**It’s No Walk in the Park: The Tough Climb Up Mount Everest**

Imagine climbing across a field of ice, high on the slope of a mountain. You are on the lookout for blocks of ice as big as cars that can fall at any moment. You know the ice can move without warning, and you could fall through a crack in the ice to your death. You are so high up—18,000 feet high—that the air is thin and it is hard to breathe. People need oxygenin order to survive, and there is very little oxygen up here. Because of this, you have a pounding headache. You feel dizzy, and sometimes you vomit.  And you haven’t even entered the Death Zone. In the Death Zone, winds  can be as strong as hurricanes. Temperatures can be as low as negative 100 degrees Fahrenheit. The weather can change in an instant. Still, youcontinue hiking with your group. Your goal, the peak of Mount Everest, is  in sight.

This is what it’s like to climb Mount Everest, the world’s highest  mountain. Only 4,000 men and women have ever made it to the top,  and hundreds of people have died trying. When you stand on top of the summit, though, it is the perfect reward for years of hard work, planning,  and training. Kenton Cool has climbed the mountain 11 times. He said that when you stand on the top of Mount Everest, you can feel “the whole of  the planet beneath your feet.”

***Climbing Everest 101: What You Need to Know***

You need a lot of skills to successfully climb Mount Everest. Many climbers begin preparing ten years before their climb. Many climbers take courses  that teach them about the equipment they will use. Climbers learn about  ropes, pick axes, compasses. They learn also about the techniques they can use in case of trouble. They learn how to survive when buried in snow by  an avalanche, how to navigate dangerous whiteouts, and above all, how to stop yourself when falling, falling, falling down the steep icy slope. These  courses make survival more likely. Climbers often make plans so that in case  of injury, a helicopter can be reached with just one quick call and will then immediately begin evacuating the climber from the mountain, flying that person to a nearby hospital.

Climbers not only need to build muscle before they climb, they also  need to gain weight. The trip up Mount Everest is so tough that many  people lose weight, so many prospective climbers try to gain weight before  their hike. Climbers also take practice hikes up other high mountains. They might climb up Denali in Alaska. Even with all this preparation, many climbers still do not make it to the top of Mount Everest.

***You Can’t Do It Alone***  Even with all the training, few people make it to the peak of Mount Everest without help. Instead, about 90 percent of people who travel to the top of Mount Everest do so in huge groups with Sherpas. Sherpas are an ethnic  group of people who live in Nepal, and many of them serve as mountain guides on Mount Everest. Sherpas do an incredible amount of work. They carry the heaviest loads on their backs. Sherpas carry tents, tables and  chairs, and even vases of plastic flowers. Often, they take multiple trips  up the mountain with supplies so the other climbers can climb without a  heavy load. Of course, if a climber wants help from Sherpas, this adds to the cost of the climb, and even without Sherpa help, these climbs are not cheap.  It costs at least $36,000 and often well over $65,000 to climb Mount Everest.

Although Sherpas are not inexpensive, they are important. Sherpas  have far more experience on the mountain than the people who have  hired them. Sherpas prepare safe routes for climbing, attach ropes and ladders to the ice to help climbers cross the most dangerous areas, and give recommendations about when to keep hiking and when to stop. Sherpas  might recommend stopping 500 feet from the top of Mount Everest and  turning around if the weather is dangerous. That advice can be difficult to take. Still, climbers who listen closely to their guides are the most likely to survive the climb.

Without the help of Sherpas, it would be almost impossible for climbers to climb Mount Everest and reach their dreams of standing on the highest point on Earth.