Everest

A dangerous place

Everest, in the high Himalayas, stands tall and firm, a giant unmoved by wind or snow, the air too thin for plant or animal life. Climbing Mount Everest is hard and dangerous work. Even with the aid of modern technology, the fittest of climbers may experience the effects of hypoxia ( a lack of oxygen to the brain). Then their dreams of reaching the summit of the highest mountain in the world are over.

Adjusting your body to the thin air, allowing it to get used to lower levels of oxygen, is vital if a climber wants to tackle Mount Everest. On early expeditions to Mount Everest, climbers trekked for weeks to get to Base Camp, which gave people’s bodies time to adjust. Today, climbers are flown into Lukla, a Sherpa village from where it takes just ten days to reach Base Camp. This shortens the amount of time a climber has to acclimatize to the thin air.

Base Camp

Once at Everest Base Camp, there follows a period of further acclimatization. Base Camp is situated on a glacier that constantly shifts and moves beneath your feet. It is an inhospitanle place filled with the brightly coloured tents of climbers who are anxious to make it to the top.

The climb to Mount Everest’s summit begins with a traverse of the Khumbu Icefall. This is a steep glacier filled with deep crevasses and huge ice blocks. It should be climbed in the early morning when the sun has not yet warmed the snow and ice. A mass of fixed ropes and ladders cross the crevasses to enable climbers to get across the glacier; without them, no climber would make it through. It is a dangerous start to the climb, for the icefall is unpredictable. The giant blocks of ice which dominate the area can weigh up to thirty tons each. These blocks can shift without warning; and crevasses can cave in, taking climbers with them. Later in the day the icefall becomes even more unpredictable and unstable; to cross it then would be foolhardy in the extreme.

**VIPER Questions ( Session 4)**

1) Which word is closest in meaning to **constantly**?

**infrequently, continually, often**

2) How much do the giant blocks of ice that dominate the area weigh?

3) What is the Base Camp situated on?

4) What do you think could happen if you attempted to traverse the Khumbu icefall later in the day?

5) What does 'trekked' mean?

6) Can you write a fact about this passage?