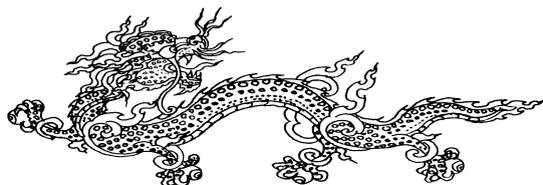


THE BHUTAN SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

Number 26

President: Lord Wilson of Tillyorn, KT, GCMG

May 2003

10th June 2003

Recent Developments in Bhutan

An Informal Talk by Michael Rutland

An opportunity to hear from Michael Rutland, our Hon. Secretary, who lives in Bhutan for part of each year, about recent changes and developments in the country.

The intention is to provide plenty of opportunity for the audience to ask questions about any aspects of modern Bhutan which interest them.

Michael first lived in a very different – or perhaps not so different – Bhutan in 1970, and is therefore well-placed to comment on the changes he perceives to have taken place over the last 33 years.

The past year has been a particularly eventful and exciting one in Bhutan and has seen the start of changes which are perhaps the most significant and profound since the commencement of the hereditary monarchy.

Tuesday 10th June 2003

6:30 pm for 7:00 pm

**The National Liberal Club
(The David Lloyd George Room)
Whitehall Place, London SW1A 2HE**

Drinks available before the lecture

Dates for your diary

Dr. Françoise Pommaret will lecture to the Society on the evening of **Friday 12th September** at the National Liberal Club, London. She will be speaking on 'An estate and its festival: Ugyenchoeling in Bumthang.'

The **2003 Annual Dinner** of the Bhutan Society will be held on **Friday 24th October** at the National Liberal Club, London.

Further information will be in the summer Newsletter.

New Hon. Treasurer

We are delighted to welcome Robin Lee as the Society's new Hon. Treasurer. Robin takes over from Nicholas Rhodes who has done a wonderful job for the Society over the past decade and is now spending part of each year following up new opportunities in Singapore.

Robin and his wife Elizabeth are founding members of the Society and will already be well-known to Members. Robin can be contacted at:

13 Albury House, The Sells, St. Luke's Park,
Guildford, Surrey GU1 3PE
E-mail: lee.robin@virgin.net

'The Other Final'

London screening of Bhutan football film

On June 30th 2002, amidst the excitement and anticipation of the World Cup final between star teams Brazil and Germany, two unknown teams from the lowest rungs of the FIFA ladder – a Himalayan kingdom and a Caribbean island – faced each other in 'the other final'.

Organised and filmed by a Dutch communications company, KesselsKramer, the Bhutan v. Montserrat match took place in Thimphu – the biggest media event ever to take place in Bhutan. The film 'The Other Final' tells the story of the build up to the match and demonstrates how football can bond together people with completely different cultures and beliefs to celebrate friendship and their love for the 'beautiful game'.

The film's British Premier will take place on 11th June, with a public screening on **Saturday 14th June** which Members are strongly encouraged to attend.

The June 14th screening will take place at 11am at the Curzon Mayfair Cinema, 38 Curzon Street, Mayfair, London W1Y 7TY

Tickets cost £5 (concessions £3) and can be booked by calling the Curzon box office on (020) 7495 0500.

For more information about the film visit the website: www.theotherfinal.com

This Newsletter is produced by Lucy & Bodo Hornberger to whom enquiries and contributions should be addressed. Unit 23, 78 Marylebone High Street, London W1U 5AP E-mail: info@bhutansociety.org Fax: (020) 7580 2648

The Society's website is at www.bhutansociety.org and carries information about the Society, news and events, an archive of previous Newsletters and a selection of interesting Bhutan-related links.



News & Updates from

Tour Report: The Bhutan Society Tour 2002

by Topsy Hughes

The Bhutan Society Tour took place
from November 2nd - 16th 2002

Our tour started splendidly at the delightful Dwarikas Hotel in Kathmandu. This elegant hotel has been both built and furnished using traditional Nepali materials. The evening we arrived the Bhutan SAARC representative welcomed us with a most enjoyable reception with delicious food and wine, and we were honoured to be given the excellent Coronation whisky made specially for the King's Silver Jubilee.

