12-14 min read

Part 4

Auspiciousness

Updated with Dinyar's Day of Reckoning - Page 35

It's just a number, a churn
A rock going round the sun

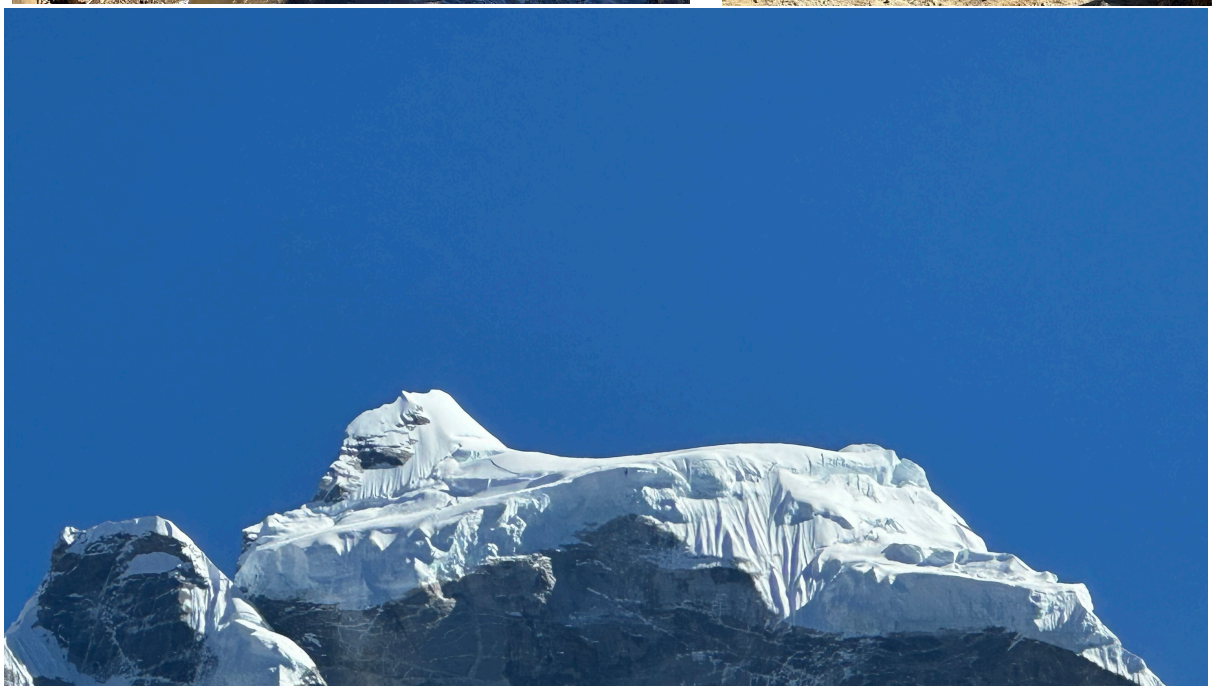
Nov 18: The day begins with singing happy birthday and cake cutting. Its Vijay's.
The cake had been picked up from the café so that we could sing around it.

Hearing the birthday, singing, the owner of the teahouse comes up to Vijay and garlands him with a shawl wishing him luck. Khumjung is

indeed a delightful town both physically and in their people's good nature

Soon we set out on a most charming part of the trek - from Khumjung to Diboche via Tengboche. Both our point of departure and final destination are at the same altitude but we would be climbing 565 m and then descending the same amount to reach the destination. That is the terrain of the Himalayas for you.

It is a lovely walk surrounded by rhododendron trees, which we realize we are not going to see for very long. The Himalayas have hundreds of varieties of rhododendron flowers. Unfortunately, this is not the flowering season so all we see are the leaves and bushes.



icy exit from Khumjung,

a peak that we called bear

Lunch en route to Tengboche.

Contemplation aided or otherwise.

Another bridge to cross

The approach to the Tengboche monastery is interesting. We have been on a relatively steep climb for some time and stop at a turn on the trail to take a break. Lester is following some birds, trying to take their pictures. Tenzing comes up to us and signals that we have reached - we look around the bend and see the archway of the monastery. Other trekkers are already there and taking a break wherever they can get a place to rest their tired legs.

Tenzing does not let us stop. He makes us go up that last incline and go through a path. He doesn't shout "Surprise" but it suddenly opens up into the most breathtaking view yet. Layers of mountains on both sides, tapering to form of valley at the center and at the end of it all is Everest in the distance. He is elated by the fact that it is afternoon yet there are no clouds.

