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A powerful partnership

The emergence of Tim Macartney-Snape and Lincoln Hall from the Dunagiri expedition as a potent climbing partnership followed a long-established Himalayan pattern—that of a well-matched pair pulling off remarkable mountaineering feats. In 1978, the same year that Macartney-Snape and Hall succeeded on Dunagiri, the Austrian combination of Reinhold Messner and Peter Habeler stunned the international mountaineering community by climbing Everest without artificial oxygen. A strong English partnership, Joe Tasker and Peter Boardman, got their start on Changabang, a mountain just next-door to Dunagiri, and went on to achieve a string of impressive successes. Well before any of those pairs was established, Eric Shipton and Bill Tilman, in nearly 20 years of climbing together, had become arguably the most prolific mountain explorers of all time.

Thus, in mountaineering, two is the optimal number. Although many of the highest Himalayan peaks, including Everest, have now been climbed solo—that is, by climbers operating entirely on their own—it is far more common for mountaineers to rope together in pairs. Even in the largest expeditions, where the climbers might number 15 or 20, the climbing itself is often done by pairs climbing in turn, not by larger groups.

The reason for the predominance of twosomes is partly practical. When mountaineers encounter difficult or dangerous terrain where a fall becomes more than a remote possibility, they usually climb one at a time, one out in front and the other, anchored to the mountain, paying out the rope while always alert to hold a possible fall. In such situations, a solo climber has absolutely no margin of safety while three climbers on a rope are considerably slower than two. On big mountains, speed, without undue haste, means safety.

In the case of the most successful and long-lasting partnerships, the psychological reasons are undoubtedly more important than the practical ones. Roping up with someone else on a big and potentially dangerous mountain is not a decision to be taken casually. You are literally putting your life in someone else's hands. A mistake by one of a roped pair often means the death of two climbers instead of one.

In Himalayan climbing, there is another side to the psychological aspect. Just the harshness of the day-to-day existence at high altitude can strain any relationship. Having to endure days of stormy weather in a cramped snow cave, to fiddle with a recalcitrant stove when you are dehydrated and exhausted and it is your turn to cook and to face together the very real dangers of avalanche or altitude sickness will test the best of friendships. It is when two competent climbers share a similar outlook and philosophy on mountaineering but have complementary personality traits that the most dynamic and successful partnerships are formed.

Messner and Habeler were an example of a pair that achieved some phenomenal successes but broke apart prematurely because they clashed with rather than complemented one another in one important personality trait: they were both extremely competitive. In fact, even on the trek to the base of a mountain, they would often become involved in quite serious foot races over the steep paths. That might have been good for conditioning, but it probably added considerable unwanted pressure to a relationship that would be stressed enough just from the rigours of Himalayan climbing. So, although Messner and Habeler did some brilliant climbing together—in addition to Everest, they made a lightning-quick 10-hour ascent of the infamous north wall of the Eiger in the Alps—they split apart soon after their 1978 success.

Tasker and Boardman, on the other hand, were the ideal team. At the time they got together for their first Himalayan trip as a partnership—to Changabang in 1976—Boardman was much better established than Tasker as a high-altitude climber. Nevertheless, Tasker sensed Boardman was the right person when he was looking for a partner for the Changabang trip:

But it was not these things [his climbing record] which made Pete in my eyes the right person to ask about Changabang. It was not the record of achievements that I saw in him but the attitude of mind that I sensed. With some people it is not necessary to have climbed in their company to know that they are of the same inclination and share the same spirit as oneself.¹

Tasker's intuitive choice of Boardman as the ideal climbing partner proved to be the right one. Although their plans to climb the west face of 6864 m Changabang—an unrelentingly steep wall of granite often made even more treacherous by coatings of ice and snow—were considered outrageously difficult by many in

1 Tasker, J. 1982, *Savage Arena*, Methuen, London, ch. 4.

the mountaineering community at that time, they nevertheless pulled it off. The partnership quickly blossomed, as they climbed together in British expeditions to K2, the world's second-highest mountain, in 1978 and 1980, and were members of small groups that made first ascents of Kongur, a 7719 m peak in western China, and the North Ridge of Kangchenjunga, the world's third-highest mountain. In all these expeditions, the complementary personalities of the outgoing and gregarious Boardman and the taciturn Tasker, who had studied to become a monk before he took up climbing, were undoubtedly crucial in getting them through many days and nights of danger, discomfort and extreme deprivation. Tragically, the Tasker–Boardman partnership ended abruptly in 1982 when the pair disappeared on the then unclimbed North-East Ridge of Everest. They were last seen at a height of more than 8200 m on a push for the summit.

