
PUMORI: FAILURE

“Yes, it’ll go! It’s just a short push to the top.”

Ned Gillette

NED: Our two tents, like lobsters that had scuttled into a rocky cranny, were backed up into the hole on Pumori designated Camp I. It was December 22, and we were still tired and still struggling to acclimate to our 21,000-foot elevation. My heartbeat was rapid, a metronome that jazzed my body and mind. The others were restless, too. Even though it had been dark for two hours, sleep did not come easily. We continued to talk, planning the next day’s summit attempt, as Jim was chalking strategy on the blackboard of the night.

Our problem was a common one: Should we go up, or down, or rest? Since we were not fully acclimatized, we might end up more easily and safely successful in the long run by descending to Base and resting. Then we would be stronger for a faster subsequent push to the top. But we had not put the question to ourselves in those terms. Instead, as if blindered, we were simply discussing the sequence of steps to the top. We had good weather and firm, stable snow, yet we were not ready—physically or mentally—to continue upward. We were in this predicament because we had arrived late in Nepal and, concerned that we would miss the best climbing weather before Christmas, had rushed onto Pumori. We had worn ourselves down before building ourselves up. It would have made good sense to descend, or at least rest the next day, then trust the weather to hold thereafter. We would then have a far better chance of succeeding in an early-rising, hard-driving push to the top. We had only to listen to our fatigue.

We failed, however, to act on what we sensed of our condition. The next day was December 23, and we felt we had no time to spare, that we were racing the winter storm season. Here in the dark, in the incubating warmth of our sleeping bags, it was easy to imagine the storms about to break over us like giant waves. We had difficulty viewing our situation dispassionately. We were exhausted, but skies were clear and we felt driven. We would try to dash to the summit the next day.

We agreed to set our alarms for five o’clock, since we had to start climbing early to make full use of the short daylight hours. We had already prepared our equipment—stoves were filled, hardware racked, backpacks loaded. I slept in my climbing suit and harness. The last words I heard were Jim’s assurance that, “There’s no need to set alarms. On a summit day, I always wake up early.”

Full daylight—not alarms, not Jim—woke me the next morning. I lurched into a sitting position, the trajectory of my head neatly shaving ice crystals from the roof of the tent. I shivered as they shifted down inside my collar. I was agitated. It shouldn’t be daylight. I looked at my watch: it was six-thirty. Like a tortoise extending, I looked out

the tent door. The sky was clear, the wind moderate. “Jano. Up. It’s late,” I barked. “Jim, Steve.” I wanted to turn the clock back.

Like an engine asked to perform instantaneously on a cold start, I ran badly after my initial flurry. A heavy, sickly sensation swept over me. I propped my head on my arm and looked east to Everest, Lhotse, and Nuptse. Their height still hid the sun, but orange rays, directed by the outlines of the peaks and highlighted by haze, shot up in a cone-shaped aurora. I looked up at Steve and Jim’s tent tiered above, like a bunk bed fastened to a wall. All was quiet. Moments later an arm reached out of the upper berth as Steve absent-mindedly emptied his pee bottle in my direction. I retreated inside the tent to light the stove, but produced instead a sooty fusillade of flames. Jan, now awake, suggested I sign a nonaggression pact with the mechanism, then neatly lit it.

JAN: Ned had slept with his clothes on, climbing harness and all. Or should I say he wrestled with them all night, and kept me awake? He complained that his one-piece climbing suit rolled up tightly in his crotch. I knew it would annoy him, but I couldn’t suppress a laugh at the thought that being dressed for action in the morning could be worth a sleepless night.

I dressed quickly as Ned tried to fire-up the stove. I heard the harsh hissing of the stove’s flame and low voices in the other tent. I knew that Steve and Jim, too, were up and performing the morning ritual of coaxing their stove and watching the water boil. Our light stoves had an ever-so-tiny hole to permit the gas to escape, keeping the cooking flame alive. Since we hadn’t been able to bring our own white gas to these foreign parts, we had had to purchase some obscure, dirty fuel that clogged this hole. Combined with the problem of low oxygen at altitude, this meant that the stoves needed to be humored. With a little tender loving care, they would come around to your point of view, but they balked at any kind of brute force.

Ned was muttering under his breath because the stove had choked itself out. Looking down, intent on what I was doing so that my eyes wouldn’t meet his, I filled the cooking pot with snow. After three years and two expeditions together, a glance could convey an entire conversation. Ned was cranky, and certainly wouldn’t listen to any suggestions about lighting the stove. Ned slammed it down and rustled out of the tent, tugging at his twisted suit, still trying to settle his body comfortably inside it.

The tension seemed to blow out of the tent behind him. Relieved, I coaxed the stove to life. In a few moments, I heard Ned’s heavy step returning. When he poked his head into the tent, I could see that he was grinning.

“Thanks, Babe,” he whispered.

I stuck my head outside, saw Jim emerging from his tent, and called out, “‘ello Ducko, noice dai for a cloimb.” We’d gotten in the habit of chattin’ like the Brits for absolutely no other reason than the fun of it. Jim gave me a “Yea,” and flashed a grin like a boy caught with his hand in the cookie jar. I loved that smile because it was Jim, pure and simple. He was always getting away with something he probably shouldn’t, whether it involved climbing or life in general.

NED: In our tent, Jan finished filling water bottles with melted snow. Each of us would carry a quart bottle and a pint bottle—three pounds of liquid. We wouldn't stand a chance of reaching the summit without it, since the dry air at altitude would dehydrate us. Candy bars and raisins had already been shoved into our backpacks, along with down parkas and extra mitts. We carried one stove, one pot, one shovel—and no sleeping bags, since we planned to be back before nightfall and didn't want to be slowed by the extra weight.

We were all now in action, but nothing was as zippy as it ought to have been for a long summit push. When Jim finally left to climb, it was already nine o'clock. Clipping a single jumal to the length of rope left in place from the previous day's reconnaissance, he moved out from the protection of our hole, out of our sight. He dragged a second rope as a safeguard in case the anchors at the upper end of the fixed rope had loosened, or in case the rope itself had been sliced by falling rock. Steve gave him a loose belay.

Waiting for Jim to finish the traverse, my crampons long since fastened onto plastic double boots, I hiked up and out onto the far side of the camp hole. I wanted to photograph, in one frame, the camp, Jim climbing, and Steve belaying. The photograph seemed worth the risk of clambering about unroped, but it occurred to me that it would be a sorry epitaph if I should expire with a camera in hand instead of an ice axe.

I focused my 28-mm lens. But the composition was not what I expected—the belay man had vanished! More importantly, the rope to Jim snaked out unattended. Where, oh where, was Steve? He was squatting over the crevasse that sliced through the rear of the camp hole, contentedly relieving himself. His attention span on the belay had been short, no match for building intestinal pressure. Mercurial by nature, programmed for the steely 20-second span of concentration needed to ski-sprint at 125 miles an hour, Steve had belayed long enough, and now had simply wandered away. Somehow the gross distortion of priorities was funny. Jim, climbing on, never knew.

Jim finished the traverse and I, as second man across, readied myself. Steve grinned sheepishly. I laughed with him, then stepped around the crestline that defined the northern edge of our hole. I was temporarily alone. The traverse was 250 feet long, and wound horizontally under a bulge of ice before diagonaling upward. It ended at the base of a 1,000-foot snow slope we had named "the ramp." Jim was working there. My first step from the hole pushed out over 3,500 feet of exposure. It was electrifying. I concentrated on placing my hands and feet precisely.

With each step, I laid the front points of my crampons into the gray ice with an even pendulum motion of my lower leg. The surface of the ice was rippled, and I placed my spikes above each ripple, using it as a tiny platform to lessen the angle and ease my progress. A walloping kick would have fractured the ice, erasing much of the crampon's holding power. Chunk, chunk ... slide my jumal with my right hand ... chunk, chunk ... slide. Maintaining rhythm lubricated my crablike dance on the steep slope. My ice axe and hammer hung in holsters at my waist. The perlon rope, strung across the face of the mountain and hitched by only four ice screws, was springy. It would have been better to use our polypropylene rope for this purpose, but when Jim led the pitch the day before, Steve and I were bringing it up from the old belay post. To progress we were often forced to improvise, using what was available rather than what was ideal.

The rope that I was on was a safeguard in the same way that an ejection seat in a jet fighter was: I wished not to test it. It would save me from falling to the bottom of the mountain, but it would not prevent a short fall. If I lost balance and toppled outward, I

could not immediately correct my error. Anchored sparsely as it was, the perlon rope's dynamic properties allowed too much stretch. To compound the danger, the rope was horizontal. A fall would put a sharp, right-angled tug on my jumar, making the mechanism more prone to failure. As a back-up system I had clipped a carabiner on the rope, then tied it into my swami belt with nylon webbing. I felt like a lone performer on a high wire, yet I had the sense of allied support, connected by the rope to Jan and Steve below and Jim above.

When I reached the end of the traverse, I found only footprints in the snow: Jim had started up the ramp without a belay. I was discovering that this was his habit. The moderate climbing on this stretch was little match for a man of his ability. I took up his rope in a loose belay, then called up to him, chastising him. "It's beautiful going," he replied. "Easy. Fast. It's just getting out of breath that slows you down, Dad."

I had a few moments alone, standing comfortably on the belay platform. The air hardly stirred, yet the slightest zephyr brought a nip of winter. The sun had lifted high enough to soften the hard line of shadow that had defined the West Ridge of Everest earlier. Its North Face was still locked in half-night, but I could make out the Hornbein Couloir, the sliver of snow and ice that cut the rocks of the summit pyramid. In 1963 the Americans Tom Hornbein and Willi Unsoeld had climbed up the couloir during a bold traverse over the top of Everest. It was the single greatest achievement on the mountain since the first ascent.

