

an expedition on the northern side with 27 members and 36 supporting Sherpas and Tibetans.

In spring 2004, 64 teams went to Everest and only 10 (16%) failed. In spring 2005, out of the 101 groups an astonishing 48 (48%) failed to put anyone on top. There were 326 summiters in spring 2004, but in 2005 only 306 men and women claimed success.

An Australian climber figured how to beat the weather on the south side: go around to the north. Piers Buck originally planned to make a traverse from south to north and had permits to do so. He had gotten to only 7,500m on May 16, when the weather became unsettled for many days. However, on the north side people started getting to the top on the 21st. So he left the team he was with on the southern side, flew by helicopter to Kathmandu on the 23rd, and went by road to the north side's base camp. He summited on June 5 as a member of the expedition with which he had been given permission to descend.

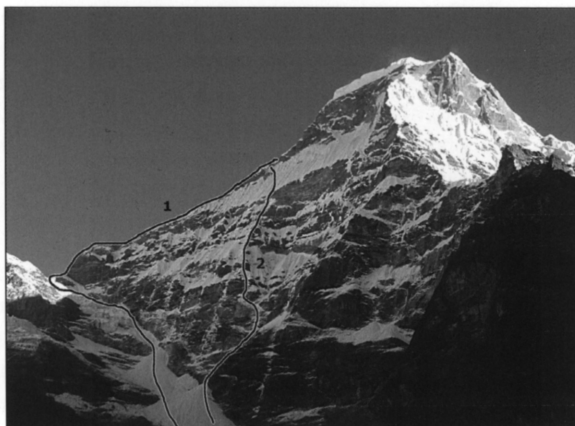
Another late arrival at base camp on the north side climbed without any Sherpa support or bottled oxygen. Marcin Miotk was on an unsuccessful Polish expedition to the south face of Annapurna I and returned to Kathmandu in mid-May. But instead of going home he went to Everest, was at base camp on May 18, and made two summit bids. On the first he climbed with two Austrians but turned back at 7,900m, on June 1, because of strong wind. His second try was a success. Climbing alone from advance base camp, he was on top at 2:30 p.m. on June 5, the last person to summit during the season.

Back on the south side it was a miracle that massive fatalities didn't occur on May 4, when a huge avalanche of rock and ice crashed down from the west shoulder. It hit tents pitched at Camp 1 just above the top of the Icefall, but few people were occupying this camp at the time. Those in camp or nearby received relatively light cuts and bruises, except for a Sherpa whose back was injured. Numerous tents and the gear inside were lost.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, AAC Honorary Member, Nepal

### *Kyashar, southwest face, attempt.*

From October 11 to 15 Jan Doudlebsky and Marek Holecek attempted the first ascent of the southwest face of Kyashar (a.k.a. Peak 43; 6,770m). This peak had its only official ascent in October 2003, by a multinational, Swiss-based team, via the west ridge and west face. The two Czechs began in the center of the southwest face and slanted up left to join the west ridge at 6,500m. It was cold, snow conditions on the ridge were bad, and both climbers were concerned about frostbitten toes. They estimated that to reach the summit would require a further one or two days of climbing, so they opted to



Kyashar (6,770m) from the Hinku Valley below Tangnag, with (1) being the first official ascent of the mountain. Steep snow slopes below the southwest face led to the 5,800m col at the foot of the west ridge. The crest above was followed to ca. 6,400 before moving left into a couloir on the west face (Broderick-Frank-Normand, 2003). (2) Is the Czech attempt on the southwest face, which reached the 2003 route on the west ridge before descending (M6+ W16, Doudlebsky-Holecek, 2005) *Andreas Frank*

descend the west ridge. Although their route did not reach the summit, it joined an existing line, and the climbers have called it Ramro Chaina. Difficulties were about M6+ and WI6.

JAN KREISINGER, *Czech Republic*

*Although the following event took place in the winter of 2006, it was such a notable tragedy that we include it in this Journal.*

## MAHALANGUR HIMAL - MAKALU SECTION

*Makalu, winter solo attempt and tragedy.* The well-known French mountaineer, Jean-Christophe Lafaille, 40 years old, vanished on January 27, 2006, while attempting to make an entirely solo ascent of Makalu (8,485m), the world's fifth highest mountain. The highest he is known to have reached is 7,600m, where he pitched his small red tent on the 26th [after almost six weeks on the mountain—Ed.] and from which he set out alone for the top early in the morning of the 27th. He reported his departure by satellite phone to his wife Katya in France. This was expected to be the first of several reports to her that day, but he never made contact with her or his base camp staff again. [Lafaille had remarked that he felt really up to it, despite the fact he hadn't been able to sleep, due to altitude and cold (down to -30°C). The forecast predicted slightly changeable conditions, with summit wind speeds possibly reaching 40-50km/hour—Ed.]

A helicopter search of the mountainside took place on February 4. Searchers included his wife, her brother, and Veikka Gustafsson, a Finnish mountaineer who had climbed with Lafaille and knew from his own ascent of Makalu the route Lafaille was following. They saw the tent but no other trace of him. The search team left a tent with sleeping bag, stove, food, fuel, and a few other necessities at base camp, in case he did manage to return alive. But Gustafsson knew there was no hope for Lafaille's survival, and thought he understood exactly what had happened to the Frenchman.

Ten years previously Gustafsson had climbed the same (Normal) route that Lafaille was. He had two climbing partners, Ed Viesturs and Rob Hall, but led most of the final part to the summit. He found numerous treacherous crevasses and fell into three of them. He was always belayed and emerged unscathed. Gustafsson is convinced the Frenchman fell into one and became fatally trapped.

Gustafsson considers Lafaille to have been "one of the world's greatest climbers." If he had succeeded, Lafaille would have been the first person to climb Makalu in winter. He had already attempted the mountain unsuccessfully in spring 2004, in an earlier solo bid by a different route, approaching the mountain from Tibet over Makalu II. Makalu was one of only three 8,000m peaks he had not yet summited.

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, *AAC Honorary Member, Nepal.*

*Editor's note: beginning with Renato Casarotto's Italian expedition in January 1981, there have been 11 winter attempts on Makalu, which remains the only Nepalese 8,000m peak not to be climbed in winter, despite serious attempts by the great Polish winter specialists. While nearly all teams encountered good snow/ice conditions, higher up the mountain they found progress impossible in fierce winds.*