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## Nepal 1993

Nepal notes this year are dominated by 'that mountain'. For some reason 40 became an auspicious number for Everest and Nepal although I am not sure what special merit there is in 40. The mind boggles at what is in store for us and Everest a decade down the road. Whatever mountaineers and the media conjure up for the half-century celebrations of the first ascent of Everest, the Khumbu will definitely be the place not to be.

**Everest** dominated the agenda. The Nepalese increased the peak fee to \$50,000 and still they were climbing, literally over each other, to stand on top. With such a high peak fee only large commercial expeditions will be able to afford to go on the mountain. Inevitably such expeditions attract mountaineers with a low level of ability who 'buy in' with a high expectation of success, which means the South Col route is what they head for. It will be interesting to see how many, if any, lightweight, adventurous expeditions attempt new routes from the Nepalese side of the mountain over the next few years. It might mean that such expeditions will have to operate under the umbrella of a large commercial expedition, sharing the costs with guided clients but in fact acting independently once on the mountain by climbing new lines in lightweight style. Of course it is debatable whether it's possible to 'guide' anyone, in the traditional sense, above 8000m.

During the pre-monsoon period over half the 30 official expeditions were Everest bound. Apart from the sheer tonnage of climbers and equipment on the mountain there were a number of firsts and even a double first for British Mountain Guide Dawson Stelfox, who made the first Irish and first British ascent via the North Col (he holds dual nationality). This is particularly interesting for lovers of mountaineering facts because it has taken 71 years for the first British ascent of the north side since General Bruce's expedition stirred our interest in the mountain. Harry Taylor climbed the 1953 route without bottled air and Rebecca Stephens became the first British woman to stand on top. Ms Stephens became one of 14 women to reach the summit pre-monsoon, including first female ascents for Nepal and Korea. Indian climber Santosh Yadav made her second ascent of the mountain in a year. Other memorable ticks included the first Finnish, Taiwanese and Lithuanian ascents. May 10 in particular stands out as something extraordinary with no less than 40 (1993's auspicious number) standing on top in a single day, rather more than reached the top between 1953 and 1973. Ang Rita Sherpa made his eighth ascent of the mountain with three Spanish mountaineers in his wake. Something close to 600 people have now reached the summit.

During the post-monsoon period, which was blessed by stable weather, a large commercial expedition, organised by British adventure travel company Himalayan Kingdoms ran into a spot of bother which rather took the shine off their summit successes. After confusion arose regarding verbal agreements about their permit, Himalayan Kingdoms were fined \$100,000. Naturally an appeal has been lodged. It's all a far cry from the 'back of Bill Tilman's envelope'. Under the guidance of several British Mountain Guides, no less than seven members of the expedition reached the summit, including Ginette Harrison, the second British woman to reach the top, and Ramon Blanco, who at 60 became the oldest mountaineer to summit. The actor Brian Blessed reached an altitude of 8300m without supplementary oxygen.

On the north side of the mountain, another large commercial expedition, with 23 climbers, was successful on the North Ridge. Jon Tinker reached the summit for the second British ascent from this side. He and Polish climber Mariej Berbeka made a significant variation on the normal route by taking a direct line to the foot of the Second Step from a camp at 8100m. In fact their line is similar to that attempted by Norton in 1924 and has the advantage of being technically easier than the ridge between the First and Second Steps, with far less time being spent above 8000m. Climbing with oxygen, climbers averaged seven hours between a camp at 8100m and the summit.

**Ama Dablam** continues to attract a large number of expeditions, although the Nepalese are restricting the number of permits. Belgian, Japanese and Swiss teams were all successful on the SW ridge during December 1992. Multiple permits on a route like this where there is a lack of tent space at Camp 1 and Camp 2 on the Yellow Tower is a major problem. Stonefall above Camp 2 is also a problem. Belgium climber, Alain Hubert, had his arm broken by rockfall caused by the Koreans whilst evacuating one of their members with AMS. Japanese climber Yasushi Yamaroi climbed a new line on the right-hand side of the W face. This rib joins the normal route high up.

