Kangchenjunga 1989

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(*Plate 24*)

The idea of a Second Himalayan Expedition came to our minds after the successful ascent of Mount Everest in spring 1982.

First we had to choose a mountain. Several possible objectives attracted us in the Nepal Himalaya: the Lhotse-Everest traverse, a traverse of the four summits of Kangchenjunga, the S wall of Lhotse, Makalu etc. There are enough mountaineers in the Soviet Union who are able to tackle such serious problems.

In reply to our enquiry, the Nepal Ministry of Tourism informed us that in 1989 the Kangchenjunga massif was available. This reply determined the objective of our expedition.

We started to study the literature thoroughly, in particular reports of previous expeditions to the Kangchenjunga region. Evans's book *Kangchenjunga: the Untrodden Peak*, which has had several Russian editions, was our main source of information. We also studied *Two Kangchenjungas* by P Molotetsky, published in Polish and Bulgarian. Valuable information was gained from the book *Holy Mountain of Sikkim*, and from the reports of the 1984 Japanese expedition. The most recent information on the route and on conditions for work on the face of the mountain was obtained from the Indian mountaineers who tried to climb the main summit in autumn 1988.

The USSR State Sports Committee supported our plan and agreed to finance the expedition. The Organizing Committee of the Second Himalayan Expedition was set up in November 1986. It was headed by A I Kolesov, Deputy Chairman of the USSR State Sports Committee. The systematic preparation of the expedition started from this moment. Candidates were selected from more than 60 of the best mountaineers of the Soviet Union. This was done during winter and spring 1987 at training meets in the mountains.

In spring of the same year we managed to make a reconnaissance trip to the Kangchenjunga area. The reconnaissance group consisted of six men: five prospective participants and coaches of the proposed expedition and also Eugeni Tamm, leader of our expedition 'Everest – 1982'. The group included Eduard Myslovski, its leader, Valentin Ivanov, Serguei Bershov, Serguei Efimov and Valery Khrichthaty. All of them had reached the summit of Everest in 1982. The reconnaissance route started from Taplidjung and went via Yamphodin to Base Camp near Pache's Grave (5300m). On our return to Kathmandu a preliminary agreement was concluded with the mediating agency.

During the summer meet in the Pamir, at the foot of the Peak of Communism (7495m), the main and reserve members of the expedition were

selected. In winter 1988 we trained in Chimbulak near Alma-Ata city in the Tien Shan, gaining experience in making a traverse at lower heights in winter conditions. Here we partly checked the equipment of the expedition: tents, footwear, clothes, oxygen masks etc.

In the summer of 1988 we made a traverse of Peak Pobeda (Victory) (7439m) in the Tien Shan. It began from the Peak of Military Topographers and led to Peak Vazha Pschavela, a distance of about 10km at a height of 7000m. This traverse gave training in interaction tactics between groups of climbers. The final number of mountaineers in the expedition, both main and reserve, was fixed at 30.

In the autumn we visited Kathmandu where the final agreement with the mediating agency was concluded and various problems were resolved with the Nepal Ministries. In the same autumn, during a rest period on the Black Sea coast near Sukhumi, the members of the expedition and their coaches discussed the strategy and tactics of the planned traverse. There were long arguments about the starting-point: should it be Yalung Kang (the W peak) or the S summit? Many participants suggested a climb up from the side of the S summit, with an ascent of the main summit along the SW buttress, directly from the Yalung glacier. But this route is very difficult and makes it impossible to use Sherpas. We therefore finally decided to organize a camp on the plateau at 7200m, from there to establish six further camps in three directions, and then to make a traverse from the S summit. The plan was to set up two camps (4ju and 5ju) on the route to the S summit, two camps (4s and 5s) on the route to the col between the main and central summits and two camps (4ja and 5ja) on the route of the first ascent in 1955. The upper camps were to be placed at heights of 8100–8200m, to give maximum safety and to facilitate the traverse as much as possible.