We have an absolutely clear sky with gorgeous views of Everest, guarded by Lhotse and Nuptse. And to our right, the majestic Ama Dablam, at much closer view.

The sight is so astounding that all our tiredness just evaporates, and we even forget about the imposing monastery that is by the side of the open field that is ahead of us.

The path to EBC lies through these mountains. Everest watching.

Happy Birthday Vijay. What a memory this will be.

I get Tenzing talking about his plan to trek Ama Dablam. He has told us that it is one of the toughest mountains to summit but seems confident that he has a path that he will get him to the top. I give him my binoculars to scour the mountain ridges and he just loves that and thanks me after that. Such simple people I think to myself.

I ask him about the remainder of the route that we have to travel, and he points through the center to the 3 giants in front of us and says that we go almost all the way to the end before making a left turn at a mountain that looks blackish from this distance. Thrilling.

The monastery closes at 3 PM and therefore we slip in just a few minutes before it is going to shut, as we are told that if we are inside the sanctum then they will not shut it until we leave.

Once again, the silent energy envelopes all of us inside and I sit quietly just watching my breath. After what seems like a long time but is probably eight or ten minutes, I get up and see a monk sitting and praying. As I bow to him he takes out a red thread which he blesses and ties around my neck. I take it as a talisman that will watch over me as I complete this journey.

We just do not want to leave this beautiful and serene paradise. However Tenzing knows that we have to move because it will get dark pretty soon. So we get back to putting on our backpacks, find our poles and start the descent to Deboche.

Again, from an acclimatization standpoint, we have done well because we have trekked high and then will be sleeping low at almost the same height as the previous night.

The trek down to Deboche is again a beautiful one. We soon reach our tea House, where we are going to spend the night. This is an amazing teahouse. The best that we have seen so far. Not surprisingly, it is run by a husband and wife with their two daughters and family dog. There are very few trekkers staying here. A European couple, a desi from US. California is my guess. Sometime later a few more walk in.

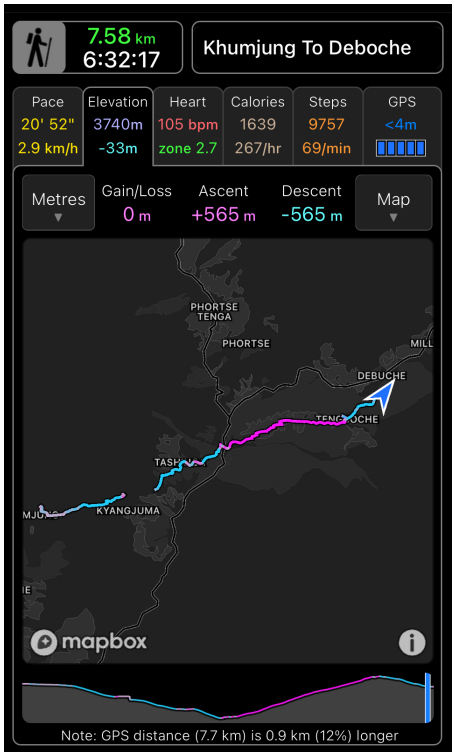
From the dining area, we get a unrestricted view of Everest and the surrounding mountains and see the golden fire of the peaks as the sun goes down. The food too is wholesome here and all of us have a good meal. All the rooms have heated mattresses.

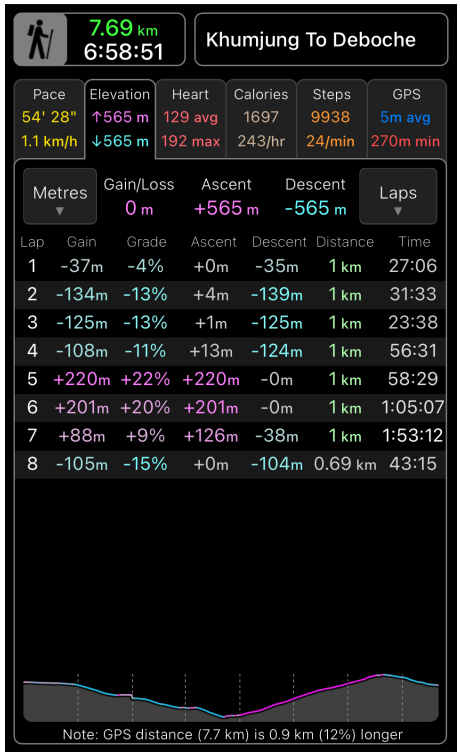
Sunrise or sunset
The mountains as if on fire
Blessed are those who see

And I can see Everest from my window. I think of how lucky the folks living here are, to be in the constant presence of the Sagarmatha as she is called locally.

