

The Olympic Alpinism Prize and a promise redeemed*

By Volker Kluge and Thomas Lippert

Kenton Cool holding Arthur Wakefield's Olympic gold medal at the Mount Everest summit on 25th May 2012. The British mountaineer was accompanied by Keith Partridge, who filmed the climb.

Photo: SAMSUNG



The timing was impeccable. On 18 April 2012 – 100 days before the opening of the Olympic Games – the last stage of the “London 2012” countdown began with a series of events in London’s parks. At the same time in Nepal, a British expedition was making ready to climb Mount Everest from the South side. In doing so they planned to honour a promised made 88 years previously by some illustrious predecessors and place an Olympic medal on the highest mountain in the world.

The following month, a week after the Olympic Flame touched down on British soil at RNAS Culdrose in Cornwall on a chartered British Airways Airbus A319 of an the climbers completed their journey. Kenton Cool a 38 year old mountaineer from Gloucestershire carried an Olympic gold medal to a height of 8848 metres. It was the tenth time he had conquered the mountain. This latest successful climb was announced and promoted as “The Olympic Games Pledge”.

The Briton Richard Robinson, a long-time acquaintance of Kenton Cool, had, in search of a London 2012 project, hit on a dazzling idea based on the story of the 1922 British Mount Everest Expedition,

to which the International Olympic Committee (IOC) had presented the “Prix Olympique d’Alpinisme” two years after the expedition’s failure. It was IOC President Pierre de Coubertin who handed over the prize on the final day of the “International Winter Sports Week” in Chamonix in 1924 and honoured the mountaineers’ achievement with a short speech.¹ In 1926 the events in Chamonix and the medals awarded there were retrospectively recognised as the 1st Olympic Winter Games.

Lieutenant-Colonel Edward L. Strutt accepted the prize, an Olympic gold medal, on behalf of the thirteen mountaineers (twelve Britons and an Australian) who had taken part in the expedition. He had been deputy leader on Everest, but in the records published later on only his boss, Brigadier-General Charles G. Bruce, was mentioned. Bruce was already on his way back to the Himalayas.

At first, Coubertin had been a vehement opponent of the Winter Games, but he was enthused by the “snowy prelude”. Strutt in particular had impressed him, as revealed in his memoirs, not published until 1931:



Which gold medal did Lieutenant-Colonel Strutt receive from the IOC President Pierre de Coubertin in 1924; that of the Chamonix Winter Games or that of the Paris Summer Games?

football
lawn tennis
pramming etc
patenage
swimming
boating
hunting etc..
amateur hippyism - polo
the
symposium
at present we
include an etc.

How Mountaineering got into the Olympic Programme

Alpinism, like "patinage", skating, was on the list of desirable sports drawn up in 1894 at the founding congress at the Sorbonne.

Left: Coubertin was an opponent of separate Winter Games, but the Winter Sports Week of Chamonix was in his view a successful "snow prelude" for the Summer Games.

Jillén based this refusal on the participation of paid and professional mountain guides who contradicted the Olympic principle of amateurism, the impossibility of comparing ascents and the variation in conditions faced by the climbers. In addition he declared:

4. *The impossibility of correctly estimating the degree of safety with which an ascent has been made, it being evident that the sporting value of a climb must be considered very much diminished if the climber has exposed himself to dangers that could have been lessened, or altogether avoided, by better judgment and greater skill.*¹

As a fifth and final point Ullén also added that the chairman of the jury relied for his knowledge on information given by the mountaineer, "i. e. the competitor himself". This was accepted in its entirety by the Organising Committee on 2 July 1912, which went a step further in its deliberations: "There is no doubt but that an Olympic mountaineering prize would lead to the loss of many human lives."

In addition it complained that the climbs would take place in places where only a small circle of people with similar interests would spectate. In short: "[...] the standard of mountaineering as a sport would decline".⁸

All the IOC could do was to recognise the change of heart, which also applied to the "Olympic Prize for Game Shooting". When the future Olympic Programme

The 1922 expedition team at breakfast: front left Wakefield, then Morris and General Bruce. On the other side of the front sits Norton. In the background some Sherpas are to be seen, but their names are unknown.

Photo: Royal Geographical Society Archive/John B. Noel



was discussed at the 6th Olympic Congress in Paris in July 1914 the two competitions were no longer to be found on the agenda. At any rate they did not appear in the Minutes, which were not published until 1919 because of the outbreak of the First World War.

That the two prizes did still exist and that ever a "Commission d'Alpinisme" had been set up under the leadership of Dr. Jules Jacot-Guillarmod was demonstrated at the 20th IOC Session, at which Coubertin presented a report. It had been written by a Swiss doctor, who had taken part in several Himalayan expeditions at the turn of the century.

The Minutes also state: "The conclusions are unanimously accepted."⁹ The document does not specify which conclusions. Clearly they had been received positively.

A contributory factor was that Great Britain had renewed its geopolitical interest in Tibet. From the late 19th century the British had been locked in an historic conflict with Russia – described as the "Great Game" – for hegemony in Central Asia. By the twenties, Russia and China were neutralised by revolution and civil war, so the 13th Dalai Lama, who had returned from exile, without direct compulsion found it advantageous to agree with certain arrangements, which made Tibet de facto into a British protectorate. A consequence was the opening of the frontier to British India. For the mountaineering community this was significant. Their imagination and ambition would be given wings.

The new situation that had arisen prompted the Royal Geographical Society, together with the British Alpine Club, to equip a Reconnaissance Expedition under the leadership of the Irish aristocrat Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Howard-Bury. His 1921 mission had the task of exploring the geological conditions in the Himalaya

In the luggage of the 1922 Mt. Everest Expedition was also a Remington portable typewriter, which had come on the market only 17 months earlier. The manufacturer exploited this to the full in an advertisement.

