
BILL O'CONNOR

Nepal 2000

Mountaineering in the new millennium was heralded by little that was innovative – most mountaineers were content to go where others had gone before. What was missing in quality, however, was countered in quantity. At Everest's Khumbu base camp, during the pre-monsoon season, tent space was particularly hard to find, with over 500 climbers and Sherpas looking for a slot in which to rest their heads.

A new cleaner image for high-altitude climbing was given a boost by Bob Hoffman's American Environmental Expedition. Apart from putting 13 climbers on the summit (10 Sherpas) on 24 May they succeeded in bringing down 509 oxygen bottles, plus 122 of their own. They also removed 168kg of burnable rubbish plus 12kg of batteries and 35kg of non-biodegradable rubbish from the mountain! Of this, the glass and tins went to Kathmandu for recycling, whilst the gas cylinders, bottles and batteries went to America for disposal. As well as all this, another 832kg of human excrement and 750kg of waste food went to Gorak Shep for burial at a prepared site. Incidentally, the human waste is being transported specifically by Tibetans rather than Khumbu Sherpas.

Distinguished Italian mountaineer Alessandro Gogna, sponsored by an Italian Mineral Water company, was reported to have led a similar clean-up operation on the north side of the mountain below the North Col. Reports, however, suggest that this has been less than successful and that expeditions operating on the Tibetan side last spring continued to abandon large amounts of rubbish. The Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee has made it a requirement of expeditions to dump their human waste somewhere other than base camp. Reports suggest that the Khumbu base-camp is now in pretty good order – long may it last.

PRE-MONSOON 2000

Annapurna 8091m

Fifty years on from its first ascent by Maurice Herzog's French expedition, four teams attempted to repeat the route. All failed low down because of dangerous avalanche conditions on a route that is recognised as being normally objectively dangerous. The first ascent of Annapurna on 3 June 1950 by Maurice Herzog and mountain guide Louis Lachenal was a landmark in Himalayan climbing. Not only was it the first 8000er to be climbed, but it was also notable in that it was climbed without prior reconnaissance.

Cho Oyu 8201m

A busy time on this popular, commercial 8000er, which statistically is the safest of the World's 14 highest peaks to climb. There were 17 expeditions active on the Normal Route and 70 climbers, including 20 Sherpas, reached the summit. By the end of the pre-monsoon season Cho Oyu had had a total of 1160 ascents. No significant mountaineering records were set, although in reaching the summit on the 8 May 2000, Koreans, Bae Gin-Soek and Ha Chan-Soon, along with Sherpa Pasang Gombu, were the first to climb an 8000er in Y2K.

Everest 8850m

Although not really disputed, the height of Everest is agreed on by most climbers, plus or minus a metre or two. According to Bradford Washburn, given that its top is always snow and that cornices come and go, the predominantly west-south-west winds will result in little variation in the mountain's actual height. So the actual height of Everest is 8850m – or thereabouts! For those with an interest in these matters the height of the South Col, on the other hand, can be calculated with pin-point precision, since a steel bolt, set in solid rock, marks the actual spot at a height of 7890.816m.

Cleaning Up In The Khumbu

The Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee took control of the icefall this year and opened and maintained the route into the Western Cwm. Using the services of experienced Sherpas from Arun Treks, the route was found, ropes were fixed and ladders placed. Expeditions were then charged \$2100 (up to 7 members) for using the route and \$275 for additional members going through the icefall.

MORE RECORDS ON EVEREST

Most Ever

As predicted Y2K saw a record number of people on the mountain and a record number of ascents. On the Tibet side 30 expedition groups attempted the mountain, whilst from the south there were 26 groups. In total, the 56 groups put 133 (134) climbers on the summit.

First in the new millennium were four Russians who climbed via the North Ridge. Of the 133 only two climbers, both Sherpas, reached the summit without bottled oxygen. There is some debate as to whether Ram Krishna Newar actually reached the summit as claimed – if proven true 134 climbers reached the summit.

There was little activity on any other than the 'Standard Routes' from the north and south, although two expeditions attempted the South Pillar. The Danes were successful in their attempt, with five members reaching

the summit in the middle of May. They followed the original Polish Route to circa 8040m, at which point they broke out right to reach the South-East Ridge at circa 8150m from where they followed the normal route via the Balcony to the summit. A Spanish team retreated from 8740m.

Fastest

Impressive indeed was the ascent by well-known Babu Chiri, a 33-year-old Sherpa. Having bivouacked on the summit in 1999 he went on in spring 2000 to climb from base camp to summit in only 16 hours and 56 minutes, reaching the summit on the 21 May at 10 am. After leaving base camp at 5pm he climbed through the night, met up with his brother Dawa on the South Col, from where together they reached the summit at 10am. He only used oxygen between 8500m and the summit. On descent, they spent the night on the South Col before returning safely to base camp. This was Babu Chiri's 10th ascent of Everest and his brother's fifth ascent.

Sadly, Babu Chiri Sherpa died on Everest on 29 April 2001, after falling into a crevasse at Camp II in the Western Cwm.

