

# FLAGCRAFT INTERNATIONAL TOP OF THE WORLD EXPEDITION 2010

## MT EVEREST 29029' / 8848 M

FlagCraft International Managing Director, Tony A Hampson-Tindale departed South Africa on March 28 2010 to climb Mt Everest, 29029' / 8848 m. Pending a summit of Mt Everest, Vinson Massif, 16067' / 4897 m, Antarctica, is targeted for December 2010, to complete his quest to climb the seven highest continental summits in the world. To date only 205 known climbers have achieved this goal.

Continental summits climbed to date are:

- i. Kilimanjaro, Tanzania, Africa, 19340' / 5895 m – 2005.
- ii. Elbrus, Russia, Europe 18481' / 5633 m – 2007.
- iii. Denali, Alaska, North America, 20320' / 6194 m – 2008.
- iv. Aconcagua, Argentina, South America, 22840' / 6962 m – 2008.
- v. Carstensz Pyramid, Indonesia, Asia, 16024' / 4884 m – 2009.

The purpose of this article is to provide a daily chronicle of progress, however postings will likely be only every three to four or up to ten day intervals, on account of the lack of access to the email facilities at Base Camp. Pending adequate acclimatisation to the high altitude, the summit bid will in all probability, take place between May 10 – 26 2010, during an opening of an appropriate weather window. At an altitude of nearly 9 km high, that is five and a half miles, the height at which intercontinental airliners fly, the weather tends to be a trifle fickle.



Mount Everest: the South Col climbing route from Base Camp to the summit as viewed from Mt Pumori.

### Day 1: Sunday, March 28

Left Johannesburg on Singapore Airlines en route to Kathmandu via Singapore.

### Day 2: Monday, March 29

Arrived in Kathmandu, Nepal midday after a five hour flight over, firstly, the greenery of South East Asia, followed by the progressively brown and yellow of the Indian sub-continent. Met by New Zealand-based Adventure Consultants head guide Mike Roberts and transported to The Shanker Hotel.

Explored the adjacent city areas in the later afternoon.

**Day 3: Tuesday, March 30**

Met remainder of climbing team:

- Mandy Ramsden, a banker from South Africa, for whom a success on Everest would represent attainment of the goal to summit all of the world's seven continental eminences;
- Vanessa O'Brien, an American, but now living in Hong Kong, also a banker, whose objective was to climb to Camp 2;
- James Haydock, a Britton living in Ireland, with a property vocation and a successful summiting of several of the continental high points behind him; and
- Lak Dorje Sherpa, assistant guide and seventeen times summitter of Mt Everest.
- Myself, a New Zealander and naturalised South African, for whom a topping out on Mt Everest would leave only Vinson Massif in Antarctica to complete the personal goal of climbing the seven summits.

Spent the rest of the day sourcing a few climbing related items in Thamel, the main retail district.

**Day 4: Wednesday, March 31**

Did the touristy thing of visiting some of the more prominent Buddhist temples and monasteries. Fortunately, a threatened city-wide strike by the Maoists was averted, which would have otherwise caused a major disruption. The Nepalese are particularly friendly and courteous and, despite the dusty roads, the city is clean and acceptably orderly.

**Day 5 - 13: Thursday, April 1**

Up at 03h30 for a 08h30 departure, forty minute flight to Lukla, high in the Himalaya.

Flew over forests on very steep snow-capped mountain sides. On landing, had lunch at the picturesque Paradise Tea House, followed by a 3-hour trek to Phakding. In most places the route was steep to very steep, with heavy traffic of laden shaggy-haired yaks and small-in-stature porters carrying impressively heavy loads. In one case, typical of many, I saw a porter weighing 50 kgs at best, carrying 4 climbing kit bags, whose combined weight would probably have been close to 80 kgs. These people are tough!

After lunch we, being the 4 climbers together with 13 trekkers who were walking to Base Camp, climbed 200 m up an adjacent mountain side to visit a monastery and gained the benefit of the additional altitude for acclimatisation. The old mountain adage of climbing high and sleeping low is vital to avoid AMS, i.e. Acute Mountain Sickness, which manifests as HACE, i.e. High Altitude Cerebral Oedema, where the brain cells fill with fluid and burst and/or HAPE, i.e. High Altitude Pulmonary Oedema, where the lungs of the hapless climber become fluid-saturated and the victim literally drowns. To be avoided!

