News from SSB  
By Marianne Frei, President

General Assembly 2017 – new date
On Saturday, March 11, 2017 we will conduct our General Assembly in Bern and link it with an SDC event. After our formal meeting in the morning, we are invited in the afternoon by SDC to a public event commemorating the end of their involvement in Bhutan. As most of you have already heard, SDC will definitely phase out their support to Bhutan and close the office in Thimphu by the end of 2016.

The program includes a welcome address by SDC’s Director General, followed by a panel discussion with participants from Bhutan and Switzerland on SDC’s activities in Bhutan over the last years. After the panel SDC is inviting all participants for an apéro riche.

We are looking forward to this joint event and hope that you will understand that we changed the date to make this joint event possible. We will inform you as soon as possible about the venue and the details of the programme.

Dr Otto Stern resigns as Editor of the SSB Newsletter
The SSB Newsletters were initiated in 2009. We felt that it would be very important for the identity of our Society and for the information of the SSB members and friends of Bhutan to have our own information platform. Dr Otto Stern, a retired language scientist, was entrusted as the Editor of the SSB Newsletter with the 2nd edition. He knows the country and the people of Bhutan very well, he was involved since 1989 as an expert in the Partnership in Teacher Training (PITT) carried out by the Zurich University of Teacher Education, financed by SDC.

15 numbers of the newsletter were published since 2010, and I was always looking forward to the collaboration for the next newsletter. The two of us decided on the content and the authors. Although getting all the articles together on time was often tough work, I could always rely on Otto. He edited the different articles and wrote a number of excellent interviews with young Bhutanese studying or training in Switzerland.

The newsletter became a showcase of the activities of SSB and BSS. It was always well received by the European Friendship Associations as well, and last but not least by our collaborators and friends in Bhutan.

Dear Otto, we all would like to thank you for everything you achieved as the Editor of the SSB-Newsletter. You did a great job!

Tashi Delek!

The new Newsletter with key topics
By Hanspeter Bürgi, editorial team
In 2017 the Society Switzerland Bhutan starts with an update of the newsletter. The future concept centres on a key topic in each of the two annual numbers. Relevant social and cultural subjects concerning Bhutan shall be discussed. Authors from Bhutan, Switzerland and elsewhere will open different perspectives and use the communication space to deepen the themes. A new editorial team will set the focuses, a responsible editor for each issue will create the newsletter and complete the new layout with suitable photos. Every newsletter will be based on three to four articles concerning the topic, editorial’s position and comment, followed by the project news, debates and feedbacks. The content-related approach of the first edition 2017 will be “Architecture in the Bhutanese Himalayas and in the Swiss Alps”.

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House in Punakha, Bhutan, 19th century

House in Engelberg, Switzerland, 15th century
Bhutan Film Days January 27th – 29th, 2017, Ethnographic Museum University of Zurich
Unique opportunity to see films of emerging filmmakers from Bhutan

By Dieter Zürcher, on behalf of the organising committee

Since the introduction of TV and Internet in the year 1999, a very diversified film production took off in Bhutan. Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche represents an internationally renowned film director of this country, and his most recent film "Hema Hema" was shown as World Premiere at the Locarno Film Festival. Apart from him, several young, independent filmmakers, like Dechen Roder and Tashi Gyeltshen, had their films shown abroad and received awards for them.

The goal of the Bhutanese Film Days is to offer a glance at the rich and broad spectrum of contemporary Bhutanese author-films. The program includes films of fiction, short films and documentaries. These films have in common a strong bond to the Bhutanese culture and traditions, particularly Buddhism. Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche very aptly said: “For centuries Buddhism has adopted the method of statues and artistic representation in order to express messages of compassion, love and wisdom. Film could be seen as a modern day thangka (a traditional Buddhist painting) as it is one of the most powerful mediums that we have today.”

We have invited filmmakers and producers from Bhutan (i.a. Jamyang Jamtsho Wangchuk and Pawo Choyning Dorji) in order to discuss with them the contemporary film production in Bhutan. The opening on 27.1 will be done by Corine Mauch, Mayor of Zurich and H.E. Kinga Singye, the Ambassador of Bhutan in Geneva. During the film days Bhutanese food will be served at the cafeteria of the Ethnographic Museum in Zurich (www.musethno.uzh.ch/de/museum/news), where the event will take place.

The Bhutanese Film Days are organized by the Society Switzerland-Bhutan (SSB) in collaboration with the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich. The Bhutan Film Trust supports the organizers in matters of film copyrights and contacts with film directors and producers.

Programme:
Documentary and fictional movies will be displayed during six film blocks on Friday and Saturday late afternoon and evening as well as on Sunday’s matinée and afternoon. The detailed programme can be consulted on the SSB website after 12.1.2017 (www.bhutan-switzerland.org). A matinée on Sunday will show the development of the role of women in Bhutan’s society as a special subject.

