



## NEPAL: To The Abode of Snow, 1981

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**PEACE RETURNED:** On November 21, 2006, the Nepalese government and the Maoist Revolutionaries signed a peace agreement, ending a 10-year Civil War. By the time of our 2007 trip, tourists had flocked back to Nepal.

**Recent history:** From 1996 to 2006, Nepal was torn apart by a home-grown Maoist Revolution against the government, and both sides were guilty of severe human rights atrocities. Maoists killed 4500 Nepalis, and the government killed 8200 Nepalis, reaching a vicious military stalemate. The Maoists gained control of most rural areas, and the government controlled the district capitals.

Tourists were never targeted, except for mandatory donations - both the Maoists and the government taxed the tourists. Tourism dropped drastically as people avoided the crossfire. In 2006 the peace treaty was signed, and by 2008, Maoists leaders had peacefully joined significant positions in the budding democracy.

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*Above: Behind a Himalayan fir rises Ama Dablam (22,310 feet).*



*Above: Friendly Hindu children in the lowlands of Nepal.*

*Below Right: Two Nepalese women rest heavy loads on T-shaped walking sticks (on Trek Day 3).  
Copyright by Tom Dempsey.*

## INTRODUCTION

*My prime motivation for visiting Nepal was to satisfy my childhood dream of visiting the Himalayas, the highest mountain range in the world. Imagine a country that is the size and latitude of Florida but contains eight of the ten highest peaks in the world, and you will begin to picture Nepal. Nepal has the amazing elevation range of from 600 feet to 29,035 feet above sea level. The highest peaks in the continental U.S. barely reach half this height.*

*Landlocked Nepal has enjoyed quiet isolation in the mountainous region between India and Tibet until recent times, when the airplane and supersonic jet finally opened it for easy access by the international traveler. Nepal contains one third of the 1500 miles of the Himalayas, or the "abode (alaya) of snow (hima)." In order to best experience the Himalayas one goes "trekking," walking long distances in roadless areas.*

*A trek through Nepal takes one back in time to the medieval ages. Hinduism and Buddhism have locked Nepalese subcultures into ways of life that have not changed for thousands of years.*

*Nepal has few roads, and most of the fourteen million inhabitants live scattered throughout the countryside. Life revolves around the village, the harvest, and the clan. About ninety percent of Nepal's population work*





*in agriculture (as compared with twenty-five percent in a mechanized country like Japan), and villagers serve as the chief beasts of burden for carrying goods to market.*

*Trekking in Nepal is not a wilderness experience. I found farmers working every patch of arable land along the trails. I encountered yak herders grazing their animals as high as 15,000 feet. I found human impacts everywhere, from terraced rice fields to jungles thinned by firewood scavengers.*

*Since Nepal was not opened to foreigners until 1950, Western trekkers are still an oddity in many areas, attracting stares of amazement from the local Nepalese. Many of the people whom I met had never before met Westerners. Exodus Travels, our trek organizer, was the only company conducting treks in that part of Nepal, and 1981 was only their second year of operation on that ancient trade route between India and Tibet.*

*By walking from the Terai, the lowland jungle, to Kala Patthar within six miles of Mount Everest, I passed through a cross section of the climates and cultures of Nepal. I walked from tropical jungle to alpine tundra, and from a land of Hindus to a land of Buddhists. Beginning at an altitude of 700 feet, most of our group eventually walked to 18,192 feet on Kala Patthar (or Pattar / Patar). We covered about two hundred miles by the end of the twenty-four day trek, climbing and descending the equivalent of one and a half Mount Everests.*

*Right: Sherpa Ang Dendi laughs as he jokingly shoulders both his and Graham's pack. With a delightful spirit, he guided and cooked for us with responsibility and reliability.*

## PROLOGUE

My parents' sabbatical leave to New Zealand launched my dreams of visiting far away lands. I hoped to travel for many months and possibly find an overseas job. During a computer programming job in Palo Alto, California, I devotedly saved money for my travels to come. Having never been out of North America, I first considered touring just New Zealand and the Pacific, but after reviewing my financial resources, I concluded that my seven thousand dollars would take me all the way around the world.

**January 7, 1981:** Within thirteen hours of leaving San Francisco's winter rain, I stepped into the summer sunshine of Auckland, New Zealand. I shared a wonderful two months with family and relatives, as I backpacked and bicycle toured the South Island of New Zealand.

In March, I had to choose between 1) waiting for a chancy job offer from the University of Dunedin, New Zealand, or 2) travelling on to catch the trekking season in Nepal, which would end in June with the coming of the monsoon. Choosing the surest course, I proceeded to Nepal.

My brother Dave met me in Sydney, Australia, where we spent eight days sightseeing and preparing for our separate treks in Nepal. Dave and I flew onwards to Singapore, thus returning to the Northern Hemisphere (two degrees North Latitude). We spent five days in Singapore, mainly bargaining with photo dealers to replace the cameras that we had sold profitably in New Zealand.

On March 29th, with untested cameras in hand, and with both apprehension and anticipation in our hearts, Dave and I approached Nepalese airspace on Thai Airlines. We eagerly took turns peering out the jet window as a distant mural of sharp, snowy peaks appeared on the horizon . . .





*Rhododendron trees bloom in early April in the foothills of the Himalaya. Rice terraces cling to the steep slopes.*

## TWO DAYS IN KATMANDU, NEPAL

### March 29, 1981.

The 2,500-mile journey from Singapore to Katmandu, by way of Bangkok (Thailand) and Dacca (Bangladesh), was made easy by a modern jet. But we had come to use a more ancient means of transportation, our feet.

Since I had purchased a packaged trek, I separated from Dave in Katmandu Airport to meet my group in the three-star-rated Blue Star Hotel. I passed through the confused but cursory customs and was immediately surrounded by clamorous children who all wanted to carry my luggage and roll my bicycle. One who spoke English hailed a taxi, a small dirty station wagon, which I reluctantly accepted. The taxi driver drove wildly through the narrow dirt streets, honking his horn liberally at the teeming crowd of bicycles, rickshaws, pedestrians, taxis, and the occasional cow.

Arriving at the Blue Star Hotel, I found part of my trekking group, four men and one woman, discussing their plans for visiting India after the trek. A young British couple

representing Exodus Travels briefed us on our \$42-per-day trek. Our package included twenty-three days on the trail and five days in Katmandu. I was excited to learn that we would be embarking in just two days.

Dave met me at my hotel and we joined some friends of his from New Zealand for dinner at the Katmandu Guest house. On the walk to the restaurant, the mixture of dirt and paved streets reminded me of a city in Mexico, but the bustling crowds of Indians and Nepalese reminded me that I was in a new country. I worried about ordering food at the restaurant because Katmandu's water needed to be filtered and boiled to be safe, and the food could have been contaminated. In the end, I had to trust the restaurants, as they were the most practical way to get meals.

After dinner and a visit to a bar where some Sherpas were selling opals, I returned to my hotel room. Just as I was falling asleep, the seventh member of our trekking group showed up to share my room. Graham, a young Australian from Melbourne, would be my quiet tent mate throughout the trek. I was glad that someone my age would be on the trek.



*Left: First payday (on Trek Day 2). Ang Dendi's sister distributes porter wages while our tent carrier awaits his share. Copyright by Tom Dempsey.*

The next day, our group of seven was given a guided tour of Bhaktapur and Patan, two small towns neighboring Katmandu. The intent of the tour was to contrast medieval Bhaktapur with "modernized" Patan. Bhaktapur, with its muddy streets, ancient buildings, and poor people, depressingly emphasized the contrast between the rich tourists and the poor Nepalese residents. Taking a picture seemed to threaten the dignity of the squalor and to stress my detachment from it. My camera would have been a possession of inconceivable value to the ragged people of Bhaktapur. But despite its poverty, the village had a rich complement of ancient Hindu temples, whose history I unfortunately lost in the garbled English of our tour guide. In 1979, UNESCO declared the

Kathmandu Valley a World Heritage Area, and described it as follows: "At the crossroads of the great civilizations of Asia, seven groups of Hindu and Buddhist monuments, as well as the three residential and palace areas of the royal cities of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhadgaon, illustrate Nepalese art at its height. Among the 130 monuments are pilgrimage centres, temples, shrines, bathing sites and gardens - all sites of veneration by both religious groups."

We climbed back into the tour bus and drove to the village of Patan, part of which had been modernized. As a planned community with a human assembly-line for creating cottage crafts, renovated Patan had little character. Our tour ended as some scattered afternoon rain showers began.

Time was short for our final trek preparations, since we were leaving early the next morning. At the Blue Star Hotel, Dave joined me and the Exodus Travel couple to travel by jeep to the Sherpa Cooperative to rent trekking equipment. I rented a down parka and a pair of down booties for ten rupees (eighty-three U.S. cents) per day. Most other equipment, including tent, sleeping bag, and duffel bag, was provided by Exodus Travels.

Dave and I then went looking for a lunch spot and bumped into Dave's New Zealand friends by chance. They seemed to know the hot spots of Katmandu, so we ate at Jamaly's, a popular restaurant/cake and pie shop. I was strongly tempted to eat the cheesecake, pineapple upside-down cake, or apple crisp, but I decided to avoid such possibly-contaminated delicacies until I returned from my trek. I was still concerned about getting sick, for good reason, as I would soon learn.

We put in many miles that day walking between our hotels, errands, and restaurants. We enjoyed dinner at another choice spot, the Kantipur Restaurant, where I enjoyed a dinner of buffalo filet mignon and "cheeps," or French fries, which cost less than two dollars.

After dinner, Dave and I parted ways. In the next twenty-five days, we would travel separately. Dave would trek around the Annapurna mountains in midwest Nepal, and I would trek from the Terai jungle to within six miles of Mount Everest in Eastern Nepal. In this way, we would experience a wider sample of Nepal, which we could share afterwards through our photographs. We also planned to trek together the following month.

I hailed a bicycle rickshaw to take me to my hotel. The wiry driver pedaled madly, plummeting down pitch-dark alleys in record time. I clung to the seat awning so as not to fly into the street. We briskly pulled into the Blue Star Hotel courtyard, ending a roller-coaster ride that would have inspired Walt Disney.

In my room, I packed my duffel bag, which the porters would carry, and my daypack, in which I would carry my camera equipment and water bottle. Right after I finished packing at 11:45 PM, Graham arrived to do his packing. He had managed to find a casino and make a night of it!

## **BY TRUCK TO THE LOWLAND JUNGLE**

### **March 31.**

At 5:30 AM, I hurriedly stored my bicycle and excess luggage at the hotel. I placed my valuables in the hotel safe. Outside, the five tourists from Britain, the Australian, and I climbed into the expedition truck. Our twenty Nepalese porters occupied the seats over the rear wheels, where motion sickness was the worst.

The porters turned green as we bounced over a 7,000-foot pass and descended to the hot Terai. Near sunset, our truck bogged down at a stream crossing, and we joined the porters in pushing the truck out of the mud. Some of the shyness between my trekking companions melted while rescuing our vehicle, but I sensed a reserve in our group which hinted that our interactions would not be very lively.

We slept in our four tents for the first of twenty-four nights to come. Our porters found lodging in a neighboring village, as they would throughout the trek.

## THE TREK BEGINS

### April 1, Trekking Day 1.

Waking at 6 AM, we each had a bowl of porridge while the porters efficiently packed our tents. As we began our first day of walking we could see the low expanse of the Ganges River Plain behind us and the first foothills of the mighty Himalayas in front.

The sparsely wooded foothills scarcely deserved the term "jungle," as the present dry season, lasting from March to June, supported little growth. But once the June monsoons began, the jungle would become dense and lush.

A squall line swept upon us in a rolling burst from the plain, giving several hours of afternoon showers. We and our porters crowded into a small, leaky-roofed teahouse to wait out the rain, where more shyness disappeared.

Over the next few days, I came to know my fellow trekkers fairly well:

#### *Trekking Companions*

**Graham:** a truck driver from Australia. Age 22. An easy-going man from "Ozzieland." Easily our strongest member, he was rarely sick, and was always quick to lend his strength to help others. For example, he acted as a runner with Sherpa Ang Dendi to assist in the logistics of helping altitude-sick Reg at the end of the trek. He preferred to carry his own possessions rather than have the porters do it. He was a vegetarian, even omitting fish and eggs from his diet, and he carried several pounds of his own food.

**Allen:** a student of architecture from England. Age 23. A slender, intense man who suffered from insomnia most of the trip, due to discomfort sleeping at a different locale every night. His insomnia and occasional illnesses wore down his enthusiasm for the trip.

**Caroline:** a secretary from England. Age 33. As the only woman of our group, Caroline slept in a tent by herself. She vowed by the fourth day that she would quit due to painful blisters. With patience, we saw her through her first week of pain as her feet adjusted to walking six hours a day over stony ground. With hardened soles, she maintained good spirit for the remainder of the trek.

