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Notes:

1. This version has some minor corrections and modifications that inadvertently did not make it into the published version.
  2. See [Broad Peak Aftermath](#) for follow-up on this article, including Diemberger's comments and my response to them.
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# Broad Peak and the 1957 Austrian Karakoram Expedition

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## Introduction

In 1957, a team of four Austrians — Marcus Schmuck, Hermann Buhl, Fritz Wintersteller and Kurt Diemberger — made an ascent of Broad Peak (8047 m). This climb was remarkable for a number of reasons, mostly to do with style:

- It was accomplished without supplementary oxygen.
- They had no porters on the mountain and carried everything themselves.
- All four team members summited (a first for an 8000-metre peak).
- By reaching the summit, Hermann Buhl became the first person to make two first ascents of a mountain over 8000 metres.

Making this expedition all the more remarkable, Markus Schmuck and Fritz Wintersteller followed their ascent of Broad Peak with a flash ascent of a nearby mountain, Skil Brum (7360 m), which they climbed in pure alpine style. Starting from base camp at 4900 metres, they climbed to 6060 metres, where they camped. The following day they summited and then returned to their high camp. They descended the next morning. From base camp to base camp, the ascent of Skil Brum was done in 53 hours!

From all of the above, this 1957 expedition was a wonderful precursor of the new style that was to follow, as exemplified in the climbs of Messner and Habeler.

But there was a dark side to this expedition. It suffered from interpersonal difficulties. By the time of the second successful summit attempt, the members were no longer climbing as a team of four but as two teams of two: Schmuck and Wintersteller, and Buhl and Diemberger. Further, following the ascent of Skil Brum by Schmuck and Wintersteller, Buhl and Diemberger made an alpine-style attempt on Chogolisa (7654 m). It was on this attempt that Buhl was killed. Thus, the legacy of one of the most stunning expeditions in the history of Himalayan climbing has been dominated by the shadow of Hermann Buhl's death rather than by its stellar accomplishments.

That I paid particular attention to any of this, much less came to write about it, grew out of a series of events which took place in the summer and fall of 2005. I had accepted an invitation to be on the jury of the Banff Mountain Book Festival. Thus, I ended up reading a large number of books that had come out in the previous year. One of them was Richard Sale's *Broad Peak*, the first book-length account in English on this 1957 Austrian Karakoram Expedition. Furthermore, I was asked to moderate a session in which Sale would speak about his book. In accepting, I didn't know what I was letting myself in for.

On the positive side, one surprise was that Richard was also bringing with him Fritz Wintersteller and Qader Saeed, the Pakistani liaison officer assigned to the expedition. Thus, I had the bonus of meeting two of the book's (and the climb's) protagonists. As an added bonus, I also got to meet Marcus Schmuck's two sons, Christian and Reinhold. And with them, they had brought a veritable archive of original material relating to the history of the expedition.

Then there was the other side. It was clear on reading Sale's book that it would arouse a certain amount of controversy. Not only did it present a very different story than that of most previous accounts in English, it also presented the author of the most well-known account — Kurt Diemberger — in a not too flattering light. Still, nothing prepared me for the letters and calls protesting the Banff Festival providing the book a forum. To the credit of its director, Bernadette McDonald, the Festival did not back down. On the other hand, those of us involved took these protests seriously, and did everything we could to make sure that this session was handled in a fair and objective manner. One consequence was that I spent much more time than expected in my library, as well as in the archives of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies. Preparation and literacy seemed to be the best foundation for treating this topic fairly.

The panel went well, I think. Normally, that would have been the end of it. But it wasn't. First, while the panel helped resolve some issues, it also shed new light on some aspects of the story. And, of course, having the chance to talk to some of the participants and see some of the original documentation was an education in itself. The net result was that my research on the topic did not end in Banff.

This brings my story to the present, and this essay. In it I have tried to capture the essence of the research I did prior to, and after, the Broad Peak session. Its genesis was the notes I used to introduce the session. I built from there. All along, I have tried to be fair and objective and to base what I write on solid documentation.

In my writing, I have tried to keep in mind what Barry Blanchard said to me, his eyes full of admiration, after hearing Wintersteller speak at the Festival: "They climbed Broad Peak! They Climbed Broad Peak! In beautiful style! What else do you want?"

Precisely. The *only* other thing we could want is for the accomplishments of this expedition to be better appreciated, and the controversy swirling around it to disappear. It is towards that end that this essay is dedicated.

So let us begin by looking at the literature.

## **The History, the Literature and the History of the Literature**

While Schmuck and Diemberger have both written books in German covering the expedition, the only accounts that have appeared in English by any of the participants are by Diemberger. He wrote three. The first was an article, "Broad Peak: The Austrian Karakoram Expedition 1957", in the 1958–59 edition of *The Mountain World*. The second was in his 1971 book *Summits and Secrets*. His third account was part of a brief article, "Herman Buhl's Last Climbs", that appeared in *Mountain* 36 in 1974 and was less than a page long.

It is interesting to compare these texts, especially the first two, in light of the controversy around the history of this climb and around Diemberger's role in it.

While significantly longer than the third, the first two accounts are relatively short (25 vs. 28 pages, respectively), and in many ways both are similar. Rather than telling the story of the expedition as a whole, each is more an account of Diemberger's own personal experience during it. This is especially true in the *Summits and Secrets* version. For example, Schmuck and Wintersteller do not figure much in either version. On the one hand, this is understandable; Diemberger was telling his own story. On the other hand, this means that there was no full account of the expedition in English.<sup>1</sup> We shall come back to this. What I want to touch on first has to do with the differences between these two versions.