The quintessential mountaineering partnership, however, has to be that of Eric Shipton and Bill Tilman. The two first climbed together in 1930 in East Africa, where Shipton had established himself as an immigrant farmer. In addition to the well-known volcanic peaks of Kilimanjaro and Kenya, they climbed in the ice-clad Ruwenzori Range. Then, over the next 18 years, they climbed and explored in some of the most spectacular and least-known mountainous areas of the world: trips into the Nanda Devi and Badrinath Ranges in the Indian Himalaya, two expeditions to the Tibetan side of Everest, an exploratory journey through remote areas of the Karakoram Range in Pakistan and China, and several trips to the high mountains of western China while Shipton was the British Consul at Kashgar.

During many of those journeys, they were undoubtedly under considerable mental stress as they were operating in areas that had not been mapped and, indeed, had not been visited by any previous explorers. Often they set out up gorges for which no exit was known and headed for high, glaciated cols that sometimes offered only hideously steep, broken ice cliffs for the descent on the other side. The physical deprivations were just as severe. On one trip, they ran out of food while still deep in the mountains and had to subsist on bamboo shoots for days before forcing their way through thick forest to the nearest village. Through 18 years of this sort of travel, there was reportedly only one serious disagreement between the two, which broke out when Shipton wanted to take two shirts instead of one on a four-month expedition and Tilman thought it an unnecessary extravagance.

The partnership of Tim Macartney-Snape and Lincoln Hall showed elements of these other, more well-known Himalayan pairings. In addition, they clearly represent the two strands of outdoor activity from which Australia's high-altitude mountaineers are drawn. Macartney-Snape was an 'all-rounder', an outdoorsman competent in a wide range of activities, including bushwalking, canoeing and skiing. For him, climbing was almost an extension of bushwalking, just on steeper and more difficult terrain. Hall, on the other hand, was a dedicated and highly skilled rock climber before broadening his horizons to include alpine climbing.

Hall was something of a rarity on the Dunagiri expedition of the ANU Mountaineering Club (ANUMC): he was one of only two Canberra-born and bred members of the team (the other was Ken Baldwin). It was in secondary school in Canberra that Hall had his start in rock climbing:

A friend had been rockclimbing once or twice with the Phys. Ed. teacher at school. One day he suggested that I join them. I didn't know anything about it. It was a case of not having anything better to do. So why not?

I certainly didn't take to it naturally. Gymnastics I had done as a kid helped but didn't stop me from being scared silly. What was I scared of? The usual thing, Death. Here I was in my jeans and T-shirt and jeans jacket dressed as if I was going for a stroll in the bush. And there in the mist was this wall of granite hundreds of metres high. Awe-inspiring. Well anyway, quite enough to start with.

The climb we did in the morning was straightforward enough, but the afternoon's problem was a different story. We did three pitches [rope-lengths, climbed first by the leader and then the beginner at the other end of the rope]. On the last pitch we went up a vertical face that fortunately had very big hand holds. It started to rain, and my hands very quickly became cold and nearly useless, while the rock became dangerously slippery. I was more or less hauled up, which meant putting my faith in the rope. That's when I decided that I would stick to hockey.

The following weekend this same friend wanted to go rockclimbing again. Again I went along, just because I wasn't doing anything else. Once at the cliff we heard that only the day before someone had fallen off this same rockface and been killed.

We did some good climbs, the weather was good and I enjoyed myself. If I hadn't gone that second time, I don't think I would ever have done it again.²

Hall was only fifteen at the time and the physical education teacher who took him on his first climb was Norm Booth, a talkative, elf-like character who clambered over rocks as though he was born to climb them. Booth was one of the veterans of the ACT rock-climbing scene and he knew all the cliffs and crags of the territory as well as anyone.

