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## Alpina

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# Alpina

*A semiannual review of mountaineering in the greater ranges*

## Yosemite National Park

**On the walls.** This past June, Selah Schneider, age 10, climbed **the Nose on El Capitan** (3,000 ft on the 7,569-ft peak) with her father and one other climber. They ascended in five days. Selah is the youngest known climber to go up any line on the cliff. She led some of the pitches.

The park's **Camp 4** launched the great Yosemite Valley golden age of climbing from the late 1950s through the early 1970s. Steve Roper described it as a pretty anarchic place in his colorful book *Camp 4: Recollections of a Yosemite Rockclimber* (The Mountaineers, 1994). But now times at Camp 4 are changing, and not necessarily for the better. The National Park Service issued this announcement:

Late May through Early September, as part of a pilot program in 2019, campsites are available only by daily lottery, one day in advance, via [recreation.gov](http://recreation.gov), beginning May 22 (the first lottery is on May 21) and lasting through September 15 (last lottery is September 14). The lottery is open from midnight to 4 P.M. Pacific Time each day, with results notifications soon thereafter.

Each person (not just the primary applicant) must check in at the campground using a valid photo ID that matches the entry on the lottery application. (Minors must check in but do not need a photo ID.)

It is hard to imagine Steve Roper and his unruly cohort following these protocols.

## Canine Ascent Record

Mera, a 45-pound Nepalese mutt, perhaps part Tibetan mastiff and Himalayan sheepdog, became the first dog to climb a 7,000-m peak by summiting **Baruntse** (7,162 m) in Nepal on November 9, 2018. Mera had attached

herself to the expedition guide Don Wargowsky, and she followed him and the other climbers to the top. She climbed unroped except for a brief section on the descent. After the successful climb, they renamed her Baru after the mountain, and Kaji Sherpa had her transported to Kathmandu so he could keep her.

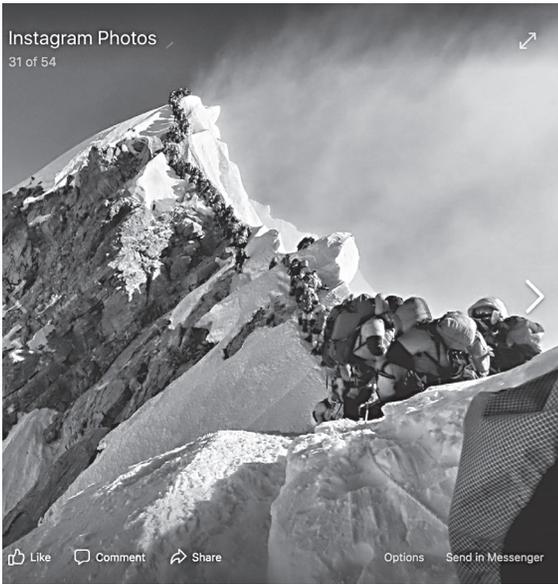
Although Baru's was the first canine ascent of a 7,000-m peak, dogs have a rich mountaineering history. W. A. B. Coolidge climbed with a mongrel named Tschingel, who made many first ascents in the Alps in the late nineteenth century. Dogs have climbed the Grand Teton. Northeastern climbers and writers Guy and Laura Waterman's collie-golden retriever, Ralph, climbed so many mountains in New England that he was proposed for Appalachian Mountain Club membership (but was denied).

### **Everest 2019**

Spring 2019 was the busiest season ever and one of the most controversial on **Everest** (8,848 m). The saga was epitomized in a single photograph by the Nepalese mountaineer Nirmal "Nims" Purja. It shows perhaps 60 aspirants lined up, high on the final ridge. They are jammed together, with almost no space between any of them. They might be lining up for the latest Harry Potter movie. They are relying on the ropes that have been fixed for them by a team of Sherpas. According to the climbing blogger Alan Arnette, nearly 900 people had reached the summit by May 30. And almost all of them did so on one of the very few days in May when the winds and temperature are relatively accommodating. As always, only the two routes of first and second ascents were overwhelmingly the most popular, with the Nepal side seeing the majority.

Eleven died, nine of them on the Nepal side. Two died of heart attacks, possibly unrelated to the mountain. A number of others succumbed to altitude. Although the exact count is disputed, it is certain that overcrowding contributed to the fatalities. The Hillary Step is gone, but at its site climbers still bunch up. Their ascent is complicated by all those descending the same narrow ridge. The longer you stay up there, the more oxygen you use and the colder you get.

