

PLATE 3

Photo by Galen A. Rowell

CHO OYU's Southeast Face by telephoto from Everest's West Ridge. Polish 1985 route is on left, Austrian 1978 route (Furtner-Koblmueller) route is in center and Richey-Wilcox route on Ngojumba Kang and attempt on Cho Oyu are at the far right.



Cho Oyu's Three-Kilometer-High Face

ANDRZEJ ZAWADA, *Polski Związek Alpinizmu*

THE CLIMBING action began on January 4 when Berbeka and Pawlikowski established Camp I on the Lungsampa Glacier, still a fair distance from the face. The fascinating view of Cho Oyu with its vast, steep southeast face was hypnotic. Excitement about struggles to come mingled with awe caused by thundering avalanches and the sight of shining, ice-covered, overhanging séracs. The whole climb was visible from bottom to top, 2800 vertical meters of ice and rock. Only then did I understand why this face was thought to be impassable. It was diabolically dangerous. We spoke with great admiration of the Yugoslav climbers, who in the fall of 1984 were the first to attempt the precipice. The only chance of safe passage of the higher reaches lay in an inconspicuous rock-and-ice spur separating the southern and eastern faces. But the main problems were in the lower face, an enormous cliff, 1200 meters high. Its only possible weakness lay in a system of ice gullies to the right. This was the line chosen by the Yugoslavs.

The ascent from Camp I to the foot of the face required technical climbing, as it went through the continually moving glacier, which descended from a large plateau under the east face. Every few days the overhanging séracs fell down on our fixed ropes. Passing beneath these "big ducks" and "ships," as we called them, took a lot of nerve. From the very beginning, these difficulties split our team into two groups. One carried equipment from Base Camp to Camp I, while the other, a six-man team, climbed on the wall. Only three two-climber teams for such a face in the thick of winter! If anyone got sick, we'd have no chance for success. When we looked up searching the route on the spur, we were somewhat counting on the fixed ropes left by the Yugoslav attempt, but this was a disappointment. There were only a few ropes hanging on the wall and they were shredded by rockfall.

The weather was difficult. The snowstorms were disturbing, and after them, on the face we were haunted by avalanches. Average minimum temperatures in Base Camp were -25°C ; the maximum ones in the shade did not reach 0°C . The coldest temperature, -33°C , at Base Camp was on the night of February 15 while Heinrich and Kukuczka were bivouacking at 7700 meters.



PLATE 4

Photo by Andrzej Zawada

Polish Winter Route on the Southeast

Face of CHO OYU. ○ = Bivouacs;

△ = Camps. I-5400M, II-5750M;

III-6700, IV-7200M, V-7500M.

On January 10 Berbeka and Pawlikowski attacked the face. By rappelling into the deep, black bergschrund and then by climbing delicately on wedged ice blocks, they managed to get onto the wall. They fixed the first ropes in the difficult, exposed terrain and withdrew to Base Camp. From their stories we knew that we were undertaking a climb with the greatest technical problems. Camp II at 5700 meters was established by Gardzielewski and me. The substantial tent stood on an overhanging rock, well protected from avalanches and rockfall. We always returned to it with joy from higher camps after tiring bivouacs in frost-covered, super-light nylon gadgets. The third team, Chrobak and Heinrich, forced the next pitches, coming back to Camp II. When they ran out of rope, they went to get more in Camp I and returned to Camp II the same day. Everyone worked with highest dedication, but from observation with binoculars on the glacier, one could easily despair, comparing our tiny progress with the vastness of the wall. Chrobak and Heinrich reached the foot of a rock band above which was an overhanging sérac at the edge of the spur. It later turned out that this was the most difficult section of the whole climb. The activity of the pair was interrupted when a falling rock hit Heinrich in the leg. Berbeka and Pawlikowski entered into the action. They worked for two days, fixing ropes up through the rock band and rappelling down to Camp II for the night. The face of Cho Oyu was yielding slowly, very slowly! Moreover, new snow and subsequent avalanches were delaying us. We reshuffled the teams: Chrobak and Gardzielewski replaced Berbeka and Pawlikowski. The new pair lost one day, pulling the fixed ropes from under the new snow. The next day, heavily loaded with Camp III gear, they finally reached the ice slopes above the rock bands. We watched them with binoculars with concern. Could they at that late hour find a bivouac site or would they return to Camp II? After a while we saw them set up a tent. On the radio they were optimistic: Camp III tomorrow.

But it didn't happen. After a whole day's climbing, they almost reached the spur's edge, but steep ice gullies barred further progress. One more bivouac in a rapidly pitched tent. Gardzielewski had frostbitten hands and they had run out of rope and pitons. They returned to Base Camp and again, Berbeka and Pawlikowski went into action. With delicate climbing on sharp ice tools and front-points, they got to the top of the gullies. They were on the spur! But they could not transport Camp III gear until the next day, January 29. Camp III was finally established at 6700 meters. It had taken almost a month since Base Camp had been set up. And we had climbed only a third of the face, though the most difficult part.

