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TREK REPORT – EVEREST REGION AND EVEREST BASE CAMP 2023

MEMBERS: Teresa Williams – Group Leader, Ekki Loeber, Ben Schmied, Michelle Warren, James O'Connor, Melissa Alsopp, Becky Boyer, Helen Walker, Lucy Tomasi, Rita Morgan, Fennel Blythe.

SUPPORT TEAM: Lahar Pun – Guide, Bharat Ghalle – Second Guide

PORTERS: Gyelgen, Sanchok (Lahar's son), Lagpa (Kancha's son), Karma (Lahar's nephew), Dawa, Tenzi, Reshan, (Bharat's nephew), Deepak (Akai's brother), Mangal (from Syange) and Ramchandra.

Ekki and I had a few warm peaceful days up at Benchen Monastery Guesthouse in Swayambu. Lucy joined us there for a couple more days. We circled the hill 'kora' and chilled at this little oasis of Tibetan Buddhist culture in its quiet garden....though the passage of a big troupe of monkeys, mornings and evenings, certainly livened things up.

OCT 15: This morning we moved down to the International Guesthouse at Paknajol, on the edge of Thamel. Out to the airport in very heavy traffic. Bang on time for Helen's arrival. Back at the hotel the gardens are a delight. The bougainvillea are enormous! We are once more in the 'old house' section of IGH. Somewhat renovated though the plumbing still has issues. There are lovely antique things on every wall and stairwell.

OCT 16: Becky and Fennel arrived early this morning after an exhausting transatlantic flight. Rita was not far behind them. Ben, Michelle, James and Melissa soon arrived by van from their overnight at Nagarkot. All here.

Dinner was just a stroll away at the Yangling, our local, and the best momos in Kathmandu. Only decision is veg, buff or chicken filling, and then fried, steamed or kothey (steamed THEN pan fried to brown the bottom). A chap named Ollie was gracious enough to give up the large table, so we invited him to join us. He proved very pleasant company.

OCT 17: KATHMANDU

A big busy day in Thamel, cashing money, shopping for trekking gear, stocking up at the pharmacy, then a long slow lunch at Pumpernickel. The chicken pesto sandwiches on wholemeal baguettes proving popular. The days are still rather warm....maximum 27 degrees....so fresh lemon sodas and banana lassi were a hit.

The Pre-trek briefing was a rather casual affair. Sorry. Almost everyone had been trekking in Nepal previously, most of them with me. We did cover Trail Etiquette (stand on the inside of the trail when donkeys are coming) and Lodge Etiquette (ordering the same food as each other, flushing your own toilet). Dining in the garden it was too dark to see the map. The dinner was quite good. IGH is not a great restaurant, but they are good with Nepali food. Ekki was good enough to find a dozen tins of tonic water. Unused, most of it was stored....in the deep freeze! With predictable consequences.

OCT 18: KATHMANDU TO PHAPHLU

6 am wake-up. 6.30 breakfast. By 7 am our three Scorpio jeeps were loaded with rucksacks on the roof, sticks and boots under the back seat and everyone had a reasonably comfortable seat. Great jeeps with electric windows and air-con, though that was not needed. Dorje accompanied the jeeps to see us off. No Himalayas to be seen when we crested the rim of the Kathmandu Valley at Dulikhel but the farmlands and uplands, the rivers and villages were a compelling movie as we sped along. Lots of traffic, a pretty good road, and great drivers.

It took almost 11 hours, but we had some decent breaks along the way. A short delay just before Salieri with a woman on the road – an accident? A drunken argument? She was not seriously hurt, and local people knew her and were happy to take her home nearby. Phew!

Sonam's lodge was expecting us, and food was quickly ordered. Slept well until the 'Great French Awakening' at 4 am. Not cold at night. Did not unpack our sleeping bags.

OCT 19: PHAPHLU TO BUPSA

Early bed-tea and a great pre-ordered breakfast. Lots of porridge and vegetable omelettes. We needed 5 small jeeps today. A very difficult road: some of the worst I have seen in Nepal.

Like last year but wet and muddy in many places. The bridge we had used last time was broken but we drove through the river at a ford. Happy to discover that Bupsa was just a few steps away from the jeep stop at the end of the day.



Despite the road conditions – and they were fun at times – the scenery was magic. Jungle which resembled every houseplant you have ever seen cascading down a hill, fed by countless streams and waterfalls. The little houses in the villages were festooned with chrysanthemums and marigolds and the odd pink rose. A family of tiny baby piglets ran across the road. Adorable; compensations for the rubbish road.

The lodge is traditional and comfortable. Dinner order taken, time to allocate the porters.

Me, Teresa didi Bharat (kindly acting as Guide-Porter)

Ekki Gelgen (Dorje's downstairs neighbour)

Helen Lagpa (Kanchas son, 16, just)

Lucy Karma (as always)

Fennel Sanchok (Lahar's youngest son)

Rita Ramchandra

Both 'youngsters' joining the Tamochi Valley group. Not so high. Not so hard.

Ben Schmied Deepak

Melissa Tenji

Becky Reshan (Bharat's nephew)

Michelle Mangal (competent to Guide if group splits for any reason)

James Dawa

The more experienced Juke boys (Kancha's village) going on the more demanding EBC.

FRIDAY OCTOBER 20:**BUPSA TO POYAN**

We walked up a jeep road for two hours. Jeeps passed us. I had been told the road was closed. Apparently, it opened the day before. The guy who ran the lodge could have said something?? The day was so long and so arduous that I cannot recall a lunch stop. We must have had one. Reaching a huge piece of yellow earth-moving machinery on the trail we were advised to take the 'alternative route'. The normal, level forest trail was closed due to blasting for the new road which was above the old trail.

The beginning of this alternative trail just looked like a landslide. It WAS a landslide, but there was a faint trail over it. Some of our members said 'you must be joking' only maybe not that politely. But, in a few precarious zig-zags we located some wet stone stairs....we had a trail. It climbed and climbed. It was wet and muddy. After about an hour and a half we broached the ridge, still in deep forest, but on the descent the trail just became even more horrifically wet and muddy. Suck your boots off muddy. Logs, rocks, mud pools and steep, slippery descents would test the hardest trekker. I went down three times! No photos exist of this day. We shared this horrible trail with long donkey and dzopke trains, carrying gas bottles and beer kegs. One of my worst days of trekking ever – and still whinging about it as I write this, three days later.

