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THE BRITAIN-NEPAL SOCIETY

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*Journal*

Number 37

2013

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# A LEGACY OF LOYALTY



A 7GR Welfare Pensioner

The day will come when an entire generation will exist who will be unaware of the debt of honour owed to the Gurkha soldier; a generation which cannot remember, as we do, the brave and loyal service Gurkhas have given to the British Crown over nearly two centuries.

That is why we are asking those who do remember, to consider making a provision now for the time when funding and support for Gurkha welfare will be much harder to come by. You can do this by a legacy or bequest to the Gurkha Welfare Trust in your Will.

This will help to ensure the long-term future of our work.

In just the last four years the monthly 'welfare pension' we pay to some 10,400 Gurkha ex-servicemen and widows has risen from 2,500 NCR to 3,800 NCR to try and keep pace with inflation in Nepal. Welfare pensions alone cost the Trust £4.4 million last year. Who knows what the welfare pension will need to be in 10 or 20 years time.

If you do write or amend your Will to make a provision for the Trust then do please let us know. We hope it will be many years before we see the benefit of your legacy, but knowing that a number of our supporters have remembered the Trust in their Wills helps so much in our forward planning. Thank you.



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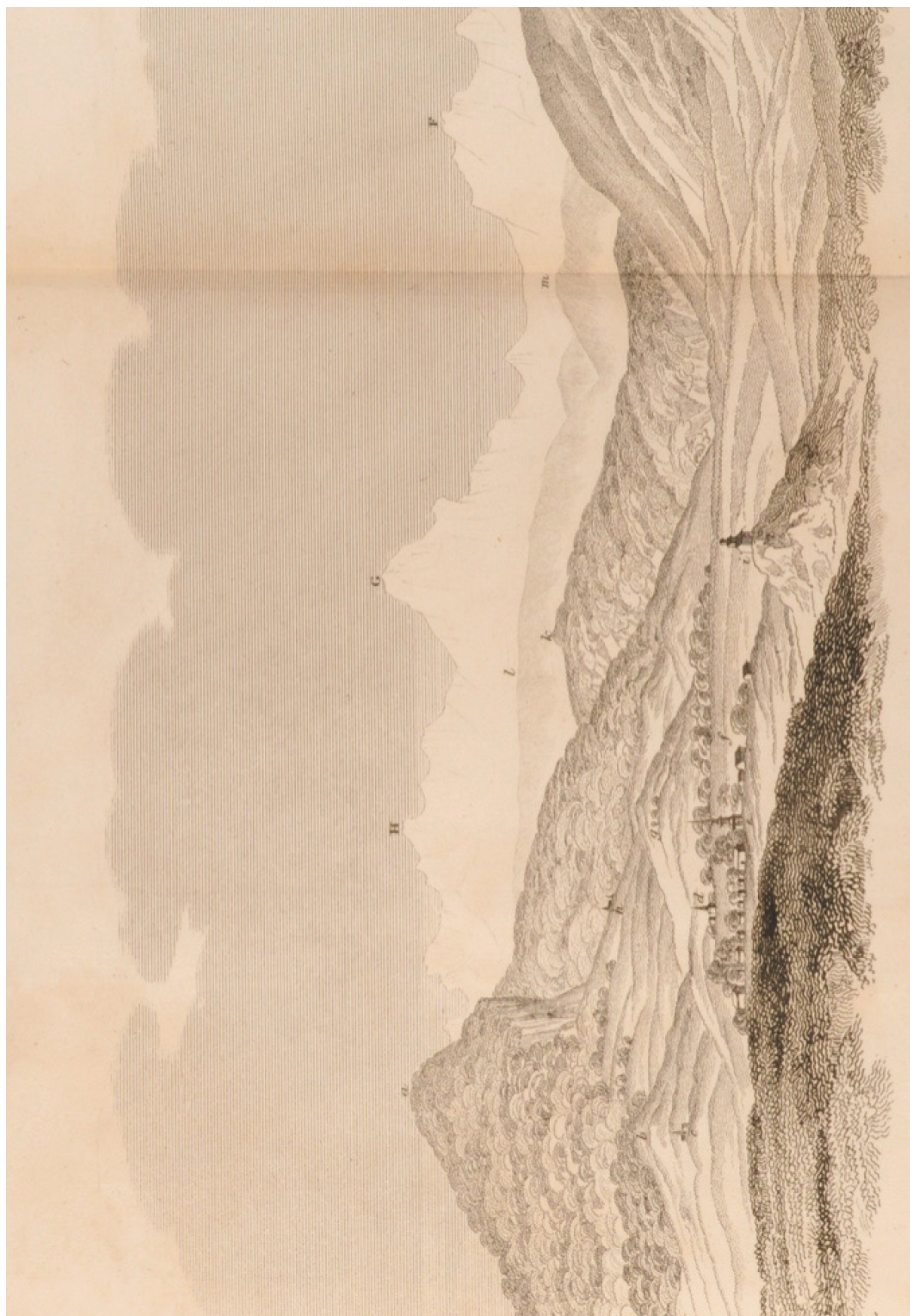
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### CONTENTS

- 4 Editorial
- 5 The Society's News
- 9 The Britain-Nepal Society Summer Outing July 2013
- 10 A Late Summer Trek in Dolpo
- 32 Dr Francis Buchanan-Hamilton: Pioneer for Nepalese Biodiversity
- 39 A Sustainable Art Project
- 43 Life in Kathmandu
- 45 The Gurkha Museum Programme of Events 2014
- 46 Useful addresses
- 47 Notes on the Britain – Nepal Society
- 48 Officers and Committee of the Society



*His Holiness the Dalai Lama being presented with the framed insignia of the Infantry Training Centre and the Gurkha Training Company by Lt Col James Birch, CO 2 Infantry Training Battalion and Chewang Gurning the Brigade's senior Lama.*



*Figure 1. The Kathmandu Valley in 1802, from Francis Hamilton's Account of the Kingdom of Nepal (1819)*

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## EDITORIAL

As I promised in the last edition of the journal, the Dolpo theme has been continued. In 2012 I published the trek notes of the late Major Malcolm Meerendonk who trekked into Dolpo in 1963 at the request of the Intelligence services to ascertain what, if anything, the Chinese were up to in that region. This followed the Chinese incursions into Indian territory in Assam in the east and the Aksai Chin in the west in the autumn of 1962. India had suffered a humiliating defeat as a result and it was not clear what Chinese future intentions were or what action the Tibetan Khampa guerrillas were taking. On this latter point I hope to have a piece that throws some light on Nepal/Tibet cross border actions over the period of the late 1950s/early 1960s in the 2014 edition. I am grateful to Anne Cowan who went with her husband, Gen Sir Sam Cowan, on this long and difficult trek into modern-day Dolpo and kept such an excellent daily diary of their adventures. This was their third trek in this region. A record of their first trek, undertaken in 2002, was published in edition number 27 of the journal in 2003. Since that journal we have now gone to colour for our photographs and the excellent daily photos that Anne took have greatly enhanced the record of their latest trek, although I have had to be selective on grounds of space and cost. I was unaware that the Brigade of Gurkhas nowadays employs two Lamas to assist in the spiritual and cultural side of life of the Brigade. Members may remember that HH The Dalai Lama visited UK and was received by the Prime Minister. I was somewhat surprised to learn from my son, Lt Col James Birch, that he, with the Gurkha Training Company based at Catterick, had been granted an audience with the Dalai Lama, uniform to be worn. This must be a first I thought and I pointed out that I hoped this had been formerly approved, being aware of the diplomatic niceties and pitfalls of such

visits and possible Chinese reaction. [The Chinese had forced the Nepalese government in the past to close the Dalai Lama's liaison office in Kathmandu and their refusal to allow the Dalai Lama to visit Lumbini.] The connection with the Cowans' trip was that they met the Brigade's senior Lama in the remote village of Dho Tarap where he was assisting at a local Buddhist ceremony. The frontispiece shows Lt Col James Birch and Lama Chewang Gurung presenting His Holiness with the framed insignia of the Infantry Training Centre & Gurkha Training Company.

Dr Mark Watson, from the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh, has researched the story of the 1802/03 Buchanan-Hamilton mission to Nepal. From a diplomatic standpoint it did not achieve much as the Nepalese Durbar were not inclined to co-operate, preferring to maintain an isolationist policy in respect of foreign influence to the south. What it did achieve was a collection of specimens and paintings of great botanical value. Mark Watson gave a very interesting lecture to the Society on this mission in November. The artist, Gordon Davidson, has written about his experiences in Kathmandu when he visited to set up an art charity. Members may remember that he spoke to the Society in 2011 and held an exhibition in the Gurkha Museum in April 2011. Nick Morrice has a piece about his adopted family in Kathmandu. He has written a book on his experiences entitled 'Discovered in Kathmandu'. A review of this work will be included in the next edition of the journal. Our new Chairman has described the Society's news and events and Frances Spackman has written about the successful outing to Stowe. I am grateful to all the contributors. May I remind members that the journals up to the last edition are now available on the Digital Himalaya website: [www.digitalhimalaya.org](http://www.digitalhimalaya.org).

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## THE SOCIETY'S NEWS

By Roger Potter

*(This is an edited version of the Chairman's report to the 53rd AGM held by kind permission of the Ambassador, HE Dr SC Chalise, at the Nepalese Embassy on 5th December 2013.)*

My first year as chairman has passed extremely rapidly and I am delighted to be able to give an upbeat report on the Society's activities. For me, this has been a year of stocktaking and I am now in a position to give some indication of how I think that the Society might move on.

First and foremost I would like to thank all of the committee for their outstanding (and essential) help throughout the year. The unstinting support of all these people has made my 'settling in' process easier than I could ever have hoped.

In particular, I am especially grateful to Jenifer Evans who, as acting secretary, has inevitably shouldered the vast majority of the work needed to keep the Society running smoothly. I am as delighted as you will be that she has agreed to forgo the 'acting' part of her job description and to continue as permanent secretary. Jenifer's generosity in this respect, for which I am very grateful, removes an air of uncertainty from the Society's management and adds substance to our public image.



*The Chairman is hoping that Dr Peter Trott, outgoing treasurer, is not about to carry out an amputation during the AGM.*

I would also like to thank our Vice Chairman Colonel John Swanston for all his unobtrusive support and wise counsel. My thanks are also due to Jane Loveless whose stint on the committee has come to an end.

Great thanks are also due from us all to our Honorary Treasurer, Dr Peter Trott, who has handled the Society's finances with meticulous care and good humour for the last nine years. I am delighted to report that Col Rupert Litherland has agreed to take over as treasurer. He will take up the reins immediately after the meeting.

We have also been delighted to welcome Sarah Wrathall as an ex officio committee member representing the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

I would also like to thank those members of the committee who put so much time into arranging the summer outing to Stowe. This was a hugely successful occasion for the 40 members and guests who were able to come. A particular pleasure was the presence of His Excellency the Ambassador and a strong contingent from the embassy.

I was struck to be reminded that when the Society last visited Stowe some twenty years ago the party was 180 strong. This statistic coupled with the fact that this year's outing made a small financial loss underlines the need to examine ways of boosting Society membership and participation in our events. A summer outing for 2014 has not yet been arranged. It will depend in part on identifying a location that will appeal to a greater number of members than were able to come this year. Your ideas will be most welcome.

