

# ADVENTURES IN MOUNTAIN CLIMBING

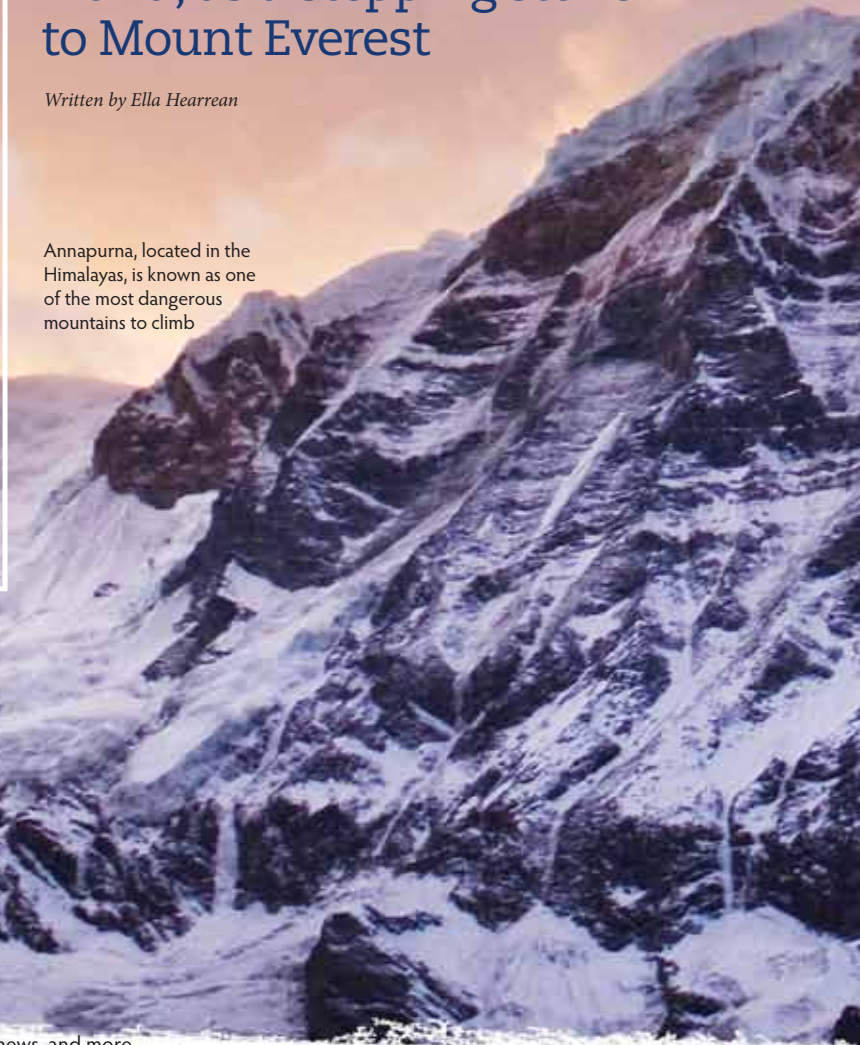


Bryan Finnesand, being dissatisfied with a traditional fitness regime, accepted the challenge of becoming a world-traveling mountain climber

Katy resident, Bryan Finnesand, climbs Annapurna, the tenth tallest mountain in the world, as a stepping stone to Mount Everest

*Written by Ella Hearrean*

Annapurna, located in the Himalayas, is known as one of the most dangerous mountains to climb





Bryan Finnesand knows how to take on a challenge. When his wife, Kerri, encouraged him to begin running, he did – all the way to the finish of the 2011 Houston marathon. Next he set his sights on biking and completed the 100-mile Katy Flatland Century Ride and the 2011 Kona Eastside Triathlon. And when he spotted a shirt about triathlons afterwards that read, “Because life is too easy, and Everest is too far away,” he couldn’t help but consider climbing the world’s tallest mountain. “I’ve learned I can do anything if I put my mind to it,” Finnesand says.

