

Ogyen Choling Foundation

Annual Report 2015



This is the second year after our registration as a formal Civil Society Organization. Many of the activities and achievements during the year have already been detailed in the two previous newsletters (see the January–April and the May–September issues at <http://www.oling.bt>.) Therefore, while this annual report provides an overview of the activities of the entire year, the main focus is the period of October–December as well as the financial summary. As a new element in this year’s report we feature two articles by people who stayed at Ogyen Choling during the year.

Retiring to Ogyen Choling (contribution by Dolma Roder)

I just returned from spending nearly four months in Ogyen Choling with my parents. During my stay I had the opportunity to get to know the Tang valley better, (relearn family history and to see firsthand what exactly “retirement” in Ogyen Choling looks like for my parents. When my parents decided to retire to Ogyen Choling in 2013, I pictured them trading a hectic life in urban Thimphu for a quiet and undemanding one in rural Bhutan. I worried that they would be bored. There were signs that I was mistaken (for example, within a few months of their move, my parents had turned into leaner versions of themselves), but until I had the chance to spend this fall with them, I really hadn’t fully understood their version of “retirement”.



Between multiple on-going construction projects, looking after visitors, running the museum, the gift shop and the guest house and training young staff who have never seen a museum or stayed overnight in a tourist-standard hotel, their days start early and stay busy. Almost every day contained surprises (both good and bad) that demanded some mixture of creativity, compassion and a robust sense of humor. While I was easily distressed by every instance of unreliability, rudeness or lack of interest (how can any visitor fail to be instantly enamored by the museum?), my parents were consistently generous and patient. My mother can charm (almost) any visitor exhausted by long car trips on less than comfortable roads, out of a bad mood. She also finds time to talk to the old women from the village who come to pray at the temple, and to run a reading program for the village children. My father regularly spends his own “free time” in the evening dealing with all the correspondence and accounts. His thumbs have deep cracks from his hours of work on the construction site yet on very busy days, he will dust off his work pants and lead a tour through the museum.

Retirement in Ogyen Choling might not be relaxing or quiet but clearly my parents enjoy the excitement and rewards of their commitment and efforts. I was constantly awed both by the sheer amount of work that they do each day and by the scope and ambition of their vision for the Ogyen Choling Foundation.

Permanent Staff

Until the beginning of the year, aside from the voluntary services of the museum curator Kunzang Choden and the estate development supervisor, Walter Roder, the temple caretaker, Ngawang Jampa was the Foundation's sole paid staff member. Taking advantage of the Labour Ministry's Guaranteed Employment Programme (GEP), the Foundation recruited Kelzang Namgyel as the Development Officer. Kelzang, who has a BA in Geography from the University of Punjab, joined the Foundation on the 1st of April. A quick and enthusiastic learner, he has taken over some of the responsibilities in the museum including leading the tours. During the low tourist period from June – August, the Foundation sponsored Kelzang to undergo a guide's training course in Thimphu. We hope that this training will help to broaden his knowledge of Bhutan's culture and history, and also that it will give him an opportunity to interact with professional tourist guides. Kelzang completed the course successfully and received a diploma.



Ngawang Jampa painting prayer wheels of the temple



Kelzang Namgyel, working on the window frames of the museum

Office Space

Ever since it was established in 2003, Ogyen Choling's Community Forest had its office in a room on the upper floor of the *shagkor*. Since the beginning of this year the old grain store (*zodh*), which is on the ground floor directly below the Community Forest Office and which was previously being used as the display room for the Dyeing and Weaving processes was converted into the Foundation's office. Rather than using two separate rooms as offices it was decided that the Community Forest and the Foundation will share office space.

Arrival and Installation of the Sanitary Materials from Switzerland

The long awaited sanitary and fire mitigation materials from Switzerland finally arrived in early April. Installation work, however, could only start in September, with the arrival of Heinz Mischler, a Swiss sanitary expert. With the approval of the Ministry of Labour, we worked out an arrangement with the two Technical Training Institutes (TTI) in Chumey (Bumthang) and Dekiling (Sarpang), for their plumbing trainees to be attached with Heinz Mischler for a month-long on-the-job training. For one month Ogyen

Choling guesthouse hosted eighteen trainees and five instructors. More than half of both, trainees and instructors were woman. Heinz and the trainees were able to finish a great deal of the installation work and we are grateful for their hard and enthusiastic work, which included the installation solar water heating systems, bathrooms, and drainage systems.



Heinz Mischler explaining the use of plumbing tools



Trainees installing solar water heating system on the shagor roof

Fire Prevention and Mitigation Project

The first phase of the Fire Mitigation project was completed in December, with the final testing of the fog pump and the smoke detectors. Thanks to the initiative and the valuable contacts of Walter Spielmann, two major German suppliers were identified. Although the materials already reached Ogyen Choling in April, the final testing was carried out only in November after receiving parts, which had to be replaced.

