

29 May 2013

Mr Gerard McPhee  
53 Howard Street,  
Brunswick, VIC, 3056.

**WITHOUT PREJUDICE**

Dear Gerard,

**Re: Damodar Saribung Traverse**

Thank you for your comprehensive feedback in respect of the Damodar Saribung Traverse trek that departed 09 April 2013 which has been passed on by our CEO in my capacity of Himalayan Operations coordinator. We have now undertaken a detailed investigation of the matters you have raised and had the opportunity to also interview the tour guide & sherpas as well as other participants of the trek.

We would like to begin our response with some relevant information regarding the creation of the Damodar Saribung trek. This trek was introduced by World Expeditions in 2011 after our local team researched a suitable trek route. We remain very enthusiastic about what it offers in terms of an authentic, rigorous, high altitude expedition for our more experienced trekkers. The first trek operated in 2012 under the tutelage of Simon Yates. It was a successful trip on all accounts but at short notice, during the treks operation, the airport at Hunde closed temporarily due to weather conditions, leaving the group to walk out. This was researched immediately after the event and the local authorities at Hunde advised this was a one off and that we should continue to schedule our treks using Hunde airstrip as the exit point. This year however, very shortly before your trek was due to depart, we were advised that Hunde airport would be closed until further notice which prompted us to review the itinerary and notify you and your group of the changes. This was surprising given the earlier assurances that the closure was really an isolated occurrence. We engaged the same trek route as used by Simon Yates the year before which had operated well and without incident. We acknowledge your feedback and agree that going forward, we will operate the trek excluding Hunde which has shown itself to be unreliable, using the current itinerary, but enhancing it with an additional two days during the trek and finishing at the road head at Chame.

The trek is graded as Level 8 - as an Entry level mountaineering/exploratory with the following description of what can be expected which we find to be accurate for the nature of the expedition.

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*These adventures are classed as expeditions. They involve either extreme trekking and or basic mountaineering. Expect remote and poorly defined trails in variable weather conditions for up to 12 hours a day (possibly more subject to weather conditions and altitude). This may include a number of demanding high pass crossings and evacuation may be difficult from remote areas. Suitable for first time mountaineers wishing to take the step from trekking into the realm of mountaineering. Prior experience trekking at altitude is preferable but not essential and you should be comfortable in adverse weather conditions. Prior technical mountaineering experience is not necessary. Terrain will involve low angle snow slopes. Ropes may be used during treks for glacier travel and steeper sections of ice and snow. When mountaineering, basic mountaineering instruction is given by our mountaineering guides.*

We acknowledge that your partner's phone calls were not answered on Friday the 03<sup>rd</sup> of May. Those calls came in after 9pm. We would like to point out that all 24 hour emergency numbers to be used in Nepal and Australia, are kept securely with the emergency satellite phone, as it is our trek leaders who are trained to deal with any emergency situation. However we have now taken steps to notify friends and family of our travellers on our answering machine message that those phones are not monitored 24 hours. We'd also like to put the comment made by our CEO to your partner the following morning in context, that it would indeed have been impossible for us to do anything that evening if an emergency evacuation had been required – as the region in which you were trekking is restricted and we are unable to mount any evacuations quickly due to the approval process of authorising helicopter entry let alone at that time of day. You will have seen this with respect to Sasha's evacuation which was unable to be mounted until 2pm on that same Friday. We find that on expeditions in isolated areas such as Damodar, self sufficiency of the group and managing situations as they arise is procedurally always best practice as scenarios are always fluid. For this reason, we take our responsibility of guide and staff training seriously and are always sure to assign the most experienced group leaders to treks graded 7 and above. In emergency situations, our guides will always rely upon and have the support of the local base as was the case with your trek and Sasha's evacuation.

We acknowledge that the circumstances of Sasha's evacuation meant that Harka needed to take some decisions with regards to group movements on Friday 03 May. After assessing a range of factors, he identified that the weather conditions were very good, there were good staff to client ratios to proceed and so to keep the trek on track, made the decision for the group to proceed while he awaited the arrival of the helicopter and tended to Sasha. We acknowledge that the Sherpa Som's comment has contributed to your concerns however, others feedback is not consistent with yours that there was an emergency situation unfolding. Bernadette and our guide do not concede that she was suffering from hypothermia on Thursday 02 May. It was clear however that Bernadette was cold and moving slowly due to a lingering chest infection believed to be picked up in Kathmandu, and Harka tended to this quickly and efficiently. We understand that she was also tired on the descent to Glacier camp. The manner in which all of you supported one another on that day (group participants and staff collectively) was commendable and a great display of team work. Please understand that our staff were always committed to ensuring that all group members were safely in camp and accounted for, as was confirmed by other group members.

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In regards to points 4 to 12 of your other feedback we would like to comment on each as follows:

4. We believe that one satellite phone per expedition is sufficient. We do not recommend our travellers carry their own satellite phones. Our staff must be making decisions on the operations of the trip which they are trained to do.
5. Our tents are upgraded every three years or earlier as required. It is true that over a couple of seasons they lose their colour vibrancy, but generally, are fit for purpose and maintained in a good standard. All tents are checked before they leave Kathmandu for expeditions, particularly for faulty zips. The sign out log suggests all tents were in good working order before they left on the Damodar Expedition. We appreciate that zips can falter during a trek and our guides and camp staff are trained in rectifying them. The inference that they were unable to fix zippers, and the reliance went to the gear of a trekker, is infactual.
6. Your suggestion regarding space blankets is valuable and we intend on adding that to the gear list of participants on treks graded 7 and above, and have our guides encourage them to be carried by group members in their day packs.
7. We acknowledge the section of road that was used on the final day as being a bit of an anti climax. In future, we will bring a 4WD vehicle up to the trail/roadhead to avoid this. This was also highlighted by Harka as a recommendation so thank you for bringing this to our attention.
8. Our Nepal PDI document highlights the weight restriction on internal flights within Nepal as being 15kgs including hand luggage. We appreciate on more challenging expeditions where the requirements for gear and equipment are greater, can be difficult. Up until this year the airlines were lenient, but over the last few months there has been a crackdown. We have a solution for our Annapurna and Everest region treks and are trying to find a solution for treks in other regions where we are reliant on an internal flight to the start point of the trek. Having said this, it is a guideline which is out of our control, and given your own experience you would no doubt be well aware this is a problem faced by any climber and mountaineer, with excess baggage charges part and parcel of any expedition abroad.
9. Your comment regarding group members having different trip information is perplexing. Those documents are drawn from one source on a central database. Are you able to elaborate a little further on what documents differed so we can further research this point? Thank you
10. As I have indicated earlier in this communication, we will be rejigging some aspects of the trip notes.
11. Our recommendation was that a 60kg pack is required for the Damodar Trek.
12. World Expeditions supplies porters with clothing and equipment at the commencement of each trek including under, outer and waterproof layers. We acknowledge sometimes they do not wear it and this is an ongoing challenge for us. They certainly have the same access to safety equipment and medical assistance as our travellers as a core value in our modus operandi.

We appreciate that you experienced symptoms HACE and were treated for the same and Harka felt that you responded very well to this medication, sufficiently so to complete the trek.



We hope that we have been able to address your points in a transparent manner and greatly appreciate you detailing them for us. Your feedback is important and we would like to assure you that each point has been thoroughly researched with our operators and the necessary action taken.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this response further I can be contacted by email [Julie@worldexpeditions.com.au](mailto:Julie@worldexpeditions.com.au) or on the number below.

Yours sincerely  
WORLD EXPEDITIONS

Julie Anderson  
Himalayan Operations  
02 8270 8400

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