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IAN WALL  
**Nepal 2022-23**



Himlung remains a popular 7,000m challenge but changing glacier conditions are making the approach more difficult.  
Climbing a fixed line up a steep moraine bank.

Towards the end of every season, guides, agents and expedition owners start to return from their offices and the mountains to their favourite cafes in Kathmandu. Conversations always turn to what kind of a season they have had. The usual response is, 'Well, not so good but not so bad. Fingers crossed for next season.' And so everyone had high hopes for the autumn season of 2022. Expeditions to the 8,000m peaks showed a high booking rate but as the monsoon lingered on optimism began to wane.

In the western Karnali region, late monsoon rains in the second week of October killed dozens of people, made thousands homeless and washed away chunks of the Karnali highway, a new road already in a state of disrepair. The World Food Program (WFP) has, in recent years, taken a more proactive approach, using predictive analytics and weather forecast data to respond more quickly to avert disasters. That approach allowed a fast response to flooded communities in the Karnali river basin. The WFP sent early warnings and emergency cash to 3,000 households in areas the data deemed to be high risk. Climate change is undoubtedly changing monsoon patterns and the need for such schemes will only increase.

### **Autumn 2022**

The world's eighth-highest mountain **Manaslu** (8163m) was more popular than ever, with many people trying to reach the 'true' summit having previously claimed the 'fore-summit' as the summit until Jackson Grove's video exposed so many false (or ignorant) claims in his video. Early in the season Kristin Harila, Pasdawa Sherpa and Dawa Ongchu Sherpa reached the summit followed a little later by Sanu Sherpa and Hu Tao. However, there had been days of rain on the higher slopes of the mountain making the snow very unstable and the inevitable avalanches happened, creating havoc on 23 September. The Department of Tourism had issued 404 permits to foreign clients for Manaslu, double the number in an average year. This number increased to over 700 people on the mountain when including Nepali guides and staff.

On 28-9 September, while guides and clients were spread out between camps three, four and the summit, two heavy snow avalanches broke away, seriously injuring four Sherpas and sweeping away more than 13 clients and Sherpas. Bad weather hampered rescue operations keeping several helicopters grounded in Samogaon, while one was forced to land above camp one with an injured client and a Sherpa, as well as the pilot. Crowded camps also created problems for pilots trying to evacuate ill or injured clients and staff, problems only compounded by politics and delays in obtaining national park clearance permits, even in the case of extreme medical emergencies. Higher up the mountain, above camp four, a large number of people were trapped as an avalanche had swept away the fixed ropes and clients lacked the skills to descend without them. This created more safety concerns as many people were on supplementary oxygen, which, in all the chaos, was inevitably running low.

On 2 October another avalanche hit Manaslu base camp, destroying more than 30 tents. After that, and several other avalanches, the agencies finally admitted that trying to get everyone up and down the mountain safely was suicidal and withdrew their teams in the face of increasing criticism on social media. There were avalanche fatalities including two Nepali expedition staff. The well-known American skier Hilaree Nelson, a former National Geographic Adventurer of the Year, fell to her death while attempting to ski down from the summit on the same day Anup Rai died in an avalanche.

Dawa Chhiring also died in an avalanche days later. Nelson's body was retrieved by her husband Jim Morrison, who had been skiing ahead of her and saw her fall, and a Sherpa team from around 6,000m on the south side of the peak.

Two statements stood out from media reports. Himalayan veteran Ralf Dujmovits, a high-altitude expert trying to reach the true summit, said that when he reached the top of the fixed ropes on a previous climb he hadn't realised it wasn't the true summit. 'A strong wind blew that day,' he said of his first climb in 2007. 'I wasn't able to look behind the supposed summit cornice. The sky was full of spindrift. I climbed another three metres further, but I didn't see a higher point.' He also stated that Manaslu is no longer the 'easiest' 8,000m peak since those who have little or no real mountain experience found the steep sections difficult, both technically and physically, despite the fixed ropes. Slow climbers caused much of the crowding and traffic jams on the lower half of the route. Adriana Brownlee, a newbie to the 8,000m speed game, said: 'this has taught me how dangerous this mountaineering world really is.'

