

Tuesday November 20th

We were up again at 6:30 for a scheduled hike up to the top of Manahankot Mountain, rising 1200 meters above Damauli. We began the walk around 8:30 with a party of Rotarians and few spouses and child. As we walked out of town we visited as small Hindu temple and the local museum. The museum was small and contained a few of the locally made handicrafts like brightly colored and woven baskets, sitting mats, drums, and older pieces of cultural antiquity. The crafts were made by various ethnic Nepalese groups and unfortunately none of them could be found in the local shop.

We walked across the bridge spanning the Madi Seti River and were told the bridge was built by the Chinese, twice, as the first time it was poorly constructed. At the end of the bridge there was a tourism sign that read “Nepal – Once is not enough”. How very true.

We began the ascent of the mountain immediately after that. The mountain paths in Nepal have been constructed over many hundreds of years and are mostly stepping stones of rocks that have been laid into the hillside, weaving their way up and across the terrain. At various point there are resting places called Chautaris and are a base of rocks that have been made around trees to form a flat resting area, providing shade. Many were also constructed at places where water was flowing from the mountain. Many are also built around two different types of trees, the Bar and Pipal and these trees are worshipped as symbols of the Gods Goodish and Bishnu.

On the trek up we encountered school children that walk as much as 1 ½ hours each way to school, men and women carrying large and weighty loads of wood, rock, vegetables, and plant cuttings for animal feed. The rural Nepalese are a hardy mountain people, reminiscent of our own Appalachian heritage. Much of what people carry is in large baskets on their back with a thick strap that they place around their foreheads. To see elderly men and women carry such loads up and down the mountains is to realize that life is hard for them and that for them and their children not much of this is likely to change in their lifetimes.

The higher up the mountain we climbed, the more scarce the water resources are. We did pass two small ponds that serve as places for livestock and washing clothes are were very dirty. The few places where water was available were communal and kept clean with people having to walk significant distances to carry large metal pots on their backs. This is done at least once daily and seems to be one of the many roles that fall to the women.

After 2 ½ hours we finally reached the top where there are two small temples. We each provided an offering. The view was incredible. As you look out you see the town of Damauli below and two rivers cutting though two different valleys. There are large tracts of farmland to the left stretching between the valleys. To the right is Damauli. Directly across from us is the Himalayan range, this part being the Annapurna range with Annapurna, the third highest mountain on earth stretching into the vast sky. How cool to be witness to this, the best panoramic view I have had in my visits to Nepal.

We rested on the top for several hours, all the while more Rotarians and their families showing up at different times. In the end there were probably 30 of us. These folks had again taken their day to show us this wonderful vista. They had also brought a picnic, actually they had hired an elderly man and woman to carry it up as I have described previously. I had brought binoculars which were very popular and several had never used any before, they were thrilled! The club had also brought a club banner which was tied high and we took a group photo under it. I also had to play photographer for many of the folks with promises to email them photos.

If this wasn't enough, there is also a small village of Magar people, about 75 who live atop this incredible mountain. They are very poor and to get anything to market or to the village requires the trekking up and down the mountain. They had arranged a cultural program for us with five young girls in traditional dress dancing while six or seven men played the traditional drum, the Khainjari, and sang the songs of their clan. It was so much fun with many of us joining in the dancing. The Magar people were welcoming and had prepared a meal for us and shared their local "wine", actually a millet whiskey which was very tasty and potent, about 90 proof. In the end one person had to be put to bed before we left as he was too unstable to travel back down. We also took up a collection plate for the village and everyone was very generous. An additional note, we were the first Americans to ever visit this village!

We began back down later than we had planned and about half way we were walking these paths in the dark with only the aid of a few pen lights. It was difficult going but everyone made it without incident. It took as long to get down as the climb due to the darkness. When we arrived at the base someone had called ahead a vehicle was waiting to take us the short span remaining.

What an incredible day. Again the Damauli Rotary Club had given of their time, energy and expense to share their culture and join in building friendships. We were pretty tired and headed to our rooms to clean up and begin packing for our morning departure.

Nafeeza went out to make a call and I asked her to meet with me when she returned. She had spoken with her father and he had stated that it was between us and that my decision would be respected. Nafeeza apologized for being a problem but wanted specifics. That she got very directly but in teaching and mentor manner. Bottom line is that she is more self-absorbed than self aware, the crux of the problem; it is always about her and her needs. In the end I agreed to allow her to continue but would intervene at any act of rudeness, self absorption, or threat to the service work. I laid down specific rules about her continued presence.

And so another day ends.....Peace to you.