

TREKKING WITH TERESA

www.slowtrekking.com • teresadb@hotmail.com

TREK REPORT – Solu, November 2017

Wednesday 8 November

On our start date for this trek Tony, Denise, Lesley and Dot were already in Pattale. They jeeped up there on the 7th in order to check out the Pattale Health Clinic of which Denise is a trustee in Australia. For the others, a few days in the countryside, at altitude, without trekking, always a pleasure.

I stayed in Kathmandu awaiting the arrival of Mary and Theresa from Canada. Their flight was bang on time and they had no problems with arrival formalities. In fact I got a tap on the shoulder as I was scanning the arrivals screen. In good time, after a very bumpy taxi ride home, for a beer in the garden.

Thursday 9 November

A slow start to the morning for our slightly jet-lagged guests. A leisurely breakfast and a check of their trekking gear and then into Thamel. Coffee, gear shopping, more shopping, a bit of banking and admin., just a bit more shopping then home on the same bloody bumpy roads; they really are getting worse.

After an afternoon siesta and a pre-dinner bottle of icy Chilean white, we walked, slowly, over to Bouda. Timing was perfect as the kora was in full swing. No lights at all on the stupa but miles and miles of marigold garlands (phul mala) over everything. Wonderful!



We ate great veg food at the Stupa View. Couldn't persuade Mary or Theresa to order the Mega Magic, a heavenly concoction of rum, lemon, honey and hot water; maybe next time when the nights are cooler. We set a brisk pace walking home. Good to find Lahar and Bir at the Shambala. They are sleeping in my apartment as I write this. All packed up and ready for the big road trip tomorrow. (2200 Day 10 NO CIGARETTES).

Friday 10 November

Our jeep was waiting for us at 5.30 am as planned. Lahar and Bir, good to go from my apartment with two cases of donated books, clothes and medical supplies from Canada. Our crew in the jeep was me, Mary, Theresa, Lahar and Bir – pretty roomy! The countryside was very green after the monsoon and, unlike my last trip up here, the day was mild. Where the bitumen was broken the road was very rough but I reckon this was only about 10 km in total. The rest was surprisingly acceptable and we were in Pattale 2800m around 4 pm. It was cold. The Himalayan Eco Lodge was extremely welcoming,

with little individual cottages. We had visitors for dinner – the new head of the village committee, the local headmaster and the new medical officer from the Pattale Village Health Clinic. The dining room was newly-carpeted, boasted a giant television and it was freezing! Rum and Coke helped enormously.

Saturday 11 November

What a fabulous day, our first big day of trekking. The sun shone all day. We left Pattale under a weight of marigold malas and kattas (traditional farewell and greeting blessing scarves – think 'Ed Hilary'). The first view from just above the village was stupendous. From Dudh Kunde through the Everest range all the way to Makalu and even Kanchenjunga. Good though it was it just got better and better all day. It was not always easy as there were quite a few uppish stretches but we all enjoyed the challenge.

Kancha had booked a lodge in Japhre, an old traditional house. It had three reasonable rooms but the one I was offered was diabolically bad. Dark and dirty pretty well covers it. I decided to see if a



Heading out of Kathmandu early



Pattale kids in their new clothes



Guru Rinpoche at Japhre Gompa

neighbouring lodge had a better option. Noticed a neat row of 'cottage system' rooms near the lovely old gomba on the way in. With a little wrangling (baksheesh) we managed to relocate. Writing this in the warm dining room, wood-fired stove going like a train (much like the one in my room here in Germany as I write this report). There are two grubby kids peering out of the kitchen and a scruffy little kitten is tearing in and out of the curtains.

The sunset was magical. Tony, Lesley, Dorje and Dot are playing a new Nepali card game. Cosy and tired, perfection.

Sunday 12 November

Japhre to Lamuje (Kancha's Lodge). The dawn was spectacular, casting the adjacent gomba in a golden glow. After a substantial breakfast we headed uphill to Lamuje. It was very gradual but relentless under blue skies and strong sun. Part of the way was on a jeepable (almost) road though only one vehicle passed us all day. We trekked past some remarkable old mani walls; Denise rescued some fallen engraved

tablets from being run over, however occasionally, and returned them to their rightful position on the wall.

