

Himalayan News

The Newsletter of the Himalayan Explorers Connection

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Khumbu Reforestation Project

By Pasang Sherpa

Since the 1950s the mountains of Nepal, and especially the Mt. Everest area (Sagarmatha National Park), have been seen as one of the ultimate climbing/trekking destinations in the world. The trickle of tourists that began in the 1950s after Sir Edmund Hillary scaled the world's highest mountain has now become a flood. In 1961 a little over 4,000 tourists traveled to Nepal. By 1998, the number of visitors had swelled to 460,000, with over 84,000 trekking permits issued. Some 20 percent (17,000) of these permits were to Sagarmatha National Park.

The surge of tourism has put severe strains on this fragile alpine environment. One of the most notable impacts has been deforestation. Wood is the primary cooking fuel in rural Nepal, and an enormous amount is needed to heat and feed the large numbers of trekkers who visit the lodges along the trail to Mt. Everest. In addition, the growing stream of tourists has encouraged the construction of more lodges using wood extracted from local forests.

Around Lukla, home of the popular landing strip for many trekking towards Mt. Everest, many of the hills, once green with Himalayan hemlock, pine, and juniper, are now bare.

Deforestation in the region has led to grave environmental consequences: a loss of habitat and biodiversity, increased soil erosion, and diminished air and water quality. Landslides, always a concern in

Nepal's steep terrain, have accelerated as the monsoon rains sweep away hillsides no longer anchored by trees.

The disappearing forests also create social antagonisms. It now takes two to three hours to bring a load of wood to Lukla, since surrounding areas are now deforested. To keep supplies of wood coming, hotels and lodges hire unemployed youths from different parts of the country to collect fuel wood. These laborers, along with the trekkers, also consume precious local resources.

Villagers who do not own lodges have come to resent the clear-cutting of local forests to heat and feed strangers, for the profit only of those who can afford to build lodges.

In 1999, the Everest Foundation (a Nepalese NGO) initiated the Khumbu Reforestation Project, hoping to replenish the forests of the Everest region. The project currently has 45,000 native pine saplings available for replanting. In 2002 the group will plant 20,000 new trees in the area around Lukla and will construct


a 500-meter stone fence around the nursery to protect saplings from being crushed by livestock. In 2003 the remaining 25,000 trees will be planted.

In April, the Himalayan Explorers Connection and Manaca.com will

send a group of volunteers to help with the project. The 16-day trip departs from the U.S. on April 20, 2002, and includes six days working side-by-side with community forestry advocates to prepare the



Rows of saplings ready for planting

soil and plant the saplings. The trip also includes a cultural education component, with lectures on Sherpa and Buddhist customs. 

For information, contact the HEC (888.420.8822) or Staci Summers at Manaca (866-9MANACA)



Workers prepare the saplings for planting

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ASK THE AUTHOR:

To Be Guided, or Not to Be Guided?

By Hannah Nordhaus

When planning a trek to the Himalayan region one is eventually confronted by the decision to trek on one's own, hire a local guide, or hire a Western guide. What is the best decision? It depends on a number of factors.

REGION. On the more remote or restricted trails, guides are essential. Where there is no trekking infrastructure, visitors may also find it difficult to find their way through the confusing network of trails, and to locate provisions if they don't speak the language. In many remote or restricted areas the government requires that you hire a guide in order to receive a trekking permit.

On the more popular routes (Everest or Annapurna) a guide is truly optional. It is rare that you can walk more than two hours on those trails without stumbling upon a lodge that provides beds, water, heat, meals and treats such as solar showers, beer, Kit-Kats and pizza. The trails are well marked, minimizing the chances of wandering off on the wrong path. The solo trekker can easily find walking companions in the teahouses, which fill up with hikers at the end of the day.

TIME. It takes time to organize a trek on one's own. Finding, interviewing, and bargaining with local guides and porters is time-consuming and can be quite frustrating. It can also take time to make local travel arrangements, and many popular routes – like flights from Kathmandu to Pokhara or Lukla – are often fully booked, meaning waiting around valuable days for an open seat.

