

THE JOURNEY UP

The expedition team faced new challenges and different dangers as they continued their death-defying ascent up Everest.

The Western Cwm

After the Khumbu Icefall, the climbers worked their way up a gently rising valley called the Western Cwm. Here, the sun's strong rays reflecting off the snowy slopes could cause temperatures to rocket to 37°C, exposing the climbers to severe sunburn and dehydration. But, when the sun set, the thermometer would plunge below freezing once more.

The Lhotse Face

At the head of the Western Cwm lay their next great challenge, a treacherously steep ice slope known as the Lhotse Face. To ensure the supplies could be carried up the 4,000-foot (1,220-metre) slope safely, a special party of climbers and Sherpas spent time cutting steps and fixing ropes up it. The work was thwarted by illness, heavy snow and extreme cold. But above all, lack of oxygen eroded the men's ability to move and even think properly. One of the team, George Lowe, later said, 'I thought I was going extremely well, in fact I was staggering about like a man in a dream.' With the monsoon season closing in, Hunt was worried that slow progress on the Lhotse Face would scupper the expedition. But somehow the team forced a way up. 'It was a performance,' Hunt later said, 'that should go down in mountaineering history.'

SUMMIT
29,029 FEET

NORTH-EAST RIDGE

CAMP 9
27,900 feet

SOUTH FACE

SOUTH COL
25,800 feet

CAMP 8
25,800 feet

CAMP 7
24,000 feet

CAMP 6
23,000 feet

CAMP 5
22,000 feet

CAMP 4
21,200 feet

CAMP 3
20,200 feet

CAMP 2
19,400 feet

BASE CAMP
17,900 feet

KHUMBU ICEFALL

KHUMBU GLACIER

WESTERN CWM

LHOTSE
27,890 FEET

NUPTSE
25,680 FEET

DEATH ZONE

THE SOUTH COL, 25,800 feet: Nineteen Sherpas reached the South Col helping to carry over 700 pounds of vital kit (tents, oxygen, food, fuel, cookers, climbing equipment). The final staging post for the first of the two summit attempts.

BASE CAMP: At the foot of the Khumbu Icefall, it was surrounded by pinnacles of ice.

KHUMBU ICEFALL: Sherpas carried over three tonnes of stores through this hazardous maze of moving ice. The trail needed to be in the middle of the icefall to avoid avalanches.

LHOTSE FACE
CAMP 7: The halfway point on the punishing climb between Camp 5 and the South Col.

ADVANCE BASE CAMP: Up to 30 men lived in a village of tents while providing support to the climbers.

CAMP 2: A rest point for those ferrying equipment up the mountain. The team later abandoned this camp because the violent ice movements made it too dangerous.

The South Col

Next came the South Col – a freezing, desolate moonscape of rock and ice, continually swept by fierce winds so powerful that to Tenzing they sounded like 'the roar of a thousand tigers'. At 26,000 feet (7,925 metres), the climbers had now entered the Death Zone. At such a height, the concentration of oxygen in the atmosphere is so low that nothing can live for any length of time – not even with supplementary oxygen. It was from here that a smaller team would now attempt the summit. And that team would have to make their move quickly.

Camp 9: Hillary and Tenzing spent their final night on this narrow ledge before summiting.