Lunch was the usual veg noodle soup and fried rice at Bulbule. I managed to spill mine, scalding my leg, but a nearby running freezing cold tap soon had me sorted. The pants were dry by the end of lunch. Happy we are not staying here, as many Pike Peakers do. A bit of a grotty hole.

Kancha, one of our favourite long-term porters, has built a small new lodge at Lamuje, in the lee of an ancient mani wall and chorten (which needs rebuilding due to earthquake damage). It is a tiny lodge but the smell of freshly-cut timber pervades. We were clearly the first ever paying guests – we had to take the plastic packaging off the pillows. Mattresses were new but extremely firm. God only knows what they were made of – wood??

The kitchen will eventually be rebuilt as an extension. I had been more than a bit disappointed on the way



Kancha's backyard

up to hear that there was no toilet. Actually, I asked Kancha if there was a shower. Answer 'Didi, there is no toilet!'. OK, bit peeved. When we arrived I was amazed to see that Akal, Kancha and Ramesh had improvised a very usable pit toilet with masses of leaves gathered by Kancha's lovely daughter to be used as cover for each fresh 'deposit'.

Kancha's wife had complete control of the kitchen though Bir and Akal were the main cooks. And it was so clean! We took turns taking a bowl of hot water to a secluded spot behind the chorten for a bird bath. There was a fabulous sunset and then a rather wind-ravaged bonfire before dinner. Despite the basic conditions we were fed a top notch daal bhat and then sheltered comfortably while the wind howled outside.

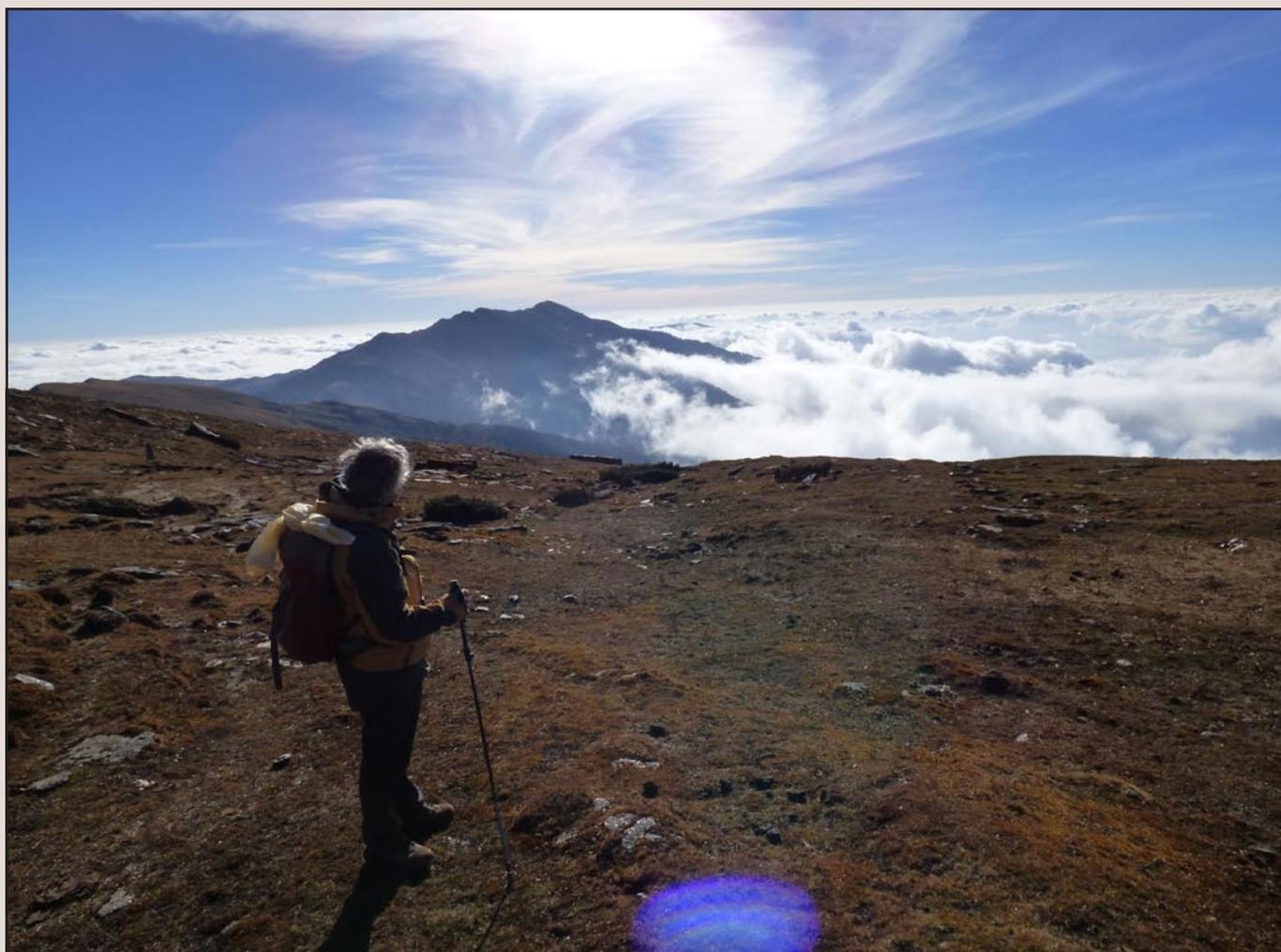
I heard next morning that the wind actually pushed the window out of the wall onto Tony while he slept which must have been a bit disconcerting. I heard nothing untoward. This will be a great little lodge when it is finished. Ideal for Pike Peak.

