



BRITAIN - NEPAL

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In this, the second number of our Journal, we have tried to maintain the standard set in the first one and we must thank our distinguished contributors who have made it possible. The Journal has been well received by the growing membership of our Society, perhaps most of all by those members who are not able for one reason or another to attend the meetings which are held in London. The main articles in the Journal are based on or related to talks given to the Society by the authors at the Royal Nepalese Embassy, the Alpine Club or the Kensington Central Library.

EDITOR

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NOTES ON THE BRITAIN-NEPAL SOCIETY

SOCIAL CHANGE IN THAK KHOLA AND MUSTANG

by

Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf

The Himalayan regions comprised today within the Kingdom of Nepal played for centuries the role of a contact zone where Hindu civilizations and the way of life of Tibetan Buddhism met and dovetailed. Though through the Rana era Nepal tended to isolate itself from foreign and particularly western influences, its people maintained a variety of commercial links with both Tibet and India, and some of the principal trade routes between its two great neighbours traversed Nepalese territory following the course of rivers flowing from north to south and crossing the Himalayan main range by passes of great altitude. One of those routes ran through the valley of the Kali Gandaki river and through the domain of the Raja of Mustang, a feudal ruler of Tibetan origin. The principal operators of the trade with Tibet were the Thakalis, a small ethnic group concentrated in 13 villages situated in the Kali Gandaki valley at altitudes of approximately 8000 feet. The main trading centre was Tukche, a settlement of close on a hundred houses of somewhat urban character. It served as an entrepot where wealthy Thakali traders stored in their enormous palace-like houses the salt and wool brought from Tibet, as well as large quantities of grain grown in the middle ranges of Nepal.

When I first studied the Thakalis and other groups of that region in 1962, the trans-Himalayan trade was beginning to suffer from the impact of the Chinese takeover in Tibet, in the same way as the trade of the Sherpas had declined at that time. Yet, the Thakalis continued to dominate the economic life of the region and there was still a considerable flow of trade along the Kali Gandaki route.

When I returned to the region in 1976, i. e., 14 years after my first fieldwork among the Thakalis, the situation had completely changed. Tukche, deserted by most of the Thakali traders, had the appearance of a dying town. Many houses were locked up, and in others there were only caretakers inhabiting a few rooms on the ground floor. Other houses were in ruins and there was a whole quarter where most of the houses no longer maintained by their owners had totally collapsed. Whereas in 1962, the population was 495 it had now shrunk to 223, and even this figure was deceptive because many so-called residents spent only brief spells in Tukche, and had their main business and houses in Pokhara or one of the towns of the Terai. At the time of my visit there were only 33 true Thakalis staying in Tukche. The population now consists mainly of non-Thakalis, the off-spring of bond-servants and dependants of the great Thakali families. Some of them have some land of their own, but most have rented land still belonging to Thakalis. This they cultivate rather inefficiently having not enough manure to produce even average crops. Trade is reduced to some local transactions in goods bought for cash in Pokhara or Baglung. Caravans coming from Jomosom, Baragaon or Mustang now rarely stop in Tukche, while in the past Tukche was one of the main staging posts.

The owners of the great houses of Tukche who once held sway not only over the region to the north, have now moved to Pokhara, Kathmandu, Bhairawa and other places in the lower country, and there they have built up businesses independent of the trade with Tibet, which used to be the main source of their wealth. One might think that the families of their former servants and dependants, who for generations had been dominated by Thakali masters, would now exert themselves to stand on their own feet. The new system of village-government, known as panchayat rule, gives them every opportunity for doing so, and indeed nine out of the eleven members of the local council of Tukche are men risen from a low social status. Yet the present inhabitants of Tukche seem to be lacking initiative and energy, and though freed from the dominance of their one-time masters, they seem incapable of improving their condition or even of preventing the gradual decay of Tukche.

One cannot help wondering why the leading families of Tukche have opted out so completely of any plans for the reorganization of the economy of Thak Khola. True, the decline of the trade with Tibet was a severe blow to all the trading communities of the Kali Gandaki valley, but others have not reacted by wholesale emigration. The Government of Nepal is making strenuous and partly already successful efforts to develop the natural resources of the region, principally by the introduction of large-scale fruit and vegetable cultivation. Tourism too provides promising prospects, though from 1974 until a few weeks ago, the area was closed to foreigners for political reasons. The great Thakali families, whose members used to play an important economic and political role far beyond the confines of Thaksatsae and indeed as far as the Muktinath group of Bhotia villages, were clearly in a position to give a lead in the various development schemes and there were many ways in which they could have invested their very considerable capital in long-term projects benefiting their home-villages. Instead they preferred to uproot themselves and to seek purely financial gain in areas where they are a small minority and hence unlikely to rise to political influence and indeed to great prominence within the framework of the Nepalese Hindu caste society.

Thus Tukche, deprived of its leading class, is rapidly sliding into insignificance and economic decline.

In sharp contrast to this situation is the social and economic resilience of the village of Marpha, which lies only 4 miles north of Tukche. Its inhabitants belong to an ethnic group closely akin to the Thakalis, yet considered distinct, and looked down by the Thakalis proper as socially inferior. Unlike Tukche Marpha was never a stratified society, and although there were always differences in the affluence of the various families there were no class distinctions comparable to those of Tukche. With very few exceptions, all villagers belong to one of the four traditional clans of Marpha, and intermarry only among themselves. Thus Marpha was and still is a closely structured, compact community very conscious of its own identity.

Like their southern neighbours the people of Marpha used to be engaged in the salt and grain trade with Tibet, but their reaction to its decline was quite different from that of the Thakalis of Tukche. Those who owned mules and pack-ponies sought out routes where they could use their animals for transport on contract, and others

concentrated on the intensification of agriculture, planting orchards and growing vegetables on a commercial scale. Instead of carrying Tibetan salt to the lower regions, they now transport their vegetables and potatoes to Pokhara and other places within reach of their mule trains. Though many Marphalis spend the winter months working or trading in the middle ranges or the Terai these seasonal migrations follow the traditional pattern, and no-one has sold his house and left Marpha for good.