First, despite frequently using much the same text, they are very different in style. The version in *The Mountain World* is written in a somewhat objective style, one that you would expect in a mountaineering journal. The version in *Summits and Secrets* adopts a far more emotional style of writing, one that is far closer to the language of a poet or a writer of romantic fiction than the language of the prototypical calculating mountaineer. The other thing of note in this second telling is the stronger role played by Buhl — perhaps more accurately, the role played by Diemberger's relationship with Buhl. This is manifest in comments such as: "Hermann Buhl was well-disposed towards me, I knew it from frequent small touches, such as suggestions he might throw out, and I was glad. He would often explain to me, in a paternal manner ...."

What Diemberger glosses over in such statements are the arguments he and Buhl had during the expedition. Perhaps most significant were those that occurred while they were on Chogolisa. For example, Buhl's diaries of June 23 — four days before he died — recount two serious arguments that saw them tent-bound in bad weather, and not on speaking terms:

Kurt lässt sich wieder von mir um 1/2 4 Uhr früh wecken, schwere Auseinandersetzung deswegen, Wetter schlecht leg mich wieder hin. 2. schwere Auseinandersetzung mit Kurt [wegen] essen, Orangenmarmelade fast zur Gänze gegessen. Kurt macht mir Vorwurf, zu wenig Verpflegung getragen zu haben, ist unerhört frech, Wetter is ganzen Tag schlecht, in Zelt, spreche nichts mehr mit Kurt, der Fall ist für mich erledigt. (Buhl 2005, p. 342)

3:30 a.m. and again Kurt leaves it to me to wake him up, heavy argument results,<sup>2</sup> weather bad, lie down again. Second heavy argument with Kurt [because of] food, orange jam nearly all eaten. Kurt reproaches me for me not having carried enough food, is outrageously impudent, weather is bad the whole day, in tent, speak nothing more with Kurt, for me this case is settled. [*my translation*]

To be fair, at high altitude, the way your otherwise best friend rolls over in his or her sleeping bag can cause an explosive argument. This is not always obvious to armchair mountaineers at sea level. Nevertheless, Buhl's diaries contradict the story of bliss which pervades Diemberger's accounts, and so warrant mention.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Diemberger cannot be faulted for this. It wasn't up to him to have Schmuck's book translated. On the other hand, there is a certain error of omission in his writing. In a recent interview (Buxton 2005), Qader Saeed observed that without the efforts of Schmuck, and especially Wintersteller, neither Buhl nor Diemberger would have made the summit. (To be fair, the opposite is also true.)

<sup>2</sup> Buhl's entry from the previous evening states that they had planned on a 4 a.m. departure and that Diemberger was responsible for getting them up on time, which he did not do. From the entry on the 23rd, it is clear that this is not the first time this has happened, hence the argument.

<sup>3</sup> It is also worth noting that at the time, they were at their low camp at 4970 metres (16,300 ft). Given their acclimatization from Broad Peak, this was not high altitude, relatively speaking.

The other thing Diemberger does in this second version is introduce comments that build up Buhl's role at the expense of other expedition members. For example, he writes: "Hermann had handed over the over-all leadership of the expedition to him [Schmuck]." Yet this statement speaks to events that occurred before Diemberger was on the team and about which he can have had no direct knowledge. Also, this statement does not accurately reflect the documented evidence, which indicates that Buhl did no such thing. As we shall discuss in more detail later, Schmuck was the leader because the Österreichischer Alpenverein (especially Buhl's Innsbruck section) refused to contribute financing if Buhl was the leader. Perhaps this might be dismissed as a small point or a quibble. However, it is out of such small points, even when innocently intended, that later controversies often arise.

This brings me to the next point I want to discuss in my comparison, which concerns the two excursions that occurred after the summiting of Broad Peak (Skil Brum and Chogolisa) and if/how they are described in Diemberger's accounts.

In the 1958 *Mountain World* version, there is no mention of Schmuck and Wintersteller's successful ascent of Skil Brum. In none of the accounts is there any commentary on the style in which this ascent was done. In his 1974 account in *Mountain*, for example, Diemberger writes: "Days later while Buhl and I were clearing the top camps, Schmuck and Wintersteller climbed a 23,000 ft peak [Skil Brum] which we had chosen as a further objective on the approach march. We decided that we, too, would bag another one." (Diemberger 1974, p. 37)<sup>4</sup>

What there *is* in all three accounts is an emphasis on the style used by Diemberger and Buhl on Chogolisa — what we now call "alpine style". This was something far from the norm in those days, especially when combining the heavy gear of the time with mountains over 7000 metres. In his article in *The Mountain World*, for example, Diemberger draws attention to the style and its novelty by titling the section "The camp that walked". In *Summits and Secrets*, he writes: "The solution was daring: a single transportable high camp — a ladder of camps consisting of a single tent." And, in the *Mountain* article, he writes: "We intended to carry the tent along as a 'moving altitude camp'."

To be fair, Diemberger is not alone in highlighting the style in which he and Buhl attempted Chogolisa. In their book *Hermann Buhl: Climbing without Compromise*, published in 2000, Messner and Höfler wrote: "Although Diemberger and Buhl did not reach the summit of Chogolisa, the climb they made was a work of genius. It pointed the way to the future [of the ethic of the alpine style]." But here is the problem. First, Diemberger and Buhl did not go strictly alpine-style. They made a preliminary climb to establish a high dump, descended for the rest of their gear and then made their attempt. Perhaps this is just another small point. But my second point is not.

