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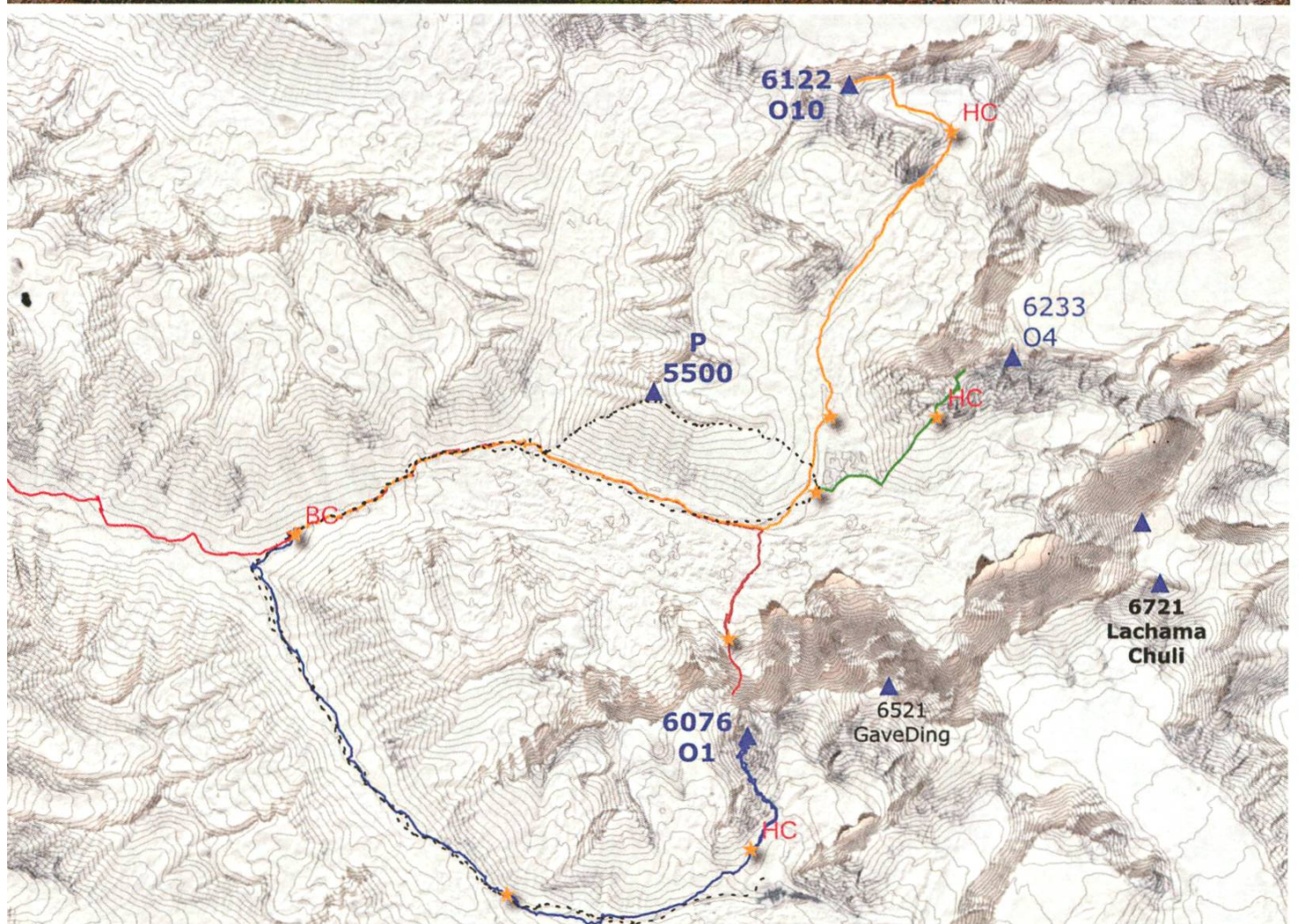
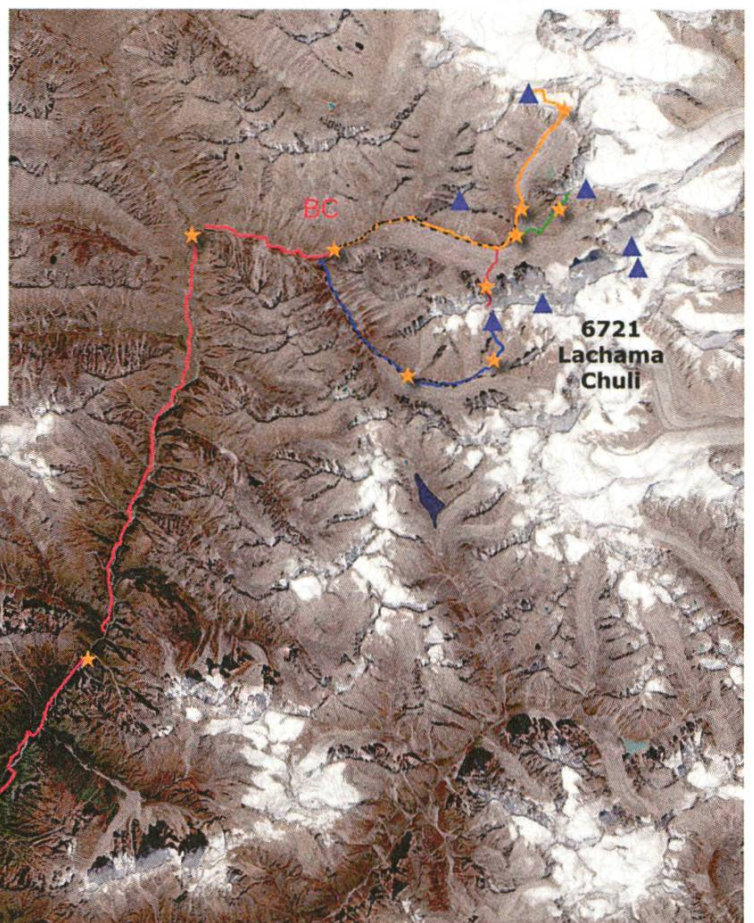
INTRODUCTION

