

EV120 - *Himalayan Odyssey: Environment, Culture, and Change in the Manaslu Region of Nepal*

May 20 – June 12, 2020 (in Nepal dates)

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2020 Course goals and background

The goal of this 24-day, 1 block course is to instill an appreciation for, and understanding of, the natural environment and traditional cultures of the upper Buri Gandaki Valley -- an ethnic region known as Nubri, to the north of Mt. Manaslu, encompassed by the upper reaches of the Manaslu Conservation Area. Much of our learning will occur through cultural immersion and travel on foot throughout the region. From an academic perspective, the Manaslu area can be described as an unusually rich, multi-disciplinary laboratory for direct study of a variety of topics and issues at the intersection of disciplines ranging from anthropology, archaeology, sociology, and natural resource and protected area management, to Buddhism, Hinduism, shamanism, comparative religions, Tibet studies, economics, demography, linguistics, international development, political science, biology, glaciology, climatology, geology and geomorphology, art, iconography, restoration science, etc. In particular, students will explore agency and impact of out-migration, the accelerating growth of tourism, climate change, resource extraction, rural development, and religious tradition and patronage. Special attention, particularly for students in natural science concentrations, will be given to topics in high altitude ecology.

The entire field component of the course (19 days) will take place within the boundaries of an actively-managed, 1,600 sq. km. protected area known as the Manaslu Conservation Area (MCA), gazetted by the government of Nepal in 1998. The administrative body overseeing management of the area, the MCA Project ("MCAP") is the National Trust for Nature Conservation, a semi-governmental body that manages several other protected areas and projects in Nepal.

The topical and sometimes divisive issues that local villagers, outside interests, government officials, and protected area managers are facing will offer important areas of inquiry during the course. The upper Buri Gandaki River valley is one of the most geo-morphically dramatic and seismically active areas of mountain topography in the world, and the heart of the river gorge is perennially affected by landslides and other geo-hazards. This area is located 30 miles directly north of the epicenter of the April, 2015 earthquake that left 8,000 people dead and a half million houses collapsed. More than 40% of the structures in the Manaslu area were seriously damaged in that quake.

Summary course description

This interdisciplinary course will travel (by van, short helicopter shuttle, and mostly on foot) through the heart of the Manaslu area, learning about the culture of the indigenous ethnic Tibetans of Kutang and Nubri, and the handful of other ethnic groups that have settled in the area. Issues of cultural change and environmental instability as a result of climate change, globalization, economics, and governance will be examined in the context of the nation and the region. As part of this, the roles and impacts of rural development efforts, demographic shifts, motorable road construction, biodiversity conservation, human/agriculture-wildlife conflicts, and climatological events will be explored, as well as changing patterns of agriculture, trade (incl. the opening up of the border crossing with Tibet/China), multi-lateral and bi-lateral foreign aid (incl. NGOs and INGOs), education, health care delivery, and local income generation and alternate energy projects, especially micro-hydroelectricity. Throughout the course, we will work on developing an understanding of the natural

environment, climate, and biota, and how that environment is changing in response to both natural and human drivers, particularly in fragile treeline biomes.

Further, the course will include an overview of, and direct exposure to, the interface of Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism, pre-Buddhist beliefs and mythology, and the anthropology, language and religions of the Nubri and Kutang people. The presence, activities, and impact of Christian missionaries in the area will also be briefly explored.

Upon arrival in Kathmandu, Nepal's capital (where the course begins), students will spend three days in an ethnic Tibetan and Newar community, then take a short helicopter shuttle across the lower reaches of the Manaslu Conservation Area. For the bulk of the course, students will be engaged in travel-study, in which reserved "trek lodges" will be used for classrooms, dining, and lodging.

During this field part of the course, students will undertake independent study and data collection, some of which quite possibly will be of practical interest and use to the managers of MCAP. Topics of inquiry related to this will include natural resource issues surrounding grazing, forest management, human-wildlife conflict, tourism, trade in wildlife parts, commercial medicinal plant collection, firewood and energy sources, protected area administration, hydrologic and geologic hazards, environmental education, community-based conservation and development, environmental NGOs, indigenous movements, and trans-border issues (especially regarding Tibet/China).

There may also be an opportunity to engage in some service work during the course, with support from funds already donated by sources independent of CC.

