

# TREKKING WITH TERESA

ANAPURNA TO MUKTINATH AND BEYOND TO UPPER MUSTANG & LO MANTANG 2015



**October 26:**

I'd had a couple of days to overcome the jetlag; harder with every passing year I find. I'd sorted my own gear and a case load of op-shop gear for the guys. I'd picked up Jette and established contact with everyone. We were 'good to go'.

Huge circuit of pick-ups today, starting with a motorbike ride into town with Deepak. I picked up Deb and Denise in Thamel and met up with Lucy. I settled them into the Shambala which has definitely gone downhill. Around town lots of businesses are closed, partly due to the Deshain festival but also due to the lack of gas and fuel. I saw long petrol queues; there is a blockade at the Indian border caused by political tension with the Mhadeshi community over the new Nepali constitution.

Having six people on the Thai flight made my job a lot easier. Wayne, Cam, Faseny, Kerri, Barb and Maureen. All except Kerri were squeezed into Muna Cottage. Definitely owe Kerri a favour after parking her in the least appealing room at the Shambala. We ate at Ramsterdam, again; two hours for ten veggie burgers....plus rats! Still, it was open and we got fed. Big moon lit the way home.

**October 27:**

Ram drove us into Thamel in the Hi-ace along with our fellow French guests (they are in the rooms I booked!). A long troll around Thamel for banking and gear shopping saw us all kitted out and ready to go in time for a smashing pizza lunch at The Roadhouse where my mate Julie, who lives here, joined us.

I managed to do the admin stuff in the background. The Aussie dollar is 'in the toilet' while the US dollar is ridiculously over-valued (in my humble opinion) having a very negative impact on our costs this

year. Also the government in Nepal now wants 13 percent on everything, including their own \$US500 permit for Upper Mustang. I'd mind less if the government was not so corrupt. Where does this money go????

Pre-trek briefing was held in the garden under a huge yellow moon. We made our own 'pic-nic' dinner with plenty of Australian red wine. Writing this at eleven pm I think I might be ready to hit the road tomorrow. Bring it on!

October 28:

Smooth sailing all the way to Pokhara with Ram at the wheel. His uncanny sixth sense regarding oncoming traffic continues to astound. Buffet breakfast at a slightly-improved Hamlet and then so little traffic we only stopped for cold drinks once. The new drink stop place was rather nice with pretty gardens overlooking the confluence of the Trisuli (brown) and the Marshyangdi (green) rivers. I ran around doing 'my thing' till we all met for dinner at The Boomerang. We were joined by Dorje, Ram, Kancha, Bir and Lahar. It was Jette's birthday, cake and everything. The full moon over the lake I'd been hoping for was barely in evidence behind the clouds but the cultural show was quite good, though their rendition of Happy Birthday was a bit ponderous. Sorted and packed till late but I do believe we are all ready for the big first day tomorrow. Lakefront Hotel is a winner. Thanks Lahar.

October 29:

It was still, raining at breakfast time after pouring all night. Sue and Liz came to say bye-bye and sample the excellent coffee at our place. Lizzie has a new porter, Anil. Seems like a keeper. It rained all the way to Nyapul but we set off in a very light drizzle in high spirits. At least it wasn't hot and the road was far from dusty – a bit too far in places. Lunch at the Everest Lodge in Sudame was delicious, especially the home made achar. Cam faded terribly after lunch and only just made it into the lodge. Do hope he's better tomorrow. The rain was a bit of a downer but now everyone is dry and happy drinking tea on the undercover veranda. I may have over-estimated our coffee requirements 4 x 500g!!



## Lunch at Sudame

This is how, the team partnered up with the Nepali staff:

Teresa with Kancha, Denise with Bir, Kerri with Akal, Jette with Ramesh and Lucy with Ram as per previous treks. Barb and Maus had Samir and Lachman, Debra had Karma (good karma), Wayne had Pasang (a perfect match up), and Cam and Fasenya had Bharat and Ika. Lahar is our guide till Kagbeni and Dorje the guide in Upper Mustang.

