

Trekking with Teresa

Trek Report. – Langtang October 2014



I arrived in Kathmandu on a really hot morning. Tried to shrug off my jetlag with a few hours' sleep. Set the alarm for five pm and took a taxi over to the old posh area of Lazimpat where I met my friend Julie for a quick bite at Saigon, for great, cheap Vietnamese food. Then we crossed the road to the rather fabulous Shangri La Hotel to meet up with Norma, Gail, Aileen, Karissa and Kerri. Great to make that first contact and wish them well for their trip to Chitwan. I headed off with all their heavy luggage.

Debra came in from Paro in Bhutan, Wayne came in from Melbourne and then Melanie and Christiane from Cologne. Denise joined us from Pokhara. Barbera came in on the late flight ex Sydney, via Guangzhou. All good so far.

As I write this report on a stinking hot Perth day at my mum's house I am having trouble recalling who came in next. Somehow Mike and Sylvie arrived and Richard and Wendy. We are sixteen including me. It seems like enough.

On the 12th October we all piled into a little bus, though Wayne had a rather more exciting ride on the back of Dorje's bike, and headed into Thamel, the tourist district of Kathmandu. Bit of a 'backpacker's ghetto but handy for all kinds of trekking pre-requisites. Lots of very warm clothing, over pants, jackets, trekking poles, water bottles, hats and gloves. Well kitted-out we took a very leisurely lunch at The Weizen and then met our little bus at the Greenline Depot – though not everyone found it on the first attempt.

MUNA made us daal baht (traditional Nepali food) which we ate in the garden on a beautiful warm evening. We went through the pre-trek briefing which is mostly useful tips on how to keep yourself safe on the trails and how to keep yourself nice in the lodges. The first trek is a big deal so any information you have about what to expect out there is reassuring. However, we had a wealth of trekking experience within the group. Denise and Debra had both trekked recently and in past years, in Bhutan and Ladakh respectively. Richard and Wendy had trekked with me before and Barbera been on so many of our Nepal treks I've lost count.

Late last night I made a rather sudden change of plan as I checked the weather for our region on BBC. A huge cyclone was crossing the coast south of Calcutta and 'heading towards the Himalayas. We will travel to Syabrubensi a day early in case the road gets washed out.

Monday October 13: Five jeeps, late as usual, but it didn't take long to load up and head out. We were out of the Kathmandu Valley within an hour and had a very pleasant drive up with a good lunch break at Trisuli. The weather was overcast which kept the temperature down. Timing was right for a new lodge this season. The old Pottala has had its day I'm afraid. The Sunrise Hotel was a nice surprise with attached bathrooms (mostly) and hot water (for most). It rained like hell all night.

October 14: We opted not to trek today. Really hard rain, thunder and lightning. A visit to the local hydro power station deep underground was an interesting diversion. Still raining at lunchtime.

Allocated the porters after considering pack weights and respective personalities and friendships.

I played Thirteen (our new favourite trekking card game) with Sylvie, Pasang Wayne and then Barbera. Still raining heavily..... The road outside our lodge is a river. Dinner was very tasty and a few drinks helped the evening along. Hotel Sunrise, highly recommended.

October 15: Fab weather greeted us this morning and we set off in great spirits. Sonam, our runner of previous treks, came to say hullo. I'm now wondering why we bought quite so many plastic sheets as it was a hot, sunny walk on the north bank of the Langtang River. All walking really well, if a little fast for me, up to the first tea stop. Really sweating by the second tea stop which was so crowded and smoky that we decided to keep going after a short rest. The marijuana was four metres high in places, which 'some folks' took good advantage of. It can be quite good at altitude when you need some kind of appetite stimulant. Pleasant dreams too.

I was really sweating by the lunch break at Landslide. They showed us some new rooms but I wouldn't change from Bamboo which is further up the trail in a beautiful setting. The lodge at Bamboo is set right beside the raging river with lots of tables and chairs set out on terraces with a beautiful vista down the valley. I found the afternoon quite testing. I walked with Debra and we saw lots of black-faced langur. Nobody in the group is struggling. Lots of hot showers and time to relax on the riverside terrace in the late afternoon. Now this is trekking!