We are looking forward to meeting you at the film days!
New SSB Members

By Julia Menk, Member of the Board

Seven new members joined the SSB during the last couple of months. We are very happy to see our Society grow and become more and more cross-linked thanks to you all. So in the name of SSB we would like to extend a warm welcome to the following new members:

- Béatrice and Urs Lütolf-Keller, Winterthur
- Christelle Weibel, St. Gallen
- Christoph Haller, Horgen
- Georg Mattli, Zürich
- Ilona Dorji, Versoix
- Sabrina Behrschmidt, Murgenthal

Tashi delek!

Obituaries

By Werner Külling and Board of SSB

In memoriam Küngolt Menzi-Baumann
(1934-2016)

It is with deep sorrow that we have to inform the friends of Druk Yul and members of the Society Switzerland Bhutan that Küngolt Menzi-Baumann, wife of Prof Dr Martin Menzi, the longstanding consultant in rural development matters and collaborator of HELVETAS Bhutan, passed away on October 12th, 2016, in the hospital of Thun.

Küngolt Menzi visited Bhutan several times together with her husband and also lived in Thimphu and Lobesa when Martin was building up – together with collaborators of the Ministry of Agriculture and Swiss experts – the NRTI, Natural Resources Training Institute, now named CNR, College of Natural Resources near Wangdi-phodrang. She was always supporting him in his different challenging missions, but she was also engaged in her own social activities in Bhutan. She was highly appreciated by the local women with whom she carried out small social projects and made friends wherever she was voluntarily active. Before she lived with her husband and family for a couple of years in the Indo-Swiss Project in Kerala / South India.

Back in Thun / Switzerland, she was always visited by the many friends of the Menzi family from India and Bhutan who all enjoyed her hospitality, friendship and social advise. May the soul of this extraordinary woman, who always showed her enormous affection to the poor and neglected people in Bhutan and India, rest in peace.

An immense loss for Bhutan:
Dasho Pema Wangchuk passed away

A heart attack caused an end of his very committed life on November 17th, 2016. Dasho Pema Wangchuk, born 1942, well known in his country under the name “Laughing Buddha” and highly appreciated by the people and the Royal Government was till the end of his days Secretary of International Boundaries. Just last spring, he lead his technical team on the trek of the Himalayan ranges along the western Bhutan-China border on a joint technical survey. No wonder his unexpected death has been a shock for everybody who knew him. Physically he was very fit, so thought many near friend of him.

Dasho Pema Wangchuk was an extraordinary, rare personality, always friendly, smiling and laughing, very honest, open, highly committed and dedicated to his tasks and duties in the interest of his beloved Druk Yul. He served since 1962, totally 55 years, in different functions for the Royal Government of Bhutan, among them as Director of Agriculture and also as Secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs. Knowing the tall, mild mannered and sympathetic gentleman, one got the impression that he never finds problems in his life. He served under three successive Monarchs. The 3rd King granted him the red scarf, the 4th King entrusted upon him the most
crucial, difficult and heaviest task of keeping the international boundaries of Bhutan, as it was handed down by the country’s forefathers. And the 5th King bestowed upon him the ‘Son of Bhutan’ (Thugsey) medal. The surest tribute to Dasho Pema Wangchuk would be the seal and sign of the Bhutan-China Border Agreement, for which he had devoted many years of his life. Dasho Pema Wangchuk was also a close friend of Switzerland, HELVETAS and SDC. From 1983-2008 he was the proprietor and landlord of the HELVETAS Residence in Thimphu. And last but not least, it should be recalled that he acted as the first President of the then created BSS, Bhutan Switzerland Society, the partner institution of the SSB. We thank him immensely for all he did for the excellent relations between Bhutan and Switzerland.

Good bye, laughing Buddha! May you rest in peace!

Visitors from Bhutan in Switzerland

As a part of the Swiss project to improve healthcare in Bhutan:

Two Bhutanese visitors from the KGUMSB¹ to get acquainted with General Medicine in Switzerland

By Prof. Dr. med. Urs M. Lütolf, former Medical Director of the University Hospital Zurich (USZ)

₁+healthcare+, the Swiss Association for Bhutan Healthcare System Support, created some years ago, came out of the former engagement of HELVETAS in the District Health Services and the Wangdichoealing Hospital in Bumthang. Today, +healthcare+ is mandated with the University Hospital of Zurich to improve the health sector in Bhutan. The “Lotteriefond” of the Canton of Zürich provided the finances for the project with a grant of CHF 500,000 for at least three years. It focuses on three support areas as stated in the Memorandum of Understanding with Bhutanese partners and +healthcare+:

1. Improving the management, medical services, buildings and infrastructure of the Wangdichoealing Hospital Bumthang (WHB) in terms of operational and cost efficiency.

2. Achieve good system quality and standards of promotive (educative), preventive and curative health services in the District of Bumthang.

3. Strengthen the institutional capacity of the Ministry of Health, especially the Khesar Gyalpo University for Medical Sciences of Bhutan (KGUMSB).

