

## *CASE REPORT*

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**R**am Bahadur (pseudonym), Nepali, was a mountain porter who died one night in October 1997. This is an account, as best as we can piece it together, of his death.

Ram was 24 years old and engaged by a commercial trekking group, to carry their equipment over the Thorung-La, a 5416 meter pass on the Annapurna Circuit. On the morning of the 24th October, near the top of the pass, Ram felt unwell and could no longer carry his load. We don't know his exact medical condition when he was paid his wages and dismissed, but we do know that snow was falling steadily and that he was sent back alone without adequate clothing for the cold conditions. We also know that he wasn't given enough money to effect a rescue if needed. A short distance below where he was dismissed Ram stopped at a tea shop and was vomiting and complaining of a severe headache, which are signs of mountain sickness, particularly cerebral edema (HACE).

Much later that day, Ram arrived at a half-constructed lodge in the tiny settlement of Letdar (4200 meters). The builder reported that Ram was cold and exhausted. He was given a blanket and some food, and he settled down on the boards for the night. At 10 AM the next day, Ram collapsed and became severely ill with mountain sickness.

He didn't receive any treatment until 5pm when an American climber arrived and was asked to see him.

The American reported that Ram was unable to stand, had great difficulty breathing and was coughing up frothy sputum, signs of pulmonary edema (HAPE). He gave the necessary medications to help treat mountain sickness (HACE and HAPE). This improved Ram's condition sufficiently for an attempt to carry him down to the Himalayan Rescue Association (HRA) aid post in Manang. Three thousand rupees (US \$50) was collected from trekkers and local people to pay two porters to carry him down. Gloves, hat, a blanket and a head torch were also donated.

It was dark and still snowing when the two porters set off at 7.30 PM to carry Ram in a basket down to Manang. The trail was treacherous with ice and snow, and they made slow progress down the mountain. Three hours later, just an hour short of the HRA aid post, Ram collapsed and died. His body laid by the trail for three days, a sad sight to the dozens of trekkers who passed by.

Yet another mountain porter has died because of the ignorance and neglect of those who employed him.

Note: It is extremely difficult to know exactly how many porters die in this way every year on the trekking routes of Nepal. These numerous deaths go unnoticed and unreported, unlike the hype and hysteria which greet the occasional deaths of climbers on well known mountains.

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