

## **Activities in the International Mountain Museum, Pokhara, Nepal**

### **Introduction**

The International Mountain Museum (IMM) in Pokhara, Nepal, was established by the Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA) in February 2004. Many mountaineering or alpine clubs and mountaineering associations around the world supported the opening of the museum. Among donating countries, Japan was the largest donor of funds and articles for exhibition.

Besides donations from mountaineers, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has supported its operations and management by dispatching “Senior Overseas Volunteers” since 2002. I was the second senior volunteer from JICA to IMM, and I worked there from April 2004 to April 2006.

The first volunteer from JICA contributed greatly to the opening of the mountain museum. My mission was management of the museum. I wanted to make the museum become economically independent. There were many tasks to be done at IMM because it was in the initial stage after the opening. I had to take part in everything in the museum including exhibition collections and design, administration, accounting, marketing, publicity, training, the library, the souvenir shop, and so on. This is a report of activities at the International Mountain Museum.

### **What is the International Mountain Museum?**

The establishment of the mountain museum in Nepal was a longtime dream of NMA, especially the late Mr. Dawa Norbu Sherpa, who was a former president of NMA. The 51,000 square meters of land for the museum was bought in 1985. The cornerstone laying ceremony was held in 1995, and two years later, Dawa Norbu passed away. Due to a lack of NMA funds, it took a long time until the soft opening on May 29, 2002. Among those attending the ceremony were Ms. Junko Tabei, the first woman to summit Mt. Everest, and Mr. Apa Sherpa, who holds the record for the most of ascents of Mt. Everest.

The grand opening of IMM was held on February 5, 2004, with the present Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa of Nepal attending. More than a hundred Japanese attended the ceremony. The Japanese showed stronger interest than those from other countries. Responding to the NMA’s request for financial support, the Japanese mountaineering world established a liaison council, which consisted of six associations, including the Japanese Alpine Club. As for the results of the fund-raising campaign,

approximately US\$200,000 was donated by Japanese. Those from other countries mostly donated materials instead of money.

### **Before the arrival in Nepal**

I first learned about IMM from *Himalaya* (No. 385, Dec. 2003), the journal published by the Himalayan Association of Japan (HAJ). Mr. Nabin Ghimire, an IMM manager, received training at several mountaineering museums in Japan in that year. When I passed the selection examination of JICA, I visited Omachi Alpine Museum and Tateyama Caldera Sabo (control of soil erosion) Museum, where Nabin Ghimire had been. I met many people who contributed to IMM, and I received many useful suggestions from Mr. Yuichi Matsuda of the Japanese Alpine Club.

### **Arrival in Kathmandu**

Nepal was experiencing politically unstable conditions during my stay there. The day we arrived in Kathmandu, Maoists directed a bandh, or general strike. “Bandh” means “closed” in Nepali. It was very quiet in Kathmandu City due to less traffic. Fortunately, cars with blue number plates (for transporting foreigners) were permitted, so we were able to reach the hotel. It was the start of many ups and downs in Nepal. The bandh was executed from time to time and created some difficulty for us afterwards.

### **Overview of the IMM**

Pokhara, where IMM is located, is the gate city to Annapurna and Dhaulagiri. Reverend Ekai Kawaguchi admired Pokhara as the most beautiful city in Nepal more than 110 years ago in his book, *Three Years in Tibet*.

The museum with the building area of 3,110 square meters, a restaurant and traditional Nepali village are on a vast area of land. The view of the Himalayas from the IMM’s garden is splendid. Machhapuchhre (Mt. Fish Tail) rises in the center of the view, then Hiun Chuli, Annapurna I, Annapurna South, and, somewhat isolated, Dhaulagiri to the west. To the east of Machhpuchhre are Annapurna III, Annapurna IV, Annapurna II, a little bit less than 8000 meters, and Lamjung Himal. The east of Lamjung, we can see Manaslu, P29 (renamed Harka Gurung Peak in 2007), and Himalchuli. The summits of these three peaks were first reached by Japanese. This view is a part of the museum—that is, the museum was intentionally designed so that this view can be seen from inside, too. The only fly in the ointment is that we cannot see the magnificent view during bad weather.

There are three sections of the exhibition: mountaineering, natural history, and ethnic groups. This organization seems common among almost all mountaineering museums

around the world, such as the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute in Darjeeling and the Alpine Museum in Zermatt.

