

the demand for them heavily outweighs their availability, a fixed rate does not prevent strikes nor demands for more gifts. The porters are becoming the *nouveaux-riches* of the Himalaya, with all the imbalances which this implies. Some systems such as that employed by the Swiss, where proceeds are shared on a commune basis, might be a more equitable way of distributing the benefits. This too would be able to cope more readily with a changing situation in which trekking parties and tourists will become more numerous even than large climbing expeditions.

A big expedition can be fun; a prolonged holiday in the company of friends, but, at the worst, it can also be an ordeal of rivalry, bickering and recrimination. No matter what the internal circumstances of the expedition, the long-term penalties are too disastrous to allow us to overrun an area with armies of friends. There is much romantic idealism put forward by people about small expeditions, without any real appreciation of just what is involved. A small expedition is primarily very hard work, both in the organizational and practical stages. Membership of a small team requires a level of tolerance and maturity far beyond normal demands, if the project is to succeed. It would need a raconteur of genius to maintain a flow of conversation into the second and third month of an expedition with one or two people whose every whim and trait have become so well known and to whom comments about the weather or the view seem like ridiculous imitations of sitting-room small talk.

It might seem that a mild fanaticism or intense dedication is needed for a small team to carry out a difficult project successfully; the strains, tensions and commitment are of a very high order. But this must be the sport at its healthiest—healthy because it is satisfying to a person attempting, with a chance of succeeding, something at the limit of his capabilities; and healthy for the environment in which he is attempting it as a visitor and not an invader.

Winter at 8250 metres

Polish expedition to Lhotse 1974

Andrzej Zawada

(Translation: Peter and Ingeborga Cochlin)

It was 1973. We were going down to the Hindukush Valley; we could feel that Spring was coming. The grass had already started to turn green and could be seen here and there through the snow. It was warm and peaceful. The memories we had of the awful bitter winds we had struggled against on the ridges were quickly forgotten. There was only one thought which was important — the first winter expedition to 7000m had ended in complete success.

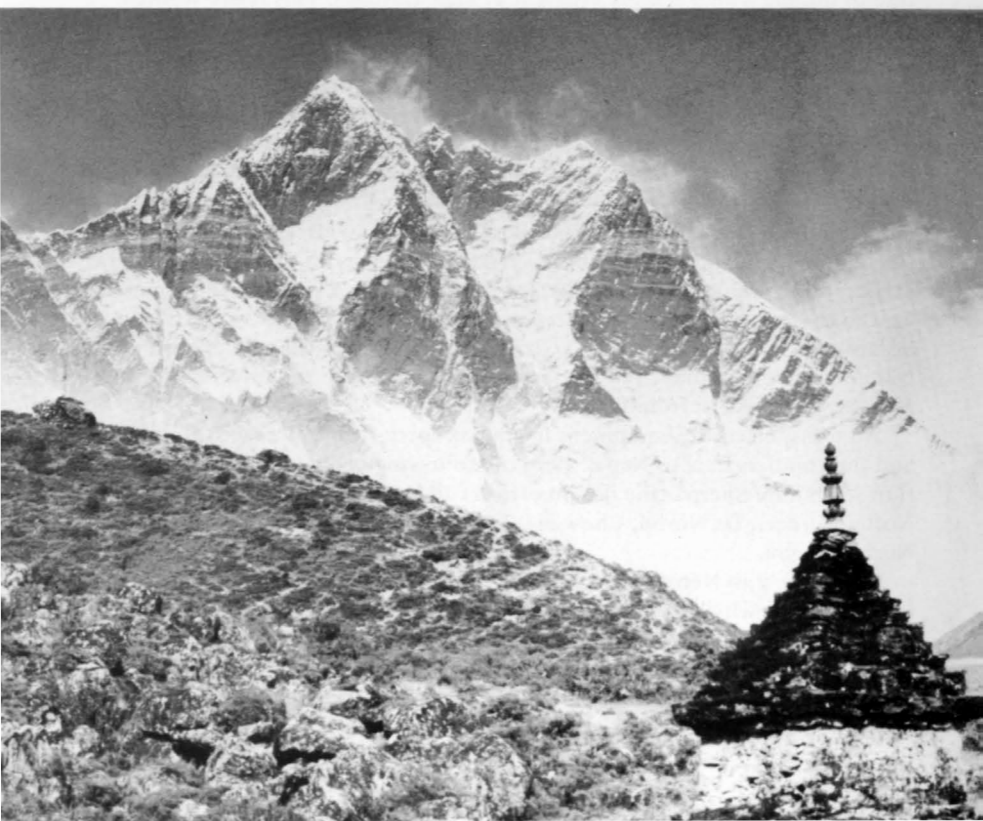
It was 13 February, 1973 and we were standing on the top of Noshaq at 7492m. Perhaps it was then while warming ourselves in the Afghan spring sun that we began to think about our next winter expedition: but this time it would be to 8000m. I think that the test of our endurance we had undergone