Illustration: Typewriter Topics, August 1922

The arrow shows approximately the highest point reached by the explorers 29,300 feet

This photograph was taken at Khambo Dong, Tibet, a short distance from Everest. The figure standing in the foreground is General, the Honorable C. G. Bruce, Commander of the Expedition. Opposite, one of the members is operating the Remington Portable. Writing from Khambo Dong on April 13, 1921, General Bruce says: "The Remington Portable Typewriter is a very great success and we have it constantly in use—it has gone through a pretty hard trial and we have taken it over several high passes in very bad weather."

Everest

The Highest Point On Earth

The heroic efforts of the hardy explorers who attempted to reach the "top of the world" have won the admiration of all lovers of true sportsmanship. The story of this attempt to conquer the "mountain of mystery" contains one of the finest tributes ever paid our product —the fact that the day-by-day record of the expedition was written on a

Remington Portable

little typewriter daily jugged out the story of effort, hardship and supreme endurance. The Remington is the most complete of all portable typewriters—with Standard Keyboard—just like the big machines. And it fits in a case only four inches high.

Service under the frightful conditions encountered by the Mount Everest Expedition may be called the extreme test of a writing machine. Under this test, the Remington Portable has given final proof of its surpassing strength and dependability. Arctic, mountain cold and storm, under conditions where men could hardly live, this sturdy

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and undertake mapping. Among the by-products was to find a viable route by which Mount Everest might be climbed. On 24 September 1921 George Mallory and Guy Bullock were the first people to reach the North Col at around 7000 metres altitude. There the expedition had to be aborted because of the imminent monsoon.

The "Sacred Mountain" that swallows human lives

The aim of the second British Mount Everest Expedition of 1922 was to climb the highest mountain in the world for the first time. They would be able to make use of the information gathered by the cartographers. This was a mountain regarded by local people as a "Sacred Mountain" and to which the Britons had in 1857 given the name of the man who measured it: George Everest.

Those who took part in the expedition were chosen not only for their ability as mountaineers, but also their education and background and the military rank which six of them possessed. Three of them were Gurkhas¹⁰, and one each belonged to the Royal Scots, the Royal Field Artillery and the Machine Gun Corps. They were accompanied by three doctors, of whom Dr. Theodor H. Somervell and Dr. Arthur W. Wakefield had studied at Cambridge University. Another of its graduates was the mountaineering teacher George Mallory, who could draw on his experiences from 1921. As well as the climbers there were a large number of local porters, so that the full complement numbered around 160 men.

It had been decided to start in the pre-monsoon period this time. From the starting point in India the route led to Tibet, because at that time access to Mount Everest was only possible from the north. The route discovered by Mallory began at the Rongbuk glacier. That was where the base camp was set up. From 5 May 1922 other camps up to a height of around 7000 metres were established.

But the first attempt, led by Mallory partly without any auxiliary oxygen, failed, as did the second under the leadership of Brigadier-General Bruce, who managed with a small team, including photographer and cameraman John B. Noel, to get within about 500 metres of the summit.

Although all the mountaineers were more or less exhausted or sick and had suffered freezing to extremities, the expedition's leadership decided on a further attempt, in which a group of five took part, supported by 14 porters. But at Camp 1 one of the most experienced men, George I. Finch, had to give up, and as Dr. Wakefield remained with him, the team was reduced to a trio, led by Mallory together with the porters through the flank of the north saddle. There the disaster took place on 7 June 1922, when a snowboard suddenly broke loose, tearing two of the four ropes into



The postcard was sold in a set of six for one shilling to commemorate the premiere of Noel's "Climbing Mount Everest", to raise funds for the financing of the next expedition.

Illustrations: Thomas Lippert Archive

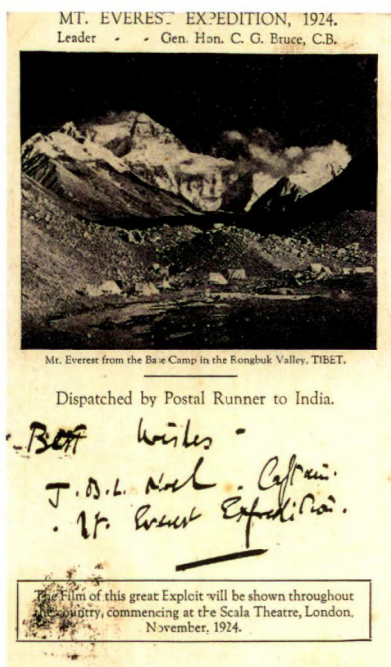


The thirteen members of the Mount Everest Expedition in the Rongbuk Valley. Bottom row from left: George Herbert L. Mallory (1886-1924), George Igle Finch (1888-1970), Dr. Tom George Longstaff (1875-1964), Brigadier-General Charles G. Bruce (1866-1939), Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Lisle Strutt (1874-1948) and Colin Grant Crawford (1890-1959). Behind left: Major Henry Treise Morshead (1882-1931), Captain Geoffrey Bruce (1896-1972), Captain John B. Noel (1890-1989), Dr. Arthur William Wakefield (1876-1949), Dr. Theodor Howard Somervell (1890-1975), Captain C. John Morris (1895-1980) and Major Edward F. Norton (1884-1954).



