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A Himalayan Journey

Naveed Ahmed Choudhary reports on the expedition to Everest Base Camp and Kala Patthar

It was certainly not a host of expectations that drew the nineteen of us, four masters and fifteen students, to aim to reach the legendary base camp and the reputed peak, Kala Patthar during the first two weeks of June. Rather, it was a deep sense of curiosity. ASH has considerable experience of trekking in the Himalayas, and, accompanied by PKJ, AKS and SBL, he led us on a journey of our lives.

There were many distinctive features to this expedition, from spying winter wonderlands (in June!) to overcoming the rigours and demands of trekking and less importantly, porridge at breakfast.

After sojourning for two days in Kathmandu's colourful Thamel area and visiting the ancient Pashupatinath Temple, and the hectic marketplaces, the team made its way to Lukhla on May 29, the first point in the Khumbu region from where we were to kick off. The journey was made in a Twin Otter, a small contraption of aeronautical genius that made us conscious of the brevity of our lives. We pitched ourselves in a tea-house in Phakding, a little way off from Lukhla. At this point of our passage, we were informed about how tea-houses were run by Sherpa women, while their men worked as porters up and down the Himalayas. On the way, we met a small contingent of Nepalese women who had come back after a historic scaling of Mount Everest's summit. We also met the first of the many parties that we were to encounter on our journey, coming down from summits or from the Base Camp.

The next day, the group set out for the capital of the Khumbu region, Namche Bazar. The trek was indeed as challenging as we had expected it to be. To rejuvenate, the group would always, after an arduous trek, immerse itself in cups of black coffee or black tea. In Namche, the mountain people's fascinating cultural paraphernalia either hung from shop windows or lined the paths: armbands, pendants, tattoos, *sarangs* (a type of Nepalese violin), little diaries of Nepalese recycled paper and other curios. Here, as everywhere else in the mountain region, the locals would pause awhile from the demands of their everyday chores, and exchange a smile or an amiable *namaste* with the passing trekker. As the group stayed a day more in Namche Bazar to acclimatise, it took this opportunity to visit a local museum, displaying the gear and the belongings of the Sherpas

and the rich history of Everest. Dr Shukla recounted the stories that had been shaped around Everest, and the group learnt of eminent personalities like Eric Shipton, Sir George Mallory and Anatoli Boukreev.

The next day our travels led us through a countryside marked by several ups and downs: the Sherpa villages of Khumjung and Kunde, through a shingled beach and into a small misty village called Phortse. Located at 3800 m, it gave us a spectacular view in the late afternoon of our first snow-capped peaks, Thamsekru and Machermu. They stood there proudly in the bleak sunlight, and for the first time we realised the enormity of the task that lay before us. The group also got its first taste of mountaineering after



watching a short documentary '50 years of Everest' by the National Geographic channel, and after meeting and conversing in person with the lodge-keeper, who had reached the top of the world six times!

The next few days were revelatory. The group toiled with perseverance by day and relaxed with small talk and cards in the evenings. After Phortse, the group reached Dhingboche. Dhingboche was where we had our first pancakes for breakfast! Lobuche was our next destination. The incidence of prayer flags and prayer wheels became commonplace. Other peaks such as the famous Ama Dablam and Lhotse were sighted. On the way, the group came across a place with cenotaphs and memorials dedicated to people who had died in the mountains. Among them we found one dedicated to Scott Fischer, a hero of Everest, who had died in the tragic accident of 1996. Since Base Camp was so close, we decided to acclimatise for an extra day in Lobuche.

The days of waiting had finally ended. Well-filled with a litre each of porridge in our stomachs, we started for Base Camp. At four in the morning, we were surrounded by blue mountains and the awe-inspiring view of twilight on one side and daylight on the other, that blended so perfectly. The view seemed surreal, and more like an image in an ingenious artist's canvas. After awhile, the group rested at Gorukshap and continued walking on the famed Khumbu Glacier till it reached Everest Base Camp. Right before us stood the stalactites of the Khumbu Icefall, standing over ten feet and forming a formidable wall. It was easy

(contd. on page 2)

News-in-Brief

WARM WELCOMES

We would like to welcome back **Jayant Hari Har Lal (JHH)**, former Deputy Headmaster, who has joined the School as Director, Fundraising. We wish him a fruitful tenure.

We would also like to welcome to School **Christopher Fraenkel** and **Jason Toups**, exchange students from Bridgehouse School, South Africa and Chadwick School, USA. We wish them a pleasant stay.

