

Thanks to advice gleaned from the Tin Tin comics, we knew always to keep mani stones to our right.

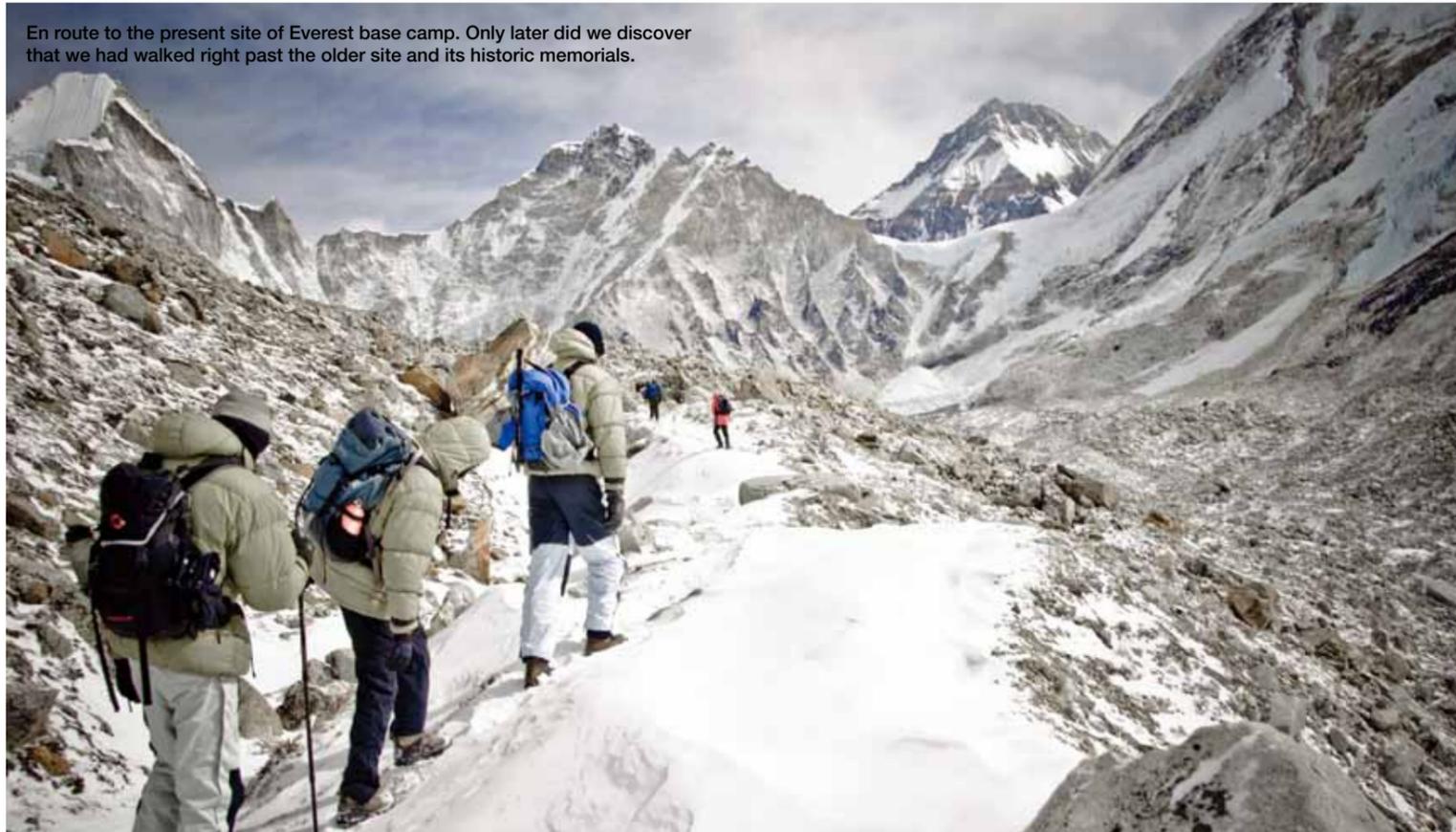
Lessons of the trail

For **Timon Wehrli**, a hike to Everest Base camp was a learning process – about underprivileged kids in Nepal as much as about trekking in the high Khumbu

Sunrise from Kala Pattar. Sadly most of the party missed out on this view, but got first dibs on breakfast instead!



En route to the present site of Everest base camp. Only later did we discover that we had walked right past the older site and its historic memorials.



Opportunities like this come along rarely: a chance to visit a country that's been on my bucket list, hiking to the foot of Mt Everest and helping underprivileged kids and my friend's school.

I decided and signed up on the spot.

And so in Feb 2011, I joined a party of 10 other trekkers in Kathmandu, where we met our porters and head guide Santosh. He outlined our route, then explained how the profits from the trip would go to the Moonlight Foundation (www.moonlight.org), a charity that supports a school for disadvantaged youngsters in the city.

Over the next few days, as the final preparations were made, we checked out parts of Kathmandu and had a great day helping out at the school. We were obviously a big, but fun distraction in their school day: outrageously tall Westerners squeezed in the small classroom, folding themselves in half, down to the kids' level, bearing new books and colouring pens to enjoy.

It was moving to see immediate results from the effort of just a handful of dedicated people working with the foundation in Nepal and Hong Kong.

