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Opening The Floodgates

31 March 1984

Peter Bird Martin
Institute of Current World Affairs
Wheelock House
4 West Wheelock Street
Hanover NH 03755

Dear Peter

Tourism is like a river: the current that nourishes and sustains life can also erode; on occasion destroy. Many Asian nations, anxious for foreign exchange, have welcomed the tourist waters; many have been scoured in return. India, Thailand, Malaysia and Indoensia have all pulled a mixed catch from the tourist flow: increased income and infrastructural enhancement have been tainted by rapid acculturation, artistic trinketization and rampant commercialism. Environmental deterioration and local economic dislocation have often also followed in the tourist wake. Only the hardiest of cultures have managed to retain their way of life more-or-less intact. Most, succumbing to mammon, have deteriorated into appendages of the Western vacation machine.

Nepal, once more isolated, consequently more fragile than the rest, now suffers a disproportionately bigger flood, a rising torrent of foreign visitors that threaten to undermine the culture and overwhelm the environmental resources of this tiny mountain nation. The problems inherent in the tourist deluge have been recognized, scrutinized and analyzed, but in Nepal, one of the poorest nations on earth, few viable foreign exchange alternatives are available. The tourist economy is not simply another way of making a living; for many it is the only way to survive.

Only 147,181 square kilometers (56,826 square miles) in area, Nepal is about the same size as Illinois. The country is squeezed between India and Tibet, with terrain that varies from the densely-populated, near-sea level, sub-tropical Terai, to the rugged gorges, desolate ridges and arid plateaus of the Himalayas. In between lie the temperate midlands, a region that once spawned the country's politically dominant Hindu civilization and now supports the capital, Kathmandu. Fifteen and a half million people live in Nepal, a number that will double by the year 2012 A.D. They are divided into thirty-five distinct ethno-religious groups, scattered across the high ridges, midland valleys and low-level plains in tiny villages and small towns. Some groups are large: the Kirantis and Tamangs number many hundreds of thousands. Some are small: the Dolpos and Lopas of the barren Mustang valley number only a few hundreds. A few are famous: the Gurkhas, a general term encompassing many ethnic groups, are well known for their service in the British Army; the Sherpas have earned noteriety for their mountaineering expertise. Officially, most are Hindu(the finer hotels in Kathmandu even have Gideon-style copies of the Bagadvad-Gita, a sacred Hindu text, on every nightstand); in fact, many Nepalese citizens practice a syncretic blend of Hinduism, Tantric Buddhism and the pre-Buddhist Bon religion. A few Muslims add spice to this convoluted ethnic melange.

Bryn Barnard is an Institute Fellow studying visual communication in South and Southeast Asia. His current interest is tourism in Nepal.

Nepal's cultural wealth is offset by suffocating material poverty. For most Nepalese, life is short and harsh. Infant mortality (15.2 per thousand) is the highest in Asia. For the survivors, life expectancy averages about 44 years. Subsistence farming and animal husbandry occupy the waking hours of most, a hard life made harder by widespread deforestation, soil depletion and erosion. Communication from one village to another is mostly by footpath and animal track, a condition that has helped maintain the nation's heterogeneity and makes education difficult. Only twenty percent of the population is literate. Population pressure exacerbates these problems; birth control programs have had but limited success. Massive foreign aid (around fifty-seven percent of the annual budget) has brought Nepal hospitals and public health care, an airline and airports, bridges, schools, dams, electrical power, civic improvements and the green revolution. Nothing, however, has yet saved Nepal's forests and topsoil. Most of the former are now charcoal and smoke. Most of the latter has been flushed into the Bay of Bengal.

The scenery is spectacular; the life is difficult but simple; the cultures are colorful and archaic. For the Western visitor, Nepal is an Asian Disneyland, a visit to a fifteenth century fantasy-world. The main scenes have been made familiar by National Geographic, travel magazines and television specials. On the spot, insulated by the hotel window or the camera lens, the visitor can absorb the ambience: the pastoral countryside, the medieval architecture, the bizarre customs, the strange costumes, and the exotic food. Then after a week, two weeks, perhaps a month, the foreigner can praise the hardiness of these quaint mountain folk, praise God that he is not one of them, and fly home to technological bliss. Tough for the hosts, ideal for the guests, these conditions were destined to make Nepal a sure-fire Western tourist attraction.

It began in 1950. The first tourist trickle came in the persons of the Oscar Houston party, a small group of Americans that visited Nepal as guests of the then-ruler, the Rana Maharaja. The visit was unusual: the Ranas had kept Nepal sealed off from virtually all outside contact for over a century. Moreover, Houston's trip up the Khumbu valley to the base of 8,848 meter (29,028 foot) Mount Everest was not a reconnaissance mission for a future summit bid, but a walk for the fun of it: a trek.

These first tourists were eventually followed by others, an increase made possible by the happenstance of politics. In 1950 China invaded Tibet, annexing the long-coveted region the following year. The Nepal-Tibet border was sealed, ending the lucrative Tibetan salt trade. Thousands of Tibetans fled to Nepal and were eventually settled around the country in mountain villages and refugee camps. Indian sea salt eventually replaced the Tibetan product (and helped reduce the incidence of goiter in iodine-poor mountain areas) but the mountain communities were deprived of trade income.

As Tibet was closed to the world, Nepal made her international debut. In 1951 the dynastic Ranas were overthrown and monarchial power restored*; the following year the nation's borders were opened. Hoteliers and restauranteurs were invited to the capital. Foreign aid missions were courted. Indian National Airways began scheduled service to Kathmandu and the initial tourist dribbles began to arrive, first mountaineers and trekkers, later package tourists. The alternative to the Tibetan salt trade had come.

*like the shoguns of Japan, the Ranas did not not replace the Nepalese monarchy, they merely usurped all power, being careful, however, to rule "in the name" of a legitimate heir to the throne.

Mountaineers climb mountains; Nepal has some of the world's highest, among them Annapurna I (8090 meters-26,545 feet), Dhaulagiri (8,167 meters-26,795 feet), Kanchanjunga (8593 meters-28208 feet) and the prize: Sagarmatha, Everest, the highest mountain on earth. Many expeditions had tried and failed to reach Everest's summit from the Tibetan side. George Mallory, the man who tried "because it's there," came closest to success: he and partner Andrew Irvine were last seen in 1924 a few hundred meters from the summit. They never returned.

The opening of Nepal also opened a new, more accessible route to Everest, via the deadly Khumbu icefall and the South Col. Eric Shipton led a major Everest reconnaisssance in 1951, but was stymied by the icefall. The Swiss passed the icefall in 1952 and almost climbed the mountain. A year later a British expedition put two men on the top: foreigner Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay. The Swiss seconded the feat in 1956. No other attempts on Everest were made during the remainder of the decade. Only six Everest expeditions were organized during the 1960's; Nepal was closed to mountaineering during much of that decade, the result of illegal climbs and the activites of the Khambas, CIA-backed (and sometimes CIA-trained) Tibetan refugees who used Nepal as their base for military forays against the Chinese. CIA-Khamba operations ceased in 1969, the same year Nepal was reopened to mountaineers.

These expeditions had an enormous impact on the local economy. They often hired whole villages as porters. Sherpas, a hardy Buddhist ethnic group that had migrated to the Khumbu centuries before, became guides and high-altitude porters; they were soon dependent on expedition income for survival. Upon departure the foreigners simply gave much of their equipment to their porters and other locals, generous actions that have much to do with current Nepalese notions of inexhaustable Western wealth. Much gear was simply dumped: the mounds of canned food, oxygen bottles, twisted aluminum ladders, tents, plates and other expedition material that littered most major base camp sites provided graphic proof of foreign riches. Certainly the deccimated forests nearby, leveled for expedition firewood, was evidence of the manpower the foreigners could harnass for their high-altitude forays. Whatever claims to poverty later visitors made, the locals knew and expected otherwise.

The successful ascents of Everest and other climbs, such as Maurice Herzog's 1950 expedition to Annapurna, helped promote Nepal as a tourist destination. Individuals dribbled in throughout the 1950's, most staying in Kathmandu, some hiking the mountain trails on their own. Even the venerable Thomas Cook organization, progentiors of modern tourism, included Nepal in one of their round-the-world tours.

By the 1960's the dribbles had become streamlets. Though the Nepalese government had forbidden climbing expeditions in 1965, no such prohibitions applied to trekking. In fact, recognizing the privations mountaineering-closure caused the expedition-dependent Sherpa villages of the Khumbu, the Nepalese government endorsed and promoted trekking as an alternate source of income.

In 1964 Jimmy Roberts established Nepal's first trekking organization, Mountain Travel. Organizer of the 1960 British-Nepalese-Indian climb of Annapurna IV (7525 meters - 24,688 feet) and a member of the 1963 American Everest expediton, Roberts was convinced that adventurous tourists would be willing to pay for an organized trek through the Himalayas. Their gear carried by porters, their food cooked by Sherpas, these "package trekkers" had only to walk and enjoy

the scenery. Yet another facet was added to the business in 1965 with the opening of the Royal Chitawan National Park and the ancillary Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge.

The Mountain Travel idea caught on slowly. Roberts organized his first trek in 1965 for a group of three women. A year later, only eight out of a total of 12,567 visitors listed trekking or mountaineering as their reasons for visiting Nepal. By 1969 however, 293 out of 34,901 were trekkers or climbers. That year, Roberts established a branch in the United States. Eight years later, seventy-two trekking agencies were registered in Nepal, and a thousand travel agencies in other countries were advertising treks as part of their tourist itinerary. That year 17, 231 people applied for trekking permits out of a total 106,277 visitors.