The expedition started its work in February 1989. The first group flew to Kathmandu on 3 February. About 10 tons of baggage – accompanied by the expedition coach, Sergei Efimov – was taken to Calcutta by an IL-76 transport plane, and the rest of the party flew there on 9 February. Climbers and gear travelled from Calcutta to Biratnagar by buses and lorries. Difficulties arose when we reached the India-Nepal frontier at Djakbani (near Biratnagar). Only the baggage was allowed to cross; the climbers had to travel to Kakarbitta, where they were allowed to enter Nepal and move on to Biratnagar. Here the expedition bought provisions such as rice and vegetables. On buses and lorries the participants, Sherpas and 15 tons of gear were brought to Basantapur where the motorable road ended. Here we joined our film crew and 65 high-altitude porters recruited in Sola Khumbu.

The caravan of porters was organized in Basantapur; there were altogether more than 600 porters to carry the expedition's load. In order to avoid two difficult passes, covered at that time of the season with snow, we did not use the well-known route via Yamphodin. Instead we travelled along the Tamur river, then in the area of Hellok village along the Simbua Khola, and then from Torontan by the traditional route of all previous expeditions up to the Yalung glacier and the site of our Base Camp.

We experienced serious difficulties on the way from Hellok to Torontan.



24. Kangchenjunga massif showing routes and high altitude camps. Summits (L to R): Yalung Kang, main summit, central summit, S summit. (p 24)

There was no path there and we had to cut our way through the bamboo jungle. Some of our porters refused to work under such difficult conditions, but the strong porters hired for work on the glacier came to our help. Ramser became a temporary base for storing the loads. At this time of year the depth of snow was about 50cm. In order to cross the glacier, we set up two transit camps on it; they had big tents, kerosene kitchens and everything needed for the normal work of porters.

Base Camp was officially opened on 16 March, although loads continued to arrive. A study now started of the route from Base Camp to Camp 3. The height of the camps was as follows: Camp 1 – 6150m, Camp 2 – 6650m and Camp 3 on the plateau at about 7200m. Having put up these camps we started to establish intermediate camps. The greatest difficulties we experienced during organization of the camps were encountered in the southern direction. Here strong winds tore the tent. We had to change the tent of Camp 4 at a height of about 7650m and also change the site of the camp.

In the process of putting up Camp 5 several ascents were made. The main summit (8586m) was reached on 9 April at 4pm, by a new route from Camp 5s on the col between the main and central summits. The climbers were V Elagin (36, leader), E Klinezki (28), A Sheinov (31) and V Koroteev (33).

The S summit (8476m) was reached on 15 April at 3pm from Camp 5s. The climbers, who used a new route to the right of the Japanese and Polish routes, were M Turkevich (36), V Pastukh (32), R Khaibullin (28) and S Bershov (42, leader).

The central summit (8482m) was reached on 15 April at 5.30pm, by a new route from Camp 3. The members of this group, who did not use oxygen, were A Bukreev (31), V Khrichthaty (37, leader), V Balyberdin (39) and S Arsentiev (30).

The main summit (8586m) was reached by the normal route from Camp 4ja on 16 April at 5.30pm. The members of the group were L Troshchinenko (43, cameraman), V Suviga (35, without oxygen mask), J Moiseev (35, assistant cameraman, without oxygen mask), K Valiev (36, leader), A Glushkovsky (35, assistant cameraman), Z Khalitov (37, without oxygen mask), G Lunjakov (34, without oxygen mask) and V Dedii (29, without oxygen mask).

Another party repeated the route of S Bershov's group to the S summit, starting from Camp 5s on 17 April at 1.30pm. The members were V Karataev (34), M Mojaev (30), A Pogorelov (31) and E Vinigradsky (42, leader).

