



Nepal 2025

Each year I start this article in the same way, extolling the breathtaking determination and character of our team. I am utterly privileged in my work to spend time with people that want to adventure across the world, make friends with all who they meet and collaborate on future projects. Three weeks with the Birkdale Nepal team hits every one of our core values, respect, humility, integrity, courage and compassion. This particular group of individuals have undertaken so many firsts for Birkdale and at each point their commitment has been unwavering and always progressed with a laugh and a smile to make the day more fun. I must thank them for allowing me to lead them on, what has been, a brilliantly ambitious adventure.



This picture, from our Birkdale Staff WhatsApp group, puts into perspective the remoteness of the trek this year. The yellow writing says 'Destination' and the caption at the bottom says 'We can see where we are headed! This is Pike Peak base camp (3540m) - we will arrive here in 3 day's time in the middle of our 8 day trek x'. Now we are back from the trek it feels so far away but during such an undertaking it can feel like it will last forever. The duration of this experience is something that many of our team may never experience again, it forms the very core of what is often

discussed as resilience. The real hardship with a trek like this is maintaining a positive mind set and believing it to be possible, it is not something that can be synthesised in training back in the UK. One step at a time and trust in the team.

This was an 'off the beaten path' trek, it was only on the 5th day of trekking that we saw another tourist, so different to the previous treks and as our guide Sanja said, 'This is real Nepal'. Some of the tea houses (places that you stay overnight in) were too small for all of us, so on several nights, some of the team camped. The trek took us through Rhododendron forests that felt long forgotten, with overgrown pathways and derelict cow sheds; lower down in the Solo Khumbu region it was hot, only cooling off once we broached the 3000 meter band. Reaching Pikey Peak (4065 meters), pronounced Peekay Peak, in the early hours of the morning (5am) gave astounding views of so many of the big 8000 meter peaks, including Everest. It was an unforgettable moment but also, only half way there! However, the really great part of this adventure was spending time with a wonderful group of people, slowing down and actually getting to talk to each other, being removed from modern connectivity and journeying together through glorious Nepal.





Our return from the trek was a 15 hour endurance bus ride that in true Nepal style was predicted to be a 7+ hour journey, I should have taken notice of the plus sign! So much of the Nepalese road infrastructure was damaged after the September floods and navigating the land slips and broken roads took time, but we got back in enough time to treat ourselves to a Fire and Ice pizza and one good night's sleep before launching into teaching at the schools. The courage that our students showed to not even hesitate at the task they had been set was phenomenal; a hard 8 day remote trek, followed by a 15 hour bus ride, devouring a pizza, grabbing some sleep and then teaching for the first time! Amazing.



As a teacher there is a certain satisfaction in hearing your own students exclaim, at the end of a day of teaching, 'I'm shattered - that was so hard - I didn't know what to do - will it be like that tomorrow'. However, the Birkdale staff team has been superb this year and the nerves of the first day in the classroom were ironed out with a few extra resources, some examples of good practice and a bit of moral support. There were the inevitable overfull classes and extra classes at the Peace Garden and Noble schools, but as luck would have it we had one of our premier Prep teachers, Beccy Tonks, on hand to step in and once she got started she wouldn't leave the classroom. Hopefully we've got her hooked for next year too! Arjun Maharjan, Head teacher of the Peace Garden School looked very stylish in his Birkdale top and Yorkshire flat cap; as always he has been so supportive, helping the Birkdale team to develop and grow. This year we began a new agriculture based science project, called Increase The Yield (ITY). Whilst we had an idea that this could be a very successful new development, we hadn't anticipated how important this would be to the communities in Nepal. Arjun explained to us that many young people are moving away from agriculture and that the sector is on a serious decline, therefore this new initiative could be instrumental in a localised boost in the industry. Test results will be available soon, for more info go to the [ITY](#) page of Birkdale School's website.



