

start, we are delighted that Alina Stonor has agreed to become a co-opted member of the Committee as a representative of the Society's younger members. Alina has long and varied family connections with Nepal and an active interest in the country and we much look forward to her contributions to our discussions.


Other ideas being floated are the active encouragement of schools and universities that have visited Nepal to become corporate members; the encouragement of existing corporate members to make fuller use of the entitlement of five of their own members to attend lectures; the publicis-

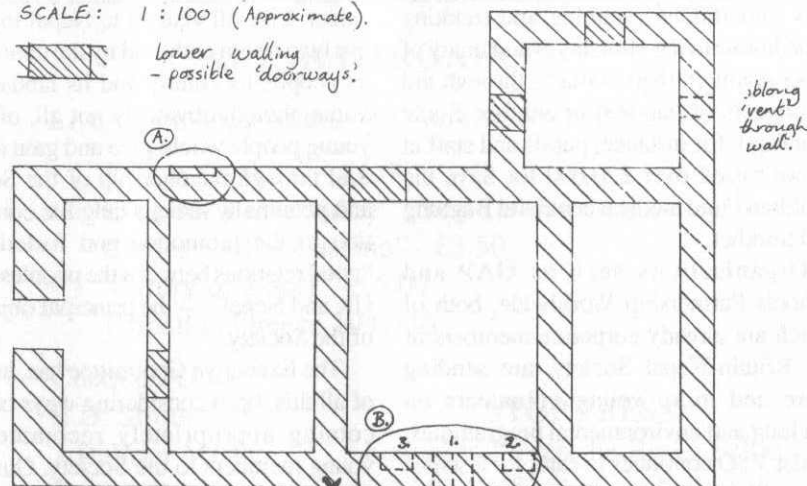
ing of the Society both through the Nepalese Embassy in London and through our embassy and the British Council in Kathmandu; and the possibility of encouraging affiliation to the Society of interested groups in universities where there is a strong nucleus of Nepalese students or UK students with an active and informed interest in Nepal.

We hope that these and other ideas will help to strengthen the Society yet further and would be delighted to hear the ideas of fellow members or their reactions (of whatever flavour!) to ours.

KHOLA SONGBRE - Plan of Large House to the West of the Settlement.

SCALE: 1 : 100 (Approximate).

 lower walling
- possible 'doorways'.



Highest point measured
3.5m of wall still standing.

THE RUINS OF KHOLA SONGBRE

by Mark Temple

Khola Songbre is one of the names by which the local people know a ruined village which is considered to be amongst the oldest Gurung settlements. By happy chance I got the opportunity to visit it in April 1992. I was on my way with a small party of friends towards the Namun Pass and on our first night out of Pokhara we stayed at the village of Thak and met Dr. Alan Macfarlane, an anthropologist who first researched there 25 years ago. He suggested we should try to find Khola Songbre, about which he had heard reports but never visited.

The oral tradition among the Gurungs of many of the villages to the North East of Pokhara, including Thak, Tangtin, Khilang and Siklis, is that their villages were founded by forebears who moved down from Khola Songbre. The ruins were reported to be high on the Lekh above Tangtin.

Alan asked that if we found the village we should note the shape and number of the houses and photograph the ruins. The original shape of Gurung houses, oval or square, has been a question of some controversy amongst those interested in Gurung culture.

From Thak we walked to Tangting and enlisted the help of Damarsingh Gurung to act as our guide. After two days not very hurried walking and two nights camping in the jungle we arrived at Khola Songbre. It is on the South facing slope of the ridge to the North of the Ganch Khola at a height of 3,300 metres. The position is 28 degrees 22.7 minutes North and 84 degrees 11.7 East. To reach the site requires a one day detour from the main trekking routes from

Tangting or Siklos to the Namun Pass. The site would only be normally visited by cattle herds from the Bhujung area who graze the pastures in this part of forest during the monsoon. A knowledgeable local guide is needed to follow the minor forest paths.

