

**A Learning Tour of the
CBN (Corbett, Nainital and Binsar) Eco-tourism Initiative Sites
by
Villagers from Hemis National Park and the Surrounding Area
18-28th November 2002**



Organized by:

The Snow Leopard Conservancy and Wildlife Institute of India

With technical support from The Mountain Institute

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Introduction

Ladakh lies between the Great Himalayas and the formidable Karakoram mountains. Its unique landscape and rich cultural heritage have been a great attraction to tourists all over the world. Apart from its uniqueness it has a rich Trans-Himalayan bio-diversity and is home to the rare and elusive snow leopard. It opened to tourism in 1974 with a handful of tourists and has gone up to the present number of about 18,000 visitors annually.

Ecotourism started in Ladakh in mid 80s in the form of conservation of traditional architecture when local communities realized the importance of their rich culture and traditions being valued by the visiting tourists. However, while tourism became a major source of income to people in Leh, most of the benefits stayed with outside (Delhi) based travel agents thus leaving out the rural masses.

During the last three years Snow Leopard Conservancy and The Mountain Institute have been initiating ecotourism activities with local communities in the Hemis National Park as an alternate livelihood and an indirect way to compensate losses of livestock from predatory animals. However, local people while venturing into such new initiatives have tended to be like blind men that are being led by NGO's so that they do not stumble along their paths. It becomes necessary in such a process that these people see and learn from other

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existing examples in our country and be able to choose for themselves how they would like to go forward. Hence it is with this purpose of learning and sharing from other existing examples that a visit to the CBN project was considered an essential part in promoting socially responsible, environmentally friendly and economically viable community-based ecotourism among the communities of Hemis National Park and adjacent parts of Ladakh.

The CBN or Corbett-Binsar-Nainital Ecotourism Initiative seeks to increase the effectiveness of conservation programmes in this biologically important region by promoting private sector and community-based natural resource conservation, and by enabling communities to increase local tourism benefits, improve sustainability and compete more equitably with the regional tourism industry. With Corbett NP, Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary and Nainital as nodes around which action can be directed in future, stakeholders can work together to achieve this goal. For more information on the CBN Ecotourism Initiative, see Appendix 1.

Objectives of the Learning Tour

- 1) To learn how the CBN communities planned for tourism activities and what challenges and shortcomings were faced in the process. What constitutes a positive experience and environment from the perspective of the homestay providers, other service providers (e.g., travel agents and ponymen) and the domestic or foreign visitor?
- 2) To share success stories, strengths, new opportunities and ideas from each other
- 3) To better understand the linkage between biodiversity conservation and sustainable income generation from CBT.

Selection of Participants

As the whole initiative has been focused around the local communities in the Hemis National Park and some of those from villages of western Ladakh where tourism is both a potential for development and a threat if not managed, it has been decided that those communities shall select the candidates under certain commitments and criteria. The following criteria were used for selecting candidates for the study tour:

- 1) Willingness to actively participate with other team members and hosts in learning and sharing of knowledge and experiences. All candidates must take responsibility and contribute in the day to day proceedings of the visit. For example, the daily report writing will have to be done by all persons taking turns.
- 2) Share something tangible: That the participants from Ladakh should take something they consider to be unique and useful to share with the host communities.
- 3) Protocol for behavior: As for most of the visitors it will be their first visit outside Ladakh they will have to be briefed on travel procedures and will have to abide by some norms of behavior.
- 4) They should be prepared for a cultural show. Ladakh is known for its rich and unique cultural heritage and this has been the foremost attraction to tourists all over the world.
- 5) Candidates must share with their communities back home what they have learnt and how they could implement good eco-tourism ventures, along with monitoring the results of the

actions implemented in their village or community. Participants would be expected to make and follow-through on a commitment that benefits their households as well as the community at large, and which draws upon lessons learned from the study tour.

Anticipated Outputs

We anticipated the following outputs would result from the study tour:

- 1) Increased awareness among women from Hemis National Park and surrounding area of the context and key elements that lead to successful homestays and CBT-related activities;
- 2) The team will produce a joint report describing the sites visited, activities undertaken, key lessons learned and offering specific recommendations for continued development of homestays and other CBT activities in Ladakh, along with promoting the community's role in conserving and managing local natural resources and wildlife.

