

# Travels

This issue is all about travels to Tibet and Tibet-like places. Tibet-like places? Well, they range from areas such as Mustang and Northern India to - you'll never guess this one - Williams Lake, BC.!

Our Directors were on the move last year, with **Dr. Marion Tipple** visiting Spiti, a remote, harsh area on the Indo-Tibetan plateau in July, and in the fall with **Dorothea Leach** and **Beth Whittaker** trekking through Mustang.

TRAS is lucky to have several Directors with the time and desire to explore this part of the world. From time to time, donors have wondered at the necessity of trips to India, but from experience, we can tell you they are worthwhile. Many of our Directors are experts in the field of their particular projects, be it education, health or agriculture, but even those of us who have nothing more than an inquiring mind and a desire to learn have found these inspection tours to be beneficial. Funds for inspection tours have to be built into the budgets of our CIDA projects, and we do the same for the TRAS-only projects. Sometimes the cost to TRAS is minimal if the Director was going to Asia anyway.

The fact that one of our Directors is going to visit keeps project partners on their feet and working hard. Surprise visits, on the other hand, show us the unvarnished truth (no Catherine the Great processions for us!!). The fact that we come so far to visit them encourages and pleases them, leading to a good working relationship. They are buoyed up by the fact that we care. Each of us has found problems on our trips, many of which can be resolved on the spot or shortly after we return. Sometimes, potential problems are spotted, that we can keep an eye on - saving money in the future. The "system" can be explained so much better when we are on the spot, particularly the need for accurate and timely reporting. The physical set-up can be examined and understood much better when we are there: Dorothea found that there are two small but adequate offices dealing with the environmental issues in Dharamsala. Why would we pay for a third, for the second phase of our environment project? Now we know what is available, we can work things out with our project partner, and save far more than the inspection tour cost. New project ideas surface,



which can be discussed immediately, leading to better proposals.

Two further benefits:

(1) we have to be accountable to CIDA for the public money we receive, so we need to conduct first-hand inspections to satisfy CIDA. Fair enough, when you think of the thousands of dollars CIDA gives us.

(2) we go on these trips with excitement and some trepidation (after all, travel in India is hard work, as one of our Directors said!), but we come back - every time, whatever the hardships met - with boundless enthusiasm for the work we are trying to do, and enormous respect for the people we are working with.

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So, sit back and enjoy some armchair travel!

And what of Williams Lake?? A movie is being made of Heinrich Harrer's book Seven Years in Tibet. They cannot film in Tibet, so are globetrotting looking for Tibet look-alikes. The movie director chose a lake in the coastal mountains near Williams Lake for one scene, and "our" Vancouver area Tibetans were invited to be the extras! They had a hilarious time being fitted for costumes, with the Italian dresser insisting that she knew how chubas were tied and headdresses arranged. The Tibetan ladies were in fits of laughter! Once all was ready, 16 adults and 4 children travelled to Williams Lake for the great day. Phuntsok Kakho tells us that they had a really good time. To their surprise, as they drove towards the site, it *looked* amazingly like Tibet, with a genuine stupa by the lake! Well, it looked like a genuine stupa! Brad Pitt plays Harrer, and in this scene, was teaching a Tibetan monk how to skate. A Tibetan monk from Courtenay, BC, played the monk, with "our" Tibetans supplying the fascinated audience who had never seen skates before! Phuntsok says they all chatted away in Tibetan, looking suitably surprised. The Director was really nice, and Brad Pitt most friendly - they got their picture taken with him. So if you see the film, just remember that the "genuine" Tibetan lake is really BLUFF LAKE, BC! And the Tibetan film stars are our friends!!

**Annual meeting  
April 16  
See page 7 for details**

# Sponsorship

## Joan Ford

First of all, a big thank you to sponsors for responding so well to the request for '97 funds. If you are concerned with anything in the program, please tell me.

Dorothea Leach came back from her visit to India with a number of new case histories from the Tibetan Handicraft Centre in Dehra Dun - 10

are already sponsored. The case histories of girls in the Mustang High School program have still not arrived - as soon as they are received, the program will be started.

I will be in Kathmandu at the end of March, and will visit the Buddha Memorial School, and hope to get information so that more children can be sponsored there.

