

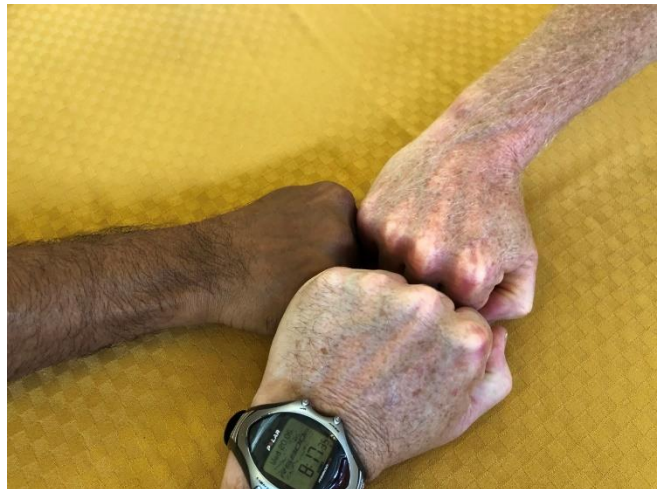
Making Waves to Fight Cancer with Swim Across America -- Mt. Everest Base Camp Trek!

Gary Lehman



From June 1 to June 22, 2018 I traveled to the capital city of Kathmandu in Nepal, then to the mountain town of Lukla with two friends with the objective of climbing to Mt. Everest Base Camp. The trip was a long dream of mine. It was formed the basis of a fund-raising effort to fight cancer under the auspices of an organization with which I have been associated since 2002. One of my friends with whom I climbed (Dave) is an individual whom I know professionally (Dave is not known to the Club) – but my other friend is well-known to many members of our Club, Parag Joshi -- who has joined Jody Deevy and our Club on many dive trips. Parag is respected and admired for his good cheer, common sense, supreme photography (really off the charts and of scientific importance in his documenting via photography of rare and endangered birdlife in his home country of India). Parag lives in Gujarat, India and joined Dave and I in Kathmandu.

I am deeply grateful to our Club for having donated the proceeds of our Club's May 50/50 raffle. And equally to our own Al Miller, who donated his winning portion of the 50/50. In return for the Club's support, it was my very great pleasure to bring with me The Scuba Sports Club banner, and to proudly hoist it at Mt. Everest Base Camp with our friend Parag. Similarly, we hoisted the Swim Across America/Making Waves to Fight Cancer banner at EBC. Photos appear below. Proceeds went to Memorial Sloan Kettering, MD Anderson Children's Cancer Center, Northwell Cancer Research, and Cold Spring Harbor laboratories for cancer research. These are some of the most highly respected treatment and research organizations in the world of cancer fighting! My climb was dedicated to my older sister Judy, who taught me to swim in 1963 when I was seven years old, and who concluded her battle with pancreatic cancer in 2009 following a nine-month battle.





Dave and I flew into Kathmandu in Nepal and spent a few days touring the historical and cultural sights there, as well as meandering through the maze of warrens in the ragtag, bohemian, fun and colorful Thamel District. We then flew from “Kat” to the foothills of the Himalayas to the town of Lukla, whose airport is known as one of the (if not THE) most dangerous airports in the world. The runway is only 66’ wide and 1,000’ long, and it is built on a hill. So, aircraft landing will land uphill (which helps slow them down) and will takeoff



racing downhill (which of course helps them gain airspeed quickly so that they are able to remain aloft once the runway disappears out from underneath the aircraft with a 1,000 meter drop-off! Quite thrilling – both the landing and takeoff!



Basically, we trekked 40 miles northeast out (and 40 miles back) over (and down and up and down and up, **mostly up!** And **then on return, mostly down**) hill and dale for nine days with two full days as rest stops. As we ascended from 9,000’ to 18,000’ the



vegetation thinned in direct proportion to the air thinning.

As divers, we know that at sea level the air we breath is about 28% oxygen. Well, that percentage remains the same at 18,000' however the air density is 50% at that altitude which means that each breath



takes in only 14% oxygen. This can cause problems such as high-altitude pulmonary edema, in which the lungs fill up with fluid.



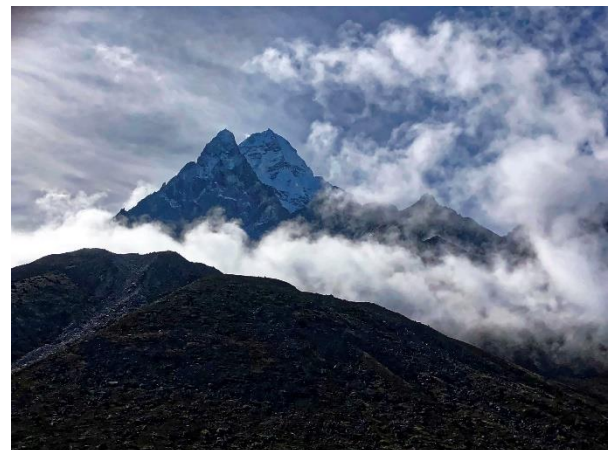
There are medications such as Diamox which alleviate to considerable extent this fluid buildup by forcing increased urination. I was on Diamox, as was Parag. Dave eschewed its use, and did fine; he is in superb condition and wanted to test his limits. (This is actually a pointless endeavor, because there are actually no limits to Dave's mountaineering prowess).

