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Editorial

JULY 2018 • Issue 200

Happy 200th!

Plans for the issue you now hold in your hands began months ago when, earlier this year, we realized that July's ECS Nepal would be our 200th issue. An amazing achievement, and one that we wanted to celebrate. We've decided to do it by doing what we do well: tracking down the best stories we could find and sharing them with you.

Landmarks are always a time for reflection and analysis. While we continue to modernize and update design and quality, when I page through some of those 199 issues that have come out over the past 18 years since ECS Nepal first went to print, what impresses me most is how many of the stories are still relevant and evergreen. Reading them is still a pleasure today, and many, in fact, form a kind of historical record or blueprint of the country's culture and heritage and history. Interviews with and articles by some people who are no longer with us add to the feeling I have that these are not just words printed on paper with ink, but more than that: something that's truly important, valuable.

I wanted this issue to celebrate and reflect that rich heritage that those of us who work at ECS today are proud to continue and be a part of.

As editor, it has been a joy to read each piece as it has come in—many from our regular, long-time writers, and others by experienced contributors specially for this issue. There are also several that touch on history and memories of the magazine itself, and those that used to work here. My sincere thanks to each and every writer whose ongoing efforts make us so good to read, the photographers whose work brings color to the pages, and our partners and advertisers who believe in us.

We are looking forward with pride and anticipation to countless issues ahead.

PS: Do you have memories of ECS Nepal? Stories you particularly enjoyed reading? We'd love to hear from you at editorial@ecs.com.np

Evangeline Neve
Associate Editor

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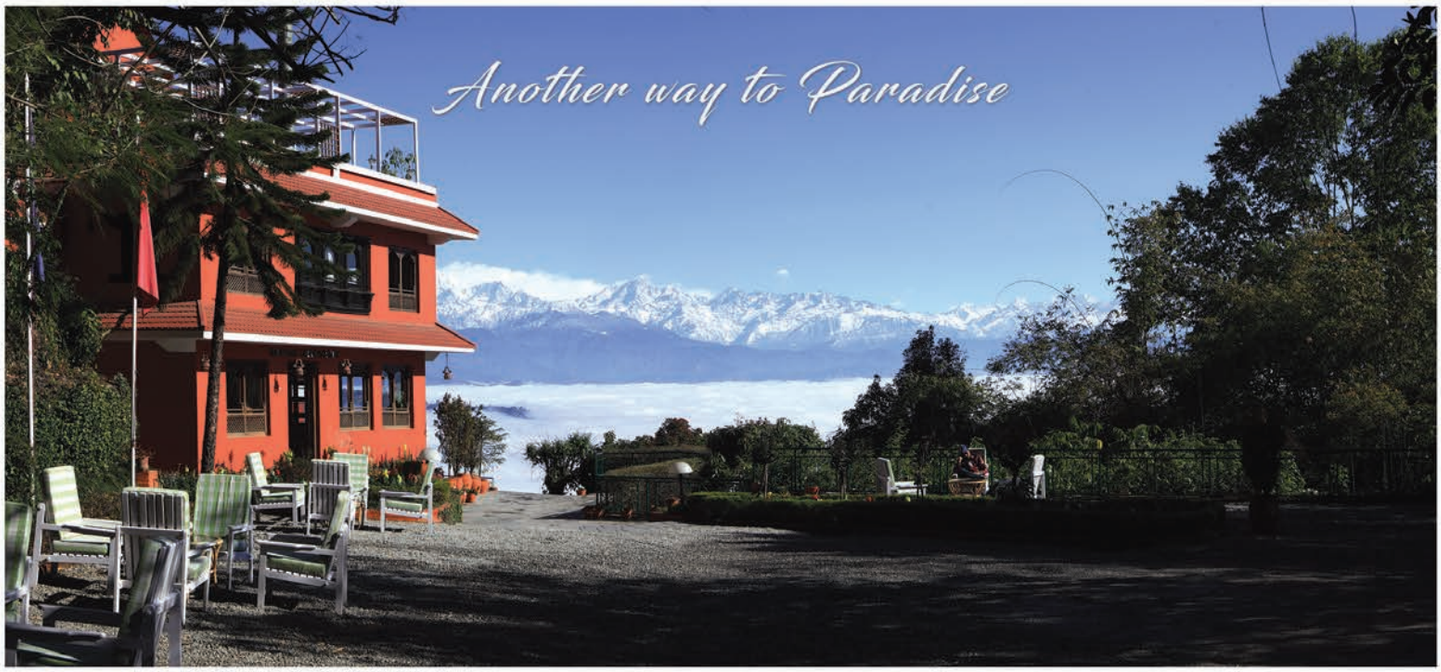

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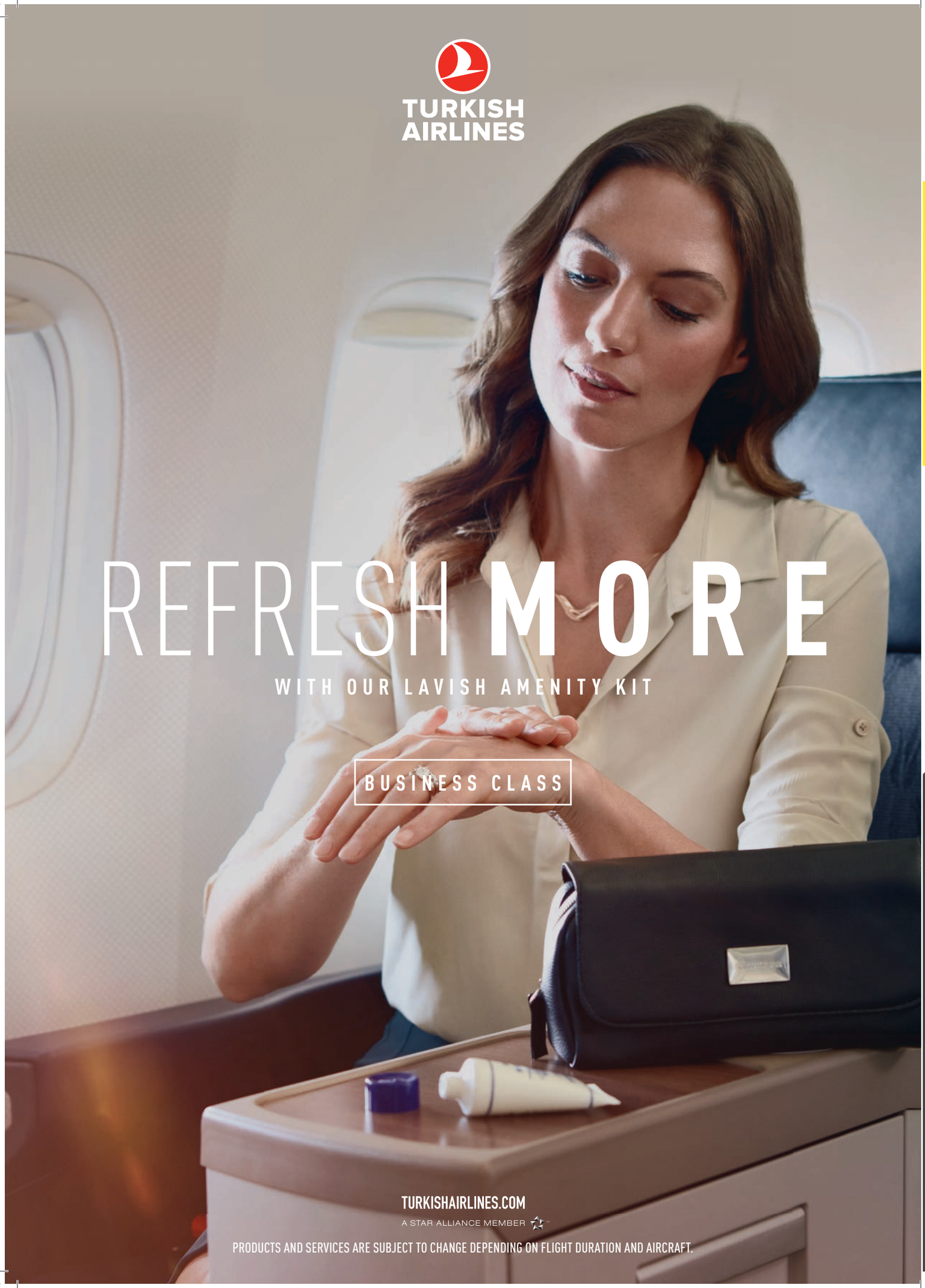
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Living in Nepal

5 things to do in Nepal

WORDS JOPHEN LAMA

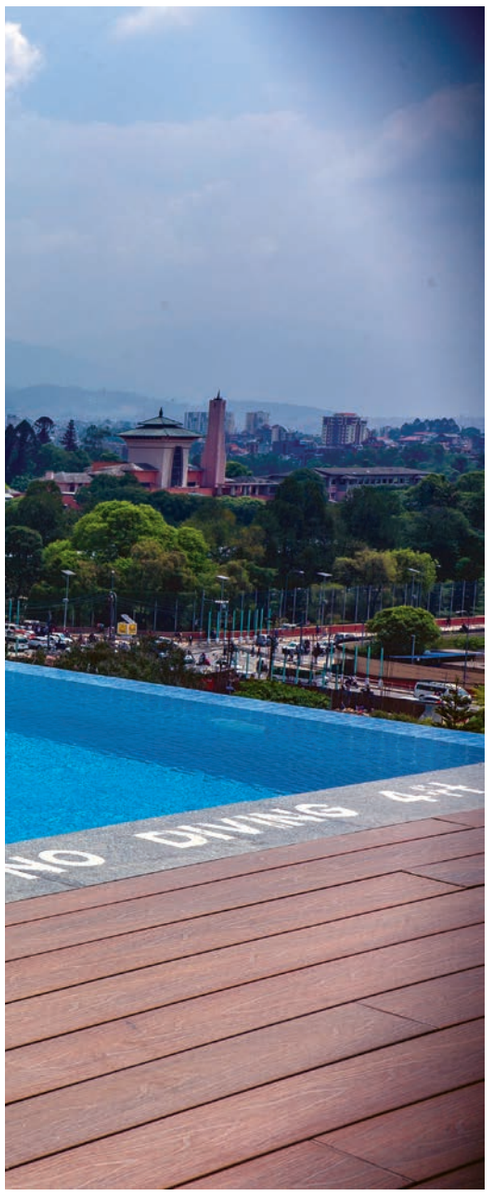
Here in Nepal, it is getting hotter with every passing day. The summer season will be with us for two more months and people are doing all they can to beat the heat. A perfectly imperfect season and something you don't want to let go, but only if you have the right things to do. So, here is a list of things you shouldn't miss out on this summer.

1. No Chini

Summer is always about keeping yourself hydrated, since heat sucks all the H2O out of you. Drinks are a major part of this season and yet proven unhealthy because of the amount of sugar present in them. We've got your back for this problem, with a newly introduced health food shop, No Chini, situated at Labim Mall, Pulchowk, that offers you a variety of healthy summer drinks like juices, smoothies, and many others containing no refined sugar.

2. Infinity Pool
We've all been to normal swimming pools, but you have to go at least once to an infinity pool. They are usually built in a precarious location, and in the hotels of Kathmandu you'll find them on rooftops, which makes it even more fun. Hotel Mulberry in Thamel and Hotel Shambala at Narayan Gopal Chowk are two places with awesome ones. Swim your heart out away from our city's chaos.

3. Visit a bar
There is no better way of enjoying summer than going to a bar late at night and listening to good music. There are lots of new bars in town if you are bored of the older ones, which I can assure you shouldn't be—they have so much character. You can go into any of them, make some friends, grab a chilled beer, or more, and spend your night in the cool air.



4. Sukute Beach
Its holiday season, and everyone is looking out for places to visit. Sukute Beach is a very popular holiday destination in Nepal, and just a three hours' drive from Kathmandu. It is the ultimate stop for an adventurous holiday. From a cozy place to stay and good food to eat, to rafting, camping, and picnics, you can do it all at Sukute Beach.

5. Evening movie
Days during summer are longer in comparison to winter. Longer days mean longer time to spend outdoors. Why don't you go watch an evening show at the movie theater with your loved one, grabbing some cheese popcorn and a couple of chilled drinks? Incredibles 2 and Ocean 8 are just two recent releases, with more coming out as summer goes on. Also, Chhaya Center in Thamel has recently inaugurated a branch of QFX movies.

Food

A PASSION FOR PIZZA

WORDS EVANGELINE NEVE

It's unlikely, of course, that I'm ever going to give up on my favorite Pizza Capricciosa, but branching out a little has been a delicious experience

When it comes to restaurants I like, I admit to being pretty boring: a creature of habit, if you will. The reason is simple – if they have something delicious that I love, I often don't feel like taking the risk of trying something else that I may or may not be crazy about.

When it comes to Fire and Ice, the well-known pizzeria in Tridevi Marg, the Capricciosa is my standard pick; a pizza covered in ham, artichokes, black olives, on a tomato-sauce base, of course, then smothered in oozy mozzarella cheese. It would be hard for me to imagine anything I'd rather eat, and as I sit typing this, I feel hungry and little forlorn, wishing I was eating one right now. The slight tang of the artichokes offsets the richness of the ham and cheese, and the whole combination is one where every bite is just pure happiness. For years now I've had almost nothing else while there. My habit is to diligently peruse the menu, then pick exactly the same thing. Over the last few months, however, I've begun to experiment–just a little.

It began when my niece ordered the Pizza Quattro Formaggi, or Four Cheeses, which is topped with blue cheese, mozzarella, Kanchan and ricotta. We swapped slices, I bit in – and oh, wow. I might have just found a new favorite. I'd expected it to be too rich, what with all those cheeses, but it wasn't. Decadent and delicious, yes, particularly the segment that was home to the blue cheese. For once, I was more interested in someone else's pizza than my own, though my niece was having none of it, and shooed my hands away as we both enjoyed our own orders.

Another happy surprise came when I tried the Pizza al Rosmarino, which uses special Himalayan mozzarella from the Himalayan French Cheese co., some fresh onions, and delightfully, fresh rosemary. The combination of ingredients, which I would never have thought to put together on a pizza myself, turned out to be amazing. As with the Four Cheeses, I did not actually order this pizza–my sister did. So I suppose if there's a point it's this: if you're too stuck in a rut to ever order a new dish, take your family and friends along–they'll order something different, you'll get to taste it, everyone's happy!

My most recent foray into trying new things (and yes, this time I ordered it myself) was the Spaghetti Bolognese: if you've ever been there while they're cooking up a batch, you know the savory, meaty, delicious smell that fills the area–and not just in Fire and Ice itself, but for quite a distance. A slow cooked sauce with deep flavor and a taste that stays with you, it's perfect when you want something warming, comforting and hearty. And the Spaghetti Puttanesca–anchovies, olives, capers and a bit of chilli in a tomato base–is also sublime. There's more to eat here than pizza.

It's unlikely, of course, that I'm ever going to give up on my favorite Pizza Capricciosa, but branching out a little has been a delicious experience. Of course, so much of this has to do with the fact that Fire and Ice is such a consistently good place to eat, and everything–from the fun artwork to a crisp glass of white wine to the bustle of happy eaters to the yummy smells and yes, even those clean bathrooms–are all part of what adds up to make eating here such a great dining experience.

Of course a place would be nothing without the people behind it, and it's Annamaria Forgione, who first opened Fire and Ice back in 1995, whose energy and enthusiasm dreamed it–and then implemented that dream through hard work. Her passion, inspiration and love for both people and good food are what keep so many customers coming back time after time. When I overhear her speaking with staff and customers both, her attention to small details and insistence that everything be done right is part of the reason, I think, that the food is, as I said, so consistently good–no small feat here. Both this Fire and Ice and the one in Kolkata, where I've never been but have heard is also great, have been featured in the international media and won awards for their pizza. To do that day in and day out, producing something this high quality every single day, well – it's just amazing. I remember hearing that during the fuel shortages of the blockade, Annamaria and her staff cooked the tomato sauce for their pizzas in a huge pot on an outdoor fire at her home: that's an example of what I mean–a team that's commitment to excellence, delicious excellence that's pizza shaped.

Cover Story

Hitting a Magnificent Century

WORDS AMAR B. SHRESTHA

This is the 200th issue of the country's leader in culture and lifestyle publications—ECS Nepal—a milestone in every sense of the word. It has taken eighteen long years to reach where it has today, but the journey has been a satisfying one, to say the least. Similarly, this is the 100th year in the life of the country's leader in culture and heritage expertise—Satya Mohan Joshi—a momentous occasion, and his journey, too, has been a most satisfying one, and accomplished in every sense of the word.

So, what better way to take advantage of this fantastic conjunction of the stars than to have a feature of the luminary in this historical issue ECS Nepal?

My Surprise Visit

Thus, realizing the significance of this worthy endeavor, I paid a surprise visit to the centenarian's home on a bright and sunny afternoon without so much as an appointment. I wanted to have a more candid awareness about the man, for enough has been written about him in books, magazines, dailies, and online portals, and as much has he been featured in numerous television shows. His is a familiar face, indeed!

One of the most recent news about him was his being presented with a vehicle by the Patan Municipality that came along with a driver and free maintenance and petrol for life. As I remember it, the mayor stated at the event that they had to now take into consideration his age, and it was the city's responsibility to make his life more comfortable.

When I entered the entrance to his house in Bakhuwa Bahal, Patan, I found him with a mask around his mouth, taking out a large ornately framed certificate of appreciation and an old tape recorder-cum-radio from a small room packed with stacks of more ornately-framed tokens of appreciation, thick and untidy piles of books, magazines, and all sorts of paper documents, as well as other miscellanea.

He was dressed in a long-tailed cotton shirt and a suruwal. He seemed quite surprised to see me; I had met him a month or so ago for a short piece about his association with a foundation that was bringing out a commemorative issue to mark its tenth year of establishment, and I think I must have appeared a bit familiar to him. Actually, I had also done a feature on him in 2011 for this very same publication, but I well understood that he is a man who gets interviewed at least a couple of times a month by some media outlet or the other, and keeping his advanced age in mind, I doubted that he remembered me. So, I reintroduced myself and explained to him about our upcoming 200th issue and how apt it would be to feature him in this issue.

Polite as always, but with a somewhat skeptical look at me, he asked me to sit down on a chair nearby. I went into the nitty-gritty once again, and he asked me what ECS stood for. I explained its meaning; he kept looking at me quizzically. I also explained that I would be coming with a photographer the next time, and asked him about a day suitable for him. He said we could come any day between nine and eleven in the morning, but that we should inform him the day ahead. He gave him his landline number. "Yes, I have a mobile, but I don't carry it around," he added, anticipating my next question.

While we were talking, I was also looking at and around his house, trying to raise my consciousness about

this very simple man, about whom people spoke with high reverence. His home isn't much of a house; it is more of a small cottage. It brings to mind a Gandhian saying–simple living, high thinking. Near the main door are stone busts of his parents and a small lawn of sorts with some chairs; the house is very old, and probably mud-plastered with mud-packed floor. Once, before, he had taken me to the first floor, up a very narrow rickety staircase, where was situated his library. At that time, a bronze bust of him stood on a table. I resolved to see if it was there the next time I visited. I didn't want to give him any discomfort right now, he did look a bit frail.

Some donors have constructed a small shed-like edifice next to his house, it looked nice and new, and some work was being finished. It is apparently to house his collection of books, magazines, manuscripts, et all; a library. Some students had also given time to arrange all these and other knick knacks and packed them in aluminum trunks. So, soon they will be arranged neatly on shelves in the new edifice. Looking at all this, I am certain that the entire premises will one day in the future be a historical monument that will attract many visitors.

Having absorbed as much as I could, I got on my bike and roared off, but right round the first corner of the narrow alley, I stopped. A book-shop displayed the latest issue of ECS Nepal, along with other periodicals. I requested the lady minding the shop if I could take it to present it to Satya Mohan Joshi. I explained about our plans. She was very happy, I could see, on hearing what I had to say, and willingly gave me the magazine. Not only that, she even began eulogizing about her esteemed neighbor to me. "He may be one hundred years, but he is still very sharp," she said with a smile. "He often comes here to pick up newspapers and magazines, and although he now has a guard provided by the municipality, he insists on coming himself, saying, 'I don't want to bother anybody.'"

"Once, he saw some new magazines that interested him. He took out all the money he had, and seeing that he didn't have enough, murmured, "Now, what to do?' I told him that he could pay later, no problem, but he said that he wouldn't like to do so. He is that kind of man," she added.

This small exchange sowed some doubt in my mind; had the eminent academician been toying with me? Asking me what ECS stood for, and all that. Anyway, I went back to his home and handed over the magazine; he was again rummaging around in the store room with the mask back on his face.

A Century of Accomplishments

Now, this is where I say something about his achievements, but before that, let me inform that even at the ripe age of one hundred years, he has a substantial looking manuscript ready for publication. This is what I discovered during my previous visit a month or so ago. It's not on just any other subject, let me tell you; it's a book about Newari idioms, their origins, their meanings, and so on, and it's not just a few hundred idioms we're talking about, but hundreds and hundreds more than that. He had disclosed to me then about looking for a sponsor to have it published, and he had stated his preference for a hard bound copy.

Well, that's what's on his plate right now. About the years gone by, he is

generally acknowledged as the foremost expert on Nepali culture, including history, art, language, folklore, folk songs, and lifestyle. He is the Founder-Member (later Chancellor) of Nepal Bhasa Academy, which is located in Kirtipur. Its aim is the preservation and upliftment of the Newar language (Nepal Bhasa). He is also Founder-Curator of Arniko White Dagoba Gallery, located in the same building. The academy is a special high point in a life full of accomplishments, and it was possible because of his high standing that attracted many donors to contribute generously. The gallery, on the other hand, was a result of his five-year stay in China, and the resultant collection of numerous artifacts related to Arniko, the Nepali architect/artist of Patan who earned name, fame, and riches in China in the thirteenth century.

Besides the academy, his other great contribution is the production of a dictionary on the Nepal Bhasa, and thirteen more in the country's other regional languages. In 1959, he was appointed the first director of the Archeological and Cultural Department. He was responsible for the establishment the Rastriya Naachghar (National Theater) in Kathmandu, the National Painting Museum in Bhaktapur, the Archeological Garden in Patan, and the Archeological Museum in Taulihawa. After resigning from service the next year, he went to China, and lived there for about five years as a Nepali language teacher at the Peking Broadcasting Institute. He was appointed a member of the Royal Nepal Academy from 1969 to 1978, and was its Member Secretary when he left.

He is also a renowned playwright, and he has a special affinity towards folk songs, admitting that folk culture is his primary subject of study. He also reveals that his career actually started by collecting folk songs, which he did by visiting numerous villages all over the country. His collection was published as *Hamro Lok Sanskrit'* (Our Folk Culture) in 1956, and it went on to win the Madan Puraskar, the nation's highest literary honor.

In 1957, he published *Nepali Rastriya Mudra* (Coinage of Nepal), and

this, too, won the prestigious award, as did his 1971 work, *Karnali Lok Sanskriti* (Folk Culture of Karnali). His *Jayaprakash,* an epic in Nepali Bhasa, won him the Shrestha Sirpa award. His other publications also include *Legends of Lalitpur* and *Kalakar Arniko.* His vast knowledge has often been called for in issues of national importance, such as when designing new commemorative coins and stamps, and he was once (perhaps still is) on the Central Bank's committee for designing new coins.

He is also a renowned playwright, and he has a special affinity towards folk songs, admitting that folk culture is his primary subject of study.

The Day We Took Photographs

I fixed a day to take his photographs, and went to his home. His wife, Radha Devi, was on the porch. She's a nice lady with a ready smile always on her pleasant face. She told us that her husband was just finishing his lunch. She also disclosed that he would be going somewhere around two in the afternoon for some function. Mr. Joshi greeted us and said he would get ready. We waited quite a while; it was a credit to us that he took some time in getting ready. In the meantime I asked his wife about their family. "We have three sons and three daughters," she said, "and twelve grandchildren and seven great grandchildren." She disclosed that she was fourteen, and he nineteen, when they got married some eighty or so years ago.

Her husband came out dressed in a dark grey dauara suruwal and coat. He had his familiar black Nepali topi on his head, and also had put on a small red

tika on his wide forehead. We went into the new construction besides the house. "This was handed over yesterday," he said. "It was built by an organization called The Art Village." The large room had a double bed (presumably to take a rest during the day), a couple of sofa sets, and a long L-shaped cabinet along one wall, on which sat the old tape record-cum-radio, a dozen literary books, half a dozen or so framed awards, and two busts of the centenarian, one golden, the other bronzed.

"Among the hundreds of awards you have received, which one do you value the most," I asked. His replied without hesitation, "The one presented by Trimurti Niketan honoring me as the 'Satabdi Purush' (Man of the Century)." The bronze plaque that hangs on the wall in the dark prayer room is as tall as the man himself. It is signed by many heavyweights of the literary and political world, and it was presented during the 'Satya Mohan Joshi Centenary Festival' observed in his singular honor.

We also take photographs in the adjoining garden, where there is a small shrine with a granite plaque with embossed figures of Mayadevi and Siddartha Gautam at the time of his miraculous birth. Over it is a young pipal bot (pipal tree), its large oval leaves looking fresh and new. "It gives oxygen, you know," he says. But, he actually is more eager to tell me the story behind this particular tree. "There was once a pipal bot (a.k.a. the Bodhi Briksha, under one of which Buddha attained enlightenment) at the Maya Devi Temple in Lumbini," he began. "For some reason, and mostly due to ignorance, it was cut down. UNESCO was furious, since Lumbini is a World Heritage Site, and wanted to know why the Department of Architecture had not prevented it from happening. Anyway, IUCN stepped in and sent the remnant of the tree for tissue culturing. From the saplings so recovered, I received two. This is one, and the other I have planted at the Nepal Bhasa Academy in Kirtipur."

Not wanting to tire him, it being a hot and humid day, and he being a hundred and all, we finished with the photography. But, before bidding goodbye, I asked him about his schedule for the day. "Well, there's one in Bhatbhateni, where I have been asked to be the chief guest and award literary prizes instituted by a couple from Bandipur in their parents' memory. Then, after that, I have been asked to bestow my blessings and inaugurate a new drama performance in another place," he replied with a rueful smile. It's close to a grimace, but of course he is too nice for that, but surely, he must be a bit tired from having to attend such functions throughout the month at one program or the other. And, at his age! However, let me emphasize again, he's too much the epitome of humility, simplicity, and magnanimity to say no when so requested.

One last time, we bid adieu, but he asks me to wait for a moment, and going inside the house, he comes out with yet another manuscript,this one written by another author. It has a photograph of him and the title, *Jureli Darshan*. "It will be published soon," he says, and adds that it is about his life and an answer to the very frequent question he gets about the secret to his long and healthy life. "What is the secret, in short?" I ask. And he says, "A life free from stress." "And, how can we be free from stress?" I ask, and he answers with a saying that can perhaps be translated as, 'All the goings-on in the forest is of no concern to the nightingale; it will continue to sing its beautiful songs.'

Having served and hosted visitors for the last two decades with local Nepalese hospitality, Royal Singi Hotel is revived, rejuvenated and upgraded boasting 95 rooms [70 Deluxe, 20 Executive and 5 Signature Suites] as well as 4 units of 2 Bedroom Residences. Only 20 minutes drive away from Kathmandu Airport, Royal Singi Hotel is centrally located; minutes walk away from Thamel, Durbar Marg [Financial Center] and close proximity to other Tourist sites.

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- Renovated Bhanjyang Bar
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Mt. Makalu (8481 m), Makalu-Barun National Park and Buffer Zone, Nepal

Feature/LongRead

A Walk Across Makalu-Barun

WORDS AND PHOTOS ALTON C. BYERS, PH.D.

Introduction: Between October and November, 2017 I spent 26 days walking across the Makalu-Barun National Park wilderness area in eastern Nepal, from the village of Khandbari in the east to Lukla in the west. I had been intrigued by this little known trek since the early 1990s, when I worked as the first Co-Manager of the then-new Makalu-Barun National Park, established in 1992 through the joint efforts of the Government of Nepal and The Mountain Institute (TMI)(www.mountain.org). Between 1993 and 1995 I lived with my young family in the village of Khandbari in a traditional, two-storied thatch roofed house, with pigs, chickens, vegetable gardens, and beautiful views of the Jaljale Himal from the veranda in the evening.

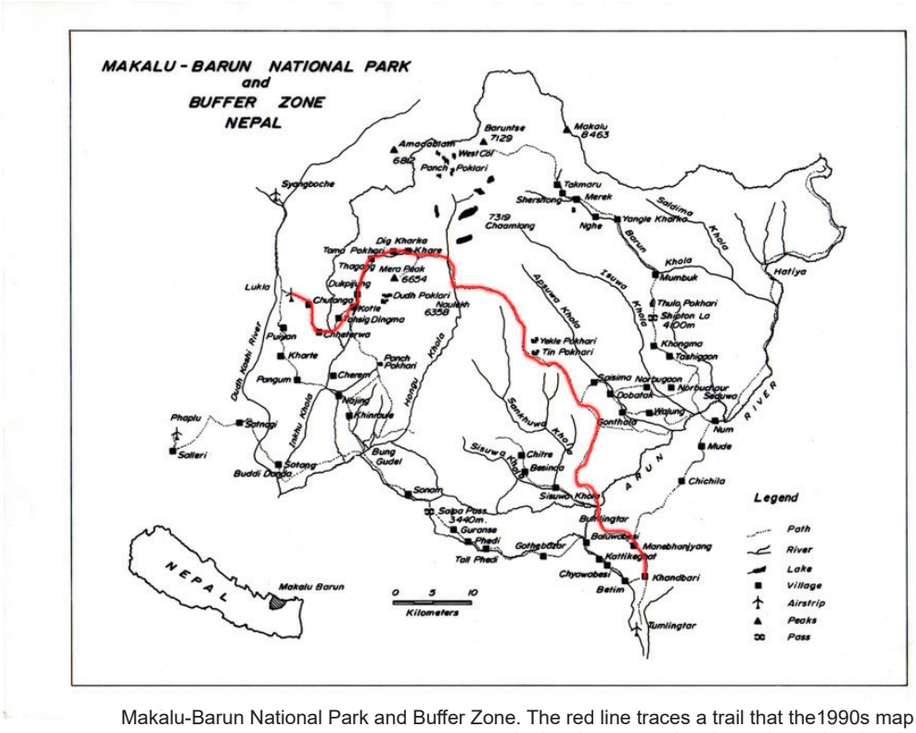
One day at the office, I found a sketch map of the new park and buffer zone in one of our tourism development brochures that clearly showed a trail that crossed the entire wilderness area (Figure 1). Trouble was, when I asked about it, nobody really knew where the trail was, nor who the cartographer who drew the map was so that I could ask him or her what their information sources were. I knew that in 1977 the anthropologist Johan Reinhard and mountaineer Yvon Chouinard had made a winter traverse of the park, from Saisima to the Hongu Khola valley and over the Amphu Laptsa into the Khumbu, following their study of the sacred Khembalung caves near Dobotak. But that was 41 years ago, and Johan couldn't remember the exact route that they had taken other than "going up a very steep ridge out of Saisima and then down to the Hongu valley."

Regardless, work, family, and the end of my tour in Nepal intervened, and I put the idea of walking across the Makalu-Barun wilderness on the back burner. We returned to the US in 1995 where I continued my work at TMI, splitting my time between the development of research

and conservation projects in the Andes, Appalachians, Himalayas, and elsewhere in the mountain world.

