

Chitwan  
Kathmandu  
Ghorepani  
Circuit  
Pokhara

Nepal  
(नेपाल)  
2013

Our friend Julie W. invited us to join her and her American hiking group on a guided expedition to the Himalayas. We couldn't say no! Over the years, we had read so many stories of mountaineers climbing to the top of the world. Having an opportunity to visit this fabled land was on our bucket list of adventures.



*Julie C. with Julie W.*

We arrived on October 31<sup>st</sup> 2013 at 10:30pm after 36 hours of travel. The crowded airport was filled with exhausted travellers in line-ups: line-ups for customs, currency, visas, and finally taxis. Our taxi ride, in the dark, gave us the impression that our cabby was taking back-roads to our hotel. But we found out in the morning, that the road conditions in Nepal ranged from paved with pot-holes, to gravel, to post-avalanche dirt tracks.



*The Monkey Temple*

who had eaten there (even Sr. E. Hillary).

At our hotel, the Holi Himalaya, the desk clerks, and porters (all men) only spoke to Simon; It would seem that it was improper to speak to Julie directly. The sounds of traffic, roosters and pigeons woke us up early the next morning. We met up with our friends, Holly, and Garth, for a breakfast and a day-trip to



Patan, an eye-opening Buddhist village near Kathmandu. That evening we dined at Rum Doodle, a restaurant famous for all the alpinists

We familiarised ourselves with Thamel, the tourist district of Kathmandu. None of the roads were straight and getting lost was a common occurrence. We had to train ourselves not to look



*Busy Thamel*

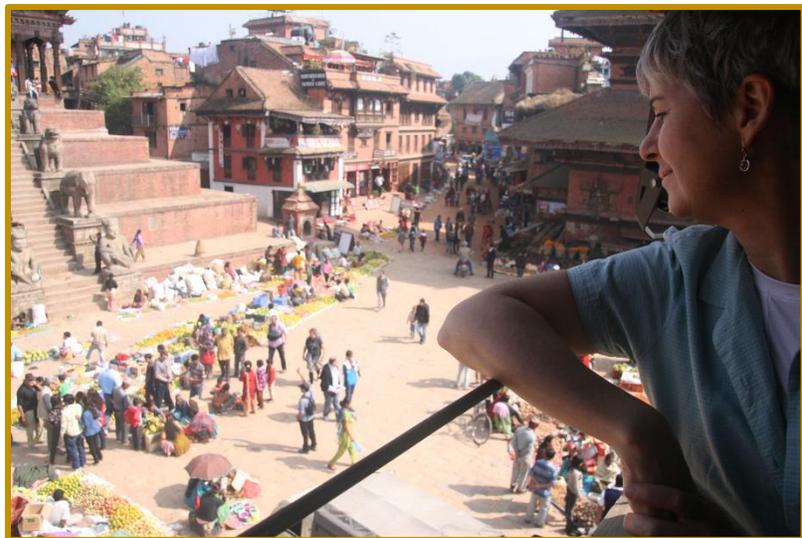
any vendors in their eyes. This would have meant we were wanting to haggle for their wares. So as not to offend, we



learned the polite way to say no: 'not today, thank you'.

Heading out of the district, we reached the Swayambhunath (monkey temple) and Durbar Square. Walking up the steep stairs up to the temple, Simon almost had his camera stolen by the bold monkeys. The view at the top was hazy but gave us a better sense of the expanse of the city. The square was bustling with vendors of all kinds vying for our Rupees.

Our plan for the following day was a visit to Bahktapur, another 14<sup>th</sup> century marvel. A quick stop at the bus depot made us find a taxi. The depot was mayhem with vendors yelling, chickens running around, and lots of beggars. Our cabby, Speedzila, drove us to the town and waited for us all day. The cost for his time? \$16.00 U.S. Bahktapur was a lived-in museum. Old ladies were husking their millet, young mothers were doing laundry in large buckets by their front doors, and shops were filled with tourists. The locals were preparing for the festival of lights, decorating their homes and stalls with orange geraniums and candles.



