

Everest's Northeast Ridge

MOTOMO OHMIYA, *Sangaku Doshikai Club, Japan* and VALERI KHRISHCHATY, *Kazakhstan**



ON MAY 17, 1982, BRITISH CLIMBERS Joe Tasker and Pete Boardman disappeared high on the northeast ridge of Mount Everest. They were last sighted through a telescope by Chris Bonington as they were working their way behind the Second Pinnacle. (See AAC, 1983, pages 22-29.) In May of 1984, American climber Donald Goodman, standing on the northeast shoulder of Everest, saw and photographed yellow and orange objects on a small domed snowfield high on the pinnacled section of the ridge, near the notch below the final Third Pinnacle. The next climbers to reach that section of the ridge were Briton Harry Taylor and New Zealander Russell Brice in August of 1988. They found the whole ridge knife-edged with cornices and snow mushrooms. Just before reaching the Third Pinnacle, they cut down into a gully to a small arête for a miserable bivouac. The next morning, they regained the ridge in a white-out and climbed the last pinnacle, perhaps bypassing the spot where Goodman had seen the objects. Goodman's snow dome was higher than where in 1992 Pete Boardman's body was found, which was near the top of the second pinnacle.

In the spring of 1992, a joint Japanese-Kazakh expedition attempted to complete the ascent of the northeast ridge of Mount Everest, which has not yet been climbed all the way to the summit. With a large number of 7000-meter peaks and some 8000ers to their credit, the four Kazakhs were much more experienced than the four Japanese, with the exception of the Japanese leader, Otomo Ohmiya, who had climbed Kangchenjunga and several other Himalayan mountains. For that reason, the Kazakhs undertook to prepare the route with the help of two Sherpas. (A third Sherpa, who had originally been assigned to that task fell ill and could not continue and this added to the load-carrying of the Kazaks.)

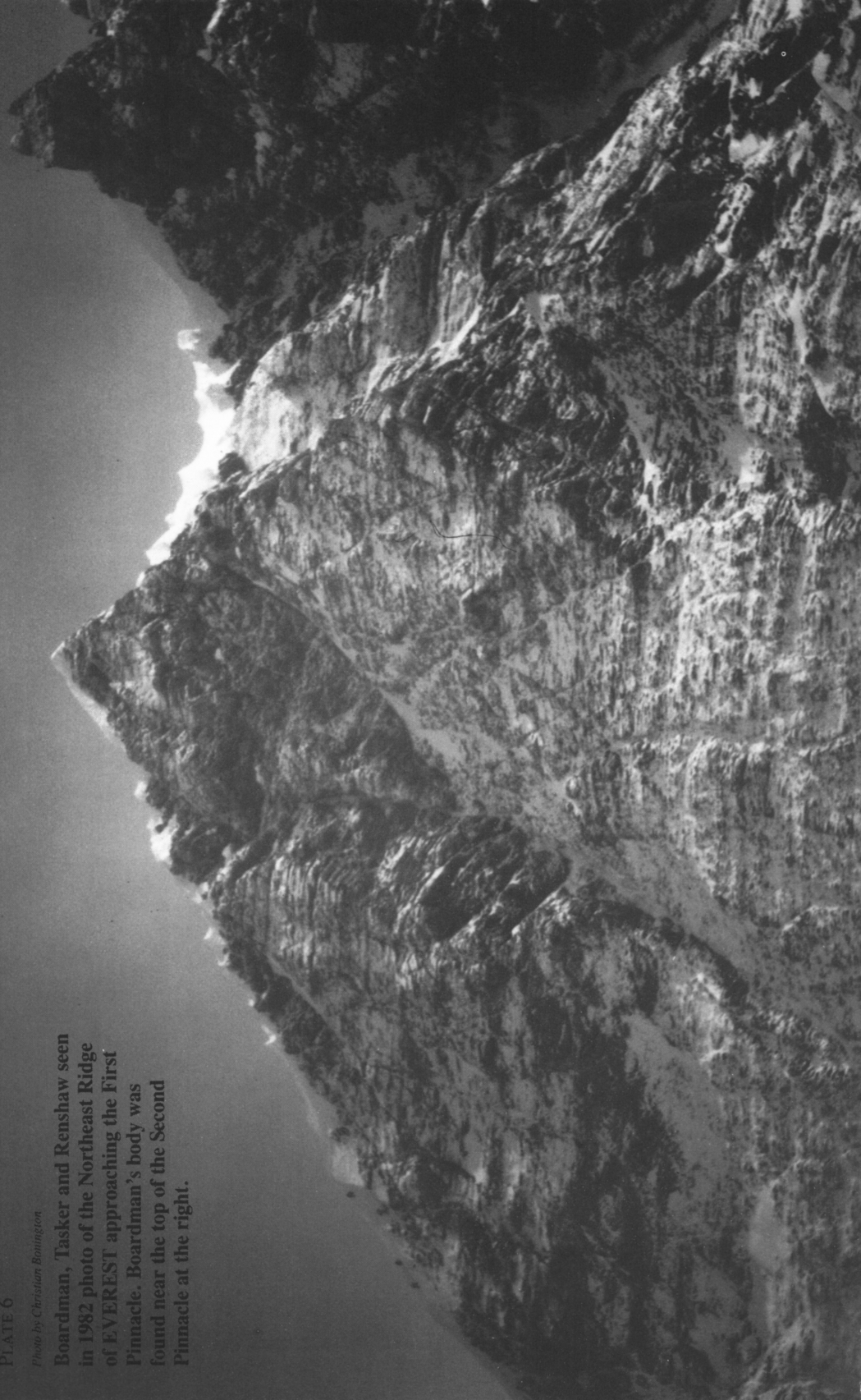
Base Camp was established at 5200 meters on April 3. Camps I, II and III (Advance Base) were placed at 5500, 6000 and 6500 meters on April 6, 7 and 8, the latter on the Rabü La at the foot of the northeast ridge. The Kazakhs set to work on April 9, stringing 4000 meters of rope and digging snow caves at 7090 and 7900 meters for Camps IV and V, which were established on April 15 and 30. Above Camp IV, at 7200 meters, they came upon signs of the 1982 expedition: two sleeping bags, two rucksacks, a notebook and other small

