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Mount Everest South Side - Fall 2003

10:35 a.m. EDT Aug 25, 2003

For the past several weeks, the small American snowboarding team on the North side of Mount Everest has had the mountain ALL to itself. But that's now about to change.

Yesterday, another small American expedition departed for Everest -- to its South side. Wally Berg of Berg Adventures International (BAI) will lead a five-member climbing team up the South Col route this fall. They are the only team with a permit to climb the route this post-Monsoon season. And like their neighbors on the North side, the BAI expedition has some ambitious goals:

1. With the team is two-time Women's World Extreme Skiing Champion Maegan Carney, who will attempt to become the first woman to ski from the summit of Mount Everest. An American who lives in Chamonix, France, Maegan has a penchant for climbing and skiing obscure, steep couloirs. In 2002, she made the first ski descent of Cholatse Peak, a technical 6440m (21,250 ft.) mountain in the Everest region.
2. Wally Berg will carry a GPS receiver to the South Col and "reoccupy" the receiver that he helped establish there in the nineties. This time, he's working with the University of Colorado to help collect valuable scientific data about the uplift of Mount Everest, movement of plates in region, etc.
3. In a joint project with Adventureweather.com and Kestrel, Wally will take a pocket-sized "weather station" to measure real-time weather readings throughout the expedition. The device is able to track every major environmental condition, including altitude, wind speed, wind chill, dew point, barometric pressure, temperature, humidity, etc. and will provide a comparison of real-time weather data with model data.

Joining Wally and Maegan on the BAI climbing team are David Burger and Brad Johnson, both from Colorado, and Gary Porter from Washington. The team will be supported by Ang Temba Sherpa, the Team Sirdar, Leila Silveira, Base Camp Support Manager, and Dennis Comfort, Communications Specialist.

As the lone expedition on the mountain's south side, reaching the summit itself will be an ambitious challenge. During Mount Everest's busy climbing season in spring, the task of establishing the route to the summit is typically shared among 15 to 20 expeditions and their strong Sherpa support teams.

This fall, the BAI expedition with its Sherpa team will handle everything on its own. Wally, a four-time Everest summiteer and longtime guide, told

ExplorersWeb that the team will fix rope through the Khumbu Icefall and the Lhotse Face, but do little elsewhere. With the exception of the Hillary Step, he does not intend to lay fixed ropes above the South Col to the summit. The first three times he scaled Mount Everest, including once in October, Wally noted little fixed line above the South Col. Cluttering the route with ropes would make it more hazardous for Maegan's descent.

In addition to the challenge of climbing during the time of year the days are growing shorter, and the nights colder, one of the biggest dangers on the mountain in the post-monsoon season is the potential for avalanche. "Mount Everest's maritime-like climate produces wet snows," Wally said. "Consolidation typically occurs within 42 – 72 hrs. After a heavy storm, you rest and wait. Then you reassess the stability."

But the post-monsoon weather is the primary reason why the BAI expedition is going to Mount Everest now. Maegan needs the heavier snow cover as opposed to the bone-dry, shaley rock that's exposed during spring. This is her first attempt on an 8000m peak. As to the hazards, Wally states, "Maegan climbs with skier's eyes, evaluating every meter of the route along the way. She's constantly assessing, 'How am I going to come down? How will I overcome that bergschrund? Is this area stable?' She's methodical in noting the hazards and characteristics ice and snow on a route?"

Lately it's been raining heavily on the lower slopes of Everest and snowing heavily up high. Wally hopes this continues until the team arrives, and then stops. "We want lot of snow now, not later," he said. "We hope for a good scenario coming into fall."

"This will be a different type of expedition than those which have defined Everest in recent years. It will be a lot more work. But it will be a better climbing experience. Everyone is used to seeing photos of a cluttered mountain taken during the spring season. We will see a fresh look, covered in snow. It will be a beautiful climb."

Wally Berg is leading a small team of six experienced mountaineers up the South Col route of Mount Everest this autumn. Expedition member and two-time Women's World Extreme Skiing Champion Maegan Carney hopes to become the first woman to ski down Mount Everest's summit. Wally is also working with the University of Colorado to re-establish the GPS receiver at the South Col used for scientific research.

Image of mountain ghost - Shadow of Everest at sunrise courtesy of Wally Berg. Image may be purchased at BAI Web Site.

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