



# High Ambitions In the Himalaya

In Pursuit of Big Dreams  
On Mount Cho Oyu, Tibet  
8,200 meters / 27,000 feet

A 57-minute documentary film  
produced and directed by Curt Dowdy

408.395.8337

[curt@belegato.com](mailto:curt@belegato.com)

# ***High Ambitions in the Himalaya***

## **Events and Awards**

### **Santa Cruz InternationalCine Festival**

**\*\* audience award - best documentary short (<60 minutes) \*\***

7:00 pm, Friday, May 6, 2005 (500 seats)  
Santa Cruz, California

### **Mount Shasta International Film Festival**

6:30 pm, Saturday, October 8, 2005 (500 seats)  
Mount Shasta, California

### **Kendal Mountain Film Festival**

11:25 am, Saturday, November 19, 2005  
4:25 pm, Sunday, November 20, 2005  
Kendal (Lake District), England

### **Dundee Mountain Film Festival**

10:00 am, Saturday, November 26, 2005  
Dundee, Scotland

### **Santa Fe Film Festival**

4:30 pm, Friday, December 9, 2005 (350 seats)  
Santa Fe, New Mexico

### **Sedona International Film Festival**

11:00 am Thursday, February 23, 2006 (180 seats)  
6:00 pm Saturday, February 25, 2006 (275 seats)  
Sedona, Arizona

### **Cinequest Film Festival**

Viewer's Voice Competition  
February 1 - March 12, 2006  
San Jose, California

### **Fargo Film Festival**

10:00 am Thursday, March 2, 2006  
Fargo, North Dakota

### **ATS Outdoor Film Festival**

8:00 pm, Saturday, May 27, 2006  
Sierra Madre, California

### **Santa Fe Film Center at CinemaCafe**

Opening Friday, June 30, 2006  
(check local listings for show times)  
Santa Fe, New Mexico

### **Woods Hole Film Festival**

July 29 - August 5, 2006  
(check local listings for show times)  
Woods Hole, Masseurhuttset

## ***High Ambitions in the Himalaya***



### **Overview**

On the world's highest mountains, most climbers return home without reaching the summit, and some don't return at all. *High Ambitions in the Himalaya* follows "Into Thin Air" Mount Everest survivor John Taske and five international teammates as they attempt Cho Oyu, a neighbor of Mount Everest and one of fourteen prized 8000-meter peaks (with summits above 26,000 feet). Facing hardships that test not only endurance but also judgment and character, the team is reminded that lessons from the journey are more important than the goal.

### **Synopsis**

Often in the rarified air and extreme climate of the world's highest mountains, the most important decision a climber may make is when to turn back. Sacrificing a hard-fought objective is emotionally painful, but making that decision saved John Taske's life on Mount Everest in 1996.

John survived the disastrous Everest expedition that claimed nine lives and was documented in the best-selling book "Into Thin Air." Having turned back 200 meters before reaching the Everest summit, John was left with a lingering feeling of unfinished business.

*High Ambitions* follows John returning to the unforgiving Himalayan environment with new teammates. Their expedition attempts another mountain in the Everest region named Cho Oyu, translated to "Goddess of Tourquoise." It is the sixth highest mountain in the world.

Even the 18,700 foot Base Camp altitude presents a challenge. It will take nearly a month before the climbers' bodies adapt enough to attempt the 27,000-foot summit.

They spend that time doing acclimatization drills, repeatedly climbing to higher camps and returning to rest and recover in Base Camp.

The team is struck by news that the leader of a Korean expedition has died from altitude sickness. Before this trip is over, the team will also engage in the rescue of a Swedish woman climber who suffers an altitude-induced stroke.

Each climber candidly shares his unfolding experience and reflects upon oxygen deprivation, extreme cold, and brushes with other teams' tragedies. Pushing into the 26,000 foot "death zone" and experiencing temperatures as low as -40 degrees, the team finds this may be the true test of any rewards one gets from this level of commitment. The climbers, sometimes impassioned and sometimes disappointed, discover new personal insights as they quest for one of the world's highest summits.