October 16: In high spirits again this morning we set off up the steep forested trail towards Lama Hotel. A brilliant day weather wise but uphill all the way. The forest provided much appreciated deep shade. We sweated blood for a couple of hours. We saw lots of black faced monkeys, the forest rang out with bird song and I heard a little squirrel before I saw it performing for us on a nearby tree trunk. The Langtang River thundered below us all day,



A cuppa at the aptly named Riverside Lodge was most welcome and then lunch at the Jungle View below Rimche was a great veg noodle soup. Must watch the chilli level in future. Arriving at Lama Hotel by 2 pm we sat around in the warm sunshine resting our tired legs. Dinner was cosy in the small dining room with some fine singing from the Nepalis and some not so fine singing from the Bideshi (us) Four much needed new rooms at Lama Hotel were very comfortable.

October 17: Not sure if the trail was a little easier than I remembered today or if was just finding my 'trekking legs' on Day 3. Everyone coping really well. The river is very close to the trail in places and the misty cool breeze emanating from below was a balm. Epiphytic plants, turning bronze with the approach of autumn, garlanded the trees. Glimpses of Langtang Lirung were an inspiration. A hot, sunny lunch at yet another #Riverside Lodge# was a good long break. There were lots of trekkers coming down. The afternoon didn't seem quite so hard with a few flat sections in between the rocky climbs. The worst of the landslides had been repaired since last season.

Gora Tabela hove into view at about 2 pm for the backmarkers as the gigantic rocky ramparts of the Langtang Valley towered over two tiny stone lodges. We tried a Nepali language lesson this afternoon with \Prakash providing much needed pronunciation tips. Hot chocolate went down well. I wrote this in the warm dining room with rum o'clock fast approaching.

October 18: I didn't sleep so well last night. A very thin mattress in the family bedroom of the lodge proprietors. I had to share with mum and the kids so felt a bit awkward getting dressed. There were no other rooms. The cracking sight of Langtang Lirung this morning soon cheered me up.

Easy walking for the first 45 minutes to the army checkpoint and then the first of several old moraines to be climbed before morning tea at Thyangshap. Bright sunshine all day, getting our right arms a bit sunburned. We needed one more tea and biscuits to get us up the last climb into Langtang village where a tasty lunch was very soon on the table at the Sunrise Lodge. We were still on track for a two night stay here so everyone relaxed and generally caught up with themselves today. It is great acclimatisation at 3550 metres.

October 19: Our free day at Langtang seemed to consist mainly of showers, shampoos and laundry.....and eating!! The small local cheese factory and bakery was just behind our lodge and the cheese and tomato toasties proved as popular as ever.

October 20: The walk from Langtang to Kyanjin Gomba is not that hard BUT everything feels like a bit of an effort over 3500 metres. It is a steepish ridge (terminal moraine) out of the village but the trail soon levels off as we walk beside a very long, ancient Mani wall piled high with carved prayer stones. I would have liked an earlier tea stop but Dorje pushed on while the going was easy. Our first stop was the planned picnic lunch of local cheese, fresh bread rolls and hot tea, finished off with yak butter cookies. M-m-m-m-m.

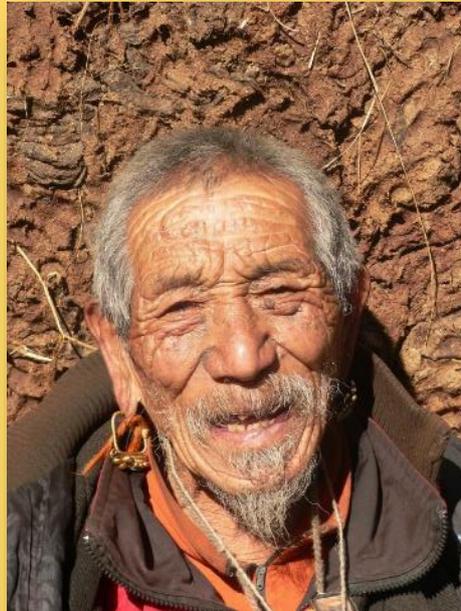
It was a bit of a slog after lunch but we didn't really struggle. Slow and steady with the altitude really starting to tell at the end. We mostly just recovered this afternoon. Nirup's new Norling Lodge is fabulous. Quite a lot of attached bathrooms and a magnificent dining room on the top floor where the sun streams in through the windows in the afternoon. Nice one Nirup!