The following morning we took the Druk Air flight to Paro. As seats are not allocated there was a frantic rush for the left hand seats in order to have the best views of the mountains, including Everest. At Paro we were met by Chambula Dorji who had arranged our tour and organised everything superbly throughout. Our accommodation was the Bhutan Resort in the hills above Paro where we revelled in the glorious views.

In Paro we visited the National Museum and Paro Dzong, and as a privilege we visited two Dzongs not normally open to visitors. One of these, Kichu, is very beautiful, and while we were there we were fortunate to see a family who had brought their three week-old baby to be blessed. At the other, Duntse Lhakang, we found the caretaker monk busy making spirit catchers which he was selling to raise money to buy material for new curtains to cover the wall paintings. There was something oddly incongruous about the old sewing machine in the Dzong! We also saw the school where Michael had taught and the house he had lived in at that time. Both were in a beautiful peaceful situation with wonderful views of Taksang.

We then had several very busy days in Thimphu. The Foreign Minister held a reception for us and we held a reception for members of the Government and officials. Both receptions were immensely enjoyable. Michael invited us for coffee at the house where he now lives. This house, too, is in a wonderful position with glorious views. While there we saw the exquisite *kiras* woven by his daughter-in-law and we had great fun trying them on. Some of us bought one.

We left Thimphu after a lunch given for us by the Foreign Ministry and, en route to Wangdi Phodrang, some of us went to Chemi Lhakang. This 30 minute walk across fields and up a steep path was quite difficult, particularly as we were unsuitably shod and attired, having left Thimphu immediately after the official lunch. However, when we reached the Dzong, there was a service in progress which I found very moving. And a little cat wandering among the monks gave me added pleasure.

Before we left, the monks blessed the ladies in the

group by touching them on the head with a wooden phallus which is said to help women conceive! It was almost dark when we made our way back over fields and streams to the road and a bar where we were revived with whisky while we watched the local men play a form of finger billiards.

We visited many Dzongs and at Trongsa saw some of the skilled restoration work being carried out. In Trongsa we stayed in a guest house owned by a previous Dzongkag and from which we had a superb view of the Dzong. Our trip included visits to two beautiful old palaces – Wangdu Choling and Kuenga Rabten. No one lives in either palace now, but Kuenga Rabten had once been the winter palace of the second King of Bhutan.

Among the highlights of our trip were several extremely interesting after-dinner talks. Jessica Beaghen told us about her work helping with the development of the new Royal Botanical Gardens which we later visited and where we saw the polytunnel donated by the Bhutan Society. Mynak Tulku, the Director of the National Library (and previously Director of the National Museum), gave an illuminating talk on Buddhism.

In Bumthang Ashi Kunzang Choden, the charming author of *Folk Tales of Bhutan* and *Bhutanese Tales of the Yeti*, gave a most fascinating talk. The following day the seven non-trekkers in the group (which included me) went to Ugyen Choeling where we stayed the night. Ugyen Choeling was the family home of Ashi Kunzang Choden and together with her brothers she has restored the house with meticulous care. Part of it has been made into a museum of history of the Bhutanese way of life. Another part is now a guest house and this is where we stayed.

To reach the house we travelled for several hours through stunning mountain scenery, making several unscheduled stops to visit a local village and a school. Eventually we left our bus and walked for about 45 minutes, over a swing bridge, up through woods and over fields to the guest house. We had been told to expect simple, very basic accommodation, and we were therefore surprised and delighted to find a wood-burning stove, candlelight and delicious food. I thought Ugyen Choeling was a magical place and was sorry to leave the next morning.

There was so much of interest throughout the tour: the sight of the black necked cranes in the Phobjika Valley, the takins in Thimphu, the excellent Textile and Folk Museums, also in Thimphu, and much else. Everywhere both the accommodation and food were good and the picnic lunches a feast of hot rice, noodles, meat and vegetables – not a sandwich in sight.

When we returned to Thimphu we were official guests at the King's Birthday Celebrations at the stadium which was an appropriate end to an excellent tour.

