
THE BRITAIN-NEPAL SOCIETY

Patron: His Royal Highness Prince Gyanendra of Nepal

President: His Royal Highness The Duke of Gloucester KG, GCVO

Vice-Presidents

His Excellency the Nepalese Ambassador
Major General J.A.R. Robertson CB, CBE, DSO, DL
Mrs Mayura Brown
Lieutenant Colonel C.G. Wylie OBE
A.R.H. Kellas Esq CMG
Brigadier A.B. Taggart MC
Lieutenant Colonel H.C.S. Gregory OBE, KSG
Mrs Celia Brown
Colonel J.M. Evans MC
Sir Neil Thorne OBE, TD, DL

Committee

Chairman: Peter A. Leggatt Esq MBE
Vice-Chairman: Peter K. Donaldson Esq
Honorary Secretary: Mrs Pat Mellor
Honorary Treasurer: Miss Antonia Derry MBE
Lt. Col. Gerry Birch
John Brown Esq
Lt. Col. W.J. Dawson OBE Brigade of Gurkhas Secretariat (ex officio)
Dr. R.P. Dhital
Timothy George Esq CMG
Miss Maya Gurung
Dr. Andrew R. Hall OBE
Hari Shrestha Esq Minister Counsellor, Royal Nepalese Embassy (ex officio)
Anthony Wieler Esq
Mrs Fiona Williams
James Yeats-Brown Esq

Editor of Journal: Lieutenant Colonel G.D. Birch

THE BRITAIN-NEPAL SOCIETY

Journal

Number 24

2000

CONTENTS

- 3 Editorial
- 5 The Society's News by Pat Mellor
- 9 From Odessa to Kathmandu by Victor Klenov
- 16 A Journey to Remember by Mayura Brown
- 20 Man's First Flight over Everest by James Douglas-Hamilton
- 26 Toni Hagen
- 27 The Fish Tail - The Machapuchare Expedition 1957 by Charles Wylie
- 31 The Yeti Association
- 32 A Note from Darjeeling
- 33 Snippets from the Editor's In-tray
- 35 Review Article
- 40 Book Reviews
- 45 The Association for Outdoor Learning
- 47 Obituaries
- 50 Important Addresses
- 51 Notes on the Britain-Nepal Society
- 52 Patron, President, Vice-Presidents and Committee



Boris Lissanevitch, Father Marshall Moran and Toni Hagen in Kathmandu in the late 1960s (taken by Tony Schilling)

NOTES ON THE BRITAIN-NEPAL SOCIETY

Patron: HRH Prince Gyanendra of Nepal

President: HRH The Duke of Gloucester KG GCVO

The Britain-Nepal Society was founded in 1960 to promote good relations between the peoples of the UK and Nepal. We especially wish to foster friendship between UK citizens with a particular interest in Nepal and Nepalese citizens resident - whether permanently or temporarily - in this country. A much valued feature of the Society is the ease and conviviality with which members of every background and all ages mingle together.

Members are drawn from all walks of life including mountaineers, travellers, teachers, returned volunteers, aid workers, doctors, business people, members of the Diplomatic Service and serving and retired officers of the Brigade of Gurkhas. The bond they all share is an abiding interest in and affection for Nepal and the Nepalese people. Membership is open to those of all ages over 18 and a particular welcome goes to applications from those under 35.

Ordinary members pay a subscription of £15 (husband and wife members £25) per annum. Life members, a single payment of £300, joint life membership a payment of £500 and and corporate business members £50 and charities £25 per annum. Concessionary rates are available at both ends of the age range.

The Annual Journal includes a wide range of articles about Nepal and is sent free to all members.

We keep in close touch with the Nepal-Britain Society in Kathmandu, and their members are welcome to attend all of the Britain-Nepal Society's functions.

However we do not have reciprocal membership.

Members of the YETI Association which provides equally for Nepalese residents or those staying in this country are also welcome to attend the Britain-Nepal Society's functions, and can become full members of the Britain-Nepal Society in the usual way. The YETI is a flourishing organisation and they publish their own attractive journal.

Throughout the year, the Society holds a programme of evening talks, which are currently held at the Society of Antiquaries, in Burlington House, Piccadilly where members are encouraged to meet each other over a drink before lectures.

The Society holds an Annual Nepali Supper, usually in February and a Summer Outing which is often shared with the Yeti Association. In the Autumn we hold our AGM, which is followed by a curry supper normally held at the Nepalese Embassy. The Society also hold receptions and hospitality for visiting senior Nepalese.

Apart from the Summer Outing, events normally take place in London.

The Committee are actively seeking suggestions from members for ways of expanding and developing the programme.

