

TREKking WITH TERESA

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TREK REPORT – Pattale and the Solu, April 2016

Friday 8 April

Dorje collected our small group, Peter, Lici, Al and Judy from their Singapore flight this afternoon, as I was having a rare 'sickie' with recurring Meniere's. It was a really hot day, such as I had never encountered before in Kathmandu in April. The whole of North east India and most of Nepal was basking in a heatwave so the suggestion of a siesta before dinner went down well. We dined, though the word seems a bit posh for the Shambala, on a balmy evening with Chilean red wine, spicy chicken Sekuwa and Momos.

Saturday 9 April

This morning Netra came by and took the group up to the nearby Kapan Gumpa and to see the busy day-to-day life in our suburb of Faika and especially the Bright Future Project he manages, along with the Dreamland Computer School and the Ketiko Sewing Project. It was another really hot day. We had discovered a new eatery near Muna Cottage, our homestay in Kapan, and it was a good choice for cold beers and great momos after schlepping around in the heat all morning. Later, I did a gear check with the individual trekkers, held a pre-trek briefing and



then, around dusk, we headed over to Bouda. The ancient stupa is still pretty much 'deconstructed' after last April's earthquake but the atmosphere was lovely after dark. We ate at the Garden Kitchen. Their little upstairs shop with its collection of Thini pottery did very well. Judy found a pretty hat for trekking. I like walking home at night when homes and shops have their lights on inside giving you a much better view of domestic life. Everyone, including kids, is up late on these warm summer nights.

Sunday 10 April

Ram's Hi-Ace took us to Thamel, the tourist/backpacker district of Kathmandu where we did the usual pre-trek chores; banking, gear shopping, last minute supermarket and pharmacy run. We started at the real North Face shop where Peter and Lici bought good new day-packs. A few doors down we found what we were looking for – Thermarest. Sadly, just as expensive as anywhere else but as we are heading into uncharted territory we felt they could be necessary. (They were). Under half a kilo for 2.5 inches of comfort.

We found the rest of our gear fairly easily at the 'North Fake' shops; trekking poles, water bottles, etc. Crocs proved much more elusive. Even a second recce at dusk by our fearless 'croc hunters' proved futile.

Pizza at the Roadhouse was an obvious choice for lunch. We were joined by two bright young women from 'Days for Girls'. They didn't have much to offer in the way of materials but showed us the concept very enthusiastically. We hope to interest Chet Kumari, the female medical officer at Pattale Health Clinic.

I was fading fast by dinner time (still not quite well) so packed hurriedly and crashed. The group seem to have found a little sustenance and cheer at the Shambala. Good on them!

Monday 11 April

A huge day. A very reasonable jeep arrived at 6.30. Breakfast seemed huge for a day on the road. With hindsight, it was a good choice for those who ate porridge, omelettes and chapattis at this ungodly hour. Coffee and a cigarette was not.

The Japanese-built road to Pattale was remarkably good for the first four hours. Even the slightly

narrower Nepali-built road was OK. Then there was a series of heavy-duty roadwork. Quite manageable under normal circumstances but it was 35 degrees and we were all very hungry. (Definitely need a better plan here; earlier getaway, earlier lunch).

Our lunch stop was a shit-hole! No other word for it I am afraid. In a hot, dusty, windswept village we found barely-warm daal baht, served on dirty tables near mucky toilets. The rubbish tip was two metres from the front door. You get the picture. I don't recall the name of this place and I don't want to!

We boarded our jeep, a bit sulkily, at least on my part. The group were rather stoic, bless 'em! Not much later we returned to good bitumen road and the temperature started to cool as we climbed out of the hot valley to rhododendron-studded hills. We stopped at a friendly teahouse, put on sweaters and Dorje made us some real coffee and opened a packet of excellent biscuits. Such happiness and only half an hour to go.

Pattale at dusk looked a treat. Peter and Lici, Al and Judy have rooms not far from Dorje's house at Muna's Lodge. It is rustic but it has foam mattresses and a clean outside loo. I am in Dhan Raj's room at Dorje's parents' house, which is surprisingly modest but has a rustic cosiness. Feeling unwell I crashed early.

Tuesday 12 April

I don't recall much about this day at all. I was as ill as I can ever remember. The group came here for breakfast and then headed off to the Pattale Health Clinic. Peter and Lici have worked with Dorje from the very beginning to fund this project. They were seeing their 'baby' for the first time. I believe they were treated like visiting royalty. Well-deserved.