October 30:

My new MP3 worked a treat with my tiny JBL speaker last night as we tried, quite successfully, to recall all the rules of 13, our favourite card game on trek. Thanks Jackson. We all slept well though it rained most of the night. We set out this morning in warm, overcast conditions. The sun broke through just as we started up the 3380 steps to Ulleri. Arrived at Ulleri surprisingly early with a fresh breeze at our backs. Cam stayed ahead of Denise and me all morning, which was not hard. After a typical noodle soup lunch with my feet up, my hip still felt like it was dislocated though almost certainly just a bit inflamed after all those stone stairs. I reached Banthanti by rising on the left leg only but by dinner time could barely walk even with a stick. A lovely hot fire and good food cheered everyone and most had a hot shower. Great new lodge choice, thanks Dorje. The old Green View lodge had a slightly unnerving lean into the valley and I didn't reckon the recent earthquake would have improved the stability of the building. I admit to being a tad nervous after last April's major quake and didn't want to stay anywhere even slightly dodgy in the construction department.

October 31:

Everyone in great shape this morning apart from the odd cold. I, on the other hand, could hardly walk and seriously considered going down and around the Gorepani hill by bus/jeep or whatever to Tatopani. A horse was the answer and after a long wait Tika was led up the hill. He was a beauty; white, sturdy and sure-footed though I'd never ridden so steeply up and downhill before. I got in around 2 pm but the group had arrived by lunchtime. Great going. We are at the Sunny Lodge in Gorepani, the sun is shining here and there and the peaks of Anapurna South and Daulaghiri are coming and going in and out of the clouds. For a while there was a rainbow in the lush green valley below us. Altogether delightful.



Waiting for Tika at Banthanti

November 1:

Last night we had one of those great nights the Sunny Lodge is famous for. Jette found a bottle of French Bordeaux (or two), we ate delicious Malai Kofta (highly recommended next group!) and we danced with our porters and fellow trekkers to a great sound system. A mix of traditional Nepali folk songs, Hindi pop and western rock. By 9.30 it was all over so it was no trouble to wake the group at 5.30 for a sunrise climb up Pun Hill. 400 metres in the pre-dawn light for a spectacular light show over the Himalayas. Good on you people. Denise, Barbara and I opted for a lie-in and a leisurely breakfast with views to die for. I'd looked out of my bedroom window during the night to see the peaks seemingly floating in the almost full moonlight.



It was an easy day's trekking downhill through rhododendron woods and then farmland. Past adorable cottages wreathed in morning glory, marigolds and chrysanthemums. We had a very pleasant lunch stop in the garden of Serendipity Lodge and then just an hour further on to Sikha. Too many of us for the Moonlight Lodge so most of the group are down the road though half the porters are here. My hip gave me an inordinate amount of grief today. Drugs and a couple of days off it should do the trick.



### November 2:

A long, hot downhill trek today through lush farmland during full-on harvest. We saw baby buffalos, drying vegetables and seeds of every kind. Huge flocks of goats were herded past us. I made it down by hitching a ride in a truck. Five guys in the cabin, nothing to hang onto and the worst road imaginable. By Tatopani the group were 'feeling their legs' a bit so we've decided to take our rest day here tomorrow. Warm climate, nice lodge, hot springs. Why not. Balmy evening so no need for a fire. Nepali kids are playing music in the courtyard as I write this. No crowds this season. A bit like the old days.



### November 3:

Lazy day off. Some of the group did a morning walk with Dorje. We washed our clothes and then spent the afternoon watching them dry in the warm Autumn sunshine. Must have been 24 degrees.

