

Apologies for the longer than usual gap between newsletters, it really was the beginning of September when we wrote the last newsletter. Since then we have been on an extended trek in the Annapurna area, and have also been very busy with the Training Institute. In September we were still in the tail end of the monsoon, writing about the landslides. Now the weather is dry – usually we have no rain between October and June, except for a few light showers in January and February. If we go to Kathmandu we have to remember to take umbrellas, there are often heavy thundery showers when it is completely dry in Butwal.

So now the level in the rivers has started to drop, this means less water for the hydroelectric power houses, and we have severe power shortages. At present we are without electricity for about 50 hours each week, we have just had a new schedule, so we try and plan around the power cuts, but it still causes many problems. This is especially a problem for industry, where machines and labour are idle, or standby generators have to be used, producing electricity at about three times the cost of the main supply. At home we have an efficient DC battery system, which gives us sufficient light and cooling fans, so there it is only a minor inconvenience.

The new government, of Maoist and United Marxist Leninist political party members (mostly), are saying the right things about developing the power supply infrastructure, however any project of significant size will take more than five years to complete, so any early improvement cannot be expected.

### Butwal Technical Institute

We were able to welcome the Minister of Industry to the Institute at the end of September, (we report to the Ministry of Industry through the Department of Cottage and Small Industries) in recognition of the Institute's role in training people from the same target area as the Department



of Cottage and Small Industries. The Minister (a woman) spoke very favourably about the work of the Institute which has certainly improved morale and motivation. We were also able to have some useful discussions with the senior civil servants that accompanied her, which was also encouraging. Following that visit the Ministry announced the appointment of a new director for the Institute, who has previous experience working at the institute, and has general support from the local community and institute staff. We are now very busy, with a new first year in full time training, and in developing

a future vision and detailed development plan. The intention is to maintain the existing programmes of apprenticeship training, along with expansion into a range of compatible short (three and six month) courses. This would more than double the number of students trained each year, from the current 250 to more than 600. There is of course a need for financial resources, from a western perspective the amount seems quite modest, but difficult to



arrange in Nepal.

First year training is always good to see. We take young people with no previous experience of engineering, or working in a regulated environment. In fifteen weeks we have to give them a culture of workplace discipline, safety and the basic skills to enable them to be useful employees to their industrial sponsors. They then carry on with their Institute studies on a part time basis for the rest of the apprenticeship. In two years the development in skills, confidence and capability is remarkable – the two pictures show students at either end of the two year period, both of girls although 80% are boys.

## Trekking

Each year in the autumn we trek in the mountains, this year we again headed for the Annapurna range. We have walked over most of the regular tourist trekking routes in the Annapurna region, so this year we took a somewhat less used route. It took us north from the main routes, heading through the last of the main Himalayan mountain range and into the high valleys that are right on the Tibetan border. There was some confusion in the planning stage as to what facilities were available, including whether food and lodging could be found. Eventually we decided on light weight camping,



and taking enough basic food for the trip, in the expectation that additional food could be bought. However, once we left the popular route not only was food not available, we found almost no one lived along our route – in three days of walking only one house was inhabited. Water was also difficult, only generally available from the main river, mostly down at the bottom of a steep valley. Our destination, a small place called Phugaon, had a hotel, however only one room, which everyone slept and cooked in. That was OK, but it was also a Buddhist festival of some sort, and three Buddhist nuns were chanting their scriptures in the room as well. So we decided to put our tent in the only available flat space in the village, on the flat roof of the “hotel”. We had some



shelter from the high wind, but outside was very cold, and unusually for what is almost a desert region we had rain and snow during the night. Life in Phugaon is very hard, I guess there are about 400 people living there, three days hard walk to the nearest other inhabited place, no school (although plenty of children), no modern medical facility, no toilets. They grow barley, and a few hardy vegetables, and the village has a large herd of yak, but the altitude of about 4400 metres (14,500 feet) and the dry climate limits the options. Yak plough the fields, provide milk and meat, and the yak dung is used as

fuel for the fires. The village is well above the tree line, not even the stunted juniper that grows very high is found there.

Language was a problem, the village speak a variant of the Tibetan language, luckily the owner of the hotel spoke Nepali, she had spent some time at school in Kathmandu. The picture shows Karshan in her hotel, with various members of her family.

## Life in Butwal

Life in the Butwal community continues to fill any spare time that we may have.

The land dispute that our friend Lila had been engaged in has now been resolved, and to most peoples' surprise it seems that both sides are happy with the result. The process however was extremely difficult, with attempts at intimidation and threats of violence along the way. There is very little "normal" legal process remaining in Nepal, and the authority of the District Officer system was seriously undermined during the insurrection. So everyone tries to achieve their objectives by any means that they feel like using. In this case using the local community committee as arbitrators, and refusing to be moved by the threats, resulted in a satisfactory outcome.



In our July newsletter we talked about the rice planting season in the countryside around Butwal, and we described our visit to a farming community. Now the rice harvest is almost complete, with most communities at least around here reporting a better than average crop. We went back to the village, to eat with our friends there, and to walk in the fields. There were stacks of rice straw everywhere, a lot of rice already had the rice threshed out, the conical pile in the picture is a pile of rice on the threshing floor. Most work is done by hand, cutting with a small sickle, carrying on the back, although

sometimes an ox cart is used, threshing using flails, beating bundles on the floor, or driving the oxen round and round over the rice straw. There are many Christians amongst the small farmers here, and plenty of interest amongst others in the Christian faith.

Our Butwal congregation at Jaitun Church continues to thrive. The Sunday school has not less than 40 children, and the adult congregation at the main service is around 60 on a normal week. The church community has some activity every day, in church, house group or prayer group. The football team are very active, we have a tournament with the other church teams here in Butwal before Christmas, and they have every expectation of being close to the top. A new initiative has been to try and organise the social / medical support visiting that the church does into a more formal framework, to better integrate with the other pastoral visiting. In fact the informal network operates quite well, but if someone leaves that may cease, so we are trying some simple procedures and record keeping.

The hope to put up a new church building continues to remain a hope at present, in a similar manner to Lila's land problems the church land has also some difficult issues to be resolved before money can be committed to new building work.

- Give thanks with us for the favourable comments from the Minister of Industry about the work of the Technical Institute, and for the appointment of a new director.
- Pray for the staff of the Institute as they prepare development plans, and for progress to be made in implementing proposals to expand the training for young people from deprived communities.
- Give thanks for the completion of a good rice harvest.
- Pray for those many communities in Nepal, in the mountains, the middle hills and the lowlands, who even after a good harvest will be short of food later in the year, and will suffer extreme hardship and poverty
- Pray for the churches in Nepal, that they will continue to work for God's kingdom here with energy and enthusiasm.

Allan and Andrea