of five Poles, two Ecuadorians, two Britons, one American and an Italian. Two others were forged on the west face and northwest ridge of a 6440-meter peak in

the Everest region called Cholatse by a team of four Americans and a New Zealander resident in the U.S. led in an alpine-style traverse by Andy Selters. But perhaps the season's most impressive new route was a pioneering effort by Yugoslavs on the north face of Cho Oyu, which is approached from Tibet. No mountaineer had ever before attempted any line up this face, one of the last great unclimbed Himalayan walls, until eight Yugoslavs under the leadership of Roman Robas, 46, a mechanical engineer from Medvode, Slovenia, made their assault in October and early November. All but one member succeeded in reaching the summit via the face, which is never less than 50 degrees in steepness and rated by these men at the French TD (very difficult). Some of them followed a 300-meter couloir at the top of the face, others traversed to the right and joined the normal (Tichy) route at about 7900 meters, and one, Iztok Tomazin, 28, a physician from Krize in Slovenia, ascended the couloir to the summit alone and then descended the entire Tichy route in the first traverse ever made on Cho Oyu.

Other notable ascents of the season included:

- An alpine-style climb of the French pillar on the southwest side of Dhaulagiri I in which one Czechoslovak and two Soviet mountaineers not only succeeded in scaling the pillar itself but for the first time went on from the top of this very difficult ridge to the summit itself. This was accomplished by Zoltan Demjan, 33, from Bratislava, with Iouri Moisseev, 34, and Kazbek Valiev, 36, both from Alma-Ata. It is interesting to note that this was the first time Soviet alpinists had ever been permitted by their government to climb in the Himalaya with a team from other nations, and the first time they had been allowed to make an alpine-style climb. It seems that *perestroika* has come to Soviet mountaineering.
- The first Danish expedition to any Himalayan peak scored a success when four of their six climbing members got to the top of Ama Dablam (6812 meters) in the Everest area.
- South Koreans climbed to the midpoint of the north-south ridge joining 7268-meter Dhaulagiri VI with Gurja Himal (7193 meters), and did the first ascent of these two 7000ers from their long connecting ridge.
- Despite a fire that destroyed most of the gear of another South Korean team on their way to Dhaulagiri I, the expedition managed to make a rapid and successful ascent via its normal northeast-ridge route at the very end of the season.
- A two-man team, Barry Blanchard from Canmore, Alberta, Canada, and Marc Twight, an American living in Chamonix, France, attempted an unclimbed feature on the northeast side of Everest and reported they reached just over 8000 meters here. Though they turned back well below the summit, they did try a new approach to quite a high altitude. (They then traversed over to the Great Couloir on the north face and gained a high point of about 8450 meters before giving up the battle.)

A list of the season's successes is not complete without mentioning the first parapente flight ever made from the top of the world. On 26 September four Frenchmen, one Swiss and three Nepalese went to the summit of Everest together. Seven of them descended in the normal tedious fashion over a number of hours on their own two feet, but Jean-Marc Boivin, 37-year-old Chamonix alpine guide, flew his parapente from summit to advance base camp (at 6400 meters) in just 12 minutes. Until the first helicopter sits on the summit of Everest and immediately lands at the base of the mountain, no one is likely to make a quicker descent alive.

Successes aplenty this autumn. More than half the teams were successful in gaining the highest points of their mountains, which is a marked improvement over the previous autumn's success rate of 32% – but the price was a higher-than-average death rate. Of all the men and women who climbed above their base camps within the borders of Nepal, 3.4% of them did not survive. By comparison, the death rate for the autumn of 1987 was the normal 2.6%, which itself is bad enough. It is clear that mountaineering is not a safe activity.

The disappearance of the four Czechoslovaks on Everest has been discussed. There were other tragic disappearances on other Nepalese peaks. On a 7161-meter neighbor of Everest, Pumori, two Icelanders, their four-man expedition's leader, Þorsteinn Gudjonsson, and Kristinn Runarsson, both from Reykjavik, were seen from base camp at 2:00 p.m. on the 18th of October moving upwards together at about 6400 meters. They moved behind a serac and were never seen again.

On Makalu, a Pole who had just been to the 8463-meter summit on the 14th of October, Ryszard Kolakowski from Warsaw, disappeared. His head lamp was spotted at 8:00 p.m., when he was not far below the summit, and then it was no longer seen. He never rejoined his teammates; his fate is totally unknown.

There were some near deaths on Makalu as well. Rick Allen from Aberdeen, Scotland, member of a team led by Doug Scott on the left side of the west face, was at 8100 meters at 10:00 a.m. on the 1st of October in a semi-alpine-style summit bid with fellow Briton, Alan Hinkes, when he was hit by an avalanche, struck his head on a boulder, lost consciousness, plunged over a cliff and fell 400 meters. He survived. (Hinkes managed to dodge the avalanche.)

Carlos Carsolio of Mexico City, climbing with a different expedition of West Germans and Swiss, also survived. He made it to the summit on 12 October but had been too long at high altitudes, and during the descent he became very sick from an apparent pulmonary edema (excess fluid in his lungs). He had to be given artificial oxygen and helped down the mountain by Spaniards who came to his rescue.

The Spanish team, Catalonians led by Josep Aced from Terrassa, acted as a kind of rescue service on the western side of Makalu and never themselves got to the summit. They made three bids to reach the top: the first one ended at 8050 meters when one member got bad frostbite fixing a crampon; the second summit-assault team got no farther than the Makalu Col at 7400 meters and then went to help Rick Allen descend after his accident; the third group also stopped at the Makalu Col when they had to come to the assistance of Carlos Carsolio. After that the winds became too strong for any early chance of a successful summit push, and by now the men were

very tired after one and a half months on the mountain. So instead of trying once again for the top, they decided to go home.

Although Aced's Catalonians were immensely helpful to other teams, a number of climbers on the west side of Makalu were unhappy that three different expeditions had been given the Nepalese tourism ministry's permission to be there at the same time. The ministry, seeing that Nepal's 8000-meter peaks are in great demand, had adopted a policy of granting permits for the same route to more than one party in the same season. But the displeasure at this on the part of some who held the permits was voiced by Doug Scott, who said on his return to Kathmandu: "There were so many on the mountain, the normal route was like a motorway. It was not my idea of Himalayan climbing."

On Lhotse Shar, the 8400-meter second summit of Lhotse, two different teams with permission to climb from the southeast almost came to blows. Fourteen Swiss mountain guides from the Zermatt valley under the leadership of Bruno Jelk, with eight Nepalese Sherpas helping them with their climbing, gave a hostile reception to three West Germans led by Werner Hof from Mudersbach, Rheinland Pfalz, when they turned up to make their own climb without Sherpa helpers. According to the Germans, the Swiss, who obviously outnumbered them in manpower, threatened to destroy their tents if the Germans attempted to pitch their own camps along the same route and insisted that the Germans wait until they themselves had completed their ascent. The Swiss took about five weeks to accomplish this, and by then the Germans' time had run out. The Germans never got higher than 6700 meters. "We had some trouble with the Germans, who wanted to climb on our fixed ropes," one Swiss reported. "It was a matter of money for us." Following this unpleasant encounter, a tourism ministry official indicated that they were reconsidering their policy on permits. There were successes aplenty and dramas aplenty in the autumn of 1988.



## **Winter 1988-89: Two Notable Achievements, One Death and Some Lucky Escapes**

Twelve expeditions last winter braved the terrible, frigid winds of winter and battled frequent heavy snowfalls in the Nepalese Himalaya. Only five managed to reach their summits, and of these only two achieved truly noteworthy accomplishments: the first winter ascent of Lhotse, by one Polish climber, and two Americans' alpine-style success on the technically challenging east face of another but much lower Everest-region peak, Tawoche.

Altogether five 8000-meter summits were attacked during the season: Everest (as always), its neighbor, Lhotse, Cho Oyu, Annapurna I and the west summit of Kangchenjunga known as Yalung Kang. But from the six expeditions to these peaks, just one lone man stood on any of these summits. The 38-year-old veteran Himalayan climber from Tychy, Poland, Krzysztof Wielicki, who in February 1980 had made the first winter ascent of Everest and in January 1986 the first winter ascent of Kangchenjunga, now achieved the first winter ascent of Lhotse. He scaled his 8516-meter peak without the use of bottled oxygen and without any companions as he climbed up out of the Western Cwm (high valley) at 6400 meters.

On 30 December Wielicki moved up from the Cwm to a badly battered camp at about 7250 meters that had remained on Lhotse's west face after the withdrawal from Everest, Lhotse's immediate neighbor, of an expedition to which he belonged but whose members were mostly Belgians. He contrived one tent out of two torn ones and at 4:20 a.m. the following day, he set out for Lhotse's summit, having decided to move quickly on this rare clear and windless day and not to waste time pitching another high camp – he is noted as an especially fast climber at very high altitudes. By 2:00 p.m. he had scaled the remaining 1250 or so vertical meters from tent to top.

He immediately began his descent, pushing himself to keep moving as constantly as possible, timing each brief rest so as not to stop too long and drift off into mindless daydreams from which he would never awake in the bitter cold and oxygen-thin air. In three hours he was back in the stitched-together tent, to which a teammate, Leszek Cichy, suffering from bronchitis but loyally in support of his friend, had climbed from the Cwm during the morning. Wielicki's big toe had become frostbitten, but he expected it to heal, and overshadowing this was the satisfaction of now having made the first winter ascents of three of the world's four highest mountains.

The only other climbers to reach an altitude of more than 8000 meters during the entire season were one of the Belgians on Everest and two Nepalese Sherpas with whom he made a bid to gain the highest point on earth on 22 December. Rudy Van Snick, 32, from Vieux Genappe, Belgium, who had one 8000-meter summit already to his credit (Dhaulagiri I), Ang Rita Sherpa, who had conquered Everest five times before and Dhaulagiri I four times, and a younger Sherpa, Lhakpa Dorje, usually called Ang Lhakpa, who had been to the top of the world once. These three

experienced mountaineers left their highest camp at 8000 meters in bright moonlight and no wind at midnight of the 21st. They had reached this camp on the South Col (pass) at 3:30 that afternoon, and Ang Lhakpa had been sick during the evening, but they were keen to take advantage of fine weather and very good snow conditions to go to the summit quickly.

The three men moved steadily up the southeast ridge of Everest, Van Snick and Ang Lhakpa climbing with the help of artificial oxygen, and by 8:00 a.m. they had gotten to an altitude of about 8700 meters, not far below the mountain's south summit. They had stopped here to drink some hot tea, and to disconnect the oxygen bottle Van Snick had been using and substitute a fresh one that Ang Rita had been carrying for him, when Ang Lhakpa suddenly fell over onto his back, slipped about eight meters down the mountainside and then lay motionless. Their progress upward now ceased and they began a struggle to get Ang Lhakpa, who regained consciousness but whose speech was confused, back down to their Col camp.

With the sick Sherpa roped between them, Van Snick and Ang Rita got him into camp an hour and a half later, and there all three rested for an hour. Now Ang Lhakpa began to lose full consciousness and meanwhile a very strong wind had begun to blow, so almost immediately after they had tried to resume their descent it had become impossible to continue, and they returned to their tent at the Col. The wind grew stronger and Ang Lhakpa weaker, and by 7:00 o'clock the next morning he was dead, believed to have been the victim of a cerebral thrombosis (blood clot of the brain).

The winds remained strong at the Col, but the two unencumbered survivors could abandon it and move down the west face of neighboring Lhotse without too much difficulty. They were safely back at base camp later the same day, and with their arrival at base, the Belgian attempt on Everest was now suddenly over. The Belgians were exhausted by six weeks of effort on their huge mountain, several members had suffered from altitude sickness at even relatively low altitudes, their two strongest climbers, Van Snick and Ang Rita, were not now in top condition and would require time to regain their strength, few other Belgians were nearly such strong climbers, the death of a fellow climber was a shattering experience for some, the fearful severity of winter weather in the high Himalaya, which none of the Belgians had ever before experienced, had sapped morale, a big storm now blew up and tore apart some of their tents and prevented any upward movement for several days, and it was time for celebrating Christmas by those who felt in a mood for any celebrations. Strong leadership was lacking with the expedition's leader having been forced by illness to leave very early in the climbing period for Kathmandu and remain there. And perhaps another contributing factor was the thought that if Ang Lhakpa had not collapsed and Van Snick and Ang Rita had not had to turn back for the Col camp when they did, they would probably have reached the summit at about 10:00 a.m. and been descending in the teeth of the terrible winds late that morning: they might never have survived their descent.

The Belgian Everest-Lhotse expedition was well enough financed to have such unusual luxuries as three generators at base camp to provide electricity, seven

Sherpas as kitchen staff at base and two non-climbing Belgians there devoted to food and equipment. They were certainly well provided for. But the Belgian members were now keen to go home, even though their Everest climb had not been completed successfully and no attempt had yet been made to reach the summit of Lhotse. By the end of December, all but one of them had abandoned base camp, and many of them reached Kathmandu just in time for New Year's Eve parties, leaving behind just three Poles and one Belgian, who was not well enough to climb very high right away, to mount the conquest of Lhotse.

The only other team on the Nepalese side of Everest, a South Korean party, stayed on longer but with even less success in terms of altitude gain on the formidable southwest face, which was exposed to fierce winds that buffeted climbers and scoured the face, leaving hard ice or bare rock and causing rock falls and fresh-snow avalanches. On 10 January one Korean, Park Jong-Guk, 29, from Incheon, and two Sherpas including the only climber besides Ang Rita to have scaled Everest five times, Sungdare Sherpa, managed to pitch a camp at 7800 meters at the bottom of the great gully. They remained there several nights, but they decided they would be unable go higher because of the terrible winds and the absence of snow in the ice-covered gully. They had been climbing for a month with no use of bottled oxygen.

A small Japanese expedition that had been attempting since October to forge a new route at the eastern end of the vast north face on the Tibetan side of Everest was reportedly also defeated by winds and, one presumes, exhaustion. They were only three Japanese climbers with no Sherpas and no bottled oxygen. The highest point they reached in their protracted effort was said to have been 8000 meters on 26 December.

The other teams on 8000-meter mountains within Nepal did not get as high as the Koreans on Everest. A Bulgarian expedition, some of whose members had attempted to climb the steep south face of Annapurna I in the winter of 1985-86 and the following spring, this winter blamed frequent falls of deep fresh snow as the chief reason for their failure to get any higher on the same route than 6800 meters, 500 meters less than the height they had gained in their previous winter attempt and 750 meters less than in the spring of 1986.

Two Japanese who intended to climb the southeast face of Cho Oyu scarcely climbed at all. Together with one Sherpa, they reached only 400 meters above their base camp and did not actually get onto the face itself: strong winds, deep snow and lack of time were their explanation for having given up after only one day's climb.

Finally, a team of seven strong Polish alpinists who made the first winter attempt on Kangchenjunga's 8505-meter west summit called Yalung Kang by its normal southeast-face route were robbed of victory at first by extremely deep snow which delayed their arrival at base camp by four extra weeks of approach march, then in clear, sunny weather such high winds that blew non-stop, night and day every day, at altitudes above 6500 meters that two men reached the team's high point of 7200 meters only by crawling on their hands and knees. Then came heavy snowfall again, and they had to abandon the struggle.

On the lower mountains there were summit successes, but all were accomplished during the first 17 days of the official winter season, which begins on 1 December, or on its very last day, 15 February – none during the depth of winter. Of these the most notable was the first ascent in any season of the steep and technically very difficult 1200-meter east face of Tawoche, which is a 6501-meter peak west-southwest of Everest, by the season's smallest climbing team, just two men. Americans John Roskelley, 40, from Spokane, Washington, and Jeff Lowe, 38, from Lyons, Colorado, made an alpine-style ascent in eight and a half days of continuous progress from the base of the face up a "magnificent line" on down-sloping rock into which they had to spend hours chipping sleeping platforms. They were on their summit at the season's end on 15 February and made their descent during the following day and a half via a Japanese route on the southeast side.

By contrast, the winter's largest climbing group, 16 foreigners and 9 Sherpas, on the third-lowest mountain to be attempted during the season, 6812-meter Ama Dablam, also near Everest, reached their base camp before the season opened and sent to the top a total of 16 climbers, mostly French and Nepalese, in the early days of December on the standard southwest-ridge route. It was essentially a guided climb in which the summit was reached by two guides and nine of their clients, including one, Yves Le Bissonnais, a 27-year-old Frenchman from Sevres, who had lost his left leg above the knee to cancer ten years before and surely became one of the very few climbers with a prosthesis (artificial leg) to gain any Himalayan summit. (The winter's other Ama Dablam expedition consisted of only three South Koreans, all of whom followed to the top the larger team's route as they were leaving the mountain.)

Another South Korean expedition went to the northwest ridge of 7855-meter Nuptse, Lhotse's immediate neighbor on its other side from Everest. In the first winter attempt ever made on Nuptse, four Koreans and two Sherpas gained the 7784-meter west summit on 22 December via its saw-tooth ridge in the first ascent to this subsidiary summit by anyone in any season. But they did not reach the main summit – no one ever has by this long and difficult route.

The winter's success rate of 42 percent was not especially good (rather poorer than the previous winter's unusual 69 percent of 13 teams), but its death toll was much lower than the average of 2.6 percent for all seasons, and it was slightly less than that of the winter of 1987-88 in which two Japanese died. This winter only the unfortunate Ang Lhakpa perished out of a total of 131 climbers of all nationalities, 44 of them Nepalese. (In the previous winter there were 150 climbers, 59 of them Nepalese.)

Some of this winter's climbers had lucky escapes from death. As has already been mentioned, a total of two Sherpas and a Belgian might have died high on Everest if the sudden serious illness of one of these Sherpas had not prompted a lucky safe retreat for his two companions. Another case of good luck was that of an unsuccessful Japanese expedition on Himlung Himal, a 7126-meter mountain near Manaslu in north-central Nepal, who reported that "it is a miracle all members are alive," for whenever they ascended or descended the route that they had made between their first and second high-altitude camps at 4600 and 5400 meters, they were exposed for

eight hours to dangerous rock fall. One member's rucksack had a large hole to show where a rock had crashed through it, and several members themselves were struck by rocks. But not one of them was actually injured. It was indeed a miracle.

## Spring 1989: A Dramatic Soviet Conquest

This spring's most spectacular climb in the Nepalese Himalaya was a record-breaking Soviet assault on the four lofty peaks of the Kangchenjunga massif, all of which tower more than 8475 meters above the seas. Between 9 April and 3 May, 27 Soviet climbers and one Nepalese Sherpa made a staggering total of 85 individual ascents of the four principal summits of Kangchenjunga, including simultaneous traverses by two parties of five men each in opposite directions over the long summit ridges, the first traverses ever accomplished by any climbers of the mountain's four great summits.

By contrast, in terms of numbers of men involved, a lone Yugoslav, Tomo Cesen, made the first solo climb of Jannu, a 7710-meter mountain very near Kangchenjunga in eastern Nepal, in the first ascent of its north face direct. "The best climb of the season," was Reinhold Messner's judgement of Cesen's accomplishment. Two other soloists, Marc Batard of France in attempts on both the south face of Annapurna I and the southwest face of Everest, and Reinhard Patscheider of Italy on Annapurna I's northwest face, were not successful.

Messner himself had returned to climb in the Nepalese Himalaya this spring for the first time since his historic October 1986 victory over his last 8000-meter mountain. But this time he had no plan to try for the summit himself, and under his relaxed leadership some of the best Himalayan climbers were unable to scale the unclimbed south face of Lhotse.

An unprecedented total of 46 expeditions, comprising 326 foreign mountaineers with 130 Nepalese to help them, came to climb in Nepal this springtime, far above the previous highest number of 33 teams of 246 foreigners and 139 Nepalese in the spring of 1984. This season, the foreigners came from 25 nations and attempted to scale 24 peaks. Forty-six percent of their expeditions succeeded in reaching their summits, which is a rate of success just slightly better than the average of about 42% over the past five years.

One factor that helped to swell this spring's totals was the fact that Tibet closed its borders to foreigners in March following rioting and martial law in Lhasa, and some teams who had come to Kathmandu to travel to the Tibetan side of Everest or Cho Oyu, or to go to Xixabangma or Changtse inside Tibet, substituted Nepalese peaks for their original goals.

Three of these teams were successful on mountains which they had not even contemplated climbing when they left home, an indication of the capabilities and adaptability of some mountaineers. Amongst these successful re-routed climbers were two Italians, Fausto De Stefani and Sergio Martini, who bagged their eighth 8000er together when they stood atop Dhaulagiri I, the world's seventh highest mountain, instead of their original objective, the highest of them all, Mount Everest. (Their expedition then did go into Tibet at the end of May when its borders were opened to foreigners again. They now found they had another objective they had not

previously planned: to become the first people ever to conquer Everest in June or July.)

Everest had plenty of assailants during the spring even after permits for climbs from Tibet had been cancelled. From the Nepalese side alone, a total of eight parties of varying sizes, abilities and nationalities attempted to reach the highest point on earth, most of them jostling each other on the same climbing route, the standard South Col-southeast ridge route. But only half of the teams – the four largest ones – succeeded in putting anyone on top, and their 14 summiters were just 13% of the total of 110 people who tried to climb the mountain. Furthermore, three of the successful men died during the descent.

The only successful Everest team that did not follow the standard route was a group of 18 climbers, most of them Polish, who sent two members to the summit by way of the west ridge and the Hornbein Couloir on the north face. Immediately after their triumph, disaster struck when an avalanche killed five Poles and left a sixth, Andrzej Marciniak, stranded on a northern glacier, unable to get back to his teammates on the southern side or to be reached by them. An international rescue operation had to be mounted from Kathmandu to retrieve him.

On lesser mountains – lesser by Nepalese standards but nonetheless high by world standards – the first attempt by any Americans on Ohmi Kangri, a 6829-meter peak on the Tibet border, by South Koreans on Langsisa Ri (6427 meters) north of Kathmandu, and by Norwegians, Australians and New Zealanders on Himalchuli West, 7540 meters high in the Manaslu region, were all crowned with summit successes. And Cesen's successful solo ascent of Jannu was the first attempt by any Yugoslav on his mountain.

But the most dramatic first ascent on a first attempt by a given nationality this spring was certainly the Soviet conquest of all the peaks of Kangchenjunga in a remarkable display of effective logistical planning of a complex mountaineering undertaking, combined with good luck with the weather over an extended period of time and with excellent performance at very high altitudes by a very strong climbing team. The expedition's leader and 1982 conqueror of Everest, Eduard Myslovsky, was in charge of 32 Soviet men and 17 climbing Sherpas supplied with about three tons of food, fuel, tents, oxygen bottles, rope, batteries and all the rest of the gear that 600 porters carried for them to base camp.

Kangchenjunga's main axis is from north to south with the highest of its summits, 8586 meters, at the northern end; it also extends westward from this main summit to its second-highest peak, the west summit which is also known as Yalung Kang. The expedition's principal goal was to send climbers from the west summit to the main (north) summit and thence along the summit ridge southward via the central peak to the south summit, which at 8476 meters is the lowest of the four principal peaks, while at the same time another group would be making their own traverse from south to central to north summits and finally to the western one.

First the team methodically made their route up the southwest side of the mountain and set up two camps along the way to the plateau known as the Great Shelf at an altitude of 7250 meters, where they placed their advance base camp. From

here they then proceeded to make three higher routes: one towards the col (saddle) between the west and main summits, another towards the col between the main and central summits, and the third up a rib to the west face of the south summit. Along each of these three higher routes they pitched two camps, making a total of six camps above the Great Shelf, and the camps were stocked with supplies of food, fuel, oxygen and other items for the final summit assaults. The three very highest camps were set at altitudes of 8200-8250 meters.

It was only after all these routes and camps had been put in place that permission was given for the first summit assault. Exactly one month after base camp at 5350 meters had been occupied on 9 March, four Soviet mountaineers stood on atop the main summit, the first Soviet men ever to scale any Kangchenjunga peak. Their conquest on 9 April was followed by two other summit parties of four men each to the central and south summits on 15 April, eight other members to the main summit on the 16th, four others to the south summit on the 17th, and on the 29th the central and west summits were scaled by three men who went to both these peaks and by two others to the main summit only.

The stage was now set for the climax of the whole effort: on 30 April a five-member team consisting of Anatoly Bukreev, Sergei Bershov, Eugeny Vinogradsky, Alexander Pogorelov and Michail Turkevitz, set out from the 5th camp on the route between the west and main summits to begin a traverse of the four peaks that would be completed next day, May Day, at the south summit and down through its camps 5 and 4, disassembling these camps as they went, and finishing at 7:00 that evening in camp 3 on the Great Shelf. Meanwhile also on 1 May another traverse team of five members, Grigory Lunjakov, Vladimir Koroteev, Vassili Elagin, Vladimir Balyberdin and Zijnur Chalitov, set out from the south camp 5 and headed north; their traverse would end on 2 May on the west summit, Yalung Kang, and down its high route to the Great Shelf. The two traverse teams had crossed paths at 2:10 p.m. on May Day while they were on the summit ridge between the central and south peaks.

The route of the Soviets' traverses followed the summit ridges the entire distance between the main summit and the south one, but between the west peak (Yalung Kang) and the main (north) summit, climbers left the top ridge at the col between them and descended the face to sleep at the western camp 5 at about 8200 meters before climbing up again to complete their ascents of all four of the summits.

The May Day traverses were clearly the high point of the entire climb. But the effort was not completely over, for as a sort of unplanned encore, on 3 May three more mountaineers, two Soviets and a Nepalese Sherpa, went to the main summit, the expedition's 26th to 28th climbers to gain that peak. Then that really was the end.

The expedition's accomplishments, in summary, were:

- They made the first traverse of all four summits, and furthermore a total of ten climbers for the first time made two simultaneous traverses in opposite directions.
- The two traverse teams followed the summit ridges most of the distance. This was in contrast to the only previous traverse of Kangchenjunga in the spring



of 1984, when 30 Japanese, aided by 31 climbing Sherpas, sent two Japanese from south to central to main summits, but did not keep to the top ridge between the central and main peaks, and made no attempt to scale Yalung Kang.

- Six Soviet members scaled the main summit twice.
- New route variations were pioneered.
- A number of the 85 individual summit successes – but none of the traverses – were achieved without the use of bottled oxygen.

All of this was accomplished without any serious frostbite or accidents, at no cost of life on the mountain. (One local porter perished in March after he had carried a supply load to base camp. The cause of his death was not entirely clear but apparently was a combination of illness and too much drink.)

While the Soviets were just about ready to make their historic traverses of Kangchenjunga with plentiful supplies of supplemental oxygen, a Yugoslav alpinist not far away on Jannu (officially now named Kumbhakarna) was quietly making a different sort of mountaineering history in a solo ascent without any artificial oxygen. Tomo Cesen, a 29-year-old sports journalist from Kranj in Slovenia, arrived at his base camp on 22 April with one compatriot, a physician who would do some filming but was not a mountaineer, and with no Nepalese Sherpas at all to join in the climbing.

After doing some acclimatization climbing on a nearby mountain which enabled him to examine the lower part of Jannu's north face, Cesen began his solo ascent of a new route on this face – the first direct climb of the north face – from its foot at 5000 meters' altitude at about 4:30 p.m. on 27 April. Approximately 23 hours later he was on the 7710-meter summit. He immediately began his descent in strong winds via its northeast ridge, a route previously scaled by Japanese in 1976. He bivouacked for four hours in the middle of the night, and was back in his base camp very early in the afternoon of 29 April. He was extremely tired.

How did he feel about his climb? "I am satisfied," he said modestly. Commented Messner after studying a photo on which Cesen had marked the route he had ascended, "He climbed the only quite safe line. It's a beautiful line. This was the best climb of the season." Cesen has hopes of doing more direct ascents alone in the Himalaya. "I like to climb solo – it's quicker, and there are fewer problems." He thinks that in the next two or three years he might attempt a solo ascent of a direct line up the unclimbed south face of Lhotse, a great face that is technically very difficult at very high altitude. Messner in recent years has declared that an alpine-style ascent of this face is a problem for the year 2000, but Cesen thinks he might manage it solo before then.

Marc Batard, a 37-year-old French professional mountaineer and guide from Megeve, Haute Savoie, who last autumn accomplished the fastest ascent of Everest in just 22 1/2 hours by the standard route, this spring tried to solo two vast Himalayan faces, the south wall of Annapurna I and the southwest face of Everest, but he was unable to make as much progress as Cesen on either one of them. First he

went to Annapurna I in early April, but he was scarcely on the face when he decided to abandon the effort at an altitude of only 5800 meters because there was too much snow, which hid a series of dangerous crevasses, and falling ice towers (seracs) presented another danger. "I don't like to take too much risk," he said on his return to Kathmandu from Annapurna I on his way to his next objective, Everest.

Here too he was unsuccessful, and his net gain of altitude by himself, without bottled oxygen, from the foot of the southwest face to his highest point, 7800 meters, was less than half the altitude Cesen had soloed. On Everest, Batard's problem was a lack of snow on the wall on his first attempt, and a week later it was strong winds and a big storm approaching. He had no interest in a third attempt because of the extremely dangerous condition of the Khumbu Icefall through which a climber must go above base camp.

While he was at Everest, the body of another Frenchman, Gerard Devouassoux, who was killed by an avalanche in 1974, was found at the bottom of the Icefall, and it was a vivid reminder of the risks Everest climbers will take. "I don't want to stay in the mountains like Devouassoux," said Batard. When the weather got bad, he turned back, and he survived. "I think I have enough experience. It is not the first time I didn't climb to the top. We have to accept this." He was keen this spring to survive for his project in the autumn, to scale alone both Everest and its immediate neighbor, Lhotse, in the same day.

The third soloist of the season, Reinhard Patscheider, 32, an Italian ski instructor from Langtaufers in the South Tirol, had even less success in his own bid to make the first solo ascent of Annapurna I. His chosen route lay up the northwest face, a route that he knew from his membership in Messner's successful expedition on it in the spring of 1985, although Patscheider himself did not get to the summit that year either. This time he really got little higher than the beginning of the face, where he placed a tent at 5200 meters, 1200 meters above his base camp, on 22 April. Heavy snowfall, winds and avalanching prevented him from ever sleeping in this tent; when he went back up to it about a week after he had first pitched it, he found it had been ruined by an avalanche, and he immediately retreated.

His retreat was to be by parapente, but after he had been airborne only about a minute, the wind sent him to a crash landing at 5000 meters and gave him a dislocated shoulder. When Patscheider went up again after another snowstorm to retrieve his gear from the tent, a piton came out at a short-roped traverse, and he fell about 15 meters and bruised his back. (These were not his first accidents on the route: in 1985 he had fallen 600 meters and was very lucky not to have been killed.) Nevertheless, Patscheider said he would return sometime for another solo attempt on the same face.

The 11-member team Messner brought this spring to the formidable south face of Lhotse, a giant of 8516 meters, was one of varied nationalities and Himalayan experience. There were three members, two Poles, Krzysztof Wielicki and Artur Hajzer, and a South Tirolean who has climbed often with Messner, Hans Kammerlander, who together had conquered 8000-meter mountains a total of 16 times. There were others like the French guide, Christophe Profit, who had yet to

make their name in the Himalaya but who had notable feats in the European Alps to their credit. And there was Messner himself, not intending to go for the summit and not the autocratic commander of the troop, but present on the scene with his experience and judgement, helping to up carry supplies.

Messner reports that he told the team they should tackle the great wall as they thought best, that two lines were attempted, one in the traditional style with fixed ropes and camps by way of the southeast buttress with a traverse onto the face, and the other in rapid alpine style direct, and that both ended at the same point at an altitude of 7200 meters. Messner himself climbed to this highest point, where he and two of the expedition's four climbing Sherpas deposited gear for others to use in a summit push. He describes the face as "extremely difficult. Before we left Kathmandu, I could not imagine how difficult it is." In addition to this problem, from 13 May onwards came snowstorms that brought chest-deep snow and dangerous avalanches. They were, he says, defeated by the heavy snowfall in May, and with hindsight he believes they arrived too late in the season.

Messner has no plans to lead another attempt on this great wall. Perhaps Cesen will climb it solo, perhaps Wielicki will with one or two friends. As he prepared to leave Nepal, Messner spoke of his next major adventure as a rather different sort of project: starting in October this year, a two-man, four-and-a-half-months' crossing of Antarctica without motorized vehicles or prearranged supply dumps.

On Mount Everest, there was overcrowding amongst 110 men and women camped in the confined area at the bottom of the great mountain, and arguments that have become almost commonplace in recent seasons about what should be paid by those arriving at base somewhat late or lightly equipped to the earlier arrivals who had devoted time and considerable equipment forging the only relatively safe route through the Khumbu Icefall, where all who ascend Everest by its normal route must pass. There were fierce winds and heavy snowfall, a virtual epidemic of viral flu, and some extremely unnerving encounters with dead bodies – and even dismembered parts of bodies – of climbers who had perished on the mountain in previous years.

Some of the bodies could not be recognized, but others like that of Gerard Devouassoux were readily identifiable: although an avalanche had killed Devouassoux 15 years before, his body could be identified by badges on his clothing that marked him as a Chamonix guide. His brother came out to Nepal and presided at his cremation near Everest and the scattering of his ashes in the region. Others bodies remain where they were, and will be a grim sight for others who pass their way.

There were climbers who came for their first attempts to get to the top of the world, like the Mexican, Ricardo Torres Nava, 34, a pharmacist and mountain guide, who on 16 May became the first Latin American ever to stand at the highest point on earth, or like a 40-year-old American university teacher, Tom Whittaker, who has one artificial foot and nonetheless reached an altitude of 7150 meters before being defeated by bad weather. There were others who had been on Everest before, in Batard's case successfully before but this time with a different method of attack, or in the case of New Zealander Peter Hillary, the 34-year-old son of Everest's first

conqueror, twice before without success and now seeming to be almost obsessed with an ambition to follow his father's footsteps all the way. But once again this spring he failed to reach the summit, and on his return to Kathmandu he said he had become bored with Everest.

Fourteen men succeeded in reaching Everest's summit, all during May. They were three Yugoslavs, one of whom, Stipe Bozic, had been there ten years before, Ricardo Torres, the first Latin American, a Briton, an Australian, six Nepalese Sherpas, four of whom had also been to the top last year, and two Poles.

The two Polish summiters belonged to the Everest expedition that produced the most drama. Theirs was a team of 18 climbers – ten Poles, three Americans, two Mexicans (a man and his wife), two Canadians and one Briton – under the leadership of Eugeniusz Chrobak, a 49-year-old chemical engineer from Krakow, and it included some of Poland's and Mexico's best Himalayan climbers. They chose an uncommon and difficult climbing route, succeeded in putting two Poles on the top of the world, suffered a devastating avalanche, and finally were unable to reach a member cut off from base camp.

Their climbing route officially lay along the entire length of the west ridge of Everest from its start at a pass known as the Lho La. This ridge forms the boundary between Nepal on its south side and the Tibet Region of China on the north, and climbers with permits for this feature are not supposed to stray across the border. However most of the few climbers who attempt the ridge actually do go across: the very first men who climbed it, Americans in 1963, moved at high altitude onto the north face and up a large gully or couloir that has been named after one of them, the Hornbein Couloir, and is climbed by most west ridgers. And some few do not begin their ascent of the ridge from the Lho La but join the ridge somewhat higher up.

The Poles – as this team of several nationalities was known to the others on Everest – did not set foot on the Lho La; instead they climbed up to a 6408-meter peak of a mountain called Khumbutse just to the west of it, and then descended onto the Rongbuk (Rongpu) Glacier on the Tibetan side, where they placed their first high camp at an altitude only 500 meters higher than their 5350-meter base camp. From the glacier on the north side of Everest they then ascended onto and along the shoulder of the west ridge, over to the Hornbein Couloir and finally very high on the mountain back to the ridge and up its extremely steep last section to the summit. This zigzagging route, they felt, was easier and safer than the west ridge direct from pass to summit.

But the descent into the Rongbuk Glacier and back up over Khumbutse's south ridge presented problems when coming down off the mountain, as the team discovered when one Canadian member developed altitude sickness in early May and had to be helped to base camp by his teammates: getting him up the east face of Khumbutse and down to base was no easy undertaking. Nevertheless they kept to this route throughout the climb.

On 24 May, nearly two months after they had established base camp, two of the Poles, Leader Chrobak and Andrzej Marciniak, 30, a civil engineer from Kolbudy, near Gdansk, gained the summit in a push that had begun at 1:00 a.m. that day from

their fifth and final high camp at about 8000 meters at the bottom of the Hornbein Couloir, and ended with a ten-minute stay at the top of the world after dark at about 8:00 p.m. They had ascended the last 250 vertical meters from 3:00 p.m. without their oxygen supply, which they left and then picked up on the way down. They finally returned safely to camp 5 at 3:00 a.m. on 25 May, rested there for four hours and then continued their descent.

The night of 26/7 May was spent in camp 1 on the Rongbuk Glacier by six Polish members: the two victorious summiters, Chrobak and Marciniak; Mirosław Dasal, 36, an engineer from Chrzanow, and Mirosław Gardzielewski, 35, another engineer who lived in Kielce, two men who had made an unsuccessful summit bid on 22 May, had turned back at the top of the steep Hornbein Couloir when their oxygen bottles were nearly empty and had then waited in camp 4 for the successful pair; and two more members, Zygmunt Heinrich, 51, from Krakow, and Waclaw Otreba, 41, from Gdynia, both also engineers, who came up (and down) from base camp to give the other four whatever help they might need and to carry back to base valuable gear still remaining in camp 1. The six men set out from camp 1 for base camp at 7:00 a.m. on the 27th. But none of them ever arrived.

At 10:00 that morning they started up Khumbutse in deep snow, and they made very slow progress. At 1:00 p.m. they were still on the lower part of its face, ascending their fixed rope in a small couloir, when a snow avalanche struck and swept them with it onto the glacier. It left four men covered by snow, Chrobak uncovered but in deep shock and with a broken leg, and Marciniak with some broken teeth and a painfully bruised chest. Marciniak managed to dig out the others, but only one of them was still alive and he died within a quarter of an hour or so. He then turned his attention to Chrobak, who was inching his way downward in the direction of the tent they had left behind at camp 1. That night the two men slept out in the open on the glacier, on two small platforms Marciniak made for them, in sleeping bags that the avalanche had swept along with them. Another avalanche came down during the night and delivered a third bag, which Marciniak laid on top of his friend after dusting off a slight snow cover. But it did no good: in the morning Chrobak was dead.

Now Marciniak was alone, but he miraculously still had possession of the walkie-talkie radio he had had with him when the avalanche hit, and it was working. He reported the disaster to base camp and made a snow-hole to shelter him from falling snow while he waited for teammates to rescue him. Six men did make an attempt, but the new snowfall and dangerous avalanching on their side of Khumbutse drove them back to base.

Marciniak then left his snow-hole in the early afternoon and made his way slowly, painfully (as he now was becoming snow-blind) to camp 1, which he reached sometime after dark, groping his way through thick mist, and when finally within the tent taking half an hour to find the matches with which to brew himself a cup of tea. This was 28 May, and he was to remain there for three more days, all alone and in pain, but with a functioning walkie-talkie for two of those days.

Meanwhile, since rescue via Khumbutse was manifestly out of the question for a number of days, and there were no teams on the Tibetan side of Everest to provide

help, down in Kathmandu a group of concerned mountaineers including Reinhold Messner, back from his effort on Lhotse, organized a rescue operation to go the long way around by road after it became clear that a helicopter flight across the border into Tibet was out of the question. The Soviet embassy, acting on behalf of Poles who had no embassy of their own in Kathmandu, asked the Chinese embassy for cooperation, and visas for an international rescue party were quickly granted. One Pole, Artur Hajzer, who had been with the Everest team at first and then joined Messner's Lhotse expedition, two New Zealand climbers just back from an unsuccessful attempt on Everest, and two Nepalis who had also been on Everest – the five men left Kathmandu at midnight of the 29th, crossed the border the next morning, drove in a Chinese truck to the deserted site of base camps for expeditions on the Tibetan side of Everest, and trekked for eight hours up the glacier to reach Marciniak at 7:00 a.m. on the 1st of June.

They found a Marciniak who had run out of food and, having had no radio contact with base camp for the last day, feared that his would-be rescuers from Kathmandu might never arrive because of insurmountable problems since Tibet had been closed to foreigners for weeks. He was actually preparing to leave his tent and try to make his way to the small monastery at Rongbuk when he thought he heard something. "I thought I heard music. I thought I was dreaming, maybe I was hallucinating, when I heard voices. But I went out of the tent and saw some dim figures coming towards me, and they really were people." He trekked with them slowly to the waiting truck, and they all were back safely in Kathmandu at 11:00 p.m. on 2 June. The entire trip had taken the rescuers 55 hours.

Asked the morning after he had returned to Kathmandu whether he would like to go to Everest again, he answered succinctly: "No." But only three days later, he agreed to join two other climbers, Artur Hajzer and a Polish-Canadian, in their plan to scale all 14 of the world's 8000-meter mountains in one year, 1991, without bottled oxygen, following the normal climbing routes. At least he would not be returning to the west ridge.

Marciniak had lost on Everest two teeth, eight kilos in weight – and five teammates, whose bodies still lay on the Rongbuk glacier where he had had to abandon them. Two other men had died on Everest earlier in the same month, one Yugoslav and a Nepalese Sherpa, both of whom fell while they were descending from the summit. In addition, four other climbers died elsewhere in the Nepalese Himalaya: a Spaniard who plunged to his death while climbing Manaslu, and three Japanese, victims of an avalanche on Langtang Lirung quite early in the season.

Eleven deaths amongst this spring's total of 458 climbers, both foreign and Nepalese, is 2.4%, just about the normal rate in Nepal for mountaineers. But the death rate for Everest climbers this season was 6.4%, a very high percentage indeed. In the spring of 1988 it was only 1%, and for the entire period from the spring of 1971 to this year, it was 2.4%. Too many Poles had died.

## **Autumn 1989: A Tragic Death on Lhotse and a Fine Ascent of Makalu**

As they arrived in Kathmandu early last autumn to climb in the Nepalese Himalaya, a number of teams planned dramatic ways to make mountaineering history. The outstanding Polish climber Jerzy Kukuczka hoped to achieve the first ascent of the great unclimbed south face of Lhotse in a very fast alpine-style climb. West Germans would be the first to scale the unconquered northwest ridge of Nuptse, Lhotse's (and Everest's) neighbor. A Spanish woman would be the first of her sex from any nation to reach the summit of Makalu. A British team would make the first east-west traverse of Makalu and do it in alpine style, and they would ascend Makalu II (also called Kangchungtse) as well by a new route. A Frenchman would accomplish the first solo ascent of the vast north face of Kangchenjunga.

Other Frenchmen were confident they would make the first parachute landing onto the summit of the highest of them all, Mount Everest, while still others would soar from the summit of Dhaulagiri I by parapente and hang glider. The question whether sky diving onto the top of the world would be mountaineering or performing a stunt was swept aside by enthusiasm for something new. The wave of the future amongst the mountains apparently involved taking to the air.

But not one of these dreams became true. Kukuczka and his team of seven other Poles, an Italian, a Frenchman and a Swiss, who climbed without any Nepalese Sherpa helpers or a single bottle of oxygen, were forced by bad snow conditions into old-fashioned siege tactics on Lhotse, which towers 8516 meters above the seas. After six weeks of agonizingly slow progress, on the morning of 24 October, when the summit was a mere 170 vertical meters above Kukuczka, when the weather was fine, there was no wind, and he was well-acclimatized to extreme altitude, something went terribly wrong. Perhaps his hand slipped on unseen snow; in any case, he fell, his light 6mm belay rope broke and he plunged nearly 3000 meters down the face to his death.

If he had succeeded in his bid to reach the summit and that morning Kukuczka was confident that by noon he and his climbing partner would do just that, he would have become the only person to have climbed all the fourteen 8000-meter mountains in the world either by a new route or in wintertime. Instead, the body of this remarkable and very well-liked mountaineer, a modest, patient, determined, intelligent 41-year-old electrician from Katowice, lay in a crevasse near the base of Lhotse's south wall, and this vast face remained one of the last great unconquered faces of the very high Himalaya.

Kukuczka's teammates immediately abandoned the climb, and his compatriots on the team declared that they were not interested in ever returning to the face. Said Ryszard Pawlowski, who was nearest to Kukuczka when he fell, "enough Polish people have died" on this face, referring also to the deaths of two Poles in previous attempts in 1985 and 1987. The expedition's deputy leader, Ryszard Wareki, agreed

with this: "We Poles have not good luck on this wall – better for us to say goodbye to it. Also, from the stock of best climbers only a few are left in Poland."

On Nuptse, the West Germans' leader got as far as a subsidiary summit. The Spanish woman climbed no higher than 7600 meters on 8463-meter Makalu, and the British did not actually make a serious attempt on its eastern side nor get above 7600 meters on the normal route from the northwest – nor did they reach the top of Makalu II. On Kangchenjunga the soloist turned back at only 7100 meters. No French parachutes opened over Everest, for the Nepalese authorities refused to permit anyone to sky dive, and no parapentes or hang gliders drifted down from the summit of Dhaulagiri I because no one got up to the top.

Some other climbers' ambitions were realized. An Italian, Marino Giacometti, a 38-year-old mountain guide from Albino, now claims the fastest ascent of 7161-meter Pumori, a peak next to Everest, which he scaled on 18 September in total elapsed time from his camp at 5300 meters to the summit and back to camp of 14 hours, three hours less than the previous record. A Japanese businessman, Toichiro Mitani, 39, finally succeeded in conquering Everest on his sixth expedition to the huge mountain. And a team of seven Frenchmen led by Michel Thodoroff, 29, a marketing executive from Courbevoie, pioneered a new route on a small (by Himalayan standards), seldom-attempted mountain in western Nepal, 6612-meter Kanjeralwa.

(A large South Korean expedition claimed the ascent of Cho Oyu via a new route up its unclimbed southwest ridge in an astonishingly short period of time, but other teams who were on the west side of the mountain from Tibet reported that actually the Koreans were just ahead of them on the normal route; presumably the South Koreans did not want to admit in Nepal that they had crossed the border into the Tibet region of China without official permission.)

The finest ascent of the season and one of the luckiest descents were accomplished by Pierre Beghin, 38-year-old French engineer from Le Sappey en Chartreuse. He led a small team to another great south face, that of Makalu, which had been successfully scaled only once before, by Yugoslavs 14 years previously, and he planned a more direct route than theirs to the summit. This he achieved, and he did it in alpine-style entirely alone above 7100 meters after two teammates had retreated from there, tired and cold. He carried a bare minimum of gear and no food at all, and in three days he successfully withstood frigid winds that drove large amounts spindrift snow, surmounted technically very difficult sections of loose rock and a final rock cliff and at last reached the summit at 2:45 p.m. on the 6th of October, extremely cold and almost totally exhausted.

He stayed on the summit perhaps three minutes and then started down the normal northwest route; it would have been impossibly dangerous to attempt to go down the face. In fact, he judged during his ascent that he could not turn back down the face after he had gotten above 7600 meters because of the dangerous powder snow on rock. He descended the northwest side in knee-deep snow aiming directly towards some tents he could see below him near the Makalu Col. He arrived at the tents more rapidly than he expected: a big wind-slab avalanche carried him down 200 meters headfirst but did him no great damage. He was given shelter and nourishment by the



Spanish occupants. Next day another slab avalanche took him 400 meters down and over two seracs; he lost his camera and his ice ax ("it was very dangerous"). He was still unharmed and when the avalanche eased at a gentle slope, he carried on down on his own two feet to a camp of the British and later the same day below there to where friends had camped to meet him.

Beghin was lucky with his avalanches. Many of the season's expeditions cited very dangerous snow conditions as the cause of their abandoning their climbs, and several were seriously hit by avalanching. The French Dhaulagiri I team who had planned flights from the summit lost two Sherpas in an avalanche, two Bulgarians and a Nepalese were hit but not killed by avalanching on Annapurna I, three Japanese and three of their Sherpas were hit but not seriously injured on Everest, and four Spaniards, including two brothers, were swept to their deaths more than 1000 meters over rock and ice down the southeast face of Pumori.

One expedition to Manaslu, to the west of the Everest-Makalu region, experienced the added hazard of a mild earthquake about 20 October that caused a huge ice cliff to break away and destroy an area where the team had a supply depot. Fortunately for this American-British team no one was at the depot at the time, but Austrian climbers had been encamped there about a week before the tremor and it would have been catastrophic for them if they had been there at the time. Another problem in the latter part of October was, as usual, the jet-stream winds that blew fiercely and defeated a number of expeditions on the highest mountains. "In September it snowed all the time, and in October the winds blew all the time," complained one Everest climber.

Altogether 57 expeditions came to climb 29 peaks in Nepal during the season; they were comprised of 396 foreign mountaineers from 17 nations, assisted by 153 Nepalese climbers. Nearly half (27 out of 57) of the teams succeeded in reaching their summits, which is about the normal rate of success. However, on the 8000-meter peaks, only 34% of 29 teams were successful, only one (Beghin's) out of six on Makalu and none at all of the five on Manaslu and the six on Dhaulagiri I. Or at least none on Dhaulagiri I that is known about, for a Spaniard, Francesc Dalmases Cunill, 32, a skier and mountaineer from Andorra, disappeared while going for the summit alone from 7600 meters, and no one knows how high he climbed or why he never reappeared. Perhaps he became exhausted and froze to death. No one was with him or anywhere near him, and he was simply never seen again.

Altogether 12 men (10 foreigners and two Sherpas) died while climbing in Nepal and a thirteenth, a team leader who never went above base camp, died of illness at his base. The 12 climbers' deaths represented a percentage slightly less than usual, 2.2% as compared to the normal rate in the Nepalese Himalaya of about 2.5% of all climbers in a given season. But their fates demonstrated once again that Himalayan mountaineering can be an extremely dangerous adventure.

## Winter 1989-90: An Unlucky Season

The winter of 1989-90 was surely an unlucky time for mountaineers in the Nepalese Himalaya. It was calamitous in terms of the death toll, especially amongst the Nepalese Sherpas who were engaged by foreigners to help them climb some of the world's great peaks. At the same time, not one-fourth of the season's 17 expeditions managed to reach their summits.

A total of nine men died last winter. This may not seem like a large number in absolute terms, but it represents 6.3% of the season's 144 climbers, a death rate that is two and a half times the average rate over the last two decades of 2.6%, a rate which itself is bad enough and which makes mountaineering one of the most dangerous of all leisure activities.

Furthermore, five of the nine who died in the mountains were Nepalese Sherpas, a horrifying 11.9% (nearly one in eight) of the 42 Sherpas who climbed with the foreign teams. (And the figure of five dead Nepalese climbers does not include a low-altitude porter who carried a load of supplies to base camp for a French Dhaulagiri I expedition and was killed by a snow avalanche shortly after he had left base camp to return home.) The Sherpa climbers' death rate is three times greater than that of 3.9% for the foreigners who perished last winter.

In terms of success, last winter was the least successful winter mountaineering season in Nepal for five years. Only 23.5% of the 17 teams gained their summits. None of the best-known Himalayan climbers was on the scene; Reinhold Messner was trekking across the Antarctic, Jerzy Kukuczka had recently died. Two Frenchmen aspiring to become as renowned as they, Marc Batard, 38, and Christophe Profit, 28, both very fast climbers, separately failed in their successive solo bids to achieve the first ascent of the huge south face of Lhotse.

Seven more groups also failed to reach their 8000-meter summits, Everest, Cho Oyu, Dhaulagiri I and Annapurna I, while the only other team to attack an 8000-meter peak, a South Korean expedition, reported success in making the first winter ascent of the west summit of Kangchenjunga (known as Yalung Kang) by sending to it one member and two Sherpas – only to have the three climbers immediately disappear without trace. Only three other expeditions claimed success, and all these were on much lower mountains. On the highest ones in the western part of the country a major problem was heavy snowfall and resulting avalanches, and in the east the strong winds defeated a number of climbers including Profit on Lhotse.

Wintertime has usually been a relatively safe time to climb in Nepal, partly because the colder weather means less avalanching than in other times of the year, and perhaps partly because fewer less-proficient climbers have ventured to brave the bitter winter weather at extreme altitudes, where fierce winds can be unbearable. In the winter of 1988-89 just one man had died, and in the winter before that two; the death rates for those two winters were 0.8% and 1.0% respectively.

It is necessary to go back to the early 1970s to find any season – spring, autumn or winter – with a worse death rate than that of last winter. The largest number of

people ever to die on a single expedition in Nepal, 15 men on a South Korean attempt on Manaslu, was recorded in the spring of 1972, and as a result, that season's total death rate was 13.3% (14.3% for foreigners alone and 12.5% for Sherpas).

Last winter's high toll included a Sherpa's death from high-altitude sickness, an unusual cause of death amongst Sherpas, who are born and live at altitudes well above sea level. Another Sherpa, Ang Lhakpa (also known as Lhakpa Nuru), who had successfully scaled Everest twice and two other 8000ers, Manaslu and Makalu, once each, and was only 26 years old, plunged to his death from 7800 meters while leading the climb for South Koreans on Cho Oyu. An Australian, George Curry, 35, fell and was killed on the first day – and, it turned out, the only day – of his team's climbing on Mt. Pumori when he was still only about 400 meters above their base camp.

The other six men who died last winter completely disappeared. The Yalung Kang summit party, Jin Kyo-Sup, 26, Ang Dawa Sherpa, 29, and Tshering Tshemba Lama, 36, left their expedition's fourth high camp at 8100 meters on the southeast face at 4:30 a.m. to go to their 8505-meter summit. At 2:30 p.m. Jin reported by walkie-talkie that it was cloudy and windy, and they were worried about their ability to return safely to camp 4 after nightfall. But by then it would have been dark before they got back to camp even if they turned back immediately, and they continued climbing towards the top. They made radio contact again at 4:05 to say that they were now on the summit and were resting for a few minutes. At 4:14 p.m. one of the Sherpas with Jin tried to talk to camp 4 to a fellow Sherpa who happened to be chatting with base camp at that moment. The two men who were talking to each other stopped their conversation and tried to speak to the summit Sherpa, but now there was no reply. There was no reply all night, and a search by the men in camp 4 next day produced no trace at all of the summit party. Their leader, Kim Teuk-Hee, speculates that they probably fell down the huge mountain's great north face, where there was no one.

At least Kim and his team know something of the last hours of their three dead colleagues and have their report of their summit success. Friends of the other three men who disappeared last winter have no idea whatsoever of what became of them. These three were the last men from their expedition to remain on their mountain, Dhaulagiri I – after all the others had left for Kathmandu and home. This group of four American and two Canadian climbers, whose American leader did not even reach base camp, was apparently more a collection of people interested in scaling Dhaulagiri I than a team. The climbing leader, Jim Yoder, the only member with any experience of mountaineering in the Himalaya, left after three weeks of climbing, during which he and his five fellow members had reached an altitude of 7315 meters on the northeast ridge and had left there a quantity of equipment for going higher. Yoder went back to Kathmandu to expedite the arrival of more funds from the U.S. to pay expedition expenses. Two or three days after his departure from base camp, one more American and one Canadian member also left: they were tired and had had enough climbing. When they had retreated to the bottom of the mountain with another American, who stayed on at base camp, the last two Americans still on the mountain, Gregory Barber, 20, and Scot McGrath, 33, and the only climbing Sherpa

they had brought with them to Dhaulagiri I, Nuru Wangchuk, remained in camp 3 at 6400 meters determined to continue climbing to the summit.

Then followed a nine-day snowstorm. The member who had stayed on at base, Joseph Cain, 43, had thought he would wait a few days for the others to join him there and to take pictures of them in the mean-time. He waited out the snowstorm at base, then scanned the mountain for signs of the men above. Before the prolonged snowfall he had been able to see camp 3 and the cache of equipment above it, but now he could see neither nor any indication that there was anyone anywhere on the mountain. The group had taken no walkie-talkies with them to Dhaulagiri, so there was no way for him to try to communicate with them.

Cain now had to return home to go back to work, and when he left, the only remaining personnel at base camp were a Sherpa cook and his helper. They dismantled the camp a few days later, and when Yoder and one of the Canadians went back from Kathmandu to look for signs of their missing friends, they found absolutely none. Had Barber, McGrath and Nuru Wangchuk been carried away by avalanching following the heavy snowfall or been buried by it in their tent? Had they tried to ascend higher and then been carried away? When and where and how did they die? No one has a clue. Asked if there was anything he would do differently concerning expedition logistics if he were able to do the whole thing over again, Yoder replied that the only change he would make would be to take walkie-talkie radios.

It is even possible that the Dhaulagiri I trio reached the top of their giant mountain before death overtook them, and that they too, as well as the Korean Yalung Kang expedition, could have claimed the conquest of an 8000-meter summit. Of the teams that returned safely from their mountaintops, two other Korean expeditions achieved the first winter ascents of lower peaks, both of them in the Langtang area, 7205-meter Langtang Ri and 6427-meter Langsisa Ri. The season's only other success was the first ascent in any season of the east ridge of a 6501-meter mountain in the Everest region called Tawoche. This was done quickly in alpine style by a Briton, David Etherington, 23, and Joerg Schneider, 33, from West Germany.

Besides its high percentage of deaths and its small number of successes, the winter of 1989-90 had one other "distinction:" perhaps the first battle between two expeditions. With the Nepalese authorities granting climbing permits to more than one team for the same mountain and often for the same climbing route in the same season, it was probably inevitable that climbers would come to blows.

This happened on Cho Oyu, where a Frenchman, Regis Maincent, 30, and his team's Belgian leader, Alain Hubert, 36, were attacked with fists and sticks by six Sherpas and, according to them, by three members of a larger South Korean expedition attempting to climb the same route. The Korean leader, Lee Ho-Sang, denies that any Koreans took part in the fracas, but he does agree that in the hour-long fight, Maincent received a head wound that bled, and that a rope was tied around Maincent's neck and his arms pinned behind his back. The Europeans fled in the night, hobbling away with the aid of their ski poles. "I never imagined such a thing could happen," said Hubert of the fight. "Mountain climbing should never turn into a battlefield."

## **Spring 1990: A New Star Shines in the Himalayan Climbing World**

While four men in a summit-assault party from a 49-strong Nepalese expedition were slowly, laboriously working their way towards the top of Mount Everest by its standard southern route last 23 April, after four weeks had been spent in the conventional style of Himalayan mountaineering that had been developed in the 1920s, establishing a series of camps and placing supplies including bottled oxygen in them for the summiters, not far away on Everest's neighbor, Lhotse, a lone man was moving carefully but swiftly up a new line on the unconquered south face. With no artificial oxygen, no well-stocked camps, no climbing companions to support him, the soloist, Tomo Cesen from Yugoslavia, was stunningly demonstrating what a few alpinists are able to achieve these days even when they discard traditional methods. A new star in Himalayan climbing was proving his impressive courage and abilities.

Reinhold Messner of Italy, the Himalayan superstar of the 1970s and '80s, developed for climbing these giant peaks what he called "fair means," which involved no supplementary oxygen and only minimal use of climbing hardware and fixed ropes, and he was the first to accomplish a solo ascent of any 8000-meter mountain. He pioneered new lines of ascent, accomplished the only solo climb of Everest itself and proved to the world that artificial oxygen is not required to scale the great mountains and still survive without brain damage. But even he was daunted by the huge south face of 8516-meter Lhotse.

This face "ranks amongst the most difficult in the world," he wrote in 1977. "At 8500 meters, this vertical face may well be impossible." He was later widely quoted as declaring that scaling the face was "a problem for the Year 2000." In the spring of 1989, when he was taking a 10-member international team to the face, he said he was prepared for his team to fix as much as 5000 meters of rope up their route: "otherwise there is no big chance of success." It was his belief that climbing the face in alpine style was a problem for 2000 A.D., he explained, and he expected that three fixed camps would be needed; he thought that even thus equipped, for his party "there's a small chance we can do it." But it actually turned out that they could not do it despite the considerable skills of the members. Plagued by frequent heavy snowfalls, they got to only 7200 meters during their five weeks' effort.

Now this spring, a decade before the start of the new century, a 30-year-old sports journalist and mountain guide from Slovenia in Yugoslavia, Tomo Cesen, could do it, he reported with satisfaction upon his return to Kathmandu. Furthermore, his success was achieved not only without fixed camps and oxygen bottles, but entirely alone, with very little fixed rope, and in the amazing total elapsed time of just 45 hours and 20 minutes from the bottom of the face to the summit.

Cesen was at or above his base camp only 14 days. His first week was spent observing the paths of frequent deadly rock falls, deciding on the best line for his ascent, taking gear for his climb to a cache at the bottom of the face at an altitude of about 5200 meters and acclimatizing by climbing to 7150 meters on a ridge far to the

right of his proposed route. His ascent was to be up a direct line in the center of the face, not far to the left of, and sometimes coinciding with, a route taken by a large but unsuccessful Yugoslav expedition in the spring of 1981; it was well to the left of Messner's route of the previous year.

After lunch at his base camp on 22 April, Cesen and his doctor hiked to the foot of the face, where Cesen retrieved his gear and ate another meal before starting his historic bid for the summit. Every afternoon there was light snowfall and some wind in the Lhotse region, but he was ready to attack the face nonetheless. As he began his climb, he carried with him a sleeping bag, a bivouac sack, extra gloves, socks and goggles, 100 meters of 6-mm. rope, eight rock pitons and ten ice pitons made of lightweight titanium, three kilos of food and three one-liter thermos bottles of liquid but no cooking equipment. He wore a one-piece pile suit, gaiters and boots and was equipped with ice ax, crampons, helmet, head-lamp, a walkie-talkie radio and a camera with extra film.

Cesen started up alone from 5200 meters at 5:00 p.m. on the 22nd of April and climbed steadily throughout the night. By 8:00 o'clock the next morning he had reached 7500 meters, and here he made his first bivouac to have some rest and to be out of the way of falling rock and avalanching snow; he had found a safe snow ledge under an overhanging rock spur. He slept for five hours, his only sleep until his return to base camp on the 25th.

Then up again at 1:00 p.m. under a gray sky, climbing continuously for four hours or so; then the clouds from time to time enveloped him and the face, making it impossible at times for him to see his way and forcing him to stop until the fog dispersed. After 9:00 p.m. the weather cleared, but at 11:00 p.m. he made his second bivouac in another safe spot just under the rock-band pillar which ends at the summit ridge. He was now at 8200 meters, and it was very cold. He shivered all night and was generally miserable at this high altitude but did not dare to sleep because of the danger of freezing to death: "if you sleep, you are dead."

He left the bivouac at 5:00 a.m. on 24 April. He had originally thought that he might descend from the summit by the often-climbed west face, but now he decided that he could no longer manage to carry up the gear he would need during his descent, so he committed himself to coming down the south face itself by leaving here his rucksack, food, sleeping bag and bivouac sack.

Half an hour after he left his second bivouac on the 24th, he encountered the most difficult part of the entire climb: a 50-70-meter steep, even vertical, section of loose rock over which unconsolidated snow had been blown. At extreme altitude it was exhausting climbing and he had to stop often to rest; it took him three hours to surmount this part. Above it there was a long ridge covered deep in snow, not technically difficult but a lengthy traverse. At the last, as he approached the summit at 2:20 p.m., fierce winds were blowing, making it too dangerous to try to stand at the very top and giving him no desire to linger there. But his goal had been achieved. He had made the first successful ascent of Lhotse's south face, and he had done it solo in his first attempt, in one continuous upward push. His was first solo ascent of Lhotse

by any route, and he was only the sixth person to have scaled any 8000-meter mountain entirely alone.

He began his descent almost immediately. He moved down as rapidly as possible in deteriorating weather of wind and snow until about four hours later at 7800 meters he stopped: a small snow avalanche had just swept him more than 50 meters down a 45-degree slope and many more avalanches were coming down the face. He was uninjured but frightened by this experience, and he waited an hour until the avalanching ceased and the face was clear. Then again down, again the weather got worse with snow and cloud cover – but mercifully now no wind – and at about 9:00 p.m. he made his third and final bivouac at 7300 meters and rested there for three hours. Finally at midnight the sky became clear again and still there was no wind, and he resumed his descent. He did not stop till 7:00 a.m. on 25 April, when, 62 hours after he had begun his remarkable climb, he had returned to the bottom of the face, and to the friendly company of his doctor, who had come up from base camp to meet him with food and drink.

Cesen said he felt “very good” in base camp that afternoon. He was mentally exhausted from having had to be extremely careful in his descent, from his fright at the avalanche that carried him down with it, and from the alarming thunder of frequent avalanching elsewhere on the face. But he still felt well physically: physical exhaustion set in only on the following day.

Later, back in Kathmandu, he declared modestly “I am satisfied” with his achievement. This ascent of Lhotse, he said, was not nearly so difficult technically as the solo climb he had done 12 months earlier of the north face of 7710-meter Jannu in eastern Nepal. “But Lhotse is much taller and wider, and you feel very small.”

Cesen is now being recognized with awe by other Himalayan mountaineers as an extraordinary new star. One of Poland’s best Himalayan climbers, Krzysztof Wielicki, climbed to 8300 meters on Lhotse’s south face in October 1987 and was again on the face with Messner last year. Now, hearing about Cesen’s ascent, he called it “one of the great climbs. The enterprise, the goal, to start alone there – it takes great courage.” And he was astonished by Cesen’s speed: “That he did it so fast above 8000 meters! I cannot imagine how fast he could climb.”

But this was not Cesen’s first amazingly rapid climb nor his first new route solo. In the summer of 1986 in the Karakoram of Pakistan, he demonstrated how fast he could climb when, first, he scaled Broad Peak alone in 19 hours from the 4900-meter base camp of the expedition of which he was a member to the 8047-meter summit; then, six days later, he began what he called a reconnaissance ascent of the southeast face of K-2 from 5300 meters to 8000 meters in 17 hours, and went another 100 meters up the Abruzzi Ridge before turning back because of strong wind and snowfall. (His turning back proved he was also not suicidal: this was 4 August, when others on K-2 were reaching the summit from different routes and then becoming fatally trapped in their high camps by a terrible snowstorm.)

In the spring of last year, while Messner’s team was assaulting Lhotse, Cesen was in far eastern Nepal and in 23 hours he achieved both the first direct climb of Jannu’s north face and the first solo ascent by any route on this 7710-meter mountain

from his base camp at 5000 meters. He said after that accomplishment, "I like to climb solo – it's quicker and there are fewer problems."

Cesen's next goal in the Himalaya is to make the first ascent of the west face of Annapurna I in central Nepal. He looks forward to this challenge in the autumn of this year or next spring. Solo, of course.

Cesen came back from Lhotse with slightly frost-nipped fingers and toes that would soon be completely normal. But two of the Nepalese who were making their way to the summit of Everest on 23 April, when he was moving up from his first bivouac, returned from their climb with serious frostbite, and all four are considered by climbers from other expeditions who were on Everest at the same time to be extremely lucky to have come back at all. "That summit team should have perished," a member of one of these other expeditions said later. "If Ang Rita hadn't been one of them, they probably would have. That man is superhuman."

Ang Rita Sherpa, aged 41, was making his sixth trip to the top of the world, becoming the first person ever to "conquer" Everest six times. He had also successfully scaled Kangchenjunga, as well as two other giant 8000ers, one twice and the other four times. And all of them entirely without supplemental oxygen, he reports. A man of considerable Himalayan experience, he is blessed with enormous reserves of strength and a dogged determination to succeed and survive.

He was now climbing Everest with the first all-Nepalese expedition to succeed on Everest in an operation mounted by the Royal Nepal Army. He and his three summit companions, plus four other men who climbed with them part of their summit day, set out from their highest camp at an altitude of 7900 meters at 2:00 a.m. on 23 April. They encountered deep snow and were buffeted by wind on the final southeast ridge, and although all except Ang Rita were using bottled oxygen, they moved so slowly up the ridge that they spent a total of 15 hours and 15 minutes to gain the last 950 vertical meters from camp to summit. By the time they stood at the highest point on earth, at 5:15 p.m., the three who reached there with Ang Rita, Top Bahadur Khatri, Ang Kami Sherpa (in his second ascent of the mountain) and Pasang Norbu Sherpa, had been climbing for the final 45 minutes without any bottled oxygen themselves, for their supplies had been used up.

Now came the problem of their descent. Several of them were exhausted, they had no more artificial oxygen and night was falling. They managed only to get down the rock feature known as the Hillary Step not far below the summit, and there they bivouacked in the highest bivouac of any mountaineers. They were at perhaps 8780 meters, perhaps even slightly higher. As they waited out the night, the toes and fingers of two of them, but not Ang Rita, became seriously frostbitten. But they survived, and they managed to continue a safe descent next day, the two frostbitten men helped by teammates as they came down the very high mountain. The two were later sent to England for medical care.

Will Ang Rita go back to Everest once again to try for a seventh ascent? His laconic reply: "Maybe."

In the following month, during an unusually long period of five favorable successive days, three other Everest teams from the Nepalese side, plus one on the



northern side in Tibet, put a total of 35 more men and two women on the summit, 18 of the men and both women from the north, 17 more men by the same southern route from Nepal that the Nepalese army expedition had followed. Together with the four from the army team, the grand total of 41 successful climbers was the largest number ever to gain Everest's summit in a single climbing season.

Amongst all these successful summit men was one with a famous Everest name. Peter Hillary, who was born a year and a half after his father became the first man to step up to the summit of the world in May 1953, now followed the same climbing route and in just eight hours on 10 May made his way from his expedition's 7900-meter camp to the top of Everest. "It's incredibly high," he marveled. "You think on your next step you're going to be joining Neil Armstrong" in outer space. Peter is the first son of an Everest summiter to become one himself.

There were other noteworthy successes in the spring:

- The first woman ever to reach the summit of Makalu, east of Everest. Mrs. Kitty Calhoun, a 29-year-old mountain guide from the U.S., gained Makalu's 8463-meter summit on 18 May via the seldom-climbed west pillar with another member of her small expedition, John Schutt, 41, also a mountain guide. Neither used artificial oxygen at any time.
- The first ascent of a 6387-meter mountain east-northeast of Kathmandu called Ganchenpo or Fluted Peak. The season's other all-Nepalese expedition, this one from the Nepal Police Force put nine men atop this handsome smaller peak on 9 May from its southwest ridge.
- A new route on the formidable east face of Dhaulagiri I. Krzysztof Wielicki of Poland, a 40-year-old electronics engineer, led a team to Dhaulagiri I and on 9-10 May soloed a new line up the east face to the northeast ridge at about 7800 meters. Since he had already been to the summit 16 days earlier via the standard northeast-ridge route, it was now snowing when he reached the ridge and he was exhausted, he did not continue on to the top but turned down the ridge. He used no supplemental oxygen throughout his climb.
- The first Belgian, Rudy Van Snick on 10 May, and the first Swedes, Mikael Reuterswald and Oskar Kihlborg on the following day, to the summit of Everest.

Altogether 13 of the spring's 28 expeditions succeeded in gaining their summits; about half is the normal proportion of teams to succeed in Nepal. The proportion of those who died amongst all those who climbed on these expeditions was happily lower than normal with only five deaths amongst nearly 300 climbers, both foreigners and Nepalese. The season's 1.7% death rate thus compares favorably with the average rate of 2.5%.

But any deaths are too many from the humanitarian point of view, and one particular loss this season was that of an accomplished Nepalese mountaineer, Wangel Sherpa, who was killed in an avalanche on Dhaulagiri I while climbing with a mostly German team led by Michel Dacher. He had reached about 6600 meters on

the northeast ridge on 29 April when he set off a slab avalanche and was carried by it at least 200 meters down the east face and buried without trace in its debris. Wangel had successfully scaled Dhaulagiri I once before, in November 1988 with a South Korean team, and had also reached the summits of two other 8000ers, Cho Oyu last September and Manaslu in May 1984.

## **Autumn 1990: Unprecedented Numbers Attack Nepalese Peaks**

### **Were the Numbers Too Large?**

Never before in the history of Nepalese mountaineering had so many men and women gone climbing in a single season as in the autumn of 1990. In very recent years, the totals in spring and autumn seasons had been thirty to fifty teams each, and these had represented sharp increases over previous years, but now this autumn altogether 78 expeditions of 553 foreign climbers, accompanied by 217 Nepalis, attacked their chosen Himalayan peaks. They were very nearly 30% more climbers and about the same percent more teams than just one year ago. (And these figures do not include two more expeditions who came to Nepal to climb but in fact did not do so, nor three others who climbed on Everest and five on Cho Oyu from the north in Tibet.)

Despite all the numbers, very few of them made notable climbs. Pioneering new routes or exploring seldom-attempted peaks was apparently not of paramount interest to the majority. Two-thirds of the teams attacked well-known 8000-meter mountains plus the two popular lower peaks in the Everest region, Ama Dablam and Pumori, and in some cases they literally queued up to do so.

There was one attempt on an unclimbed mountain, a British attack on Cheo HIMAL, a 6820-meter peak in the Manaslu area that no one had ever attempted before, but this pioneering effort, led by Alan Burgess, 42, from Huddersfield, Yorkshire, reached 6250 meters on the southeast ridge and then suddenly ended in tragedy when the Sherpa climbing with them, Dawa Wangchu, fell 800 meters to his death.

Several other teams did go into rarely visited areas of far western Nepal, but one of these never even managed to get to base camp because of the difficult terrain. Two Soviet expeditions, in a season of upsurge in Soviet mountaineering activity in the Nepalese Himalaya, attempted unclimbed routes on two 8000ers, Cho Oyu and Manaslu, but the Cho Oyu effort by nine Soviet climbers and one Bulgarian on the sharp saw-toothed southwest ridge began too late because of the death of its original leader in last summer's massive fatal avalanche in the Pamirs, and the seven-man Manaslu east-face climb ended abruptly when three members, two of whom, Zinur Khalitov and Grigori Khrichtchatyi, had accomplished the four-summits traverse of Kangchenjunga last year, plunged 200 meters to their deaths.

The best climb of the season was actually accomplished not in Nepal but on the Tibetan side of Cho Oyu, one of the great 8000ers on Nepal's northern border, where two Swiss and a Pole made a rapid alpine-style ascent of an unclimbed face. The three highly experienced Himalayan climbers, Erhard Loretan, 31, from Cresuz, Jean Troillet, 42, from Orsieres, and Wojciech Kurtyka, 43, from Krakow, did a traverse of Cho Oyu, up the unconquered southwest face and down a direct variation of the normal route on the west side. They ascended in a single push up a route they said they would not recommend to anyone who cannot do a very quick ascent, for its

avalanche danger is quite great, a route they reported is “so much more difficult technically than the normal route that there is no comparison between them.”

In just over a day and a half, during which they had one 12-hour rest and some briefer stops, the trio ascended from 6200 meters to their 8201-meter summit, without bottled oxygen, fixed ropes, tents or sleeping bags (but they did take a small stove with a one-liter pot, three bivouac sacks and a very small amount of things to eat). They accomplished their climb while other teams were unsuccessfully trying to scale the easy normal route with much equipment and series of fixed camps. How they could themselves succeed? “You have to have the mental push,” explained Troillet.

Within Nepal, notable successes were scored by one American and a third group of Soviet climbers. The American was 32-year-old Andy Lapkass from Ukiah, California, who achieved the first solo traverse of 7161-meter Pumori, up its south ridge and down the southeast face. These were not new routes, but his was the first one-day solo climb ever made on Pumori from base camp to summit and back to base.

The Soviets were a 17-member expedition who scaled the formidable south face of Lhotse to its 8516-meter summit. This near-vertical face had for years been considered almost impossible to climb, and when the Soviets began their planning, it was still unconquered. But last spring a young Yugoslav, Tomo Cesen, dazzled the mountaineering world with a quick solo ascent of the face, and his feat somewhat diminished the glamour of this autumn’s fine success by two members of the Soviet team, Sergei Bershov, 43, from Kharkov, and Vladimir Karataev, 36, of Divnogorsk. The Soviets took weeks to surmount the face, and the summiters used artificial oxygen at the highest altitudes. They found it difficult to believe that Cesen had succeeded entirely alone, very rapidly and with little gear and no bottled oxygen.

In contrasting style to that of the Soviets, two noted French alpinists, Pierre Beghin, 39, from Sappey en Chartreuse, and Christophe Profit, 29, from Chamonix, tried an oxygen-less alpine-style ascent of a slightly different line on the vast face from those taken by both Cesen and the Soviets. They, however, managed to get no higher than 7600 meters in the face of unrelenting fierce winds.

Some other successful ascents:

- An Indonesian woman, Miss Aryati, 26, from Jakarta, became the first of her sex from any nation to conquer 7525-meter Annapurna IV in the first attempt by Indonesians on this mountain. But she had the help of artificial oxygen, which is not normally used on mountains below 8000 meters.
- Helmut Kindle, 32, from Triesen, Liechtenstein, was the first from his tiny country to the summit of any 8000er in Nepal when he stood atop Dhaulagiri I. He had climbed the northeast ridge, the normal route, without any bottled oxygen. With him to the summit from another expedition was the first Latin American to conquer Dhaulagiri I, Miguel Sanchez, 33, from Guaymallen, Mendoza, Argentina, who also used no artificial oxygen.

By no means everyone succeeded, as has been seen above. In fact, only 22% of all the season's 770 climbers reached their summits. On the mountains less than 8000 meters, the proportion was 31%, but on the 8000ers it was only 15%.

Thirty-one people summited Mount Everest in a four-day period of beautiful weather, the largest number of people to reach the summit from the Nepalese side of the vast border mountain in any single season. This total is greater than that of all who successfully scaled Everest in the first 50 years of its climbing history. But even so, it is only 15% of the 198 who climbed above Everest base camp this autumn.

On one day alone, 14 climbers went to the top including the youngest person ever to reach the highest point on earth, a 17-year-old high school student from Lanslevillard, France, named Bertrand Noel; the first father and son together, Jean Noel Roche, 40, and Bertrand; the first married couple, Andrej Stremfelj, 34, from Kranj, Slovenia, Yugoslavia, and his 33-year-old wife, Mariya, and, just an hour and a half later, the second couple, Catherine Gibson, 35, American, and her Soviet husband, Aleksei Krasnokutsky, 40, from Seattle, Washington.

All 31 who reached the top of the world belonged to large expeditions totaling between 23 and 37 climbers, all except one used supplemental oxygen (and the one who didn't wish he had), and every one of them followed the well-trodden normal route via the South Col to the southeast ridge, which 180 men and women had already successfully climbed before them. Summiters who held permits to ascend other, less frequently used routes were allowed to switch over to the standard route and did so. Their abandoning attempts via the west ridge and south pillar was criticized by another team's leader: "This is not good; it is not alpinism. They were thinking only of the summit, but the climbing itself is important."

One of the men who reached the summit, the one who did so without bottled oxygen, was Marc Batard, 38-year-old mountain guide from Megeve, Haute Savoie, France, who had been to the top of the world two years previously. This time he had a new idea: it was now his ambition to be the first person to stand on the summits of both Everest and its immediate neighbor, Lhotse, on the same day. He would go to the summit of Everest in the late afternoon, spend the night there in a small snow cave he would dig for his protection from the bitter cold, and early next morning descend, cross over to Lhotse and in the afternoon climb Lhotse's normal west-face route to its summit.

Batard reached Everest's summit, dug his cave two meters below it – and half an hour later gave up the rest of his plans. He was exhausted, and his fingers and nose were becoming frostbitten. "There is too much risk," he decided; "it is better to go back." The next time he tries this project, perhaps next year, he says he will take artificial oxygen to use above 8500 meters to give him more strength and to help protect him against frostbite.

Another uncompleted effort, this one on a different 8000er, was a bid by a Japanese, Kazufumi Watanabe, 29, from Yokohama, to make an entirely solo ascent of Makalu via a variation of the standard route from the northwest. His attempt ended at 7900 meters, defeated by the winds and by exhaustion after weeks on the mountain.

In any case it was not really the season in which one could make truly solo ascents with so many other mountaineers around. Three other teams were on the northwest side of Makalu while Watanabe was there. All of the 198 people from nine teams who went above Everest base camps crowded the route up the dangerous Khumbu Icefall on the first stage of their climbs. Eleven other teams assaulted its neighbor, Pumori, all but one of them from the south and southeast with their base camps in one relatively small area. The knife-edge southeast ridge of another Everest neighbor, Ama Dablam, and the northeast ridge of Dhaulagiri I, were both attempted by seven expeditions.

Why did the Nepalese tourism ministry, which regulates mountaineering in Nepal, grant so many permits for a single season, and why such numbers even on the same climbing routes? A ministry official who was asked this early in the season, when he was being warned of possible conflicts and dangers – not to mention environmental pollution – resulting from such crowding, replied that there were three reasons: the increased numbers brought in more revenue for the government in permit fees; they earned more income for the private sector's guides, porters, food and equipment suppliers, Kathmandu hotels and lodges, and agencies that represent expeditions; and they gave more alpinists an earlier opportunity to scale their chosen mountains.

In the event, the disasters that could have resulted from large numbers on the same routes did not materialize, partly because some expeditions came later than others and partly because climbers were prudent. Indeed it was a remarkably safe season. There were just six deaths amongst the 770 men and women climbers in Nepal. During the 1970s and 1980s, the average death rate was about 2.5%, but last spring it was down to 1.7% and this autumn's dropped further to 0.8%, very nearly a record low.

But predictions of disputes between teams did turn out to be correct. If climbers did not actually come to blows, as happened last winter between two groups on Cho Oyu, there were some vociferous arguments amongst teams on Everest over who had priority on the standard South Col route, who should have the right to come along and move quickly up sections of the route that others had toiled hard to establish, and who could use a French party's satellite telephone link to the outside world.

On Ama Dablam and Everest there was overcrowding in the base-camp areas, and on the smaller mountain, some teams had to wait for days while others finished climbing its very narrow southwest ridge. The first expeditions to arrive on several mountains seriously resented the next ones' coming along merrily up their fixed ropes and pitching tents at their campsites. Even in remote far western Nepal, two European teams turned up at the same time to scale the same northeast ridge of a 7000-meter peak called Saipal, which had seen only five previous expeditions since 1954. "We had a little human problem," is the way the leader of the first Saipal team described his group's annoyance at the other team's making free use of his route.

On the other hand, some teams welcomed later arrivals. A Spaniard on Dhaulagiri I observed with disapproval how some Swiss "were bankers – they sold

the route to the Italians and Czechoslovaks and to the Greek expedition. This mountain is for climbing, not for making money. That is not mountaineering.”

By the end of the season, a tourism ministry official acknowledged that “there have been some problems” when so many expeditions were forced to climb together, and perhaps the ministry should be more restrained in the number of permits issued in future. Whether his superiors will see things in the same light is another matter.

## Winter 1990-91: An Unexciting Climbing Season

Despite the ambitious plans of four European climbers to make solo ascents of four giant 8000-meter mountains in the Nepalese Himalaya during the winter of 1990-91, not one of them succeeded, nor did anyone else reach an 8000-meter summit. Indeed the winter's climbs were almost more interesting for what did *not* happen than what did. For the first season since the winter of 1981-82, no one attacked the mighty Mount Everest. Not a single person died on any expedition; this also was the first of any season since the winter of 1981-82 to have such an unusual result. (By contrast, nine climbers died in the 1989-90 winter.)

It was a quiet season: only 11 expeditions came from 10 nations to climb six mountains. The results fitted into a most unusually neat pattern: four teams went to one mountain over 6000-meters high, and all succeeded in reaching its summit. One went to a 7000er, and a subsidiary summit was gained, but not the highest one. Six more parties attacked four peaks more than 8000 meters, and not one of them climbed as high as 8000 meters.

In winter, the extremely low temperatures and constant fierce winds are always an important cause of failure in the Himalaya, and this is especially true at high altitudes on the very highest mountains, where these factors are most acute. This winter's climate was no exception, and its unrelenting frigid gales defeated two of the four would-be soloists, who had no artificial oxygen to help compensate for the extreme cold.

One of these men was an Italian, Kurt Walde, 28, from Bruneck, South Tirol, who was seeking to gain his first 8000-meter summit. He was forced by the terrible wind to retreat after reaching 7500 meters on the normal climbing route on Cho Oyu. The other was a Polish mountaineer who aspires to become the first alpinist to climb the world's five highest mountains in winter; he was now attacking the fifth highest, Makalu (8463 meters), after having successfully scaled Numbers One, Everest, Three, Kangchenjunga, and Four, Lhotse, during the 1980s. But in his bid to scale entirely alone the exposed west pillar of Makalu, Krzysztof Wielicki of Tychy, Poland, spent the night of his 41st birthday listening to the winds howling around the small snow hole he had dug when it had been impossible to pitch a tent at his highest point of 7300 meters. Next day he retreated to base camp and his climb was over.

It was the severe cold, plus a lack of acclimatization to very high altitude, that forced a Frenchman to retreat from the greatest height reached by any of the season's soloists, estimated at a bit more than 7950 meters, on the seldom attempted south face of Manaslu. Eric Monier, 34, from Dergis Michaud, Hauteville, believed the temperature was minus 50 degrees Celsius and the wind blowing at 80 km/hr when he reached his high point at day break, took off his gloves for one moment and saw that his fingers had begun to freeze. He now suddenly also realized that for the last 250 vertical meters he had been hallucinating – he had been talking with many people who were accompanying him including a woman who said she was 100,000 years old. "My legs would have taken me to the top, but I was dreaming and falling



asleep,” he reported; he managed to descend to 6000 meters by early evening with no more permanent damage than the possible loss of the frostbitten end of one little finger.

Immediately after having abandoned their climbing attempts, Walde and Monier seemed to have given up their wish to solo an 8000er. Walde, who had tried 8000ers before without success, although he had not attempted to climb them alone, said now that perhaps he should try 7000ers instead. Monier, who had been unsuccessful in two solo attempts on Kangchenjunga in recent years, declared that he was content with his Manaslu experience. “The summit was not the most important thing for me. The most important was the experience of loneliness, of achieving my philosophy of loneliness, and this I achieved, and I am satisfied. I reached my limit of climbing alone.” Wielicki said he was temporarily setting aside his winter 8000ers goal and will climb next in a milder season of the year.

The fourth planned solo climb this winter was abandoned even before it began. A 32-year-old Yugoslav, Miroslav Sveticic from Cerkno, Slovenia, who is said by his colleagues to have the potential of being another Tomo Cesen, was to do a very fast solo ascent without fixing any ropes up a previously unclimbed very steep smooth rock face on the west side of Annapurna I. But first his teammates began to prepare a descent route for him on the standard north-face route. Here they found that frequent falls of huge seracs made the north too dangerous, and for Sveticic to attempt to descend the west face without fixed ropes would also be unacceptably dangerous. Their acute concern about safety was increased by the unnerving presence at the north side base camp of numerous plaques placed there in memory of climbers who had died on earlier Annapurna I expeditions.

The four expeditions on a 6000-meter mountain attacked the very popular neighbor of Everest, 6812-meter Ama Dablam. One of these teams, a pair of Americans, Chris Warner and Glen Dunmire, did a rare traverse of the mountain in a five-day push up the formidable west face and down the standard southwest-ridge route. All of the other parties kept to the standard route – and a member of one of these, the leader of an Italian team, Fabrizio Rodolfi, who was a “Thalidamide baby” born without a right arm below the elbow, even managed to do so safely and successfully, although slowly, with an artificial arm. He made the last of the season’s ascents.

## Spring 1991: Personal Tragedies and First-Rate Ascents

Different sorts of tragedy struck two of the best-known Himalayan mountaineers who came climbing in Nepal this spring: Friedl Mutschlechner of Italy was killed by lightning while descending the lower slopes of Manaslu, and France's Marc Batard had become so enmeshed in controversy with Nepalese authorities concerning permission to scale Mount Everest that there was doubt he would ever return to climb in Nepal again. Meanwhile difficult new routes were forged by Yugoslav and Soviet mountaineers on Kangchenjunga and Dhaulagiri I, and Manaslu was traversed for the first time.

Gottfried Mutschlechner, known to his many friends as Friedl, 41-year-old mountain guide from Bruncio, Bolzano, in the South Tirol, had considerable Himalayan experience, much of which he had gained climbing 8000-meter mountains with Reinhold Messner in 1981 to 1986; he had conquered Kangchenjunga, amongst other giants. This spring he was a member of an 11-man team led by Hans Kammerlander, also a guide from South Tirol; they planned an alpine-style ascent of the normal route on Manaslu from a camp at 6000 meters near the base of their 8163-meter mountain.

Their program did not work out in several ways. They climbed without any Nepalese Sherpa helpers or artificial oxygen, as planned, but unfavorable weather with frequent heavy snowfall caused them to set up three successively higher camps in the course of their ascent of the northeast-face route. (When they established the first of these camps on 21 April, they found a thin film of oil on the water they had just produced by melting snow; they speculated that this might have been carried by winds eastward from the burning oil fields in Kuwait. Fresh snow fell, and they did not see any oil again.)

After nearly three weeks of climbing, they decided that bad weather and lack of time was forcing them to give up hope of reaching the summit, but early in the morning of 10 May three of them started up from camp 3 at 6900 meters. They could see that the weather would not remain good long enough for them to make a summit bid, but the morning was fine and they would climb upwards for a while.

The three were Kammerlander, Mutschlechner and Karl Grossrubatscher, 28, another South Tirolean mountain guide. After half an hour's climb, at about 7000 meters, Mutschlechner's fingers were becoming numb from the extremely cold wind, and having suffered from frostbitten fingers before, he did not want another episode of that, and he turned back to camp 3. When the two others had reached about 7200 meters, Grossrubatscher had to stop climbing up; he had not brought his ice ax with him that morning, and now the terrain required one. So he, too, returned to camp 3 and was seen moving around its tent by teammates watching from base camp until clouds moved across and the camp was no longer visible from below. Kammerlander continued alone to 7500 meters and then finally he also abandoned the climb.

When Kammerlander arrived back at camp 3, Mutschlechner asked him, "Where is Karl?" Near the tent they discovered his ice ax with a glove in its strap. A

bit farther away, perhaps 100 meters, they found his body. His neck was broken. How this had happened is a mystery: his legs, arms and head were not badly broken; the slope where camp 3 was located was gentle with snow in good condition; if he had climbed up to a nearby serac and fallen from it, there was no trace of his fall in the snow; he was a healthy, strong professional mountaineer.

The two survivors placed their friend's body atop a closed crevasse that in warmer weather will open and receive it. They then took down the tent, descended to camp 2 at 6200 meters, packed up that tent and, roped together and on skis, they continued down the snow-covered slopes. But now fog or wisps of cloud were passing over them and visibility was poor; finally, about 100 meters above camp 1 at 5600 meters, they were enveloped in such thick cloud that Mutschlechner suggested they wait for the mists to clear a bit. They could hear continuous soft thunder, their hair was full of electricity and their ice axes were humming from it, but they saw no lightning in their dense fog. But suddenly Kammerlander had a sharp popping sound in his ear, which felt as though it had been bitten. He dropped to the snow and tugged on the rope between him and Mutschlechner; there was no answering tug, and when he went to Mutschlechner later, Kammerlander saw that he was dead with three burn marks on his head and his cap. Mutschlechner had been only eight meters away from his colleague and a mere two vertical meters above him at the highest point of a small snow-covered hill. It was about 4:00 p.m. and snow was falling. Mutschlechner is believed to have been the first mountaineer ever killed by lightning in Nepal.

Kammerlander spent the night alone in camp 1 while a storm raged, then descended to base camp to tell the other members the tragic news. Three of them immediately went up to Mutschlechner but left him where he lay. Kammerlander and Friedl's brother Johann, also a member of the expedition, left base camp quickly to meet Friedl's wife at the town of Gorkha; she had been trekking in the area while the men were climbing.

Marc Batard is a 39-year-old French mountain guide from Megeve, Haute Savoie, who made himself famous in September 1988 by achieving what is still the fastest ascent of Everest, 22 hours and 29 minutes from base camp (5350 meters) to summit (8848 meters) via the normal South-Col route on the Nepalese side. This was not a solo climb, for there was a number of other climbers at various points along his route, and indeed several of them went to the top before him on his own summit day.

Everest has not been his only 8000-meter mountain. When he set his speed record in September 1988, he had already scaled three other 8000-ers successfully in the previous eight months. But he seemed to have a fascination for Everest, and he went to its summit a second time in October last year in part of an attempt to become the first person to stand atop both Everest and Lhotse on the same day (he did not get to Lhotse's summit).

Unfortunately Batard manages to quarrel with other climbers, and last autumn there was a dispute between him and a Nepalese woman on his expedition, Mrs. Pasang Lhamu Sherpa, whose ambition was to become the first Nepalese woman, and the twelfth woman from any nation, to conquer Everest. But she left the

expedition and the mountain in late September in great anger, claiming that Batard had stopped her from going to the summit from their highest camp. He has stated – and so did climbers from another expedition who were also at the high camp – that she was not strong enough at that time to reach the top of the world. However, according to Batard, he invited her to join him in a second summit attempt soon afterwards, but she refused to continue climbing.

Mrs. Sherpa's husband is the head of a trekking agency in Kathmandu, and his firm lodged a protest with the Nepalese ministry of tourism, which regulates mountaineering activities in the country. The agency protested against a foreigner's forcibly preventing a Nepalese woman from climbing a Nepalese mountain, and stories went around Kathmandu that Batard had manhandled her, even beaten her – all charges that he has consistently denied.

Batard came to Nepal again this spring to try once more to have a double Everest-Lhotse success, to reach Everest's summit late on an afternoon, spend the night just below the highest point on earth, and next day descend a few hundred meters (yards) to where Everest and Lhotse meet at the South Col and then go up to Lhotse's summit. In Kathmandu he understood that permission for him to try this again was promised to him by a tourism ministry official, and he went into the mountains. He climbed to 8200 meters on 1 May, and if he had been able to continue to the summit that day, he would have broken his own speed record. But very strong winds stopped him, and he retreated for a rest at base camp. He now learned that he had not in fact been granted a climbing permit, and he therefore abandoned his climb.

Why had he not received permission? When it appeared that it was about to be granted, despite the fact that teams normally have wait to years to get permits for Everest, charges arose in Kathmandu that he must have bribed an official to give it to him. He in turn charged that officials were bribed not to give it.

For having climbed without an official permit, Batard is liable under the mountaineering regulations to be banned by the Nepalese government from entering Nepal for five years or from mountaineering activities in the country for as many as ten years. Whether the authorities will actually take action against him is not known, but in any case, he has made the matter irrelevant. On his return from Everest, he issued a declaration in Kathmandu which stated that "I have been very badly victimized in Nepal this time" by those making charges against him and withholding his permit. "So with my heartfelt salutation to these brave and powerful people in Nepal, I have decided to cancel all my future climbing activities in Nepal."

Batard's plans had included still another return to Everest this autumn, but the Nepalese government's permission for this attempt was suspended following last autumn's dispute with Mrs. Sherpa. Discussing his future as he handed out his statement, he said he was not greatly disappointed not to be coming back to Everest: "I have climbed Everest twice, and I am happy with this," he said. He would now concentrate more on climbing in the Alps and spend greater time with his son and two daughters (he is divorced from his wife). To those who were scheduled to climb Everest with him later this year, he would offer instead to go with them to a high mountain of their choice in South America or Pakistan.

The day before Batard reached 8200 meters on Everest this spring, two Yugoslavs succeeded in reaching the 8476-meter south summit of Kangchenjunga, a summit that is the lowest of the four great peaks of the world's third highest mountain. Two members of an expedition of 13 Yugoslav men and two Polish women, Andrej Stremfelj, 34, a sports teacher from Kranj, Slovenia, and Marko Prezelj, 25-year-old student from Kamnik, Slovenia, in four days of alpine-style climbing (no fixed camps, fixed ropes, bottled oxygen or Sherpas) pioneered a line up the south ridge, a feature of Kangchenjunga never before attempted by anyone. The two men, who climbed alone, reported their ascent was one of "extreme difficulty" especially up a very small but steep rock and ice face at the bottom of the ridge (from 5550 meters to 6400 meters) and again in a couloir covered with hard ice 1000 meters above the top of the face. Since they had fixed no ropes, they felt it was almost impossible to descend the ridge, so they went down the west face and joined their teammates at camp 3 on the great shelf at 7250 meters. They had left their fourth and final bivouac at 7900 meters at 6:00 a.m. on 30 April, gained the south summit at 4:45 and 5:00 p.m., and were safely in camp 3 at 1:30 the next morning.

While they had been successfully scaling the south ridge and descending the west face, three other Yugoslavs had been going to the main and central summits of Kangchenjunga, 8586 meters and 8482 meters, respectively. From camp 3 on the night of 30 April, Uros Rupar, 26, from Skofja Loka, Slovenia, climbed alone and without artificial oxygen through the night, reached the central summit on 1 May after nearly 12 hours of climbing, and another 12 hours later was back in camp 3. Meanwhile Stipe Bozic, 40, from Split, Croatia, and Viki Groselj, 38, from Ljubljana, Slovenia, made the first Yugoslav ascent of Kangchenjunga's main summit on 1 May; they made their final push from camp 4 at 7600 meters and used bottled oxygen.

A team of 11 climbers from Kazakhstan in the Soviet Union sent 10 members to the summit of Dhaulagiri I on 10 and 13 May, and doubtless all 11 climbers would have been successful if one of them had not broken a bone in his hand while moving a rock to clear a campsite. The group, led from base camp by Ervand Ilinsky from Alma Ata, made a new route up the seldom climbed west face of their mountain and used no artificial oxygen as they surmounted steep bare rock, sometimes at an angle of 80 degrees; they declared that they had encountered more difficult rock climbing on Dhaulagiri I than that found on the notoriously formidable south face of Lhotse. They took five weeks to climb their face, pitched six camps above base and fixed rope along the entire route from camps 1 to 5, a vertical distance of 2100 meters.

On Manaslu a Ukrainian expedition made the first Soviet ascent of the mountain and its first traverse by any nationality. This team, led by Vladimir Shumichin from Kiev, first attempted to scale the unconquered east face, but when avalanching on this wall became too dangerous, three members from Kharkov, Alexei Makarov, Viktor Pastuck and Igor Svergoun, ascended in alpine style along the south ridge, sometimes traversing below the ridge high on the east face, and descended the normal route down the northeast face. They completed their difficult and perilous first traverse of the mountain in eight days.

The season should have seen a total of four Soviet expeditions climbing in Nepal, but authorities in the USSR forced two of them to be aborted to save badly needed foreign exchange. Three members of a group from Leningrad, who had planned an ascent of Lhotse's south face by an entirely new line, actually arrived in Kathmandu, but they were recalled to Moscow, and passports were not issued to the nine other members. Meanwhile Georgian officials confiscated the dollars collected by an expedition from their republic who intended to scale the previously unattempted northeast buttress of Annapurna I.

Others climbers who did come and had success included a nine-member team from Denmark who managed to place their leader, Soren Smidt, 31-year-old Copenhagen student, on the summit of Dhaulagiri I by its standard route via the northeast ridge on 14 May. He thereby became the first Dane to conquer any 8000-meter mountain. He had climbed solo from their second high-altitude camp at 7200 meters, spent two nights alone at their camp 3 at 7700 meters and made his way to the top on a cold but clear and windless morning. He used no bottled oxygen.

Also successful were a team of three Frenchmen and a Spanish Catalan in the first traverse of a much lower mountain, a seldom attempted peak in western Nepal called Kanjerolwa (6612 meters). Led by Olivier Besson, a French mountain guide from Megeve, the four men scaled its northwest face and descended its south ridge in three days of some very difficult climbing on 60-degree hard ice.

On Mount Everest, which stands on the Nepal-Tibet border, there were eight teams this spring from the Nepalese side while eight more attacked from the Tibetan side. It almost seems as though success by Nepal's normal South-Col route is becoming routine, although this is not actually true, as shown by Batard's failed attempt. Nonetheless this spring nine men from four expeditions reached the summit via this route – and no one by any other route on the Nepalese side – while from Tibet 21 others made it to the top of the world; seven of these 30 men, two Americans and five Sherpas, had actually been there before in previous years. At the end of the season, the total number of climbers who have conquered Everest by all routes had risen to the impressive figure of 343.

That there were not more successes this spring was due to various factors; the usual fierce winds at very high altitude were a principal one, but there were several others. South Koreans on the huge southwest face in Nepal, who were led by Lee Kang-Oh, were defeated by an unusual kind of snow problem immediately after two of them had reached 8300 meters: a light snowfall had just deposited two centimeters (three-quarters of an inch) of snow on the face above them, and they could not climb it with crampons nor without them. They gave up and went home.

An 8-man Japanese team in Tibet under the leadership of Shinichi Hirano was defeated by the extreme difficulty and danger of their chosen route, which no one had even tried to climb before. It was the east ridge, a steep knife-edge rock ridge with huge snow mushrooms in a remote area of the mountain. On 5 May, they managed to reach an altitude of 6400 meters, 1000 vertical meters above their base on the Kangshung Glacier; their progress was so slow that one member joked they might

reach the summit by the end of the year. They stopped before someone had a serious fall or got hit by pieces of mushrooms that were frequently breaking off.

With so many teams on Everest at the same time, and most of them clustered around the same or nearby routes, it was probably not surprising that some climbers arrived with meager supplies of food, tents and other equipment, perhaps consciously or subconsciously assuming that better-supplied expeditions would give them any needed help. Several cases of such need arose on the north side, and well-stocked teams found themselves acting as free restaurants and suppliers of gear to total strangers, a situation that did not please them.

What further displeased them was that these carefree climbers boasted of how they were attacking the mountain in alpine style, not hiring numbers of Sherpa helpers, fixing kilometers of rope and having cozy well-stocked camps full of food, fuel and oxygen bottles like other expeditions. But in fact they used the others' tents without asking permission, expected to be fed, and even sought and received the use of artificial oxygen when they needed it. "There is much hypocrisy about climbing Everest in alpine style," commented a leader of one of the well-supplied teams. "They like to claim all the risks but not take them." (None of them reached the summit.)

Besides the Japanese bid to scale Everest's east ridge, there were two other unsuccessful attempts this spring on very difficult unclimbed routes, both of these on formidable faces. Two members of the Yugoslav expedition to Kangchenjunga had as their own objective the steep east face of nearby Jannu's east summit, 7468 meters. The highest summit of 7710-meter Jannu (officially named Kumbhakarna) has been successfully reached from its north and south sides, but no one had ever before tried to climb from the east. Now an alpine-style ascent was attempted by two foresters, Bojan Pockar, 28, from Ljubljana, and Vanja Furlan from Novo Mesto, Slovenia, on whose 25th birthday they reached their highest point, 7050 meters.

They had started up the face from a tent at 5430 meters two days previously, taking with them only two sleeping bags, a bivouac sack, two ropes, a stove, some gas and some biscuits. The entire face, they found, was one of "extreme difficulty plus" with five pitches, two of ice and three of mixed rock and ice, even more difficult. They were unlucky with Jannu's weather; it was in cloud every day their expedition was on Kangchenjunga, and they themselves were defeated in the early afternoon of 1 May by strong winds and fresh snow avalanches. The route is possible despite its great difficulty, they reported: "if the weather was good, we would have been on the top on the 1st of May in the evening."

But the weather was bad, and they descended instead. They took a more direct line down the center of the face than they had used going up and were plagued by heavy snowfall and avalanching during their retreat of the 2nd and 3rd, once having to spend nine hours in a big crevasse while avalanches poured overhead. By the time they returned to their tent at the foot of the mountain, they were in no condition to make another attempt: they were very tired, they had slight frostbite, and each of them had lost 10 kilos in weight, for their only food had been 200 grams of biscuits during the entire climb. They said they would like to come back to Jannu again, but

next time to reach the east summit from the eastern end of the north face, which no one has ever attempted to do.

Makalu has never been successfully scaled via the vast central portion of its west face. This spring a team of seven Italians under the leadership of Casimiro Ferrari of Ballabio, Como, attempted a line about halfway between the one followed in the autumn of 1981 to 7900 meters by Jerzy Kukuczka, Wojciech Kurtyka, both Poles, and Alex MacIntyre, British, and another at the left side of the face which Kukuczka soloed after his two teammates had left the mountain. Two of this spring's Italians, Salvatore Panzeri, 28, from Costamasnaga, Como, and Dario Spreafico, also 28, from Lecco, managed to reach a high point of 7300 meters at the top of a small ridge and the bottom of a very steep section. Now a fierce wind was blowing a lot of snow onto their route, and their feet were beginning to freeze in the extreme cold. They retreated, tired and with painful feet, so the climb was over because their teammates were not capable of moving fast enough on such technically difficult steep rock and ice. These two men would like to return and finish their route one day.

While Pockar and Furlan were in the final hours of their descent of Jannu, two of their expedition's members were making a bid to reach the main summit of Kangchenjunga. They were Mrs. Mariya Frantar, 35, from Ljubljana, and Joze Rozman, 36, from Trzic, Slovenia, who radioed at 4:00 p.m. on 3 May that they were 150 meters below their goal. They had been seen to be making very slow progress in strong wind that morning: one was seen to ascend only 100 vertical meters in three hours, another to go up 50 meters and then return to the other. They had one oxygen bottle, and presumably one was using it, but their teammates could not tell which member was doing what. At 11:00 a.m. clouds came in, and they could no longer be seen from below. At 4:00 p.m. they said they were very cold, and Rozman wanted to descend but Mrs. Frantar, despite the fact that she was becoming snow-blind (a very painful affliction that is not permanent), was determined to continue to the top. Their leader, Tone Skarja, instructed both of them to descend immediately, and ten minutes later they reported they would do so.

The last radio contact with them was at 7:00 p.m., when Rozman spoke with difficulty (from altitude sickness?), said he was having trouble pressing the button on the walkie-talkie (because of frostbite?) and they were completely lost, had no idea where they were or where to find the expedition's highest camp at 7600 meters. That was the last time they were heard or seen until their very badly battered bodies were found during the next two days 50 and 100 meters below the camp they had not found. Their fatal falls caused Skarja to end the expedition.

If she had actually conquered Kangchenjunga, Mrs. Frantar would have been the first woman of any nationality to accomplish that feat, and teammates believe her ambition to be the first was why she wanted to continue up even when she was becoming snow-blind. As it turned out, she also would have been the only woman to reach any summit amongst the 15 who climbed in Nepal this spring.

Following are the basic statistics of the spring 1991 climbing season in Nepal:



- 36 teams of foreigners came to climb 19 mountains; in addition, there was one expedition of only Nepalese climbers on one of the same mountains (Everest).
- Three foreign teams never established base camps and thus actually did no climbing.
- The 34 expeditions that did climb were composed of 229 foreigners, including 15 women, from 17 nations, plus 89 Nepalese climbers; 12 foreign teams had no Nepalese climbing with them.
- Of these 34 teams, 14 reached a total of 16 summits.
- Four foreign climbers (three men and one woman) died; they represented 1.3% of all climbers or 1.7% of all foreign climbers. No Nepalese died.

## **Autumn 1991: One-Man Teams, Speed-Climbing Everest and Mysterious Death**

Never before this autumn had so many foreigners come to climb Nepal's great Himalayan peaks without other teammates, planning to scale their mountains either entirely alone or with just one or two Nepalese helpers going with them. Indeed, the autumn of 1990 was the only previous season in which so many foreign climbers altogether had come to Nepal in a single season, and the number of different teams was slightly higher this time. But this autumn's results were merely good, not spectacularly so. The 583 foreign and 163 Nepalese mountaineers on this autumn's 83 expeditions reached 44 summits, a success ratio that is seldom surpassed. But none of the one-man shows was successful, although a soloist from Slovenia, Slavko Sveticic, made a strong effort to pioneer a new line to the summit on the west side of Annapurna I. Two much lower peaks, Cheo Himal and the south summit of Hanging Glacier Peak, and also perhaps a third, Bhrikuti, had their first ascents, and, in perhaps this autumn's best climb, a big Soviet expedition succeeded in becoming the first to conquer the forbidding east ridge Cho Oyu.

The one-man teams were a varied lot. Sveticic, whose effort is described below, was the only true soloist amongst them; the others either engaged a few Sherpas to climb with them or went to busy routes on popular mountains where there were other teams and they were by no means alone. Two climbers, a Swiss on Cho Oyu, and a Spaniard on another 8000er, Dhaulagiri I, even went without the Nepalese authorities' permission, which all expeditions are legally obliged to have. The Spaniard, Antonio Martinez, was stopped before he had climbed very high on Dhaulagiri I by the government-appointed liaison officer with an authorized expedition and was taken to Kathmandu, where he was fined about \$1750. But the other, Jacob Reichen from Switzerland, succeeded in illegally crossing the Nepal-Tibetan border and going to Cho Oyu's summit in the company of a member of an international expedition, and no Chinese or Nepalese official interfered.

(Reichen was not the only climber to cross the border illegally in order to ascend Cho Oyu's easiest route. Three teams with Nepalese permits went over into Tibet and had no trouble with officials. In fact, the liaison officer assigned by the Nepalese government to one of these expeditions himself actually crossed over with his group and climbed as high as 7300 meters, while the foreigners went on to the summit.)

The six other loners were:

- The highly experienced Himalayan climber, Sergio Martini from Italy, who managed to reach an altitude of 8200 meters on Kangchenjunga, which towers a total of 8586 meters above sea level. He and two Nepalese helpers became too exhausted to complete the climb after a month's effort.

- A South Korean Buddhist monk, Rim Jong-Bum, was accompanied by five Sherpas to a high point of 7000 meters on 7525-meter Annapurna IV before strong winds forced a retreat.
- A month earlier, a Japanese economics student, Koichi Sugiyama, had made his own attempt on Annapurna IV with just one Sherpa. After reaching 6480 meters, he abandoned his climb because of frequent snowfall and other problems.
- A Swedish chiropractor, Magnus Lekman, and three Sherpas tried a new approach to an unclimbed ridge on Everest's neighbor, Nuptse (7855 meters). They gave up after only a few days when they found strong winds and route difficulties were preventing any progress above 6500 meters.
- Heinrich Buhr, a German engineer on an adventurous holiday, and two Sherpas had serious problems with the approach by which they tried to get onto Putha Hiunchuli, a western Nepalese peak of 7246 meters. They abandoned their attempt at only 5300 meters after they had exhausted their supply of rope for fixing their route.
- A British mining engineer named Jonathan Pratt attempted Everest without teammates or any Sherpas employed by him. But with eight expeditions on the same climbing route, he could hardly be alone; indeed he made use of other people's tents, ate their food and used their fixed ropes; he brought such meager resources with him to Everest that, according to a Sherpa, Pratt tried to borrow from him the equivalent of about \$3.50 to buy food in the nearest village. But he used no one's bottled oxygen. He twice tried to reach the summit in the company of other climbers and gained his highest altitude, about 7950 meters, with another Briton.

The most noteworthy of these one-member parties was Slavko Sveticic, a 33-year-old mountain guide from Cerknjo, in the Yugoslav republic of Slovenia, who neither used others' equipment nor climbed in their company. He was entirely alone on the west face of Annapurna I, which was the way he wanted to be. If he had been successful, he would have achieved the first solo ascent and the first ascent of it by a Yugoslav, and he would have pioneered a new line up the mountain to the left of the route successfully climbed by Reinhold Messner and his small team in the spring of 1985. But after four days of oxygen-less struggle against very strong, cold winds on a mixed rock and snow face sometimes at a steep angle of 55 degrees, with minimum nourishment and shelter at his bivouacs, he found he was climbing very slowly. On the fifth day fierce wind was blowing from the summit. "I was now very tired and my fingers and toes were very cold, so I stopped" at about 7900 meters and returned to his last bivouac site 200 meters below to get some rest, warm his fingers and toes and resume his ascent on the next day.

But the next day, 2 November, Sveticic was too tired and his toes were too cold for him to attempt the summit; "there was no wind, the weather was good to go to the top – but it was also good to go down. There were no clouds, it was possible to see the way." Down he went via a 300-meter traverse on the north face to the normal route,

which he had earlier ascended to 6450 meters to test his performance at high altitude. When he finally reached the site of his base camp on 3 November, he found no camp; most of it had been packed up and carried away by his base-camp staff and the liaison officer, who had gone to the nearest village where there was a police radio to report that he was missing. He spent a day resting at the base camp site, where he found that some of the less desirable food and a small supply of petrol had been left; he filled a bottle with petrol and with one of his last three matches lighted a string he used as a wick and kept this lighted all day and night so that he could do some cooking from time to time as he regained strength and warmed his feet. He then walked down into the villages with two frostbitten toes and sent a radio message to say he was alive and well.

Sveticic seemed to be of two minds whether to return to his west face and finish the climb, or whether, if he can raise funds for climbing, to go to the unclimbed west face of Makalu. "But first I need to have more training," he said. And on his next climb he will correct the mistakes he said he made: he will have better rest and food before starting his solo push, and he will carry a lighter load but take a walkie-talkie radio so others can know where he is.

The unclimbed Makalu west face was attempted this autumn by two Swiss mountain guides with excellent Himalayan credentials, Erhard Loretan, 32, from Fribourg, and Jean Troillet, 43, from Valais. But early in their climb they lost a substantial amount of equipment in an avalanche, and then, when they had reached 7800 meters, just below the practically vertical rock wall, which is the most difficult section of the face, Troillet's crampon broke into two pieces. They now decided the west face really didn't want them to climb it, so they returned to base and later went to the 8463-meter summit via the west pillar instead. But they are convinced that the west face can be conquered in a fast alpine-style ascent.

In their own attack on an unclimbed route, a Soviet team of 14 Russians, one Ukrainian and one Bashkir led by Sergei Efimov, 47-year-old physicist from Ekaterinburg (formerly Sverdlovsk), succeeded on Cho Oyu where in previous years Japanese, British, Polish, American and South Korean climbers had failed: they made the first successful climb of its formidable east ridge, which has a 70-meters-deep, 80-degree-steep rock gully at very high altitude. They overcame this great obstacle partly by making an extremely difficult traverse on a rock ledge on the Tibetan side.

On 20 October six members set out for the summit from their bivouac at 7900 meters on the western lip of the gully at 8:00 a.m. Climbing without artificial oxygen, three of them, Ivan Plotnikov, Eugeny Vinogradsky and Aleksander Yakovenko, gained the 8201-meter summit three hours later; two more, Valery Pershin and Sergei Bogomolov, were there nearly two hours later; while the sixth, Yuri Grebeniuk, turned back after reaching 8000 meters because his fingers were beginning to freeze and as a surgeon he wanted to keep them from being damaged. Tragically, next day during the party's descent from their bivouac, Grebeniuk was hit on the forehead by a falling stone while he was climbing up out of the gully; like all the summiters, he was not wearing a helmet. He received a deep wound and lived only a minute longer.