Monday 13 November

Up early for a pretty sunrise, all enjoying the bed-tea custom. Cheese omelettes on fresh chapattis and our own coffee was a perfect way to start the day. A slow getaway with kattas and fond farewells from Durga, Kancha's wife. (Didn't see at the time how unwell she was).

There was a lot more uphill than we expected today. We only gained about 150 metres overall but, and there is often a but in Nepal, we seemed to lose about 200 metres as we traversed the first ridge, which was a delightful, slightly downhill, walk. The climb up to Dairy (pronounced diary) was brutal in places, but eventually crested a pass leading to a long, easy stretch all the way to a small cluster of buildings taking their name from a small cheese factory. It had closed for winter a couple of days before. The cheese in our omelettes this morning came from here.

It was a rather bleak location, looking out over an ocean of white clouds with just the odd isolated 'island' as the top of a hill poked through.



An ocean of white clouds on the way to Dairy



Pike Peak



We lunched on the by now predictable veg noodle soup in a tiny cold dining room. Hoped to eat a bit nearer the kitchen tonight.

We decided to have a crack at Pike Peak at about 2.30 pm. It was cloudless and who knew what tomorrow would bring. Also the afternoon sun is ON the peaks not behind them, affording better views. All save Tony, who started half an hour later, rugged up and headed out. Dorje and Ram were with us.

It was about a 400m climb, just on 4065m at the top, and it was a pretty hard slog. I found a good rhythm early on and, possibly for the first time ever, I was first to summit. The view was breathtaking, quite literally, and at first I just ran about laughing. I made a 360 degree movie, though the wind took my commentary away. Then the others arrived, first Lesley with Ram, then Denise. We were all so pleased to have made it. Lots of smiles and hugs and photos... then Tony arrived. All present and correct!! Nice one guys!

The way down should have been quicker but I managed to veer off to the right a bit further than

necessary, taking Dot, Lesley and Ram with me. We were at least a kilometre off course at the level trail and had to backtrack to our lodge. 'Doing a recce for tomorrow' said Dot. 'Didi's way is very far' said Ram, more than once!

Our meal, in the smoky dining area, was just adequate. Two pretty French girls shared the diner. After dinner our host played a beautiful old Serangi while his wife and others sang and danced. Of course, we soon joined in. At least it warmed us up. Cold at 3650m and I am certainly going to buy a better sleeping bag for next season. The Thermarests (wimp mats) are a boon as the mattresses are invariably hard, very hard indeed. I slept well anyway, finally acclimatised. We are all well enough to leave off the Diamox.

