

A Survey of Kathmandu-based Trekking Agencies

*Market Opportunities for Linking Community-Based Ecotourism
With the
Conservation of Snow Leopard in the Annapurna Conservation Area*

Report submitted to:

**WWF-Nepal Programme
and
King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation
Kathmandu**

Prepared by:

**Nagendra Budhatoki and Rodney Jackson
Snow Leopard Conservancy
Los Gatos, California**

**Final Report
December, 2002**

Introduction

In 2001 the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC), Annapurna Conservation Area (ACAP), Snow Leopard Conservancy (SLC) and WWF-Nepal initiated a collaborative project aimed at enhancing ecotourism in the Manang area, in ways that strengthen benefits to local communities while also protecting the environment and the local culture.

Manang is known for its relatively dense snow leopard population, along with supporting good numbers of blue sheep, the endangered cat's principal prey through much of the Himalaya. However, snow leopards periodically kill many livestock, leading to retributive killing by herders along with other associated people-wildlife conflict. In order to encourage the local people to better co-exist with snow leopards and other wildlife, SLC, WWF-Nepal and ACAP agreed to explore ways of providing tourism benefits to local communities as an incentive to protect this rare predator and conserve its alpine habitat. Key in this regard is the possibility of developing locally guided nature treks, and accordingly, this survey was conducted in order to assess existing market opportunities and constraints to such ecotourism enterprise.

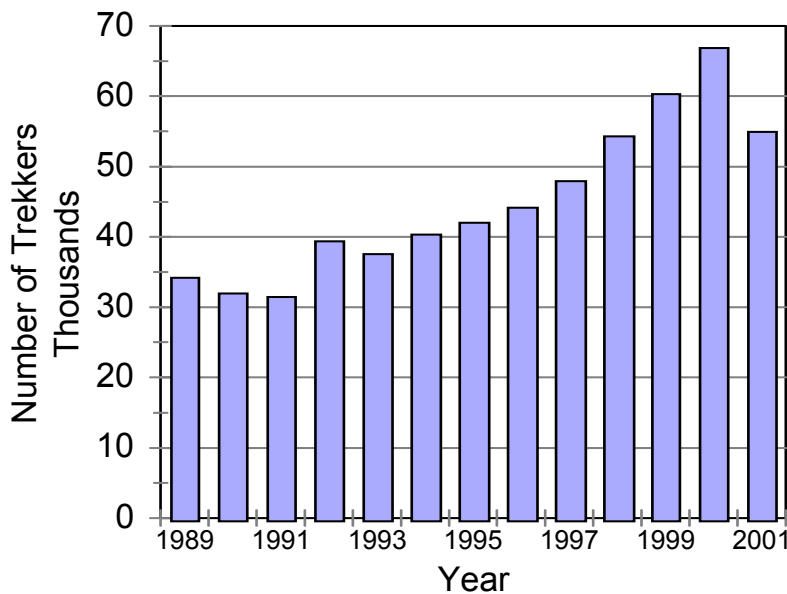
1 When quoting information from this document, kindly cite the source as:

The Snow Leopard Conservancy. 2002. *A Survey of Kathmandu-based Trekking Agencies: Market Opportunities for Linking Community-Based Ecotourism with the Conservation of Snow Leopard in the Annapurna Conservation Area*. Report prepared for WWF-Nepal Programme. SLC Field Series Document No. 4. Los Gatos, California.

Trekking in Nepal and the Annapurna Region: After Nepal opened its doors to foreign visitors in 1950, tourism began with first mountaineers arriving to climb the highest Himalayan peaks. Their exploits were widely publicized, and milestones like the conquest of Mt. Everest in 1953 brought world-wide attention to this landlocked country. Tourism followed as a natural extension to mountaineering, with one of the early climbing expedition leaders, Colonel Jimmy Roberts being considered by many as the “father of trekking” in Nepal. He led a small party of American tourists on a short trek in 1964, supported by porters, tents and all of the paraphernalia normally associated with a mountaineering expedition. This set the style for upper-end guided treks and is essentially how many treks are still conducted. Colonel Roberts subsequently established Mountain Travel (Nepal) as the country’s first trekking agency.