It took 10 days to climb to Base Camp at 5400 m. Initially the lodges in which we stayed were basic, with ablution facilities attached to the sleeping quarters. By the time our last overnight was reached at Lobuche, pit latrines were the order of the day, with no washing facilities. As we left the vegetation zone, building construction changed from wood to fitted stone blocks with corrugated iron roofs. In this environment, functionality is the key and keeping warm is vital, such that interior ventilation is non-existent. This produces an ideal environment for respiratory ailments which are collectively known as the Khumbu Cough, a dry wracking bark, which will likely last the duration of the trip.

To avoid the KC, I wore surgical masks to minimise the ingress of dust and dry molecules of yak dung and pedestrian spit. During meal times, I similarly wore a mask and, at date of writing, April 17, was the only one of our contingent to avoid contracting a snuffly cold. Watch this space.

From Lukla, the steep wooded trails gave way to more gentle inclines completely devoid of significant vegetation, above which towered the most magnificent mountain peaks on this planet. One simply runs out of superlatives to try, unsuccessfully, to describe them. The size, grandeur, height and profile do, in reality, leave you feeling as though you are entering the realm of God.



Suspension bridge crossing in the lower Himalaya.

Several times during the trek in, we sought the blessings and prayers of Lamas en route. These elderly robed men, with tanned, lined faces radiated wisdom and a degree of peace and serenity so noticeably absent from the world in which I live. These visits were typified by introductions, chanting, the burning of incense, the throwing of rice, prayers, and, finally, the tying of a red silken chord around one's neck and the issue of a special written prayer to keep us safe. Collectively, a very sobering experience.

**Day 14: Saturday, April 10**

Arrived at Base Camp at midday, after a four and a half hour trek up the Khumbu Valley, which is a boulder-strewn, near waterless space between the surrounding peaks. Base Camp is located on the residual moraine at the bottom of the receding Khumbu Icefall, a 700 m vertical tangle of giant ice blocks moving at the rate of a metre per day, which makes it the most life-consuming portion of the climb to the top. If you can imagine a nuked building site, populated by a couple of hundred multi-coloured variant sized and shaped expedition tents, where the horizontal plane changes on a daily basis, as the underlying fractured ice sheet moves and melts, you will have an image of my home for the next two months.



The Khumbu Icefall with Buddhist Prayer flags as viewed from Base Camp.

**Day 15: Sunday, April 11**

Rest day.

**Day 16: Monday, April 12**

Sunny no wind. Practiced ice climbing skills on a 15 m high serac at the edge of the Khumbu Icefall – climbing on jumars and technical ice axes, and abseiling with and without tools. Our sherpas have begun to carry gear to Camp 1 and Camp 2. Snowed during the night with periodic thunder and lightning.

**Day 17: Tuesday, April 13**

Practiced ice climbing skills.

**Day 18: Wednesday, April 14**

Further day of practicing ice climbing skills.

**Day 19: Thursday, April 15**

Up 02H15 and left Base Camp at 03H45 for 350 m vertical climb half way up the Khumbu Icefall aka The Dragons Lair, a series of jumbling, fractured ice blocks consisting of seracs the size of houses, crevasses and vertical ice walls. Reached our objective at 08H00 and after a 15 min rest and relaxation break started down. Two of our team stayed back in a supposedly safe spot and narrowly missed being taken out by an avalanche. Icefalls are great places to get through quickly.

The return to Base Camp was incredibly hot on account of the strong sunlight being refracted off the multifaceted ice blocks. The round trip took eight and a quarter hours, however one of the team was adversely affected by the temperature and took an additional hour. She was subsequently diagnosed with potential pulmonary oedema.

**Day 20: Friday, April 16**

Rest day. Visited photographic exhibition of five time Mt Everest summiter and professional photographer David Breshears. Several avalanches during the night.

**Day 21: Saturday, April 17**

Rest day due to all team members, except myself, having colds.

