

TREKKING WITH TERESA

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TREK REPORT – Langtang, October/November 2013

My nephew Jackson and I flew in from Doha after an epic voyage in a car, a train, a bus, a flight, a short layover and another flight from my place in Germany. The drive through the German countryside in October was a riot of autumn colour and the food on Qatar Airways keeps getting better. Netra picked us up on a surprisingly hot sunny day. Ian from Ocean Grove had already been in Kathmandu for a day and seemed to be at home already. We decided on an easy dinner at the Shambala and I was pleased to find a whole bunch of friends in the dining area. Isabel was there along with Lizzie, her brother Ian and his wife Lynda. They plan to trek independently to Manang with a couple of their friends, taking Purna as their guide. We slept like logs.

Friday 11 October

Breakfast in the garden was a familiar treat. French toast and garlicky fried tomatoes. There are a pair of new kittens which Djangbo (much recovered) lets down from their rooftop apartment in a plastic basket on a rope.

Ian and Jackson headed off to Pashupathinath with Dorje but Ian was soon overcome with panic when he realised he had left his very expensive super-duper camera in yesterday's taxi. They rushed off to New Road to buy a replacement with Ian trying desperately to remain philosophical. The credit card transaction was almost on its way when I casually phoned to say 'By the way, I found a very expensive



Ready to go at Syabrubesi

super-duper camera on my bed this morning'. Being Nepal the electronic credit card verification process had failed first time. Phew! They did see the temples and burning ghats at Pashupathi afterwards.

Meanwhile, I slipped out to the airport for Jette and Mike. They were a bit slow through the people-jam at immigration (a bit of a theme song this season) but they had enjoyed a decent flight.

After a couple of hours for a shower and rest we all went over to Bouda for dinner. There was great live rock music emanating from the maidan at Bouda. The stupa at dusk was lovely as usual. It never fails to impress first-time visitors. It is such a simple form and completely white-washed but surrounded by colourful Buddhist folk in traditional clothes swinging prayer wheels or fingering their beads. On this occasion the myriad butter lamps were flickering in little niches around the stupa and the big lights were out (no electricity from 6pm to 9pm most nights). We ate pizza at the aptly-named Stupa View. The evening was warm as we strolled home, just in time to buy some wine and a couple of beers at the Shambala to be supped in the garden at Muna's. I even saw a firefly. Magic.

Louise flew in later that evening. I was a bit nervous of the pack of growling and barking dogs gathered outside our gate but Netra assured me I need not worry. 'They are not interested in you didi, it's just the "dog marriage" season.'

Saturday 12 October

This was the official start date for the Langtang Trek. With Mike, Jette, Ian, Jackson, Louise and myself already in Nepal I only had to find a few more people. Jack and I picked up Lyn so just Barbara and Maureen to go. Robina was doing a meditation course up at Kapan Monastery and would wander down to join us sometime today. Jackson and I appear to have slipped into Thamel at some stage today (according to my notes) but I can't begin to imagine how. This evening we ate a traditional Nepali meal of daal bhat in the garden at Muna's. After everyone went to bed I hooked up with Tarke for a late night airport pickup. The flight from Hong Kong was delayed but Tarke's taxi is quite large and clean so I snoozed in the backseat while Tarke played some soft Nepali pop music on the stereo. When he went to see if the flight had landed he returned with a paper cup of milky sweet Nescafé. Can't remember

enjoying a coffee that much for ages. They finally showed up and the chowkiddhar (night watchman) let them into their apartment. Night-night!

Sunday 13 October

This is traditionally a somewhat chaotic and busy day but we managed rather well this time. It is the middle of Dashain, the biggest festival of the year. Lots of things were closed – including the trekking permit office. Somehow we got it all organised, thanks mainly to my fantastic travel agent at Sahara – nice one Deepak. Money was exchanged for Nepali Rupees, trekking gear was purchased and a long lunch was taken at the Weizen. We held the pre-trek briefing at the Shambala and then home for packing, packing and more packing. Jack kept an eye on the one-day cricket scores while Jette kept us up to date on the tennis. Lyn was unwell but, fully medicated, I expected her to be well enough for a jeep ride next day. It has rained on and off all evening. We have caught the tail end of the cyclone which tore up the Bay of Bengal a couple of days ago.

