

Nanda Devi's Northeast Face

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OUR EXPEDITION FROM Ostrava, Czechoslovakia selected as its objective the nearly untouched northeast face of the highest mountain in the Garhwal Himalaya, 25,645-foot Nanda Devi. The face rises more than 10,000 feet. Since the reconnaissance of Tilman and Shipton in 1934, the only serious attempts from that side were our spring of 1978 Ostrava expedition, which tried to climb the entire north ridge, reaching the foresummit now given on the latest maps as 7055 meters (23,146 feet), and the two-man British team led by Terry King, which tried that autumn to climb the route we did ascend in 1981.

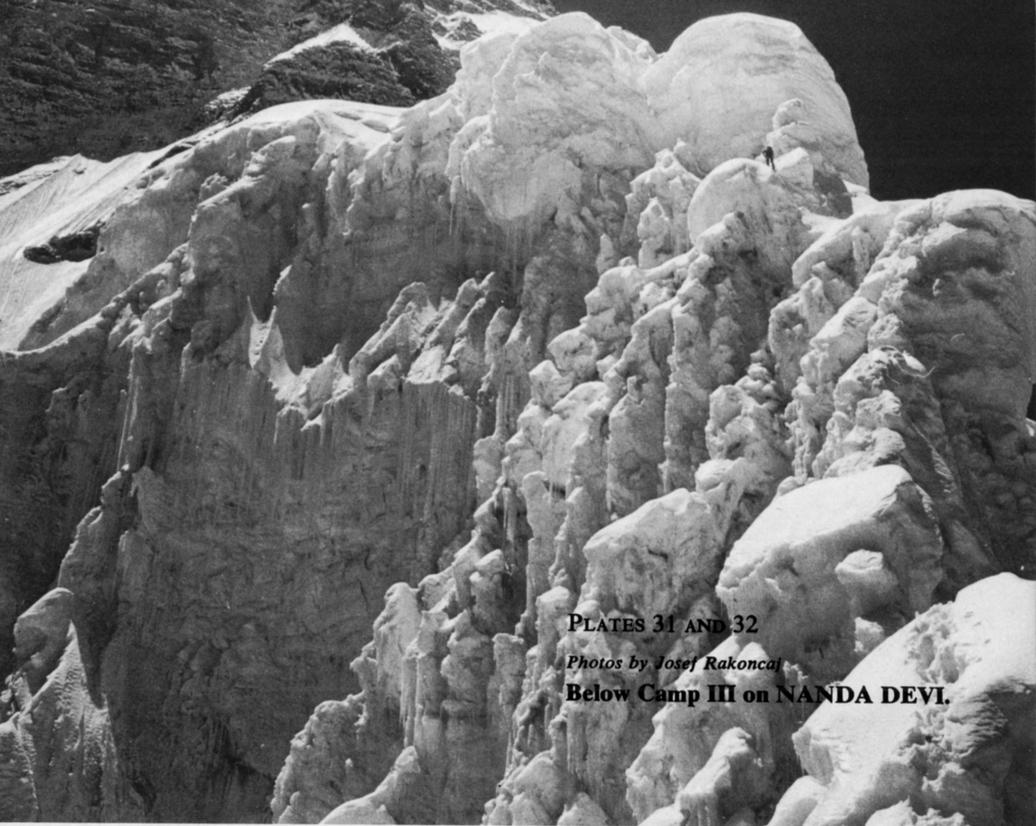
After our bad experiences in May 1978, when time was cut short by the unexpectedly early arrival of the monsoon which prevented us from completing the entire traverse of the north ridge, we decided the 1981 expedition would begin to climb in the full monsoon. After a difficult approach march, our 120 porters had transported in all a ton and a quarter of supplies to Base Camp by July 30. Base Camp was on the right bank of the glacier, the Uttari Nanda Devi Gal, directly below the most prominent ridge in the northeast face. [It is the third ridge to the left.—*Editor*] After a brief reconnaissance, we decided to climb the ridge, which presents an ideal *Direttissima*. Though technically difficult, the danger of avalanches was minimized. Our strategy proved to be correct, but during the monsoon, a whole day's activity often resulted in climbing only one pitch.

The expedition comprised in all 11 climbers, a physician, an Indian liaison officer and a high-altitude porter. The latter carried loads as high as Camp II. We established three climbing groups, which rotated their activities on the ridge. In spite of unfavorable weather, progress was ensured. The groups established high-altitude camps, the last of which, Camp IV, was pitched at 23,625 feet on September 6. Between the camps, 13,000 feet of rope were fixed, enabling the safe transportation of food and gear to the high camps. The climb was complicated by the

Photo by Otokar Srovnal

NANDA DEVI's Northeast Face.





PLATES 31 AND 32

Photos by Josef Rakoncaj

Below Camp III on NANDA DEVI.

