

# TREKKING WITH TERESA

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## TREK REPORT – Easier Mustang, October – November 2017

### *Monday 16 October*

It was a warm soft evening when I arrived in Kathmandu. Surprisingly warm, with a forecast 29 degrees next day. Undaunted, I slept all night and half the next day, then sorted three cases of gear into 'trekking now', 'trekking later' and 'gear for the boys'. I had spent the previous summer op-shopping for jackets and buying trekking boots on eBay, with some success.

Later in the day I met Paddy and Lee at the airport, looking not-too-shabby after such a long flight. They shared my apartment at Shambala so we sat up for an hour or so over a much-needed beer.

### *Tuesday 17 October*

This day was a busy one. Lee and Paddy needed some trekking gear so we trundled into Thamel on appalling roads and found sleeping bags, rucksacks, over pants, head-torches and trekking poles. All set then for a great trek. I can't recall where or when we ate; that is the problem with trying to write a diary ten days after the event.

### *Wednesday 18 October*

I took the guys into Thamel once more, this time early enough for the Greenline Bus. Check-in 7 am. Deepak was there to make sure they got away OK and a local hole-in-the-wall joint made excellent



*The Kali Gandaki valley near Ghasa*

take-away cappuccino. I taxied home before it got hot and beat the morning rush hour.

### **Thursday 19 October**

I came into Thamel today. Did some admin with my travel agent, Deepak. At The Roadhouse, always a good place to meet, I had a coffee with Dot, who is coming on my Solu District trek in November. Later I caught up with Veita and Phillip, along with June and Lyndall, at the International Guesthouse. Such a beautiful garden and the staff were putting butter lamps in every alcove. We teed up a pick-up time for next day and I walked back through Thamel. With Diwali (Tihar) fully under way, each entrance had been decorated with a colourful mandala and there was singing and dancing everywhere. The party vibe was growing as dusk fell.

### **Friday 20 October**

Official start of the 'Easier Mustang'. Have already heard that Paddy and Lee are happy at the Lakefront in Pokhara – and who wouldn't be?? They have connected with Lahar so 'alles gut' as we say in Germany.

The four guests from the International Guesthouse arrived in our minibus around lunchtime. My last two guests, Bruce and Eddy, arrived on Thai around the same time as three other friends so we sent a minibus big enough for them all. Bruce is Isabel's brother. Isabel is a familiar face around Kapan as she runs Bright Future Community Centre.

After a little siesta (it's REALLY quite hot in the middle of the day) I took the group over to Bouda. We walked over and had dinner at the Garden Kitchen, after a couple of laps of the stupa of course. Throngs of Buddhists, coloured lights and massed butter lamps made a really atmospheric first night for our group who are all now HERE!

### **Saturday 21 October**

Checked everyone's gear after a rather scratchy breakfast (staff on holiday over Dashain/Diwali) then headed into Thamel. After a 'proper' breakfast at Northfield, we found gear shopping was rather limited due to holiday closures. However, we gradually found everything we needed and headed off for a walk around the old bazaars of Assan Thole



*Veita, Eddy, Bruce and Lyndall*

and Indra Chowk. Mostly deserted and strewn with yesterday's litter it was a very different experience. Still, room to move, no motorbikes or taxis and quite cool in the shade of tall buildings on narrow streets.

Meandering back to Thamel we dined on wood-fired pizza at The Roadhouse. A popular move. Tony, Denise and Lesley hung out with us and Dorje and Kancha helped us get through it all – the shopping and then the pizza. Eddy rode into town on the back of Dorje's motorbike but it was Bruce's turn on the way home. A thrilling ride I believe.

Not overly hungry this evening and the restaurant was closed, so we shopped at the supermarket and put together a splendid picnic to eat on the terrace. One thing about these too-hot days: the evenings are gorgeous! We had Australian and Chilean wine, crisps (I'm English), crackers and three kinds of cheese and spicy local snacks. I hear there was a bottle of port. We then tried to pack all that new gear into our already-full rucksacks, with a modicum of success. Full marks group but not that critical when

travelling in your own bus or Jeep over the next few days. A few 'spare boots' hanging out of here and there as we loaded next morning.