on the top of Noshag qualified us to do so. Even today with all the numerous record-breaking achievements in the world of mountaineering, climbing the highest peaks of the world in winter would open a new chapter in mountain climbing. Furthermore, to overcome greater barriers of frost and wind, to prove that it is possible to climb under any conditions and at any time of the year is a test to sort out the top climbers from the others. It would be an achievement which would give the highest satisfaction.

But are the officials who take the decisions about these expeditions to the highest mountains in the world the people best qualified to understand the problems of the mountaineers? It is easy to see why they cause a great deal of animosity. This is one reason why fatal accidents occur even during summer climbs. This is the reason why the Government of Afghanistan, before giving us permission for our expedition, demanded something very unusual from us. They insisted that we obtain a letter from MSZ of Poland stating that they were fully aware of what the Polish expedition wanted to do and that they would take full responsibility for their actions. We had great difficulties obtaining this letter. Not without reason, we feared similar problems from the Nepalese Government as well.

According to a long tradition, mountaineering 'seasons' are divided into pre-monsoon and post-monsoon periods. Both these periods exclude any possibility of getting permission for a winter expedition. We wanted to begin the

11 Lhotse, south face (This and next photo: A Zawada)



expedition in late autumn and to use December as well. In the Alps December is considered to be the beginning of the winter season but in the Himalaya winter months are different. All previous expeditions to Everest regarded the end of October to be the start of severe winter conditions rendering further climbing impossible and have, therefore, withdrawn from the mountain at that time of year. But the Polish Expedition intended establishing a Base Camp at this very time.

The Government of Nepal suggested that we climb Lhotse in the post-monsoon period in 1974. However, their permission for us to have a go at the peak from Khumbu Glacier through Western Cwm depended on agreement with the French, who had received permission earlier to climb Everest at the same time. After some correspondence, the leader of the French expedition, Gerard Devouassoux, agreed.

For the first time ever, 2 climbing teams of different nationality were going to meet at the bottom of the highest mountain in the world. As a result of our experience on Noshag we made our preparations with great care. Apart from the members of the team who had to be in tip-top physical condition with extreme powers of endurance, the next most essential factor was our equipment which had to protect the climbers from the bitter frosts and winds for which this region is notorious at this time of year. We designed, and had made up, a new type of tent, special overalls stuffed with down to give extra protection against the winds and specially insulated boots for use at high altitudes. The French Company Camping Gaz International sent us a special mixture of butane which is more efficient at high altitudes. This really worked excellently. The total load of our equipment weighed 10 tons.

The team was made up from the best mountaineers from different mountaineering clubs in Poland. Each one of them had an impressive list of climbing achievements behind him and was also very experienced at high-altitude climbing having taken part in expeditions to the Pamirs, the Hindukush and the Karakoram. The team included Andrzej Heinrich, Piotr Jasinski, Marek Kowalczyk, Wojciech Kurtyka, Jacek Rusiecki — all from Cracow, Anna Okopinska, Andrzej Zawada (the team leader) from Warsaw, Bogdan Jankowski (second in command) from Wroclaw, Tadeusz Piotrowski from Szczecin, Jan Stryczynski from Poznan and Ryszard Szafirski from Zakopane. Then in addition to these there was a filming crew of three — Jerzy Surdel from Cracow, Stanislaw Latallo and Wojciech Tedziagolski from Warsaw and a doctor, who was also a photographer, Jan Koisar from Katowice and the driver of the lorry Mirosław Wisniewski from Warsaw.