Monday 14 October

Four jeeps arrived, as promised, at 5.30 am while we were still scoffing omelettes and chapattis. In half an hour we had the bags stowed inside – it was raining – and everyone had a seat. Four jeeps – 10 Bideshi and 11 Nepali.

We took a different route this season; following the road out towards Pokhara to the west on the Prithvi Highway. Shortly after Naubise we turned north on a winding country road which took us to Trisuli surprisingly early at 10 am. Our usual lunch place was closed (Dashain holiday) so we pushed on, buying bananas and oranges and snacks to eat along the way. We were through the checkpoint at Dunche before midday so we pushed on for lunch on arrival at Syabrubesi. This was great for the drivers who wanted to go straight back to Kathmandu to spend the main festival night with their families. Six hours to Syabrubesi is a record and yet they drove carefully, especially over the treacherous landslides. Everyone travelled well and dinner was quite sociable. The Potala is not the fanciest lodge in town but the owners care about their customers.

Tuesday 15 October

We were woken fairly early with bed tea but we had booked our first night's lodge by phone so no need to hurry today. It isn't a particularly hard day but it

is the first day. Sadly, nobody was slower than me so I had to put in a bit of an effort. The walk along the northern bank of the river was fairly easy with cloudy skies keeping the temperature down. We took a cup of tea before we crossed back to the old trail but still had a sit down in Dobar near the giant waterfall. The gardens were lush here and the creepers had almost taken over the bridge. It was a very steep little pull out of Dobar but once we ducked into the shady forest the walking was only moderately hard. Lunch at Landslide was rather good. Veg Noodle Soup with a chopped up omelette on top got the mouth watering as the people who had ordered potatoes looked on in envy. The potatoes were just as good.

A drizzling rain started before lunch was finished but it was so warm that many of us didn't bother with jackets. An hour or so brought us to the Bambu Lodge. In sunny weather this lodge is idyllic with wide open terraces overlooking the raging river. And the river was really raging on this day. A mass of foaming brown water was literally roaring downhill in front of the lodge.

The dining room was cosy with a fire going tonight. Scott, from Canada, was chatty. Luckily, I didn't meet the Christian fundamentalist priest. Spring rolls or daal bhat for dinner and apple pie that someone described as the size of hub caps. Everyone is well.

Ian's joke: What do you call a man from Warsaw walking in the Himalayas? A trekking pole.

Wednesday 16 October

A good breakfast set us up for the slog up to Lama Hotel. It is not very far but it is nearly all uphill. The weather was cloudy and warm again. A couple of our boys have tummy bugs so I've dosed them up with Loperamide and Ciprofloxacin. As I wrote this they were both feeling better. I found the going pretty hard today but I think I am the 'weakest link'.

The trail is fairly broken up in places by landslides. We lunched at the tiny, rustic lodge below Rimche but by the time we crested Rimche there were a few lollygaggers needing to share the one Mars Bar we had handy. While we rested there the clouds



The raging river at Bambu



Lodge breakfast – is this Kyanjin Gomba?



First glimpse of the Langtang Valley

cleared enough for us to see Thulo Syabru across the valley. It was raining a little as the tail-enders came into Lama Hotel but the almost-full moon showed through during the evening.

There was a lot of singing in the warm dining room – western and Nepali. Not everyone found it entertaining but we didn't care; we were enjoying ourselves.

Thursday 17 October

The walk from Lama Hotel to Riverside was heavenly. Not too hard with lots of flat bits to catch your breath. Finally the weather was sunny, almost hot.

After a lovely lunch break our luck changed as the heavens opened. We tried to wait it out but it just got heavier and heavier. In the end we had to just jacket-up and get out there. It was quite demanding at times; especially the mud which sucked at your boots as you missed the rocks and sank into the dark quagmire. Heavily soaked we were very happy indeed when the forest suddenly opened up and we could see the gigantic valley of the Langtang. I wrote this in the warm dining room, with dinner ordered and a rum and coke to hand. Lyn has shown us great photos on her tablet. We are completely fogged in.

