
ELIZABETH 'LIZZIE' HAWKER

Running a Dream

We had a dream. And sometimes, just sometimes, dreams come true. Our dream was to make a journey from the wilderness of the mountain heights to the chaos of a city. We planned first to climb the stunningly beautiful Himalayan mountain of Ama Dablam, which at an altitude of 6837m was the highest any of us had been to, and to then follow this with an attempt at the record running back from Everest Base Camp to Kathmandu. A journey of some 188 miles (302km) with around 10,000m ascent and 15,000m descent, the previous record was set in 2000 by a Nepali,



111. Running in the shadow of Ama Dablam. (*Daz Stonier*)

Kumar Limbu, who had completed it in 3 days, 7 hours and 10 minutes. At the time of his run, Kumar was working as a climbing Sherpa with Doug Scott's Community Action Treks.

At 09:52 on Sunday 28 October 2007 we arrived in the dusty heat of the Sports Stadium of Kathmandu. Weary, footsore and grimy, we were greeted with smiles and garlands, and warmly welcomed by our friends, the press and the president of the Nepal Olympic Association. Our mission had been accomplished. A new record had been set. I cast my mind back over the previous 3 days, 2 hours and 36 minutes to another world. Arriv-



112. A pre-run warm-up: Lizzy Hawker high on Ama Dablam. (*Victor Saunders*)

ing to the chaotic heat of the streets of Kathmandu it felt a very long way from our start in the silence and peace of dawn at Everest Base Camp. It was an incredible contrast. And it had been an incredible adventure.

Om Mani Padme Hum. The omnipresent Buddhist mantra ingrained itself from the very beginning into our experience of Nepal. Carved into stone and spun on prayer wheels along every path we travelled, it represents the path of the practice of generosity, pure ethics, tolerance, patience, perseverance, concentration and wisdom. It was in this spirit that we needed to trek, climb and run together. The mountains of the Himalaya were home to us for a month. Their incredible beauty and inspiration were food for the soul.

In the chill of a minus-10°C autumnal Himalayan dawn, clad in fleece and duvet jackets, we touched the flag of the first Thai Everest expedition just as the first tents were stirring. We logged our GPS position, started our watches, and set off to scramble across the glacial moraine. It was an incredibly beautiful morning with clear skies above, early cloud filling the Khumbu valley below and sun hitting the summits of Nuptse, Pumori, Thamserku and Cholatse. We were lucky. I relished those early hours, emerging out of the shadows of the majestic summits into the early morning sunshine, with warmth on our limbs and moving fast over terrain usually taken at a snail's pace. In these early miles above 4500m there was delightful and easy running, although I felt for Mark and Spyke who still suffered bronchial coughs – a legacy of their exertions on Ama Dablam

whose summit Mark and I had reached just a few days earlier. We startled the groups of trekkers, who were moving slowly upwards as though walking on the moon, receiving a mixture of doubt, intrigue and amazement.

Welcome refreshment awaited us at Dughla lodge, where our new friend Mr T (Tashi Tsering) had copious amounts of milky tea waiting for us as promised. Further down the trail the traffic started to increase considerably, with yaks, porters and tourists to dodge. For me, all too soon we had left the high mountains. Beyond Namche Bazar, where Victor Saunders awaited us with a welcome hug, hot tea and pastries, we were back to the hill country and the thicker air of lower altitudes. By nightfall we had passed the trail to the large village of Lukhla and its small airstrip. Having lost the crowds we were back to the 'real' Nepal, with simple lodges and sharing the trail only with the local porters carrying huge loads of everyday necessities. Until Jubing Bridge we followed the drainage of the Dudh Kosi, but from there we had to cross the grain of the land with five passes in quick succession. A beautiful but demanding night's running with steep ascents and rocky descents slowing our progress.

We were as self-sufficient as possible, aiming to run non-stop, carrying just a little extra clothing, food and water and using the lodges along route to supplement our supplies and take advantage of copious amounts of tea, tsampa porridge and chapattis as we needed. Running through the hill country off the normal tourist track gave us a special, if fleeting, contact with the Nepalese people and their culture.