Meeting with the Village Committee and others at the Medical Centre.

Tuesday 12 April (from Felicity's diary)

At 10.30 the four of us, Peter and I as representatives of the Pattale Health Trust, and Judy and Al as supportive friends, our friend, trekking guide and assistant Dorje, and our porters, headed up the path to the Medical Centre. Our introduction to the effectiveness of the Centre was immediately demonstrated as we encountered on the way Binod the Community Medical Assistant and Chet the

Female Health Worker (whose salaries our Pattale Health Trust provide for), attending to a sick woman in a private home. It was serious and she was put on a drip and helicoptered out to hospital.

Together we made our way to the Clinic which is the upper level of a light and roomy rented building with an office, a waiting room and two consulting rooms, which the Pattale Health Trust supports. Here we were shown around by the Village Committee, about eight individuals, all impressive people who manage the funding and operations of the Clinic. There was also a gathering of interested villagers observing.

This gathering was an opportunity to introduce ourselves, meet the Village Committee (all men of course but I suspect woman have a say behind the scenes), as well as other villagers. We presented the ongoing funding for the next 6 months as well as some medical supplies which we had brought from Australia (supplied by the CFA), which were much appreciated, and it was an opportunity to discuss what was needed for the future so we could determine what might be possible.

Dorje was our translator and he welcomed us on behalf of the Committee and explained to the those gathered how we had met and how the Clinic had evolved through our contact with him and the others involved with the PHT. Binod then showed us the record keeping of all the patients who had come through the Clinic and their ailments. This demonstrated the real need for such a service. The numbers have gradually been building and service not only the Pattale village but many from outlying areas who often come in on market day. For January,

February and March 2016 there had already been 564 patients.

Peter made a small speech saying how pleased we were that the service was helping the village and the region, and that we wished to reinforce the idea that this was a combined effort by the trust and the Village Committee. We felt it was important that they had ownership of the service. Finally, he said how happy we were to be there and meeting them all. The Villagers expressed their appreciation for our assistance and presented us all with many scarves or katta which they draped over our shoulders in the traditional way to thank us. We were very touched by this and happy to have had the opportunity for this meeting. Many photos were taken!

We were also impressed with the CMA Binod, the work he was doing and the way he approached his role. Since our visit, Chet has retired and we now have a new Female Health Worker, a valued assistant for Binod.

Wednesday 13 April – New Year's Day 2073

I had a visit from the medical officer, Binod, last night. Despite feeling like rubbish my vitals are good. Meds. for Sinusitis already affording some relief.

Today is Nepali New Year. Woo-hoo! Our group are out carousing. I have heard music and singing and cheering all day long. Sounded like lot of fun. Obviously, I am writing this the next day as I've started to feel almost human.

Wednesday 13 April (from Felicity's diary)

A beautiful sunny day and windy as usual as the



Akal with his daughter



Lek, a familiar face for so many years now

local politician arrived with a small entourage to attend the celebrations. We made our way along a mountain path through the pines, cedars, silver oaks, rhododendrons, Daphne and some potato crops with Dorje and our porters. There were many happy villagers heading for a special place where a new gomba has been erected. We picnicked on the grass looking down the valley to distant villages and layers of mountains.

There was much music, dancing and food and drink stalls and the revellers, from babies to the elderly seemed to be having such fun. There was also the local sadhu (holy man), giving blessings and pressing tikkas on to foreheads including ours. We were privileged and delighted to be part of it and will always remember the colour and spontaneous happiness of this day.

Thursday 14 April

I am now not the only one with 'health issues' so, luckily, the group are all fine with staying here for one more day. Great that we have the time. Washing lines are groaning under the weight of all our wet

clothes. Lunch was at Rames' house, served by his lovely wife Gita and their daughters Anjuli and Regina. It was delicious. Felt great to have an appetite of any kind and the Meniere's, caused by ear problems, is finally backing off.

The group are currently visiting the local school. It is an altogether well-run little community. It is very mixed ethnically with Tamang, Magar and Sherpa living happily with each other. Apart from our very first morning it has remained very hazy, despite the constant wind. We hope for better views further on. It rained late this afternoon which is a blessing for local farmers. The group stayed at their own lodge for dinner tonight, the rain, hail, and lightning making the five-minute walk to Dorje's place a bit hazardous – though Dorje dashed up there, wearing thongs, to make sure they had supper.

