

EXPEDITIONS

THE ASCENT OF LANGCHA. After the attempt on Lhotse in the post-monsoon period of 1955, by the International Himalaya Expedition organised by Norman Dyhrenfurth, the three Americans in this group made several ascents in the Sola Khumbu region west of Everest.

George Bell, Richard McGowan, and I found interest in the peaks about the Dudh Kosi. There were, of course, many to choose from. In fact, the entire region of the Sola Khumbu seems to be a fairyland of magnificent ice and rock peaks, colossal monuments of impregnability barely overshadowed in height by some of the highest giants of the Nepal Himalaya.

After leaving base camp on the Khumbu Glacier we made camp at a small pond above Lobuje, well known as a camp site of past expeditions. From here we climbed to the West summit of 'Lobuje Peak', about 20,000 ft., by a route which took us up an exposed ice apron along the ridge of the peak that faces the Khumbu Glacier, and then involved a narrow and corniced ridge traverse. Oncoming darkness prevented us from continuing across a final notch to the highest summit peak.

Following that, we made an excursion with our porters and Sherpas to the Mera Col region and Ama Dablam. While the other two climbed to the ridge above the glacier and the Hongu watershed I made a solo climb far along a ridge of Ama Dablam to explore its system of alpine armour. Our principal objective of this post-monsoon period was a glittering pyramidal peak up the valley of the Dudh Kosi, about 21,000 ft. in altitude, and quite prominent as the icy spire left of the valley as seen from Thyangboche.

This peak we called Langcha, a derivation we arrived at from Sherpa talk. We followed the trail up the Dudh Kosi, after crossing the Imja ravine, and camped at a hillside village. The following day we pursued the trail, then crossed the river by a ford. The way then was open to make a hillside camp far up the slope, not far from the glacier at the peak's base. This route took us through some cliffy grasslands to a nice flat spot. Here the Sherpas left us, to camp at a yak corral down nearer to the river.

We arose early, climbed a tedious rockslide, and then onto the glacier. Arising to the challenge of the compelling forces of anticipation and the sunshine of a perfect day, we hurried across its crevassed slopes to the West wall of the peak, where in our judgment the most apparent route lay. Like most of the soaring peaks of this region, Langcha is not a gentle peak. Its summit is protected by fluted ice walls, corniced ridges, and rocky ramparts. But its edifices seemed to have a vulnerable

spot on the western exposure, where several very steep couloirs channel the wall to a final ridge that appeared to give access to the summit. It was a wall of about 2,000 ft., averaging 50 degrees or more, and ending in a dizzy ridge that corniced off to the north.

After crossing the bergschrund we climbed in combination to a steepening of the couloir, where glare ice bulged over a rock hump for two hundred quite steep feet. Cutting was necessary here, and for virtually the remainder of the climb, which relentlessly angled up to the ridge. This we reached by climbing across a rock step, then carefully belaying along its corniced arête, we arrived at the top about four in the afternoon. The final stretch was composed of almost powdery snow, quite treacherous for the exposure.

The view was marvellous, presenting the pageant of peaks from Gaurisankar to Makalu. The descent went much quicker, owing to our steps; in several places we rappelled from snow pickets or ice belays. The last few were in the dark, and after that the trek down the glacier and rockslide was like a blind game.

The region abounds in many other spectacular peaks of about the same height as Langcha, but as it was already early November, the expedition was about to begin to trek back to Katmandu. The Sherpa Nima Tensing and I took two excursions up side valleys and crossed a high ridge at about 17,000 ft. to follow a system of trails leading to Junbesi on the main path; the main body of the expedition was only a day from its destination before we caught up.

