

four trips apiece, we were finally established at the snowline, well acclimatized, completely provisioned and ready to start doing some skiing. On October 5, all of that changed. After spending our first night at ABC, we awoke the next morning to a clear, sunny day with a variety of nebulous plans. Alex, Conrad and David wanted to take a long loop over to check out a potential climb, then circle back to the base of the Swiss/Polish route. I was mainly interested in looking at our route, so I headed straight up toward it, with Mark, Hans and Kris about 20 minutes behind. After about an hour's climb straight up a gully, I reached a plateau and immediately spotted Alex, David and Conrad about half a mile off to my right. We were separated by a crevasse field and as I stood there wondering how to connect with them, we all noticed a small avalanche start far above. At first, it didn't seem to be a cause for alarm; it looked like it would probably stop on the first of three benches that it would come to. Instead, it did something far worse: it triggered a bigger slide, which in turn triggered an even bigger one. In a matter of seconds, the whole mountainside was in motion with Alex, David and Conrad directly below it. Conrad ran to the left while Alex and David ran downhill, perhaps to try and dive into a crevasse, still not realizing how large the slide was. From my view on a small knoll off to the side, my thoughts quickly turned from mild concern to blind panic as I realized they weren't going to make it.

The slide was huge. As it hit the apron above them, I saw the last of my friends before realizing that I was in the line of destruction. With five seconds to find a place to hide, I jumped into a small corner, covered my head and tried not to panic. The windblast flattened me, then filled every crevice with snow. When I dug myself out and climbed to the top of the knoll again, I was amazed to see a lone figure walking around on the debris pile. It was Conrad. "They're gone. Alex and David are gone."

We searched that day and again the next, but never found any trace of them. The debris pile was roughly 400 feet wide by 1,200 feet long and in places had filled in 30-foot crevasses.

A big part of this trip was the fact that we had all been good friends for years beforehand. With Alex and David gone, it completely took the wind out of our sails. The trip was over. Conrad was injured, our friends had died and the mountains seemed cold and inhospitable. We decided to head down.

ANDREW McLEAN, *unaffiliated*

CHINA

East Kanthari, First Ascent. East Kanthari (6167m) lies on the Tibet-Qinghai (Changtang) Plateau in an area known as the Kokosiri that covers the borders between Tibet, Qinghai and Shinjyan. The Kokosiri is one of the most remote places in central Asia. Because of the numerous small streams that originate from glaciers to become the headwaters of the Yangtze River, it would take more than two weeks from the nearest village by jeep if you tried to reach here in summer. In mid-winter, the frozen ground and lakes make it possible to access the area relatively easily. The legendary explorer Sven Hedin commented on the Kanthari mountains 100 years ago, but no one had visited here for climbing, nor had anyone come in winter.

Our climbing trip was part of the 1998-'99 China-Japan joint Scientific Research Expedition to Kokosiri. Members were Shigeru Masuyama (leader), Kazuya Yamada, Noriyuki Muraguchi, Harik Muhammad, Shigeru Itoh, Yuji Kanazawa, Fumihiko Yamanushi, Daiki Hiroshima, Yuko Masuda, Noriyuki Otaishi and Huang Rong Fu. K. Yamada, our film leader, tried to reconnoiter the north face of the mountain in 1998, but his photos did

not present a precise view of the peak. We also got two pictures taken by a 1991 Chinese scientific research party and another by a Kyushu University expedition. However, before leaving Japan, we could not tell from which direction these pictures were taken, nor could anyone confirm that they were really of Mt. East Kanthari.

On January 6, our five-day, 800-kilometer jeep caravan from Golmud (2800m) finally arrived at Base Camp (5200m) at the southern foot of East Kanthari. Though it was crazily cold, bitterly windy and dry, we were able to see Tibetan gazelle, antelope, wild ass, wild yak and wolf. After four days' recon of various possible routes, during which the temperature did not rise higher than -20°C , we decided the best route would be to establish an attack camp at the col of southeast ridge. From this camp, we would climb via the southeast ridge to the south peak and then on to the main peak via the south ridge.

On January 10 (-31°C), S. Masuyama, N. Muraguchi, F. Yamanushi, D. Hiroshima, K. Yamada and Y. Kanazawa carried all necessary equipment and food for six people to the attack camp at 5650 meters. As the temperatures were below -20°C , even at BC during daytime, we expected temperatures of -40°C at the top. In addition, strong winds were inevitably observed in the daytime. Because East Kanthari stands alone in the Kokosiri Plateau, daytime sunshine accelerates the airflow from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Serious difficulty would be raised by severe cold compounded by strong winds. We thus had to start early in the morning despite the severe cold.

On January 12, S. Masuyama, N. Muraguchi, F. Yamanushi, D. Hiroshima, K. Yamada and Y. Kanazawa moved from BC to Camp I, where we found a nice windless space for two tents. Muraguchi and Yamanushi, after reconnaissance to the foot of the south peak, reported, "Snow is stable, but wind is bitter!" The next day (-28°C at CI), the first attack team of S. Masuyama, N. Muraguchi, F. Yamanushi and D. Hiroshima departed at 6 a.m. (China has only one time zone; dawn here was around 9 a.m.) We wanted to reach the top before 11 a.m. when the strong winds began. An endless, wide snow ridge led us to the south peak. Drifting snow slowed our ascent. Masuyama and Yamanushi reached the south peak at 8 a.m.; Muraguchi and Hiroshima had gone ahead to film. The wind became stronger on the main ridge to the peak. Gusts knocked us off balance. Sensory feeling in our faces and in our fingers began to disappear. At the bottom of the last steep snow wall to the top, we noticed Muraguchi and Hiroshima descending. Hiroshima seemed too cold to respond promptly. He needed to descend to a safe zone. The other three continued to ascend the final wall. At 10 a.m., we arrived at the top, a wide snow peak, in -30°C temperatures with strong 20 m/second winds. We enjoyed the 360-degree view, including the Shin-Qing-Hong (6860m) in the east, and the twin-towered West Kanthari, which had been named "the beacon of Kokosiri" by Mr. Hedin, in the west.

We returned to CI at 1:30 p.m. Severe cold and strong winds gave Hiroshima frostbite on eight fingers. He was directed to go down to BC immediately with the support of Masuyama. (At BC, Masuyama sent e-mails asking friends in many countries for the best field treatment for Hiroshima's case. The responses helped save Hiroshima's fingers.)

On January 14, the second attack team of K. Yamada and Y. Kanazawa started from CI at 7 a.m., arriving at the south peak at 11 a.m. Further ascent was abandoned because of wind stronger than that of the day before. In the afternoon, CI was evacuated by K. Yamada and Y. Kanazawa, N. Muraguchi, F. Yamanushi and S. Itoh.