

# The South Face of Dhaulagiri

Franci Savenc

Yugoslav alpinists selected the S face of Dhaulagiri (8167m) as a goal some years ago. A request for permission for spring 1982 was submitted as they returned from Everest in 1979. However, in the spring of 1981 approval was received for the post-monsoon period. Although the expedition to the S face of Lhotse had scarcely been concluded, and another was not planned, it was essential to accept the offer. The expedition leader immediately left on a reconnaissance mission and established 2 possibilities: to the left and right of the funnel-shaped central section of the face. After speeded-up preparations, 6 alpinists left on 3 September 1981 for Nepal. Accompanied by Mr Mihan Khadka as liaison officer, five Nepalese staff and 56 porters they left Pokhara on 12 September.

The final section of the approach march was over virgin ground. On 23 September they reached the location of Base Camp (3950m), where the low altitude porters left them. Nevertheless by 26 September Base Camp had been set up. Following a period of bad weather and research, the only acclimatization tour/climb possible was made to Manapanti (6380m) during 1-3 October. From 7-13 October the lower part of the face was explored, the climbers reaching an altitude of 5300m, fixing 400m of rope (grades IV and V) and pitching a tent at 5150m.

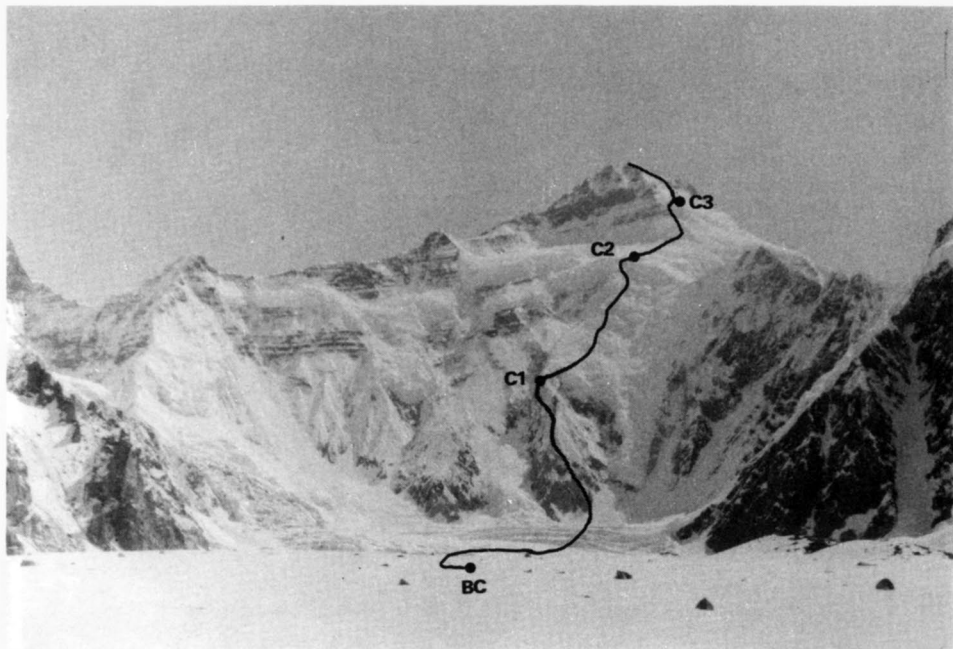
15 Oct.: Stane Belak, Cene Berčič and Emil Tratnik started upon the face and left their tent (5150m) at 0235 the following day. At 0900 they were halted for 7 hours by falling stones at an altitude of 5500m. They then climbed until nightfall, reaching 5700m.

17 Oct.: At midnight they continued the ascent over an icefield (50°) and by morning had reached the third rock-step (5900m). Continuing to climb they dug out their third bivouac at an altitude of 6100m.

18 Oct.: The following section presented difficulties in orientation (50-65°) and at 6400m the fourth bivouac was made. The same day the second rope (Rok Kolar and Jože Zupan) started on the face and reached the tent at 5100m but then descended so as to go with the sixth climber (Janez Sabolek) to meet their companions.

