

Trekking with Teresa

TREK REPORT EVEREST REGION – NOVEMBER 2022



Members: Teresa Williams and Sharon Leonard

Support: Lahar Pun and Rinji (Bir) Tamang

October 24: At 2 pm I was just about out of the door for the airport when I checked Sharon's ticket one last time. 4 pm Kuala Lumpur!! 8 pm Kathmandu!! Relax. I gained a lovely afternoon in my airy room reading Year of the Farmer. At the airport, the new arrival hall is superb. OK, you have to pay 100 NRS (\$1) to sit in air-conditioned comfort on upholstered chairs opposite the new lifts. There is a Himalayan Java and clean toilets. Airport quiet and Sharon emerged from the lift just 40 minutes after landing. Some kind of record. Our driver, Ram Bahadur, was quickly summoned by phone (how did we do all this in the old days?). The drive home to Benchen Monastery Guesthouse at Swayambu was a delight as every house, street, business, tree draped with coloured lights for Diwali. Even the most modest home had a coloured chalk mandala and a butter lamp in front of the entrance. Way too late for dinner, the cook had packed up some veg pakoras for us and I had wrapped the cans of tonic in the heavy quilt bedding to keep them really cold. A gifted bottle of Rose

Gin was put to good use for a welcome drink. Sat on the balcony, high above the city, enjoying the light and sound show that is Diwali.



October 25: A slow start today. Sharon has come a little early for the trek so a first requirement was to wash some clothes; impossible to dry them in under three days in Bali without growing mould. We taxied into Thamel and breakfasted on good omelettes at Potala Hotel; our Nepali agent, Deepak, from Sahara Treks and Travels, has his second office here. I left Sharon in Pilgrims Bookshop while I organised currency exchange; she escaped with just three books this time.

We taxied home to meet our lunch visitors on the shady dining terrace at Benchen. Still 25 degrees today so too hot in full sun. Isabel and Lizzie's taxi found us, eventually, and even Mangal Thakali dropped by, which was a lovely surprise.

We read, and possibly even dozed a little this afternoon but by seven we were wide awake but not yet hungry. We strolled through the local area of Kimdol, out to the big Buddhas on the Ring Road. Most shops were closed but we stopped a couple of times to dance with locals. Near home I noticed the Eco Hostel was still open; it is home to quite a few medicos from nearby Chauni Hospital. We shared the tiny outside terrace with some monks and dined on veg momos and beer. As the monks moved on, their table was taken by a soldier and his mate. The more enthusiastic of the two was almost annoying but his mate, rolling his eyes behind his friends back, soon steered him out of harm's way. This little café is run by an ex-monk from Benchen, Tarching, who knew me, by name, from 14 years ago!!! After dinner, it took us a good few minutes to raise the chowkidar. He likes to lock the gate early though I am pretty sure he knew we were just outside.

October 26: Another nice slow start. The waiter, and general helper at the guesthouse is called Chiring, and we are friends on Facebook. Such an easy way to organise a coffee, on room service no less. We ate our breakfast on the terrace and then taxied into downtown, starting at Durbar Marg. Nearly everything was closed. Thamel, being the commercial hub for tourists, was open and we cruised a few of the better trekking

shops and found a few bargains. We tried on some cool Nepali clothes and bought some cute things. We lunched at the Roadhouse – half a pizza each this time – gotta show some restraint.

Thamel suddenly erupted as hundreds local youngsters arrived in a parade, celebrating Newari New Year. Lots of very loud drumming and some really wild dancing. We ducked down a tiny back lane and then easily found a taxi.

I did a last-minute pack of my rucksack for Everest. 10.5 kg. Lahar contacted for last minute instructions – buy more ground coffee! All set for Friday.

October 27: One more easy day before we trek. At the very fancy Marriot Hotel we caught up with Meghan, a teacher at the American School here in Kathmandu. She is a travel-mate from one of Sharon's many previous trips. Thanks Cliff, delicious lunch.