CBN Tour Activities and Lessons Learned

18th November: The Tour commenced with an initial orientation with participants from various villages gathering in the SLC office, Leh. Among the community members there was one travel agent and a tourism officer from the department of Tourism. A short briefing was conducted by Rinchen Wangchuk, including a list of requirements and things to carry. The itinerary of the program was announced in detail. As a few of the participants were missing, the detailed briefing was postponed for a later period.

Participants were accommodated at the Green Land Guest House for the time. This was their first experience of staying in a Local Guest House and was much appreciated as all felt at home.

19th November: The participants flew from Leh to Jammu early this morning, arriving Jammu by 9.am. Hitherto they were transferred to the Ladakh Sarai for the day's accommodation. After lunch the participants went visiting Bagh-e-Bahu Fort, which is an important tourist attraction of Jammu.

On returning to the Sarai Rinchen and Jigmet gave a presentation on the community based initiatives in Ladakh from year 2000 to present. This was followed by the tour Objectives and participants were asked to list their expectations from the tour. And finally some more briefings on Do's and Don'ts for the onward journey by train to Uttaranchal. Participants boarded the train at 19:00 hrs for their onward journey. Participants expressed shock at the large number of commuters in the train.

20th November: We reached Moradabad at 11 in the morning and Kamal from Wildrift Adventures was there at the railway station with a jeep to receive us. At around 17 hours we reached Wildrift camp at Sattal. After resting there for a while they served us some tea and Kamal gave a briefing on the Sattal camp, Surya village and their activities with the villagers. Since there are seven lakes in the area, it is named as Sattal. Lots of visitors come from different parts of the world including, students and foreigners, so there is a good scope of income generation for the villagers.

21st November: At around 10 in the morning the participants had a meeting with Mr. Manoj, director of the Wildrift Adventures. He told the participants about the Wildrift Adventures and their activities with the villagers of the Surya village. Wildrift applied APPA methods for involving the villagers and bringing out the best outputs by first Discovering their assets and capacities, which were Forest, Wildlife, Lake Sattal, Culture, Waterfall , Temple, Hills, Fruits, Vegetables and festivals. Based on the following assets planning was done for Ecotourism activities such as Kayaking in the Lake, Rock climbing, Water fall for showers, trekking and Homestays.

Apart from Homestays, environmental education for the women's group and the Youth and the villagers was discussed. Trainings were also provided on serving meals to tourists. Hitherto, we proceeded towards the Surya village, where we had a meeting with the women's group of the village. A discussion was initiated on the negative and positive impacts from tourism. Given the limited exposure to tourism the women there felt that they had only positive interactions and benefits from tourism so far. Their only source of linkage with tourists was through Wildrift Adventuress and they claimed to have received domestic help like collection of fuel wood from forests, farming and other such activities where tourists participated. Apart from that, income benefits were accruing through provision of meals and handicrafts. Wildrift Adventuress also promoted environmental awareness.

Further trainings were provided on homestay management, guides and card making. We had firsthand experience of an interesting game where a visitor had to treasure hunt for their meals through various clues and directions. During this time we provided some help by making greeting cards, designing them with flower petals. These were some existing examples of income generation for the village. The villagers also exchanged information with tourists and learning about different places as benefits.

Surya village is located about over a kilometer from the Sattal camp, situated on top of a hill overlooking the lake and surrounded by forest. Agricultural activities were dependent on rain water and there was one spring water source below the village at a distance of 20 minutes walk. Domestic livestock while grazing in the forest had to be guarded from predatory animals at all times. The village was peacefully located away from the road head and the villagers expressed no desire to have roads built as they feared noise and garbage pollution from this.

Observations: This was the first example and experience for most participants where they saw how a private adventure outfit catered to tourists with part of the benefits accruing to local villagers in the form of handicrafts, meals and also seasonal job opportunities at the camp.

Lessons learned: Sattal camp discovered the existing natural assets and turned them into Eco-tourism products, such as guided jungle walks, waterfalls, a cultural exchange program with the villagers, and kayaking in the lake.

