

March 22, 2004
The Ottawa Citizen

An armchair look at the Everest bid

When Sir Edmund Hillary reached the summit of Mount Everest in 1953, it took four days for news of the accomplishment to reach the outside world.

This spring, it will take seconds.

"We are probably going to be the most technologically advanced expedition ever to go up Everest," says Ben Webster. "People will be able to follow our expedition, in real time, for the whole ascent."

Algonquin College, although not an official sponsor of Webster's expedition, is behind the latest innovation in high-altitude trekking. The college has even set up a website that will allow people to follow Webster and the other climbers as they scale Everest, using a virtual model of the mountain and global positioning systems (GPS) that will update the whereabouts of the climbers every 30 minutes.

"The technology is simply amazing," says Kent MacDonald, dean of business at the college and an early supporter of Webster's expedition. "The digital rendering of Everest, I'm told it's perfect. You really do feel as if you're there."

Webster approached Algonquin last year, intrigued by the college's growing reputation as a leader in new technology. He explained that he wanted to be "fully wired" when he went back to Everest, wanted to broadcast live images and data from the summit, to go live over the Internet, to let people follow the progress of all the climbers at all times, maybe even record heart rates and other medical information. No problem.

"We have partnered with a couple of local hi-tech companies to make all this work," says MacDonald. "Skywave mobile communications has handled the GPS satellite communications and we have been working with March Networks as well. We're all quite excited to see how the technology works up on the mountain."