

# Quo Vadis

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THE NUMBER 26,247; does this mean anything to you? No? I must correct you since it corresponds in feet to the mystic altitude of 8000 meters. But the metric system is not used all over the world. Now, this 8000-meter figure which sets most European climbers dreaming doesn't have the same meaning for those who use English measures. The height of 8000 meters doesn't have as much prestige for Anglo-Saxons as it does for us.

Let me point out that nowadays climbing an 8000er is not really of great interest and is certainly no longer a great exploit. I have just returned from Gasherbrum II, which I climbed on August 2 with Elisabeth Julliard and Michel Berquet by the normal route. One should know that, different from Nepal which authorizes only one expedition per season on any route, Pakistan permits several expeditions to try the same peak by the same route at the same time. Consequently at Base Camp this summer, aside from us, there were numerous expeditions. A large French expedition was directed by the guides Claude Jacoux and Michel Vincent who were accompanied by their clients. With them were Pierre Gévaux who jumped from the summit of Gasherbrum II by parachute and Jean-Marc Boivin who descended from there by hang-glider. There was another group led by Thierry Renard. One of them, Michel Metzger, skied down the southwest face. Another successful French expedition was led by Louis Le Pivain. I won't mention the Japanese, Swedish and Italians who climbed the same route.

The result of this heavy traffic was that the difficult spots were thoroughly fixed with more or less new rope and the slopes and campsites were littered with varied and abundant trash. You could no longer talk of an expedition but rather of alpinism away-from-home. It seems to me that to try to climb all the 8000ers will soon mean no more than to have climbed all the 4000ers in the Alps one hundred years ago. Who remembers the first one to have done so?

On the other hand, to open new routes to the great peaks, even if they are less than 8000 meters, represents a definite step ahead in expeditionary climbing. No one has forgotten the names of those who first climbed the Nose on El Capitan in Yosemite or the southwest buttress of the Dru. Bonatti on his only Himalayan expedition climbed Gasherbrum IV, which is less than 8000 meters but is extraordinarily difficult. He had the right perspective. If he had kept on, he would not have amused himself by climbing all the 8000ers. This race to 8000 meters is out of date and, aside from Messner who may indeed climb them all

without ridicule, his imitators and successors will have done nothing original and will leave no tracks in Himalayan history.

The English have understood this, as well as the Poles and a few other climbers, who try new routes, sometimes in winter, on difficult peaks which are often less than 8000 meters.

It would be good if young climbers would not be enticed by the fleeting glory which they get by ascending a large number of 8000ers. They should direct themselves rather to difficulty on great peaks of any altitude whatsoever.

I have no fear that bold mountaineers will solve the last problems of the Himalaya, that they will climb virgin summits and ascend very difficult routes. But will my fellow Frenchmen be among them?

PLATE 7

*Photo by Randy Harrington*

**AMA DABLAM's East Face from Advance Base. Lagunak Ridge rises from right to left in front of the shadow. High up, they traversed left nearly to the skyline and the south-ridge route.**