The Buddhist gumpa is well maintained and there are still sufficient lamas to perform the services and function at village ritual. Indeed the way in which seasonal rites and festivals are performed demonstrates the vitality and cohesion of the village community of Marpha. Unlike the leading Thakali families of Tukche who had begun to neglect Buddhist ritual even when they still lived in Thak Khola, the people of Marpha are stout adherents of Buddhism and none of them have ever commissioned brahmanic rituals such as some wealthy Thakalis of Tukche used to do.

In this context it is not possible to elaborate the comparison between the two villages Tukche and Marpha, but even on the strength of the evidence quoted, it would seem that the two communities reacted very differently to the change in the trade-pattern imposed on them by external events. Historians are familiar with situations in which political changes diminish the importance of a trade-route but information on their effect on small individual communities is rarely forthcoming. The events in Thak Khola, on the other hand, exemplify the variety of ways in which trading communities can adjust themselves to changes in their economic environment.

If we look further north we find that the virtual abdication of the leading families of Tukche and their move to other regions has had repercussions on the Tibetan-speaking Bhotia groups of an area known as Baragaon. The inhabitants of this area which comprises a number of substantial villages lying at altitudes between 9,000 and 12,000 feet, had fallen into a state of far-reaching economic dependence on some of the Thakali families of Tukche. They owed them considerable sums of money, had mortgaged much of their land, and had even been forced to hand over some members of their families as bond-servants to their Thakali creditors. How this came about is not quite clear, for there can be no doubt that in the not very distant past Baragaon had been ruled by local rajas comparable to the present ruler of Mustang. The impressive ruins of several forts are evidence of this phase in the history of Baragaon, which seems to have come to an end when in the late 18th century the house of Gorkha extended its dominance over most of Western Nepal. The descendants of the old ruling families have still the tradition that their forefathers looked down upon the Thakalis and had been able to impose a rule according to which Thakali traders had to bare their heads as they entered the village gate. Later the roles became reversed and the Thakalis' great wealth enabled them to dominate the whole of Baragaon. In 1962 this dominance was still unbroken; many people of Baragaon lived as bond-servants in the great houses of Tukche and Thakali creditors received regularly large quantities of agricultural produce as interest payment from Baragaonlis who had had to mortgage their land.

The departure of the great Thakali families from Tukche has brought about a drastic change in this situation. When they decided to transfer their business activities to

Pokhara, Kathmandu or Bhairawa, they had no longer the determination to hold on to their assets in Baragaon. Some sold their holdings to local people on easy terms, while others found it no longer practicable to collect the interest on loans given to Baragaonlis and in effect abandoned their investments which were in any case rapidly eroded by inflation.

Thus the Bhotias of Baragaons have emerged from their subservience to the Thakalis of Tukche, and freed from the burden of old debts have greatly gained in self-confidence and the will to better their economic position. While in the past they worked often as carriers for Thakalis, they have now become entrepreneurs, and surprisingly have developed extremely successful trading ventures in India. The nature of these ventures strikes one as somewhat bizarre. Every winter many men of Baragaon go to Ludhiana in the Punjab, and there purchase large quantities textiles mainly in the form of sweaters, made of some wool and a large component of artificial fibres. These they peddle in other parts of India, and above all in Assam. Trading on their unmistakably Bhotia appearance and dress, they easily convince potential purchasers that their wares are the product of Himalayan cottage-industries and made of pure, home-grown wool. The margin between the price they have to pay to the Indian manufacturers and the selling price is so great that each such venture results in profits of several thousand rupees. This enables Baragaonli traders to meet their needs of such commodities as cotton cloth, tobacco, tea, kerosene and minor manufactured articles. While it is impossible to foretell how long they will be able to maintain this very rewarding trade, for the time being it fills very well the gap created by the decline in the trade with Tibet.

The new sense of self-reliance which springs from the ending of Thakali domination finds expression also in the successful working of the panchayat system, a form of grass-root democracy established throughout Nepal. Various communal projects have been started, and villagers pool their labour for such public works as the construction of channels for the irrigation of plantations of fruit trees.

North of Baragaon lies the domain of the Raja of Mustang, and this region which juts like a peninsula into Tibet, has its special character. Throughout the Rana period Mustang was virtually a state within the state, and the Raja of Mustang continued to be recognised as a feudatory prince, whose position vis-a-vis the government of Nepal was comparable to that of the Indian princes vis-a-vis the British crown. De jure the Raja of Mustang has today no longer a special position and his previous domain is supposed to be administered like any other parts of Nepal. In practice, however, the Raja of Mustang wields still great influence, and the change-over from the traditional autocratic rule to the modern system of panchayat raj has not brought about any dramatic developments. What has changed, however, is the orientation of the people of Mustang. Previously they were largely orientated towards Tibet, and Nepalese cultural influence was minimal. The Raja of Mustang, locally known as Lo Gyelbu (i. e., King of Lo), intermarried with the Tibetan aristocracy, spoke only Tibetan and lived entirely in Tibetan style. The numerous monasteries of Mustang had close ties to Tibetan monasteries and young monks went to study in Tibet. The laymen were active in the trade with Tibet, but acted only as middlemen between Tibetans and Thakalis and rarely went further south than Tukche. They had little occasion to speak any

language other than Tibetan, and as late as 1962 it was difficult to find in the villages of Mustang people who could express themselves in Nepali.

All this has changed. The trade with Tibet, though not completely interrupted, has lost much of its importance and personal relations with Tibetans inside Tibet are no longer practicable. On the other hand, the people of Mustang have re-orientated themselves towards their Nepali-speaking co-citizens, and travel much more frequently to the lower regions and even to India. Government schools have been opened in most villages, and many young people have become fluent in Nepali. There is, however, no desire to break with traditional customs, and Buddhist temples and institutions are well supported. It is too early to say which way Mustang is likely to go, but I think there is a good chance that the area will retain the Buddhist character, while benefitting from economic improvements such as the introduction of new crops, and the extension of irrigation. A break-up of the social fabric such as we have observed in Tukche is very unlikely, for the leading families of Mustang, linked with the Raja by ties of kinship and marriage alliances, are firmly based on substantial landholdings, and unlike the Thakali traders they have no incentive to seek new outlets for their energies but can maintain and eventually improve their economic standard by developing the resources of their mountain homeland.