What none of these accounts point out (including Messner and Höfler's) is that the ascent of Skil Brum by Schmuck and Wintersteller — on which they climbed higher than did Buhl and Diemberger on Chogolisa — was done in the purest of alpine styles. And they made it both up and down without incident. Contrast then, that which is the more significant achievement with that whose style has been most celebrated. For sure, the style of Diemberger and Buhl is to be admired. But by the same token, that of Schmuck and Wintersteller can be viewed as being

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<sup>4</sup> With today's eyes, a reasonable reading of this passage is that Schmuck and Wintersteller went off and climbed Skil Brum, a mountain that all four had discussed climbing together, without telling Buhl and Diemberger, who were left behind to clear the upper camps. As a kind of tit-for-tat, Diemberger and Buhl then went off to climb Chogolisa without Schmuck and Wintersteller — and without telling them, either. We shall return to the issue of clearing camps later. Suffice it for the moment to say that while the facts of this statement are consistent with other accounts, their likely interpretation is not.

unfairly and improperly ignored in Diemberger's writing, given its precedence and overall success.<sup>5</sup>

It is to other writers that the reader in English needs to turn in order to learn more about the expedition. The next account was written in 1977 by G.O. and N. Dyhrenfurth in *Mountain* magazine 55. The article was a four-page summary of the climbing history of Broad Peak. The authors say nothing of any controversy, but they do emphasize the contribution of Wintersteller on the first summit attempt:

The last 800 ft. to the col between Central and Main Summit — considered “somewhat problematical” by Dyhrenfurth — turned out to be just that and possibly more so. Verglas on steep rock — grade 4 at least — required the utmost care, but Wintersteller, by virtue of his superb condition, managed to overcome all difficulties and secured the route with 270 ft. of fixed rope. (Dyhrenfurth and Dyhrenfurth 1977, p. 40)

They also speak of how fast Diemberger moved to the summit when he left Buhl, as well as how weak Buhl was on summit day. Given this, they comment on how remarkable Buhl's ascent was: “It took every bit of his famous, near-legendary strength and willpower.” (Dyhrenfurth and Dyhrenfurth 1977, p. 41–42)

There is, however, no mention of Skil Brum. Chogolisa is mentioned only in passing, in the context of Buhl's death.

The following year another account appeared: Baum's *Sivalaya – The 8000-Metre Peaks of the Himalaya* (which gives a good, brief summary of the mountain's climbing history). Due to its brevity, this version, like its predecessors, still left a large gap in the literature. This gap did not start to be filled until the appearance of Chris Bonington's 1981 book *Quest for Adventure*.<sup>6</sup>

In preparing his account of the expedition, Bonington clearly spoke with both Diemberger and Schmuck. As a result, Bonington told the story from a broader perspective than had Diemberger. Bonington's account reinforced the Dyhrenfurths' comments about Wintersteller's performance. Schmuck and Wintersteller emerge from the background and are characterized as the strongest members of the expedition.<sup>7</sup>

It was also in Bonington's account that the discord among the four team members first appeared in the English literature. In saying this, I am not being critical of Diemberger. At the time when he wrote his accounts, it was simply not considered appropriate to air one's dirty laundry in public. Furthermore, Reinhold Schmuck, Marcus' son, showed me the original of a letter from the then governor of Salzburg (and later chancellor of Austria). It asked Marcus not to write or speak publicly about any of the differences amongst the team.<sup>8</sup> So, if Diemberger's account reads as

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<sup>5</sup> In *Summits and Secrets*, Diemberger writes: “Herbert Tichy and his Sherpa had worked their way up Gurla Mandhata in Tibet that way.” So, while he repeatedly celebrates the style of his own climb, he does acknowledge some precedent — just not that of his teammates. The inevitable result, as reflected in the quote from Messner and Höfler (no less), was that it was Diemberger and Buhl who received credit for making a climb whose style was “a work of genius”.

<sup>6</sup> The Broad Peak story did not appear in later editions of this book.

<sup>7</sup> It is clear from most accounts that Wintersteller did most of the trailbreaking as well as cooking. He was the workhorse of the team. Yet Diemberger is quoted by Eiselin (1961, p. 154) as saying on Dhaulagiri: “On Broad Peak they beat me to it, although I had done all the hard work ....” Either this is a misquote by Eiselin; the quote is taken very much out of context; or Diemberger was seriously misrepresenting the facts as presented in virtually all other accounts and records.

<sup>8</sup> Although Diemberger did not see this letter, it is only fair to assume that he understood the times as reflected in it, and wrote his accounts accordingly.

though the expedition was one happy team, that is understandable and he cannot — in my opinion — be criticized for that.

The next account of the 1957 Austrian expedition to Broad Peak to appear in English was the already-mentioned *Hermann Buhl: Climbing without Compromise*, by Messner and Höfler, published in 2000. This version was largely based on selected excerpts from a seven-part report on the climb, prepared in base camp by Hermann Buhl.<sup>9</sup>

In these excerpts, Buhl makes only two brief references to any discord amongst the team. In the first, he expresses annoyance that Schmuck and Wintersteller set off early on summit day. Buhl writes:

Marcus has left the tent and Fritz follows straight after him. We finish eating and then at 3:30 as agreed, we too [Buhl and Diemberger] set off. .... Actually I am a bit annoyed; we had agreed to set off together. But Marcus and Fritz always do it like that. They never wait and just set off ahead. Normally that doesn't matter, but at 7000 m and more, it is difficult enough to make up the time difference even when it is only a quarter of an hour.

In the second, he comments: "Quader [*sic*] [the Pakistani liaison officer] had already told Fritz [Wintersteller] that morning that it was not right to leave us [Buhl and Diemberger] to clear the camps, while they went off climbing without our knowledge — to a mountain [Skil Brum] we had always talked about climbing together."

Overall, the account by Messner and Höfler suggests none of the serious discord found in Bonington's account. However, it is still worth going into a bit more detail on both of these complaints.

Concerning Wintersteller and Schmuck leaving early, Buhl writes a bit later: "Then the snow gets deeper. It is light powder and wind-blown drifted snow. It takes us hours to catch up with Fritz and Marcus."

