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Dear Friends,

Having returned from Spiti recently I would like to bring you up to date with the news. This year I was accompanied by four 6th form girls from The Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School in London. In addition to introducing the girls to a wholly new environment our principal objectives were;

- a) To teach the Spiti children hygiene and help out in the schools.
- b) To research the logistics of installing the water pump in Mane Village.
- c) Checking on the progress of the craft centre.

After a two day journey by jeep via Simla we finally reached the lower Spiti Valley checkpoint. Our faithful friend Jeet Singh was patiently waiting for us. Jeet used his holiday time to be with us during our ten-day stay in the valley. We had driven through the heavy monsoon rains along the Sutlej valley so it was a relief to be at a higher altitude of the Himalayas. The journey was full of interest and excitement, including walking through a river across a road. A novel experience and not what the girls were used to on British roads.

Our first stop was Tabu where we stayed two nights. After a tour of the famous monastery we visited the local School and soon discovered that all the schools in the valley had gone to Kaza for a week of "Inter-schools sports competitions".

As we travelled from village to village we had great fun gathering up the local children for a "spring clean". Our first experience was in Mane. We washed hair, often removing nits and fleas, scrubbed and cut nails, cleaned faces and teeth. At the end of each session the children lined up for sweets and pens, they were full of smiles with their new appearance.

On our way up the valley to Kaza the capital, we stopped in the side valley of Pin. On an extremely hot day we gave another 22 children a good clean. Some of the parents joined in to help, others sat back in total bemusement. The children's ages ranged from toddlers up to teenagers, they were so appreciative – so unlike our children where soap and water and washing was considered a bore.

Finally we reached Kaza where we stayed three nights in a local guesthouse. We were now at an altitude of twelve thousand feet above sea level and I am delighted to say that none of us were sick during the trip. We went straight to the Mission Hospital where we met up with Dr Andrew and Nurse Nimala. Some of the girls joined the medical team on their village clinic visits; this was another great experience for all. Bryonny Nurse one of the girls on the trip had managed to acquire a complete set of keyhole surgery instruments. Brian Whitley of Biostat Ltd. Generously donated these. Dr Laki the senior surgeon was delighted, he said he had a waiting list of 30 gall bladder operations to be done. The equipment, the first of its type in the hospital, would be put to good use.

We held a cleaning session in Ki village where the children were madly enthusiastic and couldn't wait to get their heads under the cold village tap; we could hardly keep up with their enthusiasm.

We visited Demel the "weaving village" of the valley where we took a spinning wheel, which had been kindly donated. The girls assembled the kit and set it up for the local people to use. Now, one person can spin in half a day the quantity of wool which would otherwise have taken two days. Ideally we would like one spinning wheel in every village, so far we have three spinning wheels in the valley.

On our way down we visited the first village of the valley called LARI. This is where the building for the Swinnerton Spiti Women's Foundation is in the final stages of completion after taking a battering from the severe winter snows of last year. Before the long journey back to Delhi we witnessed the blessing of the craft centre by the local Lama, a flag pole was erected at the entrance and rice was strewn to all corners inside. We hope the centre will be open by the time you receive this letter.

Our principal objectives for the craft centre are for the women to receive rewards for their work. This will have a twofold effect,

- a) Keep the culture of these beautiful shawls alive
- b) Giving the women a sense of their own worth, and to allow the women to benefit from the expanding tourism in the valley.

It was good that a new generation were able to contribute to the valley. This is another step forward for the people of Spiti whose warmth and generosity of spirit is unique. For the girls it was an eye opening experience of an entirely different culture.

What does the future hold for this valley in the next millennium? It has jumped from the 18th to the 21st century in the space of 7-8 years. Cable TV had arrived and is subsidised by the Government. The influence of tourism is very strong and it is up to us to guide it in a positive way, by giving a little back to the people who have given so open heartedly to us. I hope we can improve their life which can be done with your support.

While in Delhi I had the good fortune to meet Col. SS Singh ex-army who was very interested to hear about the pump project. He has offered to send his Army engineers to advise and oversee the installation of the water tank, piping and pump with generator in Mane village. After much research into the suitability for the right pump for the job required and the severe winter weather conditions, I have discovered that to do it properly the cost is going to be twice our original estimate.

**WE NEED ANOTHER £3,000
HOW ARE WE GOING TO RAISE THIS MONEY?**

Many of you have given generously to this project already. However, we thought a “SPITI LUNCH” would be a good idea and a great opportunity for many of you to catch up on each other’s news. DETAILS TO FOLLOW but please put Sunday 28th November in your diary now.

SPITI MILLENNIUM TOUR IN AUGUST

His Holiness the Dalai Lama will be visiting Ki Monastery in August to perform the KALACHAKRA INITIATION CEREMONY. During his two week stay His Holiness will also be giving Primary teachings for western people. I am planning a fabulous trip to Spiti to enjoy this festival. We will be staying in Guest houses or camping, the highlight will be the possibility of a private audience with the Dalai Lama. Our journey will continue by road to Ladakh for 2-3 days before returning to Delhi by plane.

The full details are enclosed, please let us know as soon as possible if you would like to join us on this trip, numbers will be limited, so don’t wait too long.

Look forward to seeing you in November!

With all good wishes

Joan Pollock