

# TREKKING WITH TERESA

## Trek Report – Langtang (& Everest) 2015



### **March 29:**

Good flight from Melbourne on Malaysian. Twin babies in the adjacent seats could have been a problem but they were little angels. I couldn't find my Nepali SIM card to ring Netra so I grabbed a taxi to Muna Cottage. I stayed awake, sorting gear till 6.15 then crashed for 12 hours.

### **March 30:**

Into Thamel with a big 'to do' list. Travel agent not there. Web guy not there. Had a leisurely lunch with Jules and then it was wet enough to buy an umbrella to walk to Durbar Marg where I picked out a hundred kurtas (long shirts) for the market in Germany. Picked up Stu, my first Everest customer to arrive, at 11 pm. No problems and a nice guy. Settled him into the room next to mine.

### **March 31:**

Slow breakfast with Stu in the garden on a fine, sunny morning at Muna Cottage. (French toast with fried tomatoes). I was at the airport by midday but the flight carrying Carol, John and Gillian was delayed and so they didn't emerge much before three o'clock. We relaxed over a cuppa and then a little 'siesta' till dinner. Meanwhile Bir took Stu up to Kapan Gomba and Gokarna where he ended up having daal baht at Bir's house. Nice first day in Nepal Stu! Netra and Sarmilla joined us for dinner at the nearby Shambala – lots and lots of chicken momos.

### **April 1:**

Carol had fond memories of a previous day trip to Nagarkot with a trek across to Changu Narayan so the group opted to repeat it. A couple of taxis took our guests plus Bir up to Nagarkot after breakfast. I don't think Bir really knew where the lunch stop was so they walked all the way to Changu Narayan for lunch. I believe they were well beyond peckish. Meanwhile, I had collected Doug and Marianne from the airport so it was a full complement for dinner at Shambala tonight

### **April 2:**

Our group of six customers, plus me, Dorje and Bir piled into three taxis this morning and headed into Thamel, the tourist district of Karhmandu. Everyone needed some additional trekking gear and Stu needed a photo for his trekking permit. Banking too, made all the rest possible. The gear shop we use is great. Fixed prices (10 percent off

for us) and endlessly patient staff. Happy with their jackets/sleeping bags/poles/drink bottles/buffs/head torches etc., we retired to The Weizen for a very big lunch indeed. A quick turn around the pharmacy and then the supermarket saw us all set.

Back home at Muna Cottage I couldn't compete with the noise from the building site across the road so retreated to the dining room for our pre-trek briefing. Since Doug, Marianne and Carol have trekked with us here before, more than once, their experience on trek will be a huge asset.

While the Everest group turned in early for pre-dawn start, I schlepped back out to the airport for 10.30 arrivals. Lucy and Robyn finally emerged at midnight just as I was starting to get a bit worried. The immigration desks are chaotic these days. Despite the expense I will try to purchase my visa in advance next season. We drove through the dark empty streets at top speed and I checked them into The Northfield in Thamel. They wanted to be 'where the action is' for a few days before their trek. The footpath (such as it is) was choked with taxis and late night revellers and I had to bash loudly on the locked metal door of their hotel to wake up the chowkiddar. Room ok, bottled water supplied, good to go. I quickly found a taxi home. At 1.45 am I set the alarm for 4am. Phew!

### **April 3:**

Up very early for tea and coffee with cinnamon rolls in the dark garden. Dorje soon showed up and then Bir and Ram with the minibus. I had them all booked on 'first flight' with Simrik but there was little point in me going with them to the airport. Not allowed into the terminal without a ticket. I phoned Dorje just after 7 am to make sure things were going smoothly; they don't always. They had already landed in Lukla! Nice going gu

After sending off my Everest trekkers I enjoyed a really long sleep in and a well-earned day off.

### **April 4:**

I had a few things to do in Thamel today so I hooked up with Kancha and headed into town. Lucy and Robyn were in good spirits. I showed them a few of my favourite shops and cafés and left them in Kancha's very capable hands, heading for Durbar Square.

