

# EXPEDITION NEWS

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**June 2013 – Volume Twenty, Number Six**

**EXPEDITION NEWS, now in its 19th year, is the monthly review of significant expeditions, research projects and newsworthy adventures. It is distributed online to media representatives, corporate sponsors, educators, research librarians, explorers, environmentalists, and outdoor enthusiasts. This forum on exploration covers projects that stimulate, motivate and educate.**

*Editor's note: Just over 60 years ago, on May 29, 1953, Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary summited Mount Everest. With May the ideal month to attempt an ascent, some 540 have already succeeded this year, including an octogenarian, the first female amputee, and the first female climber to summit twice in one season.*

*Not content to sit on the sidelines during this diamond jubilee, EN traveled to Nepal last month to check out the scene and provide communications support for the Dooley Intermed Foundation and Operation Restore Vision, sponsors of the 2013 Gift of Sight Expedition to the lower Mustang region. What we saw, what we experienced, the people we met, and the logistics required to plan and implement an expedition is the focus of this month's issue.*

## **EVEREST ROUND-UP**

### **New Records Set, But Does it Matter?**

On May 19 alone, when 150 people successfully summited, around a half-dozen records were set. A few climbers were first from their country to summit; the oldest summiteer record was pushed up to age 80; and a climber from India was first female amputee to reach the top. If it seems as if Everest is getting easier to climb, you're right. In 1990, only 18 percent of 72 summiteers were successful; whereas in 2012, the number of total summiteers was 547 - a success rate of 56 percent.

At least one mountaineering journalist doesn't think these new records amount to much (see related story).

### **The Yak & Yeti is an Urban Base Camp**

This classic hotel at Durbar Marg, in the middle of Kathmandu's business and shopping district, is like an urban base camp for climbers headed to and from Everest and other

Himalayan peaks. You can tell this is no normal hotel by the multi-colored mountaineering backpacks and duffel bags in a lobby decorated with ornate Buddhist artistry. Guests walk around in goggle tans, wearing parkas festooned with logos. Six separate banners sponsored by guide companies hang outside, each congratulating their clients for successfully summiting.

Sitting in the lobby is like stargazing at the Chateau Marmot in L.A. as a who's who of climbers walk through its doors. During our stay we saw Reinhold Messner in the lobby, along with record-setting Everest summiteer Apa Sherpa (see related story), oldest man to summit Yuichiro Miura, and famed Himalayan chronicler Elizabeth Hawley grilling an expedition leader. (More on Miss Hawley below).

### **The Michael Jordan of Nepal**

He's the Michael Jordan of Nepal. People stop him on the street, in restaurants, wherever he goes. We stopped him too at the Yak & Yeti Hotel in Kathmandu.

It was our honor to sit with Apa Sherpa, 53, because in all the world, this is the one man who knows the top of Everest best. Here he was back on home turf. It was like meeting Elvis in Las Vegas, except Apa was very much alive ... and in much better shape.

Apa, a gentle man who resides in Salt Lake, holds the world record for most Everest summits: 21. He received an honorary degree from the University of Utah and spends his retirement from climbing involved in environmental education in Nepal.

According to a story in Nepal's *Republica* newspaper (May 28), Apa is urging the Nepali tourist industry to unite to maintain ecological balance in the (Everest) region.

"Vast changes in the climate of the mountain region have occurred between my first ascent in 1990 and the 21st ascent in 2011. All people should be aware of this," he says.

On the positive side, not that there are many advantages to climate change, the success rate of Everest expeditions has been increasing, due to more guides, better gear, and the rise in temperatures and subsequent decrease in the snow volume, thus lessening the risk of accidents.

### **You Haven't Summited Until Miss Hawley Says You Did**

At 90, Elizabeth Hawley has been chronicling Himalayan expeditions for over 50 years. As the saying goes, if she hasn't certified your summit, you haven't summited.

In her biography, *Keeper of the Mountains: The Elizabeth Hawley Story* by Bernadette McDonald (Rocky Mountain Books, 2012), she says, "The mountains hereabouts are infested with men mad enough to want to slog to the tops."

She considers her adopted home in Nepal, “a kind of fairy tale mirage, an oasis of fertility in a sea of verticality.” She revels in the sense of intimacy she has found in Nepal for six decades, “as though cut off from the rest of the planet by the towering peaks.”

The grilling that this pragmatic, no nonsense journalist puts climbers through has been called a team's Second Summit due to the difficulty of her intense scrutiny.

Hawley, who has documented nearly every expedition that has ever climbed in the Nepal Himalaya since the 1960s, has never set foot on a mountain herself.

