

But How?

Throughout this Supertramp venture one thing has become abundantly apparent to me: people's stubborn belief that their happiness depends on someone else. Be it someone else organising their lives or validating their existence, people will always want someone else to make things happen to them. Even my friends, when told about the Supertramp venture, would ask me 'But how?' when I told them they could do it too if they wanted to. I firmly believe that in this day and age anyone can do anything if they truly want to and if they go out and do it for themselves. The key things to success in this regard is doing it regardless of how likely it is to succeed and to not convince yourself that you can't do it. The tried and tested 'at least you tried' philosophy holds true in that you either get what you want or just invested a bit of time in getting what you want, even if it didn't pay off. I did not believe I would be one of the recipients of the Supertramp Award and yet a few hours of my time and the belief in the small possibility of success led to where I am now, with three months of incredible experiences behind me. Invest a little time and a little belief, and you never know how it's going to pay off.

In my case my time paid off many times over, and by the 4th of April I was flying out to Dubai, to set off on my Supertramp venture in Nepal. About 30 hours of flights and layovers later I was in Kathmandu, where the baggage collection was more crowded than a bank at the beginning of the month. Kathmandu is comparable to South Africa in that even though it's dirty and disorderly everyone there is friendly and the city is vibrant with life. Four days later and a lot of struggle with withdrawing money later I set off to Nepalgunj, the first stop in my two-step flight to Simikot, the start of my trek.

Simikot was the metaphorical deep end of Northern Nepal that I was thrown into. Arriving in this tiny town the first thing I was asked for, fortunately in English, was a permit I did not have. Friendly as ever the Nepali men showed me where I could and could not walk and sent me on my way. I was told that I couldn't sleep in the town however, so my journey started the same day, and thus I was off into the unknown and undeveloped.

It didn't take me long to take the wrong route after this, and on the first day I had a long detour but this extra distance did help set the tone for the next three weeks, as there were many more mistakes to follow. Undeterred I pushed on and found myself a campsite next to a freezing rush of Himalayan snowmelt. I made a small fire here, out of necessity for food and out of desire for heat, since my gas cannister had been confiscated at the airport. Little did I know the first town I would come to that sold camping gas was two and a half weeks worth of hard trekking away.

This first week was a truly local experience, overwhelmingly untouched by tourism. The first foreigners I had seen on my trek were 10 days in, in the district capital Gamgadhi. The one thing holding back my interaction during this part of the trek was my vocabulary, as I still could not speak much Nepali. As I got into the swing of things I started to pick up the more prominent words I would need, such as 'food', 'water', and 'I don't understand'. I was becoming used to the country. One thing worth mentioning that I could not get used to was the portions. You would think in an underdeveloped country such as Nepal there would be small portions. There aren't. The Nepali people even have a saying 'dal bhat like mountain'; not an understatement when you see how big the portions are.

In this first week I had detours, days without battery on my cellphone, a full day of rain, my first snow, a horrible section of road which had collapsed under an infamous Himalayan landslide which I had to cross twice, lack of communication, lack of food, and a very sore and tired body, and this was the easiest of the three weeks.

From Gamgadhi I had a shorter section to walk to Jumla, and yet this section turned out to be the hardest for me. In the stretch I walked along one of the only roads in the north of the country and I was tempted to hitchhike but decided to stick it out instead and trek the route by foot. Here I had deep snow and lots of mud, making me very grateful for my leather boots that Groundcover, a local leather company, had sponsored. One military checkpoint, many suggestions of marriage to a certain Ghita, and the only bus stop for a long, long way behind me I headed off on what would turn out to be the most taxing, emotionally and physically, day I would have.

Distance-wise the day was nothing new. Walking an estimated 20 kilometres from eight to six was standard fare for me but something about the terrain or the distance left me entirely depleted. At this point, given the option to return home, I would have taken it without hesitation. I however didn't have that option so I pushed on, and after a tough night on hard ground, I was feeling counterintuitively good and looked forward to the days ahead. The days ahead turned out to be only one, and I made it to Jumla in one piece, more or less. By this point my feet were more callus than flesh, and my muscles more pain than strength, but I had made it and I was happy.

I spent longer than I might have liked in Jumla while I was waiting for my phone to charge but by around two the next afternoon I was off on what felt to me like the most remote section of my trek. By this stage I was two weeks in and I had picked up much of the Nepali I needed. It was here that I had started asking locals to camp by their houses and eat in their kitchens. These experiences were as human as they were unconventional, and I will remember them for a long time to come. It is one thing to travel a country by bus or plane, it is another to walk from town to town, house to house, and experience it from locals' houses, villages, kitchens, and lives, but this is something I will cover in more depth nearer the end.

From here I walked along long forested stretches inhabited only by yaks and horses, with the occasional strangers looking after the livestock. Aside from a few small towns, none with more than 100 inhabitants, this section was generally long stretches of beautiful, old forests. Along this section I followed a yak because I had lost the route and it was snowing, and this was how I finally ended up in another small family's house, where I got terrorised by a small puppy and played doctor, very hesitantly and cautiously, for their sick child. The night I spent here was much needed as the next day was one of my furthest, but also most fulfilling. This aforementioned day was another long, lifeless stretch but it was the end that made it worthwhile. A lot of hiking behind me, and no hope of another house for the next two or three hours I had to find somewhere to sleep. I found it in an odd place, this time with friendly yak herders who shared their food and their fire with me, like something out of a story. I even had one of them sleeping in the tent with me, wrapped in four thick blankets to keep out the Himalayan night's cold. Nights like these are what made this trip truly unique.

From here it was two days to Dunai, along a barren yet beautiful stretch of azure river. When I finally reached Dunai, where I had been hoping to charge my phone again, I found out that the power was set to

be off for the next few days I stayed in Dunai for five days to give my knees and feet a chance to recover, after a strenuous three weeks over hard terrain. During these few days,, after I had practically been inaugurated as a resident of Dunai and was known throughout the town, they finally arrived and we set off on what we soon found out was the hardest part of my trek, since it would end my trek. I would have liked to have made it past this section and still plan to do it one day but the combination of the weather not being in our favour, and a very uninhabited stretch of unclear path, and the potential for the previous night's snow to have covered the route, meant that going further would have been a risk. It was not that the weather was particularly heavy, simply that it changed too quickly for it to be safe to continue into what would be a truly lifeless length of my trek. Part of this hesitation to continue came from a section coming up where even a few millimetres of snow make the path impossible to follow so, two days from Dunai, a good distance and altitude increase later, I decided that the path ahead was a risk not worth taking, and there I called an end to my trek, and turned around back to Dunai.

From here I took the route back down and ended, at around 8pm, in Dunai, where I had previously spent so much time. From here I flew out from what was barely an airport, over the same Dolpa mountains that had turned us around. My adventures continued from here but they are not relevant to this so I'll save that story for another time. What I would like to do to end this story of sorts is answer the titular question: 'but how?' How would you do something like this? How did you manage on your own? How did you walk around 400 kilometres in three weeks with barely passable communication and no map? The answer to all these 'How?' questions is simple: by forgetting my inhibitions and simply trying, instead of passing it off because it seems unlikely. It seemed unlikely that I'd be one of the Supertramps but here I stand with 400 kilometres of Himalayan wilderness behind me, simply because I tried.

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