

# THE BHUTAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



NUMBER 57

PRESIDENT: SIR SIMON BOWES LYON

AUTUMN 2015

## Summer visit by Society members



### **Annual Dinner**

*A final reminder to those who have not already booked, that this Dinner will be held on Friday 27 November at The Polish Hearth Club, 55 Prince's Gate, Exhibition Road, London SW7 2PN.*

*Booking forms were enclosed with the last Newsletter. Please complete and return with payment to the Dinner Secretary, Mark Swinbank.*

Blessed, or cursed, by the hottest July temperature ever recorded in Britain, members of the Society were welcomed by Sir Simon and Lady Bowes Lyon to St Paul's Walden Bury for a delightfully informal but informative day. The house, in the family of the Society's President since 1725, is the place where HM the late Queen Mother grew up and was later home to her brother, David (Simon's father). From its oldest part, the 18th century Adam style north wing, formal tree-lined allées, each leading the eye to a statue or architectural feature, radiate in the classic French goose-foot pattern.

Although the show of flowering shrubs from Simon's trips to the Himalayas were over, it was the perfect time to see a special Bhutanese tree *Cornus capitata* in full bloom (or, technically, bract). This provided a good backdrop for the group photograph above.

After a light lunch next to a gnarled but magnificent old oak, Caroline showed guests round the house, with its original 18th century plasterwork ceilings and some very recognisable royal pieces: a portrait of the Queen Mother (one half of a pair with that of her brother David), and a rocking horse which had been ridden by the young princesses Elizabeth and Margaret, as seen in a photograph from 1932. The day provided something for all tastes. While a statue of Diana the Goddess is depicted in classical splendour in the gardens, Diana, Princess of Wales, appeared inside in a photograph, together with Simon as Lord Lieutenant, during a Royal walkabout.

Many thanks to our hosts the Bowes Lyon family and to Dorry Friesen for arranging everything splendidly.

# SOCIETY NEWS

## Next meeting

### *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.

**The meeting will be held at The Polish Hearth Club, 55 Prince's Gate, Exhibition Road, London SW7 2PN**

## ***Annual General Meeting***

*The next AGM will take place at 6.00pm on Wednesday, January 13th, 2016 at The Travellers Club, 106 Pall Mall, London SW1 5EP.*

*The AGM will be followed at 7.00pm by a talk from our Chairman, Michael Rutland OBE, on "Recent Developments in Bhutan".*

*Reception drinks from 5.30pm  
Usual dress code applies.*

**Further information is enclosed**

## **New business development programme for Loden Foundation**



The Loden-DHI Fund has recently been launched to give financial support to developing social enterprise in Bhutan. The Druk Holding and Investments (DHI), Bhutan's state investment company, gave an interest free loan of Nu.20million (approximately £200k) to the Loden Foundation to be used towards funding new social ventures. Dorji Tashi, Loden's Executive Director said: "This will help address issues concerning access to finance, which is a major constraint for starting a business in Bhutan."

Dr Danbar S Kharka, deputy CEO of DHI confirmed that DHI is doing away with its own Business Entrepreneurship Growth and Innovation (BEGIN). It will now be working with Loden to promote entrepreneurship based on Loden's potential, expertise and success stories in training, mentoring and funding young entrepreneurs. Dr Karma Phuntsho, President and Founder of the Loden Foundation and member of the Bhutan Society, noted that this was a major milestone in the transition for Bhutan from an economy traditionally directed by the state to one in which the private sector would be the main driver. He said, "It is an exemplary public-private partnership in order to achieve a sustainable and socially responsible business growth".

An initial call for business proposals for this funding has been made and a total of around two dozen entrepreneurial awards, including those funded by the DHI loan, are expected to be made in November. Loden aims to have funded and mentored 100 social entrepreneurs in Bhutan within twelve months. Meanwhile, the Loden Foundation has already received over 160 business proposals for its regular competition for 2015.



