

# Eight trekkers in Tibet

From Lhasa to Mount Kailash and the three river sources



Maryvonne Plessis-Fraissard

2017

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The author at the Golden Temple in Patan, Nepal.

Pictures in this book are from Anis Dani, Colin Warren and Maryvonne Plessis-Fraissard.  
Texts are quoted from all eight trekkers, sometimes with their name, and sometimes not.

The voyage was by air, bus, train, truck, and trekking with yaks or horses



Forget orthography, Tibetan names have many ways, so maps and text at times differ.

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The Tibet of three provinces, as defined in “The Dragon in the Land of Snows” counts 3.8 million km<sup>2</sup>, almost the size of the European continent. It is the “Gangs Yul”, Country of the Snow, a high and harsh plateau set beyond the Himalayan chain that serves as a Southern frontier.

We flew from Kathmandu to Lhasa and made a land journey of some 1,200km (746 miles) West to Shigatse (or Shingatsé) by train, and then to Manasarovar by bus along the line of the highest peaks. We adapted to altitude, we visited mythical Lhasa, and in the steps of the “Parisienne” Alexandra David-Néel, dear to my grand-mother, we walked through the monastery of Shigatse. All together, we traveled in Tibet by train, bus, truck and walked with yaks and with horses, some 2,601km (1,616 miles). Tables at the end of the book give the trip and trek numbers.

## Foreword

Trekking the Kora around the sacred Mount Kailash, and to the source of the four major southeast Asian rivers that originate around it, was one of Anis Dani’s lifetime pursuits. Anis befriended Rabi Thapa, founder of Sacred Summits, while working in Nepal. Together they planned the trip. It was to be simple: get a team of the best Sherpas from Nepal, travel across the Himalayas by truck, through Zhangmu to Shigar on the high Tibetan plateau, and from there to Manasarovar, less than two days away.

There are only two short periods in the year when this can be done, in late June and mid-September, between the summer monsoon and the winter snows. A trip, from Simikot up the Kali Gandaki river, was to be made in June–July 2014. That was the year of the Horse when the Kora bestows twelve times its benefits on pilgrims, and because of the affluence, China closed the border. To avoid disruptions from the religious calendar, the trip was set for the 2015 September travel window. Then, on April 25 2015, an 8.1 Magnitude earthquake struck Nepal, killing over 8,000 and injuring scores. The road to Zhangmu was closed. So we had to travel with the core team of Sherpas by plane to Lhasa, to join Chinese logistics and guide, and then travel the long road West.

Because this was the first trip of its kind that Sacred Summits organized, the trip had to be adjusted at each step. Somehow, adjusting day by day was to be a core feature of the rare and precious experience of the voyage.

## The Eight Trekkers

We were eight. Eight is a favorable number in Buddhist tradition. It structures the thangka paintings that recount the life of Buddha, it is the organizing number of the cosmology.



**Anis Dani**, the passionate Kailash teamster,  
**Brad Roof**, the un-fatigable “native” trekker, doer on a quest,  
**Chris Parel**, the poet and philosopher,  
**Colin Warren**, with the furry friends, Amilous in Tibet reporter,  
**Cyprian Fisiy** the wise warrior, first ever African among pilgrims,  
**Marc Blanc**, the sure footed mountaineer,  
**Maryvonne Plessis-Fraissard**, another “Parisienne” in Lhasa,  
**Rabi Thapa**, the humanist and Buddhist, guide and friend.

## The Teams Attending the Trip



The Lama



Tenzing Dhargye  
the Tibetan guide



The thoughtful  
and gentle  
horsemen



The proud and resilient  
Yak men

The devout bus driver,  
the shy factotum,  
the practiced truck driver,  
the resourceful cook Sherpa  
.. and



Kishor Gurung,  
the powerful Gurkha  
who knew no impossible



The Nyatapola Temple in Bhaktapur before the rain



## Part I

## Nepal

September 16 – 19,  
and on the return October 7, 2015



A butcher shop in Shankharapur



We came together  
in Kathmandu on  
September 16, 2015,  
the day of  
the Teej festival.



After a long drab flight, it seemed we had arrived in a country where gods and people mingle among temples. Women wore crimson and gold. Crowds flocked to Durbar Square. On Teej day, women visit the temple of Shiva; it was explained that “they fast and pray for their husband”. I thought: why do they fast for their husbands? Do they not pray for their children too? And why are men not dressing up too? But then I immediately corrected myself: “who am I to think of questioning, on arrival, such fervor and joy?” Under the amused eyes of Anis, I took the invitation to join a dance. I do not know Lord Shiva, but I can dance for peace, for my husband back home, and for mystic Nepal.



The first impression is bewildering: So much color, youth, beauty and riches. So many iPhones and such dense crowd: It is like walking Time Square in a 700 \$ per capita version, only with women looking like royalty. This is no Italy however: men are making no effort to be elegant and wander around in flip flops and jeans!



The second impression comes from the tangled jumble of electricity wires, the shabby upholstery of the World Heritage temples after the five months old earthquake, and the pervasive signs of lack of sanitation in a dense habitat.

Certainly here, youth and beauty bloom amongst chaos, and the joy and riches are found amidst much suffering!



The streets are a fast rolling story.  
The memory of the earthquake is everywhere.  
I note the many ladies on Vespas:  
Unrestrained mobility is a great  
springboard to wealth.  
Go sisters!





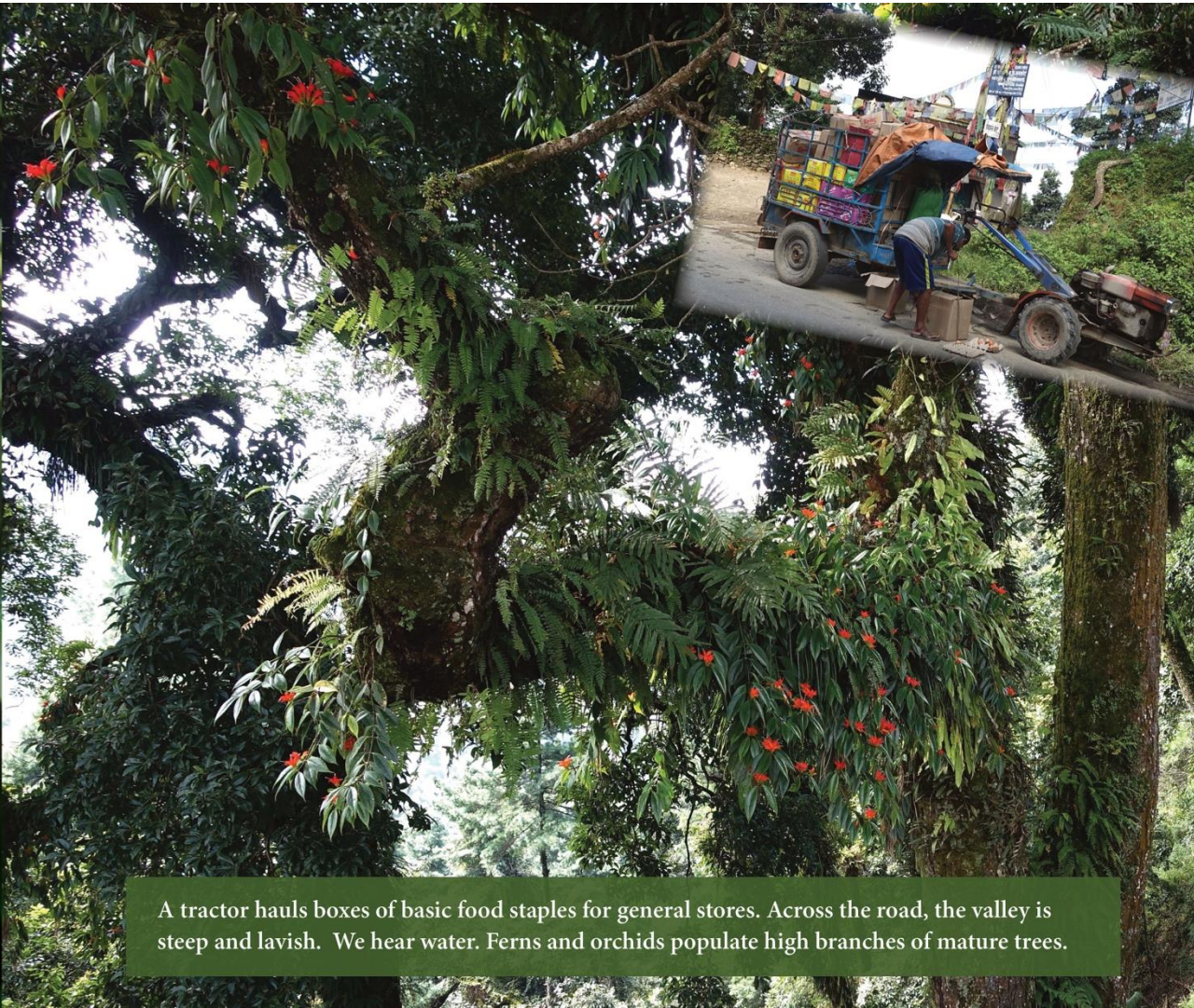
We go stretch our legs in the Kathmandu valley.  
The mountains are terraced and covered with lush greenery.  
We walk along pedestrian paths through villages.



