

Nepal 1984

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The 1983-4 winter in Nepal was the most successful since the winter season was opened in 1980. The season is officially from 1 December to 31 January, though the calendar winter season starts on 21 December — a date when the majority of successful expeditions have already reached the summit. The beginning of December has stable, clear weather, in fact more of an extension of the post-monsoon period, though the winds are higher and the temperatures colder. Also, the Nepalese government allows winter expeditions to reach Base Camp and even establish a Camp 1 (though not man it) before 1 December. Thus the winter season is not as unattractive as it at first appears.

Such was the case with the Japanese who reached the top of Everest on 16 December via the South Col. Norboru Yamada, Takashi Ozaki and Kazunari Murakami used oxygen and were part of a ten Japanese, ten Sherpa team that climbed Lhotse in the autumn and thus had prepared their route on Everest to at least 8000m. This was not so with the Polish ascent of Manaslu S face by the 1972 Austrian route. Maciej Berbeka and Ruszard Gajewski reached the summit on 12 January using four camps. They did not set up Base before the beginning of December and intended from the start to reach the summit in the calendar winter. The ascent was one of the most impressive of the year: it was the first winter success above 8000m without oxygen and the first time an 8000m peak had been climbed in January.

The Poles reinforced their position as foremost nation of the hard game of winter climbing when Andrej Bielum and Tadeusz Piotrowski made the first winter ascent of Api (7132m) by the NW ridge on 24 December. Unfortunately Bielum disappeared on the descent. Two small Korean teams took advantage of the fine weather in the first half of December. One climbed the S ridge (normal route) of Ama Dablam (6856m) using three camps and two Sherpas above Base Camp. They reached the top on 5 and 6 December. On Tilicho (7132m) the other succeeded in an alpine style ascent of the N face to the N ridge, taking four bivouacs to reach the summit on 11 December. Jong Bon Wan and Yoon Dae Pyn reached the summit; two other members retreated from the third bivouac due to altitude sickness. This was the first winter ascent of Ama Dablam, the second of Tilicho. The first winter ascent of Numbur (6957m) was made by a Japanese team via the SW ridge. Three members reached the summit on 11 December, two others included Nima Wangchu Sherpa the day after. Kangburu (6981m) was climbed for the first time in winter by the Japanese climber Hiroyuki Baba when he reached the summit via the W ridge on 18 December. He used two camps on a route climbed just beforehand by another Japanese team. One of the most impressive individual efforts of the winter was made by Jeff Lowe who soloed the SE spur (1972 French route) of Pumori (7161m). The summit was reached in four days on 18 December.

Of the six expeditions attempting the lower summits, all were successful but on higher peaks two expeditions succeeded and three failed (generally below 7000m). The unsuccessful expeditions were a Japanese attempt on Annapurna I (8078m) by the French N face route, Ron Rutland's British expedition to Annapurna II (7937m) attempting the N face to the W ridge and the Canadian attempt on Manaslu (8156m) by the NE face normal route.

When I experienced the Himalayan winter on Everest we did not start climbing until well into December and the weather conditions throughout January were miserable, with high winds, cold temperatures and generally poor conditions at Base Camp. The team deteriorated rapidly and my opinion of winter climbing in Nepal was that it was very much a war of attrition. Over the last year there has grown up a consensus of opinion: winter climbing *can* be enjoyable! But the time to practice it is the first half of December. The weather is stable and there is little stonefall or avalanche danger. Snow conditions are excellent for climbing. In the future we are likely to see many more ascents at this time of year. The highest peaks will certainly be booked for the winter season but unless the mountain is prepared in advance the success rate is likely to be low.

Pre-monsoon

The pre-monsoon was particularly successful for larger expeditions on 8000m peaks, though very little of note was done by small teams going for technical, alpine style ascents. Has expedition style really changed over the last decade? To some extent yes; Doug Scott's multinational expedition to the Makalu area is a pointer to a more informal and relaxed style of expedition. Nevertheless the traditional and rigid type of large expedition is still the most promising in terms of success rate, though individual members now often choose not to use oxygen and East Europeans in particular rarely use Sherpa high altitude porters.