The rollercoaster of ascents and descents continued. The second nightfall was rapidly encroaching as we reached Shivalaya beyond the Deurali Pass. It was here that we decided to take the 'safe' route via Jiri and the road to Karatichap since earlier reconnaissance of the route had proved that the maps were unreliable and the paths hard to find. It was also here that Mark made the reluctant decision to quit at Jiri, his reserves drained. Thirty-six hours in and less than half the distance had been covered. However, what should have been a simple jaunt between Shivalaya and the road-head at Jiri proved a problematic epic in the dark as we repeatedly lost the old trail and had to resort to map and compass. We finally arrived in Jiri, but by then Spyke too had had enough. Mentally and physically I wanted to continue but with the current political situation and as a single woman it



113. The Beginning of a Journey:
Mark Hartell, Lizzy Hawker and
Stephen Pyke at Everest Base Camp.
(Mark Hartell)

wasn't a safe option to run alone. Dejected and surrounded by a howling pack of stray dogs we attempted to contact our support and call the attempt off. The deserted town offered no shelter, but by some miracle we landed upon a hayloft and buried ourselves in the hay. A few cold hours later, stiff and dejected I awoke to a new dawn.

A few hours of sleep had given Spyke a different perspective on life. With renewed vigour we decided to continue together. Could the record



114. The Final Miles – police escort as 'Spyke' and Lizzy approach Kathmandu. (Mark Hartell)

still be possible? We snatched a few cups of tea at the roadside, stuffed some battered bread in our sacks and left Mark to catch a bus to Muldi. All being well, there he would meet our friends who were waiting to support us over the remaining miles. I had no idea if we could make it, but it was good to be on the move, and good to be trying. Some miles went

fast, some went slow. Valuable hours were lost as some of our short cuts led us astray and demanded energy-sapping bushwhacking to make our way back on route. Finally by 7pm on Saturday evening we had arrived in the small town of Muldi. From running alone for so many hours it was strange suddenly to see so many welcoming faces. Not only our friends but also the local youth club were there to cheer us on our way. From here the route followed the road and our friends were able to support us. They took it in turns to run a mile or two with us, providing inane chatter to help pass the lonely night hours. Sunday dawned and we were on the final descent into Kathmandu. The roadside got busier, noisier and smellier as we reached the city outskirts. By 8am we were fighting our way through the gridlock of traffic to reach the national stadium. Miraculously a police motorcycle escort appeared out of nowhere and after an endless last few miles we reached the gates of the stadium. Spyke and I had set a new record. However, our success was truly a team effort and Mark's invaluable support after his reluctant withdrawal made all the difference.

Whilst modern communications have replaced the need for human messengers to carry news from Everest, the route from Base Camp to Kathmandu remains of historic importance. Our objective was simple: to set a new record for this historic run. The style and ethics of the attempt, however, were just as important to us. We made our record attempt in the

spirit of peace and friendship, with a style and approach to show respect for the local environment, peoples and culture. As a team we wanted to use this run to show our respect for the Nepalese people and for the steps being taken to ensure a peaceful future for the country. We hope that publicity gained from our run will help to support recovery in the tourist industry by highlighting how wonderful Nepal is – its people, mountains and culture.

Our journey was an incredible endurance challenge amid some of the most awe-inspiring and beautiful mountains we may ever have the fortune to experience. It truly needed us to run with our hearts and our souls as well as our head and our legs. The entire journey from the lowlands to the summit heights of the mountains and back at a run was an incredible exploration – physically, mentally and spiritually. It was a privilege to have the opportunity of such an exceptional adventure and experience. ‘Success’ on the mountain or on the run, was not what mattered. As in life itself it is the journey not the destination.

Summary: An account of a record-breaking run from Everest Base Camp to Kathmandu in October 2007. Team members, Mark Hartell, Stephen ‘Spyke’ Pyke and Elizabeth ‘Lizzy’ Hawker, three established UK ultra runners who have competed internationally, and between them hold a number of records in mountain, ultra and endurance races.



115. The End of a Journey – ‘Spyke and Lizzy’ breast the tape in Kathmandu Stadium (*Mark Hartell*)

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Footnote: Through their run, Lizzy, Mark and Spyke raised £4,403 for Community Action Nepal. The charity’s main focus is to work with local people and village communities through sustainable health and education projects. Find out more at www.canepal.org.uk All donations would be gratefully received.

