

31 March Day 13 Back to Kathmandu



The Everest Valley looking up the Dudh Kosi River Valley...as I flew off from the Shyangboche airstrip in the Porter.

Well, here I am safe and sound, back in Kathmandu at the - where else - Green Hotel.

We departed Shyangboche with snow on the field at 0810 (8:10 AM) and arrived at Truhuvan Airport at 0855. It was an uneventful flight other than it went just per schedule. I was met at the airport by my trusty "guide" of before the trek who I really didn't expect to be there - I think he didn't expect to see me so soon either. I went directly to the Yeti Travel Bureau where I used a personal check and my American Express Card to get \$200.00 extra for the homeward bound leg of the trip. Then, I did what I'd been waiting for so long - shaved off the beard and took a hot shower. I felt like a new person. I then cashed \$40.00 worth of Traveler's checks at the bank several doors down and set out for Thai International to check on the earliest flight I could get out of Kathmandu for Bangkok. Unfortunately, I

must wait till Wednesday to leave, for I was hoping to transfer my ticket to the Royal Nepalese Airlines and go tomorrow. Anyway, I'm really not that disappointed since we did get away from Shyangboche after last night's snow storm and snow on the field. It dawned beautifully, though I think this afternoon may result in more clouds and cold weather.

After Thai international, I went to Sherpa Hiking House to deliver some letters that my Sherpa gave me. And, buying two tangerines for lunch, I find myself tired (???) and writing these last few notes.

At 1600 (4:00 PM) I awoke from a drowsy sleep with a sharp knocking on my door. It was Ang Pasang from the Sherpa Hiking House who had arranged the plans for my journey. He brought me very sad news. Crushing, in that I hadn't even known the Hillary's were in Nepal. They were. Apparently, Sir Edmund, his wife and a son and daughter were in Pha phlu working on a hospital there. I remember it well since my Sherpa guide specifically pointed in out to me as we rounded the point of a large hill just past Junbesi (Solung). We had seen a STOL type aircraft going into Pha phlu, but we didn't know whether the Hillary's were there or not. As I arrived this morning, my "guide" told me of a crash near the airport - a plane similar to the type I was flying in. He had said six people were killed but hadn't known who. Ang Pasang told me it was Mrs. Hillary and their daughter. I feel stabs of pain and an immense amount of grief for the family who I have never met, yet they were close to me these past two weeks. Mrs. Hillary, particularly, seemed to be a close friend as she had described the "Everest Trek" so wonderfully in her book, *High Time*. A family close, very close to all of Nepal has been torn in two. Ang Pasang tells me Sir Edmund is grieving badly for the loss he has suffered this day. He described the Hillary's as "like gods" to the people, particularly the Sherpas of Nepal. Apparently, a mechanic failed to notice an engine problem, and there was an engine fire in flight - in the mountains that is fatal. You will see by my pictures what a STOL strip in the mountains is really like and why I say it would be fatal. I only pray, and pray hard that the Lord will come and comfort the remaining Hillary's in this, their greatest time of need. One further note which drove the pain somewhat deeper for me was that, as I had previously noted in these memoirs, Ang Pasang is a Sherpa who I thought, after much reflection, had been mentioned by Mrs. Hillary in her book. I reflected correctly, as Ang told me this afternoon. In fact, if I remember right, he is pictured in her book also. He is, of course, shocked, hurt, grieved and truly broken about the loss of such a close twosome of the Hillary's. Apparently, and as had

been mentioned, I believe in her book, Sir Edmund had helped Ang set up his Sherpa Hiking outfit with monetary aid. Indeed, he has worked hard for the Sherpa people, and they love him deeply for it. He struck me initially as having deep, dark set eyes - swarthy. Wrong! It is a characteristic trait which I noticed to varying degrees in most Sherpa men. In fact, I consider him to be a friend and will try to help him in any way that I can. He has proven to be a very fine, competent agent to work with and has at least one very excellent Sherpa guide who I now also consider my friend. Would that such a terrible tragedy had not happened at all and now, particularly in the closing moments of a once-in-a-lifetime experience.