**Day 22: Sunday, April 18**

Rest day. Team member suffering from potential pulmonary oedema has been persuaded by the team doctor to abort the expedition.

Packed for early morning departure for Camp 1 at the top of the Khumbu icefall.

**Day 23: Monday, April 19**

Up 01H45 away 03H00 and arrived at Camp 1, 19500' / 5900 m, having climbed through the entire Khumbu Icefall. Several 25 m ice walls were climbed, some on ropes and others on vertical ladders screwed to the ice faces. Weather good. Had lunch, kipped till dinner and then slept for twelve hours.



Camp 1 on the Khumbu Glacier at the top of the Icefall.

**Day 24: Tuesday, April 20**

Left Camp at 07H15 and climbed to just below Camp 2, which is on a fractured glacier with generally small crevasses – south east ridge of Mt Everest on the left and Mt Lhotse on the right. Cannot really believe I am actually here. Returned to Camp after absence of three and a half hours. Sunny with snow in the afternoon with moderate intermittent wind bursts.



Ladder crossing over a Khumbu Glacier crevasse.

**Day 25: Wednesday, April 21**

Left Camp 1 and climbed to Camp 2, 21000' / 6400 m, at the upper end of the Western CWM – copious small crevasses, ladder crossings. Elevations moderate. Slept all afternoon.

**Day 26: Thursday, April 22**

Up at 08H00 and away 09H30 for a two and a quarter hour climb to top of Western CWM above of which a combination of the climbing companies' staff were fixing ropes up the Lhotse Face – looks like a solid wall of blue glass for the next 700 m to Camp 3. Returned to Camp 2 after acclimatisation break, lunch and slept for most of rest of the afternoon.

**Day 27: Friday, April 23**

Up at 08H00 away at 09H45 for two hour climb to bergschrund at bottom of Lhotse face elevation 6750 m. Two stunning, enormous dragon's lair caves at the base. Had fifteen minute break then forty five minute return to Camp 2. Sherpa's still installing ropes up the Lhotse Face. Intermittent cloud / clear with moderate temperatures. Set up gear for early ± five hour return to Base Camp. The ambiance is stunning.

**Day 28: Saturday, April 24**

Up at 03H45 left Camp 2 at 04H25 and arrived at Base Camp at 10H25. Five hours being the expected transit time. Met sick Adventure Consultant Sherpa on way up who we brought down to Base Camp. Weather clear. Ice fall had taken massive avalanche, which had to be re-roped by icefall doctors, as avalanche created tension release. Notwithstanding the volatility of the icefall, the climb is both demanding and fun – very beautiful with the blue of the ice melding through to white. Three rest days in Base Camp programmed before return up the icefall, Camp 1, Camp 2 followed by a single night at Camp 3, 700 m, up the Lhotse face.

**Day 29: Sunday, April 25**

Rest day. Washed clothes and hung out to dry. Within 20 minutes the water had drained to the bottom and formed icicles. Typically at Base Camp mid to late morning, temperatures will be in the early 20 ° C, which drop to below -25°C at night. Diurnal fluctuations in excess of 50°C are common. During the night an avalanche wiped out part of the tested route up the icefall – an expected occurrence given the 1 m per day flow rate of the glacier.

It is 16H00 and a chopper had just casevaced out a climber with a broken leg – really tough luck. It has started to snow again, which graphically highlights the relief of the surrounding mountains.

**Day 30: Monday, April 26**

Rest day. Wrote up journal in the morning and slept in the afternoon. Weather clear in morning, cold with light snow.

**Day 31: Tuesday, April 27**

Packed gear in preparation for early departure en route to Camp 3. Expect one night at Camp 1, one night at Camp 2 depending on weather and one night at Camp 3 at 7350 m, one night at Camp 2 and then return to Base Camp. 60 cm snow forecast for tomorrow.

Can expect next communication on May 4.

**Day 32: Wednesday, April 28**

Up at 02H45 and away at 04H00. Khumbu Icefall had sustained two major collapses since last visit. Got to Camp 1 at 09H30 and drank, snacked and rested until 10H15 and decision was taken to proceed to Camp 2 with its preferable facilities. Arrived at 14H00 feeling somewhat tuckered. Tough day with very high temperatures, i.e. 28°C. Lunched and slept for three hours. Altitude gain of 1105 m.

