

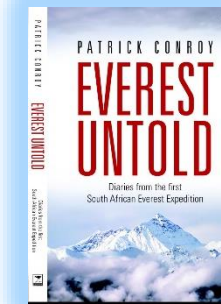
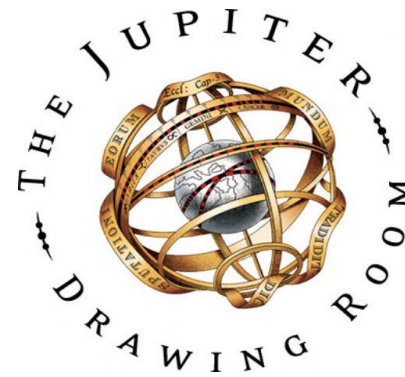
EVEREST

Lessons for Reputation Management

Patrick Conroy



@PatrickConroySA

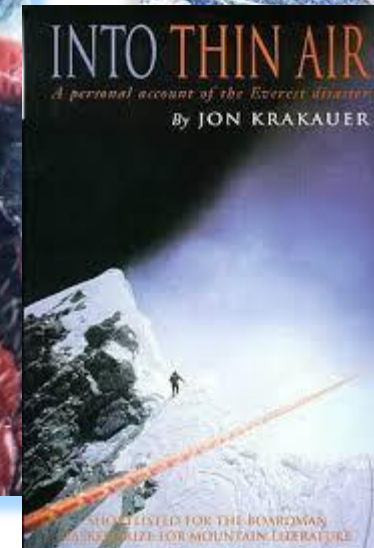


Once Upon A Time

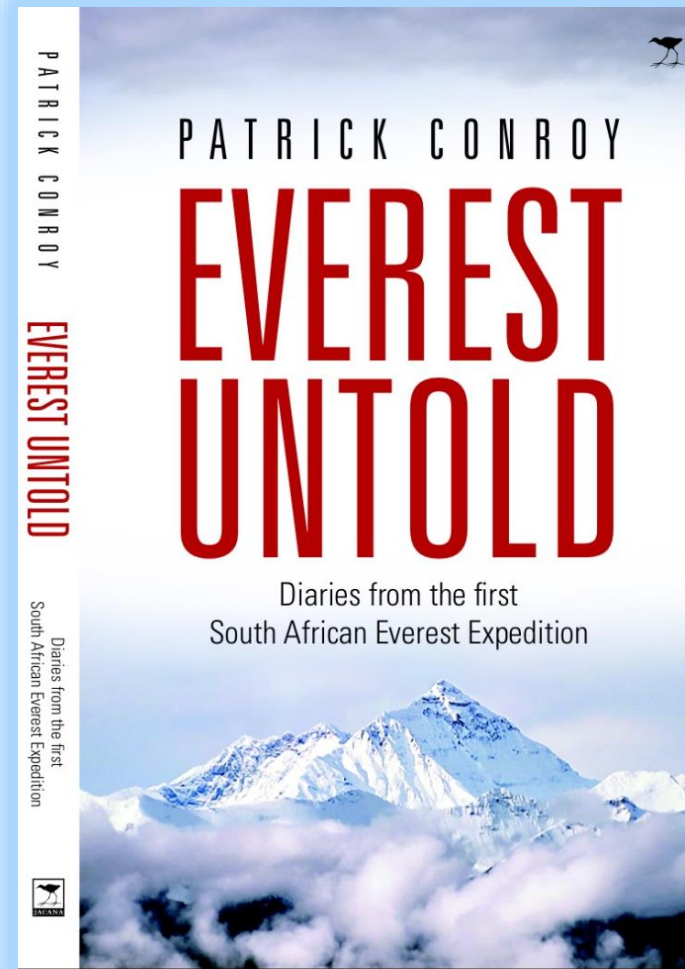
This is a
TRUE STORY

The mysteries and controversies of what truly happened in 1996 **continue to endure.**

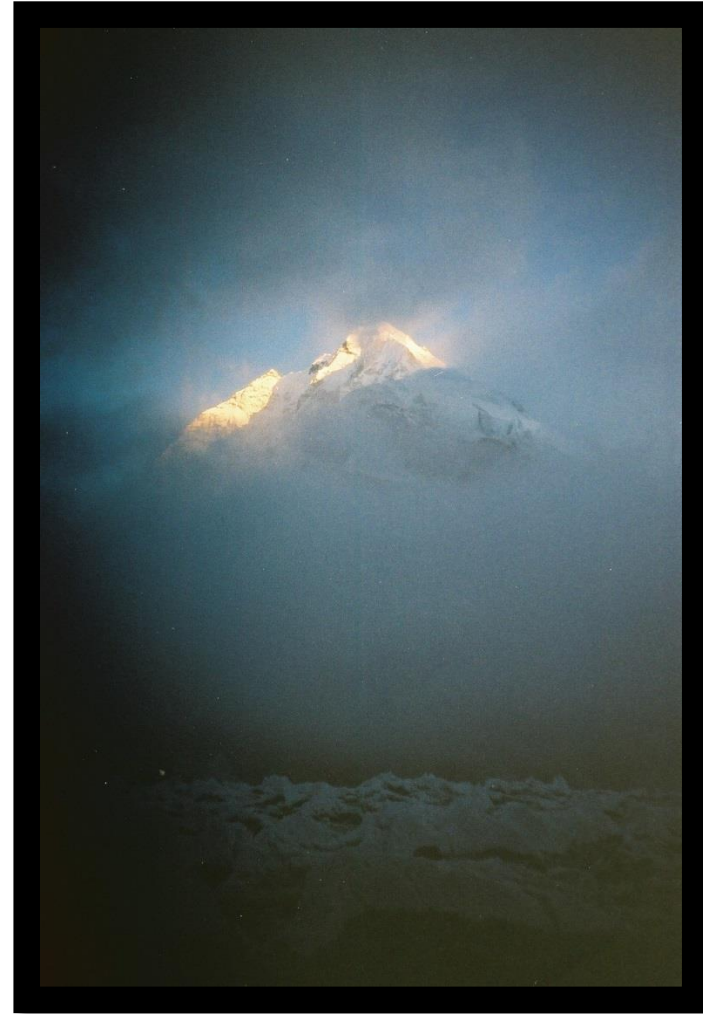
Books have been written, documentaries made and several movies released, including Hollywood blockbusters.



It also shows how poor communication cost lives and ruined reputations.