*Market in Bahktapur*

The Pashupati Hindu temple was next on our list. We walked through the city, through a haze of pollution, honking of car horns and traffic. The poverty and unsanitary conditions were everywhere now that we had left the Thamel district. Once at the temple, we walked around the park-like setting, the temple itself was restricted to Hindus only. We found a shady spot by the river and witnessed a funeral process; a young man was washing his deceased mother's feet and face with the river water.



*A few Faces of Nepal*

Once clean the body was placed atop a pyre and burnt. The ashes were swept into the river below. The Bagmati river was life and death. Locals used it to drink, wash, defecate, and sweep away refuse and ashes. The smell was out of this world.



Our friend Shannon arrived, and we took her to Freaky Street to witness the festivities of the last day of the festival. The streets were jammed with young and old all banging on pans and musical instruments. The decibels were over the top.

#### *Festivities on Freaky Street*

We retreated to the quiet of the Garden of Dreams by our hotel for a cup of chai and a rest. That evening we met with the tour group.

On November 6<sup>th</sup>, we took a bus toward Chitwan National Park. At some point we realised that our bus was malfunctioning. This required a stop and a mechanic. While our guides dealt with the transportation troubles, we made fast friends with some nearby children. They all wanted to speak with us to practice their English. We taught them how to high-five and the funky chicken dance. There was a lot of laughter all around. Back onto the bus we finally arrived at the Green Mansion Hotel in the late afternoon.

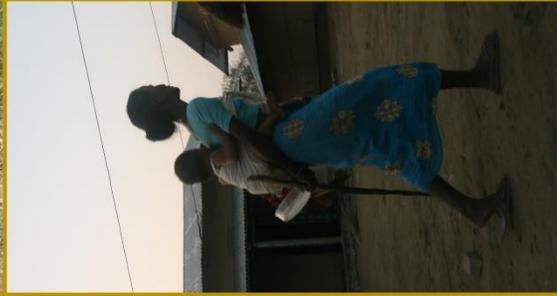


*Shannon Jet Lagged!*

Suki was our guide at this park. There was a boat ride on the Rapti River which was amazing. We saw many shore birds, Mugger and Estuarine crocodiles, and spotted deer. For our return to the hotel, we hiked into the forest of the Terai valley where we saw a black rhino in a nearby swamp. After lunch we were taken by elephant to a wildlife preserve. There, we were lucky to see a one-horned rhino and her 2-month-old calf. Our driver was gentle with his elephant, nudging her behind her ears to direct her. But our friends, Julie W. and Shannon, were not so lucky. Their elephant was upset and tried to rid herself of her passengers by tipping her body and whipping her tail. The passengers were all relieved to step off this irate elephant at the end of the trek.



*Chitwan National Park*



Lucky Sightings in Chitwan National Park



*Our Travel Group in Chitwan*

A misty morning walk with Suki gave us an opportunity to hear many birds and fauna. Our guide was amazing at identifying the species by their song or flight pattern. With many thanks, we were off onto our next adventure, the Annapurna trek.

Another bus ride got us to Pokhara, a beautiful town by Phewa Lake, near the Himalayan foothills. We had a free day to explore the surroundings. Shannon joined us and we hiked up to a viewpoint to see our friend, Garth, take flight on his paragliding wing.



