Nepal 1987

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Winter 86/87 Fewer expeditions were active in Nepal than in recent winters, and most expeditions were small in numbers. Those who stayed at home did not miss much. It was a winter of poor weather and high winds, even by Himalayan standards. As a result, only four of 14 expeditions were successful.

The major success of the season was on Annapurna I and belonged once again to the masters of winter climbing, the Poles. It was a personal triumph for Jerzy Kukuczka who led the team, Artur Hajzer, Wanda Rutkiewicz and Krysztof Wielicki, on a successful ascent of the original route from the north. After his epic ascents of K2's S face and Manaslu's NE face (with Hajzer) in 1986, Kukuczka and his team did not set up Base until 18 January. They therefore missed the usual advantage of a November start, but at the same time missed most of the mid-winter bad weather. Four camps were quickly placed, the last at 6800m on 31 January. Rutkiewicz and Wielicki descended while the remaining pair went on to place a final camp at 7400m. After a day's rest they reached the summit on 3 February at 4pm and descended to their high camp in the dark. It was Kukuczka's third first winter ascent (after Cho Oyu and Kangchenjunga) and his 13th 8000er.

A five-man Korean team led by Park Yung Bae employed nine Sherpas on an attempt on the SW face of Everest. They had reached 8300m when Sherpa Tsuttin Dorje fell to his death working between camps at 7700m and the expedition was abandoned. Another Korean team retreated from the S col at about the same time in mid-January.

All other expeditions to 8000m peaks failed, among them Spanish and Koreans on Dhaulagiri and Swiss on Annapurna. Apart from the Poles on Annapurna, the only other successes were on the outlying peaks of the Everest region. The previously unclimbed E face of Pumori received ascents in quick succession, first by the Japanese Hiroshi Aota and Yoshiki Sasahara in three days, who reached the summit on 3 December, and two days later the same route was soloed by American Todd Bibler. Lobuje West received its first reported winter ascent when three Koreans and two Sherpas reached the top on 30 January.

Pre-Monsoon The season was notable only for its continuing poor weather and low success rate. 27 expeditions were active, but only two 8000ers were climbed. The one positive feature was that only one fatality was recorded, compared with 15–20 during the previous two pre-monsoon seasons.

The Chileans reached the highest summit yet climbed by S Americans when they succeeded on Cho Oyu, but there was a bizarre postscript to the expedition, one that fulfils the nightmare shared by all expeditions using

Nepalese permits to reach the NW side. The Chilean team repeated the normal route over the Nangpa La on to the NW face in Tibet. Shortly after placing two on top, including Sherpa Ang Rita who recorded his 10th ascent of a 8000m summit (Dhauligiri 4, Everest 3, Cho Oyu 2 and Kangchenjunga), the Chinese army commandeered Base Camp and ordered everyone off the mountain. Passports and permits were confiscated. An American team on the same route were also forced down and reluctantly retreated, with two members in position to attempt the summit. Future expeditions attempting this normal route could well face similar treatment, and only the difficult S side of Cho Oyu may be accessible from Nepal in future. Experiences reported from Tibet in 1987 indicate a general hardening of Chinese treatment of Western expeditions. Those planning the normal route on Cho Oyu are warned.

An American team to Makalu had better luck. They climbed the original route, placing leader Glenn Porzak, Chris Pizzo and Sherpa Lhakpa Nuru on top on 12 May. Four days later Gary Neptune and Sherpas Dawa Nuru and Moti Lal also reached the summit.

On Everest, an ambitious Czechoslovak expedition led by Ivan Galfy attempted two new routes on the SW face, but continuous bad weather forced them to retreat from a high point of 8300m without making significant progress on new ground. Similar conditions were experienced by a 14-strong Spanish expedition on the 1980 Polish S pillar, and their attempt was abandoned.

A Spanish team on Annapurna abandoned their attempt on the original route after Andrés Ferrer fell to his death while descending between camps. A Dutch expedition failed at 7600m on an attempt to climb the S face of Makalu, and an American team failed on the S face of Jannu. Lhotse Shar was climbed by a French army expedition via the original route, but the much-attempted SW spur of the mountain defeated a Yugoslav expedition at 7450m. The only other successes were Japanese on the SW ridge of Langtang Ri, and Americans and Greeks on the S ridge of Ama Dablam.

Post-Monsoon A total of 55 expeditions had permission to climb during the autumn season from 1 September to 15 November. Of these, 17 were successful, although some were marred by tragedy. The weather throughout most of the season was fine and settled, the exception being a severe storm on 19–20 October which caught many teams about to make summit bids, destroying camps and sweeping away fixed ropes. Many teams abandoned their attempts in the face of the havoc and the dangerous snow conditions which ensued, despite the fact that thereafter the weather was near perfect. Continuous high winds also played a role in the failures on many 8000m peaks.

