

THE BHUTAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



NUMBER 77

PRESIDENT: SIR SIMON BOWES LYON

SUMMER 2022

DIARY DATE

***An evening talk (via Zoom) will be held at
7.00pm on THURSDAY 6 OCTOBER 2022***

"Bhutan – Personal Reflections - with Photos"

***Four members will share their reflections of their time
and experiences visiting and working in Bhutan. Photo
images will play a key part of these short presentations.***

Charlotte MacCaw first visited Bhutan, as a child, in the 1960s with her father Dr Aubrey Leatham. Charlotte has been fortunate to return on several occasions since.

Dr Deborah Keith During the 1980's she set up the horticultural development programme in Bhutan – and learned Dzongkha along the way. Deborah is a founder member of the Society and has maintained close contacts with Bhutan over the years.

Matthew Heasman is a keen plantsman with particular interest in rhododendrons. He has visited Bhutan in pursuit of that passion and was there also for the coronation of His Majesty, the Fifth King in 2008.

Andrew Sutton will offer memories from the many walking treks which were his introduction to Bhutan.

30th Anniversary Celebrations

***We are delighted to announce that arrangements to
celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the Bhutan Society
in the UK have been finalised. The celebratory
Reception will take place in the Parliament Chamber
at the Inner Temple in London on Friday, November
18th 2022 starting at 6.30pm.***

***After a welcome cocktail, a selection of delicious
dishes will be served along with wine and other
drinks and it will be a wonderful opportunity to meet
with friends, old and new, and to share time together
again. So please consider, when completing the
booking form enclosed, bringing family and friends
and also making a donation, as many of you usually
do, to support our Bhutanese students wishing to join
us on this special occasion.***

Losar Celebrations

While there were continuing (but reducing) COVID regulations in force, the Society decided to plan for its first in-person event for quite a while with an informal gathering to celebrate Losar, the Bhutanese and Tibetan New Year, at the start of March. Little did we know that, though COVID would not present any special problems, we had chosen one of the days that London Transport staff would decide to bring the Underground to a halt. Sadly many members and their guests were unable to come to St Columba's in Pont Street. BUT it was wonderful that just over two dozen brave, resourceful and patient souls found their way - by slow bus or lengthy walk or private car. It was so good to catch up with old friends and meet new ones – and to chat mask free.



Our thanks go to Elizabeth Jacobson for her initiative in organising the evening. She even perfected her skills in preparing momos and provided a profusion of chicken, cheese and vegetable versions. Just wonderful - no one went hungry.

SOCIETY REPORT

MINUTES of the ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING held on 25 April 2022

- 1. David Glazebrook, Secretary opened the meeting on behalf of the President.** He noted that this was the third time that the Society had held its AGM online. He explained that voting would take place through online polls. Apologies had been received from Rosie Glazebrook, Sylvia Robert-Sargeant, Nicholas Thompson and Lady Bute. Over 40 members are estimated to have joined the meeting online.
- 2. Sir Simon Bowes Lyon, President of the Society, added his welcome** to the Members and formally opened the AGM. The minutes of the previous AGM (21 September 2021) were approved by poll.
- 3. Andrew Sutton presented the Chairman's report.**

The Society held one in-person event in 2021, which was a visit to view Michael Blooman's rhododendron garden near Lyme Regis. Two online talks were held, one given by Zara Fleming on the subject of Textiles in Bhutan and the second by David Lascelles and Judi Alston entitled, A hare-marked moon. Several videos were shared online, including videos made by Michael Rutland on his travels in Bhutan and interviews with distinguished guest speakers. The AGM in September was followed by a talk given by Steve Berry concerning holiday opportunities in Eastern Bhutan. Three newsletters were published during the year.

The Chairman thanked the Committee members for their work for the Society, particularly Sylvia Robert-Sargeant for her work on the newsletters and David and Rosie Glazebrook for facilitating other communications. The Chairman noted that 2022 marked the 30th Anniversary of the founding of the Society. He thanked Elizabeth Jacobson for her organisation of the first in-person event of 2022, which had been held on 3 March to mark Losar (New Year) and announced that the Committee was planning to host a celebratory 30th Anniversary Dinner at the Inner Temple on 18 November.