Everything I wrote in this journal is now loaded with significance seen in hindsight from the perspective of 'afterwards'. As in, they saw Durbar Square before it was smashed to pieces in an earthquake.

### **April 5:**

I collected Andrew from the airport today at around 1 pm from an 11.30 flight. Despite the new computers and credit card facilities the hassle of getting through immigration increases annually. Andy is actually my younger brother from our blended family. Tall and well-built with a big, bushy beard he still manages to look like a Nepali thanks in part to his Philippines heritage. Heard by phone that Rob and Lucy having no problems and sent Andy off to stretch his legs after the long flight. This evening Andy and I ate with Sarmilla and Netra at the Shambala. Can't get enough of those chicken momos. Nice company too.

### **April 6:**

Netra took Andy and me to see a couple of potential alternative hotels in Bouda for next season as Muna and Django do not want to take paying guests in the future. A kind of semi-retirement I think, now that son Michael is an intern in orthopaedic surgery at Queen's Hospital, New York. One of the hotels, recommended by Dorje, was great. Opposite the back gardens of The Hyatt. We went to The Roadhouse in Bouda afterwards. Great location and super coffee. The music wasn't bad either. We walked home and then fetched some bags of gear I had bought last season for the markets in Germany and taxied them into Thamel. We had an excellent curry lunch at The Weizen and caught up with my travel agent Deepak. All in hand for the Langtang. Andrew bought some trekking gear.

I went to check on Robyn who was having a 'sickle' with the typical Kathmandu ailment 'funny tummy'. Being a nurse she had the problem well in hand. On the way home I heard that there would probably be a three-day general strike, starting tomorrow. Half a dozen phone calls later I had arranged for Ram to pick up the ladies in Deepak's jeep

this evening and bring them over to Kapan a day earlier than planned. Lahar was also contacted and he arranged to come this evening, while transport was still running. He arrived around ten this evening.

Meanwhile the ladies arrived and we walked up to the Shambala for supper while I made a simple map for Andy and he headed off to Bouda to 'do his own thing' He got lost here and there but made it home by 9.30 having enjoyed a few little adventures and meeting other young travellers.

#### **April 7:**

Up early today for a visit to Bright Future Community Centre. The kids loved it when Andy sang and played a couple of his own songs for them. He is really good! After a leisurely breakfast in the garden we donned our trekking boots and walked out to Kapan Gomba. The gomba was closed to visitors today but it was a lovely sunny walk with four boys from BFCC in tow. A good three-hour stretch to get ready for the real thing. As I write this Muna is cooking us fried rice for lunch.



After a little siesta we walked over to Bouda late this afternoon. It was crowded with Tibetans at dusk so we joined in the throng and circled the great white Stupa. We climbed up onto the first level for a better view of the ring of old terraced houses which completely encircle the stupa. We found a shop selling trekking gear so Robyn bought some much-needed trekking poles for our day-walk tomorrow. Sadly, she managed to break one within minutes.

We had a good curry dinner at the Garden Kitchen where the garden was a mass of snapdragons. We bought homemade cookies for tomorrow's trek and then ambled home through darkened streets. So much calmer than Thamel.

### **April 8:**

Deepak rang at 7 am to say that the strike had been called off at the last minute so I cancelled the Chang Nayarit trek and reverted to our original schedule. The customers were expected at BFCC this morning where the kids had planned a dance for them so Robyn, Andy and Lucy headed up there while I madly phoned around and rearranged our itinerary. Lahar came around after breakfast beaming widely as ever. He looked so cool in the Akubra I'd brought him from Australia. Pity I looked such a dork wearing it in transit.

We taxied into town, changed our money, finalized the trekking permits and bought all the trekking gear we needed; Gortex jackets, over pants, down jackets, sticks, bottles, buffs and towels. Even down booties. A few muesli bars and we were good to go. Back home at Muna Cottage I held a pre-trek briefing. This group are all first-timers.

A rum and coke with my new favourite dinner at Shambala – chicken Sekuwa and potato wedges, the latter flavoured with chilli and timur. Must try that at home. The evening was spent packing and packing and.....I am writing this at 11.40 and everything is ready. Could be a record. I've even washed my hair!