There is a puzzle here. How can it take hours to catch up to two people who only have a 15-minute lead, when the two ahead are breaking trail in powder snow?<sup>10</sup> The answer that first comes to mind is that the ones following are not fit. If so, that would beg the question of whether the root of Buhl's anger was Schmuck and Wintersteller leaving early, or Buhl not being able to keep up with the others. There may be other explanations, but there is something not right here.<sup>11</sup>

Buhl's second complaint had to do with Schmuck and Wintersteller going to Skil Brum. When I asked them about it in November 2005, Fritz Wintersteller and Qader Saeed contradicted what Buhl wrote in this passage. Qader emphasized that he gave Schmuck and Wintersteller

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<sup>9</sup> Note that this report is distinct from Buhl's climbing diaries. The former was typewritten by Buhl at base camp and intended to be read by others. The diaries were handwritten and personal, meant for him. One can reasonably assume that there would be differences in how the two present the events of the expedition. The handwritten diaries have not been made public. However, a transcription of them has just appeared in German in the 2005 reissue of Buhl's classic *Achttausend drüber und drunter* (more on this below). It was the report, not the diaries, which was quoted in the book by Messner and Höfler. It is important to keep this in mind.

<sup>10</sup> On page 131 of his book *Broad Peak*, Sale reports Wintersteller making this same point.

<sup>11</sup> Sorting out the details of the morning of June 9 provides a good example of what any fan of the classic Japanese film *Rashomon* (Kurasawa 1950) already knows: you cannot rely on any single source for "the truth", even when consulting diaries or an eyewitness's recollection. For example, Wintersteller's diaries have him and Schmuck leaving at 4 a.m., half an hour after Buhl and Diemberger. Furthermore, Marcus Schmuck's son, Reinhold, sent me the photo reproduced in Figure 1. If it is accurately described, then it supports the contention that Schmuck and Wintersteller did leave after Buhl and Diemberger.

permission to go to Skil Brum (Buxton 2005).<sup>12</sup> Buhl's complaint about them doing so while he and Diemberger were clearing the upper camps echoes the earlier quote we saw from Diemberger. Both give the impression that Schmuck and Wintersteller were not pulling their weight and that Buhl and Diemberger had to do an unfair share of the work. This is simply not an accurate representation of the facts as I understand them. Bonington's account is consistent with what Fritz Wintersteller told me — namely, that all four had agreed to clear their own personal gear as well as their share of the expedition equipment, including tentage. Schmuck and Wintersteller did this on their descent from the summit. Buhl and Diemberger (apparently due to fatigue) did not. Rather, after summiting they descended to base camp, leaving their gear on the mountain. Consequently, after resting they had to re-ascend to high camp to clear their share.

So, while Buhl was understandably upset that Wintersteller and Schmuck went off to climb Skil Brum without Diemberger and him, it is equally understandable that Schmuck and Wintersteller did so.

There are a few reasons I say this, based largely on my conversations with Fritz Wintersteller and Qader Saeed. First, as Bonington points out, the relationship between the two teams was very bad even before the final, successful summit attempt. This was further aggravated by Schmuck and Wintersteller's anger over Buhl and Diemberger not clearing their gear on their descent, and taking unjustifiable risk in going to the summit so late in the day. As to the former point, this meant that if all four were to go to Skil Brum, Schmuck and Wintersteller would have to wait around for a few days while the other two went back up to do their share of stripping the camps. Second, Qader had gotten a report saying that the window of good weather was short, so if they were going to go, they could not wait. (The weather encountered by Diemberger and Buhl on Chogolisa is a testament to the accuracy of this report.) Third, based on Buhl's performance on summit day, and the fatigue of both Buhl and Diemberger after their descent from Broad Peak, Wintersteller and Schmuck would not have had them along even if they had been in camp. Their performance and fitness level (made even more obvious by their not clearing camps on the way down) would simply not allow the lightning ascent required to get up and down Skil Brum before the weather changed. However, Wintersteller made one other thing clear to me when asked the direct question: if Diemberger and Buhl had been at base camp and both had been fit enough to keep up, they would absolutely have gone as a foursome, despite the previous problems.

Returning to the literature, the next account of the 1957 first ascent of Broad Peak was in Sale and Cleare's *Climbing the World's 14 Highest Mountains: The History of the 8000-Meter Peaks*, published in 2000. In preparing the section on Broad Peak, Sale spoke with both Fritz Wintersteller and Marcus Schmuck. John Cleare also included photos from Kurt Diemberger. Diemberger specified certain conditions for the use of his photos which needed to be agreed upon by John Cleare, Richard Sale and the publisher. One of the terms was that Diemberger could check the text for errors, but significantly (given the ensuing controversy), that same clause explicitly stated that he did *not* have the right to make changes. Nevertheless, Sale's U.K. Publishers, HarperCollins, changed his text prior to publication, on Diemberger's insistence. Furthermore, these changes were made without Sale being informed.

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<sup>12</sup> Qadar Saeed explained to me (Buxton 2005) that he was able to give permission because Skil Brum did not appear on the map and was therefore not a recognized mountain. By exploring it, Schmuck and Wintersteller were doing the Pakistani government a service. On their return they were congratulated by the Pakistani government for having done so.

