

Forgotten Sherpas of Nepal





Forgotten Sherpas of Nepal Trust

Who we are and what we are doing in Nepal

After the first ascent of Mt. Everest with Tenzing Norkay, Sir Edmund Hillary and the teams he formed did a vast amount of work in Solu Khumbu, the main Sherpa district in Nepal, building schools, hospitals and bridges. In a very small way we are following in the giant footsteps of Sir Ed. Ngima Sherpa, from the village of Damar, one of the villages in the area we work has also inspired us with his vision “ to make a future for his people in their own land.”

We are a group of trampers from the Geraldine Tramping Club in South Canterbury, New Zealand. Initially, from 2010 we worked in Damar and some other villages each year, both physically and with funding, helping to improve living conditions. In early 2013 we set up a Charitable Trust (Reg No. CC 50948) to help ensure that the improvements in living conditions and the mobile healthcare service we had just set up would be sustainable.

The villages are just outside the south-western border of Solu Khumbu District, the Sherpa homeland, and in the most northern part of Okhaldhunga District. No trekkers visit them who could perhaps bring new ideas and some income. The altitude of the villages varies in the range 2,200m to 3,500m and they are in the ‘ middle hills ’ of the Nepal Himalaya. The ‘ middle hills ’ are a range running parallel to the main divide, rising to over 4,000m and well to the north of the lowlands bordering India.

The ‘ middle hills ’ are generally regarded as Nepal’s poorest and most deprived areas. Infrastructure is almost non-existent, there are no roads and access is by steep and rough walking tracks across the hills.

The villager’s lifestyle is simply subsistence farming on the steep hillsides. But they are cheerful and resilient people.



Living Conditions, Healthcare and Education 2010—2011 —2012

After the fighting in the civil war ended the Sherpas asked us, in 2009 if we would provide solar lighting in one of the villages. Their houses inside were black with soot and tar residue from the cooking fire with no chimney and kerosene lamps for lighting. In 2010 we installed the solar panels, charge controllers, batteries and 3 or 4 lights in each house. Almost 7 years later these systems, well cared for by the Sherpas, are working well. It looked as if the indoor airpollution and lack of clean, safe water had a serious effect on the health of the young children and also affected others in the family.



In 2011 one of our nurses and a teacher were in the villages. In our visits in 2010, 2011 and 2012 it became very clear that the poor living conditions, lack of hygiene and sanitation, no healthcare education and no access to community healthcare had a serious effect on families, particularly on young children but on the whole family also.

The death rate of children under five in Nepal at that time was 7 times the rate in New Zealand.

School Education in the Middle Hills

School education in remote areas of the Himalayas began to be available in the mid 1980-s so most people living there over the age of about 30 have had no opportunity for any school education. Primary school education is now available to all children from age 6 to 12 and they may have the opportunity to go on to one of the few Secondary schools. We first gave building materials to the school at Nalidanda in 2003 but this was taken by one of the sides in the civil war as the fighting became more intense. After the fighting abated in 2007 the villagers at Damar asked us for solar lighting and that became the first priority.



The school we have helping since 2010 is at the village of Dhikure, a walk of about 1 1/2 hours each way, for the children from our base at Damar and they are tremendously keen to learn all they can. We have, each year since 2010, provided equipment to this school, pens, pads, whiteboards, the “Room to Read “ books in Nepali and English, sports equipment, lots of clothing and small Day Packs as schoolbags and also electricity from a mini-hydro scheme for lighting in schoolrooms and materials to complete two new classrooms. As with other schools this school was seriously damaged in the earthquakes and has since been rebuilt. We have been able to assist in this process by channelling funds from a large European Charitable Trust to the very reliable school committee whom we know well.



In 2012 ,a spring fed, reticulated, water system was installed, in a village, with the marvellous skilled work and supervision of a New Zealand skifield operator and a back country farmer. It was complete with a water storage tank and tap– stands, with a base for washing and with drainage, outside each house and, of course, km’s of MDPA pipe. This meant that the Sherpa women, as had always been their responsibility, did not now need to spend about an hour each day (two hours in the dry season) collecting water at a spring and then carrying a heavy container back home. With the rapid development , in the last 3 years, of .02 micron water filters these will be the cost effective way to provide more safe water.