22nd November: After breakfast we drove to the famous township of Nainital which surrounded a beautiful large lake in the centre. It was a booming township with plenty of vehicular traffic and clustered with concrete modern buildings. On asking some people there,

we were told that Nainital was a peaceful, clean and a heavenly place some twenty years ago. Now the forest landscape had been replaced with concrete, and the lake was contaminated with waste and pollution. There remains an increasing threat of overpopulation and increasing buildings which were concerning issues and lessons to learn from.

From here we proceeded to Choti Haldwani where on arrival we met Rajesh Bhatt, coordinator CBN Ecotourism Project. There first of all we went to the Jim Corbett museum where Rajesh gave detailed information about the life and achievements of Jim Corbett and his contributions towards the people of Kamaun and conservation. The village is located on the Ramnagar- Kaladhungi state highway and remains in a peaceful environment. With a population of over 500 people it depends mainly on agriculture.

The village has a unique history, as it belonged to Jim Corbett who worked for 30 years to develop it as a model village. Corbett tried to create Choti Halwani by settling farmers and supporting agriculture. The 9km wall constructed to protect crops from wild animals, the Chaupal where the villagers gathered for meeting with Corbett and the channels for irrigation are all intact and have become visitor attractions. As a result of CBT consultations between December 2001 and August 2002 by LEAD and other NGO's , there has been increased awareness about Jim Corbett Heritage and the significance of Choti Haldwani village in the Corbett folklore. Villagers have gained insights and started thinking about ecotourism and conservation issues.

The major tourism product at Choti Halwani is the Jim Corbett house which has been converted into a museum. From Choti Halwani we proceeded towards Kyari camp where we stayed overnight. After Dinner we were briefed by Manoj Choudary about their camp. Afterwards the Ladakhi participants headed by Norboo and Padma sang some folk songs of Ladakh while Kamal and Manoj sang Kamoani songs.

Observations and Lessons Learned:

- Choti Halwani existed as an unimportant village despite its historical importance. However, with proper interpretation and preservation of important village historical sites (Corbett House, Chaupal) it has turned into an important tourist attraction.
- On the other hand, chaotic tourism growth of a beautiful township like Nainital headed towards destruction of its natural resources.

23rd November: Kyari village is located at a distance of 7km from the headquarters of Corbett National Park at Ramnagar. Wildrift company tried to set up a camp on village land in 1996 by obtaining a lease. However they failed to attract visitors and were forced to abandon the project. Wildrift again approached the village panchayat and obtained a second lease for three years for setting up accommodation. Camp Kyari started functioning in Dec 2000. Initially the camp was set up primarily for winters by including the villagers and improving the huts for tourists. Further they made some furniture like chairs and tables using the stones from the river. The camp is similar to the Surya camp. The difference is only that in Kyari the village panchayat, villagers and the Wildrift company all work in co-ordination and 25% of the profit goes to the village panchayat. The profit is used for the benefit of the village and tries to help the unemployed youths.

The participants were divided into three groups and went to Kyari village where we met the villagers and they told us that they are getting benefit from the tourists in different ways. These are juice-making from fruits available in the village, the making of furniture from local forest wood, employment of youths in Kyari village at Camp Kyari, income generation from homestays, and offering traditional dances for tourists.

Kyari is a peaceful village. Different types of crops are grown there. They get their water for irrigation from Sitabani. The village has a moderate climate. Afterwards participants trekked from Kyari to the waterfall temple along the river. En route, Rajesh Bhatt and Kamal explained the different types of butterflies, plants, birds and tracks of wild ungulates and leopard that we saw along the way.

Once again there was a meeting with Manoj in the evening and he told the participants about the difficulties they faced in the beginning but later on a few of the villagers came and joined the Wildrift Adventures. He further said that it is very important to involve the locals in the activities. There should be equity in the income and villagers should be included in planning and have communication with some travel agents.

This was followed by a cultural evening during which the Kyari villagers and the participants gathered in their traditional outfits and sang and danced around the camp-fire until midnight.

Observation: Camp Kyari was a unique example of cost effective, resource use in local style and yet meeting highly serviced standards for tourists.