Whilst the 1924 Mount Everest Expedition was still in progress, photographer Captain Noel issued invitations to the film premiere at London's Scala Theatre, arranged for November. As indicated on the card, it was transported with a Postal Runner to India and from there sent to England. The vignette bears an Indian cult symbol of four right-turning swastikas. The British Film Institute was able to restore the film, so that it could again be shown at the BFI Festival on 18 October 2012.

Illustration: Thomas Joseph Archive



the depths. The bodies of six porters were recovered but another was never found. The expedition was then aborted, and one planned for 1923 was postponed by a year for financial reasons. This also failed, and cost Mallory and his companion Andrew C. Irvine their lives. It was not until 29 May 1953 that the New Zealander Edmund Hillary and the Sherpa Tenzing Norgay finally succeeded in reaching the summit.

"Last-minute idea" and the irritating Paris medals

Despite their failure the mountaineers enjoyed enormous popularity. Mallory and Finch reported on their experiences on a three month long lecture tour through the United States. When asked why he wanted to climb Mount Everest, Mallory's reply became legendary: "Because it's there."

The film made by Noel appeared in March 1923 under the title "Climbing Mount Everest". It was shown for ten weeks at the London Philharmonic Hall and also made a big impression.¹² The exposed films had had developed by the Captain at the base camp in a tent which allowed no light to penetrate. The Captain had made excursions into Tibet while stationed in northern India. He had dried the films using the heated dung of yaks in the absence of other heat sources.

In the long run the IOC could probably not resist this hype. Their motives for giving the "Prix d'Alpinisme" to the British expedition cannot be established for certain, but it seems likely that the dramatic and tragic end of the undertaking contributed to this decision. At least Sandra Noel, the only daughter of the film documentary maker, believes in a considered decision rather than in a "last-minute idea", which she argues for by the fact that the mountaineers did not receive medals of the "Winter Sports Week" but those of the Paris Summer Games.¹³ So supposedly there were not enough Chamonix medals available.

Ms Noel probably starts from the position that the medals for the remaining expedition members were handed over also to Strutt on that February day. Which one he himself received is not known. In fact in the Official Report of 1924 "medals" are mentioned, whereas Coubertin used the singular in his memoirs.

It is likely that the remaining medals were handed over at a later date – possibly even after the Summer Games – a theory which could be backed up by the fact that Noel's medal had got lost in the post.¹⁴ The same applies to the information that the Mount Everest Committee, which had been founded in the meantime by the Royal Geographical Society and the Alpine Club, had requested further medals for the families of the seven porters. Whether the request was fulfilled is unknown.

Whatever: Richard Robinson needed nine months to establish the location of the first medal. After 18 months he located another five, while the others are considered lost. All existing medals show the design "Paris 1924", which proved a source of mystery for Charles Wakefield, who lived in Canada. The grandson of Dr. Wakefield, who had died in 1949, contacted ISOH General Secretary Anthony Th. Bijkerk in 2007, to find out the background to the presentation of the medals.¹⁵

Five years later Wakefield junior said he was prepared to put his grandfather's medal at the disposal of "The



Olympic Games Pledge". He sent Kenton Cool an E-mail with the sentence "Arthur Wakefield's Olympic medal is waiting for you in Toronto wrapped in a flame red silk handkerchief", at the mountaineering ace flew over the Atlantic in the first week in March to borrow this most vital item for the story.¹⁶

It was on 25 May 1912 when Kenton Cool held the relic up to the camera on the summit of Mount Everest. Thus the promise of 1924 was fulfilled. After a six week expedition he returned to Great Britain, where the story could be revealed to a wider audience. For this the Royal Geographical Society put a second gold medal at his disposal, said to have come from the estate of General Charles Bruce. One day before the beginning of the Olympic Games, on 26 July 1912, it was time to hit the Olympic trail again. Cool was chosen to carry the Olympic torch on the stretch between Camden and Westminster. A case perhaps of "Cool" running. (This time without a Jamaican bobsledder in sight.)

"Toni Tollkühn" and a posthumous gold medal for 1932

After the Paris Olympic Games, in November 1924, the Alpinism prize was back on the agenda, this time at the meeting of the IOC Executive Committee, created in 1921. In place of the hunting prize there had suddenly appeared the "Prix d'Aéronautique". The minutes remain silent on the origins of this.¹⁷ However it can be assumed from this that the IOC was against

WHY did you want to climb Mount Everest?" This question was asked of George Leigh Mallory, who was with both expeditions toward the summit of the world's highest mountain, in 1921 and 1922, and who is now in New York. He plans to go again in 1924, and he gave as the reason for persisting in these repeated attempts to reach the top, "Because it's there."

"unnecessary regulations". Baron de Blonay (Alpinisme) and Marquis de Polignac (Aéronautique) were charged with compiling the outstanding performances achieved between 1 January 1924 and 31 December 1928. This in itself is a little strange. The period chosen makes little "Olympic sense". It began before the Chamonix and did not end until after the conclusion of the Amsterdam Games. Despite that there was no one considered worthy of one of the prizes.

It was a time in which the craze for records blossomed unimaginably. The new heroes were pilots like Charles Lindbergh, and the cinema discovered a new genre: the mountain film, in which the Germans especially distinguished themselves. Parallel with the overheated bundles of nerves, the desire grew to become famous as conquerors of mountain peaks – and egos swelled to match. The most ambitious of the climbers began to keep a close eye on each other, and on many mountains there were real races to be the first to reach the top.



"Why did you want to climb Mount Everest?" George Mallory was asked this question on his lecture tour in New York. His laconic answer: "Because it's there." Left: the 1922 expedition also included Bruce's cousin Geoffrey (left). Right: George Ingle Finch, the father of the actor Peter Finch, who in 1977 received a posthumous "Oscar" for his representation of a crazed television presenter in the film satire "Network".

