

Note on the history of Polish Alpinism

(A contribution on the centenary of mountaineering organisations in Poland)

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Poland is a typical low country. The high mountains—the Tatras—occupy only 0.1% of her area, and the highest peaks of the Polish part of the Tatra do not exceed 2500 m. In spite of that the traditions of alpinism date far back and mountaineers associated for the last 100 years in a regular organisation have contributed greatly to the exploration of the world's mountains.

On 1 August 1818 a young romantic poet Antoni Malczewski (1793–1826) was the first man to ascend the N Peak of the Aiguille du Midi (3795 m) above Chamonix. A few days later he became the twelfth tourist to reach Mont Blanc (4807 m), the highest European peak. Malczewski was in the mountains for the first time, but both his ascents have probably more than a chronological position in the history of Alpinism. Setting out for the conquest of peaks he was one of the first alpinists *sensu stricto*, attracted to them, not by an ordinary admiration of nature or by a need to carry out scientific work, but by a sporting willingness for struggle with difficulties and discovery of the unknown.

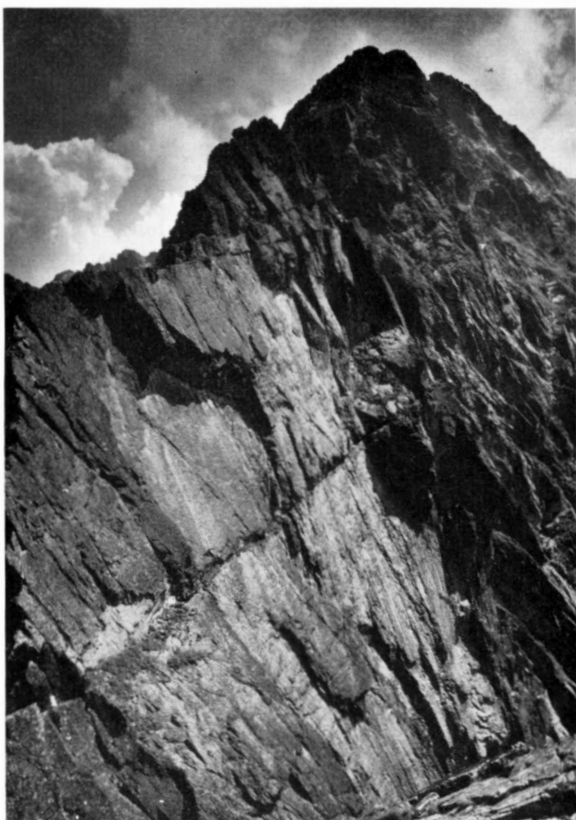
The ascents of Malczewski did not remain isolated cases for long. Within a few years Poles were concerned in the exploration of other mountains, beyond Europe. In the Chilean Cordillera from 1837 there was working the geologist Ignacy Domeyko (see *A.J.* 73 109), reckoned as one of the forerunners of Alpinism in South America (among others, first ascent of the 3180 m-high Nevado Chillan in 1848). In 1840 in Australia Sir Paul Edmund Strzelecki was the first man to climb Mount Kościusko (2225 m), the highest summit of the continent.

In the meantime, home mountaineering began to develop in the exploration of the Tatra mountains, so worthily initiated by Stanisław Staszic during the years 1803–5. Priest Staszic, father of our geology, statesman and scientist, was one of the most eminent characters of Polish enlightenment. His first ascent of Kolowy Śtit, ascents of Krivan, Slavkovsky Śtit and Lomnica (2632 m), a mountain believed at that time to be the highest in the Tatra, were very much of note. It is characteristic that on the summit of Lomnica Staszic decided to spend the night of 21 August 1805 to make measurements and study nature.

