

Trekking with Teresa

Trek Report – Muktinath November 2014



November 6: Barbera and Jette were already here and visiting Boudanilkantha with Dhan Raj so I only had to collect Sebastian from the airport to complete our small group with Lahar, Kancha, Ramesh and Bir. We dined at Bouda under a full moon. The Stupa was beautifully illuminated tonight.

November 7: Jette, Barbera, me, Sebastian, Bir, Kancha and Ramesh piled into Deepak's lovely Toyota Hi-ace around 8.30 this morning. Traffic was light as we dropped Deepak 'at office' in Thamel. We crested the rim of the Kathmandu Valley by 9.30. It was a pretty hazy day but the air quality improved dramatically as we coasted down the switchback road on far side of the rim. First stop was the River Top Café, a tiny little tea shop right on the river bank. Clean loo and delicious tea. Just an hour and a half later, along the scenic Prithvi Highway, to Riverside Springs Resort for lunch. The gardens are looking great due to the late rains a few weeks ago (remember the Oct 14 disaster). In Pokhara we checked into the hotel Splendid View around 4 pm. The name says it all. Lahar was there to meet us. Dinner at Black and White was as good as ever – paneer butter masala with naan bread. We strolled about the main tourist drag but turned in fairly early – it had been a long day on the road.

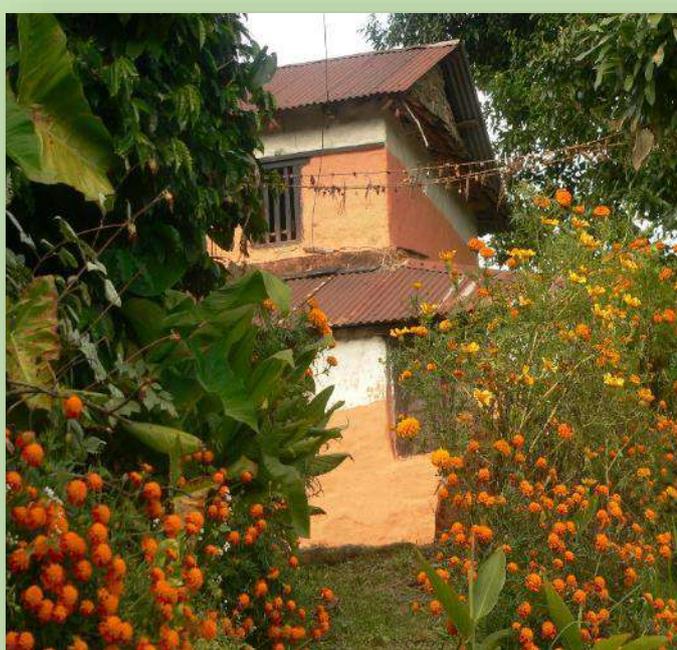
Saturday November 8: Breakfast was included so the guests dined in while I, coffee snob that I am, ducked out to the Black and White for some real takeaway coffees. Lahar came over at 8 this morning and has taken Sebastian, Jette and Barbera out on the lake to the Peace Stupa for a little 'test trek'. Not that any of them needed it, but Sebastian soon realised that his boots were a bit hot and bought some trekking sandals this evening. Luckily, it was clear and sunny in Pokhara this morning with clear views of the Anapurna. Sebastian is heading off for a tandem paragliding flight and I am taking the ladies out for lunch overlooking the lake.

Sebastian had a great flight and I think Jette may be tempted to try it when we return to Pokhara on the Cultural Safari. This evening I helped Jette to buy some great new trekking gear at the real North Face shop and later Sebastian got himself kitted-out with trekking essentials at the more moderately priced 'North Fake' shop. Hat, sunglasses (which he had amazingly never worn before) trekking shirt, water bottle, buff and a waterproof/windproof jacket. All set for tomorrow.

We had a very tasty dinner at Café Olive.

Sunday November 9: Early wake-up call at 6.15 and then two local taxis out to Millanchowk on the outskirts of Pokhara. We set out on a warm, partly overcast day up a little-used jeep road. We walked in deep shade. After about an hour we turned off the road and mounted a tiny, jungle trail which climbed straight up to the Eco Village high on a ridge overlooking Pokhara. It was a tad early for lunch but the food took ages to prepare so we were ravenous by the time it arrived. Gouma, our hostess picked and prepared the veg herself and then rolled the hand-made pasta for our veg Thukpa. Delicious.

