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Quiet years

George Finch, outstanding and well-known climber that he was, never had an impact on Australian mountaineering. His lecture tours were confined to Britain and the Continent; in fact, he never returned to Australia after leaving in 1902. His climbing career was focused firmly on the Alps and to a lesser extent Britain. He went to the Himalaya only once, as a member of the 1922 British expedition to Mt Everest.

Finch's book *The Making of a Mountaineer*, which interspersed vivid accounts of his climbs in Corsica, the Alps and on Everest with instruction, often in considerable detail, on climbing techniques, was read avidly by New Zealand mountaineers but had no impact in Australia. The reason was simple. There was no history or tradition of climbing in Australia, there was no active or vigorous Australian climbing community and there was little contact between outdoors-oriented Australians and climbers elsewhere, even their cousins across the Tasman.

Further Australian connections with Himalayan climbing followed the Finch model: they were the result of isolated individuals joining British expeditions or of British expatriates resident in Australia launching their own efforts in the Himalaya. Even these sporadic and unrelated trips were, however, to come more than three decades after Finch's 1922 Everest expedition.

Indeed, for Himalayan mountaineering in general, the 1930s and 1940s were quiet years—the result of economic factors and problems of access. Most climbers simply could not afford the costly trip to the subcontinent for such a frivolous activity as mountaineering, particularly during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Even if they could afford it, lack of access was an insurmountable barrier for much of the Himalaya. Nepal was still closed to all foreigners and only the British were allowed to climb from the Tibetan side of the main Himalayan range. Apart from a succession of unsuccessful British attempts on Everest, Himalayan mountaineering

was confined largely to attempts on Kanchenjunga, accessible through Sikkim; exploration and some climbing attempts in the spectacular Karakoram Range; and a series of German attempts on Nanga Parbat, a massive 8000 m mountain to the south of the main Karakoram Range.

All of this changed after World War II. Nepal opened its doors to foreigners in 1950 and an increasing number of suddenly affluent Western mountaineers mounted climbing expeditions to the once forbidden kingdom. Annapurna was the first 8000 m peak to fall—climbed in dramatic fashion by Maurice Herzog's French expedition in 1950. A British expedition finally succeeded on Everest in 1953, with Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay reaching the summit just in time for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Activity was not confined to the giants. Expeditions from Japan, North America and New Zealand joined those from Europe and Britain and peaks of 7000 m (23 000 ft) and higher fell at an exponential rate. In addition, there were still plenty of remote areas to explore for those with a geographical curiosity and a desire to climb a virgin 'lower' peak of 6100–6700 m (20 000–22 000 ft).

It was on one of these exploratory expeditions in 1957 that the next Australian set foot on a Himalayan mountain. In that year, the Imperial College Exploration Society sent an expedition to a remote area of the Karakoram, centred on a series of glaciers draining into the Siachen Glacier south-east of the area of high peaks dominated by K2, which was second only to Everest in height. With experts in geology, glaciology and surveying as members, it was one of the typical exploratory trips that were so valuable in accurately mapping previously unknown areas of the Himalaya (see image 3.1). In addition, the expedition hoped to make the first ascent of Peak K36 (Salto Kangri, 7740 m [25 400 ft]) via the K36 glacier.

The leader was Eric Shipton, who with Bill Tilman had elevated the exploratory/climbing expedition to a fine art. In addition to Shipton, five other English members and a Pakistani surveyor, the expedition included two Australians: Grahame Budd, an Australian doctor who was working in London, and Tasmanian Geoffrey Bratt, a surveyor (see image 3.2). Interestingly, the trip owed a little to the first Australian Himalayan mountaineer, George Finch, for it was Finch who first established the Imperial College Exploration Society in the early 1930s.

The club's 1957 Karakoram expedition was beset by problems from the outset. First, the Suez crisis threatened to scuttle the entire trip and in the event delayed by three weeks the arrival of the expedition's equipment. Then, Shipton's well-known preference for frugal expeditions that 'lived off the land' had several members wondering what they had got themselves into. Englishman Keith Miller reported some disquiet about the food just two weeks into the trip: 'At this stage the local

food was not tasting too good but who dared grumble when we could see the porters nibbling away at boiled chicken heads?’¹ Budd, on the other hand, found the food excellent—on the approach march and in the mountains.