Those interested in joining the Society should write to the Honorary Secretary:-

Mrs Pat Mellor
3(c) Gunnersbury Avenue
Ealing, London W5 3NH
Tel: 020 8992 0173

EDITORIAL

The year 2000 marks the fortieth year of the Society's existence.

The majority of the articles in this millennial edition look back some forty years to the period of the early 1960s and beyond. I am indebted to Tony Schilling for his thoughtfulness in offering to the Society, from his archives, a copy of the photograph used as the frontispiece. This photograph depicts a famous triumvirate of ex-patriots (Boris Lissanevitch, Father Moran and Toni Hagen) who made great contributions, in differing fields, to Nepal in the early days following the opening up of the country to the outside world post 1950. By complete chance last year in Pokhara I met Victor Klenov, a mountaineer from Odessa in the Ukraine. It was Odessa where Boris Lissanevitch was born and this set Klenov on course to research Boris's life and work. Boris became a legend in his own time as the 'father of tourism' in Nepal. Klenov sketches his early life in Russia and the events that led him to Nepal where he eventually died. His wife, Inger, still lives in the Valley.

Some time after returning to England I was made aware that a biography of Father Marshall Moran had been written by Donald Messerschmidt. I was able to secure a copy by the good offices of a Society member who was in Nepal. Later casual conversation with John Brown elicited the fact that in 1960 he had come to know Father Moran quite well after his record-breaking flight from UK to Nepal in a light aircraft. I too knew him in the early 1960s and always found him both dedicated and enthusiastic, enthusiasm which had not been dulled when I met him again thirty-five years later in 1989/90, not long before he died. His funeral was the most amazing mixture of Christian, Hindu and Buddhist ritual, reflecting the beliefs of those he had taught. John Brown has written an appreciation of his life in the accompanying review article.


The third member of the group, Toni Hagen, sadly I have never met. This is not so surprising since he spent so much of his time travelling to the most remote parts of Nepal. I have added some brief notes about him for completeness.

Continuing the theme of flight, Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has provided the text of his lecture about his father's flight over Everest in April 1933, a pioneering achievement of the highest degree. It was in March 1933 that Mayura Brown travelled by train, truck and on foot along the old road to Kathmandu over the Chandraghiri and Chisapanighiri passes. She describes her journey and arrival in Kathmandu, a journey she was not to repeat for almost sixty years, but this time by air.

At the start of the year Charles Wylie and Roger Chorley gave a fascinating presentation on their epic climb on the Machapuchare Expedition which took place in the spring of 1957. This lecture produced one of the highest turnouts for a Society meeting and I am grateful to Charles Wylie for reducing this to an article for publication in the journal for the benefit of members who were unable to attend. The full story of the expedition is described by Wilfred Noyce, one of the expedition members, in his book 'Climbing the Fish's Tail'. The original book is now out of print but a paperback version has been reprinted by Book Faith India and is available from Pilgrims Book House, Thamel, Kathmandu.

A number of interesting books concerning Nepal, the Gurkhas and associated topics have been published in the last few years. I hope readers find the reviews of sufficient interest to stimulate further reading.

Finally my thanks go to all those who have contributed to the journal and, where relevant, to their original editors. The Society is grateful too to those organisations that continue to help sponsor the journal by their advertisements.



Johnnie Gurkha's
NEPALESE CUISINE

*For Exotic Meals in a
Nepalese Atmosphere*

Established 1979

"We are one of the very oldest and Premiere Nepalese Restaurants open in the UK. "**Johnnie Gurkha's**" Nepalese Cuisine is situated in Aldershot, Hampshire. Home of the British Army. Ever since we opened in 1979 we have been at the service of the community and take extreme pride in this role. We offer the finest Nepalese Cuisine at the cheapest prices with an authentic taste.

To celebrate our 21st year in business we will be offering our patrons special offers. So when in Aldershot call in to see me Hari-Bivor Karki or Harish as I'm more commonly called. At Johnnie Gurkha's Nepalese Restaurant we have easy parking facilities and authentic cuisine."

Johnnie Gurkha's
At Down-Town area, Victoria Road, Aldershot, Hampshire Tel: 01252 328773 / 323191

Aldershot is better known as the Hunting Ground for Gourmets at Johnnie Gurkha's
Please visit once – then always!

We open 7 days a week for Luncheons and Dinners We cater for large Parties, Functions and Banqueting
For a truly inimitable Restaurant serving Authentic Nepalese Food come to Johnnie Gurkha's where the friendly owner staff will welcome you, and the Nepalese surroundings will ensure your comfort.