*This article has been put together thanks to detailed reports written by the co-leaders of this joint Japanese-Kazakh expedition, and with the able assistance of Audrey Salkeld, *Alpine Club*. Mr. Ohmiya's report was dictated to a friend on September 10 in the hospital where he was still recovering from frostbite and injuries suffered on the mountain.

PLATE 6

Photo by Christian Bonington

Boardman, Tasker and Renshaw seen in 1982 photo of the Northeast Ridge of EVEREST approaching the First Pinnacle. Boardman's body was found near the top of the Second Pinnacle at the right.



items. Apparently hurricane winds had etched the snow away, revealing what had been in a snow cave. On May 15, near the top of the second pinnacle, the Kazakhs stumbled on a corpse, which has since been identified as that of Peter Boardman.

On May 16, they pitched tents at 8350 meters as Camp VI, nearly at the junction of the northeast ridge and the north ridge, which has become the normal route on this side of the mountain. Unfortunately they were storm-bound on May 17. Climbing without supplementary oxygen and with still doubtful weather, on May 18 they realized they could not push on to the summit. Two of them descended the ascent route while the other two went down via the North Col. They all rested at Base Camp for two days.

Meanwhile, three of the Japanese and three Sherpas set out from Advance Base on May 15, but they were storm-bound at Camp IV for several days. They were using supplementary oxygen for sleeping but not while they were climbing. This and lack of time at higher altitudes may have contributed to their imperfect acclimatization. One of the Japanese, suffering from the altitude, descended with one of the Sherpas. The upward progress of Ohmiya and his companion, Manabu Hoshi, was slow.

