



Name of Volunteer:	Kalvin Moschkau
Project Sector:	Construction, Education
Project Name:	Chharka Bhot Basic School
Project Location:	Chharka Bhot, Upper Dolpo
Project Duration and time of stay:	4 weeks, May 2019

Short Summary of Volunteering Project (project itself, location, specialties of the project, planned activities and goals)

In early 2019 I attended an event at the Bozeman, MT local library which introduced me to Chay-Ya and the work the organization does in Nepal. I spoke with the coordinator Bill Keller and expressed my interest in volunteering. After several emails and during personal meetings I had the chance to speak with Kamal over the phone and confirm a time to volunteer. My time in Nepal spanned four weeks and during much of it I stayed in a village called Charkha Bhot in Upper Dolpo. While I was there, I helped with the digging of a foundation for new classrooms, taught English, and collected data for a planned drinking water project. It was a great experience overall. The building was successful, and I gained a new understanding of Nepali/Tibetan culture and their way of life.

Preparation Beforehand (mental, physical and medical preparations)

The preparation for Nepal involved just a few things. What I spent the most time on was learning the customs and culture. The extensive documents provided by the travel coordinator Magdalena were very helpful in gaining an understanding and overview of Nepal and I recommend that future volunteers read them at length.

Journey and Arrival in Nepal

Simply planning the travel to Nepal and back is probably the best one can do, as events and needs will dictate their own requirements once you are in the country. I purchased my flight just over a month beforehand and had travel vaccines ready soon after. The minimum recommended vaccines were Hepatitis and Typhoid.

Once in Nepal, the total travel time took seven days to get to Charkha Bhot and seven to return. Traveling around Nepal includes journeys by bus, jeep, airplane, motorcycle, horseback, and by foot. The bus was the craziest experience and I would recommend it to anyone once.

Project schedule and experiences on site (description of activities on site, description of daily routine, description of housing situation and catering, interaction with locals, leisure activities etc.)

The intent of the trip to Charkha Bhot was to begin the construction of two new school rooms and to collect information on a planned drinking water project. I traveled with two Nepali's - Surendra Sahi and Tsering Samdup. Surendra is an engineer for Chay Ya Nepal. He designed the plans for the buildings, facilitated the initial construction, and provided instructions for the completion of the project. He also facilitated the collection of data for the drinking water project. Samdup is a Charkha Bhot resident and the coordinator of the local partner NGO Dolpo Tomorrow. He coordinated with Chay-Ya to acquire the materials for the project and assisted the work with local leadership. Both were wonderful travelling companions and taught me quite a lot about the culture and history of Nepal.

The trip to Charkha took roughly seven days with a bus ride and a flight to the foothills. Once in the foothills, we hiked for 5 days to the village. The only routes to the village are on foot, by mule/horse, or by helicopter. The hike there requires an 18,000ft pass which we prepared for by acclimatizing for one full day at a village below.

Engineering

Working with locals, we began the construction of two new school rooms. The first steps involved digging the foundation and moving the earth. Nepali buildings must be earthquake resistant and unique specifications in the building plans ensure this. We completed laying out and digging the foundation for the first building by the time I had left, but some demolition was required before the second could be started.

Before we left, Surendra provided and presented plans to the school leadership for the finishing of the project. Samdup stayed in the village to coordinate the pouring of the foundation and construction of the walls and roof. He also coordinated the purchasing and transportation of the materials which took many months to acquire, due to shipping routes that leave and reenter Nepal through Tibet. Working alongside the Nepal engineers and laborers taught me quite a lot about how extensive projects can be accomplished well with very limited resources.

While there, we also collected data on a planned drinking water project. The project had been started a while ago but wasn't currently functioning. The intention was to pipe water from upstream to a series of cisterns which would eventually reach the village and provide clean water. Some of the cisterns cracked and the piping needed to be moved and reburied, so no water was flowing. The three of us collected information on the flow, repair requirements, possible improvements, and took many pictures. I provided a report back to Chay-Ya and donors once I returned to Kathmandu. This project would provide water to villagers in the upper part of the village who currently must walk some distance to and from the river or collect water from barely flowing pools nearby.

Teaching

While I was there, I also taught English to students ranging from ages roughly 10 -15. The village had one school for about 70 families and about 40 students attended. Each class had between 5 and 15 students. Each morning a roll call was done and during it the Nepal anthem was sung, some simple calisthenics performed, and short passages read out loud by a selected student. Attendance tallies were recorded for each class and the day started promptly at 9am.

The regular English teacher was occupied with training in another village, so I continued the instruction where the students had left off. All of the students were very excited, and I encouraged them to talk about their lives and ask questions about my own. Most students already had a very good grasp of English for their grade level and I was able to focus mostly on practicing spelling and learning grammar. The educational materials were adequate and although the level of education the students had at their respective ages was not as high as in the developed west, they all had an adequate understanding of language, science, geography/social science, and health. With more resources, improvements could be made in math, art, music, and physical education. The rooms were minimally furnished, though without electricity, and during the day students could sit comfortably, write lessons, do homework, and read information and problems from the workbooks. I had little experience teaching prior and welcomed some feedback from the other teachers on how I could improve.

Costs (a brief overview of the costs of travel, accommodation, meals, permits and leisure activities)

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Reflections, Comments & Recommendations for future Volunteers

I faced just a few hurdles during my time. One was being an effective teacher and the time I spent there wasn't enough to try out different teaching methods. I think in the future I would dedicate a much longer time to teaching to make sure the students were benefiting the most. Another was

some serious stomach issues I faced toward the end of the trip which sometimes made hiking and the flight back a challenge, but this was forewarned when visiting Nepal for the first time. All expenses I incurred during my stay were assumed by me which were paid by wire once I returned to the United States.

Overall, I believe my volunteering experience was a success and the project itself brought major improvements to the village. The hard work put in by Chay Ya engineers and the local organizers was what truly made it possible and I am proud to have worked with them. As of right now, the new buildings are in the final stages of completion and the water project is being analyzed. I would encourage future volunteers to take part and contribute to the success of Chay Ya.

Impressions



