

The 50th Anniversary Celebration of the Union Internationale des Associations D'Alpinisme

John Hunt and Dennis Gray

PART 1 John Hunt

It was a happy and appropriate initiative on the part of the Nepal Mountaineering Association to invite the UIAA to convene its 46th annual General Assembly in Kathmandu, for the first time in the 50 years since it was founded by Count Egmond d'Arcis in Chamonix in 1932. Their invitation elicited a predictably excellent response; there were between 130-150 delegates, representing 26 nations, not all, as yet, in membership with UIAA from 5 continents, with a number of special guests and accompanied by several wives and family members.

The following sample statistics may partly be explained by the aid of government or Trust funds (or their lack) in some instances: Japan 19; Switzerland 16; South Korea 11; Italy and France 10; India 8; Bhutan, UK and USA 3; Chile, China, USSR and Bulgaria 2. Many other countries sent one or two delegates. Nepal was, of course, strongly represented. A number of delegations included Presidents of national federations or clubs.

Some world-famous mountaineers attended as special guests of the NMA. They included Gombu Norbu, Director of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling, who has twice climbed Everest; Pertemba Sherpa, a Sirdar working for 'Mountain Travel', likewise a 'double Everester'; Commander Mohan Kohli and Lieut Colonel Narendra Kumar, leaders respectively of the Indian Expeditions which climbed Everest in 1965 and Kangchenjunga in 1977; Fritz Luchsinger of the Swiss Everest Expedition, 1956, who made the first ascent of Lhotse; Herbert Tichy, leader of the first successful ascent of Cho Oyu in 1954; Junko Tabei the Japanese Everest climber; Boris Romanov, a member of the Soviet Expedition which climbed the SW face in 1982; and Reinhold Messner, who needs no introduction.

The formal proceedings were inaugurated on 11 October by the Prime Minister, Mr Surya Bahadur Thapa, at the City Hall. The importance of the occasion was underlined by the presence of most members of the Nepalese Cabinet. Main events following the opening ceremony included an Exhibition, to which some 8 national delegations had contributed, which was opened by M. Pierre Bossus, President of

the UIAA, and honoured on 16 October, by a visit by King Birendra. Each national display was housed in separate halls, and most of these featured the inevitable vistas of snow and ice, with the accent on national achievements on well-known peaks. Climbing paraphernalia were also much in evidence. A notable exception was provided by Nepal, with a most imaginative display of information about village life and local housing, of fauna and flora and ecological problems deriving from developmental programmes and the promotion of tourism, which illustrated the main theme of the Conference.

Our British exhibition shared with that of the Swiss the distinction of being modest in size: we also produced a paradox, in a Conference whose theme was of Himalayan dimensions, by illustrating the thrills of rock-climbing in Britain!

A film festival, opened by the newly appointed Minister of State for Tourism, Mr Deepak Bohara, was given an excellent start by a modest lecture given by Reinhold Messner, during which he also showed a film illustrating the dramatic rescue of Peter Hillary and his surviving companions, after their accident on Ama Dablam. Three speeches followed: by Pertemba, who spoke delightfully in Nepali; and by Mrs Junko Tabei; who brought the house down by bursting with loud exuberance into song to the tune of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. As the third speaker, I availed of the occasion to draw a comparison between the changes in Nepal, and in Kathmandu in particular, since the ascent of Everest in 1953, with those in Switzerland (and Zermatt in particular) following the ascent of the Matterhorn in 1865. I presented a first edition (in French, 1875) of Whymper's 'Scrambles amongst the Alps' provided by the AC library, which I had presented to the Club after receiving it from the (then) Maire de Chamonix, on being made an honorary citizen of that town in 1954.

The two delegate meetings consisted of a symposium on 'Conservation of the Himalayan Environment' and a parallel symposium on 'Problems relating to Himalayan Expeditions'. I attended the former, which was chaired by the Minister for Tourism, and was invited to present one of several papers as a preface to a general discussion.

