

## A Promise Fulfilled

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By Peter Laurenson

I fell in love with Nepal on my first visit there in 1988. Ever since I've been drawn back. My eldest son Ben has watched me go and return time and again. When he was three I made him a promise to take him with me one day. I made good on that promise in his sixteenth year. This is our diary account.

### Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> November

**Pete:** We awoke still full of Mum's chicken casserole – Ben's 'last request before execution' dish. He had another bowl of it for lunch. But first, at breakfast, we each enjoyed one of Grandma's famous cheese omelets as we watched the All Blacks annihilate France at Marseilles – Ted's boys were on fire, a good start to our adventure.

Mum and Dad drove us to Auckland International Airport. Lucky we had plenty of time because the check in cue for our Thai Airways flight to Bangkok was an hour long.

Once on the plane there was a never ending supply of food, drink and movies pretty much until touch down in Bangkok 11 hours later. The lights of Bangkok on the approach impressed Ben.

By the time we were through customs and reconnected with our bags it was about 10pm local time. It took another hour or so to make the transfer to our room at the Grand Pinnacle Hotel.

So we hit the pillows at around 11pm local time / 4am NZ time. Ben slept all night until 6am. I got about four hours sleep – my sleeping has yet to settle following the rigors of the past couple of months, but I'm sure a dose of Khumbu should do the trick.

### Monday 30<sup>th</sup> November

**Ben:** We woke and walked downstairs for an American breakfast (two eggs and two little sausages). Then we got a taxi back to Bangkok airport, which was one of the most amazing pieces of architecture I've ever seen. The building seemed to be made entirely of glass and fabric. Once through customs we walked the length of the airport, a about 2 kms!

After a couple of hours on TG 319 I saw my first awesome glimpse of an 8,000m mountain - Kunchenjunga. Next came a sight I'll never forget – Mount Everest. It was in a cluster with a black wall in front and cloud around the middle, incredible.

Once through customs at Kathmandu airport (a complete mad house, with papers getting mixed up and the price of a one month visa \$40 USD each), I went on the craziest taxi ride ever – 200 Rp, with a discount at the Red Planet Guest House, which was 500 Rp a night (NZ\$10), such cheap living.



An unforgettable sight – Mount Everest (right) et al from 10,000 metres on the approach to Nepal



Finally, my first walk in Kathmandu streets, first black market exchange of money, first momo (delicious), first Nepal tea (very sweet and creamy, again delicious). After the momos, Dad and I took a taxi to the Swayambunath – the Monkey Temple. We walked up the steepest staircase I've ever walked. But at the top, wow, an amazing temple with a crowd of monkeys and gleaming gold. Well that's a lie, the temple was being cleaned so lots of scaffolding was up, but still breath-taking.

Back at the bottom, we decided to walk home through the narrow bustling streets. When we got back to the Red Planet Guest House, we had dinner at the café next door, then went to bed.

**Pete:** Good to see Ben has the rough place appreciation gene – he's right into Kathmandu – the noise, the filth, the food, the beggars, stray dogs, monkeys, cows, hustlers – taking it all in with genuine interest and a big smile. We also booked and purchased our returns to Lukla today - US\$101 each way i.e. US\$404, down from \$452 – it was worth shopping around and bargaining. US\$1 = 73 Rp. NZ\$1 = 50 Rp.

### Tuesday 1st December

**Pete:** We woke early and went down the road to central Thamel for breakfast – eggs, sausages, hash browns and Cokes! Then Phura and her Aunt Khachi Phuti came to take us back to their home. First we bought a box of cakes to have at morning tea with them. Phura speaks good English now. It was great to see her again – she's growing up – and for Ben to meet a Nepali of his own age.

We gave Phura, her Aunt, Uncle, brother and sister Maori pendant necklaces made of pewter – got them from duty free on the way out. Hopefully they liked them. We left Phura about 10am and went to the Boudhanath.

**Ben:** The Boudhanath was an incredible sight, with Monks everywhere, men throwing white and brown coloured liquid over the big dome at the top and stalls all around the outside.



Above, hanging with Sahdus in Durbar Square  
Below, at Aunty Khachi Phuti's place



**Pete:** In the afternoon we walked down to Durbar Square, then further to Freak Street to get a couple of our garments embroidered with Buddha eyes. Had an early dinner, momos – Ben was keen, so we could be ready for our 4.45am start – a taxi back to the airport for supposedly a 6.15am departure to Lukla.



### Wednesday 2nd December (Day 1 of our trek)

**Pete:** Our 6.15am departure ended up being 10.30am – a five hour wait in the madhouse that is the domestic terminal. Cloud at Lukla was the cause. At least we had some great views en route and found ourselves AND our gear on the airport tarmac soon after 11am.

In our boredom at the airport we devoured a ridiculously expensive canister of Pringles so, rather than eat right away in Lukla, we decided to get a bit of walking in before lunch. We set off right away, stopping in the end for yes, more momos, about 12.30pm in Ghat.

