Editor's Afterword - Good Night and Good Luck!

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Editor's Afterword—*Good night and good luck!*

This is the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studie's 29th year as an organization, and it marks a new era. There is considerable excitement in the executive council that governs ANHS, new energy in a relatively young and cohesive council that has high hopes to expand the membership and take the organization in new directions. Theirs is exactly the sort of energy and commitment and critical mass that was needed, and often absent, during the 20 years I've been part of the organization. The enthusiasm is contagious, the energy put forth on behalf of ANHS is impressive, and the talent and commitment already shown by the present council suggests that this time—unlike many earlier efforts to rally the organization—change may be in the offering.

I applaud the energy and commitment. But as someone who's mothered this organization for more than half its life—15 years—operating from my own evolving set of assumptions about what ANHS is and whom it serves, I'm a little sad about one aspect of the change. The current council seeks to strengthen ANHS' and HIMALAYA's scholarly credentials, to insure that the organization serves its academic community. This is manifest in a formal protocol for review of articles submitted for publication in Himalaya, begun with Volume 27, and in the impressive though unsuccessful application the Council made to CAORC (the Council of American Overseas Research Centers): this is a shift to a more professional, less homespun—and I fear less inclusive and diverse—publication and organization. I wanted that myself, at one point, but came to see a different role for ANHS and our journal.

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So after 15 years of constructing editorials around new ways to apologize for late issues, I'm going to take this last (and latest) editorial to do something different by way of goodbye: I want to explain the circumstances and vision that have been reflected in the journal and other ANHS-sponsored Portland-generated activities during my editorial tenure. I want to make a last plea to members to weigh in on what sort of organization you want the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies to be. And I want to acknowledge the help that has made it possible for ANHS to survive for the last 15 years, so that there could be a future for others to chart.

**DEMOCRATIZING HIMALAYAN SCHOLARSHIP**

I don't think it is sufficient for those of us lucky enough to have come to know the peoples and places of the Himalaya to talk only amongst ourselves. So for most of my last
15 years as editor I've been trying to make HIMALAYA a place where academics doing research in the Himalaya talk not only to each other, but to any and everybody with an interest in the region; I've tried to make room for non-academic voices as well. This feels to me like a natural outgrowth of our organization’s history.

A bit of history

The Nepal Studies Association (NSA) grew out of a need for fellowship felt by American scholars who worked in Nepal and found their interests marginalized in the broader universe of South Asian studies. NSA began with a generous endowment from the Ford Foundation, and had a home within the Association for Asian Studies; the few dozen members communicated through a mimeographed broadsheet, THE NEPAL STUDIES ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER. From those beginnings, NSA grew in members (to a high of—who knows?: accurate member record-keeping has rarely been among the skills of member managers; maybe 300?), widened in scope, taking in members with scholarly interests in Tibet and the Indian Himalaya, Hindukush and Karakoram, as well as development professionals and other non-academics—and declined in resources, as the Ford Foundation nest-egg dwindled to support the increasingly substantial HIMALAYAN RESEARCH BULLETIN.

Whether newsletter, bulletin, or journal, the organization’s publication has been the meeting ground for an organization with members dispersed in twenty countries, whose diverse professional and disciplinary callings have been synergistically fused into a rich, eclectic mix held together by our common interest in the region and willingness to learn about how others make sense of it.

It was HIMALAYAN RESEARCH BULLETIN (HRB, now HIMALAYA) that brought me into NSA. I stumbled on a copy, and learned about this community of interest in Nepal, as I was beginning my own dissertation research in Khumbu, Nepal. I had come to graduate school in geography at the University of California at Berkeley in the late 1970s fascinated by Nepal and anxious to conduct research there, only to be told, “find someplace else for research—Nepal has been done.” I wasn’t deterred, but I was lonely. Discovering an entire organization of kindred spirits was comfort and inspiration, and I looked forward to the three issues a year sent from then-editors Kath March and David Holmberg at Cornell. In those days HRB provided book reviews, abstracts from the few dissertations on the Himalaya or papers being presented at various meetings, the occasional short article. In the pre-internet universe, it was a motherlode of useful and engaging information.

A motherlode of information—that someone had to search out, assemble, produce, and distribute, while keeping track of members and their subscriptions, and simultaneously engaged in a full-time career in a major university, negotiating with the university for the support that made publishing the journal possible. Journal editors have all been

HISTORY OF PUBLICATION

1981-1988
South Asia Program, Cornell University.
Editors: David Holmberg and Kathryn March

1988-1990
School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University.
Editors: Theodore Riccardi, Bruce Owens William Fisher

1991-1992
Jackson School of International Studies/ South Asia Center, University of Washington, Seattle.
Editors: Ter Ellingson Linda Itis Leonard van der Kuijp
academics, challenged, as most of us are these days to balance the competing demands of our over-busy lives.