Friday 15 April

A fine sunny morning and no rush to get started as we are trekking barely three hours today. A delicious breakfast this morning as we've finally found a good use for the long-life white sliced trekking bread:



Local kids were a hoot

French toast. Today was the local weekly market so we tarried for an hour. Mattresses, blankets, towels, plastic shoes, clothes, shawls, boots, fruit and veg, pots and pans and live chickens and pigs were just some of the offerings. I found a jacket for young Raj Tamang, a constant companion during our stay. I promised his mum I would help with his school fees in the future if only she would go to the clinic every day to get the dressings changed on her injured leg. No dad in evidence.

In warm sunshine, we finally set off on trek, only to stop for a cup of tea just half an hour down the road. The distant views were very hazy though the villages below the ridge were a picture, looking like a scene from *The Sound of Music*, complete with distant cow-bells. AG's home, in a mainly Sherpa village across the valley, was pointed out. It looked huge. The Sherpa tend to build more impressive houses. We saw many Rhododendrons and Peeris in bloom, a yellow holly and dark whispering pines, their lime green new growth forming a stark contrast.

Leaving the dirt road, we followed a very small 'local trail'. It wound between beautiful stone cottages. We passed lots of folk heading to the weekly market and

quite a lot of them knew our group from the New Year's celebrations. Their market day best clothes of glittering reds and turquoise a bit of a contrast to our trekking greys and khakis.

After a rest at an old stone Chauthara (traditional resting place) the trail descended steeply on stone stairs and the odd broken gully. We had another sit down in the woods, which were fairly open and sunny, before descending once more into Belli Danda. This little village is on the road and the lodge could best be described as 'adequate'. Glad we brought the Thermarests or 'wimp mats' as Al has dubbed them, as the mattresses here appear to be made of wood. I estimate the weight of the pillow in my room at 7kg! The noodle soup and chapattis for lunch were fantastic.

The guests are out for a walk this afternoon as I try to catch up with this diary, comfortably propped up on my new 'wimp mat'. The battery-operated pump did the job in three minutes. Two feet too long and six inches too narrow if anyone at Thermarest GHQ is interested. We tried the Khukri Rum and Coca-Cola tonight, to very good effect.



Local farmer in her beautifully-kept house



Muna at her lodge with Raj – again!!



Very proud goat keeper

Saturday 16 April

We did not get to sleep much before midnight last night. The neighbour chatted, very loudly, on the phone for hours just outside the corrugated iron wall. The owners didn't come to bed till eleven and neither did their kids who seemed to have the run of the corridor as a playroom. I am ashamed to admit that I wished the man downstairs with the hacking cough would just die! Bad karma right there. Woke at first light. No choice at a bustling jeep stop.

The trekking was wonderful today. The descent was a bit hard on the knees but the scenery was exquisite, although clouds hid any distant mountain views. Here and there we used the bitumen road for a short stretch but it was mostly small local trails through terraced fields and farmhouses. We halted for tea at Ram's house. Through his wife's father, Gurkha Welfare are funding a new house after his was lost in the earthquake last year. His kids Roshan and Roshini are beautiful.



Ram's kids Roshan and Roshini

We trekked through a lush gully before lunch, which was at a neat bhatti where BBC World Service was playing on the television. Our planned stop at Jor Bouda, which has a beautiful pair of ancient stupas, had to be abandoned when we found the great-looking lodge closed. The alternative was pretty crappy and Saleri was said to be 1.5 hours away. It was just 2.30 so we decided to go on. Old Saleri Bazaar was a small, neat, Newari village some distance from Saleri itself. I liked it a lot. Saleri was just the opposite. Huge, sprawling, dirty and bustling, it took almost an hour just to walk through it in fading light as the market was packing up. We eventually found a lodge, name unknown, and I would not recommend it to any but the most desperate. The massive dining room had nine (I counted them) matching sofas and there was a warren of pokey little rooms on the floor below. Luckily there were two large, airy rooms on the top floor. Electricity on. Mail checked, phone charged. Lek turned up which was a nice surprise. Dorje seems to know EVERYONE.

