
IAN WALL

Nepal

Himalayan weather is created by prevailing winds that roll in from the Bay of Bengal and winter winds from Central Asia. A sudden change in conditions in those regions will always have a huge impact on the environment, communities and tourism in Nepal and especially if those winds from the Bay of Bengal are held by the high Himalaya.

Cyclone Hudhud, which struck Nepal in October 2014 originated from a low-pressure system that formed under the influence of an upper-air cyclonic circulation in the Andaman Sea. Shortly before it made landfall in Andhra Pradesh, it reached its maximum speed of 115mph before moving further inland to Nepal and Uttar Pradesh, pushing the fading monsoon back into Nepal. Unlike most of these storms, which dissipate quickly over land, Hudhud reached as far north as the Himalaya with fatal consequences. It was a harbinger of things to come.

Over the last few years the predictable four-season weather pattern has changed, the edges of these seasons becoming blurred. Unusual weather is now increasingly common out of season. Situations like Hudhud are becoming more likely, associated with global warming. The monsoon brings less rain but more intensively, threatening worse flooding.

One such event happened in June 2021 when the Helambu region was affected by an early spell of monsoon weather with storms and flash flooding that inflicted major damage to the long-awaited Melamchi water supply into Kathmandu. The project was luckily only somewhat damaged and repairs were swiftly completed. The first supply of water reached the reservoirs on the outskirts of the Kathmandu valley in April 2022. However, in the last days of June 2022 the authorities have expressed concern that there are insufficient mechanisms to restrict the large flow of water and that there is a risk of flooding.

The autumn season 2021 also saw bad weather and unusual snowfall in the mountains while the winter period produced some extremely low temperatures. Spring 2022 provided a good and stable weather pattern but once again May saw regular storms in the middle-hill regions and flooding in Kathmandu and other low lying regions attributed to early pre-monsoon weather patterns.

Unsustainable Development in Nepal's Mid Hills

There is an increasing trend of erecting 'viewing towers' on established natural viewpoints. These are, in my opinion, destroying the natural beauty of those locations in the name of tourism. Kathmandu now has its own



The latest 'development' craze in Nepal is for hill-top towers, which critics say is disfiguring the country's natural landscapes.



Road building has accelerated in recent years in Nepal, where the JCB franchise was briefly the busiest in South Asia. But projects are often started without proper engineering or environmental impact assessments disrupting water supplies and causing landslides.

new viewing platform. Although the skeleton structure has only just been completed it has caused a public outcry for the inappropriate use of land originally acquired by public donation at an estimated cost of seven billion rupees, a government priority that seems misplaced for a country like Nepal. The federal government has allocated money to build similar structures across the country, with the former prime minister K P Oli allocating an estimated Rs1.5bn to construct an 18-storey tower in his constituency of Damak, Jhapa, which will soon be completed.

Nepal has always regarded itself as the premier adventure tourism destination but in the light of global competition does Nepal still deserve that accolade? Visitors and trekkers expect to see wildlife, traditional architecture and a pristine environment but these qualities must be managed to meet the expectations of local stakeholders. Without access to modern facilities more and more people will migrate to Kathmandu and large cities leaving their villages to fall into ruin.

One significant problem is road construction. Without doing the appropriate technical work, building roads in the mid hills leads only to environmental disaster. Sadly, there are people in high places that see road development as providing financial perks and enhanced political standing. As a result of poor

environmental impact studies, the first monsoon often results in landslips, rendering the road impassable and with no funds left for maintenance. Tourist appeal has also been dented and the damage to watercourses is well documented. However, there are short-term benefits for local communities as many find temporary employment in road construction, including people formerly involved in the trekking industry seeking alternative income during lockdowns.

New road construction in Solu Khumbu is one such high-profile project. The road into Salleri and Phaplu has been several years old but more recently it has been pushed closer to Lukla. This latest section, from Salleri to Lukla, will be 104km long. At present the road is near Kharikhola village and the completion date to Lukla is intended to be December 2022. The road into Jomsom will eventually become more vehicle-friendly, linking the China- Mustang road to the central regions of Nepal and beyond. At the moment the surface is graded stone but the road from Kagbeni to Muktinath is already black-topped.

