

Namasteonepen! Namasteonerupee!

Never mind the pens or the rupees, where's the beer and chocolate cake after 15 days of porridge and noodles? Just arrived back to Kathmandu on December 1st (Judy's birthday) from Langtang, Goainkund, Helambu to Mealamchi Pul Bazar and hence Nargakot on the hills close to Kathmandu. A different experience to The Annapurnas and much quieter, indeed we met no other trekkers on some days, only friendly villagers. We now intend to cease trekking and explore more of Kathmandu and environs, in any case our socks are in holes and one of Pete's knees is protesting after several of the last few days of our trek involved descents totaling 4,800m. The weather continued to be perfect, chilly at night, all the lodges providing bitterly cold bedrooms but a warm central iron stove in the living room; in the Helambu we took our meals with the Buddhist/Tibetan families, we being the only guests. One day cloud did hang around the mountain slopes inspiring a gloomy atmosphere and a sombre mood especially as we observed a rock fall scar on the opposite slope where, 10 years earlier the Thai International airliner (lost in cloud) impacted killing all on board including previous DMC member Mick Hardwick and his wife.

Maoist activity is having a significant effecting the Helambu Hills, police and army are nowhere to be seen having scampered-off closer to Kathmandu. Any private schools in the hills have been closed down and police stations demolished by the maoists, people seem quietly afraid wherever their sympathies lie.. We didn't meet up with any Maoists and were therefore not put in the position of being asked at gunpoint to make a donation? If trekking in this and quite a few other popular walking areas e.g. Manaslu, Jiri to Lukla (Everest), Kanchenjunga, one should add Rs. 3,000 or \$40 per couple to one's budget when trekking alone (this year's rate); ask for a receipt! Our parting yesterday evening with our young porter/guide after five or six weeks was not an easy moment. Not surprisingly we had formed a close relationship over and above that of guide-client but the time comes to move on.

Here in Thamel (backpacker's Kathmandu) dawn has broken; yesterday evening the music died at midnight, the odd drunk continued its tedious rambling until 2 a.m., at 6 a.m. the dawn was greeted by the ubiquitous throat clearing and expectorating in the surrounding streets, we looked out from our room on the shambles of yet another crazy construction site and now we sit like lizards on a roof top restaurant for breakfast warming ourselves in the sun at the start of another winter's day in Kathmandu.

Love to you all

Peter and Judy

Kathmandu December 2nd 2002

Forgot to mention: Met Ali and Pete Kennington? on the Langtang trail, we'd never met before and it took 10 minutes conversation before we established the mutual connection with the Oread (they being longstanding active prospective members! Small world!