

Nepal 1985

Brian Hall

Winter 84/85 The harsh weather of the Himalayan winter came early to Nepal in 1984 and dashed the hopes of many of the winter expeditions. Only the very early expeditions or experienced, physically strong and determined climbers succeeded. Such is the competition to climb 8000m peaks, that nine of the expeditions attempted these mountains. Attempts on Annapurna I, Cho Oyu and Dhaulagiri I were successful and the only other successes were on Jannu and Pumori, both over 7000m. Compared with last year, there was a lack of interest and success on lower peaks.

On Annapurna I a S Korean expedition climbed the N face by the Dutch rib. They reached BC on 22 November, then rapidly placed ABC and four camps before Miss Kim and four Sherpas, Pasang Norbu, Keepa, Dorje and Ang Temba, made the ascent stopping probably two hours short of the summit. Nevertheless it was a fine, well-organized ascent. It ended in tragedy on the descent when Keepa and Pasang Norbu fell to their deaths.

Over on the E side of Nepal another S Korean expedition succeeded in making the first winter ascent of Jannu. Ki Heyg Kim and two Sherpas, Ang Dorje and Lhakpa Gelbu, climbed the French route with variations, using four camps, reaching the top on 9 December.

In my opinion Kukuczka ranks as one of the best mountaineers of the '80s. He enhanced his reputation by making two fine winter ascents of 8000m in one season. First he was part of a Polish team on Dhaulagiri I where he and Czok made the second winter ascent by the NE ridge reaching the summit on 21 January. Kukuczka then joined the Polish-Canadian expedition to the S pillar of Cho Oyu led by Andrej Zawada. Two Poles, Berbek and Pawlikowski, reached the summit on 12 February, and on the 15th (the last day of the official winter season) Kukuczka and Heinrich also reached the summit. This first winter ascent of Cho Oyu was made without using oxygen.

The only other success of the winter was by Richard Pierce and Richard Wilson, both from the USA, on Pumori. On 13 December they both disappeared without trace on the summit day. It is believed that they reached the summit. They used two camps and three bivouacs on the SW ridge.

Unsuccessful attempts were made on Ama Dablam, Annapurna I (including an attempt on the S face, British route), Annapurna S, Dhaulagiri I, Everest, Gangapurna, Himlung, Kangchenjunga, Kang Guru, Khatang, and Tilicho. Five climbers were killed. Particularly tragic was Chris Chandler's death high on Kangchenjunga's N face despite heroic efforts by his wife and Mangal Singh Tamung who both were climbing with him.

Spring In spring, at least 45 expeditions were expected but only 28 turned up. There was little work for the many businesses set up by the Sherpas to

service expeditions and treks, and instead of expanding they suffered losses. A big increase in peak fees in Nepal and economic recession in the West may have contributed to this but in my experience, the costs of mounting an expedition have only increased over the last ten years by the rate of inflation. Nepal is still excellent value and flights to the East have never been cheaper, but for British expeditions, sponsorship is very scarce and the grants from the MEF and the BMC have not kept up with the rise in numbers of expeditions or with inflation. This is reflected by the total absence of British expeditions during the winter and spring seasons. The 'dole' may finance high-standard rock-climbing but it certainly does not pay for trips to Nepal, let alone Himalayan expeditions. The expeditions which did not arrive missed the best March and April weather for many years and 21 expeditions were successful.

Certainly the most rapid ascents of the season were by Reinhold Messner and Hans Kammerlander who climbed Annapurna I and Dhaulagiri I within 23 days. On Annapurna I they climbed a new route on the NW face, first fixing one camp, then climbing the route in a four-day push, reaching the summit on 24 April. They climbed Dhaulagiri I in a rapid Alpine-style ascent of two and a half days via the NE ridge reaching the summit on 15 May. This is Messner's 12th and Kammerlander's 5th 8000m summit.

On Manaslu, Studer (Austria) and Ang Kami Sherpa climbed the E ridge using three camps to 6500m and in a long day, reached the summit on 1 May. One of his team died in a second summit attempt.

The impressive N face of Yalung Kang was climbed for the first time, by a Yugoslav expedition. Using four camps and the help of Sherpas, Bergant and Cesent reached the summit on 22 April. Bergant, who used no oxygen, was exhausted and fell to his death on the descent.