Tuesday 14 November

The ascent and then descent from Dairy to Jastabanijang ('Just a bunny jump') was not too hard though a few really dodgy frozen waterfalls over the trail presented a challenge. The porters were great, pointing out exact footfalls and leading us across. Could not have done some of them without help.





Pike Peak



Kancha heard from home that Durga was sick. He returned right away. Dorje has taken a few heavy items and Akal has taken the rucksack. I wanted to find another porter but Akal wants to carry both and be paid accordingly. He is a big strong man and wants the work. What to do?

We descended through a riot of small rhododendron thickets, crunching the dead leaves underfoot like a giant carpet of ginger-nuts. Only 3–4 metres high the thickets were impenetrable.

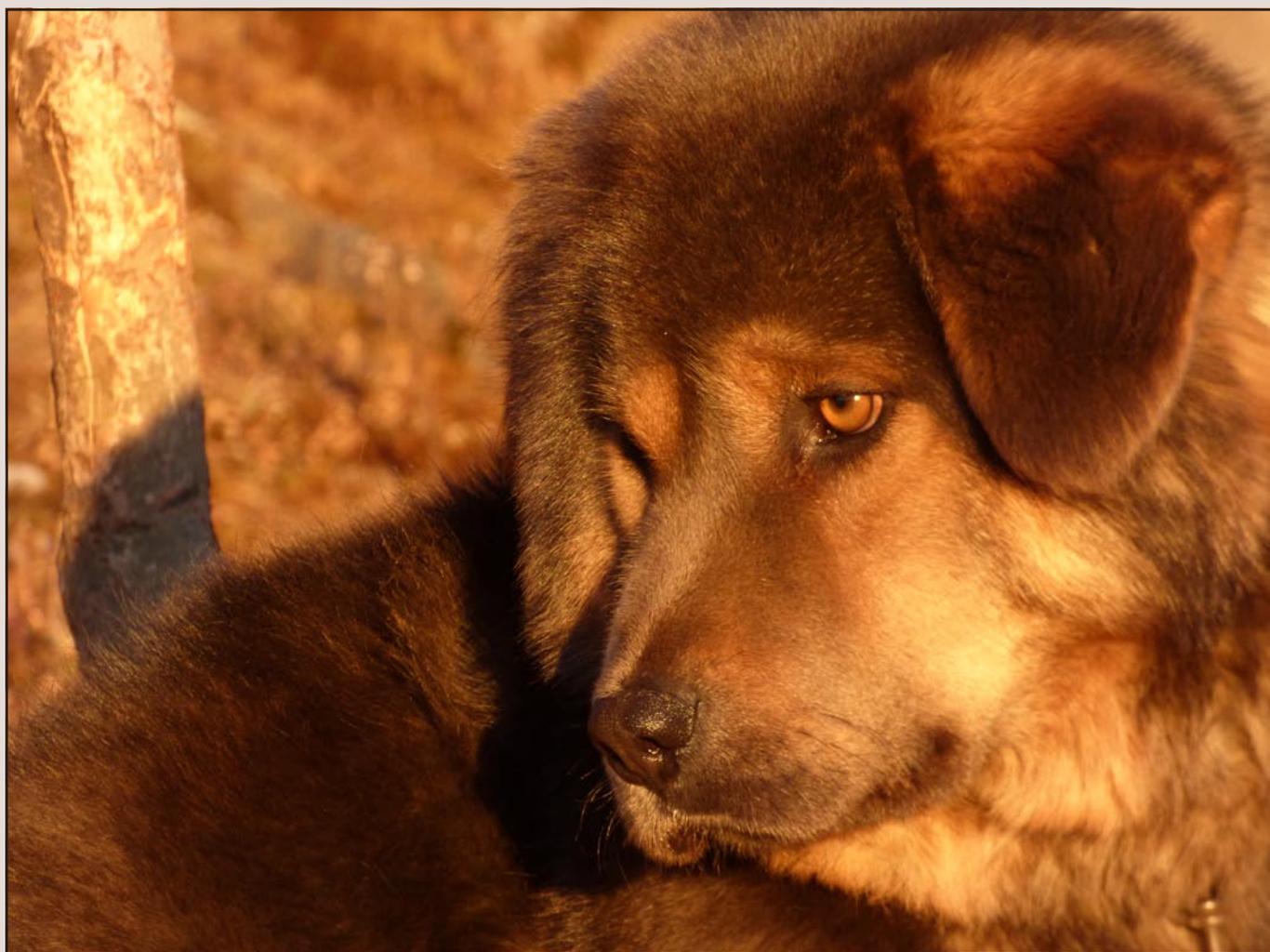
We arrived in Jastabanijang in time for lunch on a very sunny terrace. Fried potatoes with cheese and omelette was delicious. As we neared the end of lunch, soldiers started to arrive in ones and twos. AFP, a kind of military police in blue camouflage, were heading off to district headquarters to maintain order during the upcoming general election. I thought perhaps billeting some 20-odd armed men in our tiny lodge (rooms finished yesterday by the look of them) might be a problem. They were great, demolishing massive daal bhats and then sleeping all evening and all night in a makeshift camp on the