**Day 33: Thursday, April 29**

Rest day. Packed gear for light carry to Camp 3, 350 m elevation to the bergschrund and then 700 m up the Lhotse face. Expecting a very tough day, possibly 12 hours of climbing. Weather largely clear.

**Day 34: Friday, April 30**

Up at 05H30, but after breakfast and review of the latest snowfall on the Lhotse face, Mike and Lak Dorje decided to call a rest day to let the snow consolidate. The discovery of the body of a Khazikstani climber lost in an avalanche on the Lhotse Face last year, may well have had some influence – very sad. I was only advised of the corpse when we got back to Base Camp, which was very irritating – would have otherwise insisted that we sled the body down to Camp 1, where it could have been picked up by a chopper and given a proper burial.

Went for a wander up the morain scree before lunch then kipped in the afternoon – will hopefully be off to Camp 3 tomorrow. Met a very fit 37 year old ex U.S Army Special Services operative, Derek, who may have to go down on account of developing suspected asthma.

**Day 35: Saturday, May 1**

Left Camp 2 at 07H00 for Camp 3 arriving 15H00, i.e. eight hours. Two hours to bergschrund, followed by six torturous hours very steep ice climbing on fixed ropes using jumars. 10 m climb along and up bergschrund face, and then for the most part solid blue glass ice. Maximum energy required. Regrettably too demanding hanging off the side of the mountain to take photos – hopefully take some on the summit climb. Camp 3 is carved into a severe slope .... with a 700 m drop below. Ate little, but slept well. Minor brief headache. Weather was clear with periodic whiteouts.



The Lhotse Ice Wall showing the Yellow Band centre, and to the left, the Geneva Spur, with the bergschrund running horizontal at the base of the icefall.

**Day 36: Sunday, May 2**

Left Camp 3 for Camp 2 at 08H10 and arrived at 11H10, i.e. three hours. Semi whiteout for most of the descent with gusting to strong winds with moderate snow. Descended on figure eights the whole way. Conditions difficult, but provided good experience. Rested for the remainder of the day. No altitude problems other than not being able to eat enough – very sensitive to any strong flavoured foods.

**Day 37: Monday, May 3**

Up at 03H45 and left Camp 2 for Base Camp at 05H10 and arrived approximately 11H00 after extended stop at bottom of popcorn section of Khumbu Icefall, so named for fluffy appearance of the fractured ice – was met by camp manager, Caroline, camp Sirdir, Ang Tshiring and two of the kitchen staff with hot tea and cold juice – very well received. Had sushi for lunch, washed clothes and slept for two hours before supper. Slept for ten solid hours that night.

**Day 38: Tuesday, May 4**

Rest day. Washed and dried clothes and packed gear for pre-summit low altitude R & R at Periche, 1200 m down the mountain, for which we leave tomorrow. Really looking forward to the rest and increase in oxygen.

**Day 39: Wednesday, May 5**

Left Base Camp at 08H30 for Pheriche 4240 m and arrived with James at 14H00, i.e. five and a half hours. Trip from Base Camp to Lobuche two hours – scree and morrain in untidy piles all the way. Quite cold, overcast with light snow. Increasing vegetation to Thokla with steep mountain sides beyond river crossing and into valley containing Pheriche, a cute little village full of Yaks and friendly dogs – stayed at the Himalayan Hotel – very clean, good standard food and freezing except in the dining room. Sited in broad green valley with majestic snow capped mountains all around.

**Day 40: Thursday, May 6**

Slept for twelve hours, had breakfast and then spent three hours wandering up and down the river bed looking for signs of wildlife – sighted finches, sacred ibis, a falcon and a lapped faced vulture. Cadis fly larvae in the river – apparently small fish present, but did not see any. Reputedly there is snow leopard higher up, thar and some antelope. Weather mainly overcast with mist and snow in the afternoon.

**Day 41: Friday, May 7**

Slept for twelve hours then climbed 300 m up both sides of the valley. Only sign of wildlife being droppings of some small antelope. Cold and overcast. Chris, the camp doctor, having lost a considerable amount of weight for some undefined reason, elected to go down and left this morning to return to the United Kingdom.