In other respects, the Society's activities have followed the customary pattern. We held a very enjoyable and well-attended annual supper in February. Our principal guest was Viscount Slim, who gave an entertaining and challenging speech, the burden of which was that small societies like ours must be pro-active if they wish to survive – much food for thought. Minister-Counsellor Mr Tej Bahadur Chetri also spoke on behalf of the Nepalese Ambassador.

We were delighted to welcome as our guests HE Andy Sparkes, newly appointed Ambassador to Nepal, as well as two of our speakers from the previous year. Next year's supper will take place on Thursday 20th February at Pont Street. A speaker has yet to be confirmed.

Once again we have had a varied programme of evening lectures followed by supper at the Medical Society of London. In May, Dr Rosie Llewellyn-Jones gave an intriguing talk entitled *Tales from the Past – Monuments in South East Asia*. Her survey of cemeteries and tombstones ended appropriately with a picture of the grave in Kathmandu of Boris Lissanovitch. In October, society member Nick Morrice gave an inspiring and moving account of the family that he has adopted in Kathmandu; and in November, Head of the Major Floras Research Programme at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh and committee member, Dr Mark Watson gave us a scholarly, authoritative and fascinating talk on *Francis Buchanan-Hamilton and the First Natural History Collections from Nepal in 1802*.

Looking ahead, we have a similarly varied programme of talks for 2014. In May following his forthcoming visit, Craig Holliday will talk about *Water Aid Projects in Nepal*; in October Diana

Wooldridge will tell us about *The Paintings of Dr H A Oldfield*, on whom she has recently completed a doctoral dissertation; in November, Celia Brown will talk on *Darjeeling Past and Present*; finally at the December AGM, Gordon Corrigan will give a talk on *Gurkhas in World War 1* as part of the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the Great War and in anticipation of the 200th anniversary of the Treaty of Sugauli.

It will come as no surprise to you to know that the principal challenge to the Society is to increase the membership and in particular to attract those in the younger age groups. I don't recall which society it was that spent some time discussing whether younger membership started at 60 or 65. You will know what I mean. We are planning a concerted membership drive which we hope will include developing strong relationships with, for instance, the Nepal desks of the British Council and VSO as likely sources of members; and distributing a new glossy flier to selected travel companies and other groups who work with or are in touch with potential members. We are beginning to make contact with schools and colleges that have contacts with Nepal – their staff may be interested in membership and their students are potential future members. We are also anxious to increase the Nepalese membership and are hoping to work with the Non-Resident Nepali Association, amongst others, with this in mind.

One of the best ways of encouraging people to join is word of mouth. So do please try to enlist the support of friends and family who share our love of Nepal.

We also need to keep a careful eye on finances. We are in reasonable shape with a small surplus and a reasonable reserve





*Mrs Marian Donaldson, Mr Ashley Adams and Col Rupert Litherland, incoming treasurer at the AGM.*

reported for the year. However, this would have become a small deficit (for the second year) had there been a charge for a Journal in 2012/2013. Even with increased subscriptions we cannot be complacent and will be exploring amongst other things cheaper ways of producing the Journal.

We must also consider reducing costs by embracing e-mail and other new technologies whilst fully recognising that some members will wish to continue to receive communications by post. Those who wish to will of course be able to do so. I also hope that we can find an inexpensive way of redesigning the website and regularly maintaining it.

Despite some financial concerns I am glad to report that we have made donations during the year of £1000 each to The Gurkha Welfare Trust and the spinal cord injury centre in Pokhara, highlighted by Lt Col John Cross. Examples of how the GWT can use £1000 include: one month's costs for a mobile outreach doctor; or three months' support for a care home resident; or the provision of working lavatories in a GWT school.

Our donation to the spinal cord injury centre has contributed to support for two disabled women in Pokhara, office equipment and mobility devices. If anyone would like to receive more details of this

project I would be delighted to forward to them the report received from Ganga Bahadur Khadka, chairperson of the centre.

It is very important that the activities of the Society reflect the wishes of its members and to this end it is intended to invite

members to complete a questionnaire in the early part of 2014 to raise, amongst other issues, the content, timing and nature of our events programme, the possibility of regional events, joint activities with other organisations etc. Your input into all of this will be hugely appreciated. If anyone would like to volunteer their services and expertise in any of these areas I would be delighted to hear from you.

Whilst seeking help in this way, I should mention that we are looking for a new archivist as Celia Brown has decided to step down from this position. We must all be grateful to her for keeping an eye on the records over the last few years. The plan at the moment is to bring the archive together and re-locate it at the Gurkha Museum at Winchester where a number of other relevant documents are already lodged including the personal papers of the late Mayura Brown. In due course we hope to be able to catalogue the collection and make it available for research purposes.

Sadly but inevitably, I have to report the deaths of two members during the year - Major L Pottinger, Major Dickie Day and Sheila Wylie wife of the late Lt Col Charles Wylie.

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## THE BRITAIN-NEPAL SOCIETY SUMMER OUTING JULY 2013

By Frances Spackman

“Just like the old days” was the contented verdict of one of our longstanding members after a very happy and successful visit to Stowe House and gardens this summer.

Early on Saturday 6th July a coach load of members including HE Dr Chalise, the Ambassador, set off from the Embassy arriving in lovely sunshine in time for elevenses with those who had already arrived there by car.

There to meet us was John Swanston wearing a wide hat and a smile to match.

Roger Potter welcomed everyone and made the introductions. We were then whisked off by our wonderful house guide Anna. Such was her skill as a guide that she presented us with sufficient information to make sense of our surroundings with enough gems to whet our appetites to tempt us back.

Even though Stowe School boasts fabulous dining rooms, we mostly ate our

Nepali picnics on the steps looking at the wonderful view and enjoying the sunshine.

The Garden guides were spot-on too. Our group was lead by a Stoic. (Who knew, apart from Roger, that Old Boys of Stowe School were called Stoics?)

He was as affable as he was authoritative and more than up to his task. When he pointed out, for example, the 13th century church which we wouldn't be visiting, predictably, half our number shot off into the woods to check it out! Good humour and stoicism what a combination!

Weirdly, the return journey was much quicker maybe thanks to some tactful suggestions as to a better route.

Many thanks for all the work put into this exceptional day by Jenifer Evans, Maggie Solon and Roger Potter. They made it all happen.



*Members being briefed at Stowe.*

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## A LATE SUMMER TREK IN DOLPO AUGUST 2011

A JOURNAL BY ANNE COWAN

*(Lady Cowan is the wife of General Sir Sam Cowan)*

### **Introduction**

Dolpo is Nepal's largest and least populous district. It lies in trans Himalaya, directly north of Dhaulagiri [8100m+]. It is an area of entirely Tibetan culture and language. We had trekked there twice before [in 2002 and 2009] but each time in the autumn when the skies are usually crystal clear and the earth is brown and barren. Sam had long wanted to see it in the short summer season with wild flowers blooming, barley ripening and villagers in the high pastures. We also hoped to catch the start of a festival that is held once every twelve years in the Tarap valley.

I agreed to join him on the trek on condition that I had a pony and just before we flew out Sam made the wise decision to ask for one also. He also insisted that his friend Dawa, from Tingku village in northern Dolpo, join the trekking crew as our guide. He was a key man for us. He spoke the local language, knew every trail and was well known wherever we went. He opened endless doors for us, from houses in the villages to the gompas and the lamas.

With the monsoon in progress to the south of the main Himalayan range, getting into the area in a safe and timely way was the first challenge. The normal option is through the Nepalganj-Juphal air link [Juphal is close to the district headquarters of Dunai]. We did not trust this during the monsoon so decided to travel in and out on the historic Jomsom-Chharka route. As we found out, this is not for the faint hearted, with some treacherous trails and big passes to be tackled early. The attached map shows our selected route through Dolpo.

*Friday 26th August*

### **POKHARA – JOMSOM – PHALYAK Day 1**

We had flown from Kathmandu to Pokhara the day before to be ready for an early flight to Jomsom with Santosh Rai, our Sirdar. We arrived at the airport at 4.50am and the gates were locked. On checking in, we heard flights were delayed due to weather; soon after it started to rain. Plan B had been to take a vehicle to Beni, and make our way up to Jomsom by 4-wheel drive vehicles through landslides – a long day. Luckily the weather cleared and we flew. It is a seventeen minute flight through the gap in the Himalaya between the 8000m plus peaks of Dhaulagiri and Annapurna. At Jomsom (2720m) we met Dawa the guide, Ram the cook, 3 kitchen porters, Lakpa, Nima and Krishna, and Gopal the Sherpa. We set off and had long discussions at the police checkpoint about permits for the Annapurna Conservation Area Project. These should have been obtained in Kathmandu. There we also met Sukbahadur, and two horses – Tekay, for Sam, and Kali (black), for me – and we rode through Jomsom onto the dusty new 4-wheel drive road, which goes to Kagbeni and Muktinath. We crossed the long bridge over the Kali Gandaki River started the climb to Phalyak (3300m). We rode after the first steep climb until just before the village. Dawa showed us to the only lodge labelled “Restaurant” where we had tea and then took rooms for the night. It was an old Tibetan-speaking village; several large new houses were being built. Babu, the muleman, joined us there with eight mules and our baggage. It was about a four-hour walk for our first day.



campsite was above the village and by the school. It was nearly dark when we arrived and there was much hassle putting up the tents. Some children and a few adults came to see us. Sam enquired about Charles Ramble's search for papers relating to village history. It was a 9-10 hour day.

*Sunday 28th August*

### **SANGDAK – KIWAR/JUNIPER FOREST**

#### **Day 3**

During breakfast the ladies of the village came to offer us 'chang'; they said they were celebrating a 'village festival'. They needed 200 rupees to go away! We then walked through the village and talked to a young educated lad about village papers that might exist but the headman was away. Across the valley we could see an abandoned settlement and fields, which we heard had not been lived in for a very long time. Further up-river, on the opposite side of the gorge is the winter settlement called Gok which is 400m higher but south facing, so is warmer in cold weather. After walking through the village (which was medieval, except for solar panels and baseball caps on the young) we continued until the horses and mules caught us up. The route high up on the left-hand side of the river was very hard. We had to dismount to cross a deep tributary and walked and climbed, finally descending on foot to the main river where we had lunch in very hot sun. We then crossed the river and climbed a steep and narrow path. The mules had to be unloaded and everybody had to help carry the loads for 200m up the steep path, while we waited for the horses. We then got going, however this was the juniper forest where some of the trees hung low over the path; one branch managed to remove me from my horse.

About an hour later we arrived at the campsite at Kiwar (4200m), not far from Gok, the winter village. It was a good camp with views up and down the valley.

This was a hard eight-hour day.