Australians Bratt and Budd distinguished themselves by escaping from a couple of dangerous positions—one of their own making and one definitely not. Miller recalls Bratt’s bravado in doing a survey from the top of Tawiz Peak, a 6400 m (21 000 ft) mountain they had just climbed:

The summit was heavily corniced which necessitated volunteer Geoff, sitting on its very edge, complete with phototheodolite equipment, so that a 360 degree vision could be achieved. Whilst the cornice groaned Geoff did a first-class piece of work, and his sin of mishandling the loose rock during the ascent was readily forgiven.²

Budd, as well as Keith Miller, had narrow escapes from close encounters with hidden crevasses. Budd’s accident occurred on the return journey to the Siachen base camp. As Miller noted, ‘Reuniting with the party on the Lolofond we were told of Budd’s lucky escape from a crevasse—long outstretched hands had saved him... From now on, everyone moved in pairs with a rope between them wherever they went.’³

Escape from a black hole

Grahame Budd

My own mishap occurred when, at the start of our return journey from Siachen Base near the end of the expedition, Shipton and I were breaking trail for six laden porters to lay a dump four hours’ march up the Lolofond Glacier. Recent heavy snowfalls had so effectively filled the lower crevasses that we were travelling unroped. A few minutes before the end of my final lead, my right foot suddenly broke through into a hidden crevasse. I found myself sitting on my left leg, which was doubled under me on the near edge of the crevasse. My right leg was dangling down the crevasse and my body was sprawled across a large black hole, on the far side of which my right forearm and my ice axe spread my weight over the unbroken remainder of the snow bridge. Both crevasse walls were vertical and faded into blackness 40 feet below me. For the moment, I was secure enough, but any attempt to extricate myself would have broken the remnant of the snow bridge and sent me to the bottom.

I called to Shipton for help, and in the 10 seconds or so until he could reach me I gazed at the opposite wall 8 feet away, and pondered the vast airiness of the crevasse. Then Shipton arrived, I grabbed his extended ice axe with my left hand, and in a moment I was out. The porters arrived and dumped their loads, I photographed the hole, and we returned down the glacier—securely roped together.

For Geoff Bratt, the expedition had a most interesting fringe benefit. He and the veteran Shipton hit it off instantly, as both were very much interested in the exploration of unknown mountain ranges. Later in 1958 the pair was off to the wild mountains of Patagonia in South America.

1 Miller, K. J. 1958, ‘The Imperial College Karakoram expedition, 1957’, *Himalayan Journal*, vol. 21, pp. 71–9.

2 Ibid. G. Budd noted that Geoff would have been standing and was not on the very edge of the cornice—just close enough to see the required trig points.

3 Ibid.

Of the other members of the Imperial College expedition, Keith Miller was the most fascinated and intrigued by the spectacular Karakoram mountains—enough so to organise another trip to the same region in 1960. A mountain called K12 had fired Miller’s imagination. He and the two Australians had climbed a 22 500 ft (6860 m) mountain they called Island Peak and from the summit they could see the northern flanks of K12—24 370 ft (7430 m) high—and a large basin that sat below it. Miller was fascinated by this huge snow basin and the walls that retained it. His party was unable to explore it fully in 1957, so it and K12 became two of the primary objectives of the 1960 trip.

The 1960 Salto expedition, as it was called, again had an Australian connection, as Jon Stephenson, later Associate Professor in the Department of Geology, James Cook University, Townsville, was its leader. Like its 1957 predecessor, the Salto expedition nearly did not make it even to the Karakoram. The Pakistan Government initially denied permission for the expedition on the grounds that enough expedition permits had already been issued and the region’s resources could not sustain another group. Miller’s persistence paid off, as Stephenson recalled: ‘as a result of Miller’s insistence, every known string was being pulled and ten weeks later, through the support given to our re-application by the Australian High Commissioner in Karachi, we obtained a permit.’⁴ It would not be the last time Australian Government officials used diplomatic pressure to ensure that a permit was granted to Australian climbers.