Today, pressure on the principles of sustainable tourism principles is extreme and without a planned approach and monitored development, Nepal is in grave danger of shooting itself in the foot. The loss of trekking trails to road development, high permit costs, the migration of wildlife and misplaced development strategies along with all the associated light, noise and air pollution could result in trekkers and other visitors looking at alternative locations and destinations. There is also the possibility of different forms of tourism that are less environmentally aware than trekking, like off-road vehicles.

Helicopter Boom

Nepal has faced challenges in the past to attract 'top-end tourists', looking enviously at Bhutan, but now that it is happening, some communities are regretting the fact. Helicopters are a popular way for the wealthy to get around. Helicopter sales to Nepal have consequently boomed with more than 20 new machines being delivered over recent years to the airlines of some of Nepal's top agencies: Shree Airlines, Simrik Air, Fishtail Air, Air Dynasty, Heli Everest, Mountain Helicopters, Altitude Air and Manang Air. Airbus has reported they expect to hand more than 30 helicopters by 2025. Khumbu is the busiest destination in Nepal for helicopter tours. Local residents now complain these flights create unbearable noise pollution in an otherwise quiet and sensitive environment. While there are undoubtedly advantages in having helicopter services, for rescue and medical emergencies, rubbish collection and disposal, the overuse of helicopters is creating ever-greater problems and pressures.

Autumn 2021

There was a reminder early in the season that honesty and transparency are critical if ascents are to be taken at face value. The first headlines of the autumn concentrated on **Manaslu** when in October Jackson Groves published images taken by his drone that clearly showed where the lines of rope fixed by commercial expeditions really end: way below the summit.



Drone footage from Manaslu has lifted the lid on commercial expeditions not fixing ropes to the peak's summit, bringing into question many claimed ascents.

In the background, Mingma G Sherpa can be seen clearly leading his team to the true summit. Groves' images prompted statistician Eberhard Jurgalski and his team at *8000ers.com* to start looking closely at claims to have climbed Manaslu and in doing so reopened the enormous can of worms of whether those who have claimed all 14 8,000m peaks really have been to their true summits. When Jurgalski was done, he pronounced that just three on the list of around 36 had actually been to the top of all the peaks: Ed Viesturs, Veikka Gustafsson and Nims Purja, although not on his Project Possible round, going back later to tag Manaslu. The question is, does it really matter? Reinhold Messner, Jerzy Kukuczka and Erhard Loretan might be off Jurgalski's list but most mountaineers who understand the sport won't be discounting them.

Tom Livingstone and Matt Glenn succeeded in climbing the north pillar of **Teng Kangpoche** (6500m) over a seven-day period in October 2021. They called their route *Massive Attack*. Livingstone reported hard mixed climbing, difficult aid sections and a long exposed snow ridge to the summit. The climbers used some equipment cached by a previous abortive attempt by an American team, which prompted controversy. See this edition, pp16-31.

In mid October, Slovenian alpinists Luka Stražar, Nejc Marčič, Marko Prezelj, and Matija Volontar visited Rolwaling, their main focus being **Chobutse** (6686m). The mountain was first climbed in 1972 by a German team via the north-east ridge and more recently, in 2015, Mingma Gyalje Sherpa soloed the west face, but the north-west face is a real step up. The Slovenians split into two teams and on 28 October Marčič and Stražar started up Chobutse's north-west face. They faced steep, exposed climbing in the central part and



The line of *Massive Attack* on the north pillar of Teng Kangpoche.



The line of the Slovenian route climbed in October 2021 on Chabutse (6686m).

despite unfavourable terrain they found two really good bivy spots before topping on 30 October. The climb was accompanied with low temperatures and strong winds, creating frequent spindrifts. To avoid confusion, the pair visited both the central and east summit before rappelling and descending the southern side of the mountain to reach base camp. Prezelj and Volontar tried a line up the mountain's south face but were forced to turn around because of the high winds.