We walked back, via Thamel, where Sharon bought a huge silk chainstitch embroidered Kashmiri rug. A bargain. I paid the same for work, one quarter the size, in SriNaggar in 1986.

Cheese and chapatti for supper; we made a couple of spares for the trip tomorrow.

October 28: Lahar arrived at 6 am and Dorje accompanied our jeep as the driver was not sure he would be able to find our location. We soon dropped Dorje near his home on the way out of Kathmandu. It was really quiet. Most people were on holiday and business was at a standstill. Sadly, it was quite hazy, so no mountain views as we cleared the ridge at Dulikhel. Farms, and hills, rivers and harvest were enough to entertain us. Still cool at this early hour. First stop Banepa, Mamas Café, soon to be a chain. We ate KwarToast with Chana dhal. Lovely brekky with real coffee in the morning sunshine.

Second stop also REAL COFFEE. What is happening to Nepal? Pushed on to a nice little lunch stop, Sherpa Mountain Café, at the entrance to a rather grotty little town. Only daal bhat on the menu but that is typical in these little roadside villages. Icy cold Coca-Cola was nice.

Just five minutes down the road from our lunch stop, we crossed the huge Sunkhosi river, whose course we had been following for hours. The road climbed steeply and it was soon much cooler and the rugged hillsides were cloaked in rhododendrons, way too steep for farming. At Pattale Bir, our second porter, was waiting on the steps of our lodge. He was fresh off a 3 Passes trek with young Australians who had not endeared themselves. 'There's no mirror in the bathroom?' I mean, really!

I had guessed, incorrectly, that my warm clothes would be fine in the very bottom of my pack. We quickly dug out some warm gear and went down the road to the village, for a stretch after a full day in the jeep. We found Headmaster Ram's café open and the stove lit. Rum and coke went down well, with us and our local friends. It is really cold up here at 2800m.

As I write this, I believe the stove is being lit in the dining room of our lodge. There are quite a few young Nepalis here, and a few Indians. Mostly on motorbikes but some in jeeps. None of them are trekking. There are no bideshi (westerners) here. On a shelf in my room, I found an electric blanket. OMG! It is on, I can feel it getting hot. OMG!

Good dinner of fried potatoes with veg and egg. We got to hold a lovely baby while mum busied herself serving dinners. The young Nepali lads look bored. The girls are miming pop songs for Tik Tok, since the boys are not that interested in them. Our plans are pretty fluid and that is just how we like it.

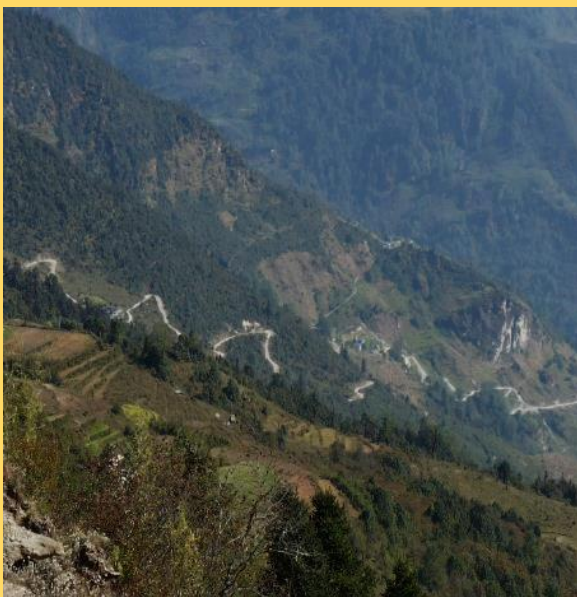
October 29: We awoke to clear skies and fabulous views. Numbur is the closest but all the big peaks in the Everest range were clear. After a simple breakfast we walked into Pattale village to visit Dorje's mum. Dorje is another of our great guides. Though mum was not very well she was delighted to see us and ushered us upstairs for a cuppa. We had shared a drink with Dorje's dad the night before.