**Tras T-shirts**



**Adult sizes:** medium, large and extra-large (they are roomy!)  
**Colour:** white; b/w leopard; black, red and blue border.  
**Price:**

- \$20.00 for the front design
- \$22.00 for the back desing with a front logo
- postage \$2.00

You can order them from the office.

**HARRISBOOK A SUCCESS!**  
Brian Harris's book, calendar and posters on Tibet have been a resounding success, with 50% of the profit going directly to Tibetan projects through TRAS - that's \$30,000!!

**THANK YOU, BRIAN!**

## PROJECTUPDATE

The LATEST NEWS on the two projects we are following is good and bad. The good news is that the **Development Education Project** is starting up, with an application form and criteria for joining the trip being planned.

The bad news is that hard on the heels of receipt of an excellent reply to our request for exact details of the **Computer Training Course**, and Board approval of the project as a TRAS-only venture, came the shocking news that the Director of the Institute and two students had been murdered. It is incomprehensible that anyone should wish to kill Buddhist monks at an educational institute in India, but despite their grief, the staff are determined to start the computer course, delaying its inception until June. So a Letter of Agreement, along with reporting and payment schedules will go off this week. This course will be a fitting memorial to a monk who believed fervently in education and vocational training.

# SPITI CHILDREN' S HOME SCHOOL

## Dr. Marion Tipple

Here's a case in point. Dr. Tipple was on a personal visit to India, and was particularly impressed by what this little school is trying to accomplish. Her enthusiasm led her to join TRAS on her return to Canada, and she is now a Director.

"...if you are travelling the Spiti-Lahoul road", a British Buddhist we met at Tabo Monastery's 100th birthday celebration said, "you **MUST** visit the school". The school? A recently opened school for Tibetan children to be educated in their own language, with emphasis on Tibetan tradition and culture, whilst receiving a contemporary education. Situated in Rang Rik, Spiti's largest village, further along the remote valley towards Lahoul, the Spiti Children's Home School was due to be opened by His Holiness the Dalai Lama after the Tabo celebrations.

As we approached Rang Rik a few days later, the long white Tibetan-style building gleamed in the morning sun, in stark contrast to the barren valley. As we walked up the stony drive, the sound of children's voices greeted us, a happy chorus of answers, shouted in unison to their teachers' questions. At the side of the main door, a

plaque proudly recorded the Dalai Lama's inauguration of the school on July 3, 1996.

We entered the cool, mud constructed building to be greeted warmly by Lama Tashi Namgyal, whose vision this school was, delighted to receive unexpected visitors. He proudly gave us an impromptu tour and discussed his plans for the future.

The school, constructed over the past year and opened three weeks before our visit, is 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". Following a successful pilot project in Yol, near Dharamsala, this school opened with a staff of 5 teachers and 76 pupils; two kindergarten and one Grade 1



classes, each class having a maximum of 26 students. The plan is to expand gradually, adding a new class each year to a maximum of 300 pupils. As Spiti is a remote area on the Indo-Tibetan plateau, with isolated villages spread out over a wide area and harsh winters (snow 7 months of the year), it is necessary to build accommodation for the children. At present, the children from distant homes are being boarded locally with the families of relatives or friends. Tashi Namgyal's plan is to have 10 boarding houses, each run as a "family home" with a house mother and father for these children.

A gong sounded. Suddenly, the noise of excited voices and running feet! Morning break. 76 five and six year olds in slate blue and maroon school uniforms headed from their classrooms to the sunshine outside. 15 minutes later they were back again, sitting quietly at their

classes, each class having a maximum of 26 students. The plan is to expand gradually, adding a new class each year to a maximum of 300 pupils. As Spiti is a remote area on the Indo-Tibetan plateau, with isolated villages spread out over a wide area and harsh winters (snow 7 months of the year), it is necessary to build accommodation for the children. At present, the children from distant homes are being boarded locally with the families of relatives or friends. Tashi Namgyal's plan is to have 10 boarding houses, each run as a "family home" with a house mother and father for these children.



desks. The classrooms had distinct similarities to that of mine in England many years ago; bare, with rows of wooden desks, each accommodating 2 children and a large blackboard occupying the front wall. Whilst the children waited for their teacher, I popped my head around the door. "Halloo", 26 bright eyed, ruddy faces with shy grins greeted me. To my surprise, they already had a basic knowledge of English and were presently learning the 2 times table, written on the blackboard. We became friends in no time at all, a stranger from afar and a group of happy, curious, amazingly well-disciplined Tibetan children.

