

# THE BHUTAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



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PRESIDENT: SIR SIMON BOWES LYON

SUMMER 2015

## Bhutan sets Guinness World Record in tree planting

Bhutanese people made a statement about their wish for a green future earlier this month by setting the Guinness World Records title for "**Most trees planted in one hour**" in the capital, Thimphu. Coinciding with Social Forestry Day on June 2, a team of 100 volunteers took up the challenge of planting a total of 49,672 trees in just 60 minutes, and breaking the previous record by nearly 10,000.



More than 75% of the mountainous country's land is currently under forest cover and the constitution of Bhutan states that a minimum of 60% of the land shall be covered under forest for all times to come.



Speaking after the attempt, tree planting event organiser Mr. Karma Tshering said: "The

whole country is happy. Our world record shows that Bhutan's young generation wants a clean and green future. We will never compromise on that".

The environmentally-friendly feat was organised by Bhutan Eco-Green Initiative Network (BEGIN), which promotes green initiatives in Bhutan, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture & Forests. A number of indigenous tree species were planted including the Blue Pine and Cypress.

This is the first time Bhutan has attempted a Guinness World Records title and the challenge was taken very seriously with planters participating from all over the country. Environment conservation is a top priority in Bhutan and Nature is one of the pillars and key indicators of the country's Gross National Happiness (GNH) index.

## Five happy Bhutanese students



Standing: Lugten Wangdi (2013/15), Thinley Dhendup (2013/15) and Sonam Wangdi (2014/16),  
Sitting: Dawa Zangmo (2013/15) and Sonam Choden (2014/16)

At the annual Leavers' Ceremony at Pestalozzi in Hastings, East Sussex last month, Dawa Zangmo and Sonam Wangdi both received awards for their Outstanding Contributions to Pestalozzi. Two will return to start their second A level year in September and the two other students will be joining them to start their first year. We hope to meet them at future meetings of the Society.

# SOCIETY NEWS

## Next meetings

### *Trekking High in Bhutan*

Speakers: Andrew Sutton  
Henry Preston

7.00 pm 23 September 2015

Many members will be aware that our Society Secretary is a keen walker. Andrew Sutton, and one of his fellow walkers, Henry Preston, will talk about various treks undertaken in Bhutan, including a recent adventure close to Gangkhar Punsum.

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### *The Hidden Lands in Himalayan Myths and History*

Speaker: Ian Baker

7.00 pm 9 November 2015

Ian Baker is an author and academic on Tibetan Buddhism and Himalayan Art and Culture. He founded *The Hidden Lands Trust* to help preserve the natural eco-system and support cultural traditions of indigenous people and is currently concentrating on Bhutan.

Both meetings will take place at:

The Polish Hearth Club, 55 Prince's Gate,  
Exhibition Road, London SW7 2PN

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***Members are welcome to bring guests to Bhutan Society talks. There will be a small charge of £10 (payable on the night) and this will be redeemable against the annual subscription fee if the guest then wishes to join the Society.***

## Annual Dinner

***This will be held on Friday 27 November 2015 at The Polish Hearth Club, 55 Prince's Gate, Exhibition Road, London SW7 2PN***

***An invitation and booking form are enclosed. Please complete the form and return to the Dinner Secretary, Mark Swinbank.***

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## Annual General Meeting

***The next AGM will take place in early 2016 and will be followed by a talk from our Chairman, Michael Rutland OBE, on "Recent Developments in Bhutan". The date will be confirmed in the next issue.***

### NEWSLETTER SCHEDULE

During 2015, one more issue of the Newsletter will be published - at the end of September. Dates of meetings not included in the Newsletters will be notified directly to members via e-mail and on the Society website. Please make sure that the Membership Secretary has your latest e-mail address.