Our jeep arrived mid-morning and it was a perfect drive. A bit of blacktop missing here and there but only one and a half hours till we were dropped at Santos' great little lodge in Phaphlu. We know Santos and his wife from their previous lodge at Ringmu. Here they have a coffee machine, a very comfortable dining room and lots of customers. Tonight 6 French, 9

Polish, 3 Nepalis, 1 Dutch and us two. Walked to the Ani Gumpa in the afternoon. I talked over the jeep details but, in retrospect, could have made a better choice. There was a brief incident with a rat during the night but since I had left a 2-day-old old cheese sandwich on the windowsill the less said about it the better.

October 30: This was a new route for us. A 4 x 4 twin cab pick-up which takes 5 people would take us to Kharikhola in about 6 – 7 hours. The road was appalling, terrifying and beautiful. These foothills have farms on any piece of flattish land, and is terraced in the steeper places. We had a tea stop and a lunch stop, and a couple of stops just to look at the view. I saw Choy Oyu (due North?) from one vantage point. Every high point allowed a view back to Taksundo La. We saved three days trekking. Some of the hairpin bends leading down to the only road bridge required a 5-point turn. Excruciating. Did I mention, the road was appalling.



I have since learned that one can jeep from Phaphlu to Nuntala, get out and walk over the river on the steel suspension bridge. This jeep takes around two and a half to three hours. The jeeps waiting on the far side will get you to Kharikhola in under an hour. Next time!

This evening we strolled through Kharikhola for about twenty minutes to the monastery on the ridge at the edge of the village. I remember climbing up here with Kancha after I sprained my knee at Nuntala some years ago. Puts the jeep ride into perspective. The gumpa has been lovingly rebuilt in memory of a climber who lost their life here. Dusk fell early and quickly at 5.30, so it was almost dark by the time we got back to our lodge. Huge quilts and thick foam mattresses - very comfortable as I write this.

October 31: Today's jeep took us just one hour up a steep road. I was a bit disappointed, having imagined we would only have to walk downhill to Poyan. The first hour was very uphill, rocky and still quite muddy in the shade of the forest. There were a lot of halts for Khaghar (?) mules and dzopke (half yak, half ox), often with not much room for passing, especially when the mules were carrying gas cylinders. Nervous at first, we soon

learned to dive to the inside of the track and give the beasts a good hard shove if they were too close. Soon Bir took control, reaching for a pole from Sharon he then shooed them wide.



Our lodge in Poyan was brilliant. Little wooden cabins terraced above the trail, bathed in sunshine. Some of them had attached toilets, 'Notties" (not squatties). Not self-flushing but no drama with a full big bucket of water provided. The blankets are thick, clean and plentiful. Vegie omelette with chips went down very well for lunch.

I emptied my new Karrimor rucksack and we adjusted it properly for Lahar. Sharon's poles are letting go when used in mud. On-line instructions would have helped but no wi-fi today.

A wall of forest covers the view across the valley from my room and the sound of rushing water somewhere below soothes the spirit. Only three and a half hours trekking today but any lapse in concentration might have been costly, especially on some of the landslides where six inches was a generous track. Great to have a strong arm to hang onto here and there today. All in good health and blissed out by our surroundings and the weather.





November 1: What a huge day. Chilly to start we dressed warmly. First hour was 'Nepali flat'....little bit up, little bit down. By the end of the day, I think we had encountered about 300 animals, mules mostly. The yaks are very slow moving and impossible to pass so it is 'Yak Speed Ahead'. This trail made you redefine 'rocky', and the rocks were liberally plastered with animal shit in places. Mule trains passing each other was the biggest danger but we became adept at finding little niches in which to hide, and rest, as the day wore on. Despite the knee-crunching descent, and the animal hazards, we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. Concentrating like hell as slips could be dire, not to mention dirty, we did not notice how hard we were working. Watching the mule and yak drivers' intense efforts to avoid bashing each other's animals, was fascinating, and the sound of jangling bells, hoarse shouts and ear-piercing whistles floated up and down the hill all day.