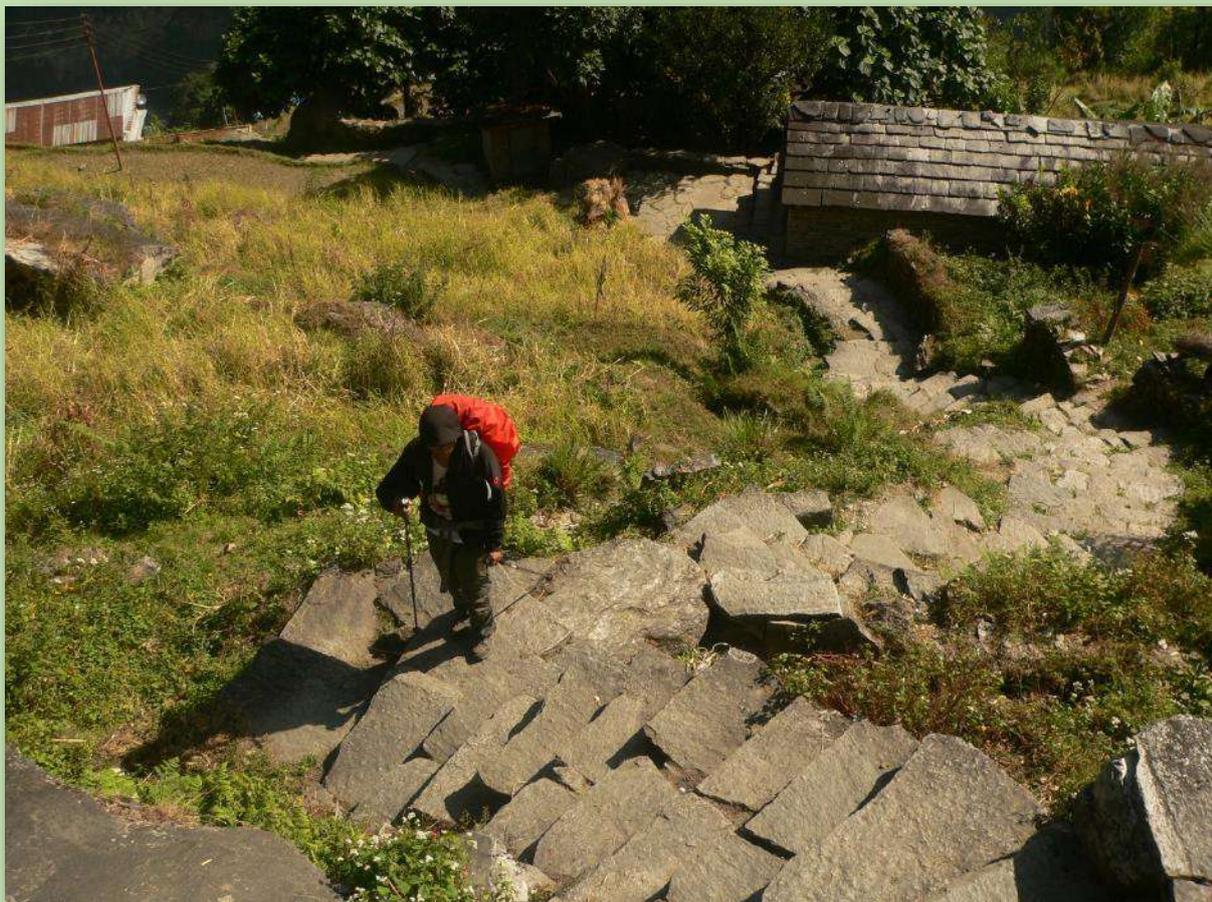
At one o'clock I estimated it would take about two hours to reach Damphus. I was way out. We crossed farming fields till we located the trail then wound through delightful villages on old stone paths. Every house was surrounded by massed marigolds and over-run with morning glory and bougainvillea.



Poinsettia and hibiscus were other favourites. The trail climbed steeply, still on old stone stairs, to the beginning of Damphus. We still had a way to go and it was closing in on 5 pm when our lodge hover into view. Paradise. Almost too tired to stand up we showered, ate and then slept like logs. A very big first day.

Monday November 10: Another big day. Climbed all morning from 8 – 11. Sebastian gave Kancha the slip somehow shortly before Deorali and we didn't find him again until we reached our final destination at Landruk. He had assumed that we were ahead of him so pushed on to Tolka which should have been our lunch stop) but we were waiting, more than a bit concerned, at Deorali. Kancha backtracked and saw Sebastian's tracks on the main road so we knew he was on his way. We kept hearing all day that he had been seen here and there. Which was good because I was already thinking about what I was going to tell his mother!!

It was 4 pm when we got into Landruk but after a decent dinner and a drink on the terrace in the warm evening, we followed the sound of music to an adjacent lodge where local girls were performing. We had a really fun night. Lahar was our star turn but there were some really entertaining dancers on the floor. We have a huge climb in front of us tomorrow, which Lahar reckons will take an hour and a half. Let's see....



Tuesday November 11: Fine weather this morning though a few wisps of cloud were already forming as we descended on what felt like 10,000 stairs to the river. We passed a couple of old honey hunters making offerings to the Gods for a successful trip. Crossing the river, the

Mahdi Kola, we took a cuppa at a cute-as-pie traditional lodge. Whitewashed walls, royal blue trims and massed marigolds. After tea it was up, up, up. We had descended about 300 metres so now we had to gain over 700 metres, pretty much straight up. Stone stairs all the way to Ghandruk. Actually the main ascent took two hours so Lahar was not that far wrong.

Our lodge at Ghandruk was very comfortable – brand new and rather featureless but with thick mattresses and attached bathrooms. Unheard of luxury in other regions. We taught Sebastian (generally referred to as Subas by the Nepalis) to play Thirteen. I think he's got it!





