

Foreword

Doug Scott, CBE

Doug Scott is the founder and operations director of Community Action Nepal (www.canepal.org.uk), through which he pays back all of those people who helped him on 40 expeditions to the Himalaya. Doug and the late Dougal Haston made the first ascent of the southwest face of Everest and became the first Britons to reach the summit.

There is nothing so good as to get into that routine of exercise and rest, day after day, walking through the Nepal Himalaya. After five days, body and mind become completely adjusted, so that it seems this is all one ever did or needs to do. This is most likely to happen if the walk is a moving meditation with attention put on every step, being right there in the moment, until you stop to rest and lose yourself in wonder at the magnificent setting, taken out of yourself in that powerful landscape where for centuries holy men and pilgrims have lost and found themselves leaving, it is said, their good energy permeating the land itself.

The villagers of the Himalaya help reveal to us all that remains hidden during our everyday existence. To climb high we must attain a 'sherpa' physiology by allowing our bodies to adjust to the lack of oxygen. It's also wise to acquire a sherpa psychology, putting the emphasis more on co-operation than competition. It is salutary to find yourself among people who are at peace with themselves, who don't want to be anything they are not. As much as the mountains, it is the inhabitants of the Himalaya who lure us back time after time.

Trekking, as it is now called, started in 1963. The Himalayan climber and diplomat, Lt Col Jimmy Roberts, first considered that the pleasures of trekking could be enjoyed not only by mountaineers but also by a wider public. He was prescient, as the number of trekkers increased dramatically. If there are trekkers who are embarrassed that so much is done for them – bags carried, tent erected, food prepared in all kinds of weather – Roberts is to blame for applying the same high standards of service as were operating in the British Army in India. Roberts never took the hard-working porters for granted, becoming a well-loved expat.

The same could be said of another ex-British officer, Mike Cheney, who took a special interest in the plight of the porters and made sure the trekking industry in Nepal was more inclusive by involving Tamangs and other ethnic groups. Jimmy set the standards of service on a trek, and Mike set high standards of employment in the trekking industry. Not only is it the right thing to look after workers in the trekking industry, and to look after the environment, but it also makes economic sense, with many tourists alerted and eager to travel with companies operating and monitoring such policies.

Whichever company you travel with or whether you go as an independent trekker, your experience in Nepal will surely change your life. I have known many trekkers on a week-long trek who have been astonished to go to one of the poorest countries in the world, with very few of the facilities and amenities we all take for granted, and experience the tremendous hospitality, care and concern of the local people for complete strangers. It really does make us wonder who has got it right.

Trek Descriptions

In this book Nepal's main treks are described in detail, along with numerous suggestions for side trips, short cuts and extensions. The Table of Treks on p12 outlines the major factors you might consider as you choose a trek: length, difficulty, elevation and season.

Most chapters or regional sections have a brief overview of the trekking options possible in that region. The introductory trek descriptions also include information to help you plan your trek, including transport options and permit requirements.

ROUTE DESCRIPTIONS

Each trek account includes a general explanation of the lie of the land, but these are not self-guiding trail descriptions. If you are not travelling with a Nepali guide, you will sometimes need to ask about the correct path. Read the Route-Finding boxed text, p353, for the best ways to find the correct trail.

The terms 'true left' or 'true right' are used in this book to describe the banks of a stream or river. The 'true left' bank simply means the left bank as you look downstream. Remember that when following a river uphill the 'true left' side of the river will therefore be on your right.

The route descriptions are separated into daily stages, thus giving an overview of the number of days required for each trek. Your actual stopping place will depend on your fitness, health, the weather, trail conditions, arrangements with the porters and personal preference. Any moderately fit trekker can accomplish the suggested daily stages in one day.

At high altitudes, in order to avoid altitude sickness, you should proceed no faster than the ascent times recommended in the trek descriptions, even if that means ending the day's walk before lunch.

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Each trek is rated according to difficulty in the Facts Box preceding each trek description. Our authors have used the following guidelines:

Easy – Shorter walks following well-travelled trails through villages with facilities for trekkers.

Most days of walking are less than six hours and ascend less than 500m.

Medium – Involves some steep climbs and perhaps exposed cliffs and bridges of dubious design. There are places to camp, and usually lodges, at all night stops. Some days may require as much as nine hours of walking.

Hard – May require basic mountaineering skills and route-finding ability. There may be long days without lodges or camping places.

The classification of many treks falls between these categories. Most treks graded as 'medium-hard' are in remote areas where you must camp.

TIMES & DISTANCES

The route descriptions list approximate walking times for each day, with cumulative walking times for the day placed in brackets at key points through the text, eg '(90 minutes)'. You can reckon that most walkers travel at about 4km/h in good weather, with an extra hour for every ascent of 300m to 500m. Times are based on actual walking time and do not include time for snacks, photography or side trips.

To help you plan a trek that offers alternative night stops, we've included a table with detailed walking times for each major trek in the