Friday 18 October

Anyone who got up during the night last night (and the loo was across the garden) knew that we were in for a great day. There was a full moon and a million stars. I woke at ten past six and ran a rag over the fogged-up window. I saw just what I had hoped for – a glistening white peak called Langtang Lirung right behind our lodge. The first rays of the sun were just setting fire to the tip of the peak so I quickly woke everyone up and ordered a pot of hot chocolate. Lyn's tripod was soon in place and shutters were clicking – even digital cameras make a fake shutter noise these days. This was just what we needed after three cloudy and rainy days.

We didn't start till 9 am as it's not far to Langtang. From Gora Tabela at 2900 metres it was an altitude gain of over 600 metres – quite enough for one day. We had planned to stay only one night at Langtang village but in order to get the lodges we wanted on particular dates we needed to linger for an extra night up in the Valley. I was hoping it would be good acclimatisation; it is certainly one of the more interesting villages in the area.

Today's walk was quite easy in some places and then quite a challenge in others. Everything feels like 'a bit of a pull' once you get over 3,000 metres. The valley was lush with vegetation and we passed grazing cows, smelly goats (must be the goat 'marriage season'), beautiful horses and quite a few trekkers coming down, not so many ascending. We ate bowls of fresh yak (nak) yoghurt at a little bhatti and then hot noodle soup further on. One of the very best things about today was the solar hot showers upon arrival at the Sunrise Lodge. As I write this we have washed our clothes and hung them out to dry. The fog has just rolled in but we hope for another sunny day tomorrow.

Saturday 19 October

The weather did close in overnight and looked grim this morning but there was sunshine as the group set off with Dorje and Pasang to visit the nearby Namling Gomba. It is a beautiful 500-year-old monastery. Neglect has only made it more so.

After a lunch of Sherpa Stew (Nepal's answer to minestrone) we wandered around the old part of the village. I found a few old trinkets and some much-needed Nivea and tissues. The international phone worked but the internet was 'down' as it so often is up here. We watched as yaks came wandering into town and then chatted with women harvesting potatoes. (*Doing a quick edit I realise that this sentence sounds hysterical but thought I would leave it in for a laugh.*) The little lanes were full of kids on school holidays. Quite easy to pick the kids who go to the local government school and those home from boarding school. The local kids are a very hardy breed and often work long hours alongside their parents in the fields. At this time of year millet and potatoes are being stored for winter. At our own lodge even the food scraps were being dried for the animals for winter when they will be softened with hot water.

One of the many delights of Langtang Village is a visit to the little cheese factory, very handily-located just behind our own lodge. The cheeses are all racked up and we bought a couple of eat on the trail. We also indulged in cheese and tomato toasties. Yum!

The boys had a bit of a party in the kitchen tonight. Nearly everyone in the group has become addicted to the card game 'Thirteen'. There were some chatty types from Lancashire in the dining room this evening.



Visiting the cheese factory at Langtang



The Langtang Range forms a stunning backdrop to the ancient mani wall

Sunday 20 October

This morning broke fair but an ominous grey cloud mass was lurking below us so we didn't loiter, hoping to make Kyanjin Gomba in the good weather. We made it easily. The sky stayed blue above us while the beautiful mountain views were very slowly obscured as the day went on.

It was sun hats and sun cream at morning tea and then a great stop at a very shabby bhathi to eat our own bread and cheese and yak butter biscuits. The going was fairly easy but the altitude was starting to play a part. I was walking with Mike for the last stretch and we took A LOT of rest stops.

Nirup, owner of the Norling Lodge, gave us a very warm welcome. It is an old lodge but he has constructed good inside loos. The dining room extension is quite big and yet still really cosy. The fog completely enveloped the village at the end of the day but it cleared later as a million stars and then a full moon illuminated the peaks. Heavenly.

Quite a lot of people are coming up in a phenomenally short time. On our sixth day, heading to Kyanjin Gomba, we met people who were descending on their fourth day. Can't imagine what they've seen. Not that much.