This story is less about adrenaline and glory than it is about having a big dream and embracing that journey with honesty and dignity. Ultimately we can only face Nature's extremes with humbleness.



## **The Climbers**

The personal journeys of five "client" climbers are featured. One is a survivor of Everest '96 and a subject from the book "Into Thin Air." Further context and color is provided by three additional individuals, including a professional expedition leader and two sherpas.

### "Client" Climbers

**John Taske**, 61, is a medical doctor and anesthesiologist from Brisbane, Australia. During the 1996 Mount Everest event, John was one of the few who turned back in time to avoid a deadly storm. With John's mountaineering experience and medical expertise, he speaks articulately about the risks of climbing and the effects of high

altitude. During the Cho Oyu expedition, he reassesses his own life and mountaineering priorities.

**Hall Wendel**, 58, is Chairman of Polaris Industries, a manufacturer of snowmobiles and recreation vehicles, based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Hall is the most experienced member of the client team, having completed the highest summits on all seven continents as well as several major Himalayan peaks. Hall had made two attempts on Mount Everest, reaching the summit on the second expedition. On Cho Oyu, he experiences a physical problem that forever redirects his mountaineering career.

**Dietmar Voss**, 49, is a Project Director for Bechtel and currently lives in Perth, Australia. A former marathon runner, Dietmar had to this point only been mountaineering in New Zealand. He is inadequately prepared for Cho Oyu, but he believes he can persevere through sheer will. He soon learns that persistence alone isn't sufficient for an 8000-meter mountain.

**Raymond Behm**, 48, is a Money Manager for a major bank in Luxembourg. Raymond has been a life-long athlete with experience competing in marathons, bicycle racing in the Alps, and completing the Ironman Triathlon in Hawaii. Raymond came to Cho Oyu with only one year of mountaineering experience. Raymond wants to take on mountaineering as his next competitive sport. He finds that Cho Oyu doesn't fit his competitive model.

**Curt Dowdy**, 44, is a filmmaker from Los Gatos, California. Curt's previous mountaineering experience included several serious climbs in the United States and one previous trip to a 20,000 foot Himalayan mountain. He performed the primary photography and is also interviewed on-camera by the other team members. As one of two clients remaining on the final summit attempt, Curt finds that the smallest of problems can mushroom out of proportion at these altitudes.

#### Expedition Leader & Guide

**Dean Staples**, 37, is a heli-ski and mountaineering guide from Queenstown, New Zealand. He had previously led a successful Cho Oyu expedition as well as several other expeditions around the world. He provides context to events on the mountain.

#### Sherpas

**Ang Tsering Sherpa**, 47, is the expedition camp manager, from Khumjung, Nepal. Ang Tsering came to Cho Oyu with over 25 years experience in Himalayan expeditions. He had been Rob Hall's camp manager during the disastrous 1996 Everest expedition. Ang Tsering's wisdom guides this Cho Oyu team, and as a Buddhist holy man, he provides a spiritual perspective.

**Ang Dorjee Sherpa**, 28, is a climbing sherpa from Periche, Nepal. The most accomplished member of the expedition, Ang Dorje had previously stood on both Everest and Cho Oyu's summits seven times and had summited four other 8000-meter peaks as well. Ang Dorje was the lead climber on Rob Hall's 1996 Everest expedition.



## Filmmakers

First-time director **Curt Dowdy** left the security of a well-established corporate position to pursue a passion for filmmaking. He plunged into the independent film world, and prior to releasing *High Ambitions*, Curt gained producing experience on two feature-length documentaries and one feature-length narrative film. He has twice been invited to the Sundance Independent Producer's Conference. In *High Ambitions*, Curt is producer, director and cinematographer, as well as a subject in the film.