**Paul:** a professor of metallurgy from England. Age 52. A large, big-boned man with a voice to match. As the trek wore him down, he once yelled at me in anger for folding his trekking map incorrectly. His redeeming quality was willingness to help others in need, such as carrying Caroline's pack when her blisters were especially bad.

**Gordon:** a high school math and computer science teacher from England. Age 55. A year and a half after his wife's death, Gordon began a search for a new life, first by moving into a new house, and then by making his "first and last trip to Nepal." From the outset, Gordon was a strong and healthy walker, with an indomitable spirit that carried him to the top of Kala Patthar (alternatively spelled Kala Pattar or Patar) at 18,192 feet, the goal of the trek. I often chose to walk with him and share his company.

**Reg:** a retired civil servant from England. Age 62. A kind, soft-spoken man. Poor health due to various Nepalese bugs occasionally slowed Reg down to the rear of our group. On the eighteenth day of the trek at 16,000 feet, he collapsed due to altitude sickness, causing us great concern.

**Tom Dempsey:** Author and photographer.

Later I would get to know our Nepalese Sherpa guides: Namgyal, Ang Dendi, and Rinzi Gambro listed in order of descending responsibility, plus 20 porters.





*Left: **Sherpa Namgyal** our sirdar, or trek leader, was quiet but effective; his duties included directing the porters and keeping us fed, sheltered, and on the right trail. He was born in Sikkim, a protectorate of India on the eastern border of Nepal.*

*Right: **Sherpa Ang Dendi**, chief cook. Here he flips a chapati, an unleavened wheat or barley flour cake, a Nepalese staple which resembles the Mexican tortilla. "Cooks live shorter lives because of the smoke," he told me. He proudly wore an electronic wristwatch, a sign of wealth.*



*Left: **Sherpa Rinzi Gambro** rolls fresh chapatis for brunch, while Caroline writes in her journal under a fig tree. Despite carrying a heavy load of kitchenware, he walked so fast that he led the way for Graham, Gordon, and me. All photos copyright by Tom Dempsey.*

## Day 2.

After wading across a river, we followed a dirt path through rice paddies, which stepped up the hillsides in terraces. As we approached a large village, dozens of children swarmed out of the local school and surrounded us in curiosity. Some of the kids shouted "Biro, biro!" requesting a biro, which is a "pen" in British slang. Other kids just looked at us politely.

As I passed through the village, Gordon appeared from a side street. He had just had one of the thrills of his teaching career by giving a brief English lesson to a group of Nepalese children in the school. With a glow on his face, he described the wondrous feeling of stepping alone into a room of foreign children and taking the instructor's place for a few golden moments. I felt a certain detachment from the Nepalese whom we met, which was perhaps encouraged by being in a packaged group. Suddenly, hundreds of children's voices filled the air with song. They were beginning that day's school session with the Nepalese national anthem. Tears came to my eyes. I felt as if they were singing for me.

Our group of seven Westerners was a huge curiosity in the village. Everyone stared at us with questioning, surprised faces. When I greeted them with "namaste," they would always respond in kind with a smile, and sometimes follow with questions in Nepali which I could not decipher. Namaste (pronounced na-ma-stay) means both "hello" and "good-bye," and translates as "I salute the spirit within you."

We stopped for brunch outside of the village, far enough away to avoid being crowded by the curious. Still, a number of Nepalese of all ages sat close by to watch us.

An attractive sherpani (female porter) who turned out to be Ang Dendi's sister took charge of issuing the first pay for our porters -- three U.S. dollars per day plus an extra day's wage as tip (in 1981). For every day of work, a porter could thus earn about three days worth of living expenses. Back in 1960, the going rate for porters was four times less -- seventy-five cents per day, as reported by Sir Edmund Hillary.

After brunch, we followed a little river upstream for several hours to a small Hindu village. To be social under the curious stares of the villagers, I greeted an old trader with "namaste." He responded in kind by touching his fingers together in front of his chin, bowing slightly, and saying "na-ma-shi-tay!". A tumpline over his forehead supported most of the weight of his dhoko, or basket, which was riding on his back. In his right hand he held a "T"-shaped walking stick which doubled as a support to rest his basket upon when he stopped. In his belt was tucked a large knife.

The people in the village were mostly of the Indo-Aryan-speaking group, who were originally migrants from India mainly from highest Hindu castes, like the Brahmins, the warrior Kshatriyas, and the Gurkhas. The Indo-Aryans in Nepal prefer living in valleys below 6500 feet in elevation.

I happened to notice a man in a Nepalese Army uniform leaning against a house. He was probably a Gurkha returned from the army to employ his skills in this village.

*Right: A man greets me with "namaste" in a Hindu village at 1500 feet elevation.  
Copyright by Tom Dempsey.*

***The Gurkhas***, refugees from the Mohammedan conquest of India in the 14th century, set up the kingdom of Gurkha northwest of Katmandu. In the 18th century, they united the small neighboring kingdoms and conquered the largest native kingdom centered on Katmandu (the Newars), and thus established Nepal. The term "Gurkha" eventually evolved to refer to all Nepalese soldiers who served as mercenaries for Great Britain and India, regardless of their actual ethnic affiliation.



A crowd gathered around Graham as he sat and cut open a mango snack that he had bought downstream. When he dumped the mango seeds onto the ground, he was startled by a trader who bent down to scoop them up. "Could you translate for me?" Graham asked Ang Dendi, our second-in-command guide. We found out that the man collecting the seeds wanted to grow mangoes of his own. Relieved that he was not violating a local littering law, Graham gladly handed the seeds to the appreciative trader.

### **The following day was typical of our 23-day trek:**

*At 6 AM, I would awake to a steaming bowl of hot water for washing. I took this opportunity every day to clean my hands and put contact lenses in my eyes. After emerging from the tent, I would pack my duffel bag for the porters to carry and my daypack for me to carry. While the porters took down our tents, we would eat a small breakfast of oatmeal porridge and tea. From 7 to 10:00 AM, we would walk leisurely to a brunch spot chosen by Ang Dendi, trying not to stray too far ahead of the porters. From 10 AM to noon, we would eat a hot brunch cooked by Ang Dendi, Rinzi, and Sukman. The brunches were composed of chapatis, jam, boiled eggs, canned fish or Spam, and tea. From noon until usually 3:00 PM we would complete the day's walk accompanied by one of the guides. At a suitable campsite, we would wait for the porters to catch up. The porters would arrive, and by 5 or 6:00 PM, dinner would be ready. I would join my fellow trekkers in the special eating tent and sit upon one of the little folding stools that our porters carried. Conversation would gradually peter out, and I would usually be back in my sleeping bag by 9:00 PM.*

### **Day 3.**

The rice paddies clung to steeper and steeper hillsides. Ingenious aqueducts irrigated the fields. Thatched-roof houses overlooked their paddies from precarious perches.

Graham, Gordon, Reg, and I found ourselves scrambling up a network of diked fields that were certainly not the trail. As we paused in uncertainty, we heard the voice of Sherpa Sukman calling up the valley from behind us. We had missed the turnoff. By speeding ahead, we had not known to cut over the mountains to the next valley. We scrambled up a very steep hillside to rejoin the trail. Dislodged rocks almost injured those below. As we joined the rest of the group, we were sorry to have caused a delay. We vowed to stay closer to our guides and porters so as not to get lost again. However, later in the trek, I would get lost again by falling behind.





*Above: Friendly traders on an ancient trade route in Nepal. They use forehead tumplines and shoulder straps to lift their baskets. Copyright by Tom Dempsey.*

My mood improved as I encountered a friendly group of traders who broke into smiles as I greeted them. Their facial features were Mongolian, and they may have been of the Tibeto-Burmese-speaking group, who are aboriginal to Nepal and prefer living at elevations from 4,500 to 8,500 feet.

Although many of the traders whom I met had shoulder straps on their baskets, they all used forehead tumplines to carry the brunt of the weight. Graham wanted to try out using a tumpline, and he asked Rinzi if he could borrow his basket, which was full of pots and pans. With a red face a shaking neck, he took a few faltering steps under the average Nepalese burden. Quickly placing the load onto the ground, Graham conceded admiration for the endurance of the Nepalese.

Inspired by Graham's example, Ang Dendi playfully shouldered two packs -- Graham's pack on his back and his own pack on his front -- for great comical effect. Ang Dendi was about 22 years old and had a delightful fun-loving spirit. The prefix "Ang" is a common nickname meaning "younger" or "little" and is often retained by adults.

I descended to a rocky riverbed, and encountered two women carrying baskets piled high with market goods. At first the two requested rupees for allowing me to take their picture. Since I did not want to encourage begging, I refused. Farther down the riverbed, I saw the same two women as I was waiting for our porters to catch up. This time they requested no money, so I took their photo.

We walked through a deep gorge whose river would flow into the Sun Kosi. The sides of the gorge rose so steeply that we would have had trouble escaping a flash flood. Somehow several houses clung to the precipitous walls.

By the end of the day, the remainder of the group seemed tired, but Graham and I felt strong. Aside from tiredness, though, everyone was captivated by the terraced terrain, the gorges, and the exotic people along the trail. I thrilled at the sense of remoteness from Western culture.

In the evening, I spoke with Namgyal, our sirdar, or trek leader, as he repaired one of his shirts. His English was adequate for basic conversation, and I learned that he was born in Sikkim, a protectorate of India on the eastern border of Nepal. He was a quiet but effective leader; his duties included directing the porters and keeping us fed, sheltered, and on the right trail.

After the trek, I visited Namgyal and his wife and children in their Katmandu residence. Namgyal proudly presented his son to me while his daughter stood in the background. When I asked the name of his daughter, he down-played mention of her. He had just unconsciously demonstrated the Nepalese preference for male children over female children. Ang Dendi, our head cook, lived in the adjacent one-room flat.

## ACROSS THE SUN KOSI

### Day 4.

We continued downstream on the following day. A troop of gibbons on a cliff rolled rocks down upon us, presumably protecting their territory. An aqueduct contoured high along the opposing cliff.

At brunch time we crossed the Sun Kosi, one of the three major rivers of Nepal, on a bridge built with American aid in 1969. Named the Toxal Bridge, it is the only river crossing for dozens of miles in either direction. (Kosi means "river" in Nepali.)

*Various countries hoping to win friendship have built projects for strategically-located Nepal. For example, the Chinese have built a road between Tibet and Katmandu which makes trade (and invasion) easier. In Katmandu, the Russians built, of all things, a cigarette factory to supply the habits of the Nepalese, many of whom smoke.*

Beneath the American bridge, we swam in the Sun Kosi. Our swim that day was our only full bath of the twenty-three-day trek. While we swam, Rinzi rolled out fresh chapatis which Ang Dendi cooked. A chapati is an unleavened wheat or barley flour cake, a Nepalese staple which resembles the Mexican tortilla.

After brunch, we ascended a steep, baking hot canyon, passing several thatched-roof houses. I felt strong and lead our group at a brisk pace. An old man in rags noticed my energy and greeted me with a smile. Using Nepali and gestures, he wistfully complimented me on my youthful vigor. Then in an assertive manner, he convinced me to talk with his son who was learning English in school. The son was too embarrassed to speak, but we had great fun exchanging some simple written sentences. The father, who spoke no English himself, looked on proudly. Our communication and sharing of friendship was exciting. When the father requested a pencil for his son, I wished that I had brought extras to give away. I was impressed that here even a pencil was a luxury. All too soon, with a touch of sadness, we parted ways with "namaste."

The hot and dry climb brought us several thousand feet above the Sun Kosi onto a ridge. We could find no water on the parched slopes, and we welcomed a stop at a teahouse. We each had three cups of tea. I filled my water bottle from a piped spring, adding an iodine tablet as usual to kill diarrhea-causing organisms.

We walked on and on, hoping to find water so that we could camp. Finally, at 5:00 PM, Ang Dendi found a campsite that was fifteen minutes from a trickle of water. It would have to do, because sunset was rapidly approaching, and the porters were an hour behind. Caroline was suffering from painful blisters, and the hot climb had not helped her spirit. Paul had carried her pack.

The porters arrived just in time to establish camp before a wild thunderstorm ripped the skies with lightening and rain. After half an hour, the furious storm petered out, leaving us feeling refreshed.

## HEALTH GOES DOWNHILL

### Day 5.

*The peaks of the Himalaya rise 50 miles to the northwest, across terraced foothills.*

After a week of good health in Nepal, I inevitably awoke with a sore throat and diarrhea. As I trudged up and down terraced hills, my perception of the world deadened. Distracted by my ailments, I could not fully appreciate the red blossoms that accented the occasional grove of rhododendron trees. However, I could not help but appreciate the glimpse of huge peaks which rose above the foothills fifty miles to the northwest. The tremendous view impressed me with how far we had left to walk. I would later appreciate the incredible scenery in those mountains all the more for having worked hard to get there, overcoming exhausting vertical relief and sickness.