MONEY. Going with a guide certainly costs more than doing the trek on one's own. Western guides for treks in Nepal, India, or Pakistan can run as much as \$100 per day, including meals and all in-country travel arrangements. Local companies, on the other hand, can normally book the same trek for approximately \$30-\$50 per day. Costs for directly hiring a local guide or porter in Nepal (not going through a trekking company) will depend largely on the number of people in your trekking party, but assume about \$10-\$15/day for a local guide and \$5/day for a porter. Those that carry their own bag, staying at teahouses, can spend as little as \$5-\$10/day

while trekking in Nepal.

Remember, however, that employing a local guide or porter is the most direct means a foreign trekker has of contributing in a positive way to Nepal's rural economies. Generous wages from one long trek could easily sustain a guide or porter and his family for up to six months.

SAFETY CONCERNS. Walking along lonely trails and cliffsides, it is always good to have a companion in case of unforeseen events. A travelling companion can be invaluable in case of accident, a twisted ankle or something more serious – such as a fall or onset of acute mountain sickness – to provide a helping hand or to call for help. Many western guides (and some local guides) have extensive first-aid training, plus some groups carry a Portable Altitude Chamber in case a member of the trekking party suffers from high altitude pulmonary or cerebral edema.

RECOURSE. There are many people – in the West and in Asia – that call themselves “guides” without proper training or experience. By booking with a reputable trekking or adventure travel company you are more likely to have some recourse should you be disappointed in your trip. Ask for references, training experience, and a list of professional associations they belong to. You can also browse the HEC trip reports or post a message on HimalayaNet.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS. Teahouses are rough on the environment for a number of reasons. Most attempt to cut costs by cooking over wood burning fires, not kerosene stoves. And the construction of elaborate wood and glass lodges in the fragile environment at 15,000 feet has deleterious impacts. Many guides use carefully tented camps, cook over kerosene stoves, and carry out all waste.


AESTHETIC CONCERNS. Trekking alone or directly hiring a local guide offers an independence you may feel you sacrifice with an organized group. You can go your own pace, acclimatizing to your own schedule, taking side trips, etc. You needn't worry about struggling to communicate, nor about the cultural misunderstandings that sometimes arise between local guides and their clients.

On the other hand, a knowledgeable, bilingual guide can give you insight and perspective into the local cultures that you would never get

on your own, insulated from the local people in teahouses crowded with Westerners. There often develops a feeling of camaraderie, companionship, and life-long friendship.

MY EXPERIENCE. On my first trip to Nepal, I traveled with a local guide and learned local customs, songs, games, Nepali phrases (have you truly been to Nepal if you've never learned to say “ke garne?”), and basked in the warmth and humor of our Nepali escorts.

I've also had excellent experiences without a guide. On my most recent trip I found myself with a week to spare, so I set off on my first entirely solo trek to Annapurna Base Camp. I did double days when I felt like it, met interesting people, and read a very thick book.

My advice? Unless you are very familiar with the area you are visiting, hire a Western or local guide. 

David Reed is currently in Nepal updating his book, the "Rough Guide to Nepal," but plans to return for the next issue of Himalayan News.

publication statement

Himalayan News is the newsletter of the Himalayan Explorers Connection, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Basic Memberships start at \$30 a year and are U.S. tax-deductible, as are donations to support our educational/infrastructure programs.

The mission of the Himalayan Explorers Connection is to promote a better understanding of and respect for the environment and cultures of the Himalayan region. The HEC coordinates education, assistance, and cross-cultural experiences for members, volunteers, trekkers, and Himalayan residents.

The Himalayan Explorers Connection
P.O. Box 3665
Boulder, CO 80307
Phone: (303) 998-0101
Fax: (303) 998-1007
info@hec.org
http://www.hec.org

P.O. Box 9178
Kathmandu, Nepal
members@himexp.wlink.com.np
977-1-259-275

House 14A, Street 63, F-8-4
Islamabad, Pakistan
hec@trivor.com.pk
92-51-282-146



Little Karim of the Karakoram

By Greg Mortenson

Little Karim, 41, is a Balti native of Pakistan's Karakoram range. He grew up as a shepherd, herding goats, sheep, and cattle over the craggy hillsides of the Hushe Valley, south of K2.

