
Trans - Himalayan Aid Society

Fall Newsletter

September 2001

CIDA Soul Searching

Under the guidance of Minister Maria Minna, CIDA is taking a good look at its work, to ensure that Canadians give the best value per dollar to overseas development. Canada's aid programs have long been considered an excellent example of carefully managed, humanitarian and timely help to poorer countries. But problems exist. Not the least are the huge cutbacks in government spending. There are more natural and man-made disasters each year. Canada's aid is spread thin over a vast number of countries.

The document, "Strengthening Aid Effectiveness", outlines these proposed changes and can be found at www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/aideffectiveness. Please read it and send in your comments, as members of TRAS. TRAS Directors will be attending a meeting with the Minister on September 12, to promote the work of smaller NGOs, which we feel still have a place in helping those in great need at a grass roots level. TRAS funds go direct to projects - no bribery and corruption enroute; they are administered by local



dollars have been spent and accounted for, with excellent results. We have had one - only one - entire failure, and two projects were closed when local administration wasn't able or sufficient to see the project through. The other projects have helped the Tibetans and hill people in India and Nepal improve their quality of life beyond anything that could have been imagined 39 years ago.

SHOULD CIDA CONTINUE MATCHING FUNDS FOR THE SMALL NGO? IF YOU THINK IT SHOULD, PLEASE RESPOND TO MINISTER MINNA'S QUESTIONS.



Should CIDA continue to support NGOs' work?

As the world becomes a smaller place, through trade agreements and international cooperation, it seems timely to reconsider the way Canada gives aid to the less fortunate. Minister Minna is hoping to streamline the work, cut the geographic area and perhaps concentrate Canada's efforts in certain fields, co-ordinating with other countries to produce the best long term results.

NGOs, giving managerial expertise as well as ownership to the people involved; local people do the work, earning salaries and experience; CIDA's guidelines on the environment and gender equality are closely followed, and the projects are well monitored and highly successful. Over 39 years, TRAS has undertaken 249 projects and sponsored thousands of children and old people. Several million

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LOOKING BACK by Dorothea Leach

Happier Days in Kathmandu

The recent tragic events at the Royal Court in Kathmandu, Nepal, reminded us of our close connection with the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation. The foundation of this trust took place in 1983 and one of our directors, Barry Leach, was invited to attend the very colourful inaugural ceremonies, with the King and Queen present, and also the ensuing discussions with other participants from different countries, all involved in many aspects of conservation.

The directors of TRAS were immediately very interested and enthusiastic at the prospect of getting involved in the conservation of an environmentally very sensitive area and the needs of the inhabitants. The Trust was encouraged to send us proposals for projects which would fall within our guidelines; however, it took some time for them to be properly organised and functional.

Our first commitment was the funding of a lodge-keeper training along the trekking routes. We had noticed on treks that what was offered in so-

called lodges (private homes) in the little villages was often very inadequate for the hikers and could be improved upon, which in turn would be of benefit to the owners. Latrines were either not available or in deplorable condition, and quarters where trekkers could unroll their sleeping bags often lacked a certain degree of cleanliness. Simple meals would bring an added income. This training scheme was very successful and no doubt many foreign visitors appreciate the improvements in the standards of accommodation to meet their basic needs along the popular trails.

Our most ambitious project in cooperation with the King Mahendra Trust is the Anapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP), which has been described in great detail in our Newsletter. It covers the funding of forestry schemes such as growing seedlings, of which 170,000 have been planted with a very good survival rate. Horticultural projects are equally successful with the yearly distribution of

vegetable seedlings, fruit tree saplings and community plantations of fuel and fodder trees. A certain type of rice has been introduced at an altitude where previously no rice grew. Irrigation canals have been built or existing ones improved, benefitting many families who supply the labour and maintenance. Considerable effort has been focussed on improving the lives of women by offering courses in basic health and nutrition, small income generation schemes, schooling for the children, establishment of health posts in remote villages, etc. The women in several villages have formed women's groups which are proactive in helping to improve village life. For instance, some groups have paved and stepped the previously rough mountain trails into their villages, making them much safer.

