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Pushing Hard: An Excerpt from *Bringing Progress to Paradise*

by Jeff Rasley
November 7, 2012

We hiked as fast as we could, running when we had easy trail. I set the pace. Dax kept up with me but would start to whine if I pulled ahead. I was determined to reach Deorali before nightfall. So I pushed hard and barked at Dax to keep up or I'd leave him behind, it was up to him.

I felt very strong, perhaps to some extent relative to the slowness and tentativeness of the other members of the group. But I had conditioned well over the summer through daily workouts of bicycling, rollerblading, kayaking, and occasionally running. The last time I had visited Dax in LA, he put me to shame on the treadmill in his gym and then in street running around his neighborhood. But during the summer, outdoor workouts, rather than gym training with free weights and machines, had toughened me. Outdoor workouts provide a better conditioning base for trekking and mountaineering than gym workouts. The former create a stronger spirit and willingness to handle physical stress more than the controlled conditions of machines in a fitness club. Outdoor tough is tougher than gym tough.

The blood pumping through my veins, my lungs sucking hard for air, and my heart pumping rapidly felt great. And all around me was the great outdoors in these lush hills and valleys of the Middle Himalayas. Pounding up or scampering down the trail, dancing across wood plank and log bridges over streams—it all felt good. My senses were tuned in and the physical and spiritual challenges were a relief from ordinary life in Indianapolis. When I thought we were getting close to the village, I pushed even harder and did leave Dax in my dust. I arrived around six in the evening, just as dusk was settling on the village.

It was magical. Our porters had arrived at the lodge before I did. They must have taken a shortcut to beat me to Deorali, because they did not pass me on the trail. They had hiked the day before from Phaplu to Deorali, spent the night in Deorali, and then left early in the morning to get to Jiri, pick up our duffels, and hike back to Deorali. Amazing! They had hiked double the distance I had that day, in less time.

A young-looking and handsome “Sherpa,” Arjun Rai, was the assistant sirdar in charge of the crew. (The assistant sirdars are designated Sherpas by some Nepalese trekking companies, even though they are not of the Sherpa ethnic group. Westerners often incorrectly refer to porters, or anyone working on a trekking crew, as Sherpas.) I had not met Arjun before, but I was too tired

and hungry for any long introductions to him or the crew at that point. I just thanked them all, shook hands with each, and then had them show me where they had put the duffels. The duffels were organized and stacked outside of rooms ready for our group, whenever the others arrived.

Dax arrived about fifteen minutes later, and immediately demanded food and drink. We were both very tired after trail running and humping hard for over three hours. But I said, “You know, we have to go back and find the others after we finish eating.” Dax basically told me to stuff it, that he was not going to hike back down the trail in the dark. Sanga was with the group, and they didn’t need us. He said that when he finished eating, he was going to bed. And he did.

Jeff Rasley has given programs about adventure travel and philanthropy, as well as UChicago football history, to many service clubs, community organizations, churches, and interviews on radio programs. He has served on several nonprofit and for-profit corporate boards. He is an avid outdoorsman and recreational athlete. He leads trekking-mountaineering expeditions in Nepal and has solo-kayaked around several Pacific island groups. Rasley also loves to read and considers completing Marcel Proust’s 3600 page *Remembrance of Things Past* as one of his most enjoyable accomplishments.

Visit Rasley’s website: <http://jeffreyrasley.com/> or buy his book at [Amazon](#).