For organiser Miller, the Salto expedition was not a very happy one. Shortly after leaving Skardu, the jumping-off point for the expedition, he contracted a severe case of dysentery and had to return to the Skardu Hospital. After recovering, he rejoined the main body of the expedition but was later knocked unconscious by a block of ice while receiving packs being lowered into a crevasse during a difficult crossing. He luckily escaped serious injury but was again forced to return to Skardu.

Stephenson, on the other hand, was having a most enjoyable and productive trip. In addition to his satisfying geological work (see image 3.3), he was thoroughly enjoying the spectacular scenery of the Salto Gorge, with its row upon row of magnificent rock towers and spires. As one of the two experienced mountaineers in the party, Stephenson had his share of climbing as well, particularly on the route to the pass north-west of K12, a route made difficult by an enormous crevasse that spanned the entire width of the glacier. It was in this chasm—the crossing of which was pioneered by Stephenson—that Miller suffered his unfortunate accident.

4 Stephenson, P. J. 1961, ‘The Salto expedition’, *Himalayan Journal*, vol. 23, pp. 71–9.

With the departure of Miller, Stephenson was left without an experienced partner for his attempt on K12. Nevertheless, he, American anthropologist J. P. Hurley and two porters, taking advantage of an unusually fine spell of weather, made an attempt on K12. After re-establishing themselves on the pass, they set to work on the south-west ridge, which rose towards the summit in a series of snow and ice buttresses. The initial climbing was made difficult by the fact that neither of the porters had crampons, so Stephenson had to painstakingly cut steps in the ice under the overlying crusted snow. They pushed on to nearly 20 700 ft (6310 m), where space was found for their one small tent. Just before reaching that point, the inexperienced Hurley had decided to descend with one of the porters and leave the other, Mohammed Choo, to continue in his place. Choo and Stephenson were rewarded with a magical sunset: ‘The view was fantastic, the wilderness of peaks, spires and ridges being picked out in their incredible succession by the setting sun.’⁵

The next morning the pair continued up, sometimes traversing out onto the icefields of the upper part of K12’s west face. By late morning, however, Choo was feeling the effects of altitude and exertion and decided to wait while Stephenson continued on alone. From that point—about 22 000 ft (6710 m)—Stephenson continued up the firm snow of the face for another four hours. By then, though, he had reached only 23 000 ft (7000 m) and had nearly 1500 more feet (450 m) to go. It became obvious that he would not reach the summit for some time. As he later said, ‘I ran out of support (and energy!)—the technicalities were passed.’ Still Stephenson was not unhappy with his effort:

I had the thrill of looking down into the south and southeast sides of K12 which I believe no one has previously seen, and to my delight observed that the published map details of much of this country are entirely incorrect. It was easy to turn back for I was extremely tired and the summit would still have been four hours away.⁶

In an uncanny similarity to George Finch’s attempt on Everest in 1922, Jon Stephenson had teamed with an inexperienced climber and a porter to mount a serious attempt on K12. He very nearly became the first Australian to climb a major Himalayan peak and he was the first Australian to climb to 7000 m without the aid of supplementary oxygen (see image 3.4).

Another three years passed before Australia was again linked with the Himalaya, but this time the roles were reversed. The expedition was mounted from Australian shores, but its leader was an Englishman, Peter Taylor. His was one of the more bizarre expeditions ever to travel to the Himalaya. It was undoubtedly the smallest and quickest expedition to make a first ascent, its training program had been

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

conducted on the sand dunes and in the searing heat of the Australian outback and its execution was bedevilled by logistical headaches of the nightmarish proportions usually associated with large Everest expeditions.

Taylor was an itinerant geologist, a man short of stature but blessed with an engaging personality that charmed the ladies and got him into, and subsequently out of, predicaments of varying seriousness with officialdom around the world. He had done some mountaineering in Europe and Canada, but his only experience with high altitude came when, working in Brazil, he managed to talk his way onto a 1961 German expedition to Aconcagua—at nearly 23 000 ft (7000 m), the highest mountain outside the Himalaya. By the time Taylor reached base camp at 14 000 ft (4270 m), however, bad weather had forced the Germans off the mountain.