### **April 9:**

The jeep arrived on time. It was fairly squeezey, especially after we picked up Karma on the ring road. After a rather grubby little tea stop we took Karma into the middle seat which worked much better. Lunch in Trisuli was a treat – aloo paratha with fresh yoghurt. We reached Syabrubesi around three which was pretty good going. We drove through a local wedding after Dunche. I heard later that it was for the daughter of Sonam, our sometimes runner. Slept like logs after way too many rum and cokes.

### **April 10:**

Our first day on trek was a tough one. Mainly because it was hot, but also because it was our first day on trek! After a pleasant morning tea, an easy hour into the trek, everyone was in good spirits. After crossing the bridge and walking to Dovan it was really hot. Then the serious climbing started. By the time we reached Landslide (Pairo) for lunch Robyn was fading. Lunch was very good as we chatted with fellow trekkers on the sunny terrace.

After lunch was even steeper and Robyn slowed down while Lucy and Andy charged ahead. Even before we reached Bambu Robyn had decided that trekking was just not her 'cup of tea'. Actually, she may not have been quite that polite. Going on to Bambu was our only option at that point so we just pushed, rather miserably, onwards.

Over dinner we came up with a plan for Rob to return with Rames to Kathmandu after a couple of days rest to let her swollen knees recover. I really felt for her but it was a sensible return plan, nice and slow, and she couldn't have been in safer hands.



### April 11:

Down to three Bideshi and three Nepali we began fairly late after setting Rames up with lots of cash and instructions for Kathmandu. I phoned a few people to expect them in four or five days. It was steeper than yesterday and 'bloody hot' where the trail was unshared. The swirling river put up a good mist in places and we kept finding shady spots to rest. Riverside was a lovely tea stop and I was very pleased to figure out how to stop my new camera from over-exposing every shot.

Up, up, up to the sunny lunch place below Rimche. Veggie omelettes in fresh chapattis with home-made chilli sauce to spice things up. More serious uphill to Rimche for a 15-minute sit down and then, just twenty minutes later the little cluster of lodges that comprises Lama Hotel was glimpsed through the trees. We always stay in the old, original Lama Hotel. The owner is a strange little dude, not the least bit attractive, reputed to have three wives, he always manages to make his welcome hug last just a bit too long. I am writing this on a rapidly-cooling afternoon where we have been sitting in the sun for hours reading and chatting and watching people from all over the world passing by. Andy borrowed Tashi's guitar this evening and played us some songs after dinner. Brilliant.

### April 12:

It was a bit cloudy but still warm as we headed off this morning. No hurry as we were only going to Gora Tabela, a lunch stop for most. It was uphill all the way and I could not help thinking that Robyn would have hated it. While it was really steep in places there were just enough flat stretches to catch your breath and admire the forest, sitting on moss-covered boulders We sat in the sun at the yet another 'Riverside', waiting for our food to be freshly prepared.

It became quite a bit cooler today as we closed in on 3000 metres and skies were cloudy half the time. When a light rain started half an hour before Gora Tabela we didn't bother with rain jackets but we didn't hang around either. As we emerged from the forest into the phenomenal Langtang Valley the heavens opened. It rained all evening but the dining room was cosy with a wood stove burning fiercely in the middle of the room. I met some young Germans from Teterow which is a small village very close to my own in Mecklenburg Vorpoomen. The older Germans were not quite as friendly. Sharing a room with Lucy, which is working well. Warmer with two bodies in the room too.



### April 13:

It rained steadily all night. When it finally fell silent at 7 am I thought it had stopped. But no, it had actually turned to snow! Andy, who had never seen snow, was rapt. The surrounding pine-covered slopes were soon beautifully dusted with fresh white powder snow, down to the level of the lodge. It looked as though we might have a boring day waiting out the weather but at 9.30 the sun broke through and we set off in high spirits.

