

be below -30°C) and insufficient acclimatization to this high altitude, the pair finally came to a halt on May 10 at ca 7,450m. Above, the mixed terrain looked hard and icy and the pair decided to retreat, hoping for another attempt later in the month. In the meantime the South Tyrol team had regained their high camp but once again been forced to retreat.

Subsequently, the weather did not allow either group to make another attempt and the Russians, who were the last to leave, finally abandoned their efforts because of too much snow-fall, their exhaustion, and lack of time to get well-rested before resuming the climb.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, *Nepal*

Nuptse East I (7,804m), first ascent. Last autumn's attempt on the southeast pillar of Nuptse East I was the third by Valeri Babanov of Russia. Babanov had made an unsuccessful solo attempt on this pillar in the autumn of 2002, and in the spring of 2003 returned with Vladimir Suviga as noted above. But he was not willing to give up, and now he knew the route well. This time, at last, Babanov, with Yuri Koshelenko, stood at the pointed summit of Nuptse East I in bright moonlight. They had made one attempt to make their way up the route on October 21 and 22 but only reached 6,900m, before very strong winds forced them to descend. The two Russians resumed climbing the 2,600m buttress on October 29 and in one continuous push, with three bivouacs, they gained the summit on November 3. A lead article on their climb is found earlier in this Journal, along with a chronology of attempts on the route.

Babanov was clearly very pleased to have achieved his goal at last. Not only had the two Russians made the first ascent of the southeast pillar and the first ascent of this 7,804m summit, but Babanov believes they had managed to reach the top of the highest unclimbed peak in the world.

Many of those who are knowledgeable about trends in mountaineering are admirers of Babanov. The equally well-known Slovenian climber, Tomaz Humar, who prefers faces to ridges himself, was quoted in a German Alpine Club magazine three years ago as commenting that, "the future of climbing belongs to the new Russian teams around Valeri Babanov. They practice classical alpinism with little equipment on technically extremely demanding routes.... To me, the future is the lightly-equipped conquest of technically demanding routes at great heights in alpine style." But the admiration is not shared unanimously. One American climber remarked in September, "Babanov uses bolts and I don't like that." Some climbers who made earlier pure alpine-style attempts on the southeast pillar have strongly complained about Babanov's use of fixed ropes.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, *Nepal*

Nuptse, north face, The Crystal Snake. In terms of high-standard technical ascents at altitude the highlight of the season was the new route on the north face of Nuptse by Argentinean guides, Damian and Willie Benegas.

The brothers made their first sortie onto the face during early May and a second on the 15th of the month, when they climbed 10 hard pitches over good but brittle ice and wonderful orange granite. At 2 a.m. on the 16th the stove broke and the pair had no option other than to rappel, leaving most of their gear at the high point.

The third and final attempt began on the 18th. The first night they bivouacked at 6,500m,

the second at 6,700m, and the third at 6,950m. At this point they exited from the steep triangular face onto the snowy crest of the north rib, having climbed ca 22 pitches up to 5.9 WI5 and M4 (for speed, pieces of gear were intermittently pulled on or hooked with ice tools). On the 21st they reached a small rock band on the rib at 7,100m and bivouacked for the fourth time.

The next day it snowed more or less continuously and the pair only managed a further 300m. The next day the weather began to improve and the summit was reached after midday. After rappelling the approximate line of the British Route they were back in the Western Cwm by 10 that night. The new route, 1,500m high and christened The Crystal Snake, involved 42 roped pitches and a considerable amount of unroped climbing during the last 800m on the crest of the rib. A lead article on this ascent appears earlier in this Journal.

Historical note: In October 1979 Georges Bettembourg, Brian Hall, Al Rouse, and Doug Scott climbed the snowy left flank of the north rib, joined its crest in the upper section, where they continued to the main summit to make the second ascent of Nuptse's 7,861m main summit. This route or variants to their original line have been repeated on three separate occasions to date, but by members of only two expeditions. In September 1996 Ralf Dujmovits and Axel Schlonvogt established a camp at 6,800m on the glacial shelf above the Western Cwm and directly below the start of the snow rib leading up the face to the crest of the rib. From this camp they climbed the intervening ca 1,000m to the summit in 12 hours. In May 1999 Andy Lapkiss, Jeff Rhoads, and Gyalzen Sherpa adopted the same tactic but started up the face right of the 1979 Route, crossed it, then followed a snow ramp left of and parallel to the crest of the spur to arrive directly at the summit. This was repeated the following day by Pete Athans climbing alone but from the same expedition.

LINDSAY GRIFFIN, *High Mountain INFO*

Lhotse south face, winter attempt. Two years had passed since the Tokai section of the Japanese Alpine Club tried the first winter ascent of Lhotse's giant south face. The attempt, which took place in December 2001, eventually failed at 7,600m due to a biting winter blizzard. A second expedition was organized in 2003, JAC's centenary. The idea was to train five top men in excellent physical condition and acclimatize by climbing an 8,000m peak immediately before the route, pushing for the summit as early as possible in winter.

On October 14, all five reached the top of Shishapangma Central and by November 14 base camp had been established at the foot of Lhotse's south face. However, we discovered that the bottom one-third was in worse condition than last time. On November 22 we set up Camp 1 on a rock rib at 5,900m. On November 28 Camp 2 was established at 7,100m and then on December 3 an interim C3 was placed at the site where the Slovenian team pitched their C4 many years ago.

Conditions were good, with rock fall less frequent than the last time. On December 5 we climbed past our high point of 2001 and on the 9th set up Camp 3 at 7,850m. How much we had dreamed about occupying a high camp, from which we could finally head for the summit! Everything, so far, had gone smoothly and according to plan. The summit would surely be in our hands.

But it was not to be. The crux of the entire face actually began above our top camp. We opted to follow the couloir to the right of the final crest and in order to reach it had to make a 200m descent rightward from Camp 3. By doing this we would avoid the seemingly difficult