

TREKKING WITH TERESA

www.slowtrekking.com • teresadb@hotmail.com

TREK REPORT – Langtang 2019

Members

Teresa Williams – Group Leader; Ekkehard Loeber, Ian Chalmers, Rhonda Chalmers, Debra Leyshan, Barbara Hardcastle, Kati Sonnenberg, Cheynelle Beale, Wayne Fiscalini, Sue Scrivener, Franca Pearcy and Lucy Tomasi.

Lucy was already in Nepal when Ekki and I arrived. We had all taken more than 2 hours to crawl through immigration. Dashain holiday season with at least half of the staff 'away'. By the 7th Ian and Rhonda and Debra had arrived and Lucy was away in Pokhara to hang out with Karma and family and just chill out – Pokhara is great for that. On the 9th, very late, we collected Cherie and Franca from the airport, along with Barbara. We had already collected Wayne and Cheynelle that afternoon... so, just two to go.

10 October – Kathmandu

Our official start date saw two more arrivals, I collected Sue ex Singapore and Ekki picked up Kati ex Doha. They had an easier run through immigration by far.

11 October – Kathmandu

Kathmandu was the usual chaotic mix of banking, gear shopping, sightseeing and packing. A lot of nice new trekking gear was bought along the way so I expected a very well turned out crew in the mountains. Warm at least. Franca and Cherie were bordering on tearful when they arrived back at the hotel this evening. They had been quite dreadfully lost – though not actually far from home. Kathmandu – it's a maze. It was warm enough to hold our pre-trek briefing in the garden. Struggled



Kancha, Lahar, Teresa, Rhonda, Barbara, Ekki, Sue, Kati, Lucy, Ian, Franca, Wayne, Coco, Debra

just a bit with the orders... '1 Gin and 2 tonic?'. 'No, 2 Gin and 1 tonic'. You can guess what we got, but with a lovely smile!

12 October – to Syabrubesi

Hotel made us a very early simple breakfast and we were away at first light. It was slow going on very broken roads. This is not earthquake damage, this is wear and tear. I sat holding Lucy's hand as we drove up to and through Dunche where we had experienced the big earthquake in April 2015. It was OK.

We had really good jeeps and the lodge at Syabrubesi was excellent.

Meanwhile, Cherie flew down to Pokhara for her own sweet holiday.

13 October – to Bamboo

The first day was a bit of a killer. We stopped for tea at Bangri and were all in good shape till then. We stopped at Landslide for lunch where Ian's back was really hurting him. He could hardly sit down. Later on, it was Lucy's turn. 'Sick as a dog' does not begin to cover it, but heaps better afterwards.

The village of Bamboo is a wreck. Half the lodges were crushed in the earthquake and ensuing landslide, which this village is always prone to. We camped half the group in our old lodge in a kind of temporary building (I think it used to be the dining room) and half down at the next lodge. The river is wonderful. Really full and roaring past at a huge rate of knots.

Not sure I would use this trail again. We were advised to take the new route over Sherpagaon but the first day would have been a huge climb.

14 October – to Lama Hotel

Today was hard, bloody hard. I can't recall it being this hard last time. Five years, and those being from 60 to 65, really make a difference. The extra 10 kilos does not help – though I think that could be balanced out by not smoking? Well, OK, the occasional late night one after dinner. Hard to think about the 2012 Langtang group trekking from Syabrubesi up to Lama Hotel on the first day. The term 'doddle' still resonates.

Having Ekki here is a real plus. We do not always walk together. He could walk much faster than me



Karma helps Lucy over a landslide near Lama Hotel

but tends to sit and wait here or there, contemplating nature. The other customers usually share a room and I have come to enjoy having a room-mate.

There is of course an 'elite' group who barrel ahead with Dorje. Wayne, Debra and Kati I had expected to be quicker but Franca and Sue are a bit of a surprise for first time trekkers. Of course, those of us further back have mastered the ancient art of 'bistari jane'. There is a lot to see out there.

The Langtang Khola is as full as I have ever seen it – and what a force of nature it is. Even here in Lama Hotel where you can't see the river, it is a constant loud 'thrumming and whooshing' in the background. It was louder still last night at Bamboo. Barbara dreamt she was in a plane – the sound is uncannily similar.