ground floor under our rooms. ‘Nepali under-floor heating’ quipped Theresa.

Once more we were very adequately fed and watered in a very simple kitchen. Watching this husband and wife team fetching, carrying and cooking so efficiently, wordlessly, was a delight. I got a blanket tonight, well, I think everyone did, and slept really well.

Wednesday 15 November

We rather expected an easier day today, descending from 3500 to 2900m. Sadly, there was some quite serious climbing first. It was once more almost as spectacular as Pike Peak so quite rewarding. Dudh Kunde and Numbur were quite close now, but across the whole Eastern horizon was Everest, Lhotse and even faraway Kanchenjunga. Then the descent. Hard at first, it then got harder as the trail steepened and we picked our way over broken rocks in wash-out gullies. Lower down were rhododendrons and gigantic Himalayan cedars. Lower still the trail was softer on muddy, root-crossed tracks through deciduous forest. Stopping for a break to eat our



boiled eggs we sat on cushions of springy moss. The final descent, before and after Tactor (so glad we are not staying there) was through squelching meadows with stepping stones, observed, rather disdainfully, by cud-chewing cows. The old stone stair trail down into Junbesi is still lovely but by then our legs were screaming 'ENOUGH'.

The Apple Garden Lodge has pine-lined, draft-proof rooms, a stove in the dining room, good cooking and wi-fi (for sale on tickets). We ate well, we had a rum and coke, we played cards. There was a quiet Ukrainian couple (boy, they could really eat) and two young German boys staying here too. We are finally on the main Jiri to Everest Base Camp Trail.

Thursday 16 November

Breakfast at 8 am (late for us) and our lodge-owner found some more coffee so we don't have to scrimp for the last few days as feared. We washed our clothes by hand in freezing water, happy to be doing so in the balmy temperature below 3000m. One by one we were called for hot showers. I washed my hair, though I have no comb so some of the dreadlocks are staying for now.

As I write this on the sunny back terrace of our lodge, overlooking the apple orchard, a man is ploughing the next field with two cows and some fairly guttural instructions. It is 12.10 and beginning to cloud over. There are two cats here, of similar heritage. The older is sleek and looks to be in good health. The younger has a little the look of the wild-cat about it. It has a healed but badly-broken leg, a healed but badly-damaged ear and a mournful yowl. There is a large but indifferent dog.

We took a slow stroll about the village this afternoon. First stop was the village shop where everyone succumbed to the temptation of either Bounty or Snickers. Munching away as we walked we found beautiful vegetable gardens, rustic houses of quite substantial dimensions and then the main monastery. Built in 1650 the frescoes and statues were really exquisite. A friendly monk showed us around on condition we looked in at his little shop (despite my 1,000 NRS donation). He did have a few cute things and not at all overpriced.

From the gompa we followed a little path through delightfully derelict houses and over a pretty



wooden bridge. A bit cool and late to get to the river we returned in fading light via a new lodge made in a renovated old monastery building. The New Zambala would be worth trying next season. Beautifully restored, immaculately clean and charming owners.