Few of the expeditions to Everest have been so successful as the Norwegian expedition. With four camps, oxygen and Sherpas, they climbed the South Col route and put 17 climbers on the summit including six Norwegians and four Sherpas. Sungdare was the first person to make four ascents. Bonington (GB) and Bass (USA), in the space of a few days, were each the oldest men to climb Everest.

On Cho Oyu, the Polish-American team was stopped by the same gully system which stopped the British in 1983. Richey and Wilcox then climbed Ngozumba Kang which was almost on their route. Garozielewski and Jezierski climbed the SW face route of Cho Oyu on 28 May, in six days alpine-style climbing. Six Spaniards also climbed this route without oxygen or Sherpas. On Makalu, high winds prevented Maurice and Liliane Barrard (France) from reaching the summit. On both 10 and 11 May they climbed to within 35m of the summit having climbed the NW route.

Naoe Sakashita led a group of seven Japanese climbers. Based in the Khumbu valley, they did a lot of climbing and succeeded on the S ridge of Cholatse, Taweche SE face, and Ama Dablam W face (first ascent) and SW ridge. One member died on Ama Dablam. A Japanese-Nepalese expedition climbed the NW face of Gurja Himal but, there too, one member died and plans for further climbing were abandoned.

A Swiss-Nepalese expedition made the first ascent of Ohmi Kangri, climbing

the E peak (previously climbed by the Japanese in 1982) and going on to climb the higher W summit.

Other successes were; Ama Dablam N ridge (Italians), Annapurna III N face (Nepalese Army), Chobuje SW ridge (New Zealanders), Gurja Himal NW face (Japanese and Rumanians), Himalchuli SW ridge (Hungarians), Makalu II W face to S ridge (French), Pumori SE face (Spanish), Pumori SW ridge (Austrian) and Tukuiche N ridge (Korean).

Expeditions to Annapurna S, Dhaulagiri (Pear), Everest (Lho la, W ridge), Gaurishankar, Kangchenjunga (N ridge), Lhotse Shar (SE ridge) and Nilgiri N (W ridge) were unsuccessful.

Autumn The most notable feature of the season was the unusually appalling weather in October. There were 22 deaths in 49 expeditions, only 15 of which were successful. Only three 8000ers were climbed — Everest, Makalu and Cho Oyu.

Disaster struck the Indian Army on Everest. Just below the S summit one member died and four more died in a storm on the South Col. Later, the Japanese succeeded, with seven members reaching the summit on 30 October (Yamada without oxygen). Another Japanese expedition succeeded on Cho Oyu, three members reaching the summit on 3 October after a rapid climb of the W ridge (12 days from arrival at BC). On the NW ridge of Makalu, four Italians and one Spaniard reached the summit on 1 October.

A S Korean team climbed Himalchuli N on 27 October (Lee Jae Hong with Sherpas, Lhakpa Norbu, Pasang Dawa, Ang Pasang and Zangbu). Shortly afterwards, Poles climbed the SW ridge to the SW face and then around to the E ridge. On Saipal Spaniards made the second ascent (first ascent 1963) via the W ridge on 22 October. Two of them traversed the mountain, climbing the SW face and descending the W ridge on 24 October. On Thamserku, two climbers from a French expedition climbed a new route via the W ridge to the N ridge, reaching the summit on 30 October. An American team climbed a new route up the SE ridge of Ama Dablam (Aprin, Harrington, Zabaleta) with four bivouacs and Athans soloed the S ridge.

Two international groups succeeded on Ama Dablam and on Baruntse; a Japanese-Nepalese team climbed Dorje Lhakpa W ridge; Poles climbed the E ridge of Gangapurna; Japanese, the S face-SW ridge of Himalchuli E; Dutch, Makalu II normal route; and a S Korean team climbed the N ridge of Tukuiche.

1985 was a mixed year, with no ascents that can be regarded as milestones in Himalayan mountaineering. Eastern European and Asian mountaineers now predominate and the total lack of success by even a single British team is an indication of the low level to which British expedition climbing has sunk.

Most expeditions are repeating routes, ignoring the challenges of the many unclimbed faces and ridges. In general, rises in standards are due to a few E European teams and the individual talents of climbers such as Messner and Kukuczka.