
THE BRITAIN-NEPAL SOCIETY

Journal

Number 28

2004



ACORN Nepal Trust

(Aid for Children of Rural Nepal
and Educational Trust)

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ACORN Nepal Trust

बन्धु, काठमाडौं - १४

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 EDITORIAL

The year 2004 has seen the continuation of the Maoist insurgency with seemingly little progress towards a solution. The so called 'war against terror' has also had adverse impacts upon Nepal. The senseless murder of the twelve Nepali workers in Iraq attracted worldwide condemnation. Unfortunately the slaughter of children by Chechen rebels within hours rather overshadowed this atrocity. The subsequent backlash against the Muslim population in Kathmandu merely added to the general misery of the situation. More recently a number of ex-Gurkha soldiers were killed in an incident whilst guarding the 'Green Zone' in Baghdad. It is understood that tourism, whilst well down on normal levels, has risen slightly. Most people of my acquaintance who have made trips report that they were able to enjoy their visits, Maoists notwithstanding. The insurgents have not overly interfered with tourists, restricting themselves, in the main, to asking for cash contributions of around NCRs 1000 (approximately £10) from each trekker. The work of the Gurkha Welfare Trust has also continued without any serious interruptions. In a recent speech to the Gurkha Brigade Association, Sir John Chapple described the Nepalese as 'remarkably stoical' in the face of the present situation.

The continuing friendship between our two countries, the present situation notwithstanding, is well illustrated in the article by John Burlison in which he describes the 2nd Gurkha Rifles Regimental reunion that took place in Pokhara. The second and concluding part of the report by Anne Cowan on the trek that she and General Sir Sam Cowan carried out in the remote Dolpo area

seems well away from the insurgency. Dolpo is a little visited area and remnants of the pre-Buddhist Bon-po religion (swastikas reversed) can still be found. Mark Temple compares Rai wedding rituals in both Dharan and in an east Nepal village. Susi Dunsmore has contributed an article on the *allo* or nettle project that seeks to help the local population make something really worthwhile from their local natural resources. During the year the Society provided a platform for two important charities by inviting them to give lectures about their work in Nepal. The Britain-Nepal Medical Trust is relatively well known to the Society but over the years their work has moved on to take account of changes that have occurred in their area of operations in east Nepal. A new charity, the Esther Benjamin's Trust has taken on the task of rescuing Nepali children that have been abducted from Nepal to work in circuses that tour around India, and children of parents that have been imprisoned in Nepal but have to remain with them as there is no other provision for such children. Articles based on these lectures have been included, along with details of the contacts, should any member wish to contribute to their work.

Following an idea from a past committee member, I, with the committee, are looking at the possibility of producing a small publication to mark the Society's 50th anniversary in 2010. The initial thoughts are for an A5 sized booklet that would be both a short history and a digest of articles over the first fifty years. Once an outline has been set a small editorial board will be established to flesh out the detail and this is where members may well be able to assist. However before this

stage it will be essential that Society archives are available. If members have material that may be useful for this work or for the Society in general, may I ask that you contact the archivist, Mrs Celia Brown. Details of how to do this are shown below.

Finally, and as always, my thanks go to all those who have contributed to this

edition. Also thanks are due to those who support the journal by their advertising revenue. We are always looking for more advertisers so any members who wish to use this medium for advertising or know of any firm or organization that would be interested, are encouraged to contact Dr Peter Trott. Details are given on page 52.

THE ARCHIVIST

Mrs. Celia Brown has agreed to take on the task of collecting archival material and in obtaining where possible, brief memoirs. She would like to hear from anyone who may wish to contribute. However, in the first instance she would

appreciate it if members could let her know what they have available.

Her address is: 1 Allen Mansions, Allen Street, London W8 6UY and
email: celia.collington@btopenworld.com

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THE SOCIETY'S NEWS

By Pat Mellor
Honorary Secretary

Once again, we have been privileged to be able to hold our AGM at the Royal Nepalese Embassy, and HE the Ambassador has also allowed the Society to hold executive committee meetings there too. This AGM really was my last as secretary and I am handing over to Mr Neil Weir. Neil is a long standing member of the Society and I am sure that many members already know him well and that all members will appreciate his great enthusiasm and interest in being your secretary. He started the Britain Nepal Otolaryngology Service (BRINOS) and most years takes a party of doctors to Nepal to set up a clinic and diagnose and operate on people suffering from ear problems. Neil Weir's address and telephone number are elsewhere in this Journal. I am remaining as membership secretary and will look after any membership queries.



Mrs Celia Brown and Mrs Marian Donaldson preparing flowers for the supper.

LECTURES

In 2004 the Society was able to hold four lectures at the Society of Antiquaries.

On Monday, 19th January, Dr Gillian Holdsworth of the Britain Nepal Medical Trust gave a talk entitled '30 Years of

Health Care in Nepal'. Dr Holdsworth's talk on this subject, with such interesting and beautiful slides, was well received by all the members attending.

Tuesday, 30th March Philip Holmes of the Esther Benjamin's Trust, gave a talk on 'Helping Nepal's Marginalised Children' and he outlined the background of the charity which he has set up and gave the members an insight into the work that he and his wonderful helpers are giving in the rehabilitation of the marginalised children, some from prisons and now, many Nepali children who have been working in Indian Circuses. This talk was much appreciated by members and I am pleased to confirm that the Society has made a donation to this charity. *(An article based on this lecture is elsewhere in the journal. Ed.)*



Brig Taggart, Mrs Hickey, Maj Dudley Spain and Mrs Iris Bolton at the Supper.

Tuesday, 22nd June, Mr Chris Evans of the Jajarkot Perm culture Project & Himalayan Permaculture Group, gave a most fascinating and informative talk entitled 'Forty Farmers' Favourites – Sustaining Agriculture in the Himalayas'. It was very interesting to hear and see on the slides, how with advice and help, the farmers who live in such inaccessible places can improve their methods to help themselves. It makes so much difference

to receive advice in a warm and helpful way.



Mr Anthony Wieler, FM Sir John Chapple with Philip Holmes and Beverley Waymark of the Esther Benjamin Trust at the Supper.

Finally, we were privileged to have Dr Ramesh Dhungel of SOAS to a talk on Mustang, entitled 'Lo/Mustang: Historical and General Reflections'. We were all impressed by the wonderful slides of the Mustang of twenty years ago. His interesting talk covered both the historical aspect as well as the current problems. We were privileged to be able to welcome HE the Nepalese Ambassador and the Minister Counsellor, Mr Bista, to this talk.



Maj Dudley Spain and Lt Col Alistair Langlands with the Queen's Gurkha Orderly Officers at the Supper.

By the time you receive this journal, we will have already heard a lecture given by David Waterhouse on his book about Brian Houghton Hodgson, which is due to

be held at the Royal Nepalese Embassy on the 8th December 2004. Our grateful thanks go to all of these excellent speakers who gave us their time, shared their knowledge and showed beautiful slides. We look forward to meeting them again and thanking them personally at the Annual Nepalese Supper on 17th February 2005



HE Mr Prabal SJB Rana and the Chairman at the Supper.

The dates for 2005 at the Society of Antiquaries have already been booked, although speakers have not yet finalized their dates. The dates are as follows:

- Tuesday, 1st February
- Monday, 21st March
- Monday, 6th June
- Tuesday, 4th October

All the above lectures are planned take place at the Society of Antiquaries, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London. At the same time, I would like to make my usual reminder about parking outside the Society, which is very restricted. If anyone wishes to bring their car to the Society, they should phone the Secretary first (020 7479 7080) and she will be

pleased to issue a parking pass subject to availability. This availability is only for up to 2 cars, and that includes their own staff. It is therefore not feasible for members to bring their cars on the 'off chance' of parking at Burlington House.

ANNUAL NEPALI SUPPER

As usual, the Supper was held at St Columba's Church of Scotland Hall in Pont Street on the 17th February, with approximately 160 people attending. We were honoured to have HE the Royal Nepalese Ambassador as the speaker and guest of honour. He spoke with deep feeling of the situation in Nepal, and also reminded members of the fact that he was one of the original founder members of the Society. This was a very happy and successful evening and we were glad to welcome a piper from the Queen's Gurkha Signals to play during the evening and two orderlies from the Royal Gurkha Rifles who efficiently looked after the bar. Also we were very happy to welcome the two Queen's Own Gurkha Orderly Officers as our guests.

SUMMER OUTING

The Summer Outing this year was held on Sunday, 27th June, when, with Colonel John Swanston's help and introductions to the right people, we were able to visit the



Mr Harish Karki, the Chairman, the Ambassador and Mrs Pat Mellor with Mr Boileau, an In-pensioner, at the Royal Hospital.



Marian Donaldson, John Ackroyd, Neil Weir and the Ambassador at the picnic in the Ranelagh Gardens at the Royal Hospital.

Royal Hospital Chelsea. They very kindly allowed us into their grounds in the morning, so that we could settle ourselves down in the lovely Ranelagh Gardens in readiness for a Nepalese curry lunch, which was supplied from the back of the Munal Restaurant's van. This was much appreciated by the 70 members who attended, which included HE the Royal Nepalese Ambassador, and the Minister Counsellor, Mr Bista. We also had with us one of the Chelsea Pensioners, Etienne Boileau, who has a connection with the Gurkhas, having served in Malaya with the Gurkha Army Service Corps. After lunch two very smart Chelsea Pensioners arrived to give us a guided tour all around the Royal Hospital. With patience and much good humour, they guided us all round that amazing and



Members enjoying the 'curry picnic' in the Ranelagh Gardens.



The tour of the Royal Hospital about to start led by an In-pensioner guide.

wonderful building, and were still bright and breezy at the end, whereas we were only too ready for a cup of tea which we obtained at the Army Museum next door, before some of us took the opportunity of looking around there too. It was a very happy and interesting summer outing, and the Society was able to make a donation to the Royal Hospital of £200 given by the members who attended.

OTHER MATTERS

I am pleased to be able to report that a Tea Party was arranged at the Royal Nepalese Embassy to welcome our Patron, HRH Princess Jotshana and Dr Basnyat in April, when they came to London after having been with HRH Princess Helen in Bangkok. HE The Royal Nepalese Ambassador was out of the country at the time, but had kindly allowed the Britain-Nepal Society to arrange this reception at the Embassy, so that members were able to greet their Patron. The event was hosted by Mr Bista as Charge d' Affairs. This was a happy occasion when we were all so glad to welcome HRH Princess Jotshana & Dr Basnyat and to say how happy we were to know that HRH Princess Helen was responding to treatment. We presented flowers to HRH Princess Jotshana with greetings from all the members of the BNS.



The Ding Hall of the Royal Hospital.

During June, Mr Peter Leggatt, a vice-president, entertained Mr and Mrs Pande to lunch at which I was present, as I had met Mrs Pratima Pande whilst in Nepal. We had a very pleasant time and heard news of Nepal, and of the Nepal-Britain Society, of which Mrs Pande is President.

SOCIETY TIES

Mr David Jefford is still looking after the sale of the Society ties. The price of these ties is £10 each including postage and they may be obtained from David Jefford, 20 Longmead, Fleet, Hants GU13 9TR by post or at one of our functions.

ROYAL NEPALESE EMBASSY

Once again, I wish to point out that so many of our events and functions would not be possible without the help, support and encouragement of HE the Royal Nepalese Ambassador, and his staff, and in particular Mrs Nilia Ranamagar who is so unfailingly charming and helpful.

DEATHS

It is with sadness that I have to report that the following members died during the year of 2004:

Major General J A R Robertson, CB
CBE DSO* DL

Sir Michael Scott KCVO CMG

(See obituaries elsewhere in the Journal. Ed.)

OF GOMPAS, CHORTENS, MANI WALLS AND YAKS
A TREK THROUGH MUSTANG AND DOLPO

By Anne Cowan

(During his last year in the Army, General Sir Sam Cowan, Colonel Commandant Brigade of Gurkhas and Lady Cowan were able to undertake treks into the remote areas of Upper Mustang and Dolpo. The 2003 edition of the journal featured the leg to Upper Mustang. The concluding extract from Lady Cowan's diary describes their journey in Dolpo. The literary references were selected by General Cowan and the photographs were taken by him. Ed.)

DAY 16 - Friday 4 October - Jomsom to Pokhara

It was now time to prepare for the move to Dolpo. Having spent the night in the Majesty Hotel in Jomsom, we were picked up from the airport at about 8.30am, and flew to Pokhara. The weather was not good when we arrived there so we put off our departure until the next day, and spent the afternoon and evening in Sandhurst Lodge in the camp, getting our clothes washed and building up our strength. The porters were also able to prepare for the next phase of the trek. As this stage, Ramji, the Sirdar, and two other porters left us to return to Kathmandu.

Sam had a useful briefing from the BWO about one of the Gurkha Welfare Scheme's staff who had just been released after 55 days in the hands of the Maoists. He had been made to walk very long distances in the districts of Rukum and Rolpo, just south of Dolpo, where we had trekked in 1997.

We slept very well that night.

DAY 17 - Saturday 5 October - Dunai

We woke in Pokhara ready to go at 7am. The weather was cloudy but we got away at 9am. We flew towards Dhorpatan and straight over where we had been stuck in snow four years before. We flew high level over two 17,000ft ridges with the pilot on oxygen before landing at a large Army Camp in a beautiful spot at the junction of the rivers Suli Gad and Bheri. The OC, Major Barat met us and looked after us for the rest of the day and we stayed in the camp overnight. It was decided that we would not be able to get hold of enough porters that day, so our departure was delayed. We visited the small town of Dunai where the District Headquarters had been attacked and looted by 2000 Maoists two years earlier. This involved crossing above the Bheri in a two-man basket and a 45 minute walk along the river. Part of the town was like an armed camp with a lot of soldiers and police. We met the new Chief District Officer who had been there a week. He explained that there were no representatives of the police, army or National Park north of Dunai. We also met the local Judge and Registrar, and the Police Chief and his daughters as we walked through the town. A helicopter arrived to deliver rice for Dasain, mostly for the Army and Police. We had our evening meal in the Officers Mess and heard the announcement by the King of the dismissal of the Prime Minister and his Cabinet.

DAY 18 - Sunday 6 October - Dunai to Chepka

Eventually six porters arrived and we decided to start even though it meant

leaving half our kit behind. We hoped to find some Yaks at our overnight stop. We set off at 9.50 in beautiful weather, and within an hour had stopped for lunch at Khalrupi. Some of our porters needed food. We crossed the river twice and stayed overnight in Chepka. We found a very basic room. There were four children playing around, and soon three of them were singing and dancing.

We made arrangements to get five yaks to carry our equipment for the duration of the journey and the yak man's son was sent off on a pony to collect them from near Ringmo; two small dzos (yak cross breeds) were to carry the equipment for the next two days to Ringmo; seven porters were to collect the rest of our stuff from the Army Camp and bring it to Chepka (five of the porters were then paid off); and finally the five yaks were to bring it all up to Ringmo. It was a complicated arrangement which eventually worked. The Maoists had burned a checkpoint at this small village six months earlier, and we found they had destroyed another further up, and a small army camp nearby.

DAY 19 - Monday 7 October - Chepka to near Palam

We set off with Purba the cook, two kitchen porters and the two dzos in cloudy weather. We crossed the river three times and went through a variety of terrain. The valley was very steep in places and at one point we descended to the river where the trail was made up of rocks and sticks to form a dyke to walk on. We also passed some empty settlements with houses almost built into the sandy soil. These are used by the people of Ringmo in winter. Matthiesson had been inspired to write:

"I wonder if anywhere on earth there

is a river more beautiful than the upper Suli Gad in early autumn."

The colours were wonderful but we were worried about our complicated logistics! We saw the yaks being brought down from Ringmo which was a great relief. We had a packed lunch in a field, while we waited for the porters. When we got to Sumduwa it started raining quite hard. This is where the Suli Gad meets the Pungmo Khola and becomes the Phoksumdo Khola. It is also a trail junction where a major route from the west along the Pungmo Khola meets the main trail east to Tarap which runs along the east bank of the Phoksumdo Khola. Our route lay along the west bank. On the way we passed a large school where we saw some tents. We heard that some foreign teachers were helping in the school and living in the tents. Our guidebook stated that it was the Tapilza Cultural School which aims to teach the local language and culture as well as the standard Nepali curriculum. Eventually, just as it was getting dark, we reached a small group of houses beside a small hospital for Tibetan medicine run with overseas funding. An amchi - a Tibetan doctor - was in residence. We camped in a muddy field and it rained most of the night, but we did have our meals in one of the rooms nearby.

DAY 20 - Tuesday 8 October - Near Palam to Ringmo

It rained all morning, but eventually we set off at 8.30am at the insistence of our yak man who was worried about the weather higher up. We climbed past the destroyed army camp. It started snowing and continued all the way up and over the pass. The route was steep and quite tricky to follow, and we reached 12,000ft before we started to drop down through the

trees. We heard the large waterfall, but we could not see it as we were in cloud. As we came out of the trees we saw some yaks and a herder, who confirmed that we were on the right track. We arrived in a snow-covered Ringmo and waited for the two porters to arrive an hour later. They were heavily loaded and did well to get over the pass in the bad conditions. They found us a room in a small lodge while we walked to the lakeside which was pretty desolate. When the two dzos arrived we found that almost all our



Phoksomdo Lake.

clothing was wet from the rain and snow; a depressing moment in our wet state. We had lunch in our room and then went for a walk. The clouds had lifted and the lake was a wonderful blue. There were several 'National Park Camping Sites' and various facilities near the lake, but none of them had been used for over a year. Apparently there had been two visitors in the spring. We also saw a Gompa on the eastern side of the lake. The houses were square-built, with stabling for horses and yaks on the ground floor. Logs were laid horizontally between the layers of stone at intervals. They were not painted or whitewashed. On the edges of the flat roofs were packed layers of straw, which could be used for livestock when needed. The flat roofs were covered with red clay to keep out the water and the windows

were very small. The man with the dzos stayed overnight to feed and rest the animals. The weather had improved but there were still clouds around. The Head Lama of the gompa was conducting some ritual in a nearby house and after a chat with Sam he agreed to show us round the next morning.

DAY 21 - Wednesday 9 October - Ringmo

It was a sunny day for Sam's birthday - and a rest day. At 9am we went off, not with the Head Lama who said he was going south, but with one of his assistants to see the Gompas on the east of the Lake. We walked through pine and silver birch woods near the lake. Despite the Dalai Lama having recently formally accepted the Bonpos - followers of the Bon religion - into the fold of Tibetan Buddhism almost as a fifth order, the notice board said defiantly:

"Pal Shenten Tgasung Monastery

This Bon Monastery was established by Treton Tsewang Tsultrim.

Its purpose is to teach Bon religion and protect wildlife.

Bon is not just another Buddhist sect, but a separate religion founded

By Lori Tonpa Shenrag Mibo in Zhang Zheng."

Bon is the old shamanistic, pre-Buddhist, indigenous religion of Tibet which survived in the more remote areas despite attempts to root it out. It has influenced Tibetan Buddhism but probably not as much as Buddhism has influenced it. The Bonpas spin their prayer wheel left about and pass manis, shrines and chortens on the right-hand side. As opposed to *Om Mani Padme Hum*, their chief mantra is *Om Ma Tri Mu Ye Sa Le Du* which not even Snellgrove can fully translate but he points out that no Tibetan ever stops to

ponder on the literal meaning of any mantra: the potency consists in the sounds themselves.

At the first Gompa we went upstairs to a side room which was the prayer room



Entrance to the chorten at Ringmo.

and was very small. The second Gompa was similar. The third Gompa had been built four years ago. We walked back to Ringmo, and went through the main entrance chorten with splendid Buddha figures painted round the inside walls. However the ceiling was the real gem with nine beautifully painted mandalas (mystic circles) of great detail and still well preserved. Snellgrove gives an explanation of each and describes the ceiling as:

“... One of the finest pieces of painting we had seen in our travels, and it was all the more remarkable since there is now no one in the village who can do anything comparable. One can only assume that 150 and more years ago Tibetan culture flourished in this remote valley and that as a direct result of attacks from the south its whole spirit has been destroyed.”

We had lunch in the sun where the clothes were drying. The ama (mother) was weaving outdoors, she had an older daughter, Lakba, three children away at school, and a 2-3 year old, Kanchi, who

was very amusing. She said she had enough children and asked if we would like to take her, Kanchi, home with us!

In the afternoon we went back on the path we had come along in the cloud. It was now a beautiful day. First, to our great relief, the yaks appeared, bringing the rest of our equipment and stores. Then we climbed through the forest and got a view of a series of huge waterfalls, above which we could see Lake Phoksumdo. We also saw Murwa, the summer residence of the people of Ringmo - each family therefore has three houses in different villages. We returned to Ringmo, and everything was ready for our trek tomorrow. We were in bed quite early, but Sam was not feeling well - probably chilled by our walk through the rain and snow the day before. During the evening a yak arrived with sacks of barley. Discussion seemed to indicate that due to a lack of foodstuffs from the south, supplies seem to be coming through on the ancient trade routes with Tibet.

DAY 22 - Thursday 10 October - Ringmo to Chunemba

We packed up and set off from Ringmo along the lakeside route about 7.30 am. It was very cold, and a good reason for local people not to get up too early. It remained cold until the sun reached the lake at about 8.15, it was a pleasant walk through birch woods until we began climbing steeply, crossed several ridges, and descended again to the lakeside at the Northwest corner of the lake. This is where Phoksumdo Khola joins the lake. We saw two eagles soaring above the steep lakeside. Having had the privilege of living for two days beside Phoksumdo Lake we could agree with Snellgrove's assessment of its effect:

“The water is edged with silver birch and the gleaming whiteness of the branches against the unearthly blue of the water is one of the most blissful things I have known.”

We had lunch in close company with six very large yaks - black, grey, light brown, and black and white. We now have a different Sirdar, Chhongba, who had been Assistant Sirdar, also Purba, the Cook, 2 Kitchen Assistants, one local porter, and a Tamang porter (who had been left behind by another trekking company in Ringmo 14 months ago when he got ill). Also we have 5 yaks to carry our equipment, a yak man, and a pony to carry his equipment. The weather started to cloud over, and we set off up the river valley along indistinct paths. The route is dominated by the eastern flank of Kanjiruwa 23,000ft. There were three glaciers which feed the Phoksumdo Lake and we saw a spectacular avalanche of snow from one glacier; we were to hear several further avalanches during the evening which sounded like thunder. We arrived at the campsite among the trees at about 2.45 in light hail, but the porters got a fire going with dry wood. There was plenty of wood around, much of which had been brought down by the river. It was a pleasant spot and the yaks arrived at about 4.30. One of our bags had been torn apart when the yaks went down a very tricky, slippery part of the trail among the trees, but no great damage was done. From this site we have three days walking to Shey Gompa - there is a shorter route which Peter Matthiessen had taken but the climb to the pass is too steep for the yaks - and probably for us!

**DAY 23 - Friday 11 October -
Chunemba to Lar Tsa**

We set off from beyond Chunemba and very soon crossed the river. It was a gentle walk up the wide river valley, which narrowed gradually. The autumn colours were glowing in the sun. On the other side of the river we could see people in Tibetan dress with red braid in their hair felling trees and some Europeans in tents with them. A little further up one of them, a German, came to talk to us - he is in a group of three, without a guide and they came from Simikot across the northwest and had been travelling for three weeks across some wild country. They had met Maoists near Simikot who had charged them \$50 each for a permit, but had given them a receipt, which gave them no further problems. They were due back in Kathmandu about now, so would be late, and were concerned they would have to pay a fee for the National Park. We told them there was no problem as there was nobody to check their permit, and suggested they might get a lift on a helicopter at Dunai. The Germans were travelling with a group of people from Phijor in northern Dolpo who were getting wood for a new gompa. We continued a short distance up the valley to Kang Gopa campsite with a shelter in a grove of trees. We had lunch here, and then had a very long steep climb up the next valley to our overnight stop which was about 300m higher, and about two hours further on. We were coming to the treeline when we saw some Blue Sheep (I thought they were a row of mani), and then saw them closer when we came round the next ridge. There were about 35 of them. Blue Sheep are called *Naar* in Tibetan, and *Bharal* in Nepali. We came to the campsite at 2pm, and the tent was already up so we went inside and rested out of the driving wind. It was a

chilly night.

DAY 24 - Saturday 12 October - Lar Tsa to Mendok Ding

It was a cold, overcast morning though there was blue sky at either end of the valley. At first we had a gentle walk along the valley bottom, then we climbed up the steep, shaley left hand side which was very testing. The shale became snow - quite deep, and difficult for the porters, then it became more icy, and finally we crossed a shallow stream and arrived at our very cold camp site with a sight of our route for tomorrow, over the Pass. We arrived at 11 am in a cold wind after three and a half hours hard climbing. We had lunch. The yaks arrived and the yak man had a look at the pass through our binoculars and was worried about the yaks getting up the final steep bit fully loaded: we may have to unload them below the summit and get the porters to carry the kit up. We rested during the afternoon in the tent, sheltered from a bleak environment.

DAY 25 - Sunday 13 October - Mendok Ding to Shey Gompa

We had a long, cold, and almost sleepless night. There was a cold wind but the sky was clear, so we would not get any more snow. The yaks had gone down the valley to escape the cold, and had to be brought up again. The camp was packed up and we set off with the porters towards the pass. The snow became quite deep at the bottom of the pass. We left the camp at 7.45am and arrived at the steep part at 9.30 then struggled to the top which we reached at 10.30. The yaks were approaching the difficult stretch as we arrived at the top, but with much encouragement from the porters they slowly zigzagged their way up and

reached the top without being unloaded. The views at this point were spectacular. To the south we could see the flanks of Kanjuwara and other inner Himalayan peaks. Northwards it was breathtaking as we could see across the snow-covered mountains of inner Dolpo to the jagged peaks that marked the border with Tibet. Across the valley we could see the Ngadra La, the pass which Matthiessen used and which took two days less. Sam's altimeter read 17,500 feet and it was probably a bit higher. We think the pass we took is called the Dolma La. The descent was steep, over snow and loose shale, and soon we saw the feature which Matthiessen called Black Lake to our right. We walked down through pastures to the river valley which was sometimes stony, elsewhere muddy, and tricky in places. It was a glorious day and when we came to the prayer flags we saw our first stunning view of Shey Gompa. It was still a long way down, across the river, and up to the campsite near the gompa. We had lunch in the sun and then discussed the plan for the next few days. The yak man announced that we had to stay there the next day, and move on after that. His yaks were tired and needed a day's rest. That would still leave enough time to get to Tingkyhu on the evening of the 19th October. Sam also discussed the rest of the route with the yak man who wanted to go direct to Simigaon from Saldang over the Koma passes. Sam said that we had to go further north to visit the famous gompa at Yangsher. The yak man was not very happy since he had not travelled that route but he had heard that the trail from Yangsher to Shimen was difficult. Sam assured him he had a guidebook! In the afternoon we walked round Shey looking at the impressive chortens and visiting the gompa, said to

be 800 years old. There was a vast quantity of prayer stones around the gompa, an accumulation which does underline Shey's age and importance as a religious site. No monks were present: they had gone to Saldang on a visit. Shey is the spiritual centre of Dolpo and takes its name "Crystal" from the nearby sacred mountain. In the late spring people come to Shey from all over Dolpo for religious festivities which often culminate in a "kora" or circuit of the mountain. Once the sun disappeared behind the surrounding peaks it got very cold, so we had a 12 hour stint in our sleeping bags after an early supper.

DAY 26 - Monday 14 October - Shey Gompa

This was a rest day, and it was much milder and warmer, though still cold in the early morning and at night. We had breakfast at 8am in the sun. At 9am we set off down to the river on an allegedly 45 minute walk to visit Tsakang hermitage. It took two hours over several ridges, but it was worth it. There were several mani on the ridges and great sights of the Crystal Mountain, Tsakang and another hermitage further away down the valley.

The Lama of Shey is a 'tulku' or reincarnated lama of the original founder of Shey Gompa. The 16th Shey Tulku died in 1991 and by all accounts he was a very holy man who was loved and respected throughout Dolpo [the 15th Tulku died in 1928 after wishing that in his next incarnation he would be more dedicated to the Dolpo community and less inclined towards women] The 16th Tulku resided in Tsakang for most of his life spending very long periods in solitary meditation. Snellgrove did not meet him in 1956 "*since he had not broken his vow*

of solitude for three years and there was no question of disturbing him on our account."

Matthiessen claims to have met him in 1972. Valli tried twice in the 80s but he was "in retreat" for most of that decade, though through a closed door, in response to a request for guidance on a decision he had to make, he was advised: "*When two paths open in front of you, if you are strong, you choose the most difficult one, the path that will demand the most of you.*" We assume that the search is on for the 17th Tulku.

It was a steep climb to the monastery. The resident lama had gone on a visit to Phijor in north Dolpo. We were greeted by his assistant Dawa and his 6 year old helper. The gompa was situated on a ledge in a fantastic setting against red and grey cliffs. We entered and climbed some stairs and went into the tiny prayer hall decorated with the usual deities and tankas. Where the Lama sits he can only see sky and mountains. We also saw the kitchen and his small bedroom. He had a small black cat inside and a big mastiff dog chained outside. Afterwards we walked past the dog and round the cliff path to have a sight of the other hermitage which is even more isolated. Matthiessen states that it is called Dolma-jang. It was closed in his day because passing Khampas had stolen a precious statue. Dawa told us that no lama lived there now and that there had been a recent theft. On our return to Tsakang we went through an arch to see water dripping from the cave ceiling which was the water source for the gompa. Dawa and his young helper also climbed to the chortens on the left to see if there were any Blue Sheep around. There were none. But we could see the side of Crystal Mountain.

We walked back to Shey for lunch, and were met on the way by the Tamang



Shey Gompa.

porter with a hot orange drink. After lunch we washed our hair even though it was windy. The clouds came over in the late afternoon, but by 6pm the sky was completely clear. The yaks were herded up near the camp for the resumption of our journey the next day. We read and reread the pieces from “The Snow Leopard” about Shey Gompa which brought it very much alive.

DAY 27 - Tuesday 15 October - Shey Gompa to Namgung

We had another very long, cold night and set off at 7.40 for Shey La. We were keeping an eye out for Blue Sheep, but it was probably too cold for them at this altitude. We gradually climbed beside the river, then there was a steep climb up a gully with loose shale and rocks. We came out at a flat place and could see another steep hill ahead, finally at the top of this we saw the long traverse through the snow to a cairn and prayer flags at Shey La. We stopped at the pass and it was an emotional moment. At last we could see the amazing land of inner Dolpo:

“From where we stood we could see no trace of human habitation, for the villages

were concealed within the deep-set valleys. We were alone amidst a chiaroscuro of light and shade falling upon ridge after ridge of grey and brown, while the far horizon was edged by a rim of snow.” Snellgrove.

In the distance we could see the reddish ridge below which was the village of Tingkyhu, our ultimate goal. We had a snack, though it was very cold in the wind. Before long the yaks arrived, so we made our way down around the bowl beneath the pass, over ridges and down the steep descent to the riverside at Namgung where we were to camp. We had a light lunch and then made our way down to the village, where there were many chortens, an old monastery on the cliff, most of which had collapsed, and a new one in the village which we visited and were shown round by the lama. There was also a hermitage gompa in the cliffs beyond our campsite. It was sunny and sheltered in the afternoon, but got cold. We saw a yak man passing with nine yaks loaded with timber. Apparently it was for houses in Saldang, but it is known that there is illicit trade in timber to China and there is no Government representation in this area at the moment. Finally, before our evening meal we saw Blue Sheep, eight females, not far above the camp; they were going down to the river to drink. We also saw a type of snow grouse, which stay in the high regions.

DAY 28 - Wednesday 16 October - Namgung to Karang

It was cool in the morning but there was no wind so we breakfasted outdoors. We set off up the hill above the village towards Saldang, our lunch stop. At first it was quite steep, then it levelled out. As we went round a ridge by a mani wall we saw five or six Blue Sheep who quite

quickly ran away, but with the binoculars we saw an indistinct grey figure - we thought at first it was a Blue Sheep with young - but in fact it was a Snow Leopard which was lying in a thicket ready to attack. When the Blue Sheep ran away it walked slowly back to a rock and slipped into the space underneath. Its distinctive long tail, thick to the tip, made it unmistakable. We walked on at a high level, with fantastic views of the mountains and hills in hazy blues, greens, browns and purple. We came to the pass to Saldang and could see the village beautifully laid out in the valley. As we descended we could see activity around the Gompa - lots of people were there and Sam saw a lama arrive on horseback with a retinue so he went down to investigate while the rest of us made our way down to the other end of the village.

Sam writes: "It took me about 20 minutes to get down to the gompa. There was a large group in front of the gompa, with the women wearing their colourful traditional shawls with elaborate silver clasps and some were wearing the traditional Dolpo headdress - a pair of curved rectangular plates of silver or brass, laced together with leather thongs and worn on the top and back of the head. The Chief Lama of Yangsher gompa with eight other lamas were singing/reciting the liturgy with full musical support from traditional instruments. Everyone was so happy and extremely welcoming. I was invited to sit with the lamas but declined! I took many photographs, and chatted to a lot of people who wanted me to stay for another couple of hours but I knew that I had a 20 minute walk up through the village to join Anne and that we had to get to Karang that afternoon. The Chief Lama gave me a blessing, I apologised

and was very sad to leave such nice people. Their faces were memorable and I am glad I have the photographs to remind me of such a happy hour."

We had lunch near to a school which was almost finished. It had 10 - 12 classes including the younger children. There was also a row of three impressive chortens just below us. The village was well organised and used in winter by many families from outlying settlements like Shey. All the main Dolpo villages are occupied during the winter and Snellgrove asserts that it is the highest permanently habitable area in the world. It must be bitterly cold and life must get down to survival levels. There was lots of activity with the recent harvest, and plenty of water, which enabled them to grow poplars near the streams, but they had to encircle the trunks with stones or bricks to stop the animals eating the bark and lower branches and leaves. Soon after we moved on we saw more Blue Sheep, about 12 in one group and 36 in another. We moved on around the ridges and came to the pass above Karang, another big village with, a gompa above and several chortens. The fields had recently been harvested and threshing was taking place, it was beautiful weather with a little wind. We camped in a newly harvested field and provided great interest for the children, particularly when the porters started preparing the evening meal.

DAY 29 - Thursday 17 October - Karang to Mo

We left the camp at 7.15am, crossed a deep ravine and climbed a gentle path along the valley. We climbed again to the ridge then had a tortuous descent along the river to the junction of the two rivers that flow down the two main valleys of

inner Dolpo: the one we had walked down called Nang-khong (Namgung) and the one we were just about to walk up going east called Ban-tshang (Panzang). These are the headwaters of the mighty Karnali river which flows down to India through the far west of Nepal. The junction is called Dorasumdo ["the stone enclosure where the 3 waters meet"]. There were three impressive and very old chortens right at the meeting point of the waters. We walked along the south side of the Ban-tshang and crossed the river, just after passing a pair of gate chortens, towards Yangshir Gompa. We continued for one and a half hours along the river and then up to Nisalgaon. We eventually found the yard where lunch was being prepared with the sun blazing and no shade.

We walked down to the Gompa, across two ravines and along to the group of



Ladies of Saldang wearing traditional dress.

buildings. The main lamas were away at Saldung so we were only able to see one small prayer hall, but afterwards Sam climbed over a wall and was able to see the mass of chortens and the two other temples within the walls. There was a new house just below the main gompa and it was probably for the lamas. A lot of building work had taken place

recently, so it seems to be thriving. We know from our reading that if Shey is the spiritual centre of Dolpo, Yangshir is its historic spiritual power-house. A lama called "Religious Protector Glorious and Good" was the abbot here in the 16th Century. The buildings are old and strikingly impressive, made more so by the extraordinary desolate setting. As ever, Snellgrove captures its essence:

"Yang-tsher is one of those places that seem to haunt the mind. It represents an oasis of great religious culture amidst what is perhaps the harshest scenery imaginable - bare rocks and coarse eroded soil. One thinks of the zeal and energy of those former inmates, who brought such a place into existence, practising their religion in all holiness and sincerity."

When we got back to our lunch spot the yaks had arrived, but the Sirdar reported that the Tamang porter had got drunk the night before and decided not to continue, so he had been paid off. This was perhaps why he had been left behind by the trekking company in Ringmo. This business had delayed the yaks departure in the morning and the programme for the day. We set off down from the village and the yaks joined the group, but it was a very difficult path. One of the porter's dokhas or baskets had also started to come apart, so there were further delays. There was a long descent to the Ban-tshang gorge and then we had to climb high above it on a tricky path. None of our party had been on this route before. We finally got to the top of the ridge where we were to take the route up to Mogaon along a narrow valley. The Ban-tshang gorge was impassable from this point, and we would rejoin the river that flowed down it the the next day. First we had a gentle descent, then numerous

climbs and descents with the wind behind and occasional sunshine - it seemed an endless path. Finally, we saw four ladies collecting firewood and bringing the cattle and dzo in for the night. They assured us the village was just round the corner, though it took half an hour to reach. We waited and saw four of the porters coming up the valley which reassured us. The ladies showed us to a camping place in the village. Very few spoke Nepali, and they seldom see foreigners. The yaks arrived 45 minutes later in the dark - but there was an almost full moon so we were able to unpack and put up the tents fairly easily. Again the local people were fascinated by the cooking. We asked about the path to Simigaon and the ladies said it would take 4 to 5 hours, we thought it would be 7 to 8 hours, but in the event we took about 6 hours, including our lunch break.

DAY 30 - Friday 18 October - Mogaon to Simigaon

In the morning we found it had snowed a little in the night, and was still overcast. We started to climb, and crossed a series of ridges before we saw the Mushi La (over 5000m). It was quite a struggle in the wind, and the snow was lying so it was not easy to follow the path. We reached the cairns and tied a kata to the prayer flags in a bitter wind. The descent was steep and difficult with the loose shale, but we continued straight down to the river bed, which joined another river where we reached the ruins of some houses, near where some yaks were grazing. We stopped for our packed lunch here, and walked on down to where two yak men were driving their 14 yaks to a lower grazing ground. We crossed the river at intervals until we finally reached Simigaon, quite a big village above the

main river. We saw the path from Saldang over the Koma passes opposite. The porters arrived soon after us, and the yaks later still, but they had been allowed to graze during the journey. The fields had all been harvested and we camped in the field of a friend of the yak man. Again, many of the locals came to see what was going on, mainly women and children,

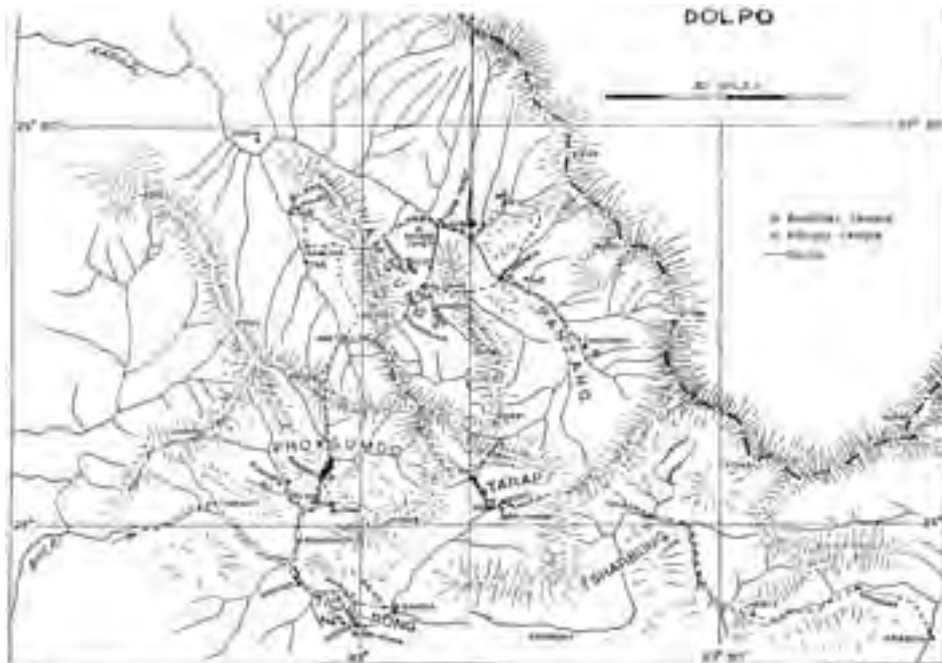


Yang-tsher – the spiritual heart of Dolpo.

some of whom caused quite a nuisance. The weather improved and we had a sunny afternoon after all the snow and clouds on the Pass. Simigaon is a pleasant village with a lot of trees. The sun went behind the hill at 4pm and it cooled quickly.

DAY 31 - Saturday 19 October - Simigaon to Tingkyhu

Again it was a clear morning but cold with a wind blowing up the valley. We left at 7.30 am through the fields and along row of chortens and mani walls with prayer stones. There were several flocks of yak, goat and sheep. We went on up the river passing two or three settlements. We passed a small village and went on up a flat plain towards Tingkyhu, which was a large village surrounded by fields which had recently been harvested. Threshing was taking place in front of many of the houses. There were many chortens, and a gompa



but we wanted to keep a low profile because of our departure by helicopter the next morning. On the very first day of the trek in the Kali Gandaki Sam had met some lamas from Tingkyhu who told him that some Maoists had been in the village the week before co-ercing “contributions” from people. He decided to keep quiet about this! We had chosen Tingkyhu as the end because the Lonely Planet guide says that on leaving the village one passes “a mysterious airstrip”. Enquiries revealed that this was a CIA-financed airstrip, built in the early 60’s to fly Khampa fighters out for training in Colorado and to reinsert them. The strip was still in very good order, and we were relieved to see it. We camped by a side river under the airstrip and hoped all would go well the next day. The yak man was paid off and bought some of the supplies which were left over from the trek. The Tamang porter had returned to

the fold that morning after two days absence; he had walked across the Koma passes from Saldang and met up with the yak man that morning at Simigaon. He was welcomed back after a bit of coldness.

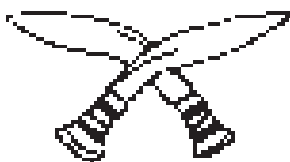
DAY 32 - Sunday 20 October - Tingkyhu

It was a very cold night, and we woke early to prepare for our departure. We had breakfast in the tent as it was so cold. We were packed by 6.30 and all the kit was on the airstrip by 7am. We expected the helicopter at 7.30, and about then groups of yak, and flocks of goat and sheep under the control of small boys and girls started walking along the airstrip towards their grazing grounds. We waited for another 40 minutes, and then heard the wonderful sound of a helicopter. It appeared and flew into a valley to our right towards Tibet, but a few minutes

later it reappeared at a lower level and landed nearby. Sheep and goats scattered in every direction! We loaded up rapidly with our entire party, and were away within 10 minutes. Initially, we flew back down the valley and then gained rapidly in height to pass low across various high snow ridges. We saw Lake Phoksumdo, and more valleys and ridges before we came to the plains of the terai where we landed at Nepaljung, only a few miles from the Indian border. Inside an hour, the contrast of altitude and temperature, not to mention culture, could not have been greater. By mid morning we were on a scheduled flight back to Kathmandu and our great adventure was over. All we had left was a host of vivid memories some of which we have tried to share in this record.

“Already within me Shey remains only a strange combination of memory, dream and desire. I know that all things in nature are transient, that species vanish and mountains dissolve, yet I hope that nothing will change at Shey, that from reincarnation to reincarnation the lama will still occupy his ochre-coloured eyrie, that the medieval silence will continue to be broken by the clashing horns of fighting bhara, and that Drutob Senge Yeshe will fly forever on his magic snow lion around the sacred Crystal Mountain.”

George B. Schaller - companion of Peter Matthiessen - in ‘The Stones of Silence.’



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THE BRITAIN NEPAL MEDICAL TRUST – AN UPDATE

By Dr Gillian Holdsworth

(This article is based on the lecture given by Dr Holdsworth to the Society on 19th January 2004. Many members of the Society have connections with the Britain – Nepal Medical Trust from its early days. This is a timely update on how the BNMT has developed in recent years.)

The Britain Nepal Medical Trust (BNMT) has been working to improve health in the Eastern Region of Nepal for over thirty five years. Established in 1967 by a small group of expatriate health professionals with a vision, it has grown into an organisation which is now led and managed by Nepalis with an annual budget of over £600,000 and a staff establishment of 100.

However, the health needs of people in Nepal remain significant:

- Over half of the deaths are still attributable to infectious and parasitic diseases and perinatal and reproductive disorders.
- Nepal is estimated to have one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world (500/100,000 births – compared with 10/100,000 in England) and some 80% of all maternal deaths are as a result of preventable obstetric complications.
- Nepal's neonatal mortality rate is the third highest in the world – 39/1000 (compared with 3/1000 in England). One in every eleven children born will die before the age of five years. The major cause of mortality in young children is from acute respiratory infection and diarrhoeal disease, exacerbated by chronic malnutrition.
- Tuberculosis is still a big killer with over 45% of the population infected.
- HIV/AIDS is now emerging as an

increasing problem. It is estimated that more than 35,000 people are living with HIV/AIDS and it is predicted that it will be the leading cause of adult death in Nepal by 2010.

BNMT had developed a number of areas of expertise over the years. Traditionally known for its exemplary work in tuberculosis control – BNMT had for many years been the main provider of all TB services in the Eastern region and was instrumental in undertaking much of the operational research which led the National Tuberculosis Programme to adopt Directly Observed Therapy (DOTS) as the national strategy to fight tuberculosis. DOTS provides a shorter drug regime (6 months as opposed to 12-18 months) but being directly observed by a health care worker ensures that compliance is better and the likelihood of cure much greater. More recently BNMT has shifted its operations from direct provision of care to supporting the government health services to provide quality TB services. BNMT does this through staff training, monitoring and evaluation of the programme and quality assurance of microscopy in the laboratories.

Access to quality services in rural areas of Nepal, at a price which people can afford, has been a long term goal of BNMT. Fifteen years ago the state of rural health care facilities was poor. The annual consignment of government drugs was only sufficient to last for four months in the district hospital or health posts. The combination of an inability to do one's job properly and insufficient reward meant that health care workers rarely stayed in post – making frequent trips to the district or regional centres to apply for transfers.

BNMT piloted a number of approaches to try and ensure a 'year round supply of medicines at an affordable price' at rural health posts and the district hospitals. The drug schemes programmes which have evolved are now operational in five hill districts covering a population of over one million people. Over the last few years BNMT has worked extensively with local communities to establish, train and supervise local health committees who will coordinate the implementation of the drug schemes in the future, organise the logistics, revise patient fees annually and ensure that the poorest and most vulnerable receive their drugs free of charge. Each committee manages a revolving drug fund with contributions from the village development committee, the government, patient fees and BNMT. This fund finances the purchase of medicines through BNMT who source and purchase quality medicines from reputable pharmaceutical companies at cost price.



Street theatre.

The Community Health and Development Programme (CHDP) develops people's abilities to improve their health and living standards. Born out of the community health leader training programme which had trained community leaders in basic health care and disease prevention – the programme has evolved into a more holistic approach towards community health, encompassing women's

literacy and empowerment, kitchen gardens, environmental sanitation, community savings schemes and development and use of health education materials. The programme equips community members with the knowledge and skills to identify their major health problems, analyse their cause and effect and work out solutions based on the use of local resources. The programme works with over 100 communities in the hills of Sankhuwasabha and Khotang helping them develop health action plans and providing training in nutrition, kitchen gardening and providing literacy classes. An evaluation of the CHDP in 2002 found a high level of knowledge about nutrition, health and sanitation among both men and women in participating communities. Most have put the knowledge to good use by building latrines, protecting sources of drinking water and adding green vegetables to their diet. Women in particular have become more aware of health issues while local health post staff report that the programme's health workshops have increased demand for their services.



Purchasing drugs at a health post.

In 2002 BNMT, with its staff, trustees and key stakeholders undertook a detailed strategic view of its own work and of developments in Nepal. In response to the changing needs of its partners and new or re-emerging threats to public health, BNMT is introducing important new



A happy mother and baby.

changes to its approach. These have been incorporated into an integrated plan of work for 2003-2007 called the Health Improvement Programme. The Health Improvement Programme builds on the Trust's achievements and wealth of experience in TB and leprosy control, community drug supply schemes and participatory approaches to community health. It also seeks to address a wider range of health needs and new ways of working. Over the years BNMT has gradually shifted from direct implementation of health programmes to supporting and training of partners, including staff of the government basic health services. It has also placed increased emphasis on community participation, empowering communities to identify, address and manage their health needs (for example by training the local health committee to manage the drug scheme programme at their local health post). These elements of partnership and participation feature strongly in the Health Improvement Plan.

The key changes proposed include:

- An emphasis on poverty and equity –

enabling the programme to target the most marginalised groups within the community;

- An effort to address new and re-emerging public health problems – BNMT is expanding its programme to work in HIV/AIDS and malaria, particularly around health promotion and disease prevention. This is particularly important in view of the impact that HIV is likely to have on the incidence of tuberculosis in the country.
- The health improvement programme will also develop and extend its role into reproductive health and safe motherhood initiatives in an effort to try and institutionalise good practice in antenatal care, maternity services and child health.
- The integration of programmes to enhance their impact – the move to an integrated programme has meant a change in organisational structure, from three programmes focussing on distinct areas of intervention to a system of area offices – has required changes in personnel and new roles and responsibilities for staff members.

Despite the challenges of political instability and growing insurgency by the Maoists, the programme has continued to operate and maintain its support for most areas in the hills as well as expanding its



A member of staff at work in a health post.

programme into the Terai districts of Morang and Sunsari. The insurgency has created big population shifts with many people from the rural areas moving either to district centres or Terai towns because of perceived better security. This will also impact on BNMT's future way of working.

Obtaining funds for a small international non governmental organisation has also become more challenging. Worldwide competition for resources from major donors has increased whilst Trusts and foundations have seen their investments fall in a declining world economy. In addition, because of the insurgency, much of the resources allocated to Nepal is now categorised as 'emergency' money and sourced on an annual basis. This has the effect of creating uncertainty and instability in implementing a five year health improvement plan and frequently distracts the Trust from their overall mission and goal.

But is the Trust's product value for money? An evaluation of the work between 1998-2002 showed that more than 80% of patients with TB complete their treatment and nearly 80% are cured; BNMT supported community drug schemes exist in 73 out of 74 major health institutions and 25 smaller institutions, within BNMT's working area, are providing essential drugs year round; community based organisations are increasingly promoting their own health and hygiene and working to ensure access to health services and medicines. This is a great legacy to have emerged from those individuals all those years ago and their vision.

If you would like to learn more about BNMT, contact Mrs A G Peck, The Britain-Nepal Medical Trust, Export House, 130 Vale Road, Tonbridge, Kent TN9 1SP. You can donate online at www.givenow.org.uk

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NEPAL'S LOST CHILDREN

By Beverley Waymark

(This article is based on a lecture given to the Society by Philip Holmes on 30th March 2004 and reflects work that the Trust has achieved since that time. The 'operation' to release the children as described, was not achieved without considerable courage on the part of the Trust staff involved. Also since this was submitted for publication, Philip Holmes and Beverley Waymark have moved to Nepal to carry forward this important work. A Trust 'flyer' is enclosed with the journal and provides more details of the work and contact details. Ed.)

The young girl sitting in the shade of the garden speaks softly but without pausing for breath. "She is only thirteen years old and it is inhuman what she has been through, I am finding it difficult to listen to her story" comments Philip Holmes as he observes the animated group before him. Rupa (name changed) has just returned to Nepal from India where she spent three miserable years living and working as a performer in a circus. She is now safe and is able to speak freely for the first time about her experience, including the frequent punishments she suffered for crying at night. She was regularly beaten with a stick until it broke.

In April, Rupa and 28 other Nepalese children and teenage girls had their dreams answered when charity workers and parents, accompanied by police, swooped on a circus in Southern India and freed them. They brought them back to Nepal, a gruelling 60 hour journey, but no one minded as they were on their way home to family, friends and safety. Philip Holmes shared their elation because their rescue has been his own dream too; it is all part of the extraordinary work of his charity the Esther Benjamins Trust (EBT).

Philip set up the Trust five years ago, in response to a profound personal tragedy. Philip's wife took her own life as she adored children and could no longer bear her inability to have a family. Philip immediately decided to build something positive out of this sadness by helping some of the world's most marginalised children in Esther's name. His passion and commitment has created an inspiring charity, which works through its own partner organisation, driving some of the most innovative work with children in Nepal.



Children emerging from behind bars.

The campaign to free children from circuses is one such project. Every year, thousands of Nepalese children are taken across the border into India by agents who sell them into business as bonded labour. It is a huge problem to tackle but when Philip heard rumours about children being held in circuses, he was intrigued and determined to investigate. The Trust commissioned the first ever survey of India's twenty-nine major circuses, conducted undercover, using teams of field workers posing as academics, talking to staff and as many children as they could get access to. The survey revealed a shocking picture of a workforce of around three hundred children, mostly girls, 50% from Nepal and

50% ethnic Nepali Indians. Some of these children are as young as five years old and they have to live and work in grim and often dangerous, physically and sexually abusive conditions. They rehearse for long hours, serious accidents are common and they suffer a daily round of little food and rest, no schooling, no play and of course no freedom. All the children spoke of their desperate desire to escape.

The Trust is working to rescue these children through a mixture of persuasion and voluntary release, and legal action. Considerable funds are needed to retrieve and reunite victims with families and to rehabilitate and reintegrate them properly through a combination of education, vocational training and employment initiatives for older girls.



A child 'clown'.

The plight of the circus children has clear parallels with the suffering of the first children Philip helped, children held in prisons. This problem was something Philip discovered very soon after establishing the Trust and meeting his Nepalese working partner, Captain (QGO) Khem Bahadur Thapa. Philip had been an officer in the British army and decided to base his work in Nepal as he had been living and working alongside Gurkhas at their (then) UK base in Church Crookham

at the time of Esther's death. Capt (QGO) Khem Bahadur Thapa, Queen's Gurkha Signals, was Philip's Nepali language tutor. He was about to retire and the two men quickly realised they shared the same vision. They formed a partnership and arranged to fly to Kathmandu to look for their first project. Within days of arriving, a cover story of *The Kathmandu Post* grabbed their attention. Scores of innocent children were living in pitiful conditions in jails across the country. They had little food, no schooling or toys, no freedom and were in free association with adult criminals, some jailed for serious violent crime. They were there simply because their parents were jailed and no one outside would care for them; the shame was too great.



Retired Capt Khembahadur with some of his charges.

Philip and Khem were horrified and set about negotiating the release of the children. Obtaining parents' consent was easy. Most were eager to give their children the chance of a new life, but red tape with prison authorities necessitated considerable diplomacy and patience. Finally, in September 2000 they proudly brought the first four children out of Tansen jail, and into a new refuge home in Bhairahawa, in the south, run by Khem's organisation, the Nepal Child Welfare Foundation (NCWF). Khem now runs three of these homes and manages operations on the ground while

Philip is based in the UK, planning projects and raising funds as Director of the Esther Benjamins Trust. He visits Nepal frequently and the close working partnership and trust between the two men remains at the heart of their success.

Today NCWF and EBT care for 45 children from prisons and it is amazing to see how quickly they recover and thrive. Children who were at first subdued and malnourished, become happy, sociable individuals delighted with their new 'family' and excelling at school. The central aim is to 'give children back their childhood' and the children all relish the chance to learn, enjoy new activities, and have fun in a loving home. Eight year old Jithang, for example, spent the first five years of his life in a filthy prison in eastern Nepal with his mother. When she decided she didn't want him anymore, he came to Bhairahawa, where he quickly developed into an energetic fun loving and sociable boy. Like all the children, Jithang exhibits a touching zest for life after all he has been through.

It is important to maintain links with the



Returning to their families.

parents by ensuring children visit them regularly, but in many cases families won't be reunited for a very long time as some are serving sentences of many years. Supporting children into early adulthood is part of the ongoing commitment and requires considerable resources. Officially,

the law has been changed to halt the jailing of children, but the reality is that this practice often continues. Children still come into NCWF care as a result, like four year old Juna and her three siblings, whose parents are both serving a twenty-one sentence for murder.

Philip and Khem also help other children who suffer discrimination, like deaf and hearing impaired youngsters, who are generally considered 'lato' or stupid, or their disability seen as a punishment for misdeeds committed in a previous life. Substantial support has been given to the

Bhairahawa deaf school and its one hundred students. New classrooms have been built, twenty-seven scholarships funded for those from the poorest families, and a deaf teacher has been employed to act as an inspirational role model. This support is now being extended to other major deaf schools. Street children, Ghandarva gypsies and children with physical disabilities and learning difficulties also enjoy substantial assistance in a region otherwise largely overlooked by major aid agencies.

Many children's lives are being changed by the Trust, and gaining INGO status later this year will mean that even more children can be helped. Philip's enthusiasm for his work is unabated. "I can't wait to spend more time in Nepal and get going" he smiles. "We have some very exciting plans ready to put into action, and with enough support, there is so much we will be able to achieve for Nepal's lost and forgotten children".

Any member who wishes to help this trust can contact them as shown below. The Esther Benjamins Trust, The Business Village, 3-9 Broomhill Road, London SW18 4JQ. Telephone 020 8877 2519. Website: www.ebtrust.org.uk Email: ebtrust@hotmail.com

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THE NEPALESE NETTLE PROJECT

By Susi Dunsmore

(Susi Dunsmore, a member of the Society, has, with her husband, the late John Dunsmore, been involved with the nettle project in Nepal for many years. She has addressed the Society on this topic and is the author of a number of works on the development and use of nettles in Nepal. Following the death of John Dunsmore in November 2000 (see obituary in the 2001 journal), Susi Dunsmore carried on their work. This article is an edited version of a piece that appeared in the December 2002 edition of the 'Journal for Spinners and Weavers'.)

I am grateful for the opportunity to write about the progress of the Nettle project and to express my gratitude to the many weavers who have helped over the past years, particularly since the death of my husband through cancer in November 2000. John had been invited to go to Nepal by the Hill Agricultural Research Project (HARP) during November/December 2000 to help conduct a workshop on the 'Potential opportunity for income generation through Himalayan Nettles' and to sum up what had been achieved so far and to recommend steps for the way ahead. Sadly John was not able to go to Nepal but he did manage to finish writing the draft paper for the conduct of the workshop in October 2000. Most of this article is based on that report and subsequent work.

As in previous papers John tried to convince policy makers that the use of 'traditional skills and materials can contribute towards economic development and environmental conservation' (Dunsmore 1988). He was convinced that nettle projects could enable some of the poorest households in Nepal, where food

production is limited due to the nature of soils and terrain, to obtain much needed supplementary income, and that the nettle plant, if well managed or even cultivated, could help to stabilize the soil in the fragile mountain areas, besides providing some food, medicine and fodder. The weavers had asked for help for improved fibre extraction methods for spinning, weaving and finishing equipment; and, most of all, for nettle product development and marketing.

Fibre extraction trials by chemical and by mechanical means and recently also by the use of enzymes (trials at the *Institut fur Angewandte Botanik*, University of Hamburg) are continuing, but so far the nettle producers still practice the traditional methods.

Weaving and finishing equipment is now available to many weavers in the Sankhuwasabha area at the weaving centre at Sisuwa which was completed in 1988 and is fully functioning as an outlet/supply workshop and training centre. The centre is managed by the officially registered Allo (nettle) Cloth Producers Club, involving weavers from all the surrounding villages.

The traditional nettle products such as sacks, bags, mats, carrying straps, fishing nets and to a lesser extent clothing (jackets), are still made for home use and local trade. Sacks are especially in demand as they are much harder-wearing than the more common jute sacks. All the traditional items are functional as well as beautiful and one can hope that the manufacture of at least some of the items will continue even if there is only a limited local or outside niche market. Adaptation of the traditional warp-faced cloth for furnishing material, mats and

bags has found some market but one has to bear in mind the considerable weight of these items and the amount of raw material used. The Nepalese Tweed cloth (nettle warp, local wool weft) developed in the eighties continues to find a market, mainly in Kathmandu for men's winter jackets; but for export it could not compete price-wise with British Harris Tweed, which is similar in appearance.

Recently, local hand-spun silk, from broken, boiled and carded cocoons, has been made available to nettle weavers and a combination of nettle warp and silk weft with the traditional herringbone (*Taro kes*) or diamond (*Gimte*) pattern looks perfect for high quality furnishing or clothing. Most of these trials were initiated by Ang Diku Sherpa, a member of the London Guild of Weavers, who in spite of the current difficult political situation, continues to travel to the remote villages of Nepal helping the weavers with design suggestions and marketing. Some of the most successful items she encourages are the beautiful lacy knitted nettle scarves and shawls. They are especially popular amongst tourists. In England they are available at Livingstone Studio, Hampstead. One advantage of a finely-knitted nettle shawl (50x170 cms approx.) is that it weighs only 60gms, in comparison to a woven sack (55x115 cms) which weighs over 600gms. Thus a knitted shawl could be made from the fibre of approximately 20 nettle stems whilst a woven sack would require about 200 stems. Being of such light weight means also that items can be transported on a porter's back and posted at minimum cost. From the weaving centre it takes at least one full day, two for me, to walk to the airstrip at Tumlingtar. The nearest road-head with bus connection is three days walk away. Another advantage is that the weaver can harvest her own

nettles, extract the fibre, spin the yarn and knit when and wherever she likes, and invent and combine patterns all to her own choice. All she needs are knitting needles and these can even be carved from the local bamboo. When she sells the nettle shawl she gains the full return for the process from the harvest to the completed item.



Rai nettle fibre spinner from Sankhuwasabha

Looking at the fine quality of the single hand-spun nettle yarn, it is not surprising that there have been requests from buyers for this. Members of the project were reluctant at first to encourage the sale of yarn, as obviously a higher return could be obtained by selling finished items. However Ang Diku Sherpa found that there are some, usually elderly, women who prefer just to spin and sell their yarn. Therefore, after much calculation of harvesting, extracting and spinning time, and transport cost, small amounts of yarn are now exported, giving the spinners a good return, thanks to the understanding encouragement of Nancy Lee Child of Handweavers Studio in London.

Inevitably the question arises, will there

be enough raw material available if the demand for nettle products increases? There has been no shortage so far as the nettle seeds freely and also produces root suckers from the harvested plant. If shortages occur, nettles could be grown along forest edges, or, where single species forest plantations afford inadequate cover for the soil, *allo* (nettle) could be established for this purpose as well as it in its own right. Becoming more aware of the nettle plants as a source of income, some weavers started growing them near their houses on land unsuitable for arable crops, thus contributing towards soil conservation at the same time. As more spinners, weavers and knitters want to get involved in the nettle production, 14 sub clubs have now been formed, and there is a growing demand for a greater variety of products. This was expressed in a letter I received in 2001 from the 'Allo Cloth Producers Club'. The weavers in Sankhuwasabha have very little outside contact. It is difficult for them to experiment or design or assess which product might be marketable in other parts of Nepal or the wider world. One must bear in mind also that the traditional nettle cloth is still looked down upon as poor man's clothing in Nepal and only recently with new designs or in combination with other fibres is this perception beginning to change. But what kind of nettle products might be the most suitable to suggest to the Nepalese weavers? Because of the long established link between the Nepalese and the London weavers, I turned, via Ang Diku Sherpa, to the London Guild for help, inviting members to take part in a competition to weave, knit, crochet, braid or use any other technique to make a sample item which could vary from a small gift or something to wear, to furnishing and curtain material. The aim was to develop a

range of high quality products which would have a continuing appeal to the upper end of the market, less dependent upon fashion trends, but which would nevertheless use nettle fibres or yarns to their best advantage. The fifteen weavers who took part in the competition did just that with their 150 grams of Nepalese nettle yarn. There were beautiful cloth samples in plain-weave, twills and leno, some made up into bags, cushion covers and belts. I was glad I was not one of the six judges who had to decide on the best entries. The judges, all with different backgrounds, examined every aspect of the entries and their possibilities, but had to consider especially the marketing potentials if the project was going to help the weavers. Inge Cordsen and Kate Crossfield, who have given much valuable advice to the project over the years, kindly hosted the event at their Livingstone Studio and acted as judges together with Ron Stewart former buyer at Liberty-Oriental carpet department; Dr Mahesh Pant, Development Projects, Nepal; Liz van Rensburg, weaver, former VSO who helped to establish the weaving centre at Sankhuwasabha; and Phillipa Watkins, lecturer at the Royal College of Art and a weaver. Eventually and after long consideration five winners were chosen: Melanie Venes for her curtain and table linen designs; Angus Williams for his rug and cloth designs; Eve Alexander for her plain-weave bag with open work detail; Jennifer Midgely for her cushion cover with Nepalese silk inlay, and Tim Parry-Williams (not yet a Guild member) for his fashion cloth designs. Not only these but also some of the other excellent entries, for instance Claude Delmas' brocade pattern cloth, Ann Hecht's spaced warp and Anne Willit's felted wool and nettle samples, were then woven in full size to be market tested. The response and also



Knitting an allo (nettle) shawl whilst returning from collecting fodder.

the reaction of the weavers towards the new products was encouraging; we could just see Kathmandu hotels at long last becoming interested in curtain and furnishing material made of allo. So the potential for further allo development was evident, but, as John put it, if help was given “every aspect should be discussed with the weavers and knitters from the very beginning”, especially the points listed below:

- ensure the availability of raw materials.
- build on existing skills.
- when supplying labour-saving devices or devices to improve the quality of products, minimise the capital outlay required; as far as possible any new equipment should be capable of being built and maintained locally.
- ensure that there is a relatively quick return.
- any effect on the environment should be beneficial.
- minimise any adverse effects on family life.
- maximise the return to the producers by ensuring that the distinctive qualities of the allo fibre are brought out to produce unique items quite distinct from other

fibre products.

- ensure that the maximum benefit from the work goes to the households in the allo areas” (page 6, draft Report 2000).

In a survey carried out by Mountain Spirit (NGO) in 2002, interviewing representatives of weavers’ groups and Village Development Committees from Sisuwa, Bala, Mangtewa and Tamku, all aspects of allo production development were high on the list of priorities. The survey also revealed that supplementary income was essential as many of the small farms can produce only enough food crops to feed the family for 6-7 months of the year. We thought maybe the best way to fulfil the request of the weavers and discuss future development would be by holding a practically-orientated allo workshop using the funds John had left.



Checking out a new loom.

Eleven UK weavers, spinners, dyers, felt makers and helpers volunteered to teach (and to learn!) – and sixteen Nepalese weavers from Sankhuwasabha were invited to take part and share their ideas and skills with us. The workshop took place from the 6 -16th February 2004 at the very hospitable Ambassador Hotel in Kathmandu. Earlier plans to hold it in Sankhuwasabha had to be changed because of the political situation.



Learning about the new spinning wheels.

However, holding the workshop in Kathmandu had the advantages of giving the Nepalese weavers the opportunity to see and explore their capital, visit the shops where their products are sold, see how the products are used and witness the interest and admiration of their work at the final exhibition. At the same time, we were able to meet and exchange ideas with representatives of allo projects taking place in other areas of Nepal. The Nepalese weavers' enthusiasm and eagerness to discover all the possibilities of the four looms and two spinning wheels we had brought is difficult to describe. Adding to the interest of the workshop, six invited speakers provided information on allo growing, processing and marketing and the importance of working together: Mr KP Shrestha (socio-economist from the A.R.S Pakhribas); Mr SP Acharya (former co-ordinator of KHARDEP); Professor SC Singh (RECAST, Tribhuvan University); Usha Nepal (former CDO and Head of Women's Training Centre Dhankuta); Reeta Simha (Managing Director of Aama Impex); and Shakun Sherchand (International Wheels Boutique). The workshop was a most rewarding experience for all of us; only time will tell what impact it has had. Because of the remoteness of the areas, marketing may remain a problem, and so will migration to the towns as well as the

danger of outsiders exploiting this special resource of allo. But at least the workshop will have drawn attention to the wealth of skills of the Sankhuwasabha weavers and knitters and the unique quality of allo fibres. It also established a strong link and friendships between the Nepalese and UK weavers and knitters; a link we all want to strengthen further. Future plans may include follow-up workshops (with emphasis on marketing) or invitations for weavers to visit the UK.

Another valuable link with Nepal was made in 2002 when the John Dunsmore Scholarship was established at the Royal College of Art, sponsoring each year- if a suitable candidate applies- one (or two) student/graduates to visit Nepal for a few weeks working with, and exchanging ideas with, Nepalese textile producers. Two of these young RCA Textile Design graduates, Louise Rolt (knitter) and Catherine Sevilla (weaver), who returned recently from Phidim, East Nepal, created together with the Nepalese weavers some exciting Dhaka/Embroidery designs which are going to be used by Himalayan Leather Handicrafts – a Nepal Leprosy Trust project – for their new range of bags this year. These innovations based on traditional designs could open up a whole new market for Dhaka weavers and embroiderers as well as allo spinners, knitters and weavers. Although allo occurs in some nearby countries like Bhutan, nowhere, except in Nepal, have the allo fibres been used to their full advantage as they are now in the finely woven Sankhuwasabha allo cloth or the delicate knitted shawls. One day Nepalese allo textiles may well become as famous as, for instance, Irish linen or Thai silk. The creativity and the knowledge of the Nepalese weavers and knitters will ensure that traditional textiles will not only survive, but will become richer with every

generation.

(Author's Note: I am very grateful to Sir Christopher Freyling, Rector Royal College of Art, and Mary Restieaux, Inge Cordson and staff of the College for having established the link with Nepal through the John Dunsmore Scholarship scheme, and I greatly appreciate the help we received from the members of the Britain Nepal Society and especially the Patron Princess Jotshana Rajya Laxmi Devi Basnyat for her interest in all textiles, Pat Mellor and the editor of the journal, Lt Col Birch for compiling this article. The late Madame Teeka Rajya Laxmi Simha will always be remembered for encouraging the development of Nepalese Textiles. My deep gratitude to our generous Nepalese hosts, to Mountain Spirit (NGO) and to all the teachers and

participants who made this workshop so successful and enjoyable.)

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FAITH OF THEIR FATHERS

By John Burlison

(I am grateful to Major John Burlison for permission to reproduce this article from 'The Sirmoor', the journal of the Sirmoor Club, the regimental association of the 2nd Gurkha Rifles, of which he is editor. Major Burlison is a member of the Society.)

In this the 60th year since the Allies launched the invasion to liberate Nazi Europe, many of the historic and county regiments of that army and of other areas of operations, are themselves now deceased and exist only in the occasional mention of a reunion. I attended one such reunion earlier in the year, but in Nepal, and that of the regiment of Gurkhas in which I served for four decades. It is one thing for a hundred or so old officers and soldiers in England to gather in a hotel or club in this country, but it is quite another thing to have two thousand Gurkha ex-servicemen and families assembling in the Himalayas to meet up with 131 of us officers and supporters who had flown from UK to central Nepal for this Reunion – probably the last of its kind.

This regiment of Gurkhas, the 2nd Gurkha Rifles, we call ourselves 'The Sirmoor Rifles' from the area in which the regiment was first deployed in 1815, went the way of so many other fine bodies of men and was disbanded ten years ago when amalgamated into the remaining British Army Gurkha infantry regiment: 'The Royal Gurkha Rifles'. Whereas there were some 19,000 Gurkhas serving The Queen when I joined in 1961, now there are about 3,500 spread between Infantry, Engineers, Signals and Logistics.

Many people have their own stories of Gurkhas. Some of these depict colourful heroics, while others declaim only simple fatalism and blind obedience. Most describe

rustic toughness. All comment on humour, charm, a winning smile, and a traditional military professionalism, inherited from their ancestors. Life with Gurkhas is to belong to a family, in which they enlisted with the faith of their fathers, and so did we. There are several British officers who are third or more generation in the Regiment.

Gurkhas have qualified to fly helicopters, served with the SAS, qualified as high grade engineers, operated sensitive radio links, and until recently have supplied complete Companies of soldiers to British Army regiments to make up manpower shortages. Gurkhas and their unique system are not without their faults and deficiencies, especially in the modern era of ever-ready litigation experts and clamouring Human Rights advisers. Gurkhas are, however, particularly useful to Britain as peacekeeping troops in countries where a well-trained and imposing Gurkha can be seen as a more acceptable ambassador for peace than perhaps his equivalent from urban England.

Gurkhas are not mercenaries as their enlistment to British service is by a special inter-government agreement and not as individual 'dogs of war'. Nor are Gurkhas a remnant of colonialism. Nepal was never part of the Empire and is not a member of the Commonwealth, but, as we witnessed, many old Gurkhas reserve pride and honour for the British Crown.

Our assemblage of Gurkhas comprised some 1400 men, and half that number again of wives and families in their finest attire. Some had travelled for two or three days, by foot or by bus, to be present. Nepal is not a happy nation at the moment as there is a serious insurgency situation raging, which makes travel an uneasy exercise.

There are local strikes, or '*bhands*', which close roads in a whole area; checkpoints or road blocks are set up where '*dues*' may have to be paid over or travel even denied. But some impulse of loyalty drove our people to overcome these difficulties and to attend.

One of the holders of the MC, in this case won at Cassino in 1943, said that it normally takes him one day walking and one day by bus to reach Pokhara, where the Durbar was being held, but this time there were no buses so he had to walk for three days, aged 93.

Another party arrived late for the parade because insurgents had halted their bus. They backed off, waited until night then proceeded unnoticed, to arrive for the festivities of the Reunion, if not for the formalities.

On parade were nearly one thousand Officers and Men, reviewed by the Regiment's own Field Marshal, Sir John Chapple. In the ranks was a former Secretary of State for Defence, Sir John Nott, and the Gurkha holder of the Victoria Cross medal won at Tamandu (Burma) in 1944, LCpl Bhanbagta. There was a British officer who had won a Military Cross in the same battle, and then a second MC later in Malaya. There were present some twenty holders of the MC and other significant gallantry decorations.

We had officers, a couple from National Service days, and men on parade who had served for ten years keeping communism out of Malaya, and those who had resisted Indonesia's Confrontation with Malaysia. There were many who for some 20 years had fulfilled the depressing duties preserving Hong Kong's border, containing the flow of illegal immigrants until the hand back of the Colony, and present too were the younger generations with their medals from Bosnia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone and the Gulf.

This '*Pride of Gurkhas*', representing approximately 15,000 years military service to the Crown, had come in the spirit of those who had preceded them in the Regiment in the Great War and the century of small wars before and after that. They turned up keen to be present at a gathering of old comrades and to meet up with companions-in-arms now living elsewhere in Nepal and with their officers from Britain whose names they recall and recount to their youngsters. (But could we still remember their names?)

The golden smiling faces, faded a little perhaps with years, but still each with its own quiet sparkle of separate identity, displayed the appreciation and friendship built up over years of sharing hardships and dangers, despite differing backgrounds and cultures. Such had been the faith of their fathers too.

The oldest present was either 94 or 95 or even 96, he did not know and nor did anyone else. The ambulance in attendance was never needed, although the celebrations afterwards caused many to stumble just a little. The stories that came out from the years of military service together around the world grew with the age of the teller and the courtesy of the listeners and the tipples imbibed.

The day after the formal parade, lunch party and old boys' football match, we had a barbeque picnic for over two thousand officers, soldiers, wives and families, which filled the whole of the local golf driving range. The entire two-day event had been the inspiration of our Gurkha Officers in Nepal, with support and monitoring from The Sirmoor Club in UK, and had been nearly three years in the making.

This was the Sirmoor Rifles family together for possibly the last time at this scale and we were not just fading away.



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A RAI WEDDING

By Mark Temple

When I was a young man in Nepal in the nineteen seventies I read with zest the books of the social anthropologists. Their descriptions of the mosaic of tribe and caste and their customs were essential reading for me. As an agriculturalist engaged in the messy business of changing things, I admired their observation and especially their detachment. So I learnt who would eat what sort of meat, if any, who would mix with who and something of the customs. How pleased I was when a few years ago, I had the opportunity to attend a Rai wedding.

My books on Nepal are many, but I had little information about the customs of the Rais. *Nepal and the Gurkhas*, published by Ministry of Defence in 1965 contained the following:

“The Rai marriage customs do not differ greatly from those of other eastern tribes. Risley notes: “The Khambas marry their daughters as adults and tolerate sexual licence before marriage on the understanding, rarely set in defiance, that a man shall honourably marry a girl who is pregnant by him. Men usually marry between the ages of 15 and 20, and girls between 12 and 15, but marriage is often deferred in the case of the former to 25, and of the latter to 20. The preliminary negotiations are entered upon by the bridegroom’s family, who send an emissary with two bamboo vessels of *murwa* beer and a piece of pork to the bride’s house to ask for her hand. If her parents agree, the bridegroom follows on an auspicious day, about a fortnight

later, and pays the standard bride price of NCR 80. (The payment of bride price seems to have discontinued nowadays, but the boy’s parents usually provide the girl with gold ornaments.) The wedding takes place at night. Its essential and binding portion is the payment of one rupee by the bridegroom as earnest money to the bride’s father, the smearing of vermilion on the bride’s forehead and putting a scarf round her neck.”



The night-time tikka ceremony outside the bride’s house is underway with the bride (second from left) wearing on her head a gold flower ornament and the groom a white head-cloth. A boy provides illumination with a pressure lamp. (In the hills of Bhojpur District circa 1975.)

Once in Dharan, an ex-serviceman, Captain Harkabahadur Rai, showed me photos of his niece’s wedding in Bhojpur district in the hills in the 1970s. The *tikka* ceremony went on all night outside the bride’s house. The bride wore a

golden flower ornament on her head and the groom was presented with a series of white head cloths. The following day the couple set off for the groom's house, the groom being carried on a back, and the bride in a hammock slung from a pole. In Dharan, the family of the bride of the 1997 wedding lived in a delightful bungalow in a quiet tarmaced street. The street is inhabited almost entirely by British ex-servicemen. This family home was built by their father on retiring from the army in 1968 when he moved the family down from the eastern hills to the advantages of civilisation. The garden is particularly attractive with lawns, shrubs and trees.



The following morning the couple set off to the groom's house, the bride still wearing the golden flower and carried in a hammock slung from a pole.

The wedding invitations were distributed only four or five days ahead of the ceremony, but no doubt all the guests had, like me, received their verbal invitations long before. "Just a small ceremony for neighbours and family" I was told. The printed wedding invitations, on yellow card, had a picture of Yalambar the famous king of the

Kirantis, the eastern tribal people of history who included the Rais and Limbus. This Rai family is one with generations of service in the Indian Army and more recently the British Army. Hence the family's youngsters do not speak the Rai language although the older and more distant members who still live in the hills continue to use it. Who can say how much the ceremony that I witnessed was affected by influences of India, Malaya and Hong Kong?



1997 Rai (Chamling) wedding in Dharan. The couple in the bungalow during the tikka ceremony. The groom wears a lemon grass garland and the bride a red sari.

Preparations for the wedding began early in the morning with the killing of a pig reared by the family. The bridegroom, a squeamish fellow, declined to watch the slaughter. Then the contract caterers arrived. They set up their very large cooking pots over log fires on three impromptu fireplaces in a corner of the garden to cook rice, spicy pork and chicken. There was a relaxed atmosphere as the morning of preparations took place. The speakers of a CD player perched in an upper window gave a musical accompaniment of popular Nepali pop songs and such old favourites as the Nepal Police brass band playing

folk tunes. Kids played around, as they always do in Nepal, but a colourful screen was erected to make the garden more private. The street has a residents' association which can provide equipment for events like weddings. The folding tables and chairs had an army surplus appearance and must have been liberated from active service by the street's residents and relations. The bride's two eldest brothers, both retired Captains were quietly in charge of the preparations and later the ceremonies and festivities.

The wedding ceremony was in two main parts - the application of *tikka* to the bride and groom (Risley's vermilion) and later the *dhogbhet*. A *dhogbhet* is translated in Turner's dictionary as a 'formal introduction with presents'. In between, a meal was served to everyone. Both parts of the ceremony took place in the bungalow's neat lounge, but the meal was served in the garden.

The formalities began at about two o'clock in the afternoon. The bridegroom, being far from home, was supplied with a best man drafted in for him by the bride's family. The groom wore the traditional Nepali trousers and tunic, a cummerbund, jacket and colourful *topi*. The bride wore a dark red sari and a gold necklace. Her bridesmaid, a younger cousin, wore a blue sari. Perhaps in deference to the groom's advancing years the foursome sat on a long sofa.

The *tikka* ceremony began as dish of red powder with rice was brought forward – the raw material for the *tikka*. Two bottles of beer were produced, and then some more. The groom's representatives were negotiating with the bride's family. After some bargaining, five rupees were added to the ritual bride price. The deal was struck for a nominal

fee of four beers and the equivalent of five pence sterling. The bride's mother and a senior lady of the family started the application of *tikka* by sticking the red mixture to the foreheads of the foursome, starting with the bride.

Then the bride's oldest brother and his wife carried out the *tikka* ceremony and presented the groom with an ornate kukhri and a lemon grass necklace so large it was almost a wreath. This couple were followed by the bride's three other brothers and their wives in descending order of the brothers' ages. Then the bride's sisters and their husbands followed in order of the sisters' ages. As each couple came forward, gifts were presented, sometimes presents in parcels, sometimes money notes discreetly placed in envelopes - and sometimes both. The best man and bridesmaid also received several envelopes. After the immediate family, uncles and aunts and more distant relations followed to complete the ceremony.

Once all the relations had completed their turns, the newly married couple went outside and were served the meal of rice and curried meat. The ladies of the bride's family were manning the food table from which the guests collected their food before sitting at the many tables set out on the lawn. The tables were arranged so that everyone sat to eat under a colourful awning. At another table drinks were served.

After all had eaten and drunk their fill the *dhogbhet* began. The bride and groom took their places on the sofa in the lounge once again.

An elderly gentleman with a woolly hat and an ill-fitting pair of glasses came to sit on the floor in the front near the bride to take charge of the ceremony. He was the most senior male member of the

bride's family. He asked the couple their names. Then two bottles of beer were produced and two old fashioned one rupee coins. The coins were balanced on the crown lids of the beer bottles. The bride and groom were instructed not to take other partners and of dire consequences if they did – which would involve the use of kukhris. Then the bride's mother began the *dhogbhet*. Each person who came forward, touched the rupee coins on the beer bottles and then *namaste*'ed with the bride and then the groom. Members of the family called out to the groom the correct term of address as he was introduced to his new relations – mother, brother, sister, uncle, aunt and so on. When all the adults had been formally introduced, the children, starting with the teenagers and ending with the

toddlers, came forward for their turn.

While all this was going on, the chatter and good-natured banter which had accompanied the whole day of proceedings reached a peak of animation – no doubt assisted by the alcohol. Much of the talk was of what should happen next in the ceremony and who should do it. Ceremonies of this sort are a learning experience - especially for the young.

Towards the end, night had fallen and the party slowed down. The bride sat chatting to her relations and worrying about the weight of the wedding presents and her meagre 20 kg airline luggage allowance to London. “Never mind my Dear”, I said, “We will just have to pick out a few of the ones we most want to take”. So much for detachment.

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FROM THE EDITOR'S IN-TRAY

Honours and Awards

Professor SP Subedi has been made an honorary OBE in recognition of his services to international law and his contribution to Anglo-Nepali relations. Members will remember that last year he addressed the Society on the 1923 Treaty of Friendship between Great Britain and Nepal. (*See below and 2003 edition of the Journal*).

Gurkha VC sold at auction

The VC awarded to Naik (Cpl) Agansing Rai 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles, as a result of his gallant action in storming a Japanese bunker at Bishenpur in 1944 during the Burma campaign, was sold by Spinks for £132,250 in July. This was the first Gurkha VC to be auctioned. Thirteen VCs have been awarded to Gurkhas. Agansing Rai died at the age of 81, in Dharan in 2000. *The Daily Telegraph* reported that a large proportion of the 'hammer price' was to go to children's charities in Nepal as requested by him and his family. Agansing was also awarded the Military Medal.

Following Partition in 1947 he stayed with 2/5th GR in the Indian Army. He was promoted to Subadar and was granted the honorary rank of Lieutenant on his retirement. (*See obituary in the 2000 edition of the journal. Ed.*)

Compensation for Gurkha Prisoners of War

The compensation scheme for PoWs of the Japanese, which had been originally announced by the Government in 2001, has been extended to Gurkha PoWs following action by veterans against the

MOD. The scheme provides £10,000 for each former prisoner of the Japanese. According to a report in *The Daily Telegraph* the widow of Lt Col O'Neal 2GR having read about the scheme remembered that her husband, then Capt O'Neal, himself a prisoner, had kept a list of Gurkha prisoners which had to be hidden from the Japanese but was later recovered by another officer and returned to him in Rangoon. Mrs Veronica O'Neal realized the significance of this list which was still in her possession. It has greatly assisted the team that has the duty to find and verify all claims for the compensation award.

The 1923 Treaty of Friendship

Following the lecture given by Dr Subedi to the Society on 14th January 2003, Mr Timothy George writes:

Sir,

I much enjoyed the article by Professor Subedi about the 1923 Treaty of Friendship between Great Britain and Nepal. By replacing the Treaty of Segauli, the 1923 Treaty did indeed put relations on a new footing, at least from a formal point of view.

But the antecedents of Segauli are interesting too. It may well be that King Prithvi Narayan Shah halted the advance of Captain Kinloch in 1767 – and so established a *de facto* boundary with India. But the war with China, which ended with the Treaty of 1792, was an own goal by Nepal. It happened as a consequence of Nepal's invasion of Tibet. However the war of 1815 aimed at stopping Nepalese expansionism to find

land on which to settle its retired soldiers rather than at annexing the Kingdom. It was a punitive rather than an expansionist war – though annexation might well have happened if the Nepalese had not given the invaders a bloody nose.

Segauli is often referred to as the Anglo-Nepal Treaty of 1816. This is wrong. The Treaty was concluded on the British side by the Honourable the East India Company, who at that time ruled India, not by any authority in London. By contrast the 1923 Treaty was between the British Government and the Government of Nepal, and was a full international agreement between sovereign states. It was subsequently registered at the League of Nations.

In practice however, the Treaty was a three-part deal. At least according to Fr. Stiller, Delhi continued to call most of the shots in India's dealings with London, continuing for instance to appoint the Envoy resident in Kathmandu. (*Ludwig F Stiller SJ – "Nepal – Growth of a Nation", Kathmandu 1993*). As with the Gurkhas, the untangling of the relations had to await Indian independence from Britain, so that the three parties could deal with each other as principals. But the significance of the 1923 Treaty in confirming Nepal's sovereignty is absolutely undeniable.

There is a tailpiece, which demonstrates the essentially triangular nature of Britain-Nepal relations even after 1923. When India became independent in 1947, the British Embassies in Nepal and Afghanistan were declared the property of the Indian Government, which had built them. So India eventually took over the Embassy in Kathmandu, while Pakistan inherited the Embassy in Kabul (though it only took over actual

possession in the early nineties). Until the British moved out, the Indian Embassy was housed in Sital Niwas, which became the Foreign Ministry. The British Embassy was then housed in a plot alongside the Indian compound (partly carved out of the Indian compound and partly obtained separately). The British also kept the beautiful little cemetery nearby, which is still in use for the occasional burial.

Timothy George
(HM Ambassador, 1990-95)

The Natural History Museum

The library at the Natural History Museum houses a great collection of artwork from South Asia. Part of this collection can be viewed on the Museum's website at www.nhm.ac.uk/art The drawings and paintings by local and European artists, date from the 18th to the early 20th centuries. Examples include water colours of Indian birds by Samuel Richard Tickell (c1809 – 1875) painted whilst serving in the Indian Army and the Bentinck Drawings of Himalayan birds, probably commissioned from local artists in the 1830s.

Vulture Rescue

The problem of the catastrophic crash of the vulture population in the sub-continent was touched upon in the last journal, and this is still giving cause for concern. Research seems to indicate that the cause results from cattle that are treated with an anti-inflammatory drug known as diclofenac which are then consumed by vultures. In turn this leads to renal failure and visceral gout in the vulture population. Diclofenac is a cheap veterinary drug widely used throughout

the area. Vultures are highly sensitive to small amounts of the drug and the residue in the flesh of cattle so treated are sufficient to cause death. In the last year an international meeting was held in Kathmandu as part of the work to address the problem and a workshop was held in India. An organization known as 'Vulture Rescue' has been established with the RSPB, the Zoological Society of London and the Bombay Natural History Society to look at the problem and progress possible solutions. It may be necessary to remove numbers of the three target species of vulture (the Indian white-backed *Gyps bengalensis*, the long-billed *G. Indicus*, and the slender-billed

tenuirostris), a possible captive breeding population, to sites abroad away from the contamination. This would be necessary while the construction of captive breeding centres in the sub-continent was undertaken. It is understood that the Nepalese government have offered land for such a site in the Chitwan buffer zone, probably for the slender-billed vulture. Bird Conservation Nepal, led by Dr Hem Sagar Bharal and the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC) will be involved. The UK chapter of KMTNC are considering providing some modest funding once Vulture Rescue's plans are firmed up.

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The Esther Benjamins Trust is a registered children's charity working for some of the most marginalised children in Nepal. It was set up in 1999 by Lt Col Philip Holmes in memory of his wife who took her life in January of that year because of childlessness.

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 BOOK REVIEWS

Round and About in Asia - The Royal Society for Asian Affairs Tours 1971 – 1995. *By Marinel FitzSimons with Susan Farrington. The Royal Society for Asian Affairs, London, 2004. Pp xvii + 112. B&W Illus. Index. Pb.*

Marinel FitzSimons, a member of the Britain – Nepal Society, was, for twenty seven years, the secretary of the Royal Society for Asian Affairs. In 1971 it was decided to mark this Society's 70th anniversary by arranging a tour for members. This initial tour to Turkey was so successful that the Society now normally tries to run a tour to a different part of Asia each year. During Marinel's tenure there were twenty three tours, for all of which she bore the main planning responsibility and was the 'bear leader'. Countries visited include: China, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Taiwan, Thailand, Iraq, Iran, Yemen, the Central Asian Republics and Bhutan. Each chapter is preceded by an appropriate black and white reproduction of a suitable photograph or drawing from the Society's archives. Each tour has a separate chapter which describes the highlights and the anecdotes as seen by Marinel. Notwithstanding the august, experienced and knowledgeable membership, tours did not always go to plan, a not altogether unexpected occurrence when travelling in remote parts of Asia. This often required Marinel and the members to draw upon their resourcefulness and stamina. The anecdotes that resulted from the various situations encountered make excellent reading. Those who have travelled in Asia will readily identify with the experiences described. The tour to Nepal took place in 1980, and after a short visit to Delhi and

Agra, including the Taj Mahal, the party arrived in Kathmandu and were based in the Yellow Pagoda hotel. The candles placed in the rooms were much needed for the inevitable power cuts. One member, Maj Gen Sir Maurice Dowse, was knocked over by a motorcycle on his initial walk to the bazaar! [Sadly, whilst on a later tour to Ladakh in 1986, he became ill in Leh. He was transferred to an Indian military hospital where he died. The Indian Army gave him a funeral with full military honours at the Karzoo cemetery in Leh.] The tour included the Kodari road, Pokhara, Lumbini and a memorable visit to Tiger Tops in the Royal Chitwan national Park. The tour to Bhutan in 1988 included a short trek. As luck would have it a retired Gurkha Officer was in the party so with his ability to speak Gurkhali he was able to organize the porters. However his attempt to make a formal presentation to the abbot of the nearby monastery fell on deaf ears! This book is an ideal bedside book that can be read by individual chapters and will greatly appeal to those who have had the pleasure of travelling in Asia. The book, at the very reasonable cost of £5, can be bought from the Royal Society of Asian Affairs, 2, Belgrave Square, London, SW1X 8PJ. (By post £7.50.)

GDB

Duel in the Snows – the true story of the Younghusband Mission to Lhasa. *By Charles Allen. John Murray, London, 2004. Pp xi + 350. Map. B&W photos and line drawings. Gloss. Bibliog. Index. Hb. £20. ISBN 0-7195-54276.*

The Younghusband Mission to Lhasa in 1903/04 was the last major event in 'The Great Game' played out between Great

Britain and Russia throughout the 19th century. The steady eastward expansion of the Russian empire into central Asia was viewed with suspicion by the British Indian government. The latter felt that such expansion could threaten their influence and trading links in the surrounding Himalayan states. The arrival of Lord Curzon as Viceroy in 1898, a strong advocate of the 'forward policy' on India's frontiers, was the key to future operations. Curzon was well travelled with a great knowledge of Asia. Reports that Russia was increasing her interest and possible influence in Tibet were filtering through to Curzon. This served to increase his view that action should be taken to pre-empt any Russian attempts at gaining a foothold in Tibet. The India Office at home, however, was less convinced that the threat was of such danger. However these reports chimed well with Curzon's views and these, along with minor border disputes and incursions, led to the eventual, if reluctant, authorization of the mission. The fact that Curzon had received no reply to letters sent by him to the Dalai Lama probably exacerbated the situation and increased his determination to proceed. He had the ideal man to lead such an enterprise in Colonel Younghusband who, like Curzon, was a man of action and also had travelled widely in central Asia. They knew each other and Curzon felt that he could trust Younghusband with such an enterprise. In the event the original intelligence reports from Lhasa and St Petersburg were thin and proved to be exaggerated, however, since they fitted in with the views already held, they were seen by those involved as a justification for the proposed action. This is not unknown today, and Allen draws the parallel with Iraq and 'WMD'. In the event Younghusband exceeded his

brief by imposing harsher conditions on the Tibetans than were authorized. Throughout the mission Younghusband, as its political head, had serious differences with the mission's escort commander, Brig-Gen MacDonald. A previous work by Peter Fleming, *Bayonets to Lhasa*, published in 1961 also examines the story of the mission and sought to justify Younghusband's action for which he was censured on return to England. Allen claims that this work relied heavily on Younghusband's private letters and material from surviving officers. Allen paints a somewhat different picture which results from much research into letters and diaries of those who took part as well as official reports. These include diaries written by Cpl Coath and Pte Sampson of the Royal Fusiliers, as well as those of more senior participants. These expose the problems and differences encountered at all levels of the mission and he sets it in context of later events. Whilst most modern writers who concern themselves with the Empire usually hold a fair degree of scepticism in respect of it, Allen has uncovered previously unpublished work that gives a fuller account of this expedition, throwing a different light on its aims and the attitudes of those both participating in it and authorizing it. Whilst the mission was a serious undertaking, militarily and logistically, whether the results justified it are quite another question, and Allen, by his research challenges some previous thinking on this issue. In the light of the current situation in Iraq, modern day journalists would have had a field day, particularly in respect of the large Tibetan loss of life. Even Lieutenant Hadow who had command of the Norfolk Regiment Maxim machine gun detachment wrote, following the battle at Chumik Shenko (p.119), 'As soon as my guns got to work

the slaughter was terrible, as the Tibetans fell in heaps where the Maxims struck them. I got so sick of the slaughter that I ceased fire.' There are several connections with Nepal in this story. Captain Jitbahadur was the Nepalese Consul in Lhasa and was instrumental in assisting Younghusband in his early negotiations on his arrival in Lhasa (p. 265). A battalion of the 8th Gurkha Rifles formed part of the mission escort and Lieutenant Grant was awarded the VC for his action in scaling the rock-face at Gyantse Jong. (pp.220, 310). Two other participants, Capt O'Connor who was Tibetan interpreter and assistant to Younghusband, and Lieutenant FM ('Eric') Bailey of the 32nd Sikh Pioneers, attached to the Mounted Infantry, subsequently held the appointment of Resident in Kathmandu.

This is an eminently readable book written in Allen's easy but informative style. He uses his references well and has listed an extensive bibliography and glossary. Since there are many players in this story he has thoughtfully provided an excellent 'order of battle', and a clear map, which will please Staff College trained officers! In summary Allen has provided a well researched and clearly written account of this last great imperial adventure which deserves a place on the shelves of anyone with a serious interest in the region and its history.

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The Origins of Himalayan Studies – Brian Houghton Hodgson in Nepal and Darjeeling 1820 – 1858. Edited by David Waterhouse. RoutledgeCurzon, Abingdon, Oxon, 2004. Pp xxiv + 280. *Illus. Colour and B & W plates. Bibliog. Index .Hb. £70. ISBN 0-415-31215-9.*

David Waterhouse, a member of the Society was the British Council Director in Kathmandu 1972 – 77. He is currently

a Vice-President of the Royal Asiatic Society.

It was during his posting to Kathmandu that his interest in Hodgson was first aroused. However, it was not until his retirement that he was able to pursue this interest and was persuaded to put pen to paper on the subject.

Hodgson arrived in Calcutta in 1818 after completing his education at Haileybury, founded as a college for future East India Company employees. He soon developed a 'liver condition' which meant thereafter he was more or less confined to 'hill area' postings. His first appointment was to Kumaon for a year followed by two years as Assistant Resident in Kathmandu. He returned to Calcutta in 1822 but illness intervened and he returned to Kathmandu, this time as Postmaster, until the Assistant post became vacant in 1825. He took over as acting Resident in 1829 and was finally appointed Resident in 1833 following the departure of Maddock in December in 1832. He remained in post until he was removed by Lord Ellenborough, the newly appointed Governor-General, in December 1843 over disagreements of policy in Nepal. Offered a junior post by Ellenborough, Hodgson decided to retire. Unable to return to Nepal in a private capacity, he retired to Darjeeling where he was able to continue his Himalayan studies. He finally left Darjeeling in 1858 and never returned to the region.

Hodgson had interested himself in a wide range of studies. Apart from his political role, his interests included Buddhism, zoology, ornithology, linguistics, ethnography and ethnology, and Buddhist architecture. It became clear that in order to do full justice to the wide span of subjects that Hodgson had studied, it would be necessary to obtain input from relevant experts in all such

disciplines. To this end Waterhouse has gathered together a team of writers that have succeeded in covering all these different aspects with great authority. The team includes John Whelpton, a historian who has worked in Nepal and has written several books on Nepalese history including *Jangbahadur in Europe* (1983); Carol Inskipp, an authority on Nepalese ornithology (who has lectured to the Society) who, with Ann Datta, has contributed chapters on zoology and ornithology; Professor David Arnold of SOAS, on Hodgson's time in Darjeeling; JP Losty of the British Library on the architecture and Harihar Raj Joshi has researched Hodgson's life on the domestic front in Kathmandu. From the latter I learnt that in our time in the embassy compound (early 1990s) we may well have employed a dhobi (a Muslim) who had descended from the family that serviced Hodgson's laundry requirements! There are detailed chapters on ethnography and linguistics by Dr Martin Gaenszle of Heidelberg University and Professor George van Driem of Leiden University respectively and Professor S Lopez of Michigan University deals comprehensively with Hodgson's published research papers on Buddhism. Waterhouse himself writes the biographical section and assesses Hodgson's legacy to Himalayan scholarship. Much of Hodgson's work was new to the academic world of his time. His remote posting was an obstacle to wider publication. Most of his papers were published through the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta. It was also possible for rivals to capitalise on Hodgson's research material that had been sent to India or back to England since he could not easily influence or supervise how this material (including skins of birds) was being (or not being)

used. There are still papers and other material that have not been fully examined. Waterhouse has provided a comprehensive list of material located in Europe and Asia, no mean undertaking in itself. The breadth of Hodgson's interest was extremely wide and even allowing for the fact that he had, by modern standards, time to amuse himself in what was then an extremely remote posting, his efforts can only be described as prodigious. That he was able carry out so much research whilst his movements were largely confined to the Kathmandu valley, apart from trips down through the Terai to the Indian border, makes his whole contribution all the more surprising. He trained teams of trappers and artists to help him obtain and draw specimens of birds and mammals from often very remote areas. The majority of drawings are of a high standard with much technical taxonomic detail. A great deal of his ornithological work took place in the area around the bungalow at Kakani (still in use by the British ambassador) on the northwest rim of the valley which Bhimsen Thapa had built for him. Sadly, Hodgson was not able to have this work published due to cost and the British establishment's reluctance to publish work which was not produced by British artists. Hodgson himself, after retirement to England, seems to have made rather half-hearted attempts at publication and is the main reason why he received less recognition and is less known than might have been the case, although he was elected a fellow of the Royal Society in 1877, and other learned societies also awarded him various medals and honours. His main contribution to all the various subjects in which he interested himself has been described as a collector, recorder and interpreter. He was early in the field and, perforce, had to operate in a narrow

area without the ability to see a wider picture.

The breadth of Hodgson's interests meant that it was necessary for Waterhouse to gather together a team of experts to assess Hodgson's work, and they have done full justice to their task. There is an excellent index and a very full bibliography. This book has been very well produced and is a serious academic work

from which much further research is possible. Nevertheless it is largely written in a way that can be assimilated and enjoyed by the general reader who has a more than passing interest in Nepal and its history. It is shame that the publishers have thought it necessary to price the book so highly which will limit the number of potential readers and purchasers.

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 OBITUARIES

**Maj Gen J A R Robertson CB CBE
DSO* DL**

Jim Robertson was a remarkable man – a fighting soldier for nearly all his 35 years in the Army; he saw active service in every rank except full Colonel from 2nd Lieutenant to Major General; he commanded two Gurkha battalions on jungle operations in two theatres of war, saw action in command of two different brigades in three separate theatres and both his appointments as a Major General in command involved active service, once again in two different theatres. His two Distinguished Service Orders (DSO) and four Mentions in Despatches (MID) recognise his inspirational leadership and courage.



Born in Nainital, Uttar Pradesh on 23 March 1910, the son of Colonel J C Robertson Indian Medical Service, he was

educated at Epsom College and Sandhurst. Commissioned in 1930 into the Indian Army, he spent a year serving with the Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (KOYLI) before joining the 1st battalion 6th Gurkha Rifles on active service at Razmak in Waziristan in 1931, *(the battalion he subsequently commanded in 1947 and from 1961 to 1969 was Colonel of the Regiment)*.

Regimental life for him during the 1930's was typical of the time and place; hard training and plenty of sport with the men, game shooting and fishing to relax; the life interspersed with periods of active service in the North West Frontier tribal conflicts. The Regimental home was in Abbottabad, a family station that Jim described as “delightful”, at an elevation of 4000ft it was cold and had some snow in winter, a good summer and a feeble monsoon. The garrison included a polo ground, a swimming pool, five tennis courts, attractive bungalows, a Church and a Club that held dances on a Saturday night.

At the outbreak of war in 1939 Jim was Adjutant of his battalion, stationed in the Malakand. Selected for Staff training he attended the Army Staff College at Quetta and was then posted as Brigade Major to the 1st Burma (Maymyo) Brigade in the Shan States. The 1942 Japanese assault into Burma reached Mandalay and resulted in the retreat of 17 Indian Division with Jim's Brigade acting as their rearguard. The Brigade's final battle included hand-to-hand fighting within the Brigade HQ and an “every man for himself” withdrawal across the Irrawady River. The battle had temporarily halted

the Japanese advance and the remnants of the Brigade reformed and continued the retreat into India; Brigade HQ settling in Shillong. Jim then joined 56th Gurkha Rifles, a training unit specialising in jungle warfare, a "finishing school" for 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles (Frontier Force) and 6th Gurkha Rifles recruits before they joined their battalions.

In February 1944 Jim returned to Burma to command the 1st battalion 7th Gurkha Rifles in the Chin Hills. During the next fourteen months of hard fighting Jim received a facial wound from grenade splinters during an action in which Rifleman Ganju Lama was awarded a Military Medal. Jim was evacuated to hospital in Calcutta. With a broken jaw he was initially unable to talk and used a slate and pencil to communicate and exchange jokes with his ward mates. Though still in hospital when Ganju won his Victoria Cross, he was subsequently present at the parade in Delhi to witness the historic event at which General "Bill" Slim pushed Ganju's wheelchair up to the Viceroy, Field Marshal Lord Wavell to receive his Victoria Cross. Jim returned to command the battalion, was awarded an immediate DSO, and later a bar, for his outstanding leadership in a bloody, prolonged and eventually successful battle to dislodge a fanatical enemy defending a large ammunition dump near Meiktila.

In May 1945 Jim took command of 48 Indian Infantry Brigade in time to receive the surrender of the Japanese Forces in south Burma. After two years as a Temporary Brigadier, Jim reverted to his substantive rank of Lieutenant Colonel and was appointed to the Directing Staff of the Army Staff College at Quetta and then to the command of 1st battalion 6th Gurkha Rifles.

Having taken his battalion to Malaya in 1948 at the outbreak of the Emergency, he was quickly plucked out of command to become Brigadier General Staff, Malaya Command. In 1950, in order to experience wider service in the British Army after a 17 year career in the Indian Army, he reverted to the rank of full Colonel at his own request and served in Staff appointments in The War Office in London and 1 (British) Corps in West Germany.

In 1955 Jim took command of 51st Independent Lorrain Infantry Brigade in Tel-el-Kebir in Egypt and moved it to Cyprus at the outbreak of the EOKA terrorist campaign. After two years of continuous operations, he and his Brigade HQ flew to Muscat to command a hastily assembled force that successfully put down a rebellion against the Sultan.

Promoted Major General in 1958 he returned to Malaya appointed General Officer Commanding (GOC) 17th Gurkha Division with the task of completing the defeat of the remaining Communist Terrorists (CTs). For 10 years Gurkha troops had played a key role in operations against the CTs and Jim's wartime experiences, knowledge of the Gurkha soldier and personal reputation made him an extremely popular GOC and ex-officio Major General Brigade of Gurkhas (MGBG). The Malayan Emergency officially ended on 31 July 1960.

In 1961 Jim was again appointed to an operational command as GOC Middle East Land Forces in Aden. In an early precursor to the first Gulf War, Iraq's leader, Abdul Karim Qassim indicated his intention to annex Kuwait, a country with which the UK had Treaty obligations. Jim arranged for 24th Infantry Brigade to be flown in from Kenya to join 42 Marine

Commando embarked on HMS Bulwark and with troops already under his command, created a show of superior force which successfully dissuaded Qassim from his intention without a shot being fired.

Retiring in 1964 to take up a five year tenure in the post of Personnel Director of NAAFI, he enjoyed travelling worldwide to all military bases and particularly those locations where he could spend some time with his beloved Gurkhas.

General Jim was Colonel 6th Queen Elizabeth's Own Gurkha Rifles from 1961 to 1969, was Chairman of the Gurkha Brigade Association from 1968 to 1980 and President from 1980 to 1987. He was a Deputy Lieutenant of Greater London from 1977 to 1979 and worked for the National Canine Defence League, (*now The Dogs Trust*) for many years.

Jim married first, in Kuala Lumpur Malaya in August 1950, Ann Toswill. In a cruel twist of fate she contracted polio within a few days of marriage and died a month later. He married secondly, in January 1972, Joan Wills who brought him the contentment of a loving family life but sadly too late for fatherhood. Indeed, Joan's daughter Gail was married the year after Joan and Jim. Joan's premature death in 2003 was another cruel blow that hit Jim very hard.

During his service Jim was renowned for his warm hospitality towards both adult guests and children; the latter exemplified by the parties he regularly arranged for young children and teenagers whilst GOC in Malaya, during which he energetically joined in the activities. He had a well developed sense of fun, on one occasion being dressed as a "Flapper" for a fancy dress party in Flagstaff House and then appearing immediately afterwards in

the Club as a "Teddy boy", accompanied by his similarly attired ADC.

He was appointed MBE in 1942; promoted OBE in 1949 and to CBE in 1956. He was appointed CB in 1958.

In retirement he lived in St John's Wood in London. A skilful water-colourist and sculptor, he also made beautifully crafted and furnished dolls' houses. He made excellent cine-films often with separately recorded sound tracks and was a keen gardener.

He was a stoic throughout his life. At the age of 85 he was severely injured in a freak accident whilst walking near his home. A wheel that had come off a lorry struck him and shattered a leg that subsequently had to be amputated. It is recorded that when a paramedic at the scene asked how he was, Jim's laconic response was, "well it does hurt a bit"! Despite his disability he continued to attend Brigade of Gurkhas and Regimental functions whenever possible.

As most distinguished senior officer in the Brigade of Gurkhas when the Britain-Nepal Society was in its infancy, he became a strong supporter of society events. Older members will remember him at lectures at the Alpine Club. He was very supportive of the committee in these early days and was always ready to help with advice and contacts in the Brigade. He was made a vice-president of the society.

Jim died on 11 February 2004. A very well attended thanksgiving service to celebrate his life was held in the Memorial Chapel at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst on 21 May 2004.

The expression "Officer and Gentleman" might have been devised with General Jim Robertson in mind. As a senior officer, he could plot the bloody

demise of the King's or Queen's enemies or deliver a blistering "rocket" if that was what the situation required. Yet he was unfailingly courteous to people of all ages, ranks and races. He was a truly distinguished soldier and outstanding human being.

(The Editor acknowledges with thanks the permission of Major General R A Pett CB MBE to use material from his eulogy in compiling this obituary)

Sir Michael Scott KCVO CMG

Michael Scott, who died on 9th June 2004 aged 81, had a lifetime interest in Nepal. This started in World War II when, following attendance at Durham University, he was granted an emergency commission in the Durham Light Infantry in 1941. He subsequently transferred to the Indian Army and the 1st Gurkha Rifles, with whom he served from 1943 to 1947. His brother, Peter, also served in the same Regiment. During his service he became an instructor at the Indian Military Academy and learnt Urdu, Hindi and Gurkhali. It was this experience that started his great interest in the Indian sub continent. Having joined the Foreign Office after the war he found himself back in the sub continent as First Secretary in Karachi (1958-59), Deputy High Commissioner, Peshawar (1959-62) and Counsellor and Director of the British Information Services in India (1963-65). Following a tour of duty in London he was appointed Deputy High Commissioner in Nicosia (1968-72) and then attended the Royal College of Defence Studies in 1973. He was then appointed ambassador to Nepal from 1974-77. His last two appointments were as High Commissioner in Malawi and latterly in Bangladesh. He then spent five

years as Secretary-General of the Royal Commonwealth Society.

This enabled him to continue his



Sir Michael & Lady Scott with HRH Prince Gyanendra and HE Mr Ashwari Raj Pande at 25th Anniversary celebration of the Society at the Banqueting Hall, Whitehall.

interest and work with many of the countries in which he had served. He continued his interest in Nepal and its wildlife conservation as a Director of the Tiger Mountain Group and as a committee member of the King Mahendra (UK) Trust for Nature Conservation. He was a strong supporter of the Society and served on the committee where his experience and wise counsel were sought. In recent years he acted as a 'research assistant' to the late AP ('Jimmy') Coleman, also an officer of the 1st Gurkha Rifles (*See obituary in the 2000 edition of the journal. Ed.*) when the latter was working on his book, *A Special Corps*, (*See review in the 1999 edition of the journal. Ed.*). Sir Michael too was a leading member of the 1st GR Regimental Association. During his service with the FCO he became aware of the need for aid to be provided at the 'grass roots' level. To that end he was involved with the Overseas Development Institute, the

International Agricultural Training Programme and the Drive for Youth Programme with the BBC news presenter Martyn Lewis. The latter innovative programme involved widening the horizons of under privileged children in UK by giving them chances to participate in projects abroad. His career in the FCO was a distinguished one; head of three missions and having three Royal visits whilst in Peshawar 1961 (state visit of HM The Queen), Kathmandu 1975 (HRH The Prince of Wales, TRH The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester and Lord Mountbatten – the delegation to the coronation of His Late Majesty King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev) and Malawi 1979 (the state visit of HM The Queen). Sadly he was not blessed with good health having been struck by poliomyelitis in his early twenties which

restricted his sporting activities. Again for his last few years he was dogged by poor health which he bore with patience and good humour with the strong support of his wife, Jennifer, whom he had met and married whilst serving in Cyprus. She at that time was with the US Embassy. His was a life of service to Queen and country. His old friend, Mr Desmond Watkins, whom he had known and helped in the early 1960s summed up his life: 'Michael was, in every sense, a giver. He gave the best of himself and he never stopped doing so....'

In everything he did he was positive and he had purpose and commitment. Michael was a true Christian in word and deed. He believed and acted like the Christian Knight that he was.'

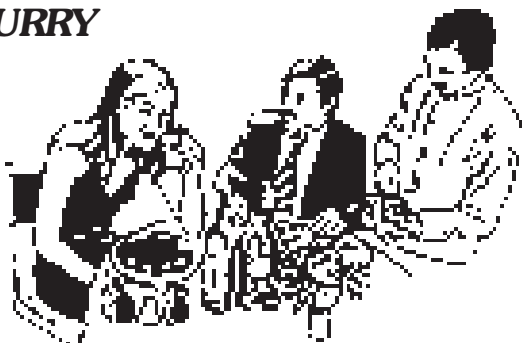


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Yeti Association
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Tel (0118) 959 4914

The Wilderness Trust
c/o ECCO Tours Ltd
4 Macclesfield Street
London W1V 7LB
Tel and Fax (020) 7494 1300

The Britain-Nepal Medical Trust
130 Vale Road
Tonbridge
Kent TN9 1SP
Tel (01732) 360284

The Gurkha Museum
Peninsula Barracks
Romsey Road
Winchester
Hampshire SO23 8TS
Tel (01962) 842832

Britain-Nepal Chamber of Commerce
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c/o 12a Kensington Palace Gardens
London W8 4QU

The Pahar Trust
c/o Tom Langridge
5 Foxsteep Cottage
Crazies Hill Wargrave
Berks RG10 8NB
Tel (01734) 404004

If your address has not been included here or has changed please accept our apologies and request inclusion in the next journal. Ed.

NOTES ON THE BRITAIN-NEPAL SOCIETY

Patron: HRH Princess Jotshana Rajya Laxmi Devi Basnyat

President: HRH The Duke of Gloucester KG GCVO

The Britain-Nepal Society was founded in 1960 to promote good relations between the peoples of the UK and Nepal. We especially wish to foster friendship between UK citizens with a particular interest in Nepal and Nepalese citizens resident – whether permanently or temporarily – in this country. A much valued feature of the Society is the ease and conviviality with which members of every background and all ages mingle together.

Members are drawn from all walks of life including mountaineers, travellers, teachers, returned volunteers, aid workers, doctors, business people, members of the Diplomatic Service and serving and retired officers of the Brigade of Gurkhas. The bond they all share is an abiding interest in and affection for Nepal and the Nepalese people. Membership is open to those of all ages over 18 and a particular welcome goes to applications from those under 35.

Ordinary members pay a subscription of £15 (husband and wife members £25) per annum. Life membership is a single payment of £300, joint life membership, a payment of £500, and corporate business members £50 and charities £25 per annum. Concessionary rates are available at both ends of the age range.

The annual journal includes a wide range of articles about Nepal and is sent free to all members.

We keep in close touch with the Nepal-Britain Society in Kathmandu, and their members are welcome to attend all the Britain-Nepal Society's functions. However we do not have reciprocal

membership.

Members of the Yeti Association which provides equally for Nepalese residents or those staying in this country are also welcome to attend the Britain-Nepal Society's functions, and can become full members of the Britain-Nepal Society in the usual way. The Yeti is a flourishing organization and they publish their own attractive journal.

Throughout the year, the Society holds a programme of evening lectures, which are currently held at the Society of Antiquaries, Burlington House, Piccadilly, where members are encouraged to meet each other over a drink beforehand.

The Society holds an Annual Nepali Supper, usually in February and a Summer Outing, which is often shared with the Yeti Association. In the autumn we hold our AGM, which is followed by a curry supper which normally takes place at the Royal Nepalese Embassy. The Society also holds receptions and hospitality for visiting senior Nepalese.

Apart from the Summer Outing, events normally take place in London.

The Committee is actively seeking suggestions from members for ways of expanding and developing the programme.

Those interested in joining the Society should write to the Honorary Membership Secretary:

Mrs Pat Mellor
3 (c) Gunnersbury Avenue
Ealing Common
London W5 3NH
Tel: 020 8992 0173

THE BRITAIN-NEPAL SOCIETY

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