Pheriche Valley – a candidate for a second Middle Earth.

**Day 42: Saturday, May 8**

Slept for eleven and a half hours. Went for two and a half hour walk up the mountain for +300 m vertical. Many Buddhist stupas and great views of Ama Dablam towering white over the brown, pasture and shrub covered slopes. Weather cool / cold with intermittent clouds of mist.

Saw first newspaper in over seven weeks – great news – the Nepalese Maoists have withdrawn their 06H00 – 08H00 and 18H00 – 20H00 curfews as a consequence of a spontaneous counter demonstration in Kathmandu of hundreds of thousands of Nepalese civilians – hopefully peace will prevail.

**Day 43: Sunday, May 9**

Slept for twelve hours and then climbed 650 m up the opposite mountainside for stunning panoramic views of the mountains, lunched and messed around for the afternoon.

**Day 44: Monday, May 10**

Slept for twelve hours – again. Took a two hour walk up the river. Lunched and sent emails in the afternoon. Returning to Base Camp tomorrow.

**Day 45: Tuesday, May 11**

Usual sleep. Left Pheriche at 07H25 and walked alone to Base Camp and arrived at 14H15, i.e. six hours and fifteen minutes. It was good to have some time to myself. Clear with mild breeze. Return

trip was uneventful. Great unobstructed views of the surrounding mountains. Now only have to wait for an open weather window before striking for the summit.

**Day 46: Wednesday, May 12**

Clear, but windy. Did washing. Mike was trying to rectify a computer problem so that we can get weather forecast. May set off for summit tomorrow. Seven day round trip.

As a result of the narrow window expected to open on May 16, the decision was taken to wait until the next weather window forecast for May 22 / 23 – expect a further six days in Base Camp.

**Day 47: Thursday, May 13**

Practical instruction on use of bottled oxygen at high altitude in the morning – will be 4 l / minute when climbing and 1 l / minute when sleeping from Camp 3. In the afternoon we went through a detailed analysis of the route from Camp 3 to Camp 4 and then Camp 4 to the summit ....and return.

We have new neighbours – an oriental group, whose national identity shall remain unspecified, have felt duty bound to shatter the previous monotonous silence by the inclusion of the putter putter of a generator – the only one in Base Camp – every other team uses environmentally friendly solar panels. Serious thought has been given to figuratively, popping an RPG into the offending device, or on a more passive note, administering a teaspoon of sugar to the fuel tank.

**Day 48: Friday, May 14**

Left Base Camp at 09H00 for acclimatisation walk to Kalla Patthar peak, 5550 m, near the village of Gorak Shep – took three hours to reach the summit. Great, somewhat intimidating view of the top of Mt Everest. Very cold on top, misted over on the way down. Found the monument to Bruce Herrod who I knew and who perished on the Hillary Step on May 25 1996. Draped a string of Buddhist prayer flags around and added a stone to his stupa. Returned to Base Camp a little before 15H00.



The stupa memorial to Bruce Herrod at Gorak Shep. The loneliness of silent places.

**Day 49: Saturday, May 15**

Clear, windless morning. Spent most of the day reading up on various climbing techniques. Long range weather forecast indicates May 23 to be suitable, which means we would have to leave on May 19.

**Day 50: Sunday, May 16**

Perfect weather, however change in forecast ....the window has moved out to May 27, with 20 kph winds, which is the max for safe climbing at 29000' – also the possibility of this scenario materialising is not encouraging. As always we are in the hands of the Goddess of the Mountain.

Went for a walk to the lower levels of the trail to the Pumori Base Camp, and then did a preliminary pack of gear to be taken to Camp 2 tomorrow, in preparation for when summit conditions appear favourable.

**Day 51: Monday, May 17**

The day started with two choppers fetching the recently discovered remains of two climbers killed on the mountain in previous years, their bodies suspended on long ropes hanging beneath the machines. One was a Swiss national, the identity of the other unknown. It happens!

Clear and hot 28°C. A number of teams had climbers summit today and we are presently awaiting interpretation and collation of several forecasting services reports to decide if we are going up tomorrow.

