

6,814m summit at 9:20 a.m. on the 19th and then descended the southwest ridge all the way to Camp 1 (5,900m), which they reached at 5:40 p.m. The descent was long and tiring, with no fixed rope to follow on the ridge above Camp 3, where it had obviously been swept away by the November 14 avalanches. Yoshida had minor frostbite to the fingers.

TAMOTSU NAKAMURA, *Japanese Alpine News*

*Editor's note: Glenn Dunmire and Chris Warner climbed the central rib on the west face in alpine style during December 18-21, 1990. The Japanese ascent is probably the first repeat of this route.*

*Ama Dablam, southwest ridge, tragedy.* The southwest ridge of Ama Dablam, a beautiful peak often referred to as the Matterhorn of the Khumbu, is now one of the most popular routes in the Himalaya: commercial operators who run trips to Everest during the spring, usually reserve autumn for Ama Dablam, when there can be as many as 40 teams on the mountain. Camp 3 is situated on a shoulder, above which a steep section of ridge leads past a large serac barrier, the Dablam, which is situated out left on the west face. Camp 3 is normally considered a safe haven, but in November an unprecedented incident resulted in a fatal accident to six climbers: the British mountaineer Duncan Williams and his Sherpa Mingma Nuru, together with two Swedish climbers, Daniel Carlsson and Mikael Forsberg, plus their two Sherpas, Danuru and Tashi Dorje. Stephen Gandy, who was a member of a commercially organized expedition to the ridge, takes up the story.

On November 11 my fellow team members Duncan Williams and Mingma Nuru Sherpa left base camp for Camp 1. Clive Roberts and I had just come down from this camp after a spell of acclimatisation and needed to rest. Additionally, we had limited sleeping spaces on the mountain and it made sense to split the party, rather than carry up additional tents and stoves. Clive, Pembu Sherpa, and I set off again for Camp 1 on the following day, but later Clive descended due to difficulties with a recurring chest infection. Pembu and I continued to Camp 2 without incident.

Early on the morning of the 14th Pembu and I were woken by what sounded like an avalanche or serac fall. Approximately 15 minutes later there was a second. It seemed at the time that these came from further east and were not on Ama Dablam. Another climber at base camp put the time of the first at 4:15 a.m. A third avalanche has been reported but we didn't hear it at Camp 2.

At 7:30 a.m. we made a scheduled call to base camp and confirmed that we were ready to ascend to Camp 3. Pembu tried to raise Mingma on the radio but got no response. We assumed that either his radio batteries were dead, or that the pair were already on their way up. At 9:45 a.m. we began our ascent, with no idea that there had been any problem further up the mountain. Our radio was switched off during the ascent to conserve batteries.

At around 1:15 p.m. we were just below Camp 3, when there was another avalanche. This was not a serac fall but a snow (blocks and powder) avalanche from above the Dablam. It was directed to the right of the Dablam (looking in) and down the normal ascent route. We were sheltered by the shoulder of Camp 3. We continued and arrived at the site of the camp 10-15 minutes later. All that was left was a metal spoon to the right of the ascent route and two old ropes above some steep ground. Subsequent questioning of earlier ascensionists has shown that these were there before the avalanche.

Snow and blocks of ice weighing roughly 250-350kg covered the ca 30m by 30m area,

with the 10m nearest to the Dablam heavily covered with debris and indistinguishable from the slope above: on the surface there was no evidence of Camp 3 having ever existed. We moved down the route to a safer area, where I radioed a distress message to Clive at base camp. We then descended, arriving back at Camp 2 shortly before dusk. At 4:30 p.m., a further avalanche, witnessed from base camp, again struck the site of Camp 3. Subsequent helicopter survey revealed no sign of life, though some debris was seen through binoculars, spread out ca 500m below the camp.

I believe that the initial avalanche was caused by part of the Dablam collapsing. This changed its structure, and subsequent snow avalanches from the slopes above were directed rightwards (south) onto the camp. Why the initial serac fall from the Dablam hit Camp 3 instead of following its presumably normal channel down the west face is still unclear. In initial reports several critics noted that this site has, on occasions, become too cramped, with many expeditions operating together on the mountain, forcing some teams to pitch away from the shoulder. However, I can confirm that the site was definitely not overcrowded, nor were tents situated too far to the left. In the 10 days prior to the accident there had been intermittent but certainly not heavy snowfall on the mountain, and during my ascent to Camp 3 I found the ridge to be quite firm.

I have set up a website where it is possible to make donations that will give assistance to the wives and children of the deceased Sherpas. The Himalayan Trust has agreed to act as the conduit for these funds. Please visit [www.justgiving.com/amadablamwidows](http://www.justgiving.com/amadablamwidows)

STEPHEN GANDY, UK

*Editor's note: This incident has raised the number of deaths on Ama Dablam from 11 to 17, although well over 3,000 climbers have now been on the mountain since its first ascent during the calendar winter of 1961. Before last autumn only one death had resulted from avalanche: in 1979 Ken Hyslop was killed when part of the Dablam broke while he was attempting the first ascent of the west face with fellow New Zealanders, Merv English, Geoff Gabites, and Peter Hillary. The latter was quite badly injured.*

*Everest.* The majority of notable events on world's highest mountain took place on the Tibetan side. See that section of the *Journal* for more details.

*Everest, an uncommon post-monsoon ascent and partial ski descent.* Only a handful of climbers go to Everest in the autumn season because everyone knows that very few succeed in the short climbing period between the end of the monsoon rains in September and the onset of the fierce jet stream wind in October. The last ascent of Everest in the post-monsoon season was made in 2000 by a team of Slovenians led by Davo Karnicar. They needed the mountain in very snowy condition, and in early October Karnicar became the first person to descend on skis in one continuous run from the very top of Mt. Everest to base camp.

However, veteran Himalayan climber Wally Berg, owner of a business that organizes and conducts climbing expeditions, and four times Everest summiter, felt he knew how to succeed: for a seven-member team, take plenty of supplies (88 oxygen cylinders) and Sherpas (13 climbing Sherpas plus cooks and bottle-washers), go relatively early, get the camps set up, and wait for favorable weather in which to make the summit attempt. His plan worked: five members with nine Sherpas reached the summit on October 18, after having sat through continuous