I hadn't been up here in springtime for many years and the rhododendrons blew me away. Red, deep pink, light pink and white – in abundance. Not the forests of giant rhododendron trees one finds near Gorepani but 3 – 5 metre

shrubs absolutely covered in blooms. It was really quite cold when we stopped for soup about half an hour before Langtang Village. We arrived in Langtang around 3 pm. Single rooms available tonight. Thick foam mattresses and hot showers. This was our first meeting with Pete and Liz. Good company. Warm stove, good food. Played cards.



It is quite hard to write this now, knowing that the entire village was swept away when the glacier above the village was shaken loose by the earthquake. Almost everyone who was there on the day was killed – around three hundred people. Nobody is quite sure. So sad.

#### **April 14:**

Lahar advised a reasonably early start this morning in case the weather turned bad in the afternoon so we were on our way before 8, full of porridge and chapattis. After a short climb up the terminal moraine the view back down the valley was beautiful. Lots of fellow trekkers on the trail this morning. Overcast but clearer than yesterday as we stopped for tea and biscuits at Thyangshap at the end of the long mani wall. Nice, easy walking today, though the altitude is beginning to come into play as we climb over 3500 metres. At a tiny tea shop high above a bend in the river we broke out the bread and cheese from the bakery in Langtang. The sun penetrated the haze somehow and it was warm enough for t-shirts out of the wind. I certainly got a sunburned nose. 61 years old and still getting sunburned. Duh! The Norling Lodge had great rooms for us, with attached bathrooms no less. Nirup was very pleased to see us. The solar hot water was working well despite the overcast conditions (see sunburn). Andy got 'brain freeze' as he couldn't figure the taps. "It must be the other one mate". Lucy's bathroom didn't have a shower but a huge bucket of very hot water was quickly delivered.

We found 'the Germans' and 'the Canadians' and sat outside around 3 pm chatting as the clouds lifted and the entire blinding Langtang Range put on a show. Fresh snow top to bottom looked fabulous. The peaks shone till about 5.30 when the clouds once again enveloped first the peaks and then the entire village.

#### **April 15:**

An easy start this morning as we are just going for a day walk and no need to pack. At 9 am on a rather dull day we headed off up the valley – really easy going with the breeze behind us. Almost warm in the shelter of the small ridges we crossed. The trail clings to the riverbank most of the way and we saw lots of grazing yaks. The valley is a vast, bleak, open space here. Wildly beautiful.



By 11 the weather looked worse so Lucy, me, Lahar and Karma decided to turn back after a short stop to eat our packed lunch. Tea from a big thermos, boiled eggs and chapattis. Our return was uneventful apart from a naughty yak who gave us a momentary fright. Amazing how fast you can move even at this altitude. I quite like this kind of long, easy trekking. Wind in your face and the sound of your boots crunching on gravel and the rustle of Goretex as you tuck your chin into your jacket and trek rhythmically towards home. We saw big cat footprints in the mud by the riverbank. Geologists I met later said they had seen a 'Clouded leopard' in the area. Cool!



Andy and Kancha decided to push on further up the valley but as I write this it is snowing heavily so I am hoping they didn't go all the way. Huge white flakes are cascading out of the sky and I am happy to be snuggled up in the dining room of our lodge with a bottomless pot of hot chocolate.

Andy and Kancha came in late having marched into the teeth of the blizzard. Andy comes from Dampier, WA, so this was well outside his usual comfort zone. A novel experience at least. It was really, really cold tonight as the snow fell silently for hours.

**April 16:**

The weather was overcast again this morning so we decided to pack up for moving on while Andy, Karma and Kancha climbed Kyanjin Ri. We hot-footed it down to Langtang. 400 metres lower and a bit warmer perhaps. It was a gorgeous walk. Gently downhill with plenty of time to stop and admire the view. At lunch three cheeky black-faced langours came right down to the edge of our garden.



It started to rain about an hour before Gora Tabela so we scooted along to try to avoid the worst of it. Lucky we did as it poured all night. Walking in the rain was not unpleasant. Warmer down here and the land seemed lush after the bleak upper reaches. Many varieties of rhododendrons. We played cards tonight. Dalmara, the Nepali game. Bit like 500; trumps decided on the first five cards dealt to the person left of the dealer. Object – to get the 10s. A lot of fun.

