



The completed exterior of the Community Centre, decorated for the Grand Opening Ceremony

The Community Centre in Kaza opens on July 31st, 2015 with a Grand Ceremony

It was a pleasure to welcome twelve supporters from England to celebrate the inauguration of the Community Centre in Kaza. Colin Taylor, Chairman of Adventure Ashram and their Project Manager, Fritha Vincent also joined us. **Adventure Ashram had raised and donated £90,000 towards the building. The Tibet Relief Fund generously donated £20,000.** Many who had visited the valley previously came back to show their support. It was a grand reunion.

The week before the opening the local workmen worked fifteen hours a day to make sure everything would be ready on time. The interior was cleaned, rubbish was removed, the building was decorated with prayer flags and balloons. A canopy was put up outside, and chairs were provided for the Grand Opening Ceremony.

There was a buzz of excitement as we arrived in the morning. We had been told by the Oracle to **His Holiness Dalai Lama**, that the most auspicious time to perform the opening ceremony

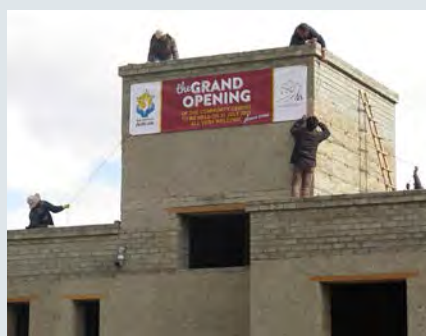


View from the side of the building

was 10.30 in the morning on the day of the Blue Moon, 31st July. As people gathered, Dr Philip Alexander from the Lady Willingdon Hospital in Manali, The Nono, the Prince of the valley and other dignitaries took their places, and the monks from the Kaza temple arrived to prepare for the blessing of the building.



Dalai Lama with Joan and Zena



Getting ready for the Grand Opening



Supporters from England

Inspection of the building

The Chief Minister Mr Ravi Thakur M.L.A. Vice Chairman National Commission For Scheduled Tribes, Government of India travelled from Delhi to inaugurate the building. He arrived exactly at the auspicious time with his A.D.C. Mr Suneel Sharma and his engineering team. At the entrance to the building, three monks from Kaza temple chanted prayers from a Buddhist text, while others threw rice on the ground and on the doorstep to the entrance. Finally, Mr Thakur cut the ribbon and was first to enter the building. He was followed by crowds of local people, many of whom had not seen inside the building before. Swati, one of the architects and the project manager, escorted the minister around the building answering questions as they went. Mr Thakur seemed very impressed and this encouraged the local people.



Tashi outside the building waiting for the VIPs



Girls in traditional dress wait for the ceremony to start



Guests gather outside the main entrance to the Centre for the opening ceremony



The Monks blessing the building



Mr Thakur cuts the ribbon



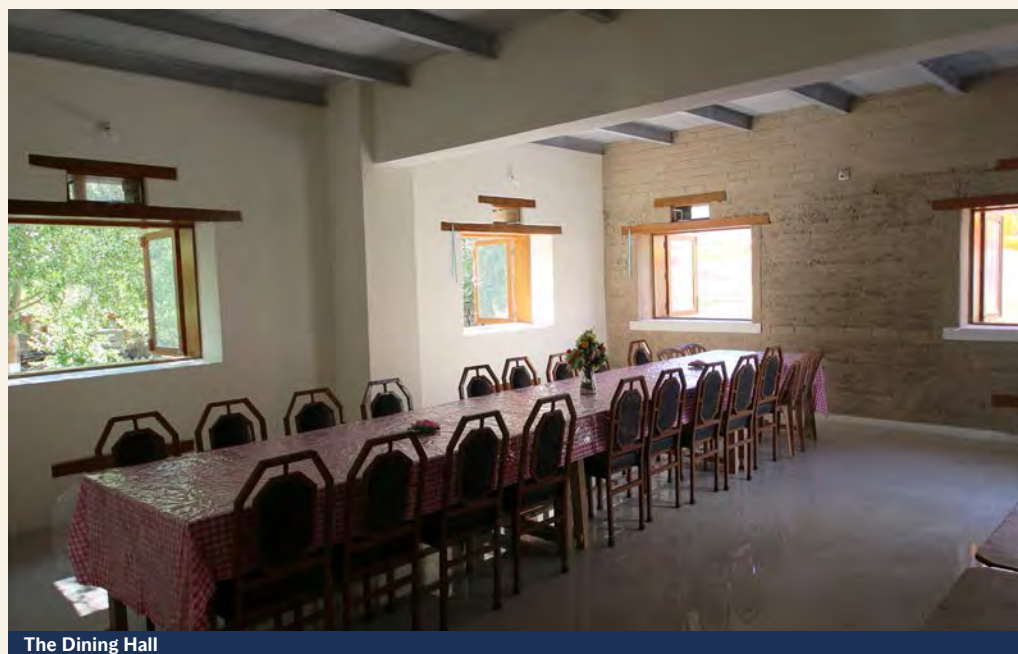
Swati, the project manager, leads the tour of the building