The cost of the fog pumps was very high! However, considering the urgent need for fire mitigation provisions, the Board of Trustees decided to take a risk and finance the purchase through a private loan. The total cost for the first phase, including cost of materials and transportation amounted to CHF 65,566. (approximately Nu 4.4 million). Thanks to generous contributions by the S. Eustachius Foundation, the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation and many individual donors a considerable portion of the loan has already been repaid. The cost for the second phase of the project which includes the construction of storage rooms for the pumps, purchase and installation of additional fire alarm devices and the installation of storage tanks is expected to be comparatively lower at an estimated Nu 0.7 million.

Visitors to the Museum and Project visits

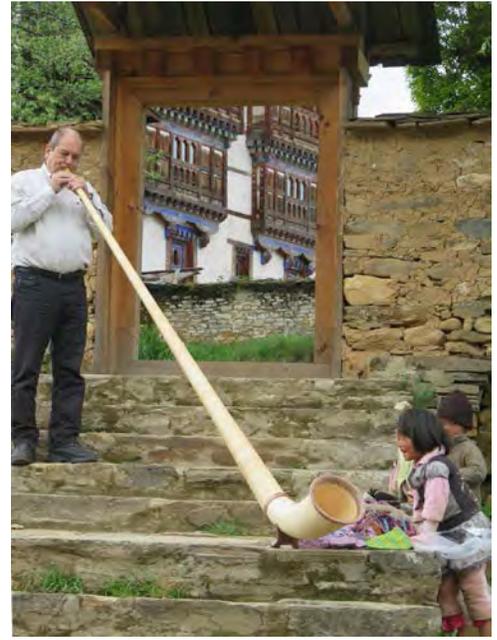
Notwithstanding reports in the national media about a significant decrease in the number of tourists visiting Bumthang this year, Ogyen Choling museum saw a record number of visitors. During the year there were more than 1,500 international visitors, which is almost double of our numbers for 2014.

Besides the international tourists, we were happy to welcome large groups of students from local schools and colleges. While some of the students came on regular visits some of the groups came on special projects and field assignments. Recent coverage of the museum by the Bhutan Broadcasting Service may have played a role in increasing interest among Bhutanese visitors. Other visitors to Ogyen Choling included groups of artists, bicyclists, a musician (alphorn player), film makers and writers.





Students of Misetang Central School doing a project on the museum



Swiss alpenhorn player Fust playing in Oling

The organizer of the writers workshop Wendy Erd writes:

Last year on a chilly March afternoon, crow calls and sunshine filtered through the high windows of Ogyen Choling’s Tara Temple. Lit by soft light, a rapt group of thirteen visiting writers from America leaned in as we listened to a circle of elder women from the village share stories in a session of “Dangpo Dingpo” (Once Upon A Time). Even though the stories were told in their own language, and later translated by Kunzang, you might



have heard a grain of rice drop in the temple if there hadn’t been so much laughter and the sprinklings of “Eea” the elders chorused to stave off demons who might otherwise snatch the story teller’s tale away. All of us drew close, across borders and culture and time.

“Dangpo Dingpo” culminated in a 3 days

writer’s workshop that included a wonderful day spent with five local teachers from Tang Central School and Jakar High School. Graciously hosted by Kunzang and her husband, Walter, and led by Kim Stafford, Director of the Northwest Writing Institute in Portland, Oregon and myself, a poet and writer from Alaska, we gathered in the warmth of Ogyen Choling’s new dining area, to write, read and share our work. The teachers took home new ideas to explore creative writing and inspire the love of language and stories with their students.

From the Visitors Book

“ This is the highlight of our trip to Bhutan! Thank you so much!” Anne Keisder and Doug Lapp, Washington DC

“ This was the most interesting and fascinating tour we have had in a very long time. Please keep it going on. It’s a great pleasure to listen to your stories.” Four Friends from Luxembourg

“ We came from Martinique (French West Indies) . It was a long way but it was worth visiting this museum!”

“ What a wonderful surprise to visit such a wonderful museum in Tang valley. We all hugely appreciate all the efforts and long-term vision to establish the museum here.” Young Ju Park, South Korea

“ This was the best museum we have ever been to. I have come here with my mother and she is fascinated to see all the things that have been preserved. We got the “ feel” of things just by looking at them, it was indeed a time travel experience. Coming back to the ground floor got us back to this present world. Thank you.” Kunal and Alpa Verma, Bangalore.

Filming Policy

Over the last few years several filmmakers have been attracted to Ogyen Choling as a potential location. It therefore became necessary for the Foundation to formulate a filming policy that works to protect the site’s best interests. The policy has been approved by the Board.