*Monday 29th August*

### **KIWAR – NULUNG**

#### **Day 4**

We woke up in cloud. The horses had walked down the valley almost to the river, so they had to be collected. It was a long, rough, steep climb to a lower pass before we reached the sharp-edged Khag La [also called the Sangdak Pass] at 5100m. We rode up some of the way, but had to dismount because of the loose shale. At the pass there were great views of the valleys on each side. We walked part of the way down and then the horses carried us to the river where we had lunch. It was windy but clear. The Dho Tarap family arrived shortly after us and had their lunch nearby. After lunch we crossed the river and rode up on our own to the Tuche La (5550m). Both horses chose their own way up, slowly zigzagging, stopping at intervals to get their breath, but steadily. There were good views from the top and the cairn had many prayer flags and coloured paper around it. We walked a little way down and then the horses arrived to carry us; then the rain and hail came. We got soaked and it was a long trek down the valley to the river and round to the campsite at Nulung (4900m). This was a desolate spot at the junction of three rivers but it was relatively flat land where yak herders were keeping an eye on 150 yaks from Sangdak. They were returning home two days later after three months on the site. There were two large stone circles for looking after the young yaks. The Dho Tarap family also camped there in two tents. Since the kitchen staff

and mules had arrived only a short time before us there was chaos. We sheltered in the kitchen tent while the other tents were erected and tried to find dry clothing. Eventually we got into our tent, the sun came out and we were able to dry off some of the bags and their contents. It was cold and windy so we had tea and then supper in our tent to keep warm. It had been a 9-10 hour day, with some bad weather.

*Tuesday 30th August*

## **NULUNG – CHHARKA**

### **Day 5**

The morning was cloudy and we set off on the horses, across the river and down the right bank. We came across the man from the Dho Tharap family who could not find his horses. We crossed the river and another tributary to follow the high path as the river path was dangerous. At the first ridge we saw a family of Blue Sheep. The male was keeping a lookout up the ridge, two females were near three young who were mock fighting and playing with great speed and agility. We later saw six or seven Blue Sheep cross our path. It was a difficult route, with big rocks, small stones, up and down, in and out. There were wonderful flowers, pink and blue, carpeting various grassy meadows. We

eventually made it down to and across the river and nearby was our lunch site which was quite cold and windy. After lunch a herd of about 25 yaks were driven past and a man, a young boy and a young girl, all on horseback came after the yaks. It started raining again and we set off along a high, difficult, stony section of the trail. Eventually the path broadened out, it stopped raining, and we walked along a very picturesque section until we came to a bridge. There was a very steep and rocky path down to a new, metal footbridge and continued on the last part of the journey to Chharka. We crossed a small stream but beyond was a narrow path, part of which had slipped so we had to dismount. Shortly after we saw a new multi-coloured metal bridge which had been built by the Japanese and we knew that Chharka was not far away. The first campsite was not suitable but ahead we could see paths leading to a ridge and houses below. At the top we dismounted, took in the views, and walked down into Chharka. With plenty of daylight to sort out the camp, everyone was happy to be there as the next day was a rest day. This had been a 9-10 hour day with some rain and difficult sections.

*Wednesday 31st August*

## **CHHARKA - Rest Day**

### **Day 6**

Just after midnight it started to rain and did not stop until after 8am. Streams of water came through the campsite and channels were cut above the tents to divert the water. The kitchen tent had to be moved and the dining tent where the team was sleeping was flooded. When the sun came out we had an excellent drying day. Sam and Dawa walked around the village. Chharka is a remote and interesting village and Sam took many photographs. Most of



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the men were away with their yaks for their annual trading trip to Tibet. We heard that the family from Dho Tharap had finally found their horses and they arrived in Charka at 8pm. We had hoped to telephone from Charka, but it had been out of order for two days. Everybody had a good rest.

*Thursday 1st September*

## **CHHARKA – GHAJYANG**

### **Day 7**

We left the village in overcast weather with eight village girls who were taking provisions to a camp in the high summer grazing grounds. We passed the school and various chortens. There were some difficult steep patches and then a gradual rise to the Mola Pass (5100m). We went ahead and reached the top on our own, where we had wonderful views. We waited for Sukbahadur at the top and walked down one hour to the lunch site. A woman with four children came to see us. Her daughter, aged about seven, had dislocated her shoulder but we could do nothing about it. Eventually Santosh arrived with the mules. We set off again down the valley but the sky was clouding over. We passed several streams from the left, one of them must come from the high pass to Dho Tarap, which we had not

attempted to climb two years before. The valley bottom was treacherous for walking and for the animals; we passed a large herd of goats and sheep, crossed the river several times, then it started raining. Dawa led us to the right side of the river and over a small ridge. Beyond was a fast flowing river with a large flat area beyond. Sukbahadur led Sam's horse into the flow and Kali followed. It was fairly risky, however we got across safely but wet.

The eight mules managed to cross but the porters struggled with their heavy loads and were helped by the others. Santosh said the water was very cold and the stones on the bottom of the river very painful. We camped by the river as it was still raining and we were pretty cold and miserable. However, the rain soon stopped and a yak caravan arrived to camp nearby. They were the first of the yaks from Chharka, which had been over to Tibet to buy Chinese goods for trading and supplies for the winter. The headman from Chharka had ridden in at a fast trot, in typical Tibetan fashion, to stake his claim to the campsite. There were between 80 and 90 yaks and several ponies in this part of the caravan, and four hundred would come along later. Sam talked to the headman from Chharka. One young man told us he was studying at a university in New York. We had our supper in the tent to avoid another chilling. It was another 9-10 hour day, with bad weather and a soaking in the river.

*Friday 2nd September*

## **GHAJYANG – TINGKHU**

### **Day 8**

We had good weather and the first part of this trail was very gentle and we walked part of the way. Then streams came in from the right and we mostly rode the horses, except where the trail was very



*On the Mola looking north*

steep. We stopped to rest in a sheltered valley, and then rode on to the lunch stop. Sam had a minor mishap when he was hit on the lip by a pole, and he also had a painful back. It was a long day and we still had four hours to Tingkhu. During lunch black clouds appeared, and later it started raining. Several Chharka-bound yak caravans passed during the day. Many of the men had been drinking, and there was a trail of beer cans along the way. As we approached Tingkhu there were several tents ('ghotes') with families looking after the yaks, goats and sheep as they grazed in the summer pastures. On the right, Dawa pointed out the sacred mountain above Tingkhu known as Kula Ri.

Eventually a green strip appeared in the valley and we recognised Tingkhu from our 2002 trek. We stopped by the path in the sun but storm clouds were gathering. We moved on but it got colder and windier and began to rain. There was considerable settlement around the never-

used airstrip which was not there in 2002. We realised that the village had expanded considerably. We descended the path behind the chorten where we had camped and crossed the old bridge, high above the river into Tingkhu. A young boy met us and we crossed towards Norbu's house, which was at the end of a long path. We had to wait for a long caravan of yaks to make their way through a narrow passage of stone walls. Finally we climbed and climbed in the rain to the campsite near Norbu's house. The mules and kitchen staff had just arrived, and we sheltered in the dining tent. Dawa invited us into his mother's house to have Tibetan tea and soup. The tea was very good, but the soup was quite strong with mutton meatballs. It was warm and dry in his house. We then went back to our tent for tea and later our evening meal. This was an 8 – 9 hour day, with some bad weather.



*Yaks on the trail*

*Saturday 3rd September*

**TINGKHU - Rest day**

**Day 9**

We had a cloudy start, but it turned into a beautiful sunny day. Sam set off with Dawa for a walk round the village to take photographs and meet some of the people. The phone in Tingkhu had also been out for the last two days. A large number of small children, including several young girls carrying their baby brothers and sisters, came to see the camp and everything that was going on. Several flocks of goats and sheep were driven here and there; some were on their way to Pokhara to be sold for the Dasain celebrations. A schoolteacher from Darjeeling came to talk to Santosh. It was the weekend and the school was several hundred yards from where we were camping beyond a large chorten. Gopal, the Sherpa, who had a Nepali mother and Sikkimese father, and spoke Tibetan, was around and he helped me wash my hair. All our damp clothing and bedding was put out to dry and air on the stone walls. Sam returned for lunch and afterwards



*Old mani wall and chorten*

walked to the gomba which was a very steep one-hour walk up the hill behind our camp site. There he met up with Norbu's mother [Ama] who gave him Tibetan soup and tsampa. He returned with her and Dawa. Later, Ama invited us into her house for tea. She has a wonderful face and featured as the wife of the hero in Eric Valli's highly-acclaimed film *Himalaya*. In the house we met Sonam who is Norbu's wife. They explained that Norbu had been spending most of the summer in Saldang organising the painting of a large fresco in the gomba there.



*Barley ripening in Tingkhu*

[Norbu comes from a long lineage of Tibetan thanka painters. His father was the lama in the gomba and the family had only moved down to a house nearer the village after his father's death. Norbu has adapted his skills to paint impressionistic Dolpo scenes and has had exhibitions in New York, Paris and Japan. He has a studio in Kathmandu where he and his family spend the winter.]

*Sunday 4th September*  
**TINGKHU – SHIMEN**  
**Day 10**

In overcast weather we set off through the village which extended a long way down the valley. We came to the outskirts of another village called Phalwa with ancient chortens, crossed a stream and continued through barley fields. We saw the valley leading north to Tibet where the men go on their trading trips. Phalwa had been a very small hamlet in 2002 but a number of new houses had been built recently. After Phalwa, the valley became a narrow gorge and we followed the trail, high and low. We also stopped to look at an old gomba on the other side of the river which was being restored by two Lamas. At this stage we came to a tributary from the right and walked down a very steep trail, crossing the river at the bottom, then continuing again on the right bank. Eventually the valley broadened out on either side. We passed a group of six East Europeans walking very seriously. They had camped at Koma, and passed through Shimen. We came to the first of the Shimen chortens and followed endless mani walls [built of stones with religious texts engraved on them] and

*With Sonam's mum*

other chortens till we came to the outskirts of the village. It started to rain and we followed narrow paths and streams till we came to our campsite. The kitchen had just been set up in a local house, where we sheltered and had lunch. We moved into our tent when the rain stopped.

A little later we set off with Dawa up the hill to see Sonam's family. [When we arrived in Shimen in 2002, the first person we met was a lady who had a little baby on her back with a harelip and cleft palate. This was Sonam. Norbu brought her to Kathmandu two years ago. She has had three operations and is doing well.] We found her mother and several brothers and friends. First, Sam had to persuade her from photos from 2002 that we had been there before and he then showed her photos of Sonam over the last two years in Kathmandu and left them with her. Sonam's father came the next morning to talk to Sam and to Dawa, who had looked after Sonam in hospital. He is the local Lama whose specialisation is protecting the growing barley from hailstones which are very big in these areas and can wipe out the crop in a few minutes. We had supper in our tent. It rained during the night. Tingkhu to Shimen was 5 – 6 hour day, with some rain.



*Monday 5th September*

**SHIMEN – KOMA**

**Day 11**



*Above Shimen village*

It was a beautiful day, and we had a late start. Sam had had a bright idea to retrace our steps in 2002 from Shimen over a pass to Mogaon, past Yangshir Gompa and then to Saldang. Wisely we kept to the original programme. We walked down to the river, crossed it and climbed quite a way until the trail was safe for riding the horses. We had great views all around. There was a long ride over a pass then a steep descent to another river. Sam's walking pole had been left behind at the pass so Sukbahadur returned on my horse to fetch it – successfully. We walked up to the village of Koma in full sun, where we had lunch and camped in front of the school. We managed to dry off some of our kit, though the clouds came up later. It was

*Chortens and houses in  
Koma*



a beautiful spot, with excellent views, a gompa and chortens and an interesting old village below. We had a 5 – 6 hour day in beautiful weather.

