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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
Mandalay’s Maha Muni temple with seated Buddha statue covered in an estimated ton of gold, Street scene of Ladakh, Przhevalsky in military uniform, Costumed ladies in Sikkim.
President's Message

Being a devoted Christian, Galileo had to perform some of his scientific research, or projection of his theories, secretly to avoid a run-in with the Church. Xuan Zhuang, the famous Tang Dynasty pilgrim monk who went to India to obtain a rare Buddhist sutra, had to hide during the day and sneak out of the city gates at night to circumvent the emperor’s edict prohibiting travel on the Silk Road to exit China. The Wright brothers defied skeptics and the law of gravity to bring about the first successful flight of an airplane. Later, scientists made it possible for man to go into space and even land on the Moon.

All of these pioneers were vindicated in their defiance of established law or beliefs based on the ultimate successes of their pursuit. That same spirit has guided explorers and knowledge seekers throughout man’s history. These are the people who always put themselves at the frontline, or “precipice”, of man’s knowledge. I call it a precipice because of the danger of demise if the effort should fail. Many more people failed than succeeded. That, unfortunately, is part of another law, that of natural selection, and survival of the fittest.

CERS, likewise, has been operating on the margins, whether on far-reaching expeditions or undertaking almost impossible tasks in conservation and preservation in remote places. Sometimes I was told the bureaucratic hurdles were too daunting, or the physical difficulties too challenging. My conviction and ultimate results often proved such well-intended advice too pessimistic. Often times, my motto, “It is easier to ask for forgiveness than permission”, prevailed over situations. I found my heart is the best guidance in each unique situation. Prudence in assessing whether one can afford the consequences provides another measure of caution. With those two checkpoints, my heart and caution, I stubbornly moved on and rarely looked back.

That persistence and defiance of the norm has won us both accolades and criticism. Neither is a driving force nor deterrent to our efforts. I do it because of my belief in the spirit of our work and entertain challenges as an impetus to success. At times, the gratification of a project well done may not be as great as the quiet satisfaction I derive from proving others “wrong” in their predictions. Ultimately, it is best to let our exploration and project results speak for themselves.

This issue brings our readers some of those diverging views, be it our interest and involvement south of the Himalayas to a private meeting with the Dalai Lama. In proverbial Chinese, it is a precarious position to be walking a delicate line between fences, or having one foot on each boat. But for an explorer, such a position has always been a most challenging one.

A final piece in this newsletter depicts one of the most accomplished explorers venturing from Czarist Russia into China over a century ago. It is perhaps a timely example of what CERS reflects, reaching out to explore beyond the borders of China.
The Sonam Gyatso Mountaineering Institute is just a short distance from my hotel. Looking up, I can see the large emblem engraved on the wall in front of several buildings, perched on a hillside of the mountain town here in Gangtok, capital of Sikkim. The emblem has two ice axes forming a cross over three snowy mountains, with a tagline, “Sky is our limit”.

The institute is the natural outfit for me to check out. After all, my biggest wish here in Sikkim is to explore the high country to the west of the kingdom where it borders with Nepal. Kangchenjunga, at 8,586 meters, is the third highest peak in the world, behind Everest and K2. I always thought that it should simply be named K3 given how difficult the name is to spell, to pronounce, or to remember. There are at least three different ways to spell it.

K3, as I call it, is a more technical climb than Everest, claiming more casualties and deaths than the number who succeed in reaching the summit. As of 2005, for 2,283 summiteers on Everest there were 185 fatalities. While 174 successfully made it through the west route up to the top of K3, 36 died attempting it. On its eastern approach, a meager 11 climbers succeeded while eight perished. This eastern route, approaching from Sikkim, is...
The icefields and glaciers present the perfect baseline and index for such study. The footprints of the receding snowline and glaciers can tell us much about our macro climate. After all, changes in temperate zones do not demonstrate changes as acute or dramatic as zones on the margin. Explorers are attracted to such a parallel philosophy, to seek new information on the edge or precipice of man’s knowledge.

On the second day of my stay in Gangtok, I asked my taxi driver to take me to the Mountaineering Institute. I hoped to meet some interesting climbers, maybe even Sonam Gyatso, the namesake of the institute. After a few hairpin curves beyond the main gate, I arrived at the parking lot where several young, strong people were standing.

Nearby, along the same border, a meager 101 kilometers between the two countries, K3 alone hosts three 8,000-meter massifs and the range boasts 11 other 7,000-meter giants, let alone all the “dwarfs” slightly below 7,000 meters. I have always thought that such extreme elevation would provide an ideal monitoring opportunity to study global climate change.

The first successful attempt to summit K3 was Briton Charles Evans expedition of 1955, using the western route. It stopped just two meters below the summit as a symbolic deference to the mountain’s sacredness as a deity and protector of the people of Sikkim. The Indian Army expeditions to scale K3 through the eastern route were defeated in their first two attempts, but they arrived at the summit in 1977. They, too, stopped and planted the Indian flag two meters shy of the top.

A tough looking man, who resembled a Gurkha warrior, walked up to my window. I thought, “Wow, what a welcome,” as I tried to get out of the taxi. He leaned against my window and asked sternly, “What are you doing here?” I explained that I was keenly

is 10 times more deadly than Everest and four times more so than the west route.
interested in the mountains of Sikkim and would like to talk to someone from the institute. His stern face grew more stern.

“We don’t receive anyone from outside. If you want to ask anything, go to the tourism office,” he commanded. “But I thought this was the Mountaineering Institute,” I protested. “No, I am sorry, we don’t receive outside people,” came the firm answer. I told my driver to turn around. As we drove down the hill, the driver whispered to me, “I thought you knew someone here. This is really an office for intelligence. They are all intelligence officers here.” Thus ended my attempt to go to the border to view the Himalayan giants.

The Himalayas encompass 11 of the world’s 14 peaks of 8,000 meters. It largely defines the border between two huge countries, China and India. Men since ancient times had forged precarious footpaths through high mountain passes with their trickle of traffic in trade and religious pilgrimages, using draft animals in caravans. Few and far apart are the tiny cracks left on this giant screen carved by the hands of nature.

Sikkim is blessed to have relatively low-lying passage between India and Tibet of China. Historically this tiny kingdom became the most important access into China from south Asia. Even the British expeditionary forces entered Tibet through here over 100 years ago, between 1903 to 1904, to capture Lhasa. I came south from Lhasa to the border at Yatung in 1999, though my tiny expeditionary force then was not able to gain entry into Sikkim nor India.

Being sandwiched between two giant countries to its north and south is both a blessing and a curse. Its 7,000 square kilometers in area is too small to serve as a buffer or to leverage one friend or enemy against another. Even the other two neighbors to its east and west, Bhutan and Nepal, cannot help this small land-locked kingdom of the Himalayas. The Nepali has gradually immigrated into Sikkim from the west and has now replaced the indigenous Bhotia and Lepchas as the majority inhabitants.
For a long time, being a protectorate of India and more or less a client state of the country, Sikkim was later incorporated as a state within India in 1975. Though politically that unity is long a reality, religiously Sikkim still owes much to its neighbor to the north, Tibet. Two Tibetan Buddhism sects flourished here, the Nyingma (Red Sect) and Kagyu (White Sect).