A thin smog covers the city from afar. A sign posted by the women association warns that beating one's wife leads to prison, and Rabi tells the story of the unexpected spreading and positive impact of these women's clubs, despite lack of government support.



Blue flowers garnish luxuriant bushes. We meet a Himalaya grasshopper, among the most beautiful of the acrididae family. We can not find its picture in Wikipedia or bug guides. Could it be a new specie, which we would call “Thapai”, of Thapa, in the honor of Rabi?



A tractor hauls boxes of basic food staples for general stores. Across the road, the valley is steep and lavish. We hear water. Ferns and orchids populate high branches of mature trees.



In villages, the sacred tree, Ficus Religiosa – the tree under which Gautama Buddha attained enlightenment -extends its shade to create a public meeting place.



The earthquake has stricken erratically and some villages, such as Shankarapur, have been devastated. No organized information, help or support appears to have come. It is a painful and sad sight.



At the Jalpadevi Temple, a Mint Division barrel from the Currency Department of Rastra Bank makes amends as a rubbish bin, mysterious and amiable reminder of the virtue of austerity.



Our first encounter with children, is at a Ganesh shrine in Shankarapur.

Exquisite sculptured ironwood windows in Bhaktapur speak of past prosperity.



At a Nepalese carpet factory in Patan, we buy treasures. The smile of the weavers is a precious gift.



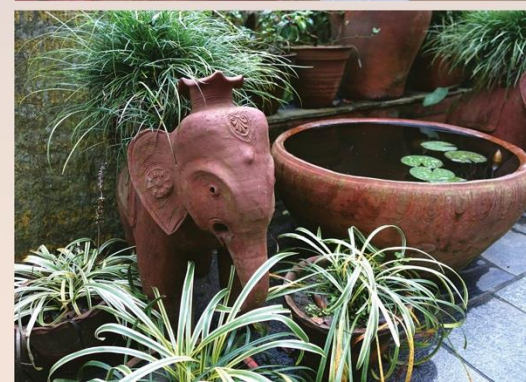
We take a bounty of memories, with Tika blessing from gurus in Pashupatinath.



In Bhaktapur, the Nyatapola Temple withstood two major earthquakes, in 1934 of 8.0 on the Richter scale, and in 2015 of 7.6. Is it the strength of the mythical guardians which keeps Nyatapola intact when all other ancient buildings are damaged, or is there something unique in its structural design?

In Nagarkot, we enjoy the luxury of patios and gardens among mindful earthenware.

We came to see Mount Everest, but it remains shrouded in clouds.





Still dazed by the imprints of the Kathmandu visit, We leave the green alleys, and fly over the Himalayan chain towards mythical Lhasa. Over the iced peaks, we are unable to identify Everest as the sky and the earth interweave.

## Part II

### Lhasa and the road to Manasarovar

September 19 – 23, 2015  
and the return October 3 - 6, 2015



Our Tibet bus



The Lhasa airport lays at the side of the Kyi Chu River, tributary to the Yarlung Tsangpo, the upper section of the Brahmaputra. The first vision of Tibet is a flowing composition of earthen tones. We land above 3,600 m of altitude.



Lhasa means the “place of the gods”.

From the airport, a newly built elevated highway passes by publicity boards for mobile phones and “Princess Wencheng, Tibetan Culture Legendary Opus”. The outskirts of Lhasa display huge housing construction sites which appear somewhat inactive.



Lhasa stands out as an imperial city, planned, with wide avenues and grand perspectives. Traffic is policed, streets are swept day and night. Electric only motorbikes schuss by, silently, the air is pure. Bike-share is on. “Friendship anniversary” decorations line the streets.





Tibetan architecture is prevalent in the city center. Street vendors from the emblematic Barkhor area have been moved to a sanitized indoor market.

The valley of youth and happiness gives its name to our hotel Shangri-La, contemporary and lavish, with displays of Tibetan art and artifacts.



Tourists and pilgrims with prayer wheels are everywhere.

Colin reports on the adventures of "The Amilous in Tibet", a gang of his grand son's furry Friends from Oxford, looking for adventure "and a different breakfast". This voyage intertwines gently with our journey and contributes a youthful outlook to its orderly purpose.







Entering the Potala Palace compound, we walk through a garden of roses towards the stairs rising up 170 meters.



The Potala is the Holy Palace of the Snow Land, built by the Emperor Songtsen Gampo in the 7th century. On its enclosing wall, the Buddhist mantra: “Om Mane Padme Hum”, means “may the Jewel of the lotus flourish”. It takes a lifetime to own up the many layers of significance of this prayer.

The “Red Palace” holds the gilded burial stupas of past Dalai Lamas, weighing up to 13 tons of precious metal. No picture may be taken of the innumerable treasures of murals, scrolls, sculptures and carpets within this UNESCO World Cultural Heritage treasure.



The Jokhang Temple is the most sacred temple in Tibet. Standing in the Barkhor Square and contemporaneous of the Potala, it holds the image of “Yomo Rinpoche” the young Buddha prince, brought in the dowry of princess Wencheng, and thought to have been uniquely made during the Buddha’s earthly life.

Deer are the first beings to have listened to the Buddha, and are featured prominently by the wheel of life, above the Jokhang entrances. The Temple is exquisitely decorated and paintings are being renovated. The Chinese flag guards the Temple.



We start the long journey, 1184km West and over 1000 meters up, to the Manasarovar Lake and entry to the Mount Kailash Kora. The Lhasa railway station is monumental, a testimony to the colossal infrastructure outreach into Tibet.

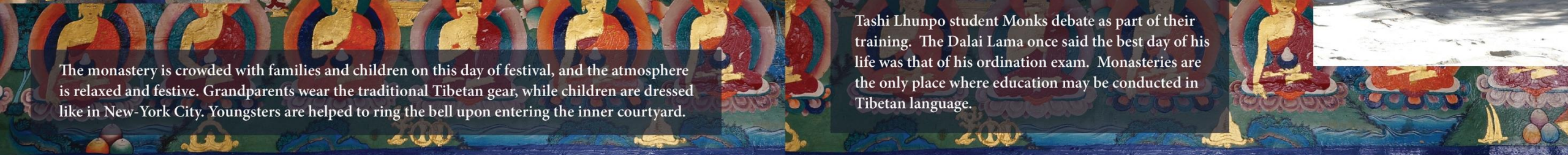


We complete the first 270 km by train, to Shingatse (or Shigatse), for the time being the end of the Beijing to Tibet train line.



The significance of the transport, energy and telecom investment along this corridor is revealed as we journey past barley fields and cement factories, along uninterrupted high voltage electricity lines.





The monastery is crowded with families and children on this day of festival, and the atmosphere is relaxed and festive. Grandparents wear the traditional Tibetan gear, while children are dressed like in New-York City. Youngsters are helped to ring the bell upon entering the inner courtyard.

Tashi Lhunpo student Monks debate as part of their training. The Dalai Lama once said the best day of his life was that of his ordination exam. Monasteries are the only place where education may be conducted in Tibetan language.





We continue our journey West and up. Houses are decorated and often freshly upgraded surrounded by barley fields. Corners are adorned with votive branches, and one always holds a Chinese flag.



Gradually around 4,000m barley disappears, replaced by sheep, and above 5,000m, by yaks. Houses become more humble. Still, electricity arrives to the most isolated farm.