*Tuesday 6th September*

**KOMA – SALDANG**

**Day 12**

We had a late start and it was less than two hours up to the pass, though there were a few difficult, steep stream crossings on the way. From the pass we could see the fields of Saldang and Karang [where we had camped in 2002] to the right. It was a very steep three hour descent which we did on foot, stopping at intervals. We crossed the river near to the campsite and had lunch in the shady, dusty terrace of a local house. Sam showed a photograph he had taken in 2002 to the owner of the land and this man recognised himself in the foreground at a ceremony in front of the gompa, with Sam and Thinle, who played the hero in *Himalaya*. After lunch we rode up to Saldang Gompa and found Norbu and another young painter called Siddhart working in the gompa. We were shown round. Then in the forecourt we showed photographs of the 2002



*Chortens above Saldang*

ceremony to everybody and they were received with much excitement. The local lama remembered Sam “nervously arriving at the edge of the ceremony” and told us that he had taken the photo with Thinle. We then rode up to a campsite by the school and chortens in wonderful weather and had excellent views all around. A Russian woman was camping nearby. She had trekked from Juphal to Dunai then Phoksundo, Shey, Namgung and Saldang. She was then going to Dho Tarap, Chharkha, and back to Jomsom. Norbu came to our camp for an evening meal with Siddhart; momos were produced. He told us about what had gone on in Dolpo during the yarsagomba harvest, and we discussed Sonam’s future. She had had no education and wants to stay in Kathmandu which would enable her to catch up. Norbu already sponsors three Dolpo children at schools in Kathmandu, so he knows how it can be arranged. This was another day of beautiful weather.

*Wednesday 7th September*

**SALDANG - KHONGE**

**Day 13**

This started off with good weather, though it deteriorated in the afternoon. The Russian group [the girl we had met with a

male companion] passed us early on. We set off up the valley on quite a difficult but extremely interesting trail, with many chortens, several gompas and some interesting small hamlets with many people passing on the trail. We arrived at a village with a kani chorten [one you walk through] where we found the Russian man and the porters finishing their lunch. We rested there and continued a long way up the valley. We passed the Russian woman and finally came down a steep path to the river where some yaks carrying timber passed through. We worried that this was going to China but were assured that it was needed to build a school in Koma, and we had seen this work going on. The river crossing was quite deep but easy on horseback. Later the Russians had difficulty getting across on foot. We had lunch in a blazing sun while more yak caravans passed carrying timber. The Russians arrived as we were leaving and were spending the night on the campsite.

We continued up the valley, passing more yak caravans. Sam’s photo-stick was mislaid but not recovered. We eventually came to a place where our trail to Dho Tarap crossed the river to our left, while the main trail continued towards Phoksundo. There was some discussion



about which way to go, but Dawa was clear and we crossed the river, rode through deep undergrowth and finally came to the proper trail again. It became overcast and damp and we continued on the long and difficult path. We passed a camp of six tents with yaks nearby where two people were processing hemp. It was a tricky part of the trail, along the edges of the river and up over ridges. We turned right into another river valley and decided to camp nearby as the rain was increasing and the planned campsite was another 45 minutes up the valley. Three of our bags had arrived with the mules so we were able to put on warmer clothes and gradually the rest of the party arrived. We were given Tibetan tea from some local people in a tent across the river; it was salty but warm and very welcome. A small boy brought it across to us. We had dhal bhat in our tent as it was cold and windy, and everybody needed a hot meal as soon as possible. It had been a long hard day of 9 – 10 hours, in mixed weather.

*Thursday 8th September*  
**KHONGE - DHO TARAP**  
**Day 14**

We decided to leave early as it promised to be another long day. We walked, first past the planned campsite, and then on up a right-hand valley. Dawa and the horses

soon arrived to take us up towards the Jang La pass. We passed another camp of six tents with women milking the yaks and this year's young looking very forlorn with their mouths tied to stop them getting at their mother's milk. It was now a beautiful day and we travelled up a relatively gentle slope with wild flowers growing in abundance, except for where a deep valley with shale made it difficult. We rested at the Jang la (5100m) with the kitchen staff, and could see much of the descent ahead. It was quite steep so we walked much of the first part. The next part was over difficult terrain until we reached the main path across the river. There was a further descent on the horses to the lunch site in a gully by the river. The weather was very changeable – sun, then cloud. The mules soon caught up. We realised it was only two hours to the Tarap valley, so after lunch we set off for a short afternoon. At one rest stop we heard that a German man had died of a heart attack – more of which later. As we descended we saw the valley off to the left which leads to Tingkhu which we would take to return to Chharka. It was overcast and started raining. We came down to the top village of the Tarap valley, with Chamling Gompa across the river with its recently built new stupas in front. We crossed the river and rode through three small hamlets which had lots of tents acting as shops and bhatts [for sleeping and eating], then on to the lower track and to our campsite below Gagar, a short way above the Crystal Mountain School. We set off for a short walk. We saw a French photographer with his Sirdar, who had passed through the area before us and there were many preparations at the school for the visit of a High Lama, Rabjam Rinpoche, the head of the Shechen Monastery of the Nyingmapa school of Tibetan Buddhism in



*On the Jang La*



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Kathmandu. He is the leading Lama in that tradition. During his stay he was to preside over the enthronement of a new Tulku [reincarnated lama] for Gagar gumpa. His name was Donag Norbu. He was born in 1991 in Mukot village in lower Dolpo and had been studying in Bhutan and in the Shechen monastery. On the way back we came across another Frenchman who was doing a documentary about the changes in Dolpo since Corneille Jest wrote his book 50 years ago, when he was based in this village of Gagar. The weather was overcast so we had tea and later supper in the tent. The horses and mules had been taken across the river and roamed the hills for grazing over the next two days.

*Friday 9th September*

**DHO TARAP - Rest Day 1  
Day 15**

We had a late start. It was cool but the weather was quite bright. We set off down the valley at 9.30 with Dawa, and came across various people. The French documentarist and other French women were going up to Chamling to help the French girl whose German friend had died. We came across our friend Lama Nyamgal who we had met in this valley in 2009. He was very involved in preparations for the visit of the Great

Lama. We reached Dho, the bottom village in the Tarap valley and saw our friend Urken's 'lodge' which had a family in it running a shop and met his sister-in-law. We saw the man who had made the journey from Muktinath with his family. We carried on through the village to where we had camped in 2009. We walked up to Ribo Gumpa above Dho and picnicked in a sheltered spot with Dawa. Lama Nyamgal arrived and showed us the main hall, and we helped to put up the decorations for the visit of the High Lama.

Then we went round to his house; the other side of the gumpa, through a courtyard, into some lower rooms, up a ladder, and round the corner into his main room with a stove, floor seating, cups and bowls, cupboards, cooking pots, etc. Eventually he got the stove working and we had a cup of Tibetan tea, with some nuts and biscuits from our lunch. We set off back up the valley, but soon it started to rain and we sheltered in a tent, run as a shop and a bharti by some people from Shimen where we had more Tibetan tea. In the tent we were surrounded by Chinese goods for sale.

When the rain stopped we set off again but soon we were walking in a steady shower. As we neared the school we saw a helicopter flying up the valley towards Chamling Gumpa to collect the body of



*Picnic at Ribo gumpa*

the German man. Fifteen minutes later it returned down the valley. We retired to our tent for juice and soup and a rest. It was very warm for a while. Later we walked into the village of Gagar to look at the Gompa and to see if the French man was around but he was still up the valley. It got very cold and we returned to the camp and dined in our tent with a glass of red wine.

*Saturday 10th September*  
**DHO TARAP - Rest Day 2**  
**Day 16**

It started cloudy and we had mixed weather through the day. With Dawa we went back up the valley to Chamling (Jameken) Gompa. The Lama ‘Dolpo Tulku Rinpoche’ ([www.dolpotulkurinpoche.org](http://www.dolpotulkurinpoche.org)) made us very welcome and took us into a modest prayer room for Tibetan tea and discussion. His grandfather had been a lama in Tibet and he had escaped when he was sent into the grazing grounds with the yaks. He studied in India, in Karnataka, had good English and excellent knowledge of local history. He showed us the sacred mountain, Ribo, across the valley. We went back to our camp for lunch and made a decision to move up the valley the next day after lunch to help us make a good start for the two day walk back to Chharka

It was a hot afternoon with occasional showers and a bit windy. Sam walked down to the school to see the state of preparation for the next day’s visit. Things were happening quite slowly. The Lamas’ party were to stay in a new set of classrooms which were not finished; dust and rubble were everywhere. Also there was much confusion about the Lamas’ programme. Originally they were to stay for 12 days, and now it was just 4 or 5 days. It was a wet evening and we stayed in the tent for our meal.

*Sunday 11th September*  
**DHO TARAP - Rest Day 3**  
**Day 17**

The big day arrived, with light early rain. The Great Lama was due to arrive about 11am. The local people in their traditional costumes were all lined up in the valley, on the path from the helicopter pad to the School. They included Ama who had ridden from Tingkhu the previous day. Lama Nyamgal was busy issuing instructions to everyone! Shortly after 11am a helicopter arrived with the new Tulku and another lama. They were served tea and milk while the helicopter returned to Dunai to collect Rabjam Rinpoche. He arrived at 12 noon and was accompanied by one of the Brigade of Gurkhas Buddhist Lamas who was in Nepal on



*Relaxing in Tarap valley*



*Waiting to greet the Great Lama*



*The procession starts*

leave. (*Chewang Gurung, currently based at Catterick with the Gurkha Training Company. See Editorial. Ed*)

Sam was able to take photographs of the events. The four main Lamas then rode up on horses and the others walked in procession. As they approached the school the children and others were lined up in their various categories, then the group with musical instruments led the Lamas into the school. Many people from the local communities were there and a scattering of westerners. Several French people from the 'Action Dolpo' NGO had helped to organise the visit and they sponsor the Crystal Mountain School. There were the two French photographers, an American 'Buddhist', the two Russians



*Tingkhru villagers*

we had met earlier and a few others. We returned to the camp at 1pm for lunch. Ama, whose family came from Gagar, came to get some eye drops. We packed up and set off for the next stage at 2pm. We took the right-hand valley above Chamling Gompa, on the path to Tingkhru. We climbed steadily and passed more people from Tingkhru coming down to see the lamas. We assured them that the great man had arrived safely. Yes, we had seen him! No, we had not talked to him! We stopped at 4pm at the campsite, and the mules arrived. We saw some blue sheep across the valley, a marmot and a huge eagle circling overhead (*Lammergier? Ed*) The weather was changeable, so we had supper in our tent.