The most important ascent of the season was undoubtedly that of the Czechs on the S face of Lhotse Shar. This huge and steep face has been one of the outstanding problems of the Himalaya. The 18 strong team led by Ivan Galfy used six camps on the 3000m face. The summit was reached on 20 May by Zoltan Demjan and again on 21 May by Josef Rakoncaj, Juromir Stejskal and Peter Bozik. On Everest the Bulgarians made the second ascent of the Yugoslav W ridge route, the second traverse of the mountain and the first ascent in April. Out of the 24 members, Pridanov reached the summit without oxygen on 20 April but tragically died descending the W ridge. On 9 May Savov and Valtchev reached the summit and on the following day so did Doskov and Petkov. Both teams traversed the mountain, descending the SE ridge to the South Col and the Indian expedition. The Indian expedition, consisting of 20 Indians and 43 Nepalese Sherpas climbed Everest via the South Col. (*See also Harish Kapadia's Indian Notes. Ed.*) Phu Dorje reached the summit alone on 9 May; a further team of four, including the first Indian woman, Miss Bachendri Pal, on 23 May.

A traverse of the three peaks of Kangchenjunga and on to Yalung Kang is an obvious challenge. A large expedition of 22 Japanese and 31 Sherpas stormed the mountain and had a complicated time trying to traverse the four summits. In the end the Central, South and Main summits of Kangchenjunga were climbed, though hardly traversed. This type of expedition is not in my view very impressive, merely emphasising that with plenty of money and people just about

anything is possible — as one member demonstrated by hang-gliding from camp 4 at 7800m.

Two groups from Switzerland and Germany climbed Manaslu by the NE ridge normal route. Eight members and two Sherpas reached the summit on 30 April, 7 and 11 May. Over on the S ridge the Yugoslavs Bozie and Grozelj made a semi-alpine style ascent without oxygen, reaching the top on 4 May. Mrs. Komarkova (USA) and Mrs. Sterboua (Czech) became the first women to climb Cho Oyu. They climbed the SW face (the 1983 Messner route) with Ang Rita and Nuru, reaching the summit on 13 May. On Makalu the Basques Abrego and Pablo Denito climbed the normal route (NW side to the N ridge) with no fixed camps, Sherpas or oxygen, reaching the summit on 17 May. Makalu was the main objective of Doug Scott's Chamlang/Baruntse/Makalu expedition. This multi-national expedition was run on informal lines, with separate pairs climbing what they wanted within the limits of the expedition's permission. On Makalu Doug Scott, Afanassieff (France) and Sustad (USA) made an alpine style ascent of the long SE ridge to the E face and reached 8400m on 28 May, but due to extreme fatigue/oedema suffered by Afanassieff the party was forced to turn back just short of the summit. Difficulties of descent into and out of the East cwm meant they encountered the most strenuous climbing Scott says he has ever done; 'a traverse as planned would have been far easier.' Earlier on in the same expedition Baruntse original SE ridge was climbed by a party of six on 6 May. Chamlang's unclimbed E summit (7290m) was reached via the N face on 16 May by a party of four: Doug Scott and his son Michael, Afanassieff, and Ang Phurba. The central summit was traversed and a new line descended on the N face. Although the expedition failed on the last few metres of Makalu the format of the expedition was excellent, allowing as it did up to 30 people (including wives and children) to enjoy the mountains of the Himalaya. The policy of ascending smaller easier peaks first allows fitness and acclimatization to be built up so that true, single push alpine style ascents of big routes on 8000m peaks become possible.

