

we set up our base camp very close to Chanagor Bhanjyang (5,665m), on the northern border. The next morning, we climbed the pass on the border, and were rewarded with a good view of the Tibetan side.

West and northwest of us, there were four other passes in the northeastern Dolpo: Daknak Bhanjyang (Sena La 5,465m), Jyanche Bhanjyang (5,534m), Kang Kung Bhanjyang (5,564m), and Pindu Bhanjyang (5,600m). The trails from Dolpo to Tibet cross these five passes and converge at the Raka Nadi River. We also saw one of the tributaries of Yalung Tsampo, flowing north. On the eastern two passes, there was no sign of activity nor cattle; blue poppies and other alpine plants were abundant. Presumably, these passes have been abandoned as roads have been built. Old markets have been disappearing too.

On July 10, we left base camp in fine weather. From a small pokari (pond) just below the pass, we walked east and northeast along the border ridge, and after an hour of climbing a gentle ridge of rock and snow, we were on top of Araniko Chuli, surrounded by other 6,000m peaks.

From the highest point, a vast ice field extended east. I confirmed various bearings and elevations of nearby peaks on the Nepalese New Topographical Map (1:50,000), using surveying instruments. But to the northeast, the peaks of the Man Shail group were hidden by clouds. We returned to base camp by another route: straight down a scree slope on the south face of Araniko Chuli, where, unlike on the Tibetan side, there was no snow. Then we finished our research and climbing around Araniko Chuli in three days, by following an old path directly to Mustang from Chharka, via Ghami Bhanjyang (5,740m), to Ghami.

The second stage of our activity in Damodar Himal started at Ghami. We set up a base camp at the northern foot of Saribung (Selibung or Soribung, 6,327m) following a route via Chharang, Dhi, Yara, and Nakkali Damodar Kund (a sacred place for Hindus). Another party had already pitched a high camp, at 5,720m, on the northwest glacier of Kumlung North Peak (6,378m). In the central part of this huge glacier are the two highest peaks of Damodar Himal: Khumjungar Himal (6,759m) and Chhiv Himal (6,591m). They were both climbed by The Himalayan Association of Japan in 1983. Although the other party had attempted Saribung, they were unsuccessful because of sudden bad weather.

We continued the topographical research in this area—the east glaciers of Bhrikuti Sail (6,361m), and north of a nameless high peak (6,899m) in the east—then we returned to Pokhara, via Jomsom.

TAMOTSU OHNISHI, *Japan* (*translated by Tamotsu Nakamura*)

MAHALANGUR HIMAL (KHUMBU)

Nuptse, south pillar attempt. The Nuptse International South Face Expedition (a.k.a. the Slo/Can/Am—emphasis on Slo) was concluded at the end of May, 2002. Team members were Marko Prezelj (Slovenia), Barry Blanchard (Canada), Stephen Koch (USA), and myself (also USA) as leader. In support was Barry's wife Catherine Mulvihill and our wonderful cook, known to us as Prakash.

We arrived in B.C. on April 15. Basecamp was on the western side of the Lhotse Nup Glacier, about a two-hour walk from the small village of Chukung. We spent about two weeks acclimating and all members climbed to 6,800m on the 1961 British route—the route of first ascent. On the last trip up that ridge Stephen Koch had a small mishap with a snow cornice

which dropped on him from a height of 50cm (really) and tore his medial-collateral ligament on his right knee. Stephen left for Thailand four days after this incident.

The three remaining members stayed healthy long enough to see the season's good weather spell. Barry, Marko, and I started up an untried route in the center of the face between the '61 route and the often-attempted-not-yet-completed south pillar route. We left B.C. early the morning of May 15. We soloed to about 5,400m, and then belayed the ensuing 400m-450m to establish a bivy site at approximately 5,800m. That first day offered excellent mixed climbing on fine granite up a very natural and objectively safe line. For all of us this day was the best of the trip—the quality of the climbing combined with the joy of discovery made for an exceptional day in the mountains. The second day on the route saw five more belayed pitches of moderate mixed terrain that led to easier climbing. We then unroped and climbed to 6,600m. The third day we climbed to 7,200m and bivied in the bergshrunf at the top of the south face névé.

