

Preface

On November 2, Slovenian Tomaž Humar reached the high point of his climb on the south face of Dhaulagiri I. Behind him lay an audacious seven-day ascent on a steep 4000-meter face that was documented on both film and the internet. He was exhausted, and the decision regarding the summit some 170 meters above was easily made: to go on, he said later, would have been to die. He traversed to the northeast ridge, climbed down to 7300 meters where a tent had been left for him by an American team and bivouacked for his eighth night on the mountain. Two days later, with the aid of a helicopter, he was back in Kathmandu.

As evidenced by the other two routes on the face, the south face of Dhaulagiri is both dangerous and hard. In 1981, ethnic Slovenians Cene Berčič, Emil Tratnik and Stane Belak Šrauf made a nine-day alpine-style ascent on the right-hand side of the face, reaching 7950 meters on the southeast ridge before they decided to descend. Leaving their tent, stove and food behind, they continued for six days down the northeast ridge. Hungry, troubled by storm, weakened by dehydration and the simple magnitude of their climb, they barely survived the mountain. A 1986 Polish team's ascent of a line to the left of center encountered friable rock and thin ice that was overcome only with great effort and extensive use of fixed ropes, but this team too was severely challenged by the difficulties and turned back short of the summit. Humar's climb was carried out solo with a paucity of equipment that ruled out retreat. It did not result in the perfect directissima he had envisioned and invoked ratings that have raised eyebrows, but its full import may not be known until a second ascent of the route occurs, and who will be bold enough to undertake that?

If Humar had simply walked away from the mountain at the finish of his climb, his ascent would have opened a window on what is possible at the highest altitudes in a manner not witnessed since Reinhold Messner's 1981 monsoon-season solo of a new route on the north face of Everest. From the object of exploration's greatest adventures, the high peaks of the Himalaya have evolved into quotidian affairs that are increasingly guided, skied, blasted in single-day pushes, climbed in winter, parapented. Now Humar had soloed a tremendous face in a fine effort that gave Himalayan climbing the short, sharp shove it needs to interrupt its myopic focus on routes first climbed in the 1950s. But Humar's climb was also a "production," and in that regard it reflects even more closely the modern state of climbing. Helicopters whisked him into and away from the mountain; radio contact with Base Camp monitored his progress and informed him on route-finding during the climb. Film documentation and an internet broadcast covered the expedition far in advance of the ascent itself and celebrity status awaited Humar upon his return to Slovenia. Taken as a whole, the climb was an event, an ascent marked by originality and verve, spiced with recklessness, captured in the bright lights of media in all its forms. So ends the century. Fittingly, we might add.

Other climbs that shared the media's affection in 1999 did not advance the style we bring to the mountains. Business climbing in general is ill-suited to push physical and mental limitations, encumbered as it is by a need for immediate documentation that precludes speed on technical terrain. The way we tell our stories is changing, spurred on by the internet and its real-time recounting, with results that can be more notable for the press generated than for any climbing done along the way. But how does this affect climbing itself? Few would argue that the increasing prominence of commercialization in modern climbing influences

styles, objectives and, ultimately, climbing's evolution, yet it rarely sees candid discussion. Beginning on page 151, we offer three perspectives on the subject in an effort to bring it into the public dialogue.

The above notwithstanding, there is still plenty of climbing being done in the alpine arena, where the cameras remain secondary to the outcome of the climb. Witness Lionel Daudet and Sébastien Foissac on the southeast face of the Burkett Needle, proceeding in autonomy for 40 days in the isolation of Alaska's Coastal Range; Joe TerraVecchia and Steve Larson on their tenacious ascent of the south face of Mt. Foraker; and Doug Chabot and the late Alex Lowe on Mount Huntington, romping up the east face of what Chabot calls "the most beautiful 12,000-foot peak in the world" in a quick three-day ride. Rolando Garibotti, Silvo Karo, Bruno Sourzac and Laurence Monnoyeur continue to push what can be asked of modern climbing on the granite spires of Patagonia, while Jérôme Thinières, Stéphane Benoist and Bruno Ravanat made an intriguing foray into the Hindu Raj with their route on the northwest pillar of Chuchubalstering. Minus the hoopla, the scope for wild times in high places is in no way the sole domain of the expeditions with budgets in the tens (or hundreds) of thousands of dollars. And while the question of why we climb is at this point a tired one, it is one of the joys of compiling an overview of climbing in the Greater Ranges to watch the different answers people bring to the question in the form of their personal ascents.

Simultaneously, one of the more difficult parts of publishing an annual volume of climbing is turning down many submissions simply because they are not new climbs. One such climb that you won't read about in this volume was the ascent of the normal route on Nevado Ojos del Salado by Vlastimil Šmída and Jan Cervinka of the Czech Republic. The mountain is of moderate altitude and difficulty and has seen numerous ascents; we declined to publish their note as we do with many accounts simply because it was not significant to modern climbing. Or was it? Šmída is in his late 60s, Cervinka recently celebrated his 70th year, and both have been climbing in the high mountains all their lives. The goal of keeping the Journal's focus on its role as a record of significant climbing often comes at the cost of missing stories such as this that speak volumes about the spirit we can bring to the mountains over time. Though we may not cover it, a great day at the crags, a great week in the mountains, discovering cause for celebration that would sound vain if it ever appeared in an article, continue to be some of the better reasons for doing what climbers do, even if the stories don't show up in these pages.

Approach the contents of this journal, then, with perspective. The climbs recorded here may be very difficult, but they hold nothing that cannot be reached by us all. With friends, watching from our aerie the play of light as it evolves over the course of a day, we discover anew the ancient rhythms of the world—and that is sorely needed. If we look away from the crags and mountains and toward the life we are forging around us, we see what an ignorance of such rhythms can bring. We build the dams and a generation later realize they can cause more harm than good; we exterminate a species from an ecosystem only to find that the ecosystem depended on the species for balance. In climbing, the wildflowers chase the snowline, a cloud forms out of blue sky, the sun loosens a wall's grout, all factors in the problem of our ascent. Here, in change, lies harmony—paradoxical, beautiful, a foil for our cries to harness, domesticate, control. Climbing teaches us to work within the natural context to accomplish our goals. Such lessons are in short supply in our workaday lives, but they are the magic of climbing, a magic central to all of our stories. May you discover a bit of your own on your next adventure.

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