Swinging my gaze to the southeast, I spied Ama Dablan and other lesser peaks. They lacked Everest's magnitude, but showed a more finely sculpted beauty. The landscape farther to the south was hidden by Pumori's shoulder.

I felt hidden, deliciously so. We had the place to ourselves-no other expeditions populated the head of the Khumbu. During the regular pre- and postmonsoon climbing and trekking seasons, the place would be alive with activity. Our precious solitude was a gift of the winter. It was as if the clock had been turned back to the 1950s and we were some of the first to visit the Khumbu.

Jan arrived, and clipped into the anchor. She, too, was happy to be moving. Romance here in the thin air was decidedly platonic, but I kissed her cheek. Bundled like mountaineering knights, armored with spikes and picks and axes, we had about as much sex appeal as armadillos. I started up in Jim's footsteps.

JAN: Jim clipped his jumar onto the rope that draped gracefully across the traverse of steep, lacy blue ice leading out of Camp I. His first couple of steps out were careful and deliberate, feeling the strength of the rope. Then his shoulders lowered, and I could almost see his muscles relaxing. His quiet, deft movements carried him steadily across the traverse. It was a joy to watch him display his strengths, to see him move with such confidence. I remember this image and hold onto it tightly whenever I'm disappointed in myself or in others, and it reminds me of the best in people-sometimes hidden, sometimes shining out.

Ned waited while Jim moved up to the belay 150 feet above. Given the nature of the traverse, it wasn't practical to have more than one person on the pitch at once, since a tug by one could send the other flying. I watched Ned make his way across and up.

I often live in my imagination when I attempt a physical endeavor. I had studied a bit of ballet as a child, and as I began the traverse I imagined that the front points of my crampons were the wooden blocks at the tip of my toeshoes. I forgot about the pack on my back and the layers of bulky clothing, and dreamed I was dancing ever so delicately across the stage for a terribly discriminating audience. Then I remembered I had put on toeshoes before I really deserved them. I hoped I had paid my dues for front points.

The ice had some fragile white lace on it, which shattered at a touch, but was mostly solid blue. A swift kick set my points, and the jumar hummed rhythmically in my right hand, sliding along the line. As I moved across, Ned belayed Jim heading up the next pitch. The wind was beginning to pick up as the day warmed. I looked down the sheer rock and ice gully below me, pleased that I felt more comfortable out there than I had expected. I wasted no time, knowing Ned would want to ascend as soon as Jim was settled, and that Steve was preparing for his traverse debut. But, most probably, I moved right along because I'll forever have this monkey on my back about keeping up with the boys. I finished the traverse, sighed slightly, then began moving up.

Ned and I had a quiet moment together on the belay stance before he continued on. Jim was anchoring the rope above, Steve moving slowly on the traverse below. We looked directly across at the Khumbu icefall, and the wind-shrouded crown of Everest, alongside Lhotse and Nuptse.

“Neddy, do you think we’ll make it today?”

“Depends on what time we reach the “breadloaf” and how straightforward the summit pinnacle is.” We had nicknamed the icefall on Pumori’s crestline the “breadloaf.”

I knew; I had just wanted to hear him say that he too thought the summit was within our limits. I held him for a moment, then he left. Feeling alone, I bent over and cupped my hands to yell to Steve.

“Come on up, nice views.” I gave him a hearty welcome, wishing I could see his eyes underneath his glasses. Of the three men, Steve’s moods were the most difficult to read. He always pushed an eager expression at you, leaving you guessing at his intimate thoughts.

“Feels good to be off the dread traverse, doesn’t it?” I asked, in a tone that admitted I thought it was dicey, too.”

“Yea. Ned’s moving right along, isn’t he?”

“M-m-m, we need to make some time today. I better get going.”

I patted his back, clipped on, and began my steady step up. Both Steve and I are dreamers. I use my illusions to push myself, or to improve my performance. I felt as though Steve used his dream world to take himself away from where he was.

NED: The ramp was long and rose at a constant angle. We climbed upward on a slight diagonal line to the left. I hurried, knowing Jim could not move safely on the highly technical pitch that followed until I was in position to belay. I kept up a steady, head-down pace-chunk, chunk, chunk-my boots kicking into the steps. I could hear small avalanches-ice loosened from the upper wall by the sun-shooting down the couloir to my right. When I arrived at the first piece of protection buried in the snow, an aluminum plate called a “deadman,” I knotted the rope to the carabiner. This anchored it so that Jan could start up. I continued

moving, dreading the long monotony of this section, yet surprised at how soon Jim's red boots filled my field of vision.

I was soon at his stance at the base of the breadloaf, a nearly vertical wall of ice barring access to the Northeast Ridge. I began to chop a larger platform so we could both stand, first prying away a crust of old snow. It came off in small plates that fell straight down the slope. Our route angled off the fall line, so Jan and Steve weren't in any danger from it. Suddenly a plate a foot in diameter cracked off, stood itself on end, then cartwheeled downward. I watched it, but shouted no warning. There seemed no need. Then, like a guided missile suddenly gone astray, it veered-no, jumped-at Jan. She was climbing head down, and a warning cry now would only lift her head, exposing her face. With demented accuracy, it struck her on the head, driving her forward into the slope. Her stillness was sickening, alarming. But soon I saw her stand and investigate damage with an ungloved hand. She did not answer my calls, but soon started moving again. I knew her well enough to sense that her silence heralded some anger with me, -not with the mountain.

JAN: From where Steve and I stood, the next pitch went up at a 45-degree angle for another thousand feet. Ned was busy above belaying Jim on the more difficult, upcoming pitch. I moved along in my rhythmical fashion, letting the low hum of the rope through my jumar lull me. I was very relaxed. Quite suddenly I heard a loud whizzing and felt a sharp pain. My teeth slammed together so hard that their impact made a big bang, and black spots in front of my eyes began to knit together into a black curtain. I made myself concentrate on watching each foot, as I focused on continuing to step up. I was deliberately forcing myself to move, because I was afraid that otherwise I might black out completely. I blinked hard several times and took a step. My tunnel vision expanded slowly as the black began to recede. I continued to move up.

Ned had seen this little episode from the beginning. I finally realized he'd been yelling "Jano, hey Jano, are you okay?"

I felt steady enough to stop, and reached for the top of my head. My hand was wet from the blood that had soaked through my hat and two silk balaclavas. My immediate thought was that heads bleed a lot, so it didn't mean much.

"Yeah, what was that anyway?" Before Ned could answer I remembered that Steve was below me. I glanced down to see if he'd been hit, but he was moving along fine, minding his own business.

"I knocked off a big dinner plate of ice."

Geez, I thought, dinner plate! That was more like a turkey platter with the whole bird on it. It was useless to try to carry on a conversation considering the distance between us. I just kept moving up, my head throbbing with every step. I kept all my headgear on, hoping it would help slow the bleeding. My hair already had a few weeks of grease on it, and I hoped that would help too. I was less concerned about the bleeding than about infection.

I told myself to be diplomatic as I climbed up, but I couldn't help myself. The first thing I said when I reached the stance was, "Hey, Neddy, why didn't you tell me that was coming?"

“Well, it looked like it wasn’t going to cross your path and I didn’t want to disturb you. Then it hit something and changed course. I was too late. If I yelled to you then, you might have looked up and gotten it smack in the face.”

Relieved that that hadn’t happened, I began to feel lucky.

“Boy, that was the closest I’ve ever come to blacking out.”

“That thing fell about 200 feet before it homed in on you.”

By now Steve had reached the stance, and we shifted around to make room for three. Jim was above us, still hacking away at a nearly vertical section of ice that looked like white Swiss cheese. I looked at Steve and said, “Maybe there’s a big white mouse in there,” hoping to get a laugh out of him. His reply was merely to look up, appearing to assess the difficulty of the pitch. I had the impression that he’d rather be almost anywhere else, but he wouldn’t say so.

NED: Jim and I turned to the breadloaf. Our stance was at the base of a bulge of ice, and it felt as though we were at the mercy of a colossal wave that was frozen in place, curling off the Northeast Ridge. The ice wave hid any view of the summit and was of far greater magnitude than we had expected. It towered above and extended to the left and right along the entire ridgeline—a nearly perfect barrier. Directly above there was a single defect, a slot, as if this were the final break-over point of two waves joining. We felt a sense of urgency standing under the wall of frozen water. It seemed as if we had only glaciological seconds to sneak through the passage before it closed. It also seemed we were in danger of losing our race to the top. The hand of the clock—our enemy more than the mountain—was moving into the afternoon hours.

Jim gazed at the faint diagonal scar that seemed our only hope of crossing the barrier. A great fin of ice seemed to have been peeled back from it, and hung out over the void. The slot rose less steeply than the wall, but even so it appeared to be just off vertical. Jim left his pack: he would be more efficient without it. Slipping his hands through the wrist straps of his ice tools, he unclipped from the anchor. I belayed him.

He moved right, out on the fin, then up its curved edge that bordered thin air. The placements of his tools were precise. Little explosions of ice bits sparkled in the sun as he worked smoothly upward, held delicately to the ice by an inch of crampon and axe steel touching only where needed. His instinctive grace, honed through hundreds of climbs, disguised muscle tension. There was no sign of struggle; his progress was more like a dance. Tim, a few feet away, and Everest, a few miles away but just visible beyond the fin, appeared the same size. The illusion was almost hallucinogenic.