Illustration: New York Times, 18 March 1923.

The German Alpinists Franz and Toni Schmid, 1932 Alpinism Prize winners. On Whit Monday 1932 Toni and his friend Ernst Krebs fell from the North West wall of the Wiesbachhorn. Krebs who was three years older, survived the fall which was allegedly caused when an ice-fastening gave way. In contrast to his brother Franz Schmid was much more cautious and did not take part in this climb. Franz later became a police inspector. He lived to be 87.

Illustration: Thomas Lippert Archive



The 1932 Olympic medal, awarded to the German mountaineer Franz Schmid. Top: at the Closing Ceremony in Los Angeles the German NOC President Theodor Lewald (right) accepted the Alpinism Prize on behalf of the Schmid brothers from the IOC President Count de Baillet-Latour. Right: Hettie Dyhrenfurth.

Photos: Alpines Museum des Deutschen Alpenvereins München; Karl Lennartz Archives; Official Report Los Angeles 1932

But the sensations in the mountains were limited. The north wall of the Matterhorn was viewed as one of the "last frontiers".

In the summer a German quartet cycled from Munich to Zermatt in Switzerland: There were two brothers Franz and Toni Schmid both students of natural science, as well as their colleague Hans Ertl and his friend Friedel Brem. All four had a dream: they wanted to conquer the mountain from the north side a height of 4774 metres. However they kept quiet about their plans, for they were disunited. Ertl, destined to become chief cameraman for Leni Riefenstahl's Olympia films in 1936, thought they should wait because of the bad weather, but the Schmid brothers saw it differently. They hated the thought of sitting around idly. While their competitors apprehensively observed the rock face, Franz and Toni Schmid left the group on 30 July 1931. They set off shortly before midnight, but it was hours later before they informed a pub landlord of their intention. When it was still dark they climbed over the glacier, and when day dawned they stood at the foot of the 533 m high north wall which was their target. The date they recorded in the peak diary on the Italian side was 1 August 1931. But the mountain got its revenge, probably because it had lost its virginity. On the descent it poured out its entire repertoire: storms, rock falls, snow, hail and avalanches. Yet the Schmid brothers got down safely, and were received in Zermatt with jubilation.

The world of mountaineering showed itself to be split. There were some who were envious, people who accused them of showing off, and critics who were to be taken seriously. The Olympic champion Strutt even wrote about the despoiling of the Matterhorn, because the brothers had struck hooks into the glacier.¹⁸ Others spoke of a wrong development, and yet others maintained that young people would be chased to their death by such competitive climbing.¹⁹

Among the admirers was Theodor Lewald, who at the IOC Executive meeting on 11 June 1932 in Lausanne – supported by Count Bonacossa – proposed his two compatriots for the Alpinism prize. Six weeks later came the full IOC Session in Los Angeles. According to the Minutes the distinction went to "Mr. Schmid (Allemagne)", for in the interim the hunt for records had sealed the fate of the four and a half years younger brother "Toni". Simon Anton Schmid, to give him his full name, had fallen to his death on Whit Monday 1932 from the north west wall of the Wiesbachhorn in the Tauern range.

His friend Ernst Krebs fell into the depths with him, but he had the good fortune to survive the accident. After that Krebs dedicated himself to the racing kayak. At the end of the twenties he had contributed greatly to its development. In 1936 at Berlin-Grünau, he became Olympic champion in the K1 class over 10,000 metres. Thirty four years later on 20 July 1970 Krebs went to help a neighbor repair his drainpipe. Standing on a ladder, he lost his balance and fell to his death. Talk about the irony of history. Men like him just could not die in bed.²⁰

In view of the tragic end of "Toni Tollkühn" (Tempter Tony), as the younger Schmid was also called, we can understand what J. Sigrid Edström said. The Swede had emphasised at the IOC Session in Los Angeles that he would vote for this award, but thought it appropriate in future to consult the international federation before the



prize was awarded. Moreover at the same Session the death knell of the hunting prize was sounded, without it ever having been awarded.²¹ Although the Session had decided otherwise, the IOC finally awarded gold medals to both brothers.²² Lewald received the medals and charged his colleague Karl Ritter von Halt with the presentation of the trophies. Thus Franz Schmid and his father received the prizes at a festive evening in Munich's Löwenbräukeller on 5 September 1932.²³

A German struggle for the "German" Kangchanjunga

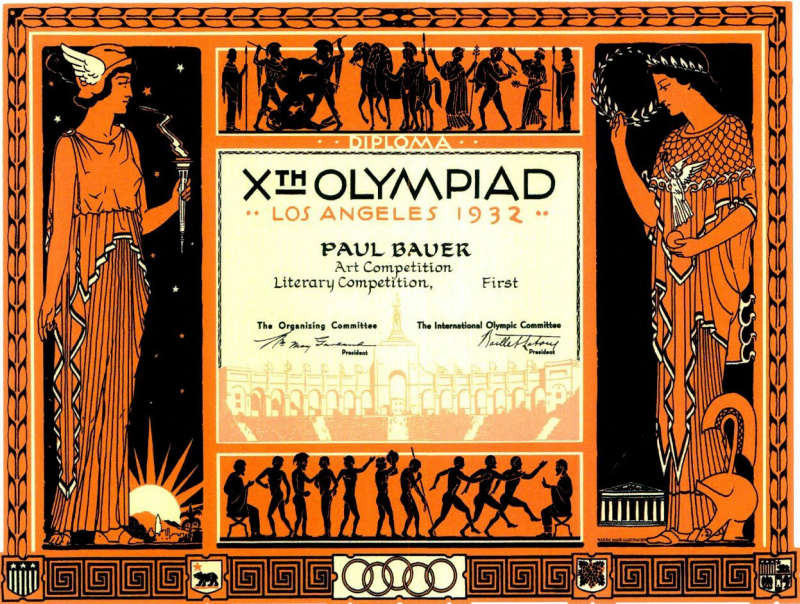
While there were few summits left in Europe that appeared worth climbing for the first time, the distant Himalayas with their unvanquished eight thousand metre peaks exercised a great fascination. After the British fiasco of 1924 the Dalai Lama did not grant permission for any further climbs for some time²⁴, and since the king of Nepal permitted crossings of his kingdom only in exceptional cases, the focus was performance on other summits, of which the 8565 metre high Kangchanjunga exercised a particular attraction. Until 1852 it was considered the highest mountain in the world, when trigonometric measurements of India taken by British scientists established that it was not quite as high as Mount Everest and K2.