Just as the Manaslu season was winding down, Grace Tseng of Taiwan and three Nepali guides set off from base camp at 6.30pm local time reaching the summit at 7.30am, 13 hours later. Tseng used no supplementary oxygen, although the three Sherpas supporting her did. Tseng's claim to have reached the summit of Kangchenjunga in October 2021 came under scrutiny with the conclusion being reached that she had not. Tseng has since told the media that she intended to revisit Kangchenjunga but on the next occasion it would be without supplementary oxygen. French mountaineers, Helias Millerieux, Charles Dubouloz and Symon Welfringer canceled their attempt on Manaslu's west face due to unstable snow conditions.

Expeditions to **Dhaulagiri** (8167m) also closed down early in the season due to bad weather and avalanches which forced all climbers to descend from no higher than camp three including Mike Arnold, Mathieu Maynadier, Vivian Bruchez, Matheo Jacquemond and photographer Bertrand Delapierre who had aspirations to make the first complete ski descent. David Goettler and Hervé Barmasse also called off their winter attempt. On **Everest**, extremely bad weather forced Andrzej Bargiel to cancel his attempted oxygen-free ascent and ski descent.

The world's sixth-highest mountain **Cho Oyu** (8188m) remains the focus for Sherpas intent on finding a new route to the summit from the south side but last year's winter expedition called off their attempt at 7,300m. The cost of the enterprise was supplemented by paying clients including Kristin Harila and Adriana Brownlee, both chasing the 8,000m speed record. Harila and Brownlee's lack of experience on non-fixed routes and the magnitude of the challenge in winter, on a highly technical route, without oxygen, attracted some criticism. (Harila is, if nothing else, a strong athlete: at the time of writing she has just climbed K2, the last of her 14 8,000ers achieved in 92 days, smashing Nims Purja's record, along with Tenjen Sherpa.) On Cho Oyu, strong winds destroyed high camps and other essential equipment and

the expedition was ultimately cancelled. Commercial expeditions don't often include the cost of staying on the mountain for several weeks if the initial summit bid fails. This often results in a short expedition and the use of helicopters for the return leg to Kathmandu.

It was an extremely busy autumn season on **Ama Dablam** (6812m) with over 500 clients attempting to summit. Fixed base camps are now established at the foot of the mountain pre-season and they remain there, along with Sherpa staff, until December with the staff repeating the ascent as each new party of pre-booked clients arrive. With this approach, the surrounding environment is being impacted, particularly by human waste.

The Grey Couloir is a 100m long, 70° section of mixed terrain just above camp two that leads to the so-called Mushroom Ridge and camp three. Towards the end of the autumn season the couloir was unusually swept by rock fall that not only cut but also flushed out some of the fixed ropes. This is a critical part of the route, often taking several hours for clients to climb. Climate change is undoubtedly having an effect on the stability of this couloir. While the surface is refreezing, deeper internal dampness within the cracks and fissures is not and this gives climbers a false sense of security.

Robert Mads Anderson led an expedition to **Himlung** (7126m) that reached the summit on 17 November. While the expedition was 'trouble free', changing glacier conditions, once again caused by climate change, have created an objectively dangerous approach.

An expedition comprising Topo Mena, Roberto Morales and Joshua Jarrin of Ecuador left base camp on 14 October for **Langtang Lirung** (7234m). The team got caught on the crux section of thin and delicate ground at 5,800m in the heat of the day and decided to abseil back to base camp. With conditions not improving they wrapped up their attempt early.

A large Russian 14-member team led by Oleg Afanasiev, Sasha Eliseev and Andrey Dergachev reached the summit of **Annapurna IV** (7525m) on 13 November but Afanasiev was evacuated with frostbitten fingers and toes. The German solo climber Jost Kobusch succeeded on **Chulu West** (6419m). That was not his original goal but as on many other mountains, conditions were not good with his potential routes overloaded with snow and a high avalanche risk. To complicate his plans, Kobusch contracted dengue fever and his season came to an early end.