For me, the trek itself was about getting to grips with

the sleepless nights, huge carb-heavy meals, and the small pack on my back that seemed as if it were filled with rocks. I enjoyed learning to pace myself as the altitude increased its burden and it became a very internal 14 days as I found I had the strength and stamina to enjoy the journey as well as making it there and back.

As a photographer, I jumped at any chance to shoot something or someone on the trail that was near-deserted in this off-season period. I became obsessed with the small villages we passed through, and the yak trains that would regularly overtake us.

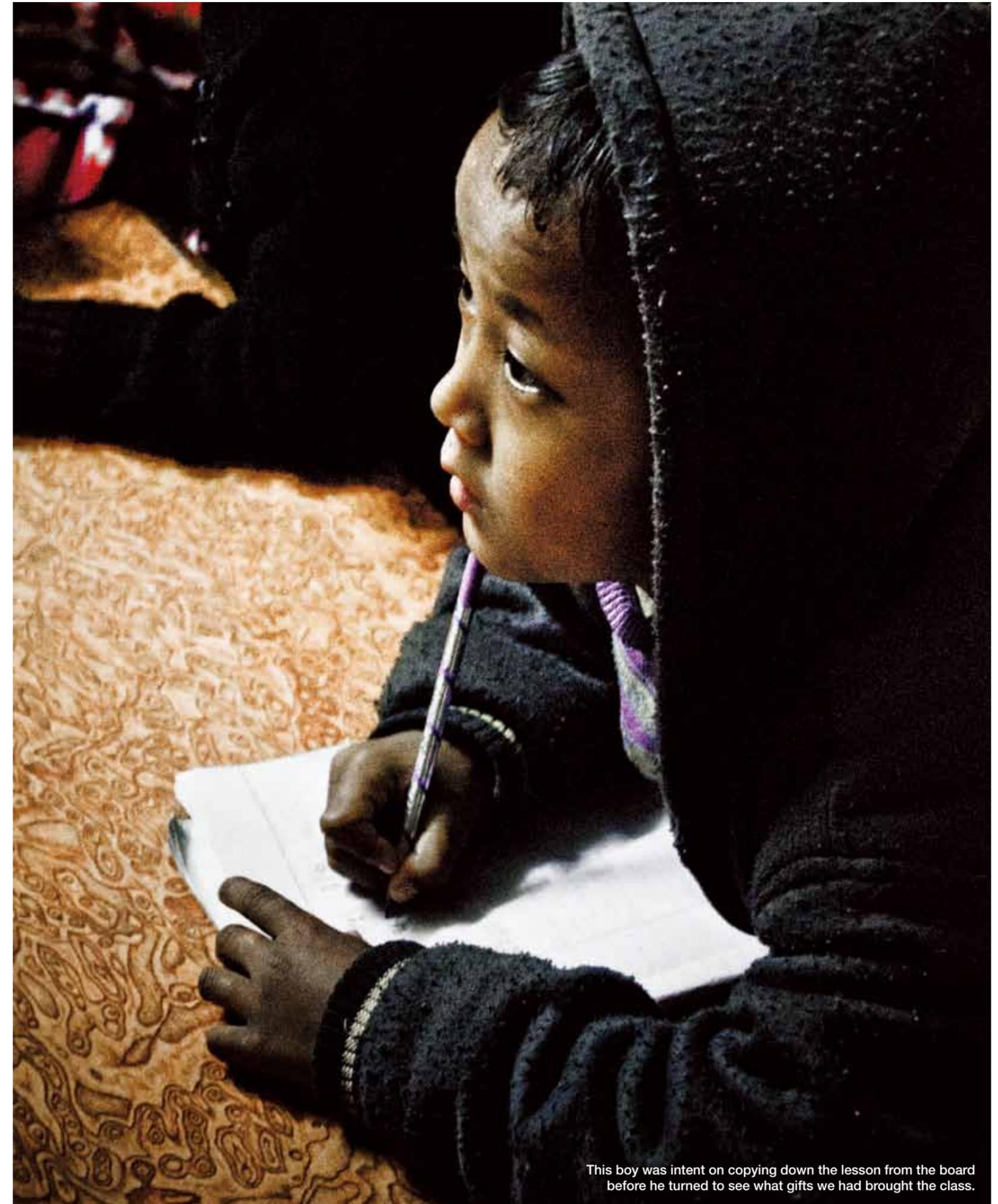
The day we headed to base camp started around 4am, with a hike up to Kala Pattar. Though it was a beautifully star-lit night, it was freezing cold and not all of us made it – some electing for warmth and a leisurely breakfast instead.

Then, after we had all eaten, came a brief visit to base camp. After a 4-6 hour roundtrip, it was a little anticlimactic. The site turned out to be only two years old – we had walked right past the more historic, original base camp. Still my cold, exhausted body was overwhelmed by the sense of accomplishment. The whole adventure had ticked all the right boxes.

An attentive class, shortly before we disrupted it with presents of new books and colouring pens.



Working with the kids was great fun and the kids clearly loved it too.



This boy was intent on copying down the lesson from the board before he turned to see what gifts we had brought the class.



Our arrival in villages often drew out the kids, well used to hiking parties in this area, who wanted to practice their English.



A well-earned first beer after descending from base camp.