**Geology:** *The Himalayan range is actually one of the youngest mountain ranges on earth, starting as a bed of a vast sea only one hundred million years ago. As the Indian subcontinent collided with Asia fifty million years ago, the sea bed began to rise. Marine limestone, made of the shells of billions of microscopic sea creatures, was lifted to form the peaks, including Mount Everest. In the last million years, the Himalayas have risen ten thousand feet, faster than any other land area on earth. The Indian subcontinent continues to push upward two inches per year, and balanced with erosion, the Himalayas may have a net rise of one inch every five years.*

On a ridge crest I came across a curious structure: two ten-foot diameter crosses mounted on an axle suspended fifteen feet off the ground. Neither Ang Dendi nor Namgyal could find the words to describe what it was, and its function remained a mystery to me throughout the trek. Not until after the trek did I find out that it was a ping, or Nepalese Ferris wheel. People ride the human-powered ping in the fall festival paying homage to the Hindu goddess Durga, the dreaded female side of Shiva, god of destruction. Both children and adults enjoy riding the four swings of the ping.

*Right: A Nepalese Ferris wheel (or ping), partially constructed, used in the fall Durga Puja festival.  
Copyright by Tom Dempsey.*

Farther along the trail, I came across an oddity that I could identify: a collection of pebbles lying on a cross-hatched pattern that was scratched into a large flat stone. I could just imagine two tired traders sitting down for this impromptu game of Bagh Chal, or "Goats and Tigers." Also called "village chess," Bagh Chal is a very popular game in Nepal.



People stared at us all along the path. We were rarely out of someone's sight. School children crowded around us during brunch, but I had little social energy because of my ailments. I was annoyed by the lack of privacy, especially for relieving diarrhea. I let the other trekkers handle the playful, curious children, while I tried to rest my sore throat and ignore my queasy stomach.

After a long walk, we finally camped at 6500 feet, our highest and coldest camp to that point. Okhaldhunga lay in sight, a town with a population of several thousand, the largest for fifty miles around.



## Day 6.

My intense sore throat progressed to a head cold as expected the next day, and diarrhea continued to give me annoying stomach cramps. I was not ailing alone, though, since a woman porter also had a sore throat, and Allen had a sick stomach.

Attractive whitewashed houses lined the approach to Okhaldhunga. The dirt path became a road inlaid with rocks. Kids kicked a soccer ball through the main street. Traders and townspeople regarded us with curiosity.

In the variety stalls, I bought "Nebico" brand cookies, made by the Nepal Biscuit Company. When meals became more and more monotonous, I became addicted to Nebico biscuits as trail food. "Biscuit" is a British term for what Americans call a "cookie."

Leaving the town, I encountered a spectacular explanation for the presence of Okhaldhunga in this remote part of Nepal. A vast acreage of brown rice terraces blanketed the hillsides as far as I could see. The elaborate stonework in the path continued for many miles, which I attributed to the prosperity of the rice and wheat harvests which are double-cropped on the terraces surrounding Okhaldhunga.



*Left: Graham hikes above extensive terraces near Okhaldhunga (5500 feet elevation). Preferring self-sufficiency, Graham carried his own large pack instead of using the porters. In contrast, I carried only five to fifteen pounds of day-use gear, such as water, camera, and journal; porters carried the rest. Copyright by Tom Dempsey.*

After a substantial climb up the stone road, we finally found a campsite in a small village on a ridge at 9300 feet. As I sat reading in my tent before dinner, I looked up to see a group of ten curious kids watching me. I wished that I spoke Nepali to learn what they were thinking. They stiffened self-consciously when I brought out my camera.

*Right: Children from a mountain village at 9300 feet elevation. Copyright by Tom Dempsey.*



## Day 7.

The next morning was chilly, and I walked quickly over the frosty ground to warm up. My two-day bout with diarrhea was over, and my sore throat had become a less debilitating cold. I felt almost back to full energy.

As usual, the surrounding ridges blocked the sun until mid-morning. I finally rounded a corner into the sun's warmth and was rewarded with a view of some giant peaks, now only forty miles away.

We descended steeply to a village of several dozen houses. While we waited at a teahouse for the porters to catch up, Graham tried a glass of chang, pronounced "chung," a local beer fermented from potatoes. "This tastes great!" he declared. Since I was feeling healthier, I let him convince me to try some. One sip was enough. I had never tasted a more sour substance.

We descended further to a river, then climbed a trail lined with rock walls through the fields of

prosperous farmers. Their houses were large, two-story structures with attractive whitewashed walls and windows framed with timber. Some even had running water, a luxury provided by black plastic tubing which snaked downhill from a spring.

Having descended 4000 feet and ascended 2000 feet in six hours of walking, everyone was tired. But our guides had to take an additional hour to find a campsite that was both near water and also on land on which a farmer would allow us to camp. We finally established camp at an elevation of 7600 feet.

We had been on the trail a full week, but our group still did not communicate very well. We interacted little with our guides and hardly at all with the porters. The food was dull. Too many dinners were composed of spicy hot Indian curries and the Nepalese staple, dhal bhat, a thick lentil soup eaten with rice.

#### **Day 8.**

Sickness struck again. I woke up with my stomach growling. Stomach cramps worsened as I walked. I lagged behind the porters, and Gordon dropped back to accompany me. Suddenly, I was too depressed to go on. I had to lie down and cry for ten minutes to release suppressed feelings. I did not know what was wrong with me, and Gordon and I tried to figure out if sunstroke might explain my symptoms. I appreciated having Gordon with me to talk to.

Relieved by crying, I continued to our brunch spot. After brunch, a second attack of sadness hit me. The effort of fighting diarrhea and a head cold, combined with walking six hours a day, had culminated in a physical and mental depression.

After brunch, my cramps worsened. I had to go on, though, because the terrain was so steep that the only place to camp would have been on the trail itself. I plodded at a painfully slow pace. By this time, the entire group had become aware of my condition, and they slowed to walk with me. I appreciated their concern.

By the end of the day, I had climbed only 1700 feet in ten miles, but it seemed to have taken a lifetime. The three-hour walk that afternoon was one of the hardest things I have ever done.

I finally collapsed in my tent at 9300 feet elevation, feeling an ascetic resolve to fight my sickness. I awoke at 10:00 PM thinking that morning was near. My Lomatil tablets for diarrhea control had worn off precisely six hours after taking them, as the label had promised. I awoke again at 3:30 AM as the next dose wore off. I barely had the energy to reach the bushes.

#### **Day 9.**

The next morning, I felt well enough to walk up a thousand feet to a 10,050-foot pass where our path joined the Lamosanga to Mount Everest trekking route, the most common way for trekkers to reach the Everest area on foot. An auto road connects Lamosanga with Katmandu and China, providing access for both trekkers and traders.

We had entered the Khumbu District, home of the Sherpa tribe and land of Buddhism. While the others sampled cheese from a factory on the pass, I rested my stomach. Five thousand feet below flowed the Dudh Kosi, or "Milky River," whose waters run milky with the finely-ground silts from the Khumbu Glacier of Mount Everest and from other glaciers. *The Dudh Kosi, like all other Nepalese rivers, flows into the Ganges, which in turn flows through India to the Indian Ocean.*

Trailing behind even the porters, I lost the entire group on the vertical mile of descent. I became confused by divergent paths in a small village, and I found no one around to point the way. I felt a little panicky about being both lost and also ill. Luckily, some Gurkhas, or Nepalese soldiers, came up the lightly-traveled path. I asked them with gestures, English, and a little Nepali if they had seen my group. They pointed downwards.

While still feeling lost, I continued downwards. The descent was so jarring, I lost my breakfast. Part of the way down, a porter boy from my group came up the path to meet me. He accompanied me down to the brunch spot, where the concerned group greeted me with relief.

I decided that I could not climb for three hours to the next possible campsite. We cut our walk short and camped on a farmer's terrace near the bottom of the Dudh Kosi gorge. In my tent, I fell into a deep, healing sleep for twelve full hours.

## HEALTH GOES UPHILL

### Day 10.

I awoke on the mend, ready to begin a positive mood cycle. A spectacular view of the Dudh Kosi gorge encouraged my improving health and mood. The cooler and wetter climate here at 8500 feet in elevation created a lush green carpet, a welcome relief from the brown of lower elevations. Vibrant green terraces climbed out of the 5,000- to 10,000-foot deep river gorge. The tip of Mount Everest poked above the mountains twenty-six miles away. I felt as though I had a new lease on life.



*Above: Rest stop on rice/wheat terraces near Lukla Airport, above the Dudh Kosi gorge.  
Published in Wilderness Travel 1989 Catalog of Adventures. Copyright by Tom Dempsey.*

For the next four days, we walked in a portion of the Dudh Kosi Valley called Pharak. The mild climate in the valley allows Pharak villages to raise large crops of maize and potatoes in the summer and crops of wheat, turnips, cauliflower, and cabbage in the winter. The Sherpa villagers raise cows, yak crossbreeds, sheep, and goats.

Without much effort, I was able to climb three thousand feet to our next camp at 9200 feet of elevation. For dinner, Ang Dendi cooked two chickens, a rare treat. My appetite returned.

Large, white blossoms filled the magnolia trees that surrounded our camp. Misty clouds flirted with the snow-dusted peaks across the valley.



*Peaks rose two vertical miles above Chhutra Village.*

### **Day 11.**

So far in the trek, I had not seen any other foreign trekkers. For ten days I had stepped back in time. But finally I encountered two Europeans, reminding me that I was in the twentieth century. Two airplanes overhead showed our proximity to Lukla Airport.

My head cold continued, but my strength rapidly recovered from the bouts with stomach distress. In the afternoon, we walked through three hours of rain underneath dripping rhododendrons to reach Surke (7700 feet) on the Dudh Kosi. To escape the rain, we stayed in a hotel room at two rupees (24 cents U.S.) apiece. The room was thankfully separate from the cooking area. Usually one must sleep in the smoke of the cooking fire, because Sherpa houses have no chimneys.



### **Day 12.**

We continued upstream, climbing high above the river to circumvent an impassable part of the gorge. We passed the turnoff to Lukla Airport, which was an hour's walk away.

The majority of people whom I met on the trail were Nepalese, but amongst them now I saw about five foreign trekkers per day. We no longer attracted the looks of surprise that had greeted us during the first ten days of the trek. We were no longer an unusual sight. The foreign trekkers tried to ignore each other to preserve the exciting feeling of being submerged alone in an exotic culture.

The vertical relief were becoming more and more extreme. Behind Chhutra were peaks that rose two miles above the village. A short walk after brunch brought us to Phakding, where we camped in a yak pasture near a teahouse.

## **THE SHERPA CAPITAL**

### **Day 13.**

In the morning, we continued through the region of Pharak, meeting many people who had round, Mongolian faces mixed with Indian and Chinese features. We had entered the heart of Sherpaland.

I passed through the entrance gate to Sagarmatha National park, which cost sixty rupees (\$7.20 U.S.). We concluded another short day of walking with a steep climb to the town of Namche Bazaar, which is nestled in a south-facing natural amphitheater at 11,300 feet in elevation.