We made such slow progress that we arrived at the river crossing shortly before 4 pm. It had taken 7 hours to do 3 – 4 hours normal trekking. We gave up the idea of a 2-hour climb to Chaurikharka and found a lovely lodge at the riverside. Our rooms were traditional, wood-lined, and with a western loo just down the hall. A pink bathroom suite! We availed ourselves of gas-fired showers and I am writing this sitting near the stove in the dining room. BBC news is on the tv and we have a rum and coke. Cheers.

I ducked outside (for a cigarette) not long after dusk and was rewarded with a view of Mera Peak glittering in the last of the sun's rays, just behind the lodge. Later on, I saw it glowing gently in the last of the setting moon.

Homemade pumpkin soup with huge spring rolls added to the joy. We met Rajiv tonight. A man from New Delhi who has been here as often as I have. He runs motorbike tours from near Hamburg to the Alps. Charming man. Top day.

November 2: Today went exactly to plan. The warm sunny day made the steep climb up to Chaurikharka a hot, sweaty affair. The views down to the river were breathtaking. A big waterfall crashing under the suspension bridge was a special treat. Sharon was unstoppable. A spell at a little creek on the way was another highlight. At our lunch stop we sat in an immaculate traditional kitchen with the guys.

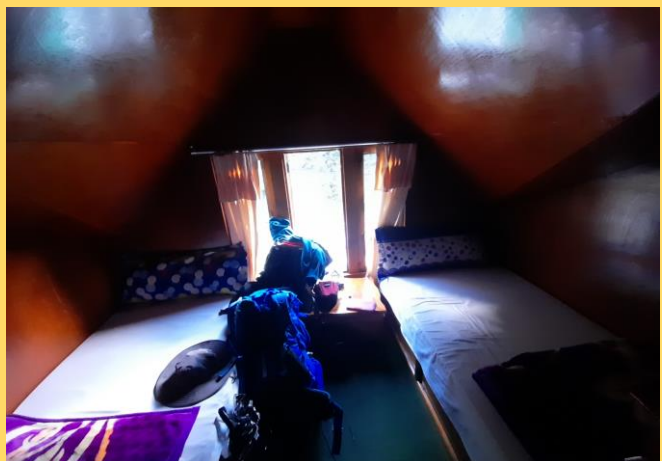
Shortly after lunch we joined the main trail. OMG!! It felt like a million trekkers were on the track. Russian, Spanish, Chinese, French....and hardly any more Namastes. Rather different from the last few days. On the positive side, lovely new or upgraded cafes serving real coffee. The Lama Lodge is a treat. Just a lunch stop for most trekkers, who tend to follow rather predictable overnight stops. Beautiful rooms with two windows affording lovely views by day and night in the moonlight.





November 3: We did not start early, figuring this would be an easier day. Not quite as easy as I remembered from my last visit in 2018. So many stairs, so much up, so much down. We must have ascended and descended the same 200 metres at least five times. We did take it easy. Just 40 minutes out, just past Phakding, we stopped at the fancy bakery for Café Americano and chocolate/vanilla home-made cookies. Our usual lunch place at Benkar was a building site. Why not. It is a great location. We dropped down to a nice old-style lodge where they made us pumpkin soup and chips. A very friendly dog snuck under the table and was rewarded with the last few chips. It was still warm enough to remove boots and socks for the lunch break.

More up and down after lunch. Climbing up through the big village of Monjo we bought our trekking permits at the entrance to the Sargamatha National Park. We met a couple of athletic young lads doing the 3 Passes Trek. One Aussie, one Canadian, like us; just a couple of generations younger. Since our favourite lodge in Jorsale, Nirvana Gardens, was full, the guys guided us back through the village to one of their favourites. I love it. Our tiny wood-lined rooms are in the attic with dormer windows overlooking the raging Dudkhosi just metres below. Soft mattresses, thick blankets and a spotless loo just down the hall. Could not be happier. What a find.