### *Sunday 22 October*

The minibus was half an hour late but then I found out he was parked out front. Kancha arrived early and helped get the bags down. Pretty sure we had Amit and Rames on board as well. No traffic on the ring road due to the holidays so we were over the rim of the Kathmandu Valley by 9 am. About the same time as Tony, Denise, Lesley and Dorje arrived on their short flight KTM to Pokhara (25 minutes). We had tea and a lot of biscuits at the Rivertop. A beaut stop at any time but especially welcome after no breakfast. Our lunch at Riverside Springs was a rather leisurely affair (1½ hours) but it was such a relaxing spot. I feared a hot drive but we hardly used the air-con. Pokhara was a little overcast on arrival and we had a solid hour of rain overnight (apparently?).

We ate out at Café Olive. Gorgeous as ever in the back garden on a warm evening. We still have Tony,



*Sagar (Lahar's son), Lahar, Surya and Kancha*

Denise and Lesley as they plan to trek ABC with Dorje starting tomorrow.

### **Monday 23 October**

Lahar came early to take the six customers over the lake, Phewa Tal, and up to the Peace Stupa. They had a good day for it though it was pretty hot by the time I met them for lunch at Black and White Café. Greek salad was delicious, mopped up with naan bread from the tandoor.

Around 4.30 we gathered on the balcony of the dining room; a bit too drizzly for the garden. The pre-trek briefing went off smoothly and then some of our porters showed up for a meet and greet. The evening is a bit of a blur but I put that down to the gin and tonics. Unless you specify 30mL you always get a double!

### **Tuesday 24 October**

OK, time to go trekking. Our jeeps showed up on time and seemed quite luxurious by local standards. I only found out later that the windows on the second jeep didn't work. The drive in, on a

gradually worsening, though partially sealed road was absolutely beautiful. By Beni it was getting a bit hot so we decided to push on to Galeshwor for a lunch break. Nicer environment and turned out to be a great place with good fried rice. The drive from there to Tatopani was hot, dusty and bumpy as hell. It lasted 1½ hours. Ugh!

At the Trekkers Lodge in Tatopani Lee, Paddy, Lahar, Sagar (yes, Lahar's son!!) and Surya were waiting to meet us. They had trekked in from Nyapul over the past five days. They loved it. Their enthusiasm was infectious and we were soon sat around in the garden with cold beers comparing notes on our various discomforts. The downstairs rooms have had their bathrooms renovated – well overdue. We schlepped around the village, Bruce and Eddy trekked up the road a bit. We ate outside, at 1100 metres it was still warm.

### **Wednesday 25 October**

More jeep today but just a couple of hours to Kalopani. Lee and Paddy, keen to keep on trekking, were joined by Eddy and Bruce, keen to start. The



*The road near Larjung*



*Tractor accident*



*Bruce on the bridge between Kokethanti and Larjung*

four of them set off before us with a view to trek to Ghasa, then take local transport up to Kalopani. Much to my surprise, they did just that. Good boys!

Meanwhile, June, Lyndall, Veita and Phillip have arrived with me in Kalopani and we decided on an afternoon trek to Titi Lake. It was a little further, and tougher, than I remembered... isn't it always? We all made it even if it was pitch dark for the last ten minutes of the return trek.

#### ***Thursday 26 October***

Finally, we are all on trek today. We were informed that there were no seasonal bridges from the Kokethanthi side so we crossed over the Kali Gandaki on the steel bridge and then trekked on and off the road to Larjung for lunch. The river had become extremely wide here, in fact the whole valley had opened up so we were mostly on river bed trails.