The Chairman expressed his deep appreciation to David Glazebrook for his service to the Society as Secretary for the last four years and as Treasurer for four years before that. He said that the role of Secretary would be taken on by Scott Steedman, who would be leading an initiative to consider strategy for the Society, and he welcomed Chris Watt, who would provide IT advice and support for the Society's online activity, Zoom meetings, email messages and YouTube. In conclusion, he thanked the Members for their continued interest and participation in the Society.
- 4. The Secretary presented the Membership report on behalf of Rosie Glazebrook,** thanking all 499 Members including 57 students for their continuing support, involvement, ideas and feedback. He noted that the Society has 408 total membership subscriptions, made up of Life, Annual (individual and household) and Honorary (non-paying) Members.
- 5. Dorji Wangchuk presented the Treasurer's report.**

The Society ended 2021 with net assets of £28,872 including £15,269 cash in the bank and the interest-free loan of £10,003 to the Trust Fund. There was a surplus of £1,850 on the year. The Society continues in good financial health. The accounts for the Year Ended 31 December 2021 were approved by poll.
- 6. David Glazebrook presented the Secretary's update on the Committee.** He said how much he had enjoyed working with the Committee over the past nine years and he welcomed the changes being proposed for 2022. The constitution of the Committee was confirmed by poll: Andrew Sutton as Chairman, Scott Steedman as Secretary, Dorji Wangchuk as Treasurer, Sylvia Robert-Sargeant as Newsletter Editor, Rosie Glazebrook as Membership Secretary, Elizabeth Jacobson as Dinner Secretary and Events Group, Nicholas Thompson as Events Group Secretary, Dee Cano as Student Liaison Officer and Chris Watt as Technology and Web Editor.
- 7. Any other business and meeting closure.**

Sir Simon Bowes Lyon, President, thanked the Secretary for his work over many years and, noting that no other business had been shared in advance, closed the AGM.
- 8. Video report from Bhutan.**

Following the end of the formal business of the AGM the Chairman introduced the screening of a video report from Michael Rutland on Recent Developments in Bhutan.

Scott Steedman
Secretary

26 May 2022

SOCIETY REPORTS

Society Meeting

On Tuesday, May 17th 2022, the Society was delighted to welcome Tim Bodt, BA, postdoctoral fellow at SOAS, University of London, to present a talk via Zoom entitled "Linguistic and Cultural links in the Eastern Himalayas". Here is his synopsis of that presentation.

Bhutan and the adjacent areas of western Arunachal and Sikkim (India) and southern Tibet (China) show a remarkable linguistic and cultural diversity. Although we now have several descriptions of languages of the region, still much remains to be done.

Recent linguistic studies show us that many of the languages of the Bhutan-India-Tibet border area are not confined by the modern national borders, but that they actually form contiguous areas across them. This is particularly pronounced on the eastern border of Bhutan. There, we also find that, in addition to linguistic similarities, people from the different sides of the borders share religious, cultural, matrimonial, and other characteristics. Examples include the Brokpa, the Tshangla, and the Dakpa-Dzala-Tawang, Monpa-Tshona, Monpa-Pangchenpa dialect areas. The national borders that separate these closely related linguistic varieties are the result of geopolitical changes occurring in the mid-17th and mid-20th centuries. Rather than the people of the area or the languages that they speak, the national boundaries are 'new'.

Perhaps the most extreme example can be found in the diaspora of Tshangla speakers, who migrated from eastern Bhutan to south-eastern Tibet, then into India, and more recently to Canada. While they maintained their language, something noted even by Bhutanese Tshangla speakers through chance meetings in India and on the messaging app WeChat, we can observe considerable changes in, for example, female dress styles. Of all the cultural characteristics of

related people, then, language appears to be the most stable factor.

Five female dress styles.

All these women speak the Tshangla language. From left to right, we see pictures from eastern Bhutan, western Arunachal Pradesh, south-eastern Tibet, Tibetan refugee settlement in India, and Canada. The third picture



likely represents the most archaic dress, which has been revived in exile in Canada: all the other dresses are borrowed from other peoples.

De-Suong Skilling Programme – DSP

Having established the De-Suong (volunteer Guardians of Peace) in 2011, His Majesty the King now wishes to offer the Desuups – particularly those young and unemployed – training opportunities to provide skills needed in the workplace.

