

Mountains that had to be moved before reaching the peak

A MOUNTAINEER and explorer from Newbury was faced by an unusual obstacle before he could scale his latest peak – a group of angry political demonstrators.

Land agent Lee Farmer, 37, from Woolton Hill, has returned from the Himalayas after reaching the top of Mount Mera on May 16, the highest trekking peak in Nepal at 6,490 metres. However, the mountaineer and his 10-man team almost didn't make it to the mountain after arriving in a country in turmoil.

Initially the group's trip was delayed owing to the flight ban caused by ash from the Icelandic volcano, and upon landing in Nepal's capital, Kathmandu, Mr Farmer and his team found the city at a standstill because the majority political party, the Maoist Communist Party, had blocked every major road in the city as part of a national strike.

He said: "We were all set for the short internal flight to the mountain town of Lukla, when our bus ground to a halt. There was a throng of about 200 people around

the bus chanting and waving placards. It was pretty scary."

As expedition leader, Mr Farmer negotiated their way through the angry mob, but they were stopped at three road blocks before they managed to limp their way to the airport.

"Each time I explained we were on holiday here to climb their beautiful mountains, and from Britain, hoping this would pacify them. I have to admit I was pretty nervous."

As a result, telephone calls were made to Maoist Party leaders, and

the expedition was let through.

There was more drama on the mountain when, despite being bound together, a team member fell five metres into a deep crevasse in the ice. Mr Farmer organised a pulley system, with ropes and climbing equipment, to rescue the shaken, but uninjured, mountaineer.

On a further expedition next month, Mr Farmer will explore the deserts of Namibia in Africa.

Lee Farmer on the summit of Mera with Everest in the background

