

“Beyond The Bridges”¹

A Journey to Tibet, and Chomolungma- April/May 2011



This book is again dedicated to my wife, confidante and mate, Janet.

As ever, she allows and encourages me to be me.

This photobook² was probably never destined to be written. It is the sequel to my similar journal “Bridges I Have Crossed” which was written as a result of my trip to Nepal just 12 months earlier.

¹ Editor note, October 2021. The text herein is largely unedited from the original text written in 2011, other than to remove references (mainly to photographs) which are no longer relevant.

² I refer throughout to this being a “photobook”, and I refer to actual images. They are not reproduced in this version, but many can be found [here](#). Sometimes I have removed the photo caption, other times I have left it in place for the story it tells

Readers of that book will recall the strength of my then conviction that I would not be heading off on a trip like this again -- that I found the separation from my wife and mate Janet something I did not want to re-experience.

So how then did this come to be? There is not a clear answer to that question. It goes to many conflicting reasons. As with the first trip, this one had its genesis in a book, although I saw the movie version of the book before I read the book itself. The book, and the movie, was *Seven Years in Tibet*, the amazing autobiographical story of Heinrich Harrer set in the late 1930s and 1940s. Early in the movie, in justification of his imminent departure and in what I assume was a strong piece of artistic licence, Harrer says to his wife "but it is the Himalaya". The strength of those words, within that context, have always stayed with me, and well before this trip was planned, I have been known to periodically quote them to Janet in justification of something or other. The book is an amazing read, and chronicles a journey of great hardship by Harrer, and his eventual lifelong friendship with His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

With what is a most fortuitous coincidence, on the morning of Tuesday 17 May, as I was preparing to leave Nepal, at the Kathmandu International Airport I chanced upon another book I did not know existed -- this time *Return to Tibet* -- also by Heinrich Harrer. What a bonus. I started to read it immediately, and found from page 1 that I could readily relate to much of what he says. This book, a "sequel" after a fashion to *Seven Years in Tibet*, and written in 1982, describes the changes in Tibet in the 30 years after he wrote his first account of life in Lhasa, and some 20 years since he was forced to flee with the Dalai Lama in 1959. The great sadness is that what I have experienced in much of the three weeks I spent in Tibet absolutely mirrors Herr Harrer's reactions. Early in his book Harrer implies an optimism that common-sense and decency will prevail in Tibet and that the Chinese authorities will relax their dominant ways -- that was certainly his hope and the view he was expressing for much of his journal. By the end of the book, in an epilogue, he had, to his great sadness, come to an alternate viewpoint. Nothing I saw suggests that this was not the case -- the strong impression that I am left with is that the Chinese have strengthened not relaxed their hard line.

Both the domination by and the paranoia of the Chinese government to the Tibetan situation and people appears to me to be more alive now than it was when Harrer returned to Tibet almost 30 years ago now. It is probably just as well that he is no longer alive to see the situation as it is today.

To continue the book references for a moment, not long after my return to Australia I chanced upon a book of photographs *Khampa, Portraits of Eastern Tibet*. This is a new book, only published last year, and what made it special was a foreword by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, dated April 2010, in which he said:

I have been encouraging people to visit Tibet and see for themselves the people, the country, and the situation that prevails there.

I feel it is important for people to have some idea of what is being lost, not only for Tibetans but also for the world at large. It is through pictorial books like this that help to create better awareness about Tibet, its rich culture, and the potential to serve humanity.

I am well aware that His Holiness did not write these words for me. But these words spoke to me, and they seem to well fit the spirit of my book.

I did not set out in any way to journal a political piece. But my personal experiences -- including the strictly controlled way we were marshalled through our visit to the Potala; the endless, and meaningless, passport and security checks; the way the security forces checked any book that anyone dared to bring into the country in case they were seditious in nature; the overbearing nature and presence of the police and army on the streets of Lhasa in particular; the personal experiences and enforced image deletion when I happened to point my camera in the “wrong” direction; the strength of the apprehension (almost fear) of our guides in the event that we, as visitors, would ask a wrong question at the wrong time about the Panchen Lama, or even dare to mention the Dalai Lama; each and every one of which I witnessed or experienced -- all of these and more quietly enraged me. Add to this the “fact” that the authorities detain and even shoot their citizens for wanting to leave and my indignation has been well and truly roused -- the somewhat quixotic and at times uncompromising attitude for which I am sometimes known. I recognise that the central Chinese Government, with its 1.2 billion citizens to govern has a challenge on its hands, and that maybe it sees that control is the only workable answer. But from my perspective, and with the benefit of living a day-to-day Western life, this is not an acceptable way to manage one’s citizens.

So this book may become some form of commentary on Tibetan affairs as they are today. I don’t profess to be an expert. But I can recognise injustice when I see it, and so I will comment accordingly. I’m unsure where I will take this, but writing this in this form is a start.

Lastly, though, some credit where it may be due. Despite my comments above, I did see what seemed to be restoration and/or maintenance work at the Potala and the Drepung Monastery, and the Norbulingka appeared to be in reasonably good repair. Whether, cynically, this is simply to attract the tourist revenue, or to put on a “good face”, or whether this is indeed a genuine attempt to restore and maintain some of these cultural icons, I don’t know.

But back to the genesis of this particular work. Post my 2010 Nepal trip, once the memories of the separation from Janet had faded somewhat, the memories of the excitement and adventure (and the fear) remained as the dominant recollections. I didn’t have specific plans to do something again, until a few months after the last trip I heard of this one again being escorted by Lincoln Hall. Indeed, it was Lincoln who alerted me to it, and I am told that I somewhat “jumped the gun”, being the first person to register with World Expeditions, even before the trip had been officially announced. (And I am told that the trip was filled in just a few days.) So in that way I guess it was meant to be.

The twists and turns of the world being what they are, Lincoln did not in fact join us. He was clearly unwell when he arrived in Kathmandu, and apart from a brief, introductory group meeting on Sunday 24th April, we did not see him again. Much later in the trek we were to find out that he spent around the next fortnight making initial recuperations in Kathmandu before eventually being repatriated to hospital in Australia.

Even before I set foot in Nepal or Tibet I had decided to title this book as I have. It is more than just a sequel; it is an allusion to the challenges I had to face last time -- heights, swing bridges, being alone in a crowd -- and a reference to the hope that I have learned and grown as a result of those past experiences. And to the physical challenge of hiking around 5000 metres, and the allied even stronger mental challenge of keeping going when seemingly all energy has been depleted. The events particularly of 10 May reinforce this. This was a salient lesson for me -- a key reminder that whenever life gets really tough, whether it be in a business or personal sense, sometimes there is no option other than to keep going. And that having kept going, I am better for it. And lastly, to the Buddhist notion of *anicca*, the concept of Impermanence. Loosely interpreted by me as the joint ideas that nothing is quite as it seems; and that everything is in a state of constant flux. That the impossible walk to the top of the pass will indeed be achieved, that both the "good" times and the "bad" times will end. And that there is little to be gained from worrying about it.

These, for me, are lessons which extend well beyond simply a few weeks in the mountains.