For the second year running, Everest was not climbed from Nepal (but see *Winter 1987/88*, below). A 26-member international team employing 20 Sherpas failed at 8400m on the S col route, reaching their high point on 2 October. Peter Hillary's four-man Austro–NZ team was blasted off the 1981 American S pillar at the end of September by winds which Hillary estimated to have reached 200mph. Kim Logan and Michael Rheinberger were both frostbitten, and the wind prevented further attempts.

A strong 16-member international team to Lhotse's S face succeeded in

putting two members on the summit ridge, but, as in the case of the Yugoslavs in 1981, the summit was not reached. Led by Krysztof Wielicki, the team included 10 Poles, two Brits, two Italians and two Mexicans. They followed much the same line as the Polish attempt in 1985, but tragedy struck early on the climb when an avalanche on 15 September swept Doctor Czeslaw Jakeil to his death and badly injured Walenty Fuit. The team regrouped, and by 14 October had reached 7800m. Then came the big storm and avalanches seriously threatened Base Camp. Improved conditions at the end of October allowed Wielicki and Artur Hajzer to complete the difficulties above 8000m, and the summit ridge was reached on 29 October, 200m from the top. Strong winds stopped further progress. This was the eighth expedition to this massive face, and it came nearest to success.

On Lhotse Shar, four well-known Spanish climbers died in an attempt on the SE ridge on 27 September. Toni Sors, Sergio Escalera, Francesc Porras and Antonio Quinones were moving up to establish Camp 5 at 7850m when they were caught in a slab avalanche. An Anglo–American team also failed on the route. Two attempts on the S spur of Nuptse, the route first attempted and given high praise by Jeff Lowe, also failed. The Italian pair of Enrico Rosso and Fabrizio Manoni managed to reach 6700m.

There was a good deal of activity on nearby Pumori. A 10-strong Japanese team fixed the entire SW ridge, assuring success for eight Japanese and one Nepali on three successive days, 12–14 October. Permission for the route belonged, however, to a four-man German–Italian team who reported that the Japanese had already occupied the ridge when they arrived and, although they left most of their 3000m of fixed ropes, small sections had been cut. All four reached the summit. On the E face, a French party guided by Marc Batard found the going too hard, so Batard proceeded without clients but with three Sherpas, completing the ascent on 25 October.

A number of successful and impressive ascents were made in the Kangchenjunga region. Two Australians, Michael Groom and John Coulton, made a semi-alpine-style ascent of the SW face, without oxygen or the aid of Sherpas. From a high camp at 7900m, they completed the first Australian ascent of the mountain of 10 October, but, when they were descending in twilight, their vision became blurred and their minds disorientated. Groom fell into a crevasse, but what might have been a disaster proved a godsend, since Groom was unhurt and they now had shelter for the night. Although badly frostbitten in both hands and feet after their bivi at 8000m, they completed their descent next day. Two other Australians, James van Gelder and Terry Tremble, were meanwhile attempting a lightweight repeat of the British route on the NW face. They had reached 7500m when the big storm struck and, on returning to their Camp 2, they discovered that much of their equipment had been lost or destroyed by avalanches, so further attempts were impossible. An American attempt on the S face of Yalung Kang was forced to retreat from 8100m. Jim Farkas fell about 300m and, although he was not badly hurt, he and his Nepali partner Narayan Shrestha decided to descend. Farkas was frostbitten by the time they reached Base Camp, where the shortage of supplies brought a halt to further attempts.

There was success and disaster for a six-man Dutch team who repeated the Japanese N face route on Jannu. Base Camp was established on 17 September, and by 3 October the team had reached Camp 2 at 6100m above the difficult 'Wall of Shadows'. A week later leader Gerard van Sprang and Edmond Ofner set off for the top, but at the second bivouac, at 7250m, van Sprang discovered that both his feet were frostbitten, so he waited while Ofner continued alone to the summit on 11 October. As they descended, Ger Friele and Rudolf de Koning passed them on the way up and reached the summit on 13 October. The next day the second pair were seen descending the 'Wall of Shadows', but they never arrived at Camp 1. Falling ice killed them 60m above Camp 1, where they were buried two days later. Thus this milestone in Dutch mountaineering was sadly marred by the loss of two of its members.

There were two other successful ascents of Jannu. Pierre Beghin and Erik Decamp made a fine alpine-style ascent of the N face; they followed the NZ line and reached the summit on 25 October. A variation of the 1962 French route on the S ridge was climbed by another French team. Michel Vincent and Frederic Valet reached the summit at dusk on 6 November and managed to regain their high camp safely in the dark.

Further up the range, Manaslu was climbed by an Austrian expedition via the normal NE face; two members and a Sherpa were placed on the summit on 7 October. A Japanese attempt on the E ridge of the mountain was called off when the team had reached the beginning of the difficult pinnacles at 6500m. After descending to Base Camp, one member collapsed and died after an apoplectic fit.

