

effort, sank onto the bed in tears. 'Come', said the woman 'I'll take you to the bars. Don't cry, elder sister'.

So Hilary was taken to an iron palisade outside the hospital, there to be confronted by three fierce males gazing at her intently from the other side. 'Don't worry, elder sister, they are not bad men; they are just salesmen. Tell them what you want. Whether it's a cup or medicines. They will get it for you.' So it was that after several visits by Hilary to the bars, we became equipped in the days that followed for life in the Trabzon Numune. After we had learnt the system, we saw that in fact much kindness was being extended to us. An almost perpetual stream of patients and 'relatives of the same sex' arrived unannounced at our room to learn *viva voce* how anyone had managed to evade the gunshot or traffic accident classification; also, if the foreign gentleman had really fallen off a glacier, and if so, where and why.

The Doctor in charge was entirely competent, but completely worn down by work. Seven doctors ran the hospital: unfortunately only 2 were then on duty; it was the hazelnut season, and the others had gone to tend their nut-groves. I was a relatively unimportant case who would recover automatically: he was sorry he had not provided more personal care, but he would prescribe a powerful pain-killer for my return journey. I should visit a good orthopaedic surgeon on my return to Istanbul.

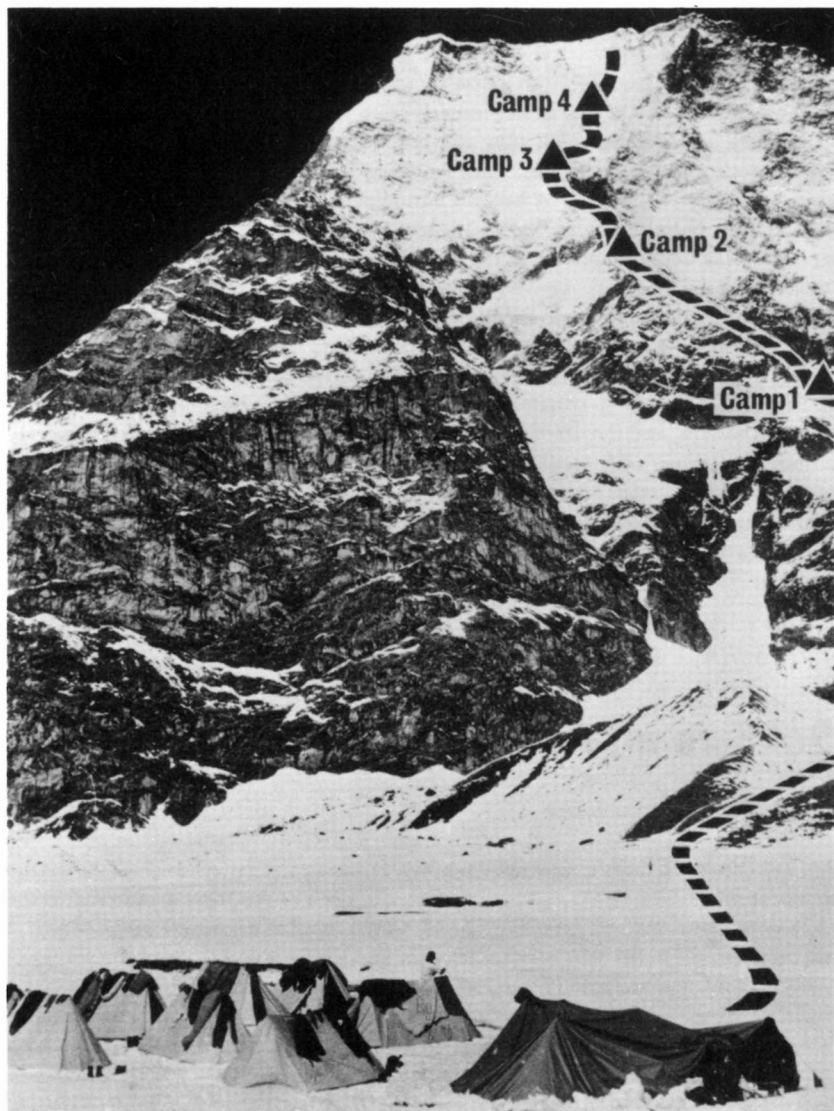
Foreigners might have a tendency to look askance at the standards provided by the Trabzon Numune. But they cared for us as they could. And no charges were levied.

