

## From the Editor's Desk...

Happy New Year to you all and we wish you a peaceful, prosperous and progressive 2009.

There are a lot of new itineraries in store for you this year and we hope that you will check in with our Trip Calendar periodically to plan your long weekends and longer breaks.

Yousuf and the HRR team are heading out to Arunachal Pradesh from 16th to 27th Feb to do our first commercial descent of the Kameng river. It is easily the last frontier. We managed to invite many of our stalwarts from previous expedition trips for this one and it promises to be fun. We'll have more to report on this one in the next edition.

We have all been affected directly or indirectly by the economic downturn and the mood, generally, seems to be a bit dismal. It is absolutely the time to connect with nature and spend a few days in the outdoors on an eco-friendly and pocket friendly holiday with Himalayan River Runners in the care of our professional and friendly staff. So give us a call and a plan your holiday to get away from it all and come back relaxed, refreshed and recharged.

## Bush Notes

### “Colourful Birds!”

As well as being attracted to birds by their distinctive calls, as described in the previous edition of Bush Notes, flashes of colour as birds move through the dense foliage along the Ganga draws one's attention to the diverse birdlife of the area.



**Red-billed Leiothrix** (*Leiothrix lutea*); a medium-sized bird with striking markings. A red bill, yellow throat, and orange breast with a black forked tail make this bird easy to identify as it moves through the undergrowth of the broad leaved forest in search of insects and seeds at the back of the beach at the camp.

**Crimson Sunbird** (*Aethopyga siparaja*): whether you are an avid birdwatcher or not, it is hard to ignore this brightly coloured glistening bird as it searches for nectar from brightly coloured flowers. In pursuit of the nectar, it often hangs upside down, pushing its long curved beak deep into the flowers. As its name suggests, the male has a crimson back with scarlet throat and breast in addition to green tail and yellow rump! A positive riot of colour.



**White-capped Water Redstart** (*Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*): on the banks of the river, away from the trees you may be lucky enough to see this striking bird. He has a white cap, which almost makes him look as though he has been in a snowstorm! His wings and chest are black in marked contrast to his 'snowy' cap and his breast and tail, except for a black tip, are rufous in colour.

**Velvet-fronted Nuthatch** (*Sitta Frontalis*): at only 10cm in length, the smallest of the birds described in this edition of Bush Notes; it also has the shortest, almost non-existent, tail! To be seen creeping up and around branches of trees it is easily identified by its violet-blue upperparts and as it turns you will be able to see the lilac under parts. It has a red bill with a black tip and the male has a distinctive black eye-stripe.

## Trekking in Ladakh: A Guide to Feeling Alive!

Tired of brown haze choking your urban lungs? Always wanted to see the endless expanse of the Great Himalaya? Pining for the bluest of skies and the freshest of air from a 4,000 meter perch? Want to stretch your legs (and your heart) and push yourself over purple mountain majesties? Never fear, Ladakh is here! And any trip there will surely be one of your most rewarding and exhilarating in India.

This August, we set out on a two week voyage through Ladakh, beautifully organized by Nexxstop India Tours/Himalayan River Runners.

Covering the town and surrounding farms of Leh; the monasteries of Alchi, Hemis, Shey, Spituk and Thiksey; the highest motorable pass in the world at Khardung La; and the apricot-strewn and luscious Nubra Valley this was a whirlwind tour of heart stopping views, cultural immersion, and fascinating history.

Our trek, however, remains one of the most memorable highlights. Having put most of the driving and acclimatization behind us (highly recommended in this order!)



we set out in our second week from the monastery of Lamayuru for a 5 day trek over the Zaskar mountain range towards Chilling on the Zaskar River, not long before it joins the mighty Indus, with stupendous views along the way of the East Karakoram, the Ladakh Range and the Zaskar itself. You are not alone at least 10 other groups hiked the same route with us those days, each group staffed by a small army of porters, horsemen, cooks, and guides but the mountains permit solitary time and the welcome illusion of being an adventurous explorer.

