

## Sir Chris Bonington

Mountaineer Chris Bonington (CVO, CBE, DL) is one of the great explorers of modern times. His career has included nineteen expeditions to the Himalayas, including four to Mount Everest and the first ascent of the south face of Annapurna.

### How did you start playing bridge?

I started playing in the late '60s. I had previously played a lot of poker, and often with a group that included film directors with incomes ten times mine – that was a scary business. I learnt my bridge on expeditions from fellow climbers, particularly from a great climbing friend, Graham Little. Graham was a good player, and had a photographic memory so could remember every card – after each hand he could tell us where we'd gone wrong to help teach us.

### What is the appeal of playing bridge on an expedition?

The beauty is that all you need is a pack of cards. It weighs virtually nothing – less than a paperback – and can give you hours of pleasure. So, you may be caught in a storm, but you can have two or three days, trapped in a tent, happily playing bridge.

### Has it always been happy?

**You don't want to be trapped in a tent with someone if you've argued over a hand.**

Absolutely true. I remember on one expedition, one member could play bridge, but never took it seriously – he almost seemed to enjoy making mistakes. As I'm very competitive, I confess I did lose my temper – I can understand why people have been shot playing bridge.

### Have any 'locals' played with you on an expedition?

No, just those in the expedition party. In Nepal particularly, they are passionate card players. The porters, when resting, will all be playing card games, but none have shown an interest in playing bridge.

### What skills are common to playing bridge and climbing?

When playing bridge you've got to plan ahead, just as with climbing. You plan ahead the whole time. Not just the next move, but the ones after that – planning where you are going and making sure you are in the right position. Leading big expeditions, as I have on Everest, takes very full and careful planning. Also in both you have to really concentrate – that process in bridge offers a real therapeutic value.



Photo: Chris Bonington Picture Library

*L to R: Chris Bonington, Rob Ferguson and Jim Lowther playing bridge on a natural table on their Greenland 1993 Expedition.*

### What is your experience of more competitive bridge?

I never had much chance for 'club' bridge due to my other commitments, but it is something I would very much like to do in future to keep my mind active.

I once lectured on the QEII, and there was a bridge club. We started against a couple who discussed conventions with great precision and speed. We were very impressed, and confessed

to being quite inexperienced and nervous, but they just looked down their noses at us. They were the only pair we beat and doing so made our evening.

### What do you think of the current efforts to have bridge recognised as a sport?

I wouldn't agree with it, as I believe that sport should be 'physical'. But I do think bridge and chess are activities that are hugely important, and should be encouraged. I think we should be questioning the values and priorities of government and society in relation to these activities – if this action is necessary to get better exposure and funding, then I think it is a sad reflection on our society. □