There was evidence from the former SHMSC project (Swiss Health Management Support Committee, 2010-2013) that General Practice, GP, (“GP” stands for our „Internal and General Medicine”) will play a major role in order to achieve the medical needs of the rural population. Therefore, fostering General Practice became a very important issue of the project. The KGUMSB has started postgraduate training in 2015. (The pre-graduate training for medical students to become doctors takes place mostly in India or other foreign countries.) It is not surprising that in the first year no trainees applied for GP: GP is often considered as a „poor mans medicine“. In order to start an attractive curriculum, +healthcare+ agreed to welcome two representatives of the KGUMSB in Zurich from September 18th – 25th, 2016, and get them in touch with the teachers of the University and the University Hospital of Zurich. They should learn how GP is instructed in theory, practice and research in Zurich and that GP is a highly appreciated speciality. Dr med. Sonam Dhruptshob is a staff of the Thimphu General Hospital and actively involved in GP. He has been appointed to be the leader of the upcoming curriculum in GP. Tashi Rabgay is the Planning Officer at the KGUMSB.

The doors in Zurich have been wide open for the study tour covering the Institute of Parasitology (Prof Peter Deplazes; himself just back from Bhutan, exploring a parasitological problem for the Ministry of Health), graduate training at Campus Irchel (Prof Wenger, Prof Ulrich), the Department of Family Medicine (Prof Thomas Rosemann and Dr Elisabeth Bandi-Ott), Internal and General Medicine at USZ, University Hospital (Prof Battegay), Telemedicine (PD Dr Christiane Brockes) and Palliative Care Units (USZ: Dr Stefan Obrist, Light-house).
A very important part was the day in Wattwil, with Dr Hans Gammeter, a specialist in internal and general Medicine, since many years is in his practice. To know that Dr. Hans Gammeter spent four years as Swiss doctor and District Health Officer in Bumthang. The medical skills and the lab exams at the fingertip of Dr Gammeter impressed all of us: This is just what the people of Bumthang should be offered.

The visitors have been delighted by two informal lunch meetings with Marianne Frei and E. Werner Külling of the SSB and with Prof. Dr. Franz Rhomberg who treated the late third King of Bhutan, H.M. Jigme Dorji Wangchuck. Finally, a day of leisure (Säntis, visiting the Tibetan stupa, City of St. Gallen) was offered to the visitors before they returned back home to the Himalaya.

The result? We think the two motivated guests will be facilitators and motors of the project. They have learned that +healthcare+ wants much more than to provide financial assistance for the improvement of Bhutanese health services. We want to offer and transfer medical knowledge and experiences and that the people of Bumthang will have improved medical services as soon as possible.

Namgyel Tshering was recruited as the first Bhutanese staff of HELVETAS Bhutan in 1983 by the then Resident Coordinator Ernst Reinhardt. For the coming 32 years, “Helvetas Namgyel”, a nick name he soon acquired, managed all logistics, procurements, administration and special duties for the HELVETAS programme in Bhutan. When I met him for the first time in 1992, I had the privilege to get to know his very supportive and active wife Tsomo and his four children, who had grown to be teenagers by then.

Many Swiss HELVETAS Bhutan staffs, but also our government and civil society partners highly appreciated Helvetas Namgyel’s reliability, efficiency, hard work and especially his commitment and engagement for the benefit of the people of Bhutan. Namgyel Tshering was one of the few Bhutanese, who dared to bring his opinion into discussions even when this meant to constructively scrutinise the opinion of his supervisor. This atmosphere of constructive debate helped to identify better solutions and was highly welcomed by his line managers.

Thank you very much HELVETAS Namgyel!

By Franz Gaehwiler, Programme Coordinator Nepal & Bhutan

Namgyel’s engagement with HELVETAS and many Swiss motivated him to become a member of the board of the Bhutan Switzerland Society. As its Secretary, Namgyel managed and monitored the rural education projects and the production of a short film about the BSS (SBB) activities.

He was also instrumental for organising the Swiss National Day celebrations on 1 August combined with the Annual General Assembly of BSS.

At the end of December 2015, Namgyel Tshering reached his retirement age. All the present staff of HELVETAS Bhutan and the Programme Coordinator badly miss Namgyel and his warm-hearted personality. On behalf of HELVETAS and the two friendship societies in Switzerland and Bhutan I would like to thank Namgyel for all his efforts and commitment. We wish him all the best for his “very busy” retirement, especially good health and fulfilment with his various “family projects”.

Khesar Gyalpo University for Medical Sciences of Bhutan (KGUMSB)
Following its established tradition and past practice since 2010, Bhutan-Switzerland Society held its 7th Annual General Assembly on the 1st of August 2016 coinciding with the celebration of the Swiss National Day at the grand new premises of the Early Learning Center (ELC) High School at Tandin Ney in Thimphu. The meeting started with cutting of a beautiful birthday cake organized by the HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation office in Thimphu and wishing Switzerland a happy 725th birthday.