The course will draw upon a digital (and partial hard copy) library that will accompany the study-trek. Throughout, the students will be required to carefully document their observations, their personal experiences, and pertinent content from the structured format of the course. This format includes:

- Lectures by the co-instructors
- A daily briefing session
- Daily group discussion
- Numerous field trips and site visits (including schools, temples, health posts, tree nurseries, micro-hydro plants, wildlife research sites, landslide areas, treeline tree communities, monasteries and sacred sites, etc.)
- Guest lectures from visiting experts, local representatives and workers, etc.
- Enforced reading periods
- Viewing of topic-specific videos and films
- One-on-one discussion with instructors, paraprofs, guest lecturers, etc.
- Participation in trek-related chores, to be assigned.

The students' "meta-experiences" -- deconstruction their own emotions and moving points of view -- will also be shared, as a means of processing the typically surprising (and sometimes disturbing or conflicting) information, perceptions and analyses.

Professor Miroslav Kummel will guide the geo-sciences, ecology, agriculture, land-use, biological conservation, and climatology components of the course. In addition, Prof. Kummel will lead discussions on contemporary and future climate change and its likely impacts on the physical and biotic environments, and on resources, planning, and society in Nepal.

Visiting Assistant Professor Broughton Coburn will oversee the course format and itinerary, deliver content on the history, culture, religion, and socio-economy, and guide discussions on issues relating to the changes and

pressures impacting indigenous residents, and on conservation and development issues as they tie in to the Manaslu Conservation Area in particular.

Nepal provides an excellent context for studying issues of natural resource use and management, which will provide the background for the abiding thematic questions of the field part of the course:

1. What is our contemporary understanding of the origin and tectonic setting, and the geologic evolution of the Himalaya? What challenges (seismologic, geomorphic, etc.) does this tectonic setting present?
2. What factors affect the climate of the Himalaya and Tibetan plateau, how do climate patterns vary spatially and temporally? What hydrologic and other challenges does the natural climate system present?
3. What is development, exactly, and what are the most successful examples of humanitarian foreign aid?
4. How are common property resources such as forests, pasturelands, and water managed? How have demographic shifts, national politics, and changing market environments affected this change?
5. How has trade and religion -- historically, and in the present -- shaped the culture and economy of the Nubri people?
6. Will the proposed construction of motorable roads provide socio-economic benefit, and if so, to whom? What are the environmental and economic impacts, and geological hazards, of the road construction?
7. How do the uncertainties of Nepal's political environment affect the everyday lives of the people living in the capital city, as compared with those in remote communities? How is wildlife and natural resource conservation affected by these challenges?
8. How is migration -- both internal and external -- and a growing remittance economy affecting Nubri, and Nepal and its environment?

One historic development will be occurring during the period that the course is in the Manaslu region: a motor road has been approved by the Government of Nepal for construction from the Tibet border, to the north, and into the Nubri valley. (The road is expected to arrive in the villages at the upper end of the valley within the next two years.) The geo-political, socio-economic, cultural, and environmental impacts of the road on this small valley will prove to be significant; the course will present opportunities to study its impact. Similarly, other major road links are being constructed into the area from the south and from the west.

Our approach to addressing these questions will be a combination of theory and field study. What does the literature on each of these questions tell us? Does our field experience validate this literature? Is our field experience consistent with the applied work done on natural sciences, development and conservation in Nepal? And importantly, how do we know what we know? Some aspects of our inquiry may contribute directly to the collection of baseline data for future studies and possible future CC courses in the region.

Note that a number of previous students of the *Himalayan Odyssey* course have been inspired to pursue further research and post-graduate opportunities that were initiated by their experiences with this course. Colorado College has a Fulbright Scholar from the class of 2007, Tyler McMahon, who continues to live and work in Nepal. Three students from 2014 were in Nepal during the summer of 2016 on a Watson Fellowship. Several others have maintained an academic and personal connection to the region.

Summary of itinerary

The course begins with exploration and study tours within the Kathmandu Valley, with the goal of understanding the profound cultural history of this exploding city and its daunting issues. Some of the lectures, guest lectures and site visits in Kathmandu will also relate directly or indirectly to natural resource issues that pertain to the Manaslu area, and to MCAP in particular.