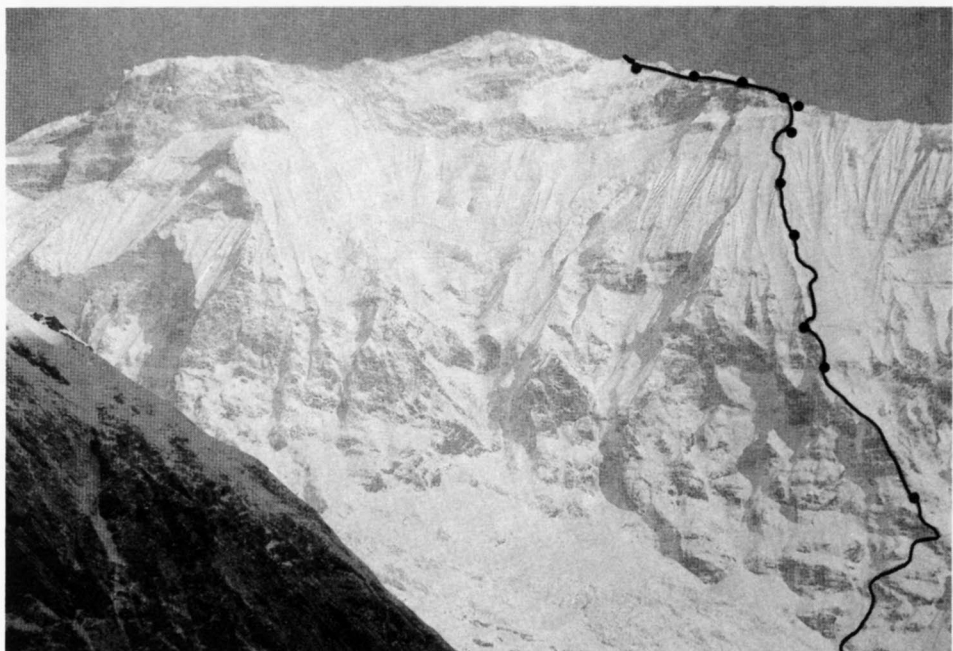
19 Oct.: Belaying was problematic, inclination 50°. They bivouacked at 6900m. (In fact they had at their disposal on average only 5-6 hours for climbing; the remainder of the time was needed to prepare the bivouac.)

20 Oct.: At 1400 they reached the rock band (7300m) in the SW ridge, where they came upon the ropes used by the Japanese expedition in 1978. The face was climbed.



60 *Kanjut Sar W face*

*Photo: Masayoshi Fujii*



61 *Dhauligiri S face showing the line of ascent*

*Photo: Stane Belak-Strauf*

21 Oct.: After a bad night they climbed the exposed rock section (III-IV) of the ridge. They were able to gain only 100m in height.

22nd Oct.: Only 150m height was gained. There followed a cold and windy night at an altitude of 7550m.

23 Oct.: In the afternoon they reached the right-hand edge of the huge snow-slopes below the summit (7800m). The chances of preparing food were minimal while the wind and cold intensified.

24 Oct.: From this point there were no further climbing difficulties. The leader informed Base Camp of their plan for the descent. But shortly after 0800 the gas-stove ceased to function. The wind also increased in force and buried the tent. All these conditions called for an immediate retreat. All that was no longer important (the gas-stove, tent, dehydrated food, etc.) was rejected and at noon they reached the highest point of the SE ridge (altimeter 7950m) and then descended over the northern slope to 7200m. Here they fortunately found the remains of a tent (probably Japanese). However the gas-stove they dug out burst into flames and was destroyed. Radio contact with Base Camp failed to function.

25 Oct.: They descended by the N rib. Worse weather was rapidly approaching from the west. The climbers bivouacked in the open, without either protection or food. 20cm of snow fell during the night.

26 Oct.: The weather deteriorated still further. Nevertheless they fought their way down to 6000m and bivouacked in a crevasse.

27 Oct.: 60cm of new snow fell. They ploughed through to the ridge and in deep snow reached the altitude of 6090m above the Dhaulagiri glacier and the valley of the Tak Kola. They then descended for another 7 hours and organized a bivouac on the glacier (4800m). Contact with their companions was still not possible.

28 Oct.: At daybreak they started the difficult traverse of the extremely fragmented and dangerous glacier and after 12 hours gained the border moraine. Bivouac on snow-covered pastures (4200m).

29 Oct.: For the first time in 16 days they met other people and after 6 days of hunger had access to food. By evening they had dropped down to the village of Kala Pani.

30 Oct.: In the village of Beni they met their remaining companions, who had searched for them in vain. On account of his frost-bitten feet Cene Berčič continued the journey on horseback. There still remained the march to the Baleba airfield, and they were home again on 16 November.

'Yugoslav Dhaulagiri I South Face Expedition 1981' had completed the first ascent of the S face of Dhaulagiri and thus registered one of the greatest achievements in Yugoslav alpinism. It was the first expedition entirely in alpine style (and without oxygen). It followed the first ascents of the S face of Makula in 1975, of W face Trisul in 1976, of SW ridge of Hidden Peak (Gasherbrum I) in 1977, of the W ridge of Everest in 1979, and of the S face of Lhotse in 1981.