Turning to the lower peaks: Gaurishankar received its second ascent by Hyman Culbreth (USA) and Ang Kami Sherpa on 16 May. Three camps and three Sherpas were used on the same line as the American first ascent in spring 1979. The Japanese Naose Sakashita made the second solo ascent of Ama Dablam, reaching the top on 3 May, after two bivouacs. Further up the Khumbu on Pumori an Australian/American team climbed the E face to the NE ridge (American winter route of 1981/82) using three camps. All seven members reached the summit on 5 and 6 May. A team of South Koreans climbed Shartse by a new route up the S face to the S ridge, reaching the summit on 8 May, and a further team of two Koreans and two Sherpas climbed Putha Hiunchuli via the S ridge/face, reaching the summit on 1 April. On Kang Guru four camps were used by Kang Byoung and a team of three Sherpas, all of whom reached the summit via the W face and the SE ridge on 1 May. On Baruntse, Koreans climbed the N ridge using six Sherpas and four camps, reaching the North and central summits but not the main summit. On Kangtega five Catalan women with two Sherpas climbed the NE face (original route) reaching the summit on 15 May.

Thus it was a successful season with 18 expeditions climbing their objectives. Of the remaining 17 which did not reach the summit several are worth mentioning.

On Cho Oyu a British team climbed the S face of Ngozumba Kang to the E ridge, despite the team being harassed by recurrent illness. Matthew Priestman and Jeffrey Jackson (USA) made a strong attempt on the summit, only to be thwarted at 7750m by an apparently impassable gully system stretching down into Tibet. Priestman suffered frostbite attempting to get round the obstacle. A French/Canadian attempt on Annapurna I by the WNW spur failed at 7200m when Philippe Dumas and Patrick Tuglanut were swept to their deaths from Camp three by an avalanche. On Makalu's W pillar a USA/Canadian team reached 8400m on 21 May but had to retreat. Over on Kangchenjunga a New Zealand team led by Nick Banks retreated from 8000m on the N face Japanese route. Other teams failed on Dhaulagiri I, Lhotse Shar, Kangbachen (a solo attempt by the Italian, Porta), Churen Himal, Kang Guru and Langtang Lirung. On Kangde Hiunchuli a British team failed at 5800m, and the American John Roskelly *et al* retreated from Taboche (Tawache). There were also failures on Churen Himal, Annapurna II and Ama Dablam.

Post-monsoon

A total of 49 expeditions visited Nepal of which 27 were successful. There were a number of impressive ascents, in particular of Annapurna, Dhaulagiri, Everest, Kangchenjunga, Manaslu, Yalungkang, Makalu, and Ganesh II.

On Annapurna I the Swiss, Lovetan and Joos, succeeded on the unclimbed E ridge, then made the first traverse of the East middle and main summits (23-25 October) before descending the N face. They were part of a six man team which had no oxygen or Sherpa support. On the same mountain the Spanish pair Bohigas and Lucas made a fine first ascent of the line tried by Alex MacIntyre and René Gillini in 1982. They reached the middle summit on 3 October after seven days alpine style climbing, before descending a line very similar to the Polish route of spring 1981. A very impressive performance altogether.

The previously unclimbed W face of Dhaulagiri I was climbed by a party of 20 Czechs. The route joins the NW ridge at 7600m and was found to be extremely dangerous. Simon, Stejskal and Jukes reached the summit on 23 October without using oxygen or Sherpas. Unfortunately Simon fell to his death on the descent. Also on Dhaulagiri the French pair, Begin and Roche, made a fine alpine style ascent of the S ridge (the Japanese route of 1978) using a camp at 5600m and three bivouacs to reach the top.

The Czech ascent of the S pillar of Everest was particularly notable as no oxygen was used. The 15 climbers and nine Sherpas used five camps. Demjam, Pspotka and Ang Rita Sherpas reached the summit on 15 October and descended via the South Col. Pspotka fell from the Lhotse face and was killed. Also on Everest the first Dutch ascent was made by Vos via the South Col route. He reached the summit alone on 8 October, after the eight member expedition's only woman, Miss Mourik, turned back at 8600m when her oxygen ran out.