Jim moved well, finishing off the fin and continuing up the slot; but it was a long pitch, exhausting at this altitude. I could hear the drafts of air he heaved in and out of his lungs, especially during the silence of his stops to place ice screws for protection. Eventually he disappeared around a corner in the slot. I monitored his progress by the rope running out through my hands. When it stopped, I barely heard his call: “It’s okay to climb.”

Hefting Jim’s pack over mine, so that I carried them both, I followed, charged by the potential elevator-shaft drop out the bottom of the fin. I moved clumsily compared to Jim, but felt, by my standards, smooth and controlled. I was enthralled by the work, the place, the goal. I wondered if it was too late to be catching fire. Was the top still

accessible to us? When I reached Jim, he said he was still tired from his effort. A cigarette hung from his lower lip, and his words came at me punctuated by little puffs of smoke. He asked me to lead the next pitch, which was far easier and appeared to roll over in a humpback onto the Northeast Ridge itself. I returned his pack and continued, exalting in the chance to be in front. As I progressed, the summit came into view. I stopped, looked left and up. Jim knew why I'd stopped. "How's it look?" he called.

JAN: I felt as though I were just a pack animal for this pitch: my function was to get the load up however possible. I used style when I needed it, but front-pointing at 22,000 feet, especially with a light load, made my calves feel like hot potatoes. At one point I stashed my feet in a hole chest-high, shoved my jumar as far up the rope as I could reach, and hauled myself up.

As I approached the relief in the slope, I spied Ned heading out and Jim at the stance. I slogged up to him. "Hey, Ned will reach the breadloaf and get a good look at the summit from there. You didn't want to lead?"

"My hands are freezing in these gloves," Jim said matter-of-factly.

"Here." I swung around and put my back to him, almost knocking him off balance with my pack. "Back left pocket."

He asked how I was feeling as he slipped the mitts on. Since I felt pretty good, Jim said, "Why don't you go on up?"

I was thrilled. I thought Jim was being quite gracious to allow Ned and me to be the first to reach the breadloaf, look into Tibet, and check out the route to the summit. I humped on up, looking back at Jim once. I smiled to myself to see Big 01' Jim standing there with my little red mittens on that had JAN written over them in huge black letters. I'd grown quite fond of him.

NED: The summit pyramid rose above. Its East Face was heavily shadowed, accentuating its features. The shadows were notable, since they could have been caused only by the sun having moved into the western sky. That was of concern, but they also created a soft beauty that was bewitching. The ice on the lower slopes of the pyramid was criss-crossed with crevasses, which resulted in great blocks of ice. A route to the top would weave through the blocks, then climb to an open bergschrund that cut the entire face. A massive cornice curled off the top, product of the prevailing west wind, which was now dispatching a plume overhead.

"Will it go?" Jim was repeating his question. He must have thought my sudden petrification strange. Maybe it was the shimmer of the plume shadows, or the altitude, or my hopes for success, but I had difficulty assessing the situation. The summit was big, but I chose not to perceive it as such. Like a mirage, it seemed graspable. "Yes, it'll go," I answered. "It's just a short push to the top. It's easy terrain. We've got it."

Immediately, my own words bolstered my confidence. Like a lost desert rat thinking of palmed oases, I ran toward the ridgetop. In 10 steps I loped, in five more I walked; I was at 22,000 feet. The little sprint cleared my perception. I stole more glances upward. The mirage was quickly dissipating. In its place was an increasingly realistic assessment of distance, vertical rise, difficulty, and time.

When the slope leveled, I anchored the rope. Tibet was hidden behind a barrier of ice blocks standing on top of the ridge. Impatient for my first look, I untied, heaved myself onto the nearest block, jumped a small crevasse, and eased to the edge of a second block. Like a deep-sea diver emerging at the surface, I suddenly burst upon another world.

Tibet spread at my feet. The Pumori Glacier, young and snowy, flowed into the huge West Rongbuk Glacier, which appeared rumpled and creased, like an aged face. The great, glaciated peaks of the main Himalayan crest extended to my left and right. Beyond the shoulder of Pumori, Gyachung Kang, a white giant, dominated the western horizon. The ridgeline on which I stood seemed like a wave that appeared to be breaking to the north—the colossal push of the entire Himalaya about to tumble over the dry sands of Tibet. Northward, beyond the Rongbuk, all was brown. Barren hills of 20,000 feet extended to the horizon.

I stood on the edge of forbidden territory, terra incognita. From the crest of the main Himalayan chain I looked into a land that is a treasure trove of mountains. Hundreds of untouched peaks begged for attention, hundreds of untouched valleys hid rich culture. I could imagine Lhasa, the Forbidden City, the real-life Shangri-La, just beyond some lost horizon. Except for British attempts on Everest in the 1920s and 1930s and Chinese sieges during the past 30 years, there had been precious little opportunity to test such a mountain inventory. From a climber's point of view, the land lay fallow. But there was a difference now. I did not feel the total frustrations of my predecessors at being so close to a tantalizing lodestone. Tibet had finally opened—in a guarded way, but enough to allow controlled expeditions. I knew that I would soon be walking in Tibet on the second half of our circle.

I was not so sure that I would be visiting the summit of Pumori. It loomed above, cloaked in increasing shadow, displaying its true proportions. Standing still, I felt the bite of the west wind eddying off the upper slopes. There was no longer anything mirage-like about Pumori. I looked at my watch: it was past one o'clock. I walked back into Nepal. Jan was waiting. She had climbed strongly, and was obviously pleased with herself. She had put in a no-nonsense day, sticking to the job of getting herself up the mountain in an efficient manner, and she was happy to be here. I was not so pleased.

My thoughts were farther up the mountain. Although I hadn't yet voiced or admitted it, we were unlikely to catch up to those thoughts. Instead, I announced that I had just been over in Tibet for a short visit. Would she care to join me? Yes, but let's wait for the others.

Within minutes Jim was with us. Before he could catch his breath, I took the offensive. I wanted to revise my initial report of the proximity of the summit. That first assessment now seemed of another time, another place, another mind. Jim just chuckled in reply. Somehow we hadn't been able to shake the holiday mood of the expedition. Still breathing hard, lighting another cigarette, he burred, "Yuh. I was thinking the same thing. This thing is bigger than any of us thought." It was a generous reply that immediately defused any tension.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon, and little more than three hours of daylight remained. Our perch was now in the shadow, and the temperature was plummeting. Severe lenticular clouds capped Everest and Pumori's plume had lengthened since I first arrived. We had no proper bivouac gear. Huddling in conference, we turned our backs to

the wind. Even so, it ripped our words and distorted them. The cold penetrated, and with it the growing realization that we were not going to make the summit.

The mood became somber. We would live with the decision to retreat or not for all our years ahead. Hold on! Here was Steve breaking over onto the easier ground near us. Was he crawling? Mirages seemed epidemic. He was crawling! One of the strongest men I had ever met was on his hands and knees! Even in his time of trial on Pumori, Steve had never lost his ready humor. Creeping toward us, he looked like a disheveled pilgrim doing penance. Coils of rope hung from his shoulders and waist in looping festoons. He had stepped through several of the coils, which now tangled his legs. As last man up, he had collected all available residue, like a bag lady in New York. Jim was mildly chastising. "I told you there was no need to heft all that rope beyond the breadloaf."

Steve's refugee like appearance confirmed this as our high point. The summit, lying 1,500 feet above, was out of reach. Continuing would entail an all-night bivouac without food, water, sleeping bags, or shelter-insanity in the killer cold of winter. We had reached the border, if not the summit. We had miles to go to finish the entire Grand Circle of Everest, and must get on with them. We had tried to dash from Camp I, but had ended crawling. With a shuffling gait, we men, ambitions dissolved, turned to the descent. Jan, returning from her visit over the ridge to Tibet, leapt toward us in a graceful bound, landed, stretched her arms skyward, and, bowed. She alone had reached an inner goal. She was satisfied for the moment to have climbed well in the winter time, and pleased to have established our circle by touching the border. Moments later, as I began the first rappel, Pumori's summit began to grow as my consuming goal. The calling was faint, but it was no longer a mirage. Our failure would become the catalyst that would soon harden our determination to reach the top.

JAN: We had worked hard and we had worked together. This was the best blend of personalities I'd seen on any climb. We enjoyed each other's company, as opposed to merely tolerating each other. We knew we had failed at our first common objective, but we each tried to shelve our personal disappointments for the sake of the others and the expedition.

I said, "Well, you guys, this is the border running along this ridge to the summit. We can legitimately begin the circle. I suppose our climb isn't a failure in that sense."

We actually were standing on the border between Nepal and Tibet. The Everest Grand Circle could go on to its other objectives. Still, it was odd. We all sort of milled around on the ridge looking at Everest, the summit of Pumori, and over at the Lho La in Tibet where we were planning to ski during the second half of the circle. Nobody wanted to start down, but we all knew that was the only real choice.

Slowly a feeling of elation rose in me. From this vantage point, our imaginative approach to Everest was unfolding before my eyes. This was one of the joys of circumnavigating Everest rather than climbing it: there was always a new adventure around the corner. We hadn't failed, we had just begun.

These thoughts warmed and cheered me, and I turned my attention to the others to see how they were adjusting. Steve gave off slight scents of relief, and an indication of being anxious to descend. I'd heard him say jokingly once that Ned was Captain Ahab,

and Pumori the great white whale, and I didn't feel that his own disappointment cut too deeply.

Ned and Jim, I could see, would be drowning in dissatisfaction—they hadn't fulfilled their expectations of themselves. They made a good climbing duo: Ned is as strong a workhorse as you could ask for at altitude, so he'll lug the extra load while Jim, unencumbered, moves quickly over ice and rock to run up the rope securely. They wanted success together. I knew they'd never consider reaching the ridge a success. They were trying to cover their moods, but I could see the disappointment working inside both of them.