# SOCIETY MEETING REPORTS

**On Thursday 26th March, 2015, at an evening meeting of the Society, members and guests gathered to hear a presentation by Charlotte MacCaw about a visit to Bhutan she had made with her parents and sister. Below is a summary of her talk.**

My father, Dr Aubrey Leatham was called upon in November 1963 to go to Bhutan to give the Third King a consultation on the state of his heart. The King, then aged 38, was recovering from what was most likely his second coronary in the space of two years. The sixteen Indian physicians who had examined the King had not allowed His Majesty to get up from his litter for the previous three months. My father was a well-known cardiologist (he developed the pace maker in the 1950s) and had a passion for clinical diagnosis.

Within half an hour of his arrival he was questioning the King who had been free of cardiac symptoms since an attack of severe chest pain three months before. So he made him rise from his litter despite the surprise of the armed body guard and of the Queen who murmured, "Are you sure Dr Leatham? Later that night when my father was asleep in the guest's wing of the King's Palace at Thimphu, he was awakened by His Majesty's Chamberlain in long silk robes and carrying a lantern. "The King has a pain" he said; "Where is it?"; "In the stomach" he said; "What did he have for supper?" "Fried hornets' eggs!" The King was advised to go to Switzerland to receive western medical help and some much needed rest. He was therefore away from the country for long periods of time.



**Thimphu "High Street" in 1964**

In November 1964, my father was invited back by the King and to bring us, his family, with him this time. In Paro our accommodation was in the King's Palace as there was no guest house. The King sent us presents of Scottish walking socks and whisky and the dancing monks entertained us in the courtyard of the Palace at Paro. Meanwhile preparations were made for our eight night trek to Chomolhari.

The Third King incredibly survived another eight years after his second coronary - enough time for his son, the Crown Prince to be just old enough to become King in 1972 - the youngest ruling monarch of the world - aged only sixteen. My father was presented with the Order of Bhutan by the Queen for restoring His Majesty to health until his son was of age.

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**On April 20th, 2015, at an evening meeting of the Society, members and guests gathered again to hear a presentation by Laurence Brahm on The Himalayan Consensus. Here is his brief summary of what it is about and the planned summit and process.**

**Himalayan Consensus (HC)** is a fresh economic paradigm of holistic, middle-way economics (fusion economics). In the spirit of pragmatic idealism it calls for: compassionate capital, conscientious consumption, and empowering people with capital to communities.

HC emphasizes protecting ethnic diversity through cultural sustainable development and prioritising the environment through green growth (environmental economics). Himalayan Consensus actualises the GNH vision, by making it operational through the Himalayan Consensus Forum.

**Himalayan Consensus Summit (HCS)** will articulate the principles of the HC but more importantly have the vision to be a forum that delivers practical and commercial results. The conference will be a global forum funded partially by the public and private sectors. The HCF will meet annually in a rotating SARC country, as a one day event to present concrete examples of successful social and community based enterprise, eco-tourism, organic agriculture, and renewable/efficient energy best practices, toward articulating a fresh economic paradigm.

**HCS** will emphasize multiple stakeholder participation (civil society, business, finance, technology, and government). Emphasis will be upon South Asia Regional Cooperation (SARC) member states. Session topics may cover: eco-tourism, social enterprise, gender, technology for environmental adaptation, community financing (microfinance), renewable energy (hydro power and solar), and water security.

It will be Davos style in format. HCS differentiates itself by emphasizing "diversified localization" (community based solutions) and serves as a process for presenting pragmatic solutions for sustainable development and combating crisis from climate change.