One of the important agenda issues was the election of new Board members for the next term. Unlike in the past when elections were held without much of a preparatory groundwork nor prior consultation or consent from potential candidates, due to which the last Board was almost paralyzed, this time a proper procedure was followed which included approaching potential candidates who could serve the Society and obtaining their consent and commitment. Accordingly the following Board Members were elected:

- President: Lyonpo Dr Kinzag Dorji
- Secretary: Mr Dragyel Tenzin Dorjee
- Treasurer: Mr Kinzag Tobgyal

Board Members:
- I. Mr Sonam Tashi
- II. Mr. Nado Dukpa
- III. Aum Pema Baumgartner
- IV. Ms Kunzang Wangmo

Lyonpo Dr. Kinzag Dorji has a very long association with Switzerland since he started working with Swiss experts assigned to Bhutan since 1976 and continued till 2008, and beyond. He had visited Switzerland many times during his long association with Swiss assisted projects. Currently, he also holds the post of the President of Bhutan Indigenous Games and Sports Association. He has been re-elected for the 3rd time as President of BSS.

Mr Dragyl Tenzin Dorjee is the Deputy Country Coordinator of Swiss Red Cross in Bhutan since 2014 having established its first office in Bhutan since 2012, and concurrently the Acting Secretary General of Bhutan Red Cross Society since this year. He was earlier the Executive Director of Bhutan Institute for Media, and has worked in Switzerland as well. He was one of the first Bhutanese to undertake undergraduate studies in Switzerland graduating with a BSc. degree in Business Studies and International Management and Economics from Zurich.

Mr Kinzag Tobgyel has been working as the National Programme Officer (second-in-command) at the SDC office in Thimphu since its establishment in 2014. Earlier, he worked with the Bhutan Olympic Committee and Ministry of Economic Affairs.

Mr Sonam Tashi, who works in the Policy and Planning Division of Ministry of Economic Affairs, was a member of the last BSS Board. Although he has neither been to Switzerland nor was he associated with Swiss assisted projects, he is a genuine admirer of Switzerland and many things that Switzerland does and stands for and like me he believes that there is a lot we can learn from Switzerland. Mr. Tashi was re-elected for his second term on the BSS Board.

Mr Nado Dukpa is the Administrator at HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation office where he has been working since 1989.

Aum Pema Baumgartner is the spouse of Mr. Fritz Baumgartner, a Swiss Architect-Engineer, who has been working in Bhutan since 1989. She has a PG Diploma in Community Nursing from Tribhuvan University Kathmandu, and
has worked as a Nursing Instructor of a Nursing School in remote area of Northeast Nepal before coming to Bhutan. While in Bhutan, she has always volunteered her service as a health professional at the Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital, Dechenphodrang Monastic School and the then Natural Resources Training Institute.

Ms. Kunzang Wangmo works as a General Manager at the Terma Linca Resort and Spa in Thimphu since 2012. Earlier, she worked as the Personal Secretary to Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck and as a Program Officer in the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources. She has a Diploma in Advanced Studies in Hospitality Management from HWZ University of Applied Sciences Zurich, and the Royal Institute for Tourism and Hospitality Bhutan in addition to PG Diploma in Public Administration and a B Com. Hons. from Sherubtse College, Kanglung.

Activities of SSB Members

8th meeting of the European-Bhutan Societies in Greece

By Otto Stern

The 8th Biennial Meeting of the European Bhutan Friendship Societies was held from October 6 to 9 in Athens and Nafplio.

The meeting was attended by 50 members of the 14 friendship associations from 12 countries. The event was hosted by the Greece-Bhutan Friendship Association under the direction of President Romolo Gandolfo, and opened in the historical centre of Athens by the Mayor of Athens. In the four days of the Meeting a very interesting and varied tour programme was offered, including guided visits of the Acropolis Museum in Athens, the archaeological sites of Mycenae, Epidaurus, and the historical town of Nafplio.

After the formal Meeting of the European Bhutan Societies in Nafplio, even a visit in the wine producing area of Nemea was on the programme, with wine tasting at the renowned Skoura winery.

Seven members from SSB participated, led by our President Marianne Frei and Treasurer Rosmarie Frey, and their partners and friends Claudio Zingg, Richard Frey, Katherina Washington, Sabine Liebherr, Otto Stern.

H.E. Ambassador Pema Choden and officials from the Royal Bhutanese Embassy in Brussels also participated in the biennial event.

The next Biennial Meeting of the European Bhutan Societies is planned for June 2018 in Geneva and Chamonix, and will be co-hosted by the Society Switzerland-Bhutan and Les Amis du Bhoutan, France.
History books help geophysics to describe big Bhutan earthquake in 1714
By György Hetényi, Uni. Lausanne (gyorgy.hetenyi@unil.ch) – in preparation for the SSB newsletter

What was the biggest earthquake in Bhutan? In January 1941, a magnitude 6.75 earthquake occurred in Sakteng, east of Tashigang, and has shaken the entire country. Many people also felt the 2011 Sikkim earthquake, which was larger but deeper and farther away. This is based on the past century’s record, which is reasonably complete. How about earlier in time: has there been a bigger earthquake, where and when?