THE GURKHA MUSEUM
PENINSULA BARRACKS
ROMSEY ROAD, WINCHESTER
HAMPSHIRE SO23 8TS
Tel: (01962) 842832 Fax: (01962) 877597

THE UNIQUE AND EXCITING GURKHA STORY

Open: MON-SAT 10am - 4.30pm
SUN 12 - 4pm

Registered Charity No. 272426

THE SOCIETY'S NEWS

by Pat Mellor
Honorary Secretary

Lectures

During 2000, we were only able to book the Society of Antiquaries for four lectures. The Society's lecture theatre is becoming so popular that even booking one year ahead is difficult but in spite of this we have had some very interesting talks, well attended by members.

The first talk of the year, in February, was given jointly by Colonel Charles Wylie and Lord Chorley with the title of 'Climbing the Fish Tail - The Machapuchare Expedition 1957'. As members will imagine, this was a real draw, and we had a full house for a fascinating talk with wonderful slides. The expedition is described elsewhere in the journal.

Our second talk in March was a cameo of four short presentations entitled 'Nepal - Another Dimension'. The first was given by Mr Hari Shresta, First Counsellor at the Royal Nepalese Embassy. The Ambassador, who also spoke to the audience, and HRH Princess Jotshana attended to support their First Counsellor. This was followed by three short talks by young 'GAPers', who are all now at university. The first was by Mr Simon Dodsworth, who spent time in Nepal before taking up his place at Newcastle University. He was followed by Mr Ben Maher and Mr George Blom Cooper who gave us a joint insight into life as a GAP student. It was so interesting to hear from them what it is like to go to Nepal and help in remote schools when they had never been there before, particularly as they spoke no Nepali! It was a steep learning curve, otherwise there was a chance that you would not get any 'dhal bhat'! The excellent slides and the description of their lives there, and the chance to talk to them afterwards made a very enjoyable evening. All three are now completely entranced by Nepal and cannot wait to return. Thank you for a wonderful evening.



Lt Col Charles Wylie and Lord Chorley with members after their lecture on Climbing 'The Fish Tail' - the Machapuchare expedition in 1956

The third talk in July was given by Charles Allen and entitled 'The Hunt for Shangri-La' - the title of his recently published book. This talk concerned his return to Nepal and Tibet to the Mount Kailash area to look again into early Tibetan history with regard to the pre-Buddhist religion of Bon and its connection with Shang-shung and Shangri-La. What a thought provoking talk but also highlighted by amusing stories of his travels and thoughts. The slides were exceptional too.

The event booked in October was postponed as we received an invitation from the Zoological Society to attend a lecture there to be given by Dr Flamand, a veterinary surgeon presently on a three year project at the Royal Chitwan National Park in Nepal. The lecture was entitled 'A Tiger at My Tail?', and was most informative, added to which it was interesting and different to go to the Zoological Society in Regents Park.

Our grateful thanks goes to all these excellent speakers who gave us their time, shared their knowledge and showed us beautiful slides. We look forward to meeting them again and thanking them personally at the Annual Nepali Supper in March 2001.



General Sir Sam Cowan at the Nepali Supper
The Annual Supper

As usual, the supper was held at St Columba's Church Hall in Pont Street in February. About 170 people attended the supper which was prepared by Mr Manandhar of the Natraj Restaurant in Charlotte Street and was enjoyed by all who attended. His excellency The Royal Nepalese Ambassador and HRH Princess Jotshana attended the evening, and our guest of honour was General Sir Sam Cowan, KCB, CBE, who gave an entertaining after dinner speech about the original 'Goorkhas' and their amazing bravery and determination - not absolutely matched by our own soldiers deployed in India at that time! All our members who were present really enjoyed the talk, and I think all felt that General Sir Sam would be most welcome back. This was another successful and happy evening.



The Chairman, the Royal Nepalese Ambassador, Lady Anne Cowan and FM Sir John Chapple at the Nepali Supper



Princess Jotshana presenting champagne to the winner of the Society tour draw, Mrs J Rasmussen

The Summer Outing

I am pleased to be able to report that the 2000 summer outing was a success. We travelled down to Winchester and visited the Gurkha Museum followed by a buffet style lunch at a new Nepalese Restaurant in Winchester, called the Gurkha Chef. Following this tiffin, we made our way to the Hillier Arboretum and Gardens near Romsey, and in particular to visit the Gurkha Memorial Garden which has recently been



The chautara at the Gurkha Memorial Garden

laid out there. Approximately fifty members joined in this outing, and although the weather was not brilliant, it did not rain! We were joined by the Yeti Association who, after we had all spent a fascinating time in the Museum and spent lots of money in the shop, went directly to the Hillier Gardens for a picnic. When our own members arrived at the gardens, we were greeted by the curator,



The Chairman, Maj Tom Spring-Smythe, the Editor and Mr Mike Buffin, Curator of the Hillier Arboretum

Mr Mike Buffin, who spent the rest of the afternoon guiding us around and giving us the history of the gardens and also how the Gurkha Memorial Garden was planned and set out. They had, of course, been greatly helped by Maj Tom Spring-Smythe, a former Gurkha Sapper and expert on horticulture and Himalayan plants, who had the original idea for the garden. We were honoured and so pleased that he was able to join us at the garden and answer questions from interested members. At this point we started to wonder where our Yeti friends were, and found them all having had a splendid afternoon, but leaving us sad that we had not joined them earlier.