The Museum

During the quiet winter months the Development Officer worked on cleaning the glass in all the windows which required that he remove each pane before washing it. He also devised a new and improved system using wood strips and screws to hold the glass in the window frames. Until we are able to fit every window with a proper frame we feel this system is a good temporary solution.

The donation of masks which was reported in the previous newsletter made us reconsider Ogyen Choling’s policy on acquiring new artifacts. A collection of 36 masks received from. Leo Caminada found a perfect display-space on the landing of the third floor. Leo is a Swiss national, who worked as a forest engineer in Bumthang and Paro in the 1970s and 1980s. Being interested in wood work, he commissioned a mask maker in Bumthang to make masks which he took with him when he returned to Switzerland. After visiting the Ogyen Choling museum Leo decided to return these masks to Bhutan and so donated his collection to the Ogyen Choling museum. We are grateful to Leo for his most thoughtful donation. However, accepting this donation of artifacts will be an exception because we are clearly a family museum where every artifact has a historical or contextual connection to the family and the Ogyen Choling community.

We were fortunate to have Dolma Roder here for over three months working in various capacities for the museum. With her experience of having worked in museums in Switzerland and the USA, she was able to advise us on some much needed improvements particularly in regard to the care and maintenance of the artifacts. Dolma also made an inventory of the artifacts in the museum which will be the basis for a more detailed catalog of all the artifacts. She recorded over 1,500 artifacts.

An urgent concern is to find ways to prevent the visitors and their guides from touching the artifacts. As most of the exhibits are not in glass display cases, even some of the most sophisticated visitors cannot resist touching the exhibits!

In the meantime the ground floor of the *nagtshang*, which used to be a granary, will be used for an exhibition on cloth production - particularly woolen fabrics, which is a specialty of the Bumthang region. The exhibition will be the largest and the most ambitious of all the existing exhibits and will be complemented by live demonstrations by women from the village.

Winter Reading Programme with the Children

The lack of reading resources is a problem for children in rural Bhutanese communities. When schools close for the winter holidays, the children do not have any access to books as there are no local bookshops or libraries. Considering this, Ogyen Choling Foundation started a weekly reading programme. We have had up to 24 young readers attend at one session. The enthusiastic response from the young readers has convinced us that this activity must be sustained.

As a gesture of our conviction that reading is important to learning, Ogyen Choling Foundation has contributed 170 books to the Tang Central School in Misethang which has started a community library.



Financial

Our expenses are still substantially higher than the income generated because of the various construction activities. We, however, foresee that this will change in 2016 as the construction projects are mostly completed. The detailed accounts for the year will be ready sometime in February. The financial report will form an important part of the Foundation's formal annual report to the Civil Society Organizations Authority. The income, consisting mainly of proceeds from museum tickets and donations amounts to almost Nu 2 million, while the expenditures is above Nu 3 million. Thus our liabilities increased by about 1.2 million to a total of Nu.5 million (excluding the outstanding loan for the fire mitigation project). Donations of Nu 4'000 and above are individually mentioned below. Donations received in Switzerland and the contribution of Nu 1'252'000 received from the Swiss Development Cooperation towards the fire mitigation project are shown separately. We would like to thank all of you who have supported us through the year with donations, encouragement and good will. What we achieved is thanks to you.

Donations received in Bhutan	
Source	Nu
F. Pommaret	160'000
Gerard and Anne Tardy	9'000
Dominique Bastien	20'700
Writers group (Wendy)	15'250
Tee and Rod Graham	14'640
Heinz Buergin	13'000
Footloose groupe, (Roger R)	23'350
Jan and Glen Adenhoven	4'000
Christine (Bhutan Sangay)	6'500
Harry and PhillipaFrank	9'848
Ian O'Sullivan	28'100

Donations from different sources, received towards fire mitigation project	
Source	CHF
Swiss Development Cooperation (Nu 1'252'000)	19262
Gerard and Anne Tardy	4796
Kaspar and Regula Mettler	1000
Vincent Dannecker	550
Dr Urs Niederhauser	505
Monika Antje Ingeborg Kramer	500
Beat Koller	400
Young ju Park	303
Dieter Zuercher und Maria Kaenzig	300
Tina Rohner and Group	202
Kungold and Martin Menzi	200
HWZ Hochschule fuer Wirtschaft, ZH	200
Fabienne Grossebacher	200

Celebrations

While we were finalizing this update we received the happy news of the birth of the Crown Prince We join the nation in celebrating this historic moment.



We wish everybody a happy Losar (Bhutanese New Year). May the year of the Fire Monkey be happy, healthy and tranquil. May the monkey use his ingenuity to bring us peace, understanding and plenty of humor