Our host in Ghat, Phanden Sherpa, had summited Everest six times, so it was fascinating talking with him. He has two brothers, each who've also summited Everest. One of them is now a guide for Alpine Guides down at Mount Cook.

After lunch we pressed on. Ben found it a bit of a challenge and developed a strong head ache near the end of the day. We reached Jorsale just on nightfall at 5.30pm. There Ben had pain killer tablets, hot lemon and dry warmth.

While he rested by the fire in the tea house kitchen I went next door to say hello to Pasang Dorje and Ang Nimi (Phura's parents, who I'd last seen in 2006). I immediately had a plate of beans in front of me, which I ate before going back to see how Ben was. He'd moved to our bedroom upstairs, feeling knackered.

By 7pm both of us were in our bags – the nights are certainly cold now, even though it doesn't seem like winter during the day. The good news was that we both slept well and Ben's head ache was gone by morning. His knee seems to be bearing up well too.

### Thursday 3rd December (Day 2)

**Pete:** Now here in Namche Ben is feeling the effects of altitude again – less so than yesterday, but a head ache and some nausea. Considering that he got up the dreaded hill below Namche he's in reasonable shape. Hopefully his symptoms will pass soon. We'll have two nights here to acclimatise. Beautiful weather now – no sign of snow whatsoever.



In Phanden Sherpa's teahouse, Ghat

We checked into a fabulous upper story room – heaps of space, double mattresses, nicely decorated in Tibetan style – all for 100 Rp (NZ\$2). But the price of food has gone up a lot.

**Ben:** Our meeting with Pasang Dorje was extremely nice. Ang Nimi was really kind and I really like her. We had some never ending tea, then a tour of Pasang's 130 year old Tibetan style house. The top floor was black with soot because there is no chimney. Down stairs we sat back down for more never ending tea.

Then we climbed the dreaded hill to Namche. What can I say – it was big, long, steep and tiring. But we made it. Well, I made it, Dad made it easily.

Namche is what I imagined Kathmandu to be like – no cars, people not constantly trying to sell you things, beautiful views.



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### Friday 4th December (Day 3)

**Ben:** At dawn we walked up to the Park head quarters and museum. It was very cold! Then we descended half way and had breakfast. I finally ate something – two bits of stale toast, but at least something. We then came down and did some washing.

After hanging the washing we walked to the Panorama Hotel, several hundred metres above Namche. At the start Dad and I didn't think I would make it, but by about the halfway point I was going much better. We ended up reaching 3,900m from 3,500m – a VERY good sign for my acclimatisation. And to top it all off, at the top I was hungry. So we ate cheese and crackers while taking photos of a large gathering of Himalayan Condors (BIG birds). It was a very worthwhile climb.

Back in Namche I had some tomato soup and fries which, so far, I've kept down. I may have some macaroni tonight for dinner. After the soup we visited a Tibetan market, mainly just selling down jackets and shoes. Then back here to write this – time now 5.20pm.

**Pete:** Ben forgot to mention the stupendous views of the Everest group he saw today – he was impressed.



With Pasang Dorje, Ang Nimi and Lakpa Temba at their house in Jorsale

Although part of me regrets the modernisation of Namche Bazaar – still no roads, but now many cyber cafes, small supermarkets, blaring music, we have enjoyed the email contact. Very pleased to hear that Madras Street sold so well.

Something I haven't seen before is a huge outdoor market, run by Tibetans, laid out in the bowl of Namche.



The Everest Group and others from above Namche at 3,900m



The Tibetan traders have all come over the Nangpa La (5,600m) with their yaks laden with cheap gear made in China. The market is for the locals, not tourists.

The Everest Base Camp marathon ran today – a 6.30am start from 5,300m! Down over huge glacier terrain and plunging hillsides to Namche 42 km down at 3,450m. The winner covered the distance in around three hours! That's what it took me to run the Rotorua marathon on roads down near sea level. The mind boggles.



Himalayan Condors with Ama Dablam behind

I'm looking forward to moving on above Namche now – it's all a bit too town-like here these days. We'll head up after the Saturday morning market. Shorter days in December – sunrise a tad after 6am and nightfall at 5.30pm. The nights are cold.

### Saturday 5th December (Day 4)

**Pete:** Well, I class today as near perfect – certainly a geezardio day. Both of us had good sleeps and awoke with appetites. My downward motions were prolific, Ben's had not yet eventuated at all.

After breakfast we checked out the Saturday market, then shouldered our packs and set off towards Khunde. Ben was pretty slow to start but, after a monster trail dump, he started to pick up. Still a bit queasy though.

We paid a visit to Ed Hillary's Khunde Hospital, getting there about 12.30pm. Made a small donation and an entry in the visitor book, then on across the top of Khunde to Khumjung, which merges with Khunde a little lower down. Idyllic views.



