

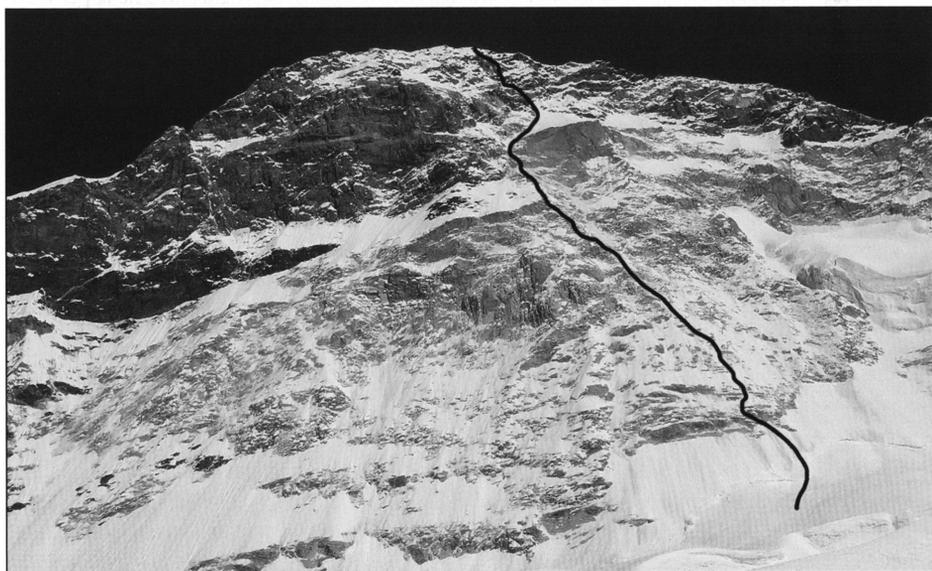
## MAHALANGUR HIMAL – MAKALU SECTION

*Makalu (8,485m), west face, attempt; Makalu II (7,678m), west face, new route.* Our three-man expedition, which ran from September 12 to November 15, was plagued by difficulties from start to finish. We made two attempts to climb the west face of Makalu. The first, by Marko Prezelj and me (Steve House was ill), ended at the bergschrund below the start of the climbing at 6,300m. A later attempt, by Steve alone, reached a higher bergschrund at 6,600m. However, while acclimatizing Marko and I completed a new route on the west face of Makalu II (Kangchungtse).

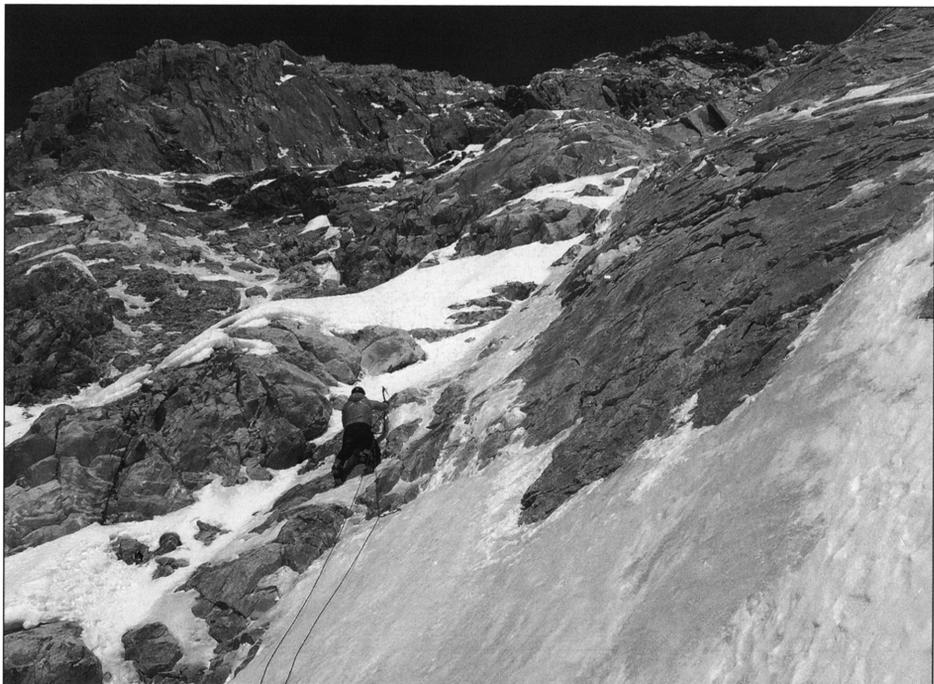
The monsoon lasted longer than normal and was strong until we arrived at upper Makalu base camp on October 4. We found the site shockingly littered with the refuse of numerous expeditions. It was the filthiest base camp any of us had encountered and certainly decreased the aesthetics of the otherwise beautiful high mountain surroundings. Marko and Steve arrived with a cold-like illness, which for Steve remained for the entire expedition. I eventually succumbed to the mystery virus as well.

The monsoon let up as we arrived in base camp, and the winds began. At first the wind was helpful, as it cleared the monsoon-generated snow from steep faces. Conditions high on the mountain quickly became good for travel, but strong winds made life at the higher altitudes challenging. We acclimatized on the normal route, reaching a high point at the Makalu La (7,400m).

