

Nepal 1982

Letter from Kathmandu

Mike Cheney

Post-Monsoon, 1981

Of the 42 expeditions which arrived in Nepal for the post-monsoon season, 17 were successful and 25 unsuccessful. The weather right across the Nepal Himal was exceptionally fine during the whole of October and November with the exception of the first week in November, when a cyclone in western India brought rain and snow for 2 or 3 days. As traditionally happens, the Monsoon finished right on time with a major downpour of rain on 28 September.

The worst of the storm was centred over a fairly small part of Central Nepal, the area immediately south of the Annapurna range. The heavy snowfalls caused 6 deaths (2 Sherpas, 2 Japanese and 2 French) on Annapurna Himal expeditions, over 200 other Nepalis also died, and many more lost their homes and all their possessions—the losses on expeditions were small indeed compared with those of the Hill and Terai peoples.

Four other expedition members died as a result of accidents—2 Japanese and 2 Swiss.

Winter season, 1981/82

There were four foreign expeditions during the winter climbing season, which is December and January in Nepal. Two expeditions were on Makalu—one British expedition of 6 members, led by Ron Rutland, and one French. In addition there was an American expedition to Pumori and a Canadian expedition to Annapurna IV. The American expedition to Pumori was successful.

Pre-Monsoon, 1982

This was one of the most successful seasons for many years. Of the 28 expeditions attempting 26 peaks—there were 2 expeditions on Kanchenjunga and 2 on Lamjung—21 were successful. Six of the expeditions were to new peaks open only to joint Nepali/foreign teams and in fact all of these were Nepali/Japanese. Presumably the Japanese are the only people able to afford the greater cost of joint expeditions.

The weather during May was exceptionally fine but only after very heavy and late snowfalls in March and up to mid-April. The falls were so heavy that deep snow was still present as low as 3100m in many places at the end of May.

Five foreign climbers died on 4 expeditions, the most tragic deaths being those of 2 Spaniards on Manaslu. Their deaths were partly the

price that inexperienced and poorly planned expeditions to 8000m peaks may have to pay for logistical errors.

There was only one Nepali death—that of a high altitude porter with the Austrian Annapurna I expedition. It was the type of accident that happens all too often but should not. The porter was carrying a heavy load down the mountain by himself; this should never be allowed to happen. This type of accident sadly reflects the lack of control and discipline that develops at the end of expeditions, when care and control of High Altitude Porters is especially important. The fact that it was a Rai porter and not a Sherpa reflects the growing employment by expeditions of non-Sherpas, something that Sherpas have brought on themselves.

The first ever Russian expedition in Nepal, to Everest, kept a very low profile after receiving a very critical local press when it was alleged that the Russians tried to fly all their equipment in on a special charter flight without receiving permission to do so. The flight did not take place.

Post-Monsoon, 1982

There were 42 expeditions, of which 19 were successful. The Canadians managed to produce what must surely be the most obnoxious and the most crassly commercial expedition to Nepal. The British Army, on Peak 29, managed to break some sort of record by 'losing' not only all their stores and equipment but all their funds as well. Despite this they put up a very gallant attempt on this very difficult mountain.

Winter season, 1982/83

At the time of writing 8 expeditions are due in Nepal for the winter season. Details are as follows:

On Everest, a Japanese expedition of 7 members with 4 Sherpas has permission for the South Col route; a French team of 11 members with 6 Sherpas had permission for the S Face but after reporting the icefall too dangerous were given permission for the W Ridge. On Cho Oyu Reinhold Messner has a 10 member (7 Europeans, 3 Nepalese) expedition on the SE Face. There is a 2 man South Korean party attempting the S Ridge of Pumori and a 6 member American expedition on the S Ridge of Ama Dablam. On Manaslu there is a 10 member Japanese expedition on the NE Face and another, 13 member, Japanese expedition will attempt the NE Ridge of Dhaulagiri I. Finally, a joint Nepalese-Japanese expedition (6 Japanese and 3 Nepalese) is attempting the N Ridge of Keryalung.

Anthony Burgess writes: The New Zealand Lhotse Expedition (post Monsoon '82) shared the route through the Khumbu Icefall with the Canadians who intended to climb the South Pillar of Everest. After 2 accidents involving the Canadian expedition, in which 3 Sherpas and 1

Canadian were killed, the Canadians changed to the South Col route with the agreement of the Lhotse group, even though they realised that their 4-man team would be swamped by the Canadian fixed ropes and Sherpas. They found that it was usually feasible to go direct from Camp 2 (6450m) to fix rope high on Lhotse's W Face without using Camp 3. On 8 October they made a bid for the summit from Camp 4 (6680m) but were forced to descend by a storm having gone above 8100m. They were not using oxygen.

Some Sobering Thoughts on Nepalese Climbing

Rab Carrington

It is with some reservation that I sit down and write these few words. It has been an appalling season for European climbers on Nepalese mountains. First, Joe and Pete disappearing on Everest, then Reinhard Karl avalanched on Cho Oyu and finally Alex MacIntyre killed by stonefall on Annapurna. With the death rate of climbers in the region so high the last thing I want to do is to publicise and definitely not glamorise this form of mountaineering.

I can't make up my mind whether this has been a particularly bad year—or was it just that in previous years we were lucky? In recent years in the Himalayas great changes have taken place. The trend has taken us away from the large expeditions of the 50s and 60s towards a more intimate style of climbing: Alpine style. Amongst the earliest exponents of this style were Dick Renshaw and Joe with their epic ascent and descent of Dunagiri. I'm not certain that Alpine climbing is intrinsically more dangerous than Big Expedition climbing but it does place the climber in different forms of danger.

Firstly, in a small expedition which is virtually wholly financed from the climbers' own resources and for whom future finances may partially depend on the outcome of the trip, decisions concerning the dangers involved must be, to some extent, coloured by the financial aspect even though one may not realise it at the time. Unfortunately, Himalayan climbing is a very black and white affair; either one gets to the top or nothing. I'm sure other Himalayan climbers can relate tales of climbing snow slopes on some mountain which they would avoid like the plague if it appeared on Ben Nevis or Mont Blanc. On the larger expeditions there wasn't quite the same financial involvement amongst the climbers and so decisions could be taken in a slightly more detached fashion.

Secondly, with Alpine style, climbing parties tend to be reduced to 4 climbers. This puts the individual climber in an invidious position. Not