*Monday 12th September*

**Above DHO THARAP (4550m)**

**Day 18**

We had an early start at 7.15am in cloudy conditions. It was a gradual rise to the Chhoi La (5050m). At the pass we put up prayer flags and katas [white scarfs]. A little beyond there were two cairns which marked the separate paths to Tingkhru and to Chharka; we took the latter. It was a long traverse right handed, in and out of river valleys, mostly at about 4000m. We had lunch in a very cold spot, sitting in a ring of stones which locals use when they are looking after the animals, above which they raise a yak hair tent. They had clearly recently moved down to lower pastures, a sure sign of the advent of autumn. After lunch there was further one and a half hour climb to a second pass (5000m), after which there was an extremely steep descent down dry and slippery shale. At the bottom we rested, then remounted to continue the descent, crossing and re-crossing the river. At one stage people from a nearby 'ghote' [a camp/summer

pasture] came to watch us. At the base of the valley we turned right upstream into the valley we had previously come down from Chharka to Tingkhu two weeks before. At this stage Sam took an unfortunate somersault from his horse, Tekay, which stumbled in the mud in the river. He bruised his hand which shielded him from injury to his face, but he was in agony and suffering from shock. It was a wet and miserable journey of over an hour, past a possible, but swampy, campsite, up to the planned site. It had been raining for quite a while and the porters got the tent up as quickly as possible while Sam shivered in a sleeping bag on a chair. Once we were installed and had a cup of tea and things looked better. Sam had not broken his wrist or thumb; he did not need to be evacuated.



*The remote village of Chharka*

We made a slow start, breakfasted in the tent and as we were about to leave, the Russian party appeared. They had gone over the high pass and had hired a horse for the woman. We had a long morning journey to Chharka, mostly in brilliant sun. We made our way on horses up to the Mola pass but the going was wet, unstable and shaley, and we were crossing swampy flats and rocky rivers. We stopped at the Mola (5100m) for a drink and the views. Two girls from Chharka joined us and we gave them some nuts. They were returning to the village from a camp in the high pastures. We descended on foot for a long way as it was still very difficult with deep mud near the top. There had been considerable rainfall since we first came that way conditions were now very different. We finally reached the outskirts of Chharka at around 12pm. Sam walked down in beautiful sunshine and took photographs, and rode down to get our kit dry in the sunshine in the same campsite we had used on our way into Dolpo. The weather had been fine however black clouds gathered. By 2pm it was overcast and at 4.30pm it started raining. Luckily by then we were dried out and relaxing in our tent. We had supper in the tent as the rain continued. Although we were a day ahead of schedule we continued as



Paracetamol and Brufen gel improved his condition. It rained all evening and we dined in our tent so that the rest of the staff could shelter and sleep in the dining tent. Sam did not sleep much during the night but we were at 4700m. In the morning his hand and wrist was bluish black but he could grip the reins and click his cameras!

*Tuesday 13th September*  
**TO CHHARKA**  
**Day 19**

planned in case the weather made travelling more difficult.

*Wednesday 14th September*

## **CHHARKA – NULUNG**

### **Day 20**

We had an early start on a familiar route, walking for the first half hour to the Japanese bridge to the stream. The horses arrived and we rode above the river on a high path till we came to the long bridge. We walked across and climbed the steep hill. At the top we could see there was a problem with the mules. One had slipped and panicked as it was reaching the end of the bridge, and its load was stuck in the framework of the bridge. Everybody rushed to help, first to unload it and then bring it back across the bridge. We were left at the top. Then one of the horses, Kale, decided to walk on along the route. Eventually Dawa managed to get it back on the trail. It was a beautiful day with fantastic scenery, including views towards the difficult northern trail into Mustang. The path became quite difficult until we reached the lunch site at about 11am which we had used before. The Russian group were further along the valley; the woman had decided to hire another horse for the rest of her journey to Jomsom.

After lunch at 12 noon we set off, the kitchen party along the river and ourselves



*On the high trail*

and the mules over the tricky high trail. The kitchen porters told us later that they saw a snow leopard walking along the hillside 50 metres below us, in the same direction, which was very exciting for them. We saw them pointing but did not know why! We then crossed the two rivers and it was a long, cold walk up the valley into a very strong wind but no rain.

We reached our old camping ground at 3.30pm. It now looked even more desolate and we hurried to get set up as there was slight rain, some more sun, and then cold.

We had completed a difficult day and knew we were at 4900m, but it was going to make the climb to the two passes, at 5550m and 5100m the next day less formidable. However Sam had a poor night at this altitude and felt bad most of the next day. It was much colder and more autumnal than two weeks previously when we had arrived in rain and hail. The Russian group arrived shortly after us.

*Thursday 15th September*

## **NULUNG – JUNIPER FOREST**

### **Day 21**

We had an early start as a long, hard day was ahead, bed tea at 5.15am. It was a cold, clear day so we started walking to try to keep warm. The horses eventually arrived and we had a very long but gentle climb up the valley which became a long



*With Dawa and Seti*

steep struggle to the Tuche La (5550m). We put katas on the prayer flags, and then started walking down the steep, shale slope. Sam was led by Dawa down a very difficult track but I followed the horses' trail which was easier. Looking back we could see that the horses had done an amazing job carrying us up to the pass two weeks before.

At the valley floor, Suk came with the horses to get us across the river and we had lunch. Santosh finally arrived as we were finishing – it was a tough section.

It was quite cold so we continued up the valley on the horses and finally reached the Khag La (5100m) and tied on more katas. Then we walked down a very steep and hazardous route to our campsite which we reached after 2 hours at 1.30pm.

Sam felt much better when we had descended to 4200m. Our tent was up, and we rested on the chairs as it was warm and sunny. We had tea, washing water and a good rest. The Russian party camped 100m above us, where we had spent the night two weeks before. A family from Mukot in lower Dolpo were also on our site. They had a traditional tent like a wigwam. They had lost two dzos, [yak/cow offspring] but had subsequently found them. The group consisted of an elderly lama, a mother and child and a man who all argued loudly during the evening.

*Friday 16th September*

## **JUNIPER FOREST TO BEYOND SANDAK**

### **Day 22**

The day was damp and cloudy. The lama from Mukot asked for 'money' before they left, so we gave him 100 rupees. A donation to a lama is expected. We set off down the steep, difficult descent which took one hour. After the bridge we

climbed steeply for a half hour while the horses followed us. The mules went another, difficult way. The porters were ahead. The river was flowing very strongly after all the rain, so we were worried about the mules. At the top we found some people from Mugu with 500 goats and sheep from Tibet which they would sell on at a profit. They had paid 7000 rupees each for the animals in Tibet. They had been on the road for three weeks and looked very wild. They would sell the animals on at Sangdak and the Sangdak people would take them to Pokhara for Dasain. The trail was very dangerous with landslides and two very steep descents. We passed four young trekkers heading to Dolpo. They had a support team but were carrying very heavy backpacks. At one stage we saw a large group of blue sheep below us on a grassy platform. We finally reached Sangdak, and could see the colourful stripey fields of buckwheat below the village. There was no barley grown here. We came to our lunch site by the village where we had camped before.

In Sangdak there were various groups of men playing a very noisy Tibetan gambling game on the roofs. Some were traders or middlemen, for the goats and



*Buckwheat in Sangdak, the Khag La in view just below the clouds*

sheep, from Tarakot. At the lunch site there was great concern as the mules had not been seen all day. However, twenty minutes later they were spotted approaching the village which was a great relief all round. The mules did not like crossing the fast-flowing river, but Tekay finally led them across and up the long climb to Sangdak. For lunch Ram made crisps and pate sandwiches which were excellent. After lunch there was a very long, steep ascent on the horses towards the final passes. Then we had another hour across ridges and valleys, mostly in the sun. We finally reached the campsite we might have used on the way out. The Russians were already there but there was room for all of us. It was 2pm, with sunny, drying weather. On the Dolpo side there were heavy clouds, but we could see blue sky and white clouds above Mustang. There were still two more shortish days to reach Jomsom.

*Saturday 17th September*

## **BEYOND SANGDAK – PHALYAK**

### **Day 23**

The Russian group set off at 5.30 after much noise to get to Jomsom the same day.

We set off in thick cloud, climbing and descending round the high paths. On some stretches we had to walk across landslides. While we were still in the mist, we saw the Kali Gandaki valley in sunshine beneath. There were some steep descents, and we finally walked down, across a stream and up to our lunch spot (for a packed lunch) at the beginning of the ‘road’ to Phalyak. We were sheltered from the wind as we headed up to the last pass but it hit us with full force as we walked and rode down the long, steady, dusty descent to Phalyak. We finally reached the Phalyak ‘Restaurant’ where we had stayed three weeks before. No one had stayed

there since we left!

*Sunday 18th September*

## **PHALYAK – JOMSOM**

### **Day 24**

It was a sunny day and as we set off many ladies were walking up to Phalyak to help with the harvest. It was a long ride down to the bridge; we crossed the Kali Gandaki and proceeded on the road to Jomsom. There were many 4-wheel drive vehicles taking pilgrims to and from Muktinath, and a good number of motorbikes. A big bulldozer had fallen into the river at one stage, where the road had given away. We rode through Jomsom, said goodbye to our horses, and had lunch in the Dancing Yak Hotel. We had arrived a day earlier than planned so our booked flight out was in two days’ time. Santosh had long discussions on the phone with our trek manager’s wife Nima about the possibility of getting a flight out the next day. We were suddenly checked in for the last flight of that day, and our baggage was put on an earlier flight. Then our flight was cancelled, so Nima, Sam and Santosh set about getting us an early flight the next day, as we had lost our baggage. They were successful. We spent the afternoon in Jomsom. We met a group of 32 Medical trekkers from the US who were going to Mustang (on horses) and planned to stay a



*At Phalyak on the morning of Day 24*

few days in each village dispensing medicine. They were led by Roshie Joan Halifax from the West Coast and were staying at Om's Home (Hotel). She is described in Wikipedia as "a Zen Buddhist roshi, anthropologist, ecologist, civil rights activist, hospice caregiver, and the author of several books on Buddhism and spirituality." We walked to the other end of Jomsom beyond the hotel where the buses leave. The wind from the south was fierce. It starts at about 11am every day. We met two Christian medical missionaries [Australian] who were visiting Jomsom and Mukinath. We went back to the hotel and met Dr Tsampa Ngawang who owns Hotel Dancing Yak. He is a famous amchi doctor who had been a close colleague and friend of Sienna Craig when she wrote a book about Horse Amchi Medicine – 'Horses Like Lightning.' He told us about his work,

showed us his large stock of herbs from all parts of the Himalaya and gave Sam a small piece of yarsagomba.

*Monday 19th September*  
**JOMSOM – KATHMANDU**  
**Day 25**

The clouds took a little time to clear, but we were on the second flight to Pokhara, where we collected our baggage. Within an hour and a half of leaving Jomsom we were back in Kathmandu, and heading back to the Summit Hotel for a bath and some rest.

