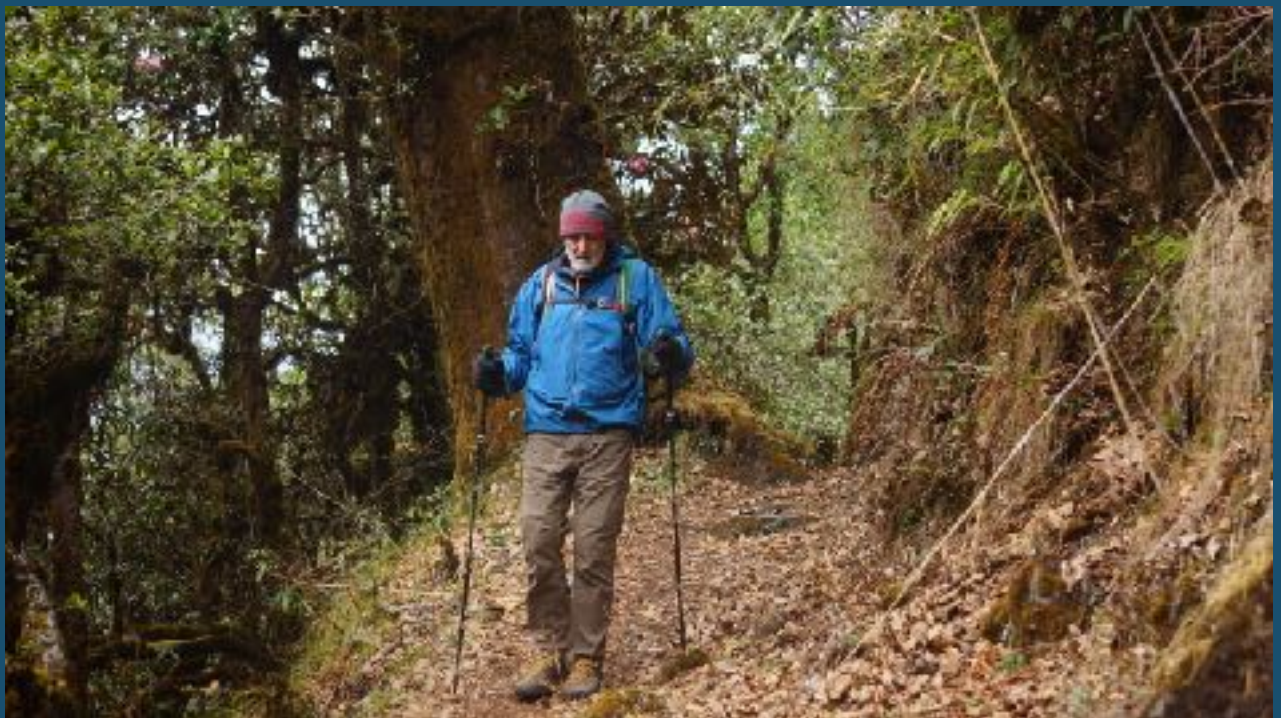

SALPA-ARUN FIELD VISIT IN SOLUKHUMBU, BHOJPUR AND SANKHUWASABA DISTRICTS



THE PARTNERS NEPAL



APRIL 2023

1. INTRODUCTION

The Partners Nepal (TPN) recently conducted a brief field trip to the districts of Solukhumbu, Bhojpur, and Sankhuwasaba in eastern Nepal, where they have implemented community-based development programs. The trip was organized from April 21st to April 29th, 2023, and was attended by TPN Chairman Ang Rita Sherpa, Treasurer Bhala Kaji Rai, as well as long-time friend and advisor, Mr. Peter Nichols. During the visit, the team had the opportunity to observe firsthand the impact of TPN's development programs in the region.

The trip aimed to assess the progress of ongoing projects, identify areas that need improvement, and explore opportunities for future collaborations. Overall, the field trip was a success, and TPN members gained valuable insights into the needs and challenges faced by the communities they work with. The Partners Nepal remains committed to its mission of promoting sustainable development and improving the lives of the people in the region.