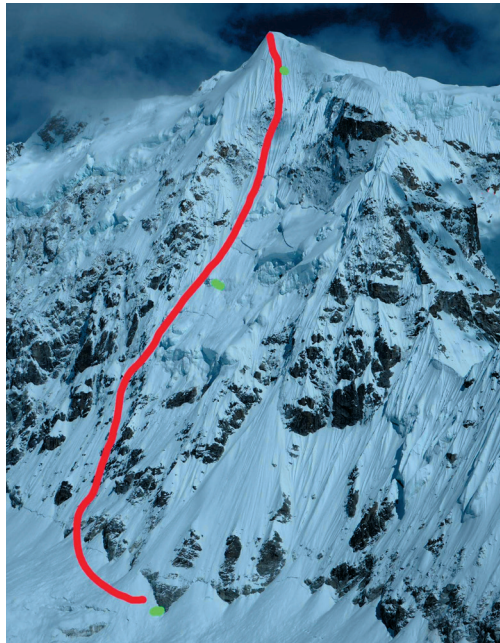
An American team had the north face of **Jannu** (7710m) in its crosshairs but due to appalling conditions curtailed their expedition. Still in the Jannu region, a Spanish team attempted **Jannu East** but one member was evacuated early on also due to contracting dengue fever. Previously unclimbed **Chumbu** (6859m) lies near the Tibetan border to the north-west of Gorak Shep got its first ascent from a Czech team comprising Zdeněk Hák, Juraj Koren, Radoslav Groh, Jaroslav Banský and Petr Kejklicek. Juraj Koren had to withdraw, another victim of dengue fever, but Hák, who recovered from his dengue, and the remaining four set off from the Gaunara glacier, climbed the west face and descended south toward Changri Nup glacier. 'Because of snow conditions and unknown terrain, it was a very difficult climb. We assessed



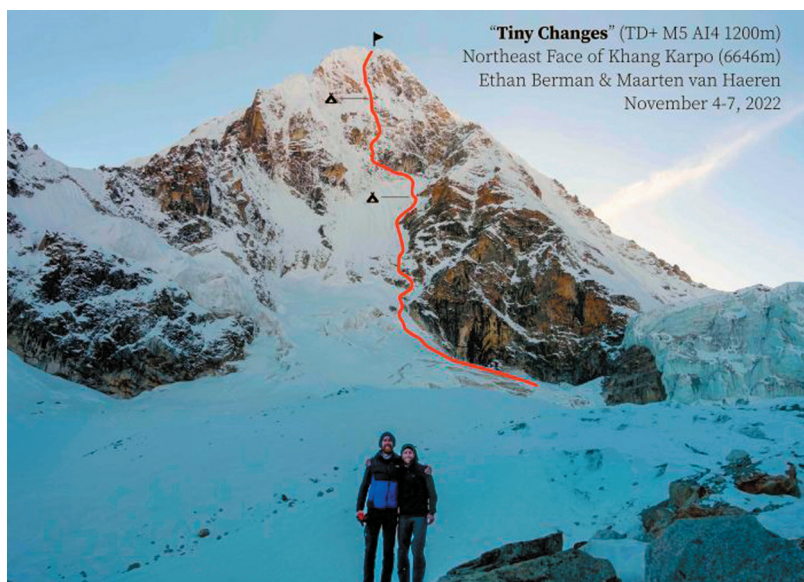
Radoslav Groh on the first ascent of *The Last Flight of the Falcon* on the west face of Chumbu. (Zdeněk Hák)

the overall classification as TD+,’ Hák said. They called their route *The Last Flight of the Falcon* as a tribute to fellow mountain guide Andrzej Sokołowski, who died in September 2022 in the Tatras. Sokolowski was a Polish climber, instructor and rescue worker. They camped twice at 6,350m and 80m below the summit which they then reached on 27 October.