The 1930 "International Himalaya Expedition" led by Günter Oscar Dyhrenfurth.

Photo: Karl Lennartz Archive

It was in particular the Germans who strove for the heights in this instance, and in doing so there arose bitter rivalries among them. After the experienced expedition leader and film producer Günter Oscar Dyhrenfurth had, on 16 January 1929, handed in a detailed plan for the climbing of "Katsch" to the main committee of the German and Austrian Alpine Club (DuOeAV), his toughest opponent Paul Bauer made the same request exactly two months later. And although the former Freikorps fighter, who worked as a notary public in Nabburg (Bavaria), did not yet have a British visa for India, he nonetheless he set in motion a hastily assembled and insufficiently financed group at the end of June 1929. This consisted exclusively of the elite



The notary Paul Bauer received a gold medal for his book "Struggle for the Himalayas" in the literature category of the artistic competitions at the 1932 Games. Left: the Olympic diploma of Los Angeles.

Photos: Alpines Museum des Deutschen Alpenvereins München; Karl Lennartz Archive

"Herr und Frau Professor Dyhrenfurth." The photo appeared in a Swiss magazine under the title "The first gold medals for Switzerland". A short time later the Swiss Olympic Committee denied all knowledge of this.

Illustration: Norman Dyhrenfurth Archive



circle of the Academic Alpenverein of Munich (AAVM). Purely to get ahead of Dyhrenfurth, who already had had permission to travel to Nepal in 1930, he decided to put up with the unfavourable post-monsoon period. On 3 October 1929 two expedition members reached the north west ridge, where at 7400 m they encountered a five day snowstorm which forced them to give up. Although the expedition was ultimately unsuccessful, Bauer had stolen the show from his rival. Dyhrenfurth, who had been a professor at the university of his home town Breslau since 1919, nonetheless kept to his plan, as finance had been secured. The Scherl publishing house in Berlin had given him an advance for a book, and the Transocean Film Company shared the costs. In contrast to Bauer, Dyhrenfurth did not only rely on German mountaineers. Instead he founded the "Internationale Himalaya-Expedition 1930", to which he recruited Austrians, a Swiss and a few Britons as well. This latter group persuaded *The Times* to help with sponsorship.

While Bauer a First World War prisoner of the British refused to throw in his lot with them, Dyhrenfurth saw in them his teachers. After receiving the book "Mount Everest – the exploratory journey 1921" by Howard-Bury as a present that Christmas, he had immediately gone with his family to Grindelwald, as he had found out that Bruce and his men had a training camp there. In fact the two men met, but the General was not prepared to accept an unknown German as a member of his expedition. He considered that Everest was to be the "third Pole" and as such uniquely British.²⁵

While Dyhrenfurth was occupied with the formalities and finances – it was more or less at the last moment

that the DuOeAV and its Swabian section decided to give a financial contribution – his wife Hettie looked after the equipment, to acquire which she had recourse to donations from German and Swiss companies.²⁶ The only child of the well-off Heymanns, a Jewish family of industrialists from Breslau, she had become engaged as a 14 year old to Dyhrenfurth (himself only 19) and married him five years later. The honeymoon took them – where else? – to the Alps. The family planning was remarkable: in 1913 the first child was born, in 1914 the couple undertook the first Himalayas expedition, in 1915 the second child arrived, followed by the second Himalayan expedition in 1916. In 1917 the third child followed – the later equally successful mountaineer son Norman –, and in 1918 the Dyhrenfurths set off for the third time to explore the "roof of the world".

Hettie Dyhrenfurth was the only woman in the team. She was in charge of rations and baggage which needed no fewer than 300 porters. As a climber in her own right, she was up with the men. On 1 June 1930 she led 22 porters in a snowstorm over a difficult pass at a height of 6120 metres. Meanwhile the mountaineering duo of Schneider-Hoerlin achieved two spectacular first ascents, but the real aim of the expedition was missed. They could not find a navigable path to Kangchanjunga. On 15 June 1930 the tour ended with the start of the monsoon.

Still, it was a remarkable achievement, which had added significance from the geological researches and medical tests that Dyhrenfurth carried out. Among the important documents produced by the expedition were the sound film "Himatschal – throne of the gods", and the book "Himalaya – our expedition 1930", published by the Scherl Verlag in 1931.