SAFETY FIRST

Superintendent (City) of Police, Dehradun, Jyoti Pushpak, gave a talk at Assembly on Monday, August 4 on safety precautions and procedures in case of a terror attack. The Bomb Disposal Squad that accompanied him also gave demonstrations on bomb detection.

MARKING A MILESTONE

At the **Milestone Cultural Festival**, held at **St. George's School, Mussoorie** on August 2, the School was placed first in the Solo (Hindustani) vocal and Western Band categories. The School dance troupe was placed second. The Doon School was given the overall first position and won the Milestone Trophy. Congratulations!

WELL SPOKEN

In the second round of the **Inter-House Junior English Debates**, Kashmir House beat Tata House and Hyderabad House beat Jaipur House. Arjun Badal, Sachit Taneja and Vihan Khanna were adjudged **Best Speakers** and Kanishka Malik and Varun Gupta were adjudged **Second-Best Speakers**.

Well done!

BLACK AND WHITE

Eleven schools participated in the **Inter-School Open Chess Tournament** which was held in School from August 4-6, 2008. Saurav Mediratta was declared joint runner-up.

Well done!

CLIMATE TALK

Bhaskar Vira (ex 286-JB '85), a faculty member in the Department of Geography at Cambridge University, gave a talk in the AV Room on climate change, on August 5. An interview will run in a forthcoming issue.

Unquotable Quotes

Are there any escorting outings this weekend?

Vahin Khosla, asking out.

I am going to PCH to get her signature signed.

Arnav Sahu, the signatory.

I am small, but he is smallest than me.

Udit Kapur finds Lilliput.

Our whole sign got a two-form!

Abhishek Gupta, don't jam this change.

Don't speak when your food is open.

Arjun Sethi reprimands.

Don't speak with your mouth open.

Arjun Sethi, foot in mouth.

Istanbul is in Pakistan, isn't it?

Nikhil Sardana remaps.

Career Call

The careers notice board will focus this week on the field of **Economics** as a career choice. All those interested should look it up.

(contd. from page 1)

to see how this edifice had claimed the lives of many climbers to Everest. Simply put, the Khumbu Icefall emanated power. After the usual picture-taking and posing, the group retraced its steps to Gorukhshep.

The next day, the last destination, Kala Pathhar, was to be realised. Surprisingly, at 4:30 in the morning in the middle of June, the group found itself trudging through snow. After a lot of bickering and wheezing, we stood on top of Kala Pathhar at last and, while coming back down, the clouds parted and right before us stood proud Everest. It was what we had been waiting to see and the resultant feeling was electrifying.

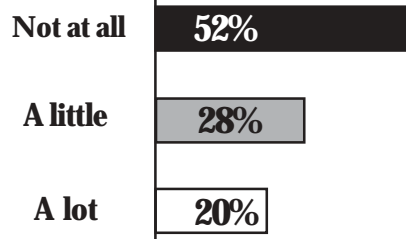
The following day marked our exodus and we passed through Tengboche and Monjo, through deep valleys, rope bridges hanging precariously over turbulent rivers and rocky descents until we finally reached Lukhla on June 12. Though the clouds refused to let any traffic pass through in the morning, the sky fortunately opened up in the early afternoon, and the familiar contour of the Twin Otter appeared on the small runway and took us away from what was probably the last visit for many of us of Sagarmatha National Park. After eleven days of nomadic living, Kathmandu was a welcome sight; we impatiently merged into urban life to inaugurate the beginning of our holidays.

It is a depressing truth that for most expeditions the guides and porters are seldom acknowledged and are only fleetingly mentioned. If the likes of Sadharam and Kiran had not been present, we would seldom have recognised the gravity in the simple maxims of life, one of which was mentioned casually: "Mountain is mountain. Life is life."



Opinion Poll

The bomb blasts: are you scared?



378 members of the school community were polled.

Next Week's Question: Which of these three countries do you think will bag the most medals in the Beijing Olympics: USA, Russia or China?

Votalysis

The response given by the members of the School community clearly shows that many of the residents of Chandbagh have a very cursory awareness of the security condition of the country and are not informed enough about the apparent threat to the nation, perhaps because they have not experienced the horror of bomb blasts or, if they are apprehensive, it is only because the blasts have made the headlines many days in a row. The Weekly would like to advise the community that they should show some concern regarding the blasts, as no man is an island. We cannot live in seclusion, no matter how much we try to isolate ourselves from the outside world and harsh reality.