Fast forward 27 years. I'd recently started coming back to the Barun valley in the northeastern part of the park, in 2014, 2016, and again 2017, on different research expeditions funded by the National Geographic Society and the National Science Foundation. This time, October 2017, I was back with a team of teenage Rai porters, earning some extra money over the Dasain holiday, determined to find this elusive trail and cross the entire Makalu-Barun wilderness area by foot. Trouble is, nobody knew where the trail was from the edge of the Hongu valley ridge down to the Hongu river. Nor if, once we got there, there's a bridge to cross to the other side.

And so began the journey of uncertainty and change. Uncertain because we were venturing out into a wilderness area with only a vague sense of how to get to the other side. Change, because so many things had changed throughout the region since I had lived there in the mid-1990s.



Makalu-Barun National Park and Buffer Zone. The red line traces a trail that the1990s map depicted as traversing the entire national park.

Change: Khandbari in those days, for example, was a sleepy bazaar town with no paved roads and no power lines, four hours walk from the grass airstrip at Tumlingtar. Tumlingtar itself was a three day walk from the nearest road. It was an exciting time to be living in the region and working with the project's Nepali and western staff, testing new models of local participation in protected area management initiated by Daniel Taylor, then the CEO of TMI, with the full support and encouragement of his Harvard college days friend, the late King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah. Makalu-Barun was the first national park to be nearly surrounded by a conservation area, and the first to hire local people as Game Scouts and Rangers, including the first female Rangers, instead of using the military for patrolling purposes. During the 1990s the project implemented dozens of innovative projects that promoted cultural conservation, biodiversity protection, ecotourism, and the marketing of local handcrafts (e.g., lokta paper, allo cloth, bamboo implements), to name a few. This all changed with the Maoist insurgency between 1996 and 2006, during which nearly every building and trace of the Makalu-Barun project was wiped clean off the face of the earth.

Weaving allo cloth, made from the fibers of stinging nettle *(photograph by A.R. Sherpa).*

But that's not the only thing that had changed. By 2010, the demand for cheap labor in the Middle East and Malaysia had resulted in the outmigration of thousands of young Nepali men each year from the region, leaving behind villages that were now populated by older people, young children, and single wives. Livestock populations had plummeted, reportedly a result of the new labor shortage; plus the fact that more children, a key component of the labor force in the 1990s, were now attending school; and changes in preferred lifestyles, since spending months in a high altitude, cold and rainy Goth was not exactly the younger generation's idea of a good time. Climate change, a phenomenon totally off our radar screens in the 1990s, had led to the formation of new, massive, and potentially dangerous glacial lakes and hazards to downstream life and infrastructure, such as the April 20, 2017 glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) in the Barun valley that killed over 30 yaks, scoured the river channel to bedrock, and destroyed dozens of bridges and structures (https://nepalitimes.atavist.

com/high-water). The construction of unpaved roads in the region had brought positive, negative, and uncertain changes—access was now better and food was cheaper, but roads tend to generate strip towns, garbage, and are often abandoned after a year once they become impassable due to a lack of maintenance. Finally, the curious "moth-plant" yartsa gunbu (Ophiocordyceps sinensis), which can demand prices of up to $50,000.00 per kilogram in China depending upon size, aroma, and region of origin, started being commercially harvested in alpine valleys of the Makalu-Barun region around 2003, bringing thousands of collectors per year to remote and high alpine pastures historically visited by only a handful of livestock herders and pilgrims per year.

Bhakta Ram Rai in the mid-1990s, holding a Jack in the Pulpit corm that a pheasant had eaten

But some things had not changed. Makalu-Barun is still one of the most wild, beautiful, biologically/climatically/culturally diverse regions in Nepal. Vegetation ranges from subtropical Sal (Shorea robusta) forests at elevations below 1000 m; temperate zone oak/maple/magnolia forests between 2,000-3,000 m; fir/birch/rhododendron forests in the subalpine between 3,000 m to 4,000 m; the herbs, grasses, and dwarf rhododendron/shrub juniper of the alpine pastures between 4,000-5,000 m; and nival or snow and ice zone above 5,000 m. Thousands of kilometers of latitude squeezed into six kilometers of altitude.

The park, which receives more than 3,000 mm of precipitation per year, contains more than 3,000 species of flowering plants that include 25 of Nepal's 30 varieties of rhododendron; 48 species of primrose; 47 species of orchids; 19 species of bamboo; 15 species of oak; 86 species of fodder trees; and 67 species of economically valuable medicinal and aromatic plants. Wildlife include some of the densest populations in Nepal of the red panda, snow leopard, musk deer, barking deer, clouded leopard, Himalayan black bear, wild boar, and serow. Ethnic groups consist primarily of the Rai and Sherpa, with populations of Gurung, Tamang, Magar, Newar, Brahmins, and Chetris in the lower altitudes. Since the 1950s, a number of expeditions in search of the Yeti have been launched in the region, based upon the theory that the rugged terrain and impenetrable forests of the eastern Makalu-Barun region would provide the perfect cover and habitat for a creature not wanting to be found. Aside from a few tracks in the snow photographed by ecologist Edward Cronin in the early 1970s, however, little real evidence for the existence of the creature has been found. Most experts now agree that tracks found in the snow by Shipton, Cronin, and others since the 1950s were made by the Himalayan black bear through a process known as "direct registration," i.e., the back foot is placed precisely over the front footprint, creating a large track that appears to be bipedal and human-like.

In spite of its spectacular biophysical and cultural diversity, however, the park has received little in the way of tourism when compared to most other mountain parks in Nepal. Between 2010 and 2015, for example, the Government of Nepal records an average of only 1,027 trekkers and climbers per year to the entire Makalu-Barun National Park, with the vast majority attempting to climb Mera Peak (6,476 m), Nepal's highest "trekking peak," located in the drier western region of the park. Only a couple of hundred trekkers and mountaineers visit the Barun valley and Makalu basecamp per year. Lodges, which have only been constructed since the end of the insurgency in 2006, are still quite primitive, and food varieties and quality limited, certainly when compared to those of Nepal's other national parks. Nearly 30 years later, I was to find that Makalu-Barun still remained a hidden green jewel among Nepal's protected areas, containing an enormous potential as a nature-based economic development asset for local communities if only development of the adventure tourism trade could be initiated.

The Journey: The journey began with a jeep ride from Khandbari down to the village of Heluwa on the Arun River, stopping halfway down at a village named Ratimaati because the road was too muddy to proceed any further—due to no maintenance, I might add. Just for fun, while chatting with our jeep driver on the way down, I asked him if he knew an old friend of mine from the 1990s, Bhakta Ram Rai. Bhakta was a farmer, yak herder, and former shikari (hunter) who had an incredible knowledge of jungle lore—how to identify

Low altitude rice fields adjacent to the village of Heluwa on the Arun River, near Bhakta Ram Rai's house

animal tracks, scat, edible/medicinal/utilitarian wild plants, birdcalls, how to make cordage from natural materials, how to survive in the forest with just a kukri and some salt, and on and on. I had met him after sending out word that I was interested in hiring former shikaris for one of our natural history projects, since I knew by experience that hunters are usually among the best naturalists to be found. Once Bhakta and others understood that I wouldn't throw them in jail for being former hunters—a widespread rumor at the time, I later learned, since why else would the park's Co-Manager want to meet with shikaris?–we were to spend weeks together in the forests of the Makalu-Barun wilderness area over the next two years, immersed in jungle lore, making plaster casts of mammal tracks, identifying birds and bird calls, and documenting traditional trapping methods.

"Sure," said the driver. "He's my uncle."

I couldn't believe my luck, especially after having no contact with Bhakta for 27 years. The next morning I was talking to him by cell phone (another thing we never dreamed of back in the mid-1990s), and he said that yes, he knew the trail, but that he was in Dharan getting a tooth pulled and wouldn't be able to come with us because he needed a week or more to recover. But he said that a friend of his from Tamku, Pasang Sherpa, knew the way and could guide us across the wilderness and down to the Hongu valley.

So once in Tamku we found and hired his friend Pasang Sherpa, originally from Dobotak but now living north of Tamku where the schools were much better, he said. As it turns out, Pasang had been the research assistant and guide for a number of western graduate students working on their Ph.D.s in the 1990s, such as the ornithologist Jim Bland; medicinal plant specialist Ephrosine Daniggelis; and geographer/forester Chris Carpenter and Bob Zomer. He still works occasionally as a climbing and trekking guide. We also hired two other local guides at his recommendation, one of whom, a former Makalu-Barun Game Scout, said that he had been as far as the overlook to the Hongu valley the previous summer searching for yartsa gumbu, and knew of a trail down to the Hongu river. Everyone felt confident that we'd find the trail once there. Things were looking good!

But one thing was already abundantly clear--this trek was different. In the Khumbu, Langtang, and Annapurna regions you basically know what to expect each day—where the villages are, which lodges to stay in, when and when not to attempt to cross the 5,500 m passes, what food is available, etc. Here, we kind of knew where we were (turns out that Pasang had only gone as far as Tin Pokhari, and didn't really know the way beyond that). We didn't see another human being for over two weeks, an experience practically unheard of in today's Nepal. I spent sleepless, rainy nights worrying about whether we'd be able to cross the high pass the next day if our rain was its snow, making an ascent impossible and delaying or canceling the journey in the face of our finite provisions. We climbed over some of the most rugged, little known, and beautiful terrain I'd ever encountered in over 40 years of remote area fieldwork in the Nepal Himalaya, Peruvian Andes, Russian and Mongolian Altai, and East African Highlands.

Yartsu gunbu (Ophiocordyceps sinensis) from the Makalu-Barun region is smaller and less valuable than that found in other places such as Dolpa, but still provides a good source of supplementary income to livelihoods based on tourism, agriculture, and animal husbandry

On day one, we trekked through oven-like temperatures from Heluwa (800 m) to Tamku (1,500 m). The heat made me feel faint and spacey at times, but it was the only time in the entire trek that I was faster than our young

The moist Makalu-Barun jungle, which receives over 3,000 mm or precipitation per year

Climbing up the Lamini Danda

porters who, used to living at higher and cooler altitudes, just couldn't take the heat and humidity. From there it was on to Dobotak, an especially steep ascent and descent where Pasang showed me wild fruits and nuts favored by bears; spoke of the people-wildlife conflicts that still plague the region, especially in the summer when the corn ripens and bad-tempered Himalayan black bears insist that it rightfully belongs to them; and casually mentioned that large, long-haired Yetis live in a region a week's walk north of us.

I remembered Dobotak well from my work there in the 1990s, especially the time that I visited Pasang's father, now long deceased, who'd made a point of giving me a precious hardboiled egg. Except for a few blue, corrugated metal roofs that had since replaced the traditional thatch roofs, Dobotak is pretty much the same as it was in the mid-1990s, although the lack of men, now working in Korea or Dubai or Malaysia, was conspicuous. Pasang showed me a large prayer wheel near the village gompa that one of our staff, the late Tashi Lama, had provided to the village on behalf of the Makalu-Barun project. From Khandbari to the last settlement at Saisima, it was touching to see how Tashi, and so many other project staff such as Ang Rita Sherpa, Tsedar Bhutia, and Chirring Lamu Sherpa, were remembered with such fondness.

Then it was on through broadleaf evergreen forests to Gongtala, home of the sacred Khembalung caves that Johan Reinhard had explored and written about in the 1970s. These caves are believed to be the entrances to the "hidden valley" (beyul) of Khembalung, one of a considerable number of hidden valleys in the Himalaya established by the Indian Buddhist yogin Guru Rinpoche in the eighth century A.D. to serve as refuge for Buddhist doctrine and followers of Buddhism in times of war and evil. There are stories of lamas who have visited the Khembalung caves to meditate and who then disappear, presumably because they'd found their way into the beyul and see no reason to return.

The next day we proceeded on to the settlement enclave of Saisima, passing the footprint of Guru Rinpoche left in stone thousands of years ago that I had seen 27 years earlier with Bhakta Ram. While I was descending the slippery stone trail down to the bridge I was thinking about how climbing Kilimanjaro, which I had done for the third time in July, 2017 as a guide/lecturer for National Geographic Adventures, was a piece of cake compared to trekking in the Makalu-Barun, and how the trails here had definitely gotten steeper and infinitely more difficult over the past quarter of a century. Taking my mind off the slippery trail for a split second was all that was needed to send me spinning head over heels and slamming against a large boulder, with a sickening "crunch" sound where it connected with my chest. I remembered thinking as I was falling that "this is it! This is the big one, the fall that's going to break your leg or your back and confine you to a wheel chair for the rest of your life, you fool!" But at worst it was just a cracked rib, painful as hell, and something that was to plague me for the rest of the trip and for weeks afterwards. Sneezing or coughing were enough to make me nearly pass out. But there was no turning back now, and I was determined to walk across the wilderness.

Deep Rai, our guide from Himalayan Research Expeditions (http://www.himalayanresearch.com.np/) had purchased a goat from some shepherds encountered along the way for the staff, but the lamas at the Saisima monastery wouldn't allow its slaughter on sacred ground. So they took it deep into the forest for the killing and butchering. Grilled goat, sauteed nigro (fiddleheads), and sautéed wild oyster mushrooms made for a particularly fine dinner that night. The forests of Makalu-Barun are loaded with wild edible foods, like bamboo shoots, saag (stinging nettles), sulpher shelf mushrooms, and other delicacies, if you know what to look for.

The settlement enclave of Saisima and the old gompa built with funds from the Makalu-Barun Conservation Project in the 1990s. A new and much larger gompa is currently being built nearby with funding from a Swiss donor, as the 2015 earthquake de-stabilized the hillslope upon which the old gompa sits, raising concerns about a possible landslide

From Saisima, we climbed for three hours up through leech-infested bamboo-broadleaf evergreen forests to a campsite at Bali Kharka, a short day since the next days' climb of 1,000 m or more up the Lamini Danda would take between 5 and 7 hours. From Bali Kharka we climbed up from the bamboo-broadleaf forests, mostly in the rain, to the fir/birch/rhododendron forests higher up, then through forests of tree-size rhododendron, then up to the Sutlej campsite now surrounded by shrub-sized rhododendron. The next day was on up to the dwarf rhododendron and shrub juniper of a beautiful alpine campsite at Eklai Pokhari, a single lake as the name implies, overlooking the Apsuwa valley and Chamlang mountain range to the north.

We were now in yartsa gunbu hunting grounds, and Pasang said that every June some 500 collectors come to the region in search of the valuable fungus. We found very little in the way of environmental disturbance or garbage at the yartsa gunbu camp sites, as widely reported for other areas in Nepal and Tibet. In remote regions such as Makalu-Barun with no roads, glass and canned goods are too heavy to pack in and harvesters use local foods—rice, potatoes, dal—instead. And fuelwood is packed in from the tree-size rhododendron forests below, thus sparing the dwarf rhododendron and shrub juniper of the alpine zone that have been devastated elsewhere.

That evening I saw Khanjendzunga glowing like a white diamond in the east from the comfort of my tent, the foothills below turning a beautiful bluish-green as the dusk progressed. The beautiful Chamlang mountains and glaciers to the north would emerge whenever the gods showed pity on us, and graciously opened up the ever-cloudy and drizzily Makalu-Barun skies for a few precious moments.

The next day at the Eklai Pokhari camp was particularly cloudy and foggy, with no sign of letting up, and Deep suggested that we take a rest day instead of attempting to find the poorly marked and little used trail under such difficult and unknown conditions.

"Better to be safe than sorry," he said. "I know. During the 2014 snowstorm in the Annapurna region I kept my trekking group down in Manang instead of trying to cross the Thorong La. But other groups insisted on climbing up to the pass in spite of the snow, and 32 people died."

Point taken. So I enjoyed a rainy but comfortable rest day, catching up on laundry, writing, and tending to some 30 leech bites collected from below (note: once the itching becomes unbearable, an antihistamine works wonders).

The forests that we passed through are, for the most part, in as pristine condition as one can find in Nepal, aside from a corridor of disturbance for 10 m or so on either side of the trails resulting from the annual livestock migrations to and from the alpine pastures. But the alpine pastures that we were walking through in the park are far from pristine, having been grazed and modified for hundreds of years by Sherpa and Rai yak and sheep herders. Here, slopes that are naturally covered with rhododendron shrub above treeline have been cleared of up to 60 percent of their woody vegetation to promote grass and sedge growth, and the white skeletons of burned shrub juniper and dwarf rhododendron are testimony to a relentless and continuous effort to convert the native alpine vegetation to grassland. The good news, however, is that because the Makalu-Barun regions receives so much rain, alpine ecosystems tend to rapidly heal themselves to a full and continuous cover of grasses and sedges, in spite of hundreds of years of annual disturbances. In drier climates, such as in the Sagarmatha (Everest) National Park to the northwest, the use of shrub juniper for fuel by lodges and trekking groups was turning much of the upper Imja Khola alpine into a high altitude wasteland by the early 2000s, since it takes hundreds of years for alpine juniper to reach even a few centimeters in diameter, and the bare areas left behind encouraged the accelerated erosion of the thin alpine soils. According to Johan Reinhard, even in the 1970s tons of juniper were being cut and burned each climbing season in the Everest base camp as part of the expedition puja ceremony. Both practices were discontinued in 2004 thanks to the actions taken by

Sutlej camp, overlooking the Apsuwa river valley. The Chamlang mountain range is due north, to the right of the photo

the Khumbu Alpine Conservation Committee (KACC), a local NGO formed by communities concerned about the degradation of their alpine ecosystems and long-term impacts on tourism.

Unlike the more developed trekking regions in Nepal, however, the remote valleys of Makalu-Barun are still home to a number of secrets and mysteries, some of which are difficult to entirely understand.

In the fall of 2010, for example, my son Daniel and I trekked down the entire length of the Hongu valley, from Kongmadingma to Bung, Cheskam, and on to the airstrip at Salleri. We were doing a study of the dangerous glacial lakes in the valley as part of a grant from the National Geographic Society, and knew of only two or three other westerners who had completed the trek during the past 50 years. They included the climber/cartographer Erwin Schneider in 1956, and American adventurer Jack Cox in 1995, both of whom got lost in the dense forests down by the Hongu river channel and who ended up boiling and eating their boots, belts, and leather namlos just to survive. Fortunately, we had a guide who'd been to the Hongu the year before searching for yartsu gunbu, and who kept us on an ancient and long-abandoned trail high up the ridge all the way down to Bung.

One early morning on October 31, 2010, I heard J.B. Rai, our sirdar, and Kamal, his assistant, walking around outside and talking. At breakfast, J.B. was very quiet, and looked like he was worried about something. Then he looked at me and said, "Last night, Kamal was visited by a ghost."

Kamal said that he awoke around midnight to hear a noise like someone pulling up grass, and occasionally loudly slapping the tent. Sure that the porters were playing a joke on him, he unzipped the tent and jumped outside, but found nothing. Sometime after returning to the tent he heard the same noises, but this time with a sound like a loud, nasal, high pitched 'neh neh neh' sound from multiple sources that would begin in front of the tent, then start again behind it, then to the side, then around and around continuously, getting louder and louder until it suddenly stopped.

By this time thoroughly frightened, Kamal dug himself deep into his sleeping bag and stayed there until the morning.

After J.B. told me Kamal's story, he and Kamal took me to a spot immediately behind their tent to what was in fact the fresh grave of some unfortunate soul, hastily covered by slabs of alpine turf and stones. Arriving late the previous day, Kamal had unknowingly pitched his tent practically on top of the grave site.

We decided not to tell the porters of this for fear of a real or imagined mutiny, and shortly afterwards we departed for the trek down the Hongu valley.

Most westerners that I've told the story to stare at me for a moment with one eyebrow raised. Nepali friends, however, see nothing really remarkable about it. This was not an evil spirit, they say, just something that was just trying to tell us that it was still around, most likely confused, and looking for a way to the next world. Another friend said that a violent and quick death, such as from an avalanche or flying rock to the head, could leave a spirit disoriented, since there were no family members in the living world to help it along to the next. Daniel said that he himself had felt as if were being watched ever since we'd arrived, especially late at night when he stepped outside to pee. Other Buddhist friends have since told me that if this ever happens again, chanting "Om mani padme hun" could comfort and help guide the spirit into the next world.

My western brain continues to puzzle this one out, wondering if it was really nothing more than a Himalayan thar grazing around the tent, or Snowcocks with their nasal calls, or a combination of the two. Regardless, it was the best Halloween in years!

From Eklai Pokhari we continued our sojourn through the spectacular alpine, and on to Tin Pokhari, Kalo Pokhari, and up over two more passes to a camp site on a ridge known as Gurung Gang, or "place where the Gurungs gather." Pasang said that from here one had a choice to head north over a high pass toward Makalu that we could clearly see, or west over another high pass toward the Hongu valley, which was our route.

That night it rained continuously. Sleep was impossible, and I worried, like so many other nights before, that snow would prevent us from crossing the Sahuni La still in front of us, forcing a return and two-week retreat to the lowlands. But the next morning was clear, sunny, and snowless, and the Sahuni La was clear. But after the pass Pasang and I spent hours and hours descending a very steep, rocky, wet, knee-killing 2,000 m down to the Sankhuwa river, from the treeless grass/shrublands of the alpine to the dense forests of big leafed Rhododendron hodgsonii below. If this trail is indeed to be developed into a trekker-friendly route, breaking it up into shorter segments would be highly recommended. The next morning we ascended once again to the alpine zone and to the Sankhwa Sii camp site, perched upon a beautiful ridge overlooking the Sankhwa river below.

And then one day, after dozens of passes had been climbed to, and thousands upon thousands of meters ascended and descended, we stood at the rim of the Hongu valley. Trouble was, nobody knew the way down to the Hongu river, in spite of all the previous assurances. As planned, I sent out three parties of two-man teams the next morning to scout the different route possibilities—north, west, south–and they all came back with the same report.

Nada. Shidyo. No possible way down. The former Game Scout who'd said that he knew of a trail down to the Hongu became remarkably silent. Later, in comparing my GPS-generated track of our trek with the map contained in Johan Reinhard's 1977 Khembalung article in Kailash, it looked to me like we had both followed an identical route from Saisima to the edge of the Hongu valley here. But Johan thinks that he and Yvon Chouinard were able to make the descent to the Hongu because there was so much snow. Snow would have made it much easier to climb down what were otherwise steep, precipitous, and dangerous hillslopes and rock faces, which is precisely what we faced no matter where we searched. Still, it seemed odd that local people who've lived their entire lives in the region couldn't find a way down.

Guide Pasang Sherpa gazes off into a typically cloudy, drizzly alpine valley

Regardless, there I was at 5,000 m with eight cold and hungry Rai boys, and my choice is to either retrace our steps for 3 weeks back to the airstrip at Tumlingtar with

Chamlang North glacial lake in 2017, also known as Lake 464

limited supplies, or charter a helicopter to take us on a four minute flight down to the Hongu valley, and continue the traverse from there.

Not much of a choice. We used the satphone to call Fishtail Air and specifically asked for my friend Tim Field to come pick us up. In May, Tim had flown me and my two colleagues from Dingboche in the Sagarmatha (Mt. Everest) National Park over the Amphu Laptsa and West Col passes into the Barun valey in Makalu-Barun National Park. We went to see if we could determine the source and cause of the April 20, 2017 glacial lake outburst flood, and I knew that he was a superb pilot. I returned to the Barun valley by helicopter three weeks later with a porter and research assistant to complete a more detailed, two week-long analysis of the flood and its cause, prior to beginning the long walk back to Khandbari and Tumlingtar. If anyone could land safely on the ping pong table-size "helipad" that had been hastily constructed on the valley rim at Sankhwa Sii, it was Tim.

Tim and an assistant landed, and several short flights later the whole team was safely at a campsite on the Hongu river below Chamlang North glacial lake, traveling in minutes from the cold, clammy, wet reaches of the eastern Makalu-Barun to the sunny, rain-shadowed, warm alpine pastures of the upper Hongu. The staff were elated by the warmth and familiarity of the Hongu, and so was I.

The next day I climbed up to Chamlang North glacial lake, also known as "464," one of Nepal's high risk lakes in terms of a GLOF because of the large masses of overhanging ice perched directly above (see: https://vimeo.com/69665582). In the event of an ice avalanche into the lake, caused by an earthquake, gravity, or warming trends, a surge wave could be created that overtops and breaches the unconsolidated terminal moraine to the far right, unleashing millions of cubic meters of water in the form of a glacial lake outburst flood. Thankfully, I didn't see much change in the condition of the overhanging ice in the eight years since we'd first visited the lake, most likely due to its high altitude and year-round freezing conditions. But at some point in the future, mostly due to continued global warming, a flood from 464 is pretty much inevitable.

Tim brings the helicopter onto the ridge above the Hongu valley below

From there it was a three-hour trek to Kongmadingma camp, passing the grave site of Kamal's ghost which by now is hopefully enjoying the afterlife and its new home. The signs and noise of civilization greeted us for the first time in over three weeks—lodges, tents, and countless groups of 20+, 30-something tourists in the latest candy-colored trekking outfits, most attempting to climb Mera Peak. Especially after crossing the Mera glacier and descending to the tourist village of Khare, the groups of returning climbers and trekkers mushroomed. It was clear that tourism had grown significantly during the past few years and, as mentioned previously, now comprised the vast majority of tourists visiting the Makalu-Barun national park. Dozens of young porters, anxious to get back to Lukla and the next job, trotted passed us throughout the day, and the trek was transformed from one of wilderness solitude to one of

The remote and beautiful Hongu valley, as seen from the slopes of Mera Peak, looking back over the territory that we'd just crossed. Chamlang (7,319 m) is center-right. Chamlang North (464) and Chamlang South glacial lakes lie immediately below the peak

The camp site in the Hongu valley where Kamal met the ghost. The circle shows the cave formed by boulders where we found the grave site

constantly stepping aside and waiting until they passed.

The next day we crossed the Mera glacier and climbed down to a campsite about an hours' walk below the village of Khare, which was much quieter and peaceful than the tourist and lodge-filled Khare. From the Khare camp we descended to the alpine settlement of Tagnag, site of a major GLOF from the Tama Pokhari in 1998 that destroyed much of the Hinku Khola's riparian zone and took out bridges for 100 kilometers downstream. This was also the site of one of our Alpine Conservation Partnership (ACP) projects in 2007, which encouraged lodge owners to find alternative sources of fuelwood to the fragile and slow growing shrub juniper that they were burning by the truckload each year, destroying their alpine ecosystems and, in the long run, the source of their livelihoods, in the process. As I walked down the trail I couldn't help but feel pleased by the valley's green and visibly undisturbed condition compared to only 11 years ago, and by the fact that the stacks of shrub juniper that I'd seen in 2007 outside of every lodge were now gone, since replaced by solar, kerosene, and propane.

Still, the next "alpine challenge," both here and in every other alpine tourist destination in Nepal, is to figure how to export and recycle the tons of solid waste–glass, plastic, tin cans–generated each year and ultimately ending up in local landfills. Usually referred to as "burnable garbage," burning such waste releases toxic chemicals into the air, and once buried the waste contaminates local groundwater. Although solid waste management and landfills have been major problems for decades in the Sagarmatha (Everest) National Park, local people recently started an initiative to collect and send the solid waste back to Kathmandu for recycling. This will hopefully prove to be successful, and ultimately replicated by other park's throughout Nepal.

In Khote, we're now back in the warm and friendly fir/birch/rhododendron forests. Commanding Rai, a national park friend from our alpine conservation and restoration work in the Hinku valley in 2007, came to my tent to

Crossing the Mera glacier

talk and reminisce about old times. Tomorrow it's a steep climb up to the Jaljala Pass, then another steep, knee-killing descent to Lukla on a new stone staircase built by local people to encourage the recent growth in tourism.

And then we were in Lukla, with its hundreds of tourists, shops, cafes, candy colored roofs, wifi, coffee houses, bakeries, helicopters, STOL aircraft, and noise. After the silence and remoteness of the past several weeks, it was a definite culture shock. After a little thank you speech to the staff, distribution of tips, and dinner of dal-bhat, the hot shower and soft bed felt very good indeed. I slept until noon the next day.

Failure Turns to Re-discovery? Needless to say, I was disappointed that we didn't entirely succeed in crossing the entire Makalu-Barun wilderness area by foot. On the other hand, that's why they call journeys such as these "adventures," which by definition are "undertakings where the outcome is uncertain." And I did learn a number of extremely valuable lessons.

For one, we hadn't done enough background research to find a local guide or guides who knew the correct path. What we should have done was conduct a pre-expedition trip to Khandbari and the park's buffer zone to consult with yak herders, shepherds, yartsa gunbu harvesters, local trekking/ mountaineering guides, and others who might know the way.

Second, we could have consulted with trekking map companies, who regularly received information from local people about new prospective trekking routes throughout Nepal, and who might have shed some light on the various routes across Makalu-Barun. Mea culpa. My fault. I still don't know what I was thinking, but by not doing any of these, I had to evacuate my entire team for a 4 minute helicopter ride down to the Hongu valley below, to avoid a 3-week retreat back through some of the most vertical, rugged terrain I've ever been through.

But pundits have been saying for millennia that "it's not the goal, it's the journey" that's important. And in fact, during the course of the trek across Makalu-Barun, I rediscovered one of the most beautiful, remote, rugged, and forgotten trekking areas in Nepal.

After all the challenges of the past 20 years, Makalu-Barun remains one of the best kept secrets of Nepal's protected areas. The park offers everything from extreme mountaineering to long distance wilderness trekking to shorter treks that are perfect for the serious bird watcher and naturalist. These little-known treks and trails could be improved and mapped with little effort, designed from the beginning with leave no trace and solid waste recycling in mind. Many of the trails can be challenging, yes, especially compared to the Khumbu, Langtang, or Helambu regions. But they're as close to wilderness as one can get in the Himalayas, and without the crowds, noise, traffic jams, and mule and dzopio trains bottle-necking the suspension bridges while pushing the occasional tourist off the trail. And where else in Nepal can the adventure tourist trek for weeks without seeing another, or very few, human beings, most of the time immersed within thousands of square kilometers of pristine forestland with

unparalleled floral and faunal diversity?

Last but not least, the park and buffer zone offer unprecedented opportunities for a nature-based economic development of the Makalu-Barun region. Training for local people in tourism-related skills could result in a range of new jobs and employment opportunities, such as guides, cooks, lodge managers, and naturalists, which in turn could help to increase incomes while decreasing the trends of outmigration. A resurrection of the Makalu-Barun Conservation Project's cultural conservation programs, promotion and sale of local handcrafts, and capacity building programs could once again help to supplement traditionally mixed local economies and livelihoods in low impact, environmentally friendly ways.

In Tamku, local officials visited our camp one morning and asked how they could develop tourism in the region. My response was that the blueprints for economic development, cultural conservation, and skills training already exist in the form of the original Makalu-Barun Conservation Project's management plans. These plans were created by some of Nepal's best minds in the course of years of field work and consultations with local people, including Dr. Tirtha Shrestha (Natural Science Specialist), Dr. Lhakpa Sherpa (Park Management Specialist), Dr. Kamal Banskota (Tourism and Economic Specialist), and Mr. Rohit Nepali (Community Development Specialist). Adjustments would have to be made in light of all the changes that have occurred in the interim, of course, but the basics are still there. And, most of the people who worked on the project in the 1990s are still around, anxious to provide their expertise and advisory services if given the opportunity to do so.