The floodgates really opened in the 1980's. In 1981 162,699 tourists visited Nepal; of these 19,076 were trekkers or climbers, most funneled into the popular Khumbu-Everest Base Camp and Pokhara-Mutinath treks (the latter now sees an estimated 6000 foreigners in the high-season, inter-monsoon trekking months - October and April) Tourist arrivals leveled off in 1982 and 1983, part of an Asia-wide trend. Tourist-derived income continued to rise, however, in lockstep with inflationary prices. Each year, trekking and mountaineering claimed an ever-larger share of the tourist pie. Last year saw 45 mountaineering expeditions in Nepal on 33 peaks, including six separate assaults on Everest and three solo climbs on other peaks.

Not all trekkers participated in the organized, Mountain Travel-style trip. Often, groups of budget travelers or individuals could hire their own porters or, in the heavily-traveled areas, travel light and depend on the burgeoning village hotel and restaurant sector to provide sustenance for the duration of the trip. Such treks cost no more than a few hundred dollars at most for a month of travel.

Organized treks, however, had developed into expensive propositions. Participants often paid ten, twenty, sometimes thirty dollars a day for someone to organize, supply and lead their hike. Up to five porters per trekker were sometimes necessary to carry the tables, chairs, tents, stoves, pots, food and personal gear for the foreigners. The trekkers were expected to carry only a small rucksack with water, a little food, perhaps some basic medical supplies. The group medical kit was carried by a porter or two and administered as necessary by the trekking physician, a foreigner who usually got a price break for his services. Emergency medical treatment was expensive, but available, via Royal Nepalese Army helicopter to Kathmandu or, for the truly rich, medi-vac Lear Jet to the Western hospital of their choice.

Porters and Sherpas, alas, rarely had access to more than basic medical supplies. They, after all, were not paying for the trip. Though responsible trekking companies did make efforts to care for workers who suffered from AMS (Altitude Mountain Sickness, an ailment that can lead to fatal pulmonary oedema) or other disabilities during the course of the trek, all too often, sick porters were left by the trailside to fend for themselves. More than one has died from such treatment.

Increased tourism is good for Nepal's limited exchequer. More tourists mean more money, which can translate into more schools, better roads, improved medical care and smaller foreign debts. Tourism, however, is only a short-term answer to Nepal's serious financial problems and usually creates plenty of problems of its own. The cultural and environmental costs of this foreign innundation have yet to be accurately assessed.

With the increase in trekking, the guests traveling to Nepal have changed; so too have their hosts. Hashish is still cheap and available in Nepal and is still the fuel that powers the sadhus, the Hindu holy men that wander the trails from cave to pilgrimage-site. The Western hippies and junkies, however, the dregs of the sixties and seventies, have now been surpassed in number by preppies and yuppies. The hepatitis-cafes, head-shops and opium-dens are giving way to quiche-and-perrier restaurants, mountaineering supply stores and antique dealers. Not a bad thing, some would say, forgetting that these New Age tourists are heading to the hills, an armada that puts increasing pressure on the local food and wood supply. These tourists can easily pay for their meals and lodging, but they can't improve Nepal's archaic agricultural system, already lagging far behind the demands of the local population. Nor can they replace the wood used to cook their meals and boil their water. The results are devastating.

Muktinath, for example, has long been a popular pilgriamge site. The area was opened to trekking in 1976. Here, in the rainshadow of the Annapurna Himal, plant growth is slow; centuries are required to produce the forests of cottonwood, birch, juniper and pine that still cling to the hillsides in some areas. Local and pilgrim wood demands, however, had created a wood supply problem long before the arrival of the first tourists. Too late, efforts were made to replant. Little survived: most of the topsoil was on its way to the ocean. The soil was stripped bare and is now etched with erosion gullies. The local residents must now devote more and more time, travel further and further to gather wood. Little time is left over for cultural pursuits. Muktinath, Jharkat and Kagbeni, the villages in the immediate vicinity of the pilgrimage site, are fast becoming decrepit. The buildings are crumbling, the wall paintings are neglected, the thankas (Buddhist devotional paintings on cloth) are torn and faded. Civilization is dying.

In the Khumbu, the Nepalese government has tried to prevent a similar catastrophe by the establishment of the Sagarmatha National Park. Here strict regulations prevent the cutting of wood by locals, rules that supercede the traditional system of village forest-guards. Instead, the Sherpas have been asked to use expensive kerosene for their cooking needs, a request that is also made to foreign travelers. Paradoxically, however, the Park lodge and other construction has denuded the surrounding forests as timbers are felled for walls, fences and other structures. The Sherpas, seeing their forests decimated by government fiat, have begun hacking away, every man for himself, regulations be damned. Most Sherpa homes are well-stocked with wood today, but the juniper and birch forests that cloaked the hills in Edmund Hillary's day are nearly gone. Traditional life is fading as well. Few locals now take the time to carve devotional mani stones, traditionally important in Sherpa Buddhism. Nor are many willing to become lamas, devoting their lives to prayer and meditation. Here, in a region where tourists outnumber locals two to one, those Sherpas that can't get into mountaineering expeditions become menials at the new, posh Everest View Hotel, travel to Kathmandu, or join the migration south to the Terai.

Undoubtedly, Nepalese encouragement of tourism, particularly trekker tourism, is well-intended. And undoubtedly, today's cash-register receipts in villages and government offices probably seem to vindicate such bureaucratic enthusiasm, Without prescient long-term planning however, Nepal may one day pay hideous environmental and cultural costs for current cash-in-hand gains. Without vision, today's tourist flash-flood may leave a barren wash behind; the roof of the world may cover an empty attic, devoid of all but the dregs of life and culture.

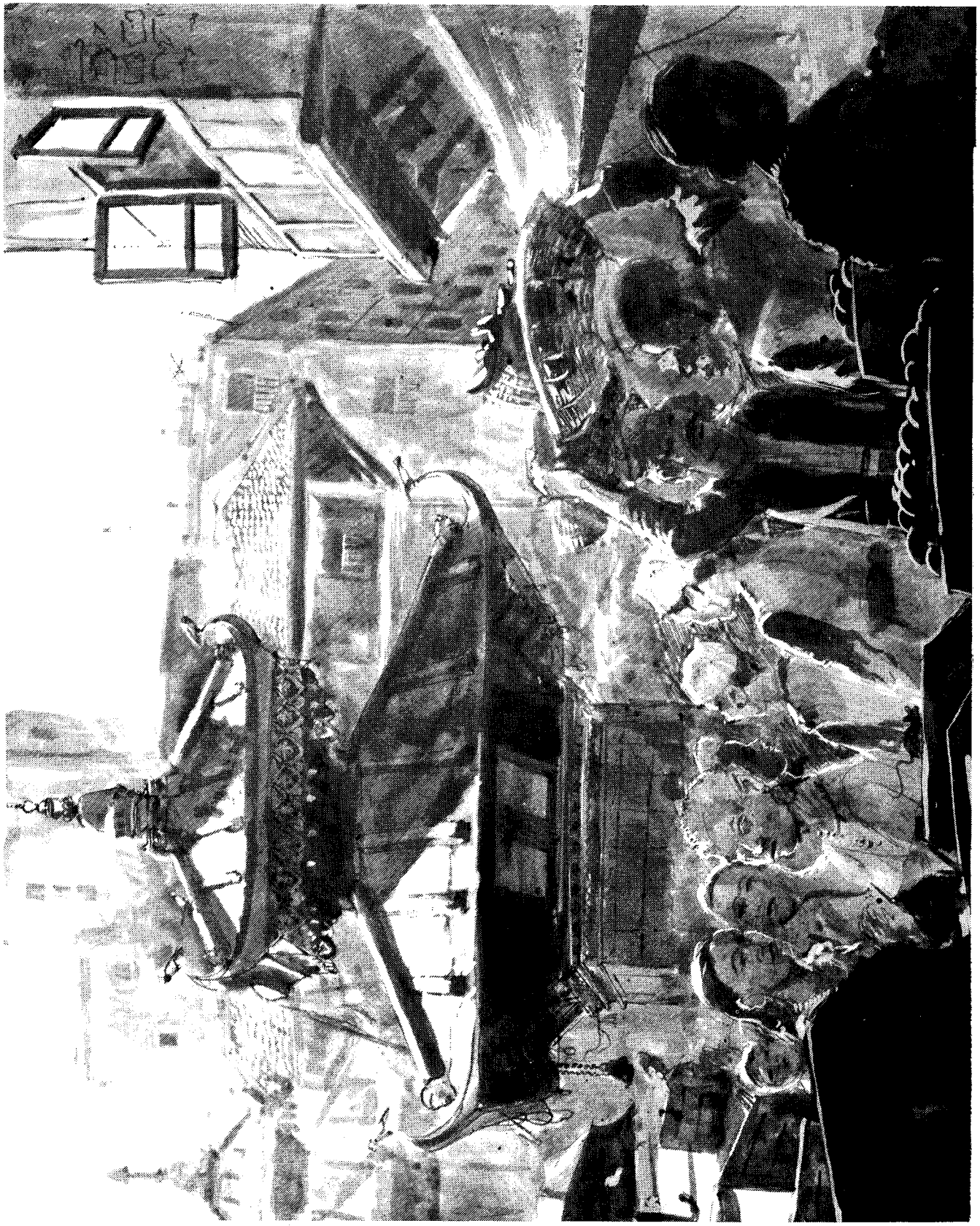
This newsletter concludes my fellowship with the Institute of Current World Affairs. I am deeply grateful to the members and trustees of the Institute for these last two years, two of the most fufilling and fascinating I have ever had. I am especially thankful to you, Peter, for your support and criticism, to Roger Reynolds for his avuncular counterpoint and, of course, to Louise Cunningham, whose efficient administrative work kept me informed and fed while in the field. I hope these last twenty-five newsletters have given you some taste of the ambiguities and contradictions involved in Asian visual communication. More importantly, I hope this fellowship has demonstrated the worth of visual study as a tool for cultural understanding. My time of doing and observing has only begun to penetrate beyond the surface of this cultural mirror. I hope that somewhere, sometime, someone else has the opportunity to delve a little deeper.