*On the slopes near Pokhara where Garth Paraglided*



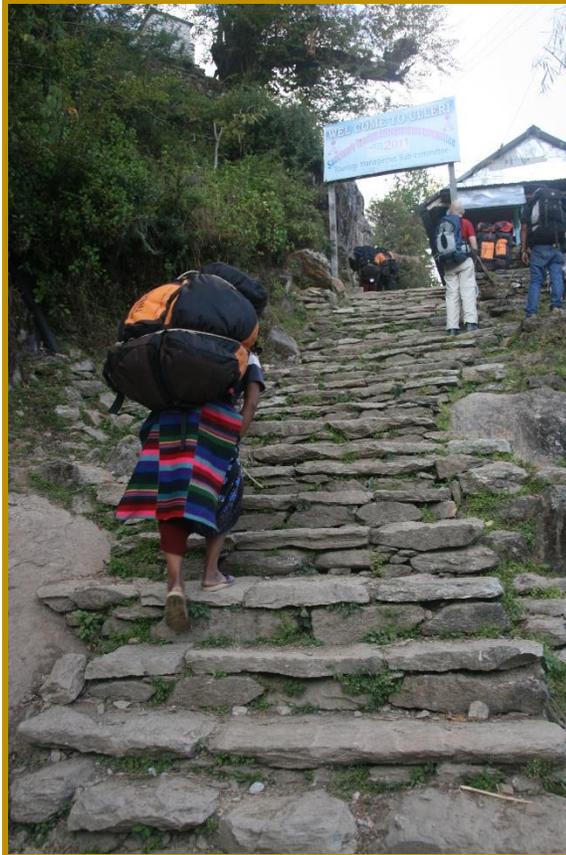
*Julie Makes a Friend*

Day 1 of the Annapurna trek started with another bus ride to the village of Nayapul. Our chief guide, Teki, was accompanied by 4 guide trainees and 6 porters (ours: Nemi) who would carry most of our gear. We met our fellow trekkers: Rose and Gary, Vicky and Rick, Art and Val, Gary and Leslie, And our friends Julie W. and Shannon. Our main guides were Christine and Ian.

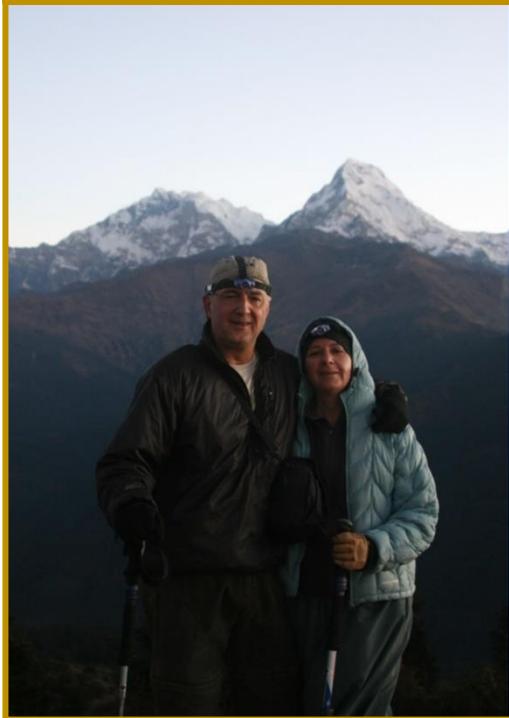


*Our Group*

Our lesson of the first day was when faced with a mule train on the trail, it was important to hug the mountain side of the path, otherwise the animals could easily bump us off. The path was mainly stone steps slowly gaining altitude. The old suspension bridges seemed flimsy but held our weight and swayed gently as we crossed over fast moving streams. Our lungs burned a



