

THE BHUTAN SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

Number 27

President: Lord Wilson of Tillyorn, KT, GCMG

August 2003

12th September 2003

**A Lecture by
Dr. Françoise Pommaret**

**'An estate and its festival :
Ugyenchoeling in Bumthang'**

An opportunity to hear from Dr. Françoise Pommaret, leading expert on Bhutan and the Himalayas and author of the well-known guidebook to the Kingdom. She is founder and President of the French Bhutan Society, *Les Amis du Bhoutan*, and a Research Fellow at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris.

Ugyenchoeling is a revered site that has links with several great Buddhist masters and saints. Meticulously restored, the estate now houses a museum.

Friday 12th September 2003

6:30 pm for 7:00 pm

**The National Liberal Club (Lady Violet Room)
Whitehall Place, London SW1A 2HE**

Drinks available before the lecture

Job Opportunity in Bhutan

Bhutan's Nima High School is seeking an English Literature Teacher, commencing February 2004. Details from Michael Rutland (see contact info. below).

The Hon. Secretary Michael Rutland will return to Bhutan on 29 Aug., probably staying until late May '04. He would be delighted to meet Members visiting Bhutan – telephone him when you are in Thimphu.

Thimphu

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The 11th Annual Dinner of the Bhutan Society

Friday 24th October, 2003



The 11th Annual Dinner of the Bhutan Society will take place on Friday 24th October, 2003 at the National Liberal Club, Whitehall Place, London.

All Members and their friends are invited to join us for what is always a most enjoyable evening and a great way to catch up with old friends... and make new ones! Please see the enclosed flyer for details and a ticket application form.

Please also consider sponsoring, or part sponsoring, a ticket for a Bhutanese student to attend – see the application form for details or call Peter Li, the Annual Dinner Secretary, on: (01730) 893 829.

Contact details for the Hon. Treasurer

Most regrettably there were several errors in the address given in our last Newsletter for our new Hon. Treasurer Robin Lee.

The correct address is:

13 Albury House, Sells Close
Guildford, Surrey
GU1 3JY

E-mail: lee.rob@btopenworld.com

Robin can also be contacted by phone on:
(01483) 455 764

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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.



Druk Air orders new planes

by Gopilal Acharya & Gyaltzen K Dorji, Kuensel Online

Druk Air will replace its present fleet of two BAe 146 aircraft with two larger jets, the Airbus A319, next year. The decision was made by the Council of Ministers after an appraisal report by Druk Air, demonstration flights and discussions with several aircraft manufacturers.



The Airbus A319

Druk Air planned to upgrade its fleet in 2000 when Bhutan saw a rapid growth in tourism and its present aircraft were more than ten years old. Initially it signed a memorandum of understanding with British Aerospace on the purchase of two RJX-85 jets, scheduled for 2001/2002, but the orders fell through after BAe systems announced the termination of its RJX programme.

The Airbus A319 can seat 124 passengers in a two class cabin layout, or up to 145 passengers in a single class layout. Although the A319 will also face the dreaded pay load penalties of Paro airport, the maximum take off weight is 75,900 Kg – substantially higher than the current BAe 146's maximum take off weight of 38,000 Kg.

Apart from this higher payload capacity, the A319 will also be able to fly further and faster, giving Druk Air more flexibility in its flight schedules. The Airbus A319 can fly to the nearest sectors like Kolkota, Kathmandu and Dhaka with 114 passengers without any load penalty. New flight sectors are also being considered. For example, with a range of 6,800 kms the A319 will be able to fly from Paro to Hong Kong non-stop at 840 km/h.

While negotiations on the actual purchase are yet to begin, it is estimated that the new aircraft will cost between US\$ 35 million and US\$ 45 million (21.5 - 29 million £). Druk Air hopes that the two new jets will arrive between July and December 2004. Meanwhile most of the staff, especially the engineers and pilots, will go for courses to acclimatise to the technical and functional aspects of the new aircraft.

Druk Air is keen to sell the two BAe 146 jets but fears that it might not get a good deal as the international market for jet airliners has shrunk by 50 percent, falling from around 800 a year to 400 in 2002 in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in America. It is currently exploring various options.

Taktsang Monastery Restored

Kuensel Online

Members of the National Assembly visited the Taktsang Monastery in Paro on 10th July and all agreed that the monastery had regained its original splendour and glory.

'It is amazing,' said the Thimphu chimi, Dorji Bidha. 'We thought that we had lost a national treasure but we were wrong. Without the fire, we wouldn't have initiated such a vast renovation.'



Members of the National Assembly climb up to Taktsang

Many of the chimis expressed their appreciation to His Majesty the King for immediately commanding the reconstruction of the monastery, and to the government for making the renovation a national priority after the fire on May 18, 1998.