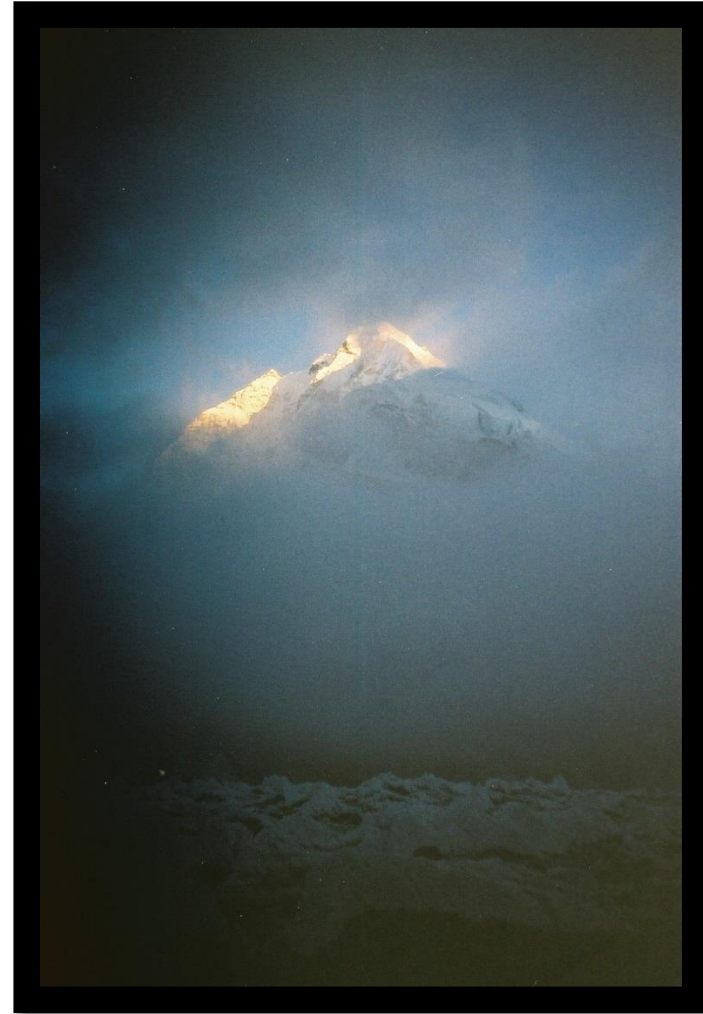


The Story begins in
1996...



Talk Radio 702 decided
to cover the first
expedition.

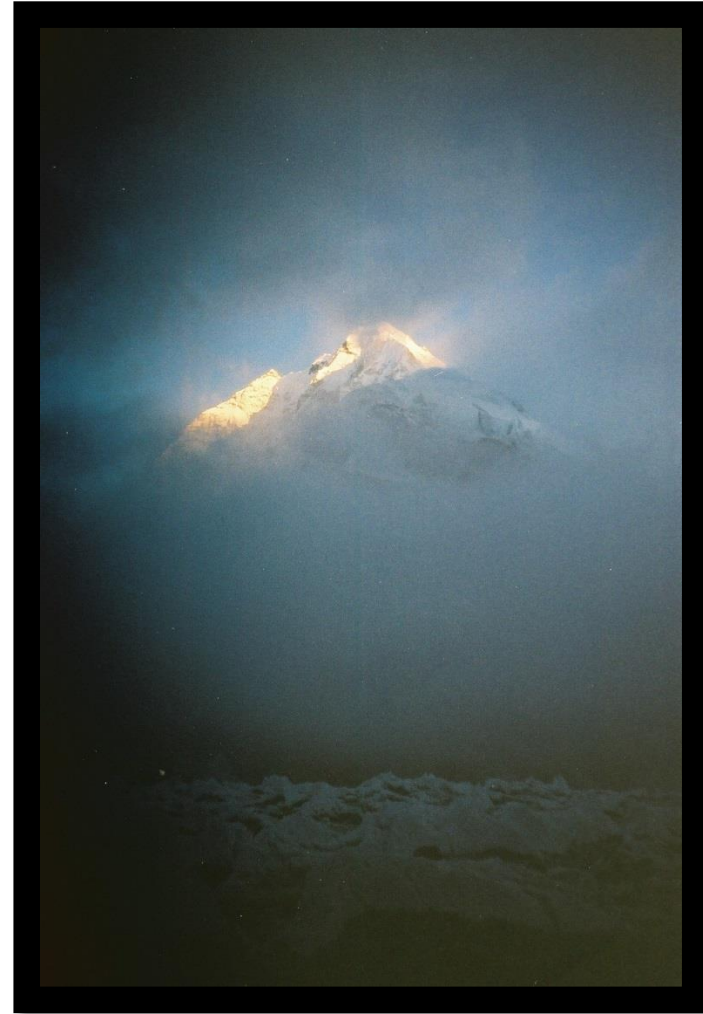
No senior reporters
wanted to go.



I was the sole applicant,
thus forcing my
employer to pick me.

**Nobody had an
appreciation for the
risks and
consequences.**

**We were poor on
research**



After being dropped off by helicopter the hike to Base Camp would take nine days.



Altitude sickness was a risk.

I had no means of communicating with the outside world.

No communication plan if something went wrong.



The expedition had already been on the mountain for several weeks.

Team Leader Ian Woodall



Team Photographer,
Bruce Herrod





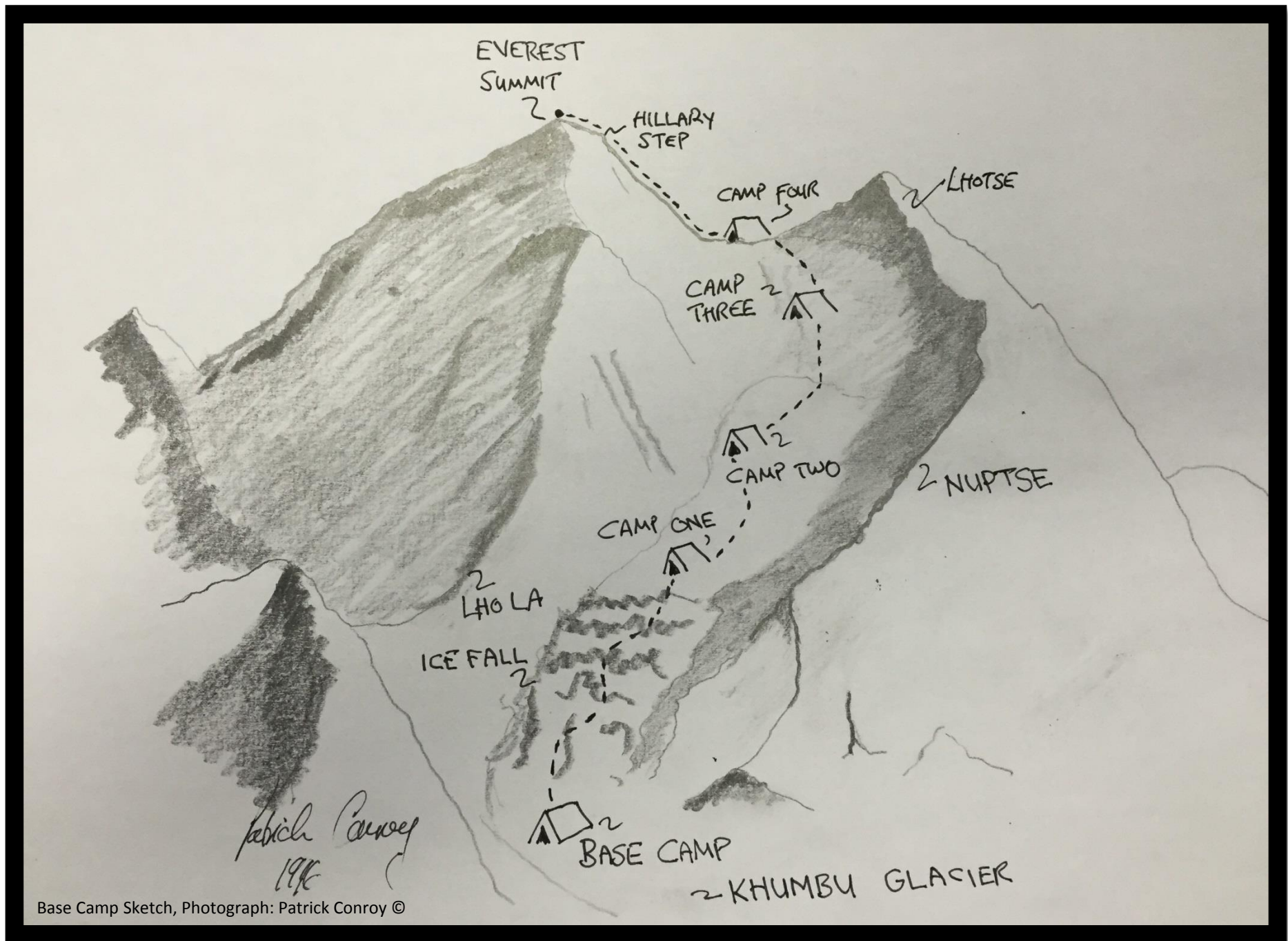
Climber, Cathy O'Dowd



Climber, **Deshun
Deyssel**

Base Camp Manager
Philip Woodall





Base Camp Sketch, Photograph: Patrick Conroy ©

Base Camp, Everest 5600m



Trouble in Base Camp

Big commercial expeditions were also on the mountain.