The Royal Geographical Society Lecture and Supper

The last event before the AGM was an evening at the Royal Geographical Society. This was a prestigious lecture, given by Mr Barney Smith, lately Ambassador to Nepal and Mr Charles Allen entitled 'Oldfield and Sketches of Nepal'. Mr Charles Allen kindly stepped into the breach at the last minute, as Mr Kanak Dixit who had agreed to give the lecture with Mr Barney Smith, had unfortunately had a mountaineering accident which had kept him in hospital in Nepal. All the members attending wished him well and

a speedy recovery. A candlelit supper followed the lecture. Approximately seventy members attended, and together with RGS members, the RGS hosted about 170 people. His excellency The Royal Nepalese Ambassador and HRH Princess Jotshana attended the lecture and the supper which followed. This was a wonderful evening, and it was agreed that it should be repeated in the future.[†]

General

Members will already have noted that the Committee is planning a Society tour to Nepal in November 2001. Plans will include special visits that can only be arranged through Society contacts. Interested members may wish to contact me, so that I can give them an outline of possible events likely to be included in the proposed itinerary.



Jermyns House at the Hillier Arboretum

Deaths

It is with sadness that I have to report that the following members have died during this last year:

Captain A P Coleman
Mr John R Dunsmore
Mr A L Gillibrand
Mr Roger Harrop
Lieutenant Colonel T M Lowe
Major Ronald John Massey
Mr James M Patrick
Colonel D E Travers

[†] (In 1966 the Society mounted a photographic exhibition with support from the Kodak Company. Initially it was shown at the Quantas gallery in Piccadilly in November. It was subsequently moved to the Royal Geographical Society where it remained from December 1966 to June 1967. A further event was held at the RGS in 1979. Mrs Celia Brown writes: "The first opportunity for the Society to view the Oldfield sketches took place in the autumn of 1979, thanks to Lord Hunt who was then President of the Royal Geographical Society." Ed.)

MOORE STEPHENS

CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS

With best wishes

St. Paul's House, Warwick Lane, London, EC4A 3BN

Tel: 020 7344 9991 Fax: 020 7348 3408

**Registered in England and authorised to carry on investment
business by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales**

FROM ODESSA TO KATHMANDU

by Victor Klenov

A few decades ago when only chosen people could visit secret Himalayan kingdoms, closed for centuries to the outside world, the Himalayas were as remote, spiritually beckoning and as contemplative as any earthly paradise. Roerich and Sidorov, Shangri-La and Everest, Lumbini where Buddha was born, Gurkhas and kukris and yetis. Who didn't know these clichés? When Nepal was opened it attracted romantics in swarms. Nepal rapidly became a Shangri-La for hippies, esoteric societies came to study sex habits of monkeys on Swayambhunath Hill, scholars wrote tomes on the dietary habits of yetis but all this was later.

In the beginning there was the Name, and this name was Boris, with the accent on the first syllable. Under this name he was known throughout the Kathmandu valley. Without exaggeration it is possible to assert that this name has opened up Nepal to many foreigners - a land forbidden for so many centuries. For many years this name has been repeated by thousands of travellers, movie stars, princes and mountaineers. The name was in the subtitle of the book 'Tiger for Breakfast' written in 1966 by the well-known French writer Michel Peissel, who explored Bhutan, Sikkim and Tibet. The hero of this book was not a king, prince or high lama, but the owner of the Royal Hotel in Kathmandu - Boris Lissanevitch - a Russian émigré from Odessa.

After taking part in the Odessa climbing expedition to Dhaulagiri, I wandered into Thamel, the famous tourist bazaar in Kathmandu. "Hello, Russian", one bookseller called out to me, "there are books about Boris from Russia here". And then occurred a small miracle of discovery. Besides 'Tiger for Breakfast' I found a novel 'The Mountain is Young' by the Chinese writer Han Su Yin and 'My kind of Kathmandu' by Desmond Doig. Before me there was an exotic history of Boris

Lissanevitch's life. But was it a real story or did the authors exaggerate? I began an exploration.