Our first excursion was up into the secluded valley from the Dudh Kosi trail that leads into the cirque between Thamserku and Kangtega. A long system of cliffs made the yak paths leading to this virtually unknown sanctuary a most precipitous ascent—one that took about one and a half days. From a grassy camp at the headwall we examined the flanks of Kangtega, and decided that the main peak was too risky a venture without support, so we climbed one of its satellite summits, a pretty snow and rock peak of about 20,000 ft. The view from its summit spurred us to take the route across the aforementioned passes from Ghat to Junbesi, and explore the region of the Kwangde Peaks and Numbur. The khola behind the ridge of the Kwangde peaks provided many surprises: we found small yak huts and corrals probably unknown to previous climbers, visited some beautiful waterfalls, and then on a long climb to the great glacier at the head of the valley, we discovered two magnificent impounded lakes. One, gray from silt and thinly spotted with surface ice, bulged against the retaining wall of its exit. We climbed further north, up meadows and rockslides, and in a cirque beneath the second and third principal Kwangde summits, at an elevation of about 18,000 ft., discovered a sparkling sapphire-blue lake of remarkable beauty. It was a real jewel, and we both marvelled at its

exquisite colouring. From a peak high above the lake we had a wonderful vantage of the entire Numbur-Kwangde headwall, and our last look at Everest and Lhotse—the icy north wind blowing a trailing pennant far off their summits.

FRED BECKEY.

ANNAPURNA. *Party* : D. P. Davis (non-member), R. C. Evans. *Sherpas* : Dawa Tensing (Sirdar), Urkien, Mingma Tsering, Pasang Sonam.

The intention was to follow the route from the north (from Manangbhot), taken in 1950 by Tilman's party which attempted Annapurna IV, and in 1955 by the German party which climbed Annapurna IV, and, passing over the shoulder a few hundred feet below the top of Annapurna IV, to follow the ridge joining Annapurna IV and II (24,600 and 26,041 ft. respectively). The party was held up at first by an unusual depth of winter snow, which in the Manangbhot valley had caused avalanches which had destroyed many acres of forest, and Base Camp, at 15,500 ft., was not occupied until April 16.

The main Annapurna ridge was reached on April 30, and Camp 3, on this ridge, at about 21,500 ft., was occupied next day. The route to Camp 3 had changed considerably since 1950; one ice-step which then had been very difficult was now easy, and stretches which then had been easy walking, were now broken-up. We were here forced to climb a number of fairly steep ice-slopes.

The main backbone of the Annapurna range was followed from Camp 3 to Camp 4 at 23,000 ft., with a number of detours on the north side of the crest, where, contrary to our experience in 1950, there was now good going.

Camp 4 was first occupied on May 4, and next day, as the two Sherpas who were there with Davis and me were unwell, Davis and I climbed Annapurna IV. This took three hours from camp.

So far the weather had been poor: strong south-westerly wind, daily heavy snowfall, and frequent electric storms. There had been only one fair calm day (one of the days when we were prospecting the route between Camps 3 and 4) and the night after we climbed Annapurna IV was a particularly bad one at Camp 4, so much so that at dawn, when the wind showed no signs of moderating, we decided to go right back to base for a few days in hopes of some change in the general weather pattern before pushing on with our plan of putting a camp along the ridge between Annapurnas IV and II.

We came down in strong wind and blizzard, which made the descent from Camp 3 to Camp 2 difficult. We reached the base next day, May 7, and stayed there till May 13. On several of these days there

was snowfall as far down as 13,000 ft., whitening the forest in the valley below base.

On May 15 we again reached Camp 4. The weather was unchanged, and on the climb we experienced, as before, very strong winds and found our various camps almost buried by snow.

On May 16, with Dawa Tensing, Urkien and Mingma Tsering, Davis and I climbed over the shoulder of Annapurna IV and followed the ridge towards Annapurna II, taking with us equipment for a fifth camp, but after following the ridge for about a quarter of a mile, and finding that our progress was very slow and that the ridge fell more than we had expected, we turned back. Our opinion was that in unsettled weather this ridge was too long, and involved too great a descent for it to be justifiable without a supporting party sitting somewhere near the shoulder of Annapurna IV.

Immediately after beginning the return to Camp 4 we were overtaken by a blizzard which made the finding of the way on the shoulder of Annapurna IV difficult and hindered our descent below the shoulder: snow here was falling so fast and visibility was so poor that each one of us had to cut his own steps. We reached Camp 4 not long before dark.

For the next two days, while we climbed down to Base Camp, the weather remained bad, and during the next week, while we were still in sight of the range, and could judge of conditions either by the look of the clouds or by the sight of wind-driven snow, there was no change.

