

APRIL 1ST AND 2ND

DINNER AT DRAGNAK WAS FAIRLY EVENTFUL AS ANDRONICO HAD AGREED TO PURCHASE PERTEMBAS BROTHERS YAK FLEECE WAIST COAT. TERMS WERE AGREED AND ANDRONICO WAS SOON CRUISING AROUND LOOKING LIKE THE LOCAL YAK HERDER, BUT AS HE WENT TO PAY FOR THE WAISTCOAT HE WAS SPORTING, THERE WAS A MISUNDERSTANDING IN CURRENCY CONVERSION! THE WHOLE LODGE WATCHED AS THE JACKET WAS TAKEN OFF AND RETURNED ONLY TO BE BROUGHT 5 MINS LATER. AS WE WATCHED THIS JACKET EXCHANGING HANDS BETWEEN THE TWO OF THEM, THE MOST EXTRAORDINARY NEGOTIATION GAME I'VE EVER WITNESSED, I THOUGHT THE ALTITUDE HAD FINALLY KICKED IN!

WE DEPARTED FOR THE CHOLA PASS AT 6.30AM THE NEXT DAY, IT WAS A LONG DAY AND THE SCENERY WAS STUNNING. THE PASS IS A ROCKY SCRAMBLE WHICH LEADS UP TO A SMALL GLACIER AT 5,400M WHICH WE CROSSED AND THEN DESCENDED SHARPLY INTO DZONGLA. WE ARRIVED AT LOBUCHÉ AFTER 7 HOURS OF WALKING AND WERE SOON TUCKING INTO DAL BAHT AND MARS BARS. THE TWO PEOPLE WHO RAN THE LODGE THAT WE STAYED AT IN LOBUCHÉ THOUGHT THEY WERE THE GUESTS AND WE WERE ALL TREATED WITH A GENERAL ANNOYANCE. THEY TOLD US WHEN WE WERE TO HAVE DINNER AND I COULD SEE THEY GOT OPENLY IRRITATED WHEN I ORDERED TONS OF FOOD! I HAVEN'T COME ACROSS TWO SUCH BOSSY SURLY CHARACTERS IN A WHILE. THE CONSTANT ALCOHOL ON HIS BREATH PROBABLY EXPLAINS THE LONG TERM EFFECT OF LIVING IN LOBUCHÉ. THAT SAID, WE DID END UP STAYING AN EXTRA DAY OBEDIENTLY EATING WHEN TOLD! ERNESTO, PATO, OUR DOCTOR AND I ALL HAD BAD COUGHS SO WE THOUGHT WE WOULD STAY LOWER DOWN FOR ONE MORE DAY WHILST THE REST OF OUR GROUP WENT ONTO BASECAMP.

ON OUR REST DAY AT LOBUCHÉ WE DID A SHORT, SHARP ACCLIMATIZATION HIKE TO 5,300M AND RETURNED TO THE LODGE FOR LUNCH. THE DISCOVERY CHANNEL TEAM WERE THERE AND I WAS TALKING TO HECTOR, ONE OF THE BEST CLIMBERS IN MEXICO. HE HAS MADE THE SUMMIT OF EVEREST TWICE, AND I WAS CHATTING TO AN AUSTRALIAN GUY CALLED ANDREW WHO WAS VERY UNASSUMING AND I SOON FOUND OUT FROM MY BARAGE OF QUESTIONS TO HIM THAT HE HAS CLIMBED 10 OF THE 8,000 M PEAKS WITHOUT OXYGEN OR O<sub>2</sub> AS IM MEANT TO SAY IN MOUNTAINEERING LINGO! THEY ARE CLIMBING EVEREST FOR A DOCUMENTARY FOR THE DISCOVERY CHANNEL. THEY HAVE A SKIER CALLED SHANNA WITH THEM WHO ALSO PLANS TO TRY AND SUMMIT WITH HECTOR AND ANDREW. IM GLAD THERE IS ANOTHER GIRL CLIMBING AMONGST SUCH ELITE MALE CLIMBERS AS I AM, I FEEL LIKE I CAN RELATE TO HER!!!

WE LEFT LOBUCHÉ LATE MORNING ON MARCH 3RD AND ARRIVED IN BASECAMP 3 AND A HALF HOURS LATER. ON OUR APPROACH TO BASECAMP WE PASSED THE REMAINS OF THE HELICOPTER THAT CRASHED HERE LAST YEAR, (NEEDLESS TO SAY IT IS ONE OF THOSE RELICS FROM THE AFGHAN WAR). SHORTLY AFTER

PASSING THIS MORBID WRECKAGE WE ARRIVED INTO BASECAMP AND THERE WAS THE CHILEAN FLAG AND A HUGE BANCO DE CHILE LOGO WHICH MARKED OUR HOME FOR THE NEXT 6 WEEKS. EVERYTHING IS GREAT, WE HAVE A BIG DOME MESS TENT AND A COMMUNICATIONS TENT WHICH IM THE MOST REGULAR VISITOR TO! WE ALL HAVE OUR OWN TENTS AND ITS INTERESTING TO SEE THE 4 TONS OF EQUIPMENT THAT WE HAVE LAID OUT!

TOMORROW WE HAVE OUR PUJA CEREMONY WHERE ALL OUR ICE AXES AND CRAMPONS ARE BLESSED FOR OUR UP AND COMING CLIMB. THE LAMA WILL COME AND BLESS OUR EXPEDITION ON SAGARMARHTA. THERE WILL BE LOTS OF JUNIPER BURNING AND RICE AND FLOUR THROWING, BUT I WILL TELL U ALL ABOUT IT TOMORROW.

THE ICE FALL OPENED TODAY AND WE ARE PLANNING A PRACTICE TRIP INTO THE ICEFALL ON 5TH MARCH, IT LOOKS SCARILY MAGNIFICENT IF THAT IS THE RIGHT DESCRIPTION OF IT, I KEEP GAZING UP AT IT IN BOTH AWE AND TERROR. I HAVE A SLIGHT HEADACHE BUT OTHERWISE AM FEELING GOOD AND THE TEAM FEELS VERY BONDED!