Sincerely,

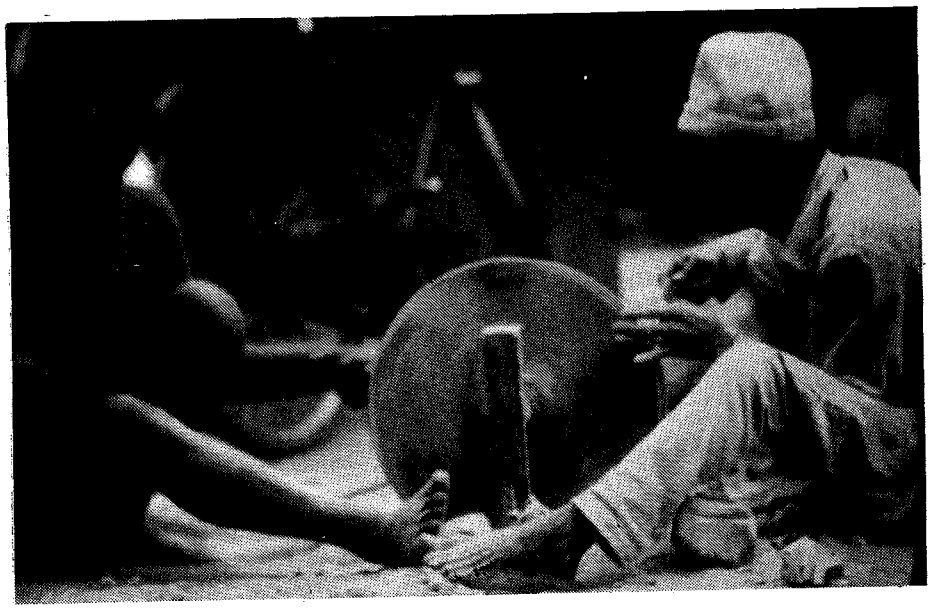
Bryn Barnard

1a Kathmandu restaurant advertisement

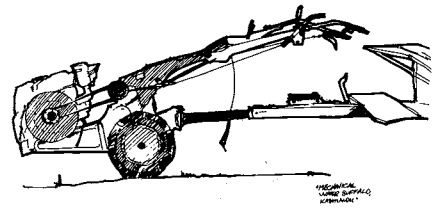
1b. Map of Nepal



2. Saturday market, Kathmandu.

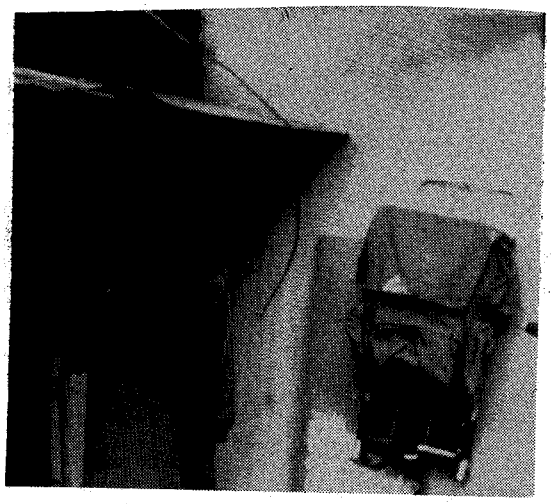


3. Knife sharpener, Kathmandu. The fellow on the left serves as the engine, wielding a bicycle chain while his colleague hones knife-edges on the rotary sharpening stone.



4. Mechanical water buffalo, Kathmandu. These Japanese-built substitutes for draft animals were imported to help till the fields of the Kathmandu valley. More often than not, however, they end up on the streets of the city, pulling wagons and passengers. Pedestrians scatter as these noisy, smoke-belching, knobby-tired creatures come rattling down the cobbles.

5. Moving picture show, Patan. Just across the Bagmati river from Kathmandu, Patan(also called Lalitpur) boasts one of the biggest Buddhist populations in the Kathmandu valley, plenty of Tibetan refugees, a zoo, and this forerunner (or budget copy) of the cinema.Viewers peek through the windows at an unrolling scroll inside, framed by a miniature stage. On the scroll are pasted magazine pictures, Indian movie star photos, advertisements and other visual material. Radio Nepal provides the soundtrack to this non-narrative montage. Scroll speed is determined by the hand cranks on top.



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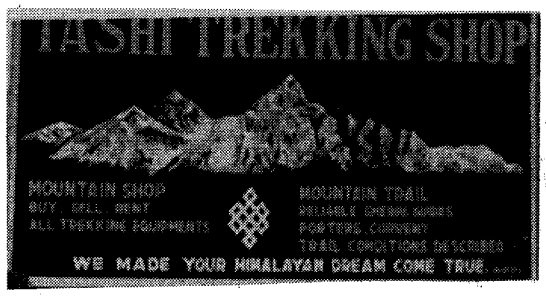

6. Trekkers and mountaineering expeditions need equipment. Not all come adequately prepared. To service their needs, trekking supply shops have sprung up throughout Kathmandu. The more prosperous, well-stocked shops are located in the up-market Thamel area of the city. Most are Tibetan-run, and boast not only a wide range of new and used mountain gear (from high-altitude tents to water purification tablets) but also black-market money changing facilities (large-denomination US dollar notes are prefered). Prices for new equipment are no bargain: the proprietors often have the latest US catalogs and use the list prices as their standard. Most shops also stock Tibetan and Nepali handicrafts.

7

7. The clientele served by these enterprises is a motley crew ranging from emaciated French junkies and zealous German Greens to portly Australian businessmen and well-scrubbed American college kids.

8. An ecclectic assortment of restaurants serves this international crowd.

8

9a

9b

9c

9. Locals have responded to tourist needs with hotels, with restaurants, but most of all, with souvenirs. Like most countries along the South-Southeast Asia tourist-corridor, Nepal now has a variety of foreign-oriented handicraft enterprises, most centered in Kathmandu, Patan, Pokhara, and other major Nepalese population centers. The majority of these "souvenir arts" are traditional art-forms redefined for the tourist milieu, sometimes with new technology and materials, occasionally with a new name or use. Cheap, home-spun cotton clothing is worn by many Nepalese peasants; festive wear is often hand-embroidered. For the tourist market, machine-embroidered cotton pants and shirts in the loose gypsy-style cut preferred by many youthful budget travelers are now sold in most souvenir shops. Other entrepeneurs specialize in embroidery only. Using brightly-colored silk thread, they produce mandalas, Buddha eyes, marijuana leaves, Sanskrit Om symbols, Tibetan good-luck signs or, as shown here, reproductions of Grateful Dead album covers (a&b). The large influx of Tibetan refugees into Nepal has also spawned a tourist-oriented Tibetan rug industry. Tibetans use rugs for warmth and decoration on the walls of their homes. These tourist rugs are sold for use on floors. Using Indian and Tibetan wool, traditional and innovative patterns and colors, vegetable and artificial dyes, the rug factories and home shops sell both to tourists and foreign import-export houses (c).

10. Other souvenirs include incense, Gurkha daggers, tankas (Tantric religious paintings) and a wide variety of hand-made Nepali paper products. These last are usually rough-textured for the tourist market (finer paper quality is popular in domestic markets), corresponding with Western notions of hand-made products. Wood-block printed or hand-painted with traditionally-inspired designs from Hindu and Buddhist myth and legend, the paper is crafted into book-covers, stationary, postcards, wrapping paper, frameable images and, as shown here, calendars (a). Tourists have a choice of either Western or Nepalese calendrical systems. Many street-side vendors (b) and shops also sell Tibetan "antiques" (c). Though the first waves of Tibetan refugees to Nepal may have indeed sold their family heirlooms for survival, most contemporary goods are produced especially for the tourist trade. Opium bottles, votive lamps, ritual silver-lined skull-cups, prayer wheels, bells and similar bric-a-brac are hawked at most Nepali tourist destinations as The Real Thing. Whatever the object, hawkers usually claim "yak bone" (horns or hooves of a high-altitude draft animal) as a component, this apparently the tourist proof of authenticity.

10a.

