

Thousands harmed in major Bolivian floods

BY ALLISON STALBERG
STAFF WRITER

The Bolivian government recently announced a state of national emergency after months of heavy rain caused severe flooding and landslides, devastating thousands of families. People, their homes, and chunks of land have been swept away by the increasing flash floods.

And it's not about to stop. "Several rural towns in the Cochabamba Department are practically submerged in water," César Pérez, an environmental engineer in Santa Cruz, told The Guilfordian in an email. "Agriculture, livestock and even human lives are gone."

"In the Beni Department, many losses were registered," said Pérez. "A total of 38 human lives were lost and more than 44,200 families were affected."

Mario G. Aranibar, the national coordinator of search and rescue in Bolivia, told The Guilfordian that although floods have occurred in the past, Bolivia was ill-prepared to respond.

Ninety percent of recovery efforts were initiated by volunteer units with little to no support from the state.

"We resort to using army soldiers with little or no training in disaster response," said Aranibar in an email. "Of course, they do not have the right equipment, and instead of being a help, they increase risk, since they risk their lives."

Not only has there been an inadequate response to the disaster, but news of the devastation caused by flooding has been

under reported in the media.

"I was watching the news and CNN was covering what tree the president was going to pick, while I was reading newspapers from Bolivia and seeing people really suffering in my country," said junior Ines Sanchez De Lozada.

"I think it's about which story sells, and the Christmas tree always sells."

With Bolivia having its fair share of lowlands and valleys in addition to mountainous terrain, post-flood issues have also been a source of concern.

"This does not end here," said Aranibar. "Post-disaster, a series of epidemics and diseases will come and cause more deaths. That's what comes next."

Some, like Pérez, have begun to speculate about a connection between the flooding and climate change.

"I witnessed extreme cold a couple of weeks ago in the U.S.," said Pérez. "Last year, Egypt received snow after almost 100 years. Now, in Bolivia, the unusually heavy rain is affecting the whole country."

"The worst part is that the climate change is most affecting the poor," Pérez continued. "Thousands of families depend on agriculture and livestock production to survive. Climate change is affecting the weather stability that these families need."

Twenty-one thousand Bolivians are homeless as of Feb. 10, and that number is still rising.

"We have a saying about how in January, it is going to rain," said Sanchez De Lozada. "But in February, the rain is going to wash us away."

NCSSM holds 23rd successful Powwow

BY CHASE CLAUSEN
STAFF WRITER

The drumbeat continued throughout the day along with a variety of traditional dancing and singing, ranging from competitive dances like the smoke dance to honor songs that are sung to pay tribute to a tribe member.

On Saturday, Feb. 1, the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics held their 23rd annual Powwow to celebrate Native American culture and ancestry.

The NCSSM Powwow dates back 23 years when Native American students approached a former teacher of 30 years, Joe Liles, about organizing an event to raise awareness of the culture and communities of origin.

They also wanted to use the Powwow as a method to encourage other Native American students to apply for admission to NCSSM, a residential school recently ranked 23rd in Newsweek's "America's Best High Schools."

At NCSSM, the Powwow emphasized a Native American tradition that has been on display for centuries.

"It's important to bring awareness to the Native American population," said Liles in a phone interview with The Guilfordian. "February is a very opportunistic time because it's a time when Indian people want to get moving again."

Liles chose to have the powwow in February to avoid interfering with other traditional Native American powwows across the region. Typical powwow ceremonies resume in March, the beginning of spring.

In Native American culture, the drum is a strong symbol. It is a token of trust and faith as well as a representation of ancestry. The

drumbeat remains constant throughout the Powwow while families gather together to embrace the singing and dancing of many Native American tribes.

This year, Liles' most memorable story was inspired by a group of young dancers known as the "Eagle-Dancers," in which the youngest dancer was a seven-year-old.

"The first place where natives actively sing and dance is here at the NCSSM," said Liles. "They feel a loyalty to keep coming back."

The Powwow serves as an occasion for Native Americans to show belonging not only to their respective tribes but also to their country.

"Native Americans are almost a forgotten part of history," said junior Jace Sowden. "Having celebrations like this brings awareness to (non-Native American) cultures."

Sowden is a member of the Seneca tribe in upstate New York, which is a part of the larger Iroquois Confederacy, consisting of the Onondaga, Cayuga, Oneida, Mohawk and Tuscarora tribes.