Over the five days, the path winds in equal measure through lush and barren landscapes peppered now and again by villages and their hinterland, where if you're lucky, a friendly face will invite you in for a welcome cup of piping hot butter tea and fresh bread, and a chance to live the village life, even for just a little while. Back on the trek, the food at camp was always delicious (and much the envy of other groups), and our cook produced nothing short of a series of small miracles, whipping up calzones and chocolate cake with a camping stove! Our guide was top class: attentive, knowledgeable, and fun, and by the end, a true friend. Other groups offer welcome conversation on the route and at camp, but if the cast of human characters bores you, there is no shortage of animals: donkeys and their young who can cause even the most jaded to coo, sturdy pack horses always happy for some attention, cows grazing around campsites, and the occasional huge male yak who can only inspire awe, and was that a little fear?

But the best part is the total immersion in nature that comes with any great trek: you push yourself every day, you don't shower, you sweat and you shiver, you gasp for air as you summit the peaks and jump with joy as you scramble back down, you eat greedily and deservedly, you dip your tired limbs into icy glacier fed streams, you see an endless expanse of bright stars, you sleep like a baby in a snug sleeping bag, and you wake up waiting for the sun to crest the nearest mountain and kick start your day. Add to this: views only to be found in the northern Himalayas and the Tibetan Plateau, and this is truly a holiday to treasure. Do it!

# Bush Chow

## “Apple Fritters”

These apple fritters are really delicious and simple to make!



## Ingredients

Ingredient/Quantity	Metric	American
Sifted Plain (all purpose) Flour	250g	2 cups
Sugar (white caster)	50g	¼ cup
Baking Powder	1 tablespoon	1 tablespoon
Nutmeg	½ teaspoon	½ teaspoon
Salt	1 teaspoon	1 teaspoon
Eggs	2	2
Milk	235 ml	1 cup
Apples (peeled and cored and cut into thick slices)	4	4
Oil for frying and icing / confectioner's sugar		

## Method:

- Mix together the flour, sugar, baking powder, nutmeg and salt
- In another bowl mix together the eggs and milk and stir until well-blended
- Pour the milk and egg mixture onto the flour mixture and mix well until you get a smooth batter
- Dip the apple pieces in the batter
- Fry in hot oil until golden brown on both sides
- Sprinkle with icing/confectioner's sugar and serve with honey or lemon juice
- **Enjoy!**

# Gorgeous Garhwal

*By Stewart Foreman,  
San Francisco, California Trekking*

Garhwal provides the most spectacular and spiritual Himalayan trekking in India. The mountains, meadows, rivers and high passes are unsurpassed, and they take on a particular significance for traveling in India when combined with visits to the Panch Kedar temples of this region.

For two weeks in September 2004, my friend, Suzanne, and I trekked the steep terrain of Garhwal visiting these remote and ancient temples to Lord Shiva. Our first temple was Madhyamaheshwar (3400 meters), located in a pastoral village along a well maintained trail. Here is where Sheva's abdomen is said to have entered the earth. In the small stone entry building many brass bells hang from the ceiling to be rung by the worshippers during the evening arti. The chiming and chanting transported me to another emotional space. The brahman monk must have known that I needed a blessing and good luck because he gave me the lotus flower and an envelope of dried blossoms and seeds as we departed the village the next morning heading for higher elevations in the Himalayas.

My favorite temples were Rudranath (2700 meters) and Bansi Narayan. Rudranath is where Lord Shiva's eyes entered the earth. The temple is located on a high ridge overlooking beautiful meadows. The spiritual power of this place is palpable. We approach by passing under a wooden arch and

ringing its brass bell that reverberates through the mountains. The two monks served us chai masala tea while we sat on the stone entry to the temple learning about Sheva's battle with the evil Pandav brothers. Our porters were in awe at being able to pray in this remote ancient place. Inside the temple, the depiction of Sheva's eyes made me feel that he was in the temple gazing at all of us. My photographs of these monks and the temple provide my most cherished memories of this trek.

Bansi Narayan was another temple that houses a Hindu god. This was one of Lord Vishnu's temples. The temple is almost invisible on the mountain side being virtually indistinguishable from the boulders and rock outcroppings surrounding it. We had descended from Bansi Narayan Dhar (pass) at 2900 meters on a steep trail for two hours. We could not see the temple from a distance, but as we arrived, we knew this was a very special place erected many hundreds of years ago. The porters were visibly anxious to enter the small stone chamber of this temple to chant their prayers.