We returned to Katmandu by way of Muktinath, the Kali Gandak and Pokhara.

R. C. E.

SPANISH PYRENEES: THE SIERRA DOS ENCANTADOS.—T. Crombie and B. R. Goodfellow joined Robin and Renée Fedden in this mountain group for a fortnight in the latter half of June 1957. The Encantados seem to be visited rarely even by Spanish mountaineers. I can find no reference in the A.J.; Charles Packe, the 'Tyndall of the Pyrenees', makes no mention of the group, and even Belloc passed it by. I know of only one other British party which has been there. Fedden, however, is something of an expert, having been twice before. With his experience, with the invaluable Guide Soubiron, and with the generous help and advice of the Federación Española de Montañismo and their important satellite the Centro Excursionista de Cataluna, we had all we needed. They had sent us their simple but adequate maps, had recommended to us the best climbs, and had offered us the hospitality of their huts in the region.

The group is well into Spain, bounded on the north by the Val d'Aren, which is itself south of the frontier though a head-stream of

the Garonne. It is flanked by the two branches of the Rio Noguera, the Ribagorzana and the Pallaresa, thirty miles apart. Thus in area it is the size of the English Lake District. The valleys are of very great beauty. The northern valleys have the richness of flowers for which the Pyrenees are famous. They are studded with lakes (twenty and more in an average valley), set in rock basins, the lower ones amongst fir trees and the upper ones frozen for all but a month of the year. Nearly all the district is of granite—rough, firm, and splendid to climb. The main peaks are between 2,900 and 3,000 metres in height.

The principal climb is the North-west face of the lesser of the Encantados (2,738 m.), the twin peaks which give their name to the group, not, as might well be, because of the enchantment of their beauty, but a different enchantment: two conspicuous towers are huntsmen turned to stone for not returning to Mass. Unfortunately the rock on these peaks is bad: the only bad rock we found. The route gives 2,500 ft. of climbing of continuous 'difficult' standard, often delicate and exposed, with superb situations and intricate route-finding. The party grossly underestimated the scale, started late, reached the top at 8 p.m. and spent the night out.

A climb highly to be recommended is the traverse of the Agulles de Travesany (2,784 m.). This gave us about six hours of ridge, face and abseil, interesting and often difficult, on superb warm dry rock, with gentians on the ledges, saxifrage in the cracks, and the whole fragrant with many other flowers. We climbed this from the hut above Bohi, a hut as beautifully situated as any I know in the world. On our return the guardian had caught ten pounds of trout for our supper. We climbed other peaks by the routes which appeared to be the most interesting, and these gave us much splendid scrambling and delightful, almost alpine, ridge walks. There was, of course, a good deal of soft snow at this early time of year in the upper valley cwms. Our days were usually twelve to fifteen hours of march, at less than alpine pace, for in the Pyrenees climbing is a less earnest matter.

In general we camped. Mules from the villages took up our ample paraphernalia, and returned for it a day or two later. Hotels in the peripheral valleys, and especially at Espot up the branch valley below the Encantados, are surprisingly good. Everything is extremely cheap. A car is almost essential, for there is little or no public transport.

The whole group is strangely deserted, as if by some change in the life of the people. Old paths to the high grazing are falling into disrepair and we saw neither man nor beast above the lower valleys. We had the mountains entirely to ourselves. Indeed, cards in the tins on the better-known summits suggest that even these are climbed only once or twice a year by the easy routes. There can be few places in Southern Europe where one can so easily escape from crowds to beauty.

Unfortunately many of the valleys up to 2,000 metres are in process of being savagely mutilated by hydro-electric works. Fortunately, some, of great charm, are unscathed, and one hopes they will remain so.

B. R. G.

MONT AIGUILLE (Vercors), South-east face. April 1957. First ascent, with one bivouac. J. Couzy and R. Desmaison.

MONTE ROSA, Marinelli Couloir. July 26, 1956. R. Ayrton, with A. Lochmatter and Eddy Petrig, climbed direct over the Grenzgipfel to Dufourspitze; the following day they traversed Lyskamm, Castor and Pollux to the Théodule and Zermatt.