During two weeks of quest in Kathmandu I had seen numerous photos from his archive and had talks with many people who knew and loved Boris. There were his wife Inger and son Alex, who has been keeping his father's archive, his close friends Jim Edwards and Bernadette Vasseux, Toni Hagen and Elizabeth Hawley and many others. I read about Boris in the books of famous travellers and explorers and in all the guidebooks on Nepal. I regret the fate that I never met Boris. But those who roam the world are bound sooner or later to meet him if not in person then in the multitude of his friends, who bear the impress to his remarkable personality. He was one of the few people who have been vouchsafed in full measure the greatest gift the gods can grant - the art of living.

To quote Boris Nikolayevitch Lissanevitch himself, "My family was from Odessa, the great seaport on the Black Sea. I had three brothers. I was the youngest of my family. Our Odessa home was on the outskirts of the town, between the racetrack and the Cadet School. Those were two places that played the most important parts in my life in Odessa, and have remained in my heart all my life"

Boris's great grandfather was Lieutenant General Grigory Lissanevitch, a great soldier, honoured by the emperors of Russia, Pavel and Alexander 1. Nicholas Lissanevitch, Boris's father, was quite famous in Russia as a horse breeder and rider. Although Boris, a modest man, did not like to recall the titles of his family (unlike so many Russians who thrive today on princedoms and dukedoms of their own invention) his family coat of arms and the hundreds of photographs saved by his mother, testified to the luxurious lifestyle of

the Lissanevitchs in Odessa before the revolution.

Paradoxical, but sincere and not without humour, was Boris's comment in answer to questions as to how he had been launched on his incredible career: "I owe everything to the Russian revolution. Otherwise I would have followed my elder brothers into the Imperial Navy, and then joined my father horse breeding at our country home in the hamlet of Lissanevitchovka near Odessa."

He was born on 4th October 1905, and at the age of nine was sent to the Cadet School in Odessa. At this school with the rigours of discipline he received his formal education. Four years later while he was still there, the revolution broke out in Russia.

During this tumultuous period Odessa was degenerating into chaos and confusion. The French fleet had for a while taken possession of the city and held parts of it together with the White Russian Army. "One quarter of the town was in the hands of the Reds, while anarchist bandits held another district. Barricades of furniture were piled up in the streets. One could see opposing flags flying just a few hundred feet apart. At fifteen I experienced gunfire and was hit by a bullet in the thigh".

Boris's boyhood was already symptomatic of his later life. His family experienced everything from famine, typhus, starvation to the loss of the elder sons. As the Revolution neared its end, the family had to think of some way of removing Boris from suspicion. It so happened that their distant relative, Mrs Gamsakhurdia, was the ballet mistress and teacher at the Odessa opera and ballet theatre, a grandiose copy of the Vienna Opera. Boris's alibi was found. He joined the ballet school and corps de ballet of the opera. Slim, well built, strong and agile he made an excellent pupil and after one year was admitted to her troupe.

"With famine, typhus and the revolution I learned the relativity of values early. In those days in Odessa a gold dinner service could not have purchased a loaf of bread, Boris

remembered. A total disregard for money was later to be one of Boris's major characteristics. He could gamble away a fortune in the evening as easily as he could ruin himself by his great generosity. In 1924 during a performance of "The Prophet" by Meyerbeer the stage manager overdid himself that night, not only was the castle scenery burned, but the entire Odessa Opera House went up in flames. This event provided a plausible pretext for Boris to leave Russia and travel to Paris where he obtained a contract at the Alhambra Theatre. In Versailles he took out Nansen's certificate, the League of Nations passport for refugees.

"The fact that I was a refugee and had no national papers," Boris explained, "was responsible for my eventual settling in Asia, but when I managed to escape from Russia I had no idea then where that flight would lead me".

The Ballet Russe, which thanks to the genius of a Russian by the name of Sergei Diaghiliev, became one of the most refined arts on the stage. Gregoriev and Balanchine invited Boris to come to the Theatre Sarah Bernadette to undergo the examination by the great master himself.

"I was so excited", remarked Boris, "that I overdid myself. I had never done a double turn in the air before but in front of Diaghiliev I just flew and I was taken on." It was a wonderful new life. From 1925 until 1929 he was to live at the incredible tempo set by one of the greatest artistic geniuses of his time. The Ballet toured in London, Paris, Monte Carlo, in Spain, Italy with the full repertoire - Le Carnival, Le Boutique Fantastique, Prince Igor, Petrouchka, Mercure, Parade, The Firebird. Off the stage Boris met and became friendly with such figures as Cocteau, Deren, Matisse, Stravinsky, Dali, and Picasso. These were five unforgettable years.

Together with Vera Nemtchinova as one of the leading dancers Boris was to tour South America on a two year contract. With an Argentinian visa and ticket to Buenos

Aires in his pocket Boris was watching a rehearsal of Chaliapin's opera company in Monte Carlo when he noticed a very lovely girl, Kira Schbatheva. By the end of the lunch they were in love. The ticket and a contract at a nice, fat salary were sent back. He toured Europe for the next three years. Boris then received an invitation to take their act on an extended tour of the Far East.

