

Case Study: *Into Thin Air*

Into Thin Air, Jon Krakauer’s account of his participation in a 1996 expedition to Mount Everest, focuses primarily on two of the teams attempting the summit at the same time: Adventure Consultants and Mountain Madness.

	Adventure Consultants	Mountain Madness
Guides	Rob Hall, leader and head guide Mike Groom Andy Harris	Scott Fischer, leader and head guide Anatoli Boukreev Neal Beidleman
Clients	Frank Fischbeck Doug Hansen Stuart Hutchinson Lou Kasischke Jon Krakauer Yasuko Namba John Taske Beck Weathers	Martin Adams Charlotte Fox Lene Gammelgaard Dale Kruse* Tim Madsen Sandy Hill Pittman Pete Schoening** Klev Schoening
Sherpas	Ang Dorje, climbing sirdar Lhakpa Chhiri Ngawang Norbu Tenzing Arita Chuldum Kami	Lopsang Jangbu, climbing sirdar Ngawang Dorje Ngawang Sya Kya Ngawang Tendi Tendi Tashi Tshering “Big” Pemba
Base Camp	Helen Wilton, manager Dr. Caroline Mackenzie, team physician	Dr. Ingrid Hunt, manager and team physician

*On May 6, Kruse, suffering from altitude sickness and possible cerebral edema, descended with Fischer from Camp One to Base Camp for treatment.

**Pete Schoening decided not to make the final push to the summit while still at Base Camp.

The following teams and leaders had noteworthy interactions or involvement in the events described in *Into Thin Air*:

- MacGillivray Freeman IMAX/IWERKS Expedition—David Breashears, leader
- Taiwanese National Expedition—“Makalu” Gau Ming-Ho, leader
- Johannesburg *Sunday Times* Expedition—Ian Woodall, leader

Timeline

Note: The book does not present events according to a strict time sequence. Some events, therefore, are described in a different chapter than is implied here, and in some cases the chapters are not listed sequentially. In addition, chapters that describe events not directly relating to the activities of the Adventure Consultants or Mountain Madness expeditions are not referenced.

Mission Overview

Introduction

Chapter 1—May 10—Everest Summit

Chapter 2—1852—Dehra Dun, India

March 1995	<i>Outside</i> magazine makes a commitment to fund Krakauer's participation in an expedition to Mount Everest so that Krakauer can write a story about the experience.
February 1996	Krakauer agrees to go to Everest with Rob Hall's Adventure Consultants.

Team Formation

Chapter 3—March 29—Over Northern India—30,000 feet

March 29, 1996	Krakauer arrives at Katmandu.
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Chapter 4—March 31—Phakding—9,186 feet

March 31	Adventure Consultants team flies in Mi-17 helicopter to village of Lukla at 9,200 feet and then hikes to Phakding where they spend the night.
April 4	After hiking from village to village to speed the altitude acclimation process, the Adventure Consultants team arrives at Pheriche above 14,000 feet.
April 6	Team arrives at Lobuje at 16,200 feet.
April 7	Hall and Groom coordinate the rescue of an injured Sherpa, Tenzing.

Chapter 5—April 8—Lobuje—16,200 feet

April 8	Tenzing is brought down and eventually flown to a hospital.
April 9	Team arrives at Base Camp at 17,600 feet.

Team Development

Chapter 6—April 12—Everest Base Camp—17,600 feet

April 12	Climbers prepare equipment.
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Chapter 7—April 13—Camp 1—19,500 feet

April 13	Climbers leave Base Camp for Camp One. This is the first time the climbers see each other on an actual climb. Climbers arrive at Camp One at 19,500 feet.
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Chapter 8—April 16—Camp 1—19,500

April 16	Climbers make their second trip to Camp One at 19,500 feet.
April 22	Stricken with High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE), Ngawang Topche must be dragged from Camp Two to Base Camp for emergency treatment.
April 26	Ngawang is evacuated by helicopter. Later, in mid-June, he dies from the illness. A dispute breaks out between Hall's team and the South African team over the fixing of ropes on the Lhotse Face. Adventure Consultants team arrives at Camp Two at 21,300 feet.