*Endless Climbing*



*Poon Hill and Machapuchare*

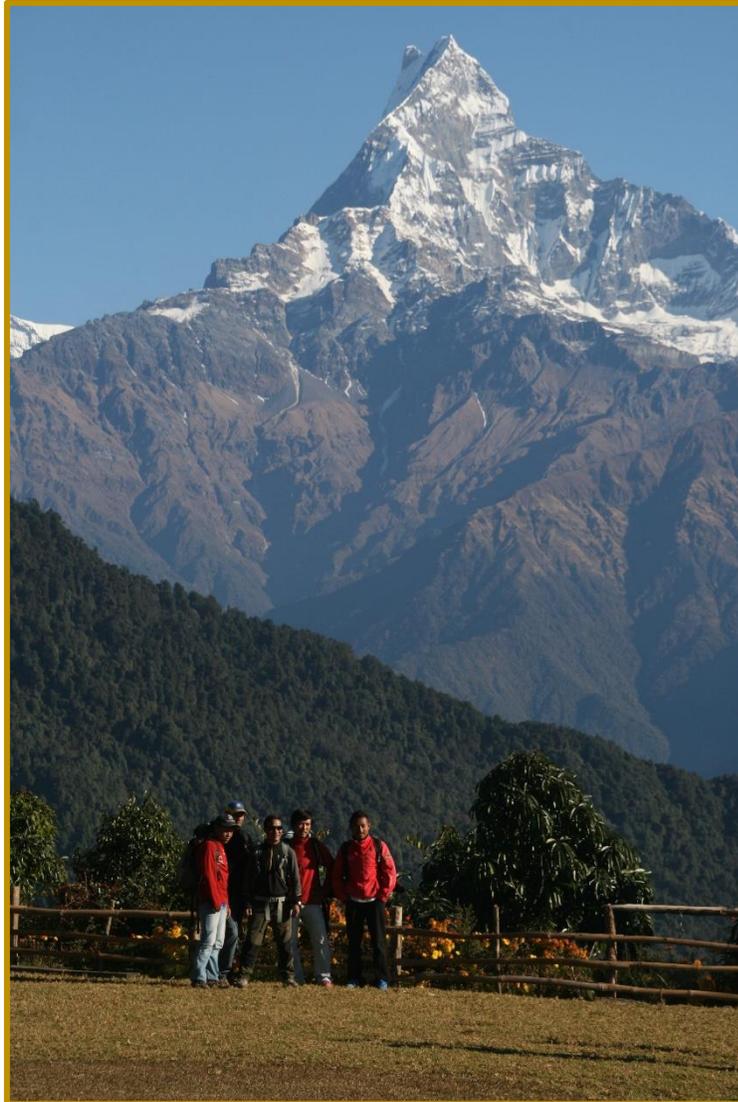
bit as we were not yet accustomed to the altitude. By 4pm we arrived at our Guest-house in Uleri, the Meera Hotel. Once dinner was over, we all had a quick wash and went to bed.

With a slow steady pace, we climbed over 1000m the next day. The weather was clearing and provided an opportunity to see the fish-tail mountain called Machapuchare. We stopped for tea at 10am and stopped again for lunch at a Tea-house. By mid-afternoon, we had reached the 9,000 ft elevation and Ghorepani one of the prettiest alpine villages tucked in the saddle between 2 mountains.

Early on November 12<sup>th</sup>, we climbed to Poon Hill to watch the sunrise. We were not alone. There must have been 100 other hikers on this hilltop.



*The Villages on the Circuit*



*Our Guides with Machapuchare*

The cold did not dampen our spirits as the sunrise touching the high peaks was a spectacular sight. Down we went for breakfast and the continuance of our trek. This was a long 6-hour day with 800m elevation gain and 1,500m elevation loss. Our knees were throbbing, but our spirits soared with the breath-taking views of South Annapurna.

After a good night's sleep at Chitre, we started our day with a stretching session, lead by Julie. As we set off, the group split into the faster hikers and the slower ones. Rose had been feeling ill and was starting to feel more energetic and decided to head off before the group after lunch. Unfortunately, she took a wrong turn and got lost. Our guides acted quickly and soon she was found, and the group was reunited. When we arrived at Ghinu Dada, we strolled to the hot springs. But the area was crowded with other hikers and so we retreated to the bar.

After consulting with our guides, we decided not to take a long break mid-day. This meant we arrived in Landrung before noon. We spent the afternoon exploring the village and resting. Vicky found a bakery and bought 2 pies which were shared amongst the group.

The second to last day on the trek, we ascended 800m on stone steps to a pass at Bhinchok Deurali where we stopped for lunch and a bit of shopping. We walked the ridge to Pothana and then down to the Australian camp for the night. The views of the Himalaya were exceptional. That evening there was a party with the guides and porters to thank them for their fine work. We shared a traditional meal of Daal-Baht (lentils and rice) for dinner.

After a gorgeous sunrise and hearty breakfast, we descended into a valley and our exit point, the village of Khanda. A short bus ride returned us to Pokhara where we enjoyed a leisurely afternoon of sightseeing.



