

# TREKKING WITH TERESA

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## TREK REPORT PIKE PEAK NOVEMBER 1 – 20, 2024



### October 27

Immigration was a breeze for Ekki and I arriving in Kathmandu shortly after one in the morning with on-line visa applications, while those trekkers arriving in boots and down jackets struggled a bit. Only 18 degrees C outside but none of that fresh air was penetrating the arrival halls as sluggish overhead fans stirred the hot air to very little effect. Deepak was there to meet us, at 2.30 in the morning. Bless. His big jeep whisked us off to the Potala Hotel. I had diligently booked our favourite International Guesthouse for October 27, but at this time in the morning it was still the October 26! Deepak had spotted the problem. Potala Hotel has strange modern décor, but the bed is huge and soft and draped in lots of white cotton bedlinens.....zzzzzzzzzz.

### October 27, again, for real...

After a farcical breakfast ....yes, we did want TWO Light Breakfasts....with excellent coffee, we taxied to Int. Guesthouse where our much-loved Room 110 was ready. A big new fan on a stand and no smelly plumbing. Win-win! It was quite a bit warmer than expected, which turned out to be the prevailing theme of our entire trip this year. 25

degrees in fact. The gardens were a treat, and we ate a veg. daalbhat at an outside table this evening. Made our own gin and tonics with Gordons from our luggage (9.99 euro at Aldi, TKU).

## **October 28**

Lazy day. Still recovering.....Since the wi-fi was a bit unreliable in remote Room 110, we bought data packs for our Ncell SIM cards. 6 euro for 28 days unlimited. Lahar rang. All good. He will arrive with the Pokhara guys on November 1. Also confirmed that he was free to take Ekki and I up to Muktinath, half jeep, half trekking, after Pike Peak. Good news.

Dinner at Yangling for the best momos in Kathmandu. Met the charming Renzo. Strolled through Paknajol. Bought an electric kettle for our room. Paid the 1500 rupees, the asking price (10 euro) but the shopkeeper said it was a festival and gave us 500 back. Welcome to Nepal.

## **29 October**

Another rather lazy day, the highlight being lunch with Julie , who brought a friend along. We ate in the garden. This evening we taxied over to Kapan to retrieve our trekking gear from storage at Netra's house. Lovely dinner with Netra, Sarmilla, Isabel and Lizzie. Bright Future continues to prosper with their unstinting help. Late taxi home through streets illuminated for Diwali.

## **30 October**

We collected Julie, our first Pike Peak customer, from the airport. Back at the hotel by 3.30 this afternoon. Leisurely dinner in the garden again. A beautiful soft evening getting to know Julie over nice Nepali food.

## **November 1**

Checked Julie's gear. Heavy drink bottles, but she is rather attached to them. Might want a down jacket. Overall ,she has really nice practical gear. Probably the best-prepared customer I have seen. Ekki took her to find the Garden of Dreams (not a euphemism) while I headed back to the airport for the other three customers. Helen was first to arrive, despite being on a later flight. Sheila and Ann had a long wait for their luggage. It was a bit warm for comfort. Strolled over to Pumpernickel for excellent sandwiches.

Evening was Yangling for momos but it was full. French Café for burgers was a great alternative. Early night for weary travellers.

## **November 2**

Crazy busy day. After checking their gear, the customers each had a list for shopping, as planned. Jackets, long johns, overpants, hats, buffs, sleeping bags.....plenty to do.

This was the day we had a pizza lunch in the rear courtyard of The Roadhouse. The Newari community had an amazingly noisy festival today. Cymbals crashing, drums throbbing, dancing and singing, some on open trucks, some following on foot. .

I glanced out of the window of the restaurant and, from the back, recognised a guy in a blue t-shirt with short grey hair. Of course it was Lahar. Along with Bharat, Sanchok and the newest porter 'young Bharat' who seems to be a child of one of Loyan's sisters. Lahar's nephew?

We did the pre-trek briefing in the garden of the Int. Guesthouse, over veg daal bhat all round. All set for tomorrow.

### **November 3**



Our jeeps arrived at 5.45 along with Lahar, Sanchok, Bharat and Bharat Jr. Two jeeps for 10 people was very roomy. Being Bhai Tikha, there was very little traffic, and the city fell away quickly. Too hazy for a mountain view at Dulikhel but the devastation from recent flooding was everywhere in evidence. Roads were often half-blocked by rocks, broken trees and mud, which could have made for slow progress, except that we were mostly alone on the road. After Dulikhel the damage was even worse, with kilometres of road just swept away. Alternative detours were rough but passable in strong jeeps. Acres of rice fields which used to border the road on the left are just GONE! After an hour or so of this dreadful damage the road returned to almost normal. Where it was high above the river it was obviously less damaged. The beautiful new resort with pool which we can usually observe from the cliff above, was drenched in mud. A complete write-off.

It was hot in the valley and EVERYTHING was shut. Empty roads were a bonus but no restaurants to speak of. Shortly before we crossed the river we turned on the air-con and wound up the windows. This is November 3!!!

We put together a scratch lunch at a little shop. Crisps, Coke, Tea and Biscuits. After 'lunch' the road climbed rapidly so we opened the windows to deliciously cool forested hillsides. Even our last tea-shop was closed so we pushed on. Ram's lodge was very welcoming. Big beds, tiny attached bathrooms with western loos, big windows, power points. Luxury.

Simple trekking dinner – veg. noodle soup and big plates of shared chips. Julie shouted a rum. Very relaxing. All tired after the 5 am start.

#### **November 4**

Over a slow breakfast – veg omlettes with chapatis – we were joined by Ram Kaffle and Deepak (Akal's younger brother). Young Lagpa (Kancha's son) had joined us last night. He was Helen's porter in Everest last year so that was a happy reunion. So now we had 7 Nepali support staff. 6 porters and Lahar as Guide.



At this point I had to assess myself as unfit. My knees were just not up to any more than an hour or so of walking. I planned to wait in Patale a day or so then jeep, via Phaphlu, to Jumbesi to hook up with the group and possibly be fit enough to trek by then. No point pushing my luck and then, in the middle of nowhere, become a nuisance when I could not continue.

The group went up to the local Hindu Temple and then the nearby ridge for a testing little day-trek, and to check gear preferences. Does your daypack fit you properly? Do you need one stick or two? Which jacket is comfortable in this weather? They were so late back I had actually started to worry but all was well, and trekkers are ready for the off tomorrow. After huge plates of fried rice, we all relaxed as it poured with rain for the rest of the afternoon. The only really bad weather of the entire trek, and we were safely ensconced in the lodge. Good karma??



**November 5A** beautiful morning for the start of the trek. Helen did not pull up well from yesterday's outing and has opted to join me for a few days in Patale, then a jeep over to Jumbesi where we will meet the group. We may both be able to trek onwards with them from there. Optimistic at this stage.

First report at 10.30 and all are well and enjoying themselves. The last call of the evening suggested some of our members are utterly exhausted but all probably fine to go again tomorrow. Some new rooms at Japhre and the village is as pretty as ever.

## **November 6**





6.30 call this morning and everyone is up and well and happy to continue. Phew! Helen and I had a leisurely breakfast with Doug, a doctor from the nearby mission hospital at Okaldhunga. Easy company for an hour. Lots of local experience and a sense of humour. At 11 Helen and I set off for Dhap, about 3 km away. We heard, and then saw a pair of Lampuchre – a beautiful bird about parrot-sized with a foot long tail of beautiful feathers – the name means Longtail.

Email from the main group at their lunch stop in Bul Bulle. All well and happy. Good to know. I do feel odd, not trekking with my group for the first time ever.

Our fried rice order at Dhap took forever, but turned out to be a full daalbhat!! Who knew. Bharat and Bharat Jr found us there and we walked home together. Everyone was very friendly, even the ambulance slowed, tooted and waived. Knee hurting by the time I got back but 6 km was my best effort since February when I was literally bedridden. Progress indeed.

Helen and I opted for a long, slow amble around the village for a couple of hours. We played Thirteen this evening, our favourite card game on trek.

Dinner order of curry and chips was a bit of a faux pas. PotatoCurry with potatoes! Helen's omelette and chips was a far better choice. Luckily, there is an abundance of fabulous local apples.

Group very well and very happy at Kancha's lodge at Lamuje.



## November 7

Phone calls from Kancha's Lodge again this morning confirmed that all are well and enjoyed the hospitality greatly. A large new building of rooms, separate from the renovated dining hall which has BIG NEW STOVE!!

The climb up to Diary, now called Pike Base Camp, left everyone pretty exhausted. Altitude playing a part now, as they were camped at 3650 metres. Lunch was late but heard that they are all resting quietly. Phew! Ekki plans now to do Pike Peak in the morning, which was always an option.

Helen and I jeeped over to Phaphlu, where we had coffee at Sonam's Peace Café. Sadly, they are booked out for the date we needed, so we have booked Everest Hotel. Have

rejigged our plan so that now we will spend another night at Ram's Place in Patale, mainly to shorten the return drive to Kathmandu.

We four, Helen and I, Bharat and Bharat Jr (Kidlet) hired a jeep to Jumbesi. Only took an hour or so, through deep jungle-clad gullies and over ridges topped with flower-filled gardens and painted houses. Orchards were a common feature. The Apple Garden, our usual lodge, was full but the owner's son was managing a newly-renovated lodge in the village. Beautiful rooms, a sunny terrace, western toilets and gas hot showers. Bliss. French Mauritian fellow trekkers and some monks with their Nepali followers, all female, were the company in the dining room tonight.







## **November 8**

Back at the Base Camp there was a bit of a delayed start; not everyone wanted to summit. Setting off around 10.30 I had concerns about the group as sombre clouds gathered, blocking out the nearby hills by midday. Happily, I got news that they had arrived at Jastabanijang at 3 pm.

Helen and I trekked about 2 hours up to a little bridge over the small river. An absolute delight and it did occur that this way of doing Pike would suit some people more than going 'over the top'. An option next season?



## **November 9**

I had no contact with the group this morning. NCELL is not the main carrier in this region. They are in good hands with Ekki and Lahar.

Helen and I had a lazy morning, doing a little washing and reading on the sunny terrace. I could easily take a lot more of this. By 2 pm we decided to trek steeply up on the local trail to join the main route from Jastabanijang, which is actually part of the main Jiri to Everest trail, the traditional way to get to EBC. A sign on a lovely old lodge with a garden full of cornflowers, marigolds and roses said, 'French Pres Coffee'. We were in like a shot.

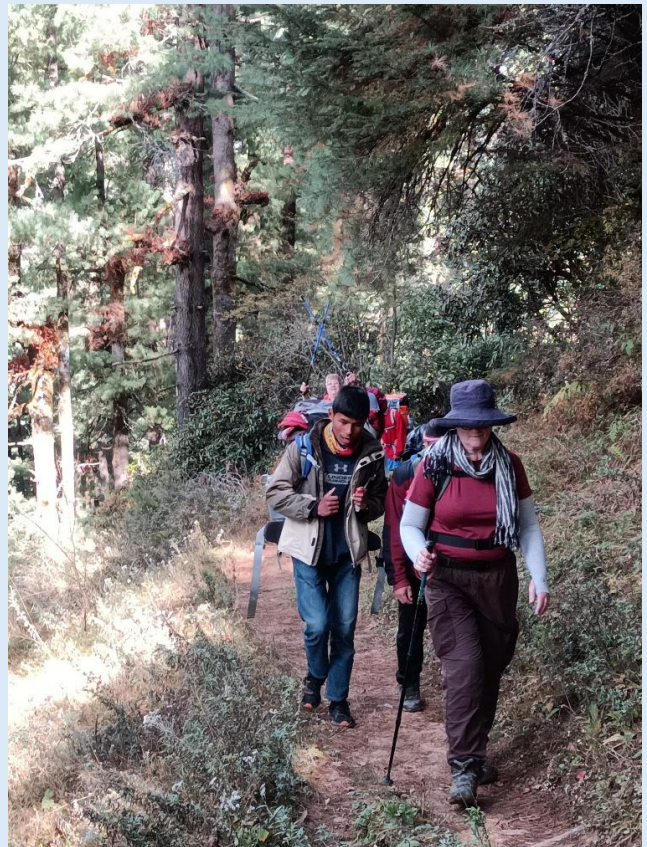
Continuing steeply up after the break we finally got a phone signal and then an incoming call from Ekki. They were having lunch at Tactor, about an hour and a half up the trail. Though the weather was mild it was still too chilly, up on the hill, to sit around waiting for the group.

The group started to trickle in at 5.15. This is the longest day on the trek. A happy reunion. Cheerful dinner tonight with an electric heater in the dining room. A nice young Brit and a beautiful Polish woman, Monika, who lives in London – actually, quite close to the guy. A pretty early night for our tired A Team. So nice to have Ekki back. Jumbesi is mild, despite being 2750 metres. The valley is a sun trap and very sheltered.

## **November 10**

Very, very slow breakfast of smashing cheese and tomato omelettes with the best ever Tibetan bread. We are talking flaky, like a croissant. Pushpa, the cook, is a gem and used to cook at the Apple Garden.

The entire group apart from Ekki, Lahar and I went up to Thubten Cholung Monastery today. We trekked up to meet them at the bridge. All were extremely happy with their experience. Butter lamps had been lit for sadly -deceased family members. They were clearly moved by their visit.





## November 11

The entire group, except myself and Bharat, set off at 8.30 for Ringmu, hoping for a clear view at lunchtime. Everest View Lodge. Sadly, it was cloudy, but the trek was very enjoyable. The jeep ride, via a shortcut from Phedi to Ringmu was astounding. The road was 'exciting' and the landscape was as picturesque as you could ever wish for. Pretty cows, orchards and flower-filled gardens. A regular little Eden. Alighting at the bottom of Ringmu I soon discovered that our lodge of choice was shut and the couple of others I checked out were dark, cold, dusty and with VERY basic toilet facilities. Staggering up the steep trail, finding one closed lodge after another, Bharat got a bit ahead of me (well, I sat down) and found an absolute gem. Sherpa Heritage Lodge has large rooms with thick blankets, thick mattresses and a western-style bathroom on the same level as the rooms. Newly-built and run by two dynamic women, one of whom has a beautiful 9-month old baby. We are charmed as we sip hot black tea in the huge kitchen. We can also see our group from the front garden, looking across the valley. Decided to 'un-book' Taksundo La for tomorrow and do it as a day-trek from here instead.

Happy trekkers staggered in as the afternoon chilled. All pretty exhausted by the last climb. The stove in the dining room is a beauty and we are soon taking off all our warm clothes. Dinner was excellent. Decided to spend a second night here. All happy.



## November 12

Only an hour or so up to Taksundo La, mostly on the jeep road as the short cut trail is steep and slippery in places, covered in wet autumn leaves. It was pretty cold at the top but we had a long leisurely lunch. No longer a donkey station due to the prevalence of jeeps so none of the swirling donkey-shit dust we used to associate with this place. There was a friendly German dude in the diner, though another man said NOTHING in two hours except 'Shut the door!'.



I have opted out of tomorrow's trek down to Phaphlu. Not difficult but Longish. Helen too, on Lahar's recommendation.

A lovely stay at Sherpa Heritage Lodge. Highly recommended.



## November 13

Group away early on a chilly morning. Winter is coming on. An hour later our Sumo jeep (a kind of twin-cab ute) picked us up for the ride down to Phaphlu, along with all the rucksacks. I noticed that most places were closed on the beautiful drive down, so I started to make enquires upon arrival about a bag full of pakoras and some kit-kats to be schlepped up to the tired, hungry group. There was no need. Good morning tea and lunch. Thanks for the update.



The Everest Hotel is a rather strange place and I find myself sleeping in a bed where I have slept before. We had a super dinner of Indian food in the large warm dining room at the back. Huge stove. Phurba was a lovely surprise visitor. He has turned into a very good-looking young man.



## **November 14**

Having foregone our original plan to visit Bright Future's projects at Kangel due to the demands of the destroyed roads, we headed off today just as far as Pattale. This will make the return to Kathmandu an hour and a half shorter. We will then be past the dodgy part of the road before dusk. The jeep ride was great on a clear, sunny day.

Back at Ram's Place Ekkki and I took the upstairs room to save Ann and Sheila the stairs. We froze our asses off. Winter really is on the way. We went for a long wander around the village this afternoon, warm jackets required. Baby goats were a hit.

Bit of a hassle in the dining room this evening as jeep drivers arrived from Kathmandu. Dorje had organised this, apparently. But the mistake was perhaps 'To Patale' not 'From Patale'. The guy was stropky and demanded that I hand over the money for him and his driver. I did try to let things chill, but they were very insistent. In the end I said 'I have the money, I am only giving it to the guys we made the deal with in Phaphlu'. It did the trick. I hear Dorje sorted something at the Kathmandu end.

## **November 15**

2 jeeps, 10 people, bags inside. Comfy ride. An early start after tea and biscuits. We stopped for a great breakfast at Sherpa HomeLodge, ten minutes after Gormi. Highly recommended. Freshly-made chapatis with omelettes inside, plated up with Alu-dum and Saag. Lahar brewed us a coffee in their kitchen. Clean place with a pretty garden. A good choice when there are so many shabby joints on the road.

Despite my misgivings the trip went smoothly, though we did not arrive at our hotel until 5 pm. The last 3 km, in horrific peak-hour traffic, took an hour. Beautiful hot showers and then dinner at the nearby Yangling. No! Closed, it was Saturday again! An easy stroll to the French Café and a stroll through the late night shops of Thamel on the way home. Kathmandu is buzzing. Deepak's little shop was still open and we spend a wonderful hour there experiencing the singing bowls wonderful sounds. His knowledge and expertise is amazing.

## **November 16**

This was a day off. As I write this, there is nothing written in my diary. I am pretty sure we ate and slept and washed clothes and shopped.

## **November 17**

I think this was the day we went to Nagarkot. The views were lovely and lunch on the terrace of the ????? was a real treat.

Kamal took a local back road down from Nagarkot and it was just lovely. He brought us to Bouda, the biggest Buddhist stupa in the world. Coffee on a terrace overlooking the

stupa and then let the group off the leash for an hour or so. We climbed up onto the first tier of the stupa. The perspective from up there is amazing. We gathered at 6 for Tibetan food at the Rooftop Potala. A great restaurant with authentic Tibetan food and Australian wine. Great combination. Driving home this evening was easy through uncrowded streets. I like riding around at night, with shops lit from inside. There is more to see than day time when interiors are often hidden in shadows.

## **November 18**

Over to Durbar Marg for Grace, Fabindia, Biba, etc. Julie bought a beautiful salwar kamiz for her daughter. Helen and I got new kurtas in a brand called Sabhyata, which we buy every time. Feeling unwell, I taxied back to the hotel. We had a group lunch in the garden with Netra and Isabel, who filled the group in on their work at Bright Future. By evening I was seriously unwell and Ekki took the group to Yangling – best momos in Kathmandu – which was finally OPEN!! All enjoyed it.

## **November 19**

Although I was unwell today, the plan was for Ekki to take the group up to Swayambu, so timing was good. They swung by Bina's little jewellery store on the way down and a few treasures were selected. Quality silver with real stones. A few more 'antiques' were bought from the Tibetan sellers on the road down to Kathmandu. A new footpath is a great help to customers and sellers alike. They shopped back in Thamel too and had a late lunch at Rosemerry, a good choice.

I was well enough, just, to take part in our farewell dinner at The Roadhouse. Very loud, even at the outdoor terrace. Youngsters, oblivious!

## **November 20**

Julie left early this morning for a flight to Chitwan. The rest of us piled into Kamal's blue van for a trip to International Departures for Shiela and Ann. Pretty sure that was just enough Nepal for those two. Absolute troopers, on and off trek. Anne, we will miss your jokes and your singing. Sheila's determination continues to inspire.

Good luck all of you. The hotel seems a little quieter now and dinner was not the usual social highlight of the day. Ekki has hooked up with a German friend, Wigbert Roth, look him up for fabulous professional photos of Nepal. Both Helen and I are having a much-longed-for big night in, with a good book and a huge bar of chocolate.

You may have noticed that Helen has not gone anywhere? She is joining Ekki and I on our next adventure – jeep trekking to Muktinath.

I was a bit saddened by my inability to trek with you this time, but I thought Ekki stepped up and did a great job as Group Leader. Of course, the porters were fabulous and Lahar was a rock. So, thank you Lahar, Bharat, Ram, Deepak, Sanchok, Lagpa, Bharat Jr. We could not have done it without you.

As we head off to Pokhara and more trekking and jeeping around, I want to say thank you for coming with us. Stay tuned. We would be more than happy to take any of you with us on future adventures.

Cheers,

Teresa didi and Ekki bhena



Go to [www.slowtrekking.com](http://www.slowtrekking.com) to see our plans for this year. Not many interested parties at the moment so plenty of room. Form your own group?? I am in Germany for the whole summer, with Ekki. Email me at [vonschwichtenberg@gmail.com](mailto:vonschwichtenberg@gmail.com) or [teresadb@hotmail.com](mailto:teresadb@hotmail.com). Happy to answer questions or arrange a WhatsApp chat. Cheers ! Teresa