I cannot claim that the examples here recounted provide a sufficient basis for a novel interpretation of historic processes involving social and economic change. They rather suggest the infinite variety in the reaction of different ethnic groups to political events impinging on the traditional economic pattern. The adjustment necessitated by such events may bring about a disintegration of the social order as it has done in Tukche, or it may induce a population to pull together and overcome difficulties by a heightened sense of identity and cooperation as it has been my experience in Marpha.

Editor's Note:

Members would wish to know that the following books by Professor von Föhrer-Haimendorf are published by JOHN MURRAY, 50 Albermarle Street, London W1X 4BD, and can be ordered through any Bookseller:

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THE BRITAIN-NEPAL MEDICAL TRUST

by

Dr. John S. Cunningham, Chairman of the Trust

Ten years ago in April 1968, three Land Rovers were parked in a field in Henley just behind John Hunt's home. Five doctors, five nurses (including John Hunt's own daughter Prue) and Peter, the team's general dogsbody - welcomed the final cheer of a log fire before braving the cold of Spring and the incredible chaos which reigned supreme in the orchard outside.

A sign-writer sat placidly on a stool carefully painting interlocking Union Jacks and Nepalese National flags on the doors of the vehicles as the mound of equipment grew steadily higher and tempers more frayed. Tents, sleeping bags, survival blankets and mosquito nets lay in heaps, cluttered together with jerry cans of water, padlocks and pilchards - perhaps a Prayer-Wheel would have been more appropriate. The Land Rovers gleamed white with their new paint, spotless stainless-steel sinks lay sandwiched between cupboards; fresh water tanks snuggled into the tropical roofs and wire mesh covered the headlights. Two years of work lay behind us, full of frustration but always tinged with optimism; no-one knew what lay ahead.

Two years previously, somewhat jaded by the beurocracy of the National Health Service, I had optimistically written to the Health Department in Nepal offering the services of a medical team from the United Kingdom to assist their under-doctored Country. It was many years later that we were to meet the Nepalese Doctor who replied to that letter and sowed the seeds of the organisation which exists today - The Britain-Nepal Medical Trust.

As our crazy idea gradually evolved, others with similar inclinations soon appeared. John Ward with his surgical keenness, Barney Rosedale with his flair for ideas backed by a keen medical brain and Vint Chadwick, the academic, with a dry wit and newly-wed nurse-Wife, Di. Our nurses were Gill Kellie, Rosemary Reid, Prue Hunt and Sheena Gordon (soon to become Ward in Kathmandu after a short engagement announced in Delhi) and, completing the eleven, Peter Hawksworth, son of a gynaecologist with the ability to do almost anything for anyone under the most trying circumstances. A motley crew, sufficiently endowed with enthusiasm to write five thousand letters through which we raised fifty thousand pounds, three Land Rovers and ten tons of equipment already sent on its way by sea to Calcutta.

With cars finally packed we said our farewells and drove in convoy to Southend and abandoned ourselves to a quick channel hop by Silver City Airways and to 7,700 miles of tarmac, desert and dust, arriving in Kathmandu six weeks later - battle-scarred and somewhat wiser. The Diplomatic Service had carefully paved our way with His Majesty's Government of Nepal and seven weeks later, after endless tea-strewn meetings, we found ourselves in Biratnagar in Eastern Nepal in a temperature of over a hundred degrees and with humidity to match. The Nepalese are to be thanked most sincerely, not only for permission to work in

their very beautiful country, but also for the blind eye which was turned to our initial enthusiastic but rather short-sighted activities.

Gradually we absorbed some of the problems faced by our host Country allowing us to take a more far-reaching view of the medical needs. Before the end of our first year our sights were set on the field of Tuberculosis control and John was happily operating in Dhankuta with Vint as a newly trained anaesthetist/pathologist, an oxygen mask in one hand and a microscope in the other. Barney was developing a Pathological Laboratory in Biratnagar and Penny had started to design an Out-Patient building in her spare time whilst fulfilling two other commitments - that of anaesthetising patients in Kosi Zonal hospital and giving birth to Andrew in Dharan. How very grateful we all were for the help given to us by all at Dharan, without whose kindness we might well have floundered.

By the end of the first three years, Biratnagar had become our home and our work had spread north to Terathum and Chainpur. When Penny and I returned home in 1971, only Barney remained of the original team but new faces had filled the gaps and new ideas had been kindled. The Trust gradually became accepted as part of the Health Service in East Nepal and more permanent examples of our presence were the X-Ray building in Dhankuta and the outpatients building in Kosi Zonal Hospital built on two floors and covering two thousand four hundred square feet. Immunisation against Tuberculosis proceeded apace and BCG teams were soon trekking north into Terathum and Sankua Sabba.

Last year saw the millionth child given BCG with teams now spread over Mechi, Kosi and Sagamatha Zones ably organised by Frank Guthrie (ex Peace Corps) and now the longest serving Trust member who personally directed the training of thirty Nepali vaccinators. House-to-house visiting had involved thousands of miles of walking over some of the most difficult terrain in the world. Active cases of Tuberculosis had been routed out and patients referred to clinics for treatment. The Chest Clinic in Biratnagar which in 1968 had coped with less than fifty patients a week, now has eight thousand cases on its books and is very well run by Nepali staff. The policy has always been to start projects which could, in time, be integrated into the Nepalese Health programme and this we will continue until one day our help will no longer be needed, a day when Nepal will be as proud of its Health Service as it is of its soldiers.

Today, The Britain-Nepal Medical Trust (B.N.M.T. for short) owes its existence to the continued support of Oxfam, Christian Aid and a host of Industrial Companies, private Trusts and individuals who love Nepal. In the last few months, the Ministry of Overseas Development has agreed to match the Oxfam and Christian Aid Grants. With a budget of only £60,000 per annum, we have a team of 7 in Nepal with nearly fifty local employees. Integrated into the Government Tuberculosis Control Programme, we cover all of Eastern Nepal from the border with India to the South to the high Himal in the North. Four clinics run by Nepali staff (and supervised by UK doctors) cope with the active cases of Tuberculosis found by the BCG teams.

A drug distribution scheme, the brain child of Barney Rosedale almost eight years ago in an effort to introduce cheap medicines into the hill areas, will hopefully be taken under the wing of the Panchayat system and continue to flourish.

We have had our successes and also our fair share of mistakes from rather too enthusiastic beginnings to our inability to understand how other nations conduct their affairs of State. We have been short of money and short of sympathy with those who have failed to achieve their ambitions with a single wave of a magic wand. We will make more mistakes, but the Trust will continue to flourish happy in the knowledge that we are providing a service to a Country we all love and to a people who have fought by our side for over a hundred years.

THE HONG KONG MOUNTAINEERING EXPEDITION
TO ANNAPURNA SOUTH PEAK - AUTUMN 1976

by

Captain D. H. McK. Briggs

It really was a most odd feeling that struck me on the morning after we had struggled up to Base Camp. As I wrestled with yet another tent and the sun sailed over the Machhepuchhare - Annapurna III ridge I was overcome by the thought that we still had to climb the mountain. The mammoth task of getting everyone and everything to Base Camp was only a part of the task. The real challenge was still to come. This might seem an odd idea, but the problem of preparing for a Himalayan expedition had seemed so great that it had become an end in itself and all thoughts of the actual climb had faded into a hazy future. The plan to climb Annapurna South Peak, one of the smaller (23,607 ft) but more spectacular mountains of the Annapurna massif in western Nepal had begun with maps, photographs and journal articles spread over the dining table of 6th Gurkha Rifles British Officers Mess in Hong Kong during the summer of 1975. Work really started in earnest in January 1976 and on September 28 we were complete at Base Camp. We were a small team of Britons and Nepalis with one Hong Kong Chinese to add that certain "je ne sais quoi". We split ourselves into lead climbers: 2 Gurkha, 1 Chinese and 3 British, and support climbers: 1 Gurkha and 2 British. On top of this we had 2 Gurkha mail runners who very gamely agreed to help with loads lower down and a Liaison Officer from the Nepalese Army; a total of 12. We employed no Sherpas for ethical reasons, really feeling that we should do all the work to get ourselves to the top, if we were going to make it,

and for the financial reason that we wanted to keep the cost as low as possible. In fact our porter arrangements were rather unusual. The normal arrangement is to employ a Sherpa Sirdar through one of the trekking agencies. He would then take on the responsibilities of hiring high altitude porters, generally Sherpas, and march in porters, local labour from the bazaar. We chose to hire march in porters from the area close to Base Camp, i.e., Chhomro and Kyumni Khola, and we opted for an ex Gurkha soldier who I had known well to act as Sirdar. This was a previous RSM of 6 GR now Hon. Lt. (QGO) Sanbahadur Gurung who lives in Chhomro and who recruited all our porters. Having adopted this approach we endeavoured to look after them, and provide them with: shoes, blankets, jackets, woollens and blue and white striped groundsheets. The porters became very much a part of the expedition and we developed a very special relationship with Chhomro in particular.

Our first problem on the climb was to get across the very broken glacier situated between Annapurna South Peak and its smaller but impressive outlier Hiumchuli. We would then be at the foot of a steep snow and ice ridge that we had christened Serac Ridge. This, it was hoped, would lead us to the summit ridge or thereabouts. Colonel Jimmy Roberts had suggested that we skirt round the snout of the glacier and move up the far or right side of it to the base of Serac Ridge. An early reconnaissance had suggested that by pushing up the left side of the glacier and then crossing it via the relatively even upper snowfield would be much quicker and would save us a camp over the other route. These early days were a useful opportunity to teach basic snow and ice techniques to those on the expedition who had never climbed on snow and ice before. This may seem a rather odd approach to a Himalayan expedition but there is no snow in Hong Kong to practice on and many of the team had climbed only in Hong Kong.

Camp 1 was quickly established, and while two climbers occupied it and pushed on up the left side of the glacier the rest of us carried the first of many loads to stock the camp and provide the basis for higher camps. The lead pair now found that due to the tremendous foreshortening effect that snow has when you are looking along it we had considerably misjudged the distance involved. Probably more important the route was plagued with frequent powder avalanches from the upper slopes of Hiumchuli. Colonel Jimmy Roberts had been right! The route would have to be abandoned and we had lost a valuable week, for we still had to recover all the stores we had carried up to Camp I. We felt that we had lost "round one" to the mountain.

Having skirted the snout of the glacier the route progressed well; a new Camp I and Camp II were established. The higher reaches of the glacier caused some difficulty as there were many large crevasses and seracs, but after one member had had a fall of 60 ft. when climbing a serac, Camp III was established at the foot of Serac Ridge at 18,500 ft. Peter Cooper, the expedition leader, and Rick Broad occupied Camp III and started the more serious snow and ice climbing offered by Serac Ridge.

On the second night at Camp III around midnight Rick was half awake and thought he heard the rumbling of a train; it appeared to be getting closer. His next sensation was one of rolling over and over, and at this stage Peter woke up. They rolled on

and on knowing that there was a large crevasse some 30 metres below the original position of the tents. They stopped less than five metres from the crevasse. The avalanche had made considerable changes to the surrounding landscape. They reorganised as best they could and, nursing their bruises, spent the rest of the night using the remains of the tent as a bivouac sheet. The following morning, while retrieving their scattered belongings, they began to realise how lucky they had been. There were numerous large blocks of ice scattered over the landscape, any one of which would have crushed them easily.

The tent was replaced, a new camp set up below the crevasse and the assault continued.

Camp IV was established at 20,500 ft. and although manpower had now become critical, spirits were high as we hoped that the summit would be accessible from the next camp. Unfortunately two of our lead climbers and one of our support climbers had dropped out, leaving two climbers to make the route and only four to keep it open from Base Camp to Camp IV. During the push up to the site for Camp V Rick damaged his leg and thus he too had to pull out. Peter stayed at IV and Rinchen Wangdi Lepcha, one of our Gurkha lead climbers, and myself who had been supporting the lead pair went up to join him.

The following day, by now October 31, the three of us dismantled Camp IV and carried it to 21,500 ft. and the site of Camp V. From here we were on our own. The rest of the expedition members were at Base Camp some 8,000 ft. and three days below us, our only contact being our twice daily radio call. Supplies had to be brought from below, and some work was required on the steep snow and ice above us and so it was not until November 2 that we set off for the summit.

With three of us on the rope progress was frequently slow, and by midday it was clear that we would not make the top. Over a meagre lunch we agreed on a bivouac just short of the summit ridge. I stayed to construct the bivouac while Peter and Rinchen pushed on to the Summit Ridge. They made it; fixed a rope and returned to a palatial bench with a wind break. We made a brew which took an age to boil and shared a small tin of frozen pilchards. The sunset, however, was breathtaking; we could see clearly for over 50 miles and the golds, blues, pinks and finally purples were extremely beautiful. We had a dreadful night seated upright on our bench at nearly 23,000 ft. The only comforts were that we were not cold having had the foresight to bring sleeping bags, and that the summit should be ours on the following day.

We had a luke warm brew after dawn and struggled into our frozen boots. Crampons were a real problem to put on, but finally we were away. By 10 a.m. we were on the Summit Ridge, but were met by icy gale-force winds from the north. The summit was now in sight but it was not going to be the easy trek we had thought. The snow was treacherous; one often broke through the surface crust and continued to do so while trying to climb out; it was really exhausting. Equally difficult was the loose snow picked up by the wind and hurled into our faces like a sand blast.

At 1300 we finally made the summit. The views were fabulous, but I am afraid that the conditions were so bad that we did little more than take photographs of each other and some panoramas. Rinchen was already suffering from exposure; his irrational behaviour before the summit had indicated this, and now he had to be shouted at to make any effort. Before long this too was ineffectual and Peter had to help him along. I, too, was exhausted and remember little of the return from the summit. Finally, some four hours later back at the bivouac it was obvious that Rinchen could go no further and so we bundled him into his sleeping bag with our two bags around him and hoped that he would recover. As darkness closed in on us we retrieved our sleeping bags from Rinchen who was by this time much better, and settled down to another long and uncomfortable night.

The following day we dropped down to Camp V to find that the tent had been blown away. We continued down to Camp III. Only at this stage could we contact Base Camp as our radio had been left in the ill-fated tent at Camp V. They had not heard from us for nearly three days and having seen nothing of us either the were very worried.

Our recovery went very smoothly. The porters appeared and we were on our way back to Pokhara. We were all sad to leave the beauty of the Annapurna Sanctuary; its grandeur surely cannot be surpassed by many places in the world. Our reception in Chhomro was tremendous. There were garlands, raksi, tea, eggs and simi beans as we entered the village, and lots of people had turned out to welcome us. That night after a delicious meal of curried venison, a nautch was staged in our honour. There were lots of songs, dancing by the village children who were all beautifully dressed up, and skits on the Army, the Government and life in general. It was a night I am sure we will never forget. In the morning, as we left we were covered in garlands once again, and after a round of house calls for more raksi and more food we finally took our leave of this village which had adopted us and treated us so royally. It was most humbling to experience such generosity from people with so little.

On reflection we had been very fortunate. As a very inexperienced team we had achieved our aim: climbed our mountain without loss or injury. Perhaps more important, we had all shared in that achievement and one of the Nepalese climbers had deservedly reached the top; still an unusual feat. We had made lots of friends, and had had a fabulous time in those beautiful valleys. Should the reader ever venture past Ghandrung perhaps he will see the occasional denim jacket, army blanket or blue and white striped groundsheet being put to good use and will also feel that we left a little of ourselves there.

BBC BROADCASTS IN NEPALI

After the Annual General Meeting on 29th November 1977, a tape was played illustrating the nature and content of BBC broadcasting in Nepali. This was introduced by Evan Charlton who recently retired from the Eastern Service of the BBC. The tape included some historic excerpts from the BBC archives including one of an interview with His Majesty the late King Mahendra. This was a genuine rarity as His Majesty very rarely gave recorded interviews. There was also an excerpt from an interview given at the BBC by H.M. King Birendra when he had visited England as Crown Prince. Mr. Mani Rana, of the BBC's Nepal programme, was prevented from attending the meeting because of his wife's illness, but he had compered the tape, explaining that such broadcasts were heard by Gurkha soldiers in Hong Kong, Brunei, Dharan and now Church Crookham as well as by numerous listeners in Nepal and other parts of South Asia.

Radio Nepal, said Evan Charlton, who was the Programme Organiser of the BBC's Nepali Service until September 1977, had celebrated its silver jubilee in 1975. There could be few countries in the world where radio could be more valuable than Nepal with its difficult communications and rugged countryside. H.M. Government had seen the great benefits that radio could bring to people living in far-off valleys and on the mountainsides, and had planned the steady growth of Radio Nepal's services. It had begun with one transmitter and studios converted out of an old schoolroom. Now it had a number of transmitters - shortwave and medium wave - and new buildings, the equipment for which was presented by the British Government. Radio Nepal had begun broadcasting 4½ hours a day; now it was on the air for 12 hours daily, with one more hour on Saturdays.

One of the great pleasures for a BBC man visiting Radio Nepal was the number of old friends he would meet as 75% of staff trained abroad have been to the BBC. Excellent relations exist between the two organisations and the welcome given to the BBC's decision in 1969 to start a weekly Nepali Service was very warm. Equally welcome was the decision to extend the service to three transmissions a week, but when he visited Nepal in 1973 and 1974, many officials and other listeners expressed the hope, echoed in many letters from Nepal, that the service should soon be on a daily basis. There was no doubt, said Evan Charlton, that a tri-weekly service of fifteen minutes did present certain difficulties for listeners over tuning-in and the solution to these problems lay in the expansion of the service to daily broadcasting. Habit is very important in listening, particularly on short wave. The solution was not to follow what the Government's Think Tank advocated, which was to abolish it altogether. That would not only destroy a valuable link between the two countries and damage what in many ways are very important connections with Radio Nepal but would be taken by many in Nepal as a signal of Britain's lack of interest and concern for its welfare.

Evan Charlton thanked the Society for giving him the opportunity to discuss a matter which was of real concern to all those believing in friendship between the two countries and anxious to extend existing ties of mutual interest. And as a last word, he rejected the argument that because all influential Nepalese were fluent in English, only broadcasting in English was necessary. Many indeed spoke English brilliantly but there were others who preferred to use their own language. In any case, even those who were most fluent in English enjoyed hearing Nepali well spoken from the BBC in London.

THE ROAD TO MUKTINATH

by

Frances Slade

Sometime ago I read Michel Peissel's book on Mustang, and was at once enchanted with the magic he conjured up - the names of villages, the description of the Kali Gandaki Gorge, deepest canyon in the world (three times as deep as the Grand Canyon), the strange Tibetan customs and culture, and the remoteness of the little kingdom of Mustang, pointing like a finger, northwards into Tibet. I thought then how wonderful it would be to see such places, but little did I imagine that one day I would myself be standing on a hillside at 12,000 ft. behind Annapurna, gazing north towards Mustang and the plateau of central Asia. It was the fulfilment of a dream. (The rest of the dream - actually to go into Mustang and visit the capital - is still waiting.)

I did this trek on my own, but very luxuriously, taking a Sherpa and a porter, though the Sherpa guide wasn't in fact necessary, as maps are available and routes easy to follow. We were an oddly assorted trio: me, an ordinary English housewife; an experienced Sherpa guide, about 30 years old but a veteran of several mountain expeditions; and an 18 year old Solu Sherpa porter, a simple illiterate boy, full of charm and kindness and laughter.

We took an ordinary (springless) Nepalese bus from Kathmandu to Pokhara - all of eight hours of action-packed torture - alighted, and started walking. My Sherpa was obviously determined to set a spanking pace because at the end of the second day out from Pokhara we were on Pun Hill, above the Ghorepani Pass, and as anyone who has travelled that way will know, this was quite a marathon - Pun Hill features on about the fourth day on any normal trek. The summit of the Hill is a supremely beautiful viewpoint for the whole Annapurna range and for great vistas of Himalayan peaks. Clothed in dense rhododendron forest (deep scarlet)

its slopes lead up to a grassy summit at 10,000 ft, and one stands there, unbelieving, trying to absorb the beauty; the dazzling white face of Annapurna South rising above the scarlet forest; Dhaulagiri soaring into a deep blue sky to the west; and to the north-east, Machapuchare, Hiumchuli, Lamjung Himal - on and on into the farthest distance. It was breathtaking.

Following my mild protests at the rapidity of our progress, my Sherpa evidently decided I was hopelessly slow and feeble, and took time off, while descending the Ghorepani into the Kali Gandaki gorge, to visit friends; with the result that by the time he caught up with me, to his annoyance I was reclining comfortably (and determined to remain reclining rather than cover another ten miles) in "Camillo's Trekking Lodge" in Tatopani, where I shared a very comfortable room with an Australian. He was acutely ill with hepatitis, and we spent most of the night discussing symptoms, which are unpleasant... Tatopani, as its name implies, is a lovely place to stay in, because the river runs hot, and alfresco baths are free! (Tatopani = hot water. On the other hand Ghorepani = horse water, and you can take that how you like...)

The excitement of being actually in this mighty canyon was immense. Next day we set off up the gorge, following the course of the river, walking below a vast waterfall, and passing a point where the Dhaulagiri icefall can be both seen and heard, far above. It is a wickedly steep fall, and claimed several Sherpa lives on the German expedition. It was a constant source of wonder to be walking through villages that I had read about so avidly, to meet the reality behind the names, and to gaze into the dark and awesome recesses of the Miristi Khola valley - the route Maurice Herzog followed to establish his base-camp on Annapurna in 1950 - and whence he returned, victorious, but to face agonising mutilation as a result of frostbite.

And so, onward and upward, the mountains always with us; Dhaulagiri to the west, chiselled and symmetrical, and Nilgiri to the east, a lovely peak in the Annapurna range; both over 26,000 ft high.

Trekking alone, with no other European for company, is a wonderful experience. You meet the people of the country on a much more intimate level, sharing their homes, playing with their children, learning their ways. It is also, in a sense, a much more mind-bending experience than travelling with companions of one's own kind. Alone, you are thrown on your own mental resources, your thoughts range more freely, you have long silences by day and night in which to speculate on life, and death, and philosophy, and cabbages, and kings. Amid the vastness and the beauty that surround you, you feel infinitely small and insignificant in the scheme of things; but in these conditions, alone in an enormous landscape, you sense that there is, indeed, a scheme, the exact nature of which lies only just beyond your understanding. And occasionally you experience that momentary flash of vision, which shows you the ultimate truth, so that suddenly, and fleetingly, you know. Silence and solitude can be great enlighteners.

And if all this makes no sense to the less whimsically-minded, forgive me, and let us return to our muttons. There were, actually, no muttons on this trip; but plenty of donkeys, mules and ponies, moving in long caravans, laden with goods from the lowlands for the remote regions to the north. There were also infinite numbers of piglets, puppies, kids, chicks, ducklings - in fact the whole countryside seemed to be reproducing itself with complete abandon.

The floor of the Kali Gandaki gradually widens and flattens as one approached Marpha and Tukche, the first villages of the Thakali people - ethnically a Tibetan race whose culture and architecture are quite different from the Magars and Gurungs encountered on the earlier part of the trek. Here, where the river changes its name to Thak Khola, one begins to feel that one has traversed the main chain of the Himalayas and reached a remoteness far beyond familiar things and people. A few miles after passing Jomosom, we took a trail up the eastern wall of the gorge and gradually climbed into the valley of Muktinath. This is a primitive region, and the people are quite poor, but very hospitable and friendly. (My anti-flea powder had already been put to generous use, albeit not always effectively; but at Jharkot, near Muktinath, where I stayed, the fleas seemed to be resistant to every effort at massacre. We came to terms in the end - live and let live).

At Muktinath there is a jet of natural gas emerging from a rock beside a spring of fresh water, so here in one spot you have the four mystical elements of fire, water, earth, and air, and the whole place has become a centre for pilgrimages from all over the sub-continent. The complex of shrines was interesting - both Hindu and Buddhist temples, and a line of 108 little bulls' head fountains, under each of which the Sherpas dipped their heads reverently. I was moved and impressed, watching the rituals they performed at each Buddhist shrine, and was allowed to stand at the entrance to a little Hindu temple - not, as a non-Hindu, to enter - and watch the ceremonies within.

From Muktinath one can now climb the Thorung Pass, over 17,000 ft, and descend to Manang, thence to complete the circuit of the Annapurna range, which I should like one day to do. This time we returned by more or less the same route, which was very interesting as we stayed at different villages, and took paths on opposite sides of the canyon to the ones we followed on the upward trek. At Jomosom I met Colonel Jimmy Roberts and had a most amusing and stimulating lunch there with him, surrounded by his retinue of Sherpas - all of them on their way up to Tilicho Lake. And there too I heard the sad news of the death of Eric Shipton.

It was on the return journey that I experienced the full force of the terrible wind which blows up the Kali Gandaki Gorge, from about 10 a.m. till mid-afternoon, drawn by the rising warm air over the heated central plateau of Asia. It was a horror and a torment, like being in a wind-tunnel and having dust and sand forcibly propelled into your face, eyes, ears, nostrils and mouth. Walking against it, you had to lean forward at an angle, head bent, and if it let up for a second, lo - there you were, flat on your nose in the dirt. Oh joy. And yet more joy followed, in

three days of severe dysentery, accompanied by pain and fever and rigors, during which I walked and stumbled, half-conscious, often in heavy rain, always with increasing weakness, to fall into my tent or a trekker's lodge at the end of the day, more dead than alive. But the human body takes a lot of killing off, and on the fourth day I awoke with neither fever nor pain, and trotted up the thousands of feet from Tatopani to the Ghorepani Pass with no bother, there to consume a huge plateful of real "western-oat-porridge". It was food for the gods.

And so, back to Pokhara, with memories of an experience far transcending a mere walk in the Himalayas, which, after all, is all I had done. I had felt, in those remote lands, as if I had left forever the world I knew. While there, I had tried to focus on a culture that includes cars and television and overdrafts and pre-packed meals and wall-to-wall carpeting and school fees and launderettes and tupperware parties and queueing in traffic jams and covering 500 miles in a day on a motorway.... But, sitting on a Himalayan hillside, in a landscape devoid of any mechanisation, watching a young Tibetan boy come whistling down from a pass driving two laden yaks, I found it impossible to believe in "my" world. Or that I could ever return to it.

However, return we did. (Obviously). And now, caged again in this so-called civilised world, I often pull out a map and pore over those magic names; and at once the spell is renewed, stronger than ever. Mustang is still a forbidden, waiting land; I haven't yet seen the Langtang glaciers, or the Rolwaling and the Tesi Lapcha Pass; and what about the dream of trekking from the Dudh Kosi across eastern Nepal to Darjeeling?

But all that will be another story, for another day.

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I must express my gratitude to Mike Cheney for his help, advice and encouragement on this trek. But for him, I wouldn't have been armed against the fleas, and thanks to his lending me a blissful foam mattress I slept like a log, never before on a trek having had the luxury of foam between me and mother earth. I should also like to thank Frank McCready for getting me hooked on the Himalayas in the first place.

FRANCES SLADE

THE GURKHA MUSEUM

by

Lieutenant Colonel (Retd) M. P. Dewing - Curator

The Gurkha Museum was opened in June 1974 by Field Marshal Lord Harding of Petherton. The aim was to 'Record the Services rendered by the Gurkhas to the British Crown since they were first enlisted in 1815 to the present day'.

It was indeed an interesting challenge. In the beginning no one knew what the response might be to the appeal for items of interest nor were we certain what form our display would take though certain general principles had been agreed upon.

Looking back four years later it never ceases to astound me to realise just what a fascinating collection we have built up nor would I have thought it possible that the name of the Gurkha Museum would now be known far and wide together with a reputation that 'it is well worth a visit!' That this is the case I put down to two factors. Firstly, the generous response over the years for items connected with Gurkhas in its widest sense which have either been gifted or loaned and, secondly, the willingness with which those interested became Friends of the Gurkha Museum. Funds from this source have enabled the Museum to purchase many items which otherwise would have been lost to us.

We now have a museum of which we can justly be proud and each year it has gone from strength to strength.

For those members of your Society who have not yet been able to pay us a visit it would be impossible to portray in any detail what we have to offer. Suffice it to say that we have a unique collection of Regimental insignia of all the Gurkha Regiments both past and present together with a remarkably complete set of insignia used by the Royal Nepal Army. We have built up a comprehensive display of medals both individual and groups. There is a corner on Nepal and a number of the older uniforms on display. Photographs taken in the nineteenth century are fascinating to look at and very instructive. Of similar interest are the fifty or so albums which have accumulated some of which date back to 1880.

A number of interesting accessions have recently been added to our collection. Some of these items are:

The Kukri belonging to Maharaja Jungbahadur which was carried at the siege of Lucknow 1858.

An officer's scarlet jacket of the 10th (Madras) Regiment c. 1860 (later 10 GR)

A GOR's Dark Green Tunic of 43rd Light Infantry c. 1890 (later 8 GR)

A number of sketches of Gurkhas by Lt. Col. Borrowman

Medals of Subedar Major Dhanbahadur Rana, 4/1 GR

Pipe Banner presented by Lt. Col. Graeme, 2/1 GR

Medals of Lt. Col. C. W. Yeates, DSO, 8 GR

A Tenor Drum 1/9 Gurkha Rifles 1896

Visitors are always welcome and admission is free. Regrettably we do not open at weekends except by occasional special appointment.

SOCIETY OF FRIENDS OF THE GURKHA MUSEUM

The objects of the Society of Friends are:

- (a) to provide a fund for the purchase of specific items to preserve for posterity articles which might otherwise be lost.
- (b) to encourage interest in the Gurkha Museum among serving and retired officers of Gurkha units, Regimental Associations and others who would wish to see the unique record of the Gurkha preserved for all time.

Membership stands at around 140 and many exhibits on display in the Museum have been purchased by the Society. The latest acquisitions are a tenor drum of the 1/9th Gurkha Rifles dated 1896 and a set of regimental badges from a well known collection. Without the Society of Friends these items would have been lost for ever.

Minimum annual subscription is £1 and tax can be recovered from covenanted subscriptions.

Enrolment forms are available from the Gurkha Museum or Headquarters Brigade of Gurkhas.

The Honorary Secretary is Lieutenant Colonel A. A. Mains, late 9 GR

THE GURKHA WELFARE TRUSTS

The Gurkha Welfare Trusts provide a sum of money each year for distribution in the form of grants or pensions to Gurkhas who have at any time served the British Crown and who for one reason or another are in need of help. Dependants of former Gurkha soldiers are also eligible for help.

For Gurkha Ex-Servicemen and their dependants The Gurkha Welfare Trusts do what The Army Benevolent Fund does for British Ex-Servicemen. The need for prompt assistance is, however, usually very great in the hill areas of Nepal whence come our Gurkha soldiers because of the high incidence in those regions of natural disasters, particularly landslides which carry away several houses and farms at a time. There is as yet in those areas no way of insuring against disaster, even against outbreaks of fire to which the thatched houses huddling together on the mountain slopes are very vulnerable. Nor is there as yet any form of public welfare aid or any other private charitable organisation which can come to the rescue. For example: the house and barn belonging to the widow of a Queen's Gurkha Officer of 1/2 GR were totally destroyed by fire spreading from a neighbour's burning house. She has four young children. She was unable to save any food or possessions from her house but saved some animals from the barn. She was granted immediate aid of 300 Nepalese Rupees (approximately £14) to buy food and she was later granted a further 1500 rupees (£70) to help rebuild her house - both grants being from the Gurkha Welfare Trusts.

The Gurkha Ex-Servicemen who can benefit from the money provided by the Trusts are broadly in two groups - those who have served with The Brigade of Gurkhas which since 1948 has been an integral part of the British Army, and those greater numbers of volunteers, now growing old where they still survive, who served for a few years during the Second World War. The majority of these went back to their homes in the mountains after the war and received no pension as their service of five or six years was, of course, not long enough for pension. Many were disabled and the survivors of these receive disablement pensions for which the Government of India has assumed responsibility. But such pensions are relatively small and, though improved from time to time, have not kept up with inflation.

When the Brigade of Gurkhas Welfare Scheme was set up in Nepal in the early 1960's with contributions of one day's pay from all serving officers and soldiers of Gurkha units, help was given to the first of the two groups mentioned above, i. e., former members of the British Brigade of Gurkhas. Later, following a successful appeal in the United Kingdom and other interested Commonwealth countries, the Gurkha Welfare Trusts were set up and help was offered to all Ex-Servicemen in need who had ever served the British Crown. As it became known in the hill areas that help could be obtained, more and more cases were reported and funds were stretched to the limit even though payments that could be given were quite small.

A word about the character of the Gurkha would not be out of place here. Traditionally he is a self-reliant stoical farmer who accepts hardships cheerfully and manages to feed his family on the produce of two or three acres of land. He is generally proud without being arrogant. He does not hold out his hand for assistance easily. This fact is well understood by those who manage the Trusts and the character of those who benefit is fully respected and, it is hoped, unharmed by the manner in which help is given.

While the Gurkha Welfare Trusts are doing their best to bring help to this large group, the lower value of the pound sterling has resulted in less Nepalese rupees being obtained for each pound sent. Last year the total amount sent was £92,500, exactly the same as in the previous year, but the sum produced in local currency was 300,000 rupees less than in the previous year. This would not be too bad if inflation were unknown in those remote hills, but unfortunately it is only too well known.

The Gurkha Welfare Trusts would like, therefore, to increase their yearly contribution. And chiefly for the two reasons mentioned - to ensure that the money available for distribution is not less than in previous years and, if possible, to do more for the older warriors and dependants from the Second World War.

For the financial year 1978/79, the Trusts are committed to sending a total of £104,000 to Nepal for distribution through the Welfare Scheme.

ADDRESSES

- | | | |
|--|---|--------------------------|
| The Britain-Nepal Medical Trust
Stafford House, 16 East Street,
Tonbridge, Kent. | - | (See article on Page 6) |
| The Gurkha Museum
Queen Elizabeth Barracks,
Church Crookham, Aldershot GU13 0RJ | - | (See article on Page 17) |
| The Gurkha Welfare Trusts
Room 543, Lansdowne House,
Berkeley Square, London W1X 6AA | - | (See article on Page 19) |

Patron: H. R. H. PRINCE GYANENDRA OF NEPAL

Our aim is to promote and foster good relations between the peoples of the United Kingdom and Nepal.

The Society was founded in 1960, under the patronage of His late Majesty King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Deva of Nepal during his state Visit to London; Lord Hunt became the first President.

British and Nepalese subjects, and business firms or corporate bodies resident in Britain or Nepal are eligible for membership.

Members include serving and retired Gurkhas, mountaineers, schoolmasters, members of the Diplomatic Service, doctors, nurses and businessmen.

Ordinary members pay a subscription of £2 per annum.

Life Members - a single payment of £40.

The "Yetis" - Nepalese Students in Britain are honorary members during their stay in the United Kingdom.

Our strength at the present is:	Ordinary Members	376
	Life Members	127
	Corporate Members	7
	Honorary Members	8
	Yetis	70

The Society's programme includes:

Monthly lectures, meetings and films from October to May
Receptions and hospitality for visiting Nepalese
An AGM in November and an annual supper party in February

We keep in touch with the Nepal-Britain Society in Kathmandu which the late H. H. Field Marshal Sir Kaiser, a Life Member of our Society, founded shortly before his death.

The Britain-Nepal Society is unique in that although we do not have a large membership there is tremendous enthusiasm for Nepal; our meetings which are usually attended by about 100 people each, provide an excellent opportunity for us to get together over a drink. Our membership, not counting the "Yetis", Honorary Members and Corporate Members, now exceeds five hundred.

The Committee welcome new members amongst people with a genuine interest in Nepal. The address of the Hon. Secretary is:

Miss C. M. Stephenson,
17 Sydney House,
Woodstock Road, London W4 1DP

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