

*Selecting a Summit Team*

It's supposed to happen are happening. I feel as if something is telling us one of us dies."

I like talking about it. I just want to climbing for twenty years, and I've never felt so unstable. The avalanches are sometimes it seems almost immoral to

to do everything right except selecting about the ability to climb the mountain. The hardest part, but I don't know if we could survive more weeks and keep walking under the sun every day after day without someone getting

It's good about Annapurna because of the fact that we'd picked another peak, too, but I guess we'll have to go on."

When it was finished, the qualms never subsided, and the course was never seriously considered. Liz Klobusicky, had to return to her camp. As she was bidding adieu, she concluded, "I'm not sure it was particularly hard, and nobody quit or balked at the end." "I'm not sure it was particularly hard to stay," Blum later wrote. "But it

EXPEDITION MOUNTAINEERING IS an enterprise in which everyone must stand on the shoulders of others, a "pyramid of people." Nobody can reach the top without the unremitting efforts of all. But it is also an enterprise in which everyone wants to reach the top. That, after all, is the sport's allure, the reason mountaineers are willing to risk the avalanche superhighway. The problem—and the leadership challenge for Arlene Blum—was that there is room for few on top. Not literally, of course, but so extreme are the conditions at 26,000 feet that often only a single pair of climbers is likely to have a realistic shot at the summit. When Herzog and colleague Louis Lachenal reached the Annapurna pinnacle, and when Hillary and Tenzing attained the Everest crown, a dozen team members were supporting them below and none would get close to the top.

The sport's obsession with the summit was a formidable drawback in Blum's eyes. If the rewards of making it vastly outweigh those for all other contributions—a winner-take-all mentality—she worried that as individuals vied for the summit team, they would lobby her to favor their own chances even at the cost of the team's objectives. And once it became clear which few would have a shot at the summit, it could demoralize the others, whose continuing energies would still be critical for a successful ascent and safe descent. When planning the expedition, Blum even considered refusing to announce later who had reached the summit so that all of her climbers could glory in the full credit for attaining it.

Serendipity plays a role in determining what history records. Who is healthy and who is high on the mountain when the weather clears are important contributing factors. Still, the final order of ascent remains in part a leader's prerogative, and Arlene Blum had to make two critical decisions. Later, in years to come, she would repeatedly relive both, mentally undoing and redoing each and wondering again and again if they had been right or wrong.