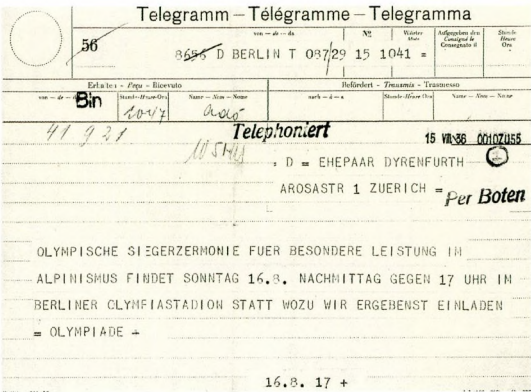
Thus the competitive struggle moved to the book market, for in the same year Paul Bauer published his work "The Struggle for the Himalayas", whose subtitle indicated who had won the race: "The first German attack on Kangchendzönga 1929". Encouraged by Carl Diem, the General Secretary of the German Olympic Committee, he entered the book for the "Literature" section of the Olympic Art Contests in 1932 in Los Angeles. Following Diem's invitation Dyhrenfurth was "of course willing" to lay a copy of his "Himalaya" before the judging panel in Los Angeles.²⁷ However he did not get through the first round. The German jury, presided over by Reichskunstwart Edwin Redslob rejected the book, as it "[was] not thought as appropriate as Bauer's 'Struggle for the Himalayas', in which the sporting character is more to the fore."²⁸ The result is well-known. A jury of four, made up of prominent people, awarded Bauer the Olympic gold medal.²⁹ Lewald received it on the final day in the Los Angeles Memorial Colosseum.

Five and a half months later Adolf Hitler came to power. Dyhrenfurth reacted to the Nazi book-burning

of 10 May 1933, which took place also in Breslau, by resigning his chair, to the astonishment of his colleagues. He applied for Swiss nationality, which was rapidly granted.³⁰ At the same time – in August 1933 – Bauer was named by the NS regime as the top German mountaineer. As expected, he put into effect the discriminatory “Aryan paragraph”, by which Hettie Dyhrenfurth as a Jewish woman was also affected.

The Dyhrenfurths – devalued and silenced

In the light of this it is astonishing that the IOC, of all places at its Berlin Session on 31 July 1936, made the decision to award the “Prix d’Alpinisme” to two German exiles – the Dyhrenfurths. From the Minutes it is unclear who made the proposal – it may have come from the ageing Swiss Vice-President Godefroy de Blonay (formally responsible in the IOC for mountaineering) who had had to tender an apology for absence. It was however noted that the decision was unanimous. Once again however the committee pointed out “that the giving of this award conceals in itself the risk of motivating young people to over-adventurous ascents”, and it resolved “that the prize from now on would only be awarded if the national Alpine club gives the assurance that the performance was achieved under its control”.³¹ The justification for honouring the Dyhrenfurths was formulated in very general terms. In the Minutes the reference is to “a series of remarkable ascents and scientific expeditions in the Himalayas”, so that the



honour was to be regarded as an appreciation of the entirety of their efforts. According to the rules only the individual performance should have been evaluated, in which case, during the the Olympic time-frame, only the “Internationale Himalaya-Expedition 1934” would have been able to be considered. This led in the Karakorum to the Hidden Peak, where Hettie Dyhrenfurth with the climb to Sia Kagri improved her women altitude world record to 7315 metres. But with this journey it was not climbing that had precedence, but the photography on the original places show in the film “The Demon of the Himalayas”. The plot entailed the imaginative search for the spirit of the mountains who according to the local inhabitants kept watch over the peaks.³² The film was directed by Dyhrenfurth together with Andrew Marton; besides that he played himself as the expedition leader. Behind the camera was Hans Ertl.³³ Despite the film the expedition was a financial disappointment.

The three German IOC Members offered no official objection to the distinction given to their former compatriots. There was no counter-proposal, which was understandable in view of the catastrophe of the “German Himalaya Expedition 1934”, which had been paid for by the state and started amid much propaganda and expense. During this German-Austrian undertaking, which had led to Nanga Parbat, four mountaineers had perished miserably. The consequence was mutual recriminations over who was to blame, also a reflection of the tensions between the two neighbours. For after “Kantsch”, the NS sports authorities laid claim also to Nanga Parbat, which was declared pathetically to be “the Germans’ fated mountain”. Everest was “generously” left to the British, K2 to the Italians, and Annapurna was considered “French”.³⁴

Although the IOC had reached its decision on 31 July 1936, the Chef de Mission of the Swiss team, Dr. Francis

“Olympic victory ceremony for special performances in mountaineering takes place on Sunday afternoon, 16.8., about 17.00 hours in the Berlin Olympic Stadium, to which we are respectfully invited.” The telegram was only sent off to the Dyhrenfurths in Zürich on the day before the ceremony, although the IOC decision had been taken two weeks previously.

Illustration: Norman Dyhrenfurth Archive



Left: Olympic tablet of honour at the Marathon Gate of the Berlin Olympic Stadium. The achievement of the Dyhrenfurths was set in bronze at the bottom of the column under the heading “Special Recognition.”

Photo: Thomas Lippert

Secrétariat Général
LAUSANNE

Ad. lithographique : Sclenotypie Lausanne

Lausanne, le 7 août 1936.

Madame et Monsieur G.O. Dyhrenfurth
Professeur,
Südstr. 10,
ZÜRICH 6

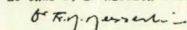
Mes chers Compatriotes,

Je nom du Comité olympique suisse j'ai l'honneur de vous faire savoir que vous avez reçu le prix d'alpinisme pour vos diverses expéditions à l'Himalaya, spécialement pour celle de 1934 au cours de laquelle Madame Dyhrenfurth a établi un nouveau record féminin d'ascension et je vous adresse les plus sincères félicitations de notre Comité.

