



89 Taukila Pass and Taweche (Photo: B. Fulk)

On Foot in Nepal

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Ever since Hillary and Tenzing Norkey climbed Everest, I have wished to go there. Since 1968 I have wanted to run there. Until New Year's Eve 1978, I was unable to locate a runner who knew the area. Thanks to a friend in Hawaii, we spent New Year's Eve with Barbara and Gerry Roach—both climbers and both mountain runners. They provided most of the necessary information and we prepared to leave for Nepal immediately after the Boston Marathon, 17 April 1978.

Early on 22 April, my wife, Barbara, and Galjanz Sherpa, our guide, flew to Lukla and began trekking to Namche Bazar intending to meet me within 24 to 30 hours on my way to Kala Pattar. Galjanz was one of the Sherpas who has gone from the Everest Base Camp to Kathmandu in 6 days. Kala Pattar had replaced the Base Camp as my objective because of the view and because I could descend faster in case of acute mountain sickness.

At 6.00pm on 22 April, I began running from Sherpa Cooperative Trekking amidst a cheering band of Sherpas, including Mike Cheney.

My difficulties began almost immediately. Within 4 hours I missed an important short-cut and arrived dehydrated in Banepa instead of Dolalghat. Trotting downhill from Dhulikhel, I located water running along the road which treated with iodine cured my dehydration. However, I tore the blisters forming on my heels and balls of my feet. My new running shoes gripped the road well but permitted my feet to slide within them. From then on, every time I began running, the pain would be severe for a half hour until my feet became numb.

The most serious problem first arose upon leaving the Chinese road at Dolalghat. For 4½ hours that night I searched for the main trail up the mountain to Dumre and Chaubas. Yet even in daylight I found myself invariably taking the wrong trail if no one appeared to direct me. Many trails blanket the countryside and they vary greatly in width, often running through a farm-yard, garden, even across a porch or verandah of a house.

At 6.00pm 23 April, struggling into a tea hut in Kebre, soaking wet from rain and sweat, hungry, depressed, frustrated and clearly understanding that I could not reach my destination in 24 to 30 hours, I decided to spend the night in Kebre. Rather than spinning my wheels locating the correct trails, I would be better off resting my mind and body.

Without sleeping bag or blankets, I slept my usual 5 hours in the 3-sided tea hut before starting to shiver uncontrollably for 4 hours until 5.00am. I kept telling myself to get up and exercise to generate warmth, but my body would not respond. Fortunately, the rain and wind stopped as dawn arrived.

During that initial 24-hour period I covered about 70 miles—creditable progress in light of the difficult terrain and losing my way. The next day was far worse. I barely managed 20 miles or so to Chyangma. A hard driving rain forced me to seek refuge in the morning. Most of the afternoon was spent running up the wrong mountain beyond Tose. That night, the Sherpa Hotel in Chyangma offered blankets and better food which lifted my spirits immeasurably.

The next day I felt strong on the way to Lamjura Pass. Surprised by 2 Nepalese running behind me, I increased my speed forcing them to stop to rest. However, my only bout with diarrhoea occurred at 3700m in the clouds and a blinding snow-storm. The Nepalese runners recaptured the lead. I overtook them just short of

Junbesi where we stopped for tea and sought refuge from a driving rainstorm.

They invited me to follow them because Taksindu Pass, my next objective, was on the way. For the next 2½ hours we ran and ran, joyously egging each other on. At an unoccupied tea hut, 2 other Sherpas pointed out that I was running along a river and Taksindu Pass was high above me and 2 mountains away. Indeed, I was almost to Paphlu!

At 6.30pm 25 April, I arrived at the Sherpa Hotel in Taksindu. There I bathed in the cold out of a dishpan and borrowed a sleeping bag. The Sherpa-owner cooked dinner and discussed my trip at length. He was impressed by my progress that day and assured me I could reach Namche the next day by taking a new trail along the cliffs above the Dudh Kosi, thereby missing Kharichola and Karte, with its 600m ascent through a pass. Thank you Ang Dowa! At 6.00pm April 26, I arrived in Namche (on the wrong trail of course).

Although my spirits were high, I was clearly running out of gas. My feet ached. I longed to eat something other than rice, potatoes and glucose wafers. My patience had worn thin. If I stopped according to plan, had a good dinner, comfortable sleeping bag and an evening with Barbara, I do not think I could have faced charging up to Kala Pattar the next day. So I continued through Namche, determined not to stop until I climbed Kala Pattar and ran back to Namche.

It was snowing steadily in Thyangboche. Unknown to me, Barbara was worrying in Thyangboche, having pushed higher from Namche on 24 April to increase her acclimatization, leaving Galjanz in Namche to await me. I sloshed on! Although the snow hid the full moon, the trails thankfully were easy to follow and soft. About 4.00am the snow stopped and just after daybreak I passed the 2 huts at Lobuche and proceeded up the valley of moraine to Kala Pattar and Everest.

Finally, at 8.00am 27 April (4 days and 14 hours from Kathmandu), I struggled over the last big boulder blocking my way to the top of Kala Pattar. That was the third and last time I thought I might lay down and die. Slumping down on a rock I gloried in the panorama of Pumori, Nuptse, Everest, Lhotse, the ice-fall and the Khumbu Glacier. It was even more incredible than I had imagined. The beauty, the grandeur, the magnitude of what I was seeing for the first time were stupendous.

My pulse was only 60; I was not exhausted after all. So I headed back over the boulders and down the mountain, arriving back in Namche at the end of my fifth day on the trail.

During my adventure run, I ascended and descended 21300m between Kathmandu (1340m) and Kala Pattar (5500m), crossed 24 rivers (the Dudh Kosi 6 times) and passed through 64 villages, running about 40% of the time and 60% of the distance. Getting lost cost me 12 hours and probably a night or another 11 hours. Stopping at night cost a great deal of time. With no electricity and heat, bed followed dinner at 6.00pm. I slept only 5 hours but could not leave until daybreak.

Dr Harkha Gurung, the Nepalese Minister of Tourism, has assured me that next year on my adventure run around the Annapurnas, the local governments will post signs to keep me on the correct trails.

It was indeed a privilege to make this adventure run and to meet so many kind and helpful Nepalese. Our thanks also to Dr Peter Hackett, Mike Cheney and Galjanz for their encouragement. If any of you would care to join me on a somewhat less ambitious, but even more exciting, adventure run in Nepal, just give me a call or drop me a line.