The Nyingma sect’s founder Padma Sambhava or Guru Rinpoche had spent long years in Sikkim. He was known to bring Buddhism into Tibet during the eighth century. The Sixteenth Karmapa, head of the lineage of the Kagyu Sect, lived in Sikkim for a long time after he left Tibet. Even today, Rumtek Monastery where he resided is still considered the most important seat of the Kharmapa outside of Tibet.

I was fortunate to visit a most secret and sacred cave where the Guru Rinpoche was said to conduct his retreat. Accompanied by Lodi Gyari, Special Envoy of the Dalai Lama, we drove through the mountains west of Gangtok before arriving at an obscure site. Several monks were waiting to lead us down a hill to the hidden cave.

Getting in was both difficult and dangerous. At times I had to crawl, face up, to stretch my nimble body across some cracks and crevices. At one point, I found myself alone stuck at two apparent dead ends inside the cave, but soon found my exit. The spiritual experience was most tantalizing. As I emerged from the cave, I felt more connected to this important deity from well over 1,000 years ago.

The return journey took us through some beautiful tea gardens along a long stretch of hillside. Sikkim tea has now become quite famous though its production is far below that of neighboring Darjeeling. We sampled some of the tea at a co-op shop and the aftertaste was superb. I bought several packages to satisfy my daily quest for breakfast tea.

Back in Gangtok at a pass above the city, I could see Kangchenjunga and its neighboring range in the distance. Near the pass is the Sikkim Zoological Park. Passarej Nargyal Bhuhia and Ongdi Bhuhia are both zookeepers who have worked for long years with the few animals on exhibit here. The flagship animal, as far as they are concerned, is the Red Panda or Lesser Panda as it is sometimes called – the state animal of Sikkim. Here they have 11 of them, three of which were born in the zoo last year.

“We have two more pregnancies right now, and if we are lucky we may have another three babies in a couple months,” said Ongdi. “Are you conducting a breeding program here?” I asked.

“Not really, we don’t have the permission. But we pretend it just happens when you put a male and female together,” he said with a twinkle in his eyes.
Probably more valuable than the Red Pandas are two Snow Leopards, Ravi and Malika. “They are siblings so we cannot breed them,” said Passarej who was also an expert on friendly and feeding terms with the single spotted leopard in the zoo. “Can you approach them and feed them?” I asked naively. “No, they are quite wild and we feed them six days a week,” he replied. “Why six days and not seven?” I asked. “Well, we close on Thursday and so they, too, go on fast,” answered Passarej with a smile. “After all, in the wild they sometimes have to go hungry, so this regime is good imitation of how nature is.”

“Later this year, we may get our first Takin as we have asked the locals to try capture one or two,” Ongdi said proudly. At the entrance to the zoo, I saw a poster with multiple animals indigenous to Sikkim, including a picture of a Musk Deer. CERS has been studying the Musk Deer for over a year now and the Himalayan Musk is the least known of the five species. I expressed our huge interest in this particular animal. “The zoo has never kept any. They are too expensive and only hunters have ever seen them,” said Ongdi.

Sikkim is a tiny kingdom where tourism is in its infancy. April is the top month for visitors, yet the tourism office had recorded less than 1,000. In other months, there are usually less than 500 visitors. As my helicopter hovered above Gangtok taking me out of this mountain enclave, I looked towards the snow range of Kangchenjunga and recalled the last thing Ongdi had said to me. “We would love to have a Yeti. Then the whole world would come and see it. Mountaineers have always claimed to have seen the abominable snowman and we are still waiting to get our specimen,” he had said with a laugh.
KANGCHENJUNGA – ON TOP OF THE WORLD’S THIRD HIGHEST PEAK

Wong How Man
Hong Kong – May 8, 2011
MAIN: Camp 1 Kangchenjunga glacier.
RIGHT: Camp 2 under an ice ridge on the mountain.
It helps put things into perspective,” Keith Kerr remarked. “It is not religious, but more accurately a spiritual experience.” He was, in his unassuming way, speaking about scaling mountains. He has summited eight of the world’s 14 8,000-meter-plus peaks and the somewhat iconic seven summits – the highest peak on each of the seven continents. Even when he speaks about something truly exciting, he is unhurried with a calm demeanor.

Keith is more calculating than speculative. He has sat for a couple of decades on the pedestal of Swire Property, managing its huge investment portfolio with proven success. But in the pantheon of nature and in front of a Himalayan massif, that career accomplishment must seem rather humble. Failure in a business venture is not life-threatening. But when climbing a mountain, let alone a giant like Kangchenjunga – the world’s third-highest peak at 8,586 meters – there is no room for the slightest error, and certainly no time for regrets.

I have often said that explorers probe at the precipice of knowledge. But a mountaineer is literally at the forefront of a precipice in our physical world. We were chatting about his latest climb in 2009, during breakfast on his terrace overlooking Deep Water Bay. Keith can recount the world’s climbing history like clockwork. He proudly produced a rare book of the first successful ascent of Kangchenjunga by the Briton Charles Evans’ expedition in 1955. Perhaps the mountains Keith climbed are more intimate to him than the Hong Kong household names that he masterminded, such as Pacific Place, Taikoo Place and Festival Walk.
Kangchenjunga (which I nicknamed K3), as Keith pointed out, is barely 25 meters lower than K2. “K stands for Karakoram, an extension of the Himalayas,” Keith reminded me. But to me, K at this juncture also stands for Keith or Kerr. He climbed Kinabalu in the 1980s, Kilimanjaro in the 1990s, and then Kangchenjunga in 2009. K2 would make a nice finale for this decade, I thought. But soon to enter his sixth decade, Keith noted that we cannot cheat age no matter how great our perseverance.

I feel privileged that Keith shared with me his very private diary and account of this particular climb. True to an English gentleman’s form, everything was orderly, typed and bound. Private and intimate, faults and flaws, doubts and inner thoughts, even occasional humor (or humour in Keith’s case), are all there. It is a record of the turn of events and observations during that six-week ordeal. The accounts were timely, yet timeless, reflections of the endeavor. His 57th birthday en route was treated like a footnote in passing, with little fanfare. Though Keith and I have different pursuits in nature, I discover parallels in the many names and terms he used. Himalayan Hotel, VE25, satphone, Diamox, Blue Sheep, are common to both of us.

The diary’s recount of “summit day” took up as much space as the entire previous week. Leaving Camp 4 or high camp at 9 at night, the last 900 meters in elevation took 10 hours, and they reached the summit at 7:15 the next morning. A night climb allows ample time for the descent, skipping directly to the less exposed and lower Camp 3.

The nine-day hike out, compared to the quick and pricey helicopter (Helo as Keith called it) exit by a much more sophisticated Spanish TV team assault, or the Korean first, or a Dutch failed first attempt, is testimony and salute to a respectable and traditional climb. Now sitting back and sipping an espresso in his home, I cannot help but quote a line from Keith’s diary, “eating becomes an individual religious experience as opposed to a time of social communication”. That solitude is solace to the heart and mind, when one is with nature, and also at the mercy of nature.

