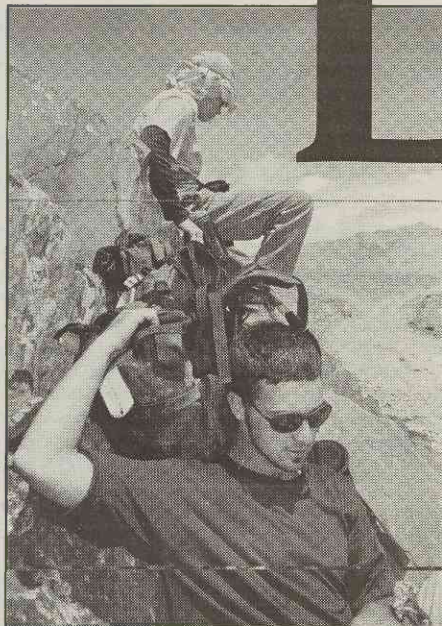


A mission of Love



Mary Jones
Pilot staff

"We told them that we were Christians and that we loved them and that our God loved them and that this was an outpouring of that love," said Doug Keene, recalling the medical mission trip to the Himalayas he and five others ventured on this August.

Current Gardner-Webb students- Doug, Dave Byers and Russ Williams, and former students- Wade Gamm, Clayton King, and Brian Winkler, journeyed to the northernmost sector of India. For about two of their three weeks in India, they helped a doctor and her assistant to bring medical treatment to the people of Ladakh, who for six to eight months of the year are cut off from the rest of the world, and from medical attention.

Photos by Dave Byers



August 3, the group left; their destination-Delhi. In Delhi, they met Wade, who had been in India on another mission trip. They fly to Lea. After landing at the highest airport in the world at 11,000 feet, they met Dr. Anna Perry from Baton Rouge, La., and her sidekick Lana, a full-time missionary in Delhi, who for a couple months of the year goes north with Dr. Anna to do trips like this one.

An orientation for the team, let them know what they'd be doing. The team knew little about what they'd be doing before they left. Doug said, "We knew nothing-how much food and supplies to bring. We had so much crap, just in case." And so their trip began as they pulled out in an old white ambulance driven by Devin, an Indian man familiar with the roads and with Tashi, his assistant and native of the Zaskar valley, in which they would trek.

The region of Ladakh makes up the greater part of the Zaskar Valley. The Zaskar Valley slices through the Himalayas and is dotted by small, primitive villages. The people are mostly farmers. They bundle in layers of clothes and their priests wear yellow and red. Some villages have electricity, but only for a few hours each day. "Everything in Ladakh is a shack," said Doug.

It was 170 km (about 105 miles) to the village of Malbek, the first stop, where they stayed in a tourist bungalow for two nights. They set up a clinic for school children and visited the monastery in the village. Most of the villages are Buddhist and many had never heard of Jesus. Unlike Muslims, they are receptive to Christians, so the team was able to hand out Bibles in the monastery and sing praise songs within the courts of the temple.

The team was in Malbek at the

time of the Buddhist harvest and new moon celebration. There is a 1760 year old statue or shrine, called a stupa, on a hill in Malbek, where the people make pilgrimages and bring offerings. The team made the hike up the hill and found a conifer tree wrapped in cloth and fresh footprints in the dust. The next day, as part of the festival, a Buddhist priest would climb a 60 ft. cliff to mount prayer flags and then prophecy. At the focal point of the city and at the monastery, they prayed for the people.

Driving away from Malbek on the way to Kargil, they came across the king of Zangla, whose small town Christians had never visited. He was returning from the festival when his car broke down. They invited the man to ride with them, and during the trip they talked. The king, insisting that they visit his town, left them with a letter to his wife to deliver personally.

They continued on to Kargil, which was often pounded by shelling from the nearby Pakistan border. They passed a charred gas station that had been bombed only the night before.

Between Kargil and the village of Phea, the team met one of the four candidates for the future dalai lama. Although they didn't know who he was at the time, the young boy had been selected for his devotion and his love of the monastery. Dr. Anna told them that the monastery had been hostile to Christians before, but this time they received the team, something she had been praying for. The young boy joined the team for a ride to Phea.

At Phea, in the shifting shadows of the mountains, the team set up tents. "We all like that kind of stuff," said Dave, of camping out.

"Everyone got sick eventually,

except for Russ," said Doug. "I had to rely on 'super strength' at times to make it."

"We were dirty, tired, and uncomfortable, but it was so wonderful. People's comforts pale with everything we see. It's hard to complain in such an incredible place," Dave said. "I don't even know if there's a word to describe it. It's like nothing I've ever seen in my life. Huge, giant rocks pop up from nothing. You wake up at 4:30 and see the sun come over peaks so high. You're not used to the sun rising like that. It's just amazing."

As they traveled among the people they learned a lot about themselves.

"They get up early and work until sundown. Their main worry is survival. If they don't get something done in one day, they don't do it. They don't worry about TV or computers," Doug recalled. "The people in the towns just watched us and praise God. We played soccer with the kids. We played soccer. We enjoyed them. We learned about pumping water attracted at least three people, taking a bath - six people, and putting up tents and eating 20 people."

Russ added, "Given the environment, they're some of the toughest people." He told of a man who let Dr. Anna cut an abscess of his neck with only lidocaine, a mild anesthetic.

"An American would not have sat still for what she did. We respect them as a people. They are

