

TREKKING WITH TERESA

Slow Trekking for People of All Ages



TREK REPORT – EVEREST APRIL 2013

I set down in Kathmandu on a mild day towards the end of March, 2013 after a three month spell in an overheated Melbourne summer. Netra was there to meet me and Muna had my usual room ready. I felt immediately at home. Due to a rather hasty connection at Guangzhou – boarding time 1830, arrival time 1835 – our bags did not appear on the carousel. A pleasant man from the airline showed me a fax which indicated that my bags would be on the next flight – 2330 tomorrow night! I had my Nepali clothes at Muna Cottage and my toiletries in my hand luggage; not a problem.

Tony and Denise were already at Muna Cottage having done the horror jeep ride down from Okaldungha, near Dorje's village of Pattale. They'd been up there for some off-the-beaten-track trekking and to check out the clinic and scope the potential for eco-tourism up there. I had trekked with them in 2009 to the Langtang, Gossainkund and the Helambu.

I spent a couple of days shopping for handicrafts for my market in Germany. It's a job I enjoy. Colours, textures, sizes, designs. New suppliers to meet, old ones to catch up with.

Melissa was in good spirits when I picked her up on Saturday from her Malaysian Airlines flight out of Kuala Lumpur. Muna's famous fried rice and a pot of tea in the garden helped to pass a pleasant afternoon. Tony and Denise joined us for a walk over to Bouda for dinner around dusk. The huge stupa glowed eerily in the fading light as swarms of Tibetans circled the stupa with prayer beads in one hand and prayer wheel in the other. We had a curry dinner at the Kitchen Garden and a slow walk home through darkened streets. Feels good to be back.

SUNDAY MARCH 31

Tony and Denise are off to Ghorka and Bandipur today and offered Melissa and me a lift into Thamel on the way. Deepak showed up with their car and driver. We couldn't all fit in the car so Netra stepped up and took Deepak to his next appointment, in a very smart suit, on the back of his motorbike. Melissa and I did a mass of shopping in Thamel. We found more great gear for my market – kid's clothes, funky tops, pendant necklaces. We breakfasted at the roadhouse first and, when we could shop no more, we took a quick bite at the Weizen and then trolled through Tahiti Thole, Assan Thole and Indra Chowk, buying scarves and fabrics along the way. We just managed to resist buying beautiful shallow brass bowls for floating flowers. We had a lassi at the tiny, hole-in-the-wall shop near Assan Thole and then found a taxi that would take us home for 500 rupees – not so easy when you look so obviously like tourists as we do.

Jon Bowden and John Hemsley were waiting for us when we got home. Dorje had met them at the airport and settled them into Muna Cottage. Jon had trekked with us in 2009 on our first full circuit of the Anapurnas. Too tired to venture far we opted for dinner at the Shambala with Netra. The fried momos were excellent. Finally, an early night.

MONDAY APRIL 1:

Dorje took JB, John and Melissa over to Pathan while I went out to the airport for Helen, then Mark and Denise (D2 as she has been affectionately labelled, to distinguish her from Denise Rawlins). Great to see old friends coming back again. Helen has been in training and it really shows – the black shirts are a winner too. It was Mark's first time in Nepal so I put him in the 'hot seat' of the van for an exciting trip home. Totally unfazed!

I settled Mark and Denise into a nice apartment at the Shambala and took Helen down to Muna Cottage with the other 'singletons'. We all walked over to Bouda in fading light. It was very atmospheric. We had another good feed at the Kitchen Garden – pity Mark had the chicken curry! Could just as easily have picked up something nasty en route. I slept like a log. They tell me in the morning about dogs barking and shutters banging open and shut, builders with power tools. I hear nothing.

TUESDAY APRIL 2:

A big day. Ewa arrived on Malaysian Airlines, which was a bit of a surprise to me. Dorje took Helen, Mark and Denise down to Pathan. Someone (possibly A.G.) took JB, John and Melissa into town. Melissa took off on her own and seems to have been everywhere. She is very independent and has already developed a habit of walking over to Bouda for a cup of Nepali tea in the early mornings. The Johns got in a bit of advance gear shopping.

Rita and Lindsay, Ros and Rob and Tony and Denise all returned from their various travels – Pokhara, Ghorka, and Bandipur. Yet another walk over to Bouda, before dark this time, for a swirl around the stupa and dinner at our favourite cafe. The group is all here!

WEDNESDAY APRIL 3:



Kaos Tag went surprisingly well. Everyone got the gear they needed and exchanged their money at reasonable rates. Some beautiful cashmere pashminas and sweaters were bartered for and then Ros/Rob/Denise/Rita taxied home while the rest of us ate a very large pizza lunch at the Roadhouse. Mark and Lindsay stayed home under doctors orders (well, ‘nurses orders’ anyway). Mark has an upset stomach and Lindsay has a rather grotesquely-swollen leg. Otherwise no serious casualties and patients improving rapidly.

We ate in at Shambala tonight and covered most of the pre-trek briefing. About half the crew had a sensible early night but the rest of us drank far too much wine considering what we had to do next day. I was still drying my hair at 1.30 am and far too excited to sleep.

THURSDAY APRIL 4:

After what felt like half an hour’s sleep my alarm rang with a hideous new ringtone which was impossible to ignore. In the pitch dark I fumbled around for my gear. Luckily I had packed everything the night before – pity about the tooth brush.

The two small vans sent for the drive to the airport could only take 7 people each. Luckily a taxi came by – this was only 4.45 am remember – and we reached the domestic terminal at 5.25. Not bad at all. There were no delays and our flight was perfect. We couldn’t all fit in one 16-seater plane so Helen, Ewa, Tham and A.G. caught the next flight.

It was a stunning morning to arrive. The crisp, clear air was bracing as we stepped off the plane at Lukla – such a contrast to the sultry pollution of Kathmandu. It is an airstrip that leaves an impression. There were lots of familiar faces to greet us, especially Bir. That is a smile you really want to see after a scary flight.