2. OBJECTIVE OF FIELD VISIT

The primary objective of the field trip to Solukhumbu, Bhojpur, and Sankhuwaba districts was to observe and assess several community-based programs. These included visiting the Sir Edmund Hillary Memorial Museum in Bung of Mahakulung-1, observing the "one day one tree" reforestation program, and inspecting the construction of a pond in Cheskam of Solukhumbu. Additionally, the team explored the possibility of developing a Trekking Guide Book for the Salpa-Arun region to promote economic opportunities for off-the-trail lodges and communities.

Another essential goal of the trip was to distribute a Nepali translation of the "Climate Change in the Himalayas" book to local high schools in Sotang, Bung, Cheskam, Gudel, Phedi, and Hoyengla. The book aimed to educate students on the impacts of climate change and global warming on their communities and the region as a whole.

Overall, the field trip was successful in achieving its objectives, and the Partners Nepal remains committed to promoting sustainable development and improving the lives of the people in the region.

3. SIR EDMUND HILLARY MEMORIAL MUSUEM AND ELDERLY CARE CENTER IN BUNG

Thanks to financial support from various donors, including our international advisor Peter Nichols, The Partners Nepal has been able to contribute to the conservation and preservation of the health post established by Sir Edmund Hillary in 1989. The post was built to provide essential health services to families in the southern region of Solukhumbu, where access to healthcare was limited at the time.

Prior to the establishment of the post, the only medical services available in the region were located in Khunde, which was 4-5 days away, or in Phaplu, which was 2-3 days away from the district headquarters.

The local community expressed their desire to preserve the memory of Sir Edmund Hillary by maintaining the health post he built with his own hands. The clinic was constructed to provide basic healthcare services to families in the area who were hesitant to travel up to an hour to access the government-built clinic. The community did not want to demolish the building, and they requested that it be continued as a platform to honor Sir Edmund Hillary's legacy. This sentiment was expressed by Shree Dhoj Rai in 2015.



The Partners Nepal recognizes the importance of accessible healthcare in promoting the well-being of the community, and we are proud to have played a part in preserving this crucial health post for future generations. Despite not having visited the village since the successful British Everest Expedition's first ascent of Mount Everest in 1953, Sir Edmund Hillary maintained a special attachment to the area where he had built the clinic. Unfortunately, the building collapsed during the devastating 2015 earthquake, prompting the local community to request that The Partners Nepal raise funds for the conservation and renovation of the damaged structure.

Thanks to the generous contributions of organizations such as Sir Edmund Hillary Stiftung Deutschland Germany, Nepal Hilfe Tirol in Austria led by Wolfgang Nairz, and Engage Nepal, as well as individual donors including Peter Nichols and others, and technical assistance from The Partners Nepal, the project was made possible. The Hill Development Conservation Group provided implementation support to the project.

The primary objective of the initiative was to conserve and revitalize the original clinic established by the late Sir Edmund Hillary in 1989. The community formed a special committee and sought to establish a non-governmental organization known as the Sir Edmund Hillary Memorial Museum and Elder Care Centre. Through this project, The Partners Nepal and its partners were able to contribute to the preservation of an important piece of local history while also supporting the provision of essential healthcare services to the community.

Bung is a remote region situated in the Solukhumbu district, within the Sagarmatha Zone of northeastern Nepal. It sits at an altitude of 1200-2400 meters and is located in Mahakulung Rural Municipality-1, Bung. The population of Bung is dispersed, with around 4,500 people residing in 900 households spread across 1-9 wards.

The Sir Edmund Hillary Memorial Museum and Elder Care Center, as it is known locally, continues to provide essential health services to the Rai people of Solukhumbu. The clinic offers various services to the residents of Bung, Cheskam, Gudel, Sotang, and Pawai VDCs, now collectively known as Mahakulung Rural Municipality- 1-5 in Solukhumbu, where government support was absent at the time of its construction. At present, seven elderly individuals occupy seven of the ten available beds.