My personal achievement was reaching the 5000 meter Ghia Vanayak Pass after walking through two feet of unexpected snow under a blue and windless sky from glacial Nandi Kund lake far below. The towering Chaukhamba massif (7070 meters) rose above us in the distance. I was jubilant and emotional as I placed my "prayer rock" on the shrine with those of the previous travelers who experienced the majesty of this place.

The Garhwali people are very friendly and hospitable. Near Kangot, a shepherd's wife invited us out of the rain into her thatched hut to warm at her fire and served us chai masala tea. The shepherds of Tolly Bugyal gave us fresh milk and curd in the morning at our campsite in their meadow. Our cook, Mansing, added spices and chives to the curd to create a delicious breakfast treat. In Dumak, the school children entertained us with folk songs and dances. Then we answered questions about life in far off America. The sadhu in Mandal, who had taken a vow of silence years ago, but who conversed by writing messages in his notebook, told us about the Ansoya Devi temple and suggested other holy places for us to visit in other parts of India.



After trekking through the rugged and remote Himalayas of Garhwal, and sensing the holiness of the Panch Kedars, I welcomed relaxation and a shower at the Himalayan Hideaway. An expert massage after fifteen days of trekking was truly a transcending experience, to say nothing of the cold beer.

## Bush People

### Vijay Singh Chauhan

Vijay is usually referred to as V2 to distinguish him from the other Vijay, V1; the camp manager!

Vijay lives in a village called Silkani with his wife and 2 children aged 11 and 6. The village is within an hour's walking distance of the river camp, and although quietly spoken, is a mine of information about local knowledge. He accompanied my daughter and me on a 2-day trek in September and more recently



I went with him on a ½ day trek near the camp. On both occasions he proved to be knowledgeable about plants and their uses, local customs and living conditions and was a fantastic link between ourselves and the local people. On one occasion he was stopped by a local woman whose son had been suffering from diarrhoea for several days; he was able to give her some medicine but also spent considerable time explaining that it was important that she took her son to the doctor. He cares greatly about the environment and was seen to engage in conversation with some women who were cutting down a tree in a protected forest area. He apparently pointed out to them that this was not permitted, whilst also trying to make it clear why trees should not be cut down in that area.

Vijay has worked for HRR for about 5 years in a variety of capacities; general camp worker, working in the stores and acting as a guide on treks and as a barman. Prior to working at HRR he had various jobs including working in an ashram where he learned to speak English. He also worked in a bakery where he learned to make bread and drove a truck for a while. But his favourite activity is walking in the foothills, whilst passing knowledge onto other people!

# Trip Calendar 2009

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## January

Ganga Base Camp open

Himalayan Hideaway Package: 24th to 26th Jan

## March

Ganga Base Camp open

Long weekends: led and Holi

Upper Alaknanda Expedition: 6th to 9th March

Rhododendron Trek: 6th to 9th March

## May

Tons Camp open

Tons Expedition: 1st to 7th June

Tons Family Trek: 30th May to 5th June

## July

No activity

## September

Ganga Camp Opens 15th

Long Weekends: led, Dushehra

Himalayan Sojourn Trek: 26th to 28th Sep

High Water Kaali Trip: 19th to 21st Sep

## November

Ganga Camp open

Long weekends: Guru Nanak's Birthday, Thanksgiving

## February

Ganga Base Camp open

Long weekends: Valentine's Day, Presidents' Day

Kameng Expedition, Arunachal Pradesh: 16th to 27th Feb

## April

Ganga Base Camp open

Long weekends: Ram Navmi, Mahavir Jayanti, Good Friday/Easter

Kaali Expedition: 17th to 23rd April

## June

Tons Camp

Tons Family Trek: 30th May to 5th June

## August

Zanskar

Trip I: 5th to 16th Aug

Trip II: 16th to 27th Aug

## October

Ganga Camp open

Long weekends: Gandhi Jayanti, Diwali

Saryu Expedition: 17th to 24th Oct

## December

Ganga Camp open

Christmas and New Packages available