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Ogyen Choling Foundation

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Mid-year Report 2017 (January to June)

As decided by the Board (10th board meeting, January, 2017) instead of sharing periodic newsletters we will be reporting on the activities and achievements of the Foundation twice a year. This is the first issue of a mid-year report.

The year of the Female Fire Bird began, as usual, by celebrating *losar*, the lunar new year, with the community on the 27th of February. There were around fifty people who participated in the celebration.



Guests enjoying the Losar lunch

Annual Program of Activities/Budget

The annual program for the calendar year 2017 with a budget of Nu 4.45 million, was approved by the 11th board meeting (May, 2017). The fact that we have already received substantial sums of donations in the first few months of the year gives us confidence that such a large budget may be realistic. With the remodeling/construction work gradually slowing down, our activities are gravitating slowly towards regular routine and maintenance work.

Religious Rituals and Observances

On the 3rd of July, coinciding with the 10th of the fifth lunar month or the summer solstice according to the Bhutanese calendar, we observed the Gonpoi Dudchoed, the annual ritual dedicated to the family's deities Maha Kala and Palden Lhamo. Sadly, the prevailing reality is that it is almost impossible to get enough ritualists to properly perform the rituals these days. We had to make do with four ritualists, whereas, this ritual traditionally requires a minimum of seven! Similarly we had to postpone the *tongchod* (offering of 1000 butter lamps and ritual cakes) because of the unavailability of ritualists in March.

Museum

Improvements to the museum: We have noticed that quite often that visitors are out of breath after they climb up the stairs to the three levels of the museum. Kelzang (Development Officer) has made benches at every level so that tired visitors can rest. These benches are now regularly used by visitors.

Inventories: Work on various inventories continues.



Cleaning artefacts and making inventory



Bench for visitors on the second floor

Visitors to the Museum: The numbers of visitors to the museum both international and Bhutanese has been steady. It is heartening to note that more and more Bhutanese pilgrims include the museum in their pilgrimage itinerary. Once again two groups of international students from

School of Field Studies (SFS) attached to the Ugyen Wangchuck Institute of Environmental Conservation (UWIEC) in Lami Gonpa visited the museum and spent half a day here.

Surely the most enthusiastic and appreciative visitors was a group of 16 visitors from Thailand led by Phra Paisal Visalo a highly respected Thai Buddhist monk. The main purpose of their visit was to launch the Thai translation of Kunzang Choden’s book of short stories “Tales in Colour”.



The enthusiastic group from Thailand

It has become a norm for the various guide training institutes to visit Ogyen Choling as a part of their cultural training programme. We are always happy to meet and talk to future tour guides of Bhutan.

Scholarship & Early Learning



We are happy to offer financial support to six children in Khangrab Primary School for the academic year of 2017. As in previous years the recipients were selected by a committee from school, based on their economic needs.

The library for the children and adults from the community is now functional. The shelf has been built in the office of the Foundation. The process of inventorying the books is still on-going. Thanks to Mr Abraham we have quite a good collection of English books for young children and young adults. In the future we will also add a section for books in Dzongkha .

The reading group which is especially for the young children who have not yet begun school continues on Sundays. The numbers of children attending has dropped as all the children above class 3 have been transferred as borders to the Central School in Misethang (10 km from Ogyen Choling). Nevertheless, at every session there are about six to eight children who also bring along their younger siblings.



Renovations and other Construction Work

Work on the boundary wall: has made good progress and we have been looking at basic playground swings and slides and see saws. We hope at least one or two items can be installed this year although the wall can not be completed this year. We are actively looking for information as well as sources for acquiring playground material. As far as possible we will use local building materials and recycle used materials, such as tyres .