After those first few weekends, as Hall recalled,

it was a matter of going as often as we could talk Norm into it. He was our transport. Before long I was climbing at the same standard as Norm, which was good because this meant that he was no longer having to climb below his ability in order to encourage beginners.³

2 Sheppard, T. 1984, 'Lincoln Hall. Everest mountaineer', *Australian Adventurers*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, pp. 3–14.

3 Ibid.

Not much later, Hall was able to do first ascents, which most rock climbers aspired to as the ultimate stage in their development. A beginner climber usually climbs as a 'second'—that is, he climbs up on the end of a tight rope being taken in by the leader, who has already climbed the pitch and is firmly attached to the rock above. Thus, a fall is of little consequence; the second simply dangles on the end of the rope, rests a bit and has another go.

After a climber has become comfortable seconding climbs, it is time to begin leading them. A lead climber ascends the rock first, taking the rope up behind. A leader arranges 'protection' in case of a fall by slotting metal nuts into cracks in the rock and attaching the rope via carabiners (snap-links) to create a pulley-like system. Placing protection depends on natural weaknesses in the rock and the skill of the climber. Obviously, places for protection are not always available precisely where the climber would like to place nuts, so leading a climb can be a serious business. A fall by a leader, if well above the last piece of protection, can result in severe injury or occasionally death.

The final step in a rock climber's development is to do 'first ascents'—that is, to climb a patch of rock that no-one else has climbed. First ascents are much more difficult mentally than recognised climbs, for which a guidebook provides a description of the route and a judgment of the difficulty. No such psychological crutch is available on a first ascent, where the lead climber can suddenly find himself in a delicate situation when he runs into unexpected difficulties. That Hall so quickly became competent at doing first ascents was testament to his skill as a rock climber.

Many of the first ascents that Hall and his partners put up were on Orroral Ridge, in the mountainous country south-west of Canberra. Orroral Ridge is a long, heavily wooded ridge littered with a number of small granite outcrops and a few single, free-standing monoliths. Its climbs are noted for their short but very steep character and its rock for its very coarse, sharp and crystalline nature, which often makes the climbing rather painful. The names of some of the climbs with which Hall was involved were indicative of the toughness of Orroral Ridge climbing: 'Manic Depression', 'Psychadelia', 'Lincoln's Lament' and the spectacular crack line 'Vertigo'. All in all, Hall had a hand in 26 first ascents during the early 1970s.

By the time he entered The Australian National University, Hall had become one of the best climbers in the Australian Capital Territory. Academic life did not, however, seem to slow his very active climbing lifestyle. In addition to climbing at Booroomba Rocks and other ACT crags virtually every weekend, Hall found novel ways to train during the week.

[M]y friends and I would practise on buildings on campus. I started on the library and the shop next to it and moved on to the back of the post office. That was good, with plenty of difficult problems. Unfortunately sometimes there were cars parked right up against the bottom of the wall that prevented me from starting. Also, I tended to get an audience and that was a trifle distracting. The retaining wall of the physics building down by Lake Burley Griffin was my favourite. It posed some very hard problems.⁴

Hall joined the ANUMC and it was through the club that he was introduced to alpine climbing: 'A few of my friends in the club had gone over to New Zealand to climb mountains and came back saying that they'd had a good time and that I should go too. Again it was a matter of, well, why not? Nothing better to do. So off I went.'⁵

The many pitfalls of making the transition from Australian rock climbing to New Zealand alpine climbing were by then very well understood, so Hall followed the established pattern and did a week-long course with Geoff Wyatt's Mountain Recreation at Mt Aspiring before attempting a few of the standard, less-difficult climbs in the Mt Cook region.