The King Mahendra Trust stands as a wonderful memorial to the enlightened idea of the late King. Our commitment to the Trust will continue for some time to come. TRAS and CIDA have begun another three year project with ACAP this year, and we might receive other proposals for schemes of equal importance to aid people in one of the poorest countries in the world.

TRAS Benefit Evening

Mark Friday, November 2, 2001, on your calendar - and come to the Vancouver Planetarium at 7.30pm for an evening with TRAS directors. There will be a magnificent slide show "TIBET - THEN AND NOW" and a handicraft sale. More information from the TRAS office. All proceeds to TRAS projects.

Spotlight on Spiti by Marion Tipple

TRAS President Marion Tipple hiked to the remote Spiti valley in northern India last year. Here is her vivid report of an incredibly successful project in a most unlikely place. For hundreds of years the Tibetan peoples of this desolate region have turned to Lhasa to help them keep their culture and religion alive. That connection has been cut by the Chinese occupation of Tibet and His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, is keen to help this "forgotten" group of Tibetans in northern India.

From the ridge, the silver ribbons of the Spiti River flowed 3000ft below. Excitedly, I scanned the opposite riverbank until my eyes rested on a small green patch in the arid landscape. Focusing, I could just make out the white dots of the Tibetan houses of the village, and suddenly I saw it – the school. The Mun Sel Ling Tibetan Children's Home School, a large white rectangular building, linked by a fine white zigzag thread to a new, indefinable, yellow dot higher on the hillside.

It had been a long trek to reach this point, 16 days over a remote high desert plateau, following the Parang chu (river) to its glacial source, climbing the glacier to cross the Parang La pass (elevation 18,350ft), to arrive, finally, in the hills of Spiti on the Indo-Tibetan border.

Last time - four years ago - I had taken a different route, not knowing that this school existed. Driving, with friends, from the old British Indian hill station of Simla, we had followed the course of the mighty Sutlej River towards its source in Tibet, to reach its confluence with the Spiti River. Crossing the foaming water on a rickety bridge, over which the bus had driven and we

had walked, we entered the narrow gorge, creeping and climbing along a track carved like a half pipe into the sheer rock face, to reach the Spiti valley.

We were headed for the 1,000th birthday celebrations of Tabo monastery, where His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, was to conduct a 3-day kalachakra ceremony. It was during the ceremony that I first learnt about the school. Sitting on the dusty ground, sheltering under the canopy in the foreigners' area to gain some relief from the merciless sun's rays, fellow travelers had said "If you are heading north, you must visit the school. A new school for Tibetan children which the Dalai Lama is to open on his way back to Manali".

Stashing this information away, it wasn't until several days later that, as we entered the small village of Rangrik, a large newly whitewashed oblong building caught our eye and we remembered the school. On the spur of the moment we decided to visit. A shining plaque, on the newly whitewashed wall, commemorated the inauguration by the Dalai Lama, July 3rd 1996, a few days earlier. We were warmly welcomed by Lama Tashi Namgyal, the principal and founder, who invited us to tour the school and share his vision of the future. The school, constructed over the past year,

was part of the educational mandate of the Rinchen Zangpo Society for Spiti development; a society formed to "lift

Spiti society out of its economic backwardness and to promote enjoyment of our peaceful Buddhist culture by young and old". 76 students were enrolled, divided between 3 classes, two kindergarten and one Class 1 (Grade 1 equivalent). Many of the children were boarded with local families as they came from distant parts of this remote valley. Lama Tashi's vision was to expand the school with the children, adding a class each year and to build boarding houses to accommodate them, run family style with housemothers. We were all deeply impressed by the dedication and commitment of Lama Tashi and his staff to the school's development and chil-



The Housemothers



The new boarding houses

dren's education and humbled that they could do so much with so little.

Returning to Vancouver, I became involved with TRAS, which I coinci-

dentally discovered was supporting the training of 5 teachers for the Spiti school. Through regular reports, I followed with interest their progress and that of 8 housemothers whom we at TRAS are currently supporting through their training. Now, four years later, I was going back.