**SATURDAY OCTOBER 21:****POYAN TO SURKE**

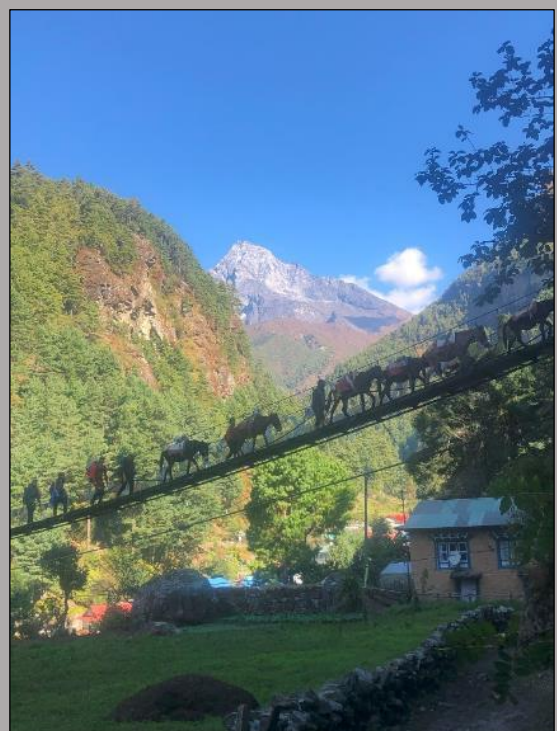
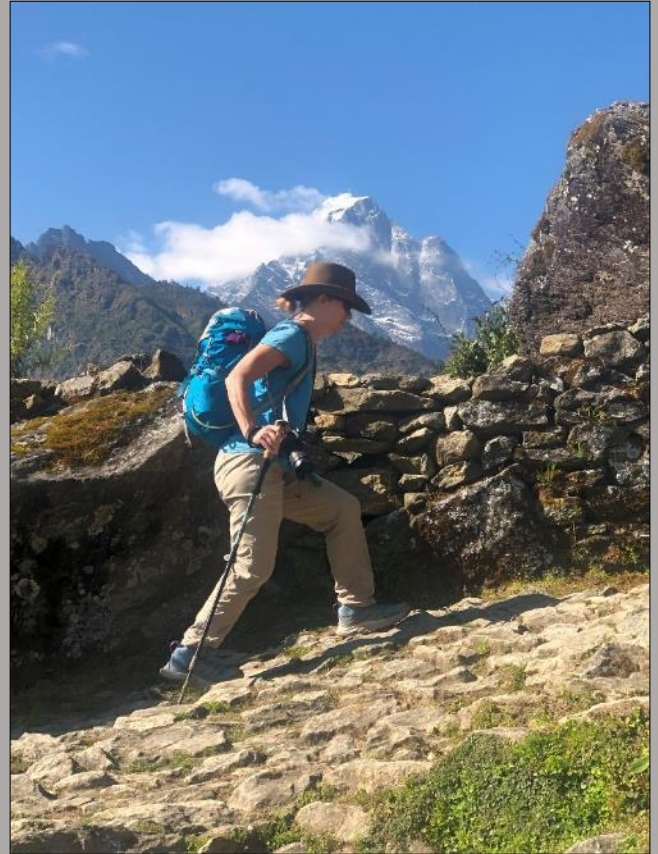
Leaving Poyan on a flattish trail through a village spread along a ridge, in bright sunshine, was a delight after yesterday. There were a few steep climbs but on a dry track they were not a huge challenge. Tea in a sunny garden where Lahar made temporary repairs to Ekki's boot....the sole was flapping off. Duct tape and nylon string.

The descent to Surke did drag on a bit, especially where it was still wet and muddy at the lower levels. The lodge at Surke had hot gas showers and super Spring Rolls which in Nepal, are the size of a big pastie, with lots and lots of hot chips. Happy campers tonight.

SUNDAY OCTOBER 22:**SURKE TO CHAURIKHARKHA**

The walk up to Chaurikharkha, and then the main Lukla to Namche track, was uppish as Surke is at the bottom of a deep valley. Sherpa Tensing Norge's house in Surke was pointed out to

us. Who knew? The uphill trail alternated between dense forest and sunny ridges. The soil here is sandy, free draining...dry! It was warm and sunny, tee shirt weather. Chaurikharkha is a delightful village with Buddhist chortens, stupas and gompas along the way. Many of the trails are flanked by ancient stone walls. Vegetable gardens are well-tended, and most houses have flowers either in the garden or in pots (sometimes just rusted old milk tins). Marigolds, Chrysanthemums and Cosmos in abundance. The Lukla Danda had a fresh dusting of snow.



Lunch at Chaurikharkha took forever but most of us enjoyed the delay, pottering around the village taking photos or just sitting in the sun. We had wi-fi!!! Momos were good, apparently, but a tall order for lunch. They do make almost everything from scratch in these lodges. The pastry, the filling, the cooking..... I had fond memories of this kitchen, where I had sat with Sharon, Lahar, and Bir the previous November.

The main trail, reached just twenty minutes after lunch, was a shock – and not a good one. Hundreds of trekkers streamed past us, in both directions, in just the first hour! We took the ‘good rooms’ at Ghat’s Lama Lodge. Attached separate shower and toilet – a ‘nottie’ not a ‘squattie’. We showered in very hot water and washed our hair then descended to the dining room for a warm stove. No stove. Nada. Nothing. No heater. I was bitterly disappointed and admit to having a ‘bit of a rant’ at the dear lodge owner, who is also the local Buddhist Lama. He explained that they were renovating the stove, and this was the first chilly weather this season. Firstly he gave me an industrial heat gun – when I smelled burning hair, I gave it back to him. He let me dry my hair by the kitchen fire. In the end he and his wife and housemaid brought in the slate flooring, then the stove, then the chimney. Wife went upstairs to line up the installation and ‘hey presto’ we had a stove. Nice and toasty, under twenty minutes.