In 1855 two Polish botanists, Zygmunt Bośniacki and Wojciech Grzegorzek, made the first ascent of Gierlach (2654 m), really the highest peak of the Tatra Mountains. Many other Tatra peaks were successfully climbed for the first time by Polish mountaineers. Baranie Rogi (in 1867), Świnica (1867), Mięgus-zowiecki Szczyt (1877), Szatan (c. 1880) and Ganek (1895). Interesting as well were the results concurrently achieved in exploration in the Alps. Chronicles of European mountaineering include the names of Antoni Rydzewski (Bergell),

Aleksander Rzewuski (Bernina, Silvretta) and the brothers Marian and Tadeusz Smoluchowski, among the pioneers of guideless climbing in the Dolomites (about twenty new routes and first ascents).

Polish mountain-travellers and explorers of the nineteenth century occupy an unusual position in the opening up of Asia. The way to her virgin, un-mapped areas led from a divided native country (Poland was under partition) in most cases via the Tzar's service or deportations. In 1850 Józef Chodźko, a known surveyor of the Transcaucasus, was the second alpinist to climb Ararat (5165 m). Two years later this national height record was improved by Józef Czarnota, who made the second ascent of a splendid but easy volcano, Demavend (5670 m) in Iran. Some of the travellers and geographers whose names are commemorated in the mountain ranges in the NE Siberia and Transbaikial regions are Jan Czerski, Aleksander Czekanowski and Benedykt Dybowski.



49 *The granite spires of Zamarla Turnia, Tatra Mountains* This and next two photos: R. Ziernak

General Bronisław Grabczewski, geographer and first governor of the Pamirs (in the name of the Russian Tzar), crossed the highest ranges of Central Asia three times with big expeditions. In 1885 he went to the Tian-Shan and Kashgar (Chinese Turkestan), in 1888 to western Tibet and Hunza Karakoram, and

in the winter of 1889–90 across the Pamirs, Hindu Kush and Tibet. His caravans traversed seven high passes above 5000 m (the highest Hindu Tash, 5515 m) but did not attempt to climb the peaks above them. On 5 October 1889 during his second traverse of Illy-Su Pass (4948 m) he discovered a beautiful peak sparkling high over the general Himalayan range. He carefully measured its altitude as 28,000 ft. The mountain he saw was in fact the famous K2 (8611 m), discovered earlier and triangulated by the British surveyors. The expeditions to Central Asia made by Grąbczewski, and later by Mrs Jadwiga Mrozowska-Toeplitz and Dr Maciej Kończak travelling with the Workmans, brought back still more geographical knowledge and did a great deal of useful exploration.

On the African continent at the same time other Polish names found a place in the history of exotic expeditions. In 1883–5 the group of Stefan Szolc-Rogoziński climbed (second ascent) Mongo-Ma-Lobach (4113 m), the highest peak of the Cameroons, and in 1910 the botanist Antoni Jakubski made an ascent of the Kibo crater of Kilimanjaro.

But let us turn again to the Tatras. Since the middle of the nineteenth century a real mountaineering movement started here on a larger scale, and by the end of the century nearly all the peaks had been climbed, several of them by different routes. The increased interest in the mountains resulted in the foundation of a mountaineering organisation. In 1873 the Tatra Society—Towarzystwo Tatrzańskie—was founded (since the 1914–18 war and the regaining of independence called the Polish Tatra Society).

