

TREKking WITH TERESA

www.slowtrekking.com • teresadb@hotmail.com

TREK REPORT – Everest, April 2014

Air Asia turned out to be a good option at \$504 one way to Kathmandu. Vinyl seats, food available for purchase, no footrests or video screens BUT the price was right. I arrived in Kathmandu in reasonable shape on a cloudy afternoon. Netra met me with Santosh's taxi and I was soon collecting stored luggage at Muna Cottage and eating fried rice. Thanks Muna. Oh dear, one paragraph into the report and I'm already talking about the food.

I am writing this on day six of my trip. Victoria and Jane flew in three days ago. Flamboyant and unusual V with her petite and more serious friend Jane. Since they are friends of Tony and Denise I knew they would be good value. Dorje took them to Bhaktapur yesterday with Bir and I went to the airport for Des, his daughter Suzanne and his son Daniel. Des has

done most of the Everest trek more than five years ago but not Gokyo or the Base Camp. Along with the Cho La, these are our goals for this season.

Monday, 31 March

On a warm evening we walked over to Bouda together, along with Netra and his new, and extremely beautiful, new wife Sarmilla. There were crowds of Tibetans and Tamang Buddhists swirling around the stupa in the twilight. We ate at Garden Kitchen as usual. Dorje didn't join us – he got waylaid by friends on the way and played pool instead.

We crept home by torchlight through darkened streets. No power in our neighbourhood tonight. Jet-lagged customers slept like logs till 'bed tea' at 6 am.



View from Thukla Pass

We ate our French toast with fried tomatoes in the garden till Ram collected us for a drive up to Nagarkot. The Himalayas were rather hazy but the effect was lovely as the white peaks appeared to be floating. We had a posh coffee for the view from their terrace. Our test trek was a bit shorter than I had in mind. It was pretty hot by the time we reached Telkot – not that the Perth contingent had a problem with that. We lunched on local food at the quaint little ‘bambustan’ restaurant.

Jane and Suzanne opted for a massage and raved about it afterwards. We ate at our local, the Shambala, tonight. Sharing a few beers and a bottle of Gossips cab/merlot. Lots of momos and good cheer. It is a very nice group indeed. Only Diane to come tomorrow.

Monday, 31 March

The Chaos Day went very smoothly. We started at the genuine North Face shop; it is a favourite of mine. I found a lovely weightless rain jacket on sale for \$90 in a turquoise ikat print. Dan got some quality trekking pants. V bought lots of their weightless wet-packs. We soon realised that I had forgotten to ask people to bring their ID photos with them today – for trekking permits so we made a quick stop at the photo shop. Six good shots for \$3. Somewhere in the busy day Netra brought Diane into town to join us. Her flight had been ‘rescheduled’ by one day but since she had been trekking with us before she came well-prepared. I love it when people come back for more.

After a break for cinnamon rolls and cappuccino at the Weizen we went to our favourite ‘North Fake’ gear shop. Reasonable quality at super prices. We checked out the handicrafts at Amrita Craft and then had a big pizza lunch at The Roadhouse. A lot of trips to the money-changer and the ATM and then two taxis home for all except me and V. As only the first taxi knew the way I heard it was a pretty exciting ride in the second one. I ran a few errands with V and then home to Muna’s for daal bhat in the garden. We attempted the pre-trek briefing – a bit hard with no electricity to see the map or the notes – then retired early to pack for the big day tomorrow.

Tuesday, 1 April

The date should have been a clue! We had an 8.30 flight booked to Lukla and were asked to be at the domestic terminal by 7 am. First thing we were told

is ‘stand over there for half an hour’. Bugger! We piled up our gear at the Tara Airlines counter only to watch as a team of cheerful Japanese, and then others, got checked in ahead of us. We were finally given boarding passes for the 9.30 flight though not before Des tried to make friends with a rather grisly looking male monkey who was marauding around the terminal.

With boarding passes in hand we streamed through security and then waited. And waited. At 10.40 we were on the tarmac and soon on our way. Yipee! A reasonably good flight though it got a little ‘lumpy’ as we closed in on Lukla. Sadly the pilot raised his finger and made the twirling sign. Too windy, we were going back to Kathmandu. April Fools?

Muna was happy to have us back – she is always relieved when we survive the flight – and soon fed us huge piles of fragrant fried rice. A bit of a snooze (we had been up since early) and then an evening stroll over to Bouda and a pizza dinner at the new Roadhouse. We needed a treat.

Wednesday, 2 April

8.30 flight tickets again today though we were on a promise this time. They didn’t let us down although we had to leave Bir and Lahar behind with three of our bags. It was a perfect flight but I was still relieved to nail the landing. Much fresher up at Lukla at 2800 metres and as the wind increased the flights stopped coming in. Oh dear!

We decided we could manage without the extra bags for one night and we left one guy behind, Rajan I think, in case our last two porters got a flight. We could hear flights in the distance around 2 pm and



Lukla airport – excitement guaranteed!

Lahar's phone was 'switched off' which we took to be a clue that he might be en route. We were right.

It is always a bit hard the first day though everyone managed really well. I am a bit footsore as I write this in my 'attached bath' room at the Kala Pattar Lodge at Phakding. It has just started to rain. Lahar and Bir have arrived so we all have our bags. My bag mysteriously appeared on a different flight this morning, which was something of a relief as it held almost all the money. Daal bhat has been ordered for dinner and I think that right now I need some warmer clothes.

The line up looks like this: Teresa with Lahar, V with Bir, Rames with Jane, Dan with Kancha, Des with Pemba (our new boy), Diane with Rajan and Suzanne with Subas Jr. Dorje is guiding. A great team.

We saw the Magnolias as soon as we arrived, then Rhododendrons, Daphne and Primula. There is the first blossom on the fruit trees. After a few doubts

about bags and porters it has turned out to be a perfect day.

Thursday, 3 April

Bed tea at 6.30 and the sky was clear, revealing snowy peaks and long views. Breakfast was leisurely then Des, Dan, Sue, Jane and Diane opted to cross the valley to visit the ancient Pemacholing Monastery and take the local trail back to the main track. V and I set off twenty minutes later and didn't meet the others till lunchtime. It is a rather up and down trail today and we walked in warm sunshine. We wound around ridges and gullies where cultivated fields of wheat and potatoes were nestled behind stone walls. A couple of big steel suspension bridges cross, and then recross the Bhote Khosi. We lunched in Chumoa on veg noodle soup and good chips. It only took another hour to Jorsale but it was a steep descent to a small river and then a long climb up through the village of Monjo. Luckily, it was nothing like the descent through the same area last year when torrents of water flowed down the stairs beside us. Writing at 3 pm we are cosily ensconced in Nirvana



A beautiful old monastery viewed through the spring magnolias near Lukla

Gardens. A beautiful small lodge. Gas hot showers, clean big beds and the stove in the dining room has already been lit.

