

Jomsom & Annapurna Sanctuary Treks: 6 October to 7 November

Walkers: Jeff, Liz, Lothar, Mike, and friends (Rowan, Amy and Gordon, etc)

Jeff's: For me, the trip to Nepal was a revisit of my very enjoyable trip in 1980, or 27 years ago!! Of course, a lot of things have changed over that time, but surprisingly, many things hadn't.

Nepal is a poor country and continual effective "civil war" between the government and the Maoists over the last 10 years has either rendered the infrastructure ineffective, or else it is ineffective anyway. Despite living and working in Asia (Hong Kong), I was surprised at how poor and undeveloped the country was. Plus the warm and friendly people I remembered from almost 30 years ago were quickly fading as the scramble for rupees and making a living produced quite a mercenary class of shopkeepers, merchants, beggars, touts, etc. But this was pretty much confined to Kathmandu, once we got out of this city, the people improved, as well as the pollution levels.

Pokhara was an enjoyable city, not as hectic at the Thamel area of Kathmandu that we stayed in on arrival, but being surrounded by mountains and clearer skies improved the feeling of the place. Despite our guide not meeting us at the airport, we managed to find a hotel, then a guide and porters, plus book our tickets for the Jomsom flight the next morning – amazing. Then we were really off on our adventure.

Liz, Mike, Lothar and I walked up the valley by ourselves to Kagbeni, to one of our favourite guest houses of the whole trip. Wonderful apple crumble, as it is apple orchard country. Our guide, Dipendra, and two porters, Till and Nima, joined us very late the first night, having travelled overland while we enjoyed the luxury of flight. We then started our trek proper, with a few days walk up to Muktinath on the way to the Thorung La pass. We reached 4100m as part of our acclimatization, with sleep problems at night and for me, nausea in the morning. Never mind, we



then set off down the valley again, through Jomsom and onto Marpha. Lots of marihuana growing wild by the side of the road. And it was a road, with jeeps, trucks, tractors and lots of donkey trains, carrying goods up and down the valley.

In a couple of days, we had our first rest day at Tatopani, where we enjoyed the hot springs and finally caught up with the O'Briens (Ami, Rowan and Gordon), who walked over the Thorung La pass the day we were in Muktinath. They were all well, but looking forward to finishing their walk, after more than 2 weeks of solid work.

We then headed up the Annapurna valley to Poon Hill, with the O'Briens heading off to Pokhara and, as Ami said, a real holiday! The views of Machhapuchre ('fishtail' mountain) grew better and better as we walked up the valley over the next 4 days. We finally reached Annapurna Base Camp at 4,200m, our highest point of the trek. The mountains were superb – ringed right around us and we enjoyed clear early morning skies as we watching the sun rise over the range, plus an amazing clear night with a full moon, showing the majestic mountains to their very best. It burnt into our eyes and memories.

After that, the trek was downhill for a few days, as we walked our way out of the Annapurna Conservation Zone (no water or beer bottles allowed). We were looking forward to the end, after 21 days of walking in which we probably covered about 200 km. Not bad for the 'oldies' – average age 60 years old. Mike did very well, considering his 6-way bypass operations just 2 years ago; he was the fittest and best walker in the group.

We then spent a few days in Pokhara, with Liz and Mike going onto the Chitwan National Park, while Lothar and I caught a bus back to Kathmandu. A few days shopping back in the turmoil and dust of Thamel, desperate searches for souvenirs for loved ones back home, and then flying out to our previous lives.



It was a very rewarding experience to spend 3 full weeks walking amongst the hills and people of Nepal in such a beautiful region as the Annapurna ranges. Despite the tendency of the locals to 'rip you off' when they have half a chance, the cost of traveling is very low, with food and accommodation costs laughable by Australian standards. I think my costs were about A\$15 a day for the guides/porters, plus the same for room and food on the trek. Dearer in Pokhara and Kathmandu of course, but it was a low cost holiday by any standards. I am definitely going back again, having already booked my flight for a 15 day walk to Everest Base Camp. I really look forward to it.

Lothar's:

Where did we go?

