Arlene Blum Ascends Annapurna

"The expedition needed a strong leader but not a dictator."

ARLENE BLUM had braved violent winds and mammoth avalanches to push high up the slopes of Annapurna, one of the world's most awesome mountains. She was determined to place some of her climbing team on the summit—not just for herself or for her expedition but on behalf of women the world around. Blum was leading more than an expedition to one of the planet's most dangerous spots; she was leading a cause.

Annapurna is a part of the most exclusive of all mountain groups, the fourteen Himalayan peaks that all tower above 8,000 meters, more than 26,000 feet. None of the "Eight-Thousanders" had been scaled until 1950, when Maurice Herzog led a French team to the summit of Annapurna. Three years later, New Zealand's Edmund Hillary and Nepal's Tenzing Norgay attained the ultimate Himalayan summit, Mount Everest.

If mountaineering is a sport of adventure and risk, expedition mountaineering is a sport of extreme adventure and risk. By the mid-1970s, Arlene Blum had come to thrive on its special blend of adrenaline and camaraderie, delighting in the grand vistas and mental challenges that come with vertical slopes and thin air. She had already climbed in Alaska and on Everest, and now,