Finally, botanist T.B. Shrestha once described the Makalu-Barun region as containing "the only major natural habitat[s] in Nepal where the vegetation cover from subtropical to alpine may be seen in a single sweep of slope...[it] is Nepal's last pure ecological seed." In spite of the impacts of wars, globalization, and changing demographics, Makalu-Barun continues to show exceptional promise of once again becoming a model of nature-based economic development concurrent with long-term conservation. It's time to once again develop and support the idea of "walking on the wild side" of Nepal's national parks, and turn the successes of Makalu Barun's past into the successes of its present and future.

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Feature

A Pilgrimage for a Friend

"During my trek in Nepal I often though about Pam and felt I was seeing and experiencing all she had missed. And now, (at home in the U.K.) as I am typing this email I am thinking how glad I am that the radar is installed (in TIA) and that means other people will not die and their loved ones will not go through what we did." Karen McCarthy, February 2018.

Note from the Author: *This article was written prior to the crash of U.S.-Bangla Airlines on March 12, 2018. Deep condolences to all those involved.*

WORDS AND PHOTOS JACKIE TAYLOR

At 2.30 p.m. on Monday September 28, 1992, Pakistan Airlines Flight PK268 from Karachi International Airport crashed on approach to Kathmandu, 18 km south of the city, at an altitude of 2,225 meters. There were 167 on board, including 12 crew members. No one survived.

The exact cause is not known, as there is no record of the flight crew's conversation, but it was suggested that evidence indicated the prime cause of the accident was "one or both pilots consistently failed to follow the approach procedure and inadvertently adopted a profile which, at each DME fix, was one altitude step ahead and below the correct procedure. ... Contributory causal factors were thought to be the inevitable complexity of the approach and the associated approach chart."

In other words, at each DME (distance measuring equipment) fix, it appears the plane was ahead and below where it should have been. The DME is defined as a navigation beacon, which enables aircraft to measure their position relative to the beacon. For whatever reason, after being instructed to maintain 11,500 feet, the aircraft descended incorrectly to the altitude of 8,200 feet (2,400 m) and impacted into a steep cloud-covered hill.

When the investigation gave its findings, one (among many) of its recommendations was that the Nepal Government and Department of Civil Aviation should "study the practicali-

ties of providing an instrument landing system (ILS) and radar coverage at Kathmandu." Another finding was that working conditions be improved for air traffic controllers, including providing training and formal air traffic controller licenses.

This disaster came hard on the heels of the crash of Thai Airways 311, 37 km north of Kathmandu, on July 31 of the same year. All 113 people on board lost their lives. There, too, one of the probable causes was sighted by the investigators as "ineffective radio communication between the area-control center controller and the flight crew, which allowed the aircraft to continue in the wrong direction."

Two years later, in 1994, rating and licensing of air traffic controllers was introduced, but it was only in 1998 that an ASR/SSR radar system was inaugurated, funded by the Government of Japan.

Almost 20 years on, that radar system became obsolete and in desperate need of being replaced or upgraded. For the second time, the Government of Japan stepped in, and through their development arm—the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)— gave over 9 million dollars to the Government of Nepal to install an antenna tower and monopluse secondary surveillance radar (MSSR) system at Bhattedanda (the highest point in the valley and crash site of PIA PK268) and a new antenna system at the airport itself. The goal behind this is to both improve air safety in Nepal and strengthen air transport capacity to vitalize the national economy.

These are the facts, but of course, there is always a human face to any disaster, as I was about to find out.

"I 'knew' it was Pam's plane"

Among the passengers of PIA 268 was Pam Muttram, a young woman of 34 who was a women's health worker in north Manchester, U.K. Pam was founder and co-developer of the Y-WAIT Young Women's Health Project that reached out to young women. On this particular trip, Pam was traveling to go trekking with a group of climbers from the north west of England who were planning a future expedition, and the trek they organized was part of their expedition fund raising.

Just before leaving for her trip, Pam handed her friend, Karen McCarthy, a sealed envelope with instructions only to open the letter it if she didn't return from Nepal. Naturally, Pam fully expected to return. Certainly, Karen did not expect to hear—on her drive home from work—that PIA 268 to Kathmandu had crashed.

Photo Courtesy Karen McCarthy

"At the point that I heard about the crash on the 5:00 p.m. news, I 'knew' it was Pam's plane, although I did not actually know the number of her flight at that point. I had to pull over into a layby, as I was shocked and shaking. By the time I arrived home about 25 minutes later, I had somehow talked myself into believing she would not have been on the plane, or would have survived the crash if she was," explains Karen. She goes on to say that when she got home, her flat-mate was waiting, anxious to know whether Pam had heard the news or not. "I told her I thought Pam may have survived, or not been on the plane, and she gently steered me to sit and watch the news so that I could see the reality of the situation."

On opening the letter that Pam had given her just a few days earlier, Karen read, "If you are reading this, I did not make it back..." This note from beyond the grave impacted on Karen profoundly. It was effectively Pam's will, and also contained her parent's phone number, who had no way to get in touch with Pam's friends until Karen called them. Pam's mother herself had heard on the 12 noon news, long before the airline contacted them.

As Pam had a big impact on people who met her, both friends and colleagues, they were all understandably profoundly shocked by news of her death. These feelings were exacerbated by the amount of TV coverage about the crash. Footage of the crash site was shown on the news, and Karen spoke about the shock of seeing a man sifting through debris and holding up an open passport to the camera, which was Pam's.

Time goes on, but memories and friendship do not die. In 2017, Karen felt it was time she faced her ghosts and try to bring some closure on that horrific event of 1992. "Visiting Nepal and the Himalayas had always been a dream of mine and I was envious of Pam's trip. At the time, I could not afford to go. As I don't like flying, the idea of repeating Pam's journey was something of a challenge, and my life moved on and there was always a reason I could not go. Last year, I semi-retired and finally had the time and money to travel to Nepal. It was my own journey and would also give me the possibility of visiting the memorial site. It felt important to me to visit the site, to honor Pam and her memory, and to see where her life had ended so abruptly."

So on October 24, 2017, Karen flew from Manchester to Kathmandu. The tears pouring down her face as the plane approached Kathmandu were tears of sadness in memory of Pam, and also, understandably, tears of fear as she made the same approach as Pam would have all those years ago. What Karen perhaps didn't realize

was that, in October 2017, the approach to Kathmandu remained as tricky and dangerous as on that fateful day in September 1992.

I met Karen through a mutual friend living in Kathmandu, and we attended a few events together, but it was only after Karen had trekked the Annapurnas and taken a trip to Tibet that I learned about Pam and about Karen's intention to visit the memorial that PIA had erected below the crash site in memory of flight PK268.

Two or three days before leaving Nepal, Karen told me she finally had the courage to visit the memorial at Lele. I had never been there, so thought it would be both an interesting morning out and moral support for Karen if I went along. Despite being only around 14 km from the ring road, Lele lies in rough terrain, so a four-wheel jeep was hired for the trip. It took around an hour to reach there, and around 1.5 hours to return through the heavier late morning traffic. And, although the driver did stop at one 'view point', no mountains were to be seen through the fog and cloud. Very much, no doubt, how it was on September 28, 1992.

Lele village lies at the foot of Bhattedanda, the highest point in the valley, and to reach the memorial site you need to walk a few minutes from the parking area. Paved stones and an archway mark the entrance. On climbing up the steps, the path opens out to a horseshoe shape, where each passenger on the

flight has their name carved into stone. The carvings are touchingly grouped by nationality, including the Pakistani crew members. It is obvious the caretaker takes his or her job very seriously, as the area is spotlessly clean. Moreover, around the British passengers' section, there are copper water jugs filled with fresh flowers. In the center of the stones is a grassy area, which contains a tall pole with the words, "May Peace Prevail on Earth", painted onto it. I leave Karen to light her candles and incense and be with her own thoughts.

Some time later, Karen walks down the steps to where I am sitting in the sun, listening to the birds. She had decided not to climb up the hill to the actual crash site. We drink cold coffee and snack on muesli bars and Christmas cake. I half joke that maybe we should have put some rum in the coffee. But the tension, so very obvious in the drive to Lele, seems to have left Karen.

Almost simultaneous to this trip, I learn that the Japanese Government, through JICA, installed a new radar, officially commencing its job on February 1, 2018. Somehow, it seems both ironic and fitting that the same month efforts were finally completed to make the approach to Tribhuvan International Airport safer, Karen made a pilgrimage to honor the memory of her good friend Pam Muttram.

Sources: *https://aviation-safety.net/database/record.php?id=19920928-0*
http://www.tiairport.com.np/page/chronological-development-tia
JICA
• u n t : 9 8 9 million yen (USD9 million)


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Photo Story

Ashad, a Month of Precious Blessing

WORDS AMAR B. SHRESTHA

Ashad is the month when the heavens rain down its precious blessings on the parched earth below, and the miles and miles of fertile fields in the mountains and the hills and the plains of the country, and the farmers who so tirelessly till those lands, breathe a collective sigh of relief, for once more will these very fields witness the pleasing sight of green paddy saplings being sown once again. In a nation where more than three quarters of the population make a living from tilling the land, Ashad is undoubtedly the most important month of the year. And, so, the people celebrate it with gay abundance and unfettered joy, for the wet passage of this month and the vital nourishment it brings will surely assure prosperity and abundance to all. The muddy fields are where the celebrations take place, and it is an uplifting sight that celebrates the nobility of honest labor. You, too, can take part in this most inspiring of celebrations and notch it down in your cache of unforgettable lifetime experiences.

Feature

Reconstructing Heritage

WORDS SUSHMA JOSHI

Reconstruction of heritage has risen to the top of priorities in the world of development post- earthquake. Even as the aftershocks continued to hit after the 2015 earthquake, I remember the first and primary concern for most people in Kathmandu was for the Dharahara, the Kathmandu Durbar Square, the historic city of Patan, and other material architectural heritage. People could be united around these monuments and feel their loss in a way they couldn't for those 400,000 who lost their mud-thatched huts and stone cottages.

News about the powerful destruction in other parts of the country trickled in as hearsay, at first: the erasure of Langtang village from the face of the Earth took a while for us to understand. A wonderful, young tourist guide came to visit me a day or so after the big quake in the hospital. He told me how he had been trekking in Langtang when giant boulders started to fall down the side of the cliffs like *"makai ko dana"* (maize kernels). I asked him how he survived. He said he would run for twenty minutes or so, and then take shelter when he knew the boulders would start to burst down again. "I'm afraid I was a little stern with my tour group," he said, frowning a little, as if he feared he been too strict. "I told them they had to make a run for it."

I couldn't help thinking how polite the Nepalis are, always–he had just saved the lives of a group of travelers, and yet his concern was still with whether he'd been too forceful with his speech. He had physically picked up a woman from Singapore, one of the trekkers in his group, and run all the way to Dhunche, because "I realized she would not be able to make it." The rivers are full of dead bodies, he said, and we looked at each other in silence. For the first time I got a keyhole glimpse to the magnitude of what had happened. Of course, I was in the B and B Hospital, where the doctors had to forcibly lock the gates after too many injured and dying people started to block the corridors and the stairways, so I knew things were bad. In the midst of all these

chaos and unaccounted deaths, the only way for people to do something was to focus on those beloved monuments and landmarks, which became icons representative of all that was lost. On the day my young friend visited me, he had just come from cleaning up the Kathmandu Durbar Square. In the midst of all that horror, I could not help admiring the serious, conversational way in which he told me all this, as if we were sitting there chatting in his house's threshold in the village, and how fresh and clean he looked, and the way his smile never wavered, as if he hadn't seen horrors of the Earth opening up.

While these iconic monuments and historic sites definitely deserve to be rebuilt, and rebuilt with proper seismic standards, I am struck by how blank the knowledge of those who propose to support these reconstructions can be. Nepal is replete with brick and mortar buildings, which layer its outward cities, and those are visible to the outer eye. But, the architecture often rests upon intangible heritage like *jyotishis* preparing auspicious times and charts, priests conducting secret tantric goddess worship, and everyday folks sharing oral narratives about demons and ghosts.

Myths, legends, and family histories that may or may not have been transliterated into a textual source are woven into the architecture and are invisible to the causal outsider. How can Kathmandu be rebuilt by banks in Germany if they do not take the traditional knowledge of Bhaktapur locals into account? What can bankers know about the intersecting knowledge required to create brick and mortar, stone and wood carving, pottery and bronze? But, most importantly, what do they know of the intangible heritage that triggered these monuments in the first place, the goddesses and the deities that populate the rafters and the foundations of these very old structures?

How many experts who flew in recently to rebuild Kathmandu know about Jamuna Gubaju, Nepal's greatest tantrik, who became annoyed with the Indian who came in boasting about how

he was the greatest tantrik, and one day invited him over to his house—only to see Gubaju's wife using her legs as firewood to cook her rice? There she is, with her feet stuck inside the firewood stove, busily cooking her rice. The Indian tantrik was terrified, admitted defeat, and retreated. (Note: This story is excerpted from a much later one, to be saved for a later date.) What do the heritage re-constructionists know about all this—and how are they going to fit all this within their neat engineering solutions to Kathmandu Valley's revival? But this story is very much part of Kathmandu's inner lore, and very much part of the woof and warp of what makes up the architecture. The smoky rafters in the attic, where the female tantrik cooked up her calm kitchen revenge, the *buigal,* or attics, where such events occur, the narrow wooden staircases that lead up to the room, the smell of burning flesh and the smell of cooking rice, this is all part of the intangibles that creates the city. But, start talking about the tantrik, or how Hinduism, astrology, tantricism, and animism are the foundations of architecture in Nepal, and you would be pegged as an amusing eccentric with nothing tangible to say in international development circles. "Traditional knowledge" today means training a few village women how to rebuild a basic building. You can check the gender equality box and the cultural sensitivity box, and continue onwards with the work. The work that is done in this manner is no longer religious work, or spiritual work, or community work—it is development work, and development work almost always crumbles into nothingness once the project phases out.

Astrologers not only picked the dates for when a building could commence being built, but could also advice on which direction the building was to face, depending upon the owner's personal chart and vastu alignments. For a country that is still deeply immersed in cycles of festivals in which the waxing and the waning of the moon, and the change of the seasons, play a major role in timing, the astrologer and his *patro* (the *panchang*) was often of vital importance in setting dates. Because building is a communal activity, it was advisable to avoid those months in which sowing and planting take place—a commonsense planning benchmark that most modern builders overlook. A lot of complaining about Nepali workers and their unreli-

ability ("My workers have all suddenly left to go back to the village, and I don't know when they will be back. Nepalis are so unreliable!") could be solved with a little judicious foresight of local festivities.

What is remarkable about Nepal's traditional heritage was not just the beauty of its buildings, but also the way in which they aligned together to form squares and intersections, temples, and water tanks. All of these then came together to form coherent towns and settlements with a central core, where a temple complex, or a water body, played a central part. Unlike today, when houses are built haphazardly, following no rules of community in their alignment—with some facing to the back, and some to the front, some to the left, and some to the right, all apparently fighting to rise higher than the next in the same few square meters of space—buildings in those days respected rules of height, coherence in building style and materials, and spatial alignment, not just because the king commanded it, but because the astrologer said so. The Ranas made equally beautiful palaces modeled on Italian renaissance architecture, formal in structure, with courtyards, gardens, and fountains. In fact, some have argued the Shah monarchy were the least precise and demanding in their architecture, with the Narayanhiti Palace characterized a dumpy eyesore by one disgruntled observer. Often, these ancient settlements and towns resulted in what to our eyes now look like beautiful urban planning, with a logic and coherence which eludes us in post-modern, republican times.

Temples were also built in the form of mandalas, which assigned different deities to different corners. If reduced to 2D, they would be complex diagrams that map out space and time and other elements in their internal blueprints. Often, these symmetrical alignments had to be strictly adhered to, in order not to disturb the deities who lived in these structures—and the symmetry of which also imbued the building with seismic strength. A book I read about temple-building mentions how the interlocking wooden frame allowed the building to sway during earthquakes. I assume the grinning skull bricks that line temples also act to protect against earthquakes by creating a tensile line of strength, in much the same way as the modern method of building a horizontal band that breaks up the t-wave. Again,

there were a lot of do's and don'ts in the old methods of building that had to be strictly adhered to, and the knowledge of which has now been lost in the modern moment of concrete-and-iron rod supremacy.

The weariness with the old rules and regulations made us think we could do without them—only until the next earthquake, in which structures that had adhered to the old school of thought survive, and will probably do so for the next several hundred years. Concrete and iron rods are, of course, the preferred modes of building now, because they are perceived to be safer and more reliable than old methods. But, as we degrade our river beds in the search for more and more construction materials, we have to rethink how long this free-for-all exploitation of natural resources can continue for building cities that, at the max, have a lifespan of a century. Concrete, I am told, ages fast and doesn't last beyond 70 years. And, when a concrete building collapses, it collapses suddenly.

I was interested to learn from architect Kai Weise, who posted about this on Facebook, that the chariots used in jatra festivals functioned as a "shake table". Builders rebuilt the chariots each year, each time testing strength and reliability of their design and structure for seismic performance. We often think of jatras as amusing spectacles with splendidly useless structures like the Machindranath chariot being wheeled through crowded cities, and we forget they may have vital utilitarian purposes. And, once the aftershocks receded, leaving people with debris and death to deal with, the jatras became deeply emotive locus points of survival and reconstruction.

How could all of this intertwined heritage be separated into the good versus the bad? How can buildings be reconstructed if the astrologers, priests, storytellers, musicians, butchers, and tailors are not included? How can those who tie the wheels of the chariot at a jatra, or paint those eyes on it, not be asked to a meeting with international development consultants about how to reconstruct their city? Which is why I feel a certain level of unmistakable joy that the Bhaktapur residents rejected the German bank's offer. The money may have been large, but at the end of the day, it is also about preserving the intangibles—the Hindu philosophy, the tantric practices, the farming culture—all of which would have been lost if the living, breathing buildings had merely been reduced to picturesque architectural edifices with potential to draw large numbers of tourists.

After seeing the destruction of Rani Pokhari, which has now become a dry plot which the powers-that-be hope will dry up enough to re-build as a giant concrete supermarket, it is natural for all of us to wonder: "Can the Nepalis save themselves?" Can the Nepalis hold on to their heritage? Or, are we doomed to watch it all collapse and crumble before our eyes as an enforced secularism tries to erase, asphalt over, and sell the last lingering bits of religious piety and devotion?

If we can't even reconstruct our one last remaining water body in the middle of the dense, overpopulated, water-scarce urban core, what can we do? Rani Pokhari is the only open water body that can recharge the groundwater in the areas around Ason and Indrachowk. The thought occurs to me that *nagas,* thought to live in the watery depths, and once worshipped devoutly by Hindus, get angry when their habitats are disrespected. Water wells are always cleaned on a certain date in Newari households, because they don't want the nagas to be angry. What happens when powerful beings that dwell in the depths of the Earth start to get furious? Do earthquakes result from water being disrupted? Do nagas take revenge on puny humans and make the earth split open? Do we need to revive our myths to revive our water ponds and rivers?

Behind our most charming mythologies lies serious science: environmentally-sound water recharge and management strategies, shake tables, collective trauma therapy. Sanskrit mantras that are memorized and enunciated syllable by syllable, and chanted at the right speed, help to thicken a part of your brain that retains memories, says a recent research by neuroscientist James Hartzell, who has dubbed it, "The Sanskrit Effect." We are willing to put millions of dollars in Alzeimer's research (with no treatment in sight) but we won't encourage people in this poor country to take up this simple, powerful, and scientifically proven remedy that comes from the heritage that their ancestors left them. Whatever the politically correct politics behind this, the point remains: when we lose our mythologies, we lose the balance of our lives.

Perhaps there may be a middle point where all these intersections meet—finance, religion, spirituality, culture—but if the process of rebuilding brings bankers and development consultants to the center of this process, and sidelines the gods, goddesses, and nagas, the process no longer makes sense. At the end of the day, the woof and the warp of religious, spiritual, and communal life must always take precedence over neo-liberal capitalism.

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Feature

Cyclical Nature

Web of Ganga

WORDS SUSAN M. GRIFFITH-JONES

I am once again grateful to mighty Ganga for causing me to muse upon her cycle, thus offering me basic teachings of life. For when I see droplets of water jumping out of the sky with no idea where they'll end up, natural conditions governing their gravitational freefall within this system, either linking them up with others so that they pool together and become one collective of water, or dissolving into the earth and nourishing it, or putting out fire wherever it may be out of control, and some that never even make it to the ground, but dissolve back into space on their way down, I connect the dots.

For we, too, land in a family, meet up with people who become part of our lives, our friends, our greater community, forming larger streams that join with ever larger rivers, and again, expanding as we mature, we swell, merge, and become a much larger vessel encompassing a greater amount of energy. In the meantime, we nourish our surroundings with our participation and quell issues causing trouble. But, just as local fishermen in the mid stream of Bihar have to pay mafia elements for everything related to the river, so we too encounter taxation and karmic debtors and are subject to barriers and pollution.

Sightings of the Gangetic dolphin seem to start a little downstream from Haridwar, when Ganga is already flowing along the flat plains of North India. Here, the Bhimgoda Barrage that was built around 100 years ago blocks them from swimming any further upstream. And before that had been built, I'm told there'd also been a weir there. I shift perspective. Is it possible that Ganga, who is herself a huge manifesting body, has her own sense of conscious understanding of what she's doing on Earth and is not just blindly following a path according to the laws of the Universe... the ones that we too are also churned around by? Is this the aspect of Ganga that people have come to recognize as the so-called 'deity', or greater consciousness, who has, let's face it, a greater vessel from which to provide so much, to many?

Sightings of the Gangetic dolphin seem to start a little downstream from Haridwar, when Ganga is already flowing along the flat plains of North India. Here, the Bhimgoda Barrage that was built around 100 years ago blocks them from swimming any further upstream.

Is this tiny act of us wee humans placing a weir or a barrage at this part of her stretch, Ganga herself expressing the limitation of the path of the dolphins through us? In this simply an action of hers, performed by men, one of whom may have picked up on her desire to do so through his consciousness, which is not ultimately separated from hers? Even though the program itself keeps on turning out self-predicted episodes, the past and future swinging like a pendulum to keep the process ticking into the present, despite his otherwise robotic existence stemming from his DNA, man also owns the quality of 'free will' that allows him to make choices and override the decisions of others from within the limitation of 'human programming'.

Or is it simply humans controlling the river in their desire to re-channel her into the Great Ganga Canal at Haridwar at the Bhimgoda barrage, siphoning off 80% of her flow in order to use her great volume for drinking water and to irrigate the growing food supply? But, does he remember that in gaining one thing, he's also losing another? For downstream from Haridwar, her depth is often less than a meter in many parts. Or, coming back to the days of the weir, was this simply the process to keep her clear of larger objects before she entered the stage of transporting all that fine soil she's collected along the way, right from the highest peaks, to where she'd lovingly deposit it onto the flat lands of this region, making them fertile, healthy, and ready for the crop?

The question stretches way further downstream, to the controversial Farraka Barrage in West Bengal that quite simply put, diverts much of what is now an averagely 5-km wide river into a tiny, by comparison, feeder canal that will forty kilometers later join her up with the Bhagirathi-Hoogly River that flows through Kolkata to the Bay of Bengal. Experts say they need her strong flow here, to flush out the silt that's clogging up the riverine port of Kolkata, but in reality, the majority of the larger, ocean-going ships are parked up at the mouth, at Haldia, which is itself in the Bay of Bengal.

Is this simply to keep the mighty River Ganges inside the territory of India, as natural flow would have it, just a couple of kilometers downstream from the Farraka Barrage, she enters Bangladesh and her same waters suddenly turn into the mighty Padma?

Professor Chaudhery from the University of Bhagalpur says that the Ganges is facing a crisis as in 2016, the government declared 111 major rivers of India as 'national waterways' for the transportation of goods—Ganga being marked as Waterway Number 1—in order to relieve the aching and swollen train routes of their bulging cargos.

"If you slice the river into a cross-section, you'll see that it looks like a large lake, averaging 2.5-3 m, with the deepest parts of it reaching 50 meters. The ocean-going cargo must traverse the deeper parts of the river, and that's where they'll have to dredge to maintain a continual depth for the ships to pass through. This will be a disaster for the dolphins, who tend to live in the deeper parts, not only this, but the sound that the vessels make disturbs the natural resonance system of these cetacean creatures, thus disorientating them."

For traditional fishermen, dolphins are an indicator of where the fish are hanging out. This reminds me of the enormously interconnected chain that we're a part of and how the river plays her role, too. Small to start off with, then growing in size, with the massive energetic movement of her downward flow and increasing magnitude as she interacts with other streams, pulling them into her main path through her gravitational advantage, offering her the jewels of their flow, which she doesn't keep for herself, but impartially distributes wherever she goes. Finally, tired and groaning with the weight of her path, she merges with the great planetary body of water.

In this sense, her source is the root, and the ocean, the fruit. Albeit logical, somehow, this way round doesn't seem altogether accurate, and to gauge the potential difference, I mentally switch her flow 180 degrees—"What if the ocean is the root, and her source, the fruit?" Metaphorically speaking, like a tree rooting itself into one place and sucking the nutrients out of the ground, producing a main trunk and many branches of a tree, right along to the twigs and flowers, she does exactly this. Her flow that enters the ocean, merges with it, and is thus swept up into another dimensional aspect, carried by the wind that sucks her across to the mountains in gaseous, atomized form, then deposits her upon the tops of them, released once again upon the earth with all the nutrients of the ocean within her. Hereby, she's then transported and processed by river bodies following the natural gradient of the land that ferry them all over the place in a brilliant system, bringing nourishment, the fruits of the ocean, to the whole land.

All the qualities of the elements are playing together here, from the space of the sky above her, holding her gaseous form as clouds, from which she congeals to become the liquid rain water, which falls and becomes a solid form of ice, cradled by the earth, the whole performance being orchestrated by the quantity of heat of the fire, the master of transformation that causes water to change form.

In this way, like a mighty river, we may also be inexplicably useful to the path we course along, sometimes as a source of refreshment to others, sometimes as a transportation mode, or even as life force, unconditionally so, until we reach the ocean of our life, at death, and again get swept into evaporated form, come into being and drop again upon another shore, grow, swell to maturity, do our job, and pass on once again into the ocean...

"This is the ultimate message of Ganga," I whisper to myself, incredulous that she should hide such a deep coded message of altruistic service and compassion in plain sight, before our eyes.

Feature

The Unsuccessful HIPPY

WORDS LISA CHOEGYAL
PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

Lisa with John Edwards at Tiger Tops Tented Camp c1974

It's not easy being a hippy. Even if embracing the flowing clothes, dangling necklaces, open sandals, and flowers in the hair is not too hard, there is all that sitting around, smoking dope, and staring into space. Plagued by a nagging protestant work ethic, excess energy, and an irrational fear of boredom, I have never been good at doing nothing.

In the spring of 1974, the route from Pokhara to Jomsom had just reopened for trekkers. I had come to explore the network of trading trails that cobweb the Nepal Himalaya, part of a wider overland wander that began in Bali and took me through South East Asia and Burma to Kathmandu, then a hippy haven. I arrived on the short rackety flight from Rangoon, wide-eyed and entranced, eager to embrace the adventures Nepal had to offer.

Blissfully unprepared and recklessly casual, I trekked alone through the deepest gorge in the world with Annapurna and Dhaulagiri towering on either side. My feet ached with blisters, formed before a kindly ex-Gurkha teashop owner forced some good woollen socks on me, and I had a large bruise on my thigh from a water buffalo at Ghorepani that did not appreciate my friendly pat. But, I was enthralled, captivated by the scenery and people of these sacred mountains. Basking in their warmth and hospitality, something about the place made me feel deeply at home.

After the trek, impatient with hanging out in Kathmandu on a tight budget amidst the joint-rolling tabletops of Freak Street, I devoured temples,

palaces, and medieval bazaars, cycling through the emerald terraces to discover the valley's outlying shrines and remote corners. It wasn't long before a chance meeting in the Panorama Hotel's Union Jack Bar resulted in the opportunity to visit Tiger Tops Wildlife Lodge in Royal Chitwan National Park. I leapt at it, rescued from my stoned indolence.

And so it was that, although I never meant to stay, I am still here. Over 40 years later, I write sitting in the garden of the yellow Rana and Newar-style house with traditional terracotta roof tiles that Tenzin and I built in Budhanilkantha, overlooking Kathmandu Valley. The afternoon light filters through the trees, insects are busy amidst the flowers, doves call from among the rocks, and the stream that becomes the Vishnumati River gurgles through the adjacent wood. Of course, Nepal has changed since 1974, but the strong sense of connection that overcame me then still endures.

The excitement of exploring the jungle on elephant back deep in tiger country does not disappoint. That first trip to Tiger Tops was a turning point. I became hooked on the wild thrill of the jungle, and persuaded the maverick owner, Jim Edwards, to give me a job.

"If you can talk me into that, you can talk anyone into anything!" Jim leant back smiling with resignation in his blue chair in Tiger Tops' Durbar Marg office, a shop front that is now an expensive jeweller's. I rushed back to the jungle before he could change his mind, and for the next few years Chitwan became my home, before I moved to Kathmandu working with him as director of marketing in a career that lasted over 20 years.

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Afternoons in the Terai jungle in May are endless, oppressive, and soporific, with the heavy smell of dense grass awaiting revival by the monsoon. The thick sweltering heat shimmies as the afternoon haze dances on the horizon. Chitwan's tangled grasslands are dying, matted into heaps of crackling gold and brown.

As a newcomer to the Tiger Tops world, I was keen to be part of the team. Not just with the bosses Jim Edwards, his brother John, and Chuck McDougal, but particularly with the

Lisa with A.V. Jim Edwards in the Tiger Tops office Durbar Marg

Tiger Tops Lodge

Lisa in the the elephant camp 1976

Nepali staff, many of whom had been there since the lodge first opened in 1964. My special favourites were the Subedar headman, whose flat teak-coloured features and cropped hair bestowed an air of unassailable authority, and master tiger tracker Krishna Gurung, who had a shy smile that lit up his face and a fluid gait hard to keep up with on jungle trails. I already had earned a nickname, I learned later–*Hattini*–which means lady elephant. I liked to think this was due to my nearly six-foot height.

The Tiger Tops lodge community numbered about two hundred people if you included the elephant camp and the chaps who labored to pump the water and tend the roads. Dressed in shades of buff and khaki, we were a self-contained group with lives defined by our jobs, a hierarchy of interlocked relationships. Like living on a ship, I used to think, sailing in a sea of dense green trees.

Room boys doubled as waiters, shikaris guided walks and safaris, and drivers were also skilled mechanics, which was just as well, given the ageing Land Rover fleet. Some of the open green jeeps were peppered with bullet holes, allegedly acquired in some warzone before being divested by the British army, and one had a tin-opener gash in the door made by the horn of a charging rhino.

Mornings were busy with organizing lodge logistics–elephant safaris, wildlife walks, jeep drives, elephant camp visits, room lists, menus, supplies, and flight and road arrivals and departures. The black board in the cramped wooden office with screened windows behind the kitchens was our blueprint for the day.

One hot afternoon, soon after I arrived, I was battling the humidity, pouring with sweat even while I rested motionless on the bed. It was that quiet time of respite when guests had been dispatched on their safaris and we had a rare hour to ourselves.

Someone hammering on the door jolted me out of my reverie. "Come quickly, memsahib, the kitchen is on fire!" As I raced down the packed mud path, the crackling in the air reached me at the same time as the shouts of the boys. The smell of burning was unmistakable, and as I crossed the rickety wooden footbridge, I could see flames rising from the kitchen roof. A stone building with wooden beams and glassless windows, only sheets of corrugated iron separated the sparks of the open cooking fires from the grass of the thatched roof.

