

# 35 years of Caring and Growth

TRAS celebrated its 35th anniversary at the recent Annual General Meeting held in Vancouver. From George and Inge Woodcock's first impassioned plea for money to save the malnourished, freezing Tibetan orphans (who had survived the arduous trek over the Himalayas) to the desk top publishing course for Tibetan youth (which starts this month) seems like a quantum leap – not a mere 35 years! Thanks to the indefatigable spirit of the Tibetan exiles themselves, with a small helping hand from TRAS and a few other overseas agencies, these 35 years have changed the face of aid to Tibetans. Sustenance has grown into self-support; relief has been replaced by development; and hand-outs have given way to partnerships! Food and basic shelter were the immediate needs of the first Tibetan refugees, and TRAS members generously met those needs. After 35 years of helping to establish settlements, schools, agricultural programs and carpet weaving, TRAS and its Tibetan partners are able to work on programs which will bring self-sufficiency to the second generation and renewal to the land they live on. Vocational training and environmental projects are important now, for all the peoples of the Himalayas with whom we work,

although we never lose sight of the fact that there are still those who need our most basic care.

Vocational training is needed at a school in Nepal; Dharamsala is asking us to help with training for 1400 unemployed Tibetan youths; they want the environment project to spread out to more settlements; CHIRAG wants to improve the quality of health care for 50 poor Indian villages – YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT, THE ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH CARE – ARE WE REALLY SO DIFFERENT?

Yet we in Canada have so much. Let's continue to work together to find the answers for our Himalayan friends!

This issue includes highlights from the Annual Meeting, environmental excitement from the youngest of the second generation and the finish of Dorothea's and Beth's travels in Mustang and Nepal – where they too found that vocational training must be a priority for TRAS.

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## PRESIDENT' SREPORT

### Dr. Frank Beck

“This year we are celebrating 35 years of TRAS, and Inge Woodcock, our Patron and founding member of TRAS, sends best wishes to all our members. We at TRAS owe her a great debt of gratitude for her vision in creating this Society 35 years ago. TRAS has been helping the Tibetans and the people of the Himalaya ever since.

1996 was a successful year for TRAS. Thanks to the generosity of our members, we are able to support many projects. We continue to receive CIDA matching funds and, in fact, CIDA contributions to TRAS have increased despite federal government cutbacks in foreign aid. We continue to cooperate with Canada India Village Aid (CIVA) on a joint project in the Indian Himalaya and we hope to join SEVA on an eye project in Tibet. I am pleased with the spirit of cooperation among BC agencies working with the Tibetans and in the Himalaya. SEVA, Canada Tibet Committee, Tibetan Cultural Society, Women Working for Tibet and CIVA each has a slightly different focus, but our energies often come

together to create new opportunities and ideas.

I would like to acknowledge Brian Harris and his *"Tibetan Voices"* project. Brian has created a book *"Tibetan Voices"* which contributes to the preservation of Tibetan cultural heritage. Projects strongly supported by TRAS in the past (Delek Hospital and the Dolma Ling Nunnery) will benefit from the proceeds of his book. I am also very pleased to announce that TRAS will fund the distribution of Brian's book to BC schools and public libraries, a wonderful opportunity to educate the Canadian public.

TRAS membership has been growing and we are now distributing 500 copies of our newsletter. We just hope that all who receive it are up to date on their dues!

'Coming Home Films' has recently released a documentary called *"She Makes Mountain Calls"* about the life and work of Dr. Joan Ford, our past President. Proceeds from the premiere went to one of our partners, the Snow Lion Foundation in Nepal. We hope to have a local screening for members and the public.

TRAS is fortunate in having a strong Board of Directors with skills and expertise in many fields. The directors make every effort to visit our projects. Their evaluations and comments are essential to run successful projects. Our directors are able to donate their time and the cost of travelling. In this way, we can monitor the projects at no cost to TRAS – making optimal use of the donations by members.

Tony Phillips has been a TRAS Director for 18 years. He was a

project director and a vice president. Due to many other commitments, Tony has decided to resign. I will miss his experience, eloquence and

especially his insightful perspective on development in a large context.

It is always a pleasure to work with a diverse Board of Directors.

# Sponsorship

## Joan Ford

We have increased the number of settlements where we sponsor children from 6 to 9, and the number of children sponsored from 142 to 196.