It was impossible for his teammates to carry his body down as far as their highest fixed camp at 6950 meters – by just moving his body to place it in his sleeping bag, Pershin got frostbitten fingers – so it was left on a shelf in the gully.

First ascents of two, possibly three, much lower peaks were recorded this autumn. The noted 50-year-old British mountaineer, Doug Scott, led the first ascent of the 6553-meter south summit of Hanging Glacier Peak (also known as Tripura Hiunchuli) in the first southern attack on the mountain, which is in a remote part of western Nepal. The south buttress that he, Nigel Porter, also British, and Miss Sharavati Prabhu, Indian, scaled was extremely difficult, he reported, and they had an unplanned, very cold bivouac without sleeping bags the night of the 28th of October after they had reached their summit.

The previously untrodden summit of 6820-meter Cheo Himal, which is north-northwest of Manaslu, was gained on 13 October by one Japanese, Shigeki Imoto, together with three Nepalese, Pasang Tshering Sherpa, Ful Bahadur Rai and Dambar Bahadur Gurung, who belonged to an expedition of climbers from Japan and the Nepalese police force. They climbed the south face to the southeast ridge despite frequent rock falls from the face; they fixed about 2500 meters of rope along their route.

There had been some question as to whether Bhrikuti, a 6364-meter mountain in the northern Mustang area, had been successfully climbed before a British-Nepalese team set out for it this autumn. Japanese claimed the first success in 1982 by three separate summit parties, but the leader of an unsuccessful French team four years later said he had seen their photos and was certain they had not reached the mountain's highest summit. In any case, it was not the British members of this season's party but three Sherpa members who say they went to the top on 22 October while all the Britons, who were feeling the effects of altitude, remained at base camp except for the doctor, who went to advance base.

On mighty Mount Everest, there were ten different parties, all but one of which did their climbing on the same standard South-Col route. But only two teams, one Spanish and one Soviet and American, were successful. Proof of success was nicely provided by one of four Spaniards, Rafael Vidaurre from Valencia: when they reached the summit on 6 October, he left there on the snow a small cross, and the following day it was retrieved by a Russian, Anatoli Bukreev.

Bukreev, 33, a mountaineering instructor from Alma-Ata, was one of two Russian climbers who had as their goal the establishment of a new Everest speed record by ascending the 3500 vertical meters from base camp to the summit and returning to base camp, all within 24 hours. The other was Vladimir Balyberdin, 42, from St. Petersburg, a mountaineering instructor and computer engineer, who was leader of their small team of six Soviets and three Americans. The speed record they hoped to break had been set by a French climber, Marc Batard, who at the age of 36 in September 1988 climbed from base camp to summit in 22 hours, 29 minutes.

Balyberdin originally had permission to scale Everest from an unclimbed route up the west ridge of neighboring Lhotse to its 8516-meter summit, down Lhotse's north ridge to the very high saddle between Everest and Lhotse known as the South

Col, from there up to Everest's summit and down its west ridge, a route in the shape of a horseshoe that will make Everest climbing history when it is done one day. Neither of these Lhotse ridges has ever been attempted and both are considered to involve very serious technical difficulties at great altitude. But Balyberdin changed his strategy and instead decided to attempt an unprecedentedly rapid climb via the much easier standard Everest route that leads more directly to the South Col.

First Balyberdin and Bukreev climbed to the summit of Everest on 7 October together in somewhat more conventional style although without the help of Nepalese Sherpas or the use of any bottled oxygen. Then they separately attempted to break Batard's record. Bukreev set out alone from base camp in his attempt at 5:00 p.m. on 12 October. He climbed through the night and managed to reach an altitude of 8300 meters at 8:00 the next morning before terrible winds forced him to retreat. He had made his ascent of 2950 vertical meters in just 15 hours. He was safely back at base 24 hours after he had left it.

Balyberdin took 17 hours on 17 October to cover the same distance. When he left base camp alone at 6:00 that morning, he actually intended to go only part way up and bring back a tent and other equipment. But when he saw how fine the weather was, he kept on going. However he was climbing without crampons, which he had not thought he would need when he set out from base camp. But when he reached 8300 meters at 11:00 that night, he found it was now impossible for him to go higher on very hard snow and in gusting winds without crampons. He stopped here, and with only a thin sleeping bag and wearing a thin down jacket, he spent the rest of the night in the snow waiting for daylight. He then descended, safe and well – with no frostbite.

"Maybe I will come again" for a one-day climb, Balyberdin said. "But first I must have one year's rest and think about it. It's possible [to make such a rapid ascent], but it's necessary to have good weather and good rest before trying. I had no good rest." He said Bukreev definitely wanted to try a speed climb again one day.

Amongst the teams which failed to reach the summit of Everest, a group of 10 Nepalese, four French and one Belgian led by Mrs. Pasang Lhamu Sherpa, the first Nepalese woman ever to lead a mountaineering venture, received considerable attention. Mrs. Sherpa is not a professional climber, but it is her ambition to become the first Nepalese woman to conquer Everest. Last year she was a member of an expedition to it led by Marc Batard, but she failed then and claims, despite his denials, that Batard had prevented her from trying for the summit. Now she had her own group with it clearly understood that she was going to the top if at all possible; her leadership duties were actually performed by her husband, who runs a trekking agency and has been an active mountaineer, and one of her Sherpa climbers. Some of the other teams on Everest this autumn say they were told by her men that she had first priority amongst all climbers for going to the top.

Most of the work making the route through the Khumbu Icefall, the treacherous jumble of ice blocks and crevasses that guards the base of the mountain, was performed by Sherpas employed by her team and a Spanish expedition. For their work in making the Icefall route, and for the ladders and other equipment they supplied to do it, these Sherpas demanded from other expeditions on Everest and two

on Lhotse some payment in cash or kind, preferably \$300 per foreign climber using the route. This was not the first time that those who established the Icefall route had asked for contributions from others, and as long as permits are granted to a number of teams to climb this route at the same time, it surely is not the last time. According to the leader of one of the other teams, Hans Eitel from Germany, four or five Sherpas were posted at the beginning of the route to stop those who had not paid from using it, and this may have been a new development.

“This situation is not good for climbing,” he commented angrily later; he said he gave \$1700 and 1000 meters of climbing rope which apparently was used to fix the route higher up. He was not the only person to object: the Russians, who were on a very tight budget, refused to pay and made their own Icefall route, which was dangerously close to avalanche-prone slopes. According to a Sherpa involved in making the general route, the Russians went their own way several times, then switched to the normal, safer route, wrapping up their faces so that no one could tell whether they were people who had paid or not.

Despite two summit bids, on both of which she used artificial oxygen, Mrs. Sherpa was not able to reach the summit. On her first attempt on 30 September she got all the way to the south summit, 8748 meters above the seas, in the company of several members of her group. Then they decided the wind was too strong to continue. On her next attempt, she got no higher than the last camp at 7900 meters.

She says she would like to try again if she can find the necessary funds, but these might not be available. Her Nepalese sponsors, principally a brewery and an ice cream maker, are unlikely to back her a second time, and the foreigners who were in her group were not enthusiastic about their experience. One French member said he had to sleep in a tent of another expedition at the last camp on the night of the 29th of September because he was told by other Nepalese on her team that there was no room for him in their tents. Mrs. Sherpa's husband explains that the Frenchman was supposed to be in the second summit-attack party, not the first. Perhaps Mrs. Sherpa will join some expedition organized by other people in 1993, he says.

Another unsuccessful Everest team this autumn was a predominantly French one organized by Denis Pivot, one member of which, Jean Michel Asselin, succeeded in reaching the south summit with Mrs. Sherpa and her Nepalese and French teammates. The Spaniards' leader, Juan Carlos Gomez, was bemused by Pivot's group, which he described as not really a team but a collection of individuals, each doing his own thing. Although he did not explicitly say so, he clearly had a different philosophy, and his party closely supported each other. An Australian climber commented in some amazement on how one Spaniard, Lorenzo Ortas, carried two oxygen bottles to 8500 meters, where he deposited them, not for his own use but for that of his teammates to enable them but not him to reach the summit. And Gomez did not quite arrive at the top because when he was only a few meters below it, he met Vidaurre, who had just left his cross there and was beginning his descent, but who was now almost blind from the wind blowing into his eyes. Vidaurre was weeping in his distress and begged Gomez to help him down; Gomez did not tell him to wait a

bit while he himself went to the summit not far off, but immediately abandoned his summit bid and helped his friend descend without any accident.

Unfortunately 13 autumn climbers did not descend safely. This number is a smaller-than-usual percentage of the 701 men and women who climbed, but with five of them Sherpas, the Nepalese percentage alone was high. As already recounted, a Russian on Cho Oyu, Yuri Grebeniuk, fell to his death while coming down from the summit. So too did Ari Gunnarsson, an Icelandic summiter on Everest's smaller neighbor, Pumori, and a successful Spaniard on Makalu, Manu Badiola. Another Makalu summiter, a Japanese, Takumi Ishizaka, apparently collapsed from exhaustion or altitude sickness or both while descending the fixed ropes and was found by a teammate frozen to death.

The remaining six deaths were caused by avalanching while summer monsoon weather lingered in the first month of the season, as it normally does. On 15 September, a French teenager, Brahim Saidi, and Gyalzen Sherpa accompanying him were struck by a small avalanche as they moved towards the summit, and next day their bodies were covered by more avalanching. Four days later high on Annapurna I's north face a massive slab avalanche took the lives of two South Koreans, Lee Song-Gu and Lee Seog-Jee, plus four Sherpas, Dawa Sange, Norbu Jangbu, Lhakpa Tendi and Tenzing. They perished only eight days after several tents had been destroyed at a middle-altitude camp and four days after three advanced base camp tents had been lost, in both cases due to the blasts of wind produced by avalanching which luckily caused no injuries to the climbers.

The 13th ill-fated climber was a Belgian who died in the season's most dramatic death: he completely and permanently disappeared. Gabriel Denamur, a 28-year-old computer programmer from Herbes-le-Chateau, was a member of one of two international expeditions led by Poles on the Bonington route up Annapurna I's huge steep south face; his team was led by Mieczyslaw Jarosz. Denamur and a Polish teammate, Kazimierz Stepien, who climbed without Sherpas or any supply of bottled oxygen, planned to go together to the summit from the last camp, camp 3 at 7300 meters, and they made an abortive attempt to do so on 19 October. The next morning Denamur started up again alone, and he was never seen again.

Stepien began his own ascent at about noon on the 20th, hours after Denamur had left camp 3, and did not see Denamur at any time. He lost the trail, darkness fell, he bivouacked at about 7700 meters in the hope of climbing the rest of the way to the summit on the 21st, but had to descend instead because he was beginning to suffer from high-altitude sickness. He was met that morning by the leader the other expedition, Krzysztof Wielicki, who himself was on his way to the summit. Wielicki found a line of fresh footprints in the snow ahead of him leading all the way to the top – and down the other side, the north face. Wielicki saw no other trace of Denamur, and members of his own team who followed him to the top on the 22nd and 23rd also discovered none.

Wielicki reported to Jarosz on the 21st that no one knew where Denamur was. When climbers go missing in Nepal, the general practice is to send out a search team, but assuming that other climbers were on the north face and hoping that Denamur



would reach them, Jarosz made no attempt to find out what had happened to him. His team's food supplies were running low, so they mounted no other summits attacks but instead started leaving the mountain; some of them had already left base camp on the 20th to return to Kathmandu, and the rest followed during the next ten days. They hoped Denamur was also making his way to Kathmandu.

But he was not. A Russian expedition was still on the north face when Denamur disappeared on the 20th, and two of their members went to the summit on the 24th. But they saw absolutely no sign that anyone had descended their route shortly before them – no ice ax, no rucksack, no tracks, no body. So what had become of him? Jarosz speculated that he had reached the summit during the night of the 20th/21st and made some fatal misstep in the dark that plunged him down into an area of the mountain where the Russians did not go. This possibility is perhaps supported by some footprints raised above the surface of the snow by wind scouring the snow around them; these were found by Sveticic west of the normal north-face route during his traverse from the west face on 2 November. But Sveticic saw no other trace of Denamur. The Belgian had not taken with him from camp 3 any sleeping bag, bivouac gear, extra food or cooking equipment. Whatever fate befell him, it is not likely that he would have long survived.

What was he doing on the north face in any case? Jarosz said he learned from teammates after his disappearance that before leaving Belgium to come to Nepal, Denamur met with a compatriot who has climbed in Nepal and who himself disappeared from an attempt on Everest in December 1982. This was Jean Bourgeois, who became famous as the man from Furfoos, Belgium, who wandered into Tibet alone from Everest and was presumed dead until he suddenly turned up at his teammates' hotel in Kathmandu. Bourgeois reportedly recommended to Denamur that he descend Annapurna's north face, which is an easier route. But would this route be easier for someone who has not climbed up it and thus is not familiar with it, and for someone with no bivouac equipment where there may be no camps to provide shelter or nourishment at the higher reaches of such a vast mountain, as indeed there was none when Denamur started down it? For Gabriel Denamur, the answer appears to be no.

A development that concerned a number of climbers who came back to Kathmandu and contemplated future mountaineering adventures in Nepal, was a sizeable increase in the fees that the Nepalese government charges for permission to climb its peaks. On 20 September the ministry of tourism announced that fees were being raised from the start of the spring 1992 season "in consideration of environmental conservation." A ministry official said this meant the government wants fewer climbers and their rubbish on Everest and the other very popular 8000-meter peaks. He cited the view of Sir Edmund Hillary, Everest's first conqueror, that Everest should be closed to all mountaineers for several years in order to give the mountain time to cleanse itself. The Nepalese authorities do not want to take such drastic action as this, but they would like to encourage climbers to go to peaks below 8000 meters, for which the fee increase was much less extreme than for those above this altitude. He also pointed out that Nepal had devalued its currency by about 20

percent in July, and the new rates were partly designed to make up for this. (The old rates had been fixed in Nepalese rupees.)

A member of a returning 6-member Spanish team that had just been on both Lhotse and neighboring Pumori, which is slightly over 7000 meters, observed that the new fee of \$8000 for Lhotse alone is equal to half of their total budget for this autumn's climb.

The leader of the Soviet Cho Oyu team that achieved the first success on Cho Oyu's east ridge, Sergei Efimov, said on his return to Kathmandu that he had previously applied for a permit to scale another 8000er, Dhaulagiri I, in the spring of 1993. But this permit would now cost \$8000 for a team of up to nine members, with an added charge of \$800 per additional member, and "I am afraid this is too much money. I may not be able to come." (The old fee was less than \$2000 with no fixed limit on a team's size.) And when Sergio Martini came back from his attempt on Kangchenjunga, he went to the tourism ministry to apply for permission to return next year and try again; when he learned that he would have to pay more than four times as much as he had this autumn, he did not put in an application. He said he could not find the financing for this alone, but he would try to find two or three friends who would join him and share the cost.

Whether the drastic increase in fees for the 8000ers will actually decrease the number of expeditions seeking to climb them is open to question. The obvious way to achieve this goal is simply for the ministry to stop granting so many permits. Otherwise it seems very likely that there will be a drop in the number of self-financed teams, but there could perhaps be an increase in the so-called commercial expeditions, which are organized for profit by adventure-travel agencies, mountaineering clubs and climbing schools. The commercial expeditions are joined by people who are strangers to each other so have never climbed together before, and sometimes they do not even speak the same language; they are led by professional mountain guides who are hired to take them climbing by standard routes. By contrast, the self-financed teams tend to be small groups of friends – or single individuals like Sveticic – who try difficult and unclimbed routes, often on little-known peaks that do not attract commercial organizers.

(There is actually a third source of expedition financing, and that is finding sponsors. But potential sponsors also are often not interested in unknown peaks, especially small ones. And there can be drawbacks to sponsorships: a French team on Dhaulagiri I this autumn received help from a television organization which quite reasonably required photographic coverage of the climb. The two team members who went for the summit did not quite arrive there, for they spent so much time taking pictures just below it that when they finished their photography that afternoon, they had to descend because the wind was rising and they wanted to be sure to be back in camp before nightfall. None of the members got so high again.)

Other results of the fee increase could be:

- The ministry's desired result, climbers turning to Nepal's lower, and thus less costly, peaks and search for more difficult unclimbed routes on them. Instead

of having to find \$8000 or \$10,000, they would need only \$1000 to \$3000, depending on their mountain's altitude. (The old rates for the "lesser" peaks ranged from about \$500 to \$1400.)

- Some mountaineers say they would go where the cost is lower. Said an American who was on Lhotse this autumn with just one teammate, "for a small two-man climb, I would look instead at Pakistan." Of course, it is possible Pakistan will follow Nepal's example and raise its own fees.
- There could be a rise in the number of people who climb in Nepal without getting official permission. When discovered, they are subject to fines and banishment from entering and/or climbing in Nepal for some years, as happened to Martinez this autumn, but often the Nepalese authorities do not know about such cases.

Only time will tell what the effects of the increase in fees for next spring will be.

## **Winter 1991-92: Perseverance on Everest**

### **Success Only on Two Much Smaller Peaks**

It was not an impressively successful season, but the winter of 1991-2 was a safe one. A South Korean expedition did achieve the first winter ascent of a peak just under 7000 meters, and throughout almost the entire period, a Japanese expedition on Mount Everest displayed extraordinary perseverance in attempting to make wintertime history on their enormous mountain.

The winter of 1991-2 saw only three successful teams in the Nepalese Himalaya amongst a total of 12, and all three successes, achieved by South Korean, Australian and Nepalese climbers, were on two relatively small – by Himalayan standards – peaks under 7000 meters, Ama Dablam, a neighbor of Mount Everest, and Dorje Lhakpa, north of Kathmandu. Only one giant 8000-meter mountain, Everest, was even attempted, and the two South Korean and one Japanese expeditions on it, who struggled against terrible winter winds at very high altitudes via three different routes, were never able to climb all the way to its 8848-meter summit.

The 16 Japanese climbers who were on Everest with 25 Nepalese Sherpas to help them, led by the Himalayan climbing veteran Kuniaki Yagihara, 45, a travel agency director from Maebashi city, had set as their goal the first winter ascent of their mountain's formidable, exposed southwest face. This vast wall rises approximately 2400 meters from its foot in the high valley known as the Western Cwm, and it has been successfully scaled only three times, by British, Nepalese, Soviet and Czechoslovak climbers from 1975 to 1988, all in milder spring and autumn weather.

“Before the expedition, I had three fears: the cold, the wind and falling stones, but only the wind was a big problem: not so much cold, not so much stonefall,” said Yagihara on return to Kathmandu after his team had spent three long months on the mountain. Although the low temperatures and falling stones did cause some slight injury – three members and a Sherpa suffered mild frostbite, and one member received a three-centimeter (slightly more than one-inch) cut on his cheek from a stone – it was the wind that defeated them. How strong was this force which halted four summit-attack parties at altitudes of about 8350 meters? The answer of the deputy leader, Yoshio Ogata, 43, from Tokyo, who is a staff member of the Himalayan Association of Japan, was not expressed in words but by a sound imitating the whoosh of a jet engine in full blast.

When Ogata and a 26-year-old teammate, Fumiaki Goto, made their expedition's first attempt to set up a tent for the fifth high-altitude camp at 8350 meters on 21 December, the wind broke their tent poles, forcing them to descend without having established the camp. They had managed to climb a small distance above the campsite to what turned out to be the team's highest point, 8370 meters, before retreating.

Camp 5 was at last pitched on 8 January, slept in that night and again on the 15th, and reached for the last time on 29 January by two out of five members who had set out from camp 4 that day. Each time the climbers were confronted by devastating winds forcing their retreat. A total of seven tents, including two down at base camp, were torn apart. Although the expedition had taken 14 tons of cargo to base, they were beginning to run out of tents, and, more seriously, the Sherpas were becoming sufficiently demoralized by the constant battering by the gales that they were unwilling to carry more supplies of oxygen up to camp 5 for still another summit attack, which the Japanese wanted to mount when the winds seemed to diminish on 9 February.

So instead of trying one last time for camp 5 and the summit, the expedition decided on 9 February to abandon their effort. They had been climbing since 16 November, when they began making their route immediately above base camp through the Khumbu Icefall, where seracs were frequently falling and four Sherpas had to be permanently assigned to the task of repairing the route every day. Will Yagihara and Ogata try again? "I cannot say," was the reply each man gave in Kathmandu.

The two Korean expeditions on Everest managed to climb higher than the Japanese. By a route up the south pillar to the southeast ridge, one Korean, Park Young-Seok, and a Nepalese named Bir Bahadur Tamang, reported they got to 8700 meters, almost to the south summit, on 14 December, before problems with their oxygen supply led them to decide that this, plus the cold and windy weather, meant they must descend. Their team gave up completely after a second summit attack on 20 December was halted by winds at 8300 meters. By the standard South Col route, one Korean, Song Jong-Gil, with Sherpas Chuldin Dorje and Kami Tshering, reached 8600 meters before the winds of the 20th stopped them too, and then this small team of only four Korean and eight Sherpa climbers also abandoned their climb.

Every climber on all the teams this winter left the mountains alive and, in most cases, well enough, although there was one case of frostbite that might cause one Korean Everester's losing the very ends of some toes. No fatalities in the winter were in very welcome contrast to the results of the autumn season, when 13 climbers died.

By Nepalese government rules, the winter climbing season runs from 1 December to 15 February. But this winter, by 2 January all the climbs were finished except for the efforts by the large Japanese team on Everest. In fact, except for one other expedition also, South Koreans on a peak near Annapurna called Fang, by 24 December every one of the winter expeditions had left their base camps to return home.

All 12 teams had arrived in Nepal early, before the end of November, half of them with high hopes for achieving first winter ascents. Of the nine peaks they were to assault, four of them, Fang, Roc Noir, Bhrikuti and Dorje Lhakpa, had never been attempted in any winter season and two more, Gangapurna and Himalchuli, had been attempted but not successfully scaled in winter. Furthermore, two of the three expeditions on Mount Everest were to climb routes by which it had never been

conquered in any winter, the south pillar as well as the southwest face; the summit has been reached only by one route, via the South Col, during a winter season.

Not only had the teams arrived in Nepal early, but some had also begun climbing before the official starting date. A Swiss party on their 6364-meter windswept mountain, Bhrikuti, on the Tibetan border, had even finished their very brief and unsuccessful climb before 1 December. If the teams had hoped that by starting early, they would avoid the fierce winter winds, they were sadly disappointed, as Romolo Nottaris's Bhrikuti climbers had discovered, and most left early without success. That only one-quarter of the season's teams reached their summits is a much poorer showing than the normal rate of success of about 40% per season.

In the end, just one peak saw its first successful winter ascent. A South Korean expedition of four members with two Nepalese Sherpa climbers, led by Song Ki-Bo from Buchun, managed the first winter ascent of Dorje Lhakpa. This first Korean bid to scale the 6966-meter mountain was crowned with success on 16 December, when Song, Jung Woo-Chang and Ang Kami Sherpa reached the summit via the standard west-ridge route.

South Korean climbers composed half of the 12 teams this winter, the first season in Nepal in which Koreans had constituted such a large percentage. And half of these had tried to accomplish first winter ascents, but those who went to two peaks of the Annapurna massif generally known as Fang and Roc Noir (officially named Vahar Shikhar and Khangsar Kang respectively) were defeated by the extreme difficulty of their chosen routes and on Fang by those fierce winds as well.

A safe but not very successful season.

## **Spring 1992: Some Have to Queue Patiently for Everest's Summit While Others Disappear on Different 8000ers**

The 12th of May, 1992, was a day of high drama in the Nepalese Himalaya. Not far below the summit of Everest, a queue of climbers from around the world – Dutchmen, Russians, Indians, Americans – waited for as long as an hour or more for their turn to follow New Zealanders, an Israeli, a Hong Kong Chinese and other Americans scaling the Hillary Step and standing at the top of the world. When the afternoon was over, an astonishing total of 32 persons had reached the highest point on earth. The same evening to the east on Kangchenjunga, the world's most experienced woman Himalayan mountaineer, Mrs. Wanda Rutkiewicz of Poland, was last seen alive as she bivouacked before her summit bid planned for the following morning; no one knows whether she perished that night or what happened to her later. And to the west on Dhaulagiri I, two Romanian women were perhaps being blown away in their tent on an exposed ridge; they had not been seen since the previous day and they, too, were never seen again.

Perhaps these three women, and others who also vanished during the spring, will be found one day and clues as to what happened to them may be revealed. The body of one of two Britons who have been missing on Everest for ten years, that of either Peter Boardman or Joe Tasker, was seen by Kazakh, Japanese and Nepalese climbers this May lying on its side high on Everest's northeast ridge on the Tibetan side of that vast border mountain.

Difficult technical climbing was undertaken by very few of this season's 447 climbers on 35 expeditions to 14 peaks in Nepal. However two extremely steep unclimbed faces were attempted. The east face of Jannu (also known as Khumbhakarna) leading to the mountain's 7468-meter east summit exhausted two Slovenes before they could complete a direct route to the east peak, but they were able to top out onto the southeast ridge. Vanja Furlan and Bojan Pockar made an alpine-style attempt in a single push to conquer the face directly up the middle, but after two days of continuous climbing and another day waiting out a storm, they moved diagonally to the ridge at 7100 meters and then descended, saying they were satisfied to have completed a climb of the face in this way.

The great west face of Makalu which had defeated three top-class alpinists a decade ago with its extreme difficulty at very high altitude, this season defied a well-publicized, massively-financed group of eight British climbing members and one Australian who made no attempt at a fast alpine-style climb but adopted the traditional siege tactics of Himalayan climbing. A British climber who was on another Makalu expedition via its normal route commented: "Nick Mason's expedition was well-organized, but they just didn't have the necessary depth of Himalayan experience. But they weren't "kamikaze," they admitted the face was too much for them, and they got off it without anyone getting hurt." They reached no higher than 7000 meters on the face, then tried to scale the normal route from the northwest and

managed to get to 8250 meters before newly falling snow and weariness caused them to turn back.

The deaths of Mrs. Wanda Rutkiewicz on the north face of Kangchenjunga (8586 meters) and of the two Romanians, Mrs. Taina Coliban and Mrs. Sandita Isaila, who climbed together on the normal northeast-ridge route up Dhaulagiri I (8167 meters), were strikingly similar in several ways. All three women from eastern Europe were fiercely determined to reach their summits. But they were over 40 years old, which is approaching old age for Himalayan climbers: Rutkiewicz was 49, Coliban 48 and Isaila 42. Perhaps because of their ages, they were extremely slow climbers. Despite this handicap, they had very few other climbers on their teams and in the end were attempting to reach their towering summits without companions, without artificial oxygen and with a minimum of climbing gear. Alone high on their two mountains with no means of communication, they simply failed to return to those who were waiting for them far below, and their fates are unknown.

Rutkiewicz had eight 8000-meter summits already to her credit: she was the only woman ever to have conquered more than four of the world's 8000ers; her first was Everest in 1978, when she became the first European woman and the third woman of any nation to conquer it. In recent years she had conceived the ambitious plan to bag all 14 of these giant mountains. Last autumn she hoped to finish them all this year; this spring she hoped to do the job by next spring. She even wanted to attempt a second 8000-meter peak also this spring, and her name was actually on the membership list of the Romanians' Dhaulagiri I team. This summer she was to be a member of an expedition to Broad Peak in the Karakoram.

Rutkiewicz was last seen alive shortly after 8:00 p.m. on 12 May. She and the Mexican leader of her Kangchenjunga team, Carlos Carsolio, had left their fourth high camp, camp 4 in an ice cave at 7900 meters on the north face, at 3:30 that morning in good weather. According to Carsolio, she was climbing even more slowly than usual, and he soon went far ahead of her despite the fact that he was having to break trail in deep snow while she could follow in his footsteps. "She was climbing extremely slowly," Carsolio reported later. "Maybe it was because of her age, maybe because of her leg," which she had injured while climbing another 8000er a decade or more ago and which had given her trouble when she conquered Annapurna I last autumn. She had said just before going to Kangchenjunga, "I will not be very quick. I don't want to take risks. I have a lot of respect for Kangchenjunga," which she had attempted before from the southwest side.

Carsolio reached the top alone at 5:00 p.m., the first Latin American ever to gain Kangchenjunga's summit, and during his descent to camp 4, he met Rutkiewicz three hours later at 8250 or 8300 meters. She was inside a wind hole, a kind of cave carved out of the snow by the wind, where she had stopped to bivouac an hour and a half earlier. "It was good protection for her," said Carsolio. "It was a very cold night but clear and not windy." She told him she was cold, that her old down suit was not warm enough, and she had her bivouac sack around her. She had no sleeping bag, stove, fuel or food, and she had taken from camp 4 that morning only a liter of water. (As Carsolio later pointed out, "without enough to drink, you cannot survive. Also she



was very tired.”) She did have a headlamp and extra batteries, 20 meters of rope, extra gloves, extra goggles and perhaps some sweets.

She planned to go for the summit next morning, she told Carsolio, and “she showed in her eyes her determination to reach the summit,” he said. “I think she felt this was her last chance to climb Kangchenjunga.” He told her he was going to camp 4 for the night and would then descend to camp 2 at 6890 meters and wait for her there; there was no food or fuel left in camp 4. They were together for perhaps ten minutes, and she was clear mentally.

Then Carsolio went on down, never to see or hear from her again. A member at a lower camp watched the mountain on the 13th, the day she should have gone for the summit, and saw no movement by her that day. But she could have left her bivouac during the dark early morning hours and would have been out of sight when she reached an altitude of 8400 meters.

Carsolio left camp 4 at noon on the 13th and spent that night and two more nights at camp 2 waiting for Rutkiewicz. On the 14th the weather turned bad with high winds driving heavy snow. When she had failed to appear at camp 2 by the morning of the 16th, he left for base camp, leaving behind at camp 2 a tent, sleeping bag, walkie-talkie radio (one of only two they had with them, the other was at base), food, gas and a thermos of water. At base camp he and two teammates, who had been unwell and unable to go for the summit, had the other walkie-talkie open all the time, but no sound came from it. The three remaining members finally left base camp in very bad weather on 21 May with no idea as to what had happened to Rutkiewicz.

“It was very difficult for us to leave the mountain,” Carsolio said in Kathmandu, “but I am sure that she cannot have survived because of the bad weather and because she was extremely tired and without drink.” These factors he felt counteracted the fact that “she was very good at surviving at high altitudes,” had endured the fatal drama on K-2 in 1986, and that on Kangchenjunga she had had no problems with altitude sickness, nor had she succumbed to frostbite in April when two Mexican teammates whom she and Carsolio were with did get seriously frostbitten and had to go home for medical treatment.

“I have no idea what happened to her,” Carsolio said. “Maybe she reached the summit and then fell. Maybe she died during the night of the 12th and never made it to the summit. Maybe she went to the summit and tried to descend the other side” which she had been on a year ago. And perhaps she simply collapsed somewhere high on this vast mountain, alone, without shelter and without the strength to go one step farther.

“It is a very sad loss for all of us and for the mountaineering world,” said Carsolio. “She was a safe climber, but she was extremely slow. But on Kangchenjunga, the wind changes, the snow comes and you have to be fast.” She told Carsolio that she was climbing three times more slowly than she had climbed on Everest. And on Everest she had been only 35 years old and using bottled oxygen, whereas now she was 49 and had not been climbing with artificial oxygen for several years. She now remarked to Carsolio that she must finish all the 8000ers quickly before she became even slower.

Was Rutkiewicz's disappearance a tragic case of ambition outstripping physical abilities? And was it the same on Dhaulagiri I for Coliban and Isaila, who also had been climbing extremely slowly, according to others who watched them? The Romanians did not have Rutkiewicz's great experience in the Himalaya. Coliban had climbed in Nepal once, seven years ago, at which time she made a brief attempt on Dhaulagiri I, and both Romanian women had successfully scaled a much lower peak, 6995-meter Khan Tengri in the Tien Shan range of the Kirgiz-Chinese border area, in 1990. Perhaps they now made some fatal error of judgement during their climb. Or, since their equipment was not the best, according to their Sherpa, he thinks perhaps their inadequate tent pegs could not hold their small tent securely against fierce winds while they were inside it, and it and they were blown off the ridge and down the mountainside.

They had not intended to climb alone, had hoped to add themselves to someone else's expedition to an 8000-meter mountain (like Rutkiewicz had done) but they had been unable to find a team they could join and so took a permit of their own for Dhaulagiri I, put the names of Rutkiewicz and the young Polish man with her on Kangchenjunga on their membership list and added a Chilean, who started out with them but was able to climb only a short distance above base camp before he became ill, gave up the effort and left their base some days before they went missing.

Coliban and Isaila were last seen at about midday on 11 May. Their Sherpa, Kaji, who had been helping them carry up supplies at the start of their climb, had been asked to stay at base camp while they went for the summit as quickly as possible, and he watched from there as well as he could without binoculars. Every day during this period the mornings were clear while the afternoons brought some clouds and light snowfall. On the 11th he saw them at about 6500 meters climbing up a snow ridge. Above them at 7000 meters was their next expected camping site, which was exposed to the wind. The site was visible from base camp, but Kaji never saw their tent there, so he does not know whether they reached it that day or any other day. He scanned the ridge day after day but never again saw any sign of them, and they had no radio communication. Then came a change in the weather with a big snowstorm on the 23rd. He finally struck base camp on 29 May, taking their personal belongings with him back to Kathmandu but leaving some food and fuel just in case they miraculously got down to base.

No one vanished on Nepal's side of Everest, but the scene was not one of unmitigated joy at all the summit successes. Four men died. The base camp area was crowded with 268 climbers plus their base-camp staffs belonging to an unprecedented total of 13 expeditions. One team, the British Joint Services Everest Expedition of mostly British army men, acted as mediator amongst the others from time to time and early on suggested areas where teams should sleep, where the toilets should be, and where a path should run between the various expeditions. This last suggestion was made after Spaniards and Dutchmen threw stones at each other for walking through their camps.

American and New Zealand expedition leaders complained about Russians pushing ahead of them on a climbing route the Russians had no permit for, and doing

so in violation of their repeated promises to wait briefly for those who did have a permit to move up first, and in contravention of the Nepalese authorities' instructions to stick to their own more difficult route; the result of this conflict was that eight Russian summiters and their leader were banned from entering Nepal again within five years. Russians complained that the American and New Zealand leaders were making large profits conducting incompetent clients whom they had charged US\$35,000 each, that this was merely business, not mountaineering, and the American leader was no gentleman in the language he used. The British made a formal complaint about a Czechoslovak who "was wandering all over the mountain; he asked if he could climb up our ropes [to the west shoulder], I said no and he came up anyway." A New Zealander, whose commercial expedition caused much of the long delay for others having to wait their turn to ascend the Hillary Step, complained of "the most frightening time of my life" when he was descending the Step and Indians, who were roped together but to nothing else while coming up it and one of whom kept slipping, were grabbing him for a hand hold "and I could see myself falling down the southwest face tied to four Indians." A Chilean who reached the summit from the Nepalese side complained of the rudeness of Chileans whom he met at the top. They had come from the Tibetan side and greeted him with epithets (fascist, thief and unprintable) instead of a friendly welcome; he had been ready to congratulate his compatriots, the first South Americans to the summit and only the second successful team on their climbing route, the steep east face to the South Col.

A general complaint by well-organized, well-financed and well-equipped teams was that others climbed on their backs. The wandering Czechoslovak, Russians, French expedition members and a Briton who was not really anyone's team member were mentioned as climbers who would never have made any progress on the mountain, and some of whom would have perished, if others had not been there to aid them. There were charges that the Russians helped themselves to other people's food and tents; a Dutch climber refused entry to his small tent at 7200 meters during a storm to a Russian who said he couldn't find his tent at that camp when, the Dutchman said later, there was no Russian tent at the camp, and he had no idea what became of the Russian. (An American took the Russian into his tent.) When a Frenchman became extremely seriously ill because of high altitude, his radio-less team's leader asked the British to send word down to base camp on their radio, and to supply his oxygen-less team with three very expensive bottles of oxygen, medicines, a stretcher and much of the manpower needed to carry the sick man through the exceedingly difficult Khumbu Icefall to base camp. The British reckoned that only about five of the 13 parties on the mountain were truly equipped for the task.

All except one of this spring's summiters used artificial oxygen. The exception was Ang Rita Sherpa, who went to the top on 15 May in his record-breaking seventh ascent of Everest and who says he has never used oxygen on the mountain. All but one the eight successful teams from Nepal climbed by way of the standard route up the west face of neighboring Lhotse to the South Col, the high saddle that separates Lhotse from Everest, and finally up Everest's southeast ridge. The team that did not follow the normal route was a group of Spaniards, mostly army men, who peacefully

(they were not the stone throwers) and happily climbed alone up the south pillar, joined the southeast ridge above what they are calling the south corridor to the right of the pillar, and sent three Spaniards and two Nepalese to the summit on the last successful day, 15 May, when altogether 19 climbers went to the summit. (The only other team on Nepal's side not to attempt the standard route were the British, who valiantly battled the winds of the west ridge-north face route, a route that has been climbed to the top by only six of the 37 expeditions who have tried it since 1963. The British gave up at 8500 meters on the 18th.)

There has been considerable comment on the massive numbers of participants – some of whom, from the Russian and an unsuccessful Indian expedition, were not even on their teams' membership lists approved by the Nepalese authorities. An Italian visitor to Everest base camp said it was difficult to move amongst the tents at what looked like a fairground. An Indian watching the New Zealand-led 14-strong successful summit party going towards the top of the world on 12 May said later that they looked like a picnic party.

The day of the 14 summiters' success saw a grand total of 32 people from five expeditions atop Everest between 10:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.: six Americans, four Russians, three Indians (including one woman), three New Zealanders, two Dutchmen, the first Belgian woman, the first Israeli, the first Hong Kong Chinese and 11 Nepalese, who were there chiefly to help the foreigners. The largest number of Everest summiters in any previous season was 31 on four different days in October 1990. This season altogether 55 people reached the summit, also on four days, from the Nepalese side, while three more climbed to the top from Tibet. These numbers of successful climbers compare with earlier totals as follows:

- 28 individual ascents of Everest from 29 May, 1953, until 20 years later, when a huge Italian expedition began sending eight men to the top in May 1973.
- 55 individual ascents from 1953 to and including May 1976, when two Britons made the 54th and 55th ascents.
- 58 individual ascents from 1953 to September 1977, when a South Korean and his Sherpa made the 58th and 59th ascents.

(The term "individual ascents" adds up all the ascents by men who summited more than once.)

The 55 Everest summiters were 20% of the 268 climbers on the Nepalese side of the mountain and comprised two-thirds of the 83 men and women who successfully scaled any mountain in Nepal during the season. The 268 Everest climbers were 60% of all climbers on all Nepalese mountains this spring.

The Everest summit figures assume that all claims were correct. This spring doubts were expressed on whether four Russians went to the summit on the 14th, a day when the weather was not good, but others including Americans are confident that they did. (A claim by the Russians that they had at first attempted to climb their assigned route, the southwest face, was however greeted with nearly universal disbelief amongst other teams.) And others wondered whether a party of three

Indians had really managed to get all the way to the main summit on the 10th, another day of bad weather; they stoutly assert they did.

So, counting all claims of success, 32 went to the summit on one day, 58 over four summit days. The very first summiter, Sir Edmund Hillary, has been asked several times what he thought of these large numbers, which have brought the overall totals to 399 summiters in 453 ascents. He was quoted in *The Times* of London of 13 May as observing that "It is becoming so that you can go to the beach for your holidays or climb Everest. It is becoming a routine thing to do. I remember the brisk wind and the view. I am just glad that I climbed it then and didn't have to jostle my way through this large group" waiting their turn on 12 May. Several weeks later, according to the Associated Press, he told reporters in London, "What's happening to the sense of remoteness and adventure? Tenzing and I didn't have to jostle anyone. ... I do not like the business of paying \$35,000 to be conducted to the top of Everest." It seems he would agree with the Russians on this last point.

Another negative is, of course, the four lives that were lost, although the toll was very small for such a large number of people. Two members of an unsuccessful and somewhat disorganized and under-financed Indian expedition, their leader Deepak Kulkarni and Raymond Jacob, died of exhaustion and exposure after they had failed to reach the shelter of their highest camp at the South Col. They had been climbing extremely slowly through snow and winds during the day and into the night of 1 May. They were discovered the next morning, barely alive. Jacob was found lying in the snow perhaps 30 meters from their camp; Kulkarni was hanging on the fixed ropes a bit farther down.

For the other Indian team, a well-organized group from the Indo-Tibetan Border Police, all went very well, with summit successes on two different days, until the last day they were descending to base camp. Then an Indian who had been a cook at camp 2 and had helped carry supply loads, Sher Singh, who was not a climber, slipped on a tilting ladder about 20 meters from the bottom of the Khumbu Icefall. He had a nylon sling tied around his waist that he had attached to the safety rope along the ladder, and when he fell, it pulled tight like a noose, ruptured his kidney and broke his back.

The fourth man to die with an Everest expedition on the Nepalese side was a 43-year-old Nepalese, Subba Singh Tamang, who was cook at base camp for a Spanish team. He never went above base but suffered a fatal heart attack.

There was also a death on one of three unsuccessful groups on the Tibetan side of Everest. A joint Japanese-Kazakh team, attempting to be the first climbers to succeed in reaching the summit by way of the northeast ridge, lost a Japanese member, Manabu Hoshi. He disappeared on 23 May, and it is thought he may have slipped down the west side of the northeast ridge; his ice axe, jumar and rucksack were found at 8350 meters but his body was not seen.

Another body, however, was seen on the northeast ridge by this team. It was at about 8250 meters and has been described as that of a large person lying peacefully on his side with one hand under his cheek. Near him were various possessions including a book with Chris Bonington's name inscribed in it and a diary with entries

in May 1982. It was in May 1982 that two Britons on Bonington's small expedition, Peter Boardman and Joe Tasker, were going for the summit in the first attempt ever made on Everest's northeast ridge. They disappeared high on the mountain, and no one had any idea of what happened to them. In the summer of 1988 two climbers from Britain and New Zealand reached the altitude where the body has now been found and indeed went higher, but they saw no sign of anyone in the deep monsoon snow. This spring the winds were especially fierce on the north side, and they could have blown all the snow away.

One of the Kazakhs took photos of the body and retrieved the diary and the book; perhaps the Boardman and Tasker families will soon be able to know whose son has been found. (No one else died nearly so high on the northeast ridge, and the body of the only other climber who did die on an expedition to this route was cremated.) The next questions are obviously where is the other body, and why is the one that has been found lying there in a relaxed position? One explanation would seem to be that they had bivouacked here, which would mean they would have been unroped, and the other body is still lying nearby waiting also to be discovered by future passing mountaineers.

Other bodies to be found perhaps one day are those of three South Koreans and a Nepalese, who succeeded on Everest's neighbor, Pumori (7161 meters) by its seldom climbed southwest ridge, returned to their high camp, and then vanished. When a teammate and a Sherpa went up to learn what had become of them, it was found that an avalanche had swept the high camp completely away: the only thing remaining at its site was one left-hand glove lying on the snow.

Pumori, like Everest, is on the Nepalese-Tibetan border, and early this year the Tibet Mountaineering Association revealed that this mountain, which the TMA spells Phumari, is one of 22 Tibetan peaks newly opened for foreigners to climb. Three other border mountains are also now open: two 8000ers, Makalu and Lhotse, and Tashe Tseringma, which is 7134 meters and is called Gaurishankar in Nepal. None of these four was attempted directly from Tibet, but in 1964 Britons were on Gaurishankar from Nepal and went around onto its north face, from which they retreated following two dangerous avalanches. Six decades ago a French team was granted permission by the government in Lhasa to climb Makalu in 1934, but no attempt was actually made. Mountaineers who have seen Makalu from the north believe there are some good lines up it, but Lhotse's northeastern flanks are notorious for the avalanching that pours down to the Kangschung Glacier, and Pumori's northeast face is reported to be very dangerous because of seracs and hanging glaciers. Another consideration for interested climbers is the "registration fee" for permission to climb these newly opened peaks: between \$27,000 and \$41,000 for Makalu and Lhotse, \$13,500 to \$27,000 for Pumori and Tashe Tseringma/Gaurishankar.

## **Autumn 1992: A Noted French Climber Plunges to His Death**

### **Attempts at New Lines on Great Faces Fail**

Last spring the foremost woman Himalayan climber, Wanda Rutkiewicz of Poland, perished in the Nepalese mountains; this autumn it was one of France's outstanding men of the Himalaya, Pierre Beghin, who tragically died on another giant Nepalese peak. Also this season, a Japanese expedition concluded that in their ascent of Himlung Himal they had made its first ascent, whereas all previous Himlung teams had actually been on another peak. Otherwise there were few notable successful climbs by the 526 foreigners from 28 countries and 176 Nepalese who went on 68 expeditions to 23 Nepalese peaks. Half of the teams did succeed in reaching their summits, a good rate of success in Nepal, but very nearly all did so via standard routes in routine fashion.

There were non-routine attempts to forge new routes on several of the big faces, but all were unsuccessful, and one never actually got underway. In a tragic drama on Annapurna I, Pierre Beghin, who was 41 years old, was killed apparently when he his rappel rope failed him and he plunged down the formidable south face of Annapurna I, on 11 October. Beghin had been attempting an alpine-style ascent of the great face by a new line slightly to the right (east) of the 1970 Bonington route with just one other climber, a younger Frenchman, Jean-Christophe Lafaille, 27, who lacked Beghin's vast Himalayan experience but is well-known for his own impressive technical skills.

On the 11th of October the two Frenchmen had gotten to the top of a very difficult rock section at 7400 meters. They then decided that the weather – “a lot of snow, a lot of wind,” as Lafaille described it – had become too bad to continue on upwards, and they began to descend with Beghin in the lead. They had no fixed rope or pitons with them but were using rope to rappel down. When he was at about 7100 meters, Beghin's rope came away, perhaps because the “friend” he was using to hold his rope was too small. Whatever the cause was, Lafaille knew immediately what the result must be: “it is not possible to live if you fall on this face.” Beghin must have tumbled at least 1000 meters, probably nearly 2000 meters, down the face; his body has not been seen, but it is thought to be somewhere amongst the crevasses and deep snow of the glacier at the bottom.

Lafaille's solo descent after that was an epic in itself. He made a very uncomfortable bivouac at 7000 meters for two nights and a day while waiting for improved weather; there was scarcely enough space in which to sit on ice-covered rock, and he had to wear his helmet all the time because of falling stones. Indeed on the 13th, when he was just 30 meters above his next bivouac site, a falling rock struck his right forearm and broke it in two places. He stayed here, at 6500 meters, for a night and a day, then resumed his descent at night in order to expose himself as little as possible to more falling stones.

When at last Lafaille reached their advance base camp on the glacier at the foot of the face at 5330 meters, he found that their tent had been crushed by the recent heavy snowfall, and there was no haven for him here. He had to keep moving, going down and across the difficult glacial terrain in bad snow conditions. He wearily managed on the afternoon of the 15th to get himself to the base camp of a Slovene expedition, led by Tone Skarja, who were unsuccessfully attempting the Bonington route on the face, and here a doctor gave him a shot of morphine and put his arm in a splint. For three days a helicopter tried to fly him out from the Slovenes' camp but was prevented from doing so by rain falling at lower altitudes en route, and only on the third day could it get there and evacuate him to Kathmandu. Except for his injured arm and fatigue from his ordeal, Lafaille was in good health.

"Pierre was the best Himalayan climber from France," Lafaille said on his return to Kathmandu. "He had very good experience. We were a good cocktail of his experience and my technique." In Beghin's remarkable Himalayan climbing career, he had no use for big expeditions on standard routes employing the traditional style of fixed camps, teams of load-carrying Sherpas and supplies of bottled oxygen. Instead he attacked difficult routes with just one or two other teammates in alpine style. At the beginning of his account in the 1992 *American Alpine Journal* of his ascent of a new line up K-2 with another French climber, Christophe Profit, Beghin wrote about the kind of adventure he loved: "a simple rope team for days and days without logistical support striving with incertitude towards a summit, a goal with real meaning. What is the purpose of setting out with ten or 15 climbers on that kind of objective while uncoiling kilometers of fixed rope? Today, when our technology lets us explore space, the conquest of the great walls of our planet is interesting only if done 'by fair means'."

Annapurna I would have been Beghin's sixth conquest of an 8000-meter mountain if he had reached its summit. His first 8000-meter success was on Manaslu in October 1981, his last was the ascent of K-2 in August 1991, and in between he succeeded on three others: Kangchenjunga in October 1983 in the only truly solo ascent that anyone has ever made, Dhaulagiri I in the following October, and Makalu in October 1989. Only 15 other people have ever reached the summits of five or more of the world's 14 mountains that tower over 8000-meters, and very few of them have scaled so many of these giants as he had without using artificial oxygen.

Another new line up a formidable Himalayan face was to have been climbed on the east face of Jannu (or Khumbhakarna, as it is now officially known) in the Kangchenjunga region. A six-man Slovenian team, led by Dusan Debelak, were confident that they would pioneer a new, direct route to Jannu's 7468-meter east summit in the first ascent of this untrodden eastern peak. Amongst the most confident was Damjan Vidmar, 31, one of Slovenia's most promising alpinists. But when they were still on their approach march to base camp, Vidmar was swept to his death while bathing in a monsoon-swollen river. His teammates made no attempt to go on to climb their mountain.

This autumn on Mount Everest, 32 men (but no women) gained the highest point on earth, 8848 meters above the seas, but all of them made their conquests via



the standard South Col-southeast ridge route. On the huge, steep southwest face, which so far has been successfully scaled by only three expeditions, this autumn a team led by Mikhail Turkevitch, who had already climbed the face in 1982, and composed of 10 Ukrainian, 3 Russian and 2 French climbers (including Christophe Profit, who had been with Beghin on K-2), with no Nepalese Sherpas helping to carry loads of food, tents and other gear up the mountain and with no climbing oxygen, wanted to make a new route directly up the center of the face straight to the summit. But they were somewhat late getting started and after two weeks of climbing reluctantly concluded that they would not be able to open a new line in the time and with the resources they had. They decided instead to attempt to repeat the British 1975 route, and after nearly two more weeks of the team's efforts, three Ukrainians together reached 8500 meters before two of them became frostbitten and had to descend.

The remaining man, Igor Svergun, 26, stayed high on the face alone, and the day after his teammates had gone down, he made a solo bid for the summit. Just exactly how high he reached he doesn't know, for it was a dark night and his head lamp batteries were dead when he stopped ascending, and without artificial oxygen he had become confused. He surely got to the south summit of Everest, which is 8748 meters, and by his description of the area where he had to stop because he was confronted by a very steep wall with a lot of fixed ropes, he may well have reached the Hillary Step, which is not far below the main summit. Wherever he was, he waited for the moon to rise and give him light, too confused to remember that it was the time of a new moon. After three or four hours' wait, a very strong wind blew up, and he decided he had to go back down.

By the time he had gotten down to the highest camp at 8300 meters, he could scarcely breathe; perhaps he had developed a serious case of pulmonary altitude sickness. Luckily slightly above this camp, he had found a large bottle of some other expedition's oxygen, and without any oxygen mask or other equipment, he simply opened the valve and breathed in pure oxygen in gulps. He continued his descent with the bottle on a rope, from time to time taking more gulps from it, and in a period of 24 hours through the day and night he climbed down from the highest camp to the camp at the bottom of the face at 6400 meters. Even then he didn't stop for very many hours: he and his bottle, "like a woman with her dog on a leash," went on downward with the bottle sliding before him through the Khumbu Icefall, helping him to avoid crevasses as well as continuing to supply him with occasional bursts of oxygen. By the time he finally got to base camp, he was in remarkably good condition considering all he had been through during three very long days in very difficult circumstances.

Amongst the 32 climbers who did succeed on Everest were some who achieved personal "firsts": Eugene Berger became the first Luxembourger ever to stand atop Everest, and Augusto Ortega was the first Peruvian. However, other planned firsts were not accomplished. Marc Batard of France did not succeed in becoming the first person ever to sleep at the top of the world – he didn't actually manage to reach the top. (If he had, it would have been his third time there.) A Nepalese, Iman Gurung, became ill half way up the mountain and did not realize his ambition of setting a new

speed record by climbing from base camp to summit in just 20 hours. This left still standing Batard's record ascent of Everest in 22 hours and 29 minutes four years ago. Even the total of 32 people to the summit from 25 September to 9 October was not a record; that many climbers made their way to the top on just one day last May.

Only two others of Nepal's eight 8000-meter mountains were successfully climbed, both by their normal routes. One of these was Manaslu and here there is a question as to how many people actually did reach its summit. Two expeditions, one from South Korea and the other composed of climbers from Poland, Italy, Bulgaria and Belgium, reported summit successes via the northeast face by a Korean and his Sherpa on 25 September and one Pole and two Italians three days later. The Pole, Krzysztof Wielicki, a highly experienced Himalayan climber with eight 8000-meter summits (including Manaslu by a different route in 1984) to his credit, said on his return to Kathmandu two weeks after the Koreans that he and his Italian summit companions in their final day's ascent followed the Koreans' footprints until their tracks stopped at one of Manaslu's several peaks that are 50-80 meters lower than the highest point. He claimed that in clear weather, which both expedition's summiters enjoyed, one can easily see which is the very highest place, and that he and his friends saw and photographed the Koreans' trail end about 150 meters short of it. So was this a case of a very high summit reached – but not the highest summit?

The other 8000er conquered this season was Cho Oyu, and it was not actually scaled from the Nepalese side at all but was successfully assaulted by three teams from Spain who had Nepalese permits but who crossed Nepal's unpatrolled northern border and climbed it by the easiest route, which is inside Tibet. But unauthorized border-crossing has its drawbacks, for when two Spanish Basque summiters became severely frostbitten, it was not possible to summon a helicopter to evacuate them immediately to Kathmandu since no helicopter is allowed to cross from Nepal into Tibet. The frostbite victims had to be carried by teammates and compatriots to the Nepalese side of the huge mountain, an effort that took several days, and this meant that some of their Catalan rescuers did not go back to make their own bids for Cho Oyu's summit. No lives were actually threatened by this delay in evacuation, but it is easy to imagine a scenario in which a life could be lost because of it.

The loss of climbers' lives this autumn was mercifully very low. In addition to Pierre Beghin of France, only five others, two Italians, two Belgians and a Pole, died while climbing in the Nepalese Himalaya, making an unusually low percentage of just 0.9% of the season's total of 702 men and women. But besides them, two mountaineers died while they were still enroute to their base camps. The Slovenian climber on his way to Jannu has been mentioned above. The other was only 19 years old, a member of a South Korean team to Pumori who became fatally ill, apparently a victim of altitude sickness, a day or two short of base camp. His teammates went on to attempt their peak, but their hearts were not in the climb, and they abandoned the effort soon after it had begun.

Himlung is a 7126-meter peak northwest of Manaslu very near the Tibetan border. This autumn a Japanese expedition was the tenth ever to go to Himlung; of their nine predecessors, only one, also Japanese, who were there in 1983, reported

that they had been successful. But when this season's Japanese returned to Kathmandu, their leader, Yukio Niwa, said he was "99% sure" that his own team, who had climbed with no great difficulty on their west-ridge route, had made the very first ascents of Himlung on 3 and 6 October. He was convinced that all previous climbs had actually taken place on another mountain just to its south, Nemjung (7140 meters). He pointed out that the map coordinates assigned to Himlung by the Nepalese government correspond on the best Nepalese map of the region to those of the northern of these two mountains, not the southern one, labeled Nemjung, which Niwa believes all those before him had been on.

A British team also had a permit for Himlung this autumn and arrived at their base camp more than two weeks after the Japanese had left theirs. When the British came back to Kathmandu, their leader, Peter Hudd, readily agreed that Niwa could well be correct: "The Japanese probably have a fair claim" to having been first atop Himlung, even first anywhere on the mountain, he said. His party unsuccessfully attacked the southern peak knowing that it was called Nemjung on the map because previous expeditions' reports "were the only information we had. ... There is no reason why the map should be wrong."

Two physically handicapped men were members of climbing expeditions this autumn. A legally blind Briton, John Mitchell, 34, aimed to make the first ascent of any 7000-meter mountain by a sight-impaired person in his ascent of Makalu II, but he did not even arrive at his expedition's base camp because of illness. Nonetheless, he asserted on his return to Kathmandu that he still intended to proceed with his plans to climb Everest next year. Michael Galbraith, a 47-year-old Canadian who wears a leg brace because of the progress of his case of the frequently fatal disease multiple sclerosis, gamely made his way to an altitude of about 5500 meters, which was just below the first of a series of high-altitude camps set up by the team of which he was leader in their attempt to scale Manaslu. He at least had never expected to gain his 8000-meter summit, and before he went to the mountain he said he thought this might be his last climb.

There are many who question the wisdom of handicapped people coming to climb in the Nepalese Himalaya, where the mountains are remote and their altitudes very high, where these slower-moving people may have to make unusually lengthy assaults and where rescues can be exceedingly difficult, slow and costly. One man involved with Mitchell's group, none of whom got to the top of Makalu II, was highly critical of what he felt was over-zealous promotion by its commercial organizers. "Mitchell would never have been able to make it up the mountain," he said, "but the organizers told him he could."

This critic's condemnation applied to the Makalu II organizers' entire sales promotion of the climb. He claimed that "the whole group were sold short; it was a commercial rip-off." Another criticism of some of the guided, commercially organized expeditions this autumn was the fact that in several cases it was the guides, but not the clients, who reached the summits of Everest and lesser peaks. "The clients put up the money and the guides made the conquests," was the complaint, although this was certainly not true of all the commercial efforts.

To climb Everest undoubtedly requires considerable financing. According to their Kathmandu representatives, a large Italian expedition paid \$39,200 to the Nepalese government just in royalty fees for permission, at first, to climb via the seldom used south-pillar route, and then later, when they wanted to change routes, for half the members to change over to the normal South Col route. Another expense is making and keeping open the route through the dangerous, ever-shifting Khumbu Icefall, and this autumn a Kathmandu trekking agency undertook to establish and maintain this section of the climbing route for all of the season's nine expeditions. The charge for this service was \$20,000, which was divided amongst the teams at the rate of over \$200 per foreigner.

The cost of climbing Everest will go steeply up again in the autumn of 1993. Last July the Nepalese government announced that "taking into consideration the pressure on the environment of the Khumbu region [where Everest is located] and to lessen pressure in the area and to conserve the environment," the royalty for Everest starting in September 1993 will be increased to \$50,000 for a team of up to five members, there will be an additional charge of \$10,000 each for the sixth and seventh members, and no more than seven will be permitted. (The present fee for Everest is \$10,000 for one to nine members and \$1200 for each additional member with no stated limit.) There will be the same limit on the number of members on teams to other mountains in the Everest region.

It is speculated that the new high charges and the limit of only seven members will make commercial expeditions to Everest prohibitively expensive per individual paying member, since one or two of the total membership would have to be guides provided by the organizers. Possibly the limit on membership will also discourage commercially organized climbs to other Khumbu peaks.

An additional new cost, which has already gone into effect this autumn for all expeditions in the Khumbu area, is a rubbish deposit each team must pay to the government before starting to climb. The charge is \$4000 for Everest but less for other peaks, and is refunded at the end of the climb if the teams show evidence of having disposed of all of their waste properly, including having shipped home all oxygen bottles and batteries.

At the same time the government announced that from next autumn only one expedition will be permitted on each of Everest's four climbing routes in any one season. In cases where more than one team has already received permission for the same route, all those who agree to the increased costs and the limited number of members will be allowed to make their climbs. But new Everest permits are going to be extremely difficult to obtain for the standard climbing route for years to come if the Nepalese authorities keep to these new regulations. Already there are efforts to get them retracted.

With May 1993 marking the 40th anniversary of the first ascent of Everest, permits have been granted to an unprecedented total of 14 expeditions for next spring, and these teams will not suffer from this latest fee increase or other new limitations. Nor will any team who wants to climb in a newly instituted summer

season of June to August which will be added from next year to the regular Nepalese climbing calendar.

The new rules announced in July were the second recent attempt by the Nepalese authorities to discourage large numbers of climbers, with their quantities of rubbish, from attempting Everest and neighboring peaks; in September 1991 the fee for Everest was increased from about \$2300 to the present \$10,000-plus level. But that increase did not have the desired effect; there were 12 teams on the mountain last spring, a record total for any single season. Seven of them were together on the standard climbing route, all of them were camped in the same confined base-camp area, and there was considerable bickering amongst them. This autumn on the night of 3 October a total of 40 climbers from eight teams were camped at the South Col at an altitude of 7900 meters, where expeditions place their final camps before going for the summit. Altogether 90 people reached the summit of Everest this year between May and November, 87 of them from its Nepalese side. They brought the total number of people who have gained the top of Everest to 428.

Nearby Pumori and Ama Dablam were similarly overloaded this autumn with climbers crowding the same routes. Some Ama Dablam climbers from seven expeditions had to wait several days for their turn to try for the summit because of the lack of camping space on its narrow southwest ridge. On Pumori on a single day in October, there were 18 people belonging to five teams on the fixed ropes on the southeast face.

Another government step taken to reduce pressure on the most popular mountains, which are in eastern and central Nepal, was the addition in August of eight western mountains to the list of 133 peaks open for climbing. However, all of the newly opened peaks are relatively low by Nepalese Himalayan standards, between 6500 and 7000 meters in height, and all are little-known summits in remote parts of the far west that take considerable time and effort – or money for helicopters – to reach. Since several of them were scaled many years ago, they therefore do not have the appeal of being virgin peaks. They are not likely to attract more than a handful of climbers.

## **Winter 1992-93: Both a Soloist and a Big Expedition Fail on Everest**

### **But Some Winter Firsts Are Achieved on Cho Oyu**

Winter is not a popular season with climbers who want to attack Nepal's Himalayan peaks. Its bitterly cold weather and fierce winds are notoriously hostile, especially after mid-December, and most mountaineers prefer to come in the relatively milder spring or autumn. Four of this winter's teams sought to avoid defeat from these desperate weather conditions by arriving very early and actually doing a considerable portion of their climbing before the winter season officially began on 1 December. For Belgian, Swiss and South Korean teams on one of Everest's much smaller neighbors, Ama Dablam, starting their climbs days before they were authorized to do so proved to be a successful move. For Britons on Everest itself, however, it did not bring them really close to victory.

If one wants to make a solo ascent of a standard route on any of the more popular Nepalese peaks, one just about has to come in winter, for one cannot expect to get these mountains all to oneself in spring or autumn. This winter a Spanish soloist, waited to attempt Everest until the only other climbers on it, the British, had left the mountain, but he, too, was unsuccessful in the first attempt by anyone to scale most of Mount Everest alone in wintertime.

He was Fernando Garrido, a 34-year-old mountain guide from Barcelona who had soloed nearby Cho Oyu in February 1988. He says he prefers to climb in winter, for it means hard-packed snow which is perfect for climbing, and "it is a little more exciting" to be alone on a mountain. Actually he was not completely alone on Everest, for on the lower part of the mountain he had a few Nepalis helping him to maintain a safe route immediately above base camp through the dangerous Khumbu Icefall at the start of the route, a treacherous area which had to be surmounted, and carrying supply loads with him to his advance base camp above the icefall at 6300 meters. But from there he planned to ascend the standard route entirely by himself to the 8848-meter top of the world, carrying on his own back his meager supplies – no bottled oxygen – and a small tent for the two bivouacs he expected to make.

Strictly speaking, he would not have achieved a solo ascent of Everest if he had managed to reach the summit since he did not climb alone from the bottom of the mountain. Ascents are truly solo only when the alpinist is entirely by himself from the point at which beasts of burden such as yaks, or untrained low-altitude porters, must stop, which is where base camp is pitched. The only person who has ever done a solo ascent of Everest, the noted Italian, Reinhold Messner, takes this view, and for this reason he accomplished his historic feat in August 1980 not from the Nepalese side but via the north face in Tibet, where there is no difficult icefall, and yaks and porters can carry all supplies to a higher base camp at about 6500 meters.

In the event, in Garrido's ascent alone from his advance base camp, he reports he managed to reach an altitude of only 7750 meters, or perhaps slightly higher, on 3 February, although his goal for the day had been the South Col at 7900 meters. He

was too tired to climb higher that day, he says, and next day there was light snowfall and heavy cloud cover, so he decided to descend. He never went up again. His time was running out, and he was not feeling strong enough to try again immediately. His climb was over.

Garrido had been late in his attempt to reach the Col and from there Everest's summit. Although the British had left the mountain by the end of December, he did not establish his advance base until a month later because he had hurried to base camp from Kathmandu too rapidly and had developed mild altitude sickness as a result. He had to leave the mountain to recover at a lower altitude. After his return to base, he and his Nepalese helpers set out on 15 January for the site where they would pitch advance base. But one of them, Ang Tshering Sherpa, in a hurry to reach the new camp, became careless, did not belay properly, and plunged to his death in a bottomless crevasse. This tragedy caused further delay – perhaps a crucial delay – for Garrido.

“I would like to go to the north side next winter. Then I could be really alone,” says Garrido. But he does not know whether he can get the necessary permit, for the authorities who control mountaineering in Tibet now have a policy of giving permission for climbs only in the spring and autumn seasons. If he is not allowed to climb there in the winter, perhaps he will go to Pakistan and climb Nanga Parbat.

The Britons before him on Everest had hoped to achieve the first British ascent of Everest in winter. Their patron was the Prince of Wales, they were well-financed, had trained for two years, were well-supplied with the necessary gear including artificial oxygen, and were on the standard South Col-southeast ridge climbing route. They were an expedition of 16 British climbers, most of them from the Territorial Army, plus one American and 22 Nepalis, mostly Sherpas but two men of another tribe, the Tamangs. The leader was Lt. Col. Philip Neame from North Waltham, a 46-year-old serving officer in the parachute regiment who had followed the same route to within 460 meters of the summit in the spring of 1976.

But with all their manpower and equipment and bottled oxygen, which they used at the unusually low altitude of 7300 meters, and despite the fact that there were some usable fixed ropes already in place along their route left by autumn teams, and that they had begun their climb shortly after mid-November in the hope that they could beat the jet-stream winds normally due around the middle of December. In spite of all these assets, they got only slightly higher than Garrido.

On 19 December, one Briton, Mike Smith, reached about 7800 meters while three Sherpas went 100 meters higher than that and gained the South Col. No one on the expedition went that high again despite another effort on the 22nd in which three Britons and their American teammate had to turn back at 7700 meters in the face of gathering fierce winds with snow falling, and with two of them now unfit (one had slipped and pulled some shoulder muscles, the other feared the onset of altitude illness).

On Christmas Day it was decided to abandon the climb. Several factors led to this decision, Neame explained. The Icefall was extremely unstable, and its condition “took its toll on people’s nerves.” The weather was not cooperative, and the forecasts

they were receiving and basing their plans on were not always accurate. Just after their third high-altitude camp had been pitched at 7300 meters, there was a period of high winds in early December, and until 9 December they could only stock camps with supplies but not push on higher. The 13th, the 19th and the 23rd were predicted as days of favorable weather, but the 13th was not, the 19th was but the following day not, and the 23rd saw a major storm blow up which completely destroyed a total of ten tents in their three high camps.

By now the team's members had been battered by the elements, some had mild frostbite and others had developed altitude problems, the foursome who had tried on the 22nd to mount a summit bid had had an epic descent getting down to lower camps, and by Christmas Day, when they assembled in base camp to consider the situation, in Neame's judgement only he and one other member with Himalayan climbing experience were still fit enough to try once again. Their climbing Sherpas he considered unreliable. The weather forecast was "dismal" for the following week, and he knew that no one has ever summited Everest during the month of January. "What was the point of continuing, accumulating risk with little chance of success?"

"Unreliable" was one of the milder words used to describe their Sherpas; others included "useless" and "yak herders" who once, about 12 December, "rioted" when those who came from the village of Pangboche and those from another village, Khumjung, threw rocks at each other. They had no discipline and ignored instructions, "making a nonsense of our logistical plans" by dumping loads below where they had been told to put them, going down to a lower camp than the one they had been told to descend to, and even refusing to move out of a camp on the 22nd in support of the four members' summit effort, which because of weather predictions was seen as the last chance for success. Furthermore, the head Sherpa, an experienced Everest climber from Khumjung named Ang Tshering, (not the same man who was with Garrido) was "a drunkard."

In response to these charges, the liaison officer assigned by the Nepalese government to the expedition, who was at base camp throughout the climb, and the very responsible trekking agent who arranged for the employment of the majority of the Sherpas, explained that the head Sherpa was unable to maintain discipline because a number of them were not his men and therefore owed no loyalty to him. The normal practice in selecting Sherpas is for the expedition leader and his trekking agent to choose the head man, called a sirdar, and let him bring his own team of men; quite often a sirdar will go on a series of expeditions that are assisted by a particular agent and is loyal to that agent.

But this system was not followed by the British. One member went into the Everest area before the rest and hired a man from Namche village to look after the transport of supplies to base camp and then to climb; this member also hired four other Sherpas including a sirdar with whom he had climbed in Nepal before. Another member produced another Sherpa with whom he had climbed in the past. And two more Sherpas had been held over from an autumn expedition to maintain the Icefall route between seasons. Thus of the 22 Sherpas who went above base camp, one sirdar, Ang Tshering Sherpa, and 13 other Sherpas, including the three who were the only



climbers to reach the expedition's highest point on 19 December, were supplied by the team's own trekking agency, while eight of them, including another sirdar, work for three different agencies and have no loyalty to Ang Tshering or his and the team's agency.

In this situation, the liaison officer said, Ang Tshering did drink "a lot" on rest days and some evenings, but not to an excessive extent. He had served as sirdar for half a dozen previous Everest expeditions, most recently a successful Indian team in the spring of 1992 spring, and, said the same agent whole helped the Indians as well as the British, the Indians were completely satisfied with his work. The agent also said that the Britons' dissatisfaction with the sirdar and other Sherpas cost him several thousand dollars, a very considerable sum for a small Nepalese business.

As to the decision to abandon Everest after having been hit by their first big storm, there was not unanimity amongst the members. "I think we should have gone back" after several weeks' rest at lower altitudes when the weather might have improved, one of the 22nd December summit party said, and he reportedly was one of several who thought so. But the whole team left base camp for Kathmandu and home on the 27th and 29th of December.

The only mountain besides Everest over 8000 meter that was attempted this winter was Cho Oyu, just west of Everest along Nepal's northern border with the Tibet region of China. A team led by Manuel Gonzalez from San Pedro Alcantara, Malaga, and composed of five more Spaniards, one Argentinean and one Swiss crossed the border from Nepal without official permission – which many Cho Oyu expeditions do in order to follow the easy standard climbing route – and all but one of them gained the 8201-meter summit. Manuel Angel Sanchez of Mendoza became the first Argentinean to conquer Cho Oyu and the first Latin American to succeed on any of the eight 8000-meter mountains in Nepal during winter when he reached the summit on 10 February. The same day Miss Marianne Chapuisat from Chavannes-Renens, Vaud, became the first woman ever to conquer any Nepalese 8000er in winter when she also stood atop Cho Oyu.

Two smaller mountains near Everest were attempted. One was its immediate neighbor 7161-meter Pumori, which one Japanese, Shinji Sasaoka from Ageo, Saitama, and the three Nepalis with him abandoned after encountering at 6700 meters an area of wide crevasses which they did not have the equipment to cross.

The other was Ama Dablam (6812 meters), on which all five expeditions on it succeeded. Four of these groups, composed of Belgians, Swiss and two teams of South Koreans, ascended by the same route up the southwest ridge, which has been conquered by well over two hundred men and women. The crowding by a number of climbers on this ridge at the same time has become almost as great as that on Everest's southeast ridge, and even in winter there can be problems. The Belgians' leader and guide, Alain Hubert from Harsin, suffered a broken arm while he was descending with one of his members. Above them was a party of Korean and Sherpa climbers, who were helping down a Korean teammate, seriously ill from the effects of high altitude and unable to descend properly; they dislodged a piece of hard ice which

in turn sent a loose rock crashing down on Hubert's arm. As a result of this incident, he thought he would probably be unfit to lead a spring expedition to Dhaulagiri I.

While two members of the fifth team on Ama Dablam, four Japanese, also went up the standard route, another, Yasushi Yamanoi from Chiba, went alone around to the steep west face and climbed a new line, a rib on the right side of the face, and joined the southwest ridge high on the mountain.

The other successful ascent of the winter was made by a six-member South Korean team on Langtang Lirung, but their pleasure at victory was tragically short lived. The summit trio, Kim Jin-Ryun from Jeju, and two Nepalis, Bir Bahadur Tamang and Dorje Tamang, reached their 7234-meter summit at 1:00 p.m. on 18 December in the final day's seven hours' climb up a steep snow face and along the southwest ridge in cold, windy, cloudy weather. They reported by walkie-talkie that they were on the top, were all right but would be late returning to their highest camp at 6800 meters.

The last contact with the Langtang summiters was at 8:00 that evening, when they said they could not find the camp or the fixed ropes and were bivouacking for the rest of the night. Nothing more was ever heard or seen of them. Just before their final radio report, an avalanche had been heard by teammates at a lower camp who believe it had swept away the ropes. The summit climbers themselves were presumably swept to their deaths by another avalanche. From a helicopter a week later it could be seen that the high camp's area on the side of a snow ridge had been completely changed by much avalanching. Three men had thus been lost in a single tragedy, bringing the winter's toll to four, 4 percent of the precisely 100 climbers who went above their base camps during the season. (These two Nepalis brought their nation's toll to three, or 8.1 percent of 37 climbers.)

## **Spring 1993: Everest Dominates Nepal's Climbing Scene**

### **40 Years after Its First Conquest**

Soon after Mount Everest was first “conquered” by Hillary and Tenzing on 29 May, 1953, a British climber of the small-is-beautiful school (was it Eric Shipton?) commented that since the mountain had finally been successfully climbed, mountaineers could now get on with more worthwhile activities. But the lure of Everest certainly did not die out as he thought it should, and ascents of the highest mountain in the world still make newspaper headlines and create local – though no longer worldwide – heroes. This spring, the first Irishman to reach the highest point on earth knew before he flew back to Ireland that his nation's president would soon be honoring him, and the first Nepalese woman to reach the summit was heaped with extraordinary posthumous awards and memorial tributes to her achievement.

Everest overwhelmingly dominated Nepal's climbing scene this spring, to an even greater degree than usual. Half of the 30 expeditions that came to the Nepalese Himalaya came to Everest 40 years after its first ascent. Of the 429 men and women who went climbing above their Nepalese base camps this season, 294 were concentrated on Everest. Eighty-one of these 294 climbers, or slightly over one-quarter, managed to reach the 8848-meter summit, and nine more, including the Irishman, got there from the northern slopes in Tibet. In just about six weeks, more climbers summited Everest than the 87 people who made the first 89 ascents (two men made their own second ascents) in 26 years from May 1953 to September 1979. On one day alone, 10 May, altogether 40 men and women, a record number for a single day, got to the top; this number is more than the total who went to the summit from May 1953 to late May 1975.

This spring's unprecedented number of successes brought the grand total of all Everest summiters to 496 people in 575 ascents. Another unprecedented total was that of the number of successful women, 14, one of whom was the first of her sex from any nation ever to make her own second ascent, and their triumphs in one season nearly doubled the previous total of women atop Everest, 16 since May 1975. And another: of this spring's 90 summiters, 22 had been to the top before in previous years, and one, Ang Rita Sherpa, now made an historic eighth ascent.

All the Everest summiters made their climbs by standard routes, via the South Col to the southeast ridge on the Nepalese side and via the North Col to the north ridge from Tibet. The few expeditions who attempted other routes either gave up and went home or changed over to the South-Col route and succeeded. None of them even attempted to forge new routes; a team of Russian, Ukrainian and French climbers, to be led by Mikhail Turkevitch and to include Christophe Profit of France, had planned to make the first direct ascent of Everest's formidable southwest face, but they never turned up.

However elsewhere in Nepal, another expedition composed mostly of Russians successfully pioneered a completely new line directly up the center of the 60-degree

north face of Dhaulagiri I. Said their leader, Sergei Efimov, "our route was not easy to find, but it is a good line." His nine-member team had no Sherpa helpers, fixed a minimum amount of rope (a total of 300 meters on the entire 2000-meter face) and used no artificial oxygen while climbing (one summiter used it during his descent after it was realized he had seriously frostbitten feet). Efimov, five other Russians and the team's only British member, Rick Allen, gained the summit on 11 May.

An unclimbed face Makalu was attempted by two different teams but still remains unclimbed. The great west face defeated two teams this spring, a strong 13-man group, mostly Italians, under the leadership of Oreste Forno, and a three-member party led by the well-known American climber, Jeff Lowe, and including another noted wall climber, Frenchwoman Miss Catherine Destivelle.

Lowe had planned to solo the face by roughly the same line unsuccessfully tried a decade ago by a noted Polish-British trio, so he was quietly dismayed to learn that others also had permission to attempt the same route and were a week ahead of him going to the mountain. When he arrived at the foot of the face, Lowe was, as he described it, "in a bit of a dilemma" about his own climb. He didn't want to join the Italians on their fixed ropes, but he "felt ridiculous" making his own line very near it. "I was quite de-motivated" by this situation, but he ascended their ropes on the lower parts of the face and then moved diagonally off to the right on a different line he liked better.

Forno's expedition abandoned their face attempt at 7600 meters on 17 May when they found that the very steep rock there and above would not hold pitons. They then shifted their attention to the normal route from the northwest side, and in three days with as many bivouacs, six men gained the summit. With the Italians having left the face, Lowe now made preparations to solo his line and continue on up to finish at the south ridge and thence to the summit. But he was too late: he gained a high point of 7000 meters on 23 May, but during the night of the 24th it snowed, and so much avalanche debris backed up in two avalanche chutes which met just below his "safe" bivouac site that his tent was buried by the debris and it took him three hours to dig himself out. Next day a snowstorm dumped enough new snow to render the face "completely out of condition," and it appeared that the monsoon weather had arrived. Furthermore, Nepal's spring climbing season ends on 31 May. He decided on the 25th to quit.

While Lowe had been on the face, Destivelle and her compatriot Erik Decamp had been climbing the west pillar, a route Lowe had thought he might himself descend. But the French pair abandoned their route also because even on this ridge there was too much snow after the 24th. Strong winds had delayed their progress earlier in the month, and the highest altitude they managed to reach was 7650 meters on the 14th before descending to rest and then making what they had hoped would be their final push to the top.

There was nothing new or unclimbed about the way up Cho Oyu followed by the spring's ten expeditions on this huge mountain which is west of Everest and also stands on the border with Tibet. All of the Cho Oyu teams, three from Nepal and seven with permits to climb from Tibet, basically used the Tichy route, named after

the Austrian who led the mountain's first ascent in 1954 from its west side, and those who climbed a variation of Tichy's original route followed a line already used by others in recent years. Twenty-six men and women reached Cho Oyu's summit this season, bringing the grand total of summiters to 362, of whom only 35 have climbed by other routes.

What was new on Cho Oyu this spring was the unexpected reception given by Tibetan security men to the teams who had the Nepalese government's permission to climb in Nepal but, like many others before them, crossed the international border without authorization to follow Tichy's easiest way to the summit in Tibet. Returning teams gave somewhat varying accounts of the details of what happened, but the basic facts seem clear.

Each of the three parties from Nepal, one German and two Spanish, had pitched their first and second camps in Tibet and expected to go for the summit soon when, in late April, the Germans were accosted by Tibetan police (or were they soldiers?), two of them armed with rifles. Tibetan-speaking Sherpas with a large expedition of Swiss and Austrian members met the police at the team's base camp, which was being visited because of problems with Tibetan bandits in the area, and complained that climbers had come across from Nepal and crowded onto their route. The police (or army) went up to see about this and met the Germans.

The Germans' leader, Peter Guggemos, was told, other teams reported, that he would have to pay \$15,000 if he wanted any in his group to be allowed to continue going for the summit, or \$5000 to leave the mountain and the country. According to a member of the Sherpas' expedition, Guggemos was in a difficult position: he wanted to fulfill his promise to at least one of his seven clients that there would be no problem about climbing all the way to the top inside Tibet, nor did he want to pay for them to be permitted to do so the sum of \$15,000, almost twice what each client had paid to him. The police escorted him down to the Swiss base camp, and after three hours of negotiations, it was agreed he could pay just \$5000 for his group to resume their ascent. He rushed down to his base on the Nepalese side to fetch the necessary funds, and one of his members reached the summit. The two Spanish parties from Nepal then decided not to risk being caught and forced to pay; they left the mountain.

Also on standard climbing routes were the first Tibetan mountaineers on the first climbing venture by Tibetans or any other Chinese citizens outside of China. Their team, called The China Tibetan Expedition to 14 Mountains above 8000 Meters in the World, commenced their climbing program, to put Tibetans on the summits of all 14 of the world's 8000-meter mountains by the year 2002, with a rare double play, going to Annapurna I (8091 meters) and then on immediately to nearby Dhaulagiri I. Led from base camp by a 1975 Everest summitter, Samdrup (Sam Druk, according to the Chinese version of his name), the group of nine climbing members, several of whom had already been successful on Cho Oyu and Xixabangma (Shishapangma) as well as on Everest in 1975 or 1990, sent four of their men to both summits in late April and at the very end of May; in fact, in the last two days in May, all nine got to the top of Dhaulagiri I.

Samdrup said they found Annapurna I technically more difficult than Everest from the north, and they fixed 4000 meters of rope on the unusually long line they selected up the north face. Nonetheless the four summiters managed an ascent all the way from their last camp at only 6700 meters to the summit, 1400 vertical meters above, and a safe return to the camp late the same night, a round trip of 21 and a half hours. Because of their meager supply of oxygen bottles at the camp when they set out at 3:00 a.m. on 26 April for the top, only two men climbed on oxygen during the ascent, and even they had none left for their descent.

Dhaulagiri I via its northeast ridge was found by the Tibetans to be technically easier than Annapurna I and Everest but harder than their own 8000er, Xixabangma. The second group of five summiters had such perfect weather at the top on 31 May that "they didn't want to come down" and while they lingered there for an hour and 11 minutes they burned incense, an activity not routinely performed on 8000-meter summits in Nepal.

Much incense was burned, however, at the foot of the Nepalese side of Mount Everest where base camps for 15 teams were set up close together and their approximately 200 Buddhist Sherpa climbers, cooks, supply-load organizers and other staff, performed their usual rituals upon arrival in March and early April. Foreign climbers sent some of their Sherpas to base ahead of their own arrivals so as to secure the best locations at the inhospitable boulder-strewn site. They knew that the Nepalese authorities had granted permits to a total of 20 expeditions, and although in the event not more than 15 actually went climbing, how many might be no-shows could not be immediately known.

This spring marked the 40th anniversary of Everest's first ascent on 29 May, 1953, by New Zealand's Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay from India, so it should have come as no surprise that more teams signed up and actually turned up than in any previous season. (Last spring, an unprecedented total of 12 came to Nepal and sent 55 people to the summit.) A Nepalese tourism ministry official acknowledged that this spring's even larger number on its side of the mountain was due not only to the anniversary, which can be a very useful tool for expedition organizers to raise funds from sponsors or recruit client members on commercial climbs, but was also due to mountaineers' eagerness to make their climbs before a steep increase in the royalty charged by the Nepalese government goes into effect this autumn.

Nepal's fee for Everest goes up on 1 September from the present \$10,000 for a team of one to nine members, plus \$1200 per additional member, to the new charge of \$50,000 for up to five members, \$10,000 for the sixth and seventh members each, and no more than seven members permitted. Furthermore only one team will be given permission for each of Everest's four climbing routes in Nepal. These big royalty increases and the limits on numbers were explained, when they were announced last year by the tourism ministry, as an effort to reduce the number of climbers on the mountain and thus to minimize their rubbish.

Most of this season's 15 teams crowded onto a single route, the standard one leading to the southeast ridge which Hillary and Tenzing Norgay pioneered. Several were commercial groups with professional mountaineers guiding inexperienced clients up

the mountain, which meant that the many men and women attacking the world's highest mountain by the same route simultaneously had a variety of skills, Himalayan experience and motivation; they came from very different cultural backgrounds, and not all of them understand any of the others' languages. Some had special motivations: the leader of an Australian team, Tashi Tenzing, is a grandson of Tenzing Norgay, and hoped to pay tribute to his illustrious grandfather by following in his footsteps; with him was a nephew of Tenzing Norgay, and on another expedition was a niece. (If he had succeeded, Tashi Tenzing would have been the first grandson of a summiter to become one himself.) Others, both foreigners and Nepalese, aspired to be the first persons or the first women from their country to reach the top of the world, or to achieve other historic "firsts."

By and large the teams got along well together and helped each other out in times of crisis. They joined in assisting in bringing the dead down off the mountain. Basques rescued a dying Briton, and Tashi Tenzing talked down via his walkie-talkie two Americans whom he could see from afar were in difficulty finding the correct line to descend. But there was occasional friction as well. For the second successive year, Russians were charged with theft, helping themselves to oxygen bottles at the top camp, where their owners might be put in danger when they were badly needed; taking four pairs of high-altitude boots from a Korean camp and mats from a British tent and selling them in a village well below base camp. (A trial was reportedly held by some teams' government-appointed liaison officers at the village, Namche Bazar, and a Russian was found guilty in the case of the stolen boots.)

The season's climbing successes began with a "first" that was totally unexpected. On 14 April two figures were seen descending from the southeast ridge, which no one had ascended. They turned out to be an experienced Himalayan mountaineer from South Korea, Heo Young-Ho, aged 38, and Ngati Sherpa, 25, who were completing an unplanned – as they and their acquaintances maintain – traverse from north to south, only the second time any climbers have accomplished this and the first time it has been performed without any support from the south side.

When they got down to the highest camp that had as yet been established on the southern side, at about 7200 meters, Heo and Ngati had been 37 hours without food, drink or proper shelter. The final days of their saga had begun, according to Heo, on 11 April, when he and Ngati, who were from a team of just four Korean climbers and Ngati was the only climbing Sherpa, pitched a tent at 7700 meters on the north face; two others from their party had gone no higher than 7000 meters, and the third turned back at 7600 meters. That night their tent was ripped by strong winds and in the morning their cooking partly burned it, so on the 12th they carried only their sleeping bags when they moved up to a snow hole used by previous climbers at 8300 meters, just below the north ridge. They surmounted the ridge next day with wind blowing hard and snow falling as they made their way up "rock, snow, rock, snow – very difficult, very long way." By the time they were on the summit, their oxygen bottles were empty, they were tired and visibility was poor.

Heo says it was the bad weather that decided him to descend the southeast ridge, and others agree that this was his safest move: he knew this route from having

been up it in December 1987; he was aware that this easier route immediately descended steeply, and they would lose altitude much more rapidly than via the north ridge, which is long at very high altitude; and they had fixed no rope on the upper part of their northern route for a safe descent that way. (Indeed a Sino-Taiwanese expedition was very angry at the way the Koreans had used Chinese ropes for their ascent at lower altitudes.) Furthermore, Heo expected to find southeast-ridge teams camped at the South Col at 7900 meters who would help them.

The two men were on the summit in mid-afternoon on the 13th, moved down the southeast ridge and scooped out a narrow snow hole to bivouac for the night at about 8500 meters. On the 14th they were dismayed to find no one at the South Col, and they had to continue their descent exhausted, cold and dehydrated till they arrived at the 7200-meter camp of a Korean women's team, and here at last, in the middle of the afternoon, they received nourishment and some attention for Ngati's fingers that had become frostbitten during the previous night. They did not stay long here but continued down to the next lower camp which was advance base for several expeditions.

Heo slept there in the tent of a Korean friend, Lee Eui-Jae, who later quoted him as saying, "I almost died." Heo, said Lee, was too tired to be happy; his only thought was that now he was safe. He had no frostbite, but he had a wracking cough that plagued him for a number of days. His teammates on the north side thought he was dead until he descended to base camp on the 15th and was able to tell them by a borrowed walkie-talkie that he was alive and safe.

Heo now had to deal with government bureaucracy, for he had entered Nepal illegally. From base camp he was escorted by a liaison officer to Kathmandu and the ministry of tourism, but he got a sympathetic reception here and also in the ministries of home and foreign affairs. As soon as his passport was brought to Kathmandu by his expedition's Sherpa cook, he had a Nepalese visa and could fly home on the 29th of April.

On the north side, also, there was no great fuss. A member of a Swiss expedition reported that a Chinese official merely smiled broadly at Heo's having disappeared over the top and down the other side. Last year, leaders of the Tibetan and Nepalese mountaineering associations agreed that unplanned border crossings by mountaineers should not be punishable acts if they took place because of accident or for reasons of personal safety. Although the agreement has not been formally ratified, a high-ranking Tibetan Mountaineering Association official said in Kathmandu a month after Heo's unexpected traverse that there was no problem about Heo's southern descent: the two associations had accepted that "we must think about expedition members' safety."

The next summiters after Heo and Ngati were Nepalese, who arrived at the top on 22 April from Nepal's southeast ridge. Now a different sort of high drama ensued. Indeed there had been drama from the very inception of this Nepalese Women's Sagarmatha Expedition (Sagarmatha is the Nepalese name for Everest), which was designed to place the first Nepalese woman at the top of the world. Eighty-



one Nepalese men had already been there, 23 of them more than once, but not one Nepalese woman had done so.

Early this year India leaned quite hard on Nepal's authorities to give a climbing permit to Indian women so they could celebrate Tenzing's historic ascent, and in return the Indians offered membership and training to three Nepalese women. One of the Nepalese they invited was Mrs. Pasang Lhamu Sherpa, who had already climbed high on Everest and felt she was entitled to be the Nepalese co-leader of the expedition. The Indians already had enough leadership and declined to accept her on those terms. She then decided that she must have an expedition of her own – she knew that one of the Nepalese women who did accept the Indian invitation was capable of being a summiter – and she and her husband, a director of a prominent Kathmandu trekking agency, hurriedly put together a team to get her to the top first.

This was Pasang Lhamu's fourth attempt on Everest and the second one to be led – or nominally led – by her, a 30-year-old housewife who occasionally led treks in Nepal. Shortly before leaving Kathmandu for this spring's ascent, she issued a formal statement in which she declared: "This time, no matter what type of difficulties I may face, I am determined to climb Sagarmatha again on behalf of Nepalese women without caring for my life. I feel compelled, not simply desire, to pay attention to enhancing the prestige and reputation of the nation. I have three children [aged 7, 9 and 13], but I am determined to concentrate more on the promotion of national identity on behalf of Nepalese women ... [who] are no less courageous than men but have been unable to achieve success because of the lack of encouragement and inspiration."

Cynics allege that she had all too much encouragement from her husband, who, in their jaundiced view, saw profit to be made from her becoming famous as the first Nepalese woman to the summit. This caustic view of Pasang Lhamu's motivation is not widely held, but it is clear that she was competing fiercely with her compatriot on the Indian team. She herself was not an expert mountaineer. A disaffected woman member of her own team claims that she did not know how to down-climb with crampons and had to descend sideways. It was well-known from her three attempts to scale Everest in 1990, 1991 and last year, that Pasang Lhamu was an extremely slow climber, especially in descent, and the disaffected teammate says that Sonam Tshering Sherpa, already a four-time Everest summiter and one of the Sherpa men who composed her "high-altitude support team," thought they should pitch an extra camp at about 8500 meters, above the usual last camp at the South Col, but this idea was ignored.

When Pasang Lhamu and five men, including Sonam Tshering, set out at midnight of 21-22 April from the South Col for the summit, they carried no sleeping bags or bivouac gear except a lightweight wind sheet. One of the men explained that this was because each man was already carrying a 26-kilo load of oxygen bottles for themselves and Pasang Lhamu, while she carried only one bottle for herself (and this she transferred during the ascent to one of the men and thereafter took her oxygen from it by a long hose). Their expedition had no walkie-talkies for use in a time of

crisis, and they dropped off their headlamps when daylight came as they moved upwards.

Almost all expeditions on the Nepalese side planned for summit bids in early to mid-May, but Sherpas with the Indian women spread the rumor that their first attempt would be on the 25th or 26th of April, and Pasang Lhamu absolutely had to get up there first. The leader of another team, New Zealander Rob Hall, summarized the position of her summit party, which was out ahead of everyone else: “they were completely on their own, with no communications equipment, no support climbers left at the Col to help them out, and no potential support from other teams that day” since no one else was camped at the Col yet.

Pasang Lhamu was as usual extremely slow in her ascent – and so, it developed, was Sonam Tshering, who last year, in his fourth ascent, had been immensely strong but now clearly was not. Most climbers take around 10 hours from Col to summit; this party took 14 hours and 15 minutes. Most take an hour or less from summit to south summit, 100 meters below it; they took four and a half. Pasang Lhamu had to be dragged down to it, one Sherpa claims, and now Sonam Tshering was even slower than she as he coughed blood, increasingly affected by what apparently was an acute infection of his lungs.

Three of the male Sherpa summiters had gone down ahead of “these two weak people,” as a Sherpa described them, and of one much fitter man, Pemba Nuru. The trio stayed the night at the south summit in an unprepared bivouac unable to communicate with the three who had gone down to the Col or anyone else on the mountain. Their last supply of oxygen ran out; Sonam Tshering coughed blood all night and spoke of great pain. When Pemba Nuru insisted on resuming the descent the next morning, Sonam Tshering was too sick to stand up, and Pasang Lhamu was so dizzy when she stood that she fell over twice. Pemba Nuru went down to the Col to send up to them the other three men with more oxygen.

More oxygen never reached them. The trio at the Col hardly tried to do so; no one else was at the Col till that afternoon. When an attempt was made by other Sherpas to get to their bivouac on the following day, the 24th, fierce winds drove them back at 8400 meters. It was not until the 10th of May that anyone got there. Pemba Nuru was one of those who did, and he found Pasang Lhamu sitting in death with her back to the 40-degree slope just as he had last seen her alive on the morning of 23 April. Sonam Tshering was not there, but his backpack was; Pemba Nuru speculates that in an agony of pain, he moved too jerkily and pitched over the mountainside, down the huge empty east face in a corner of Tibet.

Pasang Lhamu has now practically been canonized by Nepalese political leaders and the press, all of whom had never paid serious attention to mountaineering accomplishments since Tenzing Norgay scaled Everest 40 years ago. “Pasang has carved an enviable niche in the history of mountaineering where she will stay till eternity commanding the adoration of all those who love dignity, courage and bravery,” was a typical newspaper comment. The nation’s prime minister sent a condolence message to her family saying “the name and fame of Pasang Lhamu Sherpa, who proved that Nepali women are also endowed with such tremendous

courage, will ever be remembered,” and the King sent his own condolences. A seemingly endless stream of such messages and memorial meetings followed. A street is to be named after her in Kathmandu, a city where most streets have no names. A Pasang Lhamu Mountaineering Institute has been established with the speaker of the lower house of parliament and the minister of tourism as chairman and vice chairman. Postage stamps with her picture are to be issued. A memorial to her is to be erected in Namche Bazar. The government is giving the equivalent of \$10,000, a huge sum in Nepal, for the education of her children. One of the highest awards at the King’s disposal, the Star of Nepal, has been conferred upon her. (Hillary has one too.)

The tragic deaths that overtook Pasang Lhamu and Sonam Tshering were unfortunately not the only fatalities on Everest. Three other men also died, all of them on the Nepalese side, all from falls, and two in descents from the summit. The first was Lobsang Tshering Bhutia, 41-year-old nephew of Tenzing Norgay and like his famous uncle, a mountaineering instructor in Darjeeling. It is speculated that he became confused when his oxygen supply ran out, wandered off the correct line onto some steep ground, fell and broke his skull. In the next week two South Koreans who were members of the same expedition perished in falls on separate routes. One, An Jin-Seob, a student aged 25, also came down the southeast ridge from the summit and lost his way; he fell on very steep blue ice on the south pillar. The other, Nam Wan-Woo, 27, a farmer, went up his team’s original southwest-face route, which he and teammates had tried to scale but had abandoned in early May at 8450 meters because of unsafe snow. Kim was not an expert climber but went up alone on this difficult, steep face nonetheless; he was seen to fall, and a trail of blood was discovered leading into a bottomless crevasse.

There very nearly was one more death on Everest. A 34-year-old Briton, Harry Taylor, had been to Everest without summit success four times before, as recently as last December, and he was back again now, climbing without artificial oxygen. He made it to the top this time, at about 10:30 a.m. on 10 May, after having left his British team’s South Col camp alone at 11:00 the previous night. But he got into deep trouble in his return.

He was seen by others, while he was still going up, not to be wearing his snow goggles; he later swore he had had them on all the time – probably an indication that he was suffering from cerebral edema (altitude sickness) at the time. Going down, he fell into a small crevasse and lost a crampon. He was now snow-blind and extremely tired; not far above the Col he fell again, this time down an ice slope, managed to arrest his slide, but then could no longer progress. He had fallen to a place that kept him for while out of sight of teammates who were camped on the Col, getting ready for their own ascent the next day. He believed he spent two to three hours trying to get down from there. Finally at about 10:00 p.m. he started shouting for help. His calls were heard and heeded by Basques at the Col; they got to him at 10:30 and in 15 minutes had him down at the Col and inside a British tent. The Basques said he was in such extreme condition that he would have died within 20-30 minutes if they had not rescued him. He was by then suffering from snow-blindness, hypothermia

(loss of body heat), cerebral edema, dehydration, exhaustion and frostbite to nose and toe.

Why Basque rather than British rescuers? According to members of Taylor's expedition who were not at the Col, one of the Britons who was there, John Barry, discussed Taylor's failure to return over their walkie-talkie system with a lower camp and debated whether to mount a search for him. Winds were blowing at perhaps as much as 70 mph. (110 kph.); it was dark; three head lamps could be seen above, suggesting three people were together. Taylor would recognize and respond appropriately to flashes of light from the Col camp, but there was no response, suggesting none of the three was Taylor. Actually one was his, but he could see nothing in his snow-blind condition and so could not know that he had anything to respond to.

But the question remains, why not Britons as well as Basques? Were the Britons so intent on getting the first British woman to the summit on the next day that they were reluctant to contemplate jeopardizing her success by mounting a middle-of-the-night foray? At any rate, once Taylor was delivered to them at the Col, they took care of him, and the lady, Miss Rebecca Stephens, did not try to go up next day (but did summit a few days later). After Taylor refused for six hours to have oxygen administered to him, she told him to shut up and shoved an oxygen mask on his face. (So he made an oxygen-less ascent but not descent.) He was not fit to go anywhere on the 11th; Barry stayed with him while Stephens descended. On the 12th the two men started down, and on the 14th Taylor got to base camp, was evacuated by helicopter from there to Kathmandu and caught a flight to England the same day. His next stop was a British hospital for medical tests and attention to his frostbitten nose.

After the ascent on the 22nd of April by Pasang Lhamu and her party, no one summited from the Nepalese side of Everest until 10 May. But then it seemed that everyone was succeeding at once. Harry Taylor had been the first to set out for the top. Others also began their ascents late on the 9th to climb through the night and well into the morning of the 10th. The first to arrive at the highest point on earth was an American, Alex Lowe, who was making his second ascent of the mountain and got there at about 9:30 a.m. By the time the last man, Alexei Mouravlev, a Russian, had arrived after 1:00 p.m., an astonishing total of 40 men and women from Australia, Britain, Canada, Finland, India, South Korea, Lithuanian, Nepal, New Zealand, Russia, and the United States had made it successfully on that single day. Some had to wait their turn at the bottom of the very steep Hillary Step not far below the summit and again for those ahead of them to finish taking pictures and move down off the limited space at the very top. And a somewhat similar situation developed again on the 16th of May, when the summiters totaled 29 people from India, South Korea, Nepal, Russia, Spain and the U.S.

Amongst the many summit "firsts" on Everest were:

- The first Irishman, Dawson Stelfox, leader of an Irish north-ridge team. Holding dual Irish and British nationality, he pulled the neat trick of

simultaneously being the first Briton from the north side, 69 years after the legendary British pair, George Mallory and Andrew Irvine, had disappeared there.

- The first Finn, Veikka Gustafsson; the first Lithuanian, Vladas Vitkauskas, who arrived in Kathmandu with his own gear early in the season looking for a team to attach himself to for a payment considerably less than the full permit fee. After having talked with several teams, Vitkauskas became a “member” – but a silent and independent one – of Pasang Lhamu’s women’s expedition.
- The first Taiwanese, Wu Chin-Hsiung, a member of a Sino-Taiwanese expedition which represented the first mountaineering collaboration between mainland China and the island nation.
- The first women from Britain (Rebecca Stephens), Korea and Nepal; the youngest woman (Miss Rada Devi Thakur, 19, from India) and the oldest (Miss Dolly Lefever, 47, of the U.S.); the first woman of any nation to make her second ascent (Miss Santosh Yadav, an Indian).
- The first person to make his eighth ascent, Ang Rita Sherpa, who is still getting to the top despite advancing years (he is at least in his late 40s). No other person has summited more than five times, no non-Sherpa more than three.

There were two Everest teams that were notable non-starters. One was the Russian-Ukrainian-French team for the southwest face direct. The other was a clean-up party, who were supposed to go as high as the South Col to remove the accumulated rubbish of earlier years, especially the empty oxygen cylinders, broken tent poles and one or two dead bodies at the Col, which has been dubbed the highest junk yard in the world. First it was to be a French team led by Philippe Royer, who was quoted in February as speaking of how shocked he had been when he went to the summit last autumn by the amount of rubbish he had seen on Everest, and he was organizing an expedition costing \$740,000 that would provide Sherpas with lightweight sleds made of carbon fiber to pull the junk down the mountain. Then in April came news from Vancouver that a Canadian group headed by Joe Cadham was entering the scene with two helicopters to lift the debris from the Col. Soon afterwards, Royer dropped out, citing differences with the Canadians and asserting that there is no helicopter that can do the job. The Canadians actually came to Nepal, and two climbers went to base camp, but plans for them and 30 Sherpas to move up to the Col to make the rubbish ready for being lifted off were never put into effect after arrangements for their helicopters’ insurance were not completed in time to start work. Finally they went home, saying they wanted to come back next year.

How many teams there will also be on Everest at the same time next year will be interesting to see.

## **Autumn 1993: Everest's Newly Increased Permit Fee**

### **Bites in More Ways than One**

Last spring, 15 teams crowded onto Mount Everest from the Nepalese side and completely dominated the season's climbing scene in Nepal, accounting for half of all the expeditions in the country. This autumn provided a sharp contrast with only three teams on Everest from Nepal while 54 more arrived to attempt 21 other peaks. As a Nepalese tourism ministry official observed, the five-fold increase in royalty charged to each Everest expedition, which went into effect from this season, has begun to bite. He cited three teams from western Europe who cancelled their plans when the basic fee rose to US\$50,000 for teams of one to five members starting from the 1st of September.

All three Everest teams in Nepal succeeded in sending climbers to the top of the world. Indeed, one team was punished by the Nepalese authorities for being entirely too successful and sending too many members to the summit. Under the new rules, not only did the peak fee go up, but also the total number of foreign members permitted to be on each team went down, with a maximum of just seven allowed. But the too-successful expedition actually sent nine members to the top of the world on the standard route.

Several teams on other Nepalese mountains had ambitious plans to climb new routes or otherwise add to climbing history, but unfortunately none succeeded. The well-known Swiss pair, Erhard Loretan and Jean Troillet, set out for Kangchenjunga to ascend alone its southwest ridge to the south summit and then, if conditions were right, to make a two-man traverse northwards on the very long, very high ridge to the main summit. Their southwest ridge had not yet been scaled in its entirety, and only very large expeditions from Japan and the Soviet Union have ever made grand traverses of Kangchenjunga. But two days after they arrived at base camp in early September, both of them fell sick; Loretan became especially ill, and by the time they were finally fit to do some serious climbing a month later, snow conditions were too dangerous, and they abandoned their efforts.

To make the first ascent of the extremely steep east face of Kangchenjunga's neighbor, Jannu, has been a Slovene project since 1991, and this autumn's three-man party was the fourth Slovene group to plan its conquest. But two members, Dusan Debelak and Tomaz Zerovnik, could get no higher than 6800 meters before frequent stone avalanches drove them down to safety. The 7468-meter east summit of Jannu still remains untrodden.

Another small Slovenian team, climbing like those on Jannu without Sherpas to help them, tried to make a new line up the formidable south face of Annapurna I without the use of any artificial oxygen. But they also got no higher than 6800 meters and were defeated by rock fall. They abandoned their attempt altogether after one member, Slavko Sveticic, while climbing on the face alone, was struck at about 6000 meters by a stone avalanche, fell 500 meters down the steep face, was rendered

unconscious for an hour and a half, and his neck was broken in one place, although he could function normally except for moving his neck. He climbed down to base camp with two members helping him from where he had ended his fall: “the very difficult part I flew down.”

The Swiss have no plans to return to Kangchenjunga, and the Slovenes who were on Jannu think enough attempts have been made of that dangerous face. But Sveticic wants to go back and try the Annapurna I face again next year.

On Makalu another sort of historic climb was attempted: the first ascent of any 8000-meter peak by a blind person. Guy Gerard, a 48-year-old French postal worker who has been totally blind since the age of 30, was the central figure of a team of 10 others, including his wife and six professional mountain guides, dedicated to catering to his wish to enjoy the ambience of the Himalaya, to experience the challenge of Himalayan climbing, and to prove that handicapped people are nonetheless normal. He was at times a fast climber on snow and succeeded in reaching an altitude of 7200 meters with the expedition’s leader, Jean Coudray, a noted Chamonix mountaineer. He was disappointed not to have gone higher but enjoyed his experience and expects to return to the Himalaya, although perhaps next time not to such a high mountain.

On Everest, an experienced American Himalayan climber, Ed Viesturs, who had already summited Everest with teams in 1990 and 1991, made a persistent attempt this time to achieve a solo ascent by any one of several routes on the north side, but the highest he could reach was 7800 meters before fierce winds defeated him. Another American, Robert Anderson, who lives in New Zealand, made a push for the summit by himself on the north face from his small team’s second high camp at 6520 meters, but he was climbing in summer conditions and was stopped by very deep snow at an altitude he estimates at 8400 meters; it was his fourth unsuccessful bid to summit Everest. And a pair of other veteran American climbers, Jim Wickwire and John Roskelley, who also climbed in the summer, gave up an attempt to make their own way up the north side after they had gotten no higher than the North Col at 7000 meters in early September because of “horrendous” snow conditions threatening great slab avalanches.

Others who failed to gain Everest’s summit in the autumn included a Briton with two artificial legs, Norman Croucher, who took several spare sets of limbs with him but got no higher than 7600 meters. And a well-known British actor, Brian Blessed, who has a passion for Everest, has written a book about it and had set his heart on the summit, did reach 8400 meters – and, like Anderson, he managed to achieve this very high altitude without the help of any bottled oxygen.

Still, 33 people were successful on Everest. Notable amongst the summiters on the overly-successful expedition was Ramon Blanco, a 60-year-old Spaniard, longtime resident of Caracas, Venezuela, who on 7 October set a new record for the oldest person ever to stand atop Everest. He is five years older than the previous record-holder, an American, Dick Bass, was on his own summit day in April 1985.

Blanco had a brush with death during his descent, when his supply of oxygen ran out as he was coming down the Hillary Step, not far below the summit. He passed out, and he was saved by a Spanish Basque team, who supplied him with some of

their oxygen – and while reviving him deprived one of their own members, a potential summiter, from making use of it. Blanco was helped to reach his expedition's highest camp after nightfall, and he managed to descend the rest of the mountain safely, but eight days later, down in a comfortable hotel in Kathmandu, he was still a rather tired man. Said his expedition's leader, Stephen Bell, "it's as though he used all his energy going up and had left none for going down. ... He is very tough, but Everest is such a big mountain it does test your stamina."

As already mentioned, Everest teams in Nepal now should have no more than seven foreign members, but Bell's commercial, guided expedition, organized by a British adventure travel company, Himalayan Kingdoms, actually had 14 foreign members, 11 clients plus three guides, as well as 14 high-altitude climbing Sherpas (and the unusually large total of 59 bottles of artificial oxygen, for all of which supplies and services each client paid \$32,000). Bell, one of the guides as well as leader, thought he had found a way to make it possible to take 14 members to Everest at a reasonable cost. He divided them into two teams with one holding a permit for the standard South Col-southeast ridge route up Everest for a fee of \$70,000 and the other allowed to scale Lhotse, the 8516-meter peak adjacent to Everest, for just \$9600. He says he understood from middle-level officials in the tourism ministry, which regulates mountaineering in Nepal, before he left Kathmandu for the climb that it would be all right for those on the Lhotse membership list to go to the summit of Everest provided that he paid an extra fee of \$10,000 for each such summiter afterwards.

Four of his Lhotse team members, and five on the Everest permit including Bell himself and Blanco, plus seven Nepalese Sherpas, reached the highest point on earth on 7 and 9 October. The tourism officials deny that they had agreed to let anyone from Bell's Lhotse membership list go to Everest's summit, and on 7 November an official public announcement from the ministry stated that since four climbers had not confined themselves to their permitted peak but had "climbed Everest without permission," they had thereby violated the law governing mountaineering, and "any expedition who does such an act is subject to punishment." The punishment awarded to the Himalayan Kingdoms expedition was a fine of \$100,000, which was calculated by doubling the basic fee, as the rules provide.

Himalayan Kingdoms is appealing the severity of this fine on the grounds of what Bell describes as an "enormous misunderstanding" between himself and the officials in August. He continues to claim that they had agreed to the terms mentioned above, but he now realizes that they actually did not have the authority to make such a commitment. He also feels that when the royalty was raised to such a very high figure, and the maximum number of members was simultaneously fixed rather low, the authorities should have at the same time reduced the severity of the fine that could be levied against violators of the rules. He points out that at no time did his team attempt to hide the truth from the ministry, and he is prepared to pay \$10,000 for each of the four summiters from the Lhotse list, or even \$50,000 for another Everest fee, but he pleads that the sum of \$100,000 "will have disastrous consequences" for the finances of Himalayan Kingdoms. His appeal is supported by



the British embassy here, who speak of “mitigating circumstances” that should be taken into account. However, for the punishment to be changed after it has been approved by the Cabinet and publicly announced might mean considerable loss of face – and perhaps of jobs – for those involved in the original decision.

Altogether 27 people successfully scaled Everest from Nepal’s southern side this autumn. The other 11 not in Bell’s group were five Frenchmen with four Sherpas from a military expedition led by Alain Esteve, who also used the standard climbing route, and the leader of the Spanish Basque team, Juanito Oiarzabal, and one of his Sherpas, on the less frequently climbed south pillar. From the Tibetan side of this great border mountain just two of the nine teams who were there in September and October managed to send men to the top: one member of a South Korean expedition with a Sherpa in the first ascent of the season (on 6 October), and a few days later four climbers from another British-organized commercial group, all of them by the classical North Col-north face route made famous in the 1920s by George Mallory. They achieved the first ascents of the mountain via this route in any autumn season.

At the end of this autumn, the total number of people who have reached the summit of Everest since 1953 stands at 519. Many of these people have been to the top more than once – this autumn alone, ten Sherpas amongst the 33 summiters were repeaters – so the total of individual ascents is now 608. Those who arrive at the top these days must have their photos taken beside altitude-measuring devices left by Americans in the spring of last year and by an Italian-French party that autumn. The famous Chinese tripod, which was erected on the summit in May 1975, has long since disappeared, and its place has been taken by these poles and attached prisms.

There is no restriction on the number of members an expedition may have while climbing with permits from the Chinese and Tibetan authorities. The north-side British-led party organized by a firm called Out There Trekking, consisted of 19 climbing members, four Sherpas and a research team of four foreigners. This expedition, led by professional British mountaineer, Jonathan Tinker, can be considered successful in terms of having sent men to the top, but the only summiters were Tinker, another guide, who is Polish, and two Sherpas who had summited Everest before. Not one of their clients – who included the legless Briton – got to the top.

Furthermore a member of the research party, a man from the American space agency, NASA, whose mission was to study the effects of solar radiation on human tissue (with a special NASA measuring device) for NASA’s trip one day to Mars, died of acute altitude sickness which struck him when he was at advance base camp at an altitude of only about 6400 meters. He was Karl Henize, a one-time astronaut, aged 66, surely the oldest person to die on Everest.

Other mountains with numerous teams climbing them this autumn were the popular lower neighbor of Everest, Ama Dablam, and the most frequently climbed 8000-meter peak of Nepal besides Everest, Cho Oyu. Ten teams went to Ama Dablam, nine of them to the standard southwest-ridge route, and there were the usual problems of coordinating climbers’ movements on the narrow ridge with little space

for pitching tents. Somehow they managed, and all the normal-route teams sent members to the top, with one Swiss, Aldo Verazoli, achieving a rare solo ascent.

The standard South Col-southeast ridge route on Everest has been called by some cynics “the yak route,” which it actually is not, for it has some very difficult technical sections, including the Hillary Step; perhaps the normal route up Cho Oyu which is mostly on the Tibetan side of the mountain comes closer to qualifying for this belittling name. By the end of this autumn, a total of 400 people have claimed success – although some of them may have actually stopped at a slightly lower summit than its highest point.

Thirty-nine of these 400 made their ascent this season, and all but four were on the standard route, known as the Tichy route after the Austrian, Herbert Tichy, who made the first ascent of the mountain in October 1954. The four who did not follow the Tichy route were members of a team led by the noted Polish mountaineer, Krzysztof Wielicki, and they forged a new line on the west ridge. The many summiters belonged to ten of the 15 teams on the mountain, eight of whom had permits from the Tibetan authorities while the other seven crossed the border from Nepal without permission.

Several teams with Tibetan permits had earlier obtained Nepalese permission and planned to cross the border illegally themselves, but after they had heard about Tibetan security men last spring demanding money from climbers who had come across from Nepal, they cancelled their Nepalese permits and got Tibetan ones. They need not have bothered to change permits: none of the autumn parties from Nepal encountered any police or army, and they were able to cross the border at will. Indeed one small European party did not trouble to obtain climbing permission from anyone; they simply went trekking, crossed the border, quickly climbed the mountain and came back to Nepal again in a nine-day journey from the Nepalese village of Thami to the summit of Cho Oyu and back to Thami. (They had very recently done a more leisurely unauthorized ascent of Xixabangma and were already well-acclimatized to high altitudes.) There was also a report of a Korean and two Sherpas similarly arriving on Cho Oyu from Nepal without authorization, and of the Korean and one of his Sherpas climbing very high, possibly all the way to the summit.