We camped at 18,000' on the ninth and last night before descending 500' to Everest Base Camp. The climbing season had concluded four weeks earlier and the tent city was gone, along with all the prospective summitteers and climbers. All the ladders through the notorious Khumbu Ice Falls had been removed by the Sherpa teams. Only a few trekkers were in evidence and actually, at the early hour that we were there, we were the ONLY humans in sight. Occasionally dogs from the local high-altitude settlement of Gorak Shep would hang out to keep us company (and hope for a treat, which were of course forthcoming from yours truly); and occasional ravens which were no doubt intent on exactly the same thing.



I went for an EKG and stress test before finalizing my plans for this trek. I wanted to make sure there were no structural defects or other issues which might arise enroute. Being at 18,000' is a bad place for bad things to suddenly happen. I checked out fine. This is a trek on a trail, with no helmets, spikey things on boots, or ice axes. This was obviously an involved cardiovascular endeavor for which either considerable cardio training or a committed athletic lifestyle is prerequisite. I was wearing a Polar heartbeat monitor and was

carefully watching the beats/minute so as to not redline too hard and too long for my six-decade old ticker. When things got really tough up particularly steep sections, I just slowed down. My teammates were in better baseline condition, younger, and had been training more – so we just kept in touch via walkie-talkie, which fortunately worked as advertised and which had a surprisingly long range in this mountainous region. The local Nepalese military took an interest actually in our walkie-talkies and at first wanted to confiscate them, but decided upon further inspection that we were rather clearly not a particularly viable national security threat. They wished us well on our journey.





Many of us have seen films of the Himalayan region, and have seen videos of the suspension bridges which ease the travel from ridge to ridge, crossing over raging streams and rivers which are delivering water to the great rivers of India to the south. Those bridges seem in the photos daunting, and in the event, they are. I did videotape and photograph them, *however* my courage would flag on occasion and I would expeditiously complete my traverse of the bridge to get the heck off it! Some of the yaks which are used for animal transport are only semi-domesticated and can be ill-tempered at times. So.....

with these bridges, interesting situations can develop when ill-tempered yaks on supply trains are headed towards you – on the very same narrow bridge....But with the help of our guides and porters, we made it through these and all other adversities!



We were so happy to fulfill our long-held dream of going to Mt. Everest Base Camp, completing our trek successfully; and we were so grateful to the Club and Club member Al Miller for the support they offered to fight cancer from the 50/50 -- and similarly *to all the Club members* who so generously individually contributed; and members of the dive community, our work friends, neighbors, families, and our personal friends who reached deep to support the fight against cancer and become virtual teammates. Similarly, we were so pleased to help out in a small way the Nepali

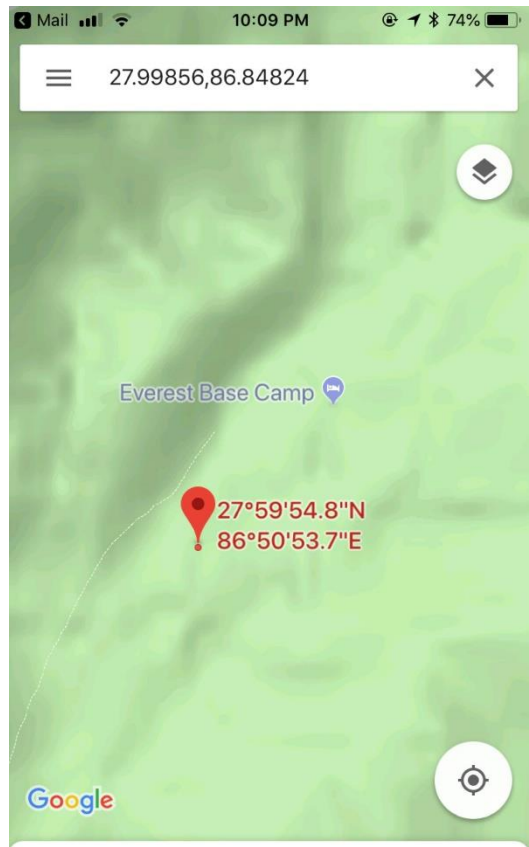
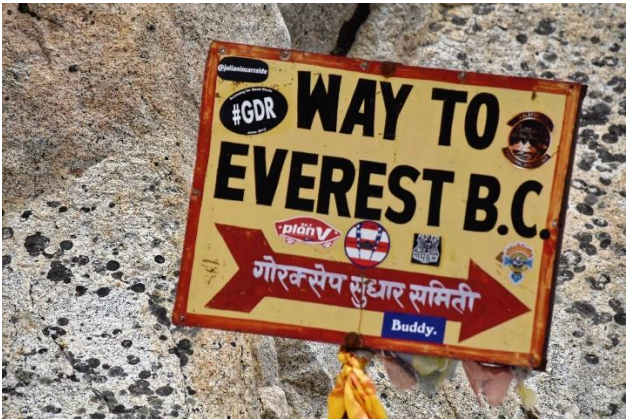
economy and our porter friends who helped us achieve our dreams. Nepal suffered a devastating earthquake in 2015 and is still early in the recovery phase following the abject devastation all over the country, and particularly in the homeland of the venerable Gurkhas in north central Nepal. It is a fascinating country with a spellbinding culture and history and a trip there will be an unforgettable experience!



Please reach out to me at gary.a.lehman@gmail.com for any detailed feedback on the trek if you are interested, and I will share any and all observations and recommendations (which for brevity's sake I am excluding from this article).



Photos from this trip can be viewed online at: <https://www.imageshappen.com/p497416592>



27°59'54.8"N 86°50'53.7"E
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