

# Namaste, Nepal

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In March this year I had the opportunity to go to Nepal. It was on the recommendation of John and Fiona Earle, who have been many times to the country, that I decided to go on a trip organised by the WPA (World Pheasant Association) to visit a Schools' Project supported by the WPA and trek through beautiful countryside with the possibility of seeing some of the nation's rarest pheasants. The WPA is a world-wide organisation dedicated to the conservation of pheasants across the globe through various projects. Our trek included visits to the Pipar Schools in the Seti Khola valley which are supported by the WPA, which could then spread the message of pheasant conservation to the villagers through education of children and their families.

As the plane left the airport and headed to Kathmandu - the capital of Nepal - I was apprehensive about what was to come. Little did I know of the inspirational local people, beautiful traditions and amazing sights that I would experience over the next few weeks.

When I arrived in Kathmandu it was late at night and I was very tired from the journey. After meeting the rest of the group and travelling to the hotel I went straight to sleep and it wasn't until the next morning that I got a true sight of the amazing city of Kathmandu.

The first thing that hits you when stepping onto the street is the noise. The air is filled with the sound of motorbike engines, car horns and people shouting at the congested traffic. Naturally, the next thing that strikes you is the chaos on the roads! With no pavements or road lines all sorts of vehicles travel side by side with pedestrians, and although it is law to drive on the left hand side few local people abide by this, resulting in cars driving in all directions, overtaking and almost constant non-moving traffic - a far cry from the roads at home.



Once I had got to grips with the treacherous traffic I could explore the area. Everywhere there are Nepali stalls selling beautiful jewellery and trinkets, fruit and snacks, and so many handmade wares. Religious temples fill the city and colourful Buddhist prayer flags line the buildings like bunting. Here, in Kathmandu, we spent a few days relaxing, sight-seeing and shopping before heading to start our trek.

On beginning our trek, it was lovely to be out of the bustling city and walking through the countryside breathing the clear air and taking in the stunning views. Most of the land is used for farming, and the carefully crafted terraced fields on the side of steep hills were a common sight. I really enjoyed walking through the small villages where the farmers and their families lived.

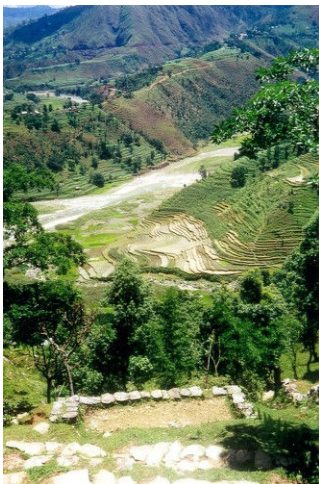
The Nepali people are extremely friendly and in each house that you walk past all members of the family put their hands together as if they are praying and greet you: Namaste. We would always return their greeting and the children and women would giggle as we smiled.

We trekked to, and visited, six schools over ten days, camping overnight. Our visit to Rumja Primary School was particularly memorable for me. In the morning we woke at 6 o'clock, and had breakfast before we started walking, and began our ascent up a hill which looked extremely high and very

steep from the bottom. I knew it would be a hard climb!



We were staying in a lodge near the village of Karpani - our tents overlooked the stunning river below and you could see miles ahead up the valley to the holy peak of Machhapuchhre and the mountains far away. From here we climbed for 2 hours up very steep stone steps that had been laid there by the local people years ago to make the ascent easier for them. It was truly exhausting as the temperature rose and the sun was beating down on our backs. Each time you stopped to look around you the view got better and better and it was so satisfying to see how high you had climbed.



Eventually, sweaty and tired, we reached a village for a short rest - this did not last long and we soon found ourselves climbing up again to get to the primary school. By this time the sun was even stronger and there were no stone steps to make it easier - for me this

was without a doubt the hardest trekking we did on the trip. When we finally reached Rumja at midday I was very relieved but it was worth the effort. The school consisted of three buildings and a surrounding wall which the WPA had helped to build and more recently, separate sanitary toilet blocks. On arrival we were greeted by the head teacher of the school who presented us with garland made of flowers and leaves and I spent the rest of our visit playing various ball games with the children.

The rest of the trek was amazing. We walked through luscious rhododendron forests, across dried up riverbeds, through jungle-like woods surrounded by monkeys, and met many other lovely local people. I did not spot any pheasants, but did hear the call of a tragopan pheasant at 5 o'clock in the morning! The trip was amazing and it was eye-opening visiting a country with such different culture and traditions from our own.



On Saturday 5th May, 2 months after my visit to Nepal, a huge flood swept down the Seti Khola valley through the village of Karpani where we had stayed for two nights. At the north end of the valley there had been a massive blockage of the river caused by land slides - eventually the river behind the blockage built up and finally burst through down the valley causing paramount destruction and razing the village of Karpani to mud and debris.

Luckily many of the villagers had travelled to a different area for a religious ceremony at the time of the flood. However, 23 people have been confirmed dead and approximately 40 people are currently still missing. The people of the village will have no insurance cover and the government is unlikely to be able to do a great deal to help. Many of the WPA schools are situated around this area and will therefore be raising money to assist the locals in any way WPA can.

With this in mind I will be holding a stall selling cards and soft fruit on Sunday 24th at All Saints Church, Hertford to raise funds for WPA and the area of Karpani. Please come and support this worthy cause.