Over breakfast at the North Face Resort (the word 'resort' might be a little ambitious) we tried to allocate the porters to the customers while we waited for the rest of our group to arrive. Rita wanted Tham again, Denise wanted Bir, and I always have Lahar. Kaji couldn't make it this time and Sunder is back at college. There are some beautiful new faces. Mostly from the villages near Dorje's home. I think Rames, Rajan, Pasang, Subas and Akal had been with us sometimes before on previous treks but the young new guys were great – Dawa, Nima, Subas Jr, Gelje (Elvis), Kancha (not the usual one who is Laki's brother) and Amit. Beautiful young men with strong shoulders and broad smiles.

We set off on the trek at 9.30 and had no trouble along the way. The weather was fabulous for our first day and the scenery breathtaking. Lunch at a new place at Cheplung was quite convivial. Great to see that nobody at all was struggling. In fact, with my extra kilos I was probably the weakest link although John looked pretty tired towards the end. The Kala Pattar Lodge at Phakding gave us the new 'attached bath' rooms which were greatly appreciated by those who go there. The rest of us, using the outside sink with freezing cold water tried not to look jealous. Some of our group went over to the gomba across the valley and were delighted to find evening prayers in session with lots of chanting monks.



An early night all round. The new steri-pens which sterilise your drinking water with a 90-second swirl of u.v. light, were a great success. Slept fantastically well and woke at 7 am when the tea arrived.

FRIDAY APRIL 5:

Breakfast was good and we had no need to hurry. We started at 9 am and took a long, sunny tea-break before Benkar. The trail here is brilliant. Not too hard, just a bit up and down through small farming communities along a beautiful river bank. It is a bit drier than usual though there was late snow this year; perhaps that is why the rhododendrons look so good. Fruit trees blossoming along the way. We lunched in a new place again today, at the end of Chumoa. It is so good I've asked if we could stay there on our way back. Further along than Jorsale but not as far as Phakding – perfect.

We were in the aptly-named Nirvana Lodge by 3 pm. I am closing now to go and take the dinner orders. I am betting on a large number of apple pies with custard. (I was right).

SATURDAY APRIL 6:

The Fire was lit in the dining room this morning which encouraged a fairly leisurely breakfast. I was in no hurry as I knew only too well what the big climb ahead was like. Actually, the 700 metre ascent to Namche Bazaar went quite well. First glimpse of Everest was clear from the chautara. I was easily the slowest and I really hated the last twenty minutes to the tea-stall. Arriving in Namche is always an amazing experience. Houses are swirled around a tea-cup shaped bowl. As you round the last corner the whole village comes into view. Wow! And the mountain backdrop seems hardly believable. While it was a long hard slog to get there we all made it in time for lunch which was quite acceptable by anyone's standards.



The rooms were booked out but we persuaded my friend Jerry, who met us there, to take a smaller, darker room at the back so that Helen and I could fit in a double room. Actually we

should have stayed at the back – at least the mattresses were more than 1 cm thick!! But thanks Jerry. You are a gentleman.



SUNDAY APRIL 7:

A Beautiful day for the early morning climb to the rim of Namche to see the big peaks. Kwangde, Thamserku, Kangtega, Amadablam, Lhotse and of course Everest itself. A valley of giants. After rather too much breakfast we trekked over to Thamo. This is usually our day-walk but we decided to stay there this time in the simple Maya Lodge with its extra-cosy dining room. It's a nice, easy 2 – 3 hour walk which takes you to a quiet, rustic village. We passed lots of full-blooded yaks on the way, compared to mostly Dzopke (yak/ox crosses) on the way up to Namche. The real yaks have long fur, high humped shoulders, beautiful faces and pretty mean-looking horns. You don't get in the way of these guys.



We crowded into the cosy dining room for lunch and then put our feet up for an hour or so. Dorje took Melissa, JB, John and Mark over to the power station while some of us mooched around the village ending up at the ani gomba (nunnery). While the new gomba is amazing and very large I love the funky old one. As Denise, Helen and I approached we could hear chanting as it was evening prayer time. We found Denise (D2), Ros and Rob already inside enjoying the calming atmosphere as about ten anis chanted in Tibetan. The older nuns had the most wonderful faces. I liked the cat's meow right on cue at the end.

The evening was joyful. Some drinks, some music, some games and a very warm stove created a cosy atmosphere. The group are getting on well. The rooms are rather cold and dark but there is 24-hour electricity and thick foam mattresses. My hip says thank you.



MONDAY APRIL 8:

Another spectacular day –and I am running out of superlatives but bear with me. It was an unexpectedly steep uphill slog to Shyangboche but the views in all directions just beggared belief. There was a beautiful pine forest off the Thamo trail and then we wound in and out of huge granite boulders and juniper trees. The yaks parked at the airstrip were a bit of a hazard but afforded a super photo op. While we had our morning tea we watched a huge helicopter land and then take off in a massive dust cloud. Another short but brutal climb took us to the meadow on top of the ridge. It is an old yak breeding station but none were in evidence. From the top you have a 360 degree view from Kumbila, Kwangde, Kusum Kangaru, Thamserku, Kang Tega, Amadablam, Lhotse and Everest. Now this actually is ‘awesome’.



The Hidden Valley Lodge at Kumjung made us a good lunch of veg spring rolls (here they are a kind of crispy, shallow-fried pastie) chips, steamed momos (the Nepali dim-sim) and even a cheese omelette for JB which looked full of finely chopped greens.



After wandering into the first Ed Hilary school for a look – nice statue but the kids were on holiday – we wandered down the easy trail to Kangzuma. I like the last little quiet path which leads to the back door of the Thamserku Lodge where they soon had the fire stoked in the dining room. It is only 4.30 as I write this but I can smell something delicious cooking in the kitchen below my room.

