

AREA NOTES

China 1984

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Climbing activity in China remains on a much smaller scale than in the other Himalayan countries, largely, no doubt, because of the continuing high cost of going there; for instance no expedition went into the K2 area in 1984, even though there must be considerable scope for new routes on the north sides of Broad Peak and the Gasherbrums. The expeditions that did climb in China tended to stick to known ground and in almost every instance were comparatively large teams using siege tactics. Once again the high cost of climbing there is an inhibiting factor on both the style and the size of the expedition. You can spread the cost more widely with a large team and raise funds more easily for a well-known objective. This is probably part of the reason that Everest was by far the most popular objective with six expeditions visiting the mountain — as many as went to the rest of China.

China, however, is planning to open up more mountain areas and on 30 November Mr. Losang Dagwar, Vice President of the Tibet Mountaineering Association, announced in Peking that 40 peaks of over 7000m will be made available to foreign climbers in the next few years. This is an exciting prospect since some of the most attractive unclimbed peaks of the world are in China. It will be interesting to see whether they place a very high premium, through the peak fee, on this fast vanishing commodity. China has already taken this course when they opened up K2 from the north and the Indians have followed suit, when opening up the Saser Kangri area.

Everest

The failure rate on Everest from the Chinese side remains high; this seems the case particularly with pre-monsoon expeditions, perhaps because of the greater cold at this time of year. A contributing factor must be the lack of experienced high altitude porters. There are frequent complaints on this score.

In the winter of 1983/84 the 18-member Japanese Kamoshika Dojin expedition of Tokyo attempted the N face of Everest by the Hornbein Couloir. They were hoping to meet up with their counterparts climbing the mountain from Nepal by the South Col route. The expedition on the south side was successful, putting three Japanese and one Sherpa on top on 10 December 1983. On the N face, Camp 3 at 7700m was established on 17 November, but cold and wind combined with the inexperience of the 13 Chinese climbing assistants slowed down progress and they finally abandoned the attempt in early 1984.

In the spring there were two British and one American expedition attempting Everest from the north. The nine man Cumbrian Expedition led by Pat Gunson

had planned to try the W ridge while the 14 man Special Air Service Regiment expedition led by Bronco Lane were trying the N face by the Hornbein Couloir. Both Gunson and Lane had been members of the Army Mountaineering Association Expedition to Everest in 1976, when Lane and Brummy Stokes (also a member of the SAS expedition) reached the summit.

The SAS established base camp on 18 March, and advanced base on the 29th, near the site used by three previous expeditions. They then started pushing the route up the North Face towards the Hornbein Couloir, making excellent progress, reaching a height of 6800m on 2 April. On 3 April there were five occupants at advanced base camp when a huge powder snow avalanche, triggered by collapsing seracs from the North Col 2 miles away, swept the entire upper glacier basin and destroyed their advanced base. Tony Seirzy was killed and the other four injured. The expedition was abandoned.

The Cumbrian expedition had established their base camp alongside that of the SAS on 19 March, but, fortunately as it turned out, they had delayed establishing an advanced base because of doubt about their route. A large Bulgarian expedition from the Nepalese side was already deployed on the W ridge. The Cumbrians were trying to decide what to do, when the avalanche swept away the advanced base of the SAS. After helping the SAS evacuate the injured climbers they decided, on 10 April, to change their objective to the route attempted by Lou Whittaker's 1982 expedition, to the left of the Great Couloir of the N face.

They established camp 4 at 7800m on 20 April, but were forced to retreat because of bad weather. They returned on 1 May, but Pat Gunson suffered a heart attack at around 7000m. They succeeded in evacuating him but decided to abandon the expedition.

The 19 member American Ultima Thule expedition led by Tom Fitzsimmons was going for the original N ridge route and had a medical research programme that was to be conducted alongside the climbing programme. Advanced base at the head of the E Rongbuk glacier was established on 28 March and camp 4, on the North Col, on 12 April. The expedition had six Tibetan porters but they were restricted to going no further than the North Col by the CMA. Camp 6, at 8230m, was established on 15 May. Camp 7 (8540m) was occupied on 19 May by Fitzsimmons and Thompson, but by this time everyone was exhausted by the long stay at altitude and the pressure of load carrying, particularly in carting oxygen bottles high on the mountain. Fitzsimmons and Thompson made a bid for the summit on 21 May but retreated at the foot of the First Step at 8600m. The big problem of climbing Everest by the N ridge is the combination of the distance to be covered at extreme altitude combined with the absence of high altitude porters if an expedition is using oxygen.

There were two expeditions in the post-monsoon period; Lou Whittaker's Seattle-based expedition to the N ridge and an Australian expedition to the N face. At first glance the latter seems a standard type Everest expedition, with ten members using siege tactics, but there were a number of interesting factors. The effective climbing team numbered only five, the remainder being in a support role, making a film of the expedition, their main source of funds. They did not use oxygen, and Jim Duff, their doctor, who had been doctor on the 1975 Everest South West Face Expedition, used alternative medicine as far as possible with a

combination of homeopathy and acupuncture and a carefully planned vegetarian diet. He only used antibiotics and conventional medicine as a last resort. The team certainly seemed to remain remarkably healthy in what developed into a long drawn out struggle of attrition.

Forewarned by the experience of the SAS, they chose an advanced base tucked under some stable seracs below Changtse. They chose a new line up the N face to the right of the Great Couloir. This was technically harder than the American route of 1982 but seemed considerably safer. They put in about 1000m of fixed rope and made their summit bid on 3 October from a top camp at around 8000m. Tim McCartney Snape and Greg Mortimer reached the summit at eight in the evening. Andrew Henderson had set out with them but his crampon broke when just below the summit. In trying to repair it his hands were badly frostbitten. He tried to reach the summit, but turned back about 50m below the top as it was becoming dark.

This was an outstanding achievement; the first time a new route on Everest had been made without oxygen. They were the smallest team to achieve such a success and probably the youngest, most of them being in their mid-twenties. They were also the first Australians to climb the mountain. It was a very harmonious group who had gained much valuable Himalayan experience over the last few years, climbing progressively harder routes which included a very impressive first ascent of the SW ridge of Annapurna II in 1983.

The American expedition was also successful, when Phil Ershler reached the summit using oxygen though John Roskelly, who had tried it without, was forced to turn back.

Xixabangma

An American expedition led by Joe Murphy achieved success when five reached the top by the standard route.

Mount Congga (7556m)

A West German expedition led by Joseph Schmatz was successful when Schmatz, Heinz Zembsch and Hans Engl reached the summit on 6 October by the original route. They were the fourth group to reach the top.

Namcha Bawa (7756m)

The Chinese attempted this very steep and obviously difficult peak for the second time.

Anyemaqen II (6282m)

A Chinese/Japanese expedition put 6 Chinese and 11 Japanese on the summit on 12, 13 and 14 September.

Bogda W (5213m)

A Japanese party traversed the mountain on 9 to 13 August. Another Japanese party climbed Point 5180 on 10 August.

Namunani (Gurla Mandata) (7728m)

A 13 man Chinese/Japanese expedition made a reconnaissance in the spring to be followed by a full scientific and mountaineering expedition in 1985. This is a newly opened area in Western Tibet, just North of Api, hopefully the first of many new areas to be opened to foreign climbers.