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BARUNTSE EXPEDITION

Autumn 2009 – Four friends (Dan: Canadian, Geoffroy & Jean-F: French, myself: Swiss), following a few successful mini-expeditions in the Andes, set their minds on a larger one, this time in the Himalaya. As a first experience of this kind, we opt for the not very technical, relatively safe and supposedly rarely climbed Mount Baruntse in the Everest region of Nepal (7168 meters). We decided to use the help of a trekking agency for the logistics up to the base camp and then carry on autonomously.

Coming from different parts of the world, we gathered in Kathmandu at the end of September 2009. After a few days finalizing the details and meeting with the trekking agency, we flew off on 7th of October to Lukla, the departure point of our expedition, where we meet the local staff. From being just four, our group turns into a multitude of thirteen people: 1 sirdar, 1 cook, 1 aid, 6 porters and us 4! Sounds a lot, but it is the bare minimum, as we wanted to do part of the carrying ourselves.

It's our first time trekking in a big group and also in this region of the world. There are many other groups, trekking from one valley to the next or on their way to a trekking peak. Walking days are short, because they are needed for acclimatization. That also means there's not much to do: bed early, read a book, sleep, »Morning tea! sugar? One, or two?«, pack our bags, walk, eat our pack-lunches, camp, »Hot water!«, dry the sleeping bags, do nothing, play cards, »Soup ready!«.

10 days after setting off, we had our first bit of action with the climbing of Mera Peak (6476m) on the 17th of October. We felt very fit; the acclimatization process seems to have worked. 2 days later we arrived at the Baruntse base camp (5550m).

Well, we were definitely not the only ones! Germans, Spanish, more Canadians, even more French, even Czech and also AACZ-member, Karen with Alex, who were on their way back after successfully summiting the peak we're after! The Puja ceremony, whereby a Lam-monk blesses our equipment and endeavors and makes offerings to the God of the mountain, took place on the 21st. October. The next day, the long awaited moment to set off alone to explore the mountain had come. With 30 kilos and 600 meters altitude to cover via the West Col, we needed 8 hours. Camp 1, at 6150m, is exposed to relentless icy winds of 100km/h. Even secured with ropes, the tent were nearly blown flat on our faces. At camp 2 (6550m, 24th. October) we dig deep holes in the snow to protect ourselves from the elements. One of us is having great trouble acclimatizing, and we therefore spent 2 nights there. Below us, at the »official« camp 2 site, we saw other groups arriving and their Sherpas setting up the camp.

Finally, on the 26th at 3am, we started off for the summit bid. The organized groups of the previous days had left a trail and fixed ropes, which we used and we left ours behind. Tiredness, the awful lyophilized meals and the altitude made the climb physically and mentally much harder than expected. Beyond 6800m our advance trickles to a snail's pace. We look and feel like zombies and two of us nearly gave up half a dozen times. But the will is still there and we all reached the summit together with a German group at 11 am. Superb, our first 7-thousander! Around us Makalu, Nuptse and Everest at the back.

Kieran Morel



Bild oben: Unterwegs zum Huascaran «Schild» (Seite 24, Foto: K. Morel)

Bild unten: Basislager vor dem Baruntse

