

Expédition au Gaurisankar et Mission Scientifique au Nepal

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*Translated from the French by Joan E. Fisher,
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AFTER I had taken part in two Swiss expeditions to Mt. Everest in 1952, my one desire was to return again to the Himalayas of Nepal. As early as 1950, my friend Rene Dittert and I thought of climbing Cho Oyu. In the autumn of 1953 I began to organize an expedition which would attempt this mountain, but unfortunately, conversations with the Foundation for Alpine Research, at Zurich, did not give the hoped-for results. So it was that on April 12, 1954, I had to make arrangements myself with the government of Nepal and ask at that time for permission to take a reconnaissance expedition to the Gaurisankar massif. This region was almost completely unknown, although the famous explorer Eric Shipton had once led a small British expedition through this area.

With the Comité Himalayen de Genève, we decided on four main objectives for the expedition:

1. Reconnoiter the Gaurisankar – Melungtse massifs and study the possibility of ascent.
2. Map the region and bring back a photographic coverage of it.
3. Collect samples of rock to complete the geological study undertaken in 1952 by Dr. Lombard.

4. Gather plants and seeds to augment the collection of the Botanical Gardens at Geneva.

The members of the expedition were as follows: Raymond Lambert, leader; Mme. Claude Kogan, French, and member of two South American expeditions (in 1953, she climbed the Nun Kun, 23,410 feet) ; Dr. Jean Juge, Doctor of Science; Dr. Franz Lochmatter, Doctor of Medicine; Albert Zimmerman, head of the Botanical Gardens of Geneva; Denis Bertholet, photographer and motion-picture expert; and Marc Stengelin, student. We were also accompanied by nine Sherpas.

The expedition was financed by the members themselves, by several private contributions, and also through the generous help of suppliers. On June 18th, we were thrilled to receive confirmation from the Nepalese government of the authorization of the expedition. Our equipment, weighing in all 5,485 lbs., was rapidly packed and forwarded by ship from Genoa, July 29th. It was accompanied to Bombay by five members of the expedition, and from there by train to Patna. Mme. Kogan and I followed by plane, and we all reunited at Katmandu on August 31, 1954.

After spending several days in the capital of Nepal, we began our march toward the region on September 5th. For five days we followed the regular route taken by expeditions to Everest, but after Charicot, we turned off and headed north. We followed the Bhota Kosi to the point where it by-passes the valley of the Rolwaling Khola. Then we proceeded up the valley as far as Beding, which is situated at 11,943 feet and is somewhat to the southeast of the Gaurisankar. As we had planned in advance, it took us exactly 12 days to reach this point. From Beding, we continued north, crossing the Hadung-La, at an altitude of 17,717 feet, and eventually established base camp beside a lake which lay directly south of Meluntse.

Apart from cartographic, geological, and botanical activities undertaken from this camp, we also made two extensive reconnaissances of Gaurisankar. We were soon stopped by what seemed insurmountable difficulties. The slopes and arêtes are very steep; the latter are all heavily corniced and extremely dangerous for any ascent. It is doubtful whether an attempt on the summit can be made, in view of the risks involved. In any case, a heavily equipped expedition, with a great number of

climbers and Sherpas would be necessary. Melungste also offers no possibility of ascent — with the possible exception of the east side.

Our work in the Gaurisankar-Melungste basin ended, the expedition left the area via the Melunga-La. This was the first time the pass had ever been crossed by an important train of coolies. We then arrived at Chhule, and from there by way of the Nangpa-La, we reached the foot of Cho Oyu on October 12th. It was here that we met Dr. Tichy's Austrian expedition, which had already been at Cho Oyu for some time. We agreed that the Austrians were to make their attempts first, and only afterwards would we, in turn, try for the summit. On October 19, 1954, the Austrians successfully climbed Cho Oyu, and by the next day, October 20th, bad weather had closed in around the mountain. Nevertheless, we began our assault. On the 27th, Mme. Kogan and I established Camp 4 below the summit at 25,263 feet. An icy gale, the following morning, prevented us from setting out for the final assault before 9:00 A.M., and we had to give up the summit. There was not enough time to make the climb and return to Camp 4 before night. To bivouac at the summit under the existing circumstances would have meant disaster.

Conclusions

From the meteorological point of view, the 1954 monsoon was prolonged until October 5th, and on October 20th, winter set in. This meant that winter arrived a good month in advance, because in 1952, on November 20th, I was with Tenzing Nor-kay on the South Col of Everest.

The return march was made directly south, and we brought back with us an extensive photographic record. The results of both the reconnaissance and the botanical and geological efforts were excellent; and in general, we were able to accomplish a great deal of important work.

Summary of Statistics

ATTEMPTED: Cho Oyu.

HEIGHT REACHED: 25,410 ft. by Lambert and Mme. Kogan, at

EXPÉDITION AU GAURISANKAR

this date, October 28th, the highest elevation ever reached by a woman climber.

EXPLORATION: Gaurisankar – Melungtse basin.

PERSONNEL: Raymond Lambert, leader; Denis Bertholet, Dr. Jean Juge, Claude Kogan, Dr. Franz Lochmatter, Marc Stengelin, and Albert Zimmerman.