

tal strength. One participant was blown by the wind like a spruce tree, characteristic of the Himalaya's steep, snowy landscape. The team also included Vladimer Laratayev from Divnogarsk, who had a few amputated fingers and toes.

VLADIMIR SHATAEV, *Russian Mountaineering Federation*

Nepalese Himalaya, Various Activity in the Post-Monsoon Season. On Ama Dablam, 72 climbers from all but one of 12 teams summited via the same narrow southwest ridge; there were so many people on the ridge that they had to pitch their tents at odd spots up and down the route or skip some camps altogether.

Several expeditions this autumn came in for criticism for poor leadership or organization. A disastrous attempt by four Czechs and three Slovaks on Pumori ended in the fatal fall (see below) by three only moderately skilled Slovaks. They had been climbing without Sherpas and during the absence of their sick Czech leader, Michael Brunner, who was not a professional guide in any case. A Spaniard at a nearby base camp praised the Slovenians and Mexican for an astonishingly fast climb to rescue the man who survived; they are credited with saving his life.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY

Pumori, Attempt and Tragedy. Along with the Czech trekkers, the Czech Trekking Expedition CK Montana consisted of four Slovaks: Dusan Myslivec and Peter Lenco from the town of Nitra, and Pavol Dzurman and Frantisek Miscak from Presov. The goal for the Slovak mountaineers was to make the first ascent of the southeast face of Pumori (7161m). They worked with Slovenian climbers Janez Jeglič and Tomaž Humar, who planned to make a new route, and who wanted to link up with our mountaineers on the upper part of the wall. For acclimatization, the four Slovak climbers wanted to approach the col by the Normal Route and leave a tent there for the descent after finishing the new route. Dusan Myslivec came down with health problems; the best member of the Czech trekking group, Milos Kijonka, then joined the team. In October, after reaching the col at 6500 meters, they decided to climb to the top of Pumori. All four climbers were on the same rope. About 150 meters above the col on the ice wall, one of them probably fell and the rest were pulled with him. They stopped on a broad col (they did not fall into Tibet as reported). Peter Lenco, Pavol Dzurman and Frantisek Miscak died. Only Milos Kijonka survived. It is very hard to say what happened. Such a fall could occur in the Alps or in the High Tatras as well. Climbing four on a rope on moderate terrain was not a good idea. In such circumstances it probably is better to climb alone or to protect oneself more. Regardless, our young mountaineers are still dead.

VLADIMIR LINEK, *Jamesak*

Everest in the Pre-Monsoon. On Everest this spring there fortunately was no such dramatic disaster as the fatal storm of May 1996, although the Internet and other communications media led the public to believe there was. Sadly, a total of eight people did die while climbing with the 12 expeditions on Nepal's side and 16 teams and splinter groups in Tibet. But the Internet reported five Kazakhs had died in a storm when actually three Russians had died on one day (though not because of the weather; one fell and two were victims of the altitude). A New Zealand radio station even broadcast an item saying that it was seven New Zealanders who had died together; actually there were not seven New Zealanders among all the climbers on all the expeditions on the mountain, and not one of those who were there had any kind of accident.

By now, following all the publication of misinformation last spring and this, it is clear that instant reporting about Everest developments is quite unreliable and sometimes irresponsible. The radio station apologized later for its mistake, which had understandably caused great distress to the families of the New Zealanders who were on Everest.

The total number of people who have stood at the highest point on earth now has passed the 700-mark. This spring a total of 86 men and women reached the 8848-meter summit. They brought to 726 the total number of people who have now summited Everest since 1953, and to 932 the total number of ascents that these climbers have made.

Thirty-six of this spring's summitters had been there at least once before. All except one of these repeaters, a Mexican surgeon, were professional climbers: five were foreign guides with commercial expeditions, and 25 were Nepalese Sherpas.

Of course, Mount Everest attracts some not-so-highly-skilled amateur climbers as well. Among this spring's summitters who do not climb professionally was the first grandson of any summiter, Tashi Tenzing from Australia, whose grandfather, Tenzing Norgay Sherpa, made the mountain's first ascent with Edmund Hillary on May 29, 1953. Tashi Tenzing was a member of one of this spring's several commercial expeditions, and he summited on May 23. (Fittingly, on May 10, 1990, Hillary's son Peter had become the first son of a summiter to get to the top.)

Everest summitters this spring also included the first Indonesian men, Misirin and Asmujiono, who also were the first men from southeast Asia; after them came the first Malaysians, Magendran Munisamy and Mohandas Nagappan; the first three Icelanders, Hallgrimur Magnusson, Bjorn Olafsson and Einar Stefansson; the first Australian woman, Brigitte Muir; and the first Kazakh woman, Lyudmila Savina.