I had rather the same reaction to my first attempts at mountaineering as I did to the rockclimbing. When I came back to Australia, I thought about it and decided that I would at least give it another go. This I did the following season. By then I had finished uni and I was able to spend about three months climbing in New Zealand. In between I cycled around in the country. I made three attempts to climb Mt Cook, and I enjoyed it all apart from one near disaster that taught me twice as much as the climbing course had the year before.⁶

For two of those attempts on Mt Cook, Hall's partner was John Finnigan, a veteran Canberra climber and one of Australia's best all-round mountaineers. The pair had planned a very ambitious outing: starting from Plateau Hut, they would first ascend Mt Cook by the seldom-climbed Bowie Ridge, traverse the mile-long summit ridge, descend to Empress Hut on the other side of the mountain, then climb the steep South Face of Mt Hicks—one of the most demanding ice climbs in the Southern Alps. The plan required that they carry heavy packs with all their gear as they climbed the difficult Bowie Ridge, traversed the summit ridge and then descended.

Finnigan recalled:

We climbed the Bowie Ridge all right, but when we got to the summit icecap, we met Gary Ball [a New Zealand mountain guide] and his client, who had turned back. Gary said that the ice was soft and treacherous and also it looked like the weather was about to break, so we turned back.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

A few days later we attempted Cook again, this time by the East Face/Zurbriggen's Ridge route. Again we got to the top of the ridge and were just below the summit when the weather broke. This time it was a full-blown nor'wester, and as we came down the Linda Shelf, gusts of wind would literally lift us up and blow us across the snow. It was a pretty frightening descent.⁷

After that second New Zealand trip, Hall had a very good idea of what alpine climbing was all about:

Climbing mountains is different from climbing rocks. I enjoy the technical difficulties of rockclimbing. The applied gymnastics. But with mountains, because it's more dangerous, there has to be more commitment. You can't just go out for the weekend and if the weather turns nasty, abseil off and go to the pub. When there's a thousand metres of steep ice in every direction and you start having second thoughts you just have to push them out of your mind.⁸

Lincoln Hall was well on his way to making the transition, in skills and attitude, from rock climber to alpine climber. By the time the ANUMC was planning its expedition to Dunagiri, Hall was perhaps the most promising of the young climbers and almost certainly the most skilled rock climber of the entire team. For Tim Macartney-Snape, on the other hand, the journey to Dunagiri took a very different path.

Born in 1956 to Australian and British parents, Macartney-Snape spent the first 12 years of his life on a farm in the southern highlands of Tanzania, which was then the British colony of Tanganyika. Almost from its very beginnings, his life in East Africa was shaping Macartney-Snape's attitudes towards adventure and risk and was equipping him with the mental toughness that later served him so well in many long and dangerous sojourns in the mountains.

I spent the first 12 years of my life in Africa's south-east highlands in what was an idyllic setting. I would not have swapped that part of my life for anyone else's; yet I was to gradually find out that it was quite different from the lives of other kids of my race and generation. In fact it was much more like the lives of their parents and grandparents.

I found out that we lacked many things that others took for granted. For a start, we had no electricity or plumbing. Snakes and spiders used to regularly drop out of the grass ceiling of our house. At night we heard the noises of wild animals, some of them certainly dangerous to little boys. The nearest hospital was a four-hour drive along a gravel road. We had no telephone or radio and no medical insurance.

These would no doubt be thought of as disadvantaged conditions, but I can assure you they were quite the opposite. I was being brought up in about as natural a way as a settled existence could allow, well supplied with attention from my parents and,

⁷ J. J. Finnigan, Interview.

⁸ Sheppard, 'Lincoln Hall. Everest mountaineer', ch. 1.

thanks to modern medical knowledge, free from most illnesses. It was an upbringing very close to that which has accompanied the evolution of the human species over millions of years.

My father was a lover of trees and planted over half a million eucalypts on our farm. I was an avid climber of trees...and given quite regularly to falling out of them. Doing things like climbing trees was as important to my development as having my mother teach me to read. It made me rely on myself, and raw experience was a far more effective teacher than any number of words. It was an upbringing that encouraged me to take responsibility for myself and taught me the value of taking calculated risks, elements I think are sadly missing from the way most children are brought up today.⁹

Although Macartney-Snape's climbing experience as a boy in East Africa was limited to trees, he soon had his sights set on much bigger things: 'Our school was right below a 14,000-foot volcano. I used to look out the window at it. I always wanted to see what it was like on top, but, unfortunately, I never got the chance.'¹⁰ Like the first Australian Himalayan mountaineer, George Ingle Finch, Macartney-Snape decided from an early age that he would like to see the world from on top.

