



AAC Publications

Local Heroes

In recent years we have noticed an exciting trend in the AAJ: a steady increase in the number of significant new routes by climbers native to developing countries. For generations, most cutting-edge climbs in developing countries have been completed by visitors from Europe, North America, Japan, or other well-off areas with long mountaineering traditions. Local climbers often partnered with these visiting mountaineers—one only has to mention Tenzing Norgay—but usually these were employer/employee relationships.

There are precedents for “locals” climbing big routes in their own countries, of course, including a long history of Indian mountaineering and the brilliant second ascent of Fitz Roy, by a new route, in 1965, by Argentines Carlos Comesaña and José Luis Fonrouge. But the growing number and scope of recent climbs is unprecedented.

In this year's AAJ you will find many reports of excellent climbs by all-local teams: a bold high traverse in Bolivia, numerous first ascents in Colombia, several high peaks in Nepal by all-Sherpa teams, exploratory mountaineering in Argentina and Chile, a solo big wall in China, and the list goes on. We also have reports of native alpinists doing significant climbs with visiting climbers—but as equal partners, not as porters or rope-fixers. One reason for this: The ranks of internationally certified guides in developing countries such as Bolivia, Peru, and Nepal now number in the dozens, and Ecuador and Kyrgyzstan are on their way to full IFMGA membership. Increasingly, these guides are using days off to explore their own mountains for new routes.

We've also witnessed some tragic deaths and near misses among ambitious climbers in developing countries. One hopes such mountaineers will be patient with the long apprenticeship necessary to survive and flourish in the alpine environment. As these climbers gain experience, their desire to push their limits, along with access to better equipment and the opportunity to respond quickly when a climb is in good condition—especially as climate change alters traditional climbing seasons—should lead to many marvelous ascents in the coming years. We look forward to reporting them.

This year we have stopped publishing the Club Activities section of the AAJ, which reported on the climbs and other activities of regional mountaineering clubs and the AAC's local sections. These activities are now much more thoroughly and promptly covered by other online and print publications. Since the beginning, Club Activities has been edited by our longest-servicing volunteer, Frederick O. Johnson, a California climber who was recruited to manage this section of the AAJ by then-editor Francis Farquhar, way back in 1956. Six decades later, Johnson said, “It's been a rewarding, long run for me, with the chance to do a small part for the Club, of which I've been a minor but enthusiastic member since 1950.” Thank you, Fred!

– Dougald MacDonald, Executive Editor

Images

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