The first exhibition section is of ethnic groups. People in Nepal, such as the Tamang, Thakali, Gurung, and Sherpa, are displayed as mannequins wearing native dress. In the center of this section, there are photos donated by Austrians that compare present Nepalis living in mountain areas and former Alpine people. People from other countries are snowy northern people of Japan, and people of Slovenia. The Slovenian mountaineering world contributed to the mountaineering school of NMA.

The second section of the museum is for natural history and other subjects. The first exhibition is of fourteen peaks above 8000 meters around the world. The center of this section is about the geology of the Himalaya. Plate tectonics, the process of how the Himalaya was formed, and related rocks and fossils are exhibited. Expansion of the glacier lakes and glacier lake outburst flood (GLOF) are part of the exhibit; these have received attention as the results of global warming.

Visitors will be attracted by large Himalayan aerial photos taken by Koichiro Omori that are displayed on the surrounding wall of this section. Photos of alpine flowers which were taken by me, and WWF (World Wild Fund for nature) are in the same room. And exhibits such as a mounted leopard and snow leopard have been added by the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP).

Exhibits of Reverend Ekai Kawaguchi and Dr. Toni Hagen are in one room. The late Dr. Toni Hagen was a Swiss geologist who introduced Nepal in all aspects to the world. His daughter visited IMM in 2005 when the re-opening reception was held.

Incidentally, the late Dr. Harka Gurung corner was opened in 2007. He was a famous geographer in Nepal and the first Minister of Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation. He contributed to the establishment of IMM, but he passed away in a helicopter accident in 2006.

The most inner part of the museum on the first floor is the mountaineering section. The photos and stories of the first ascent to 8000 meter peaks are displayed first. Then, climbing gear and photos of the first summitters are displayed in glass showcases. As for the Manaslu corner, climbing gear, photos, and notes of the late Toshio Imanishi, who was one of the first summitters, occupies large space. This is an eye-catcher for Japanese. Maurice Herzog of Annapurna, the first summitter to a peak above 8000 meter is popular with old mountaineers. For Kangchenjunga, George Band donated his climbing gear. There is also an exhibition corner on Junko Tabei.

Everest expedition photos, from the first expedition in 1921 to the first ascent in 1953

by the British team, are valuable records donated by the Royal Geographic Society.

There is a corner on climbing gear. Though I wanted to complete this section with a full array of gear, I did not have enough time and funds. As for the environment, abandoned climbing gear collected by Ken Noguchi as a part of Everest cleaning activities are on display. A Yeti corner and large model of Mt. Everest are popular with visitors.

On the second floor, there are exhibits for outside bodies, such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), which is becoming well-known for its research of GLOF.

The library was open from the beginning thanks to funds from NMA. Mr. Hisao Ando who was the first senior volunteer from JICA, and other Japanese donated Himalayan related books at first. Many more books have since been donated by Japanese and other foreigners. Mr. Tomomi Yamada of the Kathmandu Club House donated many books, and I, together with a friend, donated journals and books. As a result, the number of books has increased by one thousand to 1,800.

One of the eye-catchers on the second floor is a genuine temple of Tibetan Buddhism. A festival is held here from time to time. Ms. Sonam, a Tibetan refugee, is the guide of the temple.

### **Facilities in the IMM garden**

There is a Manaslu model in the garden. It is made of stones and concrete, and the height is around 10 meters. Visitors enjoy taking photos and climbing the peak. Part of the model includes a climbing wall with belay pins. I once showed the museum staff, who did not know much about climbing tools, how to use climbing rope and gear.

At the beginning of 2006, the French made a proposal to construct a climbing wall. The cornerstone laying ceremony was held in February, and it was attended by the French Ambassador and Mr. Henri Sigayret, a designer and a contractor of the wall. Mr. Sigayret, a Frenchman was the second to climb Annapurna I. He and his wife stayed in a small house in the garden of IMM, and he constructed the wall while supervising four workers. This climbing wall was made manually with concrete blocks, reinforced concrete and stones for holds. The height of the wall is 20 meters. It consists of three combined triangular slabs like vertical tail fins of an airplane. Each slab has two sides, so there are six vertical climbing walls in total.

### **Business planning and its implementation**

At the beginning of my arrival at IMM, I carefully observed exhibitions, equipment,

operations, and so on. After observing, I began work on various issues and tasks at IMM. A key goal was to increase the number of visitors by making the museum more attractive. In order to realize the objectives, it was also essential to develop business and marketing plans.

When I made a presentation about “Issues and subjects for IMM” at the NMA office in Kathmandu, top executives, such as Ang Tsering Shrupa, the President of NMA, and Bhumi Lal Lama, the General Secretary, showed appreciation and requested that I make a business plan.