So far we did not really know. We only had one survivor’s report, that of a 3–4 year old child, telling: “That Spring (…) there occurred the great terror of an earthquake that pulverised all houses and huts in every direction. All districts echoed with the fierce wailing of grief for the many people who had died beneath the collapsed houses. Clouds of dust darkened the sunlight as if obscured by fog…”¹. Historians were not sure about the location of this report, and speculated it was sometime around 1713, somewhere in Arunachal Pradesh, near Bhutan.

More recently, geologists have analysed a fault scarp in Sarpang, and they could determine its age: it must have been broken the surface in an earthquake sometime around the 18th century. So it could be a result of the same earthquake as described above, but there is still not enough information to tell more about it.

History books then came to help again. A biography from the Gangteng temple, in the Phobjikha Valley, reports that “on the 20th day of the 3rd Bhutanese month of the Wood Male Horse Year [the 4th May 1714], a major earthquake wrecked the country, causing a great deal of death and destruction of property. The earth shook about thirty times that day alone. The grand new temple (…) was nearly reduced to rubbles. (…) The aftershocks continued for about a month, people across the country were stuck in fear.”² Another historical chronicle about Assam describes that temples in three different places have been damaged in an earthquake that year. Finally, it turned out that the 3-4 year old child was Shakya Rinchen, who later became the chief abbot of the state monastic body of Bhutan, and his biography tells that he grew up in Wangdue Phodrang district.

The actual Gangteng temple – a former temple was turn into ruins in the 1714 earthquake

Details of all citations are available from the author, and the scientific publication is available here. This “discovery” is not a surprise, at least for geophysics, as the life cycle of earthquakes is much longer than the life cycle of men, and we tend to have short memory. Luckily for our case, we stumbled on history books, which brought us the necessary details to shed light on this important earthquake. This will certainly help properly assess earthquake hazard in the Bhutan Himalayas.
Swiss researchers on the tracks of rockslides in the Himalaya of Bhutan
By Benedetta Dini, Engineering Geology, department of Earth Sciences of ETH

It is difficult to know where to start, after coming back from such a long trip to such a wonderful, far-away place. There is a lot to take in, from many points of view, and a lot to think about and to allow to settle in our mind and heart. As geologists we can consider ourselves extremely lucky for this experience, because not so many, after Gansser and before us, could benefit of the same conditions that allowed us to carry out detailed mapping of a relatively large area of the country.

The motivation behind this trip was to collect data that would help us understand how landslides behave in northwestern Bhutan and the questions that we ultimately would like to answer through our research are such as: Where can we find landslides? Are these landslides in rock or soil (large or small)? Are there landslides that are active today? What controls where and when these landslides occur? What are the physical mechanisms underpinning them? Are there landslides that may threaten people, properties and infrastructure?

With these questions in mind, we set off from Zürich with a preliminary map of landslides previously identified during a desk study, only with the use of satellite images and a high resolution digital terrain model.

Example of revised landslide map. This includes data obtained both before and during the field campaign.

Our aim was to verify in the field what we saw with remote sensing data. At the beginning it was all a little difficult and new, the climatic conditions of the region have allowed for the development of relatively thick residual soil, essentially weathered and disaggregated rock, which drapes most slopes and makes it hard to see geological structures. But as the days went on, we started to see more and more and we began to identify, among other things, deposits that spoke of large, past landslides. We gradually became better placed to interpret our initial data under the new light of our field observations and, thus, to refine our maps.

We spent roughly a week in each valley, of Paro, Thimphu and Punakha, in search for landslide deposits, active landslides, faults and clues in the landscapes that would reveal to us snippets of the history of fluvial incision. Our initial plan was to set out on a trek in the north of Bhutan, but our visas were declined. With hindsight, we can say that every cloud has a silver lining, because in the new areas we were able to observe a lot more than we had initially anticipated. The ability to drive along roads (some better than others) up and down the valleys enabled us to cover a relatively large area efficiently and the presence of many new road cuts proved to be crucial and indispensable. Along these road cuts we could, in fact, observe many important geological structures that we could use to build our interpretations. During our mapping days we were able to mark roughly a thousand points, scattered across a large area, for each outcrop or feature we observed. For all these points we collected key information regarding the characteristics and the materials we encountered, which is now a set of invaluable data for our research.

During this trip we also tried to interweave new relations with local partners (or potential ones) and to strengthen existing ones. Among those that we had the pleasure to meet we should mention the ever supportive College of Natural Resources, the Department of Geology and Mines, HELVETAS, the Land Commission, the Technical Training Institute Chumey and even the Vice Chancellor of the Royal University of Bhutan. Even though not all processes and discussions were always devoid of some difficulties, we found plenty of space and fertile ground for a positive and constructive dialogue and we hope a basis is set for fruitful future collaborations.

So, all in all, despite the hard work, despite being caught in the last bout of monsoonal rains, despite some of us narrowly escaping a landslide whilst taking measurements and our cars getting stuck in mud, the balance at the end is extremely positive. Whether any of us enjoyed the food, or a fuss with the dogs, or the beauty of landscapes and decorations more than the others, all of us were impressed by the aura of overwhelming kindness and the all-encompassing friendliness of the people that
This map shows the area that was covered during the campaign, from Paro through Thimphu to Punakha. All the dots on the maps represent sites for which information was collected. The colours refer to attributes of slope stability assigned.

welcomed us everywhere we went and that will, for sure, make us long to go back.