In 1986 the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC) launched the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP), the first and largest conservation area in Nepal, covering 7,629 square kilometers. It was conceived as an innovative and holistic attempt at community-based protected areas management, vital in an area which lacks the necessary governmental infrastructure, resources or trained staff demanded by the classic park model. Drawing 60 percent of the country’s visitors, the Annapurna Conservation Area takes a lion’s share of Nepal’s annual trekking contingent, which is comprised of people from their late teens through sixty or even seventy years of age. Figure 1 indicates ACAP’s annual trekker tourist visitation rates over the last 13 years, which has grown at a steady pace of around 10% per annum until the events of last year.

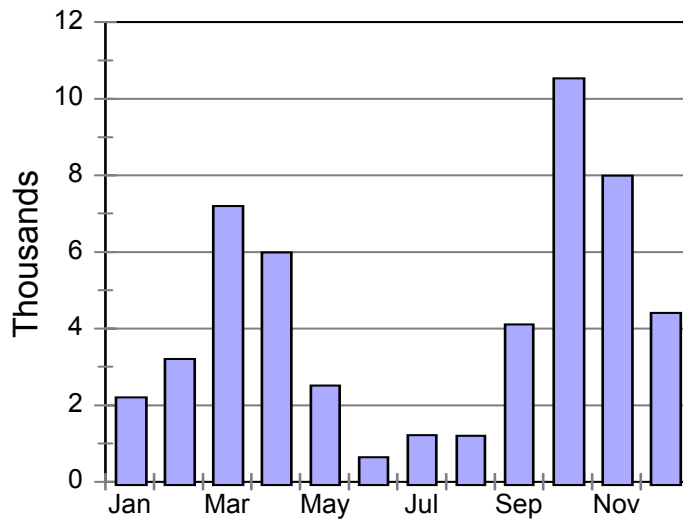
Figure 1: Yearly Trekker Visits to the Annapurna Conservation Area for the period 1989-2001.



As shown in Figure 2, most trekkers visit the area in April or May and October and November.

There is a wide choice of trekking routes and scenery within ACAP’s area of jurisdiction. These range from treks a few days in length to rigorous hikes lasting a month or more. Short and long trekking routes can be accomplished under a wide variety of itineraries, depending upon the trekker’s personal interests, physical condition and sense of adventure. The major trekking routes are located along the Annapurna Circuit, Annapurna Base Camp and Sanctuary trek, the Jomsom

Figure 2: Seasonal Visitation Pattern of Trekkers to ACAP



trek up the deep Kali Ghandaki valley, and the Upper Mustang trek (which requires a special permit and payment of a \$700 fee to HMG). Other shorter but extremely popular trekking routes are Siklis, Poon Hill, and the Annapurna Panorama treks just outside of Pokhara, the main access point to this scenic part of Nepal.

This survey, however, focuses on a broad-based sample of trekking agencies interested in servicing the Manang and the “Around Annapurna Circuit.” It is a follow-up to the survey of 82 foreign visitors that was conducted in late 2001 (Snow Leopard Conservancy 2002).

Survey Objectives

The primary objectives of this questionnaire-based survey were to:

- 1) Assess current involvement in community-based tourism (CBT) in Manang by Kathmandu-based trekking agencies;
- 2) Identify the primary marketing opportunities and constraints associated with offering guided nature walks and treks through these agencies or their local affiliates; and
- 3) Provide recommendations for developing nature treks and tours that will maximize benefits to local communities, while also supporting conservation of snow leopards and the other alpine wildlife found in ACAP.

Methods

This survey was conducted by Mr. Nagendra Budhatoki under contract to WWF and SLC. Budhatoki and Rodney Jackson drafted a questionnaire and solicited input from knowledgeable persons in the tourism and conservation sectors, including officers of the Trekking Agents Association of Nepal (TAAN) and eco-tourism specialist Ms. Tara Gurung of the UNDP-supported Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Project (TRPAP). Recommendations given by these advisors helped us to modify the questionnaire, which was then pre-tested with several trekking agencies. Final revisions were made to the questionnaire used in this survey (see Appendix 1).

