

From : Jean Coudray FFM *

Subject : Role of the U.I.A.A.

Nowadays, expeditions and trekking are more and more numerous - aiming at more or less important and ambitious targets, but bringing a considerable and growing number of foreigners to the Himalayan valleys, and thus an increase in contacts between people of the host countries and guest visitors. Let me insist first of all on the role of moral tutelage which the UIAA must assume for those who practise Himalayism. One must here remind, precise and develop what may be called the deontology of expeditions.

- The respect for the people in welcoming countries: respect of men, their traditions, religions, mentalities. What might sound simple and obvious nevertheless needs constant attention to enable one to act tactfully in all details, with a preoccupation never to give offense, irritate or create doubt.

- To respect and to comply with laws and by-laws of welcoming countries regarding the practice of mountaineering.

Even though the latter may sometimes be painful and awkward, and though one might wish to see them progressively alleviated, climbers must accept them and obey them.

- The respect for mountains and areas visited: simply to leave the places as one found them: again this may sound obvious but nonetheless appears to be difficult to carry out. One just has to visit a few base camps to be convinced of this.

- Last but not all, the respect for a certain ethic of Himalayism. In carrying out expeditions more soberly, avoiding in particular colossal undertakings with many a cumbersome package. By no means do I intend to follow the present fashion by advocating, as many have done, ultra-light expeditions in the Alpine style.

Now, considering the development of mountaineering in the Himalayas in the past thirty years, and the problems thereby created, I earnestly think that heavy expeditions are no longer advisable-even if extreme targets are set, or conversely, if modest ambitions are to be secured with a sizeable margin.

In a word, this is the moral role which befalls to the UIAA and only the UIAA can assume it, owing to the influence it has on associations, and also on information medias it can use to get its guidelines through.

Secondly, in being the partner of both welcoming countries and of expeditions, the UIAA become a privileged speaker for the former and a spokesman for the latter.

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1/ The UIAA offers its collaboration to most countries to try and overcome given difficulties inherent to mountains, as follows:

- The appreciable growth of tourism in these areas and its consequences in economic and human matters by creating new needs.

- The training of mountaineering staff or guides of the Himalaya, appears today as one of the more urgent necessities. A potential pool of clients already exists to ascend peaks even those of a great height. It will keep growing, and the guides- to - be of the Himalayas could head, even organise these climbs. In heading to this direction in recent years, Nepal is effectively proving that it offers a new profession open to some of its youth: that of mountain guide. "Guide" in its most honourable meaning, as we interpret it in the Alpine countries, namely as a cooperation, attaining high technical standards, and world-famous. However, in this perspective, Nepal will definitely have to develop amongst its youth the practice of mountaineering as a sport.

This preliminary training will foster a passion, without which true vocations could not arise. Sizeable efforts and considerable financial means are necessary to this effect. These will be secured more easily thanks to the understanding and good-will of friendly countries which apply for expeditions.

Briefly, this entails the close participation to tasks already set up, as for instance the Manang School, and admirable achievement which I visited recently and have the pleasure to praise and condone. Then, it entails suggesting workable initiatives to complement what already exists: for example, the setting up of joint expeditions with the primary aim to complete or update the training of managing staff or guides. This would of course require both a deliberate will to do so and recognised skills on the part of members of these expeditions.

The above are but a few recommendations. The UIAA has an obligation to do all it can to help Nepal and host countries in this undertaking, and to convince all its members and world opinion as to the importance of this reality.

The era of Himalayan great conquests is over, or nearly so! For still some time to come the Himalaya will offer a number of possibilities which should enable man to fulfill his quest for adventure, enable him to out do himself, thus always stretching his ability in the extreme conditions of very high altitude. But other aspects of adventure are now before him.

Thus we must approach the expedition in a different light- a more humanist one- its principal motivation being not only to search for but also to offer.

2/ The UIAA must not forget, however, its role of spokesman for alpinists and expeditions. To encourage ventures and to facilitate their organisation remains one of its principal responsibilities. To that effect, it must convince the authorities of the host countries that streamlining their rules is necessary. The future of expeditions is at stake.

Indeed, even though expeditions are becoming rather common-place their setting up is increasingly hazardous, whatever their targets may be. Will most countries also accept that it would be desirable to favour joint expeditions, which would sincerely accept to play an effective role in training? How would these expeditions, with limited means, be otherwise prepared to spend a great deal of time, at the risk of not reaching the summit, if they face at their arrival bureaucratic harassment, ever increasing taxes, exorbitant material constraints?

3/ As from now, and thanks to this kind of intervention, the UIAA can fully assume its fundamental function of dynamic instigator, favouring and supporting expeditions, in the Himalayas and other remote mountains chains. This is done in building one's concepts about expeditions, based on experiences rich in teaching acquired in the years and on the realities of today; in becoming a switch plate of all information data, available to those who want them; in encouraging enterprises of a very high technical level, those who score a progress in the conquest of summits, that true stake of a competition in which skilled alpinists are engaged; in encouraging mixed expeditions, by organising meetings and seminars, in order to share ideas, to exchange information, to create contacts between climbers of different nationalities, to present their achievements and their projects

However the action of the UIAA could not be truly effective, in its different areas of its activities, without calling upon the medias. How else can it diffuse and present its role, actions, philosophy and practice of the mountain in the framework of expeditions? How to inform public opinion of its achievements, and therefore those of its members and mountaineers from the world over? It must present all this, skipping the drama, the spectacular of the sensational, too often in the headlines, and instead explaining more widely the quest of those who, endeavouring to better themselves, discover that the key to many problems is a better understanding and mutual help amongst men.

My intervention by no means pretended to restructure the UIAA, not even to sublimate its role. It simply meant to recall the latter, with an effort to see how to improve it, so that its influence may grow within the world of mountains and of expeditions. In conclusion, a role which appears