*(Our thanks to Tashi and Nima of Tenzing Asian Holidays for providing us with outstanding support for this long trek, including a superb team in Santosh, Dawa, Ram, Lakpa, Nima, Krishna, Gopal, Suk and Babu. Our special thanks go to them for their friendship, hard work and never-failing good humour. AC.)*

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DR FRANCIS BUCHANAN-HAMILTON:  
PIONEER FOR NEPALESE BIODIVERSITY

By Dr Mark F. Watson, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh,

The scientific study of Nepal's biodiversity began at the start of the nineteenth century with the collections made by Dr Francis Buchanan-Hamilton, during a year he spent in the Kathmandu Valley as Surgeon-Naturalist to the British Embassy led by Capt. William Knox. Buchanan, as he was then known, recorded more than 1100 plant species, over 800 of which he thought were entirely new to the scientific world – a staggering figure demonstrating that Nepal was a botanical *terra incognita*. During forays around the valley Buchanan collected, pressed and dried plant specimens, prepared coloured drawings for more than 100 species, and wrote meticulous notes on everything he found. He intended to publish his discoveries as the first *Flora Nepalensis*, but fate dealt him a cruel blow, and he had to leave India in a hurry with the manuscript only a third complete.

When in England Buchanan handed all his collections and manuscripts to two of his scientific friends, and although they went on to publish some of his finds, much of his material remained unstudied and hidden away. In retirement Buchanan changed his family name to Hamilton, in order to inherit his mother's estate, and it is as Francis Hamilton that he wrote *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal* (1819). As Charles Allen related in *The Buddha and the Sahibs* (2002), this change of name left a 'trail of confusion', and by doing so 'this man of many parts caused posterity to subdivide him into four persons: Dr Francis Buchanan, Dr Francis Hamilton, Dr Francis Hamilton-Buchanan,

and Dr Francis Buchanan-Hamilton.' In botany he is known as Francis Buchanan-Hamilton, and recent research on his Nepalese plant collections has confirmed that he fully deserves the title 'Father of Nepalese Botany' and symbolises a relationship between Nepal and the UK reaching back over 200 years.

Buchanan-Hamilton was employed by the British East India Company (EIC) at time when the EIC was keen to learn more about its territories and eager to develop trade links with neighbouring states. The EIC commissioned detailed surveys and backed political missions that strengthened control over its own lands and developed influence beyond its borders. These missions were primarily focused on promoting trade, fostering diplomatic relations and the gathering of 'intelligence' - with natural resources (including crops, medicines, timber and minerals) of special interest as potential subjects for commercial exploitation. Amidst the impressive list of natural historians employed by the EIC, the name of Buchanan-Hamilton stands out, for the many years he spent on major surveys to far-flung corners of the Indian subcontinent, and the huge volume of information that he gathered on a bewildering variety of subjects. He was an energetic and enthusiastic polymath, equally proficient in collecting and recording information on natural history, agriculture, climate, geography, geology, architecture, history, politics, culture, sociology, anthropology, commerce, economics, languages, philosophy, health and religions of the lands and peoples he encountered.

He was born on 15 February 1762 and in 1780 he decided to follow his father's example and enrolled for a medical degree at the University of Edinburgh, then a major training ground for EIC surgeons. A thorough understanding of the classification, identification and use of medicinal plants was a required component of a medical degree at the time, and in the summer of 1781 he attended lectures given by the Professor of Botany, John Hope at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. Here Buchanan-Hamilton received a solid grounding in accurate observation and scientific record keeping – invaluable skills for his future career on Indian survey work.

By the time Buchanan-Hamilton was selected to join Knox's Mission to Nepal he had already established a name for himself both as a medic and as a surveyor. Since joining the Bengal Medical Service in 1794, he had undertaken ground-breaking natural history research in Myanmar (Burma), surveyed parts of the Chittagong hills (Bangladesh) and spent a year recording the agriculture, people and plants of Tipu Sultan's former kingdom of Mysore in southern India. Although botany was just one of Buchanan-Hamilton's many talents, Dr William Roxburgh - Superintendent of the EIC Calcutta Botanic Garden - considered him 'the best botanist in India'. Buchanan-Hamilton's extensive collections and detailed reports had been received with acclaim by the Bengal Government, and the Governor-General, Richard Wellesley, had no hesitation in appointing him to the Nepal Mission.

At the start of the nineteenth century British alliances with Nepal were decidedly shaky. Since Capt. Kinloch's truncated military expedition in 1767, the relationship between the two neighbours

was cool, with the Nepalese Court wary of the expanding influence of the EIC and its history of progressive annexation of neighbouring lands. Capt. William Kirkpatrick's Mission of 1793 was more successful, ostensibly sent to help rebuff a Chinese incursion into Nepal, but the party spent just a couple of weeks in the Kathmandu Valley before returning to India. Dr Adam Freer was Surgeon on this Mission, and like Buchanan-Hamilton, had studied botany under Hope in Edinburgh. Freer was probably the first botanically inclined foreigner to visit Nepal, and, although the botanical details in Kirkpatrick's *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepaul* (1811) are almost certainly by him, no collections or other natural history records are known. Also on the Mission was a young Lieut. William Knox, commander of the military escort. This would provide Knox with valuable experience for leading his own mission a decade later, as the first British Resident to the Court of Nepal. The 1802-03 Knox Embassy was the result of the 1801 Treaty of Commerce between Britain and Nepal. Charles Crawford signed the Treaty on behalf of the EIC, and it was he who was appointed to command the escort to the Knox Mission.

Buchanan-Hamilton met Knox and Crawford in Patna, and although the Mission set off in January, it spent the early months of 1802 on the Gangetic plains waiting for permission to enter Nepal. The Nepalese were in no hurry to escort the Mission to Kathmandu as the 1801 Treaty had been imposed upon the Durbar much against its will. At that time the lowland Tarai regions were feared for the 'Ayul', a particularly virulent form of malaria, which was invariably fatal to incomers but to which the indigenous Tharu people were immune. The pestilent

season began in mid-March, and so the long delays were becoming of great concern to the British. Permission was granted at the 'eleventh hour', and the Mission crossed the border and headed up to Kathmandu, passing through Hetauda and Chitlong. On 15 April the party camped at Thankot and looked down across the wide expanse of the Kathmandu Valley, devoid of the crowded buildings that we see today. In 1802 the scenery would have consisted mostly of open grassy meadows, luxuriant forested hills and farmland clustered around the towns and villages. Occasional Hindu temples and Buddhist stupas rose up on prominent ground, punctuating the skyline and towering above the village houses. Buchanan-Hamilton later wrote about the time he spent in this spectacular valley where 'everywhere, in all seasons, the earth abounds with the most beautiful flowers', and that he was 'delighted with the variety, beauty, and grandeur of its vegetable productions.'

The Mission was given a large house to use as a Residency, situated to the northeast of Kathmandu near the Queen's Garden - the most extensive of the Maharaja's gardens - today in the grounds of the Narayanhiti Palace Museum. In strict accordance with the Treaty, the British were kept isolated, with their movements and communications closely monitored. Nevertheless, the Mission staff was able to go on several excursions within the Valley, but not beyond. Buchanan-Hamilton did not work alone on his surveys, and

could have achieved little without enlisting the help of indigenous scholars and informants in the gathering, recording, translation and transcription of information. Following the conventions of the time, these native helpers are seldom named, but we know that the majority of the information recorded was with the help of Babu Ramajai Bhattacharji - an 'intelligent Brahmin from Calcutta.' His botanical notes regularly feature vernacular plant names (and their native language), and many of Buchanan-Hamilton's new Latinized scientific names were derived from such local names. Indigenous collectors and artists also assisted Buchanan-Hamilton, but their names were seldom recorded and the name of the Bengali artist who worked for him in Nepal is sadly unknown.

In the field of natural history Buchanan-Hamilton made his usual detailed observations, took meticulous records and pressed hundreds of herbarium specimens. His Indian artist prepared coloured drawings of the most interesting, especially orchids, succulents and other plants that would not make good dried herbarium specimens. There are also



Figure 2. The Kalij Pheasant, *Lophura leucomelena*

drawings and descriptions of a pair of Kalij Pheasants and of the Himalayan Goral. However, it fell to Brian Houghton Hodgson, twenty years later, to initiate the scientific study of Nepalese birds, and other animals, and should be honoured as the 'Father of Nepalese Zoology.

Buchanan-Hamilton recorded local names and plant uses in both Newari and 'Parbutti' (Parbatiya, the language of the 'hill people', equivalent to modern Nepali), sometimes in Hindi, and occasionally in Persian. He dated and localised his collections to the area where he was working. Of these Narainhetty (Narayanhiti) features prominently, but also Sembu (Swayambhunath) and occasionally other localities such as Etauda (Hetauda), Chitlong and Nilkantha (Budhanilkantha), though the specimens were often brought to these localities from much further afield. Buchanan-Hamilton also regularly dispatched baskets of living plants to Dr William Roxburgh in Calcutta. His daily records show that he sent over 107 batches of fruits, seeds, roots, bulbs, tubers, cuttings and whole plants, each with a covering letter. Roxburgh tried to grow these Nepalese plants in the Calcutta Botanic Garden, and some were still flourishing there a decade later, as recorded in Roxburgh's garden catalogue, *Hortus Bengalensis* of 1814.

As winter approached, the tiresome restrictions became too much for Buchanan-Hamilton and he formally expressed his wish to be replaced and return to Calcutta. By now he considered that he had exhausted most of the botanical interest of the Kathmandu Valley, as he had collected throughout the flowering season, and felt that his talents could be put to more profitable use elsewhere. The desired news of his recall came on 1 March 1803, but the diplomatic

relationship between the two countries broke down and the whole British Mission left Kathmandu on 18 March 1803. The British took the southern route out of the valley via Pharping, crossed the Nepalese border on 27 March and reached Sugauli the following day.

Soon after returning to Calcutta the Governor-General appointed Buchanan-Hamilton as his personal Surgeon and placed him in charge of the Barrackpore Menagerie. The Menagerie was one of Wellesley's grand schemes, aiming to display and be a base for cataloguing the wildlife of the Company's dominions. This was a golden opportunity for Buchanan-Hamilton, as he had a team of artists at his disposal and leisure time to work on his natural history collections. In gratitude to his patron he directed his artists to prepare a full-colour set of his Nepal drawings for Wellesley, and another



Figure 3. *Sungabha*, *Dendrobium densiflorum*

set for his friend Dr John Fleming, head of the Bengal Medical Board (and another Hope pupil). The Wellesley drawings are now in the British Library, and Fleming's are housed in the Natural History Museum, London.

At Barrackpore Buchanan-Hamilton was able to return to the study and writing up of his Mysore materials, but unfortunately could not complete the same for his Nepalese collections. He had only worked up one third of the species when in 1805 the Court of Directors finally lost patience with the extravagant Governor-General, and ordered Wellesley's immediate recall. With his world in turmoil, Buchanan-Hamilton decided to accompany his patron on the voyage to England, to attend to his medical needs and press for a new appointment that would allow the continuation his botanical researches in India. Buchanan-Hamilton had set his sights on succeeding his friend, the ailing William Roxburgh, as Superintendent of the Calcutta Botanical Garden. It must have been with some sadness that Buchanan-Hamilton packed up his specimens, drawings, original notes and partly finished manuscripts, resigning himself to the fact that it was highly unlikely that he would be able to finish this research himself.

