

Newsletter no 4, 2011

Ekerö 27 September 2011

## **Hello, Tashi Delek and Namaste**

This summer 4/5 of the board of KMCH Support Group visited Humla. This and future newsletters will therefore, in essence, include a travel story with some reflections from the journey.

## **Visit to Humla**

In July of this year KMCHs children home in the village of Yangar in Humla was visited by five old men from Sweden, of which four are members of the board of KMCH Support Group. It was Eddy, Hans, Italo, Pär and Richard. Chembal met us in Kathmandu where we should apply for visas to Humla and purchase tents and other equipment that we would need during our stay in Humla. Humla is one of several so-called "restricted areas" in Nepal which require special visas. These can be applied for only in Kathmandu. It was a sad Chembal who met us at the airport of Kathmandu. He had just heard that one of his brothers, Dawa 34 years old, had died the day before. This was a novelty which of course was to put a damper on our visit.

You must fly to Humla. You fly to Simikot, the capital of Humla, from Nepalgunj in southwestern Nepal. The flight takes one hour with small and weather sensitive aircraft. In monsoon time the weather is especially erratic. When we arrived in Nepalgunj there had not left any aircraft for Simikot for more than a week, so it was with anxiety we noted that we could not leave for Simikot the planned day. However we were lucky

because we had to wait only one day in Nepalgunj. We were lucky even on our way back from Humla. Then we left Simikot just one day after schedule. In Nepalgunj Chembal switched from his monk clothes to ordinary clothes. Now, when he shall act as a guide for a couple of weeks he is not supposed to be dressed as a monk.



*View of Simikot with  
airstrip*

Well in Simikot, we had to go to the police to register and to show our trekking permissions. It suited well for the horses that would bear our packaging had not

yet arrived at Simikot. During our walk through the village we met the highest political official in the Humla, "Chief District Officer", I believe that he presented himself as. He is also a Member of Parliament. He thanked us for our commitment to Humla and said to me that "Chembal is good boy and that he is doing a lot for Humla." It is good to hear that the authorities are aware of and appreciate the work of Chembal and KMCH.

After a lunch at Simikots best and perhaps only restaurant, we began our three days walk to the village of Yangar where the children home is situated. It was very much up and down on the first day. From Simikot on the altitude of 2960 m you have first to climb to 3200 m and then go down very steep to the first camp site Dharapuri at 2270 m. The paths in Humla are not easy to walk so you have to very careful all the time. The walk strains both lungs and knees. When we reached Dharapuri it had started to rain and the twilight was setting in. No ideal conditions to put up tents in. Moreover, our spirit stove, which we had purchased and tested in Nepalgunj, did not function so our cook had to borrow a stove in a house nearby. We fall asleep fast when we at last crawled into our sleeping bags.

The second day we trekked to a village named Kermi on 2700 m. It was very much up and down even this day but not the large altitude variations that it was the day before. When we left Dharapuri we passed a new police station where we had to show our papers again. We now left the part of the Humla which is inhabited by Hindus coming from northern India and known as Chetris.

At the same time we left the part of Humla where it is possible to cultivate rice. From now on most of the people are Buddhists of Tibetan lineage and known as Bothias. All Bothias are called Lama as surname.



In Kermi we camped on the roof of one of KMCHs

board members – Soenam Kyab -house and could also eat with his family. We were not able to repair our spirit stove so our cook had to use borrowed stoves or use an open fire. A bit above the village of Kermi, there are hot springs. It was nice to wash oneself, rest and soften the muscles in the pleasant warm water. On the way to the bath we met

another member of the board of KMCH. It was Paljor, who read economics at the University of Kathmandu while he worked in the children home in Kathmandu. Paljor is now teacher in Simikot. He has grown up in Kermi.

It was harvest time in Humla. The corn was cut with old-fashioned sickles and the threshing was done with old-fashioned tools on the flat ceilings. (*I could not find the English word in my dictionary so you have to look at the photo below*) The wheat was stift from the chaff with help of the wind. The fields were plowed with plows made of wood and draught by yaks. On small parcels the land was prepared by hoes. I do not



know how many years back in time we were. In the houses the entire family lives in a large room, which serves as kitchen, living room, bedroom and stockroom. The center of the room is the stove, which was introduced less than ten years ago. Before all cooking was made over open fire and smoke went through a hole in the roof.

With the smokeless stoves the health has noticeably improved. A constantly inhalation of smoke from the fire resulted in problems with the bronchus. In recent years they have also begun to open small holes in walls in order to get some light. The holes are covered by glass or plastic. Several houses have solar panels that provide electricity to one or two filament lamps. Formerly they used sticks of tree to lighten the rooms.

The third day it was warm and sunny. We passed through the village of Yalwang where our children go to school and the monastery Namkha Khyung Zong, where I met Chembal 12 years ago.

When we came to our camp site on the 3000 m we were met by all children and the staff of KMCH. This meeting dispersed the physical fatigue that we all felt and we just enjoyed the warmth and joy we were met by. It became a beloved au revoir, for many of the children we had met in Kathmandu in the summer of 2007. The children had grown during these years, so it was quite a few that I recognized immediately.