An eight-person French team from the Groupe Excellence d'Alpinisme National led by the well-known veteran Stéphane Benoist and comprising Thomas Arfi, Louis Pachoud, Gabriel Miloche, Pierrick Fine, Pauline Champon, Anouk Felix-Faure and Pierrick Giffard acclimatised with an ascent of **Cholatse** (6440m) before making the first ascent of the north-east ridge of **Nare Ri Shar** (6005m), a satellite peak of Kangtega, (700m, D), which they named *Sugar Ridge*, presumably a comment on the snowy terrain that was broken up with the occasional rock section.

Fully acclimatised, the group split into two. Thomas Arfi, Louis Pachoud, and Gabriel Miloche went for **Mingbo Eiger** (6070m), a satellite peak of Kangtega south of Ama Dablam. Having spent two days at the base of the peak's west face checking conditions, on 26 October they climbed the couloir on the left side of the face. A little after 5pm, they reported from their bivouac site that all was well. Sadly, that was the last anyone heard from them. The French Federation of Mountain Clubs made every effort to locate the three and helicopter pilot Claudio Mittner spotted tracks on the summit ridge suggesting they turned around at 5,900m. An avalanche fracture line was spotted above and it's assumed the trio was swept away.

While this trio were on Mingbo Eiger, the rest of the group – Fine, Champon,



The route *Brothers in Arms* on Cholatse (6440m), climbed by a French team over five days in October.

Giffard, Felix-Faure and Benoist — started up a new route on the north face of **Cholatse**, facing ‘six days of bitter cold and verticality’. On their last day up, 29 October, they learned the fate of their compatriots. They subsequently called their route *Brothers in Arms* (1600m, ED, VI, M5+, WI5).

Earlier in October, another French team featuring Charles Dubouloz and Benjamin Védrines climbed an impressive new route up the north face of **Chamlang** (7319m). The peak was most recently in the limelight thanks to the new route on its north-west face climbed in 2019, the work of Marek Holeček and Zdeněk Hák. That year, Védrines attempted the mountain’s north-east couloir with Nicolas Jean, reaching a fore-summit at 7,240m before descending. In the autumn of 2021, Védrines and Dubouloz reached base camp with Damien Tomasi, Fanny Tomasi-Schmutz, Symon Welfringer and Aurelien Vaissière who planned and subsequently failed to climb the mountain’s north pillar. The team acclimatised on **Mera Peak** (6476m) before Védrines and Dubouloz set off, early on 9 October, climbing fast up steep and difficult terrain. They needed just two bivouacs to reach the summit and one more on the way down the west ridge, reaching base camp again on 12 October. *À l’Ombre du Mensonge* (1600m, ED, M5+, 90°) was, Védreines said, ‘the most demanding climb I’ve ever done, both for the nights under spindrift and for the pitches we had to climb. I am very happy to have succeeded with Charles, in this ambitious challenge for both of us. I return having learned from the experience and happy, happy to have intensely enjoyed the Himalayan mountains.’ The route name, which translates as ‘shadow of a lie’, refers to the claims made earlier in 2021 regarding summits on Manaslu.



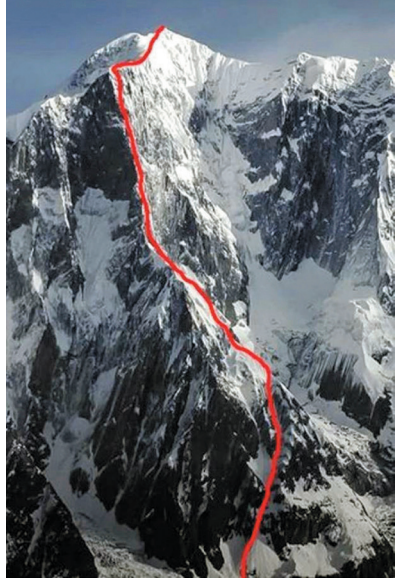
Another impressive new route from the French on Chamlang (7319m), *À l'Ombre du Mensonge*, a north face direct with just two bivouacs on ground with vertical ice. (Charles Dubouloz)