Further individual accounts from tour members will be featured in the summer issue of the Newsletter.

the Bhutan Society



Can you help? Hospitality and an English course sought for two dancers from Thimphu's Royal Academy of Performing Arts

The Royal Academy of Performing Arts (RAPA) was established in Thimphu in 1970 to train young Bhutanese in the traditional masked dances, folk dances and songs of Bhutan. The RAPA now has over 60 dancers and students who are seeking to preserve these wonderful and colourful aspects of traditional Bhutanese life.

RAPA's dancers and singers have visited a number of countries, and you may recall a group visiting the UK in Summer 2000, when they performed at the Millennium Dome and in Guildford's historic High Street.

Many of these students have only basic English skills, and this is a problem when they are invited to perform abroad. The Head of RAPA has therefore asked whether any Members might be able to offer two things – firstly, hospitality in their home for a young Bhutanese lady dancer for around eight weeks and, secondly, sponsorship for an English Language course for that period. If any Members can offer either or both, that would be excellent!

The two ladies involved have both been at RAPA for several years, and are among the most experienced in folk dances and song. They briefly visited the UK in 2002 and were hosted by families in Guildford; both ladies can be thoroughly recommended.



Lady dancers from Thimphu's Royal Academy of Performing Arts

Timing is flexible for the visits, however the sooner the better, and summer is of course a particularly pleasant time to visit the UK. The host family need not be in London, but there must be an English Language School nearby.

If you are interested in helping, please contact either Lucy Hornberger (lucy@globeflower.com; tel: (020) 7580 2617) or Michael Rutland (mrutland@aol.com; tel: (01483) 538189) as soon as possible. Thank you!

Beware Smile Internet Bank!

The Hon. Secretary, Michael Rutland, passes on this warning about the potential dangers of Internet Banks. He has held accounts with the Smile Internet Bank, part of the Cooperative Bank, for several years. Smile emphasises its excellent security, and clearly states that any losses occurring due to fraudulent transactions will be reimbursed. Don't believe it!!

In January 2003 £3,000 was transferred out of Michael's accounts without his authorisation. Smile knows that the money was transferred to an Alliance and Leicester account in the name of 'A. Stone' – a name and an account unknown to Michael. Thinking it a clear case of fraudulent transactions, he confidently expected the money to be reimbursed by Smile. However, they refuse to do so on the grounds that he cannot prove the transactions were fraudulent! It is, of course, impossible for Michael to prove that without access to, and knowledge of, Smile's systems and security procedures. Smile claims that 'this has never happened before' so, in effect, do not believe him.

As the receiving name, account and ISP (identifier) of the computer used to make the transactions is known to Smile, it is strange in the extreme that Smile refuses to make suitable enquiries. The current position appears to be that Michael has lost £3,000, and he therefore strongly recommends Members to steer well clear of Smile Internet Bank Accounts.

Money raised for Health Trust Fund arrives in Bhutan

The money raised by the Bhutan Society for Bhutan's Health Trust Fund has arrived at the Ministry of Health where it is much appreciated. The total was the magnificent sum of US\$ 4,720. Many thanks to all who contributed!

Thank you also to those who purchased the TASARAM 'Himalaya' design silk scarves, featured in our previous issue. TASARAM has donated a further £50 to the Health Trust Fund.

For information on TASARAM Scarves please visit www.tasaram.com or telephone (020) 7631 0420.

The Hon. Secretary Michael Rutland will be in Guildford from 6th June until the end of August, when he will return to Bhutan. He is delighted to meet Members visiting Bhutan during the periods when he is there. Please telephone him when you are in Thimphu.

Guildford

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News from the

The Pressures of Education

Kuensel Editorial

There is no achievement without hardship, goes a traditional Bhutanese saying. Just as Bhutanese students learnt this lesson down the ages, today's students are finding out what it means.

For some of us the most vivid stories our parents told us were of the harsh punishment meted out by their teachers who sometimes even whipped them with the stinging nettle plant. Students travelled long distances to school, both within and outside the country, meeting their parents once a year during the brief winter holidays. Now, the future generation is facing its own challenges.