I have photocopies of the originals of both the December 26, 1999, letter that Diemberger sent John Cleare specifying the conditions of use of his photos, and a January 8, 2003 letter from HarperCollins to Richard Sale explaining the reasons for its actions. Diemberger's conditions included the following clauses:

- 3) because even the best writers continue to make factual errors and mix-ups on what happened on Broad Peak, Chogolisa, Dhaulagiri, K2, I will grant the use of my pictures only if the author does send me the few actual pages of his text, which shall be illustrated with my pictures, in time to tell him such factual errors ... it remains his free will to correct or not.
- 4) inclusion of three of my books onto [*sic*] the bibliography page: a) "Summits & Secrets" (Hodder & Stroughton), b) "The Endless Knot – K2, mountain of dreams and destiny" (Collins) and c) "The Kurt Diemberger Omnibus" (The Mountaineers & Baton Wicks)

Despite these terms, here is what HarperCollins wrote to Richard Sale:

.... Just as we were about to go to press (you'll remember things got very tight towards the end of the schedule), we received a fax saying that unless we changed certain specific captions and text, and inserted references to his own books within the text, Herr Diemberger would revoke all permissions to use his photographs and instigate legal proceedings against HarperCollins. As the corrections concerned events in which Diemberger was personally involved, we had no option other than to take his view and make the changes that he requested. These changes were made under our contract with you allowing us to make changes that in our opinion are liable to end up in legal action by a third party.

There are a few things to note:

1. The last phrase of clause 3) makes clear that Diemberger did *not* have the right to change the text, just make suggestions.
2. Diemberger added references to three of his own books to the revised text (Sale, personal communication). In so doing he exceeded what was stipulated in clause 4) of his conditions of use. His doing so can be viewed as self-serving rather than addressing any perceived errors in Sale's text.
3. Sale and HarperCollins *did* conform to Diemberger's conditions of use, and it is clear from events that Diemberger did get copies of the proofs of the relevant parts of the book.
4. Diemberger's changes went well beyond making corrections. For example, he added a passage stating that he was asked to join the expedition due to his performance in climbing the "Mushroom" on the Königsspitze. This is an anecdote that he has not included in *any* of his previous accounts in English, regardless of their length. It was not part of Sale's original text (Sale, personal communication). Therefore it *cannot* be considered essential; rather it is indicative of the liberties that Diemberger took with Sale's text under the guise of addressing its "errors".
5. Based on what he has written, Diemberger's changes appear to have more to do with whose version of history gets presented rather than correcting errors. Sale wrote a version of the climb's history that reflected the accounts of the other two living participants. Due to Diemberger's intervention, that is not what got published.

To go against his own terms and threaten legal action, Diemberger must have really wanted to change Sale's text. Here is what Diemberger wrote to me:

"The corrected errors were mainly, that Schmuck and not Buhl was the initiator of the Broad Peak expedition (clearly a matter of opinion – but my version is corroborated by a pro memoria of Hermann Buhl). And secondly: that I was wrongly told to have said on

Dhaulagiri (now on p. 193/194 Sale-book 2004): „...on Broad Peak they beat me to it, although I had done all the hard work.“ referring to being first on top ...”<sup>13</sup>

He admits that the first point is a matter of opinion (there is documentation supporting both views). The second has to do with a quote that has already appeared in the literature and which I have discussed briefly in footnote 7.

Regardless of the merits of his justification, Diemberger replaced Sale’s account with his own. Hence, despite the copyright notice or the stated authorship, the version of the 1957 expedition in this book is his, not Sale’s, making it his fourth in English.

On seeing this account, Wintersteller and Schmuck contacted Sale, understandably believing that he had written it. Their reason for doing so was that what had appeared in the book was not consistent with what they had told him, nor with what he had said he would write. They wanted to register their sense of betrayal.<sup>14</sup>

## Sale’s Broad Peak

This incident led to the most recent account of the expedition — Richard Sale’s 2004 book, *Broad Peak*. This is by far the most extensive account of the expedition in English. And while it is consistent with the account by Bonington, it is nevertheless turning out to be the most controversial.

One of the strongest aspects of this book is that it is the first to draw on all three diaries kept by team members (Buhl’s,<sup>15</sup> Schmuck’s and Wintersteller’s<sup>16</sup>). It also draws on interviews with Schmuck, Wintersteller, Diemberger and Saeed, as well as on Schmuck’s book, *Broad Peak 8047m: Meine Bergfahrten mit Hermann Buhl*, which was published after the expedition.<sup>17</sup>

So what of Sale’s treatment of Buhl and Diemberger, the two characters in the foreground in Diemberger’s accounts?

The characterization of Buhl is very consistent with Bonington’s. It is that of a highly competitive man who is struggling with frustrations due to sickness, fatigue, the aftermath of frostbite from his time on Nanga Parbat, and, ultimately, the difficulty of being one of the world’s most famous climbers and yet not being able to keep up with the younger Wintersteller. But in general, the

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<sup>13</sup> Personal communication.

<sup>14</sup> Wintersteller had also written to Höfler to contest the accuracy of the account based on Buhl’s report, found in the Messner and Höfler book.

<sup>15</sup> One of the most consistent criticisms leveled at Sale is that he made use of Buhl’s diaries without the permission of Buhl’s widow. This is not an issue I am going to go into. My focus is on the expedition and its history. That means the diary’s *contents*, not this particular controversy. Transcriptions of Buhl’s complete Broad Peak and Chogolisa diaries appeared in print shortly after Sale’s book and so are now publicly available (more on this later).

<sup>16</sup> Diemberger did not keep a diary, which is significant given the amount he has subsequently written about the expedition. Furthermore — based on my asking the direct question to Fritz Wintersteller and Reinhold and Christian Schmuck — Diemberger, unlike Sale, has not read the diaries of Schmuck or Wintersteller, nor did he consult with them in the preparation of his published accounts

<sup>17</sup> As mentioned earlier, Schmuck’s book has never been translated into English. Even in German it was published in a very small production run. I have not been able to find a copy, so have not consulted it in preparing this article.

portrayal is not disrespectful. On the contrary, it highlights the strength of character that got Buhl to the summit *despite* these problems — problems that would have caused almost anyone else to turn back. Buhl appears exceptional, but human. For the most part, if anyone is going to level criticism at Sale for his portrayal of Buhl in this book, my view is that criticism must be directed at Bonington as well.

