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# NEWSLETTER 2012

Swiss Yaks collect for Yak farmers in Dolpo, Nepal

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***In autumn 2011 Sonja Mathis and Rosula Blanc departed on an adventurous journey probably nobody has ever attempted before them. They wanted to cross the Alps with their three yaks to collect donations for yak projects in the countries the animals originate from. On the 12th of September the small caravan headed out from Evole-ne (Valais in Switzerland) and reached Menton (France) at the Mediterranean Sea on the 8th of November. The yaks Lufang, Julong and Manduk traversed 37 passes, overcame 600 kilometres and defied an elevation gain of 60'000 metres. During these eight weeks Sonja and Rosula lived closely with their animals, they became drogpas, alpine nomads. Here is Sonja Mathis' unique account of their experiences:***

Originally we had planned six weeks for our donation trek. But when travelling with animals not everything goes as planned. The first ten days we were on the move without a days rest. That was clearly too much for the yaks. They began to rebel whereby one of the raffia saddles tore. While trying to repair the saddle temporarily, Rosula cut herself in the hand so deeply that we had to go down to the valley to get the cut stitched.

Back on our route again we soon noticed that the hooves of the yaks had become sensitive. This made us doubt about our entire project, as the yaks would still have to walk on their hoofs for a few hundred kilometres more. We treated the yaks homoeopathically and luckily the hoofs stayed stabile after that. Thereafter wherever possible we shortened the day's march and allowed ourselves more rest days. This prolonged our trek by two weeks.

On the 16th of October we experienced the probably most daunt moment: We were walking through the wood on an officially marked trail. Unexpectedly the path got worse and narrower and dropped down 300 metres vertically on the left hand side. Soon we decided it was too dangerous and turned around. Then suddenly the path broke away under Lufang and the yak hung over the precipice. Rosula had been leading the animal and held on it as well as possible, but we still thought it would fall down. But it jumped back onto the path with a large leap thereby losing saddle and baggage. We were all in a state of shock and the yaks refused to walk even a meter. As the path was too dangerous for us, we called the mountain rescue who sent the fire brigade. With eight firemen pulling their halters the yaks could not refute any more and let themselves be led to safer ground.



Despite these frights good experiences clearly prevailed on our journey. Thanks to the yaks we had many wonderful encounters with the local mountain population. Everywhere we were extended a warm welcome, and when we camped near a village, many people came to visit us. The warmth of these people touched us deeply.

During the last days of our trek it rained continuously and we still had to cross one pass before descending 1000 metres to the sea. That was a very touching moment – we walked for eight weeks and after every pass more mountains appeared – and suddenly it was there, the Mediterranean Sea. And even the sun was shining again, especially for us.

We were delighted that all five of us reached the ocean safely. The yaks were very tired by the end of the trek, their hoofs very sensitive and worn down, and Rosula lastly got the spotted fever because of a tick bite. And of course we were also very proud of our animals, because without their endurance we would never have come so far.

With a trailer we returned back to Switzerland. It was strange to sleep in a house again after two months and not have the yaks close by us. We believe, we could grow accustomed to nomadic life.

Our project is homage to the yaks and their large working capacity and ability to move in the mountains with ease. It is also homage to the people of the Himalayas who have been living closely with their animals since centuries and transmigrate through the vast mountainous regions with them.

Sonja Mathis

With their yak donation trek “Drogpa” ([www.yaks.ch](http://www.yaks.ch)) Sonja Mathis and Rosula Blanc support a yak project of the Tapriza NGO in Dolpo, Nepal ([www.tapriza.org](http://www.tapriza.org)) and a project of the Rigzen-Zanskar-Association ([www.rigzen-zanskar.org](http://www.rigzen-zanskar.org)) in Zanskar, North India.

We thank both *drogpas* and their three yaks wholeheartedly for their exceptional contribution.

With a part of the money collected by “Drogpa” the Phoksumdo region bought a young potent male yak from Saldang. The hope is to refresh the bloodline of the region which has been weakened over the years. The expectations in the young animal are high, we will report on his successes.





