

Stranded In The Himalayas!

• Aryeh Cohen



James Scott was a medical student from Australia who arrived in Nepal to fill a post in a local hospital. Before his scheduled starting date, he decided to climb the nearby Himalaya Mountains, which boast the world's highest elevations. In the midst of a thrilling climb 15,000 feet above sea level, Scott suddenly found himself stranded by a heavy blizzard that left him without food or drink.

The student's family and friends feared the worst. Rescue workers who went to search for Scott were thrown off by misinformation that cost them weeks. Would he be found alive? Is it possible for a human being to survive so long under such adverse conditions and without food? Read the riveting account of one man's saga in the Himalayan snowcaps.

It was day 40 of James Scott's disappearance in the snowy peaks of the Himalayas. Forty days since Scott had tasted food. For almost six weeks, he had been forced to subsist on snow and water. Scott felt dizzy; he could not stand up or think clearly. He tried to read the book he was carrying with him for the sixth time. He was more exhausted than he had ever been before. He sucked on a small icicle in a desperate attempt to take his mind off the terrible hunger and weakness that overcame him.

The long days without proper nourishment left Scott painfully thin and haggard. His body fat had been used up long ago, and now his body was consuming muscle tissue to keep itself going. It is not possible to last for long under such circumstances.

Fear and worry had long since left him. Now Scott no longer bothered to protect himself from the terrible cold that

penetrated every fiber of his being. He knew that his hours on this world were numbered. His greatest regret was that his family would be upset to lose him. All those years he had invested in the study of medicine were now going to waste, before he could have the opportunity to put his knowledge to use.

With his last ounce of strength, Scott climbed out from beneath the overhanging rock that had sheltered him for the last few weeks. He tried gathering a bit of snow, as he had done so many times before. Now, however, his body was too cold to melt the snow into water. Instead the snow and ice he put into his mouth just stuck.

Scott crawled back into his sleeping bag and just remained there, motionless. He had given up.

A Medical Student in Nepal

It was the winter of 1991. James Scott was then a 22-year-old medical student from Brisbane in northeastern Australia. In keeping with regulations for medical students, he was required to work for a year without pay before he could graduate.

Scott chose to volunteer at a hospital in a third world country. He wanted to learn how hospitals in undeveloped countries operate under restricted budgets and how outdated methods could be used to treat serious illnesses. He was confident that this experience would stand him in good stead one day, at least as well as the lectures and book knowledge he assimilated in university.

After considering many options, Scott chose to go to Nepal, located between India and China. The snowcapped peaks of the Himalayas that run through Nepal were a strong attraction for Scott. He hoped to be able to spend his free time climbing in the world's highest mountain range. He looked forward to enjoying the unparalleled panoramas.

When Scott arrived in Nepal's capital city, Kathmandu, at the end of 1991, the post he had been assigned had not yet been vacated. So Scott decided to use the extra time to



Nepal's parliament building.

visit the nearby peaks together with his friend Tim Hooper. Hooper, a fellow medical student from Australia, had come to Nepal together with Scott. Together, they bought themselves a full complement of climbing equipment. They stocked up on warm clothes and hired a guide and two servants to carry their packs. Then they chose a path that soars 10,000 feet into the sky.

During their climb, the two friends reconsidered the measures they had already taken. They decided they had wasted their money buying so much clothing and equipment, in addition to hiring a professional guide. On their way up, they met a group that had climbed 18,000 feet with barely any supplies. That group had not even brought along sleeping bags to keep them warm at night. In Nepal many mountain climbers are too poor to afford a full outfit of clothes and equipment, and it is common for people to try to make do with less.

For Scott and Hooper, however, this was a lesson that the mountains were not nearly as forbidding as they had previously thought. It couldn't be all that difficult to scale them if other people managed it with hardly any equipment at all. Next time, they decided, they would dispose of the guide and instead rely on maps and their own senses.

A Regrettable Encounter

Several days later, the pair set out again to climb the nearby hills. This time they settled on the Helambu Trek, a relatively easy hike through the mountains that climbs



Nepal's historic royal palace.

no more than 10,000 feet. There are guest houses along the entire way that are kept up by the locals to encourage visitors to enjoy the hike. These huts offer a place to rest as well as hot drinks, though most have no heat or electricity.

For this trek Scott and Hooper did not bother with a guide. They brought along sleeping bags, some warm clothes and iodine, which is used to purify water. They also brought along a basic first-aid kit and a map of the mountainside. Like most of the maps sold locally in the shops in Nepal, this one was unclear and outdated. James Scott also packed a camera and four books, two of them written for tourists to the Nepalese Himalayas. Scott's backpack weighed 23 pounds.

On the first night of their trek the pair enjoyed a full moon that illuminated the mountain peaks. They decided to settle down for the night in the first guest house they reached. There they met a small group



Camel ride in the Himalayas.



Transportation in Nepal.