

On our sixth and final day, we began by traversing left to get back onto ice, then went up and right on discontinuous ice that was M5 in two places. The snow conditions were even worse below the summit ridge, where we topped out at 6,050m.

We began our descent with three diagonal rappels down the south face, followed by a downclimb to the glacier on the south side of Shar, where we bivied. The next day, we walked southeast on the glacier to a point near the lowest col between Shar and a nameless peak, then descended to the Namche side. We reached the moraine after seven raps and more down-climbing, then bivied again on the east side of the northeast ridge. The next day, December 15, we finally descended to our advanced base camp by detouring around the northeast ridge.

HIROYUKI NAKAGAWA, *North Japan Climbing Team* (translated by Tamotsu Nakamura)

## ANNAPURNA HIMAL

*Annapurna I traverse.* Unquestionably the best climb of the season was the Annapurna I traverse by Jean-Christophe Lafaille and Alberto Inurrategi. They were members of a six-man expedition jointly led by Inurrategi and Ed Viesturs. They had no Sherpa climbers with them at all, so the members did the work together to make the route, pitch the camps and stock them with supplies as far as their third high-altitude camp at 7,100m, nearly 100m below the summit of their eastern-most peak, Glacier Dome (now officially known as Tarkegang). They had no bottled oxygen with them.

Viesturs climbed beyond camp 3 westwards along the ridge until 7,300m, but went no farther. He judged the avalanche risk unacceptable and was worried about the problem of returning from Annapurna's summit by the same long ridge. He descended to base camp and remained there for the remainder of the climbing period.

Lafaille and Inurrategi remained to continue alone. On May 14, they left camp 3 at 6 a.m. and moved along the sawtooth ridge. It had a steep and technically difficult section up to the summit of the 7,485m (24,557') peak known as Roc Noir (Khangsar Kang). They took three hours to surmount the last 250m-300m to the top; here the incline was 55° – 60° with a rock band running across it and bad powder snow. From here, they had only two alternatives, according to Lafaille: to retreat from the top of Roc Noir back the way they had come, or to continue west. It was not possible for them to descend the north or south faces, both of which were very steep; the distance down the north face was too great, while on the south face there were numerous unacceptably dangerous seracs and cornices.

They elected to continue west from Roc Noir by traversing on the north face between 20m and 100m below the ridge depending on the snow conditions. Sometimes they could walk along it with a pole, sometimes it became a very steep (65° – 70°) snow face which involved very technical climbing and some rappeling. At 4 p.m. they bivouacked at about 7,500m, the average altitude of this part of their traverse. They had climbed more than four km. from camp 3.

On the 15th they went back onto the ridge for about a kilometer and then, at about 7,700m, they crossed again down onto the north face, where all the snow was very good and firm whereas the ridge had become only bare rock. However, they did have some technical ice and snow climbing to do. They now were actually on the huge expanse of Annapurna I, and they bivouacked at 7,950m at the top of a couloir below its east summit. They stopped their

traverse at about 3 p.m. because they knew it would take them hours to chop out enough space to stay for the night. That afternoon Lafaille also spent some time fixing 100m of rope above their bivouac site for the next day's climb.

On May 16 they completed their east-west traverse. The route now lay along a steep rock face that was technically very difficult. They had trouble finding a route here. About 40m below the east summit (8,026m), they moved westward along the north face. They crossed the middle summit area on the face and joined the normal north face route at a couloir at about 7,800m, climbed up the couloir, and at 10 a.m. were at last on the main 8,091m summit (26,545'). Half of their grand traverse had been done.

Now to get down safely. After half an hour on the top, they started out on their west-east return traverse. They took a different line on the face from the one they had just been using because they were very tired and the snow conditions were not good. In the middle of the afternoon they returned to their bivouac tent, stayed there an hour, then moved to a lower altitude to make a new bivouac on a small plateau at 7,400m. They were very weary, and there was no food and little cooking gas; their supper consisted of some biscuits with milk tea.

On the 17th they continued their return climb. They were still very tired, but at their bivouac of the 14th found their cache of food and gas; they spent two hours to have some food. Then back to Roc Noir and camp 3, which they reached at 4 p.m. Here there was a proper camp with a tent and more food, and they could be more relaxed. The next day, they descended all the way to base camp at 4,000m, where they arrived at the end of that morning.

Throughout their remarkable climb, they had used no bottled oxygen and experienced no accident or frostbite. "I was very happy," Lafaille said about his success on Annapurna after three previous attempts and his "bad experience" on its south face 10 years ago. (In October 1992, he and the noted French alpinist Pierre Beghin had been attempting an alpine-style ascent of the south face when Beghin fell to his death. Lafaille's difficult solo descent developed into a growing nightmare when a falling rock shattered his right arm.)

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, *Nepal*

## DAMODAR HIMAL

*Gaugiri, first ascent.* Jim Frush (then-president of the AAC) and I went exploring for an obscure 6,110m (20,046') peak called Gaugiri, which is in the Upper Mustang district northeast of the Annapurna massif on the Tibetan border.

We had an idea of roughly where the peak was from a trip to Mustang in the fall of 2001, but no one had ever attempted to climb the peak and there were no photos or description of it or its exact location. This was the first permit issued for a peak under the new regulations, and the first ever in Upper Mustang. It was one out of the list of 103 newly opened mountains, many of them unknown to mountaineers, ranging in altitude from 5,407m (17,740') to 7,349m (24,111'). Eighty-three of them are between 6,000m and 7,000m high. As we set out for Gaugiri from Kathmandu in mid-May, we didn't know whether we would be tackling something that was technically difficult or an easy walk uphill. But first we had to find it. We had the latest 1:50,000 maps, produced in 2000, from a detailed Finnish Meteorological Institute survey, but even these maps proved to have put some significant lakes in totally the wrong place, which caused us some problems. However, we found Gaugiri and