The abortive Aconcagua trip had nevertheless sown the seed of high-altitude mountaineering in Taylor's mind, so, when he was transferred from Brazil to Australia a few weeks later, he firmly set his sights on a Himalayan trip in 1963. He wisely used his 1962 Christmas break to make a climbing trip to New Zealand, where even his considerable gift of the gab was not enough to convince the head ranger at Mt Cook National Park to allow him to attempt Mt Cook itself. Taylor settled for some of the lesser snow and ice climbs in the Cook region, and even then he was impressed with the seriousness of the undertakings compared with the climbs he had done in Europe and Canada. It was those difficult, and often dangerous, conditions of New Zealand's Southern Alps that had so thoroughly prepared Edmund Hillary and the climbers of his generation for the Himalaya and would play a crucial role in the development of Australia's Himalayan mountaineers.

Nearly all of Taylor's preparation, however, took place at his work site along the Birdsville Track at the southern edge of the Simpson Desert. It would be hard to imagine a more inappropriate place to train for a Himalayan climb. As Taylor himself remarked: 'here I am in a country that's dead flat, so hot that even the birds have quit flying, and we're about two hundred feet above sea-level. It's a great combination.'⁷ Of his training regime on the dunes of the Simpson Desert, he said:

I loaded seventy pounds of the stuff [sand] into my pack, and the first time out I managed to stagger about four hundred yards with it. A week later I was able to manage a couple of miles without too much exhaustion. At five o'clock every evening it became a ritual. Pack hoisted, I set off across the flats to the same old dunes every night. At the same half-way mark I stopped for a few minutes, wiped off the perspiration, and swatted away at the clouds of flies. Then the march back, a quick shower, and into the mess trailer for tea at six.⁸

7 Taylor, P. 1964, *Coopers Creek to Langtang II*, Rigby, Adelaide, ch. 3.

8 *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

Taylor's choice of mountain in the Himalaya was dictated by timing. He had six weeks of leave, beginning on 20 April, which would put his expedition just near the end of the normal climbing season in the Nepalese Himalaya. That season is dictated by the monsoon, which dumps snow on the mountains from June through to September and makes climbing difficult and dangerous during that period. The generally warm period leading up to the monsoon, during April and May, is considered the best in which to attempt the higher peaks. A further constraint was the length of time; six weeks was long enough only for an attempt on a relatively low peak close to Kathmandu. Taylor settled on a 21 592 ft (6583 m) mountain in the Langtang region just north of Kathmandu. He later learned that it was called Langtang II.

Difficulties immediately arose when Taylor discovered that Langtang II was not on the Nepalese Ministry of Tourism's list of peaks officially open to foreign expeditions. That was an insurmountable problem for an ordinary mortal, but the slick Taylor was equal to the challenge. A few letters with just the right amounts of authoritative presumptuousness, gentle pleading and demurring politeness and that tough nut was cracked.

In comparison, the other major problem—Taylor had no-one to climb with—was trivial. He simply mounted a one-man expedition and, through a contact in Kathmandu, organised Sherpas to climb with and porters to carry the loads to base camp.

Theoretically, a one-man expedition should be the easiest of all to organise. Even Shipton and Tilman, those paragons of parsimony, might have considered it just a bit small. When April 1963 finally arrived, however, the one-man Langtang II expedition was beset with a series of bureaucratic bungles from which even the fast-talking Taylor had trouble extricating himself.