Monday October 23: GHAT TO JORSALE

While this is one of our more reasonable days, my knees had still not recovered from the hideous Bupsa – Poyan detour. I don’t think I realised that a trail could be that bad, for that long. It was three days ago and here I am still writing about it.

A sparkling morning and thick toast for breakfast. A good start. The lodge is attached to an exquisite old gompa and our host, the local Lama, happily opened it up for a look around. Many beautiful old tapestries and ancient Tibeta texts. The ‘books’ are collections of flat parchments wrapped in silk cloth and then held flat between two pieces of wood. There are many shelves full here.

The trail was very reasonable through to Phakding. Many new lodges and LOTS of trekkers. So different from our first few days. We crossed the Dudh Khosi on a suspension bridge and stopped at a beautiful garden café with real coffee and homemade ‘bakery items’. We kind of wasted an hour but it was hard to move on from such a delightful spot with the river rushing not far below us and a constant stream of donkeys, dzopke, porters and trekkers ambling past. The way from there to Benkar for lunch should have been easy but a big landslide has finally taken out about a kilometre of trail. The temporary alternative was barely adequate but made much worse by rude trekkers in a hurry. Passing each other in opposite directions on a very thin, loose trail was difficult at times. Waiting a minute or so would have been smart. Lots of overloaded porters got my goat.

I fell over today. I thought I could restrain a little runaway calf but, reaching for the halter, I missed a step and went down like a sack of spuds. A full daypack and a chubby bum saved me from serious injury. A bit of bark off elbow and knee.(Later developed a very colourful bruise.)

Two porters surged ahead during an extremely slow lunch at Benkar to get us rooms in Jorsale. We really should patronise some of the older nearby lodges for lunch in future. Jorsale is a small village and we are a big group, so no luck. Our two favourite lodges were full, and the others are inadequate. They called Lahar, and we managed to halt at Monjo. I think it is the Kailash Lodge. I have stayed here before. Ekki and I loved our funky little wooden room with a very basic shower and loo attached. I believe the rest of the group had the better digs upstairs. Big, full, well-organised dining room tonight. Cheerful dinner.

TUESDAY OCTOBER 24: MONJO TO NAMCHE

I did this same trek last year with Sharon and it was manageable. I stopped smoking shortly afterwards, so it is almost 11 months now. I hoped to do better this time. . I was bitterly disappointed. It was so hard at times I could have wept. I think the Poyan day had 'trashed' my legs. The arthritis in my hip was also very evident today. What was I thinking?

The rest of our group were troopers. A wave and a coo-ee from a high point above us meant that Ben, Michelle, Melissa, Becky, Rita and James were romping it. Lucy was with the slower group for a while but gradually pulled away. Impressive! The tailenders mainly consisted of me with Ekki and Fennel, who could go faster if they wished but were kind of enjoying my slow pace. Plenty of time to rest and take photos, I guess. Helen mostly trekked with this slower group but just put a nose in front towards the finish.

We last three were too tired for the final push so stopped for a cuppa at the first teashop we came to, a little before Namche proper. Resham and Sanchok had descended back to take our daypacks the last ten minutes – which felt as if they weighed a ton at 3400 metres.



I love arriving in Namche Bazaar with new people. It is such an amazing 'reveal' as you come around the bluff. Luckily our new lodge, Zambala Home, is the lowest in the village, and it has a garden. Thanks for the recommendation, Shiva???? Our booking of their four 'attached' rooms was sidelined for some reason, and the common shower is kind of out through the back door. Ho Hum! Still, they have a coffee machine, thick foam mattresses and clean facilities in the corridor by the bedrooms. Seems great.



WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 25:

STAYING IN NAMCHE.

Lahar took most of our group up to the Military Post lookout for some serious big peak viewing this morning. Some of us had a little 'lie-in'.

Ekki had eventually given up on his boots and trekked to Namche in socks and sandals, so our first priority was a cobbler. I phoned the number on his door, but he said he would not be back for two days. We bought some local boots 'Humto' by brand. Very happy with them.

We checked our blood oxygen levels at a local pharmacy. At 81 it was suggested I might benefit from a Diamox. I did not feel the need. Michelle, at 94, might want to consider a DNA test as she is clearly part Sherpa. I considered buying an oximeter for the EBC group, but the results were so variable it did not seem that helpful. Some great new gear was bought and two of the Everest group rented bright orange down jackets.

Ben, Michelle, Melissa, James and Becky are all still committed to Everest Base Camp. Ekki has decided to stay with my group going to Thame then Kumjung. I have a feeling James' health could hold him back higher up. Made it clear that any of the group who wished to bail out of EBC and join us over the coming days, could do so, as we have arranged flights out of Lukla for the Thame group, abandoning our original plan to walk back out to Phaphlu. I would definitely walk on future treks, once the trail to Poyan is restored.

Our lodge is pretty and the owners are 'enthusiastic' but they do charge like wounded bulls and their coffee machine is flat out as they urge hot chocolates and fancy coffee on the customers.....at \$5 a pop.

Not sure how he did it, but Deepak has got us all tickets to fly down from Lukla on the same flight. Rita, Lucy and Helen have opted to chopper down from Namche to Lukla after the main part of the trek. Because they can – and it looks like fun.

Stocked up on freshly-ground coffee, peanut butter and a few medications.....Strepsils!!

THURSDAY OCTOBER 26: 'A' TEAM SETS OFF FOR EBC. - 'B' TEAM HEAD TO THAMO

Cheered the EBC team off this morning in blazing sunshine and clear blue skies. Becky's account of the Base Camp ascent is attached at the end of this report. An hour or so later we 'holidaymakers' set off for Thamo. We schlepped up through the steep lanes of Namche, emerging above the gompa at the helipad where an arrival was imminent. Very exciting, even as a windswept onlooker.



The walk today was bliss – even on my battered and bruised body. At first the trail wound through quiet forest, mostly pines, where we saw Impeyan Pheasants. Chuffs, acrobatic in ones and twos, and Snow Pigeons in great flocks, accompanied us, as did the raucous crows with their 'Aaaarp – Aaaarp – Uuuuup'. I love this valley, overlooked by the towering snows of Kwangde, with the Bhote Khosi far below us, accompanied by the breeze in the pines.