India, Burma, China, Java, Ceylon... and Bali island. "I was absolutely shattered by the beauty and charm of the island, its people and music. The dancing, coupled with the music and the scenery simply sent me mad. I was totally captivated by the East."

Thanks to an invitation by his friend Lainelot, Boris was able to indulge his love for sport, that was rapidly to become his greatest passion - big game shooting. Boris spent in all three months in the bush in Indochina. He shot three leopards, three tigers and numerous other beasts. "I hunted on the territory of the fierce Mois tribes, which used blowpipes with poison arrows. A convict of definitely sinister aspect, who had killed his wife and mother-in-law, was ordered to carry my gun. I smoked opium - gift from the King of Cambodia. They stayed in Angkor. "I left Angkor stunned by the beauty and charm of the place."

Now at last they were on their way back to Europe. But, Boris had no real home, he was a refugee. On the other hand, India offered them a possibility of eventually obtaining a British passport. He headed for Calcutta, where, with the help of his influential friends, he created the famous mixed Indian - British 300 Club. The club was opened in 1936 in a large palace, known as "Philips Folly" built by a fabulously rich Armenian for a beautiful young lady. Unfortunately on the day before they planned their wedding, his fiancée ran away with a common soldier...

Maharajas, princes, diplomats and businessmen, millionaires and sportsmen, travellers and pilots - all knew Boris as the

hospitable host of the most exclusive club in Calcutta, where East meets West.

In Calcutta started a long-term friendship with the fearless pilot Emmanuel Golitsyn, the Maharaja of Cooch Behar and General Mahabir from Nepal. At this club Boris met HM King Tribhuvan of Nepal, then a prisoner of his own Prime Minister. From the instant they met, Boris and King Tribhuvan became good friends.

Boris took an active part in the reinstallation of King Tribhuvan on the throne of Nepal. (It is interesting that several times in his life Boris had been suspected of being a spy. Thanks to his charm Boris had an unusually wide circle of friends and acquaintances and the exceptional breadth of his information on happenings in Asia were the causes of such suspicions. The Indians thought Boris a Russian agent, the Russians thought him an American agent, and the Americans, a Russian agent! Was he an Asian Kim Philby or Lawrence of Arabia? Asked, he only smiled, "I'm more a Marco Polo".

After the war Boris and Kira visited United States. Kira decided to remain in America and started a ballet school. Boris met a beautiful young blond from Denmark, Inger Pheiffer. They married in 1948.

In 1952 together with his wife and two sons, Misha and Alex, on the invitation of King Tribhuvan, Boris arrived in Nepal.

"Beyond the valley of Kathmandu I discovered the Asia of Kipling, a mixture of China and India set in a landscape, that makes Switzerland look tame. The charm and beauty of this country were incomparable. I knew this land would have to be my home." Enchanted with the incredible beauty of the Kathmandu Valley, Boris appreciated the great possibilities of tourism in Nepal. The first climbing expeditions drew the attention of the world to the great snowy ranges of Annapurna, Dhaulagiri and Everest.

But in 1954 it was still as difficult to enter Nepal as to enter Tibet. Formalities were

long and complicated. No road led to Nepal, and visas were almost unobtainable. Boris mentioned the possibilities of tourism to many of his Nepalese friends, among whom was the Prime Minister. All these people at first only smiled: "How could tourists be interested in Nepal, a country that has no beautiful buildings, steel bridges, sky scrapers and museums?"

Boris suddenly had the idea of opening a hotel that could cater more fittingly to the future visitors and increased numbers of foreigners to be expected in the Valley. But in the Valley there was virtually nothing available such as gas, kerosene, electricity and good food. A century-old curfew obliged all people to stay at home after 11 pm.

Boris introduced to Nepal dozens of varieties of fruits and vegetables that were unknown in the country - carrots, beetroot, spinach, lettuce and strawberries. He set up a bakery. He also had to teach the servants such strange things as how to wear shoes, how to wash their hands and not to serve clients the water from "the little white wells in the bathroom," as they called the toilets.

In August 1954, the Royal Hotel - unique hotel from Kathmandu to Calcutta 450 miles away - was opened and described. "On the hotel staircase, framed by the stuffed heads of two rhinoceroses, two crocodiles and tigers gaping at each other, was a sturdy, handsome man. Bear hug, broad smile and Russian accent. This was Boris."

After much persuasive talk and string pulling, Boris obtained government agreement that visas could be delivered for the first three groups on their arrival.