The apparent suicide of a 13-year old school girl after she received poor academic results is yet another chilling reminder of these inevitable new trends. While this tragedy was an extreme case, we are reminded that thousands of our children take that painful walk home at the end of the year, carrying a less than perfect mark sheet to convey the bad news to their parents. And, for some, that is just the beginning of life's problems.

In the past education might have meant dreaded physical penalties, but it led to job security. Today, after a series of examinations, youth are faced with increased competition in further education and jobs. 5,026 Class X students recently awaited their examination results and 150 university graduates are seeking jobs. Such a sequence of hurdles means that a child might be forced to feel that he or she has failed in life at a very young age.

Last week, His Majesty the King reminded Bhutanese teachers of their 'vital role in providing a wholesome education to all Bhutanese youth' and in 'shaping the future generation of Bhutanese people'. This represents a greatly enhanced role for Bhutanese teachers, a role we have recognised since the beginning of the modern education system. But we know that it does not absolve the parents of their roles. Although the government has taken up the responsibility for the education of Bhutanese youth, providing free education for all, the parents hold the ultimate responsibility and it falls on the parents to ease the pressure on their children.

Today we should not need psychologists to tell us that such trauma in school children is caused by their home and school environments and social pressure. But we do need to wake up to reality. Parents are commonly overheard threatening their children with fearsome fates if they do not do better in their studies. It seems that, as parents, we need to first educate ourselves. We need to understand that topping the class is not a guarantee for success in life and that education is far broader a concept than class work. We need to understand that, in Bhutan, there is a wide variety of jobs available to our youth, no matter what their qualifications are, as long as they are willing to work.

We need to understand our own children. The foundation of every state is the education of its youth.

RBG Serbithang receives Darwin Award

The British Government has announced that Bhutan's Royal Botanic Gardens at Serbithang has been awarded a 'Darwin Grant' for the development of the Gardens through training, staff exchanges and capacity building so that it can contribute effectively to environmental education, species conservation and research.

The project will be implemented in association with the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh, which recently published the definitive 'Flora of Bhutan'. Lyonpo Kinzang Dorji, Minister of Agriculture, was Chief Guest at the publication's Edinburgh launch last year.

The Darwin Initiative is part of the UK Government's commitment to tackling biodiversity problems at an international level. The Darwin Grants target important projects aimed at saving species and ecosystems and are intended to assist developing countries conserve their rich biodiversity resources using UK expertise in a partnership approach. The British Deputy High Commissioner to India, Mark Runacres, who visited RBG Serbithang when he was in Bhutan recently, expressed his great pleasure and congratulations that the Gardens had been selected for a Darwin Award.

India signs deal with tribal rebels

Kuensel Online

India has signed an agreement with a major insurgent group fighting for autonomy within the north-eastern Assam state. The agreement was signed in Delhi between senior officials of the Indian Home Ministry and leaders of the Bodoland Liberation Tiger Force (BLTF).

India's Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani and Assam's Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi attended the signing ceremony. The accord sets up a Bodoland Territorial Council in Assam offering considerable local autonomy to more than 3,000 villages that are home to Bodo tribesmen. The agreement aims to bring to an end a six-year conflict in which thousands have been killed and wounded.

Mr. Gogoi hailed the agreement as 'a gift for Assam' and expressed the hope that it would go a long way towards solving the state's tribal insurgency, adding that he was determined to implement the accord so that the 1.6 million Bodos of Assam could enjoy self-rule without having to break up Assam. Mainao Daimari, a BLTF official, expressed similar optimism. 'We can now decide our own future with greater autonomy,' he said.

However, not all Bodo groups are happy with the accord. The separatist National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) rejects the agreement, claiming the deal 'fell far short of the Bodo aspiration for a separate, independent homeland,' and pledging to continue its armed struggle. Assam's strongest separatist group, the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), has also rejected the accord.