The Sherpas have a long tradition of an open cooking fire, without any chimney, in the living area of their house. The indoor smoke pollution is a serious health problem, particularly for young children. Stoves with chimneys have been trialled previously and in 2017 we will be providing improved stoves and helping the Sherpas install them safely and effectively.



Indoor smoke pollution in the Sherpa villages v Stoves and chimneys

As mentioned on the previous page, in 2017 our group from New Zealand will be visiting the villages to help the Sherpas with the installation of stoves and chimneys and, as well, to provide help to the schools and Dali Sherpa Memorial Health Service.

It is pointless and heart-breaking, to treat young children with eye and lung infections in the clinics we have, and then send them home to the appalling indoor smoke pollution. The death rate for children under five years old was seven times more than in New Zealand when we began work in 2010 but we hope and believe that it is beginning to improve.

The stoves we had previously trialled were very efficient for cooking but, at the altitude of the villages we help, the Sherpas felt they did not provide enough heat to keep their families warm in the winter. In 2017 the stoves and chimneys to be installed are being made in a factory in Kathmandu and have been proven to be adequate for both cooking and heating at a similar altitude in the middle hills further west. They will be taken by truck to the road end and then by porters across the hills to the villages at an altitude of about 3,000 metres. All families in each or 7 villages are being offered a stove and chimney.

A detailed survey and assessment of all houses in each village about 1 days walk from the road end has been completed by the guides we have worked with for many years. These guides are highly respected in the villages and have enough information for each house to ensure that the stoves will be correctly positioned so that the chimneys can go vertically through the wooden roofs without causing a fire hazard. Education sessions will be held to make sure that families understand the need, where there are toddlers, to insulate the sides of the stoves with a strong clay mixture and to provide other screens around the stoves also. In April 2017 four teams of two New Zealanders and two Sherpas will install a little over 100 stoves and chimneys in the village houses.



Safe steady light, smoke free houses and clean safe water are important improvements for healthy living, but local community healthcare is clearly essential to make improved individual health sustainable, especially for the young children.

After the water supply system had been set up, in late 2012, we talked with Dr. Mingmar Gyelzen Sherpa about setting up a Health Post in the area . He was a senior official in the Nepal Ministry of Health and was previously in charge, for many years, of the nearest hospital, at Phaplu, 3 days walk away across the hills. That hospital was built by Sir Edmund Hillary and his team. Dr. Mingmar suggested that a mobile health service would be more effective than a health post. We agreed as we had seen various health posts on our travels mostly without any evidence of regular staff. In early 2013 we set up four clinics, in houses around the area, for nurses to work at on a regular and predictable program. Dr. Mingmar selected 2 nurses to begin work but we and the nurses soon realised that, never having had any healthcare previously, the Sherpas' expectations were quite unrealistic.

When the first nurses left for a less primitive working environment further south we talked with the Sherpas about how, with their help, we could set up a better health service. We set the priorities as ante-natal and post-natal care and women and children's health and also education in hygiene and sanitation. The Sherpas responded very well and for a new healthcare team the men made furniture for the clinics, including secure storage for medicine. With helpful advice from the NZ Himalayan Trust we asked the local Sherpas to help us find an Auxillary Nurse Midwife (ANM) and a Certified Medical Assistant (CMA)with family near the work area. In NZ terms they are both nurses having each had between 1 and 2 years training. By late 2014 the team, including two Sherpa assistants was settled in and working well. They have formed, in the following two years, an excellent relationship with the approximately 3,000 villagers for whom they care.



Clinic support committees, Earthquakes in the mountains and the idea of a local NGO in the village area



In 2014 prior to the earthquakes in April/May 2015 the two nurses Thirman Tamang (CMA) and Parwati Katwal (ANM), as they moved around the clinics, with the help of the two Sherpa assistants, established excellent relationships with the villagers. Led by Thirman and Parwati the villagers had begun to form local committees to support the clinics.

The Sherpas usually build their homes with a timber frame, dry stone walls and for a roof, timber slats or sometimes metal roofing. There had been about 450 homes in the villages we help. Over 100 were totally destroyed and the rest, with very few exceptions, badly damaged in the April/ May quakes. The second one (7.3) was centered less than 50km away. From Kathmandu we, and others, sent large truckloads to the 2 road ends, containing basic foodstuffs and large tarpaulins to waterproof the bamboo shelters the Sherpas make so well, (and also goodies for the young children).