## Soldiers on Api

Crispin Agnew of Lochnaw

Api was chosen by default. I do not know my 'Himalaya' very well and so I picked the first peak on the Nepalese list. Api, The Grandfather, (7132m), lay, I gathered, in the far NW of Nepal in the Byas Rikhi Himal, which stand as a separate range of hills. I paid the deposit to the Ministry of Tourism and forgot about it, until the spring of 1980 suddenly loomed near. Frantically I began to research my mountain, but could find little about it and that on record sounded rather frightening. If Henry Savage Landor is to be believed it was first climbed in 1899. The Nepalese demand a photograph of the intended route before they will confirm the booking and so I borrowed one from John Allen who had led an expedition to Nampa in 1970 (*AJ* 77 126), drew on any old line and sent it to them. With the booking confirmed for an impossible line, more research showed that the Japanese had climbed it from the N in 1960, the Italians by the E ridge from the S in 1977 and 2 Japanese expeditions in 1971 and 73 had thought better of a direct attack on the S face and tried routes on the W flank of the S face. My impossible line on the photograph was unfortunately up the S face.

After the successful Army Mountaineering Association Expedition to Everest in 1976, Api was to be our first return to the Himalaya. The idea was to take only Himalayan novices with a view to building up a pool of climbers with altitude experience for future Himalayan ventures in the 1980s. The 12 man team flew to Kathmandu in early February, took 3 days to negotiate stores into customs and 14 to get them out. We then set off, with our Sirdar and camp staff provided by Mike



77 Base camp and route (Photo: C. Agnew)

Cheney from Sherpa Cooperative, to drive the 400 odd miles to the far W in trucks provided by Exodus Expeditions. After a frustrating week of delays we eventually ground up the new and incredibly engineered road to Dandledhura, from where we had to begin the 2 week trek to base camp.

Here our problems started. Ang Tshering Sherpa, who had given up his medical training in Calcutta to return to the mountains, could not recruit sufficient porters. There is little tradition of carrying in the W as most of the population are Brahmin and most full time porters are contracted to road building. Eventually we had gathered enough to move half the freight and so the team split, leaving Meryon and Rick to bring up the rest of the baggage, when they had recruited enough porters.

They followed 5 days later, reaching base camp on 24 March, while we staggered away after the last minute 'Union dispute'.

The trek from Dandledhura, via Baitadi and the Chamlia Valley to base camp is quite fantastic. Trisul, Nanda Devi and Api dominate the high ridge paths to Baitadi; the ancient fir and rhododendron forests swirl magically in the mists; the Chamlia valley slides through the subsistence agriculture of its inhabitants, whose villages perch precariously on the terraced cliffs. These are all happy memories. The minor porter troubles, the sahibs carrying 80lbs when there were no porters, the blisters and the 'baitadi belly' have been forgotten, but not the final approach to Api. From Ghusa, the path enters a narrow gorge and winds its way upwards through bamboo forests. To our horror we found snow from 3650m and massive recent avalanches barring the path. We struggled on, often in thigh-deep snow, with Krishna Napit, our Manchester diploma'd Liaison Officer, valiantly cajoling, blackmailing and bribing the reluctant porters to our 4275m base camp. Here we camped by a stream, on deep snow overlaying the summer pastures, wondering if we had come after an exceptionally hard winter—or was this norm!

The S face of Api rose 3000m before us with its impressively vertical headwall, and our selected line impossibly dangerous. After a couple of days sight-seeing, we espied a possible line, up a ridge-like feature to the centre of the face, then taking the Monch-Nollen like nose of the first glacier direct, and by-passing the next glacier up a ramp, which ran below its séracs, to gain the upper ice slopes. Having selected the route, we began to acclimatize and allowed Tim Finnegan, our doctor, to start his research programme. He made 29 electro encephalographic (EEG) recordings at various altitudes from 4275m to 6400m, using ambulatory monitoring equipment provided by Oxford Medical Systems, to ascertain changes in brain function at altitude. These tapes will be compared with EEG recordings made in UK both before and after the expedition.

At last on 25 March we began the search for Camp 1. On our first serious sortie Dave Baggaley, Andy Simkins, Duncan Sperry and I were caught in the edge of a mile wide airborne powder snow avalanche—the maelstrom of snow was petrifying as was the site of Camp ½ pitched below a small overhang of rocks. That evening it too was avalanched and the attempt to put in Camp 1 abandoned. On All Fools' day, Meryon Bridges and John Arthy put in Camp 1 (5100m), below the start of the difficult climbing. To reach Camp 1 involved a 3 to 5 hour haul up quite steep snow covered grass slopes, which could only be done at night, because of the avalanche dangers and soft snow.

Camp 1 was flattened twice by heavy snow slides, while the route was pushed out to Camp 2. Steep gullies, filled with rotten sugary snow slowed up the climbing, but once the ridge was gained 300m above, Duncan Sperry and John Walsh did a fine lead to the foot of 'the tower'. To here the route was alpine AD sup, with the odd grade IV problem, but the tower was 75m of smooth vertical granite. John Walsh, with Meryon Bridges eventually turned this on the E side, up a difficult crack system, which led through and round some overhangs (V inf). Once turned, we dropped ropes over the front and jumared, when load carrying. I was injured in the eye by ice knocked off the tower so retired to Base Camp. John Arthy and Rick Broad went into the lead, climbing the ridge and turning more difficulties on the W flank to reach Camp 2 (5650m) after an awkwardly steep and long snow traverse. Yet another tower followed, which was turned on the E—a steep gully (Scottish II/III) and a final snow ridge led up to Camp 3 (6200m) in the bergschrund of the pyramid feature. Throughout this period we had been plagued by many snowfalls and increasingly



78 *Upper face and glacier 2*

frequent thunderstorms, which made the difficult climbing even more awkward, especially as the snow thawed dangerously by 9.00am each morning.