The Ground Floor. Below: Stairs leading to the First Floor



View from the roof over the valley



The Dining Hall



The Ceremony

Outside once more, we took our seats under the canopy and speeches were made. Tashi Bodhi, the President of the The Spiti Projects Society – the local committee – welcomed the minister and guests. He thanked everyone for their support in the construction of the building. Tashi said on behalf of everyone, how much the Spiti community had appreciated the many projects that Spiti Projects Charity had undertaken over the last 23 years.

The purpose of the Centre

As founder of Spiti Projects Charity, I said a few words of thanks to the people of the valley who had always made us welcome in their houses over the years. I explained that the Community Centre was for local inhabitants to enjoy and have a place to meet, where they can practise their traditions and preserve their Tibetan culture in this fast moving world.

Colin Taylor, chairman of Adventure Ashram spoke about their enthusiasm for working with Spiti Projects Society in the future.

Provision of Solar lighting

Mr Ravi Thakur spoke of the value of keeping family life and communities together and of respect for each other. The minister also announced that the government would allocate a grant to provide the building with solar lighting next year and would provide a water pump for the use of the Community Centre. This generous offer was appreciated by all.

Design and Construction

Satprem Maini, Architect Director, UNESCO Chair Representative for South Asia and his team from the Auroville Earth Institute in South India worked on the suggestions made by Spiti Projects Charity. The design and construction was planned with Satprem's team of architects who travelled to Spiti to oversee the main construction each year. Satprem and Lara came from Auroville to attend the opening ceremony. Satprem spoke about the importance of using rammed earth mud brick technology in this high-seismic zone to make buildings resistant to earthquakes. Compressed stabilised earth blocks preserve the heat of the sun and reduce the necessity to burn wood for warmth in winter.



Joan thanks the people of the valley



Mr Thakur announces solar lighting provision



Lara and Satprem are honoured for their huge contribution to the building of the Centre



Guests enjoy lunch after the ceremony



Monks from Dankar Monastery



The monks performing a religious dance to purify the land and expell evil spirits



The dance will bring positive energy to the centre

Rammed earth technology

At the start, Ayyappan came to mark out the ground and make sure the foundations were built to the right specifications. Lara Davies, a specialist in brick making, spent months in Spiti working with the local labourers. Lara taught the masons the value of using the compressed stabilised earth blocks and rammed earth technology – this 1000 year old Tibetan building method is still the best way to build in this environment.

Keeping the project on time

Swati Negi, also from the Auroville Earth Institute, was the Project Manager. She worked relentlessly to keep the project on schedule and did a brilliant job. The Community Centre took three summers to complete, just thirteen months in total, at an altitude of 3,550 meters and temperatures of 30C in this remote Himalayan valley. The project was led by Spiti Projects Society members, Tashi Bodhi, Jeet Singh and Ramesh Lotey with the help of rammed earth masons from

the Pin Valley, carpenters and many others. They all made an unparalleled contribution to this project.

Performance of Cham Dance

After the speeches, monks from Dankhar Monastery performed the Cham Dance, a religious dance to purify the land of negative energy and drive away evil spirits. Dressed in colourful robes and religious masks, they moved to the beat of drums and the clash of symbols to bring in positive energy to the Centre. The building

will be used as a meeting hall, for celebrations, for weddings and in the winter as place for traditional dancing, folk music, and for the older generation to tell their stories.

Finally, the Kaza community kindly provided lunch for the 250 guests. It was lovely to see people throughout the building and on the roof enjoying the day. The Grand Opening of the Community Centre was a happy occasion for all concerned.



The local masons who worked on the Centre



Where do we go from here?



Now that the first stage of the building is complete and it is weatherproof, we move on to the next stage, to fit out the inside.