Last year's tragic deaths focused the attention of a wide public on the ongoing debate about the merits of commercial expeditions, and the controversy has not disappeared. The first woman ever to summit Everest, Junko Tabei of Japan, speaking in Kathmandu early this year, was reported to have agreed that such teams have their favorable aspect since they enable people to climb Himalayan peaks who do not have the time or perhaps the organizing ability to put an expedition together themselves.

But she touched on their unfavorable side as well when she said she felt the world's highest mountain should be off-limits to commercially organized teams so as to preserve the grandeur of an Everest success: "Lots of people now feel you can climb Everest if you have the money. An Everest conquest doesn't enjoy the kind of accolade it once did." But Nepal's government has not indicated any intention to prohibit commercial teams or anyone else from climbing Everest or any other peak if they obey the regulations and pay the royalties for permits. Last year, mountaineering fees for all Nepalese peaks earned \$1.8 million for the government of this impoverished country.

There actually are several types of businesses that organize commercial expeditions. Some are highly reputable and provide excellent services with experienced guides, plenty of Sherpa helpers, first-class equipment and all the bottles of oxygen their clients would want. But others do not fit this description. Amongst the latter is a German company called International Mountain Climbing (IMC), managed by Hans Eitel, who accepted payments from 30 or 40 people to join expeditions to Everest, Cho Oyu or Shishapangma (or even all three mountains), this season, but who failed to forward any payment to the Kathmandu agent for transport costs to reach base camp, for staffs to help the clients make their ascents or at least to prepare their food, for the purchase of foodstuffs and other necessary items, and so on. When the climbers arrived in Kathmandu, they learned from the agent that he could not provide any services unless they paid him directly, and that IMC already was so deeply indebted to him from

past years (by about \$200,000) that he no longer could extend credit to IMC's clients. Some of them turned around and went back to Europe to try to get their money refunded, while others paid a second time and stayed on; from one team of 14 Germans with plans to attempt all three mountains, only eight now could afford to make a second payment, and they were able to pay for just one peak, Cho Oyu.

There also are various types of guided climbs. Groups sometimes are made up of people who are strangers to each other and who are placed together in rather haphazard fashion. One such group this spring consisted of six very dissatisfied clients of a Polish guide who arranged for them to be on a permit to scale Everest in Tibet but did not actually climb with them because he was hired by another expedition and went with that group instead, leaving his first party to its own devices, without leadership or guidance on the mountain. Only one person in this "cocktail expedition," as they called themselves, reached as high as 8100 meters, and most of them did not get above 8000 meters. It is quite possible that the one who climbed the highest, Joao Garcia from Portugal, might have made it all the way to the summit under different circumstances.

On Everest, two of the climbers who perished during the pre-monsoon season were western Europeans. One was a Scotsman, Malcolm Duff, who was leading a commercial team to the Nepalese side of Everest, and who was found dead in his tent at base camp one morning when a Sherpa went to give him a cup of tea. He had fallen over onto his side but still clasped an open book in his hands; it was speculated that perhaps his heart had failed him.

The other western European was a German mountaineer on the Tibetan side, Peter Kowalzik. He was ascending alone on May 8 when he was met by two Frenchmen coming down from the summit. The three chatted briefly at the bottom of the Second Step at about 8570 meters, exchanged "good luck" and "congratulations," then continued on their different ways. It was 1 p.m., and the French estimated that if Kowalzik had gotten to the top, it would have been at about 4 p.m. By then at that altitude he would have been experiencing strong winds and poor visibility from cloud cover. He was never seen again.

Altogether, five people died on the Tibetan side of Everest (Kowalzik, the three Russians, and a Nepali, Mingma Tamang, with Koreans), and three on the Nepalese side (Duff plus two Sherpas, Nima Rinzi and Tenzing Nuru, on Malaysian and American teams). Duff's body was escorted home by his widow, but the others remain on the mountain. At the same time, one from last year was removed: the body of the Japanese woman, Yasuo Namba, who perished in the terrible storm of last May, now was brought down from the edge of the South Col, where she had died, to base camp and to a Sherpa village below, and cremated. And the body of Bruce Herrod, a Briton who had climbed with a South African team last spring, was released from its ties to fixed ropes at the bottom of the Hillary Step above the south summit and dropped into a southwest face crevasse.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY

Nepal, Various Activity in the Pre-Monsoon. Britain's Alan Hinkes arrived in Kathmandu at the end of March with a film crew and publicity material describing him as "the most successful high-altitude mountaineer in Britain," and quite rightly pointing out that no one has ever successfully climbed as many as six 8000ers in a single year, which was the goal he was now setting out to reach. This spring, he was to scale three in Nepal, first Lhotse, then Makalu and finally Kangchenjunga; in the summer, he would move on to Pakistan and climb Nanga Parbat; and in the autumn, he would finish up back in Nepal on Dhaulagiri I and Annapurna I. Moreover, he said, he would do his spring ascents alone as much as possible; he would