*Namche Bazaar (11,300 feet elevation), administrative center of the Khumbu District of Nepal. Among the 70 houses are the headquarters for Sagarmatha National Park (with advisors from New Zealand), a police checkpoint, hotels, restaurants, and shops selling used mountaineering equipment. The mountain Kwangde (20,320 feet) provides a snowy backdrop.*

*Copyright by Tom Dempsey.*

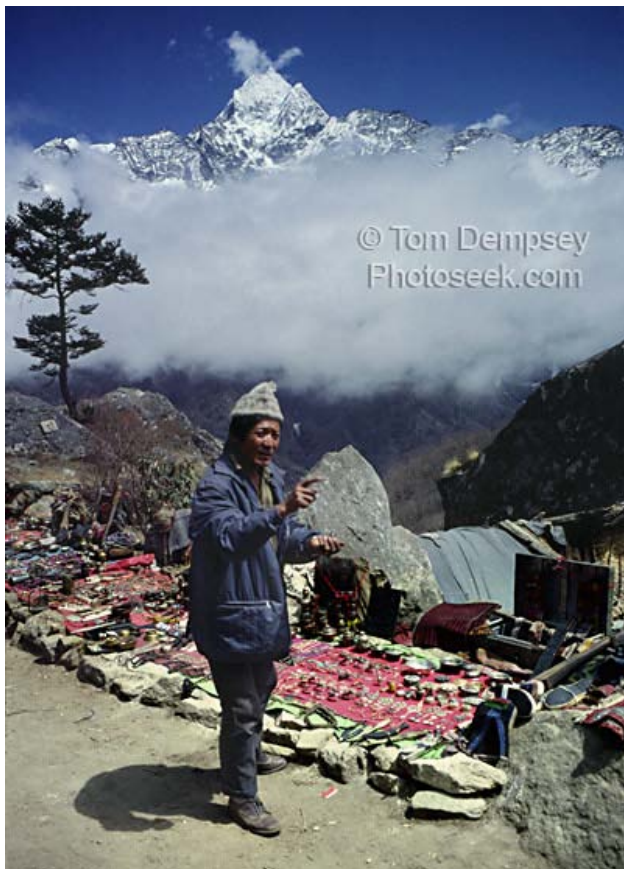
### ***Who Is a Sherpa?***

*Namche Bazaar is famous as the unofficial Sherpa capital of Nepal. The true Sherpas were originally from Eastern Tibet, and in fact, the word "Sherpa" itself means "Easterner." Around 1400 AD fifty thousand Sherpas migrated from Kham, Eastern Tibet, to their*

*present location in the Khumbu District of Nepal. In the twentieth century, the Sherpas became famous to Westerners as good-natured and hardy porters for assaults on Himalayan peaks, especially after Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norkay achieved the summit of Mount Everest in 1953.*

*Although our trekking guides called themselves Sherpa Namgyal, Sherpa Ang Dendi, and Sherpa Rinzi, they did not actually belong to the Sherpa tribe. Namgyal had Indo-Aryan ancestry, not the Tibetan ancestry of a Sherpa. Ang Dendi and two of his porter sisters belonged to the Tamang tribe, who live mainly east of Katmandu at 5,000 to 7,000 feet elevation. In fact, there were no true Sherpas among any of our guides or porters. The capitalized word "Sherpa" has evolved into a title for any Nepalese guide. The uncapitalized term "sherpa" often loosely refers to any Nepalese porter, regardless of ancestry.*





*A souvenir vendor in the Khumbu District of Nepal.*

*Looking northeast from Namche: Behind the Lhotse Wall (upper left), Mount Everest rises only 16 miles away, with snow blowing from its top. Ama Dablam (right).*



We camped in Namche on the terraced bazaar grounds, which were not being used since it was not Saturday, market day. Namche is the administrative center of the Khumbu District. Among its seventy houses, the town has a police checkpoint, the headquarters for Sagarmatha National Park (with advisors from New Zealand), several shops selling used mountaineering equipment, and a few hotels and restaurants. In 1979, UNESCO listed Sagarmatha National Park as a World Heritage Area.

#### **Day 14.**

After showing my trekking permit at the Police Station, I climbed a small hill above Namche and was stunned by my first view of Ama Dablam (22,310 feet), famous worldwide for its knife-edged beauty.



*Ama Dablam (22,310 feet elevation) means "Mother's Charm Box," named for the rectangular hanging glacier on the main peak that bulges in the shape of a dablam, a Sherpa women's ornament. The dablam is the size of two football fields.*



At the head of the valley rose the icy Lhotse Wall, behind which poked the pyramid of Mount Everest. The jet stream blasted a plume of snow from the top of Everest. By 1:00, the usual afternoon cloud build-up obscured the mountains.



*Above: The Lhotse Wall, as seen from the village of Pangboche, rises up to three vertical miles from its base. The jet stream blasts snow from the summit of **Mount Everest**, the world's highest peak (29,035 feet; on left, 2 miles behind). Lhotse (27,923 feet; on right) is the world's fourth highest peak.*

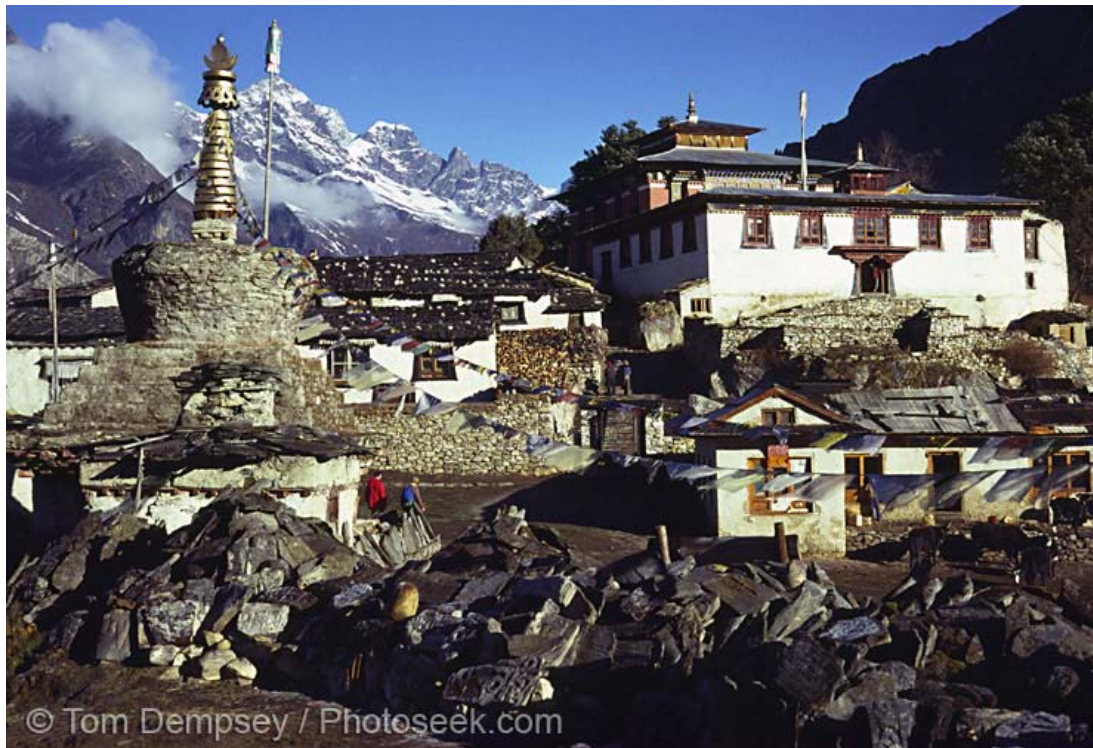
I descended a couple thousand feet to the Dudh Kosi, then began climbing the ridge to Thyangboche Monastery. Twice I paused to let by trains of hairy yaks which carried tons of gear for mountaineering expeditions.

Of our group, I now chose the slowest pace. I was very cautious about the effects of altitude, which reached 12,700 feet at the monastery. At the time, I believed that the others were hiking almost as if in a race to prove that they were not affected by the altitude. I ignored the temptation to walk fast, and instead, I listened to my body, which told me to take my time and acclimatize. I was surprised that Paul, Reg, and Caroline, who were usually the slower walkers, were setting a quick pace up into thinner air.

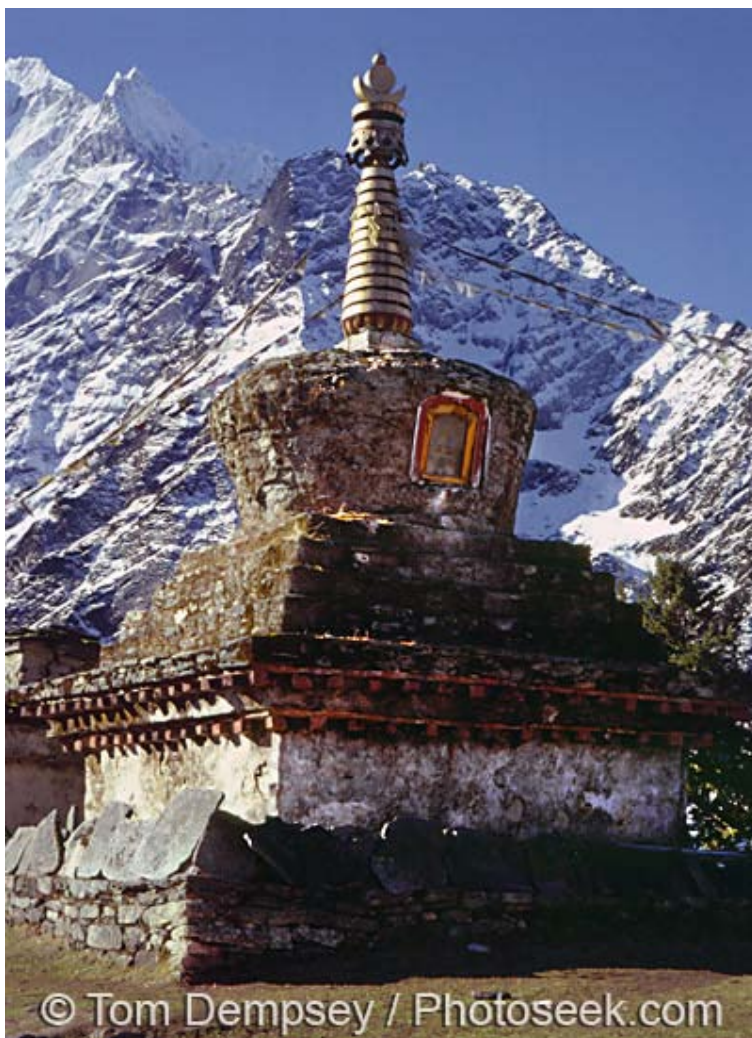
*Nepal contains eight of the ten **highest peaks on earth**; the five highest are as follows:*

- 1. **Mount Everest** (29,035 feet) on the Nepal /China border*
- 2. **K2** (28,250 feet) on the Pakistan/China border*
- 3. **Kanchenjunga** (28,208 feet) on the Nepal/China border*
- 4. **Lhotse** (27,923 feet) in Nepal*
- 5. **Makalu** (27,824 feet) on the Nepal/China border*

*The Lhotse Wall rises an impressive two-and-a-half to three vertical miles from its base. Even more impressive vertical reliefs are found elsewhere in Nepal. In midwest Nepal, the Kali Ghandaki (river) cuts through the 18-mile space between Annapurna (26,503 feet) and Dhaulagiri (26,811 feet), creating the deepest river-carved gorge on earth, more than four miles deep!*



*Above: Thyangboche Monastery (1981) is surrounded by mani walls, chortens, prayer flags, and spectacular Himalayan peaks. (The monastery burned down some years later and was rebuilt.)*



*Left: a chorten (stupa, Buddhist monument) at Thyangboche Monastery. Buddhism is thought to have been brought into the Khumbu District at the end of the seventeenth century by a lama from the Rongbuk Monastery, located in Tibet just north of Mount Everest. To this day, at the November or December full moon, the lamas at Thyangboche celebrate the Mani Rimdu festival, where they don masks and costumes, and through dances, they dramatize the victory of Buddhism over Bon, the ancient animistic religion of Tibet.*



## MAGNIFICENT THYANGBOCHE

*Thyangboche Monastery (or Tengboche - 12,700 feet)  
Kwangde rises to 20,320 feet in background.*



At the top of a ridge I reached Thyangboche Monastery (or Tengboche), the religious center of the Khumbu District. Also called a "lamasery," the monastery is famed worldwide as a center for Mahayana Buddhism, or Lamaism. Lamaism, found mostly in Nepal, Tibet, and Japan, teaches compassion and universal salvation. The lamasery itself is a relatively recent structure, built in the 1920's. It had to be rebuilt after it was destroyed by an earthquake in 1933. (After this trip, Thyangboche burned down in 1989 in a fire caused by an electrical heater, and was rebuilt and reopened in 1993.) Thyangboche is quite new compared with the oldest structure in Nepal, a stupa in Patan built by Emperor Asoka in 250 BC.

Our group conversed little that evening. We had become entrenched in the routine of the trek. Earlier that day, I had met an American dental assistant and his schoolteacher wife who both worked in Katmandu. Talking with these two open Americans was refreshing after being so long exposed to reserved British small talk.

Fog moved in for the night. Nineteen German trekkers camped near us. In the idle evening hours, I contemplated my travels soon to come in Europe. Would travelling there be too expensive? Could I afford to see Scandinavia? (It would turn out that I was able to afford travelling for \$15 per day in Norway by staying in youth hostels and camping.) I sifted memories of happy times with family and friends.

### Day 15.

After having walked continuously for two weeks, our group finally stopped. We rested in Thyangboche the next day for altitude acclimatization. Fog drizzled upon us all day, obscuring all views. Time slowed almost to a standstill. When we heard that the group of German trekkers had had freeze-dried reindeer for breakfast, we laughed and laughed!

In the comfortable teahouse, I exchanged card tricks with an American trekker. I learned of the various mountaineering expeditions that were currently in progress: the Japanese were climbing Everest; the Yugoslavians, Bulgarians, and Spaniards were climbing Lhotse; seven Australians and two Americans were climbing Ama Dablam; and some Germans had just come down from Island Peak. The forbidding peaks now suddenly seemed more accessible.