The person who comes out the least well in this account is Diemberger. In many ways, how could he not? By far the most previously read account in English is the one in *Summits and Secrets*, of which Diemberger is the author. It is not surprising, therefore, that it was not self-critical. To be fair, nor was it critical of anyone else.

Sale set himself the unenviable task of trying to bring the history of the climb out from the shadow cast by Diemberger's compelling storytelling. In so doing, Sale brings Diemberger down from his stance as poet into the grunt and sweat of expedition climbing, where people are tired, grumpy, critical and often unreasonable. And in this world — in Sale's telling and in the diaries of the others — Diemberger was not the famous climber of 8000-metre peaks (as he was later to become known). Rather, he was an outsider, the only one on the team who had not previously climbed with any of the others. He was a beginner at expedition climbing who still needed to get some experience under his belt in order to mature. In short, Diemberger is portrayed as being human and fallible rather than as the poetic young climber who shared Buhl's last minutes.

In Sale's telling, the problems of interpersonal discord began even before the expedition left Austria. The issue that first started to interfere with the relationship between Buhl and Schmuck had to do with something we have already touched on: leadership. Buhl, who was certainly the best known of the team, felt that he should be leader. However, given the controversial aftermath of the Nanga Parbat expedition, this was not acceptable to the Österreichischer Alpenverein. The eventual compromise was that Schmuck was the overall leader of the expedition but that Buhl was to be the climbing leader.

On the mountain, this didn't work out. As Sale tells it, Buhl was weak (due to a combination of sickness and the aftermath of frostbite to his foot on Nanga Parbat). Likewise, Diemberger is characterized as being weak, a sandbagger and not very competent (his lack of performance in handling a crevasse is one example). Wintersteller was the strongest and did much/most of the leading. He was generally paired up with and out front with Schmuck. Diemberger generally paired up with Buhl.

After the first failed attempt, which got them to the fore-summit, they tried again after resting at base camp. All of them reached the summit. However, by this time the group was climbing as two separate teams of two. Diemberger and Buhl reached the summit significantly later than the other pair (it being very questionable whether Buhl — who was eventually climbing alone, behind — would make it at all). Diemberger was descending from the summit when he met Buhl, and turned around to accompany him back up to the top.

As has already been recounted, after descending to base camp, Diemberger and Buhl had to go back up to retrieve their personal effects and clear off their share of the camps, and on their return from doing so, both were stunned and furious to find that Wintersteller and Schmuck had gone off and bagged Skil Brum.

As a consequence, Diemberger went off alone, ostensibly to take photographs. Then, while the others were sleeping, Buhl went off to meet him without telling Schmuck or Wintersteller. What is clear is that Buhl and Diemberger had planned this in advance. In his recent book in German, *Aufbruch ins Ungewisse* (Launching into Adventure), Diemberger wrote: "...but our discussion with Quader [*sic*] in the kitchen ended with the permission for that mountain: 'They have their peak, you have yours!' said Quader."

However, when I asked Saeed about this (Buxton 2005), he strongly denied that this conversation took place and insisted that not only did he not give Diemberger and Buhl permission to climb

Chogolisa, he did not have the authority to do so even if he had wanted to.<sup>18</sup> He did know that Buhl was going off after Diemberger, but Buhl was under clear instructions to get him and bring him directly back to base camp. Saeed stated that as a result of this illegal attempt on the mountain, he recommended in his final report that Diemberger be banned from Pakistan.

So, what about Sale's book?

It is not without its weaknesses. My perspective is that (often legitimate) attacks on these weaknesses have overshadowed discussion or appreciation of its strengths, and vice versa. Overall, I see the book as important despite its flaws. That being said, one needs to be aware of them and at least take them into account. But as the dictum goes, "Don't throw out the baby with the bathwater."

Here are some of the main things I found wrong with the book:

- The writing is sometimes unclear and in need of a good editor.
- There are mistakes of fact that should have been caught before publication.
- There are a number of cases where the author shows a lack of objectivity. This erodes one's confidence in his judgment and therefore damages his ability to make his case.
- There is no index,<sup>19</sup> no bibliography and no maps.

An example of what I mean by unclear writing can be found on pages 72–75. This passage describes carrying gear up to base camp from where it was dropped off by the porters. I defy anyone to make sense of this in terms of reconciling distances, times and locations. A map would have helped greatly, but the writing is still a mess.

Another example of sloppy writing is found on page 14, where Charles Bruce's joining Conway is being discussed. Because things are not presented in chronological order, the reader will almost certainly assume that Bruce was with Mummery before he was with Conway, which is not correct.

While seemingly small, these are points a competent editor should have caught. Furthermore, it is through clarity and accuracy on such things that an author gains the confidence of the reader.

As for mistakes of fact, here are a few glaring examples:

On page 30, Sale has Schmuck in Spitsbergen in 1955 and writes: "The Austrian successes on Cho Oyu and Gasherbrum II had pointed the way." Though Cho Oyu was first climbed in 1954, the Austrians did not make their successful first ascent of Gasherbrum II until 1956, the year after Schmuck was in Spitsbergen. This kind of mistake, while trivial on the one hand, serves to discredit the quality of the research elsewhere in the book.

Likewise, on page 190, Sale describes Dee Molenaar as "another member of the successful American Gasherbrum I expedition". This is simply not accurate. Yet again, since the details are wrong, the reliability of the rest of the research is undermined even when it is accurate.

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<sup>18</sup> Unlike Skil Brum, Cogolisa was on the map and therefore was forbidden to climb without a permit.

<sup>19</sup> Sadly, Sale is not alone here. The lack of an index is far too common in mountaineering books today. This absence makes a book almost unusable as a research vehicle. In this day and age of computers and modern word processors, it is inexcusable. If the author and/or publisher do not take the book seriously enough to include an index, why should you or I take it seriously enough to purchase or read?