It was a chaotic scene. Water was being carried from the pumps and river in buckets, and a few brave souls were on the kitchen roof, trying to separate the grass from the flames so it did not ignite further. The air was filled with flying black cinders, and everyone was shouting advice as I took my place, using my height to lift the pails up to the men on the roof. Soon, a more orderly relay line was formed, as the buckets were passed from person to person, then to me to hoist up to eager hands. It was not long before the embers were drenched, the danger subsided, and fear of the fire spreading was quashed. The main lodge rooms, central golghar, office, and store were all safe.

Guests at Meghauli airstrip departing on elephant safari

Smeared with ashes and soaked with spilled water, we hugged each other with relief. I can still smell the burning grass stench that filled our throats. "That was close," observed Chuck, ever sparing with words. "Your height came in handy," Krishna smiled at me kindly, and the Subedar unexpectedly shook my hand. On that hot afternoon, Hattini earned her stripes and now belonged to the Tiger Tops team.

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I loved the complex logistics required to manage a safe, up-market wildlife enterprise in the heart of a national park. Everything had to run smoothly for the guests, and my colleagues were skilled former Gurkha army engineers, Tharu elephant drivers, Kumal boatmen, and Tamang cooks. I learned how to identify every sound in Chitwan, motorized or natural—all so different from my native north of England countryside—studying wildlife behavior with the Indian and Nepali naturalists.

Airport duty had become my favorite task. In khaki shorts and floppy hat, I enjoyed greeting the arriving guests at the bottom of the wheeled wooden aircraft steps, the same ones used for boarding the elephants who were lined up patiently behind me, drivers lolling on their flat grey heads.

Airport duty had become my favorite task. In khaki shorts and floppy hat, I enjoyed greeting the arriving guests at the bottom of the wheeled wooden aircraft steps

On this particular afternoon, I was meeting a group of middle-aged middle-Americans, who chattered excitedly as I supervised their loading for the two-hour elephant safari through the national park to the lodge. The elephants heaved themselves onto their feet to squeals of delight and clicking cameras. "Please do not drop litter and be silent once inside the jungle so as to maximize wildlife sightings—rhinoceros, deer, wild boar, monkeys, crocodiles, birds, and always the chance of a leopard or tiger." A frisson of expectancy crackled through the group.

In the distance, the shadowy white outlines of the Himalaya floated above the wrinkled middle hills. Most times, I took the open baggage vehicle back to the lodge, but today it was piled high with provisions, so I elected to join the Americans on the elephant safari. My ride, Rup Kali, extends her hind leg on command from Sultana, her wiry dark-skinned driver, so I can climb up onto her back, feeling smugly like an expert. Off we all lumber, across the river and into the trees.

Having trawled the thick grasslands and passed a couple of *tals*, pools left

With Krishna Gurung, master tiger tracker at Tiger Tops 1974

stranded by the ever-changing Terai waterways, the wildlife safari is running its course, and the afternoon light is fading to rose. Weary from hanging onto the swaying howdah, dodging branches, I decide it is time to get back to the lodge. The elephants emerge onto a park track that I recognize, and I signal to Sultana that I'll get down to walk.

Setting off on foot down the long straight jungle road, I ignore a sound in the bushes, my mind occupied with dinner recipes dependent on today's supplies, and my legs enjoying the exercise. The crushed-insect scent of pale clerodendrum flowers is heavy in my nostrils and a fine dust rises with my footsteps. A shout alerts me. I turn in horror to see a large rhino emerging onto the open road behind me, a young calf close to her side.

Mercifully, Rup Kali and several other elephants are still on the track, having not yet faded into the forest. The mahouts urge them backwards, anxious not to drive the rhino closer towards me. Stories of adrenalin-fuelled feats in the face of extreme danger flash through my frozen brain, but there is no way that I can find a climbable tree to scale, from the smooth trunks of the towering sal or solid silk-cotton trees whose horizontal branches are of unreachable height.

Working with Jim Edwards was fun, entertaining, and innovative, and I reveled in the rhythms of jungle life.

The rhino mother, short sighted and aggressive in protection of her young, pauses uncertainly on the track. Head high with concern, she turns first to me, and then to the retreating elephants, assessing her options. Deciding I am the easier target, she charges towards me, the baby close behind. Another revelation–how quick and nimble is an oncoming rhino, despite its massive bulk, and how impressive her huge size and great folds of rough skin-like armor plating. I have no hope of outrunning her, and can only clamber onto the high but inadequate buttress roots behind a handy bombax tree. Rup Kali, with her load of startled tourists and Sultana in full cry, hurtle down the road in pursuit, trumpeting, shouting, waving, and throwing sticks. The rhino veers away and takes off into the undergrowth.

That evening, much Khukri rum flowed in the elephant camp at my expense. I was mercilessly teased for my ignorance of the danger of walking alone in the Chitwan jungles. I can still taste the fear and feel my trembling knees as I cowered uselessly behind that tree. Too little knowledge and too much confidence is a treacherous combination in the wild, but I had survived, saved by Sultana and Rup Kali.

Working with Jim Edwards was fun, entertaining, and innovative, and I reveled in the rhythms of jungle life. I was young, it was a golden time for nature tourism, and at last I felt I was doing something useful; no longer an unsuccessful hippy!

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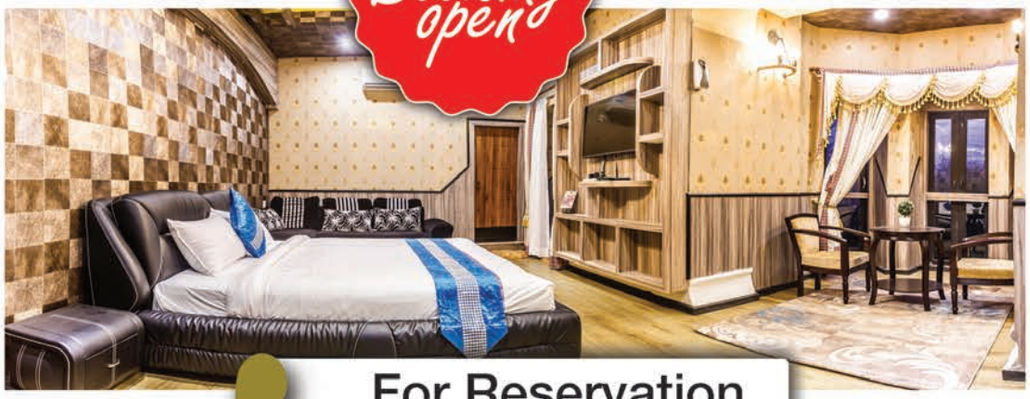

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Feature

Sweet Susal Stebbins

1958-2016

WORDS DINESH RAI

Most people will remember Susal Stebbins as one of those sweet persons who would never say anything to upset you. Always polite and attentive to what you were saying, she was a soft spoken person who never raised her voice. To put it simply, she was a very nice person who seemed to get along with everyone.

I may have met Susal at Mani Lama's in Lazimpat, while she was studying photography under the seasoned photographer. But I got the opportunity to get to know her better when she was leaving her job as editor of ECS and I was about to step into her shoes. During the transition period, she brought me up to speed on where the magazine was at. We discussed future articles and the style that she had maintained. I guess it was her interest in photography that had brought Tom Kelly's photographs to her attention and his portrait of a sadhu was about to appear on the cover of ECS with a photo feature inside, followed by a photo spread by Jill Gocher (yes, 'Jill with the Hasselblad'). It was the February issue of 2004 and I had just quit Boss magazine to join ECS. It was her last issue as she was preparing to leave Nepal soon.

I remember Susal telling me, "I changed my name from Susan to Sujal, to avoid confusion as our previous editor was Susan Fowlds." She decided to go by the name Sujal Jane Dunipace at ECS. However, Sujal was too difficult and unfamiliar a name for expatriates to pronounce, so she was generally known to everyone as Susal and that's the name that stuck.

Susan Leigh Stebbins was born in Minneapolis, Minn., on 5th August 1958, to Robert E. Stebbins and K. Ann Stebbins. She attended Model High School in Richmond from where she graduated and received a BA in Music Performance from the St. Louis (MO) Conservatory of Music. Oboe was the

instrument of her choice, a musical instrument that is not heard too often. She had also completed her MA from the School for International Training in Conflict Management and International Education. Susal and I had much in common; we were both into music and photography. We had also both become editors and that brought us close.

She worked for social change organizations as a teacher, lobbyist, fundraiser, grant writer and editor, both in the U.S. and in Nepal.

After returning to the U.S., Susal got married to William Collins and seemed happy. I would see her photos with him on Facebook with that engaging smile. However, she was diagnosed with a serious illness which was to change her life abruptly. She was already into Buddhist philosophy and the spiritual aspects of life and this new development pushed her further into it. She always maintained a close friendship with Nepali people living in the U.S., especially among Buddhists, and talked about it when she visited Nepal. She believed in karma and found meaning in the way she had come across certain Nepalis back home and thought they were destined to meet; she thought they had a part to play in her life.

Susal spent her final years teaching intercultural communication at the School for International Training (Brattleboro, Vt.) and Mindfulness at Hampshire College (Amherst, Mass.). She had fully embraced Buddhism. She visited Nepal before she fell ill and the last time we met was in New Orleans Café & Bar in Thamel where we had dinner. Dinner time was filled with an interesting conversation about life in general and her philosophy. She also talked fondly of the Nepali people living in America whom she had befriended and met as often as possible. I updated her on friends we had in common and discussed the usual problems we face in our everyday lives in Nepal. She seemed to be doing alright back in the States, leading an active life, inspiring others. Reading about her in publications in the U.S. one gathers how much she was contributing to other people's lives, because she cared for other people. She helped those in need, and in Nepal she was focused on the marginalized people of the Terai.

Susal died on 15th July 2016, in Dummerston, Vermont after a year-long struggle with a debilitating illness. She was 57 and is survived by her husband, William Collins; her mother, K. Ann Stebbins and two sisters. I came to know her only after she had decided to leave Nepal, but we had so much in common that we bonded instantly and shared ideas like old friends. The image that comes to mind when I think of her is of a relaxed Susal, sitting at the opposite end of the small table at New Orleans Café, sipping on a milkshake, looking very calm. I will always remember her smile; it was so warm and loving. It was a smile that said "I care for you."

Mani Lama remembers: Susal came to me to study photography for one semester. She was a very friendly person and was always helping people. She spent a lot of time helping people from the Gandharva community who are known for their profession as gaines, the traveling minstrels. She was so dedicated that they accepted her in their community as one of them. She took many of them to the U.S. and even from there she supported those living in Nepal.

She will be missed and remembered always.

A Writer's Reminiscence – by Baishali Bomjan

The last time I met Susal was the first time we bonded as writers and most importantly as women. I didn't know her much beyond the scope of our work until we spent one last afternoon at her residence in Lazimpat before her departure from Nepal. We talked for hours that day, about my life, love, thoughts and plans, her incredible life in Nepal, falling in love with its people and culture. I sensed both an unspoken sadness for leaving a place she called home for years and yet witnessed her enthusiasm and excitement for what was to come in the next phase of her life. I left that day, never to see her again, with two ceramic plates and bowls each and a gas cylinder; I never asked her why she gifted me them.

I joined ECS magazine in the year 2003. An aspiring writer then, I vividly recall the first few days at my new office. Having made a transition from a bustling editorial team in my previous work, ECS seemed to me to be a rather quiet zen place. I had one more person in the editorial team and had been told that Susal, the then editor came to the office only twice a week. My first introduction to her was hence through an email. I had two assignments in the first week–first, to go over the past issues of the magazine to get a better grasp of its vision and style; the second, and more urgent one, to take up a half completed story started by a former writer. The magazine was to go to print within a week so I had a few days for research and a few more for writing. I was a bit nervous to actually meet Susal in person, but when I finally did, her big smile and warm personality immediately put me at ease. My first article, aptly titled by her 'Life in a Click' was published soon after. I couldn't have asked for a better editor to show me what good writing entailed. I got to work with her only for a few months but I learnt three key lessons to grow in this sector:

1. Write true, write simple, and write from the heart, no matter your subject. No jargons, No show-off, No exaggeration.
2. Maintain editorial integrity. I saw how fiercely assertive she would be while negotiating with the marketing and creative teams.
3. Know your subject well. I was amazed to learn of her knowledge of Nepal and the Nepali community. At times she seemed more Nepali to me than myself.

Years later, we found each other on Facebook and that's how we remained connected. To me she has been my quiet inspiration. I never got to tell her this, but 15 years later, across two countries, I still have those two ceramic plates.

Feature

#MeToo in the Deukhuri Valley

Through film, a Nepali village begins to grapple with domestic violence

WORDS PETER GILL

Shila Tharu and Shanta Chaudhary on set in the Deukhuri Valley Photo Courtesy: Ishan Bhusal

For two years in 1989 and 1990, Damian Jones lived in Ratanpur, a village in the Deukhuri valley of Dang district, in mid-western Nepal. An American Peace Corps Volunteer then in his 20s, Jones taught primary-level math and science at the nearby Saraswoti Secondary School, one of only a handful of schools in the valley at the time. Ratanpur was small and isolated; there was no electricity, and the roads were far away and poor. The villagers, who all belonged to the Tharu ethnic group, lived in long, mud-wattle homes that housed multiple generations and extended families under a single thatched roof. Jones lived in a loft above a cow shed; he was the only person in Ratanpur who lived alone.

But Jones was not lonely. He took his meals with the village leader's family, and after school, students often came to his room to play or do homework, or chat with Jones in the Tharu language, which he learned to speak along with Nepali. Much social and community life revolved around two annual festivals: Maghi, or Tharu New Year, in the short, brisk days of winter; and Dashain, celebrated in the fall, when the rice fields began to turn golden brown and the sky sparkled a crystal blue. Jones loved to partake in the festivals' communal dances and improvised public theater—a tradition known in Tharu as *soung*, when villagers performed humorous skits.

After finishing Peace Corps service, Jones maintained ties with Ratanpur. He worked on health projects for several years elsewhere in Nepal, and visited often. After the projects expired, Jones returned to the United States. Desiring to maintain his connections with Nepal, he began exploring the field of socially responsible handicraft importing. At first, he struggled financially, taking out loans and selling items from Nepal from the back of his car while driving up and down the East Coast of the United States. But, eventually, he developed strong partnerships with American handicraft retailers, and Aid Through Trade, as his business is known, became fair trade-verified in 1994. Today, the company creates original necklace and bracelet designs that they produce in collaboration with about 200 female artisans in the Kathmandu and Deukhuri valleys, including in Ratanpur. Many of the artisans in the Deukhuri valley are Jones's former students or friends.

On a visit to Deukhuri valley in 2017, Jones, who lives in Maryland, made a troubling discovery. He was in the midst of interviewing the artisans to produce profiles for the company's web page when he learned that one of the women had been severely beaten by her husband. Jones began to ask the other artisans about their experiences, and found that roughly every third woman had experienced spousal violence.

Women artisans making bracelets in Ratanpur Photo Courtesy: Ishan Bhusal

This shocked Jones, because he believes such violence was rare when he was a Peace Corps Volunteer. "I can't believe that it would have been at the level it is now, and I wouldn't have noticed more of it. Living there every day for two years, eating, sleeping, going to school, teaching–I can't believe that I wouldn't have heard more about it," Jones, who has a boyish face despite now-graying hair, told me.

One young woman made an unusual request. "'Sir, *eske lake ek tho chaki nan dyo,'"* she said, according to Jones. "Meaning, 'for this [domestic violence], please bring us a pill [to give to the men].'" Jones told her he knew of no medicine to prevent violence, but her question played over in his mind. After returning to the U.S., he had an inspirational dream one night. (Jones often records his dreams, and has been a student of Jungian dream analysis for 25 years.) In the morning, an idea clicked. "It was right there: I should go back and make a film about this."

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In early 2018, some friends (full disclosure: one of those friends was me) introduced Jones to Keshab Pandey, a film-maker and director based in Kathmandu. Via email, Jones pitched Pandey his idea: he wanted to create a short feature-film telling a story focused on domestic violence. The characters would be played by the female artisans in Ratanpur. Eventually, he wanted to show the film in Ratanpur and nearby villages, in order to "bring the topic of gender based violence to the level of conversation, and foster societal intolerance and intervention." He shared some additional objectives: "Have fun. Be surprised what is created. Make something captivating."

Jones explained that he had discussed the idea with the women and would cover the project's costs if Pandey and his team could volunteer their time.

Pandey is in his 40s and short, with a personality that alternates between sarcasm and earnestness. He had directed feature films and television advertisements (the Nepali 2014 World Cup Coca-Cola ad was his), but he had never worked on a project using only non-professional actors. The idea intrigued him. He proposed to Jones that they travel to the village together, interview the women about their experiences, and then write a script in-situ based on the women's inputs.

Pandey later explained to me why this approach was important. "If we had written the script before coming to the village, there would have been a different perspective; we could have put our ideas above theirs," he said. "We wanted to work using their ideas."

Pandey recruited six of his former students from Oscar International College of Film Studies in Kathmandu–a cinematographer, a sound designer/recordist, an assistant director, and three other assistants, all in their 20s–to volunteer as well. In April, Jones flew from the U.S. to Kathmandu, and then he, the film crew, and one other colleague and I set off for Ratanpur.

The Deukhuri valley, in which Ratanpur is located, is a long, narrow plain between the Mahabharat and Churia ranges, a day's drive from Kathmandu. The Rapti River cuts a path from east to west through the middle of the valley, following the daily journey of the sun. Irrigation canals spring from the river's edges, watering fields to its north and south.

The valley is home to the Tharus, who are indigenous to the area, although beginning in the 1960s, other groups from the hills (many of them so-called

Shila Tharu and Rajeela Shrestha off-set in Ratanpur Photo Courtesy: Damian Jones

"high-castes") began to settle locally, attracted by the valley's fertile soils and the eradication of malaria. The new arrivals bought and sometimes stole land from the Tharus, and cut down forests to make way for new farmland. Today, the central valley floor is largely forest-less, although there are scattered orchards of mango and lychee, and shade trees like *neem* and the lofty *simal.*

Ratanpur lies to the south of the Rapti, in an area that was historically more remote than the river's north side, where the East-West Highway has provided connectivity since the 1980s. However, the local road and bridge network has improved significantly since Jones was in the Peace Corps, and electricity arrived in Ratanpur about a decade ago. Like most local Tharu villages, its several dozen homes are built along a north-south axis. As incomes have risen, traditional homes made from mud and wattle are gradually becoming outnumbered by brick and cement houses.

Among the team that travelled from Kathmandu was Shree Prasad Chaudhary, a former student and close friend of Jones's from Ratanpur who now lives in Kathmandu and helps manage Aid Through Trade's business operations. Chaudhary is built like a wrestler, but speaks softly and laughs often. Arriving in Ratanpur in the evening, the team settled into Chaudhary's family home, which is occupied by his older brother, who farms and runs a small business with his son renting out two tractors.

Chaudhary's sister- and niece-in-law welcomed the guests with drinks and snacks, which they served on a large wooden table in the back yard, under an old mango tree. There was *dhikri*, a Tharu dish made from steamed rice flour, fried fish, pork, and local alcohol distilled from the flower of *mahuwa* tree. After dinner, the guests retired to their rooms, crawled under their mosquito nets, and fell fast asleep.

Over the next few days, Jones and Pandey's assistant director, a young woman named Rajeela Shrestha, interviewed Aid Through Trade artisans about their experiences with domestic violence. The women meet daily and, sitting on stools or on mats on the floor, thread tiny glass beads onto strings that they then weave to produce complex and beautiful designs. As they worked, they shared stories of abuse at home.

The stories were disturbing, but sometimes also humorous. One middle-aged woman said that her husband, an alcoholic, used to frequently beat her. Amid much laughter from the other women in the room, she described a morning after a night of drinking and brawling, when her husband woke up and told her that his eye itched. He asked her to look at it for him. Surreptitiously, she squished a chili pepper in her fingers before examining his eye, and when she did, he howled in pain and ran off and was not seen for hours.

When Jones asked whether she and her husband still loved each other, she said, "What love? He beat me. There's no love."

A slender woman named Shanta Chaudhary spoke softly, flashing a beautiful smile. She said she was 28 and that her family had been urging her to marry, but she had steadfastly refused. She had seen too many marriages go awry.

"Boys do all sorts of things to convince the girls," she said. "They give them dreams of having everything. But actually, once they are married, they treat them poorly, and they fight."

Still, Shanta said that eventually, circumstances would probably force her to marry. While the artisan work provides a decent income, it wouldn't

Ankit Paudel shooting a scene for *Babuniya* Photo Courtesy: Damian Jones

be viable in her old age, she felt, once her eyesight weakens. With only a high-school education, she foresaw few other career prospects. Marrying could provide economic security.

She related a story about an older aunt who had struggled to survive as a single woman. The aunt had stayed with her brothers, but they never fully accepted her as part of the family, and when she fell ill, they didn't take her to a good hospital. When she died, no one performed the 13-day full Hindu funeral rites.

"And I worried, 'Will this also happen to me?'" Shanta said.

Pandey's film team was all male, except for Shrestha, and there were no Tharus among them. This complicated sensitive discussions, but Shree Prasad and Jones acted as intermediaries, speaking to the women in earnest tones in Tharu, translating and clarifying. For his part, Pandey tried to lighten awkward moments with a self-deprecating joke or two.

The artisans also had a question for Jones: would there be dancing?

Jones immediately said yes. ("Of course, all films have dancing, right?" he later explained.) The film crew agreed.

Keshab Pandey (right), crew members and actors Photo Courtesy: Damian Jones

Together, they decided on a traditional dance: the "Barkha Naach," or the "Big Dance" of Dashain, which hadn't been performed in Ratanpur in decades.

During the afternoons before shooting began, the women practiced the dance in a village courtyard, accompanied by a local man who sang and played the two-sided *madhara* drum, made from wood and goat skin, which he beat with his hands. The dance has a couple dozen different drum patterns, each with their own set of steps. The older women instructed the younger women, who giggled and avoided eye-contact with other villagers who showed up to watch.

Among the audience was a thin, white-haired woman with a weathered face and high cheekbones who used a cane. Each afternoon, she slowly walked across the village and positioned herself under a tree in the courtyard. She told me she had been a dancer and a singer herself when she was young, and was

Shanta Chaudhary in her kitchen Photo Courtesy: Damian Jones

happy to see the Barkha Naach finally performed again.

In the evenings, the film crew sat under the mango tree behind Shree Prasad's home, snacking on more pork and drinking with their hosts. Hari Prasad, Shree Prasad's brother, joked about the crew's city-boy habits (one of the cinematographers had packed jeans and a denim jacket despite the heat), and the team hatched pie-in-the-sky plans to open up a mahuwa distillery in Kathmandu, amid many laughs. They discussed what they had learned during the day and began to shape the film's plot.

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On their fourth night in Ratanpur, the team shot the film's first scene. In it, a young bride has returned to her natal home for her first visit with her parents after the wedding. The woman– known in the film only by her nickname, "Babuniya"–overhears the dull thuds and terrified screams of a woman being beaten in her neighbor's home. Shaken, Babuniya falls into an uneasy sleep. She has a nightmare: a shadowy figure approaches her, raises a fist, and...the screen goes black.

The filmmakers chose an artisan named Shila Tharu to play Babuniya. She looks even younger than her 20 years, and her face betrays an innocence they say was one of the reasons they cast her for the role. She told me she had been married for a little over a year and had never been beaten herself, though her older sister-in-law had been.

In the second scene, Babuniya awakens in the morning and goes to fetch water from a well in the center of the village, under a flame tree that Jones and his students planted years ago. Babuniya meets three older women–all dressed in their finest, brightly-colored *lehenga-kurta*–who also overheard the previous night's beating. The older women gossip in Tharu about the violence, but are not surprised by it.

Through the course of the day, Babuniya goes about her daily work–taking grain to the mill, feeding the animals, weaving bracelets with her artisans group–and overhears the women she encounters talk about their experiences being beaten. She learns that it is much more common than she had ever thought, and worries that her husband, too, will one day turn on her.

When Babuniya visits her artisans' group, the women discuss what can be done: "It's not just that house's business, it's the community's business," one woman says.

Another comments, "It affects not just the woman who is beaten; it affects her children, and it affects my children, and you know what? It affects all of us."

:::::

The crew encountered some technical challenges in the course of filming. Babies cried or toddled into the middle of scenes; tractors rattled past in the middle of a heart-felt chat between characters. In a scene where Babuniya goes goat-herding with an older, married friend, played by Shanta Chaudhary (the woman who has rebuffed marriage proposals in real life), the goats kept wandering out of the camera frame. Shree Prasad and I were dispatched to stand nearby and gesture menacingly at them to stay put.

Off-set, I asked Jones and Shree Prasad more about their rationale for the film. Both reiterated that it was important to address spousal violence, because the problem seems to be getting worse. (Of course, accurately determining a trend in domestic violence is difficult since it almost always goes unrecorded, but I asked a handful of village women what they thought, and

Photo Courtesy: Damian Jones

nearly all of them agreed with Jones and Shree Prasad.)

Jones says that one reason he was surprised by the magnitude of the problem is that Tharu women traditionally held a high status. “I’d say the women always worked harder, but the gap between the workload on the women and the workload on the men, when I lived here, was probably the smallest in all of Nepal,” he told me. He contrasted Ratanpur with a high-caste village in Tanahun district where he also taught, where the women did the bulk of household and farm work, but were treated very poorly.

Shree Prasad told me the increase in domestic violence was partly due to alcohol consumption. Although drinking has always been a part of Tharu culture, commercially-produced alcohol has recently become widely available. “Before, you just drank what was available at home. If you didn’t have any, you didn’t drink,” he told me.

He said the problem is also connected to a larger societal shift. Like elsewhere in rural Nepal, dependence on agriculture has waned over the past couple decades, as young men, and in some cases women, migrate to cities or abroad to study and earn cash that they send home. Separation leads to distrust between husbands and their wives. Moreover, the shift from subsistence to a cash economy has caused relationships of co-dependence to break down.

“Money determines everything now," Shree Prasad told me. "People think, if I have money, I can do anything.”

Within families, brothers began to quarrel over inheritances more often, and frequently split their joint households. As families divided, there were fewer older relatives like in-laws or grandparents present to intervene when relationships became abusive.

One evening, I took a walk with Jones along the banks of the Rapti. The flood plain is expansive, covered with millions of round river stones, with little vegetation other than a few wispy-flowered grasses. It was near sunset, and on the horizon we saw villagers returning with water buffalo from pastures on the far shore. At a riffle in the river, we came upon an old man, dressed in a *beguwa* (a traditional loincloth worn by Tharu men) setting a fish trap. He had assembled a V-shaped weir from branches and brushwood that channeled the flow into small woven box, in which the fish, most of them finger-sized, were ensnared.

Film team, from left to right

Ankit Paudel - Cinematographer
Ishan Bhusal - BTS Cinematographer
Lakpa Tamang - Cinematographer's Assistant
Sudip Shrestha - Sound Assistant
Rajeela Shrestha - Assistant Director
Shrawal RP - Sound Designer/Recordist
Pramod Chaudhary - Chief *Badmas*
Keshab Pandey - Director

We remarked that it was nice to see traditional fishing methods still in use. Electrocution and dynamite-fishing have become common, and Shree Prasad’s youngest brother, a shopkeeper in Ratanpur, had lost some fingers in a fishing accident involving explosives.

Seeing the fisherman reminded me of something I had been meaning to ask Jones. Even though the film is set in the present, all the characters wear traditional clothing, rather than the “maxi” dresses or T-shirts that are often seen today, and the scenes feature traditional thatch homes instead of the increasingly common brick ones. Modern technologies are mostly absent, too. There are no mobile phones, and for the water-fetching scene, the team chose to shoot at an old open-air well—one that had been dug

by hand, with wooden siding grooved from years of rope-wear—rather than a hand- or electric-pump well, which are more common these days. In short, Ratanpur in the film looks like real-life Ratanpur probably looked decades ago.

Jones told me that he and Pandey wanted to document what is left of traditions before they are lost. "This film is not a documentary, but there's a lot of stuff in here that's documenting how the Tharu lived and looked," he explained.

Still, something about this aesthetic bothered me. Some aspects of modernity are certainly ugly, even detrimental to well-being. But new infrastructure and technologies have undoubtedly made life easier in villages like Ratanpur. Likewise, healthcare and education have become more widely available in recent decades. Educating girls is now the norm, whereas it was uncommon when Jones taught in Ratanpur. By emphasizing the traditional, was the film disavowing real progress?

There is also a long history, throughout the world, of outsiders portraying indigenous people as relics of an earlier age. Colonial-era Orientalist ethnographers portrayed native groups as "uncivilized" and backwards. In the U.S., the photographer Edward S. Curtis—an early influence on the field of "visual anthropology"—took iconic photographs of Native Americans in the early twentieth century that depicted them in traditional attire and scenes, even though many of them led thoroughly modern lives by that time. As a kid growing up in the 1990s, I was used to such depictions, and it surprised me to learn that most Native Americans dressed like me and lived in houses with electricity. Likewise, I had met foreigners and Nepalis in Kathmandu who had never visited Tharu areas, who seemed to have similar misconceptions about them. Didn't depicting Tharus leading old-fashioned lives in the film reinforce stereotypes?

Jones saw it differently. He told me that he and Pandey didn't want to reenforce negative stereotypes at all, and he reminded me that the film's intended audience is Tharu people themselves.

"I hope that the Tharu[s] can feel proud about how beautiful, and dignified, and just *special* their culture was. I mean it *is* too, but *was,"* Jones said. I recalled the white-haired woman who was so happy to see the Barkha Naach finally performed again. Jones had a point.

Shree Prasad Chaudhary and Damian Jones Photo Courtesy: Damian Jones


Krishna Lata Chaudhary, a former fourth grade student of Jones's, and an artisan. She was one of three artisans who had danced the Barkha Naach as a young girl, and instructed the younger women in dance steps Photo Courtesy: Damian Jones

Later, I asked Rajeela Shrestha, Pandey's assistant director, how she felt about the film's portrayal of tradition and modernity. She compared the film's emphasis on traditions to efforts by her own Newar people, who are indigenous to the Kathmandu Valley, to preserve their culture. Today, even well-off Newar professionals still take pride in celebrating festivals in traditional attire, performing ancient dances, and cooking traditional food. "We are also doing a lot to try to save our culture," she told me.

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One evening, the film team set out from Shree Prasad's home to retrieve a wooden boat they needed for a scene. The boat is owned communally by the village, and is used for crossing the Rapti during the monsoon. During the dry season, the villagers store it underwater to preserve the wood, by sinking it in an ox-bow lake along the flood-plain.

The film crew and I had had a few drinks by the time we piled onto the back of a tractor, driven by Shree Prasad's adolescent nephew, and bounced along a bumpy dirt road towards the lake. It was dark when we arrived, and the boat was invisible under the surface of the water. An initial attempt to tow it out with the tractor failed when the rope snapped.

The Barkha Naach, which had not been performed in Ratanpur for decades Photo Courtesy: Damian Jones

Pandey, Shree Prasad, and several others stripped down to their underwear and jumped in. After much huffing and heaving—and laughing—they managed to flip the large, unwieldy boat over by hand, and then bailed out the remaining water with a bucket. Everyone cheered when the boat emerged from the depths, casting ripples that flashed the moon's reflection across the water.

The boat appears in the last scene of the film. In the penultimate scene, Babuniya's husband arrives to take her back to his village. When he shows up, Babuniya refuses to go, despite her parents' and the community's protests. But her husband, intuiting her fears, promises he will never harm her. She relents, and they leave together, crossing the Rapti by boat on a sunny morning.