The Rivendale Teahouse dining area

I check my trip app. Reminding us of how much we have done today. I reflect with satisfaction on a day well walked!





Tenzing tell us about the next day's plan - The climb to Dingboche. One that will take us from our current 3600 m to 4400 m. Cool. We are now getting to the business end of things.

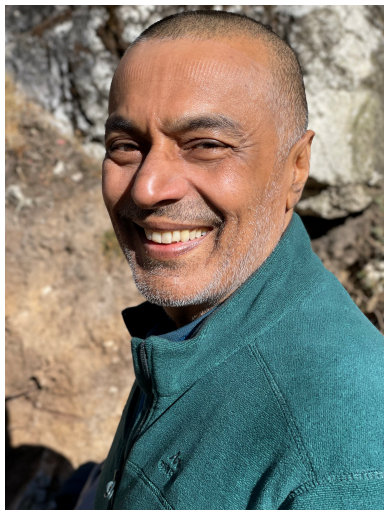
Diny, the researcher in our group, tells us that the best restaurant and cafe of the entire trek is at Dingboche and is called Cafe 4410. That's a motivation!

The rooms here are very nice and we are told that this is the best we would have on the trip. Also probably the last place for a hot shower. From my window we can see Everest. I lie down and slip into a dreamless sleep.

Nov 19th

Goodbye Ama

We wake up to a cold, bright morning. Getting ready is as always a race against Milan's knock on the door.



Different moods this morning. I wonder what Lester is preparing for while Vijay has stayed in his birthday mood.

We would have liked to stay longer here too, given how nice the teahouse was and the fabulous views around us. The journey must continue though. So we set off after a good breakfast.

Show time folks

The hike is pretty much an incline all the way up though It is not as steep as some of the earlier ones. Long stretches with very little vegetation once we cross 4000 meters.

It is also time to say good bye to Ama Dablam, at least the view that we had got used to in the last few days.

All of us want our memories too and stop along the way several times. The initial tree cover soon disappears and there are vast open spaces as we walk through valleys.

Its goodbye Mt E for a while. As we turn off in a different direction to

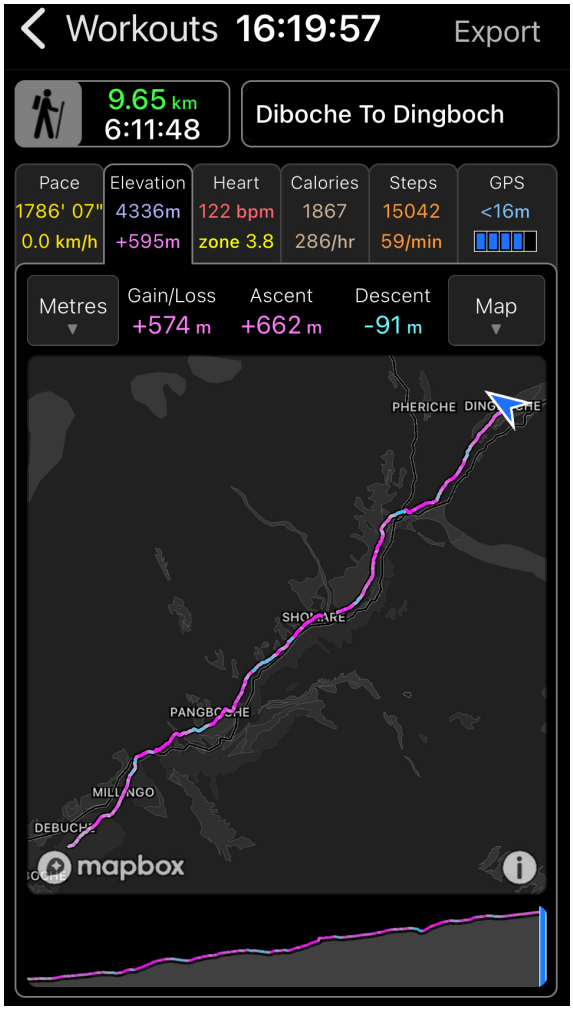
reach our next destination - Dingboche.