Currently, the center has ten available beds, out of which seven are occupied by elderly individuals who do not have anyone to care for them. These individuals belong to various castes, including Rai and Blacksmith, and are from the Mahakulung Rural Municipality of Solukhumbu. There are three males and four females among them.



4. ONE DAY ONE TREE AND COMMUNITY POND IN CHESKAM

The Partners Nepal initiated a project to plant native trees on public lands in Cheskam village, Mahakulung Rural Municipality-3, Solukhumbu, with the aim of conserving and restoring a fragile forest area that had been severely degraded due to open grazing and firewood collection. The residents of Cheskam were supportive of the idea and enthusiastic about planting native trees on both public and private lands. The project was led by Mr. Bhala Kaji, a native of Cheskam and Treasurer of The Partners Nepal.

In addition to the successful planting of native trees, the residents of Cheskam requested The Partners Nepal to fund the construction of a community pond. The pond would serve as a source of irrigation, promote tourism, and serve other purposes to mitigate climate change and global warming. According to locals, 90% of trees planted in the area have a high survival rate.



The people of Cheskam are also interested in constructing a community pond similar to the one in Necha, Solukhumbu, in order to mitigate the effects of climate change in the area. The Partners Nepal Secretary, Bheem Raj Rai, will be involved in this initiative.



A woman who had worked in Dingboche of Khumbu for three years has decided to open a lodge and teashop in her hometown of Cheskam. With her experience in serving tourists in Khumbu, she hopes to provide quality hospitality services in her village.

5. DISTRIBUTIONS OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE HIMALAYAS BOOK IN NEPALI

The Partners Nepal has decided to reprint and distribute the book "Climate Change in the Himalayas" in Nepali language to all schools in Solukhumbu. Responding to requests from Solukhumbu's secondary and lower secondary schools, the Nepali version of the book on climate change was reprinted. The book was produced to address the lack of knowledge about climate change, its impacts, community vulnerabilities, and opportunities for adaptation, especially among young people in developing countries. The Partners Nepal decided to publish this book in Nepali to meet the demand for resources on climate change education in the Himalayan region.



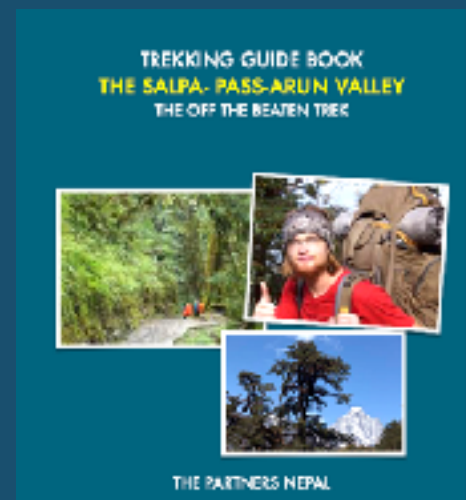


Peter Nichols kindly offered to distribute the Nepali version of the climate change book to every school in Solukhumbu, Bhojpur, and Sankhuwasaba districts. This publication was produced in response to requests from teachers and principals of schools and colleges who identified a need for materials to educate students about climate change and its impacts on mountain communities and environments.

The book on climate change in the Himalayas, now available in Nepali, will serve as an important tool for students and general readers in understanding the challenges that climate change poses to mountain communities and environments. By providing information on adaptation opportunities and mitigation strategies, the book aims to encourage education and action towards addressing the effects of climate change. The translation from English to Nepali was done by The Partners Nepal secretary, Bheem Raj Rai. We are grateful to our International Advisor, Mr. Peter Nichols, for kindly delivering the books to the school teachers.