Classical mountaineering had paved the way for lucrative guided climbs to the summit.



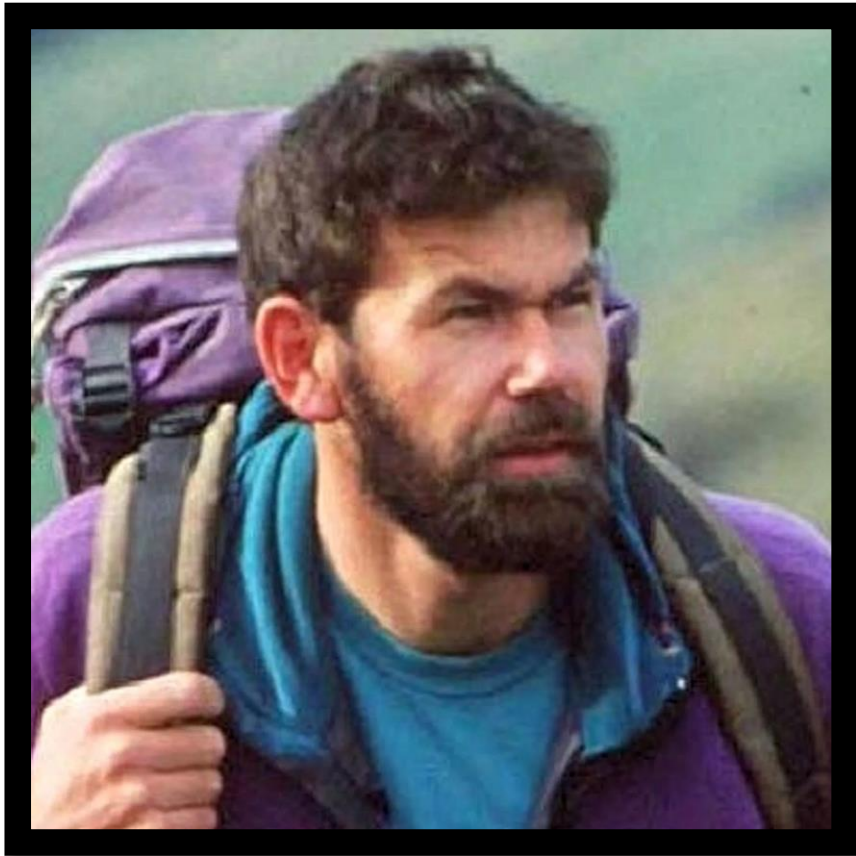
**Clients paid
\$65 000 each to
be part of these
teams.**

This added
**commercial
pressure** to the
risks already
involved.



Big Commercial Climbs

New Zealand Leader: Rob Hall

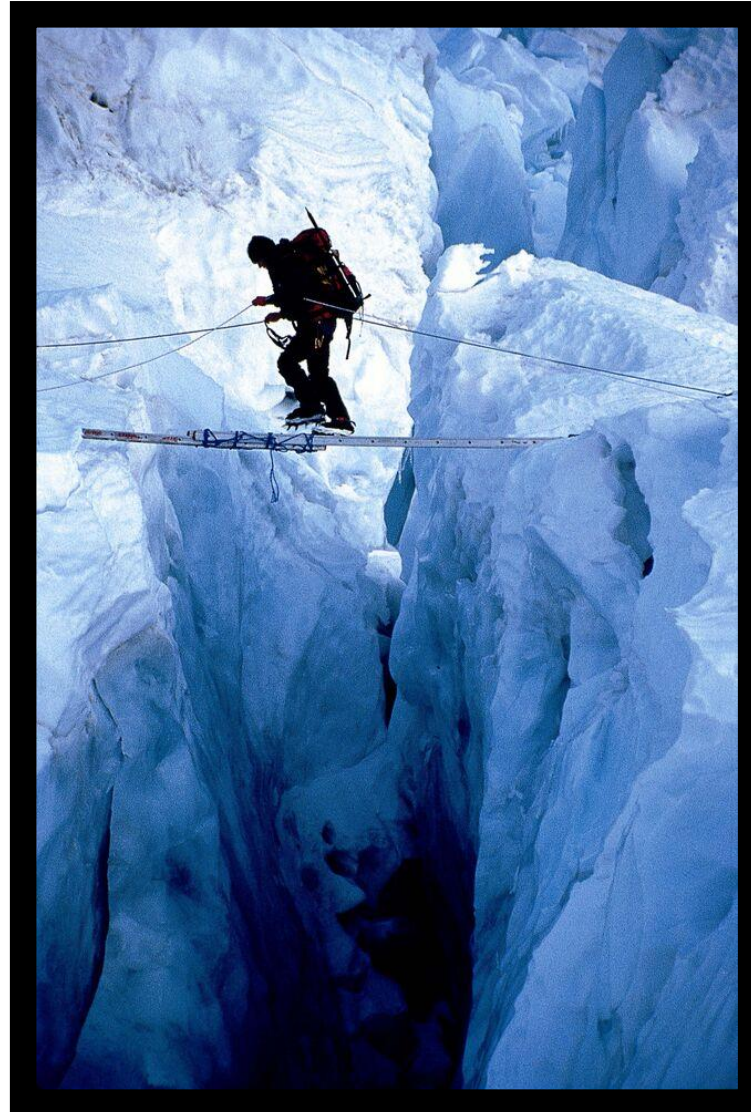


American Leader: Scott Fischer

May 10th 1996

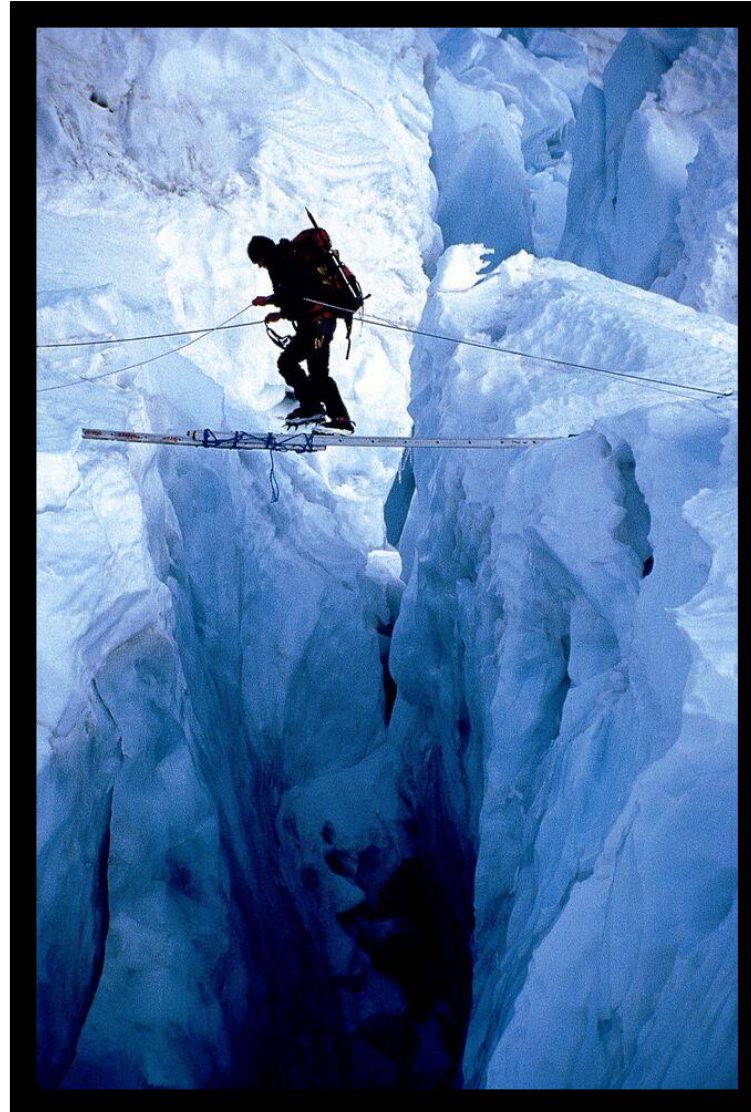
Weather reports suggested good conditions on May 10th and 11th.