Chapter 9—April 28—Camp 2—21,300 feet

April 28	Adventure Consultants team attempts to climb to Camp Three but turns around because of bad weather. Hansen's larynx seems to have frozen. Hansen generally does not feel well.
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Chapter 10—April 29—Lhotse Face—23,400 feet

April 29	Adventure Consultants team arrives at Camp Three at 24,000 feet to complete acclimatization.
May 1	Adventure Consultants team return to Base Camp.

Chapter 11—May 6—Base Camp—17,600 feet

May 6	Adventure Consultants, Mountain Madness, and Taiwanese team leave Camp Two to begin summit attempt.
May 7	Teams reach Camp Two and have rest day.
May 8	Teams move from Camp Two to Camp Three, despite a snowstorm. Most climbers begin using supplemental oxygen.

Operations: The Ascent

Chapter 12—May 9—Camp 3—24,000 feet

1300	Krakauer arrives at Camp Four. Winds are blowing at 50 knots. Weather conditions deteriorate throughout the afternoon. Everyone from the Adventure Consultant and Mountain Madness teams makes it to Camp Four.
1930	Winds abruptly cease, and summit push is a go.
2330	Adventure Consultants team sets out for the summit. Mountain Madness team follows approximately 30 minutes later.

Chapter 13—May 10—Southeast Ridge—27,600 feet

0530	At the Balcony, first climbers must wait for set ropes to be fixed. Also the location where Rob Hall instructed his team to rendezvous.
1130	Taske, Kasischke, and Hutchison decide to turn around because they judge that they cannot make it to the summit before the understood turnaround time of 1300.
1140	After realizing that the Sherpas who were present would not do it, Beidleman, Harris, Boukreev, and Krakauer set ropes at the South Summit.

Operations: The Summit

Chapter 14—May 10, 1:12 pm—Summit—29,028 feet

1312	Krakauer documents the time when he reaches the summit.
1335	Descending, Krakauer encounters a clot of climbers ascending Hillary Step and is forced to wait for over an hour before the traffic clears. He runs out of bottled oxygen as he waits.

Chapter 15—May 10, 1:25 pm—Summit—29,028 feet

~1325	Beidleman, Boukreev, Adams, Harris, and Klev Schoening reach the summit.
~1400	Taske, Kasischke, and Hutchison are back at Camp Four.
~1415	Hall, Groom, Pittman, Fox, Madsen, Gammelgaard, Lopsang, and Namba reach the summit.
1430	Boukreev begins descent.
1500	Harris, Groom, and Krakauer stop at South Summit where Harris insists that all the oxygen bottles in the cache there are empty. (The bottles are not empty, and Groom and Krakauer resupply their oxygen.)
1530	Beidleman encounters the still-ascending Fischer at the Hillary Step.