6. SALPA-ARUN TREKKING GUIDE BOOK

The Partners Nepal decided to publish a guidebook for the lesser-known Salpa-Arun Valley trek with the aim of promoting alternative trekking routes in the Khumbu region, beyond the popular Sagarmatha National Park. Nepal was once a geographically isolated country unaffected by external changes, but in the age of globalization, this is no longer the case. The Salpa-Arun Valley trek offers a unique combination of remoteness, adventure, and natural beauty.





Typical Rai villages along the Salpa-Arun Trail from Solukhumbu and Bhojpur

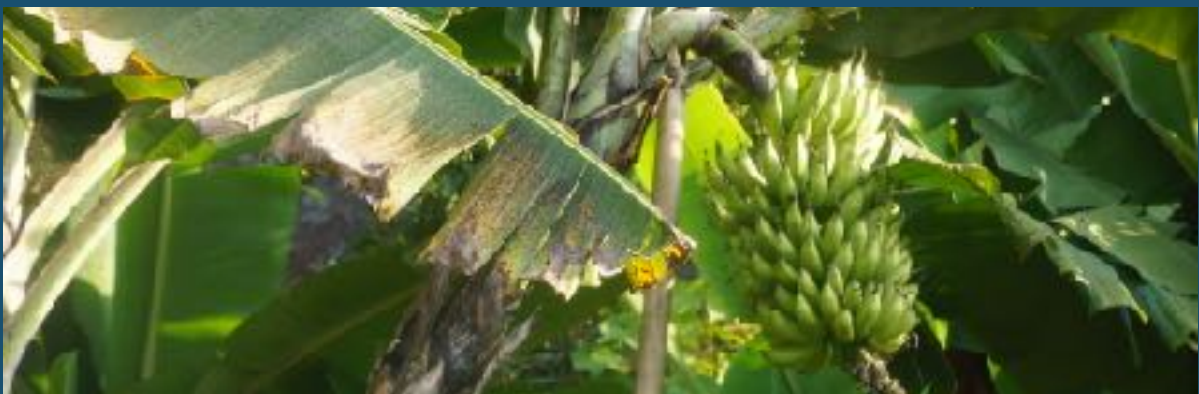
This lesser-known trail connects the renowned Khumbu region with the Arun Valley, which has its own ecosystem protected by the Makalu-Barun National Park. The trail's higher elevations are home to a variety of flowers and butterflies, making it a paradise for nature lovers.



The Salpa La trek can be started either in Lukla and ended in Tumlingtar or vice versa. The trek is rated as medium to hard, and we recommend it for experienced hikers who can walk for at least 5-7 hours daily. While the Himalayan trails in the Everest region are now crowded with thousands of trekkers during the fall and spring seasons, the Salpa Pass/Arun Valley route remains relatively undiscovered. Only a few visitors per year have the opportunity to explore this scenic route, where ethnic Rais and Sherpas live in harmony with nature, preserving customs that have remained unchanged for hundreds of years.



The route is a great off-the-beaten-track trek that combines remoteness, adventure, and natural beauty, and it connects the popular Khumbu region with the Arun Valley, which has its own ecosystem protected by the Makalu-Barun National Park. The trek offers stunning views of a variety of flowers and butterflies, which are truly appreciated at this elevation.



The Salpa Pass trek offers a unique opportunity for trekkers to experience a world of lush forests, terraced farmlands, and rare wildlife, birds, and plants. The absence of highways and machines adds to the sense of being in a natural and unspoiled environment. The region is rich in natural forest resources like bamboo, nettle, and daphne, which are used for making buildings, household utensils, jewelry, clothing, pens, and paper.

This area has great potential for community-based ecotourism, which involves promoting the conservation of natural and cultural resources while improving local livelihoods. Due to its extraordinary natural landscape and cultural heritage, as well as its connection to more popular trekking and mountaineering areas like Solukhumbu-Mera Peak, the Salpa Pass trek has immense potential for attracting visitors seeking a less crowded region.

