

Everest Environmental Expedition

BOB McCONNELL *and* LIZ NICHOL

ON THE NORTHERN FLANK OF EVEREST, popular trekking and climbing areas have been scoured clean by a multi-national expedition, the first targeted solely at cleaning up this side of the world's highest peak. Our expedition consisted of a staff of seven, which included American, British and Ecuadorian members. Both the British and the Ecuadorian actually reside in the Galápagos Islands, where they are professional photographers and guides. In addition to our staff of seven, we brought in one seventeen-member group of trekkers and another of thirteen. We also hired twenty-three Tibetans to work in various capacities such as cooks, drivers or yak drivers.

The expedition returned to the United States on August 21 after spending six weeks collecting and bagging well over a ton of trash and hauling it down. This had been left by previous climbers and trekkers. The expedition included Tom Leech, an artist and paper maker from Colorado Springs, who taught monks from the Rongbuk Monastery to make paper using waste products found on the mountain. Other trash was carried down by backpack, yak, tractor and truck. At present, recycling in Tibet is limited and so the trash was deposited in a landfill near Xegar, about 110 kilometers from the Rongbuk Base Camp. The trash bags will be reused by the newly established Chomolangma Nature Preserve officials. The expedition donated a truck which will be used by Preserve officials for the regular removal of trash in the future. During 700 person-days, we built eleven stone holding areas for the temporary storage of trash as it accumulates. We are extremely encouraged by the cooperation and enthusiasm of local and regional officials with whom we are proud to have worked on this project. Preserve officials sought creative solutions to problems of trash and human waste generated by foreign visitors to their beautiful mountains.

Trekkers and expedition members must assume responsibility for preserving the beautiful yet fragile environments in which they travel. We shall recommend to host nations around the world to establish codes of environmental ethics for visitors; make a call to travelers around the world voluntarily to comply with these codes; strongly suggest that sponsors of future expeditions inquire of those seeking sponsorship how they plan to deal with environmental issues before



PLATES 16 AND 17
Photos by Bob McConnell

**The Mess at Advance Base of Everest
before and after the Clean-Up.**

sponsorship is granted; and finally urge climbing organizations to support the enforcement by host nations of environmental codes of ethics by fines, expulsion from protected or pristine areas or denial of future visas or climbing permits when voluntary compliance is not forthcoming. These codes should embody the concepts of "pack-it-in, pack-it-out," respect for local customs and beliefs such as those related to the protection of wildlife and burning garbage, reduction of the quantity of packing materials, food and equipment taken into developing countries and the preparation of waste management plans as part of pre-departure planning.

Only if each one of us who visits Mount Everest or any of the beautiful remote areas of the world shoulders the individual responsibility to leave no trace of our passing will these areas be preserved for our children to enjoy. Now, more than ever, as the number of visitors increases, we must adopt the simple rule: *Take only pictures; leave only footprints.*