This photobook contains around a tenth of the images I captured during this amazing three week trip. I've aimed to record a wide spread of spiritual places, symbols and artefacts, people and scenery, balanced with a bit of a story of each image, or collection of images. Beyond just recording my journey, it aims to tell a little of the story of Tibet, past and present. I hope that this book gives you the reader as much enjoyment viewing this completed work, as it gave me pleasure initially collecting the images and then editing them and their stories into something coherent.

Like the last one, this book is dedicated to my wife, partner, mate Janet. I think that this will be the last time I go on a trip like this on my own. As I left Perth on Saturday 23rd April, she said something very poignant to me -- noting that I was leaving her (albeit only for three weeks) as recently had her father, mother and sisters, all of course in very different ways. So now it's time to stay.

Peter Campbell
June 2011

Day 4 – Tuesday 26 April: Kathmandu - Lhasa

Today represented the proper start of the journey. I had arrived safely in Kathmandu two days previously, and once again thoroughly enjoyed being a visitor in that crazy city. For reasons which probably make little sense, I am using the World Expeditions day numbering system, so today was Day 4 of the trip -- Day 1 being the previous Saturday when I left Perth for Singapore.

But today was where the real adventure began. After a seemingly interminable wait at Kathmandu airport, we left at 2:00pm Lhasa time (11:45am China time) on our Air China A319 for our one hour -- 630 klm -- journey to Lhasa. The excitement was palpable -- mine not the least. We flew just south of

east, along the southern side of the Himalaya, with nothing but clouds to see. Then a left turn and over the Himalaya, with Chomolungma hiding somewhere in the clouds.

Shortly afterwards we landed at Lhasa airport, which is a long way out of town. All very exciting. And a very modern airport, but cold in both senses of the word. I did not know it then, but this coldness was a portent of things to come.

On the road into the city is the Neitang Buddha (right), the largest carved Buddha in Tibet. It sits almost 10m tall, and is named after the mountain into which it is carved. It is almost 1000 years old (11th century), and is the first deity we met. I am blown away by almost anything which is 1000 years old, let alone a carving by hand into a rock mountain -- a carving which has been cared for and maintained over centuries. I wonder how it has survived the Cultural Revolution and beyond. Below are three other Buddhas which accompanied the Neitang Buddha.

The Neitang Buddha is about 40 klm out of Lhasa, and so the trip into the city slowly unfolded. It was clear that my expectations were out of alignment with reality. Lhasa is a huge, modern city (by Asian standards), and I was surprised by the commercial developments which unfolded before me as we journeyed closer to the centre of town. Modern (concrete and glass) vehicle dealerships, mobile phone companies, commercial businesses, combined with seemingly more traditional (but still three-story) Tibetan buildings, and with corner shops. A modernness and a mixture I did not expect. I realised then that I had yielded in my mind to Heinrich Harrer's view of Lhasa, and that I was at least 50 and probably 60/70 years too late.

And then of course I was transported back in time. I recall sending Janet a text that "I have just seen the Potala". At the risk of being melodramatic, driving along the 6-lane highway, and all the development described above, and then almost stumbling upon the Potala off to my left, high on the hill, was one of the moments of my life. For a moment I somehow disregarded that same 6-lane highway which runs right along the front, and which really doesn't belong there, and I was transfixed by what I was seeing.

The day ended with a traditional welcoming Yak Dance at our hotel, dinner with the group, and a good night's sleep.

Day 5 – Wednesday 27 April: Lhasa

The following pages record some of the magnificence of the Potala and surrounds. I can describe the Potala Palace in so many ways: stunning beyond my imaginings; amazing; controlled. A paradox of beauty and sadness.

Beauty for all the obvious reasons – a glorious, spiritual building with an almost 400 year history in its current form. Sadness because of the overbearing and controlling nature of the Chinese authorities and the residual fear that that seems to generate and surround at least some people.

This and the following two pages record just some of the images of this amazing place. I could fill many more pages -- indeed with full access to the building I'm sure that I could fill many books.

The crispness and the clarity of the Tibetan blue sky, which I was lucky enough to experience for much of the Potala visit, truly sets off the magnificence of the colouring and the architecture.

Construction of the Potala Palace in its current form commenced in 1645 (the first Palace was apparently built some 1000 years earlier). The Potala was the main residence of the Dalai Lama, from the 5th, who commissioned its construction, to the current Dalai Lama, the 14th, who lived there until age 24, when he fled the Chinese invasion in 1959.

The Potala soars over 100 metres from base to top. It sits on top of Marpo Ri, the Red Hill, itself some 200 metres above the valley floor. The Potala contains 13 stories of buildings, although we saw just a few. Access to the roof is denied these days. The walls are 5 metres thick at the base, and average 3 metres thick.

In 1994 the Potala was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Despite my misgivings about the highly structured nature of the visitor operations surrounding the Potala, I am all the same truly fortunate to have been able to visit this most magnificent building.

The Norbulingka was the official summer palace of the Dalai Lama. Norbulingka means "The Jewelled Park", which name rather suits it. It was built around the mid -1700s by the 7th Dalai Lama, making it about 100 years younger than the Potala. It served as the summer residence of the Dalai Lamas from around the 1780s -- during the reign of the 8th Dalai Lama -- until 1959. It covers an area of some 36 hectares, although we didn't see that much.

I was very much taken with it because of the *Seven Years in Tibet* connection which I mentioned in the introduction to this book. The radios and the film projector featured in the film and favoured by the young Dalai Lama are there to see (and indeed touch if one felt so inclined).

It was actually from the Norbulingka that the current Dalai Lama fled Lhasa in 1959. Dressed as an ordinary Tibetan -- indeed with a rifle slung over his shoulder as part of his disguise -- he and his party rode for two days before the Chinese discovered his disappearance.

The Norbulingka was damaged extensively during the Cultural Revolution. In 2001 it too was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List, and in 2003 the Chinese government committed extensive funds to its restoration.

I found it a very beautiful and peaceful place, and much less controlled than the Potala. The frescoes, the architecture, the layout -- all were very lovely and are recorded over this and the following three pages.

Day 6 – Thursday 28 April: Lhasa

Today we visited the Drepung Monastery in the morning, and the Jokhang Monastery (also known as the Tsuklakang) in the afternoon.

The Drepung monastery sits high at the foot of Mount Gephel overlooking Lhasa to the south-west, around 5 klm away.

The monastery was founded in the early 1400s, and in its heyday was the largest monastery in Tibet, when it housed up to 12,000 monks. Today perhaps 800 live there.

It is a fascinating place, and we had fairly uninterrupted access, unlike the Potala.

It was the home to the second to the fifth Dalai Lamas, and they were the abbot of the monastery. The 2nd to the 4th Dalai Lamas are entombed there -- the 5th Dalai Lama onwards are all at the Potala. (And it was the 5th who commissioned the construction of the Potala.)