Wednesday November 12: After a really good night's sleep we were ready for anything. Despite the name Tadapani (Far Water) it was not a really long trek today. The way was beautiful. First the trail wound through the charming old houses of Ghandruk village and then continued, fairly easily through lush forest up to Baisi Kharka (Buffalo Grazing Place). Actually, the last 45 minutes was pretty steep but by now we were getting used to the foothills. Steep up, steep down. Our lunch took ages to prepare, from scratch, but was well worth the wait. Masses of well-made chips with perfect omelettes.

Tadapani was only one hour further on and was easy walking through one of the loveliest regions of Nepal. The trail wound gently uphill through a forest made up entirely of giant rhododendrons. I walked on my own this afternoon. Magical.

The lodges at Tadapani are not the best, and they were almost full; our lodge, possibly the least inviting, had rooms free. The third triple room they showed us was 'ok' and a small cupboard with a bed was found for Sebastian. The views made up for everything. The dining room was dismal but very cosy when the fire was lit – and it was very chilly – and the lodge was just a short stroll to a magnificent view of Machapuchre and Annapurna South.



Thursday November 13: A lovely thing about Tadapani was that we met up with Dorje, Ram and Lucy who were descending from the Annapurna Base Camp. We set off all together on a cool morning and were soon hammering downhill on a seemingly endless stone staircase (again!). Twenty minutes

Later, after a brief pause, we started the first of three big climbs for the day. A cup of tea under the looming cliffs at ?????? was most welcome and then the trail was 'reasonable' for a stretch while we warmed -up again. The track followed a stream with pretty waterfalls along the way.

The second big climb of the day was almost a spiral staircase. It even had handrails in some places. We passed masses of trekkers heading to Tadapani – hope they found rooms.

Lunch was perfect. A cheese omelette in perfect chapatti. Sebastian climbed up to the lookout while food was being prepared. He was fairly gobsmacked by the view. Sometimes words are not enough. So glad we were not travelling with the huge group (28) of 'Essex girls' though the eye candy factor was high for the chaps.

After lunch it was still a bit uppish but within half an hour we were on top of the ridge with pines and rhododendrons all around us. We had occasional glimpses of Daulaghiri to the North West and Nilghiri to the North. As we strolled easily through the quiet forest only the sound of birds, cicadas and rustling bamboo broke the silence. Soon we trekked clear of the trees at the old stone chauthara (resting place) on the Deorali (ridgetop). Easily as good as the view from Pun Hill and only one couple there – and they soon moved on. We sat in the sun and took photos for half an hour. Thanks for the chocolate Lucy. The run down to Gorepani was dead easy on earth trails.



The Sunny Lodge is much-enlarged, if not much-improved. The dining room has been enlarged although the old stove is now in the corner which is not terribly efficient, especially when draped with dozens of bedsheets. Lots of hydro-electricity here; dare we suggest a tumble dryer? No music tonight, sadly. Jette and I splashed out on a bottle of red wine (the first of many as it turned out). Gossips Merlot is not 'top drawer' in Australia but it was a pleasant change from the local rum with coke. Thanks Jette.

Friday November 14: I saw Dorje and Lucy off around 7.30 and then had a leisurely breakfast with Barbera, Jette and Sebastian. I hadn't realised that they had a tandoor oven in the kitchen here, but once I saw it I ordered nana bread for breakfast, thickly spread with crunchy peanut butter. Lahar made us big mugs of strong Nepali coffee – the local organic coffee gets better every year.

There are new stone stairs leading out of Gorepani and we set off on a cool, clear morning with Daulaghiri shining in front of us. No point at all climbing Pun Hill after the magic view we'd had yesterday from Deorali on the way in. Amazes me how often people do both.

Our trail led steeply down through rhododendron forest. It was cool in the shade but warm and sunny on the immaculate lawns of the Daulaghiri lodge for morning tea. It was fairly easy trekking downhill on legs made strong by five days in the foothills. Still, my knees were 'overheating' by the time we stopped for lunch at the Serendipity lodge where the garden was chock-a-block with marigolds. The food took ages but it was a gorgeous place to wait. Kancha also bought us a huge lump of cheese. It was the best I've had in Nepal. Somewhere between a mature cheddar and a pecorino - half a kilo for tomorrow's picnic lunch.



Less than an hour later, walking on ancient stairs paved in granite and marble, we arrived in Sikha; a lovely old village of traditional stone houses. The Moonlight Lodge, is a treat. It is a traditional house with a huge woodstove in the upstairs dining room. A great vantage point to observe busy village life at harvest time.

Saturday November 15: We had planned an early start but it was an overcast morning and we ALL slept in. 6 am bed tea came at ten to seven. I ate my breakfast in the kitchen (sneaking cheese and tomatoes) as I watched the careful food preparation.

It was still rather misty as we set off on easy downhill trails but the sun soon broke through and it was 'jackets off' within half an hour. It got warmer and warmer as we descended back down through 1500 metres. Kancha and Sebastian were 'on a mission' today and didn't stop at either of the flower-filled gardens where we usually take morning tea. Lahar and I tarried here and there to find tomatoes for my 'perfect picnic'. Didn't catch up till Durbin Danda.