Two French teams for other Nepalese peaks never attained lift-off – they reached their base camps from which to launch their climbs, but went no higher. One intended to scale Baruntse in the Makalu area, but the porters carrying their gear and food supplies were not properly outfitted for the snow and cold they encountered, and the team members had to devote their energies and supplies to helping these poor people survive. The other was a party who expected to attempt Bhrikuti, north of Annapurna, but by the time they arrived at the base of their small mountain, all except the leader were not physically very fit and were by now feeling the effects of high altitude. Each of these teams spent one night at their respective base camps and immediately moved down.

The number of climbers who died during the autumn was very small – only two on Everest, three on two other 8000ers, Dhaulagiri I and Manaslu, and one on an Everest neighbor, Pumori. But any death is tragic, and the one on Dhaulagiri I was

especially so since the man who died was a well-known, well-liked 40-year-old professional mountain guide from New Zealand, Gary Ball, who had climbed in the Himalaya a number of times before and summited Everest twice, most recently in May 1992.

Ball was stricken in early October with an acute form of altitude sickness known as pulmonary edema. His team of just three foreigners, with no Sherpa climbers or supply of oxygen, had arrived at Dhaulagiri I base camp after other teams but had kept mostly to themselves. He developed symptoms of serious altitude sickness one evening in a high camp, but the leader of his group, his close friend and business partner, Rob Hall, decided it would be too dangerous for them to try to descend that night, even though other climbers had fixed rope along the route, and Ball was kept at 7350 meters until daybreak, then helped to move down. Other expeditions gave what assistance they could that next day, supplying some manpower and bottled oxygen, but by then it was too late, and Ball died in the next lower camp that afternoon. His body lies in a crevasse on the mountainside. Only two days before he became ill, he had said happily to Hall it was “so good to be back [in the Himalaya], strong and fit.”

## **Winter of 1993-94: The First Winter Ascent of Everest's Southwest Face Achieved and Tragedy on Cho Oyu**

The great southwest face of Mount Everest, very seldom attempted and even more seldom successfully scaled in any season because of its steepness, technical difficulties and sheer size, saw its first “conquest” in wintertime this winter by a small but highly experienced team of Japanese aided by a large group of strong Sherpas. Their outstandingly successful expedition contrasted markedly with a party of three Spaniards and two Swiss on neighboring Cho Oyu in a low-budget alpine-style climb that resulted in this season's only deaths as well as in victory.

The Japanese Everest team was a highly organized, well-financed (by a sports newspaper publishing house), and abundantly equipped team with experienced leadership and 28 climbing Sherpas to help the seven Japanese climbing members reach the top of the world via one of its most difficult climbing routes, the vast southwest face, despite bitterly cold winter winds, and in the unusually short climbing period of only three weeks.

The Japanese leadership were three Himalayan veterans: Kuniaki Yagihara, 47, leader, who stayed at base camp throughout the climb – Everest teams on its Nepalese side are now allowed only seven foreign members, so he was at base camp with just a trekking permit – plus deputy leader Yoshio Ogata and climbing leader Hideji Nazuka. They carefully planned their effort, which actually began last autumn with the ascent by all seven Everest climbing members, plus Yagihara, five more compatriots and five of their Sherpas, of nearby Cho Oyu, which is very high (8201 meters) but not very difficult by its normal route. Their successful climb of this mountain gave them good acclimatization to high altitudes; their use of artificial oxygen when they went to its summit minimized the likelihood of frostbite. They then spent three weeks resting in Kathmandu and southern lowland Nepal before returning to the high mountains.

When the Everest climbers arrived at base camp on 21 November, two of their Cho Oyu teammates had already established the camp and supervised the arrival of their 13 tons of food, tents and clothing for 50 people (seven Japanese climbers, leader and doctor at base camp, 28 high-altitude Sherpas, two head Sherpas and three Sherpa cooks at base and advance base, five kitchen helpers at base and three mail runners from and to base), plus all their equipment including a special light platform for their highest camp, 6000 meters of rope for fixing the route in the treacherous Khumbu Icefall and up much of the face, and 96 bottles of oxygen (65 were actually used).

Everest climbs usually take about six weeks. All seven of these Japanese climbers and their leader had experienced two grueling months of struggle in the winter of 1991-2 in their first attempt to scale the face. They were driven back then by fierce winds, and by the end of the two months, their Sherpas were no longer willing to continue the exertion to carry supplies to the highest camps. Now, this

second time, the Japanese knew the route, which was the same line taken in the autumn of 1975 in the first successful ascent of the face by the British expedition led by Chris Bonington, and the one attempted by the Japanese themselves two years ago. They knew its problems, including what they needed to make a proper last camp at 8350 meters from which to make their final summit assault.

The Nepalese government's mountaineering regulations fix 1 December as the first day of the winter season. In the last half of November, the expedition's Sherpas made the route through the Khumbu Icefall with 50 ladders and 2000 meters of fixed rope, and carried supply loads to the top of it, the site of the first camp above base. At the same time the Japanese climbers made a quick climb of a small peak in the Everest region, Pokalde (5806 meters), which they all summited, and then they got down to their siege of Everest itself, well-acclimatized, fit and in good climbing condition. On 1 December, seven re-acclimatized members and a number of Sherpas moved up through the Icefall, and by that afternoon six of the Japanese were established in camp 2. Their epic climb had begun.

Winter is not usually a period of much snowfall, and for the Japanese there was only one day when new snow fell all day long. However on the face there was falling rock, which was blown loose from the mountain by the strong winds, and several climbers' head lamps and goggles were damaged, but no one was hurt. The problems were the wind and the cold. At base camp the temperature was minus 16 degrees Celsius; at 5:00 a.m. one day at the highest camp, camp 4 at 8350 meters, it was minus 36, and at the summit it probably was minus 45. The winds were especially fierce above the south summit – so fierce that the air was full of swirling snow blown off the mountain, making it impossible for the summiters to see Makalu not far away to the east.

Three pairs of Japanese reached the summit of Everest, 8848 meters above the seas. "In winter the face is very easy to climb," says Ogata, "after route-making is finished." Between camp 2 at 6500 meters near the bottom of the face and the south summit (8750 meters), they had fixed their route with 3635 meters of rope. On the final difficult part of the entire climb, the Hillary Step on the southeast ridge, which they joined at the south summit, they had no need to fix any rope, for plenty had been left there by expeditions in previous seasons.

The successful summiters on the 18th, 20th and 22nd of December were Hideji Nazuka and Fumiaki Goto, Osamu Tanabe and Sinsuke Exuka, and Yoshio Ogata and Ryushi Hoshino. (The seventh climbing member had developed chest pains on reaching camp 4 on the 13th and was forced to abandon the climb.) With the use of bottled oxygen while sleeping and climbing at and above their two highest camps, the Japanese suffered no really serious damage from frostbite, although one member's fingers did get somewhat frostbitten. "We could not climb Everest in winter without oxygen and not lose all our fingers and toes," Yagihara said.

His team had achieved the first Japanese ascent of the face as well as its first ascent in wintertime by anyone. Yagihara and Ogata attributed their success to four factors: they had made a proper, complete camp 4 at 8350 meters; they were in good health and were well-acclimatized from their Cho Oyu and Pokalde climbs; they knew

the route from their 1991-2 attempt; and they were under considerable psychological pressure to succeed this time. "Now I can go back to Japan," said Yagihara, stressing the word "now," following their success. Clearly another important factor was generous financing.

By contrast, on Cho Oyu was the last party to arrive for the season, a group of four Spaniards and two Swiss, who got to their base camp on 8 January, nearly two weeks after the Japanese had left theirs. They were not actually a close-knit expedition like the Japanese but a collection of Europeans who happened to want to climb this 8000-meter mountain in the least expensive way. The co-leaders were the Swiss, Jean-Luc Beausire and Juan-Carlos Piedra, who had obtained a climbing permit and wanted others to share the \$8000 peak fee and other costs. They advertised for more climbers, and two Spaniards, Juanjo Garra and Joaquim Tell, responded. Another Spaniard, Jordi Magrina, who knew the Swiss pair's trekking agent in Kathmandu, and a friend, Albert Cucurull, also joined. Garra and Tell were strangers to each other and all the rest; the Swiss did not know the Spanish.

The group expected to climb as three separate parties, but Tell dropped out early, leaving them as two small self-contained teams of two Swiss and three Spaniards. Unlike the Japanese, they attacked their big mountain by its well-trodden standard route, and they did so with a minimum of equipment in alpine style: for them, there were no climbing Sherpas, no fixed camps, no fixed ropes, walkie-talkie radios or artificial oxygen.

The Swiss pair set off from base camp at 5600 meters for their push to the summit as soon as clouds cleared away late in the morning of 19 January, and the Spaniards followed next day. Each party had its own bivouac tent, sleeping bags, cooking and eating gear, and food. The Swiss stayed ahead of the Spanish trio, who in the following days spotted them above from time to time and followed their footprints on snow slopes and sometimes on ice.

Then Beausire and Piedra disappeared. They were last seen alive on the 22nd moving up an area of seracs at about 6700 meters, and their footprints were seen as far as just below the first summit of Cho Oyu, which is an hour or two before the highest summit. There was no indication here whether the Swiss had reached either peak, and whether they had fallen or collapsed from exhaustion and then frozen to death before or after doing so. But one body in its red down clothing lying with one arm outstretched was seen on the 25th two or three hundred yards to the right of the climbing route in a dangerous area of rock and ice; the Spaniards did not attempt to reach it, for in winter temperatures of minus 20 to 40 degrees Celsius, no one long exposed to the elements could possibly still be alive. The Swiss had left their tent, sleeping bags and all other equipment at a bivouac site at an altitude of only 7000 meters, which the Spaniards found impossible to understand in the Himalaya in winter. (The Swiss had never climbed in the Himalaya before; their Cho Oyu effort was in preparation for a climb they planned on K-2 in the summer of 1995.)

One of the Spaniards, Cucurull, abandoned his attempt to reach the summit on the 25th, but Magrina and Garra pressed on, and finally on their seventh day up from base camp, at 11:00 a.m. on the 26th of January, the two men gained the highest

summit. They had spent the previous night out without a tent, but their sleeping bags gave them some protection. Garra now had frostbitten fingers, and both men – and Cucurull as well – had frost-nipped toes, but the three returned safely to base camp.

Elsewhere in Nepal amongst the winter's nine teams was a South Korean group who made a brief attempt to accomplish the first known ascent of an obscure mountain called Gurkharpo Ri, 6891 meters in the Jugal Himal range north of Kathmandu and near the better known Dorje Lhakpa. It is a peak that was opened by the Nepalese authorities to mountaineers only in January 1992, and this party of eight Koreans and two climbing Sherpas led by Chun Young-Ho made their attack via its southwest ridge. They were stopped at 6100 meters by a 500-meter rock wall, which they could see no feasible way around. They then wanted to try an approach from the southeast, but the government-appointed liaison officer said they were not permitted to climb another route without obtaining permission from the tourism ministry in Kathmandu. The team had scheduled a very limited amount of time to spend on their climb, so they left the mountain.

Another South Korean expedition may be punished by the Nepalese authorities for completing most of their ascent of Ama Dablam before the winter season's starting date, 1 December. This five-man team led by Yoon Kwang began their assault on this 6812-meter neighbor of Everest by its frequently climbed southwest ridge on 21 November, and it was on 1 December itself that three members and their only climbing Sherpa actually went to the summit from the fourth camp they had pitched above their base. The ministry of tourism, which attempts to regulate mountaineering in Nepal, has written to Yoon for an explanation of this violation of the rules.

The ministry raised another sort of problem for an American team of seven climbers led by William Crouse. They had permission for two Everest-area peaks, Ama Dablam and a slightly lower neighbor, Cholatse, and they had fully paid the peak fees for both. But then they were told by officials in Kathmandu that they might have to have separate liaison officers for the two climbs, and this would have meant an additional cost of \$1500 or more. The self-financed party did not have the extra funds, so they dropped their plans for Cholatse, thereby forfeiting the fee they had paid for that peak, and went only to Ama Dablam, which four of them successfully scaled by the southwest ridge.

## **Spring 1994: More Success on Everest from Nepal**

### **Greater Drama from Tibet**

Thirty-seven men (no women) conquered Everest this spring from the Nepalese side in rather straightforward fashion. No one suffered very serious frostbite, altitude-measuring devices were installed at the summit, several hundred empty oxygen cylinders were retrieved to clear the South Col of some of its debris, all four south-side expeditions sent members and Sherpas to the top of the world.

While climbers were summiting from the south, men and women on the northern slopes were frequently pinned down in their camps by winds that were both fiercely strong and extremely cold – winds from which the great solid mass of Everest tended to protect southern climbers. (This May the winds blew at up to 160 kph/100 mph at high altitudes across the north face.) Of the six men who did manage to struggle to the summit from the north, two collapsed while trying to descend and perished high on the mountain. They and the surviving summiters were members of just two of the nine teams that went to Everest in Tibet.

The Nepalese government's limited number of permits to climb Everest from the south is clearly having its effect. In the spring of 1993, 15 expeditions on the Nepalese side put a total of 81 men and women on the 8848-meter top of the world with 40 of them summiting on a single day. This spring, just four teams climbed the mountain in Nepal, and while all four were able to send climbers to the top, they totaled only 37 people. At the same time on the Tibetan side, the number of Everest teams rose from four last spring to nine this time as the Chinese and Tibetan authorities imposed no limit similar to that in Nepal. Still this season's summiters from Tibet totaled only six. Not a single client on any commercial expedition on the north side was amongst the summiters – indeed, probably no commercial team's client has ever summited from the north. While the total number of all climbers who have ever gained the highest point on earth now stands at 548, just 108 have done so via any route in Tibet.

Why? The terrible winds that seem constantly to sweep across the north face while buffeting climbers on the southern side less frequently and less fiercely are certainly one reason. Another factor that defeats more climbers on the north side is the altitude of the final camps from which they make their summit bids. On both sides of the mountain, the normal routes above the usual sites for expeditions' highest camps are about the same in length – perhaps slightly shorter on the north – but the camp on the standard northern route (North Col to north ridge and north face) is very high at around 8300 meters, whereas the last camp on the standard southern route via the South Col to the southeast ridge is invariably at the Col, only 7900 meters above sea level. Thus summiting Everest from the north means most climbers stay for two nights and an entire day at and above 8300 meters, while on the south side they usually are in this altitude range for only eight or ten hours. The longer humans



remain at very high altitudes, the more their bodies deteriorate and the more susceptible they are to acute altitude sickness.

Furthermore on the north there are a number of serious technical difficulties above the last camp: the Yellow Band of unstable rock, the great Steps, and a last section of difficult rock just below the summit's snowcap. It can be hard to find the way back down again. On the southeast ridge, there is the famous Hillary Step to surmount, but it forms just a relatively small section of the final day's climb. And the descent down the southeast ridge is clearly defined by the precipitous east face on one's left as one makes one's way back to camp.

An extremely vivid example of the north-south contrast was enacted this season. On the morning of the 9th of May the leader of an American team on the north side could see from below through a long lens (and talk to by walkie-talkie radio) a fellow American and others who had just arrived at the summit from the south enjoying themselves at the top of the world. At the same time, unknown to them, just 300 meters below them on the north face a Taiwanese who had summited alone late on the previous day was seen trying to make his way down to safety. He was Shih Fang-Fang, a friendly 27-year-old known to his teammates and everyone else as Norman. He collapsed and died that noon.

Shih's death was only one of several dramatic events on the north side. The final tragic one centered on an Australian, Michael Rheinberger, a 53-year-old veteran a total of six previous unsuccessful attempts to scale Everest who was fiercely determined that now he would manage to get to the summit. "This time was definitely a situation when he was not turning back," said the strong New Zealander, Mark Whetu, who went to the summit with him. When it was the middle of the afternoon, and they still had several hours' climbing ahead of them to reach the summit – not to mention the descent to their last camp – at Rheinberger's very slow pace, Whetu felt they should turn back, but Rheinberger clearly had no intention of doing so and was prepared go on up alone and bivouac out that night.

Whetu stayed with his friend and they got to the summit as the sun was setting at 7:18 p.m. Whetu, who has been a mountain guide for 14 years, said he had never seen anyone's face show the tremendous elation at summiting that Rheinberger's did, never had had a climbing companion "dive onto the summit and embrace it" as Rheinberger did. But now they were confronted by the very technical rock just below the summit which Rheinberger would not possibly be able to negotiate in the dark and in his exhausted condition. So they dug a snow hole behind a rock and bivouacked there, only 20 meters below the top of the world – the highest bivouac anyone has ever made on Everest.

Their descent on the next day, 27 May, was a nightmare in extreme slow motion that finally ended for Whetu when Rheinberger, now blind and mentally confused from altitude sickness, could no longer move and Whetu left him to fetch more oxygen. But by now Whetu had seriously frostbitten toes and a finger; he was unable to return to Rheinberger and no one else was in a position to do anything but save Whetu. On 31 May an American summiter saw Rheinberger's body sprawled 100-200 meters below where Whetu had left him.

In the days just before Rheinberger and Whetu summited, two Canadians, John McIsaac and Denis Brown, developed altitude sickness. McIsaac was especially seriously ill, and in the final stage of getting this dying man down to the foot of the mountain in the very early hours of the morning, a line of dots of light from head lamps of perhaps 20 climbers from various expeditions could be seen moving upwards to help carry him down in relays. He survived, thanks to the cooperation of so many people.

But this cooperation came at a price for those who helped. Two members of an international expedition of New Zealand, American, French, Canadian and Romanian climbers had moved up for a summit bid when their leader suddenly had to ask three of the team's four climbing Sherpas to go up very quickly with a supply of oxygen for the stricken. The Sherpas made a forced march from 7000 to 8300 meters in four hours and 20 minutes. The Canadians were rescued, but the international expedition no longer had the resources of manpower and oxygen in place to support a summit push. The team went home unsuccessful. On a much more cheerful note, one of the men who summited on 9 May, Erling Kagge from Norway, asserts that he is the first person to have gone from the base of all three of the world's poles to those poles: the North Pole, South Pole and the "Third Pole," the highest point on earth. A South Korean climber, Heo Young-Ho, claimed in January 1983 to have been the first, but Kagge's rebuttal is that Heo began his ski trip to the South Pole at a point three weeks closer to the pole than a setting-off point on the coast, where Kagge began his own travels and which, he says, is the proper place to start.

Two of the successful climbers on Everest's south side went on to gain the summit of its immediate neighbor Lhotse. They were Rob Hall of New Zealand and Ed Viesturs of the U.S., the fourth and fifth persons to scale both summits in the same season and the first ones to do Everest first and then Lhotse.

They and the others who conquered Lhotse this May, the first Scandinavians to its summit, Oskar Kihlberg and Mikael Reutersward of Sweden, and the first Latin American, Carlos Carsolio from Mexico, contributed a footnote to the Tomo Cesen Lhotse south face saga of 1990. They noted that despite Russian claims to the contrary, it is possible to see part of the Western Cwm from Lhotse's summit, and they have their own photos to show it. Russian climbers have cited what they said was an erroneous claim by Cesen to have looked down into the Cwm as one of the reasons to doubt his having made his solo ascent.

No one succeeded on a new route on Everest or Lhotse, but two expeditions pioneered new lines on the smaller neighbor, Ama Dablam, and on an even lower peak northwest of Kathmandu called Urkinmang in the Jugal Himal range. Their styles of climbing contrasted starkly. On Ama Dablam, four Russians moved up the 6812-meter mountain in pure alpine style with no fixed camps, no fixed rope and no Sherpas helpers with them, whereas on 6151-meter Urkinmang, five Japanese and three Sherpas pitched one high camp and fixed 2000 meters of rope along their route.

The Ama Dablam team was led by Vladimir Bashkirov, who had conquered Annapurna I in 1991 and Everest last year on more sizable expeditions and via known routes. Now he and his three compatriots placed a base camp on the Nare Glacier and

from it achieved the first Russian ascent of the mountain in one continuous ascent. They climbed the southeast face (to the right of the eastern of two ridges that run south from the summit) onto the southeast (or east-southeast) ridge. They had to make altogether six bivouacs as they moved up because the route was steep (average 50 degrees, sometimes vertical), there were many rock towers, and they could climb only for three or four hours each morning before clouds rolled in and snow began to fall, limiting visibility to 20 meters ("it was necessary to see where to go").

The Japanese, under the leadership of Tamotsu Onishi, were the first climbers to attempt Urkinmang's north face and its ridging, which they ascended in "a good, simple line direct to the top." They found the climb "somewhat difficult" with steep ice sections up to 75 degrees near the summit.

Another notable achievement this spring: a Bolivian who says he is the first Native American (or American Indian) from any North, Central or South American country ever to climb in the Himalaya gained the summit of Makalu. He was Bernardo Guarachi, 41-year-old mountain guide from La Paz, who made the first South American ascent of Makalu on 29 April in the company of Anatoli Bukreev, the first Russian atop Makalu. Both climbed without using any artificial oxygen.

Guarachi then went home, but Bukreev stayed on to repeat his climb of the normal route on the northwest side in a speed ascent, which he hoped to accomplish in less than 24 hours, with an American, Neal Beidleman, again without bottled oxygen. The two men reported they left their team's base camp (5600 meters) at 6:30 p.m. on 13 May, climbed through the night, reached camp 2 on the Makalu La (7400 meters) at 4:00 a.m. the next day, stayed there an hour before pushing on up to camp 3 at 7700 meters on the north face, where they arrived at 6:15 a.m. to find its tent had been flattened. They spent several hours putting the camp in shape, brewed some tea, slept and set out for the top at 2:00 p.m.

But they were back in camp 3 an hour and a half later, too tired to go for the summit without more sleep. They finally gained the top at 4:15 p.m. on 15 May after nearly eight hours of climbing that day. They had actually taken almost 46 hours from base camp to the summit.

Carsolio, the Mexican mountaineer, also is a very fast climber, and he summited alone in two fast oxygen-less ascents. First, he acclimatized on a minor peak in the Everest region, Lobuje East, then traveled quickly to Tibet to climb Cho Oyu as an autonomous member of a commercial expedition. He succeeded in making the fastest ascent ever done of this 8201-meter mountain: in just 19 hours, he said, he went to the summit from the team's base at 5650 meters, which he left at 3:00 p.m. on 25 April in the company of the team's Swiss leader, Erhard Loretan. They rested for an hour in camp 1 (6400 meters). Loretan was not really interested in following the standard route, which Carsolio had decided to climb, and the Swiss turned back at 6600 meters at about 7:30 p.m., leaving the Mexican to carry on up alone in full moonlight so bright he had no need to use his head lamp most of the night. He was on the summit at 9:57 the following morning, 26 April.

Carsolio was back in Kathmandu on 30 April, then flew by helicopter to the Everest-Lhotse area, arrived at Lhotse base camp on 6 May, joined the team led by

Kihlberg, and made a fast daylight ascent of Lhotse in just under 24 hours including rests totaling three hours in two camps on the way up. He had wanted to do the climb in less than 21 hours, but a big party at base the night before had left him not very fit.

Carsolio has now succeeded by the age of 31 in scaling eight of the world's 14 mountains over 8000 meters and is only the fourth person to have conquered the five highest, Everest, K-2, Kangchenjunga, Lhotse and Makalu. (The first three persons were Reinhold Messner, the noted Polish climber Jerzy Kukuczka, and the Slovene Viktor Groselj.) Carsolio clearly is looking to bag them all. He left Nepal to scale another one, Broad Peak in the Karakoram, this summer.

Two Nepalis aspired to make record-breaking fast ascents of Everest this spring. Kaji Sherpa, who successfully scaled Everest with American and South Korean expeditions in 1992 and 1993, and Iman Gurung, who has not yet summited Everest, planned to lead their own separate small teams on the Nepalese side and individually climb from base camp to summit in less than 20 hours – Sherpa hoped he would make it in just 18 hours. The shortest time in which Everest has been climbed so far is 22 hours and 29 minutes, a record set by a Frenchman, Marc Batard, in September 1988. But neither Sherpa nor Gurung actually made an attempt. The Nepalese bureaucracy took so long to agree to waive payment of their \$50,000 fees for permits to climb the mountain that they abandoned their plans for this season.

An experienced Dutch climber, Bart Vos, came to Nepal with a different sort of ambitious project, to solo Dhaulagiri I via its standard northeast-ridge route. With no teammates, no climbing Sherpas to accompany him, and no other expedition anywhere on the mountain, he was completely alone in his efforts. After three weeks he had reached a maximum altitude of 7100 meters, and two weeks later he abandoned the attempt because of constant heavy snowfall and serious avalanching. He reported he had had to spend 22 nights in base camp with only 14 nights above it. "It was very boring. I finished reading all the books I had taken along with me."

In Nepal, this spring was a safe season: not a single person died while climbing there. All the tragedies occurred on the Tibetan side of Everest. Not only Shih and Rheinberger died, but also an Italian, Giuseppe Vigani, who lost his footing while descending from a summit attempt and plunged 1600 meters down the north face to his death.

## **Autumn 1994: Ninety Teams Produce Handful of Noteworthy Climbs While Some Best-Known Women Climbers Perish**

A Japanese succeeds in making a new line up Cho Oyu's southwest face; a Slovene soloist scales the virgin west face of a much lower peak, Langsisa Ri, in its first traverse; a successful Japanese expedition, with Nepalese collaboration, are the first climbers ever to attempt another smaller mountain, Gyajikang. These are the pioneering results from the efforts of 74 expeditions in Nepal and an additional 16 on the Tibetan side of two border mountains, Everest and Cho Oyu. The others were repeats of previous climbs with varying degrees of success and a certain amount of tragedy.

Fifty of the season's teams, or more than half of them, crowded onto just five mountains: the constant magnet, Mount Everest, drew 12 teams; Cho Oyu with the easiest route on any 8000-meter mountain had 11 teams, 10 of them on that one route; another 8000-er with a straightforward route, Dhaulagiri I, had eight, all on the same ridge; and two of the Everest area's most attractive-looking lower peaks, Pumori and Ama Dablam, had ten and nine, most of them also on normal routes.

A French climber wondered whether Ama Dablam was becoming the Mt. Blanc of Nepal's Himalaya after a total of 50 men and women had summited it this season, but it should be noted that the technical difficulty of Ama Dablam is far greater. Two expeditions each put 11 of their members on the summit, bringing the grand total of foreigners to the top of this 6812-meter peak to 388. The two teams had 14 and 16 members, a size that one of their leaders said "was much too large."

Cho Oyu was successfully scaled this autumn by 35 climbers (bringing its total of foreign – or non-Sherpa – summiters to 409) and Dhaulagiri I by 34 (new grand total of 180 foreigners). But Everest was scaled this autumn by just three foreigners plus five Nepalese Sherpas from only two of the season's 12 teams, not greatly raising its previous total of 437 successful foreign climbers.

Actually two Cho Oyu teams never got onto the mountain. For a number of years climbers have obtained permits from the Nepalese government to scale Cho Oyu, on Nepal's northern border with Tibet, and then slipped across the border illegally and followed the mountain's easiest route, which is on the Tibetan side. It is simpler and easier to get to the mountain this way, and the total cost can be much less. But this September when Americans and Spaniards moved across the border pass, the Nangpa La, to begin their climbs, they met with an unpleasant surprise.

The sports commission of Tibet has given full authority to one of the China Tibet Mountaineering Association's deputy general secretaries, Rinzin Phinzo, to check unauthorized Cho Oyu ascents. Since June, a team of five officials have been posted just north of the Nangpa La: its leader, Rinzin Phinzo, a Tibetan mountaineer who lost parts of his fingers to frostbite when he was on Everest in 1988, another CTMA man, two officials from Tibet's home affairs ministry and one from its foreign ministry.

Despite his lack of some fingers, Rinzin Phinzo had a pistol in a holster at his waist, but he was most cordial to one of the Americans whom he met just north of the Nangpa La, even invited him to lunch. The situation became quite clear when the Tibetan displayed a thick wad of American dollars and wrote the number 2000 in the snow: Welcome to Tibet and Cho Oyu – at US\$2000 per climber, payable in cash in advance. There were seven members in the Spanish group; the price offered to them, they said, was a total of only \$13,000.

The American and Spanish teams abandoned their plans for Cho Oyu. Some of the seven Americans (who actually had a noted Khazakh, Anatoli Bukreev, as their deputy leader) had in any case been alarmed by the threat they perceived to themselves and their possessions from fierce-looking Tibetans illegally crossing into Nepal close to the expedition's base camp.

The first climbers to attempt Cho Oyu this season had the most notable achievement. They were just two women and a man: the leader Miss Taeko Nagao, 38, who already had three 8000-meter summits to her credit (including Makalu in 1991, when she became noted for her nose that was so badly frostbitten she required plastic surgery to give her a new one); Mrs. Yuka Endo, 28, also with three 8000ers to her credit; and Yasushi Yamanoi with a mere two 8000ers but a reputation for solos of difficult peaks. They climbed in pure alpine style on Cho Oyu's southwest face, which had been scaled only once before, by two noted Swiss, Erhard Loretan and Jean Troillet, and the Pole, Wojciech Kurtyka, in September 1990. The women were the first climbers to repeat the 1990 route while Yamanoi alone was ascending a totally new line to the left of it.

The trio left their only fixed camp at the normal advance base camp site at 5600 meters on 21 September and were together till they reached the bottom of their face at 6000 meters; here they separated for their two different routes. At 8:30 that evening Yamanoi began his solo ascent. He climbed until 4:00 next morning 1200 vertical meters on a 60-degree snow face with some hard ice. Then he stopped for three hours to rest and wait for daylight to let him see the way ahead. He decided to follow a couloir of rock and snow to the right and made his first bivouac at about 7600 meters at the top of the couloir at 4:00 that afternoon. He slept there in his tiny tent and at 6:00 a.m. on the 23rd resumed his climb, which now was through very deep snow, then up a 40-meter rock band at an altitude of about 8000 meters.

Finally more deep snow to the summit, and a search of two to three hours for the very highest point of 8201 meters from where at 4:00 p.m. he photographed Everest and its immediate neighbor, Lhotse. He then descended the normal route on Cho Oyu's west side and at 7000 meters made his second bivouac at 9:00 p.m. He reached the team's camp at 5600 meters at 6:00 p.m. on the 24th. "I was very tired, but quite happy with the good mixed route." He had hoped to climb a more direct line but found that would have meant too much difficult vertical rock climbing.

Meanwhile Miss Nagao and Mrs. Endo had wasted a day by taking the wrong couloir; they had had no previous experience of climbing at night, and the moonlight was no real help to them. They climbed through the night of the 21st/22nd, went to the end of this wrong gully at 6700 meters and bivouacked there that afternoon. They

descended in daylight, found the correct line and bivouacked that night, the 23rd, at 7700 meters. On the 24th they made a traverse in deep snow, which was above their knees and had to be packed down by kneeling on it. This permitted extremely slow progress, and they made another bivouac before the summit at 8000 meters.

On the 25th they gained the summit at 1:30 p.m. through even deeper snow that came up to the chests of these two short women (only 156 and 165 centimeters – five feet and five feet four inches – tall). They also went down the normal route, made a last bivouac at 7000 meters and finally were back in camp on the 26th. The appearance of these three climbers descending the normal route, by which 47 others reached the top after them, astonished the other teams who had known nothing of their unobtrusive presence.

On mighty Mount Everest, seven teams tried to climb from the northern slopes in Tibet, but not a single person reached the summit. In September the monsoon continued till late September and brought large amounts of new snow and great avalanche danger. (One avalanche struck a Norwegian team and killed a Sherpa.) Then at the beginning of October it was as though someone had turned on a wind machine: the gales that swept the vast north face were too strong for man to manage.

On the standard South Col route on the Nepalese side, climbers are somewhat better protected from the terrible winds, and on 10 October one Japanese, Muneo Nukita, made his second ascent of the mountain with three Sherpas. On the following day two Britons and two more Sherpas reached the summit.

But the real drama concerned Nukita's compatriot and teammate, Takashi Miyahara, aged 60, who was forced to turn back only 100 vertical meters below the summit when he lost the sight in his right eye. His eyesight improved as he descended, and by the time he was down in base camp, it was fully restored. If he had gained the top of the world at 8848 meters, he would have been the oldest person ever to climb that high. The age record is held by a Spaniard living in Venezuela, Ramon Blanco, who went to the top on 7 October, 1993, at the age of 60 years, five months and one day; Miyahara was 60 years, six months and 25 days old this 10 October when he nearly summited.

Amongst others who did not quite succeed on Everest was Britain's best women mountaineer, Mrs. Alison Hargreaves, 32, who climbed without the use of any artificial oxygen, unlike Miyahara and those who were successful. Climbing alone from her last camp at 7900 meters on the 12th, she managed to reach an altitude of 8400 meters and then turned back when her feet began getting numb and frostbite threatened.

Two well-known Frenchwomen failed to reach their 8000-meter summits. Catherine Destivelle, 34, with Erik DeCamp followed a variation of the Bonington route on the south face of Annapurna I that had earlier in October been pioneered by a much larger South Korean team, a route on the left of Bonington's line which the French considered safer and better than Bonington's, and which they planned to descend after having summited by their own route high on the mountain via a pillar to the right. But they never got to their pillar because of strong winds, snowfall and many avalanches that Destivelle said were "very scary."

The other Frenchwoman was Chantal Mauduit, 30, who was on Manaslu. She tried to reach this summit with two Swiss men but got no higher than 7600 meters (about 200 meters lower than the high point of Destivelle and DeCamp) in the face of fierce wind. One of the Swiss, who did get to the top, explained: “she had not enough kilos.”

This autumn was not a good season for women – with the notable exception of the two Japanese on Cho Oyu. Russia’s best known woman climber, Mrs. Ekaterina Ivanova, 32, and the best-known female alpinist of Bulgaria, Mrs. Iordanka Dimitrova, 41, died on the same expedition to the southwest face of Kangchenjunga. Ivanova was killed by an avalanche that struck a bivouac at 6700 meters while she and a Belarussian, Sergei Jvirbiva, were asleep; when a search party went to their bivouac site, they found only a crampon on the snow. Dimitrova disappeared after she was seen by teammates at 8300 meters in her bid for the 8586-meter summit without the use of bottled oxygen. She was never seen again. A Belarussian who had left their highest camp more than five hours after her for his own summit attempt, and who did reach the top using artificial oxygen, the only successful member of their 12-member predominantly Belarussian expedition, which was led by Sergei Novikov, reported that he saw her ski pole and ice ax at different places along the way and noted that her footprints stopped at 8300 meters.

Another woman died while on a successful Ukrainian expedition to Dhaulagiri I. “Expedition” may not be the right word: in contrast to Soviet-era teams, this group was not highly disciplined nor tightly structured; those who wanted to climb the mountain and could pay, came, and they climbed independently of each other nominally led by Ivan Valenia, an engineer, diplomat, politician and former member of parliament. The leadership was reluctant to talk about Mrs. Galina Tchekanova’s death; her name was not included in the team’s membership list (presumably to save money on the permit fee). But it seems that she disappeared after having reached the 8167-meter summit.

There were few other deaths on climbing expeditions during the season: a Swiss, Robert Baehler, fell on Dhaulagiri I, and a Slovene, Beno Dolinsek, apparently fell on Annapurna III. Three Sherpas also died: the Sherpa who was killed in an Everest avalanche mentioned above, Mingma Norbu, who had summited Everest twice in his career; Kami Tenzi, who had a heart attack during the trek to Baruntse base camp; and Lhakpa Gyalu, who died apparently from his exertions at high altitude on Cho Oyu.

Lhakpa Gyalu had gone to Cho Oyu’s summit with a Japanese member despite the leader’s order for them not to do so. Lhakpa Gyalu descended much faster than Shinji Sasahara, the team’s climbing leader, who lost the route back to camp; Lhakpa Gyalu went up to try to find him; next day Lhakpa Gyalu developed intestinal pain which is thought to have been due to a blood clot induced by high altitude; and he died three days later while being carried to base camp.

There is a group of lesser mountains in Nepal that are classified as trekking peaks, and events on them are not normally included in these reports. But it should be noted that Nepal’s second-worst climbing disaster occurred on one of these, 6091-



meter Pisang north of the Annapurna massif, on 13 November when nine Germans (including a woman), one Swiss woman, and 1 Nepalese died. There were no survivors to say what actually happened, but searchers who found their bodies a few days later concluded that in their descent from the summit, several of the highest climbers started a slab avalanche, slid down on top of the next rope of climbers who in turn slid onto the lowest climbers, killing all of them in a fall of 500-600 vertical meters for most of them along a snow slope, over rocks and down an ice couloir. The German Alpine Club's Summit Club group was led by a 25-year-old German guide, Stefan Hasenkopf. (The worst disaster in the Nepalese Himalaya was the death on Manaslu of ten Nepalese, four South Koreans and one Japanese in two successive days of avalanching in the spring of 1972 when a South Korean expedition's high camp was completely destroyed and two or three searchers went up the next day to find out what had happened and were themselves killed.)

On a more cheerful note, the two Swiss who four years ago pioneered the Cho Oyu southwest-face route, Loretan and Troillet, were this autumn on Lhotse (8516 meters) which they successfully scaled via its standard route on the west face. There were two results of their success. Loretan, who is 35, bagged his twelfth 8000-meter summit and is now only the third climber to have summited so many of them. By the end of next year he may have managed to scale all 14 of these giant mountains to become the third person, after Reinhold Messner and Jerzy Kukuczka, to achieve this feat.

While they were on Lhotse, they studied the possibility of making the first traverse from its highest summit along the formidably difficult and extremely high ridge to the untrodden middle summit of Lhotse (8410 meters). They made no attempt at this traverse this season, but Loretan says it is possible, and he would like to come again to try it with perhaps two teammates and with a pair of Sherpas as far as the main peak to carry the gear needed for the historic traverse.

Two notable ascents were accomplished this autumn on mountains not nearly so high as the 8000ers discussed above. On Langsisa Ri, a 6427-meter peak in the Langtang area north of Kathmandu, Vanya Furlan, a 28-year-old Slovene, achieved several firsts: first alpine-style ascent, first solo ascent, first attempt on its west face, first traverse, first attempt on it by anyone from the former Yugoslavia. After acclimatization climbs which included an ascent to 5700 meters on the standard south-face route to become familiar with the way he would descend, he began to climb the previously unattempted west face from 4700 meters late in the morning of 7 November. He found two very large and dangerous seracs overhanging the face, so he climbed a rock ridge between them; it was "quite nice climbing" on this ridge which received direct sunlight and therefore the rock was warm, but which was a bit complicated with some difficult pitches. He stayed with it to its top at 5360 meters.

Then he was on the face, which he ascended to a bergschrung 5820 meters, and here at 8:30 p.m. he bivouacked without a sleeping bag, for he had had to save as much weight as possible and needed to take two ropes for his descent of the south face. After a very cold night, he resumed his ascent at 6:30 a.m., now on the steepest part of the route which was never less than 60 degrees and in one place 80 degrees,

where he had to traverse some rock with very bad snow on it, a “very difficult move.” The rest of the snow was excellent, frozen, but not icy. His line joined the southwest ridge about 100 meters below the summit and followed the right side of the ridge to the top, where he arrived at noon on the 8th, four hours after he had completed the “delicate traverse” and began the straightforward ascent to the top which was “beautiful climbing.”

He then descended the ridge to 100 meters below the top, where he had left his rucksack, traversed 100 meters on the south face to the normal route, rappelled almost all the way down the south face and reached its foot at 5:20 p.m. It was getting dark now and he was tired, so he bivouacked here at 5700 meters for the night and reached his base camp the next day. Said he: “I’m really happy because everything went just as I planned and as I hoped. ... Also, I did everything myself, found sponsors myself, planned it myself, climbed it alone, and I feel very good.”

Gyajikang is a 7038-meter peak northwest of Manaslu in north-central Nepal. So far as is known, no one had ever attempted to climb it until this season, when it was first made available to mountaineers. An expedition of ten Japanese and five Nepalese police, plus several Nepali high-altitude porters, under the leadership of Taichi Fujimatsu, sent a total of 17 men to its highest summit via the northwest ridge to the west ridge. The route lay across icefalls and crevasses, up rock and ice to steep snow slopes to a summit so big that “we could have played a game of football on the top.” The route was “a little difficult” for the inexperienced younger members, who needed 1550 meters of fixed rope.

During the summer season of this year, there were only three expeditions in the Nepalese Himalaya, all on 8000-meter mountains. On the classical route on the north side of Everest, the leader, one member and three Sherpas from an eight-member team of mostly Britons got as high as 8200 meters before snowfall in July made it very difficult to make a trail up unconsolidated snow and normal camp sites were too dangerous. On the team’s arrival at base camp in mid-June the weather had been perfect: no snowfall, no wind, no afternoon clouds, just clear blue skies. But July brought typical monsoon weather with daily snowfall. In addition, this expedition had the normal problem of commercial teams: it was completely unrealistic for most of the members even to be on Everest because of their lack of climbing skill or strength for a very long route up a very large mountain.

Another commercial team of two Britons, one American, one Australian, and one Sherpa went to Cho Oyu’s standard route in early June. They were stopped at only 6800 meters by winds, snowfall and lack of manpower.

Five Japanese on the north face of Annapurna I climbed no higher than 5840 meters because of serious avalanching that destroyed two camps during the three weeks they were on the mountain in July and August. No one was injured.

## **Winter of 1994-95: Russians Again Pioneer a New Route in a Winter of Few Expeditions**

A small Russian expedition succeeded in scaling an unclimbed route on the 7000er known as Annapurna South last December. They were one of only three successful teams amongst the eight that attempted Nepalese Himalayan peaks in the bitter cold and fierce winds of wintertime, and they were one of only two to attempt new routes. The other bid to forge a new route was abandoned when tragedy struck and an American plunged to his death on Dorje Lhakpa, a mountain just under 7000 meters. No one tried to climb Everest this season, and those who went to other 8000ers, Swiss and South Koreans to Dhaulagiri I and Annapurna I, got no higher than 6500 and 5800 meters respectively.

The five-member team to Annapurna South, which rises just to the south of Annapurna I and has seldom been successfully climbed by any route, was led Vladimir Bachkirov (or Bashkirov), one of two Russian leaders who have in recent years managed to lead successful climbs in the Himalaya by new routes on tiny budgets with no climbing Sherpas and with artificial oxygen only for medical emergencies. Bachkirov in the spring of 1994 was the leader of a four-man team who made an alpine-style ascent of Ama Dablam's southeast face (to the right of the eastern of two ridges that run south from the summit) onto the east-southeast ridge of this 6812-meter neighbor of Everest; this was the first ascent of this very steep route with many rock towers. (The other similarly successful Russian leader is Sergei Efimov, whose teams made the first ascent of the east ridge of Cho Oyu in the autumn of 1991 and the first direct ascent of Dhaulagiri I's north face in the spring of 1993.)

Now Bachkirov continued this new Russian trend – which is in marked contrast to such big-budget Soviet expeditions as the one which swarmed all over Kangchenjunga in 1989 with many Sherpas, numerous fixed camps and plenty of oxygen bottles. Climbing with no Sherpas, no fixed camps, no permanently fixed ropes, no artificial oxygen, Bachkirov and his four teammates ascended in 11 days of continuous climbing the central rib of the south face (or the south ridge) of Annapurna South to reach its 7219-meter summit on 17 December. This climb was technically not so difficult as his Ama Dablam ascent, Bachkirov said, but it was harder work because of the greater altitude; the difficulty in finding a route amongst many rock towers and small gullies; moving in very cold weather with less than 12 hours of daylight each day; and the necessity for each man to carry a very heavy load containing enough supplies for two weeks. They could take with them only one tent, so “we had to climb together or descend together” – there was no possibility of some members dropping back during the ascent while others continued on up. And on up to the top all five of them succeeded in climbing.

“It was a nice route, a straight line,” Bachkirov commented with satisfaction. It was basically a route attempted only once before, in the spring of 1988, by three Americans and one Briton under the leadership of William Silva who pitched a series

of camps to a height of 5850 meters and after a month of effort had climbed to a high point of only 6100 meters before food supplies were becoming exhausted and the weather had started to deteriorate. The Russians believe that in the middle section of their route, they followed the same line as the Americans; they found some of the Americans' rope on the ridge's very few rock pitches. (The ridge in December was mostly ice with some snow.)

Dorje Lhakpa is a mountain of 6966 meters in the Jugal Himal to the north of Kathmandu. Before this season, all climbs had been via its west ridge, and seven of the ten previous attempts had been successful. Now an American, Andy Selters, and his teammates, one German and two Americans, wanted to scale it by its northwest face to northwest ridge, and to do so with no climbing Sherpas, no fixed camps and no fixed ropes. In four days of climbing, they had moved up their face and onto the ridge, and Selters and another American, Kurt Schmierer, had made the team's fourth bivouac at 6400 meters on the northwest ridge. Next day, 4 December, they started a slow descent. Schmierer's toes had begun freezing. On the 5th, Schmierer's crampon came off while he was descending 40-degree hard ice on the face, and he silently slid down the ice into a crevasse, probably breaking his neck on the edge of it. Selters reached him in the crevasse 15 or 20 minutes later, but he was already dead, the first person ever to die on Dorje Lhakpa. The climb was immediately abandoned.

Another of the Americans, Gregory Collum, said the west ridge appeared to be a much easier climb than their chosen route: it was less steep and much warmer from direct sunlight (in winter in Nepal, the sun is in the south, and on their northwest side of the mountain, his team had only four hours of direct sunshine daily). He thought that if they had continued up the northwest ridge, they would have had "serious problems" with the rock climbing in extremely cold wind at the top of this ridge, and he said they probably would have moved over onto the west ridge if the fatal accident had not occurred.

Schmierer was the only one of the winter's 37 foreign climbers and 14 Nepalese to die while on their mountains. But one South Korean, from the season's largest expedition of eight members and nine Nepalese on Annapurna I, died during their retreat from base camp: Jun Suk-Byun fell 50 meters down a hard-crusting snow slope on the second day of their trek back to Kathmandu and died six and a half hours later.

On the mountain itself, avalanches of ice injured several members and Sherpas of his Korean Annapurna expedition led by Kim Teuk-Hee. At midday on 2 December, when the route was being made at about 5800 meters, at the beginning of the steep section on the north face, a big avalanche started from 200 meters above and struck three members and three Sherpas, leaving them with a broken finger requiring an operation, plus injuries to leg, shoulder and head (they were not wearing helmets). With this accident and the expectation of more avalanching to come, plus the fact that three other members were suffering from the high altitude, the climb was abandoned. The climb was "not difficult – without avalanching, maybe it's easy," said

Kim. But without avalanching is a rare condition on Annapurna I's notorious north face.

On the only other 8000er to be attempted this winter, Dhaulagiri I, one Swiss mountaineer, Franco Dellatorre, proposed to make a solo ascent of the standard northeast-ridge route. He had assumed that he would be able to use the ropes that had been fixed by the teams who had summited in October, but scanning the ridge from base camp, he determined that he would need to fix about 400 meters of new rope because most of the autumn ropes were either not visible or were now uselessly off the route.

So he sent a message to his trekking agent in Kathmandu to provide him quickly with rope, and in the mean-time he climbed alone to 6500 meters to acclimatize. On his descent to base, he found no rope had arrived; he waited another day, still no rope came, and he abandoned his climb, presuming his message must not have reached Kathmandu and the rope would not arrive. However, when he got to the nearest village, Marpha, he found there the liaison officer who had been assigned to him by the Nepalese government – and his rope.

The official version of the case of the missing rope is that (a) Dellatorre was supposed to climb in alpine style and therefore should not require a lot of rope; (b) he should have brought the rope with him from Kathmandu; (c) the liaison officer had not been informed of the need for the rope; and (d) a porter did try to take the rope from Marpha but could not reach base camp because of bad weather. A very angry Dellatorre claims that the liaison officer told the man who had brought the rope from Kathmandu that it would not be needed since the Swiss climber would be back in Marpha enroute to Kathmandu on 10 December, which happened to be the very day that Dellatorre was actually reaching his highest point on the mountain before descending to base to pick up his rope.

Two Japanese teams went up the normal route, the southeast ridge, of Langtang Lirung, a 7234-meter mountain west-northwest of Dorje Lhakpa. The first party to arrive at base camp succeeded, the other one, who came 16 days later to a lower base-camp site, failed to get higher than 6200 meters. The first one consisted of eight Japanese and four Sherpas under the leadership of Koichi Ezaki. Ezaki and two members, Manabu Kuboki and Masayuki Sano, had been to the mountain in the previous winter, but they had been unable to climb above about 6200 meters because of the need for more than the 1400 meters of rope they had already fixed; now they came better supplied, fixed a total of about 2250 meters between their base at 4800 meters and the top, and Kuboki, Sano and a Sherpa named Lopsang Jangbu stood on the summit on 14 December.

The other team, only three Japanese and one Nepalese led by Ichiro Hosoda, arrived at their 4200-meter base camp on 11 December and used their compatriots' fixed ropes. They pitched advance base camp next to Ezaki's base and their camp 1 where his camp 1 had been; they had to wait for heavy snowfall and avalanching to stop before making camp 1. On the 24th they reached their high point of 6200 meters, where Hosoda and a Nepalese placed their camp 2 in the face of very strong winds. Hosoda waited there alone for two more days hoping the wind would drop and he

could go to the summit from there. But the winter winds usually gain in strength after the middle of the month, and they did not abate for him. He gave up.

It may be remembered that in October 1993, a British adventure-travel company, Himalayan Kingdoms, found itself in serious trouble with the Nepalese government because too many of its expedition members had gone to the summit of Everest, and the outfit was slapped with a US\$100,000 fine. That matter has recently been resolved.

Then – as now – Everest expeditions were normally permitted to have no more than seven foreign members, but a commercial, guided expedition organized by Himalayan Kingdoms actually had a total of 14 foreign clients and guides. The leader, Stephen Bell, thought he had found a way to make it possible to take all 14 members to Everest by dividing them into two teams with one holding a permit for the standard South Col-southeast ridge route up Everest, and the other allowed to scale Lhotse, the 8516-meter peak adjacent to Everest. He said he understood from middle-level officials in the tourism ministry, which regulates mountaineering in Nepal, that it would be all right for those on the Lhotse membership list to go to the summit of Everest provided he paid an extra fee for each such summiter afterwards. Four of his Lhotse team members, and five on the Everest permit including Bell himself, did reach Everest's summit on 7 and 9 October.

The tourism officials denied that they had agreed to let anyone from Bell's Lhotse membership list go to Everest's summit, and on 7 November, 1993, a public announcement from the ministry stated that since four climbers had not confined themselves to their permitted peak, Lhotse, but had "climbed Everest without permission," they had thereby violated the law governing mountaineering, and "any expedition who does such an act is subject to punishment." The punishment awarded to the Himalayan Kingdoms expedition was a fine of \$100,000, which was calculated by doubling the basic royalty fee, as per the rules.

Himalayan Kingdoms then appealed the severity of this fine on the grounds of what Bell described as an "enormous misunderstanding" between himself and the officials that August, although he continued to claim that he had had their agreement; he further pointed out that at no time had his team attempt to hide the truth from the ministry. He said he was prepared to pay \$10,000 for each of the four summiters from the Lhotse list, or even \$50,000 for another Everest fee, but he pleaded that the sum of \$100,000 "will have disastrous consequences" for the finances of Himalayan Kingdoms. His appeal was supported by the British embassy here, who spoke of "mitigating circumstances" that should be taken into account.

The ministry insisted for about a year that the full \$100,000 had to be paid, and officials even talked of taking further action if it was not. No official announcement has been issued, but apparently in October 1994, a few weeks before a parliamentary election that, as it turned out, was to bring about the defeat of the government then in power, the cabinet suddenly decided to waive the \$50,000 penalty and demand payment only of the \$50,000 normal royalty. A tourism ministry mountaineering official says the cabinet gave no explanation for this decision, and he has no idea what lay behind it, but he notes that there had been discussions "at a

high level” – presumably meaning between the British ambassador and the tourism minister, and perhaps the prime minister, of that time. There has been some suggestion that the election campaign was somehow involved, but the official says he has not heard of any such connection. In any case, he says payment of the \$50,000 royalty fee was received from Himalayan Kingdoms on 22 November.

## **Spring 1995: The Jinx is Broken on the Tibetan Side of Everest for Commercial Teams and a British Woman Has Notable Success**

The jinx on clients of commercial expeditions to Everest's north ridge in Tibet was finally broken in this May's perfect weather, greatly to the satisfaction of organizers of these climbs. Until then, not a single paying client had gotten to the top of the world at 8848 meters above the seas. Guides, yes; Sherpas, yes; experienced film-team members, yes; but not the sheet-metal worker from Hong Kong or the Minneapolis, U.S.A. corporation executive who had succeeded in considerable numbers on Nepal's side of this border mountain. Now an astonishing 67 climbers summited with 11 teams from Tibet, and 21 of these summiters were clients with five commercial expeditions, which are organized by people who make a business of organizing climbs of Everest and other peaks for participants who are often total strangers to each other.

This season's Tibetan-side total of 67 was impressive but not record-breaking, for in the spring of 1993 altogether 90 men and women gained the summit, 40 of them on a single day from the Nepalese side; only nine men summited from Tibet. But it brought the grand total of Everest summiters from both sides, starting with Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay Sherpa in May 1953, over the 600-mark to 608, after adjusting for climbers who have made more than one ascent. The total number of individual ascents, including all the ascents of repeat summiters, now stands at 739.

The reversal of fortune for commercial teams from Tibet was all the more dramatic when no clients and just one Sherpa summited from the two commercial expeditions on the Nepalese side. (The only other team from Nepal, a group of friends, did send two members and three Sherpas to the top.) What caused the turnabout? According to leaders of three commercial expeditions, there were several factors. Firstly, there were three very strong teams on the north side plus on other teams several very strong individuals like the well-known Russian, Anatoli Bukreev, and almost all the eleven expeditions worked very well together in what one leader called a "harmonious mob."

Secondly, the first to the summit, Japanese from the northeast ridge (their climb is described below), acted as a stimulus to others to go for the top themselves, and by the time members of other expeditions were reaching 8500 meters, where the two ridges meet and there is a single line to the top, the unusually large number of Sherpas with the Japanese team had already fixed ropes on the highest section of the joint route. The commercial parties' clients could immediately use the Japanese fixed lines and move up quickly.

And thirdly and most importantly, the weather was "incredibly good." An unprecedentedly long period of fine weather began on the 11th of May, the day the Japanese summited. The skies were cloudless, the winds were slight and temperatures were mild for such high altitudes. Tent flaps remained unzipped, layers of warm clothing were few, hands did not have to be gloved and over-gloved; "we were



really comfortable.” This splendid weather lasted from the 11th to the 17th. Then the winds grew stronger. Climbers waited for them to drop, and drop they did so that from the 23rd it was lovely weather again and another wave of climbers reached the summit. By the 27th of May anyone who had the strength and determination to go to the top had done so.

“Most people who summited would not have gotten to 8300 meters in normal weather conditions on the north side,” said one veteran Everest leader. “There would have been dead people everywhere if there had been a sudden drop in temperature or increase in the winds” in mid-May. He noted that the average time taken to ascend from 8300 meters, where most teams pitch their highest camps, to the top this spring was six hours; in last year’s normal weather it was eight to ten hours.

The beautiful weather surely helped in the success of the first woman to make an unsupported ascent of Everest, and she accomplished this without the use of any artificial oxygen. Mrs. Alison Hargreaves, 33, Britain’s best woman climber, reached the highest point on earth via the north ridge on 13 May at 12:08 p.m., just about ten minutes after two Italians, who had camped very near her last camp at about 8300 meters.

Hargreaves does not claim to have made a solo ascent as some of the British press trumpeted – how could she when there were 182 other climbers including the two Italians on the same route and 33 more on the Japanese route that joins hers very high up? Nor does she claim to have been the first woman to summit without using any bottled oxygen. That distinction belongs to a New Zealander, Miss Lydia Bradey. But Hargreaves is the first British woman to have done so. And other climbers on her route concur that she can rightfully claim to have made the first unsupported ascent by any woman. By “unsupported” she means that she was an entirely self-contained unit above advance base camp, that she carried all her own supplies of tents, gear and food up the mountain, slept in her own tents rather than in camps pitched by or with others, ate her own high-altitude food which she cooked herself, and did not climb in the company of anyone else. The other climbers noted that she had refused invitations to come into their tents for a chat or a cup of their tea; she stayed outside to visit with them, and she drank her own brews.

According to her account, Hargreaves carried her loads of supplies in three trips to the North Col (7000 meters), where the north ridge begins, slept there the third time, then down to advance base; went up to 7000 meters, pitched a tent and slept one night there, then again down to advance base. Finally she started her summit push on 11 May, went up to the Col, picked up gear including a tent and went to her other tent at 7700 meters where she slept that night. On the 12th she climbed to 8300 meters and pitched there the tent she had brought from the Col; she had a hard time making her own platform for this tent, having to move a lot of stones to do so, and she spent the night melting snow and drinking liquids, occasionally falling into a light sleep. She had no sleeping bag with her at 8300 meters because she had lightened her final load as much as she possibly could.

At 4:40 on the morning of the 13th (Nepalese time) she left the tent for the top of the world in very clear weather with no wind, but “it was incredibly cold.” She took

with her a water bottle, a small camera, a walkie-talkie radio and spare batteries for her foot-warmers (she had had frostbitten toes on earlier climbs and did not want frozen feet again). Climbing not far behind the two Italian summiters, Marco Bianchi and Christian Kuntner, she joined them on the summit at 12:08 p.m. and left them there 40 minutes later. She had noticed a single set of footprints coming up to the top from the Nepalese side, prints that she learned later would have been made on 7 May by Lobsang Jangbu Sherpa of a commercial team from Nepal. She took photos and sent a message by walkie-talkie: “to Tom and Kate, my two children, I’m on top of the world and I love them dearly.” Then down she went.

At 4:00 p.m. she packed up her tent at 8300 meters, chatted with some Sherpas, and set off down to 7700 meters, where she arrived at 7:00 p.m. in fading daylight and stayed the night. (The Italians, she said, descended only as far as 8300 meters, and the leader of another expedition reported that she descended “in good order,” whereas the Italians were quite sick). On the next day, the 14th, she continued down alone to 6500 meters, where an American and a New Zealander came up to meet her, and the three went down together to advance base, where she arrived at perhaps 2:00 p.m. “very, very tired.”

Throughout this final day’s descent, all of the 20 or more Sherpas she met wanted to shake her hand and hug her, and the dozen foreigners along the route congratulated her and gave her hand a shake. “At this point, I realized that I had done something people thought was quite special. I still find it hard to believe [in a posh Kathmandu hotel a week later] that I actually climbed Mount Everest.”

Commented Bianchi when he too had returned to Kathmandu: “She is a new star of the Himalaya – of women for sure, but also of men. She climbs like a man. She is very strong. And very kind.” Her future climbing plans were immediate: she would go next to the world’s second highest mountain, K-2 in Pakistan’s Karakoram range, a month or so later and to the third highest, Kangchenjunga on Nepal’s eastern border with India, in the autumn or next spring.

A number of other first-time ascents were recorded on Everest. From Nepal to the top went the first Argentinean, Tommy Heinrich. From Tibet the firsts were much more numerous: the first Dane, Michael Jorgensen; first Latvians, Teodors Kirsis and Imants Zauls; first Ossetian (from a republic in the Russian Federation), Kazbek Khamitsayev; first Brazilians, Mozart Catao and Waldemar Niclevicz; first Turk, Ali Nasuh Mahruki, who was also the first Moslem; first Taiwanese woman who was also the first woman of the Han Chinese race (i.e., not Tibetan or of any other minority race within the Chinese nation), Miss Chiang Hsiu-Chen; and first person to go from bottom to top of the mountain twice in the same season, a Sherpa named Babu Tshering, who summited on the 14th and again on the 26th of May.

On the other hand, some other attempted firsts did not take place: the first under-16-year-old and the first person over 61 – the age range amongst clients was the greatest ever. An American high school student, Mark Pfetzer, 15, got as high as 7300 meters before becoming too tired to continue, and he says he is satisfied with his first but not last Himalayan climb, while on the Nepalese side another American,

64-year-old Albert Hanna, was still going strong at 8500 meters, but deep snow was making progress too slow for both summit success and a safe return to camp.

A probable first was the first summiter named George Mallory. This spring's Mallory was a 35-year-old Australian engineer who climbed rapidly and reached the top from Tibet on 14 May. He believes he is actually the second Mallory, that his illustrious British grandfather, George Leigh Mallory, preceded him – and everyone else – to the top on 8 June, 1924 at the age of 38. George Leigh Mallory was last seen that day in 1924 at 8450 meters “going strong for the top,” a teammate reported at the time, and his grandson, who followed the same climbing route 71 years later, is confident that there are no technical obstacles above that point that his grandfather, who was a skilled rock climber, would have been unable to overcome. Furthermore the 1924 attempt was the first Mallory's third time on Everest, and he was highly motivated to succeed on what he expected to be his last chance at the mountain.

The fastest ascent of the Tibetan side of Everest was accomplished this spring by a 38-year-old mountain guide from Graun, Italy, Reinhard Patscheider, who climbed by himself and without bottled oxygen from his team's advance base camp at 6450 meters to the summit in a record 21 hours. In April he had been ill and left the mountain for ten days for medical treatment in Kathmandu, but he recovered well enough to begin his historic effort at 7:30 a.m. on 13 May. He stopped for three hours twice in higher camps, then from 8:00 p.m. he climbed through the night in full moonlight with a light wind blowing (“it was a nice night”) and was on the top at 4:30 a.m. next day, the 14th. He was “a little bit tired” but descended all the way to advance base camp, where he arrived at 1:00 p.m. that day.

The previous speed record for Everest had been set in September 1988 by a Frenchman, Marc Batard, who ascended Nepal's side in 22 hours, 29 minutes. He began from a significantly lower altitude, 5350 meters, where base camps are pitched at the foot of the treacherous Khumbu Icefall at the start of the route. So perhaps Batard should be allowed to retain the record: his ascent of 3500 vertical meters in 22.5 hours yields a rate of 167 meters per hour, whereas Patscheider's 2400 vertical meters gives a rate of 107 meters per hour. (The previous record on the north side had been made in the summer of August 1986 by two Swiss, Erhard Loretan and Jean Troillet, via a different route from Patscheider's – they ascended the Japanese and Hornbein Couloirs – in 39 hours from their advance base at 5800 meters.

Another piece of Everest history, the first successful ascent of the northeast ridge, was achieved by a team of eight Japanese climbers who were assisted by 23 climbing Sherpas, 4000 meters of fixed rope, and enough bottled oxygen for some members to start using it as low as 7100 meters. Under the leadership of Tadao Kanzaki, the expedition overcame the serious difficulties presented by the “the Pinnacles” at altitudes between 7850 and 8350 meters in three days of route-making and fixing 1250 meters of rope on this section, and at last the climbing leader, Kiyoshi Furuno, Shigeki Imoto, and four Nepalese Sherpas, all of whom had summited Everest at least once before, Dawa Tshering, Lhakpa Nuru, Nima Dorje and Pasang Kami, became the first of the season's Everest summiters when they arrived at the top between 6:45 and 7:00 a.m. (Nepalese time) on 11 May. The two Japanese and

two of their Sherpa companions had left their expedition's highest camp at 8560 meters at 4:00 a.m. and were the first to arrive, while the other two Sherpas, Nima Dorje and Pasang Kami, had started out at 3:00 a.m. from the camp below at 8350 meters because there was not enough tent space for them at 8560 meters.

The northeast ridge had first been attempted in the spring of 1982 by a four-man British party led by Chris Bonington without the help of any Sherpas or artificial oxygen and with a minimum of fixed rope. Two well-known members, Peter Boardman and Joe Tasker, disappeared at high altitude, and Boardman's body was seen ten years later by Japanese and Khazakhs near the ridge. This spring again Japanese saw a body at 8200 meters that is presumed to be Boardman's. Tasker's body has still not been found.

Although Everest tends to grab the limelight, there are of course many other mountains in Nepal and along its borders. This spring saw successes on several of these, perhaps most notably on Makalu (8463 meters) to the east of Everest and, like it, astride the Tibetan border. Before this season, no mountaineer had ever attempted to scale Makalu from its northern base in Tibet. A French team received permission for a climb in 1934 from the then Dalai Lama, but this permit was cancelled and no attempt was actually made.

Finally in 1992 the Chinese authorities added Makalu to their list of peaks that were open to foreigners. But their fee was very high for this spring's first-ever attempt on their side of the mountain, \$30,000, compared to their \$5500 charge for the Tibetan side of Everest, and to Nepal's fee for its side of Makalu of \$8000 for a team of nine members plus \$800 more per additional member. In 1992 the Chinese were reportedly asking \$60,000 for the right to make the first attempt to scale their side of Makalu, but with no one yet having agreed to pay this price, and with cordial relations existing between the Chinese Mountaineering Association and the Japanese Alpine Club, who were the organizers of this spring's effort, the fee was now fixed at \$30,000. Even so, who would be willing to pay a royalty of \$30,000 for any peak other than Everest? The answer, it turned out, was a prominent Japanese newspaper.

The Japan Alpine Club sent a team of 11 climbing members and 12 climbing Sherpas under the leadership of Tsuneo Shigehiro and the climbing leadership of Munehiko Yamamoto, both with considerable Himalayan mountaineering experience. Their plan was to ascend the northeast ridge (or east ridge) from its beginning despite their not having seen any pictures of its lower reaches and their realization that higher up it was a sharp knife-edge ridge with many rock towers and cornices. They estimated their route would be ten kilometers of extremely difficult pioneer climbing.

They even had some difficulty getting to base camp on the south side of the ridge on the Malung River north of the Sakyatang Lho Glacier. There is a road as far as a place called Karta, and from there 150 porters carried their supply loads for a week through deep snow. Base was pitched at the relatively low altitude of 3920 meters on 30 March, and they now decided that to follow the entire ridge line over its many small rock peaks would take too much time and effort. They chose instead to forge a route along the southeast face of the ridge to a site for their third high-altitude

camp, then go up onto the ridge, continue southwestward on it briefly, move northwest from the ridge onto the main Sakyatang Glacier and its vast plateau east and southeast of the Makalu La (Pass), and finally, without going to the pass itself, join the standard route of climbers from Nepal up the northwest ridge to the summit.

The route was difficult, especially the section of the ridge which they did climb and where they had to place two of their seven high camps. They spent a month, from mid-April to mid-May, making the route and fixing all of it in this segment of knife ridge, rock towers and cornices; here an ice avalanche struck but did not seriously hurt two Sherpas. The team called up the additional services of their base-camp sirdar (their head Sherpa), Pertemba, a veteran mountaineer who prefers now to manage Sherpa teams from base. Finally they had mastered this section of the ridge, pitched camp 5 at the southwest end of it, moved over onto the plateau at 7350 meters and on 20 May made camp 7 at 7650 meters on the often-climbed northwest ridge. They used artificial oxygen sleeping in the camps on the plateau and the northwest ridge and while making their final ascent up this ridge to the summit.

At long last, on 21 May the summit of Makalu was reached via the previously untrodden northeast ridge for the very first time by four Japanese eight hours and 45 minutes after they had left camp 7 at 4:00 a.m. Chinese (Beijing) time or 1:45 a.m. Nepalese time, which is a truer time for the Everest-Makalu area. The sky was cloudless, but fierce winds buffeted the summiters, Osamu Tanabe, Atsushi Yamamoto, Toshihiko Arai and Masayuki Matsubara. It was Yamamoto's fourth conquest of an 8000-meter mountain and Tanabe's fifth. Said Tanabe, "this was the most difficult climb in my experience." Next day they were followed to the summit by their climbing leader, Munehiko Yamamoto, and three other teammates, Taro Tanigawa, Takeshi Ono and Hirotaka Takeuchi. For both the climbing leader and Tanigawa, Makalu was the third 8000er they had successfully scaled.

On Nepal's side of Makalu, there had been no pioneering search for a new line. All four teams followed the standard route which approaches the mountain via a glacier from the southwest, ascends to the Makalu La and here crosses the border to go up onto the northwest ridge. Success came to all these teams – and an international party of three had a remarkably swift success – while tragedy came to one of them, a seven-member Australian group.

For almost all the successful summiters except the Australians, Makalu was one more in a string of 8000-meter conquests. One team, the first to reach the top this spring, was composed of just two Frenchmen, Benoit Chamoux and Pierre Royer; for Royer, it was his fourth 8000-meter summit, and for Chamoux it was the twelfth time he had stood at the highest point of an 8000er. Chamoux now joined the exclusive group of only three others – Reinhold Messner of Italy, the late Jerzy Kukuczka of Poland and the Swiss, Erhard Loretan – who have ever scaled so many successfully; he has still to conquer the world's third greatest mountain, Kangchenjunga, and the highest of the several summits of Xixabangma (Shishapangma).

On 8 May, the day after the Frenchmen summited, and on the 9th, all members of a party of four Spanish Basques and their South Korean friend and teammate followed to the top. For the group's leader, Juanito Oiarzabal, this was his sixth 8000-

meter success and for the Korean, Um Hong-Gil, his third. Twenty-four other climbers have conquered as many as six 8000ers.

And finally from the Nepalese side on the 18th of May the summit was reached by an international trio of Ed Viesturs, American, now also on his sixth 8000-meter ascent, and on their fifth each were his teammates, Rob Hall of New Zealand and Veikka Gustafsson from Finland. (Hall and Gustafsson were the first of their nationalities to gain Makalu's summit.) The three made the fastest ascent ever achieved on Makalu, and they did it with no Sherpa helpers or artificial oxygen.

The rapidity of their climb astonished members of the Japanese expedition when they learned about it on their return to Kathmandu. They had seen and waved to Viesturs, Gustafsson and Hall when the trio were coming down from the summit to their camp on the Makalu La and the Japanese were pitching a tent on the plateau a kilometer (more than half a mile) to the east of the pass – too far away for the two parties to exchange words – at the site of what would be the next-to-last high Japanese camp.

The 11 Japanese climbers and their 13 Sherpas had toiled on an unknown route for seven weeks to establish seven fixed camps above their very low base and to fix a total of 5600 meters of rope along their route. By contrast, the international trio, who were extremely well-acclimatized to very high altitudes since they had just come by helicopter from climbs high on Everest and its immediate neighbor, Lhotse, took only five days to make their way up the normal route from base camp to the top with four high camps set up on four successive days. As the last climbers from the Nepalese side of Makalu to arrive at the mountain, they were able to make use of ropes put in place by the Spaniards, and they occupied a tent the Spanish had left.

The Australians were not nearly such experienced Himalayan climbers as others on Makalu: none of them had been to the highest point on any 8000-meter mountain, although their leader, David Hume, had reached a subsidiary summit, just over 8000 meters, on Xixabangma in Tibet. On 8 May, nearly eight hours after three of the Spaniards and their Korean friend had gotten to the top, Hume and a teammate, Mark Auricht, became the first Australians ever to summit Makalu. Hume did not survive the descent; Auricht did, but he does not know what happened to his companion.

Hume was not a fast climber, the two men had gotten very little sleep the night before, and neither one of them had used any bottled oxygen during their ascent. They had reached the top quite late, at 6:15 p.m., when the sun was beginning to set, in light winds with a cloudless sky above. Auricht led their descent, and at a section of steep snow they glissaded (went down on their backsides). Auricht stopped his glissade and had just stood up about 250 meters below the summit, Auricht reported, when “my legs were struck by David [Hume] as he slipped above me and collided with me. [I fell but] I was able to arrest my fall as I witnessed David accelerate on his back over the rock step below. I did not see him again.”

Auricht went on to recount their saga: “As I climbed down, I found evidence of his fall including his ice axe and one glove, also a streak of blood on the ice approximately 250 meters below where he first slipped. It was clear that David must

have continued to fall/slide down into the icefall below, possibly another 100 meters or more. I felt that there was no hope for his life. I also felt it was unsafe to search for David at that time. I returned slowly to camp [at 7800 meters], arriving at 4:30 a.m. on the 9th of May, 27 hours after leaving it.”

The fact that Hume did not cry out as he slipped and did not arrest his fall suggests to Auricht that Hume may have blacked out. But perhaps not, perhaps he just lost control of his glissade, possibly because he had lost a crampon. When he began his fatal slide, Hume was only 20 meters above the start of the fixed ropes. His body may be in a crevasse at an altitude of about 7900 meters, but said Auricht, “we will never know exactly where he is or why he fell.”

Sadly, Hume was not the only climber to die this spring. Two Germans fell to their deaths on another 8000er, Manaslu, on the day the French summited Makalu and on the day before that. Michael Zunk went to the 8163-meter top of Manaslu on the 7th with two teammates, Joerg Bartock and Steffen Thomas, from an 11-member expedition led by Holger Kloss. They had made an oxygen-less alpine-style ascent from 6100 meters. Then in their descent, Zunk fell for reasons no one knows since he was the last coming down and his fall was not seen nor his body recovered. On the day before, Joerg Starke had become very tired and was returning to camp when he lost his footing, and he died despite the efforts of his colleagues to keep him alive.

A third German who died was Albrecht Hammann, a member of Norbert Joos’s predominantly Swiss team on Dhaulagiri I, which is discussed below. Hammann had summited with a Swiss teammate on 19 May but became fatally ill from the high altitude during his descent. And a young Nepalese named Kami Rita Sherpa plunged to his death while climbing with an unsuccessful commercial expedition on Nepal’s side of Everest led by Todd Burleson.

These five who died represented 2.3% of the 153 foreign men and women, plus the 70 Nepalese Sherpas, who went climbing on all the expeditions in Nepal this season. This is about the normal rate. Mountaineering is not the safest of sports.

Notable ascents were made on two much smaller mountains than the giant 8000ers chronicled above. A peak called Drangnag Ri (6801 meters) in the Rolwaling range near Gaurishankar, had never been attempted before this spring by any climbers. There was considerable criticism in the Norwegian press about the plans of a Norwegian shipping magnate who lives in London, Arne Naess, and his team of 10 more Norwegians, one very well-known Briton, Chris Bonington, and 10 climbing Sherpas, to “violate” this pristine and, they claimed, even sacred peak. (No information about its alleged sanctity is available in Kathmandu.) Naess’s party went to Drangnag Ri despite all the unfavorable comments, and they succeeded.

Their approach was via a long southern glacier, where they used Nordic skis, to the mountain’s east ridge, and up this ridge, which Bonington said gave some of the hardest ice climbing he had ever experienced in the Himalaya. “In places it was so difficult that it took a whole day just to complete two rope lengths of climbing,” Bonington reported. After two weeks of work on this “technically challenging mountain,” two Norwegians, Bjorn Myrer-Lund and Ralph Hoibakk, Bonington, and two Sherpas, Pema Dorje and Gyalu, were on the top on 30 April.

Tawoche, a 6501-meter satellite of Everest, had never been successfully scaled via its very steep and difficult northeast pillar until late this April, when two Britons, Mick Fowler and Patrick Littlejohn, made the first ascent of this feature from a series of six increasingly higher bivouacs in as many days. They descended via the frequently used southeast ridge.

Back on an 8000-meter mountain, two Slovenian brothers made the first continuous ski descent of Annapurna I. (In 1979 a French team had attempted a similar ski descent but accomplished it only in segments and started from 200 meters below the summit. One French skier died when he got entangled in the fixed ropes.) Despite frequent dangerous avalanches on the Slovenes' north face route, Davorin and Drejc Karnicar became the first brothers to reach the summit on 29 April after two weeks of climbing without Sherpa helpers or bottled oxygen by their nine-member expedition led by Tone Skarja. The two men started their final climb to the top at midnight from their last camp with a Mexican teammate, Carlos Carsolio, and the three were on the top at 8:30 a.m.

Carsolio moved down the mountain in the normal fashion, but the two Slovenes began at 9:15 a.m. to ski down their ascent route from just two meters below the top. At about 6500 meters, Drejc skied into a fixed rope that got tangled around his leg, and it took him half an hour to cut the rope with the sharp edge of his Tour Alpine ski. They ended their descent at 3:30 p.m. the same day at 4200 meters, where the snow stopped and moraine began. On arrival at base camp at 6:00 p.m., Drejc was exhausted and found to have two frostbitten toes, the ends of which will probably have to be amputated.

Carsolio got back to base camp at 9:00-9:30 the same night, but his climbing was not finished, for he wanted to scale another 8000-meter mountain before going home to Mexico City. He rested and waited a few days for porters to come up to base camp to carry his supplies with him to nearby Dhaulagiri I. On 11 May he joined Norbert Joos and his team, who were near the midpoint of their two-week period of establishing camps and becoming acclimatized to high altitudes without the help of Sherpas or artificial oxygen. On the 14th he, Joos and four of Joos's teammates left base camp (4800 meters) at 4:00 a.m. for a push straight through to the top. Joos's group dropped out at various points along the standard northeast-ridge route: Joos went to the group's highest point at about 7500 meters before lack of acclimatization, which Carsolio had acquired on Annapurna I, forced him also to turn back. The Mexican climbed all night alone and reached the summit at 10:00 a.m. on the 15th. (Joos and other teammates reached the top a few days later.)

Carsolio, who is 32 years old, has now successfully scaled 11 of the world's 14 mountains over 8000 meters. Only four other climbers have ever conquered so many of them. He was scheduled to attempt two more, Gasherbrum I and II in the Karakoram, this summer; he had no exact plans for attempting the other remaining giant, Manaslu in Nepal. "I am not in a hurry," he said, "but I would like to climb them all."

When Carsolio came back to Kathmandu from his Annapurna and Dhaulagiri climbs, he learned that a woman's body had been found on Kangchenjunga by Italian



climbers in April, and it seemed quite possible that it was that of the noted Polish mountaineer, Mrs. Wanda Rutkiewicz, his climbing partner on the north face of Kangchenjunga three years ago who disappeared as she was trying for its summit. The badly-battered body was now discovered at 7700 meters not far from the standard southwest-face route; that it was on this side of the mountain did not prove that, if it was Rutkiewicz, she had reached the summit and fallen from it, for climbers on the north face have to make a high traverse onto the west ridge, and she could have slipped while making this traverse. But it could also be the body of a Bulgarian woman, Mrs. Iordanka Dimitrova, who last October disappeared from 8300 meters on the southwest face. Carsolio would have to discuss descriptions of the body's hair, clothing and other items with the Italians who found it and the Bulgarian woman's teammates before concluding whose remains it is. The Italians put the body into a crevasse.

In recent years there have been stories of official corruption concerning Nepalese permits for Everest expeditions. At the end of this season, a middle-ranking officer in Nepal's ministry of tourism, which grants permits to expeditions and generally oversees mountaineering in Nepal, became the first official ever to be sent to jail to be tried on a charge of attempting to extort a bribe from a foreign mountaineer. He fell into a trap on 28 May and was arrested as he left a Kathmandu hotel with a wad of Nepalese bank notes reportedly worth about \$600, which were part of his demand for at least \$5000 in cash, a camera, a video camera and climbing equipment in return for having "done everything" for an American leader, Todd Burleson, to obtain his permit for an Everest climb that took place this spring. Unhappily for the official, under-secretary Indul K.C., Burleson had informed the authorities in advance, and the serial numbers of these notes had been recorded before Mr. K.C. came to collect them from Burleson.

## **Autumn 1995: Tragedy and Quiet Triumph on Kangchenjunga**

### **A Missing Ladder on Everest**

On the great Asian mountains, this summer's high drama took place in Pakistan, where seven climbers, including the well-known British woman, Mrs. Alison Hargreaves, died on K-2, the world's second highest mountain. This autumn's major triumph and tragedy occurred in Nepal on Kangchenjunga, the easternmost huge Himalayan peak and the world's third highest (8586 meters, just 25 meters lower than K-2), where a Swiss mountaineer became the third person to "conquer" all of the world's 14 giant 8000-meter mountains while a Frenchman perished attempting his 13th "conquest."

The Kangchenjunga drama took place on 5 October, when eight men from three teams set out without any artificial oxygen from their last campsites at about 7800 meters, high on the plateau known as the Great Shelf on the southwest face. They included the Swiss climber Erhard Loretan, who was going for his fourteenth and therefore his last 8000er; Benoit Chamoux, a Frenchman who had reached the highest summits of twelve 8000ers, plus a peak of Xixabangma which is over 8000 meters and only slightly lower than its highest point, and which he counted as his ascent of the mountain; and Sergio Martini, an Italian who had already summited ten 8000ers.

Loretan and his frequent climbing partner and fellow Swiss, Jean Troillet, left their bivouac on the Great Shelf at 2:00 a.m. for the summit. At the same time, Martini together with Chamoux and his usual French partner, Pierre Royer, and three of their Sherpas, whom they had employed to help with the film Royer was making about Chamoux's expected historic ascent, set out for the top from their third fixed camps nearby. The eight stayed together until about 9:30 a.m. At this point the two Swiss and the Italian went on ahead after they had found the French party was moving too slowly for them. And just after this moment, one of Chamoux's Sherpas, Riku, lost his balance while sitting down with a rucksack on his back and fell to his death. The other two Sherpas with the French descended immediately.

Loretan forged a route up to the col (saddle) just west of Kangchenjunga's summit pyramid on the ridge connecting its main summit with the west summit, which is known as Yalung Kang, and then by what Loretan calls "an easy way" along this rock and snow ridge to the top. But Martini doubted that this line would prove satisfactory because of a difficult big rock pillar and the strong wind that was blowing. He waited for half an hour for the Swiss to retreat from it and to follow the normal route via a couloir. But they did not immediately return, so he turned back at 8200 meters, below the col, and decided he would attempt the couloir alone. However, after he had climbed only 20 meters of it, he found the condition of snow-on-rock too dangerous, and he descended in bitterly cold weather.

As Loretan and Troillet approached the summit alone, the weather was extremely cold and the wind was blowing lots of snow in spirals, but when they

reached the top at 2:35 p.m. the wind was not so strong. They started their descent at 3:00 p.m. and were in their camp at 7300 meters, just below the Shelf, at 5:30 p.m. Two other members were now in the camp and Loretan slept there with them, but Troillet continued down to base camp (5300 meters) at midnight (Loretan met him there at 6:00 a.m. next day).

Loretan had now joined Reinhold Messner of Italy and the late Jerzy Kukuczka of Poland as the only people to have successfully climbed all the 8000ers, and at the age of 36 he is the youngest to have done so. When he was back in Kathmandu nearly two weeks later, he spoke matter-of-factly about his accomplishment: "It's something done." This goal was not a burden to him, he said – he did not feel any release from having achieved it. For the future, he was thinking about some other mountaineering projects, perhaps the very steep unclimbed west face of Makalu.

When, at about 4:00 p.m. on 5 October, Loretan and Troillet reached the bottom of the west ridge coming down from their summit success, they met Chamoux and Royer still moving up. About half an hour later Royer reported by their walkie-talkie that he was abandoning his summit bid because he was too tired; he had been carrying his cameras himself since their Sherpas were no longer with them. An hour after that, at 5:30 p.m., Chamoux radioed that he also was too exhausted to continue his climb and he was unable to find his way down the ridge. He said he had lost visual contact with Royer, who had handed over their walkie-talkie to Chamoux. Chamoux stayed all that night on the ridge a few meters above the col and was on the radio again at 8:00 a.m. on the 6th. He received guidance from Troillet on how to come down the final section of the ridge. He was seen reaching the col, but then he went out of sight on the north side.

Neither Chamoux or Royer was ever seen again, alive or dead. Their surviving Sherpas refused to go up to try to find them since they had done nothing to help Riku Sherpa when he had fallen. Aerial searches were made a few days afterwards from helicopters and a small airplane, and climbers on the mountain immediately north of Kangchenjunga that is called Gimmigela or the Twins, who had been using a telescope to scan Kangchenjunga's north face and summit area, had seen no trace of the Frenchmen. No avalanche paths, no marks made by falling men, nothing.

Martini made another summit attempt on the 14th with a teammate, Abele Blanc. They were successful in their final six-hour ascent to the top via Loretan's route, and Martini is now the eighth person to stand atop as many as eleven 8000ers. They had not taken bottles of oxygen with them to the mountain and had planned to climb Kangchenjunga without any, but this day they used oxygen belonging to another team to make sure that they would reach the col to look for Chamoux and Royer. They did not find the two men, but along the ridge they found a torch where marks in the snow indicated someone had rested or bivouacked. Very near the col they found several items that had been placed there: two ice axes, Royer's small rucksack containing two cameras, and, draped on a rock, two harnesses; a little higher was a walkie-talkie propped against another rock. They brought back the rucksack and its contents to be taken to France.

Loretan thinks the two French climbers probably fell down the north face. Martini believes this may be true, or they may have died amongst the many big rocks near and above the col and their bodies are hidden by them. There are no crevasses in the area for them to have fallen into. So perhaps each man alone sat down to rest, had no strength to get up again and froze to death behind rocks that gave some shelter from the wind.

There was considerable discussion amongst members of expeditions camped at the foot of Kangchenjunga as to whether the presence together on the mountain of three top-class mountaineers had created a dangerously competitive situation. One French climber believes that Chamoux was in a race with Loretan to be the third person atop all fourteen 8000ers: "It was a fatal challenge for Chamoux. ... The Swiss were much faster. Loretan is the best." Said an American bluntly: "The French were not well-acclimatized. They tried to keep up with the Swiss and they killed themselves."

On Mount Everest some intrepid climbers came to the Tibetan side in the summer, while the monsoon weather was dumping large amounts of snow on the mountain. No one was killed on these unsuccessful summer attempts by a Swiss expedition and two small American teams. But an American, David Breashears, reported that when he was caught by a huge windslab avalanche about 30 meters below the North Col (7000 meters) and his life was saved only by a previous expedition's fixed rope that he had clipped into, "it made me realize how mortal I was," and he went home.

A small Indian team came to the north side of Everest during the summer and stayed on well into the autumn – they were at or above base camp nine weeks in all – and their leader, Atanu Chatterjee, said they were finally defeated by the unhappy discovery of the disappearance of three-fourths of the important ladder which much earlier mountaineers had placed at the rock formation known as the Second Step at about 8700 meters, and which all climbers via the classical North Col-north ridge route expect to use. The Indians did not have enough rope to either surmount the Step or traverse around it. Nor did they have the strength to do this.

Two out of three South Korean teams on the same route in the autumn managed to overcome this problem. All three teams also reached the Step and were turned back by the absence of the well-known ladder. One team had no strength left to continue their climb, but the other two temporarily retreated, brought up a good supply of rope and together went to the summit on the 14th of October.

One of these successful teams had begun their attack on Everest via the northeast ridge, which was climbed all the way to the summit for the first time only last spring by Japanese. Now the Koreans had brought with them one of the Sherpas who had summited by this route and who had reached the top five other times, Lhakpa Nuru. But an avalanche struck a party of two members and four Sherpas when they were at 6900 meters, and it killed Lhakpa Nuru and injured another Sherpa and two Koreans. When this team went up the northeast ridge a week later, they found there was still serious danger of avalanching, and they abandoned that route.

The other successful Korean team also lost a Sherpa, Zangbu, who fell to his death during his descent from the summit. He either lost his footing or was involved in a small avalanche; he fell 3000 meters down the Great couloir.

And another autumn expedition, this one from Spain, suffered the loss of a member, Xavier Lamas, who was killed by an avalanche while they were acclimatizing on a peak called Changzheng, just north of Everest.

On Nepal's southern side of Everest, there was not a single expedition on the normal South Col-southeast ridge and only one team anywhere on the mountain. This autumn was the first major season (spring or autumn) since the spring of 1987 that no one was on the South Col route. Four Nepalese permits had been granted, two for the Col, one each for the west ridge and the southwest face, but one British Col team hadn't been heard from by its trekking agency for two years, the other had to back out because they could not find enough funds, and the west-ridge party of Yugoslavs also apparently couldn't raise the money they needed. That left another South Korean team all alone on the mountain, on its southwest face, although they shared base camp and the route to the second high camp with a Spanish-South Korean Lhotse expedition, and they managed to succeed on the same day as the two north side teams, about four hours after them.

The Lhotse expedition of five Spanish Basques and one South Korean friend sent the first Spanish citizens to the top of their 8516-meter mountain in a rapid climb of only eight days from base camp to summit by two members and a Sherpa, 12 days by three other members. Their first successful party had the advantage of having gone just before their Lhotse climb to nearby Cho Oyu which they successfully scaled even more quickly – they were on this mountain without a Chinese/Tibetan permit – and had crossed the Nepalese-Tibetan border and reached its summit in only three days. They did not meet any Tibetan officials and so had no trouble about their border crossing; they were there rather early in the season, and summited two weeks before anyone else. The two members in this party were two brothers, Felix and Alberto Inurrategi, who often climb together and never use artificial oxygen. They now have five 8000-meter summits to their credit, but Felix says they have no plan to climb all 8000ers.

Cho Oyu is widely considered to be the least difficult of the 8000ers in or on the borders of Nepal. This autumn 12 teams besides the Inurrategi brothers attempted it, and all 12, most of them commercially organized, were successful, all via the standard route from the west side in Tibet. A total of 75 men and two women summited from 11 September, when the Inurrategis were on top, to 13 October, when the famous, indestructible Ang Rita Sherpa, who is about 48 years old, became the first person to make four ascents of Cho Oyu. He is best known as the only person to have summited Everest nine times; he has been to the tops of Dhaulagiri four times and Kangchenjunga once. Amongst the other men were the first South African to this summit and two Sherpas who summited twice this season. One of the women, Mrs. Jan Arnold from New Zealand, was the first woman from any country to make a second ascent.

One very likely Cho Oyu summitter never reached base camp. A New Zealand mountain guide, Guy Cotter, was a member of the same team as Mrs. Arnold, and they flew from Kathmandu to Lhasa before going to climb. At his Lhasa hotel one evening he handed in a fax message for his family back home, waited while it was transmitted, and took it away with him to his room. Later that night he was arrested, taken away by the police for several days of intensive interrogation, forced to confess that he had committed a crime, and deported on a plane back to Nepal; he was videotaped by the police throughout his time in their custody. His offense: in his fax he had said that he had heard a bomb explode and seen army vehicles speeding down the street. The Inurrategi brothers may not have had any trouble with officials in Tibet, but Cotter certainly did.

Another 8000er, Dhaulagiri I, had nine teams on it this autumn, and they too were all on the same climbing route, the northeast ridge. The climbers came from Georgia, Belarussia, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Japan, Spain, Austria, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and of course Nepal, and 28 of them reached the 8167-meter summit.

The summitter from Kazakhstan, who also holds a Russian passport, was the well-known mountaineer Anatoli Bukreev, who joined a predominantly Georgian expedition at the last moment in Kathmandu. He specializes in speed climbing, and he made the fastest ascent of Dhaulagiri I in 17 hours from base camp at 4600 meters to summit. He left the team's base alone at 6:30 p.m. on 7 October; climbed for five hours to their second high camp (6500 meters) in full moonlight; stayed in the camp for two and a half hours to rest and to get out of the strong cold wind; resumed climbing at 2:00 a.m.; stopped in their next high camp (7400 meters) from 5:30 to 8:00 a.m. and was on the top at 11:30 a.m. of the 8th. He was back in base camp at 7:30 the same night. Watching him climb was a delight to others: "The Russian moved with his crampons like he was born with them on his feet – he used his crampons so very easily, so smoothly," said an experienced Dutch mountaineer.

The Dutchman was Bart Vos, who had expected there would not be more than one or two other teams on the northeast ridge while he was there and he might be able to do a solo ascent, so he was dismayed to learn how many others climbers he would have to share the route with. He asked the Nepalese tourism ministry officials who grant expeditions permission to change his permit from Dhaulagiri I to Annapurna I, where there was only one other person attempting the whole vast mountain, but he was told they could not do this, he would have to pay another \$8000 fee for another peak. So he went unhappily to Dhaulagiri I.

He became very much more unhappy soon after he had left his tent at 7400 meters to go to the summit when he found that a Belarussian woman, who he learned was Mrs. Irina Vialenkova, was closely following him. He said she had no real knowledge of mountaineering techniques and was so close behind him that she was bumping her head against his crampons, thus endangering his life by possibly knocking him off balance. He was feeling very strong and well able to reach the summit alone, but he felt that she had become a responsibility of his – no teammate was with her – and he said he turned back so that she would no longer follow him upwards and would, he thought, join him in descent. (She did not, and she claimed

she reached the summit – which he doubts – and then spent the night out at high altitude, with the result that her feet were very seriously frostbitten.)

Vos left the mountain soon afterwards without success. All except two Austrians of the 17 other western Europeans also were unsuccessful, but 26 men and women from eastern Europe and Asia, including Bukreev and eight Japanese, reached the top.

The only person to lose his life on Dhaulagiri I was the leader of one of three Japanese teams, Hisayoshi Tawaraya, who tragically disappeared after having been to the summit. He is presumed to have become confused, lost his way to their fixed ropes and fallen to his death. He was one of just four who died this season: Tawaraya and the two Frenchmen, Chamoux and Royer, plus their Sherpa, Riku, on Kangchenjunga. Sad as any deaths are, these four were an unusually small number amongst the total of 363 foreigners and 131 Nepalese who did any climbing within Nepal. The usual seasonal death toll on expeditions in Nepal has been about 2% in recent years; this autumn it was only 0.8%.

Vos was not the only disappointed soloist. The very able French alpinist, Jean-Christophe Lafaille, went back to the south face of Annapurna I where he had been with Pierre Beghin three years ago when Beghin fell to his death and Lafaille had an extremely difficult descent alone. Now he was on the Bonington route, to the left of the line he and Beghin had been attempting, and he was trying to make the first truly solo ascent of the mountain from his first camp at 6200 meters to the 8091-meter summit. There was no one else anywhere on Annapurna I except his small film team at camp 1. He had trained very hard and planned thoroughly for this climb. But he was unlucky with the weather; it was the fresh waist-deep snow on the mountain and new snow and clouds every afternoon when he was ready to make his dash for the summit that defeated him after he had already been to 7600 meters and believed he had surmounted all the difficulties. “I’m angry I stop at 7600 meters, but it’s a game,” he said. “It’s a very nice route, not very dangerous, an interesting route.”

Unclimbed routes were successfully scaled on three “lesser” Himalayan peaks, Gimmigela (also known as the Twins), Baruntse and Cholatse. Baruntse (7129 meters) just west of Makalu, was climbed by a team of 11 Russians (with no Sherpas) led by Sergei Efimov across an icefall southwest of the summit and up the previously unattempted 850-meter west pillar, which was mixed rock and ice and quite steep (65 to 75 degrees). They descended the normal route on the southeast ridge, which they had earlier climbed to 6500 meters.

A larger expedition of 16 members, 11 of them Japanese and five Nepalese police, plus 12 Sherpas and other Nepalese load carriers, was on Gimmigela (7350 meters) immediately north of Kangchenjunga on the border with the Indian state of Sikkim. They succeeded in making the first ascent from Nepal’s western side of this mountain, which had been attempted in the 1930s by Germans, Swiss and British teams from Sikkim and not summited until the autumn of last year, when Japanese finally scaled the east ridge. Now the not technically difficult west ridge was successfully climbed on two successive days by a total of 16 men despite very unstable rock.

A much smaller party of five Frenchmen and no Sherpa helpers led by Paul Robach forged a new line up the north face of 6440-meter Cholatse, which is near Everest. All five members went to the summit in a four-day push in which they made two bivouacs on the face; the second bivouac was at 6150 meters on a 70-degree slope. They said it had been a safe route with no seracs or rockfall, although the sun hitting a snow mushroom let off some small avalanches.

Plans to make the first ascents of three peaks by any routes failed. The highest of these, Jasamba, a peak of 7351 meters on a ridge just south of Cho Oyu which has been officially renamed Pasang Lhamu Peak in honor of the first Nepalese woman to summit Everest, was attempted by a South Korean team who were the first people ever to try to scale it, but its northwest ridge proved to be too difficult for this group, most of whose members were not experienced climbers and had not been in the Himalaya before.

A Japanese expedition planned to climb Cho Polu, a 6711-meter mountain north of Baruntse, in only the second attempt on it (the first had been made in 1954). However a reconnaissance from the Lhotse Shar Glacier convinced them that their proposed approach from the west to the north ridge was unacceptably dangerous from falling seracs, and they had no time to make a long trek around to the Barun Glacier for an ascent via the northeast face, which they thought would be easy. They did no actual climbing on Cho Polu.

It is not entirely certain whether the third in this group of mountains was scaled or not. Six Americans and one Briton reconnoitered from its northern and southern approaches a peak they were certain was Shey Shikhar, often called Junction Peak, which is 6139 meters in the Kanjiroba Himal of far western Nepal and had never before been attempted. There was very loose rock on both sides which was “very scary” and too dangerous to try to climb, so they turned their attention to other peaks in the immediate area. One of these north of their first objective was a mountain they were sure was Tsokarpo Kang (6556 meters) and on this they made its second and third ascents via its southwest buttress and southeast face. But their Sherpas were convinced that this was actually Shey Shikhar, and in the records of the tourism ministry it is recorded as an American-British ascent of that peak.

The teams discussed above on Gimmigela, Baruntse, Cholatse, Jasamba, Cho Polu and Shey Shikhar/Tsokarpo Kang were all alone on their mountains, although two Baruntse teams turned up after the Russians had completed their ascent. But not everyone who went to mountains lower than 8000 meters had them all to themselves. The two very popular peaks near Everest, Pumori (7161 meters) and Ama Dablam (6812 meters), had eight and 17 teams on them respectively. A total of twenty-eight people summited Pumori by its standard route up the southeast ridge and face – but not two Italians with artificial legs, who did manage to reach the height of 6200 meters at the top of the most technical part of the climb – and altogether 67 climbers gained the summit of Ama Dablam by its usual route on the southwest ridge.

Leaders returning from Ama Dablam commented on how smooth relations were amongst the large international community on their mountain, a situation that was a very pleasant surprise for many of them. Ama Dablam summiters included its



youngest “conqueror,” a 15-year-old high school student from the United States, Mark Pfetzer, who has plans to attempt Everest next year in his second bid to become the youngest ever atop that mighty mountain. They also included a New Zealand mountain guide, Russell Brice, who amazed others by his ascent that began from camp 1 at 5200 meters at 6:00 a.m., just after an early breakfast, put him on the top at 9:20 a.m., and got him safely back to base camp at 4600 meters in time for lunch at 1:00 p.m. “It was just a nice day out for me, a half-day holiday” from his work as leader of a small team.

Brice’s summit day, 8 November, was the final day on which anyone got to the summit of Ama Dablam. The last teams to arrive in Nepal to attempt any peak in the autumn season, which officially ends on the 15th of November, were three for Ama Dablam, and they paid a price for coming so late and therefore not having time to spare to wait out bad weather. One of them, six Italians and an Austrian, had come to base camp two days before and had pitched their first high camp that day but returned to base to sleep. Another, a Spanish party, arrived at base camp the next day, the 9th, to start their climb, and the third, a French group, had a summit-attack party in their highest camp, poised for a push to the top on the 9th.

But on the 9th an unusual snowstorm began about noon and by the time it ended in the night of the 10th, it had dumped a remarkable two meters of fresh snow at base. Brice knew how much had fallen because only the top of his toilet tent was visible above it. He suddenly found himself hard at work during these days shoveling snow off his team’s tents and taking hours to dig out a path to the start of the ridge so other climbers could get safely down to base. Everyone who was in base camp remained snowbound there until the morning of the 11th, when the Italian-Austrian group, the Spaniards and some of Brice’s own members plowed their way out to the village of Pangboche.

Up on the mountain on the 9th were eight Frenchmen who had planned to attack the summit that day. Brice, an experienced Himalayan climber, advised them by radio to descend immediately, and down they struggled with difficulty for 12 hours through half a meter of snow on the ridge to their first high camp, a descent that would normally take perhaps seven hours. Then they were stuck in camp 1 on the 10th; their leader, Michel Cormier, spent two hours to go to the Italians’ tent not far away to fetch food and return to his camp. On the 11th they managed to reach an intermediate camp, but could go no farther in the very deep snow. Finally by the 12th, Brice, his teammate who was still in base camp and two of Cormier’s members who had summited on the 8th and had safely descended to base before the height of the storm, had dug out a trail up from base and were able to rescue Cormier and his party. These Frenchmen, who came down the last part of the ridge on their backsides or crawling while dragging their sacks of belongings to the point where they met Brice’s party and the trail, suffered no frostbite from their ordeal, but Cormier felt that if they had had to spend one more night above base, they would have had frostbitten feet.

The French team left base on the 13th for Pangboche on their trek down to an airfield for a flight to Kathmandu. The Italians went back to base camp that day from

Pangboche to retrieve their tents and gear left at camp 1 but made no attempt to go higher. The Spaniards also returned to base on the 13th; they established their own camp 1 on the 14th with the intention of trying to go on to the summit. But on the 15th, when their leader, Jorge Clariana, and Gyalbu Sherpa tried to reach the site for camp 2, they were unable to gain more than 500 meters altitude before they decided that the snow on the ridge was still too deep and the avalanching falling onto their intended route was too dangerous to continue. Their climb was finished.

The world's television, radio and newspapers carried many stories about this epic storm, and especially about the tragedy in the Gokyo Valley, northwest of Ama Dablam and its Khumbu Valley, where a massive avalanche smothered a tiny village called Panga and killed almost all of the people in a Japanese trekking group sleeping there; all 13 Japanese trekkers and 10 of their 11 Nepalese staff (guide, cook and porters), plus two local residents, were killed. Farther east, at the site of the north Kangchenjunga base camp, another Japanese group was hit by the heavy snowfall, and here three Japanese and four Nepalese died while six Japanese survived. In the Manang region, just north of the great Annapurna massif in north-central Nepal, a landslide caused by constant rains buried a cluster of houses and lodges, and here six foreign trekkers (a German, an Irishwoman, a Briton and three Canadians) and some of the local residents also died.

This kind of storm with such massive amounts of snow or rain is most unusual in the autumn. The summer monsoon rains often bring numerous fatal landslides which carry away small houses in Nepalese villages, but foreign trekkers do not normally venture into these areas in the summertime and so don't get killed or temporarily stranded as a result of the weather.

As soon as the dimension of the November disaster was realized in Kathmandu, the Nepalese government set up a search and evacuation task force, and helicopters were sent into the northeastern quarter of Nepal daily from 11 November to find and airlift to safety everyone who needed help because of the very deep snow or landslides in Khumbu, the base camp areas of Manaslu, Makalu and Kangchenjunga, the Langtang Valley and Manang. Within about a week 541 people, including 250 foreign nationals, were evacuated to safer places. No mountaineering expedition members were amongst the evacuees, but the climbing season had come to an abrupt and dramatic end.

## **Spring 1996: Disastrous Storm over Everest**

### **Kammerlander Makes Fastest Ascent and Return on Everest**

As the whole world seems to know, disaster struck climbers high on Everest on 10 May, and immediately the mountain and the men and women assaulting it were headline news around the world on radio and television, in newspapers and news magazines, and – for the first time in history – on the Internet, where facts, errors and rumors came and went almost constantly. The sudden world-wide attention, fueled by satellite communications equipment at base camp and a ceaseless flow of Internet postings, continued day after day with international and local media scrambling for new details and new approaches to the tragic drama that unfolded over three or four days at the highest altitudes on earth, and that left, in the end, five people dead on the Nepalese side of Everest and three more on the Tibetan side. With three other fatalities during the month of May, the total death toll was 11, which is the largest number of people ever to die on the great mountain in a single season.

Not all the notable events on Everest were tragic, but the happy results received scant public attention. They deserved better. One example: two weeks after the fatal storm, the 39-year-old Italian, Hans Kammerlander, successfully scaled the normal route from the Tibetan side with astonishing swiftness after having acclimatized on one of the 8000-meter summits of nearby Xixabangma. Although there was a camera crew with him on the lower part of the mountain, he climbed alone steadily through the night of the 23rd/24th of May and managed to cut more than four hours off the previous speed record for an ascent of his route which had been set in May last year by another Italian from the South Tirol, Reinhard Patscheider. In only 16 hours, 45 minutes, Kammerlander ascended from base at 6400 meters to the 8848-meter top of the world. He greatly enjoyed the “unimaginably beautiful summit panorama” on “a super day.”

He then proceeded to ski down almost the entire length of the same route (he could not use his skis on rocky sections which he said totaled only 250 vertical meters) in six hours, 45 minutes, thus having accomplished the round-trip in the truly remarkable total elapsed time of just 23 and a half hours. Patscheider had taken 21 hours just to go from base to the top. Despite not having used any bottled oxygen and therefore having felt slightly drunk very high up, Kammerlander returned safely to his base in good health although much thinner.

It is widely believed that there are no new routes to be scaled on Everest, but a 14-member Russian team from Krasnoyarsk, Siberia led by Sergei Antipine, disproved this by making the first ascent of Everest by a difficult, steep (mostly 65 degrees, in one section 90 degrees) rock and snow couloir between the north and northeast ridges that starts at an altitude of about 7400 meters and emerges onto the north ridge at 8000 meters. Three of these Russians, Petr Kouznetsov, Valeri Kohanov and Grigori Semikolenkov, gained the summit on 20 May via their couloir and at the top of it joined the normal route on the north ridge and continued up the

north face, where they began to use artificial oxygen. They descended the normal route all the way, capping their team's success with no accident or serious frostbite.

Nonetheless the world's attention was grabbed by the high drama of the 10th-11th May. In the spring of last year, when all of the eleven teams that assaulted Everest from its northern slopes sent a total of 67 climbers to the summit from the 11th to the 27th of May, one veteran Everest leader remarked shortly afterwards on their enormous good luck: "Most people who summited would not have gotten to 8300 meters in normal weather conditions on the north side," he said. "There would have been dead people everywhere if there had been a sudden drop in temperature or increase in the winds" at a time when altogether 212 successful and unsuccessful people were on the northern side of the mountain. But fine weather lasted for many days, and not one of them died.

This May the luck didn't hold. Eight people perished and two more suffered severe frostbite in the wind-and-snow storm that raged at high altitudes on Everest from late in the afternoon of the 10th. Three more climbers had died by the end of the month: a Taiwanese fell to his death the day before the storm, an Austrian succumbed later to altitude sickness, and towards the end of this eventful month, the last summiter, a Briton, disappeared during his descent.

Until 10 May, all had gone smoothly for the team of 12 foreign climbers led by the highly experienced New Zealander, Rob Hall, professional mountain guide, organizer, leader and summiter of a number of previous expeditions to Everest as well as to other 8000ers. Their summit party left the highest camp, Camp 4 on the very high saddle known as the South Col at 7900 meters, at 11:30 on the night of the 9th in perfect weather. But a South African member, Frank Fischbeck, and a Sherpa with him turned back after two hours because, according to a successful American teammate and fellow client on Hall's commercially organized trip, John Krakauer, Fischbeck didn't feel well enough to push on, and "he intuitively had a bad feeling about the weather" – he had been on Everest three times before.

For Krakauer, this was his first attempt, and he continued on up. He and Everest veteran Ang Dorje Sherpa were ahead of all summit parties that early morning, and at dawn on the fateful 10th they arrived at 8300 meters, where the southeast ridge becomes a definite feature. They had been asked by Hall to wait there for others from their team, and so they did; when the others including Hall came up to them an hour or so later, so did the summit team from another commercial expedition led by a veteran American Everester, Scott Fischer, and this caused congestion on the route. To Krakauer's annoyance, the Fischer party moved on ahead of Hall's group.

An hour was lost by a delay fixing ropes up from the South Summit (8748 meters) because Sherpas had not been properly instructed to put in the ropes immediately upon their arrival there; when Krakauer and three guides from the two expeditions got to this point, they found Sherpas sitting there smoking cigarettes, not having removed from their packs and put in place the rope that was intended for the task. "Not our job," the Sherpas said, so the guides and Krakauer took the rope and set off to do the fixing themselves.

By the time the four foreigners had reached the South Summit late in the morning, wind had started blowing at perhaps 20-30 knots, and the famous snow-plume had begun to be visible coming from the summit. Krakauer stood on the top of the world at 1:15 p.m., only eight or ten minutes after the first man up, Anatoli Bukreev, an amazingly strong Himalayan mountaineer from Kazakhstan who was a guide for Fischer's team.

The American now noticed clouds rising from below. He stayed on the summit only a few minutes, then started down but encountered a bunch of people coming up the Hillary Step, the steep section just below the top, and had to wait half an hour for them to pass before he could continue his descent. His supply of bottled oxygen ran out at this time, and he did not manage to return to Camp 4 until 6:00-6:30 that evening, about half an hour before sunset. Having battled "screaming winds" and periods of white-out, when visibility was virtually nil and snow was falling horizontally, he was the first foreign summiter to reach the safety of his tent.

And none too soon, for as the winds grew ever stronger and snow fell harder and a dark night descended, disaster struck. A New Zealand teammate of his, Andy Harris, one of the guides who fixed rope above the South Summit and who got to the main summit at the same time as Krakauer, also returned to the South Col but he never got into a tent there. According to an Australian summiter with Hall's team, Michael Groom, Harris was last seen about 100 meters above the Col at 6:00 p.m. "before he made a dramatic right turn and walked towards the Lhotse Face;" Krakauer reported that crampon marks were seen next day that could have been Harris's leading to the Col's western edge and the steep drop hundreds of meters down neighboring Lhotse. His body was never seen despite a search later at the bergschrung at the foot of the face.

Altogether 24 people reached the highest point on earth from the Nepalese side between 1:07 and 3:10 on the afternoon of the 10th of May, but only 19 of them came back alive. The summiter who collapsed at the highest point on the mountain was one of Hall's clients, Doug Hansen. The next highest, who stopped not far below Hansen, was Rob Hall himself, who had been to the top of Everest four times before, had also summited the world's second, fourth, fifth and sixth highest mountains, and planned to proceed immediately from Everest with Fischer and three others to attempt the eighth highest before the end of May.

From Everest's summit Hall radioed at 2:15 p.m. that he and his two strong Sherpas, both already Everest summiters themselves, Ang Dorje (also known as Chuldim) and Norbu, were at the top, and he could see coming towards him his client Hansen, who had also been with him on an attempt last spring. At that time Hall had decided they should turn back at the South Summit at 1:00 p.m. because he felt it was then too late to continue to the summit and be able to return safely to camp. Now Hall said he would wait for Hansen, the last of his clients to approach the summit; the other two guides, Groom and Harris, were moving down, he reported, and he was sending Ang Dorje and Norbu down with his successful Japanese client, Mrs. Yasuko Namba.

Hansen made it to the top 35 minutes after Hall's radio call. According to statements issued on 11 and 13 May by Hall's office in New Zealand, "last to descend [on his expedition] were Rob Hall and Doug Hansen, who were caught by nightfall above the South Summit and consequently ran out of bottled oxygen. Hall had remained with the weakened American, Doug Hansen, who subsequently died during the night whilst on the South Summit." Where his body is now, no one knows: climbers who went to the main summit on the 23rd said no one in their party saw it, and they speculated that it may have dropped down the east face.

Hall's office reported that Hall himself "was forced to bivouac in the open at 8750 meters [approximately the altitude of the South Summit] without tent or sleeping bag" after Hansen's collapse. The next morning "a rescue" for Hall was initiated by two Sherpas, Ang Dorje and Lhakpa Chhiri, who tried to carry oxygen and drink to him on the South Summit. Hall was in radio contact with base camp where he was able to describe his condition and talk to friends. He even spoke to his wife, Jan Arnold, who had climbed Everest with Hall in 1993 [and who was now in their home in Christchurch, New Zealand, awaiting the birth of their first child in July]. On a satellite phone link to New Zealand, Hall sounded positive but was unable to move due to extreme cold.

"... Late in the day [he] was informed from base camp that the Sherpas performing the rescue had had to turn back due to very high winds and extreme cold. They left oxygen and a thermos for Hall on the southeast ridge, some 200 meters below him, and descended to the South Col fearing for their own lives in the bitterly severe conditions. Hall took the news stoically that rescue wouldn't happen until the following day, stating he would wait. After a call to his wife Jan, he turned off his radio and was not heard from again." His body is to be seen at a small col or notch between the South Summit and the Hillary Step, which forms the final ridge to the main peak.

The other body that came to rest between the Col and the top is that of another mountain guide who had already successfully scaled Everest in 1994 and two other 8000ers in his career, the American leader of another international commercial expedition, Scott Fischer; it lies on a rock ledge a few hundred meters above the Col. Fischer was the last person of all to gain the summit on the 10th. He had been moving unusually slowly that day, and friends speculate that he was not well, although he did not say so. He was half an hour and more behind the last of his six summiting clients and their four-man Sherpa escort. In any case, his death was not related to any problems his clients were having. He radioed from the summit at about 3:10 p.m. that he was extremely tired but was coming down.

One of his successful Sherpas, Lobsang Jangbu, reported that by the time Fischer and he had descended to 8300 meters, Fischer was very confused, abruptly sat down and refused to continue his descent. He ripped off his oxygen mask, took off a glove, opened his jacket; he was clearly greatly disoriented by altitude sickness or a dangerous lowering of his body temperature or both. Lobsang tried to warm Fischer's face but received no response, then left him on his ledge and went down to the Col, where he asked others to go up to help Fischer. But this did not happen, and

his body was seen by climbers later in the month at the place where Lobsang had had to leave him.

That night was a nightmare of confusion and distress. With visibility zero because of the dark and the wind-driven snow, according to Groom, a group of perhaps a dozen climbers including himself reached the lowest part of the Col very close to the equally steep vast east face of Everest on its Tibetan side, realized they were completely lost, and had enough sense or instinct for self-preservation to stop where they were. They lay there huddled together hoping for rescue or at least better weather conditions.

At 12:30-1:00 a.m. on the 11th, the clouds temporarily parted and Groom was able to get his bearings. He got up to go to the camp and get help, and left two members of Hall's party whom he had struggled to bring down to camp 4: (1) an American, Beck Weathers, who had not made it all the way to the top because his eyesight had begun failing, who had waited patiently for Hall to descend to where he had stopped going up (Hall had instructed him not to try to go down alone, "and like a good Boy Scout, I did what I was told") and whom Groom had had to escort down, first on a very tight rope linking them together and later shouldering him down; and (2) Mrs. Namba, who had been going strongly in the early part of the ascent from the Col, had been considerably slowed down by the technical problems that begin just below the South Summit – difficulties that she had not had sufficient experience to handle well and that had caused her to waste a lot of energy from a slight body weighing only 41 kilos (90 pounds). She had succeeded in gaining the summit, but during her descent had become totally exhausted when her oxygen supply finished at about 8500 meters.