Rappelling back to camp went along routinely. Jim hacked some sturdy bollards for anchors, and footing was good. When we reached the Swiss-cheese pitch, Ned had me dangle around awhile for some descent shots. I noticed that I felt irritated at being interrupted in my descent, and began to wonder if my disappointment ran deeper than I knew.

Recrossing what we had nicknamed the "dread traverse" back to our camp in the hole seemed more difficult under the strain of the long day. Thoughts of hot tea and warm sleeping bags on the other side coaxed me along. On an expedition it is seldom possible to choose an activity to suit one's mood—the key is responding to the situation at hand. My legs were soft with fatigue and my mind somewhat vacant from the hard work at altitude without proper acclimatization, but I forced myself to concentrate on my foot placements.

I was looking right into the hole of Camp I during my journey across the traverse. It looked to me now like an open blue mouth with large white teeth, and I was tiptoeing right into it.

We all rustled into our respective tents, anxious to get the stoves going. The din of voices in the other tent quickly began rising in decibels. We heard "hey-watch-it" and roaring curses. Then suddenly a burst of flame catapulted out of the front of the tent, burning the delicate nylon in its course, and landed in the snow with a metallic clank. Jim had handled the stove with the old theory, if you can't deal with it, destroy it. We had replacement stoves below, and that was where we were ultimately heading, so I saw humor in the event. Laughter, however, wasn't appropriate.

Ned had been hovering and fussing over our stove for some time now, and I could see the pressure gauge rising on his face. I knew we all needed to get this stove to light properly, so that we could melt some snow for drinking water.

"Ned, let me light it. It worked for me this morning."

No response. I really dislike being ignored.

"Ned, don't be dumb. You're making it worse. Give it to me." I knew I was badgering. My concern for water overwhelmed my more diplomatic self. Ned turned his black tangle of hair and beard toward me. His eyes had that look of rapidly eroding self-control, and he lashed out. "Someday someone is going to smash your nose in." Ned's threat was like a bucket with a hole for a bottom. He didn't say he was going to smash my nose in, so I ignored him and lit the stove anyway.

Later, Ned's hollow threat became a great classic between us. When either of us is treading on thin ice, the other just smiles sweetly and repeats it. It defuses the situation and makes us cool down with laughter. But it was no laughing matter that night on Pumori.

We drank a great deal of tea and water that night, but there was very little to eat. With our fuel supply all but depleted, and with no edible food remaining, we didn't have the option of resting there to make another summit bid in the next day or so. Besides, all our bodies had been drained by the cold, wind, lack of food, and high altitude. On top of that, our minds were out of sorts.

At last, after the final cup of tea, I sank gratefully into my sleeping bag. To my chagrin, two great tears rolled down my cheeks. The silence in the tent since the stove incident hadn't been golden. Ned rolled on to his side, looked at me and his eyes began to soften. "Why are you upset now, after all the trying times during the day?"

I stared at the top of the tent: I hadn't meant to say anything. I try to be strong, cheerful, and easygoing on an expedition to guard against unnecessary tension, and to defuse uncomfortable situations. I feel I have to tread carefully around Ned's moods, so I often keep intimate thoughts to myself.

"Sometimes I'm afraid to speak my mind to you, because I know you'll write about it," I answered slowly, turning my gaze from the top of the tent to his eyes. I explained that sometimes there were things I wanted to express, but that I held back because he was always furiously recording in his notebooks. I didn't ever want to appear apprehensive or frivolous in his journals. I suppose I was suffering from the fear of being exposed, analyzed, criticized. But, as the night drew around us, and we were warm and comfortable for the first time during this long, physically demanding day, it made me weep quietly that I was afraid, almost ashamed to whisper to Ned about my true thoughts and feelings about the day gone by.

"I'm sorry," Ned breathed out slowly. He rolled over, and it wasn't long before I could tell by his heavy, rhythmical breathing that he was asleep.

My head was throbbing where I'd been smacked by the ice earlier. I'd cleaned it up a bit, but it had never stopped hurting. Besides that, I felt as though a hurricane was raging in my digestive system. I had to rouse myself up out of my soft, warm bag to relieve myself several times during the cold of the night. Ned woke and lent comforting words when he realized that I was under the weather. We laughed about how he had kept me up the night before, wrestling with the gear he slept in, and now I was keeping him up with all my tossing and turning. But I had eased him into the day, just as he was easing me into the night. Soon we both slept.

CHRISTMAS

"We've completed a major portion of the circle. We should be celebrating!"

Jan Reynolds

JAN: There was no joy in packing our goods before the long descent all the way back to Base Camp. We worked quietly and monotonously. I was trudging up and out, toward the beginning of our fixed rope at the top of the ridge, when an awkward step caused my knee to buckle. I fell and caught myself. I had already known that I was physically weak from our hard work at high altitude with little food, but now I was aware that I wasn't mentally acute, either. A lapse in concentration caused my slip. I could see myself falling prey to one of the most familiar truisms of climbing: because the descent is anticlimactic, attention drifts, and climbers are more vulnerable. Most climbing accidents occur on the way down.

I reached for the fixed rope, and as soon as I gripped it the world seemed to be a better place. My pack was heavy and swung my body around under it as I rappelled. Our loads in this final descent were the largest so far, since we were leaving the mountain and needed to take everything down with us at once.

I rappelled last. The descent was painfully tedious and wearing, especially when I broke through the crust of a snow hole on the ridge. Because the hole was deeper than the length of my legs, and because I had extra weight on my back, I had to claw with my hands to drag myself out, crawling on my belly as I floundered around. I swore like my father did when the milking machinery used to break down in the barn. When I had successfully extricated myself, I had to laugh at the things children learn from their parents and then keep with them forever.

After we had negotiated the lattice work of ice on the ridge, Jim decided we should hack a bollard out of the snow to anchor our rappel ropes, which we could pull down behind us for use again on the next rappel. The bollards were oblong lumps carved out of ice and snow. About two feet in diameter, they looked like giant doorknobs.

Before we descended we had a discussion to determine the pecking order. Should the heaviest go first to test the bollard for our maximum load? Or should the lightest go first, followed by the rest in graduated succession? We all agreed it probably didn't matter either way about Ned, Jim, and Steve because their loads were of similar weight. But it was decided that I should have the dubious distinction of rappelling last. The others rationalized that the lightest should be last because that person would be the least likely to tip the rope over the top of the bollard. After Jim and Steve had gone down, I held the rope down on the bollard for Ned.

“Whatever happened to ladies first?” I asked with mock indignation. He laughed, told me to be careful, and began working his way down.

The lower we descended, the lower my heart sank. Leaving the mountain unclimbed was like opening a gorgeously wrapped package only to find nothing inside.

Yet, I felt warmed to see Anu’s eager face waiting for us at the Advance Base Camp. “Congratulations. You make the top.” Oh, no, I thought, the upper portion of the route wasn’t visible to them from Base Camp, so when we made our push from our high camp in the hole, our Sherpas had assumed that with all that good weather we’d surely reached the summit. I replied simply and softly, “No, Anu, we just weren’t prepared.” It hadn’t dawned on me until now how deeply disappointed and almost embarrassed I was to admit to someone else that we had failed. Anu just shrugged and hugged me again.

Since we had no supplies here, we still had to make the long walk over the moraine before we could indulge in the comforts of Base Camp. The moon was rising and cast a gray glow on the rocky glacier’s tongue. Ned kept looking back at me, calling for me to join him, but I wanted to be alone. It was Christmas Eve and the night was beautiful. I wanted to wrap myself in the stars, and saw absolutely no need for hurry. We had been all together on our umbilical cord up the mountain for several days. I had forgotten the delicious feel of independent decision and freedom to move, and I was savoring it now.

In a couple of hours, when we all finally gathered together in our big dining tent at Base, the mood had shifted 180 degrees from that of the morning. The Sherpas served us hot french fries and catsup, along with gallons of sweet tea. We had eaten meagerly for the past five days, so the fries were not only palatable, they were a feast. We laughed at each other. We laughed at ourselves. In the cozy glow of the lantern light and with full bellies, our past perils became a source of levity. In retrospect, the first night in the hole with all four of us in one two-person tent, Ned’s threat to punch my nose in, and Jim’s daring dash out on the traverse were all very humorous. We had already begun to forget how awful our ill-prepared summit attempt had been, and could view the recent events through different eyes. As we got sillier and sillier that evening, Jim announced, “Royal Robbins once said my problem was that I wasn’t serious enough. You know, I had to keep myself from just singing that little kids’ song, ‘Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream, merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, life is but a dream.’” “Jim had us giggling so hard, hearing his rough voice singing a nursery rhyme, that our tightly stuffed stomachs hurt and we begged him to stop. I went to sleep that Christmas Eve satisfied that we’d all shaken our failure from our minds.

NED: “Fools and energy are easily parted,” Jim muttered in Christmas greeting to Jan and me. Steve was still sleeping.

“So are fools and summits,” I added. I needed little encouragement from Jim to lapse into a grinch grump. It was Christmas morning, and we sat in sunshine at Base Camp, sipping tea. Phutashi served omelets, fried potatoes, and pancakes with apricot jam from a tray decorated with a brightly colored cloth.

Jan sang the first stanza of “Deck the Halls,” and tried to cajole us into joining her. I mumbled something about not needing any morning caroling calisthenics. I had awakened early that morning, while Jan was still asleep. I crooked my neck, peered out.

The camp lay in a cold shadow that seemed to coat the sand and rocks like steel-blue varnish. I felt sulky, like a child who knew he wasn't getting what he wanted for Christmas.