The jeep bounced down the steep, switch-backed track, narrowly avoiding pedestrians and local tractor transport. It felt strange and somewhat unnerving to be descending the steep hillside in a vehicle after walking for so long. Plunging towards the river valley, we passed Key monastery, a spectacular hillside structure, freshly face-lifted for the recent visit of the Dalai Lama. A forest of gaily coloured prayer flags blew in the wind and across the river the yellow dot above the school transformed into a large golden Buddha. The concrete bridge, spanning the languid, summer waters of the Spiti River, brought us to Rangrik and the school. Changes were immediately obvious. Five new buildings, bordered by flowerbeds of bright pink Cosmos daisies, stood adjacent to the school building and construction of greenhouses and a new toilet block was in progress. Two women washing clothes at an outside tap greeted me and summoned Tsering Dorje, the co-founder and current resident principal, who delightedly welcomed his unexpected visitor. Over English tea and

biscuits, I learnt how much the school had developed since my last visit: the original three classes had grown to seven; the number of children from 76 to 203; and the teachers from 5 to 8, with 3 more finishing training. The five boarding houses were the temporary homes of children from the Spiti and Lahoul valleys, remote Zanzkar and nomadic families of the Chang Tang, (no man's land between Chinese-occupied Tibet and India), each ably run by a TRAS-sponsored housemother. Only one child of the original 76 had dropped out and in addition to the regular classes, a special opportunity class had been created to accommodate the gifted students. After my briefing, we toured the school so that I could see the progress for myself, visiting each classroom in turn. The main school building and the classroom layout were unchanged, three rows of four wooden desks, each accommodating two ruddy cheeked children in their maroon and blue school uniform, but the previously bare walls were now covered with a plethora of drawings and diagrams. The children who had been in Class 1 on my first visit were now in Class 5. With an amazing command of English, which they learn along with Hindi and Tibetan, they shyly but curiously quizzed me on who I was and where I had come from.

A bell sounded; lunch was ready. Scurrying to the long dark dining room, the children sat back to back in rows on the floor. Large bowls of rice and dahl bhat (lentil soup) sat ready on the kitchen counter. Expectancy filled the air as hungry stomachs growled, but first prayers needed to be offered, rippling along each row as the children chanted their Buddhist grace before the housemothers served the meal.

After lunch, with the children out to play, Tsering Dorje showed me around the boarding houses. The mud brick, two storey buildings housed 25 children each, 2 - 4 to a room. Each child had an iron bedstead furnished with the traditional warm padded coverings neatly rolled at one end and a trunk of their personal belongings by the side. The wall art reflected the eclectic tastes of children worldwide, magazine photos of their favourite stars and pictures of desired cars, interspersed with Christmas cards from home and photographs of the Dalai Lama. Each house had a large room where the housemother lived with space to accommodate any child who was sick or in need of special attention. At the entrance, one window ledge held jam jars containing 25 toothbrushes and toothpaste whilst the opposite accommodated rows of house shoes. From above, the 25ft Golden Buddha towered over the school and residences. Built as a focus for morning assembly,



Children first met in Class 1 in '96



Lunch time

which incorporates all four sects of Tibetan Buddhism, the Buddha had recently received the inaugural blessing by the Dalai Lama.

The school operates for nine months of the year, closing for the three coldest months, January to March. Central heating has not reached the Spiti valley. During the break, the children return to their families, whilst the housemothers travel to Dharamsala to continue their training which includes early childhood development and basic nursing skills. The teachers take the time to attend courses, continually upgrading their skills.

I was overwhelmed by the energy and dedication of the staff and how much they had achieved in the short space of four years. The children were thriving, happy, and excelling in the Indian State Examinations with higher than average marks. They were well cared for in comfortable, on site accommodation and during their home visits were already educating their local communities in the health and sanitation skills they had learnt at school. Predominantly funded by donations from around the world, with a small contribution from the Indian government, the school charges a nominal fee for tuition and board to those able to pay but no child is turned away for lack of funding. The teachers are a committed group who chose to work here despite earning half the salary that they might in an Indian government school.