Marko and I continued with the ropes and rack a bit higher on the ice face to 7,300m. This eventually proved to be our highpoint. On the fourth day we woke up to windy and much colder weather with a lot of black clouds down valley. We spent the day in the tent and woke to the same weather on the fifth day at which point we elected to descend. We downclimbed to 6,500m where we joined the '61 route and continued down now-familiar terrain to reach B.C. at 9:30 that night. Nuptse East, 7,804m, is still unclimbed.

We are happy to report that Stephen didn't require surgery and his MCL is apparently healing up nicely. We saw no Maoist insurgents, though we heard many rumors and the steets of Thamel were strangely quiet without normal tourist volumes.

We had originally proposed to attempt the route in a single-push variation of alpine-style. Upon climbing on the lower '61 route and trekking two days to the west to get a view of the summit rockband, we collectively decided that there appeared to be too much hard climbing up high (between 7,300m and 7,600m) to make that approach feasible. We switched to "classic" alpine style, carrying a bivy tent and



Top: Routes and attempts on Nuptse's south face. Left to right: the British route, the Slo-Can-Am attempt (2002), and the line of most previous attempts (originally by Lowe-Twight). Left: Acclimatizing on Nuptse's British route. Right: A good day on the Nuptse south pillar attempt, with Makalu behind. Marko Prezelj (3)

two sleeping bags in addition to our food/stove/fuel/clothing. Having climbed to 7,300m on the face I would elect to use the same "classic" approach if I were to attempt the route again.

STEVE HOUSE, AAC

Everest, summary of the spring season, questions on the use of bottled oxygen and sedan chairs. Altogether 46 teams sent 155 people to Everest's summit this spring. Seventy-seven of them reached the summit on May 16—61 from the southern side in Nepal and 16 from Tibet. But the spring of 2001 still holds the record with 50 teams, 182 summiters, and 88 on top on a single day (May 23). Of the 155 summiters in 2002, 66 men and one woman had made ascents in previous years, so the total of first-time summiters was 88.

The high number of summiters on the Nepalese side of Everest on May 16 forced one of them to wait 56 minutes at the top of the fixed ropes on the Hillary Step before he could resume his descent—it took that long for ascending climbers to get off the ropes.

Among the various firsts in 2002 were the first Armenian summiteer, the first Hungarian, the first Basques living in France, and an American who believes he was the first cancer survivor on Everest's summit. There was also the first person to scale the mountain 12 times: 40-year-old Apa Sherpa. And there were the oldest man and the oldest woman.

One would think that the question of who is the oldest person to reach the summit would be quite simple. Until this year, that distinction belonged to an American, Sherman Bull, who was 64 years old last spring. On May 17, 2002 the title passed to Tomiyasu Ishikawa, a 65-year-old Japanese. Or did it? Another climber who was also on the Tibetan side of the mountain, Mario Curnis of Italy—only 26 days younger than Ishikawa—has put forward his claim to the title on the grounds that he is the oldest to have climbed to the top, which he achieved on May 24. No one doubts that Ishikawa did arrive at the summit, but his Sherpas, according to Curnis's fellow summiteer, Simone Moro, carried him up the final 50 meters to the top. Furthermore, Curnis returned from top to bottom on his own two feet. An Austrian who also was on Everest, Wilfried Studer, said that he saw Ishikawa being carried down the mountain on the back of one Sherpa while breathing oxygen through a tube from a bottle on the back of another. This reputedly took place from Ishikawa's first high-altitude camp at 7,000m (23,000') all the way down to base camp at 5,200m (17,000'). Ishikawa needed other help during the ascent as well. Another climber on the mountain, New Zealander Russell Brice, reported that on the Second Step ladder Ishikawa had the help of three Sherpas: two were immediately behind him and placed his feet on each rung while a Sherpa in front pulled him by a short rope.

Ishikawa had made extensive use of artificial oxygen. By his own account, he started using it on his push for the summit at about 7,500m (24,600'), and continued using it sleeping and climbing above there. And not all of it came from his own supply. A different Japanese expedition had to abandon their own summit bid on the 18th and descend from 8,500m because they were told that Ishikawa "was in big trouble" 200 meters above their summit party, and their Sherpas had to carry more oxygen up to him.

Is this use of Sherpas to pull or carry a climber, and this use of considerable amounts of artificial oxygen, really mountaineering? Four climbers on the Tibet side said they used absolutely no bottled oxygen throughout their time on Everest. A few commentators take the view that only four people, rather than 155, should be credited with ascents this spring. They believe that after Reinhold Messner and Peter Habler proved in May 1978 that summiting