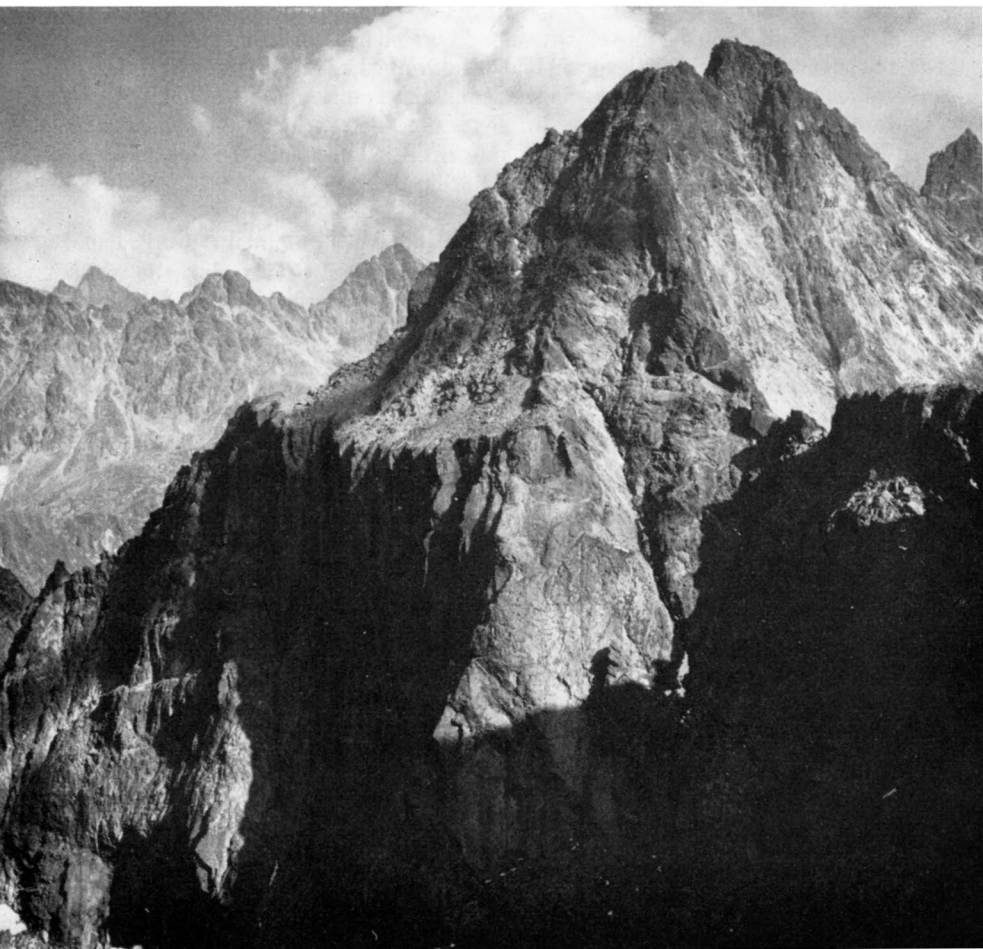
This first mountaineering organisation united all mountain tourists and climbers, and covered with its activities not only the Tatra but the whole Carpathian range. The aims of the Society were energetically realised from the beginning: the encouragement of mountain tourism, making foot-paths, building hostels and shelters and conservation of mountain nature. Climbing in the Tatras became popular at that period, and famous people of the epoch like Dr Tytus Chałubiński, poet Adam Asnyk, writers Stanisław Witkiewicz, Kazimierz Tetmajer, Tadeusz Żeleński-Boy and composer Mieczysław Karłowicz were noted among the 'taterniki's' (Tatra climbers). In 1876 the Society began to publish a yearly journal, which still appears under the title *Wierchy* (*The Peaks*). In 1903 some members founded a new section within the Tatra Society, the so-called Tourist Section—Sekcja Turystyczna—however, the word 'tourist' was equal to 'climber' at that time. For the first time an exclusively mountaineering section separated out from a general mountain tourism organisation. The membership of this section was by ballot and climbing qualifications were demanded of its candidates. The Tourist Section of the Tatra Society was the direct forerunner of the present Polish High Mountain Club (Klub Wysokogórski). In 1907 this section started to publish its own quarterly, *Taternik*, which is still issued today.

In autumn 1909 the Tatra Volunteer Rescue Service was founded by Mariusz Zaruski. The aim of this organisation, composed of professional guides, rescuers and amateur mountaineers, is to give immediate help in any accident

occurring in the mountains. Although the organisation today is somewhat different from that of 1909, the original name is still retained (the President from September 1972 will be Michał Jagiełło, who climbed in Britain in 1966).