Travel

After two full days in Kathmandu (Newar, Tibetan, and other ethnic groups, as well as Hindu caste peoples), the

class will travel 5 hours by van to Arughat (Brahmin, Chhetri and Gurung). From there, we will take a short helicopter shuttle along the Buri Gandaki River to Prok (Nubri Tibetan), at 8,500 feet elevation. The field part of the course, which takes place within the 1,663 sq. km. Manaslu Conservation Area (<http://www.ntnc.org.np/project/manaslu-conservation-area-project>), will begin there, and the team will ascend gradually on foot through subsistence/trans-humanist villages between 8,000 and 12,500 feet. (The team's slow rate of ascent should not present issues with acclimatization.)

The last 5 days of the field part of the course will take the team gradually over a 16,000 foot pass, the Larkya La, then descent to the Marsyangdi River Valley, in the Annapurna Conservation Area, to connect with a roadhead and travel by van back to Kathmandu.

Travel times will average 3-4 hours of actual walking time per day, at a normal pace, although five to seven days will be designated for rest, study, and extended site visits. On travel days, class activities, site visits, lectures, guest lectures, study/research, and rest periods will be spread throughout the days and evenings. (Formal "rest days" are not built into the schedule.)

Students may divide into sub-groups, generally based on topics of interest, for site visits and other activities. A prof or para-prof will accompany each group.

Course Assignments and Expectations

(Note that #1 & #2 need to be completed before departure.)

1 Required reading: in advance of the course, students will read:

- *Tibetan Diary: From Birth to Death and Beyond in the Shadow of Manaslu*, Childs, Geoff, University of California Press, 2004.
- *From a Trickle to a Torrent: Education, Migration, and Social Change in a Himalayan Valley of Nepal*, Geoff Childs and Namgyal Choedup, University of California Press, 2019.
- Selections of text from articles to be posted on the course digital library.

Note that Nepali and Tibetan language materials can be made available to interested students before the course begins, though this is optional.

2 By May 1, students are asked to select an independent study topic or area of study. (A large number of online articles and other materials, from a variety of academic disciplines, will be provided in advance on the CC Canvas site). Students will prepare a short summary of the background and issues relating to that topic, and what they expect to explore and learn about it. (This will generally become the topic of their independent study project during the course.) Students and Instructors will convene before the course to discuss and share information about the proposed topics, and to confirm course logistics, preparation, etc.

3 During the course, students will be provided some time to conduct limited first hand research and interviews keyed to their **independent study topics (ISPs)**, with assistance from the two instructors and three paraprofs, who can act as translators, as needed. A study topic can be changed from what was proposed before the course, but cataloguing the proposed study topics will help the Instructors identify needed resources, stock the mobile library, and plan the itinerary and site visits. At the end of the course, the student must prepare a final presentation on their independent study topic. (Alternatively, this can be submitted in the form of a paper or study/research proposal.) **40% of grade**

- 4** A key responsibility during the course will be to maintain a comprehensive daily journal and notebook, documenting all activities, lectures, interviews, site visits, observations, home stays, etc. (This will be a primary reference for #6, below—the final exam.) Students are encouraged to maintain a personal journal and/or sketchbook, as well.
- 5** Students will read an average of one hour per day from the reading list and/or books in the mobile library or Canvas site.
- 6** **Final exam** (three hours), consisting of essay questions on topics explored over the duration of the course. Students will be allowed access to their journal/notebooks. **40% of grade**
- 7** **Participation** in discussions, interaction at site visits, and involvement in group tasks and dynamics. Level of participation will be assessed. **20% of grade.**
- 8** The field part of the course (outside of Kathmandu) will be smartphone-free. Ample accommodation will be made for contacting family by voice cell phones, whenever desired, and time will be set aside for Internet connection from a lodge/cyber café at one point during the field trip. Students will be encouraged to bring cameras, and CC may be able to provide a limited number of loaner cameras for the duration of the course. Please signify if you would like a loaner camera. (Smartphone use in Kathmandu will also be limited.) Immersion is a critical element of this course, and has been cited by past students as a key source of the richness of their experience.

Itinerary:

We view this course as a rigorous intensive/immersive learning experience that will make use of mornings, afternoons and evenings for lectures, guest presentations, site visits, course meetings and related activities -- in addition to a significant amount of travel on foot, over variable terrain. Note that there is unlikely to be any Internet connection for the duration of the 24-day field part of the course. A group phone will be available for calls to the U.S. or other countries, and phoning family at home will be encouraged.

