From the Editor: Himalayan Peoples and Environments

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FROM THE EDITOR

HIMALAYAN PEOPLES AND ENVIRONMENTS

Anyone writing today about people and environment in the Himalayan region will almost certainly be concerned with climate. A warming planet, with waning glaciers, rising seas, and increasingly frequent extreme weather events, is already transforming land and life in South Asia. And it is certain that climate changes in High Asia, in the onset and intensity of monsoon, in the timing and temperature of winter storms, and in overall patterns of temperature and precipitation, will have profound effects on the rest of the world. Remember that the great rivers that rise in High Asia—the Amu Darya, Indus, Ganga, Tsangpo-Bramaputra, Salween, Irawaddy, Mekong, Yangze, Huang he—supply about a third of the world’s people. More than two billion people have a stake in what happens in these mountains—and so, of course, do we all.

Since the publication of the International Panel on Climate Change’s (IPCC) 4th Report (2007) and subsequent studies underlining or intensifying the warnings of that document, climate has dominated discussion about the interactions of people and environment in the Himalaya. What to expect, with what ramifications, and how to cope are indeed critical questions. But sometimes lost in that alarm-driven discussion is what actually happens on the ground: the reality of people making use of nature.

This issue of HIMALAYA, a compilation of papers researched, written, and assembled before climate was all we could talk about, offers that look into the real lives of people and institutions engaged with the natural world. The issue brings together a diverse roster of authors who consider a number of environment-focused topics from across the Himalaya and Tibet, and draw from a diversity of perspectives, to make clearer the complex and changing interactions of human and natural communities across the Himalaya.

Featured articles, research reports, and several book reviews all center on people and environment. Three articles began as conference papers at the 34TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON SOUTH ASIA at Madison, Wisconsin, in 2005. Kenneth D. Croes presented his inversion of the usual account of the Annapurna Conservation Area’s creation, written up here as Conserving the King: Inverting the Origin Story of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project of Nepal. Writing while Nepal still had a ruling monarch, Croes argues that internal politics was the genesis for this pioneering form of protected-area management. Christopher Thoms looks into the way community forestry plays out in its user groups, in Some Thoughts on the Democratization of Community Forestry in Nepal. Though the form and function of groups may change, Thoms argues that the social and economic dynamics that underlie most human relations in Nepal dominate here, too. Tom Robertson’s Malthusian Thinking Among Foreigners and Nepalis in Nepal explores the role of the 1960s’ population discourse in shaping perception and response to Nepal’s exploding human numbers. The fourth article in the issue Michael A. Rechlin’s A Passion for Pine: Forest Conservation Practices of the Apatani People of Arunachal Pradesh, shifts the focus out of Nepal to the far east and Arunachal Pradesh, where the Apatani practice an unusual and seemingly very effective form of forest stewardship without the intervention of foreign or state experts.

A particularly rich collection of BOOK REVIEWS and the most extensive compilation of conference abstracts continues the people and environment theme while adding in a full range of other issues and questions of interest.

RESEARCH REPORTS return to the forest focus of Rechlin and Thoms’ articles in Daniel Winkler and Karl Ryavec’s account of forest exploitation in eastern Tibet; shift to grazing in Naho Ikedain’s study of
pasture use in the area near Kanchenjunga; consider forests in Ranu Shrestha-Acharya and Joel Heinen's paper on, *Emerging Policy Issues on Non-timber Forest Products in Nepal*. The last Research Report is Jenny Anderson's *Report from the Field: The Constituent Assembly Elections, Nepal, Rukum District (Kol, Rangsi, and Kandar VDCs)*. Anderson, working for the Carter Center as an elections observer, describes her experience in Maoist strongholds during the 2008 elections. Her paper marks a departure both from the broader subject matter of the issue, and from the time frame a 2006 journal ought to encompass. This is not the first time Himalaya has broken the conventions of normal publishing, but it may be the last.

This issue breaks the record for longest lag, both between intended and actual dates of publication (now 3 years), and in the time since the last issue was published (2 years). By way of compensation, it may also break the record for richest content. Readers can take heart in the fact that this is the last issue to emerge from my rule-breaking, publication-delaying stewardship as editor. Things will undoubtedly be better henceforth; subscribers are likely already to have received Himalaya Volume 27.1-2 from new editor Arjun Guneratne. Rather than extend the usual litany of explanations for the delays in Volume 26.1-2, I offer, as an epilogue at the end of this issue, a recapitulation of the organization and publication history over my 15-year tenure as editor: my last word.

In the several years that this issue has been coming together, a great number of people have put forth a great deal of effort, and put up with considerable disappointment and delay. I want to thank all the contributors, some of whom have waited for more than 6 years to see their pieces in print. Tom Robertson, Sienna Craig, and Anne Rademacher saw to the BOOK REVIEWS and CONFERENCE DIGEST sections. Two graduate editorial assistants came and went while this issue was in production; thanks to Joe Narus, and especially to Lindsay Skog who learned InDesign and pulled together most of both this issue and its successor Volume 27. Peggy Lindquist reappeared to guide us through the various tricky places in creating InDesign documents. Thanks to all of these critical helpers. And thanks also to reader-subscribers who have stuck with us as we have navigated the tricky places in the transition of editorial and membership functions from here at Portland State to a new team: Arjun Guneratne, Susan Hangen, and their lieutenants.

Two names are missing from my thank-you list. I had planned to ask two friends with deep experience in people/environment relations in the Himalaya to comment on the article by Ken Croes, as both had been deeply involved with the Annapurna Conservation Area from its inception and would have had something interesting to say. But I missed the chance. Instead of thanks, I’ve had to say goodbye to Mingma Norbu Sherpa and Chandra Gurung, best known and dearest to me among those who died on September 21st, 2006.

Our issue begins with a tribute to those heroes of Himalayan conservation. Thanks to Gabriel Campbell, who remembers the extraordinary group of conservationists who died in September of 2006 in the crash of a helicopter returning them from the dedication of Nepal’s newest, most inventive protected area, Kanchenjunga.

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