#### **April 18:**

Absolutely perfect morning with Langtang Lirung shining above us. We saw a huge, distant avalanche this morning, higher up the valley. I heard later that some houses were damaged and the snow came right down to the trail. At first, trekking downhill feels easier, no longer fighting gravity, but as the day wore on my knees and ankles reminded me that I am not 20 years old. Lucy was the same. We took a short break at Riverside and a much longer one at Lama Hotel for lunch. Veggie omelettes full of fresh greens were delicious.

After lunch the gruelling descent continued. At one point Lucy and I stopped to put on heat rub and tighten our bootlaces. It helped a bit but we were almost hobbling by the time we reached Bambu at 3 pm. Loud thunder threatened rain but it never arrived and we sat outside by the roaring river. The lovely surroundings a welcome distraction from aching limbs. Writing this at 4.30 the sunshine persists. Happy to trek uphill again tomorrow.

#### **April 19:**

Tried for an early start but it was almost 8 am by the time we headed off on a perfectly clear blue sky day. In 45 minutes of more bone-jarring downhill we were drinking tea at Pairo. 15 minutes later we turned off the main trail and started the steep uphill track to Thulo Syabru. The trail was very steep and partly shaded by huge Bambu. It was hot as we climbed the endless old stone staircases to the tiny tea shack on the rim for a much-needed rest. The walk across the ridge was a welcome relief on a level trail but then we descended to a huge steel suspension bridge – long and breathtakingly high. Andy was way out in front but admitted to needing two goes at getting out on this high bridge alone. The sides are a bit lower than average and quite a bit of the side mesh is broken or missing. After descending into deep, moist jungle for a while it was up, up, up to Thulo, Syabru. We stopped at the first tea shop before the town for a rest and some noodle soup. I gave the didi there a copy of 2013 Langtang Trek Report as it had her picture in it.

We staggered, quite literally, into Thule Syabru around 2.30. And quickly washed all our clothes, had hot, high-pressure showers and jumped onto the internet. WI FI at last. ....and phone signal.... And power points in the rooms. Luxury indeed. Dinner was great. Lucy and Andy had the 'sizzlers'. Big heated cast-iron platters loaded with pasta in home-made tomato sauce, smothered in cheese. Served with chips and, best of all, piles of fresh steamed veg. Hugely satisfying. Lucy shouted vodka and we drank it with Sprite. Highly recommended.

I love this lodge, Snowfall, but now wonder how it fared on April 25???

#### **April 20:**

Slept till 9 a.m. French toast for breakfast and then a lazy day supervising the drying of all that washing – easy enough on yet another clear sunny day. I am writing this in my room with windows flung wide. Camera batteries and Phone charged. Soft mattress and an attached bathroom. Love this lodge! Especially the view out the back.





### **April 21:**

Big uphill day today, starting with a hot slog through lush bush full of flowers and birds and then on a more exposed ridge. Up, up, up and then a couple of cups of tea before more uphill slog through a beautiful forest. The last section was once a grassy slope, prone to landslides. Ten years later the slope is a mass of rhododendrons and azaleas with well-cut sig-zag trails to Chandan Bari on the saddle. We devoured a first-rate daal baht with wild dried mushrooms in the curry. After lunch the trail was fairly easy with massed red rhododendrons and acres of Daphne amongst huge cedars. Later on it started to drizzle lightly but Lucy and I didn't care, we didn't want that walk to end.

Cosy evening round a roaring fire. Local cheese. Rum and coke. Played cards till late.



### **April 22:**

The exit from Sin Gomba village is steep but only for fifteen minutes then the trail flattened out and clung to the side of a ridge on the sunny side of the range. After a gentle uphill walk through a silent forest of pines we emerged into the sunshine a Chalang Patti for a good lunch and a rest. After lunch the climb up to Laurabinayak was a pig; mercifully short though. An hour and fifty minutes was quite respectable. The lodges up here are pretty basic but the yak dung fire was roaring in the dining room. A large circle of down-jacketed trekkers edged as close to the fire as they could while still appearing polite enough to let others into the circle. It soon began snowing – sago at first but then huge flakes. After sitting huddled round the stove all afternoon the sky brightened a little and we were treated to a delightful sunset. Nothing garish but rather muted and mysterious. Very beautiful. There is a reason this is considered one of the best views in the Himalayas.