Kangchenjunga is awe-inspiring even from a distance, as I saw it from Gangtok in Sikkim. It is much more inspiring up close, as Keith experienced it, climbing from its foothill to the summit. “Five Treasures of the Snow” is the local translation of the name of the sacred mountain. May this deity continue to thrive with its treasures hidden among its five high peaks, coming together like the apex of a natural crown.
Ni hao,” the Dalai Lama greeted me in Chinese, with a charming and disarming smile. For a moment, I stuttered in returning the greeting in English. His handshake was like a hand holding, his firm grip like that of a friend greeting me. It was most reassuring and more than compensated for the cold-handed body search I had just experienced before I was allowed to enter his home. He walked with a slight stoop and had a relaxed composure. As soon as we sat down, he began firing off questions as if we were old acquaintances.

“What do you think of the policy to remove the nomads to new settlements to protect the natural environment?” he asked. “When they kill all their livestock, there will be no more. While we try to modernize, some things from the past are also very important,” he opined before I had a chance to answer.

“Very few people in the world can be considered part of the ecosystem, and the Tibetan nomads are certainly one of them, as they live so close to nature and respect nature,” I said. He nodded approvingly as we expanded on the subject about the need for livestock management and pasture control. I mentioned that resettling the nomads could bring them two advantages, healthcare and education, and added that the infant mortality rate could be reduced. “But then we can use a mobile medical team to serve them, and the nomads are so used to giving birth at home,” he interrupted, as I tried to explain the government’s policy. “You know, my mother gave birth to many children, all at home. When my younger sister gave birth in a hospital, my mother felt it was strange and unnecessary.”

Soon we turned to another subject. “What is the situation with the wildlife? Are they as threatened as before? What with the Wild Yak, Drung?” Obviously his interest is focused on environmental and natural issues. I offered evidence that the government policy is finally producing positive results and that some endangered animals, such as
the Blue Sheep, are coming back in great number. “You mean the Ngur?” he asked, using its Tibetan name.

I also reassured him that the Tibetan Antelope’s situation has improved tremendously, the result of a drop-off in demand for the now illegal shahtoosh goods made from their underfleece, coupled with stepped up law enforcement. I gave him a brief description of our own work at the Tibetan Antelope calving ground on the plateau.

Next we talked about the Black-necked Crane, or “Zong Zong” as he knew it. I described our two decades of studies and conservation of this stately bird of the plateau, and how we use satellite tracking devices to follow their migration. “But I thought they go all the way to Japan and Russia,” he said. I told him those in Japan are the Red-Crowned Crane, and I had been to Hokkaido to see them.

Our meeting was much longer than I had anticipated, and he was extremely warm and engaging. This was his home, and he was quite at home in it. To call his house a palace is an overstatement, as the audience room is a modest and simple place with few decorations.

Before I rose to leave, he signed three books for me, including a rare one printed in the Tibetan language, of Tin Tin in Tibet. As I produced the comic books, he sighed, “Ah, Tin Tin!” “I, too, am an adventurer reporter,” I said. Finally, I signed a copy of my latest book, *Islamic Frontiers of China*, for him. He thumbed through its many pages of photographs while I explained that while he must have received countless books on Tibet or Buddhism, this one promised to be different.

We exchanged other gifts. I gave him a saffron-colored scarf made from lotus stems in Burma, something purportedly the Buddha also used for his robes. He touched it with his forehead before slinging it over his left shoulder and patting it down. In return, he gestured for his attendants to bring a long white scarf, the ceremonial Tibetan khata, and draped it over my neck. He made two circles with it so the ends would not touch the ground.

We held hands for a long time while standing and posing for pictures. As our meeting drew to an end, I asked the Dalai Lama a personal question. My mother had passed away over two years ago, and even though we had been extremely close, I had yet to shed a tear for her, and still feel her presence around me. Was there something wrong? “Passing away is like someone changing clothes, from old ones to new ones. Now she is always looking over you with compassion, not like some others who look over...”
you with suspicion,” he replied, warmly grasping my hand as he walked me to the door.

By coincidence, or karma as Buddhists would have called it, CERS has conducted many projects to restore Tibetan monasteries and a nunnery. CERS had happened to have assisted in restoring a leaking roof at the birthplace of the Dalai Lama’s predecessor, the 7th Dalai (the current one is the 14th). Having worked on the Tibetan plateau for three decades, this encounter with the supreme Buddha of all Living Buddhas was extremely meaningful to me.

The gods are smiling on me today. I also met with the Karmapa, the second most important reincarnated Lama outside of China. I had been a special guest at the Karmapa’s enthronement at Tsurpu Monastery outside of Lhasa in 1992 when he was seven years old. He left China in 2000 and resides in India. Now he is a giant of a man, both physically and spiritually, at the mature age of 26.

At that earlier meeting with the Karmapa at his residence down the hill in Dharamsala, his asking to switch the conversation from English to Chinese was most heart-warming. I showed him some pictures I had taken of his family at his enthronement almost 20 years ago. He carefully stored those images in his own computer. The Karmapa also took a keen interest in the environment and gave me his booklet about the code of conduct for his followers. To help save the environment, he proposes some guidelines for the monasteries to influence their community and neighborhood, as well as practices for lay people to follow.

I spent the evening with my close friend Lodi Gyari, himself a Rinpoche or Living Buddha, and his sister Dolma Gyari who is Deputy Speaker of Parliament here in Dharamsala. We dined at a Korean restaurant in town on top of the hill. The view was spectacular with the snow peak and pine forest in the distance. At our table was Thamtok Rinpoche. He spoke perfect Italian with an Italian friend who joined him. Thamtok had founded and headed a religious center in Milan for 22 years before returning to Dharamsala two years ago to become Abbot of the Dalai Lama’s Namgyal Monastery. Dinner was the the perfect close to a special day of meeting all these significant Buddhas.

As I looked out toward the hills, I recalled my encounter with creatures great and small that morning. Across from the Bhagsu Hotel where I stayed, I saw a few macaque monkeys playing in the pine trees, within 10 meters of me. Later I saw another group of Langurs, long-tailed monkeys with white hair around
their black face, sharing those same pine trees. They perched a couple of meters above the ground while nipping at the new buds on the tree. Spring is just arriving and hundreds of white butterflies were dancing above the trees and fields, sharing the same blue sky with soaring eagles. Closer to the ground of our hotel garden were ladybugs and honey bees, bathing in the same fragrant air. On a stroll to a nearby waterfall, I twice crossed paths with otters.

The animals have it best here in Dharamsala. When they feel like visiting His Holiness the Dalai Lama, they just drop right in, no introduction or appointment needed. Here in the Himalayas, animals share happily their habitat with people. Can we not replicate the same spirit in other, more modern parts of the world? With the right attitude and passion, I believe we can.
The first truck arriving at the end of April would be a most welcome sight after a long winter, announcing spring’s arrival at this isolated mountain town. Leh, at an elevation of 3,600 metres, is an ancient settlement of predominantly Buddhists with Tibetan heritage, some Muslims with Kashmiri ancestry, and a few Hindus with Indian connections. By April, the high mountain passes from Jammu into Leh would have been closed for six months.

