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Nepal 2009-10

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2009

The spring season in Nepal and on its northern border was again influenced by restrictions and uncertainty on the Tibetan side of the Himalaya. March 10th was the 50th anniversary of the 1959 Tibetan uprising, followed by the flight of the Dalai Lama, and the Chinese government severely restricted access for both climbers and tourists, but subsequently, in April, restrictions were eased and a number of expeditions were able to get permits just in time for the season.

Perhaps the most significant climb of the season was by Denis Urubko and Boris Dedesko from Kazakhstan, who made the second ever ascent of the avalanche prone 2400m SE face of **Cho Oyu**, by a new route, over five days. Their climb took a very direct line well to the left of the 1978 Austrian route on the same face, and included some very steep rock at over 6000m, which was partially climbed with aid but also with free sections at up to American 5.10. They graded the route F6b A2/3 M6. They took an additional four days to descend by the same route. Both climbers lost around 10kg of body weight. Denis Urubko became the eighth person to climb all fourteen 8000m peaks without oxygen, and he has done several of them by non-standard and often difficult routes.

The Americans Joe Puryear and David Gottlieb made the first ascent of **Jobo Rinjang** (6778m) south of the Nangpa La by its S face, largely on ice up to 75 degrees, with one bivouac on the ascent. They tried to traverse west to the highest peak in this group (6895m, provisionally named Lunag I, and also unclimbed) but ran into very bad snow conditions on the ridge crest and eventually bivvied again on the summit of Jobo Rinjang before descending the way they had come up with a long series of abseils from threads in the ice.

Earlier in the year, in early January, Inez Papert and Cory Richards climbed a new line on the N face of **Kwangde Shar** (6091m) in Solu Khumbu over four days. This is no less than the seventh line on the continuous N face of Kwangde Lho and Kwangde Shar, overlooking Namche Bazaar, which was first climbed by David Breashears and Jeff Lowe in 1982. It shares some ground with a 1996 French route. It was graded a mere TD (!) but also WI5 M8.

In far NE Nepal the Spanish climber Salvador Garcia-Atance led a



179. The route on the south-east face of Cho Oyu taken by Denis Urubko and Boris Dedesko, with bivouacs marked. *(Denis Urubko)*

party on what may have been the first ascent of **Dome Kang** (7264m and a subsidiary summit of **Jongsang Peak**, 7483m).They climbed the SE face of the Jongsang massif to the extensive summit plateau with 1500m of fixed rope, in what appears to have been largely a repeat of a Slovenian route climbed alpine style in 2001.

Joseph 'Dodo' Kopold from Slovakia made an impressive solo ascent of the east face of **Annapurna South** (7219m) by its central pillar, which had been attempted at least twice before. His climb involved very steep water ice, difficult rock and insecure snow and he graded it V+, WI6, M5. He reached the north summit of the peak, traversed to the main summit, and descended by a route to the south and east, close to the original Japanese ascent route of 1964, largely in the dark, during which he fell 5 metres into a crevasse. His round trip took only 40 hours from the Annapurna Lodge in the Sanctuary.

Kopold, with Martin Minarik and Elizabeth Revol, had originally intended an alpine style ascent of the 1970 British route on the S face of Annapurna I, but they were defeated by bad weather. Minarik and Revol then climbed the E ridge of **Annapurna** from the Sanctuary to the 8026m East Summit. Their ascent route involved dangerous snow conditions, so they decided to descend the north side of the range toward Manang, from the 7100m col between Roc Noir and Tarke Kang. However they became separated. Revol reached Manang village safely but Minarik, who was going very slowly and apparently suffering from oedema, disappeared. He



180. Dodo Kopold's route line on Annapurna South, seen from the Sanctuary. (*Dodo Kopold*)

had previously climbed seven 8000m summits, which shows yet again that no one is immune to the effects of very high altitude.

On **Everest** a Korean team led by Park Sung-Yeok climbed the SW face by a new line, to the left of that taken by a Russian party in 1982, and joining the W ridge high up. Four climbers reached the summit using large amounts of both fixed rope and oxygen. The upper part of the new line reportedly included rock climbing of 5.9 standard at 8100m. The same team had tried the route unsuccessfully in 2007.

