

**Mountaineering ethics and rescue: Mountain Forum minutes of the first meeting 27th-28th April 1996 - Gaverina Terme (Bergamo, Italy)**

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- Expedition Ethics and Mountain Rescue Objectives Self-Rescue Rescue as Solidarity Organized Rescue
- Actions Nepal - Khumbu Valley Pakistan - Baltero Tibet - Tingri
- Medical Research on Human Physiology at High Altitude Participants at the Meeting Members of K2 Geoexpedition

**Expedition Ethics and Mountain Rescue**

Forward Mountain climbing in the Himalayas in this decade has very complex features. More than 30 years after the conquest of the last "8000m", the development of climbing at high altitude has continued in different ways and styles. As well as coming upon small teams of mountain-climbers, you still meet expeditions organised following the canons of the 50s and 60s, with extra weight, extra equipment, porter and logistic apparatus. It is extremely common, however, to find expeditions that are well-equipped and not too heavy: 5-7 mountain-climbers, light camps, reduced materials, and reduced number of porters. Furthermore, over these last years commercial expeditions have been increasing; in order to have paying climbers make the peak, strategies are planned, and abundance of logistic means and porters are arranged. From a point of view of safety, it is necessary to underline the fact that on operating, but on the big Himalayas mountains, not only self-sufficient and well-organised group are operating, but also expeditions which show considerable shortcomings and accept, unwittingly, very high level of risk. In fact, with respect to 10-15 years ago, the number of participants to the "Himalayan Game" has significantly increased.

Although current Himalayan mountaineering still preserves some links with that "romantic" period which one associates with the early conquests of 8000m peaks, it has inevitably moved away from that framework. Himalayan climbing has not escaped the logic of our times: mountains to be consumed, or whose conquest is to be considered a status symbol - and all at the expenses of the true sporting idea of a challenge within acceptable risks. Accordingly, the ethic of mountaineering as a sport fades away. Over the last years, the race to

conquer the 8000m mountains has made people forget values which are the basis of common life, of sport and of the mountaineering activity: loyalty to themselves, to others and to the environment, solidarity and reciprocal help. It is sufficient to remember the incident of Benoît Chamoux where lack of response on the part of the mountaineering expeditions present on the Kangchenjunga to the request for help is only one example of behaviour of shameful indifference which must be roundly condemned. If we were to take the sea as an example - in case of accident, common sense but also maritime law means aiding colleagues in difficulty or in danger. Within mountain-climber framework, on the contrary, hurts to have to say that the life of other human beings is sometimes hardly taken into consideration. If it is true that in such a difficult environment as the Himalayas, each mountaineering team must count only on its own resources, this does not exclude that the ordinary human decency involved in succouring colleague in difficulty should not come into play. It is not acceptable such a colleague should be left to fend for himself because he must have been aware of the risks he is running in the first place, and, in any case, because the economic cost of a mountain rescues are not indifferent. Finally what can be said about the numerous accidents occurring to indigenous staff, Sherpas or members of other ethnic groups who participate in mountaineering expedition as a means to earn their life? Still, the right of adventure, to mountaineering and adventure holidays, to knowledge is an alienable principle of our human existence. Notwithstanding the Benoît episode on Kangchenjunga, even at high altitudes, solidarity and self-denial towards climbers who have been injured or in serious difficulty have been recorded. But it is worth repeating that the race towards the conquest of the most famous peaks has induced a relaxation of the most elementary rules of human co-existence.

Starting from the above mentioned reflections (and considering also the "Code of the Ethic of Expeditions", elaborated by UIAA in 1987 at Marrakech), a "Mountain Forum" was convened at Gaverina Terme (Bergamo - Italy) on 27th-28th April 1996. The lectures proposed the constitution of an "Operative Committee" aimed at drawing up a detailed project for the realisation of a series of concrete interventions for the improvement of the extra-European alpinism, fostering its growth and the development of its ethical contents, as well as helping to create greater safety standards. This Committee should comprise representatives of those bodies who are already active : the Italian Alpine Club, the National Alpine and Speleological Rescue Branch, the National College of Mountaineering Guides, as well as the Ev-K2-CNR, an Italian project rooted in Nepal, of Eco-Himal, a non-governmental promoting co-operation between Alpine Countries and Himalayan regions, the Benoît Chamoux Foundation, which is setting up some activities for this purpose in the Himalayas, and CISDAE, as observatory of the cultural and statistical phenomena of the world alpinism.