After a pitstop in Khumjung we headed on to Mong. This winds and undulates, at first, around from the 'cattle route' to Everest BC, up the Dhud Kosi River. We had a bigger climb than expected – up from 3,700m to 4,000m. But Ben is now getting into the swing of it. He went very well on this leg – best yet; and a far cry from Day 1. Things bode well.

We reached Mong a bit after 3pm in swirling cloud – a predictable weather pattern at present. I'm about to join Ben and a guy with a less than geezardio accent from Tennysee, to play some cards. It's 4pm.



### Sunday 6th December (Day 5)

**Ben:** We awoke to a perfect morning of virtually no cloud, crisp morning air and a nice walk over to a view point two minutes away. Then we had one of the grossest bowls of porridge I've ever let down my throat.

After Dad's quick excursion to the toilet we hit the track. From 4,000m down to 3,650m took us 30 minutes. But then came the slog up to Lhabarma, back up at 4,330m. This took 3.5 hours – a really good effort by me. I found it soooo much easier than the first day from Lukla.

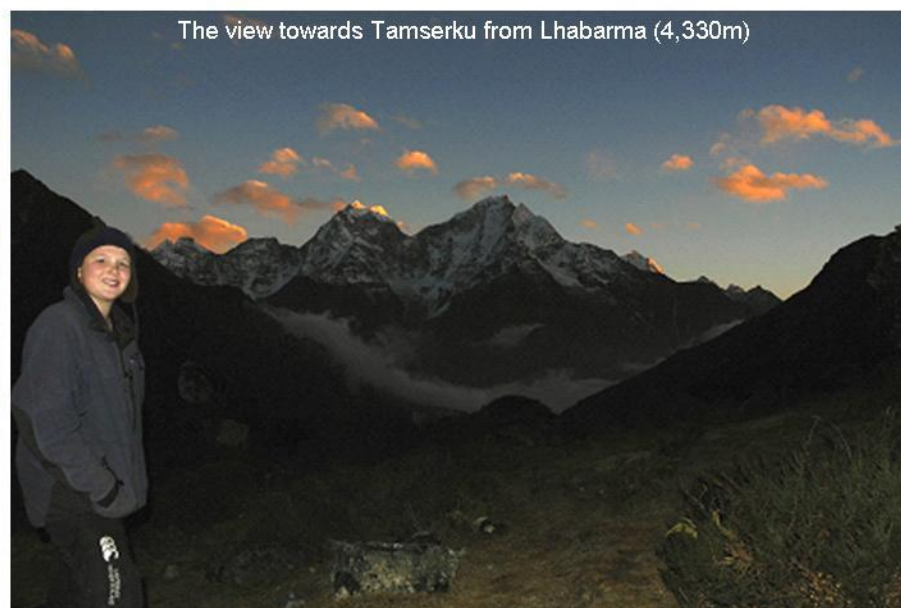
At about 4,000m we found a little boy about three years old wandering the track, crying for his mum, who was chopping wood WAY below in the forest. We looked after him until he started wandering off towards Dole, the nearest village. Dad stayed back to see if his mother would come up while I followed the boy along the track. A porter came down the track behind Dad and offered to help to get the boy back to his house – he knew the boy. So he followed Dad up the trail until they reached me and, by now, a really distraught little kid sitting on a rock.

After dropping the boy off at a lodge – the owner knew the boy and vice versa, we headed on towards Lhabarma (from Dole). Now I'm writing at 4,330m, higher than I've ever been on land – and really loving every second of it.



With a teary 3 year old

**Pete:** Now that we've reached this altitude and Ben is really getting into the groove, I can admit to being very worried on the first three days about how Ben was going to deal with this trek. He really wasn't prepared at all and it was a shock to his system. But now, despite still having a disrupted stomach (he's presently quite literally full of s—t – when it comes I don't want to be nearby!) and eating very little, he's totally positive and upbeat. Here is one very proud Dad.



The view towards Tamserku from Lhabarma (4,330m)

Boy, prices have escalated here now – we were budgeting what I thought was a very generous 3000 Rp (\$60 NZ) per day but, once Ben gets his appetite back, I think we'll struggle to keep to that. Apparently, by the time we reach Gokyo, a single cup of milk tea will cost about 80 Rp (\$1.70 NZ).



We're now in a very nice lodge – wonderful, spotless dining room with fab views. We're the only ones here now at 3.45pm. The hostess has just filled the pot belly stove with yak dung and things are starting to warm up nicely. As soon as the sun is obscured by the cloud the temperature plummets. This has happened pretty much on cue each afternoon around 2.30pm.

### Monday 7th December (Day 6)

**Pete:** As I put pen to paper, its early afternoon on Tuesday. Ben and I are sitting in a sun drenched dining room overlooking Gokyo Lake. It's somewhat better than a poke in the eye with a blunt stick. We have a lot of time on hand each day. I've just taught Ben how to play Patience in return for him teaching me Liar a couple of nights back. It's wonderful to have this completely uninterrupted time with him.