“It is crowded up there,” she tells Tsering Dolker Gurung of the *Nepal Times* (May 24-30 issue). “I prefer the comforts of my home, sleeping in my bed, eating hot food at my table, and driving around in my car.”

Although frail and requiring a quad walking cane and a young male assistant by her side, there she was in the Yak & Yeti lobby debriefing a raccoon-tanned team leader just back from the summit.

Earlier, she kindly granted *EN* an interview. Knowing her prickly personality, we were on our best behavior.

Oldest man, youngest man, first amputee – these “firsts” are not basic to climbing, she says. “They may be relevant to humans, but these firsts don’t matter much. What matters are pioneering new routes; it’s not about a line of ants climbing up mountains.”

Hawley feels strongly that women climbers are playing catch-up to men. “Women need to get on with it,” she tells *EN*.

By the end of the 2010 climbing season there were 5,104 ascents to the summit by about 3,142 individuals, 77 percent of those ascents accomplished since 2000. Does she believe the appeal of Everest will ever diminish?

“The fascination with Everest will never go away, so long as it remains the highest mountain on earth. But half the people there don’t belong on the mountain – many of them can’t put on crampons or tie knots.”

We wondered if she believed whether George Mallory’s lost Kodak camera, assuming it is ever found, might reveal that he and/or Sandy Irvine summited in 1924.

“If, if, if. It would be a miracle if the camera is found. If Kodak is still around to develop the film. There are too many ‘ifs.’ I’m afraid it’s not going to show anything.

“Besides, considering Mallory and Irvine’s hemp ropes, hobnailed boots, and lack of ladders, considering the stage of their climbing skills, I doubt they ever got to the top. And Eddie (Hillary) agreed with me.”

Hawley continues, “Today’s advanced equipment and fixed ropes and Sherpa who push and pull have made it easier to get up Everest, but certainly not easier to survive.”

Hawley’s records are now a treasure trove of mountaineering history, still expanding as Miss Hawley, as climbers know her, continues to interview, record, and document expeditions that same way she did six decades ago. These historic records are maintained by the Himalayan Database, a company she started with a friend, Richard Salisbury of Ann Arbor, Mich.

When the *Nepal Times* asks if she would ever go back to the States, Hawley replies, “I am still here 50 blooming years later. I will retire when I die and I don’t have any unfulfilled wishes. I am happy as I am.”

She’s currently looking for someone to replace her, as if her singular, lifelong passion to chronicle mountaineering expeditions could ever be replicated.

(For more information: [www.himalayandatabase.com](http://www.himalayandatabase.com))

### **Climbers Honored at the Famed Rum Doodle**

It’s a Himalayan tradition. Climb a mountain, subject yourself to a debriefing from Elizabeth Hawley, then get your team over to the Rum Doodle (elevation 4,528-ft.), the famed Kathmandu restaurant and bar best known for the hundreds of wooden Yeti feet imprinted with the names of Himalayan expeditions. Every Everest summiteer receives a membership card good for a free meal – over 3,000 cards have been issued to date according to manager Yog Bdr. Rajbhandari.

The night *EN* ate there, Yuichiro Miura was keynote speaker at a reception for a predominantly Japanese audience honoring his record-breaking summit at the age of 80.

There are large white footprints with names, love songs and the occasional swear words, hanging from the ceiling and tacked to the walls literally in every corner. The oldest ones are beneath glass, signed by Hillary, Messner, Viesturs, Bonington, Hall, Tabei, and dozens of other climbers of great renown. Every footprint is a story in itself. In fact, the place is named after a story, a 1956 short novel called *The Ascent of Rum Doodle* by W.E. Bowman (1911–1985).

The book is a parody of the non-fictional chronicles of mountaineering expeditions (notably H. W. Tilman's account of the ascent of Nanda Devi and Maurice Herzog's book *Annapurna* chronicling the first ascent of Annapurna in Nepal) that were popular during the 1950s, as many of the world's highest peaks were climbed for the first time. Though a parody, it has become one of the most famous and celebrated books of mountaineering literature.

The food isn’t bad either, although the best part, as far as tender Western stomachs are concerned, is that the fresh vegetables are washed in iodine before cooking and all drinking water is treated to WHO Standards. Good thing too. Two weeks of Nepali fare were raging war on our intestines.

### **Give “Mount Neverest” a Break**

Amid the 60th anniversary celebration, clearly designed to attract more climbers to cash-strapped Nepal, comes a call by a *Republica* columnist to ban climbing on the mountain for a few years. During the hiatus, Prayash Raj Koirala suggests cleaning the garbage and "bringing down the corpses of ones who lost their lives there. Within a few years, Everest's beauty will be restored.