Progressively the passes are higher, all adorned with “lungta” wind horses or prayer flags. We shout “Ki ki so so hai gyal lo” to convey good fortune. A kit of solar powered telecom equipment confirms that smartphones continue to receive calls and email.



Stops at check posts, at least once before and after each town, pace the journey. With the bundle of authorization papers held by Tenzing, it is speedy. Only once an officer steps aboard to quickly count the number of passengers.



Near To Gue La, reaching 5,211 m, we encounter dunes.



Herds of wild donkeys, called kiang, and of gazelles roam the plateau. Marmosets are common even in the highest valleys close to 6,000 m. We catch a glimpse of the rare blue sheep and distant wolves in the mountain.







Paryang, at 4,750 m, is a lively market place, and a halt for pilgrims.

Children are coming back from school. Ornately painted furniture is sold in the streets.

Motorbikes are everywhere, in all variations, adorned and fun.



Like in the rest of Tibet, pool is serious business in Paryang, for boys only.

Neighbors with contrasting attire, chat in the sun.

A little girl with a banana bursts with joy.

Our grand parents saw the beginning of electricity, of radio, cars, asphalted roads and public health; our parents were first to travel by plane, to have a TV and a phone; our generation saw the first computers, smart phones and the internet.

In Paryang, people got all these things in one big bang, less than five years ago. The excitement about it, somehow, is still palpable.





Our hostel in Paryang is welcoming, clean and elaborately hand decorated. The hostess and her daughter made us feel at home. Water is outside the room in a bowl, and there is electricity in each room, although it does not get to charge a phone in the night. On the return, these rustic amenities, including the living room yak dung stove, feel outright luxurious.



Pilgrims and tourists now come by car, and Paryang is no longer a required night stop. We are the only guests at the hostel, and are concerned with the business prospects of our gracious hostess, and her daughter.



The road slowly goes up. In the early mist, fresh snow starts just above the plateau.



It is cold. Belatedly, I ask to turn on the heat of our brand new bus, just bought by the Tibetan driver. The notice is in Chinese. The mystery of how to put the heating on cannot be solved. Is this a mishap of our driver's shy and gentle business start, or is it a symptom of hindered Tibetan business participation?



Carved prayer stones are piled at every religious site on the Kailash Kora

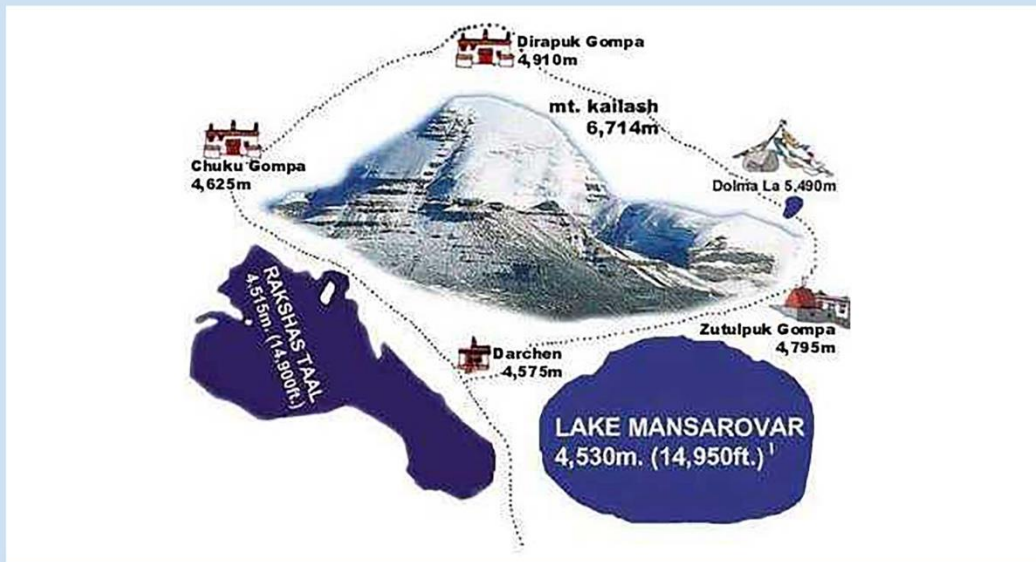


## Part III

### Lake Manasarovar and the Kailash Kora

September 23 – 26, 2015





Mount Kailash is a most sacred mountain blending its long history with legend, where pilgrims from four major religions walk the Kora. The Kora is 32 miles (52 km). A few hardy pilgrims do the Kora in a single day, but most pilgrims need three days. The Dolma (or Drolma) La pass at 5648m is the biggest hurdle.

The Bons continue the Bonpos religion, first established in Tibet. To them, Mount Kailash is the Swastika Mountain, home of deity

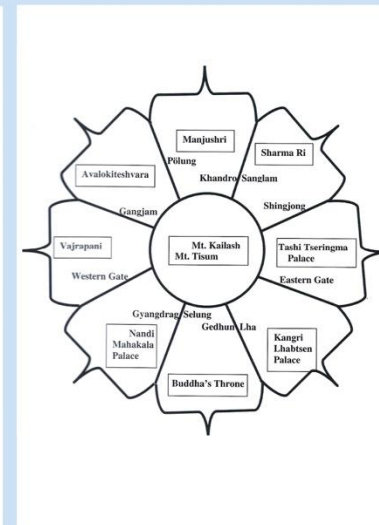
Ku Lha Gekho, center and source of abundance: they alone circumambulate counter clock-wise, accessing the Dolma La pass the harder way.

To the Hindus, the Mount Kailash is the home of Shiva, God of Destruction, whose consort Parvati holds the Lake Manasarovar.

The lake Rakshastaal, is salted, lifeless, and its waters are said to be deadly. It was cursed by Shiva and is held by demons.



Map quoted from "The Inner and Outer Paths of Mount Kailash" by Wolfgang Wöllmer, the Ngari Korsum Association, Switzerland



To the Jains, the Mount Kailash is where the first prophet gained enlightenment towards Nirvana.

To the Buddhists, "Kang Rinpoche" is the "snows of the precious jewel" where wisdom and enlightenment are created. Buddhists are freed from sorrows and sins when passing Drolma La, and may undertake the Inner Kora after walking 13 Koras. In line with religious bans, the Chinese government does not authorize the ascent of Mount Kailash.



Beyond Mayum La lies the Lake Manasarovar, entry point to Mount Kailash



Approaching the Lake Manasarovar, prayer flags line the road. Buddhists prostrate themselves on arrival.



Tibetan pilgrims walk the 96 km Kora around Lake Manasarovar. Offerings in small clay pots, herbs and prayer stones lie on the lake shore. To the North stands the lone Mount Kailash hidden by clouds.



Brad, Colin and Anis walk along the lakeside



To the South of the lake stands Gurla Mandhata, 7694m seldom ascended.



The sweet lakeside of Manasarovar is full of life and birds. A stream links it to the salted lake Rakshastal. We take a blissful spa in the hot waters in between the two lakes.





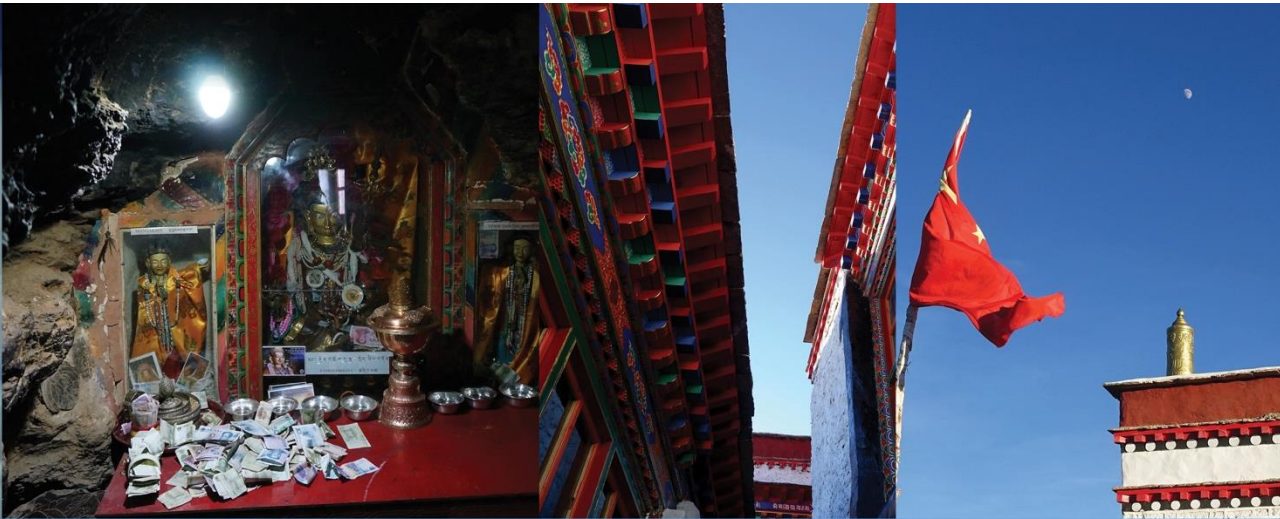
We build a cairn and plunge into the frigid waters of the lake Manasarovar.