A huge well done to the Noble School team this year, they worked so hard to make this first year back since the COVID pandemic as special as they could. The joy and laughter coming out of the classrooms could be heard across the valley and the music pumping out from Ella and Ruby's speakers kept the party going. Alongside the excitement and fun our students kept up the longstanding work of the [Nepal Health Checks NHC](#), operating an informal triage system to check general health parameters that highlight students who need professional medical assistance. In the absence of a fully accessible health service for children, these





checks can have a real impact. Any students that are identified as being, for example, underweight or having eyesight difficulty are then given a place on a bus that is taken to healthcare professionals for a full assessment. All arrangements and treatments are then paid for by [RNV Nepal](#), continuing the ongoing aim of improving access to healthcare. I know that Manoj Shrestha, headmaster of the Noble School, was very happy with the effort our students put in and has welcomed us back next year.



After a hard day's teaching, the team then heads off to see the sites of Kathmandu, awash with world heritage sites and markets of every possible trinket, souvenir and waterproof jacket imaginable, and lots of authentic North Fakes on every side street. Parents that lent their best jackets to the students, just double check you receive the same jacket back! It is always fun to visit Thamel markets, try to haggle and inevitably pay more than you should but also it has the excitement and buzz of Kathmandu. This year our students also visited Pashupathinath Temple, a Hindu holy site, something so different to mainstream European religious sites, it can be quite a shock but certainly broadens understanding and perspective of global religious communities.

The next leg of our new adventure unfortunately did not take off, quite literally. A nationwide thunderstorm struck on the morning of our flights to Lumbini, waking the team up with thunderclaps and lightning across Kathmandu. Whilst the storms did abate, the forecast showed more potential over the next few days and knowing that if flights were cancelled it would entail a 15+ hour Nepalese bus ride to get back to Kathmandu, we decided not to take the risk. However, under Tulsi's guidance we did decide to send down two adult representatives, Sandy Armstrong and Holly Heaton, who brilliantly flew the Birkdale flag, met with the school and local government representatives and participated in a big Nepalese school prize giving ceremony; giving speeches and building relationships. The Headteacher of the Durga School Mr. K.R. Poudel loved his Yorkshire flat cap and proceeded to wear it, with the same Yorkshire style, as Arjun Maharjan. The relationship between Birkdale and Durga will flourish, ideas of shared teacher training, collaboration and much more. I am certain we will get there and look forward to the opportunity next year.



The following days, with a bit of momentum taken from the team, saw us slow down and rest; lots of lazy daytime naps, sightseeing and market hopping. The most unusual Thamel purchase this year goes to Rohan, grinning as he unwrapped his treasure he then presented a weight lifting frog; none of the team could understand his logic. Gifts bought for family, fun had in temples and relaxing at the International Club pool, not a bad way to recuperate at the end of an adventure of a lifetime. However, amidst the laughs and relaxation there was still one more part of the adventure to go. The annual international friendly. The Birkdale V's Peace Garden football match.





This time with a full Birkdale kit we were sure to win. After losing in 2023, documented in [Fergus Cooke's documentary](#), with a very disappointed George commenting on the loss, we then lost in 2024 again. Not this year, or so we thought! Alas, it was not to be and the victory went to the Peace Garden School again, with an 8-2 score line, the trophy stayed in Nepal for another year.



Thank you again for the most amazing adventure, it is a privilege to lead the team each year but it is always made special by the individuals that go.

Ameer, Sophie, Kieran, Jack, Flo, Jono, Hannah, Ryan, Will, Mark, Sophie, Thalia, Emma, Issy, Shiva, Noah, Eason, Toby, Ella, Celia, Maria, Jake, Harry, Ruby, Rohan, Hugh, Sandy, Emma, Beccy, Holly.

The biggest thanks of all goes to Tom Farrell. This adventure and the new ideas wouldn't happen without his support and involvement.

Warmest regards to all and here's to 2025, the 25th year of Birkdale In Nepal!

Simon Watchman