## That was a drone that was....



**It was only last summer we were reading about an exciting new venture exploring how the use of drones could help develop better telemedicine links to people in the more remote parts of Bhutan. Drones have also been used by the Institute for Environment and Conservation (UWICE) for environmental studies, mapping land use, disasters and for anti-poaching activities.**

However there is now a blanket ban on using drones until proper regulations are framed. Except for governmental purposes, no one will be allowed to use drones. This has not been well received by those who feel that the latest technology could bring down cost and save time in every

field. UWICE researchers said the department of civil aviation (DCA), Royal Bhutan Army (RBA) and other regulating agencies must take a better approach to drones than just banning their use. "While it's only wise to be careful with the introduction of any new technology, banning, however is not the solution," UWICE senior researcher, Nawang Norbu said, adding that drones have become an integral part of the research carried out by the Conservation Institute. The Institute tried to avail permission for further use, but was rejected on the grounds of absence of regulations. The ban, they feel, is hampering the study of pressing issues like receding glaciers and snow cover, which cannot wait for the regulations.

Filmmakers are also very concerned about the constraints it will place on the developing industry. "The advent of unmanned aircraft systems is a huge technological boon to filmmakers and photographers alike," said an independent filmmaker. "It's a new super tool for storytellers that will allow for creative and exciting aerial shots—at a fraction of the hire charge of a real helicopter." The costs of aerial film scenes in Bhutan would have remained unrealistic until drone technology came on the scene. "

Both researchers and filmmakers have offered alternative options to a blanket ban. "The way forward is to revisit the ban and differentiate drone hobbyists and tourists from professional Bhutanese drone users like filmmakers and photographers and others who use it for research purposes—and have a case-by-case basis for exemptions," the filmmaker said. They suggest authorities list no-fly zone sensitive areas e.g. around dzongs, airports and army establishments among others and only grant licences to genuine cases.

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## Dairy Market doing well

When it comes to achieving self-sufficiency in milk and dairy products, latest reports show Bhutan has achieved over 90% of domestic requirements. The market value of these milk and milk products is about Nu 1816.66mn. In addition money is earned from the sale of other minor milk products, like Swiss cheese, yoghurt, fermented cheese (yetpa), ice cream, paneer, etc. In efforts to achieve 100% self-sufficiency, good dairy cow breeds with 30% subsidy are distributed to farmers. In addition, the Government has also sought expertise to source 2,000 cows from India.



***A livestock official demonstrates how the edges are trimmed before the cheese is packed and sold off.***

In Merak and Sakteng the highlanders, famous for fermented or smelly cheese, have ventured into a new product. They are making Gouda cheese from yak milk. Started about two years ago, the highlanders have found Gouda cheese to be a good income source. A kilogram of Gouda cheese is sold at Nu 550 in the market. The smelly cheese sells around Nu 450 to 500 in Trashigang. Villagers are serious about their new venture, and have already formed two co-operatives, one at Merak with twentysix members which annually produces 400kg, and the other at Sakteng with eight members which produces about 60kg annually. The cheese is produced once a year when yaks and zom (yak and cattle hybrid) return to the villages. Apart from a few civil servants, major buyers of Gouda cheese are the local tourist hotels and hotels in and around Thimphu. "High-end hotels are regular customers of the cheese and the feedback is good. They said the quality was on a par with international standards," he said. "In future, there are possibilities of exporting the cheese to other countries as well."

# KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

## Disasters and their management

The earthquakes in Nepal in late April were a tragic event and caused massive damage to property. Death toll figures are believed to be in excess of 8,500 and injuries close to 20,000. The first shake, 7.9 on the Richter scale, occurred in one of the three seismic zones in the Himalayas. Such events are an urgent reminder to the communities in that area that they sit on such a major seismic zone. Bhutan sits almost at the centre of this zone.

Bhutan was one of the first countries to offer medical assistance and supplies for the relief operations and a team of sixty two personnel (later increased to seventy eight) included surgeons, medical specialists, nurses and technicians from the Ministry of Health and Royal Bhutan Army and seven support staff. Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay flew in on the first relief flight to Kathmandu and personally handed over a cheque to Nepal's Prime Minister for Nu 63M (USD 1M) to help with rehabilitation efforts.