"We collected materials as they came in, put them together, and printed and mailed the journal, with some help from work-study students," explained Kathryn March, when I was contemplating taking on the role of editor in 1993. Simple.

What was simple for the Holmberg-March team, creating their three issues a year, has eluded all editors since. After three years at Cornell, HRB moved to Columbia where graduate students Bruce Owen and Bill Fisher, casually overseen by Ted Riccardi, saw to the next incarnation of the journal. They put a photograph on the cover, enriched the interior with more, more substantial articles, often on particular themes, and started to fall behind. After a ten series of issues on a wide range of topics, the Columbia editors passed on HRB to Ter Ellingson, Linda Iltis, and Leonard van der Kuijp at the University of Washington.

Ter and Linda, the workhorses of this period, were simultaneously engaged in trying to keep the Nepal Studies Association from fading away. Ter in his dual roles as president and HRB co-editor brought the NSA council to Seattle for an organization-building exercise while Linda organized the membership into a database, helping generate new momentum for a flagging organization.

Time stolen from an academic job and spent on the NSA's survival was time lost from the production of HRB, and a lag of half a year or so in its earlier homes stretched to two years at the University of Washington.

At the time it seemed to the NSA council that I would be in a better position to bring journal up to date. Though the lone untenured female in a notorious department, at an institution (the University of Texas at Austin) then famous for its hostility to women faculty, with a new baby and a six-year-old, I had the backing of the Centre for Asian Studies and the promise of a graduate assistant. Get HRB back on track? No problem.

In fact that graduate assistant, Kamal Adhikary, and his successors are who have kept HRB and NSA alive for the last 15 years. Their work is almost invisible to the membership and indeed to the council, and in this look backward I want to recognize their contributions and introduce them to members and readers. These students have been essential partners in managing the membership, preparing and producing the journal, and in conducting the other work that has supported the organization and journal during my tenure.

It is in that other work—the projects that I developed out of a necessity to convince my university to support the organization—that steered my vision for ANHS and its journal, as I will explain.

After producing two and a half issues at UT, HRB and I left Texas, and a Center for Asian Studies at least aware of Nepal and the Himalaya, for Portland State University,
which promotes its urban mission and orientation to the Pacific Northwest. My “start-up” package included three years of support (office space, computer, graduate assistant) for the journal, after which all assumed I would hand HRB along to the next set of editors.

But nobody wanted it—or more accurately, no one saw a way to add HRB and the attached member and financial management into their lives, jobs, and institutions. And that meant finding a way to keep a Himalayan journal interesting to Portland State, so as to hang onto the critical graduate assistants who permitted me to produce HRB despite increasing university and personal demands. This led me to try to make our organization and journal relevant to an institution that sees its role as to “Let Knowledge Serve the City” and its first goal to connect the university with the community.

In other places with similarly oriented universities this might have been tricky. In Portland, where Mount Hood looms on the skyline and mountaineering is the passion of every third person, the Himalaya are an easy sell. Portland is a small but cosmopolitan city, its citizens curious about the world. Widening and deepening that local interest in the Himalayan region was the premise behind our various HRB-sponsored initiatives—and became the primary manifestation of our organization’s mandate to increase awareness and appreciation for Nepal and the Himalaya. No one else in the organization had the motivation or the resources to cook up ways to increase public awareness about the Himalayan region: So began the Populist Era of the Nepal Studies Association.

**ANHS brings the Himalaya to Portland State University**

The necessity to impress the dean and make “Himalaya” a household word in Oregon was the mother of a lot of invention.

**Tapping the Federal Government**

In 1997, in collaboration with colleagues from the Oregon Geographic Alliance, and with the Nepal Studies Association as a partner, I won a US Department of Education Fulbright Group Projects Abroad grant to take a dozen K-12 teachers to Nepal. They developed course materials for teaching their students about the Himalaya, creating a nexus of enthusiasts for Nepal in Oregon’s elementary and high schools. The teachers’ collected teaching materials, still housed in the HRB “library,” have become tools to engage even young children in lives and landscapes of Nepal.

Another effort to leverage the presence of the journal at Portland State, in building the capacity of the organization and showing the vitality of Himalayan studies at PSU, led us again to the US Department of Education. We applied for a Title Six grant to create a federally funded Area Studies Center for High Asia at PSU. Though they turned us down, the exercise was useful in refining our definition of the organization and its mission. Reviewers were enthusiastic about the idea (though not impressed with the institutional support available), and in a brighter economic climate, we might try again.
A federal grant might not be available to support the organization and Himalayan Studies in Portland (yet), but we nevertheless found help from the US government. Always short on funds, we applied at this point for non-profit status, and were successful in acquiring 501 (c) 3 status as a tax-exempt educational association. We thought donors would be more enthusiastic, and we were right, as we have discovered in subsequent outreach efforts.