The Jomsom Trek to Tatopani and then via Ghorepani/Poon Hill, Tadapani and Chhomrong to the Annapurna Sanctuary. The idea was to avoid the high 5418m Thorung La pass. We flew from Kathmandu to Pokhara and then from Pokhara to Jomsom. Our itinerary was as per the attached document above. After the trek, 2 of us went to Chitwan National Park while the other two returned to Kathmandu by tourist bus.

What were the highlights?

It's not often that you get a chance to walk every day for 21 days - I loved it. Especially when someone else is carrying the bulk of your gear! Nepal is so different to Australia that everything about it is a marvel. As last time, the people on the trek - both local and fellow travellers - were fantastic, and the lodges and food were excellent. We also ventured off the main thoroughfare on a couple of occasions, visiting hidden villages - excellent! We met up with 3 other groups from South West Victoria and joined in a 60th birthday celebration with the Portland crowd. In Thamel/Kathmandu we found a lovely quiet place for breakfast, lunch, happy hour, and dinner: Delima Garden (accessed via a corridor next to the Prince Guest House). We enjoyed visiting Boudhanath Stupa and Bhaktapur, and exploring the streets around Asan (south of Thamel).



What were the worst bits?

Pollution, car horns & touts in Thamel/Kathmandu. Everyone trying to rip you off - Hotels, taxis, shops, etc - so you have to know the going rate for lots of things and do a fair bit of shopping around. Chest infections (Jeff & Lothar), and still a bit of a struggle at altitude and on some of the steep bits! When we first got to Pokhara our guide didn't show up. So within an hour the Manager at our hotel (Karki Guest House) had arranged our guide, 2 porters, and flights to Jomsom. There is now a 4WD track that goes from Muktinath all the way back to Beni - this cuts out some of the romance of the Jomsom trek.

What were the expenses like?

During the trek an Australian dollar was worth about 55 Rupees, and a US dollar about 60 Rupees. We budgeted on less than \$50/day during the trek. Daily costs on the trek ranged from 600 - 1200 Rupees per day for all food and accommodation. Porters cost us an extra 700R/day and our guide 1100R/day. We had 2 porters and 1 guide between the 4 of us.

Prices were fixed at the lodges and increased the higher up you went in altitude. You got a great selection of food and drinks. If you purchased the local "Dal/Dhal Bhat" (lentil soup, rice, curried vegies, some greens) you would usually get seconds. From the lodges you could buy bottled water (20-150R/litre bottle), "boiled & filtered" water (that you would treat with iodine, etc), or purchase [Ozone treated water in selected villages](#). On cold nights some of the lodges put red hot coals or kero heaters under the tables to keep the feet warm - this service cost about 30-50Rs/person.

It cost us 2000Rs in Kathmandu for the Annapurna Conservation Area Permit. We also paid 100-200R each to the Maoists for their compulsory "donation". Internal flights cost us about US\$60-70 each.

What was a typical day like?

Out of bed at about 6-7am. Packed and had breakfast (such as porridge or



muesli, eggs, pancake, tea/coffee). Started trekking 7-9am. Stopped once or twice for a cuppa or soup. Lunch was usually 12-2pm. We mostly finished our walks by mid afternoon or earlier. We'd then check into a lodge, have (solar heated or gas powered) showers at lower altitudes (and a bucket of water at high altitudes), changed & washed some clothes, chatted with fellow trekkers, ordered dinner at about 4-5pm, chatted & had drinks, dinner at about 6-7pm, and off to bed by about 7-8pm (yes - very early!).

Any specific advice?

The Annapurna Sanctuary area was very busy and large trekking groups sent porters/Sherpas ahead to book lodges. At ABC it's a bottle neck - we had 2 porters sharing a single bed in our room and another slept amongst the rafters. Some places had no room left and so many independent travellers couldn't get accommodation. Even some of the large groups ended up having to sleep on benches and tables in dining rooms. I'd recommend anyone going on the Sanctuary trek to take a tent and sleeping mat - just in case! Also, take note of your government's travel advice (eg <http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Nepal>) and take plenty of medications - including antibiotics for chest infections, etc. Also take note of the advice in relevant travel books.



