

DICK ISHERWOOD

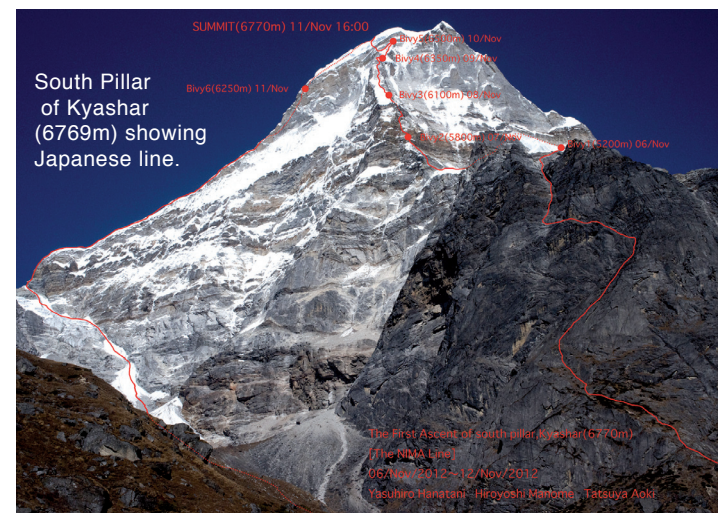
Nepal 2012

Once again, **Mount Everest** was distinctly crowded in the spring season of 2012. Photos of long queues, on the Lhotse Face in particular, made it into the mainstream media, not to mention the frontispiece of the 2012 *AJ*. Factors contributing to the acute crowding near the summit on the standard Nepal route included there being virtually only two good weather days in May, and also because both permit fees and hassle levels have risen on the Tibetan side. Just under 500 people reached the summit, again all in the spring, and about two thirds of these climbed the standard route from Nepal. There were at least eight deaths. Records established included the first Latvian woman and the oldest woman ever – a 73 year old from Japan. She had already summited Everest when she was 63 and plans to return at 83. A Mexican climber with one Sherpa made the summit in 27 hours in a continuous push from basecamp, despite having to wait for some crowds, and for the removal of a dead Spaniard. This is a lot slower than the record time of around 8 hours, but perhaps not bad for a non-Sherpa. There were the usual stories of people who had apparently never worn crampons before, and at least one person exhausted her oxygen ration while still low down in the Western Cwm. One large party had to wait three hours at the foot of the Hillary Step, at around 8760m, for descending groups to get off it. Did you think the Alps got crowded?

The effective closing of Tibet to climbers in the autumn, related to Chinese leadership changes, prevented commercial expeditions to Cho Oyu, and as a result no less than 47 expeditions went to **Manaslu**, more than twice as many as in 2011. One reporter counted 231 people waiting for good weather in basecamp in early September. This perhaps increased the toll from a spectacular avalanche on 23 September which buried no less than 25 tents at camp III (6800m), killed 11 people and injured as many more¹. However, the fatal avalanche path was the same as that of an earlier one before the teams arrived, and occurred after much new snow had accumulated. If the affected teams had been alert to this, they might have placed their tents 200m to the right and been in a rather safer location.

On the north face of **Annapurna I**, two members of an Uzbekistan expedition were fatally buried on the afternoon of 7 October by an ice avalanche in the area of the Dutch Rib. They were completely buried in an ice cave, making it impossible to retrieve their bodies.

In the spring, a Scandinavian expedition attempted the apparently unclimbed **Pang Puche** (approximately 6620m) in the upper Buri Gandaki, north-east of Manaslu. They abandoned their climb after two members



were seriously injured in an avalanche.

In November, Yasuhiro Hanatani, Tatsuya Aoki and Hiroyoshi Manome made the first ascent of the highly sought-after South Pillar of **Kyashar** (6769m), also known as Peak 43, close to Mera Peak in Sola Khumbu. The Japanese team called the 2000m route *Nima Line* (ED+, 5.10a M5). Nima is Nepali for sun, and the name celebrates the unusually good weather they encountered. The trio was awarded a Piolet d'Or for this climb. Since 2001, eight teams had attempted this pillar, including Andy Houseman on two occasions.

In the post monsoon season, Nick Bullock and Andy Houseman attempted the north face of **Chamlang** (7319m) in the upper Hongu valley between Everest and Makalu. High winds prevented them from getting far on the face but they made what may have been the first ascent of **Hunku** (6119m), nearby on the west side of the Hongu valley. Another British party, Rob Greenwood and Jack Geldard, who shared a base camp with Bullock and Houseman, attempted a couloir on the north face of **Peak 41** (6623m) close by, but were forced to retreat from around 6000m in bad weather and on very poor rock.

In the Kangchenjunga area, again in the post monsoon season, Britons Gavin Pike, James Clapham and Dave Searle attempted the unclimbed north pillar of **Talung Peak** (7349m) from the Yalung glacier. They acclimatized up to 6400m on the original south-west face route but subsequently conditions on their chosen route were very poor, with very high winds, and they were unable to make significant progress.

In autumn, Julian Freeman-Attwood continued his explorations in the far north-west of Nepal. With Nick Colton, Ed Douglas and Phil Bartlett he made a recce into an unvisited valley at the confluence of the Changla and Gorakh Himal. No safe route was found on the main peak, **Lang-tachen** (6300m), hitherto unseen at the valley head, but a thorough recce of this Tibet frontier area was undertaken².

1. See report 'Critical Factors for Himalayan Avalanches' on page 225.

2. See the report 'Nepal's Wild West' by Julian Freeman-Attwood on page 107.