Fischer and Hall wanted the smaller teams to stay off the mountain.



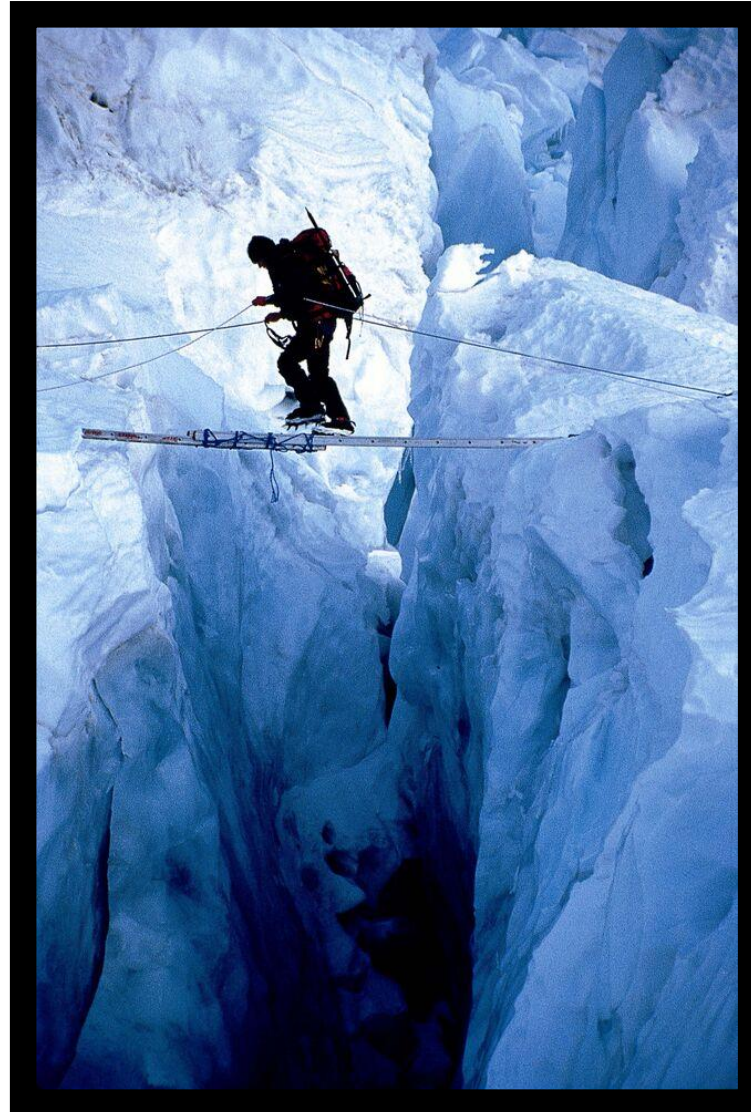
May 10th 1996

Fischer and Hall did not want to **rescue** 'inexperienced' teams or have them clog the route to the summit.



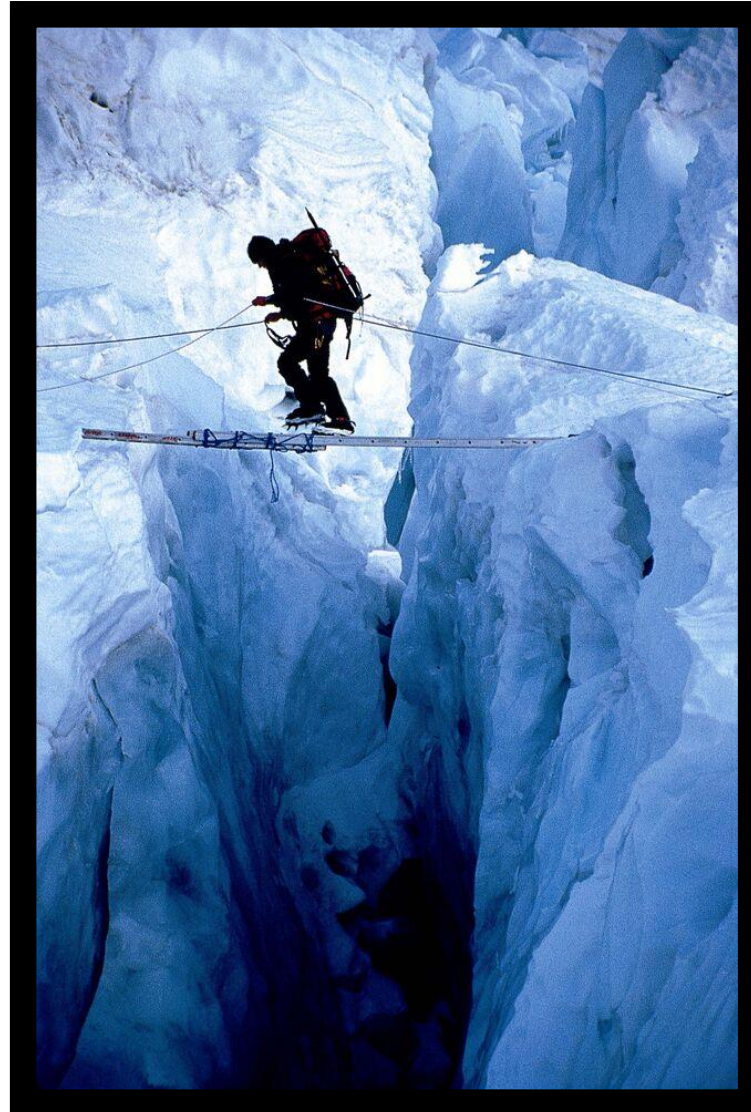
May 10th 1996

Ian Woodall
aggressively refused
saying they “didn’t
own the mountain”.



May 10th 1996

**This created an
immediate divide
between the big
experienced teams
smaller
'inexperienced'
ones.**



It was amidst these tensions that I hiked into Base Camp.



Communication at Base Camp

Satellite phone
operational
occasionally.

