

Manaslu 1972

Wolfgang Nairz

Two years of hard work were required before the necessary conditions for the start were completed. Like many other expeditions ours also did not have enough money. The costs of the expedition were 800,000 Austrian Schillings; about half of it was paid by the members. We got substantial support from the Government of Tirol, Austria; the Ministry of Education, Austria; the Government of South Tirol, Italy; the Austrian Alpine Club; the Alpine Club of South Tirol, and numerous private persons and friends.

At first we wanted to climb Kangchenjunga by way of the NE spur, but because of the war between India and Pakistan the necessary permission was not given. In the S wall of the 8156-m high Manaslu we found an even more challenging and serious problem. The expedition was under the patronage of the Governor of the province of Tirol, Ök. Rat E. Wallnöfer.

Today all peaks over 8000 m have been climbed. Climbers now try to find more difficult routes to the summits of the mountains of the world. It started with the ascent of the Diamir face of Nanga Parbat in 1962, followed by Annapurna S face by a British expedition and then the Rupal face of Nanga Parbat, attempts on Mount Everest SW face and the Pillar on Makalu. We were the fifth expedition to try a great wall in the Himalaya.

We were a small but strong team, a team of friends that had done lots of climbing in the Alps together, and I am sure that this was also the reason for the ideal fellowship before, during and after the expedition.

The team was as follows: Wolfgang Nairz, age 27, leader of the expedition, mountain guide, teacher in the Austrian mountain guide school: Matterhorn N wall; Lyskamm, direct N wall first winter ascent. Reinhold Messner, age 27, one of the best climbers in the world; first ascent of the Rupal face on Nanga Parbat, descent via the Diamir face; expeditions to New Guinea, Pakistan and East Africa. Dr Oswald Ölz, age 29, physician; expeditions to East Africa and Bhutan. Andi Schlick, age 27, mountain guide; Hindu Kush expedition; first winter ascent of the direct Lyskamm N wall. Franz Jäger, age 29, mountain guide; extreme climber on rock and ice. Hansjörg Hochfilzer, age 26, mountain guide; one of the best rock-climbers in Austria. Horst Fankhauser, age 28, mountain guide; extreme climber. Hans Hofer, age 30, mountain guide; leader of the mountain rescue team in Salzburg, Austria; expedition to the Hindu Kush. Josl Knoll, age 48, extreme mountaineer; great winter traverses in the Eastern and Western Alps.

Eleven Sherpas came under Sirdar Urkien, also three Sherpas from the IHE 1971. The Sherpas considered the Manaslu S wall more difficult than the



3 *Manaslu from Base Camp* This and next photo: Tiroler Himalaya Expedition

Mount Everest sw wall, and also more difficult than all the other routes they knew. We were very pleased with all our Sherpas; they were friendly, hard working, cooperative and we became great friends with them.

We walked ten days from Pokhara with 90 porters and 2700 kg through the Marsyandi valley and the Dona Khola to the end of the Thulagi glacier, where we established a provisional Base Camp. On 29 March, the final Base Camp was established at the base of the Manaslu s wall at a height of 4300 m.

The next days were used for reconnaissance. First we were depressed: there was a great ice-fall on the left side of a high pillar. We counted fifteen avalanches in one hour! On the right side of this pillar huge ice-overhangs threatened the ascent. However, after some days of observation we were able to find a safe ascent. The route can be divided in four parts:

- 1 Only by way of a 600-m high, partly overhanging rock pillar was it possible to reach the middle part of the wall. Rock climbing was partly of the VIth degree and can be compared with the Comici route on the N wall of the Grosse Zinne in the Dolomites. In order to make possible a safe load transport for the Sherpas, rope ladders and fixed ropes were used on the pillar. At the base of the pillar the pillar camp was established; on the top of the pillar Camp 1 was placed at a height of 5300 m. Above the pillar there was a small ice wall leading into the ice labyrinth.
- 2 Through the ice-labyrinth we reached the 'Valley of the Butterfly', about 6 km long. The ice-labyrinth was marked with 300 bamboo sticks for route finding in case of bad weather. In the middle of the 'Valley of the Butterfly' we established Camp 2 at a height of 5850 m; at the end, on the SW saddle, Camp 3 was at 6600 m.
- 3 A great, steep ice-wall made possible the ascent from Camp 3 to the summit plateau, where Camp 4 was established at 7400 m. The ice-wall can be compared with the Ortler N face in the Alps.
- 4 The summit plateau, about 2.5 km long and 1.5 km wide, very flat in the lower part, is absolutely harmless. At the end of the plateau a ridge leads to the summit.