The Yak Whisperer in action at Gokyo

But back to yesterday. We left Lharbarma (4,330m) after breakfast about 9am and undulated our way alongside the upper Dhud Kosi River, enjoying the stupendous views under another vivid blue sky. Ben wasn't going quite so well and, by the time we reached Pangla (4,480m) about three hours later, he had that "I just want to flop" look about him. So we took a break at Pangla for an hour, had half an acclimatisation tablet and Panadol, and then I worked on Ben's motivation. The conservative approach would have been to just stay put, but I knew we were less than three hours from Gokyo, where it is way nicer to be and where our acclimatisation would be pushed along further – thereby giving us many more options in the days ahead.

After the break Ben felt a bit better and he agreed to push on. So up the side of the terminal moraine of the Ngozumpa Glacier we went. To be honest, the route was longer than I remember it, making me a liar more than once when I assured Ben we were almost somewhere.

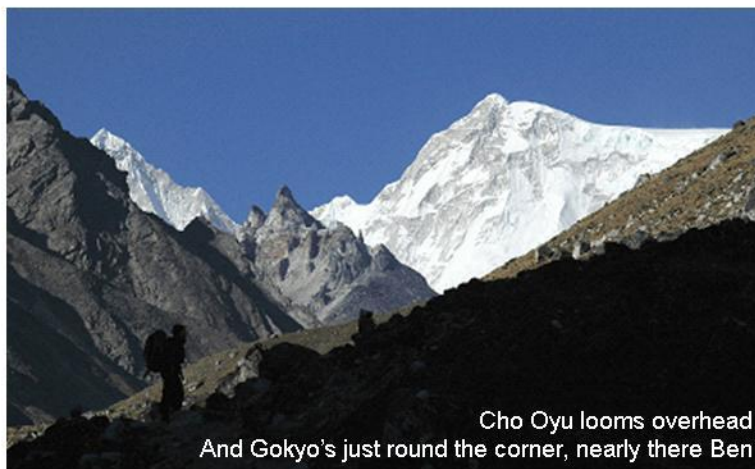
He wasn't having a good time so I offered to take his pack for him, but once again, to his credit, he refused and doggedly pushed on. We reached Gokyo after two and a half hours of up and it's fair to say that Ben has never been more physically tired in his life. We both had headaches again and it wasn't long before Ben had his second vom of our trip.

I know some would say I'm a pretty harsh father letting his son suffer like this. But I knew he wasn't in any real peril and I'm a firm believer in the importance of self-motivation. During our journey so far I've started to see some of the father in this son of mine i.e. the bloody minded, determined streak that can be a powerful resource at times. I'd hoped that this trip might be a stepping stone for Ben from boy to man and that's exactly how it's panning out. He's rising to the challenge wonderfully.



And as it's turned out, my call to proceed to Gokyo has proved to be the right one. Ben is fine. We've had another great day here at Gokyo and now we're well placed for the next challenges.

Up here at the lodge prices are even higher, but our room is roomier, the food is tastier and there are some nice people up here to talk with and play cards with. After half a dozen hands Ben has just got his first hand of Patience out (with just one sneaky number 8 shift).



Cho Oyu looms overhead  
And Gokyo's just round the corner, nearly there Ben

**Ben:** Yesterday WAS the toughest day physically I've ever put myself through. And heck, at one point I did hate Dad and thought he was a lying pusher. But I am soooooo glad that we pushed through and arrived at Gokyo. The food's better, the views are spectacular and there are people to talk to.

### Tuesday 8th December (Day 7)

**Ben:** We woke feeling a lot better. I only had a very small headache, but was still a little queasy. I had cornflakes for breakfast and Dad had the Julius Cheeser, an extravagant concoction of French toast, cheese and baked beans. After breakfast we explored the moraine of the glacier, which was almost the opposite to what I expected – 99% rock and rubble on the top and a couple of frozen lakes. I had expected 99% ice and a little rock. We then came down and skipped stones along the ice beside the lake shore. We ended up breaking the ice and releasing a little iceberg. Then we came back to the warmth of our lodge for a bowl of soup. Now, after a few hands of Patience, I'm writing this with sun pouring down on my back.

### Wednesday 9th December (Day 8)

**Pete:** Today I awoke from the best sleep I've had on the trek so far. We went crazy last night and played cards with Con and Theresa, an Aussie couple, until 9pm (normal bedtime closer to 7pm). Ben didn't sleep so well apparently, although I still had to wake the teenager up.