10b

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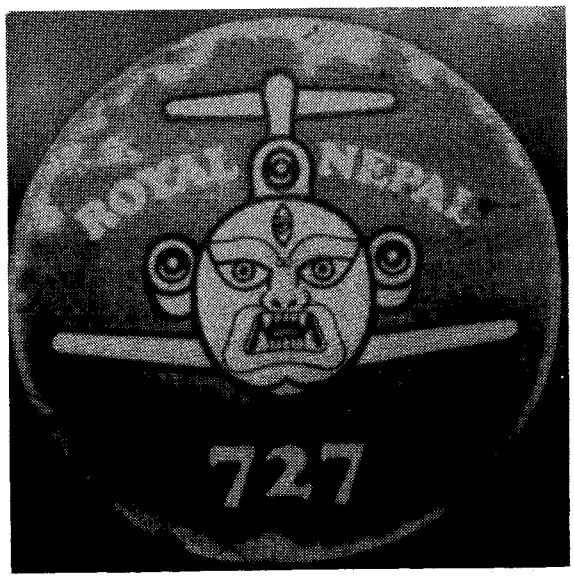
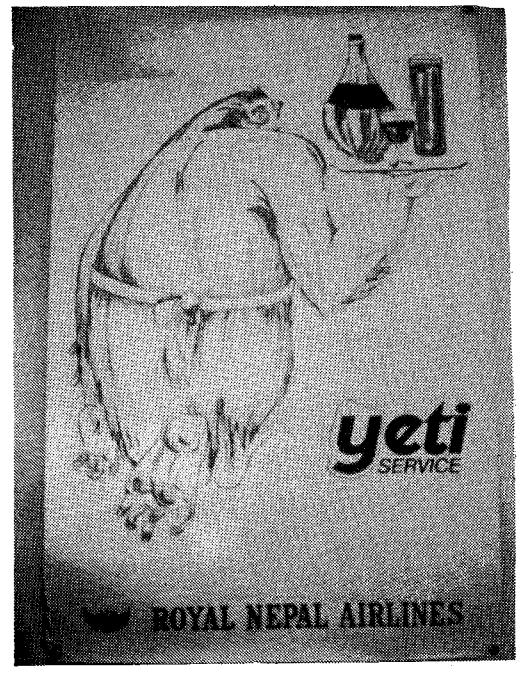


11a



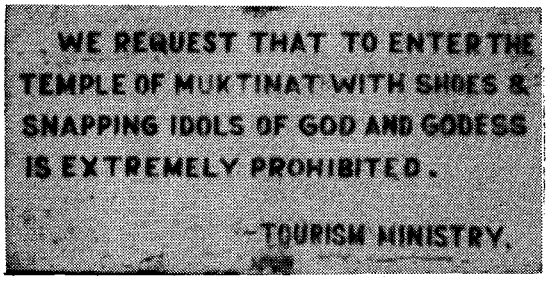
11b

11. Advertising is an important component of Nepalese tourism. The country's Ministry of Tourism and the national carrier, Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation (RNAC) both produce posters, brochures and billboards designed to attract tourists to Nepal and guide their activities while there.

RNAC's advertising, however, is a fledgling craft; the product often seems better suited for domestic consumption than international markets. Foreign-oriented ads often employ traditional Hindu-Buddhist iconography or other symbols, familiar to locals, arcane to outsiders. Out of context, in a foreign environment, the ideas communicated to the uninitiated are often bizarre or confusing.

This RNAC decal (a) for example, incorporates the company's symbol, White Bhairab, one of the more terrifying avatars (incarnations) of the Hindu deity Shiva. A statue of this hideous celestial stands in Kathmandu's Durbar Square and is an oft-invoked deity in Hindu areas of the country. Here used to advertise the airline's Boeing 727, grimacing White Bhairab is hardly the image to reassure foreigners considering RNAC in their travel plans, particularly Americans, whose own advertising airliners usually smile. In the USA, grimaces are more often associated with fighter aircraft (the Flying Tigers) or ordnance (the cruise missile) than commercial airlines. The decal image says "Nepal" but the communication is not positive.

Similarly, "Yeti Service", long the RNAC motto, presents foreigners with other unintended images. Nepal is proud of the yeti, the legendary abominable snowman; the creature is familiar to Westerners as well, popularized in animated cartoons and popular fiction as a shaggy, ape-like, semi-intelligent buffoon. Undoubtedly, whoever dreamed up the "Yeti Service" slogan intended to bring something of Nepal's



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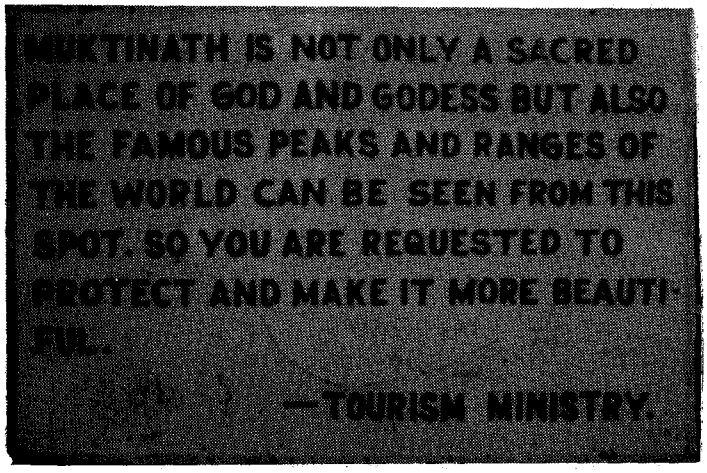


11d

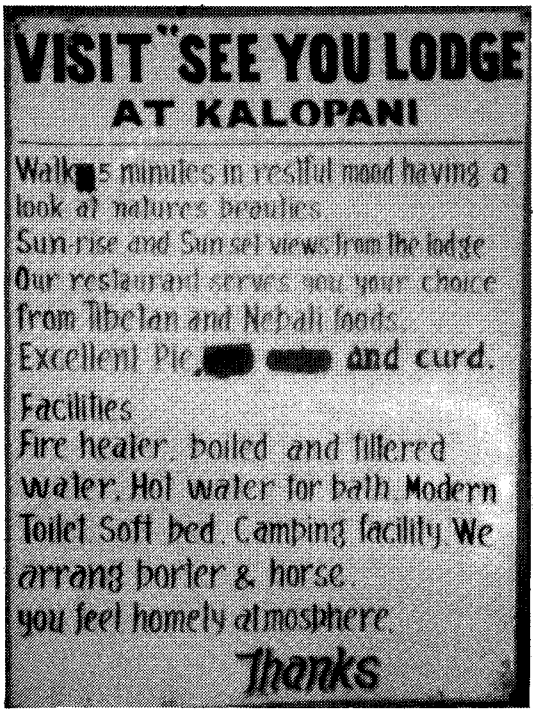
11e

popular culture into the airline's image. Alas, the lumbering Bigfoot picture conjured up by this phrase does little to attract foreign customers; the aproned, drink-bearing yeti caricature (b) that adorns many RNAC posters reinforces the inept symbolism. This hardly does justice to RNAC's attractive and reasonably efficient air-crews. Considering RNAC's antiquated booking system and sporadic arrival record, however, perhaps the yeti image is not all that off the mark. A bronze version of the yeti caricature stands outside the airline offices in Kathmandu, testimony to RNAC's faith in the symbol.

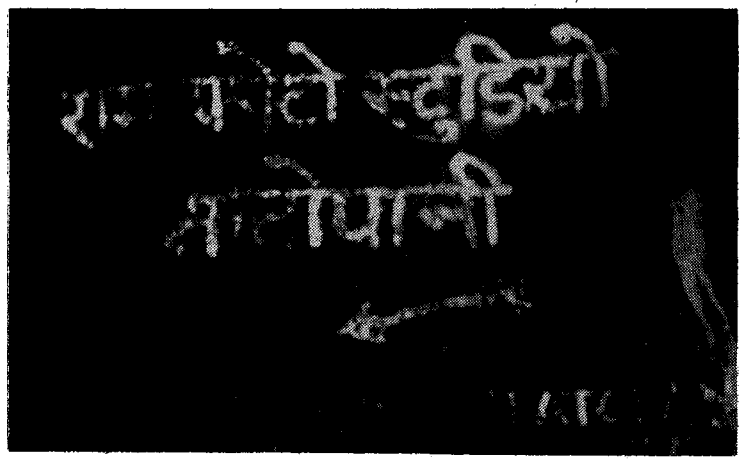
The yeti and Bhairab images may serve a positive communication function outside Nepal: Hindu pilgrims and travelers from India form a significant percentage of the airline's passenger total. Many of these tourists, like the Nepalese, no doubt find comfort in these religio-cultural symbols. For Western audiences, however, RNAC does better with its unadorned photo-posters of Nepal's spectacular mountain scenery.

English-language signs at the sacred Muktinath shrine near Annapurna also make their point. Here, methane-gas flames dance on river water in underground caves, a meeting of fire, earth and water considered auspicious by Hindus. This pilgrimage spot is also popular with foreign tourists more interested in the area's natural beauty and ethnic "local color" than any religious significance. Thus the signs, erected by the Ministry of Tourism.(c&d).

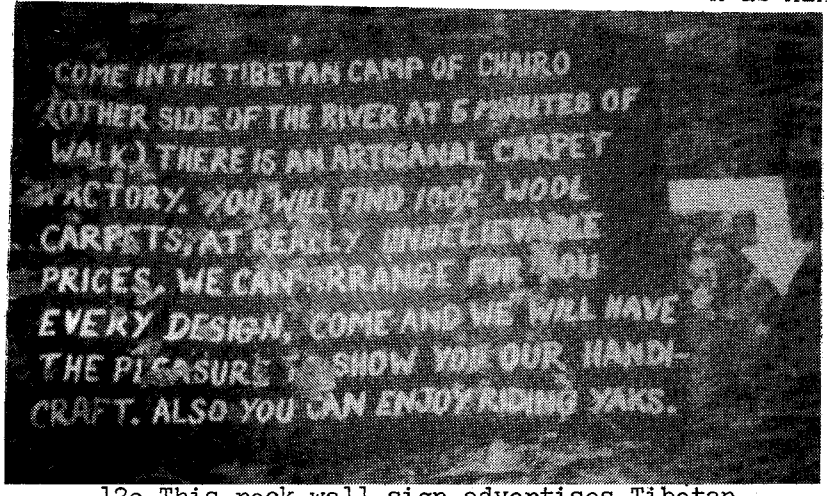
Apparently, this Nepali-language cigarette ad was also effective. Printed on metal signs, posted on village shops throughout the Nepalese high country, the ads laud a domestic brand of cigarette. Crumpled ,discarded packs that line many mountain trails are mute evidence of the brand's popularity (e). Incidentally, cigarette packs are about the only trailside refuse found in Nepal: just about everything else is recycled.



