

reasonable altitude of 5000 meters at the foot of the north face. Then pessimism set in, as unbelievable serac falls regularly swept over the route from Camp II to Camp III.

On the eve of our second portage, Camp II was buried under a falling serac—even bigger than the others—along with the only route into it. As with an American team and two groups of Spaniards later on, we were forced to renounce the plan before we really got going—a frustrating decision!

One of the goals of this expedition was to teach Himalayan techniques to the neophyte members of our group, so it was out of the question that we would leave the region entirely after this setback. During the next few days, we did a great deal of reconnaissance on other approaches to Annapurna as well as neighboring peaks. Nilgiri Northeast (6750m) was finally chosen because it offered the only routes free of exposure to seracs.

On April 26, a team of climbers headed toward the couloir leading to the south pillar. They set up Camp I at 5000 meters alongside a large rock at its base. On the 28th, Camp II was in place at the high end of the couloir, at 5650 meters. We had to carve out a platform in the icy surface of the col. Four days later, after fixing more than a kilometer of ropes, we sat in the single tent at Camp III on a fine flat shoulder at 6450 meters. At this point the majority of our difficulties were behind us.

We rested for a few hours and left camp during the night of May 3. Seventy meters of rope were devoted to circumnavigating a serac; a bit farther on, the arête butted up against an unconquerable serac. After numerous tries, we noticed after sunup that a long snowbridge traversed the southeast face and would allow us to reach the opposing arête. A bit of trial and error, and we reached the summit at 7:30 a.m. The heavens opened up for us and provided a magnificent view: Annapurna, Manaslu, Mustang.

On May 4, the second team summited at 4:30 p.m. under a gray overcast, and strong winds prohibited any thoughts of parapenting. They descended to Camp III. The next day at dawn, however, conditions were ideal; Lauren Miston took off. Clouds rolled in immediately, though, and he was enveloped, obliging him to make a few 360s in the cottony sea of clouds. Thanks to his mastery of the art, once he came out of the clouds he was able to land alongside the tents at Base Camp. A movie camera attached to his helmet recorded his flight and the remarkable vista of his canopy and the clouds.

We made the return to Kathmandu by helicopter, which made it possible to avoid the misadventures of trekking and allowed us to admire the highest reaches of the Annapurna massif.

Despite the initial frustration, the GMHM succeeded in its return to high altitude, and gathered much information useful for future expeditions.

ANTOINE DE CHOUDENS, *Groupe Militaire de Haute Montagne, France*

*Annapurna III, South Ridge, Attempt.* Six years after our first try on Annapurna III (7555m), we were back again. In 1994, we were very close to success, but on the only day of bad weather, one team member, Beno Dolinsek, disappeared near the high camp (CIII) at 6600 meters. We didn't find him, so we broke off our climbing.

Last autumn, the members of the expedition were Boris Strmšek (leader), Zare Guzej (doctor), Boris Lorencic, Blaz Navrsnik, Niko Sumnik, Jernej Sinkovic, Dusan Rauter, Mitja Plohl, Tadej Zorman, Aleksander Kelneric and Samo Znidarsic. With our sirdar, Kami Tenzing Sherpa, and his assistant, Lhakpa Tsering Sherpa, we reached Base Camp at 4050 meters, a two-hour walk from Machupuchare Base Camp (3700m), on September 28. The liaison officer, Mr. Dharma Raj Aryal, arrived at BC with our doctor on October 3.

On September 29, Lorencic, Sinkovic and Strmšek reached the glacier at the bottom of the south face of Annapurna III (5060m), eight kilometers from BC. We left some equipment and returned to BC. In the next few days we carried up equipment and food. On October 2, Navrsnik, Plohl, Rauter, Sumnik and Znidarsic stayed in the tent on the glacier. The next day, Navrsnik, Plohl and Rauter crossed the glacier and climbed to the foot of the south ridge. There is one 5.5 pitch up to 90 degrees that is about 40 meters long. After that, they all returned to BC.

Kelneric, Lorencic and Strmšek came to the wall and placed Camp I m at 5100 meters on a big rock head a few minutes from the beginning of the ridge. The next day, they went up and started climbing a ca. 400-meter rock wall. Lorencic and Strmšek climbed two long pitches (5.8 and 5.9), fixing ropes for the return. The next day, Strmšek and Lorencic climbed another three pitches (5.9, 5.8 and 5.8) while Kelneric brought up some equipment. All three then returned to BC.

On October 6, Sinkovic, Sumnik, Rauter and Zorman came up to CI. The next day, Sumnik and Sinkovic climbed three new pitches (5.9, 5.10a and 5.8), while the other two carried up ropes and equipment. On October 8, they all tried to climb to the end of the rock section and make Camp II a little bit higher, but the weather was bad. At the end of the fixed ropes, Rauter and Zorman bivouacked in a rock hole; Sinkovic and Sumnik returned to CI and the next day to BC. Rauter and Zorman then fixed ropes to the end of the rock section and returned to CI, where Strmšek and Navrsnik had arrived. On October 10, Rauter and Zorman returned to BC. Strmšek and Navrsnik climbed higher and made CII on a snow ridge at 5850 meters. They passed the night and then returned to BC, but not before Strmšek climbed to the seracs at 6000 meters and found a good way to continue.

On October 13, Lorencic, Sumnik and Sinkovic reached CII. The next day they started climbing to the upper part of the wall. They climbed seracs that were not so dangerous (ice to 75°) and then continued to the step in the ridge at 6550 meters. The angle of the snow was between 40 and 50 degrees. They placed the tent for CIII here, passed the night in strong wind and the next day returned to BC. The same day (October 15), Navrsnik, Strmšek and Zorman came up to CI. They spent the next night at CII and the third day at CIII. After a windy night, they started climbing higher. From CIII there is a steep snow ridge, then a mixed part. At 6700 meters, Strmšek climbed one rock-and-ice pitch (M6), which Zorman followed. Then Strmšek climbed one snow/ice pitch (65°) and fixed the ropes on a sloping rock ledge at 6800 meters. It was only 100 meters of steep snow to the end of the hard part, followed by a wide, 20- to 30-degree snow ridge to the summit. Strmšek had a toothache, Zorman was tired, and it was too late in the day, so they returned to CIII. (Navrsnik had turned back earlier because of cold toes). They spent another windy night and the next day returned to BC.

On October 20, Sumnik, Sinkovic and Lorencic started from BC. The next day they reached CII, where Lorencic turned back. Sumnik and Sinkovic spent two nights at CII, one in bad weather. Early in the morning of October 23, they continued climbing. After four hours they reached CIII, where they found the tent destroyed and the sleeping bags, gas, and food gone. The wind had blown everything away. They were only able to clean up what remained and return to BC. Over the next few days we cleaned camps I and II and finished with the expedition. On October 2, we were all in Kathmandu.

The route is very safe for climbing. We left pitons at the belays and fixed ropes on the rock section. The rock quality is mostly bad.