### Day 16.

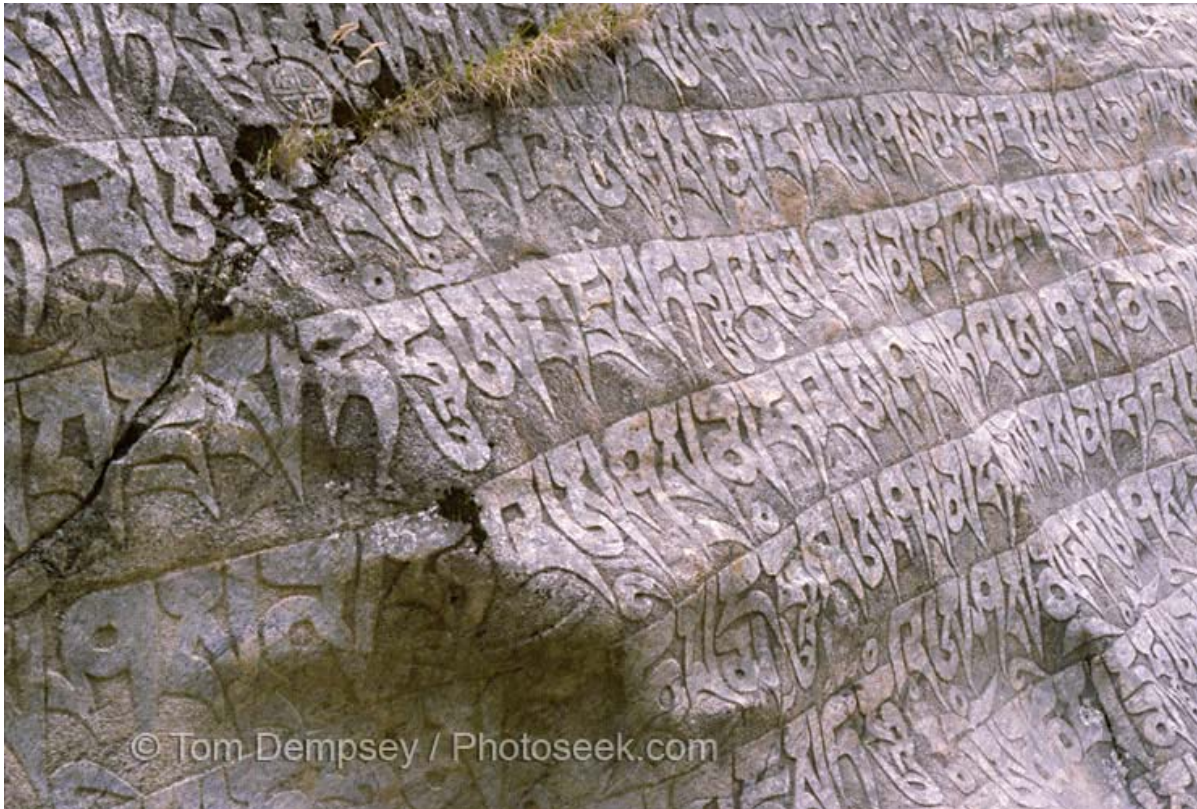
The next morning I awoke to crystal clear skies. When I crawled out of my tent, Thyangboche revealed to me its charm and spectacular setting. The mountains Kangtega, Thamserku, Ama Dablam, Lhotse, Everest, Nuptse, Taweche, and Kwangde provided a fantastic display. The grandeur instantly put me into a good mood, and I felt healthy and energetic. The glory of that morning really made the trek worthwhile. The view from Thyangboche is rightly pronounced by many as one of the most magnificent on earth.

After a late breakfast, I descended through groves of dwarf firs and rhododendrons to the Imja Khola, then proceeded upstream. Ama Dablam soared out of the clouds above. Mount Everest gradually receded from view behind the Lhotse Wall as I approached it.

At the village Pangboche, we waited for the porters to catch up so that we could have brunch. Everyone in our group was affected by the altitude somewhat with queasiness, headache, and shortness of breath. Unbeknownst to most of us, Reg had been throwing up for the past few days . . . a foreshadowing of an emergency to come.



At 12,800 feet elevation, Pangboche is the highest year-round human habitation in the Khumbu District. This is somewhat lower than the highest permanent settlements in the world, which are located in the Andes Mountains of South America.



*Above: The Lamaist inscription Om Mani Padme Hum is often enscribed in stone in areas of Nepal that follow Tibetan Buddhism. This prayer roughly translates as "Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus," which invokes the patron saint of Lamaism, who is envisaged in a lotus flower. The Lamaists believe that their prayer will have more effect the more often it is repeated, which explains the proliferation of prayer walls, prayer flags, and prayer wheels in Nepal and Tibet.*

### ***Highest Human Habitation***

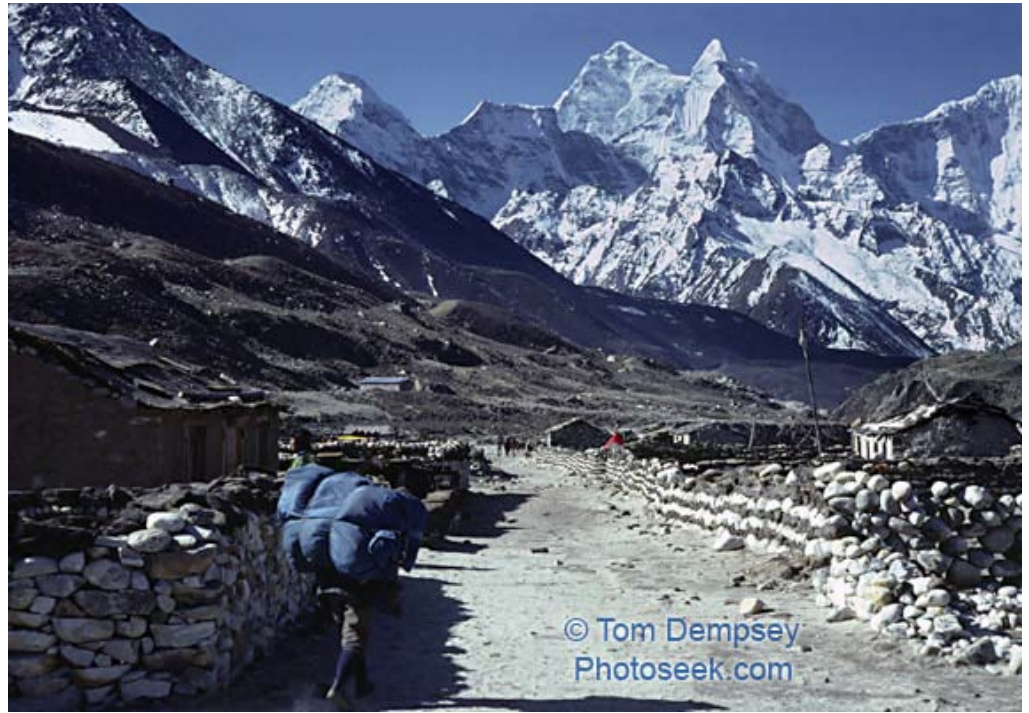
*Workers in Aucanquilcha sulfur mining camp in Chile used to live at 17,500 feet and ascend each day to 18,800 feet to work in the mine. At the end of the day the workers descended to sleep in the settlement at 17,500 feet. A settlement in Bolivia matched this 17,500-foot maximum altitude for permanent human habitation. As of May 2003, National Geographic reports that 16,730-foot La Rinconada, Peru, is the highest permanent human habitation.*

*Research indicates that humans cannot live permanently above an elevation of 18,000 feet without suffering a gradual physiological deterioration that eventually leads to death. Mountaineers who anticipate spending time above this altitude have to fatten themselves before the climb to offset their inevitable weight loss.*

*Right: Kangtega peak rises above  
Pheriche Village.*

## THE ABODE OF SNOW

All trees disappeared, and the vegetation became mainly scrub juniper and tundra. I reached Pheriche, a summer village in a beautiful alpine meadow. The village contains several lodges for trekkers and huts for yak herders, which would all be deserted in the winter, when the Sherpas return to their homes lower in the valley.



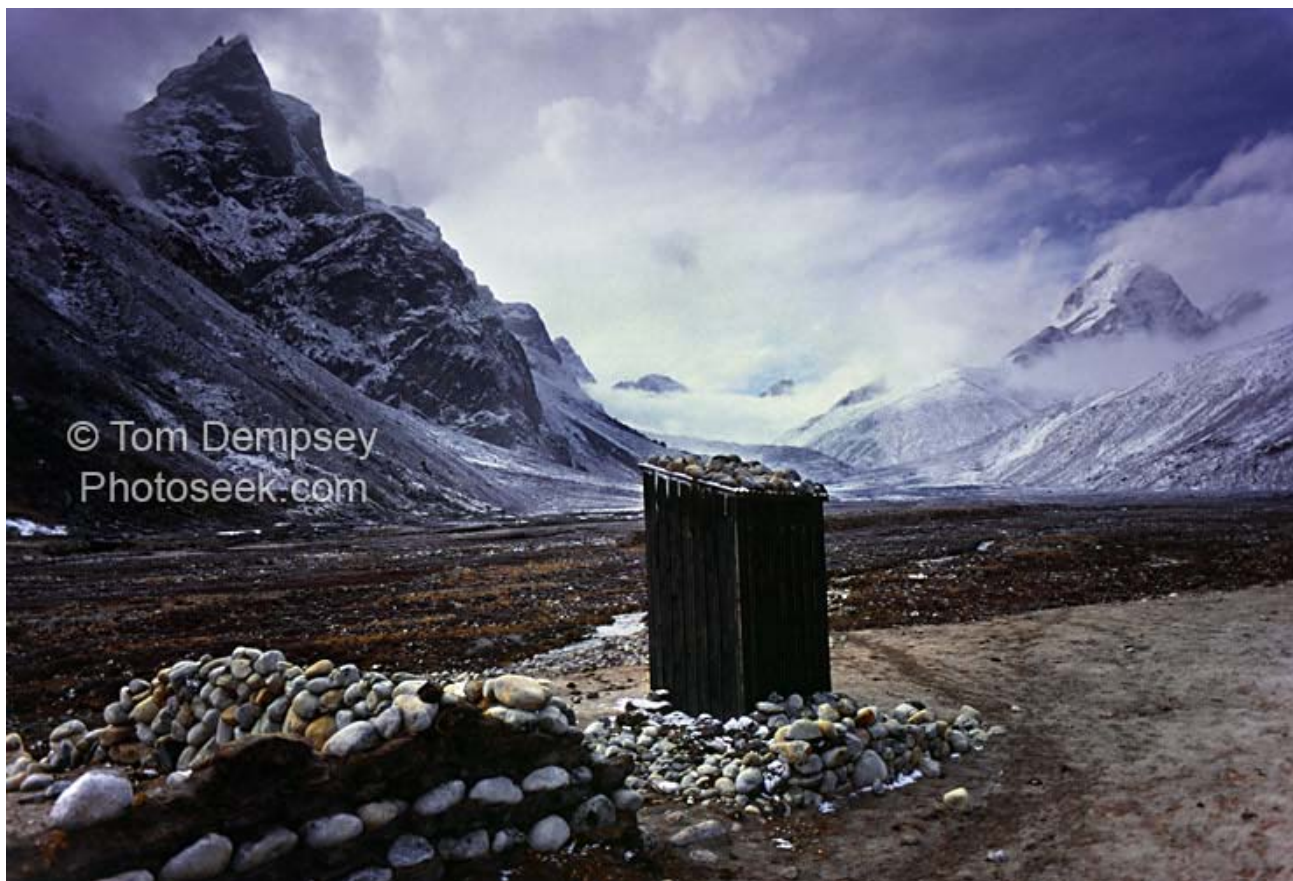
I was surprised to find a two-room hospital in Pheriche staffed by a Japanese physician. The post is supported by the Himalayan Rescue Association and the Tokyo Medical College. Amid its equipment was a small pressurization chamber for victims of altitude sickness.

I had trouble sleeping that night due to diarrhea and the 14,000-foot altitude. Quiet flurries of snow dusted my tent as I lay awake. Twice I had to leave the warmth of the tent to relieve myself in the snowy, high-altitude night. While outside, I set up my camera on a tripod for a time exposure. I stood in my long underwear, down jacket, and boots for half an hour waiting for my camera to collect enough light from the moonlit mountain scene. Not minding the intense cold, I witnessed the beautiful night with awe.