The weather has been very warm for trekking on both the last two days. Bamboo is not really a village, much like Lama Hotel, it is just a collection of lodges. The nice thing about Bamboo is that it is right on the river bank – and I do mean right on it. You can take your cuppa to an outdoor table and sit

in the shade with a cooling mist off the tumbling water. It is almost a waterfall, a cataract?

The line-up for this trek is as follows: Lahar Pun as Guide, Nabraj (Dorje) Tamang as Runner. Karma, Lahar's nephew, is with Lucy. Ram is with Cheynelle, Kancha (Dorje's brother-in-law) is with me. Rames (from Patale, Dorje's village) is with Barbara. Sinha, a new guy from Okaldungha is with Sue. Sagar (Lahar's eldest son) is with Ian. Sanchok (Lahar's second son) is with Rhonda. (Both working during the school holidays only). Surya is with Franca. Rinjipuri (Bir) (Dorje's uncle) is with Ekki. Akal, another Patale guy is with Kati. Lagpa is with Debra and Phurba is with Wayne.

I heard a nice story from Ian today. He fell badly at one point and bent his trekking pole. While trying unsuccessfully to bend it back, a fellow trekker, who had almost finished his trek, handed him a good pole and kept walking without a word. Nice trekking ethic.

Met a nice German guy on the trail before Bamboo. Marcus. He knew some of our group from 2014.



Ian and Rhonda towards Tyangshap



Rhonda and Lahar towards Tyangshap

marked on my map as the 'main trail' anyway. It is longer and no picnic. Travelling with Ekki, Ian and Rhonda we scrambled through the forest trail, sometimes muddy, sometimes wet slippery rocks. At the top of the ridge we had a lovely surprise as Kancha was waiting with a thermos of lemon tea and big pieces of sweet Tibetan bread. Only half an hour to go to Gora Tabela for a late lunch and the Langtang Valley was exquisite as we emerged into it from the forest.

I am happy to report that the entire Gora Tabela family is OK, no loss of life during the earthquake though the lodge was trashed completely. They have rebuilt and are all doing well.

So, according to Dorje, whose estimates have proved a bit light-on this season, just an hour to Tyangshap. It took ninety minutes but that was mainly due to the beauty of the afternoon. We stopped for at least 20 minutes to photograph a huge family of black-faced langur and once the cameras were out

He had even checked our website during the 2015 earthquake. He was back, with his teenaged daughter. He recalled singing with us. Cool or what!

there was no stopping us. The larger hills were shrouded in mist but the undergrowth and nearby fields were positively glowing in the strange light.

OK, trek notes up to date. Just ordered fried potatoes with cheese and omelette times two for me and Ekki for dinner. Might be time to hit the dining room.

The lodge at Tyangshap was new to me – Summit Lodge. I can't recommend it highly enough. Well-built AND well-maintained. Excellent food and lovely dahlias in the garden. A great night of card playing. Everyone is doing OK with the altitude which is well over 3000 metres. A few serious snuffles but otherwise not bad.

We had a great night playing Thirteen – especially with Kancha!

15 October – to Tyangshap

The trip from Lama Hotel to Tyangshap was much longer and harder than anticipated. Firstly, it was longer because Dorje telephoned from the front group to say 'DO NOT' take the normal route, there is a HUGE DIFFICULT landslide. The new route which crosses the river just north of Riverside is

16 October – to Langtang Village

The trek up from Tyangshap to Langtang Village was actually quite short but the altitude does start to pull on your legs a little. We had a delightful tea stop where I met Min who was my first guide when I started to trek on my own in 2000. Promised to

stop there for a real coffee on the way back. The lady proprietor is a card.

We then we had to face the worst. Not many dry eyes at the first sighting. Langtang Village is not there. Just a vast moraine of broken rocks. In the middle of a kilometre-wide river of rocks is a gushing stream with really difficult access on both sides. Apparently, there is still a mass of broken ice underneath which is slowly melting, breaking the trail as it sinks a few feet each time. The slide was caused during the 2015 earthquake, when a glacial moraine burst above the village, from above a sheer cliff in fact, and millions of tons of rock and ice came spewing out of the mountains and blew the village to pieces.