**Crucially though
the South Africans
had the most
powerful radio
setup on the
mountain.**



Photographs © Patrick Conroy

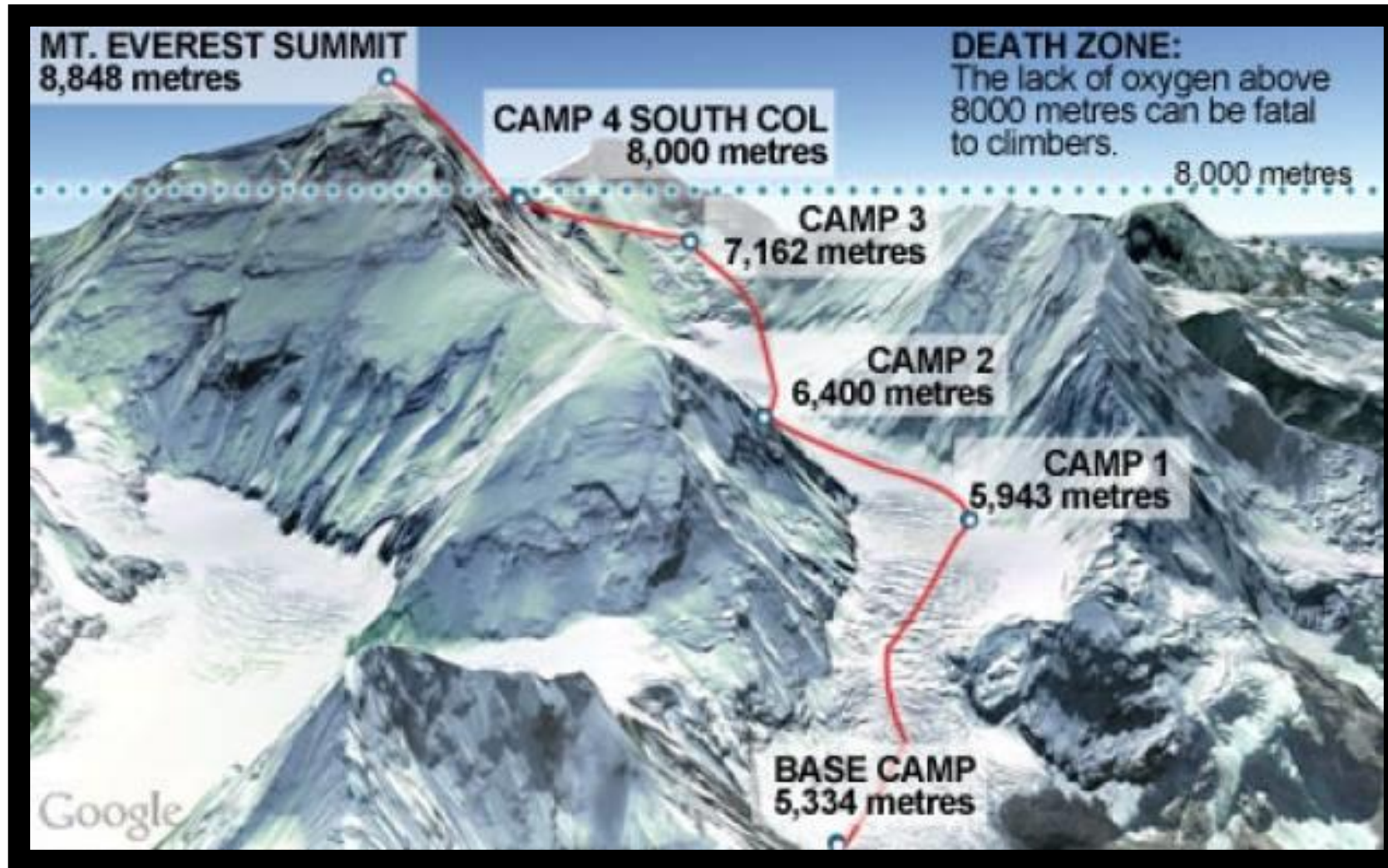
Alone on Everest

The newsroom wanted regular reports from the mountain.

The flow of information was one-way. No feedback, guidance or inquiries about the challenges I was facing.

Someone even quipped before I left “Wouldn’t it be exciting if someone dies”

Divided the Teams Go Up



**But the South Africans stay behind at
the South Col.**

They had been trapped in a storm on
their way up to Camp 4.

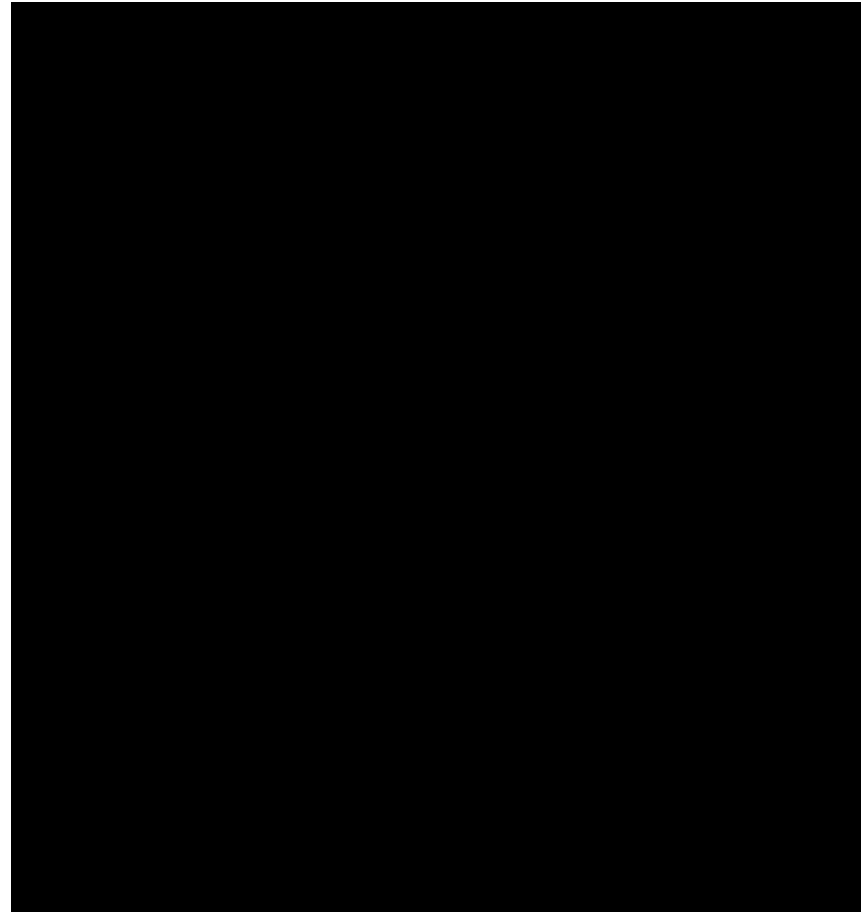
For several hours they were missing.
Until we got this radio call from New
Zealander, Rob Hall.

Rob Hall Radio Crossing

“I can confirm that three South African packs arrived on South Col.

To the best of our knowledge they are not in the best condition. They are not in the best condition but are OK. Are OK and on South Col.”

Rob Hall, May 9th.



May 10th 1996

Shortly after midnight
Rob Hall, Scott Fischer
and Makalu Gau led
their teams up the
mountain.



May 10th 1996

Through-out the day we heard cheers go up as the teams of Rob Hall, Scott Fischer and the Taiwanese reached the summit.

All seemed well.



May 10th 1996

Late in the afternoon we noticed thick clouds moving in around Base Camp.

Then the New Zealand camp sent out a message for urgent help.



May 10th 1996

A sudden storm had hit the Death Zone and 21 climbers were trapped in the white-out conditions.



May 10th 1996

Philip Woodall (left)
grabbed a radio and
rushed over to the
New Zealand camp.



Photographs © Patrick Conroy

May 10th 1996

Deshun Deyssel and I
manned the Base
Camp radio.



Photographs © Patrick Conroy

Missing

21 climbers were lost in the storm.

Rob Hall was fighting desperately to get a climber, Doug Hansen, across the South East Ridge.