There is already a long waiting list to attend the school next year. The parents pay a small fee for the education of each child in the way of commitment and although boys are sent more readily than girls, Tashi encourages the girls' attendance.

A resounding "Good bye" from the children sent us on our way. We were all very impressed with what Tashi Namgyal, a warm, friendly, sincere man who obviously cared deeply for the children and the preservation of the Tibetan culture, had achieved in such a short time.

This brief, unplanned interlude on my travels through Spiti left a deep impression on me. I was, therefore, delighted on my return to Vancouver to find that TRAS was one of the school's sponsors. Personally, I look forward to helping Lama Tashi Namgyal complete his vision and intend to maintain my link with the Spiti Children's Home School for many years to come.

## MEETING SISTER VICTORINE

### Beth Whittaker

One of the highlights of my recent trip to India was meeting Sister Victorine, TRAS' partner in the field for projects in the Mysore and Bangalore areas of southern India. TRAS' association with Sr. Victorine goes back many years (see June and Sept '96 Newsletters). As a Director, my association with her began in the early '80s with a Medical Vocational Training project, and has continued to the present. As soon as one project finished, another began and sometimes two or three were running concurrently. Most of the projects were concerned with the training of teachers or nurses in institutions of their choice. The girls were from poor families and required financial assistance for tuition, books and maintenance.



Sr. Victorine's reports have always been detailed and complete. With very few exceptions the trainees have finished their courses successfully and found work immediately. The current project for nurses training almost collapsed before it started, when the favoured training hospital changed its entry requirements, but somehow Sr. Victorine found places for all the applicants in other hospitals. Besides these projects, she also manages a sponsorship program and a School Children's Assistance program, as well as attending to her very responsible religious duties.

Unfortunately, because of lack of time, Dorothea Leach and I were unable to visit Sr. Victorine on her home ground, so arranged to meet her at a sister convent near Delhi. The children of the convent school welcomed us with jasmine garlands and a lively rendition of "Old Macdonald had a Farm"! After a brief tour of the school we found a quiet room for private conversation. Sr. Victorine proved to be a very pleasant person, cheerful, but also calm and patient. She is compassionate and totally devoted to the poor of her country. It was very satisfying to be able to discuss things freely with someone I had previously known only through letters, and to express our appreciation for her efforts.





# TREKKING INTO MUSTANG

## Dorothea Leach - Part 1

“You can’t go there — that is Mustang, forbidden territory”, we were told 17 years ago when on a trek in northern Nepal. We looked down from the trail onto a Mustang town - a visit was a intriguing thought, but at that time impossible.



The history of the Kingdom of Mustang goes back a very long time. For a while it was ruled by Tibet; then the Mongolians invaded the country, and finally the Gurkhas defeated it in 1790. Since then, Mustang has been under the sovereignty of Nepal, although the status is unique! It is an independent principality within Nepal, and sends only a token tribute to the government of Nepal. The Mustang King is a direct descendent of Gyalpo Ame Pal who founded the dynasty in the 15th century. It is a Tibetan speaking, Buddhist state, long closed to foreigners because of the embarrassment to the Nepalese

government of the presence of Kham freedom fighters, who for many years harassed the Chinese over the border in Tibet.

In 1992 the Kingdom of Lo (as the Tibetans call it) was finally opened to foreign visitors, however in a very controlled way. Only a few - and expensive - permits are issued per year, and only registered trekking companies can obtain them. An Environment Officer comes along to make sure that no cultural heritage or natural environment is destroyed, and that rules are obeyed.

Last year, Ans Muller, a former director of TRAS and a long-standing member, invited Beth Whittaker and myself to join a small group to go to Mustang. We were delighted to accept! Once one focuses on such an undertaking, a “little” side trip does not seem much of a problem, so Beth and I decided to go to India first. We travelled to Dharamsala and visited the Tibetan Government in Exile to discuss projects in progress, applications for new schemes and problems and needs concerning the Tibetan communities. We then went to visit Mrs. Taring in Rajpur. Although 86 now, she is still very active, giving advice and helping the Tibetan settlements around her as much as she possibly can. My late husband and I had stayed with the Tarings many times and it was wonderful to see “Amala” (Mother), as she is lovingly called by hundreds of Tibetans who, as children, were under her care at the Tibetan Homes

Foundation in Mussoorie. We visited THF, the Central School for Tibetans and the settlements in the Rajpur area. Although many problems in the Tibetan communities have been solved over the decades by organisations such as TRAS, we noticed everywhere overcrowding through the considerable influx of new refugees. The situation in Tibet is deteriorating and many people, especially the young, leave the country to seek asylum in Nepal and India. Many of them have had very little education and now place a heavy burden on the schools and settlements. Wherever we went, it was very obvious to us that the vocational training programs funded by TRAS have been of the greatest benefit to the Tibetans and no doubt will be very much in demand by the new arrivals in the future.