Kingdom of Bhutan



Driglam Namzha:* the embodiment of *tha damtshi

by Dr. Richard Whitecross

Previously, I wrote about *tha damtshi* (see Newsletter 25, p.4). Here I show how *tha damtshi* is the moral foundation of *driglam namzha*, the code of conduct. Before doing so, let me add one further detail to *tha damtshi*. *Tha damtshi* is often spoken about with reference to *leyjumdre* or cause and effect, reminding us of a key aspect of Buddhist teaching about karma. In brief, each action never fails to produce an effect. During early conversations with a Bhutanese family with whom I became close, they described *tha damtshi* as being part of the alphabet of being Bhutanese. *Leyjumdre* was explained to me in terms of the ten virtuous and non-virtuous actions or *gyewa cu*. These are not killing, stealing or lying, not committing sexual misconduct, refraining from divisive speech, worthless chatter or harsh words, not being covetous, or having evil intent or wrong view. The first four are viewed as physical actions, the next three as aspects of speech and the final three as aspects of the mind. This tripartite division is important and leads us to *driglam namzha*.

The Zhabdrung, Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651), in the process of consolidating his authority over Bhutan, drew on the codes of discipline and conduct used at Ralung Monastery. From these codes, the Zhabdrung developed a code of etiquette and conduct for members of the Drukpa government which over time came to spread beyond the court and the government offices to the ordinary people. Through the development of *driglam namzha* a sense of common identity amongst the various linguistic groups of Bhutan was promoted.

Driglam namzha is more than a mere requirement of outer form – wearing national dress for example. Rather, it is the embodiment and practice of *tha damtshi*. The intricacies of *driglam namzha* represent not only a desire for good manners, but also a means of disciplining one's body, speech and mind, thereby avoiding committing negative actions which will ripen in the future. Since 1997 three texts have been produced in Bhutan detailing the practice of *driglam namzha*. Each locates the origins of *driglam namzha* in Buddhist teachings and I think this is an important dimension which is too often overlooked. Perhaps we should view the rules and practices of *driglam namzha* as providing the laity with a simplified code of conduct that allows them to lead virtuous lives.

As friends of Bhutan, we are aware of the stress placed on wearing Bhutanese dress – the *gho* and *kira*. This is *driglam namzha*, yet it represents only a small part of what *driglam namzha* really means. In everyday life, the formal etiquette is less prevalent but there is still a way of being, of behaving, which receives little attention because it is so commonplace – *bey zhag*. Once while sitting drinking sweet tea, Auntie pursed her lips when an adolescent boy

wandered into her kitchen with his muddy shoes on. 'Bey zhag mindu!' The boy had displayed no concern that he had walked mud into her kitchen after her sweeping it – he lacked the quality of *bey zhag*. There is a constant movement between everyday understanding of *tha damtshi* and *bey zhag* which reflect, and gain, meaning by reference to the more formal *driglam namzha*. It reflects the social and cultural value of *driglam namzha* as part of a wider framework of social values drawn from Buddhist teachings.

New momentum in the refugee problem

by Kencho Wangdi with Kinley Dorji, Kuensel Online

Nepal and Bhutan have gained a 'new momentum' as the governments renewed their commitment to the bilateral process in seeking 'a just and durable solution' to the problem of the people in the refugee camps in eastern Nepal, according to the foreign ministers of the two countries who concluded a two-day meeting in Thimphu on March 25. The Nepalese foreign minister, Mr. Narendra Bikram Shah, said he was confident that the two governments would find a permanent solution to the problem.

The 13th meeting of the Ministerial Joint Committee (MJC) reviewed the progress made by the Nepal-Bhutan Joint Verification Team (JVT) which has been working in Thimphu for the past month to place the 12,095 people in Khudunabari Camp into the four agreed categories: bonafide Bhutanese who have been evicted; Bhutanese who emigrated; non-Bhutanese; and Bhutanese who have committed criminal acts.

Both the foreign ministers commended the work of the JVT, describing its achievement as a 'splendid job' on a 'very complex problem'. Mr. Shah added that 'when we meet in Kathmandu in May it will be our hope that they will have completed the categorisation and we'll move forward to other camps.'

The Bhutanese foreign minister, Lyonpo Jigmi Y. Thinley, said that once the categorisation was over, the next step would be taken according to the 'harmonised' positions of the two governments on each of the four categories, basically resulting in the dismantling of Camp One and moving the JVT thereafter into the other camps.