Geographically Ladakh is an extension of the Tibetan plateau. Historically for its residents, getting into Tibet or even distant Yarkand in Xinjiang through the caravan route of the Karakoram is easier than getting to the Indian continent. The last ruling king of Ladakh was a Tibetan who lost his kingdom’s independence in 1834. For now it is a district of Jammu State in northwestern India, in a pocket north of the Himalayas and south of the Karakoram. In the past, people eked out a marginal existence in this dry arid terrain, in barley farming, animal husbandry, and trading over the Himalayas with western Tibet.

Sonam Gyatso is a walking encyclopedia on Ladakh, knowing its history, culture, politics, even flora and fauna. He accompanied me during my visit here. His ancestors were caravan traders, carrying tsamba, the parched barley and staple of the Tibetans, over the Himalayas high passes into Tibet. They would bring back salt harvested from the many saline lakes in Tibet. That trade came to an end following closing of the border after the India-China war in 1962. Today Leh also has a refugee population of several thousand Tibetans who fled Tibet into India after the 1959 uprising.

What brought me to this mountain fastness ahead of the coming of spring is a museum project CERS supports. The almost finished four-storey, Tibetan-style museum will become the future home of four integral exhibits, on Tibet, Central Asia, Kashmir and Baltistan (the Karakoram region), an area in which CERS has immense interest. Next to the museum is a small library, and a garden café for visitors to this site.

Dolka, a member of the Tibet Heritage Fund in charge of the project, explained the difference in opinion between the young and the old generation in determining the use of this site. The land belongs to an Islamic association of a nearby mosque. The younger generation wanted to see a shopping mall on it, but the elders insisted on using the land for something related to culture. As in most traditional Islamic communities, the elders had the final say. As the new generation matures, I believe they will come to appreciate the decision.

Sonam is 51 years old and had studied for eight years in Kashmir. He has seen both the good and bad effects of tourism which started in 1974. Judging from the many guesthouses and hotels, it is evident that tourists would overrun the small town during the summer high season. The Ladakhi’s former subsistence lifestyle has evolved. Now, tourist shops with English signs are selling all kinds of trinkets, mostly items from neighboring Kashmir or Tibet. Fewer and fewer parents want their children to be farmers or shepherds, preferring to see them take on jobs in town.

In villages, people grow poplar and willow trees as a new cash crop. Poplars are used to make pillars and beams, and willows are used for house ceilings. Since independence, the government...
has had a policy here, as in Kashmir, prohibiting Indians from buying and owning land, thus driving up prices. Ladakhis own all the properties.

The famous pashmina shawls are found everywhere. The once pricey shahtoosh shawl, hand-woven from the fine fur of the Tibetan Antelope, is now outlawed and cannot be seen. Sonam said there is much wildlife in nearby hills: Wild Ass, Gazelle, Ibex, Blue Sheep, Argali Big Horn Sheep, Snow Leopard, Black-necked Crane and even a few Antelopes that roam across the border from Tibet during the summer. “They come and graze in our pasture, but return to Tibet to give their fleece,” said Sonam with a chuckle. During British colonial rule of India, the abundance of wildlife made the area a stomping ground of big game hunters keen to bag their trophies.

On the second day, we drove west and saw the confluence of the brownish Indus with the emerald-colored Zanskar River. Sonam says upriver of the Zanskar is a nature reserve with high mountains and ice fields. The freezing cold prevented glacial melt at this time and so the water is clearer. Last year, flash flooding inundated some nearby villages along the Indus as unexpected heavy rain brought torrents down the largely sandstone and loess hills. More than 200 villagers died as houses were carried away. Some are still unaccounted for.

At the tiny village of Alchi, we visited a small Buddhist temple where murals from the 9th to 11th century are undergoing restoration. Under management of the Tibet Heritage Fund, German and Swiss experts have been working on the project for four seasons with a number of volunteers from Europe. Each season lasts about seven months before winter sets in, halting their work. It is anticipated that after one more season the murals would be thoroughly cleaned as new.

On the third day, I visited the King of Ladakh’s palace at the village of Stok to the west of Leh. The museum was closed so I asked for an audience with the young king. His attendant returned with the message that the king was busy. Later I also visited his summer residence, the Shey Palace. It had been built upon an earlier fortress from the time the first king came from Tibet in the 11th Century, and was of the same era as the Kingdom of Guge in western Tibet. Thiksey Monastery nearby is known as the little Potala and sat majestically upon a hill. It was founded in 1433 and today around 120 monks still live within its ensemble of buildings.

The natural scenery was breathtaking. The folds and layers of the mountains exposed nature’s sculpting at its best. Scientifically it would
be a geologist’s paradise to study the tectonics and action of the earth. The winter snow helped accentuate the many features of these mountains. No doubt this is an area where the Indian subcontinent plate crashed into the Inner Asia land mass about 30 million years ago. In this process, the Himalayas were formed by the uplift, producing some of the highest peaks in the world.

Back in town, I strolled the streets of Leh and appreciated the integrated mix of people of different backgrounds and origins. Even the little food stands revealed such diversity to the fullest. Though the place is small, there are several Buddhist monasteries, some rising on top of nearby peaks, at least three Mosques, a Hindi Temple, a Sheik Temple and even a Protestant Church of the Morovia Mission which was started in 1885. High in elevation, Ladakh and its capital Leh graciously play host to multiple religions, all of them sitting closer to heaven.
At first glance Leh, the former royal capital of Ladakh, resembles Lhasa. Situated at an altitude above 3,500 meters, a smaller version of the Potala Palace rises above a city of flat mud-roof houses with Tibetan-style window ornaments. Tibetan language prayers sound from the temples and monasteries that pepper the city. Pictures of Tibetan religious leaders dot homes and shops, and visitors get served butter tea and sweet milk tea simultaneously. There are also calls to prayer from a large mosque founded in 1666.

At second glance, one realizes that Leh resembles Lhasa 30 or maybe 60 years ago. With all the rapid changes on the Tibetan plateau, here the pace is decidedly slower, and the local culture is going strong.

The former kingdom of Ladakh was founded by the heirs of the Tibetan Empire from the 7th-9th centuries, who fled here after the empire’s disintegration. Only in 1840 did Ladakh become a part of India.

For centuries, Ladakh’s unique culture was shaped by its location at an important caravan crossroads in Central Asia – a bridge between the Buddhist and the Islamic civilizations (Yarkand in Xinjiang, Baltistan, Afghanistan, Kashmir). All came to an end when India was partitioned upon independence, and immediately was forced to go to war with
Pakistan over the border of the Kashmir region. The Indo-Chinese border war in 1962 sealed the Tibetan border. Ladakh’s Central Asian borders have remained closed since then, and many people have not seen family members stuck on the other side of the border for the past 50 years.

When I first came here for the Tibet Heritage Fund in 2003, I found many remains of the royal capital established by King Senge (the Lion) Namgyal in the early 17th century: remains of the city walls, crumbling residences of his ministers, two palace monasteries to celebrate the official festivals and the nine-storey Lehchen palace.