October 21: After a fortifying breakfast we headed up the valley in glorious sunshine. We planned to stay at Kyanjin Gomba for three nights so that this was just a day trip. Mike and Wayne opted to go #all the way# to Langshisha KHARKA but the rest of us went about two thirds of the way, stopping often to admire the views which were stunningly clear today.

Chapattis, tasty cheese and a boiled egg each made a lovely picnic with hot tea from the thermos. The weather turned very suddenly and by the time we got close to Kyanjin Gomba it was snowing into a biting wind. Happy to get in ahead of the worst at 2.30. By 5 pm the weather cleared beautifully. Cosy night in the dining room playing Thirteen.



October 22: Huge climb today. Kyanjin Ri, the first peak, is 4400 metres above sea level and it really felt like it. Two hours – straight up! Everyone made it. The views were AMAZING, especially as we crested the ridge to see another gigantic glacial valley falling away at our feet. I'd been to Kyanjin Gomba many times but this was my first ascent of Kyanjin Ri. Rather pleased with myself and the crew, bloody well done you lot! Meanwhile Norma and Aileen walked out to the glacier valley from the lower trail and enjoyed it enormously.

Too tired after our climb for anything much after lunch, most of us visited the Dorje Bakery which is still fantastic. I ate too much rye bread with grilled cheese and have had to skip dinner. The lodge was jam-packed tonight. Three nights here is great to really explore the valley but we will be happy to get moving again tomorrow. The new lodge is a wonder. My own room is a little cold, and sunless on the ground floor BUT it has an attached bathroom with a pristine white western toilet. A real treat.



October 23: Heavenly day today. Downhill in glorious sunshine. We stopped for some yak yoghurt with honey but it wasn't as thick and creamy as the one I had on the way up. The Sunrise Lodge at Langtang welcomed us back for a beautiful deal baht lunch. They also made me a special treat of Tibetan soup with, light as air potato dumplings in it. Delicious.

The trekking was rather hot in the gullies and we were out on the trail for most of the day today. We covered in one day downhill what took two days to ascend. I brought up the rear with Barbara and we were walking in the cool twilight by the end of the day. A huge group of langours entertained us near the checkpoint. A local man said there were about fifty in the group.



The boys built a big bonfire in the garden of the lodge tonight and it was great to spend a couple of hours in the warm glow of, the fire while, the Nepalis sang every folk song they knew. We hardly wanted to go inside when dinner was called.

October 24: A steep descent through the forest today. Great to be back amongst so much greenery and noisy birds after the rocky wastes of the higher altitude. A bit hard on the legs going downhill.... All day. We had lunch at Lama Hotel and were then re-united with our stored gear. (No need to take lightweight clothes and dirty washing up and then back down again). We spent a frustrating ten minutes trying to fit it all back into our rucksacks.

It was quite hot after lunch, back around 2.000 metres, as we trekked endlessly downhill on moist forest trails. Back at the Bamboo Lodge we had the usual problem of not enough rooms – they only have eight rooms. I took a rather chappy room in the next lodge but it had an electric light and a soft new pillow. Mustn't grumble. After dinner local youngsters came to the door singing traditional festival songs for Diwali. We gave a little cash and joined in the singing.

October 25: We were quickly away this morning, garlanded with marigolds. After a quick cuppa at Landslide we tackled the big climb up to Thulo Syabru. The first section is a steep climb on stone stairs through bamboo thickets. The trail is well-made and we did it before the sun hit the hillside. The proprietor of the tea shop at the top of the ridge was a very drunken, though harmless, local lama. I've seen him sober and he is a delightful man. It is the festival season. Our own guys made the tea.