The itinerary below identifies class topics and activities for two daily “sessions.” When the course is not in session, students are expected to keep up with their reading assignments, as well as work on individual or group projects that involve observation and interaction in the locality.

Day/Date	Location	Session 1	Session 2
Day 1 May 20	Kathmandu	Arrival at Shechen Guest House by 5:00 pm.	Introduction and overview/ orientation, medical, \$, etc.
Day 2 May 21	Kathmandu	Orientation to the history, economy, ethnic groups and cultures of Nepal; guest lectures and discussion	Site visits, and introduction to issues, agencies, projects, and field people and scholars. Overview of earth sciences topics.
Day 3 May 22	Kathmandu	Talk on demographic shifts and intro to natural resource management issues; visit to local cultural sites, and the National Trust for Nature Conservation / ICIMOD	Ecology lecture, including climate systems, plant communities, mountain hazards.
Day 4 May 23	Arughat	Travel to Arughat by van; meet with MCAP staff re conservation and development issues, traditional village management committees, etc.	Guest lecture from a naturalist and an MCAP staff person.

Day 5 May 24	Prok	Buddhist monastery (Pel-ri Gompa) visit; trek to Khal Tso lake pilgrimage site	Discussion of forest above the village and bear predation on crops.
Day 6 May 25	Bihi	Bihi micro-hydro and proposed extension of line to Serang;	Tour the historic Bihi chapel and ancient “library.”
Day 7 May 26	Serang	Sacred <i>Naga</i> shrine visit; micro-hydro-electricity proposal	Energy and firewood; religious wildlife sanctuary
Day 8 May 27	Serang	Visit with incarnate lama and tour monastic settlement and nunnery; sanitation, firewood and environmental issues.	High altitude ecology study; material culture.
Day 9 May 28	Ghap	Trekking; tourism; natural resource management issues; and school visit	Tree plantation; missionary and other development assistance; education
Day 10 May 29	Namrung	Overview of area history and resource utilization; micro hydro site visit	Patterns and practices of subsistence agriculture; Tourism growth and management.
Day 11 May 30	Lho	Visit to village plantations and afforestation and fencing projects. Demographic and cultural/ethnic issues.	Rural health care delivery and educational challenges (school and health post visits).
Day 12 May 31	Lho	Hike through high temperate forest with local guide. Issues re medicinal plants, timber, and common property	Inquiry re social and environmental impacts and financing; role of Buddhism and priest-patron relationship
Day 13 June 1	Syala	Guest presentation on local cottage industries; school and monastery visits; discussion of religious and economic out-migration; Comparison of the socio-economic and env’l impacts of the forthcoming motor road.	Interview with village and MCAP representatives. Exploration of development initiatives; impacts and hazards of roads
Day 14 June 2	Sama	Discussion of Tibetan refugees, fruit cultivation, indigenous cultures, and local small business and conservation initiatives, etc. Service work.	School and health post visits; Punggyen Lakes side trip. Glacier visit and lecture + discussion
Day 15 June 3	Sama	Visit to 17 th C. monastery, discussion of the Thakali and Gurung ethnic groups in the context of trade, the central government and representation, etc. Cultural change in a changing world: how new economic opportunities shape settlement, livestock husbandry, health, ethnic composition, social hierarchy, religious expression and patronage	Hydrologic hazards, and water as a common property resource; discussion and study re glacial recession and climate change. Discussion with school and village leader Bir Bahadur. Water rights and response to climate change; issues and impact of local trade with China
Day 16 June 4	Samdo	Study of modes of farming and yak/cross-breed husbandry, changing horse culture, etc.; wildlife-human conflict and other conservation and development issues.	Guest lecture by Nyima Dorje; Tibetan refugees; possible side trip to Manaslu Base Camp; treeline study.