Kisuke Goto and two other members of Japan’s Himalayan Camp team attempted **Pungi** (6523m) but because of altitude sickness and bad conditions on the mountain they abandoned their expedition at 6,150m. **Pomlaca** (6187m), also known as Phamlahaka and Ngole East, is situated in Khumbu near Thyangbo village. Slovenian climbers, Bor Levičnik, Žiga Oražem, and Matija Volontar made a first ascent via the west face but it was not, as they believed, the first ascent of the mountain, which



Topo of the new Czech route on the west face of Chumbu. (Zdeněk Hák)



The line of the Canadian new route *Tiny Changes* on the north-east face of Khang Karpo.

was possibly climbed first in 2002. Already well acclimatised, the team climbed in a single and extremely fast sub-nine-hour push. The route was continually steep, between  $70^\circ$  and  $90^\circ$ , with some multi-pitch sections at  $90^\circ$ . They descended the east ridge. The trio, who met as part of the Slovenian Youth Alpine Climbing Team, named their route *Screaming Barfies* (1,100m, AI5,  $70^\circ$ - $90^\circ$ , IV-V), referring to the pain of 'hot-aches' that they endured during their ascent.

The closest 6,000m peak to Kathmandu is **Ganchempo** (6387m), which is situated in the Langtang region and was climbed via a new route up the south-south-east side of the mountain, also known as the Sindhupalchok side (after the closest village) by an all-Nepali team comprising of Rabindra Aryal, Ram Kaji-Prayas and Ashok Sharma Battha led by Sanu Sherpa and Lal Bahadur Waiba. Maarten van Haeren and Ethan Berman from Canada completed a new route on **Khang Karpo** (6646m) in Rolwaling: *Tiny Changes* is 1,200m and graded TD+, M5, AI4. This was the first ascent of the north-east face from the rarely visited Chulle glacier basin. The descent took two days down the line of ascent. The alternative descent on the south side seemed objectively hazardous and descent to the north would put them in Tibet. **Chekigo** (6257m), Rolwaling, was attempted by an experienced Japanese party, Hiroyoshi Manome, Yukio Ueda, and Makoto Kuroda alpine-style, they did not summit but made it up the south face to the main ridge before descending in poor and dangerous conditions. **Khembalung** was climbed in November 2022 by American climbers Ted Hesser, Garrett Madison, and one unnamed other. This is believed to be the first ascent of a nearly 7,000-metre peak that is relatively close to Everest. The name comes



Matija Volontar climbing the initial ground on the first ascent of the west face of Pomlaca. See p242. *(Bor Levičnik)*



Higher on the west face of Pomlaca.  
*(Matija Volontar)*



Good conditions on the middle part of the Slovenian route which they called *Screaming Barflies*. (*Matija Volontar*)



Pomlaca/Ngole East (6180 m), West face, first ascent of the face  
Matija Volontar, Bor Levičnik, Žiga Orožem (Slovenia)  
Screaming Barflies, 1100 m, AI5/70°-90°/IV-V  
23.-24.10.2022

A topo of the Slovenian route. Despite the Slovenians believing otherwise, this was not the first of the mountain, which was likely first climbed in 2002.



The Japanese line on Chekigo Peak. (*Hiryoshi Manome*)

from the village all their Sherpa team call home. The route is 1,400m with difficulties up to 5.6 to 5.8 with significant mixed terrain.

On 22 October the *Nepali Times* published an article indicating that the tourism-dependent municipality below **Machapuchare** (6993m) wanted the decades-old ban on mountaineering expeditions on the iconic Himalayan peak lifted. Wilfrid Noyce and David Cox, members of the 1957 expedition led by British Gurkha Lt Col Jimmy Roberts, had to turn back from 50m below the summit due to poor weather and technical climbing on the last stretch. Roberts later became defence attaché at the British embassy in Kathmandu and is said to have convinced the Nepali government at the time to keep the mountain out of bounds. Mountaineers had been forbidden from climbing it ever since, although that didn't stop New Zealand climber Bill Denz from claiming an ascent in 1982. At the moment the jury is still out.