12a

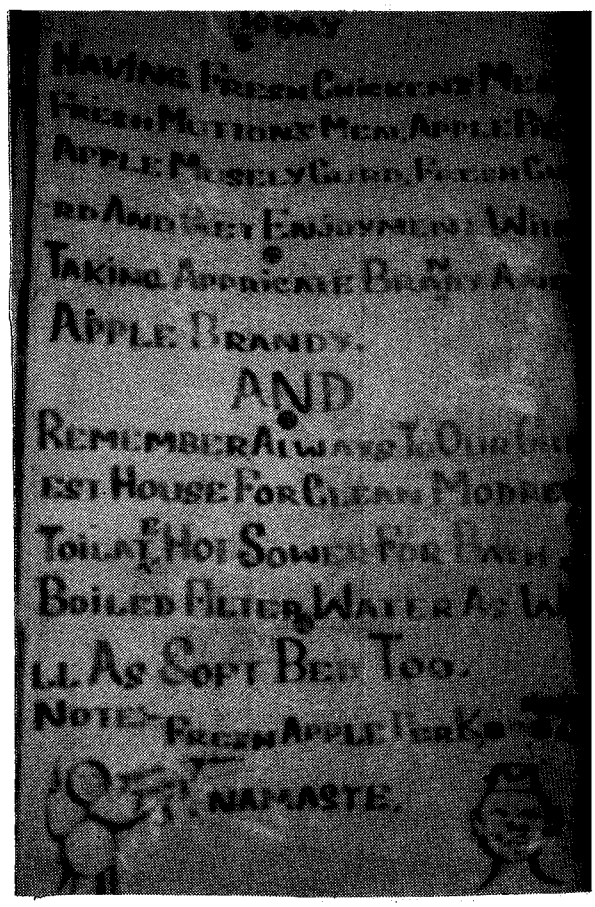


12b On the Muktinath pilgrimage route, many lodges advertise in both English and Nepali, taking advantage of the heavy local and Indian tourist traffic (the Devanagri script is used to write Nepali and other Sanskrit-based languages, such as Hindi). This sign is painted on a rock wall



12c This rock-wall sign advertises Tibetan rugs and yak rides.

12. Highly effective advertising is also produced at the village level. Entrepeneurs in heavily-touristed areas of Nepal have long produced signs advertising their foreign-oriented wares. Signs have increased with tourist traffic and today are a virtual imperative for any villager wishing to open his home to the foreign deluge; homes without are often passed up by foreign travelers looking for lodging and food. Foreign sophistication crumbles in such circumstances: many travelers make a beeline for the fanciest



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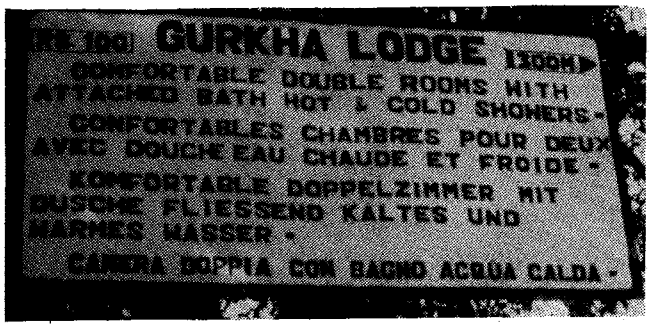

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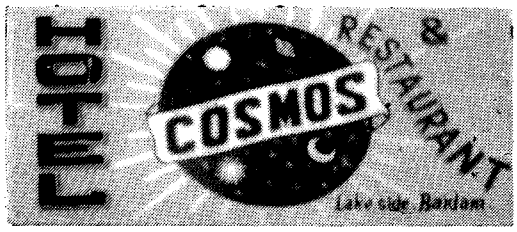

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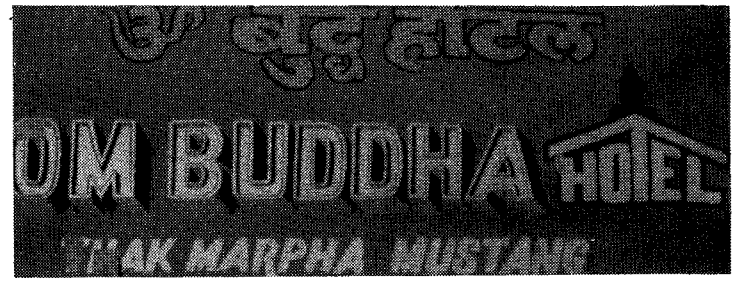

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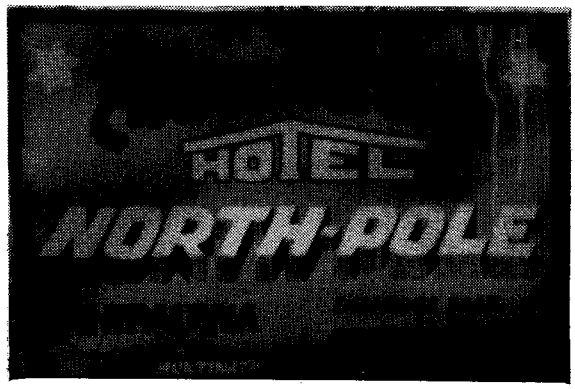


12i

sign in town. Such apparent gullibility has produced a plague of misleading advertising in many tourist villages. Advertising promise and entrepeneurial reality do not always correspond: "The Best Address in Besi Shahar" (an actual sign) proves to be an airless, spider-infested attic; "Solar Heated Rooms" (another sign) means windows. Still, most signs are reasonably honest, albeit grammatically convoluted attempts to best the competition.

12j Even the best intentioned signs can run awry of language barriers, such as this civic minded restauranteur's apparent offer of free refuse.

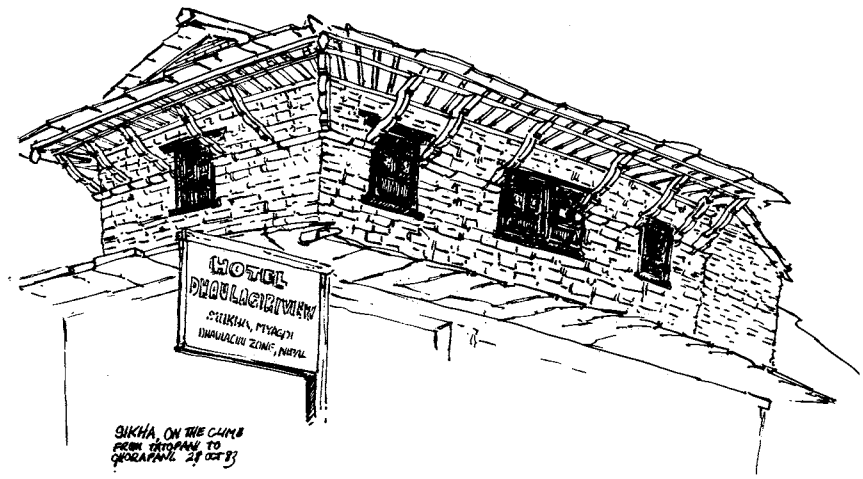
13a. Kathmandu hotel.

13. Tourist lodging takes a variety of forms, depending on the environment and the surrounding culture. In relatively cosmopolitan Kathmandu and Pokhara, numerous hostelries have been consturcted especially for foreign habitation. They run the gamut from rock-bottom flea-bags to international-class hotels, complete with swimming pools and air-conditioning. Most of these lowland accomodations are built of durable materials: sun-baked brick, concrete, occasionally wood. Though usually of the urban block-house genre, many display at least traces of the Hindu architectural ornament seen on traditional valley homes: carved wooden window sashes and lattice-work, pagoda roof lines, perhaps a bronze door-guardian or two. Though the building shown here (a) is more Islamic than Hindu, the basic

13b Slate-roofed, wooden homes in Lumle, an area thick with retir British Gurkhas.

lines are common to most contemporary urban architecture in Nepal.

As tourists move from Kathmandu up the valleys and ridges of the Nepalese back country, other hotel-types appear. Bhattis, traditional thatch-roofed, mud-floored tea house/rest stops are scattered through most of the lower elevation hill areas. These huts provide accomodation for the steady stream of porters, mule-skinners and other itinerants that travel Nepal's mountain trails.