Although our stay in India was very limited, we did bring back some new proposals and ideas, and the fact that we did renew personal contact with some of the Tibetan leaders and administrators was much appreciated.

On October 17 we joined Ans and the group in Kathmandu, which has grown since my last visit there in 1983. However, it is still an exotic place, and the colourful little shops and the traders from different parts of the country offering lovely crafts such as carpets, jewellery, carvings, clothing, etc, are as fascinating as ever.

Two days later we flew into Pokhara and the trek began! I felt that I was in fairly good shape - how mistaken I was! After a short bus ride from Pokhara to Phedi we started the trek - truly straight up on uneven rocks arranged as steps, from below 3000ft to 5900ft. The entry in my diary that night reads, "exhausted, last one into camp". After several days walking steeply up and down through beautiful rhododendron forests, it started to rain and for 3 days we had no more vistas of the Annapurna range and the other giants of this most impressive range of mountains. We followed the spectacular Kali Gandaki river for 5 days on often very narrow trails, made quite unsafe by several landslides. The rain, very unusual at that time of year, had obliterated trails in the river valley and dumped a thick layer of snow on the passes ahead.

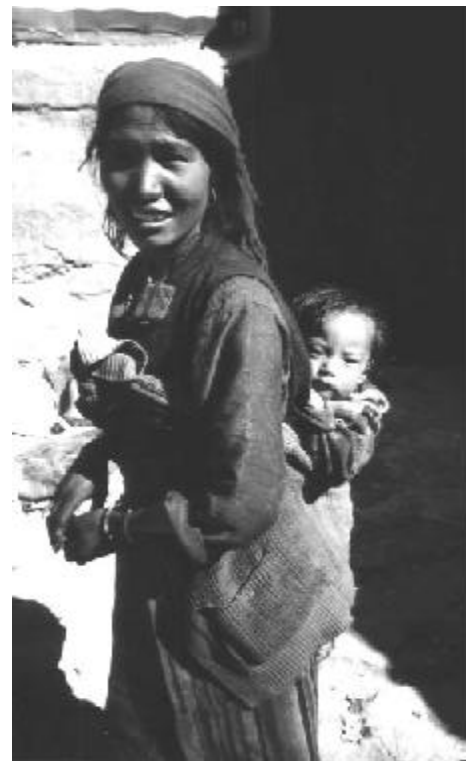
At Jomoson our porters were paid off and ponies were hired to carry our gear. The terrain and the terrible



winds blowing up and down the valley every day made it very hard for porters to carry heavy loads. It is less than a 4 hour walk from Jomoson to Kagbeni, where we registered our entry into Mustang. Not only were permits and passports checked, but all tins and jars of food and drink were counted; to be recounted on the way out - empty or full. They certainly made sure that we stuck to rule #8 in our "Letter of Agreement", that we should keep the trekking route and environment clean.

The registration office is run by ACAP (Annapurna Conservation Area Project), with whom TRAS has worked for several years (see Sept '96 TRAS Newsletter). Part of the hefty trekking fee of US \$700 for a ten day stay in Mustang is used to support ACAP projects which now extend into Mustang - such as tree planting, health services, solar energy, school support, women's issues, horticulture, restoration of monasteries and irrigation. Other signs of ACAP were water taps, willow and poplar groves, a kerosene depot and small hydro plants (ie harnessing a creek). The most recent request to TRAS was a proposal to educate 90 girls from Mustang (see Dec '96 TRAS Newsletter). Beth and I took every opportunity to get information about ACAP's work, and met 2 of their officials. We talked to village leaders about the benefits from ACAP, and also to a school teacher, who described the school system to us.