Buchanan-Hamilton was well aware of

the scientific importance of the large numbers of new species he had discovered, and so when back in England he gave away all his material to his scientific friends and asked them to take the work through to publication. To Dr (later Sir) James Edward Smith, President of the Linnean Society, he gave the top set of his Nepalese herbarium specimens and all of his drawings and manuscripts. Lamentably, Smith did very little with these treasures. Fortunately Buchanan-Hamilton gave a partial duplicate set of the specimens to Aylmer Bourke Lambert, a respected botanist and private collector. Fifteen years later Lambert directed his young librarian, David Don, to work on the Nepalese specimens in his collection, which by then also included specimens gathered by the Honourable Edward Gardner, the first permanent British Resident in Kathmandu - sent to Lambert by Dr Nathaniel Wallich, head of Calcutta Botanic Garden.

In 1825 Don published *Prodromus Florae Nepalensis*, the first Flora of Nepal, in which he catalogued 806 plant species from Nepal, nearly 80% of which were newly described, and most were based on Buchanan-Hamilton's collections. As Don's descriptions are very short, the herbarium specimens (now in the Natural History Museum, London) are vitally important as vouchers for the modern interpretation of these early names. Smith was jealously protective of his Nepalese material, and did not allow Don or even Buchanan-Hamilton, to consult his specimens, drawings or descriptions. Don's book was considerably the poorer because of this, and Buchanan-Hamilton was, hardly surprisingly, disappointed, commenting that Don's book 'abounds in errors'.

Buchanan-Hamilton spent almost all of



Figure 4. Chilaune, *Schima wallichii*

1806 in Britain. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society, and, after protracted machinations, the EIC Court of Directors decided that he would indeed succeed Roxburgh on his retirement. Buchanan-Hamilton returned to India in 1807 with Lord Minto, the new Governor-General, and was deputed to lead an extensive survey of the Bengal Presidency. During the next seven years Buchanan-Hamilton travelled widely in Bengal undertaking his 'statistical survey' under gruelling conditions. On two occasions, in 1810 and 1813, he was camped near the Nepalese border, and although he was instructed not to cross the border himself, he was able to send native collectors into Nepal to gather medicinal or otherwise useful plants. In particular he was keen to obtain information on the enigmatic 'spikenard' (*Nardostachys jatamansi*), a plant highly

prized since ancient Egypt and Roman times as the source of a pungent perfume. During retirement Buchanan-Hamilton completed a manuscript catalogue of these and the other herbarium specimens collected on the Bengal Survey. Buchanan-Hamilton's own specimens, and his personal copy of his catalogue, are among the treasures of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.

Roxburgh's resignation finally came in 1814, but by then Buchanan-Hamilton had spent 20 years in India and was ready to return home. He lasted just four months in charge of the Calcutta Botanic Garden, before returning to Britain and retiring to his family home of Leny House, Stirlingshire. He spent his final years working on the notes amassed during his many years in India, and published articles and books on a wide range of subjects, not



Figure 5. HE Nepalese Ambassador to the UK, Dr Suresh Chalise, inaugurating the memorial plaque to Francis Buchanan-Hamilton at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.

only botany: from geography to ichthyology, and archaeology to genealogy. Buchanan-Hamilton married late in life, at the age of 59, and had two children. He died on 15 June 1829 and was buried in the family graveyard on the Leny estate. In recent years his memorial gravestone was rescued, restored and is now displayed at his *Alma Mata*, the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, where it was inaugurated by the Nepalese Ambassador, Dr Suresh Chalise, on 24 September 2010.

It is a pity that Buchanan-Hamilton was not able to publish his *Flora Nepalensis* at the time, as this would have been the first comprehensive record of plants found in and around the Kathmandu valley over 200 years ago. This would also have been the first documentation of local plant names in Newari and Nepalese (Parbuttiya) languages – some of which are still the same today, but many have either changed over time or gone out of use. The material given to Smith, Buchanan-Hamilton's unfinished study frozen in time, is now in the Linnean Society of London and provides a remarkable window onto his working methods. It is tempting to think that, two centuries on, Buchanan-Hamilton's *Flora Nepalensis* manuscript could still be completed, using his neat piles of species notes, index slips, drawings and specimens.

Buchanan-Hamilton is now recognised as a pioneer of biodiversity research in Nepal, but he could not have done this by himself, and he needed to work with Nepalese and Indian informants to achieve what he did. It is unfortunate that the names of most of Buchanan-Hamilton's collaborators have been lost in the mists of time, but, none-the-less, today we can recognise the invaluable part they played

in these early discoveries. Collaboration, with the mutual exchange of skills, knowledge, expertise and experience lies at the heart of progress, and it is in this spirit of sharing that Dr Chalise has put forward a plan for a Nepal-UK Foundation to support the development of skills and learning in the environmental sector. Ultimately all life on earth depends on a healthy environment, functioning ecosystems and plant biodiversity, and knowledge and understanding in this field is pivotal to the future of our planet. Inspired by Dr Francis Buchanan-Hamilton, Dr Chalise has proposed the launch of a *Buchanan-Hamilton Foundation* as part of the celebrations of the 200th anniversary of the Nepal-UK Treaty of Sugauli, to support capacity building and promote of collaboration in this area that is so important for the future of our planet.

*(Figures 2, 3, 4 are reproduced by permission of the Linnean Society of London)*

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



Richard Olivier - photographer - 020 8567 5629



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## A SUSTAINABLE ART PROJECT

By Gordon Davidson

*(Gordon Davidson spoke to the Society and held an exhibition of his own work at the Gurkha Museum in April 2011. Ed.)*

In 2010 I was taken to Nepal to produce a series of paintings for Dr Chalise, the Nepalese ambassador. The exhibition was to be part of the 'Year of Tourism' celebrations. At the exhibition in the Gurkha Museum in Winchester I was asked by the curator, Major Gerald Davies, if I would be interested in going to Nepal to set up a sustainable art project in an orphanage north of Kathmandu.

To be honest my head said 'Oh, free trip to Nepal. I'll do it. I can show art to a few teenagers, aye no problem!'

However on arrival, plan 'A' went out the window in the first minute as four fourteen year old boys came in followed by twelve others ranging from three to twelve. I don't even like 'wee weans' never mind working with them. That is when the 'What am I doing here?' phrase came to mind.

The idea was to give the children proper art skills, as it is not taught in Nepalese schools. They are already learning how to grow vegetables and herbs, woodwork, sewing and other things that will help them to get jobs when they leave the home, so art might be a new possibility for them. My job was not just to show them the skills but to see if there were any places that might be able to exhibit their work or any companies who might be able to employ the youngsters in some artistic capacity.

However, first things first, I had to find out who could do what? I had arrived at the start of Tihar. My first morning in the 'Happy Children Home' was spent getting the children to write their names and then apply patterns to them. Everyone was

really interested and they all concentrated very hard. I had a young helper from the home to translate for me so I was really surprised how well the morning went. In the afternoon we all got smartened up and the entire home went off round the village to sing and dance for money as part of the Tihar celebrations. The children had a wee dance troop of the three older girls and two of the older boys. Kumar played a drum and they all sang.

My second day came as a bit of a shock as my translator had disappeared and I was left with the smallest children who spoke very little English. I've no idea how I got through but somehow we managed to draw fish and colour them in with felt tip pens.

I wanted to introduce the older ones to painting. Saroj was completely blown away when I mixed yellow and blue and I made green. I think he thought I was a wizard.

Two more days of Tihar gave me the chance to see more of the village and to get to know the children, and to join in the culture, especially when on the third day a tikka was painted on my forehead. On the last night of Tihar when we were coming home, there was an electricity blackout. A cry came from one of the adults; 'Get the children'. I grabbed a few, not even knowing if they were ours. As our eyes got used to the dark, I saw the face of tiny Sunil who looked up at me and then he saw the stars and started to sing 'Twinkle, twinkle little star'. Dolma on my left joined in. If my friends could see me now ... standing hand in hand with two wee children I did not know, in the dark, on a

street I did not know, in a village I did not know, in the middle of Nepal singing ‘Twinkle, twinkle...’ It does not get much weirder than that.

By the start of my second week I was picking up a few Nepali words like colours and instructions which was a big help. The older boys gave me homework and always checked if I had done it. They thought this was a great laugh.

By now the bare walls of my art room were filling up with colourful fish and butterflies on *lokta* paper and highlighted with glitter which was a great success...the wee ones really liked glitter. I don’t think they had seen it before.

The older ones were also doing fish, but they were really keen on trying to do what I was painting in my free time so they were coming up with landscapes, sunsets and temples. By now we were well into the serious work I wanted to take home to exhibit.

I had taken a good quality TV camera with me and I suggested to the older children the idea of making a wee film showing their lives in Budhanilkantha. They really enjoyed the project. They filmed the local temple, the market, the main street, a holy tree, and in the second week they filmed an interview with their teacher and began to talk directly to the camera. During the last week we were allowed to film inside the local Buddhist temple. The paintings inside the temple were a real inspiration to the children. They also filmed inside the home.

They do not have toys and there is no TV so they make their own fun. The boys use flip-flops as goalies gloves. There is a big bamboo swing (*ping*) outside the home and a tyre acts as a mini bouncing castle. So the art project was a new and exciting thing to do. Very often the one hour session in the evening with the older

children would stretch to two hours or even three. It was a nice way to spend an evening. Also the older ones liked to speak English so I got to hear about their lives and what they did and did not like.

Kneeling on the floor became my way to work as there were no desks, which made me the same height as six year old Jalak, who would come up to me shaking my shirt at the shoulder and gibber in Nepali at me. I had to work out whether it was a pencil or a rubber or a pen he was wanting. He always gave a big smile when I got it right.

After a week of working them hard producing work for exhibiting, I gave them a day to paint what they wanted. Quite a number of them did scenes of mountains with tigers on them. So for the last week I planned to do paintings of tigers with the older ones.

Sunil asked me; ‘Will you walk to school with us?’ I tagged along and could not believe the route under the barbed wire, jumping ditches, scuttling over polluted rivers and climbing up a very steep hill. I’d like to see some of the children here do that everyday, no big ‘four-by-four’ school runs here.

In my last week I found some good *lokta* paper which had flower petals in it so we made lots of flower pictures with oil pastels. The older ones were now coming up with great tigers and temples.

I gathered a total of eighty artworks from the children to take home. On my last day they all cried when they heard I was going home. Most people are usually glad to see the back of me when I leave so this was a bit of a shock to me. I even got sixteen hugs..... So much for me not liking ‘wee weans’ ... I liked this lot. I was very surprised at my own reaction to this whole event.

I was determined to make sure I could

get a good exhibition space for the work. The Arran Whisky Distillery offered their exhibition space and the show was scheduled for June 2013. I asked the Ambassador, Dr Chalise if he would open the event, thinking he might send an attaché. However, three weeks before the opening I got a letter from Sunita Poddar, the honorary Consul General of Nepal for Scotland saying that the Ambassador would be coming to open the event. The press got on to it and there were articles in both Scotland and Nepal and the STV News showed an article about my trip and included some of the film I took whilst working with the children. My work was commended in the Scottish Parliament after a motion proposed by Kenneth Gibson MSP.

Dr Chalise opened the event on a beautiful day in early June and we sold seventy of the paintings which ensured that every child had sold a painting. I was so proud to see their work hanging up on the walls beside mine. The distillery staff was so kind and helpful throughout the two months of the exhibition. They could not have been more helpful. We made over one thousand pounds and have now bought a year's supply of art materials for the orphanage. I think this is probably the definition of a sustainable art project.

