

OTHER MOUNTAIN ACTIVITIES

KHUMBU CLIMBING SCHOOL

The Sherpa people of Nepal visit the mountains for reasons quite different than the western climber. For the Sherpa of Nepal climbing is by and large a vocation. The level of risk these climbers accept while working is very high. Consequently, the Sherpas have the highest fatality rate of any nationality while on climbing expeditions. Despite being well known for their stamina and ability to carry heavy loads in the thin air of the Himalaya, they generally lack the years of training that western climbers have.

The goal of the Khumbu Climbing School (KCS), founded by the Alex Lowe Charitable Foundation, is to lower the injury and fatality rate among the Nepali climbers who work and climb in the Himalaya. This goal is to be achieved by improving the safety techniques of the Nepali climbers. The program is based on instruction, practice, application, and testing of technical climbing skills.

The inaugural school in winter 2004 provided instruction, practice, and testing of climbing skills. The instructors assessed the skill level of the participants and tailor the instruction. The western guides focused on presenting climbing as we were introduced to it: recreationally. The sense of enjoyment that one receives from climbing is as much of the message as the technical skills. The class took place in the village of Phortse, a one-day walk from Namche Bazaar in the Khumbu region. The course lasted seven days (February 15–20, 2004) and consisted of two classroom days and four days in the field. The course was planned in the winter to time it with the expedition off season. The instruction focused on ice climbing as the skills are similar to what is used on the high peaks. A series of ice flows on the northern flank of Khumbila Peak provided a practical schoolroom for instruction. At least a dozen climbs of varying degrees of difficulty exist within a several hour walk of Phortse.

Thirty-two students took part in the school this February. The class had eight novices with the balance having worked with climbing expeditions. The novices were split between attending as a way to gain employment in the trade and attending for recreational purposes. The experienced climbers have worked on expeditions to Everest, Cho Oyu, Manaslu, Makalu, Shishapangma, Ama Dablam, and as guides for the “trekking” peaks. The instructors came from the western U.S. All the instructors have been climbing and/or guiding for many years in an alpine setting: Conrad Anker, climber and private guide; Chris Booher, International Mountain Guides; Topher Donahue, photographer and guide; Steve Gipe M.D., climber and emergency medicine; Harry Kent, Kent Mountain Adventures; Adam Knoff, Mountain Link; Jon Krakauer, climber and writer.

The 2004 school produced a 40-minute video in Nepali focusing on the fundamentals of belaying and rope work. It was duplicated in Kathmandu into VHS and DVD formats and is being distributed free of charge to trekking agencies, tea houses, embassies, and the Nepal

Mountaineering Association. If you would like a copy of this film please contact info@alexlowe.org.

The KCS is an ongoing enterprise. The hope is to have a school that is run and maintained by the people of Nepal. Our goal is to get the ball rolling and provide help in making the school a viable operation. Perhaps the best measure of the school's effectiveness was a comment from Palding, a student in this year's class: "I have always felt like a yak working for expeditions; now I am a climber."

CONRAD ANKER, *The Alex Lowe Charitable Foundation*, AAC

CLIMBER IMPACTS AND ACCESS IN PERU'S CORDILLERA BLANCA

The Cordillera Blanca is the world's highest tropical mountain range, with the greatest concentration of 6,000-meter peaks outside the Himalaya. It has attracted climbers and explorers from around the world since the early twentieth century. In 1975, most of the range was designated Huascarán National Park (HNP), and has since become part of a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and a World Heritage Site. The area surrounding the park is also home to an estimated 230,000 residents, many of whom are descendants of the indigenous cultures that have inhabited the region since before the Incas. Much of the area now encompassed by the national park has long provided for local livelihoods, and many residents still depend on park land for various resources and as dry-season pasturage for livestock.

In recent decades, traditional ways of life in the Cordillera Blanca have been significantly affected by the region's burgeoning tourism infrastructure. HNP's spectacular and accessible mountain scenery draws high numbers of both domestic and international adventure tourists annually, yet climbing and trekking have remained largely unrestricted and free of the red tape and expense associated with permit systems in other countries. While tourism brings important economic opportunities for local residents, it has also created highly politicized conflicts over resource distribution and management as well as increased inter- and intra-community competition and environmental pressure.

I first became interested in tourism impacts in the Cordillera Blanca in early July of 1999 when I observed staggering numbers of trekkers and climbers in the Santa Cruz Valley and Alpamayo base camp (73 tents in the base camp and more than 100 people and 60 burros on the trail over a five-hour period). Later reports, including one by Cameron Burns in the AAJ 2001, also indicated that popular climbing routes and camping zones in the region were often overcrowded and increasingly trashed by heavy use.

As a Conservation Fellow in Environmental Studies at the University of Montana and with the sponsorship of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and an AAC Research Grant, I returned to the Cordillera Blanca during the summer of 2003 to begin a preliminary analysis of climbing and trekking impacts in HNP. Working as a research intern with The Mountain Institute's Andean Branch and under the auspices of HNP, I began collecting data on garbage and human waste accumulation, non-designated camps and trails, overcrowding, and the harvesting of fuelwood from native forests in a number of sites, including the popular Santa Cruz, Llanganuco, and Ishinca Valleys.

This research is, to my knowledge, the first attempt to gather ground-truthed data on visitor impacts in HNP, which is especially important at this time as park authorities are in