The term 'trekking peak' is often misinterpreted. Mountains thus classified are still a challenge. British mountaineer Andrew James Clayton died at 5,000m in a high camp on **Lobuche** on 6 November, his deteriorating condition forcing him to return to base camp on advice from expedition guide Nims Purja. Clayton said he was okay and planned to go to Everest Base Camp next day with his guide. He went for a short sleep but never woke up. This was the third fatality on lower Khumbu peaks last autumn. Previously, Mingma Wangdi Sherpa and Jean-Marc Morschel of France died on **Ama Dablam** in separate incidents. Meanwhile in Manang, two Thai women, Rataya Philaisengsuri, 49, and Penny Aranlum, 37, died at 4,200m at the foot of Mesokanto La (5330m) as they were descending towards Tilicho lake. They were part of a large party of 22 and accompanied by eight porters and two guides.

Other ascents, apart from those on commercial expeditions, from the autumn 2022 season include Baruntse, Bhrikuti Shail, Dolma Khang, Khatung Khang, Metalung, Nagoru Far East and Tengi Ragi Tau South. According to the tourism ministry many permits were issued for lesser-known peaks around 6,500m in the autumn of 2022, including Sat Peak, Chandi Himal, Dogari Himal, Lachama North, Mansail South, Sharphu V, Sherson Peak 3, and Jobo Rinjang.

Expeditions to the far west of Nepal suffered particularly in the unseasonably late monsoon. Julian Freeman-Attwood, Nick Colton and Ed Douglas made the eight-day trek from Simikot to a base camp in the **Chandi Himal** just shy of 5,000m and then established advance base just below the Ganglung glacier. Douglas was another climber struck down with dengue. Having recovered, he and Colton put a cache high on the glacier with the intention of climbing Chandi next day. That was the last good weather of the expedition and after three days of snow they were forced to make a difficult descent to base camp. Four days after that, and with snow still falling, a sat-phone call confirmed mules could not reach within four to five days of base camp and the team called for an air evacuation that picked them up on 11 October.

From an optimistic start to the season, albeit with a long-lasting monsoon, the autumn ended with appalling conditions and weather bringing all big mountain expeditions to an early end. The style of modern commercial expeditions, their overuse of helicopter support, over-crowding, the excessive use of oxygen and staff along with the huge amount of fixed ropes resulted in many specialist media running negative reports of events and questioning the state of modern commercial expeditions.

### Winter 2022-23

Simone Moro, the Italian mountaineer and helicopter pilot, returned to **Manaslu**. The Basque Alex Txikon was also on the mountain and reached the top on 6 January but not without controversy. Mountaineering is now a closely scrutinized activity with questions being asked of Txikon's, mask-free ascent while his team working with him were all using bottled oxygen.

During January 2023 the issue as to when winter in the Himalaya is not winter again surfaced. Adam Bielecki suggested that the astronomical (calendar) winter is the best way to define the climbing seasons, for a logical reason: you can apply the same definition all around the world. 'If we used the meteorological winter definition based on the coldest days, we should have to set different dates for every mountain in the world,' he explained. 'Better to stick to the simple calendar: four seasons, three months each, based on astronomy.'

Bielecki also spoke about the current evolution of Himalayan winter climbing, including using helicopters for the approach or acclimatising in different areas with more comfortable resources: 'it's part of a natural process,' he said, 'just as it was in the Alps. There was a time when the Alps were isolated, without roads, no lifts and nearly no huts. Climbing there was tough.

Now we can start from the valley, climb a 4,000er and be back at a restaurant at the end of the day.' He also aired his views on the use of oxygen: 'the biggest obstacle to climbing 8,000m peaks is the lack of oxygen. When you remove that, it is not the same. If you climb without O<sub>2</sub> but the people around you are using it, the style falls somewhere between an O<sub>2</sub> and a no-O<sub>2</sub> climb. If there are people with O<sub>2</sub> around you, there is always a chance that if things go really wrong, they'll share their masks,' he said. 'Only with no gas available can you prove that you are physically and mentally capable of reaching the summit without oxygen.'