Sunday 17 April

Breakfast of omelettes and chapattis was an excellent start to the day. I had not slept more than five hours last night and the rest of our group had not fared much better. At 12.30 last night, the aforementioned couches were noisily rearranged to make beds for the staff on the wooden floor above my room. At 12.45 I went upstairs and read the riot act. 'You! Turn off that TV'. 'All of you shut the f--k up!'. Luckily, most of them did not understand English but they got my drift and fifteen minutes later all was quiet... Until Bir upset the water cooler in the room next to mine. Ho hum.

Today we only had to trek to Phaphlu, just over an hour up the road, so we started with a walk around Saleri. It is a dirty, noisy, crowded but fascinating town. At 10 am we set off for Phaphlu, waving hullo to Lek on his building site along the way. Lahar and I checked out the Laxmi Lodge which would have been a much better alternative. (Next time.) Gas hot



Lalit Bahadur (gentleman)



The Ani Gumpa

showers, attached bathrooms, way better than last night's dump. Who knew?

Phaphlu was a pleasant surprise. A few great looking lodges with fields around them (Sherpa style) and an amazingly good sealed airstrip. Our lodge, The Everest, was a prince among lodges. After almost a week of 'local style' facilities we were in heaven. Thick foam mattresses in clean rooms with clean bedding and HOT SHOWERS. Halle-bloody-lujah!

This afternoon I went for a walk with Dorje, through the village and along the airstrip till we came to an unused Ani Gompa (nunnery). It was beautiful, with richly-decorated windows. An old guy, Lalit Bahadur, led us around the garden where cows and chickens fed contentedly. What a treat.

Dinner was well-cooked. We met Julie Adam, a charmingly independent trekker on her way to a school she supports near Okaldungha. Travelling alone with a guide and a porter. Way to go Julie! Slept like logs in our super rooms.

Monday 18 April

I didn't want to leave my comfy bed this morning but bed tea arrived at 6.30. As soon as I opened my eyes I could see it. Bright, clear blue sky. Woo-hoo! Hurriedly dressed and tore outside. Yes, we have clear mountain views. After a sunny breakfast in the courtyard we set off at 8, but just walked as far as the Ani Gompa at the end of the airstrip. This time we were invited inside; firstly, to the monastery, which had the most beautiful old kitchen. Ancient copper vessels glowed in the shadowy light while an old cast iron Chinese stove dominated the room. There was old Tibetan script chalked on the walls and all kept neat as a pin by Lalit. The gompa itself was another treat. Hundreds of small cast Buddha statues lined the walls of the downstairs. Ascending on an ancient creaking wooden staircase with treads worn smooth over centuries we arrived in a dimly lit prayer hall whose walls were entirely covered in frescoes; unrenovated, in an original subtle colour palette. Dorje lit butter lamps for us. He has a special connection with this gompa where a famous Ani had once helped him when his first boy, Tenzi, was sick.



Al, Judy, Peter and Lici drink mint tea while waiting for lunch

On her advice Dorje had 'renamed' the one month old child Sonam and the baby quickly recovered. Though the Ani died four years ago, her presence could still be felt... we spent an hour there and left feeling uplifted.

The trekking today was wonderful, again. For a while we were very close to the Dudh Khosi. When we climbed out of the valley towards the end of the day the scenery was magical. Pine, rhododendron, walnut, larch and cedar lined the way. Giant black butterflies with segmented red tails flitted across the trail. We saw a lampuchre (long-tail) in flight. Birdsong filled the air. Lunch was at a rainbow trout fish farm. Rather unexpected. Pity they tipped their rubbish into the river at the bottom of the garden.

The village of Jumbesi is lovely and brings us, finally, onto the main Jiri to Everest trekking route. A Sherpa village with a variety of Buddhist monuments dotted all over the place, some damaged by last year's earthquake. Chortens, stupas, Mani walls, prayer flags and gompas. Our lodge was called The

Apple Garden. Name says it all. Pine lined rooms with almost-thick-enough mattresses in a well-made old stone house. Around a hot wood stove in the traditional dining room we finally met regular trekkers; 8 Austrians coming down, 3 boys (Poms/Aussies) going up, a rather odd Swiss youngster. Very cosy dining, with drinks.

Tuesday 19 April

We have opted to stay another night here while we make a day trip to the Gompa at Thupten Chulong. After a leisurely breakfast in the sun (far too cold in the shade) on a stone terrace overlooking the apple garden we did some washing and left it to dry while we headed out at ten.