This Programme needs competent trainers and the DSP invites those with relevant knowledge and skill to make contact and learn more of how the programme should work. There is a wide variety of areas of training activity being explored. These include Construction, ICT, Mechanical and electro-technology, Refrigeration and air conditioning and Solar power. Individual training programmes will be tailored for length and content; visiting trainers will be paid a fee (subject to discussion) and expenses for travel, insurance and accommodation. If you would like to know more – because you, or someone or an organisation you know may be able to contribute – please contact Andrew Sutton (andrewsutton001@aol.com). He can provide more information on the Programme and the range of skills that the DSP wishes to cover. He can also guide you to contacts at the DSP.

New Opportunities for Drones

The rugged and steep terrain in Bhutan has presented many challenges for the routine maintenance of transmission infrastructure and has posed huge risks to field inspectors. Following strict interim guidelines from the Bhutan Civil Aviation Authority (BCAA) last December, hydropower projects were initially allowed to operate drones for drawing transmission lines.

Druk Holding and Investments (DHI) InnoTech, in collaboration with the Bhutan Power Corporation Limited (BPCL), are about to take the project to the next stage and pilot a programme to utilise drones for power maintenance and operations. This could not only reduce the time necessary for power infrastructure maintenance, but also reduce routine costs and promote safety by minimising accidents during field inspections. Use of drones will also reduce the costs of developing further underground power transmissions which are expensive in Bhutan.

BPCL CEO, Sonam Tobjey, said, "Drones can inspect the faults in power transmission lines and help restore power more quickly. They are also more effective in surveying power transmission lines to find any faults after any disruptions during natural calamities". Early results have shown that with the use of drones, significantly less time is required to carry out such work and the need to clear forest areas for such purposes has also decreased. He said that drones are used around the world for power line maintenance, and BPCL and DHI InnoTech, have been working closely to build and utilise the technology. "We hope to optimise operation and maintenance costs and increase reliability, but more importantly also build home-grown technologies and systems." He added "It will also help us with building intelligent and smart preventive maintenance schedules. As we fly the drone over the lines, we will capture images of various components of the power infrastructure using high-resolution cameras that can be used for preventive measures, as well as for optimising the time and other resources needed for regular maintenance. The InnoTech team is working on building machine learning or AI algorithms to eventually build automated identification of potential faults in the system."



Model of a drone currently being used by BPCL

The DHI InnoTech team is also working to design, prototype, and fabricate components of drones in its research centre as test flights will be a challenge to fly at altitudes of 3,000m to 4,000m above sea level and with very varied and sometimes extreme weather conditions. It is hoped that the results of these trials will not only help to solve ongoing supply and maintenance issues but will also enable collaboration between industries, colleges in Bhutan and around the world. Additionally this project will likely result in creating opportunities for specialised employment, new design

approaches, and manufacture of drones to be used in a variety of sectors. There are also plans to collaborate with universities to generate a talent pipeline in the country.

Drafting of the new general regulations on drone usage has reached the third and the final stage and it is hoped that it might be completed soon. It will include details of sensitive areas where the operation of drones will not be permitted - such as in areas within 5 kilometres of airports and airlines - and at heights exceeding 90 meters above ground. It is expected that the BCAA will be helped with the challenges faced with monitoring of unauthorised flying of drones by other agencies such as the Royal Bhutan Police, Royal Bhutan Army, Dzongkhag authorities and local leaders.

KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

Camera, Action, Success!

In the year 2021, the Bhutanese film industry experienced a significant change with the start of two over-the-top platforms (OTTP), Samuh and Songyala. Since the pandemic in 2020, film theatres have been closed and the industry suffered losses leaving many unemployed. Film producers estimated that the industry suffered a loss of Nu 90 million with new film releases postponed, film shootings halted, and theatres closed.

With the start of OTTP it offered a new normal in the world of entertainment. It's a service that is offered directly to viewers via the Internet as opposed to the traditional means of a cable or satellite provider. Whilst self-regulation of digital content is important, OTTPs do face copyright violations from the start and in less than a month after Samuh went online, the company experienced its first case of copyright infringement which resulted in 3 copyright violators together paying a total of Nu 0.59 million to Samuh for damages etc.