'On behalf of the people we would like to thank His Majesty for the royal initiative, the donors both within and outside, and the people involved in the renovation work,' said the Dagana chimi. 'It looks like the government has spared no efforts to restore Taktsang. The importance attached to the monastery heralds peace, prosperity, and happiness for the people of Bhutan,' added the Lunana chimi.

The chairman of the National Council for Cultural Affairs, Lyonpo Thinley Gyamtsho, said that Taktsang monastery was one of the most sacred *nyes* established by Guru Rinpoche. Reconstructed at a cost of about Nu 94 million (approx. 1.25 million £), about 95% of the renovation work has been completed. According to the Paro Dzongda, Jigme Zangpo, everything has now been reconstructed except the butter lamp house.

In addition to reconstructing the eight main lhakhangs, a guest house, a kitchen and four new toilets with modern septic tanks were also built.

The restoration is expected to be completed by October this year.

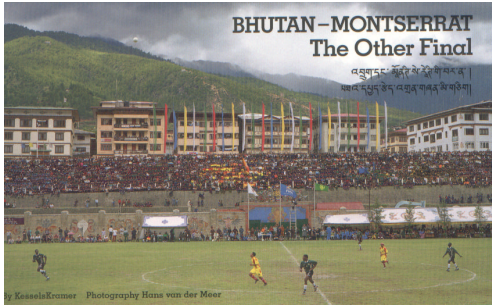


News & Updates from the Bhutan Society



Bhutan – Montserrat: The Other Final

Photos by Hans van der Meer
140 pages, 120 colour photos
Verbeelding Photobooks 2003; £14.50
ISBN 90 74159 55 9



This charming small photo book records the extraordinary football match that took place between the Bhutan and Montserrat teams in Thimphu on 30th June 2002. The introductory text is brief and captions are few; however the 120 colour photos are more than up to the task of telling the full story, going well beyond the pitch to give us a rare view of the real Bhutan – an affectionate portrait of a calm and dignified people who at the same time are eager for fun and novelty.

In addition to the preparations for the match, we see street scenes and children playing, we gain access to families in their living rooms, shop keepers and their customers, sports crowds concentrating intently on the game.... The photographs are arranged chronologically, counting off first the days and then the hours before the match, then documenting the kick-off, the match itself and finally the joyous celebrations that followed.

All this is a refreshing antidote to the many sumptuous photo books that portray Bhutan as a mystical realm of monks, mountains and temples. This is a book that will be enjoyed by anyone with an interest in Bhutan, whether or not they have any interest in football.

Available from The Photographers' Gallery, 8 Great Newport St., London WC2H 7HY. Tel: (020) 7831 1772
Website: www.photonet.org.uk
E-Mail: bookshop@photonet.org.uk

Football: FIFA ranks Bhutan at 195

Bhutan has moved up an impressive five places to be ranked 195 out of 204 FIFA countries in the FIFA world rankings. After upsetting Guam (6-0) and drawing with Mongolia (0-0) in the preliminary round of the Asian Cup 2004, Bhutan now stands above 9 countries globally.

In Asia, Bhutan holds the 42nd spot out of 44 Asian Football Federation (AFC) countries, the last two spots belonging to Afghanistan (43) and Guam (44). South Korea continues to hold the top spot in Asia and is 21 in the world ranking.

Bhutan will head to Saudia Arabia in October this year to play Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Indonesia.

Bhutan article wins award – and money for the Society's Trust Fund!

John Ryle, writer/journalist and former pupil of Michael Rutland, has written a piece on Bhutan for the September issue of Condé Nast Traveller Magazine. The article has won an award and John has very generously donated half the money to the Bhutan Society Trust Fund (and the other half to the Khyentse Foundation). The September issue of Condé Nast Traveller will be available from mid-August.

Himalayas: An Aesthetic Adventure

Members planning to travel to the USA in the coming six months may be interested to know that a major exhibition of Himalayan art will be held in Washington D.C. from October 18, 2003 - January 11, 2004 at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

Himalayas: An Aesthetic Adventure will include works of art from the entire Himalayan region – India, Kashmir, Nepal, Pakistan, Tibet, and Bhutan – to explore the particular beauty and artistic achievement that developed from a spiritual tradition unique to the Himalayas. The exhibition will comprise 187 works of mostly religious art created between the 6th and 19th centuries from private and public collections around the world. Most of these objects have never before been publicly exhibited.

The exhibition received rave reviews during its run at the Art Institute of Chicago (closing August 17th). The exhibition catalogue (University of California Press; ISBN: 0520239008) is available from www.amazon.co.uk.

A money making opportunity?

Members planning a trip to Bhutan may wish to gather up as many Druk Air air sickness bags as they can while on the National Airline. A single such airsickness bag recently sold on the online auction site Ebay (www.ebay.com) for the astounding sum of US\$106 ! The buyer was an American collector of airsickness bags.