Friday, 4 April

Today broke fair and clear and Khumbila was shining above us. The nearest dusting of fresh snow was not far above us. Kaiserschmarm and Pancakes for breakfast were excellent.

The couple of kilometres to the base of the bridge is mostly easy and holds close to the banks of the Dudh Kosi, which is an intriguing milky turquoise colour. Inevitably Des, Dan, Diane, Sue and Jane were soon ahead while V and I formed the rearguard. I think it was Rajan who went back for my camera before we started the climb. Thanks mate. The new bridge is great and was long overdue. However, it is much higher so that the climb up to get on it is even harder. I didn't look down once from the bridge, and V and I sang several loud choruses of Amazing Grace as we walked across. A man was 'Go-Proing' his crossing so he will have some hilarious footage. Can we still call it footage?

It is a hideous slog up to Namche Bazaar but V and I took it slowly. No choice really. The clouds which rolled in around 11 am were very welcome as it was hard, sweaty work. Yesterday's rain seems to have kept the dust down. We made Namche before 2 pm and it was still clear enough to see Thamserku, Kwangde and Kusum Khangharu towering above the town. Lunch at Hotel Everest and then into the bazaar for a bit of last-minute gear shopping. Buffs and socks for the boys who needed them. Dinner was cheerful and I played Thirteen afterwards with Dan, Dorje and Kancha. I had never seen a ten-card run (played by Dorje) only to see it immediately beaten by a higher ten-card run (from Kancha). Most of the group faded fairly early. It had been a very big day indeed.

Saturday, 5 April

Today Dorje and Kancha have taken Des, Diane, Dan and Suzanne up the steep hill to cross over the airstrip at Shyangboche and drop down at the Hilary School at Khumjung. I took Jane and V, and the rest of our porters around the ridge on an easier trail to Kangzuma. We had a pleasant stop at the



The new and even higher suspension bridge spans the Dudh Kosi at the foot of the climb to Namche Bazaar

gomba (Tibetan Buddhist monastery) on the way out of town. We donated for little friendship bands and were pleasantly surprised when the Rimpoche himself tied them on with a blessing of great warmth.

A fairly easy walk today with just enough 'pulls' to keep us honest. It was rather cloudy but the view down to the river was fantastic. Lovely to be back at the cosy Thamserku Lodge. We passed a warm evening playing Thirteen in the dining room with the fire well stoked with yak dung. V regaled us with the story of how she got the name Victoria Ida Clare Firth-Smith. Hysterical doesn't begin to cover it.

Sunday, 6 April

Big climb today so we got off to an early start. The weather started off pretty cloudy but the sun shone more and more as the morning wore on. Certainly put the sunscreen to good use on the long climb to Mong Danda at over 4,000 metres, our highest so far. The teashops on the ridge looked so close, but took two hours to reach, once sighted. We basked in the sunshine for a good while, eating cookies that

Dan had thoughtfully bought at Ang Tashi's bakery in Kangzuma.

We saw lots of wild goats (blue sheep??) this morning. Eagles too – though they could have been Lammergeirs?? Hey, I am not David Attenborough! We saw Danphe (Impeyan Pheasant) this morning. Another startled me by taking off from a bush right at my feet. Beautiful in flight.

After the break the trail descends rapidly on a kind of dusty spiral staircase all the way down to Phortse Tenga. The pine needles on the ground give off a sweet scent as they bake in the sun. Gas hot showers and steamed veg momo for lunch and the crew are all happy.

Monday, 7 April

It was quite a cold morning but the stove was going in the dining room – always a good start. We had a short trek today – four hours max. – but it was uphill all the way. Clear blue skies afforded great views, especially of Thamserku behind us. The rhododendron woods and junipers gradually gave



The tough but inspiring climb to Mong Danda, clinging to a ridge at 4000 metres



Suzanne, Dan, Des, Diane, Jane and Victoria take a well-earned break below Dole



Three of the best – Lahar, Bir and Rames

way to small azaleas and spreading cotoneaster. The pine trees were barely a metre high. We passed several frozen waterfalls, though water was flowing under the ice. No tea-shops on the way today but we easily made Dole for lunch. I had met Pema on the trail yesterday and she had asked me to try her new lodge, the Dole Resort. It was a winner. Clean loos, thick mattresses and a beautifully decorated dining room – her husband was the artist. Des broke out the Jamieson's and Suzanne was more than generous with the Baileys. Played Thirteen like demons.

Tuesday, 8 April

Jane and V have decided not to go any further up towards Gokyo, figuring to save their energy to give themselves a better shot at Everest Base Camp. Since I was not planning to go over Cho La, and the rest of the party is, it seemed logical to go down with them. Dorje is taking Des, Dan, Diane and Suzanne up to Machhermo today where they will stay for two nights to acclimatise to 4,500 metres. Suzanne is keeping trek notes so I will add them at the end of my report. Thanks Sue.

I headed back downhill on a cloudless morning with V and Jane. It took less than two hours (three and a half yesterday uphill) to reach Phortse Tenga again. We ate noodle soup and then did the 'big slog' up to Phortse. It is only 45 minutes but there is not one metre of level track all the way. The reward is the view as you crest the ridge at the top. Ancient stone chortens, encrusted with moss and lichen in front of Thamserku which fills the sky with its massive white bulk. The sun was still shining at 2 pm as we wound between stone-walled potato fields to our lodge. The Laser-lite enclosed corridor made the rooms really warm till well after the clouds rolled in.

Wednesday, 9 April

V's birthday and I don't think presents come much better than today's trek. It took about five hours from Phortse to Pangboche but it was a fantastic walk. Climbing up to about 4300 metres the trail affords some really great views. You feel you could reach out and touch the mountains across the valley. At the highest point you can see almost to the Namche new bridge downstream and Everest, behind Lhotse Shar



Burning juniper as an offering to the Lord Buddha

upstream. And some fabulous peaks in between – like Ama Dablam, Thamserku and Kang Tenga. Thangboche Monastery was a toy-town below us. It was quite hard but worth the effort. We met only half a dozen other trekkers and saw lots of eagles and goats – some up very close indeed. Hope the rest of our crew is having this much fun. Writing this in the cosy dining room of the Sri Dewa Lodge with the wind howling outside and yak bells gung-ga-dunging in the background.

