

HOW HIGH IS HIGH?

Earlier explorers probed the deep,
But far from nitrogen narcosis I will keep.
“How high is high?” a well-known platitude,
My exploration will be in altitude.

Near the poles and in the cloud,
Less atmospheric pressure I’m allowed.
And so I’ll be affected early,
Hypoxia will set in most surely.

My vision’s impaired, at least in the dark,
Decreased oxidative phosphorylation has left its mark.
The trouble I’m told is in the rods,
This design seems strange, but it is God’s.

Whether it be dopaminergic, cholinergic, or metabolic,
One thing is sure in this mountain frolic:
Hypoxemia is the glomus cell’s sensation,
And with this comes hyperventilation.

EPO floods into my blood,
Viscosity increases, thick as mud.
My heart is strained with increased work,
Regardless of the oxygen-carrying perk.

My oxyhemoglobin dissociation curvy is all jittery,
First left, then right with 2,3 DPG.
Better oxygen unloading. I’ll say no more.
If you want to know, then consult Bohr.

Diuresis affects me as I go,
I pause to write my name in snow.
Questioning the nature of my condition,
Osmoreceptor threshold change against my volition?

This alkalemia I really hate,
I need to loose bicarbonate.
How this happens renally Kwok could tell,
But its CSF transport is not known well.

My chest is tight and seems quite weak,
Gurgling breath sounds make me feel meek.
I figure it’s due to H-A-P-E,
In short, this makes me unhappy.

My brain is swelling, but not with pride,
Cerebral edema—fluid is leaking out inside.
Looking at me you'd say I'm sick,
My walk's uncoordinated, all ataxic.

My troubles, they all but dissipate,
I'm entering a euphoric state.
My short-term memory is impaired,
My short-term memory is impaired.

At an altitude never before reached by man,
I'm surprised I can function as I can.
But I now see the end of all my toils,
For at this altitude blood, it boils!

Stephen Thompson