Along the sunny ridge was fairly easy and then we scrambled down a slippery gravel trail to a long suspension bridge. Across the valley we descended into deep, shady jungle once more. The trail finally climbed steeply up onto a cultivated ridge. We came upon our usual tea stop and found the Didi at her traditional loom while her kids played nearby. A bit hot for tea so we had coke and sprite. A small luxury! We were pretty dead beat by the time we reached Thulo Syabru and it is a long uphill schlep through the village to our lodge. I can't recall who met us at the bottom of the village and took our daypacks but it was a blessing. Me, Barbera and Denise plodded rather mournfully up to the Snowfall Lodge, what a welcome sight that was. Good food, great rooms with thick mattresses and, best of all, gas hot showers. Two days here will be easy to handle.

October 26: Long, lazy day washing clothes, reading, eating and 'watching our clothes dry' on the rooftop terrace. Superb views though.

In the evening we sang and danced in the courtyard; still celebrating Diwali. Around ten pm there was a ghastly disturbance. We were just turning in, the music was off, when our neighbour at the Blue Star started banging the hell out of something. When one of our group complained our lodge owner, Chimi Dorje Lama, went to demonstrate but was chased back inside by a drunken, knife-wielding maniac from next door. Dhan Raj saved the day by disarming the man. Dragged off by his wife the drunken idiot then found a huge stone and heaved it through the kitchen window where the women and kids were cowering. A horrid business.

October 27: 'Happy Birthday' rang out in the courtyard this morning as Melanie descended to breakfast. I left a detailed witness statement about last night's madness and we headed off up the big, hill to Choprang Danda. This is possibly the hardest climb of the whole, trek. A steep zigzag track up to the first tea shop and then more of the same till the forest. Almost as steep inside the forest but shady at least. The local military had investigated last night's incident and asked Dhan Raj and Lahar to stay behind.

After what feels like an endless maize of zigzag paths up the last ridge we reached our lunch place. As soon as we arrived the clouds rolled in and the temperature plummeted. The food was almost cold on the plates by the time it reached the table but we were so hungry we fairly bolted it, down. I was told then that Dhan Raj and Lahar were being detained in Dunce at the local police headquarters. Bugger!

A practical inconvenience for me and Melanie whose bags were still languishing in Thule Syabru but I was sure it was really frightening for Dhan Raj. The police in Nepal do not have a great reputation. The villain of last night's incident had apparently gone to the police at first light with a rubbish story about Dhan Raj 'stealing' a knife from his house. It is possible that money changed hands.

One of my other concerns was that our entire remaining trek budget was in the left behind rucksack. Kings, our best ever runner, called, two mates in Thulo Syabru who happily carried our bags up to Sin Gomba. It was an easy walk into Sin Gomba, quite delightful through forests of cedars and rhododendrons but I couldn't really enjoy it till I heard how 'my boys' were. Luckily, I had a message to call Prabin Pokrel, police chief down at Dunce. The first thing he said was 'Don't worry please, your guys are being released right now. They will be with you in the morning'. Phew.