When Tim was twelve, his parents migrated to Australia. He was enrolled in Geelong Grammar School and, when he was fifteen, he spent a year at Timbertop, Geelong Grammar's outdoor education centre in the Victorian mountains. That sort of educational environment suited Macartney-Snape perfectly and, in addition to developing skills such as bushwalking and cross-country skiing, his year's experience at Timbertop reinforced his self-reliance and sense of personal responsibility.

It was a stroke of genius on the part of the school to let students loose in some of Australia's most rugged mountain terrain. We all grew tremendously from that year in the bush. One of the most important lessons was that we could actually look after ourselves, virtually independent of the sheltered world we were brought up in. Being responsible for ourselves made us feel more alive, gave us a sense of purpose and gave more meaning and enjoyment to what we did. It was amazing how much easier it was to coax aching muscles to keep on climbing a steep hill, when going to that hill was our own idea.¹¹

A few years later, Macartney-Snape enrolled as a forestry student at The Australian National University. During Orientation Week, he found his way to the stall of the now-rejuvenated ANUMC.

9 Macartney-Snape, T. 1990, 'Taking personal responsibility', *Australian Geographic*, no. 17 (January–March), p. 31.

10 T. Macartney-Snape, Interview.

11 Macartney-Snape, 'Taking personal responsibility'.

‘I walked past the Mountaineering Club display and saw some photos of people climbing and stopped to have a look. It was something I had always wanted to try. A very enthusiastic, very young-looking bloke started telling me about climbing and I signed up.’¹²

The young bloke was Lincoln Hall, who was already becoming one of the top rock climbers in the Canberra region.

It was not in rock climbing, however, that Macartney-Snape first made his mark in the club. Rather, he quickly established a reputation for generous amounts of energy and enthusiasm, as Steve Colman, another of his good friends in the ANUMC and a future partner in the outdoor adventure company Wilderness Expeditions, recalled:

The ANU Mountaineering Club used to run beginners’ ski trips. We organised one of these trips up to the Snowies [Snowy Mountains]. With the typical heavy nights that one would have, early morning starts were often neglected. There we were, after a late night at the pub, sunrise at Island Bend, and suddenly there was this noise of someone walking through camp banging a billy. It was Tim, with his Timbertop-style approach to things, trying to get us up to go skiing. The howls of abuse had him sulking back to his tent.¹³

Macartney-Snape’s remarkable stamina and energy, for which he was later very well known, were also evident, according to Colman, in the early ANUMC days:

The thing about Tim is that he has a superb physiology. On skis or walking, he’s a dynamo. He doesn’t know the meaning of the words ‘slow down’. I found it good, as amongst the people I skied with, I was probably the strongest and most able-bodied skier. Tim’s coming onto the scene allowed me to push a bit harder, as Tim and I used to find quite severe slopes to ski down. That opened up a whole new era of skiing at Kosciuszko, in terms of telemark skiing and cross-country/downhill skiing.

Out of that core network from the Mountaineering Club emerged the renaissance of the telemark in Australia as a functional turn. We were doing things that made people think twice—we were skiing down the pipeline at Guthega Power Station and off Watsons Crag. This was the era when the general feeling about cross-country skiing was that you just walked around on the skis. If you did a stem-christie, then that was about it. It was bushwalkers heading out on skis, whereas we saw ourselves as skiers. We had discovered a way of putting a lot of excitement into it.

As for Tim’s energy, it nearly got us into trouble once. One of the first times we went out to ski Watsons Crag, Tim and I had arranged to meet at Blue Lake. He said, ‘I’ll bring all the food and stoves, and we’ll meet at mid-afternoon.’ So I skied in about mid-afternoon, but there was no Tim. All I had was a bar of chocolate, nothing else. I didn’t bring a tent, as Tim said he would supply that too. Luckily

¹² T. Macartney-Snape, Interview.

¹³ S. Colman, Interview.