After their ascents all the members of the expedition came down to the Tseram area (about 3750m) to have a rest in the forest. Here we discussed the tactics of the intended traverse. As all of us were in good physical shape, we decided to make traverses from opposite directions by two groups, with five men in each.

The part of the traverse between the central and main summits was the most difficult and least known to us. It had been successfully carried out in two hours, but we realized that it was impossible to do the whole traverse quickly. We therefore decided to take two days over it. To provide safety for this undertaking it was necessary to supply Camp 5s between the central and main summits with everything necessary. This had to be done with the help of support parties.

The first support group climbed with oxygen up to Camp 5s. Starting at 9am, they reached the central summit at 11.20. The climbers were V Karataev, V Pastukh (leader) and M Mojaev. They then came down to the saddle where they were joined by S Bogomolov and R Khabibullin, and all five climbers reached the main summit at 2.20pm. After this ascent the group came down to Camp 3 at 8pm for a night's rest.

The traverse was started by the first group headed by S Bershov on 30 April. The members were S Bershov (leader), M Turkevich, A Pogorelov, E Vinogradsky and A Bukreev. Starting from Camp 5ja, this group climbed Yalung Kang (8505m) and returned to Camp 5 for a night's rest.

On the same day the second support group left Camp 4ja, brought oxygen up to Camp 5ja and climbed to the summit of Yalung Kang at 3pm. This group consisted of V Dedy, E Klinezky, S Arsentiev (leader), V Suviga, A Sheinov and V Khrichthaty, the last three without oxygen masks. After the ascent the group returned to Camp 4 at 7pm.

S Bershov's group continued the traverse on 1 May. It left Camp 5 at 8am, was on the main summit at 10, on the central summit at 12.40 and on the S summit at 2.45pm. Coming down from the S summit, this party removed Camps 5ju and 4ju and descended to Camp 3 at 7pm for a night's rest.

The second group selected to do the traverse consisted of V Elagin (leader), V Koroteev, Z Khalitov, G Lunjakov and V Balyberdin, the last three without oxygen masks. They left Camp 5ju at 9am on 1 May and reached the S summit at 12.30. During the rest of the traverse all the mountaineers went with oxygen masks. The two traverse parties met at 2.10pm on the saddle between the S and central summits. The second group was on the central summit at 3.50pm, on the main summit at 5.40pm, and came down to Camp 5ja at 8pm for a night's rest.

On the same day the second support group (with G Lunjakov instead of V Dedy and A Sheinov) left Camp 4ja and reached the main summit at 12. On the top they met the second party making the traverse, and they came down to Camp 5s at 7pm. Next day this group removed Camps 5s and 4s and came down to Camp 3.

The traversing party left Camp 5ja on 2 May, climbed Yalung Kang, and the same day came down to Camp 3.

So on 2 May the traverses to both ends of the Kangchenjunga massif were successfully completed. Only two camps, 4ja and 5ja, had not been removed. The third support group moved on 2 May to Camp 5ja, and the following ascended the main summit: Ang Babu Sherpa (22), S Efimov (45, leader) and N Cherni (51). Coming down they took off Camps 4ja and 5ja, completing the removal of the high-altitude camps.

In order to take off Camps 2 and 3 (Camp 1 had been removed in mid-April), we gathered together all Sherpas able to work at high altitude, climbed up to Camp 3 and, with the help of the Sherpas, carried all the load to Base Camp. In Tseram we set up a base for resting and started to organize the caravan for our return. By 7 May all members of the expedition and the film crew had come down to here. The return route was via Torontan – Yamphodin – Gopetar – Phidim – Ilam – Birtamod. From Gopetar, the load and part of the

expedition were taken by lorries along the road which is now under construction. All of us arrived in Kathmandu in the evening of 18 May.

As the result of the work of the Soviet expedition 24 mountaineers out of 29, three out of five members of the film crew and one Sherpa had made ascents of summits of the Kangchenjunga massif. There were altogether 85 men/ascents on all four summits of Kangchenjunga.