TUESDAY APRIL 9:

Another good day. JB regaled us at breakfast with a tale of mysterious rustling during the night. Hastily grabbing his torch he scanned the room and saw two furry paws sticking out from under the bed. The dog and had moved into their room.

The climb to Mong Danda was spectacular. Lindsay, who is nursing his 'Indian Tummy' back to health walked at the back with me, Helen, Tony and Denise. We couldn't help but stop often as the views were stupendous in all directions. There were yaks a plenty grazing above us and a blue-green river snaked through the bottom of the valley below. There were huge, white snowy peaks everywhere you looked. We saw massive eagles and lammergeirs gliding effortlessly on thermals – sometimes below us! Mong Danda is on top of a 4,000 metre ridge but after a stiff start the approach is fairly gradual. We arrived a bit too early for lunch so we had tea and biscuits and a half-hour break. The descent to Phortse Tenga is a tortuous, dusty spiral-staircase of a track but it gradually backs off and becomes quite easy with large cedars marking the way.



It was still sunny on arrival at the Riverside Lodge. I think John and Rob had a dunk in the river – it was very, very cold indeed. After lunch we did a bit of washing. The sun immediately went behind clouds and the wind died so that the washing is looking a bit wet and heavy at the moment. This is our last night at a 'reasonable' altitude. Over 4,000 metres tomorrow. We should be fine having had 4 nights at 3,500 metres

WEDNESDAY APRIL 10:



A good breakfast and then away by 8.10 with a surprising amount of clean, dry washing. The last damp socks were hanging from day-packs as we made the steep zigzag back to the main trail. The trail was a lot steeper than I remembered – it is amazing how often this happens. We passed several frozen waterfalls as we wound through wooded hillsides of rhododendrons, the leaves curled inwards and drooping in the morning cold, their buds not yet ready to open at this altitude.



There is no place for a meal-break on this trail so the rearguard, comprised of the usual suspects, was fading a little as the day wore on. Suddenly A.G. appeared bearing thermos, cups and biscuits – even the sugar bowl. What a hero. We climbed off the trail and sat on the mossy rocks under the little rhodis.

When we finally got going it was not much more than half an hour to Dole anyway. The rooms which were allocated to us were not the ones A.G. had booked so some of us decamped to the sister's lodge a few metres up the hill. More than satisfactory and, for some reason, really warm. Even the loo was warm! Later on I moved Rita and Lindsay away from their original room which stank of kerosene. The lodge staff sprayed their room with some hideous chemical spray – as if that was better. It was not. There was a perfectly good room free on the upper floor. I do hate it when lodge owners try to keep their better rooms to offer passers-by later in the day. 'First in best dressed' I say. The food at our lodge was great. We had daal bhat. Can't go wrong there.



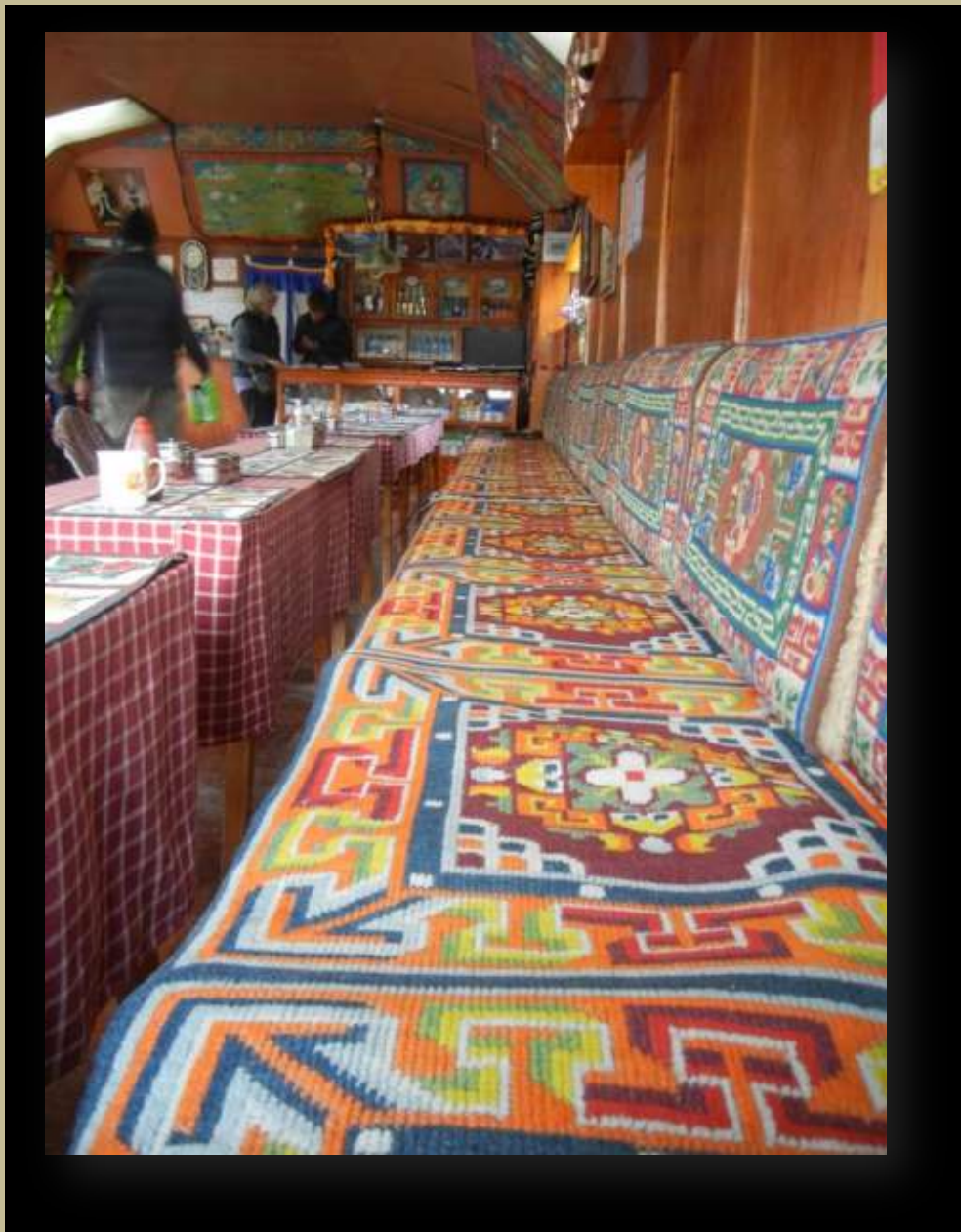
In praise of coming up slowly: World Expeditions had five guests in ‘permanent camp’ behind our lodge. Having walked so far it was all they could do to sprawl on the benches in our dining room all afternoon (their own tents were too cold). Our group taught the locals to play bocce with rocks instead of balls.