Curt's filmography includes associate producing the feature-length documentaries *Real Time* and *Confessions of a Burning Man*. Both received invitations by major festivals and critical acclaim. *Confessions of a Burning Man* received theatrical distribution, playing in 26 cities. Curt co-produced the feature-length motion picture *Happily Even After*, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2004. He has recently been invited to co-produce a major motion picture to be executive produced by Paul Zaentz (Co-Producer of *Cold Mountain*, *The English Patent*, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*).

Editor **Dan Perrett** is a Los Angeles based TV and movie editor. His largest independent work to date has been Christopher Coppla's motion picture *Bel Air*.

Singer and composer **Irina Mikhailova** has been called the "Diva of World Fusion." Irina's music provides a modern, energetic and emotional backdrop to *High Ambitions*. Her beautiful, longing and powerful songs are subtly and artistically implied in the film as the voice of Cho Oyu, the "Goddess of Turquoise."

Irina is the vocalist for the world-fusion group Lumin. Mixing devotional styles and classical instruments from South Asia and the Middle East with modern rhythms and electronica, Lumin serves up modern, mystical grooves that stir the soul.



## **Credits**

### **Cho Oyu Expedition Team (2001)**

Expedition Leader:	Dean Staples (New Zealand)
Expedition Co-Leader:	Mike Roberts (New Zealand)
Expedition Sirdar:	Ang Tsering Sherpa (Nepal)
Climbing Sirdar:	Ang Dorje Sherpa (Nepal)
Climbing Sherpas:	Mingma Nuru Sherpa (Nepal) Ang Dorje (Solu) Sherpa (Nepal) Dawa Furi Sherpa (Nepal)
Base Camp Cook:	Dawa Sherpa (Nepal)
Climbers:	Raymond Behm (Luxembourg) Bernhard Dobler (Austria) Curt Dowdy (USA) John Taske (Australia) Dietmar Voss (Australia) Hall Wendel (USA)

Marty Schmidt appears courtesy of Marty Schmidt International Guiding

## Filmmakers

Producer, Director, Video & Still Photography.....	Curt Dowdy
Mount Everest Photography.....	Michael Brown Dave Hahn
Additional Photography.....	Raymond Behm Dan Perrett
Editing.....	Dan Perrett
On-Line Editing.....	Jim McSilver
Additional Editing.....	Ben Galland Curt Dowdy
Audio Post Production.....	Chris Forrest Derek Smith
Color Correction.....	Chris Marten
Sound Editing.....	Chris Forrest Derek Smith
Animation.....	Phil Spitler
Titles.....	Tor Swanson Kurt Hutflesz
Transcription.....	Suzanne Martino Douglas Conrad

## Special Thanks To

Mick Bennett  
Marty Collins  
Brian Critchlow  
Dorothy Fadiman  
Michael Katz  
Wendy Kent  
Rob Lazarus  
Jim Lebrecht  
Spencer Lindsay  
Katrina Nazzal  
Erik Schmidt  
Digital Media Factory / Santa Cruz, California  
Fantasy Studios / Berkeley, California  
Retina Color Sensitive / San Francisco, California  
Streamworks Media / Santa Cruz, California

## **Music**

### **"Laya"**

Written and performed by Irina Mikhailova and Tom Aragon  
Courtesy of Irina Mikhailova and Tom Aragon

### **"Tibetan Drone"**

Written and performed by Timothy Burgin  
Courtesy of Timothy Burgin

**"Mila De Shag Gyad Kyi Choga"** (Tibetan Chant)  
Performed by monks of Gaden Shartse Monastery  
Courtesy of EastWest Records

### **"Sunrise"**

Written and performed by Timothy Burgin  
Courtesy of Timothy Burgin

### **"Hadra"**

Written by Michael Emenau, Irina Mikhailova and Jeff Stott  
Performed by Lumin  
Courtesy of Hearts of Space

### **"Om Tare"**

Written and performed by Irina Mikhailova and Todd Cristensen  
Courtesy of Irina Mikhailova and Todd Cristensen