The year 2021 was also a promising year for the Bhutanese film industry and was marked with the greater popularity of Bhutanese film in international markets. The one-minute film "Snow Lion and The Glaciologist" won the Best Documentary Award at the International Mobile Film Festival in Paris. It portrays a glaciologist, Phuntsho Tshering, working with the National Centre for Hydrology and Meteorology, going on foot to inspect the glaciers every year, and showing viewers what it takes for a small country like Bhutan to protect its community against climate change. A short film, "Why is the sky dark at night?" was also selected in the Wide Angle: Asian Short Film Competition segment at the 26th Busan International Film Festival, South Korea. Then to add to the promises of 2022, the Bhutanese film, "Lunana: A Yak in the Classroom" made it into the 2021 Oscars nominations

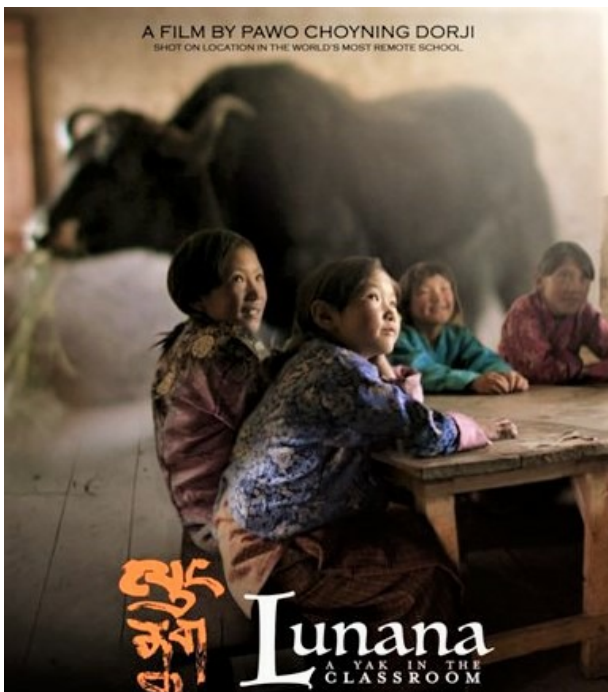
"Lunana: A Yak in the Classroom"

In late summer 2018, Pawo Dorji, a Bhutanese film director along with 35 crew, set out on what he called an improbable journey - to shoot his first film in the remote Lunana Valley. The valley, which borders western China, has glacial lakes, some of the worlds highest peaks and cannot be reached by car. So everything from firewood to batteries and solar chargers had to be transported on mules and even non-perishable foods such as dried pumpkin and mushrooms, were included. The trek took eight days and they all had to build temporary housing on arrival.

Lunana tells the story of a young teacher from Thimphu who is assigned to work, against his will, in a remote mountain school. He had dreamt of leaving his government job, emigrating to Australia and pursuing a career as a singer. As time goes by, he gets more involved with village life and takes his job more seriously.

Every aspect of the film making process was challenging. Firstly, the filming had to be done on a single camera and there was insufficient solar power to review footage each night after shooting. Secondly, the three main roles were played by nonprofessional actors from Thimphu and the others, including the schoolchildren, were all from Lunana. However, by tailoring the script to their lives, they were essentially encouraged to play themselves and this enabled some very poignant examples of village life to be included. For example, when the teacher shows his students how to use a toothbrush, they were not acting; they really did not know. The result is a film that not only captures the sense of innocence in this community, but also the attention of the world of film makers. Initially in

December it was listed in the top fifteen of ninety-three Academy Award submissions from around the world, then in March it was chosen as one of the top five for an Oscar in the International Feature Film category. Whilst it did not win an Award, the film did receive much publicity. It's now being distributed by Samuel Goldwyn Films and marketed by a public relations agency with offices in New York and Beverly Hills. Namgay Dorji, the real-life schoolteacher whose life and experiences of living and working in Lunana were the basis of this story, says that the success of this film has inspired him to stay longer in the area.



