



A Tribute to the Porters of Nepal

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When I was trekking in Nepal with 11 others from Lukla (2,600m a.s.l.) to Chomolungma (Everest) Base Camp (5,350m a.s.l.) and back from 9 October till 20 October 2006, we had 6 porters to carry our main backpacks. They were:

1. Phurba Tamang, 17.
2. Prakash Shresta, 22.
3. Rudra Ghimire, 22.
4. Dawa Tamang, 29.
5. Ravi Tamang, 21.
6. Tenzing Sherpa, 23.

Our porters did a great job and we enjoyed the trek tremendously.

October is the peak trekking season in Nepal and we encountered not only many other trekkers but many porters carrying huge and heavy loads moving in both directions, in addition to caravans of heavily laden yaks and dzo.

The porters amazed me not only with the bulk and weight of the goods they carried, but with the diversity of the goods as well, ranging from trekkers' backpacks to guesthouses' provisions to sawn timber to PVC pipes to steel posts to half a slaughtered cattle!

The trails in the Himalayas in Nepal are so rugged and steep in places that it is not possible to travel from one village to the next by any form of vehicle, not even bullock cart. In the Solu-Khumbu region, in which we trekked, the only means of transport available other than our very own legs are the yaks and dzos and the occasional horses. Yaks are extremely hardy animals with long, curved and pointed horns and long coarse hair and are

particularly well adapted for lives at high altitudes. Dzos are a cross-breed between yaks and domestic cattle. However, although the animals are very much stronger than humans and hence can carry much heavier loads, certain goods, such as long and stiff objects like timber, pipes and poles, cannot be carried by them. Cost may be another factor that makes the porters indispensable.

Tenzing Norgay, who, together with New Zealander Sir Edmund Hillary

made history by being the first men to successfully scale Chomolungma (Everest) on 29 May 1953, wrote something interesting about the Sherpa porters in his autobiography "Man of Everest":

"A Sherpa boy looks up, and he sees a mountain. He looks down, and what does he see? A load. He picks up the load and starts for the mountain, or, if not straight for it, at least up and down. That is what his life is – carrying a load up and down. It is not a strange or unpleasant thing for him, but a natural thing; and the load is not something to be handled awkwardly, to be struggled with and cursed at, but almost a part of his body. Most of its weight goes into a broad strap that is worn not over the shoulders, but across the forehead, for long experience has taught us that this is the best way of carrying. And with it the average Sherpa can manage more than a hundred pounds in ordinary country and up to seventy or eighty on steep mountain-sides."

Over the years, Sherpa porters have become an essential and integral part of any mountaineering expedition in the Himalayas. Their contributions towards the conquests of all the high mountain peaks in the Himalayas are nothing short of legendary. ■