I briefed Kancha clearly (I thought) to stop at the temple on the way down where I had planned a picnic. Clean grassy slope, shady trees, fresh breeze and superb views. Heavenly..... Could have been. Finally caught up at the grotty little, hamlet of Ghar Kola. Yes, there is a temple there too. Bugger! Potato crisps, mango juice and our picnic lunch was consumed in the little café we've used for years for cold drinks. It was rather good anyway.

The old suspension bridge over ????? was out of commission (not before time) but a tiny sandy track led to a sturdy temporary bamboo one. The main suspension bridge over the Kali Gandaki has thankfully been repaired and no longer 'gapes' in the middle. Even the off ramp is functional. On the way into Tatopani we were passed by several jeeps, a bus and a handful of motorbikes. It was a bit weird and very smelly after six days off-road. The trekkers Lodge had been booked by Dorje who was going much faster than us so we had the best rooms upstairs. We showered and washed some clothes and I wrote this sitting on the balcony drying my hair in warm sunshine.

Sunday November 16: We got a fairly early start today – once I'd woken the porters. It was a lovely easy walk along the road for the first hour to the second bridge where Sebastian and Kancha left us to trek the far side of the valley. It was pretty hot by the time we reached Dana, with its old salt trader's houses, so we stopped for a cuppa at the Cabin Lodge. We got a demo of the solar cooker which set fire to a piece of paper placed in the centre in just thirty seconds. We ducked off the main trail to visit the old Rhupse Lodge where the lunch took so long to prepare we joined the local women, harvesting beans in the gardens below us. Our daal baht was well worth waiting for. We tarried a short while at the huge waterfall at Rhupse Chahara and then crossed the suspension bridge to Kopchepani – the same grubby little place it ever was. We took just 33 minutes from the edge of Kopchepani to the green hut at the top of the landslide area. All in top form and enjoying it.

After a gentle stroll through the ancient string of cottages that is Pairo (landslide) we refuelled on hot lemon and peanut cookies for the last push to Ghasa. Kancha met us just before the huge suspension bridge and Barbera and I were easily persuaded to hand over our heavy day-packs. What have I got in there? The bridge was completely festooned with

coloured rags, corn dollies, incense and other weird offerings. A strange new custom that seems to have captured everyone's imagination. Good news was that we had rooms at the Eagle Nest. The next good lodge is 45 minutes, uphill, and it was nearly 5 pm. Our first 'hot table' was much appreciated as we had climbed back over 2000 metres.

Monday November 17: Ghasa to Kalopani today is easy so we made the most of our comfy rooms and had a lie-in. We wandered through the old village of Ghasa on the way up. Cows, buffalos, chickens, dogs, cats, goats and children happily co-exist on the paved trail. Everyone seemed busy with harvest work. Corn and beans to be cleaned and dried. Millet and buckwheat to be threshed – now that is hard work. There is no alternative to the road on this section but we didn't see much traffic. A few old 'school' busses and some better motorbikes ridden by Nepali youngsters making a holiday pilgrimage to Muktinath. We took tea twice as we had friends to visit. We followed one of the new red and white 'alternative trekking trail' signs up a very steep trail through deciduous woods and were soon ankle deep in autumn leaves. Even after reaching Lette it's a long walk through a winding village to Kalopani. The See You Lodge is a real treat which is one reason we are spending two nights here. Thakali hospitality – nothing like it!



Tuesday November 18: Big day off. Since we'd done most of our washing at Tatopani where we got in at lunchtime, this really was a free day. Lahar, Bir and Kancha took Jette, Sebastian and Barbara on a day-walk to Titi Lake. I had some interesting company at the lodge this morning and then did a nice two hour walk myself. No stick, no water, no daypack. Lovely. Tales of the group's 'big day out' are a bit more exciting than our usual quiet walk and they all seem to have enjoyed being let of the leash today.



Wednesday November 19: We walked to Tukche today. Total altitude gain 50 metres. We saw a beautiful sunrise this morning but it was very cold. The first stretch out of Kalopani only takes 45 minutes but it is the only teahouse before lunch so we all crammed into the kitchen for a cuppa. The next hour or so was flat again, this time through pine woods which thickly fringe the banks of the river – the mighty Kali Gandaki. Rounding the first headland we saw that the river was now spread out over a two kilometre wide bed, split into many smaller fast-moving streams. Lahar lead the way, locating the small, seasonal log bridges one after another. The fossicking amongst the river stones was very compelling. The wind was really gusting by the time we ducked into the old traditional house which was our lodge at Larjung. Great lunch of spring rolls and mashed potatoes. Tasted better than it sounds.

An hour or so later, buffeted along by a powerful wind at our backs, we reached Tukche where the wind was completely blocked with cleverly-designed walls. This village was once very wealthy from the salt trade with Tibet. I was really happy to return to the lovely old Tukche Guesthouse, home of Samar and Uma. The house is 200 years old and little changed except for nice clean bathrooms and tiny guestrooms on the flat roof. I got my usual room in the old part of the house with shuttered windows overlooking the main street which was full of rather antsy cattle (must be the cow 'marriage season' Netra). Barbera was rapt to get back the room she'd had many years before. We had stewed apple with custard for desert.