Groom had been helping Mrs. Namba down from there until some members of Fischer's team took over the job of getting her to the Col while Groom concentrated on saving a nearly-blind Weathers; when he left her, she was extremely confused and unable to understand where she was or what was going on. Groom found the tents of Camp 4 soon after 1:00 a.m., asked teammates there to send stronger people to go to Namba and Weathers, and then, totally exhausted, collapsed in his tent and slept.

Stuart Hutchison was amongst those who went to search for missing people. He found Weathers and Mrs. Namba together on a ledge 20-30 meters below the Col on its east side at about 8:00 a.m. on the 11th and concluded that they were already dead or so close to death that nothing could be done for them, and he moved on to help those who clearly could be saved. He was by now himself exhausted and unable to function normally, he later explained, and was intent on doing what he could for the known living from Hall's team such as the exhausted Michael Groom, who had mildly frost-nipped feet; an American who had not summited, Louis Kasische, who was another frostbite case and was also snow-blind; and an Australian who had not been to the top but also was completely worn out from his exertions, John Taske.

Mrs. Namba is presumed to have died where she lay in the snow; her body has not been seen, and no one has searched for it. She was a Tokyo office worker and only the second Japanese woman to have summited Everest (after Mrs. Junko Tabei, who in 1975 was first woman from any nation). At the age of 47 years, two months, 17

days, Mrs. Namba was the oldest woman to “conquer” Everest: this record had previously been held by an American, Miss Dolly Lefever, who on her summit day, 10 May, 1993, was 47 years, 21 days old – and who returned alive and well.

Mrs. Namba did not survive, but at 5:00 p.m. on the 11th, after having been out in the open for 20 hours, a resurrected Weathers appeared in camp 4 saying “it’s great to be alive.” Alive he was, but still temporarily nearly blind and badly frostbitten on the fingers of both hands and on his nose. He was put into his own tent; Sherpas entering it freaked out when they saw Weathers’ ghost and rushed outside, leaving the flaps open. He was cared for at camp 4 by fresh climbers from expeditions who had not been at the Col on the 9th and 10th but had on the 11th climbed up to help with rescue operations (while other teammates manned aid posts at camps 3 and 2 to receive and treat the walking-wounded as they were came down the mountain).

Weathers was lifted from camp 1 on the morning of the 13th by a Nepalese army French-made Squirrel helicopter in the first rescue flight in Nepal from such a high altitude (5950 meters) and was brought to Kathmandu for more sophisticated medical attention. The Squirrel made two landings on this rescue flight from the top of the notoriously dangerous Khumbu Icefall, one to pluck Weathers from there, and again shortly afterwards to lift off an even more seriously frostbitten Taiwanese summiter. Their descent from Col to capital city (elevation 1350 meters) was accomplished in the record-breaking time of not much more than 24 hours. The risky, delicate flight by Lt. Col. Madan K.C. (Khatri Chhetri) made him a hero in Kathmandu overnight.

The Taiwanese, Gau Ming-Ho, who calls himself Makalu Gau after the high Himalayan peak just east of Everest, was the leader of the only other team to summit from the Nepalese side on the 10th, and with his two Sherpas had been the last to reach the summit just before Fischer. Gau’s Sherpas went quickly down to the Col while Gau, not able to move so fast, had to bivouac at 8300 meters at 7:00 p.m., when his oxygen was running out and he could no longer descend. (Apparently, he was not far from Fischer.) Next morning he was too dizzy to move unaided, but one of his Sherpas managed to come up to his rescue, and they arrived at the Col that afternoon.

Not only Gau’s fingers and nose were badly frostbitten but so were his toes, and his right eye was injured by tiny particles of wind-driven ice that penetrated his goggles and made the eye bloodshot. Lying on a hotel bed in Kathmandu the day after his flight from Camp 1, with his hands and feet swathed in bandaging and his body four kilos lighter than when he went to Everest, he declared himself to be “okay – only tired” and determined to go mountaineering again. But a doctor who saw both him and Weathers said Gau’s frost injuries were considerably greater than those of Weathers, and the Taiwanese might be crippled by his. Also he may well have considerable problems carrying on with his work as a professional photographer.

Meanwhile on the normal route on Tibet’s northern side of Everest a similar crisis had arisen on 10 May for three Indian mountaineers, a summit team from a large expedition of one Mongolian and 24 Indian climbing members plus 15 Indian Sherpas which was organized by the Indo-Tibetan Border Police, a paramilitary force posted along India’s border with Tibet and led by an ITBP officer, Mohinder Singh.



Their first summit party was composed of six Indians, but three turned back at the so-called First Step, a steep rock formation at altitude of about 8400 meters. The other three pressed on despite severe weather conditions, and at 6:00 p.m. Chinese time (3:45 p.m. Nepalese time), these ITBP men, T. Samanla, Tsewang Paljor and Dorje Morup, radioed to their leader that they had managed to arrive at the summit.

They reported that Samanla, a deeply religious man, had decided to spend extra time at the top performing religious rites and was sending the other two down ahead of him. Then this trio, too, somehow got into trouble. After the six o'clock radio contact, there was no further communication from any of them, although two torches were later sighted moving above the Second Step, which is at roughly 8570 meters, presumably showing the location of Paljor and Morup at the time. None of the three ever returned to their highest camp, which had been pitched at 8320 meters on the day before they went for the top.

A five-man party from a Japanese expedition, Hiroshi Hanada and Eisuke Shigekawa with three Sherpas, Pasang Tshering, Pasang Kami and Any Gyalzen, arrived at the summit by the same northern route at 11:45 a.m. (Nepalese time) on the next day, the 11th. They were buffeted by very strong winds but there was little fresh snowfall, nor had there been much snowfall on the previous day on their side of Everest, according to their climbing leader, Koji Yada. They returned safely.

Yada said that Mohinder Singh asked him late in the afternoon of the 11th whether his summit party knew anything about the three missing Indians, and Yada put the question to his summiters by radio. They answered that they had seen five climbers but had no idea who they were or which of all the teams then on the mountain they came from. The Japanese reported that two of the five they saw were descending the north ridge, one was standing at the First Step, and two were at the Second Step, one standing, one lying down. None of them spoke to the Japanese, not one of them indicated in any way that he or she was in distress and needed to be helped.

A statement was issued by the ITBP Directorate General in New Delhi on the 13th stating that "it is puzzling that the Japanese team, which had assured the Indian expedition leader of rescuing the [Indian climbers – an assurance Yada says he never gave since he had no contact with Mohinder before late afternoon of the 11th] did not call off their summit attempt and render help in rescuing Paljor and T. Samanla, who had good chances of survival." Both Paljor and Samanla might have been saved if they had been given oxygen by the Japanese, the statement claimed, and Mohinder Singh was quoted as informing New Delhi headquarters that "all the foreign teams at advance base camp met yesterday and expressed unhappiness about the Japanese not saving the lives of the Indian climbers."

However at a press conference a month later, after their return to Delhi, the commander of the ITBP declared that "the Japanese team is not responsible for the tragedy. It was unfortunate that the three [ITBP] members were caught in a blizzard. We do not blame anyone for the tragedy. ... Bad weather cost the lives of our men." And Singh himself told the press, according to a report in a Delhi paper, *The Statesman*, that the expedition "did not have any complaint or grudge against anyone

for the unfortunate incident. ... The climbers faced very rough weather on their way back [from the top] and got trapped in the blizzard and could not reach camp.” He added that it was as a “befitting tribute to their lost comrades,” that a second ITBP summit party of five more men succeeded on the 17th of May.

There is, in fact, some question as to whether the first Indian summit party did actually reach the very top: some of the other climbers then on Everest from the north – Germans, Greeks, Taiwanese and others – have said that for various reasons, including strong winds, extreme cold, the absence of fixed ropes very high up (since no one had already been so high this spring), and the distance the Indians had to climb, these others very much doubted that the Indians did succeed.

The most specific reason given by any of the doubters was provided by the Sherpas who summited with the Japanese on the 11th. They reported that at a bump on the mountainside at an altitude of about 8700 meters, perhaps only 150 vertical meters below the top, they found prayer flags, white cotton scarves and rock pitons which appeared to have been part of a religious offering, and above this point they saw no more footprints in the snow.

One of the Germans reported that the Indians and Japanese were competing with each other to be the first to go to the top. The ITBP statement of the 13th said, “It is understood that the Japanese and the Indian teams had both reached Camp 6 [at 8320 meters] and were poised to move up. The Indian climbers, in a gesture of self-sacrifice, decided to move first, which meant a lot of hard work to surmount the two vertical Steps which form the main obstacles on the northern route.”

Summiters or not, they tragically perished, and this fatal drama seemed to reoccur on Everest two weeks later, when the last six of the season’s summiters reached the top from the Nepalese side and one of them also never returned. They belonged to South Africa’s first expedition to Everest, which had President Nelson Mandela as its patron. They arrived in Kathmandu with six climbing members, one of them a Black South African, another a Briton, and the leader, Ian Woodall, claiming both British and South African nationality.

However, by the time the team arrived at base camp, they were only three climbing members, plus one more who was added later on but who was unable to climb very high because of lack of acclimatization. The three others, including the Black, Ed February, had “resigned,” according to Woodall, who refused to give any reply to why or how except to say “no comment.” The South African press suggested that a key element was Woodall’s authoritarian leadership style.

The three high-climbing members, Woodall, Miss Cathy O’Dowd and the Briton, Bruce Herrod, made it to the summit on the 25th with three Nepalese Sherpas. Woodall and Miss O’Dowd were not only the first South Africans but the first from the whole African continent to scale the mountain successfully. Five of them were on the top before 11:00 a.m. and back safely in Camp 4 by 4:00 p.m., but Herrod, a professional photographer, moved much more slowly than the others, partly due to his photography, and it was not until 5:00 p.m. that he radioed his arrival at the summit. “He sounded pleased to be there,” O’Dowd reported.

But Herrod failed to come on the radio again at the scheduled hour of 6:00 p.m., and he was never heard from or seen after that. No one tried to go back up from Camp 4 to search for him. Miss O'Dowd and the three Sherpas went down the next morning while Woodall waited in Camp 4 till mid-afternoon, when his supply of bottled oxygen had become exhausted and there was no sign of Herrod on a fine clear day; then he, too, descended. Herrod has vanished. Woodall speculates that since his friend had not called at 6:00 o'clock, he had probably already fallen somewhere above the South Summit.

And thus on Mount Everest, the month of May – and the 1996 spring season – ended as it had begun on the first summit day, on a note of success combined with death. A grand total of 398 men and women from 30 countries climbed on its slopes. Eighty-seven of them said they had succeeded in gaining its highest point; this was the second-highest number of successes in a single season (the highest was 90 in the spring of 1993).

The successful summiters included a diverse group: a Swede who bicycled all the way from Stockholm to the closest point he could cycle to Everest and would return the same way (Goran Kropp); an Austrian who is the only person to make his second ascent of Everest as many as 18 years after his first one (Robert Schauer, who is now only 42 years old); a son of first summiter Tenzing Norgay Sherpa (Jamling Tenzing Norgay from India); the first person to “conquer” Everest ten times (Ang Rita Sherpa of Nepal); the first non-Sherpa to summit the mountain five times (Rob Hall); the first Scandinavian woman ever to get to the top (Miss Lena Nielsen-Gammelgaard from Copenhagen); and the first Spanish woman (Miss Araceli Segarra). Plus, as we have already seen, the oldest woman (Japan's Mrs. Yasuko Namba), an Italian who accomplished the fastest ascent (Hans Kammerlander), and the first people from Africa (Miss Cathy O'Dowd and Ian Woodall). A new route was pioneered, the first ski descent of very nearly all of the mountain was achieved, and a team of Nepalese Sherpas cleared a large amount of junk from the Nepalese side of Everest.

This cleanup effort by 15 Sherpas, organized by the Nepal Mountaineering Association and the Nepalese government, carried away from the South Col and lower camps and brought to Kathmandu by helicopter 1800 kilos of rubbish discarded by hundreds of mountaineers: oxygen cylinders, food cans, tent poles, broken ladders and plastic bags, plus a piece of an Italian Air Force helicopter that crash-landed between Camps 1 and 2 in 1973. They estimated that at least 15,000 kilos of trash remain to be taken off of the Nepalese side of the mountain. (No one is known to have calculated the amount of rubbish that is strewn about the base camp area and up and down the mountainside in Tibet.)

The Sherpa team also removed from near Camp 2 and cremated below base camp the several-years-old body of an unidentified man which they found in a sleeping bag wrapped in plastic. The president of the mountaineering association said “our cleaning campaign next year will concentrate on removing other bodies.”

No sooner had the fatal drama of the month of May become evident than questions began to be asked as to why it had happened, why had more people died

this season than during any other in the mountain's climbing history. Mountaineering is and always will be a dangerous activity, but did nine – ten percent – of the 87 summiters have to perish? (The total death toll of 11, it should be remembered, included two non-summiters; of the 398 people who climbed on Everest this spring, a total number of 11 deaths is not staggeringly high: it is just 2.8%).

There was of course the onset of a ferocious storm. But were too many people on the mountain? There were 14 teams on the Nepalese side and 16 in Tibet; 30 is the largest number of expeditions to have attempted Everest in any one season. This situation had apparently come about as a result of the drastic reduction in the number of permits given for a single season by the Nepalese authorities starting in the autumn of 1993, when more teams therefore went to the Tibetan side than ever before. Then suddenly this spring, Nepal's government, under pressure from Nepalese citizens who earn a living from expeditions, cancelled its limit on the number of teams, and with the least difficult route up Everest being on its southern side, Nepal now also got a good number of expeditions.

Too many people being in the same place at the same time can obviously cause congestion at difficult points such as the Hillary Step, where, as we have seen, Krakauer had to wait half an hour before he could move down below the summit. Delays can be extremely serious if the weather suddenly turns worse or a climber's oxygen supply suddenly runs out.

Were too many of the people who were on the mountain not sufficiently skilled and physically strong enough for the task of scaling the highest mountain on earth? Ed Viesturs, an American guide and Everest veteran who went to the summit from the Nepalese side on 23 May, told an interviewer that "a lot of people are here who shouldn't be here. Even some national teams, not just guided teams, are marginal. They're competent mountaineers, but Everest is another ball game."

Do commercially guided expeditions attract clients with mediocre abilities who, like Hall's clients and members of two other teams, can pay as much as \$65,000 for membership but are not fully competent to attempt Everest? (Was Mrs. Namba, who had climbed for a number of years, really ready for the task?)

Some commentators say that nowadays one must be rich to go to Everest, and the rich are not exceptionally skilled and experienced mountaineers. But this requirement of personal wealth is not entirely correct. Certainly it helps to have money, but sponsors can be found, equipment suppliers and other enterprises can be persuaded to help. A few years ago two men from Hong Kong summited Everest in the same season: one was a top British executive of a great Hong Kong property-owning company who could well afford the cost himself, while the other was a Chinese laborer in a sheet-metal factory whose employer and fellow workers provided his financing.

Another topic for discussion about events on the 10th of May has been why Hall and Fischer permitted their clients to continue up the mountain when it was beginning to be a bit late in the day for safe return from the top. Leaders of other teams have suggested that it was due to competition between them and their two Everest-guiding firms, that the two were rivals for future business and wanted the

best possible record of clients' successes for their advertising. Perhaps Hall, they thought, felt this more keenly since he had failed to get Hansen and any other clients to the summit last year; he would now not want to disappoint Hansen again, and he would not want two years in a row with no client success.

These leaders further suggested that Hall and Fischer felt another kind of competitive threat from the organizers of less expensive commercial expeditions, which charged each client only about \$20,000 while providing fewer Sherpa helpers, less bottled oxygen and no professional guides at all or only the one guide-leader for a dozen members. They might have feared a threat to their earnings if the cheaper teams succeeded while theirs did not. (In the event, the cheaper ones on their side did not send anyone to the top.)

Another leader who commented on this situation and who himself also summited on the 23rd said he could scarcely believe it when he passed Fischer's and Hall's bodies and saw they were not wearing down-filled outer clothing but had on lighter-weight clothes. He wondered whether this indicated over-confidence in their own proven skills to get everyone up and down without serious problems or delays.

Hall and Fischer are not able to reply to all this speculation, and it is very easy to be wise after the event. The two men were extremely strong, skilled, experienced Everest climbers, and they were fine men with a great sense of duty to their clients. Hall apparently paid the ultimate price for his high degree of conscientiousness.

Now to other mountains, where very small teams achieved some notable results. Technical problems had faced the Russians in their northern couloir on Everest. They also beset a team of just two Slovenian mountaineers, Vanja Furlan and Tomaz Humar, who made a quick continuous push up one of Everest's smaller southern neighbors, Ama Dablam. After acclimatizing on a nearby small mountain called Island Peak and then making one attempt on Ama Dablam that was aborted by snowfall and frequent avalanching, they set out on 30 April on their successful five-day pure alpine-style ascent by a new route on the 6812-meter mountain's northwest face.

They went down the popular southwest-ridge route since they had fixed no rope on the face; on the second day of their ascent, they accidentally dropped all their ice screws from their hanging bivouac at about 5950 meters and had no choice after that but to continue upwards. This second bivouac was halfway up the most difficult section of the entire ascent of the face. Here they solo-climbed on ice angled at 70 to 90 degrees from an altitude of 5680 to 6010 meters. For most of their six days on the mountain, they had good weather, but they got lost in fog during what should have been the last day of their descent and had to make a final bivouac to wait for a clear morning next day.

No other new routes were pioneered this spring. A large expedition of Russians led by Vladimir Bachkurov had planned to have a small party of members make the first ascent of Makalu's great west face after a large number had scaled the normal northwest-ridge route partly in order to prepare a descent route, but the whole team did not arrive at base camp to start attacking their 8463-meter peak until the middle of April, and they lost 10-12 days of valuable time as the result of a fatal fall on 14

May by one of their members, Anatoli Chlekht. So after ten Russians had summited by the standard route and then the weather deteriorated with heavy snowfall, they were forced to give up their goal of ascending the face. Bachkirov hopes to return to it soon with a much smaller team: "I prefer small expeditions," he said.

Small parties had noteworthy successes on other 8000-meter mountains. A four-man team of Spanish Basques sent three of their members to the summit of Kangchenjunga via Doug Scott's route up its seldom-climbed steep north face, which they said was not technically difficult for them. Their leader was Enrique-Julian De Pablo, but he turned back during their final climb to the summit when his toes began to become frostbitten. The successful trio were Juanito Oiarzabal and Alberto and Felix Inurrategi, the only pair of brothers to have scaled more than one 8000er together; Kangchenjunga was their sixth, and they are amongst only a handful of climbers to have summited the world's six highest mountains. Oiarzabal has now also scaled the six highest and has actually bagged a grand total of nine of the world's 14 8000ers, three of them last year.

On Manaslu, a Mexican bagged his 14th. Carlos Carsolio on 12 May became the fourth person ever to scale them all – and the first of the four to come from a non-European country – when he and his brother Alfredo, the only climbing members of their team, became the first people from the Western Hemisphere to gain this mountain's 8163-meter summit. Carlos has shattered other records. At the age of 33, Carlos is the youngest of the four who have summited all the 8000ers: the previous youngest was a Swiss, Erhard Loretan, who was 36, and those before them, Reinhold Messner of Italy and Jerzy Kukuczka of Poland, were 44 and Kukuczka 39 years old. Carlos is also the only person to have reached the tops of as many as four 8000ers in a single year (he summited Annapurna I and Dhaulagiri I last spring and Gasherbrums I and II last summer).

During their ascent of Manaslu by its normal northeast-face route without any supplementary oxygen, he and his brother felt the fury of the storm of the 10-11 May and were forced to stay an extra day in their tent at 7100 meters by the new snowfall, strong wind and static electricity in the air. They were able to resume their ascent in the evening of the 11th although it "was very difficult to orient ourselves [in continuing stormy weather] and the snow was very deep so we were very slow," he said. They climbed on through the night, and next morning, when they reached the summit plateau, the snow had stopped falling so "at least we could see," but the winds continued to blow – "it took us the whole day to get to the summit because we had to fight with the wind." They finally were on top at 6:00 in the evening of the 12th and found there the Buddhist prayer flags a Tibetan team had left a week earlier.

Their struggle against the wind was not yet over. They spent their summit night in a very windy bivouac without tent or bivouac sack; they could not move down in the pitch-black dark of that night, and they dared not fall asleep, so they kept moving about and talking to each other. When daylight came, the skies were clear but still the winds blew; they at last reached their 7100-meter camp at 3:00 that afternoon and "then we were safe." Now they could sleep for the first time since 8:30 p.m. on the 11th.

“I am very happy, very satisfied to have done all the 8000ers,” Carlos said after returning to Kathmandu. What next? “There are many Himalayan faces to be done” one day.

Manaslu’s northeast face had seen larger expeditions reach the summit last winter and early this May. The only successful climb of any Nepalese Himalayan peak last winter was accomplished on Manaslu by a ten-man team from Kazakhstan, who found the route “very easy” and sent eight of their climbers to the top on 8 December. They encountered good snow conditions and no avalanching but extremely cold strong wind. Only one of their members used bottled oxygen: he developed altitude sickness during his descent.

On 3 and 4 May a slightly smaller band of eight strong Tibetans who spend their lives on the high Tibetan Plateau needed no artificial oxygen at all to succeed in the first attempt on this mountain by Tibetans or any other Chinese citizens. This team are waging a campaign to “conquer” all the 8000ers, and most of them have now reached the tops of six including Manaslu.

A Frenchwoman who seems to seek to be the first woman of any nation atop all 8000ers went to the summit of Manaslu on a “team” on which she had only one climbing companion. Miss Chantal Mauduit successfully scaled without the use of bottled oxygen not just one but three Himalayan peaks this spring: first she joined teams organized by an American to two of Everest’s neighbors, Pumori (7161 meters) and Lhotse. She climbed both by their standard routes, summited Pumori on 28 April and Lhotse on the 10th of May.

On Lhotse she was the first woman from any country to reach the top – if indeed she did reach it. There is some skepticism on the part of a man who watched her, climbing alone, disappear from sight into the couloir just below the summit and reemerge from it in her descent rather soon afterwards. She is generally considered to be a slow but dogged climber.

Finally she flew by helicopter to the foot of Manaslu and with one Sherpa, Ang Tshering, attacked her third mountain, here too following the standard route. On Manaslu she again went to the top alone: Ang Tshering became very tired on their final push to the summit on 24 May because he had been breaking trail for hours in deep snow, and he stopped an hour and a half below the very top to rest and wait for her. Like the Carsolio brothers, she reported finding prayer flags on the summit. She was the first Frenchwoman, and only the sixth woman of any nationality, to succeed on Manaslu. After completing her hat trick, she had summited her fifth 8000er and was keen for more.

A one-man “team,” André Georges, a mountain guide from Switzerland, who already had three 8000ers (including Everest) to his credit, now successfully scaled two more, Dhaulagiri I and Annapurna I. Furthermore, he plans to return to the Nepalese Himalaya this autumn to attempt Makalu. Is he trying to summit all 14 of the huge 8000ers? “Maybe.”

First this spring he went to Dhaulagiri I and spent one month on the mountain climbing essentially by himself, although a small South Korean team was on the same normal northeast-ridge route as he for most of the time he was there, and his climb

therefore was not actually solo. The Koreans pitched a series of camps up the mountain, but Georges had no camps above base. He tried for the summit three times, was twice defeated by heavy snowfall, but succeeded in his third attempt. He began this climb at 5:00 p.m. on the 4th of May from base camp at about 4500 meters and emerged onto the top 20 hours later.

Then to Annapurna I, which he found not so difficult and not demanding such great caution as Dhaulagiri I. Here on the north face of Annapurna I, Georges climbed with a Sherpa to his only high camp, which he pitched at 5800 meters on the 14th, rested there for four hours that afternoon, and then surmounted the remaining 2300 vertical meters to the top entirely by himself – there was no one else on the mountain at this time – in 17 more hours, arriving at the 8091-meter summit at 11:00 a.m. on the 15th, and back to his camp in seven more hours. He continued down, walking or crawling all night in deep snow, for it had snowed in the afternoon; he sometimes lost his way in the clouds that enveloped him. He finally returned to base camp at 8:00 a.m. on the 16th of May.

The small Korean team of just four climbing members and an equal number of Sherpas under the leadership of Sung Soon-Je, who himself did not climb, also scaled both Annapurna I and Dhaulagiri I. Like Georges, they went first to Dhaulagiri I, but when bad weather was consuming too much of their time, they split into two parties. On the 1st of May, Deputy Leader Um Hong-Gil summited Dhaulagiri I with Ngati Sherpa, and two days later Kim Hun-Sang and Park Young-Seok with two other Sherpas, Kazi and Gyalzen, were atop Annapurna I. Also like Georges, they used no bottled oxygen to reach either peak, and this pair of neighboring mountains were not the first 8000ers “conquered” by two of their team. Um had already summited Everest plus four others, Park, Everest and Cho Oyu; both give climbing as their occupation.

Thus the spring of 1996 witnessed some spectacular lonely achievements as well as triumph and tragedy amongst the much larger numbers of climbers on Everest and Makalu.



## **Autumn 1996: Despite Unusually Heavy Snowfall, New Routes Are Pioneered on Annapurna I and Cho Oyu**

In spite of the vast amounts of snow already in the Nepalese Himalaya at the start of the autumn season left by unusually heavy and prolonged summer monsoon rains and snowfall, which were followed by a lot more rain and snow during September and October, a few expeditions managed to record historic ascents of two 8000-meter mountains, Annapurna I and Cho Oyu, and first ascents of two “lesser” peaks over 7000 meters, Jasamba and Ratnachuli, and of a virgin high 6000er, Bobaye. People who complain that there is nothing new to do in the Nepalese Himalaya were once again proved to be quite wrong.

On the other hand, dangerous snow conditions were cited by a number of teams as the reason for their abandoning their climbing attempts without success. One of France’s best known women Himalayan climbers, Miss Chantal Mauduit, reported that she and her climbing partner on Annapurna I, Nacho Orviz from Spain, went no higher than 6600 meters on the great south face because frequent heavy snowfalls over a period of several weeks left too many mushrooms. “Even the glacier was very dangerous.”

In a few cases, expeditions did not actually set foot on their mountains. The well-known American, Alex Lowe, and his teammate, Conrad Anker, had as their objective the unclimbed southeast pillar of Annapurna III, a 7555-meter peak to the east of Annapurna I, but they never got onto to Annapurna III. Since they planned to scale their challenging pillar in pure alpine style, they first did an acclimatization climb to 7200 meters on the south side of neighboring Annapurna IV. They then found themselves isolated for a week in a snow cave when heavy snowfall made it too dangerous to move; they finally managed to descend to their advance base camp, where the snow was waist-deep, and down to base – where torrential rains fell during another week of bad weather. When they returned to their advance base to make their ascent of Annapurna III, they saw there was far too much snow for a safe attempt on their pillar, and they unhappily abandoned their mountain without ever having gotten onto it at all.

A larger American party on the north side of the Annapurna range attempting Annapurna IV (7525 meters) lost two of its members very early one morning when the tent they were sleeping in at their first high-altitude camp at 5400 meters collapsed under a heavy load of snow and they were smothered to death. The leader of this group, Cleve Armstrong, was in another tent six meters away from the one in which Richard Davidson and Mrs. Debbie Marshall slept the night of 3-4 October; he cleared snow off his tent several times and survived the night, but next morning, when he went to find out why the other two had not joined his walkie-talkie conversation with base camp, he found that the weight of at least a meter of fresh snow had forced their tent down on top of them and suffocated them in their sleep.

Nearly half of the 82 parties in Nepal, a total that was just one short of the record 83 teams in the autumn of 1991, did manage to reach their summits. Some persevered despite the danger: Mstislav Gorbenko, the leader of a successful Ukrainian expedition which followed the Bonington route on Annapurna I's south face, admitted to "super danger" from snow avalanches and mushrooms. Others were fortunate enough to be climbing in periods of good weather and more stable snow conditions.

But only 38 expeditions in Nepal reached their summits.

This success rate of just 46% of all teams in the country was the lowest rate for any autumn since 1987 and the lowest for any spring or autumn since 1988. It contrasts with rates of 59% last spring, 52% in the autumn of 1995, 70% in spring 1995 and 61% in autumn 1994.

One-fourth of all the expeditions in Nepal went to just one lovely 6812-meter peak in the Everest region, Ama Dablam. Altogether 70 people from 14 of the season's 19 Ama Dablam teams reached its summit (three men even went to the top twice), sometimes struggling through waist-deep snow for over two and a half hours to gain 200 vertical meters to reach the top. This was not quite a record-breaking total number for Ama Dablam, but it was an impressive accomplishment given the snow conditions, and those who feared that there would be problems with over-crowding on the narrow ridge were pleasantly surprised that almost everyone got along well together. "We were like a big family" at base camp, said an Austrian leader, Roland Mattle. All the summiters followed the standard southwest-ridge route; the few who tried other routes did not succeed.

The season's greatest success numerically was not on any mountain in Nepal but on Cho Oyu from Tibet, where 16 of the autumn's 21 Cho Oyu expeditions claimed an unprecedented total of 77 summiters, and three of these successful men also went to the top not just once but twice. This triumph on Cho Oyu would seem to confirm that the standard west ridge/face route is probably the least difficult route on any 8000er.

Not quite all those who summited Cho Oyu this autumn followed the standard route. A team of four Spaniards and an Austrian led by Oscar Cadiach reported they had succeeded in scaling the previously unclimbed north ridge, a steep (45 to 75 degrees), "impressive" and "very nice" route, as Cadiach described it. The successful north-ridge summiters were just Cadiach and the Austrian member, Sebastian Ruckensteiner, in a truly alpine-style ascent (no Sherpas, no artificial oxygen) from a camp at a pass called Palung La at 6500 meters. After having acclimatized with a climb to the top of the 7012-meter peak called Palung Ri just north of Cho Oyu, the two men made two bivouacs as they moved up the north ridge, which begins at the pass. They left their higher bivouac at 7500 meters at 9:00 a.m. on 28 September, reached the 8201-meter summit at six o'clock that evening, and returned to their bivouac at ten o'clock at night. The next day they joined the standard route down to their advance base camp in mildly windy and cloudy weather.

It was an expedition of ten climbing members, eight Poles, one Ukrainian and one American, led by Michal Kochanczyk, who successfully surmounted the

formidable unclimbed northwest ridge of Annapurna I. Kochanczyk says this ridge should become the standard ascent route on Annapurna I “because it is logical and safe.” It is very much safer than the nearby northwest buttress, which has been fatally attempted by several expeditions over a number of years. But it is “much worse – more difficult – than the west ridge of Everest,” in the opinion of one of this team’s summiters, Andrzej Marciniak, who made an ascent of Everest ridge in May 1989 by its west ridge and says this Annapurna I route is the most difficult he has ever climbed.

Marciniak and his Ukrainian teammate, Vladyslav Terzyul, summited on 20 October, which turned out to be the last day of weather good enough for a summit push before heavy new snowfall and strong winds set in. They and their fellow members (they had no Sherpas to help them on this climb) had fixed a total of 2000 meters of rope, most of it above their third camp at 6100 meters on the very sharp cauliflower ridge and then up the most difficult section, a rock barrier that began at 7400 meters and took four days to fix. The summit pair made their final push to the top without bottled oxygen from the expedition’s highest camp, camp 5, which had been pitched on 15 October before the rock barrier just below the northwest ridge at 7100 meters.

The first mountaineers ever to set foot on Ratnachuli were this autumn’s expedition from Japan’s Shinshu University and the Nepalese Police Mountaineering Foundation. Their 7035-meter peak stands on Nepal’s border with Tibet north of Manaslu and was forbidden to any climbers until the police managed to get the Nepalese authorities to put it on the permitted list for this climb. This expedition of eight Japanese and four Nepalese members under the leadership of Mitsunori Watanabe and the climbing leadership of Osamu Tanabe, both Japanese, made their approach from the west and surmounted the west peak and west ridge to reach the top in three waves of summiters on 14, 16 and 18 October after heavy snowfall had subsided. All eight Japanese members (who were aged between 20 and 54 years), three Nepalese members and five Nepalese high-altitude porters succeeded on their very long but not technically difficult route.

The first and second ascents of Jasamba, a peak of 7351 meters just west-southwest of Cho Oyu which was officially renamed Pasang Lama Chuli three years ago, were made by Japanese and French-Italian teams on two successive days, 19 and 20 October. The mountain had been attempted only once before, last autumn by South Koreans whose approach was to the west face; this autumn’s teams ascended the west ridge and moved around to the north ridge. The five Japanese, led by Tamotsu Ohnishi, had wanted to attempt the south ridge, but dangerous avalanching convinced them to go to the west ridge instead. The ten French and one Italian climbers, led by Michel Zalio of France, had first tried a southerly approach but found too many seracs here and therefore joined the Japanese route, which was relatively easy although – or because – the Japanese did fix a total of 3200 meters of rope. Two Japanese, two Frenchmen, and three Sherpas who climbed with the French, gained the summit.

The first ascent of a 6808-meter mountain in the far west of Nepal, Bobaye, was accomplished in alpine style by one member alone from a Slovenian team which set out to scale simultaneously three western peaks, all by new routes in alpine style, and they succeeded in their ambitious objective on all three; in fact, on Bobaye the soloist made the first attempt via any route. This expedition of ten climbers led by Roman Robas established a central base camp for their climbs of the three mountains, two better-known peaks, Api and Nampa, which had been successfully climbed in earlier years, as well as the virgin Bobaye. The three stand near each other in a triangle with Bobaye south of Nampa and southeast of Api. No Sherpas, no fixed ropes, no fixed camps figured in these ascents, none of which took longer than four days from depots at the feet of their mountain faces to their respective summits.

Bobaye was scaled by Tomaz Humar, who began his climb from a depot at 4300 meters on 1 November at 2:00 a.m. by crossing a glacier in deep snow on his hands and knees because of fear of hidden crevasses. Then he moved onto the west face and into a small diagonal couloir, where he had to hurry because its 80-degree slope was a chute for pieces of ice from a frozen waterfall. He traversed the face towards the northwest ridge; he wanted to bivouac on the ridge, but deep soft snow made his progress very slow, so at 3:00 p.m. he bivouacked on the face at 5500 meters in an ice cave under seracs.

The next day Humar resumed his ascent at 5:30 a.m., reached the northwest ridge and crossed over onto the mixed ice and rock of the northwest face, came to a rock band with thin ice cover at 6500 meters, then a col (saddle) between Bobaye's middle and main summits and finally up the last 30-40 vertical meters or 150 linear meters on the north ridge from the col to the highest point at 1:00 p.m. Most of his ascent had been on terrain slanting at 60 to 90 degrees.

At the summit he had clear weather although gusts of wind were blowing snow horizontally, and it was very cold. In his descent he took a different, more direct line via the west pillar and west face, avoiding the extremely difficult northwest face, and was back in his bivouac at 4:00 p.m. This was 27-year-old Humar's first solo climb.

Nampa stands north of Bobaye. Here two other Slovenians, Matija Jost and Peter Meznar, pioneered a new route via the central couloir of its southwest face, and on 3 November they made the second ascent of the 6755-meter mountain on the fourth day of their assault. They began their climb from their 4200-meter depot at 10:00 p.m. on the 31st of October, and just above a large crevasse at 4500 meters they entered an ice couloir. They needed two hours to surmount the first 300 vertical meters of the 50-degree couloir, but they had to spend nine hours on the next very steep (85-degree) 400-meter section. At the top of the gully, at 5500 meters, they rested for four hours on the rocks of a ridge to the left of the top of the couloir, climbed for three hours on the ridge, then stopped again and now, at 6:00 p.m. on 1 November, made their first bivouac at 5600 meters and went to sleep.

Next day they started late, at 10:00 a.m., continued up the ridge and bivouacked at 6300 meters at 6:00 p.m. Finally on 3 November they gained the summit after coming close to the west ridge and joining the route by which a Japanese team in the spring of 1972 had made the mountain's first ascent. They were at the

top at 9:50 a.m., descended by the west ridge and briefly by the north face to 5800 meters, where they found a Japanese piton and rope, and on down to their final bivouac at 8:00 p.m. at 4800 meters on rock below a col on the west ridge.

Three more members of the expedition set out on 1 November for an ascent of the highest of the Slovenians' peaks, 7132-meter Api, which is west of Nampa, on a route that had been attempted by a British team in the autumn of 1992. (Led by Robert Brown, the five Britons had to abandon their climb because of heavy snowfall and lack of time after they had reached 6000 meters. The Slovenians found some of their pitons and rope.) The British called the feature they climbed the south face, but the Slovenians believe it is more accurately described as the southeast face, and they completed the British route. They were the fifth expedition to summit Api by any route.

Dusan Debelak and Janko Meglic completed their ascent of Api on the fourth day of their push up the face. A third member, Tomaz Zerovnik, started out with them, but he became sick during the night at their third bivouac at 6050 meters and was unable to make the final day's climb to the top. On their last day, 4 November, Debelak and Meglic began at 1:00 a.m., traversed beside a crevasse and moved up the snow face in very cold wind blowing the loose snow of frequent small avalanches at them, which made breathing difficult. Finally they came to rock covered by thin ice and then arrived at the western plateau and from there the last 20 vertical meters (100 linear meters) to the top at 3:30 p.m. They descended the same route, moving fast in strong wind, and slept that night in the bivouac where Zerovnik had waited for them. They had crowned their expedition's plans to summit three mountains with the third success.

A predominantly German expedition also had a plan for what they called "a trilogy" of three summits – and their plan was even bolder in the sense that it involved three much higher mountains, including Everest, the highest of them all. However, they followed only previously ascended routes and used the traditional Himalayan style of climbing – fixed camps, fixed ropes, Sherpa helpers and, for those who wanted it, a supply of oxygen – rather than alpine style on continuous pushes from bottom to top by unclimbed routes. And their results were different also, for they succeeded in summiting only the lowest of their three peaks, Nuptse.

This expedition of 13 German and two Austrian climbers was commercially organized and led by Ralf Dujmovits and sponsored by Deutsche Telekom and Schoeffel. Clients joining the expedition could elect to climb any one or more of the trio of high summits, Everest, Lhotse or 7855-meter Nuptse, which form a horseshoe-shaped massif, and they paid accordingly: as little as DM9600 for Nuptse only, or as much as DM51,700 for all three. This was the first time that a single expedition had taken the Nepalese government's permission to scale these three peaks, and it received considerable publicity. But the results were not so grand as the design.

The three peaks were to be attempted from the same advance base camp at an altitude of 6450 meters in the high snow-covered valley called the Western Cwm at the feet of the three mountains. Nuptse was the first summit attempted, and it was successfully scaled on 17 September by Dujmovits himself with a German member,

Axel Schloenvogt, by a route on the north face pioneered 17 years ago by a small party led by Doug Scott. They made their final push to the top from camp 3 at 6800 meters at the beginning of the north pillar; they left this camp at 2:30 a.m., intending merely to fix rope that day and go for the summit on the following one, but in the fine weather that afternoon they suddenly decided to continue on rapidly to the top without more ropes. It took them 11 hours to gain the summit that day, and they were extremely tired.

They began their descent together, but Schloenvogt moved more slowly than Dujmovits; at the top of the north pillar, Dujmovits says, they agreed that he would go down at his own faster pace, and he returned to their unoccupied last camp at 5:00 p.m. Dujmovits was exhausted but managed to heat hot water for Schloenvogt to drink when he came later, and then Dujmovits fell asleep in his tent. He was the only person in the camp: two teammates were to come up the next day in support of Schloenvogt and Dujmovits, but the quick decision to go to the summit on the 17th itself meant that no one else was there that day – and no one awake to realize that Schloenvogt did not return that night.

Schloenvogt reportedly was feeling the effects of the altitude as well as being exhausted. He was overtaken by darkness and fell before he could reach camp. It was only next morning that he was discovered not to be in his tent but lying in the snow only 30 meters away from it after he had fallen, hit his head and lost one glove, and had stayed the night where he had fallen. He now suffered from a broken ankle, broken ribs and seriously frost-bitten fingers of his left hand. He was brought to advance base camp that day, the 18th, to base camp on the 19th, and flown by helicopter to Kathmandu on the 20th.

There were no more attempts to climb Nuptse because on the 21st an avalanche of snow and ice fell very near Nuptse's north face. The avalanche roared down the west face of Lhotse, which is where one climbs to gain the summit of Everest on the standard route via the South Col between Lhotse and Everest. This avalanche struck a group of men headed for the Col. It left uninjured one Japanese and several Sherpas in its path, but it suddenly changed direction when it hit the yellow rock band and apparently carried with it the fixed ropes that two other Sherpas and a Frenchman were using at that moment. It swept these three men down the face to their deaths.

One of the Sherpas who died was the very well-known Lobsang Jangbu, who had summited Everest four times, most recently last 10th of May, when five people died during their descent and he attempted to rescue the leader of his team, Scott Fischer. He was now working for a Japanese climber on Everest. His body was not found during several days of searching. The other Sherpa named Dawa was with a South Korean Everest team, and the Frenchman, Yves Bouchon, was a member of a French-Belgian-Swiss expedition also for Everest.

After days spent by climbers from various teams searching for Lobsang's body and carrying down to base camp the bodies of Dawa and Bouchon, the effort to reach the highest point on earth was resumed. But Dujmovits' expedition made little progress. He himself moved up to fix ropes to a height of 7700 meters on 1 October,

and two days later three of his Sherpas gained the team's highest point, the South Col at 7900 meters, but on the 4th very bad weather set in with heavy snowfall that night. Dujmovits decided on the 5th that it would be wise to abandon the climb.

The summit of Everest was not reached by any of his people, and none of them made any attempt to go to the top of Lhotse. Dujmovits had had a private dream to climb without artificial oxygen from the South Col at 10:00 p.m. one night to the summit of Everest at 5:00 the next morning, rest, then immediately go to Lhotse's summit and at nightfall descend to the top of a couloir on Lhotse's west face, where he would bivouac in a very light tent he would carry with him. He had no chance to put this unprecedented program into action.

Several differences between the Everest-Lhotse-Nuptse expedition and that of the Bobaye-Nampa-API Slovenes have already been mentioned. Another was that the Germans could not enjoy the pleasure of having their three mountains all to themselves, of being all alone in their Himalayan wilderness. There was no other team on Nuptse, but seven Slovakian climbers were also on the west face of Lhotse, and on the South Col route for Everest there were three more parties: seven South Koreans with an equal number of climbing Sherpas; a team of four French, two Belgian and one Swiss with four Sherpas; and one Japanese with his Sherpa, Lobsang Jangbu.

Of all these teams, only the South Koreans were successful. They carried on despite "every day snowing and every day avalanches – no good weather conditions," as their leader, Lim Hyung-Chil, described it. On 11 October two Koreans arrived at the 8848-meter summit with two Sherpas and soon were followed by one more. All three Sherpas had already become Everest "conquerors" before this season.

The total of four teams on Nepal's side of Everest this autumn contrasts markedly with 14 last spring. But it is too early to tell whether last spring's tragic deaths of seven climbers on the Nepalese side and four more on the Tibetan side has discouraged people from coming to Everest, for the autumn season is normally less popular than spring.

On the Tibetan side there were also four autumn expeditions, all on the normal route, and of these also only one, a very small Indonesian party, sent anyone to the summit. The Indonesian success is described below. In addition, there was an international group who had begun their effort during the summer, in July, but had carried on into the autumn and did not give up until late September.

The summer-autumn group were six climbers led by Jean Troillet of Switzerland, who planned to make his descent by snow board; a French member of the team, Pascal Arpin, intended to come down on skis. Their first choice of route was up the north face by way of the Japanese and Hornbein couloirs, which Troillet knew well from his rapid ascent and even more rapid descent this way in August 1986 with Erhard Loretan. But they abandoned that line on 9 September at 7300 meters because the wind was very strong, there was serious danger of wind-slab avalanching, and the wind had swept away the softer snow which they had to have for skiing and snow-boarding. They then made two attempts to climb the normal route via the North Col, north ridge and north face, but again the wind was removing the snow and was

becoming increasingly fierce and difficult to withstand. Troillet, another Swiss, Dominique Perret, and two Nepalis had reached 8300 meters on 25 September when they finally gave up.

Over on the Nepalese side two Belgians were discovered by the Nepalese government to have scaled the treacherous Khumbu Icefall, which rises 600 vertical meters above base camp, and reached the Western Cwm without any permit to go above base. For this violation of mountaineering regulations, the two, identified by the Nepalese authorities as Dirk Dansercoer of Huldenberg and Daniel Hernandez of Mechelen, Belgium, were forbidden to climb any peak in Nepal for a period of ten years because of “their attempt to climb Mount Everest without official permission,” according to a statement from the ministry of tourism.

However they told me that they had not actually expected to climb Everest. They claimed they had trekked to base camp to visit a friend, a Belgian member of the French-Belgian-Swiss team, had not done any “real climbing” but had gone up the Icefall just to see the part of the climbing route not visible from base camp and to be at the start of an historic climb. They asserted that they had no idea they were breaking any rules in doing this without a permit. But the ministry took the matter very seriously since the Nepalese government earns substantial fees for their climbing permits, receiving a minimum of \$50,000 from each Everest expedition. The ministry could have asked them to pay a fine equal to double the Everest fee, but the officials realized there was no chance of collecting it.

Individual 8000-meter achievements were claimed this season by an Italian and a Dutch mountaineer. The Italian was Sergio Martini, who on 27 September summited Manaslu via its standard northeast-face route and thereby gained his twelfth 8000-meter summit. He now has just two more of these giants to “conquer,” Everest and Lhotse, and is only the seventh person ever to reach at least twelve 8000-meter summits.

The Dutch climber was Bart Vos, who reported he had reached the top of Dhaulagiri I alone on 17 October, the first Dutch mountaineer ever to gain this 8167-meter summit. He had chosen to ascend Dhaulagiri I by a seldom attempted route up its east face and to climb entirely alone without any teammates, Nepalese Sherpa helpers, artificial oxygen or any fixed camps above 5780 meters in one week of successively higher bivouacs. He then descended the normal route via the northeast ridge. (His ascent was not strictly solo since other teams were on the mountain at the same time as he. All of the others climbed the standard route; Vos’s route of ascent joined their ridge at about 7900 meters for the final distance to the top.)

Vos said that he encountered technical difficulties for about 200 vertical meters on the face above an altitude of 7600 meters, “but the real difficulty was the duration [of a week] and the weather,” which was often very windy with fresh snowfall. This was the third time Vos had gone alone to Dhaulagiri I. He had been the only person anywhere on the mountain in the spring of 1994 in a truly solo attempt; in the autumn of 1995 he had used the standard route, which others were also climbing at the same time, but he moved independently of them.



Vos is perhaps best known for his claim to have summited Mount Everest in October 1984 as a member of a Dutch expedition. He and others from that team climbed together from their highest camp towards the summit. His companions turned back before gaining the top, but he went on alone and said he had reached the highest point on earth. His summit claim was publicly questioned in the Netherlands at the time, but it was also stoutly defended.

Having one's claim questioned when one goes to a summit alone is a common problem for soloists, and Vos prefers to climb by himself. His assertion that he summited Dhaulagiri I was not immediately accepted by Nepalese tourism ministry officials, who routinely issues certificates to summiters but who asked Vos to send them photos to substantiate his statement.

A would-be Japanese soloist on Makalu had to abandon his attempt to become the first person to summit his 8463-meter mountain by its nearly vertical west face after he had been hit by a falling stone. Yasushi Yamanoi, who two years ago successfully soloed a new line on the west side of Cho Oyu, had reached an altitude of 7400 meters when a fist-sized rock struck him, and despite the fact that he was wearing a helmet, the blow gave him pain in his neck and chest, and an attempt to continue his ascent a few days later brought him pain again. The huge west face of Makalu remains one of the great challenges in Nepalese mountaineering.

An eight-man Tibetan climbing team who are in the middle of their program to scale all the 14 8000ers – some of them have already summited as many as six and seven 8000ers – were also on Makalu this autumn, and they too did not have success. (In fact, none of the six teams on the mountain this autumn managed to reach the top.) This Tibetan team has usually climbed standard routes, but this time they went to the northeast ridge, which is entirely in Tibet and had been attempted by climbers only once before, by a Japanese expedition who pioneered this route successfully in the spring of last year. This season four of the Tibetans managed to get to 7000 meters but then encountered very soft snow nearly two meters deep; they gave up because of the grave danger from avalanching.

A pair of Slovenian alpinists came this autumn to make the first ascent of the near-vertical east face of Jannu (7710 meters) southwest of Kangchenjunga in far eastern Nepal. Like Lowe and Anker for Annapurna III, these two for Jannu, Bojan Pockar, one of Slovenia's best climbers, and Ziga Petric, first acclimatized on a neighboring mountain. They went to Kabru before trying to scale Jannu's dangerous face in a rapid alpine-style ascent. They never attacked Jannu: they disappeared without trace during their acclimatization climb after clouds closed in around them. They were last seen at about 6000 meters by their doctor, Miss Anda Perdan, who watched from base camp through a powerful telephoto lens until clouds drew a curtain around them at about 1:00 p.m. on the 4th of October.

During that night 20 centimeters of snow fell at base camp, and next day clouds continued to envelop Kabru. When on the 6th the weather was clear, there was no sign of them and only small avalanche paths were visible, but it is believed possible that they had set off an avalanche big enough to bury them. Miss Perdan kept hoping they would return, thinking perhaps they had descended another side of Kabru, but

she finally left base camp alone on the 17th. With the deaths of Pockar and Petric, Slovenia has sadly lost a total of seven mountaineers in climbing accidents since July 1995. Five of them were highly skilled climbers: Stane Belak, Slavko Sveticic, Vanja Furlan, Miss Jasna Bratanic and Pockar.

There were four fatal incidents in Nepal this autumn: the disappearance of the two Slovenians for Jannu, the avalanche that killed two Sherpas and a Frenchman on Everest expeditions, the heavy snowfall that buried two Americans on Annapurna IV, and the disappearance of a veteran Japanese mountaineer on Manaslu. Eight men thus lost their lives.

The Japanese was Masatsugu Konishi, who had come to the Nepalese Himalaya a number of times before and now gained the summit of Manaslu on 30 September with two teammates from their party of five Japanese climbers and five climbing Sherpas. They had made a late start for the summit that morning because of strong winds earlier, and their descent was late and very slow because of exhaustion. Well after nightfall, after having gone down only to an altitude of 7900 meters, Konishi stopped and bivouacked for a few hours there, far above their highest camp at 7650 meters, and then in a confused state because of the high altitude, he moved briefly upwards and later finally disappeared completely. His body was not found.

On the Tibetan side of Everest there were no deaths, but on Cho Oyu illness claimed the lives of two climbers, Hiroshi Oya of Japan and Lubos Becak from the Czech Republic. They brought the season's total deaths to ten, an unusually small proportion of all the very many men and women in the mountains. In Nepal the eight who died represented only 1.3% of the 642 people, foreigners and Sherpas, who climbed above their base camps. The rate of fatalities in Nepal is usually over 2%.

This season saw more teams from southeast Asia than ever before although they still are not coming in large numbers yet. Over the years, as countries have become more affluent, they have sent increasing numbers of climbers to the Nepalese Himalaya; this was true of Japan as it emerged from the economic ruin of World War II, of Spain and South Korea in later years, and now it seems of Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. But the southeast Asian climbers appear to be just in the initial stage of their Himalayan skills and strength as they set altitude records for their nations. While an Indonesian woman, Miss Clara Sumarwati, succeeded in her second attempt on Everest and became the first Indonesian ever to "conquer" the great mountain on 26 September, when she summited by the standard route on the Tibetan side, she was heavily dependent on her Sherpas, who were veterans of Annapurna I and earlier Everest ascents, and she used artificial oxygen at a high rate of flow.

Her successful effort had been preceded in the summer month of July by that of the unsuccessful attempt of a three-man Indonesian team under the leadership of Endang Suhendra to scale Everest's neighbor, Nuptse. They did not try to climb their originally planned route up a pillar on its southern side because this looked too formidable for them, and their one climbing Sherpa, Chuldin, opened the route for them on the northwest ridge, but they were actually on the mountain for only a few days: they found it "very difficult" because this was their first time on a high

mountain, and one member suffered slightly from altitude sickness. When new snow fell and avalanching resulted, they decided to abandoned the climb. They said that all three of them and Chuldin had reached a high point of 7200 meters together in their brief time on Nuptse.

In the autumn, Malaysians were successful on two 7000ers, Annapurna IV and Putha Hiunchuli (7246 meters). On Putha Hiunchuli, two Malaysians and a Singaporean went to the top on two different dates, 16 and 19 October, but they literally followed in the footsteps of a French-Swiss team who had summited three days before them. On Annapurna IV, only one Malaysian reached the summit, and this summitter, Ramakrishnan, reported that he was tied to two of the four Sherpas who went to the top with him in order to balance him when the wind was strong, and that he used bottled oxygen part of the time on his summit day, 10 November, although it is quite rare for climbers on under-8000-meter peaks to use it. Even so, his fingers and toes became mildly frostbitten. Coping with the rigors of extreme cold and very high altitudes can be a serious problem for southeast Asians.

## **Spring 1997: Snow, Wind and Human Frailty Thwart Ambitious Plans to Scale Several 8000ers in One Season**

“Man proposes but God disposes” might well be the lesson learned by a number of climbers who ambitiously scheduled ascents of more than one Himalayan mountain this spring:

- Britain’s Alan Hinkes planned to add during this season alone three more to the collection of great 8000-meter summits he has already “conquered,” Lhotse, Makalu and Kangchenjunga. But bad weather so greatly delayed his ascent of the first one that he was unable to summit the second and never even went to the third.
- The careful plans of Russia’s Vladimir Bachkirov to make the first traverse of Lhotse to its unattempted middle summit and on to Lhotse Shar were never carried out.
- A better known Russian, who is also Kazakh and lives in Kazakhstan, Anatoli Boukreev, summited Everest from its southern side with an Indonesian expedition who had hired him for the purpose, then later went to the summit of Lhotse, which abuts Everest and is itself the world’s fourth highest mountain, but he was not able to carry out the rest of his program, which was to traverse from the top of Lhotse to that of Everest and then, he had hoped, to descend Everest by its northern flanks.
- The plan of a Japanese climber, Hirofumi Konishi, to scale Dhaulagiri I and Lhotse had the same fate as Hinkes’s program: he had to wait to summit Dhaulagiri I until the snowfall lessened and the winds died down. His wait ended only on the very last day of the season, leaving him no time to climb another peak.
- A South Korean expedition went to Annapurna I but abandoned it because of heavy snowfall, then went to Kangchenjunga and again failed, this time principally because of fierce winds.
- Even teams with two lower summits on their agendas, a New Zealand-American party and a German-Austrian team, both for Pumori and Ama Dablam, failed to reach the top of either one.

Himalayan climbing techniques are improving constantly, and many leading mountaineers are able to get sponsors to finance their climbs, but in some cases their very sponsorships push them to attempt the marginally possible, and in all cases snow and wind, plus exhaustion, can frustrate any time-bound program. In Nepal, there are fixed seasons for which one obtains a permit to climb; the spring season begins on 1 March and ends on 31 May, and if one wishes to climb beyond the end of May, one must get a new permit and bear all the additional costs that entails. To climb in Tibet on the northern side of Everest and other border mountains, the

authorities do not give their permission so rigidly by the calendar, but even they impose some time limits. And the climbers themselves do not have unlimited amounts of time at their disposal, for either they have jobs and families that demand their return home, or, as in Hinkes' case, they have still more climbing commitments they must rush to fulfil.

On Everest this spring there fortunately was no such dramatic disaster as the fatal storm of 10-11 May, 1996, although the Internet and other communications media led the public to believe there was. Sadly, a total of eight people did die while climbing with the 12 expeditions on Nepal's side and 16 teams and splinter groups in Tibet. But the Internet reported five Kazakhs had died in a storm when actually three Russians had died on one day but not because of the weather; one fell and two were victims of the very high altitude. A New Zealand radio station even broadcast an item saying that it was seven New Zealanders who had died together; actually there were not seven New Zealanders among all the climbers on all the expeditions on the mountain, and not one of those who were there had any kind of accident.

By now, following all the publication of misinformation last spring and this, it is clear that instant reporting about Everest developments is quite unreliable and also sometimes seems to be irresponsible. The radio station apologized later for its mistake, which had understandably caused great distress to the families of the New Zealanders who were on Everest.

The total number of people who have stood at the highest point on earth has now passed the 700-mark. This spring altogether 86 men and women reached the 8848-meter summit. They brought to exactly 726 the grand total of people who have now summited Everest since 1953, and to 932 the total number of ascents that these climbers have made.

Thirty-six of this spring's summiters had been there at least once before. All except one of these repeaters, a Mexican surgeon, were professional climbers: five were foreign guides with commercial expeditions, and 25 were Nepalese Sherpas. Mount Everest of course attracts not-so-highly-skilled amateur climbers as well as the professionals. Among this spring's summiters who do not climb professionally was the first grandson of any summitter, Tashi Tenzing from Australia, whose grandfather, Tenzing Norgay Sherpa, made the mountain's first ascent with Edmund Hillary on 29 May, 1953. Tashi Tenzing was a member of one of this spring's several commercial expeditions, and he summited on 23 May, the birthday of Buddha. As a devout Buddhist, he carried to the top of Everest a six-inch bronze statue of Buddha as "a message of peace and compassion to the world." He described with delight how there were "two great orange balloons" in the sky, the setting full moon and the rising sun, as he and his teammates reached the top of the world. (Fittingly, on 10 May, 1990, Hillary's son Peter had become the first son of a summitter to get to the top.)

Everest summiters this spring also included the first Indonesian men, Misirin and Asmujiono, who were also the first men from southeast Asia; after them came the first Malaysians, Magendran Munisamy and Mohandas Nagappan; the first three Icelanders, Hallgrimur Magnusson, Bjorn Olafsson and Einar Stefansson; the first

Australian woman, Mrs. Brigitte Muir; and the first Kazakh woman, Mrs. Lyudmila Savina.

No new route was forged this season to Everest's summit. But a Russian expedition did ascend what they said was an unclimbed rib on the north face to an altitude of perhaps 7500 meters before abandoning that line and traversing left to the standard route up the north ridge to put two of their 19 climbing members on the summit.

Another group had also hoped to pioneer a new route this spring. The French alpinist, Serge Koenig, had been organizing an effort by about 20 French and Chinese mountaineers to climb a new direct line up Tibet's north face that would involve surmounting a rock spur of great difficulty. They would fix a considerable amount of rope, use plenty of bottled oxygen starting at lower-than-normal altitudes, install a pressurized laboratory at the North Col (at 7000 meters), and have live television coverage involving satellite communications and helicopters.

However, important people in the French mountaineering community were passionately opposed to this project, which they said had already entailed "excessive publicity," and, they charged, would support the Chinese government's "oppressive" policy towards the people of Tibet, use "disproportionate resources," "flout elementary mountaineering ethics" and "harm the environment" with as many as 200 people at base camp for this one expedition alone. The French Alpine Club reportedly stated that it supported instead "the current trend" towards lightweight fast climbs without artificial oxygen. Koenig apparently had to abandon his project when sufficient funds could not be raised.

There were two ambitious plans for very lightweight traverses via the highest point on earth. An Italian, Reinhard Patscheider, who was an independent climber on the north side, reportedly wanted to descend the south side, but he unfortunately developed some unexplained stomach illness and after two attempts to climb the mountain was forced to go home without having gotten any higher than 7100 meters. He had climbed from the north on a permit arranged by a Polish mountaineer who actually did most of his own climbing with an Indonesian team.

Patscheider's intention had been to go down the southeast ridge, which forms part of the international border, to the South Col, the very high saddle between Everest and Lhotse, and from there descend the standard Nepalese route. He was enrolled on the Lhotse permit of a British-led commercial expedition, and the leader of that team left for him at the South Col, as requested by Patscheider, a tent, sleeping bag and mat, stove, fuel and food. These items still await his arrival.

Although Patscheider had put his name on two permits, one from the Tibetan authorities and the other from the Nepalese, such a trans-border traverse would have been illegal, and he could have gotten into trouble if he had actually carried out his intention and that had been discovered. All permits require climbers to go down the same routes they go up. Furthermore, there is no agreement between the two countries for such border crossings, and the Nepalese penalty for this can be banishment from climbing in Nepal for five years.

A similarly illegal program was Boukreev's more elaborate idea for a traverse from Lhotse's summit (8516 meters) over to the top of Everest, and then "if I feel like it" a traverse of Everest by going down the normal Tibetan route. He said he was on three permits: a British-organized commercial team's Nepalese permit for Everest from the south, the Kazakhs' Everest permit for the north side, and a Russian expedition's Lhotse permit.

Boukreev first went to the top of Everest from the Nepalese side rather early in the season, on 26 April, as one of three Russians employed by an Indonesian army expedition (who called them their "mercenaries"), and he then came all the way down to Kathmandu with the victorious Asians. After spending nearly a week at this much lower altitude, he returned to the Everest-Lhotse base camp on 18 May to join an Italian climber, Simone Moro, who was already climbing with a big Italian Lhotse team and was on the same Nepalese Everest permit as Boukreev.

The Kazakh/Russian, Boukreev, and the Italian now climbed together up Lhotse's normal route on the west face to the summit on 26 May. (It was Boukreev's second ascent of this peak.) But they made no move to go over to Everest. The weather was becoming unsettled that afternoon, and, more importantly, the normally very strong Boukreev was not now in good health: he suspected he had picked up a lung infection in Kathmandu, and his April ascent of Everest and descent to Kathmandu doubtless did not help. Moro had no interest in trying to go to Everest alone, so both men turned down and reached base camp the next day.

Another "mercenary" who summited Everest with their Indonesian employers was Vladimir Bachkirov, a Russian who, amongst his many accomplishments, had in 1994 led the successful first attempt to climb the very steep south ridge of a peak known as Annapurna South (7219 meters). While he was now engaged with the Indonesians on Everest, some of his Russian teammates had been fixing rope and pitching camps up Lhotse's west-face route while others had attempted to prepare a possible descent route for him and several colleagues, who would traverse from Lhotse to make the first ascent of the middle summit of the massif. This exit route was to be on the south ridge of a peak named Shanti Shikhar (or Shartse II) next to the massif's eastern summit, Lhotse Shar. Although his friends had not reached the top of Shanti Shikhar, Bachkirov said in Kathmandu after his descent from Everest and before going to Lhotse, that he felt nonetheless it could provide a good descent route from the east, from Lhotse Shar.

No one had ever tried to reach this middle peak, known as Lhotse Intermediate, which at 8410 meters is the world's highest unclimbed peak and is guarded on each side by a very difficult ridge at great altitude connecting it with Lhotse's main summit and with Lhotse Shar. Now in early May Bachkirov came down to Kathmandu on the 4th, flew back to the mountains with Boukreev on about the 10th, and arrived at base camp in apparent good health a week after that, ready to make the first traverse across the great Lhotse massif.

Bachkirov, who already had six other 8000-meter summits to his credit, got to the top of Lhotse on 26 May. He was amongst the last of his summit party of eight Russians to arrive there; he told a teammate that he had a slight fever, and he

explained to a member of another team climbing the mountain at the same time that he was waiting for the last of his party to come up. When the last of them, including Bachkirov, got to the top, it was late in the day, nearly 4:00 p.m. The weather was very cold, visibility was poor, and Bachkirov was not well.

Neither he nor any of the others tried to make the traverse to Lhotse Intermediate. Instead they all turned down towards the shelter of their camp at 7700 meters. But Bachkirov never got there. He managed to descend to 8000 meters unaided, then collapsed and was pulled down the snow slope to 7900 meters, where he was found to have no pulse or any other signs of life. He had died of exhaustion and perhaps the same infection that Boukreev had gotten. His teammates buried his body on the mountain in snow inside a sleeping bag.

Is the traverse from Lhotse to the middle summit to Lhotse Shar possible? His deputy leader, Vladimir Savkov, who did not climb above base camp, answered "it is very, very, very difficult" along the sharp, steep ridge. Said one of the men who did summit that fatal day, Gleb Sokolov, "maybe" it is possible, but he would like to try traversing from Lhotse Shar to the middle peak only; the section of the ridge from that eastern end, he thought, is not so sharp nor so steep as the climb between Lhotse Intermediate and the main summit, and the descent would not be so difficult.

Another of the great remaining challenges in Himalayan mountaineering has been the unclimbed west face of Makalu. Sergei Efimov, who in the autumn of 1991 had led the only successful ascent of Cho Oyu's extremely difficult east ridge, now brought a team of eight compatriots to scale Makalu's formidable west face by the direct route that in the early 1980s had defeated such first-rate mountaineers as Jerzy Kukuczka and Wojciech Kurtyka from Poland and Britain's Alex MacIntyre.

Five of the Russians reached their 8463-meter summit on 21 May, but they did not follow the expected route; instead they climbed to the right of it. Their ascent was made without artificial oxygen via a line immediately to the left (or north) of the great west pillar, and then from their highest fixed camp at 7300 meters they moved up and slightly to the right with a series of bivouacs to the top of the pillar at 8000 meters and from there along the south ridge to the summit. They reported that their own route gave them the most difficult climb of their lives with eight ropes of vertical rock and ice. But the direct route entirely on the west face is yet to be scaled.

Two men in the Russians' original Makalu summit party of six died during their climb. The leader of these six was Salavat Khabiboulline, whom Efimov described as an excellent technical man capable of leading sections of the ascent no one else could have surmounted. "But he worked so very hard he had no strength left; he sat down to rest and never got up." He had stopped about 265 vertical meters below the top while five of his teammates, Alexei Bolotov, Yuri Ermatchek, Nikolai Jiline, Dmitri Pavlenko and Igor Bougatshevski, completed their successful ascent. Three days later Bougatshevski himself was killed by a falling rock that struck the side of his head while he was on his way down to a camp at 6500 meters.

On Everest two of those who perished were western Europeans. One was a Scotsman, Malcolm Duff, who was leading a commercial team to the Nepalese side of Everest, and who was found dead in his tent at base camp one morning when a



Sherpa went to give him a cup of tea. He had fallen over onto his side but still clasped an open book in his hands; it was speculated that perhaps his heart had failed him.

The other western European was a German mountaineer on the Tibetan side, Peter Kowalzik. He was ascending alone on the 8th of May when he was met by two Frenchmen coming down from the summit. The three chatted briefly at the bottom of the Second Step at about 8570 meters, exchanged “good luck” and “congratulations,” then continued on their different ways. It was 1:00 p.m., and the French estimated that if Kowalzik had gotten to the top, it would have been at about 4:00 p.m. By then at that altitude he would have been experiencing strong winds and poor visibility from cloud cover. He was never seen again.

The French said he looked tired but essentially all right, and he told them he was fine. However, three New Zealanders with a lot of experience on Everest had urged him not to make his summit attempt because he did not look well, and they knew that he had had to go down to a village below base camp to regain strength early in his climb. They had spent some time with him at advance base camp before he left for his final summit push, and one of them, a doctor, had examined him then and believed he had a lung infection.

Furthermore, another climber on the north side, who had already known him before this spring and was with him several times in April and May, reported that Kowalzik had not yet become well-acclimatized to very high altitude. Before his summit bid, he had been only once to 7700 meters, to deposit gear there, in late April and then descended to base camp to rest. He was neither a fast climber nor an “extreme climber” of the very highest ability, and he was using no artificial oxygen.

What finally happened to Kowalzik will probably never be known. A Canadian member of the Kazakhs’ expedition, Andy Evans, who summited two weeks later, recognized the German’s ice axe below the Second Step, and not far away he saw a body, which he did not attempt to identify. If these are Kowalzik’s, that still doesn’t reveal whether he died after having reached the summit or perhaps soon after his meeting with the two Frenchmen.

Altogether five people died on the Tibetan side of Everest (Kowalzik, the three Russians, and a Nepali, Mingma Tamang, with Koreans), and three on the Nepalese side (Duff plus two Sherpas, Nima Rinzi and Tenzing Nuru, on Malaysian and American teams). Duff’s body was escorted home by his widow, but the others remain on the mountain. At the same time, one from last year was removed: the body of the Japanese woman, Mrs. Yasuo Namba, who perished in the terrible storm of last 10-11 May, was now brought down from the edge of the South Col, where she had died, to base camp and to a Sherpa village below, and there it was cremated. And the body of Bruce Herrod, a Briton who had climbed with a South African team last spring, was released from its ties to fixed ropes at the bottom of the Hillary Step above the south summit and dropped into a southwest face crevasse.

A Nepalese expedition on their country’s side of the mountain boasted that they were the first team ever to be sponsored by a political party. Their backers were the youth organization of the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxists-Leninists),

and they proudly announced that two of their five climbing members had summited on two different days, the 21st and 25th of May.

The two men, named Danuri Sherpa and Kami Rita Sherpa, did indeed go to the top, others have confirmed, but they happened to be Sherpas employed by an American expedition, and Kami Rita actually carried special equipment to the top for the American team to install there in order to measure the summit's precise position. This is probably the first time that two Everest expeditions have claimed the same summits as their own.

Kami Rita and Danuri had joined the communist youth wing, the Democratic National Youth Federation, in the spring of 1996, when the communists were beginning to organize an Everest climb. But at that time the party was in opposition to the government in office, and it was not until well into this spring, after the communists themselves had come to power, that the DNYF was granted an Everest climbing permit. So having signed up for the American expedition also, the two Sherpas were able to collect equipment allowances from both expeditions. Despite the DNYF's claim that Kami Rita had "taken leave" from the Americans on 25 April, he had not actually done so, according to that team's Kathmandu representative, and had received the Americans' Rs.20,000 bonus (equal to about \$350) for going to the summit with them. This he obviously would not have been paid if the Americans had not considered that he had been with them.

The British Lhotse climber Alan Hinkes arrived in Kathmandu at the end of March with a film crew and publicity material describing him as "the most successful high-altitude mountaineer in Britain," and quite rightly pointing out that no one has ever successfully climbed as many as six 8000ers in a single year, which was the goal he was now setting out to reach. This spring he was to scale three in Nepal, first Lhotse, then Makalu and finally Kangchenjunga; this summer he would move on to Pakistan and climb Nanga Parbat; and in the autumn he would finish up back in Nepal on Dhaulagiri I and Annapurna I. Moreover, he said, he would do his spring ascents alone as much as it would be possible when numerous others were moving up and down the same standard routes that he would follow; he would climb without companions or the use of any artificial oxygen, and much of his climbing would be in alpine style with only one fixed camp (or perhaps none) on each mountain and no Sherpas helpers.

However that is not how things actually worked out. Weather conditions were terrible for several weeks this spring with the winds a special problem; as another Lhotse team's leader vividly explained: "it would be fine until 10:00 a.m. with a soft five-mile-an-hour breeze, and then suddenly it would turn into a 50-mile-an-hour gale." (Farther east in the Kangchenjunga area, snowfall was another delaying factor: "We climbed all day, it snowed all night, and next day we had the job of route-making all over again.")

When Hinkes went to Lhotse, he was on a commercial team's permit, and it was not as a soloist but as a member of this group that he finally managed to be the first person this spring to gain the summit of Lhotse – and the only one to get to the top on his summit day – after having made good use of the group's camps, equipment,

food, Sherpas and bottled oxygen. On his return to Kathmandu, he acknowledged all this, asking: "If it's available, why not?"

He summited Lhotse on the 23rd of May, very close to the end of the season. A helicopter picked him up from the Lhotse-Everest base camp area as he had originally planned. But he had planned this would be on about the 10th or so of May and not on the 28th, as it actually was. The aircraft dropped him near an advance base camp which had already been established for him by another Briton, an American and a small Nepalese camp staff for his Makalu attempt.

The two teammates who were with him on his own Makalu permit had also already pitched two higher camps and stocked them with food and gear for his quick push for the summit. But Hinkes and the American colleague, Fabrizio Zangrilli, who went for the summit bid with him on 30 May, got no higher than 7200 meters on this giant mountain when at midday they turned back; Zangrilli had been hit on the side of his head by a piece of falling ice and made ill by this, and both were fearful of more hits by rockfall in the hot part of the day. Hinkes could see that the winds up high were very strong, and on the 2nd of June he decided to give up. Kangchenjunga was not even visited. He said he hoped to return to Makalu and go to Kangchenjunga next spring after having carried on with his attempts on this year's three other 8000-meter objectives.

Hinkes was not the only climber this season to be trying to close in on his goal of summiting all 14 of the world's 8000ers. On Kangchenjunga was the Italian mountaineer, Fausto De Stefani, who already had 12 to his credit and lacked only Kangchenjunga and Lhotse. He went to Kangchenjunga with a Spanish team, but he didn't like their route. The leader of an American-British expedition said De Stefani asked to join their effort but they preferred to climb without him, so he finally teamed up with some South Koreans. No one summited Kangchenjunga this spring except one very strong, quick American, Scott McKee.

Last year's tragic deaths in a storm on Everest focused the attention of a wide public to the on-going debate about the merits of commercial expeditions, and the controversy has not disappeared. The first woman ever to summit Everest, Mrs. Junko Tabei of Japan, speaking in Kathmandu early this year, was reported to have agreed that such teams have their favorable aspect since they enable people to climb Himalayan peaks who do not have the time or perhaps the organizing ability to put an expedition together themselves.

But she touched on their unfavorable side as well when she said she felt the world's highest mountain should be off limits to commercially organized teams in order to preserve the grandeur of an Everest success: "Lots of people now feel you can climb Everest if you have the money. An Everest conquest doesn't enjoy the kind of accolade it once did." But Nepal's government has not indicated any intention to prohibit commercial teams or anyone else from climbing Everest or any other peak if they obey the regulations and pay the royalties for permits. Last year mountaineering fees for all Nepalese peaks earned \$1.8 million for the government of this impoverished country.

There are actually several types of businesses that organize commercial expeditions. Some are highly reputable and provide excellent services with experienced guides, plenty of Sherpa helpers, first-class equipment and all the bottles of oxygen their clients would want. But others do not fit this description. Amongst the latter was a German company that accepted payments from 30 or 40 people to join expeditions to Everest, Cho Oyu or Shishapangma, or even all three mountains, this season, but failed to forward any payment to the Kathmandu agent for transport costs to reach base camp, for staffs to help the clients make their ascents or at least to prepare their food, for the purchase of foodstuffs and other necessary items, and so on. When the climbers arrived in Kathmandu, they learned from the agent that he could not provide any services unless they paid him directly, that the German company was already so deeply indebted to him from past years (by about \$200,000) that he could no longer extend credit to its clients. Some of them turned around and went back to Europe to try to get their money refunded, while others paid a second time and stayed on; from one team of 14 Germans with plans to attempt all three mountains, only eight could afford now to make a second payment, and they were able to pay for just one peak, Cho Oyu.

There are also various types of guided climbs. These are often small parties of clients, perhaps a man and his wife, a group of friends, or even a single individual, who employ a well-qualified professional guide to look after them and shepherd them to their summits if possible. Two Canadians reached the top of Everest this season with important help from their two guides. "I did my job," said one of the guides with evident satisfaction at his clients' success.

But other groups are sometimes made up of people who are strangers to each other and who are placed together in rather haphazard fashion. One such group this spring consisted of six very dissatisfied clients of a Polish guide who arranged for them to be on a permit to scale Everest in Tibet but did not actually climb with them since he was hired by another expedition and went with that group instead, leaving his first party to their own devices without leadership or guidance on the mountain. Only one person in this "cocktail expedition," as they called themselves, reached as high as 8100 meters, and most of them did not get over 8000 meters. It is quite possible that the one who climbed the highest, Joao Garcia from Portugal, might have made it all the way to the summit under different circumstances.

Last winter only four expeditions came to Nepal, one each on Ama Dablam, Annapurna I, Makalu and Pumori. Koreans reported success on Ama Dablam, but the more interesting ascent of the season was accomplished by a six-man French team led by Christophe Profit on Everest's 7161-meter close neighbor, Pumori. First Profit and a colleague scaled their mountain by its normal southeast-face route. Then they went around to Pumori's south pillar, which had not been climbed since its first ascent in 1972. Profit and three teammates followed this pillar much of the way but then moved over to the right up an ice gully. It was a difficult climb with several steps of vertical rock, but they accomplished their ascent without fixed camps, fixed ropes or Sherpas. (They went down by the normal route since they had fixed no rope for a

descent by the pillar.) Altogether, it was “a very nice adventure,” Profit said with quiet satisfaction.

## **Autumn 1997: Slovenes Make Impressive Face Ascent on Nuptse Austrians Are First Ever to Attempt Raksha Urai in the West**

This autumn's weather seemed unremittingly bad for climbing, without the normal break of a couple of weeks of fine days and nights between the end of the monsoon rains/snowfall in late September and the onset of fierce westerly winds in mid-October. It brought some unhappy results to all three major types of mountaineers who constitute the majority of climbers in the Nepalese Himalaya: the pioneers, who attempt to scale virgin mountains or unclimbed faces; the 8000-meter "peak-baggers," who are working their way down the list of all 8000-meter summits which they are determined to climb; and the commercial teams of fee-paying clients of professional expedition organizers.

Amongst the small number of the pioneers this autumn, only one man successfully achieved his goal and descended safely. This was an increasingly well-known Slovenian, Tomaz Humar, who with his compatriot, Janez Jeglic, reached the 7742-meter northwest summit of Everest's neighbor, Nuptse, in an impressive direct line up the mountain's previously unattempted west face. The two managed to scale the face, but Jeglic fell to his death shortly afterwards.

Other pioneers included an unsuccessful Austrian expedition who were the first climbers ever to try to scale a little-known group of peaks just under 6600 meters called Raksha Urai in far western Nepal, and two well-known Japanese mountaineers who failed in the first attempt from Tibet on Gaurishankar.

Slovenians have become noted for their technical skills and their readiness to attempt climbs others consider as impossible and unacceptably dangerous. "Impossible" has been the description given to Nuptse's west face by the few mountaineers who are aware of its existence, tucked as it is in between the northwest and west ridges; it is dramatically steep and threatened by hanging seracs.

Humar and his friend, Jeglic, whom Humar rated as Europe's best ice climber in terms of both speed and technical ability, needed three bivouacs for their alpine-style ascent in which they soloed with no belays and no fixed ropes. Belaying would have made their climb too slow, Humar explained; it is essential to move quickly on a 2000-meter wall which frequent avalanches.

Their climb began from a glacier camp at 5200 meters, and their first challenge, according to Humar's account after his return to Kathmandu, was the "awful glacier" of crevasses and hanging seracs where they had to spend four hours to actually reach the foot of their precipitous wall of rock and very hard ice that was mostly 50-60 degrees and occasionally 80 degrees steep. Their first bivouac was made on 27 October on a snow shelf at 5900 meters.

They continued their climb next day despite strong wind and fog (a low cloud enveloped them) and snow avalanches that passed over them. They gained only 400 vertical meters that day, bivouacked in an overhanging crevasse that did little to protect them from the wind buffeting their small tent, letting them have almost no

sleep. On the 29th they ascended another 400 vertical meters over mixed rock and ice and through small couloirs, dodging falling rocks and blocks of thin ice, and they had another night of terrible weather with winds tearing their tent and new snow falling. The fourth day they devoted to cooking and mending their badly battered tent.

On 31 October they resumed their climb at 4:00 a.m. with an agreement that they would turn back at 2:00 p.m. wherever they were at that time, and they now carried extremely light loads with no tent or cooking equipment but only something to drink and chocolate to eat. It was terribly cold: at 7100 meters at 8:00 a.m. the temperature was -30 Celsius and the wind was very strong. The two Slovenes were last together at 11:30 a.m. at 7500 meters, where they stopped briefly, but it was still extremely cold and windy, and they soon resumed their ascent singly, Jeglic going up first. "Now there was a storm with terrible wind," but despite this, at 2:00 p.m. Jeglic stood at the very summit of the face at the pointed peak 7742 meters high known as Nuptse's northwest summit, which has been reached by several teams via the northwest ridge and which is perhaps 300 meters as a crow would fly from the main summit but much farther as a man would have to traverse along a sharp difficult ridge.

When Humar himself got to the peak 15 minutes after Jeglic, he found only his teammate's footprints in very bad powder snow leading slightly onto the south side; apparently by mistake, Jeglic had gone beyond their summit and been blown off balance by the wind to plunge to his death 2500 meters down the hard ice and overhanging rock of the south face.

Humar left their summit at 3:00 p.m. and slowly descended the west face totally alone and without fixed ropes. But he did have two ice axes, and he moved with great care and concentration. "If you are pushed and you want to survive, everything is possible," he says. He was at 7100 meters when night began to fall; his battery was almost dead, but he had to keep moving, to reach shelter in their small tent; he lost his way; but finally about midnight he managed to find the tent.

Two hours later, a candle Humar had lighted caused his fuel supply to explode, but he was unharmed and he remained there until just after noon on the 1st of November, when he resumed his descent. Some falling ice seracs struck his head and slightly wounded him – he wore no helmet in order to save weight – but he kept going down until darkness fell when he was at 5400 meters, and here he stopped, not wanting to risk another descent in the dark. By now he had four frostbitten toes. A teammate who had been at base camp, Marjan Kovac, joined him at 1:00 a.m. on the 2nd and helped him to reach the glacier, from where porters carried him to base camp.

Humar said he had had an "obsession" about Nuptse's west face, which he calls "gorgeous." Faces are what rouse his mountaineering passion; he can't explain why they appeal to him as "something really special," but they clearly do when he merely looks at photos of the faces he has just climbed and talks about his ideas for scaling the unclimbed center of Makalu's west face or for a very fast ascent in the month of March up the middle of Dhaulagiri I's unconquered "gorgeous" south face.

As to ridges, the 28-year-old Slovenian can get enthusiastic about some great traverses that have yet to be done, such as one from his Nuptse peak along the west

ridge to the mountain's main summit, or across the ridge linking the great summits of the Lhotse group of peaks. Indeed, he said, he had dreamt of going this autumn to Nuptse's highest summit (7855 meters) and then descending Bonington's line on the south face or down the Scott route on the north face. His original idea for attempting Nuptse also called for two pairs of climbers. But Kovac had been forced to drop out the night before the start of the ascent of the face because of illness, and the fourth man, the noted Mexican mountaineer, Carlos Carsolio, had decided the face was too dangerous in such unfavorable weather conditions. So there was to be no traverse of Nuptse this time.

Before attempting Nuptse, the Slovenians and their Mexican friend had gone to two nearby mountains to acclimatize. First Humar, Jeglic and Carsolio pioneered a new route up the northeast face of Lobuje East, a so-called 6119-meter trekking peak, making an alpine-style ascent of its 900-meter wall in three successive days. Then these three and other Slovenian teammates went to Pumori. The Lobuje trio and Kovac climbed a new route on its south face leading to the French south pillar, but they suddenly had to leave that to rescue a badly injured Czech climber, Milos Kijonka, who with three Slovaks had fallen down the north side from their east ridge route and had been the only one of them to survive. After the rescue effort was successfully completed, Humar's team concentrated on the normal route in order to reach 7000-meters for acclimatization for Nuptse; five of them summited.

Before Humar had gone to Nuptse for its northwest summit, an attempt was made by two Italians, the very well-known climber Hans Kammerlander and his only other teammate, Maurizio Lutzenberger, to be the first people ever to reach the mountain's slightly higher east summit (7804 meters). But they could manage to go no higher along the southwest ridge that leads to this summit than 6600 meters on 18 October because of deep powder snow already on the mountain and more snow falling. "It's a very nice route for an alpine-style climb," Kammerlander said, and he thinks the 400-meter rocky summit face he had planned to ascend is probably not difficult, "but nobody knows." They too had gone first to a "trekking peak" to acclimatize and early in the month had summited the popular 6183-meter Island Peak (Imjatse).

Gaurishankar is a 7134-meter mountain on Nepal's northern border with Tibet that is visible from Kathmandu on the northeastern horizon; it was once thought to be the world's highest mountain until the British Survey of India made more careful measurements. All climbing attempts until this autumn on this rugged mountain were made with permits from the Nepalese government, for the Tibetan/Chinese authorities did not open it to mountaineers until a few years ago. A British attempt led by Don Whillans in the autumn of 1964 did go around from Nepal's southwestern side to the northwest in Tibet and reached 6700 meters before avalanching turned them back. Since then no one had repeated this approach; in fact, the mountain is seldom climbed from any side.

Now in September two well-known Japanese mountaineers, Yasushi Yamanoi and his wife Taeko (who was known by her maiden name, Taeko Nagao, until she married Yamanoi recently), went onto the northeast ridge but were quickly turned



back at 6300 meters, where the ridge became very narrow and steep and numerous mushrooms blocked the way. It was not possible to escape from the ridge because of extreme danger on the north face from many falling seracs, so they abandoned their attempt on 23 September. They thought the climb might be possible in colder weather in mid-October, but they do not recommend attempting the mountain from Tibet at all: the local people demanded a lot of extra money, and they were informed that the road leading to it is frozen after the end of October.

In far western Nepal, a team of 14 Austrians had no problem with the local citizenry but some difficulty getting through a very deep gorge to their virgin massif of Raksha Urai, which is east of two better known mountains, Api and Nampa, and west-northwest of the more distant Saipal. No climbers are known to have ever attempted Raksha Urai, which has six summits between about 6500 and 6600 meters. The Austrians, led by Guenther Mussnig, were told at the Dhula village police checkpost nearest to their mountain that they were the first foreigners ever seen at the post.

The Austrians reported that four of Raksha Urai's peaks are entirely composed of unstable rock while the other two are snow domes with an ice face or ice ridge below. This expedition was unable to make much climbing progress because of unstable snow on the lower slopes and avalanches "everywhere" from frequent new snowfall while they were there in the first half of October. Their attempts to climb two of the peaks got no higher than 5100 and 5200 meters.

There was success, claimed but disputed success and admitted failure for several "peak-baggers" who tried this autumn to reach some of Nepal's lofty 8000-meter – summits to add to their collections of a substantial proportion of these giant summits. In October 1986, world renowned Reinhold Messner from Italy made mountaineering history by summiting his last of these 14 giant mountains, and in doing so he achieved a goal that numerous others crave to reach. So far, four others have managed to "conquer" all the 8000ers: they were two Poles, Jerzy Kukuczka (in September 1987) and Krzysztof Wielicki (September 1996); one Swiss, Erhard Loretan (October 1995) and one Mexican, Carlos Carsolio (May 1996).

This autumn success came to some of the men going for all of the 8000ers. A Spanish Basque, Juanito Oiarzabal, summited Manaslu in early October and thereby knocked off his twelfth 8000er; he says he may finish off all of them by 1999. It also came to a South Korean, Park Young-Seok, who reported that he reached two 8000-meter summits this autumn, Cho Oyu in September and Lhotse in October. Since April, Park now claimed an unprecedented total of five 8000-meter summits in only six months (adding these to two others including Everest which he had climbed previously), and he is getting ready to go to Manaslu in December. Before Park, Carlos Carsolio was the only person to have summited as many as four 8000ers in one calendar year, which was 1995. Messner had managed no more than three in 1982, when he was teaching the climbing world that ascents of several 8000ers in quick succession were possible.

A new pair of peak-baggers suddenly appeared on the scene this autumn with ambitious plans for the fast track. They are two Spanish brothers, Jesus and Jose

Antonio Martinez, who set for themselves the goal of summiting all the 8000ers without Sherpa helpers or bottled oxygen within a year from the date of their first success. That first was achieved on Dhaulagiri I, which both of them scaled on 24 September. They then went to nearby Annapurna I but stopped that climb at 6400 meters on 15 October when a huge avalanche roared down the mountainside. Next they crossed the Nepalese border illegally, and Jesus summited Cho Oyu from the Tibetan side on a Nepalese permit on 6 November. In mid-November they left Kathmandu for Xixabangma (Shishapangma) in Tibet before going home for Christmas.

The Martinez Brothers' program beyond that leaves impossibly little room for more failures. They would return to Nepal in January, scale Manaslu in January-February, Makalu in February-March, Everest and Lhotse in April-May, the five summits in the Karakoram during June to August, return to Annapurna I in late August and finish with Kangchenjunga by 24 September, 1998. When asked if they don't get tired, "Tony" replied, "Three days' stay here [in Kathmandu], that's enough" to recover from a climb. Do they consume anything to help them succeed? "Only aspirin."

Two prominent Italians, Sergio Martini and Fausto De Stefani, have been much slower in scaling their 8000ers, having begun together with K-2 in August 1983, and they are not in their twenties like the Martinez Brothers or in their thirties like Park, but are 48 and 55 years old. Now close to completing the job with 12 successes already, Martini still had Everest to climb, De Stefani had not yet summited Kangchenjunga, and neither of them had climbed Lhotse yet.

So this season they came as a two-man team to Lhotse by its normal west-face route without artificial oxygen or help from Nepalese Sherpas. They had a one-month's struggle to go for the top under unhappy conditions, "much wind, much snow, no satisfaction," as Martini described it. But at last, on 15 October, they reported, they had gained the summit. Or to be more precise, they elaborated, they had been so very near the top that they considered they could rightfully claim a successful ascent. They were unable to say exactly how near they had gotten because wind was blowing snow in their faces and they were in mist at the time, but they decided they were as close as they could possibly get to the summit without being blown away by the fierce wind.

"For me and my friend, we feel that we reached very, very near the summit," Martini said when they came back to Kathmandu. "We are convinced that with the bad weather and without fixed rope we could not have gone higher. In this condition, for us this is the summit. We know we were not at the very last point, but for us this is the summit."

But the South Korean climber Park Young-Seok, who followed their footprints in the crusted snow three days later in clearer weather, does not consider that they actually gained the summit. While Martini and De Stefani indicate they were perhaps only a few meters below the top, Park claims that their footprints stopped about 30 meters below a small fore-summit and 150 vertical meters below the highest summit, which, he says, was slightly to the right and behind the lower point; he asserts he

himself did get to the very top, while he saw that their footprints had stopped well before it.

Although in a moment of depression De Stefani said he wished he had the strength to stop with Lhotse, the two Italians also said that perhaps next autumn they will return to the Himalaya to scale their 14th 8000ers. De Stefani would guide Martini to the summit of Everest from the Tibetan side, which De Stefani climbed last year, and then Martini would guide De Stefani to the top of Kangchenjunga, which Martini scaled in 1995. But would these summits rightly be their 14th? They have been very honest in reporting what they believe they achieved, but are they right to claim success on Lhotse? One remembers a French couple, Maurice and Liliane Barrard, returning from Makalu in the spring of 1985 and saying they had been turned back on two days in succession by terrible winds 30 meters from Makalu's summit and so they had not succeeded. (The next year they both perished in the K-2 disaster after they had been to that summit.)

The well-known Frenchwoman, Miss Chantal Mauduit, the only woman currently engaged in the contest to climb all of the 8000ers, has claimed success already on six of them, including Gasherbrum II in July, and this autumn had hope of summiting two more, Dhaulagiri I and Annapurna I, without bottled oxygen but with one Sherpa climbing with her. However, she reported failure on the first, and she never actually went to the second one. Dhaulagiri I had been successfully summited by the Martinez Brothers and one Bulgarian in late September, but when Mauduit started her climb of the mountain at the very end of the month, she managed to reach no higher than 7500 meters, where she arrived on 18 October, because of heavy new snowfall and very low temperatures. She had considerable difficulty even getting away from her base camp through very deep snow in the passes and had to leave all her climbing gear behind, so she was unable to attempt Annapurna I and had to return to Kathmandu instead.

A Briton who should have come to Nepal to add several summits to the nine 8000-meter "conquests" he claims, Alan Hinkes, failed to turn up at all. He had been disappointed in the spring by having been able to get to the top of only one of the three he planned to summit that season. His program for the rest of the year included one during the summer in the Karakoram, Nanga Parbat, and two in Nepal in the autumn. But his hopes of quickly becoming the first Briton to top all the 8000ers were thwarted by a sneezing fit. He had gone to Nanga Parbat in July to knock that one off when the flour covering the chapati (flat bread) he was eating got up his nose, and he sneezed so violently that did some sort of injury to his back, was unable to move and was in great pain; he had to be removed from the mountain by helicopter and hospitalized in Britain. He told his agent in Kathmandu that he would definitely come to Nepal in the autumn, but he never showed up, and finally his British sponsor informed the agent Hinkes would not be coming.

Another planned climb that did not actually happen was an attempt on Everest from the Nepalese side by three Mexicans and a Costa Rican under the leadership of Mrs. Ana Mendez from Mexico City. Their expedition was called Summit for Peace – Everest 1997, and their intention was to pray at the highest point on earth for peace

in the world and against poverty. As Mrs. Mendez explained, "The top of the world is a symbol of the world. By standing on the top of the world, I intercede with God for the world." She said that 50 million people around the world from a large number of Christian organizations would pray with her team as they held a brief ceremony on the summit. She acknowledged that none of the four climbing members including herself had known much about climbing one year before, so they had done some "intensive training" in Mexico and Peru.

However Mrs. Mendez never received a permit from the Nepalese authorities to set foot on Everest, and her party never moved above base camp. She claimed her Kathmandu trekking agent robbed her; the agent said she never produced the funds for the permit and instead made a concerted effort to convince officials that disasters would strike Nepal if they could not pray at the summit, and they should not be charged any fee for their vital services to the country; the tourism ministry said no permit was issued because only part of the \$50,000 royalty fee was offered by a representative of the team (not the agent).

So Mrs. Mendez's group fascinated others at base camp by their unprecedented activities. One Spanish leader reported that they explained their goal was to take the devil away from the summit of Everest so that God could come to Nepal and the Hindu and Buddhist people of Nepal could be evangelized. They wrote with an ice axe on seracs near base camp "Jesus Lives," and they made an altar in the ice at which they prayed every day. Even before they reached base camp, they were praying, he said: it took them six hours to travel the final normal one hour's walk into camp because they frequently fell on their knees in prayer. They found a big hole on the way to camp, and they said this was the gateway to Hell; they prayed to God to close it. (He did not.) When they didn't receive their climbing permit, they declared that they realized base camp was just as good a site as the summit for their purposes.

Mrs. Mendez was not the only person who failed to lead a team to the top of Everest. Nine more conventional expeditions on the Tibetan side and two in Nepal, several of them commercial ones, made actual attempts, but not a soul got to the top. This was the first autumn season since 1987 in which no one summited Everest. (Ten years ago, all four teams on the north side and all three from the south failed.) Fierce winds and new snowfall were the villains this autumn.

A highly experienced Nepalese Sherpa, Apa, and the Swiss mountaineer Jean Troillet, who himself has seven 8000ers to his credit, including Everest already in a remarkably swift ascent of Everest in 1986, reached together the highest point on the vast mountain that anyone achieved this season, 8700 meters or only 150 vertical meters below the top, on the north side. Troillet had intended to descend from the summit by snowboard; he went down on one from 8700 meters.

Everest claimed only one life this autumn. A South Korean expedition sent a party to the North Col very early in the season, on 8 September, to deposit gear there. One of them, the expedition's climbing leader, Choi Byung-Soo, was buried without trace by a big avalanche just below the Col.

However, commercially organized efforts on Cho Oyu and Ama Dablam fared much better. On Cho Oyu's normal northwest route, 17 out of 22 teams managed to

put a total of 75 people on its summit. On Ama Dablam, 72 climbers from all but one of 12 teams summited via the same narrow southwest ridge; there were so many people on the ridge that they had to pitch their tents at odd spots up and down the route or skip some camps altogether.

Several expeditions this autumn came in for criticism for poor leadership or organization. Some climbers on a 9-member team to Jannu were bitterly critical of disorganization which they felt caused their failure at a low altitude. They were mostly Americans and were led by one, Damian Benegas.

A disastrous attempt by four Czechs and three Slovaks on Pumori ended in the fatal fall (mentioned earlier) by three only moderately skilled Slovaks. They had been climbing without Sherpas and during the absence of their sick Czech leader, Michael Brunner, who was not a professional guide in any case. A Spaniard at a nearby base camp praised the Slovenians and Mexican for an astonishingly fast climb to rescue the man who survived; they are credited with saving his life.

A 19-member Italian team led by Giacomo Scaccabarozzi was faulted by others on Cho Oyu for leaving the mountain and deserting one of their teammates, Claudio Mastronicola, who was still there struggling to climb it and soon afterwards had to be rescued and taken care of by other expeditions when he became seriously disoriented and frostbitten. One member of his group explained in Kathmandu that this had been a north Italian expedition with most members sympathetic to the movement favoring the north's secession from Italy, while the man they had left behind was a southerner. But should domestic politics back home entitle an expedition to disregard the safety of a fellow climber and abandon him?

## **Spring 1998: Chantal Mauduit Found Dead on Dhaulagiri I in May While a December Avalanche Kills Anatoli Boukreev**

The death of the well-known, charming Frenchwoman, Miss Chantal Mauduit, on Dhaulagiri I was one of the great tragedies of the spring season, a season that was marred by false claims of success, a pile-up of frustrated would-be Everest summiters at its south summit, and several deaths on Everest and Cho Oyu due to ambitions beyond the strengths of unsupported and mostly insufficiently skilled climbers. An historic number of people reached the highest point on earth, the astonishing total for a single season of 118, including the first Native American (American Indian), Bernardo Guarachi, a tough 45-year-old Bolivian adventure travel agent from La Paz, and the first amputee, Tom Whittaker, a British-born American from Prescott, Arizona. The summit of the world's third highest mountain, Kangchenjunga, was finally gained for the first time by a woman, Mrs. Ginette Harrison, a Briton living in the U.S.

There also were successes for three men approaching their goal of summiting all the 14 giant 8000-meter mountains, Fausto De Stefani and Hans Kammerlander of Italy on Kangchenjunga, and a Spanish Basque, Juanito Oiarzabal on Dhaulagiri I.

Indeed, De Stefani now claims to have "conquered" all the 8000ers with his ascent of Kangchenjunga on 15 May, despite the statement last autumn by his teammate on Lhotse that they did not actually reach that summit although they were "very, very near" it. Only five others have already summited all 8000ers: Reinhold Messner, also Italian, finished his historic series in October 1986; Jerzy Kukuczka of Poland, who was catching up with Messner and finished in September 1987; the Swiss, Erhard Loretan, in October 1995; the Mexican climber, Carlos Carsolio, in May 1996; and a second Pole, Krzysztof Wielicki, in September 1996. Carsolio was the youngest at 33 years of age when he topped his 14th; Wielicki was the oldest at 46, the same age as that of De Stefani today.

The tragic death of Chantal Mauduit is something of a mystery. She and the Sherpa she often climbed with, one of several men named Ang Tshering (not a summiter of any 8000-meter mountain), were found lying peacefully in their second high-altitude camp at 6550 meters on Dhaulagiri I by Italians. Miss Mauduit preferred to climb independently from other foreigners. She and Ang Tshering, a team of just two, went up to camp 2 on 7 May at a time when others on the mountain didn't like the look of the weather conditions and had already gone down to base camp or did so the next day, and the two remained there during the following days of snowfall and winds. She had already been as high as 7000 meters, where she had pitched her third high camp on about the 22nd of April and from where a week later, she had wanted to go for the 8167-meter summit, but strong winds had held her back.

Mauduit and Ang Tshering apparently never left camp 2. They arrived there at 4:00 p.m. on the 7th, a windy and snowy day; snow fell all that night, and next day

it was very windy. Two Italians who were in their own camp 2 slightly below, descended to base camp that next day, leaving no one else in any other tents there. Other Dhaulagiri expeditions – there were also Spaniards, Slovenes, and a three-man team of New Zealand, American and Finnish climbers, as well as the Italians – never saw them move out of their camp, which had been pitched about 50 meters above those of the other teams.

Camp 2 was revisited by Italians on 14 May, and one of them, Franco Brunello, went up to Mauduit's tent and found it almost entirely covered by the recent snowfall – not by avalanche debris, he said – with snow and pieces of ice pressing against one side of it. Brunello opened its zipper a little and found no sign of life. The next day his teammate, Celestino Toldo, took a shovel up to the tent and removed the snow so that he could open the zipper wider. He discovered two sleeping bags with bodies inside them.

Mauduit's expression was peaceful but her jaw appeared to him to have been broken by a piece of ice on the outside of the tent. Brunello thinks that she was killed by ice striking her head and that she must have died "in a moment." But her jaw could have been broken after her death, and it is not clear to Brunello why Ang Tshering died, although he supposes the Sherpa suffocated. Indeed both may have died of suffocation. However, her family in France, to where her body was flown from Nepal, are reported to have stated that vertebrae in her neck were broken, probably by the weight of the snow; they believe an avalanche jumped over a rock band, part of it crashed onto her tent, and this killed her.

Miss Mauduit was 34 years old and lived in Les Houches near Chamonix when she wasn't away climbing in the Himalaya or the Alps. She was considered to be an easy-going climber – one mountaineer on Dhaulagiri who knew her well described her as "naively casual." She named her expeditions after flowers, and this one she called the Sunflower Expedition; she put painted flowers on the sides of her tents. She had charm and was a most attractive woman.

She was well-experienced in Himalayan climbing, had already successfully scaled six 8000ers and was hoping to knock off two more this spring, Annapurna I as well as Dhaulagiri I. (The only other woman to have summited five or more of these great mountains was the Polish mountaineer, Wanda Rutkiewicz, who disappeared six years ago on Kangchenjunga.) But Mauduit, whose policy was not to use artificial oxygen, had had serious problems at very high altitudes on some of her climbs and had needed to be rescued in May 1995, when she collapsed at the south summit of Everest with an extremely serious case of cerebral edema.

An equally famous mountaineer and a much more highly accomplished one, Anatoli Boukreev, was killed by an avalanche triggered by a falling ice cornice last Christmas Day. An Italian, Simone Moro, and he had a permit to climb the south face of Annapurna I, and a fellow Kazakhstani climber, Dmitri Sobolev, came with Boukreev to film them. When they reached the south side of Annapurna, they found the snow conditions too dangerous to attempt the face, so they decided to try an unclimbed route via the very long ridge that runs northward from Annapurna South to Fang to Annapurna's main peak.

On 25 December they were climbing the east face of this ridge with Moro in the lead and were approaching a 6350-meter col on the ridge south of Fang at 12:15 p.m. when a cornice fell off from the ridge, broke into pieces and created a very large avalanche of ice and snow. Moro was perhaps 50 meters below the col and happened to be looking upwards when the cornice broke away, so he had a few seconds in which to prepare himself to resist it. He shouted a warning down to Boukreev, who was moving up to him with more rope to be fixed on the face, and just before he himself was engulfed in the avalanche, Moro saw Boukreev run to the right to try to escape.

Boukreev was at 5900 meters and Sobolev was 200 meters below him. Both men disappeared completely. Two searches for them by experienced Kazakh climbers in early January and by one of them again, with Moro this time, in April produced no traces of the two lost climbers. Avalanches from the face of the ridge continued to thunder down the mountain, and their bodies still lie somewhere in the deep rubble at the foot of Annapurna's south ridge and south face.

Moro was carried down by the avalanche 700-800 meters, knocked unconscious, and badly battered by his fall; his hands received serious rope burns and the tendon of one finger was cut by the rope he clung to. When he regained consciousness, he saw and heard nothing of his teammates. He reached base camp alone with great difficulty and sent a base-camp Sherpa to summon a helicopter which flew him to Kathmandu for hospital treatment on the following day, 26 December.

It will be months before Moro can resume Himalayan climbing. Of course Boukreev can never climb, which was his whole life. He was a 39-year-old bachelor who had a flat in Almaty, Kazakhstan, but he was there perhaps two weeks in a year. Where was he the rest of the year? His reply: "I am in the mountains." Said Moro, "I never saw another person with such instinct for mountains. ... His death is a big loss for the mountaineering world."

Boukreev was well-known for the speed with which he scaled the great 8000ers, and became more famous for the role he played in the widely reported disaster on Everest on May 8, 1996, when eight people died during their descent from the top. Boukreev was one of the guides who summited Everest from the south side with clients on a commercial expedition that day and was prominent in efforts to rescue climbers who were struck by a terrible storm after they left the summit.

Just before leaving Kathmandu for his fatal climb, Boukreev said his future plans were to go to the Tibetan side of Everest as a guide in the following April, then to reach the few 8000-meter summits he had not yet gained, the highest summit of Xixabangma (Shishapangma) in May and in the summer the tops of Gasherbrum I and Nanga Parbat. With Annapurna I and the three others "conquered" by the end of the summer of 1998, he hoped he would then be in a position to establish his own business organizing commercial expeditions. He would have become the first Asian to summit all the 8000ers.

Obsessive determination to summit Mount Everest by people ill prepared to survive took the lives of three climbers this spring. Perhaps the strangest case of these was that of a New Zealander who lived in Australia, Roger Buick, a 52-year-old



ski travel company director who apparently collapsed and died at an altitude of 7400 meters while trying to move up alone on the normal climbing route in Tibet for a summit attempt. According to several experienced Himalayan mountaineers who became acquainted with him during his Everest climb, he knew nothing about the mountain or about Himalayan climbing in general. He was a ski mountaineer, explained a friend in Sydney, and his skills were those of a skier who knew nothing of high-altitude climbing. "He was extremely ignorant of the mountains and never could understand how they could kill him," said an American expedition member who was on Everest at the same time as he; Buick was convinced that in life in general and in climbing Everest, one learned as one went along. He thought everyone else was doing the Everest climb much too elaborately and expensively, and he had a great disdain for guides, the Americans said. "He was a determined man in all the wrong ways" and "never changed his actions despite all the advice he received from other climbers on many occasions."

Buick was a member of no team, had no Sherpa to help him on his climb (although four other teams' Sherpas actually carried some gear for him). There was no one who was obliged to come to his assistance if he should need it, and this was the way he wanted things to be. He was the last person of all to arrive at base camp on the north side: he turned up on 5 May, whereas the majority of the 20 other teams or independent climbers like himself had gotten there between the 10th and the 15th, a few even as early as late March and the last before him on the 24th of April. He used a sleeping bag good for the beach and wore ski clothing and boots instead of the normal high-altitude wear. (He actually was seen wearing shorts at 5600 meters when going with yaks carrying his kit bags above base camp.) He must have brought some food, but by the time his tents were searched after his death, the only edible item discovered was a quantity of chocolate bars at one camp.

He came with an unrealistic schedule to move up to two higher camps on the next two successive days after arriving at base camp and to summit on 13 May if weather permitted after having established several more camps along the normal North Col-north ridge climbing route. But Buick was an extremely slow climber on Everest. An American guide reported that Buick took seven and a half hours to descend from the North Col at 7000 meters to advance base camp (6400 meters) while the guide's client took an hour and a half to cover the same distance. Furthermore, a Japanese expedition's doctor told him at base camp on 10 May that he had a bronchial infection, but he carried on nonetheless, although he was in no position to attempt to reach the summit on the 13th since it was not until the 14th that he first occupied his camp at the North Col.

On the 26th of May Buick was told by no fewer than nine other climbers that he should turn back when they met him moving up terribly slowly – five steps and then a stop, a pace that is normal only at very much higher altitudes – and was seen to gain no more than 50 meters in a period of two hours and a half at about 7200 meters. He ignored all the advice, managed to reach the altitude of 7400 meters – and then died, probably that evening. His body was seen on the morning of the 27th, and on the 28th Russell Brice, the New Zealand leader of a small expedition whose permit

he had been added to, went up to it. The body was on a gentle snow slope, attached to the fixed rope and slumped over his back pack, which contained only a few chocolate bars: where he planned to find nourishment is a puzzle since almost all other teams, including Brice's party, had already finished their climbs and cleared their camps from the mountain.

Some climbers wondered about several things. Why had he not ordered yaks to take his gear away from base camp on the 29th, as per his revised schedule, when yaks orders must be given five days in advance? Why did he have at Everest only five yuan and seven Nepalese rupees in cash, plus some travelers' cheques which cannot be used at base camp or above? Why did he persist in struggling up the mountain when he was so excessively slow and still a very long way from the 8848-meter summit? Why did he leave no clothes or anything else at all in Kathmandu for his return?

Did he expect to return? Why was he wearing no gloves when his body was found, and why was the bottom of his thermos unscrewed and apparently tossed away, allowing the glass lining to be removed and also thrown down and shattered just below him? Did he drink something from the thermos, which was still attached to him, and did he smash the glass to avoid any analysis of its contents? He left a girlfriend, whom he was going to marry after the climb, and two daughters.

The other two Everest mountaineers with a fatal obsession to get to the summit were a Russian, Sergei Arsentiev, 39 years old, who had "conquered" Everest eight years ago by the same northern route, and his American wife, Francys, 40, who was determined to be the first woman to scale Everest without bottled oxygen from the north. Only two women have successfully climbed Everest without artificial oxygen, and both went up the southern route from Nepal. Both survived.

The Arsentievs belonged to a 22-member expedition, of which 16 climbers were Russians including the leader, Boris Sedusov. But when the Arsentievs went to the summit on 22 May without any bottled oxygen, walkie-talkie radio or other members or Sherpas climbing with them, all of their teammates had gone down to lower camps leaving no one from their team high on the mountain who could go quickly to help them in case of need.

And the need arose. The couple gained the summit at about 3:45 p.m. or 4:00 p.m. (Nepalese time, which is more realistic than Tibetan/Beijing time) after having started up at 10:45 the previous night from their last camp at 8200 meters: they had taken a total of about 17 hours to climb the final 648 vertical meters, whereas four days earlier, four of their teammates using bottled oxygen had taken ten hours and twenty minutes to go from camp to summit. Early in May, Brice had met the couple down at about 7500 meters, and there they were moving slowly with big loads on their backs. They seemed to him then to be "people who were doggedly determined to go up no matter what."

A descending summit party of Uzbekistanis on the 22nd met the ascending Arsentievs at about 8700 meters and advised the couple that it was too late in the day for them to continue to the top and return safely to camp. The Arsentievs replied

that they were prepared to bivouac, and they continued on up until they were seen from base camp through powerful binoculars to be at the summit.

They now had little more than two hours of daylight left and a very long way back to their camp. It is not clear where they bivouacked that night and whether they had a bivouac bag or any other gear for a night out in the extreme cold of very high altitude. It is clear that they survived the night, for on the next day, 23 May, they were met by another Uzbekistani team on their own way to the top. Mrs. Arsentiev was encountered at the feature known as the First Step, at about 8600 meters, in bad shape: she was standing motionless and did not speak, did not ask for help. Two of the Uzbekistanis stopped, gave her some oxygen and got her sitting down in a comfortable position, but they received no response from her, and after an hour with her, they continued on their way to the summit.

They did nothing more to try to help her because they had already met her husband about 100 meters below her at about 7:00 a.m., and he seemed to be in “not bad” condition. He wished them good luck and good weather, then went on down towards camp, and they assumed he was going to fetch oxygen and other vital things for his wife and perhaps to bring people from other teams to help rescue her. They had radios – which the Arsentievs did not – and could have summoned help, but at no time did they tell anyone about her plight. Brice and his small team were not very far below and if notified would have quickly assembled injectable drugs, oxygen and other essentials, and he and his Sherpa gone up to her and brought her down alive. (Her husband alone could have done almost nothing, Brice believes.) Arsentiev reportedly reached camp at 8200 meters at 8:00 a.m. and started up again alone to look for her at 2:00 p.m. or later with oxygen, medicine, food and drink. He was never seen again. No one has any idea what happened to him. Did he wander in altogether the wrong direction, befuddled by oxygen starvation, and fall somewhere? His body was certainly not seen anywhere near the route in the final few more days of climbing.

Arsentiev vanished, but his wife had not gone anywhere. On the following day, the 24th, a summit party from a South African expedition were on their way to the top when at about 5:15 a.m. (Nepalese time) they came to “the body of a woman which moaned and moved in spasms” and whose speech was that of a programmed automaton, saying over and over three phrases in English: “don’t leave me alone ... why are you doing this to me? ... I am an American.” She said nothing else, was totally unresponsive to others around her, and was in an extremely awkward position when they found her. They moved her into a more normal position, put her arms into her sleeves and her gloves on her hands, and put hot drink to her lips (it is not known whether she actually swallowed any of it). They spent perhaps an hour with her but felt her case was hopeless, that nothing could be done to save her life.

One of the South Africans, Miss Cathy O’Dowd, said she was “very shaken” by this and now had no desire to go on to the summit (where she had been from the Nepalese side two years previously), and she and her South African partner, Ian Woodall, went down with one Sherpa while their two other Sherpas continued to the summit. When the Sherpas came down to Mrs. Arsentiev again at noon, they found she was dead.

On a much more cheerful note about Everest, the season saw more people reach the top than ever before in a single season, and the total number of ascents ever made has now passed the 1000 mark. Altogether 118 people managed to get to the summit this spring, 73 from Tibet and 45 from Nepal. (Only two of them were women, Francys Arsentiev and an Uzbekistani, Mrs. Sventlana Baskakova, both from the north side.) It took 29 years for the first 118 summiters to get to the top. Now this spring the same number summited in just ten days, from 18 to 27 of May.

This spring's total of 118 is in striking contrast to no one at all atop Everest last autumn, and indeed is in notable contrast to the largest number of summiters in any previous season, 87 in the spring of 1993. It is clear that the terrible storm of the spring of 1996 did not drive people away from going for the summit of Everest.

Of this spring's 118 summiters, more than one-quarter, or 34, of them had been there before. Most of these repeaters were Sherpas, but they also included two Russians, Sergei Arsentiev in his second ascent and Evgueni Vinogradski in his third; one New Zealander, Russell Brice, in his second ascent; and three Americans, Wally Berg in his fourth, Robert Sloezen in his third, and Jeffery Rhoads, who made his second trip to the top only a week after his first one, both times with a Sherpa named Tashi Tshering. So there is another record: one person, Babu Tshering Sherpa, had summited Everest twice before in the same season, but his two ascents in May 1995 were 12 days apart.

The net result of all these successes is that the total number of people who have ever gained Everest's summit now stands at 808 (43 of them women), and the total number of ascents they have made has for the first time passed 1000 and reached 1048. Furthermore, these numbers could have been even greater if more than 50 climbers who collected at the south summit on 19 May hadn't turned back because no rope had yet been fixed beyond that point (see below); some of them returned later and got all the way to the top, but a number of them did not.

The mountain seems to be attracting older climbers in greater numbers. One Japanese group, the 1998 Showa Alpine Club Qomolangma Expedition led by Hitoshi Onondera, had a Young Men's Team and an Old Men's Team. All of the four "old men" were 60 to 64 years old; none reached the summit, but Masayasu Taruki, 64, is believed to be the oldest person ever to gain an altitude of at least 8300 meters. (The oldest person to succeed in getting all the way to the top was a 60-year-old Spaniard living in Venezuela, Ramon Blanco, who summited in October 1993.)