I asked people what impact they thought the film and its message will have once it is screened in the village. (Screening will take place early next year, after editing is finished in Kathmandu.)

Jones was cautiously optimistic. "I hope they will begin to discuss this as a problem that has an effect on everyone in the village," he told me, adding, "You take a little risk whenever you try to be helpful, and part of that risk is that some additional harm could come to some of the people you are trying to help."

Shila Tharu, who plays Babuniya, told me, "Smart people will think, 'it hurts women when we beat them or abuse them.' But stupid people [who see the film] will just think, 'these women [actors] have thrown away their dignity.'"

The wife had won by forcing the issue out of the home, into the center of public attention. Shanta said she hoped the film would work in a similar way.

Other women were more hopeful.

Shanta, the unmarried artisan, told me that the village has a double standard regarding violence: if there were a fight in the street between two men, the community would intervene to stop to it. Yet if a man beat his wife at home, most people would turn a blind eye.

Shanta recalled how another woman—the same woman who put chili juice in her husband's eyes—had ultimately dealt with the problem. Once, after beating her, the husband became so drunk that he passed out. The woman and her son then tied him up by the legs and hung him upside down from a tree in the middle of the village, for all to see. When he woke up, he was mortified, and he never beat her again. The wife had won by forcing the issue out of the home, into the center of public attention. Shanta said she hoped the film would work in a similar way.

In the late afternoon, the crew and the actors assembled to shoot the Barkha Naach dance scene in front of a home at the north end of Ratanpur. It seemed like the entire village—from the toothless young to the toothless elderly—came out to watch. The drummer sang songs over the deep staccato of his mandhara, as the cinematographer and cameraman circled around, hovering and then darting through the lines of dancers. The younger women who had been timid during initial practices now performed their steps with fluidity. All the women wore their finest yellow and green lehenga-kurta, along with elaborate silver necklaces and other jewelry that gleamed in the sun. They were beautiful, and their faces beamed with confidence.

Peter Gill was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Senegal from 2010-12 and is a journalist based in Nepal. He tweets at @pitaarji

Feature

A Most Rewarding Journey

WORDS AMAR B. SHRESTHA

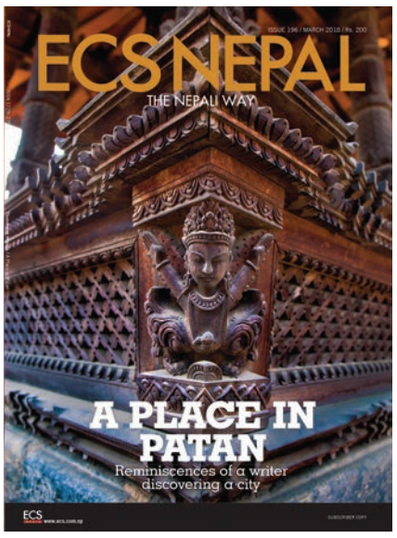
I was penniless. At last the good Lord had granted me one of my greatest wishes—to be literally on the sidewalk (footpath ma, as we say in Nepali, meaning, homeless, jobless, and penniless). In other words, out on the street. I and my partners had just sold our industrial enterprise, begun with confident optimism five years ago, and for which I had left a very cushy job in the world's second biggest pharma company, where I had risen through the ranks to the post of a sales manager. Wall-to-wall carpeting in the office, two teams of neck-tied smart guys, personalized letterhead, et all; yes it was a sacrifice, but what the hell, I always wanted to be an industrialist at least once in my life!

Anyway, it all went bust, the industry, I mean, which we had to sell for a pittance; and it was time for me to look for a job to keep the home fire going. And, being what I am, I took it as another god-sent opportunity to try to enter a field that I had always liked—writing. So, off I went on a round of all the English language dailies and periodicals (even if they were pretty scanty in number) carrying a thin file of all my published pieces (mostly in the dailies). I barged into editors' rooms without so much as an appointment, trusting my luck, and did meet a few, but openings there seemed to be none.

In this way, I visited the ECS Media office, which was in Tripureswor then. They had two publications, ECS Nepal, a culture magazine, and The Nation, a mainstream weekly. For one reason or another, things didn't work out, although I got to meet the big shots. I remember telling the boss, "Wow, you have such a nice magazine!" Then, somehow or the other, I was involved in launching a new magazine with my cousin, but it was a bi-monthly, so I had plenty of time do freelance work. And the next thing I know, I had an assignment from the editor of ECS Nepal (whom I happened to know well) to do a feature on a well-known photographer. I got a call the next day from the editor, he was astonished that I had finished the interview and sent him the piece even before he could arrange an appointment and send a photographer with me! He was impressed, surely.

That's how my involvement with ECS began. Guess my style (and speed) was appreciated, because from then on, I always had something on hand for ECS Nepal. Soon enough, I was writing quite a few stories; many of them for the covers during 2004. They included topics ranging from personalities to antiques to spices to orchids to nature to architecture. I didn't write much for ECS Nepal in 2005, since I got tied up with my own work (or maybe they had enough writers of their own), but the second half of 2006 saw me come back with a bang, with some pretty big pieces (copper, yoga, tai-chi, an ex-ambassador, a tennis coach). The year after, I just wrote one article in the beginning, and none after that. All in all, 2004-2007 was a period of 'sometimes many, sometimes none', as far as my writing and ECS Nepal was concerned.

Then, all this became a thing of the past with my leaving for the States, where I stayed for an entire year. When I came back, in 2009, it was a case of déjà vu for me; meaning I didn't have a job, a place to live, nor any idea of what I would be doing. Not much money in the pocket, too! So, I left for the Darjeeling hills, where I spent three months doing nothing but visiting places that held fond memories and exploring places I hadn't gone to before. I was



reluctant to return to Kathmandu, what with its constant bandhs and strikes and political chaos. But, return I had to (my wallet was looking very skimpy, besides!), and with not many options at hand, I met up with the ECS underboss, this time in their new office in Kupondole.

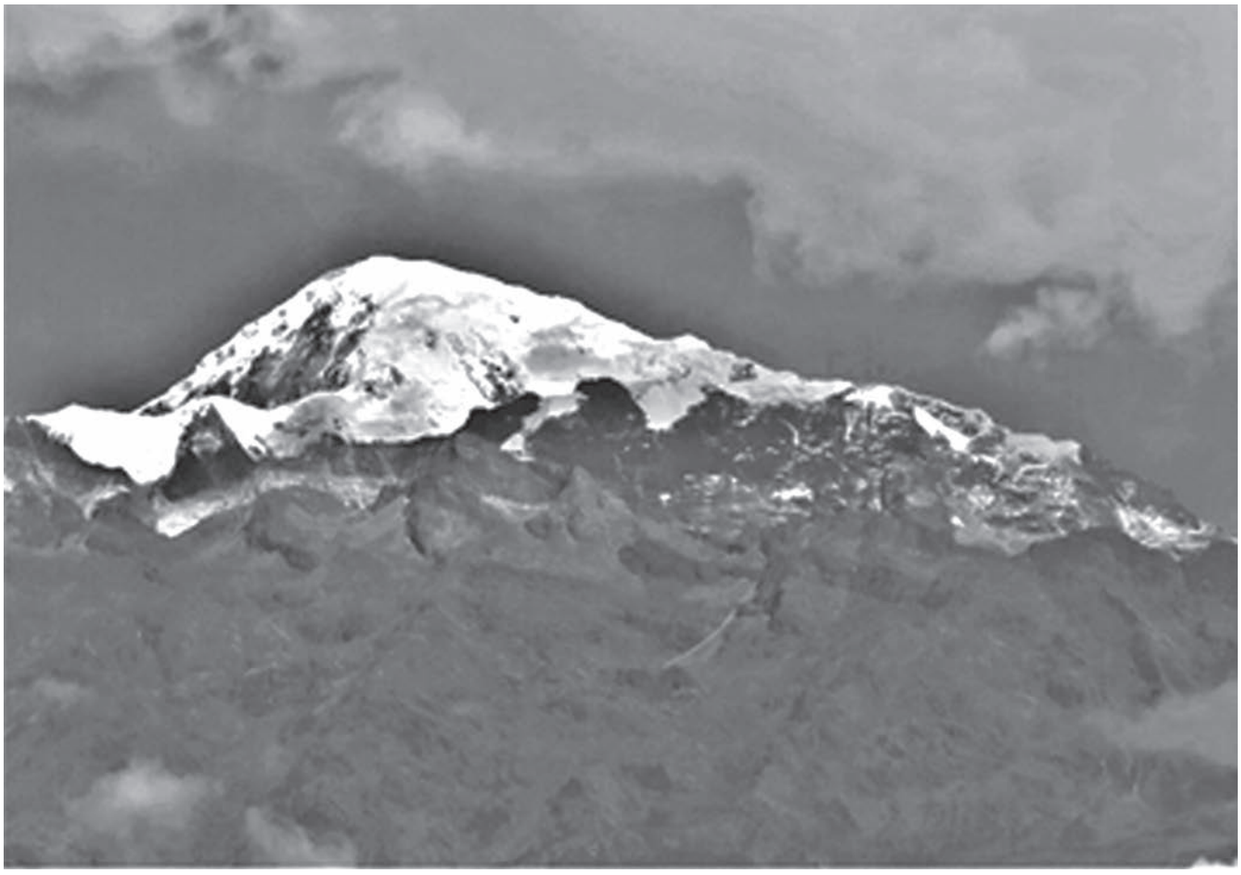
Well, the long and the short of it all is that, he asked me to write for ECS Nepal, as well as for Living, the new kid on the block, which had certainly made its mark. And since I didn't have a computer or anything, I started working from their office, using their stuff. Perhaps it was a case of being at the right place at the right time. I had plenty of work, which was further supplemented by contractual work on projects for its sister concern, Power Communications (PowerComm). In time, I felt pretty much at home, and soon enough, was writing and editing another magazine by the name of Healthy Life (my own creation, actually, under ECS Media), besides writing for ECS Nepal and Living.

And, so, the relationship kept on growing, and growing, and growing, with the result that today, through the usual, and sometimes unusual, ups-and-downs of any business, I am sitting pretty, writing and copyediting ECS Nepal and Friday (another feather to the company's cap). But, more than the copyediting, which I consider a dull but essential responsibility, it is the writing part that I find more rewarding, especially when there are so many admirers around the place!

I must mention that while the second half of 2009 was a special year for my writing, with some really heavy-duty features (Gurkhas, temple architecture, another ex-ambassador, shamans, education, tae kwon do, restorers, art, places, spices–yes, again), it was also a very special year for ECS Nepal, since it culminated in the publication of its 100th issue in December. I am pleased to say that it had quite a few stories by yours truly!

2010 saw half a dozen covers and plenty of articles by me (ponds, treks, spas, history, people, fruits, festivals, artist, heritage shops, legends, temples, heritage, feasts, rice–yes, even rice!, and also, the shortest man of Nepal). It was a fulfilling year for my writing, that's for sure. The following year was not as fruitful, although I did produce a few big ones on subjects to do with history, language, temple, a book review, and so on. Additionally, it was nice to see my piece on Nepali dances on the cover of the 10th-year issue of ECS Nepal! Not much to say for the period 2013-2015, with significant activity by yours truly only from 2016 onwards, including for a hotel special, a handicraft special, and the Thamel Revisited issue (May 2017).

Of course, there have been quite a few interesting pieces I've been able to write about in between–the likes of seeking spirituality in Tapoban, falling in love with a bear in Gangtok, hiking up to a famous hill with a gaine (folk singer in rural areas) in Kalimpong, reminiscing my attachment with my bicycle, the coming of television, and so on, and yes, even a piece on bhojanalyas (local dhal,bhaat, tarkari all-you-can-eat places)! This year, too, promises a bushel full of writing for me, with some intriguing pieces already, especially in the section, 'Where Am I?' Well, all said and done, from all of the above you'll have gathered that there definitely hasn't been a scarcity of topics to practice my writing skills on, and what could be more satisfying to a writer's soul? Like I said before, it has been a most rewarding journey indeed!



Baudha Himal from Sirandanda

Feature

The View from Sirandanda
Six Decades On

'Sirandala' is what it sounded like. I never saw the name in print, for it is not marked on any map though it is a village of some consequence..., with a Lambardar (headman) whose jurisdiction extends over a wide area — if 'wide area' is the way to describe a territory consisting mostly of near-vertical precipices. We were to receive much kindness at Sirandala. (Showell Styles, *'The Moated Mountain'*, 1955)

WORDS AND PHOTOS DON MESSERSCHMIDT

They were a strange-looking lot, four intrepid British mountaineers trekking through the mid-hills during th e hot pre-monsoon of 1954. The white-skinned foreigners in shorts and shirts and a line of porters carrying tents and climbing gear were on trails where no such travelers had ever been before. Their leader was the jovial Showell Styles. Their goal was Baudha Himal, a 21,890-foot peak in central Gorkha District.

Less than a year after Hillary and Tenzing topped Mount Everest, mountaineering fever soared high amongst the British climbing fraternity. "Most British mountaineers, I suppose, dream of going someday to the greatest mountains in the world and attempting the ascent of an unclimbed peak," writes Styles, mulling over the prospect of such a climb, he says, while sitting on a sleeping cow!

"To precious few of them is it given to convert vision into reality."

Nonetheless, for this small expedition, little Baudha seemed an easy follow-up to the big one. Reflecting on the sanctity of Himalayan peaks, Styles goes on –

"If the Nepal Himalaya are indeed gods, and you picture them sitting in a row along the northern frontier with their long legs stretched straight out southward, you have a fair representation of the lie of the land across which our route lay. Baudha is far to the north-west of Kathmandu, and we had first to make a lot of westing, as the sailors say, before striking north; we had to march

Himal Chuli and Baudha Himal over the Sirandanda hills.

up and down across the bony shins of the mountains before we could gain the feet of Baudha and begin the upward climb to its head."

With wry wit and irony, Styles tells his Baudha Himal adventure in *'The Moated Mountain'* (1955). It's a bad news/good news story, the 'bad' being they didn't reach the summit. The same thing had happened four years earlier to his friend H.W. 'Bill' Tilman and colleagues on nearby Annapurna-IV. In 'Nepal Himalaya' (1951), Tilman blames their failure on the "prosaic reason of inability to reach the top." Styles could have made the same excuse but instead he gives us copious details about a set of impassable, ice-bound geophysical defenses they encountered, which made the peak impregnable, much as moats around medieval English castles protect them from attack.

The good news is that despite the failure, Styles also tells a little-known story about the team's stopover in a small village they called "Sirandala" (Sirandanda). The locals still talk about that visit.

Baudha Himal is one of the smallest of five peaks rising along a line running northwesterly from central Gorkha District to the Tibet border. Manaslu, at 26,782 feet elevation, is the highest of them and eighth highest in the world. Himal Chuli and Nadi (formerly known as Peak 29) are both slightly over 25,800 feet. Baudha, as Himal Chuli's little sister, anchors the south end of the range like an icy sentinel. The east side of the range drains into the Buddhi Gandaki River and the west into the Marsyangdi River, while the south side of Baudha is drained by two Marsyangdi River tributaries, the Chepe and the "Darondi" (Daraudi).

In 2015, the ground under Baudha was jolted by the great Gorkha Earthquake, a severe 7.8 magnitude seismic disaster. Villages on the hills below the peak suffered major damage. Within seconds houses, schools, and whole villages crumbled, and landslides roared down the hills leaving raw scars on the landscape.

Earthquake recovery and redevelopment brought me to Gorkha that year and again in October 2017 with the non-profit Gorkha Foundation. To date, the Foundation has rebuilt 20 of the more than 200 schools destroyed by the quake. In October, I documented construction progress and helped my companions demonstrate dental hygiene and other health practices to school children.

On our last day in the district we trekked up to Sirandanda. I was personally keen on seeing the storied village and hearing what memories about the British visit, if any, still linger. I also wanted to find the old headman's house and meet descendants of the man whom the Brits described as a "most generous host."

The 1954 British expedition to Baudha Himal began in the heat of April. On their sixth day out, they reached the lower Daraudi River valley, and on the seventh they began ascending a long, steep ridge stretching north toward the snows. In *'Moated Mountain,'* Styles describes the ridge as undulating for two marches up to the last little cluster of houses. Beyond that, where "the upheaved wilderness of the great peaks is entered," he writes, "the ridge rears suddenly to 10,000 feet, a lance tilting at the eternal snows." That last little cluster of houses was Sirandanda (elevation 6,528 ft.)

Today, rough seasonal roads crisscross the hills, but back then there were no motor roads and few settlements. Throughout their two-day march up the ridge Baudha "hovered intermittently above the northern mists" – a scene, he says, which "encouraged the sahibs, somewhat daunted the coolies, and cheered the Sherpas." It was also a challenge, for the expedition was rapidly running out of food. And though they met a few woodsmen and villagers on the way up, they were not able to buy any food. Their last hope settled on the one last little village, high up on the ridge –

"We came to Sirandala early in the afternoon of the eighth day's march. Its few houses were perched on a

narrow saddle between two deep river-gorges, a most romantic situation. Had it not been for the amazing system of terracing, a man could have fallen for 3000 feet without pause into the Darondi Khola on the east, or rolled a little less speedily for 3000 feet into the Chepe Khola on the west."

When the strangers were directed to the Lambardar's house, they found "a fine affair of three stories tiled with stone slabs, dominated the half-dozen straw-thatched dwellings near it." 'Lambardar' is an archaic Indian colonial term for what the Nepalis called, in those days, their "Mukhiya" (headman). (The hereditary Mukhiya system of village government functioned in the Nepal hills from the mid-1800s during Rana times until the 1970s when it was replaced by an electoral system.)

The Brits were greeted first by a dignified woman in traditional dress, impressively adorned with brass ear-discs three inches in diameter and bearing a wooden jug full of strong *rakshi* (alcoholic beverage) as a gesture of hospitality. The village women were "much given to personal adornment," Styles writes. "Nose-jewels, necklaces, huge ear-rings, dozens of glass bangles, and a scarlet flower worn in the hair, went very well with their black garments and pale bronze skins." The flowers were rhododendron blossoms, ablaze in the surrounding forests.

The Mukhiya himself arrived soon after, "a little wizened man who bowed before me with clasped hands and indicated that Sirandala and all in it were at our service," says Styles. With such a warm welcome in this beautiful place, and the promise of ample food supplies available to purchase, the climbers decided to camp for the night. They found space on a knoll just wide enough for their tents, from which they looked down on the Mukhiya's house and up to the snow peaks.

The old Mukhiya and his wife, Credit photo from the Mukhiya family collection (1950s)

The old Mukhiya's house om Sirandanda , Credit photo from the Mukhiya family collection (1950s)

Within minutes Gyaltsen Sherpa was out foraging amongst the village houses. When he returned, he was "beaming with the news that many of the people here were Sherpas who had come from Solu Khumbu to settle." The sahibs were assured that in Sirandanda they would receive "extra hospitality and ample supplies." (We learned later that, today, 80 of today's Sirandanda's approximately 100 households are ethnic Tamang, while the remainder are Sherpa, whose ancestors migrated

Baudha expedition leader, Showell Styles (1954)
Credit photo from 'The Moated Mountain' (1955)

Mountaineers looking down on Mukhiya's house & up at Himal Chuli & Baudha Himal.Credit photo from 'The Moated Mountain' (1955)

here several generations ago from Solu Khumbu below Mount Everest, over 200 miles east.)

In 1954, the arrival of foreigners in such a remote place was a momentous event. The Mukhiya remembered only one other, years before, a Bengali fellow who was undoubtedly part of the colonial Survey of India team in the 1920s. making the first maps of Nepal. "So, at last," says Styles, "we were in country where Europeans had never set foot."

Nima Sherpa "cooked chicken and potatoes followed by rice and raisins for supper that night, while a curious but well-mannered throng of Sirandalans of all ages watched with all their eyes." The chicken had cost them all of five rupees, and six fresh eggs cost them only one more rupee.

Savoring the genial hospitality of their hosts, the climbers stayed on for a second night to finish restocking the food supply and rest up for the climb ahead. All the while, "Baudha was veiled in cloud, and it was to be long before we got our next view of its mighty ice-dome." On the third morning, as they prepared to continue up the mountain, all they saw above them was "a glittering powder of new-fallen snow."

My interest in Baudha Himal and Sirandanda was first aroused in 1963 when I was living in the neighboring district of Lamjung with Peace Corps volunteers doing community development work. From our *'dera'* (lodging) in Kunchha Bazar we had an unobstructed view of Baudha rising above the surrounding hills 25 miles northeast of us. When I found a copy of 'The Moated Mountain' for sale in Kathmandu I bought it for a pittance and read it in a day. It fired my imagination, but it would be almost 55 years before I converted my vision into reality by going to Sirandanda.

During the 63 years since the Brits came here many other travelers have passed this way, so we were not the strangers we might have been. Sirandanda is on a popular trekking trail to Rupina La, a high pass at the east side of Himal Chuli. It is also the last village on a well-trodden pilgrim trail to Narte Pokhari and several other sacred lakes high up under the peaks.

Our morning walk went by quite leisurely. We took in the sights, including a small ethnic graveyard hidden in shrubbery atop the precipitous east side of the ridge. We chatted with locals walking the narrow roadway. And, after passing through the small, newly rebuilt village of Nemki, we arrived at the base of the final ascent to our goal. That's where we discovered how the village got its name. In front of us was a true *'siran-danda'* — the 'face of the ridge' — rising steeply up more than 600 stone steps to the top. Along the way we stopped to admire a small white Buddhist stupa, freshly painted and strung with prayer flags. And we walked through an archway with a sign in English welcoming visitors to Sirandanda.

Near the top of the ridge, we walked out to a lookout from which we had an awesome view of Barpak, a large Gurung village eight miles east of us across the

upper Daraudi River canyon. Barpak had been devastated by the 2015 earthquake; the vast majority of houses and other buildings collapsed instantly into heaps of rubble. Through binoculars we could see many new houses with distinctive blue metal roofs, signifying its recovery was well under way.

Back on the trail I asked an old man for directions to the Mukhiya's house. He smiled knowingly and pointed ahead to the *'bhanjyang'* (saddle) atop the ridge. Farther along we passed an ancient Hindu pilgrims' shrine, a small tea garden, and cardamom growing in a damp nullah.

It was a school day, so we saw no small children. Any other time they would have come running to see the strangers. A few local youths were bringing in the last of the rice crop, but many of the young men, we were told, were off working in the Persian Gulf, or were posted abroad with the British Gurkhas.

We stopped for tea at a guesthouse called 'Senna's Home,' and chatted with Tulsa, the proprietor. She knew where the old Mukhiya had lived, then volunteered her uncle to take us there. "Follow me, and you can meet him," she said, and within a minute we were at his garden gate. After I explained my interests and described Styles book, Prem Kumar Lama, "better known as Karma" he said, introduced himself as one of the Mukhiya's three grandsons. "Come with me and I'll show you where he lived."

Minutes later a second grandson joined us. Suk Bahadur Lama explained that he was the eldest son of the Mukhiya's eldest son, whom the British climbers had met. If the Mukhiya system were still running today, Suk Bahadur would have inherited the patrilineal headmanship from his father.

Approaching Sirandanda 'bhanjhang'

The Mukhiyas three grandsons (L-R) Min Bahadur, Suk Bahadur and Prem Bahadur ('Karma'). Min Bahadur's store in background. The stone slabs stacked at the left are remnants of the old house, which fell down in the 2015 earthquake.

At the bhanjyang, Suk Bahadur pointed across the broad open space and with a sweep of his arm he said, "This is where the Mukhiya's house was before it fell down in the earthquake. It used to cover this entire area." I translated his Nepali to my companions. The only remnants left of it now were stacks of large flat stones we saw, from the walls, the roof, and the flagstones of the original courtyard. Suk Bahadur told us that the heavy slabs had been laboriously extracted generations ago, from cliffs on the steep east side of the ridge. Today, they (and many memories) are all that remain of the "fine affair of three stories tiled with stone slabs" that Styles had seen.

At the bhanjyang we met the third grandson, Min Bahadur Lama. He runs a small shop there stocked with snack foods, condiments, cigarettes, whisky, beer, and sodas, ready-made clothing, a few tools, utensils, and the like. From the edge of the bhanjyang behind his shop the slope drops off steeply toward the Chepe River, a thin ribbon of water far below. I recalled how impressed Showell Styles was with the steep slopes and how, with a trace of poetic license, he visualized if someone tumbled off the ridge they might roll the whole 3,000 feet to the valley bottom.

I turned back to the flat, wide space in front of the shop thinking it would make a fine playground. But if children came here to play

kickball after school, they'd have to be quick to catch the ball before it soared off into the void.

Recalling Styles description of it all, I told my companions –

"This is where the Mukhiya and his family lived. This is where the day-to-day business of running the village was conducted. And this is where the Mukhiya and his wife with the red rhododendron blossoms in her hair hosted their British guests over six decades ago."

Of the three cousins, only Karma, the eldest, had faint childhood memories of the visitors. Most everyone else in the village has heard about them from oral tradition deeply embedded in local lore and legend.

We lingered there talking and taking photographs into the early afternoon before we reluctantly bid our new friends goodbye and turned back towards Senna's Home where I had asked Tulsa to prepare us a late lunch. Karma joined us as far as his house. As we walked, I asked him if we could buy some *'tej paat'* (cinnamon leaves) in the village. *Tej paat* is used like bay leaf in curries. The Gorkha hills are well known for its cinnamon, which is sold in Kathmandu's Asan spice bazar. The aromatic bark sticks are commonly used to enhance the flavor of sweet tea.

Karma nodded and said we could have as many leaves from his tree as we wanted. At his hillside garden he opened the gate, dashed down the slope, lopped a large limb off the tree with his khukri, and with the help of some of our group plucked and stuffed fresh leaves into bags for us to take back to friends in Kathmandu.

When we asked what we owed him, he replied, "I'm a poor man. My heart feels good giving you this."

Karma & wife, with group members bagging cinnamon leaf.

We'd seen fresh cardamom pods laid out on mats to dry in the sun, and when someone asked how cardamom was grown, harvested and marketed, one of Karma's neighbors gave us samples in the same spirit of generosity.

We thanked them both, then retired to the guesthouse where we snacked on hard boiled eggs, chapattis, and spicy spinach. The cheerful Tulsa brought a bottle out of the back room and with a proud smile poured us small glasses of a sweet plum cordial she had made. That elixir of the gods was the most flavorful highlight our entire excursion.

That evening back down to where we were staying, remembering Karma's magnanimity, we pondered what it meant to live in a small village such as Sirandanda. "It's the sort of place where everyone immediately knows there is an 'outsider' in town, who is greeted with both curiosity and friendliness. In small rural places like this," said Carol, speaking for our whole group, "everyone seems to know everyone else and to be related to whomever you are inquiring about."

Baudha Himal at sunset

Thinking back on the rural American community where she herself had grown up, Carol concluded that –

"People stop whatever they are doing to help foreigners in their quest. Meeting strangers in places like this brings out the best in people. The locals answer the strangers' questions and do not hesitate to give or do their best for you. Some things are universal. There's a generosity of spirit and things like local produce are joyfully shared."

A little over a month after they had started out on their adventure, the British mountaineers called it quits and two of them, with two Sherpas, started down ahead of the others to hire porters and prepare for the overland trip back to Kathmandu. The descent was harrowing and difficult. After 11 hours on the trail, Styles writes, "we came down at last to Sirandala, in a golden burst of evening sunshine. Rarely have I been more exhausted." Immediately, mats were rolled out as they

lay reclining in the Mukhiya's yard, and women were sent running "hither and thither" until, presently, –

"a bowl of rakshi was brought to each of us with a large brass platter of roasted barley. Then the wizened Lambardar... invited us to the verandah of his house and we had more rakshi, this time with hot potatoes and chutney. Fatigue gave place to a sensation of utter peace, a sort of demi-Nirvana."

That's when Styles "noticed hazily that the females of the Lambardar's household were all possessed of houri-like beauty," a side-effect of the rakshi, "a dangerous beverage."

Next morning one of the Sherpas set off back up the mountain with three village men to strike the last camp and carry down what remained of the expedition gear. When they returned two days later, however, all the generosity and good feelings in Sirandanda turned sour with the news that the tents in the high campsite had been pilfered. Much of the team's spare clothing was gone, along with maps on loan from the Indian government, expedition papers, a few rupees, and a few food items.

The Mukhiya and his eldest son were outraged by the theft, seeing it as a serious affront to the foreign guests. Except for losing the maps and papers, however, Styles considered it more of a nuisance than a catastrophe. He was more concerned at the delay of yet another few days that sorting out this issue would cause.

Suspicion immediately fell on local herdsmen who were pasturing their cattle in the high meadows up under Baudha's cold stare. To identify the culprits and make amends, the Mukhiya convened a boisterous court of inquiry in the main room of his big house. Styles describes the venue as –

"a dark low-ceilinged place, warm with the heat of ashes in the central fireplace and the bodies of the dozen or so people present. It smelled of woodsmoke and rakshi, a cauldron of which the Lambardar's wife was brewing over the ashes and stirring with a short wooden pole."

Before the rakshi was served, however, she brought a brass platter with bananas and boiled eggs for the sahibs. Then the Mukhiya, sitting cross-legged on the floor in front of them, began to harangue the crowd with forceful vigor, implicating the herdsmen, three of whom had been ordered down from the high pastures to represent all the herdsmen at the inquiry. Although Styles did not understand much

The welcome archway over stairs below Sirandanda

that was said, he took careful note of body language, tone of voice, and crowd reactions to what transpired.

The Mukhiya, he writes, was –

"an impressive speaker, reminding me very strongly of a Welsh Methodist preacher. His voice rose in sudden emotional crescendos, fell again to a doomful monotone, lightened into normality only to make one jump with a sudden thunder of accusation. He was, I should say, a natural orator. The three herdsmen listened with close and serious attention to a speech which lasted well over ten minutes. In the pauses they all said 'Aw!' in such perfect unison that they might have been responding to a conductor's baton."

"Everyone was grave and quiet" during the inquiry, except for a few small children "who pottered unchecked across the floors of Justice wailing for pieces of chapati or staring embarrassingly into the faces of the munching sahibs."

The proceedings droned on and on, back and forth, to an inconclusive end. After the senior herdsman loudly declared their innocence, they got up and left to return to the herds. By then, the sahibs, restless and uncomfortably stiff from sitting on the floor, also wanted to leave. But not until the Mukhiya concluded the dramatics with a solemn promise to return the stolen goods intact or compensate them in cash (though nothing came of it in the end).

Among the sahibs' last memories of Sirandanda was a rowdy celebration with the locals concluding the expedition. The following morning in a hangover haze after imbibing too much high-octane *rakshi*—one of the penalties of leadership he called it—Styles vowed to forswear "rakshi" forever.

On leaving Sirandanda –

"There was no last glimpse of Baudha on the morning of our departure, and I was glad of that. One does not care to be reminded of long-ago hopes and visions, however faint and fond they may have been. In any case, the retreat from a Himalayan mountain is in itself an expedition which may produce trials and obstacles of its own."

Within a year of publishing *'The Moated Mountain,'* another witty British writer named W.E. Bowman published *'The Ascent of Rum Doodle'* (1956), a hilarious mountaineering spoof. Rum Doodle is a fictitious mountain 40,000-½ feet high, located in an equally fictitious country called Yogistan (think Nepal!). But similarities between the plot of 'Rum Doodle' and some aspects of the Baudha Expedition's mountaineering feats seem too much alike to ascribe them to chance. Was the plot of *'Rum Doodle'* inspired by failure on 'The Moated Mountain'? Surely Styles and Bowman knew each other and would have shared stories over drinks wherever mountaineers and writers hung out in London in those days. Read more about it in 'A Himalayan Mystery—Solved?' online at http://old.himalmag.com/component/content/article/4819-.

