

Himalayanism

The real art of mountaineering is the art of surviving. The more difficult surviving becomes, the greater the art of mountaineering becomes. And this will always happen whenever you have to go one more step forwards. Where nobody has ever been, where it's difficult for anyone to follow.

'R.Messner'

As Messner was on the last part of the northern ridge of Everest, in August 1980, he wondered how he would manage to get over the last 300m between him and the peak with safety. If he succumbed to exhaustion or to the altitude disease, no one would ever know what had happened with him. A while later he collapsed but his passion was so powerful, that he managed to creep up to the top using his last spiritual and physical reserves. On the entire mountain there were only two souls in anguish over him, in the camp lower on the glacier. This climbing has been the purest sole one ever done on the Roof of the World. Messner had made the art of mountaineering greater.

Five years later Polish Wojciech Kurtyka and Austrian Robert Schauer came face to face with the ultimate for them alpine fantasy, the western wall of Gasherbrum IV. They started having food and drink for 4 - 5 days, a primus stove, sleeping bags and a biwack sack for two persons. In addition, they had two ropes and only 6 nails. Reaching 7100m a system of plates covered with snow and ice, of high mixed difficulty and without any chances for securities, showed them that they had reached a point with no return.

A week later, getting over all difficulties, they reached the ridge leading to the main peak, where they were nailed by a terrible storm for two nights. Food and drink were over. There was a strong feeling that somewhere near them there was a third person, whose reactions they always seemed to wait for. The instinct of surviving pushed them to a desperate descent from the unknown Northwest Cut lasting three more days. Their only source of energy was the snow they kept putting into their mouths. Reaching the glacier half-dead, they were seriously dehydrated and they couldn't even talk. Reality had turned into non-reality. They took days to be able to feel and think clearly, though that situation of apathy an absence was pleasant. They had just ended a ten-day trip to the limits of human capabilities 4 days without food, 3 days without water successfully. They had also proved that man could climb the highest and most difficult ridges on the planet in a pure alpine style. They, too, had brightened the art of mountaineering five years after Messner. The last three decades have been sealed by such climbings by great climbers, who shared the same visions and the same passion; some of them are mentioned below.

WOJCIECH KURTYKA VOUTEK (POLAND)

✘ Born in 1947 Wojciech Kurtyka is considered to be the most important dreamer of a whole generation of alpinists, a pioneer. His percentages of success were often too low comparing to his value, but this was due to his total devotion to the alpine style and to his will for discovering new fields. The last big problems of the Himalayas were the big vision for him and he made lots of efforts on the western ridge of Makalu, on the western one of K2 and on the Mazeno Cut on Nanga Parbat, where no one had ever climbed.

1978: A new route on the South Spur of Changbang. 1980: A new route on the East ridge of Dhaulagiri along with Alex McIntyre.

1981: An effort on the West ridge of Makalu, in alpine style (he reaches 7600m along with Alex McIntyre).

1983: New routes on Gasherbrum I and II during an expedition, with his companion Jerry Kukuczka.

1984: An alpine style traverse of the three peaks of Broad Peak, again with Jerry Kukuczka.

1985: The epic first climbing of the West ridge of Gasherbrum IV with Robert Schauer.

1988: A new route on Tango Tower (Karakorum) with Erhard Loretan.

1990: A quite fast, overnight route on the Northwest ridge of Shisapagma and a new route on the Northwest ridge of Cho Oyo; both with Erhard Loretan and Jean Troillet.

REINHOLD MESSNER

✘ Born in 1944, the greatest gifted alpinist of all the times as regarded by many people. He became the first man on the planet who climbed on all 14 peaks over 8000m. He took part in 27 expeditions in the Himalayas in total and opened new ways for the others showing an unbeaten style.

1970: First climbing on the ridge of Rupal of Nanga Parbat. While descending he lost his brother Günter Messner in an avalanche.

1975: The first alpine style climbing in the Himalayas, on the Northwest ridge of Hidden Peak in Karakorum, in three days, with Peter Habeler.

1978: The first climbing on Everest without the use of oxygen, with Peter Habeler, from the classic route of the South Saddle. Three months later he climbed sole on the Diamir Ridge on Nanga Parbat. It was the first sole climbing on a peak over 8000m.

1980: His unique sole climbing on Everest without oxygen or any other support from the North Cut/North Ridge.

1984: The first traverse of two peaks over 8000m (Gasherbrum I and II) in a week, with Hans Kammerlander.

1986: Climbing in a storm on Lhotse along with Hans Kammerlander, he completes his climbings on all 14 over 8000m peaks.

JERZY JUREK KUKUCZKA (POLAND)

✘ Born in 1948 he was the second man on the planet, after Messner, who managed all the 14 peaks just a year later, in 1987. Along with W. Kurtyka and K. Wielicki he is one of the main representatives of the Great Polish School, which created tradition in Alpinism. A lot of people consider him a more important climber than Messner, because he climbed the 14 peaks opening 9 new routes, 1 sole one, 5 in pure alpine style and 4 first winter ones. Well-known for his legendary physical qualifications he was, as Kurtyka mentions, unbeaten in his capability to suffer and stand all sorts of hardships. Extremely risky, he lost his life chasing one of his dreams, the South Ridge of Lhotse in 1989.

1981: Sole on the Northwest Cut of Makalu without oxygen. 1983: Gasherbrum I and II in an expedition with V. Kurtyka.

1984: First traverse of the three peaks of Broad Peak.

