

Nepal

ANNAPURNA HIMAL

Annapurna, 14th for Viesturs, accident. The well-known American mountaineer Ed Viesturs went to Cho Oyu to acclimatize and then quickly to his last 8,000er, Annapurna I. The north face of this 8,091m mountain, the 10th

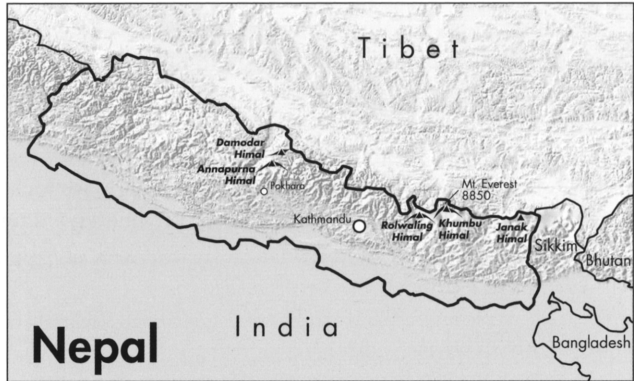
highest in the world, is notorious for fatal avalanches. Viesturs went in the spring of 2000 and witnessed constant avalanching all across the face. He returned from having climbed no higher than 5,900m and declared he would never go there again. His next attempt, in 2002, was via the long east ridge, which he decided was not for him. So he was back on the north face after all.

This time he and his frequent partner, Vieikka Gustafsson of Finland, already well-acclimatized, moved quickly up the face, pitched their high camp at just 6,900m, waited three days for the wind to drop, and were on the summit on May 12, less than two weeks after arriving at base camp. Viesturs was amazed by how free the face was from avalanching.

On the summit he felt it was “a dream come true. I had my doubts that I’d ever get there, because of our conservatism and its dangerous avalanching.” He thinks he is the seventh or eighth person to scale all 8,000ers without using bottled oxygen [in fact, he appears to be only the fifth to complete all 14 without using oxygen on either ascent or descent—Ed.]. What next? “Now that I’ve gotten the 8,000ers out of the way, maybe some 7,000ers in Nepal; maybe Antarctica.” He had no definite plans yet.

Viesturs and Gustafsson left the mountain on May 14 without having experienced avalanche problems. On the 18th four men from an Italian team led by Abele Blanc reached 6,300m in the same gully climbed by the American and Finn, when suddenly huge blocks of ice, some 3m square, came crashing down. Christian Kuntner, for whom Annapurna was the last 8,000er he had left to scale, received fatal internal injuries. Blanc, who was in the lead, was struck on the side of his head so hard that he was unconscious for 18 hours and has no memory of the incident. Two of his ribs were broken. (Annapurna was his final unclimbed 8,000er also.) The last two men going up the shallow couloir, Stephan Andres and Marco Barmasse, were not so seriously hurt.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, AAC Honorary Member, Nepal



KUTANG HIMAL

Swelokan, south face and northwest ridge attempts. A small Japanese team became the first climbers to attempt the remote 6,180m Swelokan, which lies on the Tibet border north-north-east of Manaslu, in what is sometimes referred to as the Kutang Himal. Base camp was established at just over 4,400m in the upper Buru Gandaki, from where Sadmasu Kitagawa and