

cabinet gave no explanation for this decision, and he has no idea what lay behind it, but he notes that there had been discussions "at a high level" — presumably meaning between the British ambassador and the tourism minister, and perhaps the prime minister, of that time. There has been some suggestion that the election campaign was somehow involved, but the official says he has not heard of any such connection. In any case, he says payment of the \$50,000 royalty fee was received from Himalayan Kingdoms on November 22.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY

Kangchenjunga, Ascents and Tragedy. On October 5, eight men from three teams set out without any bottled oxygen from their last campsites around 7800 meters, high on the plateau known as the Great Shelf on the southwest face. They included the Swiss climber Erhard Loretan, who was going for his last 8000er; Benoit Chamoux, who had reached the highest summits of twelve 8000ers, plus a peak of Shisha Pangma which is over 8000 meters high and only slightly lower than its highest point, and which he counted as his ascent of the mountain; and Sergio Martini, an Italian who had already summited ten 8000ers. Loretan and his frequent climbing partner Jean Troillet left their bivouac on the Great Shelf at 2 a.m. for the summit. At the same time, Martini, together with Chamoux and his usual partner, Pierre Royer, and three of their Sherpas, whom they had employed to help with the film Royer was making about Chamoux's expected historic ascent, set out for the top from the third of their fixed camps nearby. The eight stayed together until about 9:30 a.m. At this point the two Swiss and the Italian went on ahead after they had found the French party was moving too slowly. Just after this moment, one of Chamoux's Sherpas, Riku, lost his balance while sitting down with a rucksack on his back and fell to his death. The other two Sherpas with the French descended immediately.

Loretan forged a route up to the col just west of Kangchenjunga's summit pyramid on the ridge connecting its main summit with the west summit, which is known as Yalungkang, followed by what Loretan calls "an easy way" along this rock and snow ridge to the top. Martini doubted that this line would prove satisfactory because of a difficult big rock pillar and the strong wind that was blowing. He waited for half an hour for the Swiss to retreat from it and to follow the normal route via a couloir. But they did not immediately return, so he turned back at 8200 meters, below the col, and decided he would attempt the couloir alone. However, after he had climbed only 20 meters of it, he found the condition of snow-on-rock too dangerous, and he descended in bitterly cold weather.