Although still not adequately rested from their previous efforts but knowing that the date for the end of the expedition was nearly upon them, the four Kazakhs left Base Camp on May 22, planning to sleep at Camps III, IV and V and to make their summit attempt, bypassing Camp VI, on May 25. Unfortunately, their plan could not be carried out. Ohmiya and Hoshi had continued along the fixed ropes slowly, sending Sherpas Dawa Tenzing and Nawang Shakya ahead. The Sherpas carried their loads to Camp VI and descended via the North Col. When night fell on May 23, the Japanese pair had not yet reached Camp VI. Notified by radio at Camp IV, the tired Kazakhs, revitalized by this news, set off for Camp V at 10:30 P.M. by headlamp. They reached Camp V at 5:30 on the morning of May 24, where they drank tea and rested until 7:30, when they climbed on. Ohmiya saw Boardman's corpse. He gives the following description: "I did not examine closely the body found on the route at 8200 meters on the Rongbuk side of the ridge. I saw a cheek, cap and shoulder on the snow. The cheek was mummy-like. The shoulder was covered with what looked like leather and not a down jacket. The color was light brown. Of course it could have faded from many years' exposure. Neither of us Japanese went close to the body or tried to dig it out. Only Kazakh Vladimir Suviga took photos."

At two P.M., the Kazakhs found Ohmiya alone and in a pitiful state three rope-lengths below Camp VI, after spending three nights out without a tent. Khriishchaty describes the rescue: "He was beside himself. We could hardly persuade him to climb up the fixed rope to the tent. He did not want to obey us and all the time tried to walk downwards. It was difficult to get him to Camp VI, where there were four oxygen cylinders which would be enough for his descent. Ohmiya's ropemate, Manabu Hoshi, was not with him. A hundred meters below Camp VI, we found Hoshi's Jumar on the fixed rope and his ice axe leaning against the rock. Hoshi was not in Camp VI, where he could have had oxygen. He had been carrying both rucksacks. He will remain forever on the slopes and we were too late to help.

"We didn't sleep the whole night. We kept a primus stove burning and melted pot after pot of snow. Ohmiya was utterly dehydrated and drank warm water with great pleasure. His face was badly frostbitten, his fingers would soon turn black, but he didn't notice that. He was conscious only for moments. We couldn't force the oxygen mask onto him. He kept on insisting that we needed to economize oxygen so that we could continue our summit bid together. But he didn't realize that Hoshi had been lost and that he was not with us.

"On the morning of May 25, we had trouble forcing Ohmiya to start down. He implored us, swore at us and insisted that he didn't want to climb down. What we didn't hear from him! We led him downwards along the route toward the North Col, tearing ourselves away from the alluringly simple way along the ridge to the not-too-distant summit. We figured we were only about five hours from the top, but we were not fated to finish the route.

"Two oxygen cylinders were not enough to get Ohmiya to the North Col. It was then that he began to understand reality. When the oxygen ran out, he nearly collapsed and our pace fell sharply. We couldn't get further than the North Col that day. The joint Austro-German expedition, which had worked on the route, offered us tents for the night. Ohmiya could not walk to the tents of the American team, which were set up not far below. Americans brought us food, because we had left most of our food and even necessary personal gear at Camp IV before setting out on the rescue. So we were forced to beg. Thank you very much, American lads and all the others!

"We fed Ohmiya and gave him drink before we ate ourselves. Then it seemed that I had just put myself into the sleeping bag when I heard someone outside speaking English with a German accent and striking the tent with a ski pole. It was morning. We were to get up and walk down from the North Col because in a short time the sun would warm the snow and threaten avalanches. The Austrian lad who had offered us his tent the night before came in and with a smile asked if we could add four or five kilos to our packs to get some of *their* stuff down! And he had seen how the day before we could hardly put one foot ahead of the other! I explained that we had worked to exhaustion for three days, had hardly slept for two nights and had a victim who could barely walk.

"Rescues! What can be harder? How wonderful when everybody renders assistance, understanding how difficult they are!

"We walked the last several meters into the camp below the North Col, staggering, at the end of the day. That was actually the end of our joint Kazakh-Japanese expedition. We walked downward from Everest, carrying away in our hearts the pain of the irreplaceable loss of Hoshi and also unrealized dreams of the summit and the hope to come back again some day."

Summary of Statistics:

AREA: Mount Everest on the Tibetan side.

ATTEMPTED ROUTE: Mount Everest via the Northeast Ridge to 8350 meters.

PERSONNEL: Motomo Ohmiya, co-leader, Manabu Hoshi (disappeared and presumably died near the high point), Yoichiro Taniguchi, Tsuyoshi Kokubo, *Japanese*; Valeri Khreshchaty, co-leader, Vladimir Suviga, Yuri Moseev, Viktor Dedi, *Kazakhs*.