We set camp for the first time at Manasarovar and stay two nights to finalize approval for the Kora and arrangements for the yaks.



We visit the Ji Wu monastery on a pointed hill at the side of the lake.



We enter the Hue Gompa shrine, in a cave within the Ji Wu temple.

The Monastery has been repaired and repainted. The Chinese flag flaps in the wind and we can see the moon in the day time.





From the Ji Wu monastery, we see Darchen, the end of the road and entry point to the Kailash Kora.



As we approach Darchen, we get the first commanding view of Mount Kailash

Tenzing conducts an arduous price negotiation with the yak men in front of the Mt Kailash Yak Transport Service Center. Its brass sign is imposing.



We place prayer flags before entering the Kailash Kora.



We set off at Tarboche



We follow the yaks along the Lha Chu.



The valley is strikingly wide and deep. Chuku Monastery marks one of the eight cardinal points around the Kora.



North face



West face

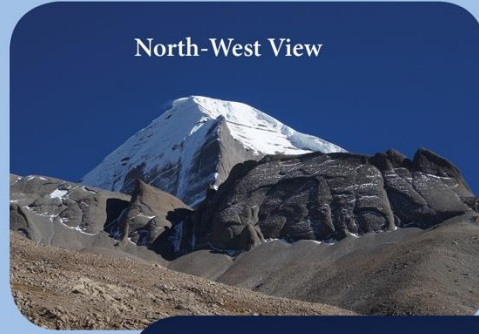
The four distinctive cardinal views of Mount Kailash.



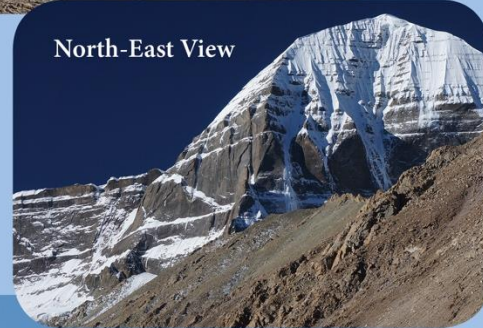
East face



South face



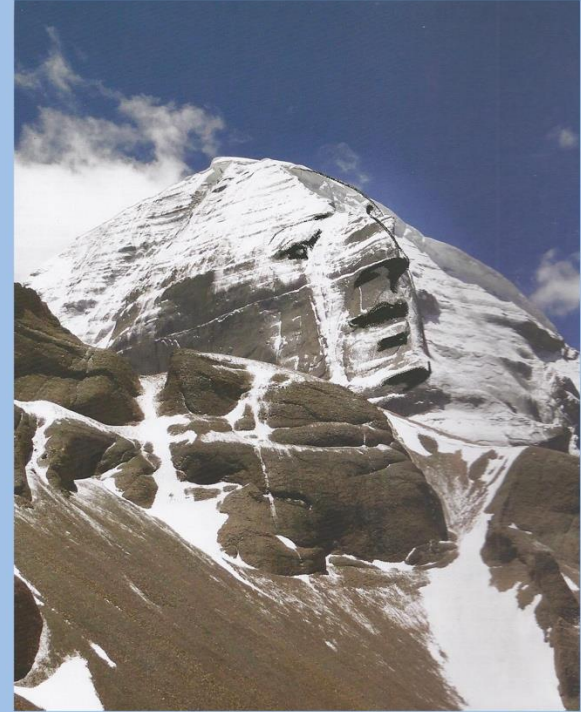
North-West View



North-East View



South-West View



The Mount Kailash is shaped as a three cornered pyramid. All its profiles evoke figures of deities.



Seas of prayer flags tell the devotion of pilgrims. Some pilgrims complete the Kora making full body prostrations at every step. They can not carry much, and we give them food and drink.

Arriving at Drolma La, Anis mounts the horse of Milarepa, the 11th century poet-yogi who won Kailash for Buddhism.

## A song of Tibet.

Listen to the wind, ...Om Mani Padme Hum  
Seven novices, each searching for ... nothing  
Expecting nothing; The illusion of nothing  
Om Mani Padme Hum, Listen to the wind

Wind-cold-dark-thin air;  
The shards of will power cull hunger, strength,  
sleep  
Om Mani Padme Hum, Listen to the wind

Stones, stones and more stones  
Stones and horizon at peace, How rich is Tibet!  
Om Mani Padme Hum, Listen to the wind

Brown-brown-all is pulsating brown;  
Colors of desolation weave a lush palate  
As browning late summer meadows drive  
the yak herds down  
Om Mani Padme Hum, Listen to the wind

Sifting illusions, A Tibet too vast to behold  
The lines tracing the mountains-passes-  
plateau-sky also illusion  
Listen to the wind, Om Mani Padme Hum

Chris Parel



After Drolma La, Gauri Kund, Parvati's emerald lake at 5,440m.





Beyond Drolma La, the axe of Karma.



Signs always follow the same etiquette: The Tibetan text is always on top, the Chinese text, always larger, and English always present, although sometimes lost in translation: “Macadam road, caution spraining”?



First camp over 5,000m. Along the entire pilgrimage route, telecom towers provide contact.



Going down from Drolma La, we leave the pilgrimage route and step into the uncharted territory with no maps, no infrastructure, no telecommunication. Only the Yak men and the Lama know the way.



Yak men have a bad reputation. “They are expensive, and do as they like.” They forge ahead beyond our sight, putting us at risk of getting lost. On the second day, they do not stop as agreed, after the dreaded Drolma La, and continue three hours in a punishing terrain. We wanted to complain and had a discussion, but communication was difficult. On the following day, first in unmapped territory, there was only one “La” to climb, yet we

arrived only at dusk. The wind was hurling. Setting camp was hard. We were exhausted. Yak men said nothing. We realized that the three hours advance had been critical for a safe arrival beyond the path. We came to appreciate their wisdom and knowledge and from then on we felt safe and thankful in their care. We grew to marvel at their ability to go about beyond the death zone, with just their skimpy clothes on, a kettle and a blanket.



La Chu Valley campsite 5,404 m, as always with the small green isolated private tent, only luxury on the road.