THAILAND SERVICE PROJECT

Yashvardhan Jain reports on the community project at Phi Phi Island from June 18 -26

On the eve of the June 18, six of us (Amarinder Sodhi, Kanishk Gupta, Pranit Verma, Ritvik Kothiwala, Uday Raj Singh, and myself), along with AKS, were gearing up for the best time of our lives, at the Thailand Service Project on Koh Phi Phi Island. But before that, ahead of us lay a long and tiresome journey. We boarded our Thai Airways flight to Bangkok at around 11:30 pm, then had an hour's connecting flight to Phuket at 8:30 am, from where we had to catch a ferry to Koh Phi Phi (where we were to do the service), and meet the seventh member of our group, Aadhar Sharma. Finally, after about four hours of waiting at the Phuket ferry-station, we boarded the transport which would transfer us to Koh Phi Phi Island at 1:30 pm. Another four hours later, we reached Phi-Phi Natural Resorts (where we were to be lodged), fatigued, travel-sick and in no fit state to work that day.

From the next day, however, our work began in full flow. We were to construct a community centre for villagers, who were affected by the Tsunami in 2004. We were pleased to see that the village had already been more or less restored, but we also noted that nothing except a few shops, a restaurant and two hotels remained. Our schedule was something like this – breakfast at 7 am, after which we had to report for work at 8 am. Lunch break was at 12:30 pm, and we were back to work by 1:30 pm. Work carried on till 5 pm, after which we would set back to our rooms and freshen up, or take a dip in the pool (which we utilised thoroughly) or go for a swim in the sea. Dinner was at 8 pm, and after that we could go for a walk on the beach and buy some food from the shop nearby (which we did every day, with the Japanese girls), or just go back to our cabins and watch some TV. The food was not a big problem for the veggies, as the hotel was kind enough to prepare special vegetarian food for us. However, we did have an initial problem with the seafood (squid, crab, etc.) and the bland taste of Thai food in general (which is completely different from the Thai food we get here).

We soon fell into the pattern of our working day. The first few days were spent in straightening and cutting iron rods, laying them down in a grid pattern to form the base of the building, and tying them together with double-wire to maintain the grid. It was trying work, as we were out in the open, and the sun showed us no mercy either. However, to make our task much easier, we worked in two groups, with half-hour shifts, which actually increased our efficiency and capacity to work. After we had finished laying the base, we had to cement it, which we did by forming two lines – one to pass on full buckets of cement, and another to pass back the empty buckets (from which the cement had been poured onto the site). Again, we did this in half-hour shifts, and were able to cement the entire area in the last few days. Most of us tried our hand at many different types of work, such as straightening, cutting and bending the metal rods, constructing the metal towers that would be pillars in the actual structure, and passing bags

of sand and stone to the people operating the cement mixer (which was the toughest, since the bags were awfully heavy and we got dirty most of the time). Even though we couldn't finish the entire structure, we had an amazing time working on the site. Another part of the service was to teach the children of the village in their school. We took turns and taught the children all about Indian architecture and culture, and drew the Taj Mahal and Qutub Minar on the board for them to see. We played word-games like 'hangman' and also made them exercise by making them play football.

Along with us were three other schools – The Regent's School, Thailand (who had hosted and sponsored the project), Tamagawa K-12 School from Japan, and The Garden International School from Malaysia (which came four days late, as they had their final A-Level exams). We made many friends, and socialised really well with all the schools present there. Every day after work, some of us played foot-



ball with the Regent's students on the field next to the school. This was the time when all of us got to know each other, and became close friends. In fact, we spent more time with our newfound friends than in our own group, and also learnt a few words of Thai, such as *Sawasdee* (welcome) and *Kapunkrabb* (thank you) from the people there. The Japanese girls also taught us some phrases such as *Konitchua* (hello), *Sayonara* (goodbye), *Ame* (rain), and

Govenna Sai (sorry), and reciprocally, we taught them Hindi counterparts such as *Shukriya*, *Namaste*, and *Baarish*. We also got to know the teachers present there – Mr. Hiro from Japan, and Mr. Crouch, Mr. Thompson and Miss Blake from Regent's. On the second-last night, we had a farewell karaoke party, as Regent's School was leaving a day early. Some of us (including myself) were forced onto the stage by both teachers and students, and had to sing for the rest of the group. After that, we said our final goodbyes, clicked final pictures together and retired to our rooms. We left Koh Phi Phi Island early in the morning on June 30.