In October, the Spanish Mountaineering Team (EEA), under the leadership of its director Mikel Zabalza, arrived at the south face of **Dorje Lhakpa** (6966m). Other members of the team included Javier Guzmán, Rubén San Martín, Mikel Inoriza, Ander Zabalza and Iker Madoz. The team spent a few days acclimatising and looking at the west ridge as a possible descent route. They then climbed a fore-summit of **Urkimang** (6197m) with two bivouacs. Bad weather then stopped them for a week but a brief weather window opened before a forecast of strong winds. Mikel Zabalza, Madoz and Inoriza headed for the south face while the others looked at the south-west face, both teams sharing a common approach to 5,800m. The route up the glacier was tortuous and they needed a second camp at 5,700m before accessing their routes. The south-west face team left at midnight but abandoned their attempt in the face of heavy snow and bitter cold. The south face team continued to a camp at 6,100m and from there they reached the summit on 25 October at 4pm. It was the first ascent of the south face. Difficulties were snow and ice around 55° to 65°.

The ascent of the season and perhaps of the last decade was the success of the Ukrainian team on **Annapurna III** (7555m) in October-November 2021. The team consisted of Nikita Balabanov, Mikhail Fomin and Viacheslav Polezhaiko. They achieved what many regard as one of the last great goals of alpinism in the Nepal Himalaya, reaching the summit via the inspiring and notorious south-east ridge on 6 November, exhibiting the core ethics that many of our readers may believe mountaineering is all about. The route was completed in a single 18-day push from base camp armed with only the knowledge the team had gained from a previous attempt in 2019. They descended to 5,400m, the base of the west ridge, via an unknown route



The legendary south-east ridge of Annapurna III, finally climbed after four decades of attempts by a Ukrainian team. (*Nikita Babanov*)



enduring a three-day nightmare in high winds before walking down to 5000m and the flatter area of the glacier from where a helicopter picked them up. Mikhail Fomin later described the climb stage by stage.

The lower snow-ice section, between 4,600m and 6,100m was easy snow climbing followed by a series of snowy chutes and short sections of hard mixed climbing leading to a snow ridge. The prominent rock buttress between 6,100m to 7,100m was the technical crux of the route. At 6,250m came the crux chimney, which Fomin described as ‘one of the most rotten technical pitches I have ever climbed.’ This was followed at 6,500m by a feature known as ‘the knife’: a huge, snow-covered ledge visible from Pokhara. Until this point, the team managed to find decent bivy sites where they could build ledges for their tent. Above the ledge to the summit, 7,100m to 7,555m, there were no technical difficulties but the climbers were very exposed to the elements.

‘In snow terrain, you had to take your shovel to lead, because otherwise, it was so unconsolidated that you did not have solid footholds to progress,’ Fomin reported. ‘And in the mixed terrain, you’re dealing with lots of loose rocks covered by fresh snow, so you have to be creative in finding ways to move forward.’

Back in Ukraine, Mikhail Fomin reported he was safe with his family and during the first days of the war with Russia they fled to Italy. The whereabouts of his partners Viacheslav Polezhaiko and Nikita Balabanov are unclear. Their social media presence was confined to sharing posts about fundraising or from those seeking material for the cause. Fomin himself is busy collecting funds. ‘Now it is time for [the] many Ukrainian climbers to wear soldiers’ helmets instead of super-lightweight BD or Petzl stuff and to protect Ukraine,’ he was reported as saying.



The impressive new combination climbed by the Czechs on Ama Dablam. (Zdeněk Hák)

Opposite page: Cho Oyu from Gokyo. (Ian Wall)

Zdeněk Hák and Jakub Kácha climbed a combination of the *American Direct* and *Smid* on **Ama Dablam** (6812m) over three days to give *Lancmit Direct* (TD+/ED, V, WI4, M4-5). 'The conditions changed, depending on the altitude and which side of the pillar we were on,' Hák told *Explorersweb*. 'It was better to climb on the south side of the pillar, where the snow was starting to turn into firn. On the other hand, a northern exposure meant tricky climbing in unstable snow conditions.' The route was named for Czech legend Miroslav Šmíd, who was known as 'Lancmit'.