Lunch was slow but delicious when it came. Meanwhile, I found a place for June on a bus

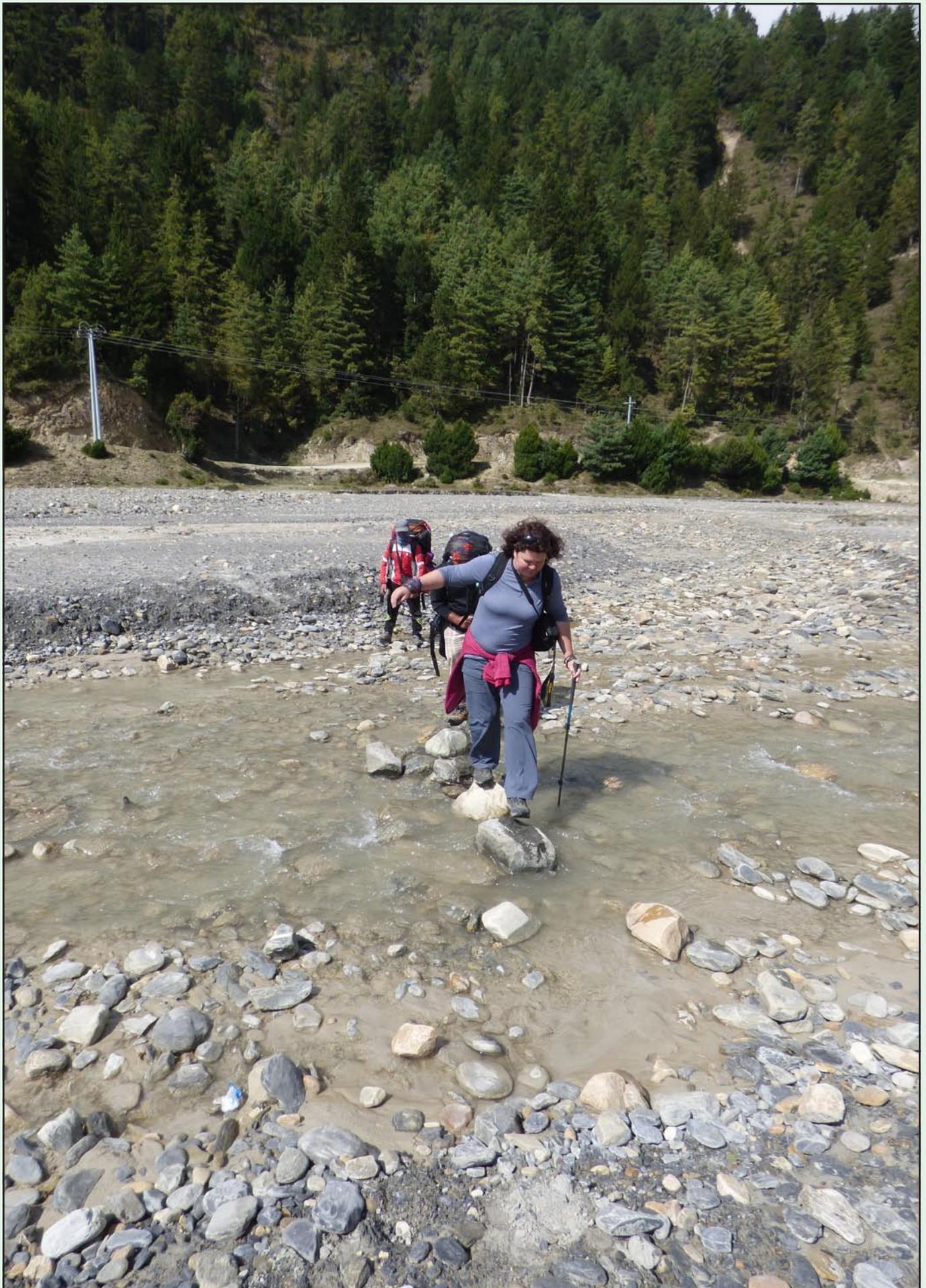
heading to Tukucho. All set. The wind fairly blew us into Tukucho where the curving whitewashed walls kept the howling afternoon winds out. We stayed at the lovely old Tukucho Guesthouse though, sad to report, Samar died three months ago. Perhaps some of you will recall what a lovely, gentle, intelligent man he was. His wife Uma is shattered. Their son and his wife are helping run the lodge. A very 'sympatisch' pair. We were still treated to Uma's delicious stewed apple and custard.