The difficult crossing was made much harder by the knowledge that so many people died on that day

and were all buried underneath us, some of whom we remembered very well. We all made it across but we had great porters to give us a hand on the most difficult paths.

While on the subject, I have been quite dismayed at the broken trails all over the Langtang, and they are NOT from the earthquake. I know that frequent rockslides are a problem here but the poor attempts at trail-making over some of them means that this trek is absolutely NOT for the faint-hearted. There is a flattened bridge below Bamboo that literally has no sides. OK, the sides lie open to catch you if you fall, and it is not a very high bridge, but still...

The weather has been really fabulous. No clouds till 3 or even 4 pm when the fog rolls up the valley and envelopes everything. We have seen grazing dzopke



Misty afternoon near Tyangshap



Black-faced Langour near Gora Tabela



(Above and below) Crossing the broken rocks burying Langtang Village

but no true yaks so far. I have seen a lot of evidence of sungar (wild pig) but no actual pigs. I saw a couple more of the wild delphiniums today – at least I think that is what they are?

17 October – to Kyanjin Gompa (or not)

The entire group, minus myself, Ekki and Cheynelle (aka Coco) have gone up to Kyanjin Gompa this morning. Coco has a heavy cold and needs a rest and not increased altitude.

Ekki had a fever last night which, quite frankly, was rather frightening. The fever broke during the night but he is as weak as a kitten today. So, at 11.30 I am sitting on the terrace of our lodge wearing a sun hat, sun-glasses and a light tee-shirt at 3430m. Glorious. An enormous flock of snow pigeons are wheeling overhead. We hope to join the others at Kyanjin tomorrow.

Ekki and I strolled up to the Mani wall above the village this afternoon. The view to the big peaks at the top of the valley was stupendous and spurred us on to hit the trail in the morning.





Marijuana and cabbages – companion planting, Langtang Village



Young Tamang woman working hard

18 October – to Kyanjin Gompa

After talking it over we have decided that Coco will trek back down to Tyangshap. Her worsening cold and her body's reluctance to acclimatise are making her miserable. An easy day and a bit less altitude will hopefully improve her health a bit and she will chill out tomorrow while the group treks back to the Summit Lodge where she will be staying. She is in safe hands with Ram.

Meanwhile, Ekki and I headed up to Kyanjin Gompa. It was easy at first. The trail is not steep and the views are wonderful. The trailside vegetation is extremely varied. I saw more delphiniums, edelweiss, lots of different ferns, stunted azaleas and cotoneasters and some striking gentians. The hillsides are often covered in a kind of briar rose, with miniscule leaves and tiny rosehips all over. Such rhododendrons as there are seem shorter and finer than I've seen in other areas.

As we neared Kyanjin Gompa, with Kancha and Bir, the altitude started to kick in and our legs grew heavy. A reviving cuppa before the end was welcome. Our porters befriended the old guy in the tea shop and helped him make some food. The little cliff top tea

shop on the curve in the river was no longer there. Eroded into the river perhaps.

Cresting the last ridge around 1.30 Kyanjin Gompa lay before us. Sadly, all the lovely old houses are gone, mostly replaced with a mish mash of green, purple and pink monstrosities. I don't think this was entirely due to the earthquake. People with money seem to have built or re-built fancy, five-storey lodges, completely overshadowing the smaller traditional ones. We stayed at the Yayla Peak, a golden oldie, which has added a block of fancier rooms but just single story. Very cold with oddly dysfunctional bathrooms – better off with a traditional room in the main house.

The group were all bursting with tales of their morning expedition to the glacier, where they had apparently gotten quite close. The afternoon afforded a chance to stroll about the village, climb up a bit of Kyanjin Ri or spend some quality time in the Dorje Bakery – which got a great rap.

We had entered Kyanjin this afternoon on the old trail through the little valley of boulders and we did pass a lot, and I mean a lot, of rubbish, quite a lot



Kyanjin Gompa



A late afternoon view of the Langtang Range from Kyanjin Gompa



of it building material. Buildings are going up at a furious rate despite everyone complaining that there are not nearly enough visitors. The competition between lodge owners was bitter and bordering on unpleasant at times.

As the mist crept up the valley, shrouding the ugliest lodges in a more flattering light, we retreated to our warm dining room to play Thirteen. Outside yaks gradually colonised the front garden.