Understandably the Bhutanese are a little jittery and many question whether the country could cope if something similar happened in Bhutan. The earthquakes in 2009 and 2011 resulted in loss of lives, and properties worth millions were also lost. Recent research findings from the Swiss Seismological Service (SED) have indicated that two heavy earthquakes of magnitude 8 or higher occurred in Bhutan within the past 1,000 years implying that seismic hazard is now significantly higher than previously thought.

So guidelines, previously based on Bhutan being a relatively safe place, need to be reconsidered. The Department of Disaster Management (DDM) was initially set up in 2005 to promote, co-ordinate and facilitate disaster management in Bhutan. Guidelines were prepared in many areas including training of engineers, masons and carpenters to build houses incorporating earthquake resilient design and construction techniques and the setting up and training of search and rescue teams.

However the 2009 and 2011 earthquakes showed that in Bhutan one of the first services to fail was the telecommunications infrastructure - a fundamental disaster management requirement. The DDM Director Chhador Wagdi said "To establish a robust and priority sensitive communication system would cost NU 488M. This would include the national emergency operating centre, district operation centres, all operating from a satellite based communication system". Without such a system, he said it would be difficult to deal with a disaster. As disaster risks seem to be increasing, so seem the challenges of implementing effective crisis management procedures.

## Bird festival in October



Much to the delight of birders, a three-day bird festival will be organised from 29 October in Bhutan. The Ugyen Wangchuck Institute for Conservation and Environment (UWICE), are organising the event in conjunction with the Agriculture Ministry.

The festival will be held at Tingtibi, which is an area much sought after by bird watchers from across the world. The place is also home to the critically endangered white-bellied heron and various hornbill species such as the Rufous-necked Hornbill opposite. Beautiful Nuthatch, Ward's Trogon and Whitehooded Babbler are now spotted regularly in the area. In recent times new birds, such as the Oriental Bay Owl, Hodgson's Frogmouth and Blyth's Kingfisher have also been sighted in Tingtibi.

Birding tours will be organised and birding groups could also begin bird watching from Samdrupjongkhar, Phuentsholing and Paro. Guided birding will be organised along trails and existing roads. Birding packages will be available and the festival will also include a bird-a-thon, a photography competition and a demonstration on how to record bird song. A spokesperson for UWICE said the event would be a new interest to visitors, who have typically visited Bhutan for cultural reasons,

## My time at Tharpaling

Last year, Mark Wainwright took up the opportunity to teach English to the monks and the young Rinpoche at Tharpaling. Below he talks about his fascinating visit.



*Mark Wainwright with students in his dratsang class*

'What kind of music do you like?' We were bouncing along in the Rinpoche's car up the 12km unpaved mountain road to Tharpaling, the monastery he heads. I suggested it would be nice to listen to a Dzongka song. 'But the music I listen to is mostly English,' he said, pressing some buttons, and a rather racy American rap song filled the air. I had been in Bhutan only a few days, and no-one had told me what to expect, but I certainly hadn't quite expected this.

I had come to teach English at Tharpaling, perched at 3600m, high in the mountains above Bumthang. The monastery was founded by the great C14 Nyingma philosopher Longchenpa. He was exiled from Tibet for some years and found refuge here, despite the fact that, so the story goes, the villagers once tried to poison him.

In the 'dratsang' (monastery), most of my students were novices aged from around 8. A short but demanding walk up the mountain is the 'shedra' (a monastic higher studies institute), where I had mostly older students, some of whom had been through school and acquired a fair amount of English, though others were near beginners. One of my most enthusiastic and delightful students was a 9-year-old trulku.

To make my task more challenging there were no teaching resources beyond a blackboard, but on the whole we muddled through at least as well as

could be expected. Tharpaling must now be one of the few Buddhist monasteries where the monks can from time to time be heard singing 'Molly Malone' and 'Auld Lang Syne'.