Thursday November 20: We took a stroll around the village this morning. It is a charming old town with whitewashed houses all trimmed with carved windows and balconies. Cows seem to, wander in and out of the front doors at will.

We left Tukche in fine, sunny weather (we hadn't seen anything else since we'd started this trek) and within an hour we'd crossed the river on a strong suspension bridge. Most bridges in Nepal have chocks of wood to make motorbike access possible. We sat on the stairs leading off the bridge eating the apples Samar had given us. Nice weight out of my daypack.

It took another hour to reach the Tibetan refugee camp at Chairo through pine and juniper woods. It was a delight to walk on earthen trails, often thick, with pine needles giving off a wonderful sweet aroma in the sunshine. The refugee camp is now 55 years old and quite a well-kept village of neat houses. The ancient Gomba is slowly being restored. Their Guru Rimpoche statue is phenomenal. The very young monks were adorable.

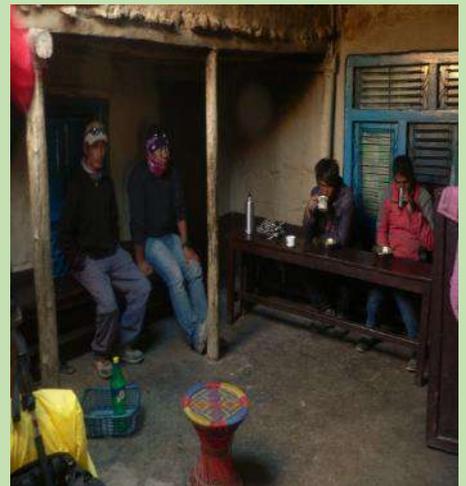


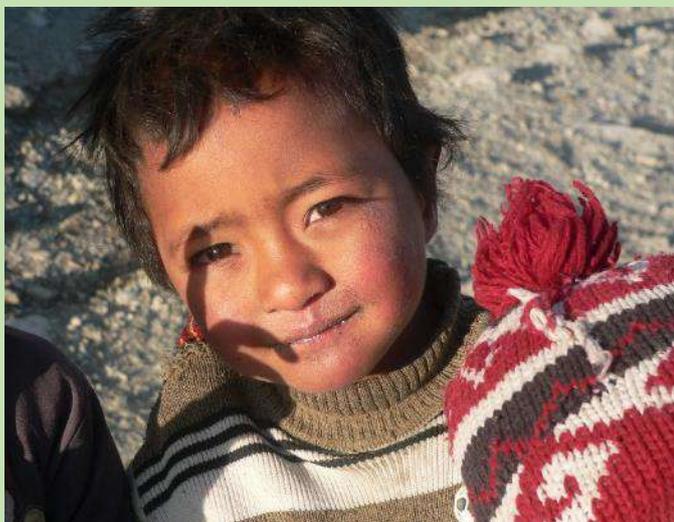
To get to Marpha we first had to run the gauntlet of curio sellers who had hastily set up while we were taking tea. I bought a few rather dubious antiques. There was a new, unfinished bridge over the river. The old rickety one was still in use but at the end we had to crawl under the new bridge. I don't know about you, dear reader, but at 60 my days of walking in a full squatting position are well behind me. Amazing what you can do when you have to.

Lunch at the Paradise Lodge was excellent. I wish I could buy a tomato chutney like that, but it was 'home made'. Marpha was built snuggled into the hillside out of the wind. It really works. After lunch we viewed Marpha from the Gomba above the village – an intriguing network of lanes and alleys dividing flat rooftops all edged with ancient piles of firewood (a sign of wealth hereabouts).

Back out on the road, quite literally, the wind was howling at our backs. We scooted up the steep trail to a warm welcome from Mangal's family at Upper Shyang. I was overjoyed to see young Isneha again. Though she was a bit sick with mumps she is growing into a fine strong

girl. One of our previous trekkers is sponsoring her education and I get the pleasure of actually delivering the money to her family. The house, in fact the whole village, is about as authentic as it gets. The rooftop has the most spectacular view over the roof of, the gomba to Nilgiri.





Life in Upper Shying

While Jomsom is not popular with most tourists, I love it. It is a dusty, windswept town bustling with jeep, bus and motorbike traffic dodging goats, donkeys and horsemen. Lodges crowd closely around the tiny airport – ours was the Mustang Taj, last year's major discovery. We met lovely couple tonight. Greek origins, living in the Czech Republic, Bhai by faith and charming by nature. Good company indeed.

Friday November 21: I think today was my favourite day of the whole season so far. Bed tea at 6.30 did not help us get away early. We left some of our gear packed up here for just three days higher up. The weather actually looked a bit 'iffy' at 8.45 when we headed out but soon cleared as we walked in deep shade along the very edge of the Kali Gandaki. The river has settled hard up against the east bank of the river this season and the trail is a bit thin, making the trekking interesting and keeping the jeeps on the higher, separate road.

