

INTERNATIONAL PORTER PROTECTION GROUP (IPPG)

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On 7th September 1998, IPPG organized a Conference on Porter Safety in Kathmandu: Sixty people attended the conference including trekking agents (some of whom supported the conference financially), embassies, press and radio reporters, social activists, HRA (Himalayan Rescue Association), KEEP, etc. thus raising awareness of the issue. Among many points raised at the conference, one of great importance was that porters are just as susceptible to altitude illness as westerners, and more so to hypothermia and frostbite. They also are more likely to suffer from chronic illnesses (bronchitis, anemia, worm infestation, TB, etc). The Canadian Consul pointed out the dangers of too many "porter horror stories", especially on the Internet. There is a chance that it may become a "cause celebre" and result in a beat up, resulting in a collapse of the trekking industry. In which case, the porters would be out of work, which is definitely not a solution for them... This is what occurred with the carpet industry and child labor. One suggestion was that a "statue to the unknown porter" be erected to raise awareness of the porters who have died while carrying for treks and expeditions (comm. Doug Scott).

IPPG will hold another event next Sept/Oct. in Kathmandu.

As a consequence of the conference: Several articles appeared in the Nepali press. TAAN (Trekking Agents Association of Nepal) has been approached in writing to endorse the five basic guidelines on porter safety that IPPG advocates.

A suggestion made to them was they endorse the "happy porter" logo (i.e. trekking agencies may use the IPPG "happy porter" logo if they put their commitment to those five guidelines, in writing).

Other related activities that have happened this year: Last Christmas, the local reps of the Manang Rescue Fund organized a fundraiser in Manang itself (this fund is used to pay local people who have rescued porters in difficulty). "Death of a Porter" has been published in two British trekking/climbing magazines, which provoked discussion in the mail column.

Other IPPG activities on the way: Plans for a documentary on the life of a porter are under way. Himal magazine (South Asia) is doing a piece on IPPG and the conference. One immediate aim is to develop a home page and ultimately a web site devoted to this issue. If anyone of you has the time, energy and expertise to do this please let me know.

If anyone of you have any ideas, suggestions, etc. IPPG would very much like to hear them. IPPG can only make a change if we all work at it.

Jim Duff

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A web page is under construction: <http://www.users.omcs.com.au/duffbel>

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