

10 women over 50 years old, 4,500 kilometers, and 40 Himalayan Passes

Bachendri Pal, the first Indian woman to summit Everest, will lead a Women's Trans Himalayan Expedition.

This summer, Indian mountaineer Bachendri Pal will lead a team of nine women over 50 on a five-month expedition through the Himalaya.

The Fit@50+ Women's Trans Himalayan Expedition '21 will track from east to west for a total of 4,500 kilometers (2,796 miles), crossing 40 mountain passes. The expedition will begin in the first week of May at Bomdila, and end at Karakoram Pass in the second week of October. The participants are a diverse group from across India: homemakers, retired professionals, and three past ascensionists of Everest make up the team.

"It [the expedition] will also signify women empowerment, leadership, decision making, lifestyle and the importance of fitness for our entire community," Pal told Telegraph India. "What makes this expedition more tough is the long duration of five months combined with multiple challenges, including emotional, social, mental factors, physical fatigue and weather constraints, and all these put together make Fit@50+ women's Trans Himalayan expedition a unique one."

In 1984, Pal herself was the first Indian woman to summit Mount Everest. Since then, she has led women on many adventures. In 1993, she led an Indo-Nepalese women's expedition to summit Everest. In 1994, she led an all-women team of 18 rafters from Haridwar to Calcutta. She also led the first successful traverse of the Himalayas—from Bomdila to Siachen—in 1997.

Pal now directs the Tata Steel Adventure Foundation, which promotes adventure programs and offers leadership development courses for women, youth, and organizations. The Tata Steel Adventure Foundation is organizing the Fit@50+ expedition this year, along with the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports under the FIT India banner. Tata Motors and Tata Sports Club are also supporting the expedition. From the mountains of Arunachal Pradesh in Bomdila, the expedition will enter Bhutan, then continue through Sikkim, Chitrey, Kala Pokhari, and Sandakphu to Nepal. In Nepal, the route covers the Salpa Pass, Lamajura Pass, and Thorang La—a pass on the Annapurna circuit that crests at 17,769 feet. The trek will proceed into the Kumaon district and then Lamkhaga Pass, one of the most challenging passes in the area. The route will wrap up in the Leh-Ladakh region with Khardungla, Saser La, and Depsang La, finishing at 18,175 feet in the Karakoram Pass. Mohan Rawat, 41, Amla Rawat, 47, and Randev Singh, 30, make up the three-person support team for the journey. They are all from Uttarakhand, India. At 67, Pal is the oldest member of the expedition, guiding participants who range from 52 to 64 years old. The other participants are Chetna Sahoo, Savita Dhapwal, Shamala Padmanabhan,

Gangorti Soneji, Chaula Jagirdar, Payo Murmu, Dr. Sushma Bissa, Maj. Krishna Dubey, and Bimbla Deoskar.

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