I had a shovel, so late in the day I dug a snow cave. Tim just didn't turn up. The really difficult thing was that the whole place was frozen over, so I was starting to get quite thirsty. I was eventually able to chip through the ice and get some water out of the lake. It came on dark, and I thought, 'Bastard, where is he?' Sometime later in the evening, when it was quite dark, this head poked through the opening. It was Tim. He had done a bit of skiing on the way. He had left Dead Horse Gap early in the morning all right but he couldn't refrain from skiing every conceivable patch of snow between there and Blue Lake. Not only had he carried all the gear in, but he had skied at least 12 hours on the way in as well!

We spent a lot of time camping in the snow, and became totally comfortable in it. It really honed up our wilderness skills. Also, I learned that Tim was a great talker in his sleep. On one skiing trip he entertained us all night with his talking. At one point he sat straight up and said, 'Don't worry! Don't worry! I'm going to organise all the transport.' Of course, it bore no relevance to the fact that we were up in the Snowies. That earned him the nickname 'The Minister for High Alps Transport', and he travelled under that name for quite a while at the university.¹⁴

In addition to being a skilled bushwalker and skier, Macartney-Snape had become a competent rock climber by the mid-1970s. His approach to that sport, however, was somewhat different to that of Lincoln Hall, who enjoyed the gymnastic aspects of climbing and had become one of the hard rock climbers of the ACT scene. Macartney-Snape, on the other hand, enjoyed rather more just climbing with a friend or two on a wild, isolated crag away from the more crowded and competitive popular cliffs where many of the leading climbers were continually trying to outdo one another by putting up harder and harder routes.

Macartney-Snape later described his attitude towards rock climbing in terms of the highly competitive scene of the 1980s, when he wrote about a remote crag he had found in the desert of Western Australia:

There was just the cliff. The only white marks were those of guano from falcons and kestrels. There were no white blotches of desperately smeared chalk to mark the past struggles of human climbers. No bits of steel bustled from any rock. What I liked best of all though was that there was no one strutting around in their latest kaleidoscopic finery. The nearest funny earring was horizons and horizons away...it was nice to see a place where we could climb on untainted rock for the anonymous joy of doing it. Where fashion had no significance and we could climb for the sake of the physical experience, for the sake of seeing the world around with the clarity which a hard climb brings, not for the sake of telling the world how good we were, that is a job for the alienated world of the city not the natural world of the wilderness.¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Macartney-Snape, T. 1989, 'Desert climbing', *Outside* (Mountain Designs newsletter), vol. 2, no. 3 (December), p. 3.

With Macartney-Snape's strong background in bushwalking, skiing, snow-camping and rock climbing, it is not surprising that he found his way to New Zealand soon after arriving at The Australian National University and joining the Mountaineering Club. In early 1976, he took a basic mountaineering course in the Southern Alps and a year later he was back in New Zealand, in the Mt Cook region, to climb some classic routes, including Mounts Elie De Beaumont, Malte Brun and Green. His second New Zealand journey was most notable, however, for his trip to the Olivine Ice Plateau, a remote, rugged mountain wilderness south of the Mt Aspiring area. Because of the Olivines' remoteness, climbing there is serious business, requiring fitness, stamina, good route-finding skills and a large dose of confidence and self-reliance. It was perhaps typical of Macartney-Snape that he would search out challenges of that nature rather than sticking solely to the more well-trodden climbs of the Cook and Aspiring regions.

Although Macartney-Snape was not one of the original group of young ANUMC members who had been involved in the Dunagiri plans from the start, he quickly joined that group and, as a result, began to climb more often with Lincoln Hall on the rolling granite slabs and steep buttresses of Booroomba Rocks. As they climbed together more frequently, they began to realise that, even though they came into climbing from quite different backgrounds, they shared a common desire to drive themselves harder and harder. With the ANUMC's plans to mount a major Himalayan expedition coming to fruition, they had a further reason to push their skills to the highest possible level.