"After all, he continued, "why hurry to get to the top and murder the glory of the one and only Everest?"

### **Leave the Hillary Step Alone**

American climber Ed Viesturs, a seven-time Everest summiteer, has a different take. He suggests preserving the challenge of the 40-ft. wall of rock and ice called the Hillary Step by restricting the placement of permanent ladders as proposed by the Expedition Operators Association, a Nepali organization that manages teams climbing Everest. He writes in the *New York Times* (June 1), "My fear is that if the ladder is installed, even more climbers will throng to Everest, convinced that a metal contraption has solved all the problems of the South Col route."

Viesturs believes a ladder isn't the answer. "It will be up to the climbers themselves to coordinate their schedules to avoid overcrowding. This is going to be very hard to do."

Viesturs reports it was "deeply gratifying" to solve the Hillary Step's challenge the way Hillary had ... "with no aids other than the ice ax in my hand and the crampons on my boots."

Viesturs, the only American to have climbed the 14 highest peaks in the world, all without supplemental oxygen, continues, "The glory of mountain climbing lies in the fact that success is never guaranteed."

### **Can You See Me Now?**

British climber Daniel Thonas Hughes, 33, is in hot water for conducting a live video interview with the BBC from the Everest summit. Seems his UK-based Jagged Globe Everest Expedition 2013 didn't have Nepali government approval for the smartphone transmission. He left the country immediately after the climb. The call was said to be the first live video from the summit.

Hughes faces banishment from Everest for 10 years.

### **Can't Climb Down? Just Jump**

A daredevil from Russia reportedly set a world record for highest BASE jump when he leaped from Mount Everest – from a point 23,688 feet/7220 m above sea level.

Valery Rozov, 48, made the leap on May 5 to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the first summit.

The extreme sportsman prepared for the leap for more than two years, even developing a new, special wing suit, ITN News reported. He reached speeds of more than 120 mph during the jump and glided in his winged suit for more than a minute before coming to a landing at a spot 19,521-ft./5950 m above sea level.

“Only when I got back home did I see how hard it was for me both physically and psychologically,” he told Red Bull, a sponsor, after the jump.

According to its website, the current Guinness World Record for the highest altitude BASE jump is 6605 m (21,666-ft.), set by a pair who jumped from a ledge on Mount Meru in India in 2006.

### **Playing the Guinness Card**

Reaching the summit, or summits in this case, is apparently not enough any longer. One climber sought validation from Guinness World Records. David Liano Gonzalez, 33, of Mexico received a certificate naming him “First Person to Climb Both Sides of Mt. Everest in One Season.”

"He (Gonzalez) summited Mount Everest on May 11, 2013 from Nepal (the south side) and on May 19 from Tibet (the north side), becoming the first person in one single expedition season to do so," said Ang Tshering Sherpa, founder of Asian Trekking, the company that organized the expedition.

Gonzalez, who says he has now climbed Mount Everest five times in total, was awarded the official record certificate from Guinness World Records at a ceremony in the Nepal capital late last month.

## **EXPEDITION NOTES**

### **We Told You So**

Remember our story about the Exotic hors d'oeuvres served at The Explorers Club's annual dinner? Here's some mouth-watering validation for you. While insects can be slimy, cringe-inducing creatures, often squashed on sight by humans, a new book released last month by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) says beetles, wasps and caterpillars are also an unexplored nutrition source that can help address global food insecurity.

The book, *Edible Insects: Future Prospects for Food and Feed Security*, stresses not just the nutritional value of insects, but also the benefits that insect farming could potentially have on the environment and on addressing the rapidly increasing demand for food worldwide.

While the idea of eating a worm, grasshopper or cicada at every meal may seem strange, FAO says this has many health benefits. Insects are high in protein, fat and mineral contents. They can be eaten whole or ground into a powder or paste, and incorporated into other foods.

Although they are not staples of Western cuisine, insects currently supplement the diets of some two billion people and have always been part of human diets in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Of the one million known insect species, 1,900 are consumed by humans. Some of the most consumed insects include beetles, caterpillars, bees, wasps, ants, grasshoppers, locusts and crickets.

Read the full story here, preferably on an empty stomach:

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=44886>

The book is free here:

[www.fao.org/docrep/018/i3253e/i3253e.pdf](http://www.fao.org/docrep/018/i3253e/i3253e.pdf)

## QUOTE OF THE MONTH

*Many climbers argue that Everest is no longer an epochal achievement and that the conga lines of climbers waiting for a shot at the summit are degrading a once pristine environment ... the door to Everest's slopes has been blown wide open, and some critics speak of the death of great adventures ... but Everest's history is the modern world's history with all its challenges and abuses, and the unparalleled opportunities for human endeavor ... we cannot step back and close the mountain, for retreat would annihilate the modern age's greatest gift to humanity: the freedom of an individual to choose his own path..."*

– American blind Everest summiteer Erik Weiheymayer, quoted in *Keeper of the Mountains: The Elizabeth Hawley Story* by Bernadette McDonald (Rocky Mountain Books, 2012).