There is apparently quite a market for these items, know among collectors as 'barf bags', and rarer examples such as those of Druk Air can fetch large sums of money.



A Druk Air air sickness bag – well worth collecting?



The Bhutan Society Tour 2002: Two Tour Reports



by **Freda Ferne**

My previous visit to Bhutan was in 1994 when I inherited some money I wasn't expecting. That holiday, the Chomolhari-Lingshi-Laya trek, saw the start of my love affair with this very special country.

I leapt at the opportunity of returning as a guest rather than a tourist on this tour and the benefits were far more than financial. With Michael as our guide it quickly became apparent that his wealth of knowledge, experience, anecdotes and reminiscences would make this a very personal visit – so much that could never appear in any guide book. The almost daily cry of 'change of plan' merely came to indicate the flexibility of the itinerary.

As official guests of the Foreign Minister we had formal meetings and a reception to host – I approached these with some apprehension thinking they may be 'trial by small talk' events. How wrong could I be? With Michael to guide us through the finer points of etiquette I was delighted to find myself thoroughly enjoying meeting a wide range of people and discussing a variety of subjects. Officials said that Bhutan has much to learn from other countries, I also believe that other countries have much to learn from Bhutan as they steer the difficult course balancing development and progress with protecting their very special identity.

We met and had talks from several people:

Jessica Beaghen working with the National Biodiversity Centre and the embryonic Royal Botanic Gardens. We visited the Gardens, saw the work and the refurbished poly tunnels (remember the appeal?). It makes a huge difference seeing the results of the appeal and how much it supports the work going on here – they have achieved so much in such a short time.

Rinpoche Mynak Tulku, Director of the National Library, which houses mostly religious texts and Bhutanese history, was fascinating. He spoke of visiting private monasteries and not being allowed to borrow their holy texts – no problem – photograph them with your digital camera and, hey ho, it's on your computer! A great example of modern technology at its best.

Ashi Kunzang Choden, author of *Folk Tales of Bhutan*, spoke movingly of her family's project to preserve the cultural heritage from the feudal period, using the family home to create a museum, a very special place which we later saw for ourselves.

I visited a government High School and a private First School, and I met two final year teaching students. There was even (hushed David Attenborough tones here) a rare opportunity to observe the *greater Rutland* in his natural habitat and also to meet his delightful family.

I welcomed the opportunity to visit numerous *dzongs*, *lhakangs* and *goembas* and to drink in the peace, the quiet, the very special 'soft as old silk' atmosphere, the feeling that all is well, the sense of coming home. To marvel at the

wealth of detail, the similarities and differences between them all. I was deeply moved to have my prayer flags blessed by a lama at Gangte. My interest in Buddhism continues to grow, it just makes so much sense to me.

The mini-trek gave some of us the chance to escape the bus and get in touch with the land, each of us finding our own pace, enjoying the chance to spend time alone to observe and reflect. I tied prayer flags at the Shobe La – a little bit of me in Bhutan, and I think of them often.

Being part of the Bhutan Society official visit was a great honour and privilege, a unique experience enhanced by the people we met officially and unofficially. There were so many very special moments, this was a unique opportunity and I am certain that the links between the two countries have been strengthened. Michael's unique contribution cannot be overstated and I extend my very special thanks to him for organising this visit. As I said to one friend – I feel blessed.

by **Gabriele von Schoeler**

Every time I travel to Bhutan I worry that this time it will be too late – it could have lost everything I liked there; it could be spoilt by Western influences, disappointing... So I go with my sociological attitudes, a bunch of sceptical questions in my luggage, and I start looking for the negative changes, the problems, the losses of what I thought had been Shangri-La.

But then, the longer I stay and the more I talk to the people, the deeper I creep into the country and the more I leave my Western brain behind. Europe is forgotten, scepticism vanishes, senses are wide open for all the beauties of the country and the people.

I believe the great potential of Bhutan and its people is its incomparable composure, its harmonious relation between man and nature. It is its natural spirituality which I think is the huge opportunity and chance to cope with any influence from outside, and the capability to carefully select from among the many options and possibilities given by, for example, the mass media now installed in Bhutan.

Of course, there already are – and there will be more – social problems, however I think Bhutan can keep the balance because the country and people are open to communication, willing to learn from mistakes made by other countries, and Bhutanese society is keen to receive advice and learn from experiences of other countries.

This time – the 5th time for me in Bhutan – was utterly relaxing with laughter and wonderful picnics around *chortens* and *manis*, holy sites and visits to Michael's and other schools. I admired the unforgettable view of the Himalayas, the prayer flags glittering in the sun, the four seasons on one single day, the water bottles, *kiras* and museums, the breathtaking landscapes, the smiling patience of the guides and drivers, the relics of Drukyl, golden and silver monkeys, the herbs, botanical gardens and their preservers.