Lessons Learned:

- Community involvement through existing local organization (Panchayat system).
- Transparency and participation in decision making and profit sharing between community and private entrepreneur.
- Local ownership of the camp through community involvement.

24th November: We went to the Corbett National Park. There the participants visited the museum, where we saw that in previous times there were about eight species of Tiger in the world but now there are only five species, while three species have become extinct. Corbett National Park has a dense forest and is rich in Biodiversity. There are guest houses and hotels for the tourists and elephant rides were available for exploring the jungle. On the Park gates, there were shops selling locally made handicrafts with Tiger and other wildlife printed on them. Participants bought a lot of souvenirs to take back home.

There are some rules to be followed while going in the National Park such as:

1. Maintain silence.
2. Flash photography not allowed.
3. Vehicles are not to blow horn while inside the Corbett National park.
4. Do not feed or disturb animals.

Following is a list of wildlife sighted: Sambhar (swamp deer), Cheetal (spotted deer), Barking deer, Hog deer, wild boar, Magar crocodile, otters, Asian Tusker elephants, langur, and

Jackal. Among the birds sighted were serpent eagle, kingfisher, peacock, jungle fowl, marsh harrier etc.

Lessons Learned:

- The Park displayed a rich bio-diversity unexploited by man.
- It was an ecotourism example where tourism activities were managed by National park authorities with benefits to local communities living outside the park.
- Handicrafts and souvenirs on wildlife of the jungle that were ecotourism products of great demand.

25th November: We left Ramnagar for Delhi by train, arriving on the 26th morning. After breakfast the participants went on a historical visit to the Red fort. From there they proceeded on to visit the Zoo and the famous India Gate. However, due to the rush hour they were stuck in a traffic jam for over 3 hrs. On returning to their lodge they were all very tired and skipped the evening discussion for an early night's sleep.

The next day was spent writing reports and getting feedback. Participants expressed shock at the amount of traffic and concrete buildings. They saw this as another form of jungle where they were surrounded by humans in the form of hungry ghosts, where one could neither breathe fresh air nor drink clean water. A place where one had to pay for everything and yet never be at peace.

Although participants had a wonderful learning experience in Corbett, Sattal and Kayri they seemed relieved to leave Delhi on the morning of the 28th for Ladakh.

Lessons Learned:

- Man pays a heavy price for urbanization through degradation of the environment and loss of peace of mind.

Participants' Expectations of the Tour

Tsewang Dorjey (Kaya):

- I was expecting to know about their culture, tradition, to ask them about their village, their relation with the tourists and how they are benefiting from the tourists, to know about the wildlife found in those areas.

Padma (Rumbak), Rigzin Dolma (Rumbak) and Stanzin Palkit (Markha):

- We would like to know about the culture, tradition and to learn how they work for ecotourism. They further said that they learned to preserve our culture, tradition and how to improve existing materials for better income generation.

Skarma Otzer-Hankar and Tsewang Norboo-Ulay:

- I wanted to know the differences between the villages of Ladakh and the villages outside Ladakh, their culture, tradition and to see some wild animals such as Elephant, Peacock, and Crocodile. and Tiger

Yangchen Dolma (Tourist Department):

- With the culture, tradition and way of livelihood of the people I would like to have some idea about how to improve the traditional materials in the village so that they can be used for income generation by displaying them to the tourists.

SLT Dorje Chitta (Adventure Tours):

- I would like to learn more about Eco-tourism. What initiatives and existing examples are there in other states that we travel agents in Ladakh could learn from?
- I would like to come back as an ecotourist service provider.

Rinchen Wangchuk (Snow Leopard Conservancy):

- Firstly, I would like the participants and myself to learn from seeing good ecotourism examples from CBN initiative.
- To understand what challenges, difficulties and opportunities they had while venturing into new projects.
- To see the role of private entrepreneurs and their linkages with local communities for tourism and conservation.
- Lastly, I would wish that the participants would come back with their own ideas and commitments for ecotourism.

What did we learn and how could we apply it in our context?

Tsewang Dorjey (Kaya), Skarma Otzer:

- I learned from this tour to preserve stupas, statues, holy books, our culture and traditions. To keep our environment clean, to include the locals in planning of activities related to tourism, Sattal and Kyari are good examples for making good income from the tourists as these can be made without too much expenditure

Padma (Rumbak), Rigzin Dolma:

- When I am back in the village, I would like to advise the villagers to preserve our culture and tradition and to provide eco-friendly services to the tourists.

