

The Everest Files.

THE EVEREST BASE CAMP BLOG 2017

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INTO THE ICE FALL, PHOTO: MATT DICKINSON

DEATH ON EVEREST: April ended with tragedy as news rippled through base camp. Ueli Steck, one of the world's most famous climbers, had died during a training climb on the North Face of Nuptse. It was a staggering blow for the climbing community, many of whom were friends of this high-profile and brilliant climber. We had also had the honour of spending time with him the previous year when we stayed in the same lodge in the village of Chukung. He was a modest and friendly man, not the least bit aloof despite his incredible achievements which include two Piolet d'or awards (climbing's greatest honour) and a speed ascent of the North Face of the Eiger in less than two and a half hours. So. What went wrong?

Was it human error? Or had Ueli been the victim of an avalanche or rock fall? Most climbers at Base Camp go for the rock fall theory. The face Ueli was climbing is prone to shed loose rocks once the sun comes up, they get loosened as the ice sealing them to the face melts. Ueli had been climbing SOLO so we will never really know the truth of what killed him. The world of climbing has lost one of its brightest talents.

AN EIGHT-HOUR EPIC: My original plan had been to join my hosts, the British Army Gurkha Everest Expedition 2017 on their first 'rotation' through the ice fall. But the logistics of setting up their higher camps had not been completed at that point so I left with Chongma Pemba Sherpa as my guide to climb up to Camp One and Two. We left at 2 a.m, in the very coldest part of the night, since that is the 'safest' time of the day to be traversing the ice fall. Nevertheless we heard two distant avalanches as we crunched across the ice



ME IN THE ICE FALL ON THE CLIMB TO CAMP ONE. PHOTO: MATT DICKINSON
towards the start of the climb, a warning sign that we could take nothing for granted.

The route through the ice fall was different this year. In an attempt to avoid massive crevasses on the right-hand side, the Sherpa team fixing the ropes had taken the route to the left. I felt my stress levels rising as we traversed some massive OVERHANGING ICE WALLS which were creaking and cracking alarmingly. The route took us right through the zone where sixteen climbing Sherpas were tragically killed in an avalanche in 2014. We heard an ice tower collapse with a tremendous BANG close by. It was a terrifying place to be in and we moved as quickly as we could.

ARRIVING TO CAMP 1: Daylight was a real morale booster. Everything seems better once the sun rises, even though, ironically, the ice fall then gets more dangerous. But it's simply good to be able to see and get an idea of the incredible scale of the place. Then the tents of Camp One came into view. A great moment! It had been my ambition to experience the incredible WESTERN CWM of Mount Everest's south side ever since I was a child. My previous expedition to the summit had been on the North Side of the Mountain so all of this was new to me. The valley was even more spectacular than I had imagined. A broad, majestic sweep of space, flanked by incredible walls of rock and ice on both sides. We still couldn't relax. Crevasses cross this zone as well. We had to traverse about ten monster crevasses to get to our tents.

The next stage would be the long trek up to Camp Two.



LADDERS ARE USED TO CROSS THE MANY CREVASSES. **PHOTO:** MATT DICKINSON



THE ICE FALL IS A ZONE OF HIGHLY UNSTABLE ICE. AVALANCHES AND COLLAPSES ARE ALARMINGLY COMMON.. **PHOTO:** MATT DICKINSON



THIS IS CAMP ONE AT THE TOP OF THE ICE FALL-- A WELCOME REFUGE AFTER A LONG AND INTENSE CLIMB. **PHOTO:** MATT DICKINSON



UELI STECK (ON THE RIGHT) TRAGICALLY LOST HIS LIFE IN A FALL FROM NUPTSE. **PHOTO:**AMIN MOEIN