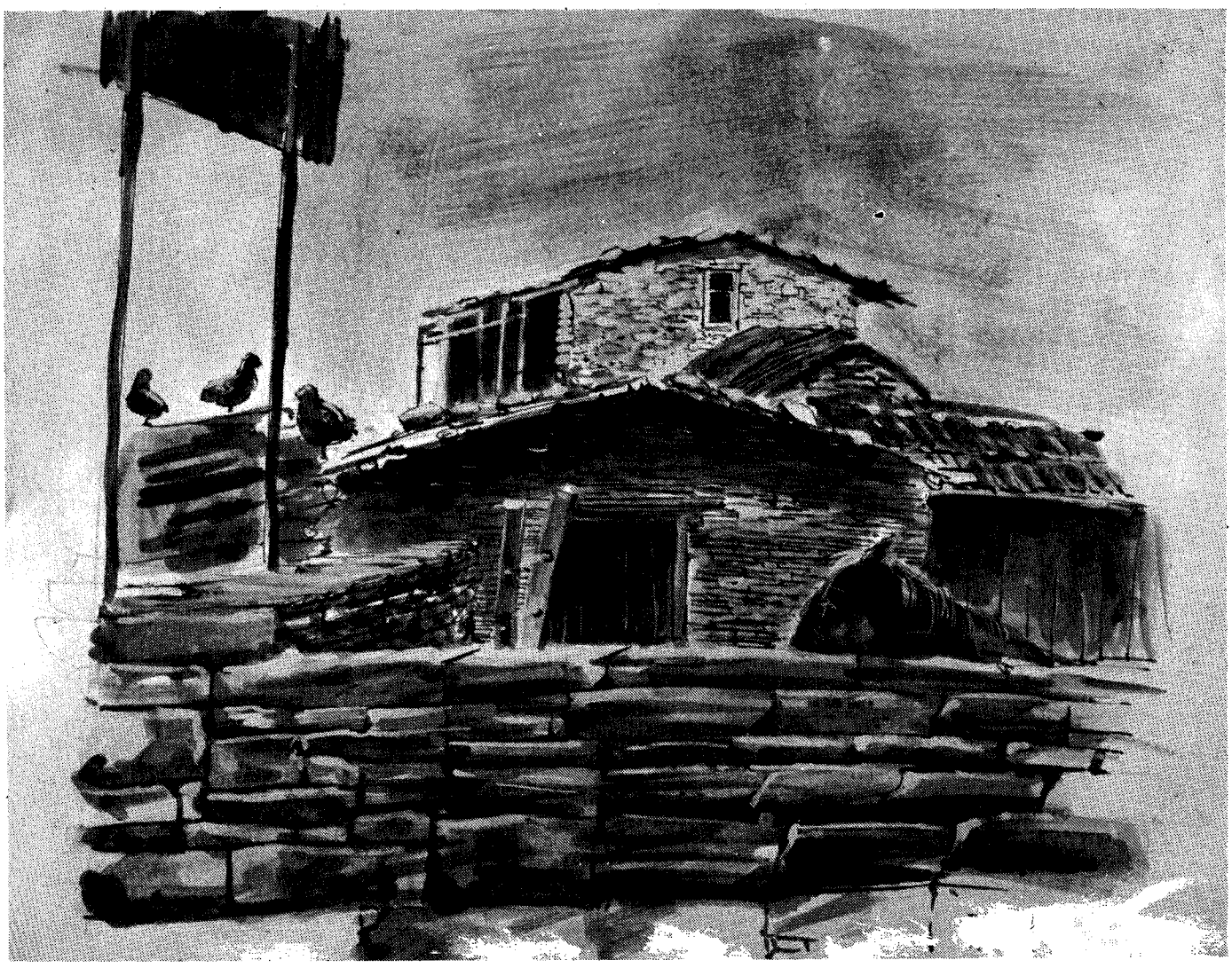


13c A slate-roofed, wood and stone hotel in Sikha, a Magar village 1980 meters (6534 feet) above sea level

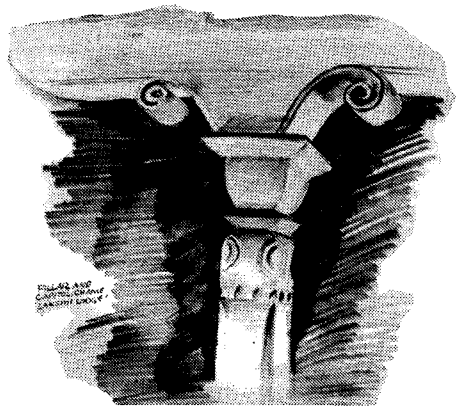
Few foreigners stay in bhattis, instead relying on tents or local homes in villages along the route. Either as-is or remodeled to accomodate this foreign traffic, most of these buildings are stylistically consonant with the architectural traditions of the ethnic group dominant in the area. Thus, hotels in lowland Brahmin villages are usually constructed of stone

13d Naudanda, a Brahmin village at 1430 meters (4719 feet) is stretched along a ridge high above Pokhara. Most buildings here are built of stone and thatch, augmented with mud and corrugated iron.

and lime-coated mud, with roofs of thatch or corrugated iron. Lowland Chetri and Thakali buildings are similarly styled. The Gurungs, Magars and Tamangs of the higher elevations also use stone for their walls, but roof their homes with wooden or sometimes slate shingles, weighted with stones for protection from high winds. The Sherpas, Manangbhots, Lopas, Dolpos and other Tibetan peoples, higher still, build flat roofed homes not unlike the pueblos of the Americas. In this arid, high-altitude region wood is used mainly for support beams. Roofs are of slate and sod, usually stacked high with firewood. Decoration is scanty, save for the occasional carved beam or window. Walls are sometimes coated with mud and then painted with white lime. These stylistic variations are not rigidly defined, of course, but blend, like the ethnic groups, from one region to another.

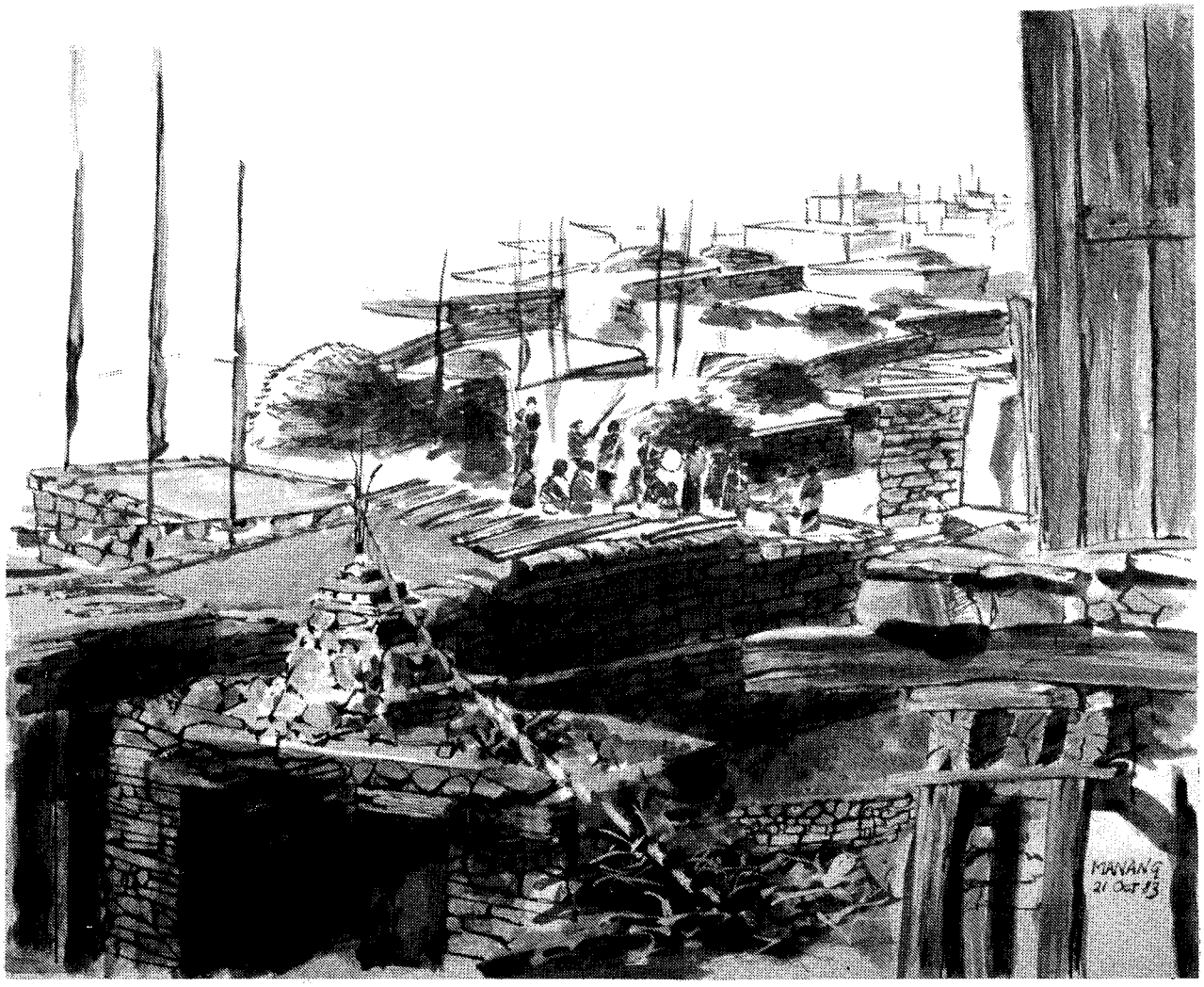


13e Dharapani, a village at 1890 meters (6237 feet) in Central Nepal, is in a transition-zone between the wet, primarily Hindu lowlands and the arid, mostly Tibetan-Buddhist uplands. Though a typically Tibetan kani-gate marks the entrance to the village, the houses have sloped, wood-shingled roofs weighted with rocks. Walls are of piled slate, chinked with mud.



13f. Tal, downslope from Dharapani at 1675 meters (5527 feet), is also a transition village with shingled, rock-weighted roofs. Formerly dependent on trade with Tibet, the village now relies on herding, agriculture, and tourism. Corn, barley, buckwheat and potatoes are grown on the wide, flat valley (a former lake, a tal) that surrounds the village.

13g. This carved wooden pillar-capital in the village of Chame (2685 meters-8860 feet) is typical of the simple decoration in the southern regions of Tibetan-influenced Nepal. The closer to Tibet, the stronger the influence, the more elaborate the decoration.



