

From: Chuck Conner (External) [cconner@rcfhc.org]

Sent: 11/13/2008 9:57 AM

Subject: Damauli , Nepal

Damauli, Nepal

Good evening from the interior of Nepal. We left Kathmandu this morning around 11 am for the four + hour drive to Damauli. Getting out of the city is time consuming with all of the traffic, it is a very congested area with all of the various vehicles and to go west there is only one way out of the valley. It is interesting to see the gradual change in living conditions as you near the edge. There are more of these supportive businesses like truck repair, brick kilns, gravel pits, etc. You begin to see the conditions that most people are contending with for survival. When you get to the top of the mountain to drop out of the Kathmandu Valley you pay the first of a number of tolls at booths manned by police. This is a road tax to assist with the repairs but it is difficult to see anything having been done since last year.

Dropping into another valley, it takes about 1 ½ hours to wind down the mountain to get to the valley floor where the rivers are. The roads are cut into the mountain side and snake back and forth with only two lanes, many blind corners, and no guard rails between you and the quick way down.

We saw three major accidents, all within the past day or so and all involving either trucks or busses that ran into each other or the mountain side. There were also about 5-6 large trucks broken down on the road and like the accidents involving these large vehicles, they remain where they are. There are no tow trucks here so with a totaled vehicle, they begin the task of disassembly on the spot. This process takes several days and jams up the roads as the vehicles remain where they broke or crashed.

The views down the mountain and along the river are very spectacular. The mountains here rise to only about 4-5000 ft. but are pretty much straight up and the "hollers" are very slim. The river waters are glacial green as they run from the Himalayas. We saw a few rafters along the way and it would be a thrilling ride in some parts. Riding thru the small villages along the highway is kin to a highway exit in the US. There are a lot of small shops, food vendors, vehicle repair shops and people waiting for buses to hawk their wares also. It is colorful and fascinating.

Sahadev had arranged for a small bus to carry out luggage and school supplies. He has been a wonderful friend, taking his personal time to work with me on the needs of the schools.

We arrived in Damauli about 3 pm and the club president, Mr. Gurung met us. I have been corresponding with him over the past six months to make this visit possible. He was also accompanied by several other club officers. We were given prayer scarves and a small bouquet of

fresh flowers, welcomed with friendly greetings and then shown to our rooms to rest for a few hours. The Rotarians have placed us in a very new hotel in Damauli, owned by one of them. We are quite comfortable, much more so than I imagined. There is of course no hot water!

After a bit we went for a short walk around to look at the area. We are of course novelties, not many foreigners get off the main road here. People are friendly, smile and say "Namaste", the children specially are all smiles and giggles.

We met with the Rotary Club officers at 6:30 to greet and go over the schedule they have provided for us. They have done a great job of getting us to schools, a hospital, the Women's literacy project, and several local attractions. I will of course give you details as our days unfold with these.

We ate a dinner of rice, spinach, dhal, potatoes w/ cauliflower, and thin bread also made from dhal (lentil). This is a typical Nepali meal, very different from the Indian meals, with less variety but no less tasty.

So until tomorrow, be at peace.

chuck