Swiss variation through col
to north side

Benoit's bivy

Normal Route

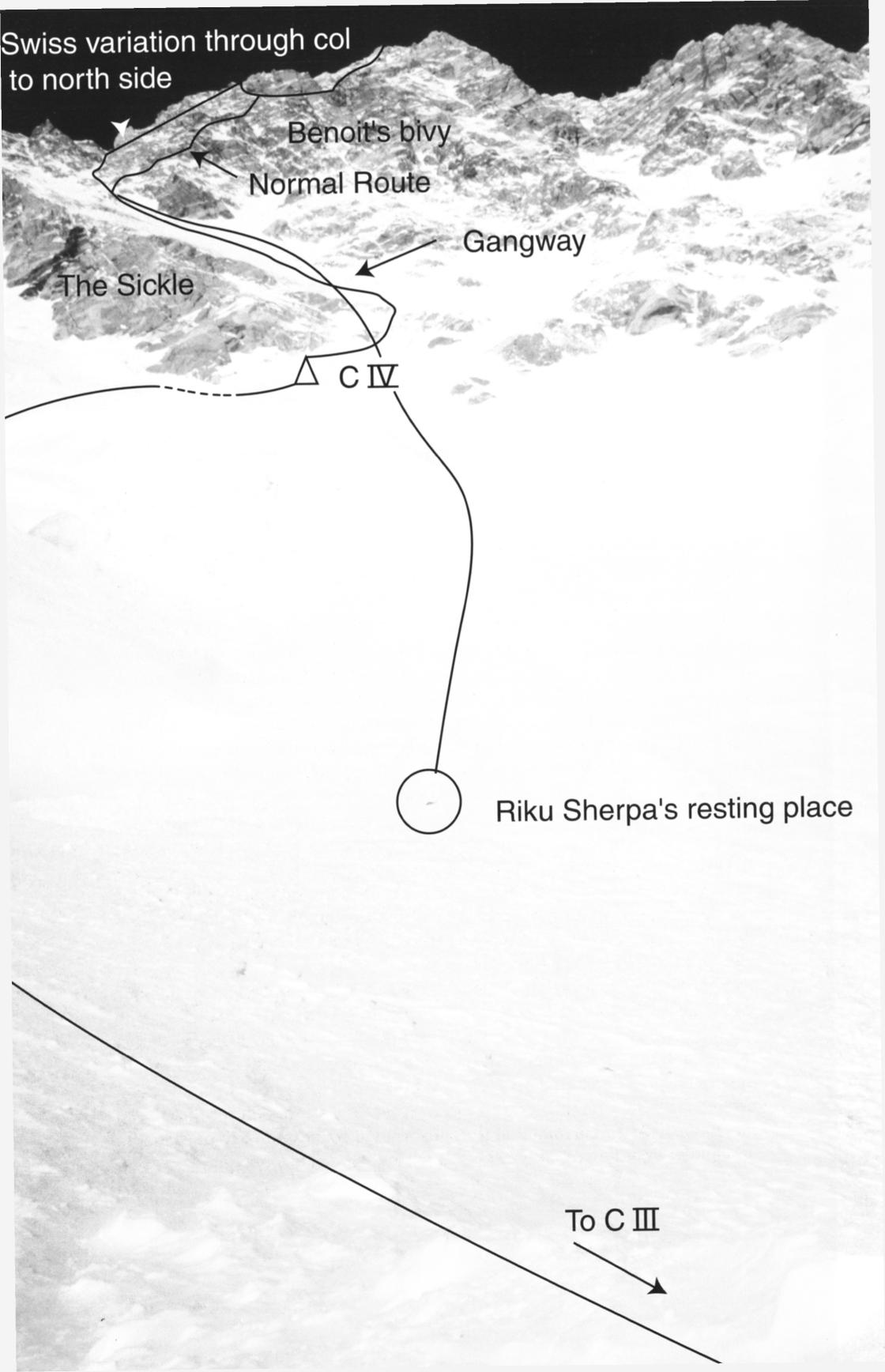
Gangway

The Sickle

C IV

Riku Sherpa's resting place

To C III



As Loretan and Troillet approached the summit alone, the weather was extremely cold and the wind was blowing lots of snow in spirals, but when they reached the top at 2:35 p.m. the wind was not so strong. They started their descent at 3 p.m. and were in their camp at 7300 meters, just below the Great Shelf, at 5:30 p.m. Two other members were now in the camp and Loretan slept there with them, but Troillet continued down to base camp at midnight.

Loretan had now joined Reinhold Messner of Italy and the late Jerzy Kukuczka of Poland as the only people to have successfully climbed all the 8000ers, and at the age of 36 he is the youngest to have done so. When he was back in Kathmandu nearly two weeks later, he spoke matter-of-factly about his accomplishment: "It's something done." This goal was not a burden to him, and he said he did not "feel any release from having achieved it." For the future, he was thinking about some other mountaineering projects, perhaps the very steep unclimbed west face of Makalu.

About 4 p.m. on October 5, Loretan and Troillet reached the bottom of the west ridge, where they met Chamoux and Royer still moving up. About half an hour later, Royer reported by their radio that he was abandoning his summit bid because he was too tired. He had been carrying his cameras himself since their Sherpas were no longer with them. An hour after that, Chamoux radioed that he also was too exhausted to continue his climb and he was unable to find his way down the ridge. He said he had lost visual contact with Royer, who had handed over their radio to Chamoux. Chamoux stayed all night on the ridge a few meters above the col and was on the radio again at 8 a.m. on the 6th. He received guidance from Troillet on how to come down the final section of the ridge. He was seen reaching the col, but then he went out of sight on the north side.

Neither Chamoux nor Royer were ever seen again. Their surviving Sherpas refused to go up to try to find them since they had done nothing to help Riku Sherpa when he had fallen. Aerial searches were made a few days afterward from helicopters and a small airplane, and climbers on Gimmigela, the mountain immediately north of Kangchenjunga, who had been using a telescope to scan Kangchenjunga's north face and summit area, had seen no trace of the Frenchmen.

Martini made another summit attempt on the 14th with a teammate, Abele Blanc. They were successful in their final six-hour ascent to the top via Loretan's route, and Martini is now the eighth person to stand atop as many as eleven 8000ers. They had not taken oxygen with them to the mountain and had planned to climb Kangchenjunga without any, but this day they used oxygen belonging to another team to make sure that they would reach the col to look for Chamoux and Royer. They did not find the two men, but along the ridge they found marks in the snow indicated someone had rested or bivouacked. Very near the col they found several items that had been

placed there: two ice axes, Royer's small rucksack containing two cameras, and, draped on a rock, two harnesses. A little higher was a radio propped against another rock.

Loretan thinks the two French climbers probably fell down the north face. Martini believes this may be true, or they may have died amongst the many big rocks near and above the col and their bodies are hidden by them. There are no crevasses in the area for them to have fallen into. Perhaps each man sat down alone to rest, had no strength to get up again and froze to death behind rocks that gave some shelter from the wind.

There was considerable discussion amongst members of expeditions camped at the foot of Kangchenjunga as to whether the presence together on the mountain of three top-class mountaineers had created a dangerously competitive situation. One French climber believes that Chamoux was in a race with Loretan to be the third person atop all fourteen 8000ers: "It was a fatal challenge for Chamoux. The Swiss were much faster. Loretan is the best." Said an American bluntly: "The French were not well acclimatized. They tried to keep up with the Swiss and they killed themselves."

ELIZABETH HAWLEY

Kangchenjunga, Body of Female Discovered. Simone Moro led an unsuccessful Italian/Polish expedition that attempted the Normal Route on the southwest face. They abandoned their attempt at 8000 meters on April 30. While on the mountain they reported finding a woman's body. It seemed quite possible that it was that of the noted Polish mountaineer Wanda Rutkiewicz, who disappeared as she was trying for the summit three years ago. The body was discovered at 7700 meters not far from the standard Southwest Face route. That it was on this side of the mountain did not prove that, if it was Rutkiewicz, she had reached the summit and fallen from it, for climbers on the north face have to make a high traverse onto the west ridge, and she could have slipped while making this traverse. But it could also be the body of a Bulgarian woman, Iordanka Dimitrova, who last October disappeared from 8300 meters on the southwest face. The Italians put the body into a crevasse.

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Kangchenjunga Attempt and Base Camp Cleanup. When I went to Yalung Kang (west summit of Kangchenjunga) in 1987 I was both surprised and saddened to find garbage at BC. I left with the hope that I would be able to return with the economic support necessary to remove the piles of waste.

Erhard Loretan.
Jess Stock