The author's companions in Gorkha were David Comerford, Mark Karl, Carol Lauritzen, Andy Morang, Marie Rampton, and Cathy Webb, all from Oregon USA. Some of them contributed photos for this story. We also thank Suk Bahadur Lama for the photo scans of his grandparents and their big house in Sirandanda, Kapil Bisht for his help in arranging it, and Hans Messerschmidt for his graphic assistance.

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Craft Maker

Adding Rhythm to Nepal's Traditional Music

WORDS SUPRASANNA ARYAL

Lishor Kulu was seventeen when his father, Santa Lal Kulu, passed away. So, at a young age, he was obliged to handle his family business of traditional percussion instruments that his grandfather Nhuchhe Lal Kulu had passed down to his father. The art of making these instruments ran in the blood, so it didn't take him more than a year to be confident in what he did. Thirty-three years later, the self-learned artist still runs his century-old shop in Saugal Tole, Patan.

Instruments like *dhime, madal, dhaa, dhyangro, damphu, tabala, tyamko, nagadaa, damaru, jimbe khein, nya-khein, and damo-khein* are neatly stacked on the shelves of his shop. He spends eight to ten hours a day in his shop making these instruments. However, workdays don't feel that long, because while working he is always accompanied either by the FM radio abuzz with political debates and music, or his friends, who come to his shop to talk politics and the philosophies of life.

The making

Most of these traditional drums require similar materials and processes to make, besides having different shapes, sizes, and designs. The materials Kulu uses are mostly made in Dhading. For instance, to make a madal, a cylindrical hollow wood is needed that is shaped to perfection by machines. One side of the cylinder has a smaller opening and the other side has a slightly bigger one. Another material used is goat/ox/cow skin for the "heads" of the madal, also brought in from the market. In some places, these skins are also dipped in limestone paste to get a good texture. Straps made of similar skins are used to tighten the attached heads. *Khari* is a paste-like substance that is layered on the heads for enhancing the instrument's tunes. This substance is a mixture of iron powders, straw, water, cooked rice, flour, and even, powdered magnets. However, people in different countries use different materials for making khari. While applying khari on the heads, one needs to be very patient, as it has to be applied in twelve different layers, and each layer needs five-eight minutes to dry off properly. The first layer is a large round shape and the proceeding layers on top are smaller circles. If all these materials are available in his shop, it usually takes Kulu two days to finish three madals. The materials have become expensive over the years, and so, the prices of the instruments have also gone up, explains Kulu.

What is the best thing about this profession?

For Kulu, it is mainly about retaining a family profession. He is proud of being able to take care of his *"purkhyauli pasal"* (ancestral shop) and it holds a special place in his heart. Another fun thing is that he gets to experiment with different designs and play with colors on the instruments, which makes work more interesting and challenging.

Along with that, the business is economically satisfying, too. The prices of his instruments range from Rs.1,500 (for a small-sized madal) to Rs.22,000 (for a high-quality khein; a normal one comes for Rs.10,000). In addition to that, he gets to be his own boss and work as per his convenience, without having

to worry about strict work-hours that corporate houses have.

"Lastly, I feel proud that I have been contributing in preserving Nepal's rich culture," he says. These traditional drums add glory to any musical environment, and are needed in cultural events, including *jatras,* weddings, *guthi* functions, *bhajans*, and *dohori*, to name a few. Band members, especially those playing folk music, also use these percussion instruments. Madals are in high demand amongst groups of people traveling, or just hanging out and wanting to have fun singing and dancing.

A fond memory

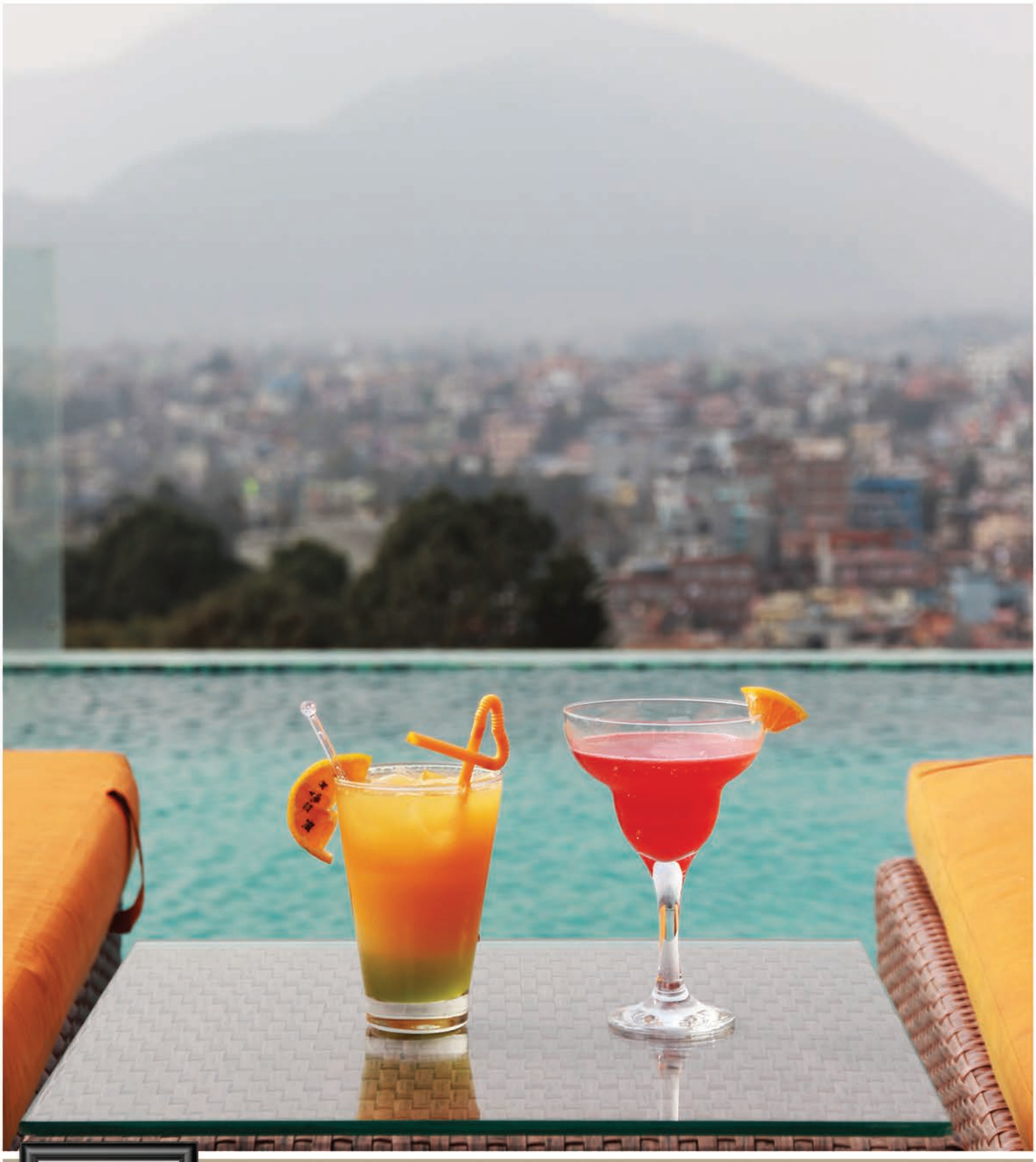
Having been surrounded by percussion instruments all these years, Kulu has learned to play almost all of them. He says, "I don't have theoretical knowledge of the instruments, but have the knack for playing them." When asked to share a fond memory related with his instruments, he recalls that, over six years ago, he became friends with a Japanese visitor who performed fire dances. The performer wanted to do one in Patan Durbar Square, so they went there one evening, and while he gave his performance, Kulu played the madal. "It went on for about half an hour, and I played six different beats. Many people came to watch us, and it was such an enchanting moment," he reminisces. He plays percussions like khaichadi, tabala, and madal for bhajans every week in Saugal Tole.

His attachment with traditional drums

Generations of the caste 'Kulu' have been in this business, dispersed all over Kathmandu Valley, especially near the durbar square areas of Basantapur, Patan, and Bhaktapur. The population of Kulu in Nepal is very thin, and the descendants of the Kulus skilled in making these traditional drums now have many other aspirations for professions, as they are exposed to various opportunities, unlike older times, he observes. He adds, "I hope that those who are still in the business do this job genuinely, and not just for commercial purposes, as the profession is our kins' glory."

There are people of other castes also interested and talented in making the traditional percussion instruments, and Kulu feels happy about it. Many foreigners and Nepalis come to his shop to learn how to make these instruments. He provides them with the materials and supervises them to make the instruments (of course charging some amount of money) and they get to take their self-made instruments home after completion. He is very happy when an enthusiast gets to learn the art from him.

He also has a son who is thirteen years old and is equally inclined towards music, learning the guitar from YouTube. He also knows a little bit of jimbe and madal, and his father gives him suggestions or hints while playing. Whether or not his son will be willing to take over his business later, Kulu is excited about at least passing on the skills of making the instruments to his son.



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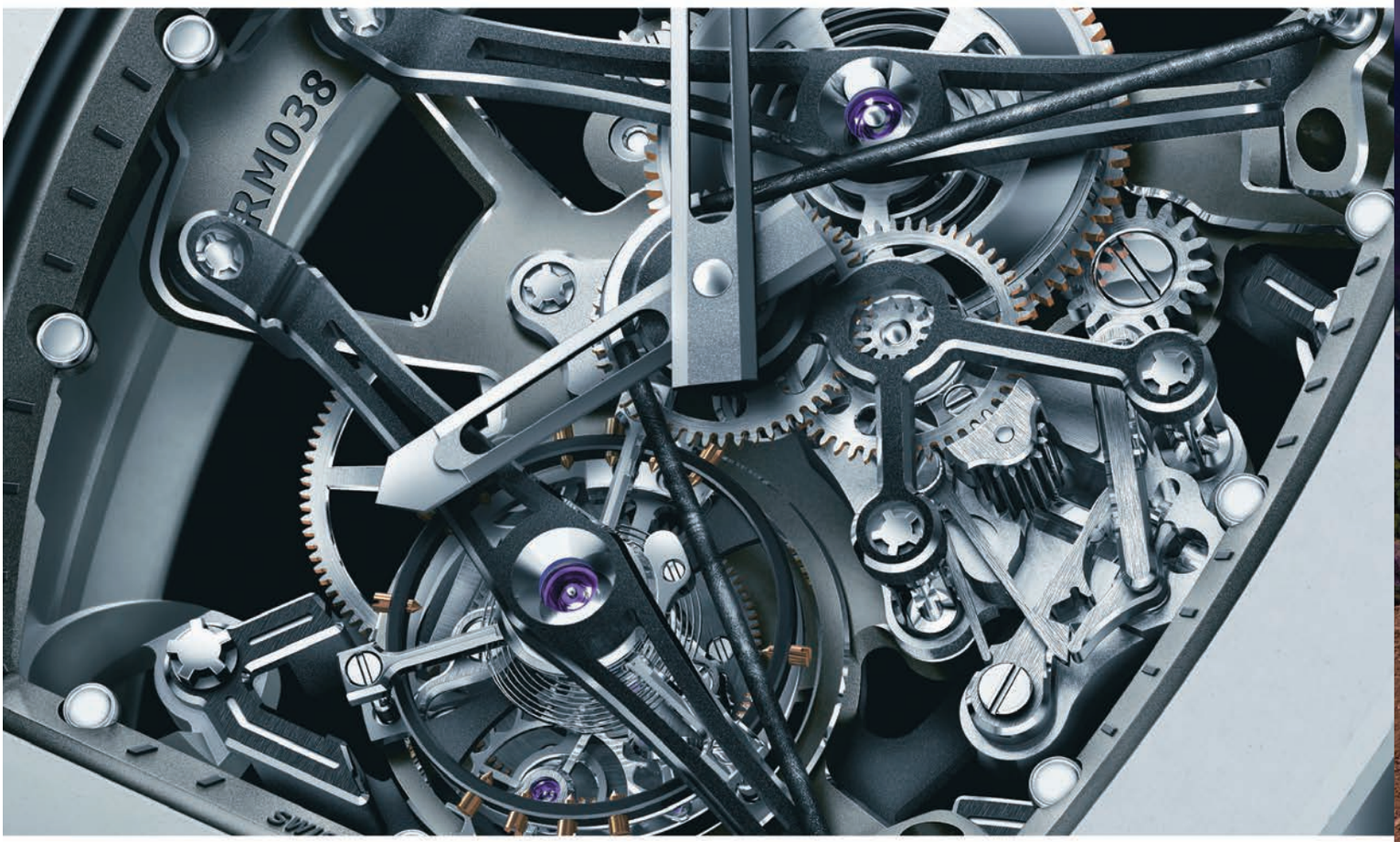

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Experience

HEADING FOR ADVENTURE, CONNECTION, AND DISCOVERY ON THE GREAT HIMALAYAN TRAIL

Sudin K.C. is setting out to experience his country—all of it—from the ground up.

WORDS EVANGELINE NEVE PHOTOS COURTESY SUDIN K.C.

Have you heard of the Great Himalayan Trail? It's the name for a general collection of routes that run across Nepal from east to west, a total of about 1500-1700 kilometers, depending on how you do it. More than just a specific single track, it's a combination of many. There are high altitude paths one can take, as well as ones that stick to the lower districts, and a combination of the two. Many people choose to go as high as they can along the upper trail in order to experience the Himalaya up close. A few, though, are more fascinated by the lower routes that take them through places where they can interact with local people and villages, known as cultural trekking.

Sudin K.C. is a young photographer and explorer who will be setting out on September 1, 2018, to walk the length of the Great Himalayan Trail, mostly following this lower cultural route, staying in people's homes as much as possible in order to better interact and discover. We sat down with him to learn more about the why and hows of this trip he's planning.

What gave you the idea to do this?
Basically, I always had this idea of finding my roots, where I belong. Nepal is the country that I was born in, and I want to know about the country itself more, and the only way to actually do it is to visit everywhere I can. And because the Great Himalayan Trail offers the whole range....

The Great Himalayan Upper Trail is the higher one, most people do the upper, some people like to do upper and lower mixed, but what I'm going to try to do is just stick to the lower as much as possible, because that's where my subject will be—people.

So, more than the mountains, you're interested in the culture and people?
Yes, the people; their lifestyle, exploring how they live, their living conditions, and those kinds of things. So, more than mountains, it's about people and culture.

How long do you think it's going to take you?
Approximately, it should take 80-100 days.

Is this going to be only walking, or are you going to take any transportation?
To get to the start, I'll go by bus or flight, but after that it's just walk. It's 1500 kilometers. My starting point will be Bhairahawa, according to the itinerary, but the zone is Kanchenjunga Zone. I'll start in the Terai and then I'll go up.

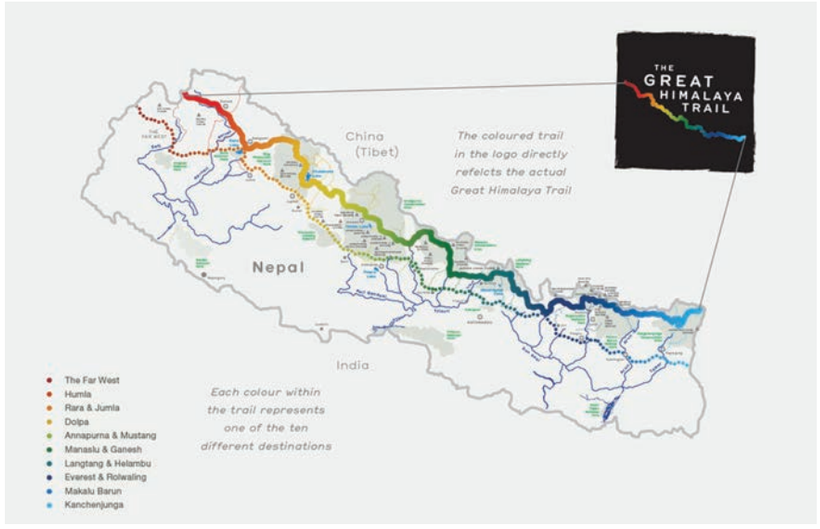
What's your goal in all of this? What are you hoping to achieve or experience?
One thing I'm hoping to get out of this is self-exploration and knowing myself better, but also knowing the living conditions of fellow

Nepalis better. And, if there's some way I could understand what the challenges and problems they're facing are, and link them up to organizations that are working on those areas. For example, if some community is facing problems with education or health, I could link them up with organizations in Kathmandu who are doing that kind of work. So, in a way, it's not just about myself, but more about the people there and trying to make their life better, as well. And, also to generate awareness amongst people worldwide that, 'Hey, Nepal doesn't just have Everest and Annapurna, but there are whole other mountains where you can go,' and that in turn would support the tourism industry and local economy of the people there. That's my hope, anyway.

No one has heard about the places that no-one has visited, so that's my desire, to open [the knowledge of] those areas to people all over the world and let them know, 'Hey, this is beautiful too; you can trek here, you can visit these places.' I have no doubt that there are so many beautiful places outside of the popular destinations. Because that's what's happening–Everest region, like Naamche Bazaar, is one of the richest, or the richest, cities in the Himalayan range, because everyone knows Everest, and everybody goes there. And the porters, local guesthouse owners and workers, everyone has employment, and that town's economy has been raised. But places like Darchula or Jumla, or other remote areas, people don't want to go there because they've never heard of it.

It's my hope that once they do hear about them and the stories do engage and they can relate to them, they can go visit there and the local economy can be raised. The people can benefit and the culture will be preserved, because they don't have to move to another place. So, they can stay in their place, with their cultural customs and festivals, and continue with their values and norms, not having to move to the city and [potentially] forget all about it.

In my experience with Langtang, that was exactly what happened. After the earthquake, Langtang was no longer a popular destination to trek; it was [deemed] risky and all the youth came to Kathmandu, and what happened was that nobody was celebrating anything anymore and the culture was just–well, dying. And it's sad, because when we interviewed the old people, they were really sad about it, because they want to celebrate Losar, they want to celebrate other festivals, too,



but they don't have people to celebrate with, because young people–well, they do need facilities like health, education, and roads, which is understandable. If they have a sustainable source of income, they can generate income among themselves, they wouldn't have a need to move to Kathmandu. They would have desires and wants, but not need. Because, that's what's happening.

**

There's a lot of insights in these words, and I'm excited to see where the path will take him, both externally and internally. Sudin K.C. told me that his grandfather's grandfather moved to Kathmandu from somewhere; he asked his grandmother where from, and even she didn't know. As we talk, it appears that this, as much as anything, may have been the deeper inspiration behind this young man's planned trek, something inside of him that wants to know: what are his roots? Where does he come from? East or west Nepal? "I've got no clue," he tells me frankly.

But, he believes that while there are good things to be learned from outside values, it's vitally important to culturally look inward, as something that should be taken pride in. "If we don't take pride in that, how can we preserve it?"

What answers will he find, and what experiences will he have on the trail? Keep a lookout, because we'll be publishing some of his stories in the months to come, and I know that I for one can't wait to hear what they will be.

You can follow Sudin K.C's adventures on the Great Himalayan Trail in real time, too, at the links below from September 1, 2018 – his travel blog will be linked there as soon as the journey begins!

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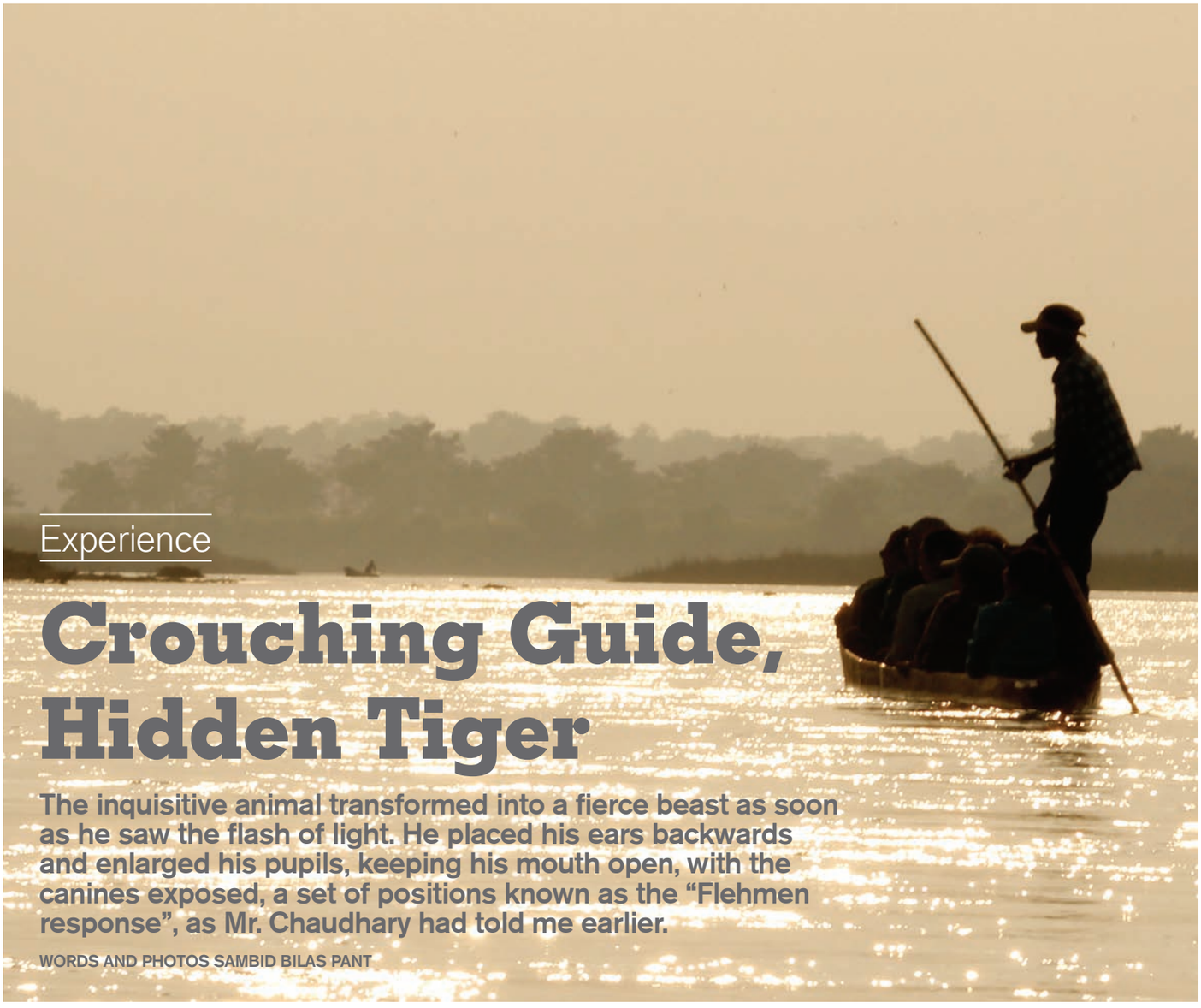


Experience

Crouching Guide, Hidden Tiger

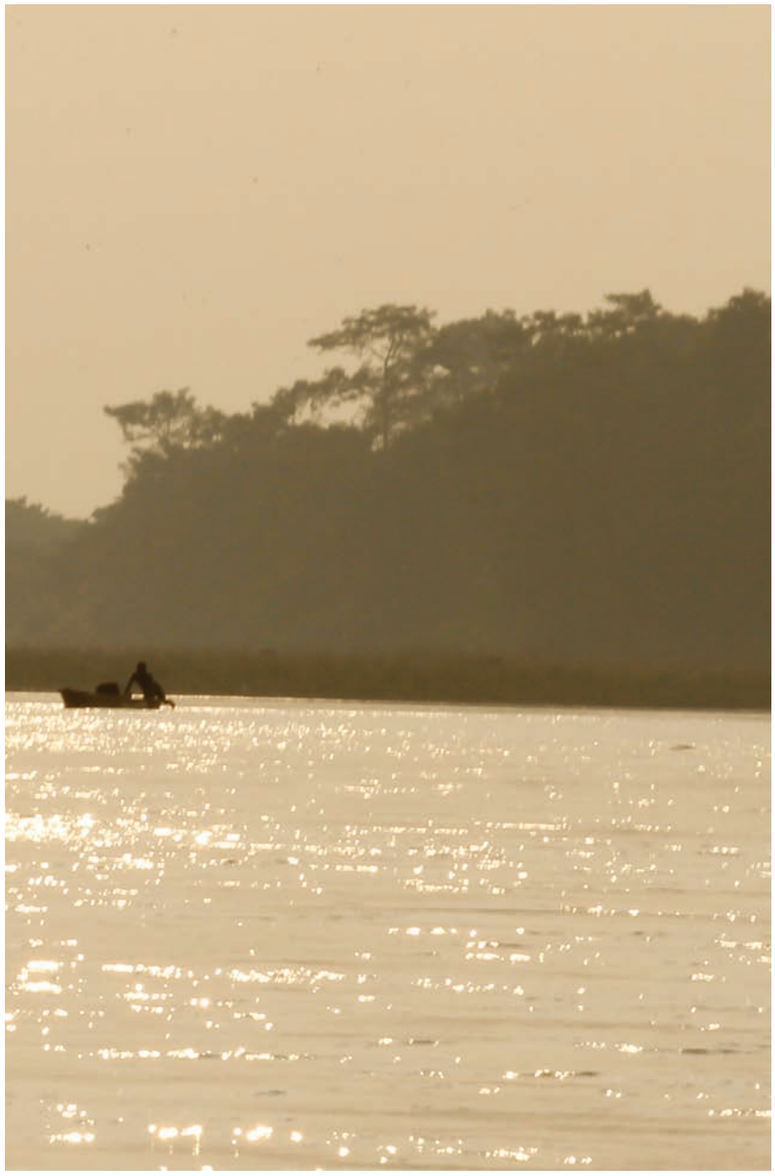
The inquisitive animal transformed into a fierce beast as soon as he saw the flash of light. He placed his ears backwards and enlarged his pupils, keeping his mouth open, with the canines exposed, a set of positions known as the "Flehmen response", as Mr. Chaudhary had told me earlier.

WORDS AND PHOTOS SAMBID BILAS PANT

I sat on the tourist coach enjoying a comfortable ride home. I was returning after a weeklong adventure in Chitwan. I had bumped into crocodiles, had a close encounter with a tiger, and learnt a lot about the Tharu culture. Like me, every other passenger on the bus seemed happy. Seated opposite me were two completely different individuals, a young girl, listening to Pink Floyd on her IPod, and next to her, a man listening to a folk song on the radio. She offered him some mint, he introduced her to *gutkha.* The lost teenager had met a man who was a tourist in his own country, and they had discovered chemistry in a bumpy bus ride. On the other hand, I was happy reminiscing about the wonderful time that I had just spent last week. At that moment, the sounds that I heard during my stay in Chitwan were still fresh in my mind. The chirping of the colorful birds, playful sounds made by the baby rhino, and the roar of the fierce tiger were no less than any song.

Most of my mornings in Chitwan always began on the bank of the Narayani River. The summer had come to an end, and the winters were mostly foggy. The fog never quite burned off, but the sun did eventually come out. At dawn, the Brahmin priest and his children rose with the sun, to purify themselves with a bath. They enjoyed staying awake when the world was asleep, and swam in the sleeping rivers in the silent mornings, before praying in front of the sun god. This, along with many other delightful moments, made my trip an unforgettable one.

I had always regretted not doing a proper jungle safari during my previous visits to Chitwan. Luckily for me, I had the chance to revisit the place where I had spent some great times during my childhood. I was staying at my aunt's home, where I had some wonderful memories as a child. I was an amateur photographer back in the day, and I wanted nothing more than to photograph a tiger. But when I pitched the idea, everyone warned me about the dangers. A Royal Bengal tiger from the National Park had entered a human settlement in Nawalparasi district, creating havoc in the village after killing a couple of villagers, and soldiers were looking for it. Although it was highly unlikely that I would encounter the tiger in



The rhino had been rescued by army personnel after being attacked by a tiger. Although it was taken back to the wild after rehabilitation, it kept on coming back.

the park, it still was a spectacular wildlife destination for animal encounters, so I was excited.

The next day I reached the park in the afternoon, and took a short nap. I was woken by a strange sound, it was similar to the sounds whales made, which I knew from those National Geographic films. Soon, we had a knock on the door. "It's a rhinoceros," said a blue-eyed girl, Julia. Her smile lit her entire face. She was an American student who had come to Chitwan to do research on buffer zones, and became an integral part of the trip. The news broke in that a baby rhinoceros had entered the resort. It may have been a unique phenomenon for us, but it was nothing new for the people at the resort. We went out to see it for ourselves. It was having a good time feeding on the green grass. The rhino had been rescued by army personnel after being attacked by a tiger. Although it was taken back to the wild after rehabilitation, it kept on coming back. "Once they learn to take care of themselves, they stop coming and live out their days back in the jungle," said the resort manager.

We met our guide, Mr. Chaudhary, early in the morning. He worked for the resort we stayed in, so he was like our personal jungle guide. I expressed my desire to see a tiger. "Are you sure? Do you still want to see a tiger after what happened at Nawalparasi? It's not just the locals, every now and then, it might maul even an unsuspecting tourist," he said jokingly, referring to a man-eater on the prowl.

"You met the right guy. I will take you to places of recent sightings," he said. A veteran of many travels through tiger territory in the park, he was proud of his Tharu heritage. Despite encountering several animals during his tours, he never carried any weapons, except a wooden staff. "It can block attacks and offer a wider reach while staying a few feet away from the animal. You will need to watch the Tharu cultural show to know what

else it can do," he said with a wink.

The first scheduled activity in our trip was a canoe ride along the Rapti River inside the park. Our journey began on the bank of the crocodile-infested river, and it was there where we saw crocodiles for the first time. A couple of gharials *(Gavialis gangeticus)* were resting on the river banks on the other side while we were boarding our canoe. We got on a traditional dugout canoe, along with some other tourists, to embark on our adventure to get a closer view of crocodiles. "Look at those beautiful creatures enjoying the sun!" The way our tour guide described the gharials sunbathing on the river bank reminded me of Steve Irwin, the host of the popular documentary series, *The Crocodile Hunter.* "They will ignore you as they bask in the sun, while we float by in silence," he added.

Gharials are one of the longest of all living crocodilians, measuring up to twenty feet. But, it isn't the most dangerous crocodile species. He warned us about the mugger crocodile. "Do not put your hands in the river: mugger crocodiles could attack, assuming your hands to be fish." Earlier in the week, a crocodile decided to pounce on a fisherman after he put his hands inside the river while catching a fish.

Despite the warnings, some people on the boat deliberately put their hand in the river, hoping the mugger crocodile showed up from underneath the water. Their wish was soon answered, as a blow on the boat caused a thudding sound. It shook the boat and silenced the bird-watching spectators who witnessed the unique incident. I looked below the boat, and I could see the scales of a giant crocodile underneath the water as it gently passed us by. Accidentally hitting crocodiles in the river must be one of sailors' biggest fears. My thoughts drifted to the infamous scene from the movie *Lake Placid,* where the head of the crocodile hits the floor of a boat with a heavy thud.

Gharials are one of the longest of all living crocodilians, measuring up to twenty feet. But, it isn't the most dangerous crocodile species.

