

Dhaulagiri IV. Unsuccessful post-monsoon parties have sometimes, while blaming the bad weather for their failure, explained that virtually no gap occurred between the ending of the monsoon and the onset of the winter snows. Certainly the weather in October, 1965 was most unsettled with heavy snowfalls and was largely responsible for the failure of the British on Dhaulagiri IV and the Yugoslavs on Kangbachen. Given usual October climbing conditions, both would probably have climbed their mountains. From time to time these bad Octobers do occur, but they are not the winter snows. This year's snowy October slipped into a brilliant November, with day after day of blue skies and the big mountains standing crystal clear from dawn to sunset. November, though growing cold, is not too late for high climbing but it is difficult and expensive to sit out the siege. The expedition to Dhaulagiri IV (25,064 feet) was organized by the Royal Air Force Mountaineering Association. The members were J. Sims, leader, R. Bird, W. Russell, S. Ward, T. Mann, R. Wilkinson, P. Addis, and R. Bennett, all of the Royal Air Force, and myself. A small but very strong Sherpa team of eight had Mingma Tsering as sirdar. Thanks to the recent arrival in Nepal of suitable freight-carrying aircraft with the ability to land on short runways at high altitudes, it was possible to fly all expedition members, Sherpas, food and equipment in seven sorties to Dhorpatan (c. 9000 feet), only four days walk from Base Camp rather than the thirteen it would have taken walking from Pokhara. There is much pleasure and value in a reasonably long approach march, but in the case of the RAF party the financial saving was such, with Pokhara porters demanding 15 rupees a day and over 150 loads, that the use of aircraft was too good to refuse. Dhaulagiri IV had previously been reconnoitered and climbed to 21,000 feet by four Sherpas and me in October, 1962. The plan now was to follow our route up the west side, which had solved the problems and most of the dangers of the lower cliffs and icefalls but had stopped short of embarking on the upper pyramid. From the big glacier basin and open snowfields attained at 19,000 feet, from which the final 6000 feet of mountain rises, we had noted two possible routes to the summit. First was the south ridge, the crest of which might be reached by a very steep buttress of snow and ice, rising from the snowfields between Dhaulagiri IV and its close neighbor to the south, Gurja Himal (23,539 feet and included in the 1965 permit). This we had judged too difficult for our small 1962 party and turned instead to a longer but apparently easier approach, an ascending traverse across the west face, to be followed by a climb up the northwest corner of the final peak. Two of my Sherpas reached 21,000 feet and reported

not unfavourably on its possibilities, but we abandoned it owing to the apparent danger of ice avalanches sweeping the traverse. The weather in September, 1965 was exceptionally fine. This facilitated the fly in, which would have been difficult, if not impossible, under true monsoon conditions. The flights were completed by September 7 and Base was established at 13,000 feet by the 12th. The party generally followed the 1962 route. Camps were established at 15,500 feet (Glacier Base), at 17,600 feet (Camp I) and at 19,000 feet (Camp II and Advanced Base). From the latter it was decided to attempt to reach the south ridge, which seen from the air seemed to present few difficulties, by climbing the ice shoulder on the southwest flank of the summit pyramid. Since October 6, however, there had been a deterioration in the weather, with cloudy days, afternoon snowfalls and high winds; snow conditions on the steeper slopes were difficult, tedious and dangerous. Camp III at the foot of the buttress was established at 20,400 feet on October 12 and 14. In an attempt to climb higher on the 15th, the snow conditions were bad and soon after leaving camp, two Sherpas were carried down by a large windslab avalanche, fortunately without injury. It seemed to Sims, who was directing operations, that the whole of the steeper parts of the west side were dangerous under prevailing conditions. At this time most members and Sherpas were at Camp III, which was well stocked. Given good snow conditions, the party was well placed for a successful ascent. I can not agree with some of the party, apparently misled by the foreshortened appearance from Camp III of slopes leading to the south ridge, that the ascent under good conditions would offer few technical difficulties. Unfortunately the alternate, traverse route was not even examined, and everyone returned to Camp II on October 16. On the 17th and 18th ascents were made of Ghustung Himal (21,200 feet), first climbed by our 1962 expedition. A heavy snowfall began on the afternoon of the 18th and the party had a hard time fighting its way down to the safety of Glacier Base on the 20th and 21st. The decision of October 15 to abandon the attempt may have been premature, but subsequent heavy snowfalls, which consolidate slowly on west and north slopes in the autumn, ensured that the final result would have been the same. We reached Pokhara on November 11. The weather during the last week of the march out remained brilliantly and ironically fine.

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Bhutan

Exploration of the Sources of the Punakha River. An interesting article on little-explored Bhutan appears in the June, 1965 *Alpine Journal*. Michael