La remise de la médaille d'or pour l'alpinisme eut lieu le dernier jour des Jeux soit le 16 août au Stade Olympique; si vous pouvez venir pour recevoir la dite médaille cela serait un grand honneur pour la Suisse. Sinon nous prendrons la dite médaille pour vous la remettre à notre retour.

Avec nos félicitations veuillez agréer, Mes chers Compatriotes, l'assurance de nos sentiments les meilleurs.

Le Chef de la Mission suisse


Sec. Gén. Hon. du C.O.S.

Drucksachen
24. 8.

presentation can have made little impression on the hundred thousand spectators present. Even the Official Report, so exhaustive in other areas, said nothing about the prize. The Dyhrenfurths are immortalized on the second table of honour of gold medal winners at the Marathon Gate of the Berlin Olympic Stadium but only under the heading "Special Recognition".³⁷

Since this remarkable silence extended to the other publications, we can suspect that it was not in the German interest to give publicity to the two renegade mountaineers. In Switzerland, a magazine had celebrated the couple's achievement with a photograph. Strangely, when it came to the official book of the Games produced by the Julius Wagner Publishing House in Zürich, the name Dyhrenfurth was left out.³⁸

In a letter Dyhrenfurth complained to the publisher, who was also German by birth and had been part of the German team which won the 1906 Olympic tug-of-war.³⁹ Wagner objected to the "tone" and gave him a lecture:

These are not Olympic prizes, and for that reason these distinctions – even if they are of a higher value than a gold medal awarded for some victory in running, throwing, swimming or sailing – do not belong in a work exclusively dealing with the Olympic Games.⁴⁰

Another complaint to the Swiss Olympic Committee and its General Secretary Dr. Francis Messerli in person was rejected, although Dyhrenfurth was able to put forward thoroughly convincing arguments from the example of the Schmid brothers:

In Los Angeles in 1932 the Germans won the "Prix d'alpinisme", through the Schmidt [sic] brothers for the first climbing of the Matterhorn north face. At that time no one dared to exclude these Olympic champions from the list of winners. [...] On the contrary, all official sites underlined this German Olympic victory. Now, in 1936, the Germans did not succeed with their candidates. A Swiss mountaineering and researching couple won this victory. In the German camp, as I know for a fact, there was a depressed mood, and they tried by all means possible to trivialise this Swiss victory and suppress it. That is unfortunately not to change. We all know what power propaganda has in the Third Reich.

In a blunt reply Messerli explained that the author and publisher of the Olympia book was completely free and needed no directions. The Swiss Olympic Committee had other concerns than such a protest. Furthermore he demanded that Dyhrenfurth "cause no useless polemics and behave himself".⁴¹ It was no surprise therefore that at the first ICC Session after the Second World War it was the Swiss who requested that "Special Recognition" should be given up. Thereupon the Session resolved:

In his letter to the Dyhrenfurths of 7 August 1936, the Secretary-General of the Swiss NOC Dr. Francis Messerli said it would be "a great honour" if they would come to Berlin to win the gold medals on the last day. Hardly were the Games over than he maintained the Alpism Prizes were not "Olympic".

Illustration: Norman Dyhrenfurth Archive

Messerli, turned a week later to his "dear compatriots" to express his congratulations. Since the presentation of the "gold medal for Alpinism" was to take place on the final day of the Games, i.e. 16 August 1936, he wrote to them: "[...] it would be a great honour for Switzerland if you could come to receive the medal referred to. If not, we will receive the medal and hand it over to you on our return."³⁵ An official invitation to the "Ehepaar Dyhrenfurth" [sic] did not follow until 15 August via the Organising Committee, but that may well not have been the only reason why Hettie Dyhrenfurth had no desire whatsoever to risk a journey to Berlin ten months after the promulgation of the anti-Jewish "Nuremberg Laws". Thus it was left to her husband to accept the prize – two Olympic gold medals and the oak wreaths given to the winners. The presentation, as the last victory ceremony, was supposed immediately to follow that for the equestrianism, programmed for 17.30.³⁶ But as the progress of the "Prix des Nations" had been held up by more than an hour, the whole timetable of the Closing Ceremony, in which the extinction of the Olympic Flame had been intended to coincide with the setting of the sun, was thrown completely out.

The presentation of the Alpinism prize and of the "Prix d'Aéronautique", which had also been awarded to a Swiss – Hermann Schreiber – thus took place under great time pressure. And since there was no information in the programme as to its significance, the

"On the proposal of the Executive Committee the awards for Alpinism and Aeronautics are abolished."⁴²

Usually the descent is quicker than the ascent. The "Prix d'Alpinisme" is history. Had things been were different, the record breaking climber Kenton Cool would have been in with a great chance of a gold medal. At the start of May 2013 he stood within three days on three summits: on 1 May he climbed Nuptse (7861 m), on 2 May there followed the eleventh ascent of Mount Everest, and on 3 May his triple ended on the 8516 m high Lhotse. But once something has been erased, it seldom returns. At most, some believe, there are allegedly rebirths in a different form. To that extent the announcement caused attention that at the meeting of the IOC Executive Board in February 2013 sport climbing made the jump into the seven shortlisted sports to be considered for the 2020 Olympic programme – so to speak the base camp before the ascent could begin. ■