There is still much to be done. A proper dining room with tables and chairs and a library are high priorities. More housing, teachers and housemothers are needed for the growing school population, poor children still require sponsors and the older children need computer training to be competitive in modern, high tech India.

In this remote corner of northern India, amazing progress is being made in the education, health and well being of the local population due to the vision, energy and commitment of a few dedicated individuals. At TRAS we are extremely proud of the accomplishments of our Spiti friends and look forward to continuing our support as they continue to achieve and expand their vision.

Editor's note: If you would like to help TRAS continue its support of this worthwhile project, please send donations to the TRAS office (see back page for the address) marked "SPITI SCHOOL PROJECT", or contact the TRAS office to sponsor an individual child.

39th Annual General Meeting

65 directors, members and guests attended the 39th AGM of TRAS on April 25, 2001 at the Lutheran Campus Centre in Vancouver. President Peter Roberts welcomed everyone, especially the many long-time TRAS supporters. He announced the completion of the TRAS website, and gave its definitive address (www.tras.ca). Steve O'Neill, the website creator, was introduced and thanked. TRAS enjoys a solid core of support, but it is time to recruit new members, generate new energy and capital, Peter said. Our capital is slowly declining as it continues to be spent on worthwhile projects. Government funding is harder to obtain and is considerably less than in previous years. Peter threw out a challenge to current members, our best recruiters, to introduce new members to the Society. He asked for ideas from members on what TRAS can do to improve its image, make mem-

bership more attractive and promote its projects.

Treasurer Bill Haberl continued the same theme, explaining that with lower interest rates and less government support, our capital is smaller; however, the Society is in good financial health. Future activities will include more fundraising. The unaudited statements showed assets of \$662,217.65, of which \$205,778.26 are already committed to projects. Revenues were up by \$4,730, and receipts from CIDA were \$127,663.00, compared with \$48,577.00 last year. Disbursements to projects (TRAS only and TRAS/CIDA) were satisfyingly high - \$333,923.00, compared with \$244,775.93 last year. (Audited reports are now available in the TRAS office). A motion to re-appoint Tompkins, Wozny & Co. as auditors was carried.

Sponsorship Secretary Joan Ford thanked all our loyal sponsors for their commitment. The total number of children sponsored is 267, an increase of 26 since the last AGM. Projects Director, Lynn Beck, gave an overview of TRAS projects - see list on Page 6.

The nominations for directors and officers received no additions from the floor, resulting in the following list being carried:

Patrons: Inge Woodcock,
Dorothea Leach.

President: Marion Tipple.

Vice President: Abby Fitch.

Treasurer: Bill Haberl.

Directors: Frank and Lynn Beck,
Bert and Hana Clark, Joan Ford, Daphne Hales, Jennifer Hales, Georgina Henderson, Videsh Kapoor, Maureen Minden, Graham Peat, Brian Sheffield, Peter Roberts.

Incoming President Marion Tipple thanked Peter Roberts for his work on behalf of TRAS, in particular his initia-

tion of the new brochure, the website and fundraising schemes.

There being no further business, members and guests enjoyed excellent refreshments, a most successful handicraft sale and a chance to chat with directors.

The highlight of the evening was Marion Tipple's slide show and talk about her trek in the dramatic Ladakh and Spiti areas of northern India.

The few remaining TRAS t-shirts were reduced to the give-away price of \$9.99 and sold like hot cakes! There are a VERY FEW left! They are all extra large, and make wonderful summer cover-ups or nightgowns if you are a small person and they fit just fine if you or someone you know is on the large side! Available from the TRAS office.

Project Report for 2001

Here is the annual listing of the TRAS projects which your kind donations fund, matched in many cases by CIDA.

Closed

- Appropriate Agricultural Alternatives, Nepal: Although much good work has been done for local farmers by this project, it was decided to close it early because of complete lack of administration and communication. \$89,769. TRAS/CIDA

Completed

- Lhasa Yuthok Kindergarten, Tibet. The three year project was successfully completed, (but see *Ongoing*). \$4,452. TRAS only.