He arrived in Kathmandu on 25 April, just as planned, but found that his gear had not followed him:

One of my travelling-bags had been unloaded by error in Rangoon and had been impounded by Customs there. A case containing my few items of equipment was still in the Port of Calcutta, as my agent there had omitted to tell me of such refinements as import licences, bonds and the like. He assumed I knew it all. I assumed he knew it all. I returned to Calcutta to untangle this lot while my Sherpas went sight-seeing in the Kathmandu Valley.⁹

9 Taylor, P. 1964, 'Langtang Himalaya', *Himalayan Journal*, vol. 25, pp. 69–76.

Taylor's 'lamentable catalogue of follies and frustrations' continued when he tried to clear his supplies through Nepalese customs:

The customs officer at the airport in Kathmandu shook his head and looked apologetic. 'I am very sorry, Mr Taylor, but I cannot permit you to bring this food into Nepal.' He was referring to some of my high altitude rations, clearly marked DEHYDRATED BEEF STEW. I had forgotten that the eating of beef is contrary to religious custom in Nepal. My *faux pas* would require delicate handling... In the end I got my rations, but only after signing—under bond—a lengthy declaration to the effect that not in any circumstances would I offer the beef stew to the Nepalese.¹⁰

After clearing that hurdle, Taylor quickly tried to patch over the problem by chatting up the customs officer, but 'the camaraderie was short-lived; a few minutes later he [the customs officer] plunged his hand into a pile of sweaters—and also into a gooey mess of honey, which had run out of a damaged carton'.¹¹

Somehow Taylor survived the problems of Nepalese officialdom—usually the most severe encountered on an expedition to Nepal—but he lost valuable time in the process. He had planned to be at base camp about 1 May, but did not even get away from Kathmandu until 18 May. The march in took only four days, but even at that he was starting his expedition dangerously close to the time that the monsoon could break.

After his previous tribulations, his successful ascent of Langtang II was almost anticlimactic. He had no choice but to attack the mountain in a single, immediate push with no prior period of acclimatisation; he climbed from the valley floor at 6000 ft (1830 m) to the 21 592 ft (6583 m) summit in a remarkable five days. Not surprisingly, he suffered badly from altitude sickness. Fortunately, the route was technically straightforward, although Taylor had one tense moment when 'I wandered on to the South ridge by mistake. The visibility was poor and the sudden realisation that I was near the sheer west face made me draw back in a hurry. There was a nasty void in the swirling mist a few feet ahead.'¹² Taylor was suffering badly, possibly from the first symptoms of pulmonary oedema, on the morning of 23 May when he and Pasang Sherpa climbed from a high camp to the summit. He was barely able to descend the mountain under his own steam.

On his return to Kathmandu, Taylor quickly found himself on the expedition cocktail circuit. Before leaving for Langtang, he had befriended Sally Dyhrenfurth, wife of the leader of a large American expedition that succeeded in making the first traverse of Mt Everest—that is, climbing the mountain by one route and descending

¹⁰ Taylor, *Coopers Creek to Langtang II*, ch. 1

¹¹ *Ibid.*, ch. 1.

¹² Taylor, 'Langtang Himalaya'.

by another. Mrs Dyhrenfurth appeared more excited by Taylor's one-man show than by the history-making achievement of her husband's team and invited Taylor to the big American celebration. Taylor was impressed:

It was a great evening; an evening of cigars, Scotch and sodas, gin and tonics, handsome and intelligent men, and their attractive wives. The smoke bothered my lungs a bit, and I had a few coughing fits. The ladies clucked with sympathy, and I felt like a wounded soldier back from the front.¹³

As usual, Peter Taylor had landed firmly on his feet.

Buoyed by his success on Langtang II, Taylor was back in the Himalaya in 1964. He had many of the same Sherpas who had been with him the previous year and also Graham Homan, who had been his base camp manager. He boosted the climbing strength of his party by adding Mary Boyle and George Petley, the latter whom Taylor described as 'an Australian of the "let's 'ave a go" school'.¹⁴ This time the objective was Langtang Lirung: at 23 770 ft (7247 m), the highest peak in the Langtang Himal. Taylor and his party were, however, clearly out of their depth. They quickly retreated after making a short trip up the lower sections of the daunting South-West Ridge and returned to Kathmandu without making any further attempts on the mountain.