Settlement	No. of children
Tibetan Homes, Mussoorie	15
Tibetan Children's Village	12
Mundgod Tibetan Settlement	21
Miao Tibetan Settlement	74
Bir Young Adult School	17
Incarnation Convent	15
Dekyiling Tibetan Handicraft Society	5
Tibetan Women's Centre, Rajpur	7
Mustang Girls' Scholarship Fund	30

As well as the TRAS sponsorships, we continue to administer 71 Tibetan sponsorships for Bente Rehm of Vancouver Island. Many thanks to our caring sponsors.

The regular program has continued without any major problems, but there is still difficulty in communication with Miao and Mundgod.

TRAS hopes a director will be able to visit these communities later this year. The Mustang Girls' Scholarship program has got off to a very good start. The first 30 girls have all been sponsored; 60 case histories have just arrived.

I was in Kathmandu in April and visited the Buddha Memorial Children's Home. TRAS has a training project in progress for senior students to enable them to get work. The Principal was very keen to start a sponsorship program for some of the younger children. He urgently needs more money to run the Home owing to the increased cost of living. I came back with 12 case histories (\$300.00 p.a. per child). I have received help (in the form of an article) from Keith Morgan of the Vancouver Province, and now I am on the second group of 12!

Please contact the TRAS Office (after June 30) and leave a message for me if you would like to sponsor one of these children.



## Tras T-shirts

**HERE'S A WONDERFUL BARGAIN  
JUST AS SUMMER HEATS UP!**

The last few TRAS t-shirts are **ON SALE!!** JUST \$15.00 for either design. Contact the TRAS Office. Even if the Vancouver rain keeps falling, this colourful t-shirt is guaranteed to lift your spirits!

# TREKKING INTO MUSTANG

## “ Tea with the King ” - PART 2

**Dorothea Leach**  
**Beth Whittaker**

Three passes and a long, steep trail later we arrived in the dark, dead tired, at our camp in Geling. We had walked ten hours that day. However, not all days were as strenuous and we had time to wander through the narrow alleys of the typically Tibetan villages with their painted mud houses, some two and three stories high. On the flat roofs fodder and firewood are stored, while household chores are done in the sunshine under the prayer flags which flutter from corner poles on each house. In monasteries and temples we were shown very old wall hangings depicting the Buddha and other symbols of Buddhism. Murals, many hundreds of years old, were often difficult to interpret as they were smudged by the smoke of butter lamps, the only source of light. Outside each ‘gompa’ there are prayer wheels full of thousands of small pieces of paper with the prayer “Om Mani Padme Hum” written on them. Mani stones inscribed with the same prayer formed walls from a few feet to several hundred feet long. We passed caravans of mules, yaks and small mountain horses, decorated with plumes of coloured yak hair, painted leather work, ribbons and bells, making their way south to Pokhara to trade wool, butter, medicinal herbs and other articles for tea, sugar and items now desired by the local people such as watches,

plastic kitchenware etc. Dzongs (fortresses) on commanding hills tell of a more warlike time. Now these huge buildings are in disrepair and we wondered how they could have been built with just mud bricks.



On treks in Nepal, one can obtain accommodation and food in often rather nice lodges. In Mustang, we had to carry everything with us – tents, food, kerosene for the stove, etc. Once or twice we were invited into the house of the wealthiest family in the village. This happened in Tsarang where our host spoke excellent English; he had been educated in Kathmandu and India. Tea was served in the rather elegant living room and we sat on beautiful Tibetan carpets at hand carved tables, painted – like the columns holding up the ceiling – in vivid colours. It was always interesting to see the inside of a home with its large courtyard where most of the domestic activities seem to take place. From there a very steep staircase leads up to a gallery where painted doors with impressive brass locks open into the living quarters of the extended family. A steep ladder

or a notched tree trunk leads up to the roof. As there is no electricity and very little firewood, the only source of some warmth is a brazier of charcoal, a luxury few can afford.

The icy wind which had made our approach to Tsarang so difficult was still blowing when we left the next morning to face one more pass before we reached a ridge from which we looked south to all the impressive peaks of the Himalayan range. To the north we had our first glimpse of Lo Manthang. It still took hours to reach this walled city but we were all quite excited and walked with renewed vigour towards our final goal. We camped outside the wall in a field and when we arrived traders had already set up shop – a blanket with trinkets, jewellery and small Tibetan artifacts – anticipating good sales!