Major Gerald Davies and Richard Morris, secretary of 6th Gurkha Rifles Association, have officially set up an organisation called 'Kalaa Jyoti' to make sure this project moves forward and becomes an annual event which can be run and financed properly.

I can't wait to go back!

Anyone wanting more information on 'Kalaa Jyoti' can contact Richard Morris at: Kalaa Jyoti, The Forge, The Street, Mortimer, Reading, Berks RG7 3PB, England.

Or can contact Gordon Davidson personally at his web site where the children can be seen...  
[www.gordondavidson.com](http://www.gordondavidson.com)

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Mrs Jenifer Evans has kindly taken on the sale of the Society ties and scarves which cost £15.00 each including postage. They are available from her at:  
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## LIFE IN KATHMANDU

By Nick Morrice

*(The author addressed the Society on 3rd October 2013)*

The Nepalese have no concept of time in quite the way that we have. Kathmandu itself is so overcrowded and congested that trying to keep to any sort of time schedule is almost impossible. Days just seem to evolve in their own way, which can have a liberating effect, but I am often left wondering how things ever happen at all in this strange city.

I go to Nepal each year to visit a small orphanage, Wasta Care Centre ('wasta' means 'nurture') where live five young men aged from 18 to 23 who I am supporting through their higher education. The oldest, Ramesh, is in his third year at Lumbini Medical College; the second, Niran, is studying accountancy in Delhi; the third, Anish is taking a course in Catering and Hotel Management. The other two, Sunil and Arun, are still at High School and are considering doing business studies and engineering respectively. I stay with them for about ten days at a time and am looked after by their foster-mother Indra Maya. Let me describe a typical day; it is early morning and the sun is just rising.

Sunil knocks at my door and indicates, by a few jogging motions, that it is time for my early morning walk. Their tiny home (entirely uncluttered by books, newspapers, CDs or pictures) is on the southern edge of the city in an area called Nakhu, so we walk out across fields and up hills, fording small streams on the way. But this is no rural idyll, as the area is strewn with litter and detritus, and the aroma of pollution hangs heavy in the air. Sunil tells me about his early life as an orphan, shows me where they went to

school as young boys, the warehouse where they buy rice at wholesale prices, and the rough open ground where you practise for your motorbike test by weaving between a few randomly placed rocks.

On the way we bump into his older brother, Kiran (for some reason Kiran is not at the orphanage – in fact he is 'persona non grata' there but I never quite discover why.). He invites us back to his room for tea – this is a sweet milky and spicy drink called 'chai' and I love it. Kiran is a poor tailor who works long hours in a factory and is irregularly paid. Over our second cup of tea, I ask him if he will run up for me a pair of white cotton pyjamas. He takes my measurements and says they will be ready tomorrow.

About two hours later we are back home for breakfast and then decide what to do next. Sunil wants to take me to his school, proudly named Oxbridge, where he has been President (that is, Head Boy) for the last year. So we set off on foot again. The roads are heavy with dust as well as traffic, because there is nothing the local work force like doing more than creating a lot of dust: putting up new buildings, knocking down old ones, bashing rocks with sledgehammers, all common features of everyday life. I always get breathing problems after a few days and sometimes a sore throat.

No appointment has been made, but the Principal is delighted to see me. He gives a good report on Sunil's academic progress and presidential year, then offers some advice on studying abroad (Sunil is considering coming to an English

university). After a short guided tour and brief introductions to some class mates, we head back home.

Sunil is walking badly and I ask him why.

“My shoes are worn out, uncle, but I haven’t any money to buy new ones.”

So we stop at a shoe shop on the way, and equip him with a new pair. The wind has now picked up creating dust storms, so if you don’t have a face mask you have to hold your hand or hanky over your mouth. At one particularly busy crossroads, the traffic controller is almost lost in clouds of dust but sticks to his precarious post valiantly trying to maintain a modicum of order in the confusion of cars, rickshaws, motorbikes, minibuses and bicycles. Not an enviable job.

We arrive home and I go for a shower – well, not so much a shower as a wash under a cold tap. Mama has prepared a typical Nepalese meal: dhal bhat, which consists of plain boiled rice with a sort of lentil sauce, and a small bowl of vegetables. It is unfailingly delicious and very welcome. More members of the family have turned up by now, as mama has five grown-up sons and one daughter of her own, so there are cousins, uncles and aunts who appear from time to time. While I eat, one of the cousins, Ashish, plays and sings to me on the guitar. He writes songs of worship for church, as well as sentimental love songs but I can never quite tell which are which. He sings with great feeling and I sit back in peaceful enjoyment. After a while, he stops as he has a suggestion to make.

“Uncle, would you like to go for a haircut and head massage? I know a really good place which you will enjoy.”

“Great idea!” I reply.

The wind has died down, the working day is coming to an end, so in the early

evening Sunil, Ashish and I set off for the barber’s. But this is no ordinary haircut. We are each given nearly half an hour’s worth of meticulous hairdressing, followed by face, neck, head, shoulder and back massage which has us in turn groaning with delight and pleasure. It costs about £1-50, which is a tenth of what I pay in England for barely a ten minute standard cut. This barber’s working day starts at dawn and finishes at 9.0pm, with only a short break for lunch, and always a heavy evening schedule.

It is dark by the time we walk home. The stars are coming up, and apart from a few dogs barking it is quiet and peaceful. Once back at home, the boys get on to their laptops and now that they are sitting still I can work on drawing their portraits. As and when tiredness overcomes us, we gradually and in our own time drift towards bed. So ends another timeless day in Kathmandu.

*(Nick Morrice has written a book on this family and his experiences in Kathmandu. The work is entitled ‘Discovered in Kathmandu’ and is available via Amazon or directly from the author, cost £12 from his home address: 12 Manley Close, New Earswick, YORK, YO32 4DN. Ed.)*

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*11th April 2014*

**Lecture and Curry Lunch**

**Subject:** *'The United Kingdom's Foreign Policy After Afghanistan – What is our Defence Priority?'*

**Speaker:** Professor Michael Clarke,  
Director General, RUSI.

**Time:** 11.00am

**Tickets:** £30.00 per head including,  
coffee, lecture, curry lunch

*6th June 2014*

**Lecture and Curry Lunch**

**Subject:** *"Lali Gurans. The Richness of Plants from the Himalayas."*

**Speaker:** Wolfgang Bopp Dip Hort. Kew,  
Director of the Sir Harold Hillier Gardens

**Time:** 11.00am

**Tickets:** £30.00 per head including coffee,  
lecture, curry lunch

*4th July 2014*

**Lecture and Curry Lunch**

**Subject:** *"Kukris in the Trenches – Gurkhas on the Western Front in the Great War".*

**Speaker:** Major Gordon Corrigan,

**Time:** 11.00am

**Tickets:** £30.00 per head including coffee,  
lecture, curry lunch

*2nd August to 30th August 2014*

**The Gurkha Museum Summer Exhibition**

**Title:** *"Across the Black Water" – Gurkhas on the Western Front at the beginning of 1st World War*

**Free Entry** to Summer Exhibition on purchase of Museum entry ticket.

*10th October 2014*

**Lecture and Curry Lunch**

**Subject and Speaker:** To be Announced

**Time:** 11.00am

**Tickets:** £30.00 per head including coffee,  
lecture, curry lunch

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## USEFUL ADDRESSES

The UK Trust for Nature Conservation  
in Nepal  
c/o Conservation Programmes  
Zoological Society of London  
Regent's Park  
London NW1 4RY  
Tel: (020) 7449 6304  
Fax: (020) 7483 4436

The Gurkha Welfare Trust  
PO Box 2170  
22 Queen Street  
SALISBURY SP2 2EX  
Tel: 01722 323955  
Fax: 01722 343119  
[www.gwt.org.uk](http://www.gwt.org.uk)

School of Oriental and African Studies  
University of London  
Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square  
London WC1H 0XG  
Tel: (020) 7898 4034

The Britain Nepal Otolaryngology Service  
(BRINOS)  
Greensand Cottage  
Puttenham Road  
Seale  
Farnham GU10 1HP  
Tel: (01252) 783265

Yeti Association  
(Nepali Association in UK)  
66 Abbey Avenue  
Wembley  
Middlesex HA0 1LL  
Email: [yetinepaliansociation@hotmail.com](mailto:yetinepaliansociation@hotmail.com)

The Esther Benjamin's Trust  
Third Floor  
2 Cloth Court  
London EC1A 7LS  
Website: [www.ebtrust.org.uk](http://www.ebtrust.org.uk)

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

The Britain-Nepal Chamber of Commerce  
35 St Philip's Avenue  
Worcester Park  
Surrey KT4 8JS  
Tel: 020 8241 0313  
Email: [bncc@tamgroup.co.uk](mailto:bncc@tamgroup.co.uk)

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

Student Partnership Worldwide  
17 Deans Yard  
London SW1P 3PB

The Royal Society for Asian Affairs  
25 Eccleston Place  
London SW1W 9NF  
Tel: (020) 7235 5122  
[www.rsaa.org.uk](http://www.rsaa.org.uk)

Bird Conservation Nepal  
PO Box 12465  
Lazimpat  
Kathmandu  
Nepal  
Tel: + 977 1 4417805  
Email: [bcn@mail.com.np](mailto:bcn@mail.com.np)  
[www.birdlifenepal.org](http://www.birdlifenepal.org)



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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](mailto:britorion@aol.com)

Website:

[www.britain-nepal-society.org.uk](http://www.britain-nepal-society.org.uk)

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## THE BRITAIN-NEPAL SOCIETY

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*President:* His Royal Highness The Duke of Gloucester KG, GCVO

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Mrs Celia Brown

Colonel JM Evans MC

Sir Neil Thorne OBE, TD, DL

Mrs Pat Mellor

Sylvia Countess of Limerick CBE

Lieutenant Colonel Gerry D Birch\*

*Committee (2013/14)*

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*Vice-Chairman:* Colonel John SK Swanston

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*Honorary Treasurer:* Colonel Rupert Litherland

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Mr Gavin Edgerley-Harris

Mr Balmukund Joshi

Mrs Sneha Rana

Mrs Maggie Solon

Mrs Frances Spackman

Dr Mark Watson

Mr Tej B Chhetri, (Minister Counsellor), the Nepalese Embassy (*ex officio*)

Ms Sarah Wrathall, FCO (*ex officio*)

Major Nigel JD Wylie Carrick MBE, HQ Brigade of Gurkhas (*ex officio*)

*Archivist:* Position vacant (*ex officio*)

*Editor of the Journal:* Lieutenant Colonel GD Birch\* (*ex officio*)



# ACORN Nepal Trust

(Aid for Children of Rural Nepal  
and Educational Trust)

Charitable Society Regd. No. 701/1999



फोन नं. : २७०७६२, २७८६३०  
पो.ब.नं. : ३०४६ काठमाडौं  
फ्याक्स : ९७७-९-२८२६८८

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नेपालका ग्रामीण बालबालिकाहरू लागि सहायता संस्था

## ACORN Nepal Trust

बल्खु, काठमाडौं - १४



**Founder President**

**U.K. Contact**

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