

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

only does he have to weigh up the dangers of the situation but he then has to convey his fears to the rest of the party. It is never easy to admit to being frightened by a situation, especially if your companions seem to be oblivious to it. Furthermore, within a party of 4 if one person doesn't wish to continue this often means that the whole party has to retreat. Can a climber be more frightened of his partners than of his surroundings?

Thirdly, each succeeding expedition is selecting more difficult propositions, more serious, without oxygen, in winter, etc and this for a variety of reasons; personal ambition, to attract sponsorship, to generally raise standards of Himalayan climbing. For whatever reason, this puts the climber in more dangerous situations for longer and longer periods of time.

How did we get into this situation? There appear to be several reasons. The main one is accessibility. The cost of climbing in the Himalayas has scarcely risen over the last 6 years. So with inflation being what it is in the western world more people are in a position to afford a Himalayan trip. Apart from this, the route by which a climber arrives at Himalayan mountaineering has altered. Previously, it was a long drawn out affair involving many Alpine seasons, until one was finally invited to join a big expedition. Nowadays there seems to be a very fast transition from Alps to Peru to Himalayas. Very often, each member is as inexperienced as the next. One problem that this brings is the assumption that Himalayan climbing is but a slight extension of Peruvian climbing. In fact it is a completely different ball-game. The sheer size of the routes brings problems of weight never previously encountered. Also, the Himalayan authorities generally insist on parties of at least 4 members, which, since most climbers are used to climbing as a pair, means that they have to adapt and devise ways of climbing quickly and lightly as a larger group. Decisions as to just how this is to be achieved are often left until the actual climb.

These problems are especially prevalent amongst European climbers. The statistics are sobering and say a great deal about Himalayan climbing. It's a very dangerous sport and not nearly as nice as the magazine photographs make out.