#### ***Friday 27 October***

Up into the high and wild today. Firstly on the road for half an hour, then through juniper woods to Chairo Tibetan Refugee Camp. I walked with Lyndall and yes, we did 'lose' June for a short while. Short tea stop at Chairo and then back over the river to get blown up the road to Marpha where the wind died upon entering the village. Clever architecture, snugged into the hill. Lunch was a long affair with quite a few quick trips to local craft shops where the Tibetan girls can be very persuasive.



*Our group at Ghasa*



*Lyndall crossing a section of the Kali Gandaki near Larjung*



*A corn crop hangs out to dry in Tukuche; the log ladder is a feature of the region*



*The Tukuche Guesthouse*



*Ruins of old salt traders' houses in the back streets of Tukucho*



*The foothills of Mt Dhaulagiri (8,167m) provide an impressive backdrop to the gompa at Tukucho*

After lunch we were once more blown and buffeted along to Jomsom. One could easily imagine the surface of the moon looking something like this. June, Karma and Kancha tried to get the local bus but it was full when it came. They caught up with Lyndall and I at Mangal's house in Shyang where we had just enjoyed a nice cup of tea. Needless to say, all the guys, and Veita, were way out in front!

Jomsom is a weird place, Our lodge, the Mustang Taj, is a treat. Nilgiri shone almost all day. A great sunset.

### ***Saturday 28 October***

Only three hours to Kagbeni under normal circumstances. This year the river has settled hard up against the East bank, necessitating a rather hastily-improvised higher trail. Steep up and steep down and very loose underfoot. Still, after a cuppa at Eklai Bhatti, chatting to some very enthusiastic cyclists, we were in Kagbeni around the four hour mark.

This afternoon Lahar took a few willing walkers for a bit more action out to Thiri. This little village was previously in the Upper Mustang permit zone but we may now visit if we are back through the checkpoint by 5 pm. Great Lasagna tonight.

### ***Sunday 29 October***

Up to Jharkot. All trekked bar myself and June. We took all the bags in a jeep passing our happy trekkers along the way. The road to Muktinath from Kagbeni is now sealed!!! Such a shock. I can't remember the last time I saw the Muktinath Valley looking this good. Overnight snow had left the air crystal clear making the valley seem even bigger than usual. The snowline was down to the Rani Pawa village at Muktinath. Perfection! We stayed at Jharkot where the sun seemed to shine all day. Strolled about the crumbling ruins after lunch. Rustic doesn't begin to cover it.

I was worried that jeeping up was not very effective acclimatisation so I took a walk up to Muktinath



*Kagbeni viewed from the bridge near Eklai Bhatti*

village this afternoon. It was absolutely beautiful BUT I still developed a shocking headache after dinner. Go figure?

Everyone else seems well apart from Lee with TTT (Temporary Tummy Trouble) and a mild headache. Paddy taking good care of him.

The hot table tonight was very hot indeed and not smoky at all (you may recall last season's problem with fumes). We played Thirteen till late... hey, 8.30 is LATE here.

### **Monday 30 October**

I was as sick as a dog all day. Lahar has headed off with the team to Muktinath and Zhong. They loved the whole thing. Temples at Muktinath, small villages on the Zhong side and then overnight in the tiny village of Zhong itself. Wish I had been there.

### **Tuesday 31 October**

I walked down, just, from Jharkot. Customers were all fine from Zhong. Loved it. Great views all the way.

