



The Two Year Mountain (Bradt Travel Guides (Travel Literature))

Phil Deutschle

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With his life literally hanging from a slender rope over a crevasse near the top of a Himalayan mountain, a young man relives in his mind a relentless two-year physical and spiritual test as a Peace Corps volunteer in a remote mountain village of Nepal. Combining the elements of adventure story, travel log, and personal confession, this absorbing account describes a wrenching experience that belies the idealistic expectations of many Peace Corps volunteers. Following a two-year stint as a science and mathematics teacher in a Nepalese village, Phil Deutsche sets off alone on a three-month expedition to conquer Pharchamo, 20,580 feet high, which has claimed several lives and is his final goal in the Himalayas. This trek forms the framework of the book, and into it Deutsche weaves the story of his experiences over the previous two years in a series of sharply etched, swiftly moving, often humorous anecdotes. Deutsche is not starry-eyed about Nepal and its people or, least of all, about the mission of the Peace Corps. He vividly describes events that are both horrible and poignant: being charged by a rhinoceros, the awful fascination of watching a corpse burn on a funeral pyre, the struggle to save a child's life, scaling a Himalayan peak higher than Mount McKinley (the highest mountain in North America). Despite his difficulties, he steels himself to stay one year, then the full two years, and, imperceptibly, grows so attached to the village that he leaves it in tears. Mourning the "small death" of his departure, confused about his identity as an American, and feeling more alienated than before, he sets off on a final, reckless, solo climb of Mount Pharchamo, hardly caring whether he survives. Apathetic from lack of oxygen and from his own malaise and only when his life literally hangs on a slender rope, does he overcome despair and make a gigantic effort to save himself. The two parts of the book - the emotional challenge of the village and physical challenge of the climb - come together in a triumphant affirmation of life. A native Californian, Phil Deutsche is currently teaching handicapped children in Denmark. The Two Year Mountain was originally published by Bradt in 1986 and remains as relevant to the spirit of exploration and real, raw travel writing today as it was then.

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