Lyonpo Jigmi Thinley said that the MJC had clarified the doubts faced by the joint verification team. 'We are confident that they will make speedy progress leading to a speedy resolution of the problem,' he added.

The two foreign secretaries, Mr. Madhu Raman Acharya, and Dasho Ugyen Tshering, signed the agreed minutes in Thimphu in the presence of the foreign ministers and officials of the two governments. Mr. Acharya told Kuensel that he was confident of the success of the bilateral process because the two governments had a very clear understanding of each other's positions. The next meeting of the MJC will take place in May in Kathmandu.



A Golf Pro in Bhutan

by Rick Lipsey

I think back to my three-month stint in Bhutan last autumn, and I see, feel, hear and taste the kingdom like I'm still there. I'm at Benez, the closest thing Thimphu has to a Parisian bistro, feasting on a platter of sizzling chicken. I am at Jhomolari base camp, craning my head up at the gigantic snow-laden mountain. I am eating hot dogs in Dasho Benji Dorji's dining room and watching Benji play with my one-year-old daughter, Claudia. I am on the soccer pitch at Changlimithang Stadium, in Thimphu, teaching 100 exuberant children to play golf.

Golf? Yes, golf. I was Bhutan's first golf pro, invited by the members of Royal Thimphu Golf Club (RTGC) to give them private lessons and share the game with Bhutan's youth.

The assignment developed out of a friendly round of golf at the RTGC in October 2000, when my wife, Carrie, and I were visiting the kingdom as tourists and playing a round at the club with Sonam Kesang, the club's co-secretary, and Karma Rangdol, a three-time Bhutan Open champion. I was giving the guys a few tips. They lamented the fact that they had always wanted a bona fide pro but didn't have one, so they learned to play golf by themselves, through magazines, books and videos.

I jokingly said, 'I'll be your pro.'

'Will you?' said Sonam, who wasn't joking.

A few months after returning home, I submitted a proposal for a golf teaching program to Sonam, and he convinced the RTGC members to accept my plan.

Carrie thought I was crazy when I told her we'd be moving for a while to Bhutan. She even threatened to not accompany me, especially after she got pregnant. 'We're not taking a baby to Bhutan!' she said, a hint of love in her voice. I knew my wife would eventually capitulate – she loves travelling, especially to Asia, as much as I do – so I didn't reply. I just smiled. We had our baby in January 2002, and on September 10, my wife, baby daughter and I were jetting over the Pacific toward the grandest, happiest, and most enriching adventure a family could have.

Living in Bhutan certainly takes getting used to, especially for a seasoned New Yorker. But I learned to enjoy the challenge of getting even simple things accomplished, such as finding a phone jack or getting our stove's propane tank refilled. We take so much for granted in the Western world, with everything you could need available 24 hours a day and in abundant supply.

One of my fondest shopping memories of Bhutan is of the meat market down by the river. American food authorities might question the sanitary state of the yak, beef, chicken and fish at the market, but I grew to enjoy having food so fresh it was, in some cases, still steaming after having been slaughtered just hours – perhaps minutes – earlier.

One thing that didn't take getting used to was the

magnanimous warmth the Bhutanese showered on our daughter. We would enter a restaurant and the staff would coo over Claudia, whisk her away to play and return her to us along with the bill. Neighbours would show up at our house (a cottage on Dasho Tobgye Dorji's property in Langjopaka) just to play with Claudia. My wife and I felt perfectly safe leaving Claudia with people we'd never met, knowing that she was in good, caring hands.

So, what do I miss most? The gentle and cheerful Bhutanese people, especially the children. I created the Bhutan Youth Golf Association (BYGA), which now has a full-time paid staff (Karma Lam Dorji) and conducts daily clinics and regular competitions for kids in Thimphu (see p.7), and beginning this summer in Wangdi. The Bhutanese children are every bit as talented at golf as kids in America and Great Britain; the only difference is the access – or lack thereof – that the Bhutanese kids have to the game.

My goal is to build a golf practice facility in Thimphu solely for children, and I am already working on this project. Ron Fream, a renowned golf architect, will design the facility for free. I am in the middle of a fundraising drive to provide financial support and I will soon begin working with the RTGC members, the Bhutan Olympic Committee and anybody else I can find to locate a suitable parcel of land that we can get as a donation.