The project “Rockslide Activity in the High Himalaya of Bhutan” is largely funded by the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH), but the European Space Agency (ESA) is also involved. The ESA’s contribution has allowed for the presence at ETH of a member of staff of the College of Natural Resources of the Royal University of Bhutan (CNR) and the beginning of a collaboration between these institutions. The scientists involved in this project are, from ETH: Prof. Dr. Simon Löw, Dr. Kerry Leith, Dr. Andrea Manconi and PhD candidates Larissa De Palézieux and Benedetta Dini. Jigme Thinley, from the CNR, has joined us for some time in summer 2016 and we will welcome him back in February 2017.

My secondment to the Bhutan Olympic Committee (BOC)

By Alain Dössegger, Swiss Federal Institute of Sport Magglingen (SFISM)

Sport is said to be the most important side issue in the world. At least this is true in the west. On the one hand, sport and physical activity is increasingly recognized as one of the main contributing factors for personal, social and even economical development. On the other hand, one could argue that the east has other problems than promoting sport.

We don’t care how you do it in the West!

The Bhutan Olympic Committee (BOC) visited Switzerland in October 2015 (see Newsletter December 2015). As a follow-up to this study visit, the BOC approached the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) to ask for a sports expert from Switzerland. Thanks to the support by SDC, my institute sent me on secondment to the BOC to help develop a comprehensive information system similar to the Swiss Youth+Sport Database. The aim was to monitor sport in order to manage subsidies, ensuring transparency and accountability. Furthermore, the BOC asked me to promote sport in whatever ways I thought it could be useful for the country. A big dream became true. I could combine my two passions, the one for sport and the other for Buddhism. To work five months for the National Olympic Committee in the only Tibetan Buddhist country in the world – the country I fell in love with ten years ago, during my first visit – was a big honour.

In order to have a better understanding of the sport system, the stakeholders, and especially of the goals of the BOC and the National Sports Federations (NSF), we drafted a logic model of sports promotion in Bhutan. After this phase, I introduced an evidence-based framework for sports promotion, called Foundation, Talent, Elite and Mastery, FTEM (Gubin, Morag, Croser and Weissensteiner, 2013). In several workshops with the BOC, we worked on some sort of a deliberate programming of sport in Bhutan. With
the NSFs, a two-day workshop was held in Thimphu in September, repeating the process of deliberate programming with the foremost important stakeholders of sport in Bhutan. This shall help to speak the same language among the sport bodies.

A gap analysis – defining what is already in place and what is still to be done – revealed some weak spots. Consequently, the necessary actions to be taken in order to promote sport in a comprehensive way could be translated into the next Five-Year-Plan.

This planning process was a big opportunity. Along with the 12th Five-Year Plan, the Gross National Happiness (GNH) Commission worked on the Key Result Areas as well. There seems to be a way to include sport or physical activity into the GNH indicator list through the definition of so called Sectorial Key Result Areas. Sport is increasingly recognized by the government as an important contributor to GNH. And, of course, HRH Prince Jigyel representing the BOC is a big supporting factor for sport. But if sport and physical activity would be part of GNH, this could help even more.

As practical hands-on help, I was able to work with sport coaches. Starting in July, 21 young men and women participated in the first four week sport coaching course in Thimphu. This course was designed to prepare young Bhutanese who are interested in coaching children and youth on a foundational sport level. I was asked to help prepare the course and work with the experts who would teach the future sport coaches. Simona, my wife, conducted first aid courses, and I worked as consultant for the coaching experts.

One afternoon, I tried to introduce orienteering as a new sport in Bhutan. Swedish Orienteerers who had been to Thimphu and Paro produced orienteering maps. And Michael Rutland – the British Honorary Consul and a friend of sport, who shared the idea of Bhutan as a future sport orienteering nation – handed them over to me, and so I could prepare the event. It seemed to be great fun and I’m sure this seed will grow.

The Royal Tutorial Project (RTP) film crew took some shots from the event for the first out of three RTP program about sport science that I was meant to present. Michael gently motivated me to agree on this side-business. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, we could only finish one program (it will be broadcasted soon on BBS 2).

Time is running fast. This seems to be true in Bhutan as well, even though the concept of "BST” – Bhutan Stretchable Time – was a charming, sometimes disturbing experience. There still is much work to be done. For the BOC and the NSFs, for the coaches, together with the Paro College of Education. But for this time, we had to leave Bhutan. We already miss the blessed places that are so powerful spots to rest in the nature of mind. We will miss our friends we met.