# NEWS

## Risk reassessment of glaciers and lakes

**A multi-disciplinary team comprising officials from various government agencies will shortly visit Lunana to reassess glaciological and geo-hydrological surveys of the lake complex. A detailed study on geomorphology along with vulnerability and risk assessments would be undertaken to find out what could be done should there be a glacier outburst.**



The reassessment is expected to take about a month depending on the extent of data and information required for the development of a land use and disaster management plan for the Punakha-Wangdue valley. Officials said that lakes in Lunana hold about 40-50 million m<sup>3</sup> of water. In the case of a Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF), the catastrophic threats downstream could impact lives, livelihood and infrastructure even beyond the Bhutan border. Flood vulnerability has increased

and so has the associated risks as human activities extended in areas that were not inhabited earlier. The Punakha-Wangdue basin makes up more than 25 per cent of the country's land area and is home to more than 14 per cent of its population. The two biggest hydropower projects are also located downstream. Officials believe that in a worse case GLOF scenario, it is unlikely that either hydropower station would survive. Hence the need to focus on new measures other than an early warning system.

According to official data, there were in total 677 glaciers and 2,674 glacial lakes, out of which 24 were considered potentially dangerous. There have been 12 GLOFs since 1966 and glaciers, that have fed most of the Bhutanese rivers since 1980, have shrunk by 22 per cent between 1980 and 2010, whilst glacial lakes have increased by 8.7 per cent within the same period.

### **A different approach is being used in another study in Bhutan.**

Trees in Bhutan, some over 650 years old, are being used to measure changes in summer temperature in the region. The study, conducted by six researchers found that the first decade of this century has been the warmest in the past 638 years (1376 to 2013). This coincides with the timing of glaciers receding. While the research found that a similar warm period had occurred in 1390, it was only for about a decade. The findings of the study are significant as continuous instrumental records of climate in Bhutan, longer than 35 years, do not exist. The researchers studied the growth rings of trees to measure summer temperatures (June-August).

Bhutan is considered a suitable place for "paleoclimate reconstruction" because 72.5 per cent of its land is still covered by forests. One of the report's authors, PJ Krusic, from Stockholm University said, "There are few places left in the Himalaya that still retain as much old-growth forest as Bhutan." So far the oldest trees found in Bhutan were nearly 800 years old and located east of Yotong la. Others collected, as old as 650 years, were found southeast of Ura.

PJ Krusic explained how the growth rings of the trees were used. Plant growth is controlled mostly by temperature, so when the temperatures during the growing season stay really low, the spruce trees studied did not grow so well and that was reflected by a small, narrow, growth ring.

The findings of the study have implications on other studies underway such as those concerning glacier recession. Preliminary results show that when temperatures rise, glaciers melt fast. Exactly how fast for every degree of annual temperature increase is what the researchers are working towards finding. In reference to hydropower dams, the author believes that careful planning is required for such large scale geo-engineering projects as any miscalculation on future stream flow could have costly impacts. History has shown that long records of temperature and stream flow are needed to accurately scale such projects.

## Bus system to get a facelift

With vehicle imports showing no signs of slowing down, the Government, through the Information and Communications Ministry, is urgently stepping up its efforts to improve public transport. Despite the increased taxes after the ban on import of vehicles was lifted in July last year, over 7,000 vehicles were imported into Bhutan, over 90% of which were for private use. Bhutan Post, which operates the public bus system in Thimphu, has been tasked with making its services more professional. Currently around 6,000 passengers use the city buses daily, compared to around 36,000 who use taxi services.

Bhutan Post is already piloting a new ticketing system on some routes. If successful, bus tickets will eventually become available for purchase in shops and other establishments. Such tickets will be introduced with longer validity periods, not only for single journeys. Such a ticket purchasing system, will also mean fewer cash transactions on the bus which hopefully will reduce or eliminate current problems with revenue leakage.

The Ministry is also working on the design of a model bus stop. This will include a shelter, information on routes, timings and fares, a dedicated area for the bus to park, and a waste bin. Bhutan Post also plans to upgrade its existing 34 buses, increase the fleet by another 18 and also explore options for the introduction of electric buses.

Meanwhile, a report on an intelligent transport system, that uses information communications technology to improve the traffic system and flow for Thimphu, will shortly be submitted to the Government. However, if traffic lights are recommended in the report, it is unlikely to be adopted. A spokesperson said that, for aesthetic reasons, it is Government policy that traffic lights will not be used.