Two Spanish expeditions reached the summit of Annapurna I within three days of each other. On 8 October two members from a Tarragona expedition reached the top; from a high camp on the 1980 German line on the central peak they traversed new ground to join the original French route. On 11 October two members and a Sherpa from a Valencian expedition reached the summit by the same route, although severe winds resulted in varying degrees of frostbite for all three. A Japanese attempt on the S face of Annapurna II retreated from 7500m as a result of the winds and the threat of ice-fall. An American, Tim Schinhofen, with Sherpa Pemba Norbu reached the summit of Annapurna IV via the previously unclimbed rib on the N face.

Dhaulagiri I's E and S faces were both scrutinized, but the warm weather made both faces extremely dangerous. The Japanese on the unclimbed S face went home without making a serious attempt. Hiroshi Aota, the leader, suggested that the winter might be the only safe season. Americans likewise abandoned the E face, but Catherine Colhoun, John Culberson and Colin Grissom reached the summit via the normal NE ridge on 16 October. A small Spanish team was stopped at 8000m on the same route when one member was hit by falling ice.

Failures on 8000ers included American, Swiss and German expeditions to Cho Oyu, all of which stuck to their permits on the S side, and Austrian, French and Swiss expeditions to Makalu.

Success on smaller peaks included a Yugoslav ascent of Ngojumba Kang 2 by a new line on the S face, Koreans on a new route on the W face and W ridge

of Longpo Gang, Poles on the SE ridge of Langshisha Ri (but only as far as the SW summit), and the first Liechtenstein success on a Nepal peak, when one climber from the little principality, supported by 13 Swiss, made an ascent of the NE ridge of Khatang. Ganesh 5 was climbed by two Japanese and two Sherpas, by the previously unclimbed S ridge. The Spanish Ski Tukuche 87 expedition managed to use skis between Camps 1 and 2, and crampons for the rest of the way, three members reaching the summit by the NW ridge on 4 October. Clients on the guided British Taweche Expedition found the going on the SE face too difficult, so Mal Duff and Andy Black attempted it alone, reaching 6350m before Duff's illness forced them to retreat.

Winter 1987/88 There were 12 expeditions in Nepal during this season, but, at the time of going to press, news of only four has been received. Everest had its first ascent from the Nepal side since October 1985 when S Korean Huh Yong-Ho and a Sherpa reached the summit from the S col on 22 December.

Dhaulagiri had two ascents early in December, both teams apparently taking advantage of the good weather that often occurs at the end of November and in early December. On 2 December, Frenchman Marc Batard and Sherpa Sundare reached the summit by the normal route. It is not known whether they started prior to the official opening of the season on 1 December, but it seems almost certain that they did. Two Yugoslavs, Iztok Tomazin and Marjan Kregar, made a fine four-day ascent of the Kurtyka-MacIntyre route on the E face. Starting on 1 December, they climbed alpine-style, apparently bivouacking three times on the way up, and returned to Base Camp on 7 December. Both expeditions were planning further attempts. It is also understood that two Japanese climbers reached the summit of Annapurna from the S side on 20 December, but both died during the descent. The full report will be given in *AJ94* (1989/90).

A Polish expedition led by Wojciech Maslowski made the first winter ascent of the difficult Langtang Lirung (7234m). They followed the normal route via the SE ridge. Base Camp was established on 10 December, and on 3 January Kazimierz Kiska, Mikolaj Czyewski and Adam Potoczek reached the summit. Three camps and 2000m of fixed rope were used.

There were one or two interesting postscripts to the year in Nepal. The most important event at the beginning of the year was a review of the environmental impact of expeditions and trekking groups on sensitive high-mountain areas. The current Minister for Tourism, Mr Ramesh Nath Pandey, threatened to close the worst-affected areas unless greater care was shown by groups visiting these areas. The problems are twofold: pollution by garbage and simple overuse because of numbers. The former is the easier to tackle by visiting groups, but control of numbers will be the responsibility of Mr Pandey's Ministry. At year end it seems unlikely that a decision to close areas completely will be made in the immediate future. The smaller numbers of groups, and the greater care they took during 1987, seem to have prevented this, although there will undoubtedly be a continuous assessment of the situation, and it seems inevitable that more exclusive use of some areas, and additional expedition expense to support a clean-up programme, are not too many years away.

Expeditions to peaks in Tibet increasingly come through Nepal, and a good workable system exists between the Nepal and CMA officials. Nepalese staff, especially cooks, are also accepted by the CMA, as long as they are listed as full members on the permit.

Finally, Trekking Peaks have been renamed Alpine Peaks, a welcome change which removes the implication that all the peaks on the list could be walked up. Many provide a very considerable challenge and are an excellent low-cost and short-time alternative to the highest peaks.

Józef Nyka adds:

A 13-member Japanese expedition led by Kuniaki Yagihara attacked Annapurna (8091m) via the S face, following the 1970 British route. On 20 December 1987 the summit was reached by Noboru Yamada (his seventh 8000er), Teruo Saegusa, Yasuhira Saito and Toshiyuki Kobayashi. During the descent the last two fell at 7900 and 7300m and lost their lives.