We have made it at a steady pace doing the nearly 10 kilometers in just over 6 hours. I feel i am finally getting used to the daily schedule.

While Its been a climb all the way. My GPS tells me that it was an ascent of 662 mtrs and a descent of just 91m. Not so steep after all.

It shows that we have reached elevation of 4336 though many of the signboards say 4440 except for the hospital clinic (yes, there is one here and more about that later) which seems to concur with my GPS.

And its just after 4 pm in the afternoon.



Having reached Dingboche relatively early, as
we enter the town, we spot Café 4410 and tell ourselves that we've got to visit it. Right now, we are used to the fact that our tea house will be at the end of the town - and we are not disappointed.

Nearby is the medical centre, and I am reminded of the fact that there is one here in one at Gorakshep too. We make our way into the dining area of the teahouse on the first available, set of tables and benches. Each of us order a drink or a snack and just sit back and relax. We
make plans to go to Cafe 4410 but somehow our guides find out about this.

Tenzing comes up to us and reads us the (unwritten) rulebook that we should consume breakfast, lunch and dinner from the tea house only, and not anywhere else. This is the tea house earns sufficient money from our visit. We are quite tired and not in the mood to listen to such rules and mentally decide that we will go to the café the next day, if not today itself.

This is the location where we would be spending two days as it was an acclimatization level. Tenzing tells us that the next day will be a pretty simple two hour up and back down trek. Basically we would climb for 250 m of elevation gain and then come back down and stay at the lower altitude.

Crossing the Rubicon

21st Nov. We are all a lot more relaxed the next morning as we are looking forward to the short trek and then time for ourselves after

It is a straight uphill behind the teahouse, there are flag milestones along the way, and we go up to flag 4. The view as expected is spectacular.

I think the best way to describe the morning are with these pictures. By now its not about the hiking. These candid photographs vividly capture the effect that the mountains are having on us. Working its magic as it were. It didn't really matter how many flags we crossed or how many minutes we stopped. i personally think its the moment or period, when many of us crossed the rubicon.

There is a whole new set of mountain peaks that we get to see Including Makalu the fifth highest mountain in the world at 8481 mtrs. On enquiring, Tenzing tells me that it will take another 26 days from Dingboche to reach Makalu base camp!
Once we return to the tea house it's time for DBT again. Most of us agree that we will go to Cafe 4410 early evening and so would skip the teahouse dinner or just order something really light.

Diny complains of an ear ache and a tooth ache and its clearly worrying him. So while walking to the cafe he and I drop in at the clinic but end up not doing a consultation. He says he will take a pain killer and hopefully things will get better.

The Cafe is all that would make it so famous and popular at this point. The main cafe is full and we get a table in their annex kind of area. A lot of food is ordered! The pizza is delicious. As are the brownies and beverages. Now that was something that set us in the right mood.

The buzz inside is really good. Tenzing has sent Bikal to check on us. He is uncomfortable when he finds us. We assure him that we will also eat at the teahouse.

Outside, the mountains are on fire again as we meander back home.

After dinner the mandatory SP02 check. Diny's starts low but quickly moves into the 80ies. the rest of us are all in the mid to high 90ies. I tell Diny to do his pranayama and don't give it much more thought.

We step out to see the starlit night but its quite cold and we hurry back in. We convince Nish instead, as the young one, to go outside and take some pictures of the night. And I find the perfect picture for the words i had written some years ago.

bright dots in the sky
earth's blue searches for life signs
are they searching too

Back in the rooms, it is colder than elsewhere and our rooms are freezing. the rooms has heated mattresses though and that is some relief. Even though the warmth they give is minimal, it is something. This was Nepal and we had been told that some portions of the trip would be rough. I am out like a light, as usual, little knowing what will be in store for us the next day.

And then there were five

Nov 21 I wake up briefly around 230 am and check my watch for the outside temperature. It shows -10C including windchill. I shiver under the blankets and go back to sleep.

It remains freezing cold in the morning. As has become a habit. I wake up, sit on my bed covered in my blanket and do my 15 minute Pranayama.

As we assemble for breakfast Diny and Lata are yet to show up. When they arrive we get to know that Diny's earache and toothache haven't got any better. Tenzing decides that we will trek as 3 groups at the start. Bikal with Lata, and the rest of us minus Diny with Milan. Tenzing will take Diny to the clinic and they will bring up the rear after that.