The Jokhang is located in the old city. It has a fascinating history. It was initially built around the year 640, making it almost 1400 years old. It has been expanded over the centuries, and the whole area now covers some 2.5 hectares. As with many of the other places we visited, we only saw a very small part of it. Our deputy leader, Lakpa Dorje, knew a great deal about the various deities and explained a lot of the history.

The Jokhang is reported to be the most important and sacred temple in Tibet. Pilgrims come from across Tibet to circumambulate the temple -- the circumambulation route is known as the “kora”. It has special spiritual significance, and the pilgrims walk clockwise around the temple, chanting their mantras of “Om Mani Padme Hum” or similar to themselves with their prayer beads -- mala beads -- and possibly prostrating themselves near the walls of the temple. Many carry prayer wheels.

I was angered to see the Chinese troops who also circumambulated the kora -- but in reverse (I assume in defiance of the spiritual tradition) so that the pilgrims had to move out of their way -- and usually in at least partial riot gear.

Later in the afternoon I spend a couple of hours at Barkhor Square, and the temple circuit. I was fascinated by the various pilgrims, often in traditional clothing, who were completing the kora.

I also got a slight telling off by an officious policeman who thought I was taking photos of him!!

After wandering around for a while, I completely lost my bearings, and couldn't find my way out. Having ended my way down some windy alley-ways I ended up on a main street, but by then I had totally lost my sense of direction. Looking on the map afterwards I see where I went wrong. With the “help” of a policewoman, a couple of her off-siders, and unfortunately no help from 4 Tibetan men, I got bundled into a rickshaw and taken back to the hotel.

For dinner the hotel staged a cultural concert and traditional buffet. I certainly gave the dishes like the sheep's heart and the yak's stomach a miss, but there was enough vegetable dishes to satisfy. The cultural dances were quite nice -- the costumes were lovely and the music good.

All-round Lhasa was been fun. The police and army presence is overbearing and way way over the top. It certainly opened my eyes, and not in a positive way.

Day 7 – Friday 29 April: Lhasa-Nangartse-Gyantse

Today was our first day on the road. As much as I enjoyed visiting Lhasa, it was good to be on the move, and getting close to actually being out on the trek.

We left the Himalaya Hotel around 8:00am. Coincidentally more than anything else, Martin Gantner, Alistair Walpole and I, who had seemed to strike up a good relationship, were first ready and so were bundled into the first of the five waiting Land Cruisers. We quite relished being the "No 1" vehicle, a position we enjoyed for nearly all the rest of the driving component of the trip.

We headed South- West out of Lhasa past the Neitang Buddha towards the Kamba La, below which lies the stunning Yamdrok Tso. The drive up to the top of Kamba La is along a very windy road which I described in my diary as being "out of this world". I felt that we had now started to reach the real Tibet countryside. (Kamba La's co-ordinates are: Elevation 4793m; North 29° 11.641', East 90° 37.040')

So we had climbed over 1000m to get to this point.

Not far beyond the pass we came to Yamdrok Tso. The view of the lake is amazing (see right). It is a stunning turquoise colour, and we were lucky to be there on a clear, still day. The lake is regarded as one of the three main sacred lakes in Tibet, and it's not hard to see why.

We drove for perhaps an hour alongside the lake, stopping occasionally to take photographs. It was fabulous to be out in this country. We had an interesting experience with a stand over man and an unofficial checkpoint just short of Nangartse. This fellow was stopping everyone and demanding money for taking a shortcut with views of the lake. Apparently he has connections with some senior Chinese government official, which allows him to get away with it.

We were also told that he had a similar scam going up towards Rongbuk Monastery (near Everest Base Camp), until enough people complained and he moved down the road. We never found out what the "penalty" was for not paying -- but we didn't pay. Dorje argued with him for a long time and we drove off.

We lunched at Nangartse, and then continued to Gyantse via Kharo La. Kharo La is a beautiful, desolate place sitting high above the surrounding "flat" country. It was our first venture above 5000m. Just before the pass is the Kharo La glacier. The glacier is rapidly melting (a global warming impact), and the face of the glacier was perhaps a kilometre back from the road, and too far to walk. Alistair had been in the same place only 6 years earlier, and told us that at that time it had been within easy walking

distance of the road, perhaps only 1/200 metres. (Kharo La coordinates are: Elevation 5033m; North 28° 53.713'; East 90° 10.096')

We went for a short walk down from the road towards the glacier face -- perhaps only 2/300 metres. In the middle of the valley was a sturdy little rock yak herder's hut. To our surprise, around the back of the hut, out of sight of the road, was a Tibetan woman weaving rugs, I assume with yak wool. She let us take some photos -- behind her is her hand loom, which she'd stood up from to come over for the photos.

Her hut, and yak pens, are visible in the picture on the left, in front of the face of the glacier.

About 45 minutes down from Kharo La we came upon another lake -- Simi La, and I understand man made for hydro power. Again, very beautiful. On the island in the middle of the lake, visible but not quite so easy to distinguish, are the ruins of an old fort.

Day 8 – Saturday 30 April: Gyantse - Shigatse

Last night was spent at the Gyantse Hotel (Elevation 4017m, North 28° 54.772', East 89° 36.153')

Gyantse is about 250 klm from Lhasa (we drove for over 8 hours yesterday, but that did include various photo stops, lunch, and the con man just west of Yamdrok Tso).

It is dominated by the Dzong, or Fort, sitting high over the town. First built around 840, the present walls were supposedly built in 1268, and expanded in coming centuries. The Younghusband expedition of 1903-04 saw it severely damaged by the British 10-pound cannon, and during the Cultural Revolution it was dynamited by the Red Guard. It has slowly been restored to its present state.

Highlight of the visit to Gyantse was seeing the tiered Kumbum at the Palcho Monastery. First commissioned in 1427, the Kumbum is the largest chorten in Tibet, standing some 35 m high -- it consists of 9 floors, and contains 76 individual chapels. It is said to contain over 10,000 murals, many of which remain intact from times well past. It is quite incredible that this magnificent building survived the excesses of the mid-to-late 60s and early 70s.

The history of the Palcho Monastery can be traced back to the 9th century, although Gyantse town, the Kumbum and the Tsuklakang, the main temple of the monastery, were all built in the 1400s.

There is a connection of this monastery to the 1st Panchen Lama, but I cannot see that he ever lived here. The Tsuklakang, the main temple of the monastery was built in the early 1400s by a disciple of Kedrub Je, who was later to be recognised as the first Panchen Lama. The inner sanctum in the Main Chapel of the Tsulaklakang has idols of Buddhas of the Three Times with a bronze statue of Shakyamuni Buddha as the main deity at the centre. This image is 8 metres in height and is made from about 14,000 kilograms of copper.

In times gone by the monastery housed some 370 monks -- today there are about 70.

Having left Gyantse around 11:00am, we travelled for just a couple of hours (100 klm) to Shigatse.

In a very Tibetan way, the countryside is beautiful, as some of these photos show. To the immediate right is an old fort sitting high on a hill overlooking a small village, with the men and women tending the fields with their animals. Below is a family of sheep herders who walked past us with their flock at one of our stops.

