

International Symposium on the Himalayan Environments: Mountain Sciences and Ecotourism/Biodiversity, Kathmandu, Nepal, 24–26 November 2000

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Source: Mountain Research and Development, 21(2) : 196

Published By: International Mountain Society

URL: [https://doi.org/10.1659/0276-4741\(2001\)021\[0196:ISOTHE\]2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1659/0276-4741(2001)021[0196:ISOTHE]2.0.CO;2)

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Three years after the initiation of their collaborative field project on environmental issues in the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area in far eastern Nepal, Tribhuvan University (Nepal) and Hokkaido University (Japan) have responded to the need for more effective communication among university scholars, governmental personnel, and NGO and INGO experts. More than 100 participants from 12 different countries and 4 continents participated in a symposium hosted in Kathmandu, Nepal, by Hokkaido University, Tribhuvan University, and the United Nations University. Inaugural addresses were presented by Mr Naveen Prakash Jung Shah, Vice-Chancellor of Tribhuvan University, and His Excellency Mr Mitsuki Kojima, Japanese Ambassador to Nepal.

Tourism: A mixed blessing?

The opening session featured 2 keynote lectures. The first was delivered by Ms Junko Tabei, Chairperson of the Himalayan Adventure Trust-Japan and the first woman to reach the summit of Mount Everest. She detailed the negative impact on the natural environment by mountain climbers, making recommendations for alleviating the problem in the future. Professor Jack D. Ives, representing the United Nations University, spoke on the Himalayan environment and tourism, asking whether mountain tourism is truly a panacea for poverty or simply a pact with the devil that will create more problems than it solves.

More than 50 papers were presented in addition to 19 poster sessions. Deliberations covered broad themes—geomorphology, climatology, biodiversity, tourism, population, environmental hazards, and natural resource use and management. Presentations focused on the current status, trends, and problem-

atic issues associated with the coverage, availability, and quality of data. Participants discussed the opportunities and limitations inherent in certain approaches and methods such as geographical information systems (GIS), remote sensing, and dendrochronology. Issues related to the utilization, conservation, and management of biodiversity, national parks and protected areas, and natural resources such as forests, water, and soil were also examined. The collaborative research being carried out by Hokkaido University and Tribhuvan University in the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area was thoroughly scrutinized. Throughout the symposium, the advantages and disadvantages of mountain tourism were high-priority topics.

Outlining needs for the future

In addition to recommendations relating to key themes, the symposium concluded by emphasizing the need for collaborative activities involving academics and decision-makers at local, national, and international levels in the generation and sharing of new information. This will help in reducing present uncertainties in understanding the processes of the Himalayan environment and in formulating appropriate policy measures for sustainable development of the Himalaya.

Conference proceedings and future collaboration

The proceedings, containing a selection of the papers presented in Kathmandu, are being published under the editorship of Professor Teiji Watanabe, Symposium Convenor. Publication of the proceedings was possible with the special understanding and financial support of the United Nations University (UNU).

This symposium was also a part of the Global Mountain Partnership Program of the UNU as its contribution to the International Year of Mountains in 2002. The symposium participants agreed to pursue their agenda with further activities in the Nepal Himalaya in 2002, which will include a conference in Namche Bazar. Details will be announced at www.iym-japan.org; for further information, contact Dr Seth Sicroff or Dr Teiji Watanabe.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many organizations provided vital support for this event. In addition to the 3 primary sponsors, the following organizations rendered invaluable assistance: the Embassy of Japan to Nepal, the Embassy of Nepal to Japan, Tokachi Mainichi Newspaper Inc, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation of HMG/Nepal, ICIMOD, WWF Nepal Program, IUCN-Nepal, Nepal Mountaineering Association, Nepal Tourism Board, Himalayan Adventure Trust-Japan, Green Camp Nepal, Japan Wildlife Research Center, "Bikkuri-Donkey" Aleph Inc, Arc Corporation, Hakusan Corporation, and T and D Co.

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