### November 4:

Disastrous start this morning when none of our Nepali staff woke up to make bed tea to wake us. Checked my watch groggily; 6.45. Hells bells! I shouted out to Dorje or Lahar who peered rather sheepishly out of the dorm window to blame the juniors who were rostered on for bed tea. Most of my group were in the dining room eagerly awaiting their pre-ordered 6.30 breakfast. I put a rocket under a few people and they were away by 7.15. Some amused. Some not. I'm giving my hip one more day off and joining the group by bus tomorrow. Not particularly looking forward to that. The group made great time on one of the longest days. They used the jeep road which was almost deserted due to the fuel shortage. They loved the lodge at Ghasa; their first 'hot table'.



#### November 5:

My bus ride was great. Plenty of room with just three passengers. It forms an unofficial delivery service so bags of grain, jerry-cans of raksi (local hooch), even a small child were handed over to the driver with delivery instructions. The road was diabolical (well, I thought so because I hadn't been to Upper Mustang). Arrived at the fab See You Lodge just as the group were tucking into their lunch. A cosy night around a very hot 'hot table' playing cards while it rained all night.

#### November 6

Clear enough for a few sunrise photos this morning. I was bundled into the bus in great haste when it arrived half an hour early this morning. Whoops of delight as I found Dines and his kids Sophie and Simon on board. I'd missed them by skipping Eagle Nest at Ghasa yesterday. Met the group for lunch at Larjung. Slow but delicious spring rolls. Arrived at Tukucho same time as the group. Most are across the road from our usual Tukucho Guesthouse. Pity, but we are a biggish group this season. They were blown

in on a blustery southerly wind, so typical of the region. All happy to have done a flat day's trekking in bright sunshine.



**A meditation cave near Larjung**



**Sunrise over Anapurna**

#### **November 7:**

The group used the road out of Tukuche and then crossed to the old trail as far as Marpha. I took Cam by jeep. After a long lunch break they blew into Jomsom, quite literally, around 3.30. The Mustang Taj is a beaut lodge with attached bathrooms. We played cards, played music and ate veg. Daal Bhat. Nice.

#### **November 8:**

The group loved the flat walk to Kagbeni today in brilliant sunshine. No jeeps today so I got a lift on a motorbike, Kancha followed on another. Scary but exciting and fun, in retrospect. Kagbeni is a maze of alleyways and crumbling citadel. Red House Lodge for a change though the rooms are 'variable'. Great outlook from upstairs. Horses hard to find. All out working at harvest due to fuel shortages for tractors. Jeeps for Upper Mustang proving elusive. Original plan of jeeping quickly to Lo Mantang, spending time

there and then coming back slowly are unravelling by the minute. Plan now to walk into Chele and source local jeeps. Mostly an issue for me and my dodgy hip.

November 9:

Much to my surprise the group loved their trek up to Jarkot, an altitude gain of 700 metres so quite enough for one day. I took Cam, Faseny and Maus in the jeep with all the bags. We all spent a delightful afternoon on the warm dining terrace of the New Plaza Lodge with pots of tea and biscuits.



Spent a pleasant hour looking around the ruins of Jarkot, then used the great Wi-Fi this afternoon while admiring the changing light on the surrounding peaks all afternoon. Dinner was delicious though the hot table was a bit smoky. We were listening to Deb' iPod music when we heard much singing and laughter coming from the kitchen. In a flash we were all down there singing and dancing our heads off. A great night. My hip is no better for trekking but I can still dance.. Might be time for a new one. Hullo Medicare.



#### **November 10:**

The temple visit to Muktinath was a success in brilliant sunshine though the wind was howling by the time they reached Kagbeni. Everyone looks great for dinner tonight due to masses of solar hot water. Jeeps are proving difficult to source but negotiations continue. All ready for Upper Mustang tomorrow.

