

Call From Mount Everest

In the spring of 2001 I got an unusual e-mail from a Tsering Sherpa who lives in Namche, Nepal, 15,000 feet up on the slopes of 29,000 foot Mount Everest.

My reputation for extending the Internet by wireless to remote places in the world - Mongolia, Latin America, Alaska, Wales had reached one of the most remote places on earth.

The email - in tolerable English - explained that he - Tsering Sherpa, having visited America and seeing the Internet in use had returned to his home in Namche, Nepal and set up a satellite-internet-feed Cybercafe in Namche. That Namche was a stop over Sherpa village for both Everest (and other peaks) Climbers, their supporters, and those who just trekked up the Khumba Valley through Namche to as far as 19,000 feet to photograph and experience the mountains. But once they reached Namche they were out of contact, even cell phone, with home. (unless they carried a very expensive satellite phone, with high charges, which only expedition guides sometimes carried)

So his Cybercafe was used by trekkers when they reached Namche after 2 to 3 days trek, to contact home.

That the 2003 Climbing season would be the 50th Anniversary the first summating of Mt Everest by Sir Edmund Hillary. That there would be many more trekkers and climbers. So the Everest 'Base Camp' at 19,000 feet which would support those attempting the summit the peak would have many support parties camped there, but would have little or no communications.

That he, Tsering Sherpa with other Sherpas wanted to carry the Satellite base equipment from Namche to the Base Camp on 18 Yaks, and provide Satellite Internet communications to the rest of the world from the Base Camp. But there was one problem - if they put the Satellite ground station and its dish antenna at the Base Camp itself, that sits on the Khumba Glacier which moves 4 feet a day. They did not know how they could keep it aligned with the satellite far in the sky. And the satellite was low in the sky to the south and had to be aimed between two peaks.

I thought about it, studied an online topo map of

the area, the valley, the glacier and base camp location and emailed back. I said he could put the satellite base, not at the base camp but across the valley at least 4 kilometers from the camp and at least 500 feet higher. And connect a computer at the camp to the satellite base using a pair of line of sight Wi-Fi type radios. That way the fan of the base wi-fi would be wide enough that movement would not be a problem.

Tsering answered fine, but they did not have any such radios. I answered, wait, let me see what I can do.

I then called engineers I knew at Cisco Corporation in California and said "I can get Cisco better world wide good publicity than all your PR Department if you just do what I ask." They knew me and said "You probably can - what do you want us to do?"

I said I wanted them to give three Cisco Class Wi-Fi radios with two tubular directional antennas to the Sherpas going up to cover the 50th Anniversary of the first successful climb, so they can connect up their satellite base to the Internet. I added They had to get it through Nepalese Customs within the next 3

weeks or it won't arrive in time.

They delivered through their Cisco outlet in Delhi, India. The Sherpas picked the items up and got them to Namche - a three day trek from the nearest landing field at Lukla - before they set out for Base Camp with their 18 Yaks carrying the satellite gear, lot of heavy batteries, solar panels and the wi-fi gear.

I instructed Tsering how to set it all up by email before he had to break down the satellite for the carry, and after he got it going on the higher ground at 19,000 feet.

It all worked, the base camp support parties, several world news organizations managed to get reporters to the camp after weeks of trekking, all were able to use - and pay for - Tsering Sherpa's bold technological Internet communications feat - supported by Cisco's radios and my expertise.

You can follow many photos of that project, with my commentary, at

<http://linkingeverest.com>

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I made good on my promise to Cisco. The New York Times, which was covering the whole celebrations both on the Mountain and in Katmandu, amply covered the story. Cisco's contribution was spread world wide.

But that was not the end of the story about me, Tsering Sherpa, Wireless, and Mount Everest. Go to next article