

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.

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*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 Pitarch, 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

on the entire vast north face of Everest. He made a serious push for the summit from a camp at 5900 meters on the Rongbuk Glacier at the foot of the great face starting at 2:10 a.m. on September 14. With two bivouacs, one at the bottom of the Great Couloir that night and the next in the couloir on the 15th, he managed to surmount the couloir and reach 8500 meters on the morning October 16.

But now “my condition was not so good” because he had had no sleeping bag during the previous night, and he had become very sleepy. He spent 20 minutes considering his options and decided that he must save his remaining energy for a safe descent. “Ten years ago, I would probably have gone for the summit,” said the 36-year-old mountain guide, but now he was more concerned about his safety. He descended without difficulty or frostbite, but he was very tired at the end.

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*Lhotse Shar, Ascent.* On Lhotse Shar, the 8400-meter eastern summit of the Lhotse massif next to Everest, a team of 15 Russian climbers led by Vladimir Savkov sent four men (Alexandre Foigt, Evgueni Vinogradski, Gleb Sokolov, Sergei Timofeev) to the top on November 1. But they were forced to abandon what Vinogradski said was their “dream” of traversing from it to the middle summit of the massif. This middle peak (8410m) is the highest point on earth not yet touched by man.

The Russian team was not the first to scale Lhotse Shar with the intention of using it as a stepping stone to the middle summit, only to find when they were on the eastern summit that they were too tired and unprepared for the very difficult traverse at very high altitude, and none of them made an actual move to do so. The Russians this autumn looked at the horrifyingly difficult ridge they would have to move across and decided the better approach would be from Lhotse’s main summit.

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*Pumori, Southwest Ridge.* The Internet contributed this spring to a new type of awkward situation concerning membership of an expedition. A Swiss, Markus Sofer, saw that a Canadian team was listed for an attempt on Everest’s neighbor Pumori, so he got in touch with them and signed up as a member. But when they met in Kathmandu, he announced that he would be entirely independent of them since he did not believe in expeditions. He did some climbing with the team, led by Tim Rippel, on its seldom-climbed southwest ridge, but most of the time he moved alone. He became the only one to go to the 7161-meter summit, which he reached on May 20.

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*Ama Dablam in the Post-Monsoon.* As the season began, the Nepalese authorities expected 16 teams to come to Ama Dablam (6812m), but they continued to grant permits to everyone who asked for them, and by the time autumn ended, an all-time high number of 30 teams with a total of 201 climbers had been there from 18 nations. (The previous highest number of teams in the same season was 19 in the autumn of 1996.) Furthermore, all of this autumn’s expeditions had chosen to climb the same route up the southwest ridge, which is quite narrow in some sections. At the busiest time, in mid-October, there were 17 teams at Base Camp