#### **November 11:**

Finally, into the previously forbidden kingdom of Upper Mustang. I set out today with Cam, Kancha and Bharat in the jeep. It was not a long walk to Chusang and the group arrived in time for lunch. Great little whitewashed rooms on the roof which were to prove typical of the Upper Mustang lodges. Thick foam mattresses and blankets provided. The scenery defies description. Go to [www.slowtrekking.com](http://www.slowtrekking.com) to see some pictures. Wind-sculptured red cliffs and ancient, crumbling villages. You need to see it for yourselves. After a ramble around the old village of Chuang, we ate in the cosy dining room which consisted of one huge 'dining nook'. Animals everywhere; horses, donkeys, sheep, goats and dogs (friendly). All with bells on. It was noisy. Impressed enough to come back. People a mix of Thakali and Lo-pa. Surprisingly warm with very little wind.



**Chusang, with Chele in the background.**

**November 12:**

**Another stunning jeep ride for me and a great trek for the group. Everyone handling the terrain just fine. Prices per person for the jeep were quite high so I commandeered a whole jeep, took Kancha and Pasang and ALL the bags. Porters happy, customers happy. As I write this we've just walked around the village of Samar and the Gomba, which was closed but offered spectacular views. Can't rate Upper Mustang highly enough. Seeing is believing.**



**November 13:**

**Samar to Ghilling. It was an extremely tough day for the trekkers today, though they seemed to enjoy the challenge. It was just too far from Samar to Shyangbouche for lunch. We will prepare packed lunches next time. Hungry doesn't begin to cover it. Some even took the local jeep from lunch to Ghilling. The caves en route were a big hit. I travelled by jeep with Jette, Kancha and Ramesh. The road was spectacular, over 4000 metres, and we changed jeeps at one impassable section. Ghilling is our most basic lodge so far but still quite adequate. It was Tihar, a local festival which involved a lot of singing and dancing in the kitchen. Local kids came to the lodge and sang their hearts out. Very touching. Ice crystals in the clouds formed weird rainbow effects for most of the day. Beautiful!**



**Waiting for the 'change jeep' half way to Ghilling.**

**November 14:**

**Another huge day with three and a half hours to lunch at Ghami in a beautiful old house belonging to a princess in the Upper Mustang royal family. It was another three to four hours over some high, wild terrain to Tsarang. I took Lucy in the jeep today. We had a great day. The old lodge here is a gem.**



**November 15:**

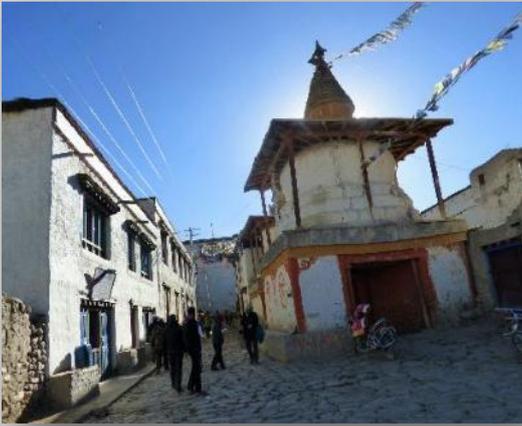
This morning we explored the village and the ancient gumpa, which is at least five hundred years old. I was deeply moved by the serenity of the old monastery and the surrounding landscape was magical. Jeeping into Lo Mantang, the capital of the kingdom, didn't take more than an hour on a rather precarious road. However, I could see that it might easily take more than the predicted 3 hours to trek in. As I write this in the rustic but comfy Himalaya Lodge Kancha has filled my daypack with chocolate bars and biscuits and headed out on foot to meet the group. We don't want another episode of the Shyangbouchen 'fade-out'. More later. Lo Mantang looks amazing from outside the walls but it is very cold in the shade.

The group staggered in from 1pm onwards. Under four hours at the front but four and a half hours for the tail-enders. It had been a grim trek, surprisingly hot and very dusty. After a reviving lunch we head into the town. It was stunning. A maze of chortens, stone walls, massive entry gates, the palace and at least three ancient monasteries (Gomba). This evening the dining room couches had heavy fleece blankets and an electric heater. Veg. pizza was excellent.



