

MARCH 24TH, 25TH, 26TH

MY CURRENT POSITION IS NAMCHE BAZAR!!

I AWOKED ON THE FLIGHT FROM BANGKOK TO KATMANDU JUST IN TIME TO SEE MOUNT EVEREST FROM THE AEROPLANE WINDOW. UNSURPRISINGLY SHE WAS LEVEL WITH THE PLANE AND I COULD SEE HER FAMILIAR ICY PLUME OF WIND STREAMING FROM THE SUMMIT. THIS "PLUME" IS PART OF THE JETSTREAM. THE JETSTREAM ARE EXTREMELY HIGH 100KM WINDS THAT CIRCUMNAVIGATE THE EARTH. WE WERE DEBATING AT DINNER LAST NIGHT HOW THE SUMMIT WINDOW OCCURS, I THOUGHT THAT IT WAS WHEN THE MONSOON WINDS ARRIVED AND THE JETSTREAM CEASED FOR A FEW DAYS AT A TIME CREATING VARIOUS SHORT SUMMIT OPPORTUNITIES IN MAY WHICH IS WHEN MOST PEOPLE TRY AND CLIMB MOUNT EVEREST. RODRIGO JORDAN, OUR TEAM LEADER, DEBATED THAT THESE WINDOWS WHERE THE JETSTREAM CEASES HAPPEN AT VARIOUS TIMES OF THE YEAR (REINHOLD MESSNER MADE THE SUMMIT IN AUGUST) AND IT IS PART OF THE MAGIC AND MYSTERY OF THE MOUNTAINS. AS IM NOT A METEOROLOGIST I COULD NOT DEBATE ANY FURTHER! IF YOU ARE POSITIONED AT CAMP 4, IN GOOD HEALTH AND THE WEATHER IS GOOD YOU HAVE A GREAT CHANCE TO REACH THE SUMMIT. IT IS A FRAGILE WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY AND YOUR MENTAL DISCIPLINE NEEDS TO PREVAIL THE PHYSICAL EXHAUSTION REQUIRED TO TAKE YOU TO THE TOP OF THE WORLD.

UPON ARRIVAL IN KATMANDU I HAD A BURNING THROAT AND BY THAT EVENING I WAS DEFINITELY FLU RIDDEN (HYPOTHETICALLY SPEAKING AND I PRAY THIS DOESN'T HAPPEN, IF I WERE TO GET THIS FLU NEAR OUR SUMMIT WINDOW, IT WOULD MOST PROBABLY COST ME MY CHANCE TO TRY AND REACH THE SUMMIT AS I WOULD BE FORBIDDEN TO CLIMB HIGH WITH THIS COUGH)

THAT AFTERNOON WE HAD BEEN TO A WAREHOUSE IN KATMANDU TO SORT ALL OUR GEAR INTO THE PLASTIC BLUE DRUMS THAT ARE SO CHARACTERISTIC OF THESE EXPEDITIONS. THE DRUMS WERE GOING TO BASECAMP. YOU NEEDED TO SEE TO BELIEVE HOW MUCH EQUIPMENT WE HAD HEADING TO BASECAMP - I CANNOT IMAGINE HOW 20 EXPEDITIONS (THAT IS HOW MANY THERE ARE CLIMBING FROM THE NEPALESE SIDE THIS YEAR) WORTH OF EQUIPMENT WAS GOING TO FIT AT BASECAMP, ITS GOING TO BE A ZOO UP THERE.

I MET OUR BASECAMP MANAGER AND SHERPA PERTEMBA AND HE IS AN IMPRESSIVE MAN. HE WAS SIR CHRIS BONNINGTONS SHERPA ON HIS 1975 EXPEDITION TO CLIMB THE SOUTH WEST FACE OF EVEREST AND PERTEMBA SUCCESSFULLY REACHED THE SUMMIT. AMAZINGLY ENOUGH ALL THEIR EQUIPMENT CAME OVERLAND FROM THE UK - NEPAL, I JUST CANNOT IMAGINE THE LOGISTICAL NIGHTMARE OF ORGANIZING THAT!!! PERTEMBA WAS ALSO INSTRUMENTAL IN CHANGING THE ROUTE UP EVEREST IN THAT WE NOW HAVE 4 CAMPS WHEREAS PREVIOUSLY THERE HAD ALWAYS BEEN SIX CAMPS.

THE DOMESTIC AIRPORT AT KATMANDU WAS CHAOTIC AS USUAL, IM ALWAYS AMAZED THAT THEY CAN ACTUALLY GET PEOPLE AND THEIR LUGGAGE ON THE RIGHT PLANES TO LUKLA WITH SOME FORM OF ORDER. I SAW DEAD CHICKENS GOING PAST UNCOVERED WITH THE HOLD LUGGAGE AND I MADE A MENTAL NOTE TO BE VEGETARIAN FOR THE NEXT TWO MONTHS! ALL OUR GROUP WAS ON SKYLINE AIRLINES TO LUKLA. THE PLANE ARRIVED,

PEOPLE DISEMBARKED, OUR LUGGAGE WAS PILED IN, THE MILITARY, MUCH TO MY ANNOYANCE, THEN PILED IN A TON OF THEIR EQUIPMENT AND FEARING THAT WE WOULD NEVER LEAVE THE GROUND WITH ALL THIS WEIGHT, WE WERE CRAMMED IN LIKE SARDINES AND PROMPTLY AIRBORNE MUCH TO MY AMAZEMENT! THESE FLIGHTS ARE OPERATED FAST AND FURIOUSLY FROM 7AM-MIDDAY AS THE WEATHER THEN BECOMES TOO DANGEROUS TO FLY IN AND OUT OF LUKLA WHICH IS AT 9,000FEET. THE FLIGHT WENT WELL CONSIDERING, AND WE WERE SOON HAMMERING DOWN THE RUNWAY AT LUKLA MUCH TO MY RELIEF!