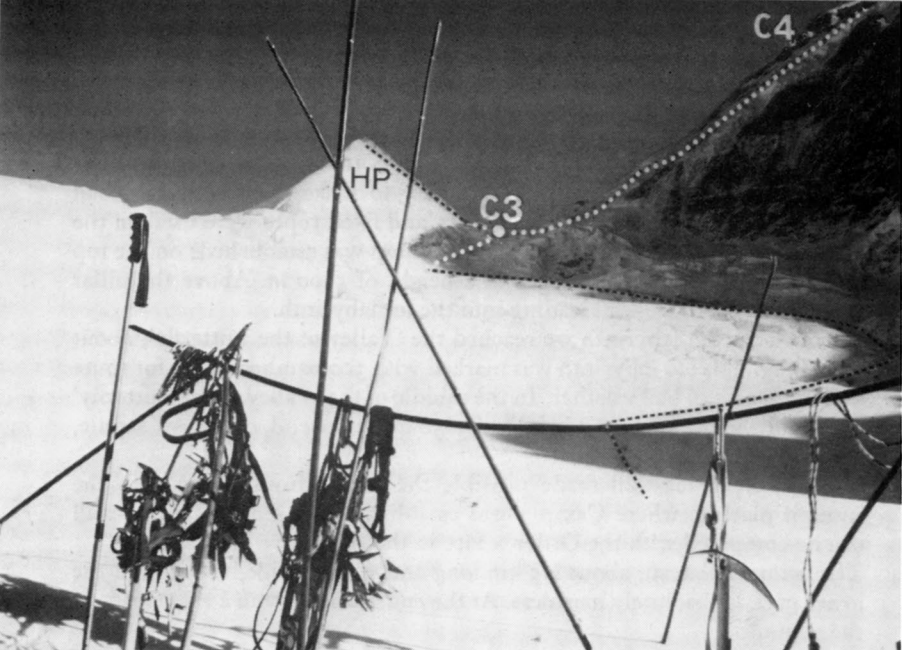
In the first days of April the final break-through of the ice-labyrinth to the 'Valley of the Butterfly' was finished. On 9 April Camp 2 was established. In the night the camp was partly destroyed by an avalanche. On the same night ten Sherpas and five members of the South Korean Manaslu Expedition on the NE side of Manaslu were buried by an avalanche. The weather did not brighten and all members descended to the Base Camp.

In the middle of April, Camp 2 was re-established and the load transport over the pillar was in full swing. Josl Knoll, Hans Hofer and Hansjörg Hochfilzer made the first ascent of the 'Bergführergipfel', 5850 m, Reinhold Messner the first ascent of the 6900-m high 'Hervis Peak' and Wolfgang Nairz and Horst Fankhauser made the first ascent of the 6650-m high 'Stubai Spitze'. In the following days the transport of loads to Camp 2 was finished and all members reached Camp 3.

Camp 4 was established in two steps on the summit plateau by Reinhold Messner and Franz Jäger with the help of Sherpas, at a height of 7400 m.

The first summit assault was prepared in every detail and fixed for 25 April. All members of the expedition were between Camp 2 and Camp 4; a longer period of good weather had provided the best conditions for the planned assault and gave hope that our plans could be realised.

In the morning hours Reinhold and Franz started to the summit. At the same time Andi Schlick and Horst Fankhauser climbed to Camp 4 to support the summit team. Hans Hofer and Hansjörg Hochfilzer went down to the Base Camp for a short rest. Wolfgang Nairz, Josl Knoll and the Sirdar Urkien ascended to Camp 3.