I make wishes that the instruments I tried to introduce will be useful for all the sport developing bodies in Bhutan. And I know that there are many Bhutanese who are more than just interested in "how we do it in the west”. I hope to be able to go back some day for more support.
Once upon a time …

Interview
by Otto Stern (OSt)

This interview – taken in Bernese German, on Nov. 9, 2016 – presents

Werner Baumann (62) – 30 years ago as a Veterinarian in Bhutan

I grew up on a farm in Grindelwald and also went to school there. Starting at the age of about ten, I spent the summers on the alpine grounds looking after our herd of cows. After compulsory schooling I spent a year as a farm-apprentice in the Jura of Neuchâtel. Then I visited the Gymnasium in Bern, followed by studies in Veterinary Medicine at Bern University. After my diploma I worked as an assistant veterinarian in the Bernese Oberland, and now I have my own veterinary practice in Matten, Interlaken; I am married and father of two adult children.

In winter 1982 I was looking for a new vet assistant place, when I saw an add of HELVETAS looking after a Veterinarian for Bhutan. I applied, was invited to present myself, and got the job! By chance, I was able to meet Fritz Maurer in Bern, and I was very much impressed by what he told me about this country. So, my decision was taken, and in March 1983 I left for Bhutan – and returned only in 1991, after 9 years!

On an adventures trip over Bombay, and by the first commercial flight from Calcutta to Paro, I finally reached Thimphu, where I was received by Ernst Reinhardt who only shortly before had become the HELVETAS Coordinator. From Thimphu I was taken on a government vehicle to Bumthang. The roads where in very bad conditions, and already after the Dochula pass we had to cross over several landslides to reach Wangdiphodrang. From Wangdi onward the road was not paved and in even worse conditions. I was told to carry enough provisions in case we had to stay over night somewhere out on the road. And in fact, some kilometres before Trongsa and only shortly before getting dark, the road was blocked. By chance, in the next car behind us the Dzongda of Trongsa was returning from hunting, and he sent somebody on foot to get a car from the Trongsa side. In the mean time carpets were rolled out on the road, we were invited to sit down, and dinner was served. This was my first introduction to the District of Trongsa!

Finally, I arrived in Bumthang on my job as District Animal Husbandry Officer. In the beginning I lived in a guesthouse, but at the departure of my predecessors Johann and Jeannette Cantieni – both Veterinarians – I could take over their nice house with a vegetable garden.

The District Animal Husbandry Officer was responsible for veterinary medicine, live-stock breeding and fodder improvement. Assigned was a Bhutanese collaborator trained as a Veterinary Fieldworker to gain practice in the three fields, and to accompany me as a translator on my visits to the farmers because in the villages hardly anybody could speak English. After some time I started to catch up a few expressions in the local language, but not enough for working.

OSt: What were the most frequent veterinary cases you had to deal with?
Frequent cases were due to nutrition problems; in winter time there was not enough fodder. Traditionally during the winter months the cattle was sent into the forests to eat foliage and dry grass. The animals lost weight, got weaker and where increasingly attacked by parasites – gastro-intestinal worms, liver leeches, etc. Until spring many of them died, and the oxen were to weak to pull the plough. We tried to find out what parasites caused the main problems, and tried to deworm the animals preventively in fall, so the parasites would not deprive the animals...
from nutrients during the dry season. Another important domain was fodder improvement. In all of the four Bumthang valleys there was a centre with a Fieldworker who’s task was to advise on fodder problems and to distribute clover-grass seeds to be sown into the buckwheat fields being the main cultivation in the valleys of Ura and Tang. Sowing clover together with the buckwheat prevented the soils from being washed out after the buckwheat was harvested. The dried buckwheat straws were harvested and used as fodder in winter. With the preservation of the soil fertility the quality and quantity of fodder increased, and the animals got stronger and more resistant against diseases – at least the animals that stayed in the villages. However, most of the herds were not settled. In summer they moved up towards the tree line, and in winter downwards to the Indian border. Thus, many families with huge numbers of cattle migrated up and down without stable settlements, and a main objective of the project was to keep more herds within the valleys and to reduce the range of their movements, and even to get more of the population settled down. In May when they returned from the south we made health checks and diagnosed several diseases, like foot-and-mouth disease, etc. Travelling through the valleys the cattle got in contact with the settled herds, and to prevent contagion we tried to vaccinate before they got in contact, but often we didn’t have enough vaccine. The vaccine for foot-and-mouth disease came from India, but we couldn’t store it, because of lack of cooling possibilities. In the early 80s there was no electricity available; only the mechanical workshop and the cider press were run by a small hydro-power station, and I managed to operate a small refrigerator over a cable from there. But reaching the distant herds took often many hours, even days of walking without possibilities of refrigerating. Thus, when resting, we had to put the vaccine in boxes into river water for cooling.

A special disease of the yaks is the so called gid or sturdy (Coenurosis, Drehkrankheit) which has been studied in Bhutan already in the sixties by the Swiss veterinarian Dr. Jürg Eberle (see report in our newsletter December 2013, p. 10, www.bhutan-switzerland.org). The disease is caused by tapeworms and transmitted by dog excrement. It causes cysts/bubbles in the brain of the yaks. These bubbles destroy a part of the brain, causing movement and feeding disorders. Traditionally the herdsmen sometimes cut open the bubble on the head of the yaks with their Patang-sword. I’ve seen several yaks with holes in their forehead, but otherwise healthy. For years the Swiss provided deworming drugs for the herd dogs. In spring and in fall the responsible Fieldworker for the Bumthang highlands followed the yak herds and fed the herd dogs with that medicine. The morning after he eliminated the dog excrements.

