



Published on Boomers without Borders (<http://www.boomerswithoutborders.org>)

Restoring a monastery in nepal

By jude

Created 05/06/2009 - 21:47

My wife and I, along with eight other volunteers, spent 12 days in a remote part of Nepal working with local craftspeople and workers helping to restore a historic Buddhist gompa (or monastery) that had thrived for centuries but had fallen into disrepair. Located near the medieval village of Marpha in the Mustang region, the Chiarro gompa had been neglected for the last 50 years as the local community lacked the resources to maintain it.

For several years now, the U.S.-based Cultural Restoration Tourism Project (CRTP) has been arranging for western tourist/volunteers to travel to Chiarro to stay in the community and work at the site. It is anticipated that, upon its restoration, the Chiarro gompa will become a working monastery again and will attract more visitors to the area.

It was our first time in Nepal and we were thrilled to fly through the Himalayas to Jomson and hike to Marpha. We stayed with the other volunteers in a local guest house and walked a gentle, downhill mile to the work site each morning, enjoying dramatic views of 23000 ft. Mt. Nilgiri, the westernmost peak of the Annapurna chain, and the Kali Gandaki river, which we crossed by footbridge.

Everyone did a variety of chores—from carrying rocks to cleaning and restoring stunning centuries-old murals. It was rewarding and enjoyable to work side-by-side with the locals in one of the most spectacularly beautiful places on earth. Despite the language barriers, we became friendly with our co-workers and other villagers. A Buddhist monk named Sashi, whose family has been associated with Chiarro for generations, was at the site every day overseeing the preservation of the wall paintings and sculptures in the temple areas. When we left, I think we all felt that we had made substantial progress in the project, learned a lot about the local culture and had had a positive effect on the community. Besides working on the project, we also had plenty of time to explore the local countryside and interact with the local folks, who are very friendly, especially when they learned that we were working at the gompa.

It was also great to get to know the other volunteers, most of whom, like my wife and I, were in their late 50s or early 60s. Some were retired, some weren't (my wife and I are both lawyers who work for local government). Most did not come from a background in artwork or building preservation. Some of the volunteers knew each other before going on this project, and we were all good friends by the time the project was over. Some were at Chiarro for the second time. I fully understand why they came back because I am planning to return to do another stint in October 2009. I definitely would recommend this trip to adventurous travelers who enjoy being far off the beaten track. (ed. note: [to read more about CRPT, click here.](#) [0])

Source URL:

<http://www.boomerswithoutborders.org/node/133>