*My moonlit tent is dusted with snow at Pheriche (14,000 feet elevation),  
with Lobuje Peak in background (20,160 feet).*







*A doorless outhouse commands the desolate edge of Pheriche. Taweche (left, 21,388 feet) and Lobuje Peak (right).*



### **Day 17.**

*Snow clings to the letters of Om Mani Padme Hum enscribed on a mani wall at Pheriche. Buddhists walk to the left of a mani wall in order to complete a clockwise circuit upon their return. This serves like spinning a prayer wheel clockwise, which repeats the prayer manifold times. Prayer wheels, found throughout the Buddhist Himalaya, are wood cylinders that are inscribed with prayers, mounted vertically on an axle, and spun by hand or water power.*

I awoke engulfed in white curtains of cloud that dropped additional snow, then lifted. The clearing mists unveiled an ethereal dusting of fresh snow, which had transformed the usual bleak browns into bright crystalline whites. My mood soared with the peaks of Pheriche. This turned out to be the most beautiful morning of the trek.

I set out across the snowy meadow, heading for Lobuje, which would be our highest overnight abode. When I began trudging up the steep terminal moraine of the Khumbu Glacier, I noticed the porters slipping and sliding on the fresh snow in their tennis shoes. As I lent a helping hand to one woman porter, I was surprised to see that the porters had no footgear adequate for snow travel.

Finally, after having accompanied us for the past seventeen days, the porters had to turn back due to slippery footing. Five of them would wait in Pheriche for our return, and Namgyal and Rinzi would accompany us to Lobuje. After collecting from the porters what gear I would need for the next two nights, I continued walking towards our highest camp.



*A trekker sports a jaunty yellow umbrella at 15,400 feet on the terminal moraine of the Khumbu Glacier. A row of stone monuments were built near here in memory of six Sherpas who were killed in an avalanche during the 1970 Japanese expedition to film "The Man Who Skied Down Everest." Ama Dablam rises in the upper right.*



Our original twenty porters had been reduced to seven over the course of the trek. After we would eat the food that they had carried, Namgyal would dismiss them with tips equal to one day's wage apiece. They would then run for several days back to their homes.

Drained by stomach ailments and the altitude, I lagged behind the others. Climbing two thousand feet was hard work above 14,000 feet in elevation. Snow and sun alternated hourly. The mountain views became ever more spectacular.

After an interminable walk on stony glacial debris, I reached Lobuje at 16,100 feet, the highest elevation to which I had ever been. Lobuje consisted of a couple of herders' huts and a lodge built with New Zealander aid. Paul, Caroline, and I rested for the remainder of the day, while the others climbed above the village for further fantastic views. In order to acclimatize properly to the altitude, scientists recommend that one should climb high and sleep low, but I did not have the energy to ascend further. I saved my energy for the final ascent to come on the following day.

In the herder's hut where we stayed overnight, I ate a delicious dinner of yak steak, rice, and potatoes for 29 rupees, or \$2.30 U.S. I did not worry about the quality of the steak, because the ambient air provided a natural refrigerator for the haunch of yak hanging in the hut.

I slept surprisingly well that night, in spite of the altitude. Lomatil controlled my gut well enough that I did not wake. But not everyone was so fortunate . . .

## A DARK CLOUD

### Day 18.

By morning, Caroline had had little sleep, and she suffered from a severe altitude headache. She wisely chose to descend to Pheriche. Reg had also slept poorly, and he had thrown up during the night. He slurred his speech markedly as he rose from bed. He was exhibiting clear symptoms of altitude sickness. He wandered outside to fetch some wash water, but he did not return. Allen went outside a few minutes later, then immediately returned, shouting "Reg has collapsed!"

We found Reg lying face down with a bloody cut on his forehead where he had hit a rock. His lack of sufficient clothing in the sub-freezing temperature had helped cause him to faint. Helplessly hoping for him to regain consciousness, we cleaned his cut and covered him with warm layers. After ten interminable minutes, Reg regained consciousness with the help of smelling salts. He remained white as a sheet and was certainly sinking deeper into altitude sickness. We had to get him immediately to the doctor in Pheriche. Caroline, stricken with a painful headache, also wanted to descend without delay.

After some quick decisions, Namgyal and Graham escorted Reg and Caroline back down to Pheriche. The Japanese doctor there later put three stitches into Reg's eyebrow, and Caroline's headache subsided at the lower altitude.

Our concern for Reg dampened our enthusiasm to go on, but Paul, Allen, Gordon, Rinzi, and I started off anyway towards the ultimate goal of our trek, the summit of Kala Patthar (alternatively spelled Kala Pattar or Patar). We followed the Khumbu Valley northwards and began crossing several lateral moraines of the Khumbu Glacier. As we walked, the altitude numbed our minds and bodies without us realizing it.

*Right: I'm hiking here at 17,000 feet on a lateral moraine of the rock-covered, mile-wide Khumbu Glacier. The height of the moraine shows that the glacier used to be at least a thousand feet thicker.*



After walking one and a half hours, I became concerned about Paul, who was slurring his speech and walking unsteadily. Reg's collapse was on my mind, and I could just see the same thing happening to Paul. A big man like Paul would have been difficult to carry out if he fell unconscious. I advised him to go back. Allen, who also felt weakened by the altitude, decided to join Paul. For added security, reliable Rinzi chose to accompany them back to the herder's hut at Lobuje.

Gung-ho Gordon and I continued onwards. We felt lucky to be the only ones of our group to be in reach of our goal.

## THE MIST CLEARS

*The sign reads "Nuptse High Altitude Hotel 5160 meters," at Gorak Shep (17,000 feet). My goal was to walk only 1200 feet higher to the peak of Kala Patthar (alternatively spelled Kala Pattar or Patar), which means "black rock" (upper right).*

Less than three hours out of Lobuje, Gordon and I reached a ramshackle hut labeled "Nuptse High Altitude Hotel." This was Gorak Shep, a site with two simple huts which are usually manned during the trekking season.



*The shape of a nearby dried lake gives **Gorak Shep** its name, "dead crow." Climbers camping on the South Col of Mount Everest have seen crows, or choughs, flying in the thin air at 26,000 feet. Even more astonishing, bar-headed geese have been seen flying above 29,000 feet over the crest of Mount Everest!*

Inside the "Nuptse Hotel", we waited for the clouds to clear. This so-called "hotel" was tended by a Nepalese man who served simple meals of rice, potatoes, yak meat, and eggs. Not feeling hungry, I reluctantly drank a cup of tea for two rupees (16 cents U.S.), the most expensive tea of the trip. By this time I had come to think of rupees as dollars, and somewhat irrationally, I hesitated to spend two "dollars" on a cup of tea. Money should not have been on my mind, though, because drinking could mean the difference between life and death in the parched, high-altitude air.

Part of our trekking ritual included drinking tea five times a day: at breakfast; before and after brunch; and before and after dinner. The British could tolerate it, but I acquired a strong distaste for tea. Unfortunately, plain boiled water was not any more palatable, and I reconciled myself to drinking weak tea, the weaker the better.

After waiting an hour at the Nuptse Hotel, I felt a physical uneasiness due to the altitude. I had to get moving, either up to Kala Patthar or back to Lobuje.

Suddenly, the mists cleared to reveal our goal. If we went up immediately, we might have good views. Gordon and I began the 1200-foot ascent. I set the pace. Ten steps up . . . rest. Ten steps up . . . rest. The rarefied air made us fight hard for each step. At 18,000 feet of elevation, we breathed only half the oxygen per lungful that we would have inhaled at sea level. Our bodies had adjusted to half the atmospheric pressure of sea level.

*The speed at which you **acclimatize to high altitude** (above 10,000 feet elevation) is unpredictable, and can vary for the same person on different occasions. As you go to higher altitudes, the mass of air pressing down from above gets smaller, which causes the air density to decrease. Meanwhile, the oxygen content of air remains at a constant 21 percent throughout all altitudes on land. As a result, the **oxygen available per lungful** decreases as you ascend, as shown in the following table:*

<b>Altitude</b>	<b>Available Oxygen, Compared to Sea Level</b> (average observed at 45 degrees latitude)
<i>0 feet (sea level)</i>	<i>100% (base for comparison)</i>
<i>5,000 feet</i>	<i>80 % of sea level oxygen per lungful</i>
<i>10,000 feet</i>	<i>69% of sea level oxygen per lungful</i>
<i>15,000 feet</i>	<i>56% of sea level oxygen per lungful</i>
<i>18,000 feet</i>	<i>50% of sea level oxygen per lungful</i>
<i>20,000 feet</i>	<i>45% of sea level oxygen per lungful</i>
<i>29,000 feet</i>	<i>31% of sea level oxygen per lungful</i>

*The above figures are averages that apply only to the midlatitudes (45 degrees latitude, North or South). **Oxygen available per lungful** also varies slightly by latitude: you will gasp for air about 5 percent harder when climbing at 20,000 feet on Alaska's Mount McKinley (Denali) than when climbing at the same altitude in the Himalayas. Denali is at 63 degrees latitude and the Himalayas are at about 28 degrees latitude. Denali rises to 20,320 feet but has the oxygen availability of a 23,000 -foot peak in the Himalayas. At a given altitude, **oxygen available per lungful** is highest at the equator (0 degrees latitude), where the atmosphere is deepest, and lowest at the poles (90 degrees latitude), where the atmosphere is shallowest. The centripetal force of the earth's spin shapes both the atmosphere and the earth into "oblate spheroids": flatter at the poles and fatter at the equator.*



*From Kala Patthar (18,192 feet), Gordon looks across the Khumbu Glacier to the South Face of Mount Everest (29,035 feet, second peak from left). The West Ridge of Everest, a route first climbed by Unsoeld and Hornbein in 1963, drops down to the left onto the west shoulder (the peak on the upper left). Mount Everest is two miles behind Nuptse (25,726 feet, upper right).*

Eighteen Germans powered by freeze-dried reindeer passed us. They spent a few minutes on top with all views obscured by mists, then zoomed back down.

Gordon and I took our time on top, waiting for a view. We both felt fine, with no headache from the altitude. Finally the mists parted. With my mind slowed by the altitude, I had to take a few moments to determine which mountain was Mount Everest. The highest place on earth rose before me only six miles away, and I felt a warm sense of accomplishment. In addition to my own picture-taking, I took photographs with Graham's camera, which he had lent to me since he could not be present.

I spent an hour and a half on Kala Patthar and was reluctant to leave. Finally, Gordon and I descended to Gorak Shep, cutting an hour off our ascent time. While ascents must be done slowly at high altitude, descents can be made safely as fast as you wish.

We retraced our route back to Lobuje. As the evening sky darkened, we became worried that we had gone too far and missed the herder's hut. Feeling lost in such a barren place was disconcerting. I believed that we were fooling ourselves by our desire to get back, and I jogged ahead to where I thought I remembered a familiar landmark. To my relief, I found a familiar pattern of ice in the ground. I yelled back to Gordon, "Come on! It's okay!" We arrived at Lobuje just before complete darkness. Graham had returned, and he reported that Reg had been safely escorted to Pheriche.

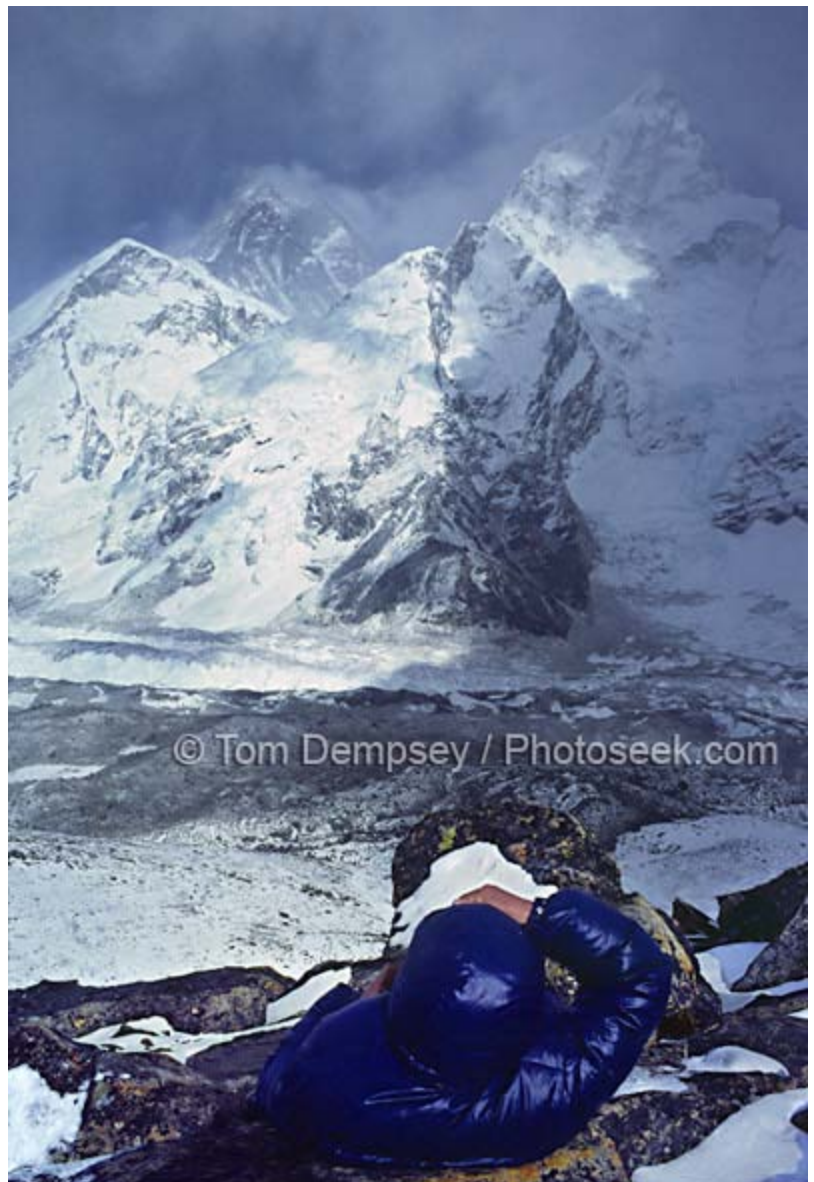
I was exhausted and could eat little more than a potato for dinner. I slept soundly, but in the middle of the night, I struggled out into the subfreezing cold and lost my dinner.