We quickly dropped our backpacks in our tents and took a quick look at the city before it got dark, entering through the one gate in the wall, which is always locked at night. ‘City’ is rather a grand description for this small place of only 150 houses. It is very mediaeval with its narrow alleys, houses, the King’s palace, monasteries, shrines and people sharing the limited space with yaks, goats, mules and horses.

We received an invitation to have tea with the King the next day. After a late breakfast – what luxury – we dressed in the cleanest clothes on hand and left early to do some sight-seeing on the way. We visited the main temple which was built about



*King and Queen of Mustang*

600 years ago. In spite of the four large Buddha statues in the entrance hall, the huge main hall with its many wooden painted columns evoked the impression of a European cathedral – quite a special atmosphere!

After climbing an almost vertical staircase to visit another ancient monastery, where a huge statue of the Buddha-To-Come stretched from floor to high ceiling, we went on to the palace. It is indistinguishable from the other buildings in the city, a high mud brick construction, although the Queen's apartment has some lovely carved and painted window frames. The courtyard was as busy as any other in the town, with dogs, children and chickens running around, the adults engaged in domestic activities. Up another steep staircase to a gallery where we waited a moment and then were ushered into the reception room to meet the King. I had bought a postcard of the royal couple, both dressed in gorgeous Tibetan clothes and magnificent jewellery. What a disappointment - the King wore ordinary brown pants, a blue quilted jacket and a woollen toque - suitable

for the freezing temperature in the room, but not to impress us! His only ornament was a heavy golden signet ring. We had all brought white katas (scarves), according to Tibetan protocol, which we presented one after the other to the King, who in return gave us one. We were asked to take a seat on the benches along the walls which were covered with exquisite old Tibetan carpets. Handsome young women served us very good butter tea in rather nice china cups and while drinking this in silence, which is the custom, we were able to admire all the marvellous hangings, carved furniture and priceless artifacts. There were lots of photos of the royal family and many dignitaries (who surely must have flown in by helicopter - they did not look as if they would have taken pleasure in walking here!). Only one of our Sherpas spoke fluent Tibetan, and after tea he translated the usual polite questions and answers. After half an hour we were glad to take our leave – we were practically frozen solid!

The next day we left early, following the ancient trading route to the

border of Tibet, this time on ponies. It was great fun for a while and quite romantic, but after several hours the wooden saddle which was covered only with a Tibetan rug became, to say the least, uncomfortable. However, it was all worth it. We rode through this magnificent, huge landscape of the Tibetan plateau to the village of Garphu to visit the Nyphu Monastery. This gumpa, very close to the border, is set into towering cliffs a thousand feet above the village. As Michel Peissel in his book "Mustang" says, it was "truly beyond all I could have imagined". The front is a large red painted wall of mud bricks. A steep trail leads up to the door to the anteroom and finally into the vast hall cut into the rock. Well preserved wall paintings decorate the hall, shelves of very old books line some of the walls, ancient thankas hang in tatters, their images obliterated by the butter lamp smoke. The gumpa had a unique, peaceful atmosphere, deep in the silent rock.

On our return journey, a terrible sand storm came up, which added to our discomfort on this desolate but incredible trail.

Five days of trekking southwards, with the magnificent sight of the Himalayan range in front of us, brought us back to Jomson and a flight in a small plane to Kathmandu, looking down on some of the trails we had laboured up and down three weeks before.

Our three days in Kathmandu passed quickly, with a few visits to TRAS projects. We inspected the Old People's Home of the Snow Lion Foundation which was renovated with TRAS funds. The work was almost done and the inhabitants

seemed to be well looked after and eagerly showed us their rooms. We delivered warm clothes to the Buddha Memorial Children's Home. Dorjee Namgyal, the director and a former TRAS-sponsored student, impressed us with his enthusiasm and compassion. The street children, the boarders from outlying areas whose parents can pay a modest fee and a few day students all seemed to be very happy and obviously fond of Dorjee Namgyal - always a good sign.



For the older children vocational training in tailoring and carpentry is offered and Namgyal assured us that these students all find work. He would like to extend this training with plumbing and electrical courses. Again, as in India, vocational training seems to be the most useful support we can offer, not only to Tibetans but to many young people across the Himalayan range, to make them self-supporting - the true essence of what TRAS has tried to do over the last 35 years.