Kyanjin Gomba never fails to please and the more serious photographers in our group found lots of great subject matter on the way up today. The river roared below the trail and the larches wore their autumn gold. The gate which usually keeps the livestock on the higher pastures was open (harvest completed) so the valley was scattered with yaks and horses.

Playing Thirteen has become an obsession as two games ran in parallel this evening. The Nepalis like it just as much as we do.

Monday 21 October

What a day – not a cloud in the sky. Picture Perfect. Kyanjin Gomba in full dress uniform. Breakfast was



Kyanjin Gomba

unhurried. The stove was lit in the dining room for though it was clear and sunny it was still cold enough for a frost overnight.

Eight of our group had a crack at Kyanjin Ri this morning. They all made it to the first peak at 4500 metres and then Jackson, Lyn, Jette, Barbara and Maureen went on to the top peak at 4780 metres. Well done you lot!!

Robina and I opted for the longer, flatter walk up the valley. It was divine. The mountains shone and we spent ages picking up rocks on the giant landslide. Fascinating miniature plant forms had us on our hands and knees more than once. Blue alpine gentians and miniscule red-ringed succulents were the standouts. An old half tumbled stone cottage on a sandbank in the river bed was the backdrop for our smoko. An hour or so later we parked out of the wind and gobbled our boiled eggs with greedy haste. Our 'bakery items' were a bit of a disappointment. My cheese croissant was a mass of dry pastry. The Dorje Bakery will be a better bet next time.

Ian and Mike managed to do the back bowl trail to the glacier this afternoon. We rarely go all the way in to the foot of the glacier but the sheltered bowl encircled by snowy peaks is a lovely calm place to be on a breezy afternoon. Many more visits were made to the Dorje Bakery for chocolate or apple cake and real espresso.

Tuesday 22 October

I felt a bit crook this morning, as did Jackson – just a snuffly, sneezy, throaty thing, but decided to give myself a day off. Jackson thought that sounded boring so has joined all the rest except Robina (who



did it yesterday) for the long, flat day-walk. It was yet another fine clear day but more than a little windy. Robina has gone to the ice-fall behind the village – good move on a windy day. Dorje set off with a stack of chapattis, lots of boiled eggs and a huge piece of cheese from the local cheese factory. I use the term 'factory' loosely here. My friend Isabel once took a group to see the facilities and found the locals inside burning the hair off a dead goat with a blow torch. The cheese, however, is surprisingly good.

I am enjoying my day off with time to write this journal, but will be happy to get moving again tomorrow after three nights in Kyanjin Gomba, especially as it will be easy going gently downhill.

Wednesday 23 October

The Dorje Bakery asked us to write a recommendation so I quickly gave them this:

If you have an hour to waste and chocolate cake is to your taste

If you have some time to while and espresso is more your style

Then come to Dorje's – on one, or more days

When you take your first sip, you'll know you've made the perfect trip

It was a very easy walk down to Langtang where the Sunrise Lodge had a good daal bhat waiting for us. Hard to say goodbye to that view. After lunch it was still warm and sunny as we tramped, mainly downhill, through the lush valley floor. Despite the altitude, over 3,000 metres, the recent rain had left



Jackson, feet and flags



Blue alpine gentians

good grazing in these pastures and the number and variety of beautiful yaks was a constant delight. From soft, shaggy greys with wool to the ground through to strikingly-patterned black-and-whites. They completely ignored us bar the occasional stare. The babies were adorable. We stopped somewhere for creamy yak curd – well, actually we were ambushed by the vendor. We'd been unable to get a booking for our favoured lodge at Gora Tabela so had arranged to stay at a lodge in Thyangshup. It was 'OK'. Loo was a bit whiffy on arrival but it 'settled down' later. The rooms were more spacious than usual. I had a throbbing sinus problem but a session of Sancho drops in boiling water with a towel over my head helped enormously. Our resident pharmacist, Louise, has advised a course of Cephalexin which would soon sort me out. Everyone else is well, if a little snuffly after five days at altitude.

We played a lot of Thirteen this evening and ate a new dish called Pingmo. Giant Tibetan dumplings with a delicious curry. I loved it.

