Nepal 1991

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(with contributions from Józef Nyka)

A rumour that Everest was to be closed to climbers from 1994 circulated early in the year. The story, originating from an Indian news source, was officially denied in Kathmandu where the ministry continues to take fees and award multiple permits for the peak.

Besides an increase in the number of expeditions visiting Nepal, two major changes have occurred, both of which will affect expeditions visiting the country.

Major increase in peak fees From March 1992 the Ministry of Tourism has announced a massive increase in peak permit charges. On average the price will double and in the case of Everest there will be a fourfold increase.

1992 Revised Peak Fees

Mountain Group	1–9 Members	Extra Member
Everest	US $10000	US $1200
Other 8000ers	$8000	$800
7501–7999m	$3000	$400
7001–7500m	$2000	$300
6501–7000m	$1500	$200
Below 6501m	$1000	$100

The announcement by the Ministry that the increases are being made 'in consideration of environmental conservation' seems particularly hollow at a time when the same Ministry has a stated aim of increasing access and numbers of trekkers to environmentally sensitive areas. This massive increase in fees makes it increasingly difficult for small, privately financed expeditions to visit important peaks. On the other hand it is likely to increase the growing trend of large commercially run and corporate sponsored expeditions. Of course it may also have the effect of encouraging climbers to attempt smaller peaks or to climb without permits.

Restricted areas opened to trekkers On 6 October 1991 the Ministry of Tourism announced the opening of 50 hitherto restricted areas to trekkers operating through a registered trekking agency. The change has undoubtedly been brought about by pressure from trekking agencies seeking new destinations, along with the need for Nepal to increase its foreign earnings. The new areas have immense potential for tourism as they include Olangchunggola in Tapeljung, Kimathanka in Sankhuwasabha and Lomanthang in Mustang. The restriction to trekkers operating through an agency seems sensible, as most of

these areas lack facilities to sustain large numbers of independent trekkers wishing to use lodges and local produce. Groups or individuals travelling in these areas will need to be self-sufficient. It would also seem appropriate to insist that no use is made of fuelwood and that waste is disposed of correctly. The Ministry of Tourism has also increased the amount of money an individual must convert daily in Nepal from $10 to $20. This obviously does not apply to those working through an agency who have paid in advance for expedition or trekking services.

Trekking Peaks

Having sung their praises for so long I am pleased to see increased interest in the Trekking Peaks. Despite the name, they offer immense climbing potential, are affordable and can be fitted into a relatively short holiday. The reopening of Rolwaling has meant that Ramdung and Parchamo have seen renewed traffic. It is worth noting that a small glacial lake burst from a moraine under Chobutse and removed the small fields and campsite close to the chorten in Beding. One is fearful of the possible consequences of Tsho Rolpo bursting its equally fragile banks. The route over Tesi Lapcha is relatively straightforward and, although exposed to slight rockfall danger, is a fine mountaineering journey.

Rolwaling – Khumbu via Tesi Lapcha The route from Rolwaling is well marked and is easily followed from Na. Those using porters would do well to hire Rolwaling Sherpas. The path in fact follows a trench up the true left bank of the Trakarding glacier, climbing a small shoulder to avoid a section of the hillside that has 'slipped', to gain the summer pasture at Kyidug Kongma (marked on the Schneider map). The route then traverses the rubble covered glacier to the true right bank close to Dragmabug and then follows moraine to below the Drolambau icefall, where there are shelter stones and tent sites. To the right of the centre of the icefall is a rognon which is climbed by easy terraces. A ramp line then leads diagonally right, beneath icecliffs, to a low-angled wall of ice about 13m high, which leads to easy going on the Drolambau glacier. A fixed rope for porters is essential on this step, although the local Sherpas scamper up and down it in Chinese pumps!

Just below the Tesi Lapcha on the Khumbu side, beneath the S face of Tengi Ragi Tau, there is a rock overhang used by locals for a bivouac. This section of the route is exposed to rockfall, as is the first part of the descent route towards Thame. Ideally an early start should be made down the short open couloir before the sun has time to do its work on the slopes above. A campsite closer to the pass, although more exposed, would be safe from rockfall.

Kusum Kangguru Perhaps the best route on a Trekking Peak was climbed by Dick Renshaw and Stephen Venables who found a difficult way up the unclimbed S face during November.

Main Peaks

Only two mountains were climbed during the 1990–91 winter: Ama Dablam and Himalchuli. Meanwhile, during the 1991 pre-monsoon season, Everest remained a 'big earner', with eight expeditions on the Nepalese side and eight climbers reaching the summit from the South Col.