The night cleared spectacularly and the peaks glowed eerily in the moonlight. We could even see Everest glowing quietly in the distance. Beautiful.

Thursday, 10 April

A bit of a dreary day for me as I woke up feeling dizzy. I sometimes get Meniere's Disease, an inner ear thing which effects your balance. (The Microsoft dictionary wants to change this to Moliere's Disease, which is rather appealing). Kind of lucky that I didn't have it yesterday on the precipitous high trail from Phortse. I am snugged up in bed reading David Sedaris. It was a scheduled rest day for V and Jane as we are trying to coincide our arrival in Lobouche with Dorje's group coming over the Cho La.

The weather turned to snow this afternoon after a lovely morning but the stove was lit early, so we played cards in the dining room. Mostly macho types in the lodge tonight. Big strong Germans and Poles going hard and fast. La di da! We got lots of clothes washed and the customers had hot gas showers.

Friday, 11 April

Back on the road again on a fabulously clear morning with peaks shining all around. In an hour we reach Somare for morning tea. A puja (Buddhist prayer ceremony) was taking place inside. Beyond Somare was quite easy for a while but it was a bit of a pull after the trails to Dingboche and Pheriche divided. At the topmost chorten of Pheriche Pass (4,270m) we took a long rest and then it was a piece of cake into Pheriche. The White Yak was full but the Himalaya was pretty good. The Brazilian Christian missionaries were an odd lot. Attractive, cheerful and reading their bibles round the stove. Bizarre!

The young British couple were classics. 'Terribly' well spoken, the man had climbed Everest two years before. When asked how that was he replied 'Lovely, just lovely'. A large group of Indian trekkers had just done the Base Camp. They looked very relieved to



Clear skies above Pheriche



Jane and Victoria looking very relaxed



Chopper rescue behind the lodge at Thukla (not for any of our crew)

be going down. Their group leader was very friendly. Coffee in a java press. More cards with the porters.

Saturday, 12 April

The ridge from Pheriche over to Dingboche looked daunting but only took half an hour. We are all getting stronger now, having spent quite a bit of time over 4,000 metres. Despite the sunshine it was a cold morning with a thin veil of snow on the ground so we didn't leave early. Delightfully warm in the lee of the ridge and an easy stroll down to Dingboche. The whole thing only took an hour and a half. V, Jane and I strolled around the village in the last of the sunshine and stopped at the warm French Bakery for coffee and cakes. I stopped by the internet shack on the way back and it was snowing heavily as I returned to Peak 38, our latest attempt to find a decent lodge in Dingboche. Its main advantage is that it is on the high side of the valley (for a quick exit tomorrow) and it has one western-style toilet (manual flush) between each pair of rooms. Otherwise it is just as 'rustic' as all the others. It was full. Two big groups – Brits and Hollanders. Met Prem who used to work with Niru (last seen in this very lodge some 8 years ago!).

Jane is in the hot gas shower as I write this (it didn't work). No call from Dorje. When he has a signal on his phone I don't, and vice versa. Given the snowy conditions I am hoping that they decide not to come over the Cho La. It looked pretty snowy up there, viewed from our side this morning. If they descend by the same route as we just did they should be no more than one day behind us by tomorrow. Phone call would be good.

Sunday, 13 April

Breakfast was busy with two large groups to feed but we were in no hurry. Nice clear morning and over the first ridge in good time. We could see dozens of trekkers silhouetted on Nagarjun as we left. The season is getting busier now.

It was a reasonably easy trail to Thukla but it all feels hard once you get over 4000 metres. The route stays on a high ridge and passes only the small settlement of Dhusa which consists of a few yak-herders' cottages and stone corrals. The wind was howling at our backs by the time we arrived. The Yak Hotel is just 'adequate' but it is in exactly the right place; half way to Lobouche at 4600 metres. Awi Peak forms a barely believable backdrop. The

rooms were really cold but we had great sleeping bags and they had thick blankets as well. Met some nice Germans, including Stefan. Two elderly Koreans were choppered out from just behind my bedroom shortly after we arrived.

Monday, 14 April

After sharing our Organic Nepali coffee with our new friends for breakfast we set off up the Thukla Pass. It's a 300 metre high ancient terminal moraine and it's straight outside the lodge. We did it in an hour and a half which was bordering on respectable. On the little plateau at the top are lots of memorial chortens for climbers who have died, mostly climbing. I have to say here that I just don't get the whole climbing thing. I met a man who paid 76 lakh Indian rupees (close to \$100,000) to summit Everest. I think he worked for a bank and they sponsored him. You could build a school or a clinic for that kind of money – a far better way to 'big note' yourself.

After the pass the trail eased off considerably but even plodding along on a slight incline is hard work as you close in on 4,900 metres. The new lodge at Lobouche, Mother Earth, was a huge improvement on past years. Our boys, Lahar, Bir and Rames went about the village to see if they could find our group, or hear if anyone had seen them on the pass. No luck.

After a rather good chow mien lunch Dorje and Kancha appeared in our dining room. Boy was I glad to see them! No contact for a week and the pass looking pretty grim. We hurriedly put on our boots (there was 2 inches of snow on the ground) and rushed next door – that is how close they were. Diane, Des, Dan and Sue were all stoked to have made it across, though they all swore it was one of the hardest things they had ever done. Harder than a marathon said Des. Dorje, Kancha, Rajan, Pemba and young Subas had done a great job. They all came over to our place for hot chocolate – our dining room was warmer. They had arrived five minutes behind us but didn't know which lodge we were in.

The sunset at Lobouche tonight was marvellous. It is nearly always grim up here in the evenings but not tonight. Beautiful glowing pink colours on Lhotse. A real treat.

I was feeling pretty crook after four days of dizziness but with Dorje in charge and Lahar along with him



Memorial chortens at the top of the Thukla Pass



Lobouche never looked better than the day they set off for EBC, with Pumori (7,165m) peeking over the ridge



Hungry trekkers eat a lot of potatoes – and this is how they come up



Hey Kancha!

I agreed to go down, along with Kancha who is not feeling too flash either. There is an air of nervous anticipation in the lodge tonight as we planned the 'big push' to Base Camp tomorrow. Plan is to go up early, grab a quick lunch at Gorak Shep and then walk out and back to Base Camp in the afternoon. It's three hours each way so that is a big ask. Plan B is to spend the night at Gorak Shep and do the Base Camp in the morning.