Thursday 24 October

The first hour or so was very easy indeed today but we still managed to take a cuppa and bask in the sunshine at Gora Tabela. It was barely recognisable as the mist-shrouded, rain-sodden lodge we had stayed at on the way up. The descent to Riverside took just over an hour and became progressively more difficult on the steep, muddy trails. We were soon off again, this time to Lama Hotel where a pre-ordered lunch was waiting for us. Mountains of fried rice and fried potatoes. We collected our stored excess gear (mainly dirty washing and lightweight clothes) while Pasang played a guitar and sang some beautiful Nepali songs. The porters had a huge card game going on a blanket in the sun.

The trail down from Lama Hotel to Bambu is quite treacherous in places. Steep, still wet and muddy and very tricky on some of the corners. I was a bit concerned about Jackson and Kancha dancing down so fast ahead of us. We took a break at Sunnyside and were entertained by a large troupe of black-

faced monkeys on the opposite bank of the swollen Langtang River. It had been over a week since the rain but the sunny conditions were sending down a vast volume of snow-melt. It was loud!

Ian and I dragged our heels a bit at the end of the day but were rewarded in the soft twilight around 5.30 by another troupe of monkeys across a narrow bend in the river just outside the village.

Bambu Lodge was cosy in the dining room where we sang songs with the local kids. Ging Gang Gooly was especially popular with its silly non-lyrics. I think I learned it as a Girl Guide.

Friday 25 October

Today started off with an hour or so downhill in the forest to the turn-off for Thulo Syabru on legs which had definitely had ENOUGH of downhill. We had to cross some fairly dodgy landslides. One in particular was really hazardous. In thick mud in the middle of a huge, recent slide a massive pine tree was embedded. It had a rough notch cut out of it for people to climb through. Lyn took photos with her camera firmly strapped to her wrist.



Struggling downhill at the landslide site

We took a quick cuppa at Landslide with crunchy Oreo biscuits and then made our way down the track to the very slight, unmarked turnoff to Thulo Syabru. There was a clear arrow scratched in the dirt. Thank you Dorje. The trail narrowed and the bambu and vines closed in on the smaller trail. It was pretty relentlessly uphill but the deep shade helped. Though it was only 11 am when the slower group came in we decided that a spot of lunch was in order as our final destination of Thulo Syabru was still two hours away. We stopped for nearly an hour, bought some trinkets and hand-woven purses and belts. It was a rather hot but easy walk along the ridge but good to plunge down into the valley and cross on a long, high bridge into deep, moist shade – the exit track is still a bit of a challenge. Some of the stairs up to Thulo Syabru are a pain but one was almost vertical. Luckily, there was a friendly tea-shop at the top. We shouted ourselves Coke/Sprite/Fanta and Ian played cricket with the three kids. Mum was weaving while we rested and we bought some purses made of her woven fabric.

The last slog was hard. By the time we hit the village I was all in. Sadly, it's a very long winding village on a very steep ridge. Jackson arrived as we neared the lodge, making the last ten minutes a lot easier without heavy day-packs.

The Snowfall is a pleasant place. Clean rooms with lino on the floors and the hottest of hot showers. Jackson and some of the porters found *Gladiator* playing on the television and were mesmerised – till the power went off. I think they got the last fifteen minutes later on. It was a very clean crew who showed up for dinner. The mushroom and tomato pasta with cheese on top was excellent. They used dried, wild mushrooms picked from the pine forests which abound nearby.

Saturday 26 October

We stayed in bed as long as we liked this morning – pity the Germans were so loud over their breakfast this morning in the courtyard below. One particularly irritating man had a laugh like a Bren gun. We ate a leisurely breakfast after everyone else had left the lodge. As I write this journal in my room with warm sunshine streaming in through many windows, there is a vast quantity of washing drying on the roof. Flat out reading seems a popular pastime today. I charged up my phone and checked my email. I found another four people for my new



Mum weaving at Thulo Syabru, while the kids play cricket

Cultural Safari in December. Dorje was especially pleased as I'd told him that if we had enough people for a Hiace then I would take him with us. A well-deserved day off.