Missing

Climbers became separated.

Not everyone had a radio, including some of the guides.



Storm Radio Crossing

Courtesy Talk Radio 702

Philip Woodall
(at basecamp)

Yes I copy that.



10 May 1996

Storm Chaos

It was assumed the big expeditions were best at rescue coordination efforts.

SA team used its powerful Base Camp radio to stay in touch with climbers at Camp 4 and relay messages to Philip in Hall's camp.

Storm Chaos

Nobody thought to switch the radio communications to our camp.

Storm Chaos

Team leader Ian Woodall and photographer Bruce Herrod risked their lives to go out and try and find missing climbers in Camp 4.

They rescued two British climbers who had climbed up to Camp 4 in the storm.

Storm Chaos

Throughout the night we tried desperately to contact the climbers at the highest camp.

Slowly survivors started to stumble into Camp 4.

Many were still missing.



The Next Morning

By morning four climbers had succumbed, including the American Scott Fischer.

Rob Hall was still alive but too frozen to move.

He had summited Everest five times before. It had been assumed he could not fail.

The Next Morning

After another night on the mountain he no longer answered his radio.

After the Storm

Three climbers had also perished on the North Face of Everest.

The storm had claimed a total of eight lives.

Lost to Everest



Survivors

Several climbers lost arms, toes and even a nose to frostbite.



Most expeditions leave Everest



The SA Team Return to Base Camp

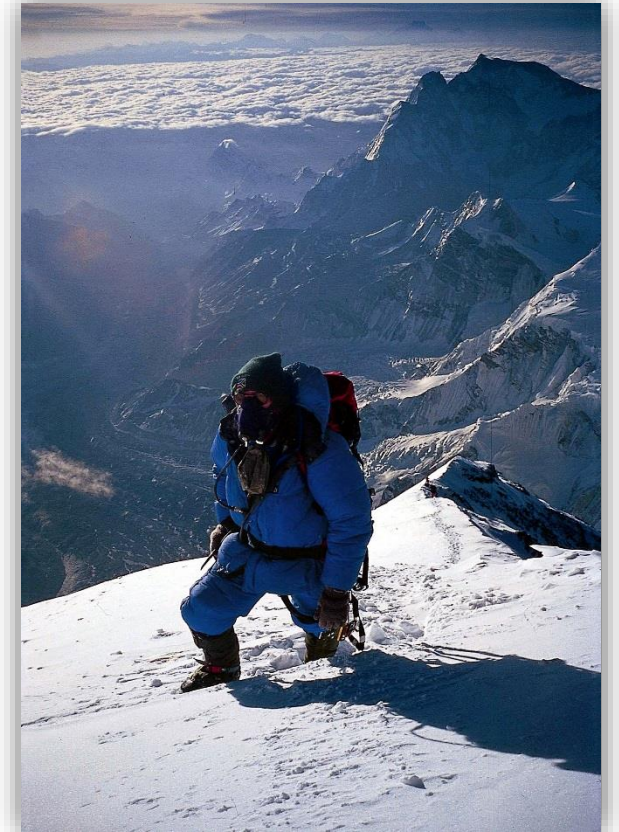


They rest for over a week.

It seems the entire expedition will be called off.

To climb now would almost certainly mean you are alone on the mountain.

Going Back Up



Last Team on Everest



25th May 1996

Three Sherpa accompanied the team to the top.

Weather conditions were perfect.

Ian Woodall and Cathy O'Dowd were exceptionally fast that day.

But Bruce Herrod was lagging.

25th May 1996

Courtesy Talk Radio 702

Ian Woodall

We have 9:52am

25 May 1996



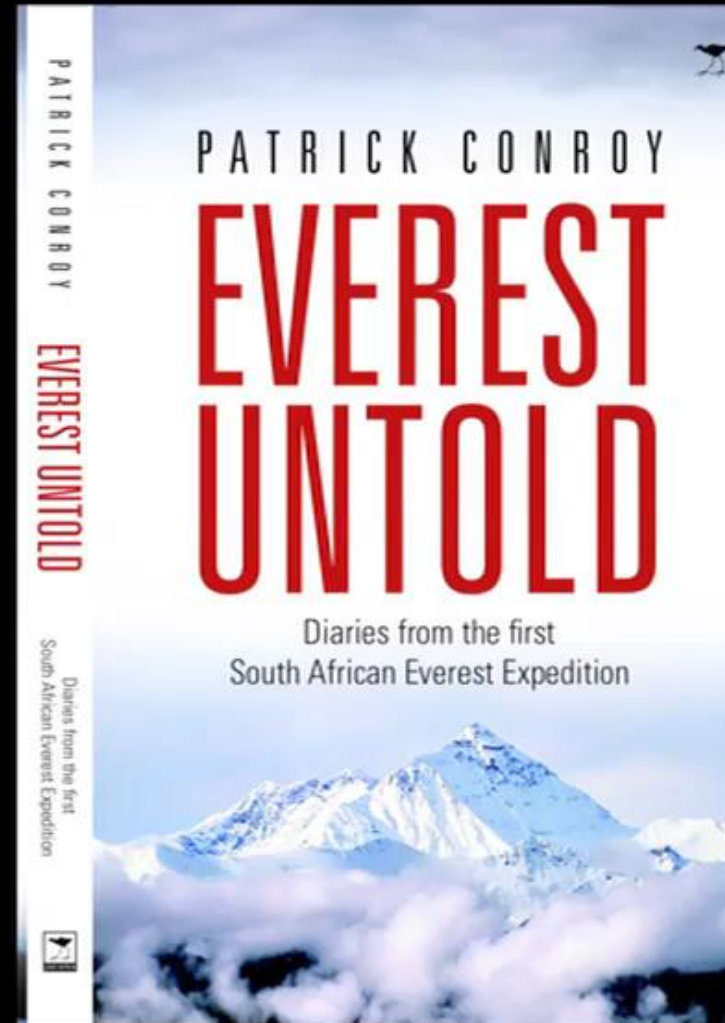
25th May 1996

Courtesy Talk Radio 702

Jeremy Maggs

*Mr President
at this point
we have got
Patrick Conroy
on the line.*

25 May 1996



25th May 1996

Ian, Cathy and the Sherpas had all made it.

On their way back they came across Herrod. He wanted to keep going for the summit.

25th May 1996

Bruce had two hours to reach the summit.

2pm was the cut-off time.

Ian made a fateful decision to let Bruce continue ...

25th May 1996

But his radio remained silent long after the 2pm turnaround time.

And then, shortly after 5pm ...

Bruce on the Summit

Bruce radios us
from the
Summit ...

He would have
to descend in
the dark.