- Rinchen Zangpo Society, Spiti, northern India: The housemother training has

been very successful (see Spotlight on Spiti on Page 3) \$2,216. TRAS only.

- Didila's Old People, Zadoh, Tibet: the funds have been sent; a full report will be seen in the December Newsletter. \$2,080. TRAS only.

- Institute of Buddhist Dialectics, Dharamsala: Purchase of more computers, colour printer and necessary backup equipment for computer training project. (The class sent a wonderful coloured poster, which they had designed and printed, thanking the Canadian donors.) \$13,430.00. TRAS only.

To be completed in 2001

- Department of Education Vocational Training, Dharamsala: - final 14 candidates will be finished by October, bringing total of students trained in various fields to 121. \$114,815. TRAS/CIDA

- Kullu Valley Toilets, Phase 2, Manali, northern India: 250 toilets will be built by year end. \$40,312. TRAS/CIDA

- Department of Education Training for Nurses, Dharamsala: 5 nurses will complete their training by December. \$6,909. TRAS only.

- Buddha Memorial Home, Kathmandu: 2 year vocational training for 52 students ends in September. \$41,506. TRAS/CIDA

- Lhasa Yuthok Kindergarten, Tibet: 1 year kindergarten improvements. \$5,600. TRAS only.

Ongoing Projects

- Little Flowers Creche, Dharamsala: TRAS supports a creche for 45 toddlers, the children of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile workers. \$1,500.00 per annum. TRAS only.

- Department of Education, Dharamsala: training for 7 thankga painters for 5 years. \$14,000.00. TRAS only.

- Incarnation Convent, south India: Sister Victorine's vocational training for youth ; various skills. \$9,600.00. TRAS only.

- Incarnation Convent, south India: Sister Victorine's 2001 vocational training for nurses and teachers, for 2 years. \$15,772.00. TRAS only.

- King Mahendra Trust ACAP, Nepal: a third 3 year project to extend ACAP's work to new villages, building on the success of the previous phases of this integrated rural development project. \$382,814.00. TRAS/CIDA.

- Department of Education, Dharamsala: Pre-Primary Teacher Training, Phase 2. The first group did so well, we are now training 25 more teachers for 1 year. \$49,549.00. TRAS/CIDA.

- CHIRAG, Sitla, northern India: Integrated Health and Community Welfare Project. A 3 year project, to continue helping the mothers and children in the 52 villages in the Sitla valley region. This grew out of the management planning process TRAS helped fund last year. \$261,366.00. Shared jointly by TRAS (\$43,560.00) and CIVA (Canada India Village Aid), and matched by CIDA.

TRAS Loses Valued Member

The TRAS Branch in Victoria, BC, shared with us the sad news of the death of a long-standing member last spring. Dr. Don Edwards writes "With much sorrow the Victoria Branch of TRAS must report the recent death of Mrs. Jean Christie after a long illness. Jean was one of the original founders of the Victoria TRAS branch over 30 years ago, and she served as our treasurer for most of that time. Her smile and ready humour, her always well reasoned counsel, as well as her devotion to the cause of Tibetan refugee support through the local marketing of their handicrafts, will be greatly missed by all of us in Victoria".

Sponsorship Report

by Joan Ford



Tsering Dolkar



Thinlay Palmo



Amar Singh Khataya



Lhakpa Sherpa

I would like to remind members that there is a great need to help children in the settlements in India and Nepal. Perhaps new members might consider taking up a sponsorship, as a way of helping a needy child. To meet the Principal of the Buddha Memorial School in Kathmandu, who was himself sponsored as a child by a TRAS member, and to see the wonderful work he is doing, is a tribute to the success of the TRAS sponsorship project. The cost of sponsoring a child is \$300.00 per annum (except at the Tibetan Women's Centre, where the cost is \$120.00). If you are new to the Society, membership costs \$25.00 per annum. Please contact the TRAS Office if you would like to sponsor a child.

