

The Eastern Outlier of Annapurna South¹

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AS the five of us stepped on to the summit, we relaxed our limbs but not our eyes as we gazed at the grandeur of the Annapurna Himal. Northwest of our summit, the massive face of Annapurna South dominated. We scanned it hoping to see the Japanese who were climbing on it, but to no avail. The tooth summit of Fang stuck out gnawingly to the right of Annapurna South. We looked covetously at its summit snow slopes and wondered who would be the first to climb on them. To the right of Fang, the south face of Annapurna I overwhelmed the view. Unlike the British, who must have gazed at and photographed our peak "the virgin" many times on their ascent, this was our first view of Annapurna.² Our route had come up the southeast face of the Eastern Outlier directly above Hinku. (See map)

To the east of Annapurna I, the long undulating ridge led to Glacier Dome and the black pyramid of Gangapurna. Next, rose Annapurna III and beyond IV and II. The whole amphitheater of peaks culminated finally with the much photographed Machapuchare rising up just across the Modi Khola.

Five of us stood on the summit at 21,133 feet: Lane Smith, Jim Richards, John Skow, and I who were Peace Corps Volunteers in Nepal, and Peter Cross, a USAID science specialist. Below at Camp I, Dave Trowbridge, Stephanie Forrest, and Ann Chlebeck, my fiancée, waited. Dave should have been with us but he had been injured four days earlier by rock fall.

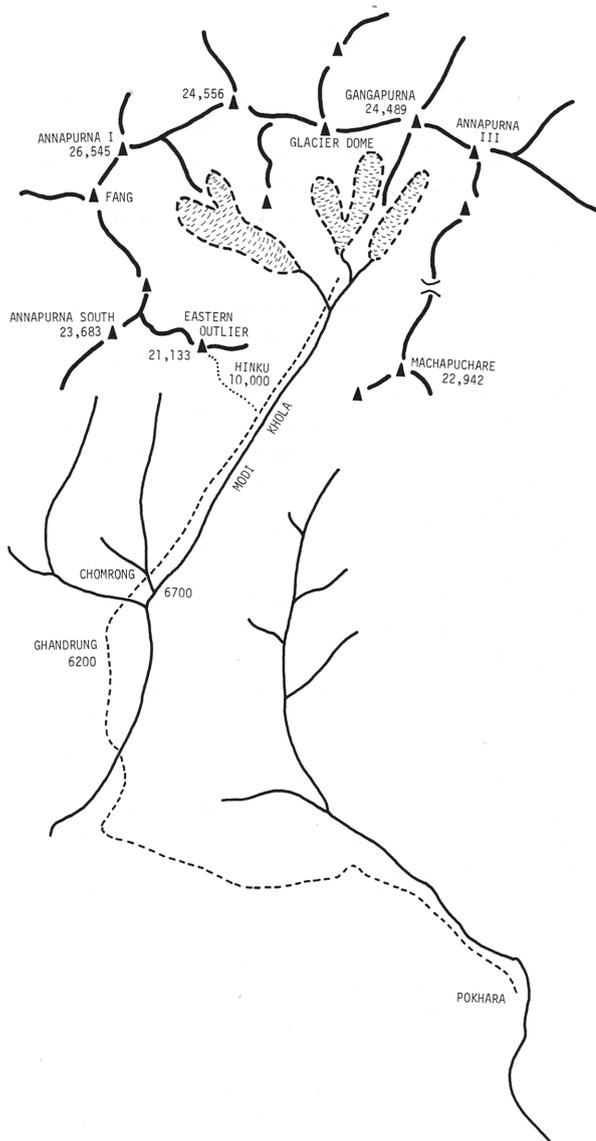
We had encountered two major obstacles during the climb. Number one was getting on the mountain. Steep snow and rock faces circumvent the peak. This problem was lessened when Ann and I went from Ghandrung (where I was posted as a teacher) to Chomrong to buy potatoes a week before the climb. Two local hunters (*shikaris*) opened up the mountain to us when they told of hunting trails directly above Hinku cave to the base of the Outlier.

¹ This is the name officially recognized by the Nepali government for the peak which lies east of Annapurna South or Moditse. On most maps it appears as "Hiunchuli," which is the name given it by the local people.

² See *American Alpine Journal*, 1971, 17:2, Plate 4.

On September 18, Ann and I along with nine porters moved our equipment from Ghandrung to Chromrong. We were to start out the next day to reconnoiter the route with the two hunters, Min Bahadur and Dal Bahadur as guides. Simultaneously, in other parts of Nepal, the rest of the party would be moving toward the mountain. It was the start of the Nepali Dasain holidays and for Peace Corps teachers, the only long vacation that coincides with good climbing weather.