One of my more unusual memories is of a group of my students taking me to see a vast concrete phallus in a secluded part of the grounds. It is about 7 feet long and juts horizontally out of the side of the mountain. Perhaps, by way of preparation, I should have read less about Bhutan's emerging democracy and more about Drukpa Kunley. The much-loved C15 'divine madman' is famous for his unorthodox teachings, and the enduring popularity of phallic symbolism in Bhutan is credited to him.

In an all too short three months, I made many new friends, learnt a little Dzongka, and became from all the enforced hill-walking, a good deal fitter. I made the steep 4-hour walk to town a couple of times and was fortunate enough not to be eaten by bears or tigers, which are known to be occasional hazards in the woods. I learned first to tolerate, then to love, and finally to cook the formidable national dish, 'ema datshi' made from boiled chillies with cheese. Back in England it is now one of my staple dishes: delicious, quick to prepare, and a reminder of an unforgettable adventure.

**MARK WAINWRIGHT**

## National Symbols of Bhutan - The Cypress Tree



The cypress tree ( *Cupressus torulosa*), is the National Tree of Bhutan. Locally, it is known as 'Tsenden'. The Bhutanese consider the cypress tree sacred and it is held in great reverence.

Its ability to survive in difficult, rugged and harsh terrains and the strong and straight form is believed to be akin to the element of simplicity, hardiness and bravery in the people of Bhutan.

Cypress trees are often planted outside monasteries, dzongs and other religious places and its wood

and branches have been used as incense for thousands of years. It is found at 3,500 – 9,500 ft in the Himalayas, needs a lot of sun, so thrives well in tropical and subtropical rainforests.

Cypress trees grow very abundantly in Bhutan and the country was once called "Lho Mon Tshen den Jong"(the country of cypress) by Tibetans referring to the abundance of cypress trees grown in Bhutan. It is an evergreen tree that can grow up to 150 ft and its trunk can have a diameter of up to 3ft. The crown of the tree or the treetop can be broadly conical or a large oval in shape.

The bark of the cypress tree is thick, either grey brown or brown in colour and often peels off in longitudinal strips. The branches are thin and slender with whip-like tips. Cones appear in February-March while the seed matures in May-June.

Its wood is hard and durable and often pale yellow in colour while the heartwood is often pale brown in colour. The timber of the cypress has a straight grain and a fine texture and is resistant to termites and insects. In addition it is good for construction and is the preferred wood for building temples, monasteries and dzongs. The essential oil extracted from the root wood of cypress is often used in medicine to cure inflammatory wounds, as an antiseptic and to make cosmetics.

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### ***Himalayan Art***

**SOAS, University of London**

**2 - 5 November 2015**

**Course Fee: £540**

At the heart of Asia the vast and sparsely populated regions of the Tibetan plateau are at its crossroads. For more than 1400 years the surplus of trade through these difficult-to-traverse regions was largely channelled into the establishment and support of religious institutions. From the Lhasa Jokhang, the holiest monument of Tibetan Buddhism the core of which dates to the 7th century CE, to the Potala Palace, the seat of the Dalai Lamas secular and sacred rule built in the 17th century, some of these institutions are hallmarks of world architecture. In addition, religious establishments also became repositories of art hailing from all neighbouring regions. Despite the large scale destruction in the 20th century, the rich and diverse heritage of the Tibetan plateau continues to be a unique source for enquiry.

This specialist art course provides a comprehensive overview of Himalayan art, its connections to the neighbouring regions, its main monuments and artistic traditions, as well as its transformation in the contemporary

For further information contact Denise Acford ([da33@soas.ac.uk](mailto:da33@soas.ac.uk))

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### **Dzongkhag enterprises**

Very soon all dzongkhags will have some community-based enterprises that will provide interactive presentations to local and international visitors. Decentralised Hands-on Exhibition (DHOE) is an alternative rural development to encourage sustainable rural entrepreneurship in villages where visitors will be able, for example, to enjoy a first hand experience of picking tea leaves with the farmers around plantations in the Trongsa area. An enterprise development programme is being prepared throughout the country which will boast the country's small and cottage industries. Besides showcasing their products, community-based enterprises will also sell their products directly and it is hoped that such enterprises will also help villages bring more visitors to their doorsteps. Whilst the DHOE expects such a development to raise the confidence of the rural people and improve rural economy, concerns have been expressed about the limited access to financial support for those wishing to follow up such an entrepreneurial step.