It was no small event for the kingdom or the outside world, and 'Life' magazine on 28 March 1955, ran a four page feature article on the event: "The irresistible stream of tourism, which has upset so many sanctuaries, finally broke into remote Nepal. Nestled in the Himalayas, Nepal has for a century peevishly shut its borders to all but a few foreigners. But recently Boris Lissanevitch, a British naturalised ex-

Russian from Odessa, managed to lease a palace in Kathmandu, capital of Nepal, and to convert it into the "Royal Hotel" by flying everything from cutlery to cooks to flush toilets. Then Lissanevitch lobbied until Nepal allowed Thomas Cook and Sons to fly in tourist groups... The experts of the agency consider that Nepal has great tourist future."

The King was so impressed by the evident enthusiasm of the tourists for his country and his crafts, that he gave orders to his ministers right there, on the terrace of the Royal Hotel that in the future visas should be issued to all tourists on sight. Thus Nepal, thanks to Boris's efforts, was suddenly open to the world.

But East is East. After the death in 1955 of King Tribhuvan, his great and true friend, Boris also learned that politics in Nepal was still on the level of medieval palace and court intrigues. As a result he stayed in prison for two months. He was innocent, but it seemed that for lack of a true judicial system nothing could be done to release him. In the East authorities need to "save face".

After two months he was released and was received by the King, who expressed the hope that he had "no hard feelings" over the unfortunate episode.

Boris's prison ordeal did a great deal to increase his popularity in Kathmandu. He had received a letter from the Royal Palace as follows: "His Majesty has given orders that Boris Lissanevitch should arrange the catering for all the guests attending the forthcoming Coronation."

Boris was now to turn the tables and serve the King. He became one of the key figures in Nepal. Boris determined to do everything to help ensure that the Coronation should be a successful and memorable occasion. With his inherent humour he had solved all problems. When the customs detained the delivery of alcoholic drinks to the Royal Hotel, where 180 correspondents from all around were staying, Boris dictated to Inger a letter to Field Marshal Keshar (Kaiser): "Your Excellency my patience is exhausted.

I again went in prison. The correspondents are drinking water, understand - WATER! If the position is not changed, I am afraid the Coronation will be a complete disaster”.

After the Coronation, so colourfully described by the well-known writer, Han Su Yin and good friend of Boris, whom she portrayed under the name of Vissili, in her novel ‘The Mountain is young’, the Royal Hotel became the meeting place of Europeans and Nepalese, the centre of political and tourist life in Nepal. And Boris with his buoyant charm and enthusiastic personality became the leading spirit of the city’s social activities.

His closest friends became the Swiss geologist Toni Hagen, the “American Lama”, Father Moran, and the correspondent and artist Desmond Doig. Boris became very friendly with Prince Basundra, the King’s brother and Field Marshal Kaiser, an oriental Voltaire.

The usual excitements began each day as the entire world seemed to flock to Kathmandu. At the Royal Hotel Boris has played host to such celebrities as Presidium Chairman Voroshilov of Russia. Chou En-Lai, Jawaharlal Nerhu, and Indira Gandhi, Crown Prince Akahito of Japan and Soviet cosmonauts Tereshkova and Nikolayev. Yes the Russian Embassy had asked Boris to handle the reception, an amusing tribute to Boris’s popularity since he was a refugee from communist Russia. Boris in high spirits, became one of their friends.

One of the biggest events in Boris’s life in Kathmandu was the state visit of HM Queen Elizabeth II of England to Nepal in 1961. An autographed portrait of the Queen reminds how she called Boris “My best Russian-British subject” and thanked him.

“How do you think you can catch him alone?” someone asked Inger in those days, “In fifteen years we have been married, I have spent only two evenings alone with him.”

In the 1950s and 1960s Kathmandu was becoming the mountaineering capital of the

world, and the inner sanctum of climbing in Nepal was invariably the Yak and Yeti bar of the Royal Hotel.

Boris a sportsman at heart and keen amateur explorer, placed himself entirely at the disposal of the expeditions, sharing the knowledge of its country and its leaders to assist everyone he could to start for the mountains. Climbers became a familiar sight at the Royal Hotel. Boris patiently accompanied the leaders through the maze of the corridors of the Singha Durbar, and countless expeditions benefited from his generosity in the form of cut rates for accommodation. “I’ve always lost money on expeditions”, Boris recalled. “The climbers would come back starved, but in a week I ought to see them eat!” “But Boris, we never will be rich if we go on like this,” Inger retorted, “Don’t worry dear, after the death we will live in the Paradise Valley,” Boris answered.