For me, expeditions to the planet's higher and wilder mountain ranges are an experience for all, not just for some elite climbers. Like in the Alps, some mountains are hard and some are easy, some are pretty and some are not, some are safe and some are better avoided ... but they are all mountains and everybody can find something at their own level of mental, physical and technical challenge. What they do not have is a scheduled Postbus service above the treeline, a cable car above the snowline or a two-star hotel (far) above the glacier line. One thing that has not changed in the last century is that the journey to the mountains is the experience – once you are there is it “just mountaineering.”

When I was asked to lead the 125th anniversary expedition, this “big tent” approach meant rising to the challenge of finding a remote area with a variety of mountain types providing a spectrum of climbing difficulties to appeal to a broad cross-section of the AACZ membership. We also asked ourselves where the support of the AACZ could make a qualitative difference to an expedition, but 50'000 CHF does not get you to the starting line in Antarctica, and the high-priced regions of China or Myanmar ruled themselves out by their current politics (without our having to consider the morals of supporting their usury). After considering further suggestions in Greenland and the Indian Karakoram, the practical and political constraints finally directed us to West Nepal where, far from the 8000m circus, there are many ranges of 6000m peaks that have seen little exploration.

In 2018 I was on a small-scale expedition to the Nalakankar Himal, in the far northwestern corner of Nepal, and then made a solo reconnaissance of some summits in the Kanti Himal. From both regions I could see the north-south chain of the Changla Himal, with about 20 6000m peaks offering huge potential for exploratory and alpine-style mountaineering at all skill levels. The highest peak, Lachama Chuli, was climbed from Tibet (where it is known as Kubi Kangri, 6721m) by a Japanese team in 2007. In 2015, British climbers Mick Fowler and Paul Ramsden climbed the north face of neighbouring Gave Ding (6521m) from the Nepalese side, winning a Piolet d'Or for their route. Other than these visits, the peaks of the Changla were yet to be explored.

To prepare for such an undertaking, in 21st century Nepal the logistics are quite streamlined. Many capable agents exist to organise the permits and other paperwork, the Nepali staff and their insurance, the domestic travel, base-camp equipment, food and fuel supplies and the monstrous task of shipping around tons of equipment, including with pack animals or porters. My friend and agent Rajendra Dahal of Mountain Sun Valley did an excellent job for us, despite the fact that we were the largest team he had ever handled and we were going to the most remote corner of the country. To organise the Swiss end, I split the team into different subgroups of members to tackle the many necessary tasks: maps and climbing routes, flights, insurance, budget, equipment, electronics, medicine, communications,



rescue and evacuation, sustainability and aid projects, internet and social media and finally team training. As team activities we met multiple times for medical training, technical training and their combination, mountain rescue training. As smaller groups we trained by climbing mountains in the overheated Alps of summer 2022.

For me as leader, and as a veteran of over 30 expeditions, one of the biggest attractions of having a large and well supported team was the opportunity to do more than just climb. First, as an academic alpine club, one would like to follow the long tradition of one's predecessors who performed important cartographic, glaciological and other forms of research during their expeditions. Unfortunately, from this perspective, the evolution in the last 100 years has seen expeditions get smaller and science get bigger, to the point where "private citizens" are simply not welcome to contribute. While we did find some areas where "boots on the ground" can still aid the cause of global science, particularly in water sampling and checking glacial surfaces to calibrate satellite images, our ideas for mini-projects in these directions died with the big snowfall we experienced. Second, coming from one of the richest countries in Europe to one of the poorest in Asia, one would like to contribute something to improve the lives and opportunities of one's hosts at any level. Here

again, international aid is a big business and contributing with one's hands or one's mind generally requires months of training and on-the-ground work. However, in this regard our Swiss money is always very welcome, and the story of how we used it to support different projects can be found in the aid chapter. Finally, international travel is becoming a deeply questionable activity in the middle of a climate crisis, and we made the unanimous decision to double-offset our CO2 emissions, again through different routes that also had a social impact.

In retrospect, perhaps it is fitting that our expedition was shaped so strongly by another occurrence of climatic "global weirding," in the form of a massive snowfall during the dry season. We were the largest team ever to go on an AACZ expedition, and despite the inconveniences of bad weather and illness we held together as a team from start to finish, working together not only to climb two summits in difficult conditions but to support each other physically and mentally through all the ups and downs. It was this teamwork and tolerance that got us all back to Zurich both healthy and happy with all our new experiences.

*Bruce Normand,
expedition leader*