

Hi everyone,

Here I am in Sikkim again! This time accompanied by my daughter Amy.

The airport in Delhi continues to improve, it is quite like an airport anywhere now, and you can even change from the international to domestic terminal without leaving the building. It is all so changed from my first visit 10 years ago. Reaching Bagdogra was all quiet straight forward but then things took a turn for the worse! Siliguri where you have to go to take a jeep on up to Sikkim was very hot and dirty and what with the wait for a jeep to fill, three changes, a jeep breakdown and then dark and fog it took us a further 8 hours. This was all a bit of a shock for Amy as it is her first time in India.

After a good night's sleep in the little wooden house of one of the locals we headed for the school to be greeted by the resounding cries of "good morning teachers". We have been here a week as I write this but I cannot access my email so it will have to wait to be sent. We have been teaching classes during the mornings and then taking the younger children for walks in the afternoon when they have no school. After prayer time at 7pm we read the children stories before they go to bed. Amy is reading them the Twits by Roald Dahl which they all seem to enjoy.

As usual there are problems with the electricity supply but this year there are also problems with water supply. This caused a big nuisance over the weekend as that is when all the clothes washing and the kids' baths are done. We ended up taking them and some soap down to a river where they could wash. Although the river was very cold they all had a fantastic time and came back to school feeling refreshed and a bit cleaner. We now have power and water so are catching up with the washing.

On my last two visits I have been up to Dzongu in North Sikkim to visit the Mayel Lyang Academy which is another school we also support. This year because of bad floods in the area creating even worse road conditions than normal and shortage of time I am not going. I will meet Loden who started the school to exchange news and letters when I am in Kalimpong as he is visiting there too. I will be visiting the children from our school who have now moved on to Dr Graham's Homes for their secondary education. It is in Kalimpong outside Sikkim but still in the hills of the Himalaya with views of Kanchenchunga the third highest mountain in the world. It was started more than 100 years ago by a Scottish doctor and has an excellent reputation. It is an expensive school where most have to pay but some are sponsored through the Scottish charity. I am looking forward to seeing the children again, most of them I have known since they were 6 or 7 years old.

After SHA some children stay on in the hostel and attend the local Government School. It is great to see how they progress too. Other students have been placed in a Tribal School near Tashiding where they are happy and doing well.

The monsoon has just about ended now although the clear days of autumn have not begun; it is hot when it is sunny but cold at night. The monsoon always causes landslides which block or wash away the roads; this means that the jeep rides are very bumpy and quite hairy when you are close to a sheer drop down the mountainside. The drivers are continually on their mobiles phones weaving in and out the traffic while winding up the mountainside! Over last weekend we were visited by a past volunteer, Margaret, from Canada. She is 81 years old and still travelling the globe on her own volunteering. Quite an example!

Our Pricipal GS and his wife Maree who also teaches at the school had identical twin sons last year. The babies are just charming but in order that Maree could get back to her job her mother came to stay as soon as they were home after being born. Also a cousin is staying to help. Living with them too is Maree's brother James who is teaching at SHA too. As their

house only has 2 rooms and a tiny kitchen and wash room it is a bit of a squash to say the least but they are all remarkably cheerful.

We have a piece of land near the existing school (which is only rented) which we are going to buy and build on but this has been taking so long to organize. Indian red tape must be the longest and most tangled in the world. We do feel that we are getting close but I believe I have said that before. So, fingers crossed this time.

This week we must take the children to the local dispensary to be height and weight checked and to have their blood group taken, they will then get a health card entitling them to free health care. Also this week they will put on a cultural performance with singing and dancing. This is always a special occasion. After that Amy and I must leave, first for Kalimpong then on to Darjeeling for a couple of days before we leave.

On the Monday before we left we had an evening bonfire, toasted marshmallows and sang songs. The children are always so happy and relish all the small things in life. The school is more like a family than a school and I am honored to be a part of it.

I am attaching a couple of photos as a taster for you. Our new website www.sikkim-himalayan-academy.co.uk will be updated with other pictures as soon as I can arrange it.

All the best and hope to see you soon,

Magi



Kanchenjunga from Darjeeling



Bath day



Toasting Bonfire



Assembly



Goodbye