Although community-based tourism or ecotourism has been attempted along off-trail routes in the past, funding and security concerns have prevented the programs from reaching their full potential. With proper support and investment, community-based ecotourism could play a significant role in the sustainable development of this area, benefiting both the local communities and the environment.

The Partners Nepal has collaborated with HDCG to produce a comprehensive map and guidebook for adventure tourists traveling from Bung to the head of the Hungu Valley. This off-the-beaten-path area is not connected to other trekking trails, and the map and guidebook aim to provide visitors with as much information as possible about the remote region. By promoting this area, which has been previously overlooked by major trekking destinations, The Partners Nepal hopes to increase the visibility of the region and contribute to the development of community-based ecotourism initiatives.

Biodiversity of the Salpa-Arun Trails

7. SALPA-PASS AT 3348 METER

Salpa La Pass, also known as Kuluphangkha, stands at an elevation of 3,350m/ 10,991ft on the border of Solukhumbu and Bhojpur districts. A sacred mountain lake called Salpa Pokhari is located near the pass, just a short 20-minute walk from the main pass. To get there, we walked for about half an hour along the north bank of the Lirung River before crossing a bridge and ascending for an hour and a half through dense fir and rhododendron forests to reach Salpa Pass, which separates the Hongu and Arun River watersheds. On a clear day, the view from the pass is truly breathtaking, stretching from Everest on the northwest horizon to Kanchenjunga on the northeast.





Glimpses of Salpa-Arun Trekking Trail

8. THE DONOR VISITED THE SCHOOL IN HOYENGLA IN SISUWATAR

Mr. Peter Nichols played an instrumental role in the establishment of the Shree Balkanya Adharbhut School in Hoyengla village, Silichung Rural Municipality-1, Sankhuwasaba District. He graciously offered to accompany us to the school. With the help of his dear friends in Colorado and generous donations from organizations such as Engage Nepal, Divers Earth (Switzerland), the Oak Foundation, and individuals including Ihab Zogib from Switzerland, Stefan Eiseline, and his Swiss friends, as well as Peter and his American friends, we were able to raise funds for the reconstruction of the school.



*Peter Nichols recieved welcome reception at Hoyengla
Balkanya Adharbhut School*

The earthquake's devastation disrupted the daily attendance of children, and the natural beauty of the area appeared hazardous. In light of this, residents were eager to rebuild and renovate as soon as possible. However, government support has been extremely limited throughout the rural municipality and District Development Committee (DDC) due to a lack of external income sources other than savings from annual crops such as maize, millet, and cash crops, which only last for 6-7 months.

TPN recognized the need to rebuild the school to ensure that the children in the community had access to a safe and reliable education. Unfortunately, the school building was severely damaged in the 2015 earthquake, making this task a significant challenge. However, with the help of the School Management Committee, led by the school Principal, Ms. Jaya Kulung, and the support of local residents, the school rebuilding program was completed within a six-month period.



The school rebuilding project began in January 2022 and was completed in the first week of June 2022, with Partners Nepal handing over the school to the school management committee in June 2022. During the project, the local community contributed approximately 150,000 worth of in-kind contributions, which is equivalent to around 1,200 USD. The community was extremely grateful for the generous assistance provided by Partners Nepal in rebuilding the school in Hoyengla village.



The students, parents, community, and teachers welcomed our advisor and supporter for this school-rebuilding project. Locals and teachers have expressed their gratitude to Peter Nichols for his tremendous efforts in raising funds for this rebuilt project, and as a result, the children can be confident that they will receive a quality education in this new building.



Completion of rebuilt of Shree Balkanya Adharbhut School in Hoyengla village

9. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES THE SCHOOL IN HOYENGLA

Despite having rich natural and cultural resources, the majority of Kulung Rai in Hoyengla Village are economically impoverished compared to other areas where communities can profit from agriculture and tourism. Locals report that their crop savings only last for 6-7 months, and they must work for others to earn money during the rest of the year. Due to its high elevation, the climate of Hoyengla Village ranges from temperate to alpine.