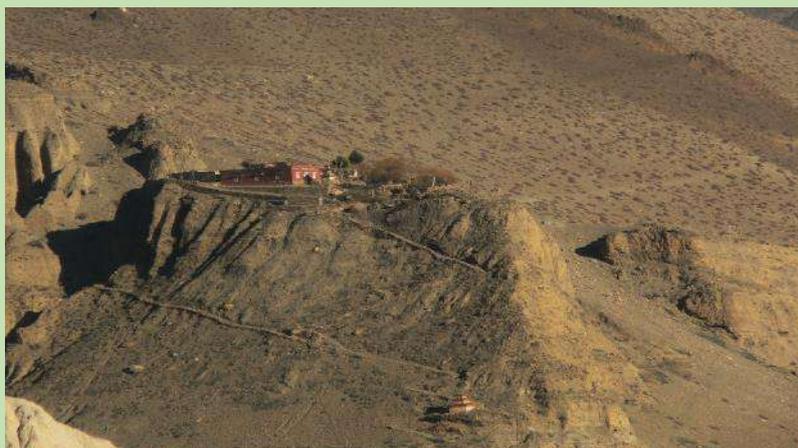
Trekking here is as flat as a tack and we only stopped once in the two hours to Eklai Bhatti where Sebastian was pouring lemon tea as we arrived. The old teahouse is a very well-kept home. I'd love to stay here some time. (Didn't know as I wrote this that I would get my wish).

Kagbeni was less than an hour further. Comfy rooms with attached bathrooms (again) and the shower was so hot I had to mix cold with it. If you've been on trek, you will know, that, this, is luxury indeed. We had our lunch in the warm 'solar room'. It's just a room on the sunny side of the house with, loads of windows but it really works.

After lunch we all trekked out to Thiri in the formerly-forbidden kingdom of Upper Mustang. We crossed the many streams of the Kali Gandaki on tiny log bridges and soon arrived at a crumbling wreck of a place where a few acres of terraced millet fields supports 80 people. They farm with cows, goats, sheep and donkeys, all of which are about half the size of ordinary animals. We clambered up the gully of the local stream to see an old meditation cave set in a cliff below an even older monastery. Bir and Sebastian found an enormous saligram fossil. We helped herd some unruly goats across a tiny bridge on the way home. Some got, dunked but none were lost in the swift waters.

I found a bottle of South African cabernet Shiraz but I had to really bargain hard to get it for \$18. We had good company and a hot table, tonight. Full house. We met youngsters who

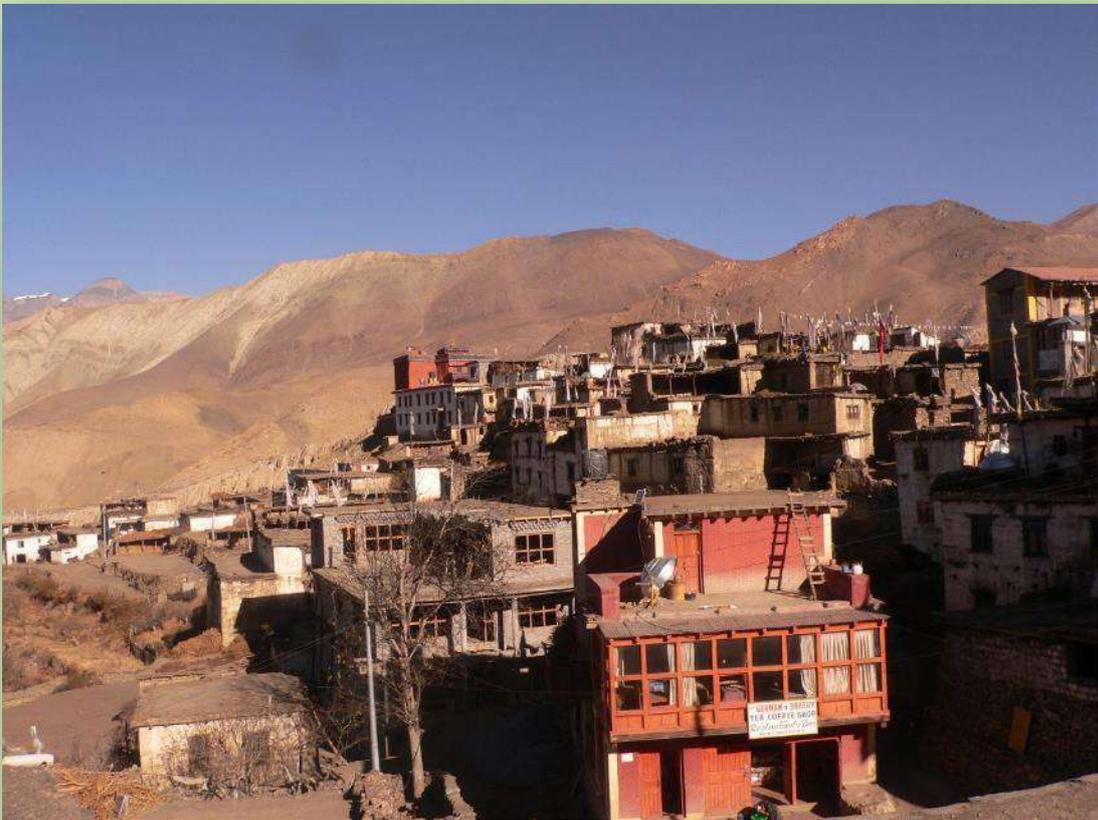
had crossed the Thorong La without too much trouble. We had seen the pass quite clearly from Thiri and there was a lot of snow on it. Hard to believe how horrible the avalanche was on 14 October. The stars were amazing tonight.



