

## HORSE TRADING IN TIBET, NEPAL AND INDIA (1956-1959)

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We well know that Corneille Jest first worked in Dolpo, in western Nepal. He has nevertheless done fieldwork at many other sites. He is well acquainted with far eastern Nepal—Walung, Tokpe, Thudam.

His is also interested in quite diverse subjects, such as the pony trade, which I shall discuss here. From 1956-1959 the ancient horse market took place from the fair in Talung, a two-day walk from Lhasa in Tibet, and as far as the Indian fairs, passing through east Nepal from place to place as far as Calcutta. The fair at Talung, "the valley of horses", lasted one month in July-August. The horse dealers came from Lhasa, Shigatse and Sakya, as well as from Himalayan villages such as Walung or Tokpe Gola in eastern Nepal near the Tibetan border. This commerce ended slightly before the Dalai Lama's exile in 1959.

The prominent merchants from Walungchung and Tokpe Gola used to leave with a servant for Talung—

among them, the *goba* of Walung and some of his near relations, as well as others from Tokpe Gola. From Walung or Tokpe Gola in eastern Nepal, it took 15 to 20 days on horseback to reach Talung in Tibet.

At the fair a good three- or four-year-old stallion could bring in 200 to 250 Nepalese rupees. At that time, the important merchants from Walung and Tokpe bought 15 to 35 horses; others would buy 60. In addition, they also bought yellow coral, rugs and blankets.

The great merchants from Walung and Tokpe hired the services of Tibetan grooms: they brought horses back from Talung across the Nepalese border. Four men were needed for 60 horses; the grooms were given one rupee per day with the meal. These grooms then returned to Tibet.

In Walung the horses stayed up to the beginning of the month of December. Some villagers who had fodder kept the animals near their houses. For the most part, the horses grazed on pastures one-day's walk from the village. For 60 horses, four farm helpers were required: they guarded the horses and took care of the fodder. They were given a little maize each day, the equivalent of one *mānā*. The horses were free to graze on the pastures. Nuruk, our Tibetan informant, lived at that time in Walung.



Dolpo, Tarap, 1963 (C. Jest)

From the month of January, the horses were led down as far as Dharan. Often it was necessary to be well-acquainted with the routes, the pasture lands. In Dho-ban, Ilam, Chainpur, along the Tamur River, Newars and Yakthumbas would buy two horses, five horses. They also bought Tibetan rugs and blankets as far as Dharan.

Finally, there were large fairs near the Indian border (Neckmard, Dharmagang, Krishnagang) which took place either in February or in March. Once in India, in Jogbani, the horses were loaded into train carriages with merchandise and most often purchased to pull rickshaws in Calcutta and in other Indian cities.

The price of horses varied according to the distances traversed by the horses from Talung to Calcutta.