The reason, today we climbed Gokyo Ri (5,350m). The weather was perfect. Ben and I agreed that he'd set off ahead of me and go at his pace. So after a breaky of scrambled eggs on toast that's what we did. Ben set off at 9am, me at 9:30am. I caught Ben at 10am, had a short break with him to check that he was ok, then pushed on to the top, arriving at 10:50am. I felt the best I've felt physically for some time, so really enjoyed my climb.

Ben had a rather tougher experience. His stomach had still not settled and he is well and truly constipated. It took him three hours 20 minutes to hit the top but, to his credit, he persevered. The view at the top was beautiful — best I've seen it on the three times I've been up Gokyo Ri since 1988.



It only took an hour 15 minutes to descend, both with sizable headaches. These soon subsided once we were back in the warm comfort of our lodge. So Ben has a new altitude record and an even greater insight into mind over matter. He did well and I'm delighted at what we are achieving on this trek.

### Friday 11th December (Day 10)

**Pete:** Happy Birthday Edwin for the 12<sup>th</sup> NZ time – we're thinking of you. Yes we were, and still are in a bit of a bottleneck at the moment. The route between Dzongla and Dragnag over Cho La has only one lodge open at each end.

Our view from Gokyo Ri (5,350m), Mount Everest dead centre



### Thursday 10th December (Day 9)

**Ben:** My day started with my first excursion in four days! We had omelets for breaky – mushroom for me and Spanish for Dad, then started to get packed. Our bill for three nights and food for three days came to 9,500Rp (NZ\$190). Even though Dad says that prices have gone up heaps, it's still very cheap living once you're here.

Then we played three games of Patience, getting all three out, before hitting the road – well track, crossing the glacier. About ¾ hour in we stopped for a first for me, a glacier cheese and cracker picnic. Once finished we headed off towards Dragnag – also spelt Tangnag, Thagnak, Tauna and probably others as well. Dad shot a couple of panoramas before we reached the end of the glacier, which came up much quicker than I expected. Now I'm sitting in an incredibly busy lodge at Dragnag writing this.

There is an interesting mix of trekkers here – a very nice Singaporean climber (Nasser) and his guide, a Korean, an Aussie, Dutch, two English glaciologists, a big noisy Ukrainian group who mostly struggle to smile at anyone outside their own circle; and a bunch of Nepalese.

We set off from Dragnag at 6:40am today. I managed to find a porter willing to take Ben's pack, which was fortunate, because if he had had to carry it himself over the pass, with his dodgy tummy, I think it would have done him in. As it was, the porter was quite amazing – a 24 year old, smaller than Ben. He must have carried at least 30 kgs over, the whole way with a smile. His fee was 1,000 Rp (NZ\$20). He really made the difference for us, so I gave him 1,500 Rp.

The weather was cold and there seems to be a change for the worst brewing, but I'm hopeful that it won't come before we fly out of Lukla in 5 days.



At least the cold was good to walk in and Ben made slow but steady progress, overhauling the Ukrainians who had left at least 20 minutes before us. All went well until the nasty steep bit before the actual pass. This is where the route started to catch up with Ben. Just before the top, we had our closest call with disaster when Ben lost his footing after straying off route. But with a little cajoling we were on the pass at 5,400m – another altitude record for Ben, after 3½ hours, pretty good going.

It was quite windy up there so we didn't stay for long. We were surprised by a French couple coming up the other way with their four year old son – bloody mad.

From the top we descended, first over a partly frozen snowfield that didn't require us to put on crampons – so I've carried my big bulky plastics, crampons and ice axe the whole way for nothing, except of course for piece of mind. After the snow was a steep rocky section which I was relieved to see Ben at the bottom of, because his energy was running out. Beyond that was a gradual descent to Dzongla.



On Cho La (5,400m), looking back towards Dragnag

Poor old Ben had another chunder just before we arrived, but I think that was for the best, because 2 ½ hours after arrival (it took us 6 ½ hours in total) as I write and we sit near the pot belly in the dining room, Ben is perking up nicely.

This was our biggest day and now it's done – all downhill from here. I'm stoked with what we've been able to achieve route wise, conversation wise, life experience wise, Dad and son wise. This has really been an awesome trek – hard especially for Ben, but very rewarding in many ways.

### Saturday 12th December (Day 11)

**Ben:** Today started very slowly and lazily at 7.20am. At breakfast I only ate half an omelet and then had another poop. We finally got on the trail at 9.30am! I felt very exhausted and energy deprived, having eaten so little and then throwing up most of it, yet still doing big days. So today was just cruisey.

We walked past Nasser's base camp beneath Lobuje Peak – a very impressive climb of 1,200m in a single push in under 24 hours. Then we reached a magnificent view point to Pumori, where we stopped on top of a big rock for Mars Bars.

From there we descended to Dhugla, a hamlet on the main cattle route to Everest Base Camp. We bought yak cheese and Pringles to have further down the track at a farm settlement. At this point we decided to take the high track to Dingboche and stay there the night.