Karim is one of the strongest high-altitude mountaineers in the world. Dozens of the world's best climbers owe their Karakoram summit successes to Karim's help. He's been above 8,000 meters at least twenty times, usually with a huge load on his back. His physical accomplishments are made more remarkable by the fact that Karim stands only 5 feet 3 inches tall. His weight might top 115 pounds after a large meal.

When he was a teenager, Karim longed to be a porter, like many of the young men in his village. "But everyone told me I was ishin tzunsay (too small)," he remembers.

Karim's chance came in the 1970s, when an American climber, Dick Emerson, visited Hushe. Karim volunteered to be his porter, but Emerson

scoffed, "You are too small." Karim was undeterred. He picked Emerson up and paraded him around Hushe. He was hired, and together, the two climbers nailed a dozen alpine first ascents.

Despite his success with Emerson, several expedition leaders were still reluctant to hire Karim because of his small stature. This changed in 1981, however, after Karim found work with a Japanese expedition attempting a first ascent of K2's West Ridge. When Karim overheard on the radio that the summit team had run out of food, oxygen, and cooking gas and had to come down, Karim carried supplies from 6,600 to 8,100 meters through deep snow to assist the team, making the trip in six hours. Because of his gallant effort, two climbers were able to summit.

Karim's feats – and his reputation – continued to grow from there. In 1985, Karim carried a glider with a thirteen-foot wingspan to the 8,025-meter summit of Gasherbrum II. In 1986, after three days of 50-pound, high-altitude carries on K2, Karim hiked to visit friends climbing Broad Peak, a neighboring 8,000-meter

summit. He decided to go up the peak, summited, dragged a stranded German climber to safety, and returned to K2 base camp – all in two days.

Karim has touched the lives and hearts of hundreds of climbers, yet he has little to show for his astonishing accomplishments – a milk cow, two dozen goats, two mountain books with his photo inside, and a few faded photos of him with the world's elite climbers. Pasted to a window frame is a thumb-printed (Karim is illiterate) \$500 receipt for his role in the movie "K2," which was filmed on Mt. Waddington, Canada. "K2 film is # 1 money I make in my life," Karim explains.

But the grim reality is that he is usually underpaid or not paid at all by his clients or travel agencies. Even today, Karim is lucky if he can find a job that pays him \$8 daily for a week or two.

In the winter, his four children sometimes go hungry. Food and rupees are scarce. Many years, he must sell off precious land to support his fam-

continued on page 5

Porter Assistance Project Update

Beneath nearly every successful summit experience – in Pakistan or Nepal – lies a mountain of support infrastructure, including the unsung heroes of the Himalayas, the porters. Contrary to popular belief many porters do not grow up accustomed to the cold and altitude, but are impoverished sustenance farmers who travel from lower elevations in search of work. And, more and more, we sense a swelling of compassion and caring for these wonderful men and woman.

In the west, the BBC documentary *Carrying the Burden* was accepted as a finalist in the Banff Mountain Film Festival. The compelling film – which features discussions with porters who have suffered horrendous

frostbite, hypothermia and high altitude sickness – generated a tremendous response at the festival. The film is now going on tour with the "Best of Banff" (one of only 20 films selected from the 250 entered) and will be shown in cities throughout the world. The film also has footage of the HEC clothing bank and interviews with Ben Ayers, the famed "bloke from the telly". Please see "HEC News" for more information.



A seasoned porter from the documentary Carrying the Burden

In the meantime, Ngima and Brandom Jones have been busy setting up the new office in Lukla, which has a separate classroom, office area, and clothing storage room. Brandom has also been teaching the daily English, first aid, and empowerment classes for porters (we continue to get 10-15 porters/day in the classes).