## EXPEDITION FOCUS

### **Anatomy of an Expedition: An Interview with Scott Hamilton, Expedition Leader Dooley Intermed Foundation 2013 Gift of Sight Expedition**

Delivering quality eye care to Third World countries such as Nepal, particularly in remote regions connected by little more than donkey trails, is a true adventure and involves a caravan of ophthalmic equipment and pharmaceuticals, personal gear, translators, camp crew and assistants.

Wall Streeter Scott Hamilton, a director of both The Explorers Club and the Dooley Intermed Foundation, previously organized a Gift of Sight Expedition in Nepal in 2011.

His medical mission to upper Mustang (pronounced MOO-stang) was featured in the documentary *Visions of Mustang* (Skyship Films). We recently joined him for his fourth eye mission to Nepal which concluded in late May.

Tall and lanky, Hamilton, 59, speaks passionately about remote eyecare, gesturing wildly with his hands as he gets worked up. Hamilton has been traveling to Nepal for 20 years; this was his 12th visit. He calls the scenery in the Himalaya, "a symphony for the eyes."

A certified ophthalmic assistant, Hamilton assembled a medical dream team from Operation Restore Vision and the New York Eye and Ear Infirmary: Sanjay Kedhar, M.D., 39, uveitis and cornea specialist; Christopher Teng, M.D., 37, glaucoma specialist; and Travis Jenkins, M.D., 30, a third year resident. Joining them in Nepal were an additional surgeon and eye technicians from the Himalaya Eye Hospital in Pokhara.

Over 20 years, Hamilton has become adept at planning and executing expeditions, including ones like Gift of Sight with so many moving parts. During a flight from Jomsom to Pokhara, we asked him to share some insight:

**1. Formulate a Plan** – Hamilton recommends first coming up with a concept, then refining it and determining the partners necessary to succeed. In the case of delivering quality eyecare to one of the poorest countries on earth, he knew he needed an overall sponsor for funding, skilled ophthalmologists from both Operation Restore Vision and the Himalaya Eye Hospital, assistance with local logistics, and 16 tri-lingual Buddhist monks as assistants whom local villagers would trust.

"People ask me to share the expedition plan. Well, guess what? There is no standard template for an expedition. You can't just fill-in-the-blanks, pack and go. Much depends on where you are going, and what you want to accomplish, and the itinerary is a bit of a moving target, so you need to be flexible," Hamilton advises.

**2. Carefully Map Logistics** – Maps of the region are useful, but often wildly inaccurate. Plan each day to the best of your ability, but keep in mind the uncertainty that accompanies all travel in the developing world. Trying to do too much, too fast, is a standard rookie error, he says.

"A medical eye mission is somewhat like the *Rolling Stones* coming into town. Our caravan arrives, we unload, meet the locals, and get to work. We put on a great 'show,' make a lot of people very, very happy when they can see again, then we pack up and head down the road to do it all again tomorrow."

**3. Formulate a Budget** – An expedition of this magnitude takes significant funding. "Sponsors will want to see a realistic and detailed budget in advance. You'll also want to start with cash sponsors, or at least in-kind support for items you would otherwise have to purchase, such as apparel, which Sherpa Adventure Gear supplied for Gift of Sight," reports Hamilton. "Thanks to the Nepal-based apparel manufacturer, we enjoyed both protection from the elements and a unified look for the team."



**4. Assemble a Team** – “Everybody needs a skill set and a job on an expedition,” and multi-taskers are vastly preferred versus one trick ponies,” Hamilton says. “There’s no room for spectators. Thus we were fortunate to work with Operation Restore Vision and the New York Eye and Ear Infirmary which loaned us three top ophthalmologists, as well as the Himalaya Eye Hospital, for effective patient follow-up after we left. The team also included a filmmaker and social media specialist who blogged daily.”

**5. Stay Healthy** – “The key to staying healthy is not getting sick,” he says. “I provided team members the knowledge that accrues from 12 previous trips to Nepal. Have I ever gotten the ‘Kathmandu gut bomb’? Sure, but there are certain precautions that greatly increase the likelihood of remaining a functional and healthy member of the team.” (See related story below).

