

The Japanese Manaslu Expedition, 1953

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BY APRIL 13TH all the expedition members had gathered at Sama base camp (12,664 ft.). The caravan, in two parties, consisting of 15 Sahibs, 2 Nepali interpreters, and 270 porters had taken 18 days from Katmandu, which included a particularly hazardous march of one week along the Burigandaki valley.

The party was formed* from a nucleus of Japanese Alpine Club members and selection was made by the Himalayan Committee of the Club early in 1953. The two scientific members parted company with the main expedition on the first stage of the march to continue the research which had not been completed around the foot of Manaslu last year.

The base camp at Sama was reached on April 13th and, although snow fell almost every day, the necessary preparations for establishing the higher camps were begun without delay. Nearly eight tons of food and equipment were unpacked and readied for transport onward under the supervision of party members and the more experienced of the Sherpas.

The camps were gradually extended upward, and on April 20th Camp 4 was established at Naike Col (18,373 ft.), between the North Col and Naike mountain. This col divides the Ralkia and Manaslu glaciers. While some of the party tried to make this camp as effective and comfortable as possible, determined efforts were made by others at the same time to proceed through the steep and dangerous icefall region leading upward to the North Col. Camp 5 (19,685 ft.), Camp 6 (20,013 ft.), and

*A list of the members of the party will be found at the end of the article

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Camp 7 (21,654 ft.) were established in stages, and finally, on May 15th, Camp 8 (23,294 ft.) was pitched on the North Col.

Over 500 bamboo stakes, each about $6\frac{1}{2}$ feet long and with a colored flag, were planted along the route at intervals averaging 50 yards on the glacier and the tortuous paths through the seracs from Camp 2 to the North Col. These guide flags served to mark a clear packing trail for the entire duration of the climbing from Base Camp to Camp 8.

Our original plan was to attack the summit on or before May 19th, but the unkind elements forced us to postpone our schedule. As previously arranged, from May 1st weather reports were transmitted from All India Radio; these despatches referred to the frequent appearance of monsoon conditions over the Bay of Bengal. The situation was such that, if we were to avoid being caught by the monsoon in this region, it was imperative that the climbing be finished and done with at the latest before the end of May.

On the morning of May 19th the assault party of K. Kato and Yamada left Camp 8 to reconnoiter the high plateau leading to the summit. They encountered soft snow and were forced to plough knee-deep all the way, and by 3:00 P.M. could only attain the altitude of 23,622 feet. As the slope steepened abruptly at that height and in the absence of a suitable spot to pitch a tent, they decided to dig a hole in the hard snow where they spent the night. Kato slept soundly while Yamada had to wake up frequently to clear the snow which clogged the entrance of the hole during the night. That a bivouac at such an altitude was managed without much difficulty came as heartening news to us. Admittedly both these climbers were not without experience in this type of improvisation in the snow. In particular, Kato had faithfully recorded the results of over 70 nights spent in such bivouacs during winter ascents in the Japanese Alps.

Unfortunately, the weather deteriorated the following morning, and fresh avalanches were noticed sliding down on either side of the snow cave in which the two had bivouaced. Since

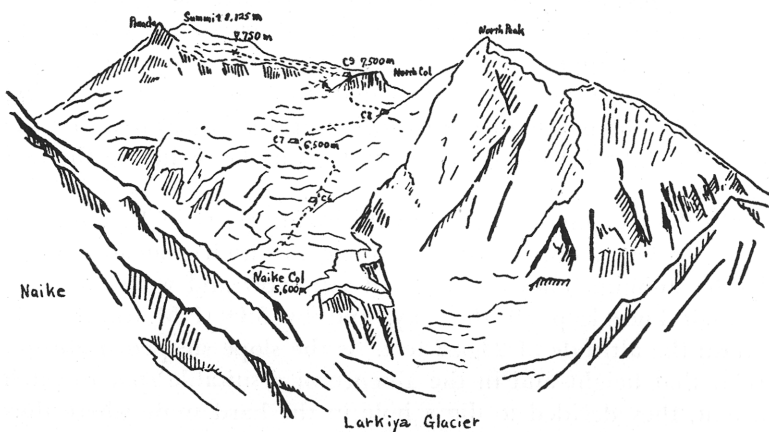
MANASLU from the base camp and the Manaslu Glacier.

Photo, by T. Yoda

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the situation was too precarious for further ascent, they reluctantly returned to Camp 8.