Above Camp III a deeply gullied, 500-meter-high ice face reminded us of organ pipes. Somewhere high in the upper part of that face would be Camp IV. Heinrich and I had the task of carrying all the gear needed for the camp to the foot of the Organ Pipes. Carrying the fixed ropes, we admired the work done by our colleagues. After depositing endless loads at the bergschrund under the Organ Pipes at nearly 7000 meters and after eight days of work, we returned exhausted to Base Camp. By radio we got the exciting news that Andrzej Czok

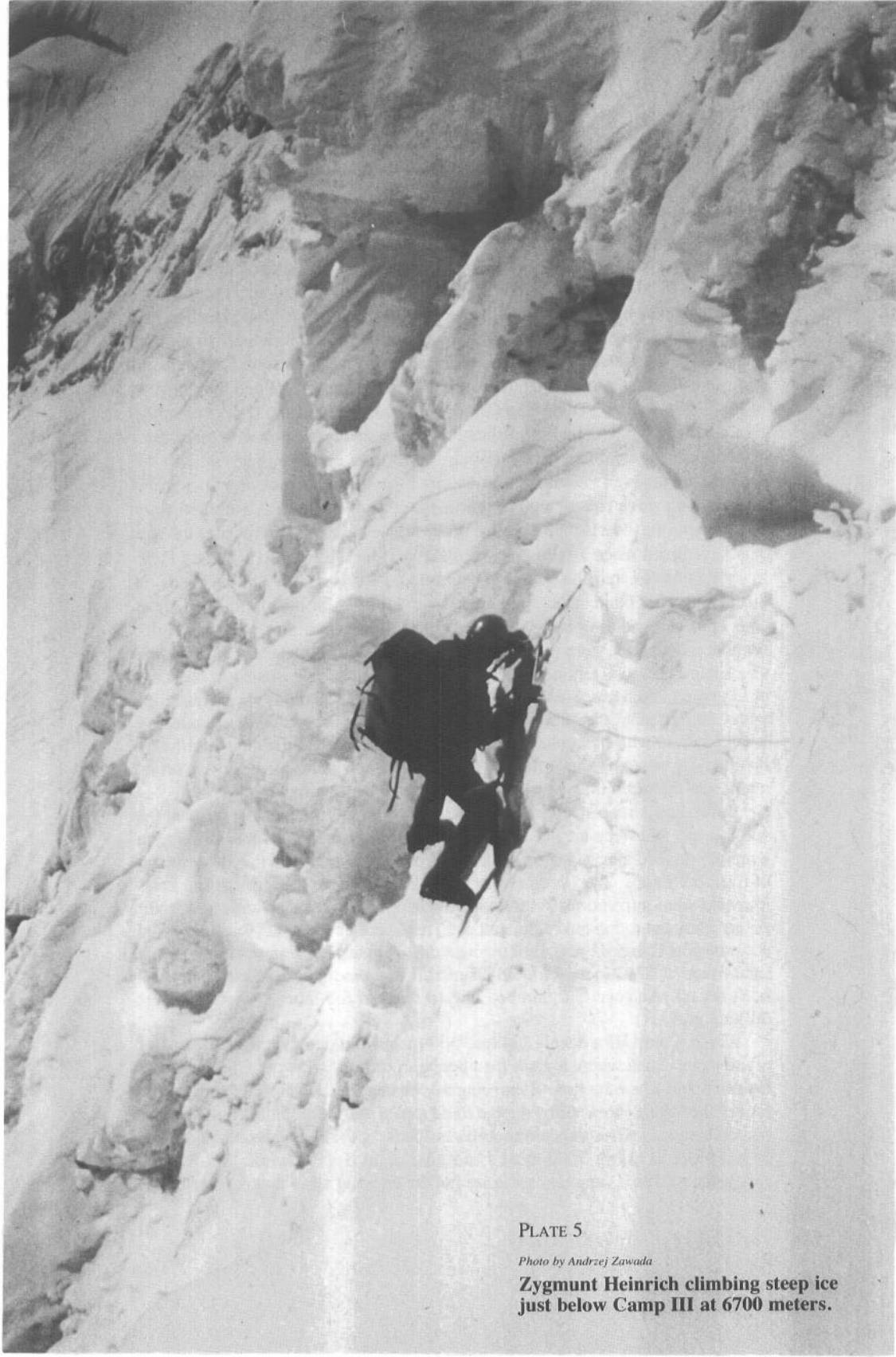


PLATE 5

Photo by Andrzej Zawada

**Zygmunt Heinrich climbing steep ice
just below Camp III at 6700 meters.**

and Jerzy Kukuczka had climbed Dhaulagiri. Could Kukuczka join us, even for five or six days before our permit expired?