From Chromrong, it took us two days to get high up into the meadows



above Hinku. We camped on a grassy slope at 13,500 feet which three days later became our Base Camp. Before the clouds rolled in on the morning of the 21st, Dal Bahadur and I crossed below the snout of two glaciers that occasionally send avalanches down to Hinku, 3500 feet below.³ We climbed up to about 15,000 feet in sight of the east face. From this point, I was able to distinguish a possible route onto the face involving a rock wall ranging in height from 400 feet at its lowest point to 1500 feet at its highest. Recalling what I had seen of the east ridge route during the monsoon reconnaissance, I felt that we should attempt the mountain from this side rather than go into the Sanctuary. It would have been difficult to rappel down the steep east ridge on to the glacier below.

It was a most rewarding day since not only had I found a possible route but we had also spotted a herd of fifteen "jaral" or Himalayan thar which brought a hunter's excitement to Dal Bahadur's eyes that was in itself enough to make my day.

On the following afternoon, at the large stream near Hinku cave, we looked across the mist above the ice-bridged river (an avalanche had come down from the Eastern Outlier and filled the stream) and saw Lane, Peter, and Dave searching the snow and ice rubble for a place to cross. Spirits were high as we related the events of the past few days over some Swiss chocolate and a fire at Hinku.

We convinced the porters that it was to their advantage to carry full loads up to Base Camp for double pay rather than split their loads and carry for two days. The trail up to Base Camp was extremely steep but these Gurung porters could handle anything! Base Camp was established on September 23. The next few days were spent ferrying loads from Base Camp to Camp I. The Gurung porters carried loads as far as Base Camp and from there up, the rest of us ferried all the loads since we did not engage Sherpas because of our limited budget as PCVs. In the long run, this paid off because we were all well acclimatized.

The second major obstacle of the climb was that rock wall itself. From Camp I, Jim Richards, our most technically competent rock climber, and I crossed the glacier running due east and climbed the wall at its lowest point. The rock was fairly solid and we had a good day's climb. However, many of the pitches were in the 5.4 range and obviously, too difficult for load carrying.

We finally got up this obstacle via a 600-foot couloir. It was a very narrow chute that proved to be a fault line between two rock masses. Consequently, the rock was extremely unstable. We had a few near accidents here, and one that disabled Dave Trowbridge; fortunately, not seriously. Towards the top of the chute, we traversed out and into a series of shorter less dangerous couloirs. These were climbed relatively

³ See *Annapurna South Face*, by Christian Bonington, London: Cassell, page 54.

easily and they brought us to the upper snow slopes. We placed Camp II at 17,000 feet.

From there, we crossed a large snow basin to the foot of the hanging glacier. We set up Camp III here at 18,000 feet. In the days that followed, we stocked this camp for the final push. John Skow and I also made a trip back down to Camp I because of Dave's accident.

On October 9, Peter and I led out from Camp III. As usual, it was a clear warm morning at this altitude, and we were soon shedding clothes. The route went up a narrow avalanche chute to the base of the hanging glacier. This offered good solid footing whereas to the right or the left, we would have been up to our waist in soft snow. All the avalanches appeared to be limited to this narrow corridor, and we felt fairly safe since we could easily traverse to one side.

The other rope team of Jim, Lane and John quickly caught up to us as we encountered soft granular snow as we traversed left under the hanging glacier. We were amazed at the 20- to 30-foot icicles that hung there defying the force of gravity. Even though our loads were heavy, no one had any problems with altitude. We climbed up and around the hanging glacier. At one point, we had to place two ice screws for safety, in a sérac. We continued on "up through the thin cold air." Technically, we were not confronted with any problem. It was exhilarating as the clouds swirled around us.

We placed Camp IV on the lip of a crevasse at an estimated 20,000 feet. We had been stopped by a large crevasse that was spanned precariously by a bridge that had fallen away in the middle. It was enough for one day, and we went to sleep hoping there would be a way around.

However, in the morning, we were stopped both to the right and the left. The exposure was great and the snow conditions poor; there was no alternative but to try the crevasse. Jim Richards, our lightest climber, led across. The bridge held and we all crossed over without an incident. The slopes now fanned out, and we picked a route to the wind-swept ridge leading to the summit. At last, I was treading on ground that I had so often studied with binoculars from Ghandrung. Below a sea of clouds spread out covering the foothills and villages where I had spent three years. We all felt the altitude a bit, but there was nothing to stop us. The day, October 10, the moment, the mountain was ours.

Summary of Statistics:

AREA: Annapurna Range, Central Nepal.

FIRST ASCENT: Eastern Outlier of Annapurna South, 21,133 feet, via Southeast Face, October 10, 1971 (Anderson, Cross, Richards, Skow and Smith).

PERSONNEL: Craig Anderson, leader; Ann Chlebeck, Peter Cross, Stephanie Forrest, John Skow, Lane Smith, James Richards, David Trowbridge.