

DHAKA TUESDAY JUNE 30, 2009



Namche bazar Sherpa capital



Porter



Yaks

## Trekking to the Everest base camp

**H**IMALAYAS. The name itself explains a lot about this colossus mountain range -- the madness, exhilaration, excitement and most importantly the spiritual chasm. Home to some of the world's most infamous mountains plus the highest peak of the world Everest, Himalayas dwarfs all other mountain ranges by far. It is solitary in every sense.

Mt. Everest has an undeniable ability to seduce explorers, travellers and climbers alike with its breathtaking pose and supernatural conviction. It is indeed a colossal icon of everlasting excitement to people of all ages throughout the world. Following the conquest of North and South Pole, this peak came to be known as the third pole of the world and the centre of eternal human interest for centuries. Mt. Everest named after the first person to record its height, Sir George Everest, translates in Nepalese and Tibetan as 'Goddess in the Sky' and

'Mother Goddess of the Universe', demonstrating the immense respect and reverence that the locals have for this awe-inspiring 8848 meter mountain.

I have been to the Indian part of the Himalayas in a previous expedition in Himachal Pradesh climbing a 6,187m peak.

In October 2008, I left home to trek up to the Everest Base Camp with three of my adventure friends. Arriving in Kathmandu Airport with backpacks and all the courage we could gather in our young hearts, we could smell the excitement in the air!

The majority of trekkers headed to Everest Base Camp start by flying into the precariously situated mountainside village of Lukla. The flight is an adventure itself as you wing your way up the steep-walled valley of the Dudh Koshi River. From Lukla, it is an 11-day bone-cracking trekking to the base camp. However, since you can't even see the summit of Everest from



Hanging bridge with prayer flags

base camp because of the structure of the mountain, you're really better off skipping this climbers' tent city and instead head to Gorakshep to climb to the summit of 18,190 foot / 5,550-meter Kala-Patthar, from which you have a view of Mount Everest that would take your breath away! We planned on following the same route.

Leaving the hustle and bustle of Kathmandu, we board a small aircraft of some sort, mutter our prayers and cast a worried eye on fellow passengers not to mention the flight crew. Some 40 minutes later a tiny land strip tucked between lush valleys and majestic mountain walls emerged below. Touching down on Lukla airport, we breathed deep for the first time. The air is crisp and thin; chatty porters -- looking for a day job -- came rushing from all directions.

We started our trekking leaving the busy Lukla valley behind. It was a four hours' moderate trekking when we reached Phakding (2,610m) on the first day. We continue north up to Dudh Koshi valley on the next day and the terrain was starting to play its part on us. The trail was getting harder and harder as the gradient

started to grow. The route was breathtaking as we the snow-capped Himalayas and the Everest were in view. We made it to Namche bazaar after the hardest day of trekking so far. The temperature fell close to the freezing point at the Sherpa capital.

We spent a day for acclimatization there. We had the first comprehensive view of the Everest as we left Namche Bazaar. On the trek we crossed rivers on cable and wooden bridges decorated with colourful prayer flags, some of them quite rickety.

We came across Yaks moving up and down the trail carrying heavy loads of expedition parties every now and then. We moved up the trail to Lobuche (4,910m) in the five few days and camped and spent nights at Tengboche (3860m), Dingboche (4410m) and Dughla (4620m).

The air became thinner and the level of oxygen dropped as we were struggling to make progress. As you reached higher altitudes oxygen in the air dramatically decreased. At 20,000 feet there is only half as much oxygen in the air as you are used to. The temperature also fell closer to zero and made it even harder. We had a

one-day rest at Lobuche for acclimatization. We had had some magnificent views of the Everest along with Amadablam, Nuptse, Lohitse and overriding Pumori -- some of the greatest mountains along the trek.

We reached Gorakshep (5140m) the next day. Kala Patthar was visible in the distance from our camp. The air was too thin and the sun was nowhere to be seen for the last two days. We were literally gasping for oxygen on our trek and the extreme temperature along with shivering blizzard made life even harder even though we could barely wait for the next morning to climb up to the top of Kala Patthar to watch Everest in its complete

poise. Everest was just around the corner of our tent that night.

Climbing up to the top of Kala Patthar (5550m) the next morning, it was a view we earned rightfully. The sun was out and shinning with all its glory and the Everest was majestic. Looking intently to the great mountain, we were speechless and bewildered. All the trouble and hardship of the trek paid off. We were not just staring at the greatest of all mountains; we were gazing at the centre of the last greatest human adventure interest of the world.

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Stupa for Sherpa Tenjing Norge



Mt Everest (middle) from Kalapathar



Thiyangboche monastery



The weather gets rough suddenly