Among a number of interesting suggestions which were made, whether from the platform or the floor, were: the need to enlist more co-operation from tourist (and, in particular, trekking) agencies in the work of conservation, and in the education of their clients in regard to local social and environmental factors. It was stressed that the national mountaineering bodies should share this responsibility. It was also suggested that the Nepalese Government should consider measures to control the pressures of tourism and mountaineering (eg the great majority of trekking permits issued in 1981 (28,000) were for 'starts' from Pokhara) by distributing these pressures more widely. One possibility might be to vary the fees for permits; another was to close (or

restrict) certain areas for certain periods of time to enable ecological recovery to take place. The policy of maintaining strict restrictions on entry by foreigners into such areas as Dolpu and Mustang received support. The Indian spokesman referred to the practice in his country of training liaison officers and of the possibility of up-grading these appointments into a professional job. The value of certain overseas aid programmes and of some work by volunteers in conservation projects, were referred to. Dr Dibya Dev Bhatta read an interesting paper on 'Aspects of Environmental Conservation' in Nepal in which he supplied information about the local economy in Nepalese villages, the rapidly increasing population, the current absence of essential fuel sources other than firewood and the changes in village life brought about by tourism. He referred to the recent Government devolutionary policy of handing over large tracts of forest to the care and maintenance of local 'panchayats' under restrictive covenants with grants available from central Government for management projects.

PART 2 THE PROTECTION OF THE HIMALAYAN ENVIRONMENT

A paper read by John Hunt to the UIAA Commission

Honourable Minister, Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen, comrades in our sport of mountaineering.

I bring you greetings from all the bodies in my country whose particular concern is the conservation of nature and the natural environment: our Countryside Commission, National Trust, our Councils for the Protection of England and of Wales, and our Council for National Parks. As President of the Council for our 10 small National Parks, I would like to congratulate your Commission on the work you have been doing for a number of years, on a much greater scale, in many countries. I will limit my remarks to 3 suggestions for the future of your Commission.

Firstly, it is a common error to suppose that the age of exploration in the Himalayas and other great mountain ranges, ended in the 19th century. In a broadly geographical sense this is true, yet to-day there is an urgent need to encourage more detailed exploration in order to apply it to the expeditions whose programmes include investigations in depth into the ecology of the mountains, the recording of inventories of all forms of plant and animal life—not least important—the insects on which the eco-systems so largely depend. Only by research is it possible to determine the extent and the kind of protection necessary for the survival of all species in the mountain lands. My plea is for a shift of emphasis from the particular protection of especially popular species (Panda, Snow Leopard, *et al*), to the entire environment in which they, and millions of other life forms, exist.

I suggest that your membership should give at least as much support and encouragement and confer equal esteem (if not, indeed, 'pride of place'), to exploratory expeditions which wish to make these environmental studies for the information of Governments of countries such as Nepal, as to mountaineering expeditions which tend to attract all the publicity and support and to bring prestige to nations, to climbing clubs and to individual climbers.

The Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research has done this for many years. The happy 'Marriage' between our Alpine Club and the Royal Geographical Society has also produced, through our Mount Everest Foundation, similarly valuable results. The RGS has been the agent, in recent years, for creating initiatives bearing on conservations, on an international plane: in Borneo and in the Karakoram. With scientists from a number of countries and several scientific disciplines collaborating with those of the host country in wide ranging research programmes, surely there is scope for similar collaboration between members of UIAA and hosts such as Nepal?

The great hope for the future lies in the designation and effective management of more national parks; an essential element in implementing such policies is preliminary research. I cannot stress too strongly the importance of this to your Commission.

My second suggestion is this. As we all know, political reality in the parliamentary democracies requires the mobilization of public opinion, in order to persuade governments to act. The threats to the natural environment are now a matter of growing public awareness; but 'ecology' or 'green' parties have not, so far, made a significant impact. The more that bodies such as UIAA commit themselves to the task of creating a national constituency for action to save our natural environment, the better our prospects for the future.

Our Council for National Parks has instituted a scheme of individual supporters. We seek individual associate membership from the millions of people who visit our 10 parks to walk, climb and sight-see. They pay a modest subscription and receive our newsletter. Is it an example which members of UIAA might emulate?

Mr President, 4 years ago my companions and I who made the first ascent of Everest held a reunion in Darjeeling with Tenzing Norgay and some of our Sherpas of that expedition. I told them of a dream I had had on the previous night . . . hundreds of guests had arrived by plane, helicopter and road at the fashionable resort of Thyangboche, with its many hotels and souvenir shops. Many of the tourists were flying up to the large mountain refuge in the Western Cwm and some were already on the summit, having arrived by a *téléphérique* between the Cwm and the highest point on earth. Champagne was being served, and there was a toast to those poor, plodding pedestrians who had toiled up the hard way a century before.