Group 2's itinerary

| Day | Start; end next row | Time | End Alt | Comments |
|-----|---------------------|------|---------|--|
| 1 | Melb | | | |
| 2 | Kathmandu | | | |
| 3 | Kathmandu | | | |
| 4 | Pokhara | 3 | 2810 | fly to Jomsom (2700) then walk |
| 5 | Kagbeni | | | rest day or walk to teahouse near Jharkot |
| 6 | Kagbeni | 3 | 3500 | walk to Muktinath & Temple |
| 7 | Jharkot | 1 | 3800 | walk up to tea houses at 4100m; no Group 1. |
| 8 | Muktinath | 7-9 | 2665 | |
| 9 | Marpha | 4 | 2550 | walk to Thasang village |
| 10 | Larjung | 3-4 | 2080 | |
| 11 | Ghasa | 5-6 | 1200 | finally meet up with Group 1 |
| 12 | Tatopani | | | rest day; hot springs; walk to nearby villages |
| 13 | Tatopani | 3-4 | 1980 | |
| 14 | Sikha | 3-4 | 2874 | |
| 15 | Ghorepani | 6 | 2725 | Pre-dawn climb up Poon Hill |
| 16 | Tadapani | 5 | 2040 | Group 1 leaves & goes to Ghandruk |
| 17 | Chhomrong | 6 | 2606 | |
| 18 | Dovan | 3-4 | 3230 | |
| 19 | Deurali | 2 | 3940 | walk up to ABC & book rooms for next day |
| 20 | MBC | 2 | 4130 | |
| 21 | ABC | 6-7 | 2606 | |
| 22 | Dovan | 5-6 | 2040 | |
| 23 | Chhomrong | 5 | 1700 | via Taglung, New Bridge and Landruk |
| 24 | Tolka | 5 | | walk to Phedi; drive to Pokhara; |
| 25 | Pokhara | | | rest day; shopping, row around lake, etc |
| 26 | Pokhara | | | plus other variants |
| 27 | Kathmandu | | | sightseeing KMD or Chitwan NP |
| 28 | Kathmandu | | | sightseeing KMD or Chitwan NP |
| 29 | Kathmandu | | | sightseeing Bouddhanath |
| 30 | Kathmandu | | | sightseeing Bhaktapur |
| 31 | Kathmandu | | | |
| 32 | Bangkok | | | |
| 33 | Melbourne | | | |



Long Forest Nature Reserve: 14 October

Walkers: *Leader: John M*

On a pleasant Sunday morning I joined John & Glenda M and 8 others from the Geelong Bushwalking Club to walk the Western Circuit of the Long Forest Nature Reserve north west of Bacchus Marsh.

The circuit took us along 4WD tracks and footpads along the mainly dry Coimadai Creek. Stands of Blue Box and Saltbush were prominent in the flatter areas. We passed a number of slate cliffs and a deep hole where miners had followed a quartz reef in the search for gold.

After lunch we left the creek and climbed out of the valley. We crossed to a high point and came across a number of Moonah trees, a type of Melaleuca. In keeping with tradition, John finished the trip with some off-track walking through sparsely vegetated Mallee bushland.

The group rounded off the day with a visit to a roadside market near Bacchus Marsh for fruit and coffee.

Thanks to John for again offering a new walk to the Warrnambool calendar.

Coralie G

Enfield Forest Walk: 27 October

Walkers: Helen, Linda, John, Di D & Leader Di F

An early start had us on the way to Enfield about 7.30pm. The temperature was predicted to reach 28 degrees so we were well prepared for the heat with lots of water, sun hats, screen, gaiters etc.

Leaving Enfield, we walked on a 4WD track for a short distance before diverting onto a narrow clay walking track. This led us up many small hills and down into dry creek beds. It was interesting to notice the gold diggings and I thought of the hard working miners of bygone days searching for their lucky strike. It was hard to imagine all those dry creek beds once rushing with water. There were many lovely orchids and other wild flowers dotting the dry landscape.

After having our lunch at Surface Point picnic area we noticed a memorial grave stone dedicated to the Chinese miners who had worked and lost their lives in the Goldfields.