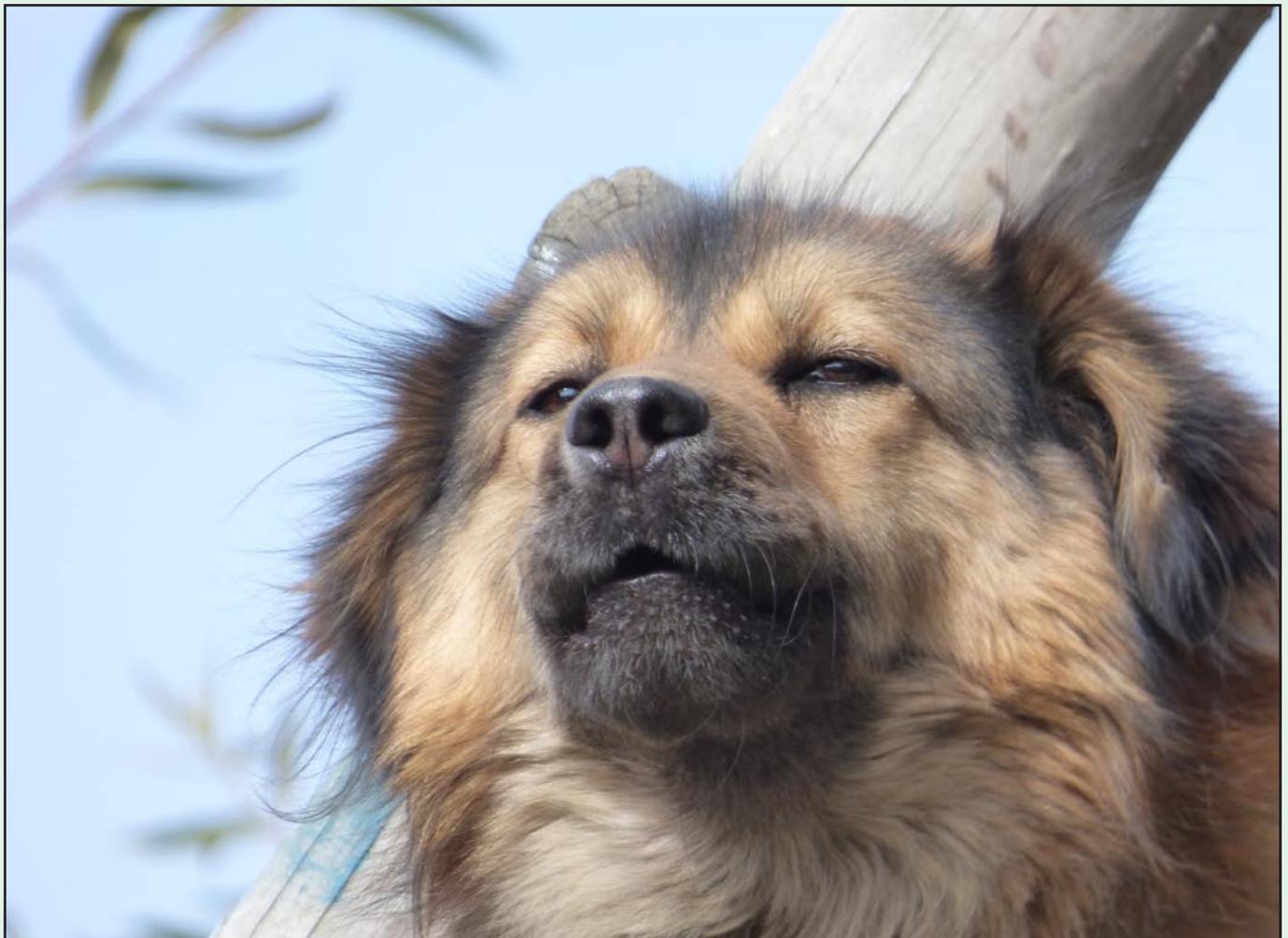
Heard they had great hot showers too. They adored Zhong. Now I REALLY wish I had been there.

Back in Kagbeni, rather disappointed to have no phone or wi-fi. Finishing up this diary to go and visit the old gompa (monastery). Built in 1490 it is in gorgeous original condition. A charming lama showed us some of the treasures. Another good dinner in a very full (warm) dining room.

### **Wednesday 1 November**

Our last big day of trekking. Paddy, now a bit under-the-weather, will jeep to Jomsom at 10 am with all the bags. I will walk to Eklai Bhatti with June, Lyndall and Phil. June will be collected by our 10 am jeep and then the rest of us will walk into Jomsom. Eddy, Bruce, Lee and Veita are doing Windy Pass, a much tougher trek with a huge scree slope descent into Jomsom. SOUNDS LIKE A PLAN.

