

Himalayan odyssey: Mt. Everest TrailRider expedition



Peak of Perfection: Everest forms a dramatic backdrop.

Two British Columbia Mobility Society members, Linda McGowan and Doug Reid, undertook a breathtaking TrailRider trek to Everest Base Camp, Nepal, in the fall of 2008.

This is Linda's account:

In the winter of 2008, the idea began to grow. Erik Bjarason, the founder of Courage to Carry On, was planning a trip with mountaineering companions to scale Mount Everest. He wanted to include people with disabilities as far as Everest Base Camp.

The timing of the March expedition was in conflict with Tibetan protests about the Beijing Olympics and other scheduled activities in my life, so the decision to climb in October with Eion White, manager of Sherpa Encounter, was finalized.

Douglas Reid (a quadriplegic) and myself (MS for 25 years) embarked on intensive planning and fundraising. There are additional considerations and costs for people with disabilities – a larger component of porters,



Life at the top: Linda McGowan, and team, enjoying the view.

manageable guesthouses, and the transportation of TrailRiders to Lukla.

Only minimal packing was possible. As temperatures on the trek range from 32°C to -10°C, *minimal* included shorts, sandals, sunscreen, mitts, polar fleece, wool socks, mini hot water bottles and hot packs.

The Black Diamond TrailRider offered comfort and, in conjunction with incredibly skilled porters, safety along narrow, rocky, steep ascents and descents. We traversed 18 suspension bridges, eight metres to half-a-kilometre in length, some with sides, others without, but all bridging cliffs over deep rocky river crevices.

The TrailRider is ideal for rolling along smooth hillside trails. The uneven rocky terrain required that it be lifted about 50 per cent of the time. At times, our guide's description was that the TrailRider passengers could be equated with a paint can being agitated in a paint shop, to obtain the desired hue

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TrailRider: Vehicle for this arduous adventure.

Seven or eight hours on the trail could be summarized as motivating, stimulating, sometimes a bit sore but always fun! The porters laughed and sang as we moseyed along.

Upon arising in the morning and embarking early on the path, looking around, we could see mountains, more mountains and after that, even more mountains. They were rocky, snowcapped, encircled by glaciers, friendly, enticing, intimidating, challenging and sometimes ominous. At lower altitudes, there were trees, woody flowers, waterfalls and rivers.

As the treeline evaporated a wide open space gave way to many rock formations and memorials to those who have lost their lives on Everest. We were humbled and slowed to pay our respects to the women and men who had embraced their last dream.

Sitting in the TrailRider on Kala Patar, 2000 feet above the tent city of Base Camp, I was overwhelmed with the incredibleness of being at the base of Mount Everest, the highest mountain in the world. How did this happen? It required a dream, motivation to follow that dream, and the belief of others – BCMOS, Eoin White of Sherpa Encounters, Erik Bjarnason of Courage to Carry On, donors, family and friends.

Do I have any regrets? No! Am I glad that I followed my dream? Of course! Would I do it again? In a New York minute!



Don't look down: Typical Himalayan bridge.



Doug Reid: Would do it all over, despite suffering acute mountain sickness.

Doug Reid, from Vancouver, was unfortunately not able to complete the trip. He became seriously ill with acute mountain sickness.

He wrote:

Now that I'm out of the hospital and have had a bit of time to recover I thought I would take a moment to thank everyone at BCMOS and the Disability Foundation for making it possible for me and Linda to travel to Everest.

Although, for me, it did not turn as I had hoped, it was still an experience I would not have passed up for anything and

Without the support of the Disability Foundation and BCMOS along with the loan of the TrailRiders, our journey would not have been possible and for that we are very grateful.



On top of the world: team shot with Mt. Everest behind.