By this time the physical condition of the entire party was becoming a problem, and the altitude affected some of the Sherpas rather seriously. Sirdar Gyalgen and young Migma Steri were ordered by Dr. Tatsunuma to climb down to Base Camp. Sarki, strongest of them all and the one who had gone up to Camp 5 on Annapurna, was taken down to Camp 4, escorted by Taguchi. No less a blow to our plans was the discovery that both provisions and fuel at the higher camps were insufficient



for a decisive effort. The young Nepali student Dilli, who had cheerfully volunteered his services as interpreter, became ill at Camp 4 and was sent down to Base Camp on a Sherpa's back.

An order was then issued to the upper camps for a general withdrawal to Camp 4 on Naiké Col where a reunion of all members was held at what had now become our most forward camp. Varieties of fresh food—considered luxuries at these altitudes—cooked by the veteran sherpa Pancy at Base Camp were carried up to Camp 4 every day. Even snowy days did not deter

Top—NORTHEAST FACE OF MANASLU FROM CAMP 4

Photo, Japanese Manaslu Expedition

Bottom—MANASLU FROM BINTATAKOTI

Photo, Japanese Manaslu Expedition

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the two teams of faithful porters who relayed at Camp 2 to keep open this flow of invigorating rations. With the camp now well stocked with provisions and appetities fully restored, both Sahibs and Sherpas became as fit and well as ever. The weather on these days held good in the morning, but more often than not turned cloudy in the afternoons with snow flurries or blizzards following.

By May 30th all the camps up to No. 8 were again reoccupied. However, strong winds prevented the attack party from leaving Camp 8 on their final assault until the morning of the 31st when the wind died and the skies cleared up completely. K. Kato, J. Yamada, and S. Ishizaka comprised the assault group, supported by six strong young Sherpas led by Yamazaki.

Leaving Camp 8 at 9:30 A.M., the party made good time because of more favorable snow conditions, and the spot at which they had bivouaced previously was passed much earlier in the day. Here the slopes rose sharply to a gradient averaging 50 degrees. The rock slabs were often felt under 12 inches of snow, and the going grew perilous with the heavily laden Sherpas. No sooner had they reached a point only 50 feet below the edge of the plateau, with ropes about to be fixed for the Sherpas, when Ang Tember slipped down the steep face, disappearing beneath a projecting rock. Most fortunately, however, Ghundi, who was dragged downwards by Ang Tember, saved himself and Tember by firmly anchoring himself with his crampons on this rock. Ghundi is said to have carried up loads to over 26,247 ft. on Everest, and he more than lived up to his reputation on this occasion.

By 2:40 P.M. the entire group stood east of the rock tower at the extreme west edge of the plateau. A whymper tent, bolstered by pitons, was pitched at the measured altitude of 24,607 feet.

Top—CAMP 4 AT NAIKE COL,
May 25th.
Photo, Japanese Manaslu Expedition

Bottom—PASSING THROUGH DIFFICULT ICEFALL,
May 26th.
Photo, Japanese Manaslu Expedition

To Yamazaki fell the unwelcome task of leading the support party of Sherpas back down the precipitous slope. The Sherpas seemed frustrated and unhappy, and to add to Yamazaki's predicament, he himself was suffering from dizzy spells. Kato and Yamada saw them off on the first leg of the descent with an anchored rope enabling each Sherpa to descend the icy slope step by step. Approximately 650 feet of painfully slow progress had been made when Hlakpa and Ang Norbu lost their footing, dragging Yamazaki down with them. Yamazaki happily had enough strength left to anchor the fall of the two Sherpas by using his ice-axe in the nick of time. The party finally made it back to Camp 8, arriving in a state of complete exhaustion.

As usual, later in the day the sky had become overcast with cumulo-cirrus clouds, accompanied by westerly winds and snow-showers. At 6 P.M. the temperature was minus 25 c. while the minimum during the same night was minus 32 c.

Meanwhile at Camp 9 the assault party of three were enjoying *Miso-zosui*, made with alpha rice for dinner (*miso*—paste made from soya beans and normally used in soup; alpha rice—rice dried after boiling and ready for immediate use either with hot water poured over it or boiled). Yamada slept well, but the other two had a restless night mainly because of the narrowness of the tent.