We asked the two nurses to supervise the fair and even distribution of the earthquake relief supplies and they did a really excellent job in difficult circumstances. The involvement of the healthcare team in bringing together the Sherpas in the areas of each of the 4 clinics was important as the Okhaldhunga District Council, with its headquarters situated well to the south, has very little infrastructure in the area.

A natural progression from the informal committees around the clinics was the local initiative of forming a NGO (non government organisation) for the support and wellbeing of the villagers.



The Okhaldhunga Nine Hills Association

As a result of the local initiative, led by Ngima Sherpa, who has, from the beginning, been the inspiration for the help for the villages, a Constitution was drafted for formal registration as an NGO with the Okhaldhunga District Headquarters and the Social Welfare Council (SWC) under the name of the Okhaldhunga Nine Hills Association.

We have previously seen how resilient the Sherpas in the villages are and were really thrilled to see this new initiative.

The draft Constitution was submitted for approval and registration to the District Headquarters and approval was granted in February 2016. The registration number is 570/072/73 and the rules in the Constitution follow the same pattern as those we have in similar organisations in New Zealand. The establishment committee has now become the first work committee (Board) with the task of establishing the new NGO on a sound basis.

The Social Welfare Council is a Nepal Government Department which controls, under the Social Welfare Act, the activities of all NGOs, both Nepali and International, in Nepal. Approval by the SWC of the projects to be undertaken by Nine Hills in conjunction with our Trust is now complete and that project agreement with SWC is supported by a written Memorandum of Understanding between the parties. The project and the MOU are officially registered with the Nepal Central Government, with the Okhaldhunga District Council and the District Health Office.

Judging by their minutes of meetings and the forms they are using the Nine Hills Work Committee have an understanding of the procedures required in an NGO.

Regd. No.: 570/072/73

 **Okhaldhunga Nine Hill Association**

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Sex: _____

Designation: _____

Permanant Address~
_____ District, _____ VDC,
Ward No. _____, _____ Zone.

Temporary Address~
_____ District, _____ VDC,
Ward No. _____, _____ Zone.

Identification Certificate~
Citizenship Card Passport Student Driving Licence

Contact Detail~
Mobile No: _____ House/Office _____
Email: _____

Member Signature

G.P.O. Box: 12130, Kathmandu, Nepal, Tel: +977-1-4499276, 9808552807 (Nepal)
Tel: +393294439236 (Mob), +390332200184 (Tel) (Italy), Email: info@ninehills.org.np

Regd. No.: 570/072/73

 **Okhaldhunga Nine Hill Association**

Identity Card

ID No.: _____

Name: _____

Designation: _____

Address: _____

Valid Upto: _____ Auth. Sign. _____

G.P.O. Box: 12130, Kathmandu, Nepal, Tel: +977-1-4499276, 9808552807 (Nepal)
Tel: +393294439236 (Mob), +390332200184 (Tel) (Italy), Email: info@ninehills.org.np

The South Canterbury Community and Donors from further afield.

None of what we have done to help the Sherpas would have been possible without the marvellous support of the New Zealand South Canterbury community and other donors. We do remind the villagers, that we are just bringing them some help, and that the help is really coming from the “villages” back in New Zealand. All our administration work is done by volunteers and other costs are minimal so that about 96% of funds raised go to work in the Himalayas.

The Global Family in the Nepal Himalaya

There are many groups and individuals helping in Nepal, particularly since the earthquakes. We have had help and sound advice over the years from the Hillary Himalayan Trust (NZ), Himalayan Health & Environmental Services SoluKhumbu and there are also groups providing teaching help in the village area and funding to schools for rebuilding. These are Eco-Himal UK, Eco-Himal Italy, Vogliam la Luna Italy, Mt. Everest Foundation UK and USA. Many others have sent earthquake help and all who have sent help are sometimes referred to as part of “The Global Family”



Our vision is to help the people in the Sherpa villages to build the better lives they seek and need, with our support and encouragement and with the caring support of donors to the Forgotten Sherpas of Nepal Trust.

We are all volunteers, either when we are in Nepal, or in New Zealand. We make certain that donors funds go directly into helping the Sherpa villages.

We are in touch with the Healthcare team often and also with the other Sherpas. We work on the ground and on the Internet.

Our website is -

www.forgottensherpas.org