Total numbers on Everest were down a bit from recent years, with a mere 457 successful ascents, mostly via the South Col. Conditions were unusually dry and some commercial expeditions used a few bolts for security on the Yellow Band – apparently a first for the Nepalese side, though at least one Russian expedition used lots on the north side in 2004. As usual several fatalities occurred, some of them clearly due to the physical inadequacy of certain paying customers. One death was attributed to 'chronic heart disease'.

Dhaulagiri had more ascents than usual, with 30 people reaching the summit in eight expeditions, all on the original NE ridge route. 22 people succeeded on the original route on **Kangchenjunga** and there were also successful ascents of Annapurna, Makalu and Lhotse beside large numbers on both Cho Oyu and Manaslu.

Tragically, in the post monsoon season, the outstanding Slovenian climber Tomas Humar died while attempting a solo ascent of the S face



181. The line on Pasang Lhamu Chuli (Jasamba) taken by the Anthamatten brothers and Michael Lergen-Dangen in autumn 2009, with bivouacs marked. (*Simon Anthamatten*)

of **Langtang Lirung** (7234m). He apparently fell at around 6300m on the south side of the SW ridge, possibly broke some bones, was unable to descend and froze to death. His body was recovered by helicopter. Humar had an impressive record of ascents on Himalayan faces, several of them solo, most notably the S face of Dhaulagiri in 1999.

In the Kangchenjunga range, also in the post monsoon season, Nick Bullock and Andy Houseman climbed the N face of **Chang Himal / Wedge Peak** (6802m, and now officially named **Ramtang Chang**). They took three bivouacs on the ascent of the steep mixed face, and a fourth while descending by the same route. They graded it ED+, M6. (*See p45*)

In Solu Khumbu Simon and Samuel Anthamatten and Michael Lergen-Dangen made an alpine style ascent of the SSE face of **Pasang Lhamu Chuli** (7351m, also known as **Jasamba**) near the Nangpa La, another difficult mixed route. They reached the summit on 29 October after three bivouacs. This is the third route on this side of this peak, and is a considerably more direct way to the summit than the others. They rated it VI, M5 with 90° sections.

The Japanese climbers Fumitaka Ichimura and Genki Narumi made an impressive traverse of **Taboche** (6501m), ascending by a new route on the north face, to the right of the pillar climbed by Mick Fowler and Pat Littlejohn in 1995, then descending by the south and east faces to Pheriche. They climbed in late November and encountered much steep ice on the face, and poor snow conditions at the top; the latter prevented them reaching the

actual summit. One abseil on the descent was from a distinctly improvised deadman – 'a buried stuff bag filled with snow, which moved slightly as I descended'.

Polish climbers Wojtek Kozub, Marcel Michalek and Krzystof Starek climbed the 1400m N face of **Melanphulan** (6573m), in the Nare valley, which is just south of Ama Dablam and the Mingbo La, over five days in October. This was a very steep ice face, up to 85°, and took them four days, but they were forced to descend from the corniced ridge just below the summit. As they had placed Abalakov threads at the belays on the way up their descent was fast and efficient.

Joe Simpson climbed a new route on the S ridge of **Mera Peak** (6470m, and a very popular trekking peak by its ordinary route) solo in October. He estimated its standard to be similar to the Route Major, and named it 'In Memoriam' after two of his former climbing mates.

Three Italian climbers, Enrico Bonino, Nicolas Meli and Francesco Cantu, made difficult new routes on **Kyajo Ri** (6186m) and two lower peaks in the area south of Gokyo late in the post monsoon season. They graded their 800-meter route on Kyajo Ri M6+ WI4+ 6b [5.10d] A2, 85°, which may set a new record for grading complexity.