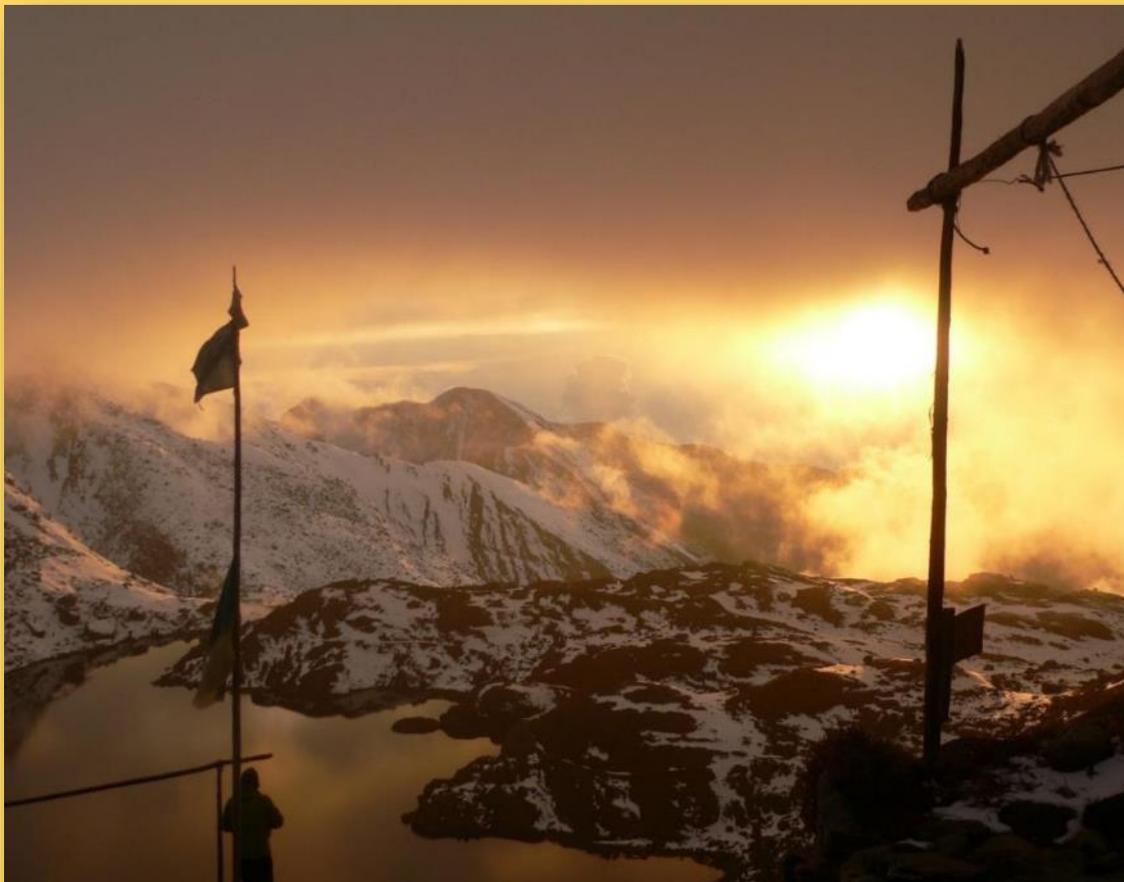
Hugely relieved, we checked into the Green View. There had been some confusion about lodge bookings – same family, shared phones – but the old lodge had its positive aspects. The toilet was huge and extremely well ventilated as it was only partially roofed. The dining room was a ripper and the stove was soon going like a train. We sat around with a drink tonight while one of the boys after another sang songs and played on an old blue guitar which they had carried up the huge hill today with our bags. Nice one guys.

October 28: I was personally feeling much happier today as I knew Lahar and Dhan Raj were on their way up to join us. The walk from Sin Gomba to Challangpatti for lunch is a treat. The trail is sandy and flats on a sunny ridge at first and then goes gently uphill through soaring pine forest. Lunch was rather early and most of us had, the veg noodle soup, jazzed up with wild dried mushrooms. Dhan Raj and Lahar showed up right on cue. I can't describe how happy I was to see them both.

The climb up after lunch to Laurabinayak is brutal but mercifully short. I recalled from past years that they were often stingy with the firewood up here so we all collected some pieces on the way. We burned our own wood till 8 pm. Well done guys!

Spent the evening snuggled in round the fire with hot drinks. Very clear night with the Ganesh Himal glowing faintly in the moonlight.

October 29: It is quite a hard climb up to the Binayak temple above Laurabinayak at any time. Today we walked on snow! The views were stunning with Thulo Syabru and Dunche easily visible two thousand metres below. It was way too chilly for a long break so we bolted a few crackers and cheese and quickly pushed on. In the shelter of the Gossainkund Valley it was much warmer. The sun and the clouds kept coming and going alternately revealing and then hiding one lake after another. There were lots of blue genitals this season and the rocks were splattered with lichens in acid yellow and glowing red.





Our lodge here is rustic but Peaceful is definitely the pick of the bunch because the loo is inside and not outside over an icy path. Sadly, the stove took ages to get going tonight so it was a very chilly evening indeed. By the time the dining room warmed up a bit Christiane was asleep. Melanie, somewhat reluctantly I suspect, agreed to sleep on the dining room settees so they dragged their sleeping bags in and snuggled in for the night. I wore lots of clothes to bed and was never cold. I do have a 'minus 25' sleeping bag though.