We transported the equipment in a heavy lorry from Warsaw to Kathmandu and the climbers flew to Nepal. Here the following people joined our expedition — Chotare Sherpa (the liaison officer) and seven other Sherpas, Pemba Norbu (Sirdar), Da Norbu, Chowang Rinzi, Rinzi, Psang Nama, Mingma and Norbu Jangbu.

On our way to Nepal, I received the news in New Delhi, on 13 September, of the tragedy which had struck the French expedition to Everest. The leader of the expedition had been killed together with 5 Sherpas. The French had started their climb much earlier than us. The monsoon had dragged on for an unusually long time and large amounts of snow were accumulating on the slopes. On the day of the tragedy, a huge avalanche collapsed from the top of



12 Base Camp, ice-fall and Nuptse

Everest and cascaded down towards the Lho La Pass completely destroying and carrying their tents away. After this catastrophe the French decided to end their attempt and withdrew from the mountain. Instead of a happy, friendly meeting with the French team that we had looked forward to on the Khumbu Glacier, it was a very sad and solemn meeting which took place in Kathmandu where we attended the Requiem Mass for the dead climbers.

On 8 October, there was a break in the monsoon which gave us a spell of beautiful, clear weather. We took advantage of this and began to transport people and equipment from Kathmandu to Lukla by plane. At Lukla we hired 300 Sherpas. Finally, on 21 October, our Base Camp was established on the Khumbu Glacier at a height of 5400m. There was some snow on 24 October. Fortunately it was the last that year. It was very sunny and there was no sign of wind. We climbed the Ice-Fall to find a route among its labyrinth of crevasses. We were able to climb it without much difficulty the first time. Camp 1 was established on 27 October at 6050m not far from the ridge to Western Cwm and on 1 November Camp 2 in the Western Cwm. Camp 3 was set up on 7 November on the NW face of Lhotse at 7100m. We had established 3 camps

in 12 days. It was an achievement which encouraged us and held our hopes high for the coming ascent.

But our excitement was short-lived. The brief spell of post-monsoon weather ended within a week. A fierce wind suddenly blew in with tremendous force – destroying everything in its path. During the night of 11 November it tore down on the tents in Camp 2. The temperature in the Western Cwm dropped to -30°C . The real Everest winter had arrived; the kind of winter which had forced other expeditions to turn back and abandon their climbs. We now had to face a severe test of endurance.

We had 3 basic jobs to do; to keep a route open through the Ice-Fall, to protect the camps we had already put up and to establish Camp 4. The Ice-Fall was becoming increasingly more difficult. The wind was sweeping the snow out of the crevasses which were then becoming deeper and wider. The bridges of ice were crumbling, and the huge seracs were turning over. It was essential to find new routes and then to protect these routes and keep them clear. We were spending more and more time transporting the equipment up to the Western Cwm. Camp 1, which had been destroyed by the wind, was re-established on the bottom of a wide crevasse.

Similarly we were able to protect Camp 2 from the winds by taking it away from the middle of the Cwm and setting it up under the wall of Everest. But our biggest problem was to establish Camp 4 from which we could begin our assault on the peak. It took us exactly 34 days to climb the next 700m on the face of Lhotse. Camp 4 should have been set up at an altitude of 7800m not far from the exit from the couloir where Luchsinger and Reiss reached the summit of Lhotse in 1956. Our next attempts at reaching the summit broke down because of the severe gales. We retired to Base Camp completely exhausted.

