and Usaev stayed with Francys until Grigoriev’s return. Grigoriev was on the top at 4 p.m. At 4:10, on his descent, he met Fedorov, who summed at 4:30. When Grigoriev reached Sokolov, Baskakova and Usaev, he sent Sokolov and Usaev down. They descended to the tents at 8200 meters, where Sokolov told Serguei what was going on with Francys. Immediately Serguei started up without oxygen, but they persuaded him to take one bottle of oxygen, tea and medicine with him. At 6:20 p.m., Grigoriev, with the help of Baskakova, started to bring Francys down from the First Step. With two ropes, they managed to get her about 80 meters down and then bring her 15 meters across to below a small rock. Fedorov descended to them at this point; his oxygen had finished at 8750 meters and he felt unwell. Francys started to convulse and Grigoriev sent Sokolova down. At 8:15 p.m., he fixed Fran, connected her to the last bottle of oxygen, set her gloves, hat and cowl straight and came down himself.

At 8 p.m., Grigoriev said by radio that he saw Serguei ascending. On the descent at 8:40 the two climbers met. To Serguei’s question, “Is Fran here?” Grigoriev answered, “She is still alive.” Grigoriev reached the tents at 8200 meters at 11:15 p.m. Serguei did not return.

On May 24, Ilias Tukhvatullin, Andrei Zaikin and Alexei Dokukin of the Uzbekistan expedition started from 8200 meters at 4:55 a.m. At 7:50 a.m., Tukhvatullin reached Francys, followed by Ian Woodall, Cathy O’Dowd, and four Sherpas from the South African expedition, plus the other members of the Uzbekistan team. Francys was still alive and connected to the rope but could not recognize anybody. She cried repeatedly, “Help, help!” Her gloveless hands were out of the jacket sleeves, her hat was off, her oxygen mask was off, and the oxygen bottle was disconnected. Serguei’s ice ax and rope were 50 or 60 meters away. There was no other sign of him. The South Africans gave Francys tea and checked and massaged her legs. They were certain that she could not move herself. Tukhvatullin offered to give her an injection of adrenaline and even warmed the ampoule, but the South Africans declined. Then all the South Africans, after conferring among themselves, canceled their attempt and went down without saying a word to the Uzbekistan climbers. Cathy O’Dowd cried.

At 9:15 a.m., after radio communication with Base Camp, the Uzbekistan climbers continued up. They were over taken by three Sherpas around half an hour later. They reached the summit, and, upon passing Francys at 6 p.m. on the descent, they found no signs of Serguei’s ice ax. They saw jackdaws on Francys’s body. Anatoli Shabanov, the leader of the Uzbekistan expedition, told them by radio from Base Camp that the Sherpas had certified Francys’s death, so they did not go to the body. They descended to 8200 meters at 6:30 p.m.

According to Shabanov, a Chinese communications officer in Base Camp came to him at 11 a.m. and told him that an American woman climber had died five minutes earlier in the hands of Sherpas. On May 29, the official report of the death of Francys Distefano-Arsentiev was sent to her family. Serguei Arsentiev is officially listed as missing, though he is presumed dead. The on-line publication RISK and The Mountaineering Federation of Russia wish to extend our condolences to all the friends and family of Francys Distefano-Arsentiev and Serguei Arsentiev.

**THE MOUNTAINEERING FEDERATION OF RUSSIA**

*Everest, Scientific Expedition.* Wally Berg was on Everest with a special mission: to bolt to bedrock as close as possible to the summit a GPS station from which signals can be sent to satellites and thus reveal exactly where the summit is at any given time. This is of great interest to scientists wanting to determine whether the mountain is actually drifting ever-so-slightly to the northwest and also creeping upward.
Berg had been to the top in three previous years; he had no great ambition to stand again at the highest point on earth, but was there to do a job for the scientists. And he did it on May 20, getting his job done, and touching the top of the world once again.

Elizabeth Hawley

Everest, South Col/Southeast Ridge, Speed Ascent. Speed ascents of Mount Everest have rarely been attempted. Now a well-known 35-year-old Sherpa named Kaji says he raced from Base Camp on the Nepalese side at 5350 meters to the South Col to the top of the world in the record-breaking time of 20 hours and 24 minutes on October 17, cutting two hours and five minutes off the previous record, which had been set ten years earlier via the same route by the French mountaineer, Marc Batard, when he was 36.

Kaji followed the same strategy Batard had pioneered by setting off from his base in the late afternoon, climbing all night except for brief stops at camps already established along the route, and making it to the summit early in the following afternoon. Batard, however, climbed the mountain without other teammates, although he employed Sherpas to help set up camps on the route, and climbers from two other teams had gone ahead of him on his summit day and made a good track that he followed to the top. Kaji, on the other hand, had five team members, two of whom accompanied him on the last leg of his ascent from the South Col at 7900 meters. Batard and his Sherpas used no artificial oxygen at any time, but two of Kaji’s teammates, who climbed with him from the Col and broke trail for him, did use bottled oxygen, and he himself used it during a small part of his descent.

One of Kaji’s men, Tashi Tshering Sherpa, summited a few minutes ahead of Kaji (the other had turned back at 8700 meters), and when Kaji became exhausted during their descent from the south summit and they wanted to press on with their retreat to their camp at the Col as quickly as possible, Tashi handed over his oxygen set to Kaji, who used it until they were back at camp.

Elizabeth Hawley

Everest, Ascents in the Post-Monsoon. In addition to the summits by Kaji Sherpa and Tashi Tshering Sherpa (see above), Norichika Matsumoto led one of the few other teams who attempted Everest this season; his team failed to gain the summit via a route that diverged from the normal route Kaji had followed at about 6500 meters. A Spaniard, Carlos Pitarach, who used bottled oxygen until his set froze, reported he had gone to the summit alone after others, Japanese and Sherpas, whom he was climbing with from the Col, had given up the battle against the terrible wind. These are the only Everest summit claims made this autumn. There were a total of four teams on the mountain’s south side, but the others, two Japanese parties, made no such claims.

On the northern side in Tibet, there were five small teams and none of them went to the top. Deep snow in the early part of the season and very strong winds later were given as the reasons for failure by most. But a notable attempt to climb the mountain was made by one Japanese, Masafumi Todaka. He first attempted to scale the Japanese Couloir on the western side of the north face. Here he was defeated by hard ice. Then he changed the line of his ascent to the middle of the face to enter the Great (or Norton) Couloir, and here he made a valiant effort to gain the top.

Todaka had no Sherpas or artificial oxygen to help him: he was one man completely alone