The cooking at this lodge has never been fab so we went with a failsafe option; egg and chips. It was excellent. Sat around the fire talking to Germans, Czechs, Israelis and our Australian friends Pete and Liz. An evening well-spent.



### **April 23:**

The day broke crystal clear and I was outside with my camera at 5.30. The mass exodus from the lodge at 5 am made sure nobody slept late. Andy was dead keen to see the lakes but Lucy said she was content with 'the best view in the Himalayas'. Karma had not handled the altitude too well on this ascent so it was an easy decision to take Lahar, Lucy and Kancha slowly back to Sin Gomba.

Meanwhile Andy and Kancha headed up the last very steep ridge to the Gossainkund Lakes, which we'd heard are almost all frozen this season. As I write this Lucy and I have strolled slowly down to Sin Gomba, eaten a good lunch, showered in super hot water and I am sitting in the garden in a t-shirt. Andy and Kancha got in around 2 pm so all is well, though we are now one day ahead of our schedule. We will make plans for our return to Kathmandu tomorrow afternoon at Dunche. Mostly depends on the availability of a jeep.



**April 24:**

It was a long downhill trek today. It got warmer as we descended and it felt good to breathe so easily. The vegetation grew lush until it was almost tropical jungle at the bottom. We took three stops on the way down to let our knees cool down. At riverside in the bottom of the valley we quickly shucked off our boots and plunged our feet into the cold mountain stream. Heavenly. We lingered over lunch, enjoying the hospitality of the quirky couple who run this idyllic little lodge. Their grandchildren played happily nearby while we ate. (God, I really hope they are all ok after the quake.)



Just an hour later Dunche hove into view. The smell of fumes as the first motorbike passed us was truly horrible but we were soon marching through the Dunche Bazaar, weaving between jeeps, trucks and buses. The town is a bustle of trade and building with roadwork and clutches of baby chickens competing for space on the road into town. The Hotel Himalayan Mountain View leaves a lot to be desired but we managed to get two rooms, each with lots of beds

so quickly formed a girls/boys dorm. Young boys working on a building behind ours peered curiously through the windows which were oddly at ground level, despite being two floors up from the front door.

No sign of a jeep so far.

#### **April 25:**

A cool morning with all our joints aching – either from yesterday's pounding downhill all day or the extra hard beds. Who knew you could make a mattress out of wood! After breakfast Lahar teed-up a jeep for midday to take us to Trisuli, three hours towards Kathmandu and a warmer, nicer place. Deepak's jeep is on its way up with a full load of trekkers but he will follow us down to Trisuli later and spend the night with us there for an early start tomorrow.....

#### **THEN ALL HELL BROKE LOOSE!**

Sitting quietly on the veranda of our hotel in Dunche a distant rumble grew louder and louder. As the ground began to tremble we immediately realised what it was and shouted 'earthquake' as we ran out into the street. Not much safety there as the biggest quake I have ever experienced shook us all to hell. It seemed to go on for ever, but was probably about 90 seconds. The part of the street we were in was bordered by shoddily-built three and four-storey buildings. There was a hideous clattering sound as roofing iron came loose and fell into the street. A nearby four-storey hotel poured into the street like lumps of brown sugar. The quake triggered lots of rockslides, big ones. The sound was like I imagine artillery fire. Soon the air was full of reddish dust from all the rockslides. We gravitated to a part of the street with single storey corrugated iron buildings which could not fall on us, gathering as many of the surrounding panic-stricken locals with us as we could. We clung to each other; hugging reassuringly....we would be alright, wouldn't we? Then another huge quake rumbled through town. Hand in hand the six of us, me, Lucy, Andy, Lahar, Karma and Kancha, ran screaming (maybe that was just me) through the village and five hundred metres down the road. When I saw a huge rock face bordering the road which had not moved an inch during both quakes I felt that was the safest place to wait. We waited a couple of hours. Each time an aftershock started we were terrified that it would build into another giant earthquake. It didn't.