I have singled out these errors because both could have been avoided if Sale had checked his facts in his own book *Climbing the World's 14 Highest Mountains!*

Moving on, there is also an unnecessary lack of objectivity in many places, as I have stated, and this lack of discipline does further damage to the book's positive contribution. Again, let me give some specific examples:

On page 27, Sale is describing a fall by Buhl on the east face of the Fleischbank in the Wilder Kaiser. In his diaries, as quoted on pages 53–54 of Messner and Höfler's *Hermann Buhl: Climbing without Compromise*, Buhl states that the fall was due to a hold breaking off. To this, Sale writes: "There were (and are) those who dispute the broken hold claim." In my estimation, this comes across as relying on unsubstantiated and anonymous climbers' gossip. Rather than Sale establishing any foundation for objectivity, the impression given is that he is using innuendo to build up Schmuck's ability at the expense of Buhl's (Schmuck had done the route clean). This is simply not necessary. Schmuck's accomplishments are enough on their own and do not need such help. It detracts from the book and should have been left out, or supported with appropriate documentation.

On the next page, Sale does his case additional damage by stating, without any substantive documentation or discussion: "It is difficult not at least to consider the idea that on Nanga Parbat Hermann Buhl was secretly pleased when Otto Kempter, who was to have been his climbing partner on the summit attempt, failed to get past the Silver Saddle and so left the summit to Buhl alone." From my perspective, as this stands, this statement is completely without merit or justification.

Yet there is more. On page 39, Sale calls into question Diemberger's earlier ascent of the "Mushroom" on the Königsspitze. In the absence of any documented evidence that this ascent was disputed prior to Diemberger joining the Broad Peak expedition, the section should not be included. Again, unsubstantiated climbers' gossip has no place in a serious book. Furthermore, given that neither Buhl, Schmuck or Wintersteller had ever climbed with Diemberger prior to the expedition, it is inconceivable to me that they would have accepted him sight unseen onto the team, no matter how much money came with him, if his having done this climb was in doubt at the time. This section just sounds petty and, once again, damages Sale's legitimate and substantiated points.

Having identified some of the weaknesses of the book, I feel equally compelled to address some of the unfair criticisms that have been levelled at it. First, Sale does not accuse Diemberger of stealing Buhl's diaries. What Sale does is report that Schmuck wrote this in his diary at the time. Likewise, Sale does not suggest that Diemberger was in some way responsible for Buhl's death. Again, Sale simply reported that this is what Schmuck felt at the time, in the heat of the moment, and what he wrote in his diaries. Criticizing Sale on these counts is tantamount to shooting the messenger. What is strange about these particular criticisms is that there is nothing here that Bonington didn't mention in his account 24 years earlier. Perhaps more to the point, the strongest implicit criticism I have seen of Diemberger (and Buhl) in terms of the events leading up to Buhl's death on Chogolisa was a footnote by Othmar Gurtner to Diemberger's own first account of the climb, published in the 1958–59 edition of *The Mountain World*, which said:

The classic view, developed as the result of a century's experience in the Western Alps, definitely calls for the invariable protection of the rope on corniced ridges, especially in bad visibility. The long climbing rope, kept taut, would probably have kept Buhl in Diemberger's tracks by its very pull. If not, Diemberger's instinctive leap in the other direction would have stretched the rope so violently that it would have bitten into the newly broken edge of the snow and might well have held Buhl in his fall over the broken edge. Blind credence in a lucky start was weighed in the scales against prudence. Fate decided the balance. (p. 150)

There is nothing by Sale that is in any way as critical of Diemberger (and Buhl) as this footnote, and it was published as part of Diemberger's own account!<sup>20</sup>

Continuing on, there is one more criticism that has been levelled at Sale: that he suggests that Diemberger, having stolen Buhl's diaries, may have made changes to them. This is equally inaccurate. What Sale says is that the version of the diaries which he and Horst Höfler have seen is a typewritten transcript rather than the handwritten originals. He simply states that the accuracy of these typescripts cannot be verified until their provenance is known and they are compared with the originals. This is simply good scholarship (and, as we will discuss below, this concern is not without some justification). However, far from accusing Diemberger of any misdeeds in this matter, Sale actually makes an argument as to why there would be nothing in the diaries that Diemberger would want to change.

Sale's book has made an important contribution to our appreciation of the accomplishments of this expedition. For that, I welcome its appearance and was glad to read it. I just wish that it had been better written and edited. I also wish that it had been written in a more objective way — a way that was accurate about the history but sidestepped some of the unnecessary controversy. However, despite its problems, it is an important contribution to the literature and worth reading, but with one's critical faculties intact. And for those who are all fired up about it, I would suggest reading the Bonington account before dismissing it out of hand.

## Summary and Conclusion

There are two other things I want to mention before concluding.

First, interested readers are referred to the Web site of the Austrian OEAV Karakoram Expedition 1957: [www.broadpeak.org/en/](http://www.broadpeak.org/en/) This site includes a slide show of photos taken on the first ascent, biographical information on the team, excerpts from the diaries of Schmuck and Wintersteller, etc.

Second, I want to make some comments about Buhl's book, *Achttausend drüber und drunter* (published in English as *Nanga Parbat Pilgrimage – The Lonely Challenge*).