With Diny before we set out not realizing that we wouldn't be seeing him again till we got back to KTM

Now down to five, we walk up to Flag 1 and then look at the vast expanse of Nepali flats, stretching some 5 km and at least equally wide, which we have to walk through. The air is so clear that we can actually see the 5 km point, marked by an avalanche, where we will reach Thukla pass. On both sides rise giant peaks.

We have a few other groups for company. Also many yaks who are out grazing on the sparse bush cover that the land allows. The walk is a pleasant and easy one. I take in the views, the crisp air feels great as we meander our way through the other groups of trekkers, of grazing yaks.

Between the peaks on the left, and us is a lower level plateau with a river flowing, and where we are told is situated the village of Periche, the place that we would finally return to the end of the climb. But that is another story to tell.

As we reach closer to the end of the flat walk, we see on the right the majestic peak of Pumori emerging. Just the upper triangle, snow clad at 23,490 feet. We will get to know her much better as we continue the journey.

Directly ahead is Lobuche peak at 20000+ feet, one who's namesake town is where we are headed.

As we reach the end of the flats, I see this massive glacier that we have to cross. Filled with giant boulders, and the river rushing through it. Another perfectly scenic adventure spot.

There is a bridge built just over the rocks and we cross it and make a short climb to our lunch destination just at the start of Thukla pass, where a treat awaits us.

As we stop at the tea House, we realize it is really cold and windy, and just rush into a completely crowded dining hall, filled with other trekkers exchanging stories.

We take over some seats and are served the most delicious meal we have had so far - a plate of two Aloo parathas each. Superbly cooked with lots of potato, salt and Oil. Just what I think we were all craving for.

As we finish the meal, we see Tenzing coming in. Alone. Looking frazzled. He doesn't know how to say it, but some of us guess by now. D is not going to complete EBC with us.

They had found that he had early symptoms of AMS and wanted him to go down a couple of hundred meters and acclimatize for a few days more before attempting the rest of the trek. so he and L had decided that they would just head back and wait for us. So accompanied by Bikal they were making their journey to Pheriche from where they would take a rescue helicopter back to Kathmandu as soon as possible.

It took some time to sink in. That we would be down to five attempting the rest of the journey. I could not also help but think of the cruel irony that the person who had researched on AMS, and given us so much information and precautionary tips would be struck down by It.

Leaving the restaurant, we follow Milan silently for a while, I guess thinking about this event, and processing it in internally in different ways. Three more days to go and we should stay healthy was the primary thought in my mind.

We stop to look back at the mountains that we have just crossed.

And a signboard reminds me of how high we have reached.

The hike up to Lobuche is a steep climb and quite a challenging one but we handle it. And elevation gain of 500+ meters over distance of about 4 km. The terrain is different. Morraine as it is called. Just rocks and boulders.

Half an hour before Lobuche we reach the Everest memorial area. The setting itself is a bit surreal, a large flattish area, where you can see memorials of fallen Mountaineers. Watched over by giant peaks, keeping eternal vigil.

In every moment
whether here or far in time
An infinity

It is a moment of introspection for everyone I guess. I find the rock on which there is a plaque for an Indian mountaineer that we were told about.

She had summited Everest, and then died on the summit.

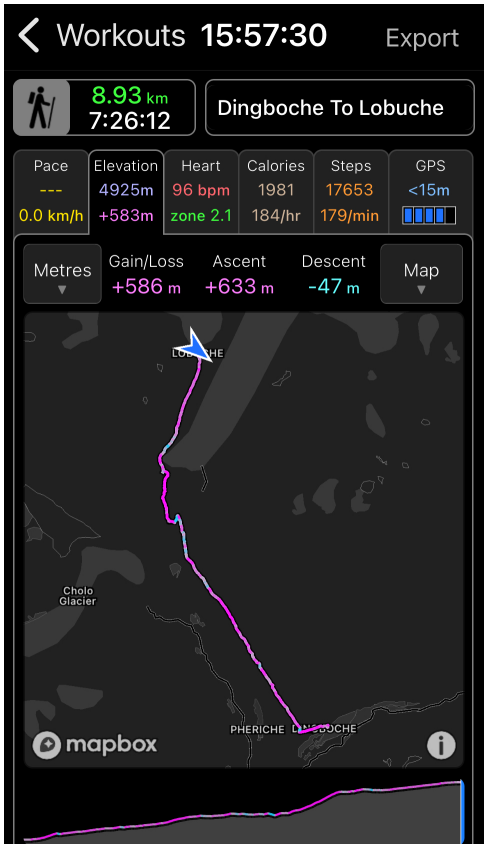
Euphoria, and then nothingness.

