

A life in the day of Claire O'Hara

Claire, 25 years old, is European and British kayaking champion and a member of the Great British freestyle kayaking team she will be going for gold in the world freestyle kayaking championships in Canada in 2007. Claire is a graduate of Leeds Metropolitan University and works as an outdoor adventure instructor. Claire spends several months each year training all over the world. This year she has traveled to Europe, Norway, Uganda and Nepal. When in the UK Claire spends most of her time training at the National Water Sports Centre in Nottingham. Claire has just returned from 7 weeks kayaking and training in Nepal.

"As part of my training in Nepal I took part in a 10 days rafting and kayaking expedition down the mighty Sun Kosi River, flowing with the river from its source, high up in the Himalayas, along 275km through a deep, wide valley to the terrain and the flat lands in the south.

I awoke at 7am on the 9th Nov under a tarpaulin tent on a sandy beach on the side of the Sun Kosi River. The sun was just rising high above the mountains. During the night my sleeping bag would be pulled up as tight as possible in order to keep out all the ground bugs who would try to fight their way into the comfort of my sleeping. I normally slept well and as I'd just spent 5 days kayaking down the river with grade 4/5 large rolling rapids (grade 6 is the highest given Niagara falls).

Breakfast was porridge, boiled eggs and toast cooked on a small campfire. Normally I have cereal and the time I get up depends on whether I'm in training or working if not I get up as late as possible. We set off at 8am on a 2 1/2 hour trek up steep small trails up the side of a mountain over a thousand meters vertical ascent. I was going to visit my Nepalese friend Sanu Babu Sunwar's family and village. I met Sanu Babu in 2004 in the

Himalayan White Water Challenge when I won the International ladies event and Sanu Babu won the Nepalese men's competition. Since then we have paddled many rivers across Nepal together. This was to be my second visit to his village. On my first visit I was the first westerner to visit and the local children were scared of me.

We arrived at 11am at Sanu Babus home and were greeted by his family. I was greeted by the traditional Nepalese greetings of 'Nameste Binnie' (hello sister) and a cup of hot char (tea) and fresh picked oranges. All the fruit and food is grown by the family or the village. Since my last visit they now have a telephone and a new road which has reduced the walk to the village from 3 days to 1 day. I was asked to visit the local school we were met with singing children, garlands, oranges and bananas. The school is open from 10am to 3pm which allows the children time to walk from the local villages in day light. The children are aged 8 - 14 years old, they have 4 teachers and the school consists of two very basic mud buildings. To go to the school the children pay 20 rupees (13p) a month which covers costs such as food and water. The drinking water has to be carried up from the river, by a local villager a journey of over 3hrs each day. I left a letter of support and donation to the school. My previous donation on my first visit had gone towards paying the local village carpenter to make benches for the school children.

Lunch was dhal bhat with Babu's family. Dhal bhat is the traditional Nepalese dish made of lentil soup, rice, potato curry, spinach or veg, chillies and meat - a far cry from my normal tuna sandwich or jacket potato lunch! After eating I set off with Babu about 4pm for another hours trek to a view point to watch the sunset over the Sun Kosi valley and the mountains opposite. This was an amazing site. In the dark we then set out through the trails in the woods and through paddy fields, using the moon light, to guide us back to Babu's home. I met up with the rest of his family who were all in the tiny downstairs room. The house is very basic but beautiful, it is a two storey

house made of orange mud / clay with a thatched roof. Each floor has only one room the upstairs a bedroom and storage room and the downstairs the kitchen, main room and a bedroom in one. We were given small mats to sit on, so almost 20 of us sat around the small clay cooking stove in the small smoky downstairs room chatting and later we ate a meal of Roti (a rice bread), vegetables and goat, which had been special slaughtered to celebrate our visit.

Around midnight we all retired to bed. There were 7 of us sharing the upstairs room - 3 on the bed and 4 on the floor. I was lucky I got the bed. It was hard to get to sleep as we were surrounded by spiders, mice and bats and the room was really smoky from the small clay stove cooking in the room below. About 3am I was startled by a spider landing on my head. I didn't get a lot of sleep. I was up at 6am to watch the sunrise from the bedroom window and had an early breakfast of pancakes and honey and sugar before setting off to return down to the beach and continue on our journey kayaking down the river. "

For more information on Claire's journey and world championship bid visit www.claireohara.co.uk