Chapter 17—May 10, 3:40 pm—Summit—29,028 feet

1540	Fischer reaches the summit.
1600	As Lopsang begins his descent from the summit, Hansen comes into view, making his way to the summit. Hall hurries from the summit to help Hansen complete his ascent.
1630	Descending, Hall and Hansen reach top of the Hillary Step, but forward progress grinds to a halt as Hansen runs out of oxygen and is severely debilitated. Hall radios to convey their urgent need for oxygen, but Harris breaks in to say oxygen bottles at the South Summit are empty.
1645	Krakauer encounters Beck Weathers on the Balcony where Weathers has been waiting for Hall as promised earlier in the day.
1653	Guy Cotter (Hall's climbing partner who was leading an expedition for Adventure Consultants on nearby Pumori) initiates a series of three radio calls to Hall entreating him to descend to the South Summit.
1655	Groom is finally able to radio information that oxygen bottles at the South Summit are NOT empty.
1700	Boukreev reaches Camp Four. Groom and Namba meet Weathers at the Balcony and all three begin to descend together with Groom short-roping the blinded Weathers.
1720	Beidleman and five others reach the Balcony.
1730	Harris begins ascending to Hillary Step with oxygen for Hall and Hansen.
1800	"The onset of the blizzard," according to Boukreev.
~1845	Krakauer reaches Camp Four.
2000	Although near Camp Four, blizzard conditions with visibility of less than 20 feet as well as low batteries on head lamps prevent a group of climbers from being able to see the tents. The group of roughly a dozen climbers—guides, clients, and sherpas—is lost and starts wandering on the South Col, hoping to blunder across the camp.
2100	Fischer, ill and unable to walk, huddles on a ledge 1,200 feet above the South Col and sends Lopsang to fetch Boukreev.
2200	Making no headway toward Camp Four and exhausted from fighting blizzard conditions, the lost climbers group together and hunker down beside a small boulder.

Change in Mission: Rescue

0000	Lopsang arrives at Camp Four. Blizzard lifts enough for lost climbers to see Camp Four. Beidleman assembles those in the group still able to walk. They make their way to Camp Four to summon a rescue party.
0045	Beidleman and five others reach tents at Camp Four.
0100	Hutchison and Boukreev attempt to organize rescue for lost climbers, but they did not coordinate their efforts, and each sets out alone to try to help. Blizzard conditions cause Hutchison to abandon his effort.
~0230	Boukreev finds lost climbers. Namba is presumed dead, and Weathers is missing. Boukreev brings Fox back to Camp Four.
0430	After returning to the lost climbers to retrieve Pittman, Boukreev reaches Camp Four. Madsen is able to follow on his own accord.
0443	Hall radios Base Camp from South Summit. Neither Harris nor Hansen is with him. Hall sounds confused and irrational.

Chapter 16—May 11, 6:00 am—South Col—26,000 feet

0600	Stuart Hutchison wakes up Krakauer and tells him that Andy Harris is not in his tent.
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Chapter 19—May 11, 7:30 am—South Col—26,000 feet

0730	Krakauer returns to Camp 4 after an hour-long search for Andy Harris.
0900	Still at the South Summit, Hall radios to communicate that he has fixed his mask. Hall begins to breathe supplemental oxygen for the first time in approximately 16 hours.
0930	Ang Dorje and Lhakpa Chhiri leave Camp Four to help Hall.
1000	Tashi Tshering and Ngawang Sya Kya reach Fischer but are unable to revive him.
~1200	Descending, Mountain Madness clients and Beidleman arrive at Camp Three and, after brief rest, continue toward Camp Two.
1500	Fierce winds and deteriorating conditions force Ang Dorje and Lhakpa Chhiri to abandon effort to rescue Hall.
1630	Given up for dead and nearly incapacitated by frostbite, Weathers stumbles to Camp Four.
1700	Boukreev initiates final rescue attempt of Fischer.
1820	Hall and his wife (patched in from New Zealand) speak on the radio. Their conversation is the last time Hall is heard on the radio.
1930	Boukreev locates Fischer, but Fisher is dead.

Descent to Base Camp

Chapter 20—May 12, 9:45 am—The Geneva Spur—25,900 feet

0945	Remaining clients, guides, and sherpas from Adventure Consultants regroup and begin descent from Camp Four.
1330	Adventure Consultants team arrives at Camp Two.
1630	Volunteers from other expeditions bring Beck Weathers from Camp Four to Camp Two, where Weathers is treated in the mess tent for severe frostbite.

Chapter 21—May 13—Everest Base Camp—17,600 feet

~0900	Beck Weathers is evacuated by helicopter from the lip of the Icefall.
Late a.m.	Krakauer arrives at Base Camp.