Below right is a recently ploughed field. I watched the ploughman and his yak for quite some time. With him, three women dug the field with their shovels. I rather doubt that the farmers had ever seen a group of tourists before, so most of them stopped to come over to us to look at our photos, and in my case to pat my pockets to see what I was carrying. They were most interested in the monastery admission ticket I was carrying from earlier in the day.

On the far right is a typical scene of a couple of ploughmen with their horse and yaks preparing their field for the spring crops. We were told that this area between Gyantse and Shigatse is a very wealthy farming area (by Tibetan standards) which supplies much of the produce for Lhasa. I could see by the standard of the houses that this was the case.

Day 9 – Sunday 01 May: Shigatse – Lhatse - Shegar

We spent last night at the Shigatse Hotel, a nice place with some lovely frescoes on the walls in the main foyer area. (Elevation 3872m; North 29° 15.811'; East 88° 52.969')

Shigatse is the second largest city in Tibet, and home of the Tashilhunpo Monastery, where we spent the morning. It was founded in 1447 by Gendun Drup, who later became the first Dalai Lama. The Monastery is the traditional home of the Panchen Lama, having been the residence of the 4th Panchen Lama (1570–1662) onwards. The monastery grounds were damaged badly during the Cultural Revolution, although the monastery itself was not as extensively damaged as other monasteries in Tibet.

The previous evening Rinzin spoke of Panchen Lama stories. Drama surrounds both the last (10th) Panchen Lama, and the current one, the 11th. The previous Panchen Lama had lived a political life, at various times both siding with the Chinese Communists and at other times being imprisoned as a political prisoner. He died at the age of 51 in 1989 in unusual circumstances -- only 5 days after delivering a speech in Tibet which was critical of the Chinese Government, some believing that he was assassinated. In 1995 the Dalai Lama, in keeping with tradition, identified the 11th Panchem Lama, a reincarnation of his predecessor. The young 11th Panchen Lama, 6 years old at the time, was detained by the Chinese authorities 3 days after his selection, and has not been seen since. He is believed to be imprisoned in Beijing. Later that year the Government selected their own candidate as the Panchen

Lama, and he publicly holds this position. He is recognised by the Chinese but not by the majority of Tibetans.

Rinzin told us a story of two tourists who got into trouble. The first one asked many questions of a monk at Tashilhunpo. Rinzin believes that he was indeed not a monk but a Government spy. After some time the monk phoned someone and she was deported and blacklisted. Similarly another tourist wore a free Tibet T-shirt to a monastery. This time his group guide was also blacklisted and never able to work again in China.

With this as background we visited the monastery as the following pictures show.

As controversy surrounded the selection of the current Panchen Lama, so it will in due course for the next Dalai Lama. The Panchen Lama is the second highest ranking in the Gelug or "Yellow Hat" branch of Tibetan Buddhism, after the Dalai Lama. Tradition has had it that the Panchen Lama plays a key role in the recognition of Dalai Lama, and with both mired in differing controversies, the future of the Dalai Lama is unclear. The current Dalai Lama has indicated that the next Dalai Lama may be found outside Tibet.

After leaving Shigatse and the Tashilhunpo Monastery we had a long and scenic and cold drive to Shegar, via Lhatse, a distance of around 250 klm.

Once again we travelled through the beautiful, desolate Tibetan plateau landscape. Around 4:30pm., just west of Lhatse we crossed the Gyatso La, stopping to take just a few photos in the freezing cold. (Location: Elevation 5274m; North 28° 57.115'; East 87° 26.272')

Even though we were driving, and so not particularly exerting any energy, breathing was still difficult. This was the highest place we visited.

Any significant place -- a high pass, a hill, a bridge -- is usually decorated with many prayer flags. The colours of the flags represent the five elements -- blue symbolises sky/space, white symbolises air/wind, red symbolises fire, green symbolises water, and yellow symbolises earth. At this pass, as is the case in many places, the colours of the flags were framed against the stunning blue of the Tibetan sky.

We arrived at Shegar (also called New Tingri for reasons no-one could quite explain) late afternoon. (Elevation 4330m; North 28° 38.134'; East 87° 10.291')

Rinzin had set out to lower our expectations of the town and the hotel. He'd described in the preceding days as the "best hotel in the worst town in Tibet". As it turned out, he was right on both counts -- the town was pretty ordinary, and the hotel was good by comparison. In truth the hotel was perfectly comfortable and serviceable, and the town provided some of us with a magical and unique experience.

Because of time zone differences it remained light until around 9:00pm. So after dinner a small group of us went for a walk through the fields, accompanied by Rinzin. We came upon a Tibetan woman making yak poo patties near her house. From a viewpoint of Western values this is a fairly gross activity. But from a Tibetan perspective this is an activity which recycles a valuable resource and provides a supply of fuel during the winter. It is common to see the yak poo patties neatly stored on the rooves of houses drying out and ready for future use. She was happy to explain this all to us, and allow us to take photos.

What made this experience simply stunning was that she then proudly invited us into her house. She lives in this 2 story 2 room house with four adults (husband, brother or sister-in-law and spouse) and three kids. The men were away working. Without stopping to wash her hands, she proudly moved to showing her yak butter making skills, serving food (and offering us some), and tending to the kids. Again, by Western norms this is outside our standards. Her immunity has built up to allow her to operate this way. That's not necessarily the case for the kids of course -- diarrhoea and the related dehydration being significant killers.

That aside, that we were welcomed to her house, and showed around, was a great experience. As we left, another woman from a neighbouring house wanted us to visit her as well -- I guess we were a bit of a status symbol! But it was late, and so we went back to the hotel. And, to state this obvious, all this with no language commonality -- Rinzin was our translator.

She's 33 years old, by the way!

Day 10 – Monday 02 May: Shegar – Camp 1 (Yuba)

We awoke this morning to a beautiful blanket of white snow everywhere. Needless to say it was pretty cold out. As beautiful as it was, the snow was bad news. We had a high pass -- Pang La -- to cross and the road would be hard to see.

That's exactly what happened. We left early -- at 7:00am -- in case the road was closed. Visibility was lousy, the road was invisible (especially for us, in the lead vehicle), and the famed view of Chomolungma from Pang La was non-existent. We arrived at Pang La at 9:00am, the first people for the day.

Windscreen wipers flapping the snow aside, we struggled up the windy road to the top of the pass and the non-view. (Details of Pang La are: Elevation 5206m; North 28° 30.787'; East 87° 09.881')

I took a few snowy photos from the top, but it was very cold and so I didn't stay out for long. I developed a slight altitude headache, but that passed as soon as we descended. Still it was 5200m and at that stage I was not on any altitude mitigating medication.

As it turned out, the snow was coming from the east, and as we descended the air and the road cleared. By the time we got to the small town -- the last before we headed off into the wilds -- the snow had pretty well gone.

Day 11 – Tuesday 03 May – Trek Day 1: Camp 1(Yuba) – Camp 2 (Dhampu)

Yesterday we arrived at the Kharta campsite around 12:45pm, which wasn't bad for such bad driving conditions.

