

The Everest Files.

THE EVEREST BASE CAMP BLOG

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LOOK CLOSELY AT THIS PICTURE OF THE ICE FALL AND YOU'LL SEE THE TINY FIGURES OF OUR CLIMBING TEAM. **PHOTO:** MATT DICKINSON



KNITTING UP READY FOR THE ICE FALL. **PHOTO:** MATT DICKINSON

WEDNESDAY 27 APRIL

INTO THE ICE FALL

We start before dawn. The cold night air bonds the ice-fall tight, preventing (we hope) the avalanches which can be so deadly. There is just enough time for a quick gulp of tea and then we are off, crampons crunching across the ice.

It takes about an hour to cross the glacier, heading through a maze of tall ice towers. Then we reach the start of the ice-fall itself, a seven-hundred metre high confusion of tumbling ice cliffs and splintered blocks. Basically the glacier falls steeply over a massive descent, too fast for it to remain unbroken. The result is a world of collision and cracked up ice where crevasses can be dozens of metres deep, widening a little every day as gravity does its work.

Soon we are working hard. The ice-fall doctors have laid a rope trail through the ice-fall. There are near-vertical cliffs of ice to be climbed, places where we have to dig the front points of our crampons in hard, places where we have to use our ascender devices to help us gain height on the fixed lines.

Stopping is a bad idea. Speed is safety ... of a sort. Every now and then comes a reminder of the real danger of this place ... the WHUMP of a collapsing serac (ice cliff) as it pounds the ice-fall with debris.

Sixteen Sherpa climbers were killed here just two years ago in a single avalanche incident ... an event which caused real trauma in the Everest climbing community and which caused the mountain to be temporarily closed.

Next we reach a crevasse. Placing the sharp crampon spikes on the rungs feels wobbly and dodgy. Two ropes act as handlines but they don't feel so secure.

Our ice-fall journey comes to an end as the heat of the sun blasts down. The ice is dangerously unstable by mid-morning.

QUESTIONS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION:

1. Everest has one ice fall. Which side of the mountain is it on?
2. The Nepali government has recently agreed certain supplies can be lifted to the top of the ice fall by helicopter. Do you think this is a good idea?
3. How fast does ice move in the Everest Ice fall. How many years might it take for ice to go from the top to the bottom?



THE ICE FALL IS A CHAOTIC AND DANGEROUS ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH MANY LIVES HAVE BEEN LOST. **PHOTO:** MATT DICKINSON



DEEP CREVASSES ARE CROSSED BY LADDERS. **PHOTO:** MATT DICKINSON



CROSSING THE LADDERS IS A PERILOUS PROCESS, ESPECIALLY WITH CRAMPON SPIKES ON THE BOOTS. **PHOTO:** MATT DICKINSON



MATT DICKINSON AND OTHER EVEREST TEAM MEMBERS IN THE ICE FALL. **PHOTO:** MATT DICKINSON