## News from our School

It has been a quiet year at the Taprizza School without any larger incidents. Nevertheless everyone is looking forward to the completion of the new dining area, kitchen and sanitary facilities in 2012. The school has not only grown in infrastructure but also new students from outside the region have joined, especially on secondary level. This is mainly due to the successes of the Taprizza students at the national final exams (SLC) so far. 2011 anew all students of the Taprizza School passed the national final exams of the Class 10 (SLC) in first division. The new students from the wider region come from other schools in Dolpo that do not offer secondary level education. By accepting their admission we offer education possibilities in the locality, reduce emigration into the capital city and at the same time use the full capacity of our secondary level classes, as so far the number of students at this level has been low. In the following years the demand will increase, therefore in the long run the planning of an additional hostel will need to be thought about.

In February 2011 we organised a coordination meeting with representatives of various education and health projects in Dolpo. Joint strategies were developed, coordination



possibilities on secondary education level in Dolpo or in Kathmandu were discussed and employment possibilities of school graduates in Dolpo projects debated. Dolpo Tulku was also present. He is establishing own projects, among which are midwives training for school graduates from Dolpo and a Kathmandu hostel.

Our teacher Tashi Tobgay expressed his ideas on his remote home in the Himalayas, the meaning of education and the joy about the successful final exams in a poem.

### **Ambrosia from Taprizza**

*S.L.C. results somewhere in the great barrier of the Himalayas  
The students of mountainous  
reincarnated beyond the inhabitable world*

*Taprizza opened the door to heaven  
Every inch of this school is carpeted  
With the children of the mountainous  
Continuous as the stars that shine  
And twinkle on the milky way*

*What wealth Taprizza had brought  
Screaming echoes through the air  
Hear the fruitful results every year  
And indeed, hear its clear results.*

*Upon their bed in such dream nights  
Students rush out of the hostels  
But once outside and whistle in sound  
Then celebration begins of S.L.C. results*

*And multi coloured gems sparkled all around  
Ambrosia from Taprizza  
Enchants all with eternity*



- 1-5 Yak caravan from Valais to the Mediterranean Sea
- 6 Taprizza School with lucky rainbow
- 7 Coordination meeting Dolpo NGO's with Dolpo Tulku
- 8 Newly equipped Taprizza library
- 9 The Taprizza family 2011

Fotos: Sonja Mathis, Rosula Blanc, Dawa Dhondup, Semduk Lama

## Upcoming Events 2012

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### **Tapriza Annual Meeting – Wih recent photos of the yak caravan from Valais to the Mediterranean Sea**

(Non-members are also welcome)

Friday, 29<sup>th</sup> June 2012, 7pm, from 8.15pm onwards photo presentation by Sonja Mathis. Quartiertreff Hirslanden, Forchstrasse 248, 8032 Zürich, Tram 11 until Burgwies, [www.tapriza.org](http://www.tapriza.org)

### **YAK-Visiting-Weekend in Valais with Tapriza**

Weekend 23<sup>rd</sup>/24<sup>th</sup> June 2012, whole day

Roti Flüo, Valais, [www.yaks.ch](http://www.yaks.ch)

Please book directly at [info@yaks.ch](mailto:info@yaks.ch)

### **Bon master Tenzing Wangyal Rinpoche**

**Weekend course:** The Clear Light of Awareness - The Practice of the Six Lamps (Dzogchen-Teaching)

Fr-So, 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> May 2012, whole day, Ascension weekend Volkshaus Zürich, [www.garudaswitzerland.org](http://www.garudaswitzerland.org)

### **Trekking in Dolpo to Crystal mountain**

17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> Sept 2012 to the Crystal mountain pilgrimage, in the Dragon year that only happens every 12 years with mask dances and horse races. Guided by photographer and Tibet specialist Manuel Bauer. Including a visit at the Tapriza school. When booking please mention Tapriza then the school will therefore get support from the travel agent. [www.himalaya.ch](http://www.himalaya.ch), [info@himalaya.ch](mailto:info@himalaya.ch)

### **Trekking in Dolpo**

22<sup>nd</sup> Sept - 21<sup>st</sup> Oct 2012, including visit at the Tapriza school. [www.himalaya.ch](http://www.himalaya.ch)

Thank you for your support!  
We wish you all the best in the coming Dragon Water year  
Marietta Kind and the Tapriza Team