Leaving the picnic area on the narrow walking track we continued through the forest until we came to a major road where we had a vote – to follow the road back to the cars (the long way) or to go off track (the short way). The short cut won, so off we went. This proved to be very interesting - and a new experience for some of the party. We startled a Wallaby and a couple of Kangaroos along the way. This section had it all (as far as off track walking goes) hills, hollows, prickles, fallen logs and many dangerous mine shafts. We also passed some old abandoned equipment. John had set his GPS to lead us back to our cars so we navigated through the challenging terrain to reach them.

The last part of the day was in lovely regenerated burn area where the going was much easier. We finally crossed a dam wall and made our way back to the cars. For most of us, this was our first walk in the heat since last summer and we certainly knew we had done a walk!

Thanks Di for a great Day.

Diane Drake

The Piccaninny 10 November

Walkers: Anne, Doug, Helen, Linda (leader) and Vivienne.

Bridgewater Bay to the Lighthouse was advertised as the walk for this day. However, up until the Wednesday night there were only Helen and myself going. I decided that we would change location and go to Dunkeld and walk the Piccaninny with our full packs on. I then received a call from Anne and Doug to say they were interested in joining the walk so I convinced them to join us. Then on Friday Vivienne decided to join us as well.

We left Koroit quite early as it was to be a really hot day. After the obligatory coffee we head for the short walk up the Piccaninny. There were magnificent views over the district as the sky was clear. As a group we decided to walk down the other side and join the track which goes to Mount Sturgeon. When we met this track we then headed out to the Mount Sturgeon car park. By this time it was about 11:30 and starting to heat up. There was a bike ride on that weekend so I asked one of the support vehicles if they would take our 2 drivers back to the Piccaninny car park. We then headed into Dunkeld for a most enjoyable lunch.

Although this walk was a lot shorter than anticipated we had a great time together. We laughed and giggled about every silly little thing we could and of course we had some wonderful food. It highlighted to me that the Warrnambool Walkers is all about the people first and the walking is just what brings us together.

Thanks for a lovely day Anne, Doug, Helen and Vivienne.

Linda

Xmas Breakup: 1–2 December

Ross and Marg Atkins of Paeston Canoe Hire provided us with a superb venue for our accommodation and outdoor Christmas festivities. Everyone contributed to the wonderful spirit of camaraderie, and culinary consumption of a grand scale. One of the many grand successes was the demobilising of the 40 second tweaky fire alarm system that assisted the sleepers in the bungalow to a good night's rest. (Peter)

Peter B organised the Xmas break-up with military precision. Arrive by 9.00 am to receive a briefing about the canoe exercise, what to bring etc. At precisely 9.30 am, we formed a convoy behind the 4 wheel drive driven by our host Ross to drive to Moleside Camp. After a car shuffle to take Peter's car to our destination, we launched our three canoes onto the beautiful Glenelg River. Peter in a single kayak, Val and Leo, and Liz and Mike in double canoes. The river is beautiful, blue sky, clear water, and healthy bush and trees on the banks. The wind was at our backs most of the time, so travelling downstream was effortless and very peaceful. We met the walkers for lunch at Saunders Landing, and then paddled onto Pritchard's Camp. (Mike & Liz)

Splashing around in the canoes at Saunders Landing after lunch was most enjoyable, even if it was the only real exercise for the day. Thanks very much to Peter for the idea and the organisation of the weekend. An excellent choice. (Coralie)

Snakes to the left of us, snakes to the right. Wriggly horrible (4 foot) creatures. I couldn't wait to meet up with the paddlers, and get away from them (the snakes). Paeston Canoe Hire venue was terrific, and the idea was great. It all worked out well. (Linda)

Paeston Canoe Hire is a lovely place for camping. Lawn area and broad canopy of trees to sit under in the afternoon to enjoy a cold beer and nibbles after a great walk. Another highlight was seeing Linda in a frock!! What a fright!!! (Helen)

Great place, good company, What more could you ask for? Thankyou Peter for a successful camp breakup. (Anne and Doug)

Good weather, excellent company and great food. (Ken)

When I covered my head and face with a fly net, Ken said "That's an improvement". The flies here were pests!!