TAAN assisted us to select 65 trekking agencies catering to visitors interested in the Annapurna area. Care was taken to include agencies of varied size and operational capacity. This list was subsequently narrowed down to 49 agencies which met the following criteria:

- Agencies which have been in business at least 3-5 years
- Proven experience in providing treks in Nepal and to the ACAP area
- Reputation for environmentally friendly and socially responsible business practices
- Willingness (or proven commitment) to spreading benefits to local communities and people
- Willingness to invest in staff skills training and development, especially with respect to strengthening the company's cadre of guides

Copies of the final questionnaire were hand-delivered or when this was not possible, faxed following an initial phone call to the respective agency. Respondents were informed of relevant background information including the purpose of the survey. All trekking agencies were first contacted by phone. In order to ensure that questionnaires would be returned promptly (along with as reliable information as possible), blank forms were personally distributed by Mr. Budhatoki to agencies on the final list. This was very helpful, as agencies could be briefed in more detail on the study objectives, thereby strengthening the commitment of the respondent to complete the form.

The agencies were contacted by phone and arrangements made to collect completed questionnaires. We made follow-up reminder calls and/or personal visits if the questionnaire had not been received within a week of the scheduled completion date. We received a total of 37 responses, of which 15 were received on time, a further 15 came in following a reminder (by phone call or a visit), and the remaining seven after several phone calls or a personal visit (Appendix 3).

Using a set of standardized codes, information from each form was entered into an Excel spreadsheet and proof-checked, before being imported into SPSS (version 10) software for tabulation and statistical analysis.

Results of the Questionnaire Survey

1. Profile of Trekking Agencies Sampled

Appendix 2 lists the agencies which were fairly randomly selected for the survey. As noted, completed questionnaires were received from 37 of the 50 respondents, a 69% response rate. We sampled a wide range of companies, from those with only one or two employees to the Nepal's largest trekking agencies which employed up to 44 full-time persons and nearly 400 seasonal staff (Table 1).

Table 1: Employee Status of Sampled Trekking Agencies

Staffing	Sample Size	Minimum	Maximum	Total	Mean number of employees
Number of full-time employees	37	2	44	385	10.41
Number of part-time employees	22	0	20	134	6.09
Number of seasonal employees	32	2	300	1087	33.97
Totals:		7	344	1602	43.30

Forty eight percent of agencies sampled used overseas representatives, while 40.5% did not (N or sample size = 33).

2. Markets Targeted by the Trekking Agencies

In terms of the agencies geographic focus within Nepal, 22.2% of agencies reported concentrating on the Annapurna area, while 33.3% also focused on the Sagarmatha or Khumbu region (N=36). Most agencies (44.5%) serviced both areas along with other parts of Nepal, such as Langtang National Park, Dolpa and areas in far-eastern Nepal, thus indicating a broad geographic coverage. However, with the upsurge of Maoist activity, trekkers now mostly visit the Khumbu, the lower Annapurna region and other terrorist-free zones like Upper Mustang. Very few tourists are currently visiting western Nepal where insurgency activity is most intense.

Respondents were asked to indicate the approximate number of clients they served in the last year according to each market segment. Unfortunately, very few ticked the relevant “individuals” or “groups” column, so that we have no choice but use the number of cases to report distributional patterns (according to five categories, from 30 or less individuals and/or groups to more than 500). None-the-less, these data suggest that visitors classified as Asian, western general interest and trekker or mountaineer constitute the primary clientele base for the agencies sampled (Table 2).

Table 2: Relative size of client base according to market sector

Market Segment	Size of Client Base (number of agencies)					
	< 30	31-100	101-200	201-300	301-500	>500
Western general	5	12	7	1	1	0
Asian general	16	4	0	0	0	2
Trekkers	6	12	6	1	0	0
Special	6	1	0	0	0	0
Indian	4	1	0	0	0	0

Table 3 indicates the mean, minimum and maximum number of visitors serviced according to each market sector.

Table 3: Clientele Characteristics of the Agencies Surveyed (see note above)

Market Sector	Sample Size	Minimum number	Maximum number	Average number
Western general interest	27	3	400	114.04
Asian general interest	22	3	2188	148.05
Trekker/mountaineers	25	2	250	84.44
Special interest	7	1	80	20.57
Indian group	4	10	32	20.50

Most clients pre-booked their trip prior to arrival in Nepal, rather than fitting the typical profile of a “walk-in client” from the street (known as FITs). Thus, 91.9% of the agencies reported pre-booking clients compared to 62.2% which booked the so-called walk-ins. Twenty-one percent of agencies catered largely to budget travelers, 13% focused on attracting affluent FITs, 47.8% targeted both groups, and 21.7% serviced resident expatriates.