## The team that won



By winning the first qualifying round of the FIFA World Cup Tournament, this young team highlighted the work started three years ago by the Bhutan Football Federation (BFF). Instead of using their entire resources on playing two or three international matches, the Federation decided to use it to build and develop a youth programme. Many of the younger players on Bhutan's current winning team came through this programme, and interest in the sport peaked after the country got its first artificial turf field in 2012. Bhutan now has about 5,000 young people playing soccer in different age groups, including 2,000 girls. The next qualifying rounds for this team are already under way and Bhutan has been drawn in a difficult group. However the BFF has benefited as it has sold the television airing rights for the next four World Cup qualifying matches for around Nu 20.M These will be held at the Changlimithang Stadium and broadcast via the World Sports Group (WSG), which is Asia's largest sports marketing, media and event management company.

### FESTIVAL EVENTS 2016

**For a the latest list of Tshechus and other festivals taking place in Bhutan during 2016, please visit the Society website: [www.bhutansociety.org](http://www.bhutansociety.org)**

### Secondary E-Mailing

***The Society often receives information from various organisations that may be of interest to members. These would include talks, exhibitions and other matters that have a relevance to Bhutan.***

***If members would like to receive such information from the Society, they should confirm interest via email to [rosieglazebrook@hotmail.com](mailto:rosieglazebrook@hotmail.com). These would be in addition to any Society membership and events currently circulated via e-mail.***

***The Society never gives out any personal information to third parties for marketing purposes.***

## CONTACT LIST

Chairman	Michael Rutland OBE (Bhutan) PO Box 1044 Thimphu 00975 1761 8553  (UK) 2 Windacres, Warren Rd, Guildford Surrey. <a href="mailto:rutland.michael@gmail.com">rutland.michael@gmail.com</a>
Vice- Chairman	John Davey <a href="mailto:jhhdavey@yahoo.co.uk">jhhdavey@yahoo.co.uk</a>
Secretary	Andrew Sutton 01306 88 43 49 <a href="mailto:andrewsutton001@aol.com">andrewsutton001@aol.com</a>
Treasurer	David Glazebrook <a href="mailto:ndkglazebrook@hotmail.com">ndkglazebrook@hotmail.com</a>
Membership	Rosie Glazebrook <a href="mailto:rosieglazebrook@hotmail.com">rosieglazebrook@hotmail.com</a>
Newsletter Editor	Sylvia Robert-Sargeant <a href="mailto:editor@bhutansociety.org">editor@bhutansociety.org</a>
Programme Secretaries	Dorothea von Friesen <a href="mailto:dorotheafriesen@gmail.com">dorotheafriesen@gmail.com</a>  Elizabeth Jacobson
Dinner Secretary	Mark Swinbank <a href="mailto:mark.swinbank@btinternet.com">mark.swinbank@btinternet.com</a>
Web Master	Chris Watt <a href="http://website@bhutansociety.org">website@bhutansociety.org</a>
General Enquiries	<a href="mailto:info@bhutansociety.org">info@bhutansociety.org</a>  West Walls, Cotmandene Dorking, Surrey, RH4 2BL
Website	<a href="http://www.bhutansociety.org">www.bhutansociety.org</a>

### NOTE

*If you have not already done so, we would appreciate you sending your latest e-mail address to the Membership Secretary at:*

***[rosieglazebrook@hotmail.com](mailto:rosieglazebrook@hotmail.com)***

*who will then add it to the database. There is no plan for the Society to go 'paperless' but there are times when it could be very convenient to communicate information electronically at short notice.*

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