November 4:

Namche Bazaar. A hard slog but done in 4 hours from Jorsale. The riverside trail has been completely upgraded but the uphill track from the high bridge to Namche is as hard as ever. Namche is still an awesome sight on arrival. Such a huge village, so far from any roads. The Green Tara lodge was not as good as I remembered. No longer friendly now that they are popular. We rested, showered, shopped and had a glass of Australian Merlot. Nice company in the dining room tonight.



November 5:

A stunning day. We set off for Thamo after a late, leisurely breakfast. A beautiful clear day and jackets were off after ten minutes of winding uphill stairs to exit Namche village. Once we gained the rim the trekking was much easier, flat in places on sandy trails, winding gently through pine forests at first then through small farming communities. The views back to Namche with Kwangde and Thamserku towering above it were stunning.

We stopped for tea in an idyllic garden but moved on when company arrived. The Maya Lodge at Thamo was very busy doing lunches but very few, if any, were staying overnight. I started to do my washing while we waited for our lunch but Bir quickly stepped in and insisted on doing it. Wished I had not included my smalls.

As I write this, we have just been, slowly, up to the Ani Gumpa (nunnery). The sun disappeared behind enormous peaks at 3 o'clock. Time to break out the merino and down clothes. Not quite cold enough for gloves but beanies, definitely.

We are going up to Thame tomorrow for a night or two, so we have packed out a lot of light, unwanted clothing and gear to collect on the way back down.



November 6:

Yet another perfect weather day. Clear blue skies and sparkling white peaks. The rooms were fairly chilly overnight so we were surprised at how hot it was in the sun. In the dining room, the international cricket was on the tv, live from Australia. Netherlands vs South Africa. 8 overs left, 69 runs required by SA, Netherlands having set 169 to beat. As the required run rate crept up over 10, it was compelling viewing from the Adelaide Oval. We ate breakfast very slowly. Sharon finished reading the Val McDermid we had pinched from the Green Tara Lodge: 500 rupees for a shower (and DO NOT wash any clothes); 500 rupees for a barely-effective 1-day internet card; 250 rupees to charge anything. I doubt I would stay there again. The Netherlands won in an exciting finish so we said goodbye to Craig, my fellow cricket fan, and were soon on our way to Thame in fine sunny weather.

Construction of a new bridge had played havoc with the trail on the far side of the river so we had been advised to cross the river at the Hydro powerstation. After a lovely half hour, clinging to the fairly level ridge above the river, we crossed the river, near the hydro-electric station, hoping to find a cup of tea there. The residential village was deserted so we pushed on. It was hot, it was steep, it was very loose and it was long, adding at least an hour to today's trek. We could not really complain as we caught up with a 90-year-old man carrying a basket of firewood; the trees near his home in Thame are protected. Good for the environment and for tourists to look at, not so great for an elderly man whose only heating and cooking is on a wood-fired stove. Friends at home had given me money to use in just such situations. Enough to buy some new boots anyway.



The lodge at Thame, Alpine Cottage Resort, was beautiful. Run by the daughter of the Maya Lodge in Thamo, Mingma is a record holder in many of the Kala Patar to Namche marathons, which are open to an international field of men and women. She now has a very engaging 3-year-old and another on the way. We lunched, had a little rest in our individual cabins, each with attached bathrooms – flushing loos and electric hot showers – then got back into our boots for an exploration of the village. ‘Gumna Jane’ the Nepalis would say, though Sherpa, almost Tibetan, is much more widely spoken than Nepali in this part of the country.



We strolled up a small ridge behind the village and were amazed to find Thame Thang, another village, as big as Thame. We could see a long way up the valley which leads to the Renjo La, it looked bleak and a very long way. At 5400 metres it is still on my bucket list. The way back involved quite a few fields and farmyards where large beasts did not look that pleased to see us.

After warming ourselves by the stove with a hot chocolate, we met three lovely Germans, doing the 3-passes and clearly well-fit for it. They had spent their day doing a 4900-metre-high acclimatisation trek. Good on them.