An added factor is the proliferation of tour companies, some of questionable reliability. Many of this year's Everest climbers, even some successful ones, lacked the experience and condition to be on the mountain.



Nirmal Purja MBE: "Project Possible - 14/7"  
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In Nepal.

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Zak Polo I agree it is ironic...but climbing to top of Everest as greatest personal human achievement is debatable and will vary greatly depending who you ask.  
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Jim Linkster It's all about the money for the Sherpas. Fame for

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While waiting to summit Everest in May 2019, Nirmal “Nims” Purja captured this image, which went viral from his Instagram account.

In mid-August, the Nepali officials sought to address these problems by tightening permit requirements. Tourism companies would need three years’ experience organizing high-altitude expeditions. Climbers would have to have climbed at least one peak over 6,500 m. (Some reports say the peak has to be in Nepal.) These are *proposals* only; they need parliamentary approval. And as one prominent Sherpa remarked, enforcing the new regulations would be a “significant hurdle.”

Everest has become too popular and accessible for Nepal to ignore, perhaps too much so for the mountain’s own good.

Despite the crowds on the two usual routes, two climbers tried a new one. American Cory Richards and Esteban “Topo” Mena of Ecuador aimed for a couloir on the north side that would have required about 1,980 m of new climbing. Bad snow conditions turned them back about 1,000 m short of the top, but they intend to try again this year.

## Nanda Devi Area

Although there were casualties elsewhere in the Himalaya, the largest death toll, eight, was recorded on an unnamed, unclimbed peak in the **Indian Garwhal**. At 6,477 m, this mountain stands next to the east peak of Nanda Devi. The experienced British climber Martin Moran was leading seven climbers in an international group when an avalanche apparently overwhelmed them on May 27. Four other party members had stayed below and were unharmed. An anonymous official in Uttarakhand state, site of the mountain, told Agence France-Presse, “The permission was granted for Nanda Devi east and any diversion is illegal. We were completely unaware of their changed plan and that turned fatal.”

## High Peaks, Winter 2019

Yet another season has passed, and **K2** (8,611 m) remains the only 8,000-m peak without a winter ascent. Two strong teams tried in 2019; both were turned back by high winds. A Polish group and probably others will try again this year. Climbing K2, the second-highest mountain in the world, in winter remains a tremendous challenge, featuring technical difficulty (far more than Everest), as well as frighteningly low temperatures. Someone will make a winter ascent—someday.

**Nanga Parbat**, the thirteenth 8,000er to be climbed in winter, was the scene of tragedy for the second consecutive winter. Two outstanding alpinists died, apparently in a fall, from the Mummery Rib, scene of an 1895 attempt and still unclimbed. Daniele Nardi, a 42-year-old Italian, had made four previous attempts on the mountain. Among his many ascents were Gasherbrum, Everest, and Shishapangma in the Himalaya, as well as Aconcagua in Argentina.

The other casualty on Nanga Parbat was especially poignant for Britons. At age 30, Tom Ballard, the son of the late climber Alison Hargreaves, had compiled a formidable climbing record. He was the first to solo the six major north faces in the Alps in a single winter and had established new lines on the north face of the Eiger. Ballard was only 6 years old when his mother died while descending K2. Earlier that year, 1995, she became the first woman to summit Everest solo and without supplementary oxygen.

## Patagonia

The most noteworthy feat of winter 2019 (Patagonia's summer) season was a free solo of **Fitz Roy** (11,171 ft). Jim Reynolds, a 25-year-old from California, made the round-trip in fifteen and a half hours. Although the route is somewhat less technically difficult than Alex Honnold's free solo on El Capitan, the elevation gain of the climb was greater, 5,000 feet (about 2,000 feet more than Honnold had to climb). Reynolds had rehearsed only a part of it. The rest was new to him. Even more remarkable: He *down-climbed* the whole thing, omitting any temptation to rappel. As most readers know, climbing down is usually trickier than climbing up.