Stanzin Palkit (Markha), Tashi Gyalpo (Sku):

- I learned to conserve our environment such as the mountains, forests and biodiversity and to preserve our culture and tradition. I would like to advise the same to the villagers of Markha.

Yangchen Dolma (tourism department):

- I will try to get more and more tourists to Ladakh and send those to different villages by giving them some information about the villages of Ladakh so that they can know about their culture and livelihood. I would further suggest firstly to use the materials available in our villages to provide local food for tourists. Services should be clean and simple according to local traditions.
- As a tourism officer I would like to promote and create policies and schemes that encourage village tourism.

Jigmet Dadul (Snow Leopard Conservancy):

- I will try to go to the remote villages of Ladakh and give suggestions to make income from the tourists and I will also try to find out what type of training they need.
- I will advise local people to preserve our culture, tradition, biodiversity etc. Before starting any activity there should be mutual understanding between the villagers and the NGOs to have faith in the villagers and the villagers should know that it is for their benefit.

Dorje Chitta – Snow Leopard Trails (Adventure Tours Company):

- I would like to share with other travel agencies in Ladakh about the importance and scope of Eco-tourism. Our Travel agency has been involved in promoting community based tourism through Home-stays but now that I have personally seen its benefits to conservation I would like to assist in the further trainings and implementation of eco-tourism amongst local communities. Lastly, as a travel agent we shall follow the ecotourism path.

Jungle Walks Guided by Kamal and Rajesh



Nature interpretation was an important eco-tourism product whereby participants discovered the different types of butterflies, plants, birds and wildlife tracks.

Rinchen Wangchuk - Snow Leopard Conservancy:

- It was encouraging to see good private entrepreneurs that are working not only for their own interest but are considering the very sustainability of tourism by involving local communities in benefit sharing and conservation of their cultural and natural resource which are the very basis for ecotourism. I would have wished to have more travel agents involved in this tour, but given the greater importance of local communities and limited resources it would have not been possible. However, given the important role of private entrepreneurs for sustenance of community based tourism I shall forward a report to all interested travel agents and shall try to involve more entrepreneurs in future.

- Community involvement through existing local organization was a good example in the case of Kyari. It was clear that they could not involve all the village households so they contributed to the community revolving fund from the profits of the business. We had advised a similar scheme in the villages where homestays have been developed but after having seen Kyari, the participants brought up this issue again and committed to contribute 15% of their profit into their community fund which would be used for other development and conservation activities in the village.
- Proper interpretation of the environment by guides give a positive and learning experience to the visitor as well as a good source of income locals. I would like to conduct a naturalist guides training for the local communities of the Hemis National Park with the help of SLC Director Dr. Rodney Jackson.

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Appendix 1

The Corbett-Binsar-Nainital (CBN) Ecotourism Initiative

Ecotourism is a potential strategy for reconciling biodiversity conservation with local development in ecologically fragile areas. Ecotourism is one of the 15 thrust areas of Ministry of Environment & Forests. With the formation of Uttranchal, the provision of employment to the youth and generation of revenues through development of tourism is an opportunity and challenge for the new Government. The year 2002 has been declared by the United Nations as the International Year of Ecotourism and also as the International Year of the Mountains. The CBN Initiative seeks to take advantage of this opportunity for generating benefits that act as incentives for the conservation of natural and cultural resources of the CBN region through promotion of ecotourism.

The Corbett Binsar Nainital region stands out for its rich diversity of natural and cultural resources at the global level. The region is a popular tourist destination and has a variety of attractions and reasonably well developed tourist facilities. Consultations with stakeholders and programmes for community involvement in conservation and tourism have been implemented in the past. However, endangered species such as the elephant and the tiger are under grave threat, land use changes are leading to severe human/animal conflicts, there has been a decline in foreign arrivals and local communities are marginalized in the tourism process and receive negligible benefits. There is a lack of vision and direction in conservation and tourism development and various agencies are acting in isolation or at cross purposes leading to fewer benefits for conservation and lowered viability of tourism enterprises.