TSERING DOLKAR - This young lady, born in 1982, is in the tenth grade at the Central School for Tibetans in Mussoorie. Her widowed mother, Sonam Dolma, works as an aya in the creche at the Tibetan Women's Centre. Tsering Dolkar has 3 older brothers and 1 older sister. She would very much like to be able to complete her schooling. \$120.00 per annum.

THINLAY PALMO - She was born in 1990, in the Tibetan Refugee Colony in Dehradun, India. Her parents escaped in the middle of the night from Lhokha province in Tibet in 1959, after it was forcibly occupied by the Chinese regime. They first took refuge in

Bhutan and later were forced to move on to India, where they were given shelter. Her father died two years ago, and her mother faces great hardship to look after her children (2 brothers and 4 sisters) since her wages from the weaving are not at all enough. A sponsorship for this little girl would be of great support for this family at the Dekyiling Tibetan Settlement.

AMAR SINGH KHATAYA - Amar Singh comes from a very poor family. He has 1 older brother and 1 older sister, who go to the village school in Dolpo, but unfortunately there is not enough money in the family to send Amar, aged 7, to school. His parents brought him to the Buddha Memorial Home to request an education, and we are looking for a sponsor so that he may stay.

LHAKPA SHERPA - He is 11 years old, and comes from Solukhumbu. His father died in 1995, leaving his mother to struggle with the rearing of 6 boys. Two are monks in India, two go to the village school, and the fifth helps his mother in the small field which she works. Although they grow potatoes and maize, it is often not enough to feed all the family. His mother therefore brought Lhakpa to the Buddhist Memorial Home in Kathmandu and begged for help.

A Warm Thank you from the Old People

Well, that truly was the last winter Didi La's old people will be cold! Thanks to the generosity of several of our members, enough funds were raised to buy a bed, mattress and thick blanket for each of the 20 old ladies at the pitiful home in Zadoh, Tibet! Didi's brother, the Rinpoche, is in Tibet at present, overseeing the construction of his medical centre, which is nearing completion. Travelling with him is a follower of his, a lady from Idaho, who has agreed to carry the funds for the old people. In Zadoh, Didi's uncle and a Tibetan lady from a local women's group have agreed to look after the project, and we will be getting a full report and photos on the return of the Rinpoche and party. The beds will be made by a local carpenter, but the mattresses may have to be ordered from Yushu, the provincial capital - Zadoh probably can't supply that many. Didi has instructed the old ladies to thank our donors by saying many prayers for them each day. Our donors should be feeling the benefit any day now!

The Old People's Fund has grown well, too, thanks to generous donors. These donations help TRAS to continue providing quarterly payments to the Old People's Homes in Mussoorie and Mundgod. The old people in these places already remember TRAS members in their prayers. Their gratitude is matched by our happiness in being to help a little.

TRAS thanks all of you who contributed to the Old People's Fund. PLEASE REMEMBER THEM WHENEVER YOU CAN.

TRANS HIMALAYAN AID SOCIETY

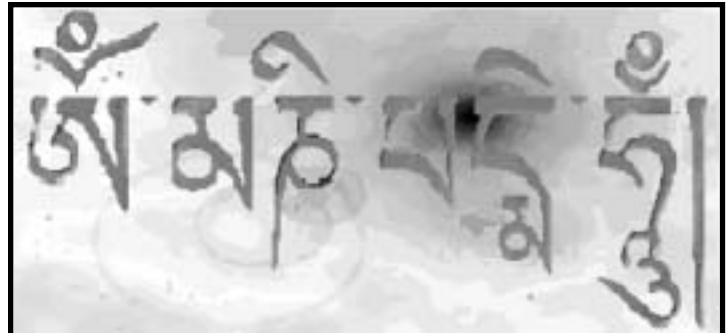
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Om Mani Padme Hum
Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus



Trans - Himalayan Aid Society (TRAS)

Yearly Membership donation (\$20) \$20
 Possible Additional Donations:
 Annual Donation of **\$300** for the “Child Development and Education Project”
 at a residential school or in a settlement _____
 Donation to the Old People’s Fund, which supports a “Self-Help Project”
 for the elderly and infirm. _____
 Donation to the general fund or other specific area of your choice. _____
TOTAL\$ _____

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