At the turn of the century (1897–1903) a very famous explorer of his time—Karol English of Cracow—was in action in the Tatra. He made about forty eminent ascents on virgin peaks, among them Javorove Štity, Popradsky Ladový Štit, Čierny Štit and Ostry Štit.

In sporting conquests of the Tatra ridges and faces, Poles shared the successes with Hungarian climbers, because Hungary owned politically the other part of the High Tatra before World War I. A symbol of that friendly competition is the first winter ascent of Gierlach, achieved in 1905 by a Polish–Hungarian team (Janusz Chmielowski and Karoly Jordan with highland guides from Spiš and Zakopane).



After World War I the best Polish climbers (the brothers A. and M. Sokołowski, W. Stanisławski, Z. Korosadowicz, W. Birkenmajer, S. Motyka, J. Sawicki, B. Chwaściński, S. Bernadzikiewicz and many others) mastered nearly all the area of the High Tatra belonging either to Czechoslovakia or to Poland. But soon climbers realised that the future of Polish Alpinism must lie outside the Tatra mountains. Much effort went in organising expeditions to the Alps, Caucasus and outside the European continent. There was also an initiative, very precious and fruitful for the future, the founding of an international mountaineering organisation. It took place in Zakopane in 1930. The internal organisation of Alpinism in this country, before the war and as well after it, underwent some more or less essential changes. The actual name of the main mountaineering organisation—The Polish High Mountain Club—appeared for the first time in 1935 within the mother club, the Polish Tatra Society (Klub Wysokogórski Polskiego Towarzystwa Tatrzańskiego). The Club's first exotic expedition to the Andes led by Konstanty Narkiewicz-Jodko in 1933–4 brought excellent results: new ascents of some peaks over 6000 m, including the third highest peak of the entire American continent—Mercedario (6770 m)—and the eighth ascent of the highest peak of both Americas—Aconcagua (6960 m) by a new route.

Expeditions to the Atlas and Spitsbergen brought other remarkable first ascents. In 1935 a Caucasus expedition was organised and established first contacts with young Soviet alpinists. In 1937 three alpinists, K. Jodko-Narkiewicz, S. Bernadzikiewicz and S. Siedlecki, made a famous traverse of the whole of Spitsbergen, a distance of 800 km. This performance was repeated 30 years later (1967) by an Austrian team, but over a shorter distance of c. 500 km, and was very much applauded by European newsmen.

By the end of 1936 the second Polish expedition, consisting of four men only, set out for the Andes. They climbed several virgin six-thousanders, among others Nevado Pissis (6780 m) and Nevado Tres Cruces (6630 m). The crowning achievement of this expedition was the first ascent of the second highest peak of the American continent, Ojos del Salado (6885 m) by Jan A. Szczepański and Justyn Wojsznis.

In 1939 the Himalaya were next to be explored. A small four-man expedition led by Adam Karpiński was scheduled as a reconnaissance party. But they did something surprising. Two climbers, Jakub Bujak and Janusz Klarner, set foot on the summit of Nanda Devi East (7434 m). This was the fifth highest of those peaks that had been climbed up to that time, but it was also the most difficult one, as the Everest Tenzing and the Frenchmen found twelve years later.

To this summarising of pre-war ascents and expeditions perhaps only one comparative figure should be added. Klub Wysokogórski at that time mustered only 160 members. World War II halted all mountaineering expeditions. The Nazi occupation was a time when our nation devoted itself utterly to fighting, surviving and rescuing whatever possible of cultural attainments. The history of war-time Alpinism is a beautiful example of realising these ideas. Ignoring the German prohibitions, 'taterniks' went to the Tatra. The first artificial

routes climbed at that time on Galeria Gankowa, Kazalnica, and Mnich exceeded everything that had been done there before. Many mountaineers distinguished themselves in partisan warfare.

In occupied Warsaw the journal *Taternik* was regularly published (probably the only Alpine review issued in conspiracy!) and its editor was an excellent climber of that period, today the Secretary of the Polish Academy of Science and Professor of Warsaw Medical Academy, Dr Tadeusz Orłowski. There was also a freedom version of our journal, edited by Jerzy Hajdukiewicz and Maciej Mischke and published by the Mountaineering Club in Winterthur, Switzerland, founded in a camp for interned Polish officers.