#### **November 16:**

**After a leisurely breakfast in the extremely rustic kitchen, the only warm room in the house, we were guided around town by two guys involved in the renovations of the 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century monasteries. The scale and the detail of the restoration work, was phenomenal. The oldest Gomba was a beautifully-sunlit pillared space on the scale of a European cathedral. The wall paintings were being meticulously cleaned and, in places, touched up, revealing a breadth of detail I had never seen anywhere else before. Cows and horses roam freely in the alleyways that connect the town. The younger families have gone south to India for the winter where they will trade rare medicinal herbs from here. I was told that they also buy clothing in the Punjab on the way to Varanasi where they sell it at the 'Tibetan' market. The older folks, especially the women, could be seen carrying heavy water cans or sitting in the sun, spinning sheep and yak wool. Anything to avoid the cold shade. We cosied up for dinner with blankets and the trusty electric heater. A few tots of rum helped a lot.**



#### **November 17:**

**Breakfast in the kitchen and then pile on all your warmest clothes for a horse ride to Chosar caves. A very chilly wind from the north this morning but it settled down to nothing within an hour. I'm still nursing my painful hip so, after seeing off the group on Tibetan saddled sturdy ponies I've settled in the kitchen with some yak wool, and a big bodkin to darn my socks. More when the group gets back.....**

**The looks on everyone's faces as they dismounted, tired and happy at around 4 pm said it all. Despite aching limbs, unused to riding, 'best day ever' and 'best day of my life' were two of the comments I overheard. The cave complex was four stories high inside, though some crawling and striding over deep gaps seems to have been involved.**

**Lots of input tonight from the group and the staff on how to proceed back to Kagbeni. Dorje felt that today's visit to Chosar caves had been so impressive that an 8-hour trek out to Drakmar was no longer worthwhile. We agreed that the group would trek back to Tsarang, which we had barely skipped through for lunch on the way up. I'd jeep down with Kancha and all the bags.**



#### November 18:

**“The best laid plans.....”** Kancha and I headed out, ahead of the pack, at 8 am, bought two tickets for the shared jeep and loaded the bags on the roof. It was then that we were shown the 6” of bench space and even less for Kancha. I have lost a few kilos in the past couple of years but there was still no way that my broad beam was going to fit in the allotted space. Our fellow passengers looked equally horrified. It was almost \$40 for me and Kancha OR \$75 for a ‘reserved’ jeep of our own. A no-brainer. I took all the bags (luckily all of our group had not yet set off) and added Denise, Debra, Bir and Karma. Fabulous! We caught up with Wayne at the first high pass and the rest of the trekkers soon joined us there. We put up prayer flags for ‘Aunty Gael’ and then set off for the one-hour jeep ride to Tsarang at a much-appreciated sedate pace. By 1 pm Jette, Wayne, Ramesh and Pasang were in the lodge and the rest soon followed. This morning’s blustery wind had died even before we left Lo Mantang and it was yet another perfect, sunny day.

#### November 19:

A jeep for me (again) and a great day’s trekking for the group. The rooms at Ghami were a ramshackle arrangement of little ‘cells’ built around a terrace on the roof of an old palace. Not a palace as we would know it, just the most substantial house in the village. Since we had skipped through Ghami briefly for lunch on the way up we all went out to explore the village more fully in the afternoon. We ambled around the medieval laneways. We saw dozens of horses cantering in from their day of free ranging. Not sure what they found to eat in these barren hills. Donkeys and cows meandered around, eventually

standing patiently at their own front doors. We were shown a charming orchard of apple, apricot and walnut trees. It doubles as a campground for tourists. Delicious apples too. We spotted an injured baby bat but we couldn't help it.

Too cold in the chilly dining room, we were invited to dine in the enormous warm kitchen where a traditional cooking fire, a gas range and an old Chinese cast iron stove generated a cosy atmosphere. The food was great and the cards were hot. Four 'choppers' and two 'super choppers' in one night. How did you do that Deb? Voodoo?



