

Bandaka and Changabang

JOHN PORTER

CHANCE IS AN ACTIVE partner in our lives. It was by chance that I was hitch-hiking from the Lakes to Leeds one Sunday in 1975 when Dennis Grey stopped to ask me to climb with a group of Polish climbers visiting Britain the following week. "Sure," I replied. But what could I have been sure about? Three years and two expeditions later, only the summits seem sure.

Andrzej Zawada, the leader of the Lhotse attempt in winter, was amongst that group. When I visited Poland six months later, the possibility of an Anglo-Polish Hindu Kush Expedition was cheerfully discussed over vodka with Andrzej. "You bring dollars, we provide equipment, food, and transportation, ok?" "Sure," I replied. A summer passed and a dark winter was descending outside the pub doors, when one day a letter arrived, and it was on.

I had six months to organize the first expedition.* A hastily assembled team was as rapidly dispersed: a broken leg, the lure of another expedition, job responsibilities—each took a member. I roped in Alex MacIntyre, only semi-conscious after a month of final exams, three weeks before we left. Howard Lancashire and Peter Holden also agreed to come at short notice. Terry King had been in since the beginning. We got together what food and equipment we could from sponsors, but it seemed a pitiful amount. "Don't worry, boys. As long as we bring dollars, we can arrive in our underwear!"

A week after we left Britain, we were on a train travelling across the USSR. "The Russians don't know you are going this way. It is forbidden to westerners," Zawada assured us. For five days the great continental plains rolled beneath us; across the Volga to Orsk, then down between the Aral and Caspian Seas through Bukhara to the River Oxus at Termez. The Russian Colonel shrugged his shoulders after his initial surprise. "Since you are here, we will let you cross the river . . . in a few days."

Five of us moved on to Mazar-i-Sharif, three plus wives stayed in Termez to wait the arrival of the equipment via freight train. (Had the

* For more details, see *A.A.J.*, 1978, pages 633-4.