

The 1979 Spanish Expedition to Dhaulagiri I

Ramon Bramona

Our expedition was sponsored by the Spanish Mountaineering Federation. The team was composed of 12 members from Navarra and 4 from Barcelona (Catalonia).

In early December, we sent 9 tons of our equipment, food, medicine, etc, by ship. However, due to several reasons (dock strikes, political situation in Iran, etc), our 5 cases were not unloaded in Bombay port until the middle of March!

We rented 3 big trucks and after driving day and night for 4 days, reached Pokhara (Nepal), having crossed the border between India and Nepal, in Bhairawa.

Finally, we started the approach march from Pokhara, with 260 porters on 24 March. We chose the Myangdi Khola route, because in spite of being a little bit longer than the Kali Gandaki route, we did not need to cross the high passes of Dampus (5100m) and French Col (5150m), both snow covered. We took 14 days to reach the foot of the Myangdi glacier, at a height of 3610m. We brought from Spain 80 pairs of boots, glasses, gloves, caps, socks, etc, and distributed them among 80 selected porters, who, during the next 4 days, carried loads to the Intermediate Camp (4100m) and finally to the Base Camp (4600m), which was established on 8 April.

From the Base Camp, below the N Face of Dhaulagiri I, we started to climb the glacier which starts on the NE col of the mountain, and on 11 April, we spent the first night in Camp 1 (5150m). The tents were set up below a big serac in the middle of the glacier. From there to the col (600m higher), we put fixed rope and moved carefully, because of the danger of avalanches and the existence of crevasses and



snow-bridges. On 15 April, Camp 2 was established on the huge NE col and meanwhile some members made a reconnaissance of the ridge itself, while the rest of the team, Sherpas and high porters, were carrying up all the necessary items to Camp 2, which was converted into an Advance Base Camp.

Weather conditions were generally good and we acclimatized well. Our efficient Sirdar Sonam Girmi and the Sherpas, were cooperating bravely with the party, and 5 days later we pitched 3 tents at 6630m (Camp 3), on the same NE ridge. A heavy snow-fall and a strong wind (250km/h) followed our arrival in Camp 3. For 2 days we could not move and 2 tents were broken.

From Camp 3 to Camp 4 (7180m), we had to put fixed rope the whole way because it is very steep and needed to be made safe for load carrying.

Dhaulagiri I is the first high mountain in the W part of Nepal, and normally is affected by strong wind and bad weather, hence it is also called 'Mountain of Storms'. This mountain, 8172m high, is the 7th in the world. It was the first 8000m peak to be reconnoitred, by a French expedition led by Maurice Herzog in 1950, and the last but one to be conquered, by a Swiss group in 1960, which used for transportation a small plane brought especially from Europe. Members and loads landed at 5700m, on the NE col.

Three other expeditions have succeeded in reaching the top by the NE ridge, a Japanese expedition in 1970, an American in 1973 and an Italian in 1976. In 1978, 2 Japanese expeditions opened 2 new routes on Dhaulagiri I.

On 2 May, we arrived at Camp 4, and during the next 10 days the whole team worked hard to enable some members to set up Camp 5. Five members (4 Spanish and one Sherpa) slept at 7600m in Camp 5 on 10 May. They hoped to reach the top next day. . . . They were thinking of the next day and found it difficult to sleep thinking of the summit. . . .

Nevertheless, at dawn they realized that bad weather had arrived. They tied down their tents firmly (one tent had blown away 2 days before while being pitched), and resigned themselves to spend the whole day inside.

On the 12th, they awoke at 1 am and 2 hours later, 5 men left Camp 5. They kept on up the NE ridge, but the wind was very strong and they decided to go W, to the foot of a steep couloir, which they climbed to the 8172m summit. The time was 2 pm (making 11 hours from Camp 5).

It was the 5th climb of the NE ridge and the 7th of the mountain. We did not use oxygen during the climb. However, a 16mm camera was taken to the very top.

Next day, while we were celebrating our victory, a French expedition led by Sylvain Saudan, had an accident at 7600m. Two French climbers and one Sherpa died, when they were trying to reach the top.

Dhaulagiri I had claimed a further contribution from climbers.