THURSDAY APRIL 11:

Ros developed a nasty migraine headache rather suddenly over breakfast so she and Rob have decided to stay on at Dole for another day. Tham has been switched for one of their less-experienced porters just in case they are unable to join us soon. Otherwise a lovely sunny morning for playing in the snow which had fallen overnight. Six of our members were from Perth – they liked it a lot. The air is always crystal clear after a

snowstorm and the sky was pure azure. Snowball fights and slides were a big hit in the winter wonderland but the Nepalis are much better shots than we are!

As we headed off we left the tree-line below us giving uninterrupted views all day of sparkling clear mountains. Predictably, Helen, myself, Tony, Denise, Lahar, Subas Jr, Akal and Nima were soon way behind. We took tea at the first bhatti where yak skins warmed the outside chairs. I think the main group did not stop here as it was too soon. At the bigger village of Luza we took our lunch though only 40 minutes short of Machermo. Sitting in the sunny window seats it was quite hard to get motivated for the last push. The peat tundra on which we walked had the texture of elephant hide on the last rise before Machermo with 360 degree views. Our lodge gave us timber-lined rooms which were still cold but with very thick foam mattresses. The dining room was beautifully-decorated with Tibetan symbols and hand-made carpets. We had a warm, cosy dinner.



FRIDAY APRIL 12:

Melissa, JB, John, Mark, Denise, Lindsay and Tony, led by Dorje, headed up onto the ridge with Lahar, Bir and A.G. (at least). Helen and I, both nursing mega-headaches didn't go anywhere. Denise and Ewa also sat around reading in the morning sunshine. This was our acclimatisation day at 4500 metres. Later in the day the water in the outside tap ran warm due to the very long incoming black hose. Several people washed their hair. After a Diamox and a couple of Panadol I felt better as the day wore on. We visited the HRA clinic for the talk on altitude problems and how to avoid them. We seem to be doing just fine. Rob and Ros have rejoined us in good spirits.

SATURDAY APRIL 13:

Today was 'quite a pull' up to Gokyo. A stiff climb out of the Machermo Valley soon had the group sorted into Fast, Slower, and Slowest. We all caught up for tea and biscuits together at the shabby little bhatti after the long, easy ramble over the peat tundra.

After tea the trail got a bit more serious, leading to what Denise called the 'death stairs'. The worst stairs were mercifully short but brutal and with quite a lot of loose steps. We were very relieved to see the steel bridge at the top. We swung away from the river (which becomes a glacier beyond this point) at the first lake which was bordered by hundreds and hundreds of little stone chortens. A.G. soon sauntered down with tea and biscuits which were most welcome. I suspect Dorje ordered these to avoid a repetition of last year's effort where Ian and myself were just about collapsed on the side of the trail way past our usual lunchtime. From the first lake it was still a two-hour slog to Gokyo (another one I had seriously underestimated). This is not a difficult trail but at this altitude even easy trails are energy-sapping. The second and then the third lake came into view. Stunningly beautiful on a perfect day. Of course our lodge was the highest in the village. The rooms were wallpapered, strangely, but the mattresses were thick. Pity about the toilets. The dining room was well-designed to catch all the afternoon sun so everyone was there – even Jerry!

Most of us managed the easy 15 minute climb up the small ridge behind the lodge for a peep over the top at the amazing glacier. It is a mind-blower. The sound of cracking ice and trickling rocks as it creeps along are a real surprise the first time.



The surface of the glacier – unexpectedly covered in rocks



Note Gokyo Peak in the background – no, not the big white one, that is Choyu, one of the ten biggest peaks in the world at well over 8,000 metres. The wee brown one on the left.

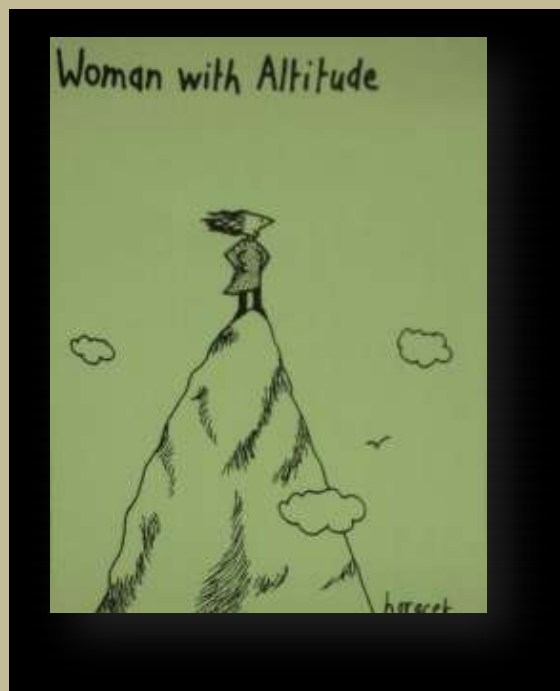
SUNDAY APRIL 14:

I got up when I heard the early-birds heading off to climb Gokyo Ri – 5380 metres. Clomp! Clomp! Clomp! Bed tea arrived at 7 am and Lahar reminded me that Helen, Ewa and myself were to head off around 9 am to climb Gokyo Ri (or Gokyo Peak as it is on some maps). John had decided that the high altitude didn't really agree with him so had headed down with Lagpa and A.G. to wait for us in Machermo tomorrow.