19 October – to Tyangshap

A surprisingly cloudy morning so we set off promptly after a big breakfast of porridge, omelettes and chapattis. Back to Tyangshap. Did I mention it's a great lodge. I always think that you know when you are in a good lodge if they light the fire for breakfast. The hot showers were EXCELLENT and I think everyone had one. Hardly recognised some of our group in a different pullover and with clean hair. Coco looked well-rested with shiny clean hair – quite a change from the day before.

Sadly, Franca has lost her mobile phone – and it was a really good one. She is properly insured at least. We

certainly 'combed the area' in a thoroughly forensic manner but to no avail. Lots of music and dancing in the dining room tonight – mostly our porters. Great to see Lahar and his son Sagar dancing together. Back to a reasonable enough altitude for a wee rum and coke tonight. Very cosy night indeed.

20 October – to Lama Hotel

You would expect that trekking downhill would be much easier. I don't really find it so. Tyangshap to Gora Tabela was easy enough but the descent over the new detour is an endless spiral of stone steps and tree roots. Across the river and then another hour of stepping carefully on jagged rocks, sometimes wet. By Riverside my knees were saying 'enough!'. Sadly, we had another hour to go to Lama Hotel. The trail twists and turns over rock slides and streams and between masses of stinging nettles in places. The glades of forest and bamboo were indeed beautiful and the skies remained cloudy which was a real bonus – mild temperatures.

We staggered into Lama Hotel in a light drizzle – which was actually rather pleasant. Only Ian and Rhonda were behind us but many of our group had



Kati and Ekki at Yayla Peak Lodge, Kyanjin Gompa



Bir, far and away the cheekiest of porters

been in long enough to shower. I think Ian tried later and was disappointed. Solar hot water!

It was really warm in the dining room tonight with our group of 12, two Canadians and a group of ten Koreans. A serious game of Thirteen tonight – with drinks. The last hand having four players and about eight enthusiastic observers. We were finally asked to go to bed at 9.30 as the solar power would not last much longer.

21 October – to Bamboo

I was seriously worried about my ability to trek more downhill today. Our rooms were upstairs and there was quite a bit of Ow! Ow! Ow! as we descended the big concrete stairs to the dining room for breakfast.

There is so much flowing water here and they are running a rather lucrative business so it was a bit disappointing that nobody had considered an outside sink for washing face and cleaning teeth. The dirty hose outside the kitchen door was a ‘bit rustic’.

Set off rather tentatively on sore legs over stone stairs and jagged rocks. Did we really climb up this? As ever, Wayne, Debra and Kati were way out in front.



Our guide, Lahar

Barbara seems to stay with them some days and some days not. Sue, Franca and Lucy are a bit of a middle group, which sometimes includes Coco, and sometimes not. Ekki and I are at the back, dawdling just long enough to catch a glimpse of Ian and Rhonda. Ever thankful for their presence behind us – without them we might have been embarrassingly slow. Still, it is called ‘Slow Trekking’ for a reason. Every plant, butterfly, bird and waterfall deserves more than a passing glance.

The lodge at Bamboo is over full. The only way we could all fit was if Ekki and I took the cosy 2-man tent. We declined. The tent itself was fine but the location was woeful – especially in relation to the loo. So I am writing this in the neighbouring lodge. Like most so-called villages up here it is merely a collection of lodges. Given how prone it is to landslides – during the monsoon every year – I am surprised that they are rebuilding, when the official maps direct trekkers to the other side of the valley.

We have a delightful tiny cabin, into which a huge rock intrudes beside the bed. We are right on the edge of a really loud rushing cataract of a river. The garden is full of marijuana. The loo is a bit basic but, strangely, has hot water running through it.



Ekki waits at a bridge in the forest near Lama Hotel

It is the last day tomorrow for eight of us. Kati, Barbara, Debra and Wayne are going on to Gossainkund, another six days. Dorje will guide. Lahar is coming with the main group. He has a camping trek to organise for us for next month. Hope my legs have recovered by then. (They did of course).