ART, EDUCATION, AND ADVOCACY

In 2000, taking advantage of a rare visit by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Portland (and forging connections to another Portland-area enthusiasm, Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism), we staged a small conference with accompanying photography exhibit intended to feed and inform the interest in Tibet, generate material for a special issue of HRB, and to generate revenue—through the sale of donated photographs—for ANHS.

The Tibetan exhibit, an enormous amount of work, was also extraordinarily rewarding. Our call for submissions to a juried exhibit of photographs depicting “Tibetan Peoples and Landscapes” drew hundreds of images. The photographers of the chosen forty were asked to provide matted prints for the exhibit—and then to let us auction them off. Almost all were pleased at the chance to show their work, glad to help a non-profit whose goal was increasing appreciation for a region they, too, cared about. Photographers within travel distance of Portland came to the opening reception, and many have continued as friends of the organization, contributing their work to our second exhibition and to the outgrowths of these exhibits.

JOURNEY TO HIGH ASIA “TEACHING” CALENDARS

One such outgrowth was the ANHS High Asia Calendar series. We now had a collection of spectacular photographs and the rights to use them in ANHS educational outreach; what to do with them? I adapted an innovation of my father’s (environmentalist David Brower), the high quality, large-format photograph calendar. Combining ANHS business with my real job as professor of geography, I offered a calendar-creating course through Portland State’s renowned University Studies program. The first High Asia Calendar “capstone” course drew 21 students from 14 majors who took my vague idea—“Let’s use these beautiful pictures to attract interest in a calendar that educates about High Asia”—and invented the first Journey to High Asia calendar in 2004. We came up with a design, found the printer, researched text, prepared maps, laid out the calendar, solicited sponsors, and developed a marketing plan. Students learned all about the region, as well as about graphic design, mapping, editing . . . and the frustration of working hard on a project that was finished too late to take a place in the highly competitive calendar-marketing world. That problem has plagued the subsequent calendars, including the second one we finished, on Nepal (for 2006), and one that failed to be finished in time to meet the early deadlines in three of the years we’ve tried to produce it. This is the Tibetan Peoples and Landscapes calendar, now all ready to go—once we identify the sponsors to underwrite its initial production, and develop a way to make the calendar available to all who would be happy to buy a beautiful and information-packed virtual year in Tibet. (Trying to create, produce, and market three calendars is a primary reason HIMALAYA has fallen so far behind.)

The photography exhibits and Himalaya-themed projects we launched in ANHS’ name
at Portland State have been quite successful in raising the profile of the region within the institution. It has been eight years since I had to beg for the graduate research assistant, or pay part of the student’s salary out of the limited funds of ANHS. Local activities also added to the roster of members: at the peak of Portland-based outreach, close to 20% of ANHS members (fewer than half of them scholars) were in the Pacific states.

**Academic Endeavor versus Collaborating with Community**

Initially I was indignant at having to turn entrepreneur on behalf of what I thought should be a university priority, supporting an international journal—the only international, interdisciplinary journal on Himalayan studies. But in being forced to sell the Himalayan region and ANHS to Portland State University and its wider community, I had an epiphany—almost like the epiphany that turned me into a Himalayan geographer after my first encounter with Nepal:

It’s not such a bad thing to try to make the scholarly study of a distant region important to a wider constituency. In fact I’ve come to believe it is a very good thing, and this became my highest purpose for the publication and its organization. This as a natural outgrowth of the particular nature of this ANHS. The Nepal Studies Association began as a home for Nepal scholars who shared interest in this small country but came from different disciplines. From the outset the newsletter and journal have functioned as a transdisciplinary meeting place where a small and cozy community could stay in touch with one another, and one another’s work. This mandates a jargon-free, accessible style of writing in the journal that admits readers from outside one’s own field. ANHS members live in twenty countries; for many, English is a second or third language. And increasingly, ANHS members are not academics. So why not use this fusion of interests and origins to create a different sort of organization and journal, reaching out on the basis of common interests and experiences rather than institutional affiliations and scholarly credentials?

This was been my vision, anyway, for HIMALAYA. Throughout my tenure as editor and membership manager I was free to take HRB/Himalaya wherever I wanted. For many years I had the tacit acquiescence, often the active encouragement, of an ANHS board aware of our history, too busy to take ANHS on themselves, and happy to have someone else keep the organization alive. It was a lot of work, but a wonderful run. Now the newly energized council and new editor have the opportunity to shape publication and organization to match their vision, always considering we are an organization whose members, ultimately, chose the path. I will hope that the ANHS of the future will seek to serve the entire community of those who care about the Himalaya, and I thank you all—readers, members, council—for a wonderful fifteen years.

*Barbara Brower*

*June 2009*