Day 17 June 5	Dharamsala	High mountain ecology (13,500 feet)	Earth sciences discussion, TBD; ad hoc tourism development issues
Day 18 June 6	Bhimtang	Examine adaptation of small community to trek-tourism; issues relating to ownership and access	UNFCCC, REDD+ and related programs for Nepal and developing countries
Day 19 June 7	Dharapani	Long transit day. Forest composition; infrastructure development; foreign aid	motor road development
Day 20 June 8	Chumjet	More earth and environmental science presentations and discussion	Travel / TBD
Day 21 June 9	Pokhara	Discussion; ISP presentations; Debriefing at regional ACAP office.	Comparison of NGO and development agency models; Early ISP presentations
Day 22 June 10	Kathmandu	Presentations by guest speakers; migration, politics	Presentations by guest speakers; Studies and issues in wildlife and human conflict
Day 23 June 11	Kathmandu	Choice of cultural site visits; discussion; ISP presentations	Free afternoon
Day 24 June 12	Kathmandu	Final Exam	Banquet

Notes to the Itinerary:

- a) A large quantity and variety of reading (and other) materials, an extensive digital library, will be made available on e-readers before the course begins.
- b) An expanded, updated, and annotated itinerary will be provided in the spring of 2020.

Partial Extended Reading List

[The reading list below is to be expanded, along with additional articles and titles to be added to the digital library.]

Core/Required Reading

Childs, Geoff, Tibetan Diary, From Birth to Death and Beyond in the Shadow of Manaslu, Childs, Geoff, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2004.

Geoff Childs and Namgyal Choedup, From a Trickle to a Torrent: Education, Migration, and Social Change in a Himalayan Valley of Nepal, University of California Press, 2019.

Anthropology

Rogers, Clint, Where Rivers Meet: A Tibetan Refugee Community's Struggle to Survive in the High Mountains of Nepal

Lehrer, Warren and Sloan, Judith, Crossing the Blvd: Strangers, Neighbors, Aliens in a New America, Norton, New York, 2003

Ramble, Charles, Braunen, Martin, Anthropology of Tibet and the Himalaya, Ethnological Museum of the University of Zurich, Zurich, 1993

Atlas, James, How They See Us, Atlas & Co., New York, 2010

Coburn, Broughton, Nepali Aama: Life Lessons of a Himalayan Woman, Anchor/Doubleday, 1995

Appadurai, Arjun (1996) Modernity at large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Environment

Schaller, George B., Wildlife of the Tibetan Steppe, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1998.

Schaller, George B., Stones of Silence: Journeys in the Himalaya, Viking Press, New York, 1980

Mishra, Hemanta, The Soul of the Rhino, Lyons Press, Guilford, 2008

Cultural Studies and Ethnographies

Von Furer-Haimendorf, Christoph, Himalayan Traders: Life in Highland Nepal, John Murray Ltd., London, 1975

Dharma - Religion

Dalai Lama, H. H., Ethics for a New Millennium, Riverhead Books, New York, 1999

Lama Thubten Yeshe, Introduction to Tantra: The Transformation of Desire, Wisdom Publications.

Development

Bista, Dor Bahadur, Fatalism and Development: Nepal's Struggle for Modernization, Orient Longman, Bombay, 1991.

Bornstein, David, How to Change the World: Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New Ideas, Oxford University Press.

Banerjee, Abhijit and Duflo, Esther. Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty

Sachs, Jeffrey. The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time.

Environmental Economics

Hyde, William F. and Amacher, Gregory Scott. Economics of Forestry and Rural Development: An Empirical Introduction from Asia

Honey, Mary. Ecotourism and Sustainable Development, Second Edition: Who Owns Paradise?

Ostrom, Elinor. Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action (Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Tibet

David-Neel, Alexandra, Magic and Mystery in Tibet.

Snellgrove, David and Richardson, Hugh, A Cultural History of Tibet, Prajna Press, New Delhi

Smith, Warren W. Jr., China's Tibet?: Autonomy or Assimilation, Rowman and Littleton, 2008

Fiction

Upadhyay, Samrat, Arresting God in Kathmandu, Houghton Mifflin Company, New Delhi, 2001

Upadhyay, Samrat, The Guru of Love, Houghton Mifflin Company, New Delhi, 2003

Miscellaneous

Mishra, Pankaj, Temptations of the West, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2006

Films [It will be possible to view DVDs during the field part of the course]

Who Will Be A Gurkha?

The Cup

Dreaming Lhasa

Travelers and Magicians

Windhorse

Kundun

Seven Years in Tibet

In Search of the Rival

The Desert Eats Us

Several other documentary offerings, TBA

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