



We began taking the drug Diamox the day before flying into Lukla as a preventative to altitude sickness and this worked well. Other than some breathlessness and mild headaches we trekked strongly. From our base camp, Purnori towered 1900 meters above us and all we could do on our first few days was simply gaze up at it in awe.

We then began a series of acclimatization climbs up to ABC (5700m) and Camp 1 (C1) at 6100m with the objective of eventually get to C2 (6600m) from which to the summit was only 550 metres higher. It was during these acclimatization runs that I become concerned about the lack of basic skills of the team. I got comments that included "...why do you always bother holding your ice axe?" and "...I find holding an ice axe throws me off balance...". I never went above the snow line without holding an ice axe and it aided balance. But the best comment of all, after climbing a ten metre, ninety degree ice wall below Camp 1, was "Did you use your ice axe to climb up that section?". The same person then proceeded to have their pack

hauled by a Sherpa and "climbed" by pulling on their jumar up the fixed line.

The higher up the mountain we climbed, the more Everest, Lhotse and the Western Cwm Glacier and southern route to Everest revealed themselves. It was spectacular scenery. We could see the treacherous Khumbu icefall including the Lhotse face leading up to the South Col. From C1 we heard the jet stream striking Everest and saw the plume it generated. At sunset we were treated to amazing light shows of orange, pink and red rays of light striking the snow covered peaks all around us. It was awe-inspiring and bloody cold!

To get to C2 we had to cross large crevasses. The highlight involved a fifteen metre crevasse and four dubious ladders tied together. Many people simply crawled across them. Then the roadblocks started to develop. The Sherpas were still fixing lines and the inexperienced climbers held things up. I kept getting showered with chunks of ice from people hacking off bits the size of dinner plates. Together with one of

our Sherpas, I decided to drop back at the end of the queue and avoid all the stuff coming down. I vowed to be in front of the group the following day.

We awoke to a glorious summit day with little wind and no clouds. It was a warm day considering we were at 6600m. The three layers under my Gore-Tex pants were almost too warm. By 7am everyone was on the move and primed for a summit push. Pumped up by two energy gels and black coffee, I raced to the front of the queue to avoid the previous days problems. But we seemed to be in the same situation. There was a hold up and the Sherpas were still fixing ropes. As I reached Jay Riley at the front we estimated we were at 6,900m and just 250 vertical metres from the summit. I also noticed that there were two climbers ahead of us, Swedes, Dennis Jonsson and Jonas Alhman. As we approached a twelve metre ice wall things came to a complete standstill. The Sherpas spent a good twenty minutes trying to fix ropes and moved above us.

The Swedes then proceeded towards the vertical ice wall with Dennis going first. He tugged at the rope and leaned back pulling on his jumar with both hands but was not progressing. He managed to get half way up the ice wall and after ten minutes he stopped. It was taking too long. Time passed and the Swedes were at a standstill on the ice wall. As people shouted for them to get moving, others yelled "...Dennis, use your ice axe!" which was strapped to his pack. To the astonishment of everyone he declared "...I don't know how to use my ice axe...". Then it was the turn of the second Swede below him, Jonas. He swung his ice axe with one hand but could not make it stick. His poor foot-work meant he could not get the front points of his crampons to stick to the ice. He was all over the place.

Then Jonas come off. He lost his footing and started swinging

on the fixed line. This caused the other climber above him to also loose his footing and he was off! So we now had two climbers in free air swinging wildly above us hanging from the fixed line. As they tried to get their footing back, the incredible happened. The snow anchor above the Swedes "popped" high in the air and they took a wild ten metre fall landing right down near us. Bang! Smash! To the sounds of "...my ankle...my ankle..." we simply stood there amazed. As people began asking if they were ok, I looked up at the next piece of pro and realised that they had severely shock-loaded the ice screw above me. This ice screw now had twelve people potentially hanging from it! Shock and horror filled my body. As I screamed for people below me to take their load off the rope, I removed my jumar from the fixed line. Better to be solo than to be on a rope that's about to fail I thought! But there was worse to come. The fall of the Swedes had started a chain reaction and had pulled the Sherpas leading higher up off their feet. To my complete astonishment, and to the astonishment of all others, a light red-suited figure appeared flying at high speed over the ice cliff above us. Making a "whoosh" type sound they were sliding on their backside. After falling off the ten meter ice cliff they began skipping at very high speed across the surface of the forty five degree snow/ice slope below us. My heart stopped. Despite people yelling "...self arrest! self arrest!..." they continued to fall at the speed of a