Whereas the original manuscript was written by Buhl, the text that appeared in print was heavily edited by Kurt Maix. In their book, Messner and Höfler state:

We could find many examples of how Kurt Maix had not only edited but also in parts re-written or even written from scratch. Maix goes so far as to admit this himself in a letter to Generl Buhl [Hermann's wife] dated 6 December 1958: "I respected those people and mountaineers who were fond of this lovable and

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<sup>20</sup> It is interesting to note that Diemberger's telling of this part of the story in *Summits and Secrets* is accompanied by a similar footnote of his own that reads, not dissimilarly and not coincidentally:

Though, perhaps the pull of the rope would have kept him in my tracks, and he might never have strayed from the right line of descent. (p. 128, *The Kurt Diemberger Omnibus*)

Besides being interesting for the part of the earlier footnote that it does not include, it is also worth noting that it remained for the translator (not Diemberger himself) to give proper credit to the source, by way of the following additional footnote:

A similar thought was expressed by Othmar Gurtner, commenting on the author's account in *The Mountain World, 1958-59*.

sensitive Hermann Buhl. I was proud to be able to edit his work, and I carried out this task carefully without wanting to suppress him. But I removed everything that might be harmful to him and rewrote certain parts. I protected Hermann — from himself and from the evil world — as I had always done. Thus I chose to change whole chapters and even to write some of them anew from my own perspective.” (Messner and Höfler 2000, pp 193–194)

Maix’s attitudes, shown in this passage, reflect the times. Clearly, for him our heroes could not be seen to be human. They needed myths cast around them and even needed to be protected from themselves. The current view — and some might call it revisionist history<sup>21</sup>— is that people who do great things but have human weaknesses or failings are all the more worthy of respect precisely because, like you and me, they *are* human. That Buhl’s diaries from Broad Peak and Chogolisa have finally become available in the new 2005 German edition of *Achttausend drüber und drunter* is a great contribution to the literature (and one hopes that they will appear in English translation sooner rather than later). However, there is a certain concern that, despite the publisher’s best intentions, the transcription of the handwritten diaries might in some way be edited in the Kurt Maix tradition.

Here is the issue. In the new edition of Buhl’s book, there is only one page of the handwritten Broad Peak diaries reproduced in facsimile; therefore, there is only one page from the diaries for which the reader can compare the transcription with the original. This page contains part of Buhl’s entry for summit day. The problem is this: on this one page, page 337 of the book, there is an important mistake that causes the meaning to differ significantly from that of the original, found on page 314.

In the handwritten original, Buhl writes: “Mir ist hundsmiserabel, vielleicht von der Kälte, habe keinen Appetit und ....” (I am disabled by sickness, perhaps from the cold, I have no appetite and ....).<sup>22</sup> The German word *hundsmiserabel* used in this extract is really significant. Literally translated into English, it means “dog-sick”. But in German it means that you feel really, really bad — both physically and psychologically. You feel as if you could just lie down and die.

Yet, in the transcription, this passage appears as: “Mir ist links miserabel, vielleicht von der Kälte, habe keinen Appetit und ....” (I feel left sick, perhaps from the cold, I have no appetite and ....).

There is a big difference in how the two versions read in German, and “links miserabel” makes no more sense in German than “left sick” does in English. This error, and its significance, was pointed out to me by Marcus Schmuck’s son, Reinhold.<sup>23</sup> In drawing attention to it, I am not

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Sacks (2005).

<sup>22</sup> These translations into English are mine.

<sup>23</sup> If one looks at the reproduction of the handwritten version and looks at the word in question in isolation, it is easy to see how “hunds” could be mistaken for “links”. First, this is a diary, after all, and the script is not all that easy to read. Second, there is clearly what appears to be a dot above where the “i” in “links” would be. However, one has to look at the whole page to get at an accurate transcription. There is an earlier form of German script called Sütterlin. In it, one put a mark over the “u” in order to differentiate it from the “e”. Many people, including Buhl, carried this practice over, even when writing in modern script. This can be clearly seen on the same page, such as over the “u” in “Marcus” or in the word “und” that appears at the end of the section I translated. But there is yet another clue that makes it all the more clear that the transcription is wrong. There is a hyphen after the “word” in question, making it evident that this is one word broken over two lines, not two words. So, even if one initially thought that the first part was “links”, this interpretation would not be sustainable since the compound word “linksmiserabel” has absolutely no meaning in German. Whereas a knowledge of Sütterlin might require someone over 50 years of age, this hyphen — and hence the error — should have been caught by any conscientious native German speaker doing the transcription.

suggesting that either the publishers or the person doing the transcription intentionally distorted the meaning in the way that Maix consciously edited Buhl's text. Rather, what I *am* saying is that there is a lot of controversy around this expedition and that some of it has to do with the accuracy of the diary transcriptions. Given the errors on the single page that one can check, perhaps one way to avoid future controversy — controversy that distracts attention from the real accomplishments of the expedition — is to make the originals of *all* the diaries and associated documents available to serious writers.

All five members of this expedition — Schmuck, Buhl, Wintersteller, Diemberger and Saeed — deserve a better legacy and a more complete, objective and accurate history than what they have gotten thus far. If the original documents had been freely available years ago, much of the current controversy could have been avoided. The recent publication of the Buhl diary transcriptions in the new edition of his book, and of material from Schmuck and Wintersteller on the Broad Peak Web site are very welcome moves in this direction. None of the expedition's participants need anyone else to "protect" their legacy, especially at the expense of others. They all did something remarkable. It is worthy of being understood and recognized. For some of them, such recognition has been far too long in coming. It is time for this to be rectified for the whole team's sake. It is my hope that our session at the 2005 Banff Mountain Book Festival, and this essay will make some contribution towards bringing this about.

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**Figure 1.** Looking down on Fritz Wintersteller in high camp. The photo is said to have been taken at 4 a.m. on summit day, June 9, 1957. If so, the footprints of more than one person coming up from the camp call into question Buhl's and Diemberger's accounts, which say that Schmuck and Wintersteller left before them. The significance of the photo has less to do with who left when than with the importance of not jumping to conclusions after looking at only one piece of the data (including this photo). Different participants have different truths, even when all of them are being honest. An important thing to remember for the would-be historian. Photo: Marcus Schmuck