Camp 1 (Kharta/Yuba) - Elevation 3643m; North 28° 05.599'; East 87° 20.269'

We spent the afternoon getting semi-organised for both sleeping and trekking. We were also introduced to the six Sherpas: Amar, Esol, Bhawan, Maila, Birbal and Ishor.

I woke this morning at 5:00am. It was a clear, cold day, and at around 5:30am I went for a walk to the nearby bridge just for a bit of a stretch. We breakfasted around 7:00am, and then waited for the yaks to arrive.

We are supported by a caravan of 21 beasts -- 4 yaks and 17 dzopkyo (pronounced "zok-y-o"). A dzopkyo is a cross between a yak and an ordinary cow. Our yaks were particularly handsome beasts -- all black with red earpieces. The dzopkyo came in a variety of colours. Apparently the dzopkyo have a better temperament than the pure yaks. But we just knew them all as yaks.

The yaks came with their handlers, the yak men. They had an interesting social structure, which was beyond our comprehension. Apparently at the start of each day they'd draw lots as to exactly which beast was going to carry what -- how the overall load was to be distributed for the day. This process took place over an early morning drink of chang (barley beer).

The first day of trekking was a short day -- perhaps 10 klms -- in two parts. After a late start (the yaks were slow in arriving from the local village) we slowly made our way East up the valley to a spot overlooking Tenzing Norgay's village, where we had lunch

Our lunch spot was at: Elevation 3969m; North 28° 04.197'; East 87° 16.901'

We then headed uphill to our overnight campsite at Dhampu. The after lunch walk was very hard, and I had to stop for breath on many occasions. Both Chris and Libby said later that the day's walk was harder than anything last year, which made me feel better. I experienced some real doubts on the way up the hill -- I was surprised that I was thinking this way -- and I eventually made it last into the camp, with Mary.

Camp 2 (Dhampu) - Elevation 4252m; North 28° 03.490'; East 87° 16.419'

This camp was a beautiful spot nestled among high trees and some nearby mountains. The yaks were let loose to graze in the nearby pastures -- their bells could be heard tinkling all night.

Day 12 – Wednesday 04 May – Trek Day 2: Camp 2 (Dhampu) – Camp 3 (Lake Camp)

Again I woke early today, around 5:00am. I had a good sleep -- throughout the night I could hear the tinkling of the yak bells in the background. I find it a lyrical, peaceful sound, and not an interruption as some did.

We left camp a bit before 8:00am and arrived at camp three, the Lake Camp, around 11:00am.

Camp 3 (Lake Camp) - Elevation 4652m; North 28° 01.507'; East 87° 16.280'

Our walking distance today was approximately 4 km, and it was certainly not as hard a walk as yesterday. Today I practiced controlling my breathing in line with my walking, something I hadn't done yesterday. Right foot forward breathe in -- left foot breathe out. Trancelike.

At one stage I witnessed a yak cow and calf walking down the hill. The calf was walking comfortably at mum's side. In one snowdrift the cow sank up to her trunk with each step -- the calf trotted along on top of the snow. With surprisingly little effort, mum dragged herself out of the snow only to sink in at next step. After about 6/8 places she got onto solid ground. Quite a sight -- amazing animals.

Today was a good day -- much better than yesterday. My diary records:

At over 4650 metres we are pretty high -- it's hard to breathe, and I have a slight headache, but I'm not on any medication so I'll just watch it and see.

Day 13 – Thursday 05 May - Trek Day 3: Camp 3 (Lake Camp) – Shao La – Camp 4 (Joksam)

We woke early -- nearly the whole camp was awake at dawn to see the sun come up over the lake. Bitterly cold but some nice photos.

The sight over the frozen lake right next to the camp was awesome. Two mountains rise from above the pass at the end of the lake. They are Makalu on the left, the 5th highest in the world, at 8,485 metres, and Chomo-Lonzo at 7804 metres on the right.

We left before 8:00am so that we could reach the top of Shao La before the sun was too high. Because it had been snowing for the past few days, the zigzag walk to the top was at times through knee deep snow. The slippery ice snow was difficult to get traction on at times, but I was really concentrating on step--breathe--step--breathe, and not on looking down the right side slope which fell away at maybe 30° for several hundred metres.

Surprisingly, I wasn't particularly perturbed by that.

I reached the top of the pass around 10:00am. The walk up was hard but nothing compared to what was to come. Shao La - Elevation 4899m; North 28° 00.592'; East 87° 15.729'

After the two hour ascent came the descent from hell. It was probably as steep as the upward, maybe at times steeper. But it was a combination of ice/snow/mud/yak poo for the first 2½ hours, and even though we were descending some thousand metres, the difficulty of the walk well and truly made up for the relative ease of breathing.

And then for the next 2½ hours we walked along a glacial riverbed. The rocks generally vary between about football size and maybe three times that size.

The walk, downhill for a lot of way, and then along the valley, was up/down rock hopping, which tested ankles much more than the knees. In this overall descent I fell three times, although no harm was done. My boots were quite wet about halfway down, but dried out by the time I reached camp.

We arrived at the campsite around 3:00pm, having walked maybe 8/10 klms. It is quite beautiful. It was sunny when I arrived, and I even had the time (and inclination) to do some washing in the river.

I felt at times during the day that I had reached my endurance limit -- I was just so tired. But after a bit of recovery time I was feeling pretty good. Camp 4 (Joksam) - Elevation 3983m; North 27° 58.604'; East 87° 13.270'

Day 14 – Friday 06 May – Trek Day 4: Camp 4 (Joksam) – Camp 05 (Rinzin Camp)

Today was an excellent day. It was relatively easy -- relatively being a very relative notion! We broke camp early and headed pretty well straight vertical up the hill behind us through a magical pine and rhododendron forest. This bit was hard walking -- but isn't it all?

We crossed around a series of ridges during the morning, offering various sightings of Chomolungma.

Today was trek Day 4, and I was feeling pretty fit and well. I was feeling stronger by the day -- the legs still didn't want to go very fast, and again I had to concentrate on breathing. But overall I was feeling good.

We set up camp at "Rinzin Camp" today. Sitting at just under 4500 m, we were nestled in a little indentation high above the Kangshung Valley. It was a cold, bleak place, but beautiful in its barrenness and isolation. Across the valley was a frozen waterfall, and by mid-afternoon I had seen two avalanches down the waterfall already. Rinzin told us that we would hear them all night. Camp 5 (Rinzin Camp): Elevation 4448m; North 27° 59.243'; East 87° 11.178'

Day 15 – Saturday 07 May – Trek Day 5: Camp 5 (Rinzin Camp)

My diary for today says it all:

We are stuck at camp five -- Rinzin Camp -- today. It has been snowing intermittently all day, and the decision has not yet been made to go or turn back.

Disappointingly the snow clouds which had come in last night stymied any chance of a dawn viewing of Chomolungma today. Still, that is the lot of those who venture into the mountains. The elements are well and truly beyond anyone's control, and we must deal with that philosophically.