After the war some time was necessary to recover from its effects. For various political reasons regular trips to the Alps and to the Caucasus could not be resumed until 1956. But they very soon brought excellent results, because a young, bold generation of climbers grew up in the meantime on the Tatra spires. 1957 brought us the eighth ascent of the w face of the Petit Dru and 1959 the Walker Buttress on the Grandes Jorasses. The famous n faces of the Matterhorn and the Eiger (S. Biel and J. Mostowski) were climbed by Poles in 1961.

On 28–30 August the same year followed a pleasant example of Polish-British co-operation when J. Dlugosz with Ian Clough, Chris Bonington and Don Whillans opened up the Central Pillar of Frêney on Mont Blanc. Next year, 1962, brought a purely Polish ascent of Frêney by M. Gryczyński and J. Michalski and 1963 the first ascent of the s Buttress of Mont Maudit. This trend is continued regularly by teams of the Polish Mountaineering Club every year going on trips to the French or Swiss Alps.

Some climbs that should be mentioned are:

- 1965 Second ascent of the Bonatti-Gobbi route on the Grand Pilier d'Angle of Mont Blanc (J. Warteresiewicz, A. Zawada, R. Zawadzki and G. Malaczyński).
- 1968 First ascent of the n Buttress of the Eiger by K. Cielecki, R. Szafirski, T. Laukajtys and A. Zyzak made one day before the West German team of T. Hiebeler. Also, the first ascent of the n arête of Pointe Young of the Grandes Jorasses.
- 1969 New route on the Grand Pilier d'Angle by E. Chrobak, T. Laukajtys and A. Mróz.
- 1971 New direct route on the n face of the Dent d'Hérens, climbed by T. Piotrowski, M. Jagiello and J. Milewski. Ascent of the Left-hand Pillar of Brouillard on Mont Blanc.

In the Dolomites our climbers have done most of the famous *direttissimas*; eleventh ascent of the Philipp-Flamm route on the Civetta, third ascent of the Squirrels' ridge and sixth of the *super-direttissima* on the Cima Grande di Lavaredo. In 1965 a Polish team accomplished the new climb of the Gran Diedro on the Schiara (J. Junger, T. Laukajtys, J. Nyka and J. Poreba) and in 1967 six Poles together with two Italians opened the 1300 m-high sw face of

the Cima del Burel by what was recognised as the best route of that summer season in the whole of the Alps.

The Caucasus were visited frequently by Polish groups of the Klub Wysokogórski in the years 1958–64, giving them plenty of opportunities for glacier practice. Here also some outstanding climbs were done: second ascent of the N face of Peak Shchurovsky (1961), first ascent by rib of the NW face of Kosh-tantau (1964), first ascent of the N face of the E peak of Mishirgitau via the so-called 'Balalayka' (1964).

Winter climbing in the Tatra, where the conditions are sometimes very severe, proved to be good practice when we switched to Alpine winter competition. First winter ascents of the E face of the Matterhorn (1959),¹ of the NE Buttress



51 *The Mieguszwieckie peaks, Tatra Mountains*

¹ This ascent was made on 25–6 April 1959 and would not now qualify as a winter ascent. See *AJ* 64 247 and 71 143.—D.F.O.D.

of Les Droites (1963), of the Contamine route on the Aiguille Verte (1965) and the most recent achievements, the dramatic first winter ascent of the Grand Pilier d'Angle (4–11 March 1971 by A. Dworak, J. Kurczab, A. Mróz and T. Piotrowski), first winter ascent of the 1600 m-high E Buttress of Trollryggen in Norway (5–12 March 1972 by A. Dworak, W. Jedliński, R. Kowalewski and T. Piotrowski) speak for themselves. The rapid development of Alpinism in Poland must of course have contributed greatly to the number and results of expeditions. The post-war expeditions to the mountains of Iran, Turkey, High Atlas, Pamirs, Pamir-Alai, Hindu Kush, Karakoram and Andes have also made a notable contribution to mountaineering exploration.

