

TRAIL SAINT INITIATIVE

A Trail Clean-Up Initiative for TAAN in Nepal

The Goal:

- (1) Create “Trail Saint” jobs for porters and villagers with a set daily payment
- (2) Keep the Himalayan trekking trails clean, thereby boosting trekking tourism
- (3) Give trekkers the opportunity to feel that they’re making a difference in eco-tourism

The Initiative:

- (1) Mandate through TAAN that every trekking company must offer the option of a trash clean-up assisted trek for a set amount
- (2) Hire Trail Saint(s) from the local villages of the region of the trek
- (3) Source trail clean-up bags from local Nepali companies - rice bags or concrete bags etc. and reused daily

Example:

A trekking company based in Kathmandu has a group of 10 trekkers departing out of Lukla for a fourteen day trek to Sagarmata/Everest Base Camp. A local porter or villager will be contracted as a “Trail Saint” to pick up trash along the trail for the duration. The Trail Saint will leave an hour before the group each morning with the intention of the trekkers having a cleaner trail for their daytime hike to the next village. The Trail Saint will meet up with the group at the first break-time area so the group can see the trash that has been cleaned from the trail. Then the Trail Saint will continue again before the group starts. Trash is to be left at trash receptacle bins along the trail if they are provided or in the villages where allowed.

A standardized rate (e.g. \$20/day) will ensure that the trekking company cannot raise the price to a huge sum to extract profit from the Trail Saint’s work and groups can therefore hire several Trail Saints to trek with their group. If the group chooses to hire one Trail Saint, for 14 days (14 days x \$20 per day = \$280), each trekker will add \$28 to their payment to the trekking company. If the group decides to have two Trail Saints with their group, each trekker will add \$56. Another possibility is to have new Trail Saints daily from each village to spread the income into the farther reaches of the Himalayas.

My own journey - Doug Silton, Portland, Oregon, USA:

I've trekked four times now in Nepal - all within the last six years.

My first trek was on the Annapurna Circuit in July of 2017 - I found my way to Nepal during a time of great trauma and crisis in my life - and Nepal was a huge part of my healing process. But I was amazed at how much trash was on the trails.

Then I trekked the Manaslu Circuit and even though there was less trash, there was still some and I saw that the trash was accumulating because of the locals on the trails - not the foreigner trekkers. There are lots of trekking companies offering "eco tourism" treks but it seems to be a name and not anything in their actions.

I decided to try to make a difference on my third and fourth treks. I hired an additional porter for trail cleaning, with the help of my dear friend and guide Sun Bahadur Gurung, on the Mardi Himal Basecamp to the Poon Hill trek and we cleaned the entire trail and shot a documentary while trekking and cleaning. Sadly, the following week I heard from other trekkers that the trash was back on the trail.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TpyYqrINGNE&t=76s&ab_channel=DougSilton

This past March I trekked The Three Passes with a stop at Everest Base Camp and I had three porters with me for trash cleaning. Also shooting a documentary about the process. We picked up 46 bags of trash from Paia to EBC over the Kongma La pass before the storm hit - and then it was impossible to see trash with snow on the ground for the remainder of the trek.

I had the great fortune of meeting various individuals who are dedicated to helping to clean the Himalayas - with note, Mingma Sherpa from the Lukla local government, Pengba at Khumbu Lodge, Minima at Hotel Panorama, Anji from Namche Bazar, Colin (Scotland) living in Dengboche, Tommy from Sagarmata Next.

I chatted with every trekking group that I passed and every single group said that they would be willing to hire at least one Trail Saint for their trek!

There is an inherent, envisioned expectation when people are coming to this beautiful land. They want to touch nature and reconnect with the beauty of the landscape. Strewn trash is too easy a way to tarnish the experience. This will not only be completely funded by outside parties (i.e. no capital investment required), it will also provide an additional steady source of income for the Nepali locals. It is another way to get

involved and to display the commitment of the local governments, to all who engage, that they care and are providing proactive options for the long term sustainability of the land and its peoples.

It is my dearest hope that this Initiative makes its way in some form into Nepal - the energy and beauty of Nepal is so dear to me and so many thousands of trekkers - and it deserves to remain clean for the Leave No Trace culture.

Doug trekking with three Trail Saints - March & April 2024
Kongma La Pass
The Three Passes + Sagarmarta Base Camp