The climb to Gokyo Ri has to be experienced to be believed. I found it quite difficult but we kept meeting people coming down who were very encouraging (thank you Giles). Helen got a second wind near the top. We had decided to 'just make it to the flags' when someone pointed out that the flags were on the summit. The view over the far side was amazing/awesome/sensational – take your pick. We could see all the way over into Tibet. Choyu was the closest big peak (8,200 metres) but Everest, Lhotse, Nuptse and even Makalu were huge and looming across the valley. The glacier split the scene in two horizontally and the village below us was just a few colourful dots near the edge of the lake. Lahar, Rajan, Subas Jr, Amit and Gelje were in our group. They had a thermos of hot tea and biscuits with them and we soon snuggled down into a hollow full of old prayer flags and had a quick snack.

The descent nearly finished off my knees but Ewa flew down , faster than Gelje could keep up with her. Everyone got up there – high enough to see Everest at least. I don't think the rest of our group would have rated the 'lipstick brigade' to get there. I rather surprised myself. (Can't believe you did this last season – Frank/Marianne/Barbara). Everyone today agreed that the hardest part was the last walk from the lake back to the lodge. Ten minutes of hell. I found the stairs inside the lodge a bit of a challenge too.





Thanks for this Lindsey (and the artist of course).

NAYAN BHARSHA SUBA KAMANA - Happy New Year in Nepal – 2070.

MONDAY APRIL 15:



We did the big group photo thing in front of the lodge this morning and bade 'farewell and good luck' to JB and Melissa who have opted to go 'over the top' of Choyola Pass and make it to the Everest Base Camp via Dragnak, Dzongla, Lobouche and Gorak Shep. They are taking Dorje along as a guide; we can manage without him for a few days as we have Lahar – and there's always me. They took Akal and Pasang as porters. We hope to meet up with them in Dingboche in about 5 day's time, on our second night there. **(Check out JB's additional journal at the end of the report)**

So, with ten customers left (John had already descended) we headed downhill at a good crack. It was bloody freezing and we were walking into the wind. Finally we needed all our warm trekking gear we'd been carrying for two weeks. It took just three hours to reach Machermo and, just like last season, it started to snow just as we arrived. It deteriorated further during lunch (again, just like last season) so we decided to call a halt here for the night. (Odd feeling of déjà vu) I've haggled with the lodge owner to light the stove at 3.30 so that, as I write this journal in the dining room, we are all peeling off layers of clothing. The piggy game is back in vogue. Our boys are staying at the special porters lodge in the HRA building. They plan to visit later.

TUESDAY APRIL 16:

We danced our buns off last night and went to bed at the unthinkable time of 9.30. Great to see the totally unselfconscious way our boys dance with us and with each other.

It was a very long way today. Having camped short at Machermo we had a long descent to Dole which always seems to be just a ridge too far. We gathered our left luggage and tried to jam it into our packs. John had already shot through with Dawa and A.G. so I had to find volunteers to take JB and Melissa's extra gear. The lunch was good and the walk down to the river was wonderful although my knees, not fully recovered from our descent of Gokyo Ri, took a bit of a pounding on the endless downhill track. Trees gradually became taller the further we descended and quite a few rhododendrons were opening. Helen and I, bringing up the rear as ever, took a cuppa and half a Twix at the Yeti Lodge to get us up the hill to Phortse.

It was a bit steeper than I remembered (isn't it always) but we were lucky enough to spot a musk deer (thank you Subas) which grazed happily while we looked on. By the time we reached Phortse the village was shrouded in mist. Clouds swirled around the ancient chortens and old houses. Wonderfully atmospheric. The lodge was a rather traditional, shabby place but the dining room was cosy and the food good. Were we low enough to enjoy a rum and coke again?

WEDNESDAY APRIL 17:

It is a really steep pull up out of Phortse, straight out of the lodge. We followed a bunch of yaks that were headed up, unloaded, for a spell of high-pasture grazing. The lovely soft brown one having a dust bath was entertaining. Sadly, the view from the ridge was fairly cloudy. Thamserku and Kang Tega came and went in and out of the clouds but Amadablam was very shy indeed, appearing only once for a few minutes.

It is a very rugged little trail, not as well-used as the main track up to Everest Base Camp. I especially like the towering dark crags above the trail. We saw pheasants, mountain goats and then one lone blue sheep high on a crag. We caught up with Lindsay having a much-needed cuppa at old Pangboche. A.G. showed up with a thermos but Helen and I had already ordered some tea – but thanks anyway. The trekking village of Pangboche is quite extensive with a few little shops, a bakery, a phone service and a trinket stall. Our lodge, the Sri Dewa, is very comfortable with large beds (most welcome after last night's narrow, sloping bunks) and a very helpful didi. The yak-dung fire has been going flat out since 3 pm and everyone has had a gas hot shower. Pineapples (tinned of course) with rice pudding for desert. Yum!

TTHURSDAY APRIL 18:

We stored a lot of our unwanted gear for the 2-night trip to Dingboche. Carrying just the bare minimum, i.e. every warm item in your pack, we headed off on a very clear, bright, sunny morning. I thought of Dorje, Melissa, JB, Akal and Pasang heading up to Gorak Shep in the same weather. I heard from another guide coming down that they were all ok.

The climb up to Somare is another one that I always seem to overlook. I told everyone that it was fairly easy at first today. Wrong. Tea and biscuits at Somare AND THEN a long gradual uphill of tundra. The wind had already started to bite at 10.30. Luckily it was at our backs. We met a lot of World Expedition porters carrying way too much. What to do? They are being loaded like donkeys. I hate it. More than 40 kilos on some of them.