Building the facility won't be easy, but that won't deter us. The Bhutanese kids deserve first-rate activities, and I want to help them enjoy golf and the life lessons the game teaches.

As much as I enjoyed my work, I respect the work my wife did in Bhutan even more. Carrie, an attorney at the New York State Attorney General's office, worked as a special consultant to Bhutan's Chief Justice, Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye, helping him to draft a new penal code and code of evidence for the kingdom. I call Carrie the 'James Madison of Bhutan', and I am only half joking!

Through Carrie's work, I had several chances to speak with the Chief Justice about the most important event right now in Bhutan – the drafting of the new constitution. It was a bold and selfless decision by the King to, essentially, relinquish his power for a constitutional democracy, and not everybody in the kingdom agrees with the King's wish. But barring an unforeseen roadblock, the constitution will likely be enacted in the near future. How will the constitution affect Bhutan? The only thing one can say for sure is that the effects will be dramatic and pervasive.

Rick Lipsey is a golf writer at Sports Illustrated magazine. He lives on the upper west side of Manhattan with his wife and daughter.

Contact him by e-mail at rick_lipsey@simal.com or telephone +1-212-531-1602.

Connections



Golf Tour to Bhutan

In Spring 2004 Rick Lipsey (see p.6) will lead a special private tour to Bhutan that will include golf at four courses in the country, including a round at the world's highest course in relation to sea level – the course at the base camp of Jhomolari, Bhutan's most sacred mountain.

The trip co-host will be Mitchell Spearman, an Englishman who is one of the world's most famous golf teachers. The trip will also serve as a fundraiser for the Bhutan Youth Golf Association (BYGA), because the trip fee for each guest includes a tax-deductible US\$1,500 donation to the BYGA.

For complete information about the trip please visit www.golfbhutan.com or contact Rick by e-mail at rick_lipsey@simail.com, telephone: +1-212-531-1602.

First junior golf championship held

from Kuensel Online



A young Bhutanese golfer in action

Bhutan's first Junior Open Golf Championship was held at the Royal Thimphu Golf Club in December 2002. About 60 boys and girls aged five to 18 took to the greens.

Participants aged 5-8 years played four holes, those aged 9-11 and 12-14 years played six holes, and participants over 15 years old played nine holes.

16 year-old Tashi Namgay shot a one-over par 34 for nine holes, to win by six strokes in the 15-18 years boys category. In the 12-14 years category, four boys tied for first place, with a score of 33. In the play off Rinchen won with a par 3 on the first hole. Among the girls Ugyen Lhamu shot 64 for nine holes to come out first.

'Some of the kids are as talented as those in any other golfing country,' said Thimphu golf coach Rick Lipsey. 'The only barrier, and it's a big one, is the opportunity for coaching, practice and competing. I hope the new Bhutan Youth Golf Association (BYGA) will help to create such opportunities for Bhutanese youth.'

The tournament was sponsored by Callaway Golf and the Royal Thimphu Golf Club.

Bhutan's Stray Dogs: an update

by Topsy Hughes



One of the dog pound staff with some of the dogs

When I visited the RSPCA in Thimphu at the end of the Bhutan Society Tour (see p.2) I was impressed with the progress that had been made during the previous twelve months despite very limited funds.

15km from Thimphu, at Serbithang, the RSPCA has acquired some land and established a dog pound. A simple building provides accommodation for the two people responsible for day-to-day running of the pound. In addition there is a basic operating theatre, a kitchen and five kennels for sick animals. The land is fenced, but because of inadequate funding it is not secure and many dogs escape.

About 500 dogs have been caught in Thimphu and transferred to the pound, where they are neutered and vaccinated against rabies. As yet, the RSPCA cannot afford a van and relies on borrowing one from time to time. One consequence of this lack of reliable transport is the uncertainty in delivering food. When I visited the pound the dogs had had no food for four days. No wonder I was surrounded by hundreds of dogs when I threw out the 10kgs of dog biscuits I had brought with me!

The pound is a lovely place with enormous potential and I was grateful for the opportunity I had to discuss the RSPCA's financial problems with the Director of Livestock.