Autumn into Winter Season

A Nepali team set out to establish a new line up the south face of **Cho Oyu** as another option for commercial expeditions climbing the mountain from the Nepal side. As with all the other expeditions during the autumn 2021 season they were hampered by poor weather conditions and the expedition came to an end below the summit. The exact line followed by the expedition is vague at the moment, but from the expedition file it appears that the team split into two groups each looking at alternative lines. Seven Summit Treks announced that they would support Gelje Sherpa on a new attempt in November 2022. Mingma G of Imagine Nepal announced he will attempt the route started by Pioneer Adventure up the south-south-west ridge, starting on 1 October 2022 and supported by a commercial expedition with 10 Sherpa guides and clients 'with appropriate previous experience'.

Jost Kobusch accompanied by Nicolas Scheidtweiler did two first ascents, as of Kobusch's acclimatisation plan for his Everest winter 2021-2 expedition. This he did in the Annapurna region, where his main goal was unclimbed **Purbung** (6500m). He then soloed unclimbed Peak 6125m, still unnamed.



Redpointing Everest?

Kobusch's 2021-2 Everest project began on 22 December with the aim of finishing before the end of meteorological winter on 28 February 2022. Kobusch was attempting the west ridge but with no specific aim to reach the summit in 2021-2 but he had set himself the target of reaching 8,000m at the base of the Hornbein couloir. This was his second winter season on Everest, solo and without supplementary oxygen, his previous high point of 7,300m coming in 2019-20, part of a three-year project at the end of which he aims to solo a combination of the Yugoslavian and American lines in winter. On this occasion he faced continuous strong winds, very low temperatures and a particularly dry line, which didn't allow him to push any further than 6,464m.

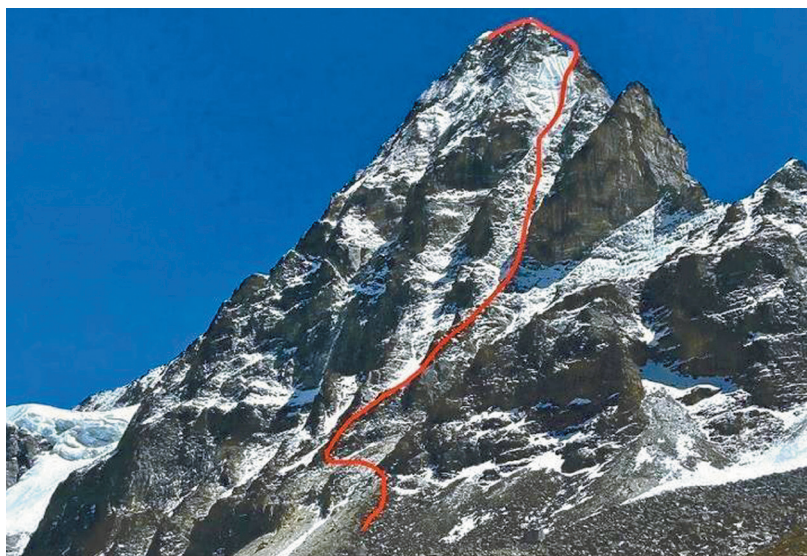
In the era of commercial expeditions there is a fine line between duty of care and meeting the expectations of often demanding clients. In 2020 Garrett Madison called off his Everest expedition, judging an ice serac perched high above the Icefall as unjustifiably risky. He was subsequently sued by one of his clients for failure to deliver his contract. The court decided the client was not entitled to a refund and that guides should not fear lawsuits when making decisions about safety. The judgment is being hailed in guiding and outdoor-adventure circles.