More than a decade passed before another Australian was a member of a Himalayan expedition. By then the Himalayan climbing game had changed dramatically. All of the 8000 m peaks had been climbed and many of those between 7500 m and 8000 m had also succumbed to the onslaught of expeditions. In many ways, however, the challenge of climbing in the Himalaya had just begun. Most of the giants had been climbed, but, quite naturally, by the easiest route possible. There still remained an almost limitless number of knife-edged ridges, mixed rock and ice buttresses, massive faces and long high-altitude traverses to be done. By the 1970s, it was this group of 'problems' that increasingly received the attention of ambitious climbers.

The 1975 New Zealand Jannu expedition was a trip very much in the modern mould, as its objective was a route up the steep North Face of Jannu, a 7710 m peak near Kangchenjunga in eastern Nepal. The expedition marked the entry into Himalayan climbing of a new generation of New Zealand mountaineers, following about 10 or so years after a number of Sir Edmund Hillary-led expeditions had made first ascents of several smaller mountains in the Everest region. The Jannu team, led by veteran guide Peter Farrell, comprised many of the best young New Zealand climbers. One of these was Geoff Wyatt, who, despite having lived in New Zealand for a number of years and having been closely associated with New Zealand mountaineering, was in fact an Australian.

¹³ Taylor, *Coopers Creek to Langtang II*, ch. 12.

¹⁴ Taylor, p. 1966, 'Langtang Lirung, 1964', *Himalayan Journal*, vol. 27, pp. 141–3.

Born and raised in Tasmania, Wayatt got his start in climbing on the Organ Pipes, a rock outcrop high on the slopes of Mt Wellington overlooking Hobart. The mid-1960s found him in New Zealand, where he teamed with some other Tasmanians to climb the north buttress of Mt Darwin, a big-rock route in the Mt Cook region. After his first New Zealand trip, however, Wayatt did not retreat to the warm Australian rock, as did many of his countrymen, but rather stayed on more or less permanently and quickly established himself in the Mt Cook climbing scene.

In the late 1960s, he worked as a guide for Alpine Instruction Limited Mt Cook, one of the first of the professional mountaineering schools and guiding services that were being established in New Zealand. Even in those days, Wayatt took a keen interest in skiing and anticipated by several years the acceptance of ski-mountaineering as a sport in its own right in New Zealand. By 1973, he had established his own school, Mountain Recreation, based in Wanaka and operating in the Mt Aspiring region. He did not, however, confine his activity to New Zealand. He also worked as a heliski guide in Canada, picking up valuable experience in judging snow conditions and the susceptibility of slopes to avalanche, and also made the first ascent of the east face of Nevado Huascarán, the highest mountain in the Peruvian Andes. By the time the Jannu team was selected, Wayatt had become so well known as one of New Zealand's leading alpinists that hardly anyone suspected him of being an Australian!

The Jannu team had certainly taken on an enormous task with the North Face route: two vertical kilometres of steep, dangerous and difficult climbing. The bottom section up the face—a rock buttress dubbed the ‘Wall of Shadows’—was difficult enough, but above it lay extensive fields of steep ice and snow, interrupted about halfway by a line of ice cliffs that frequently sent blocks of ice crashing down the face. The danger was severe enough that some climbers decided not to go above the buttress and in fact the whole expedition reached something of an impasse as the team's morale plummeted when faced with the ice cliffs.

Wayatt and partner Jim Strang broke the crisis by making an ‘alpine-style’ push virtually all the way up the North Face. Alpine-style climbing—rapidly increasing in popularity in the Himalaya—is the antithesis of the siege-style attacks used in earlier Himalayan expeditions. In an alpine-style ascent, climbers simply put everything they need—tents, food, fuel, clothing and climbing gear—on their backs and set out from the bottom of the mountain to push for the summit in one concerted effort. It is much quicker and requires much less gear and supplies than the siege approach, but it also means that there is no string of camps already set up in case something goes wrong high on the mountain. It therefore places much more emphasis on the skill, determination and stamina of the individual climbers.