The exploit raises again the risks inherent in soloing. In an article by Andrew Bisharat in *National Geographic*, Rolando Garibotti, who has made his share of solo ascents, said, "I worry about how this will influence young men. Because I was influenced when I was young. But it's important to know that there are other ways to create a meaningful life than using risk."\* But because Reynolds's climb was not filmed (as Honnold's was, for *Free Solo*, from filmmakers Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi and Jimmy Chin), I predict it will be far less influential.

## Tragedy on Howse Pk

Situated along the British Columbia–Alberta border in Canada's Banff National Park, **Howse Pk** (3,290 m; 10,810 ft) is a major challenge. Howse's east face is especially imposing. In 1999, Scott Backes, Steve House, and Barry Blanchard pioneered a very hard route, known as M-16, which ends on top of a couloir some distance below the summit. On the way down, Blanchard was struck by snow blocks and was helicoptered out.

Twenty years later another extremely strong three-man team ventured onto the face. They climbed the bottom half of M-16, moved left halfway up the face, and covered new terrain to the summit. Photos from their cameras were used to deduce the route. But on the descent, an avalanche swept over, killing them. The three climbers were some of the best alpinists in the world.

American Jess Roskelley, the son of John Roskelley, one of the foremost Himalayan climbers of his time, had completed a number of major climbs.

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\* See Bisharat's article, "This Climber Just Pulled Off the Biggest Free Solo of the Year (and He's Not Alex Honnold)," [nationalgeographic.com/adventure/2019/03/climber-jim-reynolds-free-solos-fitz-roy/](http://nationalgeographic.com/adventure/2019/03/climber-jim-reynolds-free-solos-fitz-roy/).

His April 2017 ascent of the south ridge of Alaska's Mt Huntington (12,240 ft) was described in the previous *Alpina* (Summer/Fall 2019). At age 20, in 2003, Jess climbed Everest with his father. At the time, he was the youngest American to summit.

David Lama, 28, grew up in Austria, his mother's native country. His father was Nepali. He was an exceptionally strong climber, as exemplified by his free ascent of Cerro Torre (10,262 ft). His time on the Himalayan peak Lunag Ri (6,907 m) may be found in *Alpina* (Winter/Spring 2018).

Hansjörg Auer, 35, made many daring climbs in and near his native Austria. One of the most famous is his 2007 free solo of "The Fish," 2,800 feet of sometimes extremely hard going on the south face of Marmolada (10,968 ft) in the Dolomites.

### More Really Hard Climbs

In mid-May Czech alpinists Marek Holeček and Zdeněk "Hook" Hák made the first ascent of the northwest face of **Chamlang** (7,319 m) in eastern Nepal. The pair received a *Piolet d'Or* for their 2017 first ascent of a new alpine-style route on Gasherbrum I. Chamlang may bring them another. Chamlang was first climbed by the southern ridge in 1962 by a Japanese-led expedition. The very imposing northwest route had been attempted a number of times. The Czech route is about 2,000 m; it was done in a six-day push, round trip.

Like Poland, Russia has produced many climbers who like things tough. Two of them, Sergey Nilov and Dmitry Golovchenko, have been part of two efforts that won a *Piolet d'Or*: on Muztagh Tower (7,276 m) and Thalay Sagar (6,904 m). Last spring they tackled **Jannu** (7,710 m), one of the hardest peaks in Nepal. Set in the far east of the country, it was not climbed until 1962, by an extremely strong French team. By that time, all but one of the 8,000-m peaks had been summited.

Their route may be the easiest—that is, the least difficult—on the mountain, but it can hardly be called "standard." It follows very steep, intricate, and precarious ridges of snow and ice. Several other routes have been opened on the mountain, all very hard and two of them controversial, on the grounds, respectively, of authenticity and style. Nilov and Golovchenko established a noteworthy additional line. The Russian route ascends the previously unclimbed east face to 7,400 m.

When they reached this point, they had been on the face two weeks. They elided the summit and headed down. But because their line had been swept

by avalanches, they chose the French route. This was new to them and had gotten no easier since 1962. It took them another five days to get down. The last four days, they had no food. Polish climber and filmmaker Eliza Kubarska provided support for the nineteen-day ordeal.

—*Steven Jervis*  
*Alpina Editor*

*Many thanks to Michael Levy, Alpina assistant editor. Sources include The New York Times, Outside Online, the BBC, Rock and Ice, and the indispensable [alanarnette.com/blog](http://alanarnette.com/blog).*