## Day 19.

In the morning, I could eat no breakfast because of altitude malaise. Allen, Graham, and Gordon (for his second time) left for Kala Patthar under clear skies. Paul, Rinzi, and I descended to Pheriche.

While Paul went ahead, Rinzi patiently waited for me as I slowly followed with an altitude headache. On the way down, we spotted a hawk, one of the few signs of life in that desolate area. On the trail where the porters had turned back two days before, the snow had melted entirely.

After descending two thousand feet into thicker air, I felt considerably better. I was able to eat a



normal brunch. I read and rested for the remainder of the day.

That evening, Reg ate a partial dinner, which was an encouraging sign of improvement for his altitude sickness. The party from Kala Patthar returned at 5:15 PM. They reported that clouds had obscured Nuptse and Everest. Gordon and I felt lucky to have gone the previous day.

## ESCORTING REG TO SAFETY

### Day 20.

After the doctor gave Reg a checkup the next morning at Pheriche Hospital, we set out for Thyangboche re-accompanied by the porters. After an hour and a half, Reg could walk no further. He decided to order a helicopter to pick him up in Thyangboche, the closest place that a pilot would land.

Namgyal rigged a makeshift stretcher, and we carried Reg a short distance. The rack bounced semiconscious Reg, and he insisted that we stop. Rinzi then tried valiantly to carry the 165-pound man in a modified basket, but he could not even lift him. We finally settled upon carrying Reg between the shoulders of two people.

*Right: Graham, Allen, and porters escort altitude-sick Reg across a swing bridge over the Imja Khola. (Khola means river.) Buddhists have attached prayer flags to protect the bridge and those who cross it.*



We progressed slowly but steadily. The color returned to Reg's drained face as we crossed the river at the lowest point between Pheriche and Thyangboche. But his face once again turned white as we helped him climb the thousand feet to the monastery. He was only half conscious and could hardly move his feet, but we eventually got him to Thyangboche.

To raise our spirits, Ang Dendi whipped up a rare delicious dinner of somosa, a vegetable mixture wrapped in dough and fried in oil. Poor Reg could not eat it.

### Day 21.

The next day we waited for the helicopter to arrive. Reg's condition had improved: he could eat some breakfast and he could speak clearly.

While we waited, I spoke with a Swedish trekker who was travelling alone. I told him that I wanted to visit Scandinavia. His eyes lit up as he described hiking in spectacular Norway, and I took his suggestions to heart.

After a couple of hours, the helicopter had still not shown up. I was not surprised, given the time necessary for the messenger to reach Namche Bazaar the day before to tell the radio operator to request a helicopter from Katmandu.

Satisfied that Reg was improving, we left him with Namgyal and hiked to Kunde, a small village 1300 feet above Namche Bazaar. On the way, we passed through a grove of birch and rhododendron trees. A flash of color caught Ang Dendi's eye, and he pointed out a Danfay (or Impeyan) pheasant hiding in a bush. This pheasant, the national bird of Nepal, sports red, blue, and green feathers that glisten with a metallic sheen.

I lagged behind to take photographs of the attractive but skittish bird, and I lost the group. To catch up, I hurried uphill to Khumjung, the largest village of the Khumbu Region. I chose the correct path through the village and rejoined our group in Kunde.

At Kunde Hospital, I delivered a small package to Sue Reekie, the wife of a New Zealand doctor. I had obtained the parcel from a friend of hers in New Zealand whom my parents had met through advertising a used backpack for sale. While in New Zealand, I had spoken with the friend about travelling in Nepal, and I had agreed to deliver the package of perfume, shampoo, and other items that were hard to get in Kunde. I had conscientiously carried the parcel to Sydney, to Singapore, to Katmandu, and finally to Kunde. Expecting a pleased reaction, I handed the box to Sue. Apparently

weary from her duties, she received it without ceremony. But as an afterthought, she mentioned, "Oh, by the way, Ed Hillary is out back if you would like to meet him."

I was surprised. What better way could there be to end a trek to see Mount Everest than to meet one of the two men who first climbed it?

Behind the hospital, I recognized him from photographs that I had seen in his book "From the Ocean to the Sky." I stood self-consciously as he obliviously tossed around some planks. A Sherpa helping him looked at me half-smilingly without speaking. "Hi! What are all the planks for?" I said. Hillary looked up, wiped his brow, and said "Oh, we're making a diesel fuel storage shed for the hospital." He continued working, and I left.

As the afternoon wore on, there was still no sign of a helicopter across the valley. Graham, Ang Dendi, and two porters ran back to Thyangboche to find out how Reg was feeling. The rest of us remained camped in front of the Chorten Tea House. Rinzi cooked a tasty dinner of mashed potatoes and gravy to satisfy our craving for Western-style food. For dessert we ate chocolate pudding, another rare treat.



*Above: In this view from Kala Patthar, mist mantles Mount Everest (center) only six miles to the northeast. On the far left is Changtse, the North Peak of Everest, located in China (Tibet). Below Changtse you can see a snowy saddle called the Lho La (or Lho Pass), over which a hazardous trade route goes into China and down the Rongbuk Glacier. The pyramid of Nuptse (upper right) rises 9,000 feet above the rocky Khumbu Glacier below. In 1921, George Mallory looked into Nepal from the Lho La and named the Western Cwm, pronounced "koom," which nestles out of sight between Everest and Nuptse. From the ice-filled bowl of the cwm, or glacial cirque, originates the Khumbu Glacier. The glacier tumbles out of the cwm into the Khumbu Icefall and flattens at the Everest Base Camp area visible below the Lho La. At Base Camp, the Khumbu Glacier moves at about 300 feet per year.*



## Day 22.

I slept late on the following morning. I tried to ignore Paul's grouchiness at breakfast. The long three weeks with poor food and bad health had worn him down to the point where he now whined like a child. His tantrums were becoming a strain on the well-being of the group, and I looked forward to the end of the trek.

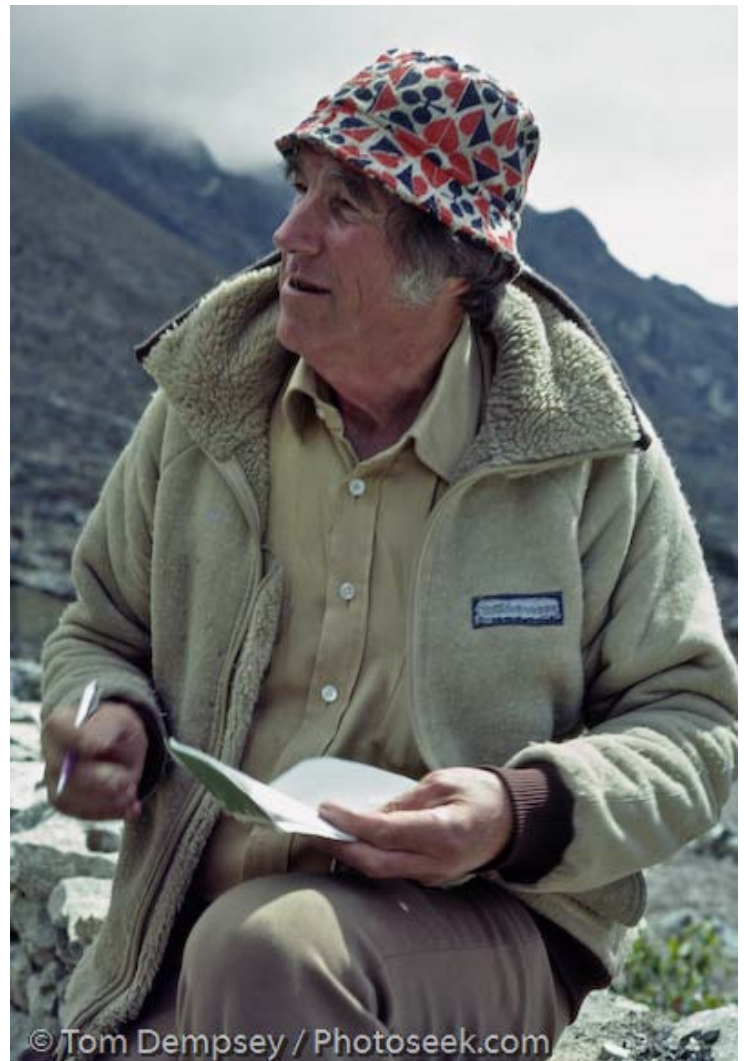
Suddenly, a deep "chop, chop, chop" filled the valley. A tiny puff of dust marked the arrival of the Nepalese Army helicopter at Thyangboche four miles in the distance. At the same time, Ang Dendi returned and assured us that Reg's condition had improved. Graham and Namgyal had remained across the valley with Reg to see him off. The "chop, chop, chop" increased in volume, and another puff of dust announced that the helicopter was safely away. The sound of the motor diminished as the helicopter disappeared in the direction of Katmandu.

### AUTOGRAPHS FROM SIR EDMUND HILLARY

*Sir Edmund Hillary (born in 1919; died 11 January 2008) is 62 years young in this photograph at Kunde Hospital in 1981. I first encountered him moving planks for building a diesel fuel storage shed for his Kunde Hospital. He later magnanimously signed autographs for us and allowed me to take this photograph. With a natural geniality, he inquired about our group. We talked about the weather, and the logistics of helping a member of our group whom had fallen altitude sick at Lobuje, and had been carried semi-conscious to Tengboche for helicopter rescue. "My doctor tells me to stay below 12,000 feet," Sir Edmund remarked, as he stood comfortably at 12,600 feet.*

I proceeded to the hospital to see Sir Edmund Hillary and to tell Sue that Reg was safe. Sue was not surprised that the helicopter had been a day late. "Sometimes they can't come for a week because the King uses the copters for transportation," she said. I was disappointed when she said that Hillary had gone to nearby Shyangboche Airport to meet a plane. But as we talked, we spotted him approaching the hospital. We greeted him and asked if he would not mind giving autographs. He magnanimously signed for each of us and allowed me to take his picture. With a natural geniality, he asked us about our group. We talked about the weather and the logistics of helping Reg. "My doctor tells me to stay below 12,000 feet," Sir Edmund remarked to us as he stood comfortably at 12,600 feet.

After the conversation with Hillary, I descended steeply to Namche Bazaar by way of Shyangboche Airport. This airport was built to serve the nearby Everest View Hotel, an expensive Japanese attempt to bring luxury into this remote area. The exciting conversation with Sir Edmund Hillary capped an already peak experience. Having achieved all my goals for the trek, I felt exhausted. Before leaving that spectacular area I photographed a farewell view of Ama Dablam with a silhouetted Himalayan fir.



*Edmund Hillary's fame is intimately connected with the mountain that was originally known as Peak XV, whose location was first fixed by the Survey of India in 1749. In 1852, computations of another survey indicated that Peak XV was higher than any known mountain. In 1856, Peak XV was named Mount Everest to commemorate a Surveyor General of the Survey of India, Sir George Everest.*

*Starting in 1921, sixteen expeditions were mounted against Everest before it was finally climbed in May 1953. As part of a British expedition of more than one thousand porters and mountaineers, Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norkay had the perseverance and good luck to be chosen as the final assault team to conquer the highest mountain on earth. After the climb, Hillary and Norkay became two of the most famous men of their time. The queen of England knighted **Sir Edmund Hillary** for his achievement.*

*To thank the Sherpas who helped him, Sir Hillary established the Himalayan Trust to build schools and hospitals in Sherpaland. In the Himalayan Schoolhouse Expeditions from 1961 to 1966, he built seven schools in the Khumbu Region. To fly in building materials for the Kunde Hospital project, he built Lukla Airport in 1965. Mountaineering is only a hobby for Sir Hillary. By profession he is an apiarist, or beekeeper, in his home country of New Zealand.*

## TO LUKLA AIRPORT

I walked interminably until I reached Phakding, where we had camped before in a yak pasture. Both Graham and I slept poorly, as we both coughed until midnight.