We've also initiated a new ID card for porters, so that they can come in and borrow the equipment without having to depend on an independent trekker or sirdhar to take out the equipment for them. Brandom also continues to develop the cottage industry program (selling small crafts that were produced by porters) and the stove lending program (lending stoves to porters to decrease their dependence on firewood for cooking).

In the U.S. we've received generous donations of equipment, including 50lbs. of shoes from the North Face, 200lbs. of shoes from Montrail, and 900lbs. of ski suits from Mammoth Mountain ski resort! These seconds, warranty returns, and ski suits are put to good use in Nepal by the porters, who take it through some of the toughest testing imaginable. And Gelbu and Arjun continue to sort, label, and loan the equipment from our Kathmandu office.

To read more about the project and tips for caring for porters, visit www.hec.org/club/clothingbank2.htm





Classified Section

LOOKING FOR INFORMATION

Looking for info on Gokyo/Everest BC. My daughter and I are planning a trip to Nepal in April and are looking for a few people who have been trekking and could answer questions. We will be doing the Gokyo/Everest BC trek. Your help would be appreciated. David Duffy, David.Duffy@esis.com

Physician seeks to volunteer in Nepal. I am a primary care physician in Canada. I recently returned from a month in Nepal including trekking to Base Camp. I thoroughly enjoyed the people & the country & would like to volunteer medically. Any leads would be appreciated. Dave Hoag M.D., C.C.F.P., choag@auracom.com

GUIDES

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Join the Himalayan Explorers Connection in the Himalayas! In March 2002 Pemba Sherpa leads Everest trek with Island Peak. The trip include an excursion "off the beaten path" to Sewangma, where Pemba grew up and the location of the HEC Bridge Project, and to the Sano-Gomela School project. Phone: 888-420-8822, info@hec.org

A HIMALAYA, AFRICA, ACONCAGUA INEXPENSIVE climb with Daniel Mazur. Amadablam, Kangchenjunga, 7000m snowpeaks, EVEREST, Cho-oyu, Manaslu, KILIMANJARO-TREK, Kenya rock climb. Phone: 206-329-4107, summitclimb@earthlink.net, www.summitclimb.com

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VOLUNTEER/STUDY ABROAD

Volunteer Nepal Himalaya offers participants a unique opportunity to teach English in Sherpa villages in the Himalayas, near Mt. Everest. Accommodations are with local families. While not teaching, participants work on community service projects or explore the endless trails and villages of the Khumbu region. For more information, please contact the Himalayan Explorers Connection at info@hec.org or call (303)998-0101.

Bridges-PRTD now accepting applications for Fall 2002 expedition (Sep 7 - Dec 10, 2002). This study/volunteer work program focuses on tourism development in a remote valley of Nepal; includes full Everest trek, optional excursion to India. \$1800 plus personal expense. Open to students and non-students. www.bridges-prtd.com or e-mail seth@bridges-prtd.com

The Nepal Volunteer Handbook offers potential volunteers everything they will need to know about volunteering in Nepal, including a personal skills assessment, background on the history of foreign assistance in Nepal, tips for ensuring a worthwhile experience, and information on over 50 volunteer leads. Contact the HEC at (303)998-0101 or info@hec.org

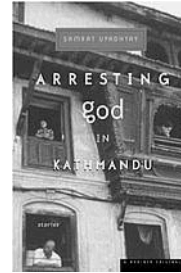
Everest Book Review

Arresting God in Kathmandu

By Samrat Upadhyay

(Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001)

Reviewed by Stan Goldberg



My initial thought as I delved into this marvelously insightful collection of nine short stories that revolve around the intimacies of Nepali home life was that this book is a great candi-

date for my wife's book club. I am usually more attracted to stories that bespeak high adventure of the mind and body. By the end of the first of these nine slices of life in the always intriguing bustle of Nepal's major metropolis, my chauvinism was replaced by a real admiration for and enjoyment of not only the finely crafted stories but also a style that exudes an understanding of the inner being. The stories are as enchanting as the locale in which they are situated.