The night settled calm and quiet, and June 1st dawned even finer than the previous morning. Getting up at 4:30 A.M., they left Camp 9 at 7:00 A.M., roped in the following order, Yamada, Ishizaka, and Kato. The ice plateau extended up as far as the summit, and the surface of the ice was so hard that even the spike of the ice-axe was found of no avail. Only the sharp points of the crampons could be relied upon.

Complicated crevasses were encountered all the way although their mouths were not opened too wide for comfort. The guide flags had to be thrust into narrow cracks in the ice. The ice plateau swept upward to the summit in three broad steps. The foot of the second step was gained at 9:30 A.M. and its ascent was rough going as it was necessary to plough through powdered snow patched with *skavra*. Clouds began to appear ominously in the west and the gathering winds spattered snow on to the southwest edge of the plateau. The summit, appearing as un-

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attainable as ever, looked down forbiddingly on the three tiny black specks toiling upwards so slowly as to seem motionless.

At length the third step was approached. Here a halt was called to discuss the advisability of further ascent. Height, 25,427 feet, and only another 1,230 feet to the summit! It was high noon already, the route left to cover was estimated to require another 5 hours under similar conditions. Considering the fickle weather, the limited time for descent, and the physical condition of the members, it was decided to retreat. Indeed it must have been a bitter pill for these three. One can only imagine their chagrin. However, they were faithful to our order to be brave in the face of an inevitable retreat.

According to their opinion the balance of the route leading up to the summit presented no formidable obstacles of a technical kind. Well acclimatized climbers who might be able to stay overnight in, say, a Camp 10, if such could be established, would stand a reasonable chance of attacking the summit on the following day. Of course, this is a conjecture based on all factors being just right at one and the same time.

To mark the altitude reached, a Japanese flag was fastened on the spot with pitons and a picture taken of it. Camp 9 was reached at 2:40 P.M., where everything was picked up, save the tent for the descent from the plateau. Snow conditions had so deteriorated during the day that an hour and a half was taken to cover a 500-foot descent. Members from Camp 4 observed this descent with not a little anxiety, thinking that some injury might have overtaken the party. With the dangerous section of the slope negotiated, the climbers were met by the support party from Camp 8 and all continued to Camp 7, where they stayed overnight.

Thus were we beaten in our bid for the summit. There remained no opportunity to repeat the attack because of our having already exceeded the time limit set in our schedule. Most of the members and Sherpas had already been above Camp 4 from 30 to 40 days, and it was clear that another immediate attempt would have been beyond their physical powers. Food and fuel were again running short, and the weather heralded the approach of the monsoon.

By June 3rd all the camps had been evacuated, and the entire

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party reached the home-like atmosphere of the Base Camp to be warmly welcomed by good old Pancy and others of his kin. After an existence of several weeks in the white realm of snow what a welcome relief it is to be back in a valley carpeted with green! Spring was in the air, and the sweetest fragrance was wafted from the alpine flowers in full bloom. Yaks from Sama and other neighboring villages roamed lazily on the pastures around our base camp, and the bells of different kinds slung around the necks of these animals made sweet and soothing melodies.

On the evening of June 2nd, preparations were afoot for a grand banquet, and a few bottles of wine had already been uncorked when the interpreter Sagar rushed in to the mess tent with the stupendous news: Katmandu Radio had announced that Everest had been scaled by two members of the British party. At first, of course, we rather doubted the news, but a few minutes later a subsequent report arrived, confirming the news source as the British Embassy at Katmandu and that the two members were Hillary and Tensing. The news to us was sensational without parallel. Heartfelt admiration was expressed for the British party and delight that it was they who had gained the victory after 10 tremendous efforts spread over 32 years. There was also a slight tinge of regret perhaps that there were no higher mountains left to climb on the face of the earth. A congratulatory message was despatched forthwith by our first postrunner to catch the British party at Katmandu.

On June 8th our base camp was completely evacuated, and the return journey was begun to Pokhra via Ralkia Pass. Along the way to the pass the magnificent northeast face of Manaslu could be seen, looking as defiant as ever. The slope leading up to the plateau was scarred with the paths of more than ten avalanches that had smashed their way from the edge of the plateau down to the level of Camp 7. This slope was last seen from Bimtakoti on the day following the Ralkia Pass crossing, and there was no doubt whatsoever of its steepness. Bidding our last fond fare-

MORGENROT ON MANASLU
from the base camp, 5:00 A.M., 1 June 1953.
Photo, Japanese Manaslu Expedition

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well to the huge white castle of Manaslu from the west, we continued our march to Pokhra while discussions about the next year's route were carried on enthusiastically each night in camp.