Winter into Spring Season

In mid February a Czech canyoning outfitter arrived in Nepal for a three-month expedition. The company had made previous descents in the Annapurna region varying in length from one to six days. During this season they attempted to descend the **Seti Khola** but inclement weather raised water levels to an unacceptable extent and warm temperatures caused serious rock-fall risk in the canyon, thwarting their plans, according to expedition leader Olda Stos.



Toshiyuki Yamada and Takeshi Tani made the first ascent of the north-west face of Kangchung Nup (6090m). (*Toshiyuki Yamada*)



The first success of the spring 2022 season was the ascent of the north-west face of **Kangchung Nup** (6090m) by two Japanese guides, Toshiyuki Yamada and Takeshi Tani. The line is very similar to that attempted by a Czech expedition that reached 5,900m in 2014, from where they retreated due to dangerous conditions. Japanese alpinist and Buddhist monk Daijo Saito and Shigenobu Akihiro made the first ascent of **Saula** (6235m) on 3 May 2022. Saula is located in the Manaslu Himal, lying on the Nepal-Tibet border, east-north-east of Samagaon.



The new British route on Jugal Spire (6563m), climbed in eight days.
(Tim Miller)

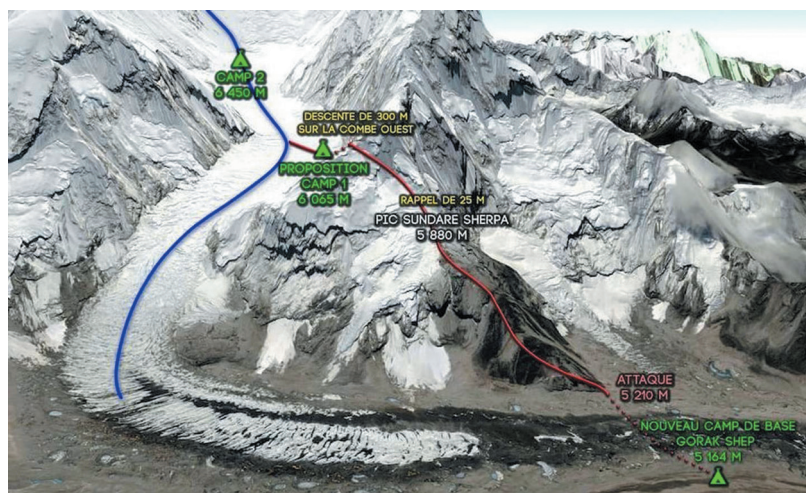
In April 2022 Paul Ramsden and Tim Miller climbed the steep and sweeping granite north face on an unclimbed peak in the Jugal Himal subsequently named **Jugal Spire**. *The Phantom Line* (ED+, 1200m), climbed over an eight-day period with five days spent on the face featured thin ice and mixed climbing across several blank sections of hard rock sections with the greatest problem an a snow-free section of rock in the centre of the wall that was overcome via a hidden squeeze chimney that was climbed inside for about three pitches. See pp1-15.

An expedition team of five climbers from the Korean Kyung Boc High School Alpine Club made the first ascent of **Phu Khang Peak** (6694m) on 4 May 2022, a peak located near Nar Phu, Manang district. The team leader Kim Migon, who had previously ascended all 14 8000ers, was accompanied by Kang Sin Won, Jang Daeboo, Kim Min-soo, Lee Kunjin along with Nepali guides Tshering Sherpa and Dawa Tshering Sherpa.

It was announced that Peter Hamor would try to traverse from **Yalung Kang** (8505m) to **Kangchenjunga's** main summit, with Romanian partners Horia Colibasenu and Marius Gane. However, in the end the Nepal authorities decided to charge the expedition for an additional peak permit for Yalung Kang and so the team modified its plans and subsequently only Horia Colibasenu summited Kangchenjunga.

Makalu (8485m) was climbed without supplementary oxygen in 17h 18m by Karl Egloff (Swiss) and Nicolas Miranda (Ecuador). They also climbed without the usual down suit as they felt the weather, which was relatively warm, would justify them using a multi-layer clothing system allowing greater freedom of movement.