Samrat Upadhyay, Nepal's first author writing in English to be published in the West, has given us a new connection to the inhabitants of this compelling land of Namaste. Once under the spell of the Himalayas our minds usually zoom in on Sherpas, snow leopards, dizzying mountain highs, busy bazaars, and the magnetic attraction of the Buddhist and Hindu temples that meld into the every day life of Kathmandu.

The colorful kaleidoscopes of people that inhabit this city are more than just moving filler between the objects of our attention. The lives of these mostly Hindu people are filled with a potpourri of common events that together make lives that are at once so similar to our own and at the same time, because of their cultural base, so different. Nepalis have arranged marriages, dal-bhat, Hindu deities, tika, saris, rupees, and really odd names. Take



OFF THE BEATEN TRACK:

Kashgar, the Crossroads of Central Asia

By Hannah Nordhaus and John Soos

At the northern end of the Karakoram Highway, the track once used by yak and camel caravans to bring silk from India over one of the highest mountain ranges in the world, sits the market oasis of Kashgar.

Kashgar also sits at the edge of the massive Taklimakan desert, where China, Central Asia and the Indian Subcontinent converge. The village is part of the far-western Chinese province of Xinjiang, which makes up one-sixth of China's land area, but is home to just 17 million people. Like Tibet, Xinjiang was forcefully brought under China's control after the Communist rise to power in 1949. Xinjiang's Uighur Muslims, like the Tibetans, have struggled for years for independence from China, which prizes Xinjiang's vast land, mineral reserves, and agricultural riches.

If Urumqi, the province's capital that lies 1,000 miles east of Kashgar, serves as the political and economic center of Han Chinese Xinjiang, Kashgar is the traditional Islamic heart of the province. Urumqi is a symbol of Chinese modernity – office buildings, oil rigs, traffic jams, and a state-of-the-art Holiday Inn; in Kashgar, the medieval still coexists with the modern: exhaust-belching trucks share the roads with horse carts, mule trains, and the ubiquitous Chinese bicycle. Concrete block buildings stand alongside ancient mosques. Children chase their spinning tops through the streets as tourists stop for a Brazilian coffee at the newly opened Caravan Café, a spotless imitation of Seattle coffee culture.




A mosque stands dwarfed
by Muztagh Ata, above Lake Karakul

The strategic location also brings together the astonishingly diverse cultures of Central Asia. The best place to witness Kashgar's fusion of cultures – old and new, desert and mountain, East and West – is at the city's Sunday market. The largest and oldest gathering of merchants in Central Asia, the market teems with the wildest assortment of humanity imaginable. They range from long-bearded, fur-hatted Kirghiz nomads of Mongolian descent to Muslim traders in white caps and shalwar kameez (cotton robe); from blue-eyed Afghan shepherders to Han Chinese migrants; from women covered head to toe in a material that resembles burlap to the scantily clad tourists of the Lonely Planet set.

The goods they come to haggle over are even more eclectic: fur hats, plastic trinkets, woven prayer rugs, and an astounding array of famously sharp Uighur knives to name a few items. In the food section, customers can sip fresh goat's head soup or choose between hundreds of dried-apricot merchants. They can buy the sweetest, yellowest melons imaginable; they can eat noodles

made from a ball of dough tossed and looped and twisted into foot-long strands; they can buy any animal part they could ever imagine – heads, eyeballs, innards.

Or, if they prefer, they can bring home a live animal: a \$200 camel, or a whole flock of sheep with rumps nearly as large as the rest of their bodies. At the livestock market, cows and horses brought for breeding hump away, and large men test-drive small donkeys at perilously high speeds around the dirt enclosure, shooing goats and chickens in their path. In a time when the Western and Islamic worlds seem far apart, a visit to Kashgar can remind one of the tremendous cultural riches that exist in Central Asia.

Kashgar is also the jumping-off point for some of the most beautiful mountain scenery on earth. Climbing expeditions and horse treks in the Pamir and Tien Shan mountain ranges set off from Kashgar, and some of the most spectacular cycle-touring in the world lies between Kashgar and Gilgit on the Karakoram Highway. Climbing from Kashgar towards Pakistan, the desert slowly turns to foothills, and the mounds of sand grow larger and larger, until you round a corner in the steep river canyon and find that one of the sand dunes has a glacier hanging from the top. Turquoise glacial lakes and meadows full of sheep and camels dot the landscape. Around every bend in the road, a new snow-covered peak pokes its head through the clouds. 