We spend quite some time here, not just struck by the solemnity of the space, but also to absorb the really scenic mountain views around us.

We are not far from our destination. Just a thirty minute walk says Tenzing. We finish it in quick time and soon see clutch of a few buildings in front of us, a much smaller settlement than the ones that we have stayed in so far. We have been told that the accommodation while, among the best available would be basic with shared bathrooms, but a heated mattress for the night. Still looking for creature comforts, I guess.

We enter the dining hall of the teahouse, and I am pleasantly surprised to see a very busy place filled with hikers who have reached before us. The buzz is really nice. We order our teas and coffees and some french fries to celebrate!

I think we are all pretty excited because we are just a day away from the first of our goals as would be all the other trekkers as well. I see some of them furiously filling out their journals and I am reminded that I need to write a blog sometime after getting back.



The temperature outside is falling and we know that it will be at least -10 at night. I just hope that the heated mattress really works. I wake up in the middle of the night to use the bathroom and realize how cold it is when I see the bucket of water there is frozen. After all we are now at 4925 meters elevation.

Meanwhile Diny and Lata were going through a challenging time where decisions had to be made and Diny's health was at the center of it. Here is what they went through - in Diny's own words and pictures. Read on…

November 21.

A day of reckoning

Having said bye to Lata , who left Dingboche at 8:15 am with Bikal, and the Famous Five 😊 who left at 8:30 with Milan, Tenzing and I waited for a few minutes and then went down to the clinic. We were the first to be seen by the doctor who examined my ear and said there was a middle ear infection. After that, he did some 'stethoscoping' on my chest and back, checked the SpO2 level which was 70, and ran some other tests.

He then pronounced that he was not happy with the sounds he was hearing from my chest and recommended that I wait at Dingboche for 2 days to acclimatize further, then do a check-up before proceeding to higher elevations. We then went back to the tea house where I took the first dose of the medicines.

(*Bawa bravado kicks in here*) Since there was no way to contact anyone while on the move, Tenzing and I decided to start for Thukla and catch up with the group and then decide. An hour and a half later, we saw Lata and Bikal on the Nepali flat, way in the distance.

Lata is given the situation summary.

(*The wife now takes charge of the situation*) Once we caught up with them, we decided that it would be best if we went to Pheriche instead of going back to Dingboche since it was at a lower altitude. We thought we would stay at Pheriche till the others completed the trek and then we would all return to Lukla together.

After descending a fairly steep hill which had a walking path of maybe 18 inches all the way down, we reached Pheriche. We got a room at a tea house, had a bite and I took the second dose of the meds. It was already cold even though it was just 4:30 in the evening, so we stayed in the dining room since it was the only warm place and had some connectivity.

We went to the room and were pleasantly surprised and thankful to find an attached toilet. However, even at that time, there was ice forming in the drum of water kept for the toilet.

As the evening wore on, my stomach started rumbling and I had to run to the toilet a couple of times. This was a precursor of things to come.

Birds-eye view of Periche

We were in touch with Nitesh to decide next steps and to possibly leave for Kathmandu the next day. Nitesh advised us to speak to ICICI Lombard in Mumbai to initiate action for the evacuation. Ava, my daughter, managed all the communication with them from then on, getting all their requirements.

We had a light dinner, after which I took the medicines and then went to sleep. That was when the chaos really started. I was getting up every 30-40 minutes to go the toilet, and it was 'double-engine' problem!

The temperature in the night was -11 C, the drum water was mostly ice, and by morning it was obvious that it was not going to be possible to stay another day at Pheriche.

After much discussion with Nitesh, the teahouse owner (who was very helpful and encouraging that everything would be all right), Ava and Dilnaz, Nitesh got us a shared chopper to Lukla. He also sent Bikal and the porter who had brought our bags back from Lobuche to accompany us and put us on the flight to Kathmandu.

An ill but happy Gilder heads back for treatment

Back to civilization as we know it

On reaching Kathmandu, there was a vehicle that took us to the airport exit from the chopper and then another vehicle that took us straight to the hospital. We had to stay a couple of days in the hospital even though all the vital signs were back to normal, since there was a persistent bladder issue, which the hospital said would have to be addressed back home in Mumbai.

Two days later, the Famous Five returned to Kathmandu after accomplishing both the goals, and their story continues in the final Part 5 of the main blog