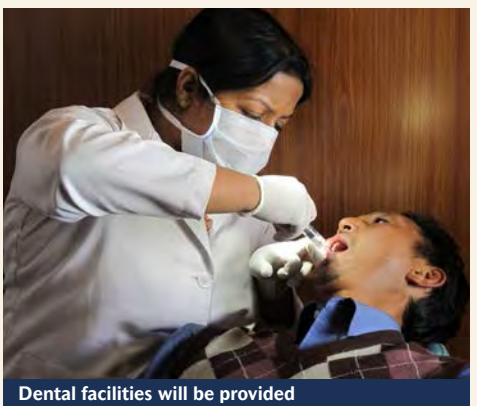
The second stage will be:
1. To fit out the kitchen, to provide chairs and tables for the hall and outside patio.
2. To fit out the eight bedrooms with furniture, curtains and bed coverings.

The third stage will be to equip the rooms on the ground floor:
1. To equip the Craft Centre with shelves for a small shop.
2. A loom has been very kindly donated by Lyn Collinge in memory of her husband Mark who was a weaver.

- 3. Dental and Eye clinics are planned and will need to be fitted, as soon as we have the necessary funds to complete this task.
- 4. We plan to have a library. We will install a wifi facility.
- 5. The government has offered a grant to provide solar lighting, to be installed in the spring of 2016.



Health check-ups for all



Dental facilities will be provided



Eye clinics will be regularly available



Local crafts will be available in the new craft room



Knitted items also



A new loom has been donated

The water pump in Upper Mane village

This project has been a challenge and taken longer than expected, but we are optimistic that it will be completed in the spring of next year. The original contractor has retired. Last winter bad weather caused a

landslide where the upper tank was scheduled to be constructed this year. However, the government engineering team has offered to help us to complete this project. A team came to look at the prospect

of piping water further up the hill to provide better access in winter. This is currently being looked at and we are optimistic that the government will provide a grant for the additional costs.



Donkeys laden with water make the regular journey



The standpipe is the main source



For many the journey is uphill and very time-consuming

Child sponsorship

The opportunity you give to your sponsored child to be educated makes a huge difference to their lives and to their families. As the Dalai Lama says “education is so important”, especially for those families who do not have land and therefore limited prospect of earning a living. So, thank you for your support and please tell your friends there are lots of lovely children waiting to be given a chance in life.



Help to sponsor a child in Spiti



Education is the most important opportunity these children will get

Sweaters

We have been taking sweaters provided by our generous knitters to Spiti for the last seven years. We have worked out that every child in the valley has now received at least three sweaters. This is a fantastic record and has kept many little people warm. The airlines are now reluctant to accept the bulk and are less generous with weight allowance. As a result, at a meeting with the Spiti Projects Society in Kaza, it was decided that we should stop for the time being. On a positive note, however, we are arranging for the sweaters you knit to go by road to another charity for the refugee children in Ukraine who are suffering from the cold as the winter



A consignment of sweaters in transit

sets in. We cannot thank you enough for all the time and love you have put into making these beautiful jumpers, they have been so much appreciated by Spiti families.



Two lucky recipients of the sweaters

The future

It has been agreed by The Spiti Projects Trustees to postpone the handover to Adventure Ashram until the Community Centre is completed and fully up and running. We are so grateful for all their support and

help over the last three years and we sincerely hope this will continue.

PLEASE continue to give us your full support, it is so important to us and to the Spiti community.



SPITI-A HIMALAYAN STORY

A PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION by Joan Pollock



The Pavilion at the Royal Geographical Society
11th April to 6th May 2016

SAVING SPITI

A DOCUMENTARY FILM

Last year I took Hugh Purcell and his wife Margaret Percy, former BBC film makers, to Spiti. They were so impressed by the unique culture of this remote high Himalayan valley that they decided to commission a film to record it.

Hugh was Head of BBC Documentaries. He won a BAFTA for his series with Ken Burns on the American Civil War and has taught at International Film Schools in Denmark, Cuba, India and Eastern Europe.

They engaged Zena Merton an award winning photographer, to record the unique Tibetan culture and the achievements of Spiti Projects Charity over 23 years.

We invite you to join us at the launch of this exciting film



TUESDAY 12TH APRIL 2016 AT 7PM

The Royal Geographical Society
1, Kensington Gore, London SW7 2AR
Doors open at 6pm with craft stall and photographic exhibition.

TICKETS £20.00

Available from Suraya at Indus Experiences.

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