

**Himalaya by Michael Palin****ABOUT THE BOOK**

The book *Himalaya* was written to accompany Michael Palin's 2004 documentary *Himalaya with Michael Palin*, in which he spent six months travelling 2,000 miles along the mountain range. This journey took him from Pakistan to Nepal via the Base Camp of Mount Everest. The journey was by no means an easy one – as well as having to travel at high altitude, he and the film crew had to deal with numerous difficult political situations. The highest point he reached was Everest Base Camp, described in this extract. At the beginning of the extract, he travels to the North Base Camp.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Palin is an English actor, comedian, travel writer and presenter, born in Sheffield, England in 1943. He became interested in acting and comedy while studying history at Oxford University, and after graduating formed the comedy group *Monty Python*. A keen train spotter, he presented his first travel documentary, *Great Railways of the World*, in 1980. He then went on to present a number of other travel documentaries including *Himalaya with Michael Palin*. As a result of his great contribution to the promotion of travel and geography, he has received several awards, including the Gold Medal from the Royal Geographical Society. He also has two trains named after him.

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Day Sixty Two: Rongbuk to Everest Base Camp

Last night I slept. Indeed, I slept so long and so deeply that Basil thought I might be dead.

What a difference it makes to everything. The sky looks bluer, the food tastes better, the yak butter tea is like nectar and the prospect of a trek beyond Everest Base Camp and up toward the Rongbuk Glacier is the only thing I want to do with the rest of my life.

It takes us 20 minutes to drive the eight miles from Rongbuk to Base Camp, passing on the way the remains of the old monastery.

Some of the walls still stand, but it's little more than a skeleton, barely distinguishable from the rubble-covered slopes on which it stands. Above these desiccated ruins a flock of blue sheep are nosing some nourishment out of the rocks.

Everest Base Camp is nowhere near as romantic as it sounds. Part of it is protected by a 100-foot high moraine, a wall of stone and shale, carried down and dumped by the glacier that has gouged out the valley. A stream trickles through but any standing water is frozen solid. In high season, between June and August, this area and the rock-strewn valley floor beyond are packed with mountaineers and trekkers. This year there were 32 separate expeditions.

Now, in early November, the camp is all but deserted though the legacy of the summer lies

around: discarded bottles, playing cards, batteries and bits of sodden, scrumpled clothing.

A couple of motorbikes are parked beside a caretaker's tent, outside which a young man sits in the sun, having his hair cut by two ladies. Nearby, the yak herders with whom we shall be walking up to the glacier have set up two or three small tents of their own, while the yaks graze nearby, nibbling at the scatterings of wheat and dry grass laid out for them. One has made a small hole in the ice and is drinking from it. Their hair is mostly black, though some have white faces. All have the soft eyes of cows and the same sad, long-suffering look, as if resigned to whatever's going to happen. Despite looking eminently embraceable, they don't seem at all interested in my friendly advances, and I'm warned that they can turn very truculent.

Though the herders seem not the slightest bit sentimental about their furry charges, theirs is one of the most one-sidedly symbiotic relationships between man and beast. In return for some grass the yaks give their owners milk, cheese, butter, meat, fuel, building materials, clothes and transport.

I join the herders around a fire of brush wood and bamboo kindling, which they keep alive by pumping hard with an ancient sheep's bladder bellows. Sitting in a circle, eating cake made from tsampa, the barley flour and tea mix, they're jolly company, naturally given to smiling and cracking jokes, most of which are at my expense.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

nectar (line 5): a drink that tastes very good

desiccated (line 14): drier than it should be

nourishment (line 15): food

shale (line 18): smooth, dark rock

gouge out (line 19): cut long deep holes into something

legacy (line 26): something that exists because of something in the past

sodden (line 28): completely wet

eminently (line 41): very or very much

truculent (line 43): easily annoyed and always ready to argue

symbiotic (relationship) (line 46): close connection between two different creatures from which both get benefits

kindling (line 51): small pieces of wood for starting a fire

bladder bellows (line 52): device for blowing air into a fire, made from a sheep's organs

**Himalaya by Michael Palin****Before reading**

- 1 You are going to read an extract from a travel book called *Himalaya* by Michael Palin. Work in pairs and answer these questions.**
 - Do you know who Michael Palin is? What is he best known for?
 - What are the Himalayas? What do you know about them?
- 2 In the extract Palin travels to Everest Base Camp. What do you think it is like there? Brainstorm adjectives and phrases to describe the scenery and the camp.**

While reading

- 1 Read the extract and put the summaries below in the correct order.**
 - the author's first impressions of Base Camp
 - the relationship between the herders and the yaks
 - the journey to Base Camp
 - the author joins the herders
 - the description of the yak herders and their yaks
 - a description of how the author slept last night
- 2 Read the extract again and answer these questions.**
 - How does the author feel when he wakes up? How do you think he has been sleeping prior to last night? Which line tells you this?
 - What do you think the author's expectation of Everest Base Camp is? What is the reality for him?
 - Are there many people at Base Camp? Which line tells you this?
 - What are the yaks like according to the author?
 - Why does the author describe the relationship between the yaks and their herders as 'one of the most one-sidedly symbiotic relationships between man and beast'?
 - How would you describe the personality of the herders? What words does the author use to convey this?
 - The author says that the herders crack jokes 'most of which are at my expense'. What does he mean by this?
- 3 Read the first seven lines, up until *the rest of my life*, and answer these questions.**
 - Why does the author use such a short sentence to start this diary entry? What effect does it have?
 - From *What a difference ...*, what tense is the extract written in? Why do you think the author uses this tense? What effect does it have on the reader?

- Do you think the author really likes yak butter tea? Why/Why not? Why does he use the comparison to 'nectar'?
- The author says that the prospect of a trek beyond Everest Base Camp is the only thing he wants to do with the rest of his life. Do you think this is true? Why does he say this?

4 Now read the description of the Base Camp from line 16 to line 28. Answer these questions.

- Underline the descriptive language the author uses to describe Base Camp. What things about Base Camp do you think the author finds disappointing?
- How would you describe the tone of the language that Palin uses in his description? What image does this create for the reader?
- Look back at the description of Base Camp you brainstormed in *Before reading* 2. Is it very different to Palin's description?

After reading

- 1 Overall what is the tone of the extract? Do you find any parts funny? Which ones?**
- 2 Imagine you are one of the herders. How would you describe meeting Michael Palin and the film crew?**
- 3 Think about a time when you visited somewhere that was not as you expected. Brainstorm words and phrases to describe your expectation of it, and then words and phrases to describe the reality. Make notes in the table below.**

Expectation	Reality

- 4 Look at the words below that Palin used to create the imagery of Base Camp, and their more neutral equivalents.**
 - gouged out – cut into
 - sodden – wet
 - scrumpled – creased
 - dumped – thrown

For the words in your table, think of stronger words that can help you to make your description more powerful. Then write your paragraph.

- 5 Work in groups and read your paragraphs to each other.**