Sunday 27 October

It was quite hard today. It was a very stiff climb out of Thulo Syabru on a small zigzag trail but the dense bambu afforded good shade. The trail seemed even steeper as we broke out of the dense jungle and climbed up to the aptly-named Beautiful Morning View Lodge for a cuppa. After another stiff climb we entered the deep forest and the trail backed off a little. The woods here are a mixture of Oak and Hemlock with a few maples turning yellow in the October sunshine.

The ancient moss-covered chorten in the middle of the woods was a lovely place for a rest. From there we only took another twenty minutes to climb up out of the forest onto the open grassy slope which leads to the lunch stop. We were not out of the woods yet though. It's a hard uphill slog to Phoprang Danda but the zigzagging trail takes the sting out of the incline. Kancha came back from the lunch place to carry our day-packs. A real treat which Robina and I availed ourselves of. Ian refused to yield. We were quite happy when the clouds rolled in and the temperature lowered instantly. Lunch was a much-needed daal bhat and it was very, very good.

After lunch it was a delightful walk into Sing Gomba. Felt like a walk in the park after this morning's

effort. Attached bathrooms were a real hit and the dining room was warm and cosy. Yet another cheese factory (the third on this trek) so we bought some good chunks for the days to come.

Monday 28 October

After an excellent breakfast we packed up all the gear we didn't need for the following two nights at high altitude and left it safely stored at the lodge. After a stiff climb up out of the village, this morning's trek was lovely and easy. As we crossed from the sunny side of the ridge through the pine forest all the Langtang peaks were glittering through the trees.

Lunch in the sun at Chalang Patti was cheese and crackers and veg noodle soup. The boys were in high spirits as they found a flute (for Sunder) and a few other instruments and sang their heads off while waiting for their own lunch – a mountain of boiled potatoes with a dip made of yak butter and chilli.

It really was 'a pig of a climb' up to Laurebinayak but the slowest of us took only an hour and a half. We did the climb in sunshine but the weather closed in behind us as we ascended. By 3 pm it was a real blizzard with thunder and horizontal snow lashing at the doors and windows. (Not ideal in a lodge with so many cracks and gaps as this one). By 4 pm the sun came out again and we all trooped outside for a snowball fight and the joy of crunching around on squeaky new snow. The light was magical. I had better leave this now. It is Jette's birthday and I have a cake to organise.



Lahar in action at Laurebinayak



Some of our fabulous porters playing in the fresh snow

I had brought the cake from Sing Gomba where they had an electric oven. It was much nicer once our lodge owner offered to frost it – with melted Cadburys. We rustled up a couple of candles and sang ‘Happy Birthday’ huddled round the stove.

Tuesday 29 October

Today was quite hard. It is always a pretty steep climb up to the temple at Laurebinayak but with the trail covered in fresh snow the way was rather indistinct at times. After a two hour slog uphill – and remember, we started out at 3900 metres – we collapsed in a heap on the grass to eat our cheese and crackers. The sun shone and the peaks glistened in their fresh white garb. A fabulous morning.

The climb up to Gosainkund is not that hard but the trail has some tricky corners and some very steep drop-offs. We stopped often to admire the chain of lakes and waterfalls that lead to the lake at Gosainkund. Climbing steadily upwards at this altitude you just have to stop often anyway. Though the sun shone all day it was still freezing cold in the sunshine at 4350 metres. The Namaste Lodge

is the best of a fairly ordinary bunch. There were draughty windows, broken floorboards and a toilet that became progressively icier as each jug of water was thrown down. The view from the lodge however is a thing of beauty.

While some of us followed the meagre warmth of the bright sunshine around the courtyard all afternoon, some of our group circled the holy lake. Jackson and Kancha went all the way up to the pass at 4600 metres and even had a look over the other side. In the evening we played cards, squashed together on the bench seating around the perimeter of the dining room. We met a very nice German family. No spare blankets up here so we just wore lots of clothes to bed and left our hats on. Glad to have a really good sleeping bag.