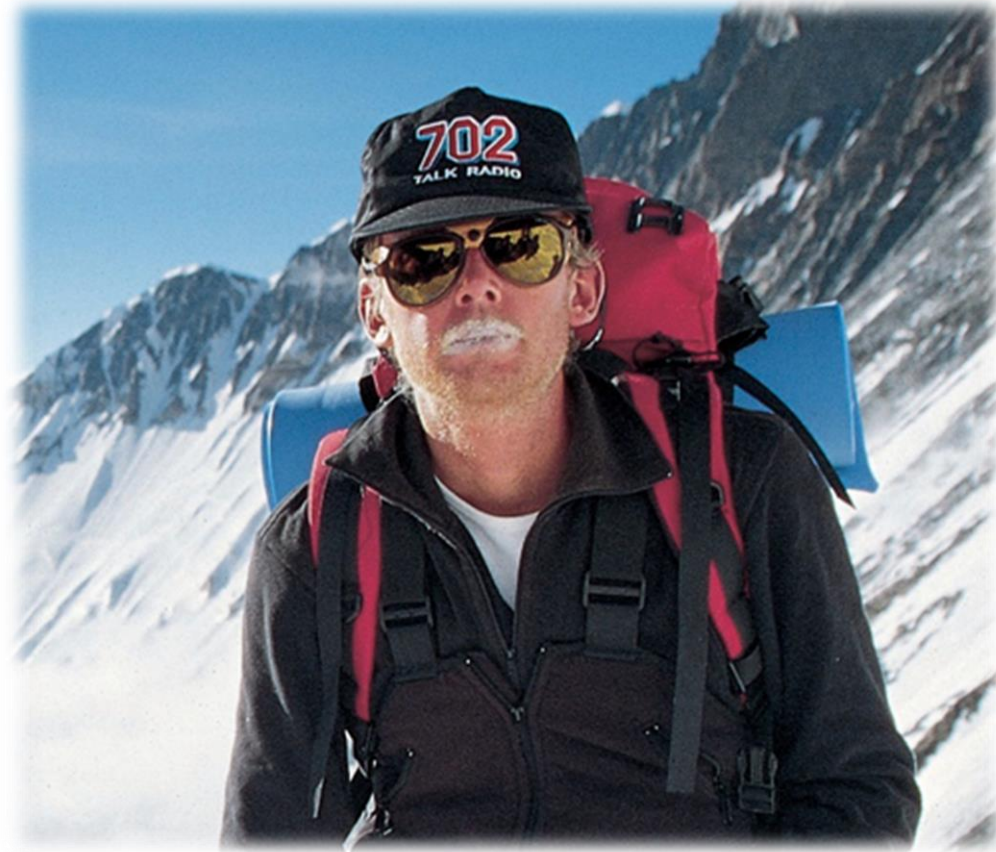
Bruce Herrod: "Its
been a long time
coming mate, and I
will be real careful
on the way down.
Over."

Bruce Herrod

We never heard from him again.

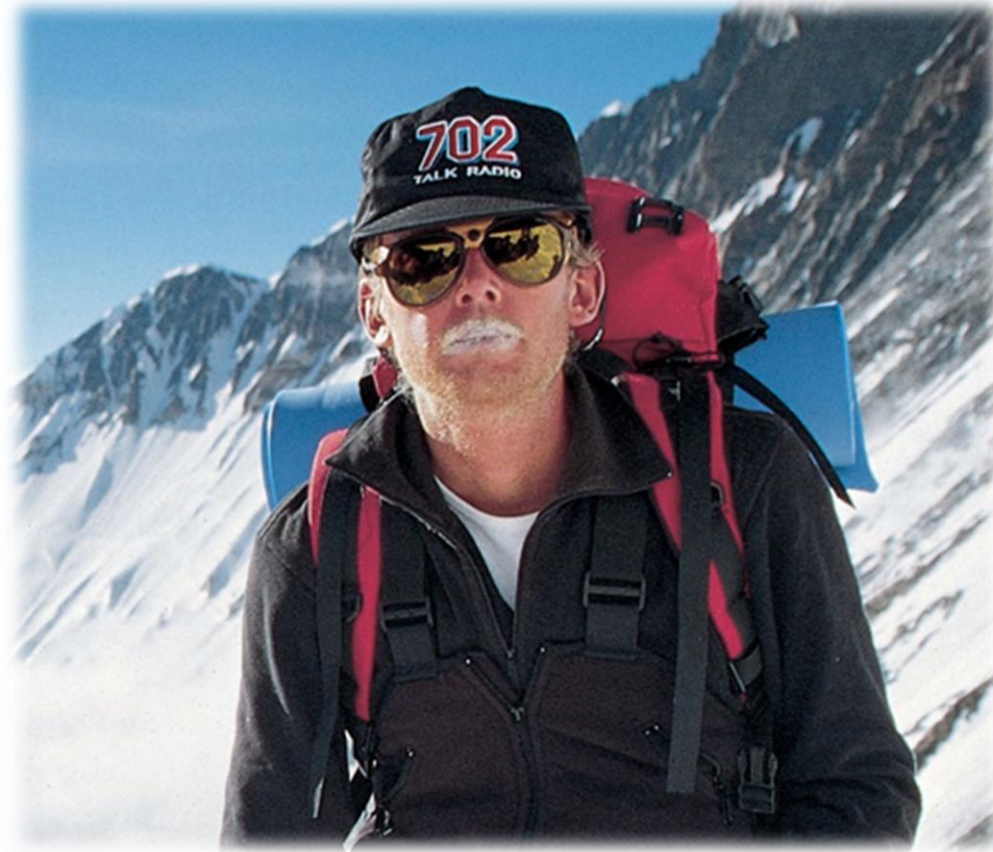


Ian would be
widely blamed
for Bruce's
death.



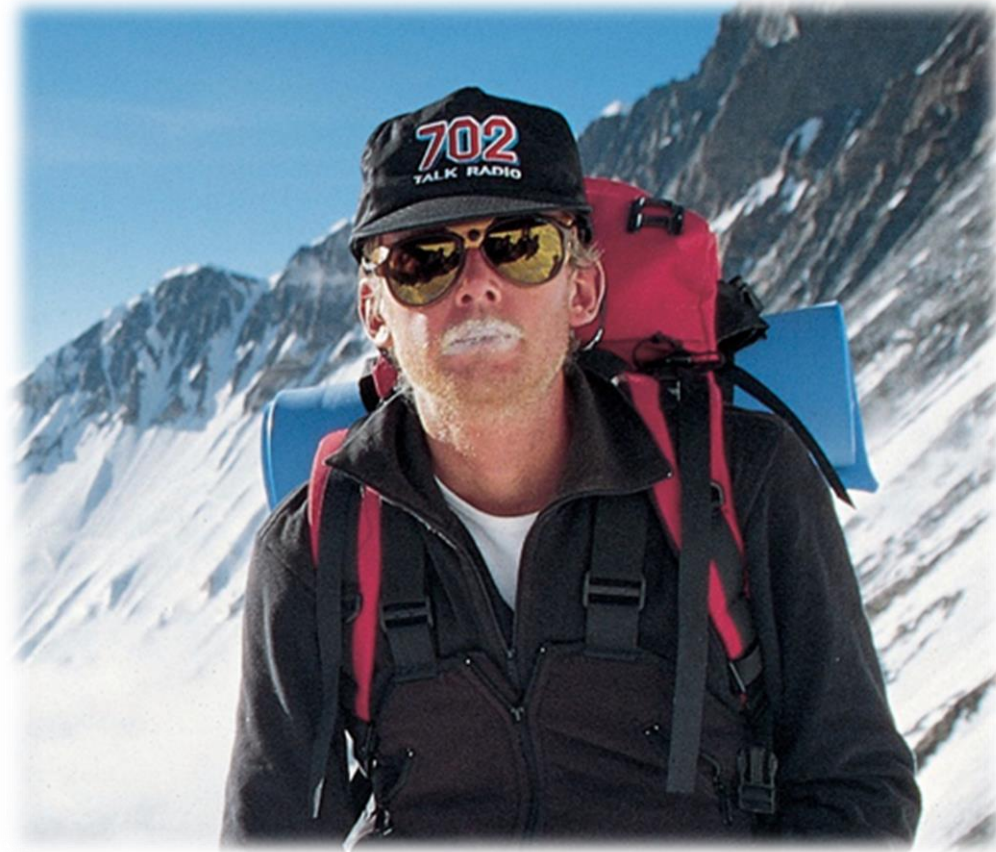
Angry at the criticism he cut off all communication out of Base Camp.