Thanks Peter for booking the great campsite at Paeston. A great Christmas party. Ken and Marg

The thrill was having EVERY girl at the campsite sitting on my knee. No wonder I look forward to Christmas. (Santa)

Glad Peter was able to de-tweet the smoke detector in the kitchen. It would have driven us all mad(der).

Great spot on a hot day under the Euc. Ficololia (flowering gum) tree. A nice grassy camping area.

The campers included Ken and Marg, Coralie and Di D, Helen, Linda, Anne and Doug, Leo and Val, Sandra and Tony, Eliz and Mike. We all thank Peter for his excellent organisation of a very enjoyable Xmas breakup.

Great Ocean Walk: 19–22 December

Walkers: *Linda H, Helen A and Marg F.*

We had to convince our bus driver that it would be safe to drop us off at the turn off to Red Johanna. It is unfortunately not a designated V/Line stop, so it was inappropriate of us to assume he would do it. (I think it was the bribe of a cup of coffee that swayed him.)

We had a very relaxing drive down and as the rain was pelting the bus windows we all started to wonder what on earth we were doing. After we were dropped the first thing we had to do was put our fly nets on, they were thick and disgusting. We had decided to stay at the public camping ground rather than pay \$20 per site at the G.O.W. sites. After the arrival at Red Johanna we explored the beach where Sandra had her accident several weeks before. We were surprised to find that the water flowing out to the ocean was quite drinkable following the recent rains.

The next morning we headed inland and followed farmer's fences for quite some time with the occasional view out over the cliffs towards the ocean. The track swung back to the cliffs and down to the sand. A short walk on the sand was followed by a steep climb (the only hard rated section on the whole G.O.W. track) then down through some gullies. The scenery was always stunning and occasionally quite breathtaking.

Along the way we met a statue offering us water, the owners of the property had placed a statue out the front with an ice cooler full of fresh water for walkers, what a lovely idea. We also met the driver of the G.O.W. shuttle bus who we nearly convinced that he should drop off some beer at Ryan's Den for us, but at the last minute withdrew his offer. After arriving at Ryan's Den we set up camp and had a cuppa under the 3 sided shelters, these shelters later proved to be invaluable for us, more about that later. I was extremely delighted with the rooms with a view; it was easy to spend a lot of time in them.

The next morning we headed off again, with fly nets. Not all that far along the track I unfortunately fell down a hole and twisted my ankle, we left the boot on for fear of my ankle swelling and then not being able to put it back on. Once the pain killers kicked in we were able to continue. A lot of time was spent walking (hobbling) on a gravel road which serviced a couple of dairy farms. At the decision point we decided to take the inland route, set up camp and then go back to Wreck Beach for a stroll. This inland route proved to be most uninteresting and we were all struggling with the hardness of the track. With sighs of relief the camp site finally came into view and we were quick to make our cuppas and relax. However, the sky started to loom grey overhead as we quickly set our tents up and moved into the shelter. Then the heavens opened. The wind blew fierce and rain just kept belting down. Any thought of a stroll back on the beach quickly left our heads. We eventually decided not to sleep in the tents as all the sites were awash with water flowing over them. We set up camp in the shelter with our sleeping bags on the bench seats. For a brief minute the wind and rain eased and we made a dash for our tents and hung them up around the shelters. Marg had hers hanging in and around the room with a view while Helen and I hung ours so they acted as a curtain around the opening. Amazingly enough we all had a great night's sleep and none of us fell off the bench.

The next morning saw the rain still pelting down as we headed out on the last stretch. By this time my ankle was turning black and blue but Helen had it strapped so tight that I was able to manage with my boot on. We got to Princetown and went in for a late morning tea. I made the decision to call home and Irene arrived later in the morning. I offered for Helen and Marg to continue without me and we would pick them up at the end but I think the constant rain and wind had got to us all.

I learnt from this walk how easy it is for accidents to happen and how wonderful the Warrnambool Walkers are in times of need. Thank you Helen and Marg for supporting me when I was ready to give up, your encouragement and enthusiasm enabled me to find something within which overcame the pain and focus on the beauty around us. I can highly recommend this walk as those rooms with a view are something to be seen to be believed. *Linda*