The extreme winter conditions were undermining the expedition. Szafirski had developed inflammation of the throat and together with Wisniewski returned to Kathmandu. Another member of the expedition, Tedziagolski, had to give up as well because of severe stomach pains. On top of these 2 of the Sherpas had an accident. Chowang Rinzi and Norbu Jangbu fell into a crevasse and were hanging from the rope. It took us a long time to pull them out and eventually we succeeded, but both men were suffering from severe frost-bite and they too were unable to continue on the expedition.

Although our numbers had decreased, this was no reason for us to abandon our climb. On 11 December, Kurtyka, Rusiecki, Stryczynski started to attack the wall of Lhotse. They were climbing the whole day since they wanted to establish Camp 4 as high as possible. Besides the tent, they were also carrying 4 bottles of oxygen which were to be used on the final assault. It was very late when they reached 7800m. They spotted a snow ledge where they cleared a small platform. But it was impossible to put the tent up, so they had to hang it on like a bivouac sack suspended from the ice pitons. Inside they had to sit huddled up together finding it impossible to sleep and suffering from the intense cold of the night. Stryczynski did not have any feeling in his toes and feet. He had paid a very high price for establishing Camp 4 – his feet were frost-bitten.

The following day I decided to go with Heinrich with the intention of leading the first assault to the summit of Lhotse. We climbed to the right of the



13 Lhotse, NW face and W Cwm (Photo: W Tedziagolski)

Geneva Spur. Below us lay a sheer drop of several hundred metres of ice stretching down towards the Western Cwm. But our crampons were gripping very well and only occasionally did we have to hack steps out of the glassy ice. We climbed slowly one step at a time, at the rate of about 100m an hour. We had to stop very often to try and gulp in as much of the frosty air as we could with our mouths wide open. We reached the Nuptse ridge. The sun was on the horizon and suddenly from the South Col a freezing gale-force wind started to blow. It tore at our shoulders and caused us to lurch forward losing our balance. I pushed my whole body against the slope and held on to the ice-axe with all my strength. Snow and ice were swirling all about us and we had to decide quickly what to do. We started to make for the nearest rocks in the hope that they would afford some protection. The wind was so fierce that all I wanted to do was to protect my hands and face. Eventually we reached the tent and crawled inside dragging in our rucksacks and the two bottles of oxygen. What a relief! It did not matter now that the wind was howling outside and tearing at the tent which had saved our lives. We started to rub our hands together trying to get some warmth back into them. My right hand, in which I had been holding the ice-axe, was very painful and the fingers were swollen and white. I crawled into my sleeping bag without taking off my boots. Andrzej tried to melt some ice, but the wind kept on blowing out the flames on the butane gas. We were only able to gulp down a few drops of lukewarm liquid. We decided to switch on our oxygen apparatus. When we touched the cold metal case of the oxygen canister it scalded our hands. Before putting on his mask Andrzej had to pull the icicles out of his beard. The wind got stronger and was tearing at our tent with a ferocity that frightened us. Then we

heard an earsplitting roar and in a few minutes we were in the centre of a hurricane. We clung to the rocks worried that we might be swept off together with the tent. The night passed slowly. We were worn out by the constant struggle against the wind and frozen stiff by the bitter cold. We hoped the wind would drop by morning but we finally realized that we could count on nothing from this weather and we had to abandon our attack on the summit, for the moment anyway. Two days later we decided to return to Base Camp, completely exhausted.

A few days later on 17 December, a fatal accident struck the team. Latallo, Piotrowski and Surdel were caught in Camp 3 waiting for the bad weather to change for the better. They finally decided to go down to Camp 2 despite the weather which was still making conditions very difficult. There was a very strong wind blowing and a blizzard reduced the visibility to a few metres. They were coming down without a rope and they lost touch with each other. Piotrowski reached Camp 2 first, since he was coming down as leader, but Surdel who was coming down in third position had trouble with his crampons and decided to go back up to Camp 3 to repair the strap. After one hour Surdel reached the point where the fixed ropes had been positioned on the lower part of Lhotse. He saw someone hanging from the rope by the jumar clamp, completely still. It was Latallo and when Surdel reached him he realized immediately that he was already dead. He had died of exposure and exhaustion.