Around 9:45am I climbed partway up the ridge behind the camp this morning. I got a few fleeting glimpses of Lhotse and Lhotse Shar. The wind was icy and I went down into the camp and donned my windstopper, and went back up an hour later with Rinzin, Dorje and a few others. They stopped where I had been an hour earlier. Dorje sprinted to the top. Rinzin followed a more sedate pace (for my benefit) and we ascended perhaps another 50m. The wind was bitterly cold but the views worth it. The clouds still shrouded Lhotse and Chomolungma, but they did make a couple of brief appearances. With this weather that might be as good as I get.

But all the same, whatever happens, this has been a magical experience. Perhaps only a few hundred people -- or few thousand at most -- would have ever been to this place, and despite its bleakness and desolation, I feel amazingly privileged to have been here.

Played cards this afternoon and a bit after 1:00pm I returned to the tent to write this up and listen to the muffled voices of the Sherpas, the coughs of my fellow travellers, and the light pitter-patter of the rain and snow.

So an interesting dilemma now confronts us. Forward in the snow is the Langma La at 17,500'. We have just received word back that it is now impassable. Fresh snow makes it very difficult and dangerous for humans and impossible for beasts. So retreat really becomes the only option. But back behind us the Shao La at just over 16,000' is in unknown condition, due to the last two days of snow.

We know that the climb up the valley floor will be incredibly hard -- climbing over those rocks again up perhaps 900 m, through snow ice mud and water.

And then down the other side, the north-east slope, with the unknown quality of what snow has fallen there, and how difficult it will be for human and yak to descend.

And they are the only options. There is no other way out of this valley. And there is no airlift in the event that we get stuck. So Shao La it is. Today is Saturday. The Shao La crossing will be Monday early. Weather permitting.

Day 16 – Sunday 08 May – Trek Day in use in 6: Camp 5 (Rinzin Camp) – Camp 4 (Joksam)

Yesterday's plan was enacted. We awoke to quite heavy snow falls overnight, which put paid to any option -- not that there was one really -- of going forward.

It was very cold this morning -- the tents were covered in snow, and there was a fairly solid covering everywhere.

It was an easy walk today. We only walked for about 3 ½ hours, and most of that was downhill -- it was perhaps a 5 klm walk.

It snowed for nearly the whole walk, except for the lower reaches of the forest. The scenery was very different to that which we had seen only 2 days earlier. The overall scenery, the juniper, fir and rhododendron plants, often half covered in snow, were stunningly beautiful.

Dundu the lead yak man of our group was preparing his dinner, of dried yak and goat meat. I asked Dorje how that worked in a Buddhist society. His answer was interesting.

One yak can feed a whole village for a year, and a special person in the village does the butchering. The meat is stored in the roof of the house where, because of the very dry air, it doesn't putrefy

It's OK to eat a little meat because the vegetable supply is not sufficient, although nowadays better agriculture practices mean less need for meat. But still some meat is needed to keep up strength.

Fish is not eaten because many lives would be wasted for a small feed for one family.

Day 17 - Monday 09 May – Trek Day 7: Camp 4 (Joksam)

We awoke to a beautiful day today. We were allowed to sleep in because we are transiting backwards out of the valley and so there is no rush. But very disappointing to have such a beautiful day -- if only it had come 24 hours earlier. Still, as I have said elsewhere, these are the vagaries of high-altitude adventuring.

Around 9:30am we went for a walk down the valley to the confluence with the Arun River, known in Tibetan as the Bum-chu (chu being the Tibetan word for water). Interestingly, this river is a trans-boundary river and is part of the Kosi or Sapt Koshi river system in Nepal, which we crossed several times last year, and which in part influenced my "Bridges I Have Crossed" book.

The total walk was only 5 klm, but we were away for around 4 hours. The scenery was quite stunning. And like yesterday, we had some beautiful flora to see as well -- despite the snow yesterday (and to come) it was spring time, and the plants were emerging from the winter chill.

The level stretches of the walk are relatively easy (we were at some 13,000') but the down and uphill were hard. The effort was worth it -- we stopped for lunch opposite a glacial valley which gave some superb views of a semi cloud covered Makalu. At 8485m Makalu is the 5th highest mountain in the world. Our lunch spot was at Elevation 3753m; North 27° 57.336'; East 87° 13.019'

The walk back up to camp from river level was hard, and my mind couldn't help turning to the next day's challenge. From our present campsite at just under 4000 metres, over a distance of maybe 9 klm we will be ascending 900m to the Shao La (and that walk being over very difficult terrain), and then descending across the face of the snow covered mountain slope down to Camp 3 at 4650m. From my diary:

I think there's a fair bit of nervous anticipation about the whole thing -- I know I'm certainly finding those doubts coming back. But a thought that came into my head today -- tomorrow will be the most difficult physical and mental challenge I've faced, certainly in advance. The Khunde Peak climb last year was harder in one respect, but I didn't know about it in advance. And that in turn led me to contemplate some of the challenges I've faced in my business environment in the past 12 months, and how I've dealt with them, and importantly, how I'll deal with them in the future -- not so much the strategy at the time, but rather putting them into perspective and the removal of self-doubts.

Day 18 – Tuesday 10 May – Trek Day 8: Camp 4 (Joksam) – Shao La – Camp 03 (Lake Camp)

Today was an early start -- a 5:00am wake-up and on the track by about 6:40am.

It can be described as no more than incredibly hard slog. The pass seemed an endless time coming -- we reached it around 1:30pm -- by that time we'd been going for some 7 hours. By the time we reached the top a snowstorm had come in, and so we crossed over in full wet weather gear and nothing to see.

We then had to tackle the downhill traverse through the snow field. That took perhaps another hour.

At 2:45pm I came around a bend to see the welcome sights of the tents in the distance -- perhaps a kilometre away. A kilometre of course is about an hour's walk.

Alistair and Gill came to take the packs of those who needed help. I readily relinquished mine! We finally got to camp at 3:30pm, almost nine hours after we had started.

And then something quite unexpected happened -- something I have reflected on almost daily since. Sitting in the mess tent, surrounded by the rest of the crew, I was suddenly overcome with emotion and spontaneously burst into tears. Two others did the same. Whatever it was, it was for me a reflection of

the total physical and mental exhaustion I felt. There was, and has not been since, any embarrassment at the event. It was just an "is" at the time -- in fact, looking back at my diary over the preceding couple of days I can see how it had built up. As a result I feel much stronger mentally now than before -- indeed it has contributed to my "I have been to the mountain" view of the world (see Epilogue).

In total we walked maybe 10 klm today. There were no cards that night -- to bed early where I slept OK but not brilliantly -- I was hot and unfortunately developing a sore throat.

Day 19 – Wednesday 11 May – Trek Day 9: Camp 03 (Lake Camp) – Camp 01 (Yuba)

Today we walked from Camp 3 straight through (almost) to Camp 1. It was a downhill walk all the way, a drop of 1000m -- apart from the endless rock-hopping, and about 10/12 klm in distance

The highlight of the day was arriving at around 11:30am at Moyey, the village of Tenzing Norgay's birth. By one account of the story, Tenzing's parents came from Thame in Nepal, but his mother was on a pilgrimage at the time he was born, and so this is regarded as his home. The village is about 2 klm from Camp 1. That explains why he is a Sherpa, since Sherpas come from Nepal, and not around here.

