

Fit@50: All women Trans-Himalayan trek completes one month

Nagpur: The women-only group of highly experienced mountaineers currently on a trans-Himalayan trek, celebrated one month of their trip a few days ago at the West Bengal-Nepal border. The 'Fit@50' group halted at Sandakphu, at 12,500 feet, which marks the beginning of the tougher phase of their trek that is scheduled to end in mid-August.

TOI had earlier reported about this unique five-month long trek in which experienced female mountaineers, all over the age of 50, embarked on an arduous journey that will test their skills to the limit. Led by the legendary Bachendri Pal, the 12-member strong contingent will now enter Nepal and navigate their way through extremely tough passes on their way to Kargil.

But even this first month of trekking around 650 kms has not been without its fair share of adventure and mishaps.

Just 10 days into the trek, Nagpurian Bimla Negi-Deoskar who's part of the group, met with a freak accident. Her husband Avinash said, "They were walking and a passing truck grazed her hand, but the impact was such that it led to a fracture."

But the gritty Bimla hit the road within hours of the incident. "Indian Army personnel who were there immediately took her to their hospital, got the cast set and she set off," said Avinash. TOI tried to get in touch with the team, who are carrying cell phones, but network issues prevailed. Avinash, who keeps in touch with the group regularly, said, "Many times it's just luck, constant network coverage is not there all the time." In the second week, the group's strength increased to 12. "They started with 10 members, and soon another two experienced members joined them," said Avinash. Apart from these two full-time new members, small groups keep joining them for day-long treks. "Recently four people from Nagpur trekked with the group for a day. They included 10 year-old Abhinav Gomase. Such things motivate the Fit@50 group and also provide a good experience for trekking enthusiasts," said Avinash. The group's last few days of trek offered some unique experiences too. Avinash said, "So the route through high mountains and hamlets was such that sometimes they were in Nepal and then back to the Indian side. Also interesting is the local culture that one gets to witness while travelling on foot. The beauty of India is being experienced by the Fit@50 group in the best way possible."

He said the group has been receiving tremendous support from army undertaking such a testing journey," said Avinash. G

At many points of their trek, the army hosted the group for night halts.

While the first month of trek did see the group being challenged to some extent by the route, the tough part begins now. Avinash said, "They will enter Nepal now

and will be off-grid for quite some time. So, they will be camping, cooking along the route as it traverses through remote points."

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But it's nothing which the group cannot handle, he said. "Their combined trekking and mountaineering experience is around 300 years," said Avinash. "Each member in the group has individual experience of more than two decades. They have seen it all and I don't think it will be a problem," he said.

The Fit@50 group has been walking an average of 20 kms everyday, which puts them on track to complete the 4,500km route sometime around August 10. A small part of the route in bits-and-pieces will be covered by vehicle, but every single day will involve walking.

As the route gets tougher and time spent away from family gets longer, the dozen women will be tested both physically and emotionally. "They are built of some different material," said Avinash, expressing confidence that none of the challenges will have an impact on their schedule.

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