

hearing and his sense of touch to help him find the way. He had to take thousands of small, careful steps over crumbly ice. He had to jump over narrow crevasses after measuring them with his climbing pole, and he had to walk across wider ones on temporary bridges. He had a bad fall and hurt his nose by hitting it on a block of ice. When he finally reached the camp at the top of the icefall, he was exhausted. When he got into his tent, he fell asleep so quickly that Pasquale had to take his boots off for him. The average time for an experienced climber making a first trip across the icefall was around seven hours. It had taken Eric thirteen.

Normally, climbers going up Everest make many trips back and forth across the Khumbu Icefall. There are two reasons for this. First, supplies and equipment needed for the final stages of the ascent have to be carried to the camp at the top of the glacier. Second, by making many trips, the climbers can ‘acclimatize’—in other words, they can get used to working in air with reduced amounts of oxygen before moving on toward the summit.

When the other members of the team realized that Erik’s blindness was going to be a particularly big handicap on the Khumbu, they suggested that Erik rest in the camp while they carried up the supplies. But he rejected this idea. He was determined to be a full member of the team. He was setting up his own tent. He was looking after his own equipment. And he was going to do his job on the Khumbu. By the time he made his tenth crossing, his time was down to around five hours.

After the Khumbu, things went well for Eric and the other members of the team. Nineteen of the twenty-one members summited, a better percentage than on any previous expedition. Eric’s team was stopped on their way to the summit by a bad storm—high wind, blowing snow, thunder and lightning, but, eventually, the weather cleared and they got to the top. On the last steep slopes Eric felt his blindness gave him an advantage. It was dark, so no one could see much, and he was better than the others at using his hands to find his way.

- information from: *TIME Magazine*, 2001, (Karl Taro Greenfeld); *USA Today*, 01.06.07, (Jeff Zillgitt);
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