Wednesday 30 October

Warmed with hot porridge and fresh coffee we braced ourselves for a freezing cold, clear morning. Deciding what to wear was almost as hard as getting changed in the chilly rooms. Fuzzy-headed and more than a bit clumsy with the altitude I decided



The high trail near Gosainkund



Views from the Namaste Lodge at Gosainkund



on trekking pants and a few warm layers on top with a Gortex, hat and gloves. A cold wind blew against us as we set off but within ten minutes the hats and gloves were off. At the twenty-minute mark the jacket and then the fleece were discarded. By the Laurebinayak temple I was down to a t-shirt and sun hat. The snow which had seemed such a novelty on the way up had melted and re-frozen into treacherous ice today. More than one person 'sat down.'

We had a cuppa in the sun in front of the amazing view at Laurebinayak Lodge and then trotted pretty briskly down the rocky trail to Chalang Patti. Being on the sunny side of the ridge it was a little bit muddy here and there with snow-melt but no more ice or snow. It took 45 minutes.

A long, sunny lunch was a delight at Chalang Patti. Their strange new telephone booth, a kind of tent Tardis, did not ring this time. Jackson rated this the best daal bhat of the trek. After lunch the gentle downhill trek through the pine forest was magical. Some of us filled our water bottles at the little spring. It would have been nice to bask in the warm sunshine on the easy trail back to Sing Gomba but

hot showers were calling. We made Sing Gomba at 1.30 and after reclaiming our stored gear we had the best hot showers. As I write this the sun is still shining at 4.45 and I have clean hair. We've bought half a kilo of cheese for tonight and another kilo for tomorrow – hey, there are 21 of us!!! A chill descends about this time each evening and there was a general movement towards the dining room – stove lit perhaps? It is much milder than where we have just been but we are still at 3,000 metres well past the middle of Autumn.

Thursday 31 October

A fabulous day. The weather got warmer and warmer as we descended. By the first tea shop at Deorali we were seeking the shade to drink our tea. Dorje had some cheese and biscuits to keep us going. It was a very long way to Dunche and all downhill. We sat down a couple of times to let our knees cool down but reached the river in time for a good lunch.

The kitchen here is truly primitive and only one sweet lady was working there. The boys pitched in – I am sure I saw Subas chopping veg straight out of the garden. The little temple in its shady riverside setting was worth a look and then we did the last



Down to tee-shirts at Laurebinayak



A mummified yak on the balcony of our lodge at Sing Gomba



A well earned 'smoko' after cooking lunch for 21 people on a small clay stove

few kilometres into Dunche. Civilisation looks a bit grim from this angle. Concrete bunkers for rooms but rather good food. Our jeep drivers had mostly arrived – just one more to join us tomorrow morning. Cards and drinks were fairly raucous tonight. I loved seeing the gentle collaboration between Jette and Pasang.

Friday 1 November

Waiting for the fourth jeep to arrive meant we didn't get away till 9 am. After a few slow checkpoints through town we rattled along at a good pace till we got to the landslide area. It was heavy going after overnight rain – hard to tell how deep the holes were when they were full of water. Once the rough part was behind us we flew downhill for a couple of hours to Trisuli. The rice harvest was in full swing as we descended into the valley and the lushness was a balm after all that ice and rock at Gosainkund.

We had a delicious lunch of aloo paratha with yoghurt at our regular lunch place, washed down with chilled canned fruit juice. After a longish break it was quite hot as we set off on our new route via

Naubise. Back on the Prithvi Highway it was slow going over broken road-works into Kathmandu but we were at Muna Cottage at 3.30. I heard later that one of our jeeps kept boiling. I was glad to see it when it came in half an hour later than us. Of course it was the jeep with all the bags in it.

Two apartments at the Shambala; one for Maureen, Barbara and Robina, the other for Mike, Louise and Jette and then Jackson, Ian, Lyn and me down at Muna Cottage. Dinner at the Shambala with plenty of Gossips Cabernet Merlot was a treat. I could scarcely recognise our group with clean hair and clothes and the men with haircuts and clean (cut-throat) shaven. I had become quite used to the 'beardy' look.