Perhaps now it will also attract numbers of disabled people following the well-publicized success on 27 May of a 49-year-old amputee, Tom Whittaker, an instructor in outdoor activities from Arizona whose right leg had to be amputated below the knee following a road accident in 1979. This was his third attempt to summit Mount Everest and prove that the handicapped can "conquer" great mountains just like everyone else. But they do so at much greater effort: Whittaker said he has to expend 30-35% more energy to climb than do the non-handicapped.

In 1995 on his second Everest expedition, he reached 8280 meters from the north side. Now he was on Nepal's southern side leading a six-member team, he had the help of strong Sherpas who had summited Everest in previous years, and he made

use of bottled oxygen from the unusually low altitude of camp 2's 6500 meters when he went for the top.

He went for the summit twice. The first time he was beset by several problems as he pushed his way up from his last camp at the South Col at 7900 meters on 20 May: he was trying to recover from a bronchial infection, he lost his crampon twice, the "foot" on his artificial leg broke up in the extremely low temperature, and a member of another expedition fell into a nearby crevasse and Whittaker's rope was used to help pull him out. After this, the stump of his amputated leg started getting very cold, and, he said, he had been "rattled" by the other man's fall; he "ran out of steam" and turned back at 8300 meters. "I thought I'd blown it" and feared he would not get to the summit on this expedition either, for there were ominous weather reports about a cyclone not very far away in India, and he was having trouble breathing.

But he did get to the summit after all. He left his base camp on the 24th and his South Col camp at 10:00 p.m. on the 26th; with four Sherpas making the trail in deep new snow and carrying bottles of oxygen for him, he, an American teammate and the four Sherpas climbed through the night and got to the summit at 6:30 a.m. of the 27th.

"I wore myself out, I'll tell you," Whittaker said a week later back in Kathmandu. "It's very satisfying. ... I worked hard, I pushed," and overcame all his problems. (Some other teams on the mountain at the same time as he felt he pushed rather harder than they liked.) He will spend his life in the mountains, he said, but not on any more 8000-meter peaks.

The American who summited with Whittaker was Jeffery Rhoads, a 43-year-old photographer and mountain guide who was assigned to climb high with him. Rhoads was with him when he turned back on 20 May, but instead of turning back himself, Rhoads elected to carry on to the top that day with Tashi Tshering Sherpa before everyone went down to base camp to rest. Then when Whittaker went to the summit on the 27th, Rhoads and Tashi Tshering were with him again and went to the top again, thus setting a new record, as mentioned above, for the shortest ever period of time between anyone's two Everest ascents.

Whittaker had had the good fortune not to have tried to go to the summit on the 19th of May. That morning about 55 foreigners and Sherpas came to a halt as they arrived singly and in small groups at the south summit (8748 meters) on their way, they thought, to the main summit, tantalizing nearby. But very nearly all of them abandoned plans to go to the top when they discovered that no rope was fixed beyond where they were.

One expedition leader states flatly that an American leader, Wally Berg, had categorically promised several teams that his Sherpas would put in the fixed rope from the south summit to the top of the Hillary Step, just below the main summit. A pile-up of over 50 climbers on the morning of 19 May occurred because Berg's Sherpas did no fixing. Babu Tshering Sherpa, a well-known Sherpa who had already summited Everest seven times, was there with a Swedish couple, and he says that the American expedition's Sherpas had not fixed rope that morning because "they

were scared” by the cornices beyond the south summit. They stopped there and did nothing.

According to Babu Tshering, he and Dorje Sherpa, who was with a Singaporean-Malaysian team, did fix 50 meters of the 100 meters of rope that Berg’s Sherpas had brought with them; Babu Tshering expected that others still coming up would have additional supplies of rope with them. But when no more rope materialized, Babu Tshering felt there no point in fixing only 50 meters more, and he stopped, for he judged that a total of 200 meters of fixed rope were needed. He says Berg’s Sherpas had only 100 meters with them at the south summit because they had already used up all the rest of the rope that they had carried that day.

Whether the details of this account are accurate or not, the fact is that of the 55 or so people gathered at the south summit that day, the 19th of May, only a small Iranian party made any attempt to go on towards the top, and they almost immediately turned back because of wind. What might have been a record day with perhaps 50 summiters (the largest number on a single day so far was 40 in May 1993) turned into one of keen disappointment, not to mention very considerable expenditure of effort, time and money. Everyone retreated to their camps at the South Col, and some continued much farther down the same day. Some of them later mustered enough strength and willpower to return for another summit bid, but many never made it back again.

Wally Berg was on Everest with a special mission: to bolt to bed rock as close as possible to the summit a GPS (global positioning system) station from which signals can be sent to satellites and thus reveal exactly where the summit is at any given time. This is of great interest to scientists wanting to determine whether the mountain is actually drifting ever so slightly to the northwest and also creeping upwards.

Berg had been to the top in three previous years; he had no great ambition to stand again at the highest point on earth but was there to do a job for the scientists. And he did it on the 20th of May. Others faulted him for the no-fixed-rope fiasco and for acting, as a displeased British leader who paid dearly for that pile-up described him, as though he owned the mountain. But he got his job done, and he touched the top of the world once again, he said.

While numerous climbers were truthfully reporting their successes or failures in reaching their summits, two 8000-meter summit claims were almost certainly false. A Turk’s report that he had topped Lhotse by himself is not believed by others who were on the mountain at the same time, and they reluctantly declare Ali Nasuh Mahruki from Istanbul didn’t make it. “I have absolutely no doubt he did not get to the summit,” said one of these others, who explained that Mahruki’s description of the summit was “totally different” from what the highest point is like. Mahruki described a rock summit, but the true top “is like an ice-snow finger,” and he may have stopped 200 meters short of it on a rock peak that is in front of the main peak. The weather was clear that day, so there was no problem of poor visibility. “Probably he thought that was good enough.”

An Argentinean expedition to Cho Oyu led by Rodolfo Ramos returned to Kathmandu and said they had put two members on the summit on May Day. But when asked for details about the final part of their climb, it became clear that they had not actually gone the last distance to reach the very highest point. A team who did summit that day reported the Argentineans had probably gotten no higher than 8100 meters on this 8201-meter mountain.

Those conscientious about not making false claims included two Spanish Basques, one on Dhaulagiri I and the other on Everest's immediate neighbor, Lhotse. Juanito Oiarzabal, who is a stickler for veracity amongst mountaineers and has blown the whistle on some errant ones, had a problem about the top of 8167-meter Dhaulagiri. On 2 May, he came to an upright aluminum pole on the normal northeast-ridge route very high on the mountain and was told that this point was considered to be the summit and that numerous earlier climbers had claimed success on the basis of having reached it.

But for him this was not the true summit but about 50 meters lower; one can see more peaks including the true top beyond it, he says. So he went all the way back up again. He made another summit push, was turned back by high winds, and only on 22 May did he get beyond the pole's area by a different line above 8100 meters and satisfy himself that he had really summited Dhaulagiri I. He has now "conquered" his twelfth 8000er without bottled oxygen. With him to the top on the 22nd went two Basque brothers, Alberto and Felix Inurrategi, who have climbed all their 8000ers together (and also without bottled oxygen) and for whom Dhaulagiri was their ninth success.

A Basque compatriot of Oiarzabal and the Inurrategis, Inaki Ochoa, was on the normal west-face route of Lhotse. He also does not make use of artificial oxygen, and he likes to climb alone, as he did this spring. He managed to arrive at a point probably only 30 meters from the top when he realized the corneas of his eyes had frozen in the -35 C cold; he was not seeing clearly, had only peripheral vision, and he felt it was not safe for him to continue to the summit that was so close – "things were not under control now," he explained about his condition which deteriorated to practically total blindness. He managed the "kind of difficult" descent to camp 3 (7400 meters), and below this camp he was helped very much by people from other expeditions, some of whom came up to meet him and escort him to the next lower camp, where he was looked after by still another team – he had been climbing alone, but he did not suffer the fate of the Arsentievs. Nor did he claim to have reached the summit, although he certainly was very, very close.

What prompts people to claim successes they know they have not actually achieved? The need for glory on return home? (The Basque, Ochoa, had succeeded often enough – on at least four 8000ers – that he no longer had this powerful motive? But for many this motive gets stronger with every success.) Personal profit associated with the glory in the form of various kinds of rewards from governments, climbing organizations and others? While other climbers are succeeding on the same mountain, an inability to admit failure? Pressure from sponsors to help them profit

from their investment? Desire to keep sponsors for funding of future climbs and to find new ones?

An Italian who is getting close to summiting all the 8000ers is Hans Kammerlander. He was on Kangchenjunga this season and gained the summit of the 8586-meter giant on 18 May without artificial oxygen via the standard southwest-face route with his teammate, Konrad Auer. But he said on his return to Kathmandu that he was not happy with this success, for the three weeks he spent on the mountain with three fixed camps along the route “is not my style. This is too slow.” His toes became frostbitten while he waited for his companion to ascend his own first 8000er; “this [frostbite] is too high a price for a normal route.” Now he was not able to go immediately to Manaslu, as he had planned, but had to have his toes cared for and wait to scale this 8000er till next year, when he hopes to do K-2 as well. That, he figures, will complete his “conquest” of all the 8000ers, although he has not reached the very highest peak of Xixabangma.

Some admissions of defeat:

Two Spanish brothers, Jesus and Jose Antonio Martinez, last autumn revealed their unprecedented grand ambition for at least one of them to scale all the 8000ers within 12 months, but they have now abandoned that idea. Jesus summited only two, Dhaulagiri I and Cho Oyu, since last September despite their having gone also to Annapurna I, Xixabangma, Manaslu and, this spring without success, to Kangchenjunga. They acknowledged that snowfall and logistical and other problems made their program impossible to fulfil. They gave up plans to go also to Makalu, Everest and again Xixabangma this spring, and went home instead. They hoped to collect enough renewed motivation to go during the summer to the Karakoram, where they have permission to climb all five 8000ers there. But scaling 14 mountains in one year is not possible, “Toni” admitted, and they may not return to Nepal.

A different kind of abandonment: a professional adventurer and writer who lives in Munich but is an Austrian citizen, Bruno Baumann, gave up his hope of making the first ascent of a peak which he has decided isn't actually there. The peak is listed by Nepal's tourism ministry, which gives climbing permits, as Saipal East, 6882 meters high. He said before going to the far west of Nepal to make an historic climb that he had no information about this peak, but said he intended to make an attempt via its north face, if it had one. However when he got to Saipal, he was unable to find any eastern summit at all and concluded that it does not exist. He did no climbing, but he did scout around for the yeti and claimed to have found droppings and bits of hair that could belong to such a creature.

The death of Roger Buick on Everest sadly highlighted a problem that has arisen in recent years for expedition leaders whose climbing permits have been used as a convenient and inexpensive way for other people to be allowed to make their own climbs. Buick was put onto the permit held by Russell Brice, but Brice knew nothing about the man, was not consulted about the addition of a total stranger – who, it unfortunately turned out, was completely inexperienced in the Himalaya. When Buick died, Brice was burdened with the task of investigating the fatal circumstances, removing his body from the frequently-used route, collecting his



belongings, obtaining a death certificate from the Tibetan authorities and communicating at length with Buick's family through his lawyer.

A somewhat similar case arose on Cho Oyu when another climber died. He was a German, Gerald Roesner, who, together with one friend, Andreas Poppe, were added to the permit of an Italian team without the leader's being informed. Roesner fell hundreds of meters to his death while descending from the summit.

These people are sometimes included in permits by their agents in their home countries, who inform the Kathmandu agents but not the permit holders. Some are added by the Kathmandu agents themselves, again without seeking prior agreement of the leaders. They not only can be a burden if disaster strikes, but as total strangers, often speaking different languages, they also can be a problem in other ways, even if they claim at the outset that they will be entirely self-sufficient above base camp. Brice has raised this issue with his agent in Kathmandu and with the China Tibet Mountaineering Association in Lhasa.

The Internet contributed this spring to a new type of awkward situation concerning membership of an expedition. A Swiss, Markus Sofer, saw that a Canadian team was listed for an attempt on Everest's neighbor Pumori, so he got in touch with them and signed up as a member. But when they met in Kathmandu, he announced that he would be entirely independent of them since he did not believe in expeditions. He did some climbing with the team, led by Tim Rippel, on its seldom-climbed southwest ridge, but most of the time he moved alone. He became the only one to go to their 7161-meter summit, which he reached on 20 May. It was an eventful season for the independents!

## **Autumn 1998: Speed Ascent Claimed on Everest Overcrowding But Many Successes on Ama Dablam**

This autumn was generally not a good time to be on the 8000-meter giant Himalayan mountains in Nepal, where climbers were plagued by heavy snowfall and fierce winds, but a Nepalese Sherpa claimed the fastest ascent ever made on Everest, and on the northern, Tibetan side of Cho Oyu there was a stream of summitters from a large number of teams. A record total were on the much lower Ama Dablam in Nepal, and with all of them on a single route, Nepal's ministry of tourism came in for criticism for granting so many permits for the same narrow ridge. First ascents were gained by Britain's Doug Scott with Roger Mear and by two small Japanese teams on other 6000-meter mountains, but ambitious Russian hopes to be the first ever to scale the middle summit of Lhotse, the highest unclimbed peak in the world, remained unfulfilled.

Speed ascents of Mount Everest, which towers 8848 meters above the seas, have rarely been attempted. Now a well-known 35-year-old Sherpa named Kaji says he raced from base camp on the Nepalese side at 5350 meters to the South Col to the top of the world in the record-breaking time of 20 hours and 24 minutes, cutting two hours and five minutes off the previous record which had been set ten years earlier via the same route by the French mountaineer, Marc Batard, when he was 36 years old.

Kaji followed the same strategy Batard had pioneered by setting off from his base in the late afternoon, climbing all night except for brief stops at camps already established along the route, and making it to the summit early in the following afternoon. However, there were also some differences between the two men's tactics. Batard climbed the mountain without other teammates, although he employed Sherpas to help set up camps on the route, and climbers from two other teams had gone ahead of him on his summit day and made a good track that he followed to the top. Kaji, on the other hand, had five team members, two of whom accompanied him on the last leg of his ascent from the South Col at 7900 meters. Batard and his Sherpas used no artificial oxygen at any time, but two of Kaji's teammates, who climbed with him from the Col and broke trail for him, did use bottled oxygen, and he himself used it during a small part of his descent.

One of Kaji's men, Tashi Tshering Sherpa, summited a few minutes ahead of Kaji (the other had turned back at 8700 meters), and when Kaji became exhausted during their descent from the south summit (8748 meters) and they wanted to press on with their retreat to their camp at the Col as quickly as possible, Tashi handed over his oxygen set to Kaji, who used it until they were back at camp. (Tashi, like Kaji, had been to Everest's summit before – in fact he had been there six times before, twice last May on the expedition of the American amputee, Tom Whittaker – whereas Kaji had summited a mere four times previously.) On 17 October the two Sherpas claimed the 1051st and 1052nd ascents of the world's highest mountain.

Kaji's declared aim before going to Everest this autumn was to scale the mountain from base camp to summit in 18 hours. But he lost one hour waiting at 7600 meters for fierce wind to abate, and had to stop for another hour at the south summit while Tashi fixed rope on a section where there was deep snow covered with a thin crust above the south summit to the final summit ridge known as the Hillary Step. "I have confidence in my speed," Kaji said later, "and I know I can do the climb in 18 hours." He wants to set his next new record within two years, before he loses some of his strength with the passing of time.

The question arises as to whether he actually managed this October's ascent. A very skeptical Japanese climber, Norichika Matsumoto, leader of one of the few other teams who attempted Everest this season, does not believe Kaji's account. Firstly, he found Kaji to be untruthful about various matters including the use of the Japanese team's radio in one of the camps. Secondly, "where is the evidence?" he asked when he was back in Kathmandu after his own team had failed to gain the summit via a different route that diverged from the normal route Kaji had followed at about 6500 meters. "Where are the pictures?"

Kaji did somewhat later produce a picture of himself holding a Nepalese flag which he said showed him on the summit, but it does not show the old poles and prayer flags that summiters traditionally pose next to, and the snow field he is standing in could be anywhere; Kaji said the flags and poles are behind him in the photo. When it was pointed out to him that the picture is almost exactly the same as that taken of him on the summit in 1993, he explained that he always wears the same suit and belt and cap and stated firmly that this was a new photo.

Kaji in turn has questioned the accuracy of the summit claim made two days before him by a Spaniard, Carlos Pitarch, who used bottled oxygen until his set froze, and who reported he had gone to the summit alone after others, Japanese and Sherpas, whom he was climbing with from the Col, had given up the battle against the terrible wind. Pitarch said he waited at 8300 meters, where they left him alone, for the wind to die down, and it luckily did at about 8:30 a.m. Pitarch's team leader, Juan Corro, told him by walkie-talkie that he, too, must come down, but Pitarch was "crazy" and made the "very dangerous decision" to continue his ascent. The extreme altitude and his ambition to get to the top affected his decision, said Corro; Pitarch explained that it was his only chance ever to get to the summit, but he realized afterwards that if the winds had not dropped when they did, and if he had waited much longer, he would have died. There was no fixed rope high on the mountain, he was already very tired, and there was the danger of more strong wind. Nevertheless he plodded slowly upwards despite the fact that most of his fingers and toes were becoming frostbitten (his affected toes required him to ride a horse when he left base camp to return to Kathmandu while everyone else walked out.)

The clouds closed in around Pitarch when he had reached 8500 meters, he said, so his summit success could not be witnessed by others below. When Kaji made his own summit attack, he could see none of Pitarch's footprints in the snow above the south summit; Pitarch said it was snowing when he was there, and he himself could not find his tracks when he came down from the top. Matsumoto, who doesn't believe

Kaji's claim also doubts Pitarch's account, but for different reasons: after his oxygen system had failed, Pitarch's vision was affected, and Matsumoto believes the Spaniard "made an error." Matsumoto said the summit ridge was clearly visible when his team's head Sherpa was watching from camp 2 through binoculars for the Spanish summit party on the ridge for about an hour from 10:15 a.m. and saw no one there; Pitarch said he was on the top of 10:30 a.m. and found some of the items left there by earlier expeditions.

These are the only Everest summit claims made this autumn. There were a total of four teams on the mountain's south side, but the others, two Japanese parties, made no such claims. One of them, a two-man team, said they wanted to return in springtime, when there are more expeditions on Everest and therefore more people establishing the route.

On the northern side in Tibet, there were five small teams and none of them went to the top. Deep snow in the early part of the season and very strong winds later were given as the reasons for failure by most teams. But a notable attempt to climb the mountain was made by one Japanese, Masafumi Todaka. He first attempted to scale a feature known as the Japanese Couloir on the western side of the north face. Here he was defeated by the hard ice cover. Then he changed the line of his ascent to the middle of the face to enter the Great (or Norton) Couloir, and here he made a valiant effort to gain the top.

Todaka had no Sherpas or artificial oxygen to help him: he was one man completely alone on the entire vast north face of Everest. He made a serious push for the summit from a camp at 5900 meters on the Rongbuk Glacier at the foot of the great face starting at 2:10 a.m. on 14 September. With two bivouacs, one at the bottom of the Great Couloir that night and the next in the couloir on the 15th, he managed to surmount the couloir and reach 8500 meters on the morning 16 October.

But now "my condition was not so good" because he had had no sleeping bag during the previous night, and he had become very sleepy. He spent 20 minutes considering his options and decided that he must save his remaining energy for a safe descent. "Ten years ago, I would probably have gone for the summit," said the 36-year-old mountain guide, but now he was more concerned about his safety. He descended without difficulty or frostbite, but he was very tired at the end. "He made a great attempt," commented a French climber on the normal route.

In marked contrast, there was an American, Craig Calonica, who had the ambition to ski down the normal northern route. He had three Sherpa helpers and bottles of oxygen for very high altitudes, but he never reached high altitudes. First he had stomach trouble. Then on 25 September, the day after he had reached what turned out to be his highest point, the North Col at 7000 meters, where he planned to establish his first high camp, snow began falling heavily. Calonica never returned to the col. His Sherpas went back up on about 30 September to retrieve the gear they had deposited there, and they set off a slab avalanche that sent them 30 meters downwards and caused them to suffer rope burns on their hands. Now, with snow continuing to fall, the route was too dangerous for another attempt immediately; more slab avalanching was very likely, Calonica felt.

Calonica had been to Everest in the autumns of 1996 and 1997 with the same goal of skiing down the north side. But in the first year he did no real climbing at all, was ill with pneumonia, had to help a teammate with a very serious case of altitude sickness, and never moved above his advance base camp. In 1997, he himself got altitude sickness and managed only to do some skiing in the area of advance base camp. So 7000 meters this September is his career best on Everest. He says he will come back again.

An Italian climber, Simone Moro, who also was on Everest this autumn, said he thought that Calonica didn't climb much because he was not really motivated to go high on the mountain. He spent a great amount of time on his computer in his advance base camp tent, which was like an office, and there he devoted hours of his attention to his daily web site reports and lining up sponsors for future climbs.

Calonica was not the only person whose plans did not materialize. On nearby Lhotse Shar, the 8400-meter eastern summit of the Lhotse massif next to Everest, a team of 15 Russian climbers led by Vladimir Savkov sent four men to the top of seldom-climbed Lhotse Shar. But they were forced to abandon what one summiter, Evgueni Vinogradski, said was their "dream" of traversing from it to the middle summit of the massif. This middle peak stands 8410 meters above sea level and is the highest point on earth not yet touched by man.

The Russian team was not the first to scale Lhotse Shar with the intention of using it as a stepping stone to the middle summit, only to find when they were on the eastern summit that they were too tired and unprepared for the very difficult traverse at very high altitude, and none of them made an actual move to do so. The Russians this autumn looked at the horrifyingly difficult ridge they would have to move across and decided the better approach would be from Lhotse's main summit. In the spring of last year the four Russians who summited Lhotse Shar this November had gained the main summit on an expedition intending to make the traverse from there to the middle summit. But they did not actually attempt to do so; the weather then was very cold and visibility very bad, and they were running out of time and strength. The leader of this group was Vladimir Bashkirov, who had scaled Everest earlier that spring and who collapsed and died while descending from Lhotse's summit.

Some of the Russian press reported that this autumn's expedition had even more ambitious plans for themselves: they would make a grand traverse from Lhotse Shar not just to the middle summit but onwards to the main peak of Lhotse and beyond that still to the neighboring summit of Everest itself. This would have been a truly historic accomplishment at extreme altitudes. The achievement most closely comparable to this was the traverse nine years ago, simultaneously in both directions, of the four over-8000-meters summits of Kangchenjunga by an expedition from the Soviet Union. Vinogradski was one of five men who made the crossing from Kangchenjunga's west summit (generally known as Yalung Kang) via the main and central summits to the south peak on 30 April to 1 May, 1989.

This autumn, a team of seven already naturally acclimatized Tibetans put five of their members on the main Lhotse summit on 13 October via the normal west-face route without supplemental oxygen. They survived some avalanching, withstood the

strong winds that blew away the Chinese flag they were holding at the top of the mountain, and managed to become the first Chinese citizens to summit Lhotse. They are a semi-permanent expedition aiming to have summited all of the world's 8000-meter mountains by the year 2002; some members have now "conquered" nine of the 14.

Despite these two ascents in Nepal, this was a poor season on Nepal's other 8000ers, although all except one expedition attempted well-trodden routes. Seven expeditions went to Manaslu, four to Makalu, one each to Annapurna I and Kangchenjunga, and not one of them reached their summits. On Dhaulagiri I, there were seven teams and only one summited, and as we have seen, nine teams went to Everest but only two had success. On Lhotse's main summit, the Tibetans were the only climbers, and they did succeed. So only five of the 21 expeditions that attempted to scale any peaks over 8000 meters within Nepal's boundaries were successful; that made an 84% failure rate, which is unprecedented in recent years. Autumn seasons normally see less success on the 8000ers than springs, but not nearly this much less.

On Nepal's only other 8000er, Cho Oyu, there were no attempts from the Nepalese side, but on the standard route from Tibet's side, there was striking success in notable contrast to the experience of teams on the 8000ers south of the border. Of the 22 Cho Oyu teams on what is probably the least difficult route on any 8000er, 19 put a total of 61 climbers on the top, 47 of them on just four days, the 24th, 26th and 27th of September and the 11th of October.

Of the 61 summiters, one German, Ralf Dujmovits, and six Nepalese Sherpas had been there before, but 51 men and three women were newcomers to the top of Cho Oyu, and they brought the grand total of people who have been to its summit to 907. (This is 99 more than the 808 people who have summited Everest.) One of the women summiters, Mrs. Tuula Nousiainen, was the first Finn of either sex to ever gain this summit.

Why the goodly number of successes on Cho Oyu, and almost none on the other 8000ers? It would seem there was in general a marked difference in the weather at very high altitudes on the two sides of the Himalayan mountain range. On the north side on Cho Oyu in Tibet the weather was generally very fine, but to the south there had been a heavy summer monsoon with much deep snow high on the mountains, and then frequent new snowfalls followed in September and October.

The number of expeditions on the same standard Cho Oyu route at the same time occasionally posed a problem. A British-American team gave up without success after their summit party had to stop at 8000 meters to wait for others to climb through the rock band, and while waiting they became too cold to carry on. The next day brought a rare bit of bad weather, and the expedition ran out of time. The first Australian woman to summit Cho Oyu, Miss Sue Fear, commented on her return to Kathmandu that there were too many others in a lovely wilderness area; "there were so many people there that there was no respite from them – no television to watch, no restaurants to go to" – just everybody crowding together.

If Cho Oyu climbers thought their mountain was crowded, they should have come across the border to Ama Dablam, a peak that is attractive looking, is easy to

reach after only a few days' trek from an airfield, and is not extremely difficult technically. Ama Dablam is not very high by Himalayan standards (6812 meters), and this autumn it enjoyed many days of beautiful weather.

As the season began, the Nepalese authorities expected 16 teams to come to Ama Dablam, but they continued to grant permits to everyone who asked for them, and by the time autumn ended, an all-time high number of 30 teams had been there from 18 nations, including Iceland, Israel and Ukraine, with a total of 201 climbers. (The previous highest number of teams in the same season was 19 in the autumn of 1996.) Furthermore, all of this autumn's expeditions had chosen to climb the same route up southwest ridge, which is quite narrow in some sections. At the busiest time, in mid-October, there were 17 teams at base camp or above. Several people remarked that base camp looked like a carnival; an American leader reported counting 130 tents pitched there on one day.

Some teams found themselves having to set up their base camps lower than they had planned because of the crowding. And more problems arose at times as climbers competed for space on the mountain. Queues sometimes formed at constricted spots on the ridge: a five-man Russian summit party had to wait in their descent from the top for one hour while others moved in the opposite direction; the Russians were able reach their last camp only well after nightfall. A pair of American and Canadian climbers had to make an unexpected bivouac because of too many people on the route. Another American "got caught up in the traffic" while coming down from the summit and had to spend the night in someone else's completely empty tent while waiting for daybreak. Lack of space for camping at the site for camp 2 at around 6000 meters forced several expeditions to skip pitching tents at that altitude and carry on somewhat higher to make their "camp 3."

Many teams found their total climbing time was much shorter than they had expected since the route had been fixed with rope by the earliest expeditions from bottom to top. In fact, the multiplicity of ropes was actually a source of complaint; at one place there were nine ropes, and elsewhere "an unbelievable amount of useless rope," as one climber reported: thick ropes, thin ones, short ones, long ones, old ones and new ones, in a "mess."

Nevertheless, despite the problems, the success rate was excellent. Twenty-nine teams sent a total of 160 people (including 13 women) to Ama Dablam's summit. Several climbers even summited more than once: an American, Chad Kellogg, made his second ascent four days after his first and raced from base camp at 4500 meters to summit and back to base in 9 hours and 40 minutes. The only expedition that sent no one to the top was a three-member French party whose climb came sadly to an abrupt end when the leader, Jean Cornignon, became fatally ill from the altitude.

On their return to Kathmandu, some leaders advised officials of the Nepalese tourism ministry, who give permission for expedition climbing, that there should be a limit on the number of permits issued for Ama Dablam in any one season. Ministry officials said they planned to seriously consider this suggestion, but there is room for doubt that the bureaucracy will actually put such a new rule into effect. Officials may intend to make recommendations to their superiors, but office-holders are changed so

frequently that often nothing gets accomplished. Furthermore, ministers like to be able to reward relatives and hangers-on with money-earning posts, and since every team has to take with them and pay a government-appointed liaison officer, there is reluctance to reduce the number of these lucrative jobs.

First ascents of 6000-meter mountains were reported by three expeditions this autumn, and four other teams attempted new routes on already-scaled peaks. The noted British pioneering mountaineer, Doug Scott, went with just one teammate, Roger Mear, to a 6855-meter mountain called Drohmo in far eastern Nepal north-northwest of Kangchenjunga. Drohmo was first attempted by Swiss in 1949, but they were unsuccessful, and few climbers have given it any notice since then till Scott had a good look last spring. Now he and Mear managed to scale the south pillar of the central summit, which Scott believes is probably the main summit. The climb up the pillar was partly on rock, which Scott said was good granite, but most of the surface was snow and ice, and he “was scared all the time” because of inadequate belay points, a condition that was “a bit unnerving.” They needed three bivouacs while, with Mear leading much of the way, they struggled about 750 meters up to the top of the pillar, where they then climbed the ridge that led west to their summit. “Technically it was the hardest climb I’ve done since Shivaling’s east pillar in 1981. ... This was a very satisfying trip.”

Not far south-southwest of Drohmo is the 6341-meter mountain generally known as Cross Peak (its Nepalese name is Taple Shikhar). The mountain had been attempted only once before, by Japanese in 1963; it is not at the present time on the tourism ministry’s list of peaks open to climbers. Nevertheless, a Japanese couple came to complete the effort of 35 years ago, and Mrs. Misako Miyazawa, who is not a highly experienced Himalayan climber, said she and three Nepalese managed to gain the summit in ten days’ ascent of the south face to southeast ridge. “It was very difficult for me, but the Sherpas helped me, and thanks to them I got to the top. ... I was very lucky – I was protected by God.”

The other peak that was successfully scaled for the first time was the west summit of Changla in northwestern Nepal on the border with Tibet. Changla had been attempted only once before, 15 years ago, also by Japanese, who are believed to have tried to reach the south summit. Now a team of four Japanese and two Nepalese Sherpas climbed the north ridge to the west ridge to the top of Changla West Peak, which the climbing leader, Tamotsu Onishi, estimated was about 6150 meters. It was an easy climb technically, he reported, but they had to use 550 meters of rope on soft snow that was about 30 centimeters deep. They had first tried to go to the main summit by its west face, but managed to get no higher than 5050 meters before they encountered a badly broken icefall they had no desire to climb.

Several teams planned to forge new routes on already-scaled mountains this autumn, but only one succeeded. A seven-man French team summited 6779-meter Kangtega in the Everest region southwest of Ama Dablam by what they believe was an unclimbed route on its northeast face. All seven members, led by Francois Pallendre, scaled their very technical route on extremely steep thin ice with two precariously placed bivouacs on the way up.



Other teams were not so successful. On the great 8163-meter Manaslu, where six expeditions struggled unsuccessfully to scale the standard northeast-face route, one pair of innovative Japanese mountaineers made the first attempt on its northwest face. After having spent nine days cutting through bamboo forest and constructing two small bridges to reach base camp, Yasushi Yamanoi and his wife Taeko were just at the early stage of their climb and had moved up the face to an altitude of 6200 meters with two bivouacs, when a large serac broke off above them and sent them both rolling 100 meters down into deep snow and injured both. "This route is dangerous," Yasushi Yamanoi said succinctly later. "There are many seracs. Maybe this route is not logical." They have no intention of returning to this face, despite the fact that it was not difficult technically.

A nine-man party of Czechs and Slovaks led by the veteran Czech mountaineer Jiri Novak tried an entirely new approach to the often-climbed northwest ridge of Annapurna IV. Their original idea was to climb the southwest face, but they soon abandoned that plan because of dangerous ice avalanches and falling loose rock; they moved over to the far-left side of this face and reached the col on the northwest ridge between Annapurna III and Annapurna IV. They went along the ridge to 6200 meters, only one-third of the distance to Annapurna IV's summit, and then retreated because of cloud, wind and avalanche danger.

Two teams went to a 7952-meter mountain named Gyachung Kang, which stands on the Nepalese-Tibetan border between Cho Oyu and Everest. It is very seldom attempted by climbers – probably partly because it is nearly 8000 meters, but also because it is steep and difficult – and only three expeditions have ever gained the summit, all of them from its western slopes. This autumn's attempts by two parties of three Japanese and six Poles were made from the southeast, and they got no higher than 7000 meters. Like so many expeditions on the very high mountains, both were defeated by deep snow.

The Japanese, led by Takashi Shiro, aimed to go to the summit via the southeast ridge, but they stopped at 6700 meters' altitude, 100 meters below their final ridge, while they were on a snow face of the south ridge, because they had run out of snow bars. The Poles, under the leadership of Ludwik Wilczynski, managed to reach 7000 meters on a southeast pillar. They had climbed mostly at night because of the avalanching that warm daytime hours brought. But deep soft snow forced two members to spend 15 hours slowly plowing through it one day, and they were hit – but luckily not injured – by an avalanche. Their climb was abandoned after an important tent was covered by snow.

Identifying mountains in remote parts of Nepal is not always easy, as a Spanish expedition to Bhrikuti (6364 meters) in north-central Nepal learned. The few maps of the area that exist have many mistakes, and the local people whom the Spaniards asked about Bhrikuti pointed to different peaks. So Jesus Gonzalez and his three teammates climbed one of these mountains, all of which were about 6300 meters, and now wonder whether they actually scaled an unnamed virgin peak.

The number of deaths this season, a total of five, was remarkably small considering the hundreds of people who were in the mountains. With the exception of

the Ama Dablam Frenchman's death, all fatalities occurred on the 8000ers. One Swiss, Alexander Jaggi, was found dead in his tent at 7200 meters on Cho Oyu after he had been to the top; doctors at base camp thought the cause probably was an irregularity in his heart beat. On Dhaulagiri I, a Greek, Charalampos Tsoupras, disappeared when he was alone very close to the summit – perhaps after having actually been to the top. And on Manaslu, there were two deaths: a Colombian, Lennin Granados, was killed by an avalanche, and four days later a Bulgarian, Hristo Stantchev, plunged at least 500 meters down the face while descending from an attempt on the summit. They paid a very high price for their mountaineering.

## **Spring 1999: 75 Years Ago on Everest: The Discovery of Mallory's Body**

### **Two Spaniards' Pioneering Ascent of Thamserku**

The big news from the mountains this spring was the discovery high on Mount Everest of the well-preserved body of Mallory, the British climber who dramatically disappeared into the mists while going for the summit 75 years ago, and who might possibly have been the first "conqueror" of Everest. There were other notable events also on Everest: the longest stay at the top of the world, and the success of the oldest summiter ever (by just one day), for example.

The season's truly pioneering climb took place on a much smaller mountain not far away, on 6623-meter Thamserku, which is southwest of the better-known Everest neighbor, Ama Dablam. Two Spaniards, Carles Valles and Joan Quintana from Barcelona, accomplished a very fast ascent of a new route up the northeast face. Their ascent was a climber's climb.

They pitched their base camp on the moraine of the Phunki Glacier north of their mountain on 24 April. Next day, the 25th, they made a bivouac at 5300 meters near the foot of their 1300-meter face, rested there a few hours and then began their ascent in one continuous push starting at 7:00 p.m. that evening. "We did not make a bivouac on the way up," Valles reported. "Because it was necessary to make a quick ascent, we had no tent or sleeping bag and as little as possible material." Their very fast climb was required because of a large overhanging serac.

They forged a new direct line up the central part of the northeast face to the top by the "most evident couloir with a serac at the highest place on the wall." The face below the serac sloped at 85-90 degrees. Then above it they found "a little glacier plateau, and the summit was at the end of it. We spent three hours to cross it and reached the top of Thamserku." They arrived at their summit at 5:00 p.m. on the 26th and were back safely in base camp at 7:00 p.m. on the 27th with no bivouac also during the descent "because of the difficulty of the wall." They had fixed no ropes but made 30 rappels. In total, they spent 22 hours in their ascent and 14 hours in the descent.

The Spaniards accomplished only the sixth successful ascent of Thamserku and were the first team to attempt the mountain by any route in ten years. A Japanese team had been on the same face in 1980, but their route followed a series of small ridges and couloirs to the left of the Spanish line to an altitude of about 6000 meters, and then it turned right under the serac and up to the small glacier plateau.

Elsewhere in Nepal, the best present-day American Himalayan climber, Ed Viesturs, and his Finnish partner, Veikka Gustafsson, swiftly and efficiently surmounted Manaslu and then Dhaulagiri I in one month of climbing. They, too, had no Sherpas, no fixed ropes and no bottled oxygen to assist them.

They arrived at the standard Manaslu base camp site at 4900 meters on 4 April and placed two more camps along the normal northeast-face climbing route in the following eight days. Then down to rest at base camp before leaving it again on the

18th to establish one more high camp on the 21st at 7530 meters, just below the summit plateau out of the wind, and next day to go to the top. They were on Manaslu's 8163-meter summit on the 22nd despite very strong winds that "almost knocked us over a few times," according to Viesturs.

They had found out that "this mountain means serious climbing – quite adventurous." They were forced to do their own route finding since the many old fixed ropes one finds on Everest were not to be seen here. The ascent from the north col at 7000 meters to the plateau required concentration up its steep icy slope.

With the help of a helicopter, they arrived at Dhaulagiri I's base campsite on 30 April and on 4 May they were on its 8167-meter summit. They generally followed the standard climbing route along the northeast ridge but in getting to the ridge, they took a shortcut around an icefall and its crevasses and up a steep slope that avoided the usual longer route to the northeast col, where many expeditions place their first high camps. They pitched just two camps on the ridge on 2nd and 3rd May, and climbed to the top on the 4th.

Viesturs and Gustafsson started up from their camp 2 at 7250 meters at 2:30 a.m. with a full moon shining, little wind and hard snow underfoot, and eight hours later they arrived at the summit. Then the weather deteriorated as they descended: "we had a problem" to get to camp 2 that afternoon in white-out conditions with new snow falling and being blown around by the wind. Fortunately – wisely – Viesturs had insisted on their taking wands with them on their way up to the summit, and these made the descent "much easier." Nonetheless they had to wait from time to time for the clouds to part briefly so they could see their way, and they had to stay in camp 2 that night instead of going farther down as they had intended.

Viesturs has now summited ten of the world's 14 8000-meter mountains, including Everest five times and Cho Oyu twice, while for Gustafsson this was his second ascent of Dhaulagiri I, but Manaslu was his seventh 8000er, including Everest twice. "We're very happy about our climbs," Viesturs said back in Kathmandu. "It was a great adventure with no other people around much of the time, doing our own route-finding on Manaslu, having good climbing conditions and perfect weather."

They were extremely lucky to have finished just as the excellent weather of April gave way to the frequent snowfalls of May. A five-member Swiss expedition led by Martin Fischer arrived at Dhaulagiri I base camp on 29 April and pitched their camp 1 on the day the American and Finn summited, 4 May. After that, the Swiss were forced several times to wait in base camp when fresh snow fell, and finally they abandoned their climb altogether on 27 May after having gotten no higher than their camp 3 at 7250 meters.

An ascent of the obscure 6000-meter Thamserku, and even the double "conquest" of two giants, Manaslu and Dhaulagiri I, received little public attention as the spotlight of publicity was focused on the tallest of them all, Mount Everest. The location of George Leigh Mallory's body on Everest 75 years after his death caught the attention of the world's news media as no other Everest event has since the fatal storm of the spring of 1996. The drama and mystery of the disappearance of Mallory and his teammate, Andrew Irvine, without a trace in June 1924 caught the

imagination of the general public, and their climb with its unknown final achievement became a legend that has never died.

In fact the legend has gained even greater awe from mountaineers in recent times when they compare their own vastly superior clothing and equipment to that available to 1924 climbers, who were not dressed in the down trousers and jackets worn today; down clothing was unknown then. They would have been wearing woolen or windproof gabardine knickers, woolen or gabardine jackets over several sweaters, puttees of Kashmir wool, and felt boots with leather soles into which nails had been lightly driven for traction on snow and ice; crampons were not known in those days. On their heads they wore woolen deer-stalker hats or fur-lined leather motorcycle helmets. Their ice axes were much longer and heavier than modern-day ones, and the heavy cylinders containing oxygen (what the Sherpas called in those days “British air”) were made of steel, not today’s lightweight titanium. They had no such things as walkie-talkie radios; they communicated with their teammates by handwritten notes usually carried from one camp to another by Sherpas.

Mallory, aged 38, and Irvine, 21, were last seen alive by teammate Noel Odell on June 8 as the two-man summit team were climbing the north ridge towards the 8848-meter summit. They had set out for the summit from their highest camp, Camp VI, at an altitude of 8170 meters on the 8th of June, and Odell believed he spotted them moving up the ridge at 8450 meters at 12:50 p.m., when the clouds parted tantalizingly briefly. That was rather late in the day according to Mallory’s timetable, and it was the last sight of them by anyone – until May 1999.

Mallory’s body was found this May by a predominantly American team led by Eric Simonson of Ashford, Washington, who had prepared themselves for the task of finding the camera or cameras carried by Mallory and Irvine, and possibly locating their bodies. Most observers thought the searchers had set themselves an impossible task of looking for a needle in a haystack and gave them little chance of success. They had to explore the upper part of the huge mountain at high altitudes without using artificial oxygen most of the time, on difficult and dangerous terrain with no fixed ropes.

But very luckily unusually little snow had fallen in the Everest region from last December well into April, and this made the search much faster and easier than it otherwise would have been. There was a vast expanse of the giant mountain on which they could look, but one member of Simonson’s team, Jochen Hemmleb from Frankfurt-am-Main, had made a study of Mallory’s climb, and he believed he knew where they should search. And they quickly had success.

On the first day of searching by four American climbing members, the 1st of May, Conrad Anker discovered Mallory’s body at an altitude of about 8230 meters on a 30-degree slope not very far above the site of Mallory’s Camp VI. His body, largely intact, was frozen to the ground and lying flat on its stomach with all of the back, left arm and both legs not covered by the loose small stones around it.

Without turning the body over, Anker and his fellow searchers dug underneath it and extracted a large handkerchief in which a thin bundle of letters, at least one of them believed to have been written by Mallory’s wife, was wrapped; at the hem of the

handkerchief were stitched the letters "G. L. M." A label sewn into a piece of clothing said "G. Mallory." But no camera was found anywhere, despite the use later of metal detectors. The four Americans conducted a brief prayer service over the body and then covered it with large stones to protect it. Simonson asserts that "there is no reason for anyone to go back to him, and he can now rest in peace" – or so Simonson and his team fervently hope.

One of Mallory's legs was broken in two places, strongly suggesting that he fell, but perhaps not for a very long distance since so much of the body appeared unharmed. In a pocket was a pair of snow goggles, perhaps indicating that he had been descending at night. But descending from where? Had he gained the summit? The discovery of his body does not answer this key question. Only when his camera is found, and if it contains film that can be successfully developed after these many years, as the Kodak Company believes it can – only then can there be a definitive answer. Simonson has announced that his team intends to return, perhaps next year, to search again for the camera and for Irvine's body.

Anker and teammate David Hahn climbed to the summit on 17 May. They had two goals: although Hahn had summited five years ago by the same North Col-north ridge-north face route that they were on, Anker had never been to the top and wanted to get there now; and they needed to scale the most difficult part of the route, up the so-called Second Step near which the 1924 climbers were reportedly last seen, without the considerable help of a ladder that has been there in recent years and makes it possible for large numbers of people to get to the summit. The two Americans concluded that Mallory and Irvine could have surmounted the Step, but they and their teammates have varying opinions about the probability of success in 1924. Anker told a press conference in Kathmandu: "Personally, having found the body and been to the summit, I found the last 600 meters more draining and arduous [than the previous part of the ascent], and I think it improbable that they made it to the top [of Everest], considering also the distance they still had to climb and the technical problems, especially the three-meter vertical section of the Second Step, which is loose rock – unless snow was covering it, in which case Mallory could have surmounted it."

This spring a total of 117 people, including Anker and Hahn, went to the summit of Everest from three different sides: 48 from the north in Tibet via one of two standard routes which most climbers follow; 66 via the other standard route which begins on the southern side in Nepal; and three from the east, which, like the north, is in Tibet but is very seldom attempted. The total for this season is just one person short of spring 1998's record number for any single season.

Forty-seven of this spring's successful climbers had been to the top in earlier years, so the season's net gain was a total of 70 new summiters. Altogether 878 men and women have now reached the world's highest point, starting with Hillary and Tenzing, and they have been to the summit 1177 times. a total of 136 people have now made more than one ascent including the second person to have summited ten times, Apa Sherpa; on 26 May he equaled the record number of ascents first achieved

in 1996 by the famous Ang Rita Sherpa, who now seems to have retired from high-altitude climbing.

Some of the new Everest records set this spring:

The oldest person to the top: Lev Sarkisov, who lives in Tbilisi and holds both Georgian and Armenian citizenship. He waited to make his summit bid until he would become the oldest on 12 May and thereby beat by exactly one day the previous record-holder, Ramon Blanco, a Spaniard long resident in Venezuela, who on 7 October, 1993 set an age record of 60 years and 160 days. Sarkisov became 60 years and 161 days old on his summit day.

Two other men this spring aspired to set even greater age records, but both failed. A Russian, 63-year-old Boris Korshunov, believed he got to the top, but his team's leadership is certain he reached no higher than about 8700 meters and then temporarily lost his mind. He stayed for four nights in various expedition's camps at the very high altitude of 8300 meters, and does not remember much about these days, including his being in at least one of these high-altitude tents totally naked (but he suffered no frostbite!). He regained most of his sanity at lower altitude but only after he had wandered all over the mountain "and for days on end no one knew where he was," according to one expedition leader, "but his leader [Vistasheslav Skripko] did not seem to care or make any attempt to find him."

The other intended oldest was a Japanese, Tomiyasu Ishikara, 62, who had been to Everest's summit five years ago but this time was unable to go above 7000 meters.

The would-be youngest person to the summit did manage to set a youngest-person altitude record by gaining the 8748-meter south summit. He was a 15-year-old Nepalese schoolboy named Arbin Timilsina from Pokhara, a hill resort in central Nepal which is not at nearly the high altitudes that Sherpas come from. He had never before been to any height above that of Everest's base camp, and he had done very little climbing at all. But he had become obsessed with a determination to be the first person to the top who was less than 16 years of age, when, under Nepalese law, one becomes an adult, and he managed to persuade Pokhara businessmen, the Nepal Mountaineer Association and a major Kathmandu trekking agency, Asian Trekking, to make his attempt possible.

Three Sherpas helped Timilsina with his climb; two of them had been to the top on previous expeditions. Although he was often seen climbing at his own slow pace alone on the lower parts of the mountain, the Sherpas went with him to his highest point. He blamed his failure to go all the way to the top on the breakdown of his oxygen system. One British climber who was on Everest at the same time said, "I think he did a fantastic job."

Timilsina was not the first 15-year-old to attempt Everest. An American, Mark Pfitzer, tried in 1995 but got to just 7300 meters and then "I got tired." He managed to climb higher in the following year, when he was already 16 years old, but even then, only to 7900 meters. The two youngest actual summiters have been aged 17.

The longest stay at the top was achieved by 33-year-old Babu Tshering (or Babu Chiri, as he now spells his name) Sherpa, who spent 21.5 hours on the very top

or tucked into a tiny tent on a platform immediately below it. He declared in advance that his long stay was intended to establish "a new glory for Nepal and to encourage Nepalese and foreign climbers to conduct such courageous adventures." He used no artificial oxygen throughout his entire climb and, an exceedingly strong man, he now reached the summit in his eighth ascent (since October 1990) with two highly experienced Sherpa companions at 3:30 p.m. on the 6th of May, after all other climbers had abandoned their attempts that day because of strong wind and fresh snowfall. His two Sherpa friends helped him to make a platform for his tent and prepare himself to remain there for his intended 20-hour stay, and then after an hour they left him alone with his tent, mattress, some cooking gear and a walkie-talkie.

The Swedish leaders of the expedition by whom he was employed to help them at some time gain the summit themselves, Thomas and Mrs. Tina Sjogren, monitored his condition by talking with him once an hour throughout the night from 9:00 p.m. onwards (he had at first switched on to the wrong waveband). Babu actually stayed on the top for 21.5 hours because he spent an extra hour and a half chatting on his walkie-talkie with Sherpa friends and being interviewed by government-appointed liaison officers, plus packing up most of his belongings. He kept the valuable tent but left his mattress, somewhat to the annoyance of ecologically minded summiters who came after him, but the mattress proved he got there. He was still in good health, and indeed went again to the top on 26 May with the Sjogrens for his ninth time atop Everest.

A French climber, Marc Batard, who set a speed record up Everest in 1988, attempted to stay overnight very near the summit in October 1990 also using no bottled oxygen. But after having dug a small snow cave for himself, he spent only half an hour there and then decided it was too risky to remain longer and went down the mountain instead.

The first people to have summited from all three sides were two members of an Indian expedition led by Mrs. Santosh Yadav, herself the first woman ever to have summited Everest twice. Kusang Dorjee Sherpa and Sange Sherpa, both Indian citizens, one a mountaineering instructor and the other a member of the Indo Tibet Border Police, on 28 May ascended the east face out of Tibet, a feature rarely attempted and even more rarely climbed successfully (of only six previous attempts, starting in 1981, three had succeeded). Mrs. Yadav and the other female on her climbing team, Miss Nari Dhami, reached the exit at the top of their face route onto the 7900-meter South Col and thereby became the first women to gain the Col from this side. They themselves were unable to proceed up from the Col, where they had placed their highest camp, to the top with Kusang Dorjee, Sange and a third team member, Amar Prakash, because they discovered that their oxygen masks were not functioning properly.

The Indians had a lucky escape from an avalanche of large ice blocks that struck their camp on the east face 450 meters below the Col not very long after they had begun their ascent from there on the 27th. Two of the four tents in the camp were completely buried and the other two were swept 200 meters down the mountainside; "if we had left camp a little later, eleven people would have died," Mrs. Yadav said.



After the three summiters returned to the Col late in the morning, all members then descended straight down, over and around the avalanche rubble, to the first camp they had pitched on the face, which was at 6450 meters, and arrived there after dark (at 8:30 p.m.) at the end of a very long day. They had largely repeated the line up the face pioneered by a small British-American-Canadian team in the spring of 1988.

The first woman to go to the summit from both south and north sides was Miss Cathy O'Dowd of South Africa. She had summited from the Nepalese side in May 1996 in the last ascent of a month that was notorious for its fatalities in a sudden storm about two weeks earlier. Now this May she has gone to the top from the north side on 29 May, again on the last team to reach the summit, and found Babu Tshering's mattress still there, three weeks after he had abandoned it. She says that she and her climbing partner on both ascents, Ian Woodall, who is British, have no plans to go again to Everest: their goal is to scale the next four highest mountains in the world, K-2, Kangchenjunga, Lhotse and Makalu.

The strong desire to become famous as an Everest summitter seems to have enmeshed a Spaniard in an awkward situation. Enrique Guallart-Furio of Valencia reported from Nepal that he had been to the top of this great mountain from the south side on the 12th of May, and he was given a hero's welcome when he returned home. But it somehow became known in Valencia that he hadn't actually gone the entire distance. I received a series of telephone calls from Spanish newspapers about his claim, and I could only answer that I talked in Kathmandu, after their return from the climb, with his own guide on Everest, three other members of the same expedition and its leader. All said definitely that he had reached 8300 meters with the guide, Guillermo Benegas, but no higher.

Benegas explained that Guallart was a slow climber who needed Sherpas to carry his extra supply of oxygen bottles; the Sherpas had found him so slow that their feet were getting cold, and as they were fearful of developing frostbitten toes, they announced they were going back down to camp. Guallart then went down with them while Benegas went on alone to the top. The leader of their O.T.T. Everest Expedition, Nick Kekus, said Guallart had told him that he was forced to retreat with the Sherpas, and Kekus got the impression that Guallart did not have enough confidence to continue on up without them. Two Mexicans later reported to me that they too had reached Guallart's high point that day; they went down from there to the camp below, and Guallart returned to camp after them but much too soon for him to have gone all the way to the summit and back.

The correctness of assertions by two Georgians to have summited from the north on 26 May has been questioned by others who went to the top just ahead of a party of three more Georgians and one Nepalese climbing with them. The team's leader, Gia Tortladze, said that he and Merab Nemsitsveridze had stopped 30 meters before the last point at the top, where a number of summiters had placed Buddhist prayer flags, because they needed to take photos of themselves with their sponsors' products without being disturbed by other people; he claimed that the place where they halted was at the same altitude as the summit and its flags. However people

who have definitely been to the top say this is not right at all, that there is no such large summit plateau but a series of small slopes and plateaus on the northern side. (These two Georgians are not included in the total of 878 summiters given above.)

A slightly macabre incorrect claim to have summited was made by a man in Kathmandu who apparently wanted a free dinner. A well-known bar and restaurant called Rum Doodle provides large plywood boards on which successful Everest climbers sign their names, and they are thereafter entitled free meals. But first the restaurant checks with me to verify their claims. I received a telephone call from Rum Doodle one May evening saying three people were making this claim, and asked me whether it was correct. The names he gave were those of three Poles who had been to the top not long before: Pawlowski (yes, OK, I said), Maselko (again yes) and Kudelski (yes, he summited, but he died during his descent and is now unable to sign his name).

A total of 22 parties attempted to scale Everest this spring from the north, 14 from the south, and one from the east. Actually, about half of the 22 "parties" on the north side were not teams at all but only individuals or couples who were attempting the mountain independently of others above advance base camp, and who were assigned by their Kathmandu trekking agencies to the permits of teams who were glad to have some income from these independents' "memberships" but had no real responsibility for them. Eight of them never reached the top.

Some teams, especially those on the northern side, where permits are considerably easier and less expensive to obtain, were ill-equipped to handle emergencies in terms of manpower, climbing equipment and emergency supplies. When trouble arose such as the disappearance or severe frostbite of members who could not descend alone, their groups were unable to cope. Other teams' leaders, climbing members, doctors and climbing Sherpas were then called upon to save people whom they did not know at all and for whom they had no responsibility except as one human being for another. A professional expedition leader and guide, New Zealander Russell Brice, who takes teams every spring to the north side, has found that year after year he must devote considerable time, expertise and plentiful supplies of oxygen and medical items to rescue people who do not belong to his teams.

This spring he had to help rescue and care for a badly frostbitten Ukrainian, Vladimir Gorbach, even though he belonged to a large expedition of his own compatriots. A similar problem arose ten days later when a Belgian, Pascal Debrouwer, went to the summit with a Portuguese friend, Joao Garcia, much too late in the afternoon for a safe return. They were judged by others not to have been strong enough climbers to successfully execute their scheme of ascending the north side from very low camps, and climbing through the night without stopping to sleep anywhere and without any artificial oxygen or Sherpa help.

They had a disastrous descent: Debrouwer disappeared and Garcia got very badly frostbitten toes, fingers, even nose, and became seriously confused by the effects of being at high altitudes. But no one from their own expedition was able to do anything to help them. A small team of one Italian, Silvio Mondinelli, and one Spaniard, Miss Edurne Pasaban, were asked by another Belgian who was climbing independently of anyone else, Alain Hubert, to go up with Sherpas to rescue

Debrouwer; as they started up, they saw a figure stand up, try to descend and then fall a long distance. They concluded Debrouwer was beyond help.

Hubert then asked a Brazilian man and his wife from a different expedition late at night to search for Garcia; on their second venture out to look for him, they found him wandering in a daze and frostbitten; they took care of him as best they could until they and others got him down to Brice's well-stocked and manned advance base camp. Hubert himself finally made a search for Debrouwer combined with a bid for the summit, but he failed to attain either objective.

On the southern side of Everest various teams often agree to share the cost of keeping in good condition the climbing route through the treacherous Khumbu Icefall, which begins just above everyone's base camps. Ropes must be fixed and ladders put in place, and frequently these must be replaced as the ice towers topple over and crevasses open and close. But after most teams have left the mountain and only a handful remain, it is very tempting for the Sherpas who have been assigned to continue this task, to leave also if there is no one in authority to keep them at it. Babu Tshering, an extremely skilled mountaineer, had a fall this May when an Icefall ladder broke under him; he suffered bruised ribs but kept on going up – and made his second ascent of the month. (He had already made two ascents in a single season before, and is one of very few people to have done so.)

Four of this spring's Everest summiters died during their descents. Indeed all of the deaths in the Nepalese Himalaya this season occurred during descents from 8000-meter summits. Too often climbers are so intent on getting to the top that they neglect to pay attention to how late in the day it is, and to monitor their reserves of strength for the return to the bottom. Sir Edmund Hillary, when commenting on the possibility of Mallory's having preceded him to the top of the world by 29 years, observed that an important part of a climb is the safe descent, and obviously Mallory had not achieved that.

Seven climbers died this spring. They shared a fierce determination – even obsession – to reach their summits, but otherwise they were a diverse group. They ranged in age from a very young 22 to a no-longer-so-young 44 years. They included a professional climber, a fine-arts teacher and a securities trader. Three came from western Europe, two were from eastern Europe and two were Asians. Two had had no previous success on any 8000-meter mountain and used artificial oxygen during the final hours of their climbs to their summits, while five had been to the tops of 8000ers in previous years and did not use it at all this spring. They were:

- Pascal Debrouwer on Everest's north side (as mentioned above), a 29-year-old Belgian organizer and guide of travel in mountain regions of the world who before this year had scaled the least difficult 8000er, Cho Oyu. He used no bottled oxygen.
- Tadeusz Kudelski on Everest's north side, a 44-year-old Polish teacher with no summit success on any lower 8000er. He did use artificial oxygen.

- Michael Matthews on Everest's south side, a 22-year-old British securities trader also with no previous 8000-meter summit experience. He too used supplemental oxygen.
- Vasili Kopytko on Everest's north side, a 34-year-old Ukrainian doctor who had scaled Cho Oyu and now was part of a three-man summit party (including the frostbitten Gorbach) who were the first Ukrainian citizens to reach the summit. He used no artificial oxygen on Everest.
- Miss Ji Hyun-Ok, on Annapurna I's north face, a 33-year-old South Korean fine-arts teacher who had summited Gasherbrum I and Gasherbrum II in recent years. She now became the first Korean woman to reach the highest peak of Annapurna I, but she and her Sherpa companion fell to their deaths the same day. She used no bottled oxygen.
- Kami Dorchi Sherpa, 33, who scaled both Annapurna I and Manaslu last year. He accompanied Miss Ji to the top of Annapurna I and died with her. He also used no bottled oxygen.
- Michael Knakkegaard-Jorgensen, on Makalu's northwest side, a 31-year-old mountaineer and tour operator who had scaled Everest and Lhotse in recent years and now was the first Dane ever to summit Makalu. He used no bottled oxygen.

Amongst the 12 Everest summiters from the north side on 26 May (and 11 from the south the same day) was Sergio Martini of Italy, who overcame such setbacks as a serious tooth infection and periods of bad weather, and who was strong enough to descend safely from the top down to his next-to-highest camp the same day. Now his quest for the highest points of all 14 of the world's 8000-meter mountains "is finished for me." At the age of 49 years he is the oldest person to claim all the 8000ers.

However, when he and his friend Fausto De Stefani were on Lhotse in the autumn of 1997, they reported that they had climbed to a point "very, very near" the summit but were unable to say how near it they had reached in very poor visibility, so their claim to Lhotse's summit is not accepted by many observers. Martini said now that he does not plan to stop climbing and perhaps he will return to 8000ers, maybe including Lhotse.

This spring's other claim to have scaled all 14 of the 8000ers, made by a Spaniard who summited Annapurna I, is not in dispute. A man who has been scrupulous about his claims, and who last year went back up to reach the highest point on Dhaulagiri I after realizing that he had gone to a false summit, Juanito Oiarzabal, is a 43-year-old Basque, whose 14th 8000er was one of the lower ones; instead of having to scale the highest last of all, he had the tenth highest, 8091 meters above sea level.

He and his team were forced to pioneer a new line up Annapurna I's north face from 5600 meters to the top because of frequent dangerous ice avalanching down the usual route to the right (west) of the line they climbed; the route they had to take was not completely safe from avalanches either, but it was much more so than others. "Annapurna is a very dangerous mountain – terrible," Oiarzabal reported.

Nonetheless he summited on 29 April, when the mountain was still very dry, but it took him and his two Basque teammates eight hours to climb from their last camp at 7200 meters the very long distance to the top. His first 8000-meter success was on Cho Oyu in 1985: he had now summited 14 in 14 years on a total of 20 expeditions. He said he felt some relief at having done all 14 but no elation. He, too, is not retiring: next year he wants to scale Everest without artificial oxygen. It seems to be extremely difficult for climbers to stop climbing.

## **Autumn 1999: Slovenian Climbers Forge Historic New Face Routes**

### **Monsoon Late Snowfalls Ruin Many Teams' Plans**

Slovenian mountaineers demonstrated this autumn that they are now in the forefront of pioneering Himalayan climbing. Tomaz Humar displayed his remarkable skills on the world's seventh highest mountain, Dhaulagiri I, when he made the first serious attempt by anyone to forge a direct line up the middle of its formidable south face and succeeded in gaining the impressive altitude of 7900 meters on this great wall.

Other Slovenians were the first mountaineers ever to set foot on the Tibetan side of a border mountain northwest of Everest called Gyachung Kang. They surmounted its entire north face to its 7952-meter summit.

But these were the only truly notable ascents in a season in which the summer monsoon rains and snowfall continued throughout September and into early October, several weeks beyond the normal end of the rainy season, only to be followed by a few mid-October days of more heavy snowfall resulting from a cyclone nearby in India. Many teams on Cho Oyu, Ama Dablam, Baruntse and other mountains with very limited time at their disposal had to retreat from what they considered unsafe avalanche conditions or simply from snow too deep to manage to get through.

Three parties actually made no climbing attempts at all: they reached their base camps for Pumori, Baruntse and Ama Dablam, judged conditions impossible and left without setting foot on their mountains. Some expeditions even called for helicopters to lift them from their base camps – notably at Baruntse – over the passes with two-and-three-meters-deep snow which they would have had to cross. (One such team later saw the weather improving and had enough time available to return and climb successfully.) But then winter winds set in and defeated some later groups.

There was very little success on Nepal's eight 8000-meter-mountains (those over 26,250 feet). Even on Cho Oyu, where success rates are often high, 21 expeditions did some climbing but just nine of them sent anyone to the top and all followed the normal route on the northwest side. The other 12 teams – including cautiously led commercial ones – withdrew well below the summit because of the dangerous snow conditions. And those who were successful were able to reach the summit only from 26 September to 1 October; before and after those dates, snow conditions were very bad.

One Japanese mountaineer, Toshiyuki Kitamura, tried to solo Cho Oyu's seldom-climbed southwest face but had to abandon his attempt at 7400 meters, in soft snow under a hot sun which defeated him. He moved over to the standard route and followed teammates to the top five days after their ascent.

No one even attempted Annapurna I. Only one team, a predominantly American group, out of a total of seven had any summiters on Dhaulagiri I. Everest had no summiters at all, and the same was true for Kangchenjunga, Lhotse and Makalu, which had only one team each, and for Manaslu with four parties.

On Everest, there were so very few expeditions this autumn (just one Spanish party for Nepal's southeast ridge route, for the North Col in Tibet another Spanish and one Italian group, who were not there at the same time, and South Koreans on the seldom-attempted east face, which is also in Tibet) that a two-member Italian team on the north side complained about their Kathmandu trekking agency's failure to tell them they would probably be the only party on their route. They had expected others to help open the route and fix the ropes.

One Everest team that had not expected others to be on their route were the South Koreans. The teams on the south and north sides had their share of bad weather with frequent snowstorms and avalanching. But the Koreans, who were led by Kim Won-Mo, had especially brutal conditions even just getting to their base camp through almost impassable depths of snow in mid-September, as well as deep snow and frequent avalanches of snow and rocks on the east face itself. On 13 October they reached their highest altitude, 6400 meters, then had to retreat with the onset of a blizzard that sent one tent at base camp flying 100 meters away and caused frequent avalanching that wiped out their camp just below their high point. They tried to regain their high point and go higher, but after they found their high camp was completely gone, and very strong, cold winds were battering them, they gave up the attempt on 28 October.

The last previous autumn season in which only four teams came to Everest was the one in 1985. Why such a small number now? Some observers believed that many climbers were waiting till 2000, when they could be the first summitters of the new millennium, and that there will be many teams next spring. If this reason is correct, they must have been dismayed by news reports that an American, Robert Anderson, had gone to Tibet for a rare winter attempt to reach the top of the world sometime around the 1st of January, 2000.

Only one expedition tried this autumn to scale Lhotse: an 11-member team of South Koreans led by Lee Jong-Bae went to its rarely attempted precipitous south face. But they had only three experienced climbers, and they had serious problems with their Sherpas, a total of seven of whom quit the expedition. "I don't understand why," the climbing leader said, but their government-assigned liaison officer explained that one problem from the Sherpas' point of view was receiving orders – not requests but orders – from younger, not so experienced members to go up and fix ropes alone where the Sherpas judged snow conditions too dangerous. By 26 October, the team had gotten to a high point of 7700 meters on this 8516-meter mountain after a month and a half of climbing, when they abandoned their climb. The winds were too strong, they were now too tired and they had nearly exhausted their supplies of food and equipment.

The outstanding attempt on the 8000ers was made on Dhaulagiri I. The Slovenian climber Tomaz Humar is already known for his ascents of unclimbed Himalayan walls, such as the 1900-meter northwest face of Ama Dablam, Bobaye's 2500-meter northwest face (solo) in 1996, and the west face of Nuptse, a feature few people even knew existed, which is also 2500 meters high, in 1997. Now this 30-year-old electrician from Kamnik ventured to attempt his highest wall of all, the south

face of Dhaulagiri I, more than 4000 meters high, at much greater altitudes than his earlier ones, and to do it completely alone. He has been described as “just a little bit more crazy” than other alpinists in his stubbornness and powers of concentration on the routes he has committed himself to, and he had a reputation for having scaled every one of them.

This time he did not manage to climb the complete distance to his 8167-meter summit, but he did make most of his ascent to an altitude of 7900 meters on a wall whose steepness he estimated was between 50 and 80 degrees its entire height. He made his climb in one continuous eight-day push, and as proof of his remarkable accomplishment, much of his climb, including the very highest part, was filmed with great long lenses by a member of Humar’s small non-climbing support team. This should preclude any doubts about the correctness of Humar’s claim and prevent the sort of questions that have been raised in the case of his fellow-Slovenian (then Yugoslavian), Tomo Cesen, on the south face of Lhotse in 1990.

Despite frequently falling rock and ice, which left him bruised in many places, especially badly on his back, an arm and a leg, and despite occasional extremely strong winds, several rock barriers and a difficult patch of a soft mixture of snow, ice and water, Humar stubbornly persevered in a dramatic direct line up the middle of the face to 7100 meters. Here, on his sixth day, he saw a great horizontal rock band above him. He said he realized that it would take him two or three days to make the extremely difficult climb over this formidable barrier, so he traversed to his right (eastward) around it to the southeast ridge. Then back onto the face above the band and straight up it to meet the sloping southeast ridge again.

At the ridge on his eighth day, he said, he knew he would die if he tried to go all the way to the summit. There could be no exit for him down the face he had just ascended, so instead he returned the ridge, then crossed the narrow east face to the normal route on the northeast ridge for his descent. He had made seven bivouacs before he arrived at the normal camp 3 site on the northeast ridge at 7300 meters, where he took refuge in a tent left for him by some Americans. Two days after having gotten to his highest point, he was back in Kathmandu in a helicopter.

The only solo ascent ever made on Dhaulagiri I was accomplished by a Japanese, Hironobu Kamuro, on 2 June, 1981 via the northeast ridge. But he was accompanied to his first high camp at 5720 meters by two colleagues, and he had arrived at the end of the spring climbing season, when he could make good use of fixed ropes and a tent left behind by another team who had just left the mountain.

Now Humar had no such help; no one had ever set foot on the south face before him. Reinhold Messner and a small party of others went to climb it in April 1977. He described it in his book, *All 14 Eight-Thousanders*, as “one of the world’s highest unclimbed sweeps of rock and ice, elegantly proportioned. ... [But] it had not taken us long to register that the route we planned up the central section of the face was far too dangerous” from frequent avalanching. After a brief reconnaissance, they decided to move immediately to the south pillar on the extreme left of the face, and even here they went no higher than 6100 meters. So Humar had had to make his way alone on a huge uncharted face.



The Slovenians on Gyachung Kang were a climbing team of eight men led by the Himalayan veteran, Andrej Stremfelj. A total of six of them, including Stremfelj himself, reached the top on 31 October and 1 November in alpine-style ascents that had taken them from a camp at the bottom of the face at 5830 meters in just four days on the face with two bivouacs on the way. They had no Sherpa helpers and used no bottled oxygen.

Stremfelj said that they had some difficulty on sections of the face between their two bivouacs at 6800 meters and 7500 meters; here they found mixed rock and snow with powdered snow on top of smooth rock. He believed that climbing this face would be very difficult if one attempted it in traditional Himalayan style with fixed camps.

Gyachung Kang has not often been climbed from any side. Its other routes are also difficult, and since it is just under 8000 meters, attempting it involves high altitudes but the summiter does not earn praise for “conquering” an 8000er. Only 15 people have succeeded in reaching the top from routes in Nepal by various western lines.

A four-man expedition from eastern Germany on 12 November made the first officially recognized ascent of Cho Polu, which stands 7711 meters between Lhotse and Makalu. Under the leadership of Markus Walter, they approached the mountain from the west, climbed the west face of the north ridge to a col (sometimes call Hardie’s Col) on the ridge, then traversed the east side of this ridge to the north face. The four Germans climbed together without Sherpa helpers, began their ascent on 2 November and summited ten days later after having struggled often through deep snow and occasional strong winds; they were driven by strong, cold winds down to rest at base camp for three days during this period. They fixed only 70 meters of rope, which they needed to rappel a short distance down the rock face from the col to the east side of the north ridge.

Theirs was not actually the first ascent of Cho Polu, because a Spanish mountaineer, Nil Bohigas, reports that he did very quick solo climbs to the summits of this mountain and of nearby Pethangtse in the autumn of 1984, and a few days later also soloed Baruntse. However, he had no official permission for these ascents, and no one except a few of his friends knew about them until recently.

Bohigas says that he went up the north face to the northeast ridge of Cho Polo to the top on the same day in late October or early November on which he had just climbed Pethangtse (he does not remember the exact dates). He stayed at a bivouac at 6000 meters, left a cache of supplies there, went out at night and summited Pethangtse (6710 meters), before sunrise in a very quick ascent and descent untroubled by any technical difficulties. He then moved south to Cho Polu. “I found the main difficulties on the north face’s first section, especially on the descent. I reached the summit by the northeast ridge. I descended by the same route and I reached the glacier at night. ... I did not take more than 16 hours in total. Three days later I soloed Baruntse.”

He had already been climbing in pure alpine style to a high altitude (just over 8000 meters) pioneering a new route on the difficult south face of Annapurna I with

just one teammate, Enric Lucas, and now “I felt perfectly acclimatized to the altitude.” He also reports he found good snow conditions, which must have been significantly better than those the Germans encountered this autumn, and he does not mention any problems with the wind.

The Germans, without knowing the above exact details, found the claim by Bohigas to have summited Pethangtse and Cho Polu on the same day “unbelievable” because they were sure he would have had “just not enough time” to descend Pethangtse, cross an estimated five kilometers of plateau between these two mountains and scale the difficult north side of Cho Polu.

However, it is a truism that what one man cannot do another person can; that skills, strengths and experience vary enormously. Also, one must consider the facts that the Germans had worse weather; they did not climb alpine style but pitched two fixed camps, which meant they carried heavy loads in their ascent, whereas Bohigas carried nothing; and they were a team of two men aged 59 years, one 35 and one, Walters, 26, the same age as Bohigas in 1984.

On a 6387-meter peak in north central Nepal named Ganchempo (or Gang Chhenpo), a team of six Swiss led by Karl Kobler and Christoph Jezler succeeded in making a new route to the summit. One member, Markus Baumann, and a Nepalese “Sherpa” named Shyam Prasad Pun climbed the south face and were on the top on 15 October, between the end of the monsoon season’s snows and the Indian cyclone’s new snowfall.

There were surprisingly few fatal accidents in the Nepalese Himalaya this season despite the very dangerous snow conditions. But five climbers did die in Nepal, and all were killed by avalanches. Aside from the death of the American climber Alex Lowe, who died with his teammate David Bridges on Xixabangma (Shishapangma), which is entirely in Tibet and not covered by this report, the best-known victim was a 41-year-old Briton, Mrs. Ginette Harrison, the only woman ever to summit Kangchenjunga. She was caught in a danger zone around 6500 meters on Dhaulagiri I on 24 October. She was highly experienced in Himalayan climbing and in organizing and conducting expeditions to these great peaks. In addition to Kangchenjunga via its difficult north face in May 1998, she had summited three other 8000ers including Everest in October 1993.

A Nepalese Sherpa who was climbing with a French expedition, Dawa Dorje, was also killed by the avalanche that struck Ginette Harrison. The others who died on Nepalese mountains were two South Koreans, Han Do-Kyu and Hyun Myeong-Kun, on the north side of Kangchenjunga and Sange Sherpa with a South Korean team on the normal northwest route for Makalu.

## **Winter 1999-Spring 2000: Russians Make 1st Everest Ascent of Millennium On Cho Oyu Tragedy and a Dramatic Rescue**

The Year 2000 drew a record number of 57 teams to Mount Everest in the spring, and one expedition had come even before them last winter to try to be the first to the top of the world in the new millennium. Despite this attempt by an American Robert Anderson to be there first in January, it was not until 15 May that success on Everest was actually achieved.

No one tried any new routes or seldom climbed features on Everest. Plans for an Indian attempt led by Mrs. Santosh Yadav on its unclimbed east ridge in Tibet were postponed until perhaps next year. Most climbers on other Nepalese Himalayan peaks also followed well-trodden routes, but a few did not.

The experienced Frenchman Jean Christophe Lafaille was an independent climber on Manaslu and he took a direct line up the northeast face as a shortcut to the summit on the normal route which other teams were climbing. He moved alone on his own line from his second high camp at 6600 meters. He encountered steep ice climbing much of the way until he joined the normal route on the final summit ridge at nearly 8000 meters. He summited on 5 May.

There were interesting climbs on several lower mountains. Two members of a six-man Japanese team made what they believe was the first ascent of Ganesh VI, northeast of Kathmandu in the Ganesh Himal range. Their ultimate objective was the top of Ganesh II (7111 meters), while their climbing route lay along the southeast ridge of Ganesh VI to its summit and then on the continuation of this ridge to Ganesh II itself (6480 meters). In 1980, Japanese had gone to Ganesh VI by the same southeast approach, but this spring's team believe their predecessors stopped at a snow summit before the highest point. Now on 23 May, Osamu Tanabe and Yasuhiro Hanatani reported they had gained the true summit. They continued along the southeast ridge towards the top of nearby Ganesh II, but the difficulty of the very narrow, badly corniced ridge made them give up about one-third of the way at 6700 meters.

A solo climb of Kangtega, a 6779-meter peak southeast of Everest, was tried by a Russian Valeri Babanov via a probably unclimbed route on the north face to the northwest ridge. He had hoped to make a fast ascent, but the bad weather in this region gravely delayed him also, and he found that he had to shift tactics from alpine style to pitching one fixed camp and fixing 480 meters of rope on mixed rock and ice covered with snow. He abandoned the climb after a month and a half spent at and above base camp. He had arrived at the ridge at 6600 meters but immediately descended.

The best-known mountain close to Everest, Ama Dablam (6812 meters high) this spring attracted 12 teams, 11 of which attempted the standard southwest-ridge route. Only three succeeded. One, from New Zealand, went up the exceptional way by the very seldom-climbed northeast spur to the north ridge with a series of bivouacs

along the ridge to the top, then came down the standard route, the southwest ridge. All five of the New Zealanders, including the leader David Crofts gained the summit on 4 May on difficult rock and ice, sometimes mixed, all good quality, and Crofts described their ascent as “a pleasure.” They had made the first ascent of their mountain of the season after most of the other Ama Dablam expeditions had already left the mountain, and only the third north-south traverse ever.

On Everest, a number of record ascents was achieved: the largest number of people in a single season, the oldest person, the oldest woman, the fastest person, the first to make his eleventh ascent. But not the youngest, although a fifteen-year-old schoolboy nearly achieved this record.

Frequent heavy snowfalls and strong winds plagued all the teams on the eight great mountains in the Nepalese Himalaya over 8000 meters high, and many Everest parties spent frustrating weeks in base camp or advance base camp or attempting to go higher but being driven down by bad weather. By late April, when most Everest teams were ready to try for the top, bad weather had set in. Nepalese government meteorologists reported at the end of May that data from almost all of their stations across the country had shown that month’s total rainfall higher than normal, in some case double their normal totals.

Perhaps too many people spending too much time at base camp contributed to some serious tensions. An Internet reporter at the Nepalese side’s base camp was a special irritant who seemed likely to give his Discovery website employers some legal actions to handle. Briton Henry Todd got so angry about the stories filed by the Discovery correspondent, Finn-Olaf Jones from Washington, D.C., a member of his own expedition, that he threatened to kill Jones. Accounts differ as to what actually happened: some say Todd beat him up, but Todd denies that he actually touched Jones and says he only shook his powerful fist in the American’s face, and that while fleeing from him, Jones fell and injured himself on a boulder. Todd adds that before he left Nepal, he had instituted legal proceeding, and that his prominent solicitor was happy to handle the case as a test of prosecuting libel cases against Internet entries.

A helicopter was sent to base camp on 19 May to rescue Jones before he really was murdered for his reports. Another Internet reporter at base camp, Don Morrison for Quokka’s Mountain Zone website, called for the chopper. Todd says it had been summoned before his own threatening gesture but after there had been other tense incidents, including one in which Jones allegedly was the aggressor. In this case a member of Todd’s team, Todd Hoffman, got so thoroughly annoyed by Jones constantly taking photos of him, that Hoffman got hold of Jones’ camera and took it around to the back of the reporter’s tent – whereupon Jones allegedly shouted that his property had been stolen and attacked and injured Hoffman in the face. Hoffman is reported to be going to court over this alleged assault.

Another planned libel suit arising from Jones’ reports is that by an American team leader, Bob Hoffman, who said he had instructed his lawyer to sue for libel in connection with Jones’ reports allegedly charging fraud in Bob Hoffman’s handling the funds which he had raised for a campaign of rubbish removal from Everest but, according to Jones, was spending instead on members’ climbing activities. Both

Hoffman and a member of his expedition state categorically that he kept two strictly separated accounts.

The unfavorable weather conditions meant that many teams who went to Everest and to other mountains as well returned from their climbs somewhat later than they had planned, and a few even had to send staff down to the nearest villages to buy more provisions. Others on inflexible schedules who could not delay their departures simply left without success.

Nonetheless, the unprecedented total number of 57 teams managed to send an unprecedented number of 133 people to the 8850 meters high top of the world. The previous largest total of Everest summiters had been 120 in the spring of 1999, only five more than in the preceding spring. As usual, more people succeeded this season from Nepal's southern side than from the north: 73 by way of the normal South Col-southeast ridge route, plus five others via the south pillar to the South Col, whereas only 55 summited from Tibet's north side.

One of those who did not make it all the way to the top was Peter Habeler of Austria, who accomplished the historic first ascent of Everest without any artificial oxygen with Reinhold Messner of Italy in May 1978. It had been widely feared that they would die or become greatly enfeebled mentally by this daring feat at such a very high altitude, and they became instantly famous with their success. Habeler is the only Austrian to have a street named after him in his own lifetime.

Now he was back with a small international team on the same southeast-ridge route to see whether he could repeat his success of 22 years ago. He said that he had promised Messner he would not use bottled oxygen this time also, and he did not. He was disappointed not to reach the summit again: "it would have been nice to get to the top, ... but the world is not tumbling down." He added that he was bemused by the present-day "unbelievable" scene on the mountain with so much crowding and all the other changes since 1978. (When he and Messner were there, no other expedition was on Everest from the south. Other notable differences now are satellite communications, Internet and other journalists, commercially organized teams and Nepalese-led expeditions.)

Two Spaniards went to the north side of Everest to re-enact an ascent by the famous British climbers George Leigh Mallory and Andrew Irvine, who disappeared into the clouds in June 1924 at perhaps 8450 meters and were never seen again until Mallory's body was found at 8140 meters 75 years later by an American expedition at the place where he had stopped falling. It is generally believed that he and Irvine never reach the top.

One of the Spanish players actually arrived at about the same altitude as where the Britons probably were last seen climbing, and the other 200 meters higher. These were highly experienced men, Oscar Cadiach, who was already a two-time Everest summiter and "conqueror" of five other 8000-meter mountains now playing the role of Mallory, and Alberto Zerain, who had summited Everest also plus one other 8000er and now was playing Irvine. They were dressed in nearly exact copies of the Britons' 1924 clothing and boots, and they had hoped to go all the way to the top without any artificial oxygen – unlike the 1924 Britons, who did use it on their

last day. But they and team-mates climbing with them were defeated in their summit attempt on 20 May by the extreme cold. "Irvine" reached their expedition's highest point, 8650 meters at the bottom of the Second Step, while "Mallory" had already turned back at 8450 meters because his clothing was not warm enough for him and he was developing slight pneumonia.

Plans by members of an international expedition to find the camera that Mallory and Irvine had with them were entirely unsuccessful. Graham Hoyland, British, a great-nephew of the 1924 team member who lent them the camera, Howard Somervell, and New Zealander Mark Whetu, went with two Sherpas and metal detectors in their search, but they never got high enough to examine their intended area above 8000 meters away from the main route, around the location of Mallory's body and above it.

The first Everest summiters of the new millennium were four men from the Russian city of Krasnodar, team leader Ivan Aristov, Andrei Alexandrov, Alexander Fukolov, and Nikolai Kadoshinkov, on 15 May via the normal north-side route. No other expedition sent anyone to the summit that day. The first woman to the top was there on the next day. She was a Scotswoman named Miss Polly Murray on the standard southeast-ridge route.

Miss Murray was the first of seven women to summit this season. They included the oldest woman ever to reach the top, 50-year-old Miss Anna Czerwinska from Warsaw, Poland, who succeeded on 22 May. This was her fourth bid to reach the top but her first time from the south, and she followed the same route as Miss Murray. She said later that she felt no elation when she was on the summit and was happy only two days afterwards, when she had returned to her camp at 6500 meters and felt it was now no longer vital for her to concentrate entirely on her safe descent.

Before Miss Czerwinska's success, the oldest woman summitter had been a Japanese, Mrs. Yasuo Namba, aged 47 years on 10 May, 1996, but she soon perished in a terrible storm during her descent. The oldest before her was American Miss Dolly Lefever on 10 May, 1993, also 47, only two and a half months younger than Mrs. Namba, and she survived.

This spring there were nine men over 60 years old vying to take the title as the oldest person atop Everest. The winner was a Japanese aged 63 years, three years senior to the previous record-holder. The Japanese, Tosio Yamamoto from Tokyo, summited three days before Miss Czerwinska, on 19 May. On this same day, another Japanese from a different expedition, 61-year-old Kazuya Konno from Yusamachi in Yamagata prefecture, went to the top via the same northern route. Their predecessor as the oldest, who succeeded from the south side just one year ago, on 12 May, 1999, was 60-year-old Lev Sarkisov from the Georgian capital of Tblisi.

The fastest ascent of Everest was accomplished by a well-known Nepalese Sherpa, Babu Chiri (or Babu Tshering, also known as Ang Babu), aged 33, who dashed from his south-side base camp at 5350 meters to the 8850-meter summit in the record time of 16 hours and 56 minutes. His goal had been to do it in less than 16 hours, and he claimed after he came back to Kathmandu that he actually could have made it in less than 15 hours if he had had good weather and had not lost two hours

breaking trail through new snow. The previous record for the fastest ascent of Nepal's southern side was 20 hours, 24 minutes, which was set by Kaji Sherpa on 16-17 October 1998.

Babu Chiri left base camp at 5:00 p.m. on 20 May and climbed through the night to arrive at the top at 9:56 the next morning. He had two camps above base where he stopped to rest, drink liquids and change out of sweat-soaked clothes and, at the highest one on the South Col (7900 meters), to put on down clothing for the final summit push. From the Col to the summit, he was accompanied all the way by his brother Dawa, also already an Everest summitter, and by two other Sherpas for much of the last part.

At about 8500 meters, he was "so tired and going very slow" that he took a half-full bottle of oxygen that Dawa was carrying as extra supply and continued to the top with its help. He left on the summit an orange banner with his name and signature on it. A Russian who came up from the north side one week later found it and brought it to Kathmandu, showed it to Babu Chiri at a chance encounter, and took it home for a Moscow museum.

Babu Chiri is famous for other notable climbs of Everest. In May 1995 he made two complete ascents from base camp to summit within 20 days, and in May 1999 he again made two round trips in about the same period of time. On his second ascent in 1999, he spent 21 and 15 minutes at the top overnight in a special small tent, which was found there by climbers from the north side. He is already thinking about another ascent, but he says it will not be another speed climb. He is silent about what "special project" he wants to do but suggests he is already looking for a good sponsor.

This was Babu Chiri's tenth ascent of Everest. Two other men had already accomplished this feat before him: Ang Rita Sherpa and Apa (or Appa) Sherpa. Now the first person ever to reach the summit eleven times was Apa, who made his historic climb also from the south side on 24 May at the age of 39. He told some Kathmandu reporters that this spring's ascent was perhaps his most difficult one because of heavy snowfall, strong winds and the unpredictability of the weather.

Apa said that his climbs were not for making new records: "a son's responsibility is to add to the family wealth." He hopes his children will find careers in other fields than in mountaineering, which involves great risk, but he does not plan to retire from climbing Everest and other peaks until he is 55.

Two Sherpa women set Everest records amongst Nepalese mountaineers. On 18 May 27-year-old Miss Lhakpa Sherpa became the first Nepalese woman to survive her summit success. The first Nepalese woman Everest summitter had also been a Sherpa, Mrs. Pasang Lhamu, but she tragically died soon after she started her descent. Miss Lhakpa, who was the leader of an all-Sherpa-women's team, told a Nepalese woman journalist on her return to base camp that she now wanted to make a traverse of Everest by ascending the north side and descending the south. But she will have a problem gaining permission to do this, for Nepal and China would have to make a special agreement to allow it. (One South Korean and a Sherpa did such a traverse in the spring of 1993 without authorization when faced with grave

difficulties and even death if they descended by their northern route, and Nepalese officials at that time accepted this explanation.)

One day after Miss Lhakpa's success, another Sherpa woman, Miss Pemba Doma, also 27 years old, went to the top with a Swiss-led expedition from the North Col-northeast ridge route and thereby became the first Nepalese woman ever to scale Everest from Tibet. She reported that she had a difficult relationship with the leader Karl Kobler and was helped considerably by Sherpas with a Japanese expedition. She enjoys mountaineering, especially rock climbing, which she has done a lot of in the Alps, and now would like to lead an all-women's international team to Dhaulagiri I a year or two from now, but she doesn't know people to invite.

A Sherpa schoolboy failed to achieve his planned record as the youngest Everest summiter. Despite having had little climbing experience and none at all at very high altitudes, Temba Tsiri (or Chhiri) was the focus of a small team of all male Nepalese organized to send him to the top at the age of 15 years on the birthday of Lord Buddha, which this year fell on the 18th of May, and to give him the opportunity to place Buddha's statue at the top of the world. But Temba Tsiri actually made a slightly different record on 21 May by becoming the youngest climber to reach the reported height of more than 8800 meters, at the bottom of a steep, difficult rock section known as the Hillary Step. There he retreated when his fingers could no longer bend. He had frostbitten them while taking a few minutes at the South Col to attach crampons to his boots without his gloves on.

His fingers were so severely frostbitten that five of them were amputated not very long after his return to Kathmandu. Three of his lost fingers were on his right hand, which he uses to write with, but nonetheless he claims that he will return to climb Everest, even, he told a Nepalese reporter unrealistically, as early as this autumn, when he will still be young enough to make his record. The youngest summiter so far has been another Nepalese, who is not a Sherpa, Shambu Tamang, who stood at the highest point on earth in May 1973 at the age of 17.

The only non-Sherpa member of Temba's expedition, Ram Krishna Shrestha, claims he continued on to the summit when Temba turned back, but some details of his account don't seem quite right, and another climber who it is known did reach the top contradicted his version. Ram Krishna claims that on the Hillary Step at more than 8800 meters he looked upwards and saw two people at the summit, but it is not possible to see the top from the Step. Babu Chiri says he and his brother Dawa met Ram Krishna at the foot of the Hillary Step as they were descending from the top, and Ram Krishna asked Babu Chiri to turn around and help him to reach the summit, whereas Ram Krishna acknowledges that he met Babu Chiri at the Step but says he asked the Sherpa to go up with him to take his picture. In either case Babu Chiri refused the request because he was thoroughly exhausted from his own speed climb. Ram Krishna claims he then went to the summit alone, but he doesn't remember seeing the very prominent yellow oxygen bottle standing there that morning upright in the snow. And his account of his descent with Babu Chiri and teammates shortly afterwards also differs from that of Babu Chiri.



Ram Krishna had considerable incentive to gain the summit. He comes from a Nepalese people known as Newars, who have their own very distinctive language and traditions. Almost none ever go climbing, and only one Newar, Narayan Shrestha, had ever summited any Nepalese 8000er: 15 years ago, he scaled Everest. Now Ram Krishna was given substantial financial support by a Newari organizing promoting their culture, and he took to the mountain a banner reading "Newar Nepal" for the summit.

This spring there was another schoolboy in the Nepalese Himalaya: a 13-year-old South Korean went to Cho Oyu. He and his father, a two-member team, climbed the normal route up its northwest side from Tibet with one Sherpa, but his father, Kim Tae-Wung, called a halt to their ascent at 7400 meters, the site of their third high camp, out of concern for the boy's health at higher altitudes. They had taken artificial oxygen with them in case of need but did not actually use it.

Two Cho Oyu climbers made newsworthy use of a high pass on the border between Nepal and Tibet called the Nangpa La, one of them to lose his life and to other to save his. The Nangpa La is officially closed to mountaineers and most other people. To cross between Nepal and Tibet, climbers must spend more time to travel at greater cost between Kathmandu and their base camps on a hard journey by road. But the temptation to reach Cho Oyu by a shortcut over the Nangpa La on its west side can be irresistible to an independent-minded person.

A Spaniard set out to do just this last November. He was Joan Carrillo, aged 47 years, who had no experience on higher peaks in the Nepalese Himalaya and no permit for Cho Oyu. He intended to follow the normal route in November-December, when he could expect no one else to be there. An important part of his plan was to have Ang Phurba Sherpa, who knew the mountain very well, climb with him. But when he went to recruit the Nepalese Sherpa in his home village not far from the pass, Thami, he learned that Ang Phurba was away on a trip to Japan.

Nevertheless, instead of abandoning his project, Carrillo went to Cho Oyu anyway for a solo attempt on his very high mountain. He trekked to a base camp site just below the pass inside Nepal with only a young Thami man, Tendu Sherpa to help him transport his small amount of supplies of food, fuel and gear, but not to do any climbing above base camp.

Tendu was the last person to see him alive. On his return to Thami, Tendu reported to Ang Phurba's wife they had pitched a small tent at base camp, and Carrillo had left him there to cross the pass and go to the mountain. When Carrillo returned after two or three days, Tendu told him they should return to Thami: falling snow was making climbing dangerous and they had little food left. Carrillo replied that Tendu should go back. He himself would follow after a few days; he never did.

When the spring season expeditions began ascending Cho Oyu, they saw a body lying at the foot of an ice cliff on the north face at an altitude of about 6600 meters. The body was lying face down and out straight, not in the position of a person who had fallen to that spot. There was no back pack or tent near the body, but there was an ice axe, and a pair of crampons were placed beside it, suggesting that he had taken them off and put them down there. It was wearing a red or pink Gortex jacket

(Carrillo was known to have been wearing such a jacket), and it had not yet faded, which indicated it had not been there very long, for colors normally fade within six months when exposed to the harsh sunlight of that altitude. It seems extremely probable that this was Carrillo's body.

One can only speculate as to the cause of his death, if this is indeed his body. It seems possible that he was weak from lack of food and liquid nourishment and not thinking clearly because of altitude sickness. Perhaps he allowed himself to succumb to a desire to sleep, lay down for a nap, and died peacefully from the effects of high altitude on his brain and from hypothermia (loss of body heat in severe cold).

That was the bad news concerning a passage across the Nangpa La. The good news came with an unprecedented rescue mission to save the life of a Belgian climber by speedily evacuating him from Tibet into Nepal. Hugo Van Praet had reached Cho Oyu's summit on 14 May and descended safely to the 5600-meters-high advanced base camp, but early in the morning of the 17th he became seriously ill, apparently from a haemorrhage in his brain. With help in improvising a stretcher by the Australian leader of another Cho Oyu team, Duncan Chessell, and one of his Sherpas, Pen Tenji, both of whom had themselves summited on the 15th, his teammates placed the 45-year-old Belgian on the stretcher while Japanese climbers stood there watching them work and taking photos of a very sick man clearly in distress.

In order to get him from their border mountain to a good hospital and an international airport as rapidly as possible, it was now necessary to take Van Praet quickly into Nepal. No Chinese helicopter is available for rescue, and Nepalese helicopters cannot cross the border for lack of a Sino-Nepalese agreement and insurance coverage for the aircraft. Thus, his expedition and its agent in Kathmandu arranged for the first evacuation ever made of a seriously ill person from Tibet directly across a border pass into Nepal. The rescue party left for Nepal on foot from advance base camp at 11:00 a.m. with Van Praet's stretcher. They were the team's doctor, Gert Smets; four members, Xavier Georges, Marc De Sommer, Luc Hoonart and Laurent Morel; a very strong Nepalese climber who had just been to the summit, Tirtha Tamang, with the Belgians; and eight Tibetans to help carry the stretcher.

The party reached the Tibet-Nepal border at the Nangpa La in two and a half hours, and another two and a half hours later were at a spot on the Nepalese side at about 5300 meters' altitude where a helicopter could land. On the following morning, the 18th, at 8:30 or 9:00 o'clock, the Nepalese helicopter arrived and immediately flew with Van Praet and Dr. Smets to Kathmandu, where the sick man was hospitalised until his flight to Belgium could be arranged.

Lhotse saw some successes and some near-successes. The most notable success was that of the veteran Italian mountaineer Sergio Martini. He and his compatriot Fausto De Stefani went together to Lhotse in the autumn of 1997, and when they came back to Kathmandu, they said they had been so very near the top that they considered they could rightfully claim a successful ascent. They were unable to say exactly how near they had gotten because wind was blowing snow in their faces and they were in mist at the time, but they decided they were as close as they could possibly get to the summit without being blown away. "For me and my friend, we feel

that we reached very, very near the summit,” Martini said with De Stefani beside him. “We are convinced that with the bad weather and without fixed rope we could not have gone higher. In this condition, for us this is the summit. We know we were not at the very last point, but for us this is the summit.”

But a South Korean climber, who followed in their footprints on the crusted snow three days later in clearer weather, did not consider that they actually gained the top. While Martini and De Stefani indicated they were perhaps only a few meters below it, Park Young-Seok claimed that their footprints stopped well before the top, perhaps 30 meters below a small fore-summit and 150 vertical meters below the highest summit.

Now in 2000 Martini was back again, and this time he definitely summited Lhotse. The point was a very important one for the Italian pair since they claimed it as their 13th 8000-meter summit success, leaving only one more for each of them. They subsequently reached these last summits. Martini was now on an international permit with three other semi-independent climbers who were strangers to each other, but the four men climbed the normal west-face route together as one team without any Sherpas or artificial oxygen. Fifty-year-old Martini went to the top two days after one of others did, but then he was with two Slovenians who confirmed that he certainly summited, and so there is no longer any question of his having been to the tops of all 14 of the highest mountains.

De Stefani did not go to Lhotse again, so there remains the question of his ascent. The Slovenian leader, Tomaz Zernovik, quoted Martini as saying that he was now sure he had actually been to the highest point in 1997. If this is indeed correct, then De Stefani presumably did also. Martini told Simone Moro, an Italian who was on Lhotse’s close neighbor, Everest, and whose base camp was at the same place, that “now I am very satisfied because I took the pictures I could not take before, and I touched the summit and saw the middle summit,” which one cannot see below the main peak.

To reach the very highest summit of Lhotse via the normal route on its west face, one climbs a well-defined couloir and then just below the top of it moves over onto the left-hand (or northern) of two peaks which appear nearly equal in height from the couloir. Two climbers this spring made the wrong choice and on 26 May climbed the right-hand one.

They were Miss Cathy O’Dowd from South Africa, who was leading her own small team and was a candidate to become the first South African atop Lhotse, and Sandy Allan, a British member of a much larger Everest-Lhotse expedition. They had some discussion about which was actually the higher peak, and Miss O’Dowd’s Sherpa, Pemba Tenji, was sure it was the one to the left. He went up that one and reported he had summited it, but the other two decided to go up the one on the right because it appeared to be more interesting technically. They were on their respective peaks at nearly the same time. Miss O’Dowd and Allan believe that a number of other Lhotse summit claimants had also climbed the same peak as they.

Annapura I this spring defeated all attempts to scale it. Two teams, one French and the other Spanish, planned their climbs as celebrations of the fiftieth

anniversary of its first ascent on 3 June, 1950 by Frenchmen Maurice Herzog and Louis Lachenal from the north face. But there was now constant and sometimes terrible avalanching on the face, a feature notorious for this, and they abandoned their attempts after climbing no higher than 6750 meters and 5550 meters, respectively despite having received important endorsements (the Kings of Spain and Nepal were patrons of the Spanish effort).

The best known present-day American Himalayan climber Ed Viesturs also went to Annapurna to scale his 12th 8000-meter summit. With him on his four-member team were three other very experienced Himalayan mountaineers, and all of them said they had never seen such massive avalanches as some that came down their north face route. They searched for several other feasible lines up the face, but none of them looked safe, and they ventured no higher than 5900 meters. Viesturs is committed to climbing all the 8000er, but will never return to that face again. So what route will he try next? He didn't have a firm answer and seemed reluctant to try Reinhold Messner's northwest face because of its technical difficulties and the need at the top of the face to traverse a high south ridge to the summit.

Two other 8000-meter peak collectors also left Annapurna in disappointment. The Spanish Basque brothers, Alberto and Felix Inurrategi, went only to 5500 meters before abandoning their climb the same day. But they did leave Nepal with one successful 8000er ascent: they had summited Manaslu two weeks earlier. Now, always climbing together, they had caught up with Viesturs' total of 11.

Also now equalling the total of 11 was South Korea's Park Young-Seok, who summited Makalu by its normal northwest-ridge route. He went to the top with his Korean team-mate, Lee Hyun-Jo, and Da Chhiri Sherpa on 15 May without using any artificial oxygen himself, although his summit companions did use it. This was their team's third attempt to reach the top after the previous ones had gotten no higher than 7900 meters. Then they made a quick exit from the mountain: down all the way to base camp at 5600 meters on the 16th and below base on the 17th. Nonetheless, Park cancelled his planned attempt on Xixabangma immediately after his return to Kathmandu saying there was no time for another climb then.

Another South Korean managed to scale what he says is his 13th 8000er, Kangchenjunga on 19 May via its southwest face. But Um Hong-Gil almost didn't make his successful summit attempt after the tragic death of his strong and experienced "Sherpa," Ang Dawa Tamang, as mentioned below. However, he gave it a final try and succeeded only after he and his teammate, Park Mu-Teak, had been forced to make an unprepared bivouac at 8500 meters and spend the night there with their oxygen supply having run out 100 meters below, sitting on a small shelf on very steep mixed ice, snow and rock, clipped into some old rope left by an earlier expedition. Luckily, they got no frostbite while waiting there for daylight in a gentle wind and light snowfall.

At the top, they spent an hour in a ceremony in remembrance of two Nepalese who had died on Kangchenjunga expeditions led by Um in 1999 and now, and he left there photos of them with a South Korean flag covered in plastic. Indian climbers who followed the Koreans to the top two days later found the plastic bag. They

brought the flag down and showed it to Um but kept it with them. Um says only K-2 remains to complete his grand total of 14, and despite being extremely tired from his Kangchenjunga experience, he planned to go to K-2 in the summer.

Still another collector of 8000-meter summits this spring was the British mountaineer, Alan Hinkes, who was trying for Kangchenjunga, the summit he claims would be his 12th, via the same southwest-face route as Um and the Indians. He was an independent climber, although one day he moved up with a Swiss. But he couldn't climb all way to the top despite an attempt he made alone on 28 May after all other teams had left the mountain. He abandoned the effort that day at his maximum altitude of 7900 meters because he was tired and worried about avalanche danger. He was not actually struck by any serious avalanching, but in his descent to base camp on the 29th a snow bridge collapsed under him and caused him to aggravate an old injury to his elbow.

There were surprisingly few deaths this spring: they occurred on Danish and Chinese expeditions on Everest's Tibetan side and in Nepal on Um's South Korean Kangchenjunga team and a German expedition to Makalu.

Both of the two who died on Everest's northern route were killed by falls. The Dane Jeppe Stoltz fell on 20 May from an altitude of about 8450 to 8500 meters for perhaps 250 meters. When a Spanish climber reached him, he was very near death from his fall's having broken open his skull. What caused him to fall is not known since he was alone at the time, but he may well have been blown off balance by extremely strong wind.

The Chinese, Yan Geng-Hua, fell the next day just after having been to Everest's summit with Lhakpa Tshering Sherpa. Again, the cause is not known, since Lhakpa Tshering had just left him to descend to their highest camp by himself. Yan's body was seen by Russians at about 8750 meters clutching his oxygen bottle to his chest. It was very windy then also.

The Nepalese climber who was with Um's South Korean expedition to Kangchenjunga, Ang Dawa Tamang, and had four 8000-meter summits to his credit, was struck on the cheek by a fist-size piece of hard ice on 23 April while he was making their route among many seracs above their third high camp, which had been pitched on a small snow plateau at 7100 meters. The blow sent him falling about five to seven meters. When he was carried down to Camp 3, he seemed "a little okay," said Um, but while he was being taken farther down the mountain that morning, he died, perhaps from brain damage, at about 6900 meters.

The expedition's surviving personnel were so greatly depressed by Ang Dawa's death that they stayed for two weeks in base camp very much worried about more possible fatalities. Finally, Um decided to make only one attempt to go for the summit. On 15 May Camp 1 was reoccupied and on 19 May he and his teammate Park Mu-Taek succeeded, as already reported above.

On Makalu, a German mountaineer, Bernd Mehnert, 33, collapsed and died on 16 May while descending from the summit after having climbed to the top on 15 May with four teammates including their leader, Goetz Wiegand. They returned to their highest camp at 7700 meters at midnight that night after 23 hours of strenuous

climbing up from this camp and back to it from the summit. The party began their descent late the next morning, and Mehnert had gone down only 50 meters when he suddenly sat down in the snow and died immediately. His teammates attempted to revive him, but after an hour's effort they realized that he was gone, probably struck down by a pulmonary embolism.

The Germans' leader will return again and again to the high Himalaya, as he has already done in the past. Certainly the collectors of 8000-meter summits, like Viesturs, the Inurrategi brothers, Hinkes and Um and his Korean rival Park will reappear on these great mountains as many times as it takes for them to complete their collections despite the loss of companions, the frightful cold and exhaustion, and grave dangers. Even the 15-year-old child, Temba Tsiri, with his five fingers having been amputated, said he wants to try again.

There is a theory that mountaineers who have been to very high altitudes must keep returning to them because their bodies at these altitudes produce a kind of drug, which they come to crave almost like a drug addict. Only by going back to very highest altitudes can they get this "high." There clearly is something addictive about high-altitude mountaineering.

## **Summer-Autumn 2000: Slovenian Makes 1st Ski Descent of Everest**

### **Alleged Maoists Rob Manaslu Climbers**

This autumn two rather different rapid descents from summits were achieved without the drudgery of plodding on foot down the mountain. One Slovenian came all the way down Everest on skis in less than five hours from top to bottom, while two Austrians made a rapid departure from their summit, Tilicho, by paragliding directly to the nearest airfield.

Also this autumn, a French team believed they found a route on Annapurna I's north face really safe from avalanching. Spaniards approaching Manaslu's normal route were robbed by men alleged to be Maoists. A British team's access to Shringi Himal (also known as Chamar) from its western side was forbidden by Buddhist monks, but its eastern side was not. The first professional yak herder to summit any 8000-meter mountain got to the top of Cho Oyu, but a handless Korean failed on Everest. And in the summer, Japanese men made the first ascent of Nalakankar.

This autumn, two popular mountains as usual attracted many teams. A total of 31 groups of varying sizes went to Cho Oyu. 29 of them used the standard climbing route on the northwest side in Tibet while the other two went to the southeast face of this border peak inside Nepal. On Ama Dablam near Everest, all of its 25 teams went to the normal southwest ridge.

But on Everest, which in the spring had attracted the astonishing number of 57 expeditions on both Tibetan and Nepalese sides trying to become the first people on the highest point on earth in the new millennium, there were not nearly so many climbers this autumn: only three teams in Nepal including the historic Slovenian ski descent, and one in Tibet.

On Ama Dablam it was a different matter: four more teams came this autumn than in the spring. But even these numbers thinned out towards the end of the season, and on the 8th of November, a Briton, Adrian Ballinger, went to the top quite alone (he was a one-man team) and was delighted. "It was so nice to have the lines to myself and the [southwest ridge] route to myself," he said. I wanted to get to the summit before the clouds came in, and it was a great day." He had started for the 6812-meter top from his only high camp at 5800 meters at 2:30 that morning, was on the top at 9:20 a.m. in clear weather, and spent over one blissful hour there.

A Slovenian mountaineer, Tomaz Humar, as well as several other Slovenians, demonstrated last year how their country is producing men in the forefront of pioneer Himalayan mountaineering. This autumn another Slovenian, Davo Karnicar, was the first person ever to descend by skis from the very top of Mount Everest to base camp. He accomplished this feat on the Nepalese side of the mountain to base camp in four hours, 40 minutes without once removing his skis, and without artificial oxygen below the south summit.

Karnicar, 37 years old at the time of his descent, is a ski instructor who lives in Jezersko, where he was born, in the midst of Slovenia's mountains. He had already

successfully skied down one 8000er, Annapurna I, five years before. Now, on 7 October, he was back, skiing down the highest of them all.

He climbed Everest's normal route on the Nepalese side to the summit at 6:45 a.m. making use of bottled oxygen. A Slovenian team-mate and two Nepalese Sherpa summited at about the same time and went down on foot. At 8:00 a.m., he pushed off alone from the top on skis. Back in Kathmandu, he observed that "you must have something inside" (strong motivation) to get up and start. He still was using oxygen because, he explained, it was very cold and he "wanted to clear his head." The weather was wonderfully clear; he had perfect views of Lhotse, Makalu and other peaks.

He dropped the oxygen equipment and it's six-kilos of weight 20 minutes later at the south summit, which is 8748 meters. At 8:40 a.m., he was down at the South Col at 7900 meters, where his camp 4 was located and where he picked up a three-kilo camera to mount on his helmet. Other cameras were placed at several spots along his route.

Karnicar was all the way down in camp 2 (6500 meters) at 11:00 a.m., and here he stopped to drink something and to wait for movie cameras at base camp to be ready for his final descent. Then at 11:30 a.m., he was off again. At 11:50 a.m., he passed camp 1 (6000 meters) at the top of the famous Khumbu Icefall and finally was at base camp at the foot of the mountain (5350 meters) at 12:40 p.m. Total elapsed time: four hours, 40 minutes.

He had had no sleep from the time he started his ascent from camp 4 towards the summit at 10:30 p.m. on the 6th until his return to base camp on the 7th, and there the merry celebrations with the Champagne flowing postponed his sleep for a lot longer. Although he was very tired, he was now not sleepy. But he felt no great elation when he arrived safely at his base: "the emotion didn't come immediately" but built up slowly over the following days as he fully realized that he had actually succeeded – and had done so in less than the five to seven hours he had expected.

Karnicar and his friends and family had a lot to celebrate. In 1996 he had tried to make a ski descent on the northern side of Everest in Tibet, but he developed two seriously frostbitten fingers and had to abandon the plan. Now he had no frostbite and had avenged the loss of his frozen fingers. And he had made history with his unprecedented ski descent.

He had found the most difficult part had not been the very steep rocky Hillary Step, just below the top, as he had expected. His biggest problem was another steep section just below the Step. He passed the Step beside fixed ropes along one side of it, but when he came to a difficult part below it, he had to descend one step at a time with his skis sideways to the mountain. Then to the South Col, "a very nice place" where monsoon snowfall had covered all the rubbish, and on down the west face of neighboring Lhotse in big turns.

Finally confronting him was the impenetrable Khumbu Icefall, with its gaping crevasses and huge unstable towers of ice. This area would be impossible to overcome, so he didn't try to. Instead he bypassed it by skiing along its very edge at the bottom of Everest's southwest face and Lho La. He moved here just as fast as he safely could



and fervently hoped that a falling serac would not happen to arrive at the same place at the same time as he.

He had two serious problems here. One was to see where to go, because the southwest face is not a straight wall but twists and turns, so he had to ask for guidance by walkie-talkie from members in camp 1. And the other was constantly thinking about the avalanche danger. "This was real pressure: man can do nothing" if a serac suddenly topples down. Luckily he arrived at base camp entirely unscratched.

Now, having summited Everest and Europe's highest peak, Elbrus, on skis, he wants to ski down all the other continents' tallest mountains. However, he acknowledges that there probably is insufficient snow on Kilimanjaro and Karstenz Pyramid to ski them, even if he uses some special type of "skis."

Others have also used skis while descending Everest before him, but none made a complete ski descent. The first who tried was a Japanese, Yuichiro Miura, 30 years ago, and a dramatic film has shown his ski run. Miura ascended from the Nepalese side to about 8150 meters, then started skiing alone from 100 meters below that, using bottled oxygen for his entire ski run. His technique was not to come down in any large turns but to head straight down, expecting a parachute strapped to his back to brake his speed. It did not always do so – it sometimes flapped behind him uselessly and even dangerously in the swirling winds, and on hard-surfaced snow his skis also could not slow his descent. Travelling at about 70 kilometers per hour, he suddenly collided with a boulder at 7200 meters, and one of his skis came off. He completely lost control. He skidded and slid towards a ten-meters-wide deep crevasse and was sufficiently lucky enough to run into a huge rock, which stopped his slide perhaps 100 meters before the crevasse. He lay still, partly unconscious but still alive, until team members reached him and got him safely down the rest of the way to base camp.

The most noteworthy descent on skis before this autumn was made by the Italian mountaineer Hans Kammerlander, who went to the Tibetan side of Everest in May 1996 and used no bottled oxygen while climbing up or skiing down. He started skiing at the summit, but between 8500 meters and 8000 meters he had to alternate between short sections on skis and other short ones on crampons, for a total of about 250 vertical meters without skis. He changed footgear and skis at the North Col (7000 meters) and from there skied to within about 50 meters of his advance base camp at an altitude of 6400 meters.

A quick descent of Tilicho, 7134 meters high north of Annapurna I, was accomplished on 7 November by two Austrians, Hartmut Gfoellner, a 39-year-old sports instructor and specialist in paragliding, and Miss Martina Bauer, 33. After having acclimatized by climbing a lower mountain in the same region and practising their paragliding by flying from that summit, they made an unusually fast (three-day) ascent of Tilicho and descended even faster. They flew together on the same paraglider from the top to the nearest airfield at Jomsom, which lies at an altitude of about 2700 meters north-northwest of Tilicho. They then flew by airliner to Kathmandu, leaving a Sherpa to bring along the baggage.

Six young Spanish students had no such luck in even climbing very high on Manaslu, which they had dreamed about scaling for two years. Their University Polytechnic of Valencia Manaslu Expedition led by David Rosa left Kathmandu on 31 August for their base camp, but on the way, on 3 September, they had what they called “a very bad experience:” their camp at a village named Soti at about seven o’clock that evening was surrounded by terrorists, who police told them later were 200 Maoists. The team’s report to the Nepalese government said, “they frightened us with guns, and we had to pay them every rupee we had totalling Rs.25,000 [about \$345]. They put the guns at our sirdar’s [chief Sherpa’s] head, and he had to pay them more money. They struck the boss of our porters, and we had to assist him because of injuries to his face. They kept us inside the tents all the night. It was one of the worst experiences of our lives.”

They flew to Kathmandu by helicopter to flee the area and to send requests to their families and friends to provide them with them more funds to continue the expedition. They demanded that the government pay for this expensive flight. The government refused to do so, but did offer to validate their climbing permit for a later date. However, the team had set their hearts on their current plans and would not agree to change to another season.

They returned by helicopter all the way to the region of base camp. In Kathmandu, they had understood from the government that they were promised protection by the local police, but now on the spot they could find no police, and their fears of a new terrorists’ confrontation returned. Nevertheless, they finally established their base camp on 12 September at 4850 meters at the start of the normal climbing route, the northeast face. Eight days later they made their first high camp, and the following day two members and two Sherpas reached their highest point, 6100 meters among the seracs below the usual site for camp 2 and then returned to camp 1.

That night, the 21st of September, the team decided to abandon their attempt to climb Manaslu. They had a satellite telephone, and their families were putting pressure on them to leave the terrorists’ area. They returned to Kathmandu, luckily without having seen any presumed Maoists again, and went home angry with the government and keenly disappointed by their unpleasant and costly experiences.

Another sort of threatened force confronted a team approaching Shringi Himal (or Chamar), 7187 meters high east-northeast of Manaslu not far south of the Tibetan border. This group of four Britons and one Swede under the leadership of Tony Barton from Scotland were one day away from base camp for their attempt on the unclimbed west face when they saw coming down the trail towards them a file of Buddhist monks led by the head lama (abbot) from the monastery behind and above them. The abbot said the team were not allowed continue farther up the Shringi River valley and must leave it immediately: god lived on Shringi’s west face. If they didn’t go away, they would be met by violence.

The abbot went on his way. The team’s head Sherpa and the government’s liaison officer with the climbers pursued him for three or four days in several villages trying to persuade him to change his mind, but he was unmoved by their pleas.