We slugged up the nasty climb towards the end, avoiding yaks on inadequate ledges here and there. It was still only 12.30 when the last of us arrived. Rita has a little tummy trouble (treatable) otherwise all well, though John seems a little weary.

A big lunch and then a bit of cosying up with a good book in a warm sleeping bag. It is snowing. The lodge is large and there are other groups here.

FRIDAY APRIL 19:

Our Big Day Off. A few brave souls, which included Mark, Denise and Rita but not totally sure who else, headed up the valley with Lahar for a bit of a look around. I think Mark and Denise made it to the teahouse at Bibre but it was very cold, despite the sunshine. I found Rita in the warm cafe across the road from our lodge with Helen and Ewa. We met a delightful woman called Jewel who had lived in China for some years with the U.S. Embassy. The apple crumble pies and coffee were both excellent choices. I meandered through the village of crumbling farmhouses and lodges till I found an internet cafe. It looked pretty 'rustic' but the connection was fast and reliable. No major problems arising from the email so that was good. By 3.30 we had started to look out for Dorje, JB, Melissa, Akal and Pasang. They stumbled in around 4 pm, very, very tired after their big adventure – Chola Pass, Everest Base Camp and Kala Pattar. It was a reunion dinner tonight as they told their tale and shared amazing pictures. Well done you two.



Reunited.

SATURDAY APRIL 20:

It snowed most of last night so the landscape was beautiful in its white garb this morning. It was still snowing gently as we headed out and the sky looked murderous. It was a nice easy trek down to Somare where we stopped for a cuppa and found Jerry on his way up to Pheriche. In the cosy Sri Dewa lodge at Pangboche we were reunited with our stored gear – some lucky people even had clean laundry to collect. My notes fail me here but I think, from memory, that Jerry showed up as we were about to leave having missed the Pheriche turnoff in the snowy conditions and returned to regroup. After a warming lunch and a quick repack we were off downhill. The snow stopped. The village and the valley looked gorgeous, every rock and branch highlighted in white. It is a very easy walk down to Devouche and the last half hour, after the bridge, is through rhododendron and birch woods. Spring has sprung down here. Birds were singing, rhododendrons were bursting out of their buds. Spanish moss

swayed gently on foggy breezes. Enchanting.



We stayed at the very posh Rivandel Lodge with its big beds and clean, western style, toilets. It has a much larger menu than typical lodges – chicken, chips and veg. was very popular. We met Caroline from Germany. We were permitted to plug in our own music to the lodges sound system and were soon dancing away to an eclectic mix from JB's iPod. We then made ourselves popular with the porters by plugging in Helen's iPod with its collection of Hindi and Nepali pop and folk music. Even Ewa was dancing – holding onto her sore shoulder. It was much better in the morning (Thanks Rob).

SUNDAY APRIL 21

The weather looked cold and gloomy this morning but it had snowed most of the night so that the forested trail up to Thangboche was stunning. It was a bit muddy in places and dripping with quickly melting snow. It was still and not that cold. Thangboche was completely shrouded in mist. No views at all but rather atmospheric. The weather warmed as we descended over 700 metres to Phunki Tenga for lunch. Below Thangboche we dropped out of the clouds. The view down to the river was ravishing.



The new bridge is still standing at Phunki Tenga but already quite loose and wobbly. We had to wait a long time for yaks to cross. Most of our group had finished their lunch by the time the last few of us trailed in so we ate at our old friend's place – best ever fried rice and such lovely people. I wish we had a reason to stay there overnight but we don't.



It is quite a climb from the river back up to Kangzuma but on our strong legs and with so much oxygen in the air it wasn't too big an effort. Lots of iris had come out and the rhodis were 'going off' in clear red, pale and deep pink and a slightly different variety in a subtle mauve colour. The mists were closing in again by the time we reached our lodge', the Thamserku at Kangzuma. It was actually snowing again by the time we cracked open our treasured bottle of Banrock Station 2007 Cab Sav. Melissa and I went 50/50 in the hefty \$26 price tag but we both agreed it was well worth it considering what it was and where we were. The cosy dining room was jam-packed with our group and some campers. "It's so cosy in a tent'. Yeah right!!

We cherished our luck to be indoors around a hot fire tonight as huge, flat snowflakes swirled around outside the windows illuminated by the dining room lights.

MONDAY APRIL 22:

Another winter wonderland this morning. It was still chill and very beautiful as we took the easy trail around to Namche Bazaar. In 2 hours we were drinking tea at the Hotel Everest and claiming our left luggage. A short, sharp shopping spree saw some very desirable pieces of trekking gear and jewellery stashed away in our daypacks. Tony and Denise bought Subas a great pair of trekking pants. Far too many 'Gokyo Peak 5380m' beanies were purchased and consequently the crew en masse now look like gum-nut babies. As the morning wore on it became chillier though the very light snow falling through the sunshine was pretty. Hastening down the big hill we soon warmed up. I was a little ahead of the pack this morning, a bit of a novelty for me, when I saw a big dog chase a herd of mountain goats up the hill where they obligingly 'posed' photogenically on the ridge. Meanwhile, us 'stragglers', as we now thought of ourselves, crowded onto a protruding rock to await an endless train of yaks and Dzopke when it started to rain in earnest. A cheerful American guy on an adjacent ledge belted out 'Singin' in the Rain' which we all joined in – one of those funny little 'magic moments' that one treasures. We bashed on in the rain and were soon at the gates of Nirvana, our favourite lodge. All our group were there having waited over an hour for their food – a pity when they had actually all ordered the same thing. The latecomers were served fried rice within minutes but it was raining miserably when we had to leave. We battled on through muddy puddles and rivulets cascading down the stairs alongside us until we heard from Dorje that they had called a halt at Chumoa and the stove was lit. We soon found them and had our dripping clothes strung up around the fire in the dining room. Of course the rain stopped about then. The boys made the most of the early halt and I can see them from my upstairs window washing their clothes and taking turns at the tap to shave and shampoo. The valley is so much greener than on our ascent. The fruit trees all have leaves now, the mustard is flowering bright yellow and the onions are two feet tall. The birds don't seem to mind the weather and are chirruping their heads off below my window as I write.