We all returned to Base Camp, very upset, and waited until the wind dropped a little so we could go up to bury our friend. We were unable to reach Latallo until 23 December and we buried his body in a crevasse.

The next day, 24 December, Heinrich and I climbed to Camp 4 and we spent a very unusual Christmas Eve at 7800m. In the evening we radioed Base Camp to wish everyone a happy Christmas. Before settling down for the night we put on our oxygen masks. The following morning we woke up at 6am. The wind had dropped almost completely and the thermometer pointed to -46°C . It took us almost 3 hours to boil one canteen of water with juice and another 2 hours to strap on the oxygen bottles and to connect the frozen valves. At about 11am we started to climb. We managed to keep up a good speed and after 2 hours we reached the couloir where we climbed 2 bosses without any difficulty. The summit of Lhotse was clearly visible against the sky and seemed so near. I looked at the altimeter. It showed 8250m. That meant we only had 260m to climb to reach the top. Suddenly a shout reached my ears.

'Andrzej, we have to go down immediately'. I thought — Why? — Why now, when we are only a few steps from the summit and from victory?

'What's the matter?' I shouted back, drawing my mask aside.

'Look what's happening down there in the Western Cwm! Come back immediately!' Heinrich called.

I looked down behind me. A feeling of anger and despair took hold of me. Cumulus clouds were rising swiftly towards us and a violent gale-force wind was swirling a blizzard of snow upwards in our direction.

I dug my ice-axe in the ground and gripped it firmly with both hands holding on for dear life. The icy wind hit my shoulders and snow covered my face completely. My whole body began to shiver from the piercing frost. It was beginning to get dark. Slowly and very carefully I began to retreat down one of the bosses. Andrzej Heinrich was waiting in the gully. From here on down we

kept very close together. We blessed the masks which were now protecting our faces from the raging blizzard and thanks to them we were able to go unhindered straight down to the Western Cwm. If we had not had them we would not have been able to breathe.

We were worried that the storm would cut us off from Camp 4 and we would run out of oxygen and so we decided to make for Camp 3 immediately, a distance of almost 1200m. I will never forget that bitter struggle we had in order to keep alive. The hardest thing of all was to overcome our increasing indifference. We were growing indifferent to everything, no matter what. The only thing we wanted was to rest, to stop moving, to lie down and to sleep. To force ourselves to make further effort was a most difficult thing to do but yet very important. Later when I was resting in Camp 3 one thought kept on going through my mind – the summit had not been conquered. I consoled myself with the thought that the request I had sent to Kathmandu for permission to extend our expedition until January (we had enough supplies of food to last us until March) would be granted. Unfortunately it was turned down. Our expedition had to finish definitely on 31 December and nothing we could do would alter this decision. But we were returning to Poland convinced that it was possible though very difficult to conquer summits of 8000m in winter.

Mountains and mountaineering as symbols

I. A. Richards

Let us think for a minute about my title. I have been in some doubt whether I should be talking of mountains or of mountaineering. The doubt dissolved as soon as I realized that they could not be separated. For What is a Mountain? Is it the thing perceived by, fancied by, dreamed of, by people who have never been among or on any mountains? Or is it the thing known or imagined by people familiar with most of the activities and possibilities of mountain travel?

Probably, all of us who are thinking here, as I ask this, about mountains have often pondered this difference – taking it, perhaps, as typical of the changes which fuller experience can make in how we see anything and everything. Most of us have our own memories of occasions somewhat like that behind the little anecdote I will now relate.

I was at Saas Fee a while ago. (In fact it was in 1910.) And I was being talked to, at breakfast, by a very pleasant and intelligent woman about a girl she knew who had got up the year before very early – about 5.0am – at the Hotel Täschhorn, where we were, and gone up the Dom alone before breakfast and come down again to have her breakfast before they finished serving them. I hope I did not betray what I thought about this story and that girl. I asked, I think, how far up she had gone. 'Oh right up to the top. There is no doubt about it. She is the sort of girl who is always doing these things. Very exceptional!'. I was young enough then to be surprised that people could be like this. Later on, one gets more used to it.