However, he had no objection to their climbing the east side of Shringi Himal because he considered that a different mountain.

So the expedition went around its southern flanks to have a go instead at making a different new route via a couloir on its northeast face. They set up their first high camp on the glacier just below this face and spent about six days to ferry their supplies from west to east sides. These six days were quite warm, and when Barton and another member climbed to the top of a snow cone for access to the couloir, the gully had become a chute for an “incredible” amount of rock and ice. They were pelted by stones for 20 minutes, and then they retreated.

Even before they had arrived at their first – and last – high altitude camp at 5600 meters but were already on the glacier, they saw that the cliffs above them were sending down stones and seracs as soon as the sun hit them, especially after 10:00 a.m. The team spent a day discussing the possibility of climbing somewhere else on the face, but they concluded there was no safe place they could go and they should leave the mountain. And to top it all off, when they descended to their lower camp, advance base camp, they found that local villagers had stolen \$5000 worth of their belongings.

In base camp, the team decided never to come back to Nepal again if the government refused to refund their peak fee, because they felt strongly that they should not have been given a permit for the west side of Shringi in the first place. On their return to Kathmandu, they handed in a letter to the ministry of tourism, which grants expedition permits, asking for their refund. As of mid-December, the request was in the process of being considered, but they were most unlikely to receive any repayment since they did actually do some climbing on their permit. Barton said he probably would come again anyway to try a different peak, but it had been an “incredibly frustrating” experience not to be able to approach their permitted route, which been their goal.

Four expeditions went to the north face of Annapurna I last spring and encountered constant and sometimes terrible avalanches. All of them abandoned their attempts after climbing no higher than 6750 meters. This autumn again the face was avalanching dangerously, and as a result, a Japanese expedition went home without success in early October.

A team of French mountaineers were also there, and they believed they found the solution to this problem: go up the eastern side of the face to the east summit and traverse westward along – or very close to – the ridge that leads to the increasingly higher central and west summits. This, they said, was very safe. But they did not complete the route.

The eight Frenchmen were led by Nicolas Terray, son of the noted alpinist, Lionel Terray, who was active in the Nepalese Himalaya in the 1950s-1960s. They arrived at the north-face base camp a few days before the Japanese left for home and after seeing the enormous seracs threatening the face, the French quickly decided it was much too dangerous. But two members were very interested in attempting a longer line than the original French route of 1950: Christophe Profit and Jean Blanchard liked the idea of staying on the east side of the face, part of which was

exposed to avalanching from a peak known as Roc Noir (just east of Annapurna's east-west ridge) only when there was recent heavy snowfall. The French had quite good weather, and this line near the Spanish 1974 route to the east summit attracted them.

Profit and one Sherpa, Dorje, climbed from the team's last fixed camp (6500 meters) slightly farther east than the Spanish line and bivouaced on the 27th of October at 7200 meters. The next day they intended to go to the east summit and see from there whether it would be feasible to traverse slightly down on the south face. But Dorje's feet had gotten very cold and he could not continue on to the top. They therefore bivouaced at 7400 meters, planning to start their push for the east summit on 29 October at 10:00 a.m., when the sun would warm Dorje's feet.

However, that night a cyclone blew in from Bangladesh, east of Nepal, forcing them to sleep in their shoes. When they left their tent in the morning, the terrible wind blew it away. They descended in this wind to base camp. Meanwhile, on the 25th of October, Blanchard and Frederic Gentet, intending to acclimatize, had climbed closer to the Spanish route to an altitude about the same as Profit's highest point.

During the night of the 29th, the wind stopped blowing, and, Profit commented, this was "the best condition to go to the summit." But when he had reached base camp, there was little time left to go again before the departure date of the team from the mountain which had been fixed for 1 November, and Profit found "no motivation from the members to go again – except me." The people in base camp had taken the decision on the 28th that when he and Dorje Sherpa came back, the climb would be over. They had no desire to change the fixed departure date, and they could not agree to one member's staying longer.

"My idea," Profit said, "was to go to camp 3 [the last camp] with Lhakpa [Sherpa] and go alone to the east summit and then, if possible, to traverse to the main summit." This possibility depended on whether or not one could traverse slightly down the south side. And if he could make this complete traverse at about 8000 meters and gain the highest summit at an altitude of 8091 meters, he had no intention to descend by any route except the one he had just ascended, because only it was safe. Back in Kathmandu, he declared that he was "determined to come again and finish this climb on such a safe route" with one friend who would go very high with him.

On other 8000ers, there was one interesting success and one not-unexpected failure. The success came on Cho Oyu. Karsang, a Tibetan who is about 42 years old, lives just north of Cho Oyu and Everest, and earns his livelihood as a yak herder. He had been taught how to climb by Russell Brice, a New Zealander who leads so-called commercial expeditions every spring to Everest and every autumn to Cho Oyu. Now, on 24 September, Karsang, Brice, three Nepalese Sherpas, and five clients went to the summit of Cho Oyu. Brice is certain that Karsang is the first yak herder ever to "conquer" any 8000er.

The failure came to a South Korean who tried to summit Everest despite the fact that he has no hands. Kim Hong-Bin, who is 35 years old, said before leaving

Kathmandu for base camp that he was confident of success. Climbing without hands is “no problem,” he claimed, although he cannot hold an ice axe or ski pole and cannot attached himself to fixed ropes. He makes use instead of his teeth to grasp things, uses his knees and grips things under his arms.

Kim’s hands from his wrists down were amputated after they were severely frostbitten when he was on Mt. McKinley (Denali) in Alaska in 1991. Seven years later he went again to McKinley, the highest peak in North America, and reached its summit that time. He has been climbing again ever since. He has no job but makes a career of mountaineering with support from an association for the disabled and “many, many people.”

Last spring Kim was on Manaslu, where he reached 8000 meters before bad weather, he explained, forced him to retreat. Now on Everest, he was able to ascend no higher than 7300 meters, where his expedition, led by Yoon Bong-Keun, had pitched their third high-altitude camp. He gave up here because he was extremely tired.

Despite a number of notable Slovenian successes on steep unclimbed faces in the Nepalese Himalaya, not all Slovenians are great climbers. One who wasn’t demonstrated how not to climb Nepal’s peaks: he was Andrej Zaman on 6966-meter Dorje Lhakpa north-northwest of Kathmandu. He was only 24 years old, a graphic designer who had climbed in Peru but had never been to Nepal before. He seemed not to know much about his mountain, but he had seen a photo of its northwest face and he decided to climb it to its junction with the west ridge, and from there follow the normal route via the ridge to the top. He had no teammate with him. “I like to climb alone,” he explained in Kathmandu.

So he climbed alone, and he died alone. A Slovenian doctor, Miss Tjasa Subic, who was not a member of his one-man team but visited base camp, was the only witness to his disaster, and she gave the following account of what he did. He went up the start of the ridge a little way on 18 or 19 October and returned to his base camp the same day. That was his only sort of acclimatization: up to 6200 meters very briefly, then down to 4800 meters.

On the 23rd Zaman pitched his only other camp at 5200 meters, below the face, and beginning at about 6:30 the next morning, he moved up the face to 6400 or more, where he intended to sleep. But perhaps he was unable to find space enough to use his sleeping bag and bivouac sack; he did not get any sleep. At 8 o’clock the next morning, he reported to Dr. Subic on his walkie-talkie that he was now about 20 meters below the face’s junction with the ridge at 6500 meters.

He called again about nine o’clock to say he was exhausted, very cold and developing the serious high-altitude illness known as pulmonary edema. Dr. Subic said he sounded as though he had cerebral edema. He asked her to request a French expedition on the mountain at the same time to rescue him. He enjoyed climbing alone, but now he wanted other people to come and help him.

The French replied that they could not go to him. They explained to her, and said again back in Kathmandu, that they had just made their bid to reach the summit by the west ridge, were extremely tired and cold themselves, were down in their camp

at 6100 meters on the ridge, and would have serious technical difficulties getting to him. He was seen by Dr. Subic about two meters below a cornice on the ridge, but unable to scale it. Then he fell – fell about 1000 meters all the way to the glacier at the bottom of the face where he had begun his ascent two days before. He was, of course, dead.

In the summer, Japanese made the first ascent of Nalakankar in the very remote far northwest of Nepal, where few people live and climbers seldom venture; it stands 6062 meters high on Nepal's northwestern border with Tibet. Only two expeditions had ever received permission from the Nepalese government to climb the mountain: Britons in the autumn of 1995 and Japanese eight years later. Men from both teams were arrested by Chinese on charges of crossing the border illegally on espionage missions, and it seems these charges were correct in both cases. The British leader years later publicly confirmed that his team had gone there to spy, and knowledgeable Japanese climbers say their compatriots had done so also.

In those days, the Nepalese authorities believed its summit was over 7000 meters high. However, more recently Sino-Nepalese surveyors have concluded that it is barely more than 6000 meters high.

Now this summer a group under the leadership of Tomatsu Ohnishi composed of 12 Japanese men and women, most of whom were not skilled mountaineers, plus four climbing Sherpas, ventured into the same area and were not arrested or troubled by Chinese in any way: the party never encountered any Chinese during the nearly three weeks they were in its immediate vicinity.

On 6 July, one experience Japanese climber, Takehiko Yanagihara, and Ang Phurba Sherpa reached the top of Nalakankar's north peak (6062 meters) by its north ridge very quickly and easily. It was an "uninteresting climb – like an ice cream cone," said Ohnishi.

Then the group turned their attention to Nalakankar's slightly lower south peak, 6024 meters high, also on the border. For this effort, they divided into two parties, and one successfully scaled its more difficult direct route up the east face, while the other of less skilled Japanese climbers ascended the north ridge. Both parties were on this summit on 7 July and went down the south ridge the same day.

Finally, the expedition moved south again to another peak on the border called Til Kang by local people. It is 6422 meters high, and Ohnishi said this is the highest summit in the Nalakankar range. Here they were not successful in gaining the top. On the 18th of July three members, Ohnishi, Yanagihara, and Koji Mizutani, plus two Sherpas, did an easy rock climb from the east side until they were halted at 5373 meters by a hanging glacier. By now it was raining heavily. They abandoned their attempt and headed home.

## **Winter 2000-Spring 2001: Unprecedented Numbers Attempt Everest**

### **Russians Make the First Ascent of Lhotse's Middle Summit**

The oldest Everest summiter, the youngest, and the first totally blind one were among the throngs of climbers who jostled each other at the highest point on earth on 22, 23, 24 and 25 May. The summit was occasionally so crowded that some of those who got there couldn't find space in which to stand to have their pictures taken.

On the mountain just next to theirs, Russians made an historic ascent to become the first people ever to set foot on the world's highest unclimbed peak, Lhotse's middle summit, and they reached it by a previously unattempted route. Nearby, two Swiss forged a new route up Pumori, and farther west Ukrainians made a new route up the southeast side of Manaslu. All across the Nepalese Himalaya, there was genuine grief at the sudden death of the best-known climbing Sherpa in recent years, Babu Chiri (or Babu Tshering), who once astounded the world by spending all night on the summit of Everest without artificial oxygen and coming down in fine health.

Everest's many summiters were rewarded for their patience to wait throughout the first three weeks of May, when total rainfall/snowfall was about 50% above normal for the period. Day after day, reports on teams' websites recorded thwarted plans for climbing high and going for the 8850-meter-high summit. A number of expeditions simply gave up and went home. But since there were altogether 49 teams on the mountain – 27 were on the normal North Col route from Tibet, 21 on Nepal's normal route via the South Col and one on the seldom-attempted east ridge – there still were plenty of people to crowd the top. However, the deep snow prevented discovery of the body of 1924 climber Andrew Irvine, who disappeared while going for the top, and the camera he and George Mallory had with them.

The first summiters of the season – of the millennium, according to those who believe that the last millennium ended in 2000 – were six men on top on 19 May, while all others summited on just four days, the 22nd to the 25th. The first were two Americans, Michael Otis and Terrence LaFrance, plus their four Sherpas, on the north side. Otis counted 107 people who shook his hand and congratulated him as he descended from 7300 meters to advance base camp at 6400 meters.

The largest number of people ever in any single season reached Everest's summit this spring: an astonishing total of 182 went to the top, 99 from the south and 83 from the north, far surpassing the previous record of 117 climbers in the spring of 1999. On just one day, 23 May, 47 successfully scaled Nepal's South-Col route, seven more than 1993's record for a single route on a single day of 40 on the 10th of May.

The 182 successful summiters, including 47 men who had already been to the top in earlier seasons, raised the grand total of all summiters to more than 1000 – precisely 1119 – and they increased the total number of ascents that all these people had made to exactly 1500. They represented 35% of the 516 men and women who were on the mountain this spring; they came from 33 teams, or 67% of the 49 teams that were there. Of these 516 climbers, 223 were on the Nepalese route, 278 on Tibet's

northern route and 15 on its east ridge, where no one reached the top. And to get a more complete picture of the populations of the tent villages that sprang up, one must add uncounted dozens of trekkers who went to base camps and even advance base camps.

The most remarkable of all the summiters – indeed of all summiters in recent years – was the 32-year-old totally sightless American climber, Erik Weihenmayer, who was among the 26 successful men and women on the last day, the 25th of May. “I just couldn’t believe it” when he got to the top, he said on his return to Kathmandu. “I spent two and a half months to get there [from his arrival at base camp]. You work so hard and so long to get there, but I just took it day by day. And when I took the last step [onto the top] it was almost an anti-climax.”

A major problem for him during his climb was the notorious network of crevasses in the Khumbu Icefall, where the southern climbing route begins. He said it took him a long time to get accustomed to jumping them. He managed to cope because he received guidance from a teammate who placed Weihenmayer’s foot at one edge; then, in order to judge the distance he had to leap, he probed the other lip with the two poles he carried. When he jumped, he almost always leapt quite a lot farther than he really needed to, teammates said. But one time he came to a crevasse unexpectedly, and in his surprise, he put one leg down in it; however, his torso landed safely on the other side, and he suffered no injury.

A retinal disease made Weihenmayer sightless when he was 13 years old. Before attempting Everest, he had had considerable climbing experience including ascents of Aconcagua and McKinley (Denali) and leading up Yosemite’s El Capitan. In Kathmandu before going into the Everest area, he said he was “confident of how I perform on mountains.” Why was he going to Everest? His answer: “The reason I do it is probably the same as that of anyone else. I probably have to put in more effort, but still it is the same adventure and excitement for me.” But why go when you cannot see the magnificent views? “I get a lot of pleasure out of the wind and the sun on my face and feeling the rock under my feet – the same kind of pleasure that other people get out of the view.”

Strangers who were on Everest expected disaster; one of them callously remarked that he planned to stay near Erik so he would “get the first picture of the dead blind guy.” But there was no such picture to be taken. Guided by a bell on the rucksack of the teammate ahead of him and by his own feeling and probing, Weihenmayer with three teammates and at least one Sherpa arrived at the top of the world at 10:05 a.m. on the 25th of May. He descended safely to base camp over the next few days.

The oldest person ever to reach the summit belonged to the same expedition as Weihenmayer. He was a 64-year-old American physician, Sherman (Sherm) Bull, and he was joined at the top by his son, Bradford (Brad) Bull, 33, to be only the second father-and-son pair ever to summit at the same time. Sherman Bull, whose age surpasses by one year the previous oldest summitter, Toshio Yamamoto, a Japanese aged 63 years in May 2000, said this had been the fifth time he had gone to Everest. When he finally made it all the way on this attempt, his success as the oldest



summitter didn't really sink in immediately, but getting to the top was "a dream come true." Like Weihenmayer, he plans to continue climbing by summiting the highest peaks on all seven continents.

The youngest Everest summitter was a 16-year-old Nepalese schoolboy, Temba Tshiri Sherpa, who had unsuccessfully tried to scale it from the Nepalese side in the spring of 2000 and gotten several severely frostbitten fingers which had to be partially amputated. Now he was back again, this time on the Tibetan side, as his own one-man team but with some help from others on the mountain.

Temba later reported that he was a bit frightened by the three dead bodies he encountered in one area along the route. And he had difficulty with his fingers putting on his harness properly. But he had "a great feeling" when he got to the top. Now he plans to concentrate on his studies – he is in ninth grade – rather than to climb again soon, but he could change his mind about that if he gets "a good chance."

On the same north side of Everest at the same time as Temba Tshiri was a Frenchman, Bertrand Roche, who holds the 11-year-old record as the youngest non-Nepalese to the summit (he was a 17-year-old schoolboy at the time). Now he is a mountain guide, and with his wife, Claire Bernier Roche, owns a para-gliding school, where she is an instructor. They brought their tandem paraglider with them, and when they soared overhead to descend from the summit directly to advance base camp at 6400 meters in about ten minutes, people below were amazed and fascinated by the spectacular sight. It was the first complete descent of Everest by paraglider.

The only expedition that did not climb the standard Everest routes on the north and south sides was a team of ten Indian climbers and five Nepalese Sherpas led by Mrs. Santosh Yadav, the first woman ever to summit Everest twice. They made a brave attempt to scale the unclimbed east ridge, a ridge that rises steeply from the middle of the east face (the Kangshung Face) and that in the spring of 1991 defeated a Japanese team, the only other people ever to try this route. The Japanese abandoned their attempt at 6400 meters because of the ridge's extremely difficult terrain and dangerous avalanching.

Mrs. Yadav took with her large quantities of rope, ladders, rock pitons and karabiners, plus two pulleys, and before going to the mountain said she was "very optimistic about our success. I am 100% sure about my climbers and 100% sure about my equipment." She could determine these factors – but not the constant snowfall. With not a single full day of good weather throughout their expedition period from 12 April to 24 May and white-out conditions briefly even at base camp, with frequent avalanches and few safe places to place camps beyond the team's maximum altitude of 6900 meters, they packed up and went home. But Mrs. Yadav said she is determined to try again this autumn.

The incredibly strong and fast mountaineer, the best-known Sherpa of recent years, Babu Chiri, died tragically on 29 April at the age of 35. His most spectacular feats on Everest included staying overnight on the summit without any bottled oxygen for an astounding 21.5 hours in May 1999 – and then, after returning to base camp, making another complete ascent later in the same month. In the following May, he accomplished the fastest ascent ever made from base camp to summit on the

Nepalese side in a total elapsed time of 16 hours and 56 minutes. In May 1995, he was the first person ever to make two complete ascents in the same month. He made ten ascents of Everest, and if he had been successful this spring, his total of eleven would have been equalled by that of only one other person, Apa Sherpa.

Babu Chiri was a fine person: “a gentleman,” as one frequent American Everest summiter called him. He wanted to build a school for the children of his home village, Taksindu, which has no school and had none when he grew up there. His next climbing project was to make an incredible traverse of Everest from the northern slopes to the top, down the southern side to base camp, and then immediately a reverse traverse from south to north – a plan only Babu Chiri could even contemplate.

But this dream died with him when he inexplicably fell into a crevasse at Camp 2 on the Nepalese side. At about 4:00 p.m. on 29 April, he told others he was going to take some photos in the camp’s vicinity. When he had not returned to his tent by 9:00 o’clock, his brother Dawa went out to search for him. An American team leader, Willi Benegas, and Benegas’s head Sherpa, Pemba Gyalzen, joined the search. At midnight they found his footprints in the snow leading to a crevasse which would not have been readily visible because of fresh snow had it not been for the hole he had made by plunging into it.

While the two Sherpas belayed him, Benegas lowered himself about 9 meters down to Babu Chiri’s body and found that the famous Sherpa was now dead. At 6 o’clock the next morning the effort to recover his body began, and it was brought to the surface three hours later. His death was reported in the media around the world, and tributes to him poured in. King Birendra of Nepal himself sent a condolence message to Babu’s family in which the monarch declared that Babu’s “demise has caused irreparable loss to the nation and to the mountaineering fraternity.” The Prime Minister and other dignitaries visited the Sherpa Center in Kathmandu where his body, covered with flowers and Buddhist ceremonial scarves, had been brought, and paid their respects.

Three more climbers perished on Everest. Peter Ganner, Austrian, was killed on 23 May when he was headed for the summit but fell about 500 meters from an altitude of 8500 meters on the Nepalese side. On the following day on the opposite side, an Australian, Mark Auricht, apparently suffered a fatal stroke, and Aleksei Nikiforov, a Russian, died from illness, probably altitude sickness.

Another Austrian, Erich Resch, completely disappeared on 14 May while very nearly reaching the summit of Makalu, 8463 meters high. Like Peter Ganner on Everest, Resch was climbing as an independent team. Several climbers from other expeditions met him at very high altitudes not long before he vanished. They later reported that he had seemed extremely tired, but one man thought it was slightly possible he actually got to the top.

The most impressive of all of this spring’s climbs was accomplished on Lhotse’s middle summit. It is not a mountain in its own right, but it stands 8413 meters above sea level, which is only 50 meters lower than the top of Makalu. Until Russians reached it on the 23rd of May, it must have been the highest unclimbed peak in the world. Various expeditions in recent years had planned to reach to it from the east

via the main summit, or from the west from Lhotse Shar's summit, or up the south face of the Lhotse-Lhotse Shar massif. No team actually ever made a serious attempt from east or west beyond the two summits, but last autumn a different Russian expedition did make a real effort from the south. They, however, climbed only as high as 7000 meters on the face.

Now this spring, 12 Russian climbers, under the leadership of Sergei Timofeev and with the help of four Sherpas, took an entirely different approach. First, they ascended Lhotse's west face to the South Col between Lhotse and Everest, which is the normal south-side route for summiting Everest. But from the Col, they turned right instead of left and moved along Lhotse's previously unclimbed north ridge and out onto the north face, which is technically Tibetan territory and also never climbed before, and finally up the middle summit's west ridge.

Nine members summited in three waves: four on the 23rd, three more the next day, and two on the 25th. They were Alexei Bolotov, Evgeni Vinogradski, Piotr Kouznetsov, and Sergei Timofeev in the first wave; Nikolai Jiline, Yuri Kochelenko and Gleb Sokolov in the second one; and Vladimir Ianotchkine and Victor Volodin in the third. All except Kochelenko had been to at least one 8000-meter top in Nepal before, and Vinogradski had summited Everest four times, Cho Oyu twice, Lhotse, Lhotse Shar, Kangchenjunga and two of its subsidiary summits one time each.

With all their formidable experience, they nonetheless found this climb extremely challenging, especially on the final section from their final camp at 8250 meters on Lhotse's north face to the middle summit. From the South Col to this last camp, their route led over snow and rock but no fixed rope was required here. Beyond the camp, however, they had the tedious chore at extremely high altitude of fixing 1400 meters of rope over snow and much rock, some of it 65-75 degrees steep. The final rock step just below the top was a "very difficult" 90-degree wall; the top itself was actually a huge cornice. All summiters made use of artificial oxygen to reach the base of the cornice.

Lhotse's middle summit had been officially opened to mountaineers only a week before the Russians finally reached it. At the same time, the Nepalese ministry of tourism also added eight others to its list of peaks available to climbers; most of them are unknown and by Himalayan standards, not very high. One was a 6251-meter mountain known only as P-2, which is very near the giant Manaslu and scaled by a Ukrainian team this spring (see below). *Not* amongst them, despite erroneous predictions to the contrary, was Machhapuchhare, "the Fish's Tail," near Pokhara. When announcing their decision to open more peaks, a ministry official stated, "We are of the hope that this will help attract more mountaineers from around the world and contribute to the growth of mountain tourism in Nepal."

A rather dramatic rescue of a 19-year-old British climber took place on Lhotse's normal west-face route. The Briton was Thomas Moores, who belonged to an American-led commercial expedition. He had gone to the summit on 21 May with a Polish climber, Dariusz Zaluski, who was on a different permit, and when they were descending from the summit, Zaluski saw him fall about 150 meters from an altitude of 8300 meters.

The principal rescuer was Simone Moro, an Italian on still another Lhotse permit who was in his tent at 7950 meters making preparations for his own summit bid in the next day or two. At 6 o'clock that evening he heard Zaluski shouting about Moores' fall. Later, back in Kathmandu, Simone reported that when he heard Zaluski, he immediately got out of his tent to rescue the fallen Briton. He said no one in any of the other tents at that camp on Lhotse's west face – there were teams for Everest's summit as well as for the top of Lhotse – would join him because they said they would lose their chance to reach their summits if they did. So Moro went up alone. He found Moores at 7:00 p.m. lying on his back in deep snow, which Moro feared could avalanche onto a camp below at any moment; Moores' face was bleeding and he had lost a crampon. He told Moro to leave him alone – “but don't tell Mama.”

Moro, who was highly experienced on Nepal's great peaks, ignored this plea and hoisted the teenager, who weighed only 50 kilos, onto his back. He carried Moores up and away from the avalanche-prone area and then down to Moro's tent, where he provided water and first aid, and on the next day organized two Sherpas from someone else's team to carry Moores down the mountain (Moro had no Sherpas of his own). Now he found that he had actually sacrificed his own summit chance, for next day he realized that he was too exhausted to try.

Moores was the only member of his expedition to make a bid for Lhotse's summit. His leader, Gary Pfisterer, said later in Kathmandu that he had instructed Moores to spend only one night in their highest camp (which had been left behind by a Korean team when they left the mountain) and then to descend. But the Briton stayed for another day and pressed on for the summit despite his lack of experience at high altitude.

His team was composed of 11 men: seven Americans, two Ecuadorians, one Canadian and himself, but by the time the last members left base camp to return to Kathmandu, only three were still there. All the others had dropped out from time to time from early May onwards, including Moores himself, who was quickly evacuated by helicopter to Kathmandu, where he was found to have internal injuries and was sent on to a hospital in Bangkok.

Moores' team had no Sherpas or bottles of oxygen with them, and a number of the members were inexperienced in Himalayan climbing. The British leader of another successful commercial Lhotse expedition was critical of this, saying that when Moores fell, it meant that other teams had to rescue and care for him. (His leader, Pfisterer, climbed up to 7200 meters to bring him down to base camp.) Pfisterer responded to such comments by saying that his members were clearly told exactly what would be provided for them, and their joining the team meant their acceptance of his arrangements.

A 13-man expedition from Ukraine led by Mstislav Gorbenko made an oxygenless ascent of Manaslu. On 22 May the summit was reached by the first Ukrainians to ever go there, Sergei Kovalev, Vadim Leontiev and Vladislav Terzyul, all experienced Himalayan summiters. Their route was a new line up the southeast face and onto a southeast pillar; they descended by the normal northeast-face route, where

two other expeditions had already made their own unsuccessful bids for the top and gone home.

Their climb on the southeast face began with a 2000-meter wall of mixed ice and rock 80 degrees steep with frequent snow avalanches from daily new snowfall. Above 6400 meters, the climbers then moved up a very difficult rock pillar covered by a thin layer of snow. They put three camps on this pillar during the following four weeks and finally placed their seventh and final camp on the summit plateau.

Six of their teammates went up the normal route to 5100 meters to help them descend the treacherous icefall below, from which local villagers had removed all the fixed rope installed by the other teams. In their ascent, they themselves had fixed 2900 meters of rope on the southeast face and an additional 2000 meters on the pillar.

At the same time as Ukrainians were working to establish a route up the southeast face, some of them began an attack on neighboring 6251-meter P-2. They were believed to be the first mountaineers ever to set foot on this relatively small peak which lies on the east ridge of the better-known Peak 29 south of Manaslu. They approached P-2 from the north and four men, Gorbenko, Leontiev, Sergei Pugachov and their deputy leader, Mykhaylo Zagirnyak, scaled its east ridge to the top on 16 May. Leontiev then joined the final push to the summit of Manaslu.

Back in the Everest region, on Pumori, two Swiss members of a team of four Swiss and one American, led by Ueli Buehler from Switzerland, succeeded in reaching the summit in alpine style via a new line up the west face until they joined the south ridge at 6700 meters. They then followed the ridge to the summit and descended the normal route down the east ridge to the east col and thence the southeast face/ridge.

Buehler and the other successful climber, Ueli Steck, reported that most of the west face was 55-60-degree ice with some parts of it as steep as 80 degrees while there were some pitches of mixed ice, snow and rock. They began their ascent at 2:15 a.m. on 6 May in nearly full moonlight, stopped at a bivouac on the south ridge at 6800 meters and were on the top at six o'clock the next morning. Then they had to spend a long time descending the east ridge to the east col without any fixed ropes and having to avoid many crevasses. From the col the descent was not such a problem since they were able to use ropes and follow flags left on the route by a German team. They were finally back at their west-face base camp at 5200 meters 8:30 p.m.

Teams in Nepal during the 2000-2001 winter season totalled only four. Three successfully climbed the well-trodden southwest ridge of Everest's neighbor Ama Dablam. The fourth was a team of nine Polish climbers and one Georgian hoping to make the first winter ascent of Makalu's formidable west pillar. Their efforts, under the leadership of the veteran Himalayan mountaineer Krzysztof Wielicki, did not succeed on the pillar or on two other lines which they attempted, first via the south pillar to the south col and then on the normal northwest-side route. Terrible winds were their biggest problem.

## **Autumn 2001: Scarcely Anyone Attempted Everest A Double-Amputee Did Try, But Could Not Succeed**

In stark contrast to the unprecedented hordes of climbers on Everest last spring, the autumn season brought practically no one. For the first spring or autumn season since autumn 1970, not a single team came to the Nepalese side of the world's highest mountain. In Tibet, there were only three, and not one of them managed to climb higher than 7800 meters on this 8850-meters-high giant. Even a bid to make the first solo flight over Everest in a balloon ended unsuccessfully: the basket never left the ground. Nonetheless, 99 teams did come to climb in the Nepalese Himalaya, with just over half of them concentrated on Cho Oyu and Ama Dablam.

An American named Ed Hommer attempted to be the first double-amputee to reach the summit of Everest. The 45-year-old airline pilot lost his lower legs in a flying accident in 1981, when he crashed his single-engine airplane into Mt. McKinley (Denali) and was stranded for several days with little food and no shelter; after he was rescued, his frostbitten legs had to be amputated at mid-calf. He now wears prostheses and moves easily.

Hommer was the climbing leader of a seven-member team organized to enable him to fulfil his dream of summiting Everest. They went to Tibet's northern side with the original intention of climbing via the Great Couloir, but when they arrived in late August, there was so much snow that the danger of avalanching down the couloir was prohibitive. They therefore followed the standard route up the north face and north ridge. They pitched their second, and what turned out to be their last, high-altitude camp at 7500 meters. This was lower than the usual site, but a higher spot would have been too far for Hommer to reach directly from their first high camp on the North Col at 7000 meters.

Unfortunately, they had frequent spells of very bad weather with a lot of snowfall and strong winds, and Hommer, not wanting to climb up and down very often, spent much of his time in advance base camp (6400 meters) or even lower; one time he was in advance base for 15 days waiting for snow to cease falling, avalanching to stop and the winds to abate. He climbed once to the 7500-meter camp, but did not sleep there nor go any higher than that. (One American member and two Nepalese helpers went up to 7800 meters.)

Hommer said he was "pretty disappointed" at not having reached the summit. "It took me 25 years to get there, and it was disappointing and frustrating to get so close and not get all the way up. ... We gave it our best shot, but we just didn't get the weather window of five or six days we needed." He was already planning to return in the spring of 2003.

In the mean-time he will have surgery on at least one of his legs. During the climb, he had a problem with the stump of his left leg. In the extreme dryness of very high altitude, its scar tissue split open; it bled slightly and was somewhat painful.

Nevertheless, he would have made a push for the summit despite this, for it was “only aggravating, not debilitating.”

Hommer was not the first amputee to attempt Everest. Another American, Tom Whittaker, who had one artificial leg, did succeed in getting to the summit in May 1998 by the normal route on Nepal’s southern side. But a South Korean, Kim Hong-Bin, whose two hands had been amputated, failed in October 2000 after reaching 7300 meters, also from the south.

The only other team on the standard northern route was a 13-member Hungarian group led by Laszlo Mecs who hoped to become the first mountaineers from Hungary to reach the top of the world. They, too, got no higher than 7800 meters. The frequent snowfall and extremely strong winds certainly impeded their progress also, but the final blow was the death of a member, Santor Gardos, who on 18 October plunged to his death 1100 meters down to the Rongbuk Glacier, where his body was found the next day. A tent was found with him, and his teammates guessed that he had attempted to set it up but fierce winds blew him off his feet with the tent acting like a sail.

The third expedition on Everest tried to scale the seldom-climbed east face. They were five climbing members under the leadership of David Klein. Their maximum altitude was just 6300 meters, which they reached after more than four weeks on the mountain. They finally abandoned their attempt because they, too, experienced many days of heavy snowfall followed by days of dangerous avalanching down the extremely steep face. They would climb a bit, snow would fall heavily, they would retreat to a safe camp, wait two days for avalanching to stop, go back up again – and then the same pattern would be repeated. Luckily none of them was killed or seriously injured, although the leader was knocked unconscious briefly by a falling stone, and two others were carried inside their tent by an avalanche 250 meters down to the bottom of the face.

Why were there so few teams to Everest this autumn? Firstly, springtime is widely seen as better for climbing such a huge mountain: temperatures get slightly warmer, rather than colder, as climbers move to higher altitudes; daylight hours get longer; and in Nepal, the prescribed climbing season lasts for three months instead of the two and a half months in autumn.

In addition, this year’s downturn in the economies of North America, Western Europe and Japan, from which most climbers come, and concern about aviation safety probably were major factors. Furthermore, those who know about the lack of success of Everest expeditions in autumn in recent years would tend to favor springtime. It is true that last year three out of four autumn teams did succeed, but in 1999 all four failed, in 1998 only two teams out of nine reached the top, and in 1997 all eleven teams failed.

The would-be balloonist was a 44-year-old British adventurer, David Hempleman-Adams, who had successfully climbed Everest in October 1993 and had walked solo to both the North and South Poles. Now he wanted to set a world record with a solo flight lasting two to six hours in an open-basket hot-air balloon over

Everest flying from Rongbuk Monastery near the northern slopes of the mountain, soar in a southerly direction as high as 10,670 meters and land somewhere in Nepal.

He had permission from Nepalese authorities to land in their country. He set out overland from Kathmandu to Rongbuk in September planning to lift off sometime after 20 September wearing an oxygen mask and a parachute and taking along enough food for 10 days. But he left Nepal without China's permission to make the flight from its Tibetan territory, and this he never received. No reason was given for the Chinese decision, but organizers of the adventure said in Kathmandu before his return, "It is understood that at this time of increased security, particularly regarding air space after this month's tragedy in America, any loss of contact or communication with the balloon during the flight could prove a security and safety risk."

The only balloon flights that have ever been made over Everest took place in 1991. At that time, two British teams of two men each flew over the great mountain from Nepal to Tibet.

The least difficult of all the 8000-meter mountains, Cho Oyu when climbed by the normal route in Tibet, did have its usual crowd with 233 people, members and Sherpas, trying to scale it by this route. And many were successful: of the 36 teams, three-fourths of them sent at least one person to the top, with a high concentration of summiters on 24-26 September.

The total of 36 expeditions is the largest number on Cho Oyu in any one season: the previous record was 31 in the autumn of 2000. Many in both autumns were actually a single person or a very small group who went to Tibet on someone else's permit and climbed independently of the permit holders.

Notable events on Cho Oyu were:

- A 41-year-old New Zealand mountain guide, who has American citizenship also, Marty Schmidt, made an extremely speedy climb of the mountain on 27-28 September. After having already been to the top on 24 September with a client, he set out again alone from his advance base camp at 5800 meters at the foot of Cho Oyu in very strong wind at 6:00 p.m. on the 27th; he reached the summit, he reported, roughly 11 hours later, at 4:54 the next morning, the only person to go to the top on the 28th.

It was still dark at that early morning hour, but he was sure he had gotten to the highest point on a summit plateau that has many high points because he found the prayer flags that had been left at the very top by Buddhist Sherpas. He actually slept there, curled up in his down suit, for an hour, got up at 5:45 a.m. although it was still dark and high winds were blowing, and descended to advance base at 12:00 noon, then on to base camp at roughly 4800 meters at 5:00 p.m. "I was a bit tired" when he reached base, he confessed.

A mountaineer who has made a similarly – in fact, even more rapid – climb of Cho Oyu is another New Zealander, Russell Brice, who has been on the mountain numerous times and made a total of six ascents, the last one a week before Schmidt's speed climb. Brice was still at the mountain, and he said on his return to Kathmandu that Schmidt had made an "amazing ascent" from



advance base to top to base, but it was not quite a speed record. In the spring of 1996, he himself had gone up from a lake below advance base at 5400 meters to the summit in 11 hours and back to the lake in only three more hours.

- A veteran Slovenian mountaineer, Viki Groselj, made a ski descent from the summit to his camp 2 at 7100 meters on 10 October, and next day he continued down on skis to camp 1 (about 6400 meters), below which there was no more snow. He said he was sorry that he could not ski farther because “it is easier to ski than to walk.”

Groselj described his climb and ski descent as “a nice farewell to 8000-meter peaks.” His summit date was the 26th anniversary of the first time he had reached the top of any 8000er, Makalu. He later successfully climbed eight others, including Everest in May 1989, and had summited Cho Oyu once before, in November 1988. Now he was saying farewell to the 8000ers because he is 49 years old and has a six-year-old son who needs his attention.

- The first Mongolian ever to climb to an altitude of 8000 meters anywhere was Boldbaatar (one name only), who got to 8150 meters on his 41st birthday and then quit when tiny wind-driven ice particles prevented him from seeing where he was going, and after that he was too tired to try again.
- An Italian claimed a high-altitude record for golf. On 5 October, Guiseppe Martignago, 58, struck a golf ball with his iron at 7050 meters and drove it about 200 meters. He said the previous record was made on South America’s Aconcagua, which is not even 7000 meters high. He explained that he had not gone all the way to Cho Oyu’s summit because of the serious avalanche threat that day, and afterwards strong winds made him decide not to try again.
- The Tibetan authorities have become conscious of the need to remove rubbish from their mountains. Many complaints were made about large amounts of rubbish left at advance base camp by earlier expeditions when teams arrived this autumn. But by the time the last one had left, the China Tibet Mountaineering Association, which is headquartered in Lhasa, had sent yaks up to advance base and cleared it away.

Cho Oyu has had an unusually tiny number of deaths (only 30 deaths compared to more than 1000 summiters) amongst its thousands of climbers; it is probably the safest as well as least difficult of the 8000ers. This autumn, however, there was one more death, that of a South Korean leader, Kim Su-Ya, who succumbed to altitude sickness in his advanced base camp. Another victim of the high altitude elsewhere in the Nepalese Himalaya was a Japanese climber, Isao Kuribara, who was stricken at about 7500 meters on Manaslu and died two days later despite his teammates’ best efforts to keep him alive.

Dhaulagiri I, 8167 meters, does not have the same safety record as Cho Oyu: 57 deaths and just 300 summiters. No doubt a factor in Dhaulagiri’s less favorable statistics is the extreme difficulty of some of its routes; another is the usual objective danger of avalanching; and of course there is always the possibility of missteps leading to fatal falls. This autumn a Spaniard, Jose Antonio (“Pepe”) Garces, the

leader of a small Spanish-Italian expedition on the normal northeast-ridge route, was killed on 12 October, when he plunged to his death from the summit ridge at about 8050 meters. His body could not be found.

On the much more difficult east face, which has been successfully climbed by only nine men, three Japanese disappeared sometime after 14 October. This four-member team first went to the northeast ridge for acclimatization, and one of them went all the way to the top alone on the 11th. His fingers became badly frostbitten, and he immediately left the mountain, while the remaining three, leader Ryushi Hoshino and members Masashi Fukumoto and Yukihiro Shinagawa, moved over to scale the great face to about 7500 meters, where their line of attack would join the northeast ridge.

The trio were watched by another Japanese party led by Ryoji Yamada – a party that with Hoshino's group actually made one large expedition, but Yamada's men had no intention of attempting the face. His members saw the east-face climbers start up early in the morning of the 12th with three days' food supply and saw them later make two bivouacs. Yamada himself watched them on their third day, the 14th, and reported that at 10:00 a.m. they were at only about 6400 or 6500 meters. "They were moving very slowly, were very tired and not in good condition," he observed. If Hoshino and teammates had managed to reach the ridge at 7500 meters as they had planned, they would have been all right, for Yamada had left for them a camp with a good supply of food.

Yamada and his teammates left their own base camp, from which they had climbed the ridge, on the 16th, and now the only person left at Dhaulagiri was Hoshino's base camp cook, who was not a climber. The cook came back to Kathmandu alone on the 22nd or 23rd to tell their trekking agent that the Japanese had not returned to base. He also said that on the 18th and 19th there had been heavy snowfall and on the summit very strong wind.

Yamada was still in Kathmandu when the cook returned, and on the 24th he went by helicopter to Dhaulagiri to search for the missing men. From the air Yamada could see no trace of them nor any signs of any avalanching on the face. He concluded that they must have plunged down the face before they managed to get to his ridge camp.

A third Japanese expedition also went to Dhaulagiri I and was led by Kiyoshi Ishii. This five-member group were the first to arrive at base camp, and they went up the northeast ridge. Ishii reported in Kathmandu that two of his members and three Nepalese had gotten to the top on 2 October; his Sherpas told them that the point they reached was the correct summit. But they, like other climbers before them, were wrong. They had actually gone to a false summit.

A German woman, Miss Barbara Hirschbichler, went to the same point at the same time. She said that she had seen a higher point to the west, but at the time she believed the Japanese team's Sherpas, who said no one goes to that other, but true, summit, so she did not try to climb to it. (If she had, she would not have been able to reach it from the false summit, but would have had to retrace some of her route and

take a different line.) She was extremely disappointed to learn later that she had been given incorrect information.

There were two noteworthy events on a 7000-meter mountain, Pumori, Everest's neighbor, 7161 meters high. One was good news, the other was bad news. The good news was that it was on Pumori the first Iranian women mountaineers ever to come on an expedition to the Nepalese Himalaya had success. This team was led by Miss Zarefeh Rahimzaddeh and consisted of 11 members, eight of whom were women. The three men were an experienced Himalayan climber, Jalal Chesmeh Ghasabani, whom they wanted for his expertise; the team's doctor, whom they needed since they knew of no woman doctor who climbs; and a "civil servant" who never moved above base camp and got extremely bored but whom they had to take along as their chaperon/watcher.

Three of the women successfully climbed to the summit on 20 October by the standard route via the southeast face/ridge to the east col and up the final east ridge: Miss Leila Bahrami, Mrs. Mitra Nazari and Miss Farhondeh Sadegh, together with Chesmeh Ghasabani and three Sherpas. Their Sherpas stopped trying to open the route at two steep sections above the col (6750 meters), which were at a 90-degree angle, because they thought the women could not manage such difficulty. But the women insisted, the ropes were fixed, and the summit party of seven went to the top after nearly ten hours' ascent that day.

The Iranians fortunately had no accidents, but an expedition of ten Spanish Basque men were not so lucky. They were on the same normal climbing route as the Iranian women, but they never summited. On 19 October the leader, Aritz Artieda, and four of his teammates perished when seracs above them suddenly collapsed and struck them in a big avalanche that carried them 600-800 meters down the face. All were between 22 and 28 years old.

This southeast side of the mountain is notorious for fatal avalanching. For this reason, the Iranian women never occupied a camp at the top of the southeast ridge, as the Basques – and many before them – had done. The Basques' avalanche hit them when they were just 50 meters above this camp, which they had pitched at an altitude of about 6200 meters.

On a very popular 6000-meter mountain in the Everest region that is a favorite of commercial expedition organizers, Ama Dablam, 6812 meters high, there were 17 teams, 16 of them on the southwest ridge. There was such crowding at the narrow sections that the Swiss leader of one commercial expedition complained about an American-led commercial group's moving so slowly as to monopolize the fixed ropes and camp sites for a week. Both teams were successful, as were 13 others.

The only expedition that did not follow the standard route was a British group led by Julian Cartwright. They believe they forged a new line by climbing the northwest ridge from its very beginning all the way to the summit. Cartwright and Richard Cross accomplished this in pure alpine style with no fixed camps, no fixed ropes and no climbing Sherpas, just a series of new bivouacs every night and steady climbing progress every day. They stood on the summit on 10 November.

They had set up their base camp at the village of Pangboche (3956 meters) high, which was four hours' trek from the bottom of their ridge. They began their climb on the 1st of November, made five bivouacs from the start of the ridge to the point at 6100 meters where the west spur or buttress joins their northwest ridge, then three more bivouacs on a relatively flat section of the ridge, and finally one on the 9th of November where the north face and the northwest ridge meet, about 100 meters from the top. Almost all of their route to this point "was quite difficult technically," Cross said. He rated it as Scottish Grade 6 and was sure "it will never be guided."

From the last bivouac they climbed 600 meters and finished on an easy snow dome. They arrived at the top at 9:30 a.m., descended by their ascent route with only one bivouac on the way down at 6200 meters on what they dubbed "the football field" atop a very stable large serac, and next day were back at their Pangboche base.

In mid-May this year, the Nepalese authorities opened nine more peaks to climbers. The most important of these was the middle summit of Lhotse, which a Russian expedition promptly scaled successfully that season. The least important was a 6012-meter peak that officials called Thapa Peak. It is just north of Dhaulagiri I and Tukucho Peak, and is really only another bump on a mountain widely known as Dhampus.

This autumn a French team went to Thapa and on 28 October made its first officially recognized ascent by its western slope. From their base camp in Hidden Valley at 5080 meters, six French summiters took seven hours to make what they reported as an easy walk with a little snow at the summit. When they returned to Hidden Valley, they met several parties of trekkers who intended to climb Thapa, and they learned from their own Sherpas that it is not at all unusual for trekkers to scale it. The French felt they had been fooled into paying the government's royalty fee of \$1500 for a peak that others go to free of charge.

## **Winter 2001-Spring 2002: A French-Spanish Traverse of Annapurna I**

### **The Traditional Spring Hordes on Everest and Use of Oxygen**

The most challenging climb this spring was a traverse of Annapurna I's very long summit ridge starting from Glacier Dome in the east and running westwards to Roc Noir and the three over-8000-meter summits of Annapurna – and then back again via the same ridge. Jean-Christophe Lafaille, the well-known French mountaineer, and an equally noted Spanish Basque, Alberto Inurrategi, accomplished this outstanding feat.

Lafaille and Inurrategi had no bottled oxygen or Sherpa support on their difficult traverse at very high altitude. In stark contrast, amongst the usual very large number of springtime Everest summiters, only a tiny percent used no artificial oxygen at all, while a few employed it for sleeping as well as climbing from remarkably low altitudes and had significant Sherpa help.

The main purpose for one Everest team was to make a film to mark next year's 50th anniversary of the first ascent. It is not difficult to imagine that the numbers during the anniversary year itself will be much greater as organizers use the golden jubilee to attract sponsors and participants.

Altogether 46 teams sent 155 men and women to Everest's summit this spring, 77 of them on a single day, the 16th of May, 61 from Nepal's southern side and 16 from Tibet. But this was not record-breaking; the spring of last year still holds the record with 50 teams, 182 summiters, 88 on top on 23 May. Of the 155 summiters this year, 66 men and one woman (Miss Ellen Miller, American) had made ascents in previous years, so the total of first-time summiters was 88.

The high number of summiters on the Nepalese side of Everest on 16 May was sufficient to force one of them, the first successful Armenian citizen, Igor Khalatian, to wait 56 minutes not far below the summit until he could resume his descent after other climbers had come up and were off the ropes fixed on the Hillary Step. Such a long wait at such a very high altitude can dangerously lead to severe altitude problems or frostbitten toes, but fortunately for Khalatian the weather was mild that day and he suffered no ill effects.

Besides the first Armenian summitter, there were the first Hungarian, Zsolt Eross; the first Basques living in France, Frederic Lafitte and Robert Larrandaburu; and an American, Sean Swarner, who claimed to be the first cancer survivor. There was the first person to successfully scale the mountain a total of 12 times, 40-year-old Apa Sherpa. And there were the oldest man and the oldest woman.

One would think that the question of who is the oldest person to reach the summit would be quite simple. Until this year, that distinction belonged to an American, Sherman Bull, who was 64 years old last spring. Now the title on 17 May passed to Tomiyasu Ishikawa, a 65-year-old Japanese. Or did it?

Another climber who was also on the Tibetan side of the mountain, Mario Curnis of Italy, only 26 days younger than Ishikawa, has put forward his claim to the

title on the grounds that he is the oldest to have “climbed” to the top, which he achieved on 24 May. No one doubts that Ishikawa did arrive at the summit, but his Sherpas, according to Curnis’s fellow summiter, Simone Moro, “carried” him up the final 50 meters to the top.

Furthermore, Curnis returned from top to bottom on his own two feet. An Austrian who also was on Everest, Wilfried Studer, said that he himself saw Ishikawa being carried down the mountain on the back of one Sherpa, and breathing oxygen through a tube from the bottle on the back of another, from Ishikawa’s first high-altitude camp at 7000 meters down to his advance base camp (6400 meters) and then on down to base camp (5200 meters).

Ishikawa needed other help. Still another climber on the mountain, New Zealander Russell Brice, reported that when, in his ascent, Ishikawa came to a ladder on a steep, high rock feature known as the Second Step, he had the help of three Sherpas: two were immediately behind him and placed his feet on each rung while one in front pulled him by a short rope.

Ishikawa had made extensive use of artificial oxygen. By his own account, he started using it on his push for the summit at about 7500 meters, and continued using it sleeping and climbing above there. And not all of it was from his own supply. A different Japanese expedition even had to abandon their own summit bid on the 18th and descend from 8500 meters because they were told that Ishikawa “was in big trouble” 200 meters above their summit party, and their Sherpas had to carry more oxygen up to him.

After his return to Kathmandu, Ishikawa said he was delighted when he arrived at the summit in his second ascent (his first was in 1994), was not tired and even wanted to go higher. But Moro reported that he was irrational at the top and told his Sherpas to leave him because he wanted to ski down the mountain.

Is this use of Sherpas to pull or carry a climber, and this use of considerable amounts of artificial oxygen, really mountaineering? Four climbers said they used absolutely no bottled oxygen throughout their time on Everest. (All of them climbed from the north; two men were from western Europe, Jorge Egocheaga from Spain and Hans van der Meulen of the Netherlands, and two from eastern Europe, Alexei Bolotov of Russia and Miroslav Caban of the Czech Republic.) A few commentators take the view that only four people, rather than 155, should be credited with ascents this spring. They believe that after Reinhold Messner and Peter Habler proved in May 1978 that summiting Everest and safe and sane returns do not require oxygen, only oxygen-less climbs after them should actually be counted as successful.

Ishikawa was not the only climber this spring to use bottled oxygen extensively. Another was a Japanese member of the team who had to forego their summit bid on 18 May. Tsutomu Miyazaki went to the top on the same day as Ishikawa, 17 May, and said later in Kathmandu that he had used it continuously from Camp 1 (7000 meters) to the summit and down to Camp 2 (7700 meters).

No problem exists about who is the oldest woman atop Everest. That record was set in May 2000 by a 50-year-old Pole, Miss Anna Czerwinska. This spring a Japanese woman 13 years older than she, Miss Tamae Watanabe, went to the summit

from Nepal's southern side on the busiest day, the 16th of May. Her use of bottled oxygen was confined to climbing from her Camp 3 at 7300 meters to the top and back to 7300 meters plus sleeping two nights in Camp 4 on her ascent and descent.

Unquestionably the best climb of the season was the Annapurna I traverse by Jean-Christophe Lafaille and Alberto Inurrategi. They were members of a six-man expedition jointly led by Inurrategi and the well-known American, Ed Viesturs. They had no Sherpa climbers with them at all, so the members did the work together to make the route, pitch the camps and stock them with supplies as far as their third high-altitude camp at 7100 meters, nearly 100 meters below the summit of their eastern-most peak, Glacier Dome (now officially known as Tarke Kang). They had no supplies of artificial oxygen with them.

Viesturs himself climbed beyond Camp 3 westwards along the ridge until 7300 meters, but went no farther. He judged the avalanche risk unacceptable and was worried about the problem of returning from Annapurna's summit by the same long ridge. He descended to base camp and remained there for the remainder of the climbing period.

Lafaille and Inurrategi remained to continue alone. On 14 May, they left Camp 3 at 6:00 a.m. and moved along the saw-tooth ridge. It had a steep and technically difficult section up to the summit of the 7485-meter peak known as Roc Noir (Khangsar Kang). They took three hours to surmount the last 250-300 meters to the top; here the incline was 55-60-degrees steep, there was a rock band running across it, and there was bad powder snow.

From here, Lafaille said after returning to Kathmandu, they had only two alternatives: to retreat from the top of Roc Noir back the way they had come, or to continue west. It was not possible for them to descend the north or south faces, both of which were very steep; the distance down the north face was too great, while on the south face there were numerous unacceptably dangerous seracs and cornices.

They elected to continue west from Roc Noir by traversing on the north face between 20 and 100 meters below the ridge depending on the snow conditions. Sometimes they could walk along it with a pole, sometimes it became a very steep (65-70 degrees) snow face which involved very technical climbing and the use of a rope rappel. At 4:00 p.m. they bivouacked at an altitude of 7450-7500 meters, the average altitude of this part of their traverse. They had climbed more than four kilometers from Camp 3.

On the 15th they again started their climb at 6:00 a.m. They went back onto the ridge for about a kilometer and then, at about 7700 meters, they crossed again down onto the north face, where all the snow was very good and firm whereas the ridge had become only bare rock. However, they did have some technical ice and snow climbing to do. They now were actually on the huge expanse of Annapurna I, and they bivouacked at 7950 meters at the top of a couloir below its east summit. They stopped their traverse at about 3:00 p.m. because they knew it would take them hours to chop out enough space for them to stay for the night. That afternoon Lafaille did also spend some time fixing 100 meters of rope above their bivouac site for the next day's climb.

On 16 May they completed their east-west traverse. The route now lay along a steep rock face which was technically very difficult. They had trouble finding a route here. About 40 meters below the east summit, which is 8026 meters high, they moved westwards along the north face. They crossed the middle summit area on the face and joined the normal north-face route at a couloir at about 7800 meters, climbed up the couloir and at 10:00 a.m. were at last on the main summit, 8091 meters, high. Half of their grand traverse had been done.

Now to get down safely. After half an hour on the top, they started out on their west-east traverse. They took a different line on the face from the one they had just been using because they were very tired and the snow condition not so good. In the middle of the afternoon, they returned to their bivouac tent, stayed there an hour, then moved to a lower altitude to make a new bivouac on a small plateau at 7400 meters at 6:30 p.m. They were very weary, and there was no food and little cooking gas, so their supper consisted only of some biscuits with milk tea.

On the 17th they continued their return climb at about 6:30 a.m. They were still very tired, but at their bivouac of the 14th found their cache of food and gas; they spent two hours to have some food. Then back to Roc Noir and Camp 3, which they reached at 4:00 p.m. Here there was a proper camp with a tent and more food, and they could be more relaxed. The next day, they descended all the way to base camp at 4000 meters, where they arrived at the end of that morning.

Throughout their remarkable climb, they had used no bottled oxygen and experienced no accident or frostbite. "I was very happy," Lafaille said about his success on Annapurna after three previous attempts and his "bad experience" on its south face nearly ten years ago. (In October 1992, he and the noted French alpinist, Pierre Beghin, had been attempting an alpine-style ascent of the south face when Beghin fell to his death, and Lafaille's difficult solo descent developed into a nightmare when a falling rock shattered his right arm.)

A climb of an entirely different sort was made by two Americans who first had to explore their mountain's area to locate it and then to decide on the best line of attack. Jim Frush, president of the American Alpine Club, and Peter Ackroyd went exploring for an obscure 6110-meter peak called Gaugiri, which is in the Mustang district northwest of the Annapurna massif in the Damodar Himal range on the Tibetan border. They had gotten an idea of roughly where it was when they had previously trekked in Mustang, but no one had ever attempted to scale their peak and they could refer to no earlier team's photos, description of it or its exact location.

Gaugiri was added only last December to the list of peaks permitted by the Nepalese government to be climbed. It was among a total of 103 newly opened mountains, many of them unknown to mountaineers, ranging in altitude from 5407 meters to 7349 meters. The majority of them, 83, are between 6000 meters and 7000 meters high.

As they set out for Gaugiri from Kathmandu in mid-May, Ackroyd and Frush didn't know whether they would be attacking something that was technically difficult or an easy walk uphill. But first they had to find it. They took the best map available which had recently been produced by a detailed Japanese reconnaissance of the area,



but even this map proved to have put some nearby landmark lakes in the wrong place. However, they soon found Gaugiri without very great difficulty and were pleased to discover a southwest ridge that would definitely not be just a trek to the top. They decided to climb it.

From their base camp at about 5400 meters, they set out at 7:30 a.m. on 28 May in relatively good weather after some days of snowfall, and they quickly ascended the ridge successfully. Most of it was covered by good snow, but in some places there was loose rock. Its width varied from a narrow two feet (less than a meter) to a broader five feet (nearly two meters). Some sections were quite steep (between 45 and 55 degrees). The two men, unaccompanied by any Sherpas, were on their summit at 1:20 p.m., stayed an hour enjoying the view, and were back at base late the same afternoon (4:30-5:00 p.m.).

Frush described their ridge as “a nice long, classic route.” The mountain dominates its area as the high peak on a long southeast ridge, and its summit on the border with Tibet gave them dramatic views of the giant 8000er Dhaulagiri I to their southwest and a wide panoramic arc of Tibet in the east.

A new route was successfully forged on the Tibetan side of Everest’s 7161-meter neighbor Pumori. The noted Swiss mountaineer, Erhard Loretan, led a group of nine members, all but one also Swiss, in the first attempt of its north ridge. They made their base and advance base camps at the sites of the corresponding camps for climbs on the north side of Everest and then moved west into the Pumori Glacier to pitch their first high camp here at 5700 meters. They had to climb their long, steep ridge with care, Loretan said, up a section of loose rock followed by another of powder snow.

The expedition gained the summit in two parties. The first, Loretan and a Swiss member, went to the top on 7 May from their second high camp at 6050 meters, which was on the ridge itself. The next party of four more Swiss set up another camp on the ridge at 6700 meters on the 9th and summited the following day with Loretan, who had come up to their high camp early the same morning to go with them.

Two Americans, Mike Bearzi and Bruce Miller, planned to make the first attempt on the northeast face of 7952-meters-high Gyachung Kang, which is on the Tibetan border between Cho Oyu and Everest. But before attacking this mountain nearly 8000 meters high, they did some acclimatization climbs on several peaks in Tibet very close to it. On the last of these, the two men summited Ngozumba II, 7646 meters high via its west face on 9 May.

As they were descending in the late afternoon, Bearzi was slowing down noticeably. At about 7:00 o’clock, when Miller could see their bivouac below at 7000 meters, Bearzi, who was behind him, fell at a steep place and couldn’t stop himself. His fall ended 600 meters down to a spot on the glacier west of their route, Miller was able to discover two days later.

Plans to pioneer new routes to two other 7000-meter summits were not fulfilled. The goal of a four-man team, Steve House, an American and the leader, one other American, a Canadian and a Slovenian, was to climb another Everest neighbor, Nuptse, to a subsidiary summit known as Nuptse East I, which is 7804 meters high

on Nuptse's long summit ridge. One American injured his knee during an acclimatization climb and had to leave the team, but from a base camp at 5160 meters on the Lhotse Nup Glacier, the remaining trio moved up the south face in a series of three bivouacs on three successive days in mid-May. After surmounting a steep rock wall averaging 60 degrees on the first day and wading through deep soft snow on the second, they bivouacked the third night at 7200 meters.

On their fourth day on the mountain, the 18th of May, while the Canadian, Barry Blanchard, built up a camp at the site of their third bivouac, House and their Slovenian teammate, Marko Prezelj, scouted the line they should take up from there. They went about 100 meters above the bivouac and decided they had found a reasonable way up. But the weather was deteriorating with bitterly cold wind blowing and snow falling. The team now decided that they must retreat, and on the 19th they went down to base camp, descending by their route to its junction with the so-called Bonington route established by the spring 1961 British expedition and then went down that.

The most interesting climb of the winter 2001-2 season was a new line followed by a trio of Frenchmen on another peak in the Everest region, Kangtega, which is 6779 meters high southwest of Ama Dablam. Under the leadership of Christophe Profit, he, Olivier Besson and Andre Rhem made a rapid alpine-style climb of the east pillar to 6400 meters from a base camp at 5000 meters on the Hinku Nup Glacier.

Their pillar had never been attempted before, and for the first two days they encountered no very great difficulties. But above their second bivouac at 6300 meters, after they had moved another 100 meters to the shoulder, serious problems arose. The pillar ended at the shoulder, and now seracs threatened from above. Straight up from the shoulder were not only dangerous seracs, but also a rock step, where one needs special shoes for rock climbing, and mixed rock and ice in some places. They decided to make an easy traverse to the normal route on the southeast face, went to the top from there, and descended the face.

Insecurity for people throughout Nepal due to an armed rebellion by Maoists, who have become especially active in the more remote areas of the country, was encountered separately by two teams, one Swiss and the other Spanish and Italian, on their treks in April to Makalu base camp. It is not certain whether the teams met genuine Maoists or Nepalis posing as rebels, in any case but they were stopped by armed men who demanded money and cameras. No one was injured in these incidents, but they were certainly not pleasant experiences.

The six-member Spanish-Italian expedition, led by Miss Edurne Pasaban from Spain, had their encounter before they had reached Tashigaon, the last village on the trail to Makalu. Here six young men or boys armed with rifles, pistols and grenades, took Rs.5000 (worth about \$64) and a camera from each member.

The Swiss were just two men led by Norbert Joos, and they were stopped at Tashigaon itself. The Nepalis carried rifles but were not in Maoist uniforms; they demanded from each person Rs.10,000 plus one camera. They produced handwritten receipts, but the Kathmandu trekking agency helping this team told Joos that real

Maoist receipts are issued on printed forms and rubber-stamped, and that they had probably been robbed by some other people.

Trekking groups in remote areas of Nepal, notably in the far western hilly regions, have occasionally also been forced to surrender money and cameras to armed men claiming to be Maoist insurgents. As a result, the number of trekkers has dropped in recent seasons, especially this spring. Could climbers, too, go elsewhere in the future? Could the number of people dreaming of standing on the top of Everest decide to make their bids from Tibet, despite the fact that many prefer to climb from Nepal?

## **Summer-Autumn 2002: A Noted French Snowboarder's Death**

### **While Descending Everest**

The most notable events of the autumn climbing season occurred when a French snowboarder went missing while going down Everest; five expeditions made first ascents of peaks over 6000 meters high which had been opened by the Nepalese authorities to mountaineers since the spring of 2001; and teams approaching their mountains in three widely scattered parts of Nepal suddenly met up with armed men – Chinese soldiers, in one case – but no one was harmed in these encounters. There was also a notable non-event: not one climber died on an expedition inside Nepal.

Marc (Marco) Siffredi, the well-known 23-year-old French professional snowboarder from Chamonix, came to Mount Everest this autumn to snowboard down two couloirs on the giant mountain's north side. This was to be his second descent by a "tray," as a snowboard is slangily called; his first was achieved in May last year, when he made Everest's first snowboard descent. His route then took him down the Great Couloir (or Norton Couloir). Now he wanted to descend a different northern route, the Hornbein and "Japanese" couloirs.

As usual, very few expeditions attempted to scale Everest this autumn. Of the five who came from France, Canada, Brazil, Japan and South Korea, only Siffredi and his three strong Sherpas were successful in reaching its summit. The Sherpas survived, but tragically Siffredi did not.

Siffredi, Panuru Sherpa, Phurba Tashi Sherpa and Da Tenzing Sherpa arrived at the top at 2:00 p.m. Nepalese time on 8 September via the standard North Col-north ridge route. They had used artificial oxygen slogging through chest-deep snow and consumed a total of 22 bottles of it in their final push to the summit from camp 2's relatively low altitude of 7700 meters in order to keep warm. The weather at the top was fine, but Siffredi had to wait for clouds below him to disperse.

One hour later, with weather and snow conditions perfect, Siffredi launched himself for a descent that he had expected would take him just one hour to the foot of the mountain at 5800 meters, where he had pitched a camp below the Japanese couloir. At the same time his Sherpas began their own descent on foot by the route they had ascended and reached advance base camp at 6400 meters at 10:00 p.m. that night unaware of what had happened to Siffredi.

What had happened was that he had disappeared. With binoculars from advance base camp, he was seen starting his descent. His track in the snow was clearly visible to 8600 meters, but no trace whatsoever of him, his snowboard or his track was visible anywhere beyond that point. One would immediately guess that he might have plunged into a crevasse, but there are no crevasses where his trail ended. No one knows what became of him. He simply vanished.

Snow conditions that were good for snowboarding were not good for other teams on both north and south sides of Everest and on other mountains. They made climbing very difficult for a noted Russian mountaineer, Valeri Babanov, 37, in his unsuccessful attempt at a solo ascent of a pillar on the south face of Nuptse, the

lengthy mountain that stands immediately south of Everest. His aim was to make the first ascent of one of its eastern summits, which presents such difficulties that it was described as “only for Babanov” by Vladislav Terzyul, a highly successful Ukrainian climber who has summited 12 of the world’s fourteen 8000-meter mountains, including Dhaulagiri I just this autumn (see below.)

Babanov arrived at his base camp on the Lhotse Nup Glacier at 5200 meters on 19 September, but was prevented by new snowfall and avalanching from starting up the mountain until the 29th. His original plan was to fix 500 meters of rope on the lower part of the pillar, then go to acclimatize on the 1961 British south face route to an altitude of 6900 meters before making his push for the top of the pillar in three or four days. He said before leaving Kathmandu for this climb that he expected it to be “the most challenging climb I have ever done.” He would have to scale a vertical distance of 2500 meters – 600-700 meters of it highly technical and then big mushrooms above that – from base camp to his goal, the summit known as Nuptse East I, which is 7795 meters high on Nuptse’s east ridge and only 60 meters lower than the main summit.

However, he had no official permit to climb the 1961 south face route as well as his pillar, so he devoted himself entirely to the pillar. He actually fixed 1000 meters of rope until his supply was exhausted. He spent days moving up and down the pillar, fixing rope and spending some nights in a bivouac he established on 7 October at 5900 meters and other nights at base camp. He calculated that during the ten or more trips he took up his route he climbed a total of about 1500 meters, reaching some of the same points many times, and still he would need to fix 200 more meters to overcome the steepest section, known as “le Diable” (the Devil), before attempting to go for the summit.

Babanov reached an altitude of 6300 meters at the bottom of the Diable on 26 October, four weeks after he had begun his attack the pillar. He now had no more rope and “was very, very tired,” strong winds had started blowing, and he had other commitments elsewhere. So he abandoned the climb. He wants to return next autumn but not solo: he would like one friend to come with him, partly so he would not have to carry up the pillar all the rope and other gear needed to scale this very technical route.

Dhaulagiri I had five expeditions, some of them very small, by the normal northeast-ridge route. One of these was a two-man team of Vladislav Terzyul, Ukrainian, and Vladimir Pestrikov, Russian, who had no Sherpas or bottled oxygen to help them to reach the 8167-meter summit, but they were the only successful climbers. The other teams from France, Germany and Spain got no higher than 7600 meters in early October and then gave up their climbs because of fresh snowfall over a number of days. But the eastern European pair stayed on, and they managed to gain the top on 17 October.

Terzyul and Pestrikov arrived at base camp after the other teams, who unluckily came too early in a year when the summer monsoon ended a bit late. On the mountain, the eastern Europeans followed the common practice in the Caucasus of setting up high altitude camps in snow caves, which are more spacious and warmer

than tents and much better protected from the wind. Only at their third and final high camp at 7500 meters did they pitch a tent, and it was placed in a crevasse. They also had brought snowshoes with them, and these they used in their climb below camp 3; snowshoes make progress slow, they said, but it was not possible to move without them. Above camp 3, the snow was not deep and snowshoes were not needed.

On 16 October, days after the other teams had already returned unsuccessful to Kathmandu, the two men went up the northeast ridge to what they discovered was a false summit at 8000 m. They were very disappointed to see that the highest summit was still above them, and most climbers would now have descended and made a traverse onto the north face to follow the standard route. But there was serious avalanching on the face, as the earlier parties had discovered, so Terzyul and Pestrikov decided to keep to the ridge all the way to the top.

They started up again from camp 3 on the 17th before 5:00 a.m., before the sun had risen. They moved as quickly as possible because they saw that a big storm was coming in from the east over Annapurna. They went again to the false summit and then on up to the topmost point, where they arrived at 3:00 p.m. They got back to camp 3 at 6:00 p.m. in wind, snowfall and poor visibility. The following day, it took them at least ten hours to descend to camp 2 at 6800 meters because of avalanching; normally it would have taken only one hour to get there. One day after that, on the 19th, they had planned to go all the way to base camp but were forced to pitch a tent at 5700 meters – in the icefall above camp. It was not until 2:00 p.m. on the 20th that they finally arrived safely at base.

Eastern Europeans have a reputation for patiently waiting out periods of bad weather and then moving when others choose not to. These Dhaulagiri summiters' explanation of why they stayed longer than the other teams was that funds for an expedition to a Himalayan mountain are very difficult to raise in their part of the world, and they probably would not have been able to finance another expedition to the same peak.

Since May 2001, the Nepalese government has opened 125 additional mountains for expedition climbing in an effort to attract increasing numbers of climbers. Five of them, all 6000ers in the Kangchenjunga, Everest and Mustang regions, were successfully scaled this autumn in first ascents by teams from Denmark, Germany, France and Slovenia, and a sixth, also in Mustang, was successfully climbed during the summer.

The goal of a team of four Danes led by Henrik Hansen was to do some exploratory climbing amongst a group of three 6000-meter peaks in northeastern Nepal near Kangchenjunga which no one had attempted before, and they were well satisfied with their results, for in pure alpine style ascents they had managed to find successful routes up two of them. They did it all in only three weeks with just one fixed camp which was their base of operations at Lonak, 4785 meters above sea level. From there they sallied forth and bivouacked as they progressed. They had no Sherpas climbing with them and they fixed no ropes.

The Danes first attempted Tinjung, 6250 meters high, from the east but dangerous avalanching forced them to abandon the mountain only about 115 meters

from the summit. Henrik now had flu, but his three teammates, Allan and Bo Christensen and Jan Mathorne, turned their attention to 6850-meters-high Pandra; its rock-and-snow south face presented difficulties because of its steepness, but they reached the top in two days' climb. Finally, all four members went to the south face of their third peak, Danga, 6355 meters high, and another two days of climbing saw all but Hansen on this summit as well.

Two teams attacked recently-opened mountains in the Everest area. Three Slovenian climbers made the first known ascent of Peak 41, which is sometimes called "the real Mera Peak." It is 6649 meters high north-northeast of the frequently-climbed lower Mera Peak, a so-called "trekking peak." The six-man expedition, with no climbing Sherpas, pitched their base camp on the Hinku Glacier near its southern end and made their advance base camp northeast of there at 5600 meters on the Khare Glacier at the bottom of the west face. Fixing no ropes during their ascent, Leader Matija Jost, Urban Golob and Uros Samec climbed the face, made one bivouac on the face 900 meters higher after 19 hours of climbing, and from there followed the north ridge to the top on the 16th of October.

They reported that the face was difficult technically, but the main problem was the loose snow above it. However, their first serious difficulty was to reach the Khare Glacier plateau where they set up their advance base; they encountered a steep climb to get to it, a problem complicated by broken seracs in the icefall that block a direct line to the top. They were forced to go up and over a rocky section at the southwest foot of an unnamed 6091-meter peak and down onto the glacier. The other three members at the same time tried to scale the mountain via its north ridge directly from advance base, but were stopped at 6000 meters by "terrible" deep powder snow.

The Slovenians were the third or fourth expedition to attempt to scale Peak 41. Two previous ones, from Japan in the spring of 1998 and from Finland and the United States two years later, also attacked from the west face. The 2000 team, led by Petri Kaipianen, believed that the icefall could not be bypassed. Climbing alpine style, they carried heavy loads on their backs, and this slowed their progress up its broken mess of crevasses and seracs to just 180 vertical meters per day. They had already lost a few days to heavy snowfall, and at 5200 meters, after spending a night listening to the cracking and groaning of the icefall and ice avalanches falling down on both sides, they concluded this route was proving to be too slow and dangerous and abandoned their climb.

Slightly higher than Peak 41 is Numri, also in Khumbu, south of Cho Polu and east of Chhukung village. Its first ascent was now accomplished in the first attempt on this 6677-meter mountain, which is close to a "trekking peak," Imjatse or Island Peak, by a German team led by Olaf Rieck.

The seven-member expedition establish their base camp at 5140 meters on the Imja Glacier south of Island Peak. They made two camps above that, and from camp 2 in a snow cave at 6185 meters, three climbers, Rieck, Carsten Schmidt and Miss Lydia Schubert, ascended the west face to the summit on the 7th of November. Their team also had no Sherpas climbing with them, but they did fix a total of 800 meters of rope in sections above 6000 meters.

There was considerable danger from avalanches on the face, and one member's backpack was struck by a chunk of falling ice when he was at about 5900 meters, but he was unharmed. Slightly higher up, a large part of a glacier broke away with a loud crash, but again no one was hurt. The climbers had problems with deep snow in several places along their route with no good anchors; the average steepness was 30 degrees.

A cluster of new peaks is in the Damodar Himal in the western Nepal district of Mustang north of the Annapurna range. One of them, 6346-meters-high Poharkan, was the goal of two expeditions: one, a Japanese and his two Sherpas via the north face, and the other, seven Britons plus a Dane and their three Sherpas, up the south face to the east summit and then along the east ridge. Both were successful.

The Japanese, Koichi Kato, said his ascent was easy after 400 meters of rope had been fixed along the sloping snow face, which had some crevasses above 6000 meters. He and Panima Sherpa were on the summit on 31 October in the mountain's first ascent.

The predominantly British team, led by Stephen Town, forged a new route as they completed the mountain's second ascent on 17 November. Their line of attack was not nearly so easy as the north face; it required serious climbing up steep snow and ice above 5800 meters, where they fixed 150 meters of rope; it required the use of an ice axe in each hand to surmount it. Five members reached the east summit, a small plateau where the snow was waist-deep, but only two of them, Martin Scott and David Wynne-Jones, plus a highly experienced Sherpa named Kaji, who scaled Everest five times, carried on, down the east ridge 100 meters and then up to the main summit.

The summer's first ascent in Mustang's Damodar Himal was made by one Japanese, Tomotsu Onishi, Ang Phurba Sherpa and Ang Phurba's wife, Mrs. Dikki Sherpa, who found the 6039-meter Arniko Chuli an "easy walk" via its rocky west ridge. They pitched their base camp at the north end of the Nallkham Khola just south of the Tibetan border at 5562 meters on 8 July. The next day, they went up to Chanagor Bhajang (Pass) at 5665 m. on the border and returned to base. On 10 July, the three left base at 8:55 a.m., reached the pass at 9:30 a.m., left it at 9:45 a.m., ascended the west ridge, which runs up the border, reached the summit between 10:50 a.m. and 12:00 noon, and were back in base camp 55 minutes later. The ridge had presented no technical difficulties.

In the autumn, a two-man American expedition planned to make the first ascent of another newly-opened mountain, Nagpai (or Nangpai) Gosum I, which is in the Cho Oyu-Everest area, but they never got above base camp. Dave Morton and Jeff Lamoureux unexpectedly encountered three soldiers from China who had come into Nepal via the Nangpa La, a major pass between Nepal and the Tibetan region of China.

The climbers had pitched their base camp at 5100 meters at the foot of the southeast face of their 7312-meters-high mountain, and then on the 20th of September went around to its west side intending to look for a possible descent route via the north ridge. The Nagpai Gosum range is just south of the Tibet-Nepal border,



if not actually on it, and the western end of Nagpai Gosum I is not far from the 5700-meters-high Nangpa La.

Suddenly they were fired on by two men who turned out to be Chinese soldiers; it was the first incident of this kind ever to befall any mountaineers within Nepalese territory. The Americans were unharmed, but they immediately abandoned any thought of climbing their mountain. "It was scarier than any climbing I've ever done," Lamoureux said about their experience. Added Morton, "It was hard to figure out what their motive was, which made it more frightening."

Morton told how "a shot came at us and just missed us. We heard the bullet go right past our ears. ... We started running and there was another shot. We hid behind a rock and ditched our backpacks so we could run faster, then kept running. It seemed clear they were actually shooting towards us. There were about five shots total at us." The Chinese appeared to keep pursuing the Americans, who managed to escape by turning up a side glacier and hiding for several hours behind rocks. They then got safely to base camp, packed up their gear and spent the night hiking down to the nearest village, Thame.

On the other side of the border not far from the Nangpa La were the tents of Cho Oyu expeditions' advance base camps, and one of the leaders who were there at the time, Russell Brice, a New Zealander, explained the background to the incident: three soldiers of the Chinese army, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), were searching for a group of about 20 Amdos, Tibetans from northwest Tibet. Since the Nangpa La is an important escape route for Tibetans fleeing their country, usually to pass through Nepal to join the Dalai Lama in northern India, a unit of the PLA is permanently posted close to Cho Oyu base camp on a highway.

The three soldiers found a woman lying down near the pass; she probably was a decoy, for when they went to look at her closely, they were unexpectedly attacked by Amdos, who hit them over the head with rocks and stole two of their guns before escaping across the pass into Nepal. The three soldiers, two of whom were Tibetans themselves while only one was Han Chinese, chased after them the next day. The night after that the two Tibetan soldiers came back across the Nangpa La and slept in one of Brice's advance base camp tents. They had no sleeping bags, warm clothing or food.

On the third day, 15 to 20 more soldiers arrived at advance base camp looking for the same group of Amdos. Some searched the moraine, some went to the Nangpa La and returned to advance base. Three of them spent the night in Brice's tent and the rest slept in tents of a joint Japanese-Chinese/Tibetan women's Cho Oyu expedition. Next day the soldiers went back to their encampment by the road.

Later that morning shots were heard at advance base camp. They were fired by the Han Chinese soldier from the original trio who was now crawling, dragging himself through the snow and firing to attract attention. Brice, his Sherpas and some Tibetans employed as Sherpas by the women's expedition went to investigate and brought the unfortunate soldier into camp. Brice speculates that the two Americans had been shot at by Amdos in crossfire with the PLA men.

Not quite so dramatic were the encounters by two expeditions, one in the Kangchenjunga area in far eastern Nepal and the other in the west on their way to Putha Hiunchuli, which is sometimes called Dhaulagiri VII. These teams were stopped by armed Nepalis who may have been Maoist rebels fighting against the constitutional monarchy with the aim of replacing it with a “people’s republic,” or they may have been just bandits taking advantage of the well-known presence of Maoists in those areas.

The Putha Hiunchuli team of ten Austrians led by Gunther Mussnig were stopped when they were approaching their mountain from the north in late September at a village named Kakkot by about 25 local people whom Mussing called “Maoist-friendly.” They refused to let the expedition enter their Kaya Khola valley, where base camp would be established, unless they were paid Rs.100,000 (equal to about \$1280); when the Austrians refused, they were kept at Kakkot for a day and a half. They were not freed until Rs.67,000 were handed over.

In eastern Nepal, a predominantly Slovenian expedition for Ramtang Chang (formerly known as Wedge Peak) and Kiratchuli (Tent Peak) near Kangchenjunga were similarly held up. Their leader, Gregor Kresal, and another member flew by helicopter to their base camp with the team’s funds while the other ten members trekked towards the mountains from the Taplejung airfield. One day’s trek north of the airport at Chhiruwa village, they were stopped by four armed men who villagers thought probably were Maoists. The men said they knew the team had paid the Nepalese government \$3000 for their climbing permits, and demanded a payment of this sum plus their own “tax” on each member. The climbers explained that they had no money since all the funds had gone ahead by helicopter.

After being locked up in a small lodge for a short time, their captors reduced their demand to a total of only Rs.8000 (\$103), but the team could not meet even this price. They were allowed to proceed on their way to base camp but were told they would have to pay on their return trek to Taplejung. This expense was avoided by the entire expedition’s chartering a helicopter out of the region from a village well north of the airfield. The cost of avoiding Taplejung by hiring a helicopter to Kathmandu was \$6500, whereas they would have had to spend only about \$2000-2500 to trek to the local airfield and fly by a scheduled fixed-wing flight from there.

These expeditions’ encounters were not the first by mountaineers in Nepal. The earlier ones occurred in the autumn of 2000 to a Spanish Manaslu team, and in the spring of this year to two Makalu expeditions, one Swiss and the other a joint Spanish-Italian party. No doubt they will not be the last, but it is most unlikely that any teams in the immediate Everest region will be affected, at least in the next few years.

## **Spring 2003: Everest Dominates the Climbing Scene**

### **A South Pillar of Nuptse Defeats Two Noted Mountaineers**

It seemed the whole world's attention was focused on Mount Everest this spring to mark the 50th anniversary of its first ascent. Not only climbing magazines but also periodicals of general interest devoted pages or even entire issues to it, and new books were published.

Nepalese organizations including the government sponsored a series of events over several months which included a marathon from base camp, a kyaking race and, on the anniversary day, 29 May, a program of speeches and dinner in the capital. All Everest summiters were invited to come to Kathmandu to attend the program, and one of the city's best hotels offered considerably reduced rates for their rooms. A few notables such as Sir Edmund Hillary, Reinhold Messner, Junko Tabei, and the first person to scale Everest 13 times, Apa Sherpa, were given VVIP treatment: they were driven around the streets of Kathmandu one hot morning in open horse-drawn carriages, and they were received on separate occasions by King Gyanendra and Crown Prince Paras.

The King conferred honorary Nepalese citizenship on Hillary in recognition not only of his pioneer ascent with the late Tenzing Norgay Sherpa, but also for his tireless work over the following decades in bettering the lives of the people living in the Everest region with the construction of schools and hospitals and renovations of Buddhist monasteries. Hillary is the first foreigner ever to be made an honorary citizen.

On the mountain itself, were half of the 137 expeditions attempting to climb any Nepalese Himalayan peak over about 6500 meters. The Everest teams numbered 35 on Nepal's side and 34 on the Tibetan slopes, and all but two of them attempted the standard routes via the South Col and southeast ridge from Nepal and by the North Col to the north face and north ridge. (By comparison, the largest previous numbers in the millennium spring of 2000 were just 27 on Nepal's side and 29 on the Tibetan side.)

Neither of the two expeditions to non-standard routes succeeded, but one demonstrated that it is still possible to find on Everest an unclimbed route and even perhaps a previously unattempted one. Ian Woodall, a Briton, and his wife Cathy O'Dowd, South African, both of whom had already summited Everest from its south and north sides, went with just one climbing Sherpa to the huge east face to try to forge a totally new route on the east face in Tibet. They had chosen one of three ribs between the so-called American buttress, near the south end of the vast face, and the east ridge in its middle.

But when the couple reached base camp, they found massive avalanching of hanging seracs in the area of the ribs and concluded that an attempt there would require a fast, non-stop alpine-style effort, which they were not prepared to make. So they tackled the east ridge, a forbiddingly steep and difficult feature which had defeated the two teams who tried it previously. They chose as their approach a snow

ramp leading to the ridge from its southern side. However, Ms. O'Dowd and Ang Gyalzen Sherpa gave up at an altitude of just 5800 meters on the ramp, 200 meters below the ridge. They had not brought gear to fix rope in deep snow, and after Woodall had become ill, only two climbers were still active.

In terms of numbers of climbers, expeditions ranged from just one independent individual on someone else's permit to nearly 80 members and Sherpas with a joint expedition from the Indian and Nepalese armies to both Everest and its immediate neighbor, Lhotse. Men and women came from all over the world: Iceland, Estonia, Georgia, Andorra, Bhutan, Kuwait, South Africa, New Zealand and Ecuador, as well as from the usual countries such as the U.S., Britain, Spain and Japan.

There might have been even more. A London newspaper reported that a British team had been forced to cancel their plans to go to the north side because by the time they wanted to reach Everest in early May, a rather late date, the Chinese government had already closed Tibet to all entrants in late April in order to prevent the acute respiratory illness known as SARS from spreading into Tibet. A few Romanians also were refused entry to join a team already there. (The border was reopened on 1 July.) And when Hillary heard about plans by two New Zealand and two British skiers and skateboarders to race down the mountain from 7000 meters to mark the anniversary of his ascent, he described the idea as "rather dangerous... and not appropriate." They did not turn up.

At base camp at the Nepalese foot of the mountain was a sizable village of tents housing 441 climbers on the 35 Everest teams, plus their base camps staffs, members and Sherpas on other expeditions, 10 for Lhotse's west face and one for Nuptse's north side, bringing the total expedition personnel to at least 600. And then there were the staffs of a satellite communications tent, several small cafes, a medical clinic, a massage parlor for a brief time, some shops selling soap and t-shirts, plus numerous trekking groups. The total population at base camp perhaps occasionally reached the same figure as the entire population of the area's largest village, Namche Bazar, which is about 850.

Reinhold Messner paid a visit to base camp and was appalled by the scene. He noted that tents stretched for one kilometer from the bottom end to the top, and that the cafes were well patronized by the Sherpa "Icefall doctors" who were trying to forget their dangerous daily task of repairing the Khumbu Icefall route as seracs toppled over and crevasses widened.

At the start of the season there was grave concern that with narrow sections of the routes and small campsites over-crowded, and with many of the men and women climbers not really skilled, there could be a repetition of the disaster of May 1996, when 11 people perished in a sudden storm. Very fortunately this did not happen.

Climbers on the Nepalese side did complain this spring of having to wait a long time to go up or down the Hillary Step, where there were many others ahead of them in the queue: one leader reported that it had taken his summit party on 26 May two and a half hours to climb the fairly short distance from the south summit to the top, whereas it would normally have taken them only one hour. An American who

frequently leads teams on the south side of Everest believed that the competence of this spring's climbers was lower than before, and he cited the specific case of members belonging to a Japanese expedition as being "really, really slow."

On the Tibetan side, climbers had similar complaints. A Swiss expedition leader said that when he and his group on their way to the top reached 8600 meters, near the bottom of the Second Step, he could see 15 climbers ahead waiting to go up the ladder on the Step; clouds were rolling in and the wind was getting stronger, so he decided to retreat out of fear of a repetition of 1996. He noted that many of the climbers from other teams who did carry on to the top returned with frostbite or snow-blindness or even a broken leg, and he was very happy with his decision; his party descended safely and in good health.

Other climbers on the north side during their summit bids a few days before the Swiss were forced to climb up or down much more slowly than they were capable of doing because of the inexperienced people blocking their way. Another problem created by the novices was falling discarded oxygen bottles, which had been carelessly dumped in soft snow; when the snow melted, the bottles fell, and a skilled American mountaineer had to leave for home after being hit on the back of his head by one of them.

The number of people who actually died on Everest this spring was remarkably low considering the large number who were on the mountain. Those who perished were just one Pole, Krzysztof Liszewski, who fell to his death, perhaps blown off balance by the wind, one Nepalese summiter on the Indo-Nepalese army team, Bhim Bahadur Gurung, who was a victim of altitude sickness and fell into a crevasse in the Khumbu Icefall, the 20th person ever to die in the Icefall, and Karma Gyalzen Sherpa who succumbed to altitude sickness.

Some noted mountaineers, including Hillary and Messner, have publicly voiced their strong view that the numbers of people given permits to climb Everest should be greatly restricted for a variety of reasons: safety of others, pollution of the mountain with abandoned oxygen cylinders, broken tents, and other kinds of rubbish, the belief that climbers on Everest, or perhaps any mountain, should be limited to preserve the adventure of their accomplishment. Some urge that only climbers who have already had the experience of summiting at least one 8000-er (peaks over 8000 meters) be allowed to attempt Everest.

Disagreement with the idea of limiting the numbers of Everest climbers was cogently put in an article in a May issue of **Time** magazine by the blind American summiter of 2001, Erik Weihenmayer (who would have been disqualified under a rule requiring an earlier 8000-meter success). He wrote:

"Many climbers argue that Everest is no longer an epochal achievement and that the conga lines of climbers waiting for a shot at the summit are degrading a once pristine environment. In Hillary's day, teams of top climbers were handpicked by prestigious bodies such as the Royal Geographical Society. Today, an overweight globe-trotter with more money than experience and a little-known blind guy have equal access. The door to Everest's slopes has been blown wide open, and some critics speak of the death of great adventures."

“But Everest’s history is the modern world’s history, with all its challenges and abuses, and the unparalleled opportunities for human endeavor. ... We cannot step back and close the mountain, for retreat would annihilate the modern age’s greatest gift to humanity: the freedom of an individual to choose his own path.”

By no means everyone was successful this spring: one-third of the 69 teams did not make it to the top. A long period of very bad weather with fierce winds and considerable amounts of snowfall resulted in many tents being destroyed, supplies of food and gear being irretrievably buried, people losing top strength over the days and weeks on the mountain, and time running out. A number of these groups simply gave up and went home instead of waiting patiently for better weather.

Nevertheless, a record number of mountaineers did succeed when weather finally permitted. From the 20th to the 31st of May, an astonishing 260 people, foreigners and Nepalese, men, women and one 15-year-old child, stood on the summit of Everest. It had not been until October 1988, 25 years after the first ascent, that the 260th person reached the summit.

On just one day in 2003, the 22nd of May, 114 summited. From the Nepalese side, there were 66 on the top that day, while 46 came up from Tibet. Before this season, the largest on a single day was 89 on 23 May, 2001 (47 from the south and 42 from the north), and during that month of May 182 from both sides.

Notable amongst the men and women who succeeded were:

- The first Arab, Zaid Aasa Al-Refa’i, a Kuwaiti. This had been his second time to Everest; two years ago, he had not been able to acclimatize properly and fell seriously ill as a result.
- The first black from any country, Sibusiso Vilane of South Africa. He said he did his climb to show other black people that they can do it too. “It was very exciting to be the first black on the summit ...I am very proud.” He added that he would like to climb another 8000-meter mountain, and this one he would do for himself.
- The first one-armed person, an American, Gary Guller, who found his biggest problem was keeping his balance, especially when descending the Hillary Step, since he had no left arm or prosthesis to help steady him. (A Sherpa who has no hands, Ungdi Tshering, got no higher than 7300 meters, but claims he is sure he will be able to get to the top if he can find sponsorship for another attempt.)
- The oldest summitter at the age of 70, Yuichiro Miura, a Japanese who became famous in 1970 as the “man who skied down Everest” when he made a dramatic partial ski descent. In his climb to the top, he used a considerable amount of artificial oxygen: he started on it in the evening of 16 May while sleeping in Camp II in the Western Cwm at 6400 meters, and throughout the rest of his ascent for both climbing and sleeping in successively higher camps including a rarely-pitched camp at 8400 meters just below “the balcony,” to the top on 22 May, and down again to Camp II. Miura was five years older than the oldest person before him.

- The youngest, Miss Mingkipa Sherpa, who said she was only 15 years and 9 months old. The previous record-holder was a Nepalese Sherpa boy, Tashi Tshiri, who was just over 16 years old when he summited in May 2001.
- The first person to reach the top for the 13th time, Apa Sherpa, who is 42 years old. He made his first ascent in May 1990, summited every year after that except in 1996 and 2001, and went to the top twice in 1992. He says he may go to Everest again since this is how he earns a living.
- The fastest ascent – in fact two of them in just four days – on the Nepalese side by Pemba Dorje Sherpa on 21/22 May and by Lhakpa Gelu on the 25th/26th. Both used bottled oxygen in the final stage of their climbs. Lhakpa Gelu climbed alone, while Pemba Dorje had a friend with him from the South Col. They were challenging the previous speed record for an ascent on the Nepalese side set by another Sherpa, Babu Chiri (Tshering), who reported he had summited on 21 May, 2000, 16 hours, 56 minutes after he had left base camp the evening before.

Pemba Dorje said it took him just 12 hours and 45 minutes to climb from bottom to top. Lhakpa Gelu said he himself spent only 10 hours and 56 minutes to do the entire ascent. Pemba Dorje charged Lhakpa Gelu with lying about his timings and continued to insist in statements to Nepal's tourism ministry and to the press that he had made the fastest ascent. Lhakpa Gelu countered with his own statement to the ministry with supporting documents. The government's liaison officer posted at base camp had recorded the time he set out from there at the start of his ascent; Apa Sherpa noted the time at which he himself reached the top, and Lhakpa Gelu, Apa confirmed, had been there not much later. The ministry's verdict was not given immediately, but no one doubts Apa's evidence.

Lhakpa Gelu set up a brass Nepalese flag on an iron pole at the summit. As long as it stands, it can provide proof of success for anyone having a photo taken of himself standing next to it, as the 1975 Chinese tripod did for many summiters for nearly a decade and as Lhakpa Gelu's flag did this spring.

Pemba Dorje says next goal is an historic double traverse of Everest next year. He would climb to the top via the South Col and southeast ridge, descend via the north face-North Col route to the foot of the mountain, climb back up via this same route to the summit and down the southeast ridge-South Col route to base camp. But he has no sponsor yet for this project.

- Another first, but on a much less serious note: the first person to play a guitar on the summit, Vernon Tejas from the U.S. He strummed his 1.4-kg. instrument very briefly.

Immediately to the south of Everest is the jagged Mt. Nuptse, which has numerous peaks with no easy access to them from its southern flanks. By coincidence, two noted highly skilled European mountaineers, Hans Kammerlander from Italy's South Tirol and Valeri Babanov of Russia, came this spring to attempt first ascents of south pillars that lead directly to the 7795-meter peak known as Nuptse East I. Both lines are technically extremely demanding.

Kammerlander led a team of five compatriots plus two climbing Sherpas, but they arrived rather late and got no higher than 6880 meters on a previously unattempted, slightly different route from that of Babanov, and his team then had no time left to start their climb over again after winds had destroyed their tents. Babanov had made an unsuccessful solo attempt in the autumn of 2002 on his line; this time he had one teammate, but no Sherpa, to help carry the large amount of rope needed to be fixed in order to succeed. They came earlier and stayed later than the Italians, but after having reached 7450 meters, they finally abandoned their efforts because of too much snowfall, their exhaustion, and lack of time to get well rested before resuming the climb. Kammerlander wants to return next spring to his line; Babanov, who now knows his route well, hopes to finish it this autumn.

First and second ascents were made of a 7000-meter mountain in the Everest area that was recently opened by the Nepalese authorities for mountaineers. Mt. Hunchi, 7036 meters high, was approached from Gokyo and the Ngozumba Glacier by Japanese and South Korean expeditions in early April. Both teams gained the top by the southwest ridge, but the Japanese, who were led by Takashi Shiro and who summited just five days before the Koreans, got onto the ridge via the south face, while the Koreans, under the leadership of Koo Kyoung-Mo, ascended the west face to reach the same ridge.

The two teams fixed a grand total of 6300 meters of rope up their separate lines and on to the top. Said the Japanese leader, "It looks so easy, but there are many difficulties" on his route over snow and ice with patches of exposed rock all the way from his advance base camp to the summit, and for the Koreans, there was a very steep (70-80 degree) rock face to overcome. The Koreans also found that a small 90-degree snow-covered wall at the highest section of the route was a problem.

Well to the west of Hunchi's region, a German team led by Goetz Wiegand made first ascents of two 6000-meter mountains north-northeast of Dhaulagiri I, across "Hidden Valley," before making their successful bid to scale the 8000-er itself. These first climbs, of an unnamed peak 6195 meters high and then of 6386-meter Tashi Kang, were partly for acclimatization, partly for pure adventure.

The unnamed peak was not hard to ascend, they reported, but their route up Tashi Kang was a very difficult via a steep, sharp, rocky southwest ridge broken by crevasses leading to the southeast ice ridge at a 60-degree angle. Commented Wiegand, "It was a very interesting climb that was constantly changing up difficult terrain with crevasses and even a small face to climb."



## **Summer-Autumn 2003: 1st Ascents Made of Recently Opened Mountains**

### **Babanov Achieved 1st Ascent of an East Peak of Nuptse**

#### **Maoist Continued Extorting Funds From Climbers**

Responding to the Nepalese government's attempts during the past two years to disperse expeditions over more regions of the country and to take pressure off others in traditional areas like Khumbu by opening additional peaks to be climbed, climbers from the U.S., Canada, Britain, Denmark, France, Austria, the Czech Republic and Japan made attempts on these mountains, which ranged in altitude from 6005 to 7590 meters. Several teams succeeded in achieving first ascents of mountains of these "new" peaks while others scored firsts on mountains already permitted. One of the most notable amongst the autumn's successes on earlier-permitted peaks was that of Russia's Valeri Babanov on an east summit of Nuptse in his third try.

However, despite the Nepalese authorities' efforts to entice climbers to go to far-flung regions, half of the autumn's 123 expeditions went to just two mountains, only one of which was climbed inside Nepal. This one was Ama Dablam with 27 teams consisting of between one to 21 members each. Cho Oyu, which is on the border but, as almost always, was climbed from its Tibetan side only, had 36 teams, ranging in size from one to 24 members.

Cho Oyu can expect even more teams next autumn to mark the 50th anniversary of its first ascent on 19 October, 1954 by two Austrians, Herbert Tichy – whose name is often used to identify what is now the normal route – and Sepp Joechler, plus Pasang Dawa Lama from India.

Amongst the 150 summiters on Cho Oyu was the veteran Spanish Basque, Juanito Oyarzabal, who set an impressive record by having successfully been to the highest summits of all 14 of the world's 8000-meters-high mountains a total of twenty times, including two ascents of Everest (in 1993 and 2001 by different routes). He had already summited Cho Oyu twice before (in 1985 and 2002), and now again he was on the top, not just once but twice, 14 days apart. Already far into the fifth decade of his life, he says he has no plans to stop.

Oyarzabal's two Cho Oyu ascents this autumn put him ahead of the only other person with a record of 18 times. Previously he was even with Ang Rita Sherpa, who, before his retirement from mountaineering, summited Everest ten times, Cho Oyu four times, Dhaulagiri I three times and Kangchenjunga once, giving him a total score of 18 at the end of 1996.

All Cho Oyu and Ama Dablam teams were on the standard routes this autumn. But on Annapurna III, a new route was successfully pioneered by a British-American team. First ascents on new lines included those pioneered by Babanov and a teammate on Nuptse's East Summit, by French on a far western peak in the small mountain range called Raksha Urai, and, on two newly opened peaks, by a four-

nation group on Kyashar (Peak 43) in Khumbu and two Americans on Saribung in the Mustang region.

In stark contrast to the spring season, when 69 teams swarmed on the north and south sides of Everest, there was only one expedition on the entire mountain in the summer and just one other in the autumn, both of them American, and both with plans for ski and snowboard descents. Unfavorable snow conditions thwarted their plans.

The summer team consisted of just two climbing members, Jimmy Chin, the skier, and Stephen Koch, the snowboarder, plus two climbing Sherpas. They were on Tibet's north face with the intention of climbing to the 8850-meters-high summit via a direct line up the Japanese and Hornbein Couloirs and descending the same route. But they went no higher than 7000 meters, near the top of the Japanese Couloir, in increasingly deep snow not less than knee-high. Having climbed through the night, they turned around at 8:30 a.m. on the 10th of September when their progress had become much too slow.

This autumn on the standard South Col-southeast ridge route, five Americans led by Wally Berg plus six Sherpas had not only a problem with the snow but also with the wind. One member, professional skier Miss Maegan Carney, who holds the world extreme ski championship title, was on Everest to ski down it. However, when she and the others reached camp 2 in the Western Cwm at 6400 meters on 22 September, she decided that there was too much snow accumulation, too great a danger from avalanching and too strong winds for a safe and successful complete ski descent.

Miss Carney had no interest in waiting for conditions to improve and left the mountain immediately. Another member followed several weeks later, while the remaining trio including Berg stayed through a four-day heavy snowstorm and other periods of fierce winds and snowfall, waiting in base camp for all the new snow to settle, avalanching to stop and the wind to abate.

Finally, they launched their bid for the summit from base camp on 29 October. It now seemed possible that they could make the first ascent of Everest in the month of November. Late at night on the 1st of November, Berg, David Burger, Garry Porter and four Sherpas left their highest camp at the Col (7900 meters) for the top. At 8:00 a.m. they were 8748 meters above sea level at the south summit. But here they were "blasted by very abrupt strong winds," Berg said later, "and the winds from the south summit on up were clearly going to be a big challenge."

Berg decided they must abandon their try for the top. On their return to the Col camp late that morning, they found three tents had been torn apart, so they kept descending all the way down to camp 2 and arrived many hours later. Asked how he had felt being the only expedition on the huge mountain, Berg replied that he felt "lucky and privileged with only ourselves to rely on" without the presence of "hordes" of other climbers as in the spring. "This was real mountaineering."

Plans for a ski descent of the west face of Everest's neighbor, Pumori, 7161 meters high, also had to be cancelled because snow conditions were not right for skiing, and the winds were too strong. Frédéric Bernard, French, and David

Casartelli, Swiss, found that at first the snow was in great danger of avalanching. Later, when temperatures dropped, the good snow on the face became frozen, and the wind transformed this surface into pinnacles 30 centimeters (one foot) high.

This autumn's two most technically demanding first ascents of new routes on already climbed mountains were achieved by small parties on very different peaks: two Russians on a south pillar of Nuptse, which is directly opposite Everest's southwest face, and two Britons and one American on the southeast ridge of Annapurna III, which is east of Annapurna I. They climbed in quite different styles: both had no Sherpas with them, but the Russian pair fixed 1200 meters of rope and established a camp on their pillar 1000 meters above base camp, whereas the British-American trio fixed no rope at all and had their highest camp, advance base, on a moraine before getting onto their less precipitous ridge.

This was the third attempt by Valeri Babanov of Russia to succeed in scaling a pillar on the south face of Nuptse that leads directly to one of the mountain's eastern peaks known as Nuptse East I. His summit is 7795-meters high, only 60 meters lower than Nuptse's main summit, which itself has been reached by only five expeditions since 1961.

Babanov had made an unsuccessful solo attempt on his pillar in the autumn of 2002, and in the spring of this year he had returned with one teammate to help him carry and fix the rope but still he could not achieve his goal. Last year he reached an altitude of only 6300 meters before he was defeated by exhaustion, and in any case, he had run out of rope. This spring with Vladimir Suviga he reached 1150 meters higher, but again exhaustion, this time compounded by a lot of new snowfall, put an end to this effort.

But he was not willing to give up, and now he knew his route well. This time, at last, Babanov, with Yuri Kochelenko, stood at the pointed summit of his Nuptse East I in bright moonlight. They had made one attempt to make their way up the route on 21 and 22 October, but they got to only 6900 meters when very strong wind forced them to descend. They went down below base camp to Deboche village to rest, and while they were there, three days of heavy snowfall dumped one meter of snow at their base.

Their pillar's steepness is formidable. Its gentlest slope is a mere 30 degrees, most of it is over 45 degrees with many parts above 65 degrees and some between 80 and 90 degrees. The two Russians resumed climbing the 2600-meters-high buttress on the 29th of November, and with three bivouacs in one continuous push, they gained their summit on 3 November.

The most difficult section was a 75-80-degree buttress of rock covered by ice just below their last bivouac site on the west side of the pillar, which they made at 7450 meters on 1 November. Next day they began their final day's climb at 8:40 a.m. when the sun had reached them at last. They soon found it difficult to find a feasible route up mixed rock and snow. Babanov, in the lead, took several wrong lines and had to retreat and try alternative ways up.

By 5:00 p.m. the temperature had dropped to -20 centigrade and the wind had gained strength, but they decided to finish the climb that evening nevertheless. They

went on without their one small tent and stove and reached the very narrow summit ridge at 6:30 p.m. Finally, Babanov was on the top of Nuptse East I after nightfall at 7:20 p.m. (10 minutes ahead of Kochelenko). They went back to their highest bivouac “very tired and very frozen” to spend the rest of the night. They were not actually frostbitten, and two days later they returned to base camp.

Babanov was clearly very pleased to have achieved his goal at last. Not only had they achieved the first ascent of their pillar in the first ascent of this 7795-meter summit, but Babanov believes they had managed to reach the top of the highest unclimbed peak in the world.

Many of those who are knowledgeable about trends in mountaineering are admirers of Babanov. The equally well-known Slovenian climber, Tomaz Humar, who prefers faces to ridges himself, was quoted in a German Alpine Club magazine three years ago as commenting that “the future of climbing belongs to the new Russian teams around Valeri Babanov. They practice classical alpinism with little equipment on technically extremely demanding routes... To me, the future is the lightly equipped conquest of technically demanding routes at great heights in alpine style.” But the admiration is not shared unanimously. One American climber remarked in September, “Babanov uses bolts, and I don’t like that.”

Annapurna III, 7555 meters high, had been summited before this autumn by ten expeditions since the spring of 1961, but no one had ever successfully scaled its southeast ridge. Now a team of two Britons and one American managed to do it in alpine style – no Sherpa support, no fixed camps above their advance base at 5495 meters, no fixed rope. They took just one tent with them above ABC, and since they fixed no rope, they had to make a series of six bivouacs. On the seventh day of their ascent, the 6th of November, the summit was reached by the three together, the British leader Kenton Cool, the other Briton Ian Parnell, and American John Varco.

Although none of them was injured, just above advance base they had run under a dangerous icefall which was repeatedly active, releasing ice a dozen times a day. “It was very scary,” they said. From there they overcame a 600-meters-high vertical section of bare, very loose rock at first, then hard ice. The middle section of their ridge, from 6000 to 6500 meters, was moderately steep ice and unpleasant granular snow. Above 5000 meters, where they had their fourth bivouac in a snow hole, the first two hundred vertical meters were again steep loose rock with some sections of vertical ice, and from 6700 to 7000 meters the ridge was knife-edged. Finally, from there to the summit it was an easy climb on snow, but in the end they had to crawl on their hands and knees getting to the top because they were now being buffeted by very strong gusts of wind that were bitterly cold.

In far western Nepal in the Api-Nampa-Saipal region, there is a small north-south range named Raksha Urai consisting of several peaks which this autumn’s team from France called Raksha Urai I, II, III in order from south to north. The highest peak in the same range, which is in turn south of I, is actually named Dhaulagari (not the same as Dhaulagiri) and was considered to be Raksha Urai I by the first of four earlier expeditions on the mountain, Austrians in 1997, but it was not given a number by this autumn’s party since it has its own individual name.

This autumn's team, led by Arnaud Clere, were seven French climbers plus three Nepalis (not Sherpas but from the Gurung tribe), and they succeeded in being the first people to reach the top of any of the four peaks. Three of their members and one Nepali stood on the summit they designated as III, which they said is about 6600 meters high.

Because they had been delayed in reaching base camp by Maoist extortion (see the end of this report), the expedition's tight schedule left them only ten days for climbing after arriving at base camp. They set up their base at 4000 meters east of the range near a stone hut designated on some trekking maps as Saipal village. While one party went exploring other mountains in the area, Clere, Miss Catherine Coulaud, Gael Faroux and Keshab Raj Gurung attacked Raksha Urai.

They moved around to the northwest side, which none of the previous teams had attempted, to see whether they could climb from there up Raksha Urai II, at 6420 meters the second-highest of the group (Dhaulagari is higher). They quickly decided it was too technical for them, so they changed their objective to Raksha Urai III and returned to base camp.

They left base camp again on the 13th and bivouacked at the foot of east ridge of III at 5100 meters, and next day they moved up to a spot for their second bivouac below the col between Raksha Urai II and III. They bivouacked here at 5800 meters and on the following day, the 15th, they climbed to the 40-45-degree snow slope onto the col and then turned northwards on Raksha Urai III's south ridge.

Most of the ridge itself was covered by snow with many small cornices and little loose rocks, which they had to toss away, then one short steep last part broader than the rock-strewn section. Here there were several false summits on the final 200-300 meters to the true summit. The four climbers had left their bivouac at 4:30 a.m., were on the top at 12:00, stayed half an hour and then began their descent.

By the time they had reached a point 500 meters before the col, Faroux and Gurung were in the lead; now Clere and Coulaud could no longer see them. When the last two were at a place where they had a view of the whole ridge above and the mountainside below it, they spotted one body 400 meters down a slope of the mountain and two tracks in the snow. They were too tired to try to go down the very steep slope where the body lay. They returned to their bivouac to sleep that night and were in base camp the next day.

One of the less dramatic firsts was scored by two Americans, Peter Ackroyd and Jim Frush, on a 6320-meters-high mountain, Saribung, in the Mustang region in north-central Nepal. They made a very fast ascent via the northwest ridge with no Sherpas and only one high-altitude camp. They were on the top on 15 October, just three days after they had arrived at base camp. On their route were two icefalls and many crevasses hidden by wind-blown snow; the final part of the ridge was very steep, 70-75 degrees at the last 30 vertical meters, but they fixed no rope. Frush fell into one crevasse up to his chest, but he managed to crawl out of it unharmed. Their route was the same as the only earlier team on the mountain, Japanese, who reached their own maximum altitude at a col, 6070 meters high, in the summer of 2002.

Another first ascent this autumn was accomplished on Kyashar (also known as Peak 43 or Tangnag Tseng) by four men from Britain, Austria, Switzerland and Canada led by the Briton, Bruce Normand, the first climbers to attempt this 7590-meters-high mountain in Khumbu south of Kangtega. Their initial problem obviously was to discover a feasible route. They camped on 6th October at the normal site for Kangtega base camps south of it, which placed them north of their own mountain, and looked at the north face of a col that is on the way to Kyashar's summit. They found that this face was too dangerous because of many mushrooms, much fluting and other problems.

Eleven days later they made a second base camp at the bottom of the west ridge at 5800 meters, and next day, 18 October, three members were on the top. The other member, Kevin Riddell, the Canadian, left them on the 16th because of the objective danger, but Normand, Sam Roderick, Swiss, and Andreas Frank, Austrian, persevered.

They fixed 100 meters of rope on their route, all of it on a rock step at the bottom of the west ridge, on the 17th, then on the 18th went for the summit in one continuous push from their camp. Above the step, the ridge was covered by snow; it was "an ugly corniced ridge" that was very steep above 6400 meters, so here they crossed onto the west face and went up a snow-and-ice-covered couloir, then to the top on the face in soft snow. They had left camp at 3:30 a.m., were on the summit together at 4:00 p.m. and returned to camp at 1:10 a.m. of the 19th. By now Roderick's left hand had been struck by a rock or block of ice while he was rappelling down the rock step: there were constant falls of ice and rock down the southwest face after the sun began to warm it at about 7:00 a.m. (He waited to find out what the damage was until he got home.)

One of the autumn's more enterprising teams was a three-man party from Britain hoping to scale the previously unattempted northwest face of Teng Kangpoche, which stands 6500 meters high in Khumbu west of Namche Bazar and near the village of Thami. They had no leader; they were Al Powell, Jules Cartwright and Nick Bullock, and they dropped out of the effort one by one until Bullock was the only one still trying to get up their face.

They had no Sherpas, no fixed ropes, and only one fixed camp. They made their base on 13 November in a partly built lodge in a small village called Thengpo at 4320 meters north of the mountain. Next day the three members were on the northwest face working their way up on the right side of the north pillar and pitched their only more-or-less fixed camp at 4850 meters. On the 15th they climbed to 5400 meters bivouacked there. That was the highest point they reached on that line.

The next day they retreated to Thami because Bullock had developed a stomach problem, and they went on down to Namche to rest. Now Powell left to return home, so it was only Bullock and Cartwright who went back to Thengpo and on the 22nd were again on their route. In an 11-hours' climb, fighting very strong wind, they were at their bivouac site at 5400 meters.

The wind was loosening small rocks on the face; a lot of them were falling or spin-drift snow was avalanching constantly. They stayed the night there hoping the wind

speed would drop, but it did not, and they spent the 23rd at the bivouac patching the holes pierced by rocks. On the 24th, Bullock said later in Kathmandu, “we decided we’d had enough of being bombarded and we both wanted to live, so we ran away to Thami.”

Now, on the 25th, it was Cartwright’s turn to drop out. Bullock went back alone for a solo attempt, but not again on the same line. He bivouacked on the 26th at 4300 meters just west of a tiny hamlet called Ribug, which is east of their previous base at Thengpo village, and next day attacked the face to the left of the north pillar.

He started up the mountain at 1:30 a.m., “steadily plugging uphill” and, with frequent pauses to warm his hands from cold wind to prevent frostbite, 13 hours later he had succeeded in ascending 2000 meters to reach the top of the face and get onto the east ridge at 6350 meters. The last 800 meters of the face up to the ridge was 75-80 degrees steep, 90 degrees in a few spots. His line on the face consisted of snow-ice on 75% of the route, the rest mixed rock and snow. Here he bivouacked for the rest of the afternoon and that night.

On the following morning, the 28th of November, he had a look at the final 250 meters he would have to surmount to reach the summit, and he didn’t like what he saw. The ridge was steep and badly crevassed. “I wasn’t going into the middle of that lot and have it crumbling around me and die” without anyone there to hold the rope to belay him. So he decided not to attempt it and immediately descended. He went down a more direct line than he had followed going up and in six hours of down-climbing was back at his bivouac site at the bottom of the face. He gathered up his belongings and was in Thami that evening.

In the summer, Japanese led by Tomotsu Ohnishi made the first ascent of Norbu Kang, a 6005-meter in the Upper Dolpo region of northwest Nepal. From a base camp pitched on 20 June at 4805 meters west of the mountain, they moved to a higher camp (5250 meters) two days later, on the 23rd climbed to the west col (5490 meters) and returned the high camp that day. On the 25th they fixed 50 meters of rope on the north face as they climbed to the top up the snow and ice face broken by two crevasses. They were back in base camp the same day. The summiters were Ohnishi, Takehiko Yanagihara, Koji Mizutani, Mrs. Tazuko Inoue, Chhuldim Dawa Sherpa and Kanchha Dawa Sherpa.

Two of the expeditions on newly opened mountains were unsuccessful in their bids to scale their peaks, both of which had never been attempted before. A French team under the leadership of Paulo Grobel actually were an exploratory party trying to determine which was their peak, Amotsang, 6392-meters high in the Mustang area, and then what line to take on it. They never set foot on the mountain.

While some members made first ascents of two nearby mountains, three French members and one of their Sherpas went looking for the best place to make a base camp from which to scale Amotsang. The expedition had originally expected to climb its west ridge but quickly realized that was not possible, so the explorers went around its southern side and then northwards to the east side. They concluded that the best approach would be from its east side. But now there was no time left for a

chiming attempt. "At least we know where the mountain is and where there is a route up it," Grobel remarked.