November 7: We decided that one night at the top was enough. The village is at almost 4000 metres and we did not seem to have much energy for trekking around the area, as planned. We agreed to descend just to Thamo and several other trekkers had advised that access to the old bridge was 'not too bad'. Of course, it is not too bad as an uphill climb. Going down it was treacherous on a steep, narrow temporary gravelly track with very few rocks or bushes to stop the inevitable slides. Lahar and Bir were great and helped us down slowly. I was sorely tempted to sit down and slide on my bottom a few times, but then there was the question of stopping!

There were a few streaky clouds very high up this morning, and it was the first time I had trekked in long sleeves. By 10 the sun blazed and it was hot when sheltered from the breeze.



Happy to be back at the Maya Lodge in Thamo, waiting for lunch in the garden.

November 8:

Yet another leisurely start. While we often refer to this trail as going 'down to Namche', there are a lot of ups on the way. I thought we should be getting much stronger now, after 10 days of trekking, but my legs felt leaden this morning. I did find my 'trekking legs' a week or so ago, but appear to have lost them again. This trail to Namche from Thamo is a dream, in bright sunshine, past stone-walled potato fields on the flat areas. We had become quite blasé about 6000 metre glittering peaks. They were everywhere. Used to seeing mountain goats, surprised to see Blue Sheep close to the trail.



On reaching Namche it was a bit of a grind to climb up and behind the village, so a tea stop was in order at the junction with the main EBC trail. The simple lodge belonged to friends of Bir and the lovely Sahuni (proprietress) turned out to be a neighbour of Kancha and Durga at Juke. She laughed when she heard I had stayed at their house in April this year.

The trail from Namche to Kangzuma is roundly described as flat. Nepali flat – bit up, bit down. Valley views were astounding. As we came close to our destination the whole valley opened up with Thamserku, Khang Tenga and Ama Dablam standing proud. Then the giants, including Everest, showing its tent-shaped peak behind Lhotse and Nuptse. In the valley below we could clearly see Phortse Tenga in the bottom on the river and the arduous track up to Thangboche. The track up to Mong Danda and Phortse was a distant lure. It is great to be back here. At one stage, no less than ten eagles hovered and wheeled above us. Were we going so slowly that we looked like a potential meal??

It was great to catch up with the folks at Ama Dablam and Thamserku lodges but sadly they were both full. Bir checked other smaller lodges nearby but all full. This has become a popular overnight stop for trekkers returning from EBC and Gokyo. Nothing for it but to climb 45 minutes up to Khumjung. The initial climb, through shady local paths between huge granite outcrops just behind the lodges, (the school trail) was a delight, but the long shallow stairs for the last half hour were a bit of a grind on tired legs.

Khumjung was very peaceful after the buzz of the main trail. We stopped at the first decent-looking lodge when a delightful 3-year-old with a blue satin jacket and a topknot of long hair put out his hand to shake 'hullo' with Bir. Finding Santo, a porter from previous treks, having a coffee in the kitchen was a real surprise. The rooms were great with amazing views. The stove in the dining room was very effective and pasta with home-made tomato sauce was one of our best meals. I don't know what the festival was this evening but all the locals were

dressed up and cruising the village, singing in groups door-to-door. Lots of them came to our door and we soon ran out of small change for donations. Charming visit.



November 9: Perhaps the best day of the trek. Kumbjung is a beautiful place to wake up, even if the inside of the windows was iced over. We dressed quickly and descended to the back garden for breakfast outside in the sunshine. As we set off, half a dozen huge yaks mooched around the stupa in the middle of the village. We decided on the other 'school trail' to complete the loop back to Namche. Ostensibly the easiest. I had not stopped in Kumbjung for quite a few years so it was a lovely surprise to find our old friend Sheru, the art teacher at the Hilary School, in his modest home with his wife and three kids. Oldest in Class 8!! The last time we met, on the trail, he had just married. Sharon bought a really good painting of local scenery.

We did quite well on the climb to the ridge and could hardly bare to leave as the view was stunning through 360 degrees.