### Spring 2023

A total of 1,009 mountaineers received climbing permits to scale 23 mountains in the 2023 spring season, accumulating \$5.5m in royalties for the Department of Tourism (DoT). Once again the weather played an all-important card. Adam Bielecki, Felix Berg and Mariusz Hatala were aiming to establish a new route on **Annapurna** while expedition outfitter Mingma G was planning to use **Thorong Peak** for his team to acclimatise on, with possibly two ascents and a summit camp before being airlifted to Annapurna base camp. Then it snowed and everything that could go wrong did go wrong. Again, a large number of climbers got stuck in high camps in very bad weather, eventually running out of food, fuel to melt snow and supplementary oxygen. Some of the exhausted climbers and Sherpa sustained frostbite. Sadly, Noel Hanna passed away in his tent at camp four. The usual mixed communications coming from the agencies, or no information at all, led to more confusion. One remarkable rescue on Annapurna was that of Anurag Maloo who, while descending from 5,800m fell into a deep crevasse, where she was later spotted by rescuers from a helicopter and eventually winched to safety and transferred to Kathmandu for extensive medical care.

Bartek Ziemiński and cameraman Oswald Rodrigo Pereria of Poland planned ski descents on Annapurna and Dhaulagiri. After a swift ascent without oxygen or personal Sherpa support, the climbers reached the top. Ziemiński then descended all the way on skis. He rappelled down several sections amid the seracs between camp three and camp two but kept his skis until the snow ended while Pereira made it back down to base camp on foot. Their physical strength, experience and self-sufficiency saved them from getting stuck in a difficult situation.

A new technological issue arose this season with the use of tracking devices on Annapurna. Some climbers who reached the summit used their InReach devices to share their locations live. All the trackers had two theoretical points in common. First, they all went to the same point, which was, logically enough, the end of the fixed ropes. The second point was not so obvious. All the climbers seemed to stop at a secondary summit on Annapurna, far from the spot marked on the map with a red summit triangle and Annapurna's name in Devanagari. The trackers put the altitude somewhere between 7,800m and 7,900m. It has transpired that the trackers were correct

but the maps were not. Expert commentator Rodolphe Popier also observed that the contours on the InReach map were amazingly 'inaccurate'. His colleague Eberhard Jurgalski agreed. 'I think the trackers are correct but the contours are quite wrong,' said Jurgalski. 'They have marked the highest point at the central summit, not the main one.'

Climbers on **Manaslu** were also experiencing unfavourable conditions. However, the dangers were increased as a result of those seeking speed ascents pushing Nepali staff into going up to fix ropes in less than ideal conditions.

Peter Hamor along with Nives Meroi and Romano Benet succeeded on climbing a new route on the unclimbed west face of **Kabru South** (7394m) while climbers heading to **Kangchenjunga** in the spring of 2023 included Domi Trastoy and Gonzalo Fernandez Garcia of Andorra. Trastoy had already climbed Everest, Cho Oyu, Manaslu and Lhotse. Also headed to Kangchenjunga was the German guide Luis Stitzinger, whose experience on 8,000m peaks stretched back a quarter of a century and who was noted for his ski descents. He planned on skiing down Kangchenjunga but was found dead at 8,400m. His body was recovered and the cause of death given as pulmonary oedema.

Nepal issued a record 478 permits for **Everest**. Factor in that for every two climbers there are three staff and the number actually at Everest was more like 1,200. There were fears of overcrowding but a cold spring and persistent illness at base camp sent a lot of climbers home early. The cold weather also caused more frostbite injuries than usual. As a consequence there were even more flights on Everest, with approximately 200 flights to camp two during the season. These flights were also used to ferry equipment over the Icefall and by climbers not wishing to descend the Icefall to return to base camp. Helicopters are also being used increasingly to bring supplies to base camp without the need for traditional transport.

Despite the helicopters and huge support, the 2023 season developed into the deadliest on record with 17 fatalities. Within the first few days of the season three Nepali porters working for outfitter Imagine Nepal were caught in an avalanche in the Icefall: Tenjing Sherpa, Lakpa Sherpa and Badure Sherpa did not survive. Despite this, the Sherpa team fixing the route reached the summit in mid May.

