



In November this year I was fortunate to travel to Nepal with a group of 11 others to trek the foothills of the Himalayas.

The group came from all over Ireland and was fundraising for Concern Worldwide, a charity delivering aid and development programmes into poor countries.

Not being an experienced trekker, I was happy to be welcomed at the airport in Kathmandu by a representative from Across the Divide who very quickly began to inform and encourage the whole team.

A 6 hour bumpy bus ride later and we were all settled at our camp Sekute Beach, a small resort by the river very popular with Kayakers from all over the world.

The following day our trek began from a small town a few hours' drive from camp where we got our first taste of Himalayan trekking 'countryside'.

Each day the group passed through tiny communities perched on the hillside and on terraces perfectly formed for their gardens of basic vegetable patches.

It was with a sense of real privilege that we met with the people of Nepal. An almost endless stream of school children, women with impossible loads on their back, men with pretty Joe Ninety shaped hats on and many small girls and boys holding hands welcoming us along the way with their shouts of Namaste! Namaste!

Although I had anticipated it, the stunning beauty of this land is something that I found to be quite unfathomable. It's almost like your whole being has to absorb it, as if your eyes can't do the whole job on their own.

Meeting with a community of people at a monastery was a highlight one afternoon. We were welcomed to enter the small place of worship and meet with the monks. In the sunshine outside and before we resumed our journey we were offered refreshments and I have a feeling many blessings!

The spirituality of the country is renowned and it was evident everywhere. Our path was punctuated by walls etched with prayers and every now and then the startling sight of an array of colorful prayer flags blowing in the warm wind.

The summit trek was challenging, thrilling, grueling, amazing and very wonderful! Trekking from 3.30am through the blackness with our head torches, we reached the summit of Pike Peak to see the sun rise over the Himalayas - close up.



At 4065mtrs, we were treated to an astonishing sight. A perfect, clear sky meant that we could see Everest nestling in the middle of the range 50.2 miles from our view point.

The sense of awe that we experienced up there that morning may have almost been nudged into 2nd place by the welcome we received at a hill side school on our way back to camp the following day. The

school was a small hut with table and benches and not much else. The teacher and children were so happy to see this group of funny looking people and we all had fun blowing bubbles that one of the team had brought.

The nature of the people and the beauty of the landscape is unforgettable. In particular, the presence of the Sherpa's working, helping and supporting every step of the way carrying all the equipment from camp to camp.

The trek was very challenging but was made a lot more comfortable by the Sherpa team and the wonderful Nepalese chef. Not to mention the head Sherpa guide Pherba (The Great)

Thanks to the expertise of the Across the Divide team a safe and very rewarding adventure was experienced by all.

Leanne Coates