In my times the number of infected and dying yaks was again increasing and we assumed that something with the prevention was not working well. I accompanied the Fieldworker on his deworming trip, but everything was well done. Of course, the remains of the deceased yaks were exploited as much as possible, for example the yak skin for tents. The heads of the dead animals were often just thrown into the forest, and evidently eaten up by wild animals, e.g. wolfs you could hear howling at night. Thus the tapeworm infection was transmitted again, and in this case deworming was not possible! Then we started a new pilot project in Bumthang district: to motivate the herders not to throw away the yak heads we offered to pay 50 Ngultrum per head. Thus, every year we collected about fifty yak heads, many of them with coenurusis bubbles.

OSt: You got in contact with all sorts of environments and agricultural activities; was it easy for you to adapt?

I’ve been able to get along very well, I had a garden where I planted my own vegetables, now and then I also got some meat, and lots of rice of course (laughs), yeah, I had quite a good life there, in the Bazar I could find all the necessary things. When I arrived first in Thimphu I was told to buy provisions to survive in this remote place called Bumthang. So I went to the Sunday market and saw farm ladies behind big piles of red chilli; I showed them a ten ngultrum Sunday market and saw farm ladies behind big piles of red chilli; I showed them a ten ngultrum

OSt: In all the years in Bhutan you had many adventurous experiences, tell us one of them!

One of my jobs was also to look after the horse breeding programme, trying to reduce the num-
ber of horses not suited for breeding; horses with crooked legs or bent backs not able to carry loads, i.e. with defects caused mainly by in-breeding. By crossing the healthier horses with Haflinger they tried to get stronger ones, and by crossing weaker specimen with breeding asses, reproduction was stopped by getting infertile mules. The Haflinger once arrived in Bhutan as a present, but breeding asses were rare. Earlier they arrived from Tibet, but with the closing of the Chinese-Indian border the exchange was interrupted and inbreeding was growing.

Thus, we had the idea of buying breeding asses in India, and the Indian administration recommended a market for asses taking place in March in the Rajasthan desert. So, together with my counterpart Ngawang (District Animal Officer and Director of the Horse Breeding Programme) and a farmer from Bumthang, we set off to Rajasthan, with a first stop in Delhi where we had to get the necessary official papers. In a two days journey over Jaipur we finally reached the oasis village of the market, where we had to get the necessary access papers from the village chief. The whole village gathered under a big tree at the centre where the chief studied und finally signed the papers. It was getting late, so from there we had to go to a next village with a government guesthouse to stay over night. There we also met the officially delegated Veterinary Dr Pant; he was a Brahmin, but he used the occasion, far from the people who know him, to look after a Whisky bottle. When we finally wanted to go to bed he turned on all the lights in the guesthouse. We wanted to switch it off, but no, the light had to be on during the whole night! And the reason he gave for it: “For once you have electric light you have to use it!”

In the morning a jeep with a driver was waiting to get us to the market, and we were waiting for Dr Pant; the driver went for him and came back alone: “Doctor is still sleeping”. Towards noon we were still waiting and Doctor still sleeping – he was sleeping off his Whisky (laughs). Considering the efforts we took to get here and because of the limited validity of our papers, we decided to go ahead without Dr Pant. He had warned us never to go there without him, they would sell us a pup! He would keep himself behind, and once the price was acceptable he would give us a sign. But now we went there without him, and in the beginning we just observed and listened to get an idea of the size of the bids. The Bhutanese wanted tall, dark coloured male asses, and on the market about 5000 male asses were on sale, but only small dark ones or tall white ones, and we knew that in Bhutan they didn’t like white ones. So we decided to go for half and half, and so we bought a dozen of small ones and a dozen of tall ones. Finally, when it started to get dark, Dr Pant showed up hoping we hadn’t bought anything yet: “And how much did you pay for these animals?!” Ngawang mentioned to him almost the triple sum of what we actually paid, and he asked Dr Pant how much he would have payed. Dr Pant mentioned the double, and so we knew that we got a very good bargain!

Ost: And how did you get those asses back to Bhutan?

We drove them for about three hours to the next village where we organized two trucks. Ngawang and the farmer from Bumthang went on with the transport over 1000 km via Bagdogra to Bhutan, and I was flying to Delhi to get the necessary entry documents from the Bhutanese Embassy, and again joined the transport in Bagdogra. Up to Bagdogra it took them three days, manly because they were held up for customs formalities at the Inner-Indian State borders, which could only be accelerated by a little cash I had advanced to Ngawang to be on the safe side (laughs).

Thinking back to those days I sometimes wonder that – with a little patience – everything came to a good end!