Various challenges during the rebuilt of school in Hoyengla as everything has to carry from the nearest roadhead which is 4 hours of walk from the school premise.

Unlike the more accessible Upper Solukhumbu, Hoyengla is located in a remote and challenging area, requiring a three-day trek from Khandbari, the district headquarters of Sankhuwasaba District, even during shorter days. The region is underdeveloped, lacking in tourist attractions and basic infrastructure. The rough and unpaved road to Hoyengla can only be navigated by a four-wheel-drive jeep, and the trail to the village takes three hours of strenuous uphill hiking. To construct the school, locals had to carry building materials such as cement, rods, and corrugated iron sheets on their backs from the road to the village. The rural municipality is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change on agriculture, forest, water availability, and human health. The area is already experiencing serious consequences of climate change at various levels.

10. POSSIBLE SUPPORT FOR FENCING AROUND THE SCHOOL

The school management committee and teachers thanked TPN advisor Mr. Peter Nichols and the TPN team for their assistance with the Hoyengla village school. Shree Balkanya Adharbhut School was severely damaged and threatened to collapse during the 2015 earthquake. As a result, the damaged school endangers the lives of the children in the mountains. The damage caused by the earthquake disrupts children's daily attendance and the natural beauty, which appears dangerous.

The school management committee and teachers expressed their heartfelt gratitude towards TPN advisor Mr. Peter Nichols and the TPN team for their invaluable support in rebuilding the Shree Balkanya Adharbhut School in Hoyengla village. The school had suffered severe damage during the 2015 earthquake, posing a serious threat to the safety of the children in the mountains. The earthquake's impact had disrupted the children's daily attendance, and the natural beauty surrounding the school had appeared dangerous.

The Silichung community's limited resources had been further depleted due to frequent landslides caused by heavy monsoon rains, coupled with a lack of external income sources, and the remote location of the village had resulted in very limited government assistance through the rural municipality and District Development Committee (DDC). The only way to reach the village is through narrow footpaths, which makes transportation very challenging.

The office conditions of the school had been severely compromised, with the walls cracked or damaged due to the earthquake, and no repairs or rebuilding had been possible due to a lack of financial support. The primary students were forced to cram into a small classroom, further exacerbating the already challenging learning conditions.

The Shree Balkanya Adharbhut School was successfully rebuilt in 2022 with the generous support of The Partners Nepal, providing a safe and happy learning environment for the students. However, the school is currently lacking adequate playgrounds, and students are struggling to concentrate due to frequent disruptions from free-roaming livestock and other pests. To address this, the school has requested funding for fencing around the school to keep it free of human and livestock encroachment, reducing the risk to children walking to and from school. Additionally, the school is in need of furniture, and further assistance will be submitted to TPN to help address this issue.

11. MEETING WITH THE ALLO CLUB PRODUCTION CENTER (ACPC)



Peter Nichols with Laxmi Rai and Bhala Kaji Kulung at ACPC building in Sisuwatar

The team was invited to visit the Allo Club Production Center (ACPC) in Sisuwatar by Ms. Laxmi Rai, the coordinator of the center. Allo (*giardinia diversifolia*) is a native plant that grows naturally in the undergrowth of mixed deciduous forests, such as oaks, maples, utis, etc., at altitudes ranging from 1200 to 3000 meters. It grows best in nitrogen-rich soil, and proximity to sheep and goat pastures for manure is beneficial. The plant's fiber is traditionally woven by Kulung Rai women in the Makalu-Barun area to make strong rope, clothing, and religious and cultural attire.

Ms. Laxmi Rai shared the history of ACPC, as well as the challenges and opportunities it faces. She explained that traditionally, women wove allo in their homes for their own needs and those of their families, with occasional sales to tourists visiting the area. Suzy Dunsmore, a woman from the United Kingdom, traveled a great distance as part of her job in the UK to visit the ACPC.