**OBJECTIVES** The participants in the Congress expressed their conviction that overall it is necessary to work on the cultural dimension of alpinism, to arrange a suitable opinion campaign and to awaken the mass media by proposing a positive ethical message aimed at a return to solidarity, respect of life, rational and attentive evaluation of risk. Well-organised safety measures are of fundamental importance particularly considering that on such a vast territory as the big Himalayan chains of Central Asia; nowadays there hardly exists a structure which can ensure rescue operations, radio links and first aid treatment. The Himalayan Rescue Association is working hard, but suffers from an acute shortage of means. The issues, to which we must find a suitable solution in a short time, by carrying out a detailed feasibility study, are the following:

- Self-Rescue, the opportunity for each Alpinist, alone or as a member of a group of trekkers or mountaineers, to follow a code of behaviour that takes into account one's own limitations, that of others and keeps in mind the environment. This is possible only through adequate physical, psychical, technical, organisational and logistic means. Preparation and athletic training and cultural background are the basis on which Alpinism must be re-evaluated. Then, self-rescue must foresee the possibility that an expedition can bring help, autonomously, to its own members.

- Rescue as Solidarity: the direct intervention of all the expeditions on a mountain to succour the mountaineers in difficulty. In particular, the participants in the "Mountain Forum" examined also the opportunity of including, among the regulations in force for mountaineering expeditions, a norm that, in case of accident, obliges all the mountaineers climbing on that face of the mountain to suspend immediately the climbing operations in order to verify the possibility of a concrete rescue intervention. There should also be a built-in compensation system (e.g. expanding the authorised period for their expedition) for the time dedicated to the rescue operations.

- Organised Rescue: the creation of the first specialised rescue units (professional teams, doctors, mountaineers, suitable equipment), for the recovery and rescue of mountaineers in difficulty, all this without reducing the quality of the mountaineering adventure and without excluding the unknown factors of very high altitudes, which make so imperative the appeal of the Himalayan environment.

**ACTIONS** The fatal accident that happened to Benoît Chamoux and his two companions on Mt. Kangchenjunga, a few steps from the peak, and the heavy snow-falls of last autumn, which showed public opinion the phenomenon of a mass Himalayan alpinism and trekking, induced some people particularly close to this facts to take action. The Italian Alpine Club (CAI) and the film festival of Trento were requested to focus on this issue before it becomes a real

emergency. CAI, the Alpine Rescue and the film festival of Trento answered concretely, with readiness and commitment.

A free "Mountain Forum" has been constituted in order to discuss together ethics, solidarity, specific events and possible solutions. The first meeting was held at Gaverina Terme near Bergamo - Italy in April 1996. This meeting was a first step in the right direction. This step promoted principally three main initiatives:

**NEPAL - KHUMBU VALLEY:** We intend to realise a small office in Kathmandu for the co-ordination of "active Himalayan rescue", in close collaboration with and responding to the Himalayan Rescue Association and the local authorities, in order to have a first aid and rescue system, updated information as to the whereabouts of helicopters and a mountaineering staff standing by. We intend to organise, at the Observatory-Laboratory Pyramid, a training centre for Sherpas and a first aid and rescue base, supplying the Khumbu Valley, and afterwards the others valleys, with radio communication systems. Ev-K2-CNR, Mountain Research & Development GEIE and Benoît Chamoux Foundation confirmed their readiness to provide plant and equipment, staff and means.

**PAKISTAN - BALTERO:** The Italians owe a great deal to the populations and mountains of Karakorum. The 40th anniversary of the climbing of K2 passed without leaving a tangible sign in its valleys. We would like through our contacts with the Pakistani authorities, to develop a small project for the realisation of a first aid and rescue base on Baltoro and one communication system. "K2 Geoexpedition", jointly put together by the "Ragni della Grignetta" group of Lecco, Italy, and Ev-K2-CNR, has already set discussions in motion with the Pakistani authorities concerned. Some funding, albeit limited, is already available.

**TIBET - TINGRI:** In Gutsho, at 4300m above sea level, a hospital has been recently established with the support of the local population, Tibetan expatriates and the local authorities. The hospital began working, albeit with extremely limited means, at the end of 1995. Now support is coming from Eco-Himal, Ev-K2-CNR and Benoît Chamoux Foundation so that the equipment and the medicines required can be purchased and the structure of the hospital can be improved. The Chinese authorities have authorised the hospital to act also as a basis for scientific research on high altitude pathology. As this hospital is situated at an operative distance from the north-face of Mt. Everest, Mt. Cho-Oyu and Mt. Shisha Pangma, it could become also a basis for Himalayan rescue in Tibet. The above mentioned actions will be successful and durable only if strongly supported by a cultural action, for which the friends, journalists and intellectuals, present at the "Mountain Forum" expressed their willing, but also by means of economical resources, which the participants committed themselves to find. Something is already available; much has still to be done. To this end a "working group" must be constituted in order to plan in detail a