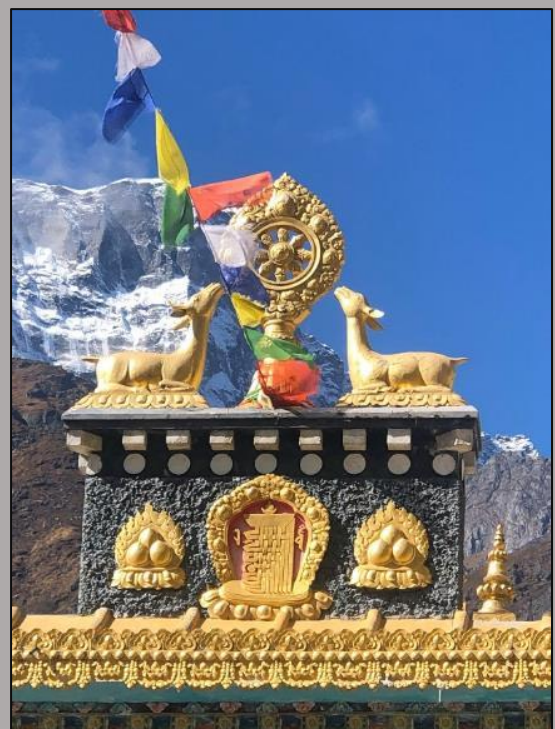
Maya Lodge was very welcoming. Cooler tonight, though warm in the dining room with a stove going flat out with Yak dung. A big group of around 20 British trekkers, who had come over Renjo La – had done all three passes in fact - looked about 100 years old! Tough trek. Three charming Belgian girls chatted with us this evening. Rum and coke hit the spot.



FRIDAY OCTOBER 27: THAMO TO THAME

A rather leisurely start today, to give the noisy Brits a chance to vacate the dining room. Sun poured in through the massed geraniums on the windowsills as we munched on crisp Tibetan Bread with Peanut Butter. Bharat made us real coffee. Our first morning as a small group.

The way out of Thamo is steep, but we paused at the top of the village to visit the Ani Gompa. While the anis were all busy in a puja, we were quite free to look around the lovely gompa. Newly built over the past three years but completely traditional in form and decoration. Fennel made a special connection with one of the nuns.



The trail was not that difficult at first, through stunted junipers and azaleas. The weather was perfect, and I was soon too hot in a long-sleeved top. My knees, still not fully recovered from the cruel first day, are competing with my arthritic hip for attention but everyone else seems to be doing just fine. Slowly and surely, we edged our way up the valley to Samde for a cuppa in a sheltered courtyard. At around 3600 metres, the altitude is starting to be a factor.

After tea the views were even more amazing; we looked back as often as we could at the astounding peaks – Thamserku, Kwangde, Kusum Kangaru. The Bhote Khosi thundered below carrying the snowmelt of prolonged autumn mildness. Very few fellow trekkers and NO choppers. The uphill trajectory of the trail was a bit more demanding as the day wore on. The new suspension bridge is great, though much higher and therefore windy and exposed. The final slog up to Thame started to take its toll as we topped out at 3800 metres. Our lodge, The Alpine Cottages, is great. Individual bungalows, carpeted, with big beds with thick mattresses. Attached white-tiled bathrooms with sit-down toilets and electric hot water showers. I just had lunch before writing this and the cooking, as remembered, is excellent. The owner is the daughter of the Maya Lodge family; renowned for placing second in the Kala Pattar to Namche Marathon, in an international field of mostly men.

A little sunburned today and a bit lethargic – altitude? Feeling a little bit down on the texted news from Germany that a dear friend has died. R.I.P. Egbert.

A few of us walked around the village near dusk. We got directions from a local woman, feeding her yaks. No mountain views as the clouds were barely above our heads, but a very atmospheric charm about the place. Met two British anis from Laudo Monastery. They told of Dzorpa Rimpoche, a famous lama, whose home we were standing next to. Apparently, he has a worldwide following.

The mountain range illuminated in nothing more than starlight, towered above the lodge as we left the dining hall for our rooms tonight. Stunning.

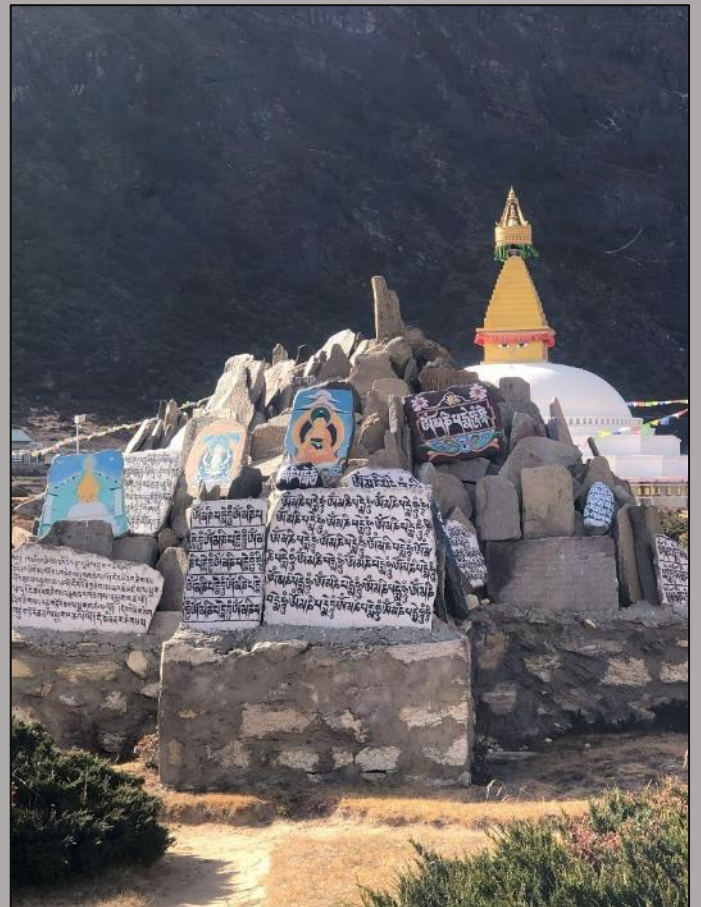
SATURDAY OCTOBER 29:

STAY IN THAME

What a stunning place to wake up. Thame is at the end of the Rolwaling Trek so there is a lot of mountainous wilderness right in front of us this morning.