All this went according to said plan. At one point we were slightly delayed while June had one more cuddle with a puppy she had met. I seem to recall



*June's puppy*



*A classic Mustang view over Jharkot*



*Paddy and Kancha*



*Lyndall, Karma, June and Pemba*



*Detail of the mural at the Jharkot gompa*



*Phil, Teresa and Lyndall heading back down to Jomsom*

wrenching 'trade goods' out of her hands in order to get moving.

The 'heavy' trek was a huge success. The main trail was hard, rising way above the usual trail on the jeep road and then a long, narrow, sandy descent at the end. We were all in the lodge by 3.30. Paddy feeling OK. Sunset gorgeous. All tired. Our jeeps for tomorrow are here!

#### ***Thursday 2 November***

At 7.20 am, lusting after that first cigarette of the day, I started to get a bit antsy at the non-arrival of our jeeps. The first two arrived while I was dialling the agent. Calm. Om! Day 4, no cigarettes! We hit the road at 7.45 with luggage on the three roofs, along with kilos and kilos of apples. They really are that good.

OK, it was a long jeep ride, and I had planned on a 25 minute flight. Right up until we set off on trek I could not really believe that flights were unavailable.

Only Tara is operating one plane in and out of Jomsom. I was offered sixth, maybe seventh flight of the day. Turnaround Pokhara–Jomsom–Pokhara is one hour and ten minutes. By 11 am it is nearly always too windy. They start at 7 am. Do the maths.

Actually we didn't mind the ride as much as we expected. Three strong, fully-functional jeeps, with good drivers. Morning tea at Kalopani on a sparkling clear morning afforded some of the views we had not seen when we stayed here last week. Seriously rubbish roads meant we had been on the move for four hours when we parked at Trekkers Inn at Tatopani for lunch. So warm down here at 1100 metres.

A further two hours of dreadful roads, perilous but always interesting, found us driving, quickly, through Beni and onto the skimpy black-top. Best advice you can give anyone who asks for a recommendation in Beni is 'don't stop there'.

From our jeep we saw our gang having a drink break in Galeshwor but we pushed on to Nyapul for our break. Half-way back to Pokhara I figured. The sun was going down as we drove behind Machhapuchhare and the Annapurnas; huge, glowing massifs. Wonderful. By the time we hit Pokhara the mountains were still glowing pink and still mostly clear. Great drive.

Lakefront felt like a 5-star hotel after trekking. All a bit tired, Paddy and Lee opted for room service and a movie on TV. Amit, Kancha, Rames and Pemba joined us for dinner. We discovered a couple of bottles of Jacobs Creek Cabernet Shiraz. Exorbitantly overpriced at \$30 but man it was good! Gee, that Eddy can eat!