program of action and intervention, also indicating meanwhile times, executive terms and conditions and possible sources of financing. The participants in the "Mountain Forum" illustrated many ideas for the realisation of a "Fund of Himalayan Solidarity", starting from an awareness campaign through to contributions by private organisations and Alpine Clubs, and including co-operation programs with Third Countries of the European Union, private sponsors and companies, insurance companies. There was keen interest on the part of all the participants and a profound desire to take concrete actions: this is an excellent start. We requested the President of the Italian Alpine Club, Roberto De Martin, the President of the Italian Rescue, Armando Poli, after the Filmfestival of Trento, to indicate two collaborators as member of this "working group" in order to start work immediately. This proposal has been presented at the Congress "SOS from the Mountains of the World", convened on 3rd May 1996 within the International Film Festival on Mountain and Exploration «Città di Trento».K2 Geoexpedition - Letter of Intent dated 12.08.96

### **Medical Research on Human Physiology at High Altitude**

In the framework of the medical research program carried out by the Ev-K2-CNR Project, a specific project denominated EAST (Extreme Altitude Survival Test) is planned for Spring 1997 and most members of the mountaineering expedition will participate in it. In fact a detailed study of the physiological limits faced by athletic performance in extremely high altitude can provide an important basis for a better understanding of the bounds of human activity and survival which need to be acknowledged. A better awareness of oneself means also better security standards by more competent strategies and better training, possibly with the introduction of new scientific methods so far unknown in this context. In this field lie the ideal continuation and the development of the co-operation between the Ragni di Lecco and the Ev-K2-CNR Himalayan Rescue. All the members of the K2 Geoexpedition have signed the document with the relevant issues proposed by the "Mountain Forum". One additional point has been added: the concrete realisation of a radio communication network. This latter will allow a prompt intervention by the military helicopters in case of accident in the Karakorum region and will also provide for a specific telephone-number so that the relevant military district can be easily reached and this can provide detailed and up-dated information.

### **PARTECIPANTS TO THE MEETING**

Kurt Diemberger

writer, cinema operator, the only mountain-climber who climbed for the first time two 8000 m

Riccardo Cassin

among the big representatives of the international alpinism and dean of the Italian one.

Silvio Ceccato

sociologist, writer and opinionist

Roberto Mantovani

journalist, for many years' director of the "Rivista della Montagna", collaborator of the Italian National Museum of the Mountain and CISDAE (Italian Centre Study and Documentation Extra-European Alpinism)

Danilo Barbisotti

Chief of the Mountaineering Rescue delegation

Roberto Serafin journalist, from many years responsible of the "Lo Scarpone", review of CAI

Mons. Aldo Nicoli

as well as having ecclesiastic responsibilities, he loves and support sports activities in mountain

Roberto Coppello

journalist and mountain-climber

Hildegard Diemberger

ethologist, expert in Tibet studies, Univ. Vienna, researcher of Ev-K2-CNR Project

Pino Cappellini

journalist, responsible of the mountains pages on a local newspaper at Bergamo

Antonio Salvi

central chancellor of CAI and co-ordinator of mountaineering meetings for the Filmfestival in Trent

Maria Antonia Sironi

president of ECO-HIMAL

Pinuccio Castelnuovo

mountaineering guide and president of the group "Ragnidella Grignetta" of Lecco - Italy

Silvio Magni

vice-president CONI delegation of Bergamo - Italy

Antonio Camozzi  
president of the School of Alpinism, sky-alpinism and sportive climbing of  
Bergamo - Italy

Pierangelo Zanga  
mountain-climber

Eugenio Sorrentino  
journalist

Gianpaolo Rosa  
layer

Ilario Ghidini  
prier, Seminary "Giovanni XXIII"

Don. Luca Betelli  
prier, expert in ethic, mountain lover

#### MEMBERS OF K2 GEOEXPEDITION

Agostino Da Polenza	co-ordinator and leader of the project
Marco Negri	mountain-climber, leader of the expedition
Carlo Besana	mountain-climber
Carlo Ferrari	mountain-climber and guide
Giulio Maggioni	mountain-climber and guide
Giuseppe Lafranconi	mountain-climber and guide
Mario Panzeri	mountain-climber
Salvatore Panzeri	mountain-climber
Antonio Taglialegne	mountain-climber
Gian Pietro Verza	mountain-climber and guide, technician

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#### Notes to readers

This papers is a minutes on the meeting Mountaineering Ethics and Rescue. A Mountain Forum minutes on Mountaineering Ethics and Rescue, Bergamo, Italy. 27th-28th April 1996.