Most

Three days after Babu Chiri's ascent, which equalled those of Ang Rita and Appa Sherpa, the 39 year old Appa went on to make his eleventh ascent of the mountain and so regain the record.

Oldest

On 12 May 1999 Georgian climber, Lev Sarkisov at 60 years and 161 days became the oldest man to climb the mountain. On 19 May 2000, the record fell to Toshio Yamamoto aged 63 years and 311 days old when he reached the summit via the North Ridge. This was almost surpassed when Alan Hana, who is older still had to retreat from the South Summit. Polish woman Anna Czerwinska, aged 50, became the oldest woman to summit when she reached the top on 22 May.

Youngest – almost

A 15-year-old Sherpa schoolboy, with no previous climbing experience, attempted the mountain but retreated from the Hillary Step with frostbite on 21 May. He later had five fingers amputated.

British Ascents

Several well-known British climbers, Rick Allen, John Barry and Andy Salter reached the summit. Mountain Guide John Barry, born in Strabane, Northern Ireland, could possibly claim to be the first Irishman to climb the mountain from the south. Polly Murray became the fourth British woman to climb Everest when she reached the summit on 16 May. On the north

side Paul Walters reached the summit on 17 May, whilst Mark James and Dan White summited on the 18 May. All three were members of a military expedition.

The well-known and liked Pakistani mountaineer Nazir Sabir, the first from his country to climb K2, became the first Pakistani to climb Everest.

Everest star Peter Habeler, now aged 56, also returned to the mountain. In 1978, with Reinhold Messner, he became the first person to climb the mountain without oxygen. Still without bottled oxygen for this attempt, he climbed above the South Col but retreated when things became too difficult.

With so many people on the mountain there were, thankfully, few fatalities. Two climbers died during the spring season, both on the North side, both from falls. Since both climbers were descending alone, the cause of these accidents is not known.

Lhotse 8516m

There was a lot of spring activity on Lhotse. 15 climbers reached the main summit and a further two the slightly lower, more difficult, west summit.

Five Georgians and four Russians reached the summit on 15 and 21 May. This was a strong team with some distinguished high-altitude climbers including Valeri Pershin, Gleb Sokolov and Eugeni Vinogradski. They had originally hoped to traverse to the unclimbed Lhotse Middle from a high camp at circa 8000m near the West Face Couloir. However their attempt was halted by an avalanche and unsettled weather.

The efforts of Italian mountaineer Sergio Martini must surely be applauded. Now aged 50, Martini summited Everest via the North Ridge in 1999, to become, at the age of 49, the oldest man to claim all 8000ers. However, his ascent of Lhotse in poor visibility was disputed when Korean Park Young-Seok, climbing the mountain a few days later, reported that his tracks stopped short of the summit. Martini returned this year and without Sherpa support climbed the mountain on 19 May. He reached the summit with Slovenian climbers Milan Romih and Franc Pepevnik and can most certainly now claim to be the oldest man to climb all fourteen 8000ers. Perhaps more impressive is that this schoolmaster from the Dolomites is essentially unsponsored and paid for his own trips.

Lhotse West Summit

At 9.45am on 26 May, British Mountain Guide Sandy Allen and South African Cathy O'Dowd reached the West Top of Lhotse. Although this was not a first ascent, the summit has had few visitors. The route follows the West Face Couloir to a point 100-200m below the col. At this point Pemba Tenji Sherpa who was accompanying them went for the true East Summit whilst Allen and O'Dowd climbed a rock chimney adorned with fixed ropes (UIAA 111), followed by exposed scrambling and a final corniced fin leading to the exposed summit.

Pumori 7161m

Four expeditions attempted this attractive peak. All were engaged in the Standard route. Two members of an American Expedition reached the summit on 14 May.

Manaslu 8163m

Four expeditions attempted and succeeded in climbing this difficult mountain. Alberto Inurrategi, his brother Felix and Antonio Garces climbed the normal route, reaching the summit on 25 April. A week later they attempted Annapurna but failed. Jean Christophe Lafaille, on an Italian expedition's permit but climbing independently, made a solo attempt on a line up the North East Face that failed. He then rejoined the Normal Route as far as Camp 2, where he had a gear cache. His route then continued up a couloir line left of the Normal Route before breaking left to climb easy snow slopes and make camp at circa 7400m. On the following day, after leaving camp at 5am, his route went right of the foresummit to reach the main summit at 9am.

Franco Brunello's seven-man Italian AC team and a seven-man Korean group led by Han Wang-Yong were both successful. Four Italians and one Korean reached the summit on 12, 14 and 15 May.

Nilgiri North East 6750m

A French group – members of the Groupe de Haute Montagne – having failed in their attempt on the North Face of Annapurna, went on to attempt Nilgiri North 7061m. They eventually climbed the the South Spur to a point they christened Nilgiri North East on the East Ridge of Nilgiri North. The point had most certainly been climbed before. The route is said to offer good climbing, similar to the *Swiss Route* on Les Courtes or *Route Major* on Mont Blanc and was graded Alpine D+/TD-.