There were a few interesting records. Kami Rita Sherpa, now 53, and Pasang Dawa both climbed the mountain twice in the season, taking their respective tallies to 28 and 27 respectively. Kenton Cool set a non-Sherpa record at 17. Some of the most impressive ascents were from disabled climbers, most notable the former Gurkha Hari Budha Magar who became the world's first double amputee to reach the summit. A number of climbers attempted the peak without bottled oxygen but the cold conditions worked against that. Among them was Kilian Jornet who made an impressive solo attempt on the west ridge of Everest. That attempt ended after a small avalanche several hundred metres up the Hornbein couloir swept him 50m down, prompting the Spaniard to abandon his attempt.

'I'm a big believer in the how is way bigger and more important than the what,' he wrote on his Instagram account, 'and in that sense the climb was just perfect. Like a big puzzle with all the pieces but one, the summit one.' A fine sentiment.

Just two climbers reached the top without gas on the regular route: Colombian Mateo Isaza and the Pakistani Sajidali Sadpara. Another of those who tried was the Hungarian Szilárd Suhajada who went missing and was seen next day in distress near the bottom of the Hillary Step. They radioed his position but when a rescue team arrived he had disappeared and has still not been found. In fact, four of the 17 fatalities remain missing, which begs questions of the companies responsible. Commercial practice on Everest continues to cause concern with multiple thefts reported as high as the South Col, including oxygen bottles, and inexperienced clients saving money with cheap local operators who don't follow best practice. These dodgy dealers can declare bankruptcy if there are any problems and reopen for business next year. The authorities continue to show little or no appetite for challenging any of this.

On a more positive note, great credit must be given to Gelje Sherpa working for Seven Summit Treks. Spotting a Malaysian climber, Ravichandran Tharumalingam, in distress and abandoned high on the mountain, he persuaded his Chinese clients to let him rescue the man, giving up his own summit attempt to do so. (Gelje had climbed the peak six times previously.) Working with Nima Tashi Sherpa, the pair carried the stricken climber on their backs from the Balcony to the South Col where others were able to help. Tharumalingam was eventually evacuated in a long-line helicopter rescue from camp three and proved surprisingly reluctant to acknowledge the part the Sherpas played in surviving his ascent.

Sixteen Chinese climbers reached the summit from the north side of the peak, part of a group maintaining the weather station installed last year. China did say it would issue permits but did in this in March when it was too late for anyone to do anything about it.

Another sad loss, someone many readers who have trekked in the region will have known, was the death of Pasang Lama, the Everest trail builder who worked tirelessly to ensure that paths were safe and accessible for trekkers and who could usually be found sat on his chair beside the trail collecting donations.

While all the expected dramas played out on the commercial expeditions Czech climbers Marek Holeček and Matěj Bernát headed to the north-west face of **Sura Peak** (6764m). They completed their route in five days and called it *Simply Beautiful*. 'It was pure alpinism, a beautiful and untouched face. One battle tent, a backpack with gear, a rope like an umbilical cord [between us], our plan and determination. Nothing useless.' They estimated difficulties to be M6, the average slope 70° with 90° and the length of the route at 1,500m. See Holeček's article 'The Gods Are Kind on Sura Peak' in this issue of the *Alpine Journal* for a full account.

Finally, on **Chandi Himal** (6142m) came news of a likely first ascent.



Nima Tashi Sherpa carries Malaysian climber Ravichandran Tharumalingam on his back down to the South Col, photographed by Gelje Sherpa who instigated the rescue and took turns in rescuing him. (*Gelje Sherpa*)



The late Pasang Lama, right, who for almost 40 years worked and then coordinated trail repairs in Khumbu, starting near his home in Dingboche and then expanding his efforts across the region. His efforts were recognised in Nepal, if not by the authorities then by the 'everyday hero' award from a Nepali newspaper. His age was uncertain, but Pasang was likely in his mid 80s.



Setting off before dawn up the north-west face of Sura Peak. (*Marek Holeček*)

Spaniard Jaime Iranzo and Pemba Sherpa succeeded in climbing this peak in Humla after a nine-day approach. The expedition was the brainchild of Matt Powell who recruited team members through the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club in the Washington region where Iranzo was studying. The ministry has not always been a reliable source of information on peaks in this area and peaks have been confused with each other. It's likely that some of these peaks have had 'unofficial' ascents but Powell thought this was a first ascent, a view shared by the British team who visited in the pre-monsoon.