Shortly afterwards, a second crocodile appeared, then three more, until we were surrounded by these beautiful creatures. Although they were half the size of the crocodile that struck our boat, they were enough to get our hearts pounding. However, we didn't just see the crocodiles; we saw some amazing birds, too. The park is famous for birds like the Bengal bustard, storks, swamp francolin, and several species of grass warblers, but it was the grey-crowned Prinia that Julia was most excited to see. After enjoying the beautiful views, we reached the Budi Rapti River. The boat then tilted towards the shore, as Julia took a deep breath. Some of us got off the boat and walked towards the grasslands.

Before officially setting out on a jungle walk, Mr. Chaudhary told us about the kind of animals we could encounter, to keep us aware of the risks involved. The man who sounded like Steve Irwin had already entered Bear Grylls territory as he narrated his survival tips "You should never run when you see a tiger, because like all cats, it enjoys a chase. He also told us a story about a Dutch tourist who survived a tiger attack by climbing high on a tree. But, it was his guide he had to thank, who was injured while trying to lure it away. "Get as high as possible," he said.

He led the way, and a sense of attentiveness rose in us every time he stopped. After walking for a while, he stopped and pointed to a tree. We could see deep longitudinal marks on the trunk. He lowered his voice and said, "This is where the tiger attacked the tourist. The tree is tall, so it made it awkward for the cat to climb." Julia was a bit suspicious at first, because she had heard of tigers marking out territory through the scratching of trees, but the height of the marks made me believe his story.

"Bistarai, bistarai," whispered Mr. Chaudhary – "Slowly, slowly." He stopped and crouched down in a trench. "Come here," he said, pointing at the tiger paw prints. "Can you smell it?" he asked, touching the grass. He was referring to the smell of urine of the tiger that lasts up to 40 days, according to him. He was simply doing his job, but I had an insane desire to seek out the source of that enticing scent.

We were in tiger territory, where they once walked freely, but I wondered if we were a bit too late to spot them. The sun was setting, and we were running out of time.

We had walked for hours, explored, contemplated, and observed many things, but still hadn't seen a tiger. It was an exciting afternoon, but I still wasn't satisfied. As we returned to the resort, Mr. Chaudhary said simply, "Beautiful things don't ask for attention."

Later in the evening, we boarded an open jeep and drove through the jungle to watch the Tharu cultural show, a musical extravaganza of the indigenous Tharu community. Mr. Chaudhary was right about the wooden sticks. It could indeed be used in many ways, as showcased by the performers on stage. The two-hour musical highlighted the colorful culture of the southern plains. The dancers performed the *Bhajayati* dance with long sticks, and *Thakera* with short sticks, to spiritual folk music. It was a beautiful evening.

By 7:00 a.m. next morning, I had already packed my bags, but before I left, there was just one thing to do: meet Mr. Chaudhary. I saw him in the reception having a conversation with the manager. There was excitement on his face. "They have caught it! They have caught the Bengal tiger!" He was referring to the fierce tiger. They had finally caught the animal and kept it at the Kasara breeding center. I knew seeing it in the wild would have been something else, but I wanted to get a glimpse of the fierce beast even if it was in captivity. After all, it had created a fear of mythological proportions among the locals. I wanted to say my goodbyes to Julia, but apparently, she had already left for the elephant safari. And so I went to get a good look at the beast from the south.

The Crocodile Breeding Centre was established at in 1978 to protect gharials, since their population had been declining rapidly. It also housed endangered vultures, but I was interested in the temporary shelter to the most feared tiger at the time. After looking around the center for a while, I finally heard the grunts of the beast and followed the sound. The guards had warned me not to get close, as it wasn't caged, but simply surrounded by a structure made of wooden planks. I walked past the breeding center and finally saw it. There it was, twice the size of any tiger I had seen in the zoo. It was moving around restlessly. There was a self-supporting step ladder close to the planks surrounding the beast, and I gently climbed it. I saw it up close, as I was elevated. It was less than five meters away from me. When your eyes meet with the tiger's eyes, the feeling is out of this earth. Initially, I could hear loud grunts, as he studied me to see if I was some kind of a threat. As I took out my camera, the grunts turned into groans. I was very amateur back in the day, but I did realize that the moment wouldn't last long, so I took out the camera and turned the dial to auto mode, instead of manual.

I peeked through the viewfinder and couldn't take my eyes of the tiger. I looked like a hunter measuring its pray. One thing I forgot was that, the flash is automatically activated in the auto mode. The inquisitive animal transformed into a fierce beast as soon as he saw the flash of light. He placed his ears backward and enlarged his pupils, keeping the mouth open and the canine teeth exposed, a set of positions known as the "Flehmen response" as Mr. Chaudhary had told me. It was the loudest roar I have ever heard; it was short, but had the sound intensity of a plane taking off. The birds in the nearby trees flew making loud noises. He repeated his roar a couple of times, and I could literally hear my heart beat like the sound of drums beating, my hands started shaking, and I felt like he would break through the planks at any moment.

I put my camera inside my bag and watched as the tiger marked its territory. I finally had my moment. I wasn't good enough to compose myself to take a well-composed photograph, but I had realized to live in the moment of pure admiration—moments that needed to be treasured fully and consciously—not with a thought of capturing it in the camera.

Tigers can be vicious, and when encountering them in the wild, you must show respect and keep your distance. You have to be crazy to get close to a tiger; there were thin wooden planks between us, but they were simply imaginary lines for the beast. It could have broken free if it was still hungry. It was an adrenaline rush to say the least, but wow, what a memorable experience. Seeing it in the wild could have been spectacular, but seeing the beast up close was also a beautiful experience indeed.

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lake. Although surrounded by snow-capped mountains, Pokhara is less than 100 meters above sea-level, much lower than Kathmandu, so the climate is quite mild. However, the weather can be quite fickle, with sunshine one minute, and rain or hailstones the next.

After breakfast, a fiery red-headed teenage boatman rows us and some Chinese tourists on the lake not far from the shore, where we see local fishermen plying their nets, although, we are told, the best fish come from the trout farms on the edge of the lake, and which are served at the Fish Tail dining room. We row to the little temple island named after the goddess Barahi, whose shrine is on the island and the focal point of the long queue of worshippers waiting to make offerings and prayers. The shrine is guarded by a mythological brass creature somewhat resembling a horrific lion. Major celebrations are held here during the festival of Dashain, which falls in October/November.

Although Phewa Tal, Nepal's second largest lake, is only some five square kilometers, there is a lot to do, and it makes a perfect setting for a holiday getaway, even if it is just to breathe the fresh mountain air and admire the views.

Returning to our sanctuary at Fish Tail Lodge, I had to agree with pioneering Swiss geologist Toni Hagen, who wrote that, "Nowhere in the world can the highest mountains reaching 8000 meters level be admired from such small distance . . . Pokhara is certainly one of the most extraordinary and beautiful places in the world.

If you go: www.fishtail-lodge.com
Nepal Tourism Board: www.welcome-nepal.com

Pokhara is easily reached from the capital Kathmandu, either by tourist bus (6 h) or a short 30-minute flight by domestic carriers such as Buddha Air and Yeti Airlines.

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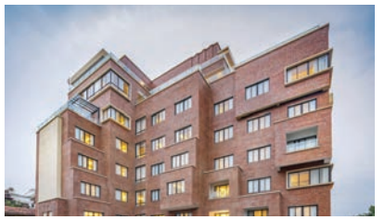

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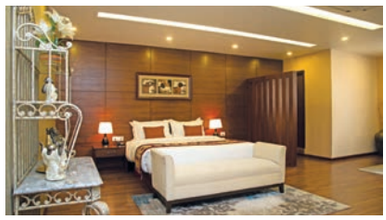

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Lumbini

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Maya Devi temple in Lumbini

History/Culture

Beyond Buddha's Birthplace

WORDS AND PHOTOS SANJIB CHAUDHARY

As we entered the Maya Devi Temple complex in Lumbini, I could hear the murmur of tourists although the area is a silence zone. At a distance, three Chinese ladies were posing, and the photographer was uttering, *'Yi, er, san',* the Chinese equivalent of one, two, three. A group of Sri Lankans in all whites was going round the temple in circles, while monks in their yellow and orange robes were meditating around the *peepal* tree next to the temple.

Lumbini, the birthplace of Gautam Buddha, attracts hordes of tourists from around the world, not to mention the Buddhist countries and domestic tourists. The monasteries built by different countries in the Lumbini complex take almost the whole day if you visit each one of them. However, most of the visitors miss other must-visit places of historical importance related to Buddha's life.

Tilaurakot where Buddha spent his 29 years

From Lumbini, we drove towards the west and reached Taulihawa, the administrative center of Kapilvastu district. Then, heading north, on the way to the Tilaurakot complex, we came across a museum that houses the archaeological findings excavated from the complex. We wanted to see the ruins of King Suddhodana's palace first, so we skipped the visit to the museum.

Reaching the complex, I could sense the ambience—tranquil and heavenly. Although Buddha spent his 29 years here before leaving the place in search of wisdom, you won't find many visitors here. We just came across a group of monks from Myanmar. They seemed mesmerised by the grandeur of the ruins.

At the entrance of the western gate, the remnants of a 10-feet-wide defence wall were astonishing. You can imagine how well protected the citadel was; apart from the defence wall, there used to be a 22-feet-wide moat with crocodiles. It was simply impossible for the enemies to enter the city.

Seeing the brick structures makes you imagine the grandeur of the citadel. Brick-arms to support the massive wooden doors at the western gate were found during the excavations. The remains of wooden doors had been found in the shape of charred wood, with large number of flat iron pieces and long iron nails.

As we moved further, we came across the remnants of King Suddhodana's palace. You can see the compartments that once housed the chambers of King Suddhodana, Maya Devi, and young Siddhartha. During the excavations, beads, bangles, potteries, and other antiquities were unearthed from this complex. They are housed in the nearby museum.

To the north of the complex lies the famous Samai Mai Temple, where devotees offer elephants statues once their vows are fulfilled. To the east of the temple is a pond that needs restoration. The staffer told us that King Suddhodana

Tilaurakot

and the royal family members used to take bath in that pond.

As you walk eastwards, you come across the eastern gateway, called *"Mahabhinishkraman Dwar"*. It is the gate from which Prince Siddartha left this worldly life in search of enlightenment. The gate complex contains a 19-feet-wide roadway flanked on both sides by brick bastions. During the excavations terracotta, human and animal figurines, coins, beads, seal with Brahmi inscription, etc. were found here.

If you walk a further 1200 feet north of Tilaurakot, at a place called Dhamnahawa, you will find twin stupas. The diameter of the big stupa is 52 feet, and it is 7.5 feet high from the working surface. The stupa was made in four phases, with the first phase starting during the fourth century BC. The second stupa, located at a distance of nearly 15 feet north of the big stupa has a diameter of 26 feet and was built in a single phase during the second-first century BC. These are probably two of the four stupas mentioned by Huen-Tsang as existing before the city gates. The four stupas may represent those commemoration stupas near the city gates, erected in the memory of the four events (the sight of the old man, the sick man, the dead body, and the sage), which led Prince Siddhartha to desert the worldly life.

Niglihawa, Kanakmuni Buddha's birthplace

While different traditions claim Gautam Buddha to be 7th, 25th, or 4th Buddha, I'd heard of Niglihawa, the birthplace of Kanakmuni Buddha. So, after visiting Tilaurakot, we set out for Niglihawa, which is to the north east of Tilaurakot, at a distance of about three kilometers. Reaching the site, we came across a board which states that it was the place of Kanakmuni Buddha's birthplace. The pillar laid by Ashoka is lying on the floor. Thanks to the authorities, they have at least built a shed and locked the premises to preserve it. Nearby is the pond from which the pillar was recovered.

Kudan, where Buddha met his family after attaining enlightenment

After visiting Niglihawa, we headed to Kudan, where Buddha met his family after attaining enlightenment. It is believed that Prajapati Gautami offered a yellow robe to Buddha during the meeting at this site. It is identified with Nigrodharam (Banyan Grove), the site of the monastery built by King Suddhodana.

Mahabhinishkraman Dwar

According to legend, Buddha's son Rahul entered into monkhood at this monastery. Meanwhile, some scholars identify this place with Kshemavati or Navik, the natal town of Krakuchhanda Buddha. I was astonished at the grandeur of the place, and it reminded me of the Machu Picchu of Peru. The place and ruins need further restoration and extensive marketing efforts to attract visitors.

Due to time constraints I could not visit other places nearby like Gothihawa, Araurakot, and Sagarahawa, which are located near Taulihawa. The Nirvana and Ashoka Pillar found at the Gothihawa village is identified as the Nirvana Stupa of Krakuchhanda Buddha, and believed to be the birthplace of Krakuchhanda Buddha. The old Araurakot most probably represents the old township belonging to Kanakmuni Buddha. Sagarahawa is believed to be the place where the Sakyas were massacred by King Virudhaka, the son of Prasenajita Raja of Kosala, out of revenge.

As I bid adieu to the land of Buddha, I could feel the compassion within. I'm sure you'll feel the same after visiting these sites representing the golden era of Buddha.

TheBuzz

MARKET WATCH • EVENTS • NEWS

Alliance Francaise Fête de la Musique

The 37th Annual Fête de la Musique was held in Kathmandu on Friday, June 22, 2018. Organized by the Alliance Française de Katmandou (AFK) in partnership with Tuborg, the event showcased a varied lineup of musicians and artists from multiple nationalities and performing in a wide selection of genres.

It was a real treat for music lovers to be part of this special event, and we can't really say it better than this quote from the AFK: "Launched in France in 1982, Fête de la Musique transforms the streets of Paris into the world's biggest performance stage as hundreds of people gather to celebrate the joy of music in all its varied styles. The international Music Day is based on a few principles: all kind of musician of every level and every style can participate; all concerts are free to attend." On this occasion, it was Kathmandu that felt the joy.

The Local Project's First Anniversary

It's a testament to The Local Project's warm reception and firm popularity that receiving news of their upcoming first anniversary was a surprise. Hadn't they been around a lot longer than one year? No, actually, they haven't, and they celebrated their first year anniversary on June 9, 2018 at Evoke Café and Bistro, Jhamsikhel to much cheer and participation from their happy customers and vendors. The Local Project is proud to provide space for innovative and upcoming made-in-Nepal products, many of whom have not yet, or many never, have a shopfront of their own. It's a place where every browse is more than likely to turn up something lovely and new that you've never seen before. If you've not been yet, go.

Dhukuti Open House 2018

On Sunday, June 10, 2018, Dhukuti, the multi-floored craft shop in Kupondol held their annual open house. Always a pleasure to attend, this year was no exception. There were the requisite bright new colors in the fabric sections–scarves, bedspreads, kitchen towels and more–not to mention all the great new dishware designs. Other new products include tea and coffee gift sets, in a smart case with a mug and a package of either coffee or tea–Nepali grown, of course! There were also some cute new toiletry collections. Dhukuti continues to be a great one-stop-shop destination for all the things you love, Made In Nepal.

Inheritance Exhibition

From June 19 through 28, 2018 an exhibition called Inheritance: The Traditional Stone Sculptures was held at Nepal Art Council. Organized in tandem with The Courtyard Studio, the exhibit, which was very well received, showcased a beautiful selection of stone sculptures in the traditional Newari style, by artist Chandra Shyam Dangol. Work like this is certainly a vital and not to-be-missed part of Nepal's cultural inheritance.

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Where am I?

Apple Pie and Crumble Cakes

WORDS EVANGELINE NEVE

Running errands down at the end of New Road recently, my hurried pace was brought to an abrupt halt by a wobble from the rear of my scooter that any driver is all too familiar with: a tire puncture. Never welcome at the best of times, when you're in a hurry and have places to get to and items to check off your list, this is just the sort of thing that tries my patience and puts me in a less-than-happy mood. I'm not sure what made the difference this time, but I just sighed instead of getting annoyed. When there's nothing you can do, there's nothing you can do, right? There is a little repair shop on a small *galli* between where I was and Jhochhen Tole (Freak Street), and with some effort I managed to get my crippled scooter there.

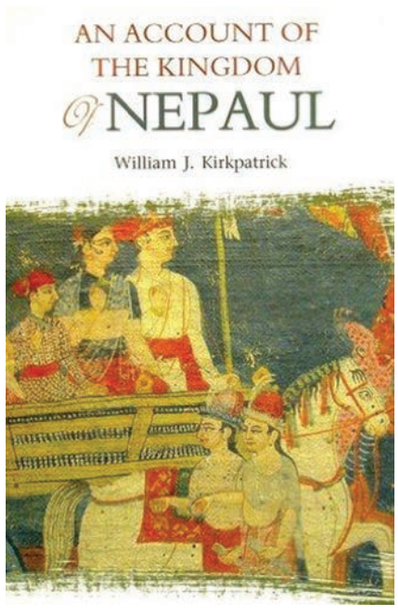
While I was waiting for my scooter to be made roadworthy again, I remembered a little cafe around the corner from where I was standing. I hadn't been there in years. Was it still even open? There was only one way to find out.

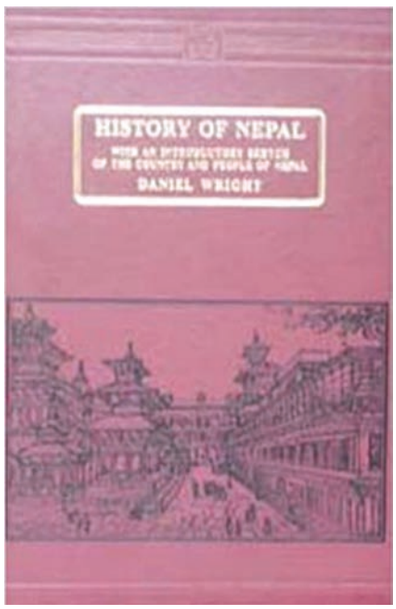
At first glance, I thought it was gone: this small alley off of Jhochhen has had a facelift, and new shops have mushroomed all around. I nearly missed the old glass window sandwiched between those shiny new facades, but there it was. The display may have been from long ago, but the pies and cakes lined up neatly on the shelves looked fresh and delicious as they ever had.

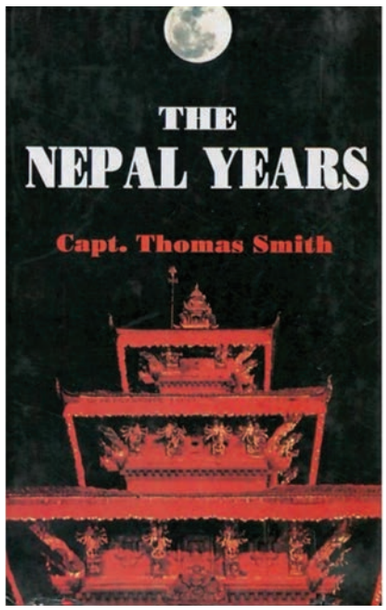
I pushed open the door and walked into the dimly-lit interior. The owner behind the counter greeted me with a smile as if I was an old friend, a regular. Looking around, I found that each table was filled with jovial faces: chatting, eating, drinking. (Upstairs, I recall, used to have seating but is currently under renovation.) After checking out the goodies on offer, I ordered a piece of apple crumble and a coffee, then took one of the few empty chairs at a table opposite a stranger to enjoy them.

The apple crumble—I could also have chosen apple pie, chocolate cake, or one of many others—was juicy, well made, and delicious. The coffee was simply produced from one of those instant Nescafe machines. Of course, these days in Kathmandu we are spoiled for choice when it comes to fresh coffee options, but somehow sipping from my little cardboard cup brought back lots of memories from years gone by, when this was the only alternative to *chiya* you could find, and that too if you were lucky.

As I enjoyed my crumble and coffee, I watched and listened to the cheerful, busy hum of the rest of the customers. Is this place fancy? No. In some corners you might say it could do with a good scrub. But, the vibe is fantastic, and the pies and cakes are second to none. Oh, and the price is right, too: for my order I was charged just 155 rupees—when's the last time you felt so good for so little money? It was enough to make me thankful for a flat tire, and also glad that there are still some of these old landmarks remaining.







Heritage Tale

Historiography of Nepal

WORDS SWOSTI KAYASTHA RAJBHANDARI

The earliest description of Nepal was written in 1811 by Sir William Kirkpatrick, *An account of the History of Nepaul,* and published in London. It was then spelt as such, a typical British pronunciation! Sir Kirkpatrick came to Nepal as an employee of the British East India Company, in 1793 to mediate disputes between Nepal and Tibet. He stayed in Nepal for two weeks and based his accounts on travel and local resource people. He also referred to the ancient *vamsawalis,* or chronicles, and it is for the first time that they were cited for reference in academic writings. The book provides a description of Nepalese culture, lifestyle, and food and eating habits with hand drawn maps.

Although Kirkpatrick is credited for the first book, a 16-page article was published a little earlier in 1789, "An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal," by Italian Capuchin Friars Giuseppe de Rovato. This article is a rare eye-witness account of the Gorkha conquest of the Kathmandu valley in 1767-69. It is believed to be the first article written by any European on King Prithvi Narayan Shah and his conquests. In 1790, this article was translated to English by Sir John Shore and published in the second volume of the Asiatic Researches from Calcutta. Giuseppe de Rovato describes the Kingdom of Nepal, its politics, and social system in a nutshell. The focus is on the three kingdoms of the valley, spelled as Cat'hmandu, Lelit Pattan, and B'hatgan. He observes with high appreciation the antiquity of these principalities and how the houses, wood doors and windows, streets, temples, and water supply system were well preserved.

The second book to be published on Nepal was *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal and the territories annexed to the dominion by the House of Gorkha* also published in the U.K., authored by FB Hamilton. Like the previous book, this book was also commissioned by the British East India Company. Hamilton stayed for 14 months and made an extensive study of the lifestyle of the Nepalis. This book records the complex caste system of Nepal, 64 *jatis,* and the untouchables and the touchable. It also mentions how the touchable can be purified with holy water if touched by untouchables. The complex geography of the country and the people are also described. Through these books, Nepal was known to the outside world, and people could imagine the life in a closed kingdom.

After a long gap of almost 30 years, in 1857, the next book on Nepal was published by Cavelagh and Captain T. Smith titled, *The Nepal Years.* This book provides a rough sketch of the government, the army, and the available resources of Nepal while under the rule of Jung Bahadur Rana. T Smith was a resident of the East India Company in

Nepal, and much of the narrations are from his five-year stay in the country. The late nineteenth century saw a new dawn in the context of historiography of Nepal. Beginning with Daniel Wright, who wrote the book, *History of Nepal,* which was sourced from an ancient Buddhist chronicle. This book is flavored with Buddhist legends and mythologies and gives the narrative from the time of the beginning of the universe. It also provides a very precise account of the Ranas, who were the ruling dynasty of Nepal at that time. Following this book was *Sketches from Nipal,* authored by HA Oldfield. Not only was Oldfield an author, but he was also a genius artist whose paintings of Nepal, particularly the Kathmandu valley, serves as references for many tangible heritages today.

In 1888, Bhagwan Lal Indraji published *23 inscriptions from Nepal.* He was the first to mention and write about the stone inscriptions, which were, and still are, considered one of the most reliable sources of history. Cecil Bendall followed suit. He visited Nepal during 1884-85 and published a book, *A journey of literary and archeological research of Nepal.* Finally, history started being written from authentic and reliable sources.

The early twentieth century saw Sylvain Levi, the first non-British scholar with an intense hunger for oriental knowledge. He had already made extensive researches of the history and culture of Tibet and India before he entered Nepal. He published three volumes of the book *Le Nepal* in 1905. He made empirical research, as well as took references from the chronicles. The interwoven traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism and its harmonious coexistence seemed to grab his attention. This subject is well narrated, which is witnessed till today. The history of Nepal from the time of Nanya Dev, the Karnat king of Simraungarh from the twelfth century till the time of Prithivi Narayan Shah, forms the main content of this book. In 2005, Dilli Raj Uprety and Bipin Adhikari translated this book to Nepali for wider readership.

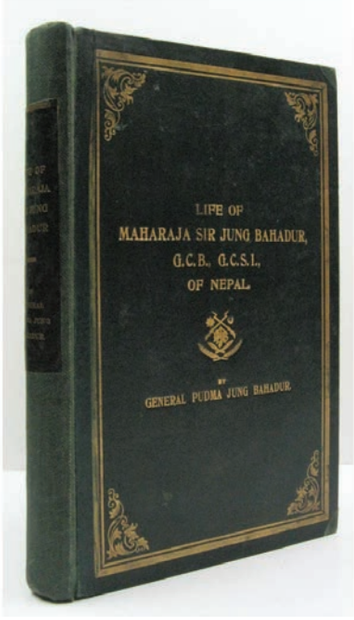
1909 saw the first Nepali writer, Padma JB Rana, the youngest son of Janga Bahadur Rana, publish *Life of Maharaj Sir Janga Bahadur Rana.* It was the first book written in English by a Nepali writer. Being a pure biography, it does not include any other literary source as references. This book is of vital importance about the lifestyle of the Ranas, as it comes from an internal source, who experienced and understood the daily life during the Rana regime.

In 1922, the first book in Nepali language was written by the Nepali author Ambika P. Upadhyaya, *Nepal ko Itihas,* published from Banaras. It opened a new chapter in the historiography of Nepal and has taken reference of many of the books mentioned earlier. A Few more important books on the history of Nepal were published in 1928. Two volumes of a well-researched and thorough work, *Nepal,* were published by Percival Landon. This book was commissioned by PM Chandra Shumsher Rana. It provides a sketch of Nepal based on the progress made by various kings, therefore, a historical political narrative. Being commissioned by Chandra Shumsher, a major part is dedicated to his times, which include the religion, customs, forestry, architecture, peace treaties, coinage, armorial bearings and flags, regalia, anthems and titles, the prime ministers of Nepal, law of descent, decorations, weights and measures, residents, envoys, inscriptions, books and articles, and flora and fauna of Nepal. The book includes 191 illustrations and five maps and two genealogical chants of the royal family and the Rana families.

In 1937, Indian historian K.P. Jaiswal made numerous researches and published a book, *Chronology and History of Nepal.* From this date till 1950 was a period devoid of any major book, only articles were published.

With the advent of democracy in Nepal, post-1950 witnessed a new chapter in the historiography of the country. The mysterious Shangri-La was now open to international media, scholars, and traders to explore the vast richness and diversity of the small country, be it culture, ethnicity, religion, lifestyle, and even topography. The books written hereafter were more analytical and critical. They were no longer filled with praises and biasness of any particular patron. They were now based on authentic literary and archaeological sources. Numerous Nepali historians and authors filled in the many gaps of Nepalese literature, specifically history.

Scholars like Bal Chandra Sharma, Surya Bikram Gyanwali, Rishikesh Shah, Naya Raj Panta, Yogi Narharinath, Mahesh Chandra Regmi, Dilli Raman



Regmi, Baburam Acharya, Bhim Bahadur Pande, Danavajra Vajracharya, J.C. Regmi, Surya Bikram Gywali, and Gyan Muni Nepal published numerous articles and books. Around 1952, the *Itihas Sanshodhan Mandal,* a council to correct the written history, was formed by a group of historians, with Gyan Mani Nepal as one of the lead initiators. They made attempts to interpret original source materials and also correct errors made by previous writers, especially Westerners. The main objective of this institution was to rewrite Nepali history "from Nepal's perspective." After 1967, the Department of Archaeology published a journal, *Ancient Nepal,* devoted to pre-history and field archaeology and history of Nepal, and is still contributing till today. Online editions are available, too.

Today, we have many Nepali organizations dedicated to research and publishing, as well as numerous local scholars, historians, writers, and the like publishing articles and books. These scholarships definitely fill in many voids by local writers. Yet Nepalese history still has many mode gaps that still need research and information. As quoted by Scottish philosopher and satirical writer Thomas Carlyle, 'History is a great dust heap'; it is never empty or ever complete!

The author is a scholar of Nepalese culture, with special interest in art & iconography. She can be reached at swostirjb@gmail.com

A long bamboo 'parri' on the Buddhi Gandaki River in 1954

Spilled Ink

Crossing the Risky 'Parris' of Old

Ever cross a 'parri'? Here's your chance, vicariously.

WORDS DON MESSERSCHMIDT

I've had fun recently perusing mountaineering books dating back over half a century looking for dangerous river walks. Wow, what travelers in Nepal's outback went up, across, around, over, and through in the early days of trekking. Some of them wore hob-nailed boots and carried clumsy wood-frame-and-canvas backpacks. But that was nothing compared to the obstacles they faced, often scared and befuddled, on trails through roaring river gorges.

Consider what climbers on the 1954 British Expedition to Baudha Himal faced while trekking along the Buddhi Gandaki River. It was there, well below the peak, that they encountered a particularly spectacular bamboo 'parri' across a cliff face. Their account describes traversing one spectacular stretch "Where the rock walls of the gorge fall vertically" blocking passage. Then, either "the track goes under water and one wades downstream; or it climbs a thousand feet to avoid the obstacle; or it is built out on catwalks of dilapidated bamboo on the walls themselves."

They describe these "incredibly gimcrack" catwalks, or gangways — known locally 'parris' — as fearful to traverse. "Miscellaneous bits of wood and bamboo splinters formed the hammock-like 'pathway', tied together with rotting pieces of twine," we read in *'The Moated Mountain'* (1955). One of the Brits noticed "with more than a little trepidation" that the knots used to bind the

'parris' were granny knots, a derisive term for reef-knots (or square-knots) tied the wrong way, making them exceptionally insecure. But then they noticed that "the material forming the footing was probably as likely to give away as the knots." In either case, "Directly beneath these shattered contraptions the grey glacier-torrent swirled along, ... mercilessly swift. If a man once fell into its smooth cold grasp there would be no hope whatever of saving him."

Where the parri was absent, the traveler faced the bare cliff and either waded "up to his neck" in the river, or would "claw his way desperately along the hanging rock," or performed an acrobatic "fly-crawl along an outward-sloping ledge overhanging the torrent."

In short, bamboo parris were treacherous. But, so were those made of wooden planks.

In 1950, H.W. 'Bill' Tilman and party crossed a particularly dangerous plank 'parri', deep down in the Marsyangdi River gorge on the Manang trail. Today's modern travelers have the option of going up and down this route by bus, jeep or motorcycle, or by walking, either on the road or by an alternate route opened by the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP). But in 1950 there were no such options, nor were there in the 1960s when I first trekked this way.

In his classic *'Nepal Himalaya'* (1952), Tilman describes the Marsyangdi River parris as wooden galleries "seldom wider than a single plank ... reached by a stone staircase or up-ended logs with footholds cut in them. When the river was low many of these cat-walks could be avoided by a little boulder-hopping in the riverbed. In the rains the traveler has no choice. He must then mind his step, for the planks are greasy with rain or with spray from the surging river."

Sometimes they had particularly frail handrails, "better left alone or at the most touched rather than grasped. The track, slimy, slippery and half overgrown after months of rain, presented the unwary with many opportunities for misadventure. One had to shuffle very quietly over the narrow planks of the 'parris' which were greasy enough to warrant the strewing of a little sand for those misguided enough to wear rubber-soled boots."

Be grateful today that most of Nepal's wild river crossings have safe modern steel bridges. In my minds eye, however, I see myself in something like an old vaudeville filmstrip close to slipping off one of those gimcrack gangways into the roaring river.

Photo from 'The Moated Mountain' by Showell Styles (1955). Read more about the 1954 Baudha Himal expedition in 'The View from Sirandanda' at page 84 in this issue of ECS Nepal. The author can be reached at don.editor@gmail.com

Vivid Varanasi For A Spiritual Getaway

It's believed that if you haven't been to Varanasi, you have not fully experienced India. As India's oldest city, you can feel the spiritual and religious aura of Varanasi. Many travelers are pulled into Varanasi's magnetism of achieving a peaceful mind and virtue, and some even come to spend their last remaining days at Varanasi to attain moksha.