## Part IV

### The three river sources: the Sutlej, the Indus, and the Karnali

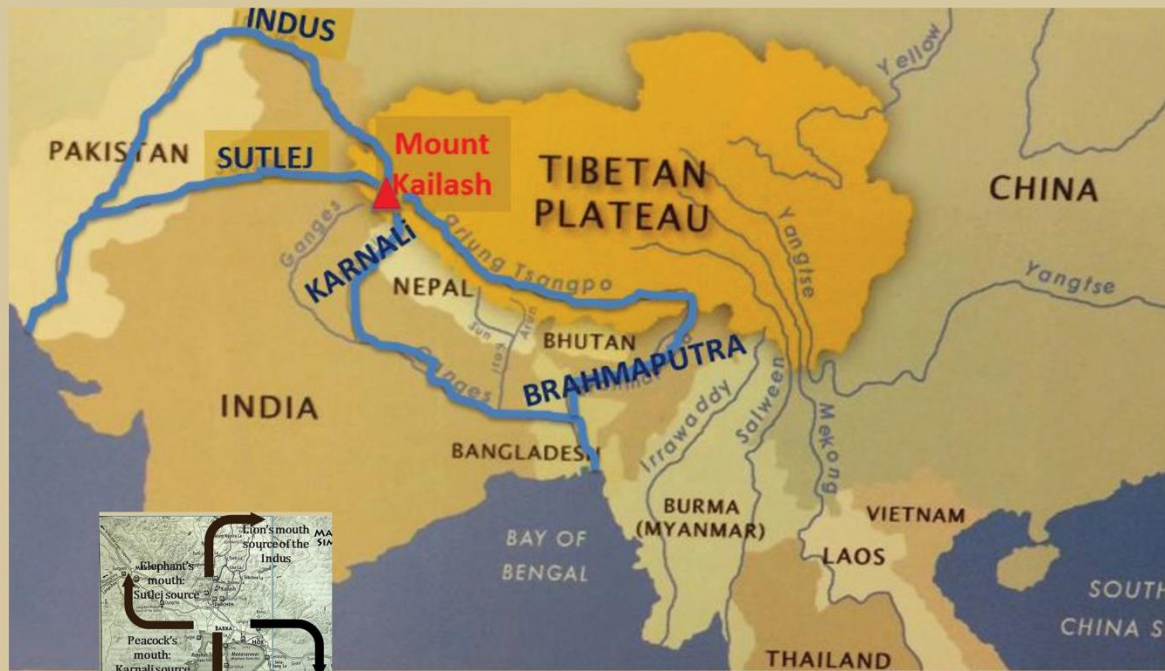


The horns of the yaks are rubbed with oil.  
Like the horses, they look wild and unkempt,  
yet are attended with care at the end of every day.



September 24, and September 27  
to October 2, 2015





To the source of the Karnali Mapcha Khabab, or Peacock's mouth

The four rivers springing about the Mount Kailash organize the cosmology of the world and are stylized in the Swastika, sacred symbol of good fortune in the four religions. They are the Sutlej and Indus which merge in Pakistan, the Karnali, major affluent of the Ganges, and the Tsangpo which becomes the Brahmaputra. These rivers run across Tibet, Pakistan and Bangladesh and bring livelihood to some 750 million people. It was late in the season and we could not trek to the Tsangpo.

The Karnali Source is located south of Mount Kailash near the Nepalese border. A dirt road ends on the left bank of the Karnali, 9km before the source. We trek to the source with horses for the camp luggage for two days and one night. This is a lower altitude, at 4341m, with more vegetation but at the late season, flowers are dry and bushes spiky.



Cyprian leads towards the crossing of the Karnali



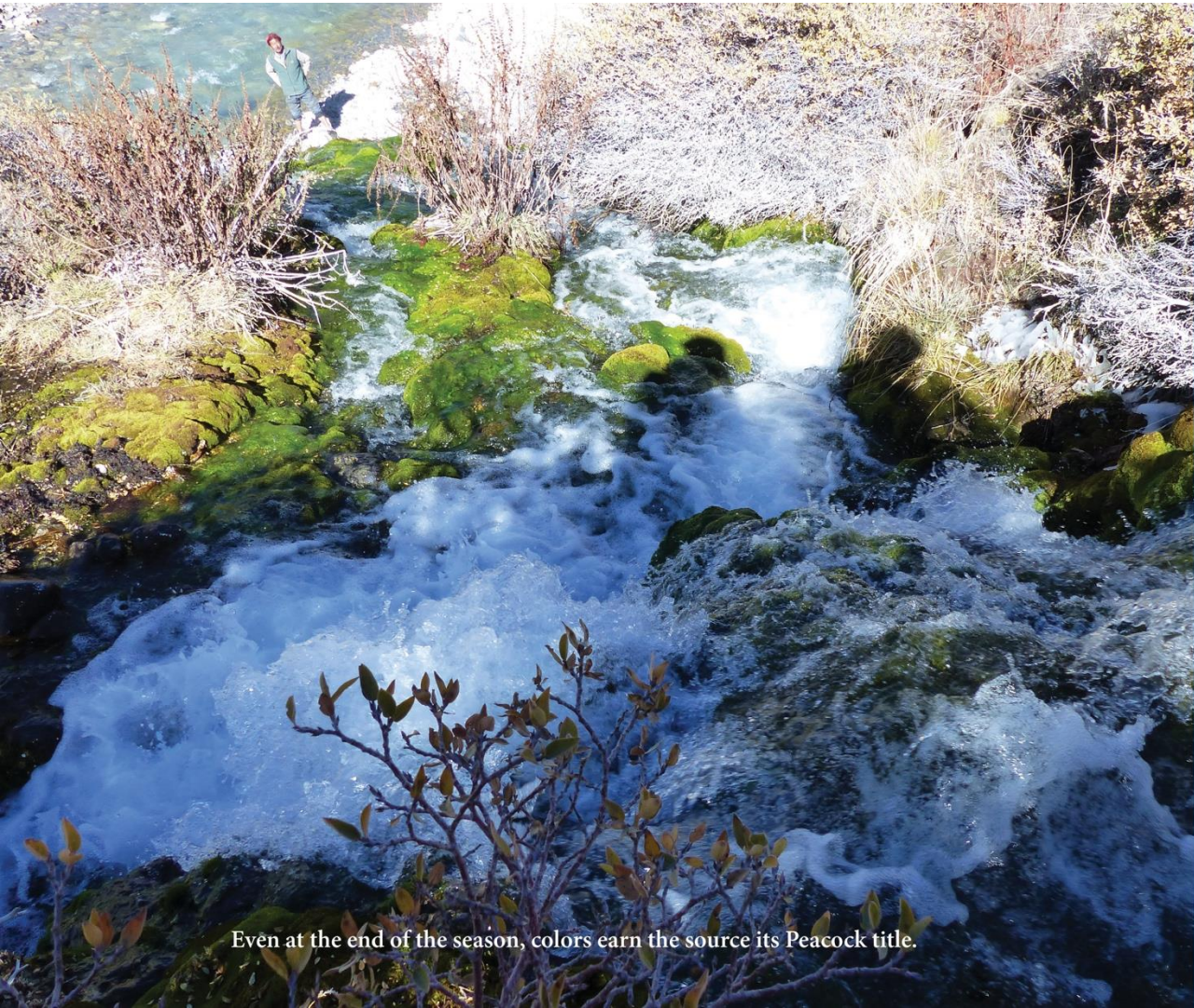
The horse man and his son show leadership in sorting the necessary cargo for one night, going without their tent to spare weight on the horses. There was little to graze, and the horses were left to scratch the dust for food. By night the animal legs are checked carefully. It took me weeks to get the prickles out of my gear.



Shoes hanging from the shoulder, we cross the Karnali



At the source, we place prayer flags down the sharp cliff.