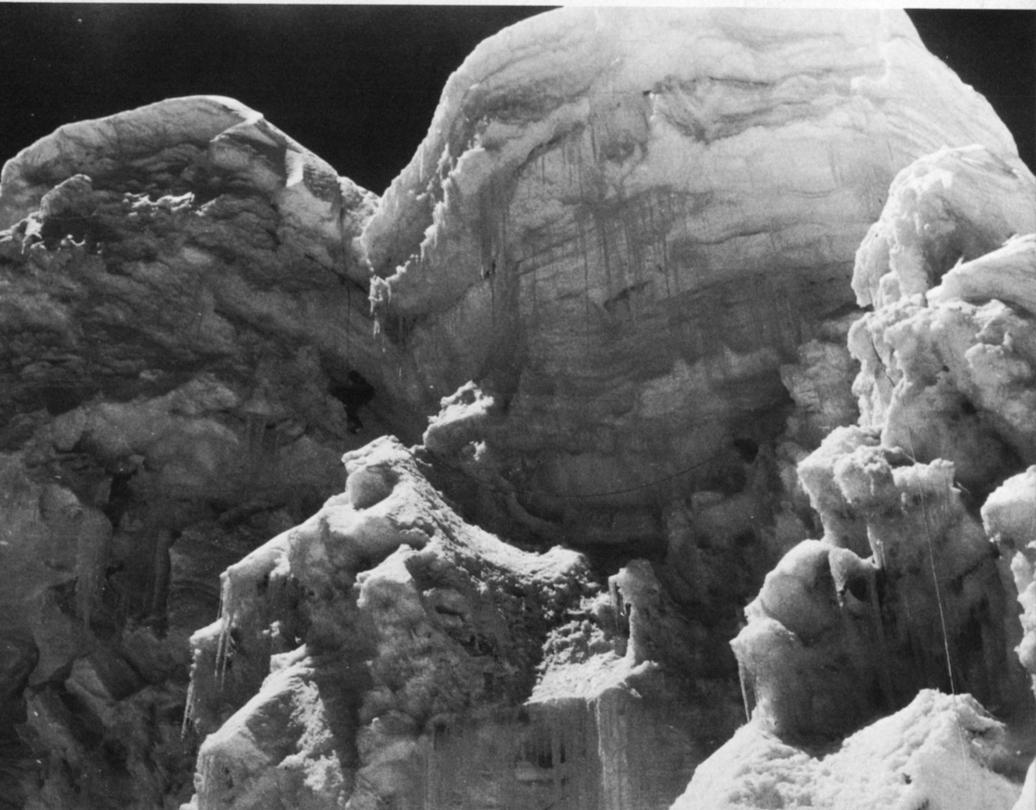




PLATE 33

Photo by Josef Rakoncaj

The ridge climbed on NANDA DEVI is in the middle distance. Nanda Devi East at left and main summit toward the right.

micro-climate of the northeast face, where nearly daily snowfall dropped from five inches to three feet (15 cm to 1 meter) of fresh snow. The rock was of UIAA IV to V difficulty. Also the ice was often bad and unstable.

Bad weather, with daily afternoon snowfalls, brought catastrophe to Camp IV in the form of a fresh-snow avalanche. The tent there was buried under a slide ten feet deep and was never seen again. Fortunately the avalanche happened when the camp was unoccupied.

Because of these unfavorable conditions, we decided to make the final attack on the summit in alpine style. The suitable time arrived on September 14. Only two days earlier, the weather had stabilized and the fresh snow had settled. Leoš Horka, Ludvík Paleček and Kamil Karafa set out from Camp III. Near the site of Camp IV they pitched a small bivouac tent and spent the night without sleeping bags. The following day, they attacked the summit wall, fixing ropes up a large rock band of UIAA V+, V-, A2, A3 difficulty. They bivouacked in a snow hole at 24,600 feet (7500 meters), once more without sleeping bags. The next day, September 16, this group was joined by the support party, Otokar Srovnal and Bohumil Kadlčík. After a day of tremendous effort, all five reached the summit just before sunset. In the meanwhile, the weather had deteriorated and it began to snow. They descended 100 meters down the southwest face, once again to dig a snow hole. They spent a miserable night, again without sleeping bags. On September 17 they got back to the Camp IV site and within three days were down in Base Camp.

Josef Rakoncaj and Leopold Sulovsky, the reserve team, set out for the summit three days after these first climbers. They moved up from Base Camp to the Camp IV site in the surprisingly short time of three days. In spite of unfavorable weather, they overcame the difficult summit wall and reached the summit on September 19 at 2:30 P.M., descending that same day to Camp IV.