Purpose: The CBN Initiative has been launched to address the interface issues between conservation and tourism. The purpose of the CBN Ecotourism Initiative is to increase effectiveness of conservation programmes through greater private sector and community conservation efforts, community involvement in tourism to increase local benefits and improved sustainability and competitiveness of the regional tourism industry. With Corbett NP, Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary and Nainital as nodes around which action can be directed in future, stakeholders can work together to achieve this goal. At the heart of the CBN Ecotourism Initiative are participatory multi-stakeholder processes that will build ownership and a greater commitment to conservation and ecotourism goals in the region.

Activities: Participatory planning activities being organized from Sept. 2001 to Sept. 2002

- Multi Stakeholder Training Workshop in January 2001 to identify partners and develop skills
- Consultations with various stakeholder groups during Sept to December 2001 to identify assets, dreams, limitations and broad group of strategies/actions
- Multi Stakeholder Workshop on 7th –8th November 2001 with representatives to share consultation outputs, validate CBN area, define elements of framework, and generate linkages and partnerships
- Planning Session for development of Framework
- Presentation before the Govt. of Uttranchal
- Research on status of conservation and tourism in the region, including visitor attitude and market survey to fill gaps
- Model Community Based Tourism Plans for four village (*Kyari in Ramnagar Forest Division, Bhakrakot in West Almora Division, Choti Haldwani in Terai West Forest Division and Dalar in Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary*)
- Nature Guide Training in Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary and subsequent Ecotourism CBN Ecotourism Study Tour
- Ecotourism training for staff of Infinity Resorts and The Corbett Foundation

- Status Survey for habitat assessment and identification of trekking routes in Kunjakharak-Patkot sector
- Training Workshop on Ecotourism Product Development and Marketing at Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary
- Informal contacts / Meeting with Donor agencies in April 2002 for funding support
- Development of materials for generating awareness (poster, code, brochure)
- Preparation of a Manual for Community Based Tourism in Himalayas

Framework: The Framework for Conservation and Tourism in the CBN region would bring out the significance of ecotourism in the context of Uttranchal and define objectives and criteria for ecotourism development in the CBN region. It will describe and analyze key issues that emerged in the consultations for converting CBN assets into ecotourism products and propose strategies and activities to achieve the ecotourism goals. The Framework would also prioritize activities, lay down potential roles for stakeholder groups for each activity and indicate resources required for implementation. The document would illustrate some of the successes and limitations of tourism activities in the CBN region through case studies. The participatory process adopted for the development of the framework has led to an increase in awareness regarding ecotourism and linkages and partnerships between individuals and organizations. Commitments have already been made by several individuals as well as organizations for actions in the near future. The Framework document once finalized would provide vision and direction for ecotourism development in CBN. The Framework would serve as a basis for initiation of future policy development, internal changes within ongoing programmes within Government Departments, NGOs and the Private Sector. It would also serve as the basis for the development of a variety of project proposals for funding from both internal and external sources.

Outputs: The CBN Initiative through its widespread consultative process has stimulated thinking and debate on conservation and tourism interface issues in the region. Various training programmes (nature guide training at Binsar, CBN Ecotourism Study Tour, Training Workshops at Corbett and at Binsar) have served to link stakeholders from the three nodes and helped create synergy for ecotourism initiatives. The framework document will serve as the basis for future ecotourism activities. The awareness materials in the form of brochure and posters will help carry forward the message. The manual will serve as a basis for training programmes. The model CBT plans will develop skills and demonstrate the viability of the concept. The initiative seeks to define roles and strengthen partnerships while mobilizing commitments towards action from various institutions and organizations. The CBN Initiative also provides a model for planning and development of ecotourism in a participatory manner for other regions in Uttranchal and other parts of the Himalayas.

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Core Group: The core group consists of the following

LEAD: Rajiv Bhartari, Professor, Wildlife Institute of India
 Fellows Elizabeth Atkinson, Senior Policy Advisor Domestic Emissions Trading – Analysis, Climate Change Secretariat Canada
 Pushkin Phartiyal, Coordinator, CDS, Nainital
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