- "La remise du Prix Olympique d'Alpinisme", in: Comité Olympique Français, Les Jeux de la VIII^e Olympiade Paris 1924, "Rapport Officiel, Librairie de France, Paris o.J., p. 721. Strutt is described as "Colonel Struth".
- Pierre de Coubertin, Olympic Memoirs, International Olympic Committee, Lausanne 1997, p. 211.
- Bulletin du Comité International des Jeux Olympiques, No. 1, July 1894, p. 4.
- Minutes, 12th IOC Session, Budapest 1911, p. 24, IOC Archive.
- The Olympic Games of Stockholm 1912, Official Report, issued by the Swedish Olympic Committee, Wahlström & Widstrand, Stockholm 1913, p. 800.
- Ibid, p. 801.
- Ibid.
- Ibid, pp. 801–802.
- Minutes, 20th IOC Session Lausanne 1921, p. 4, IOC Archive.
- Nepalese or Indian soldiers who served in the British Army.
- "Hazards of the Alps", in: New York Times, 18 March 1923.
- "Climbing Mt. Everest", under the auspices of the Mt. Everest Committee, 55 min, silent, British Film Institut 1922. Noel had initially financed his film equipment himself, but then received £600 from the Mount Everest Committee.
- Sandra Noel, Everest Pioneer. The Photographs of Captain John Noel, Sutton Publishing, Stroud, Gloucestershire 2003, p. 172.
- "My modest father never mentioned his Everest expedition Olympic gold", in: *The Observer*, 19 May 2012.
- E-Mail from Charles Wakefield to Anthony Th. Bijkerk, 15 April 2007.
- E-Letter, Himalayan Club, June 2012, pp. 4–6.
- Minutes, EC Session, November 1924, p. 2, IOC Archive.
- Karl Lennartz, Sport and Nature in History, Proceedings of the VIlth IHPES Congress, Montpellier, Academia Verlag, Sankt Augustin 2001, p. 17.
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- Ibid.
- Minutes, 31st IOC Session Los Angeles, p. 3, IOC Archive.
- The Games of the Xth Olympiad Los Angeles 1932, Official Report, Published by the Xth Olympiad Committee of the Games of Los Angeles, USA, 1932, p. 768.
- Franz Schmid, Die Goldmedaille, die es "eigentlich" gar nicht gibt, in: Helmuth Bendt (Ed.), Das Buch der deutschen Olympiasieger. Hundert Medaillengewinner erzählen 1908–1972, Schwann Verlag, Düsseldorf 1972, p. 24.
- The Dalai Lama did not permit any further expeditions that went through Tibet till 1953.
- Andreas Nickel, Günter • Hettie • Norman Dyhrenfurth. Zum dritten Pol, AS Verlag, Zürich 2007, p. 50.



- Ibid, p. 82.
- Bundesarchiv Berlin, R 827/178, letter from Dyhrenfurth to Diem, Leipzig 1 March 1932.
- Ibid, R 807/179, Bericht über die Sitzung der Jury für den literarischen Wettbewerb im Euro des Reichskunstwart, 22 April 1932.
- Ibid, R 807/178, letter from Teodor Lewald to Paul Bauer, 15 September 1932. The international jury in Los Angeles was made up of Prof. William Lyon Phelps (New Haven), Pulitzer Prize winner Thornton Wilder (Peterborough), Hugh Walpole (London) and André Maurois (Paris).
- Nickel, p. 113.
- Minutes, 36th IOC Session Berlin, 31st August 1936, pp. 2–3.
- "Der Dämon des Himalaya", Regie Günter Oskar Dyhrenfurth und Andrew Marton, 90 min, Telemontana-Film AG, Chur, Zürich und Berlin, 1934/35.
- The two other cameramen were Richard Angst and Fritz von Friedl.
- In fact after this geographical division the first successful climbs took place: on 3 June 1950 the later IOC Member Maurice Herzog along with Louis Lachera climbed Annapurna 1. After them, Edmund Hillary with Tenzing Norgay climbed Mount Everest on 29 May 1953. On 3 June 1953 the Austrian Hermann Buhl climbed Nanga Parvat and on 3 July 1954 Achille Compagnon and Lino Lacedelli conquered K2. Outside this series was Kangchenjunga, first climbed on 29 May 1955 by the Britons George Band and Joe Brown.
- Norman Dyhrenfurth Archiv, Salzburg.
- X. Olympische Spiele 1935, Tages-Programm, 16. August, p. 7.
- X. Olympiade Berlin 1936, Art tlicher Bericht, Vol. II, Limpert-Verlag Berlin o. J. (1937), p. 1180.
- Julius Wagner, Olympische Spiele Berlin 1936, Erinnerungskreis unter dem Patronat der Schweizerischen Olympischen Komitees, Verkehrsverlag A.-G., Zürich 1936.
- Wagner took part in 1912 as the only Swiss and at his own expense in athletics at the Olympic Games in Stockholm. He did not receive Swiss nationality until 1917.
- Letter from Julius Wagner to Günter Oskar Dyhrenfurth, 31 December 1936, Norman Dyhrenfurth Archive.
- Ibid, letter from Dr. Francis Deserlier to Günter Oskar Dyhrenfurth, 4 January 1937.
- Minutes, 40th IOC Session Lausanne 1946, p. 9, IOC Archive.

Although Hettie Dyhrenfurth (1892–1972) went with her children to the USA in the mid 1930s, where because of her altitude record she had become much in demand, there was no chance of a further emigration for her husband. The consequence was alienation – in 1948 the couple divorced. In the face of the Nazi terror, Günter Oskar Dyhrenfurth (1886–1975) saw it as a "commandment of honesty" to leave the German and Austrian Alpine Club, where he had been a member for 34 years. The letter confirming his resignation has the additional sentence: "Herr Professor Dyhrenfurth seems according to this to have signed on to international Jewry". In handwriting is added: "A German can come such a distance with a Jewess!"

Illustration: Norman Dyhrenfurth Archive