In early 1978, a few months before the ANUMC group departed for India, Hall and Macartney-Snape made another climbing journey to New Zealand—the third for each but the first together as a team. It was on this trip that their partnership began to flourish and to produce some remarkable results. As Macartney-Snape said, 'I was finally paired with somebody else who really wanted to climb.'¹⁶

And climb they did. They tackled the south face of Mt Hicks, a daunting wall of 2000 ft (610 m) gullies of hard, green ice—the test piece for the hard men of the New Zealand ice-climbing scene (see image 8.1). Even more impressive was their ascent of the MacInnes Ridge, a hard rock route, on Nazomi followed without a break by the climb up the long, technically difficult ridge that connected Nazomi with the southern summit of Mt Cook. It was a marathon mountaineering effort that made the New Zealand climbing establishment sit up and take notice and one of the first of the long, demanding traverses that still provide the biggest challenges to Southern Alps mountaineers. What made the Nazomi–Cook traverse even more remarkable was that two young, unknown Australians pulled it off.

16 T. Macartney-Snape, Interview.

So, with a season of truly hard New Zealand climbing just completed, Hall and Macartney-Snape, as mountaineers liked to say, ‘hit the hills running’ when they arrived in the Indian Himalaya. Their near-ascent of Purbi Dunagiri—a very difficult peak—so early in the expedition confirmed their position as the top climbing pair of the ANUMC team and their eventual climb of Dunagiri itself showed beyond any doubt that they had the skills, strength and determination to cope with high-altitude climbing in the Himalaya.

Just a year after the Dunagiri trip, Macartney-Snape and Hall were back in the Himalaya again, but this time in very different circumstances. They were part of a very small, low-key expedition, with Canberra climber Phil Cullen completing the climbing trio, and their target was the Manikaren Spires area of the Kulu Himal. Macartney-Snape’s sister, Deb, joined the expedition as a non-climbing member.

Even though the Manikaren Spires and Dunagiri are both in the Indian Himalaya, they appear as though they are worlds apart. In fact, the spires look like they hardly belong in the Himalaya at all. Unlike the towering peaks covered in snow and ice that typify the majority of the Himalayan ranges, the Spires—a small cluster of granite ridges and peaks—are of moderate height, from 5000–5500 m, and hold only isolated, very small patches of permanent snow. To climb in them requires rock-climbing skills, so the Manikaren Spires are a particularly attractive objective for Australian climbers, particularly those strong on rock such as Lincoln Hall and Phil Cullen.

Almost from the start, however, the trio ran into trouble, as Hall and Cullen developed severe stomach complaints that necessitated a walk back out of the mountains for treatment before they could even begin to climb. Macartney-Snape, on the other hand, was already proving that he was as immune to local illnesses as he was to the effects of high altitude.

Hall recovered in time to walk back into the mountains and rejoin Macartney-Snape to attempt at least a few climbs; Cullen was knocked out of the rest of the expedition. Their first efforts resulted in a gem of a climb: an aesthetic ridge route on Geru, a 5100 m unclimbed peak. From the summit, they could clearly see Ali Ratni Tibba, a beautifully tapered 5500 m high pyramid of rock that was the highest mountain in the Spires.

With little time remaining, they set out on Ali Ratni Tibba’s South-West Ridge and made short work of the route, finding it technically easy enough that they did not require a rope. The ascent was made interesting by a sudden storm that caught the two climbers partway up, forced them into a bivvy under a rock overhang and then complicated the final climb to the summit by coating the rocks with fresh snow. The descent was probably more exciting than the climb, as Hall and Macartney-Snape abseiled down the precipitous West Face.

The mini-expedition to the Manikaren Spires was nowhere near the previous year's Dunagiri trip in terms of the danger, the severity of the climbing or the magnificence of the achievement, yet it was further proof that the blossoming Macartney-Snape/Hall partnership had the drive and determination to overcome serious obstacles—this time, illness—to get to the summit. Perhaps more importantly, it forced the two, because of the small size of the team, to spend a lot of time together; they could not develop the other relationships possible in a much larger group to release built-up tensions. It was therefore a good test of compatibility, a test that Macartney-Snape and Hall passed with flying colours.

At the beginning of the 1980s, then, Australia's first durable climbing partnership had formed. Macartney-Snape and Hall had demonstrated the strength and intense desire to succeed of the Messner/Habeler team without the direct competitiveness and the two Australians were as well matched in temperament and personality as the Tasker/Boardman and Shipton/Tilman teams.