Tuesday, 15 April

I woke up feeling pretty rubbish but staggered out to see the gang off. A few nerves from the less experienced but a beautiful day to be heading into with sun shining on the top-to-bottom fresh snow. The Khumbu never looked better.

As I write this I've had a pretty easy run down (literally) behind Kancha. Felt better with every descent. It helped that the day was beautiful. It only took an hour and a half to reach Thukla for a cuppa and then about the same to Pheriche. I am writing this in my warm sleeping bag. My throat hurts, my head is thumping, my nose is blocked BUT the dizziness has gone. I have no reason to complain. I have a nice room in my favourite lodge in Pheriche, the White

Yak. I am planning my first shower in a week as soon as the stove is lit in the dining room. Kancha and I are holed up in the 'solar room', a kind of outside dining room with a laserlite roof. It is almost warm though the wind is howling like a banshee.

Wednesday, 16 April

While the group were up the top climbing Kala Pattar or battling the bitter winds to descend to Pheriche (or both) I had a day off while I waited for them. By 2.30 I had my face pressed to the window looking for windblown trekkers. Many came but they were not mine.

At 3 pm Kancha and I put our boots on and headed out. At least walking would warm us up. We didn't have to go far before we met V and Jane with Lahar and Rames. They had made it to Base Camp yesterday. Woo-hoo!!!! Stashed them in their rooms, begged the manager to light the fire (bribed actually) and then waited for the rest. They were not far behind. Spotted them in the garden looking for the lodge. Dorje had forgotten which one.

The later group had all made it up Kala Pattar, (a 500 metre climb at altitude!!) got some great, if not



Pheriche



The trail climbs from Pheriche then drops into the Imja Khola valley



A spot of civilisation at the White Yak Lodge – Diane, Ben, Jane, Victoria and Suzanne

perfect views and were all feeling pretty tired and very pleased with themselves. All agreed the bucket hot showers were a fine substitute for the real thing. I was so proud of them. The White Yak is a very comfortable lodge indeed. We drank the wine Dorje had carried over the Cho La. It was meant to celebrate their crossing but they had all been too exhausted to even think of it. Back at 4,200 metres it went down very well. Thanks Dorje.

Thursday, 17 April

Dan, Des, Diane and Sue opted to cross the ridge to Dingboche this morning – the French Bakery was a big temptation and it was a chance for Des to revisit the Chhukung Valley. They then walked down to Pangboche following the Imja Khola. I set off on the lovely, easy descent to Pangboche with V and Jane. We met up at the Sri Dewa Lodge in Pangboche just as we finished out lunch. Fresh apples were a treat.

It is a steep, rocky descent to Devouche. The rigid steel bridge at Chaturje had recently collapsed into the river and the temporary bridge, though adequate, had a pretty dodgy access trail and added at least half an hour to the trip. On arrival I detoured with

Jane to the ancient Ani Gomba (nunnery). Rivandel is a great lodge and we enjoyed a warming drop of red wine around the stove while the entire Everest range revealed itself around sunset.

Friday, 18 April

Today was harder than you would expect for a descent. Uphill through a little rhododendron wood to Thangboche Monastery where we sat in the gomba listening to the monks chanting for a while. Then it was down 700 metres on a slippery and at times broken trail to Phunki Tenga where we ate excellent fried rice in really hot sunshine. I could hear V yelling behind me and Jane all the way down. Bir had taught her to say 'na ramro bhato'. 'No good trail!'. I thought it best not to correct her Nepali grammar. The warm welcome at the Thamserku Lodge was only exceeded by the warm temperature. Heavenly!

Sadly, there was some bad news. A huge avalanche had let go above the Base Camp. It seemed likely that 14 were dead and more were missing or injured. All Nepali. Many of our friends have mates or relatives working up there so it is pretty distressing. A real



A yak on the newest bridge at Phunki Tenga



The collapsed bridge over the Imja Khola near Pangboche, and its current replacement



tragedy which, for me, just highlights the futility of climbing on Everest. How proud can you be to climb a mountain if people need to risk their lives to get your gear up there ahead of you? They were all Nepali. They would have been carrying oxygen, food, ropes and ladders up to higher camps to make summiting possible for a select few. I hate it!

Saturday, 19 April

A gorgeous morning. A slow breakfast after a good lie-in. Not perfectly clear but mild and sunny. We chose the easiest route back to Namche on the Tarke Track as we've named it. This man Tarke has been building this trail for years, voluntarily, for donations. Alone at first, but lately with a couple of workers. It is a marvel. He is an old man now, sitting at the collection box each day. I am always amazed at how many people just keep walking past him. If we all keep referring to it as the Tarke Track perhaps it will catch on?

As I write this the group have been 'let off the leash' in Namche. We are at the new Green Tara Lodge

which I would highly recommend. Very nicely appointed little rooms and super-clean toilets (two on each floor). The dining room is stunning and they specialise in Sherpa food for a change. We had a delicious lunch of curry on steamed dumplings and a kind of soup with gnocchi floating in it. It is raining now but not enough to dampen our spirits.

Sunday, 20 April

We decided to set off fairly early for a day-walk to Thamo (somehow we have generated a 'spare day') as the weather definitely seems to favour the mornings. By 8.30 me, Des, Diane, Dan, Suzanne and Dorje were climbing out of Namche past the old gomba. We marvelled at the new helipad (once Diane figured out what it was) made of beautifully fitted stone and then ambled, quite literally, along the valley towards Thamo.

We saw rhododendrons flowering, iris in abundance and tiny wild strawberry plants clinging to rock walls. Spring is finally here, albeit about a month late. It was sheer delight although clouds began to



Kancha, Teresa and Des – enjoying a 'cosy night in' at Kangzuma

roll in when we stopped for tea at Phurte. As soon as we decided to turn around the clouds melted away and it was a very sunny walk back to Namche. The sun lingered into the afternoon on the upstairs terrace of the lodge. Just a place to hang washing and do a little work really but with a table and a few chairs it became the ideal place to while away the afternoon. Pemba and Subas made themselves useful (and looked adorable) helping with sewing the tablecloths.