The assault stage of the climb was now in sight with the majority of the equipment and food in the high camps. On 22 April, Dave Baggaley and Andy Simkins occupied Camp 3 and climbing between storms took the route up to the nose. Steep ice to the séracs, a long traverse below them to a 60° snow slope, which gave access to the first glacier, kept them occupied for a few days, even with Duncan Sperry and John Walsh's help, when they came up to join them. From this glacier, the next was gained by a steep 300m ice ramp, which ran below the upper ice cliffs before bypassing the glacier on the W. It turned out that the day the upper séracs avalanched and swept the route clean was also our rest day!

Andy Simkins did a very fine lead, in deteriorating weather, to put in the last of the ropes to Camp 4 (6650m) and there at 9.00am left Meryon Bridges and John Arthy for their summit bid. It snowed heavily all day, with continual avalanches down the upper face. Fortunately the camp was protected under a sérac, and the camp only took the back blasts from the snow without the sérac collapsing on to the tent.

They rested and waited a day and a night before starting for the top on 1 May. They left camp at midnight and from dawn I watched them inching up the steep slope. They were soloing as there was no possible protection on the poor ice and by 8.00am they could be seen to be climbing 50ft an hour. Meryon Bridges describes the climb as an eternal nightmare of never ending snow. They were climbing on a rib, which apparently came out at the summit. This gave them some protection from the ever present slides of snow which having been dislodged by the strong summit winds roared down the gullies on either side of them. At 10.00am John Arthy came on the radio to say they were turning back, 120m from the top. They were exhausted, the

snow was not safe and he had frostbitten hands. Five hours later they were back at the camp, which had been buried in their absence.

The next morning Andy Simkins and John Walsh went up to help them down and then make a 2nd attempt. They set off earlier across the upper glacier to the bergschrund, but here were caught by a ferocious thunderstorm and had to shelter in the crevasse for a few hours. Disappointed, they made their way back to the camp, and I decided that we unfortunately did not have enough reserve to try again. We came back down to Base Camp, recovering as much equipment as possible and where safe cutting off the fixed ropes. The trip back to Kathmandu was an epic of missed vehicles, planes and trains, but that is another story.

Api is a fantastic peak in a fabulous area. We thoroughly enjoyed the trip, even though we are a little disappointed at missing the top. The route is proved and we wish the next attempt all the best.

Team. Sir Crispin Agnew of Lochnaw Bt, (Leader), Meryon Bridges (Deputy Leader), Tim Finnegan (Doctor), Andy Simkins, Peter Sargeant, Duncan Sperry, Paul Rigg, Rick Broad, David Baggaley, John Arthy, John Walsh, Stan Owen.

## The Picos de Europa

Louis C. Baume

The range of mountains running W from the Mediterranean Sea—the Pyrenees, which divide France from Spain—ends at the Bay of Biscay but another range continues for 600km along the N coast of Spain until, in the area of Cape Finisterre, it disappears beneath the Atlantic waters.

Where the 3 provinces of León, Santander and Asturias meet (90km WSW of the town of Santander) this range, mainly of limestone formation, rises up to form a compact, remote and harsh massif approximately 35km wide and 15km deep: the Picos de Europa—the *Mons Vindius* of ancient times—rising to over 2600m and virtually unknown until nearly the end of the last century when they were explored and climbed by the Comte de Saint-Saud.

The Picos, to the immediate N of the main Cordillera Cantábrica, comprise in fact 3 separate mountain blocks; these are bounded and divided by 4 northward flowing rivers coursing through deep, narrow and savage gorges. From E to W these rivers are: 1) the Deva, rising at Fuente Dé in the green and wooded Valle de Liébana, which forms the SE boundary of the Picos, and flowing through Espinama and Potes then N to Panes. 2) the Duje, flowing down from the Aliva mines N, close by Sotres, and W to Puente Poncebos where it meets 3) the Cares gorge, coming down from the upper Valdeón (SW side of the region) through Cain to Puente Poncebos; from there the united rivers break through a mountain barrier and, turning E, flow on to Panes to join up with the Deva, which thence runs out to the sea. 4) the Sella, whose source lies in the upper Sajambre valley (adjoining Valdeón), flowing through Cangas de Onis to the Bay of Biscay.