**6. Expected the Unexpected** – Allow for unforeseen circumstances. “An expedition plan is merely an outline, especially in the Third World. Things will go wrong, flights will be cancelled, the monsoon will arrive early, your yaks will get hijacked, there may be a national strike, vehicles won’t show up or will blow a tire once they do. It’s just a fact of life over there,” he says.

“You need to build in extra time and budget to accommodate both expected and unexpected delays and changes. Building in a few contingency days is essential.”

He suggests that if (or when) things go wrong, it’s always better to brainstorm a solution than point fingers. “Consider how you can accomplish the most you can with whatever resources are still available.”

**7. Promote the Expedition Daily** – Hamilton believes the duty of an expedition leader is to plan a safe project, execute it as well as possible under expedition conditions, then communicate the project to those who were unable to come along. “Delegate someone on the team to blog daily and feed images and video back to a someone at a desk back home who can instantly post updates online.” He reports that thousands followed Gift of Sight through blogs and photos available on [www.dooleyintermed.org](http://www.dooleyintermed.org).

Hamilton also mentions the value of taking along a professional photographer and filmmaker. For Gift of Sight, Daniel Byers of Skyship Films, the production company behind *Visions of Mustang* (2012), shot video and stills of the 2013 expedition (see his images at [www.flickr.com/danielbyers](http://www.flickr.com/danielbyers)).

“Tell your story as it happens. This raises awareness and motivates others to get involved – perhaps as participants in the future, or to write a check next time you’re seeking funding.”

Hamilton continues, “This emphasis on communications also provided additional credit to our main sponsors: Dooley Intermed Foundation, Operation Restore Vision, and Sherpa Adventure Gear.”

**8. Pull the Trigger and Go** – After months of planning, the time eventually comes to “make the leap,” pack your bags and go work the plan.”

One of his favorite quotes: “Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.” – Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749 – 1832).

**9. Post-Expedition Follow-up** – The work continues long after your return. There are sponsor thank you’s to write, the expedition debrief and report, speaking engagements to schedule, editing sessions for the expedition film, images to distribute to sponsors and media, and a final resolution and accounting of expenses.

“Sponsors need to hear from you afterwards. They want to know you did what you said you’d do under trying conditions, that you attempted to deliver a host of benefits in return for their support. You want a reputation as an expedition leader who comes through for them,” Hamilton says.

“Besides being the right thing to do, post-expedition communication with sponsors tends to make it that much easier to fund the next project.”

### **How to Stay Safe and Healthy in Nepal**

**By Jeff Blumenfeld, editor and publisher, *Expedition News***

As the new guy on the Gift of Sight team, and without years of medical training, I soaked up health and safety advice from the others. I learn food in Nepal isn't necessarily praised for being delicious or wholesome - cleanliness is what matters most.

The body is under attack from all sides and my delicate Connecticut stomach is unaccustomed to this onslaught.

The hands are deadly weapons, threatening to transmit pathogens from tables, door handles, and sinks to the nearest bodily portal. Don't bite your nails, don't touch your face. Travel with a king-sized bottle of Purell.

"You want to be careful that what you eat hasn't been blessed by flies who've just danced on yak dung," expedition leader Scott Hamilton jokes, except I realize it's not a joke.

Tap water is liquid death, I'm advised. Shower with the mouth closed, head down, and don't trust bottled water unless it's safety sealed and you've checked the cap by holding it upside down and squeezing it. Remember that scene in *Slumdog Millionaire*? I'm told the refilling of water bottles is not uncommon.

Food has to be piping hot. Toast is fine. A big open bowl of yogurt not so good. That craving for a chef salad will have to wait until I return.

There is no OSHA here. If the hotel room phone has a steady ring, don't answer. It's likely a power surge somewhere up the line ready to zap.

There are strange wires in the room, phantom switches, and the plug sparks when I charge my phone. There are also lots of sharp edges. Best advice? Take cuts seriously and disinfect immediately.

Finally, Scott advises, "never ever pet a dog in Nepal. Don't even think about it lest you contract rabies. Don't go near the monkeys either - they're mean little buggers. Back away and let them think they're the boss. It's not a fair fight; they have rabies, you don't."

Wise advice for someone new in town.

(Read the complete set of the 2013 Gift of Sight Expedition daily blogs at:  
[www.dooleyintermed.org](http://www.dooleyintermed.org))

## **EXPEDITION CLASSIFIEDS**

**Project Himalaya** – Real treks and expeditions in Nepal and Northern India. We still go exploring, are opening up the Nepal Great Himalaya Trail and alternative trekking peaks in Ladakh, as well as offering unique range of treks. We are a small operation and really care about every detail, and offer best in class treks – <http://project-himalaya.com>

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