### **Friday 3 November**

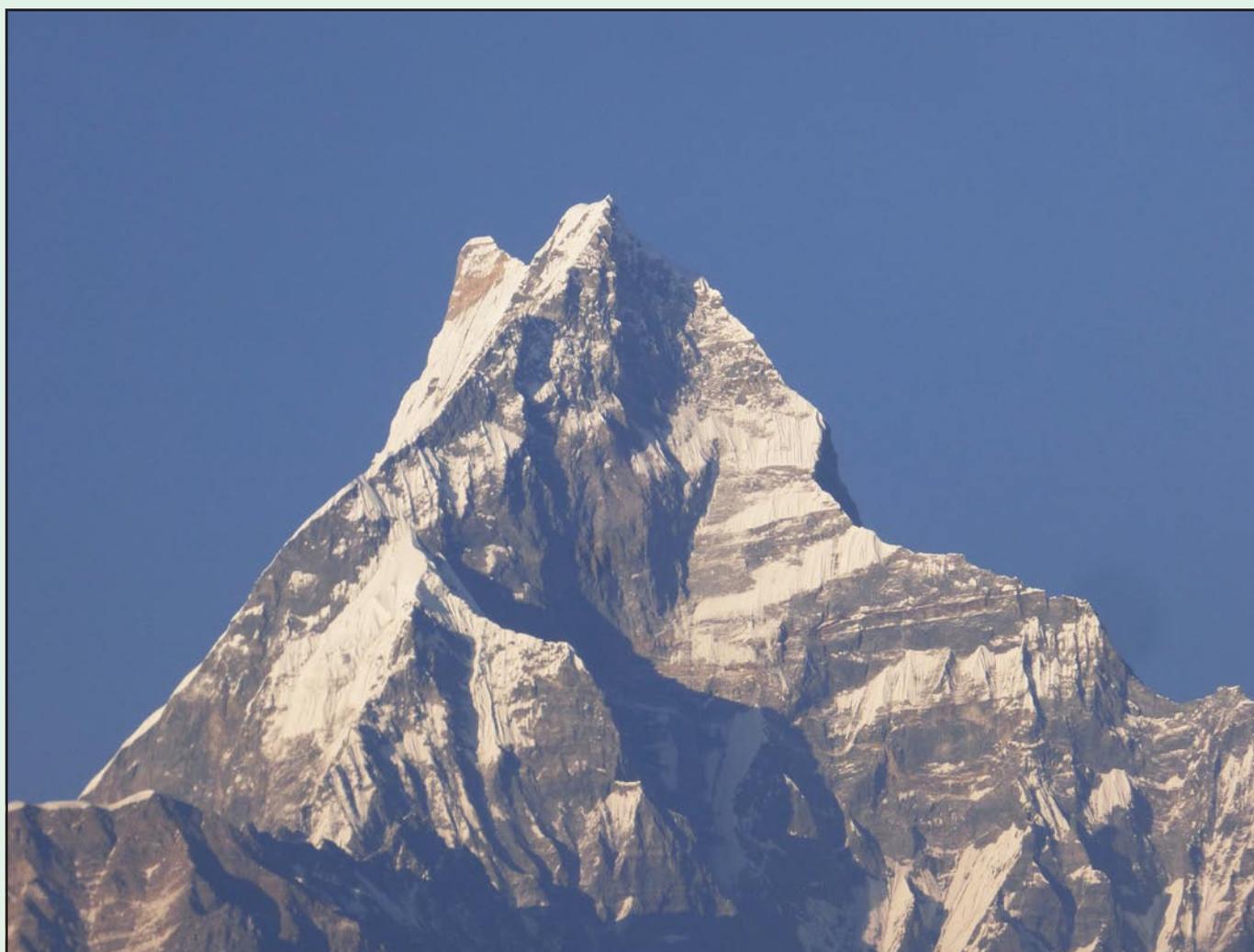
I made sure Lyndall, June, Eddy, Bruce, Phillip and Veita were good to go, made Kancha a cuppa and then waved them off in a the minibus. Off to Sarankot to see the sunrise. Back at 7.30 with big

smiles on their faces. Followed up with a lovely long breakfast in the garden. Pikelets today, a personal favourite with maple syrup and banana. Amrita, possibly Nepal's most fabulous waitress, has married the hotel's owner. She now acts as barista when she feels like it. Go girl!

Writing this diary today at midday it is 25 degrees, sunshine and there are about 30 paragliders swirling around Sarankot. Some groovy Nepali radio music drifting up from a nearby restaurant (or maybe the housemaids). It is a new, vaguely reggae version of a traditional folk song. Cool.

Massages booked for 2 pm at Jiva. Time to chill till then. Big day off!

We strolled down the lakeside path to Jiva for massages. The path is a great innovation and goes for a few kilometres in both directions from our hotel. I had a Greek salad while the massages were taking place. Fabulous feta now available from the



*Machhapuchhare, the towering 'fish tail' peak at 6,993m*

Tibetan Refugee Camp. Bruce and Eddy walked all over Pokhara in typical independent spirit, shopping not really being their thing.

We gathered for dinner at Café Olive, a favourite haunt. Tony, Denise and Lesley returned from a successful trek to ABC this afternoon so joined us, then Dorje, then Ram (Driver Ram) then Jit, our driver for tomorrow. I think we were seventeen for dinner tonight. Pretty well filled up the back garden of the restaurant. Nice night. Briefly checked out a little live music on the way home, some great young talent around. Wish I was 20 again!!