The village was having a carnival -- the main event today being a horsemanship event. There were perhaps 50 riders, in very colourful costumes, and mostly one at a time they rode say a 200 metre straight line track (on a converted paddock) at full gallop, bending over to pick scarves off the ground. There was lots of colour and noise -- the horses all had bells around their necks -- and the village was all out in traditional costume.

The only downside was that all the houses had been "ordered" to fly a Chinese flag in honour of the occasion. On one side of the track all the villagers sat and talked and cheered, and on the other side the officials watched, having parked their Land Cruiser there. I asked what would happen if the villagers didn't fly the flag -- apparently this just doesn't happen, as no-one wants to fall foul of the officials.

This aside, we were honoured and privileged to witness such an event. I "met" Tenzing Norgay's nephew -- some of our group had met his mother. Given that Tenzing was born in 1914 and died in 1986 I am still not clear on this family connection (and some 10 years ago I had met Tashi Tenzing, Tenzing Norgay's grandson, and himself a man now in his 50s).

Whether related to the previous day or not, I was now starting to come down with the respiratory infection bug which had struck down most of us.

Day 20 – Thursday 12 May – Trek Day 10: Camp 01 (Yuba)

Today was a rest day at Camp 1. By this stage I was feeling awful -- cough/sore throat/ feeling cold.

We returned to Moyey to see some traditional dancing, which as it turned out didn't happen. The group went for a walk up to a monastery above the village -- I couldn't make it. No energy. I found a semi-warm place mostly out of the wind three-quarters of the way up the hill and slept!

Day 21 – Friday 13 May: Camp 01 (Yuba) – Rongbuk Monastery

Today we got back into the Land Cruisers, after 10 days on the track, for the 100 km drive to Rongbuk and Chomolungma. Alistair, Martin and I were again in our lead vehicle, accompanied by Dorje as had been the case previously.

We headed back into the barren Tibetan plateau landscape which we had seen previously, taking the old road from Yuba through to Peruche. The road was a bit hairy at times, sometimes a rough narrow track with sheer drops to one side or another. But as ever, spectacular. (The new road was clearly visible at times across the valley, but whether this one was shorter or just more fun I don't know.)

Once past the shortcut we re-entered the Dza Chu Valley, which we had travelled through a fortnight earlier. Particularly striking -- by comparison -- was a section of valley with lovely almost "English" scenery. One wouldn't know one was in Tibet.

We stopped for "lunch" for the drivers at Peruche, the small town where we had been on Monday 2nd May -- which while only 11 days ago seemed like forever. That was at about 10:30am, but apparently the drivers were operating on Chinese time, which made it a bit before 1:00pm. Peruche sits at the junction of the Rongbuk/Everest Base Camp and Kharta Valley roads.

Back on the road a bit later we were rewarded with our first serious views of Chomolungma just outside Rongbuk, at around 12:30pm. Rongbuk is a seriously desolate place at just over 5000m, and when we got there we decided to find lodgings rather than tent. Good call. The main hotel was fully booked, so we ended up in the Rongbuk Lodge -- fairly basic but solid walls and roof, and a community room -- with a fire -- where we could partake of various beverages.

Later that day I got struck down by the altitude for the first time. Rinzin and a duo of doctors prescribed full Diamox and Dexamethasone. I felt immediately better, but still a very bad sleep that night -- the three of us in our room were all propped up in a seated position much of the night, and up and down all night. A similar experience was reported by a number of the others.

Day 22 – Saturday 14 May: Rongbuk Monastery - Tingri

Despite a lousy night's sleep (or perhaps because of it) I was up early (pre-dawn) for some Chomolungma sunrise photos. Got some nice shots, but the dawn oranges were missing.

Then onto Everest Base Camp North by 7:00am. A cold, desolate place.

Everest Base Camp (North) - Elevation 5146m; North 28° 08.454'; East 88° 51.065'

There were relatively few people there, and, as is now standard, checkpoints, passports checks, etc. Way over the top, but what I have come to expect. It was by then the end of the climbing season, so most climbers had left.

We were actually very restricted by the authorities as to where we could go. We weren't actually allowed into the Base Camp, which was perhaps 3/400 metres away. Nor were we allowed onto the small hill which would have afforded us a much better view of Base Camp and Chomolungma. In the 10 days on the trek I had put to the back of my mind the overbearing attitude of the Chinese Government, but here it was, back in our faces again.

It didn't help that I was still quite unwell, not from the altitude, but from the camp bug.

All the same I got some good shots and then by about 8:00am we were on the road again, to Tingri via the "shortcut".

And what an amazing drive it was. From my diary:

Moonscape, beautiful. Every imaginable shade of brown. Punctuated by an occasional green hill. Not a tree in sight for many kilometres.

Nomadic yak and goat herders appear in the middle of nowhere. Tough life. Altitude ~ 5000m. Cold. Bleak

Colours of sandstone, pink, green and the endless shades of brown.

Glacial valleys with spring rivers running through them.

We arrived at the Tingri campsite (our last!) around midday. A very scenic place -- with a coolish breeze at times -- it was easy to forget that it was still some 4300m, and that seemed by then to be a quite comfortable altitude.

Camp 6 (Tingri): Elevation 4345m; North 28° 34.939'; East 86° 37.944'

Chomolungma was clearly visible across the paddock, to the left, as was Cho Oyu which at 8188m is the 6th highest in the world.

Day 23 – Sunday 15 May: Tingri – Lalung La – Zhang Mu

Only about 200 metres from our overnight camp at Tingri was the Friendship Highway -- a modern, sealed road in excellent condition.

It is the main road between Lhasa and Kathmandu. We'd been on it earlier in the journey, and after some of the rocky dirt tracks of recent times it was unparalleled. A huge assortment of vehicles travelled on it -- all manner of trucks, 4WDs, motor bikes, horse drawn carts, even a few ordinary cars.

The countryside was typically Tibetan, with typical Tibetan villages interspersed with old Ghurkha fort ruins everywhere. Along the way we said our farewells to Chomolungma.

A bit after 9:00am we commenced our last climb to a high pass. This time, Lalung La: Elevation 5050m; North 28° 36.530'; East 86° 08.050'

It was a beautiful day and afforded us the last photos of the stunning brown landscape and the high mountains in the distance.

From there we wended our way down through a spectacular green valley to the border town of Zhang Mu, which we arrived at around midday. An odd town -- it sits nestled at the bottom of the valley we'd driven down, really only one main road several kilometres long which winds its way twisting and turning every few hundred metres down the side of the valley. It's one great big shopping town, with endless Chinese goods stores of every imaginable type lining the road. It sits at 2300m, which once one has got used to 4000m+ feels like sea level!

It was nice to be able to breathe easily again, and despite still not feeling 100% I enjoyed a beer in a little bar across the way from our hotel, and went for a wander that afternoon to somewhere near the top of the town.