"I enjoyed talking to the people of the tribes and learning about the Powwow and what it represented," said Dan Kane in a phone interview with The Guilfordian. "I appreciated talking with (non-Native American) students who still managed to participate in the dances."

Kane is a writer for the News Observer and recently published an article on the event.

In addition to promoting participation for multiple tribes, the Powwow facilitates the expression of culture to those who are unaware.

The next Powwow will be held at North Carolina State University in Raleigh on April 5.

Beloved Tibetan town, study abroad site devastated by fire

BY ERIC D. MORTENSEN
CHAIR AND ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

In the frigid inkiness of early morning on Jan. 11, 2014, a space heater allegedly ignited a window curtain in a hotel in the Old Town of Xianggelila — the very hotel in which Professor of Justice & Policy Studies Jerry Joplin had stayed in the spring of 2013 while directing Guilford College's Southwest China semester abroad program.

The flames spread from wooden-shingled rooftop to rooftop, and over the next 10 hours, at least 220 old wooden buildings in the Old Town had been destroyed by the ensuing inferno. Fire department crews demolished other buildings in an effort to contain the blaze. More than two-thirds of the Tibetan town's beautiful homes, shops, restaurants, hotels and cultural centers are gone.

The good news is that nobody died in the fire. Images of fresh snow fallen on the blackened, charred remains of the buildings, some of which had centered on pine pillars a meter in diameter, leave the viewer dumbfounded as to how everyone had escaped the winter night's conflagration. Nevertheless, countless antique pieces of tantric Buddhist art, books, families' valuables, investments in refitted hotels, hopes and dreams, and venues of memories are utterly gone.

The Old Town will doubtless be rebuilt in order to satisfy the stunned tourist market, but the town will be forever changed. It will be interesting and painful to see how the economics of reconstruction play out and whether the local Tibetan and Naxi house owners or their Han Chinese lessees will most benefit from whatever assistance the local government will decide to proffer.

Contrary to some news reports and YouTube video commentary, the Old Town was not "ancient," per se. Only a handful of structures, including our students' classroom



The Old Town of Xianggelila in Tibet has been part of the Guilford community for years as the Southwest China study abroad site.

building, were more than a hundred years old, and much of it had been redesigned and refurbished in the past decades without much attention to architectural tradition.

Yet it was a lovely town indeed, with cobbled streets, no motor vehicles, labyrinthine back alleys and barking dogs, stray cows and disco lights both, with gentle views over the wooden buildings to the seasonally snowbound peaks surrounding the valley. The community is, for now, shattered.

The Old Town of Xianggelila (Shangri-la, or Tibetan: Dukedzong) in the Tibetan region of rGyalthang, in Yunnan Province of China, has for many years been the home base of Guilford's Southwest China semester abroad program. It has been in this Old Town wherein our students and professors have

lived, studied and built deep friendships. Dozens of Guilford students and alumni will fondly remember the Old Town Square (Sifangjie) with its dancing and its barbecue (shaokao) vendors, The Raven, Arro Khampa and the Rebong noodle restaurant across the street and the Everest antique shop. All are now ashes.

Guilford's study abroad program will endure. We will return this coming summer for a seven-and-a-half-week, 12-credit version of the program, replete with homestays in Geza village (which is doing just fine) and an overland camping expedition to the nomad horse festivals of the high grasslands. We will redesign a few aspects of the program, including locating new housing and classroom space in Xianggelila for students and faculty. Yet we will return and reinvest ourselves in this community so full of friends and kindness. Like the town, our program will persevere.

I write this piece to inform our community about the horrid destruction of a distant but personal part of our Guilford culture and community. I cannot begin to recount the myriad memories of Guilford students at their very best in the heart of this town that now lies in cinders. Our friends have been profoundly affected, and our hearts are with them, and — pardon the potential pun given the recent flames — I hope we can hold them in the light.

Applications for this summer's program are available in the Office of Study Abroad in King Hall. If you have any questions about the study abroad program or about how best to assist folks in need in Xianggelila, please feel invited to contact Eric Mortensen: emortens@guilford.edu.

Chunjie Kuaile. Losar Tashi Delek. ("Happy New Year," in Chinese and Tibetan.)

Eric Mortensen and Dasa Mortensen (Ph.D. candidate in Chinese History at UNC Chapel Hill) designed Guilford's study abroad program in Southwest China and have led over 40 Guilford students to the region.