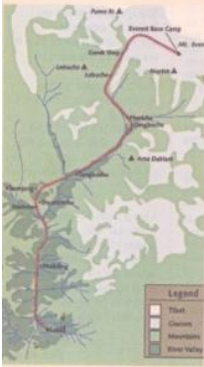


Flirting with Mt Everest

KAVITHA relives a once-in-a-lifetime great trek to the Everest base camp.



Trek route: Lukla - Monjo - Namche - Deboche - Dingboche - Loboche - Gorakshap - Everest Basecamp (EBC) - Gorakshap - Kala Patthar - Pheriche - Namche - Lukla. Six people on mission to see Mt Everest from the closest distance. Three days at Kathmandu domestic airport waiting to fly to Lukla in the best season says only one thing: "mountains have not made up their mind yet."

In the most desperate attempt on day-four, we landed up at the airport at 6 am for a 9 am flight. Looking at our sad faces but sheer determination, airlines staff boarded us on a charter flight, we made it to Lukla in 24 minutes.

With the enthusiasm and the thrill that we made it, day-one trek to Monjo seemed easy even though we climbed up and down few hills, crossed over from one hill to another on the swinging bridges across Koshi, it was all picture time.

The beauty of Himalayas is that, till the tree-line ends the entire landscape is lush green and covered with beds of flowers, this trail was no different. Dull Koshi that causes havoc in Bihar was gushing between the valleys, looked like it was in a hurry

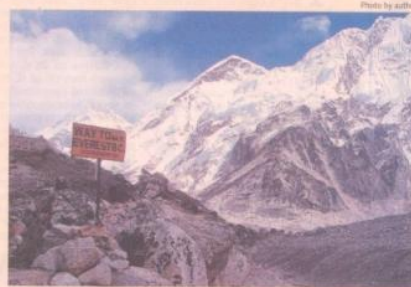


Photo by author

to hit Bihar once again. Like the name, the water is white due to the speed at which it travels, manoeuvring all the turns and twists between the hill range and the rocks. All through the trek one thing that was running parallel with us was Koshi River and its tributaries.

Namche was a big trek, we gained an altitude of 3440 mts, had an extra

day stop over. Namche is like a supermarket in the middle of the hills, it also gives the first view of Mt Everest and Lhotse tempting you to go ahead.

At Namche, we heard that one of the flights crash landed at Lukla, all the 18-people onboard died. Lukla airstrip is scary, it is just 130 mts long, elevates 15-20 degrees on landing, if the pilot does not land with great pre-

cision, it's a nosedive. We were lucky to be alive and breathing even in thin air. As we trekked to Deboche the visibility of Mt Everest was getting clearer, night in a tent, which Subbu, a team mate, and I opted for woke me up to Mt Everest. As I stretched out from the tent, I saw the fascinating hump of Mt Everest, tears trickled, could not have asked for more, it was truly "dream" come true.

The weather was getting colder, it had dropped to 2.5 degrees, wind got colder, stronger and wilder making it difficult to breathe. The terrain was rapidly changing, the stupas, which had Buddha eyes all through the trails so far were getting replaced with memorials for people who died or just over found.

It was an indication of what is it going to be next. The landscape was darker and less green, the trail was heaps of rocks and pebbles making the trek slower. We turned into the range that had Touche to our left, Amadablam to right and Mt Everest & Lhotse ahead, which eventually crossed over to Fannor, Mt Everest and Nuptse in the front.

We crossed over to Loboche, as we trekked to Gorakshap on ridges along the Khumbu Glacier, the moraine became visible. We entered the EBC route, and could see the pinnacles and the deadly Khumbu ice-fall jetted out, one could only wonder

how the climbers would cross over to open route to Mt Everest peak.

Moraine is an unforgiving terrain, ice below topped with debris can slide you down if you are careless. It's exhausting, with wind blowing at a high speed and the temperature dropping, trekking after 2 pm in this terrain is a task. Many rather most of them were returning from the ridge, but I was determined to make it to EBC by 2 pm, so was Subbu, but the rest were still not visible at that point.

Ah! Reaching EBC (5364 mts) was a reassurance that I still have a lot more left in me. The rest of group arrived, it was a perfect picture moment. I was very happy that all of us made it to EBC, and we could scream loudly here after "been there done that."

After EBC, the next mission was climbing Kala Patthar, it's just a trek up, but at 5545 mts and the steepness it's quite a climb, finally only Subbu and me decided to go. It took exactly two hours, loads of energy, not to let it go spirit to reach the top. Kala Patthar gives the best view of Mt Everest, and that was all we wanted.

On return, we made it to Pheriche in four hours flat, next day the entire team was back in Namche and the following day at Lukla. After a relaxed night, morning it was all over, we reached Kathmandu.

A great trek and for many it was once in a lifetime.

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