Just after their expedition to Mt Everest in 1984, Hall wrote of his partner:

Tim's lanky build and quiet manner belied his physical and mental stamina. Projects of his were never half-hearted affairs, though sometimes rushed as he tried to achieve more than time allowed. Things were done today instead of tomorrow to leave room for whatever tomorrow would present. If a stove needed maintenance or a candle-holder improvised it would be Tim who fiddled away by torchlight. He had definite ideas on everything and a stubbornness for what he felt to be right. Decision making on our expeditions was always a process of talking until we agreed upon the best alternative. Often it was Tim's plans we carried out because his practical mind was quick to solve the problems we faced.

For Tim part of the attraction of high mountains was their continual ability to demand more energy than one's body and mind could supply. No other sphere of activity offered that to him. Accordingly, it was when the mountains drew the utmost from us that he felt satisfied. The pleasure was not one of masochism or displaying bravery but of feeling his body and mind working efficiently when his life depended upon it. Tim always seemed to know where he was in terms of both self-confidence and geography. His skill in finding the best route in a storm or at night was little less than magical.

Away from the mountains the fierceness of his determination remained hidden behind his politeness and modesty. Self-control and self-reliance were the foundations of his self-respect. As a consequence he kept his ambitions, needs and emotions to himself. Though he had many friends it was difficult for anyone to know him well because the different facets of his life existed independently of each other. Only within himself did they come together.¹⁷

17 Hall, L. 1985, *White Limbo*, Weldons, Sydney, pp. 48–52.

Many of Hall's personality traits complemented those of Macartney-Snape beautifully. Whereas the latter was so brimming with energy and enthusiasm that he would spend his 'rest' days skiing, fiddling with stoves or in some other active pursuit, Hall was given to meditation, yoga and similarly contemplative activities. It was during these quiet times in the mountains that Hall developed his views not only towards climbing, but towards the inhabitants of the areas he climbed in. He wrote after the Dunagiri trip:

It was not until I visited India in 1978 for my first Himalayan climb that the self-indulgence of my activity occurred to me. The challenge for so many people in the world is simply to survive. There is no need for Indians to invent frightening games in order to prove themselves to themselves. India made me realise the narrowness of my outlook. I began to share my life with other interests. Climbing has remained my avenue of experience, but these days I spend more time looking around me. No longer is my head down in a beeline for the summit.¹⁸

Though Macartney-Snape, too, had developed rather similar philosophies towards the peoples of the Himalayan region and towards wilderness and the natural environment, the two would likely express their feelings in quite different ways. Ask them the same question and Macartney-Snape would respond with a careful, well-thought-out line of reasoning. Hall, on the other hand, would make the same point instantly with one of his classic, penetrating one-liners.

In one other extremely important characteristic the two were again very complementary. Macartney-Snape possesses an almost unbounded enthusiasm and a knack for problem solving that generate an air of optimism, which is often essential to carry climbers through the physically demanding and psychologically draining conditions of a big Himalayan climb. There are so many difficult and unpleasant aspects of climbing in the Himalaya—lack of food and water, long periods of storms and bad weather, the debilitating effects of high altitude—that without someone with Macartney-Snape's enthusiasm, an expedition could simply grind to a halt before the mountain is climbed.

Caution was probably the key theme in Hall's approach to Himalayan climbing. 'Usually suggestions of soft options and words of caution come from me because of my healthy awareness of my own mortality,' Hall wrote of himself.¹⁹ A good dose of caution is the perfect antidote to an overabundance of enthusiasm. Too much caution and nothing is ever climbed, but too much enthusiasm and a fatal accident can result. Macartney-Snape's enthusiasm and Hall's caution were, as it turned out, perfectly matched to produce a remarkable string of Himalayan successes that culminated, sooner than anyone had expected, in the first Australian ascent of Mt Everest.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

This text is taken from *Himalayan Dreaming: Australian mountaineering in the great ranges of Asia, 1922–1990*, by Will Steffen, published 2017 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.