I sat looking up at Pumori. It was a balanced structure-half rock, half snow and ice; half black, half white. It was not as high as many peaks, nor as remote. But, even as Everest's subaltern, the mountain had an exquisite dignity and presence that held the eye. Its beauty was simple and innocent, like that of an unsophisticated little sister seen in the shadow of her famous elder. If you asked a child to draw a mountain, the result would be Pumori's triangular pyramid, symmetrical and pointed.

For the past day and a half we had been on the defensive, the hours filled with a series of repetitive rappels down the mountain. There is no fatigue like the fatigue of defeat, which is psychological as well as physical. Yet at first I experienced a certain relief when we had turned back at our high point. But as every hour had passed and each foot downward had been lost, our failure had become increasingly unacceptable. That preoccupation during the retreat had eroded our confidence so much that we had to force ourselves to concentrate and avoid mistakes.

As the four of us sat together eating breakfast, I was plagued by the feeling that we had bungled our attempt. First, we had established Base Camp two weeks later than originally planned. Second, we had worried too much about the weather-allowed it to dictate and hurry our actions. By failing to take into account our partial acclimatization and our different levels of expertise, we had overestimated how fast we would be able to climb. Our strategy had failure built into it: we should either have gone slowly enough to stock more camps and get strong on the climb, or have acclimated fully and then gone as rapidly as possible. Finally, we had run out of food at Camp I after the one summit attempt. We had discussed these problems and possibilities before the climb, but reality was a tougher teacher than theory.

I had to remember that we had enjoyed at least a measure of success: we had touched the border between Nepal and Tibet at nearly 22,000 feet. Within the narrow, self-defined concept of the circle, our failure on Pumori was a success. Was that good enough? It was in our gloomy mood of that morning, a depression somehow heightened by the fact that it was Christmas. We had a whole circle ahead of us. That was what we had come to do, and that was what seemed most important. When Anu joined us after breakfast, I told him to send Angpura out to fetch the porters and yaks. We'd break camp and get on with the circle.

As Phutashi was gathering up our breakfast plates, a messenger arrived carrying a note from our outfitter in Kathmandu. He was relaying word from Kim Schmitz informing us that he would be unable to join us for the next leg of the circle as planned, and that Craig Calonica would replace him. Jan and I were somewhat concerned, since we had never met Calonica and knew nothing about him. The new note said he would be arriving the next day.

"If Calonica is coming in," Steve blurted out, "I'm leaving."

Steve's sudden announcement caught me by surprise. The night before he had still been planning to cross the high passes with us, and Craig Calonica was an old friend of his. But I didn't argue. He had never felt at ease on the expedition. His mind was made up; his focus lay elsewhere. "Impetuous youth," Jim said.

The messenger also delivered a plastic quart bottle of yellow liquid with Jim's name written on the side. He roared with laughter-it was the nighttime pee bottle that he had left at Anu's house in Namche! Not realizing the nature of its contents, the Sherpas had been careful to return it to its owner.

JAN: I woke Christmas morning with childlike anticipation. Just what I expected, I'm not sure, but holidays in my family had always been something very special. Years ago, Christmas was a fantastic free-for-all among the seven children in my family. Ned, on the other hand, referred to Christmas as "just another obligation." But to me it felt like a very special day. "Ned, we can't let ourselves think the cup is half-empty. It's Christmas! Besides, we've completed a major portion of the circle. We should be celebrating!" My remarks immediately sent Ned into a tailspin. He took off on a lecture about Christmas being just a public rip-off-buy, buy, buy. And it also settled the fact that Ned wasn't going to enjoy this Christmas, in particular. It didn't look as if Jim or Steve was either, given the looks on their tired faces.

During the trek in, I had told Anu about Christmas, its historic roots, and the traditional celebration we have at home. He seemed very taken with the idea of Christmas, and was my right-hand man in creating the festivities at Base Camp, in the sand pit of the Himalaya. Indeed, Anu quite outdid me. He had his mother contract with some local weavers to make us each small carpets with the peak Pumori woven in. I danced with surprise and delight when I saw them, and hugged Anu for his thoughtfulness. He also relayed my request to Angpura and Phutashi to cook up a special Christmas dinner. It couldn't be the usual turkey and cranberries, but yak meat in thick sauce would do nicely.

As evening began to draw around us, I checked on the cooks to see how dinner was progressing. Then I slipped into the dining tent, lit several candles I had brought in especially for the occasion, and laid out several small presents for the others. In Kathmandu, I had purchased such items as Himalayan snuff and Tiger Balm, then carried them with me to Base Camp. I wrapped the packages carefully and decorated them with strings and bows. I tried to push the excitement out of my voice when I called Ned, Jim, and Steve to dinner.

As I sat there waiting like one of Santa's little elves, I imagined the surprise on their faces when they saw the delicious dinner, lovely candles, and Christmas presents. I was just beginning to get that warm, snug feeling of holiday cheer that you get when you light the Christmas tree for the first time:

The three of them crawled in simultaneously. "What is this?" one of them asked.

I hadn't realized, as I was wrapping packages and humming Christmas carols all day, that they had ignored the holiday. To them, Christmas was something that happened in other parts of the world, but it didn't travel. To them Christmas was a place, not a feeling, and the place was home and we were here, so there was nothing to celebrate.

Ned, Jim, and Steve opened their presents out of a sense of duty, and almost died when I asked if we could sing some Christmas carols. That may have been my worst Christmas ever. They made Scrooge and the grinch look like nice guys.

NED: After a delicious dinner, Jan played Santa. She had presents for all, including the Sherpas: little cans of snuff and of hot balm, all tied with colorful ribbons. Anu was also in the spirit. He gave each of us small rugs of Tibetan wool. They had been designed especially for us, with letters spelling "Pumori" woven over an image of the mountain. Mama Anu had sent white scarves of fine linen that symbolized good fortune.

The next day, Craig Calonica walked into camp. He had spent only eight days in transit from San Francisco to Pumori Base Camp, but except for a bronchial cough, he seemed to be handling the altitude well. Although I was irked that an unknown was joining the expedition, I took an almost immediate liking to him.

The winter before, 1980-81-the first "fully booked" winter climbing season in Nepal-there were seven expeditions in the field; only one was successful. After-Christmas conditions had proved ferocious, with heavy snowfall, low temperatures and high winds. January of 1981 had been stormy for all but two days, with winds clocked at 140 kilometers per hour at the relatively low elevation of 21,000 feet. We knew that if we made a second attempt on Pumori, the usual winter storms might also exhaust our resources and thereby jeopardize completion of the circle. On the other hand, Jim and I both maintained that, on expeditions, we were lucky with weather. We were tempted by ambition to let go of our weather worries. Had we descended to give up or descended to regroup? Until we met unclimbable conditions, how could we not climb?

These were still but half-digested thoughts when I retreated to the tent early that evening. Jan soon joined me, and dropped off to sleep. Camp quieted quickly, but I lay awake, thinking. Only the Polish team on Everest and one other expedition had been successful in the Himalayan winter. Climbing Pumori, even though it was far smaller than Everest, would be a solid second-stage pioneering effort. Given the horrendous experiences of the previous winter, and the failure of six of seven expeditions, only two other expeditions beside ours operated this winter. We had the place and the opportunity to ourselves.

At 2:00 A.M. I started from a restless sleep. Propping myself on an elbow, I looked out of the tent. The cold, soft air floated a half-moon that draped Pumori in a splendid blue light. Our rationalization about the importance of completing the circle could not set right our failure. Pumori was too beautiful to leave undone. Suddenly, I decided on a second attempt. I had no immediate script for Act II, but I was absolutely certain of success. My gloom and frustration fell away instantly-my Christmas had come a day late.

JAN: Craig Calonica made it to camp in time for dinner that evening. I was curious to meet the person who would be an indispensable part of our team on the next portion of our journey around Everest.

My first impression was of a heavy, barrel-chested man with a cherubic face. His hair, wound in tight, dark, frizzy ringlets, framed glowing cheeks. He wore several wild scarves knotted around his neck and his fleece mountaineering clothing was embroidered with deep colors. His speech was slow and filled with the latest slang. He was a good-time California boy, footloose and sniffing for adventure.

Craig was also strong and experienced: he had climbed with Jim in Yosemite and raced the speed-skiing circuit with Steve. Craig could hold his own and more.

Early the next morning, before the light of day, Ned woke me and asked if I would try to climb Pumori again. I had known this was coming, I just hadn't known when. I mumbled a "yeah," rolled over, and dipped back into dreamland. When we rose the next morning, Jim was already packing. Perhaps Craig's fresh blood had encouraged him to try again. Jim and Ned had had trouble settling themselves since the failure, and a second attempt seemed to be the only way to do that. My main concern was the weather. It had been so good for so long, how much longer could it hold?

NED: On December 28, Steve left. Craig, Jan, Jim, and I packed to move back up to Advance Base Camp. Before we departed, the Sherpas again conducted a short ceremony to bring us good fortune, burning in a little stone altar branches of "holy juniper" that had been gathered from a special place far from any traveled path. As the fragrant smoke swirled around us, I asked Anu why juniper was holy.

"It has always been so," he replied. "From old times mothers always burned juniper when men left home."

On December 29, Jim, Craig, and I worked on the lower part of the route, replacing the ropes we had pulled down during our retreat. Craig was strong and competent, and I liked his fresh spirit. That night we went to sleep at 5:30 and slept 13 hours. The only disturbances were a loud rockfall that sounded as though it were coming through the tents, a strong wind that rocked the tents, and everybody's dry-throat coughing and hacking. The next day we all carried food and gear to the top of the staircase and cached it there.