Just received favourable weather reports – we are off tomorrow. Will be up at 01H45 and off at 03H00 for Camp 2 for two nights, one night at Camp 3 and expect to summit out of Camp 4 on the South Col, weather permitting, either May 22 or 23, then down to Camp 2 for one night followed by a five hour trip to Base Camp via the Khumbu Icefall.

**Day 52: Tuesday, May 18**

Up at 01H45 and left at 03H00 as scheduled for Camp 2 bypassing Camp 1. Major structural rearrangement of icefall as a result of avalanches. Arrived at Camp 2 at 13H30, in very hot conditions and absolutely flattened. Weather clear with moderate wind.

Conflicting weather forecasts: Fagen - US versus Swiss Service – will have to wait until tomorrow.

**Day 53: Wednesday, May 19**

Rest day – clear weather with light winds.

Packed and rested in afternoon.

Expect to depart for Camp 3 at 05H45 having risen at 03H45.

**Day 54: Thursday, May 20**

Left for Camp 3 at 05H45 and arrived ± 11H45 after very tough climb up the Lhotse Ice Face, the site of many climbing tragedies on account of the up to 60° and vertical blue ice walls. Weather clear with periodic bursts of blizzard, which made climbing and visuals very difficult. Fortunately, only needed to head up vertically! Notwithstanding that one is climbing on fixed ropes and ascenders, a careless slip can result in fatal consequences. Furthermore, the physical demands are in the realm of the truly extreme – not fanciful. On arrival at Camp 3, switched onto bottled oxygen, which made an unbelievable difference.

**Day 55: Friday, May 21**

Left Camp 3 for Camp 4 on the South Col at 07H00 arrived five and a half hours later at 12H30. Weather clear providing amazing views of the surrounding peaks, on most of which we have a reversed perspective, i.e. now, looking down on them! Incredible difference climbing on oxygen – moving like a Panther! The route above Camp 3 consisted of a one and a half hour +45° ice climb, with an ascending spiral traverse up a basin, followed by a largely rock climb up and over the Yellow Band, a golden rock coloured fractured granite composite feature projecting out of the ice. A further upward inclined ascent across another predominantly snow covered basin and then a fairly severe climb up and over the Geneva Spur, a very steep rocky ridge named in honour of the Swiss climbing team, who showed remarkably good sportsmanship in leaving surplus supplies on the South Col for

the 1953 British Hunt Team, whose second lead climber, New Zealander Edmund Hillary and co-climber Nepalese Tensing Norgay Sherpa, were the first to summit Mt Everest.

Beyond the top of the Geneva Spur, we skirted a steep rock face that leads onto the South Col proper, representing a saddle between the majestic Mt Everest towering 3000' / 898 m above and the smaller, but only marginally less impressive Mt Lhotse on the opposite side. On the North side of the South Col is the sheer 10000' / 3050 m drop of the Kangshung Face offering a speedy entrance into Tibet, with the equally sheer 8000' / 2400 m drop down the Lhotse Face on the other. Not a locality for sleep walking.

Had a brief lunch and went to bed at 14H00. Rose at 19H20 – could not sleep!



The Khumbu Glacier viewed from the Geneva Spur.

**Day 56: Saturday, May 22**

Left the South Col at 20H20 on the Friday night having had no sleep and dressed like Father Christmas in my red and black, heavily padded down climbing suit and pack weighing around 12 kg. It was pitch black and snowing with a light wind.

The access route lead across and up the transition from the South Col to the Triangular Face, a loose rock and scree snow covered slope, at the top of which lay The Balcony, a recess etched into the mountain, frequently used, but not in our case, as a half way resting place for climbers.

Mt Everest, bathed in the glow of a near full moon, then showed its formidable continece and presented three impossibly steep ascending razor back ridges culminating in the South Summit. Words now are inadequate. Down a snow covered rocky defile, with the world dropping away on either side of the infamous Hillary Step, an exhausting 10 m rock wall with the precipitous Kangshung Face to the right and the South West Face of Mt Everest to the left. Stopped for a moment and offered a

few words at the spot where Bruce Herrod had died fourteen years previously. A series of small corniced ridges followed, leading to the strings of Buddhist prayer flags festooning the actual summit of the illusive Mt Everest. There I stood together with some 15 – 20 other climbers, all taking photos and looking a combination of exhausted and elated. It was 06H22.