Alerted by friends that the historic old town below the palace was in acute danger, I stayed for three months, mapped the old town and conducted a survey. There were almost 200 historic buildings left, though some of them in extremely poor condition. In fact, more than half of the historic housing stock was severely dilapidated. Everyone I spoke to, from residents to government officials, said something should be done to preserve ancient Leh.

With seven years experience of urban conservation in Lhasa, it was almost too easy to launch a conservation program. Initial start-up funding from Germany allowed the Tibet Heritage Fund to offer people a 50% subsidy for proper restoration and improvement of their historic homes, plus free architectural advice. Immediately a number of house owners agreed. A dozen homes were restored, alleys were paved with natural stones and fitted with covered drainage, and the work received several awards, including a UNESCO heritage award.

The government of the state of Jammu & Kashmir came in after the restoration of Leh’s oldest mosque in 2007, and suggested that the Tibet Heritage Fund should design and build a museum commemorating the caravan trade. Eventually, a modest budget was provided for the Central Asian Museum Leh.

The design was inspired by the towers that dot the Tibetan Himalayas, such as the Tsemo in Leh or Milarepa’s Sekar Gutok. We set ourselves the challenge to design everything out of the local materials, and wanted everything to be made by hand on site. The walls were solid stone, assembled in the Lhasa-style masonry of alternating courses of small and big stones, held together only by mud mortar. Masons and their helpers quarried granite and slate stone, brought it to the site and then individually cut each stone in the right shape and size. We bought local poplars, cut them down and brought them to the site, where a group of experienced local carpenters carved them into pillars, beams, doorways and furniture. A smith forged metal handles and chains on site.

Attached to the museum is a research library, to which local and international scholars have donated their book collections.

Eventually, the small budget was exhausted. The Tibet Heritage Fund argued the museum should be of high quality, and funds were needed not only for the building, but for proper lighting, for displaying and explaining the artifacts well. Therefore the Tibet Heritage Fund has raised funds on the side, and CERS was early on interested in supporting this cultural project. The preview opening with a temporary exhibition is scheduled for August 23, and a full-fledged opening with a permanent exhibition will take place in July 2012.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
Fortress-like museum under construction,
Interior of museum-to-be, Leh, Ladakh’s capital, Group of restoration workers with author.
Reflecting on Myanmar
by Judith-Ann Corrente

Many reflections and silhouettes of Myanmar.
My impressions of Myanmar are perplexing. If Myanmar were simply the clichéd “land of contrasts” it would be easier to understand. But, as the Talmudic saying goes, we see things as we are, and my experience of Myanmar was quite challenging.

It is the dreamlike images that come to mind first: shimmering gold temples on misty hilltops, guarded on all sides by battalions of white stupas; simple boats gently putting over gleaming lakes at sunset; ghostly white smoke rising from the valley floor as the sun rises over the mountains. Even the jangling vision of Buddhas adorned with jarring, pulsing neon pinwheel halos has its charms.

These are juxtaposed with nightmare flashes of poverty, even squalor, in a rich country: naked babies playing in the dirt alongside goats and chickens; oxen, laundry, and humans all being washed in the same muddy river; dozens of people suffering from dysentery for lack of clean water waiting in long lines to be treated by the single doctor in a private clinic, the only one within miles.

Then there is a third vantage point. I stayed at exquisite resorts, built with an eye to preserving traditional style, decorated in the most sophisticated manner, with service as taught at the best European hotel management schools. The hoteliers’ commitment didn’t waver in the face of regular electricity shortages, lack of heat and frequently of hot water, or minimal internet and phone service. Near the end of my journey, the incongruity inherent in dining in the garden of a French restaurant in Yangon, choosing between Wagyu beef and Berkshire pork didn’t seem as extreme as it should have.

What is most striking is that all of these scenes seem imbued with the same equanimity, even peace. Could this be viewed as resignation in the face of a repressive political regime? Or a Buddhist acceptance of one’s lot in life?

People work hard, whether managing their businesses, trading in the bustling markets, hustling for tourist dollars among the monuments, or working their fields. Their animals work hard, too, and respect for life is evident. Riding along over deeply furrowed dirt roads in a horse-drawn cart, I was relieved to hear our driver murmuring words of encouragement to his “daughter”, the horse. I was deeply impressed when, visiting a relatively primitive region near border with Bangladesh, I was told that the people were largely pescatarian: their abundant oxen worked so hard plowing the fields and giving milk that they couldn’t possibly eat these creatures, too.

Social responsibility in the form of supporting the ubiquitous monks and nuns who, upon entering the monastery, make the decision to rely on begging for their food each day, is deeply woven into the fabric of this culture. Religion is pervasive.

Reading the history of Burma, and subsequently Myanmar, made this country slightly more accessible to me. But in the end, this was not a trip that I could simply state I liked or disliked. It is much more complicated than that. Mysterious. I will have to think about this adventure for a long time before I feel I understand it, and when I do, I know that it will have changed my thinking in a significant way.
I have landed at tiny Heho airport in upper Myanmar’s Shan State many times, the latest being just a month ago. The runway usually is rough and bumpy. But this time, the landing was smooth as silk. Even as the plane taxied to the small terminal, it felt as if it were floating on air. It was akin to how an old jeep with leaf-spring suspension feels when compared to a late model limo cushioned by state-of-the-art shock absorbers.

But then again, I may just be imagining the smoothness. The lofty ride in a private jet, together with fine wine and cheese, not to speak of the aroma of chocolate cookies freshly baked by Sandy the flight attendant can be quite intoxicating.

The Global Express jet landed and taxied toward a spartan looking control tower, built maybe a half-century ago. The door opened and we walked down the stairs, our own stairs. Below was a small crowd of about a dozen or so airport officials and handlers in waiting. Several had cameras or their mobile phones pointing at us and snapping, as if we were celebrities. They were in fact more interested in this jet plane than the passengers it was carrying.

The landing was spectacular, but the view during flight was even more so. Myanmar is known to use some old and almost obsolete airplanes in its fleet. The windows are often scratched up as if permanently fogged up, preventing passengers from having a clear view of the outside. On previous flights, I had looked out the window – or tried to – and lamented how wonderful it would be to have a clear view of the landscape and scenery below. That opportunity finally came.
The field below resembles a patchwork mosaic or an oil painting on canvas with vibrant colors. The distant hills faded gradually into infinity like a Chinese scroll. I was focused on my camera, neglecting the plate of fresh fruits served in the lounge onboard. The jet has two toilets, a large powder room aft and a smaller one forward. Further behind is the luggage hold. Having excess baggage never crossed my mind on this trip. I am the excess baggage, accompanying two good friends Judith and Wim on a visit to our project site.

I noticed the cockpit door remained open during our flight, something commercial flights no longer allow. Sandy gestured for me go inside the cockpit. I poked my head in and sized up the instrumentation panels. Randy the captain turned and gave me a welcoming smile of approval as I raised my camera for a picture. I have flown in private prop planes many times but this was my first time in a private jet. And private jets rarely fly into Myanmar, let alone up-country to a tiny airport. This plane has come all the way from New York. Winning approval from the State Department was just one of many hurdles to flying a private jet into this country.