During the last day of 1981 and the first day of 1982, we forgot about the weather, the mountain, and the circle and took a good, long rest. It was just as well, since Jim had a light touch of the flu. I read the first pages of the book I had brought, *The Right Stuff*. Jan and I talked about summer in Vermont, fixing up the house and planting a garden, auctions, and learning to ride horseback.

PUMORI: SUCCESS

"The only thing worse than failing is reaching your goal."

Someone

JAN: We had first reached Base Camp at 17,500 feet on the evening of December 11. By the beginning of our second attempt, more than two weeks later, we were all much better acclimatized.

For me, most of the mystery that surrounded the climb had evaporated, and now it would just be work. I already knew how each pitch would unfold, the riddle was so nearly solved. I hadn't yet forgotten all the hardship we had endured on the first try, but if the others were going back up, so was I. I'm not one for watching the nest while the others fly.

Craig had come in to climb the passes with Ned and me but felt strong enough to try Pumori as well. He had been taking a drug called Diamox during his trek into Base, in hopes that it would aid acclimatization, and he seemed to be doing very well. He might have done just as well without it, but there was no way to know. He indicated that he was feeling fine and was ready and eager to climb high.

Ned continued to take charge, making demands, setting our sights, and constantly pushing us and himself even harder. His enormous drive sufficed for us all. He was geared up to climb Pumori less out of desire than out of a sense of unfulfilled obligation, but his determination infected us all with the desire to succeed.

Jim, in his boyish way, seemed genuinely excited rather than nagged by duty. As we trudged up to Advance Base again, he puffed out a song, "What a difference a thousand feet makes," to the tune of "What a Difference a Day Makes."

On the following day, as we all crossed the solo traverse, a few rocks came whizzing down, humming past Craig's head. He didn't know whether to move backward or forward, but had little chance for an effective decision anyway, since his climbing harness slipped down around his legs. He simply ducked and hoped for the best, and the rocks all flew by him. I couldn't help feeling that this was an inauspicious greeting from the mountain. Looking back at Craig after his near disaster, I saw that even his climbing attire exhibited a certain flair. His jumars were bright yellow, hung with purple nylon webbing that attached them to his climbing harness. He wore black sunglasses and his electric black hair was tied back with a maroon and white woven scarf. None of this classic goggle-and-balaclava business for Craig. I sensed that he had always been a bit of a renegade.

Craig was as silly as Jim was funny, and had a wonderful deep chuckle. Craig and I went up close together, laughing over bits and pieces of nonsense under our heavy loads, while Jim and Ned, climbing ahead of us, were more intense and moved with a sense of urgency. When I began singing a song I had made up, called the "Himalayan

Hack,” Craig paused, peered at me from under his corkscrew locks, and asked between his heavy breaths, “How can you sing up here?” I had to laugh. I had been unaware that I was this excited to be climbing again.

All four of us gathered on the perch, like satisfied hens on their roost, and clucked and cackled together over a snack. This was a favorite place of mine on the route because we could all sit so comfortably together on this island of rock surrounded by an ocean of ice, with a view spreading before us that few in the world would ever see.

A little higher up, on the staircase pitch, I was sandwiched between Ned and Jim. Those two set a mean pace, but the hard work felt good. I remembered how cold and fragile I’d felt on this pitch during our first attempt, when I bullied the haul-bag up. I had climbed with good speed then, but the additional strength I had now convinced me that nothing would keep us off the summit this time.

“Hold up for a second,” Jim called back to Ned behind me. “I was just going to leave it, but why don’t you check it, Ned—the ice screw by your hand.”

I paused between Ned and Jim, balancing delicately on my front points while Ned, secure on a stance below, took out the ice screw. This left the line slack all the way from Jim down to Craig, but Craig wasn’t aware of what was going on above and was tugging on the line. Jim saw me teeter-tottering below, trying to keep my feet in contact with the ice as the rope through my jumar swayed back and forth because of Craig’s movements.

“Craig,” Jim bellowed down. “Will you stop climbing and pulling on the rope! You’re going to pop Jan off.”

I hadn’t been going to say anything, since I thought I could hang on until Ned got the screw in again. But Jim often seemed to have less patience with Craig than he had had with Steve, even though Craig was the more competent climber. I knew that Jim and Craig had been climbing partners in Yosemite, and wondered if that closeness made them harder on each other, as brothers often are.

I imagined that Steve was probably all the way back to Lukla by now. When he was leaving, he said, “I know I’m going to have to live with my decision if you guys make it.” Yet somehow his delivery lacked conviction. I could see him weighing Pumori on the one hand and speed-skiing and his girlfriend on the other: The latter interests simply weighed heavier.

I realized that my mind had drifted, and I pulled myself back to where I stood, moving up so I wouldn’t slow down our train. When my father caught me drifting off like this as a child, he would say, “Janet’s traveling with the fairies again.” But my mind’s ability to travel has enabled me to sort out and cope with a variety of situations. Daydreaming is a natural protective instinct for me, as well as a positive force. I often imagine myself having completed the task I’m in the middle of performing. When I tentatively explained this to Jim once, he just looked at me and said, offhandedly, “That’s how I direct the outcome of situations.”

We reached the bottom of the ridge leading to the hole at one o’clock that afternoon. It had taken us only four hours to get the ropes up and secured in place—half as long as it took us to cover this ground on our first attempt. We rappelled back down to Advance Base Camp and curled up in the tents with steaming mugs of tea. We felt smug. It all seemed so easy this time. The next step was to carry everything up to the hole and make camp exactly where we’d had it before. Then we’d tote our gear up to the

breadloaf, our previous high point, and set up a second camp. From the breadloaf, we figured we could make the summit round trip in a day.

The following day, December 31, was declared a rest day. We spent much of it discussing our subsequent climb over the three 20,000-foot passes that would complete our half-circle in Nepal. Thinking of more strenuous work before we'd even washed our hands of Pumori oppressed me. High-altitude mountaineering is, in fact, just a grueling, long-distance event—one that deals with time in terms of months, not hours. It's an event where mental fatigue may play a more debilitating role than physical stress. The real high points on an expedition are about as rare as natural pearls found in a bed of oysters. But with the perseverance of a strong mind and the willing ability to continue, these high points can be strung together like pearls on a necklace.

The next morning Jim announced that he wasn't feeling well, and wasn't up to climbing, so we spent New Year's Day in camp, waiting.

On January 2 we pushed hard up to the ridge where the gear had been tied in. Ned and Jim clipped their jumars onto the polypropylene rope left behind from the first attempt and made their way on up. Craig and I clipped on behind them, and again became a talkative duo climbing near each other.

This ridge was a narrow spine of rock partially covered with snow that had become a brittle crust. The sun, wind, and dry air at this altitude continually wore down the snow surface, making it ever thinner and more fragile. Consequently, foot placement was precarious at best. Occasionally, a rock might roll out from under my foot or the frozen, lacy ice would give way. Climbing this pitch a second time around gave me a deeper appreciation for the line Jim had artfully crocheted up through the intricate ridge on that dusky evening of our first attempt.

Our assault tents were too much trouble to assemble, considering that speed and efficiency meant so much this high in the mountains, so we brought up a larger two-person dome tent. This tent had been bombproof on our other expeditions, so we decided to use it again on Pumori. Ned, Jim, and I shared the larger dome tent, and Craig had one of the newly designed mountain tents to himself. The sleeping arrangements suited me—I eagerly accepted the warmth of the middle position between Ned and Jim. My concern was for Craig. Since he was the team's most recent acquisition, I didn't want this to make him feel like the odd man out. When I asked him if he felt cold and lonely in a tent by himself, he just chuckled and assured me he was fine.

The next day Ned and Craig descended to pull up some ropes and extra gear while Jim and I worked fixing the traverse out of the hole. We had planned to move camp up to the breadloaf the following day, but when we woke in the early morning the weather was ugly. When Craig unzipped our tent and crawled in, he revealed the whiteout outside. We were engulfed in a thick cloud.

“Doesn't look like today, does it?” he mumbled.

“I wouldn't want to take the chance of being caught out if this storm takes hold,” Jim answered. He was anxious to get the climb over with, and I could feel our morale sinking. The climb had seemed so much easier and the organization so much smoother that I had never stopped to think we might not make it this second time around. But there are certain things about an expedition that can't be controlled, starting with the weather.

I knew at least one day had to be spent here at 21,000 feet in a two-man tent with three antsy teammates, surrounded by a storm, but the last thing I wanted was to listen to

everyone's complaints and misgivings, so I scanned my mental files for entertainment. As it turned out, I had no trouble getting the rest of them to join me in a medley of rousing word games.

We ate eagerly the next morning: the weather had lifted, the sky was clear, and we were ready to go. Craig had been exceptionally quiet at breakfast, and his announcement explained why. "I don't feel too well, and I've got a headache that's getting worse. It might be the kerosene fumes in the tent, but it could be the altitude." Craig had never been this high before and didn't know if what he was feeling was normal or not. It was impossible for the rest of us to determine which condition Craig was suffering from.

The course of action that Craig chose left a lasting impression on me. I only hope that someday I can be so gracious. Although feeling good enough to climb, Craig was unsure if his condition would deteriorate, so he chose to rappel down and let the remaining three of us go up alone. His decision had nothing to do with fear for himself. He was just concerned he might jeopardize our summit success if he held us back. Craig was unselfishly thinking of the rest of us.