Summary of Statistics:

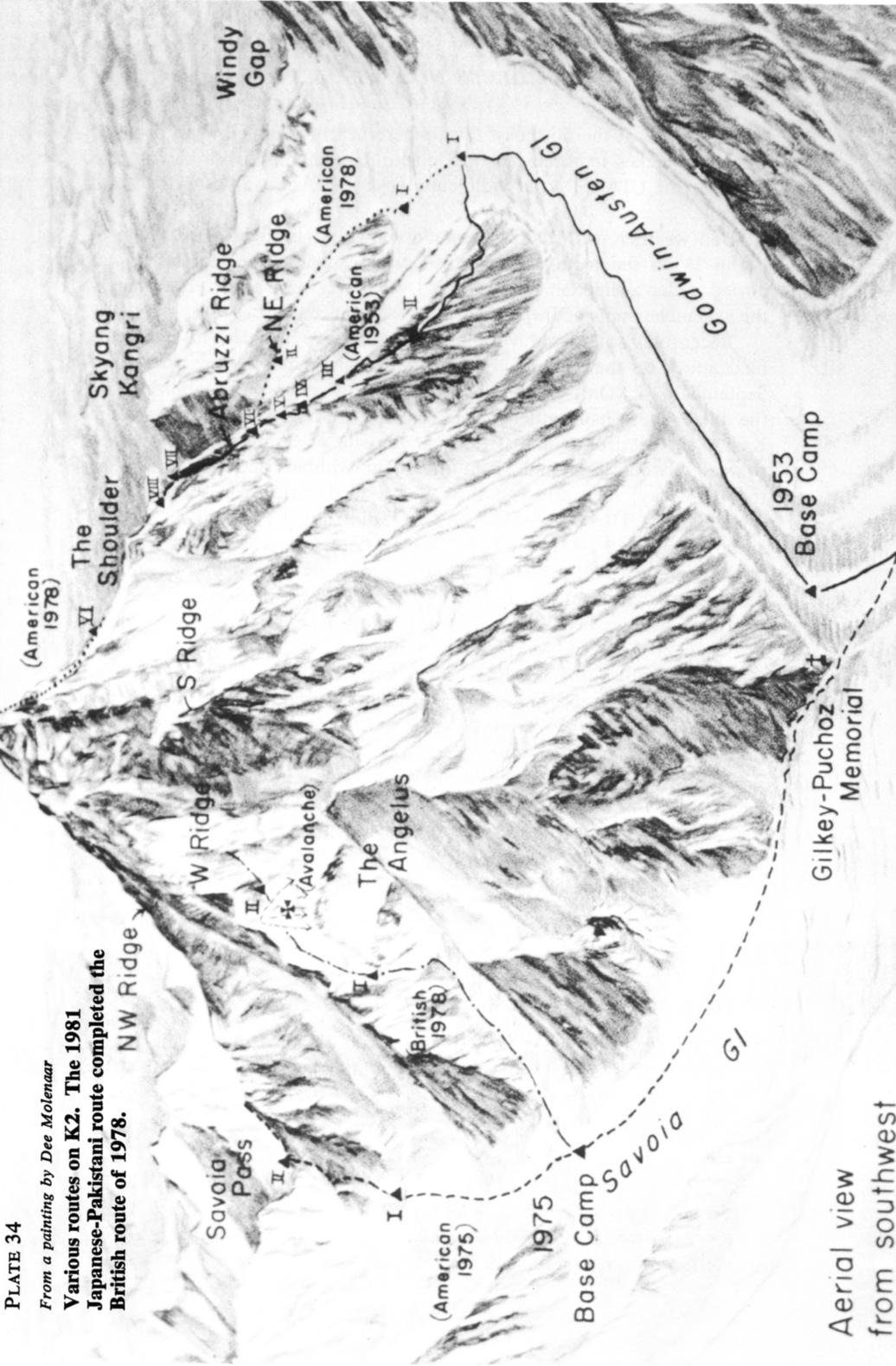
AREA: Garhwal Himalaya.

NEW ROUTE: Nanda Devi, 7816 meters or 25,645 feet, via the prominent ridge on the northeast face, summit reached on September 16, 1981 (Srovnal, Kadlčík, Horka, Paleček, Karafa) and on September 19, 1981 (Rakoncaj, Sulovsky).

PERSONNEL: Milan Martaus, *leader*, Vlastimil Šmída, *climbing leader*, Dr. Jan Charousek, Kamil Karafa, Ludvík Paleček, Leoš Horka, Josef Rakoncaj, Leopold Sulovsky, Bohuslav Mrozek, Dalibor Trpík, Otokar Srovnal, Bohumil Kadlčík, Flight Lieutenant Sridhar, *Indian liaison officer*, Narain Singh Rana, *high-altitude porter*.

From a painting by Dee Molenaar

Various routes on K2. The 1981 Japanese-Pakistani route completed the British route of 1978.



Aerial view from southwest