

# THE TREKKERS

By HIMMAT GILL

Trekking can be such fun! Walk into the mountains and discover yourself. Fill up your rucksacks, and come to the Blue Mountains. The hills whisper to you, the emerald green lakes are at your feet and the stately pines stand sentinel whilst you slumber! In the mornings awaken to the sweet aroma of the Nilgiri tea gardens, and start the day with a 10-pound trout caught from the nearby stream!

So said the guide books. We were of course tempted to take the normal 'desi' holiday, but the Tourist Office just would not hear of it. Going in the car from dak bungalow to dak bungalow, and 'seeing nature en route' "Why never heard of it", lamented the tourist expert. "If you want to really 'do' the Blue mountains, then you must trek" literally ordered the expert. So in our weaker moments we listened to him. Now after seven days of foot-slogging over hill and dale, and a fractured knee to boot, we are no longer in our

weaker moments. I have promised myself that I will wring the expert's neck with utmost pleasure. That is, as soon as I can walk of course.

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The whole expedition was doomed to failure, at the very outset, I think. Bali said that he must take his wife along with him also. In fact, now that I remember correctly it was Bali's wife who told Bali that she was coming! She appointed herself the leader of the expedition to ADDAKE GODALU BETTA (that is the name of the mountain), and then seconded her husband to be the Deputy Leader.

I was appointed the Head Sherpa and chief load-carrier. So the forty-pounder tent and the water 'pakhal' came to my lot. Other minor preparations done, we three set out on a sunny morning amidst good wishes, cat calls and sarcastic comments. The Leader told the local Press that the trio would scale the 17,500 feet peak, without oxygen, and plant the national flag atop before making the descent. We were duly photographed, hugged in the true Punjabi style and then despatched through the main grain market.

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En route to the Base camp, a total distance of 15 miles, we were twice stoned by exuberant urchins and once bitten by an over-zealous village pie-dog. The stoning was for all three of us, but the latter pleasure was mine alone as I happened to be the last one trailing behind. "Never mind these curs", cried Mrs. Bali, "onto victory and glory". So we went towards our goal.

The Base camp was not that bad. Of course the mosquitoes were not exactly overjoyed to see us there, and made it known. At midnight a strong wind came our way and blew off both the tents. And early in the morning a persistent leach got into my sleeping bag, and wouldn't just get out. I decided that this was the time to desert, but Mrs. Bali probably getting wind of such ignoble thoughts, took my wallet and map case away! "Persistence and heart my dear", she said, "will one day get you to Everest"

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Well after spending two bitterly sold nights under the stars, we finally struggled up to the top, to be completely disillusioned. And you would not blame us. For we discovered that another party had already been there before us. And we came to know later on that the local public school had sent up their Boy Scouts the night before along the Western approach. These toddlers had gone up in one day, planted their flag and left empty sardine tins as ample testimony of their presence.

On the way down Mrs. Bali wouldn't talk to us. According to her Bali was as blind as a bat, and I was a lazy lout. Otherwise how could we have lost the race. Dampened in spirits and sick at heart, I lost my concentration and fell down the khud, thereby covering 600 feet in six seconds. If nothing else that was one record up our sleeves at least.

I am in the hospital as I write this. There is a bouquet of roses by my bedside. Mrs. Bali has sent these and the card inside reads, "Perseverance and courage will one day get you to Everest".