It took Ned, Jim, and me four hours to reach the breadloaf. Jim had lead the whole route with his own pack on this time, even up the exhausting 70-degree Swiss-cheese pitch. We nestled into our Camp II in tight to the icefall, protecting ourselves to the south and west and exposing ourselves to a gaping crevasse on the other side. I was absolutely elated to be here, despite my raw throat and hoarse cough. The "Himalayan hack" affected all three of us, especially when we had been working hard and breathing heavily. Ned and Jim were pleased to be here, too. Warm friendship and positive energy surrounded the three of us who had persevered to this point. If the next day dawned clear, we were on our way to the elusive summit at last.

The next day, January 6, the weather looked very stable. We left Camp II for the summit about nine, expecting to reach the summit in three hours. Now that we were climbing above where we had been before, my excitement returned.

The mood was upbeat and alive with energy; I was gleeful and Ned and Jim were playful. The first portion of the day was spent winding through the maze - of the icefall, hopping a few crevasses, and scouting for the line of least resistance. The route steepened up a gully that looked as if a giant ice cream scoop had dredged down the mountain and peeled it out. More gradual snow slopes followed, with occasional steep pitches. After a morning of straightforward hard work, we paused for lunch, gazing at Everest and watching the soft clouds chase each other around its peak. We left our packs here, expecting to reach the summit in about an hour. Soon it became apparent that our estimate had been inaccurate. Jim began to hurry, and admitted that his feet were freezing and that he couldn't feel his toes. I was relieved that my thin cross-country inner boots left enough room in my boots for proper circulation. I had two overboots on as well, and Jim had on only one. Since our thermometers didn't go below minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit, we didn't know exactly how cold it was, but the wind was gusting up to about 40 miles per hour. The relaxed day had drawn a sense of urgency around itself.

Jim began to push himself with an intensity I hadn't seen. I was tied in behind him, hoofing as fast as I could manage. The rope became taut between Ned and me, and Ned assured me later that he wouldn't have wished for any faster pace. The last 500 feet were dotted with sastrugi snow cones two to three feet high created by the continuous

high winds. Jim continued to charge ahead, even after it had become obvious that we would reach the summit. He was also winding in and out of these horns of snow and ice, so that I had to keep stopping to unwrap the rope from the horns. By the time I got the rope straightened out, I had to scramble straight up the steepest portions of the slope to avoid having the rope snap taut between us. It was exhausting. My breathing was coarse and uneven as I sucked in the air that was so cold and dry my throat felt like it was burning.

The wind was howling so fiercely we had no audible communication. Jim finally realized what he'd been putting his second through when he dashed up a ramp to the north side and continued across the summit plateau. The rope tightened between us and I faced an overhanging climb to reach the summit. When I stood my ground, Jim came to an abrupt halt. He retraced his steps over the elliptical plateau, realizing he'd have to leave me some slack to reach the ramp. I walked up slowly, still puffing, and stood at last on the summit. Only a few feet below, I had been protected, but on the small plateau the wind pushed me around and stung my face. I had no time to savor reaching the top, since I had to belay Ned, giving him plenty of length to negotiate the ramp. As Ned moved up, Jim began jumping and stomping around. I wondered if Jim had gone crazy, then remembered his feet. Meanwhile Ned began circling us, snapping what seemed at the time hundreds of photographs. It was probably about 30 below zero Fahrenheit, and the wind was blowing at least 60 miles an hour. It was a slicing, noisy cold. The roar of the wind killed all other sound, so I was observing Ned and Jim as if I were watching a movie. Then I was suddenly pulled into the scene as Jim began to howl like an animal. He wanted off. He looked at me and I threw my arm in the direction of the ramp, indicating as best I could, "Let's get the hell out of here." Ned, oblivious, was pulling on the rope in the opposite direction, furiously recording the event. While Jim and Ned had been moving about the summit, I had been stationary, gazing at the 360-degree view. Situated between the two of them, I was subject to the maypole effect: they had wrapped the rope around me and I was working frantically to untangle the mess.

I tugged on the rope to Ned, urging him to come along as I tumbled after Jim down the ramp. Once under the overhang of the summit, we could hear one another as we shouted.

Jim was frantic about his feet and was worried about whether Ned and I could keep up with his rate of descent. I told Jim to go ahead and untie if he felt comfortable alone, and he was off like a desperate rabbit. Ned looked up from the tangled mess of rope he was trying to unravel and glared at me as he saw Jim disappear. I grabbed the rope from Ned, coiled it, and we tied in closer together. Ned was angry not because I'd made an erroneous decision, but because I'd taken charge without consulting him.

NED: I was last on the rope, and so last up to the top. I had imagined a pinpoint summit; I found a dance floor. This was the summit! We'd done it! My first feeling was of exuberant celebration. I clenched both fists and threw up my arms into the wind. "Yeah!" I shouted, triumphant. Jan and Jim were standing in the center of the summit area, their bodies cocked toward the west, leaning into the wind. They looked like frozen mannequins, their arms blowing about. In my fatigue, it was funny in an odd way. For a moment, the fight had gone out of us. A remark I had once heard popped into my head: "The only thing

worse than failing is reaching your goal.” Then another bullying gust shoved us, and we snapped back into the professional efficiency that had brought success on the second attempt.

Jim stamped about on the snow, roaring like a bull, maniacally anxious about his freezing feet. On the other end of our 600-foot polypropylene rope, I backed up, preoccupied with photography. It was awkward to manipulate a tiny 35-mm camera while wearing bulky mittens. Although I snapped only 15 photos, the others were impatient with my request to pose. Between us, tied into the center of the rope, Jan tried to keep all the loose rope lying about in some order.

I fixed my eyes on Everest even as the wind slammed me back and forth. From this distance, in the clear air of winter, the big mountain looked beautifully groomed and perfectly formed. I felt a lingering pride for the three of us having made it to the top of Pumori. When I turned toward the north, I could see at least 100 miles across the brown landscape of Tibet. There was a certain unburdened timelessness-to the minutes we spent on Pumori. Then we retreated down under the cornice, escaping the wind.

“My feet are gone!” Jim cried, throwing off the rope. “I’ll see you at camp.” He turned and ran down the mountain like an escaping desperado. His moonlike bounds seemed to defy gravity.

Jan and I, roped together, started down the summit headwall at a much slower rate. At first we had far too much rope between us, so loops snagged again and again on the sastrugi formations. Usually we yanked it free, but the release tipped us dangerously off balance. When the loops cut deeply into the hard snow lumps, we were forced to retrace our steps to free the rope. It was slow and exasperating progress. At the bottom of the headwall I again coiled all but 60 feet of the offensive tether we used to tie ourselves together. I slung it over one shoulder, but the coil was so big that it dragged on the ground and threatened to trip me. Once I snared a crampon in a loop and sprawled on the snow slope. I cursed the coil again and again. Jan thought I was angry at her, but it was the awkwardness of traveling with the coil of rope that made me impatient.

I kept close track of the time. Here on the East Face the shadows intensified early, and their deep blue hue seemed to make the cold penetrate deeper. Even though our position on the eastern side of the mountain provided a lee, the west wind eddied around the mountain, hitting us in small, pulsating cyclones.

Our progress was slow, but steady. Occasionally we exchanged a few words of information or encouragement, but mostly we down-climbed silently, concentrating on each step. The snow was so hard that our uphill footprints had left scant impression, and we temporarily lost sight of them. We found our old tracks again near the bottom of the summit pyramid. They led us through the seracs that tilted crazily against each other, then down a steep couloir where one slip could have sent us tumbling onto the lower part of the mountain. Traversing to more moderate ground, we zigzagged around a group of crevasses and walked along the ridge with one foot in Nepal and the other in Tibet. I finally caught a glimpse of our tent snuggled under a little cornice. We hailed Jim, who stuck his head out to greet us. Jan and I flopped down on the snow in front of the tent and asked Jim about his feet. “They’re fine but prickly,” he said.

Jim had prepared cups of steaming tea. Jan and I sat on the snow, sipping and basking in the glow of success. We didn’t bother to remove our crampons and overboots for several minutes. Laughing, I chided Jim about his prediction earlier that day that the

summit was “a half-hour away.” From that point we had moved upward for two-and-a-half hours. Jim just chuckled good-naturedly.

Later, inside the darkening tent, we kept the stove fired up and churned out cup after cup of hot tea and orange drink. I felt an immense, smooth satisfaction. We had made the top, but there was more. We had finally consolidated into an efficient team during our second assault. Once we were acclimatized, we had been energetic and decisive, always moving along at a steady clip. Our efficiency made the climbing far easier than it had been during the first attempt, and we had learned to read the weather more accurately. We had become the first Americans to climb successfully in the Himalaya in the winter, and Jan was the first woman to do so. Yet that in no way overshadowed the spontaneous enjoyment we felt from simply being here with good friends. I admired Craig’s decision to descend from Camp I in order not to jeopardize our chances. Now that we had been successful, we all had a sense of humor about the whole climb, and spent much of the evening chuckling about what we now saw as minor mishaps.

Clear skies and light winds greeted us the next morning. When we descended to Camp I, it looked like a messy hobo encampment, littered with clumps of discarded food and yellow pee-holes. Once the Camp I gear had been loaded into our packs, they each weighed about 45 pounds, which we knew would make the rappels awkward. We decided to push on, though it was already afternoon.

Getting the 600-foot rope down was a problem, since nobody wanted to carry it down the first series of fixed-rope rappels. Jim suggested, since he was first down, that he tie it to his waist and “pull” it down as he descended. The plan was for me to pay it out until he got to the next major stance, which was exactly 600 feet down. There he would pull the rope through all the pieces of protection, and so have it available to rig below, where there was no fixed rope. This was the most intricate part of the mountain: the route wove back and forth on both sides of the rock and snow ridge, along traverses, down couloirs. Jim quickly descended out of sight, pulling the rope. Soon I paid out enough that it was impossible to distinguish by feel between its own weight and Jim’s progress.