The first Polish expedition to the Hindu Kush organised in 1960 by Bolesław Chwaściński brought to the attention of Europeans the beauties of the Afghan part of this magnificent mountain range. Our alpinists conquered several virgin six-thousanders and also made the second ascent—only a few days after a Japanese team—of Noshag (7492 m). During the course of five later expeditions (1962, 1963, 1966, 1968 and 1971) Polish groups were the first to explore almost all of the valleys of the Wakhan part of the high Hindu Kush, and Jerzy Wala of Cracow prepared a map which provided later Alpinists with the basis for more detailed explorations. They were the first men on the beautiful summit Kohe-Tez (c. 7000 m), and on another thirteen six-thousanders, including several peaks almost reaching 7000 m, and the second ascent of Kohe Urgunt (7036 m). In the course of two expeditions to Noshag the total number of Poles who have reached the summit of this mountain is fourteen; one of them, Jerzy Potocki, lost his life there (*AJ* 72 123). Much has been accomplished during numerous expeditions in the mountains of Cilo and Sat Dag of Turkey, Zagros and Elburz of Iran, Mongolia, Ethiopia, Morocco and Spitsbergen.

Many Poles have also reached Pik Lenin in the Pamirs (7134 m), and the event of the 1969 summer was the joint Soviet-Polish expedition into the virgin part of the Pamir-Alai mountains, where the Polish group conquered thirteen virgin peaks, including Pik Skalistyj (5621 m), the highest peak in the area.

Silesian alpinists led by Henryk Furmanik managed in summer 1971, for the first time after the war, to reach the South American Andes of Peru. They visited the Cordillera Blanca, Cordillera Raura, Cordillera Chacua, Cordillera Volcanica and climbed Nevado Huascaran (6768 m), four new routes and seven virgin summits, giving them Polish names—Silesia, Bytom and Copernico.

The highest mountains of our globe were the arena where the fine traditions of the pre-war Nanda Devi expedition found their worthy continuation. In the Himalaya individuals participated in foreign expeditions on Dhaulagiri (1959 and 1960) and Everest (1971), while the Karakoram was the scene of a larger nationally organised expedition; 1969 witnessed the first Polish expedition to this range. A small, four-man reconnaissance party led by R. Szafirski conquered Malubiting North (6843 m) in late autumn and later retreated from close to the summit of the main peak. Two years later a strong, thirteen-man team passed from a tragic disaster (the fatal accident to Jan

Franczuk) to a brilliant success on the slopes of Khinyang Chhish (7852 m) in the Hispar Karakoram. The leader of the expedition, A. Zawada, with R. Szafirski, A. Heinrich and J. Stryczyński seized the chance on 26 August 1971 to conquer this twenty-second highest summit of the earth for the Polish height record.

To end this concise historical review of Polish mountaineering from the old traditions of the Tatra Society to the modern achievements of Klub Wysokogórski, some words about this organisation. It comprises actually over 2200 members (honorary, ordinary, candidates and sympathising) in fifteen regional sections, among which the sections of Warsaw (550 members), Cracow (400) and Gliwice (220) are the biggest. The Club is the main organisation of the sport of mountaineering and spelaeology in Poland; however there are also some minor tourist or academic mountain groups. Compared with analogous mountaineering organisations in Western Europe, that count 100,000 and 200,000 members and overwhelm with their considerably stronger financial and material basis, the Polish High Mountain Club with its 2000 climbers seems to be a 'younger brother'.

The fact that our modest organisation takes an honourable place in sporting competition between the 'big powers' of Alpinism gives perhaps food for thought. We look forward optimistically to the club's centenary year in the situation where more young people than ever are seeking proper climbing instruction and many advanced mountaineers are preparing for interesting expeditions in all parts of the world.