Played two tables of 13 tonight with our new Brit friends, Max and Liz. Quite a few rum and cokes, well, it was a rest day.

Friday 17 November

After a great breakfast we were off fairly early. Dot has opted to descend to Phaphlu for her health so Lahar, my personal porter, has been delegated to look after her. I now have the new guy Pasang, very little English but very conscientious. Kancha's mate from Juke. Top guy.

Within minutes we were climbing steadily on well-made trails through pine forest and then bambu jungles as we alternated between ridges and gullies. The pines were mixed with cedar and spruce. As we gained altitude rhododendron, azalea and peeris began to dominate. We finally emerged onto steeply-

sloping grasslands above the trees. In brilliant sunshine we traversed the hillside, passing a few tiny settlements with more cows than people. We made it to Phurteng (Everest View) about 11.20 and soon decided to lunch there. Liz and Max were there. A crow stole my last few ginger-nuts – took the packet. The tiny grey cats, so typical of the region, had to be chased off the cheese. We cut our slab off the other side of the block!





The lunch was delicious. Pasta with veg and lots of tiny halved fresh tomatoes. Probably should have resisted second helpings, but we didn't.

Onward then to Ringmu. Not difficult but rather longer than I had remembered – isn't it always? Actually, I had forgotten that we slept at Phurteng last time. The last stiff climb up to Ringmu was one of the hardest for me. It was quite a long day – past 4 pm when we got in. Nice to be back in our old familiar lodge, even if the loo is in a closet under the stairs. Much warmer here than Junbesi despite similar altitudes. Sunny position. Best chips ever, Sherpa stew and demon cheese/veg spring rolls means we are all agreed on staying here again tomorrow and making Taksundo La a day walk. Slept well because we were so warm.

Saturday 18 November

Another brilliant day weather-wise and a great day out too. Climbed up to Taksundo La in about an hour and a half with a brief sit down at the ancient chortens by the donkey grazing grounds. After tea and biscuits we headed into the forest on a beautiful track. Not too demanding (mostly) and only used by locals and a few cows. Views from the top were stupendous in all directions. A brilliant perspective on the whole trek. Coming down we lunched at Taksundo La, going a bit overboard on the local achar. A quarter teaspoon WAS too much. Hammered home without stopping and made Ringmu in just 45 minutes with downhill muscles kaput. Beer in the garden was a treat, as was a little lie down. My nose was peeling. More sunscreen and a hat tomorrow!

Sunday 19 November

Nice easy day, I thought, today. Great weather and an easy trail, first through forests of big pine and then open farmland. On the way we ate our picnic lunch of boiled eggs, crackers, cheese and shared nuts, washed down with mango juice sold in tiny tetra packs. The day got warmer, the road was dusty and then my my hip decided it had had enough. Very glad to see the airstrip at Phaphlu when it hove into view. Dot was soon spotted sitting in the sunshine in front of our lodge, The Everest. Soon found the hot water and then beer in the back garden. It was not cold at Phaphlu at just 2450 metres.

As I write this we have shared an entrée, it was, after all, 'chip-o-clock' and we are waiting for our dinner. Looking good for a flight tomorrow.

Monday 20 November

Nothing in my notes but I seem to recall we used the early morning to see the Ani Gompa (Old Nunnery) just at the end of the runway. A beautiful old building, cared for by Ram Bahadur. There is still an aura remaining of the famous nun who was said to have powers to see and feel much more than us. She certainly made Dorje's sickly first child well with some prayers and a name change. Go figure.

Our flight was less than an hour late; not bad by Nepali standards. Very pleasant standing in the sunshine beside the runway. Two Tara planes in quick succession took off for Lukla, one of them returned for us just twenty minutes later. The flight was great, especially when compared to our last flight into Phaphlu last April.

Soon back at 'The Shambles' with a beer or coffee to hand and a table full of junk food. I think Dorje felt sorry for us with no daal bhat but we were surprisingly content with cheese and crisps.

We walked over to Bouda at 5.30. It was already dark. Ate on The Roadhouse terrace overlooking the stupa. Top wood-fired pizza with salad and Indian red wine. (It is better than it sounds.) I had sprained my ankle slightly outside Netra's house this afternoon. It was not a pleasant walk home for me but a firm bandage and a codeine tablet sorted me and I was fine next morning.