Bhutanese dogs love dog biscuits too!

Topsy would be delighted to hear from anyone interested in supporting the Thimphu dog pound. Contact her at: Brantridge Lodge, Brantridge Lane, Balcombe, W. Sussex, RH17 6JT Tel./Fax: (01444) 400530



Bhutan Connections



Cordyceps sinensis

An extraordinary 'herb' and its poaching by Tibetans in Bhutan

by Nigel Hywel-Jones

High on the Tibetan plateau two thousand years ago the yak herders learned that when their yaks fed on a particular 'herb' (which became known as the 'Winter Grass Summer Worm') the yaks recovered their vigour after the winter hardships. Over time this became a prized herbal medicine for the Chinese Royal Court. In the last few hundred years it has become available to the masses and in the last ten years popular with Westerners interested in alternative medicines. Modern biology now recognises it to be a fungus that infects the caterpillars of the Ghost Moth, slowly killing them and digesting all of the insect tissue leaving only the outer skin of the dead insect. The fungus belongs to a genus of 300+ species that infect insects and is called *Cordyceps*. This species is *Cordyceps sinensis* – the Chinese *Cordyceps*.



Cordyceps is found in the alpine meadows of Northern Bhutan

but I had never seen the most famous of the *Cordyceps* – *Cordyceps sinensis* – in its natural habitat. Four days of trekking up the Soe Valley got our party of four (plus a horseman and his six charges) to a pleasant grassy meadow where we pitched our tents and made daily forays to known *Cordyceps* sites. Once the locals realised that we were there to help with the problem and to possibly offer a way to allow them to make legally controlled collections they opened up and showed us other sites over a week.

Once back in Thimphu, and having enjoyed a shower as I have never enjoyed a shower before, I prepared a report and a presentation for the Ministry of Agriculture. The aim of my visit was to assess the problem and to suggest a research programme for sustainable collecting or even *Ex situ* 'gardening' of the fungus. With a beer-induced flash of inspiration I realised that by the time we had completed a project the problem might have gone away. I became convinced that the Tibetans (because they collect immature specimens before they have produced the spores that kill the next generation of insect larvae) could destroy the Bhutanese populations in the same way that I suspect they have destroyed their own. Problem solved?

In the mountains Bhutanese rangers have the unenviable task of trying to police the valleys. They are few, the Tibetans many. A group of poachers passed silently through our camp one night leaving their footprints in the snow and taking our fire wood. In the first month of the collecting season the authorities had already apprehended over twenty Tibetans with 40+ kg of the fungus. I recommended that the local Bhutanese should be allowed to make limited, controlled collections which would be for their profit. If this can be controlled then we may expect the locals to become their own 'police force' protecting their harvest from Tibetan poachers.

The new collecting season begins in May. In June 2003 we will go back up the Soe Valley to recommend an emergency collecting protocol that the locals can use while we carry out research over the next few years to determine what is a sustainable level of harvesting. Hopefully, in the future this market can be open for the locals to add to their income, rather than for Tibetan poachers to profit from.



The *Cordyceps sinensis* fungus as it appears in the field (left) – a small brown fruit body measuring 3-5 cm long – and (right) an excavation showing the caterpillar under the ground with the fungus growing typically from the back of its head

Cordyceps sinensis is found above 4,300 metres in the alpine meadows of Northern Bhutan. Although known and used by the locals, Bhutanese law prohibited its collection for commercial gain. But recently there have been increased cases of Tibetans sneaking over the border to collect it for sale to the lucrative Chinese market. Each specimen is worth about US\$ 1 for the collectors. In Japan I saw a 3 kg bag that was valued at US\$ 6,000. I estimate that the annual market for this fungus is about 5,000 kg. All evidence points to a problem in securing this fungus from traditional collecting sites on the Tibetan Plateau and this is forcing collectors further afield – into Bhutan.

Last year I had the chance to see this fungus at first hand in the field thanks to an invitation from Tshitila of the Renewable Natural Resources Research Centre, Ministry of Agriculture. My work has allowed me to describe and name over 120 *Cordyceps* species for Thailand