## PROJECT REPORT

### Dr. Lynn Beck

“What does success in overseas development work mean? Successful development depends on local communities using their own initiatives, skills and resources. We can enhance these capabilities through grassroots programs run by local partners. This is the mission statement of TRAS.

In the Annapurna region of Nepal, an integrated development program is in place. Integration is essential, as the areas of education, agriculture, health and the environment are linked and interdependent. The higher literacy rate among women equals lower birth rate; better crops equal better nutrition; clean water and latrines equal better health. These are the successes we can measure. Less tangible is the impact on the community. It is now functioning better as a whole and has the spirit of cooperation necessary to achieve this.

Yet ACAP's prime focus is supposed to be conservation and the environment. To achieve this, grassroots support in the community is essential. The degree of success is evident in Beth and Dorothea's slides of their trek through Jomson, on their way to Mustang. They found the cleanliness, level of service and the state of the environment to be much better than 15 years ago. This is despite the pressure of 40,000 annual trekkers. ***This is successful development.***

The Central Himalayan Rural Group (CHIRAG) is another successful integrated project in the Kumaon hills of U.P., India. With Canada India Village Aid (CIVA), we have developed programs in community health care, social forestry, sustainable energy and Mother and Child programs. To further increase the standard of health care in the poor hill region of 40,000 people, CHIRAG has approached us to build a community health care centre. We are in the process of ensuring that the project

best meets the needs of the local people and integrates well with the existing programs. We are very excited about the future possibilities - linking with the Indian health care system, Canadian volunteer doctors, family practise medical electives, etc.

Supporting projects on this scale requires funding from a very important source - CIDA - and believe me, your donations are very important as CIDA only matches up to our total annual donation base, and we were very tight this year in spite of your generosity.

When George and Inge Woodcock first addressed the plight of the Tibetan refugees 35 years ago, they needed the basics - food, shelter, rudimentary education. I would like to give some idea of how the scope of the aid has evolved. A few of years ago, the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics requested a computer to allow desktop publishing using the Tibetan script. This request evolved into the publishing of a Tibetan textbook for modern teaching methods and then a course to teach Tibetan teachers the new methods using the text. All funded by TRAS! Now it is the cornerstone of a computer training centre for desktop publishing courses for Tibetans. We are teaching Tibetans sophisticated skills to enter the modern work force but also, just as importantly, to preserve their heritage and language. Funding was approved by TRAS at its last meeting.

Linkages with other agencies and people are very important. Brian Harris, with his Tibetan Voices project, is providing much needed funding. However, he is also providing an opportunity to educate the Canadian public and particularly youth, with the distribution of his book to schools and libraries. Also exciting is his planned fall tour of BC communities to promote Tibetan culture and the work of SEVA and TRAS.

Hopefully a new generation will be inspired to carry on the very rewarding work of development and the continuation of TRAS.

# SAVING THE EARTH

Two years ago, as part of our environmental project in Dharamsala, a workshop was held for 27 teachers from some of the Tibetan schools in India. The aim was to educate them in the importance of environmental protection and action, and each teacher was given seed money from our project to start a Nature Club (under the auspices of the World Wide Fund for Nature – India) and purchase plants. A year later, we asked for reports and received 12 wonderful letters:

From the Central School for Tibetans (CST) in **Paonta Sahib** the Principal writes “The Gangri Nature Club was registered with the WWF - India with initial 22 members. On World Environment Day, the adviser of the Nature Club gave a talk in Morning Assembly to make the children aware of the environmental pollution and problems created by Man.

The members of the club planted 200 saplings in the campus that day. Regular watering is done by club members. Weekly cleaning of the school campus is done, and on World Health Day, the club members and senior school children participated in the cleaning drive in the Tibetan settlement. This year, we have increased

the membership to 44. More activities shall be undertaken!”



From CST, **Manali**, the Headmaster writes “We have registered ourselves as members of Nature Club India, WWF. We bought colourful dustbins meant for different materials – 2 bins for plastics, 1 for iron scraps and 4 for paper. This creates awareness in keeping our environ-



ment clean. We have given talks to the children, who responded well.

Children were asked to collect pictures of animals and birds - we have a good collection and indeed is useful in bringing children nearer to Nature. We have initiated inter house contests in plantation of flowers and we will let you know how this works out.

The Nature Club members are responsible for the cleanliness of school

surroundings and toilet. The students who are found taking active interest in service are given awards.