13h. Manang, at 3535 meters (1166 feet), is a village of 500 closely-packed rock-and-slate homes in the upper reaches of the Marsyandi valley. This extremely arid region is geographically contiguous with Tibet and Tibetan influence is strong. Window shutters and sashes are elaborately carved and painted with Buddhist symbols and prayer flags sprout from every rooftop. This sparsely populated, traditionally xenophobic area was only opened to trekking in 1977. Few foreigners visited before that time, though the Manangbhots themselves, because of royally decreed trading privleges, had developed an extensive Asia-wide trading network that today includes the import of transistor radios, watches, silk, Levis jeans, gems and other high-value items. An airport now graces Manang, and the central government has plans for a luxury hotel.

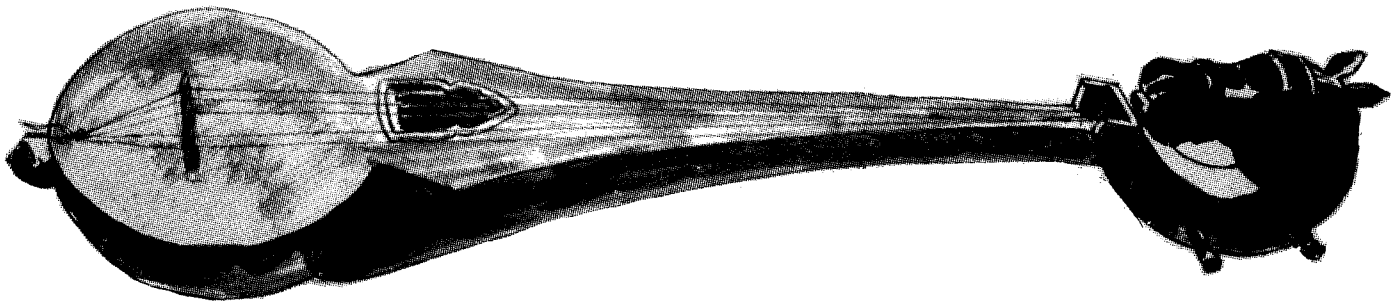
13i. Detail of a mani cairn. These devotional rock-piles, carved with Buddhist inscriptions are found throughout Tibetan-influenced Nepal.

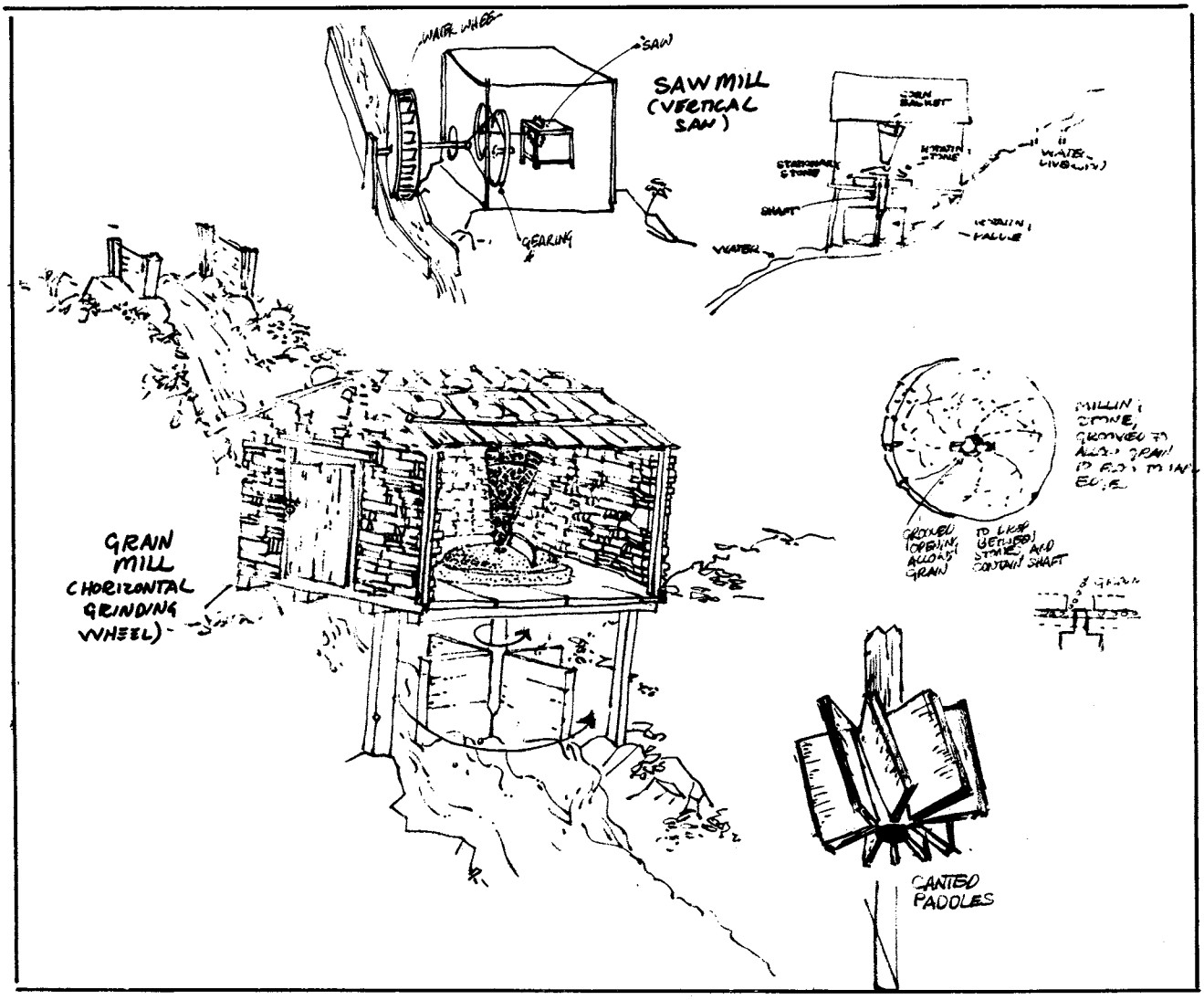
13j. Early morning cooking fires fill the air above Manang with a thick blue haze. From here, trekkers and traders travel to a small tea-house at Phedi, 4420 meters (14,586 feet) above sea level, thence up over the Thorong La pass at 5416 meters (17,872 feet). Opening the Manang side of the pass to trekking allows visitors to make a three-week loop hike from Dumre to Manang, over the pass to Muktinath, then down the Kali Gandhaki gorge to Pokhara. This circumnabulation of the Annapurna Himal is becoming an increasingly popular trek.

14. Porters, laden with trekking gear, climb the Thorong La pass.

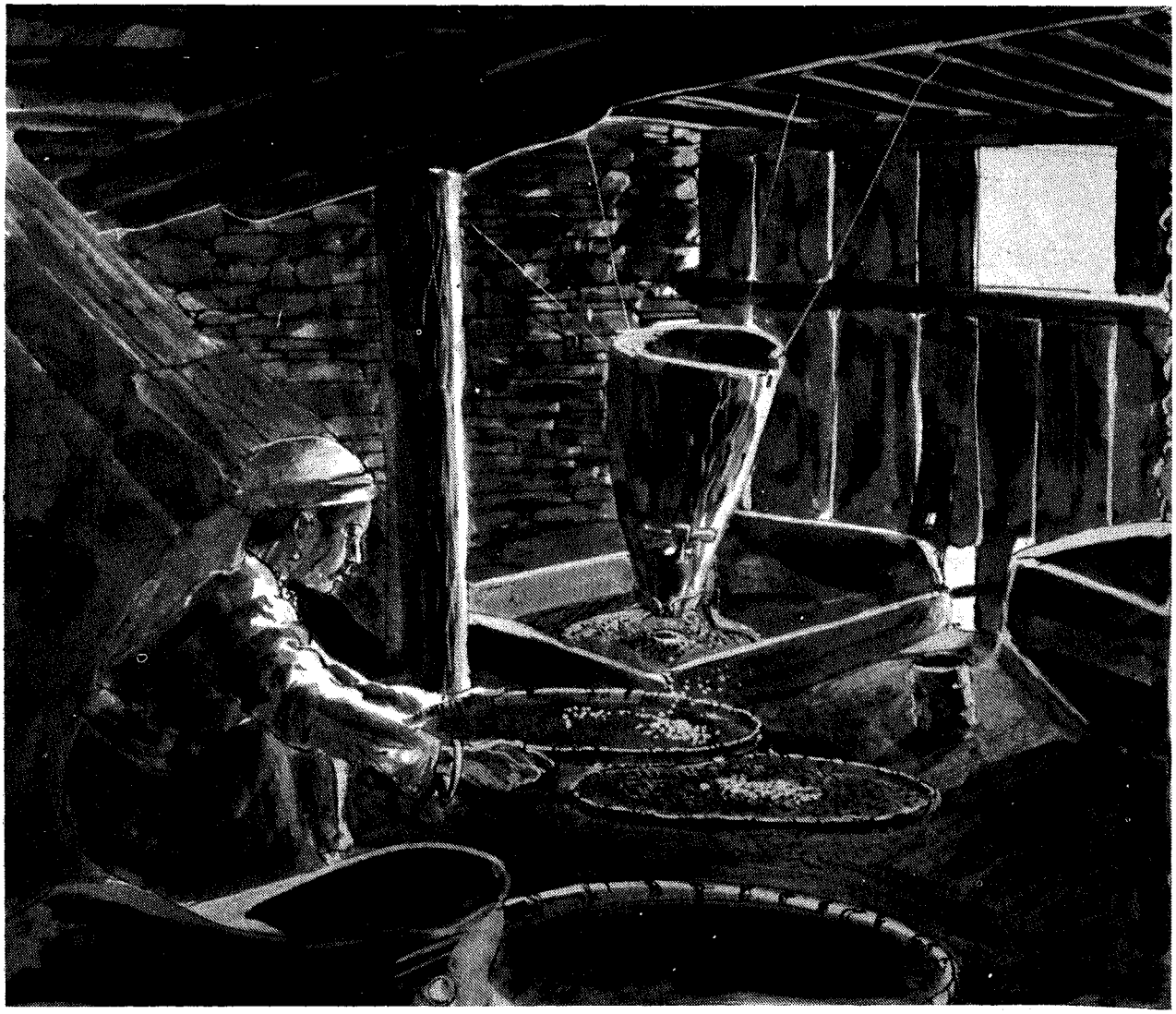
15. Jharkat, a decrepit Tibetan village at 3500 meters (11550 feet) is perched on a ridge above the Kali Gandaki gorge. Only an hour's walk from Muktinath, Jharkat suffers from the excessive deforestation that plagues Nepal's popular tourist sites. The grove of cottonwoods in the foreground is all that remains of the forests that once cloaked these hills. The rest of the land in this area has been eroded to a barren moonscape.