For 20 minutes I lay in the snow collecting my physical resources, then snapped the requisite photos and started my descent in the face of around 30 climbers, support lead climbers and sherpas. There are generally only a maximum of five days of weather windows in a season and currently less than 200 climbers and support sherpas actually make it to the top – the attrition rate is high. The climb from the South Col took 10 hours up and four hours down, including a twenty minute hold up on the Hillary Step, giving way to ascending climbers and a 10 minute break chatting to other climbers on their way up. Delicious consuming sleep filled the rest of the day.



Feeling on top of the world – the summit of Mount Everest.

#### **Day 57: Sunday, May 23**

Up early and left Camp 4 at 08H30 for Camp 2. Repelled and abseiled down the Lhotse Face proper, arriving at Camp 2 at 12H30. A bit spooky as I lost my climbing helmet when it was accidentally knocked out of my hand during a break on the mountain and just as I was abseiling down into the bergshrunn crevasse at the bottom of the Lhotse Face, a shower of rock shot past my unprotected head at meteoric velocity. Climbing a mountain is nothing if one does not safely get down to where you started. To quote the American climber Ed Viesturs, "Reaching the summit is optional. Getting down is mandatory."



Mount Everest / Chomolungma, Goddess Mother of the Earth, viewed from Camp 4 on the South Col.

**Day 58: Monday, May 24**

Left Camp 2 at 05H20 and arrived at Base Camp 12H30, i.e. seven hours. Light to medium snow from Camp 2 to Camp 1, which corniced over the crevasses, of which there were many. Very dangerous. Partial white out. The Khumbu Ice Fall was particularly demanding and had changed fundamentally from when we came up. Many avalanches had taken place. The three sections of ladder at the top of the icefall were virtually unusable and I accordingly climbed down the ice face via a split off about to collapse section at the top, which enabled me to angle down using a poorly positioned rope. Descent was hurried due to unstable nature of the now tumbled down seracs, though in effect, progress was very slow due to much of the original route having become buried by avalanches or obscured by the newly fallen snow. Packed up for early departure to Namche Bazaar the next morning, en route to Kathmandu.

**Day 59: Tuesday, May 25**

Left Base Camp at 06H30, arrived Namche Bazaar 19H00, a + 42 km push, i.e., in excess of a standard marathon. Stopped at Pheriche for lunch at 11H45. Started to rain lightly from Tengboche Monastery two hours out. Ran for much of the last 2 - 3 hours. Stayed at Khumbu Lodge and collected an old ice axe, ice tools and goggles dating back at least fifty years, which I had purchased at a local shop and left with Pemba Sherpa, the Manager, now nearly two months previously.

Had interesting discussion with an American, Steve and a Canadian, Warren over dinner. Showered and off to bed for a very poor sleep.



An unknown peak above Pheriche.

**Day 60: Wednesday, May 26**

Left Namche Bazaar ± 07H30 and arrived Lukla 13H30 – six hours. Rained much of the way. Stayed at Paradise Lodge. Dawa, the manageress had organised a flight to Kathmandu for early next morning. Joined later in the day by James whose exit from Base Camp two days earlier had been delayed by somewhat over subscribing to celebratory mind splitting beverages the night before departure.



A painting of Sir Edmund Hillary in the Paradise Lodge, Lukla.

In the lodge is a reproduction painting of Sir Edmund Hillary, who's Sir Edmund Hillary Himalayan Trust raised significant funds for the building of much needed suspension walkway bridges, schools and medical clinics throughout the Khumbu region. He is revered by the Sherpa population as virtually a deity.

**Day 61: Thursday, May 27**

Departed Lukla 07H30 arrived Kathmandu 07H55. Collected from the airport by the travel agent and taken to The Shanker Hotel, showered, went for deep tissue massage - fantastic, lunch, shopping and off to bed. Discovered on weighing myself that I had lost 13 kg during the climb – and that was five days after summiting. Picked up a particularly virulent strain of biological warfare strength stomach upset, which left little time for sleep that night.