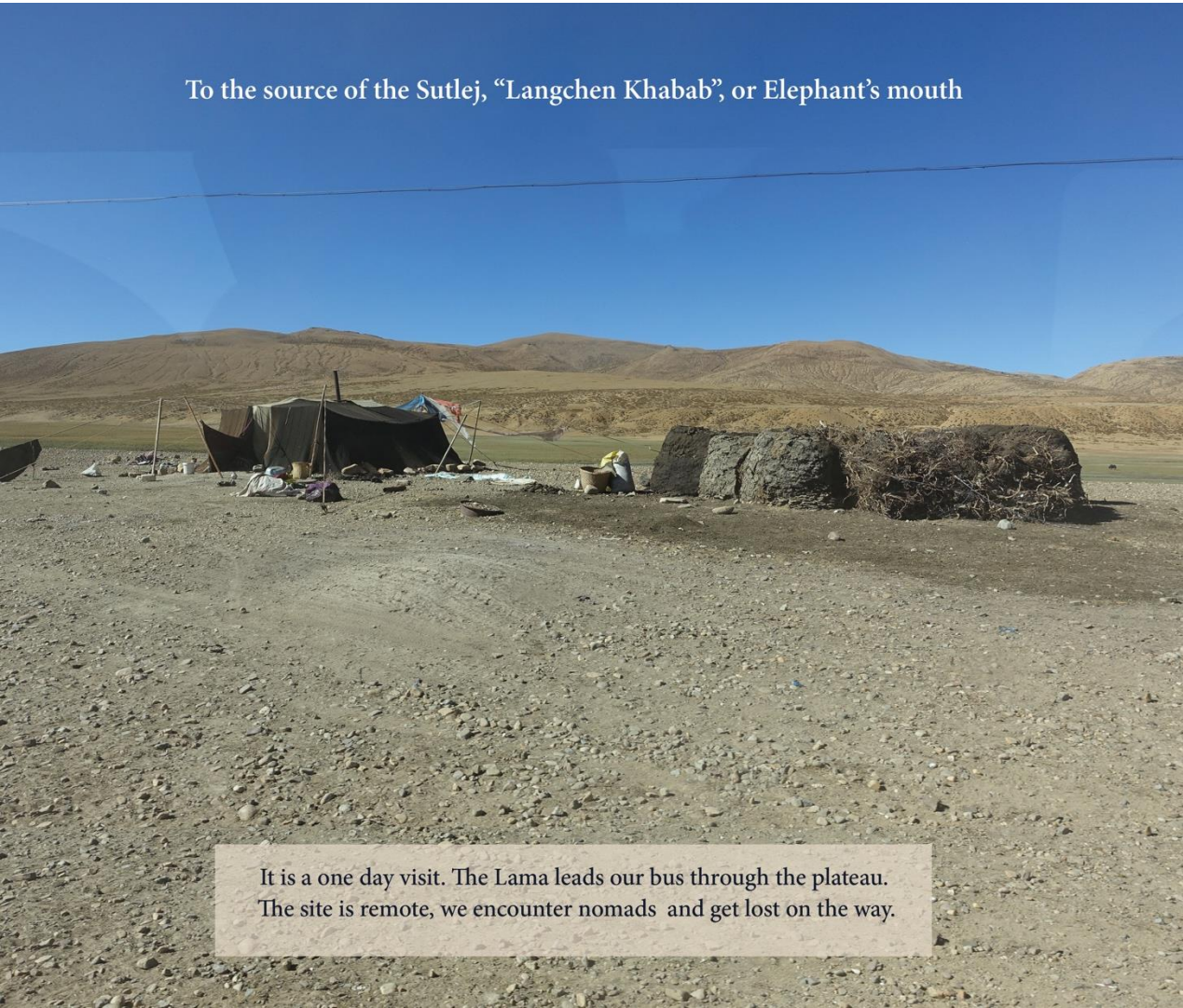
Even at the end of the season, colors earn the source its Peacock title.



The horse man takes a picture of his son in a prayer pose at the Source. What are the life options of this subservient youth? Are there possibilities outside the village? What makes him stand patient and contented, without the excitement of his age?



To the source of the Sutlej, “Langchen Khabab”, or Elephant’s mouth



It is a one day visit. The Lama leads our bus through the plateau. The site is remote, we encounter nomads and get lost on the way.



The Dunchu Monastery stands over the Sutlej Source. It is being restored, and the Head Lama has traveled to Lhasa in search of funds.



The sanctuary is packed with statues and books, and the walls are lined with scrolls libraries. This gives an impression of active study, contrasting with the remoteness of the place. We are offered tea and yak butter. Chinese Premier and all China leaders since Mao are displayed in the modest reception room.



There are four monks in Dunchu. Rabi, and each of us, lit a votive lamp and give names for the monks' prayer attention.



The elephant's mouth, source of the Sutlej , emerges as "108 springs", as many as the Buddhist prayer beads. Brad drinks at one of the spring.




We see an endangered black necked crane. We take pictures with the Lama.





To the source of the Indus, Tsenge khabab, or lion's mouth

The trek from the Kailash Kora is an uncharted three-day trek. Only the yak men know the way. From the start, the terrain molded by frost in "heaving", is a challenge.



The yak crew leads the way.  
Yaks are left to graze while we catch up and rest for lunch.  
On the first day, we pass over the Lhe La Pass at 5,724 m.

We follow the yaks on slopes and scree, sleeping five nights in a row above 5,000 m.  
The wind hurls. Except rare birds, we do not see or hear any living creatures.



The sky is intense. Time slows.



The terrain is tough and unstable.  
Cyprian gets hurt: with a swollen ankle he keeps walking,  
We cannot share his pain.  
He is a warrior and shows his metal. Never losing his smile, he gets well again.



On September 29, we set camp near Lunk Korlo Tso lake (5,176 m).  
On the other side, the last yaks are herded towards lower ground for the winter.  
Reality and fiction meet.



We leave the camp at the side of Lunk Korlo Tso lake while the camp is dismantled and yaks harnessed. The yaks will pass us by 10 AM and forge ahead.



Colors of desolation weave a lush palate painted in pulsating brown, dramatized by blue.