Monday, 21 April

It was hard to reconcile the speed of the descent from Namche with the grief this climb caused on the way up. In less than ten minutes we were at the checkpoint. Twenty minutes later we were at the Chauthara with Everest very much in evidence in the distance. It only took another half an hour to descend to the bridge, cross it and come down to the river. Unbelievable! Far too early for lunch at Nirvana Garden (10.20) so we had a nice long sit down with a cuppa and then went on to Chumoa for lunch. It wouldn't really be my first choice but, as usual, the boys convinced me – 'we need to go there because we have ordered our daal bhat there didi'. OK, Chumoa it is.

The walk after lunch was quite long – we were covering two days of uphill trekking, remember. V and I lagged behind and finally stopped altogether for a coke at Tok Tok. Amazed to see Stefan again. We had spent the evening at the Yak Hotel, Thukla on the way up. He had done everything and looked well fit. He soon bounded ahead of us, looking for the turn off to Jiri! The Kala Pattar Lodge at Phakding was a treat. Everybody likes attached bathrooms.

Tuesday, 22 April

Lukla or bust! We took a long break at Cheplung for boiled potatoes with chilli-butter dip, and then it was a bit of a slog up to Lukla. I came in last with V but 'what a feeling'! 3 weeks, no serious drama or illness. All goals achieved. Happy as.

Best hot showers in the Khumbu at the North Face Resort – endless, solar. Then a few drinks in the dining room. Hardly recognise us as we look so clean. Certificates of Achievement handed out. It is still warm and sunny so I am optimistic for tomorrow's flight. However third, or perhaps even fourth flight is not impressive scheduling since I booked the tickets last November!!

Wednesday, 23 April

If we had known we were going to spend more than eight hours at the Lukla airport today we might have freaked. However, from 9 am onwards we were regularly fed little snippets of hope. 'It is a fine day so they will fly till late' and then later 'There are planes sitting on the tarmac in Kathmandu waiting for the wind to drop'.

Many flights came and went. By 2.30 I had confirmed a reservation for the lodge again tonight. Still, we had a coffee; we had lunch; and then we ducked back out for a hot chocolate at 3.30.

While I had never heard of anyone getting out of Lukla this late, there was no full refund (and re-booking the next day) unless Tara Airlines themselves said 'cancelled'. What to do? Sue was endlessly optimistic while I tried not to be rude to the 'fat controller' despite badly wanting to smack him. With climbing and television crews heading to the airstrip it was imperative to get out sooner rather than later.

At 4pm joyous news. Two planes were en route from Kathmandu. Most flights take half an hour so by 4.45 I was dubious. Then the man blew his whistle and a siren blared briefly and the 'VIP Departure Lounge' bristled with excitement. Whoops of joy as the two small aircraft landed. Much counting and re-counting of the 32 lucky passengers.

It was a smooth flight – not much wind at sunset. We took a long, circuitous (but safe) route and made a swooping landing manoeuvre onto the Kathmandu runway just as the sun was dipping over the horizon. Phew!

Dinner in the garden of the Shambala, complete with two overly-friendly dogs and then home to comfy (hard) beds and hot, hot showers. Not a day I want to repeat but a good outcome.

Thursday, 24 April

All a bit slow this morning. Hot and sunny in the garden eating French Toast with masses of fried tomatoes. The muesli with fruit and yoghurt was a hit too – so fresh.

I tried in vain to renew my visa on line and gave up after the fourth attempt. Every time I hit SEND it demanded my Nepali husband's name! We got a couple of taxis into town and did some serious

shopping in Thamel. Nice lunch at the Weizen with loads of salad. More shopping and then home to Kapan where V, Jane and Sue headed off for a massage.

We met up later at The Roadhouse in Bouda for dinner where Dorje and his family joined us. The boys, Sonam and Lagpa are looking great. The massage girls looked pretty blessed-out too. After a really fabulous pizza dinner we enjoyed a slow, quiet walk home through darkened streets – no electricity in our neighbourhood tonight (déjà vu). Monsoon in a few weeks time will fill the dams and rivers and get the hydro plants humming.

Friday, 25 April

Before it got too hot, I took the group into the old bazaars of Assan Thole and Indra Chowk. We made our way to Durbar Square and were lucky enough to get a glimpse of the Kumari (the Living Goddess). It wasn't much of a show. No elaborate headdress, just one chubby arm thrown casually over the windowsill and a fleeting profile glimpse. The idiotic Chinese man who tried to take a photo was promptly escorted outside.

The palace museum was interesting but after an hour or so we'd had enough culture. Three taxis took us in a convoy to Monamaiju where Dorje's brother Tenzing was having a 'house blessing'. Everyone was there. Dorje's wife Laki with Sonam and Lagpa; Danraj's wife Anju with her littlest girl and the baby boy I had not yet met. Manikumar was there, and Pancha and young Pasang of course – he is Tenzing's son. The house was full of friends and neighbours. We ate until we were stuffed and then had a daal bhat. Des must have eaten two plates of fried fish. The afternoon started with the monks chanting and ended, after much eating and drinking, with singing and dancing. Great local fun. Hard to leave but some of our group had to pack – and leave – tonight.

Still managed a few plates of momos at the Shambala – by candlelight. Sad farewells at Muna's gate but I think they fulfilled all their expectations – and then some.

Saturday, 26 April

Such a little group for breakfast today. The 'blond bobs' (aka me and V) are taking a sickie – not serious, just needed. Netra has kindly offered to take Jane and Diane into town today.

I visited the library at Bright Future this morning with V and Diane. Busy on a Saturday with toys instead of school work. The singing class was popular and the kid on the harmonium was a cutie.

The women went to Fatima's for their special foot massage this morning. Everyone loves it and I think I will go there myself as soon as I surface.

Netra took Jane and Diane and his wife Sarmilla to see the Royal Palace which is now a museum open to the public since the overthrow of the monarchy. Jane checked out a couple of 'high end' trekking shops and they all lunched on BLTs in Durbar Marg.

The afternoon was low key and Muna made us a lovely daal bhat in the garden this evening. Dorje and Kancha came over and Netra dropped by to say cheerio. I am finding the days a bit too hot but the evenings are wonderful. The BBC is saying rain in the Himalayas but we have yet to see any. The city could definitely do with a wash. Sad to put my last three customers in the taxi.

I am writing this in Muna's garden having just breakfasted alone. A bit sad.

I think all my groups are great but you guys really were wonderful. I miss you already.

Cheers,
Teresa didi.

Suzanne Beck's report of the Cho La Pass and EBC appears on the following pages.

Thanks to Frank Jones, Desktop Dynamics, Geelong for editing & layout.

Trek Notes from the 'B' Team – Gokyo, Gokyo Ri, Cho La, to Lobouche

Written by Suzanne Beck (thanks Sue!)

Tuesday, 8 April

We woke this morning with the knowledge that our group of 6 would split into two groups. Our newest friends Jane and Victoria are feeling nervous about completing Gokyo and Base Camp in the time allocated when their dream really is Base Camp. So with their porters Bir and Ramesh, they have decided to head back down the track and meet up with us in 7 days to conquer Base Camp. Teresa and Lahar will lead them, which leaves Des, Daniel, Diane and I with our boys (porters) and Dorje to lead us onwards and upwards to Gokyo, over the Cho La Pass and to Base Camp. We will miss the girls dearly with big personalities and wonderful stories to tell.

It's hugs and kisses all round and then we begin our trek to Machhermo where Group 'B' will spend two nights to acclimatise. It was a tiring walk today, we definitely walked a little quicker than we had the last two days and it was all up hill. We gained 500m altogether. The scenery did not disappoint. We are now surrounded by snow-capped mountains – 360 degrees. We passed plenty of waterfalls most of which were frozen though we could often hear the gush of water underneath the ice. The trek took about 4 hours so we reached Machhermo just in time for lunch. I really did have a different idea of Machhermo thinking it would be alive with people, markets and tea houses, but the place was extremely quiet with half a dozen tea houses and a Rescue Clinic.

The sun shone again until midday and then disappeared behind the clouds when it became too



A chopper caught us by surprise at Machhermo

cold to be outside. We moved to the dining room where we all read our books. There are not many trees at this height – in fact not much vegetation of any sort – so fires are fuelled with yak dung. Unfortunately the owner of this tea house was not so generous. The boys managed to do some washing for us today so we are looking forward to some clean clothes in the next couple of days. Garlic and potato soup with potato chips for dinner. Now we are down to four members we had to teach Des how to play cards. Girls against boys...

Wednesday, 9 April

This morning we woke up in our own time as we were spending another night here in Machhermo. The sky was blue and the sun was shining; it was a wonderful morning to enjoy breakfast in the courtyard. Dan, Di and I were sat there with our teas, and then from the corner of our eyes a man was climbing out of the window of his room. How embarrassing! But even more so, as it was Des! Daniel had accidentally latched the lock from the outside so Des' only escape was the window... Now the funny story is that the last time Des was here in Nepal he was locked in his room but there were bars on the windows and let's just say when you 'gotta' go you 'gotta' go, so at least Dad was able to get out of his room – this time!

Once we were all organised grabbing our waters and cameras, we set off for a leisurely three hour trek climbing to 4,900m, all part of the acclimatisation process. What a great trek. We had our first official glimpse of Mt Everest and Dorje was able to show us the track we were to take over the next couple of days.

As we got to the top of our first ascent we could all hear a helicopter but couldn't seem to find it. Suddenly this red thing appeared right in front of us. We didn't know whether to duck or run, it was heading directly for us. It was exhilarating. It flew directly overhead only metres above – Des managed to get photos. Even the porters found it a buzz.

We walked through crunchy snow, we fixed some prayer flag poles, and we sat and pondered what was to come with the magic of Everest now in our sights. Barren hills for miles around with snow-capped

mountains that seemed to grow larger with every step we took.

Again today we were back to the tea house in time for lunch and then for a long awaited shower. You would have laughed – if only I was game enough to have taken a photo of me standing in a bucket of hot water with a cup – naked. It was like 1 degree outside as I stood in a wooden box, the only barrier between nakedness and the elements outside – snow! Whilst the body parts in the 20cm of water were warm the rest of my body froze – I actually think my nipples could have snapped off and walked off by themselves... The things we do!

At 3pm we marched off and attended the talk at the rescue post informing us of the effects of altitude sickness and the well-being of our porters. There are all kinds of symptoms (scary actually) and it did put into perspective the amazing adventure we were all embarking on. It is not to be taken lightly. We also had an opportunity to get our oxygen levels checked. So far so good, we are such a healthy bunch, and looking good for the Cho La. Rajan 92%, Suzanne, Subash 91%, Des, Daniel, Kancha, Dorje 89%, Diane, Pemba 82%. The average is about 75%, 50% and you are not going anywhere.

On the way back from the HRA Clinic we played a game of bocce in the field with rocks and had a great laugh. It was just after 4pm when we got back to the dining room so we played cards, read books, and wrote in our diaries. At 5pm it started to snow! It was the first time Daniel had actually seen snow falling from the sky, so he grabbed a beer and stood outside letting the soft flakes land on his body. It was a wonderful moment, in fact I would say that today was the best day so far.

The fire was lit at 5pm to enjoy a warm dinner tonight knowing there was only one load of yak dung to burn before the fire would go out. A few games of cards and then it was lights out.

Thursday, 10 April

It gets more serious from here. Bed tea was at 6.30am, breakfast at 7.30am, and trekking by 8am. The mornings are so incredibly spectacular with the bluest sky I have ever seen and the sun with its numerous rays emanating from behind the mountain tops. We were excited to get going today but of course no day starts without a stiff climb. The

thin air is almost indescribable. Some points on trek you walk ten steps and then have to stop to catch your breath and it's especially difficult when the morning starts with a climb and no warm up. Des was up 15 times to wee last night so both Dad and Daniel are a little sleep deprived today.

We are walking at altitude now with snow-capped peaks surrounding us. The five hour trek took us a little bit up and a little bit down, but more up than down, and no tea stop, so my glycogen stores were depleting quickly. We came to a section of the trek with a small memorial to trekkers who had got caught in a landslide and perished. It was very sad and a landslide or avalanche has become my biggest fear.

Today we conquered the 'Death Stairs', and you couldn't look down or you just wouldn't have moved. They are a continuous stack of rocks, slate and quartz creating a staircase up and around the mountain. One side was the mountain face and the other side an almighty drop to the river below. What made the 'death stairs' even deadlier was another encounter with falling rocks... So 'Dunga ayo' became the familiar cry... Daniel was rushed up the stairs to safety while the rest of us were slammed into the rock face (yet again...). My life flashed past me and my heart raced every time. The boys have impeccable hearing and eyes in the backs of their heads. Our safety is of the utmost importance to them and they are there in a flash – it is very comforting, they are invaluable. With that nervous technicality we had to climb the stairs.

Because some of us were fading slowly Kancha had run ahead and arranged a thermos of hot chocolate – racing back and meeting us at the first lake. What



The 'Death Stairs' on the way to Gokyo

these incredible boys do for us!!!! There are five lakes in the region – famous for their colour – called the Gokyo Lakes. Normally at this time of year they are at their most beautiful but unfortunately the weather was still cold and all but the small first lake were frozen. We were still able to get a glimpse of the incredible emerald green colour these lakes turn into, but who gets to see these incredible lakes so whitely frozen with the sun shining off them – we still felt their grandness and beauty. Who else gets to sit with a hot chocolate and biscuit to enjoy the awesome views?

Finally, tired and exhausted, we made it to our lodge at 1pm. Interestingly we also met a camera crew member from the BBC (David Attenborough program) who was there filming for a five part series. These guys were focusing on mountains. They were filming the Nepalese jumping spider 3mm in size that lives here in Gokyo. They had been filming for a month for a five minute segment that will air in two years time. So if you happen to see it aired – think of us – we were there!

It was time to chill. Des had a sleep, Diane read her book in the room, Daniel charged his equipment

and I sat in the dining room with the sun on my back reading a book. At 3.30pm it started snowing. Gokyo Ri was now completely white – covered in snow. As lovely as it was – Please, please, please go away. Gokyo Ri was our big challenge the next day (5360m).

The fire was lit early, we huddled around it with warm drinks and Kancha gave us a massage each. It had been a big day. By 8 o'clock (Nepali midnight) we were all tucked up in bed.

Friday, 11 April

Bed tea 5.30 am. Due to the weather yesterday we were really unsure as to whether we would climb Gokyo Ri or not. But we were ready and optimistic. Warm clothes on, drink bottles and cameras ready; at 6 am we were off. Gokyo Ri here we come – 5360m.

I don't know how to describe the physical challenge. Gokyo Ri is straight up with about 40% oxygen. Ten shuffle steps and then stop to catch your breath, and your breath comes back almost instantly. Ten shuffle steps and catch your breath. Do that all the way and what an amazing accomplishment. When Dan, Des and I got to the top 2 hours 40 mins later it was an



The 'B' team enjoying the view from the top of Gokyo Ri

incredible feeling with screams, hugs, high fives and tears.

From the top we were able to see clearly four out of the top six tallest mountains in the world. We could see for miles and miles, 360 degrees. The track was covered in light snow, which had made me nervous but by the time we reached the top it was blue skies and sunshine. Diane followed behind about 20 minutes later and for a 71 year old female to climb that, the inspiration got the better of me and I cried for her... ha-ha. Now in Nepali terms Ri means hill, so although we had climbed the highest point we had ever climbed in our lives we had still only climbed a hill!

The boys had carried a flask of hot chocolate with them and we had bought some blocks of chocolate, so in true style we took our time to enjoy the moment. Nothing done by halves in this group! Our only missing link was Pemba who was just starting to feel a little tired and headachy so he had stayed behind to rest. Being on top of the world was definitely a highlight of the trek so far. Descending was much nicer. The sun was still shining. Up in 3 hours – Down in 1½ hours!

Back at the lodge we all took the time to sit outside together and take in/look at what we had just achieved. Des stayed outside, while Daniel and Diane went for a sleep. I went to the dining room and read. Finishing my book, I was in the most incredible luck with the world's highest book shop right here in Gokyo. Hilarious I know, so I went book shopping...

The lodge was packed today. Really the first time we have had more than a handful of guests. The buzz in the dining room was so interesting with everyone reciting their own adventure stories, palming off tips and recommendations like they do it every day... I loved it! They started the fire at 3pm which was much appreciated by everyone. It felt cheerful and warm, although snowing and freezing outside. Nepali midnight came all too soon – off for a well-earned sleep.

Saturday, 12 April

Lazy this morning as today's trek was only two hours in preparation for the Cho La Pass. Dorje said it would be an easy day but *shizenhause* what a trek. Breakfast was at 8am and again there was a

huge buzz in the dining room. Lots of people were climbing Gokyo Ri and it was great to watch them slowly slowly climbing the 'Hill' as we had done the day before. We certainly had luck on our side with the weather. Today was very overcast which would have spoiled the views immensely. Yay – one to us!

We started our trek at 9am and it was freezing. Today we crossed the Glacier. This was not just trekking but climbing too. Des hadn't had so much fun and exhilaration since the Lukla flight. And of course we couldn't have exhilaration without another landslide. 'Dunga ayo' again. That's three near misses with falling rocks and large enough to hurt someone seriously. What were we doing? Our common denominator with landslides – Diane! They always seemed to fall closest to her and so Diane was getting a reputation... ha-ha.

Of course the Glacier is continually moving, making the sides very vulnerable to lose rocks, boulders, anything. The first thing Dorje had said to us this morning was stick with your porter and move 2 by 2, QUICKLY... no stopping for photos, no stopping to admire the view – it was like he'd had a premonition... Once on top of the Glacier we could relax just a little.

If only the Glacier was clean it would have been unbelievable – it was still spectacular in its own right. But the clear pale blue sparkle waiting to shine was covered in thick black rubble... We climbed rock faces, we climbed slippery muddy paths, we walked along tight ropes (well it felt like that) with a wrong step you could have fallen to your death. There were some really hairy moments. So whilst it was sold to us as an easy day's trekking what they really meant was time wise, as the degree of difficulty was right up there.

We always know when we are close to the tea houses because the porters somehow forget that we are there and almost sprint ahead knowing there is a hot tea and warm room awaiting. So today we played a trick. As every day before, just as we were nearing the tea house the boys leapt ahead hundreds of metres in front, so we hid behind rubble mounds wherever we could not be seen. About 300 metres away the boys finally looked around and realised we weren't there. We got the big 'COO-EE' from Dorje and none of us replied. Again 'COO-EE' and again no reply... he started to walk towards us and we jumped out. It

was funny but we wanted them to know you can't just leave us behind...

We made it to our lodge in Dragnag at about 11.30 just in time to escape the awful weather. Even the last hour of trekking was in snow and it just seemed to get worse and worse right up until 5pm. Another challenging day we had all accomplished, tick that bucket list. Hot chocolates all round... Whilst everyone went for a sleep I dragged a blanket into the dining room and wrapped myself in it and read my book. I even got lost looking out the window to watch the snow fall and the Yaks, Naks, and Yuppies roam and play around the mountainside.

Yesterday the lodge had 35 people, today there was us and one other person. It means we have the lodge to ourselves, which has been pretty much the pattern along the whole trip. So as opposed to the cheery bubbly atmosphere of yesterday, today the lodge is quiet and lonely.

The temperature now outside was -2 degrees (cold) so the owner kindly lit the fire early and for only me in it I felt very privileged. One by one the others awoke and joined me (I'm sure they could smell the

fire) where we chatted and had dinner. A few tough days in a row and the extreme cold weather is taking its toll. With the knowledge of a hard day tomorrow, bed was 7pm.

Sunday, 13 April

I just don't know where to begin today!!!! So let's start at the beginning. Up at 4.30am for breakfast at 5am. It was -8 degrees outside (now that's cold). We were on the road by 5.30am. The sun was still rising, blue skies and no snow – a good start. Of course our first destination – UP! I was feeling great, Daniel feels like he is getting a cold, Dad was struggling to get a really deep breath today, and Diane was feeling good.

We walked up alongside a frozen river – actually the top was frozen but you could hear the running water underneath. At the top we had to cross a rocky pass with the most spectacular views of the mountains surrounding us and the mountain we were going to pass – Cholatse. We chased the sun for as long as we could, stopping for some food at the base of the pass – energy really for what was about to come. We had our two boiled eggs, two pieces of cheese, and our chapatti bread.



The early stages of the Cho La Pass



Tough work negotiating the Cho La Pass... but a motivational message in the snow certainly helped!

By now we had been trekking for three hours and if we didn't think we were having fun yet it was definitely about to start... out of the nine of us, only two had ever done Cho La Pass before, we were all virgins of the pass. This was not trekking – this was climbing!!!!

To add to the degree of difficulty it started to snow. There was one track for up and for down – tricky work as we all fought to stay closest to the mountainside. Kancha led the way with Daniel very closely behind and the two of them worked really well together. I was next with Subash. My boots just wouldn't grip with the snow and I ended up clinging for dear life with my hands – climbing a bit like Spiderman for the one hour 30 minutes it took. Dad seemed to be coping fine – a couple of slips here and there, but I continually kept yelling at Subash to look after my dad. Diane had the help of Dorje and Rajan, who did an amazing job supporting Diane to make it to the top. Daniel wanted to cry at the base of the Pass and go home, I melted a third of the way up with a panic attack and started to cry. If I could have clicked my fingers and been somewhere else at that moment I would have.

I realised as with all of us that there was nothing we could do but keep climbing. There was no other option. So on hands and feet we kept on going up.

When we eventually got to the top I burst into tears with pure relief. Over an hour of climbing with sheer fear and we were finally at the top. It wasn't the same as Gokyo Ri. We hugged, cried, but we were so exhausted and stunned by what we had just done there wasn't any energy for high fives. It was

just pure relief. It was an opportune time to hang the prayer flags at this point as a special moment in a time that I will never forget. All the boys were extremely exhilarated too.

We took heaps of photos. The view from the top was snow and ice. It was just like something from a movie – quite magical actually. So that was it – home and hosed from here... so we thought – we celebrated way too early!!!! We started trekking in the snow and it was fun to begin with, the snow was soft and fluffy, crunching under feet – we were laughing and so happy, and then all of a sudden the fluffy snow turned into an ice ridge. It had also turned very cold with the sun now disappeared behind the clouds and snow starting to fall more heavily.

I had problems with my boots gripping again and fear of slipping over the edge definitely got the better of me. With a few swear words and a few tears again the only option was forward. Finally we realised we had a pair of Yak tracks – so I put them on and my whole life changed before me. I had balance and control.

Well what goes up must come down. It was a tight rocky crevice that we needed to climb down and this time it was Dad's turn. Because of the falling snow it made the rocks extremely slippery so placing of feet was extremely important. Dad unfortunately got the wrong footing and unfolding before all our eyes with nothing we could do, Dad slipped to his arse before rolling onto his tummy, continuing to roll with no control. Luckily as he was rolling his backpack stopped him and allowed him to grip and gain control. I screamed and screamed. No injuries

(thank goodness) and the trek went on as if nothing had happened.

Today I wasn't sure how much fun we were having. It was all pretty intense for everyone, even the porters who had our lives in their hands.

The land turned reasonably flat from here on in but the trekking just didn't seem to end. An hour went past then two hours, then three hours. We crossed frozen lakes, hurdled over rocks, and crossed some very muddy pits. We walked and walked and walked. We were extremely tired, cold and hungry. It was still snowing.

As we chatted we all agreed that today was probably the hardest thing we have ever had to do, physically and emotionally. I even commented that childbirth was easier, and both Dad and I agreed that running a marathon was easier.

A little bit up and a little bit down (what an absurd saying) – 8 and a half hours later we finally saw

our lodge. The fire was on and the hot chocolates ready. Dad and Daniel although hungry couldn't eat anything. Diane and I had a warm potato and garlic soup. The others in the lodge all looked how I felt, purely and utterly exhausted. We sat around the fire waiting for dinner at 6pm all ready for bed. Dorje even said he has never had to do Cho La in the conditions that we had today and we all did well.

A couple of funny things to mention now that we are so high up, when you go to the toilet be sure to crack the ice first otherwise there is a new meaning to the word floaty... when you wee it creates steam, I haven't seen my body in 4 days (God help us), I'm sure I've lost 2kg in snot, my tissue freezes after every use...

Today would have to be the worst and best day of my life!!!!

Monday, 14 April

Nepali New Year today – woohoo to all the boys... Diane gave Daniel a run for his money last night



The 'B' team again at EBC, with Base Camp behind us

snoring like a trooper, but I was that tired it didn't bother me.

We had a slow morning this morning with sun shining through the dining windows – it was so nice on our backs. We were travelling from Dzongla to Lobouche – an easy walk of four hours. We started at 8am although we spent a moment to view the walk we had done the day before. It was truly amazing. Cholatse Peak towered over us – very overwhelming indeed. As we walked today Dorje pointed out all the mountains which we had seen coming up but we were now viewing from a different angle. We saw climbers climbing Lobouche Peak – about 20 of them, and they were just about to reach the summit. (Lucky for us we had binoculars).

The wind was cold today and Dad and Diane were feeling a little fatigued from yesterday's efforts. Today was considerably flat, staying true to the words 'a little bit up and a little bit down'. We were still walking on the side of mountains though, with an extreme drop to our right, still very barren.

It started to snow just as we reached our lodge at midday. We had a hot chocolate and ordered lunch straight away. Dad went for a sleep, while Dan, Di and I read in the dining room as the snow seemed to get thicker and thicker, covering the paths and lodges until all you could see was a sea of white. Today was the day we were meeting up with the girls, so Dorje went out to find them...



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