An alpine-style approach to Jannu's North Face made sense. Wayatt and Strang were both very strong climbers and making a single push for the top meant that they would have to pass under the menacing ice cliffs only once on the ascent and once

on the descent, rather than having to make repeated carries under them. Despite some dangerous moments, the tactic nearly worked. The pair reached a point near the bottom of the cliffs the first day and traversed under them as quickly as they could on the morning of the second (see image 3.5). By the end of that day, they were well above the cliffs and onto the upper part of the face. On the third day, Strang made a solo climb to within 100 m of the summit ridge but, with Wayatt still back in the tent suffering from fatigue and a sleepless night, Strang wisely backed off and the pair descended.

Although Wayatt and Strang did not reach the summit, they had broken the psychological barrier. A second team then made an attempt, taking a somewhat different line up the face, but they ran out of steam on the summit ridge as cold wind threatened them with frostbite, so they retreated. The New Zealanders did not reach the summit of Jannu, but they had shown plenty of courage and determination in scaling the North Face.

Geoff Wayatt's climb on Jannu was harder, steeper and more dangerous than any Himalayan climbing previously undertaken by Australians. It marked Australia's first link with the new style of severe technical climbing in the Himalaya. In many other respects, however, it followed the earlier pattern of Australian involvement in the Himalaya, particularly that of George Finch: a climber of Australian birth who lived and climbed in another country and who was the lone Australian in a foreign expedition.

If Wayatt's only contribution to Australian climbing in the Himalaya had been his participation in the Jannu expedition, he would have had no more impact than Finch or Peter Taylor. Through the training of many novice Australian climbers in his Mountain Recreation School in Wanaka, however, Wayatt was to have an important influence on Australian Himalayan mountaineering.

On the North Face of Jannu

Geoff Wayatt

Jim led the way, clawing up steep gullies of ice and endless ridges of powder snow. The wind gusts would pin us to the face, then after a momentary lull it would swing and attempt to whip us away. Our faces were continually battered by ice pellets. It was 4.30 p.m. when we hauled ourselves onto the first flat spot in nine hours (see image 3.6). We'd eaten nothing all day and were exhausted. With a lot of effort we levelled a site, pitched the tent and stumbled inside. Jammed inside our sleeping bags and cramped by equipment, we found our stove failed to ignite. Brand new and tested 750 m lower, the faulty stove now meant we were without hot liquids. We drank some water which we had carried, ate some sardines and dozed off to sleep. The night for me was sleepless, resulting from fatigue, the altitude and the strong winds battering our tent.

In the morning, all I could think of was more sleep, so I swallowed two sleeping tablets. Disturbed by my snoring, Jim decided to look for a better campsite. Six hours later he returned after a solo climb to within 100 m of the summit ridge. While he was away, I spent two hours fiddling with the primus and managed one and a half cups of warm water. Our dehydration was becoming serious, for without liquid we could eat no food.

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That night the storm increased in intensity and threatened to collapse the tent. The air space became so restricted I was forced to sleep with my head in the tent entrance; in the morning I was covered with snow.

It was suicidal to remain high on the face any longer. We had to retreat.

Getting dressed for temperatures of -20 degrees C was an ordeal, and I eventually had to wait outside the tent for Jim. Already my hands were becoming numb; the delay was unbearable but I resisted hurrying him. Finally, stiff with cold, I led off, trailing the rope. Three metres from the tent I tripped and plummeted towards the valley. Jim had yet to tie on and watched me slide helpless through our toilet area down the steepening snow slope. Suddenly my leg jammed in a crevasse and I was spun headfirst downhill, screaming in agony and struggling to relieve the tension from my leg. Jamming my ice axe into the slope for balance I regained my footing then without hesitation I turned and clambered out of sight around a steep ice bulge. Thinking that I'd become deranged, and that I might trip again, Jim thrust his ice axe into the slope and belayed me.

For the first few rope lengths we moved singly until our muscles had loosened. We only had one set of mitts each. Jim's had become wet, so I lent him my spare pair. We backed down the face steadily, gripping the axes firmly while the ever-present wind poured snow onto our hands, feet and faces. Two hours later we ran the gauntlet under the ice cliffs to the sunny calmness of the crevasse camp. From 'Then the mountain took control...', *New Zealand Alpine Journal*, vol. 29 (1976), pp. 16-17.

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