

SUMMIT

150 years of the Alpine Club

GEORGE BAND



MORE ALPINE STYLE

Another pair of dedicated climbers, although operating normally at a slightly less extreme level, is the husband and wife team of Roger Payne and the New Zealander Julie-Ann Clyma.

Roger Payne was general secretary of the British Mountaineering Council from 1995 to 2002 and then took a part-time post as Sports and Development Director with the International Union of Alpine Associations (UIAA) which gave him a little more time for guiding and expeditions. His bureaucratic experience equipped him admirably for teasing out permits to climb in previously restricted areas close to the frontiers of India, Pakistan, Tibet and the former Soviet Union. Meanwhile, Julie-Ann Clyma, originally trained as a physiologist, had also qualified as an international mountain guide. In summer 1991, with a larger group, including also Iain Peter, Allen Fyffe, Rick Allen, Shaun Smith and Simon Yates, they climbed the world's most northerly 7,000-metre summits, the elegant

Khan Tengri (23,000 ft/7,010 m) and Pobeda (or Victory) Peak (24,406 ft/7,439 m) in the Tien Shan range, also known as the Celestial Mountains.

In October 1994, Payne and Clyma cleverly contrived a way of 'entering' the Nanda Devi Sanctuary, which had been closed since 1982 for environmental reasons. They climbed the East Peak (24,390 ft/7,434 m) of Nanda Devi by its south ridge, which rises from the eastern rim of the Sanctuary at Longstaff's Col, so you don't actually have to set foot on the floor of the Sanctuary itself. This proved a quadruple first ascent: British, New Zealand, female, and in fine alpine style!

Most recently they made the fourth ascent of Chomolhari (23,930 ft/7,294 m), which lies on the border between Tibet and Bhutan. It was first climbed in 1937 in a sterling effort by the indefatigable Freddy Spencer Chapman with his single Sherpa Pasang Dawa Lama. I recall that Chapman once wrote that 'a fit man should be able to continue on the level or downhill *indefinitely*'. He later published his wartime Malaysian adventures behind the Japanese lines as a best-seller, *The Jungle is Neutral*. The King of Bhutan has forbidden attempts on Chomolhari from the Bhutanese side, but Payne and Clyma were surprisingly able to get permission from the Tibetan side to make a successful ascent in spring 2004.



CHANGABANG AGAIN

Payne and Clyma have shown commendable persistence on one particular mountain, Changabang, in 1996 and 1997, in a period when I happened to be Roger Payne's 'boss', as president of the BMC. He was probably only too pleased to be away from the office. Julie-Ann Clyma wrote in the *Alpine Journal*: 'Perhaps the most special mountain is the one that captures your imagination in your early climbing years – the one that is so big, so hard, so impossibly beyond your ability that it could only ever be a dream. For me, Changabang was such a mountain.' Fifteen years after Boardman and Tasker had made their landmark ascent of the west face, she found herself looking at the north face of that 'Shining Mountain'. The dream had become reality, and the impossible even began to seem possible.

With the closure of the Nanda Devi Sanctuary in 1982, one now had to approach Changabang from the north, as it is on the northern rim of the Sanctuary. Nevertheless, the approach is easy: two days drive from Delhi, then just two days walk to base camp. Clyma describes the main part of the north face: 'A stupendous sweep of steep, clean granite, with improbable ice formations stuck randomly to it.' There were several possible starts leading to a central icefield. Then an upper snow spur led to a groove system which would exit high up on the East Ridge, the original line of ascent of the mountain.

With Andy Perkins and Brendan Murphy, they were a team of four and planned a capsule-style ascent, with the two pairs sharing the leading and load-carrying. They chose a route that began on the right side of the obvious buttress. After some four days on the face, with very uncomfortable bivouacs, they were in the area of the central icefield when Andy Perkins was smitten with severe food poisoning. There was also a sudden deterioration in the weather. They prudently abandoned the attempt before they got over-committed. But they soon vowed to return.

Next year, 1997, they returned as a team of six, Brendan Murphy now joined by Andy Cave, with Mick Fowler and Steve Sustad as the third pair. With their increased knowledge of the face, they were determined to try alpine-style climbing as three independent pairs. Payne and Clyma chose a line to the left of the others. After four days of superb sustained mixed climbing they reached the foot of the central icefield – their high point of 1996. Thereafter, climbing on hard green ice or strenuous mixed grooves, the deteriorating weather began to take control. After three more days, in which they reached the ice tongue just above the upper icefield, they withdrew. Getting down safely now became their prime objective. In all, Payne and Clyma spent twelve days on the sheer face.

Andy Cave now takes up the story. He and Brendan Murphy chose a central line, with Steve Sustad and Mick Fowler following two days behind because of the limited bivouac sites. With nine



days' food and ten days' gas, their sacks weighed 20 kg. They were hampered by the daily afternoon storm and they wrecked their ice screws trying to drive them into the steely ice. Spindrift swept down the route. By the time they reached a bivouac site at the edge of the snow arête at 11 pm on the fourth day they were exhausted. When they rested next day, Fowler and Sustad caught them up. The steep upper grooves involved some of the most challenging climbing yet. Each pitch had a sting to it. On the eighth day, Andy Cave hacked through the cornice onto the east ridge. They had climbed the face. It was his birthday next day and Brendan Murphy produced six Snicker bars he had secretly carried up.

A day later, on 1 June, Fowler and Sustad reached the summit ridge, but Sustad slipped on balled-up crampons and the pair fell 200 feet. Steve sustained broken ribs and was in pain, so the four climbers teamed up to descend by the normal route on the south side. It was bitterly cold and they were utterly exhausted. Only a few more abseils to go. One was too steep for Sustad in his injured state so Murphy volunteered to set up another anchor to the right. Seconds later a muffled noise came from above. Way up, one avalanche released another and another. Murphy saw it coming, but had no sling to clip into the ice screw. He was just swept away, with no chance of surviving. He would rest in one of the most remote and beautiful mountain valleys on earth.



left: Andy Cave on steep thin ice, a crucial section that linked to the upper grooves in 1997.

right: Brendan Murphy leads the ice tongue during day six on Changabang in 1996.