**Day 62: Friday, May 28**

Left for an overnight in Singapore at the York Hotel, en route to New Zealand to be with my sons for their twenty fourth and twenty first birthdays on May 30 and June 1 respectively, and subsequently back to Singapore, onward to Phuket, Thailand for six days of R & R and then the return flight to Johannesburg where I arrived on June 11 2010.

**I would like to acknowledge with sincere thanks and appreciation, the valuable contribution of Singapore Airlines and Silkair. As part of the Group's policy of involvement in supporting notable or unusual sporting endeavors, the airlines transported all of my climbing gear which totaled 66 kg, on a highly favourable basis.**

**Postscript**

Climbing Mt Everest represents the most physically and mentally demanding activity in which I have ever indulged. Success is materially influenced by one's ability to maintain a laser like focus on the primary objective and not to be distracted by either the evolving and often near overwhelming group dynamics of life at Base Camp or influences in the outside world. Without denigrating the very real significance of climbing Mt Everest, the actual technical demands of the route via the South Col are not really excessive, however the sheer magnitude of Mt Everest is enormously intimidating. The biggest rock in the world is truly gargantuan.

The most stressful part of the climb would undoubtedly be the progression from Base Camp to Camp 1 through the Khumbu Icefall. It is not the steepness of this section that commands respect, as much as the fact that other than getting through this jumbled mass of ice blocks as fast as possible, you are unable to exert any influence whatsoever on the acute peril posed by the unconditional avalanching of the huge ceracs, poised with certainty, just waiting for the momentum of the glacier and gravitational pull to trigger a collapse, the timing of which will produce a life or death outcome for any hapless climber caught in the resultant kill zone.

Camp 1 to Camp 2 is relatively safe, save for the occasional crevasse, the danger of which can be accentuated where snow drift cornices over the void and so visually obscures the potential lethal presence.

Camp 2 to Camp 3 up the Lhotse Face is very steep and predominantly blue ice. Despite its clear and constantly present danger, in reality, as long as one maintains good climbing housekeeping rules in terms of always clipping into the fixed rope and wearing a helmet to deflect lesser rock falls, the first half of the Lhotse Face can be accommodated. Nevertheless, a significant number of Everest deaths occur on this section of the climb. To date, in excess of 214 people have died whilst seeking to climb the mountain. Camp 3 to Camp 4 on the South Col provides a similar risk exposure to that immediately below.

Gazing at the summit of Mt Everest from Camp 4 is awe inspiring and humbling. You are viewing a colossus, but a climbable one, given the requisite degree of dedication, training and experience.

The greatest unknown on Mt Everest is best guessing the weather. Although most well organised expeditions have access to various U.S. and European based forecasting services, the resultant models still require interpretation and evaluation. At nearly 9 km high, Mt Everest creates its own brand of climatic conditions. If you guess right and it is not a science, you summit, if not, you will be back next year to try again.

It would appear that for a variety of reasons, most climbing teams have a + 25% attrition rate, before serious climbing begins. Of the remaining balance, if they can make it to Camp 4, they have a reasonable chance of summiting and most importantly, getting down again, given amenable weather.

On May 11 1996, eight climbers lost their lives on Mt Everest. They went up in perfect weather, but on the way down, which should have taken around four hours as was the case with my descent, a severe blizzard came out of literally nowhere and they all perished. In reality, in most of these cases, their deaths were a direct consequence of bad team management and poorly considered logistics, as opposed to purely, the intervention of the weather.

A successful summit of a mountain such as Mt Everest does not of necessity make you a better man or even more of a man, it simply reflects your luck, training, dedication, ability to anatomically handle high altitude and that you inherited the right genetic structure – thank you Mum and Dad.

## **VINSON MASSIF**

At 17h30 December 10 2010, Tony A Hampson-Tindale, Managing Director of Flag Craft International, summited Vinson Massif 16067'/4897m in Antarctica, and so completed his personal goal of climbing the highest mountain peaks on each of the seven continents. As far as can be established from formal sources, he is the 206th person to have climbed the seven summits.



TONY A HAMPSON-TINDALE Managing Director FlagCraft International (Pty) Ltd