The walk was beautiful at first and we paused for a while at a clear mountain stream where entertainment was provided by some rather athletic Germans frolicking in their underwear.

It took two hours to reach the monastery, it was hot and the last hour was steep on a dusty jeep trail.



The apple orchard was underplanted with wheat



Peiris



Rhododendron

I found the smoky warren of kitchens and dining halls a bit overwhelming and quickly left Dorje to sort refreshments and then take the group in to the gomba for a blessing. I was surprised that it only took forty minutes to descend. Spent some time in the Jumbesi monastery.

Less trekkers in the lodge tonight. Clement, a Chinese Norwegian of supreme fitness and an older Danish guy. Both descending from the traditional Gokyo/EBC trek; one in 8 days, one in three and a half weeks!

Wednesday 20 April

Breakfast in the same sunny spot this morning and then up, up, up to... well, we didn't decide in advance. Ringmu was an option. The trail was a marvellous mix of lush, almost tropical thickets of bamboo and rhododendron and deeply shaded, quiet pine forest. After an hour or so the trail opened onto a grassy ridge with stunning views back to Phaphlu. A lot of flights over our heads this morning. There was no place to take morning tea today and we had trekked

for three hours when we reached 'Everest View'. It was starting to become cloudy but Thamserku and several other peaks were playing hide and seek. If we stayed the night here we would get great views in the morning. So, we did. We have planned another 6 nights on trek and, since we opted out of PK Peak, not that far to go. We figured a scramble up the steep crag behind the lodge might be rewarding. It was, though I bailed in favour of 'contemplation'. The lodge is small, rustic and nicely-run by an aged Sherpa couple. Our guys helped with the cooking. Great food tonight. Thanks for the chocolate Lici.

Thursday 21 April

It is for very good reason that this lodge is called 'Everest View'. We did not hurry breakfast, basking in the sunshine over coffee in front of the lodge. The trekking today was fairly easy, mostly on ridges, with shady pine forest here and there along the way. After a couple of hours, we suddenly descended quite steeply to a metal bridge where we met some enthusiastic aid workers distributing lamps I seem to recall. A short, rather brutal climb brought us to



Local urchin

Ringmu. No more than an open grassy knoll with a small collection of lodges. We were brought a charcoal brazier in the dining room this evening and played cards cosily while rain threatened. A drunken guide tried to spoil our evening. His customer, Swiss Eric, was a delight and had inspirational photos of Gokyo.

Friday 22 April

An even easier day today. It only took a couple of hours to walk from Ringmu to Taksundo La, even with a long tea break. The 'tea shop' overlooked a beautiful old stupa with dozens of grazing donkeys. Snowy peaks dominated the skyline. We used the road for the next hour. No vehicles at all and a nice easy gradient. Arriving at 11.30 in Taksundo La, our highest point so far at over 4000 metres, we decided to stay tonight and trek down to Taksundo village this afternoon for a look. The walk was on a steep, eroded track and took about half an hour (descending). The village was much warmer than the ridge. It had about two dozen houses but a huge monastery and gompa, home to over 100 monks

and lamas. A friendly monk showed us inside the gompa and Dorje lit butter lamps for us. The climb back to Taksundo La was a bit sweaty but the breeze picked up as we ascended and was a howling gale by the time we reached the top. We like this lodge.

Saturday 23 April

The wind howled all last night but we slept well on thick foam mattresses – aided by a couple of local whiskies after dinner. Dorje woke us early to see the sunrise. After breakfast, we set off on a day-walk in the nearby forest. The wind sent clouds of swirling dust through the grubby donkey staging post that fronts our lodge but as soon as we entered the woods it was almost silent except for a soft whispering in the pines overhead. For a couple of hours, we walked on a narrow path through towering trees and, best of all, masses of flowering rhododendrons; pink, white and red. The trail opened out onto a magnificent grazing ground with a bluff looking south. We climbed up a little further through rhododendrons and wild rose thickets, stunted cotoneaster, daphne and primulas, even a few new shoots of wild iris. From the top, we



Buddhist ruins near Ringmu (Numbur behind)



Enjoying the rhododendrons above Taksundo La



View through the Taksundo La gateway

could see the entire valley spread out 1500 metres below us. Taksundo with its monastery, the distant Dudh Khosi and Jubling across the river. In the far distance Thamserku, Ama Dablam, Mera Peak and even Lhotse were clearly identifiable, though not seen from this angle by me before.