22 October – to Syabrubesi

A super day. Not too hard though the numerous landslides are a serious challenge. The sun shone as we slipped down the moist forest trail from Bamboo to Landslide for morning tea. We saw the Gossainkund team off with a cheer and then set off ourselves for the last descent. There was a little mix up at the grubby tea shop near the broken bridge. Sagar had been sent ahead to start the group lunch – for the porters!! I would never eat at this dirty dive but he didn't know that. The fat proprietress in a filthy dress was pretty stropky when we made it clear we did not actually want the customers to eat there. A compromise was offered. She did well to accept

since we were in a position to just walk away. The boys ate there – actually said it was a super daal bhat. We crossed the ruined suspension bridge and ate at Bangri where, I must say, the fried rice was nothing special. The food took ages but we enjoyed the rest. A project was under way next door to the lodge building from old plastic bottles. Porters are offered 1 rupee each to bring them down. Worthwhile if you were coming down empty handed.

It was really hot for the last leg. It only took an hour or so to reach Syabrubesi but we stopped often to admire cactus, towering marijuana and exquisite butterflies. Warm enough for a drink outside this evening and very clean comfortable beds with thick doonas – obviating the need for constricting sleeping bags. Luxury! Not to mention attached bathrooms with very hot water.

23 October – to Kathmandu

On the road all day. 8 am start with three jeeps. 5.30 pm finish. Pleasant lunch at Trisuli with



A pretty bridge below Gora Tabela



It is a rocky trail

exceptional banana lassi. The traffic over the rim of the valley was tiresome, as usual, but a first-rate coffee at '20 Kilometer' certainly helped. Also, the scenery was magnificent most of the way. At first there was temperate forest and steep rocky hillsides and plunging valleys near Dunche. Then we drove on down through lush terraced farmland. And always the vast Trisuli River below us – sometimes a very long way below us.

The International Guesthouse was a dream to come home to – once I had sorted the traffic outside the hotel long enough to get two jeeps in the drive anyway. Cherie was back from Pokhara. We had a couple of very large gin and tonics in the garden tonight and did not worry too much that the staff could not immediately find our left luggage. Tomorrow.

24 October – Free day in Kathmandu

Lots of washing clothes, hair washing, etc. Kept running into our customers, barely recognizable in fresh or new clothes. We walked over to Durbar

Marg around mid-afternoon for two of my favorite shops – Grace and Koruma.

We then got a lift to Bouda in time for the kora when lots of Tibetans and other Buddhists come out, many in traditional finery, and circle the ancient stupa. Very atmospheric with the sun going down. Dinner at the Rooftop Potala.

25 October – Kathmandu

Ian and Rhonda, Cherie and Franca all departed this morning. A lazy afternoon for some. Lucy finding all kinds of yoga and massage options. Coco is still on her singing bowl healing course. I have finally succumbed to the cold that others had on trek. I do not know how they trekked if they felt like this? Respect! We had a room service dinner and watched TV. A great option for a sickie.

26 October – Kathmandu

Only me and Ekki, Lucy, Sue and Coco here now. Coco is on the last day of her course. Sue and Ekki and I meander through the old market districts of



Bridge over the creek at Landslide

Assan Thole and Indra Chowk which is chockablock with folks shopping for the upcoming festival. Sue bought a shawl off a street vendor. We stop at my favorite lassi shop. The lassi is really sweet and there are no choices – just small or large. Delicious. We keep going to Niurod (aka New Road) and I find a ‘not’ Samsung shop where I get a replacement glass put in my phone, plus a clear plastic holder all for the princely sum of 500 rupees (\$6.50). Ekki and I could not resist a shared pizza at The Roadhouse for lunch.

We ate at an outdoor café near the hotel with fairy lights and Latin music. I picked up my 3 kilos of washing on the way home. \$4. The hotel gardens are beautifully decorated for the festival. The Datura tree under our bedroom window has a fabulous perfume at night. We have found DWTV (German magazine programme) in English on our TV.

27 October

Sue and Coco departing today. Early and late respectively. Better get up and get cracking. Still feeling lousy.

Sue was away in a flash after breakfast. Coco and Lucy amused each other, thank goodness. I felt a bit sorry for myself with a running nose and a huge headache but passed the day usefully catching up on paperwork, budgeting and hand washing. Coco left late this afternoon.

28 October

We headed off after breakfast for a stretch up to Swayambu with Lucy. Don’t want to lose that fitness. Good walk through exceedingly grubby streets. The rubbish collectors are on holiday though, come to think of it, it is always dirty these days.