WE HEADED STRAIGHT TO PARADISE LODGE WHERE ALL OUR TREKKING BAGS WERE DIVIDED UP AMONGST THE PORTERS. PERTEMBA SAYS WE HAVE 200 PORTERS WORTH OF GEAR (IF WE WOULD BE USING PORTERS) WE HAVE 4 TONS OF EQUIPMENT IF YOU CAN BELIEVE IT, AND ITS NOT MY MAKE UP! WE ARE USING YAKS AND THE MAJORITY OF OUR GEAR HAS BEEN FLOWN TO NAMCHE BAZAR BY HELICOPTER(THAT RELIC FROM THE AFGHAN WAR - RATHER OUR EQUIPMENT THAN ME)

MARCELLO IS OUR LOGISTICS ORGANIZER AND AN INVALUABLE MEMBBR OF OUR TEAM. HE IS COMING WITH US TO BASE CAMP TO SET UP OUR COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS (VERY IMPORTANT FOR ME!) AND TO MAKE SURE EVERYTHING IS RUNNING SMOOTHLY, BEFORE HE HEADS BACK TO CHILE TO RUN THE VERY SUCCESSFUL COMPANY VERTICAL THAT HE CO OWNS WITH RODRIGO JORDAN. POOR MARCELLOS BAGS GOT LOST ON THE WAY TO LUKLA SO HE IS WITHOUT ALL HIS TREKKING CLOTHES, I CAN EMPATHIZE WITH THE FRUSTRATION WHEN THIS HAPPENS BUT AMAZINGLY ENOUGH MARCELLO LOOKS REMARKABLY CALM (ITS PROBABLY NOTHING COMPARED TO HANDLING THE LOGISTICS OF THIS TRIP)

ON OUR WALK FROM LUKLA TO PHADKING, WHICH WAS BEAUTIFUL WE PASSED THE IRISH EXPEDITION, ALL DRESSED IN GREEN. THEY ARE TRYING TO PLACE THE FIRST IRISH WOMAN ON THE SUMMIT. THEY HAVE A CREW OF FRIENDS TREKKING IN AND I SPIED THE MOST GIGANTIC AMOUNTS OF BEER FOLLOWING THEM!!

I WAS VERY DISTRESSED TO SEE ONE PORTER CARRYING 3 EXPEDITION BAGS ON HIS BACK, ACCUMALATIVELY THEY MUST HAVE WEIGHED 13OLLBS AND HE WAS ONLY 5 FT 6INCHES TALL. THE POOR PORTER WHO LOOKED TO BE ABOUT 16 YEARS OLD WAS SHEET WHITE AND GASPING UNDER HIS HEAVY LOAD (I ACTUALLY THOUGHT HE WAS GOING TO HAVE A HEART ATTACK) I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO, I OBVIOUSLY COULDN'T OFFER TO CARRY HIS LOAD SO I GAVE HIM SOME MONEY. IF ANYONE READING THIS IS GOING TREKKING OR CLIMBING IN NEPAL PLEASE SPEAK FIRMLY TO YOUR TREKKING COMPANY ORGANIZER IN KATMANDU ABOUT HUMANELY DISTRIBUTING THE WEIGHT THAT THESE PORTERS CARRY. IT IS WITHIN OUR POWER TO INSIST THEY DO NOT CARRY LOADS SUCH AS THE PORTER I WITNESSED ON THE TRAIL TODAY. IT MIGHT MAKE YOUR TRIP TO NEPAL USD 100 MORE THAN U HAD BUDGETED BUT I COULDN'T TREK WITH A CLEAR CONSCIENCE WITH A PORTER CARRYING 3 EXPEDITION BAGS. (IT IS A FACT THAT A LARGE NUMBER OF SHERPAS HAVE CURVATURE OF THE SPINE DUE TO CARRYING VAST WEIGHTS AT AN AGE WHERE THE SPINE IS STILL DEVELOPING) GIVEN THE AMOUNT OF PORTERS OUR EXPEDITION HAS EMPLOYED FOR THE TREKKING I WAS RELIEVED TO SEE THAT THEY CARRIED NO MORE THAN ONE EXPEDITION BAG OR TWO SMALLER BAGS EACH.

ASIDE FROM THE HORRIFIC WEIGHTS, THE PORTERS ARE COMPLETELY ILL EQUIPPED CLOTHING WISE, PLEASE PLEASE IF YOU COME TO NEPAL BRING ANY OLD CLOTHES, SHOES, EQUIPMENT THAT U DON'T NEED OR USE WITH YOU AS IT WOULD MEAN A HUGE AMOUNT TO THE PORTERS HERE. AS I TREK IM THINKING HOW I CAN HELP THESE PORTERS ON AN ONGOING BASIS, I APPRECIATE THAT THIS IS VALUABLE LABOR HERE IN NEPAL BUT I THINK MAYBE WE CAN TRY AND GET SOME FORM OF WEIGHT OR AGE RESTRICTION AND THEN THEY WOULD BE LESS EXPLOITED. ILL KEEP YOU POSTED AS TO WHAT I COME UP WITH ON THIS MATTER.

IM NOW IN PHADKING AS I WRITE THIS, AND WE LEAVE TOMORROW FOR NAMCHE BAZAR, A FOUR HOUR WALK UP THE VALLEY AND SOME 2,000FEET HIGHER. IM JETLAGGED, HAVE FLU AND I STILL HAVE A FLUTTER OF NERVES WHEN I THINK OF THE ICEFALL BUT IM HAPPY, FOCUSED AND DETERMINED.