

Steeproad to ABC



by Ir. Chin Mee Poon
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IN November 2013, I led a group of 12 Malaysians and 1 Australian to Nepal to trek up the Himalayas. We had chosen to do the 10-day ABC Trek, also known as the Annapurna Sanctuary Trek. It was my 4th trekking trip to Nepal.

Because our visit coincided with Nepal's 2nd general elections, we had to start our trek on 18 November as the following day was polling day and all public transport was halted. On that day we travelled 7 hours in a so-called "tourist bus" from Kathmandu to Pokhara, and then for almost 2 hours more in the same bus to a village called Nayapul, 41km away. From Nayapul, we started our trek and 45 minutes later, we were in Birethanti where we put up the night.

It took us 2 days to reach Ghorepani. We covered a distance of 16km, gained 1,530m in height and climbed 3,421 stone steps up a steep mountain side. The main attraction in Ghorepani is a 3,190m high peak known as Poon Hill, an hour's trek away. There, one is rewarded for the effort with a spectacular panorama of snow-capped peaks of both Daulagiri and Annapurna ranges, including Daulagiri 1 (8,167m, 7th highest peak in the world), Annapurna 1 (8,091m, 10th highest) and the famous Fish Tail.

Two days later, we were in Chomrong, back on the main trail to ABC. Chomrong is 18.5km from Ghorepani but is 580m lower, at 2,170m asl. We stopped at Tadapani on the way.

Pushing on, we descended steeply into a deep valley, crossed to the other side by way of a long steel catenary bridge, climbed another mountain and continued to gain height steadily until we eventually reached a hamlet known

as Himalaya, some 13km from Chomrong. It was a long day and we actually completed the last section of our trek in a forest after dark.

Himalaya, at 2,900m asl and situated beside the mighty Modi Khola River, had only two guest houses next to each other and nothing else. From there it was a steady climb to MBC (Machhapuchhre Base Camp) at 3,700m asl and 7.5km away. It had taken us 7 days to get this far from Nayapul.

On the 8th day, we finally reached ABC (Annapurna Base Camp, 4,130m asl) in the morning. It was 3.5km away from MBC. The views of surrounding snowy peaks from both MBC and ABC were simply awe inspiring. We spent 2 hours in ABC to enjoy the views before we started to back-track and descend. We put up in Deurali and Sinuwa on the way to Chomrong, where we followed a more direct route (about 20km) to the main road, spent the night again at Landruk before getting back to Pokhara on the 11th day.

Our 10-day ABC Trek had actually taken us more than 10 days to complete. Although we only managed to reach a maximum height that was only slightly higher than Mt. Kinabalu, the many steep climbs we had to do took their toll on me. I was beginning to feel the strain. Perhaps age was catching up on me. Nevertheless, the trek was an exhilarating experience that I will cherish for a long, long time. ■

Ir. Chin Mee Poon is a retired civil engineer who derives a great deal of joy and satisfaction from travelling to different parts of the globe, capturing fascinating insights of the places and people he encounters and sharing his experiences with others through his photographs and writing.

