

Field notes from our youngest team member, Mr. Tenzing N. Dorji: Engaging with nomadic communities in the far eastern part of Bhutan

Surely to be one of the highlights of my year, this May, following the successes of the Nomad Health Camps held in the highland communities in Jomdhari and Bumthang, we were able to take the camps to the far eastern highland communities of Merak (11,500 ft) and Sakteng (8,200 ft).

These communities are vastly untouched by the modernization of the rest of Bhutan, and my colleague, Mr. Kinley Tshering, and I learned about the traditions and culture that have thrived for generations due to the communities' isolation from the rest of the country. The "Brokpas" or "Bjops" of Merak and Sakteng are nomadic people who are known for their distinct clothing (made mainly from yak hair), language, and lifestyle, which make the villages unique and very interesting places to visit.



Isolation from adequate health care--The people of Merak and Sakteng are often restricted to a limited number of health check-ups during the year, as they live far away (an expensive journey) from the nearest district hospital in Trashigang district. The Basic Health Units in the two villages are also limited by a lack of resources and infrastructure, with no qualified physicians and only the most basic of services. This is why the Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary under the [Department of Forests and Park Services](#), the District Hospital in Trashigang, and the Bhutan Foundation worked together to provide the first-ever health camp in the Merak and Sakteng community.

Health camp impact exceeds expectations--We inaugurated the health camp, titled "Unite To Conserve Nature: Healthy Forests, Healthy People," on May 8 in Merak. Initially, we were only expecting 150 people to attend the first day, but we were pleasantly surprised to find more than 300 people in attendance. What was even more exciting was the fact that while the organizers only expected around 300 attendees in total (both Merak and Sakteng), the health team of about 17 professionals was able to examine 794 community members. The health camp provided blood screenings for STDs, Pap smear services, dental services, eye check-ups, general examinations, and a community needs assessment survey that will identify the health issues most commonly faced by the people. In addition, three health assistants from the villages were also trained by a qualified gynecologist and will now be able to provide the Pap smear services to the highland communities year round! Here's a quick look at the results of the camp.



A royal visit to River Guides of Panbang provides more opportunities--On our way back, we also stopped by to visit our friends in Panbang, popularly known as the **River Guides of Panbang**. They were honored by a visit from His Majesty the King, Her Majesty the Gyaltsuen and His Royal Highness the Gyalsey, during their tour of the region and were even granted 10 mountain bikes and a new raft! As a community-based social enterprise, the team is constantly looking to grow, and with the new mountain bikes that are due to arrive later this year, the River Guides of Panbang are excited to expand their business to include more ecotourism opportunities.

New facilities benefit tourists, nomadic families, and conservation efforts-

-While we were on our trip, word came in from the Wangchuck Centennial National Park located in Bumthang (in central Bhutan) that they have successfully completed the construction of a long-awaited campsite along the Dhur hot spring route of the Snowman Trek with support from the Bhutan Foundation. It is the most important site for a night halt during the Snowman Trek, a 25-day trek described as one of the most difficult in the world, at altitudes above 16,000 feet. This campsite will not only benefit the tourists trekking on the route but also greatly benefit about 40 nomadic families on their migratory journey. Such facilities also help strengthen the cooperation between the park officials and the nomadic people in joining their forces to foster responsible waste management and overall conservation efforts in the park.

These are just a few of the important projects we have been working on recently. It has been an exciting year as we move toward assessing the needs of nomadic communities throughout Bhutan and supporting services in areas that are most in need. We look forward to sharing more stories with you in our next e-newsletter as we venture on to make major leaps in emergency medicine and special education services.

Sincerely,

Tenzing N. Dorji
Program Officer

TAKE ACTION, DONATE TODAY!

CONNECT
WITH US:



SEND TO A FRIEND:



Bhutan Foundation (Washington, DC)
3121 South Street, NW
Washington, DC 20007
+1 (202) 609 7363
info@bhutanfound.org

Bhutan Foundation (Thimphu)
Nazhoen Pelri, Post Box 1918
Thimphu, Bhutan
+975 (2) 322751
info@bhutanfound.org