Clear blue skies and bright sunshine. What to do? Fennel and Rita are heading off with several porters to the Monastery and beyond. Fennel actually reached 4470 metres – they met nobody. Ekki and I, along with Helen and Lucy, did some washing and basically sat around in the sun watching it dry till lunchtime. Huge Spring Rolls , full of fresh vegetables, with Chips, eaten outside.

After lunch Ekki, Helen and I ascended the ridge behind Thame to visit the sister village of Dunge. We met an old man with a mangled hand, selling postcards for \$3. It would have been churlish not to buy one. The stupa there was very beautiful and the old lady we had met yesterday was there, to spin EVERY prayer wheel which encircled the stupa. Unusually, there is a big prayer wheel INSIDE the stupa. I had not seen such a thing before. Gazing up the valley towards the Renjo La and Gokyo has sparked a new germ of an idea in me.....





The dining room was almost full tonight, mostly Germans. It was still festival time and a group of local women visited, at first just singing at the door. We invited them in and they brought the house down with their stomping, rhythmic song and dance. In the singing and dancing I can see a cultural connection between the Himalayan Sherpa and the American Indians who are said to descend from a migration over the frozen Bering Sea during the last Ice Age. This migration dates back as far as 18,000 years. The dancers extracted donations without mercy, as is the tradition.

SUNDAY OCTOBER 29: THAME TO THAMO

Since we are now flying out of Lukla instead of trekking out to Phaphlu, we have three or four extra days in our itinerary. We used one today and made a further overnight at Thamo, instead of our original plan of trekking up and over to Kumjung. We like this lodge. Rita and Fennel went to look at the big stupa in Dunge village after breakfast, but easily caught us up by morning teatime. We were back at Thamo for lunch. Most other guides and trekkers are amazed, even appalled, at how slowly we trek. The concept of 'slowtrekking' has never really caught on. We do walk slowly but we also stop and look at everything, we take photos, we look at plants, we ask questions of the locals, we sit and admire the scenery and generally treat the whole thing as a holiday. Is it not?

MONDAY OCTOBER 30: THAMO TO KUMJUNG

The way from Thamo to Khumjung starts off nice and easy. The weather was glorious. Fresh and mostly clear. By 9.30 we had reached the point where the small forest trail leaves the

main trail back to Namche and winds its way, eventually, to Shyangboche airstrip. Helen decided to leave us there and head back to Namche for a bit of rest and recovery. Bharat went with her to make sure her rooms at Zambala was appropriate and that young Lagpa knew what to do on his own with Helen in Namche – his first ever trek remember.

The forest trail was exquisite, though steep in places. It eventually clears the forest and emerges in a strange environment of granite boulders, bigger than houses, and stunted juniper, criss-crossed with earthen trails. It took so long I feared we had missed the airstrip somehow but, after almost 4 hours, the old buildings hove into view and yes, they were serving food. Ekki may have dozed off while we were waiting for the food. A sweet little, short-legged dog finished off our unwanted potatoes.

Bharat phoned to say that Helen was safely ensconced at Zambala Home. We did not realise that he was actually calling from high above us on the ridge. We caught up AFTER lunch, another serious trudge, but only for half an hour. No views at all today. Such a contrast with my last visit. It was chilly on the ridge at 3850 m, so we descended quickly on the old stone stairs which lead down to the first Hilary School. I did say a quick hullo to friend Sheru who has a little gallery and teaches art at the school. A bit annoyed with myself that I did not 'pop back later' as promised. It was quite a long way!

Rita and Fennel toured the village on foot this afternoon while Lucy, me and Ekki hunkered down under our respective thick quilts with a good book and spent some serious recovery time. This evening the spaghetti with fresh tomato sauce was enjoyed by all: especially Ekki, whose second helping was just as big as his first. Tired limbs tonight but all in good spirits.



TUESDAY OCTOBER 31:

KUMJUNG TO MONG DANDA



Frost for the first time today, but only on the ground and the mountains were clear, though darkly shaded early this morning. A lovely surprise was a fire in the dining room for breakfast. Mandala Lodge, Kumjung. Highly recommended. Excellent French Toast btw. We left most of our luggage in one room and booked to stay there again tomorrow, on the way down.

I had forgotten that there was a direct trail from Kumjung to the Gokyo Trail, with no need to descend to Kangzuma. The crumbling staircase at the beginning of the trail has been completely rebuilt. The new concrete stairs are hideous with a shiny steel handrail but so much safer. The way to Mong Danda is a long, gradual incline but, no matter how far you walk between each rest stop, the danda never actually seems any closer. We had spectacular views of Thamserku, Ama Dablam, Kang Tenga and, of course, Everest, a rather uninspiring peak which just happens to be the highest thing on the planet.

We were passed by at least two hundred trekkers this morning, all on their way to Gokyo, no hanging around. A contrast with the peaceful Thamochi Valley. And do not start me on the

subject of choppers !! I did see a beautiful Lammergeier today, at least two metres wingspan, maybe more. Not many yaks dotting the upper slopes today.

Mong Danda was packed with trekkers on their lunchbreak, headed for Phortsea Tenga or even Dole. By 1 pm most had left, and we enjoyed a quiet afternoon as the clouds enveloped the ridge on which this amazing group of lodges is located. Fennel, as is her wont, headed out for a bit of a trek this afternoon, following yak trails upwards till the clouds made it seem ill-advised to go further. Probably 4500 metres again! By 4 pm the stove was lit in the dining room. A cat emerged from under the stove. We ordered hot chocolate. Three Indian trekkers, scouting for mountaineering opportunities and two quiet Polish boys made up the company, with us five. Very comfortable indeed.



We heard today that all our people attempting EBC, save one, had arrived in Gorak Shep. James has opted to stay down at 4000 m in Pheriche where the group will collect him on their descent. Not everyone is suited to altitude and his health was sub-par in Namche.

WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 1: MONG DANDA TO KUMJUNG

The descent was very easy, though not as clear or warm as yesterday. Once more, we passed a lot of Gokyo trekkers coming up. A lot! We peeled off at the old stairs and joined the main EBC trail for about twenty minutes to Kangzuma. It wound through a cool, shady woodland of birch and rhododendron. A local woman brought a thermos of tea to her family gathering autumn leaves for animal bedding, garden compost and even outhouses which often use leaves not water. Kangzuma was busy with literally hundreds of trekkers. We had a good coffee at Ama Dablam lodge on their huge terrace; went down well with orange cookies and chocolate croissants. We said hullo to our friends at Thamserku Lodge. We took the hidden 'school trail' back up to Kumjung. It is a treat of tiny, winding tracks between huge boulders, small stone-walled fields and little huts built into the rocky overhangs.



After lunch Rita, Fennel Ekki and I climbed up to Everest View Hotel. Views were non-existent but the walk was atmospheric and perfectly still as we wandered through stunted junipers and rhododendrons. Everest View Hotel is an ugly concrete bunker of a building and the six staff loitering in the dining room were reluctant to serve until prompted, but the tea was very good and the walk down delightful.



Bad news at the hotel. A message from Lahar. Melissa has broken her arm! The HRA clinic at Pheriche diagnosed a fracture and applied a removable cast. I contacted the insurance company on their emergency number which turned out to be in London. Very helpful. Melissa now has a case number and a file has been opened. Relayed all this to Ben, via Lahar on WhatsApp. How did we do group trekking without phones?? By dinnertime I had word that the rescue chopper would be picking them up at 7.30 tomorrow morning. The whole family of four, plus Mangal, can fit in the chopper which will take them only as far as Lukla, where they will wait for us to all fly out together after a few days. Unfortunate yes, but not a total tragedy. Becky will still trek down, the last of the EBC group, with 5 Nepalis. Could be fun.



A brilliant sunset then a cosy evening with a repeat of the fab Spaghetti. I like this lodg



THURSDAY NOVEMBER 2:

KUMJUNG TO JORSALE

Fennel and Rita headed back up to Everest View Hotel which connects to a steeply descending trail into Namche. Ekki, Lucy and I took the easier option, a flatter trail around the back of the ridge. It was still a rather painful descent on hundreds of steps through the huge bowl of Namche village. Ekki and I spent an hour sorting gear we had left at Zambala Home. Fennel joined us as we planned our descent. Rita, Helen and Lucy have opted to chopper down to Lukla. An exciting little indulgence. The chopper takes five so they will take Karma and Ramchandra with them. Lagpa missed out but he has just spent three days off in Namche. Apparently, he wrapped up warmly each day and spent his time watching the helicopters come and go at the helipad above Namche. I walked down to Jorsale with the rest of our group, which was now just three trekkers and four Nepali.

Hells Bells it was a hard day. Kumjung to Namche in warm sunshine took almost three hours as we lollygagged a bit. I bought knee braces in the pharmacy at Namche but I should have realised that the descent would be just as hard as the ascent. Fennel and Ekki had no real problem with it but my knees had never really recovered from the Poyan debacle. It was 5 pm and dusk was descending as we stumbled into Jorsale. Totally exhausted but rather surprised that it was warm enough to sit outside for a hot honey, lemon ginger with RUM!

Good food in a warm dining room. Rooms are very small and cosy upstairs, with a fast-flowing river rushing below the window. Comfortable, we slept for almost 12 hours.

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 3:

JORSALE TO GHAT

Super day. Heard that Lucy, Rita, Helen, Ramchand and Karma had choppered down to Lukla successfully. A phone call from Lahar confirmed that Reshan, Becky and himself had arrived at Namche...and then Monjo. Phenomenal progress. I heard they took the local trail from Monjo to Kumjung. Brave.

Meanwhile, our progress, that is me, Ekki, Fennel, Bharat, Sanchok, Geljen and Lagpa, had a good day. Way better than yesterday. Up and down, up and down, the same hundred metres of vertical over and over again. The dreadful 'detour' above Phakding was completely repaired and the new trail was fantastic. We stopped for a posh coffee above Phakding. Watching the porters downing milky coffees and chocolatey croissants was a real treat. It started to spit with rain at Phakding. Ekki and Fennel appeased the rain gods by donning their jackets, but I liked the feeling of soft rain on a thin tee shirt. I do always run a bit hot. The rain intensified as we neared the Lama Lodge and, by the time we were on the home stretch, it was tiny hailstones pinging off the back of my neck. We had the fancy rooms once more but the water was barely lukewarm – often referred to as 'hot' in Nepal. I got a hot shower in the common bathroom and sit drying my hair by the stove as I write this. A very good day.



SATURDAY NOVEMBER 4:

GHAT TO LUKLA

Not the most demanding day of trekking, but after 2 weeks we were tired and Fennel, not feeling well, was not actually enjoying it. After just an hour or so we spotted Ben, Melissa, Michelle, James and Mangal – out for a Day Walk through Chaurikharkha. We joined them for a cuppa and after a few minutes the shout went up.....Lahar, with Reshan and the amazing Becky barrelling down the road. Thinner, browner and shabbier and elated with their own achievements, particularly the descent.

A light drizzle on and off to Lukla. I finally opened my big pack, dug out my jacket and a poncho for Geljen. Of course, there was no more rain. We spotted a pair of Lampuchre near the Shiva Tree but they were very shy and the woodland was dense. So happy to finally arrive in Lukla, footsore but in great spirits. Fennel crashed early, under the weather. We have been re-united with Helen, Rita and Lucy who have enjoyed NOT trekking down.

Once in the lodge, we had an hour of torrential rain. No choppers or flights in or out of the airport, the runway of which we can see from the hotel windows. But, as I write, the sun is streaming in the windows and the nearby peaks are revealed, dusted in fresh snow. Glorious.

Lots to do today sorting gear, wages, flights, etc. Lahar, Mangal, Bharat and Karma are flying down to Ramechhap with us. The rest of the porters, except two who have found more work here as porters for other people, will walk back to Phaphlu. Happy now with no rucksacks to carry and pay in their pockets. A few of them live within a few hours walk of Phaphlu and the rest will jeep back to Kathmandu. Hope to see some of them again soon. Lovely late-night chatting with Lahar, Mangal and Bharat. Life, the Universe and Everything.....