Saturday November 22: Kagbeni to Jarkot and Muktinath. Wow! What a day. Ponies were saddled-up and waiting outside for Barbera, Jette and Sebastian around 8 am. I saw them off and then our porters helped me and Kancha get the bags up the same trail to the road where a jeep had been organised to pick us up, along with two Germans and their guide. Or so I thought. The rattletrap local bus showed up, jam-packed with locals and our German friends and their guide squeezed on board. I waited another couple of hours while Kancha tried to find us some transport. We were offered a seat, to share, in a jeep going to Dzhong for a puja which might take an hour or so and would pick us up later.....bugger that! I finally just splashed out \$80 for a reserved jeep. I'd been standing on the road getting colder and colder for three hours. We took the two local guys who'd been hanging out with us all morning for a 'free ride'. They were delighted and proved very useful getting the bags from the road, some distance to the New Plaza Hotel. Fun stop for tea along the way at Blue Sheep and then a ride all the way to the top at Rani Pawa. A great result.

Way too late to visit the temples before lunch we quickly found our group and ordered lunch at a big, new, clean lodge. The group had a great time coming up on their ponies. I'd developed a nasty headache on the way up. I guess anyone's body could hate ascending from 2800 to 3800 in an hour. I didn't join the group going up to the holy temples at Muktinath but walked slowly back to Jarkot with Kancha instead. A cup of coffee, a Panadol and a lie down, 400 metres lower did the trick. The group came in around 5 pm totally exhilarated by their big day out.

We had a cosy dinner with good food and a very hot, hot table. I love this lodge.





It was a lovely evening



Sunday November 23: We had a lazy start this morning as we had not far to walk. Barbera wasn't feeling great so she had an extra hour's kip in my warm sunny room while I walked

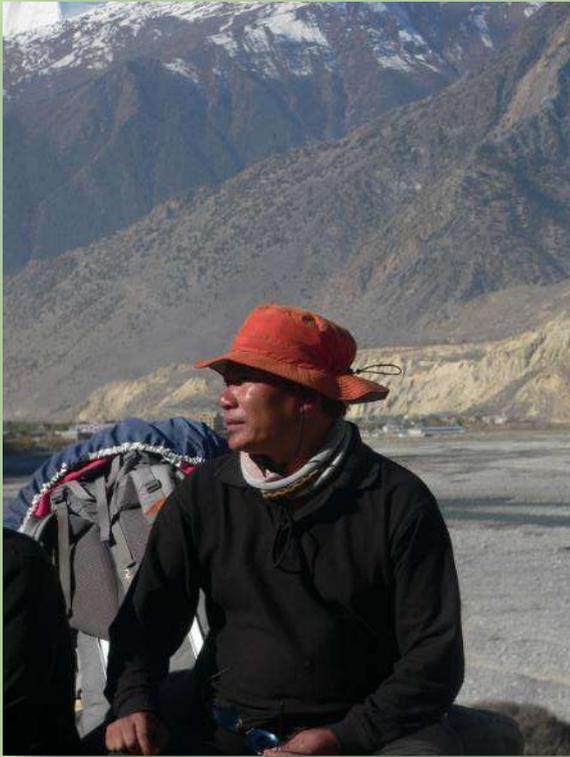
around the old village with Jette and Sebastian. The village is around 550 years old in the centre where an ancient monastery s sheltered in the remains of a citadel.

Barbera had planned to head off with Lahar today on her own 'extension trek'. Since she is feeling a bit below par I persuaded her to trek with the group for one more day. Sometimes your body is just saying 'go down'. It pays to listen. Problems with altitude are totally random and previous treks (even as recent as last month) are no guarantee of immunity.

Jette had suggested we overnight at the lovely old house at Eklai Bhatti where we usually only take tea. The trail was a nice variation of the familiar trail to Kagbeni with a wonderful, craggy little pass in the middle. The lodge turned out to have some excellent rooms. I especially liked the smooth, old polished wooden floors. We ate with the family at a hot table in the roofed-in courtyard. We watched a little TV – India's Got Talent. Look out for Raul Ghandi. Peaceful, isolated, comfortable The Hilton at Eklai Bhatt should be on Trip Advisor.

Monday November 24: It was kind of sad to say Cheerio to Barbara and Lahar until it dawned on me that we would see them in Jomsom tonight. Duh! I walked into Jomsom with Jette and Sebastian, Bir, Kancha and Ramesh. We scarcely stopped till Jomsom itself though I peeled off for half an hour and went to see Isneha at school. The Mustang Taj had their best rooms ready for us. The sun poured in like honey and we were assured that the gas heater in the dining room had been repaired.