### Day 23.

I awoke with a stomachache from the cough, which slowly disappeared as the morning progressed. We passed Sherpa work crews who were improving the trail. The roar of dynamite blasting occasionally shook the air. This portion of the trail had been under repair since September 1977, when an avalanche from Ama Dablam fell into a lake at the base of the peak, sending a wall of water thirty feet high rushing down the Dudh Kosi, tearing away seven bridges, parts of the trail, and part of Jorsale village, killing three people.

We ate outside the same hotel 800 feet below Lukla as before. The repetitive brunch had become tasteless, and I hungered for anything other than chapatis, Spam, jam, and tea. My queasy stomach made difficult the last ascent to Lukla. I climbed sunny slopes growing green grass and flowers which smelled of spring. Finally I completed the last steps of the 200-mile trek, by wandering past the new houses of Lukla and sitting with relief at our last campsite.

In the modern Sherpa Cooperative Lodge, to my amusement I found a flush toilet, a rare commodity outside of Nepal's few major cities. After resting, I walked over to the steep airstrip, where I inspected the rusting remains of a crashed airplane. Hopefully our group would have better luck when we flew back to Katmandu on the following day!

***Lukla Airport**, originally built by Sir Edmund Hillary in 1965, was lengthened to 1100 feet by the Royal Nepalese Airline Company (RNAC) in 1977. In 1981, RNAC scheduled three flights per morning to Lukla in a nineteen-seat Twin Otter aircraft, which can only carry fourteen or fifteen passengers due to the 9600-foot altitude. In the afternoon, air turbulence and clouds often prevent scheduled flights. Occasionally, clouds in the morning postpone all flights. The airstrip provides thrilling landings and takeoffs, as it drops 300 feet between the top to bottom, and the bottom ends in a shear drop of a river gorge.*

That evening I hoped for a special dinner to cap off the trek. But to my disgust, Ang Dendi served dhal bhat on rice, the Nepalese staple, and an Indian vegetable curry. After one bite of each, I could stand no more. I went into the Sherpa Cooperative Lodge and ordered "cheeps," or French fries.

I sat by the fireplace and soaked in the almost Western atmosphere. I spoke briefly with a trekker from California who happened to know someone who went to my high school. I accepted the coincidence matter-of-factly. Outside, I groped my way to my tent, waiting for lightening flashes to illuminate the pitch dark path. I climbed into my sleeping bag and fell fast asleep.

#### **Day 24.**

On the following day, clear skies assured us of a flight back to Katmandu. The twin-engine airplane looked like a toy as it approached through the deep Dudh Kosi gorge. Because of the lack of navigational aids at Lukla, pilots land by sight.

Looking at the bustling crowd of trekkers, I worried that we might not get a flight that morning, but we caught the second plane as scheduled. We sped powerfully down the 300-foot drop. The airplane's wheels rumbled with increasing volume against the dirt airstrip as we accelerated. Just before plummeting into the gorge, the plane lifted its nose and we soared into space.

The Himalayas formed a wall on the horizon. With incredible ease we flew over rugged, terraced hillsides that we had previously labored through. Ahead the lush, green Katmandu Valley welcomed us. With a speed that was difficult to grasp, we quickly reached Katmandu Airport. Within just 30 minutes, we stepped out into what now seemed a modern city. Warm air and the blossomy smells of spring enveloped us.

### **THE COMFORTS OF CIVILIZATION**

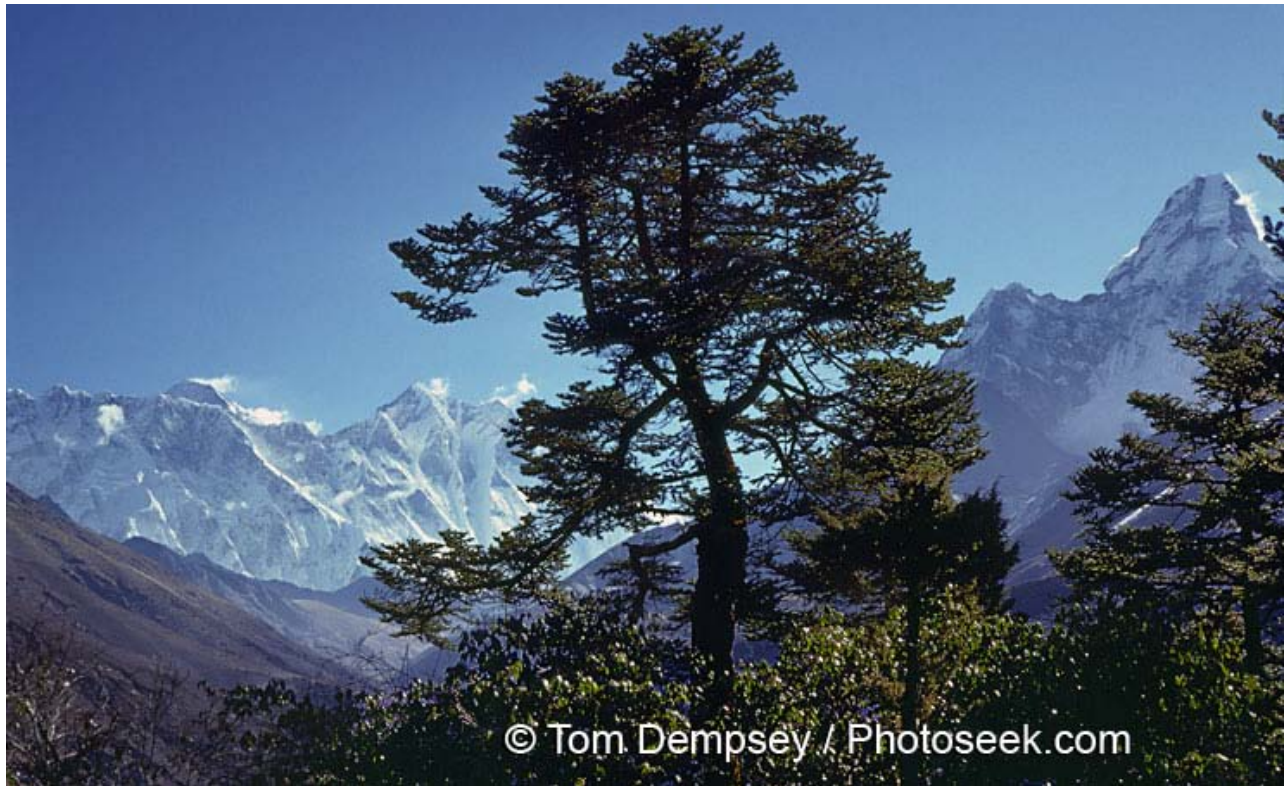
To our surprise, Reg greeted us at the airport terminal. He had quickly shaken his altitude sickness in 4700-foot Katmandu, only six days after falling ill. After having been close to death, he was now ready to go on to visit the Taj Mahal with Allen, Gordon, and Paul.

I wasted no time in seeking out a shower in the Blue Star Hotel. To my dismay, no hot water was available because of a scheduled brownout.

Graham, Caroline, and I went out to lunch and uninhibitedly sampled the delights of Katmandu's cake and pie shops. With great enthusiasm, I consumed a club sandwich, a piece of apple crumble pie, and a banana lassie (milkshake).

Ah, the comforts of civilization!





*The Lhotse Wall (on left) rises up to three vertical miles from its base. The jet stream blasts snow from the summit of **Mount Everest**, the world's highest peak (29,035 feet; on left, 2 miles behind). Lhotse (27,923 feet; on right) is the world's fourth highest peak.*

## **AFTER THE TREK**

After the trek, I spent three weeks in Katmandu staying in hotels, eating out, and reading books. On the day after I returned, my brother Dave returned from his trek around the Annapurna Mountains. Graham and Caroline helped us celebrate our adventures with an evening snack of bread and honey, items which had not been readily available on the trail. Dave joined Graham and me in our last night paid by Exodus Travels in the Blue Star Hotel.

The next day, Dave and I moved to the cheaper Star Hotel, which cost only 39 rupees (\$3.30 U.S.) per night for a double room. Graham discovered that his flight was departing that day, and he hurriedly said good-bye. As I moved out of the Blue Star Hotel, I said good-bye to Caroline, who was leaving for a tour of Chitwan National Park to view wildlife, and to the others, who were leaving to see the Taj Mahal in India. We parted ways congenially, but we had hardly come to know each other.

Dave became sick the following day, then I became sick on the day after. When we felt better, we applied for trekking permits for the Annapurna Sanctuary, where we planned to go after Dave returned from the Everest Area. I sampled more culinary treats in Katmandu: Tournedo Mikado steak, potato and egg salad, pizza, cinnamon rolls, baked apples, and pineapple upside-down cake.

After five days regaining his strength, Dave flew to Lukla and spent twelve days trekking to see Mount Everest. While waiting for Dave to return, I stayed in a single room in the Himal Cottage at 16 1/2 rupees (\$1.40 U.S.) per night. Each morning I looked forward to taking a hot shower. Pigeons rattled the metal roof over my room.

I read newspapers, magazines, and books for hours on end at the United States Embassy and the British Library. I perused the bookstalls in search of good books to read. Used books printed in English were very common. Reading an Indian newspaper printed in English, I learned that President Reagan had been shot and wounded more than a month earlier.

One day I walked to Swayambunath, the Monkey Temple, to see the stupa that is the model for most others in Nepal. The Monkey Temple was so-named for the troops of monkeys who have inhabited its grounds for the past two thousand years.

On another day, I walked several miles through town to visit the airport. Rain began to fall every afternoon for one to five hours, a hint of the monsoon that would arrive in June.

By chance, I met Dave's mountaineering friend Russell Brice in the Kantipur Restaurant, my favorite place to eat breakfast. Having just returned from the Everest area, he mentioned that he had seen Dave at Pheriche. I was glad to have received word on my brother's progress.

After twelve days alone in the same hotel room, I was worn out. I had made no friends to share activities with, and I lacked motivation to sightsee. Boredom set in, and my appetite disappeared. I weighed fifteen pounds below my normal weight.

Dave finally returned. He had reached Kala Patthar on a beautiful day with good views of Mount Everest. I was impressed that he spent two nights at 17,000-foot Gorak Shep, a difficult place to sleep due to the altitude. We celebrated his return at the Hong Kong Chinese Restaurant, where I ate my largest meal of the week. On the same day, I bought a ticket to Frankfurt, West Germany (for \$548). I was done with trekking and ready to leave Nepal.

On the next day, I claimed my bicycle from storage at the Blue Star Hotel while Dave checked our mail at American Express. A letter from our parents had arrived that very day! I had almost missed that needed message of care from the outside world.

Dave and I said our good-byes. Dave would later abort his trek to Annapurna Sanctuary, then travel on to Thailand and Australia. I bounced to the airport in a taxi with my bicycle precariously balanced in the tiny trunk. Through the pouring rain, I dashed into the airport terminal as well as I could, burdened by too much luggage.

## **EPILOGUE**

By way of New Delhi and Moscow airports, I flew to Frankfurt in about twenty-four hours, including stopovers. Eating a rich fare of jetliner food, I became healthier by the hour. Upon arrival at the technological beehive of Frankfurt Airport, I became excited about my adventures to come in Europe.

On a rich diet of European food, I quickly gained back the fifteen pounds that I had lost in Nepal, plus an additional fifteen pounds. From May 15 to October 1, 1981, I explored Norway, France, West Germany, and Switzerland. I discovered mountains that approached the grandeur of the Himalayas, but they were now tamed by tramways, trains, and tunnels. I found cultures that were different enough from my own to be fascinating. However, travelling in Europe was never as exotic as trekking in Nepal. Seeing Europe was fun and easy, but trekking in Nepal was a serious odyssey. I compromised my health during my stay in Nepal, but was rewarded with a unique adventure.



*Above: **Mount Everest**, the world's highest peak (29,035 feet; center left), is two miles behind Nuptse (25,726 feet, upper right). The West Ridge of Everest is on the left.*

## **To The Abode of Snow, 1981**

**Contents:** Introduction, Prologue, Two Days in Katmandu, By Truck to the Lowland Jungle, The Trek Begins, *Trekking Companions*, *Who is A Gurkha?*, *Typical Trekking Day*, Across the Sun Kosi, Health Goes Downhill, Health Goes Uphill, The Sherpa Capital, *Who Is a Sherpa?*, Magnificent Thyangboche, The Abode of Snow, A Dark Cloud, The Mist Clears on Kala Patthar, Escorting Reg to Safety, Autographs from Sir Edmund Hillary, To Lukla Airport, The Comforts of Civilization, After the Trek, Epilogue.

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