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 5:

LUKLA TO KATHMANDU

As usual, I did not sleep. Always a little nervous about flying out of Lukla in a tiny 16-seater aircraft. I need not have worried. Up at 5 to find the sky clear and full of stars. Jupiter has been stunningly close for days now. Our lodge-owner was extremely effective. I downloaded the flight ticket information and handed over our passports. Check-in at Lukla is always a bit of a bun-flight but this woman was great. Once the Rucksacks and Daypacks were weighed, and security checked we proceeded to the grotty little departure area. One flight later, with planes disappearing over the hill, which is the runway, at a rate of one every five minutes, we are onboard and taxp-ing onto the top of the short, steep runway with engines revving like hell. No door or even a curtain between the passengers and the pilots, makes the take-off even more exciting. Blasting, full throttle, full flaps, down the 545-metre runway we are airborne just before the end. Phew! Big cheer.



The flight was fabulous. Clear skies and calm air. Even Lamjura La was barely a wobble. Touchdown 20 minutes later in Ramechhap. I think it was Ben who said 'We took off between mountains and landed between rivers'. The town is surrounded by slopes of intricately-cut rice terraces. It was WARM!



We easily found the best local café from the smell of fresh coffee. Americanos, cappuccini and café lattes were quickly ordered and consumed. Our bus driver, Kamal, was keen to hit the road as he was parked awkwardly. We quickly filed into our 15-seater minibus and headed over some amazing roads to Kathmandu. Twisting and turning around chasms, churning dust as we crossed unfinished bridge constructions, and finally arriving at the International Guesthouse 5 hours later. Not too bad. It was time for lunch at the open air Artmandu and then lots of long, hot showers. Solar hot water is a wonderful thing.

Yangling, with their great momos, was the obvious choice for dinner – so close. And then a good night's sleep in made-up beds....no sleeping bags!

MONDAY NOVEMBER 6:

KATHMANDU

A sunny morning and sleeping in till 8 am...in our room at least. A nice slow breakfast in the garden and then Mangal arrived to take most of our group to Swayambunath. They lunched at Benchen Monastery which is one of our favourite residences when we stay in Kathmandu. Meanwhile, Ekki took Helen and Lucy shopping. I tagged along, heading for our agent Deepak's office, but we met him in the street. Helen and Lucy bought beautiful singing bowls from him and then we all had a nice lunch at Pottala Hotel.

After lunch we hit Amrita craft hard. Silver jewellery for Lucy, hemp bags, to sell at the market, for Ekki, scarves for Helen and a beautiful statue for me. A bronze statue of Krishna and Rada, plated in silver and burnished to perfection. The button shop was another long stop. It is a tiny shop brimming with inexpensive treasures like earrings for a couple of dollars, bone and horn pendants on leather necklaces, crystal pendants and hand-carved bone buttons. And somehow, Ekki was there!

Feet up for just twenty minutes and then a long walk through the busy backstreets and the old bazaar area of Kathmandu. A bit too busy for some but I rather like the hustle and bustle of Assan Thole and Indra Chowk around dusk when the little shops are illuminated from inside. Another twenty minutes of dodging motorbikes and breathing exhaust fumes brought us to the peaceful garden of The Roadhouse. Indian chardonnay, thin-crust wood-fired pizza and finally, the arrival of Lahar, Bharat and Karma, made the evening perfect.

Not sure if it was the wine or just good spirits but our visit to one particular Kashmiri handicrafts store resulted in the purchase of some very fine shawls indeed. Credit cards running hot. Luckily, the bill at The Roadhouse cleaned me out of cash so I was safe from temptation for the moment.

Tired. This is way harder than trekking.

TUESDAY NOVEMBER 10:

KATHMANDU – OFFICIAL SHOPPING DAY

The official shopping day. Amrita Craft, our wholesale emporium, was very popular. In fact we met the two Polish guys from Mong Danda there. We did Merino for wool on silk and felt goodies and Pilgrims for books – so many books. We took coffee and carried on. We lost Ben and Michelle in an upmarket Thanka shop and soon James and Melissa drifted off too. Took the rest to TriDevi Marg for real gear, as opposed to North Fake and some very posh cashmere boutiques. Helen, Lucy and I walked over to Durbar Marg for Grace and Fabindia at Sherpa Mall. These are not tourist shops but places where middle class Nepalis might shop. Quality cottons. We ate at Pumpnickel, which is becoming a habit.

Drifted back to the hotel for a short respite and sorted rooms for tomorrow's departures and arrivals. At 4.30 Kamal arrived in the big blue Hi-Ace (Ramechap to Kathmandu). Destination Boudanath. The stupa at Bouda is the largest in the world. After a couple of circuits, we climbed a lot of shabby stairs to reach the spacious Rooftop Pottala restaurant. We were joined by Netra, Sarmilla, Lizzie, Isabel and Soyena. It was a lovely evening, though the food was more popular with some than others. I ate too much. The okra was amazing!

Whizzing home in our trusty minibus, the Tihar lights were going up all over town.



TUESDAY NOVEMBER 8:

KATHMANDU, STILL!

A very easy day. Everyone did their own thing. Ekki and I started washing our trekking gear. A pleasant sunny day 23 degrees. At 10.30 I went out to the nearby intersection and hailed a taxi for the airport for Fennel and Becky. Unfortunately, there was so much luggage there was not enough room for Ekki and I to accompany them as planned. So, a rather sudden farewell for the first two to depart. We had shared a big adventure. Becky had made it to EBC with the A Team and Fennel had spent a lot of her time walking with me and Ekki in the B Team, especially the last few days as we walked down from Namche. We will miss you.

Ben's family are doing their own thing today. Mangal came by to say goodbye. Plan is to drop them at the airport, visit Netra's house to drop off all our excess trekking gear, then return to the airport in time to collect our four guests from Perth for the Cultural Safari. Everything went according to plan, though I had no idea Sarmilla was going to make chicken curry.



Lucy, Rita and Helen enjoying a day of total freedom. Pretty sure Rita would hit The Roadhouse for a pizza lunch.....she did! Our four new arrivals, Des, Christine, Kate and Barry, all from Perth, all friends, are comfortably ensconced in their respective rooms. G'night all. Another adventure starts tomorrow.....

