

Deptford Park

David Tait



Himex 2007.



From Left – Standing:

Josette Vallaton
Fred Ziel
Dean Staples
Darius Vaiciulis
David Tait
Russell Brice
Tim Medvetz
Dr Monica Piris Chavarri
Takenori Yoshida
Mark Woodward
Mogens Jensen
Betsy Huelskamp

From Left – kneeling:

Yuzo Kobayashi
Katsusuke Yanagisawa
Hiroyuki Kuraoka
Rod Baber

Timeline: 2007

29th March – Depart London

30th March - Arrive in Kathmandu [1400m], Nepal.

5th April – Fly from Kathmandu to Lhasa [3400m], Tibet.

8th April – Drive by jeep from Lhasa to Xigatse [3900m].

9th April – Drive by jeep from Xigatse to Zegar [4200m].

11th April – Drive by jeep from Zegar to Base Camp [5200m].

11th – 18th April – Acclimatisation at BC.

19th April – Leave BC for Interim Camp [5850m].

20th April – Leave Interim Camp for Advance Base Camp [6400m].

21st April – 5^h May – Acclimatisation at ABC.

6th May – Trek from ABC back down to BC [5200m] to rest.

10th May – I trek from BC to Interim Camp [5850m].

11th May – I trek from Interim Camp to ABC/Phurba treks from BC TO ABC [6400m].

12th May – Phurba and I climb from ABC to the North Col [7000m].

13th May – Phurba and I climb from North Col to Camp 3 [7900m], bypassing Camp2 [7500m].

14th May – Phurba and I climb from Camp 3 to Camp 4 [8400m] [Top-Camp].

14th May – 11pm. Phurba and I set off for the summit [8850m].

15th May – 06:15am. Phurba and I summit and then descend to Camp 2 [6200m] in Nepal.

16th May – Phurba and I descend from Camp 2 through the Khumbu icefall to BC Nepal [5200m].

17th May – 07:30am. Phurba and I fly from BC to Kathmandu.

20th May – Fly to London.

Glossary.

Arm-Wrap: A process whereby the fixed-line or rope is coiled once or twice around the climbers fore-arm, the resultant rope to clothing friction acting as a brake upon descent.

Ascender: see Jumar.

Bebel Gilberto: A Brazilian jazz singer.

Crampon: Is a steel, spiked platform that is strapped to the sole of a climbing boot in order to provide traction on snow and ice.

Dihedral: A large triangular rock formation at the top of the snowy summit pyramid [8825m], which is horizontally traversed by climbers.

Hypoxia: A shortage of oxygen in the body and brain.

Jumar: A handle that clamps to the fixed rope. It contains rows of sharp steel teeth orientated backwards. The handle will slide up a rope unencumbered, but will not be allowed to reverse, as the teeth bite into the rope. This handle is linked to your harness by rope for safety.

Karabiner: Is a metal loop with a sprung or screwed gate, which is used to quickly and reversibly connect ropes to harnesses etc.

Nalgene: A make of wide-mouth transparent water bottle.

Till Bronner: A German contemporary jazz musician.

Prologue

I summited Mount Everest for the first time on the 4th June 2005 and swore to anyone who would listen that I would never return. However, little more than six months later I had hatched a potentially headline-grabbing plan, not only to return, but also to “double traverse” the mountain; in essence ascending from the North or Tibetan side, descending the South or Nepalese side and then retracing my steps right back to Tibet, sumitting twice in the process.

My motivation in 2005 had been predominantly personal ambition, with a little charitable fundraising thrown in, so I was both surprised and thrilled when I managed to raise £200k for the NSPCC [National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children]. I obviously have generous friends.

However, the 2007 “double traverse” was conceived in order to facilitate the charity. My ego would have to play second fiddle. Although I adored the idea of potentially being the first in history to achieve this feat, my intentions were to “grandstand” to such an extent that both the charity’s profile and coffers would be boosted.

I outlined my ambitious plan to Russell Brice, the owner of Himalayan Experience, the commercial mountaineering operation I owe my 2005 summit to. I wanted to perform a solo double traverse, simply employing the infrastructure [tents, food and oxygen etc] of both Himex in Tibet, and Adventure Consultants [another commercial operator run by Guy Cotter] in Nepal.

My desire to climb “solo” apparently caused Russ, and especially Guy considerable unease. Although there were minor logistical, and major timing issues to be overcome, nothing seemed too insurmountable. After all, if the plans failed so would I – it was my problem, no one else’s, and I was happy to assume the risk. I can only guess that I was suffering the “David Sharpe” legacy. David had perished, allegedly having been abandoned on the mountain in 2006, in a blaze of publicity, which had erroneously painted the commercial operators in a poor light.

Russ negotiated fees with Adventure Consultants but they simply asked too much for what would likely be only a single weeks “room and board” and a half dozen oxygen bottles. Confronted by this apparent lack of enthusiasm for my project Russ suggested an alternative. Would I consider climbing as a two-man team with Phurba Tashi Sherpa, one of the most prolific Everest Climbers in history and incidentally Russ’s right hand-man?

The advantages of doing this were obvious. Firstly, many of the South-side logistical issues would be circumvented, with there no longer being any need for Adventure Consultant Sherpas to be “on standby” and in appropriately “safe positions”. Secondly, it was likely that Russ, who would “call the shots”, would be much less cautious about climbing in dubious weather situations if he had someone with Phurba’s experience on the mountain. On reflection it seemed a reasonable proposition to me, and one that, given the circumstances and my charitable obligations, I should accept. In the back of my mind however, I was disappointed that I wouldn’t be “solo”, but tried to assure myself that despite having Phurba alongside me I would still be the first to double traverse. It was already clear that the “title” meant more to me than I realised, for reasons that I had yet to own up to.

The expedition members congregated in smoggy Kathmandu towards the very end of March 2007. After a few days checking mountains of equipment at the Yak and Yeti Hotel, we flew to Lhasa and from there began our dusty, bone shaking road-trip across the Tibetan plateau, resting at progressively higher altitudes, before finally arriving at Base Camp [5200m] which sits in the shadow of Everest’s North Face. The following weeks of acclimatisation climbs and treks urged the necessary blood-chemistry changes, but were, on the whole, mundane and unremarkable. I chose to essentially exclude them from my account as I felt that this tedious preamble has been described to exhaustion in the plethora of other “Everest books” that populate bookshelves. My account, by contrast, focuses on the one climb that truly counts – the summit attempt: a five to six day test of both mind and body, that may not have any comparison.

However, I was carrying much more “luggage” than the average mountaineer. In January 2007 I sent an e-mail to everyone I knew, in a further attempt to raise funds for the NSPCC. At the foot of the appeal I disclosed to the world for the first time that I was, or had been, one of the many abused children the charity works so hard to protect. Up until that precise moment, only my wife Vanessa was aware of this.

I had decided at that moment that I would no longer hide behind the abuse, and instead of using it as a shield; use it as a weapon for the first time in my life. My intention in writing this book was that children, teenagers, and even adults could hopefully gain strength from my experiences – both good and bad.

By peculiar, but unnerving coincidence, “Discovery Channel” chose to send a huge film crew to accompany and record the season’s attempts, in the hope of repeating the success of the 2006 “Everest-Beyond the Limit” series. When told that a worldwide audience estimated to be in excess of 100 million people had viewed the 06’ series, I realised that I now had nowhere left to hide.

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“Chapter 1” will be posted on the 28th March 2008, with subsequent chapters being posted every 3-4 days thereafter throughout the duration of the 08 expedition.