The evening is warm and soft as I write this. An almost full moon has just risen. Ah Pokhara!

### ***Saturday 4 November***

Our Hi-Ace was ready at 7.30 so, after a huge serve at the breakfast buffet, we were off on a clear morning. Exiting Pokhara through the slummiest, truck repair suburbs the backdrop was of exquisite snowy peaks, juxtaposing the best and worst of Pokhara. (Always wanted to use that word in a sentence.)

It was a Saturday, so traffic was not too bad. Riverside Springs came up far too early for lunch – so at least a couple of the group opted for ‘Fudge Brownie with Ice Cream’. Naughty boys. In retrospect I should have made a further ‘snack attack’ break along the way but there comes a point when you just want to get there.

Trucks behaving badly were a major feature of the last couple of hours. Very glad to reach the ‘Shambles’ around 4 pm. Sadly, this place deteriorates further with each passing season. Missing shower rose, ok, tolerable, but missing hand basin, missing hot water service. Bit much! Some apartments had a fridge, one had a very dodgy-looking toaster. The plates, cups, glasses and cutlery are long gone. But, it is out of the hubbub of Thamel with room to spread out. ‘Spacious’ is such a luxury after tiny trekking rooms which are more like cupboards sometimes.

Dot, for my next group to the Solu District, is here at Muna Cottage.

We ate local, chow-mein, pakoras, momos and quite a lot of local beer. I had a nice bottle of Australian red. Fun night in. It rained for half an hour while remaining warm. Perfect. Great to catch up with

Isabel and Netra who are planning their own trip to Kangel starting VERY soon. Bruce’s Monty Python renditions had us in hysterics. ‘Say no more!’

### ***Sunday 5 November***

Dragged our slightly hungover selves downstairs for a barely-adequate breakfast. Deepak’s bus took us into town for a very determined shopping effort. Some of the guys baled after the big pizza lunch. No stamina. Our transport home was delayed in a traffic jam, but we sat on the steps fronting North Face (the real one) watching the endless flow of weird and wonderful characters that is Kathmandu streetlife.

Still full, perhaps overly so, of wood-fired pizza, we opted for a light supper at home in the Shambala. (aka Shambles). I am sharing the apartment with Paddy and Lee who have already found something entertaining on the TV.

### ***Monday 6 November***

First to leave were Bruce and Eddy. Whisked away at first light, with Isabel and Netra, to Kangel and a bit of Solu trekking. Enjoy!

Veita and Phillip were next. 8 am taxi for a flight to Lhasa. Feel sure you will attempt something more demanding in the not-too-distant future Veita.

At midday I taxied June and Lyndall into Thamel to the International Guesthouse. It has a lovely garden and the location is good. Just on the quiet fringe of Thamel. Denise, Lesley and Dot joined us in a second cab. We ate at Rickshaw which was not as good as I remembered. Taxied home in time for a half hour break before walking over to Bouda for dinner. I baled out early in order to ride to the airport with Lee and Paddy. All went smoothly. Bit sad to say goodbye to these two. Great company. Bye guy. More than just customers.

Collapsed in a heap around 9 pm. Phew!

### ***Tuesday 7 November***

Tony, Denise, Lesley, Dot, Dorje, Purba and Kanha were off at dawn for Pattale. They are the first half of my Solu District Trek which technically starts in a couple of days. See you up there guys!

Work to do in Thamel so taxied in at midday, going via Swayambhu to visit Bina’s jewellery store. Walked down to Thamel and met June and Lyndall,

aka Shopaholics Anonymous, for lunch. Just had to do that pizza thing one more time. Now, really must say goodbye. I loved having you two on board.

I had a great time with this group. A good mix of personalities and abilities so thank you all for making it work.

I walked home to Kapan. Two and a half hours. I needed it. I slept for ten hours. I needed it. Did I mention that this is Day 8 of NOT SMOKING.

Cheers,  
*Teresa didi*

### *Wednesday 8 November*

Alone all day. I pick up last two guests for the Solu Trek tonight. I guess that means the Easier Mustang is over. Move on Teresa!

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

## — Photo Gallery —







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