John Soos is currently in the midst of a circumambulation of the Himalayas and sends periodic updates from some of the world's most remote e-mail facilities. Hannah Nordhaus biked through Tibet and Pakistan in 1995.


Little Karim of the Karakoram, continued from page 3

ily. Zakhiria, Karim's youngest daughter, has been paralyzed in the right arm since birth. Now four years old, she has never received treatment or therapy because of lack of funds.

Karim's job is also hazardous. Injured porters, unlike foreigners, cannot expect to be whisked to safety by a Pakistani army helicopter when they encounter trouble on the mountain. In 1988, Karim broke his right leg at 7,500 meters on Broad Peak. Unassisted, he crawled for two days until he reached base camp. He braced his legs with ski poles and tape and, without any pain

medication, hobbled for five days down the Baltoro glacier to Askole village. There, he met a jeep for an eight-hour ride to the hospital. By helicopter, it would have taken 30 minutes.

Karim addresses all foreigners always as "Sir." Too often, Western climbers fail to return the consideration. When Karim climbed to bring supplies to the 1981 K2 West Ridge summit team, they radioed down that "Allah Almighty" had brought them new supplies. Karim's name was never mentioned. When French filmmaker Jean Marquet offered Karim \$60 to carry the 13-

foot glider to the top of Gasherbrum in 1985, Karim so impressed the film crew that they made a movie about him. "Little Karim" won the French Mountain Film Festival. But Karim was not paid a cent. Not even the \$60 he had been promised for carrying the glider. 

Greg Mortenson is the Director of the Central Asia Institute, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that promotes literacy, women's vocational skills, and awareness of public health and environmental issues through community-initiated education programs in mountain regions of Central Asia. For more information visit www.ikat.org



Himalayan Explorers Connection News

By Scott Dimetrosky, Executive Director

HEC members should have received our recent announcement of the official name change to the Himalayan Explorers Connection. We also ask for your support for our education, assistance, and cross-cultural programs. LEKI USA has graciously donated four pairs of Super Makalu trekking poles to be raffled to anyone that sends a cash donation or upgrades his or her membership between today and December 31, 2001. Thanks in advance for your support!

Porter Documentary Selected by Banff Mountain Film Festival

The documentary *Carrying the Burden* received rave reviews at the Banff Mountain Film Festival, and was recently selected for the festival world tour. The festival's Web site lists the schedule and local sponsors for the world tour: http://www.banffcentre.ca/cmc/film_tourall.html Contact your local sponsor to request *Carrying the Burden* to be included in the local showing of the films from the Banff Mountain Film Festival. And please contact the HEC if you can host a booth and display a special brochure with a list of tips for caring for your porter.

Thanks to Christine Boskoff

Thank you to Christine Boskoff, owner of Mountain Madness, for her Denver and Boulder slide shows in support of the HEC. Over 200 people attended the shows, and donations for the Porter Assistance Project filled three large duffel bags. It's encouraging to see successful guides like Christine, who was recently selected as one of the top five "most inspiring men and women in the outdoors" by Outside, making an effort to give back to the Himalayan region.

Workers Hurt by Travel Downturn

The terrorism has struck hard at the lives of hundreds of thousands with livelihoods that depend on world tourism. An enormous number of people are out of work because of travelers who stayed home. One source estimated hotel bookings were down 50% this fall in Nepal; the local Bhutanese English language weekly newspaper noted foreign visitor attendance at the festivals was down about 75%; the Everest Hotel, a five-star hotels in Kathmandu, has laid off 47 staff, to the protests of the Workers Union. While the large corporations will survive the downturn, the hotel staff, restaurant employees, and other temporary workers will continue to suffer until tourism picks up again. Those that

traveled this fall to Nepal reported no anti-American sentiment. Please consider these factors when debating whether to cancel your trip.