After a great lunch we rugged-up again and headed out for a walk across the valley to Thini. We need not have bothered with the warm jackets. By the time we cut across the end of the airstrip it was about 25 degrees in the sun. We walked on tiny local tracks, zigzagging through the fields ever upwards. The village does not appear to have changed much in the past few hundred years. Then suddenly there is a parked motorbike and a guy on a mobile phone. From above, the village is a maze of alleyways dividing flat roofs covered in drying corn, chillies, beans and millet – and satellite dishes! We scoured the opposite side of the valley but could not see Barbera and Lahar on the 700 metre descent. I made one loud coo-ee which Barbara later said she thought she heard!

We crossed back to Jomsom on the old blue iron suspension bridge. A friendly woman gave us delicious apples when we stopped for a chat. Cosy dinner back at the Mustang Taj. I like this lodge a lot. I see that Switi and Santos are running the Marco Polo nowadays but I wouldn't want to change.

Tuesday November 25: Despite there being no flights yesterday due to a weird northerly wind which only seems to occur when Barbera is here, there were no crowds at the little Jomsom airport. We were on the second flight this morning and, since the airport was only a two minute walk away, we listened out for the first flight to arrive. The return trip to Pokhara takes an hour, which is also the check-in requirement. We flew with Simrik and I was rapt to see a much more modern Daunier arrive on the runway. Still just a 16-seater but a much newer one than I'd seen in Nepal before. Our flight was perfect. Scenic in the extreme. Pokhara was warm and softly humid as we took rooms at the Splendid View Hotel. Soap, toilet paper, hot water in the attached bathroom and crisp white sheets. Heaven!

We had a nice coffee with our guys at the Black and White where Subas was a great surprise visitor. Later, we lunched in the garden overlooking the lake at the Boomerang. Paneer Tikka with naan bread and mint chutney. My all-time favourite Indian food. It was now mild enough to sit in the sun.

We shopped and shopped in the afternoon. The bookshop got most of my business. There are some great Nepali authors who write in English like Samrat Uphadyay and Manjushree Thapa. Also, books written and published in India are really cheap.

Ram, Ramesh, Bir and Kancha joined us for a drink at dinner. We looked at Sebastian's photos on my tablet. His little videos were fantastic – especially the paragliding ones.

Wednesday November 26: Kancha organised 'bed tea' at the hotel and I ducked out for real coffee for me and Jette. By 8 we were on the road again. Just six of us now with the amazing Ram, our driver. Did I mention just how good he is?

Morning tea was a rather grotty affair but the tea was good. An hour later we sat down in the lovely garden pavilion of the Riverside Springs Resort. I ordered way too much food which we somehow managed to eat. I think our guys like having a 'posh' daal bhat there. Not much traffic and only one quick stop to buy a whole branch of bananas meant we were back at Muna Cottage in Kathmandu in good time. There was a SARC conference on and traffic was limited to odd and even regio numbers on alternating days. It made the taxi drivers furious but the Kathmandu traffic was almost civilised.

Dinner at the Shambala with Isabel and Netra, and a new friend Judy. Nice Australian wine and good company.

Thursday November 27: It was Sebastian's last day and he hadn't been into the city of Kathmandu at all. He is not that fond of urban life and it was a big pollution day but we strolled the ancient alleyways and squares. You have to see at least a couple of medieval pagodas before you go home. Jette and I had the famous saffron and rosewater lassi but then we somehow lost Sebastian –it was becoming a bit of a habit. Phone contact was soon established and then Jette and I continued to shop, shop, and shop. Tanked up on fried momos Sebastian recovered his composure and we taxied home at dusk.

Friday November 28: Morning walk over to Bir's house at Gokarna was interesting. The temple there is little-visited and very beautiful. Bir's son, the surviving twin, is now 10 and in grade 3. Obviously thriving. Mina, now 18, made daal baht. She is off to Abu Dhabi soon to work in a hotel. We checked out Dorje's block of land. It is typically small, but well-located. He has scrimped and saved for five years and the \$20,000 is almost entirely paid off. Well done Dorje! Now to build a house.....

We had a nice surprise on the way back when Bir pointed out Mani Kumar's little tea shop. He got quite a shock when he looked up from behind the counter to see me and Jette. He made us delicious black tea with ginger and cardamom in it.

I put Sebastian on the plane and then collapsed in a heap. My room was a trash heap but I just ignored it. Muna made Jette and I steaming plates of fragrant fried rice to eat in front of the telly. Heaven!

It was just a small group and I knew Barbera, Jette and Sebastian before this trek. You could not have put together a more congenial bunch. The weather gods smiled on us from day one. Walking directly out of Pokhara via Damphus was an added bonus which I would highly recommend. As I finish writing this journal at the Weizen with a cup of coffee I rather envy Barbera and Lahar who are still up there.

I will absolutely, definitely be running this trek again in late October or early November 2015. See you there!

Cheers, Teresa didi



PS I've been talking to a few of our Langtang crew who fancy a 'reunion trek' to Mustang in late October. We are trying to organise an Upper Mustang add on for those who have the time. I think we need 33 days to do the whole thing or 22 days if you bail out at Jomsom and fly back to Pokhara and Kathmandu while the rest of us go to Lo Mantang. Any takers??

PPS: It is expensive. The permit for Upper Mustang is \$500 for ten days. The regular Muktinath portion will be about the same as last year. CHEERS, Teresa. YOU CAN DO THIS!