## Ludrong Memorial Garden opened

His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo recently inaugurated the Ludrong Memorial Garden. The garden, in Langjophakha, Thimphu, is a gift to the people of Bhutan from Her Majesty the Royal Grandmother Kesang Choeden Wangchuck, on her 85th birthday. The historical inaugural ceremony was attended by His Majesty The King, Her Majesty The Gyaltsuen, Their Majesties the Queen Mothers, and members of the Royal Family. Her Majesty's longstanding wish to transform the property into a memorial garden as a gift for those who appreciate the natural beauty of the kingdom, was fulfilled.

To commemorate the occasion, His Majesty The King planted a cypress tree, while His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo and Her Majesty the Royal Grandmother each planted a chinara (Platanus orientalis) sapling tree. These saplings were from the seeds of the rare species, that was originally brought from Kashmir, India and planted in Bhutan by Rani Mayum Choeying Wangmo Dorji, Her Majesty's mother.



*Her Majesty the Royal Grandmother and His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo at the Ludrong Memorial Garden in Langjophakha, Thimphu.*

Originally known as Ludrong or Settlement of Nagas, the Memorial Garden stands between the 15th century Tashichhodzong and the country's present day Parliament buildings, with the Wangchu river drawing a fine line between these two important monuments. The garden has been enriched with 560 varieties of trees, 362 scrub species, 385 bush species, 1,724 flower species and 75 fruit bearing trees. In addition to the plants, the ponds were filled with brown trout, snow trout and carp, fish species that were originally brought from Kashmir by Gongzim Sonam Tobgye Dorji. The area is home to at least 15 common bird species, as well as 30 seasonal birds, including the ibis bill and black-tailed crane.

With two prayer wheels, the garden will provide not only recreational benefits but also serve as a centre for environmental education for schools and institutions. It will also provide tourists with an attractive site to visit. Spread over 8.35 acres, this garden took two years to complete.

# KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

## Where there's muck....

The first biogas plant fuelled by pig manure is now operational at the National Piggery Development Center (NPiDC) in Gelephu and is the biggest such plant in Bhutan. The biogas from pig manure is used for lighting, generating heat for the pig sheds and for the cooking facilities in the 10 kitchens in the staff quarters and office buildings.

The piggery waste produced from 700 farm animals is used for refilling the plant which requires daily about 150 kilograms of manure for gas production. In the past, pig dung was either washed away to outlet drains or left in the open for natural drying.



The project was installed at a cost of Nu 800,000 with the specific aim of reducing the negative environmental impact from intensive pig farming by turning piggery waste into a renewable energy source. The biogas digester was installed in collaboration with the Bhutan Biogas Project (BBP), which is a joint programme of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Royal Government of Bhutan and SNV, a Netherlands

Development Organization which helped design this plant. Biogas technology is already widely practiced in China, Nepal, and Thailand. An official said "Although it is difficult to quantify the reduction of greenhouse gases emitted to the environment, the immediate impact is in the reduction of farm smells and an improvement in farm hygiene." The plant helps reduce electricity utility bills and also the use of LPG which would otherwise cost low income farm attendants approximately Nu 15,000 per year. The BBP aims to build up capacity in the public and private sectors by constructing and operating biogas plants in the country, particularly in the southern dzongkhags. NPiDC already has plans to install a similar biogas plant at the Regional Poultry and Pig Breeding Centre in Mongar.

## .... there's also money

Meanwhile, there is another successful outcome, this time at the compost plant in Thimphu. It is not only seeing an increase in the supply of biodegradable waste, but has also started making money from it. Until recently Thimphu municipal services were overwhelmed with waste at their main landfill site, but with the segregation of various types of waste, which the newly contacted waste collection firm has insisted upon, the quantity of waste ending up in the landfill site has been reduced by 60%. The compost plant receives about four tonnes of organic waste most days which is a threefold increase compared with previous years. At the plant, waste is processed over a five month period and is eventually turned into manure and sold for Nu 110 for a 12-kg bag. These sales have earned the Thimphu municipal services Nu 76,000 in the last four months.