October 30: We had a very lovely, easy and scenic walk down through Laurabinayak and Challangpatti back to Sin Gomba. Another one of my favourite days. Downhill in great weather to a good lodge. The day didn't start that way. As Lahar and I were we became aware of a young Israeli girl called Gil. She was wandering, disorientated around the village. I ascertained quite quickly that she was really struggling with the altitude. Her pulse was barely discernible. She had ascended quickly carrying her own pack yesterday. Bad planning! She was properly insured and had a credit card. No worries. Lahar organised the chopper while I got a hot, sweet cup of tea and a Diamox into her. We paid her hotel bill and left when we heard the chopper whirring up the valley. (I've since seen her in Kathmandu; she spent three days in hospital but was fine when I saw her). Amazingly, she had already been choppered off Throng La in the October 14 debacle.

The snowy descent was dodgy in places but the fresh snow offered better grip than yesterday's icy patches. We had another sunny lunch in Challangpatti, only occasionally interrupted by the phone on a plinth in the middle of the yard. It wears a blue plastic tent on bad weather days. I dawdled back to Sin Gomba with Chris, Mel and Barb. Too nice a day to spend indoors.

The Yak and Nak Lodge has mostly attached bathrooms – though, sadly, not my room. I did try for a lukewarm rinse off but with a huge gap under the door letting in a bitter breeze, I didn't hang about.

The stove in the dining room was going early and flats out. Lots of trees down here. Our boys were in high spirits with most of the hard work done. A lot of singing and dancing tonight, and a few Khukri rum and cokes too. Slept like a log on two mattresses. Heaven!

October 31: It was a long, long way down today. 1300 metres of vertical descent – and it felt like it. I made a rather obsessive effort to land on my heels with each football and it paid off. I was tired as we walked into Dunche but not as utterly stuffed as usual – i.e. I could still walk!

I caught up with the area chief of police who turned out to be rather charming. He told me that he had Dhan Raj figured as the 'good guy' the moment he clapped eyes on him. I let him know, fairly emphatically that some of his junior officers had not behaved professionally.

My room at the Mountain View lodge was warm and sunny so I didn't care about the bathroom (lack of). Lahar made me a coffee and brought me a Snickers. Hey, I earned it!

We had a rowdy sing-along after dinner. All extremely pleased with ourselves. Kyanjin Gomba, Kyanjin Ri, Gossainkund. Everyone did **Everything**. That could be a first.

November 1: It is a rather long jeep ride back to Kathmandu. Though the scenery is mind-blowing I think we had all 'had enough' by the time we reached Kathmandu. It was so good to be back at MUNA's or Shambala. You know you are in a fancy joint when they have toilet paper – and you are allowed to put it in the toilet!

We dined at the Shambala. A bit of a challenge at any time but even more so with eighteen diners at one table. With hindsight I can see that I was a 'bit frazzled' (it's a technical trekking term) so here is my chance to say sorry if I was a bit more than snappy. We managed to eat and drink well with Isabel and Netra for company.

November 2: Richard and Wendy were collected by Nepali friends which meant that the rest of us just about fitted into the bus to Swayambunath Rames, Bir and Lahar were also there.... And was that Lucy?

The temples were interesting though Lucy had her drink snatched by a monkey who leapt on her. Definitely not nice. We walked down to Fine Grains at Kimdol Bazaar. Luckily the group pointed out that we didn't have Denise. Thanks for that. We had excellent coffee and cakes (ooh- ah lava cake) and then visited my friend Bina's little silver jewellery shop. We then split into targeted shopping gangs. Getting serious now. I took Christiane, Melanie, Barbera, Sylvie, Denise and Debra in two taxis, always a risk, to Grace at Sherpa Mall in Durbar Marg. Colourful, up market Nepali ladies gear.

We then ambled over to Thamel for some serious souvenir hunting. Hemp hats, merino wool on silk shawls, felt toys and bags, cool t-shirts, bells, singing bowls, jewellery, scarves, prayer wheels..... you get the picture. Wayne bought a military Ghurkha knife.