The full moon shows through the day on Tibetan plateau

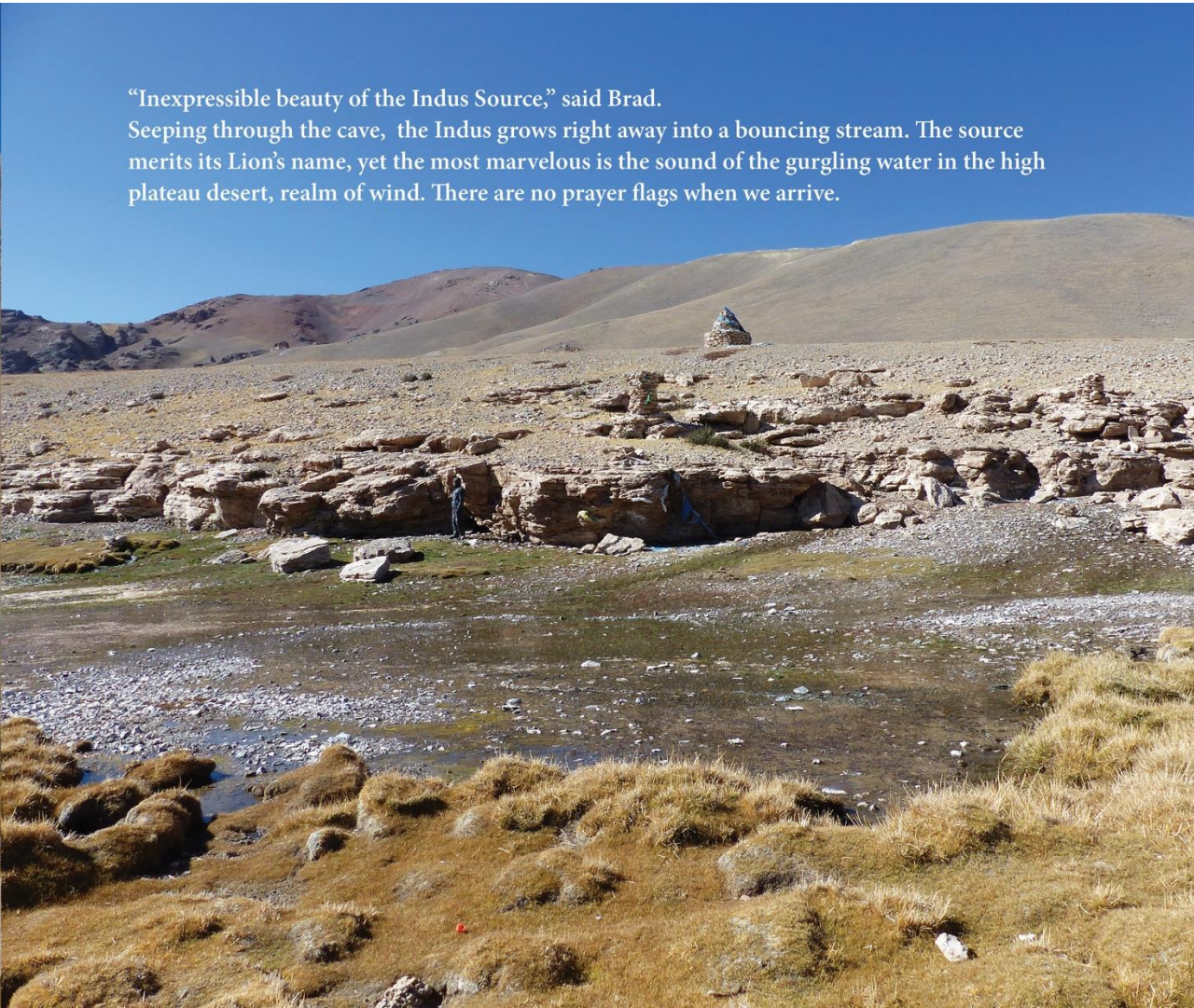


Listen to the wind ... and follow the yaks





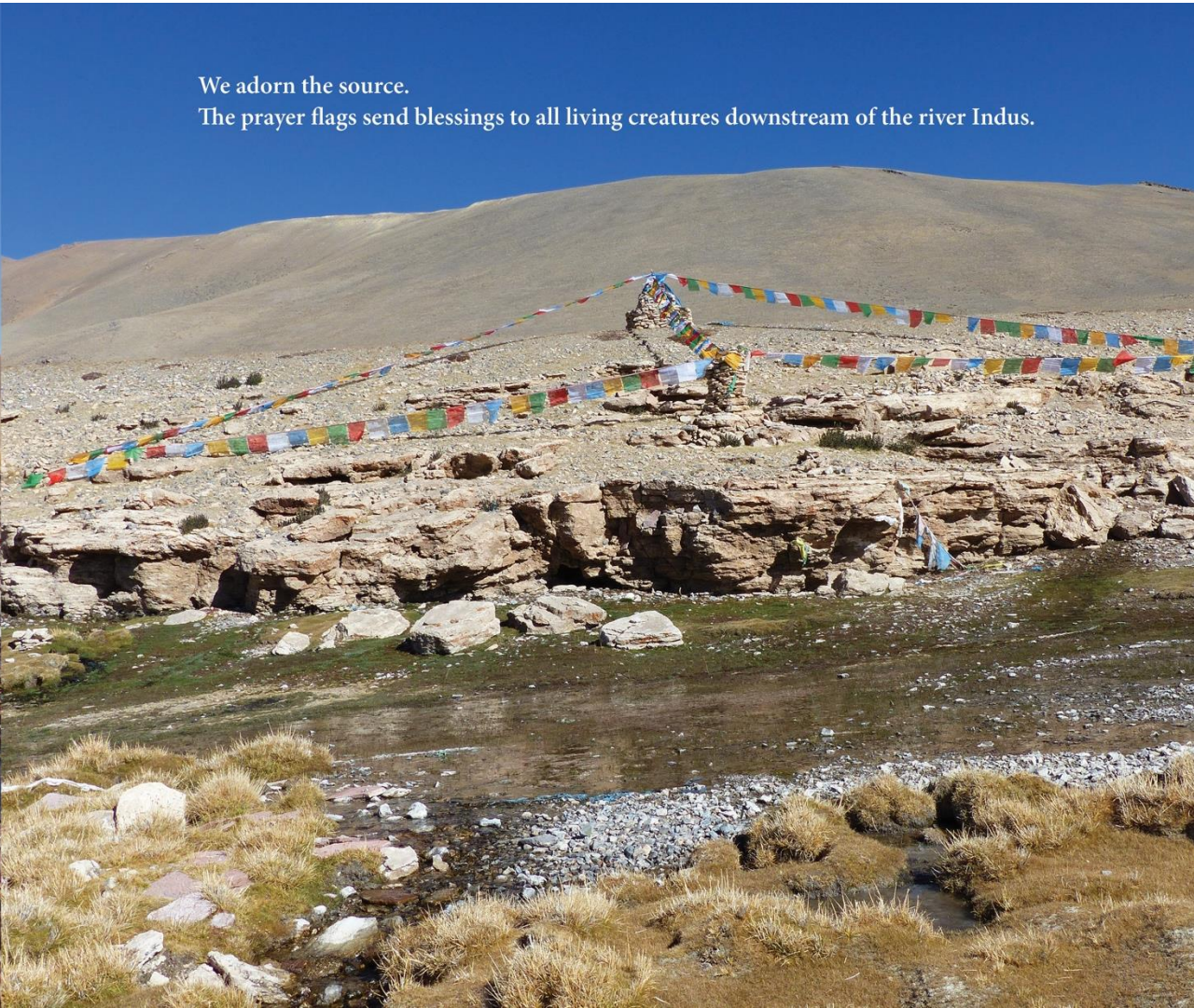
Stones, mountains, scree, more stones: “ just beyond that hill” say the yak men.  
Suddenly a road track. We are back on the map.



“Inexpressible beauty of the Indus Source,” said Brad.  
Seeping through the cave, the Indus grows right away into a bouncing stream. The source merits its Lion’s name, yet the most marvelous is the sound of the gurgling water in the high plateau desert, realm of wind. There are no prayer flags when we arrive.



In the morning frost builds silver spikes on the grass at the edge of the Indus.



We adorn the source.  
The prayer flags send blessings to all living creatures downstream of the river Indus.

We take a picture of the yak men who led us to the Indus source. They go back, holding a kettle and their woolen shoulder bag. We wait for the Lama, pathfinder for our truck and a jeep that take us back to the road.

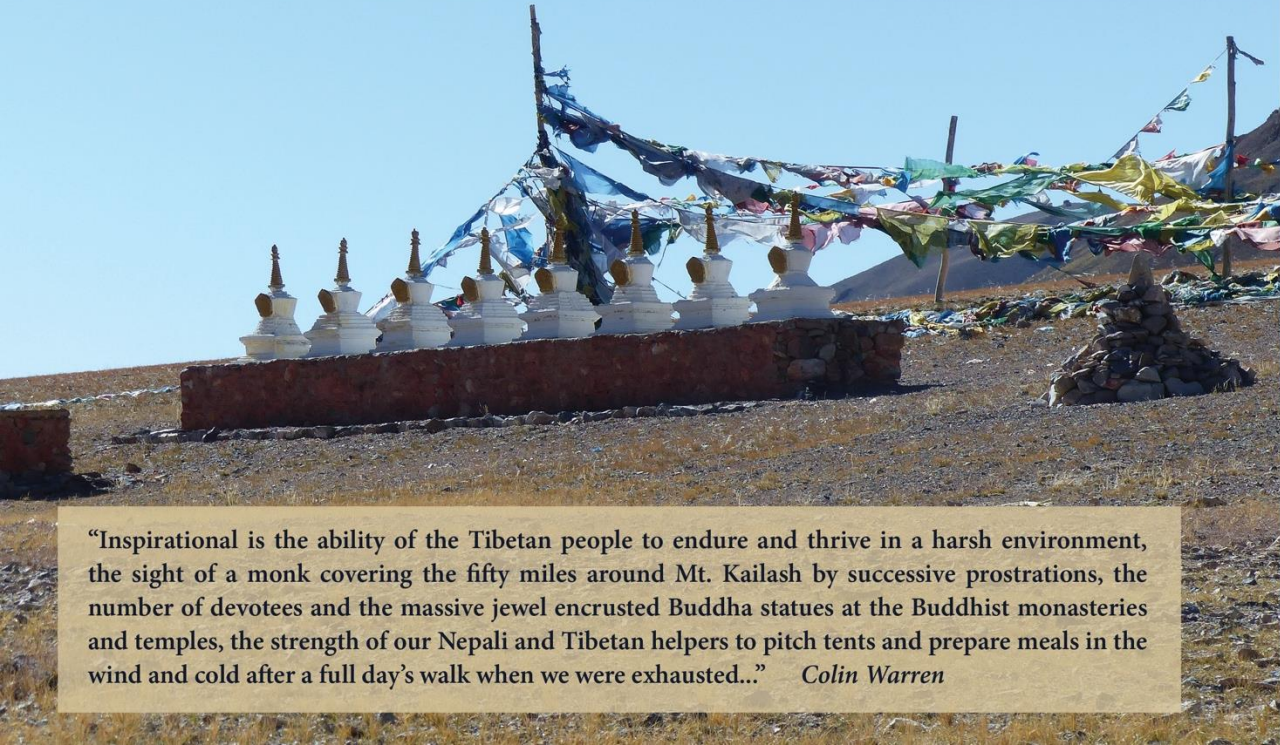


This is the high point of the voyage, the culmination of its most physically demanding stretch, long fetched solitude among stunning and austere beauty. Without words, we share a feeling of achievement, to be cherished forever.



