

Still dancing on these paths in the sky



A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. (Confucius)

.... and can be interrupted for a thousand different reasons. I had to halt my Sky Dance - but I'm so happy to still be dancing on these paths in the sky

My project was to follow the Great Himalaya Trail across the breadth of Nepal from Kanchenjunga Base Camp in the east to Hilsa on the western border with Tibet 'running' a distance of over 1000 miles. My dream was simple - to cross this beautiful country keeping as much as possible to trails through the high mountains - moving fast and light - with minimal support - making a journey within and without (body, mind and soul) - and sharing the experience so that would become something so much deeper than my own personal journey.

I knew that this beautiful journey would need all my humility, courage and passion - but importantly also the sensitivity and willingness to adapt with calm and patience.

Sky Dance: well I'm back safe now in Kathmandu with a thousand mixed emotions. It is earlier than I had hoped ... I'm humbled, scratched and sad I had to stop. But I also have a deep joy in my heart to be safe and well, and also the confidence, reason and hope to believe that I can and will complete my Sky Dance (if I have the opportunity to return in 2012).

The long story short: things had started so well, I was making good progress and loving it. Then in a remote region between the Kanchenjunga and Makalu areas I temporarily lost the path between two villages and got in a bit of a tangle in a big dark forest of himalayan proportions. Never lost but just needed to take my time to find the safe way down to the only bridge across the torrent below. And making any kind of progress through the jungle thicket is slow and painful work. The getting tangled part wouldn't have mattered - just lost time. But what did matter was losing my small sack with all the important things - satellite phone, permits for my entire journey, solar panel, camera, money, compass, maps for that section etc.

On a journey like this communication is vital and without my hard won permits for the breadth of Nepal there was no option but to stop. The worst part was losing the communication and knowing that I'd be causing so much concern and anguish not being able to let people know that I was safe. That is my deep regret.

It was literally a 'dark' few days for me in that forest - but I knew if I kept my calm then all would be well. I felt very strongly the love and support from my family, friends and so many who were following my journey. This gave me strength in ways that I have never ever needed to draw on before. I'm deeply thankful that I was allowed to find that deep core of stillness, calm and patience within and reach in deeper than I have ever needed before.

Even during those 3 days and nights there were moments I was so close to nature and given a gift to enjoy: a shaft of sunlight through the thicket, the sight of a bird, the beauty of a white tipped mountain at dawn glimpsed through the darkness of the roots and branches, climbing high, high until at last I reached out of the forest albeit into the prickly undergrowth with clouds swirling around but that feeling of lightness and freedom to be in the open.

And once I crossed that bridge across the river it was like finding life anew. From being very alone there were some magical moments - soul connections - and meetings with incredible kindness from complete strangers who were just so generous despite having so little themselves. Our lives may only touch that once - but we will know each other.

They say a picture paints a thousand words, but with the loss of camera and diary, my words will have to paint a thousand pictures. On a journey like this you live a thousand experiences and live a thousand worlds in even one day.

Despite having lost so much in that little sack, I felt incredibly rich. I had my life, I had the love and support of my friends and family, and I had some incredible connections with complete strangers. Life is beautiful.

The Facts:

Left Kathmandu on October 10th to fly to Biratnagar in the east of Nepal and jeep journey north to Taplejung. Walked in towards Kanchenjunga and reached base camp (5144m) on 13th of October where my 'Sky Dance' started in earnest. Made good progress across the Nango La (4776m) and the Lumbha Sambha La (5100m). Temporarily lost the path between Thudam and Chyamtang. Lost communications and permits for good. Reached Chyamtang on 21st October. Walked out via Num to Khandbari, short jeep ride to Tumlingtar and return flight to Kathmandu arriving on Tuesday 25th.

Going Forward:

My Sky Dance has been cut short but there is still so much opportunity in life and I hope perhaps I have the chance to turn around the misfortune of my interrupted journey. Before returning to Europe, with the support of my family and The North Face, I will accept an invitation to take part in the [2011 Everest Sky Race](#) - a 200km journey (with 11000m ascent, 7000m descent) covered during a 9 day stage race from Dolakha through the Rolwaling

valley, crossing the Tashi Lapsa (5755m), Renjo La (5340m), Gokyo La / Ri (5350m), Cho La (5420m), ascending Kala Pattar (5540m) and finally arriving at the base camp of Ama Dablam (4700m). It will be a tough race but an incredible journey. If I am fit and well at the end of the race then I shall make my way back up to Everest Base Camp and run from there back to Kathmandu. It will be a repeat of the record run that I made in 2007 with Stephen Pyke and Mark Hartell, and it is with their support that I might retry our effort. Perhaps I will have the opportunity to improve our time, perhaps not. What is more important is that with the support of the Nepal Athletics Association and joined by both international and Nepali runners for various sections; we hope to give my 'run' a deeper meaning - turning it into an opportunity to really encourage trail running in Nepal - both as a means of economic income, but also and most importantly to try encourage, inspire and persuade the wider population of the incredible value of sport and challenging our whole selves - mentally and physically. I hope the race and run might be a platform to live out our philosophy within The North Face to never stop exploring.

Fundraising: I am so grateful for the incredible generosity that people have shown for my fundraising efforts for [Community Action Nepal](#). I will be keeping this 'open' until (I hope) I finally complete my Sky Dance if I have the chance to return in 2012. I will race and run still with that spirit of peace and friendship, and with respect for the local environment, peoples and culture. CANepal founded by the world renowned British mountaineer Doug Scott, focuses on working with local people and village communities through sustainable health and education projects.

www.justgiving.com/skydance

To follow the journey: I hope still to be able to communicate during the race and then my return to Kathmandu perhaps not daily but whenever I can get mobile reception. In this way we hope again to be able to post short messages through my twitter account. Keep with me on my journey the direction has changed as so often in life but still stories to share together.

www.thenorthfacejournal.com/category/sky_dance/

www.twitter.com/lizzihawker

With thanks to:

My family and [The North Face](#) for supporting me throughout, Bruno Poirier for the invitation to take part in his Everest Sky Race, and friends in Kathmandu (particularly Richard Bull of the [GHT website](#) and Roger Henke of the [Summit Hotel](#)) for support and encouragement and for their efforts to encourage trail running in Nepal.

If (there is always an 'if!):

If you can keep your head when all about you

**Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowances for their doubting too;**

If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or, being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

**If you can dream - and not make dreams your master;
If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim;**

**If you can meet with triumph and disaster
And treat those two imposters just the same;**

If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with wornout tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breath a word about your loss;

**If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on";**

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings - nor lose the common touch;
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;
If all men count with you, but none too much;

**If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run -
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And - which is more - you'll be a Man my son!**

- RUDYARD KIPLING