

## From Kathmandu to Mt Everest

**Douglas Raupach**'s talk on 6<sup>th</sup> November was introduced by his colleague **Paul Wickham** explaining the formation of the Himalayas. He began with Wegener's Pangea land mass dividing into Laurasia and Gondwana; thence Gondwana's splitting into the continents we know; and finally the forcing of India north against the bulk of Asia to form the extensive foldbelt Himalayas (pronounced as fashion dictates) of sedimentary rocks of marine origin.

Douglas's trek, which began on the plain near the capital of Nepal, Kathmandu, included one day's bus ride followed by 21 days of walking. At about 4500 feet elevation (metric conversions are left to the reader), Kathmandu's Durbar Square, goddess house and palace and people washing clothes in the river began Douglas's colourful series of photos. The bus trip to Jiri introduced Landsat mapping, taken from an altitude of 570 miles. Villages and paddy fields, buildings made of stones, deeply sunburned countenances and yak transport were soon on view.

The third night was spent at Sete at 8450 feet, after which agricultural terraces, shaky bamboo hanging bridges, water mills, rhododendrons, sheep, yak trains and big baskets carried on human backs caught the camera's eye. Many walkers make use of modest "hotels" along the path; Douglas's party stayed in tents. At Lukla a narrow, uneven, dirt runway surrounded by forbidding mountains made walking look much safer than flying.

Namche Bazar at 11,300 feet was the only town on the route and the obvious place for a rest day. Everest was first sighted near here as the walkers approached the zone of permanent winter freeze. The Tengboche monastery at 12,687 feet could advertise spectacular mountain views were it more secular, and some stock were grazed in summer at these elevations. The 22,494-foot Ama Dablam peak was soon in view, as the trekkers moved to the Khumbu glacier and its dark moraine.

Mt Everest's 29,028-foot peak could be seen in the distance on several occasions, its curved surface sometimes quite bare, at others lined with a thin layer of cloud. An ice fall has to be climbed to gain access to the mountain itself. The Japanese have built an hotel just for *seeing* Everest.

The walkers reached their highest point at Kala Pattar, elevation 18,192 feet. On the way back and down a photo of the supposed Abominable Snowman was on display at a small settlement. The narrow airstrip at Lukla provided an easier mode of travel for the return journey.