“Jim seems to be rappelling amazingly fast,” I remarked to Jan.

When all the rope was out, I dropped the end, as planned. It snaked down out of sight, and I started my rappel. When I got to the big couloir, I was amazed to discover nearly the entire length there in a great, horrid, tangled wad. Jim, out of sight farther down, was yelling furiously. The rope was so entangled that it had arrested his rappel, and of course he assumed that I was still holding the end. From his expletives, I gathered that he had been hung up for a long time.

I tried to shout and explain the situation to him, but we were too far apart for him to understand much. I now faced the unpleasant and dangerous job of climbing down the couloir unbelayed and gathering 400 feet of unruly rope. I plucked the maverick loops off the ice and hung them in disarray on myself, all the while standing on the front points of my crampons. I climbed back up, ludicrously hampered, cursing and cursing and cursing. Jan, descending, was appalled by the sight and sound. She waited while I took 20 minutes more to sort out the mess and release poor Jim.

When we joined Jim, he hurriedly cast the long rope off for the next rappel. The anchor was an ice bollard that now measured six inches across. At the beginning of the

climb, when we had first used it, it had been two feet across. The sun, even in winter, had reduced it. Jim started sliding down the rope, but once again it had hung up, and lay tangled on the stairway. At this point Jim lost his cool, fuming and cursing when he had to stop every few feet to tug the rope free. Finally we all descended to the lower ropes, and rappelled them. Then, for the last time, we traversed toward Advance Base Camp in gathering dusk.

Anu, Angpura, and Craig were waiting on the ledges above Advance Base Camp to take our packs. By the light of a full moon that poked over the North Ridge of Everest, we followed them back to Base Camp.

JAN: Ned and I eased our way back down to camp, talking and looking. Jim had dashed down over an hour faster, and had tea ready and his toes protected by the time we arrived. Dusk began drifting in around our tent as I lay down, coughing after all the hard work. Jim kept badgering me affectionately, calling me a pinhead because I wouldn't eat some chocolate he had out for me. I knew I would throw it up, but he persisted, so I pushed it down, then promptly deposited it outside. This time I knew I could safely say, "I told you so." When I laughed, Jim just looked at me quizzically, unsure why I saw humor in the situation. He kept looking at me and said, "I have never seen a face as determined as yours was today."

"I didn't think you turned around long enough to focus on anything. You were wild. I had to dredge up any grit I had to stay on your trail." The day had been long and arduous, and now the paramount emotion was relief.

Our descent off the mountain was quick, and so were our tempers. Ned screamed when the slack rope between him and Jim caught in a gully; Jim swore all the way down the staircase over a tangle in the rope; and I tripped on the bergschrund, fell flat on the ice, and cursed myself for getting cut. We were letting out what we'd been holding in during the ascent.

Two days later I was sitting on a box in the cook tent at Base Camp, swinging my legs absentmindedly, surrounded by warming steam, bubbling pots, and good smells. The heat felt wonderful, and the level ground gave me such a feeling of freedom. I didn't have to be conscious of every foot and hand placement, as I had been on steeper territory. Down here I could walk where I wished when I wished.

I peered out of the tent and saw Saile floating into camp carrying a load of wood. Even when encumbered, she moved with a shy grace. When I stepped out of the tent to greet her, she flashed a big grin, pointed up at Pumori, and nodded her head up and down vigorously. I reflected her smile and slowly nodded "yes." At that moment, the initial emotion of relief was replaced by a growing deep, smooth satisfaction. For me, successfully climbing a peak doesn't bring about elation, just a strong, satisfied feeling that I accomplished what I set out to do. I was pleased to tell Saile that I had made it.

NED: My muscles twitched with fatigue, as if I were plugged into a faint electrical current. Kukari rum stung my mouth, slowed my brain. The celebratory dinner that the Sherpas had served bulged my stomach.

It was the evening of January 8. Two days before we had stood on top of Pumori. Now, lying belly up at Base Camp in a happy, light alcoholic haze, we laughed and remembered the highlights of the climb.

Then the mountain came apart.

There was no warning. The night was still; then it was filled with a roar that lunged upon us like a fast freight train bursting from a tunnel. Strangely hypnotized by the mountain's bellow, no one moved for a moment. Then the four of us spurted through the tent doorway and into the moon-flooded night.

"Avalanche!" Jim gasped.

Ice cliffs high on the East Face had collapsed. Falling, they had toppled other blocks and towers. An entire quarter of the mountain in our view was exploding. On the leading edge, a vast snow cloud reared into the air. We stood distant-safe, yet tense. We were more than detached spectators. The avalanche swept over the lower part of our climbing route, where we had been little more than 24 hours before. We could have been under that avalanche. The rumble subsided, then rose again, echoing off the walls of Everest as the snow cloud settled. Then we were wrapped once again in quiet moonlight.

Everest Grand Circle Chapters Teaching Guide
National English, Social Studies, Geography standards included

English/Literature Standards:

2. UNDERSTANDING DIMENSIONS OF THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Do you see any ethical decisions being made or any ethics being broken by the climbers on the Everest Grand Circle Expedition? Explain. Do climbers take each other into consideration or not, or is it important?

3. WIDE RANGE OF STRATEGIES FOR COMPREHENSION

Use the photo with the dotted climbing route indicated on Pumori to trace the progress of the climbers when they succeed. Which part appears to be the most difficult to you and why?

4/5. STUDENTS ADJUST THEIR LANGUAGE FOR DIFFERENT AUDIENCES

Write a news article about the climber's success on Pumori. Do you think it's important to mention the first failure as part of the success article?

7/8. STUDENTS CONDUCT RESEARCH

Everest has been climbed many times, by many different routes, and in all seasons. Do a web search, and utilize other sources if you like, to write a short piece summarizing the success or lack of success on Everest. Everestnews.com is a great place to start.

12. STUDENTS USE SPOKEN, WRITTEN, AND VISUAL LANGUAGE TO ACCOMPLISH THEIR OWN PURPOSES (for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information)

Read the chapters of the Everest Grand Circle and use the photos to select one of the climbers and one part of the climb to write a journal entry for that day. What did their day entail, what were their thoughts, and how did they feel about their teammates at the time?

Change the ending of any of the chapters as you see fit. Make it surprising, or scary, sad, or what ever appeals to you in this "choose your own ending" exercise.

Browse and read the web site for Tibet House, a link at the bottom of Jan's home page, at janreynolds.com to increase your knowledge of Sherpa and Tibetan life. What was something surprising that you learned from this site? Tell why.

Write a speech from a Sherpa's point of view about why they cannot cut more trees for construction of lodges and for cooking fires, and requesting aid from foreign sources for reforestation.

Write a short piece about why Everest is growing a little less than an inch per year.

Everest was named after an early British surveyor in the Himalaya, Sir Everest. The local name for our world's highest peak for thousands of years was Chomolungma, mother goddess of the earth. What name do you think suits the world's highest peak? Explain.

Social Studies Standards:

1. CULTURE

What are common characteristics between the Sherpa culture and our own? What did the climbers and the Sherpas have in common at the Christmas celebration? How does culture change to accommodate different ideas and beliefs?

2. TIME, COMMUNITY AND CHANGE

How did the Everest Circle climbers relate to the Everest climbers of the past? Was prior knowledge of the area helpful?

3. PEOPLE, PLACES AND ENVIRONMENT

Why is this area of the Himalaya with many peaks called the Everest region? Is there more to a region than its physical features, does culture matter? Are there different ways to define a region?

4. INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY

If you were suddenly turned into a Sherpa tomorrow, would you view yourself differently than you view yourself today, here and now? Why or why not?

5. INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, INSTITUTIONS

What effect did the Buddhist monasteries and nunneries have on the Sherpa people?

6. POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE

The Sherpas migrated to the Everest region from the other side of Everest, from Tibet. How does their original Tibetan leader, the Dalai Lama have power within the Sherpa culture?

7. PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION AND CONSUMPTION

The numbers of trekkers from around the world traveling through the Khumbu, the Everest region, are depleting the fragile alpine forests as the Sherpas cut wood for lodges and cooking fires for the trekkers. How can foreign trekkers help the Sherpas maintain their forests? Cook stoves? Tents? Limit the number of visitors? Visitors plant trees?

8. SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY

How can the Sherpas preserve fundamental values and beliefs in the midst of technological change?

9. GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

If it weren't for the highest peak in the world being located within the area of the Sherpa culture, do you think you would have heard of the Sherpas? Why?

10. CIVIC IDEAS AND PRACTICES

Do you think decisions about the Everest region should be made by the Sherpas alone, or by the entire world? Why?

Geography Standards:

WORLD IN SPACIAL TERMS

Find a web map of the Everest region, locate the entire Himalayan chain, locate Pumori, then look at the map with the climbing route dotted on, in the chapters of the Everest Circle expedition.

PLACES AND REGIONS

The Everest Region is associated with the Sherpa culture. How does this effect your view of climbing Mount Everest? Is the Everest Region a cultural, political, or physical region, and why? Would we have thought of Sherpas differently if Mount Everest hadn't been in their region?

PHYSICAL SYSTEMS

What physical system is occurring to cause Mount Everest to rise a little less than an inch per year?

HUMAN SYSTEMS

What is the Sherpa economy based on, what is their main source of employment?

ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY

Can this fragile alpine zone of the Everest Region handle unlimited numbers of trekkers from around the world?

USES OF GEOGRAPHY

When Sir Edmund Hillary climbed Everest in 1959, how did it change our view of the mountain, of the Sherpas, of human ability?