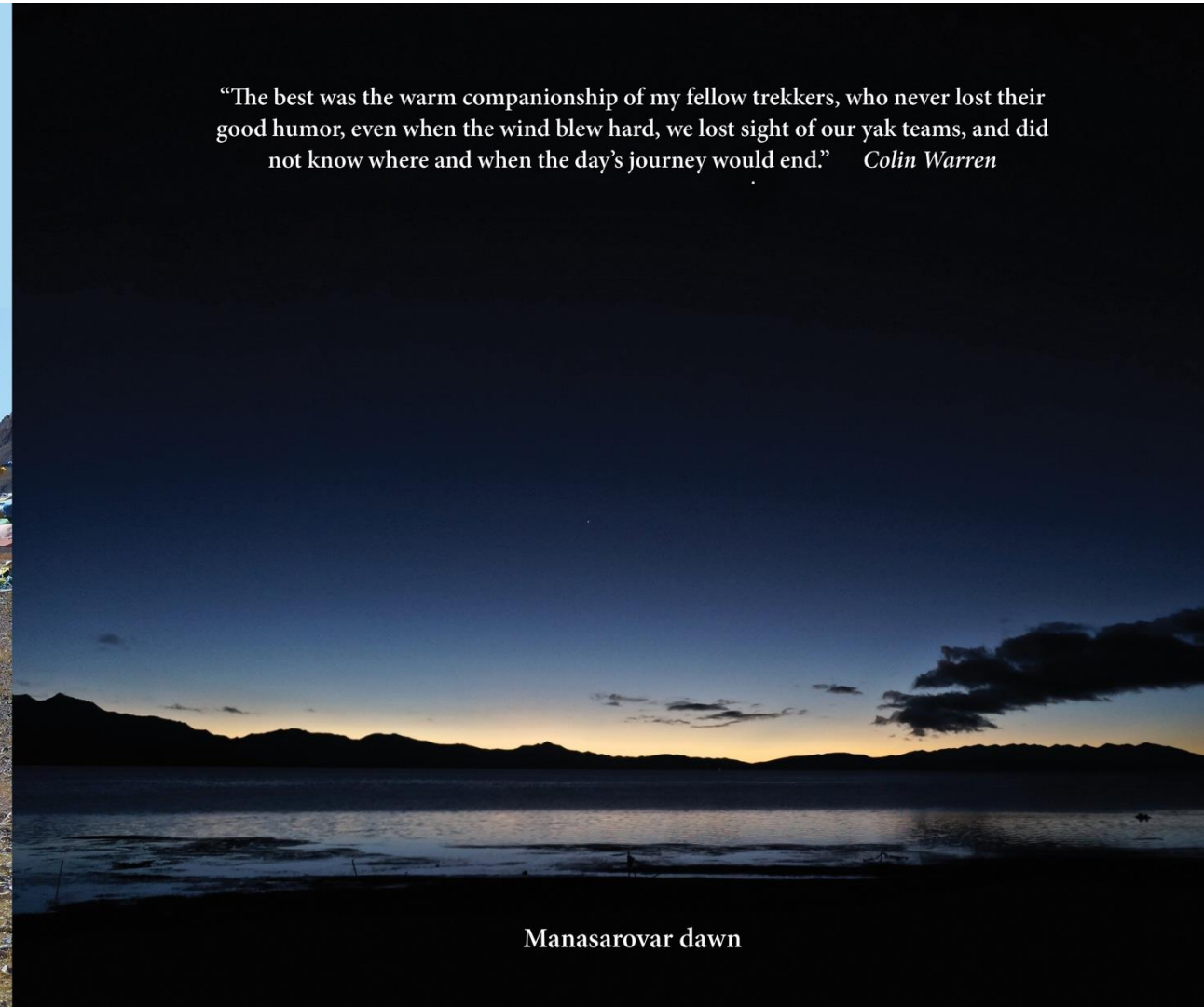
The journey from Nepal to Lhasa, Mount Kailash and the three river sources was other-worldly and inspirational.

Endless mountains of loose rock cut deeply by streams, glacier-scoured valleys stretching to the horizon, lakes nestled in the silence between mountains, yaks slowly and steadily plodding through landscapes and over mountain passes, ancient monasteries clinging to mountainsides and hilltops, night skies awash with stars, a full moon still showing its white face at midday against a deep blue sky. We shall cherish these memories like a hard earned treasure.



“Inspirational is the ability of the Tibetan people to endure and thrive in a harsh environment, the sight of a monk covering the fifty miles around Mt. Kailash by successive prostrations, the number of devotees and the massive jewel encrusted Buddha statues at the Buddhist monasteries and temples, the strength of our Nepali and Tibetan helpers to pitch tents and prepare meals in the wind and cold after a full day’s walk when we were exhausted..” *Colin Warren*

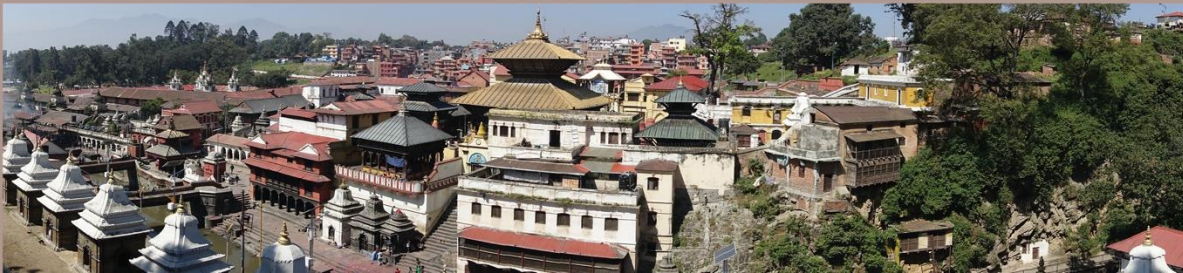
“The best was the warm companionship of my fellow trekkers, who never lost their good humor, even when the wind blew hard, we lost sight of our yak teams, and did not know where and when the day’s journey would end.” *Colin Warren*



Manasarovar dawn



During the journey from Nepal to Lhasa, Mount Kailash and the three river sources, we admired jewels of civilization. We walked the stairs of the majestic Bhaktapur Nyatapola Temple and saw the perplexing Pashupatina sanctuary in Nepal; we visited the busy Shigatse Tashi Lhunpo Monastery, we admired the rehabilitated Jokhang Temple, and climbed the steps of the Potala Palace. Everywhere, powerful and exquisite monuments withstand natural disasters and the disputes of poverty, instability and hegemony...



...Yet it is in the simple every day life that we witnessed hope, and felt the promise of permanency, with the fervor of pilgrims and quietude of monks, humble offerings along lakesides, the playfulness of children, and prayer stones at the river sources.

## Our little secret



The dedication of our team to set up daily our little secret is appreciated as we move from the luxury of Shangri La, to the practicality of China Railways, to bare minimum in uSmile gas stations, and shared minimum in tidy Paryang hostel.



Distances and altitudes throughout the voyage: Trip numbers.  
Five nights spent at over 5,000m altitude;  
109 km total trek; 12.7 km average trekked per day in Tibet.

From/To	Altitude (m)	Distance (km)
Lhasa	3,646	--
Shingatse	3,869	270
Ngamring	4,351	220
Saga	4,501	248
Paryang	4,548	236
Chiu Gompa (Manasarovar)	4,602	210
Lhasa - Chiu Gompa		1,184
Chiu Gompa-Darchen	4,678	50
Khardung	4,140	85
Kailash Kora		135
Khardung - Paryang	4,548	292
Saga	4,501	230
Shigatse	3,869	490
Lhasa	3,646	270
Lhasa- Lhasa		2,601

Route	Night Altitude m	Elevation gain -m	Trek km
3 days Kathmandu. Plane to Lhasa	3,636	2,292	18.5
Train/bus 1,184 km Manasarovar	4,590	945 (net)	-
Drive to Sutlej source	4,540	-	2
Drive Manasarovar - Tarboche	4,730	140	-
Trek Tarboche - Dhiru Phuk camp	5,070	497	14.4
Trek to Lham Chu camp via Drolma La pass (5,648m)	5,404	1,124	15
Trek to Lhe La camp over highest pass (5,724m; 18,778 ft)	5,494	320	9.1
Trek to Lhun Korlo Tso camp	5,177	-	19
Trek to Indus source	5,130	161	13
Drive to Darchen over Guma Tso (5490m)	4,628	360	-
Drive to Khardung via Raksastal	4,252	-	-
Trek to Karnali source with horses	4,341	230	9
Trek back to Khardung road	4,252	-	9





Eight Trekkers walk to the fabled lake Manasarovar,  
follow the Kora pilgrimage route around Mount Kailash,  
and pursue the great river sources that spring about it.  
September – October, 2015