Mustang is situated in the Tibetan plateau in the rain shadow of the Himalayas at an average elevation of 13,200ft. Yaks, horses, sheep and goats are bred, and shepherds wan-



der with large herds from one grazing area to another. Main trading routes connected Tibet with India and Nepal and the salt trade was at one time very important to this region. This has now declined, and TRAS support of ACAP projects, especially in Upper Mustang, will no doubt make a difference.

Our destination in Mustang was the capital, Lo Manthang, a good 4 to 5 days' hike from Kagbeni. We still followed the Kali Gandaki river, which occupies for many miles a wide bed which, in the monsoon, turns into a raging river. In the dry season, the river divides into small, fast flowing streams, leaving room for caravans and travellers to walk in the river bed amongst boulders. We crossed the river here and there on tree trunks, or got round a broader part of it by escaping up narrow trails along the rock walls which hem the river in on both sides.

These incredible ochre coloured rock formations form a stark foreground for the snowy Himalayan peaks. Our sherpas showed us how to look for saligrams in the river bed. These are round black stones containing coiled fossil shells of extinct molluscs.

While in the lower reaches of the Kali Gandaki, we saw very good agricultural land, with apple and orange groves and terraced fields of rice, millet and buckwheat. We were now in a more arid area, where we often had to walk 10 hours to the next water source. The fields are surrounded by walls made of rocks held together with mud in order to keep the animals out. At Tsele, a little green oasis of a town, we left the Kali Gandaki to make our way north-west to Geling. It had been very cold in the night and we were glad when the sun came up to warm us while having breakfast. We had to get through a steep canyon, walking at times along galleries - trails cut into the rock, something I found quite terrifying and at particularly narrow stretches, I had to ask one of the sherpas to guide me.

From the canyon at less than 6,600ft altitude we made our way up to a pass at 11,550ft where we met the first snow. We, too, added a rock to the huge cairn. We rested under the colourful prayer flags between two poles, and enjoyed the spectacular scenery under an almost dark blue sky. Little did we know that three more passes, up to 12,540ft high, would challenge us before nightfall.

*NEXT INSTALMENT*

**Tea with the King!**

## **35 th Anniversary Celebration**

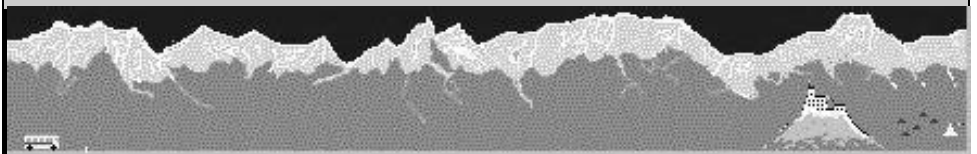
**Wednesday, 16th April 7pm  
Lutheran Campus  
5885 University Boulevard  
Vancouver  
Tel: 224-5133**

## **AGM & Slide Show**

***Khampa Caravan Trails*  
Kham, Tibet  
Dr. Marion Tipple**

***Tea with the King*  
Kingdom of Lo, Mustang  
Dorothea Leach**

**Refreshments & Craft Sale  
Non-members \$5 donation at door**



## TRAS EXECUTIVE

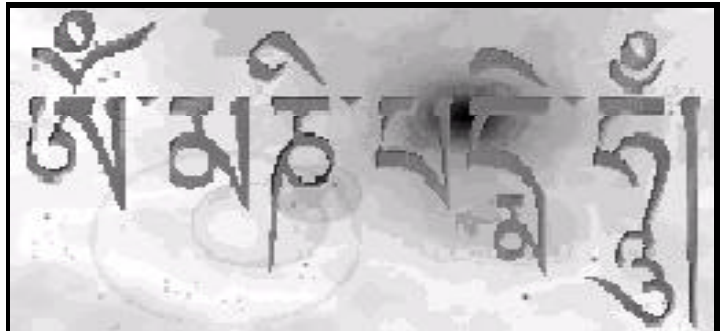
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 (published quarterly)

Editors.....Daphne Hales  
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**Om Mani Padme Hum**  
*Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus*



Yearly Membership donation (\$20) ----- \$ 20

*Possible Additional Donations:*

Monthly Donation of \$25 for the “Child Development and Education  
 Project” at a residential school -----

Monthly Donation of \$10 for a child in a “Family and Community  
 Development Project” -----

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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Please write address and postal code on your cheque and mail to:

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