A Japanese group were on Himjung, not to be confused with nearby Himlung, to which it is connected by a north-south ridge; They are located some distance away to the north from Amotsang. The Japanese planned to scale their 7140-meters-high mountain via its west ridge, which leads to the ridge connecting it to Himlung. On 2 October the three-member party led by Ayumi Nozawai had gotten to about 6000 meters, not quite at the start of the west ridge, when a snow avalanche suddenly swept down the mountainside.

One member, Nobuteru Kawahara, was untouched, but the other two, who were above him, were caught by it. Kawahara succeeded in digging Hiroytaka Imamura out of the snow, and both searched for their leader. They found him not far away, buried almost up to his neck, and when they pulled him out, he was dead. They immediately abandoned the climb.

Ayumi Nozawai was one of seven climbers who died this autumn. As noted above, two climbers fell to their deaths on Raksha Urai. An experienced German professional expedition leader, Robert Rackl, also suffered a fatal fall; he was on Ama Dablam, and the probable cause was a rope that broke. Avalanches swept to their deaths two South Koreans, Hwang Sun-Dug and Park Joo-Hoon, on Lhotse Shar. The leader of a Greek Cho Oyu team, Christos Barouchas, died of altitude sickness.

The practice of grouping together one-member and two-member teams in so-called expeditions by several Kathmandu trekking agencies in order to reduce the cost of climbing permits for their clients continued to spread, but these were not actually organized teams. These people did not even go to their mountains together nor leave together. Many of them were inexperienced, lacking adequate climbing skills, and had no leadership or anyone to help them when problems arose.

As the leader of a large well-organized expedition commented, these people rely on parties like his to fix the ropes and provide them with medical care. One such small group even complained about the removal of a horizontal line fixed at the top of an icefall before the complainants had finished their own attempt. The team who had placed it there had completed their climb and cleared the mountain of their gear.

Maoist rebels fighting against Nepal's constitutional monarchy have been earning quite a lot of money by extorting funds from groups of climbers and trekkers. Not all groups have met this problem, but many have. The rates vary from one area to another, but the standard rate seems to be Rs.1000-1500 per foreigner. Expeditions going anywhere in Nepal except in Khumbu north of the Lukla airfield must budget for these "donations" to the Maoist cause.

Khumbu above Lukla is totally free of Maoists, and very probably one important reason for this is the tireless efforts of Sir Edmund Hillary over four decades to make a better life for the people who live there through his construction of numerous schools and health facilities, and the Lukla airfield, which gives easy access to trekking and climbing groups, plus his continuing support for these schools, hospitals and health posts. Khumbu residents make up a community that is close-



knit, relatively prosperous and well educated, so for them the Maoist championing of the underdog has no appeal.

However, elsewhere in the east, on the route to the Makalu area, this autumn's Danish expedition going to the recently opened Tutse (Peak 6) found a banner across the road at Sedua village which read: "Welcome to you Makalu bass camp. Entry tax for Maoist Party." Its fixed-price list: Rs.5000 (roughly \$70) per tourist, Rs.1000 per guide, Rs.500 per Sherpa cook, Rs.100 per kitchen boy, and Rs.50 per "portter." Farther east, a French team going into the Kangchenjunga region for Gimmigela Chuli (The Twins) were also stopped and "taxed." But a Jannu expedition went so fast past Sedua that they escaped without having to pay the tax.

On the very popular trekking route north from Pokhara to the south side of the Annapurna range, the office buildings of the Annapurna Conservation Area have been taken over by the rebels, forcing the organization's staff to suspend their work; an Italian expedition to Annapurna III was charge Rs.1000 per foreigner but nothing for their Sherpas and other Nepalese staff. On the equally well frequented trail around the Annapurna massif, Maoists are seen in strength on its west side just south of the Kali Gandaki Valley village of Marpha, and they are collecting the same amount in the Marshyangdi Valley on the east side of the massif at Ngadi village, just north of the road-head town of Besisahar, where teams going to the north side of the Annapurna range leave their buses.

Much farther west, the French on their way to climb Raksha Urai had to stop at Chainpur village and wait for two days while two of their Nepalese staff went down a valley to meet the local Maoist leader to pay the tariff demanded in his area. The team's trekking agent asked the team not to disclose how much they were forced to pay: trekking agents don't like discussions of this topic. The team's men were told that if the climbers had been American, British or Japanese, they would not have been allowed to continue on their way.

## **Spring 2004: Everest Attracts Even More Climbers**

### **Russians Scale Two Complex North Faces**

### **Spaniards Attempt First Ascent of a Newly Opened Lower Peak**

Last spring, in the 50th anniversary season of Everest's first ascent, a record number of men and women turned up to climb to its summit, and it was assumed that the numbers would decrease after that. Wrong assumption. The number of *teams* was slightly less, but not of *climbers*. In comparison to last May [2003], when a mere 260 people, foreigners and Nepalese, men, women and one 15-year-old child, stood on the summit of Everest, and on a single day, the 22nd of May, 114 summited, now, in 2004, the overall total rose considerably to 323 people. However, they were more evenly scattered over various days this time, with just 62 on the busiest day, 16 May.

As in every spring, Everest attracted by far the largest number of expeditions of the season, and all except one followed standard routes on the north and south sides; the exception was a large Russian team on a difficult new line directly up its vast north face. At the same time, a smaller Russian group made the first complete direct ascent and descent of the north face of Jannu, a high 7000er in far eastern Nepal.

In another, tragic, way this spring's Everest teams exceeded those of a year ago: the number of climbers' deaths. Last year, only three people died, all of them men and two of these were Sherpas. This year no Sherpa perished but seven other climbers, including two women, did: five had just been to the summit, another was trying to rescue two of these summiters, and the seventh collapsed while struggling to surmount the final 150 meters to the top. They were an American summitter, Nils Antzana, on the South Col route, and on the North Col route, a Bulgarian, Hristo Hristov; another Bulgarian, Mrs. Mariana Maslaova, who never reached the top; two South Koreans summiters, Jang Min and Park Mu-Taek, and Baek Joon-Ho, their leader, who climbed up from their highest camp to save them and then also died; and a 63-year-old Japanese woman, Mrs. Shoko Ota.

Two other summiters also died this spring: American Jay Sieger and Vladislav Terzyul, Ukrainian, who had gone to the top of Makalu together and were beginning their descent. Sieger apparently died when his head struck some rocks, but the body of veteran 8000-meter summitter Terzyul was not found, so what caused his death is unknown.

One of the season's most important climbs was the ascent of Everest's great north face by a new direct line from a spot near their advance base camp at 6200 meters to the 8850-meters-high summit. During a one-month-long ascent, the leader, Victor Kozlov, and 14 other climbing members from Russia, faced nearly all the types of problems a mountain can involve. To overcome them the team employed three Sherpas to help carry supplies of rope, tents and gear to camp 3 at 7800 meters. From that point the members began their use of bottled oxygen and continued to use it almost all the way up to 8500 meters, with some exceptions: not everyone slept on it,

and no one used it while fixing rope above camp 3. Total amount fixed: roughly 5000 meters from 6300 to 8500 meters.

They found problems from the very start of their climb. From base camp at 5600 meters to advance camp at 6200 meters, the problem was the danger of falling stones. Then came technical problems. Just below 7100 meters, where they pitched their first camp on the face, they found a small, nearly vertical couloir. From this camp 1 to camp 3, it was not very steep, but there were exposed rock slabs like slate roofing, alternating with patches of snow, which meant that climbing here was difficult for men wearing crampons.

The face from camp 3 to camp 4, from 7800 to 8250 meters, was steep grey rock followed by the famous yellow rock band; camp 4 was placed on a small rock ledge. The steepness continued for the first 200 meters above camp 4, then eased off to their final camp, also on a small ledge, at 8600 meters. Above this camp 5, the steepness resumed, and here they discovered a serious barrier: the climb became extremely difficult because the vertical rock crumbled, making it nearly impossible to fix rope. One of the team's four climbing leaders, Pavel Shabalin, gained only 50 meters' altitude in one day using belays from camp 5.

To continue on this direct vertical line would have required at least two more days of very dangerous climbing to surmount the next 50 meters, so they decided to traverse left 100 meters, then circle back around to the top of this crumbly area to return to their direct line above camp 5. From here to the top there was no real difficulty and on three successive days, 30 and 31 May and 1 June eight members arrived at the top. The two on the 1st of June were the only summiters from any Everest team that day and the last ones of the season. They had succeeded in forging a new line to the top of the mountain.

The Everest team made no attempt to descend the face. Another Russian expedition, led by Alexander Abramov, had summited on 24 and 25 May via the standard northern route, and at 8300 meters, where that route's last camp is normally pitched, they left for the face team a tent with sleeping bags, food, gas, and oxygen bottles. The tent was, in fact, used by only the first summit party on the night of the 30th; they were exhausted from having fixed rope below their camp 5 and then trying to force their way up the crumbly rock section. The second and third summit groups descended past the tent all the way to advance base camp, and one member of the 3rd summit party even continued down to base camp.

Some uncommon details of successful Everest expeditions on standard routes:

A Greek expedition sent one climbing team to the north side and another to the south to carry to the top their flags of the 2004 Greek Summer Olympic Games. They were the first Greek expedition ever to attempt Everest, and both parties succeeded in planting their flags at the highest spot on earth.

Another team on the north side had a novel sendoff. It was the first to go to Everest from the Indian navy, so the Indian defence minister, George Fernandes; the navy chief of staff, Admiral Madhvendra Singh; the expedition leader, a submariner, Commander Satyabrata Dam, and the 13 other expedition members got into a

Russian-built submarine and submerged to a depth of about 75 meters in the Arabian Sea for the official launching ceremony.

Sherpas on the normal climbing route from the Nepalese side included one with a prosthesis on his leg, and another who claimed a new speed record in his ascent. Nawang Sherpa, 32, lost his left leg below the knee in a motorcycle accident six years ago, but that didn't prevent him from getting to the top of the world this spring with an American, Thomas McMillan, who had arranged for him to have a high-quality U.S.-made prosthesis fitted three years after his accident. Nawang went to Everest last year and climbed as far as camp 2 testing his artificial leg. Now was back, and with McMillan and three other Sherpas, became the second amputee ever to reach the summit. (The first was an American, Tom Whittaker, who summited six years earlier, but Nawang had lost much more of his leg than Whittaker had.)

The speed climber was Pemba Dorje, who claims he raced up the 3500 vertical meters from base camp on the Khumbu Glacier to the summit in only 8 hours and 8 minutes during the night of 20/21 May, climbing entirely alone and using artificial oxygen only above the last camp at 7900 meters.

For this 27-year-old climber, it was his third ascent. He was now well acclimatized: he had just made his second ascent by the same route on the morning of the 16th in the company of a Swiss, Rupert Heider, and two other Sherpas. Furthermore, he said, had spent about six months training intensively in Kathmandu before arriving at base camp on 7 April. Nearly every day, he had cycled at least eight kilometers and jogged from one edge of the city to another; he had also gone rock climbing.

The announcement of this astonishing feat was received with some scepticism and was immediately challenged at base camp, in a satellite telephone interview with a newspaper reporter in Kathmandu, by Lhakpa Gelu Sherpa, renewing a controversy they had last year. Pemba Dorje made his first speed-ascent last spring and reported then that it took him 12 hours and 45 minutes to climb from bottom to top. Lhakpa Gelu said four days later that he himself had just spent only 10 hours and 56 minutes to do the entire ascent. Pemba Dorje charged Lhakpa Gelu with lying and insisted that it was he who had made the fastest ascent. Lhakpa Gelu countered with evidence to support his own timings, and after investigation, Nepal's tourism ministry concluded that this man's claim to the record was valid. This spring again, the ministry was looking into the validity of a speed-climb claim and in the meantime was not revealing which specific details they were trying to check nor what information he had given them.

Some details do seem to merit looking into since, unfortunately for him, no one else was on the summit with him—indeed no one else was on the summit at any time on the 21st—so there was no one to confirm what time he was there or any other details. Pemba Dorje said that when he stood on the summit at 2:00 a.m. that day, he saw lights from two or three headlamps of climbers coming up from the Tibetan side. Based on his knowledge of that side from his own first ascent of Everest, he judged these climbers to be a little above the highest camp, which is normally at 8300 meters.

But there are two problems with this: there almost certainly were no climbers above that altitude at 2:00 a.m.; on the 21st there was one man, a Bulgarian searching for his missing team-mate, and he was there at around 5:30-6:00 a.m., when it was no longer dark. And even if there had been someone, that person could not be seen from the summit, according to others who have climbed to the top themselves. They explain that a small ridge not far below the summit obscures a view of anyone in 8300-meter area of the north side.

The scepticism that was voiced when the news of Pemba Dorje's ascent broke was not based on these factors, which were not generally known, but on the question of whether anyone could lop four and a half hours off his elapsed time of a year before. He said he had put himself through a rigorous training regime, but could that have cut his time by one-third?

One record that no one disputed was set by a well-known modest Sherpa, Apa, who this spring achieved his 14th Everest ascent at the age of 42. His nearest rival, Chuwang Nima Sherpa, who is five years younger, scored his 11th success this spring. Apa may not be unusually fast, but he is very strong. He has said that he does not climb Everest to set any kind of record but to earn good money to support his family by doing the only kind of work he knows.

Another record in number of ascents was set by an American, Gheorghe Dijmarescu, who has acquired the habit of climbing Everest in the spring via the standard Tibetan-side route. He became the only non-Sherpa to have gone to the summit every year for six consecutive years.

A useful permanent improvement to the standard northern route was a new ladder placed at the bottom of the Second Step at about 8600 meters. It was installed by an expedition led by Russell Brice, a leader of teams on this route every spring. His ladder is wider than the old one, which was put there by Chinese climbers in 1975, and significantly longer. The old one was four or five meters long; the length of this new one is eight meters.

The other historic climb in the Nepalese Himalaya this season was the successful ascent and descent by a direct route via the north face of Jannu by another Russian team (with one Kirghizstani member) led by Alexander Odinstov. This very probably was the first ascent of the north face direct. A Yugoslavian (now Slovenian), Tomo Cesen, claimed to have accomplished this solo in one continuous push from base camp in the spring of 1989, but after his account in the following year of having summited the south face of Lhotse solo was discredited, there has been grave doubt about his Jannu success. In any case, by his own account, he did not descend the face but came down the less difficult northeast ridge instead.

Since 1975, nine expeditions had been on this extremely steep (80-90 degrees in places) face of 7710-meter Jannu, which is officially known as Khumbhakarna, in addition to Cesen's one-man effort. The ninth was led by Odinstov himself last autumn, when his eight-member team reached 7200 meters and then abandoned the attempt because of snowfall, strong wind and the low temperatures on the north side of any Nepalese Himalaya in autumn when direct sunlight shifts around in a southerly direction (the autumn 1975 team had called it "the wall of shadows.")

This spring Odinstov returned with seven members besides himself. Six of these men had been with him in 2003, and they now had more experience of the route, knew a better site for their base camp and which points were especially dangerously exposed to falling rocks and ice avalanching.

Without using any bottled oxygen or Sherpa help, they moved slowly upwards, Odinstov reported, using a total of about 75 ice screws and 300 rock pitons to fix about 3375 meters of rope; in some sections the rock was bad enough to require two and even three pitons at a single place. In two areas, one just below and above 6500 meters, the other near 7300 meters, they had to make lower and then higher camps 2 and camps 4 because of the many hours of effort needed to fix the route. To make a place for camp 3 at 7000 meters, they had to work in shifts of three members for eight hours per shift, working in relays cutting ice and removing stone, for four or five days. Their slow progress was also due to the impossibility of climbing this face with mittens on their hands, but going without them meant their fingers became very cold, so every two meters—or sometimes even less—they had to pause and rub their fingers to get them warm again.

They had arrived at their base camp on the Jannu Glacier at 4700 meters on 3 April. They pitched their highest camp, their second camp 4, at 7400 meters on the 14th of May. Now for a rest and then the summit push. But now Jannu was hit by a prolonged period of snowfall and strong winds, so it was not until the 26th of May that their first members reached the top.

Two members, Dmitri Pavlenko and Alexander Ruchkin, left the 7400-meter camp at 5:00 a.m. on the 26th, finally gained the summit at 3:00 p.m. and returned to camp at 6:00 p.m. The final 70 meters was rock covered with dangerous powder snow, and the top itself was a snow cornice difficult for rock climbers to surmount.

Three more Russians, Sergei Borisov, Gennady Kirievsky and Nikolai Totmyanin, followed them on the 28th, and were able to move much faster since the way had been opened by the first two summiters. Next day, as they descended all the way to base camp, they cleared the mountain of all their tents and contents, plus as much fixed rope as they could recover—a lot of it was stuck in snow that had melted and then frozen. The “wall of shadows” was finally successfully climbed in both directions.

While the Russians were laboriously working their way up Jannu, to the north, on Nepal's border with Tibet, a six-member team of Spaniards were the first people making an attempt by any route on the 7264-meters-high Dome Kang (or, to give it its official name, Domekhan). Led by Carlos Soria, they made their base camp on 18 April at Pangpema, the normal site for base camp for climbers going to Kangchenjunga's north face, and approached Dome Kang from the south via the Jongsang Glacier, working their way over a difficult unsettled rocky area, and pitched their first high camp 14 kilometers from and 800 meters higher than base, at 5350 meters. Their aim was to reach their summit via the mountain's east ridge.

They did gain the ridge but were unable to follow it all the way to the summit. Their second camp was placed at a col, known as Jongsang La, on the ridge at 6100 meters. They managed to move from there westwards towards the summit, but finally

stopped at 6650 meters exactly one month after they had arrived at their base. Now the clouds moved in covering the way ahead, and snow started to fall. Furthermore, by now their time was running out.

From the Jongsang La the summit ridge was a very complicated mixture of rock, snow, and broken pieces of ice, making it impossible to keep to the ridge. They sometimes moved on the ridge itself, sometimes on its south side, and sometimes on the north side's big hanging glacier.

On the 18th of May, they realized that they did not have sufficient time left to spend four or five days more to solve the next problem of the last 600 meters up to a plateau. They want to come back next year to solve this problem and finish the climb to the top. They would follow the same route, but they would give themselves more time to do it.

## **Autumn 2004: East Face of Jannu Still Unclimbed**

### **Japanese Succeed on Two Previously Unattempted 6000ers**

#### **The Usual Flood of Climbers Attempt Cho Oyu and Ama Dablam**

Slovenia's best known active climber of Himalayan near-vertical faces was unable to achieve success on the east face of Jannu. Plans to "conquer" four virgin peaks, one in the summer and three in autumn, were fulfilled on two of them, Chhiv and Purkhang in the western districts of Mustang and Manang, by two different Japanese teams. The normal autumn flood of climbers on Cho Oyu in the first part of the season and on Ama Dablam later in the season caused some Ama Dablam climbers to complain about the crowds.

At times during the autumn., it seemed as though the only Nepalese Himalaya being climbed were Cho Oyu and Ama Dablam, especially in late September-early October, when most of the 52 Cho Oyu parties were returning from their attempts at the same time as many of the 29 Ama Dablam groups were arriving. But there actually were 58 other teams going to Everest (only two parties—with no success) and to 24 less well-known mountains, some groups seeking to make first ascents or to pioneer new routes from Chhiv in the northwest to Jannu and Janak in the far northeast of Nepal.

The best-known climber on these pioneering efforts was Tomaz Humar from Slovenia, who went to Jannu. Jannu, also known as Khumbhkarna, not far from Kangchenjunga, has a forbiddingly precipitous east face which Slovenians seem to have become obsessively determined to scale. Its main summit is 7710 meters high, while its east face tops out on the east summit at 7468 meters. Every team that has aimed to climb it has been Slovenian. None has yet succeeded.

Humar, 35 years old, famous for his spider-like ability to scale nearly vertical walls, had demonstrated his exceptional abilities in earlier climbs in Nepal on Ama Dablam and Nuptse in Khumbu, Bobaye in the far west of Nepal, and—most notably—solo on the unclimbed south face of Dhaulagiri I in 1999. This season his goal was to make the first ascent of Jannu's east face all the way—and to do it solo. But he had to abandon the effort at 7000 meters where, in its present condition, the face had gotten "harder and harder, riskier and riskier as I went higher and higher."

Before tackling the face, Humar acclimatized to 6000 meters on an east pillar with his Croatian friend, Stipe Bozic. Then to the face. But the face was "totally different" from what he had seen in pictures of the 1992 attempt: now there was black ice and above that many big mushrooms covered with powder snow, which made them very dangerous.

His ascent from advance base camp at 5400 meters lasted for four days. On the first day, 27 October, he crossed a high glacier shaped like an amphitheatre where powder snow avalanches were falling constantly and depositing chest-deep snow, and where there were very deep crevasses, many at least six meters wide. But one a mere two meters wide, and this he jumped across. Then to get out of this area of avalanche debris, he started up an ice and rock debris pillar at the southern end of the face, up



30 meters of a face of an overhanging section with a series of very dangerous and difficult obstacles where he was hit hard by an ice “candle” that luckily did him no damage. He bivouacked at 6000 meters late that afternoon.

His second bivouac the next day was only 200 meters higher. Here he now had to climb a system of what he called overhanging rock cracks, 20 meters high; they must have been something like upside-down crevasses. He had to climb up inside them and then over onto the outside. They were like polished granite and gave very little friction, so it was impossible to fix any rope. This was a “very risky” area. Next came a number of mushroom ridges, a “nightmare” of ups and downs past both the mushrooms and avalanching. At 6200 meters he found a narrow rock ledge and bivouacked there, half hanging over the edge.

On the 29th, Humar was finally able to climb very fast and in six hours had scaled a face of 80-90 degrees and then had to work his way up a very thin couloir covered with black ice under powder snow which he had to laboriously clear away. Each side was a huge balloon of powder snow and at the top of it were cauliflower cornices.

Here he fell three times but carried on, then traversed 20 meters to the right side on a mushroom to end up bivouacking at 6850 meters in a snow-hole which he dug deep into a mushroom on a ledge. He left his gear here and tried to find a route beyond, but he could gain just 25 meters in four hours. He returned to his snow-hole and spent a very cold night there; 100 km/hour winds were blowing “very fresh air” into it and down his throat. But he was confident that next day he would be able to reach the shoulder on the southeast ridge which leads to the top.

But “a nightmare came early in the morning [of the 30th] when I tried to reach this shoulder” only 20 meters above but “unreachable” through the mushrooms. He could find no way past them in five attempts up different couloirs and mushrooms. After four and a half hours of these futile efforts, he gave up at about 7000 meters.

So at 1:00 that afternoon, he packed up his gear and headed down, found a way through fog, and after 4:00 p.m., through falling snow. He fell five times on rock pillars, and at one place below had to jump two crevasses. He could not follow his own tracks because avalanches had filled them in, but he managed to arrive safely at advance base camp after nightfall in six hours’ descent. He spent the night there and was down at his base on the 31st.

He said that he has no plans to go back to Jannu’s east face again. He would not declare the route to be impossible, but it is simply too dangerous in its present condition.

Like Humar, all of the earlier teams on the east face had no Sherpas or bottled oxygen with them, but not all actually did any climbing, two for tragic reasons. Slovenians’ first bid was made in the spring of 1991, when the two members attained an altitude of 7050 meters, then gave up because of a combination of bad weather, frost-nipped toes, exhaustion and no more gas for cooking. In the following spring, a three-member team moved over towards the left and reached 7100 meters, at a point where the face meets the southeast ridge; they then turned back safely. But that

autumn one member of a six-man party on their approach to base camp went for a swim in a river, slipped and drowned; his team-mates never went to the mountain.

In the autumn of 1993, two of a three-member group got to 6800 meters, then abandoned the climb because of dangerous avalanching. In 1996 both members of a two-man team disappeared without trace during their acclimatization climb on nearby Kabru; fog closed in around them and they were never seen again. In the spring of 1998 eight members waited for weeks at the bottom of the east face for constant avalanching to cease but finally abandoned hope and actually did no climbing. Four years later, four other Slovenes spent two weeks at advance base camp just beneath the face, where at first fog obscured the face and soon snow began falling, and avalanching sent them home too.

North of Jannu, the first attempt ever made to climb the mountain that was dubbed the Outlier by climber-explorers early in the 20th century, but is officially named Janak, was made by a two-member Romanian team led by Constantine Lacatusu. Their plan was to scale this 7044-meters-high peak north-northwest of Kangchenjunga on Nepal's border with Tibet via its southwest ridge, but they managed to get no farther than a rock tower close to the bottom of the ridge.

On 11 November, three weeks after having established their base camp at 4800 meters, Lacatusu and his climbing partner Ioan Torek made their bid to reach the summit from their third high camp at 6200 meters. They climbed all day 300 meters up the right side of the tower and then gave up this line: they were now in a serac area with powder snow impossible to fix with rope, so they returned to camp. The next day they attempted the tower's left side, moved up beneath overhanging seracs, and reached 6400 meters only to find again impossible powder snow. They abandoned the climb.

Lacatusu summarized their attempt: "the first part of Janak was technical, and we climbed that, but the second half was dangerous and we didn't climb that." The technical part was "very nice" and he and Torek "would like to come back and finish what we started." Next time they would have more manpower and more rope to fix.

The only successful first ascent in the autumn was achieved by a 5-member Japanese team led by Takeshi Wada on Chhiv, a 6655-meter mountain in Nepal's Mustang district. They climbed the northeast ridge, and four members summited on 18 September. Wada said it was a very easy climb except at about 6300 meters the ridge, covered with snow, got quite steep (60-70 degrees) and 300 meters of rope had to be fixed here. (The team fixed a total of 1000 meters on the route.)

In the summer, another Japanese party had been highly successful on Purkhang, 6120 meters high in Manang district north of a popular so-called trekking peak, Chulu West. Of its 11 members, eight, plus six Sherpas, succeeded via the west ridge on 18 August. Above their only high camp at 5450 meters they first had to cross numerous crevasses—they used a ladder to get negotiate one—surmount an icefall, and, at 5700 meters climb a 100-meter high ice wall 65 degrees steep. They had a long summit day: they left high camp at 3:40 a.m., were on the summit at 2:45 p.m., and returned to high camp at 8:00 p.m.

The fourth virgin mountain that climbers had plans for was Langmochen Ri, which is 6811 meters high southwest of the Khumbu village of Thami. Two Americans, William (Rusty) Escapule and Tom Togami, first went to acclimatize on Parchermo nearby. There had been heavy snowfall for two days just before they got there, and the day after their arrival a huge avalanche swept nine people—three Americans, three Frenchmen and three Nepalis—down its north face. Escapule and Togami joined in the strenuous rescue effort. They were now very tired when they went to look at Langmochen Ri, and besides the snow conditions were too dangerous to try for the summit. They made no attempt to go above base camp, but it is a “beautiful mountain, a great mountain to climb.”

Six expeditions tried to forge new routes on four mountains, but only one of them was successful. A six-member Slovenian team led by Uros Samec went up a new line on a 7351-meter mountain just south of Cho Oyu. Although it is officially called Pasang Lhamu Chuli, it used to be known as Jasamba or Cho Aui and has been successfully climbed twice from its west side. This autumn’s group attacked it from the south, up the southeast face to the south ridge.

Their route presented technical difficulties in the mid-section of the face above a big snowfield; here they encountered rock and this ice leading to a couloir 60 degrees steep which in turn led to the summit ridge. The first part of the ridge was also a problem: it was narrow, covered with snow, in one section badly corniced, and was 90 degrees steep at its beginning. But three members, Rok Blagus, Samo-Matijja Kremelj and Samec climbed the face, pitched a camp there and two days later, on 24 October, were on the summit.

The best known of all Nepalese peaks, Mount Everest, had only two teams this autumn, Dutch and Ukrainian, both on Tibet’s standard route via the North Col and both unsuccessful. First to arrive were Werner de Jong’s Dutch team of seven members—but two did no climbing and left earlier than the others—and two Sherpas who had previously summited Everest. The team fixed 1800 meters of rope but needed more, the snow was so deep the Sherpas refused to climb very high because, they said, they were too tired, and there was avalanche danger. Three members went to camp 1 at 7000 meters, but only one of them, Harry Kristra, went on up and slept in camp 2, which the Sherpas had pitched 550 meters higher but refused to stay in. When the Sherpas did not join him the next day, 18 September, as expected, Kristra made no attempt to go higher. The expedition’s climb was over.

The Ukrainians were also only two, led by the Himalayan veteran Sergei Bershov with a newcomer to the Himalaya, Sergei Shalygin. Climbing with artificial oxygen, they managed to reach about 8000 meters on 7 October before a serious problem stopped them: all the ropes fixed by last spring’s expeditions and the Dutch were buried under the deep snow, there were no Sherpas to fix new ropes even if they had had any, which they did not, and they were having to make the route through the snow entirely by themselves since the Dutch had given up and left the mountain before the Ukrainians reached the North Col’s 7000 meters. Furthermore it was very windy. They gave up the struggle.

A major problem for the Everest climbers was that there was nobody else around: there were none of the big commercial expeditions that come in the spring with numerous Sherpas to establish the route by fixing hundreds of meters of rope much of the way to the top. But for many on Ama Dablam, which stands 6812 meters high in the shadow of Everest's southern side, the problem was that there were too many people. One leader said he was going to tell Nepalese tourism ministry officials that they must limit the number of people to whom they issue Ama Dablam climbing permits. (However, the government is most unlikely to act on his advice since the fees are a major source of its foreign exchange earnings and foreign climbers' expenditures are extremely important to their Sherpas, the trekking agencies who assist teams, and many lodge keepers in mountainous areas.)

Some Ama Dablam teams were very small with just a member or two and perhaps one Sherpa. And not all of the 29 expeditions were on the mountain at the same time—they were spread out over a month—but they did bunch up at times. And two consisted of 30 and 31 members each; the larger one, which was led by an American, Dan Mazur, was assisted by nine Sherpas.

Mazur's expedition sent a total of 38 people to the top over seven days. On a single day, the 24th of October, which was just when a number of other parties were also summiting or trying to, this team put seven members and three Sherpas on the summit.

The British leader of the other of the largest team, Henry Todd, had 30 members and two Sherpas in his party. The members arrived at base camp and left the mountain at different times, and of his 19 successful members, plus two Sherpas—who went to the top three times—18 summited on six different days between 26 October and 17 November. He said he tried to minimize the impact of his sizable group by, for example, not pitching tents that would be left empty much of the time but would take up space badly needed by other climbers, and by having his members summit in relatively small numbers each day. Furthermore, his team was based at a camp apart from others' bases, and when some members arrived at Ama Dablam, other expeditions had already moved off the mountain.

Nevertheless there were complaints. A German leader was unhappy about some climbers in Mazur's team: he said that 15 in a bunch ascended from one camp to another very slowly, and the slowest did not know how to use a jumar properly, tried to climb a small face but fell on the rope. The German leader and Mazur's deputy leader attempted to speed up their progress by hauling their rucksacks up by rope. This problem greatly delayed the German team's arriving at their second high camp and getting past them to reach the third camp.

A member of an American team, Dan Starr, reported that he had almost been hit by a falling rock loosened by a climber above him. He was at what he described as the most dangerous part of the climb, a chimney leading to the yellow tower and the site for many parties' camp 2. His own group did not pitch any second or third camp because no space was available, and they were not only ones who had to skip a camp, usually camp 2. This meant this American group's summit party of three members had to set out for the top from camp 1 at 5775 meters extremely early in the morning

and only one, Starr, a mountain guide, managed to gain the summit. His descent was slowed by having to wait for others coming up the mountain at its bottlenecks.

The leader of an international expedition, Luis Benitez from the U.S., summarized the general situation on Ama Dablam in harsh terms: “too many teams were not led properly or responsibly but too cheaply.” Some teams’ Sherpas took food, fuel and even a set of crampons from others’ tents for their own members. One leader reportedly apologized for the stolen crampons, but others were apparently unaware of what their Sherpas were doing.

The Nepalese tourism ministry must restrict the number of Ama Dablam permits it grants in a season, Benitez stated, because the mountain is getting so overcrowded that it has “almost reached critical mass.”

On Cho Oyu, 8201 meters, there were nearly twice as many teams as on Ama Dablam, but they did not have this kind of crowding problem. There was a lot more space with none of Ama Dablam’s narrow-ridge bottlenecks to confront them.

Remarkably few deaths occurred during the autumn and none in summer: only one on Cho Oyu and two on Annapurna I. Cho Oyu has a history of very few fatal accidents: only 35 climbers have perished on it—an extremely small death toll considering the thousands of men and women who have been on the mountain and roughly 1500 who have reached its summit. But this autumn a young Spanish Basque, Xabier Ormazabal, climbing independently and going for the summit alone, died while he was descending after having reached at least 8100 meters and perhaps the top.

Another independent climber, Miss Eloise Barbieri from Italy, had become acquainted with Ormazabal and was the only person who knew much about his movements. She watched him through binoculars as he went for the summit on 13 October, a very windy day. He was entirely alone on the upper reaches of the mountain while the weather worsened. She saw him reach the summit plateau at about 8000 meters, disappear out of sight for an hour and a half and then reappear. This time span is fully consistent with his having reached the highest of several small peaks before coming back into sight, which he did at 1:00 p.m.

Two hours later he had descended about 200 meters and then sat down for an hour, resumed his decent but now moved down only a few meters at a time, intermittently falling over, until 5:30 p.m., when night fell; he had descended to about 7700 meters. On the next day, falling snow made it impossible to see anyone or anything from afar; on the day after that, the 15th, when he had not come into camp, a searcher went up to look for him. His body was found at 7550 meters.

The only others to die this autumn were two Japanese who were killed by avalanching on the notoriously avalanche-prone north face of Annapurna I. The mountain has the worst ratio of deaths to summiters of any of Nepal’s eight 8000ers: 56 people, including this Japanese pair, have died on it, and more than half of these (29) were on the north face, while only 131 climbers have ever reached the top.

The Japanese who died were a four-member team’s leader Michio Sato and team-mate Hideji Nazuka, who were at 6200 meters on 10 October when a big block of ice suddenly broke loose from the glacier on the feature known as the sickle, fell

onto to a sloping snowfield and set off a major avalanche. This mass of snow and ice carried Sato and Nazuka 500 vertical meters with it. Their bodies were recovered an hour and a half later.

## **Spring 2005: Inaccurate Forecasts Cause Many Failures on Everest**

### **Swiss Climber Ueli Steck Solos Tawache Face**

### **Two Men Claim to Have Reached Their 14th 8000ers**

Once upon a time—a decade ago—everyone knew the period of good weather for summiting Everest was between the 5th and the 15th of May; commercial expedition leaders set the 6th to the 10th as their target dates. Then later in the 1990s the weather pattern seemed to push the favorable period to later in the month, to the 18th to 25th. Never so late as June—until 2004, when two Russians made the first June ascent, and that was on the very first day of the month. This year, a number of teams summited in June after weeks of waiting, and didn't leave their base camps until its second week.

The commercial expeditions were back in strength this spring, and many were receiving daily forecasts via satellite from such well-known meteorological centres as Bracknell in England. They wanted to know about impending snowstorms, but they were particularly looking for predictions about wind velocity on Everest, to know when there would be three or four continuous days of gentle breezes. Then they could plan to send their members and Sherpas up into the highest camp for their summit bids. (And not only the commercial teams were closely following the forecasts; the small two-member parties did their best to learn what predictions the others were getting.)

The problem was that the forecasters were constantly getting it wrong, and on the basis of inaccurate predictions, especially for the southern side of Everest, climbers were going up and down the mountain—and even trekking below base camp—like yo-yos, tiring themselves out and becoming increasingly frustrated. Some independent climbers ignored the received wisdom, made their attempts to reach the summit, failed and went home. “If it wasn't snowing, the wind was blowing,” said one who gave up waiting for a break in the weather. Other climbers, both independents and members of larger groups, stubbornly stayed till late in May and early June, and many of these were finally rewarded with success.

On the north side, a few teams summited on the 21st and 22nd of May, then not until the 27th, when they then continued to succeed until the 5th of June. On the south side, no one reached the top until the 30th and 31st of May, the days on which almost all the successes were achieved; others went to the summit on June 2nd and 5th.

However, this does not include the claim by a French helicopter pilot, Didier Delsalle, to have taken off from the Lukla airfield near Everest in Nepal, landed his Ecureuil on the 8850-meters-high top of the world on 14 May, stepped out of the cockpit and stayed there for over two minutes before flying safely back to Lukla. The Nepalese authorities denied his claim but invited him to leave the country for breaking rules.

There was a large number of unhappy climbers aiming to reach the top in the normal way on their own two feet. They belonged to the unprecedented total number 101 teams, 49 on Tibet's northern side and 42 on the Nepalese side, and they ranged in size from one-foreigner parties without any Sherpa support to an expedition on the northern side with 27 members with 36 supporting Sherpas and Tibetans.

In the spring of last year, 64 teams went to Everest and only 10 (16%) failed. This year, 101 groups were on the mountain and an astonishing 48 of them (48%) failed to put anyone on the top. There were 326 summiters last spring, but this season only 306 men and women claimed success.

The leader of one of the larger teams, Henry Todd, who relied on Bracknell's forecasts and as a result none of his members summited, said he intended to find out why all the forecasters predicted mild winds when they actually were fierce. He brings expeditions to Everest every spring, and obviously he is not at all interested in more erroneous predictions.

An Australian climber figured out how to beat the weather on the south side: go around to the north. Piers Buck had originally planned to make a traverse from south to north and had permits to do so. He had gotten to only 7500 meters on 16 May and then the weather became unsettled for many days, whereas on the north side people started getting to the top on the 21st. So he left the team he was with on the southern side, flew by helicopter to Kathmandu on the 23rd, and went by road to the north side's base camp. He summited on 5 June as a member of the expedition he had been given permission to descend with.

Another late arrival at base camp on the north side climbed without any Sherpa support or bottled oxygen. Marcin Miotk was on an unsuccessful Polish team to the south face of Annapurna I and returned to Kathmandu in mid-May. But instead of going home he went to Everest, was at base camp on 18 May and made two summit bids. On the first one, he climbed with two Austrians but turned back at 7900 meters on 1 June because of strong wind. The second, he reported, was a success: climbing alone from advance base camp, he was on the top at 2:30 p.m. on 5 June, the very last person of the season to summit Everest.

Amongst those who claimed success were a few whose ascents were some kinds of first:

- First Muslim women, Miss Farkhondeh Sadegh and Mrs. Laleh Keshavaz from Iran, on 30 May from the south side.
- First Mongolian, Usuhkbayar Golovdorj, on 30 May also from the south, the first from his land to gain any 8000-meter summit.
- First Bhutanese, Karma Gyeltshen, on 21 May from the north. Unlike Golvdorj, he had no Sherpas with him to the top. There was some speculation amongst other climbers that he had not gotten all the way to the summit: he was a slow, inexperienced climber, and the elapsed time he gave for his final ascent seemed inconsistent with his claim of success.
- First citizen of the Balkan nation Serbia and Montenegro, Iso Planic, on 29 May from the north.



- First black person from any country to scale Everest twice, and to do so from both south and north sides, Subusiso Vilane from South Africa, on 3 June from the north.
- First climber to make his 15th ascent, Apa Sherpa, on 31 May at the age of about 43, from the south. He says he goes to Everest repeatedly because it's a well-paying job he is good at.
- First climber with only one arm, Australian Paul Hockey, on 5 June also from the north. (An American, Gary Guller, who had summited in May 2003, had lost much but not all of an arm.) But Hockey, 42 years old, became so exhausted by his ascent that he had to be helped by five Sherpas to descend from 8700 meters.
- First marriage on the summit: Miss Moni Mulepati and Pem Dorje Sherpa exchanged garlands as she became the first non-Sherpa Nepalese woman to reach the top.

Another summit claimant who may actually not have gotten there was an Indian, Ganesh Padubidre Nagesh Rao (he simplifies his name to P. N. Ganesh). He had no teammates, just one Sherpa with him; from about 8600 meters on 3rd June he made the last part of his ascent alone and, he says, got to the top at about 10:00 a.m. The problem is that the date and time he says he summited, and the nationalities of the people who he reports were with him on the top, were not there, according to the other teams' reports of their own movements. For example, the only other summiters that day were a team of one Briton, one Norwegian, two South Africans and three Nepalese Sherpas, and they had left the summit two and a half hours before he arrived. But he thinks his fellow summiters were Dutch and Spanish plus just two Sherpas, whereas there were no Dutch and Spanish on top that day; he was sure the two Sherpas were with an expedition that actually sent no one to the top until the following day.

As usual, Everest took its toll of lives: three on each side of the mountain, one American, one Briton and one Canadian on the north side, one German, one Indian and one Slovenian on the south. The south side's notoriously treacherous Khumbu Icefall claimed its victims leaving one dead and one with a badly broken leg.

Death struck the American, Michael O'Brien, who became the 21st person to die in the Icefall. He slipped on one of the many big unstable ice blocks, plunged 50 meters down a crevasse and died of internal injuries. He and his brother Christopher had been descending to base camp together; Christopher took Michael's body home.

Ben Webster, a Canadian who knew the Icefall well and had summited Everest in May 2000 via this route, was also descending to base camp when a chunk of ice slipped out from under his left foot. He fell on his side, twisted his leg so badly that it broke in two places below the knee, and was carried or dragged down to base camp by perhaps as many as 40 Sherpas. He took himself home from Kathmandu on crutches.

One team came to the north side of Everest this spring with the sole purpose of recovering the bodies of compatriots who perished there last spring. Called the

2005 Korean Chomolungma Human Expedition, it was led by the veteran South Korean climber Um Hong-Gil, who brought 11 other Koreans and 18 Sherpas to locate the remains of three men, Park Mu-Taek, Jang Min and Baek Joon-Ho, and, if possible, take them down to the nearest Buddhist monastery at Rongbuk for cremation.

Only one body was found despite a search of a wide area of mountainside: Park was lying on his back, clipped onto the fixed rope at 8750 meters. There were no gloves on his hands, so Um put his own gloves on them “because they must be cold.” The body was brought down to 8600 meters, and there, away from the main trail, stones were moved aside to make space to lay it down; they were then used to cover it completely and to make a small cairn beside it.

It was a miracle that many more people didn’t die on the south side of Everest when a huge avalanche of rock and ice crashed down from the west shoulder on 4 May onto tents pitched at camp 1 just above the top of the Icefall. Very luckily few people were occupying the camp at the time, and those who were there or near it received relatively light cuts and bruises except for one Sherpa whose back was injured. Numerous tents and the gear inside them were completely lost.

On a much happier note, the well-known American mountaineer Ed Viesturs went to Cho Oyu to acclimatize and then quickly to his last 8000er, Annapurna I. The north face of this mountain is notorious for its fatal avalanches. Viesturs went to it in the spring of 2000 and witnessed constant avalanching all across the face; he returned from having climbed no higher than 5900 meters and declared he would never go to there again. His next attempt, in 2002, was via the very long east ridge, which he decided was not for him. So now he was back on the north face after all.

This time he and his frequent climbing partner, Vieikka Gustafsson of Finland, already well acclimatized, moved quickly up the face, pitched their high camp at just 6900 meters, waited there three days for the wind to drop, and were on the summit on the 12 of May, less than two weeks after arriving at base camp. Viesturs was amazed by how free the face was from avalanching.

On the summit, he felt it was “a dream come true. I had my doubts that I’d ever get there because of our conservatism [about taking risks] and its dangerous avalanching.” He thinks he is the seventh or eighth person to scale all 8000ers without using bottled oxygen. What next? “Now that I’ve gotten the 8000ers out of the way, maybe some 7000ers in Nepal, maybe Antarctica.” He had no definite plans yet.

Viesturs and Gustafsson left the mountain on 14 May without any avalanche problems—much to their astonishment. On the 18th, four men from an Italian team led by Abele Blanc reached 6300 meters in the same gully the American and Finn had climbed when suddenly huge blocks of ice, some three meters square, came crashing down. Christian Kuntner, for whom Annapurna was the last 8000er he had left to scale, received fatal internal injuries. Blanc, who was in the lead, was struck on the side of his head so hard that he was unconscious for 18 hours and has no memory of the incident, and two of his ribs were broken. (Annapurna was his final

unclimbed 8000er also.) The last two men going up the shallow couloir, Stephan Andres and Marco Barmasse, were not so seriously hurt.

Alan Hinkes, another mountaineer keen to finish the 8000ers, went to Kangchenjunga this spring with the additional objective of becoming the first Briton to scale them all. The mountain received heavy snowfall in April and May, and this stopped a six-member team led by Norbert Joos of Switzerland from going higher than 7620 meters on 13 May, and they decided to give up hope ten days later, citing the dangerous snow conditions. Nevertheless, Hinkes and his Sherpa, Pasang Gelu, stayed on. They re-fixed sections of Joos's ropes, and on 30 May went for the top. Pasang Gelu turned back near the summit while Hinkes pushed on alone and summited just as daylight was fading and new snow was starting to fall. He groped his way down the ropes and almost bumped into his Sherpa in the poor visibility; they managed to get safely back to their tent at 7400 meters for what was left of the night.

The British ambassador gave a garden party in Kathmandu to celebrate Hinkes' success. He certainly deserves credit for summiting Kangchenjunga. But his claim to have now climbed all 8000ers is open to question. In April 1990 he and others reached the summit plateau of Cho Oyu. It was misty so they could not see well; nine years later Hinkes said he had "wandered around for a while" in the summit area but could see very little and eventually descended to join the others, one of whom said they had not reached the top. Hinkes noted six years ago that as a mountain guide he could earn money by guiding a group of clients on Cho Oyu and would do so and make sure to get to the highest of the numerous mini-summits on the plateau. He never went back, but he said again after Kangchenjunga that he can lead a paying group to Cho Oyu. One hopes it isn't misty next time.

Climbers on most of Nepal's other 8000-meter mountains had the same problems with wind and snow and avalanching. No one at all got to the summits of Makalu, Manaslu and Dhaulagiri I. Half a dozen climbers who had planned to go from Dhaulagiri I to nearby Annapurna I immediately dropped that idea when they learned about the ice avalanche that had killed Christian Kuntner. Even on the Tibetan side of Cho Oyu, said to be the least difficult of all routes on 8000-meter mountains, only ten of the 37 teams were successful.

One of the numerous failed Cho Oyu teams was a four-man Japanese party led by Masakazu Okuda. One member was 54-year-old Yoshiki Takeshita, who has been totally blind since the age of 15 and was the first sightless person ever to try to ascend the mountain. He made one attempt to reach the summit with his three teammates and their four Sherpas on 1 May, but they decided to turn back at 7950 meters at 1:00 p.m. because by that time it was too late for them get to the top and return safely at their slow pace to their highest camp.

Takeshita used bottled oxygen from their first high camp at 6400 meters up to 7950 meters. and down to their third camp at 7000 meters, so now there was not enough oxygen left for a second summit push. In any case, he was too tired to try again.

Throughout the period when he was moving up and down the mountain from their arrival at base camp at the road-head on 11 April until their departure on 5

May, Takeshita was led by Okuda, who held one end of a pole and he the other end; Okuda also told him where he had to go next: step up now or turn right.

This is in marked contrast to the only ascent of Everest by a blind person, a 32-year-old totally sightless American climber, Erik Weihenmayer. He was not led by a pole or short-roped, but was guided by the sound of a bell on the rucksack of the teammate ahead of him and by his own feeling and probing with two poles. When he reached one of the mountain's many crevasses, a teammate placed one of his feet on its lip, and he used his poles to judge the distance to the other side—and then jumped. He was on the top of the world on 25 May, 2001.

A Dhaulagiri I team from South Korea led by Ahn Jea-Hong declared they had sent a member and three Sherpas to the summit. But when their summit member Choi Im-Bok described what he had found at the top, a tall metal pole standing upright, it was clear that they had mistakenly gone to only the fore-summit, which looks deceptively like the highest point.

While hundreds of climbers were in the early stages of their wanderings up and down Everest, one Swiss, Ueli Steck, was totally alone on the southeast face of Tawache, not far to the southwest. First, he went to the base of the northeast pillar of this 6501-meter peak, but he saw there was too much loose rock falling down the couloir on his intended route, so he went around to the southeast face instead. He started up the face at 11:30 p.m. of the 24th of April from his base at 5200 meters, was on the summit at 8:00 a.m. the next day and soon back in base camp. Just one hour after his return to camp, snow avalanches started coming down the face.

"I didn't pick the perfect route," he commented. "It was dark." He had stayed on the face throughout his climb, but he thinks the best route probably is one leading to the southeast summit and from there traversing to the left along the summit ridge to the highest point.

Mountaineers in the Everest region of Nepal are not bothered by Maoist rebels, but one expedition travelling by road from Kathmandu to the Tibetan side of the mountain had a bad experience. Rebels had declared highways closed for five days in the area which the road passes through. The trekking agency for a large Russian-led expedition and several other teams arranged for the Royal Nepal Army to escort their convoys of vehicles on 7, 8 and 9 April to the border village, Kodari, and all of them reached there without incident.

However, the Russian leader, Alexander Abramov, and one of his members, Sergei Kaymachnikov, were delayed leaving Kathmandu on the 9th, so they took a taxi to catch up with the team later. Only about 25 kilometers out of Kathmandu, a small bomb was tossed through the open window in the back of the taxi where Kaymachnikov was sitting. Its explosion ripped off his heel while some of its fragments penetrated the back of the front seat and slightly wounded Abramov.

An army helicopter quickly flew them to the military hospital in Kathmandu, where Kaymachnikov was treated until he left for Moscow on the 15th. Abramov drove to the border on the 16th, rejoined his team and climbed to their highest camp at 8300 meters.

Also to enforce their will, the Maoists had planted land mines at either end of a small bridge a few kilometers south of Kodari. Here an Everest expedition of Australians and a Dutchman led by Tashi Tenzing, a grandson of Tenzing Norgay Sherpa, had to stop on the 13th and wait for three hours until an army bomb disposal squad detonated them.

Elsewhere Maoists extorted funds from climbers. They charged Joos's Kangchenjunga six-member group Rs.5000 (roughly \$70) per member. Another team, a Georgian and a Russian led by the Georgian, Gia Tortladze, on their way to Manaslu were forced to pay a total of Rs.52,500 (\$745). This charge was calculated by the rebels at Rs.100 per member per day; the climbing permit from the tourism ministry stated that there were seven members on this expedition and it was valid for 75 days. The fact that actually they were only two members was of no interest to the Maoists. Complained Tortladze later, "there are two governments in Nepal: one in Kathmandu and one run by the Maoists."

**Autumn 2005: Worst Disaster in Wipes Out French Team**  
**Americans John Roskelley and Son Try Gaurishankar's North Side**  
**Four "Unconquered" Peaks Attempted Unsuccessfully**  
**Only Two Climbers Go to Everest and They Fail**

The worst disaster ever to befall an expedition in the Nepalese Himalaya struck a seven-member French team on Mt. Kang Guru. The only previous death on the mountain was that of a West German named Bernd Arenz, who died in a fall on 24 October 1985. Now twenty years later almost to the day, on 20 October, all the French, led by Daniel Stolzenberg and including his wife, and 11 of their Nepalese employees, three high-altitude climbers, base camp cook and kitchen boys, plus low-altitude load-carrying porters, who were in their base camp tents after the members' late afternoon tea, when they were swept by avalanching into a deep gorge below.

All 18 people perished. Several other porters were outside their tents and managed to survive and to trek to the nearest village, Meta, where they met a French-Israeli expedition planning to climb another mountain in the area, Ratna Chuli. This team immediately informed the French embassy in Kathmandu of the disaster. (Because of the snow conditions, the Ratna Chuli team made no attempt to continue to their peak.)

Early rescue attempts to retrieve the climbers' bodies were mostly ineffective. One, that of Bruno Chardin, a ski resort manager, was found before they suspended their search because of continued avalanching. In the mean-time French specialists in post-avalanche searches with special equipment and two sniffer dogs arrived from France. By mid-November, when they too called off their work until early next year, the bodies of another member, Jean-Francois Jube, an advisor to the French Ministry of Youth and Sports, and a low-altitude porter, Manilal Gurung, had been discovered.

The previous record death toll on a single expedition in Nepal had been set by a South Korean team on Manaslu. In April 1972 15 men—10 Nepalese, four Koreans and one Japanese cameraman—were killed when a big avalanche struck their tents at 3:15 a.m. But most of the Koreans were inexperienced in the Nepalese Himalaya, whereas at least two of the Frenchmen had been to Nepalese or Pakistani 8000-meter mountains, and all of them lived in mountainous parts of France. Stolzenberg, for example, came from Chamonix, was a professional guide and had been a professor at the prestigious ENSA (National School of Skiing and Alpinism). And they had an experienced sirdar (leader of the Nepalese staff) named Iman Gurung, who had summited Everest twice, most recently in May this year, as well as Cho Oyu twice.

It is easy to be wise after the event, and some people questioned the wisdom of the base camp's location. It was surrounded by 35-40-degree slopes. One porter reportedly suggested that the camp be moved to what he considered a safer location downhill, but his proposal was not acted upon.

A noted French climbing instructor, Jean Coudray, who came to Kathmandu after he had discussed this subject with previous Kang Guru leaders, noted that the

team had placed their base camp at the normal site. “In this area, there is no place for base camp that is completely safe; there is no safer site for it” than the one everyone has used. In any case, “the cost of mountaineering is a little risk.”

Furthermore, he pointed out, there was continuous heavy snowfall for many hours. The resulting avalanching was made of powder snow, the worst kind of avalanche because it travels down a slope of 30 degrees or more very fast—200 or more kilometers per hour—and its “target” is impossible to predict: it can shift direction often. In this case, the avalanching happened to target base camp.

Kang Guru is a 6981-meter mountain in the Manang area northeast of the Annapurna range; it is east of Pisang Peak, which is favored by climbers preferring a lower mountain and less bureaucratic red tape for a permit. In recent years, Kang Guru has been a favorite of some French commercial expedition organizers. It apparently was safe—as mentioned above, only one climber had ever died on the 27 previous teams to Kang Guru, and that occurred two decades ago—and the approach route went through colorful mountain villages.

East of Manang, the noted American mountaineer John Roskelley and his son Jess aimed to make the first ascent of Mt. Gaurishankar from its Tibetan side. The mountain defeated them as it had the three earlier attempts on the north side by Britons in 1964 and Japanese in 1997 and 1998. It stands 7134 meters high south-southwest of Cho Oyu. On a very clear day, it is visible from Kathmandu on the northeastern horizon and was once thought to be the world’s highest mountain until the British Survey of India made more careful measurements. Its first ascent was made by John Roskelley himself in May 1979 from Nepal’s southwest face, the feature that can be seen from Kathmandu. However, Gaurishankar is seldom attempted even from the Nepalese side and has been summited only twice since Roskelley’s success.

The Roskelleys were unable to get very far in their efforts on one of its northeast ridge, of which there are several, John reported. The Roskelleys’ ridge turned out to be a ridge of unstable rocks—“like a house of cards.” There were even huge icicles hanging from them. John and Jess gave up at only 5450 meters because of the dangerous rocks that were very difficult to climb, and the difficulties got worse as the ridge got higher.

The only team to attempt Everest this autumn also failed to reach their summit. They were another father-and-son team, Jerzy and Pawel Michalski from Poland, and they abandoned their climb in late September at only 6700 meters, 300 meters below the North Col, their intended site for Camp 1, because of the serious risk of fatal avalanching. Two of their Sherpas had been hit by a soft-snow avalanche while fixing rope just below the Col; they were not seriously hurt, but that was sufficient warning to the Poles.

The last time anyone summited Everest in an autumn season was in 2002, when Marc Siffredi, a skilled French snowboarder, climbed to the top via the standard North Col route on 8 September intending to snowboard down the north face into the Hornbein Couloir. (He had reached the top in May 2001 when he made the first snowboard descent of Everest by the standard northern route.) Then in September

2002 he started down the north face but very soon completely disappeared; no trace has ever been found of him or his snowboard or gear.

Commercial expedition organizers do not send teams to Everest in the autumn. They crowd the mountain in the spring instead because as climbers go higher in the autumn, the weather is turning colder and the daylight hours shorter, whereas in the spring it is getting warmer and the days longer. Furthermore, the period of favorable weather usually is briefer in autumn. The organizers send their clients instead to Cho Oyu and Ama Dablam in September and October respectively, and then it is these two mountains that are crowded.

This autumn, a total of 46 teams were on Cho Oyu, the 8000er, and one more, 47 teams, on 6812-meters-high Ama Dablam. Cho Oyu via its standard route in Tibet is the least difficult of all the 8000ers and appeals to those who want to be able to boast they had been to the top of an 8000-meter mountain, or to others who see the climb as training for Everest. Ama Dablam is a handsome mountain seeming to be almost within touching distance to the hundreds of trekkers who pass by it on their way to Nepal's Everest base camp site, and it does not present the problems of extreme altitude.

The four small teams' who made bids to scale peaks not already climbed successfully were themselves unsuccessful, three of them because of the prolonged heavy snowfall right across the country that tragically wiped out the French on Kang Guru. The three who were stopped by deep snow were Slovenians to Janak in the far northeast, and climbers for two peaks which no one had ever attempted before, Japanese to Pabuk Kang also in the far northeast and three Americans and a German to Swaksa Kang in the northwest. The fourth party, two Canadians and an American, went to Tengkangpoche in the Everest region in mid-Nepal.

The three Americans and one German for the south face of the previously unattempted Swaksa Kang (or Swaska Kang), a 6405-meter mountain in the Kanjiroba Himal range, were led by Peter Ackroyd, who has come several times to obscure mountains well off the beaten track. This season his party were unable even to set foot on the mountain although they made base camps in two successive locations. They put the first one on 17 October near a stream called Swaska Khola; here the problem was the impossibility of finding a route through a glacial area of big over-hanging glaciers and loose rocks underfoot which were covered with snow preventing their seeing what exactly was underneath it.

Two days later they pitched their second base camp west of the stream's valley and farther west across Yala Pass. But now the heavy snowfall began that night and continued for most the next three days. They gave up. They were now running short of food and fuel, and their porters were getting very nervous about this and the deepening snow, which could have landed them in "big trouble," said member Jim Frush, former president of the American Alpine Club. They encountered another problem away from the mountain: Maoist rebels relieved them of \$200 per member and Rs.2500 (roughly \$35) for their sirdar.

Two Japanese led by the explorer-mountaineer Tamotsu Ohnishi, who specializes in very remote areas along Nepal's border with Tibet, and who now



wanted to try the south side of Pabuk Kang, northwest of Kangchenjunga. But they, too, had to abandon their plans to climb the previously unattempted mountain. On 21 October 130 centimeters of new snow started falling kept falling for three days. On the day before, they had pitched their advance base camp just east of Yanmakang Pass, south-southwest of the peak, but went no farther. They too had encountered Maoists. On their approach march to Pabuk Kang, they met five parties of Maoists but paid Rs.2000 or about \$27 per member to only two of them.

The third team who quit climbing because of the snow were two Slovenians on “unconquered” Janak, which stands 7044 meters high, farther northwest from Kangchenjunga than Pabuk Kang but also on the Nepal-Tibet border. It was first attempted in the autumn of 2004 by Romanians. Now the veteran mountaineer Andrej Stremfelj was there with one teammate, Miha Haban. However, before trying to ascend Janak, they acclimatized on Dzanye, a 6870-meter peak farther west along the border. They made two bivouacs above base camp at 4750 meters at Lhonak—their second bivvy was 15 kilometers from base—and succeeded on 12 October via a couloir of 50-55-degree ice leading almost directly to the summit; from the top of this gully on the south-southeast face, they moved up the face and finally at 6770 meters onto the west ridge to the summit. They started down the ridge, but it became so steep they went onto the south face; even here they were forced to rappel down 350 meters to their lower bivouac at 5610 meters for the night. They were back in base the next day.

They now turned their attention to their principal goal, Janak. They had already established their advance base at 5710 meters for this climb and occupied it again on the 18th. The next day they examined the glacier under the south face and on the 20th began their ascent. They climbed a couloir at the eastern edge of the face and dug a snow hole at the top of the face where it joins the southwest ridge at 6650 meters. But they were too late.

The sky had become cloudy that morning and by evening, when they bivouacked, a strong, very cold wind had blown up. They had no sleeping bags or tent with them since they had expected to keep climbing through the night in full moonlight, but the clouds shut out the moon. On the 20th they abandoned their attempt and descended the face in 15 rappels; at 2:00 p.m. they reached their couloir; snow was falling and avalanching had begun on the face. Despite this, they were safely back in their advance base camp at 5:00 p.m.

Tengkangpoche, in Khumbu west of Namche Bazar, is 6500 meters high; it was attempted by seven previous teams, most recently by Britons in the autumn of 2004 and by Japanese in the spring of this year. This autumn it was the turn of two Canadians and an American led by Will Gadd from Canada. Their route was the north face, where they tried two lines on the 29th and 30th of October, but by now the American member had dropped out because of illness and they were down to two men, Gadd and fellow Canadian Scott Semple. They reached 5200 meters on each line and then gave up on the 30th principally because they had hoped to climb ice but instead found unconsolidated snow on the face, but also because here too there were dangerous avalanches.

The vast majority of fatalities this autumn were suffered by the French team for Kang Guru, but two other climbers died on Annapurna IV and Tilicho—not on the two crowded mountains, Ama Dablam and Cho Oyu, as some might have feared. On Annapurna IV, an Austrian, Alois Schiempfoessl, died of altitude sickness on 14 October, and two weeks later, Josef Kaesbauer, who was German, fell to his death on Tilicho.

## **Winter 2005-Spring 2006: A “Dead” Australian Comes to Life on Everest**

### **A Rare Traverse of Annapurna I Involved an Extra Challenge**

#### **Noted French Climber Lafaille Disappears on Makalu**

“I imagine you guys are surprised to see me here,” were Australian mountaineer Lincoln Hall’s words upon being discovered miraculously alive on the north side of Everest on 26 May after having been reported dead the day before. He was speaking to Dan Mazur, the leader of another expedition, Mazur’s two clients and their Sherpa on their way to the summit. “Can you please tell me how I got here? ... You guys on this boat too?”

At the “Mushroom Rock” at about 6550 meters, Mazur’s party found Hall with the top of his down suit half off, his gloves and cap entirely off, no oxygen equipment, ice axe or backpack, sitting one meter from the edge of the Kangshung Face. They pulled him away from the precipice, secured him with rope, gave him oxygen, food and water, put his arms into his sleeves, his hat and gloves on him—but he kept taking them off and Mazur’s party had to keep putting them back on—“he was like a three-old-year child,” said Mazur.

A radio call by Mazur for Sherpas from Hall’s expedition to come and get him brought them at 11:30 a.m.; he was now delirious. It took several days, at least 15 Sherpas and 50 cylinders of oxygen to get Hall to base camp; a yak took him the last distance because of his weakness and seriously frostbitten fingers and big toe. Mazur’s summit party, knowing it was then too late to go for the top, turned around and went down to advance base camp instead.

The Hall saga is reminiscent of the case in the disastrous spring of 1996 of a resurrected American, Beck Weathers, who suddenly appeared alone at his South Col camp (at 7900 meters) saying, “it’s great to be alive.” Alive he was, but after having been out in the open for 20 hours at very high altitude and presumed dead when last seen on a ledge 20-30 meters below the Col, he was nearly blind and very badly frostbitten on the fingers of both hands and his nose.

Everest traverses seem to have become the latest fashion with an unprecedented four successful ones this season. Three had received permission from both the Chinese and Nepalese authorities; one had not but managed to get away with it—but at a price, literally.

The Italian Simone Moro had no permit to make a traverse. According to him, he had intended to reach the summit from the Nepalese side’s South Col, descend the Tibetan north face’s Hornbein Couloir, move across the west ridge and down into the Nepalese side’s Western Cwm to the camp he had left there. But, he claimed, he became lost in the moonless dark and had to follow the fixed ropes, which he pulled out of the snow, down the normal northern route. An Italian friend, who lives in Lhasa and speaks Chinese and Tibetan, met him in base camp and explained to the authorities there and at the nearest police post how he had

innocently gotten lost. The police gave him a pass allowing him to cross the border into Nepal.

Others who were on the mountain at the same time as Moro point out that he had taken his passport with him, which is most unusual when climbing in Nepal. They say there were a tent and an oxygen bottle labelled MORO placed by two Italians, Marco Astori and Roberto Piantoni, at 8100-8200 meters on the normal north-side route. His friend was already waiting for him at base camp when he arrived, but he had no satellite phone, so their meeting must have been pre-arranged. He had to pay \$3000 for his permit to cross the border, a detail he had omitted to mention earlier.

Those who did have permits came from three other expeditions: crossing also from south to north were a Swiss, Mario Julen, with his Sherpa Da Nima; from north to south a Korean, Park Young-Seok, with Serap Jangbu Sherpa, and Dawa Sherpa all alone. Dawa rightly claimed a speed record for traverses with his elapsed time, verified by the leaders of the teams, which he left on the north side and joined on the south side, of 20 hours and 15 minutes. He was helped by using two bottles of oxygen from 8300 meters on his way up to 8500 meters coming down.

Although Lincoln Hall very fortunately did not die after all, eleven people did, making this spring the second deadliest season on the great mountain (the worst was the famous *Into Thin Air* 1996 spring, when a dozen died). This season on the south side, three Nepalese Sherpas, Lhakpa Tshering, Dawa Temba and Phinzo, perished when a massive chunk of the notorious Khumbu Icefall collapsed on top of them.

The remaining eight deaths occurred on the Tibetan side. Two men, a Russian, Igor Plyushkin, and Tuk Bahadur Thapa Magar, a Nepalese, succumbed to acute altitude sickness, and another, a German named Thomas Weber, to a stroke. Two were killed in falls: a Swedish skier, Tomas Olsson, when one ski cracked, and an Indian soldier, Sri Kishan. And three died—as Hall nearly did—from exhaustion, exposure and frostbite: a Briton, David Sharp, Vitor Negrete, Brazilian, and Jacques Letrange from France.

There was much outraged commentary, including entries in internet mountaineering websites, about how as many as 30 people may have passed the dying David Sharp at 8500 meters as they went for the top or descended from their summit bids, but continued on their way. Their actions were depicted as heartless and reflections of a supposed deterioration in climbing ethics with the advent of large numbers of “amateurs” in recent years. But armchair critics can fail to take into account all the possible reasons:

- Many simply did not see him. It was a very dark night and head lamps focus on restricted areas; the day was very cold, so they would still have had their hoods around their faces; almost all were wearing oxygen masks which limited their viewing areas; and Sharp was in a shallow cave where he was difficult to spot.

- Some may have seen him but thought he was the long-dead Indian whose body he was actually lying on top of.
- Others may have seen—even recognized—him and thought he was dead already.

In any case, some climbers did stop and try to give him help. Turks tried, but they were fully occupied rescuing their own member and could give only limited assistance. Sherpas from other teams also tried, but they were themselves exhausted and their oxygen supplies were running low. Sharp did not have a Sherpa helping him—he reportedly refused to have one. He wanted to climb alone, and so he did—it is extremely difficult to piece together his movements. He climbed alone and tragically died alone.

Although reports of this kind of alleged callous behaviour by climbers determined to fulfil their personal ambitions to get to the summit regardless of others' predicaments, made good newspaper stories, there were several instances in which "amateurs" sacrificed their own summit successes to help strangers in distress. The reaction of Dan Mazur's party when they came upon Lincoln Hall was not unique.

Some Everest death counts for this spring have included one more climber, Pavel Kalny, a Czech who plunged to his death on the west face of Lhotse, where the climbing routes for Everest and Lhotse are the same at lower altitudes but diverge higher up. This man was higher up, a Lhotse climber, not an Everest climber.

The total number of teams on Everest this season (which ranged in size from one member with no Sherpa helper to 29 members and 22 Sherpas) was 94, five fewer than last year's 99, rather than as one might expect greater than the previous year's total. It actually was larger this spring on the Tibetan side, up from 57 to 64, but a bigger drop on the Nepalese side, down from 42 to 30 brought down the overall total.

In terms of numbers of summiters, there was an even greater difference between the Tibetan and Nepalese sides this season. A total of 276 people went to the top from Tibet, not counting the possibility that David Sharp summited and died during his descent—his movements above 8500 meters are not known. From Nepal, only 192 people succeeded.

One explanation for the fall in numbers of Everest teams in Nepal was the worrisome situation created by the ten-year-old armed rebellion of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and its recent increasing use of force throughout the country—plus this spring's political unrest that spilled onto the streets of Kathmandu and other towns nationwide organized by conventional parties angered by the King's "autocratic" actions; this took the forms of protest marches, public rallies and general strikes including bans on motorized travel. The international news media gave increasing attention to all of this, and some expeditions planned for Nepal were cancelled.

An American leader of a Cho Oyu expedition in Tibet decided to shun Nepal. He had heard how the leader and one member of a largely Russian team to the north side of Everest last spring had been wounded by Maoist gunfire on their way in a taxi from Kathmandu to the Tibetan border. (The rest of his team had gone earlier in a bus escorted by security forces.) So instead of travelling to Cho Oyu via Kathmandu, Tom McMillan and teammates flew directly from San Francisco to Beijing and Lhasa.

Furthermore, he did not even use a Nepalese trekking agent to make various arrangements for his party. After his return home, McMillan confessed, "I made a terrible mistake" in employing a Chinese in Urumchi named Guo. "Our trip was a disaster. Mr. Guo did a poor job to organize the trip, and this ruined the trip for everyone." The tents tore apart, and the cooks were totally unaware of hygiene, cooked unappetizing food with too much grease, and when criticized threatened members with knives. Largely because of all this, but also because of illness, the expedition never got above Camp 1. McMillan hopes to return to the mountain in 2007 or 2008 and will certainly use a Nepalese agency next time.

Back on Everest, two summiters' claims to success in Tibet were immediately challenged by climbing circles in their home countries, Malaysia and the Philippines, who declared that they did not produce convincing evidence. In the case of the Malaysian, Ravichandran Tharumalingam, his statements and those of others who knew him during his climb, and a photo he gave as evidence, differed in various details, while doubts raised about the Filipino, Dale Abenojar, centered on the question of whether he was competent enough to have reached the top of the world.

The subject of incompetence arises in connection with others. A compatriot of a Czech woman, Stanislava Ludikova, noted that she had spent much of her time walking around advance base camp. She twice struggled to climb up to Camp 1, taking two days to make a normal one-day climb, but never got higher. "In my opinion, she was not physically prepared" to climb Everest.

Then there is the case of two men from the Gulf state of Bahrain who set out to be the first Arabs to reach the summit of Everest on any Arab's first attempt. Although they had never before been higher than 2000 meters, Adnan Al Jaber and Faraj Al Qassimi arrived in Kathmandu on 20 March to conquer the 8850-meters-high peak. They made a nine-day acclimatization trek—not a technical climb—in Nepal's Everest area at altitudes of 4500 to 5000 meters before going to base camp in Tibet.

When they returned to Kathmandu in mid-April, they would say only that one of them got altitude sickness but they were going back very soon. Instead, they left the area completely. Apparently they reached no higher than an intermediate camp at 5800 meters. They had not been on the mountain long enough to have reached even advance base camp at 6400 meters.

On return to Bahrain, however, they claimed triumphantly to have reached 8500 meters. "We were so close ... We could see the Everest peak," Al Jaber is quoted by the *Gulf Daily News* as saying. (One cannot see the summit of Everest

from that altitude on the north side.) They gave a chatty interview to the paper, spoke of the kindly help they had received from the Crown Prince to solicit funds, the training they devised to get in shape, how awesome their first sight of Everest was, how one must have “a 100 percent positive attitude” without which “you might kill yourself,” and how unpleasant their experience was in the mountain’s cold and rarefied atmosphere. But the published interview provided extremely few details of their actual climb, which is not surprising if they very little.

As usual some Everest summit records were set—but not by Arabs. They included the oldest ever and the first double amputee. Takao Arayama, 70-year-old Japanese, became Everest’s oldest summiter—by precisely three days—on 17 May on the Tibetan side of the mountain.

The first successful double amputee, 46-year-old New Zealander Mark Inglis, had summited two days earlier from the Tibet side. Two single-amputee summiters, each of whom had lost a substantial part of one leg, had been American Tom Whittaker in 1998 and a Sherpa six years later; both climbed from the Nepalese side. The first double amputee to try was an American, Ed Hommer in the autumn of 2001, but when he had reached 7500 meters, he found that the scar tissue of his left stump had cracked open in the very dry air and was bleeding slightly. He abandoned his climb.

About 25 years ago, Inglis had been marooned in a storm on New Zealand’s highest mountain, Mt. Cook, for two weeks, and his badly frostbitten legs had to be amputated at mid-calf. His cleverly engineered artificial legs have the flexibility to enable him to handle technical climbing, but when he was going down the fixed rope early in his attack on Everest this spring, an anchor pulled out, he did a couple of somersaults and found himself sitting in the snow with one leg lying beside him. He got out some duct tape and did “a field fix,” then descended very carefully to advance base camp; a new leg was brought up to him from base camp, and he went back up.

He said he felt “huge satisfaction” at having summited Everest. “If you are a climber, as I have been all my life,” he said, “the skills are there” already. “My problem is not going up but coming down.” This means, “you have to be very careful; there is far more wear and tear on the stumps.” And indeed he got frostbitten; in his descent to advance base camp on the day after his success, he was lowered by one his guides on his bottom and two days later reached base camp astride a yak. Back in New Zealand his stumps had to be operated on.

The most technically challenging successful climb of the season was the two-way traverse of Annapurna I’s east ridge. When the well known Polish climber, Piotr Pustelnik, organized his four-man team for this task, he was well aware of the difficulties they would confront on the very long summit ridge starting from Glacier Dome in the east and running westwards to Roc Noir and the three over-8000-meter summits of Annapurna—and then back again via the same ridge. But he did not anticipate the addition of two not-so-highly skilled Chinese Tibetans on his permit and the problems on of them would present.

This east ridge is seldom attempted and even more seldom successfully climbed: the Swiss accomplished its first traverse in the autumn of 1984, but they did not retrace their ridge route in descent. The first two-way traverse was achieved in the spring of 2002 by the French mountaineer Jean-Christophe Lafaille and equally noted Spanish Basque, Alberto Inurrategi. These were the only crossings of the ridge's full length before this year.

Like Lafaille and Inurrategi, Pustelnik's party had no bottled oxygen or Sherpa support. First they acclimatized on Cho Oyu, and then on 6 May went to their base at 4130 meters at the south end of the Annapurna Glacier for their push to the main summit (8091 meters high). After having made three more camps and two bivouacs, three members, Pustelnik, his compatriot Piotr Morawski and Slovakian Peter Hamor, set out on 21 May from their bivouac at 7700 meters for the three summits.

Tagging along with them now was one of the Tibetans, Luo Tse, who had twelve 8000-meter summits to his credit, but all of them were achieved on much bigger teams than his 2006 group of just two members and one Sherpa. He now got stuck at the col between the east and central summits, Pustelnik reported. The route here had become very difficult, and it took hours for the Europeans to find a feasible route down a ramp for 100 meters below the ridge on the northern slope of the central summit. By this time, it was 4:00 p.m., but there was no place to stop for a bivouac; it would be necessary to finish their ascent well after nightfall. At this point, Pustelnik realized Luo Tse had become partly snow-blinded and badly dehydrated and had no headlamp.

So Hamor went on alone, rejoined the ridge, gained the central and main summits on the 21st and then bivouacked at ten o'clock between the summits while Pustelnik and Morawski had a struggle to get the Tibetan down to their last bivouac at five o'clock the next morning. The Europeans' trials were still not over: by the time they had managed to reach their last fixed camp they had been without food for four or five days and were completely exhausted. They gave no thought to another try for the summit. They went home.

The two Tibetans and their Sherpa stayed on alone, rested and then, they reported, succeeded on their second summit bid in windy and cloudy weather on 4 June. They saw nothing at the top, but Luo Tse was certain they had reached the main summit because he had already seen it from the east summit in his first attempt with Pustelnik.

Another extremely difficult east ridge on an 8000ers is the prominent one in the middle of Everest's Kangshung (east) face in Tibet. An American who had successfully summited the mountain by its standard northern route in the last six successive years, Gheorghe Dijmarescu, got good advance publicity on the internet for his intention to lead a team up his unconquered mysterious "Fantasy Ridge," which turned out to be this east ridge. It is a formidable feature: a steep, crevassed, rock ridge with huge unstable snow mushrooms, a climber's nightmare in a remote area.



It had been seriously attempted only twice. A Japanese team abandoned their spring 1991 climb at just 6400 meters in progress so slow that one member joked they might reach the summit by the end of the year. They decided to stop before someone had a serious fall or got hit by pieces of the mushrooms that were frequently breaking off. Ten years later, an Indian team unluckily had not a single full day of good weather through-out their five weeks there, with white-out conditions briefly even at base camp, frequent avalanches and few safe places to put camps above 6900 meters, where they gave up.

Dijmarescu had decided not to approach the ridge from the remote Kangshung Glacier at the foot of the east side as the Japanese and Indians had. His team made their base and advance base camps where all expeditions camp for the normal northern route. They first tried climbing the northeast ridge to its junction with the east ridge to study their route looking down it, but heavy snowfall prevented that. Next they went to a low pass, the Raphu La, on the northeast ridge to look from there and saw terrible snow conditions: leaning towers of snow and ice ("it looked like the back of a dinosaur," according to the other American member, Dave Watson), with the top part of the ridge heavily crevassed. They decided it was badly out of condition and much too dangerous. That put an end to that fantasy. They successfully ascended the normal route.

A small Slovenian party accomplished the first ascent of the difficult 7000er, Janak Chuli, known as the Outlier. The mountain, north-northwest of Kangchenjunga on the Tibetan border, had been attempted only once before, by Romanians in 2004. Now Andrej Stremfelj and Rok Zalokar forged a complex route up the south face to the southwest pillar over to the west face and finally around to the northeast ridge and the top on 6 May. The south face presented many wide ice gullies while a number of pitches on the southwest pillar were shaped like the prow of a ship. They climbed the mountain from their advance base at 5715 meters with only one bivouac.

The planned use of performance-enhancing drugs was reported for the first time in the Nepalese Himalaya. The leader, Sven Gangdal, told a member of a Norwegian expedition to Lhotse, Erik Oppegaard, that either he had to leave the team or Gangdal himself would go. Gangdal explained that he had no wish to be responsible for a drug user. Oppegaard left.

A funny thing happened in connection with the first permit issued by the Nepalese ministry of tourism for Mt. Palung Ri to two unsuspecting New Zealanders, Tim Logan and Michael Chapman-Smith, who had selected it because its altitude was what they wanted (just over 7000 meters) and it was, they mistakenly thought, unclimbed. Imagine their surprise when they approached close to their mountain, found a boundary pillar and saw beyond it the numerous tents of Cho Oyu base camp.

So instead, they climbed a 6000er definitely inside Nepal called Cho Rapsek and returned to Kathmandu to declare, as Chapman-Smith put it, that it was "morally unacceptable" for the Nepalese government to have granted a permit for a mountain that wasn't theirs. (When in May 2003 the ministry published a new,

expanded list of peaks for which it would grant climbing permission, there at No. 226 was Palung Ri for the first time. But Palung Ri is in Tibet, not Nepal; its south ridge is a continuation of a north ridge of Cho Oyu, a border mountain. Even when it was pointed out to officials soon after the list was released that Palung Ri is actually in another country, it was never deleted.)

A Nepalese government ruling that team leaders found deeply offensive was its classification of human bodies left on a mountain as rubbish. The situation arose in connection with the tourism ministry's refusal to refund the expeditions' \$2000 rubbish deposits because of the bodies of the Czech who died on Lhotse and an Italian who probably fell into a crevasse on Pasang Lhamu Chuli (also known as Jasamba). The Czech's climbing partner, Martin Minarik, was unable to retrieve Pavel Kalny's body and had to leave it, while Hans Kammerlander never found the body of his teammate, Alois Brugger.

Jean-Christophe Lafaille, who pioneered the two-way traverse of Annapurna as mentioned above, tragically disappeared in January while attempting the first solo winter ascent of Makalu. The highest he is known to have reached is 7600 meters, where he pitched his small red tent on the 26th and from which he set out alone for the top early the next morning, as he reported by satellite phone to his wife Katya in France. This was expected to be the first of his reports to her that day.

But he never made contact with her or his base camp staff again. A search of the mountainside on the 4th of February by helicopter by his wife, her brother and Veikka Gustafsson, a Finnish mountaineer who had climbed with Lafaille and knows from his own ascent the climbing route Lafaille was following. They saw only his little tent and no other trace.

Gustafsson thought he knew what had happened. Ten years previously, he himself had climbed the same standard route that Lafaille was following. He had two climbing partners, American Ed Viesturs and a New Zealander, Rob Hall, while he himself led most of the final part to the summit. This section had numerous treacherous crevasses; he fell into three of them but was always belayed and emerged unscathed. Lafaille had no one to belay him, and Gustafsson was sure that the Frenchman fell into one and became fatally wedged against two walls of ice.

## **Autumn 2006: Shots are Fired Near Cho Oyu Advanced Base Camp**

### **China Initiates Policy to Reduce the Numbers on Everest**

#### **Rare Death Toll on “Safe” Ama Dablam**

When shots rang out near Cho Oyu’s crowded advance base camp on 30 September, some of the climbers ventured out to see what was going on. A professional photographer from Romania, Sergiu Matei, took his camera along and was in time to film a queue of Tibetans snaking up the trail to the Nangpa La, the high pass into Nepal used every year by hundreds of Tibetans fleeing their homeland to join the Dalai Lama in India. His pictures show a line of unarmed Tibetans trudging uphill when a shot is heard and a figure falls to the ground; behind them can be seen the Chinese border police who had fired at their retreating backs. The figure was a 17-year-old nun, Kelsang Namtso, who had put up no resistance and died where she lay in the snow.

The first official Chinese account said the Tibetans had attacked the armed police, who were then forced to defend themselves, but later her death was officially attributed to altitude sickness. A Czech expedition leader, who witnessed the shooting, Josef Simunek, told a pro-Tibetan organization based in Washington, “We felt as though it was 20 years ago in our country in communist times, when Czech soldiers killed Czech citizens in their escape over the Iron Curtain.”

International publicity about the Nangpa La shooting incident led some journalists to see it as a factor in the Chinese authorities’ decision to place restrictions on teams going to Everest next spring. But the Chinese Mountaineering Association’s formal announcement distributed in November to trekking agencies in Kathmandu made it clear that the cause was actually related to the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and China’s plan to take the Olympic torch to the summit of Everest before running it from there live on television in relays to the stadium in Beijing.

“The project of 2008 Olympic Torch Relay on Mt. Qomolangma [Everest] started officially in October of 2006, and the maneuver of [the trial run for] this project will be held in spring 2007,” the announcement explained. “According to the Spirit of Government for guaranteeing this cheering project a complete success, CMA negotiates with CTMA [China Tibet Mountaineering Association] and makes the following agreements to limit the number of climbers in Mt. Qomolangma area in 2007-spring season:

1. Increase the cost of Mt. Qomolangma.
2. Improve the quality of expeditions.
3. The climbing experience of 8000 meters is required for the climber.

Note: the duration of increased cost of Mt. Qomolangma is March 1st to June 1st, 2007.

“Thank you for your understanding and cooperation!”

A covering letter from Li Guowei, secretary of CMA's Exchange Department, to one Kathmandu agent says that "we have some temporary measures to limit the climbers in 2007 & 08." But at least part of what is now billed as temporary is expected to become permanent, according to a CTMA official in an interview in December. He estimated that the number of teams in 2007 could be half the number this spring. Asked whether any teams at all besides the official 50-member expedition would be permitted in 2008, he replied, "I don't know."

The official explained that the rules would gradually be tightened in the coming years. Improving the quality would include a requirement in 2007 that climbers have mountaineering skills—which, astonishingly, some do not possess when they arrive at base camp—and be equipped with walkie-talkies and other equipment that would enhance safety. Although he did not expand on this topic, it might also mean in future that agents will no longer be able to simply obtain a climbing permit, to sign up as "team members" a collection of independent climbers who have never met before, who don't even speak a common language, and to provide no leadership responsible for them and their safety; just charge a modest fee, take them to base camp, and say goodbye. It is possible that the tragic death of Britain's David Sharp last May, which attracted much critical attention in the West, may have gotten the attention of the authorities also. Sharp was a "member" of such a collection. He had no walkie-talkie and refused to have a Sherpa helping him: he wanted to climb alone, and so he did—and he died alone. If he were still alive, he might not be able to come back under the new rules.

The requirement that all Everest climbers must have been to 8000 meters in the past would not have disqualified Sharp, but it certainly will disqualify a lot of would-be Everesters, especially those who would normally join a "collection." A significant percentage of the hundreds of people who go each year to nearby Cho Oyu, 8201 meters high, which is the least difficult of all eight thousanders via its standard route, do so as a run-up to an Everest attempt. But many of them turn back before reaching the magic altitude of 8000 meters and thus will not be considered by the CMA and CTMA to be fit to attempt the Tibetan side of Mount Everest.

The rules from 2007 onwards may be a boon to the government of Nepal, which charges a steep fee for climbs on its side of the mountain, and they seem likely to affect the business of a number of Kathmandu trekking agents who have solicited clients for the Tibetan side only. But they will certainly be effective in reducing the crowding at camp sites and at the ladder placed beside the Second Step, and in eliminating the quasi-competent men and women wanting to be able to boast back home that they have climbed to the highest point on earth.

The cost increases in Tibet were spelled out soon after the initial notice. They add \$1000 to the current \$3900 per foreign climber, \$500 more on top of \$1700 per climbing Sherpa, and \$300 more to \$1100 per kitchen staff worker. These rates will still be substantially below Nepal's permit fees, although numerous unexpected charges keep being added on in Tibet.

Ama Dablam climbers Duncan Williams from Southampton, England, and Swedes Mikael Forsberg and Daniel Carlsson, plus their three Sherpas, were asleep

in their third and last high camp at 6200 meters at about 5:00 a.m. on 13 November, just before they were due to crawl out of their tents and go for their summit. They probably never knew what hit them. It was a huge mass of ice that broke away above camp 3, swept them hundreds of meters down the mountainside and buried them in a big mound of avalanche debris. One of Williams' teammates reached the camp's site later that day and found only one metal spoon and two pieces of rope that had been fixed but were pulled out by the avalanche.

Before this autumn a total of only 11 climbers had perished on Ama Dablam, the handsome 6812-meters-high mountain near Everest, since its first attempts in the late 1950s. Now half that number died on a single day. This was the first fatal avalanche ever to strike the standard southeast ridge route, which the six men had been following, and only the second fatal avalanche anywhere on the mountain. (The first had been late in the morning of 24 October, 1979, on the dangerous west face and had killed one New Zealander.) Thousands of men and women had safely ascended the southwest ridge; seven had died while climbing it, but six of those had fallen and the other one had succumbed to acute altitude sickness.

Avalanching spelled disaster elsewhere in Nepal's mountains. On Pumori, also near Everest, four Sherpas were killed when hunks of ice rained down on them the day after the Ama Dablam disaster; they were climbing the southeast face, which is fatally avalanche-prone but strangely the standard route chosen for commercial expeditions. In the previous month, a veteran Sherpa, Lhakpa Rita, was fatally hit by an avalanche on Annapurna I. Even before he arrived at his base camp, a Swiss mountaineer, Thomas Nikles, was killed by snow avalanching while he was on his way to Tashi Kang, north of Annapurna. And no one knows how far four Frenchmen got on Ganesh VII, a border mountain north of Kathmandu, because they disappeared. They had taken an inexpensive permit for a trekking peak, Paldor, but continued northward to climb Ganesh VII, which is off limits to climbers; it is about 6550 meters high and had never been attempted before. All of them were buried in an avalanche triggered by a falling serac after they left their camp at 5500 meters for the summit on 27 October.

While three-quarters of this autumn's teams concentrated on just two famous mountains and their well-trodden routes—79 on Cho Oyu and 56 on Ama Dablam—two teams were pioneers and made first ascents of peaks no one ever hears about. Five young Japanese, led by Miss Yoshimi Kato, were the first ever to attempt a 6905-meter mountain in the Manaslu area called Panbari, and they managed to “conquer” it in a three-week effort. Without Sherpas to help them fix 1500 meters of rope (1000 meters of it across numerous crevasses in an icefall from an altitude of 5300 to 5800 meters) they forged a route up the west face to the north ridge. The final ridge challenged them with six steps each 40 meters high; they had no more rope left to fix this section in deep snow, but nevertheless they were able to reach the top on 29 September.

In the northeastern corner of Nepal is a 6344-meters- high mountain called Merra (not to be confused with Mera, a so-called trekking peak near Everest). Two Danes attacked Merra and one, Claus Ostergaard, went to the top via its southeast

face to the east-northeast ridge. They too had no Sherpa help; they fixed no rope. In their push to the summit, Ostergaard's teammate, Thejs Ortmann, felt the effects of high altitude and was climbing so slowly that Ostergaard went on ahead and alone reached the top on 18 October. He described the climb as "quite easy" with only one "tricky section," a 20-meter rock slab just below the east summit.

Only a handful of climbers go to Everest in the autumn season because everyone knows that no one succeeds in the short climbing period between the end of the monsoon rains in September and the onset of the fierce jet stream winds in October. The last ascent of Everest in the post-monsoon season was made by a team of Slovenians led by Davo Karnicar, who needed snow and in early October 2000 became the first person ever to descend on skis in one continuous run from the very top of Mount Everest to base camp.

But veteran Himalayan climber Wally Berg, an American living in Canmore, Alberta, Canada, owner of a business that organizes and conducts climbing expeditions, and summiter of Everest four times, felt he knew how to succeed: for a seven-member team, take plenty of supplies (88 oxygen cylinders) and Sherpa helpers (13 climbing Sherpas plus cooks and bottle-washers), go relatively early, get the camps set up and wait for favorable weather to strike for the summit. His plan worked: five members with nine Sherpas were on the summit on 18 October after having out-waited a continuous snowstorm over several days. Three of the summiters skied major parts of their descent but broke their journey to sleep in their highest camp at the South Col. The expedition's members and Sherpas had consumed the contents of 84 oxygen bottles during their six-week effort, and the Sherpas had fixed a total of 3800 meters of rope.

Over on the north side of Everest were three strong and highly experienced Spaniards, Alberto Inurrategi, Ferran Latorre, and Juan Vallejo, who had a total of at least 23 8000-meter summit successes to their credit. They took no Sherpas, no oxygen bottles and no rope to fix on their chosen climbing route up the extremely steep, never-ending north face via the Japanese and Hornbein Couloirs. They were just three men equipped with their mountaineering expertise and motivation.

First, they acclimatized by climbing the normal route to the North Col at 7000 meters, then over to their camp at the bottom of the north face at 5900 meters. They started their summit push on 30 September, and with three bivouacs they were inside the Hornbein Couloir. Here on 3 October at 8200 meters Latorre stopped, not feeling strong, but his teammates carried on up to 8500 meters, where the Hornbein opens out. Now Vallejo decided his strength was ebbing, and Inurrategi turned back with him, not wanting to continue alone—and "maybe I was beginning to get tired too," he said. They seemed satisfied with what they had accomplished. "We made a good push," Inurrategi commented.

## **Spring 2007: Two Men Surmount Everest's Second Step Without a Ladder**

### **After the Hordes Have Gone Home**

#### **Global Warming Makes Ama Dablam Dangerous and Difficult**

#### **and Cho Oyu May Be Similarly Affected**

Centuries ago European theologians debated the question of how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. The modern equivalent might be how many climbers can stand on the summit of Everest. We may soon find out as the numbers rise dramatically.

The authorities in Beijing said last November they would limit the number of climbers on the mountain this spring and raise their fees. They raised the fees, all right, by \$1000 per climber, but as to numbers, they allowed hundreds to move up and down throughout the season, even while a large Chinese team made a trial run to the summit with Olympic-style torches and tested the torches' performance at 8850 meters. (No problem.)

Only one climber is known to have been turned away: the mayor of Prague, Pavel Bem, was refused entry into Tibet at the Nepalese border. The reason was entirely unconnected with crowding on Everest, but was due to his having shown a Tibetan flag in front of the Chinese embassy in Prague and having met the Dalai Lama several times. So he and his teammates went around to the Nepalese side, and he climbed it successfully from there.

Back on the Tibetan side, two skilled climbers aimed to discover whether it is actually possible to scale the formidable north-side barrier known as the Second Step without its ladder. A Chinese expedition in 1975 fixed a ladder there on their way to the summit; a longer and wider one was placed there three years ago. Now a 45-year-old American professional climber, Conrad Anker, and a British professional rock climber, Leo Houlding, 26, wanted to help answer the ongoing debate among mountaineers and climbing buffs since 1924: could two British climbers, George Mallory and Andrew Irvine, have successfully surmounted this rock feature that June? Anker's answer after he and Houlding had scaled the Step is yes and no.

A big Chinese team reported in 1960 that they had reached the top after scaling the Step by one man standing on another's shoulders—and getting badly frostbitten in the process. At the time, there was widespread disbelief in the West, and when in 1975 another Chinese expedition climbed the same route, they put a ladder up the Step to make it easier to climb. Ever since, all summiters on this route have used it or its recent replacement.

Anker's yes is that not only can the Step be climbed without a ladder, but also he actually found it easier that way. After all other expeditions had left the mountain and the ladder and ropes had been taken away, he and Houlding climbed the Step in 20 minutes. Of course, what is true for the highly skilled is not true for the general public, who go to Everest's slopes in ever-greater numbers. But as Anker and

Houlding showed that the Step could be surmounted without ladder and ropes, it is theoretically possible that Mallory and Irvine did so too.

But Anker's no is that he does not believe Mallory or Irvine could have gotten to the top in 1924. There were no fixed ropes, let alone any ladder, in place for them; their clothes were too thin for the extreme cold at the highest altitudes—he put some on at 7500m and had no desire to climb in them—and the gear available in 1924 was not nearly so good as it is today. He could have added another reason: climbing skills had not been developed to today's higher standards. He feels “it's incredible that they got to the Yellow Band” above 8100 meters, where Irvine's ice axe was found in 1933. All the way? Not likely.

A vast number of men and women did summit Everest this spring: 597 compared to 458 last spring and 305 the spring before that. An experienced leader of commercial expeditions on the north side, Russell Brice, attributes the large number of successes on his side this season—287 climbers—to the fact that the trail was very fast, which enabled so many climbers to move up and down rapidly, in some cases to descend all the way from summit to advance base camp on the same day, and many unskilled climbers to reach high altitudes and even to succeed. The route was fast because Brice's Sherpas stamped it down when they were fixing the ropes to the top at the end of April; then light snowfall froze the route. When climbers came along after the Sherpas, they moved on top of a thin layer of snow covering the frozen trail.

Amongst the astonishing total 597 who managed to summit Everest was the newly crowned oldest person, Katsuske Yanagisawa of Japan, who was 71 years and 63 days old when he climbed to the top on 22 May. He dethroned another Japanese, Takao Arayama, who was a mere 70 years, 225 days old last year.

A Briton, David Tait, who intended to make a double traverse—up the north side, down the south, back up the south side and down the north—with a Sherpa, found he was too tired after descending the south side and would need a long rest before going back up again; he stopped there. He explained later that in his training for Everest, he had neglected to train for his descent, and his knees felt it. Anyway, his single traverse was “great, fantastic.”

A party of three Filipinas and three Sherpas followed Tait the next day in their own north-south traverse. Now traversers are boasting of being first from their country, just as occasionally someone is still declared to be the first to the summit of his or her nationality. And in the case of these three women, Janet Belarmino, Carina Dayondon, and Noelle Cristina Wenceslao, they are correctly claiming to be the first females. They are also the first, unluckily, to be charged an extra fee of \$3000 per climbing member for the privilege of making a traverse from the Tibetan side, as per a sudden demand by the authorities in Beijing in mid-April. (Sherpas not charged.)

Amongst those who did not reach the summit this spring were:

- \* an ex-deputy agriculture minister of Malaysia, Khalid Yunus, who was defeated by the altitude at about 7200m;



- \* an Austrian couple, Wilfried and Sylvia Studer, who made their 11th attempt without using artificial oxygen, reached 8700m together, and declared they would not come again;
- \* a Norwegian, Cato Pedersen, with no left arm and a prosthesis on his right forearm, who got to 8600m before the weather began to look ominous, and who hadn't the strength to try for the summit a second time;
- \* a Dutchman, Wim Hof, known as the Iceman, who planned to go without bottled oxygen to 7250m wearing only shorts, socks and high climbing boots—"climbing in the cold gives a very powerful feeling," he explained—and actually reached 7400m before he reported to his teammates that his legs had started to freeze and he turned back; in Kathmandu he said he was completely satisfied.

Four Americans were forcibly removed from the base camp area in Tibet and expelled from the country in late April, but they were not there to climb the mountain. Their aim was instead to protest the Chinese government's publicizing Everest and Tibet in connection with the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. One American reportedly wore a t-shirt demanding "No torch through Tibet," and two others raised a banner calling for "Free Tibet." Not surprisingly, the authorities saw their actions as "illegal activities aimed at splitting China" and quickly removed them.

The Chinese came in for criticism from environmentalists who reacted to news reports about work scheduled to begin on a highway to base camp to speed the torch on its way. Some critics even understood that a road was about to be built up the side of the huge mountain, thus doing terrible damage to its presumed pristine character.

The possibility of putting a paved road up Everest boggles the mind; the Chinese certainly had no such idea. Actually, a road to base camp has existed for some years, and what the authorities were about to do was to improve it, to widen and hardtop it. This won't attract any more climbers, as the authorities seemed to hope, but it will speed up and make less uncomfortable the trip to and from base camp not only for Olympic torchbearers but also for people being evacuated to Kathmandu for medical care.

This season's death toll of seven was fortunately well below last spring's near record of 11, and even further below it in terms of percentage of people on the mountain. The body of one of last year's climbers, David Sharp, whose lonely death drew a large amount of outraged commentary at the time, was moved away from the trail this spring at his family's request. (The 1996 Indian body known as Greenboots, a macabre landmark when not covered by snow, was not removed; it was underneath the snow this season, and anyway it is so solidly frozen in place that earlier efforts to move it had failed.)

No new routes were put up, no virgin peaks "conquered" this spring. Two well-known climbers did try. Ueli Steck of Switzerland wanted to complete a route on Annapurna I's vast south face that had been started in the autumn of 1992 by French climbers Pierre Beghin and Jean-Christophe Lafaille. They had been attempting an alpine-style ascent of the great face by a new line slightly to the right (east) of the

1970 Bonington route and had reached 7400m, then decided they should retreat in the face of snow and wind. Beghin's rappel rope failed him, and he fell to his death.

This May Steck went to complete this line entirely alone, but he was defeated at only 5850m on 21 May when he was hit by a falling stone that smashed his helmet—but not his head, although he was knocked out and has no memory of what happened. He staggered away badly bruised on the back of his head and his spinal area, but no blood flowed, and as he wandered around not knowing exactly where he was, a member of his support staff found him. With a badly bruised body and his only helmet shattered, Steck abandoned the idea of climbing the south face of Annapurna just then. “This route is climbable,” he said, but he didn't know whether he still wanted to be the one to climb it.

Another attempt to do something new was planned by the American Peter Athans, who wanted to have a look at, and if possible to climb, a more modest 6759m mountain called Khumjung, which despite its name, is not in Everest's Khumbu area but is northwest of the village of Jomsom in north-central Nepal. The mountain was not known to have ever been attempted before—and it still isn't.

Athans' two-man team without Sherpas was hit by two snowstorms, its horsemen were late at their rendezvous, Athans had other commitments, and too little time. They saw the top half of their mountain from their base camp some distance away but did not get to it—they did no climbing at all. Athans said he wanted to return in the autumn with more time and more men. This trip had been a useful reconnaissance.

The Himalaya appear to be getting drier, so relatively easy mountains are becoming technically more difficult with more exposed rock and more danger from unusual avalanching. Ama Dablam, a 6814m neighbor of Everest, is no longer the mountain it used to be since last November, when a huge mass of ice broke away above Camp 3 (about 6500m), swept six climbers in their tents hundreds of meters down the mountainside and buried them in a mound of avalanche debris.

According to Giampietro Verza, a mountain guide who knows the area well and who led a small Italian team to Ama Dablam this spring, the ideal area for Camp 3 is still exposed to ice avalanching, and the large serac on the final ice slope is dangerously cracked. Sherpas refuse to camp under this danger, and to scale the mountain directly from Camp 2—that is, without the usual third high camp—makes the final summit climb too long for many climbers, setting aside consideration of the dangerous possibility of falling ice. “This mountain remains the desired one for many climbers, but now you have to consider that this beauty is demanding more,” Vera remarked.

Fourteen teams attempted Ama Dablam's standard southwest ridge route this season. For the first time since the spring of 1996, not one succeeded. Too many days of falling snow was the explanation given by some, but more said that bad snow conditions on the route caused them to abandon their climbs at altitudes between 5900m and 6100m.

The only success on Ama Dablam this spring was achieved by two Americans who were looking for difficulty, Aric Baldwin and James Cromie. They found it in

their 100m-a-day ascent of the northeast spur without Sherpas in a series of bivouacs. They slept on the summit, waiting for daylight so they could see if anyone had already made the route to the top up the southwest ridge, which they weren't familiar with. No one had, but they managed to descend safely.

Some climbers back from Cho Oyu, the least difficult of the world's 8000m mountains and for that reason an extremely popular one, reported this spring that it too is becoming harder technically. The mountains, like their glaciers, are changing.

**Autumn 2007: Prospective Oldest Summitter of Everest Wary of Chinese  
Army Control Next Spring  
Ama Dablam's Normal Route Still of Serious Concern;  
No Climbing Deaths in Autumn Season for First Time in Decades;  
Tomaz Humar's Latest Great Face Climb**

The majority of climbers claiming recognition as the oldest summiters—as well as the oldest women summiters—have been Japanese. This seems to be explained by the fact that Japan has the world's longest-living population; this in turn is generally thought to be due to their diet based on fish and vegetables, their trim physiques, Japan's excellent health care facilities, and its well-developed activities for elderly people.

The Japanese climber famous as the “man who skied down Everest” when he made a dramatic partial ski descent in 1970, Yuichiro Miura, became the oldest Everest summitter in May 2003 at the age of 70, five years older than the oldest person before him. Now Miura aims at the age of 75 to be again the eldest of all Everest “conquerors.”

Miura scaled the mountain from Nepal's side in 2003; now he wants to summit it from Tibet. But he is not completely certain that he will be permitted to do so despite the fact that he has a “license” from the Chinese Mountaineering Association for the climb. Next year, as everyone on earth knows, is the year of the Beijing Olympics, and the Olympic torch is to arrive there via China's route to the highest point on earth. Miura plans to make his summit bid in June, well after the torch will have left Tibet, but he understands that the Chinese army next spring will be in “total control” of Everest with 200 soldiers posted there. He fears that the military may not honor the CMA permit.

This autumn Miura tested his current tolerance for high altitude by climbing from the northern base camp up to 6800m. Since he had had two heart operations since last December, doctors in Japan were monitoring him throughout the climb by means of a tiny device attached to him. Their report was that he was just fine. Even so, he is 75. He says, “My stamina now is 50% of what it was when I was 35 years old.”

Every year, Everest's neighbor in Nepal, 6814m Ama Dablam, attracts hundreds of foreign climbers who see it while on trek and are attracted by its beauty. But last year it became a death trap when six people were swept to their deaths by an avalanche that took with it half of the constricted site for the highest camp on its normal route, the southwest ridge, and is still subject to occasional mini-avalanching of ice.

This autumn there were 56 teams on its standard route, and they came even from Bosnia, Iceland and Israel, countries not noted for their mountaineers. Some expeditions skipped camp 3 altogether, others pitched what they called Camp 2.7 or

2.8. Still others did pitch a camp at the traditional altitude, 6300m, but as far to the right of the avalanche path as possible.

The leader of a commercial expedition who used the old Camp 3 site was Luis Benitez, an American leader of an international group. He explained why: if his clients had tried to summit from Camp 2, a large proportion of them would never have made it to the top. They were just not strong enough to go all that distance up and back in one day.

A South Korean team did skip Camp 3. They left their Camp 2 at 6100m at three o'clock one morning, were on the summit 15 hours later, stayed there half an hour, and did not get back to Camp 2 until 1:00 a.m. the next day. They were moving up and back down for a grand total of 21 and one-half hours.

Benitez himself, who has led groups on Ama Dablam before, was not happy about the continuing danger of falling debris. Not all leaders agreed with the degree of his concern, but he felt "the hazard level is significantly higher" even if Camp 3 is skipped. He believed that "clients need to be made aware of the increased hazard because of the ice seracs threatening the route." There was a release of ice while his members were in Camp 3; they were far enough to the right of the seracs' path not to get hit, but they "felt the blast" of wind from the falling ice. "The whole Dablam is calving, and eventually all of it will come off," he said.

In the mean-time, until all of it has fallen off, perhaps commercial teams should not use the southwest-ridge route. But if another route were substituted for it, a higher degree of technical skill would be required of the clients. Pumori, also in the Everest region, used to be included in commercial organizer's offerings, but its southeast face came to be known as fatally avalanche-prone, and few venture to it now. The mountain's safer ridge routes present technical challenges not suitable for commercially organized groups.

In 1967, when only two expeditions attempted Nepalese Himalayan peaks over 6600m in the autumn, there were no deaths amongst climbers. Every autumn since then there have been deaths—until this autumn, when none of its 183 teams suffered any fatalities. Why? Why none now, after 40 years of fatal falls, pulmonary edema cases and other kinds of illness, and climbers freezing to death at high altitudes?

Certainly, there has been increased understanding of the causes of high-altitude sickness and what to do about it, and this knowledge is more widely shared. Clothing, sleeping bags, tents, climbing rope and other gear have improved and become more widely available, notably in Eastern Europe. But do these factors fully account for the difference? The weather has gotten no kinder. Has it been all of the above plus climbers' better judgement and better weather forecasts on which to base their judgement—plus sheer good luck? Whatever the reasons, it's a nice surprise.

Any account of the seasons' best climbs begins with the Annapurna I south face effort by Tomaz Humar, the Slovenian expert in ascending the great mountain faces solo. Eight years ago Humar displayed his remarkable skills on the world's seventh highest mountain, Dhaulagiri I, when he made the first serious attempt by anyone to forge a direct line up the middle of its formidable south face and succeeded in gaining the impressive altitude of 7900m on that great 4000m wall solo.

Now also on Annapurna I, the world's tenth highest, he did not reach the very top of the 8091m mountain. But, climbing entirely alone again, he pioneered a new line up the eastern end of its huge south face to its very long east ridge and climbed and crawled to the east summit, 8026m. He moved without the benefit of bottled oxygen or fixed ropes as well as any climbing partner on the face and the ridge.

Humar selected the far eastern end of the face because there are not so many falling stones here as elsewhere. But his first major problem was to find a feasible way to get to the face among very confusing rock towers and wide crevasses. It took him five days to find the "key," a small hidden plateau near the foot of the face. He then rested at base camp and waited for a snowstorm to come to an end before going for his climb.

At 6:00 p.m. on 24 October, he made his first bivouac at 5800m on the "key" plateau. He had developed a toothache the day before, so he stayed at the bivouac an extra day to acclimatize and nurse his toothache, but he also spent three hours to look for the way to cross the plateau to get to the face. A fierce wind pushed his tent for 20 meters when he was inside it, but no damage done.

Finally, on the 26th, he left the bivouac and began his push up the face. He took with him food for five days, a stove and two gas cylinders, a bivouac sack, a small sleeping bag, two ice screws, two Prusiks and an ice axe, but no helmet and of course no oxygen. At first the face was bare rock, then covered with snow, then rock, again snow, and his second bivouac at 7200m was a large snow hole he dug out of deep snow. He stayed here for two nights while rocks fell down the face beside his snug hole; he was not hit.

On the 28th, he resumed his climb. He left his snow hole with the "absolute minimum" of gear. He started up at 6:00 a.m. despite strong wind and his not having slept the previous night while thinking about what to do the next day. It was very cold. After two hours he had gained the east ridge and began to move along the ridge to the east summit; most of the way there he actually traversed a few meters below the ridge on the north face, moving carefully, very conscious of the danger of cornices breaking under his weight. Furthermore, he had very strong wind to contend with: while moving from the point where he gained the ridge to the east summit, he often had to lie down on the snow and crawl forward on his hands and knees between the gusts.

He had expected to reach the east summit at noon, but it was 3:00 p.m. when he got to this 8026m point. He very soon began his descent down the way he had come up. But this also was not easy. The wind had obliterated his tracks, and after it became dark, the light from his headlamp lasted only briefly. He had to wait for the moon to rise at about 7:00 p.m. to give him sufficient light to climb over the mini-peaks on the ridge. At 8:25 p.m. he was back in his second bivouac's snow hole. He brewed some hot drinks and slept there until 2:00-3:00 a.m. of the 29th before completing his descent. By now his toes had become slightly frostbitten, but he had successfully scaled the face and next day was safely sheltered in his base camp.

Another hotshot eastern European mountaineer is Valeri Babanov of Russia. He and his climbing partner, Sergei Kofanov, went to the formidably difficult and

bitterly cold north face of Jannu (also called Khumbhakarna), 7710m in far eastern Nepal. From base camp at 4700m on the Khumbhakarna Glacier on 14 October, they began their ascent.

They took only a small tent, a light sleeping bag for two, two short ropes but no rope at all for fixing the route, five gas cylinders, a stove, food for eight or nine days, only 12 snow pitons, seven nuts, seven or eight “friends,” and four snowbars. Their packs weighed 20 kgs. Their route took them across the upper glacier on its right side through a small gully, across a large plateau to the Yamatari La (Pass), up the west pillar, to the southwest ridge and made their fourth bivouac just 100 m. below the west shoulder at 7300m.

Finally on the 20th, they took the absolute minimum of equipment for the last part of their ascent, where some of the pitches were very technical on mixed rock and ice. They slept at 7600m and next day woke very early, at 4:30 a.m., because they were very cold after having spent the night without a sleeping bag. They completed the ascent of the summit ridge and at 9:45 a.m. were on a snow tower, the summit, slightly beyond a false summit, a 20m lower point that at first they had thought was the top. It was like climbing to the top of a skyscraper, Babanov said. He called their route “a very logical line,” a “beautiful” line, and the climb “a great challenge altogether.”

## **Spring 2008: International Bid Failed to Save Inaki Ochoa's Life**

### **Olympic Torch Everest Restrictions Slashed Total on Top**

This spring the famous Spanish mountaineer, 41-years-old Ignacio Ochoa de Olza, known to the climbing world as Inaki Ochoa, had the summits of only Annapurna I and Kangchenjunga left in his personal campaign to reach the tops of all 8000m mountains, and to continue doing this without bottled oxygen and on routes that are not standard ones.

He came to Annapurna I's seldom-attempted south face to gain the east ridge for the main summit. Tragically, he died before he could finish the climb, and his body is still high on mountain outside the tent at 7400m in which he died on 23 May despite the best rescue efforts of Romanian teammate Horia Colibasanu, the Swiss climber Ueli Steck, Steck's Swiss teammate, a Kazakhstani, a Russian, and a Canadian.

Ochoa and Colibasanu on 19 May were at 7850m, near the east summit's north ridge, when they ran out of rope and had to turn back. Now began the sudden onset of Ochoa's acute cerebral edema and the struggle by others to keep him alive.

Steck and Simon Anthamatten had retreated from their south-face route west of Ochoa's line on 16 May when heavy snowfall and wind higher on the mountain sent them down to their own base camp. They were waiting there for good weather and avalanching to stop when Steck received a telephone call from Colibasanu on the 19th saying that both of them were in trouble high on the east ridge and asking for help. Colibasanu was extremely tired and his voice was not clear on the satellite phone, but Steck could make out that Ochoa had frostbitten fingers and maybe cerebral edema.

The two Swiss had no high-altitude equipment at their base. Nevertheless by 9:00 o'clock that evening they had packed up some medicine (Ochoa and Colibasanu had none with them) and started up via Ochoa's route. Two Sherpas from Ochoa's base camp showed them the way up the face from camp 1. At 4:00 a.m. on the 20th on their way to camp 2, they had to stop because they could not see the route in the dark and the Sherpas had gone back to base camp. At 6:00 a.m. in daylight they started up again and reached Ochoa's camp 2 at 5800m at 1:00 p.m. But now they were in cloud and snow was falling. All of the route from camp 2 to camp 3 had been fixed, but there was avalanching in the afternoons, and they slept in camp 2 that night.

On the 21st they got to camp 3 at 6800m at about noon, and then stopped again because of new snowfall that was avalanching. They would be unable to reach Ochoa in camp 4 that day. Furthermore, they did not have the proper shoes for higher altitudes. But Alexei Bolotov, Russian member of another expedition on much the same route as Ochoa's, who had already summited and descended to his camp 3 at 6800m on the 21st, gave his boots to Steck in exchange for Steck's lighter shoes.

So on the 22nd Steck climbed alone to camp 4 at 7400m on the east ridge. He took eight hours to reach it because a lot of new snow had fallen, and Colibasanu had



to break trail for Steck on the ridge. They met on the ridge, and now Steck learned that Colibasanu also had cerebral edema. Steck gave him some medication, Colibasanu got better and continued alone down to camp 3, where he met Anthamatten, while Steck continued to camp 4. When he got there at about 4:00 p.m., he found Ochoa seriously ill with both cerebral and pulmonary edema.

Ochoa immediately recognized Steck and spoke to him, but his speech was not clear. His mind “came and went,” and he was not moving. Steck spent the night of the 22nd/23rd with him, gave him injections and sips of water. On the 23rd Ochoa was a little better and asked for coffee; coffee was not available but Steck gave him an energy bar and water. However, Ochoa’s condition deteriorated: he became unable to speak or move at all. When he stopped breathing, Steck pressed his chest and got him breathing again, but at 12:10 p.m. his head snapped back: Ochoa was dead.

Meanwhile Ochoa’s Kathmandu trekking agent, Nima Nuru Sherpa of Cho Oyu Trekking, and Inaki’s brother Pablo back in Spain, had made hectic efforts to get more rescuers to Inaki. A highly-experienced Kazakhstani mountaineer, Denis Urubko, was leaving Nepal on the 21st, but he abandoned his flight home and agreed to go by helicopter to base camp. Bolotov’s team leader Sergei Bogomolov, who had come back to Kathmandu with minor frostbite, joined Urubko. Their helicopter flew first to Pokhara; a Canadian, Don Bowie, who had been with Ochoa’s team in its early stages before they had a falling out, was enjoying a leisurely visit to Pokhara when he heard Ochoa was in trouble, and he volunteered to return in the helicopter with them. Unfortunately bad weather intervened, and they arrived too late: they reached 7200m the day Ochoa died.