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Half way there we had a Pringles picnic, sheltering behind a farm wall, surrounded by grazing Yaks. As we ate we enjoyed a fantastic view, taking in Cholatse, Tawoche and the Cho La pass – it was magic.

By the time we reached the chorten above Dingboche (4,400m) I was getting hungry. So we got down the small hill and checked into a lodge, washed our feet and my socks (they were toxic) and sat down to a feed of Coke and tomato and cheese pizza – beautiful! I then played cards and exchanged card tricks with a Nepalese guide as the sun set over the valley leading to Namche. I'm now writing this at 5.45pm, as a resident Yak called Kawa (meaning stripes) is fed.

**Pete:** Yes, it was a lovely day all round and great to see Ben's appetite returning. The Coke and pizza didn't touch the sides and now he's about to tuck in to some Sherpa stew followed by apple pie. Life is good.

**Ben:** Sure is!

### **Sunday 13th December (Day 12)**

**Pete:** We woke about 6.30am to quite a cloudy dawn. Very high cloud, which threatens snow sometime soon, but the sunrise was lovely.

I got myself sorted – warm gear, water, yak cheese and crackers, camera; and left Ben at the lodge to climb Nangkar Tshang (5,090m). About 680m vertical took me one and half hours. Although the atmosphere was brooding, it was still a great vantage point from which to enjoy a yak cheese and crackers breakfast.



Enjoying  
Yak cheese and crackers on Nangkar Tshang

I was back down at the lodge by 10am. Ben was waiting, having also had some breakfast, taken a stroll in the cobbled lanes of Dingboche and been on the internet to check his hotmail. He managed to bargain the price down from 20 Rp per minute to 10.

We set off from Dingboche (4,400m) about 10.30am and reached upper Pangboche (about 4,100m) at 12.30pm. There we had a snack and visited the centuries old gumpa – very nice, as the monks were chanting.

From there we descended further to the river and then climbed back up to Tyangboche at 3,970m. Arriving about 3pm, we checked in to a nice lodge serving the nicest pizza we've enjoyed so far in the Khumbu. Ben is well on the way to full recovery. His energy is back and so is his appetite.

**Ben:** I feel AMAZING!!!



A panorama from 5,090m on Nangkar Tshang





More Yak whispering



Inside Pangboche Gumpa

Once we were all packed, we went over to Tyangboche Gumpa, one of the most beautiful buildings I've ever seen. The detail was incredible – delicate paintings were on all four walls, with heaps of decorations everywhere. To top it off the monks were practicing – voices, horns, flutey instruments, drums and symbols – just about every kind of instrument that the monks use, all at once.

Once we'd seen enough Dad took off to a high point above Tyangboche while I stayed below for a rest. I ended up sitting on the steps of the Gumpa for about half an hour taking in the scene.

### Monday 14th December (Day 13)

**Ben:** We woke to a beautiful sunrise highlighting the ridges on Lhotse and Nuptse. Downstairs we had scrambled eggs, toast, roast potatoes and tea. My stomach felt better, but it has shrunk over the last two weeks.

After breakfast I taught Paul, an American guy, Dumble – a Nepalese card game I learnt earlier on the trek. Paul told me about a student exchange scheme to Japan that sounds really exciting.

**Pete:** I went up about 500m vertical, taking about an hour over very steep terrain, so for an old codger I'm happy with my form. But I never reached the top – pulled up about 50m short because it turned in to a real climb over cliffs. Being by myself I chickened out when the climbing became scary. I knew that climbing down again is usually harder, so it was time to stop. Once I got back down we had a Coke and then headed for Namche.



Tyangboche (3,970m), with the Everest Group and Ama Dablam on the right



First it was a big down to the river, then a big up and along an undulating trail to Namche. The clouds engulfed us about half an hour before our destination, but Ben had another energy surge, so we powered along and kept warm.

We checked into a nice lodge and I enjoyed my first yak steak and Everest Beer of the trek. Ben's appetite was back in full force, but still no downward action – for four days again! After dinner we caught up on Ben's hotmail before snuggling into our bags for the night.

### Tuesday 15th December (Day 14)

**Ben:** Today started with a nice breaky of poached eggs, toast, potatoes, milk tea and pineapple juice. Then we got away early as it was going to be a long day – 8.45am on the trail. After a very long down Namche hill we arrived at Jorsale to meet up with Pasang Dorje, Ang Nimi and their youngest son, Lakpa Temba (8 years old). Dad told me to go ahead so I could surprise them.

What a welcome I got!!! I knocked on their half door and said 'Namaste'. Ang Nimi ran out and embraced me in a HUGE hug. Then Lakpa Temba sprinted out and down the path, yelling to Pasang Dorje that I'd arrived. Soon after Pasang Dorje was at the house panting – the only time I've ever seen him pant, let alone look tired; he also pulled me into a hug. Ang Nimi had me sit down and there was already a cup of tea on the table. Dad then arrived and there was suddenly noodle soup on the table too.



