

International medical team from US, UK and Nepal trek the Tamang Trail and provide medical care on the move.

A team of health professionals traveled to Nepal in October with the ambitious goal of trekking the little known Tamang Heritage Trail and providing free health care to thousands of Tamang people living in the remote Rasuwa District. Visiting 7 villages along the trekking route the team established formal medical camps in Gatlang, Chilime, Timure and Syabru Bensi and saw additional patients in Tatopani as well.



Medical camp (The Mountain Fund)

The trip began for most of the participants with 24 hours of air travel from the US to Nepal. The Mountain Fund/KFK staff met the team at the airport and we boarded a rented bus to transfer to the Hotel Ambassador, our Kathmandu base. The second day in Kathmandu was spent sorting the boxes of medicine, eye glasses, medical supplies and camping equipment. The following day the group boarded a bus bound for Gatlang. Though only 120 km from Kathmandu, the trip to Gatlang normally takes 10 hours over rough roads. This time the trip took nearly 15 hours however owing to a large landslide which had closed the road. When we arrived at the landslide area the medical team all walked around the construction that was underway as two large road-working machines attempted to open a path for our bus. In the end, over 30 porters tied a rope to the bus and pulled it up the final hill. It had taken two hours to make it 1 km but the way ahead to Gatlang was now open.

The team arrived late in the evening at the trekking lodge which has recently opened in Gatlang and after a hasty dinner called it a day so we'd be rested for the medical camp there the next morning. Between 200 and 300 villagers turned out for medical care and were all seen by the end of the day. From the first camp it was obvious that Pete Korpi, an Optometrist from Muscatine, Iowa was much in demand. Assisted by his daughter Katie, Pete saw over 225 patients and prescribed over 175 pairs of glasses.



Examining patients at the medical camp (The Mountain Fund)

The most common complaints were vision problems, intestinal parasites, wounds and women's health. Dr. Dorothy Kammerer-Doak of Albuquerque, New Mexico who is an OBGYN specialist saw the women while her husband Bob Doak took charge of medicine for intestinal parasites.

After Gatlang we packed everything up and walked a few hours to the Chilime damn site where we set up for another camp. We used two Mountain Hardwear space stations as our primary medical buildings and some borrowed space in the local school for our pharmacy. The pharmacy was staffed by Shelly Ogle and Ann McCollum, both from Albuquerque, New Mexico and Sudha Dhungana, a nurse from the Karing for Kids clinic at nearby Goljung. The pharmacy was constantly busy dispensing medication and translating instructions from English to Nepali and then into the local language, Tamang. A tedious process made possible by a really dedicated group of interpreters who traveled with us.



Space station doubles as medical building (The Mountain Fund)

Dr. Beth Hall-Thompson from the UK and Lindsey Mahlstedt from Albuquerque took the front line triage positions and directed patients to wound care, headed up by Susie Rivard and Tu Mach and the general medicine tent staffed by Nepali Doctor Alish Prajapati. Each patient selected by the triage team was first seen by the intake team of David Diaz and Kerry Flint from Albuquerque, New Mexico. Tina Quack of Albuquerque, saw patients needing respiratory therapy and Michael Falcone helped direct patients from one area to the next.

The logistics didn't end with how to triage and care for over 1000 people while trekking. In all 42 porters, a kitchen staff of 11, 3 Sherpas and one Sirdar were employed to move the team down the trail. A team of 82 people in all.



The Mountain Fund organizes grassroots non-profit and non-governmental organizations from a diversity of disciplines, to support and coordinate these organizations' efforts to eliminate poverty, its causes and symptoms, in developing mountain communities around the world. For further details, visit www.mountainfund.org or contact mtnfund@mountainfund.org.