4 From Camp 2 towards the SW saddle and Hervis Peak

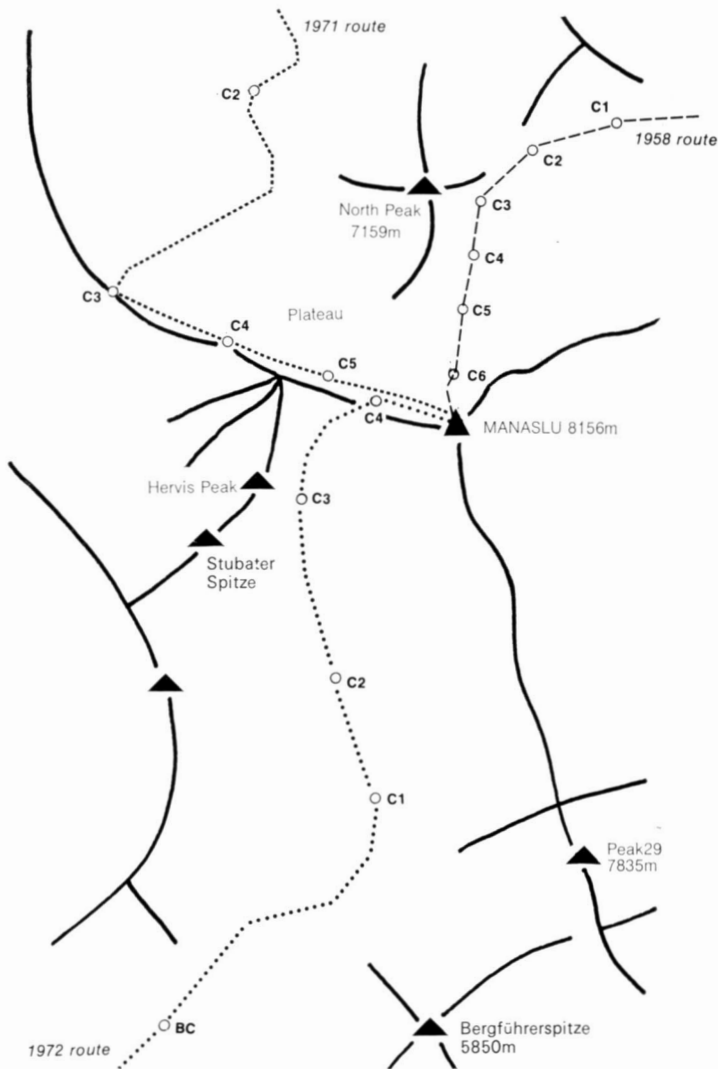
The summit team was able to go quickly over the great summit plateau of Manaslu. The snow conditions were good and the weather was excellent. At the beginning there were no technical difficulties and Reinhold and Franz climbed unroped. At about 10 o'clock in the morning they were at the foot of two steep slopes leading to the summit ridge. Franz decided to go back to Camp 4 by himself. He had doubts whether he could reach the summit and go down to Camp 4 on the same day and he did not want to make a bivouac. Reinhold also did not want to have a bivouac but he felt in fine condition and thought he could make the summit without one. Between Camp 4 and this place there was no difficulty, there was no danger of a fall, the weather promised to be good and there was no doubt that Franz could reach Camp 4 alone. He was in good physical condition and he promised to wait for Reinhold in Camp 4 and to make tea. Reinhold went on to the summit alone.

After two steep firm slopes he reached the summit ridge and then after rock climbing of moderate difficulty the highest point was reached at 14.00 hrs. Manaslu was climbed from the s (and without oxygen) for the first time.

In the beginning the descent was quick and without difficulty. Suddenly and unexpectedly fog and snowstorm started and the descent became a race with death. As Reinhold struggled down, he thought that Franz was in the tent in Camp 4. The snowstorm increased, it was impossible to go with goggles, everything filled with ice and it seemed hopeless. Reinhold lost himself on the great plateau; he searched for the tent and from time to time he could hear the voice of Franz. After a long time he found the tent and now he found with consternation that Franz was not there; only Andi and Horst were in the tent.

Horst went out of the tent to look for Franz; he ascended on to the plateau and also heard Franz. He went back to Camp 4 and together with Andi he went up again hoping to help Franz. They tried to go in the direction of the voice but the hurricane increased and the voice was lost in the wind. On account of the extreme weather conditions and the coming night they could not go on searching for Franz and the only chance of survival was to dig a snow-hole to find protection against storm and cold.

In the meantime Reinhold left the tent to help his friends find their way back to the tent with the aid of light signals and by shouting, but there was no answer



The wireless contact with the other camps was held up the whole night and we thought that our friends were in the shelter of a snow-hole.

Andi insisted that they went out into the storm to search again for Franz and Camp 4, but after a short time they realised that they had no chance and they dug another snow-hole for protection. After some time Andi left the hole to search again, but he did not come back. Horst went out; he shouted and searched for him but the storm had blown away the track and he received no answer.

In total despair he crept back to the hole and waited until the next morning. Only his great fitness enabled him to survive this night with nothing more than slight frost-bite. In the first daylight he was able to find his way back to Camp 4, which was almost completely covered with snow. After a short rest Horst and Reinhold ascended again to search for Andi and Franz, but they were forced to conclude that it was hopeless. The weather got worse again and there was no possibility of help from the other camps. During the night 1½m of snow fell and there was a great danger of avalanches. By wireless it was decided that Reinhold and Horst should descend immediately to Camp 3. Exhausted and downhearted they reached Camp 3 and then with Josl Camp 2. In Camp 2 the doctor of the expedition made intra-arterial infusions against their frost-bite.

In the following days the weather did not clear up; the danger of avalanches increased and there was not the slightest possibility of another search for our dead friends. The expedition was stopped. All mountaineers descended to the Base Camp.

A few hours after the success a terrible snowstorm and snowfall had started the tragedy. The Austrian mountain guides who had operated with the greatest caution and were able to conquer all difficulties, were helpless against this inclemency of the weather. Our dream of the Himalaya had been realised but Andi and Franz did not live to see the fulfilment.

Depressed we left two of our friends in the ice of Manaslu.