Since 1950 nearly all expeditions have employed Sherpa staff. When asked, why do you risk your life for foreign mountaineers, they often reply, 'So that I can pay for my children to have a better education so as not to have to work in a dangerous occupation.' Previous generations have grown up in high-altitude villages, doing hard manual labour to sustain the family. If they did go to school that would often entail walking up to several hours to school and back home again, often carrying heavy bags of books and of course playing and running around along the way. This hard life at altitude developed resilience and a tough physical character.

These days it is rare to see youngsters in the high Himalayan villages; they are all studying at lower altitude in Kathmandu or abroad. Does this mean the present generation of high-altitude Sherpa workers will be one of the last to work on 8,000m expeditions? Being a guide is far more physically demanding in the Himalaya than in the Alps. Many 8,000m guides physically assist clients, carrying their rucksacks or oxygen, in ways not often seen in the lower ranges. If Sherpas withdraw from the industry, what will the impact on the Everest industry be? What will be the impact on the casualty rate? The issue is not an immediate concern but surely one that will arise in a few years' time.



Starting up the rock band at two-thirds height on Sura Peak during the first ascent of *Simply Beautiful*.  
(Marek Holeček)

### Trekking Permits

An issue that has rumbled on for years is the threat to make guides compulsory for all trekkers. On 11 June 2023, the Nepal Tourist Board finally made it reality, issuing new guidelines for foreign trekkers banning them from visiting Nepal's national parks and conservation areas without a registered guide or porter. (These changes were described as 'guidelines' in the NTB's statement but look more like mandatory rules given the sanctions for breaking them.) The new rules say that a government-registered trekking company must arrange the guides or porters. Foreign visitors also have to obtain a trekkers' information management systems (TIMS) card before going trekking. These cost NR2,000.

A trekker found travelling on designated trekking trails without a guide or TIMS card faces a NR12,000: around \$100. Officials at check posts have been promised 20% of the fine for stopping illegal trekkers as a special encouragement allowance, according to the authorities. A TIMS card is not required for those holding permits for climbing mountains. Tourists visiting restricted areas with

permission from the Department of Immigration do not require the card either. Children under 10 do not require a TIMS card. Diplomats and aid workers don't require a TIMS card if they are working. The rules came with a list of 44 trekking trails across Nepal including Kangchenjunga, Makalu Barun, Everest, Rolwaling, Panchpokharai Bhairavkunda, Helambu, Langtang, Ganesh Himal, Manaslu, Annapurna, Mustang, Dhaulagiri, Dolpa and Humla.

Local authorities in the Everest region have strongly opposed the new rules, saying that they limit the right to free movement of foreigners. Independent trekkers have enjoyed taking advantage of the extensive network of trekking lodges in Khumbu.

By law all foreigners involved in trekking should insure their Nepali staff against illness, injury and death while employed as a guide or a porter. Foreign tourists also need insurance in case of helicopter rescue. Although this is not

a legal requirement by law many helicopter agents will not collect casualties unless an insurance document is shown. All agencies expect clients to be appropriately insured.

Prior to these new rules trekkers could hire a guide or trek independently, requiring the trekker to take responsibility for the insurance of staff. At that time the purchase of the appropriate TIMS card covered that issue. Now guides are required to be hired through a registered trekking agency and by law the agency should insure their staff.

Many independent trekkers will be disappointed by these changes but so are many local lodge owners, homestay operators, freelance guides and porters who operate from trailhead centres and will now be required to work through agencies. It has also focussed attention on the quality of certified guides, whose training is often out-of-date or inadequate. A few have false documents.

Scrutinised closely, this seems more about trekking agencies extracting more money from tourists than any genuine attempt to improve safety as claimed. The rules don't apply to domestic trekkers who are no less vulnerable to mishap. Whether these rules will be implemented and monitored is another story. This season many TIMS counters and park check-posts remained unmanned.