Day 24 – Monday 16 May: Zhang Mu - Kathmandu

Today was a fascinating day of an altogether different kind. Today was the day we returned to Nepal.

We knew that the border post didn't open until 10:00am, but Rinzin was insistent that we were up early and on the road quickly. We soon found out why. The border post sets a new low point for tourist friendliness. We got there around 8am, knowing that we'd have to mill around until the post opened. We'd been preceded by a large group of German tourists -- maybe 50 or so, which immediately meant that our processing would be delayed.

Patience is a virtue, and besides that there was no other viable option other than to wait. We said goodbye to our drivers, and handed them their tips. Eventually, a little before 10 the Chinese officials marched in, the doors opened shortly after 10:00am, and the processing began. The Germans had a

more difficult time than us, having to go through bag x-ray, passport stuff, intense bag searching, all just to get out! We at least were only subjected to the latter two. Anyone with a book was seriously scrutinised. So not only do you get searched and scrutinised going in, in case you take a seditious book, but you also get the same treatment on the way out!!

Anyway, we eventually got out, and headed by foot over the Friendship Bridge. Now there's a bit of a misnomer too. Once safely in Nepal I took a photo back over the bridge. Bad move. I was immediately followed and then surrounded by about 6 soldiers (Nepalese soldiers, by the way, doing the bidding of the Chinese plain-clothes agent) who demanded I delete the photo. The plain-clothes man watched to make sure that I had complied. This was the final act of senseless intimidation on the part of the Chinese Government which I witnessed or experienced. And the ironic thing is that the Friendship Bridge is a fairly grotty place, and the photo would never have seen the light of day. But that "friendship" was missing, all the same.

All that aside, at least the Chinese roads were pretty good. The Friendship Highway on the Nepal side is seriously badly maintained. The trip down to Kathmandu is about 100 klm. The first part -- down the valley -- is one of those road trips where you realise that death is only centimetres away and there's nothing at all you can do about it. Hundreds of trucks, many buses (often with people piled on the roof), and all manner of other vehicles, make their way down this valley daily. How we didn't see many wrecks on the valley floor is beyond me. But when looked at philosophically, it was a fun end to the trip. The chaos of a bus trip down an excruciatingly narrow windy hill, often with bits of the road missing due to landslides, in a chaotic third-world country seemed a fitting end to the peace and quiet of the mountains.

We got back into Kathmandu around 3:30pm, and I raced into Thamel for some last minute shopping, and back to the Kathmandu Radisson before heading back into Thamel for our last meal together at a fabulous restaurant whose name now escapes me. On behalf of the group I made a little speech to Rinzin, and at the end of our meal we then slowly drifted into the night.

So here ends my tale. I'll end somewhere near where I started -- at Kathmandu International Airport the next day I picked up Heinrich Harrer's sequel book *Return to Tibet* which I mentioned in my introduction -- and then boarded my plane for Bangkok and then Singapore to see Janet for the first time in over three weeks.

Some Statistics

- Highest altitude on foot -- Shao La, 4899m/16,072'
- Highest altitude by vehicle -- Gyatso La, 5274m/17,303'
- Number of nights under canvass -- 12
- Number of nights in hotels/lodges -- 11
- Highest altitude under canvass (Lake Camp, 2 nights) – 4652m/15,262'
- Average altitude under canvass -- 4139m/13,579'
- Highest overnight altitude (Rongbuk) -- ~5100m/16,732'

Trekkers and Crew

Peter Campbell, Perth

Peter Clark, Adelaide

Robyn Clark, Adelaide

Martin Gantner, Vienna, Austria

Mary Greig, Springwood

Frank Kotai, Perth

Judy Kotai, Perth

Rob Liddell, Perth

Christine Marsack, Perth

Elaine McLaren, Canberra

Gerry McLaren, Canberra

Barry Morrison, Fremantle

Libby Packer, Gold Coast

Gill Thomas, Gold Coast

Alistair Walpole, Melbourne

Lincoln Hall, Wentworth Falls (withdrew on day 1 due to ill-health)

Rinzin Sherpa, Tour Leader, Kathmandu, Nepal

Lakpa Dorje, Deputy Tour Leader, Lhasa, Tibet

Amar, Bawn, Birbol, Esol, Lakpa and Mila, our ever-present camp crew

Epilogue

The production of this photobook has been a labour of love. At perhaps an hour per page, there is some 60 hours' work in it -- certainly not a commercially justifiable exercise. But some things can't, and shouldn't, be measured on purely commercial terms, and I've enjoyed producing it beyond measure. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I did putting it together, and as with my last one, I ask you simply to recognise that the journey it describes was at time a very private one.

Since I returned I have got into the habit -- in part just for a bit of fun -- of explaining my current very comfortable attitude to life with the phrase "I've been to the mountain". People have even started saying to me in response to some comment or other "and don't tell me you've been to the mountain". The diary excerpts and the story of the 10th May remain very real to me still. I suspect that they always will. They have absolutely influenced my "been to the mountain" attitude. *Anicca*³ in action!

In what can only be some great serendipity, only a few weeks after I came home the Dalai Lama also returned to Australia on a series of teaching and speaking engagements. Janet and I were privileged to see him in Perth on Sunday 19th June. His message of non-violent reform in the world -- particularly in relation to his native Tibet-- is one which talks strongly to me given my recent travellings. I was saddened, but not surprised given all I had seen, to learn that China had closed the Tibetan borders from 25th June for at least a month, for the 60th anniversary of the "peaceful liberation of Tibet". An anniversary of an invasion ... which is marked by shutting the borders to the world!! Perhaps that explains the surplus of troops on the streets of Lhasa. Or perhaps it just indicates just how far the Dalai Lama and Dr Lobsang Sangay, the new Tibetan Kalon Tripa (Prime Minister, in exile), have yet to progress.

In the same manner as the quote from the Dalai Lama on page 2 of this book expresses a hope, I too hope that this small publication will cause people to think further about Tibet's situation, and perhaps even act in some way.

³ *Anicca* is the Sanskrit word describing the Buddhist notion of *Impermanence* – see <https://bswa.org/teaching/meditation-impermanence-anicca/>

Acknowledgements and thanks

Martin Gantner, Vienna, Austria, my room, tent and car mate. A great travelling companion, especially when crammed into a confined tent less than 2 metres square. And a special thanks for providing the Kharta Valley map.

Gill Thomas, for carrying my day pack on 10th May, when my energy reserves were pretty well down to zero.

The 2010 Nepal crew who came again this time -- Christine Marsack, Rob Liddell, Libby Packer and Alistair Walpole -- whose presence made this trip that much more enjoyable.

Alistair and Rob for the “obligatory” photo of me in front of this mountain or other, or on top of this or that pass. Some are reproduced on the back cover.

Rinzin Sherpa, for his cheery disposition, his regular communications, his information and stories, and for dispensing the occasional pill, and his capable off-sider, Lakpa Dorje Tsering, who was a font of knowledge on so many cultural matters, and who was a great source of information to Alistair, Martin and me on our 1100 klm drive across Tibet.

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