With Steve not feeling well, Marko and I attempted a route on the west face of Makalu II. From Camp 2 (6,700m) on Makalu's normal route we went directly to the base of the west face and ascended a line more or less directly up the center. The climbing was mostly on steep glacial ice, with moderate mixed terrain higher on the face. The difficulties were up to M4 or 5. We



A foreshortened view of the 900m west face of Makalu II (7,678m), showing the line of the American-Slovenian direct route. Where the route bends to the right, it meets a large snow terrace. The original 1989 route climbed much the same mixed ground to the terrace, and then traversed right across it to exit onto the south shoulder at ca 7,600m. *Marko Prezelj*



Vince Anderson negotiates mixed ground on the lower section of the west face direct of Makalu II. *Marko Prezelj*

took 16 hours to complete the 900m route and return to base camp via the Makalu La. The summit was in the wind most of the day, as was Makalu's. It was the norm for the duration of our stay. The Makalu La was also very windy, and tents set up by a Spanish expedition were destroyed. There was also an abundance of discarded equipment and other climbing refuse.

After descending to base camp Marko and I became ill with symptoms similar to Steve's, so we decided to go down to lower altitudes. By the time we returned to base camp it was October 26, late in the season. The winds had not yet abated, and temperatures continued to fall. Our weather forecaster in the US, Jim Woodmencey of Mountainweather.com, predicted a slight respite during the first week of November, so we decided to give it our best shot.

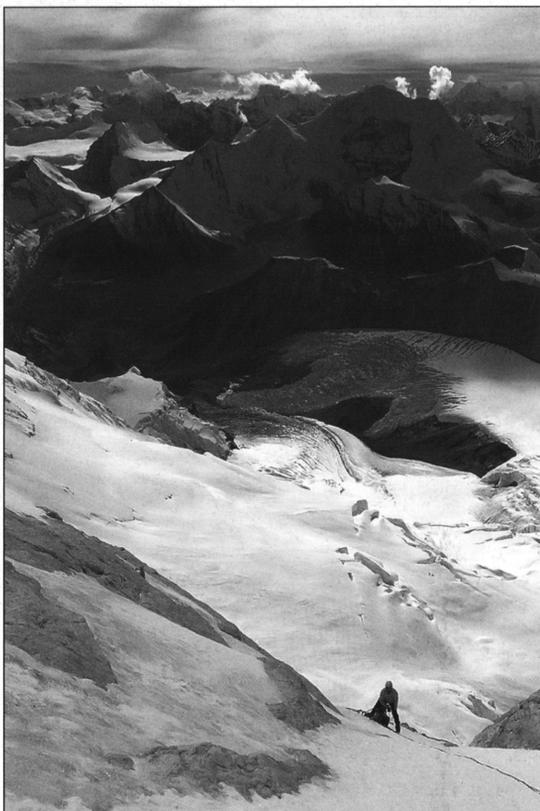
On October 30, we left base camp with greatly overloaded packs. As the forecast was not for perfect weather, we took a lot of extra stuff for the expected cold, which in turn necessitated a slower approach and, hence, even more stuff. We ended up with "failure packs." We had been at high altitude for over a month, and although well acclimatized, we had deteriorated physically and mentally, leaving us with little fire in the belly. We bivouacked in the bergschrund on the left side of the lower ice field, at 6,300m. On the approach we had seen frequent rockfall down the face, so we hurriedly tucked in under the crevasse lip. That night the wind roared up high, sounding like a big fire. During breakfast a piece of ice the size of a beer bottle penetrated our tent, narrowly missing Marko's head before landing in his oatmeal. It was all we needed to abort this attempt. Back at base camp Steve, having done nothing resembling climbing, was still hungry for something. A few days later, with a light pack, he went back up solo on a reconnaissance mission, with the option to "go for it" if it seemed feasible. He took a slightly

different approach and ascended to a higher bergschrund, but after a less than pleasant night, returned.

The face looks beautiful and difficult. We saw several possibilities through the immense rock headwall. The biggest problem will be finding good conditions. During autumn the obvious challenge is getting a weather window between the monsoon and the onset of winter wind and cold. The pre-monsoon season presents its own set of challenges, with higher avalanche potential due to snowfall on the face. Either season would likely involve rockfall from the headwall onto the lower icefields. We gained a lot of information for a future attempt, which all of us are eager for.

VINCE ANDERSON, AAC

*Editor's note: In September 1989 Victor Saunders and Stephen Sustad climbed the center of the west face of Makalu II before traversing right to the south shoulder at 7,600m in deteriorating weather. They descended to the Makalu La without following the summit ridge northwest to the highest point (AAJ 1990).*



Vince Anderson during the first ascent of the west face direct on Makalu II (7,678m). The glaciated slopes below form part of the Normal route on Makalu (below the Makalu La), while the large peak in the background is Baruntse (7,152m). Marko Prezeli

*Peak royalties.* Nepalese authorities keep trying to spread expeditions both geographically and seasonally. “Keeping in mind that mountaineering tourism is the backbone of Nepal’s tourism,” a Ministry official stated on April 30, “to make royalty fees competitive with [those of] other, neighboring nations, to promote the mountains of backward regions, and to create an environment to operate season-based mountaineering activities throughout the year (Nepal for All Seasons), the cabinet has decided to: (1) completely waive for five years royalties for peaks in the third of the country west of the Dhaulagiri massif, and (2) give a 50% discount on royalties for teams climbing in the autumn (September to November) and 75% discount during summer (June to August) and winter (December to February).” Other adjustments in the fee structure also became effective at the end of April, and the government hoped the changes would “lead to a substantial increase in the number of climbers in the Nepalese mountaineering tourism sector.”

ELIZABETH HAWLEY, AAC *Honorary Member, Nepal*