Mr President, this could have happened before the Matterhorn

Centenary in 1965. Thanks, in large part, to the efforts of UIAA, it did not. It will be up to yourselves and your successors to ensure, with the approval of the Government of Nepal, that this nightmare never comes true.

PART 3 'THE FUTURE OF HIMALAYAN EXPEDITIONS'

A paper read by Dennis Gray to the UIAA Commission

I would like to begin by prefacing my remarks on the specific topics I have been asked to cover by some general observations.

I think it is important for all visitors to realise that in climbing or trekking in the Himalayan countries such as Nepal, we are guests of a host country, and this should condition our behaviour. We have no right to assume the privilege of travel in these wonderful areas. The attitude in which visitors do come to the Himalaya is important and as the numbers continue to increase will become even more so. Our behaviour and attitudes will be of great consequence to the local people but also to other visitors from foreign countries.

The policy as to mountain tourism and its future is of course a matter for the host government. Theirs is the responsibility for its impact on their economy, culture and ecology. Doubtless the needs of the national economies of Pakistan, of India and Nepal will over-ride any problems there may be in encouraging tourism including trekking and mountaineering. Therefore on this assumption, we can base a scenario of a rapidly growing tourist 'invasion' of Nepal and the other countries in which the Himalaya and the Karakoram ranges lie. (Much as it may be painful to refer to, Afghanistan is 'out' . . . let us hope . . . not forever . . . for the magic of Tirich Mir, Saraghar, the Wakhan basin and thousands of other wonderful peaks should not be denied to those who have no politics other than the peace and friendship to be found amongst the mountains.)

The problems for the future

As we move towards the 21st century the over-riding concern in the Himalayan regions must surely be the impact of western culture on local populations and their way of life, and the damage to the environment, with most fundamentally the ecology of the mountain regions. The effects of these are already manifest. Obvious to all who have known the Himalayan regions over the past decade or so.

A major problem in the mountain regions must be, because of the numbers involved, the impact of trekking activities. Those most responsible for promoting such developments are of course the trekking agencies. Surely the time has come when all such bodies should be registered by the host governments in the countries to which they either send parties or operate within. They should conform to certain standards laid down by the appropriate ministries as a condition of their licences. The aim in doing this, I would suggest would be as follows:

- To provide an adequate and honest service to mountaineers and trekking groups
- To ensure a discipline in respect of hygiene (food, cooking, waste disposal, latrines etc)
- To ensure a discipline in respect of ecology
- To make sure trekking and climbing groups are adequately aware of the customs and way of life of local people.

Perhaps a condition of the issue of a licence to the trekking agencies might be that the firm has a policy of hiring qualified Sirdars. These professionals to be part of the future training and guiding developments which I wish to touch on later.

The actual mountaineering problems in this area, and here I am referring to climbing expeditions, are small compared to those presented by the numbers involved in trekking. Nevertheless the climbers are the progenitors for it was they who really opened up the Himalayan regions and they are still a very important piece in the jig-saw as in the past. Doubtless there will be more roads built in the Himalayan Regions in future, the mountain areas will become ever more accessible, and that means probably cheaper travel? Climbing expeditions will therefore become lighter affairs, what we call 'Alpine style'. Fewer porters will be required and gone forever will be the days of 800/1000 porters setting off for the K2 or Everest base camps.

The need now for mountaineers is for more peaks and more regions to be opened up. I don't think this will prove prejudicial in any way for the greatest traffic will always be towards the really high mountains such as Mount Everest, K2, Lhotse, Makalu, etc. Too many expeditions in any one area at any one time might pose problems, but doubtless this could be overcome by careful planning by the government departments concerned. The present system of permitted peaks is, I contend, not a good one, much better to have permitted areas, eg The South Rolwaling, Khumbu, the Baltoro in the Karakoram and so forth. This opens up hundreds more peaks, spreads parties around more widely and would be a fillip for Himalayan exploration at this time.