Living in Kathmandu he has been close to all the tragedies and joys of climbing. In his flat he had a copy of ‘Everest 1933’, H. Rutledge’s book on his expedition of that year, autographed by all the leaders and most of the climbers of successful expeditions to Everest. His friends Sir Edmund Hillary, Norman Dhyrenfurth, Raymond Lambert, Barry Bishop, Jim Whittaker, Tenzing Norkay and many others. He kept in his flat a box with little rocks from the tops of the world’s highest peaks given by victorious climbing expeditions... “That from Everest is a gift from my friend Bishop, that from Makalu from Franko and from Jannu from Terray, that from Dhaulagiri from my old friend Dhyrenfurth”. These trophies to him were rarer and harder to come by than the skins of tigers or white leopard.

Boris’s flat reflected clearly the varied aspects of his personality. On a grand piano besides golden Buddhas from Tibet stood autographed portraits of Queen Elizabeth II of England and King Mahendra of Nepal. A huge cabinet harboured Boris’s incredible

record collection ranging from the music of Stravinsky, which Boris knew so well, to the folk dances of his Ukrainian homeland.

From the first 'snowman (yeti) expeditions' to the last, Boris was deeply involved in these investigations. He had on hand the 'Alka-Seltza' gun or 'Yeti gun' given to him by Tom Slick's expedition, a strange piece of weaponry designed to put the monster to sleep. And there are no exaggerations that Boris had been called by one of the large American papers "the Number Two attraction in Nepal after Everest".

Soon after the Royal Hotel closed in 1970, Boris's Yak and Yeti restaurant opened in the former Rana Palace - The Lal Durbar, which became one of the truly grand restaurants of Asia. Its Russian fare, prepared from Boris's 100-year-old family recipes, borsch, beef stroganoff, schaslyk, omelette, and also special drinks, created by Boris, which were divine!

Mr MacNamara, the President of the World Bank granted him credit for construction of the five star Hotel Yak and Yeti. This hotel opened in 1977 but arguments with his principal partner led Boris to leave it.

In 1978 he opened the restaurant 'Boris' in the street with the poetic name of '32 Butterflies'. In 1982 he opened another restaurant in Durbar Marg, where sometimes the King was to be seen. His son Alex also opened a restaurant under the same name.

Boris died on 20th October 1985. Sir Edmund Hillary who conquered Mount

Everest then New Zealand's Ambassador to India and Nepal, came for the funeral and called Boris Lissanevitch, "One of the great characters of Kathmandu, who was always full of life, exciting ideas and never dull".

Here was a man as legendary as Everest; the man who has lived ten full lives in one. Happy-go-lucky and violent and passionate. The playboy and artist, collector. The raconteur and the administrator. To many, Boris seems to escape analysis, and this is no doubt the cause of his being legendary. He was a deep sensitive man, with a great sense of honour. His personality has cast its spell over the people of all nations and level of society from waiters to monarchs and from the maharajas to mountaineers. At a British Embassy cemetery in Kathmandu I have photographed the modest tombstone with Boris family's coat of arms and inscription: "Boris Nikolayevitch Lissanevitch born Odessa October 4th 1905 died Kathmandu October 20th 1985", Boris has become a large part of the make-up of Nepal. He is the father of international tourism in Nepal.

"What is it really that you value? What drives you on?" he was asked. Boris swept his arms around the Royal Hotel, toward the distant crest of the snow summits, past the terai and over the temples' pagodas of Kathmandu, "All this" he said, "is a game", and the friend of rajahs and refugees added, "There is only one thing that counts - it is how many people you make happy".



GAP Activity Projects

It was one of the most challenging and rewarding things I have ever done with my life and the experience has not brought me closer to my mission than I have in Nepal with my wife and children.

—David Lee, CEO of GAP, in Nepal, January 2008

- GAP is an international non-profit organisation that works to improve the lives of people in need. In Nepal, GAP is the largest and most successful of its kind, providing a wide range of services to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in the country.
- GAP is a multi-sectoral organisation that works in partnership with the government, the private sector, and the community to address the most pressing needs of the people of Nepal.
- GAP is a multi-sectoral organisation that works in partnership with the government, the private sector, and the community to address the most pressing needs of the people of Nepal.
- GAP is a multi-sectoral organisation that works in partnership with the government, the private sector, and the community to address the most pressing needs of the people of Nepal.

For the past 10 years, my work in England has been very busy. I am confident that I am making a positive contribution to the world, but I am also aware that I am not doing enough for the people of Nepal. I am now in Nepal, and I am working to make a difference.

—David Lee, CEO of GAP, in Nepal, January 2008

For more information on GAP's work in Nepal, or in our other 34 projects around the world, please contact:

GAP, 10000 Wilshire Blvd, Suite 1000, Beverly Hills, CA 90210
 Tel: +1 310 990 1111 Fax: +1 310 990 1111 Email: info@gap.org
 Web: www.gap.org

Registered Charity No. 272761