In Manang two parties attempted the beautiful pyramid of **Nemjung** (7139m) which had only had one previous ascent, by its E ridge in 1983. A Japanese group led by Osamu Tanabe climbed the WNW face on steep snow and ice in two days, descending by the same route. (Tanabe, sadly, was killed in an avalanche on Dhaulagiri I in 2010).

The French climbers Christian Trommsdorff and Yannick Graziani attempted a new route on the S face. They spent six days on 'a route of around 2400m, 45 pitches, mostly ice/mixed, a few pitches of just rock, many very delicate snow ridges, walls, flutes to climb or traverse, fantastic gullies, many vertical sections, a very committing route'. Unfortunately they had to retreat from around 7000m after Trommsdorff was hit on the helmet by a large chunk of ice.

2010

In June 2010 the China Tibet Mountaineering Association (CTMA) issued a new regulation limiting the age of Everest climbers to 18 to 60. This follows ascents by the 13-year-old American, Jordan Romero, with his father and others in May 2010, and by a 16-year-old Nepali who suffered significant frostbite. Nepal currently has a minimum age of 16 and no maximum. The upper age record is currently 76 but an 80-year-old former Nepali foreign minister is said to be planning a challenge. Further crazy projects will doubtless follow.

A British swimmer, wearing only a standard Speedo, swam one kilometre in 2°C water across Pumori Lake, at 5300m and close to the Everest Base Camp, in order to highlight the dangers of global warming. One hopes there was a good fire waiting for him in his trekking lodge.

Apa Sherpa has now reached the summit of Everest 20 times.



182. The 2009 Japanese line on the WNW face of Nemjung (7139m). (*Nobosuke Ohki*)

A South Korean woman, Oh Eun-sun, reached the summit of Annapurna in April and claims to be the first woman to ascend all fourteen 8000m peaks. She is only 5'1" in height, which possibly sets yet another record. However there is some doubt about her ascent of Kangchenjunga in 2009, as her climbing speed was remarkably fast and her photos were inconclusive. (Have we heard this story before?) Of the three Sherpas accompanying her (!) one said they made it, one said they didn't, and the third has not given an interview.

The Spanish Basque Edurne Pasaban completed her 14 peaks barely a month later, apparently without controversy.

In the spring Denis Urubko climbed Lhotse from the South Col solo, by a new variant, climbing largely on rock and joining the standard Lhotse Couloir route at 8300m just below its top. He took only five hours from the South Col to the summit.

On **Makalu** a Ukrainian expedition made a route starting on the 1975 Slovenian route on the SW face then ascending new ground, largely on steep slabby rock, to join the 1971 *French Route* on the West Pillar at 7500m, which they then followed to the summit. They used 3000m of fixed rope but no oxygen or climbing Sherpas. Three of the ten climbers reached the summit.

Three Russian climbers made a new and very steep mixed route on the 1400m N face of **Cholatse** (6440m) in Solu Khumbu in March 2010. Their

route is largely independent of the 1995 French route on this face, but joins it near the top and continues to the W ridge.

Early in the spring of 2010 David Gottlieb and Joe Puryear made the first ascent of **Takargo** (6771m and also known as **Dragkar-Go**) in the Rolwaling valley by its E face, reaching the summit on 12 March after three bivouacs. This was apparently the first ascent of this conspicuous and attractive peak just west of the Tesi Lapcha. Sadly Joe Puryear was killed in October 2010 on Labuche Kang in southern Tibet.

Also in the Rolwaling area, four French climbers made a difficult mixed route on the SE face of **Lunag I** at a standard of IV/V F5. After two bivouacs they reached the summit ridge at about 6830m. They did not continue to the 6985m summit, which is thus still unclimbed, but bivouacked a third time and descended the next day with 22 abseils.

A Japanese party climbed the remote peak of **Kojichula Chuli** (6489m) in the Mugu Karnali area of far west Nepal. They climbed the upper part of its east face that appears to be just in Tibet. Three previous parties had failed on this mountain.

In the 2010 post-monsoon season the Italian climber Walter Nones was killed in a fall while attempting a new line on the SW face of Cho Oyu with two companions. He was, as they say, a very experienced mountaineer.