Roger Marshall (Canadian) made a fine solo ascent of Kangchenjunga's original route, reaching the top on 18 October. He was helped by French and Polish expeditions on the lower part of the mountain. The impressively steep and unclimbed S ridge of Manaslu was the objective of eleven Poles. Utilising three camps Lwow and Wielicki reached the summit on 20 October without oxygen or Sherpa support. On Yalungkang, five of the six members of a French expedition

reached the summit without oxygen between 8-20 October by the 1975 German route. Miss Ferriere, who reached the summit, set an altitude record for a woman without oxygen. Also on Yalungkang the Poles climbed a new direct line on the S face using four camps and no oxygen. Kurolczak and Wojciech reached the summit on 7 October, Cichy and Piasecki on the 10th. The Swiss climber Nottaris reached the summit of Makalu on 29 September by the W face and the NW ridge (Kukaczka route, 1981) and descended by the normal route. It was a fine, though not strictly a solo, ascent, as he was helped on the ascent and descent from 6850m.

On the lower peaks, the British pair Nick Kekus and Richard Allen made the first ascent of the steep 2500m high SW face of Ganesh II. The face was climbed alpine-style with eight bivouacs, and the summit reached on 15 October. Four Americans climbed a new route on the N face of Cholatse alpine style between 29 October and 5 November. They descended in two days via the S ridge (Swiss route). The same team also climbed a new route on Lobuje East (one of the trekking peaks) via the E ridge. Four Japanese with two Sherpas reached the S summit of Gaurishankar via the unclimbed SE ridge, and on Himalchuli an American team of three plus Sherpa Pema Dorje made the first ascent of the SW ridge, reaching the summit on 22 October. Lobuje West was climbed for the first time by the Japanese, Kamakuru and Taguchi reaching the summit via the E ridge on 28 September. Nuptse's NW summit (7720m) was climbed by a new route (NW ridge from the south) by no less than eight Frenchmen and six Sherpas between 15-21 October. On Thamserku, two Koreans and two Sherpas reached the summit by a new route up the E face and along the S ridge on 27 September. There were other successes on Annapurna South, Baruntse, Glacier Dome (a team on the SW side, another on the N face), Jannu, Kang Guru and Putha Hiunchuli.

The most interesting of the failures was the five-man Yugoslav expedition attempting the unclimbed S ridge of Cho Oyu. The expedition reached 7700m alpine style where they believed they had surmounted all the technical difficulties, but had to retreat due to high winds. On Everest the 'Police Cleaning Expedition' (Nepalese/USA) created quite a controversy. The main reason for the expedition was supposed to be the removal of the body of Mrs. Schmatz from 8400m, but there have been suggestions of embezzlement of expedition funds. During their unsuccessful attempt on the summit the leader Yogendra Thapa and Ang Dorje Sherpa died above the South Col on 24 October. An expedition best forgotten. (*Mike Cheney has also sent us, from Kathmandu, strongly worded criticisms of this expedition. Ed.*) Again on Everest, an expedition of two New Zealanders and four Australians led by Peter Hillary tried the W ridge via the Western Cwm. On 9 October they set out from a bivouac at 7900m. At 8140m they decided to descend but tragically two members of the team, From and Nottle, fell to their deaths.

Altogether 1984 was a very successful year for expeditions climbing in Nepal, particularly for the East Europeans, South Koreans, Americans and the ever-present Japanese. There is no doubt that these countries are dominating Nepalese climbing at present. Why? Firstly large traditional style expeditions, of which there are at present very few leaving Western Europe, produce a large pool of climbers who have Himalayan experience, many of whom then go on to operate

successfully either in large groups or as smaller 'alpine pairs'. This was very much the situation in Britain in the mid-seventies after the expeditions to the SW face of Everest. A second point referring to the East Europeans' success is that travel to the East is extremely attractive to those living under the confines of the Soviet umbrella and a climbing expedition is a legitimate reason for travel. Expeditions may be composed of a hard core of extremely talented climbers supplemented by a large number of equally keen helpers. Perhaps this supplies part of the reason for the very notable successes of the Poles, Czechs and Yugoslavs. Certainly, the lack of expeditions involving large numbers of people from, for example, Britain has meant that there are now relatively few climbers in such countries who have Himalayan experience.

In contemporary Britain at least it is clear that high standard rock climbing is proving more of an attraction than the expense, long term commitment, danger, organisational difficulties but greater potential reward of expedition climbing.