Randy and co-pilot Tim have never flown into Myanmar. But this aircraft is equipped with the best avionics and equipment for instrument flying. He did a half circle over the tiny airport to check out its surroundings, banked his plane, and eased it in without a hitch. We also eased through immigration and security in no time at all.

My first ride in a car a decade ago from Mandalay to Inle Lake took more than 10 hours. This jet could cover that in just 19 minutes. I cherish both journeys, one affording a close-up look on the ground, the other providing an unmatched birds-eye-view from above, though with not enough time to appreciate the wine at the same time.

Visiting Myanmar is a great way to go back in time, counted in decades, or even centuries. Vintage cars from the ’40s and ’50s still ply the roads, or backroads, of upper Myanmar. Willys Jeeps from the ’40s and Series 1 Land Rovers from the ’50s are frequent sightings. Pre-war Chevrolet buses in Mandalay were packed with seated or standing passengers, many of whom hung precariously on tiny step-rails beside or behind the bus.
On the Irrawaddy River, large riverboats hark back to the British Colonial days of the Flotilla Company, plying the same waterway with large bales of cargo loads. Timber, predominantly teak wood, floated down with a tugboat in the middle. A large barge with cargo flats on each side would be pulled from in front, or pushed from behind, by larger tugs. Smaller row boats dotting the channel complete a picture from over a century ago.

There are other remnants from earlier days. Simply cross the river into the countryside. It is as if pages of the calendar enter a fast rewind mode, 1890s, 1850s, 1790s, and so on. At one place an ancient temple stands tall among the surrounding jungle. We moved on to a wooden carriage drawn by a horse, negotiating a long dirt road. To get to another temple next to the Irrawaddy riverbank, the ancient Ava capital, we rode on a simpler flat-bed carriage, pulled by two bullocks. The horse carriage had leaf-spring suspension, whereas the bullock has its carriage sitting squarely on a wooden frame, so the rider can truly feel all of the bumps on the road. Both carriages had large wooden wheels. The temples may be ancient. The means to get there is both archaic and idyllic, bringing back romance of the past.

On the edge of town in Mandalay is a section filled with marble sculptures. A line of shops and workshops all cater to this occupation, carving marble by hand. Buddha statues, large and small, filled the front and back yards of every shop. Chiseling away with simple hand tools, the work is time-honored as well as tedious.
From a small shop in the heart of Mandalay came the sounds of stone pounding and metallic thuds. Three muscular, bare-chested men were pounding a small square package with a long-arm hammer, causing a melodious rhythm. Inside the package are more than a thousand thin sheets of bamboo paper, thin as ginger skin. In between every two sheets is a tiny plate of gold. Through hours of this pounding, the gold would be flattened to miniscule thickness, resulting in gold leaf. These are used as offerings to temples and generally pasted onto the body of the Buddha statues. Gold-leaf making goes back well over a millennium.

Many such occupations in Myanmar have continuously been practiced for hundreds of years. Though much of the world is marching full speed into the 21st Century, in Myanmar’s more remote locations, people still live as though they are caught in a time capsule. Those with nostalgia for an earlier age can visit Myanmar, where time is slow, life is simple, and people are happy – even with the smallest things in life.
After a long cold winter, the entire forest is coming to life again. Every branch on every tree, from the old walnut tree to a young pine, is budding with new green. Even the Snub-nosed Monkey, commonly known as the Yunnan Golden Monkey, which usually roam higher up the mountain, have descended on the lower valley to feast on these tender shoots.

What looked to be a juvenile monkey sat just 10 meters away. I slowly walked up to a bush across from him and he stayed motionless, looking at me blankly. While for me this close encounter was intense and exciting, he was most blasé about it.

Nonetheless, everyone was excited that I was able to get so close to this rare animal. Of all the world’s primates, this one lives at the highest elevation. We are currently at their lowest range of about 2,400 meters. During summer, they are usually found above 3,000 meters and at times as high as 4,000 meters.
My team has witnessed some more evocative behavior among the monkeys in this group of more than 50 animals. Two pairs of monkeys were seen mating, one pair on a low branch, the other on the ground. CERS Tibetan Director Qiju mimics their action, with the male holding and lifting the female’s tail and setting it to one side, before straddling and mounting her from behind.

Then a large male jumped off a tree onto the ground and strolled down the hill towards me. I was caught by surprise and did not know how to react: Should I back off so as not to scare him off, or continue squatting in my position? Before I could decide, the monkey was right in front of me, literally within arm’s length. He simply ignored my presence, marched right past me and climbed up the hill next to me into a tree filled with tasty young buds. Soon more monkeys followed the same path up the tree. For a moment, there must have been a dozen or more monkeys hanging onto this tree.

This was the first time in over a decade of involvement with the Snub-nosed Monkeys that we had had such easy access to them. From supporting field research to setting up a project site to preserve both the monkeys and the Lisu hill tribe culture in the vicinity, this valley of Xiangguqing has been a regular stop for me and my team since 2003. That was the year we launched our project to preserve traditional architecture and other cultural aspects of the Lisu people.

Many CERS friends and supporters have visited and stayed here. Our trek into the mountain to view the monkeys usually took hours or an entire day. Today’s close encounter is certainly a first of its kind. Zhongtai, the reserve Director and scientist we have supported over the years to study the monkey, told me why their behavior had changed. “When we started studying them in the early 1990s, it was not unusual to hike for days before we got a glimpse of them, and only from far away. They were extremely afraid of people,” he said.

“After setting up the reserve 13 years ago, we decided it may be acceptable to keep one group of monkeys fed so as to be able to approach and study them in close quarters. This practice has produced a lot of controversy, especially among foreign scientists and conservationists who are very critical of our approach. But we always felt that such controlled tempering of their habitat and habit is permissible. It is like a half-way method between the wild and a zoo.”

Of the five known species of Golden or Snub-nosed Monkey, one of them was only discovered last year in the border region of upper Myanmar. As its range is very limited, its number must be few. The Black Snub-nosed Monkey were said to sneeze when it rains since their noses, like the Yunnan species, are up-turned facing the sky. They were reported to cover their head during the rain to protect their nose from the downpour. The Yunnan species that we are working with, however, is not at all golden except for the newborn infants. I prefer calling them Silver Monkeys as that is the coloring of their pelt. Their thick, red lips are their most distinguishing feature.

The other species of Golden Monkeys are the Sichuan species, seriously golden in color, and sharing much of the same habitat and range as the Giant Panda. There are about 20,000 of
this type remaining in the wild. The Guizhou species, smaller in size, live around Fanzenshan in the northeastern part of the province with about 800 animals. Dr William Bleisch, CERS Science Director, studied them over two years. Another species, also diminutive in size, are highly endangered and found only in northwestern Vietnam bordering Yunnan, with about 200 animals surviving.

The Yunnan species has over 2,000 animals, and more than a quarter of them are centered around a few valleys within the vicinity of the CERS site. The species was first discovered by Biet, a French missionary priest, in the village of Fushan (near Zhongtai’s home) in the year 1890. Thus it was given the scientific name *Rhinopithecus bieti*.