*Julie on the Swing at the Australian Camp*



The domestic flight from Pokhara to Kathmandu gave us another opportunity to admire the Himalaya. That evening our guides invited us to a farewell dinner at an Indian steak house. It was quite the experience. The 5 waiters were overseen by the head mistress who shouted out orders over the much too loud music. The service was curt, interrupting the toasts. But our Tika chicken was very tasty. Our friends parted ways and were heading home. We were on our own again.

On November 18<sup>th</sup>, we flew back to Pokhara for more time in this amazing city. The following day was elections day, and we were advised to stay away from the town's center. We opted for a hike to the World Peace Temple. The way was loosely described in our guidebook. We walked through suburbs, then farmland until we found the path that led uphill through the forest.



*The World Peace Temple*

After a tour of the temple, the book suggested a return trip via a circumnavigation of the Phewa Lake. But the trail led deep into the hillside villages, and we got lost. Arriving at a lake-side hamlet, we saw a man with an oar. 'Are you going to Pokhara?' with much sign language, he invited us to join him in his skiff. We left shore, he paddled to another village dock and called out. Soon another 2 men joined us. Another stop and our boat was filled with 5 men and us. We were apprehensive and hoped we weren't going to have to swim to shore. They offered us oranges, we prayed for a safe landing. The man was true to his word and arrived at the Pokhara dock. After a bit of sign language, he



*Proper (Fucked) Lost near Pokhara*

suggested 500 rupees would be a good price for his efforts; we were so glad to be safe, we gave him 1,000.

Our friends, Garth, and Ellie offered a paragliding flight over the city for the following day. We got to the flight stand early, signed in and were driven up to the launch area. Our flight guides,



*We are Paragliding!*

Vitali, and Ivan helped us don the harnesses and explained the process of taking flight.

Walk, run, and sit. Simple enough. Julie's

flight went well. Her guide managed to find a thermal and stayed in the environs of Pokhara.

The flight lasted less than an hour before landing in the valley. Simon's flight was different. His

pilot found thermal after thermal and was soon gliding very high over the mountains. Simon

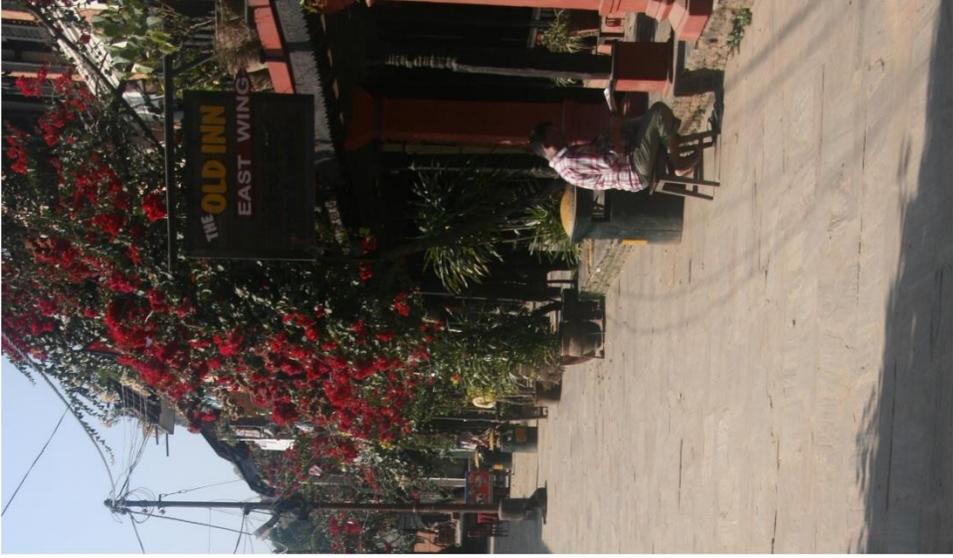
seemed a bit queasy when he finally landed. It was a great experience, but it was not a sport we

would pursue.



