



Top: Mallory's upper body, frozen into a self-arrest position, and mummified with the look of a marble statue. There is still a rope around his waist (bottom left).

Above: The green leather boot still on Mallory's right foot. His ankle was broken in two places just above the top of the boot.

Opposite above: The last picture taken of Mallory and Irvine, leaving Camp IV on 6 June, 1924.

Camp V is neither a comfortable nor a popular site with climbers. In fact, the site is not really a proper camp in the way that ABC and the North Col are broad, flat areas where tents are grouped together. Instead, Camp V is a line of flat platforms for tents, cut into the rough scree and ice which slopes 20–30 degrees down towards the North Col. The biggest of these cleared ledges can accommodate up to four or five tents, but most barely have room for one or two, and the encampment stretches for up to 500 metres (1660 feet) along the North Ridge.

The site offers virtually no protection against the wind, and the tents must be well secured to anything available – rocks, pitons, oxygen bottles – then cargo nets and more ropes are securely fastened over the top. The wind can be deafening, making any proper rest near impossible during a storm. Climbers have been known to sleep with their ice-axes in case the tent is blown down the mountain and they need to self-arrest through the floor of the tent.

Above the camp, blue-black alpine choughs (*Pyrrhocorax graculus*) circled on the updrafts of air, conserving their energy in the thin, cold Himalayan atmosphere. It is astonishing that these small, acrobatic birds can survive at this altitude, but they have even been seen to fly over the summit. For the moment, however, spring brings a fresh batch of climbers to the mountain and the birds are content to scavenge for leftover food around the camp – and on the remains of climbers who had failed during previous expeditions.

At such high altitude, life is basic; the priorities are to force yourself to eat and drink as much as you can, and to stay warm. Going to the toilet is one of life's more challenging daily functions; if you are not wearing crampons, it is essential to clip on to a rope, otherwise you could find yourself sliding down the mountain in very embarrassing circumstances. Some of the climbers also began to breathe oxygen at night to help them sleep and keep warm. Despite the discomfort of wearing a mask all night, supplementary oxygen brings immediate relief to headaches and weary limbs.

On the evening of 30 April the wind dropped, it started to snow and the mountain disappeared from view behind a dark and ominous cloud. The climbers woke at 3 a.m. to make a decision on whether to start the search. On schedule at 5 a.m. the radio crackled into life. Dave Hahn responded, and when asked how he had slept, said 'I didn't, but we're not here to sleep. We're here to climb.'⁴

Despite a bad night on the mountain, the climbers were in good spirits and had decided to start the search.

Thom Pollard continued to film throughout the climb up to Camp V. Now, as the climbing team was leaving early in the morning to move up the mountain to begin the search, his oxygen apparatus developed a fault. He tried to keep up with the rest of the climbers, but without supplementary oxygen and with the extra weight of camera equipment, he found himself falling behind. Reluctantly, he decided to turn back. Meanwhile, the remaining five climbers – Conrad Anker, Jake Norton, Andy Politz, Tap Richards and Dave Hahn (now using the video camera) – continued up the North Ridge. It was very cold and windy and, for Conrad, the highest he had ever climbed.

The climbers made their way slowly up the North Ridge on a mixture of snow, rock and ice. Dave Hahn recalls: 'There was so little snow. I was continually marvelling at that, but also it made it tougher going. You really had to be careful about what you were putting your feet on.' The climbers were following the same route used by Mallory and Irvine 75 years previously; to their right was the great North Face, which somewhere held the secret of what happened in June 1924.

Above Camp V, the North Ridge merges into the North Face, creating a 'wind shadow', which gives welcome protection to climbers. Consequently, the climb up from Camp V is often easier than lower down the mountain, despite the higher altitude. There was also fixed rope along the route. By now, most climbers were using oxygen, but, remarkably, both Conrad and Jake were climbing without.

At 10.00 a.m. the climbers arrived at the site of Camp VI at 8300 metres (27,230 feet), which the Sherpas had succeeded in putting in only a few days previously. The plan was to move out west across the North Face and locate the 1975 Chinese camp, then continue westwards at that altitude in search of the body found by Wang.

The climbers spread out, with Dave, Tap and Andy searching high on the North Face, and Jake and Conrad lower down. The rock on this part of the mountain is a series of overlapping slabs sloping at approximately 30 degrees; this, combined with patchy snow and ice, made the search a hazardous venture.