He wanted to control the message on his terms.



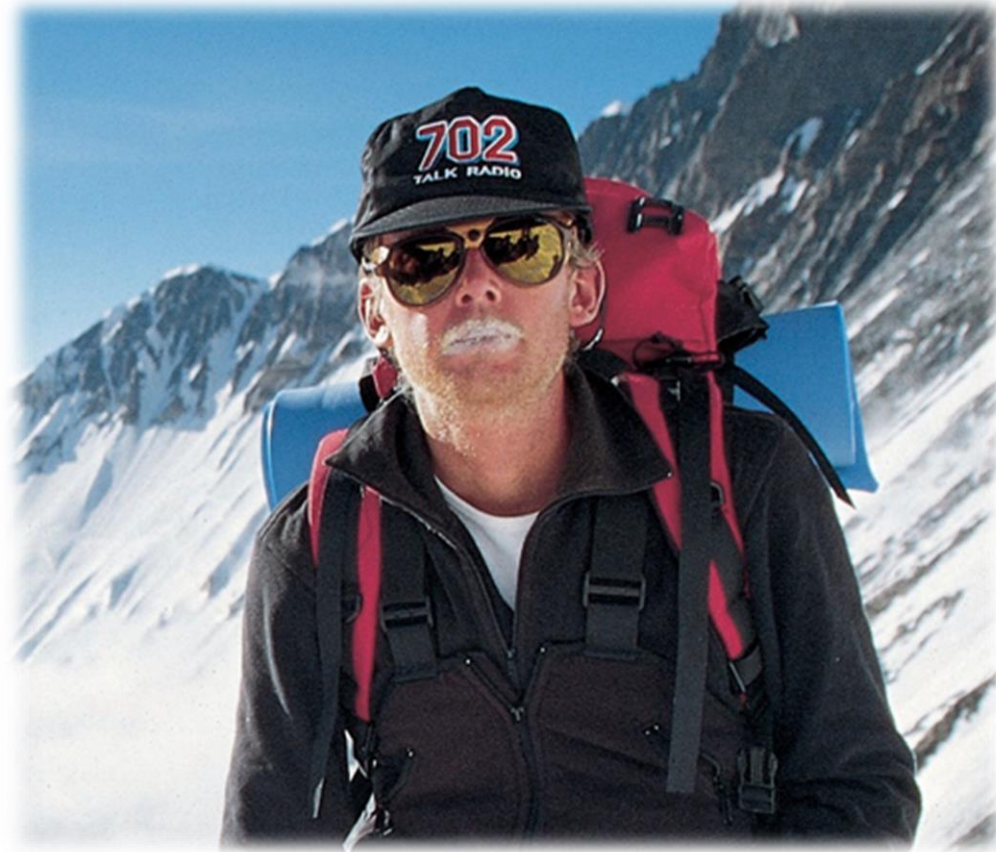
Ian had made
text book
mountaineering
decisions on the
mountain.

**But these were
poorly
understood.**



The Mountain Club of South Africa said Bruce should not have been alone.

Ian's reply did not help.



Back Home

The team returned home under a cloud.

President Nelson Mandela graciously hosted them.

But the victory was tainted by death and controversy.



Back Home

Management blamed me for getting too close to the team and not being critical enough.

I was accused of suffering from 'Stockholm Syndrome'

No understanding of embedded journalism



Back Home

No counselling was offered, no debrief.



Back Home

I resigned the following year.

Ian and Cathy left the country.



My Lessons from Everest

1. Pre-plan your Reputation

Protecting your reputation is about how well **you plan ahead.**

It is about the work you have done that others will never get to see.

It should not depend on how well you react in a crisis.

2. People Matter

Regardless of the situation – Everest, corporate environment or government.

How you treat people should be a thought-out and documented policy.

And then you must turn that policy into a living culture within the team.

2. People Matter

Your team values are a beacon for every member to use as a guide when they need to communicate.

The SA team had Nelson Mandela as their patron but failed to use his value set to determine their individual and group behaviour.

3. **Other** People Matter

Everest is so high and so remote helicopters can barely reach Base Camp.

In an emergency you will be forced to turn to others for help.

Other people are quite simply **stakeholders**.

3. Other People Matter

Identify your **stakeholders** early on.

Evaluate the quality of your relationships with them.

Identify those with whom you have a poor or bad relationship and seek to find common ground or resolutions.

4. Expect the Unexpected

Nothing goes according to plan forever.

You must **predict the possibility of a crisis or failure.**

On Everest the greatest risks were death and injury. Yet there was no pre-determined protocol on how to respond.

4. Expect the Unexpected

What are the key risks you face?

Consider these factors and **scenario plan**.

You must have a strategy on how to deal with key scenarios and how you will communicate.

4. Expect the Unexpected

Why we don't scenario plan.

Cognitive bias towards risk. Its evolutionary.

We tend to over estimate what can go well for us.

And under estimate how badly things can go wrong.

5. Technology is available. Use it.

Dispute earning \$65 000 per climber both Hall and Fischer failed to equip every climber and guide with a radio.

And when their radios failed they had no back up plan.

*** Learn from the Turkish President.**

6. The Silence Problem.

The problem with **silence** is that the cost of its damage is **unquantifiable**.

Its supporters can turn to hard numbers to justify keeping quiet.

What you can't measure is how much is silence compounding the problem?

7. Manage Expectations

In 1996 the statistics showed that **one** in every **six climbers** who reached the summit died on the descent.

Failure is **always** a possibility.

Educate people in advance of the risks and potential for failure.

Why?

8. Failure isn't a Dirty Word

In most cases nobody planned to fail.

Failure is usually without any deliberate intention or malice.

In most cases the task was either beyond your capability (**task maturity**) poor resources or the result of external factors (**unforeseen disruptor**).

8. Failure isn't a Dirty Word

Does your audience understand the reasons you **did not meet your objective?**

Educate stakeholders, clients or general public on the **inherent risks and hurdles you face.**

Leaders know you must disappoint people at a rate they can absorb.

9. You Can't Control the Media

Woodall enforced a black-out on information from Base Camp until he returned.

In the absence of information there will be speculation, uncontested accusations and information from other sources.

So-called “facts” presented early on will dominate the narrative.

9. You Can't Control the Media

But you can influence the message

Pre-planned messages that have been considered according to your scenario planning, value system, distribution channels will have high impact.

In a chaotic situation you will lose the ability to influence the narrative significantly.

10. Have an Outsider

You need a neutral **third-party to give you cold and unemotional advice.**

Identify someone you trust **ahead of time.**

Make a personal commitment to listen to them and be open to the idea that you are wrong and they are right.

Ultimately the decision is still yours. And so are the consequences.

11. Stability Trumps Perfection

In a crisis situation consider this statement:

***“Leaders bring a situation to the most stable point possible
not the ideal”***

In the quest for perfection you may achieve nothing.

12. Ask Google

Your reputation isn't what you say it is.

It is what others find when they Google you.

Make sure your digital reputation is a key priority and respond swiftly when it is questioned. **The space-time continuum** is faster in a digital universe.

13. Feedback Loop

If you are only talking or only listening there is a problem.

You will fail to pick up on the signals of a pending crisis.

And when it does go wrong do you **debrief** or apportion **blame**?

14. Leadership

Leaders have a big impact on reputation.

The skills required to succeed are a strong will, determination, intense focus and strategy.

These are vital in business.

14. Leadership

But these can be a counter force in a crisis if **the assumed outcome** is based on the **current, or past, reputation** of the leader.

And if the leader is **neutralised** – who takes over?

Good leaders know past success doesn't guarantee future glory

Thank you