**November 20:**

3 jeeps, full, set off for Kagbeni this morning. We took a break for a cuppa in the walled apple-garden at Shyangbouchen. About half way we had to change jeeps to get over a particularly poor section of road. All bags off-loaded, walked about 1 kilometre and then reload onto waiting jeeps. Great to get out for a stretch. There were some other poor stretches of road but, somehow, we managed, extremely carefully.



**That's Barb, trying hard NOT to look out of the window.**

The weather got warmer as we drove South and by Chusang it was almost too warm to sit in the sun for lunch. After lunch most of the group wanted to trek out to Kagbeni, the last leg in Upper Mustang. Driving in the jeep with Wayne, Denise, Bir and Pasang the drive seemed endless. Conferring with Kancha I thought it advisable to send a jeep back for our tired trekkers. It was not that well-received. They loved the walk though I still maintain they would not have come in before it got dark. After hot showers all round and then excellent veg lasagne sitting round a hotter-than-hot table we are a very happy band of campers.

**November 21:**

As the walk to Jomsom is almost totally flat and it's also a half-hour walk from the jeep station to the lodge near the airport, the porters actually carried the packs today.. Because Kancha and I had the reserved jeep to ourselves we felt free to pick up locals along the way. We were full by the time we reached Jomsom. The Mustang Taj is as comfortable as ever.

**November 22:**

We had to wait nearly two hours for our flight this morning as it was apparently a bit cloudy in Pokhara. Our flight down was perfect, as was the coffee on the sunny terrace of the Lakefront Hotel. Shopping, resting and massage filled the day easily.

**November 23:**

More of the same today. It was always a 'spare' day and we hadn't needed it. This evening we arranged to meet at our usual pizza place but it was shut and we ended up at Café Olive with all the porters. Great food and good company.



**November 24:**

The comfy bus, ably driven by Ram, made the trip back to Kathmandu quite pleasant. A really long break at Riverside Springs Resort certainly helped. Reached Muna Cottage around 5 pm. French people in our 'booked' rooms – again, but we managed to squeeze into the six remaining rooms. The gas shortage is really biting hard now and the menu at Shambala is severely restricted. Still, what they made was tasty.

**November 25:**

We had a really slow breakfast today. A production line of French Toast with Fried Tomatoes. Late in the morning Ram drove us into Thamel, the tourist district. We lunched at The Roadhouse; wine, salad, Lavazza coffee and wood-fired pizza. Love that place. Driving home after 4pm we did a quick turnaround

and walked over to Bouda. It was a special full moon with hundreds of butter lamps and monks chanting. We ate on the rooftop terrace of the Stupa View. Walking home through darkened streets we had a chance to reflect on our experience. Indeed it had been good. We already miss Kerri, Denise and Lucy who have opted to stay 'downtown'.

November 26:

A long, slow farewell breakfast, with visitors, and then off to the airport for Cam, Faseny, Maus, Barb and Wayne. A lazy afternoon of pottering for me. Denise walked over to Bir's house at Gokarna. Only me, Jette and Denise left here at Muna Cottage. The power has just gone off and I think Denise is asleep.

What a great group, what a great trek. While my hip packed up on the Ulleri Steps and Cam's health nearly derailed his trek, we ALL made it – by hook or by jeep! So glad I didn't bail out. See some of you back in Oz..... or next time?

STOP PRESS!!! We now have at least 3 members for a late October start to DO IT ALL AGAIN. Contact me on 03 93153505 till the end of February or email me at [vonschwichtenberg@gmail.com](mailto:vonschwichtenberg@gmail.com) or check out [www.slowtrekking.com](http://www.slowtrekking.com) for more details. Pics tomorrow, itinerary soon. Cheers! Teresa.

Some of the guys who made it possible:





