

Nepal 2010_04_18 Day 1

After exactly one hour of sleep, we showered, gathered our bags and got into our taxi at 12:30am. We arrived at the airport early for our 2:45am flight. The flight to Hong Kong was uneventful and went surprisingly quick considering we were in the air for 12 1/2 hours. Cathay Pacific is a great airline and we arrived safe and sound and on time at 6:30am.

We have 11 hours to spare until our flight to Kathmandu (KTM) so we decided to head into the city and to Stanley Market. After going through immigration we found a local bus that would take us to Central Station on Hong Kong Island and then transfer to Stanley Market. The buses are double deckers - left over from the English influence - and we chose to sit up top front and center for an unobstructed view.

Although it was warm, about 23C, it was cloudy and raining. The ride in was interesting and we're both blown away at the size of the port and number of cranes and container ships everywhere. Once we arrived at Central we found the connecting bus for the ride through Hong Kong Island. The route was partially along the coast and the streets are narrow, winding and only 2 lanes so it made for an interesting ride looking down from the upper deck. We both held our breath around a couple of corners!

We arrived at our destination early, well before anything opened and found a cute bakery and had a latte and pastry. The market eventually opened and we wandered around but didn't buy anything. We found a fabulous Chinese restaurant (you would think that this would be easy except there seemed to be only one in this area - there was every English pub you could think of and finally we had to ask a security guard where a good Chinese restaurant was. It was tucked out of the way and was delicious and we had a very filling lunch. Afterwards we decided to start making our way back to the airport.

When transferring again at Central we noticed thousands of women sitting along the sidewalks with food and playing cards - almost like they were having their Sunday afternoon picnic. It was very cool and windy so many of them had cardboard on the ground and around them like a small fort. We asked someone and apparently they are homecare workers from the Philippines and this is where they gather. Hong Kong is a concrete jungle but you would think they have some parks!

We arrive back at the airport safe and sound and well in time for our flight. We boarded Dragon Air which was a great airline and following dinner, I fell dead asleep. After 3 hours we landed in Dhaka which is the capital of Bangladesh. To our surprise about 2/3 of the people got off the plane, and mostly Caucasians. This definitely piqued our interest and we will have to check it out when we return.

We arrived in KTM at 10:30pm, went through customs and were charged 3 times what we were expecting for our Visas! I guess they either made some changes or thought we needed to pay more for being in their country for 6 weeks.

The Hotel Thamel driver was there waiting for us with my name on a sign and we took the 'wild ride' into the city. The streets are not even big enough for one vehicle let alone two and to top it off, they drive on the opposite side of the road! And then there are all the motorcycles and everyone is consistently blowing their horns. It is quite an experience. Amazingly there are rarely any accidents.

Our hotel is in the part of town favoured by the trekkers and crowded and full of shops (a million mini MECs with "knock offs" of all the name brands), restaurants and bars. We went straight to the hotel and straight to bed. Our 'first' day was almost two.

Nepal 2010_04_19 Day 2

KTM - we both woke up at 3am and chatted until 4am and then forced ourselves to sleep a couple more hours. The time change is 12 hours so our bodies thought it was the afternoon.

After breakfast we decided to wander around the streets and familiarize ourselves with the Thamel area. It was surprisingly easy and within the first 1/2 hour we had purchased 2 new jackets and sunglasses. We carried on wandering and at lunch decided to try a Nepalese restaurant that was recommended in our book. The food was very tasty - Dahl bhat which consists of rice, lentils, cooked spinach and curry and was a grand total of \$5 for two of us.

We noticed that the local Nepalese ate their rice and food with their hands. Similar to Africa, they come in to the restaurant and wash their hands before and after they eat. It is very strange to watch a man in a business suit eating with his hands. Fero finds it horrifying!

We decided to become "vegetarians" while in Nepal and I am so glad we did. Meat and chicken are sold out in the open with no refrigeration and flies all over it - it turned my stomach!

Following lunch, which was vegetarian of course, we found our way back to the hotel and had a nap. After 2 hours we forced ourselves to get up as we were meeting Tilak from Nepal Trailblazer Trekking to make arrangements for our trek and meet our guide, Bikesh (pronounced Bic-esh). To our surprise Tilak invited us to a Nepalese dinner and show. We were still full from lunch but found a way to eat again. It was a nice place and the dancers were very entertaining. Tilak dropped us off and we went straight to bed. It will take us a few days to catch up on our sleep.

Nepal 2010_04_20 Day 3

Again we woke up at 3am and Fero wanted to chat. I was tired so just rolled over and went back to sleep. We then woke up at 4:30am as the birds were chirping noisily outside our window. As well our Kazakhstan neighbors were up and heading off on their Lhotse expedition.

Today was City Tour day and we were picked up at 9am. Our guide, Butti, spoke very good English and was very knowledgeable. He had been a trekking guide and was now a city guide.

Our first stop was the Monkey Temple - an Unesco World Heritage site and the oldest Buddhist monument in KTM built in 2600AD.

Here we learned the Buddhist mantra - Om mane padme hom - while spinning the prayer wheels and walking in a clockwise direction. This mantra is from the Dalai Lama.

The gold leaf on the giant stupa monument was donated by an American woman.

From here we travel to Old KTM which dates back to the 12th Century.

It is like going back in time with the sounds and smells, carts, street vendors and the occasional holy man to complete the scene. The Wooden Temple in the center is made from the wood of just one teak tree and was built in the 12th century. It was used also as a meeting place for commerce and many street vendors still use it today.

Not far from the Temple is the original Royal Palace, now a museum and Unesco World Heritage site, and was also built from the 12-18th centuries. 100 years ago, the royal family moved to the newer palace. In 2008, the Nepal Monarchy was replaced by an elected government and the current Royal Family became ordinary citizens and had to leave the Palace. It too is a museum although the Queen Mother still resides there. Nepal was ruled by this family for over 250 years.

The square across from the original Palace was then known as the 'elephant parking lot' as that was the mode of transportation back in the day. In the 1960s the parking lot was occupied by hippies and was referred to as Freak St.

In 1944 an earthquake destroyed most buildings which are slowly being renovated.

One of the temples was of a very powerful and fearful god. In years gone by, criminals would be brought in front of this temple and would be so afraid that they would tell the truth of their crime. This temple was an olden day 'Lie detector' test but unfortunately nowadays people aren't as fearful and they have the police station just down the street.

Temple of the Living Goddess Kumari. Chosen by the people when she is 3-5 years old and is taken care of by the priest and his family until her first menstruation. She is schooled in the temple and then sent back to her parents to live a normal lifestyle. Butti had the priest bring Kumari out to bless us. It was quite an honour as this is not a normal part of the tour - Butti is friends with the priest so we had connections.

Other temples are the Hari Krishna temple, the Kama Sutra - temple of love, the Siva temple.

From here we head to the city's Cremation site. It is along the banks of the river that flows from the Himalayas, through KTM and ends up in the Ganges. As this is the end of the dry season, the river is a mere trickle, is full of garbage and the smell was a bit overwhelming. When you die, your

family brings your body to this spot; you are washed with the holy water of the river and then put on a wooden block on top of a cement block, covered in hay and set on fire. We weren't really prepared for what we saw as there were 2 bodies being prepared and one burning. The smell almost did me in and the whole event left us both very subdued. We were very happy to move along and head to our last stop.

The largest stupa in KTM is also one of the largest in the world. It was built in the 6th century.

Surrounding the stupa are shops and restaurants and we went to the Buddha Kitchen to have our lunch. Same food as yesterday's lunch but \$35 instead of \$5!

After lunch we begged Butti to take us back to the hotel as we were definitely in need of a rest. We didn't rest long as Bikesh and Dendi Sherpa (our climbing guide for Island and Mera peaks) came to review our equipment for the trek. We had everything except a couple of items. We were thrilled as this meant we could do one of our favourite things - shop for equipment!

We walked to the official Mountain Hardwear store with, of course, official prices and purchased what we needed and a few things we wanted.

On the way back to the hotel Fero had his hair cut for 100Rps (Rupees) which is equivalent to \$1.30. From here we decided to stop at the Tom and Jerry's pub for happy hour.

Finally back at the hotel we reorganized our bags for trek. This was done with headlamps as it was now dark and the power was off. This happens very frequently and for the most part, not a big deal. Once both bags were zipped up we celebrated with some wine and were in bed by 9pm.

Interesting facts:

KTM - 3M people and 30M people in Nepal. The total country is only 147,181 sq km.

1 bed (3 rooms) apartment rents for \$100us per month, with good facilities \$150us per month. Average wage is \$350us per month. 50% unemployment. 54% literacy rate. Every year they have a new government.

Motorcycles \$1500-\$3000 with 100% tax rate.

Income tax is about 24%. No medical coverage.

Nepal 2010_04_21 Day 4 Phakding

We were up with the birds at 4am excited to begin our trek. We had requested breakfast at 5am and when we went downstairs everyone was still sleeping. The service is 24 hours however it isn't that busy so the staff sleep on the lobby and kitchen chairs - quite the life. We did manage to get some breakfast and finished just in time for Bikesh to pick us up.

Off to the airport for our flight to Lukla. We were on the first flight at 6:15am - all flights must go in and out of Lukla in the morning as mountain weather can be very bad in the afternoons.

The smaller airport terminal was abuzz with activity with trekkers, guides and porters organizing luggage, tickets and clients. Even with the chaos we were checked in quickly, paid the money for overweight bags and headed for the flight on Tara air. The plane held 16 people and was a bit worse for wear but the 30 min flight was smooth and very enjoyable. There was only one spot when we flew over two different mountain valleys and hit air pockets - that was just like being on a rollercoaster. Everyone in the plane made a whoa sound and hung on!

Lukla is situated on the side of a mountain with an extremely short runway. Only propeller aircraft and helicopters are able to fly in and out. The runway slopes up towards the village and our pilot brought it in smoothly and came to an abrupt stop, when we had arrived.

Gathering our bags we met our porter, Jagat, and went into the hotel to wait while our porter packed his things. The porters live in Lukla and don't know until that morning if they will be chosen to work. Jagat is one of Bikesh's favourite porters so he was first choice.

At around 9am we are on our way down the trail. We travel at a very leisurely pace as we have come up to 2800m and we need to allow our bodies to adjust to the new altitude. I like the slow pace as I then have lots of opportunities to take pictures. The scenery is incredible with huge majestic peaks, green terraced valleys and lots of colour, the Nepalese love bright colours on their buildings.

We meet many travellers returning to Lukla as well as porters carrying incredible loads. They carry anywhere from 25kg to 75kg using their backs and a strap around their forehead. Most of the porters weigh less than the load they are carrying. Our porter has it light with a mere 25kg! Fero jokes that he is the one on vacation, not us. He has chosen to come the full 30 days with us and seems like a very nice fellow.

We stop for a drink and snack after 2 hours and enjoy our surroundings for about 45 min. We then carry on for another hour to Phakding, today's destination. The key to acclimatizing to altitude is to take it slowly so we are taking advantage and enjoying the beautiful valley to the fullest. It was quite warm today, about 25C, so taking it easy was important.

Our Teahouse is called the Beer Garden and the room is luxury with our own private bathroom AND a shower!! Fero adds with dual one piece toilet and Hans Grohe fixtures that he rarely sees in million dollar homes in Vancouver. We can't believe our good luck - this is nicer than our hotel in KTM.

We checked with Bikesh and EVERYTHING is brought up on the backs of porters. Including the one piece toilet and 2 full size billiard tables in the 'rec' room. Four porters carried each table up from Jiri and it took 20 days. What they will do to please the tourist!

After a great lunch of spaghetti, cheese and a special Nepalese tomato sauce, we head up to the room and rest until time for dinner. Following dinner we take advantage of our shower and turn in for the night. Fero thinks he may have had a wee bit of sun stroke today but I am feeling fine.

Nepal 2010_04_22 Day 5 Monjo

It is 6am and our second day in the Himalayas is dawning. Skies are clear and the sun is shining on the peaks above our hotel, the jackies (a cross between a yak and a cow) and porters are heading back to Lukla to pick up supplies. The birds are singing and the rooster (who was almost mistaken by the kitchen helper as the chicken for dinner) is very happy to be alive today and is crowing loudly. Thankfully for him the cook caught him before he lost his head!

It is really a great day to be alive, whether you are a human or a rooster!

It is nice and sunny so we ate breakfast outside. At around 9am we departed on our journey to Monjo.

Fero has named the trail the Robson St of Nepal as there are more guesthouses, restaurants, shops and trekkers than at home.

Enroute we had great views of the mountain Thamasherku which is 6618m.

The trail was fairly easy and we took our time arriving in Monjo at 11:30am. We are staying at the Summit Home Teahouse which again is luxury compared to what we were expecting. We have a great room with big duvets and a private bathroom with shower! They are spoiling us.

The temperature today was around 28 or 29C and we are now at 2800m and enjoying our leisurely trek - I think we will be in for a big surprise when we start our climbs and stay in tents.

We read this morning that Nepal is 80% Hindu and only 4% Buddhist. The Kumbu region is predominately Buddhist. Fero declared that today he will be Hindu and yesterday he was Buddhist. This got a huge laugh from Bikesh.

After lunch we head to the room for a rest and studied our maps. At 4pm we fell asleep and had to awoken by Bikesh at 6:30pm. We went upstairs for dinner and although I ate my stomach was not happy with me.

Shortly after we went to bed and attempted to sleep as we had a 5:30am wake up call.

Nepal 2010_04_23 Day 6 Monjo

Ohhhh, this was not a good day for us. I woke up in the middle of the night and was sick - I think it was food poisoning of some sort, but who knows from what. Fero hadn't slept well and was having stomach issues.

Needless to say the 7am departure to Namche was out of the question.

We spent the day in bed sleeping and resting. We had a very simple dinner and then back to the room for a nice hot shower (or shower as written in Nepalese) and back to bed. You would think we wouldn't be able to sleep any more but the two of us were fast asleep in no time.

Nepal 2010_04_24 Day 7 Namche

We woke up around 4:45am and hooray we feel normal again and ready to head to Namche at 3445m.

Breakfast was chapatti with homemade plum jam. We are going to stay away from eggs just in case that was the cause of our bad stomachs and stick more to the Nepalese way of eating.

We departed the Summit Home at 7:15am and a few minutes later entered Sagamatha National Park. Here the sign board has 5 Trekking Rules:

1. Don't Take a Life (as if!)
2. Don't get Angry
3. Don't get Jealous
4. Don't drink too much alcohol
5. Keep the trail clean!

My favourite is #1.

From the park we could see one of the houses of Namche in the distance - so close, yet so far. The trail was consistently uphill and dusty but we carried on slowly and surely and arrived here at 10:45am. We passed a couple of mule trains and many jackies. We took a break at a nice viewpoint that was our first glimpse of Everest! The day was perfect so that the jetstream was very clear and looked oh so strong!

Bikesh knows the owners of the Hotel Everest here in Namche so we got a great room on the top floor with a great view of Namche and the mountains. I even have a view of the heliport from my bed. No private bathroom this time but still an awesome room.

Apparently the owner is from Bikesh's home town and is the best chef in Namche. After a great lunch we agree.

Now surprise, surprise it is time to relax - what we do best. So far we are having no issues with the altitude and we are really loving this teahouse thing.

We spent most of the afternoon reading and Fero had a nap. It became very overcast and even rained for a bit and then cleared up.

At 4pm we took a walk through the town and went on the internet for 20 mins. It is pretty expensive here at \$10 per hour, especially when a room for the night is around the same price - the luxury of technology.

At 6pm we had dinner which was again fabulous, homemade tomato soup, veggie pizza for me and mashed potatoes with mushroom gravy for Fero. Yum! After a pot of tea and a chat with some Aussie folk, we retired to the room, read a wee bit and fell asleep around 8pm.

The night was super clear and the moon is 3/4 full and lit up the mountains beautifully. What a magical sight it was!

Nepal 2010_04_25 Day 8 Namche

Both of us woke up at 4am and tried to fall back asleep. Fero was successful but I lay awake and saw the sun rise over the mountains, gosh it is lovely here! It is also nice to be out of the valley and see the majestic peaks all around us.

Today we are heading up to Everest view to 3900m for an acclimatization hike and then sleep again at 3400m.

After breakfast we started our climb at 9am and went up, up, up, slowly, slowly, slowly. By 10:30am we reached the Panorama Hotel and were rewarded with an incredible view of Everest, Lhotse and Ama Dablam. We carried on further and made our way to the Japanese owned Everest View Hotel. Fero said the reason he could tell it was a Japanese hotel was because the door locks were much lower than usual. This got a big laugh out of Bikesh!

We had a drink and tomato soup on the hotel deck that overlooked Everest - it was a gorgeous day!

On our return journey we took a different route and went up to a viewpoint that overlooked Khumjung and a school that was built by Hillary. Also high in the mountain above Khumjung is the grave of Edmund Hillary.

Once back in Namche we had lunch and then went to the authorities to sign our climbing permits and then to Mountain Hardwear to buy me some new liner gloves.

The balance of the afternoon was spent resting in our room. Around 7:30pm we had dinner and had a discussion with Bikesh in regards to trekkers that don't hire guides.

In many places, especially Kilimanjaro, the National Park will not allow you in unless you have a guide and porters. This ensures the regulations are followed and also keeps many people employed. With so much unemployment in Nepal it only makes sense. Bikesh said that this has already been discussed in the past with the porter and guide association. We told him to make sure he brings it up again and we are more than willing to write letters to any government officials.

While we were eating and chatting, the Aussie folks we spoke to yesterday had out their guitar and flute and were singing. They seemed nice enough but there was just something a little different about them. They are our age and look from the hippy era. When they broke out into the song Hari Krishna, everything fell into place. From this point onwards we referred to them as the 'Hari Krishna's'.

Finally we went off to bed as the owner was trying to close up for the night.

Nepal 2010_04_26 Day 9 Tengboche

Well our waking time is getting later - we slept until 5:30am. The mornings are so beautiful, absolutely no clouds in the sky. We packed our bag and got ready for the day and made it down for breakfast an hour early and before Bikesh! The first thing he said to us was that he spoke to Tilak about our discussion last night and it is already in the works - hopefully it will be implemented next year.

After eating our Tibetan bread for breakfast we ready and on our way to Tengboche by 8:10am. The route started out very similar to yesterday and we climbed to 3600m again rewarded with that great view of Everest. For some time we carried on at the same level along the side of the mountain and then began descending. And you know what that means, the more we go down the more we will have to climb back up again. Sure enough we descend to less than 3300m and pass some cute little eating spots along the way until we came to the Dudh Koshi River raging over huge boulders. On the other side of the bridge was Phungi Thanga and our lunch stop which we enjoyed immensely. The highlight was the very friendly young waitress who kept collecting our plates and asking "are you fineeeesh?" in her cute Nepalese accent.

After almost an hour's rest we started the 2 to 2 1/2 hour arduous climb back up to 3880m and Tengboche. We felt right home as if we were on the BCMC Trail on Grouse. We went slow and steady and were pleasantly surprised when we reached our destination in an hour and 40 minutes!! Guess all the Grouse Mountain training all these years is paying off.

We are staying at the Tengboche Guest House in room #13 - my lucky number. The room is much smaller than the previous ones but still quite cute, and the outdoor toilet is very clean and just steps away.

First things first, we change into our running shoes and have some hot mango drink - very yummy. We then decided to walk around Tengboche and found a nice viewpoint, took tons of pictures. We found a nice stone wall that had been warmed by the sun all day and sat there basking in the sun until the clouds came over.

Jagat had arrived with our bag so we unpacked and had a wee rest before heading to the dining area for dinner. We had, again, veggie fried rice and veggie chowmein which were both delicious. We were the only North Americans in the room, there were French, Bulgarian, Russian, and a Japanese fellow - quite an international bunch, the Hari Krishnas and the German fellow from our hotel in Namche stayed elsewhere.

By 7pm we were back at the room and bundled up in our cozy sleeping bags. Fero fell asleep and I read a wee bit.

Nepal 2010_04_27 Day 10 Pangboche

We awake nice and early around 6am to the sound of the gong from the Gompa (Monastery). Gompa stands for 'good man' and therefore men go to the Gompa to become educated and to be good men.

We got dressed and Fero decided that we needed to go to the Monastery to get rid of any demons before we head up higher. We arrived a few minutes before the morning ceremony and were welcomed inside. We sat on carpets on the floor and watched as they prayed (it was a beautiful melodic sound that was very trance like) for several minutes and then sip their milk tea. After a half an hour or so, the young man filling up the tea cups offered each of us a cup. We were really thankful as we were freezing and this helped. We left before the ceremony was over and went back to pack and have breakfast.

This morning we had cinnamon and apple pancakes - yum. When there is very little to do, food becomes the major source of entertainment!

We departed Tengboche at 9am and after a short 1 1/2 hike we arrived in Pangboche at 3985m. The hotel Bikesh wanted to put us in was full so we went across the path and stayed at the Everest View Hotel. The room was small again but very clean and bright and cheerful. As a bonus the chimney from the wood stove downstairs was at the foot of my bed so the room was nice and warm. We found out though that the people are not allowed to burn wood this high up and therefore it is dried yak dung that is used for fuel - thankfully not for cooking though!

After resting for a bit we went downstairs for, you guessed it, lunch which was fabulous. We then had a bit of a lay down and at 2:30pm took a wee hike up to upper Pangboche to see the Gompa - it is the oldest in Nepal at 625 years old and really looked it. On the way back we decided to have a hot tea at Gompa Lodge and discovered Nampka Sherpa owned it. Both him and Ang Rita Sherpa are quite famous in the climbing world and he had posters everywhere signed by famous climbers. For a couple of years he was the Khumbu Ice Falls Sherpa which meant he fixed all the ladders over the crevasses - the most dangerous job! He was a real treat to speak with and we had our picture taken with him. These are the moments that make the trip so special.

We headed back to the hotel and rested again and then went downstairs around 5:30pm for dinner. We met 2 very nice fellows from France and then shared a table with an Australian couple, he was 67 and she 65 and they have been trekking for 2 months now! The dining room was another international site with trekkers from Spain, Canada, the US, Russia, Australia and France.

After eating our delicious dinner we were tucked in our sleeping bags and asleep by 8pm!

Nepal 2010_04_28 Day 11 Dingboche

Up with the sun again at 5:30am but we didn't budge out of our bags until 6:30am. Thor, my super sleeping bag is so warm and cozy, Fero almost has to drag me out of it.

We pack and head down for breaky at 7:30 and see the French fellows again and also have a wee chat with the Japanese fellow - we are all heading up to Dingboche today. The Australian couple are on their way down and then back up to do the Gokyo route.

We depart at 8am sharp and head on our way. It is a beautiful warm day and we have a great view of Lhotse and Nupste with Everest peeking out from behind. 45 min in to the trek we bump into the Hari Krishnas and say hello. We meet up with lots of folks heading down and arrive in Dingboche at 4410m at 11:15am. While walking through the town we get our first glimpse of Island Peak - looks a little challenging from here!

We finally make it all across town to the Valley View Lodge. Bikesh likes this place the best because of the view, it is also on the path to Lobuche one way and Chhukung the other way.

We had lunch and then went to warm up and have a nap. Before heading off, I asked if we could have some laundry done and Bikesh said he would ask the woman but she wasn't around at the moment - she was likely gathering yak 'sheet'. It took me a minute or two to catch on and amongst our laughter I told him it is better to refer to it as yak dung.

At 4pm we were going to take a walk except it started to hail and then snow. It was an absolute winter wonderland.

At 5pm we went into the dining area where the fire was going and it was warm and cozy. The only other guest today was a young Russian lady that was on her way to Chhukung tomorrow.

Once dinner was finished we headed back to our room and read until about 9pm.

Nepal 2010_04_29 Day 12 Dingboche

Day 2 in Dingboche was bright sunny and white with snow. By the time we went for breakfast it was about 20C and melting. It was so nice that we ate outside.

Today was our acclimatization day and we started off at 8:45am. We headed straight up the hill behind the hotel following many others either on their way to Lobuche or doing the same as us. We went nice and slow and within 2 hours we were at 4900m. We decided to make this the turn around point as the clouds were coming down upon us and we didn't fancy getting wet.

Bikesh brought us down a steeper shortcut and we were back at the lodge by 11:45am.

There was a huge amount of activity on the patio as a Russian team from 7SummitsClimb.ru had stopped for lunch. Fero recognized them from our stop in Monjo and again in Namche. They apparently have already been to Base Camp and were stopping here on their way to Chhukung and then Island Peak. 2 or 3 of the people looked deathly white and I suspect had some altitude sickness. They carried on regardless and when they left there was much conversation amongst the guides that they were going too quickly. I just hope they had acclimatized in Russia as they were from the Caucasus/Kazakhstan region where there are lots of high peaks.

We also had 4 new Czech neighbours which are on their way down so they were having a beer. A young medical student from San Diego was also at lunch.

After lunch, Thor and Ghost (our sleeping bags) were calling us, so we went for a nap. It is great remedy for those niggling headaches after reaching a new altitude. At 3pm we went into the dining room but the fire was not on yet. To warm up we ordered some tea.

Finally they came in with freshly dried yak dung and started a roaring fire. After about 15 min we were warmed up enough to go back to our seats.

The young Dr. was quietly reading and Fero made a comment to him and said, 'right Doc?'. One of the lady trekkers from Germany said 'is he a real doctor?' And I said he will be in a couple of weeks. Whoops, the poor guy then had to attempt to diagnose what her ailment was. He ended up giving her some medication and she seemed to be happy. Apparently she got sick in Gorak Shep from the water. She said many people were sick and she had this for 5 days. I didn't think to ask until later, why she hadn't gone to Pheriche where there is a great medical clinic instead of walking out of her way to Dingboche. Oh well, she is on her way down to Namche so she should be ok.

We had dinner and before we went to bed, I apologized to the new Doc for giving away his occupation. After all he is going to be an orthopedic surgeon and not a GP.

Again I read until about 9pm while Fero slept away. It is hard to stay awake as it is dark around 7pm and there isn't much else to do.

Nepal 2010_04_30 Day 13 Dughla

Up bright and early again at 5:30am. It was quite foggy but cleared by 7am. Beautiful views of Ama Dablam through the fog.

We had breaky on the deck and had a good laugh as the owner's horse walked right past us as if he owned the place. He walked up to the kitchen window and neighed several times for attention. When he didn't get any attention he proceeded to walk right into the kitchen. Thankfully the owner was on his way out with his breakfast. You should have heard the noises coming from the horse.

The German lady had already departed and as well the 4 Czech fellows. We saw the Hari Krishnas go by, although we didn't know where they were headed.

We left at 8:45am for Dughla (Thukla) and went slow and steady. We passed a large group a few at a time and some of them were really struggling and were dressed for -20C and it was more like +20C.

Later at the lodge we asked where they were from and turns out they are from Brunei (hence the heavy clothing) and were on their way to EBC for a chess tournament! Who would have thought it? Amazing that one of the least active sports tournaments would be held over 5350m and more than a 10 day trek from transportation.

We arrived at the Yak Lodge at 4610m before 11am and enjoyed the sun for a bit. It clouded over so we headed into the dining area - this is definitely the most basic of lodges as it is the only one in this part of the valley.

Lunch was quite an interesting affair. Dughla is half way between Dingboche and Lobuche and Pheriche and Lobuche so it is a natural (& only) selection for a lunch stop. We were staying here to optimize our acclimatization which is going very well.

Among the lunch guests were the previously mentioned Brunei group; a special American group with Berg Adventures who even got a table cloth and their own private chef; another special group with Peregrine who had apparently had 14 clients to begin with and were down to 3 clients as the balance of them got sick and turned back ; a rowdy group of English Infantry soldiers who had been let loose on the trails and were offended when the leader of the Berg group asked if they were the same group as last year from the Navy - that got a reaction!

After the hubbub settled down we had our lunch and then went for our ritual nap to warm up.

Around 5pm we went for a short walk as the clouds had disappeared and there wasn't a breath of wind. We got some great shots of the mountains and met up with the cutest little puppy - a black lab.

We went into the dining room and thankfully had finished our dinner before the 'yak dung lighting' show. One of the owners brought in a huge plastic bag with dried dung and proceeded to dump it into the small opening of the stove in the middle of the room - dust flying everywhere. After this was done, he took a large piece and soaked it in kerosene and then lit it and threw it in the stove, and then added more kerosene to the fire. It was rip roaring in no time and was quite a show.

Shortly after we hit the beds as that was more than enough excitement for one day.

Nepal 2010_05_01 Day 14 Lobuche

Happy May Day and happy birthday to China Tse!

Up and away by 7:45am, we were happy to leave this place. We headed straight up the hill towards the memorials of those who have passed away on Everest - among them Scott Fischer and Rob Hall from the 1996 Everest disaster. The balance of the walk to Lobuche was uneventful and quite short. We arrived here at the Alpine Inn 4928m at 10:15am. The rooms and lodge are really nice - it is the nicest one so far. We had a super lunch of spaghetti and pasta and then a quick rest.

At 1pm we head up for an acclimatization hike behind the hotel to 5150m. We sat up there for at least 40min which is good for acclimatization. We had nice views of Kala Patthar and we could just make out the tents of Everest Base Camp.

They are building a new lodge next to the Alpine Inn and it will take over 2 years to complete. The stonework is all done by hand and you can hear the workers chipping away at the rock to flatten the surface and fit it into the foundation. Absolutely everything is done by hand. Bikesh told us that they are only paid \$15US a day for 10 hours.

The young doc from San Diego is staying at this lodge as well as the Hari Krishnas. There was a group of Russians, 3 young Germans and a Swedish couple all staying here as well. There also had been a Spanish couple but they were being taken down lower as she was suffering from altitude sickness. Too many people come up too fast and don't follow the extra rest day rules and end up suffering for it. It is such a shame that they spend all this time and money and for the sake of 2 or 3 days more, miss making it all the way up.

We saw that you could buy bowls of warm water to wash up in and so we ordered two. We were like kids with candy as we washed with nice warm water - Fero even decided to shave off his 16 day beard. We were in heaven.

We had a little time for rest and then went to the dining area for dinner. It was nice and warm as the fire had already been stoked and this lodge seemed to be better put together than the others - the windows were even double paned.

After dinner and a chat with Bikesh we head off to bed. I finished my book and we were fast asleep by 9pm.

Nepal 2010_05_02 Day 15 Gorakshep

Happy 30th Birthday Kim!

I woke up minutes before our 5am alarm and while enroute to the washroom saw that it had snowed at least 6 inches and was still lightly snowing. It was another beautiful winter wonderland and surprisingly warm.

Our original plan was to leave at 6:30am to Gorak Shep and then up to Kala Patthar for the view of Everest. Looks like Kala Patthar may not happen today. Bikesh knocked on our door at 5:30am and told us not to rush.

We doddled and had breaky at 7am (toast with peanut butter & honey - yum) and were on the trail at 8am. We had both dressed too warmly and shortly after stopped to take layers off. It was almost 20C! We were much slower as the rocks on the trail were slippery from the snow and even the trail was a bit slick. There was a fair bit of up climbs so we took it easy.

Along the route we saw the 4 Russian fellows that had stopped at the Summit Inn for lunch yesterday - it doesn't look like they made it to EBC. We also came across the English Infantry group. They were going at a good pace but looked worse for wear. Fero said to them, here comes the Navy and they didn't make a peep. I said, looks like altitude has whipped their bottoms as they didn't have the cockiness they did in Dughla.

We finally arrived in Gorak Shep at 10:45am - not bad considering the trail and the fact that Bikesh said we were only half way at the 2 hour mark!

We got a nice room in the Buddha Lodge 5180m (Bikesh knows the owner here too) and sat down for some great garlic soup and tomato soup. We head up to our room and have our traditional rest.

I went to the Internet Cafe - yes way up here at almost 5200m there were 5 laptops available! I bumped into one of the Hari Krishnas and they had planned to see EBC today but turned around as it was snowing again.

Sid, the young Doc from San Diego is staying here as well. He went up to Base Camp today and chatted to a couple of climbers.

After dinner we went out for short walk as it was nice out even though it had snowed again. Our room is above the kitchen so it is super warm and smells like food all the time - thankfully is it good food.

Nepal 2010_05_03 Day 16 Gorak Shep - Everest Base Camp

Yeah! Today is the day we head for Everest Base Camp 5364m. We were awoken very early at 4am by some very rude trekkers - the walls are paper thin and they were speaking very loudly and woke everyone up.

We tried to get some more sleep but got up and went down for breakfast. We left for EBC at 7am and it was a beautiful morning with the sun shining and snow still on the ground.

The route to EBC was fairly easy along the side of the Khumbu Glacier and the mountain. There were a lot of rock overhangs and at one point Bikesh had to yell 'stop' as rocks were tumbling down in front of us. We met a lot of porters and yaks along the way. We also met two of the Brunei chess team returning from Base Camp. They said that they were surviving and the tournament went well.

Enroute we had some awesome views of Everest and Nuptse, the Khumbu Glacier and Base Camp itself.

At 10:30 am we arrived at "the entrance" of Base Camp. Here we took several photos and then walked on towards camp. This is definitely the highlight for me, to be among those that are climbing up Everest, as well as the famous climbers.

Base Camp is a sea of ice and tents of yellow, red & blue all pitched in chaotic order depending on where flatter pieces can be found amongst the rocks and glacier. Many large rocks and boulders are perched on top of huge pieces of melting ice.

And the Khumbu Ice Fall is bigger than life and looks like a jumbled mass of refrozen ice cubes. We could see climbers coming through the ice fall and they looked like ants!

The first tents we saw were huge and were part of Himalayan Expeditions. The sign out front says 'No entrance - Invitation Only'. We found out later that Himalayan Expeditions is owned by Russell Brice and his tents come complete with Huge LCD TVs.

We also saw tents for IMG - International Mountain Guides and RMI - Rainier Mountaineering Inc, from Seattle and Jagged Globe from England. As we get closer to the center of camp we see a small hand written sign on a piece of cardboard that says 'Simone Moro's Camp'. Simone is a very famous Italian Climber and one of Fero's favourite. We carried on a bit further and then sat on a couple of boulders to just watch. We saw several climbers go by in full gear who were returning from higher up.

Although we wanted to stay longer and explore the rest of the camp we needed to head back. As we were leaving Simone comes up in front of us and I felt like we were in 'climbers Hollywood' and wanted to get an autograph - ha ha. It was pretty exciting.

Bikesh and Fero had to tear me away and finally we started back. We stopped to have a snack and the clouds came up and it started to snow again. We gulped down the Chapatti and tea and headed back.

We arrived back about 1:30pm and had a proper lunch. Our lodge was full and we started chatting with a group of 9 from Ireland. The leader climbed Everest in 2008 and takes groups all over and is planning to start a formal business in Oregon. The group is on a similar schedule to us and will be climbing Island Peak the same day as we are. They all seem to be very nice people.

We were both pooped and attempted an afternoon nap but just rested and went downstairs for dinner and then back up to bed. I had a headache from the altitude gained today or possibly it was from the sunburn I got today.

We were both out by 7:30pm.

Nepal 2010_05_04 Day 17 Dingboche

We both woke up around 5am and started to pack for our trek down to Dingboche.

But first we need to have breakfast and climb up to Kala Patthar at 5643m. This is one of the best vantage points to see Everest but the weather is very foggy so we may not see much. No matter, we need the elevation for acclimatization and head up the hill at 6:50am.

We both feel pretty good but the last 100m in elevation was very steep and the altitude was really slowing us down. We made it to the tippy top within 2 hours and most of the fog and clouds had disappeared and we had a fantastic view with lots of sunshine. We took our photos and just before we started to head down a large group made it to the top. They were with Berg Adventures and Wally Berg himself was guiding. The group was Hanes Brands and is sponsoring a group of climbers heading for the summit of Everest. They were heading to EBC and staying there - some of them for a week and some for a month, how exciting!

We had a super quick descent down and were in the lodge within the hour. We had a yummy lunch and then headed out for our trek to Dingboche. It felt very good to be hiking at lower altitudes instead of up. We made it down to Lobuche in less than 2 hours and stopped at the Alpine Inn for a tea break. We carried on and made it to Dughla in an hour and pushed on for the last leg. It had clouded over again and was cold and very windy (3C was the lowest) and finally we made it in another 2 hours.

We came in to the same lodge, the Valley View and it was great to warm up with tea and friendly faces. We ordered our dinner right away. The father & son, Don and Jordan from Calgary (we met in Namche) are staying here as well so we had a nice conversation with them. At 8pm we headed off to our room and although it is very nice, it is much colder than the room in Gorak Shep that was over the kitchen!

Nepal 2010_05_06 Day 19 Chhukhung

We again awoke to fog and rain but it was quite warm - 6C in the room.

When we arrived at the dining room, the sweet owner could hardly wait to tell us, "Dendi has arrived!" We were thrilled to see Dendi and our 4 additional porters as well as our climbing equipment. All is well.

During breakfast we had more conversations with John and Darrell - what a great couple of guys they are. We find out the John is from Nfld and when he reached the summit of Everest in 2008, he was declared the first Newfie to climb Everest and has been put in the Nfld Hall of Fame!

After saying goodbye to the owners of the Valley View and to John and Darrell, we headed out on the trail to Chhukhung.

Bill and his group went up part way to Chhukhung and we met them on their return to Dingboche. He is quite a character and will always remember Fero for helping him locating his hat. After the third time, this became quite a game. We will definitely keep in touch with him.

We arrived at the Ama Dablam View Lodge within 2.5 hours just in time for lunch. Just as we were waiting for our food to arrive, guess who appears, Darrell. We asked him to join us for lunch and after 4 hours, 3 cups of tea and many stories later we again said good luck and see you soon.

Dendi and Bikesh have been busily preparing our tents and equipment for the trek to Island Peak Base Camp tomorrow and we are in our normal position of the day - in the sleeping bags keeping warm.

Tonight is our last night in a teahouse and we will be looking forward to 14-16 days in a tent before we reach Lukla.

We had a good dinner and sat around the fire until around 8pm before heading to bed.

Nepal 2010_05_05 Day 18 Dingboche - Rest/Snow Day

It was a lovely sleep at this lower level of 4410m. We awoke refreshed at 6:30am. It is very foggy and drizzling outside.

We went in for breakfast and it started to snow - looks like we won't be moving today. Bikesh says that Dendi is on his way and we will stay here for the day. Fero is suspicious that something is awry but we will just have to wait and see.

Rested and then took a glorious shower, the last chance until we get to Lukla. Lunch was good and with nothing else to do due to the rain we read and slept until dinner.

We ordered popcorn as we had seen a group of 3 Americans have this at lunch - it was fantastic. While waiting for our dinner we were listening in on conversations and turns out the people were Darrell, the Postman from North Vancouver and John, a climbing guide from Canada West. They have just come down from Camp 3 of Everest and will rest for a week until the push for the summit after the weather clears on the 12th. We offered our support and listened to great climbing adventures from both of them. The American guide was Bill Liske from Colorado and has been climbing and guiding for 27 years - he had some awesome stories as well! All in all it was a great night and we were very pleased that chance had put us in the same room with these people.

Finally I had my dream to offer our support and good luck to Darrell for a successful summit. This will be Darrell's 7th summit of the 7 summits and we wish him the best. Fero is relieved that karma brought them down to Dingboche so that we could finally meet these fellows as we were disappointed that we didn't find them at EBC.

Nepal 2010_05_07 Day 20 Island Base Camp

We both awoke at 6am and it looked fairly sunny out. It had snowed again last night and the hills were covered in white - it was beautiful.

We had breakfast and set off for Island Base Camp at 8:30am. We both felt good and did a slow steady pace. We passed the Irish group as it looked like one of the ladies wasn't feeling too well.

We plodded along and at times it was sunny and almost too warm and other times it was cloudy and cool. We arrived at Island Base Camp at 11:45am - in good time. We helped the guides and porters set up the tents as it was starting to blizzard and shortly after Bikesh brought us some biscuits and hot water with lemon and sugar - it sure hit the spot!

We rested and shortly following, lunch was brought to our tent - I like this service.

As soon as we finished lunch we had to put on our gore-tex and harnesses to practice using a jumar and descender on the rope. It was quite exhilarating and we both went up and down the hill twice to practice. Bikesh sent us hot milk coffee when we finished which was very much appreciated as it was still snowing and blowing.

We then put away our gear and crawled into our sleeping bags to warm up as it was only 8C in the tent.

At about 5pm, the wind died down and the sun came out and it was gorgeous. Bikesh and Dendi told us to come up to the ridge to see the lake. The lake was a glacial lake and we saw several icebergs break off. The Irish team was practicing their ascending and belaying as well. Finally introduced ourselves to Claire and Leona and chatted a wee bit - they are heading to high camp as well tomorrow.

In an instant the cool fog and low clouds covered the sun and we all scrambled for our tents. We had a lovely dinner and fell asleep around 8pm.

Nepal 2010_05_08 Day 21 Island High Camp

We awoke as the sun came up, around 6am. It was a nice sunny day as we had our breakfast and hot water, yes hot, to wash up with!

Around 8:30am we headed for high camp of 5565m and walked ever so slowly and methodically. As we got closer to the camp, Bikesh started to laugh as the porters put us about 1/2 hour higher than high camp. The view was superb and it just meant 1/2 hour less tomorrow morning on our way to the Summit.

We settled in, chatted. had lunch and then had a 2 hour nap - we need all the sleep we can get to prepare for the 10 to 12 hour summit climb.

When we woke they have us tea and popcorn as we were organizing our bags for the morning. Shortly after we had a fabulous dinner of pasta and then attempted to fall asleep again.

Wake up call for tomorrow is 1:30am and I don't think either one of us slept very well wondering if the weather would be on our side.

Nepal 2010_05_09 Day 22 Island Peak Summit 6160m

Well the day has come. The cook, Puri, woke us up with milk coffee and shortly after a bowl of rara noodle soup to give us some sustenance.

The night was absolutely beautiful, there was no wind, the stars and 1/4 moon were shining brilliantly, and it was 1C. We could see the headlamps of the Irish team below also preparing to leave.

Bikesh, Dendi, Fero and I started our ascent at 2:15am and did our slow and steady up, up, up. Dendi would frequently sing and hum the Buddhist prayer 'Om Mani Padme Hom' which fit in with the rhythm of our footsteps.

We stopped a couple of times to rest and drink water and reached the upper glacier just as the sky was starting to lighten. At 5:30am the sun was dawning over the horizon and we could see Mount Mera in the distance and our campground so very far below. Here is where we changed our hiking boots for our plastic mountaineering boots, donned our crampons and harnesses with our safety lines and ascenders and belay devices - all of which we need to reach the summit of Island Peak!

Just as we were ready to leave, the Irish team arrived, we wished them luck and off we went on to the glacier, all four of us roped together to prevent any crevasse mishaps.

The trail was fairly straight forward until we came across a small crevasse (about 10 ft deep and not very wide at our end but much larger further on). There were two 5 rung ladders side by side across and although a titch unnerving we all crossed very quickly. As we carried on we had a good look of where we were going. OMG, the trail wound around and then there was an 80 degree wall of snow and ice that was about 300m high that we were to scale. This was not how it was described in the trekking books or on the internet - it is supposed to be a "trekking" peak and only the last 30m or so was at a 40 degree angle. Apparently this was the case in 2008; however the glacier has melted so rapidly off Island Peak that soon it will be a rock climbing mountain. Within the last 2 years unsuspecting trekkers are faced with an ice climbing wall instead of a trekking peak!

Bikesh and Dendi were busy fixing ropes for us to ascend as we were the first ones at the base. We needed to wait and as we were the Irish team arrived and a whole bunch of other people as well - some unguided, which created a huge bottleneck.

Bikesh and Dendi were working as fast as they could but it looked like only one other guide (from the Irish team) was helping and the unguided folks were pushing their way ahead of the rest of us. Not a fun, or safe, situation when climbing straight up a wall!

Finally we arrived at the top of the wall at 9:30am and took a rest as again Bikesh and Dendi fixed the ropes to the final summit. I was totally exhausted as I was trying to push myself up faster than I normally would at altitude.

Finally about noon we made it up the final bit to the summit along with about 20 other climbers. Bikesh was upset as he wanted us to get up first but we made up for it by being last down. We took photos and video and stayed up there for about 1/2 hour.

We walked down to the top of the wall and there was a huge traffic jam to get down. Most of the people didn't know how to belay down and this was mixed with the pushy ones who did and it wasn't until after 2:30pm that we got down. Bikesh was worried as generally Island Peak is very windy but today it stayed sunny and calm, thank heavens.

We were all exhausted when we got down, Bikesh and Dendi as they did all the ropes and got everyone up and down safely; Fero and me because we were at altitude and the noodle soup this morning had well worn off.

We got off the glacier, changed into our hiking boots and started coming down. We were discussing the time we needed to get to camp and found out that we were staying an 1 1/2 hour walk further than we expected. We were not very happy campers, to say the least. Apparently Bikesh had told this to me but I have no recollection. It was a very long and grumpy descent but we finally arrived at camp by 6:30pm. We had now been up for 14 1/2 hours with only noodle soup and a couple of protein bars and with very little sleep the night before.

When we arrived at camp we all went to our respective tents, the porters brought our dinner and we were all sleeping by 8pm.

Nepal 2010_05_10 Day 23 Amphu Lapcha Base Camp

We awoke as the sun hit our tent at 6am and shortly thereafter had a milk coffee in hand.

Hot water to wash and breakfast came to our tent and then we started packing up. We spoke to Dendi and today we are heading to Amphu Lapcha Base Camp 5435m and it will be about 5 hours.

Shortly after Bikesh returned Fero's hiking pole that he was using. This seemed very odd and I thought something was up. Fero went over to talk to Bikesh, and sure enough he was planning to return to Lukla. He was upset about yesterday and thought if he removed himself from the situation it would be better. We certainly did not want him to leave as he is fantastic guide and we apologized for letting 'altitude brain' get the best of us. After a long discussion, Bikesh agreed to stay. The whole camp was very happy!

We waited in the nice warm sun for a friend of Dendi's to return some ice screws and carabiners. While waiting we had another meal as we wouldn't arrive to camp until at least 3pm.

Around 10:30am we left and headed along the river and towards Amphu Lapcha Base Camp. The trail was fairly easy but a continuous uphill climb. We arrived at around 2pm and rested in our tents. We were the only people here and it was very quiet but pleasant.

Bikesh & Dendi climbed up to the top of the pass and fixed the ropes for tomorrow - now the show begins. It took them at least 4 hours to do this and we were still not 100% sure where this pass really was. All routes looked very steep and rocky - I guess we will find out in the morning!

We had an early dinner and tried to fall asleep early.

Nepal 2010_05_11 Day 24 Cross Ama Lapcha to Seto Pohkari Base Camp

We were awoken at 4:30am with milk coffee and neither of us had slept very well. Today is the cross over the mysterious Amphu Lapcha pass.

Our hike started at 6am just behind our camp. The porters were way ahead of us as they not only had to get themselves over the pass, but all the tents, food and luggage had to be hauled over.

We took it slowly and arrived at the 'wall' at 8:30am. Bikesh and 4 of the porters were already at the top and Dendi was sending equipment up to them. It was quite an amazing thing to watch. Dendi would securely tie up one of the bags and then the fellows 40m above would pull the rope and it would be bouncing and banging over the rocks. It looked like a construction site instead of a climbing expedition!

Fero and I prepared ourselves by putting on our mountaineering boots and crampons (meanwhile the porters did this in running shoes) and realized half way up they were unnecessary. We clipped on to the passenger rope (a different line from the luggage rope) and started climbing up. Thankfully we had practice on Island Peak as this was also an 80 degree wall. About half way up there was no snow on the rocks and the crampons were not helpful. After some juggling and getting over to the snow I eventually removed my crampons and scrambled up the rocks, thanks to help from Bikesh and the porters.

Once all of us and the luggage were at the top, it was now time to come down the other side. I, naively, thought that it would be a nice trek down - NOT! On the other side was just as steep and was full of 10 story glaciers. Lord what did I get us into?

Dendi steered us down 3 or 4 of the glaciers as they were gently sloped and walkable. Further down he had to set up ropes and a belay system to get everything down. It went fairly smooth but took a long time as sometimes the bags would get stuck between ice columns. The Nepal carrying baskets (made out of bamboo) didn't fair so well and one was smashed to smithereens coming down.

Finally at 2:30pm we were down far enough that we could continue trekking. Apparently the stove was damaged in the process and we would need to walk further to arrive at a teahouse enroute. I didn't think there were any teahouses on this side. The extra walk was going to be 5 hours - another very long and grueling day. We had some crackers and a Twix bar for lunch and off we went.

I was happy to be heading down on foot rather than hanging from a rope and to be in my hiking boots again. We were pooped and walking slowly and the trail seemed endless. The promise that it wasn't too far made us hopeful around each corner.

At 6:30pm Dendi retrieved our headlamps from Jagat and we proceeded to walk in the dark. The extra distance was necessary so that we could cook food for dinner. Now I asked myself, if the stove was such a precious commodity why wasn't it carried up and down the rocks and glacier? Good question heh!

Finally we reached camp at 8:15pm and went right to our tent. The cook and porters had gathered sticks from bushes to light a fire and were able to manage cooking us some soup and noodles. Everything was delicious at this point even though it had that wood smoke flavour.

After eating we were out like lights!

Nepal 2010_05_12 Day 25 Rato Odar

Fero woke up at 6:30am, the sun was up and he couldn't hear a sound from anyone - he thought the porters had left is there!

Finally at 7:30am, the camp came alive and we managed to leave by 9am. The day was bright and sunny although fairly windy and we caught glimpses of Everest behind us. The trail for the most part followed the river so it was nice and gentle. Waterfalls cascaded from the glaciers above, and little mountain flowers were popping up everywhere - spring is here in the Himalayas.

At 11:30am we took a quick snack break and asked Dendi "How much further?" he said around 1 hour to go. Our nice and gentle trail suddenly went up again. Instead of going around and following the river we took the 'shortcut' over the 300m hill. We finally arrived in camp at 1:30pm and then realized that Dendi's one hour is equal to our two hours.

The camp has other expeditions here, either heading to Mera Peak or Baruntse which is in the direction that we came from (hopefully they will be able to follow the river route and not take the 'shortcut'). There are also 2 'teahouses'. They are more makeshift stone lodges with tarpaulin roofs and provide a place (and stove) for our cook and a place for the porters to sleep. They also sell Coke, Fanta, cookies etc. so in that respect they are like a proper teahouse.

We were greeted with hot orange drink and cookies. We then headed to our tent to settle in when lunch arrived. Yum, it is great to have a proper meal again. The afternoon was spent relaxing and snoozing in our tent.

We were invited in to the stone 'lodge' for dinner and chatted with Dendi and the porters while we ate.

Tomorrow has been declared a rest day - glory hallelujah! We are all exhausted after Island Peak, Amphu Lapcha pass and the 2 for 1 day that we did yesterday.

We went to sleep around 9pm to the sounds of laughter from the guides and porters. They were having a blast playing cards well into the wee hours.

Nepal 2010_05_13 Day 26 Rato Odar Rest Day

Well not much to say about today. We woke up frightfully early at 6:30 am considering it is a rest day.

Bikesh tells us we are heading direct to high camp from here, an elevation gain of 900m and 8 hours. And then wake up at 1am or so to head to the summit. Whoa just a minute, that is not our idea of a good time and would totally exhaust us again not to mention it may cost us the summit.

Before lunch we spoke to Dendi and clarified the route and itinerary and it has been settled to go to base camp tomorrow and then high camp the following day. That is much better as it sets us up to win and hopefully reach the summit. The winds can reach up to 200km/hr at the top so let's hope we have the same luck as we did on Island Peak.

Most of the day was spent relaxing and eating as it was snowing and cold outside. It is amazing how easy it is to just laze away the day when your body is spent.

A Dutch group came into camp during the afternoon. They had come Makalu Base Camp and had crossed some difficult passes as well. To reward their porters and guides for the tough crossing, they bought them some local made brew called 'chang'. The Dutch had a small laptop that must have had Karaoke songs on it as first we could hear the Dutch singing a song and then the Nepalese would sing one of their local songs. As the afternoon progressed the singing got louder and louder and more animated. Near dinner time, they went back to their camp and one of the Nepalese was not very happy about this. There was a lot of very loud discussions going on and it was about an hour or so before he settled down. Rule #1 - reward the porters at the end of the trek in Lukla!

Fero fell asleep early as he didn't sleep well the night before and I finally dozed off about 10pm. I couldn't shut my brain off as I was planning a ladies 'Canada to Everest Base Camp' tour for next Apr/May. I thought a leisurely trek so that no one suffers from the altitude and on the return home there could be an option for a spa/shopping or even a beach stopover as a reward! Amazing the ideas that can be borne when you are supposed to be sleeping!

Nepal 2010_05_14 Day 27 Mera La Base Camp

We were awoken at 6:30am by Puri the cook offering us milk coffee. Around 7 or 7:30 we received our breakfast. We packed up and under beautiful sunny skies we departed camp at 8:30am.

Today we are heading for Mera La Base camp at 5350m. We head up the 300m hill behind camp - at least it wasn't a rock wall!!!

The going was good and we both felt strong from our rest day. Dendi said it would take 3 hours to get to the next camp and we made it in 3 1/2 so not bad considering it was uphill all the way.

The porters greeted us with hot orange drink and our tent already set up. After a few sips of the orange and all the exertion disappears from our body.

They have decided to change tents with us and we are now in the North Face knock off and it is much warmer than the previous tent.

Shortly after we organize our tent and lunch appears. Puri is a fantastic cook and we eat up every bite. It is very windy here so we choose to relax in our tent watching the camp going on from here.

We found out that one of the porters is Dendi's nephew and his name is Tenzing Sherpa - a very cheerful young fellow. One of the other porters is named Chiri and we just have one more name to get.

The camp is quite full tonight with tents perched everywhere all over the rock ledges. There is a group of 10 from Jagged Globe, us, 2 fellows from France and the fellows from Holland that were with us last night.

Around 4pm tea and popcorn arrive and about an hour later we have a super spaghetti dinner with a garlic, onion white sauce.

As soon as we were done we both fell asleep to the chattering and laughter of the porters and guides.

Both of us awaken at 1am to visit Mother Nature and I was blown away at the very calm still evening and the billions of stars that were in the sky. It was 1C so very pleasant indeed.

Nepal 2010_05_15 Day 28 Mera High Camp

Because we had so much sleep last night we both woke up at 5:30am. It was not too long before Puri was bringing us our milk coffee.

The day was bright, sunny and warm so we had no trouble getting ready early. We had breakfast and packed up and were on our way to High Camp 5780m at 7:40am.

Within 5 minutes of camp we had to don our crampons as the full length to High Camp is a glacier. The going was fairly gentle, only about 35 or 40 degree grade but it seemed to go on forever. It took us just over 3 hours to get here.

Finally here we needed to find our tents. If I thought the last camp was a bit precarious, it was nothing compared to this camp that is literally perched amongst the rocks. One thing is for sure, the view is spectacular.

We settled into our tent and Chiri brought us our hot juice. We took some photos and then did what we do best- relaxed, ate lunch and slept a wee bit. Today we also considered what we should do with our extra week once we return to KTM. It looks like we will arrive 4 days earlier than my original plan so we are hoping to find a nice resort place to relax - I think we have had our fill of trekking for now.

We have heard Pokhara is a nice town with a lake for boating and the Annapurnas nearby. We will spend a day or two in KTM to organize ourselves and see where our adventures take us.

This afternoon we also prepared for our summit of Mera Peak tomorrow. We need to depart around 3am as it takes about 5 hours and we want to be back at High Camp before noon when the winds and clouds come in. It is about 4pm right now and it is snowing and cold so we hope we are lucky as we have been so far and we have a clear night and morning.

We rested and I was falling asleep but kept one eye open for dinner. Logic would be that dinner would be early so that we could get as much sleep as possible. Finally at 8pm, I asked Bikesh if dinner was coming - apparently it took so long as they made us Dahl Baht, which neither of us is crazy about. I was annoyed that we waited so long and both of us fell asleep rather grumpy.

Nepal 2010_05_16 Day 29 Mera Peak & Khare

Puri woke us up at 2:30am and neither one of us had much humour at all. By the time we had breakfast and got ready for our climb, we set off at 4am.

It was about -10C, cold and clear. Thankfully there was very little wind. Because we are walking up the Mera glacier the whole way to the top we had to be roped together to avoid any crevasse mishaps.

Our progress was slow and steady, almost painfully slow, every step at this altitude takes an incredible amount of effort. The sun finally started above the horizon around 5:30am and it was great to feel its warmth as my toes were freezing. I think my mind had already checked out back to Lukla and I just wasn't a happy camper today.

Finally by 9am we reached the base of the final summit. The Jagged Globe British group had just come off the peak and it was now our turn. Although the trail looked level, it was more uphill and we were exhausted, but we were almost there.

Dendi fixed the rope for us to jumar up and in no time we were both at the top of Mera Peak at 6647m - hooray!!!! We took several photos and then belayed down, just in time too as the clouds were coming in. We have been so lucky with the weather.

It took us about an hour and a half to get back to high camp and it had taken us about 6 hours to go up. We arrived back at camp at 12noon and Puri gave us lunch and we rested for a wee bit. The plan was to leave right after lunch and then head down to Khare, our next stop.

We wanted to hurry but our bodies just wouldn't cooperate. Finally at 2pm we were ready to go and the porters and Dendi took off and left Bikesh, Fero and I to fend for ourselves. The clouds were now around us everywhere and fog was right to the ground. It was a virtual whiteout as we still had a long way to go on the glacier. Thankfully the trail was very well trod and we followed it closely.

After some time I think the 3 of us were wondering if we were still heading the right direction, Bikesh has never done this route so it was really unfair that Dendi left us alone. The glacier went on forever and then finally it looked as if we were coming off of it but the trail wasn't as obvious. We managed to get down to rock and Bikesh found a trail that looked like it may be the one. For a couple of seconds the fog lifted and he saw Khare in the distance. What a relief. We carried on down the trail and I started calling Bikesh 'Mantracker' as he would say to me "this is the tourist trail (as opposed to a yak trail) as here are hiking pole marks" or "here is a snickers bar wrapper, Nepalese people never eat snickers, only tourists".

Finally we got down low enough and the fog lifted so that we could all see Khare. About a half an hour out, Jagat appears with hot lemon tea - what a lifesaver. We arrive into camp about 5pm and crash to our tent.

We crawled into our sleeping bags and I must have been very chilled as I just couldn't warm up. The next thing I knew, Puri was waking us up for dinner. We had a yummy dinner and then he brought us a 'Success' cake for making both Island Peak and Mera Peak. It was a nice touch.

As soon as the last crumb of cake was eaten, we were off to dreamland once again.

Nepal 2010_05_17 Day 30 Kothe 3700m

Well today proved to be quite the interesting day!

It started out to what we thought was normal, Fero woke me at 6:30am and Jagat brought our coffee shortly after. Following breakfast we packed up and were ready to go by 8am. Last night Bikesh had made a comment that he hadn't seen Dendi but we would carry on and hoped he was ok with the schedule.

This morning Bikesh still hadn't seen Dendi and we joked that he must have a girlfriend in town. Just at 8am, we saw Dendi come up to camp and he looked pretty rough. Shortly after Bikesh, Fero and I left. Not long after two of the porters joined us and there was a flurry of conversation between them and Bikesh.

Fero commented that there were some internal problems happening. Bikesh then confessed that Dendi had too much chang and beer last night and that him and his brother Puri had fought and Puri had left for Lukla.

Speculation was on all day as to what exactly happened, but the main theme seemed to be that there was no money left to buy food for the balance of the trip and there was barely any food left. Bikesh was up in arms as he was on this portion of the trip for training and not getting paid and it was Dendi's show.

By the time Dendi and Puri caught up to us you could tell they were still drunk and it was really an uncomfortable situation. Bikesh said that we would stay in teahouses for the last couple of nights and Dendi, Puri and the 3 porters could head to Lukla.

We carried on to Kothe and arrived at 4:30pm only to discover that the whole gang was here.

We ate a simple dinner in the kitchen of the lodge owner and hit the bed at 8pm or so. Quite a day!

Nepal 2010_05_18 Day 31 Chetrawa - 4300m

Up and awake at our usual time and had breakfast outside in the sun which was a nice change.

Fero spoke to Bikesh and Tenzing will travel with us with our black bag. The other porters and Dendi will head all the way back to Lukla today.

Shortly after breakfast the fog rolled in and blanketed the valley. A large group of 17 Australians decided to fly back to Lukla by helicopter but doesn't look like their chances are very good.

We left camp at 8am and started our trek to Chetrawa at 4300m. The trail was in the forest and the rhododendrons were in bloom and covered in moss. It was very similar to trekking at home in Vancouver.

The trail headed up for quite some time until we reached a small lodge perched at the top of the hill. It was only 10:30am but this was the lunch stop.

We filled up on pasta and soup and at 12:30pm we were on our way again for a steady 4 hour climb up.

The climb was long but for the most part it was in the forest which was nice. It started to rain so year really felt like Vancouver.

We arrived at the Chetrawa camp at around 4pm and had a hot tea and some popcorn.

The British group with Jagged Globe, which we saw on Mera, is using this lodge as well. We started chatting with the tour guide, Lee Farmer, who has been everywhere and knows John Furneaux & Brian Jones from Canada West Mountain School.

Much to our surprise Dendi and the boys are here??? Later we found out that Dendi had left but Puri was there.

We also chatted with the owner of the lodge, Dawa Gyang - his uncle has company 'Friends in High Places'. It seems like everyone has a company on the side.

Finally we made our way to bed at about 8:30pm

Lee Farmer - leefarmer.co.uk with Jagged Globe

Nepal summit Treks - Dawa - local company for Jagged Globe

Dawa Sherpa (with IAN and the Irish group) - adventures with altitude.

Nepal 2010_05_19 Day 32 Lukla - 2840m

Yeah, the last trekking day for us. We were awake at 5:30am and after breakfast we set out at 6:30am. It was a 400m climb to get over Chetrawa pass and then down to 3250m to Chutanga where we had a bit of lunch.

We kept crossing paths with Dendi and Puri which was getting a little disconcerting, but they would say hello and then carry on.

After lunch the trail was less rocky so we were able to walk faster and made it back to Lukla around 2:30pm just as it started to rain. Rain is welcome as it will hopefully clear the fog away so that flights can make it out to KTM - there have been no flights in or out in the last two days. We did hear a couple of helicopters come in and leave, so lucky for the Australians they got out of Kothe.

We checked into the Khumbu Resort Lodge and hoped to have a hot shower. For some reason there was no water at all, let alone hot water! So we put our dirty clothes back on and went to meet Bikesh. We are booked for a flight at 10:30am tomorrow as long as the weather clears.

We decided to see if we could find a pub to have a quick drink and found a Scottish and an Irish pub but both were empty. Fero had seen an Altitude pub with happy hour so we went there - it seemed to be the place to be.

Fero had the happy hour beer and I had some nice red wine and we started chatting to people. We met Paul from Indiana who was waiting to fly out since yesterday. His wife is meeting him in Shanghai on the 23rd so he was anxious that the weather cleared. I had a great conversation with him while Fero chatted with an Australian fellow about football (soccer).

Paul has lived in Asia all his adult life and started coming to Nepal 12 years ago when his daughter was teaching English to Tibetan refugees. She has since married a Tibetan monk and they are living in San Francisco. Also back all those years ago he met a woman, Nanda, who started an orphanage with one child and she now has 64 children. This would be a great organization to help with on the next trip.

We had to quickly say our goodbyes as Bikesh was waiting for us at the Lodge. We distributed the tips to everyone and made sure that Dendi and Puri understood that they didn't get a bonus because of their behaviour. We had our dinner and Jagat, Danuti, and Tenzing joined us for coke and sprite - they really were cute kids. We met a fellow from England, Ray, and had a good conversation with him as well. Five years ago he sold his business and house when his wife left and has been travelling ever since. He has been many places and done so many things. Next he is on his way to Pokhara (may see him there) to donate \$5000 to an orphanage. Instead of giving them cash and having the possibility of the children not receiving the benefits, he is going to find out what they need and purchase the items.

After dinner we headed to the Irish pub for a nightcap and then back to our room. Although it was only 9pm, the streets were quiet and dark.

Nepal 2010_05_20 Day 33 Kathmandu

It was light at 5am so both of us were awake, not to mention we had already had 8 hours of sleep.

It was clear so looks like the weather will cooperate for flying. At 6am, the planes started to come in and fill up and take off immediately. At one point there were 5 planes in the very tiny airport.

We quickly dressed and packed up and went for breakfast hoping that we will be called out earlier than our 10:30am flight. All the boys were here and Jagat gave us the Buddhist good luck scarf as a parting gift which was really touching. Puri followed suit and now we have double luck.

The phone at the front reception kept ringing and with each ring anxious passengers would scoop up their belongings and head to the airport for their flight. We chatted with a honeymoon couple from Holland who have been waiting 3 days to get out. They were thrilled when their call came. They may be heading to Pokhara so hopefully we will bump into them there.

Soon the only people left were Fero, Bikesh, me and two other guides. 10:30am came and went and no phone call. The weather is still good so I hope there is another flight coming in soon.

Finally around 11:30am, Bikesh came running out of the lodge with our luggage on his shoulders and we ran (or rather, walked very quickly to the airport). We quickly checked in our bags and went through security (??) only to realize our flight wasn't even there yet. We waited and waited and around 1pm we were told that the flight had been enroute but it was too windy so they returned to KTM. Groan..... They said they would attempt again at 2pm.

So.....with time on our hands we left the airport and went across the street to a German Bakery and had a bite to eat. The pastry was extremely good and I found out that the owner was the baker and he had been taught in KTM by German bakers.

Following we just waited and hoped that the weather would improve to allow the flights to come in. Just in case, I checked the Sherpa and Himalayan lodges for prices. While I was doing this, Fero called to me that the plane was on its way.

All of us were so excited and again waited. Many other people came into the boarding lounge and after a headcount realized there was too many for one plane load. Sure enough we heard and aircraft landing and it was an AGNI aircraft which wasn't ours. A little deflated we still kept hope and at 3:30pm our Tara aircraft landed with whoops and cheers from everyone! We boarded and took off in no time.

The flight was a little bumpy at first but we didn't care as we were on our way - we didn't want to be one of those to spend 3 days at the airport like some of the others.

Close to 4pm we landed and were taken to the Thamel hotel where they greeted us very warmly. Bikesh said goodbye and would be in touch with us tomorrow.

We were given the same room, #403 which we realized is likely the only unit that has air conditioning! We were treated like royalty due to our connections with Sandy Riley - thank you Sandy for the contact.

It is funny how perceptions work. When we first arrived, the Thamel was a good 3 star hotel but a little worse for wear. However.....after returning from 30 days in the mountains, it was like a palace, clean, cheery and tidy with WONDERFUL hot water for a shower.

After cleaning up we repacked, put the clothes we needed for the next week in the laundry and headed out for dinner - the snack from the German Bakery in Lukla had long worn off. We decided upon the New Orleans Cafe which happened to be playing Cuban salsa music. After conversations with our waiter he changed it to Nepalese music! We had huge salads for the first time on the trip and a lovely Australian wine. It was fantastic.

A fellow by the name of .Mr. R.K. Khatri was approaching all the tourists and asking for feedback and our opinion on Nepal - after a few glasses of wine we had lots of opinions to give him and we are email them to him when we get home.

Finally at around 10pm or so we took a rickshaw home and had about 6 or 7 street urchins follow as well grabbing for a few Rps - this is becoming a huge problem in KTM and we we're constantly told not to give beggars money but to help in other ways.

We finally escaped back to our hotel and crashed, it has been a full day.