ACPC BUILDING IN SISUWATAR, SANKHUWASABA DISTRICT

During her stay in Sisuwatar, Suzy Dunsmore was deeply impressed and inspired by the local women's skill in weaving allo. She saw an opportunity to help these women support their families and decided to establish the Allo Cloth Production Center (ACPC) with the help of local leaders. The objective was to take allo weaving from homes to the business world. After a few years, the ACPC was handed over to local management and has been operating independently for the past 15 years. About 150 women bring their allo products to the center, which are then exported to Kathmandu through three to four collection centers.





RIVER ENCROACHMENT TOWARDS ACPC BUILDING IN SISUWATAR. THIS RIVER ENCROACHMENT BECOMES MAJOR CHALLENGES FOR ACPC THAT NEEDS TO BE CONTROLLED QUICKLY

Despite the business's potential to provide a livelihood option through locally grown stingy nettles, the ACPC has been facing several challenges, including damage to the building caused by the 2015 earthquake, river bank encroachment, a lack of a community hall for formal meetings, and a severely rusted roof, which the Australian Youth Group helped to address.

Ms. Laxmi Rai, the ACPC's coordinator, has requested assistance from Peter Nichols and TPN to overcome these challenges. Mr. Nichols has asked Ms. Rai to submit a proposal through TPN for evaluation and fundraising purposes.

12. CONCLUSION

Mr. Peter Nichols, a long-time supporter and advisor of The Partners Nepal, expressed a strong desire to visit the TPN-implemented projects in Solukhumbu and Sankhuwasabha. To explore and inspect the projects, we have planned short visits starting from Bung, where TPN received financial support from various organizations, including the Sir Edmund Hillary Stiftung Deutschland, Nepal Hilfe-Tirol, Engage Nepal, and many individuals, including Peter Nichols, to assist in the establishment of the Sir Edmund Hillary Memorial Elderly Home. During his visit, Peter also distributed TPN t-shirts to the elderly residents.



Peter Nichols our longtime supporter and advisor of The Partners Nepal

During our visit, we also provided climate change materials in Nepali to the teachers and visited the Hoyengla School in Sisuwatar. The school community warmly welcomed our team and expressed gratitude for our financial assistance in rebuilding the school, which has made the children safer than before. Prior to the rebuilding, the parents were concerned about their children's safety and attending the Shree Balkanya Adharbhut School, which was severely damaged or collapsed during the 2015 earthquake and had a leaking roof during the rainy season. The damaged school posed a danger to the children's lives in the mountains and disrupted their daily attendance. The teachers have expressed their intention to propose the installation of a fence around the school for the safety of the children and the provision of furniture for the classrooms.

Peter Nichols has expressed his gratitude to the community for their help in rebuilding the school and to the dedicated teachers. He was pleased to see the high quality of the school building and the close relationships between the local community, parents, and teachers.

13. ITINERARY

SN	DATE	FROM	TO	REMARKS
1	21st April 2023	Kathmandu	Patale	Driving
2	22nd April 2023	Patale	Bung	Driving and had lunch in Sotang
3	23rd April 2023	Bung	Nimchola	Driving to Gudel via Cheskam and walked to Nimchola
4	24th April 2023	Nimchola	Salpa Banjyang	Walked from Nimchola to Salpa Bhanjyang (Pass)
5	25th April 2023	Salpa Bhanjyang	Salpa Phedi	Walked and had lunch at Jaubari Sherpa Hotel
6	26th April 2023	Salpa Phedi	Budhabare in Sisuwatar	Driving
7	27th April 2023	Budhabare	Budhabare in Sisuwatar	Drove to Chapchewa and walked to Hoyengla and back to Budhabare
8	28th April 2023	Budhabare	Tumlingtar	Driving along the Arun River
9	29th April 2023	Tumlingtar	Kathmandu	Flight

Text and concept: Ang Rita Sherpa (The Partners Nepal) Photos: Ang Rita Sherpa, Joachim Meyer, Mark Horrell and Jammie McGuinnes.