

## SOUVENIRS FROM THE FIELD

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I had just made my first trip into the deep stacks of the University of Wisconsin Memorial Library. I had just begun my research into the Thakalis and had found a copy of *L'Ethnographie* with an article on the Thakalis by a certain Corneille Jest.

I had heard about the Thakalis from some friends and they seemed to be just what I was looking for. I was absolutely stunned that this Jest had gotten there first (an emotion felt by many working in Nepal, no doubt). I took the journal back to my small office and began to (painfully) translate the French.

I had gotten about halfway through when a shadow passed over the pages. I turned around and there was a smiling face looking down at the pages. "You like that stuff?" he said. I had to confess I had just started, but I told him of my surprise finding someone had already worked with Thakalis (I later found there were others as well). He asked me if I knew where to find John Hitchcock.

As I was Hitchcock's teaching assistant at the time, I offered to take this still unidentified stranger there. I knocked on Hitchcock's office door and Hitchcock opened it and shouted, "Corneille! Corneille!" I asked, "Are you that Corneille?" For Jest it was all a good joke; for me it was the beginning of a long and happy relationship.

In those days, Americans were not very well trained in field methods. Anthropology was the stuff of books. You read about fieldwork, looked at pictures of fieldworkers, but seldom if ever had any real training in it. It was like learning to swim by being tossed in the pool. Corneille became my swimming instructor from that day. If I now can "swim laps" in the field (metaphorically), it is because of this teacher; a practical fieldworker tacked neatly on to the end of a bookish graduate career.

Jest and I share a love for the anthropology of the film and the film of anthropology and it was he who taught me how important photography can be to the field record. I have submitted two photographs that represent key points in my own first field experience, to show how important that record can be. Corneille later often called on me to translate the works of his students for English journals; that improved my ability to translate French, at least from the earlier days of trying to read *L'Ethnographie*. Salut, Corneille!

During the summer of 1974, the Nepalese government grew impatient with the activities of the so-called Kampa guerillas inhabiting Mustang District north of Jomosom. The Americans, always accused of having supported this group of anti-Chinese warriors, were now in the process of seeking detente with Mao's government of the People's Republic of China. It is

assumed that as part of President Nixon's initiative, one quid pro quo, was for the American intelligence groups to end their material support of the Kampas.

The Kampas were left without means to continue their activities, even to survive, as a result of the withdrawal of this outside support, and they were accused by some of having to prey on some local Nepalese villages, as well as on Chinese targets in Tibet, to enable them to continue to survive in the region.

While it is not yet possible to firmly state what caused the Nepalese to act at this particular moment, one can surmise that there was strong Chinese pressure on the Nepalese government, as well as pressure from the Thakalis and other wealthy inhabitants of the region, to act to bring this group under control.

I encountered the group of soldiers in this photograph in Birethanti, on the Modi Khola, in those days one full day's walk north of Pokhara. I was walking to Marpha in Mustang at that time, to begin fieldwork among the Thakali and related groups in the Thak Khola region of Nepal's southern Mustang District. When the photo was taken, I assumed that this group of soldiers was part of a contingent meant to relieve the normal garrison living in that area over the monsoon period: a normal rotation. As I continued to walk, however, I began encountering heavier weapons, broken down for transport on the narrow mountain trails and larger and larger numbers of troops.

By the time I reached Gorepani, it was evident to even one as innocent as I, that this was no ordinary troop movement. Officers on the way led me to believe that if I stayed ahead of the soldiers, I would be allowed passage to Jomosom and would be allowed to remain there. As it was monsoon, there seemed to be no other Westerners on what is now a very well used trekking trail.

An injury in Tatopani however, slowed me down and the army passed me and I was effectively shut out of the area.

Afterwards, the Kampas were forced out of Mustang. One group surrendered, while the other began a long trek toward Darchula, in the far west of Nepal. Elements of the Nepalese army reached the area by helicopter ahead of the Kampa army, and through a fortuitous set of events were able to kill the group's leader. The rest of the group entered India, where they were allowed to remain across the Sarda River from Nepal.

The photograph turned out to be the record of a most significant moment for me as a researcher. The immediate closure of Thak Khola by the military forces remained in force more than two years, until October 1976, when the area was once again opened to tourism. Repeated efforts to gain entrance were refused by the government. For that reason, the bulk of my research had to be shifted from work in the traditional homeland of the Thakalis, to research on Thakalis living in newer settlement areas in Kaski, Myagdi, Baglung, Parbat and other Nepalese districts and a shift to a focus on network development and impression management. I also

aimed to remain in Nepal as long as I could in the hopes of being able to return to Thak Khola once it reopened. To support myself, I began to work in international development programs, where my career has remained ever since.

The picture is a record of how researchers, even with the best of plans, often are sometimes moved by larger forces into unanticipated new directions.

The road between Kathmandu and Pokhara was opened around 1973. This photo catches a moment where Pokhara seems to be drawing a last quiet breath before metamorphosing itself into the noisy transportation and government hub it is today.

Pokhara started as a quiet, largely Newar market

Indian border at Sonauli. This was followed by the completion of the Mahendra Rajmarg in 1973, which signalled the beginning of the major commercial growth of Pokhara.

This accelerating growth attracted other significant groups to the town. These were :

- the Gurungs, a hill tribe group attracted to Pokhara through the economic activities of ex-Gurkha soldiers of which the Gurungs were a significant part in this area, centered around the British Pension Paying Post in Dip and training and educational facilities in the area such as Lumlei Farm and the Pokhara campus of Tribhuvan University;

- the Thakalis, a group once centered in the Kali Gandaki Valley and now making significant inroads



Nepalese Soldiers in Birethanti, July 1974

town. The Newars, traditional merchants from Patan, remained a significant part of the central portion of the town. The Newars traded with other local hill groups and depended on foot traffic on a major trail from Kathmandu. Traffic to the Terai was handled by air, using old Dakotas between Pokhara and Bhairawa. Later, a motor road was built connecting Pokhara with the

into the economies of the western Middle Hills of Nepal and now getting ready to use the new road to link itself up with activities in Kathmandu and the western Terai;

- the Marwaris, a group of traditional merchants and money lenders (Nep. *baniya*, lit. storekeeper) or *sahu* (lit. money lender) who came up from India and are

generally found in the cloth trade, but are also involved in other forms of investment.

This picture was taken soon after the dam at Pardi, the drainage point of Phewa Lake, broke and the town was left without electricity. Pokhara appears to get a reprieve from its growth in this picture and seems to have returned to the sleepy little hamlet it once was before its true growth began. The forces of change are apparent within the picture, as vehicles first shown as becoming part of Pokhara's normal life.

Shown is a Russian automobile used as a taxi cab broken down half a block from Mahendra Pool, now one of Pokhara's major crossroads. Russian cars at that time were sold to help pay for Russian aid to Nepal and were a real automotive bargain at the time. The license plate shows that the car comes from Lumbini Anchal,

in the western Terai, and is probably from Bhairawa which means it arrived in Pokhara via the older Sonauli road. Simple repairs were often taken care of by quite young boys.

Once this particular monsoon season was finished, the major growth of Pokhara really began. Bamboo walled stores were replaced with cement buildings and buses and trucks began to arrive. Pokhara also became a major tourist town catering to Westerners and to Indian pilgrims and honeymooners. What is striking about this picture is the total absence of any other traffic on the street, a day of quiet which was soon to end this far more innocent time.



Pokhara monsoon scene, 1974.