1985: Southeast ridge of Cho Oyo, the first new route opened in winter in the Himalayas. First winter climbing on Dhaulagiri and Nanga Parbat.

1986: First winter climbing on Kangchenjunga, a new route on the north ridge of K2 (Magic Line), a new route in Manaslu in alpine style.

1987: First winter climbing on Anapurna I, North Cut of Shashapangma in alpine style and descent on skis. He becomes the second man who completes his climbing on the 14 highest peaks.

1989: He died ingloriously trying to solve one of the last problems, the South Ridge of Lhotse, when his rope was cut at 8200m. His companion was Piotrowski.

ERHARD LORETAN (SWITZERLAND)

✘ Born in 1959, the third in row winner of the award of the 14 peaks, he climbed all of them without oxygen. He started at a quite young age, in the beginning of the 1980s, and he keeps being in the limelight fixing his attention on the big problems. With his nearly permanent companion to his climbing, the other important Swiss, Jean Troillet, he made a sensation among the climbers for his amazing capability to move rally fast at high altitudes. He, too, has made some unsuccessful first efforts on the West ridge of K2, on the traverse of Lhotse and on the Mazeno Cut of Nanga Parbat.

1982: First alpine style climbing on the ridge of Diamir in Nanga Parbat.

1983: Three peaks over 8000m: Gasherbrum I and II and Broad Peak.

1985: Full access of the three peaks of Anapurna I in alpine style, first winter climbing on Dhaulagiri, first alpine style climbing on the east ridge of Dhaulagiri with Jean Troillet and Pierre Alain Steiner.

1986: Everest Hornbein Couloirs. North ridge in only 39 hours with Jean Troillet, descent in only 5 hours.

1989: The Alps: 13 north ridges sole in 13 days, winter ones.

1990: A new route on the Southwest ridge of Shishapagma and a new route on the Southwest ridge of Cho Oyo, both with V. Kurtyka and J. Troillet.

1995: With Kangchenjunga he completes his climbing on the 14 peaks over 8000m.

PIERRE BEGHIN (FRANCE)

✘ Born in 1952 he was killed in October 1992 on the south wall of Anapurna I. He is considered to be one of the greatest French climbers of all times devoted to the alpine style. He had been a professional climber since 1970. He was the leader in 10 expeditions in the Himalayas and he climbed on 5 peaks over 8000m. From his many articles and pictures in different magazines one can easily understand his great passion for the Himalayas.

1981: Climbing on the West ridge of Manaslu.

1983: A sole route on the Southwest ridge of Kangchenjunga. 1984: A new route on the South Tower of Dhaulagiri.

1987: A new route on the North ridge of Jannu.

1992: Attempting a new difficult route on the South wall of Anapurna I. He got killed at 7200m forcing his companion J. C. Lafaille to an epic weekly descent.

DOUG SCOTT (ENGLAND)

Born in 1941 he was one of the pioneer climbers in the Himalayas with epic first climbings. One of the introducers of the alpine style, he realized from the beginning the advantages of small, flexible groups at a time when heavy expeditions were the only means to besiege high ridges. He often used to say: You must give up yourself before every big climbing; you must tell yourself I can be killed here. ☒

1975: First climbing on the Southwest ridge of Everest. He climbs to the top with Dougal Haston and they survive in an open biwack a little lower than the top, at 8700m.

1977: First climbing on Orge Karakorum.

1979: A new route on the North Cut of Kangchenjunga.

1982: A new route of the Southwest ridge of Shishapagma.

ALEX McINTYRE (SCOTLAND)

He was the chief representative of the alpine style. He was devoted to it in a dogmatic and absolute way often exaggerating. The ambition for the ridge used to come second comparing to the style he would adopt to succeed. His routes were a model of moving at high altitudes and on isolated ridges like the South Spur of Changabang, the Southwest ridge of Shishapagma and finally the East one of Dhaulagiri, with his inseparable, till death, companion Kurtyka.

He was with him on his effort for alpine style on the West ridge of Makalu. However, one of his big dreams, the South ridge of Anapurna I, kept him there forever. Attempting a new route in 1982 with the French Rene Ghilini they withdrew at a difficult part of the route due to inadequate equipment. During his descent a fatal dropping of stones stopped him. Two years later the Catalans Ehric Lunas and Nil Bohigas completed his dream by finishing the route.

ANDREJ STREMFELJ & MARCO PREZELJ (SLOVENIA)

The superstars of Slovenian Alpinism, the two never stopping climbers along with Stane Belak first on the West Cut of Everest in 1979 influenced all the oncoming super climbers of this excellent Alpine School. Alpinists like Silvo Kavo, Janez Jerlic, Slavko Sveticic, Vanja Furlan, Tomaz Humar and Bojan Pckar followed their steps often pushing the limits and losing their lives. Among the routes of the two we pick out their new, quite fast route on the Southeast ridge of Menlungtse in 1990 and the first access of the huge cut of Kangchenjunga in 1991, one of the top climbings of all times.

We should also mention climbers like Jeff Lowe, Carlos Buhler and Mick Fowler, who climbed extremely difficult ridges similar to the difficult modern northern ridges in the Alps in alpine style. They made their efforts mainly on lower peaks, 6000 or 7000m, without, however, coming behind in style and isolation, elements, which were the main characteristic of their climbing.

*All these great climbers left an overwhelming legacy to the younger ones. Many of their routes have not been repeated and some others have become a legend. Maybe because the big bet of the future is on some ridges, which, due to their size and difficulty, are the **LAST BIG PROBLEMS IN THE HIMALAYAS.***

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