Two months later, I made another presentation on “Business planning of IMM” at the NMA office. Top executives of NMA fully agreed with my presentation. I thought NMA would approve my budget proposal, but I realized later that it was over-optimistic thinking. No money was immediately remitted by NMA. NMA has many business fields, another decision-making process, and limited funds. Nabin made efforts to attain funds from NMA little by little, and we proceeded with the plan step by step, revising the plan along the way.

### **IMM staff**

Mr. Prasad Rai, a specialist of ethnic groups, was the head curator. Nabin Ghimire took part in the construction of the museum from the beginning as a civil engineer. He was also responsible for administration, facilities and operations. He was a reliable person for me and NMA. There were five other staff members in the office, who worked under Nabin.

As for operational staff, there were five guides, three receptionists, four persons for routine work, and four women for cleaning. Generally speaking, blue collar workers worked harder than office staff.

With Nepal being a multiracial country, IMM’s employees come from various ethnic groups. Besides Indo-Aryans like Bahun and Chhetri, the Rai, Tamang, Newar, Thakali, Tibetan refugees, and others were represented on the IMM staff.

Ordinary Nepalis are not interested in mountaineering or mountains. I was surprised when I discovered that, except for some of the staff, most did not know the name of the peaks from Pokhara except for the famous peak Machhapuchhre. When I handed out the list of the names of peaks, height, and the nationality of the first to ascend them, they tried to remember quickly. Because most of staff knew little about mountaineering history, geology, rocks and fossils, etc., they did not fully understand about the exhibition. The manager did not always seem concerned that some staff members were lackadaisical about their working hours. Training for knowledge, discipline, and establishing a management system were also important aspect of the job.

## **Events**

There were lots of events in the museum. One of the biggest events during my stay was the International Mountain Day, held in December 2004. Then Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba attended the ceremony. After much marching by many ethnic groups, there were lengthy speeches and an awards ceremony. After the ceremony, there was dancing on the stage and in the garden. A great many participants filled up the vast garden and the museum. Since it was the most aggressive time of anti-government activities by Maoists, army soldiers and armed police guarded the Prime Minister. The next year, on February 1, Deuba fell from power when the king declared a state of emergency.

Another impressive event was the second opening anniversary in February 2006. IMM invited selected students from public schools and gave them a tour and lecture. I lectured on the formation of the Himalayas. They listened eagerly and asked me many questions. I felt better about their future after this experience because I had heard about the many differences between private and public schools.

## **Number of visitors**

The number of visitors increased steadily after the grand opening. The total number of visitors in the year from February 2004 to January 2005 was 34,400, an average of 95 a day. The following year, until January 2006, the total number of visitors was 55,500, an average of 154 a day, and an attendance of 161% compared with the previous year. The growth ratio of entrance revenue was 132%. The reason why the growth ratio of income is smaller than the number of visitors is that the number of students and Nepalis, whose entrance fees were cheaper than those of foreigners, increased sharply. The parking lot was sometimes full of buses from schools. It was delightful that IMM was acknowledged by Nepalis and performed the role of an educational institution.

The distribution ratio of the number of visitors for 2005 was 61% student, 28% Nepali adults, 3% Indian, and 8% foreigners excluding SAARC countries. The entrance fee was different by group, costing 300 Nepal rupees for foreigners, the most expensive, and 15 rupees for students, for instance. The component ratio of the admission fee from foreigners was 48% in 2005. In other words, about half of the income came from foreigners. It means that IMM contributed to the increase of foreign currency and employment opportunities for Nepal.

Of the income from foreigners, a little less than 40% came from Japanese. This means that around 20% of the total income came from Japanese visitors. Besides Japanese, 9.8% of the foreign visitors were from UK, 7.5% from Korea, 4.2% from France, and 3.8% from Germany. It was effective for me to ask editors of leading guidebooks around the world to

mention IMM.

After returning to Japan, I have visited Nepal every year. From around autumn of 2006, the number of tourists has increased, and the number of visitors has also increased, particularly from the year 2007. As for its monthly income, IMM now makes a profit during some months in the year.

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Two years in Nepal was a short period of time in one sense. I put many plans into effect and improved many aspects of the museum. Though I wanted to do much more, the time was too short. We faced some difficulties in achieving our tasks in Nepal, as might be the case in any developing country, but my situation in IMM was much better than it might have been at other institutions in Nepal.

I was happy to utilize fully my experiences and knowledge of business fully and, above all, my hobby of mountaineering. It was a good opportunity to meet many climbers, prominent people, and high government officials around the world.