Masons working on the boundary wall

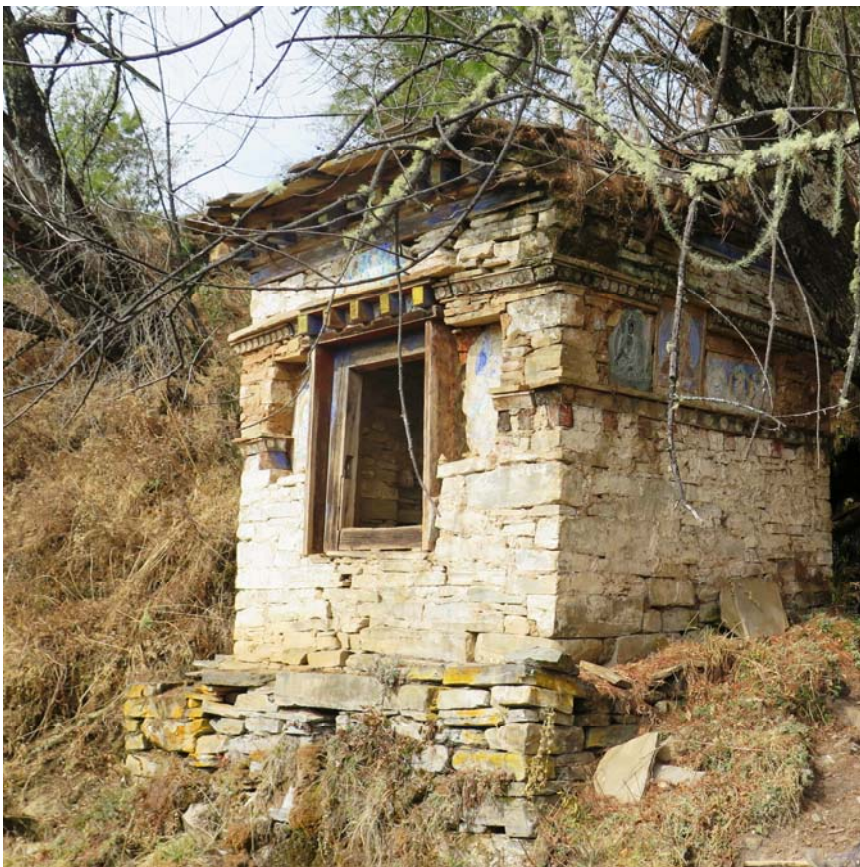
Second phase fire mitigation and security: Observations made by a Swiss group of construction specialists, staying in Ogyen Choling as tourists, sparked the process of accelerated activities for fire mitigation and security. The visitors (University professors and other specialists on fire mitigation) not only made important recommendations for modifications (such as the need for firewalls and the use of fire resistant materials), but also reminded us of the urgency of completing activities planned and initiated since a long time ago, such as the installation of smoke detectors.. To plan, initiate, and carry out some of these activities the input by a Swiss electrician with experience in fire mitigation activities was solicited. In the process of recruitment it was

realized that the required expertise is so wide that two different specialists were needed. We are extremely happy that two specialists, Mr. Matteo P. Mina and Mr. Manuel Raeber, could be recruited and their visa approval processed in time for their planned trip in August. This was possible thanks to the support provided by the CSO Authority and the Department of Culture.

Guest house: Although the work on the guest rooms will continue for some time, six rooms in the *shagkor* could be used during the spring season. The guests who have used our facilities have expressed their appreciation and have encouraged us. The new kitchen is now close to completion and we anticipate that it can be used during the fall season.

Repairs and renovations of religious structures in and around Ogyen Choling: Early this spring a generous Swiss visitor pledged to support the repair of the *khangzang chorten* near the temple which is in a precarious state of disrepair. We have informed the Director General of the Department of Culture on the matter. Fortunately during a recent visit to Ogyen Choling we could show the dzongkhag Culture Officer the particular *chorten* and he is now aware of the condition.

Another friend, also from Switzerland, donated a sum of money to repair another water driven prayer mill (*Chukor mani*) near Ogyen Choling, so this will also be another structure that we will work on in the near future. There are other structures in similar distress and the Foundation will endeavor to include them in our ongoing future projects



Chukor mani in urgent need of repair

Other News

Village improving road: This year Ogyen Choling was fortunate to receive a grant from the gewog development fund of Nu 400,000. Twenty households spent about forty days each working on the road and the “village square”. Although they could not get the roller to work on the road, the condition of the road has greatly improved.



The villagers working on the road

Audit: Early this year the Royal Audit Authority informed us that the task of auditing our accounts had been contracted to a private audit firm. Unfortunately the bad weather (snow) prevented the auditors on their first attempt but later we were informed that the auditors were not willing to carry out the audits because the payment was too little when considering the remote location. So the Foundation is yet to be audited.

Ogyen Choling Museum will be featured in a Thai documentary: A Thai film production team making a documentary on the Bhutan-Thai friendship used the Ogyen Choling Manor, especially the museum for some of the footage. We hope that this will help to promote the museum in Thailand.

Volunteer: The Foundation would like to thank Dhondup Roder who spent nearly two months in Ogyen Choling helping in various capacities. He not only helped in the construction works but whenever necessary he filled in as a museum guide and in the kitchen.

Documenting the borrowing of artefacts: A system to record the borrowing of ritual items/scriptures was introduced using a form that was translated into Dzongkha by Dr. Karma Phuntsho. In the beginning it did cause some alarm because people were used to borrowing items without any written records in the past.

Marriage ceremony: The Development officer Kelzang and his wife Tshering, both from Eastern Bhutan, observed the typical Tangpa marriage ceremony called Tsangma. The villagers happily participated, welcoming them into the community.



Book cover repair completed: Finally all the book wraps for the kanjur texts have been repaired. Ap Kaptar, the village tailor, spent many demanding hours patching up the torn covers and lining each piece!



Thank you and best wishes

The Ogyen Choling Team and the Ogyen Choling Board take this opportunity to wish you all a pleasant summer and to thank you for your continued interest and support.

The Ogyen Choling Foundation Team
Ogyen Choling, 20. August, 2017