### Opening your Heart Project

*From organising bluebell walks to bread making classes, Emma Slade, a British born Buddhist nun, has been using some innovative ways to raise money to help Meritsemo, a small village in southern Bhutan that was badly damaged in storms earlier this year.*

*The restoration project involves three elements; work on the small monastery, the village primary school and also with the village itself. So far two roofs on the village monastery have been completely repaired and two toilets, a shower and a septic tank are being built. In addition five laptops have been donated to the primary school which they are thrilled with.*

**For more information on Emma's Project visit [www.openingyourhearttobhutan.com](http://www.openingyourhearttobhutan.com)**



# NEWS AND UPDATES

## ***A Cultural Epiphany: Religious Dances of Bhutan and Their Costumes. By Françoise Pommaret***

For most outsiders, the religious dances of Bhutan are a visual feast of colours, enhanced by the twirling movements of the dancers, rich costumes and often, but not always, intriguing masks. But what are the cultural and religious meanings that hide behind the masks and the costumes? In a fascinating and authoritative article, Françoise Pommaret unravels the different layers of meanings and their relevance to the Bhutanese.



The author looks at the religious significance of various types of Buddhist Festivals, how they are celebrated and the role of the beautiful applique and embroidered banner " which liberates by sight" or throngdrel. The meanings of the many dance traditions are also explored as are the very varied costumes, masks and musical instruments that play such symbolic roles at these festivals.

The full article, along with some superb photographs, is on the Society's website: [www.bhutansociety.org](http://www.bhutansociety.org)

***A Cultural Epiphany. Religious Dances of Bhutan and Their Costumes.***, in Susan Bean (ed.), *MARG : The Arts of Bhutan*, vol. 66 n°4, June 2015, 30-39.

## **Blue collar movement**

The need to change people's perceptions and attitudes towards blue collar jobs in Bhutan is well known, but only recently has one seen examples of how this can be achieved.



In the past few months a group of workers could be seen reconstructing a traditional wall in Thimphu near the Trashichhodzong. The workers are Class X, Class XII and college graduates. About sixty students were recruited for the work by the Labour Ministry and are paid about Nu 450 a day. They have to construct the mud wall in the traditional manner, so a lot of pounding goes on as everything is done manually.

One of those workers is a class XII graduate and is from Wangdue. She wears safety boots and gloves and is covered in mud. For her this is fun and she has found some good new friends. "I am also learning new skills every day, which will be an asset when I look for a job in the future. Being a female, people ask me whether I can work in such conditions. But the job is not difficult." She said that she was hesitant in the beginning to work, but having given it a try, she likes it and finds it to be deeply satisfying. "We are all Bhutanese here and once we get the hang of the job, it is interesting and full of fun. Now I know what a blue-collar job is".

Yet another group of ten young people has started a waste management initiative. They call themselves Youth in Blue. A graduate from Gaeddu College of Business Studies started the group and they have now set up an office in Thimphu. They collect all kinds of waste to sensitise the public about waste management and also to create employment opportunities for young people.

Echoing the comments made by others, one of the young workers said, "There is no job one can't do as long as one's attitude is right. The work is easy and we are paid well. We can see that if the pay is good, young people are ready to do all kinds work".

## National Symbols of Bhutan - The Raven

The national bird of Bhutan is the raven. It is a large bird and the biggest member of the Crow family. It is completely black with a large bill, long wings and in flight shows a diamond-shaped tail.

In the Himalayas, ravens (*Corvus Corax Tibetanus*) have been recorded at many high altitudes - as high as 6,350 m (20,600 ft) on Mount Everest. In general ravens live in a wide array of environments, but prefer heavily contoured landscapes or wooded areas with large expanses of open land nearby for their nesting sites and feeding grounds. Ravens have coexisted with humans for thousands of years and in some areas have been so numerous that people have regarded them as pests. Part of their success as a species is due to their omnivorous diet; they are extremely versatile and opportunistic in finding sources of nutrition, feeding on carrion, insects, cereal grains, berries, fruit, small animals, and food waste. Some notable feats of problem-solving provide evidence that the common raven is considered unusually intelligent. Over the centuries, it has been the subject of mythology, folklore, art



and literature. In many cultures, including the indigenous cultures of Scandinavia, ancient Ireland and Wales, Bhutan and the northeast of Asia, the raven has been revered as a spiritual figure or god.