Trekking agencies were asked to indicate the number of clients who booked from in-country, according to the major market segments used in this survey (Table 4).

Table 4: Numbers of visitors booking trips from within Nepal

Type of Client	Sample size	Minimum	Maximum	Average
Walk-in affluent FITs	12	5	60	23.58
Walk-in budget FITs	11	7	70	23.82
Resident expatriates	9	2	70	24.67
Other Types	3	25	285	113.33

There appeared to be little difference in terms of the number of affluent and budget walk-ins or FIT clients. Fewer agencies reported resident expatriates as clients, but the number of individuals and/or groups were correspondingly larger. It is not clear what constitutes the “other” clientele category.

3. Trekking Agency Activities in the ACAP Area

Table 5 indicates the type of clientele that the agencies reported they were handling or trying to target in their marketing initiatives. A majority of agencies (73.5%) said they catered to the western, Asian and trekking sectors. Only 2.9% of the respondents indicated a particular interest in servicing visitors from India, perhaps reflecting the drastic turndown in visitors following the hijacking of the Indian Airlines airplane in December 1999. These numbers are expected to increase over time as traveler confidence returns and they accept the new travel document regulations. As Nepal’s general tourist statistics indicate, a majority of general interest visitors are restricting their activities to Kathmandu Valley, Chitwan and resorts near Pokhara.

Table 5: Type of Clientele Visiting Annapurna Area

Client Type / Interest	Percent of Agencies
Western visitors (general interest)	79.4
Asian visitors (general interest)	41.2
Trekker/Mountaineer	55.9
Special Interest	41.8
Indian groups or families	2.9

Sixty-one percent and 69.6% of the respondents respectively reported that they serviced affluent and budget FITs interested in visiting the Annapurna region. Resident expatriates were handled by 43.5% of the agencies surveyed, while 13.0% serviced other types of visitors who booked from within Nepal. The number of clients visiting the Annapurna area averaged 171 per annum, and ranging from a minimum of two clients to a maximum of 2,473 clients (N=34). The average group size was estimated at eight persons (range 3-25, N=25 respondents). However, when asked to report their smallest and largest group sizes, the respondents listed these at one and 100 respectively. These agents indicated that treks within the Annapurna region comprised almost half (45.4%) of their overall business (range 2-90%, N=34).

The survey data seemed to suggest that a majority of trekking companies cater to both organized camping groups and those making use of local tea-houses and lodges for their food and accommodation (63.9%). Only 16.7% and 19.4% of respondents respectively reported that their clients were solely from organized camping groups or those fully dependent upon local lodges.

However, this question was likely misunderstood, since most agencies in Nepal organize group treks that may still use local lodges for their accommodation (as opposed to providing tents for their clients, which characterizes high-end treks).

Treks within the Annapurna area lasted from 7-28 days and averaged 18.7 days. On the average, visitors spent 2.2 days in or around the Manang area (range 1-7 days). The agencies we sampled indicated that their guests rested for 1-3 days (average 1.4 days), before crossing the 17,000 foot plus Thorangla pass. The price of a group trip ranged from \$15 to \$150 per person per day, for an average of \$39.15 (USD).

4. Use and Quality of Trekking Agency Guides

Nearly all respondents sampled (N=36) claimed that their trekking groups were accompanied by a guide, but this probably only applies to larger groups or those with well-paying clients, since the cost of a guide is considered an add-on to the basic daily charge of a trek. The agencies did not differentiate between a Nepali guide (known as a *sirdar*) and a Western (or equivalent trip) leader. Normally a Nepali guide accompanies each trekking group and is responsible for supervising porters and assisting with accommodation, meals, and daily trekking itineraries, etc.

The agencies reported that they employed from 2-60 guides (average 12.6 persons), of which 38.9% were permanent employees and 22.2% were short-term contract hires. Thirty-nine percent of agencies made no distinction between these two types of employment.

Table 6 shows how the respondents ranked their guides' English language skill and knowledge of Himalayan wildlife and plants, with respect to the four categories of excellent, good, fair and basic.