I know I always say 'you guys were the best' at the end of each trek. But this was a great group. Becky has shared some notes she posted to Facebook from the A Team's perspective. Only one of the five in that group did not make it to the top, and Pheriche, at around 4500m is no mean feat when not in the best of health. Well done all. The broken arm accident and consequent helicopter ride was a drama but not a disaster. Becky, you were a star.

My group did a great job too. Bharat made sure of that. Thame was our original goal but after the horrible trail to Poyan we decided to fly out of Lukla instead. That gave us a few spare days to play with and trekking up to Mong Danda at 4000 metres was a great addition to the original itinerary. Becky, perhaps you noticed it as you charged past on your way down? The views were stupendous, and I had always wanted to spend a night there. Our spare days also enabled a second night at Kumjung which we thoroughly enjoyed as the lodge was so cosy and wandering around in the surrounding village was beautiful.

Thank you all for taking part. I can only hire the staff, lead you there and organise the logistics. It is up to you to enjoy it. And clearly you did. Trekking is not all about the high points., though there were a lot of those. How we deal with the low points, sharing the burdens with the rest of the team, can be heartening. I really enjoyed sharing it with you all.

Already thinking about where and when to trek next Autumn in Nepal. Or Spring, if that is your fancy. I may not go to Nepal next Spring myself but you know how good our team is and they could take you anywhere you want to go.

Thank you, Lahar, Bharat, Gelgen, Resham, Sanchok, Lagpa, Ramchand, Dawa, Deepak, Tenji, Mangal and Karma. Of course, none of this would have been possible without you. Your good cheer and good grace made it all so much better.

Thank you Dorje, for helping me with the itinerary and planning. Thank you, Deepak Bhujel, for keeping an eye on everything from the real base camp...your office in Kathmandu.

And thank you Lahar. You really are my superstar!

Cheers,

Teresa didi and Ekki



.....stay tuned for Becky's reportage from Namche onwards.....

BECKY and the 'A' TEAM



Day 8 : Half way point of our trek. I think we go up for about 11 days and down 5, plus a flight. Amazing! Great hiking day with more challenging uphill. 2.25 hour climb up from our lodge to Tengboche for a tea stop. Then 30 minutes to lunch in Deboche and another hour to our lodge for the night. Pangboche. 4.34 miles, 2,533' climbing and 502' down. Besides all of us having head colds we feel pretty good. We are now at 13,532'.

Day 9: A wonderful hiking day. We are now above the trees so rocks and scrub brush are the terrain. It's getting harder to breathe so hiking uphill is very slow. We hiked 3.73 miles to Dingboche at 14,200'. 1,144' up and 77' down. After lunch we did an acclimatization hike to 15,300'. 1.5 hours up and 30 minutes down. 😊 We will stay here two nights.

Day 10: A day hike to acclimatize. 6 miles round trip and 1,300' elevation gain up to 15,500' for lunch. Tough going up but a breeze coming down. Can't believe only 2 more days till base camp!!

Day 11: Started off sadly with news of someone dying overnight at Gorak Shep (our location in two days) of altitude sickness. Then as we started our hike James had to turn back and be taken down to a lower level due to sickness. It was a pretty good hike with a long challenging uphill after lunch and it's much harder to breathe. We are at 16,195'. We hiked 5.31 miles, 1,962' up and 23' down. We are staying at Lobouche where it's really cold! First view of Khumbu Glacier!

Day 12 Part 1: Base camp day and the first day I wake up feeling awful! Horrid headache, dizzy, nausea and an intestinal issue. Ate a little breakfast and slowly packed up wondering how I am going to make it to Gorak Shep and then onto base camp. It took a gruelling 3.5 hours and we finally made it to the lodge. We are now at 17,000'.

Day 12 - Part 2 - Base Camp!

We made it! After lunch I felt much better as I think my body got it together on the slow brutal hike to Gorak Shep. From here it's about 2 hours to base camp so we set out for our amazing destination at 17,270'. This is not the active base camp as it moves due to the glacier melting. Unfortunately, that base camp is a bit too far to get to right now. Still amazing to see the old camp location, the ice fall and where they begin their route. So excited and emotional to finally be here!

Day 13: We were out at 415am to climb Kala Pathar for a sunrise view of Everest. We climbed up 1,400' in just over a mile to our high point of 18,300'. This was one of the most difficult and coldest climbs I've ever done. It took us 2 hours up and an hour down. After thawing out at breakfast we packed up to head down, down, down! 7.38 miles down to Pheriche at around 14,000'. Along the way James surprised us and is now feeling better. Unfortunately, close to town Melissa, his wife, fell and may have broken her elbow. They will most likely have to helicopter out from here and it will be only me with the porters for the rest of the trek, 3 more days. I feel awful for her but at least it was coming back down.

Day 14: Fabulous (and has always been my lucky number). After saying goodbye to the other 4 took off in their helicopter. I had my breakfast and we hit the trail. We are taking a slightly different route back to Namche and it was stunning! Lots of challenging ups and downs but so worth the views and lack of people! Then to top it off I have a room with electricity, a toilet and hot shower! It's been 8 days since my last shower. I think I died and went to heaven! I am in Phortse at around 12,600' so it's finally warming up! Yay! 7.39 mile trek today with elevation gains of 1,075' and loss of 2,109'. Going down!!

Day 15: Another amazing trekking day. Only 1 more to go. Excited and sad at the same time. We really climbed and descended today with a start of an 800' descent to the river immediately followed by at 1,200' ascent. That wakes you up! We are back in Monjo tonight at around 9,300'. Getting warmer finally! 😊

10.74 miles (longest day). 2,072' up and 5,390' down. 😊 😊



Day 16: The end of my trek! I am the only one of 11 who completed the entire trek, as planned, on foot! I shed tears of joy and sorrow walking into Lukla today and joining the group. What an amazing journey this was. I'm both happy and sad that it's over. In total I climbed 22,668'! 😊

Tomorrow, we fly back to Kathmandu for a few days and then home! I can't thank you all enough for the love and support through your comments on my journey. They really helped me get through some of the tougher days. I love you all! ❤️ 😊

We survived our flight from Lukla, the most dangerous airport in the world!

Hi there, I have edited Becky's trip notes and reduced her photos to low res. Thanks. Teresa didi.