Following a visit to our project site at Xiangguqing, we drove 20 kilometers and entered the valley of Gehuaqing, another major site within the range of two other monkey groups. Here is where CERS is supporting a Lisu village which is within the boundaries of the nature reserve. Due to many restrictions following the reserve’s set-up, the villagers have had a lot of difficulty maintaining their livelihood. Hunting, a mainstay of their traditional existence, is of course prohibited. Even farming is to some extent curtailed. So the villagers subsist by collecting herbs and other forest products like mushrooms and honey. Here the monkeys are as wild as ever and roam the mountains freely. The area is also home to many other wildlife, including the Lesser Panda, Blue Sheep, Asiatic Black Bear, Musk Deer and Himalayan Serow. It would be an ideal site for wildlife biologists for the study of such animals in their natural setting.

Back at our Zhongdian Center, I reflected on our long years of support in the study of the Yunnan Snub-nosed Monkey, and our involvement in preserving the traditional culture of the Lisu hill tribe. It seems our efforts have paid off. While the number of monkeys has multiplied, the Lisu’s material culture is fading. With CERS’ intervention, we managed to secure and save more than 20 traditional log houses. Today, Xiao Yu, the Lisu people’s local village chief, manages this ensemble of architecture, together with our exhibit on Lisu culture.

As I write, a Black-necked Crane starts its high-pitched squawking in the sky above me. I looked up to see half a dozen cranes circling high above our center. This calling and circling is an obvious display ahead of their migration. Spring has arrived on the high plateau and they would soon be heading north to their summer nesting and breeding ground. Perhaps one of these birds has one of our satellite devices attached, showing our scientists his route and whereabouts, all the way to yet another Shangri-la far from this one.
I often wonder what drives people to leave the comforts of their home and put their lives at risk on expeditions to remote regions where the road is tiring, the meals are monotonous, and the beds are back-breaking. It is even more mystifying when one thinks back to the conditions faced by the early explorers of China, when expeditions were mounted on horse and camel and foot, and could drag on for years at a time.

The great Russian explorer to China Nikolai Mikhailovitch Przhevalsky was born in 1839 in Smolensk, the son of a Polish nobleman and a woman of Cossack descent. The young Przhevalsky entered the military at the age of 16, and rose to the rank of officer within one year. He was then sent to the general academy for officers in St. Petersburg where he studied geography among other subjects. In 1865, he returned to the family home of Poland to teach geography for two years at the military academy in Warsaw.

It seemed that Przhevalsky was destined to a high rank and a stellar career as part of the Russian military establishment. Then, in 1867, at the age of 27, Przhevalsky petitioned the Russian Geographical Society to be dispatched to Irkutsk near Lake Baikal in distant Siberia. He planned to explore the basin of the Ussuri River, a tributary of the Amur. This two-year exploration was his first major expedition.

Even in those pre-Soviet days, Siberia was already known as a harsh place from which few returned, a place to where exiles and prisoners were sent. What could have made a man of a noble background and promising career request such a harsh and difficult duty? What was the bug that drove him to push himself into some of the most remote, difficult and dangerous places on earth again and again?

Perhaps Przhevalsky was driven by the quest for glory. He was certainly no stranger to fame in his own lifetime. After his first expedition to China, Przhevalsky was awarded the Constantine Medal by the Imperial Geographical Society of Russia, promoted to lieutenant-general, appointed to the Czar’s General Staff, and received the Order of St Vladimir, fourth Class. His lecture to the Imperial Geographical Society was received with “thunderous applause” from an overflow audience. The Russian press called the journey “one of the most daring of our time”. This was partly because of valuable intelligence he brought back about the Muslim rebellion in China’s far west. But it was also because of the tremendous contribution his team made to science. They surveyed more than 18,000 square kilometers, and brought back over 5,000 plant specimens, 1,000 birds, 70 reptiles and 3,000 insects, as well as the skins of 130 different mammals.
After that achievement, Przhevalsky could easily have rested on his laurels. Less than three years later, however, immediately after seeing the account of his central Asian journey to publication, he recruited a team of 10 Cossack soldiers and set off on another major expedition, this time with the goal of reaching Lhasa.

It was equipped with 10 men, 24 camels, four horses, and three tons of supplies, including 72,000 rounds of ammunition, large quantities of brandy and Turkish Delight, and a budget of 25,000 Russian rubles in gold. Beset by hardships, including a siege by Tibetan bandits and the eventual loss of all the horses and camels, the expedition never made it to Lhasa and the men barely returned with their lives. But less than two years later, Przhevalsky would set out again for the same goal by a different route.

What drove him on when other officers in his position were happy to accumulate wealth through marriage and rise to power through the ranks of the military? Was it perhaps that Przhevalsky was frustrated in love and preferred male companionship, as some have suggested? Some clues are provided by the relics of the great explorer that are kept with loving care by descendants of his neighbors in the small town of Slobada in southern Russia.

Przhevalsky was born and raised in the southern Russian province of Smolensk. However, when the Rigaud-Orel railway was constructed, the track was laid right next to his ancestral estate. For many miles around the house, the forest was felled, and the wild animals and birds were hunted out. The region became crowded with people and the bustle of their commerce. To escape, in 1881, Przhevalsky acquired a large house in the village of Sloboda, built by a retired lieutenant in a remote, road-less corner of the province. It was here after each future expedition that Przhevalsky wrote the reports of his most recent explorations and planned his next expedition.

The house, once filled with books and specimens, no longer stands. In August 1941, the Nazis burned the house and garden and cut down the birch grove beside it. But the village of Sloboda, now renamed Przhevalsky, opened a museum on the grounds, which is now filled with the explorer’s books and memorabilia. Among the several hundred books are copies of the “Journey in 1286 through Tatary and other countries of the East Venetian nobleman Marco Polo”, and of a statistical description of the Chinese empire made by the head of the Russian Ecclesiastic Mission to China in 1842.

According to Yevgeny Gavrilenkov, the current head of the museum, there is also an album full of photographs that were kept by Przhevalsky. Among them there is a portrait of a dark-browed, full-figured young woman with thick hair arranged in a classically severe Russian hairstyle. Tasia Nuromskaia attended school in Smolensk, where she met Przhevalsky. He was attracted to the girl and began paying regular visits to her parents’ estate. Although he was older, they became close friends. How close? According to family legend, at her last meeting with Przhevalsky, before his departure for an expedition, Tasia cut off her long braid and gave it to him as a parting gift. She explained to her sisters that her braid would travel with Nikolai Mikhailovich until their wedding day. But the wedding never took place. While Przhevalsky was on expedition, Tasia died unexpectedly from sunstroke.

Was this tragedy a defining moment for Przhevalsky? It was apparently not his last brush with romance with the female sex. Another photograph in the photo album is of a young, well-dressed woman with a luxurious hairstyle and flowers. On the back are lines of poetry:

Do you look at my picture - because you like me?
Oh, do not go to Tibet!
Spend the quiet of your life with a young friend!
Wealth and love
I bring with me!
If this remarkable offer enticed Przhevalsky, it did not keep him from another expedition for long. A sort of reply can be found in Przhevalsky’s own journal: “I will not betray even to my coffin that ideal to which I have dedicated my entire life. Having written what was necessary, once again I am heading off into the wilderness where, in absolute freedom to do only what pleases my soul, naturally I will be a hundred times happier than in the gilded salons marriage might have bought for me.”