Tuesday 21 November

We all piled into the Hi-Ace around 9 am and I installed the group at the International Guesthouse. Simple rooms with attached bathrooms, in the old style, but a very lovely garden and a good breakfast buffet. I would use them again.

Having had a rather meagre breakfast at Shambala we headed for Northfield where the coffee and the breakfast are legendary. We then hit the shops, hard. Merino for felt shoes. Amrita for knits and more, Pilgrims for books and ethnic clothes and cloth. Our man next to the Weizen (what is his name??) for 'a lot' of pashminas.

I left the group at 6 pm for a taxi to Netra's for dinner; first meat for six weeks (chicken). I heard later the group did NOT eat at their hotel but snuck out to the Thamel branch of The Roadhouse – love that pizza!

Wednesday 22 November

The last day, officially, though Tony, Denise, Lesley and Theresa are staying on for a few more days. Isabel came into town with me and we collected the group from International Guesthouse. Said farewell to Dot. I guided the rest into Pilgrims, always good for at least 20 minutes, while I grabbed a quick breakfast across the road at Riksha (ex Weizen).

Sustained, I then took them through Tahiti Thole and Assan Thole to Indra Chowk to see the backstreet markets. We walked right up to Durbar Square where we got entry tickets for Theresa and Mary. While they were there I helped Isabel find some suitable fabrics for making bags at Ketiko Sewing Company. Behind Indra Chowk is a warren of fabric shops, the best being The Linen Club. Meandered back to Thamel, eating alu paratha on a balcony cafe, we easily spotted Tony passing by; only too happy to share our ridiculously generous portions.

All shopped out I said goodbye to 'Merri' and walked about half the way home – at 5 pm it is actually a faster way out of downtown.

The next few days are a blur. If anything really exciting happened then I am sorry I missed it. Theresa left for Canada and Tony, Denise and Lesley (Tondenles as they are referred to in my notes) have left for Thailand. All quiet at Kapan. I have moved down to Muna Cottage. Bliss! Especially that breakfast.

I can always find something positive to say about every group but this gang really was a bit special. Great vibe of mutual support along with a healthy dose of competition – not with the trekking so much but at the card table. Some really exciting games of 13 with chopper, over-chopper and then super-chopper in a final hand one evening. Phaphlu perhaps. Our enthusiasm may have kept a couple of people awake till the astonishingly-late hour of 9 pm. They could have been French?

Being just six guests was great. Any more would have been problematic at some of the tiny lodges, like Kancha's at Lamuje or the just-built 'upstairs' at Jastabanijang.

Climbing Pike Peak was the highlight for me. A truly astounding 360 degree view. From a distant smudge of Annapurnas, through Manaslu, Langtang, Ganesh Himal, the close-up Dudh Kundi and Numbur

ranges, Everest and friends like Makalu, all the way to Kanchenjunga. A mind blowing ascent, loved it!

The descent off Pike via Jastabanijang to Junbesi was tricky in places. Did not expect the ice! Will consider an alternative descent, via the ascent route, for some customers next season, with a jeep up the road to Junbesi. Might work for some. However hard the trek is in places, the maximum altitude of 4100 is a mitigating factor.

So thanks Mary, Theresa, Lesley, Tony, Denise and Dot. Big thanks also to Dorje for guiding; your back up was always spot on and appreciated. Of course we could not have done any of it without Lahar, Kancha, Akal (x 2), Ram, Pasang, Bir and Ramesh. Top team. Respect!

Definitely want to run this trek again in 2018. Have just set the dates for November 11–26. If you want to enquire you can find me on facebook at Slowtrekking or at www.slowtrekking.com or email teresadb@hotmail.com or vonschwichtenberg@gmail.com. I am just back in Germany for the summer after trekking to Gokyo. Yes, it was amazing!

See you next time,

Cheers, Namaste and Tashi Delek
Teresa didi

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





TREKking WITH TERESA

www.slowtrekking.com • teresadb@hotmail.com