When we said goodbye at the ferry station, we knew that the actual fun part of the trip had just begun. We had four days in Bangkok, of which two were for half-day tours, and we had the rest of the days to ourselves to go shopping or sightseeing. We visited The Golden Buddha Temple, The Reclining Buddha Temple, a gems factory, and the Bangkok Safari World during the first two days. We spent the rest of the time shopping at Siam Discovery Centre and Central-World (where the sales really excited us). We bought full-day tickets to the Sky-Trains, and roamed around Bangkok in search of good malls and markets. We also visited the Chatuchak Weekend Market, where AKS got lost! As vegetarians, AKS and I survived only on BK Vegetable Burgers and Subway Veggie Delights.

Finally, the last day arrived, and we left the hotel at 5 am for Suvarnabhumi Airport, and finally, after a lot of tax-refunding and duty-free shopping, we boarded the flight that would take us home. All in all, this was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

| Viewpoint |
The Gift of Solitude

Shashank Peshawaria

It is a sunlit winter afternoon. I am all alone, basking in the sun's balmy warmth. The smell of dry grass is intoxicating. The sunlight is doing the job of an antidote against the chill. The jingling sound of a bell is breaking the silence. But there is solitude. I can speak to my conscience. I can do whatever I feel like: simply anything. No one will punish me if I pluck the grass. No one will admonish me if I cage the butterfly in my pencil box. I am as free as the wagtail that once flew over the Main Field.

Sometimes, loneliness makes me wonder. Even the breeze buys for itself a tongue and begins to whisper in the ear certain incomprehensible songs. And this is when I begin to take note of little things. This is the gift of solitude. Never, otherwise, do I pick up a twig and play with an ant that is trying to crawl till the other end of that twig. Never do I sit and watch the sky so intently. Vivid pictures of the past begin to preside over thoughts. Life slows down. The mind becomes quiet. Colours fade and structures and forms are sharply limned.

These moments of uninterrupted privacy are the most precious of all. Tomorrow, form politics will come back to life and the hustle-bustle of the CDH will repeat itself. Then the Main Field will be active once again, and I will be somewhere in that corner, or maybe, somewhere here, behind, or somewhere near that goal post, playing and shouting – you never know! There will be no great silence. There will be no solitude. No remote-control to pause everything. The quiet will go. The peace will go. Everyone will be there. Everything will be on. The clock will still tick the time. The rose in the Headmaster's garden will still bloom. Yes, a new term will begin. And I will move on.

* * *

Drudgery

Arjun Badal

The word 'drudgery':
 An absolute monstrosity
 That spells dullness, ennui.
 Long hours of toil,
 Endless monotony.
 The memories of such hours
 Elicit a sigh.
 But its true nature shows
 It's something we cannot shirk.
 On our journey to success,
 Or when emulating great men.
 And then we come to realize
 That in this life of persistent difficulty,
 Drudgery is strengthening.

Artificial
 Intelligence

Arjun recounts his trip to Vasant Valley School for a Robotics Workshop

Upon a rainy morning, at eight, the three of us: Abhilaksh Lalwani, Arpan Agarwal and I, escorted by SSM, set off for Vasant Valley School, Delhi. We were thrilled, for it was a robotics workshop that we were to attend: something we had never experienced before.

The school had imposing buildings, and a pleasant ambience. Early in the morning, we stepped into the campus. We were to attend a conference which we didn't know anything about. But as soon as we reached the school, we realized that the conference had already begun. This talk was given by an old student from that school who told us about a volunteer organisation called FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology). This organisation globally provides three levels of robotics: FIRST Lego League, FIRST Tech Challenge and FIRST Robotics Competition (out of which we intend to enrol in two). He informed us about the various kinds of robotic kits available for different age groups. He also showed us a small robot which he had created himself. We couldn't believe our eyes, for it was made with such precision. After the talk, we had a web conference with a group of high school students from the US who were making a large robot for the competition.

This short-lived experience was very enriching but, sadly, we were on the road to Dehradun all too soon. The workshop left an indelible imprint on us. And how can we forget our encounter with Kalpana Chawla's father on the way back! It was, indeed, a valuable learning experience

Wordsearch

Vivek Santayana

Hidden below are the names of fifteen directors of Hollywood movies which have been released in the past two years

S	M	N	X	F	R	A	I	M	I
T	I	A	D	A	M	S	O	N	L
E	L	L	Y	V	B	P	Z	E	E
V	L	O	A	E	D	I	G	F	T
E	E	N	T	E	B	E	R	G	E
N	R	U	E	U	P	L	X	D	R
S	Q	E	S	L	R	B	K	B	R
O	S	B	O	R	N	E	N	A	I
N	H	A	Y	W	A	R	D	Y	E
S	N	Y	D	E	R	G	D	R	R

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