Of the staff we had just met our teacher Chhukel before. He and our new cook Pema are working full-time for KMCH. Lapkha Norbu, one of Chembals older brothers – and our "wood cutter", who's name I have forgotten, are working half time for KMCH. In addition to these we met Naki – a girl who was cook in our children home in Kathmandu while she completed her studies. Naki is now employed by the government as a teacher in the school in Yalwang but she lives in our children home and is helping us there.



We were not only met by our 24 children, we take financial responsibility for, but also by 8 more who are living in the children home. Their parents and/or relatives bring us food for their subsistence. Thus our rooms and our staff are optimally exploited and more children are given the opportunity to go to school. It is mostly so long distances between the villages in Humla that a living near a school is necessary if the children will be able to attend school at all. Of our 32 children there are 19 girls and 13 boys. According to Chembal, we have a long queue of children who want to come to KMCH's children home. *(More information about the children regarding age, sex and class will come in a forthcoming newsletter.)*

We camped in the place where we hope to build our own children home. We are now renting a house in the village. We did not need to put up our toilet tent because on our land there is a building with the first "eco-san toilets" in upper Humla. We were the first to use them. We also had flowing water on our camping site so it was rather comfortable.

It was a pleasure to meet all of the children. They are so candid and happy and enjoy very good with each other. It takes quite a great deal of indulgence and patience to live so close to each other as our children do. It seems that they have that. According to Chembal, the children are physically healthy and seems to feel better mentally now than when they lived in Kathmandu. Children's health is monitored regularly on our health clinic NCC.

On their way to school the children pass KMCHs piece of land, where we camped. They go in a long line with Chhukel or Naki in the lead or in the queue. It takes less than 30 minutes for them to go to school. In Yangar live approximately 25 and in Yalwang about 35 families. These villages are very close to each other to be in upper Humla.

The school was built in 2003 and had at the start 40 pupils. There are now 170 pupils in the school. They can go there up to class 10. About 50% of the students are in classes 1 and 2. There are more girls than boys at school because more boys have been sent to free schools in Kathmandu and India. This relationship is about to be countervailed now with more and better schools in Humla and more places in school homes / children homes. Of 170 students 130 live in a school home/children home operated by the organization ISIS, 32 are living in KMCHs school home/children home and the remaining 8 are from the two nearby villages.

The headmaster proudly told us that the school in Yalwang is ranked as the best in Humla. He further noted that "girls are better in school than boys", a fact that is true even in Sweden, as to Italo who is a teacher. The headmaster also said that the children from KMCH are very good at school.

The children attend school for about 10 months of the year. They are free in winter time when it due to snow barriers is very difficult to go outside the villages. Then they live with their families or relatives. The school has 11 teachers, of which the government pays the salary for six and five receive their remuneration from various NGOs. KMCH pays the salary for one

teacher. Ten of the teachers are men. Naki is the sole woman in the teaching workforce. According to the headmaster school homes/children homes as KMCHs and ISISs are a prerequisite for a functioning school in this



area. The distances between the villages or the parents' work on the fields and/or trade journeys mainly to Tibet make it impossible or at least very difficult for the children to attend school.

It is not impossible that the school in Yalwang within a few years can teach up to grade 12. Then the children need not move to Simikot or Kathmandu to attend the last two years at school, which they have to do now. (*To be continued in the next newsletter.*)

### **Muchu as an Apple district**

In the last newsletter we mentioned that Chembal had contact with a Nepali Organization — Team for Nature and Wildlife – that among other things is trying to save the snow leopard. By creating alternative employment the residents can be prevailed upon to accept the predator in the forests of Humla. Together with the organization, there are plans to make Muchu VDC (Village Development Committee), where the village Yangar is situated, to an Apple districts. 10,000 Apple seedlings will be planted as a basis for a forthcoming Apple industry. It is truly a long-term planning, for the first harvest can be obtained only after about five years.

The idea is that in the future be able to export various products made from apples to Tibet. Team for Nature and Wildlife will also assist with various education initiatives in Humla such as guiding, cook training as well as bee-keeping and cultivation in greenhouses. We hope that this soon will be a reality. As I understand there is still some lack of money.

It will not take so many years before there will be a road to at least the village Muchu a half a day's walk from Yangar. The road will change life in Humla. Today's caravans of goats and horses will be replaced by motor vehicles, which is both positive and negative. Timber can now only be exported on yak backs. A truck can replace many yaks, which is likely to accelerate the deforestation and its negative effects. Because of that it is important that KMCH will be able to start the project of reforestation and information of the importance of maintaining and reforest now barren areas.

### **Support Committee for KMCH started in Switzerland**

In previous newsletters we told about Bastian Etter, a Swiss engineer, which ensured that the water is drawn to the location where we hope to build our children home. He is also responsible for the construction of our greenhouse. Bastian has now started the "Humla-Switzerland". See [www.humla.ch](http://www.humla.ch) . Bastian can be reached on [info@humla.ch](mailto:info@humla.ch).

### **Information sheet from Chembal**

Chembal has produced a leaflet on KMCH in English. I attach it as a pdf file. Note the homepage [www.kmchumla.org](http://www.kmchumla.org).

With greetings from the board of KMCH Support Group  
by  
Hans Alm

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