I also believe that the system recently developed in Nepal of having low level peaks designated 'trekking' peaks is a good one. More of this kind of thing could be done, in all the non-restricted areas. Any peak under 6500m could be open on the same basis as the current trekking peaks are in Nepal, but all peaks over this altitude would have to remain as expedition type peaks, dealt with by different authorities than the trekking peaks. Here in Nepal that would mean the Ministry of Tourism.

The rates of 'peak' fees is something I believe should be re-considered by host governments. At the moment the amount is the same for a solo, 2 man, 6 man, 8 man attempt etc. I believe a *per capita* fee per person should be charged. This would help small expeditions, but over all could be set so that taken over a year the host governments would still receive

the same amount of cash in total. If the *per capita* bill was \$500—a 2 man party would pay \$1,000, a 4 man party \$2,000, 6 man \$3,000 and so on.

Mountain rescue and insurance

Mountain rescue and insurance are, I believe, not too difficult problems to solve. Climbing expeditions should remain self sufficient in the mountains, for here we should note what is happening in the Alps of Europe in this respect. Mountaineers are often over-reaching their techniques and experience leading to the taking of chances with the weather or objective dangers and expecting the rescue services to get them off the mountain side in any case of emergency such as injury or storms. I think it would be a grave mistake to form any kind of mountain rescue organisation for the greater ranges of the world. It should be the mountaineer's ethic that here you look after yourself and one another. If a member of an expedition is taken ill, or is injured high on the mountain, then the other members should get him or her down to base camp. From there helicopters could and should be used if possible and are available to fly the injured person to hospital. There should be a realistic charge for this service, and this should be covered by insurance.

The healthy thing for mountaineers is that they go into the mountains knowing that they are totally on their own. Trekking is a different matter, and again from suitable sites helicopters could be used to move the sick or injured to hospital. Mountain rescue in the Himalaya would be technically very difficult, extremely expensive and would inevitably lead to restrictive regulations to limit the activities of expeditions in order to avoid accidents and the need for using such expensive facilities. Insurance is unavoidable and should be mandatory for all activities in the Himalaya, covered by the terms trekking and mountaineering. Local people engaged in these activities to help a climb progress or a trek to take place should be insured by the party engaging them.

If and when nationally certificated guides on the same level and standing as, say, Alpine Guides develop, then of course such professionals would be responsible for their own arrangements in this respect.

Host governments can help climbing party leaders and trekkers by advising on minimum insurance requirements. It would be helpful to know how much a helicopter flight to, say, the Makalu or Annapurna areas might cost. Are we talking about 20,000 rupees, 50,000 rupees or 100,000? Many parties take out insurance before they leave their home countries and it is difficult to assess from the UK, the USA, Europe or Japan what insurance requirements might be.

Frankly, however, I do not see insurance as a major problem. My own Council organises insurance schemes for thousands of climbers each year, at home, in the Alps, the USA, and the Andes and Himalaya. It is a fairly straightforward commercial business. A necessary evil.

Role of Sherpas and local peoples

There is a myth which has grown up that all expeditions in the

Himalaya employ Sherpas. The Sherpas have proven themselves outstanding porters, but so have the Hunzas, the Ladakhis, the Garwhalis, etc. Most of those who have been brought up and lived for generations in the mountains understand the limitations of their environment, they understand the mountain way of life. A few (just as in Europe, Asia and the Americas) of these Himalayan peoples would make, given the opportunity to train and acquire the latest techniques, outstanding mountaineers. Some of the Himalayan hillsmen are well on the way to acquiring these skills, but few to my knowledge would yet pass as say a fully qualified Alpine guide. This is not to say that none could do this, and the mountaineering school at Manang, the climbing schools in India and the proposed school in Pakistan could be the basis of a scheme of national certification which produced guides of the same standing as professional mountain guides in other parts of the world.

Perhaps there could be some lower level (perhaps aspirant guide designation would do?) for Sirdars and high altitude porters, rather like the role of porters in the Alps, 60 years ago.

The present situation regarding joint expeditions is unsatisfactory all round I believe. You cannot pass on advanced techniques on modern mountaineering half way through a climb to your opposite numbers or rope mates, whatever their nationality. It is a situation which breeds discontent on both sides, the locals feel they are being patronised and are unequal members of an expedition, on the other side the foreign climbers feel they are providing all the equipment, all the cash. Far better for foreign mountaineers to help with instruction, advice and support of home parties climbing their own mountains by whatever routes. And here I must pay tribute to the outstanding climbs by Indian, Pakistan and lately Nepalese parties in their home mountains, which must be a very encouraging sign for the future.