## Preparing for the Climb

So the 41-year-old novice climber decided to face Mount Everest. In late September of 2012, Finnesand packed his gear, took off ten days from his position as regional director of a medical imaging company, and boarded a flight to Qatar, a country bordering Saudi Arabia. He’d spent the last seven months researching and training for an aggressive trek to Nepal Everest Base Camp. He’d poured over books, lugged a 60-pound backpack around Stephen F. Austin State Park, and hiked Matterhorn Peak in California. “I wanted to train at the gym, but my wife vetoed the idea of me with a backpack on a stair climber at Life Time Fitness,” he laughs.

## Unexpected Hurdles

His plans came to a screeching halt when Finnesand had landed in Kathmandu’s International Airport and he learned that a plane headed to Lukla, the flight he was scheduled to take the next day, had crashed, killing all 19 people on board. “Lukla Airport is one of the most dangerous in the world, and it shook me,” he says. When Lukla shut down, Finnesand faced a dilemma: continue to wait for the chance to trek Everest, or explore another mountain. He says, “research taught me that much of an expedition is out of my control. I had to be willing to make changes.”

When his Sherpa guide suggested trekking Annapurna, the tenth tallest mountain, Finnesand didn’t hesitate. The men headed to Pokhara, Nepal. “I thought Nepal was this cold and barren place, but it was lush, warm, and beautiful,” he recounts. Rice patties dotted the mountainside, schoolchildren yelled from playgrounds, and shepherds directed mules. “After the first day, my heart rate monitor said that I’d burned 4,000 calories,” says Finnesand. “By nightfall, I was physically and mentally exhausted.”

The travelers rested at a primitive bed and breakfast. They ate yak curry and slept on plain wooden beds with thin mattresses. “I loved the food,” raves Finnesand. “I’ve always enjoyed trying new things and meeting new people.” When he woke early the next morning to a mountain lit up by the sun outside his window, he said in awe, “It was the most amazing view of the trip.”

## Breathtaking Beauty

Finnesand continued to wind his way up the mountain over the next several days, creaking past streams on makeshift bridges and stopping to help two lost trekkers. He relied heavily on his poles, while his guide and porter seemed unfazed. “The sherpa wore flip flops and had his hands in his pockets,” he laughs.

The beauty of the mountains constantly surprised him. “I was breathing heavily and concentrating on each step, but every once in a while, the clouds parted, and the mountain was there in front of me,” he shakes his head. “The snowcaps were whiter than white, a different color than what we know. It was magnificent. Indescribable.” As the sun moved, Finnesand says the beauty of the mountains shifted. “Every hour they looked dramatically different.”

## The Adventure is the Journey

He says his decision to adjust his plans was the right one. “I got so much more out of my expedition,” he marvels. In addition to exploring the quiet mountainside of Annapurna,

