



Mr. Great Himalaya Trail

Sean Burch Sets Official World Record Across Nepal

BY SUNJULI SINGH



A new official world record for the fastest crossing of Nepal has been made by ultra-adventure athlete Sean Burch. He ran and trekked high altitude peaks across the much talked about Great Himalaya Trail (GHT) in 49 days, 6 hours, and 8 minutes.

Burch traversed 1,250 miles, took over 2.6 million steps and tackled elevation gains/losses of over 500,000ft. Some of the obstacles faced included blinding snowstorms, one of the worst monsoons in Nepal's history, landslides, high altitude, leeches, hypothermia and extreme daily mental and physical exhaustion.

Burch crossed 18 districts of Nepal and broke the previous world record set in 2003 by 19 days. The current estimated time for the trek by expedition

companies in Nepal is over 157 days.

Burch remarked, "There was no single moment of the expedition that stands out above others. Every day was so jammed pack with intense experiences, like 49 individual expeditions".

"We want to congratulate Sean Burch on the world record trek across the Himalaya of Nepal in 49 days and to promote tourism in our district", said Ramu Prasad Upadhaya, Chief District Officer of the Humla District government.

This expedition, led in-field by local, indigenous support staff, was an historic first in the history of Nepalese tourism to promote tourism in the remote regions of Nepal. The expedition was facilitated by The Nepal Trust, a Scottish Charity and NGO in Nepal (www.nepaltrust.org),



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which has been working at grass-roots level in the remote rural areas of Nepal and along the GHT for over 15 years in partnership with Rotary International. Their current project works in Nepal concentrate on healthcare, education, renewable energy, sustainable tourism and heritage preservation.

The Nepal Trust has been the official implementation organization of the Great Himalaya Trail Development Programme (GHT-DP) in partnership with United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), STEP Foundation and SNV.

"I am honored to be working with the Nepal Trust and Rotary International", said Burch. "Their work within and for Nepal is exceptional".

Burch had originally planned a 60 day itinerary due to the logistical constraints of such a gigantic expedition. However, support teams were pushed hard and new porters were brought in as much as possible, giving them lighter loads, so they could go faster and for longer hours - it paid off.

"Once I was 4 days ahead of schedule, I became obsessed with the goal of 49 days. Fortunately things worked out," said Burch.

"The expedition was definitely the toughest adventure by far of my life, said Burch. "It was much more intense than an 8000m peak. No days off, long hours, always intense, and plenty of dangerous situations where the results could have





easily turned very serious”.

Burch (www.seanburch.com) is a world renowned multi-world record holder in extreme adventurous sports and active explorer. His successes comprise many feats, some that have taken him to the pages of the Guinness Book of World Records. Burch, hailed as ‘One of the World’s Most Extreme Adventurers’ by National Geographic, is the author of the highly acclaimed book ‘Hyperfitness: 12 Weeks to Conquering Your Inner Everest’, as well as a motivational specialist for companies around the world, and award winning fitness master trainer (www.hyperfitnessliving.com).

“My body was put through a meat grinder on a daily basis. I still can’t feel any of my toes (Burch hasn’t for over a month due to the extensive nerve damage from the pounding on the rocks along the trails). Running and climbing came down to mental preparation. If I had listened to my body, I would have stopped about 10 days into it. I always kept the goals of the expedition in my mind, always”, said Burch.

This truly historic one-of-a-kind expedition aims not only to promote the mega campaign of NTY 2011 by placing focus on mountain tourism in Nepal, but also to encourage social groups (e.g. Rotary International), private sectors,

government bodies and individuals to assist the local communities that are living along the GHT in their social and economic development (e.g. healthcare, education, renewable energy, heritage preservation).

Tirtha Man Sakya, District Governor of Rotary International District 3292 Nepal said, “ Congratulation to Sean for a world record of 49 days, and opening up a major gateway of tourism through the GHT in Nepal and his tireless commitment for the opportunities in community service along the trail. We at Rotary Nepal eagerly look forward to work with him and the Nepal Trust as planned and help the communities in need”.

Burch tried to bring awareness to social groups and how they can provide support during his expedition referring to some of his memorable experiences in Humla, Nepal’s most remote and impoverished district. He visited the local school and village health post in Yalbang village, which was established by the Nepal Trust.

Burch explains, “Here school kids from the area villages came by in the morning to show us the ‘Little Doctor’ program started by the Nepal Trust. This was the first year for child health education in Yalbang. Children who once had no knowledge of health were now telling me they wanted to be doctors and health workers when they





grew up...terrific to hear. Also, the children were taking what they learned in the program - hygiene, healthcare, diseases...and going home and teaching their parents about how to be more health conscious. The program plans to continue throughout Humla as long as donors keep contributing".

"The expedition not only intends to show the international public that there is more to see in Nepal than just snow and mountains, and that the Himalayas of Nepal hold a tremendous cultural and ecological diversity, but also intends to inspire people around the world to visit these wonderful places and show them how they can be actively involved in

local development projects along the GHT", informs Jeroen van den Bergh, Country Director at The Nepal Trust.

"We are hoping to promote the Himalayas of Nepal as a world class tourism destination, highlighting the GHT in a sensible way and supporting the Government's efforts of Nepal's National Tourism Year 2011 and beyond", states van den Bergh.

Taken the scope of the extremity of this expedition into account and the mass media attention it rightfully is obtaining (CNNi, BBC, National Geographic, Associated Press, amongst others), this incredible feat will surely form a huge step up for Nepal as a

whole to elevate tourism by opening up the more remote and unexplored areas.

When asking Burch how he felt to pass through so many different landscapes and meeting so many different people who hardly ever had seen westerners he notes, "For the vast majority, Nepalese are extremely friendly and warm people. As I wrote in my dispatches, families in the eastern part put me up in their home, let me sleep in their own bedrooms while they slept somewhere else which was incredibly generous".

To serve this purpose, the production of a high quality film documentary is under preparation - a documentary for which necessary support is required. The film documentary will be showcased at international film festivals not only to inspire people around the world to visit the more unconventional tourism destinations in Nepal, but also provide the Nepal Government and private sectors with a useful marketing tool to promote Nepal tourism at various travel marts, conferences, etc. for many years to come.

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