*Bat Caves*

*Julie with an Official Bindi*



*A Memorable Motorbike Trip to Bandipur*

Simon rented a Yamaha motorbike. He was yearning to try out driving in this country. First thing, getting lost in the city, Simon's favorite type of sightseeing. We found caves to explore in regional parks. We were the only Caucasians there and the locals wanted to take our picture. We were blessed by a Sadhu (religious man). In another cave were 100's of bats; it was very interesting. Our guide showed us the exit which required a bit of rock climbing through a small gap.

Next day, our plan was to visit Bandipur, a restored hillside village nearby. We joined the crazy traffic and left town. The highways were a free-for-all. Simon quickly learned the signals of when to pass or slowdown. We found the turn-off for Bandipur and headed up a steep switch-backing road up to a crest. The town was small but beautifully restored. After a chai and toast, we returned toward Pokhara. Simon was really pleased with the day, but Julie was sore all over from fear and from holding on so tight to the bike.



For our last day in Pokhara, Simon booked a motorcycle day with Hearts and Tears Co. He had to learn to ride a Royal Enfield bike. This British bike had mirror image controls compared to North-American bikes. After his orientation, his

***Riding a Royal Enfield in the Himalayas!***

group headed off toward Kushma, a village about 20km beyond Nayapul (start of trek). The route followed a highway, then a few dirt roads and finally some dirt tracks into the hills. They had a lunch at an organic farm/restaurant before returning to town. The mayhem of the traffic and the magnificent vistas made this a very special day for Simon. Julie took advantage of Simon's absence to relax and get a massage.

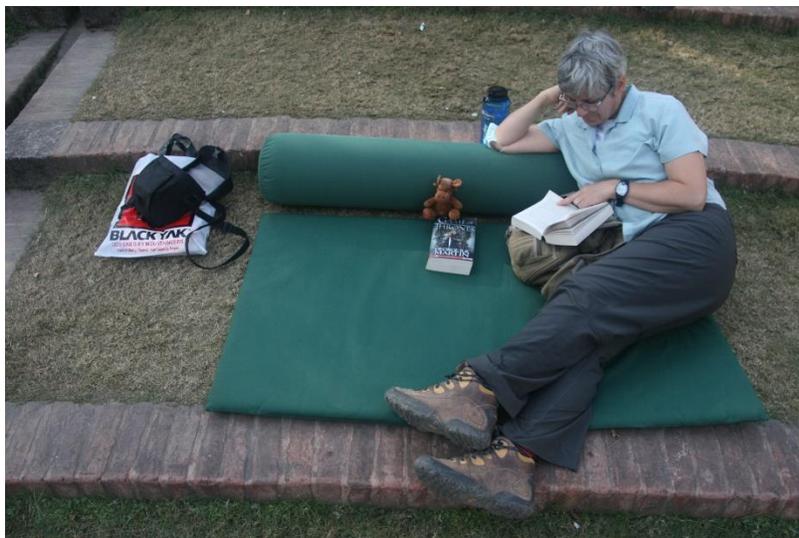


For our last few days in Kathmandu, we had reservations at the Kantipur Temple House. It was magnificent with ornate wood carvings, sculptures, and meditation gardens. They even came to our rooms at night with hot water bottles for our bed!



*Life in Buddhavat*

We took a taxi to Buddhavat to visit this bustling city. The children all dressed in uniforms were heading to school and the villagers were busy selling their wares in their colourful stalls. Our lunch was taken in a tower overlooking the town's square. A 2-hour walk got us back to our hotel, dusty and tired.



*Relaxing in the Park "Garden of Dreams"*

Our last day was spent in Thamel, doing some shopping for trinkets for our friends and family back home. Simon enjoyed haggling with the vendors. We stopped one more time at the Garden of Dreams to enjoy the beautiful park. We said our goodbyes to this amazing country, rich with history and culture, and its friendly people. Our return flights got us home safe, already dreaming of our next adventures.



***“ALL TRULY GREAT THOUGHTS ARE CONCEIVED WHILE WALKING”***

***Friedrich Nietzsche***