It is a fact that expeditions are getting smaller and smaller in terms of numbers of members, equipment used and relative costs. This is right and proper; it is, I submit, recognisable progress, part of the mountaineer's true ethic of treating the mountains with reverence, of preserving the balance of our sport . . . it should be fun not war, and keep the essential element of challenge alive. It is a ludicrous situation, I submit, that an expedition made up of 2 men, attempting to climb, say, Mount Everest should end up with a party of very large proportions—a Liaison Officer, a Sirdar, a Cook, etc. Surely if a party wishes to cook for itself it should be allowed to do so? And could not the Sirdar take on the role of liaison officer on all expeditions, say, of below 4 climbers in number? I hope that these suggestions are in no way offensive to any one. They are only put from a mountaineer's viewpoint and I am willing to admit and concede that there are other sides to be considered in such arguments, but I do hope my suggestions will be considered for the not too distant future.

Conservation of the High Valleys

I think that governments, the UIAA and its member organisations, even travel agencies and certainly trekking organisations have a duty, that their parties travelling to countries such as Nepal are well briefed on the importance now of preserving the high valleys, the customs and the way of life of the local people. There should be careful briefing of all parties to avoid needless damage.

However, the main damage I believe is actually caused by the land and fuel hunger of the local inhabitants. What climbing and trekking parties need to do is not to hasten or accelerate this problem. The rules now established clearly ban the use of firewood as fuel and demand that all rubbish and equipment be buried or carried out.

On the high mountains it probably is still acceptable to tip rubbish into crevasses, for after all, at high camps it is usually only a matter of a few weeks, occupied by a few people in a year: but in somewhere like the Everest Base Camp all rubbish should be scrupulously carried out. Deep pits could be dug somewhere much lower down, and all parties should be instructed to have their rubbish carried to such disposal points. The present rules need enforcing. Everest Base Camp now needs a Spring Clean. The rubbish should be removed and if this costs money to carry out, then so be it! Put a small amount of extra charges onto the peak fees and trekking permits to pay for such clean ups. I for one will not complain. Everything which is not biodegradable should be carried out from now on, and properly buried and expeditions should face the cost of porters carrying tins and rubbish out as part of their essential budgets. I would like to mention here how I see National Parks. To designate any area as a National Park is frankly not enough. In the UK we have an almost unique situation where our National Parks are lived in by thousands of people. Some are highly populated, and this means in principle tight control of planning, building and development—unfortunately something that is often expediently overcome when mineral or development resources are needed. National Parks can be largely cosmetic concerns unless they work on accepted rules observed and known by all who visit them. Trekking agencies, UIAA members, trekkers, expeditions, all must be aware and happy to go along with such restrictions to help preserve what is so worth preserving. Unfortunately, National Parks to work need their officers, their bureaucracies, Park Rangers, Wardens and the like. Such personnel need to be eminently qualified, experienced and so forth, and this must be a most legitimate area of overseas aid from the developed countries at this moment in time. Amongst the UIAA members there is much experience in the problems of managing mountain areas to achieve a conservation ethic and I would hope that we can help such countries as Nepal in this respect, if we are invited to do so, with advice and other support.

Finally, I am sure that given good conservation methods and

principles, it would be to the Himalayan countries' benefit to enable the Himalaya to develop like the Alps, with the absolute minimum of government controls. This would enable climbers and trekkers to go into the mountains and walk and climb at will. Despite the problems posed by such an open-door concept, I am sure it would work out to everyone's benefit. To our Nepalese friends I would like to say how privileged I feel to be in Nepal once more and I am sure that all members of the UIAA will try to instil into our members from hereon the credo, taken from that most active of mountain conservation bodies the Sierra Club, 'Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints!'.

SOLDANELLA'S SONG

By Dr I. A. Richards

Here where the snow drifts shrink,
High upon summer's brink

Our Station is,
Our tassel heads we thrust
up through the icy crust.

Through Winter's full defeat
We signalled his retreat,
Our out-going his;
for when his snows are gone
Not long we linger on.

Who were the first to bring
Our witness to those Spring
Festivities

Here through these parching days
Breeze echoes of that praise.