

## Project Yeti, Nepal



Project Yeti went from strength to strength in 2023 with several teams participating in April and September. Each year there is an intake at Kopan Monastery of fifty 8-year-old monks who invariably have a high rate of decay. They come from impoverished families and have never had any previous dental treatment. Remarkably, they are very stoic and are a pleasure to treat. It is a similar scenario at the Everest school at Chialsa. The new school children are young and courageous.

In April two teams worked at Kopan Monastery and a third group went to Chialsa in lower Sol Khumbu. An additional surgery was fitted out at Kopan which includes a radiography unit and digital sensor. This enables four dentists to simultaneously work and be assisted by an enthusiastic group of dental assistants from The Happy Tooth Group. The April groups examined 560 patients, completed 529 fillings, including 211 sealants, and 222 cleans and oral hygiene. They also extracted 53 teeth, mainly deciduous, performed 15 endodontic treatments and took 61 radiographs.

Presently there are two groups working at the clinics. The five members of the Kopan team, which includes three dentists and two assistants, are participating for the first time. Their focus has been to provide treatment for the Buddhist nuns whose treatment was not completed in April. One of the visiting dentists, Dr Karuna Khatri, initiated a visit to the nunnery. Dr Khatri went to some lengths to explain the importance of trusting Western dental treatment. Karuna was surprised at their probing questions, spoken in reasonable English. Most wanted to know about oral hygiene and the best brushing technique. They were thrilled to have Dr Khatri present and offered her afternoon tea and chai. There was an improved attendance at the clinic on the following day.



Therapist Jude Allsopp and Dr John Denton have returned to Chialsa for the sixth time. They were instrumental in establishing the Chialsa clinic in 2016. They have provided the opportunity for several senior students to have work experience in assisting, recording and sterilising instruments. The clinic has been relocated into a bigger room which can accommodate two mobile units and storage for materials and equipment. The newly acquired portable radiography unit and digital sensor were a welcome addition. *(See following article in this newsletter.)*

As usual, Jude and John were very warmly admitted to the Chialsa School Community of 280 students. These Sherpa families are among the poorest in the area. Disadvantages of unemployment, distances and extreme poverty mean that children would not receive an education

without the free Buddhist school. The dental clinic is highly regarded, and people come from several days walk away for treatment. Dental treatment is a luxury for so many in Nepal.

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### Chailsa Dental Visit, October 2023

This was our 6th trip to Chailsa. We were fortunate to have our excellent usual driver Dawa pick us up from Kopan Monastery at 4 am on Friday morning, 6<sup>th</sup> October 2023. We had arranged the dental equipment boxes to be brought up to reception the night before to facilitate a quick and early departure from Kathmandu. Not surprisingly traffic was very light as we exited Kathmandu and the Kathmandu Valley in the early morning darkness.

The journey was, as usual, long and tiring, but we made good time and arrived at Salleri in the early afternoon. We drove up to Chailsa, with some difficulty on the slippery track in Dawa's two wheel drive vehicle and finally arrived at Chailsa Monastery at 1530 hours. We were greeted warmly by a gaggle of children and the affable monk Bijay and Gisela Samten. We bunked down in the visitors' quarters in the old monks dormitory building. The adjacent toilet block provided a hot water shower and a pedestal toilet!

We set up our clinic in what was the past dining room. Things are changing at Chailsa and a recent building program has seen new dormitories for senior students and a new kitchen, dining room, toilet and shower facilities for the 160 odd boarding students in the 240 student school.



We had spoken to Pemba Norbu Sherpa, the wonderful Headmaster of the Sagarmatha Secondary School, about getting help with our clinic from senior students doing "work experience" with us. Pemba jumped at the chance to expose his students to that environment and seven seniors reported for duty dressed in white jackets ready for work. It was a delight to have them help and learn new skills and practice their English as well. These students were year 9 and 10 ages about 17, very mature and eager to learn.

Jude and I were feted for all our meals taken in the dining room of the Gisela's house. Nothing was too much trouble. We had delightful dahl bhat and miso soups, MoMo's, and pancakes and pizzas and even apple crumble, once we gave them the recipe! Gisela Samten had YouTubed pizza ovens and build one just that year.

We were able to see some 170 patients, both students and local villagers. We anecdotally think about 30% of the students we saw did not need any treatment! We feel our dental program at Chailsa is working, as last time we thought about 20% of the students did not need any treatment.



Pemba organised a trek for us after our work was done. He and two porters and a cook with the two of us in tow, set out for Dudhkunda Lake, a four day trek to the lake and back. The sacred lake sits at 4600 meters under the watchful Numbur Mountain at 6,959 meters. We completed the trek, very tired but happy, and made our long way back to Chailsa and Kathmandu with our trusty driver Dawa.

We regrouped at Kopan and delivered back our dental equipment to the clinic and made plans to return again next year to carry on the now very successful Dental Project at Chailsa.

**Dr John Denton and Ms Jude Allsopp**