Saturday 2 November

Shopping madness. Big pizza lunch at the Roadhouse. Lots more shopping and then dinner over at Bouda at the Garden Kitchen with all our boys. Fab night out. Tihar is in full swing and there were lights strung up on most houses and chalk and flower-petal mandalas on many of the footpaths.



A jeep on the road to Kathmandu

Music everywhere. Dancing in the streets. Another great day.

Sunday 3 November

Mike and Jette were the first to leave at lunchtime today. Ian went out with Puri to take pictures in the backblocks. Lyn had a day off. Dorje took Louise, Barbara and Maureen to old Kathmandu and a rooftop lunch. Jackson went to Pokhara with Lahar (once Lahar had caught up with a returning Lizzie, Ian and Lynda). Robina is 'doing her own thing' but not feeling the best. We decided on Bouda again for dinner as Shambala was shut for Tihar and Muna has had a busy day. We dined at the Garden Kitchen once again. Louise went home this evening.

Monday 4 November

With Jackson away in Pokhara and Louise, Mike and Jette departed, Lyn left this morning, leaving a much-diminished group. Not to worry, Helen and Chloe arrived at lunchtime today for the Muktinath Trek. Well, their plane landed at 1215 (45 minutes early!). By 1530 I gave up waiting, assuming they must have shot through. I thought nobody could take three hours and fifteen minutes to get through could they? I missed them by five minutes. Very luckily for me Helen had Netra's phone number. Whew!

We regrouped from our various activities for yet another Kitchen Garden dinner. The stupa at Bouda wasn't illuminated like the previous evening but there was still a festive air and plenty of dancing on the way home. Isabel was there with Lizzie, Ian and Lynda. They seem to have enjoyed their trip to Manang despite minor health setbacks.

So the Muktinath Trek has 'sort of' started and Barbara and Maureen left this evening. We hope to meet them at Thaila Thai (best Thai food in Melbourne – Lygon St, just north of Brunswick Road) in January when they come down from Sydney for the Australian Open. See ya! Only really Robina and Ian left if you count me and Jackson as 'staff'.

Tuesday 5 November

I am writing this at dusk. The power has gone off but the solar back-up is holding out. Kids are still letting off fireworks in the street and of course the dogs are going crazy. I had a luxurious sleep in today, as did our slightly jet-lagged new arrivals. Robina is having a 'sickie' but has all the right stuff so should

be ok. Ian went back to Pashupathinath today to get that elusive 'great shot'. I took Helen and Chloe to Swayambu by taxi. We first visited Bina's cute little jewellery store. I didn't mean to buy anything but ended up with three new silver rings. Helen and Chloe were no slouches either. Ian was delivered on Dorje's motorbike and he also bought his wife Rhonda a beautiful blue moonstone necklace and a stunning silver bangle set with a cabochon sapphire. Good on you man.

We ate a humongous pizza lunch with my friend Julie at the Roadhouse. It was jam-packed but the food was faultless as usual. After a bit more shopping we opted for a quiet night in – fire crackers and dogs permitting. Better go and pay my hotel bills.

Wednesday 6 November

Our friend Lizzie departed today, along with Ian, so they shared a taxi to the airport. I took Helen and Chloe, preparing to trek the Anapurnas, into town to look for gear.

This evening I went to Dorje's apartment with Helen, Chloe and Robina. Jackson came back from Pokhara and Kancha, Puri and AG were all there to help celebrate Lagpa's birthday. Sonam and Lagpa are almost the same height these days despite the two year age difference. Sonam will have the same diminutive stature as his Dad I reckon. Laki's parents and Dorje's sister Monju were there. Some wine, some beer, lovely food and a loving family to eat and drink with. This is the real Nepal.

Thursday 7 November

Jackson and Robina left today. I didn't feel as if the Langtang Trek actually ended because it blended seamlessly into the Muktinath Trek I thought we were a particularly good group. I loved having Jackson along and I think, as time went by, some of the customers enjoyed his company as much as I did. Thank you all for making it such a ripper of a trek.

Cheers,
Teresa didi

PS: Thank you all for your photos, especially Lyn and Mike and Barbara.

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



Maus, Pasang, Barb, Jack, Mike, Jette and Dorje



Playing cards at Thulo Syabru



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