Himalayan veteran Marc Batard recently announced he wanted to set up a new, alternative route into Everest's Western Cwm avoiding the Khumbu Icefall. Assisted by a small group of French guides, they started opening this new variation in 2021, planning to fix it with metal cables and bolts, like a European via ferrata. Nepal's tourism ministry decided his route was not strictly on Everest but on Nuptse, so they issued him a permit for the latter.



Marc Batard's concept of a new route on the southern Everest route aimed at reducing risk in the Icefall.

If he wanted to climb Everest, officials told him, he needed another permit. 'The mountain is not respected anymore, it's about the money, and helicopters,' Batard said. Considering many expeditions now train on local trekking peaks and use helicopters for dropping loads into higher camps, Batard has reconsidered his project, wondering if it's worth the expense and effort.

Under existing Everest rules, the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee fixes the route up to camp two. The task of fixing the rope to the summit from camp two falls to the Expedition Operators' Association. There was a significant drop in numbers of Everest climbers for the 2022 climbing season, mainly due to the war in Ukraine, Covid-19 in China and global economic woes. With a potential drop of nearly 100 climbers, the Nepali government stands to lose up to \$1 million in royalties. It also means fewer jobs for mountain guides, support staff and local hotels and teahouses.

Everest saw another slew of 'records', including several climbers claiming speed ascents. Kristin Harila, a 36-year-old professional athlete from Norway climbed her first mountain in 2015 when she trekked up Kilimanjaro. Now she wants to climb all 14 peaks above 8,000m in a shorter time than Nims Purja and climbed five of them in Nepal this spring in just 29 days. By early July she had increased that number to six with Nanga Parbat but was injured by rockfall as she descended to base camp. Individually these ascents are of little mountaineering significance but taken together they are testimony to the power of focus, strength, endurance and mental stamina.

There has been a weather station positioned on the Balcony since 2019, \$30,000 of precision instruments designed to measure wind, humidity, temperature, solar radiation and barometric pressure. It was one of five such automatic weather stations placed as part of a partnership between the National Geographic Society, Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu, and the



Tenzing Gyalzen: mountain guide and world's highest electrician.

Nepali government, with funding from Rolex. However, with gale-force winds, extremely low temperatures and exposure to solar radiation, the technology suffered and it stopped transmitting on 20 January 2020. In the spring of 2022 a technical team including 12 Sherpas climbed to a spot known as Bishop's Rock, approximately 50 vertical metres below the summit, to install a new and improved station. For IT specialist Tenzing Gyalzen Sherpa, a 31-year-old electrician and mountain guide from Phortse, this involved climbing to work at approximately 8,810m, which he has done for the last three years to service the automated weather stations.

The new station at Bishop Rock saw Tenzing Gyalzen complete the wiring barehanded, in -40°C wind chill. By the time the team had returned to base camp the station was already sending back essential data that would not only help guides plan expeditions and keep clients safe but would provide information related to changing weather patterns, snow melt and the potential impact on all those communities that rely of Everest and the Himalaya for their drinking water. As the 2019 and 2020 data continues to be analysed, it's yielding surprising conclusions across a diverse field of studies, from human physiology to questions of long-term water supplies and seasonal crop cycles.

One issue that appeared in the spring of 2022 was the role that modern communications play in reporting issues on the big mountains. Connectivity is possible from most points these days and as a result as soon as a team member reaches the summit the fact is relayed back to base camp and in turn broadcast over social media. This haste to make the news public is all part of modern commercialism but fact checking with the people concerned is way down the list of priorities. Consequently some ascents turn out to have been misrepresented in the rush to publicise. Sadly, when the true facts emerge they rarely get mentioned. I don't think there is a deliberate move to blur the truth but haste can lead to misinformation.

While we're on the subject of technology, in April 2022 the Nepali authorities announced the compulsory use of GPS in mountaineering. Although this was initially planned two years ago, implementation was delayed. Now the tourism ministry has announced it will test this initiative. Officials stated that GPS is being implemented to make mountaineering more transparent. (It also implies the ministry doesn't trust the system of liaison officers.) Mohan GC, director of the department, said it had procured 20 devices in July 2018.