Varanasi - The Spiritual Heaven of India

From hearing the constant chiming of temple bells, vendors selling flowers and prasad, the wafting fragrance of vegetarian food to seeing the colorful foreheads of people decorated with sandalwood and vermilion, all of your senses are ignited as you meander through the ghats, alleys and temples of Varanasi.

Like Kathmandu Valley, Varanasi is filled with temples in every ghat and corner. It's said that even with a bag full of rice, a person will not be able to offer every rice grain to all the temple deities. The number of temples in Varanasi seems like its endless, just like its ghats. One of the first temples to visit when in Varanasi is the Kal Bhairav Temple. Established in 1715 A.D., there is a deep belief that Bhairav had protected the residents of Varanasi from diseases, ailments and other elements that gave them fear. Further along the ghats is a temple like Kathmandu's Pashupatinath Temple at Lalita Ghat. The Nepali temple was established by Lalita Tripurasundari, the youngest wife of King Rana Bahadur Singh of Nepal.

Along the flowing Ganges River are the endless ghats of Varanasi. It's at these ghats that you appreciate the devotion of the devout Hindu. It is important for pilgrims to take a bath at Assi Ghat before worshiping Lord Shiva. To experience the renowned Ganga Aarti, make your way to Dashashwamedh Ghat. Manikarnika Ghat is also called the burning ghat as cremations happen daily. It is believed that whenever a body is cremated at this ghat, the person will get a seat in heaven - which is a promise Lord Shiva made to Lord Vishnu. This is why there is a tradition for people to come here to cremate their loved ones.

Another important temple to visit is the Kashi Vishwanath Temple. Dedicated to Lord Shiva's Vishveswara (Lord of the Universe) manifestation, the temple was built during the 1770s by Ahalya Bai. Its towers were plated using 800 kilograms of gold, hence it's also called the Golden Temple. As it is one of the twelve jyotrilinga, it is the holiest of Shiva Temples. Special aartis at the temple start from 3 am in the morning to 11 pm at night. For Hindu Nepalis, it is of great importance to visit Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi due to its spiritual link with Pashupatinath Temple. According to Hindu belief, Pashupatinath Temple is the "head" of Lord Shiva, while Kashi Vishwanath Temple is his "body". The true vision of Lord Shiva is realized only after worshiping both temples.

Varanasi is a vegetarians' food paradise. A typical breakfast consists of either puris or kachodis served with sabzi as you sweeten your palate with hot jalebis. After walking around, you can take a rest by trying its famous lassi. The lassis in Varanasi are hand churned by mixing yoghurt, milk, sugar and saffron. Like the song goes, *"Khaike paan Banaaras vaalaa...Khul jaaye band akal kaa taalaa"*- so do try the paan in Varanasi. A food souvenir to bring back from Varanasi are its rich and creamy sweets like Laal Peda and Tiranga Barfi.

Sarnath & Bodh Gaya - On Buddha's Trail

The teachings of Lord Buddha have made such a great impact on his followers that many have followed his journey towards attaining nirvana. Some important places of note that Lord Buddha has been to are Bodh Gaya, Sarnath and Kushinagar. Located 10 km from Varanasi, Sarnath is a place of historical and religious significance. It is where Lord Buddha preached his first sermon in the gardens. The 34 meter tall Dhamekh Stupa is believed to mark the spot where he gave his first sermon. Bodh Gaya marks the spot where, as a young man, he went through the most wonderful transformation. Sitting underneath a Bodhi Tree, Siddhartha Gautam meditated for weeks, attained enlightenment and became Lord Buddha. The ambiance at Bodh Gaya is serene and peaceful. You can see people engaged in meditation, their faces filled with joy and happiness as if they had no worries in their life.

If you are ready to go on a spiritual and illuminating journey to Varanasi, Buddha Air has two flights weekly, every Monday and Friday. From July - August 2018, Buddha Air will be offering up to 30% discounts on airfare from Kathmandu to Varanasi.

If you are ready to go on a spiritual and illuminating journey to Varanasi, Buddha Air has two flights weekly, every Monday and Friday

They've also made the perfect pilgrimage packages to places like Varanasi, Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, Gaya, Allahabad and Ayodhya. For more information, please email **holidays@buddhaair.com** or **call 01 5551218, 01 5554084 and 01 5521015** ext 119. **Toll Free:** 1660-01-38000

BHOJAN GRIHA

Bhojan: indulgent feast of food. Griha: not only home or a house, but the nation itself, a feast and celebration on, in, for, about: Nepali. True to its word this hidden treasure provides degustation styled experiences complimented by dance from various cultures and class service. This spectacle of cultural rejuvenation is perfect for tourists, those returning from abroad or any group approximately (200 pax) sourcing a classy meeting over dinner. Located just off Dilli Bazaar, the 21st century version has ambient preservation to the original building; an impeccably restored mini-palace; high ceilinged halls echo the Rana, Shah and Malla dynasties, as it once homed an influential priest, Badha Guruju. No plastic nor overtly Western presence besides small adjustments in washrooms and a stocked drinking space.

Once seated there's a feeling of royalty and exoticism; on the floor, but with a backrest. Immediately *anti* (brass snouted vessel) splashes organic raksi (local alcohol) into your tiny *pyala* (brass cup) by an expert hand from high above. The platform for conversing, a cheers and nibbles is perfect. Tapas-like morsel sized cuisines from gundruk to popped corn, to seasoned potatoes, all fresh vegetables delivered at 8 am each morning from organic farms to the store downstairs.

Within the walls of Bhojan Griha, all of Nepal is showcased in a single evening.

- *Set in a century old building.*
- *Previously owned by royal priest*
- *Organic foods and ambiance, reflecting Nepali culture.*
- *Well preserved by owner Bharat Basnet to showcase its historical elements.*

Address: Dilibazaar, Kathmandu
Phone No: 01-4416423, 01-4411603, 01-4420169
Contact Person: Rajib Basnet (9851047770)
Email: bhojan@wlink.com.np
Webiste: www.bhojangriha.com

Waiters seamlessly clear and set fresh momos as the band starts a slow trance over the room, jeers from the Sarangi player accompany the vedic accordion recitals. The floor saunters and is graced by two women dancing in Newari garments with measured elegance to stony rhythm. Followed up by a flirtatious young couple in a playful presentation of the Gurung's heritage dance.

The performances are engaging, but don't overpower conversations As elaborate Thakali takes the table Bahun & Chhetri dance to dimmed lights and candles illuminate a festive feeling of Tihar. Plates filled one dish after the other; sauteed mushroom drizzled in a rich garlic stocky sauce, fish battered to a surprising quality, pickled sauce, seasonal cauliflower curried with peas and carrots in a sweet, warm blend. Topped off with staple Dal and Bhat sided with gravied boneless chicken. Meal set, lights up, action. Tamangis dance a playful and upbeat number which crescendos to roars from the audience as they feast. As a rice pudding is served up in goblet I sense the performance is coming to a close, just as one starts to read unrushed toward the end of a descent novel, we try soak it in, slowly.

With deserts; Maithili adorned topped with candles, fire gestures between grace and charisma. Followed by the curtain performance of the Tharus who waltz the dining into closure.

Viva l'Italia

Experience Italy at PIANO B

Entering PIANO B you can right away sense the presence of an authentic Italian kitchen. With the walls decked with wine racks and a huge fridge full of cheese and imported cold cuts, this small restaurant makes you feel you are somewhere in Italy. The place is warm and welcoming with its contemporary design, simple yet unique.

Behind the restaurant there is PIANO B&B, a bed-and-breakfast that offers three rooms for people looking for accommodation, short and long term—the building looks like a normal house from the outside, but when I entered a room, it was no less than a high-standard starred hotel room - attractively furnished, well decorated and well maintained.

Established in 2014, Gianantonio Candiani (the owner) started from a small stall in the farmers' market. Serving take-out salad and pasta at first, his customers liked it and encouraged him to start his own restaurant. It is by popular demand that he established PIANO B. You won't find Nepali food in here, it's pure Italian cuisine and it's all about the authenticity of recipes and their execution in the kitchen. So, if you are looking to try something new or want to try genuine Italian food, PIANO B is the place.

When thinking of a place to get authentic international

cuisine, we usually picture a fancy restaurant and feel the need to dress a certain way and behave in a certain manner. But in PIANO B, everything is light and casual. Gianantonio says "People think my place is a very fancy one, but it's more like your regular restaurant. You can just drop in for some prosecco after work or you can celebrate your birthday with pizza and beers, it's easy."

A glass or two of wine, good food and some quality jazz music all mingled together in PIANO B will be sure to make your evening a delightful one.

With the increasing popularity of his food, patrons have requested further branches of PIANO B, but he only wants to focus on one venture and take it to the top. Gianantonio puts great emphasis on the quality of ingredients used in the kitchen, always striving to provide you the best service. And yes, the place does live up to the hype, with quality products and stellar service. For those who are looking for a comfortable place to stay and some authentic Italian experience, PIANO B and its bed-and-breakfast has the best of both in store for you.

Piano B And Piano B&B
In Front Of DFID - Near Alka Hospital 2 - Bhanimandal - Lalitpur

Opening Time: Monday To Saturday - 12 Noon To 10 Pm
Tel: +977 01 5000641, +977 9813449587
Email: pianob@pastapur.com
Website: www.pastapur.com

FURNITURE LAND

Furniture Land Store Pvt. Ltd

www.furnitureland.com.np

"We strive to provide our customers with a wide selection of furniture and household decorative items that are well designed, functional, practical, comfortable and have best value for money."

Furniture Land is proud of being the largest furniture showroom in Nepal. With four showrooms and two warehouses we have been supplying furniture to the Nepalese market since 2001. We aim to deliver superior quality products while maintaining an excellent level of customer satisfaction. Our current countries of import are Thailand, America, India, China, Vietnam and Malaysia. In addition, we accept custom orders to complement our products and also cater to small and large-scale projects. We strive to maintain a large stock of furniture so our supply can match the demands of our customers promptly. We strongly believe that customer satisfaction is of utmost importance so we train our staff to provide the same through long-term commitment, social-media updates, free delivery and professional advice.

AYURVEDA HEALTH HOME

Ayurveda Health Home Pvt.Ltd. a Nepal-German joint venture organization is the pioneering Pancakarma center in the country providing Ayurveda services more than 2 decades. People from more than 120 countries have received Ayurveda services in this center. The main objective of this centre is to provide promotive, preventive and curative Ayurveda health services. AHH is providing classical Pancakarmas, allied Pancakarmas programs, life style counseling and consultations along with Ayurveda meals or diet, yoga as a part of the treatments. Though centers are located in the city in Kathmandu and Pokhara are having silence serene guest houses. Dr. Rishi Ram Koirala, M.D. (Ay) (Medical Director), Mr. Badri Koirala (Managing Director) from Nepal and Ms. Marlies Foerster (Director) from Germany are the founders of Ayurveda Health Home.

AHH stands for its quality and having worldwide reputation for highly qualified doctors, paramedics, therapists, and kitchen crew and management team. Health in Ayurveda is four dimensional physical, sensorial, mental and spiritual and AHH understands and delivers services in all level. Healing is re-awakening of inner balance and harmony and giving therapies with this subtle wisdom, balanced of professionalism, love and care is important which is also phrased as awakening of self-love in this center. Dr. Koirala symbolizes is an Ayurveda physician, scientist, policy maker, adviser and orator and took responsibilities as chairperson, director, advisor in national and international organizations. He is also experts of Intellectual property rights and medicinal plants. So, he and his brother or Managing Director Badri Koirala's rigorous training mentoring, and guidance for AHH team has proven its quality on treatment and other operational level. Few words of AHH guest: "One month ago, I arrived like a little bird, too exhausted and unable to fly. Now as I depart, feeling peaceful, clear and revitalized able to soar to new heights, I feel I have taken a new birth and can feel the transformation within me. Ayurveda Health Home has provided wonderful heaven for healing my deep pain.", says Qi.

Pancakarma-

'Supports natural detox and rejuvenation'

In our everyday life, we often have a deranged lifestyle and food habit tangling up between a hectic schedule of a busy work and maintaining a social or professional life with high stress, excess or inadequate sleep, lack of routine, inadequate exercise, repressed or unresolved emotions, improper food combination, fried foods, highly processed or sugary foods. These all causes accumulation of toxins in our system on different level which is called 'Ama' in Ayurveda. The physiological expression of Ama toxins can cause digestive disorders or mal functions like Irregular appetite, bloated or sense of heaviness in the abdomen, constipation or loose motions etc. Mentally can feel lack of clarity and energy, heaviness and lethargy unenthusiastic feeling, disturbed sleep.

Generally one can experience generalized body, muscles and joint pain or mostly dull skin and lusterless with blemishes, acne etc.

'Panchakarma is an Ayurvedic detoxification of body, senses, mind and soul. It also strengthens the immune system to restore health, well-being and beauty. It is a collection of therapies that are designed by doctors' consultation for individual based on the Ayurvedic constitution type (Prakriti), imbalances, Ama toxins, age, immune status, health conditions & many other factors. Depending on an individual's health condition one, two or more therapies are prescribed.

Currently AHH is providing its services from two different location i.e. Kathmandu center which is located in Dhapasai (near Shahanshah Hotel) and Pokhara which is located in Udaya Marga, Dihiko Patan. The dreams of AHH is coming true by upcoming new center located in JITPUR PHEDI, TARAKESHWOR (10 kilometer distance from present Kathmandu center or Thamel going to be operate in mid 2019) which is surrounded by forest and organic garden far from hustle and bustle of city life. Ayurveda Health Home is no doubtly your wellness partner from generations which is touching human life from various prospective of health and beauty.

Our services includes

- Lifestyle counseling- to enhance natural and healthy life,
- Therapies to revel executive stress to promote efficiency and quality,
- Traumas like – physical, , sensual, mental and spiritual healing, recreation and rehabilitation
- Varieties of Ayurvedic therapies and Panca-Karma program (with 57 different therapies ranging from 30 minutes to 60 days.)
- Beauty package for enhancing beautiful self with the touch of Ayurveda
- We cure different diseases and disorders

If you want to improve your health or beauty or any doubt about your health please be sure to consult an Ayurvedic Practitioner and Spiritual healer Dr. Rishi Ram Koirala and his team. ''Act before it's too late and enjoy Ayurvedic lifestyle in Holy land of Ayurveda."

Ayurveda Health Home Pvt. Ltd.

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Change is Opportunity

The ACE Hotels group, Nepal's leading hospitality brand, stands where they are by adapting to local realities. Established in 1963, it has an unforgettable legacy.

Sunrise view from Club Himalaya, Nagarkot

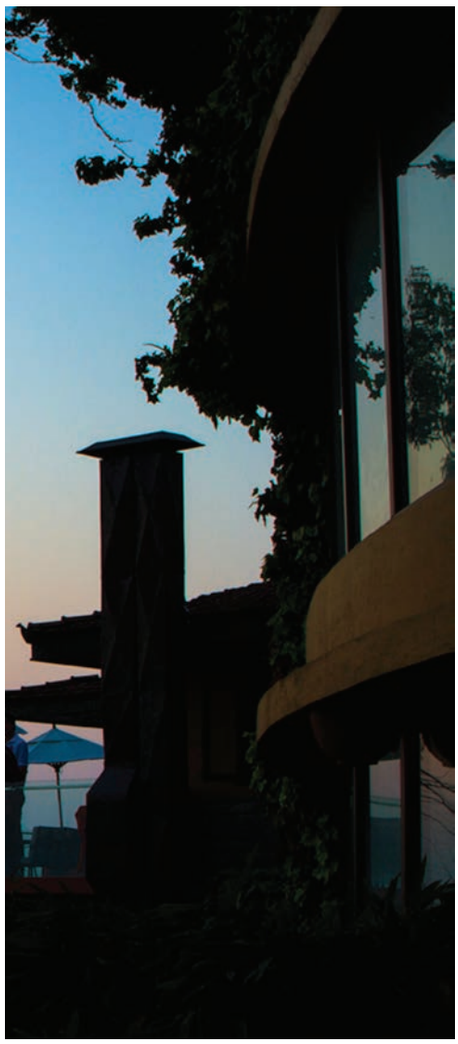
"Change is Opportunity" is a notion that Yogendra Sakya, the Chairperson of the ACE Hotels, has taken to heart and will probably title his eventual autobiography. The ACE Hotels was established by Yogendra Sakya's father, the late Basanta Bahadur Sakya, and this philosophy was part of his son's inheritance.

The common occupation of most Sakyas, and this family's as well, had been gold-smithing - the traditional Sun Sahus of Kathmandu. Unfortunately, at a young age, Basanta Sakya became color-blind, a condition fatal to his work. Having to change his occupation, he decided to build a guesthouse, adjoining the Royal Palace. This area was then known as "Lodging Path", as it provided accommodation to embassies and diplomats who resided close to the palace, and etymologically evolved to the "Lazimpat" we know of today. Having firmly rerouted his occupation, Basanta Sakya also sent his son to study Hospitality in India, who upon his return joined the new family business with his wife who also graduated from the same institute in India. Many years later in 2010, Yogendra Sakya's children, Rahul Sakya and Parmita Sakya Shrestha graduated from their studies and also joined this family business.

The ACE Hotels, this family-owned business has now been operating for 40 years. The name "ACE" was se-

Club Himalaya initially established on a barren hill

The old Ambassador Hotel



The Ambassador Suite

The Diplomat

lected as it stood for attention, comfort and economy – values that the Group espouses. The Group started with the Hotel Ambassador but now expands to several properties, evolving into a trusted brand that provides guests with comfortable accommodation, exceptional service and great value, putting the customer at the center of its every endeavor. ACE believes in embracing change, while celebrating tradition – guided by the principle of Atithi Devo Bhava (Guests are a manifestation of God). ACE's portfolio of hotels makes the brand unique for its ability to offer guests the comforts they seek, on a budget of their choice. Some illustrious and unique properties of the brand are the Hotel Ambassador in Lazimpat and Club Himalaya in Nagarkot, both of which have adapted to local realities over time. Other properties of ACE Hotels are Marcopolo Business Hotel in Kamaladi and Chhauni Apartment in Chhauni.

Residential bungalow to an iconic hotel

The late Basanta Sakya had referred to the land where the Hotel Ambassador stands, then heavily forested, as a 'diamond' - he saw an opportunity where others hadn't. At the time, the only other inhabitants of the area had been the British and Indian embassies and some bureaucratic buildings. The initial endeavor was to start a residential bungalow, and was quickly converted to a 10-room guesthouse due to the growing popularity, and further expanded into a 40-room hotel.

Expansions were ironically predicated by the need to dismantle it.

In 1961, Queen Elizabeth visited Nepal for the first time. King Mahendra reigned, and wanted her chauffeured from Sheetal Niwas in Maharajgunj to the British Embassy in his Chevrolet Impala. The hotel's premises prevented the vehicle from making the sharp turn, and the property was contracted to accommodate the royal transport. Since the property was to be affected, the opportunity was taken to

Rahul Sakya
Director (ACE Hotels)

turn the 10-room bungalow into 40-room hotel.

25 years later in 1986, during King Birendra's reign, the English sovereign was to visit a second-time. The King opted for a much more elaborate alternative – a six-horse drawn carriage. Once again, the Hotel Ambassador ceded part of its land.

Even as a Republic, the cause of transportation required the Hotel Ambassador to demolish part of the building during the road expansion drive of 2013. This time, after 36 years of operation, the family took the opportunity to demolish the entire structure and rebuild into the phoenix that stands tall today in the resulting triangular property.

Whether due to royal visits or road expansion, the Hotel Ambassador has been physically shaped by the history of the city. Rather than these retractions diminishing the Ambassador's strength, each contraction was taken by ACE as an opportunity to climb higher, retaining its unforgettable legacy.

Creating Nagarkot

Just as Basanta Sakya saw a 'diamond' in the Lodging Path, his son saw one in Nagarkot, then just a hill with a view. A village at the time, with no road or electricity, Yogendra Sakya saw potential on this hilltop. He started by building the Tea House, a restaurant famous for being featured in advertisements of the 1990's.

While the Tea House was operating, Yogendra Sakya built Club Himalaya, which came into operation in 1996, and like bees to honey, the hospitality business proliferated across the entire danda. Nagarkot has become the go-to place for Nepalis to visit on holidays, and for international guests to see the majestic mountains, especially sunrise and sunset, so close to the Valley.

Creating a tourist destination, while a challenge, was considered an opportunity

Bar Indrawati, Club Himalaya

Luxury at 7,200 ft

The Ambassador Hotel

by Yogendra Sakya – it is difficult to imagine how one entrepreneur has shaped the history of tourism, building a hotel where there were none others. Club Himalaya initially started with 44 rooms and has now expanded to 70. The influx of tourists to Nagarkot has generated employment for the local Kavrelis and Bhaktapuris (half of Nagarkot is technically located Kavrepalanchok and half in Bhaktapur), almost 120 of whom are employed by Club Himalaya.

Just as these two generations have seen opportunities where others haven't, both Rahul and Parmita have been working ceaselessly in the family business. New projects are on the pipeline – Pumdikot in Pokhara and the Hub in Lumbini – clearly the family might make a change from the hospitality business as well. It appears that they too have inherited this philosophy, however, the titles of their autobiographies is still uncertain.

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Lumbini Heritage Home— The Patan Insider Experience

Lumbini Heritage Home bed & breakfast is the kind of place that you probably wouldn't find if you didn't know it was there. This, however, is a good thing. Tucked away in Nag Bahal, behind the Golden Temple and just a few minutes' walk from Patan Durbar Square, it puts you right in the heart of the old city.

The house that Lumbini Heritage Home is in is over 100 years old, the ancestral home of a Shakya family, and is a sort of mixed Malla-Newari style architecture. It has been lovingly restored and also updated by the b&b's owner, Aman Pariyar. His passion is infectious, as is his belief in the project and the potential of the area to be a hub for tourists who are looking for a place to stay that will truly give them the feeling of being not just anyplace, but in the real heart of the Kathmandu Valley, in Nepal.

Aman Pariyar
Proprietor

Each room looks like the sort of place you'd love to stay in–they are bright, open and airy, and many of them overlook the large square of Nag Bahal, which is spacious and green. From these windows you can sit and watch daily life unfold in this hidden corner of traditional Patan. Everywhere in the rooms there are clever touches that accentuate local culture: the red and black of the curtains, the brass sinks in the bathrooms, and the bedroom doors themselves, old authentic doors that Aman bought when people were

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rebuilding their homes post-earthquake and no longer wanted them.

On the roof there's an even better view–the entire neighborhood is spread out in front of you, and again that feeling peacefulness and yet still being part of everything that's going on in the community around. Lumbini Heritage Home opened in November 2017, so it's continuing to evolve and upgrade. The rooftop will be a central theme, particularly for the local cooking classes they've begun holding, which are already a big hit. Another activity is an 'alternative or hidden Patan walk,' taking visitors to places in the area not covered by the standard guidebooks. Both the walks and cooking classes are open to all, not just guests at the b&b. Within the coming months, there'll also be steam baths and traditional massages, sure to be a hit with trekkers coming back achy and in need of pain relief.

There's so much to see and do in Patan, and staying here will place you right in the middle of it. A charming place with friendly and enthusiastic staff, Lumbini Heritage Home is for the discerning traveler who wants to immerse themselves in the local culture.

Our Booking Partners

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Nagbahal-16, 5 minute walking distance from Patan Durbar Square, Lalitpur 44700, Nepal
Tel: 01-5547257, 984-0466686
: lumbiniheritagehome
: facebook.com/lumbiniheritagehome

Take a break with Rural Heritage

A boutique heritage hospitality settlements, **The Famous Farm** sits on the lap of a hill situated just above the Nuwakot Durbar, a historic site at the elevation of 900m in the warm heart of these middle hills in Nuwakot Bazaar. The Farm's buildings stand on a broad grassy terrace of trees and shrubs and flowers with paddocks and a small stable and a barn at the far end. Three traditional buildings are clustered around a couple of courtyards on a ridge. Famous Farm Little Heritage is the vision and artistic work created from the shell of a Newari manor house once inhabited by the commander of the nearby army garrison. It's the perfect place for an authentic rural experience and all the charms of Nepal's middle hills. It offers a unique blend of ancient and modern amenities without compromising on comfort. There are views over Nuwakot and the lawns surrounded by flowering plants are perfect for relaxing with a drink and watching the sun set over the hills. These are chaotically disarranged yet beautiful fold of the Himalayas. All meals are served in the courtyard–a Nepali thali on a traditional metal plate or western dishes on request. During the monsoon and on colder winter nights the dining room provides a cozy inside atmosphere. The Famous Farm's 14 guest rooms are all different, small but with heaps of character and charm. Wi-fi connection and mobile phone reception are both limited but this adds to the experience of 'being away from it all' and recharging point is available to ensure that your camera is always up and running to capture the views and scenes of local life.

The Farm's eight steep terraces are filled with fresh grown vegetables and fruits which are used in the kitchen and a menagerie of small animals and birds as well as

dogs. Famous Farm is ideal for relaxing stays of at least two nights.

The Old Inn, Bandipur lies on the queen of hills' geographically blessed central location, it is called the "warm heart of Nepal." The well traveled routes between Kathmandu, Pokhara and Chitwan share the valleys below the beautiful heritage town of Bandipur. The views are across the south and north, one direction descending folds of foothills draped in greenish mist. In the other direction, the landscape is of the Himalayan range and Tibet beyond. All four seasons provides ambient climate at Bandipur Old Inn, the best place for escaping from the crowded dusty valley to a place of spectacular peace and serenity. The Old Inn lies in the historic heart of traffic-free Bandipur Bazaar, in a traditional Newari townhouse. The main building has a spectacular view of the mountains with an open courtyard and a wooden balustrade where the east wing overlook the traditional Bazzar. There is also a spacious terrace at ground level and steep descending gardens where you can enjoy delicious organic Nepali food and classic western breakfast as per choice. There is hiking spot, Siddha Cave, halfway down the escarpment. Reached by a steep path, it takes about one hour from the Old Inn. The Old Inn's exquisite Himalayan views and secret garden will make you to fall in love with this little guest house.

The Trishuli Centre Foot-trails from the north touch to cross the river by the busy 160m trail-bridge to reach the road-head of this colorful little bazaar. Less than 80 km west of Kathmandu along the Prithivi Highway enroute to Pokhara lies a small village poised 30m above a sharp bend in the Trishuli River. There you'll find a wild garden where 50 or more aerial roots nurture a huge tree of legendary age. Visitors are awe-struck by its gigantic yet gentle size, its absolute beauty and its influential karma. The riverside ambiance and the facilities of The Trisuli Centre with its comfortable beds in the spacious tents, delicious food and great atmosphere all combine to produce a great experience close to nature.

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Everest Miracle- Ensuring miraculous journeys

Everest Miracle was incorporated as Private Limited Company in the year 2008. Initially the company was established to deal with inbound tour packages which later included working on ticketing. With a decade long history of hard work and adherence to ethics and integrity, the company has emerged as one of the leading travel companies in Nepal. Everest Miracle was named in respect of Rtd. Col. Pilot Madan Bahadur KC, who rescued two badly injured American citizens from Mount Everest, flying his helicopter and exceeding altitude limits. It was a world record at that time; Inspired by this event the company was named as Everest Miracle.

Actually it was Miracle at Mount Everest at that time, which inspired two partners who were influenced by each other's outgoing personalities, ethical values and experiences in the tourism sector, Bharat Jung Pandey and Deepak

Bharat Jung Pandey and Deepak Kumar Chaulagai

"Travel is an integral part of our life. It enhances globalization; we get to exchange ideas, feelings, cultures and technologies, which help us all to evolve and broaden our horizons." - Bharat Jung Pandey, Director Operations, Everest Miracle Travels

Kumar Chaulagai, to lead and bring this company to this height today. The company has created a niche in the travel market that has given them significant standing among their trade colleagues and clients. They recognize travelling as an experience in itself; hence it should be easy and hassle free, and therefore both partners are seriously dedicated towards it.

Everest Miracle has regular customers from India, Europe, the Middle East, Far East Asia and the Americas, and deals with both corporate and leisure travelers. Despite being hit by the major earthquake of April 2015, the company has now regained its original pace and is growing constantly. The hard work and dedication of the company in shown in their handling "Extreme Treks" series with Ryan Pyle, who successfully filmed their documentary at Upper Mustang in Nepal and which aired on the National Geographic Channel in Europe. This is not merely a television documentary but is promoting Nepal and the Forbidden Kingdom of Mustang globally.

But their best selling destinations include world heritage sites at Kathmandu Valley such as Three Durbar Squares, Boudha, Pashupatinath Temple, and nature's paradise Pokhara and peace prevailing center of the world Lumbini.

The partners have a common ground–to provide employment to Nepali youth and help the country generate revenue. They have over 15 members employed directly in their office. Their business impacts several sectors related with tourism

"Partnership is the key to our company's success," says Pandey. He feels that they complement each other, helping the other one out whenever one of them lacks something. Each other's strong bonding, dedication and sincere efforts are the key features that have been taking the venture to newer heights every year.

They have recently set up an office in Pokhara too, for the convenience of clients at Pokhara. This has made it easier for companies and guests from Pokhara to avail of the company's services promptly and precisely from Pokhara without having to come to Kathmandu.

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Authentic American
Made in Nepal

PULLED PORK BURGER & HONEY MUSTARD SALAD

Starting off as a meat processing company and growing to a household name in restaurants, Flat Iron Grill has its flagship café at Hotel Ambassador, Lazimpat, and a branch café at Mandala Street, Thamel. The restaurant is all about American food, but with local ingredients. Among numerous restaurants that serve a variety of cuisines and offer fancy dining, very few can claim to provide you with the authentic American taste, complimented with quality and quantity! Yes, their menu is simple; mostly focusing on a variety of soups, salads, sandwiches and burgers; but that's what gives them the edge. Lately, their Buckeye, Bearclaw and especially their Cheesecake, have also become popular dessert items.

A fast-casual eatery that aims to be popular mostly among the young foodie generation of today, the restaurant is the proud producer of its own ingredients. Everything that goes into their tempting menu is an in-house product–from the meat to the bread and

the dressings. From curing and smoking the meat to baking the breads and making the ingredients for their products, everything happens in their own Satellite Kitchen at Kaldhara. With products that make it to the Farmer's Markets (Le Sherpa, Maharajgunj on Saturdays and Yellow House, Sanepa on Sundays) and to the kitchens of many other local restaurants, they're also cracking the stereotype about fast food being unhealthy. Prior to the opening of the restaurants, almost a year was spent in research and development to maintain the quality standard of the meat sold. The meats (Pork, Chicken, and Mutton) are processed i.e cured and smoked to ensure its tenderness and edibility. Likewise, their soups are made as per seasonal vegetables in their satellite kitchen and organic lettuces are used for the salads they serve with their own dressings. Since inception, Flat Iron Grill has been known for consistency and stringent quality control in all its products.

The restaurants are popular among expats, corporates and foodies. They are great places to get in and get out of - meaning fast service with a filling meal. The locations at Hotel Ambassador and Thamel provide venues for a get-together or a quick meal. They also offer delivery via Foodmandu service.

CAPPACCINO, BEARCLAW & BUCK EYE

CLASSIC CLUB SANDWICH

PUMPKIN SOUP & HIMALAYAN REUBEN

Flat Iron Grill

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Main Kitchen, Kaldhara	01-4260099

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