Back at the lodge for a late lunch and the wind was howling. I am writing this over a 'siesta' and we plan a 3.30 stroll to a nearby lake if the weather holds. We did walk to the lake; a small, dark pond in a dense thicket of rhododendron woods. The perfectly still black water mirroring the eerie surroundings.

Back at Taksundo La the wind still blasted dust across the rather exposed ridge until, finally, thunder and lightning took over. It rained, it hailed and I thought it might snow but the storm blew itself out overnight.

Sunday 24 April

The storm brought a dusting of fresh snow to the surrounding ridges, to within about 300 metres above us. We set off downhill on a crystal-clear morning.

While the trail was a little muddy in places we were just glad it wasn't dusty. We descended to Ringmu in about forty minutes by road, trail and even the tiny, steep 'school track' which required some deft hand work. We sat in the sunshine drinking tea, unable to take our eyes off the stunning backdrop of shining peaks. Cameras were clicking wildly at this point. We descended all day, mostly on the road (little used by vehicles) through pine, larch, cedar and rhododendron woods. I even saw a few maples.

We stopped for noodle soup in a shabby little wooden bhatti (local tea stop/lodge) and Dorje mentioned that this is the type of lodge one could expect on the PK Peak trail. Pretty basic. We had planned Chiwang as our overnight stop but the lodge was dismal. The monastery we had hoped to see was on an impossible cliff above the village and Phaphlu only another hour away. The trail was hot and dusty at only 2000 metres and memories of the Everest Lodge were still burning brightly.

Finally, we hit the blacktop near the airstrip, the Everest gave us their best rooms and the gas hot



Crystal clear views from Ringmu this morning

showers fired up. Our boys (gentlemen) were also given decent rooms as there were not many guests. Sadly, the lodge has had no electricity in the week since we were last here. It is a nice lodge, though I am not that impressed with the upstairs loo – western style but without a seat; kind of defeats the purpose!

Interesting Ag. Bank types in the dining room tonight plus the fattest man I have ever seen in Nepal. Then there was Martin from Poland, friendly and suffering from a bit of ‘down syndrome’ having just finished a three-week trek to ‘everywhere’. Before I turned in tonight I heard beautiful traditional singing in the dining room. One of the jeep drivers with a rare talent. Exquisite.

Monday 25 April

I had a ‘big day off’ today. My hip was saying ‘give it a rest’ and I was happy to oblige. Dorje and Akal took our group up to Chalang, a Sherpa village and Tibetan refugee community high above Saleri. They were gone from 8.30 till 2.30 so the trip was a bit bigger than expected. First time for everyone. They seemed impressed with the well-run village with its own school, clinic, old monastery and new gumpa. Very hot and tired upon their return. Nothing that a huge plate of fried rice and a few cold San Miguel couldn’t fix.

Tuesday 26 April

I now realise that we have allowed far too much time for the amount of trekking we had in mind. This trek was always something of an experiment and I had not realised just how close together some of the settlements are. I’ve also had some thoughts about Pike Peak being ‘a bit much’ for some of our members. Not the climb so much as it is only 4200 metres but the very basic lodges perhaps. It will depend on the customers. The lodges off the main trekking routes are very rustic indeed, some of them are just staging posts for locals travelling by jeep. Have had a little feedback since writing this diary that the Pike Peak lodges were ‘not too bad’.

Wednesday 27 April

Two local jeeps took eleven of us to Pattale from Phaphlu. We stopped for tea at the rather grim lodge at Belli Danda (belly dancer) where we said goodbye to Ram who lives nearby. So long mate.

Dorje’s Mum and Dad’s house is small but somehow,

we all found a spot. My own tiny ‘cubby’ is directly under the roof. Manju, Dorje’s lovely older sister was there too. Full house indeed.

We visited the clinic, which I had yet to see. It is fairly basic and hygiene doesn’t seem that high on their priorities. A little ‘pep talk’ from the visiting members of the funding committee was well-received. It got us all thinking about hygiene; incinerators, litter collection, drainage channels and chimneys for cooking fires were all on the agenda. Of course, they would appreciate funding to help get any of these ideas off the ground. Since URT infection is the number one presenting problem at the clinic, with diarrhoea and gut infections second, you can imagine how much these improvements are needed. Mostly preventable with better hygiene.