Pakistan Travel Update

Ovais Ashraf reports from Islamabad that while there are some pro Taliban elements in Pakistan, generally life in Pakistan is very normal and continuing as usual. He believes the media makes a living out of finding and exaggerating the worst side of a story and this is no exception. While he doesn't foresee any threat to Americans in Pakistan, he does report that they may experience some inconvenience or pestering, and may want to delay a visit. The summer of 2002, however, is still far away, and those interested can check with Ovais at hec@trivor.com.pk

Special Thanks

The HEC finds itself in a difficult position these days, as both nonprofits and travel have suffered badly from the staggering economy and the events of September 11, 2001. We'd like to thank the following individuals for their continued support of the HEC programs.

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CONTRIBUTING

- Chris Boskoff, Seattle, WA
- Joe Bozzuto, Denver, CO
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- Robert Greene, Denver, CO
- Molly Irwin, Park City, UT
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LIFE

- Earl Cilley, Bellingham, WA
- Chip and Becky Newcomer, Lake Quivira, KS

Life Member Profile



Earl Cilley, Bellingham, WA

Have you been to the Himalayas?

I've been there five times: Dolpo, Ladakh, Spiti; Annapurna circuit; Mt. Kailas and Tibet; trek around Manaslu; Everest base-camp and Kala Pattar.

What do you love most about the Himalayas?

The high clear wonderfully defined peaks, the spectacularly impressive people and cultures, my growing appreciation for Mayahana Vehicle Tibetan Bhuddism.

What do you like least about the Himalayas?

The lack of established ways to conserve the environment; the lack of decent health posts and educational facilities for the people who live there; the lack of regulations and policing of foreign visitors to make certain they pack out their trash; and a sense the peoples of the Himalayas have but little influence on the priorities and operations of their governments.

Why did you decide to join the HEC as a life member?


The HEC is always finding more ways to help the Himalayan people, and I really want to support that.

Everest Book Review, cont'd from page 5

away the Nepali trappings and we are left with an exposure of ourselves as we deal so differently and yet so similarly with family, ambition, desire, social position, failure, and success, real and perceived. Faceless figures in Asan Tol or Thamel are replaced by individual players in the human drama that are sometimes tragic, sometimes compassionate, ironic, or passionate. Their deepest thoughts and feelings are exposed to the appreciative thoughts and feelings of the reader.

If the present world situation allows me to return to Kathmandu next spring I know that my mind's eye will expand to encompass a vision of who these Nepalis really are. I will be looking for the limping young bride Rukmini and wondering if she has found happiness. Will Aditya, moved out of his familial lethargy by the man with the long hair, still be bringing forgotten pleasure to his wife Shobha? Has Deepak Misra found new love at the office? Is Ganesh still agonizing over the myth of his wife's infidelity? Has the old poet Acharya learned to be content with the adoration of his admirers for a talent that age has dimmed?

Whether in Kathmandu, Nepal, or Boulder, Colorado, life spews out an unending assortment of tales, boring and exiting, shallow and deep, forgettable and haunting, all with the endless variety of mountain silhouettes. The skyline of special mountains, like the Rockies as seen outside my window, are not only ever changing, they are the real stuff. These tales are the real stuff.

Stan Goldberg, an avid Himalayan book reader and reviewer, recently completed a 5-week circumambulation of the Himalayas that included Kailash, Kashgar, and the Karakoram Highway. He is 72 years old and planning his next Himalayan adventure. 

Volunteer Nepal Himalaya: One Volunteer's Lessons Learned

By Piper Foster

Each morning at the Sano-Gomela Primary School there is a swift coming to feet as my students push back the wooden benches, saying (with as much unity as possible) "Good morning, Miss."

"How are you?" I ask.

"We are fine," says the group

If this interchange sounds like a step towards fluency, don't be fooled. It breaks down whenever you meet a student alone, anywhere outside of class. On

the trail to Naamche Bazaar I greet shy Pasang Nuru (13 years old, class five), walking alone with a doko (basket) full of spinach and carrots. "How are you Pasang Nuru?"