TUESDAY APRIL 23:

We wanted to get an early start today as it's quite a long hike from Chumoa to Lukla. The breakfast was not very inspiring so we didn't linger. All our gear was dry. While the trail was a bit puddled in places at least it wasn't dusty. The sun shone and we were soon down to t-shirts. Two hours seemed quite reasonable to get to Phakding but the main group had already eaten and left by the time I arrived with tony, Denise and Helen. The scenery was brilliant. Clear skies, crystal views of Thamserku if you remembered to look over your shoulder. Vegetable gardens were doing well and every tiny flat space was planted out.



After Phakding and a quick veg noodle soup with chapattis (very good chapattis) the trail began to climb in earnest, though with just enough descents to piss you off. My friend's small tea shop was closed and a dam sight further along the trail than I remembered; I seem to recall that I had the exact same problem last year. We felt much better after a Sprite, a few snacks and a couple of cups of tea at the newly rebuilt lodge across the road from my friend's place. It really is a lovely lodge, pity it is so close to Lukla. We staggered into Lukla mid-afternoon and found the rest of our group carousing in the pub. Well done you lot!! Now

I have had a long, hot shower myself and I am writing this in the dining room of the North Face Resort . I am sipping on a glass of 'chateau cardboard' and waiting for Dorje to come and join me to do the porter's wages. We settled up, bought the porters some drinks and had a bit of a sing-song and dance. The guys went off to get their dinner' we had ours. We brought all our unwanted gear down and set up a Tombola, a kind of raffle. Early names drawn from the hat were Pasang and Dorje. The top-of-the-line (if heavy) sleeping bag and the trekking fob watch were quick picks. The guys looked better in our sun-glasses than we did. Young Subas was well-pleased to get both footy scarves. The music was cranked up, the wine flowed and we danced for hours. The Poles and then the Malaysians joined us. It was a night to remember.

WEDNESDAY APRIL 24:

Having seen the mountains glowing in the moonlight the night before, on our way to bed, we were fairly optimistic about the weather for our flight back to Kathmandu. It did not disappoint. Our flight was on time and smooth but the hills below were shrouded in clouds so we flew back down at a pretty high altitude: I thought for while that we were flying to Pokhara! Netra met us with a nice big bus. Lahar, Tham and A.G. came down on the following flight with the rest of our bags. It all worked like clockwork so I was quite surprised when Deepak told me that his other big group had just spent 4 days in Lukla waiting for a break in the weather.

It was a beautiful soft, warm morning in Kathmandu. The rivers were flowing and the trees were no longer dusty; evidence of recent heavy rain down here as well as on trek. We ate our favourite breakfast in Muna's garden; French toast and fried tomatoes. I had some yoghurt with fresh fruit. It was so delicious that Ewa had a second order. As I write this I have washed my smalls, handed in my 'big wash' and been reunited with my electric toothbrush. Although today is nominally designated as a 'recovery day' some of our group don't seem to need it and have headed off to Bouda and beyond – seeking massage therapy perhaps. I have made an appointment for Lahar to see the dentist, lobbied hard to get Bir a flight down from Lukla tomorrow (hang in there Bir) and made a date for lunch with friends on Friday. Good to be back in town.

We gathered at the Kitchen Garden tonight with Lahar, A.G., Dorje and Tham. Lovely food and a nice walk around Bouda which was thronging due to a festival. The top tier of the stupa was open and the place was jam-packed. Great to see Tham's eyes wide on his first visit to Boudanath.

THURSDAY APRIL 25:

Breakfast in the garden at Muna's for everyone this morning and then two separate groups headed off into town. Some to visit the palace and the rest with me to Swayambunath, a visit to Bina's jewellery shop and then pizza in Thamel at the Roadhouse. After lunch I took a little posse of serious shoppers out for some sport. We did Merino for felt, our favourite trekking shop, Amrita Craft, Tahiti Thole for Buddhist door hangings and best quality prayer flags. We walked back through Thamel where we had left Melissa browsing in one of the groovier clothing stores. From there we headed towards Durbar Marg via TriDevi Marg for a visit to Nature Knits which has fabulous up-market cashmere and then Champion for really original t-shirts from Kathmandu. I bought one for Eric. Meanwhile Rita and Ewa crossed the road to the real North Face shop (as opposed to the North Fake brand available all over Thamel) for quality, lightweight luggage which they found. In Durbar Marg we left Rita and Lindsay at a sportswear store and headed for my favourite shop Grace, grabbing a coffee out the front of Sherpa Mall for sustenance. Most of us found something lovely to wear or give away at Grace which has a great collection of cotton Nepali clothes in cheerful colours and designs.



We taxied home to find the rest of our gang waiting on us for dinner. With half a dozen bottles of red wine on the table we soon relaxed into our 'last supper'. Hard to believe that Melissa and Ewa are going home tomorrow. We have become a bit of a family, well, a gang at least. It was quite a hard trek at times and we didn't all do well every day but we did all do

it – all of it. We coped with the hard bits and the nasty bits, shared the joys and the laughs. That kind of experience leaves its mark. I LOVED TREKKING WITH YOU GUYS!!

I am writing this at 10.30 pm. Everyone is asleep. The moon is full and I can hear drumming and music coming from several different directions. Might try to get off to sleep before the dogs start barking as I promised Netra we would visit the kids at Bright Future tomorrow at 7 am. Good night.

Teresa Didi (and thank you Helen for the pictures)

PS: I've already started making plans to do this all again next April on roughly the same time frame – with or without Base Camp. Are you interested?? A further group are hoping to trek to Muktinath in March next year – would that suit you?? teresadb@hotmail.com

MEANWHILE, we are taking bookings for Langtang (October 12-November 3), Muktinath (November 8 – 30) and the new Cultural Safari (No trekking) (December 3 – 17). Check out www.slowtrekking.com and go to the Upcoming Treks page. Cheers, Teresa.

NB; Jon Bowden's report of the Chola Pass and EBC is attached here:

Diary of “Slow-Trekking A-Team”

Monday 15th April 2013 (Day12) to Friday 19th April 2013 (Day 16)



Panoramic View from Kala Patthar of the Himalayas. Everest is the high hill on the left side.

Monday (Day 12) Gokyo to Dragnag

What an emotional farewell we had outside the “Gokyo Resort” Lodge, with photos, hugs and wishes, before both groups went their separate ways. In our case (Super guide Dorje, super fit Aka, I Pasang, Melissa and Jon), it was with a mixture of intrepidation, curious anticipation plus a touch of determination! We headed off to cross the ever moving Ngazumba Glacier, a mass of rock-covered thick ice which creaked and groaned continually. Our first hurdle, to pass the slow group of Germans, was quickly accomplished, we then passed the dangerous rock-fall areas, an hour and a half of picking our way across a sometimes pathless rocky glacier, negotiating ice lakes in the middle, hurrying past more rock-fall areas and then climbing up and out of the

glacier. Whew!, We were safe. Now had to deal with the temperature of -8 degrees celcius in this small village where we were entertained by a battle for the hay outside between 2 horses and a greedy yak.



It's not really cold!!

What glacier? What track?

Tuesday (Day 13) Dragnag to Dzongla via Cho La Pass

So today is the test of stamina. An early start after breakfast and there's snow on the ground before a gradual uphill climb, starting at 4,700m, and passing the finely dressed and slow walking asian princess. We thought we could see our endpoint ... wrong. We arrived on this ridge at 5000m with its flagpole proudly flying prayer- f lags, and looked disappointingly over the ridge's edge to see it descended a long way down before the ascent to the pass. Weather was perfect as we proceeded down before carefully ascending the slippery, steep, rocky slope with its icy snow filled gaps. After much heavy breathing and a few rests, we were glad to be at the top of the 5,420m pass for a wonderful view of the valley we had just negotiated, and the snow covered valley we now had to descend into. After a snack of biscuits and trail mix Dorje mounted prayer flags, and then we carefully snow crunched our way past beautiful vertical ice walls and gorges to climb down boulders and rocks, under a sky becoming darker, to the moorish river flats and on to our warm lodgings. A long tiring day of 7 hours climbing either up or down, but not as long as the slow walking princess's 13 hours.



Cho La Pass – whew! but worth the climb.

Wednesday (Day 14) Dzongla to Lobouche

A short two- and- a- half hour walk today so it's a late start across the light snow cover which fell in the night. We walked along the side of a valley where the large ice lake of Chola Tsho lay far below and the majestic Ama Dablam loomed in front through breaks in the clouds. We rounded the headland, descending to cross the frozen river and passing a camp of orange tents nestled against the base of Awi Peak. It wasn't long before we were nursing a cup of hot chocolate, thankful that it wasn't a long day as we were both tired from yesterdays climb.

Thursday (Day 15) Lobouche to Gorak Shep via The Pyramid and EBC

This morning we found we were the last to leave and it was only 8:30. What's the rush? A leisurely walk up the river side before turning of onto a side track to the Italian- sponsored climate and air monitoring Pyramid Environmental Station where we were personally shown over the premises and all its measuring devices. A lot of instruments were also stationed on the hill tops around it. We left and after half an hour upstream were confronted by a rather steep hill and from then on it was a lot of up and down walking, interrupted occasionally by a team of loaded up yaks, as we followed the edge of the Khumbu Glacier. Soon the "Yeti Resort" in Gorak Shep was found where we dumped bags in our rooms, had lunch and proceeded to walk for another 2 hours on a 2 to 3 metre ridge above the glacier to the famous 5,364m high Everest Base Camp. After photos, it was here that Dorje searched for his brother who was the cook for Asian Expeditions. He found him, but being busy with climbers, he arranged for us to visit another tent for a welcome hot cuppa. Here we witnessed the constructive wizardry which is part of this place, with its carpet covered stone benches for seating and cooking on. Weather was looking bleak so it was farewell to the orange coloured tents pitched on the ice and slate-like shale surrounds of EBC. Always the Samaritan, Dorje hand-fed biscuits to two hungry birds and then some porters before returning to our "resort". It felt like a worthy day of accomplishment as we were all tired and yet satisfied with our achievements.



Top: Dorje theGood
Samaritan
Middle: The Pyramid
Above: View of Gorak
Shep to EBC

Friday (Day 16) Gorak Shep to Dingboche

Up early today for our climb up the 5550m high Kala Pattar which hovers over our “resort”. Dorje, Melissa and myself proceeded up slowly, breathing deeply and taking rests. Soon we were followed by a mad Englishman going at a crazy pace, but he didn’t last long as the altitude and lack of oxygen soon slowed him down to a near crawl. The view at the top is amazing. Not only do you see Everest, Nuptse and Ama Dablam, and even witness several avalanches, but the Tibetan side is also visible. It gives you a perspective on the entire “mountain range” as a whole. We tried to see the silhouetted shapes of climbers reaching the Everest summit but none were evident. Back down for breakfast and within 10 minutes a large trekking group invaded the dining room and virtually squeezed us out. What a difference walking downhill makes. So much easier, and faster. A cuppa at Lobouche, and then a pause at the top of Thokla Pass where many remembrance stones honour climbers of all nationalities who died attempting summits. Lunch at Thokla, where the owner recognised an Aussie bush hat, and then on across the windswept slopes towards the ever present Ama Dablam, before arriving at the stupa on the ridge above Dingboche, with its young resident white yak. Dorje didn’t know where we were staying so had to guess, and fortunately when walking the main street, we bumped into several friendly faces of our original group. Yahoo! ! We’d made it.



Everest, Khumbu
Glacier and Base Camp



The final ridge, then down to
Dingboche