We chatted for a while and then they honoured us with ceremonial scarves for good luck. We had a group photo outside and then honoured them back with scarves as well. Then it was time to go, so Pasang Dorje came with us as far as his younger sister's home, where we stopped for more tea in a proper Sherpa tea house, that was not at all touristy. Finally we said goodbye to Pasang Dorje and headed on to Lukla.

**Pete:** Pretty much for the rest of the day we trudged towards Lukla. The clouds were back so it was nice and cool for walking, although a bit subdued. We called back in to Phanden Sherpa, the six times Everest summiter who also runs his own climbing and trekking company, to put in a good word for Pasang Dorje – he is quite poor and needs a new guiding job since his last boss died. Before we left his home I gave him 500 Rp to cover his annual guiding certificate for the coming year – just a small helping hand.

Now we're sitting in the lodge of Phanden Sherpa's aunty, who reconfirmed our return flights to Kathmandu tomorrow for us after he called ahead for us via his cell phone! There are now a lot of them about - porters and guides talking while they walk, people standing in odd spots on hillsides trying to get signals. We sit by a slowly warming pot belly trying to keep warm – it's pretty cold being in the clouds after dark here in Lukla.



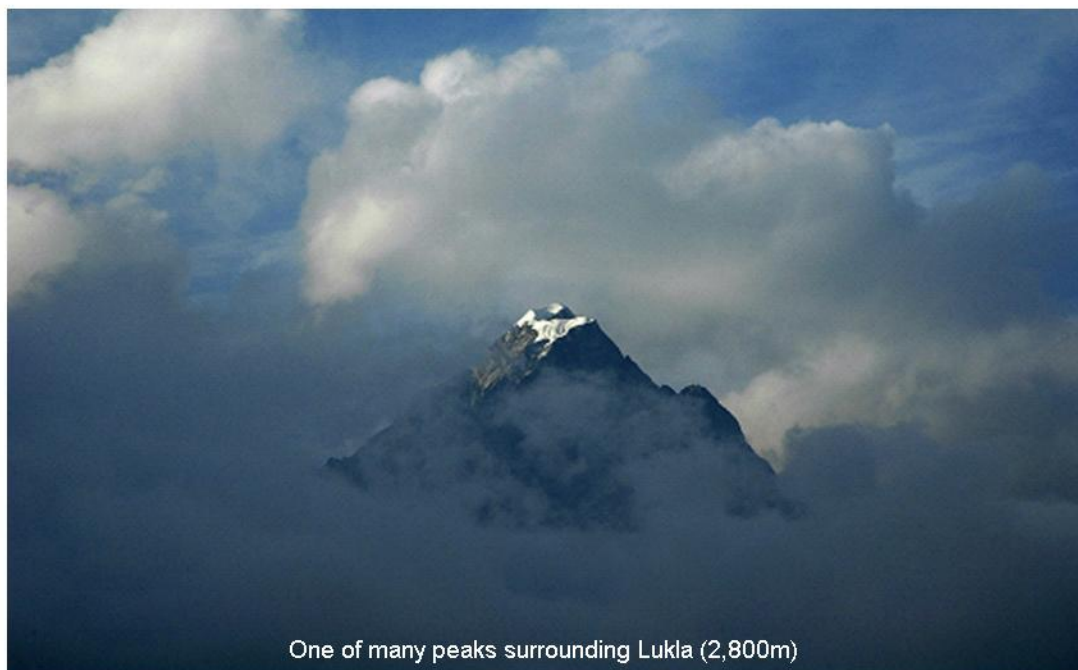
It was great today that Ben got a real insight into the life of the locals; and a very warm connection with some of them. This trek has proved to be fabulous right to the end. Ben even managed to clear his blockage after we checked in this afternoon. All is well.

### Wednesday 16th December (Day 15)

**Ben:** The alarm went off at 5.45am so we could get dressed, packed and ready to get to the airport by 6.15am. Once checked in we played another waiting game. We ended up going back to our lodge for breaky, then walking down to the bottom end of the airstrip to pace out the distance – about 550 big paces. Then we stood in the sun at the top of the runway, chatting to Kim and Shaun, an Australian couple on their honeymoon, who we met two days earlier up in Namche.

Finally the siren sounded to call us back to the terminal, so I started to prepare myself for takeoff. We had to run across the tarmac to reach our plane while its engines still turned. The pilots made their final pre flight checks and we were on the move, heading out on to the extremely short runway. Take off was intense! We sat at the top of the runway, the engines revved, the breaks let go, then we left the ground only metres from the end of the runway. It was crazy. Once airborne I had the biggest turbulence experience of my life – we literally FELL 10 metres!

Back in Kathmandu we decided to meet Kim and Shaun at Rum Doodles, a famous bar and restaurant for climbers. We met at 6.20pm for a really good chat and steak, as well as good beer for the adults and mocktails and Cokes for me. It ended up a party, with us getting back to our hotel at 11pm - the latest night we've had all trip!!!