"We are fine."

Discipline has proved to be somewhat easier than English comprehension: the threat of a caning motivates obedience like no other. I'll be the first to tell you I object to caning. The first sunny morning that Chitra, our headmaster, marched through rows of students and checked their feet for cleanliness, caning those who did not pass the test, I winced. Keeping feet clean in the Himalayas is about as likely as keeping those same feet warm. I wouldn't have passed the check and Chitra knew he wouldn't have either, nor Miss Proba, nor Sir Ramesh, nor Sir Dillhey (the other teachers). I watched with alarm as the second graders hopped from foot to foot, arching their backs, an arm flailing to the side, instinctively trying to escape the shudder of bamboo on ankle bone. The other teachers thought my disapproval charming.


Tradition is God in the Khumbu; each teacher at the school grew up quickened by the stick, and so quicken they will too. I managed to maintain order through nonviolent means, even in those moments when I might have given the old stick a chance. The one ill-fated day I wore pants, however, all hell broke loose. My traditional Sherpa dress was drying in the sun after a washing. Didn't I look cute with this American outfit? Heh. It's hard to command respect in front of a crowd of elementary students chanting Kanam kuskio! Kanam Kuskio! (De-pants her! De-pants her!). Lesson learned.

Every day was another lesson – for me as much as for the children. "What is this?" I asked on the day they would learn the names of body parts.

Around the room, lips, eyebrows, legs, and arms were labeled with masking tape, the English name of the tagged limb written in capitals. To earn a new label, the students had to volunteer the correct vocabulary word.

"What is this right here?" I repeated, tugging on my earlobe. Ngawang Chinzu knew. Arm shot confidently into the air, each finger tight together, certain he was about to earn a new label.

"Diarrhea!" he shouted, with gusto.

Could I possibly have more beautiful children with whom to spend all day losing my voice? 



Rounding up the kids for a class photograph

Piper Foster participated in the spring 2001 Volunteer Nepal Himalaya program and is currently a senior at Whitman College.



mountain quotes

"I'm missing my hometown, my neighbors, and the red ribbons in your hair. But for now, this life of portering is killing us, but such is our life."

Popular folk song of porters from the Solu Region of Nepal

Upcoming HEC Trips

Classic Everest Trek with Island Peak
Pemba Tsering Sherpa returns to his Khumbu homeland to lead the classic trek in the Everest region, including Kala Pattar and Everest Base camp, with an optional climb of Island Peak (20,252ft.). The trip includes an "off the beaten path" excursion to Sewangma, Pemba's boyhood village and site of the HEC Bridge project. Pemba's mother offers a warm welcome to all visitors!

Trip Dates:
March 16 – April 8, 2002
October 19 – November 11, 2002

Sunday = Ngima, Monday = Dawa, Tuesday = Mingmar, Wednesday = Lhakpa, Thursday = Phurba, Friday = Pasang, Saturday = Pemba

Did you know?

Ever wonder why everyone has a favorite Sherpa friend named Dawa, Pasang, or Pemba? The reason (apart from the fact that Sherpa's are such wonderful people) is that many Sherpas are named after the day of the week they are born. Can you match the name with the day of the week?



Sunday	Pemba
Monday	Pasang
Tuesday	Phurba
Wednesday	Dawa
Thursday	Mingmar
Friday	Lhakpa
Saturday	Ngima

In this issue...Kashgar, the Crossroads of Central Asia

Himalayan News

<http://www.hec.org>

info@hec.org

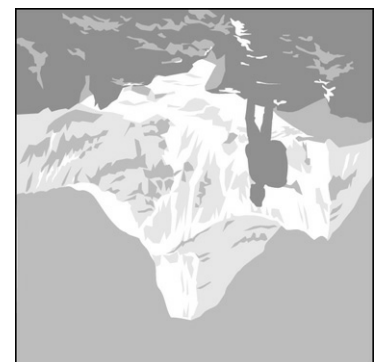
Fax: 303.998.1007

303.998.0101

Boulder, CO 80307

PO Box 3665

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