TRAVELLERS TALES

Monks and Gomchens in Bhutan

Buddhism is the state religion of Bhutan. It has long been supported financially by the government through annual subsidies to Buddhist monasteries, shrines, monks, and nuns. More recently this support has included the manufacture of 10,000 gilded bronze images of the Buddha, publication of elegant calligraphic editions of the 108-volume Kangyur (Collection of the Words of the Buddha) and the 225-volume Tengyur (Collection of Commentaries), and the construction of numerous chorten (stupas) throughout the country. Buddhism is also guaranteed representation in the National Assembly and on the Royal Advisory Council. Many of our members have spent time visiting or working in Bhutan, often with specific interests in Buddhism. Below Rachel Rigby shares with us her focus on Buddhism in Bhutan:

It's not possible to visit Bhutan without encountering the particular stream of Buddhist practice which flows through every aspect of its life and culture. That stream is known as Vajrayāna, and Bhutan is the last remaining Himalayan Buddhist Kingdom where the Vajrayāna teachings have continued unbroken since the 8th century. The word 'vajra' refers to the indestructible kindness inherent in human nature, and 'yana' refers to the vehicle by which that indestructible diamond-like nature, can be revealed.

Buddhist teachings were first introduced to Bhutan in the 7th century by the Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo, who ordered the construction of two temples that can still be visited today, in the valleys of Bumthang and Paro. Vajrayāna was established later in the 8th century by Guru Rinpoche or 'precious teacher'. He is also known as Padmasambhava, the 'Lotus Born' and as the Tantric Buddha and wall



A charge notice board at the National Museum in Paro

paintings and statues of him can be found in temples and homes throughout Bhutan. These representations of Guru Rinpoche take different forms reflecting his diverse manifestations - as an ascetic, a king, a scholar, a warrior – in order to show that one's innermost Buddha nature, or Vajra nature, can ultimately be discovered in any existential circumstance. He is depicted as both monk and yogi - reflecting the two paths of Buddhist practitioners that are still extant in Bhutan: the monastic path and the non-monastic or yogic gomchen tradition. At the heart of the Vajrayāna world view is the idea that all aspects of one's experiences can be fundamentally transformed, so long as they are approached with awareness and kindness. There is no requirement to renounce the world or any aspect of it, and the yogic path of the gomchen exemplifies this approach. Gomchen means 'great meditator' and whereas monks and nuns reside in renunciant communities, gomchen are free to marry, have a family and live within the community, or in a remote retreat cave as their practice dictates.

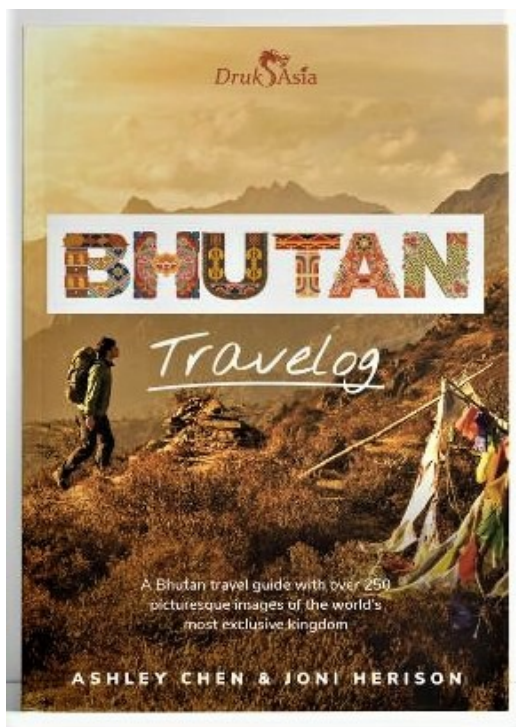
Gomchen can be men or women and are an integral part of society, serving as an accessible source of Buddhist authority at the community level, conducting funerals and leading public festivals. Due to many years of training they develop competency not only in meditation but also in all the ritual arts, astrology, medicine, and sacred dance.

As a sign of their non-renunciative path, gomchen keep long uncut hair and may wear white robes, as opposed to the red robes and shaved heads of the monks and nuns. Although visitors will meet monastics at every turn whilst touring the country, gomchen may sometimes be harder to spot – but white clothes and long hair might alert one to their presence.