My knees held up quite well down to the tea shop at the Shyangboche Airstrip, which is now mainly used for big commercial helicopters. Descending further through sandy gullies, the odd bit of slippery mud and then a million stone stairs we dropped from 3760 m to 3400 metres. My knees were not happy. As I write this, Sharon and I are sharing a hotel room in Namche. Parquetry floors, a bay window with two wicker chairs, a bathroom with a separate large shower with endless hot water and, get this, electric blankets. It is below freezing overnight. I had a glass of Merlot with my lunch. Is this Namche??

November 10: It was a bloody long way, mostly downhill today. Donkeys and Dzopke caused a few welcome halts along the way. By this time, we had become seriously adept at shoving hard to avoid contact with a very large animal, often with really big horns. First stop was Jorsale for a decent breakfast as we left Namche on a cup of tea and a biscuit. Amazing how easy the trail was as a descent. We could not pass Bankar without another bowl of the home-made pumpkin soup, complete with friendly dog. It was a rather long way, but of course we did this as an uphill trek in two days not one!



We opted for the posh room tonight with separate toilet and shower, but we were way too cold and tired to get wet. Instead we cosied-up around the stove in the dining room and then played cards with the porters. My kind of good night in.

November 11: I was quietly dreading this day as I know full well how arduous is the climb up to Lukla at the end of the day. But we only took three hours and managed the uphill way better than the downhill. It was great to trek past flower and vegetable gardens. The fields below us in Chaurikharka were either ploughed or verdant with winter wheat, which had sprung up since we were there, just 10 days ago. On the way today I saw a tiny kitten, a month-old calf, baby white rabbits and 2 puppies. The trail was busy with first-day trekkers who had flown into Lukla. They smelled of soap. The girls with shiny hair, the guys in their black trekking gear (no dust).



We cruised through Lukla which has developed almost beyond recognition. Many fancy coffee bars, fancier trekking shops, and the drainage buried under the road. The streets thronged with trekkers who kept arriving all afternoon. At a new shop called Lukla Wear and bought the guys a jackets and socks. They always say they have enough socks. They don't.

Dinner in the lodge, of course. Big, new, modern Hiker's Hotel has very large rooms with good bathrooms. I ordered the pasta and realised, too late, what a poor choice this was when I saw Bir and Lahar's daal bhat. What was I thinking? We are going to sleep in our clothes to save dressing in the cold at 5 am tomorrow.

November 12: It was dark as we schlepped around to the Tenzing Airport at Lukla. Deserted streets echoed our footsteps on the frozen flagstones. Only the garish Buddha on the exit gate blinked its neon goodbye. The airport was full of people who had been cancelled yesterday so we were told to just please 'back off' for half an hour. Coffee across the road at our favourite cosy café and then back to the queue. I had first place at the desk and guarded my position carefully – for nearly two hours! If you are not 'in the face' of the check-in clerk, you will be shunted onto later flights – which may or may not exist. Not my first rodeo!

Finally, staff arrived, bags were weighed and boarding passes issued – we progressed to the 'departure lounge' which still smells overwhelmingly of the nearby toilets. I saw a Sita plane land and park right outside the window. I edged to the boarding gates waving my boarding pass with what I hoped was a questioning look on my face. It was snatched from my hand, ripped in half and returned to me with a bit of a shove out the door. Sharon and Bir were right behind me but Lahar was in the loo. Luckily, Bir was waving his 'Sati' (friends) boarding pass and Lahar caught us up on the tarmac. Phew! Minutes later we are airborne, always a relief on this short, 545 metre, downhill runway. At first it was very bumpy but it often is on this flight, as we skim a few high windy passes. The flight smoothed out as we descended to Ramechhap, just 25 minutes away. The steep-sided foothills soon gave way to endless rice terraces, flooded though barely planted, glinting in the morning sun. Ramechhap felt almost balmy after Lukla, we had descended almost 2000 metres.

A jeep heading to Kathmandu was soon located and a price agreed. A private, rather posh Scorpio jeep, driven by dad and including mum and their 12-year-old kid. I would have preferred to go straight into Kathmandu but the family wanted to stop for lunch an hour outside the city. We also took short stops to visit the lady's mother and to an amazing dried fruit and lolly shop, where we were treated to something sweet and gummy. Delicious.

