

On October 17th, 2009, 33 brave participants began their journey to Base Camp Everest – aiming to reach a height of 5364m or 17,600 ft. Each person had their own reasons for participating, but collectively, we had a desire of making a difference in the lives of those less fortunate than us, through Save the Children’s operations in Latin America. Our group consisted of 19 males and 14 females with an age range from 21 years to 60 years. The average age of the group was 42 years.

The trip began with a day in the city of Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. Kathmandu is located in the heart of the Himalaya mountains, and we were surrounded by the beauty and vastness of this mountain range. It was an overwhelming feeling, knowing that in a



few days, we would be scaling some of these mountains ourselves. We had the opportunity to take a city tour of Kathmandu, visited various temples and did some shopping.

From Kathmandu, we took an internal flight to Lukla. Lukla is located in the Khumbu region of eastern Nepal, and this is the place from which we would begin our journey. Stepping onto the tiny 16 seater plane was frightening for most, but our stomachs were quickly put to rest, as the spectacular scenery we flew through served as a great distraction. The abrupt landing thwarted these calming thoughts, and was certainly an “exciting” beginning to the trek.

We spent the first night at a lodge in Phadking. It was clean, but very basic. It was here that we encountered yak caravans for the first time, carrying trekking equipment and supplies towards Base Camp. We realized very quickly that life on the mountain was starkly different from the life at home. We did not see a single car in the 12 days we were on the trek. Rather, the only mode of transportation was by foot or on a horse. All supplies, including basic necessities like food, water, and household items, were carried up the mountain by sherpas or on yaks.

By the second day of the trek, we realized that getting to Base Camp Everest was not our only aim. The landscape we were surrounded by was so beautiful, it was almost surreal, and soaking in every detail to ensure that we could relay the experience to everyone at home was something else we had to focus on, besides just the climbing. In the beginning, we were very eager to take as many pictures as possible of the postcard-like stills. We quickly realized, however,



that these mountains weren’t going anywhere – the picturesque snow-capped mountains were in view at all times during the day.

Reaching Namche bazaar (3440m, 11280ft) after a very steep ascent, was an accomplishment for all of us. The lodge we stayed at, Yak lodge, was by far the best lodge of the whole trek. We were finally able to have a hot shower, albeit at a cost of approximately \$5. It was the perfect place to be for an extra day of acclimatization. We had some free time to shop in the narrow streets of the Bazaar for souvenir items, and had lots of fun practicing our bargaining techniques.

The rest of the days, our ascent was a blur due to the fact that there was no calendar, and we were all feeling the effects of the altitude and getting adjusted to the local food. Every day on the trek was a different type of challenge. We trekked an average of 7 to 8



hours a day, going up and down the various valleys. The scenery at all times was magnificent, and ever changing. None of the pictures can possibly capture what we really saw - that will remain etched in our hearts forever. Walking through the various villages that came along the way and greeting the people with the traditional "Namaste" was the highlight of our days. Eager young children stood outside of their homes, waiting to see the trekkers pass by.

Each of us was responsible for carrying our own backpacks. Although they weighed only between 5 to 10kg, at times it felt like we were carrying a ton of bricks. Our sherpas (porters) carried our duffle bags

and other supplies, a weight totaling about 35kg per sherpa, and they not only walked at twice the speed we were walking at, but also quite often did not even have appropriate footwear. We were all in awe of their prowess.

We crossed many swinging bridges, with rushing streams below. The first couple of bridges were terrifying. We soon realized that these bridges were actually very well built and travelled on frequently. The only challenge was ensuring that we were not crossing at the same time as a group of yaks from the other side! We were held up "in line" many times, waiting for the yaks to cross.

Along the way, we were reminded of the incredible development work done by Sir Edmund Hillary, a mountaineer and explorer from New Zealand. In May 1953, Sir Edmund and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay became the first climbers known to have reached the summit of Everest. Following this feat, Sir Edmund devoted much of his life to helping the Sherpa people of Nepal through the foundation of the Himalayan Trust, he founded. Through his efforts, many schools and hospitals were built in this remote region of Nepal.

Our guides would periodically point out to us the peak of Everest. Because Everest is part of the Himalayan range, one can never really see the "whole" Mount Everest. All that is visible, at times, is a small pyramid shaped peak. In fact, quite often it looked a

lot smaller than the other mountain peaks that were a lot closer to us. We joked about continuing up, now that we were already this far - perhaps in a few years! (Don't worry fearful families, we're just kidding)

On the 9th day on the trek, we left our lodge in Lobuche (4940m, 16170ft), and began the trek towards our final destination - Base Camp Everest. This climb was just as difficult as most of the other days, but the fact that we were so much closer to reaching our ultimate goal uplifted our spirits and filled us with a sudden surge of energy. Finally, after countless queries of "how much longer" to our guides, there we were. The sign for Base Camp Everest, surrounded with its many colourful prayer flags, filled our hearts with a sense of pride and accomplishment. All I had left to do now was to take a picture to prove that I had actually reached my destination!



The return trek from Base Camp Everest, while almost the same route and terrain, seemed much easier and quicker than the trek leading to it. Whether we all made it to base camp or not, the real joy was the journey itself and the support and encouragement provided by all of the group members to each other.

All 33 participants made it to Dingboche at 4280 m (14,100 ft).

27 participants made it to Lobuche at 4930 m (16,200 ft).

25 participants made it to Gorak Shep at 5140 m (16,860 ft).

22 participants made it to Base Camp Everest at 5364 m (17,700 ft).

Thanks to the generosity of our sponsors, together we were able to raise a net amount of over \$150,000.00 for Save the Children Canada to be used for its programs in Latin America.