

AREA NOTES

China 1985

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There were 33 mountaineering expeditions to China in 1985 of which 12 were successful. Six of these expeditions were to Mount Everest, of which only one, the Catalan Expedition reached the top on 28 July. They used oxygen only for sleeping. The monsoon period certainly seems a good time to try Everest from the north, when there is comparatively little wind and warmer temperatures.

With the failure of Mal Duff's expedition on the NE ridge of Everest, this remains one of the major unclimbed problems of the Himalaya. Another British expedition led by Bronco Lane is going out in Autumn 1986 and the Chinese are attempting it in Spring 1988. The other Everest expeditions were a Basque expedition to the N ridge route in spring, a New Zealand expedition to the W ridge, a French expedition to the N ridge in the monsoon period and a Japanese expedition to the N face, post monsoon.

Everest remains a focus of attention with a large American expedition organized by Tom Holzel going to the original N ridge route in Autumn 1986 to look for the bodies of Mallory and Irvine, in an effort to discover whether or not they reached the summit of Everest.

In 1988 there will be a joint Japanese, Chinese, Nepalese expedition to the N ridge of Everest hoping to make the first complete traverse, up the N ridge and down the SE ridge into the Western Cwm. Arne Naess had hoped to do this in 1985 but was not given permission.

Xixabangma certainly seems a better bet for success than Everest — it might even be the softest touch 8000m peak. All three expeditions were successful. At least one of these was a commercially organized expedition, in which the clients were guided up the mountain, a growing trend in the Himalayas. Muztagh Ata, because of its relative ease, is another popular venue for such expeditions.

Kongur had another unsuccessful attempt by a Japanese expedition. The only successful ascent is still that of the British expedition in 1981.

A Chinese expedition made the first ascent of the N face of Cho Oyu from Tibet on 2 May, with nine reaching the summit. This was probably very close to the line of the original ascent, most of which had poached into China.

A 46-strong Chinese-Japanese expedition successfully climbed Naimona Nyi (7694m), in SW Tibet, putting 13 climbers on the summit. A 52-man Chinese-American expedition went into the Ulugh Mustagh group in October. Ulugh Mustagh was reputed to be one of the highest unclimbed peaks in the world as well as being the highest of the Kun Lung range at 7723m, but it has been demoted to 6973m. It is in a bleak uninhabited region on the S edge of the

Takla Makan desert. The approach was across the desert from Urumchi. Five Chinese reached the summit on 22 October.

The Chinese are undoubtedly opening up more mountains and mountain areas. There seems a trend to do this initially for joint expeditions but Li Fa, head of the Tibetan regional sports commission announced on 8 August that all mountains in Tibet would be open to foreign climbers. They hope to have the facilities to handle 10,000 climbers annually by 1990. They plan to host other activities such as motorcycle and automobile races on the high plateau and rowing races on the Yaluzangbu river. I view these ambitious plans with more than a little disquiet. It seems very important to preserve the character and traditions of Tibet in such a way that climbers and other visitors can contribute to the economy of this magnificent region without destroying the very quality that attracts them.

I am very grateful to the Chinese Mountaineering Association for their cooperation in providing the information contained in these notes.

