

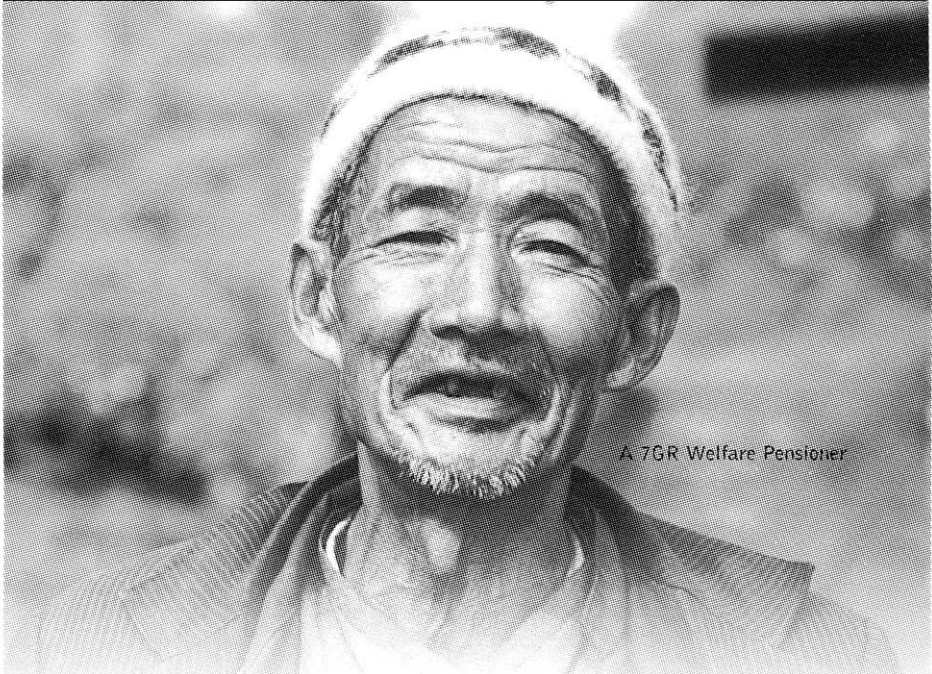
THE BRITAIN-NEPAL SOCIETY

Journal

Number 36

2012

A LEGACY OF LOYALTY



A 7GR Welfare Pensioner

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PLEASE WRITE TO: The Gurkha Welfare Trust, PO Box 2170,
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EDITORIAL

Firstly I must apologise for the late publication of the 2012 edition of the journal which has been the result of personal family circumstances. I had originally planned to make this a purely ‘Dolpo’ themed edition but once into the detail I realised that both the pieces, the report by Major Meerendonk of his trek there in 1963 and Lady Cowan’s more recent diary of the trek that she and General Sam Cowan did in the late summer of 2011 were quite long and deserved to be included in full. However I have to be aware of costs and balance. Anne Cowan’s trek diary will be the major article of the 2013 edition which I will try to bring out in the first quarter of 2014. I came across the Meerendonk report whilst going through a lot of old papers that I thought one day might be useful, and so it has turned out. I am grateful to Mark Temple for the piece on the Dharan – Kosi project railway. I remember it well from my time there in the early 1960s. The

Royal Engineers used to clear a track through that area so that we could drive our Landrovers from the cantonment to the Kosi for fishing and shooting trips in the winter season. I am grateful to John Cross and the editor of *The Kukri* for permission to use a piece written for that journal in 1975. At the Britain Nepal Academic Council conference in Cambridge I had the good fortune to meet Dr Mark Turin who has set up the Digital Himalaya Project. Back numbers of the journal are now available through that medium as a result of his interest and cooperation. Richard Cawthorne has provided a summary of the VCs awarded to the Indian Army Gurkhas 1911-1947 and Colonel William Shuttlewood, Director of the GWT, gives an update of Gurkha settlement in UK. Anna Townsend describes the charity she set up as a result of her time in Kathmandu when her husband was serving in HQ British Gurkhas Nepal. As always I am grateful to all the contributors.



Sandak village, Dolpo (Sir Sam Cowan, 2011). This view is unlikely to have changed much since Major Meerendonk’s visit in 1963.

THE SOCIETY'S NEWS

By Gerry Birch

Once again members will note that the traditional secretary's report has been once again written by the chairman. Sadly, due to changes in family circumstances, Mr. Kul Kadel was in the event unable to continue as the Society's secretary. So once again we have had a year without a designated secretary. I am particularly grateful to Mrs Jenifer Evans and Mrs Frances Spackman who have between them taken on this task.

Notwithstanding this set back, we have held the usual programme of events that were generally well supported. The ever popular supper was held at Pont Street with around one hundred and twenty participants. We were honoured to have as our guests Lt Col Strickland DSO MBE and Sgt Dipprasad Pun CGC who gave us an enlightening talk on their experiences in Afghanistan. This venue has the big advantage that we can bring in our own caterers, not an option permissible in most other possible locations. We have already booked Pont Street for 14th February 2013 for next year's supper. The three talks followed by supper at the Medical Society covered



The piper from Queen's Gurkha Engineers at the supper

a wide range of subjects. On 15th May Robin Garton spoke to us about the melting of the Himalayan glaciers and problems that result from this. We had two talks in the autumn. One by Alison Marston on the effect that the internal Maoist uprising has had on education which provoked a good deal of discussion and the second by Major Paul Whittle on the Darjeeling Railway which followed the article in the last edition of the journal. This year after strong lobbying by certain committee members we re-instituted the summer outing. River trips in the past have proved popular and since Her Majesty The Queen was due to have a ceremonial boat ride down the Thames as part of the Jubilee celebrations, it was decided that the Society should do likewise. Around sixty members gathered at Westminster Steps to board the vessel that had been chartered to take us downstream to Greenwich. The picnic was loaded in time so the panic of a previous river trip was avoided. The weather was very breezy but just warm enough for most to



The Chairman, HE Dr Chalise, Dr Dhital, Lt Col Strickland and Col Ghimre at the supper



Members enjoying a draughty trip on the Thames

venture on deck to view the sights which were explained by a member of the crew on the tannoy. On arrival we had about an hour to look around this historic site. At the same time the sun broke through which greatly added to the occasion. There is much to see and I took the opportunity to re-visit the Painted Hall in the Old Royal Naval College which I had not seen since a Staff College dinner in 1973. There is now a good information centre from where you can plan your visit to the Royal Observatory, National Maritime Museum and the Cutty Sark. There is also a good restaurant. Success of these events does depend on commitment by members as often the booking of transport etc, the vessel in this instance, requires funds up front. In the event we just about covered everything.

The Society has again donated funds to the Gurkha Welfare Trust and to a project run by Lt Col JP Cross for those with spinal injuries.

The 2011 edition of the journal continued the use of colour photos. The editor had hoped to catch up and get the 2012 journal out in very early 2013 but

family circumstances will mean it will be once again delayed. Use of colour will be continued.

For 2013 we have so far planned two lectures. The first is scheduled for Tuesday 14th May when Dr Rosie Llewellyn-Jones from BACSA and is entitled 'Tales from the Past'. The second talk to be given by Mrs Celia Brown will be on Thursday 3rd October; title still to be decided. A third talk has been

penciled in for 7th November with a speaker tbc.

There have been some changes in the committee organization that have occurred since the last AGM. Mrs Ambika Shrestha, minister counsellor at the embassy after a short spell of duty here was promoted and as a result returned to Kathmandu to an appointment in the Foreign Ministry. Whilst we were pleased for her we were sad to lose someone who had been such a strong supporter of the Society. In her place I am glad welcome Mr Tej Bahadur Chhetri. Simon Lord who represented the Brigade of Gurkhas finally handed over his post to Major Wylie Carrick. The FCO representative, the Nepal Desk officer, has been something of a revolving post. Currently Ms Jacky Devis from Belgium is filling the post part time (*the post has now been filled by Ms Sarah Wrathall. Ed*). As I have already referred to we are once again without a designated secretary and I am grateful to the committee who have taken on extra work as a result. After nine years in the post Dr Peter Trott wishes to hand over

his post as honorary treasurer at the next AGM. We are therefore once again looking to the membership for support and help in these regards. The search for a secretary also goes on. Someone of the younger generation would be a distinct advantage to help with the website. Finally I can report, with considerable relief that Mr. Roger Potter has agreed to take over from me as chairman. He is no stranger to the Society and is a previous vice chairman so needs no introduction. With his connection to the younger generation through his work with 'World Wide Volunteering' he may be able to take the Society in that direction.

On the financial front you will have seen from the accounts, and heard (at the AGM) from the hon treasurer, that we have been spending rather more than we have been receiving. This is partly due to increased journal costs and to delays in the publication of the Jubilee edition of 2010; two editions of the journal were paid for in one financial year. After a period of twelve years since 2000, when we last raised subscriptions, the Society's

costs have continued to rise. Apart from the journal, postage has gone up several times and the costs of venues for meetings have risen too and there is the website that also requires funding. We have to face these facts that are beyond the Society's control. We therefore now need to consider raising the Society's membership subscriptions, especially if the Society is to maintain its record of supporting various charitable organizations and projects. The new rates are shown on page 59.

Sadly I have to record the death of a number of members; the tragic and unexpected death of Lt Col Adrian Griffith, and Brig Tony Hunter-Choat, Mr IP Manadhar, Mr. Mike Westmacott, a member of the 1953 Everest team and also Mr Ranjitsing Rai, formerly of BMH Dharan, not a member but known to many who passed through Dharan and also my wife. Obituaries, as appropriate, will be included in the journal.



Mrs Ambika Luintel with the Chairman & Mrs Birch and Mr Luintel at the Nepalese Embassy

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A SECRET EXPEDITION TO DOLPO

In the summer of 1963 Major Malcolm Meerendonk was tasked to go on a secret expedition to the remote area of Dolpo in the northwest of Nepal adjacent to Tibet (China). The aim of this expedition was to ascertain what Chinese troops were up to in the Tibet border area and if there had been any illegal movement across the Nepal border and what their likely intentions were to be in the autumn when post-monsoon campaigning was able to resume. This was set against the background of the Chinese invasion of India in 1962.

In the autumn of 1962 the Chinese had launched an invasion into the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), now known as Arunachal Pradesh. They had already penetrated the remote Aksai Chin area in the northwest and had even built a road across it. These developments and threats went largely ignored by the Indian government, particularly by Prime Minister Nehru and Defence Minister Krishna Menon. They pursued a policy 'Hindi Chini bhai bhai' hoping that India's membership of the non-aligned movement would prevail. The whole question of the India/China border is historical and relates back to uncompleted business in the days of British India. Efforts to demarcate the frontier known as the 'McMahon Line' were never fully completed and certainly not agreed by both Tibetan and Chinese authorities.

Since 1914 the Chinese had disputed this boundary. In that year Sir Henry McMahon held a conference in Simla with the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, known as the Simla Convention to negotiate the border between British India and Tibet. The Chinese were not invited to participate on the grounds that Britain did not recognise

the suzerainty of China over Tibet and that therefore Tibet was entitled to negotiate its own treaty arrangements as an independent nation. The Chinese refused to recognise this convention since, if they did, it would give credence to Tibetan independence from China.

Meerendonk was selected for this task as he was a considerable linguist and could be made available from his post at the Brigade of Gurkhas Depot at Sungei Patani in northern Malaya. As senior education officer he was responsible, inter alia, for Nepali language training for British officers joining the Brigade. Apart from Nepali he had a practical working knowledge of both Chinese and Tibetan. In addition he had been attached to a Nepalese Army unit during his war service in India.

A member of the Society, he died in August 2001 and his obituary appeared in the 2001 edition of the journal. At that time I was able to obtain from his widow a number of his papers including a copy of his report on his trek into Dolpo. I was reminded of this when I learnt of General Sam and Lady Cowan's more recent trek to Dolpo. An edited edition of Anne Cowan's diary of their trek will appear in the next edition of the journal. I have reproduced below Meerendonk's report, mildly edited, for comparison of these two treks some fifty years apart in time. GDB.

THE MEERENDONK REPORT

SECRET

1. The name Dolpo is the correct name for the self-contained cultural unit shown on the Survey of India 1929 map

incorrectly as Danbhansar and Chharkabhot. The names now generally accepted as correct are used in this report, with the map version shown afterwards in brackets prefixed by the letter SI.

Dolpo is bounded in the north by the Ladakh range which forms the boundary between Tibet and Nepal and in the south by the Thuli Bheri River (known in the upper reaches as the Barbung Khola) and by the main Himalayan range – Kanjiroba Lekh, Mukut Himal and the Dhaulagiri Massif. It is bounded in the west by the gorge through which the headwaters of the Karnali break out into the Mugu area of Nepal north of the Sisne Himal and in the east by Mukut Himal and the mountains east of Tsarka (SI: Chharakabhot Gaun) which form the watershed between the Kali Gandaki to the east and the headwaters of the Kali and the Bheri, both of which have their sources in Dolpo.

2. Dolpo may be described as a mountainous land between 15000 and 20000 feet in height sandwiched between the main Himalayan Range and Tibet, and which is divided into valleys by various rivers which form the headwaters of the Karnali. It is about sixty miles long and thirty-five miles wide, and contains fifteen main villages with a permanent population of a few hundred souls each. It has been described as the highest land in the world of comparable size to be inhabited all the year round.

3. The habitable districts (valleys) are (east to west):

- a. Phijor and Shey.
- b. Namgung (the Namdo-Saldang Khola) (SI: Namgung Khola).
- c. Panjang (the Panjang Khola valley) containing Nyisal (SI: Nisalgaon), Shimen, Ma (SI: Majhgaon), and Ting-Khyu (SI: Tingjegaon).

- d. Tarap (from which valley a tributary flows south-east to join the Bheri near Tarakot, containing Tok-Khyu (SI: Atali), Do (SI: Tarapgaon) and Doro.
- e. Tsarka (SI: Chharkabhotgaon) on the headwaters of the Bheri (Barbung).

4. ROUTE

- a. I left Duniahi (check post) (9000 ft) on D+1 and spent the night in Rohagaon. The people are Nepali.
- b. D+3 reached Murum, 13000 ft (NOT shown on SI maps). This place is on the main trade route from Tibet via Saldang in Dolpo down to Tarakot (via Duniahi) and Tibrikot. The people are all Tibetans (Bhote), but some speak colloquial Nepali.
- c. D+4 reached Ringmo, a monastery town on the Phoksumdo Lake (15000 ft). People all Tibetan but some speak colloquial Nepali. Stayed two days to arrange porters.
- d. D+8 reached Shey (16000ft) in Dolpo, after a two day crossing of the Nangda La pass (20,000ft) (SI: Sehu-la Bhanjyang). This route is a minor one into Dolpo, and had not been used so far this year from the south, though a few Dolpo people had come over from the north (unladen) before us. It is a monastery village of great local importance but was at the time of our arrival completely deserted, the very few inhabitants at this time having fled at our approach. We stayed one day, meeting no-one.
- e. D+10 crossed the Shey La pass (19000ft) to Namgung monastery town (16000ft). Neither the pass nor this route, which goes from

- They via Namgung to Saldang, the ‘capital’, is marked on the SI map. Namgung is not marked either, although it gives its name to the whole district (SI: Nangung Khola).
- f. D+11 arrived at Saldang: stopped two days: changed porters.
 - g. D+14 arrived in Tarap after a three day three day journey over pass (20000ft) via Namdo monastery town. Stopped one day; changed porters.
 - h. D+18 arrived in Tsarka (SI: Chharkabhot gaon) after two day journey over two passes, 20000ft and 21000ft, at the head of the Lang Khola. This route and the two passes are NOT shown on the map. The normal route over the Charkula and Moha-la passes was blocked by unusually heavy snow falls. The route which I followed called a ‘new’ route by the guides, was an ‘easy’ one, ie no harder than the normal route might have been, and there was not a great deal of snow. The only disadvantage is that during the first few hours after the descent to the Bheri (Barbung) the route up the river to Tsarka is impassable for yaks. It even shook the Sherpas bit. Spent a day in Tsarka: changed porters.
 - i. D+19 reached Sangdak (SI: Sangdah) after a two day crossing of the pass on the watershed (19000ft) and a hair-raising descent of the Keha Lunga gorge. There is another route for yaks, the normal trade route, from the pass, which climbs a thousand feet higher up to 20,500 feet over the mountains to the north, and descends to Gunsu (or Gok) – not shown on the map – on the other side of the Keha Lungpa, which has to be crossed to reach Sangdak. After one look at our route down the gorge I would cheerfully have taken the yak route, except that: (1) it was too cold, and (2) it appeared impossible for anyone to cross the river.
 - j. D+22 arrived in Kak (SI: Kagbeni) after one day’s march from Sangdak involving crossing a pass (14000ft) and a steep descent in half a day of 4000ft to Kak, passing through a Tibetan (Dalai Lama) Army camp for about 100 men on the way down. There was no-one there at the time here was another large camp on a pleasant grassy shelf near the Keha Lumpa gorge a few miles away.
 - k. D+23 Climbed up to Muktinath and back.
 - l. D+24 left with our baggage loaded onto five donkeys and reached Dzong-sam (SI: Jomosom) Check post at mid-day. Stayed the night there, then left for Tukcha (SI: Tukucha) next day, passing Tibetan (Dalai Lama’s) Army Check post on the way. They gave us a friendly wave and two of them followed us down later in the evening to ask for medicine for a nagging headache of two month’s duration in one case, and what appeared to be gout in another. I was unable to help, but they were very nice about it and departed with polite expressions of goodwill.

5. PRINCIPAL PEOPLE MET

- a. DUNIAHI Check post:
 - (a) The establishment was for five Indian police officers, of whom one was on leave in India and one in India sick. Met the OSP, an elderly Sikh who was to retire in 6 weeks

time and had been four years in check posts. He was most amiable and did all he could to make me welcome: he was assisted by a ASP (a Brahmin) somewhat younger with similar service in check posts, and a Brahmin wireless operator.

(b) They appeared to have nothing whatsoever to do and were entirely concerned with minor domestic economy and efforts to provide for day to day needs, including various hobbies to pass the time such as running a tiny school for the local children, in a place where there were no amenities, no rations supplied, and very little obtainable locally to supplement the meagre stores of rice and flour brought from India by members of the post returning from leave. They did some arrangement whereby reports of any unusual movements or events reached them from Dolpo, where the check post used to be but was proved untenable. They sent or received Sitreps from the Indian embassy by radio about twice per week. They received a course in Gurkhali and Tibetan in Delhi, before they were posted to check posts.

(c) Describing themselves as there purely for the protection of the Indian officers were a Nepalese Army naik and a section of H. R. Company. There was also a section still there whom they had relieved, with orders from the C-in-C to remain till I had gone and to detach men to accompany me to Dolpo should I require it. I politely declined the offer.

(d) The relations between the Indians, Nepalese soldiers and local people were the most amicable and

intimate. Nothing and no-one passed without their coming to hear of it. Significant of this 'intelligence' system was that the OSP and officers were all waiting to greet me a quarter of a mile from the check post when I arrived unexpectedly along the path over which there was no observation possible from the post, and that they knew of my arrival in Tarakot the day before..

(e) Owing to the unexpected number of signals from Army HQ about me before my arrival (six days late) all were intensely intrigued about my mission and personal importance. They turned out the Guard for my inspection on arrival. They did not however bother me with pointed questions, though they were particularly interested to know if I was looking for Khambas. They appeared to know nothing about Khambas themselves which was not surprising, as it turned out, for I met none myself in the part of Dolpo with which they were concerned. On the morning of my departure the ASP left before daybreak to meet the Nepalese liaison officer with the Austrian Dhaulagiri Expedition; Lt Krishna Bom Rana, somewhere in the Tarakot direction.

b. MURUWA and RINGMO

(1) The people in this region were in every way the most '*lato*' I have ever met; they had no political or civic consciousness and knew nothing about anything. The headman, in whose house I stayed at Ringmo, and the people in general were genuinely loyal to the

government in a simple way and most knew a little Nepali but could not read or write.

(2) The Lama of Kham and the Ringmo Lama, the aging religious leaders of the area, have gone to seed and seem to just exist in their monasteries thinking only of *chang* and religion. There is no human habitation between here and Shey in Dolpo.

c. SALDANG

(1) I stayed in the house of Nyima-Tsering, who was acknowledged freely as far as Tsarka as the one whose word was law and whose ruling was accepted by all the village headmen. As far a way as Ringmo the headman referred to him as the Rajah of Dolpo. The acting headman of Tsarka said that he was the wealthiest man in the land. He had a large house in its own grounds outside the village. In the days of the Ranas he had successfully organised the people of Dolpo to drive out bands of brigands from Tibet who used to terrorise and plunder the villages, and in recognition of his efforts the Rana government presented him with a rifle and ammo which he still kept suspended above his bed in his fortress-like house. He is aged 65 and lost his wife ten years ago. His sons and sons-in-law are prominent landowners and traders with houses nearby and one of his married grandsons over 30 lives with him in the house with the younger grandchildren and manages his affairs, as he has recently fallen desperately ill.

Nyima-Tsering is also responsible for the upkeep of the monastery at

Namgung, which receives annual contributions of money from him, and for the rebuilding of the monastery at Namdo, where the present lama, an incarnation (Rimpoche) ordained by the Lama of Shang, was persuaded by Nyima-Tsering to take up residence and by whom part of his stipend is paid. There were huge prayer walls all over the countryside established by Nyima-Tsering, and artisans working on a new one south of Namdo said that they were being paid by him.

When we asked the headman of Saldang to assist in arranging coolies he referred us to Nyima-Tsering, saying that he himself had only authority to detail coolies as far as the next village, but that Nyima-Tsering could arrange coolies as far as Tsarka.

(2) In conversation with Nyima-Tsering and his grandson we learnt that the Check Post at Duniahi had originally been located near Saldang with a company of Nepalese soldiers to deal with Khamba bands who were making a nuisance of themselves, but that due to the intense cold winter and to the impossibility of obtaining food in Dolpo the post had been withdrawn to Duniahi on Nyima-Tsering's offer to undertake to deal with the Khamba nuisance himself and render reports if necessary. I imagine that the 'arrangement' referred to by the OSP in Dunyer for obtaining info from Dolpo must tie up here somewhere.

(3) Last year a representative of the Nepalese government,

Karnasing Thakali, visited Dolpo to explain to Nyima-Tsering the panchayat system of government and the Gram Bikas project.

Nyima-Tsering readily undertook to explain the system to the headmen and supervise its implementation when the time came. As Karnasing fell ill and left and another government official was snowed up in Tsarka for six months and could not leave, no further developments have yet taken place, though I gather that this summer further moves may be made by the central government. The old man and his grandson both declared themselves only too anxious to co-operate with the government to any extent required to further any schemes for the betterment of the country. N.B. Nyima-Tsering went once to Kathmandu as a boy; he is the only member of his household who speaks Nepali.

(4) Neither Nyima-Tsering nor any of the people of Dolpo had had any cause to be worried about the close proximity of the Chinese.

(5) As the acknowledged unofficial link between the people of Dolpo and the central government, a source of info and influence for good, Nyima-Tsering is a man of unusual importance in a region where powerful foreign influence and disturbing elements are so close at hand, while the central government is far away and its authority or influence for the good of the people as yet nowhere apparent.

d. NAMDO

The Lama of Namdo, an incarnation (Rimpoche), is devoted to religion and was not unduly worried about the close proximity of the Chinese, as long as they stayed where they were. He was happy assisting Nyima-Tsering and the Lama of Shang in organising the spiritual life of the community in Dolpo, which was the only place where the true doctrine of original Buddhist culture remained intact. He had recently paid his first visit to Kathmandu and met a number of Europeans and was favourably impressed with them.

e. TSARKA

(1) There were two acting headmen. One was a rich merchant whose interests were mainly commercial and who was nearly always in Tarakot or Tukcha. He and other merchants had little to say for themselves on any subject unless the Chinese happened to be mentioned, when with one accord they spontaneously and vociferously condemned their behaviour in ruining their trade with Tibet. The other headman was a friendly straight forward honest peasant with a distrust of Chinese and Khambas.

(2) The real headman of Tsarka appears to be the same Karnasing mentioned above. He is a well-educated, suave, absentee landowner who spends all his time trading. He is well-known in the Thak Kholā, where he is a friend of the Sher Chans and we met him twice; once in Sasudhara, a village on the way up the Kali to Tukcha on business. He confirmed what

Nyima-Tsering had told us about his visit to Saldang. He speaks Tibetan but does not write it. The people of Tsarka cannot read Nepali, so he had been unable to give us letters of introduction.

(3) A bold, jolly, intelligent-looking young man dressed like a prince rode into our camp near Tsarka on a horse on which he sat so well that he seemed to have grown from it and greeted me happily with the barely recognisable words 'Good morning'. They turned out to be the only English he knew and he understood no Nepali. He chatted for half an hour with my Sherpa sardar however and was very pleased to meet me, he said, because of all the help that we and the Americans had given them. He turned out to be the chief of a roving Khamba tribe. I asked what help he meant but he was not at all clear. He said that they had some guns and that they occasionally ambushed Chinese patrols that crossed the frontier and killed a couple – it was good fun. Next day as we left for Sandak he appeared with his following: about twenty men and women with children, two hundred yaks, two hundred sheep and goats and a party of nomads (Dok-pas) who accompanied them for protection. There was no sign of weapons. They were going to a new grazing ground in the mountains, he said. They headed in the direction of the frontier (12 miles away). The Tsarka people told us that the Khambas did no harm, but that they were afraid of them because of their homicidal tendencies, and were very glad when they moved on.

f. DZONG-SAM ((SI: Jomosom)
Check Post

(1) The post was manned by a complete company (No. 4 H.K. Company) under Capt Lalita SJB Rana, an amiable simple type who slept when he had nothing better to do. His sentries had their rifles chained to their waists. He greeted me warmly, was not in the least inquisitive but having received advance notice from the C-in-C of my arrival took me for granted. He arranged rations, accommodation, detailed a L/Cpl to guide me to Kaji Govindra Sher Chan's house in Tukcha next day, and gave me dinner in his quarter. He did not take me to meet the Indian officers who lived in separate quarters, but we all met up by chance in the evening and chatted about nothing in particular. He told me that he had been stationed with a platoon in Mustang last year but that there was now no-one there. He had also been detailed to take a section and register the numbers and needs of Khamba refugees in the mountains on the way to Tsarka off the main route, but had found the way blocked by snow and the Khambas not co-operative. While investigating reports of Khamba raiders north of Tukcha a few months back they had been fired on while returning to camp by Khambas armed with machine guns. They had no further trouble and were confined to barracks pending any need for operations against marauding Khamba gangs. Their job was to prevent the unauthorised use of the main road by gangs going south or north. This

was apparently the Nepalese Government's effort to control Khamba activities, but as somebody was supplying them with arms and ammo it was difficult to do more, since they were elusive and untraceable in the mountains. He had no idea who supplied the arms or how, but thought it was easy enough to accomplish.

(2) The Indian police officers of the post were on the same establishment of five as in the case of Duniahi, with two on leave; they were inquisitive to the point of suspiciousness, and their OSP, a Rajput, asked me point-blank if I had been looking for Khambas, and what I had seen, and did I know where they got their arms from? It is possible that they quite honestly did not know, and were trying to find out if it could possibly be the British who were behind it. I was able to tell them no more than they could see with their own eyes. No-one knew anything about air-drops

(3) The relationship between the Nepalese, the Indians and the local people was obviously friendly though by no means as cordial and intimate as at Duniahi. The only apparent reasons were:

- (a) The Nepalese troops had their own officer and refused to introduce me to the Indian OSP on my arrival. They kept me waiting half an hour until their own OC was available.
- (b) The local people are not Nepali but Lo-pa, Thak-pa and mutually suspicious Tibetan groups.

g. TUKCHA (SI: Tukucha)

(1) Here I stayed two days under arrangements made by the Sher Chan family, of which the only representative in residence was Govindra Man known locally as the Kaji. He is the younger brother of Angaman, who was in Kathmandu and Indraman who was in Pokhara. Shankar Man was also away. I spent most of the time in his company with Nar Sing Bhakta of the Tula Chan family, who is the Thak Khola's elected representative of the National Panchayat and Mangal Sing Thakali the apostate Lama of the oldest monastery in Tukcha, who is the father-in-law of Karnasing. Their interests were mainly commercial, literary and local and they were not in the least inquisitive nor inclined to discuss political matters which I did in turn not care to introduce. They were interested in the current affairs of south Asia in general, however and asked about the Malaysian Federation. Kaji Govindra Mana was most friendly, fixed coolies for my trip in spite of unusual difficulty which compelled him to detail the *hulak* (the postal runner) to make up the number and arranged introductions and accommodation all along the route.

(2) The Lama runs a rest house and trading post for tourists in his gompa, where he also carries on a profitable business as MO to the Tibetan soldiers and Khambas who frequent the area. He has a stock of medicines acquired from expeditions and has had medical training.

6. MILITARY ORGANISATIONS

a. The Tibetan (Dalai Lama's) Troops:

(1) The camps below Sangdak mentioned earlier flew the yellow flag of the Dalai Lama. There were scores of horses visible. In Kagbeni I stayed in a large Tibetan house run on the lines of a Thakali *bhatti* which I shared with an officer and a fluctuating number of soldiers of the Dalai Lama's forces, about six at one time. They were all Lamas themselves, in the tradition of the old 'household' troops of the Tibetan ruler, and were cultured, courteous and congenial company. They spoke no Nepali but conversed freely through my interpreter and gave no impression of either of inquisitiveness or of having anything to hide. They were obviously regular guests at the house, had a private chapel on the roof where they spent much time in devotions, their bearing was upright and easy, but they had the reserve expected in good soldiers in strange company, while being otherwise very friendly. They all had good horses, belonged to the camp up the hill and wore a kind of regimental mufti. They were distinguished from normal Tibetans by their short haircut; the officer wore a yellow garment above the waist and a short American bayonet, whereas the others wore various Tibetan style garments and no bayonets. Their lower garments and the Tibetan style cape worn normally hanging down behind from the waist were of khaki drill. They wore jungle boots, American Army boots, and various articles of clothing or

uniform purchased from American, Swiss and Japanese expeditions. They had light automatic weapons hidden in their bedding and kit.

They were very friendly with the local people and came and went as freemen. They looked very tough and intelligent.

(2) They declined to talk freely on their duties and stations but said that their pay and rations arrived regularly every month from the 'south'. They fed much better than the local people, I noticed. They said that they thought that their arms came from the British and Americans. (I learnt in due course that this was the stock answer always produced.). They had camps at various strategic points elsewhere. They also mentioned that there were other regular Tibetan troops, ie 'lay' troops who were rough, ill-disciplined men, many of them Khambas, who gave them a lot of trouble as they did not restrict themselves to obeying instructions but sometime went marauding inside the Nepalese frontier, even on occasion attacking the Lama troops.

b. The Khambas

(1) Mention has been made of the party near Tsarka. A number of much smaller parties of travellers were met between here and Tukcha but as there were no arms visible, their hair was long and they wore no uniform they might easily have been groups of traders or bands of nomads.

(2) The area around Kagbeni, Muktinath and the whole of the Thak khola was stiff with Dalai Lama or regular Khamba soldiery

in small parties of ones, twos and threes, unarmed, all innocently but determinedly going or coming, nearly always pleased to see us, sometimes carrying rations or, it was said, pay. All were distinguished by their short haircuts (short by Tibetan standards), the upright bearing of free men, jungle boots, American Army boots, Jap boots, khaki drill or expedition type smocks or slacks. There were always one or two loitering in every tea-shack. They said that their camps were in the Mustang or Muktinath area. Whoever they are, they obviously have no trouble passing through the check post at Jomosom or the Dalai Lama's troops check post south of Jomosom where they presumably have some system of checking identity. I wonder what would be the chances of a Tibetan-speaking Chinese or communist trained Tibetan moving around among them dressed like them?

(3) The answer to the query 'Where do all the weapons, rations and pay come from?' was always 'From the Dalai Lama'. Where does he get them from? 'International subscription'. On the subject of who supplies arms to the irregular Khamba bands, I cannot do better than repeat the observation made by Kaji Govindra Man Sher Chan, who dismissed the problem with the words 'Nepal is surrounded by India. It does not matter who supplied the arms; they can only reach Nepal with the knowledge and connivance of India'.

c. The Chinese

- (1) There was no sign of Chinese penetration or propaganda anywhere. There are no Chinese merchants.
- (2) In addition to the people of Dolpo, who are great middlemen and go freely into Tibet and south to Jumla, Tarakot and Tukucha, there is a great transit population of nomads (Dok-pas) who also drift freely north to Tibet and south as far as Dhorpatan and of Tibetans who go into Dolpo as far as Saldang or Tsarka and back. It is from these people and the villages that I learnt any info about the Chinese that appears below.
- (3) There are only very few Chinese on the border north of the Pansang valley, ie west and central Dolpo. Those who are there stress that they are not allowed across the border into Nepal, but that Dolpo people are welcome to come and trade as much as they like in Tibet. They also boast of their victory against India in NEFA and claim that they could occupy Dolpo in a day or two if they wanted to. They emphasise however that 'Chinese and Nepalese are brothers; we want nothing better than to be friends'.
- (4) The Chinese also urge that as the Khambas cause as much trouble on the Nepalese side of the border as on their side, they should all be sent back to Tibet, where they would be kept under control.
- (5) The story from the other end, north of Tsarka however, is quite different. Reports tell of masses of border Chinese; incivility, violence and high-handed treatment of traders going into Tibet so that they lose or give away goods or money

and are unwilling to return once they get back to Dolpo. It is possible that the Chinese have something to hide in this area; or it could be that the activities of Khamba irregulars in this area have got the Chinese all worked up.

7. STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

- a. Dolpo is a natural fortress, with easily defended passes, possession of which would give an invader a secure base from which to launch a winter infantry offensive if desired down the Karnali gorge towards Jumla and Nepalganj.
- b. One day would be sufficient to occupy Tsarka, effectively cutting off Dolpo from one main artery of assistance, viz, the Kali valley, while opening the way for a drive down the Bheri valley to Tarakot. At the same time it is possible to advance from Tsarka straight down a direct route via Sandak to Tukcha, thus bypassing Jomosom and isolating the whole of Mustang Bhot. Another five days would take them to Pokhara.
- c. From Tarakot, Jumla, Tilarikot and Jajarkot can be reached in four or five days, thus opening the way for a double drive down the Karnali and Bheri valleys.

Signed *M Meerendonk*
Major
(M. MEERENDONK MBE)
JUN 63

COMMENT

As we now know the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), in the event, made no moves against Nepalese territory. Had there been an invasion

through the routes indicated by Meerendonk, the Nepalese Army would have had to face the same problems that the Indian Army encountered the previous year, ie having to move from a lower altitude through harsh terrain in an attempt to defend the passes with hugely difficult lines of communication and logistics involved. The Nepalese Army were even less trained and equipped for such operations than their Indian colleagues. There was an Indian presence in Nepal on the border as the Indians were concerned about border security in the north, both police and army. At this time the Indian Military Training and Advisory Group (IMTAG) were present, commanded by an Indian Army Major General. I remember his visit to Dharan in 1962/3 and hosting his ADC, a captain in the Rajputana Rifles. There was considerable concern in Nepal and eastern India about possible Chinese intentions. Talk in the Yak & Yeti bar in the Royal Hotel, Kathmandu was often rather gloomy, something along the lines of: 'One Chinese parachute battalion landing on Gauchar Airport would spell the end!' I remember brushing up the drills involved in destroying certain items of equipment in Dharan. The Deputy High Commission in Calcutta started contingency planning for the evacuation of British personnel from the Calcutta area. This was to involve travel down the Hoogly River to ships off shore in the Bay of Bengal. One hoped that there would be no monsoon storms at the time, should this be necessary! There was quite considerable panic in NEFA and Assam amongst the local population which is still remembered. There is continuing tension on the China/Tibet border with India in this area. The Chinese still

claim large areas of what is now Arunachal Pradesh and this is likely to continue.

The Khambas operated out of northern Nepal, particularly in the Mustang area, for a number of years supported by the CIA. Politics intervened with a change of regime in the USA. Kennedy came to power in 1960 and with it JK Galbraith became the American ambassador to India. Galbraith was not a lover of the Tibetan project. Support waned until the Chinese invasion of India in October 1962 brought about a reversal of policy. The main rebel force of Khambas operated out of Mustang with some having been trained at a special camp in America and supplied by air-drops coordinated by the CIA. However this too dragged on into the 1970s. Again American politics intervened. President Nixon was anxious to re-establish diplomatic relations with China, a condition of which was to cease support for the guerrillas in Mustang. The Nepalese too were keen to have better relations with China and following Chinese pressure, the Khambas were finally cleared out and disarmed in 1974 by the Nepalese Army. A description of this operation has been described by Dr Prem Singh Basnyat in his *The Nepalese Army in the Tibetan Khamba Disarming Mission* published in 2007. Evidence of the Khamba presence can still be found in the in the area of refugee camps and the marks of their old army camps in places like Kagbeni. Dolpo was for so long a very remote part of Nepal, virtually autonomous, with little control from the Kathmandu government. Although Meerendonk claimed to have been only the second European after Dr Snellgrove (1956), to have entered and explored Dolpo

there were a few others including the botanist Oleg Polonin who published *Flowers of the Himalaya* in 1984 based on his earlier travels in 1952 with some excellent photographs of plants, these include several taken whilst in Dolpo. Tony Hagen travelled in Dolpo as he did in many of Nepal's remote northern regions. As has been pointed out to me by Sam Cowan, only in the 1998 edition (revised by Deepak Thapa) of Hagen's book *Nepal*, (first published in 1960) is mention made of his journey across Dolpo. He was apparently very ill at that time which explains why there are no photographs of Dolpo in this work. Other early travellers to Dolpo include Herbert Tichy an Austrian mountaineer (1953), Giuseppe Tucci (1954) and the splendidly named Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf (1962). Clearly there are more research possibilities in respect of early travellers to Dolpo. Further reading about Tibetan guerrilla operations against the Chinese can be found in Mikel Dunham's heavily researched work, *Buddha's Warriors* published in 2004 and the earlier work by Michel Peissel, *The Cavaliers of Kham*.

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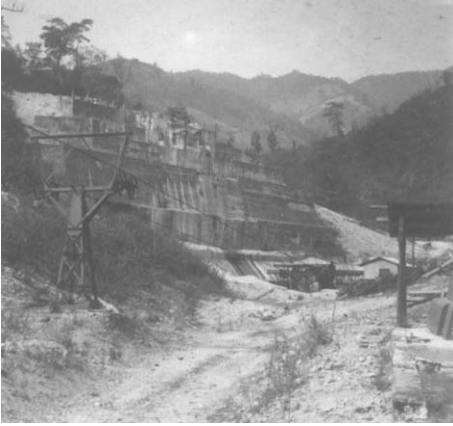
REMAINS OF THE KOSI PROJECT RAILWAY: AN OBSCURE GRICE

By Mark Temple

(This article first appeared in the 'Darjeeling Mail'

- the magazine of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Society)

(A 'gricer' is slang for 'train spotter', hence the verb 'to grice'.)



Thought to be near Phurse camp, the construction camp set up during the building of Dharan cantonment

Among the narrow gauge railways that are close neighbours of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, the Kosi Project Railway is one of the most haunting because of its short and almost unrecorded life and the fact that very little of it now remains.

I learnt of the existence of this railway in the year 2000 when on a family picnic to Kosi Tappu Game Park in Nepal we came across its narrow gauge tracks beside the Kosi River. "Ah," said older members of the family, "we used to hear the engines whistle from our house in Dharan". I learnt it had been built to help construct an irrigation project.

About 70 miles to the west of Darjeeling, the Kosi River emerges from the foothills of the Himalayas into the plains of Nepal in a landscape not dissimilar to the way the rivers emerge

into the plains around Siliguri. During the later days of British India, around 1937, there were plans for a barrage to tame the Kosi River, reduce the flood damage in the monsoon season in the neighbouring flatlands of Bihar and to provide water for irrigation. Not long after Indian independence and the coming of a less authoritarian regime to Nepal, this scheme was revised and a deal signed between the governments of Nepal and India in 1954.

An article by John Benson in *Industrial Railway Record* of 1975 (with map, four photos of locomotives and a list of engines, builders etc.) gives an excellent description of the line in 1966 to 1968 when he was stationed at the British Army camp at Dharan. The camp was a key link in the line of communication for the Brigade of Gurkhas between Malaya, Hong Kong and Nepal. This camp was constructed in the nineteen fifties after Britain came under pressure to give up its army facilities in Darjeeling. One branch of the Kosi Project Railway ended less than half a mile from this modern British Cantonment and its existence must have been well known to many who served there because the engines could easily be heard whistling by those in the camp.

The equipment for the Kosi Project Railway came second-hand from various Indian Railways 2 ft. 6 inch gauge railway lines. In addition to seventeen British built steam engines by Bagnall, North British Locomotive Company Ltd and Nasmyth Wilson and Co Ltd of the 4-4-0, 2-8-2 and 4-6-2 wheel arrangements (all

tender engines) it received in about 1960 new Class ZB 4-6-2 locomotives built in Jugoslavia by Duro Dakovic. (*This purchase doubtless reflecting Indian policy of the time. Ed.*)

The line ran from Bhimnagar on the Indian-Nepal border, which was adjacent to the new river barrage, alongside the river in a northerly direction to a junction at Chhakraghatti and on to a point where the river emerged from the hills at Chhatra, a distance of about fourteen miles. Stone was loaded at Chhatra from quarries there and carried down to Bhimnagar for construction. There was a jetty (disused in the nineteen sixties) which suggests that stone may have been quarried upstream and floated in boats as far as Chhatra. On emerging into the plains the river becomes wide and shallow and hence the need for a railway to carry stone to the barrage site. Stone was probably also needed to help build the river embankments and the river-training groins that project at right angles into the river.

From Chhakraghatti a branch ran northeast to Dharan where it ended after about eight miles at a stone loading area just northwest of Ghopa camp of the

British Army at Dharan. Stone was quarried at Phusre and carried by cableway to the railway terminus at Ghopa. A series of bunkers were used for storing and loading stone onto the railway wagons there. The cableway was soon abandoned after an accident. Lorries were then used to carry the stone the three miles from Phusre to the loading bays at the railway terminus.

From Bhimnagar a further branch ran east on the Indian side of the border to meet the Indian Railways metre gauge line at Forbesganj. (*Forbesganj is the last station before Joghani. The latter was where all the depot passengers and stores were brought to from Calcutta. Ed.*). The line was to facilitate the supply of construction materials including railway equipment from India.

The railway never officially carried passengers although many people 'hitched' a ride on its trains, whether the waggons were empty or full. My wife's aunt and another relation are said to have once travelled on it from Dharan to Chhakraghatti and back to pay a family visit.

My brother-in-law Bijay, a former Gurkha Engineer, understands my interest in railways and so he suggested in early January 2007 that we go to see what remains of the railway. He had almost no memory or knowledge of the railway, so with me perched on the back of his motorbike we set off for the obvious start of our search, the area of Dharan still known as 'Railway'. A road sign with 'Relwai' painted on it confirmed we were on the right scent and we headed west from Dharan and through a dried-up river bed towards Chhatra and in the distance we saw the piers of an abandoned bridge. We had found the course of the railway



The line close to Ghopa camp (Dharan)

where it crossed the Shardu Khola.

Benson records as follows:-

“...a single track which crossed the wide river bed on a bridge whose nine piers were solidly constructed of stone and concrete. For most of the year the river bed was dry; however, during the monsoon the river became a raging torrent capable of submerging the bridge. The track was laid directly onto the girders: there was no floor, neither were there hand rails.”

The river had naturally widened and shifted to the west since Benson described it. What was clearly the western abutment to the railway bridge is now almost in the middle of a much widened river bed. To the east of the bridge we found a substantial culvert beneath the line of the railway. Benson made the point that there were few earthworks and almost no ballast and so it is not surprising that the line of the railway is impossible to trace in many places. This part of the railway ran through tropical rain forest but it is now much depleted by small-scale (and illegal) logging. The whole area in which the railway was located is one that has seen much increase in population, not least with settlers arriving from the hills to occupy land which was formerly sparsely populated.

From the bridge site we worked our way back eastwards towards Dharan, picking up the line of the railway as we approached the Dharan – Chhatra road where there had been a level crossing. People we spoke to confirmed that there had been a railway and that beyond the crossing there had been a stone loading place. Two elderly gentlemen, Bakta Bahadur Bhandari and Rewenta Shrestha aged 68 and 67 eagerly told us where the tracks had run, where there had been



The old railway yard near Ghopa Camp (Dharan)

sidings, a water tank and where at a place called “Reeting Wall” the stone had been loaded. There we found the hoppers towering above our heads and clothed in creeper and bamboo, still largely intact but surrounded by houses. We concluded from the construction that ‘Reeting Wall’ is a corruption of ‘retaining wall’ – the key feature of construction of the stone hoppers. After a quick reconnaissance of Phusre where we could see a substantial cement and stone structure in the river bed, said to be the base of one of the towers of the cableway – we returned to home to feed the inner man. Even in 1968 Benson reported the remains of the loading bays at Phusre were crumbling away.

A few days later I set off with other members of the family in a hired Landrover and we roughly followed the course of the railway to Chhakraghatti. The road through the rain forest was startlingly straight but I was not certain if it followed the course of the abandoned railway. At Chhakraghatti there were no remains of the railway to be seen though everybody knew of its former existence. From there we set off northwards towards Chhatra. At a place called ‘Bich Pani’ (literally translates as – ‘middle of the

water’) we found where the course of the railway was caught up by a more modern irrigation scheme built in the early nineteen seventies.

The original Kosi Project was much criticised for benefitting India but not Nepal because being constructed on the India – Nepal border its irrigation canals could only reach lower lying land in India, not Nepal. By taking water from the Kosi River at Chhatra where the river emerges from the hills, this newer irrigation scheme supplies a main irrigation canal which leads off eastwards through the almost flat land on the Nepal side of the border. Considerable expense had been involved to ensure that the Kosi Project Railway, although diverted, was not severed by this new irrigation scheme. At one point near Bich Pani where the railway had been diverted by the new canals, we could see where a steeply graded and curved piece of line had run, with the marks of the sleepers still clearly visible in the ground. At two different points along the route were the remains of bridges with two piers where the railway



Koshi project railway, engine in shed

had crossed tributaries of the Kosi River. Finally we came to Chhatra and there on a mounded earthwork was a metal tank which I was assured had been used to fill the engines. There were no railway lines on the ground but there were many in use as telegraph and electricity poles near the site of the railway sidings and around the village of Chhatra, One had ‘Rhydney’ rolled on its web and another ‘Moss Bay Company’ – the original name of the company with the rolling plant at Workington in Cumbria. Thus are the names of British steelworks preserved on third-hand rails in Nepal for the determined gricer to decipher.

After its construction in the nineteen fifties and initial period of busy use for new construction, the railway was retained for many years to supply stone for maintenance. The Dharan branch had been abandoned by 1972 and the track removed according to news that Benson had received. The main line was said to be in periodic use in the nineteen eighties. The tracks observed in 2000 in Kosi Tappu Wildlife Reserve may still be there because of the greater security of the park which is guarded by the Nepal



Koshi project railway, disused engine at Chhatra

Army. (*They are in a few places. Ed.*). Elsewhere the metal rails and fittings have been stolen. The railway was property of the government of Nepal but once out of use it was vulnerable to metal thieves. Steel is a valuable commodity in a very poor area, whether smuggled across the border and sold for scrap or used more locally to smithy into knives and other useful implements (*Kukris? Ed.*). The thieving is said to have accelerated after 1990 and the arrival of multiparty democracy in Nepal, which weakened the authority of government officials and the police.

There have been reports in the Indian press in the last few years of a local development NGO pressing for the railway to be reopened – a most unlikely prospect for there is virtually nothing left. Meanwhile it remains an excellent location for a melancholy grice, if your satisfaction is in small remains rediscovered. But an interpreter is essential for the non-Nepali speaker since guidance from the locals improves the chance of finding where the railway ran. Direct your enquiries to the older residents, since the young know little about it. Your interest will cause puzzlement – and perhaps even the vain hope that another aid project may be about to appear.

Reference: Benson, J. (1975) The Kosi Project Railway, Industrial Railway Record no 61, August, pp. 65 – 71, Industrial Railway Society, Greenford, Middlesex.

Postscript

Following the publication of the above article, a photograph and letter appeared in the *Darjeeling Mail* magazine in November 2008 from Lionel Price of Oswestry. He had visited the Bhimnagar engine shed while on an enthusiast's tour of South Asia en route from the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway to the Janakpur Railway. He found the depot lying derelict and containing a number of stored/dumped locomotives some of which were partially dismantled. Then twelve photographs taken in 2002 of locomotives at the same site by Sudan Dewan appeared on the web site of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Society. People I talked to in Dharan in 2011 said they have gone but I will not quite believe it until I go there to look with my own eyes.

Photos

The article in *Darjeeling Mail* Issue 40 of November 2007 had the following three photographs by me included. Picture of the road sign, caption “a road sign with “Relwai” painted on it. First evidence of the railway in Dharan. Picture of a rail serving as a telegraph pole, caption “There were no lines on the ground but many in use as electricity poles near the site of the railway sidings in Chhatra. Silt extraction ponds of the second irrigation scheme in the background.” Picture of bridge piers in the rain forest “We had found the course of the railway where it crossed the Sadhu Khola.”

Mark Temple
27/1/2012

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THREE VIRTUES

By JP Cross

(This piece first appeared in the 1975 edition of 'The Kukri' and is reproduced here by permission of the editor. The three stories are set in three different locations. The first takes place around a village called Norkum in what was formerly the old No 3 East. The second is in Malaysia at the Sungei Buloh leprosarium some 20 miles north of Kuala Lumpur and the third took place in the First Division at Pieman Mepu, Sarawak.Ed.)

I: FAITH

One winter, in December, a Stranger visited the hills of Nepal. A soldier, on leave, had volunteered his services as guide and the two men met each other at the road head. Thence they moved north for six days, spending one night in the soldier's home, to where the hoarfrost lay heavily until the morning sun removed it, high up in the rhododendron and pine forests - serene, fresh and quiet. At the top of the high pass the snows came into view, bleak, timeless and inscrutable. They were soon out of sight as the path led the two men down into the next valley.

The Stranger's companion wanted to worship, so the two men decided to visit a famous Buddhist monastery miles to the north. It meant leaving the beaten track and venturing into more remote areas. Their route led through harvested rice fields, now brown, bare and dusty in the winter sunshine, then near a river where an otter was seen fishing. Up and up, until the houses were left behind and the forests reached once more. Through them they walked and then they were on cleared land where only potatoes grew with the air, by now, thin and cold. A shack with a Buddhist pennant outside was reached and a resting place for the night was sought. A night's shelter was given in an out-house which had walls and roof of plaited wattle.

It was a relief to be moving and to get warm again. Although the pass they had

to cross was not really high, they found their breath short and their limbs heavy. Great banks of frozen mist whirled and spun, like smoke from a giant cauldron, leaving fresh streaks of white where they had brushed the hill sides. Near the top of the pass cloud was being driven in three different directions as the cold air from the snows met the warmer air from below. The last two hours lay up the side of a stream, whose banks were thick rimed and where the water was a trickle with solid ice either side. Snow had fallen a while back and as the place up which they travelled saw little sun, it lay, caked and frozen. Progress was slow, but there was no hurry. The soldier had picked some fern smelling of parsley and said to be efficacious in warding off the sprits found high up. The correct place to put it was behind the ear, but the Stranger sheepishly put it in his pocket.

From the pass they saw a settlement in the valley far below them. There were three double-storeyed houses, a number of low shacks, few cattle but many potato fields. Around the settlement were, on one side, a sheer precipice and on the other two sides gentle slopes covered with trees. The fourth side was open, sloping down to a river beyond which rose the snows, much nearer by now. Mount Everest, shielded, lay out of sight.

Outside one of the large houses sat an old woman sorting potatoes. Nearby was

a cow, one leg broken shorter than the rest. Shelter for the night was requested and a wattle-girt shed was pointed out. The Stranger had noticed that the house had two rooms on the ground floor, one the family room and the other, strewn with leaves, empty save for a ladder up to the top floor. He was invited to inspect the upstairs room. It ran the length of the house and, at the far end there were three resplendent Buddhas, gilt and large, and a fourth, smaller, red one. They had been brought from China, long years before. Many smaller statues abounded. Grain was also stored along the walls and, in one corner, was an empty bed. Twenty people could have fitted in the room but the Stranger was told that in winter the room so caught the wind he could not sleep there.

"May we please sleep in the room with the leaves?" he asked. "No," he was told, that is reserved for the injured cow. You may have the place outside."

The night was very cold and very long. Early the next morning the soldier disappeared for a while, carrying towel and soap. He returned, shivering, having totally immersed himself in the freezing water, and he carried a bowl of clarified butter.

"As soon as the lama outside has had his head shaved, I'm going up to the main prayer house to pray," and he pointed out the largest of the three houses. "Come along with me, do!"

They went up the hill and reached the building. They waited for three red-robed lamas to come and the door was unlocked. As it was opened the sun streamed in and the Stranger was amazed to see a riot of colour. Straight in front of the door, on the opposite wall, was the altar. This

consisted of a large gilt Buddha, in front of which were many small ones. There were shallow cups set around a centre stand in which butter was poured, while bowls and jars of many sorts lay in front. Flanking the altar was the library, fifty-four cubby holes either side, each with sacred cloth-covered scriptures peering out in yellow, red and blue symmetry. A pew ran down the centre of the room with conch, cymbals and gong to hand. The walls and ceiling garishly depicted the rise and fall of man. The fallen were shown as having their limbs torn off and being eaten by ravenous demons, as being trampled on and squashed, as being burnt. The risen were sitting in the lotus position, eyes inscrutably contemplating eternity. It was very cold.

By now the three lamas were sitting cross-legged on the bench of the pew. The soldier was standing in front of the altar, head bent, eyes closed, and the Stranger was seated by the wall. None wore shoes. A low, murmuring chant started and an acolyte came in and laid fern-like leaves in the vessels in front of the Buddha. The soldier poured the butter into the shallow cups and the chant became louder and louder, then faded. The soldier was told to light the lamps and this he did, his hand trembling. Again the chanting began, low, subdued and formless. It gradually rose to a crescendo and, in startling and horrific cacophony, the instruments suddenly added their discordant threnody to the ululating voices of the lamas while the sightless, staring eyes of the Buddhas, watched, blind and impassive. The Stranger shuddered and was startled when large pea-sized grains of maize were suddenly thrown at the altar both by lamas and soldier. Then there was quiet and

tension slowly unwound. Buttered tea was brought in and offered to all five men. Then it was all over.

An hour later they were gone, once more on the move. That night they camped in a cow byre near a frozen stream in the forest. The Stranger then remembered that he had not entered up his diary since before leaving the soldier's house, so he searched for it among his few belongings. And although he was warm as he sat by the log fire, he again shuddered when he realised that he had just been spending Christmas Day.

II: HOPE

The Visitor asked the doctor in charge of the leper settlement how many Gurkha patients there were. Ten were being treated as out-patients, he was told, but one man was in a ward. His disease had not been diagnosed as contagious, nor was he disfigured in any way, but he was so disheartened that there was no hope of recovery. Death would take one or maybe two years to make up its mind. When it did, its prize would only be a pitifully wasted body.

The doctor took the Visitor into the ward, having warned him to touch nothing. The ward held twenty beds, all occupied. In one corner was a bed with screens on two sides, shielding the occupant from the rest of the inmates. The Visitor saw an elderly Chinese man, with ugly red weals on his back, sitting cross-legged on his bed, staring fixedly ahead. He seemed impervious to all that was going on around him.

The Gurkha lay in the middle of a line of deformity. Noseless, fingerless and hollow-legged humanity stared with apathy at the fit men, then smiled when

they recognised the doctor. At the Gurkha's bed side the doctor called him softly, "Here's a visitor to talk with you." The sick man brought his eyes into focus and gazed with utter uninterest at the Visitor who turned to the doctor and said, "Do you mind if I talk to him alone?"

"Please do," said the doctor, "as often and as long as you like. Excuse me, I have work to do elsewhere. You can sit down on that chair near his bed but," he added solemnly, "touch nothing."

He turned to leave but, as an afterthought, turned back and said, "Please do not talk to the Chinese behind the screen. He is serving a life sentence of solitary confinement for murdering his wife, who was also a leper. He is here only because this ward is emptier than any of the others."

The Visitor sat down and started talking to the lacklustre, listless Gurkha. Gentle prodding and sympathetic probing brought answers to his questions. The pathetically obvious yearning for compassionate comforting was as fervid as the reciprocal hope to inspire self-confidence. Half an hour passed and the man was tiring. The Visitor got up to go, as he was also tired, having given some of himself.

"Listen, Gajendré, I'm coming back next week. You said you had not seen anyone for months, nor eaten for a long time. I can remedy the former, only you can remedy the latter."

Next week the Visitor was greeted with a smile. The remains of a meal testified the return of an appetite. Animation was evident and conversation lasted for an hour. Towards the end of his stay the Visitor saw the sick man gaining strength as he himself felt correspondingly tired as his own strength was sapped once more.

"Gajendré, you're getting better. Keep trying. Next week you'll be sitting up."

A week later Gajendré was indeed sitting up, the week following he was walking to the lavatory, and the week after that, on his fifth visit, the Visitor had to go to the out-patients' quarters to meet him. Radiantly happy, although still very weak, he seemed well on the way to total recovery.

It was not long afterwards that there was an Open Day at the settlement. All was bedecked with bunting and the inmates wore new clothes. Just before the visitors' race, the Visitor went and sought out the Doctor.

"Tell me, doctor," he queried anxiously, "Gajindra Bahadur. How would you now describe his condition?"

"Miraculous."

III: CHARITY

It was part of the Traveller's charter to visit longhouses in the border areas of Sarawak and Sabah. In the course of a year he had walked many hundreds of miles and had, virtually, walked the whole inhabited frontier, visiting some places more than once.

One day he was told to visit a lonely house near the border. Troops stated to be already there would further brief him. He had with him a young Dyak policeman, who was serving his probation. Their route lay for four hours parallel to the border along a rough track, mostly through secondary jungle. They walked through two Security Forces' ambushes. As it was most probable that the soldiers in the ambushes had not been forewarned, it can only have been luck that prevented fire from being opened. Not only the fear of more ambushes, nor the fear of the

enemy, but also the shrill and incessant chirping of the small birds that allegedly predict rain made the journey nerve-racking.

They reached their destination around noon. They sat outside on the long veranda and asked for the headman. Women and children and dogs took no notice of the two men but someone must have delivered their message because shortly afterwards an agitated headman arrived. With scant ceremony he hustled both men upstairs into the loft.

"I have reports of enemy coming. You must hide," he said.

The loft was airless and musty. The two men sat on the hard wooden floor and asked for details. After all, rumours were many, but the troops were near by, so why the worry?

"Tell me, headman, where are the troops?"

"Tuan, they left this morning...you are on your own...the enemy are on their way...you must hide."

So the long afternoon was whiled away in desultory conversation. Four times men came with news of an imminent incursion and all were unaware of the others' reports. The Traveller had no means of communicating back to base so asked if he could go and warn the nearest troops, four hours and two ambushes away. The headman reiterated the necessity of remaining unseen. As a guest, albeit unwanted and unexpected, the Traveller had little option but to do as bidden.

"What do the enemy want here?" he asked. "Have they ever said?"

"They are looking for Europeans, Government men and Border Scouts," said the headman in reply. As the Traveller was all three he felt he probably qualified

as a worthwhile target. "They also want to shoot down a helicopter," the headman added.

After sundown the Traveller and his Dyak companion were invited downstairs for a meal of rice and vegetable. Neither professed to having much of an appetite.

As an enemy move against the longhouse was expected, it was decided to shelter the two men in a shallow grave-like pit dug under the headman's room. It had been dug for one man, now it was to hold two. There was no room for the men's packs which were hidden elsewhere. Weapons would be carried, but firing them from under the stilt-perched house at night was adjudged too risky a business. However, weapons would most certainly be needed if evasive action became necessary. This pit had been dug directly below a 'trap door'. This was part of the bamboo-slatted floor that could be rolled back when needs be. A man would put his sleeping mat thereon once the Traveller and the Dyak were safely hidden. He would act as a decoy for it was hoped the enemy would not suspect anyone sleeping under any such rickety structure. It was decided not to get into the pit until absolutely necessary. Soon after it was dark the lamps were blown out and, no sooner had the Traveller taken off his jungle boots, then the dogs up the track started barking urgently. "Quickly hide. The enemy are coming," the headman said.

In the dark the Traveller fumbled with the laces of his boots. "Oh hurry, hurry," said the Dyak in agitation. "Hurry, hurry," echoed the decoy. The two men groped their way to the opening of the now rolled back bamboo slates, dropped a few feet and squeezed themselves into the narrow

hole in the ground. As they tried to make themselves comfortable, the man lying directly above them urged silence.

"Quietly, quietly," he hissed down at them, a vibrant urgency in his muted whisper.

The Traveller had taken a towel down with him to use as a pillow. Within a very short time both men were beset by rats so the towel was wedged between head and wall and draped over his eyes. This manoeuvre caused the two men, already jammed together, to wriggle excessively. The Dyak gave little whimpers of fear as the rats ran up and down him. His tossings caused the earthen walls to start crumbling and all this drew more agonised requests for silence from above. The longhouse dogs were barking now, not the canine yapping at the moon, but suspicious man-induced yapping. The enemy were coming down the track.

Down below it smelt fetid. Under any longhouse human waste, pigs, curs, rats and fowls each leave distinctive smells. The Traveller reckoned that however uncomfortable it might be, sleep was essential, if only to help pass the time away. Much later he was awoken by a large rat sitting on his face. The constant movement of the rats over him probably aided by subconsciously trying to shake his head free, had resulted in the rats pulling the towel down and leaving his face exposed. He blew up at the rat and shook his head vigorously. The rat scampered off and somehow he freed one hand to drape himself once more.

It was a long night.

Next morning, at dawn, the two men were called up from their hole. The Dyak looked relieved. "I never thought I'd see daylight again," he said. The Traveller looked less sanguine, but said nothing.

They were taken straight up to the loft once more. By then it was raining heavily. Within half an hour three men had come in with separate reports that a large number of enemy had penetrated the area during the night, skirted the longhouse and gone deeper into Sarawak. They had come in at least two groups. Some were bearded. The owner of the dogs that first started barking had spent the night in the crude hut that was used during harvesting to save going to and from the main house, thinking it safer under the circumstances. The Traveller felt that he should try to get his news back as quickly as possible. It was now urgent. His request to leave was politely refused.

"This rain has so swollen the two rivers that join below our house that you cannot cross them," explained the headman.

There was nothing to be done. Men and children came up to the loft and huddled in a tight circle around the Traveller and the Dyak. The local school did not open that day nor did the pepper pickers venture forth to their smallholdings. The Traveller suddenly felt the onset of early morning nature.

"Oh, headman. I am ashamed. I must go and relieve myself," he called down from the attic.

"This I forbid. Wait," came the voice from below.

Within a minute the headman appeared carrying a red, handleless pot which he put on the floor in the very centre of the small crowd. The ensuing problems made the Traveller forget the enemy threat.

The rain continued. A morning meal was offered and accepted, so as not to give offence. Both men merely picked at it. The Dyak, whose face had portrayed happiness on leaving the earthen hide,

now registered deep gloom. On each report of the enemy being brought in, the difficulty of the situation struck the Traveller more and more forcibly - the border to the south, up to a hundred enemy to the north. The routes out of the longhouse were severely limited because of the swollen rivers. A ten-hour walk to the nearest soldiers if the enemy had only gone to the place the two men had come from the previous day. If the enemy had split...?

The morning dragged on. About midday the rain stopped, but the rivers remained very full. During the course of the morning the Traveller had found an old religious poster. It had four pictures painted in garish colours. The first picture showed a man, obviously a sinner because of the black looks emanating from his face, being chased by a tiger. The artist had very cleverly given a Mephistophelian grin to the tiger so no would-be convert need over-tax his imagination as to the allusion. The man was obviously about to get caught because a chasm and thick jungle completely blocked any escape route. The second scene depicted the man kneeling in prayer, the tiger gathering itself for a spring which would ensure both its own dinner and the man's demise. However, fresh developments were shown in the third picture. An exclamation mark, dropped by a European-looking angel, hung conveniently over the desperate man's head. The tiger looked nonplussed. In the fourth picture the exclamation mark had even more conveniently turned into a step-ladder and the man, now a firm Believer in the Faith, made the more obvious by the smirk on the angel's face, was nimbly climbing up it. The tiger was disconsolately slinking away, his face

turned round with a vexed expression caused by the unusual and unpredictable way his quarry had eluded him.

Both the Traveller and the Dyak wondered if there was a moral to the story.

Once more the headman was asked if he would allow the Traveller to leave. The urgency of informing somebody about this incursion grew steadily. The answer was definite. "Please do not go as long as there are enemy in this area. If they were to know I had hidden you, they would punish me with my life. This is their real threat."

At 2 o'clock in the afternoon, twenty-six hours after they had arrived at the longhouse, they heard a helicopter. There was an agonising wait to make sure it was in fact coming their way, followed by an exquisite feeling of relief when it circled the longhouse. It had obviously come for the two men but equally obviously it had not heard of the incursion.

The two men ran to the small field two hundred yards away and the Traveller marshalled it to the ground. He flung his kit and weapon in, pushed the Dyak in, climbed up the side and lifted up the surprised pilot's helmet. He put his mouth near the pilot's ear and bawled, "Hurry,

there are over a hundred enemy nearby and they have threatened to shoot the first helicopter they can. You are the first since the incursion."

The pilot waited just long enough to allow the Traveller to get into the body of the machine and took off faster than he had landed. There were tears in the Traveller's eyes which were not accounted for by the wind as he was sitting sheltered from it.

* * *

Some months later the Traveller returned to Borneo and was told that a broadcast by the enemy radio had demoted him two ranks and announced his death. This had also been reported in the local daily paper the following day.

The Traveller's battalion pandit (from the days when he did not have to travel quite so much) was smiling when they next met.

"We say that if a man is reported dead yet stays alive, he will live till he is a hundred years old. You have had two reports about you. This means that you can now be with us till you're a hundred and ten."

SOCIETY TIES SCARVES AND LAPEL BADGES

Mrs Jenifer Evans has kindly taken on the sale of the Society ties and scarves which cost £10.00 each including postage. They are available from her at: Bangers Mead, Lower Froyle, Alton, Hampshire GU34 4LL or at the AGM or one of our major functions.

Miss Jane Loveless has supervised the production of a very attractive lapel badge which is available for sale for £3.00 at the AGM and other major functions.

GIVING NEPALESE CHILDREN A CHILDHOOD

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.

The Trust works through its own partner organisation, the Nepal Child Welfare Foundation, which is unique in being run by former British Army Gurkha officers. Since its inception, the Trust has given freedom and a loving home to innocent children imprisoned in adult jails alongside parents (the two youngest are pictured), and street children escaping domestic abuse. We fund education for deaf children and we are rescuing and rehabilitating some of the hundreds of Nepalese girls who have been trafficked into India to work as circus performers. Held on long contracts in grim conditions, these girls are subject to frequent physical and sexual abuse. We bring them back to Nepal, to their families and communities. We offer education to younger ones to prepare them for mainstream school, and training and employment to older ones at a range of farming and business initiatives that we are developing.

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THE DIGITAL HIMALAYA PROJECT: COLLECTING, PROTECTING AND CONNECTING ENDANGERED ARCHIVES AND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT NEPAL, BHUTAN AND TIBET

By Dr Mark Turin, University of Cambridge & Yale University

(Following the Britain Nepal Academic Council study day at Cambridge University, Dr Mark Turin introduced me to this project and has agreed to upload editions of the journal to the Digital Himalaya site. Ed)

The project's origins

In December 2000, together with Professor Alan Macfarlane, Sarah Harrison and Dr Sara Shneiderman, I established the Digital Himalaya Project at the University of Cambridge to develop digital collection, storage and distribution strategies for multimedia anthropological information from the Himalayan region. The plan was simple enough and we felt that the timing was right: many archival ethnographic materials, such as 16mm films, still photographs, videos, sound recordings, field notes, maps and rare journals were fast degenerating in their current formats. As we were anthropologists who worked in Nepal—with the Gurung (Tamu) and Thami (Thangmi) communities—it was logical that we focus our attention on the Himalayas.

During our research we had noted a peculiar paradox. Even though anthropologists were becoming ever more concerned about cultural endangerment and the damaging side-effects of globalisation, and funds were available for scholars to document indigenous cultures that were fast disappearing, very few social scientists were working to ensure that anthropological collections from previous generations were maintained, refreshed and made accessible, both to the research community and to the descendants of the people from whom the

materials were collected. To this end, we applied for a grant to set up the Digital Himalaya Project as a strategy for archiving, digitising and disseminating online legacy ethnographic materials concerning the Himalayan region.

A little seed-corn funding, a small research team and a growing sense that what was still being referred to with awe as ‘the World Wide Web’ was robust enough to deliver compressed video on demand all came together to energise our fledgling project. Alongside the preservation aspect mentioned above, we had two other primary aims: to make our digital resources available over broadband Internet connections for researchers and students, and to return copies to source communities in the countries of origin—such as Nepal, Bhutan, the Tibetan Autonomous Region and the Himalayan states of India. When we started the project, we had naively imagined that the West would have the Internet, and ‘the Rest’ would have DVDs and CD-ROMs. How wrong we were.

Technology as a master class in Buddhist non-attachment

Archivists specialising in the curation of moving images use the phrase “nitrate won’t wait” to describe the urgency of migrating silver nitrate film to more durable digital formats. Not only were anthropological collections dating from

the early 20th century fast degrading, but they were also becoming orphaned, as the technology needed to view them was now obsolete and ever harder to find. The pace of technological change provides a powerful if brutal lesson in impermanence and non-attachment: it's still possible to read a book that is 500 years old (as many scholars of classical languages and cultures regularly do), but close to impossible to find a computer anywhere within the University of Cambridge that can read an 'old' 8-inch or 5¼-inch floppy disc dating back to the 1980s. The rate of innovation and obsolescence moves ever faster, and few fieldworkers pause to reflect on issues such as the longevity and persistence of their recordings before they travel to remote locations around the world to document endangered cultures.

There was a further irony in what we planned to do. While 'audio-visual' was a big technology buzzword in the 1990s, ethnographic fieldwork had been 'multimedia' or 'multimodal' for about 100 years, with early anthropologists using still cameras, wax or plastic cylinder record phonographs and copious notebooks to document their personal reflections. When these scholars returned home, though, they were expected to write books in which precious little of the material that they had recorded could be accommodated. And when anthropologists retired, and later passed away, their collections of recordings and photographs were left in shoeboxes in their attic, only to be passed on to university libraries and archives that didn't really want them or know how to catalogue them. So while fieldwork was inherently immersive, making use of all manner of technology, an anthropologist's holistic collection

would be split apart when it returned home, according to the format of the recording medium: text, to the library; sound, to the audio archives; photographs, to the photo collections; and cine film, often nowhere. The fast-developing web was the natural site for these diverse materials to be reintegrated and served up in a rich, searchable and retrievable multimedia format.

Film collections

In the first phase of the project, five ethnographic collections were selected for digitisation, along with a set of maps of Nepal and some important journals on Himalayan studies. One of the most valuable collections was that of the 16mm films taken by Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, Professor of Anthropology at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, which spanned from the 1930s to the 1980s. While Fürer-Haimendorf's specific interests included the Naga communities of India and the Sherpa of Nepal, he travelled far and wide across the region, taking over 100 hours of film throughout his career. Extraordinary in both its breadth and its depth, his collection is one of the finest extant ethnographic film collections that document Himalayan cultures.

We started digitising Fürer-Haimendorf's films in a cheap and cheerful way ourselves by projecting the footage and then filming the output through a box of mirrors, and hosting video clips on our website. These snippets caught the attention of the British Universities Film and Video Council (BUFVC) who then paid for the professional digitisation of the footage using telecine projection. Herein lay

another lesson: digitisation is a continuous and ongoing process, not a simple one off; and we began to think of digitising a subset first before committing to undertake the digitisation of an entire collection.

Another important early collection for the project was that of Frederick Williamson, a British Political Officer stationed in Sikkim in the 1930s. He was also an ardent photographer and amateur filmmaker. Between 1930 and 1935, he and his wife, Margaret, took approximately 1,700 photographs throughout the region. As well as documenting the Williamsons' travels, their photos provide an unusually well preserved and well-catalogued insight into social life in Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet during the 1930s. Of particular interest to us were the 23 reels of 16mm cine film that Williamson shot while on official trips. We first digitised these films and then returned to Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet with sets of DVDs to make them available to institutes, universities and colleges in the region, as well as to the descendants of some of the people we could identify from the footage.

Through the Fürer-Haimendorf and Williamson's film collections, interesting and unexpected collaborations began to take place. The custodians of such collections back in the UK often had only limited knowledge about the context of the footage that they held, based on a few quickly scribbled notes on a film canister or from an ancient accession form. Back in the Himalayas, however, descendants of the individuals who featured in these films could often provide a great deal of additional information about the footage,

and their insights added enormous value to the collections. Returning to source communities with DVDs and hard discs, then, was never a mechanical process of cultural repatriation in digital form, but rather an exciting opportunity for partnerships by which collections were enriched and better understood, and copies of the footage distributed to the communities who had a stake in its maintenance and content.

Himalayan journals online

It became apparent that we were in a position to expand Digital Himalaya to benefit an ever-wider base of individuals around the world who were connected to the Internet. As scholars, we were frequent users of online archives containing digitised versions of academic journals, but we were surprised to discover that no publications that originated in Himalayan countries could be found in such online archives, severely restricting access, impact and visibility. Moreover, users had to be associated with an established university or institution of higher education to have access to such portals, which essentially restricts the readership to a tiny proportion of users. With the agreement of editorial boards and publishers, we started sourcing and scanning back issues of a large number of journals, magazines and publications on Himalayan studies from Nepal, Bhutan, India and Tibet, as well as publications relating to the region that originated in Europe and the United States.

After several years of scanning, we now host back issues of many important publications online for free download, including but not limited to: *Ancient*

Nepal, Adarsha; Bulletin of Tibetology; Contributions to Nepalese Studies; European Bulletin of Himalayan Research; Gochali, Himal; Himal Southasian; Himalayan Journal of Sciences; Journal of Bhutan Studies; Journal of Newar Studies; Journal of the Tibet Society; Kailash- Journal of Himalayan Studies; Martin Chautari Policy Briefs; Mulyankan; Nation Weekly; Nepalese Linguistics; Nepali Times; Newsfront; Occasional Papers in Sociology and Anthropology; Peace and Democracy in South Asia; Purnima; Read; Regmi Research Series; Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines; Sharada and Shikshak. In this context, we are particularly happy to have made contact with Lt. Col. Gerry Birch, Chairman of the Britain-Nepal Society. At Gerry's request, we scanned the back issues of this splendid journal (at our own cost out of appreciation for the work of the Society) and we are now privileged to host the entire back archive of the journal on our website, for free, for anyone, anywhere to download:

<<http://www.digitalhimalaya.com/collections/journals/bnsj/>>

The idea is simple: we want to stimulate sales and subscriptions to journals by digitising and hosting back issues (at no cost to publishers and editors), many of which are now out of print, and thus provide a web presence for publications that might otherwise not have made it online. We have found our PDF archive of journals and magazines to be amazingly popular, especially within Himalayan states themselves, where access to good libraries and full collections of printed matter is often poor. Having started with a few journals

(*Kailash - Journal of Himalayan Studies* was the first), we quickly established a momentum and visibility such that others wanted to join the initiative. Now that we run optical character recognition software over each article, it's possible to search the content of a journal (as long as was originally printed in a Roman script), and all articles are indexed by Google.

Together with Dr Ken Bauer, we also produced a series of maps of each of Nepal's 75 districts based on GIS layers showing rivers, roads, settlements and elevation, all of which are widely used and freely available through our website. We also built an online tool to query data from the 2001 National Census of Nepal, allowing users to download data on economic activity, literacy, marital status, religion, population and school status in four different file formats. These resources are proving to be very popular the world over, and particularly among students, NGOs and journalists in South Asia itself, which is very satisfying.

Our team

Aside from Alan Macfarlane and myself, there were two other founding members of the project: Sarah Harrison and Sara Shneiderman, both scholars of Nepal, and coincidentally also our wives. Sarah and Sara did an enormous amount of the early work—including designing and hosting our first web presence and preparing collections for online distribution. As the project developed and changed direction over the years, many other people have become involved. I would like to mention in particular Daniel Ho of New York, a very talented artist and web designer (a rare combination in one person); Hikmat

Khadka, a skilled translator and user of Nepali Unicode who joined us for 6 months in Cambridge some years back; and Komin Thami, our office manager and principal scanner based in Kathmandu. Digital Himalaya has matured from being a UK-based university initiative to a multi-sited online portal with team members in three continents making use of Skype, Gmail and file transfer services like YouSendIt to work together and ensure that new collections can be hosted online as efficiently as possible.

Project movements

From 2002 to 2005, the project moved to the Department of Anthropology at Cornell University and began its collaboration with the University of Virginia. From August 2011, Digital Himalaya has been colocated at Cambridge and Yale Universities. These various moves have added a great deal to the project and our collections. I will never forget my joy at seeing the first automatic document feeder scanner, which ingested A4 print outs and spat out a perfect PDF! We made good use of this machine, along with many other tools, and we now have well over 3,000,000 pages of text online.

Our users

For a long time, we had no idea of how many users we had and where they were based, but through Google Analytics, we now have a much better sense. Most of our users come from four countries: India; Nepal; the United States; and the United Kingdom; but there are sizeable numbers of repeat visitors from Europe and South America also. On an average

day, we receive between 200-300 visits to our site, and many people spend some time downloading movies, audio files or documents from our servers that they can view on their own computers or handheld devices once they are no longer connected to the web.

The unexpected

While the project began as a strategy for salvaging, archiving and disseminating the products of (primarily colonial) ethnographic collections on the Himalayas—both for posterity and for heritage communities—Digital Himalaya has become a collaborative digital publishing environment which brings a new collection online every month. The website has grown from being a static homepage with occasional updates to a dynamic content delivery platform for over 40GB of archived data. Similarly, our website has moved from being almost exclusively used by members of Western universities to providing a range of services to a global public, with a particularly strong user base in Asia. Digitisation has been ‘off-shored’ to Nepal, dramatically reducing operating costs, increasing productivity and improving connectivity with local communities. And perhaps most importantly, our funding no longer comes from national grant-giving bodies in Europe or the States, but from users, Web referrals and individual donations from around the world. It’s been an exciting, unexpected and very rewarding process. We continue to receive as many grateful emails as we do frustrated emails from users when links don’t work (do tell us, please), alongside recommendations of areas into which we might expand.

Website: www.digitalhimalaya.org
For further information, please contact:
Dr Mark Turin:
<mark.turin@yale.edu>

A message from Dr Turin on behalf of the Digital Himalaya Project Team:

As potential users of the resources provided online for free by Digital Himalaya, I thought that you wouldn't mind being approached about an easy way of supporting this collaborative project. Amazon.co.uk has an affiliates scheme which earns our project a tiny commission when purchases on Amazon are routed through the Digital Himalaya site.

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BACSA welcomes new members. Application details and lists of **BACSA** publications can be seen at: www.bacsa.org.uk. The honorary secretary is Dr. Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, 135 Burntwood Lane, London SW17 0AJ, England. Email: rosieljai@clara.co.uk



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VICTORIA CROSSES AWARDED TO BRITAIN'S INDIAN ARMY GURKHAS 1911- 1947

By Richard Cawthorne

The deaths of Havildar Lachhiman Gurung VC late 8th Gurkha Rifles in December 2010 and Honorary Lieutenant (QGO) Tulbahadur Pun VC late 6th Queen Elizabeth's Own Gurkha Rifles in April 2011, has closed a chapter in the history of the Victoria Cross. Lachhiman was the last soldier of the Indian Army to be awarded the Victoria Cross and following his death Tulbahadur was the sole survivor of Britain's Indian Army who had been awarded the Victoria Cross. Tulbahadur's death also occurred in the centenary year that the eligibility for the award of the Victoria Cross was expanded to include Indian and Gurkha officers and soldiers of the Indian Army.

Initially the award of the Victoria Cross to the Honourable East India Company and later Britain's Indian Army was restricted to British officers and soldiers. Native officers, non commissioned officers and sepoy were only eligible for the Indian Order of Merit (IOM), which had been instituted in 1837. The expansion of the award to include native officers, non commissioned officers and men was notified in *The London Gazette* on 12th December 1911, which coincided with its announcement at the Coronation Durbar of HM King George V at Delhi on the same day.

Over the next 35 years, until Partition and the Independence of Pakistan and India in 1947, a total of forty Victoria Crosses were awarded to Indian and Gurkha officers and soldiers. Eleven Victoria Crosses were awarded during the First World War, two of which were to Gurkhas; one Victoria Cross was awarded

to an Indian sepoy during the Waziristan campaign in 1921; and twenty eight Victoria Crosses were awarded during the Second World War, of which ten were to Gurkhas. Of the twelve Victoria Crosses to Gurkhas, three were awarded posthumously, all in the Second World War.

In the First World War, the Victoria Crosses awarded to Gurkhas were both to riflemen of the 2nd Battalion 3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles; one in France in 1915 and the other in Palestine in 1918. In the Second World War, Gurkha recipients were from six of the ten regiments of Gurkhas for actions in North Africa, Italy and Burma. The first Victoria Cross to be awarded to a Gurkha in the Second World War was for an action in North Africa in 1943; two were awarded to Gurkhas, both posthumously, for actions in Italy in 1944; and the remaining seven Victoria Crosses were awarded to Gurkhas for the Burma campaign. Of the seven Victoria Crosses for the Burma campaign, four were awarded during a two week period in 1944 – two of which were awarded to a single battalion in the same battle. Gurkhas of 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles (Frontier Force) were awarded a total of four Victoria Crosses for actions in Burma and Italy, which was more than any other regiment in the Indian Army; and its 2nd Battalion was the most decorated battalion in the Indian Army, having been awarded three Victoria Crosses during the Burma campaign.

Six of the twelve Victoria Crosses awarded to Gurkhas of Britain's Indian

Army are now held by The Gurkha Museum. These are the Victoria Crosses awarded during the First World War to Riflemen Kulbir Thapa and Karanbahadur Rana, both of 3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles, and for the Second World War to Subadar Lalbahadur Thapa and Riflemen Bhanbhagta Gurung 2nd King Edward VII's Own Gurkha Rifles,

Tulbahadur Pun 6th Gurkha Rifles and Ganju Lama MM 7th Gurkha Rifles.

Havildar Lachhiman Gurung and Honorary Lieutenant (QGO) Tulbahadur Pun were the last of a special breed and their deaths represent the end of an era.

(*"The Story of Gurkha VCs" is available from The Gurkha Museum.*)

**SUCCESSION OF VICTORIA CROSSES AWARDED TO GURKHAS OF
BRITAIN'S INDIAN ARMY
1911- 1947**

Rank	Name	Regiment	Date of Action	Theatre	Comment
Rifleman	Kulbir Thapa	2 nd Bn 3 rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles	25 Sep 15	France	Died 1956
Rifleman	Karanbahadur Rana	2 nd Bn 3 rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles	10 Apr 18	Palestine	Died 1973
Subadar	Lalbahadur Thapa	1 st Bn 2 nd King Edward VII's Own Gurkha Rifles	5-6 Apr 43	North Africa	Died 1968
Havildar	Gaje Ghale	2 nd Bn 5 th Royal Gurkha Rifles (Frontier Force)	27 May 43	Burma	Died 2000
Rifleman	Ganju Lama MM	1 st Bn 7 th Gurkha Rifles	12 Jun 44	Burma	Died 2000
Rifleman	Tulbahadur Pun	3 rd Bn 6 th Gurkha Rifles	23 Jun 44	Burma	Died 2011
Rifleman	Agansing Rai	2 nd Bn 5 th Royal Gurkha Rifles (Frontier Force)	24-25 Jun 44	Burma	Died 2000
Jemadar	Netrabahadur Thapa	2 nd Bn 5 th Royal Gurkha Rifles (Frontier Force)	25 Jun 44	Burma	Posthumous
Rifleman	Sherbahadur Thapa	1 st Bn 9 th Gurkha Rifles	18-19 Sep 44	Italy	Posthumous
Rifleman	Thaman Gurung	1 st Bn 5 th Royal Gurkha Rifles (Frontier Force)	10 Nov 44	Italy	Posthumous
Rifleman	Bhanbhagta Gurung	3 rd Bn 2 nd King Edward VII's Own Gurkha Rifles	5 Mar 45	Burma	Died 2008
Rifleman	Lachhiman Gurung	4 th Bn 8 th Gurkha Rifles	12-13 May 45	Burma	Died 2010

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GURKHA SETTLEMENT IN UK – AN UPDATE

By Colonel William Shuttlewood, Director GWT

The Gurkha Settlement Programme (GSP) is now in its fourth year. It applies only to those ex-Gurkhas who left the Brigade on or before 30 Jun 97, the day prior to the transfer of sovereignty in Hong Kong. Those who left the Brigade on or after 1 Jul 97 were already entitled to settle in UK under the HM Forces Immigration Rules (HMFIR) issued in 2004. Authoritative figures are difficult to establish but the Trust estimates that circa 11,000 heads of family have sought settlement in UK either under GSP or HMFIR. Individuals are allowed to be accompanied by their wives and dependant children up to the age of 18 years.

In support of the GSP the MOD has established in Kathmandu a Gurkha Settlement Office (GSO). Its primary task is to ensure those considering settlement make informed decisions. Once an individual declares his intent to move to UK the GSO will also assist with the visa application and arrange for a fast-track issue of a National Insurance Number to enable the individual to access benefits and other support as necessary on arrival in UK. The cost of settlement to the individual is substantial: in the region of £5,500 for a married couple (visa fee/airfare/initial living expenses). Many intending to move to UK therefore borrow money in anticipation that work or their entitlement to benefits will enable them to repay their loan.

The motives of those seeking settlement are not clearly defined. At one level they are a mix of: curiosity, entitlement, pursuit of a better life (especially for children), to be with wider family, to access medical treatment, to seek employment. There are also increasing signs that many

individuals, especially those over age 60, seek settlement to take advantage of the UK's benefits system and retain the hope/anticipation that their wider family, especially children over age 18 years, will be allowed to join them in due course.

A substantial number of those seeking settlement are over 60 years. These are the most vulnerable group and from the outset of their time in UK they remain dependent on benefits and support from the Service charities. These individuals generally do not speak any English, lack the skills to secure employment and are unable to integrate into wider UK Society. Many have sought to settle in the Aldershot/Farnborough area to a life on welfare support. The extent of benefits is such that, in many cases, individuals are able to remit funds to Nepal to repay loans and to support the wider family/community. But we should not forget that many others seek and acquire work and become well-placed to integrate into UK Society.

The Gurkha diaspora is increasingly well established across the country. It is estimated that 94% of those seeking settlement who are able to work acquire employment and, with their wives and children, begin the process of integration. The concentration of large number of elderly ex-Gurkhas in Aldershot/Farnborough, and its attendant political and social implications at both national and local government levels does not always reflect well on the Brigade, past, present and future. There is particular concern that the public's perception of the Gurkha soldier could be affected, especially when combined with the political activities of various Gurkha ex-

Servicemen's organisations in UK seeking equal pensions and settlement for dependants over the age of 18 years.

There are some early signs that the numbers seeking settlement is in decline, that life in UK (especially on benefits) is not quite the paradise expected, and that work is in short supply. Some individuals are beginning to return to Nepal, having "been there, done that and worn the T shirt". But for many, the Programme has enabled them to seek a new life, to secure employment and to integrate with wider UK Society.

The Trust continues to support the GSP by providing advice and counsel in UK for those in need, leaving the established Service charities to deliver welfare support that is required (the Trust makes an annual grant -currently £200,000- to ABF in recognition of this work). This is an arrangement that enables the Trust to retain its focus on Nepal where there remains a different order of poverty and distress.



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WOMEN WITHOUT ROOFS

By Anna Townsend

*(Anna Townsend is Chair of Trustees, Women Without Roofs – Nepal,
a UK registered charity No. 1132931)*

My husband Simon (Major Townsend QOGLR) and our two children returned to Nepal for three weeks in May last year (2012) and on this occasion it was my work that took us back. Since living in Nepal six years ago, when Simon was stationed in Kathmandu, the charity that I founded has grown and we returned to see the amazing work being carried out by the charity's staff and friends in the country.

Whilst living in Patan in 2005 I was approached by an elderly missionary called Eileen Lodge, who is famous for being one of the founding staff members of Shining Hospital in Pokhara. Eileen was 80 years old in 2005 and lived in Patan near our house. With her own means she was supporting a small group of destitute women with their rent and medical bills. These women were her friends and quite simply Eileen was concerned about what would happen to these women when she died. Having no social provision, Nepal is a difficult place to survive if you are vulnerable and unable to work, and Eileen provided vital support to these women.

Eileen asked if I would take on the financial support for these women, which I did, and thanks to the kind support of my family and friends found sponsors for the women and were able to continue to paying their rent and medical bills. Eileen named the charity Women Without Roofs (WWR) and in 2006 we were registered in the UK. It seemed I was now the chair of an official charity and we have continued to expand ever since.

All the women supported by WWR are alone and have no one else to help them;

of the first group passed on to us by Eileen around half had suffered from leprosy. The social stigma of leprosy had meant that their husbands had abandoned them, leaving the women to raise their children alone. Since that time we have steadily taken on more women and discovering their problems and the issues they face has been a challenging learning experience. We have helped a human trafficking victim who had been drugged and smuggled to work in brothels in Delhi. Other women have suffered rape and there are countless widows, both young and old, who remain on the margins of Nepalese society and suffer from harsh discrimination.

We spent two weeks of our trip in Kathmandu visiting the women in their homes and took the children along too and they were warmly welcomed into the humble rooms in which the women live. The level of poverty can be shocking; some women, at the time they are referred to us (we always try to move them somewhere better though it is not always possible) live in cellar rooms without windows where the walls have been blackened with smoke from cooking. All of them have to endure endless dark evenings due to the multiple power cuts across the city. Most of the women have children to support as well and we have come across young girls who work instead of going to school and even at the age of ten have grey hair due to their poor diet; it is deeply saddening.

Thankfully though we have been able to help them and the highlight of our trip was our visit to the Anugraha Ashram

(Grace Women's Home) in Godavari that WWR established in 2011 to provide a safe and pleasant place for our neediest women to live. The home has a beautiful view over the southern Kathmandu valley and not only has clean rooms but space for a market garden so that vegetables can be grown and animals kept. There are hens, goats, bees and two cows called Angela and Bob - a donor in the UK wished to name them! It was marvellous to see the women there, some of whom have suffered enormously, smiling and caring for each other so tenderly.

WWR operates across Kathmandu and also runs two sewing and literacy courses in Bansbari that teach women a valuable skill so they can provide for their families. There is also a small shop where the graduates of the course can work and earn some income. One of the benefits of being a small and relatively new charity is that we can respond quickly to the needs of the women we support and we are keen to help them as much as we can, especially when they have their own ideas to make their lives better.

WWR's work is growing most in the area of education. All of the women we support receive an allowance per child per month (rather like child benefit in the UK) and we are now looking to support children through college and beyond. Education is the key to breaking the cycle of poverty within families so we wish to invest in this area. However it seems most students in Nepal wish to leave the country and work abroad and this is dispiriting. We long for Nepal to sort out its problems so that those with skills will stay in the country and help it to develop.

Our trip was not all work and we also spent a week in Pokhara at the British Camp at the home of Lt Col Johnny Fenn and with our children managed the Royal

Trek around Begnas Tal and Rupa Tal. We all adored the scenery and the company of our porters who were great fun. Our five year old daughter Bethany not only managed to walk the entire way but also managed to talk the entire time too. She was never out of breath! Zach, who is eight, was very proud of himself for keeping up with the porters but we did have to remind him that he didn't have to carry anything!

As a family we are all firmly committed to Nepal and know it won't be long before we visit again, whether for my work or with Simon's Army commitments. We would absolutely love to be posted there again. It is our adopted home and our children even think they are a little Nepalis. It is a source of great joy to us that we can be involved in helping, ever so little, to make the country better.

In 2009 I decided to gain a better understanding of development and so I began an MSc in Poverty Reduction and Development Management with Birmingham University. My work with Women Without Roofs was also leading me to interesting situations and so it was that I found myself in the City of London in 2011 at a Charity Dragons' Den event trying to raise some funds. It was however a propitious evening, not least because the Dragons liked our charity, but also because I was introduced to Jeremy Lefroy, MP for Stafford, who is a member of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Britain and Nepal. When it came to writing my dissertation I offered to carry out research on their behalf, and so it was that whilst all my fellow students flew off to sunnier climes for their dissertation research, I made the journey to Stafford on the train!

Both Jeremy and I were aware that the decision to allow Gurkhas to settle in the

UK following their service in the British Army, famously fought for by Joanna Lumley, had had a negative impact on Nepal. Gurkhas now look towards their future in the UK and therefore no longer send large amounts of money home to Nepal to be invested there. Towns such as Dharan, that I had visited whilst living in Nepal, were orderly and booming thanks to the influence of the retired Gurkhas resident there. Council services, such as rubbish collections, were introduced and the entire town population benefited.

My research quest therefore became to understand what influence the Gurkhas, now in their new role as a Diaspora, could have on Nepal's development from afar. At no point did I take for granted that Gurkhas should be helping Nepal develop, but I did assume that Gurkhas would want to make a meaningful contribution to Nepal and this assumption was justified by the enthusiasm I met with in focus groups with the Gurkhas and their wives serving in Stafford.

The research identified eight areas in which Gurkhas could aid and assist Nepal to develop. These were, in summary:

- Advocate and lobby on behalf of Nepal.
- Increase the value of remittances through charity giving.
- Invest in a Diaspora or public bond.
- Plan for and participate in disaster response.
- Build trade links with Nepal.
- Use sport for development.
- Involve themselves with the wider development community.
- Several areas of policy that could be amended to help development.

Diaspora bonds, a savings bond issued by national banks to the overseas workers, are in vogue with the World Bank right

now and are perceived as having great potential for raising development finance. Nepal Rastra Bank (the national bank of Nepal) has tentatively made them available for purchase by its Diaspora and I was able to meet and interview their Executive Director of Public Debt whilst visiting Nepal – I made it beyond Stafford eventually! Sadly his answers to my questions about the bond gave me no confidence in the worthiness of the product at present. I can only hope that once greater stability is achieved some progress can be made.

Other suggestions that Gurkhas could be involved in disaster response and use sport for development play to their particular strengths as a Diaspora group. Gurkhas serve in the British Army as infantrymen and also as logisticians, signallers and engineers, all of which, coupled with their language skills, would make them extremely useful in the wake of a disaster in Nepal. Given that the country sits on a major fault line this is a high probability. The Gurkha Major in Aldershot had a keen desire to see Nepal compete on the global sporting stage and he wished to copy the success of Kenya by finding and training great runners from impoverished backgrounds. He hoped this would help Nepalis to feel proud of their nation.

As a military wife I was most encouraged by the compassion yet worldliness of the Gurkha wives. They were aware of the problems of human trafficking in Nepal and were keen to do what they could to raise awareness of the issue in their home villages. My research suggests that it is they who have the most time and enthusiasm for the solutions I recommend and my hope is to continue working with them both in Stafford and in Aldershot where I now live.

(If you would like to know more about Women Without Roofs or even make a donation, please visit www.wwr-nepal.org. Anna regularly speaks to groups about the charity and its work; if you would like to book her to speak please contact her at anna@wwr-nepal.org Eileen Lodge, the missionary mentioned

in the article who may be known to you, is still alive though bed-bound at her home in Kathmandu. A full copy of Anna's dissertation is available if you wish to read more about the many ways that Gurkhas can aid Nepal to develop. Contact Anna at the e-mail address above.)

FROM THE EDITOR'S IN-TRAY

The Kosi Bird Observatory (KBO) –

A report from the journal *British Birds* (February 2012)

Following a worldwide appeal the Kosi Bird Observatory has been established after only one year of fund raising, a remarkable effort. It is a 10 hectare site located just north of the Koshi Thappu Wildlife Reserve. Dr Hemsagar Baral, Nepal's leading ornithologist and president of Himalayan Nature (expanded from Bird Conservation Nepal) said: "The site is now, in essence, a mini bird reserve complementing the conservation efforts achieved by the Government of Nepal when Koshi Thappu Wildlife Reserve was established to protect the rich natural heritage further down the river. The KBO is flanked by two Important Bird Areas, the Dharan Forest to the east and Koshi Thappu and Koshi barrage to the south. Most importantly it lies in an ideal place for studying Nepal's birds at a point where the mighty Koshi River finally opens out after meandering through the high mountains and hills of Nepal."

The Jim Edwards Memorial Fund

Members will remember that following the death of Jim Edwards of Tiger Tops fame, a memorial fund was established in 2009. The trustees have now started their first project that reflects Jim's strong interest in conservation education. In Nepal there is an umbrella organisation SENSE – School Environment Conservation Education Network Nepal which is committed to spreading practical awareness about current issues of environmental conservation and biodiversity through the involvement of school children. One of the schools that have signed up to this network is in Bardia and in the village closest to Tiger Tops Lodge, Karnali. The fund has provided a building named the 'Jagadamba Jim Edwards Conservation Education Information Centre for this village and its school. One of the Society's vice presidents, Mrs Pat Mellor, is the Trust's secretary.

Figures on the Nepalese Population living in Great Britain

At the Britain-Nepal Academic Council study days in Edinburgh (18/19 April) the following figures were quoted by presenters: in the 2001 census there 5938 Nepalese recorded in UK, this had risen to 60,002 in the 2011 Census. It is estimated that there were likely to be around 100,000 Nepalese now living here.

Gorkhaland

Recent reports (August 2013) indicate there has been more trouble in the Darjeeling area. The Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) has been angered by the Indian government's establishment of a new state in Andhra Pradesh but have again ignored demands from the GJM for recognition of a Gorkhaland state. The GJM have indicated that that it will attempt to stop the transport and export of any tea from the Darjeeling hills. This action could shut down the tea estates leaving stocks to rot and damage the next year's leaves. This would seem to be counter productive since it could leave the tea pickers and workers, some 25% of the working population, without a job. Seventy per cent of the local population live on tea estates. Darjeeling produces over 9 million kilograms of tea every year with over one hundred thousand workers involved in the tea industry.

The Vulture Crisis Update

According to the latest bulletin of the Oriental Bird Club, BirdingASIA, the decline in the vulture population had slowed and may be, in the case of the White-rumped Vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*), possibly reversed, in both India and Nepal. This was one of the findings of the SAVE (Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction) meeting held in November 2012 in Kathmandu. Surveys had shown that current population trends show a statistically significant change in the rate of decline from rapid to slow. Survival rates have apparently improved with the reduction in the use of the anti-inflammatory drug diclofenac.

Images from 29th BRINOS ear surgery camp - Nepalgunj - March 2005



Richard Olivier - photographer - 020 8567 5629



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BOOK REVIEWS

Gurkha Tales, From Peace and War, 1945-2011. By J.P. Cross. *Frontline Books, an imprint of Pen and Sword Books Ltd, Barnsley, South Yorkshire, UK. 2012. Pp x + 278. Hb. Illust. £19.99. ISBN: 978-1-84832-690-3.*

This book is called ‘Gurkha Tales’ but as John Cross explains in his introduction, it is not tales of or about the Gurkhas, rather tales the Gurkhas tell and there is a subtle difference. The Nepalis are predominantly a mountain race who traditionally like telling stories and in their mountain villages after dark and round the fire, the tales begin. The stories are competitive i.e. one ‘caps’ the other so that imagination sometimes bends the truth and the adage that a good story should not be spoilt by strict adherence to the truth is occasionally maintained. The stories cover the life experiences of the author Lieutenant Colonel John Cross who was recruited into the 1st Gurkhas in 1944 and retired to live in Pokhara in 1986.

The chapters (each representing a Tale) cover a wide range of subjects. They are in rough chronological order and represent a sort of curriculum vitae of Col. Cross’s professional career with subsidiary adventures thrown in. Each chapter is autonomous but such is the subject and style one is seduced into reading one after the other. Highlights include a description and comments of a visit to Laos in March 1975 when the Vietnam War was ending and a trip to Ootacamund in Tamil Nadu during the India/Pakistan War of December 1971. Evidently here the British Raj was alive

and well, perpetuated by stories about retired Indian army officers and South African women of Indian origin. Another story recounts how on a visit to Kathmandu, his name (Lieutenant Cross), was mistaken for a winner of the Victoria Cross. The stories were published through the years in *The Kukri*, the journal of the Brigade of Gurkhas while others are from letters to friends and family and depict noteworthy events. John Cross served throughout the Far East and the Tales reflect his time in a variety of locations including Malaya during the Emergency and his time as commandant of the Jungle Warfare School. In jungle warfare the participants are taught to talk only in whispers and never interfere with nature. One Tale tells how the dislodgement of a single leaf was the only sign that revealed enemy presence in deepest jungle. There are stories about the early days of Gurkha recruitment, soldiers’ superstitions and life with the Border Scouts raised by Colonel Cross for service in Sarawak and Sabah in 1963. Following the end of WWII and Japanese surrender, the presence of a large number of Japanese soldiers presented peculiar problems before they could all be repatriated. One solution was to incorporate them into the British Army and Col. Cross describes how he discovered he was commanding a large contingent of Japanese troops who had ‘changed sides’. His literary style includes curious phrases e.g. ‘more than a dogs lifetime’ whose meaning is not obviously clear and many puns, such as ‘slim thread’ referring to General Bill Slim and a poem referring to a hornbill

and an ashtray. There are references to Spencer Chapman, as well as a description of 'Longhouse Culture' in Borneo from the inside. This is an experience of life that is unique and probably can never be repeated.

John Cross is a prolific author and has written books on Nepali history as well as historical novels and Gurkhali dictionaries. He is a linguist of repute and is said to have learnt Temiar an obscure aboriginal north Malay language in five days. The breadth of his knowledge is reminiscent of Kipling in that he knows of cultures living in regions that are uncontaminated by Western civilisation and is able to communicate with them. I warmly recommend this book to all with even a passing interest in Nepal. Furthermore, his final paragraph in the book includes an invitation to all travelling in Nepal to visit him and his extended family in Pokhara where he now lives.

Dr. PA Trott

Birds of the Indian Subcontinent

2nd edition. By Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp and Tim Inskipp. Christopher Helm, London, 2011. 226 colour plates, 1288 distribution maps. Paperback . £35.00. ISBN 978-0-691-15349-3.

I reviewed the first edition of this work in the 2001 journal (Edition No. 25) along with the pocket guide or field guide edition of the work and the 'Birds of Nepal' which was the extract from the main work of those species to be found in Nepal, also in a field guide format. Helm have produced a much improved field guide in this second and much updated edition. A total of 1,375 species have been covered and have been

illustrated in the 226 colour plates (73 more than in the original edition). The order in which species are listed has been amended from the less familiar Sibley & Munroe to the Howard & Moore listing. The biggest improvements have been the placing of the species descriptions and distribution maps opposite the illustrations and there are fewer illustrations on each colour plate. Many of the illustrations are new and also improved. On a recent trip to India I still had the first pocket edition but other members of the party had the updated version which was easier to use and was well received. I shall be buying the latest edition for my next trip. A full review can be found in *BirdingASIA* No. 17 June 2012, the bulletin of the Oriental Bird Club.

GDB

OBITUARIES



Sheila Marian Birch

Sheila Birch, a life member of the Society, was born in 1935 and lived through the Second War as a child; this experience shaped her approach to life, as it did for many of her generation. Her childhood was spent in Leicester and she was educated at the Wyggeston Girls Grammar School. She retained an interest in her Leicester roots throughout her life, particularly via her family history research.

During her early adult life she became a Fellow of the Institute of Medical Laboratory Technology and trained in the Department of Pathology of Leicester General Hospital before working in medical research laboratories in Oxford, Montreal, London and Cambridge. During this time she made many friends for life. It was during this period she met my father for the first time, she was 20

he was only 17. She was the girl next door, literally, and when her house was full of visitors she stayed next door with my father's family. It was then that my father started bringing her cups of tea in bed in the morning, a tradition that endured throughout their lives together when they later married in 1965.

She became an Army wife and willingly followed my father to wherever he was posted. This involved living in 8 countries (Singapore, Malaya, Germany, Hong Kong, UK, Belgium, Holland and Nepal) and required 17 house moves over a 29 year period. During this time her interest in other people and other cultures flourished.

She gave up her career to follow my father around the world and she proved to be an outstanding Army wife, always interested in other people and cultures wherever she went.

After my father retired she retained her support and interest in the Army, she was a SSAFA case worker for 16 years, always helping those worse off than her and was very recently called back to assist in a specific Gurkha case.

Back in Ickleton she became a member of the village society and served on the committee for many years and for a time was Chairman. She was also a Parish Councillor for 17 years. Sadly in early 2011 she was diagnosed with cancer. She responded well to her initial treatment but the cancer returned in the spring of this year. This time the treatment was not successful and the decision was taken to halt it. She was determined to attend the wedding of a close and dear friend in Germany and the

Gurkha Passing Out parade in Catterick, both of which she achieved. Finally she and my father had a few days together in Cley, Norfolk. It was there that her condition deteriorated more quickly and she was transferred to the Arthur Rank Hospice in Cambridge and died peacefully there after less than 24 hours on the 24th October 2012.

James Birch



Lt Col Adrian M P Griffith

The untimely death of Lt Col Adrian Griffith came as a great shock to all who knew him. He was commissioned into 6th Queen Elizabeth's Own Gurkha Rifles in 1979 and filled a variety of regimental appointments. He was appointed ADC to the Major General Brigade of Gurkhas and also served with 14/20th Kings Royal Hussars, the regiment's affiliated cavalry regiment, an association that dated from 2/6th GR's

service in 43 Gurkha Lorried Brigade in the Middle East and southern Europe during World War II. After attending the Staff College Camberley he served on the staff of 48 Gurkha Infantry Brigade in Hong Kong. Subsequently he commanded a rifle company of 2nd Goorkha Rifles and then in 1st Royal Gurkha Rifles on amalgamation. After an operational tour on the staff in Bosnia he returned to 1st Royal Gurkha Rifles as second-in-command in time to take part in the Bosnia operation. Other operational tours included both Northern Ireland and latterly Afghanistan. However it is for his service in Nepal that he will be principally remembered. On his first appointment in Nepal as second-in-command of British Gurkhas Pokhara he began to establish a reputation as one of the Brigade's experts on Nepal, its culture, language and people. He spent ten years of his service in appointments on the staff of British Gurkhas Nepal. He served there during the Maoist insurgency and it was whilst escorting a BBC film crew that he was kidnapped by a group of insurgents and held for a period of three days. His final and longest appointment was Field Director of the Gurkha Welfare Scheme. He invigorated and reorganised the Brigade's welfare work and created a lasting legacy to the country and the people he loved so much. He was held in very high regard by all the officers and men of the Brigade, almost unique in his generation having such a detailed knowledge of Nepal and the Brigade. The tragic loss of Adrian will be keenly felt by many especially as he had so much to give as a result of his experiences. He was a member of the

Society, supporting its aims though as he was abroad for so much of his service he was not often able to attend.

Brig Tony Hunter–Choat OBE

Brig Tony Hunter-Choat died in April 2012. Not many members will have known Tony Hunter-Choat as he would appear to have spent so little time in UK, especially having read his obituary in *The Daily Telegraph*. This reads like a ‘Boys Own’ story. After completing his education at Dulwich College and training as an architect at Kingston College of Art, he holidayed around Europe and discovered an interest in foreign languages and craved a more adventurous life than that of an architect. He went to Paris in 1957 and joined the Foreign Legion. He spent the next five years as a parachutist on operations in Algeria during the Algerian War of Independence. Over this period he was wounded on occasion and was awarded the Medaille Militaire and the Cross of Valour and two bars to that medal. After his five year term of service he returned to UK and joined the British Army. Initially he was considered too old by MOD but he was granted a special case. After Mons Officer Cadet School, having passed out top of his intake, he was commissioned into the 7th Gurkha Rifles and saw service in Borneo during the Indonesian Confrontation. He converted to a regular commission but age was once again against him for such in the infantry so he transferred to the Royal Artillery. His postings included time as 2IC of 3rd Royal Horse Artillery and as an instructor at the junior division of the staff college at Warminster. The next step in this most unconventional career was

command of 23 SAS Regiment, the territorial unit of the regiment and this without previous service with British Special Forces. Thereafter he remained with Special Forces. He was appointed OBE for his work as Special Forces liaison officer between C-in-C BAOR and Commander US Forces in Germany. After retiring from the British Army as Colonel, he took command of the Sultan of Oman’s Special Forces in the rank of Brigadier, retiring in 1997. Thereafter he took a number of security related posts in Kosovo, with the Aga Khan and with the US forces in Iraq and later Afghanistan. He was a noted lecturer on both security and leadership. His many awards and appointments include Officer of the Legion of Honour (2001), Commander of that order in 2011, Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, Freeman of the City of London, former president and secretary general of the British Branch of the Foreign Legion Association. He maintained his interest in Nepal as a result of his service with 7th Gurkha Rifles. His last attendance at a Society function was the Nepali Supper in 2011. He would have been very proud that his daughter, Sarah Hunter-Choat won the Sword of Honour when she passed out of RMA Sandhurst in December 2012, thereby continuing the family military tradition.

GDB

Mr Ranjitsing Rai, MBE OStJ

Ranjitsing Rai who died aged 84 on 20th December 2011, was the linchpin of the British Military Hospital in Dharan, Nepal for virtually all the 30 years of the hospital’s life. For at least 25 of those years he was the hospital’s administrative



Mr Ranjitsing Rai, MBE OStJ

officer, in which capacity he toiled with calm efficiency on behalf of all members of staff, whether British or Nepalese. Once the Army Medical Services had left in December 1989 with the closure of Dharan cantonment as the Headquarters British Gurkhas Nepal, Ranjit, the name by which he was known by all who knew him, continued to support the Overseas Development Agency which inherited the hospital temporarily before handing the hospital over to the Nepalese Government in early 1993.

Ranjitsing Rai was born at Baragale Kaman near Darjeeling on 1st September 1927, the eldest of 15 children. His father, Dhanraj, was the assistant manager of the Teesta Valley Tea Estate. After education in Darjeeling, Ranjit enlisted into Britain's Brigade of Gurkhas at Jalapahar in October 1948. Having completed recruit training he became a clerk in 1st /6th Gurkha Rifles. He reached the rank of Sergeant but developed pulmonary tuberculosis in the

early 1950's and this resulted in a medical discharge from the army in 1954.

Following treatment he applied for and was accepted as a medical assistant in Lehra, one of the Gurkha recruiting centres in northern India. In the late 1950's British recruiting depots for Gurkhas were established in Paklihawa in south west Nepal and in Dharan in the east of the country. After initially working as a medical assistant in Paklihawa, he transferred to the new 80 bedded British Military Hospital in Dharan as the wardmaster. His administrative skills were soon recognised and he became the hospital administrative officer in 1962, a post that he filled for the rest of the hospital's existence as a military establishment. As the administrative officer he was primarily responsible for the smooth running of all hospital activity. Just as importantly he fulfilled the crucial role of welcoming successive military doctors, nurses and midwives as well as those from the professions allied to medicine, and introducing them to their Nepalese colleagues, many of whom had been trained in the hospital. For the majority working in a developing country was a completely new and potentially daunting experience. Many patients presented with very severe and untreated medical problems: grossly wasted and cachectic children were a shock to many. Frequently patients took several days or even weeks to reach Dharan so poor were the transport facilities, which resulted in the onset of very severe complications before admission to hospital. Accepting such cases was very difficult for some staff members. However Ranjit was able to calm the concerned and encourage and

counsel staff as appropriate to the point whereby all members of staff became accustomed to dealing with severely sick and maimed patients. As a result virtually all members of staff left BMH Dharan with great regret and yet full of memories of the rewarding experiences to which they had been exposed. Ranjit acted with compassion and sympathy for staff and patients alike. Some patients were so poor that they were given money, or where necessary, shoes or clothing funded by the welfare slush fund which he ran.

Like most hospitals BMH Dharan had a major incident plan. This was due to be practised in early 1986. Regrettably there was a major bus crash a few miles away one Sunday evening, which meant that the plan was implemented for real and several casualties were received over a few hours. What became immediately obvious was that the hospital's small A & E department was too small as an ideal area for triage. The plan was subsequently amended to provide a triage area close to but outside the main hospital complex. This became of crucial importance in 1988 following a major earthquake in east Nepal with its epicentre about 50 miles away. The hospital could so easily have become inundated with casualties, but Ranjit's administrative skills were again to the fore, which resulted in a well controlled system of admissions to the hospital for more formal assessment and treatment.

He was also a source of authoritative advice about social and welfare issues involving Gurkha ex-servicemen living in the hills, and in this regard he offered support to young British Gurkha officers working in Dharan.

Ranjit was a mentor to all his staff, a man of infinite patience and kindness but who was never afraid to correct or even chasten those who shirked their responsibilities.

Guy Ratcliffe

(I am grateful to Brigadier Guy Ratcliffe, late RAMC for permission to reproduce this piece originally written for the RAMC magazine and the QARANC gazette. During his service in the RAMC he served as Regimental Medical Officer of 7th Gurkha Rifles 1969-74 and in BMH Dharan as physician 1977/78 and consultant physician and commanding officer 1985/87. Ed.)

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NOTES ON THE BRITAIN-NEPAL SOCIETY

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, students, teachers, returned volunteers, aid workers, doctors, business people, members of the Diplomatic Service and Armed Forces. 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 £20, joint (same address) members £30 per annum. Life membership is a single payment of £350, joint life membership a payment of £550; corporate business members £75 per annum. Concessionary membership of £15 per annum is available to those under 25 or over 75 on production of proof of age. 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 Medical Society of London, Chandos Street, off Cavendish Square where members are encouraged to meet each other over a drink beforehand.

The Society holds an Annual Nepali Supper, usually in February and in the autumn we hold our AGM. The Society also holds receptions and hospitality for visiting senior Nepalese.

Those interested in joining the Society should write to the Secretary, Mrs Jenifer Evans at britorion@aol.com

Website: www.britain-nepal-society.org.uk

THE BRITAIN-NEPAL SOCIETY

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