Also in the autumn season Americans Joel Kauffman and Jarad Vilhauer climbed a very difficult new line on the SW face of **Lobuje East** (6119m) in the Khumbu Himal. They reached the summit after 27 hours on the face and descended by the standard SE ridge route on this trekking peak. They graded it 'VI WI 5+ AI 4 M7 85°', which again demands a more advanced degree in mountaineering studies than your scribe possesses.

The Everest scene continues unabated. One development is the increasing use of helicopters to ferry well-heeled clients directly from Kathmandu to various points in Solu Khumbu so they don't have to do too much walking, or suffer delays at the Lukla airport. Russell Brice, who knows more about the commercial Everest business than most, now puts his clients in the Kathmandu Hyatt, which is out on the edge of town, away from all the temples, etc, as it is the only hotel with its own helipad.

Another development is the appearance of increasing numbers of mainland Chinese climbers in Nepal, perhaps a sign of the rapidly growing middle class there. One Chinese team put eight climbers plus eight Sherpas on the summit of Dhaulagiri I in May, but lost three members on the descent, while several others suffered frostbite.

* * *

Andy Parkin endured ferocious winter weather, frostnip and three sleepless nights in January 2011 to accomplish what has been recorded as the first ascent, solo, of the north face of **Dingjung Ri** (6249m). Recounting what would also be the first calendar winter ascent of the mountain, Parkin said it was one of the hardest trips he could remember. 'The climb vindicates all I have been trying to do with my trips and shows what will be the future trend – winter climbing on unclimbed peaks or faces; hard climbing in wild places at a time of year when there are no people around.'

Technically in the Rolwaling Himal, Dingjung Ri is situated west of a point midway up the Nangpa valley (Bhote Kosi), which runs south from the Nangpa La to Thame. It was first climbed, from the west, by Peter Boultbee and Dennis Davis during Alf Gregory's productive 1955 Merseyside Himalayan expedition. This three-man team was ostensibly reconnoitring Gaurishankar but climbed five or six other summits, including Parcharmo, Ramdung and Pimu.

Parkin set up base camp on pastures above the Nangpa valley. After one acclimatisation outing, he returned to his tent to find clothing had been stolen. That night he was attacked: rocks, some of them as large as half a kilogramme, were thrown through his tent. He scared off the assailant and later moved down to the house of a yak herder, Phu Tensing, where he had no further problems.

It was Phu Tensing who pointed out to Parkin the mountain he knew as Dingjung Ri, a peak indicated on the Schneider map as point 6263m. Later an older Sherpa said the peak was called Rima Mayo, which Parkin says translates as 'left-hand mountain'. It was this peak he climbed. (Heights and names are notoriously inconsistent and confusing on maps of Nepal's mountains.)

A heavy fall of snow at the end of December made moving around difficult, but once Parkin accessed the north face, conditions improved. 'The climb was steeper than the Grandes Jorasses north wall – 85° in places – with this line of ice, névé and snow threading up and left to curve back to the summit,' Parkin said. After two extremely cold and windy bivouacs, he was able to travel light to the summit – an amazing dollop of névé on pure ice – that he reached on 17 January.

He abseiled through the night with frostnipped fingers to his lower bivouac site, where he had left a gas cylinder. Next day he reached the base of the mountain after a total of three and a half chilly days on the face. 'Zips froze and broke on my boots, all systems were collapsing and I was so tired that staggering back to ABC I would rest the weight of the sac on a boulder and promptly doze off, saved from freezing by my down suit.

'The day after I carried on down, carrying all the gear – 25/30 kilos – bent double against the gusting wind, to make BC in time for the porters who were due. My yak herder friends sheltered me and fed me *dhal bhat*; all the people from the village of Thame Tenge (upper Thame I suppose) were really good to me.' *SG*

Correction: *The photo on p 284 of the 2009 Alpine Journal was unfortunately miscaptioned. It should read 'High risk climbing under séracs high on the Japanese Route on the north-east face of Teng Kangpoche (Yasushi Okada)'*