**Cho Oyu** was very busy pre-monsoon with eight expeditions on the W ridge, which is approached from Tibet or by crossing from Nepal. Several expeditions crossing into Tibet from Nepal have been visited by Chinese border police and had to pay a hefty fine to continue. A total of 26 climbers reached the summit of Cho Oyu between 29 April and 16 May. An eight-member Spanish expedition led by Manuel Gonzales put seven on the summit via the W ridge on 8 and 10 February. Roger Mear, leading a commercial expedition, also reached the summit from Tibet with three clients. Swiss Guide André George climbed the mountain solo. To date around 360 people are known to have climbed Cho Oyu of which 23 are women – only Everest has had more!

**Dhaulagiri 1** A Russian expedition led by Sergei Efimov made the most important new route of the season on the N face. A total of six Russians and one Briton, Rick Allen, reached the summit without additional oxygen. (*Full details in 'Dhaulagiri on Cabbage Soup', pages 43-47.*)

A Chinese/Tibetan expedition led by Samdrup climbed the NE ridge on 30/31 May. Nine members reached the summit. The same expedition, which is attempting to climb all the 8000ers, reached the top of Annapurna I.

On 6 October Gary Ball died from oedema trying to climb Dhaulagiri. Climbing with Rob Hall he had had many successes on high peaks, including Everest. (*Further details in 'Mountaineering by New Zealanders', pages 222-223.*)

**Gangchempo** Tilman's 'Fluted Peak' in the upper Langtang valley was officially climbed by a joint Japanese/Nepalese expedition on 28 April via the SW ridge and S face. The mountain has had several unofficial ascents.

**Kang Guru (6981m)** This peak north of Manaslu in the Peri Himal had two more Japanese ascents, in May.

**Langtang Lirung** On 18 December 1992, two Sherpas and one South Korean reached the summit of this impressive and difficult peak, but sadly they died during the descent.

**Machapuchare** The wonderful 'fish tail' peak guarding the entrance to the Annapurna Sanctuary has been reopened for a Japanese expedition. First explored by Jimmy Roberts and all but climbed by Noyce and Cox in 1956 the mountain was subsequently listed as sacred.

**Makalu** Two expeditions were active on the mountain during the spring with the W face as their objective. The first was a strong Italian-Slav-Czech team led by Italian Oreste Forno, but they failed to siege the face, reaching 7600m at the start of the major difficulties. They then joined the normal route, reaching the summit on 22 May and making the 40th ascent of the mountain. Following the Italians, Jeff Lowe made a daring solo attempt on the W face, which has been the site of numerous failures and is fast growing the 'last great problem' tag.

Erik Decamp and Catherine Destivelle failed in their attempt on the W Pillar, first climbed by the French in 1971.

**Manaslu** An Austrian expedition led by Arthur Haid climbed the *Japanese route* on the N face pre-monsoon. Four climbers reached the summit.

**Mera** This popular 'trekking peak' between the Hongu and Hinku valleys south of Everest was attempted by Yasushi Yamanoi prior to his

solo ascent of Ama Dablam. Again climbing solo he forced a way up the impressive W face of the mountain, but after 23 pitches and five bivouacs failed on the smooth headwall, having climbed several pitches of VI and A4.

**Lobuje E (6119m)** Janko Opresnik and Danilo Tic (Slovenia) climbed the *Lowe/Kendall route* on the E face on 9 December. Despite temperatures of  $-30^{\circ}$  they climbed the 600m gully (UIAA V and Scottish 5) in 12 hours. Because of frostbite and a broken ice hammer they did not continue to the summit from the top of the route and instead descended the SE ridge.

### New Peaks Added to the Permitted List

Api West	7100m	Byas Rikhi
Firnkoph	6697m	Saipal
Firnkoph West	6645m	Saipal
Nampa south	6580m	Byas Rikhi
Raksha Urai	6593m	Urai Lekh
Saipal East	6882m	Saipal
Surma-Sarovar N	6523m	Surma-Saravor Lekh
Tso Karpo	6518m	Kanjiroba