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NEWS AND REVIEWS

Bhutan Travelog



This book is listed as the most pictorial travel guide book to Bhutan and includes over 250 stunning images. It has been written by two individuals, Ashley Chen and Joni Herison who have a deep affinity with the Kingdom and have travelled to Bhutan for over thirty times collectively. The book includes sections on:

Nine exclusive first-hand experiences shared by diverse travellers
Bhutanese cuisine, culture and identity

Important travel tips

Top attractions in Bhutan

Most popular trekking routes

The foreword is written by His Excellency Dasho Dr Lotay Tshering, Honourable Prime Minister of Bhutan, who said, *"If you ever seek to find answers to some of the fundamental questions in life, please know that there is a country somewhere in the Himalayas that could offer you the answers."*

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Memories of Bhutan competition

The publishers of this Travelog are also inviting readers to participate in "MY BHUTAN MEMORIES CAMPAIGN". There is a chance to win a return flight ticket to Bhutan (you can choose to depart from Bangkok, Singapore, Kathmandu, Dhaka, New Delhi, Kolkata, Gaya, Bagdogra or Guwahati)

You need to visit <https://bhutantravelog.com/share-your-memories> - and follow the directions on how to enter for this prize. The campaign ends on Aug 31, 2022.

Trust Fund Support for The Phensem Charity

A grant of £3,000 has been made by the UK's Society Trust Fund to the Phensem Charity to help set up a Training and Resource Centre in Thimpu. Phensem is listed as Bhutan's first parent support group for parents of children with disabilities and aims at empowering the primary caregivers. The Training and Resource Centre at Phensem will be used to host many training programmes for parents starting with basic introduction to use of ICT. The funding from the Society will be used to provide furniture and equipment for the Resource Centre. The Centre will also serve as a resource for parents who don't have access to computers, Internet, etc. and where educational and intervention materials can be accessed by them to support their child's education.



Michael Rutland with a group at The Centre

Thimphu's First Pet Grooming Service

Even with the ongoing issue of dealing with stray dogs in the country, there is scope for another perspective - a dog grooming parlour to look after those more wanted pets.

Chuki Gyaltsen, from Thimphu, is an animal lover and a self-taught pet groomer. After grooming her own dog for many years, she started a grooming service at home for friends with pets. Last December she was given a space inside a Pharmacy complex in Thimphu to set up her grooming parlour - the first of its kind in Bhutan. It is a cosy room with a deep sink, blow dryers, scissors, a panel heater, combs and brushes, and some tissues. Chuki provides services such as bathing, nail clipping, ear cleaning and trimming coats, among others. She said that it takes about five hours to groom a pet after allowing an hour to ensure the pet feels comfortable with her. Bites and scratches are hazards of the job and a few even bite her hands while she is brushing their teeth. Despite the challenges, she isn't discouraged. It costs Nu 1,500 to Nu 3,000 to groom a pet depending on its breed, size, and physical condition and on average Chuki grooms 14 dogs a month. She says that her pet grooming business is developing well.

"Hingthram: Weaving from the heart"

The textile industry has played a major role in promoting the livelihoods of women in Bhutan. As a tribute to all the women who have been preserving the art of weaving, an exhibition called "Hingtham: Weaving from the Heart, A Capsule Collection", was launched earlier this year. It showcases products made from local textiles such as throws, rugs, cushion covers, futon mats, and shawls and raw materials to make natural dyes and fibres, and looms are also on display. The exhibition is the third output of the three-year project worth Euro 4 million and represents the work of designers, textile companies and CSO's from over 200 artisans in Bhutan. Karma Tshoki, designer and proprietor of Yarn and Yatha Bhutan, said that the exhibition was a platform to create brand awareness of the Bhutanese textile. "There is a market for Bhutanese textile in the international market but we need to have quality checks and balances of our products," she said. "The project helped women ensure their livelihood during the pandemic when there was no market." As a result 22 direct beneficiaries are working together towards establishing a co-operative association called Bhutan Textile Co-operative under the Department of Agriculture and Marketing Co-operative.

CONTACT LIST

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NOTE

*If you have not done so already, please send your e-mail address to ***rosieglazebrook@hotmail.com*** who will add it to the database.*

There is no plan to go paperless, but it is often convenient to communicate information electronically at short notice.

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