The International Guesthouse seems luxurious after trekking. Made up beds, parquet floors and beautiful Nepali antique artefacts all over the place, especially the garden. To allow Lahar to leave tomorrow morning, we need to dine at Netra's in Kapan tonight. In retrospect it was a bit of a stretch. A much-needed long sleep tonight. Utterly exhausted.



November 13: I woke feeling sick this morning so had to leave Sharon to her own devices. Our hotel has all the food and drinks anyone could want and we were just a hundred metres from downtown Thamel. We had a full-on rest day – though mine was spent entirely in bed. What is wrong with me? I bought a RATS test and no sign of Covid so I dosed up on the advice of my local pharmacist; Amoxycillin, Sinex, Nasal Spray, cough syrup and Strepsils. All set.

November 14: This was always a spare day in case our flight out of Lukla was delayed. Sharon and I were invited to join Lizzie for daal bhat at Bir's house in Gokarna. I was too sick to get out of bed for long but I put a sweater on over my pyjamas and shuffled out to the main street to set Sharon up with a taxi. I gave the driver Netra's phone number to 'guide him in' at the Kapan end. The lunch apparently went well but I was still relieved to see Sharon safely back in the hotel this afternoon. While I was too sick to look after her properly (actually, not at all) I need not have worried. She easily found her way in and out of Thamel, a shopping mecca if ever there was one. She even found The Roadhouse this evening for a Pasta Carbonara.

Sharon's luggage weighed way less than the Turkish Airlines generous allowance of 2 bags, each less than 23 kg. All set for departure tomorrow morning.

November 15: Deepak, my super-agent and good friend, offered to take Sharon to the airport this morning. I was still, after three days, unable to get up for more than a few minutes at a time. Was actually a little worried, seeing no sign of improvement at all.

Sharon's flight was on time and I later received texts from Sharon who was duty-free shopping at Istanbul airport, first stop on her circuitous flight home to Vancouver. Ever Westward was the cheapest option.

Rather like my Muktinath trek with Kati, earlier this year, it was unusual to be trekking with just one customer. With three cancellations, for various reasons, it was just the two of us, plus Lahar and Bir of course. Obvious to anyone that we could not have done this without them. And just like the Muktinath trek, this one was fantastic. Sharon and I are both 'cup half full' types. We laugh easily and, like the Nepalis, we make an actual effort not to 'mind' when things don't break our way.

The jeep to Kharikhola was a bit too rugged but I have learned now that there was a better alternative. Tham Danda, the furthest the jeeps can currently take us, still leaves a tough climb up, then down to Poyan and the same again Poyan to Chaurikharka next day.

The Khumbu really is the most spectacular trekking region, but it is busy. We were stunned when we hit the main trail to EBC. Every day that we spent off this trail, e.g. Thamo, Thame, Kumjung, and all the trail below Lukla, were much nicer. Folks are trekking in groups of 10 – 20 people. Porters are still often shared and thus overloaded, which is a bit sad. To see the youngsters in cool black gear, carrying no more than a skimpy daypack, or just a water bottle, while their porters stagger along, overloaded with two, or even three rucksacks tied together. There is just no need for this.

We had a ball in our little posse. We struggled at times – making an improvised detour over a big hill to Thame comes to mind. But, even then, we laughed at our lack of physical ability and just did it slowly. We felt there was nothing we could not do. Thank you, Sharon, Lahar and Bir. You showed me what I could still do. A bit of a challenge but we came up trumps.

Cheers

Namaste

Tashi Delek

Teresadidi

Hoping to do a similar trek next October, 2023. teresadb@hotmail.com or vonschwichtenberg@gmail.com to contact. Some keen trekkers are considering Gokyo but, given the recent air crash in Pokhara, I would like to trek in and trek out of the Everest region, and that makes Gokyo a bit of a stretch. I also love staying off the main trails. To be decided.