One prominent symbol of the Bhutanese monarchy is the Raven Crown worn by reigning monarchs since the reign of Ugyen Wangchuck (1907–1926), the first King of Bhutan who adopted as the unique symbol of his authority, a crown surmounted by the head of a raven. The prototype of the founding monarch's Raven Crown had first been devised as a battle helmet for his father, Jigme Namgyel (1825–81). Known as the Black Regent, he had worn it in bloody struggles against his many rivals within the country and against others who tried, unsuccessfully, to subdue him. The raven represents one of the most powerful deities of the country, Jarog Dongchen, and it is believed that the deity took the form of a raven to guide and unify the country. At one time it was a capital crime to kill a raven in Bhutan

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### New Air Transport Services

Despite more than 6,000 miles of roads, the country's geographical terrain is still a challenge. To help overcome this, the Government has decided to improve transport with new air services. The Royal Bhutan Helicopter Services Ltd (RBHS), a state owned company, has been formed and expects to launch helicopter services in early November.

Whilst the two airlines combined carried more than 240,000 international and domestic passengers last year, there was limited scope for building more airports to meet the increasing needs. However, according to a report in 2010, there are at least 40 operational helipads of various standards in Bhutan and these are now being reviewed by the Department of Air Transport. The Government plans to use the helicopters for search and rescue operations, air medical evacuations, fire fighting needs, moving cargo, transport of VIPs and government officials, and possibly even for tourism. Whilst a former government and experienced Drukair employee has been appointed as Chief Executive Officer, the challenges of finding suitably skilled operational personnel have been met initially by Airbus. They have agreed, as part of the deal, to include two pilots and two engineers along with the two helicopters. The Government currently relies on the Indian army and air force, and at times, helicopters from Nepal, for support.



Meanwhile Tashi Air Private Limited (Bhutan Airlines), has launched its twice weekly service to New Delhi, via Kathmandu. Commercial director, Ugyen Tenzin, said that the airline expects good demand for its services as New Delhi serves as a transit hub to Europe. Although Tashi Air will not be competing with the national airline, Drukair, in terms of price, it expects customer confidence and support to grow given their good time performance and having an all Bhutanese flight crew. Tashi Air also announced it is planning to launch bi-weekly flights from March 2016 to Singapore via Yangon in Myanmar. Drukair currently flies three times a week to Singapore.



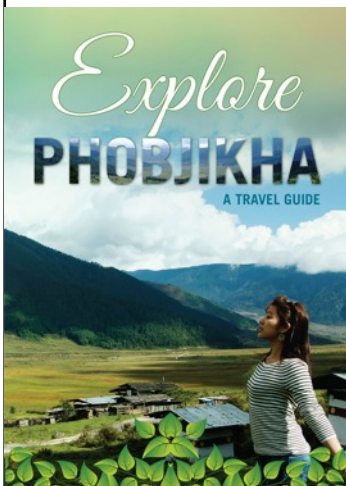
## Planning a smooth drive

**The quality of works of all contractors who are involved in the North East-West highway widening works will be strictly monitored to ensure that it will be a model road. Should the need arise, the Prime Minister confirmed he would personally inspect the works carried out by the contractors.**

While meeting the contractors, Lyonchoen Tshering Tobgay, who has studied engineering, said that he carries with him core cutting testing equipment while travelling and that whenever he stops, he drills the road to inspect the standards. As per the plan, the formation cutting of the roads is expected to wind up by the end of the year and the Prime Minister urged all contractors to complete their works by 2017. However, he gave the contractors a choice to avoid vigorous inspection by inviting them to increase the defect liability period from one year to three.

The contractors are also required to submit a quarterly plan in advance to the Department of Roads. Should contractors fail to deliver as per the plan on three occasions, their contract would be terminated, besides the additional fines and penalties that would be imposed. The Government would also debar those particular contractors from getting any work contracts in future. However, if contractors are able to deliver quality work on time, a special certificate would be awarded to the respective firms with an opportunity to explore options for more Government contracts. As an incentive to complete contracts on time, contractors would also be given 15 per cent extra on the bidding price as compensation for purchasing electricity and lighting equipment to enable major works to be carried out between 7.00pm to 8.00am.

### Explore Phobjikha



The community-based sustainable tourism (CBST) project has recently published the second edition of *Explore Phobjikha*. This is a comprehensive travel guide and includes information on the environment, socio-cultural products and community-based tourism activities of Gangtey and Phobji Gewogs in Wangduephodrang Dzongkhag and details of the annual Black-necked Crane Festival.

**The book will be available for sale at the Black-necked Crane Visitor Centre (BNCVC) and RSPN headquarters in Thimphu.**

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### 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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