The ruins are extensive and the most intact walls still stand about 14 feet high. The photograph and plan show the largest and most intact building which lies on its own one hundred yards to the West of the main settlement. The main site suggests a small central square and alleys between the clustered houses are discernible. In the centre of the square is a stone post about three feet tall. All the houses have four sides and the corners are often the best preserved part of the walls. None appeared oval. From the height of the walls it seems clear that at least some houses had two storeys. Large trees grow from within the ruins and it is clear that the site has been abandoned for several hundred years and perhaps much longer. We did not have the time to explore the area thoroughly but identified forty houses in the main settlement.

Khola Songbre is 1,300 metres higher than the highest villages occupied by the Gurungs today. Our guide, Damarsingh, explained that it is said in his village of Tangting that the people from Khola Songbre occupied three other sites above Tangting before the present day village was founded. Much more limited ruins can be observed in these places although we did not have the opportunity to see them.

What do the ruins of Khola Songbre imply about the origins of the Gurungs? The fact that this village was settled in an era when there must have been a lot of available forest at lower altitudes suggests that its climate and resources were preferred by the early Gurungs who founded it. They presumably moved in from a similar or higher area and so their livestock and crops and perhaps even the lifestyle of the people led them to select this site. They could have moved West or East along the Annapurna Range but the proximity of the Namun Pass makes a migration from Manang or Tibet possible.

Standing in those ruins one cannot but respect the hardiness of the people who built their village in beautiful but tough, cold country. Their successors went on to

populate a big area of the South-eastern slopes of the Annapurna Range. Perhaps Khola Songbre is the village to which Dr. Macfarlane and I.B. Gurung refer in their book "Gurungs of Nepal" when they say in relation to their origin that "they came to a single village, where their traditions and culture were confirmed and then gradually dispersed to their present settlements". Their way of life was presumably mainly pastoral but it will require archaeological skills to fill in the gaps in the oral tradition of their descendants.

Our party comprised Damarsing Gurung, Lekhabahadur Gurung, Bhesbahadur Gurung, Surjiman Gurung, Martin Wright and Catherine Ruthven — who did the drawing.



Extensive Ruins

TREKKING GENTLY IN THE HIMALAYA

by Mayura Brown

This is the message in a small, important book which trekkers can buy from the Traveller Information Centre (Tridevi Marg, Thamel, Kathmandu). With an estimated 70,000 trekkers of all nationalities invading Nepal annually, the fragile environment of the Himalaya is under continual adverse pressure. The Kathmandu Environmental Education Project (KEEP) whose Patron is Lord Hunt, and the Himalayan Rescue Association (HRA) are at the T.I. Centre to give help and advice to anyone who calls 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. Sunday to Friday. There is a Coffee shop, Library and reading-room, a lecture-hall and boards with weather reports and health and safety notices.

While wishing all visitors to Nepal a really memorable stay among unsurpassed scenery, one must ask them to respect the religion, culture and traditions of the Nepalese people. KEEP can be of invaluable assistance in these matters, and some prior literature can be obtained from their U.K. office, 72 Newhaven Road, Edinburgh EH6 5QG (Tel. 031-554-9977).

The greatest disadvantage of tourism is the amount of non-biodegradable, non-burnable garbage left behind by travellers. At our 12th January lecture meeting we were shown a selection of excellent slides by Mr. Steven Berry and Mr. Kev Reynolds of areas where they had trekked. Mr.

Reynolds, whose strong affection for the mountains was greatly appreciated, told us about the rubbish left by some trekkers where they had camped. It took him and his party several hours to clear up these other peoples' refuse, and this act of courtesy earned our gratitude. (The talk by Mr. K.K. Gurung on the Chitwan National Park deserves a special article and will appear at a later date.)

Now that the West has become conservation-minded and engages in re-cycling so much that was once thrown away, how can we possibly allow Everest to become a vast rubbish dump. I was brought up to revere Sagarmatha (Everest) as a sacred place. The early climbers held the mountains in awe when ascent and descent were both dangerous and difficult. Now queues form to allow one group to go up as the others go down. In May this year thirty-eight reached the summit. Lord Hunt, leader of the 1953 Everest Expedition, has said that the mountain these days is "an appalling sight with all the litter left by climbers. It is also horrifying that human bodies are left there". Is it too much to ask that both climbers and trekkers show some courtesy and consideration to these great mountains and the people who dwell below them.

(See "The Mountain that fell to Earth" by Ed. Douglas in 'New Scientist' Magazine 19 May 1993.)