Frankly speaking, we could not do more because of the flood which caused destruction in the Kulu Valley. School lost part of its ground and had major landslides. Our main attention was diverted to cleaning the debris. Yet our school is really committed to do something in creating environmental consciousness among the people here. *(Editor's note: this devastating flood also caused long delays in our Indian project with SHARE, but things are getting back to normal.*

They didn't need this natural disaster on top of all their manmade problems!)

We extended our full support for the ban of plastic materials at Manali. It is a total suc-

cess and we will take up other issues to improve our environment in the future.”



CST in **Upper Shillong** (miles from anywhere) writes: “We doing soon Nature Club activities. Yours sincerely”.



CST, **Herbertpur**, Teacher in charge writes “The name of our Nature Club is Save the Earth Nature Club. We



*Classroom at Gangkyi Day School, Dharamsala, H.P.*

have 10 students in it. Since last year, we have dug two dumping pits for the use of our settlement and school. The Nature Club cleans the school and its surrounding areas at every Saturday. I enclose photographs” - and here they are - hard at work saving their little patch of this earth.



Gangkyi Day School, **Dharamsala**, is a pre-school, so the teacher-in-charge writes “The seed money was spent on planting trees and flowers in and around our school campus. We also bought charts of animals and birds and hung them in each of our classrooms. It enables the children to be aware of the real value and interdependence of human life and wildlife.

The plants which we planted last year are growing up and presently beautiful flowers are blooming on each plant. Our children, though very small, enjoyed planting the plants in pots and voluntarily water them daily. We, the teachers, taught them the important role played by trees and plants.

Moreover we are proud to report that our children stood first in a competition held on World Health Day to test the general awareness of children on issues relating to the environment.”



Here’s a sad note, from CST, **Chauntra**. “We have planted 500 saplings around the school compound but we regret to say almost all plants were either dried up, eaten by animals or died due to weather conditions. We don’t have enough protection for the plants as there is no fence and domestic animals move freely.” Well, let’s hope they learn!!

On a happier note, the Headmaster goes on “We arranged drama and songs program on the environment with the help of some Canadian youths who stayed in the settlement for Observation of Tibetan Culture and we got very good response from the public. Dramatization and quiz were conducted in higher classes and the senior students play games on environment with the junior level.

Every Saturday we arrange talks on environment and sanitation.

Teachers and students have made dump pits and installed big dustbins for recyclables.

Every teacher and student has to maintain one flower with pot in the school, for the beauty of the school and as teaching aid for Science subject too”



Similar activities feature in the other letters too, even if the children are too young to join a Nature Club yet. Top marks go to the CST in **Kumrao** who have sent a monthly report - they formed the Nature Club, did all the activities suggested, played the Web of Life game, decorated the wooden walls of the school with pictures drawn by the children to demonstrate loving care of the world. Then they taught the children how to grow and nurture saplings, and started digging, manuring and planting. “We have planted trees and shrubs which attract birds for nectar, such as coral tree, sesbania, India oak, cotton tree and silk cotton tree; trees whose fruits and berries attract birds - banyan tree, Mysore fig, black plum, toothbrush tree, sand paper plant and neem. In the rainy season we planted 10 lemon trees, 10 pear trees and 10 peach trees. Some of them are growing very beautifully with splendour. We are caring for them with love and spirit.”

**IF ONLY WE ALL  
CARED FOR THE  
EARTH – WITH  
SUCH LOVE AND  
SPIRIT!**

## TRAS EXECUTIVE

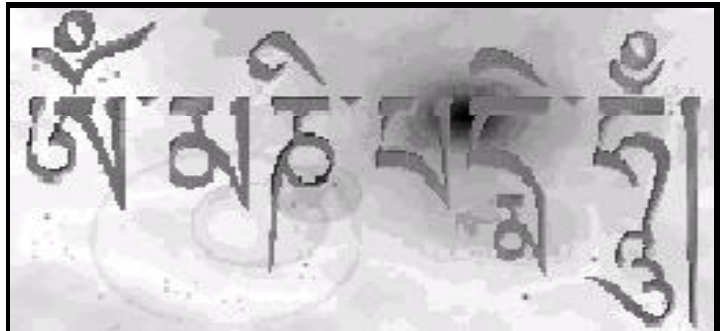
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**Om Mani Padme Hum**  
*Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus*



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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