Did Przhevalsky then have no regrets over abandoning the prospect of conventional family life? Other private writings by Przhevalsky make it clear that he had little regard for the female sex in his later life. There may have been reasons for this, however, other than a sexual orientation that was apparently not uncommon among the military men of the day. A bit of evidence comes from another remarkable bit of memorabilia preserved in Sloboda.

Just before setting off for his fifth expedition to China and fourth attempt to reach Lhasa, a pensive Przhevalsky went to the terrace of his house and, on one of the columns there, wrote an inscription in red pencil. Although the house was subsequently destroyed, the inscription remarkably was saved: “August 5, 1888. Goodbye, Sloboda! NM Przewalski.” Below this, he listed friends who had gotten married and who would no longer be accompanying him on his expeditions. In order of seniority: “W. Roborovskiy, Kozlov, Teleshov, Nefedov.”

On November 1, 1888, Przhevalsky died of typhus on this last expedition at the age of 49. During his 22-year career as an explorer, he had led four major expeditions into the most remote, unexplored regions of China. The teams he led mapped thousands of square kilometers of Mongolia, Xinjiang, Qinghai and Tibet, including 24,000 kilometers of travel in one three-year expedition alone. They also brought back thousands of specimens of animals and plants, many of them new to science. As a result, more than 80 plant species are named after the explorer, including an entire genus, Przewalskia. He was also credited with the discovery of numerous mammals and birds, including the rare Przhevalsky Gazelle, found only around Qinghai Lake. But by far his best known discovery, and the one he is most remembered for, was the Wild Horse, *Equus przewalskii*, the only living ancestor of all domestic horses.

Whether he was driven by frustration in love or the quest for fame, or by a more fundamental drive to explore, Przhevalsky’s legacy lives on.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
Map showing Przhevalsky’s differing survey results in red against black from older Chinese map of Xinjiang’s Lop Nor and adjacent region, Endangered and rare Przhevalsky Gazelle, Endangered Przhevalsky Wild Horse of Xinjiang, A plant discovered and dedicated to Przhevalsky.
CERS IN THE FIELD

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT:
CERS guests at 4,500-meter mountain pass in Shangri-la, How Man in full gear birding at Mai Po wetlands in Hong Kong, How Man, researcher Zhongtai, Prof Tai Chan and Dr Bleisch in Zhongdian, Party time at Tai Tam Center, Dr Bleisch in music suite in Zhongdian Center, CERS asset Tibetan Mastiff Juo Ge, with CERS guests at Zhongdian Center BBQ, Alan Chow greets a Lisu hunting dog.
CERS IN THE MEDIA

- China’s state television channel CCTV has proposed a series of 12 documentary films based on CERS work, to be broadcast on Channel 9 and 12, English and Chinese, over a three-year period. Filming will commence in June.

- BQ, a leading weekly magazine in China with one of the largest circulations, began a 25-part series of reports about CERS and its many projects.

- Action Asia magazine’s July issue published a feature on CERS and How Man by Editor-in-Chief Steve White.

- Rhythms Magazine published a major feature by editor Wang Chih Hung based on his travels on the lower Mekong River with a CERS team.

While in Europe, How Man visited 92-year-old Father Savioz at the Grand St Bernard Mission in Martigny Switzerland. Fr Savioz was the main character of a CERS produced film on early missionaries to Tibet.

“Birthday Present”, an animation film made for CERS by students of Yung Yau College in Hong Kong, took top prize at the 2nd VAFI International Children & Youth Animation Film Festival in Varaždin, Croatia.

CERS launches its 2011 Expedition to define the source of the Salween River, followed by wildlife research inside the massive Arjin Mountain Nature Reserve. Team members include CERS scientists, three Board Directors, select guests and support staff. Two film crews, including a three-member one from CCTV, joins the team.

Six thatched-roof houses of a traditional Li village in Hainan have been restored as an ensemble of architecture totaling 15 houses. The newly finished houses will be used for exhibits on culture and nature of Hainan island.

Two dormitory rooms were recently refurbished at the CERS Tai Tam Research Center to accommodate scientists and scholars associated with the society.

CERS has appointed two new directors. We welcome Wellington Yee and Christabel Lee to our board. Long-time directors Daniel Ng and Cynthia Brown have retired and will serve in an advisory role.

Alan Chow joins CERS as CEO in charge of future management and functioning of the Society and its many material and property assets.

Sharon Ko joins CERS as staff Exhibit Designer in charge of our exhibits and museums.

Private meetings were held in Dharamsala between His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the Karmapa and How Man, to exchange views about the situation in Tibet.

Royal Geographical Society Hong Kong Chapter presented two lectures by How Man on the topic of Islamic Frontiers of China based on his new book by the same title.

During a visit to Lawrenceville School in New Jersey, How Man met and spoke to student and faculty groups.

Recent visitors to CERS sites include Leonie Ki, Alan Lai, Prof Tai Chan, Alan Chow and Amy Wood.

UPPER LEFT: Father Savioz and How Man at the Grand St Bernard Mission.
UPPER RIGHT: Scene from award-winning animated film “Birthday Present”
Cathay Pacific Airways and Dragonair continue their in-kind support to CERS.

PricewaterhouseCoopers continues its pro-bono service as CERS’ auditors.

CERS welcomes latest and new patrons Francesca von Habsburg, Betty Tsui and Dr Joseph Chan.

The following individuals have renewed their support as CERS patrons for 2011: Gigi Ma Arnoux, Kevin Chau, Ingrid & Joe Chan, James Chen, Hans Michael Jebsen, Anish Lalvani, Christabel Lee, Audrey Lo, Patrick Ma, Arvind Narula, Daniel Ng, Oliver Silsby, Hamilton Tang, Nissim Tse, Marjorie Yang, Sonny Yau, Virginia and Wellington Yee, Billy Yung.

Lady McNeice, a long time CERS supporter, has made another donation.

Antonio Koo made a second-year donation to CERS.

Eu Yan Sang continues its support of CERS as a corporate patron as well as funding a three-year study on the little-known but valuable Musk Deer.

Dora Wu made a major donation towards the CERS project in Hainan in restoring thatch-roofed houses of a traditional Li village.

Coca-Cola pledged another three-year period of support to CERS while providing products to our China centers and offices and on expedition. The company will also organize a program of lectures by CERS scholars to key Chinese universities.

The Shun Hing Education & Charity Fund has made another major donation to CERS for 2011.

Omega continues as a CERS valued corporate patron for 2011.

Sampo Group of Taiwan pledged another major donation to CERS for 2011.

City Developments Limited continues as a corporate patron as well as providing accommodations at its select hotels around the world.

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- Anish Lalvani
- Audrey Lo
- David Mong
- Daniel Ng

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- Patrick Ma
- Stephen Suen
- Hamilton Tang
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- Nissim Tse
- Betty Tsui
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