We gathered at The Roadhouse at 5.30 where about eight of our porters materialised. Even Dorje showed up after a frustrating day at the airport trying to get medical supplies through customs for the clinic at Pattale. We demolished a lot of food, our guys favouring the tandoori chicken pizza. The brownie, sizzler with ice cream was the most popular desert. Special 'well done' to Gail (auntie gail). Kerri left us earlier today and was missed at dinner. Nobody got lost on the way back to the Greenline terminal. We finished our leftover wine at Muna Cottage reminiscing on a great trek.

November 3: Leaving Day and my regular taxi driver Santos was kept busy all day. It started at 7.30 with Denise and then Wendy and Richard at 9.30. At 1.45 here was a jeep full and then I dropped off Chris and Mel at 1 pm. Traffic was woeful but they were only ten minutes late. I thought I was in good time for Jette but somehow we missed each other and Jette took a taxi who thought that Muna Cottage was in Thamel. Oh dear! I waited at the airport for a long time but finally heard that Jette had turned up at Muna's with a fairly hefty taxi bill. All's well that ends well!

Gail and Karissa had a 9.30 taxi so we made the most of the evening with one last trip to Bouda. Chicken thika mascara with naan bread. Yum! Sad to say the last farewell tonight. Barbera is 'staying on' and Jette is already here. The next group is starting to happen already.

No news yet but I imagine most of you are safely home by now as I write this on 5 November. I am lying low with a chesty cough trying to get the next trek organised from my bed on the laptop. I am struggling a bit with Windows 8.1 (still am actually).

Your group, was my biggest group ever. While it was a little unwieldy at times the joy of having so many Nepalis on board was obvious. The fact that EVERYONE did EVERYTHING was extremely gratifying and not typical. Thank you all for making it so much fun. I do hope some of you will come back for more in the future.

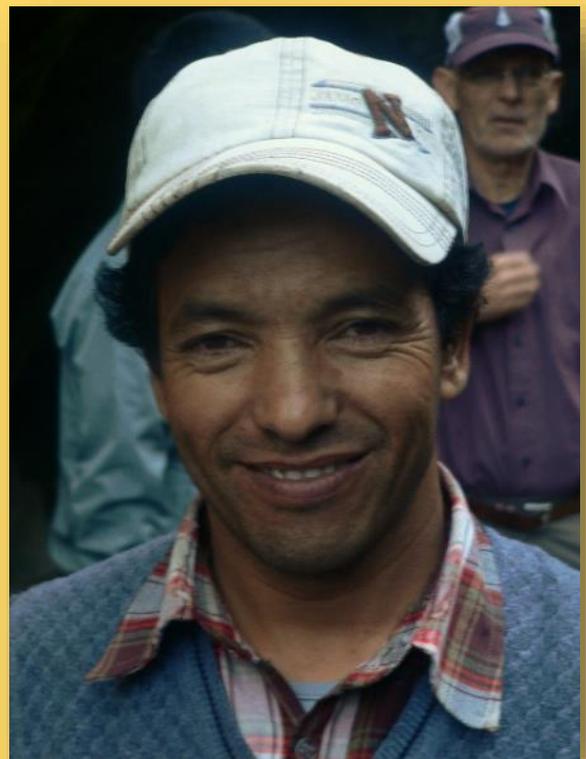
Cheers,

Teresa didi



Here are a few of the fabulous guys who made it all possible....







See you next time.....

PS I've just finalised this report, for general circulation anyway, on a hot February day in Melbourne. I will have it edited and prettied up for printing and send the booklets out to you all later. Meanwhile, there is plenty of room on our next Langtang expedition which gathers in Kathmandu on April 7 this year. It is not too late so get your skates on if you, or someone you love, really needs a holiday with a difference. Full itinerary on www.slowtrekking.com on the Upcoming Treks page. Or email me at vonschwichtenberg@gmail.com. Or give me a call; I am in Melbourne till March 29 on 0452 233 607. **YOU CAN DO THIS!**