As the dust from the landslides settled we could see across the valley to a couple of villages which were smashed to pieces. Locals with family over there were crying hysterically. I tried to reassure people that the worst was over but I didn't totally believe it myself. Karma, our youngest member, was clearly frightened to death. We held on to each other for dear life.

We were joined by some Belgians who had narrowly missed being crushed in their jeep which was on the road at the time. The Army came and escorted us back through the ruins of the village and up onto a little open field above. The entire population of the town was there. Many of them injured and distressed.

The local hospital was demolished but the resourceful staff extracted what supplies they could from the rubble and quickly set up a Red Cross tent with emergency supplies. I will never forget the keening of a man holding his dead child in a thin green blanket. I heard later that his wife died that night from a heart attack brought on by shock and grief. Pretty soon plastic tarps and tents started to appear, mostly erected by police and army. Lahar and Kancha got some food for us from our hotel which, sadly, was smashed to bits but our bags were apparently ok and they cooked us fried egg sandwiches on the street after pulling the stove and gas bottle from the trashed kitchen.

The aftershocks continued, triggering mass hysteria every time. Amazingly though, we soon got a bit used to it and the level of panic grew less and less. Trying to sleep, on the ground, you could feel every tremble, which was very scary when night fell. Luckily, Lahar had found us a small bottle of rum which calmed the ragged nerves a little. I must have bruised Lahar's arm grabbing it every time it started up again. We didn't sleep much. It was cold and it rained that first night. The tarp was less than adequate but we just wore all our clothes, sharing them with the porters. We were in the 'bideshi' tent but insisted our guys slept with us. They were so calm.

The day after the quake we got a bit better organised. Choppers were only for the badly injured at this stage so we tried to make the most of our camp. We collected rubbish, established a fire pit for that rubbish and used what bits of plastic we could find to keep us dry. Luckily, it didn't rain again.



We had a very badly-injured young woman in our tent today but she was choppered out by evening. I connected up with District Superintendent of Police (DSP) Pokrel. He was very helpful. Speaking a bit of German and a bit of Nepali I tried to make myself useful. We found that the toilet at the hospital was still functional so we organised it a bit and established a routine for filling water buckets. Locals made vast vats of food and gave it away for free. I remember I was in dire need of a coffee so I got a free cup of tea and put a handful of ground coffee in it and waited for it to settle. Never had a better cuppa.

We made friends with our fellow trekkers at 'Camp Quake'. There were 17 people in our tent so it was hard not to be friendly. A bunch of Israelis next door were also great company. We found piles of new bricks nearby and quickly

constructed a low wall at the edge of the tarp, even a floor. Lahar found some grey foam in the village and bought it for us to sleep on. Felt luxurious after the first hard night.

Half-way through the day soldiers came and asked for the plastic we used as flooring. We had to give it up as they needed it to construct a first aid tent nearby. Then they came for our tent, replacing it with a plastic tarp which was actually a bit bigger and better. In the evening we loaned our head-torches to the police who were erecting more shelters in the dark.

Next day some people decided to walk out of Dunche and head south towards Kalikistan where, it was rumoured, the road was open to Kathmandu. Still no sign of helicopters for anyone but the injured, I had to make a decision. I decided to wait one more day. Pokrel's advice was 'leave' but I wanted to hear how today's trekkers fared. We had seen a dead Spanish woman brought through the camp on a stretcher. She had slipped off a rockslide walking from Syabrubesi to Dunche. Andy's new friend Katarina headed out, against my advice, but she was a very young, strong, fit girl indeed. We heard later that she walked all the way to Trisuli. Amazing!