One of many peaks surrounding Lukla (2,800m)

### Thursday 17th December

**Pete:** We're in cruise mode now until we fly home on Saturday. Getting up at about 8.30am, we went down the lane for breakfast, then jumped into a taxi. First we visited the Sleeping Vishnu (Budhanil Kantha) on the outskirts of Kathmandu – something I've been meaning to do for twenty years! It was not actually that impressive and is currently under renovation, but still good to have had a look. Interesting just driving around too.



## A Promise Fulfilled

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By Peter Laurenson

From the Sleeping Vishnu we taxied over to the Pashupatinath – one of the most significant religious sites in the Kathmandu Valley. Cremations were underway, monkeys mulled about, the sky cleared and the hot sun burned down.

Both Ben and I are ready for home now. We're in a state of post-trek lethargy, but we're still hoping to make contact with Phura again for a dhal bhat session before we leave Nepal. Tomorrow is likely to be a bit of a non-day – just some shopping and slouching. Time to come home.

Kathmandu feels like an endless horn blaring filth right now – somehow its darker side is getting to me a little more than on previous visits. No matter, our trek was fantastic and that's what we mainly came here for.

Update - we had a magnificent dhal bhat feast at Phura's aunt and uncle's this evening. Easily the most sumptuous and delicious meal I've enjoyed in Nepal. Many sophisticated dishes, engaging conversation and even whisky to chase it down. We both really enjoyed it.

### Friday 18th December

**Ben:** Today started slowly, a sleep in until 9am and breaky at 10am. Then we took a stroll to the scummy river, probably the most polluted thing I've ever seen. There was rubbish on, in and around it and dead animals lying on its banks, yet people still washed their utensils in it! Disgusting!

Once we got back to Thamel, the tourist centre of Kathmandu where we were staying, we decided to do some Christmas shopping. Later we had a fantastic cards session, Coke and Beer, followed by a marvelous curry and naan bread for dinner at Helenas.



With Phura and Pasang on Helena's rooftop

### Saturday 19th December

**Pete:** Well, we're now in the departure lounge of Kathmandu international airport, whiling away the couple of hours before we depart.

Phura Diki and her cousin Pasang Diki met us for breakfast up in the sun on the rooftop of Helenas. The weather, even in Kathmandu, in December is quite clear – this is definitely the month to visit Nepal. After being draped in more ceremonial khartas (scarves) we farewelled Phura and Pasang and, via another beaten up little taxi, headed for the airport.

We both were excited at the prospect of getting home, but reluctant to finish this fabulous journey in Nepal. Not much else to say – Namaste to the world. Oh yes, Ben seems to have dropped at least 6 kgs (and me a couple too) – a great basis for him to continue from – a leaner, more physically active, non-nail biting young man to come in 2010! Time will tell – the challenge to Ben is now laid!

**Ben:** Farewell Nepal. I will be back!



## A Promise Fulfilled

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Day 1, near Ghat with Phondon Sherpa, six times Everest summit, 2,700m



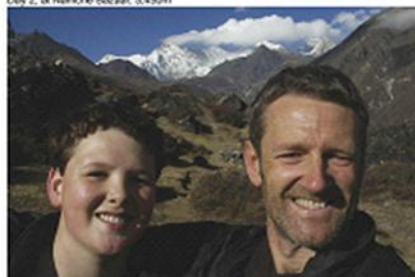
Day 2, at Namche Bazaar, 3,450m



Day 3, near the Pangosma Hotel with Choklaton, Tawoche, Nuptse, Everest, Lhotse and Ama Dablam behind, 4,000m



Day 4, below Monjo, 3,973m



Day 5, Lhotse with Cho Oyu behind, 4,300m



Day 6, Gokyo, 4,700m



Day 7, Gokyo, 4,750m



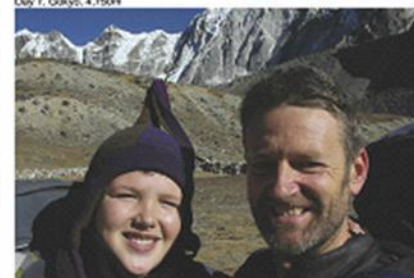
Day 8, on Gokyo Ri with Mount Everest, Nuptse and Lhotse behind, 5,340m



Day 9, crossing the Ngunzumpa Glacier with Choklaton and Tawoche behind, 4,700m



Day 10, on Cho La, 5,430m



Day 11, near Dzongha, 4,850m



Day 12, above Pangboche with Ama Dablam behind, 4,000m



Day 13, back in Namche Bazaar, 3,450m



Day 14, in Jorsale with Pasang Dorje and Ang Nims, 2,800m



On the return flight from Lukla to Kathmandu



# Solu Khumbu