Guiding Issues

Nepali guides have in recent years had the opportunity to become members of the International Federation of Mountain Guides Associations (IFMGA). This requires them to train under common international standards: gaining experience in the appropriate environment and being certified by an official institution recognised by the IFMGA. Training can take up to five years and guides are always taking new courses to keep up to date with the latest standards and techniques. It's a major achievement for Nepal to be involved and has undoubtedly raised standards.

Nepal now has 72 IFMGA guides but on Everest alone there are more than 1,500 support workers, often referred to as guides by their clients. Of that number, only around 10 are actually IFMGA certified, through their local member, the Nepal National Mountain Guide Association (NNGMA) but attempts to increase the number of internationally accredited guides is stalled by a curious anomaly: liability insurance.

The IFMGA has a professional code of conduct outlining the role and obligations for mountain guides towards their clients. According to this code, mountain guides need to assess the skill level of their clients, as well as their previous experience, encourage an attitude of respect for the environment, make sure clients have the proper equipment and raise their client's awareness about hazards and risks. They also need liability insurance bought in their home country. And here comes the weird anomaly. Because in Nepal insurance companies issue insurance to expeditions, not individuals.

So the bottom line is that according to IFMGA criteria, certified Nepali guides can't work independently in their own country because they can't buy liability cover there. They have to appear on an agency's block insurance cover. Meanwhile experienced but unqualified Nepali mountaineers continue to work in Nepal as 'guides' because there is no statutory professional body with similar criteria.

There has always been friction between IFMGA guides and experienced Everest 'guides' who are not IFMGA-qualified. Kami Rita Sherpa has now climbed Everest 26 times but was dismissive in an interview in March 2021:

I'm not a certified international mountain guide, I never have been and never will, but people still come and ask me to guide them to the top. Nepal Mountaineering Association members (guides) only work in Nepal, the rules and laws must be made taking them into consideration. If they want, the 'international' guides should go abroad to guide. They are international guides, right?

The number of Nepali guides who aren't accredited and work predominantly on 8,000m peaks has increased sharply in recent years to meet client demand, despite this group not having done any accredited training, relying instead on ad hoc courses and long experience of the big mountains in challenging conditions and hazardous situations.

In 2019 tourism authorities in Nepal announced a new law that would recognise holders of the 'red book' issued by the Nepal Mountaineering Association



Waste not. Work is needed to manage human waste in the Everest region.

(NMA) as mountain guides. The NMA hands out three colours of books (essentially licences) to mountain workers for data and insurance purposes, although for not third-party liability. The first is black and given to kitchen and support staff who work at high altitude. If a person works and renews this book for two years in a row, it's upgraded to a blue book, which recognises the holder as a support climber. This can be upgraded to a red book, which gives the person the title of sirdar (expedition leader), the person who manages all the other Sherpas on a climbing expedition or trekking group. The red book is also given to all Everest summiteers, irrespective of their other experience.

The NNMGA welcomed the government's plan of recognising these climbers and their contribution to the mountaineering industry but most of its members say that red-book holders should be called 'expedition guides' and not 'mountain guides' as the term 'mountain guide' implies something different. If anyone who has summited can claim to be a guide, it argues, then in the long run clients will be confused and their IFMGA qualification will be undermined. The NNMGA took their case to Nepal's supreme court and the law was overturned. The NMA resented this and has issued veiled threats to NNMGA guides about retaining their status as NMA members.

In the Mire

We should not allow this to happen anywhere especially a national park dedicated to Chomolungma, 'goddess mother of the world'. The Nepali name, coined in the 20th century, is Sagarmatha, mean's 'ocean's brow', a nod to the ancient Tethys Sea. Disposal of human waste in the Sagarmatha National Park near Kala Pattar causes environmental damage and a threat to the health of local communities as it slowly filters into the ground. Would this be tolerated in the grounds of Westminster Abbey? There is technology to deal with this problem and I hope this is something the Alpine Club could involve itself.