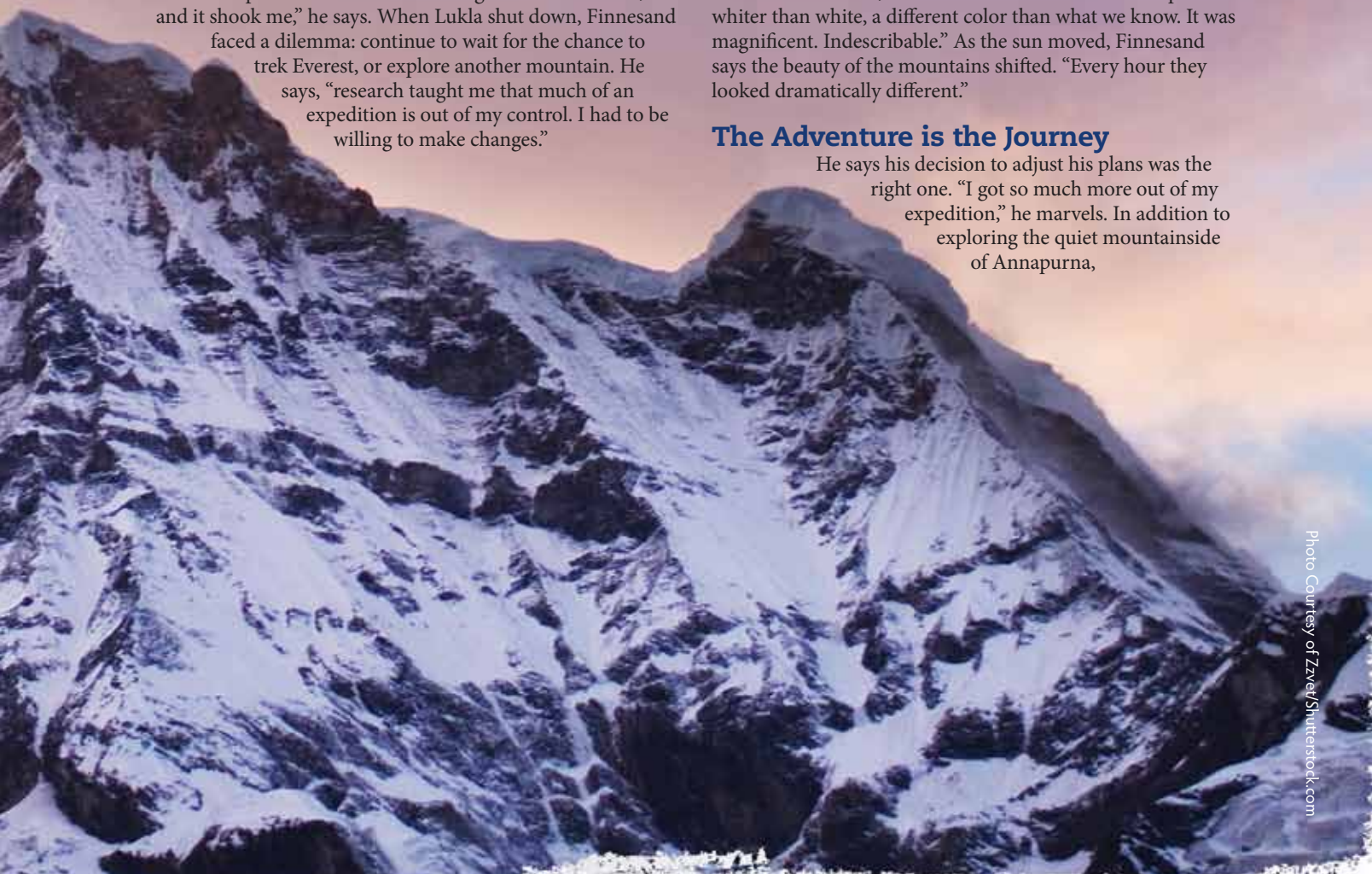


Photo Courtesy of Zvezd/Shutterstock.com





Finnesand is currently planning his next great adventure

“I’d burned 4,000 calories in one day. By nightfall, I was physically and mentally exhausted.”

- Bryan Finnesand



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Finnesand walked through Kathmandu, a poor, noisy, populated city, and toured intricately carved temples. "A trekker once told me that climbing is about safety first, then about fun, learning, and – lastly -- reaching the summit of a mountain. If I'd put all of my expectations on reaching the summit, I'd have been disappointed," Finnesand says. "The fun was in the preparation."

He reflects with satisfaction on his adventure and its symbolism of life. "I have to be ready for anything and willing to adapt. It's all about the journey," he says. "The ride is the ultimate experience."

Finnesand is happy to be back at home with his wife and 4-year-old son, Broden. A self-made adventurer, he says he's ready to begin brainstorming his next adventure, adding with a laugh, "Just as soon as I get over this jet lag." KM

*ELLA HEARREAN is a freelance writer who enjoys camping and hiking. She feels inspired by Finnesand to try different types of exercise.*

## Annapurna FAST FACTS

Height: 26,545 Feet

Location: North-central Nepal

First Climbed in 1950

Annapurna translated means  
"The Provider"

Annapurna has two of the highest  
peaks in the world



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