The temple just across the river, which is a good short cut to Swayambu, has been restored and is looking good. At Swayambu there were monkeys everywhere and we visited Bina at Kimdol. Fine Grains has re-opened and it is lovely. We ate cheese and salad sandwiches on home-made whole meal bread. Beautiful.

Got a bit of a shock when Dorje phoned to say that they were back. That was Debra, Barbara, Kati



Our lodge at Landslide

and Wayne with Dorje and porters returned from Dunche – at 1 pm!!! They had an early start, there was bugger all traffic and they did not stop for lunch. Woo-hoo! Everything was a bit chaotic there for a while as Dorje informed me that quite a few of the porters wanted to start for home today! The jeep guy also wanted paying, like now!

\$3,000 in rupees right away please! Done. Phew!

Dinner tonight with the returnees, Wayne, Debra, Kati and Barbara, was on the rooftop terrace of The Third Eye. Paneer Khadai with Naan served with a chilled Australian chardonnay. Heaven. Great vibe in Thamel as the streets are packed with tourists and youngsters celebrating the festival. Stopped to watch some dancing on the way home.

29 October

We that were left piled into two cabs and got dropped off at Netra's house in Kapan. We collected Isabel and walked over to Bouda. It was packed to the rafters as the sun started to sink so we headed off to Rooftop Potala. We were lucky to get a table. Sarmila and Netra joined us and we ordered up big. The problem was that the restaurant was just too busy and the staff were perhaps a little over-optimistic of what the kitchen could deliver. After a long wait we were told that quite a few of the things we had ordered were no longer available. Via a comedy of errors, it gradually emerged that there were no more green beans, broccoli, tofu, potatoes, etc. etc. We were offered some interesting alternatives, including crispy fried dried mushrooms – which have since become a favourite. We had enough to eat, we had a laugh. The taxi ride home was exciting.

30 October

As I write this, Kati is on the minibus to the airport. It is coming back for Lucy soon. Wayne is leaving at 1 pm. I have a lunch date. Barbara and Debra, in the adjacent room, are washing their massed trekking gear ready for our next big adventure.

Langtang was as beautiful as ever but the way there was hard. The road is in a diabolical state and the trail is not much better. I saw almost no evidence at all of trail maintenance, let alone improvement. Areas that were broken and dangerous five years ago are still the same. Landslides are a frequent occurrence in such a steep valley but almost nothing has been done to make a track across most of them.

In several places I was scared and could not have done it without a helping hand from Kancha. Youngsters with their own heavy packs were doing the trek and I had concerns for their safety at times. The fitter and stronger members of our trek did not struggle as much as I did but, as a group, I felt the terrain was a bit too challenging at times for what is billed as a 'moderate' trek. We may not be back for a while.

The four who trekked on to Gossainkund had a fantastic time. The weather held fair, as it did for the whole of our Langtang Trek, and the lakes were clear. They did NOT freeze their asses off and were well-pleased with the longer trek.

The International Guesthouse is a bit of a 'Fawly Towers' on the service side but the rooms are rather nice and the garden is an oasis in the hurly-burly of Thamel. I also had the feeling that Maya, the new owner, has lots of improvements in mind.

Being here in the festival season is mostly a delight. There are mandalas on the roads, dancing in the streets and sometimes very loud music, very close to the hotel! It's just one night.

Thank you, Rhonda, Ian, Debra, Wayne, Kati, Coco, Franca, Barbara, Lucy and Sue. It is the people who make the trek good and you were a super bunch. To our guys, Lahar, Dorje, Rames, Ram, Bir, Kancha, Lagpa, Saggar, Sanchok, Singha, Surya, Karma, Akal and Phurba. They must surely know that we could not do this without them yet they always make us feel we did it ourselves. Now that is an art. Thank you, gentlemen.

We are planning a much smaller programme for 2020. A moderate, and I really do mean moderate, trek to Pike Peak and the Solu District on November 1 – 16, followed by the very laid-back Cultural Safari November 21 to December 5. Hope you might consider joining us. I know Kati is doing Pike. Love to see any of you again.

Cheers,
Teresa didi (and Ekki bhena)

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