

Mazur's deputy leader attempted to speed up the progress of slow clients by hauling their rucksacks up by rope. This problem greatly delayed the German team's arriving at the second and third camps. Also, an American climber was almost been hit by a falling rock loosened by a climber above him. His own group could not pitch a second or third camp because no space was available; they were not only ones who had to skip a camp, usually camp 2, sometimes making for debilitating long summit days, and long waits at the mountain's bottlenecks.

The leader of an international expedition, Luis Benitez from the U.S., summarized the general situation on Ama Dablam in harsh terms: "too many teams were not led properly or responsibly [and] too cheaply." He said that some teams' Sherpas took food, fuel, and even a set of crampons from others' tents for their own members. One leader reportedly apologized for the stolen crampons, but others were apparently unaware of what their Sherpas were doing. Benitez says that the Nepalese tourism ministry must restrict the number of Ama Dablam permits it grants in a season because the mountain is getting so overcrowded that it has "almost reached critical mass." However, the government is most unlikely to act on his advice, since the fees are a major source of its foreign exchange earnings, and foreign climbers' expenditures are extremely important to their Sherpas, to the trekking agencies who assist teams, and to the many lodge keepers in mountainous areas.

In contrast, there were nearly twice as many teams on Cho Oyu (8,201m) but they did not have this kind of crowding problem. There was a lot more space, with none of Ama Dablam's narrow-ridge bottlenecks to confront them.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, AAC Honorary Member, Nepal

*Everest, north face, new route.* Elizabeth Hawley's account of the Russian new route on the north face of Everest, along with commentary from Yuri Koshelenko, a team member, is in the Tibet section of this AAJ.

*Everest, 2004 summary.* During spring 2003, in the 50th anniversary season of Everest's first ascent, a record number of men and women had turned up to climb to its summit, and it was assumed that the numbers would decrease after that. Wrong assumption. The number of teams was slightly less, but not the number of climbers. In May 2003 a mere 260 people, foreigners and Nepalese, men, women, and one 15-year-old child, stood on the summit of Everest, and on a single day, May 22, 114 people summited. In 2004 the overall total rose considerably, to 319 people. However, they were more evenly scattered over various days this time, with just 61 on the busiest day, May 16.

Last spring's Everest teams also exceeded those of a year ago in a tragic way: the number of climbers' deaths. Last year, only three people died, all of them men and two of these were Sherpas. This year no Sherpa perished, but seven other climbers, including two women, did: five had just been to the summit, another was trying to rescue two of these summiters, and the seventh collapsed while struggling to surmount the final 150 meters to the top. On the North Col route were a Bulgarian, Hristo Hristov (who was one of his country's best mountaineers and in 2003 climbed a hard new route on the north face of Thalay Sagar); another Bulgarian, Mariana Maslaova, who never reached the top; two South Korean summiters, Jang Min and Park Mu-Taek, and Baek Joon-Ho, their leader, who climbed up from their highest camp to save them and then also died; and a 63-year-old Japanese woman, Shoko Ota (the second oldest

woman to reach the summit). The only death on the South Col route was the American summiteer Nils Antzana.

There were only two teams on Everest last autumn: Dutch and Ukrainian. Both were on Tibet's standard route via the North Col, and both were unsuccessful due to too much snow and not enough fixed ropes. A major problem for these Everest climbers was that there was nobody else around: there were none of the big commercial expeditions that come in the spring, with numerous Sherpas to establish the route by fixing hundreds of meters of rope most of the way to the top.

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*Everest, uncommon events on standard routes.* In the spring a Greek expedition sent one climbing team to the north side and another to the south to carry to the top their flags of the 2004 Greek Summer Olympic Games. They were the first Greek expedition ever to attempt Everest, and both parties succeeded in planting their flags at the highest spot on earth.

Another team on the north side had a novel sendoff. It was the first to go to Everest from the Indian navy, so the Indian defense minister, George Fernandes; the navy chief of staff, Admiral Madhvendra Singh; the expedition leader, a submariner, Commander Satyabrata Dam, and the 13 other expedition members got into a Russian-built submarine and submerged to a depth of about 75 meters in the Arabian Sea for the official launching ceremony.

Sherpas on the normal climbing route from the Nepalese side included one with a prosthesis on his leg, and another who claimed a new speed record in his ascent. Nawang Sherpa, 32, lost his left leg below the knee in a motorcycle accident six years ago, but that didn't prevent him from getting to the top of the world this spring with an American, Thomas McMillan, who had arranged for him to have a high-quality U.S.-made prosthesis fitted three years after his accident. Nawang went to Everest last year and climbed as far as camp 2, testing his artificial leg. Now he was back, and with McMillan and three other Sherpas became the second amputee ever to reach the summit. (The first was an American, Tom Whittaker, who summited six years earlier, but Nawang had lost much more of his leg than Whittaker had.)

The speed climber was Pemba Dorje, who claims he raced up the 3,500 vertical meters from base camp on the Khumbu Glacier to the summit in only 8 hours and 8 minutes during the night of 20/21 May, climbing entirely alone and using artificial oxygen only above the last camp at 7,900 meters.

For this 27-year-old climber, it was his third ascent. He was now well acclimatized: he had just made his second ascent by the same route on the morning of the 16th in the company of a Swiss, Rupert Heider, and two other Sherpas. Furthermore, he said, he had spent about six months training intensively in Kathmandu before arriving at base camp on April 7. Nearly every day, he had cycled at least eight kilometers and jogged from one edge of the city to another; he had also gone rock climbing.

The announcement of this astonishing feat was received with some skepticism and was immediately challenged at base camp. In a satellite telephone interview with a newspaper reporter in Kathmandu, Lhakpa Gelu Sherpa renewed a controversy they had last year. Pemba Dorje made his first speed-ascent last spring and reported then that it took him 12 hours and 45 minutes to climb from bottom to top. Lhakpa Gelu said four days later that he himself had just spent only 10 hours and 56 minutes to do the entire ascent. Pemba Dorje charged Lhakpa