Having heard that yesterday's trekkers had made it through ok I decided to head out this morning. There had been a few serious aftershocks during the night so sleep was impossible. No sleep, no tea, no breakfast but we had packed last night. Lucy was very keen to 'get out' by now so in the pre-dawn light we headed down the road. My main fear was that an aftershock would occur while we were trying to cross the many rockslides (27, I counted them) which covered the road. The ones we climbed over were jagged and a bit difficult but worse were those where we had to skirt round the edge with appallingly steep slopes below us. I was thankful for Lahar's strong arm at times. We could hardly complain. We made friends with a young woman walking our way. She had heard that her husband had been killed in Rasuwa. She did everything we did in plastic scuffs carrying a five month old baby – a girl, oddly named Christopher! We walked through devastated villages like Khade where hardly a house was still standing. People made us tea in their half-ruined shacks and we ate a few biscuits to keep us going. It was very hard work indeed. Twenty kilometres over 27 rockslides.

At Kalikistan most of the houses were miraculously still standing. Softer ground being more forgiving. We quickly devoured a daal bhat, having located an almost new Toyota Hi-ace which was offering a ride to Kathmandu. Normal price, 1000 rupees (\$13) per person. I quickly bought our tickets, plus the last few seats so that we could get going. Just as well, as the heavens opened just as we were boarding the bus and it rained all the way to Kathmandu.

At Muna Cottage there was a lot of hugging and kissing. We exchanged stories with Gill, John and Carol who had been caught in town at Durbar Square during the quake. Robyn, Lucy's mate, was well-pleased to see us. She had been at home at Muna's on the day of the quake and was thrown down the stairs. Everyone was sleeping in the garden. Stu, Doug and Marianne had already left though I recently read Marianne's chilling description of their experience in Kathmandu on the day of the quake. By late afternoon we had electricity and hot water. Well done guys. Despite the regular aftershocks which made my thick mattress wobble like a jelly, I slept upstairs – with the door open!

The morning light showed the full extent of the damage locally. Hundreds of people's homes had been destroyed and they were camping out wherever they could. Netra got some cash from me and started getting out and about buying what people needed most – plastic tarps, rice, lentils, water, soap, etc. He worked tirelessly from dawn till dusk every day until I left about 10 days later.

We led an extremely low-key existence for a few days. Emailing family and just happy to have survived. Everyone got on their scheduled flights, except Andy, who was quickly issued with another ticket without bother.

Andy had become much enamoured of young Katarina in 'Camp Quake' so headed into Bouda thinking he might see her. It was a long shot. He had no idea where in Bouda she might stay or eat. As he entered the kora he looked up and saw her walking towards him. I just saw Andy in Perth last week and he is planning to visit her in Shanghai in August (she is Russian, speaks Chinese and works there as an actress). Ah, true love!

The airport undercroft was full of manned desks from various government and insurance organisations. Australia sent two Hercules planes but we didn't need them. Cheerful chap manning the desk though – from the Pakistan Consulate.

One by one I caught up with all my friends. Nobody was hurt. Nobody was killed. A few people had partially-destroyed homes but, amazingly, no loss of life. There was one very sad moment when I went to Amrita Craft in Thamel to see about my market goods. The entire family, who all worked at the store, were killed when their house collapsed on them. Such lovely people. I cried about that.

I felt a bit guilty as I fled Nepal. So much desperate need and where was I really going, to do what? I'd helped Netra out with funds and even worked with him a little distributing food aid but I felt I could have done so much more. Truth was, I was a bit scared, aftershocks were continuing and I was more than slightly relieved to get away. I am only human after all.

As I write this things have settled down in Nepal. Roads are open, power and water restored to the major areas. The southern area of the Terai, Chitwan and Lumbini were not affected; Pokhara only mildly so. For that reason we have decided to go ahead with plans for trekking next season. October 26 for Muktinath and the extension to Upper Mustang. Then the Cultural Safari December 6 – 19. There is even a plan to trek to Muktinath in the Anapurna in early March next year. Do get in touch if you want to come with us. [teresadb@hotmail.com](mailto:teresadb@hotmail.com) or [vonschwichtenberg@gmail.com](mailto:vonschwichtenberg@gmail.com) will do it. Or check out [www.slowtrekking.com](http://www.slowtrekking.com) for lots more information and reports of previous less-eventful treks. What Nepal could use right now is some 'business as usual' so do consider joining us this Autumn in Nepal.

Cheers,

Teresa didi



Ps I am hopeful of getting a Trek Report from the Everest trekkers later.