THE MEMBERS

- Y. Mita—53. O. B. from Keio University Alpine Club.
M. Takagi—41. O. B. from Tokio Univ. A. C. Professor of Kobe Univ. Climbing leader at high elevations.
J. Taguchi—41. O. B. from Tokio Univ. A. C. Together with Takagi has had several years' experience in climbing in the Swiss Alps.
S. Takebushi—47. O. B. from Waseda Univ. Ski Club. Participated in the World Students Ski Championship of 1928, held at Cortina D'Ampezzo in Italy. Member of Japanese Nanda Kot Expedition 1936. Together with Takagi and Taguchi joined in the Manaslu Reconnaissance Expedition last year. Chief of the sports division of Mainichi Press.
T. Kato—42. O. B. from Kyoto Univ. A. C. Has had frequent experiences with Mongolian expeditions. Transport officer.
H. Tatsunuma—37. O. B. from Keio Univ. A. C., M.D. Medical officer.
M. Murayama—34. O. B. from Tokio Univ. A. C. Assistant Transport officer.
K. Kato—31. O. B. from Keio Univ. A. C. In charge of equipment.
J. Yamada—30. O. B. from Keio Univ. A. C. In charge of provisions and meteorological survey.
J. Muraki—29. O. B. from Waseda Univ. A. C. In charge of radio and various other instruments.
H. Yamazaki—28. O. B. from Hokkaido Univ. A. C. Assistant medical officer.
S. Ishizaka—25. O. B. from Nippon Univ. A. C.
T. Yoda—36. Photographer from Mainichi Press.

NORTHEAST FACE OF MANASLU

from route to Ralkia pass, June 9th. Summit can be seen just to the right of the pinnacle. Many traces may be seen of avalanches from the plateau.

Photo, Japanese Manaslu Expedition

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SCIENTIFIC PARTY

S. Nakao—36. O. B. from Kyoto Univ. A. C. Botanist. Prof. of Naniwa University, Osaka. Member of Manaslu Reconnaissance Expedition last year.

J. Kawakita—32. O. B. from Kyoto Univ. A. C. Anthropologist. Prof. of Osaka University.

The figure after the name indicates the age.

THE SHERPAS

Name	Age	Himalayan Club No.	Previous Expeditions
Gyalgen (Sirdar)	39	57	36 Ev. 38 Ev. 39 K.K. 46 Nun Kun, 49 Pyramid, 50 Anna., 51 Chau Khamla, 52 Manaslu.
Pancy (Cook)	47	51	36 Ev. 37 Garh., 38 Sik., 39 Sik., 49 Pyramid, 50 Anna., 51 Garh., 52 Manaslu.
Ang Tering IV	39	101	36 K.K., 47 Garh., 49 Pyramid, 50 Nepal, 51 Garh., 52 Manaslu.
Sarki	34	157	46 Nun Kun, 46 Chomo Yumo, 50 Nepal, 50 Anna., 51 Garh., 52 Manaslu.
Hlakpa	29	164	49 Pyramid, 49 Panchi Chuli, 51 Panchi Chuli, 52 Chau Khamba, Sugar Peak.
Ang Norbu	23	172	52 Ev.
Nibma Sitar	29	168	47 Sik., 48 Lhonak, 52 Ev.
Nima Tensing II	24	177	52 Nepal, 52 Sugar Peak.
Ghundi	28	167	52 Chau Khamba, Ev.
Ang Tember	29	179	52 Kamet.
Ang Dowa	24	(unregistered)	52 Ev., 49 Pyramid.
Migma Steri	26	"	52 Ev.
Kippa	28	"	52 Ev.
Nym Temba	20	"	52 Ev.
Ang Tering V	29	"	New.

LIAISON OFFICERS

Dilli Bahadur Verma from Katmandu, joined the 1952 Manaslu Reconnaissance party.

Sagar Prasad Sharma from Katmandu.

Summary of Statistics

ATTEMPTED: Manaslu, 26,247 ft., Nepal; eighth highest peak in the world and unclimbed.

HEIGHT REACHED: 25,427 ft.

PERSONNEL: Leader, Y. Mita; party listed in article.