Everest SW face (8848m) A Korean team found the face almost devoid of snow cover, making the climbing very difficult. After a sustained effort they reached a high point of 8350m.

Everest race Liz Hawley, doyen of informed mountain watchers in Kathmandu, confirmed that a Soviet (or is it now Unified) team is planning a 'race' up Everest. Vladimir Balyberdin, who took part in the successful Everest SW face and Kangchenjunga Traverse expeditions, has a permit to attempt Everest via Lhotse's W face. It would in effect be an attempt on a modified Everest Horseshoe since the route would gain the Nuptse–Lhotse ridge, traverse the summit to the South Col, continue to Everest and descend the W ridge to Lho La. It seems that shortage of funds resulted in a change of plan from the six-man attempt originally proposed. Instead, to ensure funding, various international climbing stars were invited to join in, for a fee. In the end, of course, it may all come to nought, but this 'last great problem' (haven't I heard that somewhere before?) continues to be the talk of the town.

Kangchenjunga (8586m) A Yugoslav/Polish expedition met with both triumph and disaster. The Original Route via the Great Shelf was climbed by Viki Groselj and Stipe Bozic on 1 May. On the same day Uros Rupar made a solo ascent of the Polish Route from the Great Shelf to the Central Summit. A few days later Joze Rozman and Marija Frantar died during an attempt on the main summit.

Kangchenjunga South (*c*8500m) This was climbed alpine-style via a new route by Slovenian climbers Andrej Štremfelj and Marko Prezelj. Their route follows the 3000m SW pillar forming the frontier between Sikkim and Nepal and was extremely difficult – one of the finest achievements of the year and winner of the 'Piolet d'Or'.

Makalu W face (8463m) This saw yet another attempt, this time by an Italian team led by Casimiro Ferrari, on a line between the Kukuczka/Kurtyka/MacIntyre 1981 attempt and the Kukuczka line. In the end the attempt failed at 7300m. The Swiss pair Erhard Loretan and Jean Troillet also tried a line on the face, reaching a high point of 7800m. Later they reached the summit via the West Pillar (French route), along with the Basque Manu Badiola and the Catalan Carles Valles. Badiola fell during the descent and died.

Manaslu (8163m) A Ukrainian expedition completed the first traverse of the mountain in an eight-day, alpine-style push. Their climb followed the S ridge to the summit and descended the standard, NE face route.

Dhaulagiri I W face (8167m) In more normal mode a team of eleven Soviet climbers succeeded on a new route up the W face. Ten members made the summit after a five-week climb, six camps and 2100m of continuous rope. A day after the Soviet success a lone Danish climber, Sporen Smidt, reached the summit via the normal route.

Cho Oyu (8201m) A commercial expedition, organised by Renato Moro from Italy, succeeded on the normal route in September. One of those who were successful was Wanda Rutkiewicz, climbing her seventh 8000er.

Cho Oyu A Japanese Veterans' expedition, comprising 15 members mostly over 50 years of age, were successful via the normal route. Tomiyasu Ishikawa (54), Kanichi Nezu (51), Mrs Tamae Watanabe (52), Kaneshige Ikeda (52) and two Sherpas reached the summit. In view of their advancing years they employed Sherpas and some of them used supplementary oxygen.

Annapurna (8091m) Disaster struck the South Korean Incheon Alpine Federation expedition when six people died in an avalanche, from near the Sickle at *c*7500m. Two Sherpas escaped. Mountaineers from Spain, Japan and the USA joined Korean teams for the rescue. A memorial service was held on 21 September at the foot of the mountain and the Koreans expressed their gratitude to the foreign groups for their help and friendship.

Annapurna S face – British Route Several expeditions attempted this successfully, 13 climbers reaching the summit.

West Nepal

There has been increased activity in rarely visited West Nepal. **Api (7132m)** received its fifth ascent by a joint South Korean/Sherpa team and the attractive summit of **Kanjeralwa (6612m)** received its second ascent when a Franco/Spanish team traversed the mountain, climbing the NW ridge and descending the S ridge.

Chamlang S ridge (7319m) A British expedition made the first ascent of a variation on this route.

Tripura Hiunchuli (6553m) Doug Scott, Nigel Porter and Sharavati Prabhu climbed a difficult route up the S Buttress.

The policy of issuing several permits for the same route on a mountain continues to cause some concern, although it must be said that only certain mountains seem to be really affected: Everest, Ama Dablam and Pumori being particular favourites. At the end of the day sensible practice and cooperation will hopefully win through to the benefit of mountaineers and Nepal alike.