



**BRITAIN - NEPAL**

**SOCIETY**

**JOURNAL**

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As our Society came into being during the State Visit to the United Kingdom of His Late Majesty King Mahendra and Her Majesty Queen Ratna, in October 1960, we can claim to have passed our twenty-first birthday. Membership continues to grow and it would be no exaggeration to say we are now a flourishing and very active Society with a good financial base. Our thanks are due to all those who have helped to build up the Society during the last twenty-one years.

As far as this, the fifth number of our Journal, is concerned we have to thank our contributors who by allowing us to publish the text of their talks to the Society, continue to make the Journal possible.

It has been a crowded twelve months since the last Journal was issued, starting with the Royal Visit of Their Majesties the King and Queen of Nepal in November last year (the Society was well represented at the Lord Mayor's Banquet for the Royal visitors at the Guildhall on 19 November 1980) and leading on to the Royal Wedding on 29 July 1981 which was attended by our Patron, H.R.H. Prince Gyanendra and Princess Komal, who the day after the Royal Wedding were entertained on behalf of the Society at the Royal Overseas League. All these matters are covered in an interesting report by our Honorary Secretary, Mrs. Celia Brown, in this issue.

EDITOR

CONTENTS

Page

- |     |  |
|-----|--|
| 1.  | NEWSLETTER   |
| 4.  | ANNAPURNA - IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF HERZOG<br>by Lieutenant Colonel B. M. Niven, MBE, MA |
| 13. | WILDLIFE OF NEPAL: THE ROYAL CHITWAN NATIONAL PARK<br>by Mr. S. R. L. Whalley        |
| 19. | DOWN THE RIVER TO GREENWICH - SUMMER OUTING<br>by Linda Coulthard                    |
| 20. | TRAVELS IN SIKKIM, THE ASSAM HIMALAYA<br>by Mrs. Sheila Kimber                       |
| 28. | BOOK REVIEWS by Lieutenant Colonel T. M. Lowe  |
| 31. | NOTES ON THE SOCIETY   |

## NEWSLETTER

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An occasion of special interest to the Britain-Nepal Society was the State Visit to the United Kingdom of Their Majesties, The King and Queen of Nepal in November 1980. A bouquet of flowers was sent on behalf of the Society to H.M. The Queen on her arrival in London.

### Lectures

Interest in the Society's activities and its membership has continued to grow. The monthly lectures were well attended and we would like to take the opportunity to thank all those who have given these lectures.

The first of the 1980/81 season of monthly meetings of the Society was held jointly with the Royal Geographical Society at their premises in Kensington Gore on Tuesday, 14th October, and took the form of a lecture by Lt. Col. B. Niven, MBE, 10th Princess Mary's Own Gurkha Rifles, leader of the successful Army Mountaineering Association Expedition to Annapurna in 1970, entitled "Annapurna - in the Footsteps of Herzog". A display of photographs, taken by Colonel Niven on the expedition and in Nepal was on show and a selection of them will be published in a book now under preparation by Colonel Niven.

The lecture was followed by a Wine and Cheese Party and we were delighted that members of the Royal Geographical Society were able to join us.

A lecture entitled "Nepal in Sound and Vision" by Mr. Prescott Stephens on the 12th November was held at the Alpine Club. This lecture was unusual in that the slides were accompanied by sounds recorded by him on his visits to Nepal. His lecture was based on general impressions and he also described the work of the United Mission in Nepal in its three aspects of medical, social and economic development.

On 22nd January a lecture accompanied by slides on the "Wildlife of the Royal Chitwan National Park, Nepal" by Mr. S. R. L. Whalley, Executive Director of the International Trust for Conservation, was held at the Alpine Club.

In March, Mr. J. B. H. Jackson gave the second part of his talk with slides on "The Butterfly Walk", The Natural History of the Marsangdi Gorge, East of Annapurna. This was a well attended meeting.

The final talk of the season was given by Mrs. S. V. Kimber on "Journeys to Sikkim and the Eastern Assam Himalayas" and it was accompanied by slides. The text of Mrs. Kimber's talk is reproduced in this Journal.

### Nepali Supper

In the presence of H. E. The Royal Nepalese Ambassador, Mr. Jharendra Narayan Singha, and H. E. Madame Bhuban Singha, the Nepali Supper was held in March at the British Council Students' Centre, Portland Place, W.1. The Guest of Honour, Mr. Neil Thorne, MP, Secretary, the British Parliamentary Group for Nepal, and H. E. The Ambassador addressed the gathering. Over 200 members, their guests, and the Yetis (students) were present. We would like to thank Mr. Clem Sykes, of the British Council, for making it possible for the Society to hold the Supper at the Students' Centre.

We were fortunate to have the help of the Queen's Gurkha Orderly Officers and Pipers. They came from the Overseas English Wing of the Army School of Languages, Wilton Park, Beaconsfield, and the 7th Duke of Edinburgh's Own Gurkha Rifles, Church Crookham, respectively. Our thanks again to the Commanding Officers concerned for this much appreciated help.

### Summer Outing

This year the Outing was a boat trip down the Thames from Westminster Pier to Greenwich on Saturday, 25th July, and was well attended by the Yetis, their friends, and members of the Society. As in past years, an account of this excursion appears in the Journal.

### The Britain-Nepal Society Party for Mr. C. J. Sykes

Clem Sykes, our British Council representative, recently left the Committee after sixteen years of invaluable service. At a Drinks Party for him on Thursday, 7th May at the Alpine Club, the Chairman, Brigadier Taggart, thanked Clem and presented him with a gift token on behalf of the Society.

### The Nepal House, Pestalozzi Village

Following on the promise of the Society last year to present a bicycle for the use of the children, one was bought and presented to them at a tea party given by Mr. and Mrs. Broomhall at their home in Sussex.

### The Everest Cultural Society from Kathmandu

Seventeen members of this Group visited London in August and presented two performances of Nepali folk songs and dances at the Royal Overseas League and one at Church Crookham. All the performances were fully attended and proved to be very enjoyable. The Group also visited the Gurkha battalion stationed at Church Crookham where their presence and entertainment were greatly enjoyed.

Messages

On the occasion of the engagement of H. R. H. The Prince of Wales to Lady Diana Spencer a congratulatory telegram was sent to the Royal couple on behalf of the Society and was acknowledged by them.

A message of good wishes on the occasion of the birthday of our Patron, H. R. H. Prince Gyanendra of Nepal, was sent in July.

Dinner for T. R. H. Prince Gyanendra and Princess Komal

On behalf of the Society, the Committee entertained Their Royal Highnesses and His Royal Highness The Duke of Gloucester, who of course is a member of our Society, to dinner at The Royal Overseas League on Thursday, 30th July 1981.

Society Tie

The price of the Britain-Nepal Society tie is now £4.20, including postage.

Society Car Badge

Thresher and Glenny have a stock of the Society's car badge at £3.90 each.

The 7 GR 1982 Calendar

The calendar contains 14 excellent photographs and is on sale to our members at 90 pence each. The calendars are available from the Second-in-Command, 7th Duke of Edinburgh's Own Gurkha Rifles, Queen Elizabeth Barracks, Church Crookham, Nr. Aldershot, Hants, or from the address given below.

I should like on behalf of the Chairman and the Committee to wish the members of the Society a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

CELIA BROWN  
Hon. Secretary  
1 Allen Mansions  
Allen Street  
London W8 6UY

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## ANNAPURNA - IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF HERZOG

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Text of a talk given to members of the Society at The Royal Geographical Society by Lieutenant Colonel B. M. Niven, MBE, MA, on 14th October 1980. Illustrated with colour slides and preceded by a lavish exhibition of colour photographs.

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Every year mountaineering expeditions from all over the world go to Nepal to seek adventure on the high peaks of the Himalayas. Tragedies are common as men pit their resources against giant mountains. In 1970 the British and Nepalese Armies combined to send a team to try and climb Annapurna in Western Nepal. This is the story, told by the author, of their successful bid.

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Lance Corporal Purnabahadur Mall sat hunched over his wireless set in the gathering gloom and cold in the tiny camp at the foot of the giant mountains. The ground fell sheer from him many hundreds of feet to the crushing, grinding ice of the boulder-strewn glacier far below. Gradually, the set hummed into life and he was able to send out the following dramatic message:

"FROM COMMANDER AMA EXPEDITION. DELIGHTED TO BE ABLE TO TELL YOU THAT ANNA PURNA WAS CLIMBED BY US THIS DAY 20 MAY 1970 AT 1100 HOURS. SUMMIT PARTY DAY AND OWENS, ALL IS WELL. PLEASE TELL THE WORLD."

Before midnight that same day this message had been picked up by radios throughout India and Nepal and had been beamed to the rest of the world by the BBC. The Army Mountaineering Association (AMA) had climbed the third highest mountain ever to be conquered by British climbers and the highest mountain ever climbed by service personnel of any nation at any time. Annapurna, giant among giants, is the world's tenth highest Mountain and Henry Day and Gerry Owens stood on the summit on the 20th May for only the second time in history. The French scaled Annapurna first in 1950 when Herzog and Lachenal got to the summit only to descend under epic but tragic circumstances. Since 1950, apart from an unsuccessful German attempt in 1969, the mountain had lain dormant. Now, on the 20th anniversary of Herzog's agony, Annapurna yielded for a second time.

The AMA party, consisting of eight British Members, two from the Royal Nepalese Army, two Gurkha soldiers, five high-altitude Sherpa porters, a Sherpa cook and two stalwart and fast-running Sherpa mail-runners, left the little town of Pokhara on the 23rd March and headed west by way of Lumle and Tirkhedhunga. Spring

was in the air and the mountains were ablaze with the vivid whites and reds of the rhododendron forests. The whole party was eager to be under way. The work of the preparatory phases was behind them at last and the promise of excitement and high adventure lay ahead. To help carry the four tons of kit that the Expedition had with it, 132 porters were hired at Pokhara and use made of a 37-mule caravan as well. Soon the whole countryside was aware of our presence as the Expedition, spread over several miles of track at any one time, moved across the sunlit landscape, the reds and greens of our mountain-tents and the yellows of our oxygen cylinders making bright splashes of colour against the darker greens of mossy forests and young maize fields in the spring. Whole villages turned out to watch us pass and the good villagers chatted excitedly as they watched our cavalcade pass through, laden down with all the exciting paraphernalia of a big mountaineering expedition. What manner of men were these, coming out of the east carrying aluminium ladders, Thomas's splints, tables and chairs, so much food and all manner of exciting things? Did they have a doctor? Could they cure a cold, a fever or mend a broken head? What did they eat and would they like to try the local brews?

From the mossy forests of Ghorapani the Expedition descended through Sikha to the suspension bridge at Tatopani and the black waters of the Kali Gandaki. The Kali Gandaki is a river of turbulent flow and hot springs and it flows down from Mustang and the silent painted deserts and barren wastes of that place to the Indo-Gangetic Plain. The River, as it escapes from Mustang, cuts one of the world's mightiest gorges between the massifs of Dhaulagiri and Annapurna and the river terraces are breath-taking in their dimensions.

The Kali Gandaki was followed for a further three days; three days of further magnificent scenery as the flank of the Annapurna massif was slowly turned and the Expedition worked its way round to the north. As the Expedition moved north, so the Hindu landscape was left behind and Buddhism became more and more obvious in the environment all round. The tribal make-up of the villages changed as well and the Expedition was soon amongst Thakalis (a northern pastoral people), Bhotiyas (people of Bhot, or Tibet) and Khambas (the tribe of warrior giant-men who live astride the frontier between Nepal and what was Tibet).

At the twin villages of Choya and Lete, on the flat of the gentle Pangbu River and with Dhaulagiri behind as a mighty backdrop to the western setting sun, we camped. This was the point where we were due to leave the old salt trade route to Tibet and strike up into the mountains. We looked east with dismay. We could now see Annapurna sticking up from behind the intervening ridges and flying a banner cloud from her sun-flushed summit, but there had been a very heavy and late spring snowfall and our route east was still clogged with snow. The wise old men of Choya were called for and shook their heads saying that only we, the climbers, properly clad as we were, could go on, but that the porters, bare-footed and already shivering in their thin homespun garments could never accompany us up over the sacred grazing grounds on the Thulobugin through such snow. Likewise, it was the end of the trail for our frisky and affectionate mules.

Gaily decorated with jangling bells and large plumes or red wool that bobbed and weaved to the movement of the mule caravan, the Expedition had become attached to both the long-suffering animals and also to their tough but harsh handlers. The problem of taking the mule caravan through deep snow and up steep and slippery mountain slopes bereft of both hay and water was quite beyond the muleteers.

Fortunately, we had foreseen the problem that now faced us and had planned accordingly. And so, as the money stakes were raised, we also opened up kit bags and pulled forth all manner of exciting shoes, warm clothing, balaclavas, string vests, anoraks, socks and stockings, snow-goggles and blankets that we had bought in the back street bazaars of distant Kathmandu. Unfortunately, we had only enough to fit out 32 men and so the Sherpa Sirdar assembled the massed coolie train and asked for 32 stalwart men who were willing to take our clothing and try their luck with us across the pass of 16,000' that still lay between us and our Base Camp. With 32 men so signed on, we watched sadly as the other 100 porters laid down their loads in a pile, were paid off and then slowly left us, only a handful now to move our 4 tons of heavy loads across the mountains. Before leaving finally, the retiring porters, as gentlemen and fellow-travellers here are wont to do, wished us well before disappearing down the track into the darkness of the gathering Himalayan night.

The administrative problem that we were now faced with was a nightmare. If all our porters and mules had been able to accompany us, then our journey to Base Camp would only have taken three days. What in fact faced us now was a mammoth ferry of stores that was to last one month; and, in the end, all the stores never got to Base Camp at all. Very conscious of the gigantic pile of food and stores that lay not far from our tents, the Expedition members settled down to a night of fitful sleep.

The first camp that we established up in the mountains we called Shepherd's Camp. The Camp had wood for fuel as it was just at the limit of stunted tree growth, but it had no water. Here, while the ferry of stores continued from the plains below, so some 40 of us lived for water on an ever-diminishing patch of dirty snow for almost two weeks. (The tea tasted great and the odd branch in one's curry always livened up the conversation). From Shepherd's Camp the porters had to cross a frozen pass up on the Thulo Bugin to get to the higher snow-fields and then had to struggle across them before descending to just below the snow-line on the far side of the pass to our second mountain camp in the Hum Khola. Snow storms held us up and several hundreds of feet of fixed rope had to be put up the steep flanks of the Thulo Bugin before our porters could even attempt to force the passage. Now, for days on end, our porters, bless them, would struggle and slip and curse their way up these fixed ropes, limbs numb with cold as they traversed the deep shadows of the mountains before the sun got truly up. Then, the higher snow-fields at last within their grasp, the porters would don their goggles against the fierce glare of brilliant sun on brilliant snow and so make the high-level traverse to the Hum Khola.



Refreshed at that camp with a meagre cup of tea, they would return, singing lustily, to cook their evening meal and sleep the sleep of dead men before the next dawn and the next agonising journey up the frozen ropes. The patch of snow got steadily smaller but so also did the pile of kit as the bulk of it got lifted across the mountains.

It was at Shepherd's Camp that the first real tragedy hit the Expedition. One late afternoon the Sherpas reported seeing two figures slowly descending to Shepherd's Camp from the direction of the Hum Khola. It turned out to be Anderson carefully leading Taylor down the mountainside. Anderson had Taylor on a rope and from the cyanosed appearance of the latter it was obvious that he was very sick. He had had, in fact, a recurrence of pneumonia that had struck him down once already just before the previous Christmas. Luckily our Doctor was himself at Shepherd's Camp and had sufficient oxygen and oxygen apparatus with him to be able to help Taylor's breathing as soon as he had been brought into Shepherd's Camp. It was quite obvious not only that he would have to be evacuated but also that if the Doctor accompanied him then it would leave the expedition ill-equipped to go and face future hazards on the Mountain. A helicopter evacuation seemed the only solution in the circumstances and, by chance, it was on this day that we had our first link-up on the wireless from our mountain camp to Pokhara and Kathmandu. With difficulty we got our message and grid reference across and prayed that there would be a helicopter available in the Capital. Our luck held and the following day a small gleaming-red helicopter flew straight towards our airy sanctuary and buzzed angrily to a halt on our freshly cleared landing-pad on a small knoll above Shepherd's Camp. Taylor was helped aboard and our mail for the outside world thrown in after him. Words were jocular but few and thoughts went deep as we sadly watched the helicopter lift off for Kathmandu and then Dharan where Taylor was to have all the skill of the military hospital there behind him as he fought to recover his health. The team had thus lost one of its recognised climbers and we had yet to reach the base of Annapurna.

The situation at the Hum Khola Camp was the reverse of what it had been at Shepherd's Camp, for here, there was plenty of sweet ice-cold water but not so much as a stick of firewood. Our precious stocks of kerosene had to be carefully preserved for the Mountain itself and so we moved on beyond the Hum Khola Camp to the Miristi Khola and camped there, planning to carry from the Hum Khola in reverse. Thus it was that each morning our stalwart porters toiled up the severe climb of almost 4,000' out of the slotted-in valley of the Miristi Khola and went back to carry forward the Hum Khola stores. Sudden and often severe snow squalls would delay these ferry parties badly, the snow often falling so deep that kit had to be off-loaded and stacked along the route in order to let our men get back to the sanctuary of the Miristi Khola Valley with half loads before darkness fell. Soon, however, the day came when the last load was cleared from the Hum Khola and brought down into the Miristi Valley. On that final carry, Sonam, our Sherpa Sirdar, standing alone at almost 16,000' in the highest wind-swept pass of this part of our route, paid tribute to the gods

and the spirits who inhabit the mountains and the rocks there and asked their help to bring us all safely back out again. He promised the Thakali Gods that we would not make too much noise nor eat garlic whilst we were within their sanctuaries.

The Miristi Khola runs shallow at dawn but by mid-day the hot sun on the upper snowfields has released sufficient water to greatly increase the River's flow and becomes a strong surge of glacial melt-water. The journey from the camp in the Miristi Khola to actual Base Camp was only a half-day's journey and our strong Thakali porters, fit and in full cry now after their earlier labours, took this last stage of the long journey in their stride. Soon, a most heartening pile of food and stores was seen to grow at Base and as we surveyed it we were able to judge that the worst of the long, back-breaking ferry of stores was almost over.

Base Camp was set up at 14,800' on the very edge of the high right-hand moraine terrace of the Annapurna Glacier. A stone's throw from the tents, the earth plunged away several hundreds of feet down to the grinding ice and crushing seracs of the chaotic surface of the glacier ice. Vast quantities of rock and boulder debris were scattered on the surface of the ice and here and there green ponds and lakes of cobalt blue were trapped on the surface of the moving ice. Base Camp was marked by colourful orange and green tents and by our flags and pennons that were to mark the route to the summit. At Base also were our wireless sets and Base became the nerve-centre and centre of operations as we turned now to take on this Mountain whom nature has so well guarded and made of such difficult approach. To this Base, tired climbers and Sherpas were able to return to rest and relax in semi-comfort and the luxury of the big mess-tent with its tables and chairs, its radio and books and taped music while the Sherpa Cook, Sona, served up choice snacks and an endless supply of sweet, milky Sherpa tea out of an enormous kettle. Then, rested and having breathed the fuller oxygen of the atmosphere at Base Camp for a day, the climbers would go back to the attack.

The first major barrier that had to be overcome was the Lower Ice-fall. This was about 2,500' of jumbled and chaotic ice where the Annapurna Glacier plunges over a steep rock ledge from higher ice-fields. The ice here was in constant motion and every so often icefalls would occur where a tottering ice-tower or ice-pinnacle had been pushed too far and toppled, thundering down the fall in an angry blitz of avalanched blocks of ice. Movement on such a surface was almost suicidal but the rock buttresses that contained the glacier on either side were still covered in snow and no way could be seen up them. Out on the lonely face of this lower ice-fall, Keelan and Anderson tried to force a route, but in vain when their fixed ropes were torn from the ice one morning by a severe ice-fall from up above and Anderson only just escaped serious injury when he was attempting to retrieve the ropes. Then fortunately, warmer weather arrived and began to melt the covering of snow that lay on the rock-walls and rock-buttresses containing the glacier until, gradually, we were able to pick a route up the left-hand side of it by climbing on rock and up ice gullies. By this means, the treacherous lower ice-fall was successfully

outflanked and we were able to climb above it and pitch Camp I at 17,400' on a small patch of boulder-strewn ice just clear of the moving glacier itself.

From Camp I, the route lay out over the flat ice of the level upper part of the Annapurna Glacier and then below a feature we called the Upper Ice-fall. This Upper Ice-fall was a hanging cliff of ice that was continually collapsing and sending tons of ice down onto the narrow shelf where we had our track below. Daily, one or two huge blocks of ice would peel off the face of this ice-cliff and it was always with muttered Buddhist and Christian prayers that we passed below it, scampering as fast as the deep snow and rarefied atmosphere would allow us and until we had climbed up the snow and ice slopes beyond the Ice-fall and so free from its objective dangers. Certainly, if an ice-fall had occurred when any of our parties were below this cliff, there was nothing that they could have done except hold on and pray. Above the Upper Ice-fall the snowfields levelled and there were many long, deep latitudinal crevasses where the ice was stretched and troubled and torn apart. At a height of 19,600' on 20 April, Camp II was set up on the flat upper ice-fields with La Grande Barriere as a vast, all-encircling backdrop and with Annapurna, majestic and flying a banner cloud where the jet stream was tearing at her summit, ahead.

On the 24th April the first avalanche hit the Expedition. We had been watching these avalanches for many days now, deeply conscious of their terrible power and the explosive pressures that they work up as they surge down the mountains from release points high up among the topmost hanging snowfields. Indeed, we felt at times as we watched that Annapurna had gone mad and was struggling to shake herself free from the heavy spring snows that still mantled her.

On 16th April a huge avalanche engulfed the entire north face of the Mountain when an enormous section on the Sickle Glacier, a vast hanging snowfield some 700' or 800' thick and about 2,000' from the summit of Annapurna, came loose and plunged down the many and well-polished avalanche tracks on this north side of the Mountain, enveloping everything in its path. The fall-out from this avalanche, in the form of wind-borne pulverised ice, was felt by us, the awestruck onlookers, two miles away. Then, on the 24th April an avalanche removed Camp II. Owens and Summerton were in the Camp when the blast of ice-cold air and ice boulders smashed into it. It is a tribute to their tough exteriors that they survived with little more ill-effects than severe bruises and hurt feelings. The tent that they were in only survived because they were able to anchor it to the ground with their bodies; of the other tent and all the kit that had been outside, there was no sign once the avalanche had passed. As the two men struggled out from their battered, ripped tent, it was to a scene of destruction and devastation and to the awful chilling cold and suffocating effects of the air-borne powdered ice in the semi-vacuum that lies behind such an avalanche. Battered and sore, our companions retreated to Camp I to tell us what had happened. We had lost much valuable time and precious kit in this avalanche and had now to set about the wearisome task of re-siting and re-stocking Camp II.

With the Mountain in such a savage mood, it was felt that we should try to stay well away from the French route and the path of these murderous avalanches coming down from the Sickle Glacier. The feature called the North East Buttress seemed a safe alternative and the attack was switched to this feature. The Buttress was of magnificent polished blue ice and offered exciting climbing. For a week this feature was attacked, the climbers gaining height slowly, until it seemed that perhaps the route would go and that we would be able to climb up to the level of the Sickle without having to tempt providence by running the gauntlet of avalanches. However, it was not to be, and after much exacting climbing on the near vertical ice, and after many hundreds of feet of fixed rope had been put up, it was all to no avail when Day climbed out onto an ice pinnacle one day to find that he was unable to go on in any direction at all. On all sides the deep crevasses made forward movement impossible and so we had to retreat, meticulously picking our way and attempting to retrieve as much of our precious ropes as we could.

In the meantime the Mountain had quietened down considerably and the daily avalanching from the Sickle had stopped. Undaunted, the attack was switched back to the French route and Camp III was put in at 22,000' under an ice cliff. Then the weather became worse and for three days heavy snowfalls made all movement on the Mountain impossible what with the depth of this new snow, and, more especially, the dangerous unconformity that was created between it and the old, firm snow. It was during this enforced slack period in the upward assault that it was decided to attempt the excavation of all the kit and fixed ropes that we had put on the North East Buttress. We very much needed the re-use of the ropes and would want the tents also as we got further up the Mountain. The party that was to attempt the rescue of the kit included both climbing members and Sherpas. It was now that the Mountain struck a second blow when an avalanche started right under the feet of this party. Some watched in fascination as the snow slopes began to move, others hung on desperately. It was the misfortune of Summerton to be lifted by the moving snow and carried over a 35 foot drop. He was flung violently downwards and jack knifed over a heavy wooden camera box that he was carrying. The ribs on the left side of his body gave under the impact and he was escorted back to Camp II severely bruised, his ribs seemingly broken, and in considerable pain. We thus lost a second climber from our team and this drain on our experienced manpower was a worrying thing for those of us still in the attack.

Worse was to follow as it became obvious that Major Shah and Captain Rana were not acclimatizing well and that we would not be able to count on their support in the final stages of the climb. We had thus lost a total of four of our eight climbers; 50% of our climbing strength had gone and we had still 5,000' to go. Then came word from India that due to great overheating in the Plains of Bihar it was to be expected that the monsoon would be early this year as moist air was sucked up into the Indo-Gangetic Plain; already typhoons were forming in the Bay of Bengal. The race with the monsoon was on.

Quickly, from Camp III, the upward momentum was maintained as Keelan and Owens looked for the much sought-after route into the 'Bowl', that is, the

enormous corrie-like cauldron, or bowl-shaped feature, that lies beneath the Sickie Glacier. Despite severe showers of rock, stones and ice blocks, a route was eventually forced up to the level of the Bowl and we managed to break into it. It was now May 13. Then Day and Anderson made the first precarious crossing of the Bowl heavily threatened by avalanche the whole way across the steep, polished slopes of this treacherous feature. The climb out of the Bowl on the far side was equally difficult and only skilled climbing and fixed ropes got the climbers and Sherpas up out of the Bowl and onto the handle of the Sickie at 23,300'. A short breathless scabble up a steep ledge and the haven of an ice cliff was reached. This would shelter men from avalanches from above and the Sherpas dug in a small mountain tent at this height. This was Camp IV.

Typhoons were now actively battering the Bay of Bengal ports. We had to hurry if we wanted to be clear of the Mountain before the snows became rotten and the monsoon reached us still in our mountain camps. Memories flooded back of Herzog's agony on the Mountain in the rain. We had no wish to be on the Mountain or in the deep Miristi Valley when the rains started and the rivers rose to tear at the landscape and carve it up. The climbers and Sherpas were very tired now. We had all toiled long and hard and seen several companions falter and stay behind as Nature pushed and tested us. People with aches and severe strains were not allowed to rest, so short of climbers and carriers had we become. Sherpas and climbers alike went high above any heights that they had previously been to, gasped in the rarefied air there and hung on grimly until body and mind adjusted to the oxygen starvation they were undergoing. To each one of us at some time during these latter days came the thought, growing almost insidiously like a dark cloud in each man's mind, that perhaps Nature and Mountain were going to prove too strong for us and that we were going to fail even this high on the climb. Only bodies driven to the point of exhaustion brought sleep to worried minds at night and there were several who slept only after having swallowed from the many potent pills that the Doctor held ready.

Our final effort against the Mountain was now on. With the help of the Sherpas, a tent, food, oxygen and kerosene were hauled up the steep slopes of the Sickie from Camp IV, and Camp V, our assault camp from where we would reach for the summit, was set up at 24,300'. If the following day dawned fair, the assault would take place. It was 19th May.

Buddhist and Christian prayers for a perfect day were answered and the 20th May dawned fair and brilliantly cold. Mentally we urged our two companions in the topmost camp to get on and begin the assault while the weather held, but Day and Owens waited until the sun had struck their tiny mountain tent before they emerged into the blinding landscape with brilliant sun on dazzling snow. And so they began the long pull for the top - two minute specks in the vastness of the Himalayan landscape. It seemed incredible to us below that these two little black dots were the climax of all the agonising mental and physical toil that we had been subjected to these last eight weeks. Yet this was climax and the world seemed stilled as our two companions struggled on carrying all our hopes and blessings with them. Those at Base Camp were able to watch the pair the whole way to the

summit and were able to relay how progress was going via the mountain wireless sets to the other climbers who waited in support in other high camps. At about eleven o'clock we knew that we had won when we saw our companions reach and straddle their goal - the highest cornice of Annapurna's lofty crown. A wave of vast satisfaction, gratitude, pride and humility swept the mountain camps as the news was passed around. We held our congratulations for each other until we had seen our friends safely return to the sanctuary of Camp V again and meet there with the support pair, Keeland and Anderson. Then the four, utterly exhausted by their great effort and all but drained of further stamina, crept down to Camp IV to sleep fitfully there before attempting the return down the mountain to Camp III and Advance Base.

The Expedition Commander now sent a simple message on the mountain wireless to Lance Corporal Purnabahadur Mall, telling him to make victory known to all the world.

What was our Base Camp is now deserted and the only signs of our having been there will be the low sangar-type kitchen that we built and the blackened tarpaulin that served it for a roof. We also built a small cairn and left a painted plaque there. The wind and the savage forces of nature will soon eliminate all these signs and the site will become natural again. We would wish happiness and success and satisfaction to those who, in the future, will penetrate as we did, the mountains east of Choya to seek excitement, stimulation and high adventure on the Goddess Annapurna.

Those taking part:

Major B. M. NIVEN, MBE, MA, 10th PMO Gurkha Rifles and Gurkha Independent Parachute Company - Expedition Commander

Captain M. W. H. DAY, Royal Engineers - Lead Climber and Expedition Organiser

Captain G. R. OWENS, The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment (Captain Owens lost his life attacking Nuptse in 1975)

Captain G. D. B. KEELAN, Royal Marines

Captain T. E. F. TAYLOR, Royal Green Jackets (Captain Taylor was tragically killed some time after the conquest of Annapurna while serving with the Sultan of Oman's Forces)

Lieutenant R. A. SUMMERTON, Royal Engineers (Lieutenant Summerton died with Captain Owens on Nuptse in 1975)

Dr. D. P. M. JONES

L/Cpl PURNABAHADUR MALL, 1st Bn 2nd KEO Gurkha Rifles and Gurkha Independent Parachute Company

L/Cpl BUDHIBAHADUR GURUNG, 6th QEO Gurkha Rifles and Gurkha Independent Parachute Company

Major YUDDA BIKRAM SHAHA, Royal Nepalese Army

Captain BAGIRATH NARSING RANA, Royal Nepalese Army

Sherpas

SONAM GIRMI - Sirdar (Lead Sherpa)

ILA TASHI

PEMBA NORBU

PERTEMBA

ANG DORJE

SONA - Cook

ANG NAMGYAL )  
ANU ) Mail-runners

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WILDLIFE OF NEPAL: THE ROYAL CHITWAN NATIONAL PARK

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Based on a talk given to members of the Society at The Alpine Club by Mr. S. R. L. Whalley on 22nd January 1981. Illustrated with colour slides. The same talk was given earlier to the Royal Society for Asian Affairs and the following text is reproduced with permission from the Journal of the Royal Society.

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For most people, Nepal is a small mountain kingdom dominated by that great barrier of snow-capped peaks forming the roof of the world - the Himalayas. However, the country boasts other natural wonders amongst which, along the southern border with India, is a narrow strip of country known as the Terai, where the outermost foothills of the Himalayas divide to form broad valleys, called duns. These valleys contain many meandering streams, draining a flat landscape of marshes and dense, tall grassland. Of all the duns, the most magnificent is the Chitwan valley which is surrounded by hills on almost all sides and drained by the fast, clear waters of the Narayani and its various tributaries, the most significant of which, the Rapti, bisects the valley. Chitwan typifies the flora and fauna of the Terai, which is rich in species.

Until the 1950's, the human population in the valley was sparse, only isolated villages of a tribe known as Tharus. This tribe must have acquired some resistance to the particularly vicious strain of malaria that kept people out of the valley, which therefore contained over a thousand square miles of virgin forest and grassland; one of the finest wildlife sanctuaries in the whole of Asia. The only incursions into the valley were hunting parties of the ruling Rana family and their guests. Great hunts were organised but at infrequent intervals which, whilst they individually destroyed huge numbers of game animals, overall did not affect the wild population of the valley.

During the 1950's, the desperate plight of the hill people in Nepal forced many farmers to descend to the lowlands in search of new land to cultivate. At the same time a major campaign to eradicate malaria created the opportunity for thousands of people to settle in the Chitwan valley. Soon after the original eradication of malaria, all the northern part of the valley was cleared and more than two thirds of the forest and grassland was lost. Luckily the area south of the Rapti remained little touched and a Rhinoceros Sanctuary was established there in time to save the last two hundred rhinos and a reasonable number of tiger and other wildlife. However, poaching of the Great One-horned rhino continued and in 1971 His late Majesty King Mahendra set up the Royal Chitwan National Park, to protect this irreplaceable ecosystem which, with the assistance of the United Nations Development Project of FAO, the World Wildlife Fund and other bodies, has provided full environmental protection.

The vegetation of the Park consists of three types: the moist deciduous Sal forest with, on some of the highest ridges, stands of Chir Pine; the second zone is the riverine forest of which the dominant species is the silk cotton tree (*Bombax ceiba*). The third and most characteristic zone is the tall grassland comprising several species of *Saccharum* and other coarse grasses such as *Phragmites*.

The Sal forest is particularly beautiful, with tall trees of many different species, many of them excellent hardwoods, but here in Chitwan they are protected from logging, the only regular incursion into the Park is for annual grass-cutting, which is permitted by the Park authorities as the grass in any case has to be burnt to provide new, lush growth in the spring. Disturbance from the grasscutters is kept to a minimum by limiting the operation to a set period.

For tourists, there are lodges within or close to the Park. The most famous is Tiger Tops set in the western end of the Park, close to one of the tributaries of the Rapti and on the edge of the Sal forest. The lodge is surrounded by magnificent trees and is unfenced. From it stretch away the tall grasslands through which the rivers meander leaving many ox-bow lakes and providing a moist habitat, ideal for many species of wildlife. The easiest way of seeing animals in this country is from elephant back, which provides accessibility to areas where even four-wheeled drive vehicles cannot reach and sufficient height to be able to see over the grass. Travelling on foot through these grasslands where one can walk right into an unseen rhinoceros would be risky in the extreme.

The Great One-horned Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) is the most famous animal in the Park and this is one of only two areas where large numbers can still be found. It is the largest of the three Asiatic species of Rhinoceros and there are probably around a thousand left in the Indian sub-continent, of which approximately three hundred remain in Chitwan. This Rhino is a little larger than the Black Rhino in Africa and much more prehistoric in appearance, with its thick fold of skin giving the impression of armour-plating. As in all Rhinos, the horn is formed from a closely matted mass of horny fibres issuing from the skin. All parts of the Rhino, even the urine, are used for medicinal purposes in Asia; the most famous use being the mistaken belief that its horn has aphrodisiac properties.



However, constant protection by well-trained armed guards in Chitwan, has led to the present increase in numbers. The Great One-horned Rhino can be extremely aggressive and although occasional records of Rhinos attacking elephants are heard of, normally well-trained elephants turn to face the Rhino and the charge is terminated a few feet short from being pushed home. Rhinos will however attack people on foot when surprised and despite the prominent single horn, it is the lower incisors which are used both in fights with other Rhinos and in attacks when it considers itself threatened. The Great One-horned Rhino is a magnificent animal but its situation, despite the increase in numbers, is still very precarious and a project is now being finalized to translocate animals from areas such as Chitwan, and Kaziranga in India, where numbers have increased to the maximum capacity the areas will support, to other areas where, originally, Rhinos were found in abundance and where suitable habitat and protection can be provided. ITNC is planning to take an active role in supporting the project.

The Park has a wide range of other Ungulates, of which the most spectacular is the Gaur (*Bos gaurus*), the largest of all the world's wild cattle. The bulls are very black, whilst the cows are more of a dark chestnut brown. A wary animal, it is well capable of protecting itself, though even large bulls may occasionally be taken by Tigers. The Bull stands well over six foot at the shoulder, with massive horns and surprisingly slender legs, which with its white "stockings" appear scarcely capable of supporting the vast bulk. The Gaur is an animal of the densely forested hills where it lives in small herds which are extremely shy and very rarely seen. During the pre-monsoon months, after the grass burning, which takes place each year, the Gaur may visit the lowlands to feed on the sweet, new grasses. There are four types of deer in Chitwan, of which the largest is the Sambar (*Cervus unicolor*). It is a large deer, similar in appearance to the European Red Deer, but having antlers with only three tines, which are much heavier in the beam than any found on deer in this country. The Sambar may weigh up to six or seven hundred pounds and live mainly in the forested hills, though they frequently visit the riverine forest to feed when the new grasses are coming through. They have acute senses of scent and hearing, though their sight is less good and they are thought to be the optimum size prey for the Tiger. The Chital (*Axis axis*), the dainty Spotted Deer, perhaps the most beautiful of all deer, is much the same size as our Fallow Deer, though it is more lightly built and the rusty brown coat is even more heavily marked with white spots. The stags, for their size, have possibly the longest antlers of any deer, again with only three tines. They are found mainly in the riverine forest and grasslands. In Chitwan they are extremely prolific and are the most numerous prey species in the Park.

Closely related to the Spotted Deer is the Hog Deer (*Axis porcinus*), though it is smaller and confined to the grasslands. There are no markings on the coat and its short rounded head and peculiar gait, running with its head held very low, gives the excuse for its name. Although usually encountered singly or in groups of two or three, sometimes, on the open river banks, large groups of twenty or thirty can be seen feeding on the plants growing between the pebbles.

The fourth type of deer is the Muntjac or Barking Deer (*Muntiacus muntjak*).

This is a bright red deer always seen singly or in pairs, mostly in the densely forested hills. It is very secretive but its alarm call is frequently heard and is a sharp bark, completely unlike the whistling alarm call of the Chital. Muntjac bucks have small antlers consisting of a short brow tine and an unbranched beam, while the does have tufts of bristly hair instead of horns. Muntjac bucks are also peculiar in having large canine teeth, which are used defensively.

Of the other Ungulates, the Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa*) is present in large numbers and forms a major prey species of both Tiger and Leopard. The boars can be over three feet at the shoulder and weigh several hundred pounds and with their sharp tusks and aggressive nature, they are a formidable opponent for the big cats. Wild Boar are frequently seen from elephant-back, running through the grass in small herds called 'sounders'.

The Indian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*) is found in the wild in the Park but only in one small area which is almost inaccessible. However, recently a baby elephant was born to one of the Tiger Tops females and, as far as is known, this baby which was fathered by a captive male, is the first born to captive parents in Nepal. Normally, the elephant drivers and mahouts have great reluctance to let the captive elephants mate, although they are, during the monsoon, allowed to wander fairly freely throughout the area of the Park close to their base.

Monkeys are common in the Park and two species occur, the Grey Langur (*Presbytes entellus*) - these are the Bandalog from Rudyard Kipling's 'Mowgli' stories - and the Rhesus Macaque (*Macaca mulatta*) which has been the species most commonly used in laboratory work. Here, however, it is still numerous, though its habit, when frightened, of taking to the ground and running before climbing another tree, seems strange in a species one would think much safer remaining in the trees.

The Royal Bengal Tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*) is the dominant predator and, although mostly nocturnal, is occasionally glimpsed during the day, when disturbed from lying-up. During the summer, they can sometimes be seen lying in the rivers to cool off in the heat of the day. The Tiger, perhaps because of its postulated Northern origin, is always found close to the water but the ecology of Chitwan suits them admirably and there are currently twenty-five to thirty Tigers in the Park. The Tiger has a much more complex social organization than used to be thought and there is much to learn about its habits. Dr. Charles McDougal has written an excellent book\* which is the result of many years study in Chitwan and his work in the area is continuing in association with the Tiger Ecology Project started by the Smithsonian Institution. Pug marks from the Tiger can be found in soft ground all over the Park and are used by Chuch McDougal, as each is diagnostic of a particular animal, to study movements. To a first time observer the size of these prints is really most impressive. Other Tiger signs frequently encountered are scratch marks on trees and scent marks which, even to the human nose, are quite obvious.

\* THE FACE OF THE TIGER. Rivington Books/Andre Deutsch, 1979

The Leopard (*Panthera pardus*) has been able to hold its own, despite the presence of the larger predator, because of its greater adaptability. This adaptability has also enabled it to survive in many areas of the world where population increase has destroyed much of the natural wildlife. It is, however, hunted for its spotted coat everywhere it occurs, even where protected, and like all big cats is threatened by Man's fear and greed. It will kill and eat anything it can overpower - cattle, deer, monkeys, small beasts of prey, large rodents, birds and reptiles. In Sri Lanka, where the Tiger is absent, the Leopard hunts more frequently in daylight, though in Chitwan it is mostly seen at night at baiting sites. It is found in Chitwan throughout the Park, from the highest hills, which approach two thousand feet, to the grasslands of the riverine valley.

The Sloth Bear (*Melursus ursinus*) is a shaggy, black bear with a long muzzle and short hind legs which give it a shambling, ungainly gait, but this is very deceptive as the bear can be aggressive and very quick to charge. Although not large by bear standards, they can weigh up to three or four hundred pounds and with their enormous claws are only approached warily as one blow from a forepaw can remove half a man's face.

Other mammals found in the Park include Jackals, Indian Civet, Jungle Cat, Leopard Cat, Fishing Cat, Yellow-throated Martin, Mongoose, Common Otter, Large Flying Squirrel and Indian Porcupine. Occasional packs of Wild Dog (or Dhole) are sometimes seen or heard.

Of the birds, the common Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) is probably the most spectacular but there are over three hundred resident or migratory species which occur and they are probably the most conspicuous and one of the most attractive features of the Park. For someone visiting the Indian sub-continent for the first time, the large numbers of parakeets flying in noisy parties high over the trees or clustering in the branches to feed on fruits and seeds is one of the most spectacular sights. The parties of Rose-breasted Parakeet (*Psittacula alexandri*) and other common species - including the Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*) and Blossom-headed or Plum-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*) - flying in to roost are sights evocative of the area. Large Raptors are very common, with many species of Eagles and Hawks, sometimes perched in trees or glimpsed sailing high over the hills. One of the most beautiful is the Pied Harrier (*Circus melanoleucos*) looking almost like a giant butterfly in slow flight over the grasslands. Scavenging birds such as Kites and Vultures are also numerous and both White-backed Vultures (*Gyps bengalensis*) and Indian Griffon (*Gyps fulvus*) can be found wherever there has been a kill, which they seem able to find even in the forest. Many of the small birds are also spectacularly beautiful, with male Paradise Flycatchers (*Terpsiphone paradisi*) floating through the trees like animated white streamers and small sun-birds such as the Scarlet-breasted (*Aethopyga siparaja*) like living jewels on the flowers of the forest edge.

There are two species of Crocodile, the largest, the Gharial (*Gavialis gangeticus*), a purely fish-eating species, as indicated by the long thin snout, grows up to twenty feet. Originally widely distributed throughout India, Burma, Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan its numbers are down to only about two hundred in the wild of which about fifty remain in Nepal, most of them in Chitwan. It is quite different in appearance from the Marsh Mugger (*Crocodilus palustris*) which is a typical crocodilian feeding on mammals, birds and any other food it can capture. The Mugger is mainly found in slow-flowing or still water and is reasonably common in the ox-bow lakes of the marshy lowlands. The Charial is now so rare that a special project has been established to try and save it. It is a strange primitive species of crocodile with no close relatives and much of its life cycle still remains to be studied. Some of the adult males have a peculiar swelling called a Ghar on the end of the snout but since this is not present in otherwise apparently adult males, its function is still open to doubt. The special project begun, with support from the Frankfurt Zoological Society, by the Wildlife Department of His Majesty's Government of Nepal has brought in eggs from the wild, where constant interference and poaching seems to have reduced the chances of young Gharial reaching maturity to almost zero. They are hatched artificially in incubators at a centre in the Park and reared to a length of between one and two metres. Now the project urgently needs funds to enable monitored releases of the young crocodiles back into the wild combined with study of the wild population. This is another project that the International Trust for Nature Conservation is anxious to support as it is clearly both practical and urgently needed.

For many people, Chitwan is the best run of all National Parks in Asia - here rare species thrive and with its recent extension, the Park will continue to provide at least a glimpse of what the wildlife in the Indian sub-continent once was and, save for a few isolated pockets, can never be again. That we have it at all is a miracle for which we must be grateful; for, were we to lose the Tiger or the Rhino, we could not replace them and we would diminish ourselves. If we were to lose the forests completely - then our own future would be in jeopardy for, as Chief Seathl - a Red Indian Chief - said in a letter to the President of the United States in 1855: "All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth..." It is up to all of us to recognize this and to do what we can to help safeguard the world we share with so many other creatures.

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DOWN THE RIVER TO GREENWICH  
THE SUMMER OUTING - 25TH JULY 1981

by

Linda Coulthard

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With the English summer proving unreliable as always, it was marvellous to find the morning of Saturday, 25th July dawning mild and hazy with a promise of sunshine to come.

Westminster Pier is a place accustomed to flocks of tourists milling around, jostling for places on boats departing for such famous places as the Tower of London, Hampton Court and ..... Greenwich. And Greenwich was where our party of 100 were bound on the Annual Summer Outing of the Britain-Nepal Society.

Not a little frenzied counting of heads took place on the pier as members of the Committee tried to ensure that there were enough tickets to go round. Members of the Embassy, members of the Society, Gurkhas, Yetis and many Nepalese adults and children filed on to the boat along with a large French party and several Japanese and Americans. When the guide announced that he would not give a commentary as the passengers did not look like English speakers he was swiftly corrected and he proceeded to give an excellent talk.

Past County Hall and under Hungerford Bridge with the South Bank Arts Centre and Cleopatra's Needle on the other side; under Waterloo Bridge and past Somerset House with HMS Wellington and President, although sadly Captain Scott's Discovery is no longer here having been moved to St. Katherine's Dock; moving on beneath Blackfriars Bridge with the enormous, new, stark Mermaid complex and the graceful beauty of St. Paul's Cathedral and the many other City Churches sadly dwarfed now by office developments. On past the seventeenth century Anchor Inn on the south bank in an area dominated by the Bankside power station. Next Southwark Bridge and Southwark Cathedral, built on the site of a Roman temple, and on beneath London Bridge past what was the most important docking area of London. On this stretch of river was one of the most popular sights for the children, HMS Belfast, the Royal Navy's last big gun warship and now a floating museum. To the left the sinister Traitors' Gate into the Tower of London where many famous prisoners met their fate.

Looming ahead, our last bridge on the journey to Greenwich, the magnificent Tower Bridge with its Gothic towers containing the machinery which lifts the drawbridge. With cameras clicking we passed beneath the Bridge to see the St. Katherine's Dock Development on the east side with the World Trade Centre and large yacht basin. Not such an interesting stretch of river from here - many decaying warehouses and only a few famous Inns such as the Mayflower and the Prospect of Whitby. Through the Limehouse Reach and into Greenwich Reach with our goal in sight.

Disembarking at Greenwich Pier the party excitedly set forth for St. Mark's Church Hall, with an appetite whetted by the river air, ready to do justice to another of Mr. Manandhar's superb feasts washed down by ample beer and cider. A warm welcome was waiting at the Hall where members of the Committee and Mr. Manandhar's staff had food, drink and warm hospitality ready.

Some time later the party set forth to explore Greenwich and its numerous attractions, not the least of which was an antique and junk market. The more culturally inclined headed towards the park and the Queen's House, a perfect example of neo-classical architecture by Inigo Jones, housing the Maritime Museum. Here there is a fascinating presentation of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution written after his voyage on The Beagle in 1831. Some of the party also managed to visit the Painted Hall in the Royal Naval College while others climbed the hill to the old Royal Observatory, designed by Sir Christopher Wren. The Meridian Zero line (from which was calculated the Greenwich Mean Time) is marked on the side of the building and along the causeway and here you can stand with one foot in each of the East and West Hemispheres.

With time running out the party returned towards the Pier where there was still plenty to see with the tall masted Cutty Sark, a famous clipper built for the Far East tea trade, dwarfing Gypsy Moth IV, the yacht in which Sir Francis Chichester sailed around the world singlehanded in 1968.

A lot of weary people boarded the boat to return to Westminster in the afternoon sun having all enjoyed a memorable day.

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#### TRAVELS IN SIKKIM, THE ASSAM HIMALAYA

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Text of a lecture given by Mrs. Sheila Kimber at The Alpine Club on 30 April 1981, and illustrated with Mrs. Kimber's colour slides

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The speaker was introduced by the Chairman, Brigadier Taggart, who said that Mrs. Kimber was well known to members as a regular attender of the Britain-Nepal Society meetings; so it was hardly necessary to introduce her. She had provided paintings for Government House, Calcutta, on the occasion of the State Visit of Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh to India, and later, in February of the same year, her floral paintings had been hung in the Royal Guest House, Kathmandu, for the State Visit to Nepal, in the suite occupied by the Royal visitors. He went on: "She is a painter of some repute, and has been to Nepal

several times for trekking; but she is, I gather, more of an expert on the subject of which she is going to talk to us tonight, which is Sikkim. She has asked me to say that questions afterwards will be acceptable to the lecturer, but would you please keep them as non-political questions. Mrs. Kimber lectured last to the Society in 1976, when she gave us an extraordinarily interesting lecture, and I think the turn-out tonight, which is one of the biggest I have ever seen, pays tribute to the quality of that lecture which she gave us before. She has brought here with her some of the books and the paintings and the greetings cards which she has herself designed, and the book which she herself has written, and if any of you are interested, they will be available here after the lecture. I am not going to say any more; we are looking forward to a very interesting evening. Mrs. Kimber."

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MR. CHAIRMAN, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, thank you very much for those kind words of introduction. I would like to stress that this talk is based on my own personal and solo visits to Sikkim, which is in the east Assam Himalaya. As you probably know, Sikkim was taken over by India in April 1975, and is no longer the Protectorate it used to be, ruled by the Maharaja known as the Chogyal. It is now known as the 22nd State of India, and there have, of course, been a lot of changes, but my talk, as I said, is based on earlier visits and I look back on these as very happy times. I would also like to stress that this talk is also based on the fact that as a painter, I was possibly able to get permits to go into these restricted areas, of which Sikkim is one, because they probably thought I was sufficiently harmless and 'bonkers'. I wasn't attached to an embassy, or a military organisation or anything official at all. I simply went alone with my paint pots and tape recorders. I was on one visit collecting orchids, and also I was deeply interested in the culture of this beautiful country, the tribal people, and so on.

Sikkim, as you know, is wedged in the middle of Nepal on the west, and Bhutan to the east, and it is in this enormous range of the Himalayas which extends for 1500 miles along the borders of India, Pakistan and what is now Tibet-China. To give you an idea, in the Karakoram region to the east of the Punjab Himalaya, are some of the longest glaciers outside sub-polar regions, one of which is 36 miles long. And of course you know, there is Mount Everest, conquered by Lord Hunt's team in 1953, and Kanchenjunga, which is considered to be the sacred Mountain of Sikkim, climbed by a British team in 1955.

I began life in the Asian sub-continent, but I left after my mother's assassination in Lahore, when I was very young, and it was not until 1952 that I returned. After the second tragedy of the death of my only sister in an air crash, I decided to go back to India and bury my ghosts. Early memories of Lahore, where we lived, are of the horse-drawn tongas, finding snakes in the garden, and going to church with the ayah, and all the trade caravans that used to pass our gates, coming to Lahore as the centre of many trade routes from the north-west areas. But it was

later that I went to Calcutta, and here I found life in a very real sense of the word! The modern, air conditioned down-town offices of Netaji Subhas street, the expanding ports, and the thousands of beggars who besieged one in the bazaars; the lepers, and then the tribal people I met in the bazaars. I used to go down to the markets in the very early morning to do the shopping. I also met the wonderful nun, Mother Teresa. I am sure you all know a bit about her, and especially that she received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979. I wrote one of the first articles, I believe, published about her in the 1950's and her wonderful work in the slums of Calcutta with her nuns, which I accompanied with my own photographs and which appeared in magazines in New Zealand and Westminster. I have come to love her very deeply. There were then over 30,000 registered cases of leprosy in Calcutta, but of course many more unrecorded, that wandered around the streets, and who one frequently saw pulling each other along on bits of wood, begging in the streets, where, alas, they were thought to pass on the dread disease to others.

I found plenty of interest to do. There was the East India Charitable Trust, and there was the Tollygunge Homes, and many other charities. But after some years I took up painting as a therapeutic hobby because of continual illness, and this really became my passport because, through my interest in the simply wonderful flowering trees that burst upon the scene at the beginning of the Monsoon period in late May and June every year, I began to paint flowers, and then finally I went up into the Himalayan foothills, and found more of these beautiful plants and trees, and eventually collected orchids for the Sikkim Royal family, and so later published my book, "A Handbook of Orchids", which I illustrated with orchids mostly indigenous to the Himalayan regions.

The laws affecting the distribution of the plants and the lower animals materially influence the migrations of man, and as the zoology, botany and climate of the great peninsular of Malaysia and Siam advance into India, so also do the varieties of the human race itself.

∩ The speaker showed slides of scenes in Calcutta and elsewhere. These were greatly enjoyed but her descriptions are so graphic and vivid that the reader will scarcely feel the want of slides or illustrations. - Ed. ∩

This is a view of Raj Bhavan, Government House, and it was there that the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh stayed on the State Visit in 1961, and I was lucky enough to be commissioned by the Indian Government to provide floral paintings for Her Majesty's suite. On my recent visit back to Sikkim for the Royal Wedding, I was invited to go to Raj Bhavan, and was asked if I thought any of the paintings needed revarnishing or other repairs, and it was rather fun to see them again after such a long interval, happily, I am glad to say, none the worse for the passage of time!

The next slide is of Mother Teresa, and what I think is so amazing is that when I first met her in 1952, she and her nuns had hardly enough to eat and there were then only about twenty sisters in the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta. In May this year is the 50th anniversary of when she took Holy vows. But now there are 148 of these Foundations. The American-run Marian Society provided her with her first mobile leprosy unit, which was a small van; now she has over four hundred, and over four million people are cared for by her nuns and fed and clothed by them every year.



Shisu Bhavan is the home for children. I don't know if you read of Prince Charles' recent visit to Calcutta when he met Mother Teresa, but this was one of the homes he visited. I had the great honour to be presented to the Queen recently, and was able to show her the photograph of Mother Teresa, whom Prince Charles was actually visiting at that time.

The next slide shows a group of nuns with the children. I expect you know that the dowry system in India is crippling to a great many of the poor families, and so girl babies are often abandoned, or even thrown into dustbins or into the river, and Mother Teresa's nuns have rescued many of these pathetic little bundles of humanity.

The old railway runs from the valley to Darjeeling, and there are one hundred and fifty hairpin bends. You climb up the hill very slowly. The sack at the back of the engine contains coal, the one in front sand which is poured onto the track. Most of the passengers sit on the roof, and if you want a change of scene you can hop off, walk along for a while, and then hop on again, with monkeys joining in the fun from the surrounding forests.

The view of the Teesta valley shows the wonderful blue of the distant ranges, looking towards Tibet. In the foreground is the ixora plant, and one of those I painted. I felt I must include a photograph of Eric Avari, who for many years has owned and run the Capital cinema, as Celia Brown's mother tells me she knows him very well. Tenzing Norkay, who reached the top of Mount Everest with Sir Edmund Hillary, was one of his ushers in the early days. It was so marvellous to find him still there with his familiar grin, and his generous welcome. The next photograph is of Tenzing, when he was then Chief Instructor of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute which was founded in 1955, after the conquest of Mount Everest. You can see from the view of one of their high altitude camps the magnificent ranges and glaciers. This was one of the climbs run by the Himalayan Institute and was probably taken at about 17,000 feet.

The British Museum very kindly made this slide for me of the Himalayan blue bear. It is of the brown bear family, known as *ursus arctos*, but is given the specific name of *bruinosus*, and is found up to 16,000 feet. I've only found its tracks when I was on my treks, but when I was in Nepal for the State Visit of the Queen in 1961, Ed Hillary and Desmond Doig had just come down to Kathmandu after their expedition hunting the yeti, and I was allowed, having promised not to publish it, to take a photograph of what was said to be the arm of a yeti, but which was, in fact, the "arm" of a Himalayan blue bear! The photograph of Mount Everest was taken at 5.30 in the morning at 10,000 feet, with the last of the rhododendrons in the foreground.

I found November, which was when we did that particular trek, was a wonderful time of year for photography - the air was so clear, and although very cold at night, it was warm during the day for trekking in short-sleeves.

There are many suspension bridges, some of which were jeepable. But I have crossed many more which were merely a few poles of bamboo, tied loosely

together with thonging and weighted down at each end by large boulders, and one had quite a job balancing across, particularly if you were carrying a load.

The prayer flags are a familiar sight along the many tracks leading over the hills, and I think it is a rather nice custom - prayers are written on strips of white cloth which are tied to long bamboo poles, and it is thought that in this way the prayers are transported up to the Gods by the wind. Another familiar sight is the small wayside shrines, always in sight of the snows, with offerings of last year's harvest left tied to poles round the tiny white monument. Very often one met an old lama twisting his prayer wheel, and chanting the Tibetan prayer.

At Kalimpong, there is an hotel run by the daughters of a Mr. Macdonald who was a marvellous old man, once the proud owner of a unique collection of Thankhas, religious hand-painted scrolls, and one-time Agent for Tibet. Some of these were said to be over 250 years old. Unfortunately there is only one daughter now, Victoria. Annie Perry, her sister, died some years ago, and one wonders how much longer the Himalayan hotel will open its doors to visitors. When we stayed there I was fascinated to find a large fern tree. I had seen the same on the island of Hawaii, and also the datura plant which is found on limestone rocks near the Teesta river, and on lava rocks in Hawaii.

When I gave my first lecture on Sikkim in Calcutta, the Royal Sikkim family sent me down some wonderful treasures from their personal collection, including enormous coral and turquoise earrings, and I was horrified when I went to the post office to collect the parcel to find that the value of many hundreds of rupees was written in bold red figures all over the outside of the parcel, which the porter then carried in full view of all the passers-by, on the top of his head to the car!

Chang is made from fermented barley, and is a most marvellous drink, served in a bamboo container with a long straw. It is said to be innocuous, but after one or two "top-ups" one is ready to climb any mountain. When one is trekking in Sikkim, this is one of the delights that your porters greet you with on arrival at the Dak or rest bungalow.

The Sikkimese terrace their hillsides for cultivation of the crops, as the farmers do in Nepal, and here the main crops are maize, barley and millet, and also potatoes. Another important crop is the oranges, grown in groves on the steep slopes. These are carried in huge baskets by porters down to the bazaars where they are packed and exported. They are incredibly juicy and most refreshing when on a long day's hike up and down these very steep mountain sides. Maize is hung up under the eaves of the thatched houses, to ripen, and the courtyards are incredibly clean. I never hesitated to accept offers of food and water on these treks, with no adverse result, whereas by contrast, in Calcutta we had to boil, filter, boil and filter again, all our drinking water.

It was in this area that the successful Mount Everest team under Lord Hunt acclimated and trained for their assault on Everest. We found that fifteen or sixteen miles

a day in this country was quite enough for amateurs, even though we would rest at the river-side at the bottom and eat our sandwiches in the cool of the overhanging trees.

Sikkim is well known for the wonderful butterflies, and also the many varieties of fern, and it was my only regret that on these treks one could not stop for long to paint the many fascinating plants one saw.

The Dak, or rest bungalows, are particularly beautiful, always built on ridges with magnificent views of the snows, and with small gardens lovingly tended by the chowkidars who live there permanently. Often orchids are hanging from wire baskets under the eaves of the verandah, and each garden seems more lovely than the next. All that is provided is water and wood; food and bedding must be carried by your porters.

The roads are always falling away, and there are permanent teams of road workers, who live on the spot in tiny bamboo shelters, rebuilding the roads and tracks, many of which are now jeepable.

The *Bauhinea purpurea* trees make a wonderful splash of white in the dark forests in March, and the many birds that flutter around in the upper branches. Another glorious sight is the poinsettia plants, whose large bracts make such a spectacular display of deep crimson against the clear blue sky. These are a larger variety than those found in the hot plains of India.

On my first visit to Sikkim, there was a population of 130,000. Now it is probably far more. I went to see the Lama dance festival which takes place in December and marks the end of their religious year. The dances are performed by lamas, and the costumes, carefully stored in the Monasteries, depict the various symbolical characters of the Ghuddist faith. On this visit I borrowed a sleeping bag and was allowed to roll up on the schoolroom floor which, in December, was not conducive to what I had hoped would be a restful and warm night. However, the dances were fascinating and an amazing spectacle: the huge animal and bird masks, the chanting of the onlookers, and the strange haunting notes of the lama band which filled the air with a strange cacophony of sound, ending with the wild banging of the drums and cymbals, and the shrieks of the dancers as the effigy of the old year was burned.

The Lepcha guard has now, sadly, been disbanded since India took over Sikkim, but the Lepchas were once an independent nation and there are now very few of them left. Their costumes were quite unique.

Hunting for orchids in the forests is exciting and a challenge too, for most of the epiphytes I was collecting grow very high up in the fork of the old trees and one can search for hours, sometimes days, without finding a single specimen simply because they are so well camouflaged. I used to set off in a jeep with someone from the forestry office in the early mornings, and if we spotted an orchid, my companion would scale up the tree as agile as a monkey and bring down the plant between his teeth. At the end of the day we would return to the palace and I would hurriedly get out my brushes and paint the whole plant while it was still fresh.

There are many thousands of orchids, but it took several weeks to find even a small collection. I couldn't help but wonder at the courage and tenacity of the early botanists who so painstakingly and successfully recorded many hitherto unknown species, in the days when there were no telephones, air services or modern equipment for pressing and preserving plants. / Notice the floral carvings on tables, porches of monasteries and the Institute of Tibetology in Gangtok. In those days the mule caravans came down the Nathula to Gangtok, the muleteers gay in fur bordered hats and their gowns pulled up over their waists, long earrings in one ear, and tall hide boots. /

There are few tigers now left in India. / This male 6 ft. animal was photographed in the Terai forests. / The elephants are still used a great deal on tea gardens, and I was lucky to get the opportunity to mount a huge tusker, the way the mahots did. You go up to the animal facing his head, and when he lifts his huge foot, you roll his ears in your hands to make a grip, then immediately he feels your foot on his, he grabs you round the waist with his trunk, and literally lifts you up onto the top of his head. Of course it all looks very simple, but I unfortunately landed the wrong way round and didn't know how on earth I was going to get out of that one! The mahots descend by sliding down the animal's tail, but I felt it prudent not to try that method. It is an awfully long way down from the top of a very large male tusker.

On another occasion I was taken to see a wild herd of elephant in the Vandiperiya game reserve in South India, and gliding up in a small open boat without the engine on, took some wonderful photographs. Unfortunately, when it came to getting uncomfortably close, the engine refused to start and we had a terrifying few minutes trying to turn round without upsetting the head of the herd, a large tusker who had come into the water to warn us off, but we escaped by paddling frantically backwards.

You meet a lot of wandering people on the trails that cross-cross the Himalayan foothills. / You will recognise the Nepali milkman, in traditional trousers and small black hat, the lama with his possessions tucked up inside his chubha, and carrying a small drum and prayer wheel, and the porters scurrying along with their incredible loads of wood, water, vegetables, and so on. /

The old Maharaja, Sir Tashi Namgyal was a keen painter, and his work was, through the help of Sir Alec Bishop, then Deputy High Commissioner in Calcutta, shown in an exhibition in the plains. The old Maharaja was very kind to me, and I spent some happy times in his studio, looking at his oils, so many of them with a mystical theme.

I was lucky to have an audience with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, on his visit to Calcutta in 1958, and later met him on his visit to England at a meeting at the Friends House, near Paddington, London. I also had a private audience with him in Petworth where he was staying privately at Petworth House and, having admired my Tibetan charm box, he said he would write a prayer for me to keep in it. It is one of my most treasured possessions.

From Pamionchi you get a wonderful view, if you are lucky, of the entire massive of Kanchenjunga. It is a wonderful experience to sit on the mountainside alone in the dark waiting for the dawn to break, and on my first visit there, staying in the tiny dak bungalow built on the ridge facing the peaks, I was overcome with the wonder of that clear dawn and the ethereal peaks gradually coming into view as the sun rose, and then heavy mist crept up from the floor of the valley, finally to disappear again. Now there is a large and modern hotel, which has somehow ruined it all, as there is the continual chatter of the tourists who are herded from place to place, and the domestic clatter that accompanies all hotels. There is nothing more wondrous than listening to the sounds of the forest, so still and deep; and as dawn breaks, so the forest comes alive with the chatter of birds, the occasional cough of a leopard, and monkeys lower down.

I was treated to an impromptu concert by the lamas here, and have a tape recording which I treasure with my tape of the dawn chorus.

In 1965 I was very fortunate to be invited to the Coronation in Gangtok which was perhaps the last time such an occasion will happen in that lovely country. There were many heads of state present, and a great many visiting diplomats. Hope Cook, the American wife of the Maharaja, sat on a small golden throne beside that of the Chogyal, and his sons, daughter and sisters and the Queen Mother were all resplendent in their traditional Tibetan costumes. The Nepali band made a lovely splash of red colour among the many costumes of the guests on the lawns by the Palace during the reception. The guests were housed in various hotels round Gangtok, many of them especially for the occasion, and the hospitality extended to us all was most warm and generous.

I will end with one or two slides of the recent royal wedding to which I was invited in Gangtok only a short time ago. The only daughter of the Maharaja by his first Tibetan wife married an Englishman who was educated at Harrow. It was far more a family occasion, of course, than the Coronation, and in fact for some time it was thought that the Indian Government would not allow it to be held, in all the traditional ceremony. I had been told I would find many changes, and of course there were. Now the Indian Tourist office is promoting Sikkim as a centre of tourism, and much of the old ways have gone for ever, but there is something magical about the Himalayas and nothing can change that.

In conclusion I would say that I would like to quote Sir Winston Churchill who, as you know, took up painting in his later years. He said, "Happy are the painters, for they shall not be lonely." And I have found in fact that it was only when I was truly alone in the mountains that I discovered that peace he wrote about; and through the warmth and friendliness of those kind and gentle mountain people came a deeper understanding of life."

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## BOOK REVIEWS

by

Lieutenant Colonel T. M. Lowe

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**MANY PEOPLE COME, LOOKING, LOOKING** by Galen Rowell.  
George Allen & Unwin. £15.00. 163 pages

Lavishly illustrated with colour photographs of the highest quality, this is a thoroughly good book, but remember the price. Rowell is a US citizen of wide experience in mountains and is very much at home in the Himalayas.

The book deals not only with the Nepal Himalayas about which Rowell has recorded much that is interesting, but he has included fascinating pictures of mountainous regions of Pakistan. Among the fine mountain scenes there are many lively portraits of the peoples he met. Gurkhas, of course, are prominent amongst them. The best of the individual mountain pictures is probably that of the sun rise on Machapuchare from Pokhara. The latter is described in the text as 'an oppressively hot Asian city!'

A few pages on Himalayan wild life are to be found. This is something that mountaineers and trekkers alike tend to overlook in their quest for high peaks, or hashish.

Some of Rowell's reflections on the use of oxygen at high altitudes are worth noting.

Now what of the title of this fine work? The words are those of a monk, Dawa Tenzing, of Thyanboche Monastery, Nepal, in 1973. "Many people come looking, looking, taking picture. Too many people, no good. Some people come, see. Good!" The simple man often says the sensible thing.

**A GUIDE TO TREKKING IN NEPAL** by Stephen Bezruchka.  
Cordee. £4.95. 256 pages.

This is the fourth edition of the Guide. It is a mine of information about trekking, but there are continuous reminders in most of the chapters that 'Nepal is there to change you, not for you to change it . . . . . Nepal is a way of life from which we all can learn.' Sir Edmund Hilary in a short, but timely preface, emphasises that the Khumbu valley, alas, is now an ecological slum.

All you need to know about trekking in Nepal is contained in condensed form and, if your Nepali is non-existent, or rusty, there is a short chapter on the subject.

One of the appendices contains 'Recommended Reading' before setting off on a journey through Nepal. In the past too many Europeans and citizens of North American

origin have embarked on a journey to Nepal with empty minds and almost empty pockets. This publication should serve to remind us that there is a right and a wrong way to travel in the Himalayas.

The author is a physician who has spent many years in Nepal trekking and working in a health project in Western Nepal.

WALKING IN THE CLOUDS by Judy Lomax.

Robert Hale. £8.95. 189 pages

The author, an Oxford graduate in Modern Languages, and her children (11, 10 and 5 at the time she went to Nepal) undertook journeys which could be described as hazardous by any standards. Her impressions have been set out simply and clearly and the most interesting aspects have each a chapter to themselves. There are descriptions of Gurung villages, Pokhara, Annapurna and the Kathmandu valley.

There is nothing new or radical in this book, but the hard roads, if they can be so described, were also trodden by her children, including the five year old. Indeed, the book contains two diaries kept by the five year old and the eleven year old respectively. How many young mothers would risk a walk across Dartmoor with young children?

During the hardest part of the treks the family stayed in primitive villages and lived on the local diet.

Here and there is a mention of the excellent effect that military service has had on the quality of life which a number of Gurkhas can expect to enjoy in remote areas.

The book ends with descriptions of the Coronation of King Birendra.

The text is supported by numerous photographs of reasonably high quality and a few simple maps.

A book to be read with some enjoyment.

EVEREST by W. Unsworth.

Allen Lane. £14.95. 578 pages.

'If some of the party do not go to 25,000 feet without oxygen, they will be rotters.' So said Hinks, Secretary of the R.G.S. in 1921. This book must surely be the definitive history of Everest and everything connected with it. The book is well laid out, contains many first rate photographs and is a comprehensive survey of the successes and failures which have attended each attempt to reach the top of Everest.

In the early attempts the teams consisted largely of soldiers, civil servants and

other professional men most of whom had an interest in, and experience of, high altitude climbing, including the Himalayas. After the Second World War expeditions tended to become national status symbols and consisted of Players rather than Gentlemen, so to speak. Officers of Gurkha regiments were in most of the pre-1939 and some later expeditions - they understood and spoke the language of many of the porters and Sherpa climbers. Prominent amongst them was Brigadier General Bruce, Major Bruce and John Morris. Two expeditions were led by a Commissioner from the Indian Civil Service.

The contrast between the early and the post-1939 attempts is made clear in the photographs. The pith helmets, the homburg hat and plastic climbing headgear have little in common. But Mallory and Norton took those homburg hats to some 22,000 feet.

Climbing high mountains is exciting and the early expeditions had something romantic about them. Later attempts, most of which have been successful, have been efficient, but the financial cost of mounting those expeditions has been disproportionate by comparison with what went before.

It is inescapable that the technical skill and courage of climbers on the same, or subsequent, expeditions should be the subject of comparison and debate. The circumstances of each attempt to reach the peak were different. Who was the "tallest" figure? Mallory and Irvine must be on the shortest of short lists. And the leaders? Was Hunt better than Rutledge? Bonnington better than Hunt? Speculation, in this context, is fruitless and comparisons are odious.

The story of Everest includes stories of incompetence, small-mindedness, courage, endurance and intolerance. Most human beings exhibit these characteristics at different times. Climbers and those who sponsor them, or mount expeditions for them are only human, after all.

Anyone reading this book would do well to remember that men die on difficult and dangerous expeditions and success depends a great deal on the quality of particular groups who get less publicity than some others. Special mention must be made here of high-altitude Sherpas from Nepal.

The bibliography covers 22 pages and, if you want to take part in yet another attempt, you disregard it as your peril.

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COME, TOMORROW by Mani Dixit.  
Sajha Prakasham, Kathmandu. Rs 22

Glimpses of Nepalese History since 1901 as seen through Nepalese eyes, presented as a fast moving novel with deep human interest.

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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, members of the Diplomatic Service, schoolmasters, doctors, nurses and businessmen.

Ordinary members pay a subscription of £3 per annum. Life Members - a single payment of £40.

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The Society's programme includes:

- Monthly lectures at the Alpine Club and elsewhere, meetings and films from October to May;
- Receptions and hospitality for visitors from Nepal;
- An outing in the Summer to a place of interest;
- A supper party in February or March.

The Annual General Meeting is held in the Royal Nepalese Embassy, 12A Kensington Palace Gardens, W.8., in the Winter. Supper is arranged for those attending.

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

The Britain-Nepal Society has a growing membership and 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, is now well over five hundred.

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

Mrs. W. Brown (Celia)  
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