This afternoon I walked out with Manju, Al, Judy and Kancha over the local trail we had taken on our first day, only now we had time to stop and chat to a few local characters. I was very pleased to see a re-forestation effort on top of a small, bald ridge. Since our trekking was finished I left my pole with an old lady of 80 who looked stronger than me. There were wild yellow wallflowers growing amongst the wheat.

We had a huge party at Dorje’s tonight. Much drinking and dancing. Top crew.

Thursday 28 April

So sad to say goodbye to Akal and Kancha. Bir, Lahar and Dorje were travelling back to Kathmandu with us. Dorje’s parents, Chet Kumari, Rames, Akal’s wife Maya, Binod, the whole village it seemed, were there to see us off, smothered in kattas. Choki and I sobbing into each other’s shoulders.

It was a very long, very hot trip back to Kathmandu. OK for the first couple of hours but awfully dusty on the long stretches of unmade roads which deteriorated terribly around bridges under construction. After about four and a half hours we made it to the lunch stop. Despite the simplicity of the restaurant the daal baht was very good. Not long after lunch there was a little rain. Windows down, arms stuck outside. Heaven. Once we hit the Arniko Highway the going was better and the showers had cooled things down. We found a good tea stop with clean toilets and great tea at Khaure. Evidence of last year’s earthquake not hard to spot.

Two hours later we were unloading bags at Muna Cottage, having driven the last hour in dirty, city peak-hour traffic. Horrible after 18 days in the country. Quick showers and then over to Shambala for nice food and red wine. Slept like logs.

Friday 29 April

Big shopping day, starting in Durbar Marg at the slightly posh Sherpa Mall, for upmarket Nepali women's clothes. Lici found some treasures at Grace, my favourite. Thamel bore the brunt of our efforts. Trekking gear, pashmina shawls of varying qualities, felt house shoes, books and singing bowls were just some of the haul.

Catch of the day was definitely the huge brass temple gong bought from Deepak, my trusty travel agent. Maybe Peter fancied playing timpani for the MSO but I think Lici had it in mind as the ultimate dinner call at Batesford. We lunched on pizza, salad and wine at The Roadhouse.

Dinner at the Garden Kitchen in Bouda with Netra and Sarmilla. Good as ever.

Saturday 30 April

Another very hot day. We visited the Saturday Market near Nag Pokhari. Rather small, lots of expats but great bread, cheese and other 'bakery items'. The lovely cafe at 1905 is highly recommended. Imaginative food, java press coffee and delightful staff.

Al and Judy headed off to Thamel and to revisit Durbar Square after many years. I headed to Kimdol with Peter and Lici. They bought a pretty silver ring for their grand-daughter and I bought a few more rings for my market in Germany. Mangal met us there and whisked Peter and Lici off to meet their protégé Kabita, who they have helped since meeting her as a little girl in Mustang about 12 years ago. Good visit, 'best momos ever' said Lici. We met up at Bouda where Dorje was waiting with Lagpa. Drinks at Stupa View. Beautiful.

Dinner with Sarmilla and Netra. Sarmilla cooked exquisite chicken curry in their tiny but comfortable flat.



Judy and Al having yet another cup of black tea

Sunday 1 May

Home today, with bags carefully topped up with knit-wear from the Ketiko Sewing Company. This trek was a bit of an adventure – heading off into the unfamiliar Solu region. Lodging were sometimes a bit too rustic and the weather was a bit too hazy for the first and last days. In between it was wonderful. It was a surprise to me how Buddhist the region was. Old monasteries, chortens, Mani walls and prayer flags abounded. Some good lodges on the Jiri to Lukla trail and countryside which was heartbreakingly pretty. The forest walk out of Taksundo La was a highlight and short camps made the whole thing work.

Flying in or out of Phaphlu, avoiding at least one of the long jeep trips and going a bit earlier in the season when it's cooler would be an improvement.

We really didn't need 18 days. Next time 10 – 12 would be plenty. Almost anyone who is 'fit and well' could do this. I am thinking about November 2017. Any takers?

Thanks for joining me as guinea pigs for the first trial run Peter, Lici, Al and Judy. Thanks Ram, Kancha, Dorje, Lahar, Bir and Akal. We couldn't have done it without you – and even if we could, why would we want to? I enjoyed trekking with you all.

Cheers, Namaste, Tashi Delek,
Teresa didi

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for editing & layout.*



Some of the fabulous guys who made it all possible





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