Meanwhile a different sort of drama took place farther east. In early March, expedition organizers who had signed up at least 65 teams for this spring’s attempts on Everest and Cho Oyu from Tibet, plus more for Xixabangma, started to receive a series of unwelcome messages from the authorities in Beijing. First, they were told of a ban on trekkers going to base camp, then no groups intending to climb up to the North Col only, then no traverses from north to south or south to north, then Everest and Cho Oyu were completely off limits until 10 May, then Xixabangma was also unavailable before 10 May, then the Tibet-Nepal border was closed and all flights to Lhasa suspended following protest demonstrations in Tibet resulting in a complete travel ban to Tibet and nearby areas.

The commercial organizers now had the serious problem of what alternatives to propose to their clients at this late date. They offered the options of postponing their climbs, switching to other mountains in Nepal or cancelling. About a dozen Everest teams opted for the more expensive Nepalese side of the mountain while a few chose to come to Lhotse or Makalu; the rest wanted to wait till next year. A handful of Cho Oyu clients decided to climb Makalu, Manaslu or even the low 7000er Baruntse.

But Makalu is 300 meters higher than Cho Oyu and technically much more difficult above 7500m. There were perhaps more cases of frostbite amongst Makalu climbers than the many more people on Everest this spring.

Manaslu, although slightly lower than Cho Oyu, still is not a good mountain for inexperienced climbers who sign up for commercial expeditions, in the view of one such leader. Although his company does not normally take clients to it, Manaslu was offered as a substitute this season. But Cho Oyu from Tibet is considered to be the least difficult route on any 8000er. This leader found that just one of his six clients was a strong enough climber to get very high; the team did not succeed.

In any case, the closure of the Tibetan side of Everest and Cho Oyu and the complete ban on Xixabangma meant serious financial losses for the organizers, who had to stop accepting bookings and make refunds to some already signed up. And they looked to an uncertain future: one perennial organizer of autumn Cho Oyu expeditions in Tibet was taking bookings but not accepting payments until he was sure that his clients and Sherpas can be in place with fully adequate time to climb safely and successfully. In early July the authorities in Lhasa announced that “the peaks in China Tibet will be open from autumn,” but they gave no indication of exactly when.

As to next spring, he notes that 17 March, 2009 will be the 50th anniversary of the Dalai Lama’s escape from Lhasa. Who can predict what will be happening at that time in Tibet and the neighboring provinces inhabited by large numbers of Tibetans?

The Nepalese authorities, who were being leaned on by the Chinese government to supervise the behavior of climbers on Everest, most unusually issued no Everest permits until 31 March. The Chinese were obsessed by a fear of anti-Chinese or pro-Tibetan incidents anywhere on or near Everest; their worst nightmare was the sight of “Free Tibet” banners flying from the summit when the Olympic torch arrived there in May. Nepalese villagers living close to Everest reported groups of Chinese moving around with communications equipment, and officials from the military attache’s staff in the Chinese embassy in Kathmandu visited base camp to look at security arrangements—and to have their pictures taken at the foot of the Icefall.

Finally, when permits were being granted for Everest and its attached neighbor, Lhotse, expedition leaders had to sign a written pledge to abide by new conditions. The main provisions restricted movements in the first eight days of May. Very few climbers nowadays plan to get very high during this period, but many would normally acclimatize by climbing to the site for camp 3 and returning to lower camps.

Everest teams arriving at base camp in the first half of April found that the Khumbu Icefall route was not yet open. Sherpas assigned to fix and maintain the Icefall, known as Icefall doctors, had been asked on about 13 April not to complete the job they had started (they had fixed it almost to the top of the Icefall) until Nepalese security forces arrived.

The Nepalese army major in charge of security, Sunil Singh Rathor, himself an Everest summiter in May 2003, came to base camp on 15 April and authorized the resumption of Icefall work. The route was completed the next day, the 16th, and now anyone could go up the mountain at will until 30 April, when everyone must be down in base except cooks, who were allowed to sleep in camps 1 and 2 to guard their teams’

belongings. No one was allowed above the Icefall on 1 and 2 May. From 3 May teams could go up to camp 1 and camp 2 but not above there. On 8 May, when the torch had reached the summit in the early morning, all restrictions were removed and Major Rathor departed.

An American, Brant Holland, climbed from base camp to camp 1 on 18 April carrying a Tibetan flag in his backpack. He professed ignorance of any ban on such items and apparently thought it would be “cool” to take one along. But he told some Sherpas he met on the way that he had it, they reported this to security personnel, he was summoned to present himself to Major Rathor and told to go immediately to the tourism ministry. He arrived in Kathmandu on the 24th and was deported four days later with a ban on his climbing in Nepal for two years.

The Chinese torch expedition put a total of 35 people on the summit. Eight of them were rope-fixers who did their job to the top on 7 May. The next day there were 27 summiters carrying the torch to the summit or filming it. No one else was on their side of the mountain all spring, which, as well as Cho Oyu from Tibet and Xixabangma, remained closed the rest of the season.

From the Nepalese side, once the ban on moving up and down freely had been lifted, there was the expected crowding at the usual bottlenecks: the Icefall, the limited area for camp 3 tents, and the Hillary Step. This was partly alleviated by the unprecedented installation of two lines of fixed ropes up the steep face leading to camp 3, but nevertheless there were complaints about having to wait for others to move up even here.

The first person up from Nepal was a Sherpa fixing rope who carried on to the top twelve days after the torch had been there. He helped pave the way for 91 summiters the next day, the 21st, and 108 on the 22nd, the two busiest days of the season. Still, 108 were not a record-setting total for a single day: 112 people were on the top on 16 May last year. And the total for this spring, a meager 387 ascents from Nepal plus the Chinese side’s 35 making 422, was only 67 percent last year’s 632 despite a better success rate this year. Too many people were absent.

One in the multitude of summiters on the 22nd was Apa Sherpa making his 18th ascent at the age of 46. His home village is Thame near Everest, but nowadays he also lives in Salt Lake City, USA. He was stuck at the top of the Hillary Step above 8000m for one hour while waiting for the queue ahead of him to slowly wind its way down the single line of fixed rope.

Forty-six is considered amongst Sherpas as approaching old age, but three days after Apa’s ascent, a 76-year-old Nepali from the Thakali tribe, a people who live in the area between the Dhaulagiri and Annapurna ranges, Min Bahadur Sherchan, summited with five Nepalese helpers. And the day after that, on the 26th of May, the Japanese who is known as “the man who skied down Everest,” Yuichiro Miura, fifteen and a half months younger than Sherchan, arrived at the summit with two Japanese members and eight Sherpas.

Miura had been publicizing his training for this ascent via the Tibetan side for several years and last autumn went to the north side to test himself. Now, when Tibet was closed to foreigners, Miura had deliberated on whether to climb in Nepal this

year or wait. He decided not to wait and was successful, but Sherchan had snatched his hoped-for title of oldest summiter. Said Miura, "If he's 76 years old and he climbed it, that's wonderful," but he had some doubt about the claim.

People who try to scale Everest present a variety of reasons for not getting all the way to the top. This spring an American and a German physiologist specializing in the effects of high altitude presented a novel explanation. They came to Everest to learn what happens to genes in mice when taken to the highest point on earth. They had eight mice with them, and when one mouse died at about 8500m they retreated with the seven survivors and abandoned their climb.

The leader, Dr. Tejvir Khurana of the University of Pennsylvania, explained, "Our goal was to analyze gene changes from blood [and] one needs to take a blood sample while animals are alive as blood will clot after death. Hence when one mouse died probably from the cold and the rest didn't look too good just below the Balcony [8500m], we believed it was just a matter of time before all of them would be dead of hypothermia."

So why go up Everest? Why not stay home and use a pressure chamber? "The kind of hypoxia [deficiency of oxygen in body tissues] you get using a chamber simulation is not the same as in the real world. Additionally, the real-world conditions such as cold/dehydration due to loss of water from mouth breathing, etc. probably also contribute to the body's responses to hypoxia." They hope to return next year for more experiments.

The Nepalese authorities keep trying to spread out geographically and seasonally the expeditions that come to Nepal's Himalaya. "Keeping in mind the fact that mountaineering tourism is the backbone of tourism in Nepal," a tourism ministry official stated on 30 April, "to make royalty fees competitive with [those of] other, neighboring nations, to promote the mountains of backward regions, and to create an environment to operate season-based mountaineering activities throughout the year (Nepal for All Seasons)," the cabinet decided to:

- \* completely waive for five years royalties for peaks in the third of the country that is west of the Dhaulagiri massif, and
- \* give a 50% discount on royalties for teams climbing in the autumn (September to November) and 75% off during summer (June to August) and winter (December to February).

Also effective from the end of April 2008 were other adjustments in the royalty fee structure, which combined with these changes were expected to "lead to a substantial increase in the number of climbers in the Nepalese mountaineering tourism sector."

## **Autumn 2008: Climbs in Tibet Continued to Face Uncertain Future**

### **Manaslu Mobbed When Cho Oyu Seemed Off Limits**

Plans for expeditions in Tibet continued to face uncertainty despite the end of the Olympic Games, which caused total cancellations last spring. Most organizers this autumn decided not to wait for Beijing to give a green light for Cho Oyu and substituted Manaslu or, in some cases, Baruntse. Some organizers were seriously considering to forget about sending climbers to Tibet in the foreseeable future. They knew that Everest most likely will be closed next March: the 17th will mark the 50th anniversary of the Dalai Lama's flight from Lhasa, and demonstrations by citizens of the Tibet Autonomous Region and Tibetan-populated adjoining provinces can surely be expected.

The teams that had planned for Cho Oyu but went to Nepal's Manaslu instead greatly swelled the numbers on the mountain. This autumn 34 teams crowded Manaslu's slopes, while 16 patiently waiting parties got to Cho Oyu. In the autumn of 2007, there were only three Manaslu expeditions and 70 on Cho Oyu.

Cho Oyu from the Tibetan side was attractive to climbers who wanted to prepare themselves for future Everest attempts. But perhaps Cho Oyu, the least difficult of the 8000ers when climbed from Tibet, is not the best proving ground. One leader who took his clients to Cho Oyu every year but this time organized his first Manaslu climb, found that Manaslu is better. It has more technical problems than Cho Oyu and is nearly as high.

In both of the last two years, about 75 percent of all of the autumn season's teams went to Ama Dablam and Cho Oyu. This autumn, the proportions were reversed: slightly less than 25 percent were on the two mountains combined. Increasing numbers of climbers are finding other mountains. In the autumn of 2006, only 22 peaks were attempted; in 2007 the number increased to 34; this year it grew to 42, nearly double the total two years ago.

Well off the beaten track, literally, west of the region of Ama Dablam and Cho Oyu, in the Rolwaling Himal, a small team made the first ascent in the first attempt on an obscure mountain called Kang Nachugo. Two Americans, Joe Puryear and David Gottlieb, climbed alpine style, no Sherpas, no fixed lines, no fixed camps, no accounts of earlier attempts to help determine their route.

They first tried to scale their 6735m peak by a direct line up its south-southwest face, but snow fell every afternoon and formed small avalanches, which were "uncomfortable and mildly dangerous." They retreated and decided to try again on a different line.

They traversed off the avalanche-prone face to the west ridge. This time they succeeded. With three bivouacs and a final quick dash without tent or sleeping bags, they climbed the ridge to the summit—in fact, to two summits about 10 meters apart. The western summit, two or three meters higher than the eastern one, was covered by deep snow.

Next came the problem of their descent. On the third day of their ascent, the ridge had become very narrow and there was a small overhang of soft snow; they jumped over this, but they knew they could not return this way. So coming down the ridge, they picked a place where they thought they could rappel down the face. But they discovered they had made a poor choice: at three rappels down, they came to a vertical, sometimes overhanging, rock cliff about 300 meters high. However they found an alternative way and were able to continue down to deep snow and good ice below the cliff, and then they were on their way.

Ama Dablam has kept producing large falling blocks of ice since November 2006, when six climbers were killed by a huge mass of ice that broke away above camp 3, swept them hundreds of meters down the mountainside and buried them in a big mound of avalanche debris. The source of dangerous falling ice is the feature known as the dablam, above the traditional site for camp 3, which shatters from time to time and sometimes sweeps sections of the standard southwest-ridge route.

This October, the leader of a British commercial expedition to Ama Dablam, Dave Kenyon, was near Ama Dablam before his team was due to arrive, and on the basis of his observations, Adventure Peaks switched from Ama Dablam to Pumori only two days before the members were due to arrive in Kathmandu. This was such a last-minute decision that only by clicking on Ama Dablam could access their website's entry about the Pumori climb. The posted explanation for the change was "due to the unacceptable levels of objective danger on Ama Dablam this year."

No one on Ama Dablam was battered by falling debris this autumn, but during the night of 17 November a part of the dablam fell off, and next day another huge section dropped, setting off an avalanche that cleaned the snow from its path, which was the climbers' path also, and left the mountain's surface hard blue ice. The dablam was now about half the size it had been when the team had first arrived.

In late November the route above camp 3, scoured by avalanching ice from the dablam so it was all hard ice, was plagued by many more crevasses above the dablam than before, making the route more difficult and much more time-consuming to surmount than in previous years when it was covered by snow and the crevasses had not opened. It continued to be more dangerous with more peeling off the dablam. All of the dablam is going to come down, the Canadian leader of another commercial expedition predicted. He had been on Ama Dablam twice before; because of the current avalanching, "I really don't want to go back again," he said.

However where should commercial organizers send expeditions instead? Pumori is not ideal. Its normal route in past years, the southeast face, is notorious for fatal snow avalanches. Its ridges are technically more difficult, and although Adventure Peaks' team had no avalanche problems on the south ridge, they encountered unstable snow conditions that kept them from the summit. Ama Dablam is much better known and many climbers admire its beauty. Perhaps the solution is to wait for all of the dablam to come down—but how long will the waiting period be?

Few climbers venture onto Everest in the cold and windy autumn season, but this year there were six teams. Five of them went to the normal route via the South Col, and all of them abandoned their climbs in the face of frequent avalanching.

One team consisted of a Frenchman, Francois Bon, and his Sherpa, Pasang. Bon described their encounter with one avalanche: when they had descended about 100 meters below the proposed site of their third high camp at 7200m, they were hit by a mass of mixed snow and ice. It carried them about 500 linear meters down the west face of Lhotse to the bergschrund at the bottom of the face. A big chunk of ice struck Bon's right knee; a ligament in his knee was broken, and his chest was battered, preventing him from being able to breathe deeply. Pasang also was no longer able to breathe deeply, and his knees and chest were painful.

In camp 2 that night Bon got no sleep. He spent the whole time trying to hold the tent together against the wind that was blowing at 160-170 km/hr, he estimated. The winds that night shredded other teams' tents in camp 2: Korean tents were completely destroyed. The weather forecast said the fierce winds would continue for three more days.

There was a lot of avalanching from all sides of camp 2's area. In addition to Bon's avalanche, a cloud of avalanche snow from Nuptse covered base camp one day; another day, the tents at camp 1 were crushed by 10 meters of snow which came off the southwest face of Everest, and their contents were lost. Furthermore, the Icefall was moving every day. Two minutes after Bon went through it, a huge serac collapsed, and these collapses occurred frequently.

As for the sixth Everest expedition, it had no complaint about avalanching, although they were climbing the southwest face, which can produce some dangerous avalanches. The leader, Park Young-Seok, and several of his team of South Koreans knew the face well from having been there before.

The old saying that "man proposes and God disposes" in their case should be worded as "man proposes and other men dispose." The Koreans arrived at base camp in good time to scale the face before the onset of the fierce blasts of jet stream winds. But the Sherpas deployed by the semi-official organization authorized by the Nepalese government to install the route through the treacherous Khumbu Icefall, through which teams must pass to reach the foot of the mountain, had not yet turned up to do their work. The Koreans had to wait nineteen days before they could get to the bottom of their face—and even then they had provided substantial manpower and rope to get the job done.

This delay in starting their climb cost the expedition the summit, Park claimed. If the route had been ready just one week earlier, his team would have summited, but by the time they were in position for a summit bid, the winds had blown up. Tents were blown to pieces and men could barely stand up. They were defeated at 8400m.

## Winter 2008: How to Succeed on Makalu Despite Fierce Winter Winds

The way to succeed on Makalu in winter is to hide from its fierce winds as much as possible even when that means sacrificing the warmth of direct sunlight.

Six expeditions went climbing in Nepal this winter on mountains ranging in altitude from 6151m (Urkinmang) to 8163m (Manaslu) and 8485m (Makalu). Not one of them reached their summits except the Makalu team; the Czechs on Manaslu got only as high as 5850m. Even Koreans on 6814m Ama Dablam cited very strong winds as the reason they stopped their ascent at 6540m.

On Makalu, the successful expedition was composed of just two members primarily on the standard northwest ridge climbing route but with no Sherpa helpers, no oxygen, no fixed ropes and only one fixed camp above base camp, at 7600m. They were Simone Moro, 41 years old from Italy, and 35-years-old Denis Urubko from Kazakhstan.

Thirteen teams had previously attempted Makalu in winter. Eleven of them specifically blamed their lack of success on the strong winds above 7000m. One attributed it to altitude sickness and exhaustion. The 13th was a solo attempt by the French climber, Jean Christophe Lafaille, who disappeared high on the mountain; there is speculation that he was blown off.

Both Moro and Urubko had considerable experience on 8000m mountains. In fact, Urubko had only Makalu and Cho Oyu to “conquer;” Moro had already successfully climbed six of them including Everest three times. Normally they prefer to try new routes, but in the case of this winter, they apparently decided that their attempt in the winter season was novelty enough. Each had been on Makalu once before. In the autumn of 1993, Moro reached 8200m; and in the winter of 2007, Urubko got to 7487m. Both were defeated by the wind.

First, they did some acclimatization trekking in the Everest area. Then from Kathmandu on 16 January, they flew by helicopter to what climbers nowadays call the Hillary base camp. Actually, it is not the site of Hillary’s base in 1961; helicopters can’t land there but set down instead at a better landing place at 4800m, slightly below Hillary’s camp site.

From their arrival at their own base camp at 5680m on 20 January, they kept out of the wind as often as possible. Their camp was near the sites of numerous previous Makalu teams not far above the start of the Chago Glacier, but it was in a different place. They put it in a gully that protected them from the wind.

They began acclimatizing on Makalu immediately: on the 21st they bivouacked at 6100m on a level area of the glacier and on the 22nd they established a camp (which they called CII) at 6800m in a steep section of the glacier. The day after that, they went on up to 7050m, then descended to BC.

On 29 January they returned to 6800m, and on the 30th they climbed one of the technically most difficult sections. Most Makalu expeditions climb to the Makalu La for their next high camp by a slightly circuitous route in an area of large rocks where they are in the sun and can find fixed ropes left by previous teams. Moro and Urubko instead used a couloir on a direct line; this is out of the sunlight, but it gives



protection from the wind and can be climbed much faster. The two lines diverge at 7000m.

Most teams put their next high camp on the Makalu La at 7400m. But these two men bivouacked at 7350m, 50m below the Makalu La in order to stay out of the strong cold winds that sweeps across the La. This day's climb was a recce to make sure that, as they had thought, the couloir was the better choice.

It was. They returned to BC on the 31st. On 4 February they ran from BC to the 6800m bivy site in one hour and nine minutes, and they ran back to BC in just 28 minutes.

Finally, they made their push to the summit. This time they took three and a half hours to reach 6800m and bivouac with their gear on 7 February. On the 8th they took the tent and all gear to 7600m and bivouacked there.

On the 9th they left the bivouac at 5:30 a.m., were on the summit at 1:53 p.m.—where the wind speed was 90-100 km per hour with gusts up to 120 km/hr—and back at the bivouac at 5:34 p.m. On the 10th they were in BC with all their gear and rubbish, plus some Korean rubbish; they had left the bivouac at 8:15 a.m. and returned to BC at 1:00 p.m.

They descended so quickly because the weather forecaster told them by satellite phone from Salzburg, Austria that a hurricane was headed their way. It came on the afternoon of the 10th and the next day there was heavy snowfall.

They were in the Hillary BC on the 12th and Kathmandu on the 13th.

“We have been lucky and brave,” said Moro. And they knew well what they should be doing.

## **Spring 2009: Climbers Again Frustrated by Tibetan Visa Delays**

### **Successes on Seldom-Climbed Everest and Cho Oyu Routes**

Uncertainty about Tibet's being open to climbers—indeed, to any foreigners—led many to go to the Nepalese side of Everest rather than to wait, hoping for permission to enter Tibet, and would-be Cho Oyu climbers and their expedition organizers to switch to Manaslu or Baruntse inside Nepal. March 10th marked the 50th anniversary of Tibetans' uprising against the Beijing authorities and not long afterwards the flight of the Dalai Lama across the Himalaya into India. The important Buddhist holiday of Losar fell this year in late February, but the Tibetan community in Kathmandu did not hold their usual celebrations in order to mourn Tibetans who suffered during clashes last year.

By 24 February, the few foreigners already in Tibet were told to leave, and all tour organizers and other tourism operators were instructed not to accept bookings for the month of March; visas valid for travel to Tibet were no longer being issued. By early March, as the International Herald Tribune reported, the authorities had imposed an unofficial state of martial law on the Tibetan-inhabited highlands, with thousands of troops occupying areas they feared could erupt in rioting on the scale of 2008 in the largest deployment since the Sichuan earthquake in the previous spring. Even a curfew was imposed on Lhasa.

One Kathmandu trekking agent with climbers eager to go to Cho Oyu was told by the Chinese visa office that no permits could be granted until 11 April. Then the date was 14 April. With this kind of uncertainty, a Danish climber became upset and decided to go home instead, just as foreigners were being given permits.

Denis Urubko of Kazakhstan completed his campaign to summit all 8000-meter mountains in dramatic style by scaling Cho Oyu by its avalanche-prone southeast face in Nepal, which is very seldom attempted and by which precisely two climbers had ever been successful: two Austrians nearly 31 years ago. It had defeated Reinhold Messner in a winter attempt in December 1982 and most recently a pair of South Korean teams in November 2000 on which three Sherpas were killed in an avalanche.

Now, after about four weeks spent acclimatizing and Urubko recovering from a chest problem with difficulty breathing and frequent coughing, he and compatriot Boris Dedesko, taking no bottled oxygen along and climbing roped together throughout the expedition, started their assault on Cho Oyu which Urubko said afterwards proved to be the most dangerous climb of his extensive career. Big avalanches were coming down throughout the last three days, but they were not carried down with this snow "because we are strong" and could hang on at the spots where the snow came avalanching down over them.

Their alpine-style ascent began at midnight on 6 May from their camp at 5300m to move to the base of the southeast face at 5600m. From here they climbed difficult rocks on a slope averaging 50 degrees of steepness to 5800m, where the grade

became 90 degrees and sometimes overhanging. There were many snow avalanches and rocks falling that missed them by only two or three meters on either side. They stopped at 3:30-4:00 p.m. of 7 May at 6000m to bivouac on a ledge the size of the seats of two straight-backed chairs. They slept here sitting up inside their small tent while blasts of wind from snow and ice shook their tent.

The weather pattern had been good weather in the morning, clouds coming over them and some snow falling from about 2:00 p.m. On the 8th, they climbed to 6600m up a wall and from there up an ice slope that was mostly at 45-50 degrees, but sometimes 70 degrees. At about 4:00 p.m. they bivouacked on the slope under the protection of a stable serac.

But three days after the start of their climb, the weather deteriorated. On the 9th, bad weather set in at 7:00 a.m. as they resumed their ascent up the ice slope. Now for five days of low clouds and snowfall, they had no direct sunshine despite the fact that they were on the south side of the mountain. They bivouacked at 4:00 p.m. at 7100m at a bergschrund and discussed their situation.

They decided to continue their ascent. For them to go down to base camp now would mean that piling-up snow would seriously delay their resuming the climb to the summit. So up they went on the 10th. They encountered a rock band from 7300m to 7500m, and then climbed on rock, ice and a mixture. They stopped at 5:00 p.m. to bivouac at 7600m in another bergschrund.

They had planned to make one more bivouac before reaching the top, but now they wanted to complete their ascent in one day; they had also thought of descending the north side or the southeast face by the line east of theirs followed by the Austrians in the autumn of 1978, but they instead chose to come down the line they had gone up.

At last they were on the top. They set out for the summit at 4:30 a.m. of the 11th, went up through deep snow in a small couloir where snow avalanching was frequent, onto the slope covered in deep snow to the summit, where they arrived well after dark at 8:00 p.m.; they were back in the bergschrund at 7600m at midnight. They finally returned to base camp on 15 May, having eaten nothing on the final two days. They had fixed a total of 1200m of rope but they removed the rope from each section they fixed and used the same rope over and over again. They left none on the mountain.

Nine days after Urubko “conquered” his last 8000-meter mountain, a German accomplished the same feat: Ralf Dujmovits summited Lhotse via its standard west-face route. And on 26 July the Finnish climber Viekka Gustafsson reportedly summited his last one, Gasherbrum I. That brings the total number of climbers who have finished them all to 17. All are men, but several women are getting close. One of them is Dujmovits’ Austrian wife, Gerlinde Kaltenbrunner, who summited her 12th when she accompanied him atop Lhotse.

Following his team’s failure to summit Everest via the southwest face two years ago, South Korean veteran mountaineer Park Young-Seok came back with four teammates to try again—and this time he was successful. The Koreans’ line of ascent on the face had never been successfully climbed to the top; it was a new line to the

left of that of the Soviet expedition of spring 1982, up to where Park's camp 5 site was the same as that of the 1982 team (the Koreans found Soviet oxygen bottles there.)

Park's team began their climb on 18 April, when all five members moved up from BC. Jin Tae-Chang, Kang Ki-Seok, and Park established camp 1, while Lee, Shin, four Sherpas and a cook carried on up and established camp 2 in the Western Cwm.

Park's strategy was for two or three members or a few Sherpas to carry loads, fix ropes or establish camps, then descend and other members or Sherpas to move still higher before they also went down and were in turn replaced to continue the work. Helped by the use of oxygen by everyone above 7800m, they made steady progress until strong wind forced all members and Sherpas to retreat to base camp; the wind plus snowfall kept the team pinned down from the 10th to the 14th. But finally, they began to move up once again on the 15th, and on the 18th their final camp 5 was established at 8250m on the face.

Success came on 20 May. Four members, Jin, Kang, Park and Shin left camp 5 for the top at 0:30 hours on 20 May. They fixed 500 meters of rope as they climbed to 8600m and all were on the summit together at 3:00 p.m. They descended via the southeast ridge to the South Col, where they arrived at 7:55 p.m. and slept in two tents belonging to another Korean team. They were safely back in base camp on the 22nd.

The first reports of bolting the climbing route on Everest's Nepalese side surfaced this season. The west face of Lhotse, the gateway to the South Col and final southeast ridge, was very dry during part of the climbing period—although during another period, teams were paralysed by nearly a weeklong snowstorm—and some commercial expeditions had come prepared. The leader of a Swiss party brought the drill that was used by a British assistant leader of a huge expedition and by the American leader of a much smaller one. They placed perhaps as many as ten large bolts at the Yellow Band on the Lhotse face at around 7700m.

The fitness of many people who sign up with expeditions seems open to question considering high rates of dropouts and at least some fatalities. Take this spring's fatalities first: one died of chronic heart disease and one from intracerebral haemorrhage, both surely not in fit condition to tackle 8000-meter mountains. Another collapsed from exhaustion after summiting Everest. One disappeared, presumably fell, and five are known to have fallen for unrecorded reasons; some of these could well have been caused by weariness.

Then there were numerous dropouts: one ten-member team lost half its manpower to breathing difficulty, complete loss of energy, torn knee ligaments, a fractured rib and a violent stomach "bug." The ligaments and rib were injured while climbing through the Khumbu Icefall, again perhaps from a lack of strength.

Or consider this group amongst a team with 17 clients:

- (1) reached C3, descended with chest pains, left BC on 8 May.
- (2) reached C4 at the South Col (7900m), left early because of crushed ribs from a fall.

- (3) reached BC but never got higher; was sick and tired, and left in the first part of April.
- (4) got to C3 but lost motivation and left 12 May.
- (5) got to C2 but became sick and left early.
- (6) also reached C2 but lost motivation and left in late April.
- (7) developed chest pains in C3 and left 20 May.

*The Guinness Book of Records* has bestowed their coveted award for being the oldest summiter of Everest on last spring's younger of two contenders. Yuichiro Miura of Japan, 75 years old, formally received the accolade because the Nepalese summiter, Min Bahadur Sherchan, 16 months his senior according to his citizenship certificate, had "not submitted satisfactory documents."

At the much younger age of 57, the Frenchman Marc Batard, returned to Everest this spring to discover whether he was still capable of a speed ascent of Everest. In 1988 he became famous for making the fastest ascent of Everest in 22.5 hours from BC to summit via the South Col without using any bottled oxygen. As a mountain guide, he summited five other 8000ers between 1975 and 1990; in 1990 he reached the top of Everest for the second time. Then he dropped out of the climbing scene; he became a painter (of pictures) and hadn't climbed for the past ten years.

His speed record has been greatly improved on in the last 21 years. Indeed, in the spring of 2003, Lhakpa Gelu Sherpa went the same distance in half the time, in ten hours 56 minutes, but he did use oxygen. Now Batard has returned to the mountains, and this spring he came to Everest's north side to see whether at the age of 57 he could still climb fast. His plan was to go from advance base camp at 6400m to the summit in 20-22 hours.

On 18 May, he left ABC at 3:00 p.m. (Nepal time). But the shoes he was wearing were too light, and his feet were cold when he arrived at the North Col (7050m) at 5:00 p.m. He stopped for 45 minutes to warm them and resumed his ascent, but at 9:00 p.m., when he had reached 7700m, they were cold again. He abandoned his attempt for the top.

But he now knew that he was capable of making a very rapid ascent: he had climbed much faster than he had expected. He hoped to be able to raise enough sponsorship funds to return in 2010 and go all the way to the top, fast.

## **Autumn 2009: A Towering Figure in Himalayan Face-Climbing Perishes**

### **Tibetan Side of Gaurishankar Continues to Defeat All Attempts**

No one knows what caused the death of Tomaz Humar, the 40-year-old Slovenian expert in ascending the great mountain faces solo. He was soloing the south face of Langtang Lirung, a 7234m peak on Nepal's Tibetan border west of Kathmandu.

On 7 November, Humar started up a wide couloir leading leftwards and then diagonally up towards the southwest ridge, and bivouacked there at 6100m. The weather forecast predicted strong wind. On the 9th he told his base camp cook by walkie-talkie, "I'm here at 6300 meters and not possible [to continue the climb?]. I come down." Later that day he spoke again to his cook, who understood him to say that he had broken his leg and his back. Before this second call, he had told his girlfriend in Slovenia by satellite phone, "I've had an accident. I'm dying." Finally the next morning, he spoke once more to the cook and simply said "This is my last call" and switched off, or the walkie-talkie broke the connection. He was not heard from again.

Swiss rescue experts searched for him by helicopter four days later on the 14th, and spotted him at about 6100m. They lifted him off the mountain and landed at base camp.

Humar was now dead—literally frozen stiff. He had been plucked from the south side of the southwest ridge. The camera in his pocket showed an extremely steep wide couloir in both directions, up and down. In his body's frozen condition, it was impossible to tell whether he had, in fact, broken any bones, and the Nepalese doctors who perform autopsies said they were incapable of examining such a body, but his clothing and the camera and other gadgets in his pockets were undamaged. His Slovenian doctor and good friend, Anda Perdan, who had come to Nepal with the Swiss, speculated that he had managed to get down 200m to where he was found and then froze to death. His body was cremated in Kathmandu and his ashes scattered over the Langtang Lirung base campsite.

Humar's remarkable ability to solo Himalayan faces was first demonstrated in the spring of 1996, when he and compatriot Vanja Furlan made a quick continuous push up a new route on the northwest face of Ama Dablam. They had accidentally dropped all their ice screws from their second bivouac at about 5950m and had no choice but to continue their ascent of the face, solo-climbing ice angled at 70 to 90 degrees from 5680m to 6010m altitude.

Humar quickly topped this feat in the autumn of the same year by soloing Bobaye, at the time believed to be about 6800 meters high (Humar's highest bivouac was reckoned to be at 6500m). Bobaye had never been attempted before by any route; Humar ascended via its west face to northwest ridge to northwest face, and came down by a more direct line on the west pillar to the west face.

He had begun his attack on Bobaye on his hands and knees while crossing a crevasse-ridden glacier at the foot of the west face. Most of this ascent was on terrain

slanting at 60 to 90 degrees, part of which was an 80-degree small couloir acting as a dangerous chute for pieces of ice from a frozen waterfall.

By the autumn of 1999, Humar had been described as “just a little bit more crazy” than other alpinists in his stubbornness and powers of concentration on the routes he has committed himself to. Now he made perhaps his most outstanding climb, his attack on the huge uncharted south face of the world’s seventh highest mountain, Dhaulagiri I. He had already scaled three unclimbed Himalayan walls, the 1900-meters-high northwest face of Ama Dablam, Bobaye’s 2500-meters-high northwest face in 1996, and the west face of Nuptse, a feature few people even knew existed, which is also 2500 meters high, in autumn 1997. Now, at the age of 30, he ventured to attempt his highest wall of all, Dhaulagiri I’s south face, more than 4000 meters high, at much greater altitudes than his earlier ones, and to do it completely alone.

This time he did not manage to climb the complete distance to his summit, but he did make most of his ascent to an altitude of 7900 meters (25,920 feet) on a wall whose steepness he estimated was between 50 and 80 degrees its entire height. He made his climb in one continuous eight-day push.

Despite frequently falling rock and ice, which left him bruised in many places, especially badly on his back, an arm and a leg, and despite occasional extremely strong winds, several rock barriers and a difficult patch of a soft mixture of snow, ice and water, Humar stubbornly persevered in a dramatic direct line up the middle of the face to 7100 meters. Here, on his sixth day, he saw a great horizontal rock band above him. He said he realized that it would take him two or three days to make the extremely difficult climb over this formidable barrier, so he traversed to his right (eastward) around it to the southeast ridge. Then back onto the face above the band and straight up it to meet the sloping southeast ridge again.

At the ridge on his eighth day, he said, he knew he would die if he tried to go all the way to the summit. There could be no exit for him down the face he had just ascended, so instead he returned the ridge, then crossed the narrow east face to the normal route on the northeast ridge for his descent.

His last great climb in Nepal was his autumn 2007 ascent of the south face of another 8000er, Annapurna I. Climbing entirely alone, he pioneered a new line up the eastern end of its huge south face to its very long east ridge and climbed and crawled to the east summit, 8026 meters high. Humar selected the far eastern end of the face because there are not so many falling stones here as elsewhere.

His first major problem was to find a feasible way to get to the face among very confusing rock towers and wide crevasses. It took him five days to find the key. At first the face was bare rock, then covered with snow, then rock, again snow. He bivouacked for two nights in a large snow hole he dug out of deep snow while rocks fell down the face beside his snug hole; he was not hit.

On his fifth day on the mountain, he gained the east ridge and began to move along it to the east summit; most of the way there, he actually traversed a few meters below the ridge on the north face, moving carefully, very conscious of the danger of cornices breaking under his weight. Furthermore, he had very strong cold wind to

contend with: while moving from the point where he gained the ridge to the east summit, he often had to lie down on the snow and crawl forward on his hands and knees between the gusts.

He turned back from the east summit: it was late in the day. He had successfully scaled the face, and he was, after all, a face climber, not a ridge man. A great face climber.

The Tibetan side of Gaurishankar, a 7134m border mountain east of Kathmandu and south-southwest of Cho Oyu, has still not been successfully climbed despite four teams' efforts. One team did not even reach the mountain because the approach road in Tibet was impassable, and this season's party of two Japanese, Kazuya Hiraide and Ms. Kei Taniguchi, was warned in advance by the mountaineering authority in Lhasa that they might not be able to get away from it.

They did get in and out, but no higher than 6850m on 10 November on the east face because of a 500-meters-high vertical rock band, entirely bare of ice or snow. They are snow and ice climbers, not rock climbers, and they had no equipment or great talent with which to scale the rock band. Their climb was finished.

There were three notable successes on Nepal's medium-high peaks and one near-success, all achieved in alpine style—no Sherpas, no fixed ropes, no bottled oxygen, just their own skills, experience and stamina—from the far northeastern Kangchenjunga region westwards to the vicinity of Everest and farther west to an area north-northwest of Manaslu.

In the northeast, two Britons, Nick Bullock and Andy Houseman, scaled the unclimbed north face of the 6750m mountain that was called Wedge Peak by early British climbers but is now officially named Ramtang Chang. They needed three bivouacs on the face's 1850 meters of varied terrain: a snowfield above a rock formation, very steep bare rock averaging 80 degrees which in parts was vertical and even slightly over-hanging, then very loose snow "with little bits of rock as well," as Bullock described it, and snow fluting which took them to the snow-covered west ridge to the top. On the ridge they enjoyed the first direct sunshine they had had since the start of their north-face climb as they went to summit on 1 November.

A traverse of Tawoche, not far from Everest, up the north face (new route) to the top, down the south face and traverse to the east face and down this face to Pheriche—all from 25 to 28 (on top) to Pheriche on 29 November—was accomplished by a Japanese pair. Fumitaka Ichimura and Genki Narumi carried all their gear with them since they would not return to the point from which they started, the village of Dugla. They needed three bivouacs in their pioneer ascent of the north face, but only one in their south-face-to-east face descent to Pheriche village.

Also in the Everest area, close to the Tibetan border crossing point, the Nangpa La, three Swiss made a quick ascent of the 7351-meter mountain known as Jasamba or Pasang Lhamu Chuli. With three bivouacs, they surmounted their snow-covered ridge on the south-southeast face that presented them with snow mushrooms and became increasingly steeper and technically more difficult. On their third day, they found some sections were covered with ice and were 90-degrees steep, and there were



a 200-meter rock wall, numerous cornices, and more mushrooms. They managed to overcome all obstacles and reached the summit on the 29th of October.

The notable near-success in alpine style was the effort of two Frenchmen, Christian Trommsdorff and Yannick Graziani, on another 7000er, Nemjung (7139m), in the area of a better known mid-western peak, Himlung. They forged a new route to the top of Nemjung's south face at 7000m on 15 October. They failed to carry on up the summit ridge because Trommsdorff felt too weak to keep going after he had been hit on his helmet by a big chunk of ice that had left him in "a kind of shocked state" the previous day.

Trommsdorff briefly summarized their climb on "a route of around 2400m, 45 pitches ... mostly ice/mixed and snow, a few pitches with just rock. Many very delicate snow ridges, walls, flutes to climb or traverse, fantastic gullies and mixed climbing, many vertical sections; a very committing route, complicated abseils during the descent and also we had to climb from a gully back onto the base of the first tower, which we avoided by a 60-meter abseil on the way up. ... A great six-day climb of the south spur, maybe the most beautiful we have ever done, certainly the most continuously steep, sustained and constantly exposed, although no pitches were as hard as the hardest ones on Chomolongo or Pumari Chhish. Always uncertainty about the key passages; on the last day there was a miraculous hole in the very corniced ridge to cross to the other side."

The unpredictability of Nepal-Tibet border closures by Chinese authorities was a problem once again this season. Because of celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic in China, the Chinese government without prior notice ordered it to be shut for eight days from the end of August into early September. This forced Cho Oyu climbers who had arrived in Kathmandu to wait a while until they could travel to base camp. The Italian mountaineer, Simone Moro, and his team made an acclimatization trek in Nepal's Everest area and then returned to Kathmandu on 30 September, ready to go to Tibet. But Tibet was not ready for them; they went home instead. A Belgian, Leopold Goven, who was due to leave by road on 5 September, was uninterested in waiting and he, too, cancelled his Cho Oyu plans.

However, later in September, the authorities in Tibet were very helpful. When a large landslide was blocking the road between base camp and the border on 28 September, and was keeping several teams stuck in base camp, the Chinese army not only permitted an American leader, Marty Schmidt, to cross the landslide the area, but helped him over the debris and carried the body of his client with him. It doubtless helped that the body was that of the husband of a Congresswoman from New York, the state where Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton lives and which she represented in the U.S. Senate before joining the Obama cabinet.

## **Spring 2010: First Woman to Summit All 8000ers Was Korean or Spanish?**

### **First Ascents of Two 6000ers and New Routes on Two 8000ers**

Exactly who was the first woman to summit all 8000-meter mountains? A controversy erupted this spring over whether it was a South Korean or a Spanish Basque. Was it Miss Oh Eun-Sun, who scaled Annapurna I this spring after having claimed the summit of Kangchenjunga in May 2009, or was it Miss Edurne Pasaban who reached the summits of Annapurna I and Xixabangma this spring?

Miss Oh is sincerely convinced that she summited Kangchenjunga on 6 May 2009, and she produces a picture of herself standing on a rocky formation that shows more rock somewhat above her. She says she and her three Sherpas were perhaps ten linear meters or five vertical meters from the top, and she relies completely on the expertise of her head Sherpa, Dawa Wangchuk, who had summited the mountain three times before and led her to this point. If he says, as he does, that they were on top, then she has no doubt that that's where they were.

But there were debates in Korea last year about her Kangchenjunga summit claim at two meetings in Seoul last November and December. It was here in Korea that the controversy first arose—before the issue burst into a matter of worldwide interest this spring, when both she and Edurne Pasaban said they had now “conquered” all eight-thousanders. The first discussion was organized by three Korean mountaineering journals, which took no decision, and the second by the Korean Alpine Club, and after some discussion, the meeting also came to no conclusion.

However this August, after Miss Oh's success on her “last” eight-thousander, the CAC's chairman stated that “there is no evidence that she did not reach the summit. Accordingly, the Korean Alpine Club acknowledges she had successfully reached the summit.”

But this decision is by no means universally supported. Her rival for the record, Miss Edurne Pasaban, also led an expedition to Kangchenjunga in the same season, and she is certain that not enough time elapsed between the time she saw Miss Oh's summit party battling strong wind to reach about 8450m (perhaps 136 meters below the top) and then move out of sight behind a buttress, and the time at which they reappeared. Others who were also on the mountain at the same time agree with Miss Pasaban, and a well-known Korean, who does not want to be named, told me that her claimed rate of climbing that final day up the most difficult section of the route was “impossible.”

The leader of another Korean team on Kangchenjunga at the same time as Miss Oh, Kim Jae-Soo, as early as June 2009, when his team had just returned to Kathmandu from a successful climb of Dhaulagiri I, produced two contrasting photos: a picture of his star member, Miss Go Mi-Sun, sitting in good snow, and Miss Oh's best evidence of her Kangchenjunga success, standing on rock with a

little snow scattered on it; the background is blurred, but some rock appears to be behind and above her.

Even one of Miss Oh's "summit" Sherpas, Nurbu, has disputed her claim. He told me in June this year that the summit party stopped about 150 meters below the top while, he himself climbed ten meters above them but was then called back to where they were, and they all descended from there. Why? He doesn't know. He said he had taken no photograph of his high point.

But Nurbu's testimony cannot be fully relied on: Miss Pasaban made a special trip to Kathmandu to receive some photos which she understood he would make available to her, but when she met him, she says he asked one million euros for his pictures. She paid him nothing and went home empty-handed. But Nurbu told Miss Oh's trekking agent that he had said to Miss Pasaban that even if she gave him a million euros he would not support her.

What would appear to be the most serious blow to Miss Oh, on 26 August this year the Korean Alpine Federation, the nation's largest climbing association, concluded that Miss Oh had not reached the top of Kangchenjunga. Following KAF's meeting in Seoul of six leading Koreans who had scaled the mountain (including Kim Jae-Soo), KAF's secretary general told the Korean press that "all of the participants shared the view that the landscape shown in Miss Oh's alleged photo shots throughout the entire ascent doesn't seem to match the actual landscape. They also agreed that Oh's previous explanations on the process of her ascent are unreliable."

One principal cause of their doubts was the timetable she presented about her progress in ascent on the final day. They judged her claimed rate of ascent to have been very unlikely given the bad weather and the greater difficulty of the route as she and her Sherpas moved ever higher, plus her the fact that she was using no supplemental oxygen.

Miss Oh's reported response: "It's a unilateral opinion." Miss Pasaban is quoted as saying, "This confirmation eases my mind."

The latest dispute raised by Korean journalists arose in late August, when it became general knowledge that Miss Oh carried in her pocket on summit day the flag or banner of her university. It was seen carefully placed on the route by a Norwegian summitter and also by Kim Jae-Soo, who picked it up and brought it down with him. Kim said he saw it during his own descent from the top on the same day as Miss Oh's claimed success; he judges it might have been about 150 meters below the top.

Could this mean that Nurbu Sherpa was correct about Miss Oh's having stopped at that altitude? If so, why did her head Sherpa, Dawa Wangchuk, who had summited the mountain three times before, tell her they were at the top? Was it because she had been climbing without oxygen and was clearly extremely tired, as she herself later said, and he feared she might totally collapse if she forced herself to push on higher?

So the question remains, who was the first woman to summit all eight-thousanders? Doubt about Miss Oh's sincerely believed Kangchenjunga summit claim may never be dispelled.

Elsewhere in the Nepalese Himalaya this spring, while large numbers of inexperienced climbers guided by highly experienced Sherpas and professional expedition leaders, aided by supplemental oxygen, and lots of fixed ropes on well-known climbing routes with three or four fixed camps, trooped up Everest and other 8000m giants, two small teams with no Sherpas, no oxygen, no fixed ropes and no one to guide them, tackled a pair of 6000ers that had never been summited before. They were two Americans on Takargo, a mountain in the Rolwaling area near Gaurishankar east of Kathmandu, and five Japanese on a peak called Kojichuwa Chuli, in the Kanti Himal range in northwestern Nepal. They accomplished the first ascents of their obscure mountains.

The Americans, David Gottlieb and Joe Puryear, had very little information about 6771m Takargo (shown on some maps as Dragkar-Go). No foreigners had been there before, no previous attempts had been made to scale it. They had a Google overview picture, and that was about all.

They had liked the looks of a rib on the west face, but when they got close to it, they rejected the face for its bare and unstable rock and unpleasant rockfall. They went round to the east side and chose a line up the east face of mixed rock and snow to the south ridge. After three successively higher bivouacs (they had no fixed camps) on various features of the face, they joined the summit ridge at about 6755m and navigated its series of sharp cornices to the three highest of them to make sure they stood on the very highest one. They had achieved the first success on the first ever attempt. It was 12 March.

The season's other first ascent was accomplished by five Japanese led by Michihira Honda on 6489m Kojichuwa Chuli. The mountain is in the northern Dolpo area on the border with Tibet, so they began their approach to it by a scheduled flight westwards to Nepalgunj and a chartered plane north to a new airfield near Rara Lake. From Tolcha airfield, they trekked east to Gamadhi and onwards to the Mugu Karnali River, east along the river to its junction with the Mugu Khola, and finally north along the khola (small river) to their base camp on the west side of the khola.

They moved eastward to the Nepal-Tibet border and down the east face of the north-south border ridge. From their last camp on the east (Tibetan) side of this face, three members traversed diagonally northwards to the summit, which was on the ridge. They had accomplished the first ascent of the mountain after the failure in previous years of two Spanish teams and one Japanese team, and had been aided by the experience and route advice of their compatriots, who had been there in the previous summer on a different route.

All of Nepal's 8000m mountains have been summited many times since 1950, but still some climbers are finding new routes to the summits, and new routes on two 8000ers were successfully climbed this spring.

One of Kazakhstan's leading mountaineers, Denis Urubko, made the first ascent of Lhotse via its north ridge. It is normally climbed up its west face out of the Western Cwm, the deep valley between Everest and Lhotse; it has been attempted occasionally via its formidable south face, south ridge or southeast ridge.

But Urubko pioneered a new approach to the upper reaches of the west face on 16 May by climbing for 600 meters along the north ridge from the South Col, which separates Everest from Lhotse and is 7900m above sea level. He then traversed for 1.5 km. below the ridge, avoiding the pinnacles on the crest of the ridge, to 8300m, where he entered the couloir on the west face. He reached the couloir in slightly less than four hours, and finished his climb up the normal route through the couloir an hour and a half later. He did this climb from col to summit solo, without fixed ropes or oxygen. He ended the day by descending the normal west-face route to the Cwm that afternoon.

Makalu is normally scaled by its northwest ridge. This spring a Ukrainian expedition led by Mstislav Gorbenko forged a complex new route via the south face, the southwest face, the west pillar and finally the northwest ridge. It combined the autumn 1975 Yugoslavian south-face route to 6600m, a new line up diagonally left to 7500m, and the spring 1971 French west-pillar-to-northwest-ridge route from 7600m.

The members divided into three climbing teams; there were no Sherpas helping them, and they used no supplemental oxygen. Each team worked on the route in 5-to-7-day shifts; while one group was pushing the upper end of the 3000 meters of fixed ropes (which they installed from 6000m to 7800m) farther, the other two were busy carrying loads to the high camps. Each group had 2-3 days' rest in base camp after each working shift. Just one of the teams succeeded in reaching the top; they were Sergei Bublik, Dmitri Venslavosky and Vladimir Roshko.

The principal technical challenge came at 6200m on a slabby part of the face to 7600m, a section that had never been climbed before. The rock is polished, protection is generally bad, and there are no ledges suitable for camps except for one tiny place at 7000m, where they put their camp 3 and where they fixed the only bolt used anywhere on the mountain. They also found the pitch up a 30-meter rock wall after joining the west pillar at 7700m presented difficulty.

A footnote to history: the Ukrainians found the body of an American who perished when beginning his descent from the summit via the west pillar route in the spring of 2004. Jay Sieger's body was discovered hanging from a rope at 7800m. At the time, it was believed that he had been killed when he fell and struck his head on a rock.

Chinese citizens started climbing in Nepal in the early 1990s, when a team of Tibetans came repeatedly to scale all 8000ers. They even climbed two border mountains, Makalu and Lhotse, from the Nepalese rather than their much more difficult Chinese sides. And a handful of Taiwanese and Hong Kong Chinese have come in the past decade. But mainland Chinese from the dominant Han ethnic group have been much newer arrivals to Nepal.

This spring they had definitely arrived. Six joined a team on the Nepalese side of Everest organized by a reputed European commercial enterprise and four of them summited, each with a Sherpa to assist him. An independent Chinese also reached Everest's summit from Nepal; he had two Sherpas with him.

But on Dhaulagiri I, an all-Chinese team met disaster. Three members died, two others had frostbitten feet, and all five survivors, including the leader, Yang Chin-Fang, were so completely exhausted that they had to be evacuated by helicopter.

Eight members, including their leader, and an equal number of Sherpas, summited Dhaulagiri about midday on 13 May by its normal northeast-ridge climbing route. When they set out from their highest camp at 7500m at 1:00 a.m., the weather was good, but it took them eleven hours to climb the final 670 meters to the top, and by that time it had become cloudy. During their descent, a snowstorm blew up and white-out conditions developed.

Apparently it was now each man for himself, and they scattered as they descended independently. One member and three Sherpas got back to their high camp between 5:00 and 6:00 p.m. Another member returned somewhat after 6:00 p.m., a third one got in after midnight, and two arrived only the next day with three Sherpas helping them.

Three members never reappeared. Two were seen falling to their deaths; the third could no longer walk and may have fallen too, or simply collapsed and never gotten up. Their bodies were not seen. It is likely that all of them were suffering from acute altitude sickness. Their leading Sherpa, also exhausted, was temporarily paralysed on one side, and he, too, flew from BC to Kathmandu by helicopter. The remaining Sherpas got back by their own efforts.

The team's leader, Yang Chin-Fang, had scaled Everest twice and Cho Oyu once, both from Tibet, and Manaslu in Nepal once, in the autumn of 2009. He was the leader of these teams, and there were no fatalities on any of them.

Just why his Dhaulagiri expedition came to grief is a matter for speculation, but they had climbed in their final push for the summit faster than most other Dhaulagiri I teams in recent years, and it would seem that if they were suffering from the altitude, they did not realize how extremely tired they were and so failed to turn around before the top as prudence would have suggested. Were they obsessed with a determination to reach the top on the 50th anniversary of the mountain's first ascent, 13 May, 1960?

**Autumn 2010: Don't Want to Trek to and from BC? Just Hire a Helicopter  
Avalanching Took Lives of Several Experienced Japanese and Sherpas  
An Italian Fell on Rarely Attempted Route on Cho Oyu**

A helicopter whirling overhead on a flight to an expedition's base camp area is no longer only the rare event of a serious emergency situation. This autumn helicopters evacuated:

(1) climbers who had failed to factor into their schedules the time probably needed because of periods of bad weather and avalanching, or required to climb a slightly different line to ascend or descend their mountain, found their inflexible time limit was up, and simply had to catch their previously booked flights home;

(2) climbers who had serious (but some not so serious) medical problems;

(3) a leader who was in a great hurry to go from base camp to the village of a Sherpa who had had a fatal accident in order to break the tragic news to his wife as soon as possible;

(4) two mountaineers who had gotten to a tough spot on their seldom-climbed route and had no means of getting themselves down to base camp since they had neither brought the equipment or prepared the escape route necessary to get them off the mountain when the route ahead had become impassable;

(5) expedition members who just didn't want to walk when they could ride.

Next spring a prominent organizer of commercial expeditions is changing hotels. He will no longer book his groups at a friendly comfortable hotel in central Kathmandu, but will switch to a huge impersonal establishment belonging to an international chain far from the city center. He explained that this is the only hotel with a helipad; his clients are wealthy, and choppers taking them close to their mountain and back is what they want.

Don't walk when you can ride means one can't be bothered to trek in or doesn't want to "waste" perhaps five days' time. But surely one loses a bit of acclimatization and a lot of the local atmosphere that way.

Perhaps one day high-altitude helicopters will be brought to Nepal to whisk people to Everest's summit, touch down for a few minutes while passengers take great photographs, and then deliver them to a spot where they can resume a pleasant trek in the area.

Someday, will the next step in making climbs as convenient as possible be to carry people through the nerve-racking labyrinth of Everest's Khumbu Icefall? Or rig aerial ropeways to avoid the great effort of surmounting and descending Everest's final obstacles, the Hillary Step on the Nepalese side and the Second Step on the Tibetan side? Will this trend eventually lead to uphill and downhill tourism on the most popular mountains?

## **Dramatic and tragic Ama Dablam evacuation**

David Goettler, a German, and Kazuya Hiraide, Japanese, both experienced and talented climbers, found themselves in a very tight spot in early November when they attempted to ascend Ama Dablam by their own variation of an unusual route up the north face to the north ridge instead of the standard southwest-ridge route. They climbed in alpine style with no fixed camps, no Sherpa helpers and a minimum amount of gear.

They crossed the north face diagonally to the left and onto the north ridge at 6400m on 6 November. They continued up the ridge for 100 meters, but at 10:15 a.m. a snow avalanche hit them and carried them down ten meters. Snow conditions on the ridge made it impossible to go higher. But the snow was very loose on the east face and on the north face the snow was like sugar.

They did start down the north ridge, but at 6300m they encountered cornices and seracs. It was impossible to descend the ridge any farther. They did not have the equipment to fix ropes to rappel down the face. "We were trapped," said Goettler. They could neither retreat nor advance.

They bivouacked here at a small col on the ridge and phoned their Kathmandu agent to send a helicopter. They worried that night that a chopper might not be able to reach them because a strong wind was blowing from the west. Luckily, however, the wind dropped the next morning. Above and below their bivouac there were tall seracs, and Hiraide moved to the top the serac below them to fix one of their two 50-meter ropes with a snow bar for their rescue. They decided that Goettler would be taken off first and all their gear, including tent, food, fuel, the two ropes, medical kit and phone, would be left with Hiraide.

A helicopter circled them from the east in a light breeze at about 9:00 a.m., and its skids touched down on the top of the serac. It carried Goettler to a nearby village, Chhukung. David had been rescued.

Now Hiraide waited at the top of the serac for his turn. The chopper came 30 centimeters from him, but his instinct told him that it would be too dangerous for him to board. At the moment when he was hesitating, the helicopter slid onto a col very close to him "with a bang and a roar." Black smoke billowed out, and there was a strong smell of oil. (Hiraide did not actually see the chopper's rotor touch the serac because he was crouching in the snow.) The crew, pilot Sabin Basnet and engineer Purna Awale, were killed.

On the following day, the 8th, Hiraide was successfully plucked off the mountain. At 7:00 a.m. he heard another helicopter's engine, and as it approached, he gestured to the pilot that the top of the serac was a danger to the rotor; the pilot flew in several circles to check conditions and informed Hiraide that they could not pick him up where he was on the serac. He gestured that he would climb down 50 meters to a flat place. He was rescued 15 minutes later and, with all their gear, flown to Lukla. His thumb was slightly frostbitten. Two men had lost their lives.



## **First ascents**

The season saw first ascents of three 6000m mountains widely scattered across Nepal. Mt. Changla (6563m) is in northwest Nepal, northeast of Mt. Saipal and on the border with Tibet. In the middle, in Mustang district, is Yakawa Kang (6482m), at the Thorong Pass near Muktinath. And in the far northeast is another border mountain, which the tourism ministry calls Pabuk Kang (6244m): it is unnamed on many maps but probably is actually named Yangma or Yanma.

### **Pabuk Kang**

An eight-member Australian team led by Tim Macartney-Snape trekked a long way to get to their remote 6244m mountain and to climb it in strict alpine style: no Sherpas, no fixed camps above ABC, no bottled oxygen. After they had arrived at base camp at 5185m, there were several days of snowfall, but on the 2nd of November six climbers began their summit push by returning to ABC. On the 3rd they made their first bivouac at 5850m south of the south ridge. They continued their climb the next day with another bivouac at 5900m at the foot of the ridge, a recce up the ridge to 6050m and return to the second bivouac to sleep.

On 5 November at 4:00 a.m. the aspiring summiters left their second bivouac, but only two climbed all the way to the top. David Barton and Macartney-Snape followed the south ridge to a steep rock step at 6100m, which was very technical; the two managed to turn the step on the left. Above it was “perfect classic deep snow.” They were on the summit at 2:00 p.m., and then descended to a saddle at 6050m at 3:45 p.m. and, while they were in the area, climbed a small-unnamed peak (Pt. 6128m) that the step led to. Finally, they rappelled down steep rock to rejoin the others in their high bivouac.

### **Changla**

Four Japanese, leader Hirofumi Kobayashi, Seiya Nakasukasa, Yuta Shibayama and Naoki Yamaguchi, were not certain about which line would be the best for them to follow to reach their 6563m summit, so after approaching Changla from the west, they made a reconnaissance to find a good climbing route. They stayed in a temporary camp for four or five days while observing the southwest face. Their decision was to get onto the north ridge, which delineates the border with Tibet, from the southwest face of this ridge. (The face is on the Tibetan side of the border.) Their temporary camp was actually at the bottom of this face.

They returned to base camp at 4700m, and after a period of rain and snow kept them in camp until 21 September, they began their attack on the mountain without Sherpas by climbing to 5500m on the ridge and made their first high camp. On the 22nd they began the job of making the route along the ridge on mixed rock and ice from camp 1. At last, they were able to establish camp 2 on the 26th at a col on the ridge at 6090m.

The following day, 27 September, the four men made their final push for the summit from camp 2. They left the camp at 4:00 a.m. on “a beautiful day, no wind, no

clouds.” After having surmounted a 300-meters-high icefall that was just above camp 2 from 6100m to 6400m, where they fixed the only rope on the mountain, they gained the top at 11:40 a.m. They got back to camp 2 at 11:30 p.m.

Their return to camp 2 was very slow because they decided they should descend via the long fluted north ridge into Tibet and down to the glacier at the foot of the ridge. They walked along the glacier and finally climbed back onto the ridge to camp 2.

### **Yakawa Kang**

A two-member Japanese expedition to Mustang district’s Mt. Yakawa Kang was actually a one-member effort: the second member did not intend to climb above BC. On the first days, Hidenobu Tsuji, leader and the only climbing member, also stayed in BC while their three Sherpas spent two days fixing the route up the south face from 5700m to 6300m, at which point their supply of rope for fixing was used up.

The Sherpas, Dawa Norbu (known as Ang Danu), Dawa Tshering and Tshering Tashi, had a rest day, and then Tsuji and they went for the 6482m summit on 7 November. They left base at 5416m on the Thorong La at 1:45 a.m. From 6300m to the summit, they roped together, and in steep places used climbing ropes, which they fixed and then pulled up behind them. Parts of the route were steep (70 degrees) and parts gentle slopes. It was exposed rock to 6050m, then mixed snow and ice. In the section where they were rock climbing, they encountered some rock fall but were protected by their helmets and were not injured. They gained the summit at 1:00 p.m. By the time they returned to base camp, 6:30 p.m., they were “very tired” by the long day’s climb and rested for a full day before leaving.

### **Deaths of Italian, Japanese and Nepalese**

This autumn was quite a safe season considering the hundreds of climbers in the mountains and the avalanching after numerous days of snowfall. The toll was one Italian, three Japanese and two Nepalese.

The **Italian** was Walter Nones, a 38-year-old professional climber who led a team of two other Italians (with no Sherpas) in a bid to scale Cho Oyu by its southwest face, the side of the mountain which is close to the east side of the Nangpa La, the pass favored by Tibetans fleeing their country. This was only the fourth attempt ever to be made on the face.

It ended in tragedy on 3 November when Nones plunged to his death, apparently blown off his feet by strong wind just as he emerged from his tent at 7000m. He had not yet had time to put on his crampons when the wind knocked him over. He somersaulted as he fell, and his badly smashed body landed 700 meters below.

Three **Japanese** were killed on Dhaulagiri I by a devastating avalanche and the blast of wind it created while they were in the early stage of their climb via the standard route up the northeast ridge. The leader of the four-member (no Sherpa) team, who was one of those who died, was Osamu Tanabe. He was 49 and had already

summitted nine 8000m mountains, including Everest, plus numerous lower Nepalese peaks, some in first ascents, over a long period of time.

Now, on 28 September, he and his teammates were slightly scattered between 5150m and 5400m as they were making their way from base camp up to the northeast col when Tanabe suddenly radioed to a teammate below him, "Look up—avalanche!" He was then engulfed by it.

One of the four survived: Kazuaki Shimada, who was carrying a pair of skis on his back, was pushed by the blast of wind 200 meters into soft snow. He got a mouthful of snow and a lot of painful bruises but was otherwise uninjured. He quickly wielded snow bars and his skis to probe and dig for the others. He found no traces, and after hours of effort despite his pain, when it was getting dark, he returned alone to base camp.

One of their bodies, that of Daisuke Honda, was discovered eleven days later by two experts who brought special equipment from Japan. It was 50 meters under the snow.

A **Nepalese** Sherpa with a less experienced team of Japanese climbers, who were climbing in support of Tanabe's party, was also killed by the avalanche. Pasang Gelu, 47, five times Everest summiter, once atop Dhaulagiri and Cho Oyu each, was fixing rope at 6700m when he was swept 2100 meters down the mountain. He completely disappeared.

The other Nepalese who died was an even more highly experienced Sherpa, Chhuwang Nima, 43 years old. He had been summiting Everest very nearly every year since May 1994 with climbers from around the world, including numerous Americans and Japanese, and had even summited it twice from bottom to top last May to give him a total of 18 ascents.

Now he was on Baruntse with one American, Ms. Melissa Arnot. On 23 October he and another Sherpa from an Iranian expedition went up from camp 2 (6500m) to break trail and fix rope to the summit. Chhuwang Nima was ahead, at slightly more than 7000m at a large crevasse on the southeast ridge with a big cornice at one end, and was standing on the top of the cornice hammering in a picket, when the ice beneath him collapsed onto the steep east face of fluted snow and rock. The cornice carried him down with it. Then a snow avalanche came along and buried him further. Later the same day at least three more avalanches piled on top of him. It was impossible to recover his body.

## **Spring-Autumn 2011: The Supreme Master God-Angel Prays Atop of Everest?**

### **American David Gottlieb Knocks Off His Third Unclimbed Nepalese Mountain**

The year 2011 produced its share of unusual ascents and massive number of Everest summiters, several of whom were most unusual. The total number of Everest summiters was 526, all in the spring season and most on just two days, the 20th and 21st of May.

The unusual summiters:

1. According to his supporters, a 30-year-old Nepali from the southeastern district of Udayapur, Bhakta Kumar Rai, reached the top of Everest on 20 May and stayed there for 32 hours, 27 of which were devoted to praying for world peace, sitting out in the open all through the day and night, using bottled oxygen for only 11 hours. Amongst his followers, he is known as “Supreme Master God-Angel” after founding a sect, the Heavenly Path, at the age of just 18. He is credited with performing miracles from an early age; his sojourned atop Everest is only the latest one. However, the Nepalese government, which grants permits to climb Everest and other high peaks, credits Rai, together with three teammates, as gaining the summit, but does not endorse the 32-hour record.
2. Rather much more credible is the ascent by foot and the descent by a non-powered paraglider claimed by two other Nepalis, Sano Babu Sunuwar, the pilot of the tandem paraglider, and his passenger, Lakpa Tsheri Sherpa. They reported that they climbed to the top of Everest on 21 May by the standard southern route via the South Col, then lifted off from the 8850-meter summit in the paraglider and achieved a record-breaking altitude of 8865 meters, encircled the peak, and landed 45 minutes later at the nearest airfield at Shyangboche, 3780m, above the area’s largest towns, Khumjung and Namche Bazar. In early June, they continued downwards in a kayak on the Kosi River to the Ganges, Kolkata (Calcutta) and the Bay of Bengal. They named their expedition the Ultimate Descent Summit to Sea.

Notable climbs by more normal methods of going up and down mountains was the first ascent of Pangbuk Ri in the Rolwaling range just west of Khumbu, and a new route on Changwathang, in Humla district’s northwestern corner of Nepal close to the Tibetan border. No one used bottled oxygen or Sherpa helpers.

A small team of only two American climbers made the first ascent of 6716m Pangbuk Ri in the Rolwaling on 11 November in a BC-to-BC roundtrip of just one week. They left behind on the mountain four pitons, two stoppers and one ice

screw—no fixed ropes, for the simple reason they didn't fix any.

David Gottlieb, for whom this was his third first ascent of a Rolwaling peak, and Chad Kellogg, who plans a record-breaking speed ascent of Everest in 2012, separately explored the south and west aspects of their mountain and each concluded that the south face presented the best route. Up they went, setting up their advance base camp on 2 November at 5300m at what they thought was a good site, but it turned out to be exposed to daily rock fall at 6:00 am onwards (Gottlieb's hard hat took a direct hit, which smashed his hat but not his head.) Next day they moved camp up to 5700m below a large overhanging rock formation, and spent the next few days waiting for the full moon and watching the rock fall.

Finally, at 4:00 am on the 10th of November, they started up the south face and kept moving up till at 2:20 pm they reached the east (summit) ridge. Here they lowered themselves a meter and a half or so into a crevasse for protection from the wind for the night. At 6:30 am on the 11th they climbed out of their shelter onto the ridge and walked along the glacial ridge to the large flat area that was the summit.

They realized it would not be easy to rappel down their ascent route, so in 20 rappels in 14 hours the southwest face they arrived at the bottom of the face at midnight of the 11/12th. Some of the rappels were "tricky," said Gottlieb; "we had to be super-careful." Without pausing to sleep, they trekked 15 km. to their base camp, moving very slowly because they were very tired, and returned to base at 6:00 am on 12 November for the third sunrise of their climb.

It had been the most technical climbing on snow and ice of their careers, and the 50 hours they had spent moving without interruption, including their time in the crevasse keeping their circulation flowing, was the longest such period each man had endured.

Changwathang was tackled via a new route by a French team led by Paulo Grobel whose ascent was very quick. The previous climbs in 2000 by Japanese had been on the west face and in 2008 also by Japanese via that south face. But the French made their base camp on 25 September at 5400m near a small lake east of the mountain, and ascended the northwest ridge and descended the west ridge. The base camp was quite high, so they needed no higher camp. Grobel and Jean-Pierre Arles climbed on 26 September up a north glacier, which began with some crevasses, then they moved to the upper col of Changwathang (5960m) and from there up the northwest ridge, which started steep but became flat but very exposed. They were on the 6125m top at 2:30 pm that day and returned to base camp via the ridge to the mountain's lower col (5772m) the same afternoon.

## **Spring 2012: Climbers to Everest's Summit From Nepal Are Not Alone**

### **Everest Without a Permit: Chinese Are Just Like Westerners**

The concentration of large numbers of people very high on Everest on two days, the 19th and 25th of May, was most unusual, and the fact that the large majority summited from the Nepalese side, rather than about half of them on the Tibetan side as in previous years, was also unusual.

The vast crowds heading for the top of the world on the Nepalese side on just two principal days were responding to weather forecasts predicting that favourable weather conditions, notably light winds, would be concentrated on these two days. Furthermore, strong winds at very high altitudes had already prevented the Sherpas who were fixing ropes on the route from taking the lines all the way to the top until the 18th.

Contributing to this situation on Nepal's side of Everest was the relatively low numbers on the northern, Tibetan side. In recent years, the numbers have been roughly the same on each side, while the fee for a climbing permit in Tibet was considerably lower than that charged by the Nepalese government. But the Beijing authorities have been raising the price on their side to the point where they are now about equal. Adding to the drawbacks of climbing in Tibet are constant hassles with Tibetan yak drivers and miscellaneous additional fees charged for yaks and various other items, plus the uncertain political situation in Tibet, which means uncertainty about the date when visas would be granted to enter Tibet. Now it is more convenient to climb in Nepal and no costlier, and about two-thirds of climbers struggling to get to the summit on their final day were in Nepal.

This shift away from Tibet might not be a permanent trend. The considerable media attention to this spring's crowding on Nepal's side has become widely known, so more people may possibly decide to go to Tibet despite the problems there, not realizing that the concentration on just two days in Nepal was due to the unusually brief expected weather windows. (Weather conditions on the north and south sides can be surprisingly different.) But when they compare the prices, and consider the problems with going to Tibet including unpredictable border closures, they may well stick to Nepal.

The situation with Cho Oyu, also on the border and not far from Everest, is rather different. It is much less difficult to scale from Tibet, so climbers and expeditions organizers simply do not consider the Nepalese approach to the top. But Cho Oyu faces the same problem about opening and closing the border—it is likely to arise this autumn because of top Central Committee membership changes due then—but this very seldom occurs. Because of the uncertainties about permits for Tibet, some commercial organizers have eliminated Cho Oyu from their programs and substituted another mountain, Manaslu or Makalu, in its place. But most will return to Cho Oyu when possible.

The total number of Everest summiters from both sides this past spring was just under 500. This contrasts with the totals in previous seasons: in the spring of 2010, there were 531 summiters, and the following year the total was 529. Among those who managed to summit this spring were the first Latvian woman, Ms. Olga Kotova, and the oldest woman from any country, 73-year-old Tamae Watanabe from Japan. Watanabe had been to the top when she was 63 and said will return when she is 83. (The age record for men—indeed for both sexes—is 76 years, 340 days set by a Nepali, Min Bahadur Sherchan, in May 2010.)

The leader of a large Everest expedition of mixed nationalities, Marty Schmidt from New Zealand, led one group of his members out of their highest camp at 11:00 pm on 18 May, but they did not manage to reach the summit until 15 hours later, an unthinkable length of time a few years ago. Problem: they had to wait for a period of three hours at the bottom of the Hillary Step for descending climbers to leave the Step. A prolonged wait at an altitude of about 8800m can lead to serious health problems, such as high-altitude sickness and frostbite, especially if a climber who is using bottled oxygen experiences a sudden cut-off in the flow of oxygen into his system.

David Hahn, a well-known American mountaineer for whom this season's ascent of Everest was his 14th, views the great line of people heading up to the summit on 25 May as "frightening from the point of view of a leader: it takes away the ability to lead...It's really dangerous." He watched people who clearly had never before walked on rock with crampons on their boots. So why does he keep returning to Everest year after year? He shrugs while conceding, "there are too many reasons this is not mountain climbing any more—but why not keep going?"

Amongst the hordes of people atop the mountain from Nepal's side were a Mexican, David Pastor, and his Sherpa, Mingma Tenzing. They were a special pair: they made a continuous climb up and down the mountain, with pauses along the way. They left BC at 1:00 am of the 25th, reached C2 at 5:30 am and stayed there an hour. At 6:30 am they started up again, arrived at C3 at 10:30 am, stayed half an hour, and left at 11:00 am. On their way up to C4, they waited half an hour for a Spaniard's body to be brought down, then resumed their climb and reached C4 at the South Col at 2:00 pm. They stayed in C4, waiting for the summit party of the big expedition to which they belonged to leave for the top, and at 8:20 am on the 26th set out with them. Pastor now had stomach trouble, "but I kept going," he said, and they were on the summit at 4:16 am on 26 May in perfect weather, and Pastor had recovered from his stomach problem. They were on oxygen from 7300m to the summit and stayed on it till they returned to 7300m.

They stayed on the summit only long enough to take a few photos, then down to C4 at 7:15 am, left C4 half an hour later, and were back in C2 at 10:54 am. They stopped in C2 to eat dal bhat with some Sherpas and left C2 at 5:00 am. They were safely down in BC at 7:30 am. Then, while Mingma Tenzing stayed in BC, Pastor left at 1:00 pm for Pheriche village, where he arrived at 5:30 pm to rest in the local lodge.

Occasionally people go to Everest without a climbing permit; sometimes they get caught and sometimes not. They have always been from North America or Europe,

to my knowledge. But in mid-May, a 38-year-old Chinese man, Wang Tian-Han, who was well outfitted for a Himalayan ascent, was discovered to have climbed on the Tibetan side as high as C2 at 7790m on 18 or 19 May. He was forced to descend by four students from the Tibet Mountain School at Lhasa, who brought him down through C1 with his wrists tied together. It is not known what punishment he received for this unauthorized bid.

Nor is it known why he had gone to the mountain in the first place. He had already made a successful ascent on 17 May 2002 with a Tibetan assistant, Rinchen Phuntsok, after they had set up the usual number of camps on the same route. Perhaps this time he wanted to make an ascent without an assistant and without using any bottled oxygen. In any case, he was forcibly stopped in his tracks.

When climbers are just back in Kathmandu from their summit failures, they normally are serious about the undesired outcomes. But this spring, when a small Italian-Romanian-Slovakian expedition to Kangchenjunga related the unfortunate outcome of three members' summit bid, they couldn't stop laughing about it.

The world's third-highest mountain, Kangchenjunga on Nepal's eastern border with India, is not a single giant peak, but a long ridge with three summits well over 8000 meters high. The northern summit, 8586 meters above sea level, is the highest, but the middle and south summits are still formidable. This season, four climbers from Italy, Romania and Slovakia had the main summit as their goal, but when they got to their fourth high camp at 7600m, they didn't know where they should go.

One of them, Peter Hamor from Slovakia, liked the looks of a couloir as a way to gain more altitude, so he went for it. The other three, Mrs. Nives Meroi and Romano Benet, Italians, and their Romanian team-mate, Horia Colibasanu, were not so lucky or so clever; they chose a different way.

Hamor found himself atop the main summit. His team-mates did not: while still going higher and higher, they came to realize that they were approaching the middle summit, not the highest. They retreated to C4 and made no further attempt to "conquer" Kangchenjunga.

Back in Kathmandu, Mrs. Meroi, the team's leader, recounted the saga of the wrong route to an interviewer in the presence of the other members, and when she got to the punch line, going the wrong way, she laughed and laughed and laughed. She clearly found it hilarious that three highly experienced Himalayan mountaineers, who had a combined total of 27 8000-meter summits to their credit, had gotten into this kind of situation. Her laughter was infectious: everyone joined in.



## **Autumn 2012: Numerous Victims of One Avalanche on Manaslu**

### **Another Avalanche on Annapurna I Kills Uzbekistanis**

It was 4:30 in the morning on 23 September, and all the climbers on Manaslu were asleep in their tents, when an avalanche of considerable force swept their third high-altitude camps. A serac fell from a ridge above, causing a slab avalanche that carried quantities of snow and ice down the mountainside with it. Eleven people perished. Among them were Himalayan veterans: Gregory Costa, Remy Lecluse and Ludovic Challeat from France, Alberto Magliano of Italy and the Nepalese Sherpa, Dawa Dorje, from Pangboche.

In addition to killing 11 climbers, the great blast of air from the avalanche also did great damage in other ways: it destroyed all of the Magliano team's tents in the next lower camp; another expedition's nearby tents, with climbers still inside, were shifted five meters lower by the blast of wind; there were numerous injuries including one man's fractured vertebra and another's serious bruising from being swept down 300-400 meters and coming to rest in a crevasse. A number of climbers and even a few Sherpas were unnerved by the event, and families back home clamoured for their return; most of these climbers left the mountain immediately. Many others descended to base camp to settle their nerves and to take stock of the situation and decide whether to go back up again.

The highly experienced Himalayan mountaineer, New Zealander Russell Brice, who was leading a team on Manaslu at the time, believes that this mayhem could have been avoided or at least minimized. He observed that the fatal avalanche path on 23 September was the same path as that of an earlier one before the teams arrived. Furthermore, the event of the 23rd occurred after new snow had accumulated. If the affected teams had been alerted to this, they would have placed their tents at C3 200 meters to the right and been in a safer location, he thought. But in any case, they should not have been up there with that amount of snow on the mountain.

As luck would have it, there were an unusually large number of teams on Manaslu this autumn. A goodly proportion of them would normally have been on Cho Oyu climbing the popular route on its less difficult Tibetan side. But with an extremely important meeting of the topmost Communist party leadership due to take place in Beijing in November, the authorities closed Tibet to all climbing expeditions well in advance, during the summer, to preclude any "Free Tibet" banners or t-shirts being displayed by foreigners. The result was that a total of 47 expeditions crowded the northeast face of Manaslu, more than twice as many as the 22 teams in the same period last year.

Unfortunately, Manaslu was not the only mountain on which climbers died. Two Uzbekistanis were fatally buried on the afternoon of 7 October on the north face of Annapurna I by a torrent of large and small blocks of ice raining down on them from the Dutch rib, the German rib and the couloir between the ribs. The men were

completely buried deep in an ice cave, and the ice was compressed the next day, making it impossible to retrieve their bodies.

## **Spring 2013: A Nasty Brawl on Everest Between Sherpas and Europeans**

### **The Last Stand on Everest by an Aging Record Holder**

The customary rope-fixers on Everest, who extend fixed lines all the way to the 8850m summit, expect the foreigners to wait—or perhaps in rare cases at least climb behind them—while they complete their task. They are experienced climbers selected by the leaders of a few big commercial expeditions and are accustomed to being the pioneers up the mountain while docile clients of the commercial expeditions wait for these hotshot Sherpas to prepare the route to enable just about anybody to climb Mount Everest.

This spring, however, on 27 April, a small party of highly skilled European independent mountaineers had gotten ahead of the rope-fixers several days earlier and had pitched a camp on the west face of Lhotse, well above the high point already reached by the ropes. They had descended to a lower camp, but now they wanted to return to the camp and move on up. They were in the acclimatization phase of their intended ascent of a new route on the southwest face on Everest.

Two of the Europeans were the well-known Swiss mountaineer, Ueli Steck, and the equally famous Italian, Simone Moro. With them was a Briton as their photographer, Jonathan Griffin. Steck seems to have a calm temperament, but the same cannot be said of his excitable Italian teammate, who unfortunately has visited Nepal often enough to be fluent in Nepalese swearwords. When confronted by angry Sherpas, an explosion was not very surprising.

There are several conflicting accounts about who set off the explosion, who did what, which European first punched a Sherpa, and who started beating a European with whatever came to hand. Moro helped to raise the temperature by casting aspersions in Nepali on some of the Sherpas' mothers. No one was seriously wounded, and the two sides were finally calmed down by the intervention of cooler heads.

One account by a very reliable Sherpa source who was at BC throughout the conflict, explained some necessary background:

1. There had been a meeting of Everest/Lhotse team leaders to discuss their climb; Moro was the nominal leader of his team and had not been invited perhaps because he and Steck were believed to be contemptuous of commercial expeditions, and perhaps because his team's permit for Everest was for its southwest face and this route does not ascend the Lhotse face; it was not generally known that they also possessed a permit to climb Lhotse.

At this meeting, it was agreed no climbers would move close to or across the rope-fixers' route on the west face of Lhotse while they were working on it because of the difficulty and danger for the Sherpas involved; it's an area that makes Sherpas tense and nervous. Moro and Steck knew nothing about this agreement.

2. Moro knew how to swear fluently in Nepali and had a volatile temperament. After he was told to get away from the rope-fixers' route, he twice used unacceptable swearwords about the Sherpas and their parentage on the fixers' open radio frequency that just about all the teams were tuned into. This made not only the fixers, but also many of the other Sherpas on the mountains furious.
3. Several accounts say that the leader of large commercial team, Marty Schmidt, came along, saw a young Sherpa with a rock in his hand, and without knowing what the tense situation was all about, immediately threw a punch at the Sherpa. This, according to these accounts, set off the brawl. Schmidt has denied he struck first but claims that when he was kicked and beaten with a rock, he "stood up in self-defence and threw a punch at this [angry Sherpa] crowd."

The fight was on. A large number of young hot-headed Sherpas joined in. Moro and Steck were given an ultimatum to get off Everest immediately and threatened with death if they returned to their climb. They and Griffin quickly departed.

The highly experienced Everest climber and commercial expedition leader Russell Brice was at base camp while all this was going on. He has commented that his sirdar or head Sherpa, Phurba Tashi, has climbed Everest 21 times, is smart and a powerful person in his community (he comes from Khumjung in the Khumbu area just south of Everest), "but he's totally quiet. So when we talk about the current situation, his answer is, I have nothing to say. But I promise you, he'll have a huge amount to say within his own community." Brice added, "when older sirdars come to you to apologize for what younger guys have done, and they have tears in their eyes, I really take notice. I never see Sherpas cry, not even at funerals. When a Sherpa apologizes like that, it's from their heart and soul."

My own view of the underlying cause of the Sherpas' aggression was a collision between independent foreigners who were technically highly skilled mountaineers, nonconformists who never use fixed ropes or bottled oxygen, on the one hand, and Sherpas, who consider they are putting their own lives at risk fixing the lines in tricky places, felt a grave loss of face when some foreigners did not wait for them to finish their job but instead raced ahead.

An Estonian team of man and wife went to Cho Oyu and declared afterwards that they had reached the summit together, making Mrs. Anu Noulik the first Estonian woman summiter. But the small mountaineering community in their country voiced great doubt about their claim, and the detailed report I received from my own source did raise serious questions. So I sent Anu Noulik an e-mail seeking her version. She was slow in replying because she underwent an operation to amputate her badly frostbitten fingers. But she eventually answered:

- Q. You had not wanted to have any Sherpas helping you on your climb, but you hired Roshan Dipen Bhattarai on the mountain. He had been on Cho Oyu twice before and had climbed up to 7500m in 2011. There was no fixed rope above C2, so he fixed the route up to 7500m, where you had your C3.
- A. We had planned to climb without a Sherpa, but we still needed to find someone who knew the route and the only person in BC who had climbed to the summit before was Roshan. He had also fixed the route until 7500m.
- Q. But when you made your summit climb, there was no fixed rope all the way from 7500m to the 8201m summit. Visibility on your summit day was no more than one meter ahead, and the wind was blowing at 100 km./hr.
- A. There were old ropes from the 3rd camp leading up to the plateau so we used those. Visibility was mostly all right on the road to the plateau. Getting there the visibility started to get worse, but it was definitely further than one meter. It might have been one meter when we started to go back and then the storm got to us.
- Q. How could you manage to stand up in such strong wind?
- A. It was really very hard. We held on to the ropes all the time. I couldn't stand up and got on my knees at the time, and my husband helped me.
- Q. How could you find the correct line to the summit in such conditions, especially with no fixed lines to guide you, and your Sherpa never having been higher than 7500m himself [according to the Himalayan Database]?
- A. We knew that our Sherpa had been on the summit twice before. and we strongly believed that it was so because he knew the way even in the dark. And he knew where the right place was to rise on the summit plateau. And there were several old ropes like I said before.
- Q. You of course could take no photos at the summit because of very poor visibility. Can you describe the summit area? For example, was it very steep uphill to the summit, or was there a final gentle slope to the top?
- A. We have one photo of the summit. Our camera was frozen and our Sherpa couldn't take our picture. I also tried, but couldn't. I already gave up trying when the camera took a crooked picture of my husband—the quality was poor. The last slope before the summit plateau was really steep and rocky. The plateau wasn't so steep and it was much easier to go there, no more ropes, also the snow wasn't so deep and only the rising wind was against and it started snowing.
- Q. Your and your husband's oxygen supply stopped after one hour's ascent from camp 3, but you could carry on without it for ten more hours' ascent to the summit and three hours' return to camp 3. Is this correct?

- A. We only wanted to try the oxygen for future but there was no actual need for it (our acclimatization was excellent). I don't know how long my only bottle lasted but my mask was frozen soon and I gave up. When we climbed up the culuar [couloir] and went to the final slopes we put the masks in our backpacks. We never planned to use oxygen but decided to see how it goes.
- Q. You climbed to the top with inadequate gloves protecting your fingers, leaving you with serious frostbite. Correct?
- A. I wore big warm gloves, but there were no inner gloves. My frostbite was probably not caused by the gloves, but my body just gave up in such hard condition.
- Q. Was this epic struggle rewarding to you and your husband?
- A. No, it wasn't. I went in the hopes of fulfilling my dream and in the end it didn't turn out though. I wanted to go up there for the view. I wanted to see Everest, but we didn't see it. I was very disappointed. Thinking back, I regret going to the top after it was clear that the weather was getting worse, but at the end it was the only accomplishment which we succeeded in. Our planning and training before the trip paid off because we did get to the top.

What to make of this claim? An answer from a member of an Austrian-German expedition who was on Cho Oyu at the time and who met the couple as they returned to their highest camp: "Maybe they were there [on the summit], maybe not... At least they believe that they were there (even if they were not)."

A new age record for summiting Everest was set on 23 May by the 80-year-old professional Japanese skier, Yuichiro Miura, but it was clearly a struggle, and it seems most unlikely that he will return.

His acclimatization in Nepal took place on nearby Pumori rather than the normal trial period on the lower reaches of Everest itself. This was to avoid his having to go through the Khumbu Icefall more than once.

He and his three teammates, who included his son Gota Miura, went in one continuous ascent starting from base camp on 16 May, when they occupied C1, a camp some expeditions don't even bother with. On the 17th they slept in C2, on the 19th in C3. On the 20th they made an unusual intermediate camp before the route traverses across the top of Geneva Spur, a major rock formation, to reach the South Col and the site for C4. On the 21st they were in C4 itself, and on the 22nd they pitched a very seldom final camp at the Balcony, a large ledge at 8500m.

The ledge is large, but not large enough for all members and the seven Sherpas in the summit party. Two Sherpas slept there with the members while the other five stayed in C4 and caught up with the summiters early the following morning. The four members and two Sherpas left C5 for the top together at 2:00 am on 23 May and were on the summit seven hours later with the other Sherpas.

By now Miura was extremely tired and weak. In his descent, he was short-roped from 8700m, 150 vertical meters below the top, to C4 at 7900m on the South Col. He arrived at C4 at 7:20 pm, more than ten hours after he stood on the summit.

The next day he was still exhausted and took 13 hours to descend from 7900m to C2 at 6400m in the Western Cwm. But this was his last day of down-climbing, for on the 26th he flew by helicopter from C2 over the remainder of the climbing route directly to his comfortable Kathmandu hotel. (It was lucky that the team had not tried to descend through the Icefall: a sizable part of the Icefall collapsed on the 25th.) On the 28th he left for Japan.

As he entered his hotel and sat down near the entrance for photographers, he seemed tired but answered questions smoothly in English. He was non-committal about a return to Everest, but he didn't respond with a quick affirmative as he had five years previously. And his son's reply for him was also non-committal. The father was not egged on to try again as he had been five years ago when a Nepalese climber 15 months older than he got to the top the day before Miura was there in 2008. This time the Nepalese, Min Bahadur Sherchan, did not appear. Surely this was Miura's last stand.

An impressive first in the tightly controlled lives of the women of Saudi Arabia was the successful ascent of Everest by a 27-year-old art director from Jeddah, Ms. Raha Moharrak. Few climbers come to Nepal from the Arabian side of the Gulf, and none of their Everest summiters has been a woman. (Women from Iran, on the opposite side, which has a different culture and its own mountainous region, are no longer rare.)

Although it didn't take place in Nepal, also worth noting is the first attack by militants on an expedition in Pakistan. On 22 June, a murderous assault by Taliban men on a base camp for Nanga Parbat in the Karakoram Range indiscriminately killed a group of climbers including one Nepalese Sherpa. Sona Sherpa, 36, who came from Chheskam, a village in eastern Solukhumbu district. He had summited Everest with a Japanese woman in mid-May and in earlier years with Indian and South Korean teams, and also Makalu once, again with Koreans.

## **Autumn 2013: Ueli Steck Makes a Dramatic Ascent of Annapurna**

### **But As Always There Are Doubters**

### **First Ascents Are Still Being Made in Nepal**

#### **Ueli Steck on Annapurna**

Ueli Steck, a Swiss mountaineer well known for significant ascents in the Himalaya, outdid himself this autumn by making an astonishing rapid climb of Annapurna I by a new line up the vast south face near the Bonington route without supplemental oxygen and entirely alone from the bergschrund at 5650m.

He spent only 18.5 hours from his advance base camp at 5000m to the 8091m top, where he spent only a couple of minutes. He was back in his advance base camp at 5000m in a total of elapsed time of no more than 28 hours. His account of this spectacular climb was so astonishing that immediately voices were raised in disbelief.

Steck is a mild man, a very gifted Himalayan mountaineer who quietly gets on with his climbs, usually with one or two teammates. He is not given to flamboyant behaviour, and no one who knows him well doubts his word. That he was awarded the highly coveted Piolet d'Or after his Annapurna climb became known is evidence of this trust.

He lost his camera to a small avalanche during his ascent, so he had no photographs to prove his claim, although two of his Nepalese base camp staff stated that they saw the light of his headlamp perhaps 200 meters below the top. Steck told a German climbing magazine, "Of course I would like to have some proof. However, this was not my priority when I was climbing the wall. ... I am the only one who knows that I summited Annapurna I. It was a liberating experience. If someone wants to doubt it, they can. ... On the face, I made my decisions without thinking about having to prove anything to anyone. I was exposed [during the climb] and the only important thing for me up there was to survive. In an adventure you cannot plan everything. If this was possible it would no longer be an adventure."

Chief amongst those who questioned Steck's success was Andreas Kubin, former editor-in-chief of a German climbing magazine and a highly skilled climber himself, who in an interview raised a number of points which he believed cast doubt on Steck's account.

According to Kubin, Steck had talked about tracks on the summit slope which turned out to have been made by avalanching; the night of his ascent there was a new moon, which meant no moonlight, but Steck kept switching his headlamp off during the dark hours to save its batteries; he sent a message to men at base camp saying he had returned safely to Camp 2 without mentioning his having reached the top; and so on.

Kubin states that "the doubts and controversies about this ascent will remain" despite the Piolet d'Or award. ... We as mountaineers have to ask these questions; otherwise we would kill mountaineering. If, in the age of GPS, GO PRO cameras and wrist computers, you are unable to document your climb properly, you did not do a good



job. ... Don't give this award to the people with the most innocent eyes, but to those who have proof of their achievements. This is the only way this prize will keep its value and mountaineering keeps its credibility."

### **First ascent of Bamongo**

The majority of people who come to climb in Nepal go only to the well-known peaks, Everest, Cho Oyu and Ama Dablam on paths well worn by hundreds of earlier climbers. However, an obscure 6400m mountain east of Kathmandu in the area of Gaurishankar called Bamongo seems to have become an obsession with an Austrian climber, Josef Einwaller, who led the only previous attempts, two unsuccessful teams in 2010 and the following year, and was set to lead one more this autumn until a health problem prevented him from reaching base camp.

This season's climb was made in his absence by a small Austrian-Chinese-Nepalese team in a quick ascent via its steep southwest face up a ridge or pillar to its top, then on the face itself to the final southwest ridge to the summit. On 29 October, Liu Yong, a seasoned Chinese climber and guide, and two Nepalis, Mingma Gyalje and Pema Tshering Sherpa, climbed to 5440m with a tent, and bivouacked there. The next day, they left the tent at 5:00 am, reached the summit at 2:25 pm and were back down in base camp (4800m) at 9:30 pm that evening. They climbed so fast that "we didn't even have time to eat and drink," Liu commented.

It was by no means a stroll up the mountain. They climbed without fixed rope; the three summiters tied up in one 60-meter rope. The face generally slanted at 40 to 60 degrees with the last 30 meters to the summit ridge at almost 80 to 90 degrees. The final stage was on a sharp knife-edge ridge with very soft snow; they climbed five pitches with little protection "then another more than one hour running belay without protection because of soft snow," according to Liu. They had accomplished the first ascent of Bamongo.

### **Himlung's popularity increasing**

An increasing number of organizers of commercial expeditions are offering Himlung, a 7126m peak in central Nepal in the general area of Manaslu, to fill the gap in their catalogues between 6814m Ama Dablam (spring and autumn climbs) and the 8000ers, Everest (a spring climb), Cho Oyu and Manaslu (either season). Altogether 9 teams were on Himlung this season, which was not at all a large number compared to those on the favourite peaks, but it may well increase in the near future.

Himlung is not difficult technically, it just requires perseverance. An indication of this was provided this autumn by a huge 72-member medical research group with 25 climbing Sherpas, which was organized by a Swiss enterprise and led by a Swiss physician, Urs Hefti. With 5000 meters of rope fixed along the route to the top, 30 of its members accompanied by 17 Sherpas ascended the southwest ridge from their third high camp to the summit between 10:00 am and 4:00 pm on 22 October; 33 other members managed to reach their second high camp at 6500m. The only serious health

problems were hypothermia and altitude sickness which caused the evacuation of two members; there were no injuries due to falls or any other accidents.

### **Ama Dablam's ropes**

At 6814m, Ama Dablam is not very high by Himalayan standards, and it attracts many climbers because of its close proximity to Everest and its shapely figure. It is listed in every brochure of commercial organizers and is a magnet to independent alpinists as well. But its normal southwest-ridge route does present some technical difficulties; the climbers who flock to it do not venture to its summit without the aid of fixed ropes. But who fixes the ropes?

This autumn 20 teams quit after reaching at least 6000m, even 6350m. Many of them gave as their reason to turn back and go home the fact that there were no fixed ropes ahead. None of these teams had rope-fixing capability.

Then along came a commercial team led by Adrian Ballinger that did have the capability. His three rope-fixing Sherpas took ropes to the summit on 15 November and his clients were on the top on the 16th. Thereupon seven other groups in the next seven days followed to the summit and none gave up below the top.

By contrast, not expecting to depend on someone else's ropes, an eight-member South Korean expedition to the west face of Lhotse via the Khumbu Icefall, led by Hong Sung-Taek and assisted by four climbing Sherpas, brought along enough rope to fix the Icefall and to safeguard the route on the face between C2 and C3 (7300m), well beyond the treacherous Icefall. In the end, the team was forced to abandon their climb at 7900m because of a fierce storm, but not for lack of rope.

## **Spring 2014: The Largest Fatal Disaster on Everest**

### **Followed by an Unprecedented Strike by Sherpas Effectively Shuts Down Nepalese side of Everest and Lhotse to All Climbers**

### **Two Defiant Women Climb on Everest and Lhotse Anyway And Introduce a New Method of Scaling Them**

Just one subject overwhelmingly dominated this season's climbing scene: Everest's disastrous avalanche followed by the so-called Sherpa strike. A sub-topic was the newly developed method of coping with the Sherpa strike and the retreat of Sherpas maintaining the route through the Icefall, by flying over it.

#### **The Avalanche**

At 6:30 a.m. on 18 April a massive serac broke off high on Everest's west shoulder on the left side of the Icefall and came charging down at great speed to strike with great force and killed 16 Sherpas carrying loads of their teams' gear up from base camp. The route they were following was considered by several leaders who bring clients to Everest every year to be too close to the left, but the "icefall doctors," who forge the route and install fixed ropes and ladders, kept to the habit of moving to the left side rather than making a new route in the middle, away from avalanches on the right from Nuptse as well.

On the fatal morning, a problem with one of the ladders along the route caused a traffic jam at that point, exposing an unusual number of Sherpas to the avalanche; normally not so many Sherpas would have been bunched together. No foreign climbers were in the area at the time, but probably there were altogether 150 Sherpas in the Icefall.

Despite universal shock from the disaster, the largest in Everest's climbing history, a huge effort immediately began to rescue the trapped Sherpas, to dig out and care for those who were still alive and to honour the deceased. Climbers and Sherpas from a number of expeditions pitched in to hasten the search for the living and the dead. Helicopters with long lines dangling down shuttled up and down to rush the living to an emergency hospital established at base camp by the Himalayan Rescue Association, and to lift out of the Icefall the bodies of the dead. (Three bodies were so deeply buried that they were never located.)

#### **The Strike**

Some Sherpas whose homes and families were in villages not far from base camp went home during the next few days. Soon after their return a meeting was held at base camp by various leaders and Sherpas and a petition was drawn up demanding that the government improve Sherpas' pay and insurance and other rules changes. A small group of perhaps five Sherpas emerged as the most vocal malcontents; it is notable that

none of these fierce agitators was from Khumbu. Some of the largest commercial expedition organizers, International Mountain Guides and Himalayan Experience, employ only Khumbu Sherpas.

Of this handful of agitators, two who were the most forceful: one was part of the British Jagged Globe team, 29-year-old Pasang Tenzing, from Beding, who had summited Everest nine times and Cho Oyu twice. The other was Pasang Bhote, 28, from Chepuwa, Makalu, summiter of Everest three times and Cho Oyu twice.

The two ringleaders were already known as troublemakers. After a fatal avalanche on Manaslu struck 10 members and one Sherpa in the autumn of 2012, they led about 50 Sherpas to base camp and demanded that all teams stop climbing. They were not obeyed. The following spring of 2013 the two were back at Everest-Lhotse base camp; while Sherpas were nervously fixing ropes on the west face of Lhotse, Pasang Tenzing spent the day making disparaging comments over the radio to the rope-fixing team.

This was not at all helpful as a volatile situation developed involving Ueli Steck of Switzerland, Simone Moro from Italy, and a British photographer, Jonathan Griffin. The three foreigners had placed gear at the site of their camp above the area where the rope-fixers were working and were now trying to return to their cache. When they were told to get away from the rope-fixers' route, Moro, who knew how to swear fluently in Nepali and had an excitable temperament, twice used unacceptable language about the Sherpas and their parentage on the fixers' open radio frequency which just about all the teams were tuned into. This made not only the fixers but also many of the other Sherpas on the mountain furious. A fight broke out in which Steck and Moro were slightly injured by a cluster of hot-headed young Sherpas, and in their midst were Pasang Tenzing and Pasang Bhote. Moro and Steck were given an ultimatum to get off the mountain immediately and threatened with death if they returned to their climb. They and Griffin quickly left for home.

This spring after the Icefall tragedy, the agitators declared that no one should now climb Everest. They backed this up with the threat that anyone who returned to the mountain would have his arms and legs broken and his home burned down. One team had already decided not to continue their climb out of respect for their three dead Sherpas, but most teams wanted to climb the mountain for which they had invested considerable amounts of money, time and hope, and their Sherpas were willing, although one leader said he read in their eyes and their body language a considerable reluctance to do so. (Several teams, forced to abort their Everest climbs on the south side, sought to change over to the Tibetan side, but they were refused permission by the Chinese authorities citing security reasons.)

The two Pasangs' threat was extremely effective, not only for the Nepalese side of Everest, but for contiguous Mt. Lhotse as well. The leaders of 65 Everest teams and 10 teams for Lhotse declared that their programs were cancelled. This meant that members and Sherpas of 65 expeditions were unable to even try; the members had either never gotten above base camp or, in one case, moved only to the very start of the Icefall, while Sherpa load-carriers had made a few carries to Camp 1 and Camp 2. Everyone for the Nepalese side of Everest (and for Lhotse) went home. That is, everyone

except two defiant women who went up Everest and Lhotse with a few Sherpas despite the ban.

On the north side of Everest, the successful summiters included a 72-year-old retired American lawyer, Bill Burke, and an Indian student, Miss Malavath Poorna, aged 13 years and 349 days, the youngest-ever female summitter. (The youngest male was an American 13 years and 314 days old in 2010.) At least eight other teams also were successful while about nine more were not. By comparison, on Nepal's south side altogether one member and three Sherpas climbed to the top, while no one summited Lhotse.

### **The Defiant Ladies**

One of the defiant ladies was Mrs. Jing Wang, a 39-year-old successful businesswoman from Beijing and a member of the Himalayan Experience South Col expedition led by Russell Brice. He cancelled the climbing program because of the Pasangs' threats. But Mrs. Wang was nearing the conclusion of her "9+2 Project," with the goal of scaling the highest points on the world's seven continents plus two also-rans, Kosciuszko and Mont Blanc, plus "trekking to the tips of both Poles."

By early May, she had just two mountains still to climb, Everest and Denali/McKinley. She was determined to climb Everest now. She applied for permission to climb from the Tibetan side, but the Chinese authorities turned her down: "in order to guarantee the safety of climbers, they are not going to permit any individual to climb Everest from the northern slope this year," she was told. But, she explained, "I really didn't want to just give it up so close to finish, so I tried one more time on the south side."

When Russell Brice said it was not possible to go back to base camp and continue to climb, she "found friends in Nepal and asked him [sic] to help me plan it out. ... My Sherpas and I considered the question of safety in full magnitude... The organizer and the Sherpas assured me they would make sure there's no conflict between the Sherpas, and I won't need to worry about this. My English is not that good, so pretty much everything off the mountain was taken care of by my Nepalese friends. I trust them completely." Her newfound friend, the organizer, Phurba Gyalzen, the boss of a minor trekking agency, Himalayan Sherpa Adventure, delivered on his promise to her of a smooth trip up and down the mountain. No doubt she made good use of her great wealth: there were reports that she paid Rs. 300,000 (over \$3000) to each climbing Sherpa.

That ascent, in her telling, went without a hitch. She was in base camp on 7 May, about ten days after she had participated in an acclimatization climb with Brice's team on a nearby mountain, and not long after the seven ascents throughout her Project. On 10 May she flew to her Camp 2 in the Western Cwm. On the 16th she slept in her Camp 3 one night and then descended to the lower camp; she returned to Camp 3 on the 21st for a one night stay before climbing up to her highest camp, Camp 4 on the South Col. Here she rested (but did not sleep) until midnight while four of her Sherpas went ahead to fix the final section of the route.

On the morning of her summit day, 23 May, she used her satellite phone to check the weather forecast, which was that “the 23rd was a good day and the morning of the 24th also had good weather.” So at about 6:00 a.m. that day, she and her fifth climbing Sherpa set out for the top. Twelve and a half hours later, according to her account, Mrs. Jing Wang from Beijing and three Sherpa from Nepal stood at the summit of Everest.

In dramatic contrast to normal times, they were almost entirely alone. Where there should have been hundreds of climbers trudging up and down the mountain, grabbing the best camp sites and causing traffic jams, not a soul was to be found between base camp and the summit except for the other defiant lady, Cleo Weidlich from California, with her one Sherpa aiming for the summit of Lhotse.

Mrs. Wang had needed only thirteen days to go from base camp to the summit. She had the important help of five experienced Sherpas. They used ropes fixed by others in an earlier season from the west face of Lhotse to the South Col and to “the area around” the South Summit, from where her men installed new ropes.

Their being all alone she found “drastically different from the previous two experiences” when she had climbed in Nepal. “Because there were no footprints left from previous climbers, this increased the difficulty exponentially. [In addition,] there were more exposed boulders along the way; especially from Camp 2 [in the Cwm] you can see a big difference: [on] many parts of the path you can actually see stones whereas in previous years it was completely covered in snow; on [the west face of] Lhotse [on the route to Everest] it was nearly all ice, very difficult for climbing.”

Since “the climb was incredibly difficult,” she and her Sherpas went on oxygen around Camp 3 at 7400m on the Lhotse face and continued to use it till their descent to somewhere near the bottom of the face.

Mrs. Wang wasted no time in her departure from an Everest very nearly devoid of camps and climbers. She returned to her South Col camp from the summit at 11:00 p.m. on 23 May. By noon on the 24th, the entire team, including two Sherpa cooks, was down in Camp 2 in the Cwm, and by the morning of the 25th all of the team and their baggage were in base camp. Mrs. Wang flew back to Kathmandu in the afternoon of the 26th and left Nepal for Alaska and her last mountain that same evening.

After summiting Denali in Alaska, she returned to Kathmandu briefly to attend a congratulatory ceremony at which she was honoured as the International Mountaineer of the Year 2014 (despite the fact that the year was only half over) by Gontabya Nepal Publications, Kamaladi. A statuette and framed letter of appreciation were presented to her by a top leader of the UCPN (Maoist) party, Posta Bahadur Bogati.

The letter of appreciation read: “Gontabya Nepal takes a great pride in honouring you with this title as ‘International Mountaineer of the Year 2014’ for your grand success in summiting Mt. Everest alone [ignoring the Sherpas who summited with her] in the spring of 2014 and also for completing successful ascent of all seven Himalayan [sic] peaks of seven continents in the shortest possible time frame. Your grand achievement of historic climbing of Mt. Everest played an essential and remarkable role in the promoting of Nepalese mountaineering tourism industry around the globe. This

organization highly values your phenomenal contribution and so felicitates you for your entire noble and awe-inspiring endeavour.”

Mrs. Wang was also felicitated at another function on the same day in Kathmandu organized by Mahendra Jyoti Students’ Forum (Mahendra Jyoti is a school in Chaurikharka, Solu) and Pharak Sherpas’ club (Pharak is a village in Solu) at which the Speaker of the Constituent Assembly (Nepal’s temporary legislature) presented her with a framed laudatory letter. But contrary to news items published after her summit success, she did not receive any special award from the Nepalese government. Her Sherpas received on her behalf in her absence just the standard official certificate provided to all summiters, but this document signified that the tourism ministry recognized and thus approved of her ascent.

However, the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal was reported to be investigating her chartered helicopter flights to carry her, her Sherpas and her baggage from BC up to Camp 2 and later back from Camp 2 to BC, whereas it has been understood that choppers are supposed to fly above BC only on rescue missions. There were claims that more than a dozen flights were operated for her; she acknowledged a total of two for herself.

### **Cleo Weidlich’s Lhotse Attempt**

In the mean-time the other defiant lady, Ms. Cleo Weidlich, had made her own bid to scale Everest’s contiguous neighbour, Lhotse, with one Sherpa, Pema Tshering, who had been with her on previous climbs. But on the same day that Mrs. Wang reached her summit, Ms. Weidlich abandoned her attempt to scale Lhotse.

Until she arrived at base camp on 28 April, she had known nothing about the Icefall disaster and the Sherpa strike. But she learned about it in a dramatic fashion: on their arrival, her Sherpa was threatened with broken limbs and a destroyed home. The next day Pema Tshering talked with the SPCC, the group that provides the Sherpas who keeps the Icefall route open, and then he left, presumably after he had been told that the route would not be maintained.

On 30 April Cleo went alone through the Icefall (with ladders still in place) to Camp 1, where she left some gear. A day later, she returned to BC. That same day the ladders were removed.

A very angry Cleo posted a defiant statement on Facebook. “This is just to let you know that my climb on the Everest massif will continue with or without ladders. I have climbed some of the world’s most dangerous mountains WITHOUT them and this mountain is, actually, very tame compared with the likes of Nanga Parbat, Annapurna I and Kangchenjunga. I refuse to give in to the pressures of the Everest mafia. I’d like to decide for myself when I have reached my limits.”

So on May 2 at 1:00 a.m., Cleo packed up and called up Fishtail Helicopters to fly her from Gorakshap up to Camp 1 to collect her gear and the same chopper then flew her, still alone, to Camp 2 in the Western Cwm.

On the 3rd, she searched for a route to the bergschrund, the major crevasse between the floor of the Cwm and the bottom of the Lhotse face, and on the 4th and the

5th she managed to make her way to the bergschrund past crevasses and an ice ridge by using old ropes still in place from previous expeditions.

Next she began to reconnoitre Lhotse's west face. Meanwhile the American embassy became aware of the fact that one of its citizens was attempting all alone to climb Lhotse against the wishes of the Sherpa boycott organizers and asked Fishtail Helicopters about her. A few days later, Fishtail flew Pema to Camp 2, where he joined Cleo on 12 May.

Mrs. Wang reported only one encounter with Cleo: Mrs. Wang's Sherpas told her that Cleo came to her team's cook tent to ask them to help her fix the route to Lhotse's summit. They refused. "I saw her camp at that time; it was already ragged from wind blowing and wearing it down. We thought there was no one inside, but later on the Sherpas checked the tents, and her Sherpa and she were inside. We were quite concerned that her tent would be blown away by the wind. The next morning she departed first; when we passed her later on, we exchanged few words, 'be safe kind' of thing, not a lot of communication."

On 14 May, Cleo and Pema managed to establish Camp 3 on the Lhotse face with the aid of some old Chinese ropes. The next day Pema fell into one of the many crevasses on the face, but he was not injured, and they continued on up. On the 17th, they were at about 8000m on the face, the highest point they ever managed to reach, and set about digging a platform for their tent for Camp 4. (During the digging, they found a body she believed to be that of a Taiwanese climber who she thought had died the previous year.) They stopped their digging because of the constant rock fall and retreated to Camp 3 and on the following day to Camp 2. Now there was extremely strong (perhaps 90 km/hr) wind, which pinned them down in Camp 2 for four days.

On the 22nd, they decided to try to resume climbing and returned to Camp 3. But the rock fall, crashing down the couloir's funnel and threatening Cleo's helipad, drove them back to Camp 2 on the 23rd. Finally, they gave up in the face of continuously dangerous falling rock. They were not bothered by snow on the face, which was mostly exposed rock or rock covered by ice. It was the falling rock that defeated them.

On 23 May, Cleo concluded that they would never be able to claim the summit. With chopper flights required and no summit in sight, "it was not worth it" to continue. On 25 May, they flew from Camp 2 to BC to Lukla in their final helicopter flight and from there to Kathmandu.

## **Future Climbs**

Any plans by the agitating Pasang's to return to Everest next spring have not been revealed. But the Sherpas whose climbs were blocked will surely be anxious to return to the mountain and resume earning the wages and bonuses they would normally expect. And one would think that the Nepalese government would do all in its power to prevent the loss of significant contributions to its coffers. The foreign operators estimated that "the total impact to the GDP of Nepal [that spring] would have been in excess of \$15 million and that the direct income for permit fees would be approximately \$3.3 million. Not only climbing Sherpas' incomes dropped off, but so did the earnings of



Kathmandu hotels, taxi drivers, domestic airlines, food suppliers, porters, Khumbu lodges, and even postcard sellers,” according to one prominent foreign operator, Russell Brice of Himalayan Experience.

The major foreign expedition organizers have not announced any plans of their own, but several of the most prominent ones have been meeting to consider the way forward.

What could be done about the instigators of this year’s strike? It was noted that Pasang Tenzing was a candidate for recognition as a mountain guide by the international guides association, and that this achievement could be cancelled. But what of the others? And will this spring’s spoilers return to Everest or pick on climbers on Makalu or Annapurna or some other mountain?

Was this spring’s strike more serious than the threats of a few hotheads? Did it manifest jealousy on the part of Sherpas who do not come from Khumbu, but from poorer, less advantaged other areas like Makalu and Rolwaling? Was it a symptom of a generational change, the older smiling traditional Sherpas being succeeded by younger more combative, independent-minded men, perhaps misguided in wanting to do things their way rather than abiding by what the foreign organizers told them to do? Or are they just undisciplined wreckers? One organizer of expeditions harshly compared them to the Luddites in England at the start of the Industrial Revolution who feared they would be unemployable if their old machine-less ways of working were destroyed and so set about wrecking machinery in the new factories; He termed the Sherpas “Luddites [who] grandstand their nefarious negativism.”

## **Helicopters**

Mrs. Wang and Ms. Weidlich perhaps set a precedent in their use of helicopters to expedite their climbing Everest from the Nepalese side and Lhotse up from base camp to Camp 2 in order to avoid Icefall’s dangers – and to save time. *But* these climbs cannot be considered complete ascents and descents since the climbers did not go all the way under their own steam.

This method of leaving Everest has been used for the past four or five years by tired climbers who claimed they were in desperate condition, so tired they could go down no farther than Camp 2. Last spring for his descent by a manifestly exhausted Japanese while making a new old-age record at eighty. Yuichiro Miura had used up nearly all his strength reaching the summit and was extremely weak coming down: it had taken him 13 hours to descend just from Camp 3 to Camp 2. So on the 26th he flew by helicopter from Camp 2 back to Kathmandu. The Icefall had collapsed on the 25th, and he could well have been in it that day if he had not planned to fly over it the next day.

It had generally been understood that helicopters were allowed to operate above base camp for rescue flights only, although it appears that there is no actual regulation on the subject. Since Mrs. Wang’s flights set an example, will this method catch on with future expeditions? And since she raised the issue, will the Nepalese government permit non-rescue flights in future? Will it perhaps give permission only for cargo flights to get the tons of expeditions’ supplies above the treacherous Icefall, thus sparing Sherpas

from many trips that expose them to its dangers perhaps 30 or 40 times in one season, while still requiring climbers to go up and down on their own two feet?

### **Wingsuit Descent**

And then there was another method of descent from Everest's summit that would have been demonstrated if there had been no Sherpa ban on climbing it. A 39-year-old American named Joby Ogwyn from California proposed to descend from the summit to base camp in a wingsuit, looking like a bat in flight, in two minutes.

Ogwyn, 39, describes himself as a television host, professional climber and wingsuit pilot. His flight would have been the first wing-suit descent of Everest or any other Nepalese mountain.

But when the fatal avalanche struck Sherpas in the Icefall on 18 April, Ogwyn immediately concluded that his intended flight from the summit wearing his wingsuit would not be possible as planned, that the climbing situation would not be resolved very soon, so he prepared to leave the mountain quickly because of a crowded schedule of obligations for the rest of the year. He had trekked through the Icefall to Gorakshep from Camp 1 with his teammate and nominal leader, Garrett Madison; he now flew from Gorakshep to Kathmandu by helicopter on the 20th and left the mountain.