

Everest's allure hasn't peaked

Last year's disaster adds to the mystique

By Peter Potterfield

ALMOST A YEAR HAS passed since a blizzard trapped several parties of climbers near the summit of Mount Everest, leaving eight dead. Amid the storm of press stories that followed, much sober talk was devoted to the controversial conduct of such paying clients as New York socialite Sandy Pittman, who put themselves and others at risk on one of the world's most challenging mountains. Surely, when the late spring climbing season loomed again, Everest would be deserted, the amateurs scared away, the veteran guides reduced to lesser peaks.

On the contrary: The guides' phones are ringing off the hook. Wealthy climbers from all over had no idea, it seems, that they could pay a mere \$65,000 to climb Everest.

In the tight fraternity of world-class guides, the upsurge in inquiries has been greeted with mixed emotions. Two of their own, Scott Fischer and Rob Hall, were among the eight fatalities. (As if to underscore that no one is invulnerable, Lopsang Jangbu Sherpa, a Nepali climbing star who helped haul an exhausted Pittman to the summit, was killed on Everest with a Japanese team in September.) Nonetheless, the keen demand is luring most guides back, if not without a wry awareness that tragedy has made Everest more glamorous.

Todd Burleson, for one, says he'll lead a group up to the summit under the auspices of his Alpine Ascents International. He was midway up the mountain when last year's storm struck, and was able to rescue survivors. Adventure Consultants, Ltd., the guide service cofounded by Hall, will return with a team of six clients—just below the limit of seven set by the Kingdom of Nepal—under the direction of new owner Guy Cotter.

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Another guide, Anatoli Boukreev, who made repeated solo forays into last year's storm to rescue climbers, is organizing an Indonesian team.

Although guides observe that last year's fatalities were the first in guided climbing of

Everest, they intend, as American Ed Viesturs puts it, "to stick more rigorously" to their own rules. Viesturs will set a summit-day turnaround time of 2 P.M.; at that point, he'll head his team back to the high camp, whether they

know what they are capable of, and if they weren't up to the challenge, they wouldn't be with us on Everest."

The guides declined to name this season's clients, but their parties include nearly as many women as men. Perhaps Pittman's adventure, despite its tragic outcome, actually inspired others—women in particular—to make the ultimate climb.

Having alienated the climbing community with her seeming preoccupation with media spin, Pittman is now press-shy. She says only that she's not planning any major climbs this season and that her focus has changed. She is, however, writing a book—apparently on her climbing experiences. □

Everest Takes Worst Toll, Refusing to Become Stylish

By JOHN F. BURNS
NEW DELHI May 13 — Around the world since the first successful ascent on May 29, 1953, the mountain has claimed the lives of more than 200 climbers. In the past few days, a helicopter rescued a Nepalese pilot who landed on broken ice at 20,000 feet. Everest attracts climbers from Dallas, Texas, and other cities.

on top or not. As for holding clients to a higher standard of experience, guides will still rely on gut instinct. "Almost all of our Everest team members have climbed with us before," says Burleson. "We

Guide Scott Fischer, who died on Mount Everest, shown climbing and (below) with Sandy Pittman.



TICKER TAPE: Traffic in Bangkok is so bad that about 100 women a month are forced to give birth in a car.