Two teams were now in action: Chrobak and Gardzielewski and, three days behind them, Berbeka and Pawlikowski. The first pair bivouacked at the bergschrund under the Organ Pipes and the next day started work on the route on the smooth ice. They rappelled to the bergschrund for the night. In the morning, with camping gear, they started up again. We watched them with mounting tension. The weather was beautiful and windless. After climbing all day long, it was clear that they could not reach the planned Camp IV site before dark. Suddenly they turned to the right where miraculously they found a crevasse and set up their tent. It was uncomfortable and exposed.

The next day they climbed slowly on difficult, exposed terrain, reaching the séracs and established Camp IV at 7200 meters. That same day Kukuczka reached Base Camp. Berbeka and Pawlikowski spent the day in Camp III. The next morning, tired and out of rope, Chrobak and Gardzielewski decided to descend. Their place in Camp IV was taken by Berbeka and Pawlikowski, who had a fresh supply of rope. On the same day Heinrich and Kukuczka started from Base Camp.

On February 10 Berbeka and Pawlikowski spent the day climbing and fixing ropes above Camp IV, to which they returned for the night. Heinrich and Kukuczka slept in Camp II.

On February 11 Berbeka and Pawlikowski carried the material from Camp IV higher. There was no other choice, although they knew what it might mean for Heinrich and Kukuczka. The upper climbers pushed slowly but steadily ahead. They established Camp V at 7500 meters. They were in good condition and they could try for the top the next day. That day Heinrich and Kukuczka reached Camp III.

It was February 12. Fantastic weather, although even in Base Camp one could hear the gale on the ridges of Cho Oyu. After breakfast we moved from Base Camp to the moraine. The binoculars were in high demand, film was shot and impressions recorded on tape. The atmosphere was like a stadium. High above us, two little dots crept across sunny icefields. They were just below the summit. The first disappeared against the background of a dark, blue sky, and then the other. I glanced at my watch. It was 2:20 P.M. I grabbed the radio. "Hello, do you hear me?" I heard a crackling sound, muffled by the gale. "Are you on top?" "I don't know. I don't know, but there is nowhere higher to go!" What joy! Such a climb, and in the winter! A first 8000er for Pawlikowski and the second winter 8000er for Berbeka. They could not stand on their feet in the gale. Lying on the snow, they tied flags to an ice ax, took a few pictures, and started down to Camp V, which they reached about six P.M.

But that was not the end. More excitement was to come. Heinrich and Kukuczka started on February 13 from Camp III to where Camp IV had been, 900 meters higher. About noon they met the descending summit team. Tired, they slowly gained altitude. At one point, Heinrich peeled off the face and hung free on the rope. With an extreme effort he ascended the rope to the nearest



PLATE 6

Photo by Zygmunt Heinrich

**Kukuczka climbing overhanging
bergschrund below "Organ Pipes."**

piton. The night came and forced them into an unforeseen bivouac, only 60 meters from the tent at Camp V. After getting to Camp V the next day, they stayed there. Another night. In the morning, they left camp at 7:30. Heinrich was feeling the altitude. A fog made visibility poor. Finally at 5:30 P.M. they stood on the summit, near the tracks of the first team. It was February 15, the last day covered by the permit. Kukuczka shot a movie, took a few pictures and they descended in a hurry. The early night caught them far from camp. They descended in the dark for several hours. Finally Kukuczka fell five meters off a steep sérac. Heinrich rappelled to him and at that spot, at 7700 meters, they awaited the morning. After reaching Camp V, they were so tired that they spent another night there. Again the next day, unending rappels in steep terrain. Only the enormous experience, self-control and mutual help got them safely off the wall. Finally, on the fourth day after the summit, they reached Base Camp late at night.

For Kukuczka it was his eighth 8000er and the second 8000er in winter.

If anyone should ask me what I liked most about our expedition, I'd say without hesitation: a wonderful spirit among all the members, at the Base Camp, on the face and at the Christmas table.

Summary of Statistics:

AREA: Nepal Himalaya.

NEW ROUTE AND FIRST WINTER ASCENT: Cho Oyu, 8201 meters, 26,906 feet, by the Southeast Pillar; summit reached on February 11, 1985 by Berbek and Pawlikowski and on February 15 by Kukuczka and Heinrich.

PERSONNEL: Andrzej Zawada, *leader*, Maciej Berbek, Eugeniusz Chrobak, Dr. Krzysztof Flaczyński, Mirosław Gardzielewski, Zygmunt Andrzej Heinrich, Jerzy Kukuczka, Maciej Pawlikowski, *Poles*; and Jacques Olek, *deputy leader*, Martin Berkman, André Frapier, Yves Tessier, *Canadians*.

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