16. A Tibetan lute.



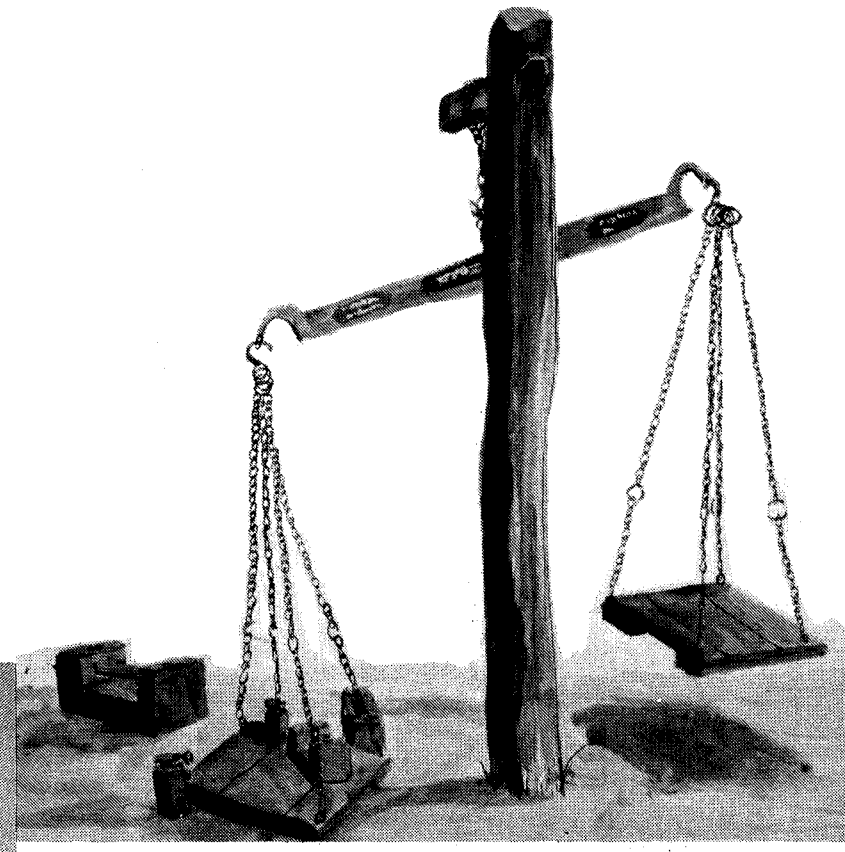


17. Diagram of a Nepalese grain-mill and sawmill. Water-powered mills are found throughout Nepal. Most grind grain between stone mortars (the lower stone is fixed; the upper stone, connected to a water-turned shaft, revolves) and are located on diversion-channels built near streams and rivers. Buddhist villages usually have but one or two small mills; Hindu areas, however, have as many mills as there are castes. Peace Corps efforts to improve the mills did not meet with much success: the foreigners suggested cupping the paddles to make more efficient use of the water-flow. The faster-turning grinding stones did grind the grain faster but also wore down more quickly, and had to be replaced sooner, a side effect of the improvement the locals did not like. The introduction of small electrical turbines to generate light for the mills proved more popular. Apparently, horizontal-to-vertical gearing is unknown in Nepal. The only vertical water-wheel I saw was used in a sawmill, which, of course, used a vertical rotary saw.



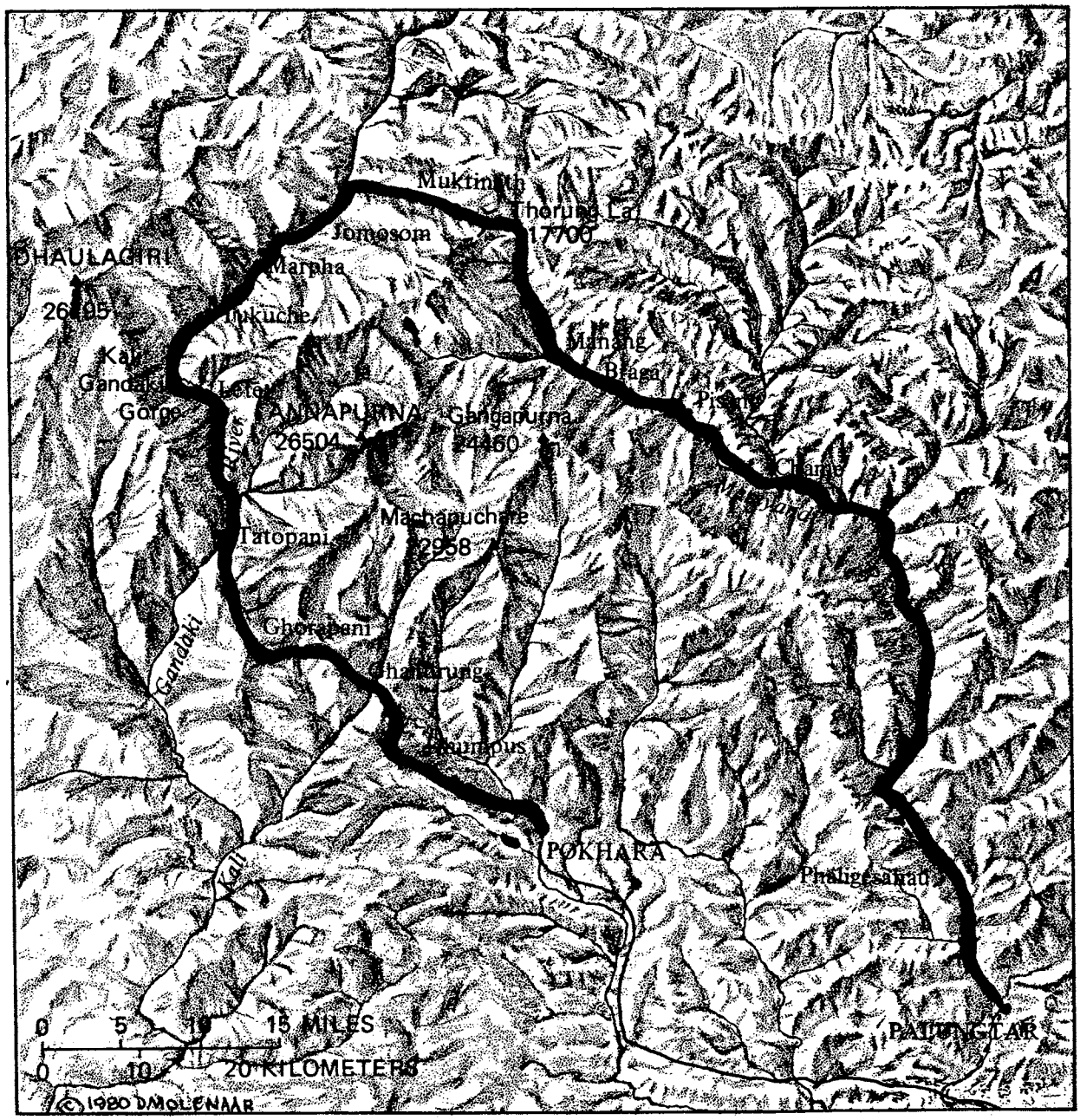
17a. Interior of a Nepalese mill, Pisang. Water to turn the paddles is diverted along wooden aquaducts that cross the mill roof. A box-like wooden pipe channels the water onto the paddle-wheel under the building. Grain is poured into the conical wooden container over the mortars, dropping through a hole in the rotating upper mortar to the grinding planes beneath. Grooves on the mortar surfaces spin the ground grain to the outer edges of the grinding surfaces where it can be collected and stored. During harvest season these mills run 24 hours a day.

8. Village scales, Botiwadar. These wood-and-iron scales, taller than a man, are found in many villages along the round-Annapurna trek. Used to weigh grain and other trade goods, they are also important measures for porter loads. Barefoot, with nothing but a forehead-held tumpline for support, porters often carry thirty kilograms (66 pounds) more than twenty miles in a single day. Forty-five rupees (about $3.50), the standard daily trekking portage fee, is considered exorbitant by local standards. Standardized metric iron weights are used to weigh loads in even remote villages.



20. Nepalese ferris-wheel. Erected for a few weeks during the Hindu festival of Dashain, in the villages of Central Nepal, these provide a welcome source of festive relief from the drudgery of daily peasant existence. Large swings are also built during the Dashain season.

19. Water-rotated Buddhist prayer-wheel, Muktinath. This lazy-man's version of the hand-rotated cylinders found throughout the Tibetan-Buddhist world sends perpetual prayers to heaven, one per rotation. Mantra-inscribed prayer flags work in a similar manner, making merit with each gust of the wind.



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