Table 6: Guide language proficiency and natural history knowledge levels

Skill Topic	Sample Size	Skill level (percent of sample)			
		Excellent	Good	Fair	Basic
English language	36	11.1	77.8	11.1	-
Wildlife & plants	36	8.3	44.4	25.0	22.2

Most agencies (88.9%) noted that they provided their guides with skills training through such groups as KEEP, Nepal's Hotel Management and Tourist Training Center (operated by HMG) or TAAN.

5. Opportunities for Marketing Locally Guided Nature Walks and Short Treks in Manang

Respondents were asked if they would be interested in sending clients on a half or full day's nature walk to the Khangshar area to observe blue sheep or snow leopard sign. Khangshar is located near Manang and this activity could readily fit within the one or two days allocated to acclimatizing for the Thorang Pass crossing. A total of 88.6% respondents indicated such an interest, with 75% desiring the services of a locally-trained nature guide.

A majority (67.7%) of agencies were willing to include the guide's cost within their client's tour package fee. The agencies placed the additional cost at \$5-100 or an average of \$22.70 per day. However, when asked what the maximum charge should be for a day-long guided nature walk, respondents indicated a range of \$5-20 for an average of \$8.23. The agencies placed the annual number of prospective clients at between 2-160 persons each for a sample average of 26.6

persons. These figures reflect the significant differences in the scale of operations among the 26 agencies which responded to this question, and which appears to be overly optimistic, as noted in the following discussion section.

Respondents were then queried about their interest in a special 1-3 day trek to Tilicho Lake, Nepal's largest high-altitude lake which is located above the village of Khangshar. Virtually all of the agencies sampled (94.3%; N=35) expressed interest. They reported that they could send 1-50 groups annually (mean = 6.75; N=24), at an average daily cost of \$39.76 per person (range \$5-\$105; N=21). When asked which sector such a trek should be targeted toward, the 18 agencies which responded suggested it would appeal equally to the budget or affluent FIT trekker (again suggesting a lack of appreciation of specialty treks).

We asked trekking agencies if they would be interested in sending clients on local homestays as another means of using rest days. Eighty-eight percent (N=34) affirmed an interest in this activity.

We asked agencies to list the difficulties or obstacles they encountered in sending clients on the "Around Annapurna Circuit" trek. They offered many reasons, including the large amount of time needed for completing the trip, the lack of good access to much of the area (especially air-service), poor communications, the area's general high elevation, and the overall high cost of this route compared to other more accessible treks located south of the main Himalayan range. Several agencies felt that over-development (i.e., too many lodges and trekkers) had already degraded the area or at least were seriously harming the quality of the experience which the visitor could expect. Trekking agencies offered the following suggestions for improvement: improved phone communications and air-access to the Manang area, controls on the amount of buildings allowed (especially tea or guest-houses), and a reduction in the entry fee which ACAP levies on all visitors (currently at 2,000 Rs or about \$26).

6. Ranking of Existing Product Opportunities and Services

Respondents were asked to rank a variety of products and facilities in terms of its importance to attracting visitors, the results of which are indicated in Table 7. If this system of ranking is a reliable indicator, the agencies placed greatest emphasis on improving on-site interpretation, the quality of local guiding, wildlife viewing opportunities, and offering local cultural shows for interested visitors. In terms of infrastructure, these trekking companies felt that the greatest need lay in improved toilets and guesthouses. Over 90% of respondents felt that improving air service to the area is important or very important.

The final question offered respondents the opportunity to make any other comment or recommendation. Eleven agencies responded, identifying the need for improving security to foreign visitors (i.e. preventing extortion or robbery by insurgents or criminal elements), porter management, promoting cleaner campsites, better water sources and proper waste disposal facilities. Several agents felt that greater emphasis should be placed on conservation initiatives, including the use of alternative energy like solar power.

7. Potential Sources of Bias and Problems Encountered

Some of the agencies we contacted flatly refused to complete the questionnaire, whereas others were very enthusiastic about the idea and promised to give their best information. Many had to be reminded several times to submit the completed questionnaire. While this is to be expected, it may

indicate that those respondents had a poor understanding or appreciation of the reason we posed these questions to them, or faced other constraints as described below.

Table 7: Product and Facility Demand and Development Needs

Product or facility	Sample size	Ranking (percentage)			
		Very Important	Important	Not Important	Not at all important
On-site interpretation	27	44.4	40.7	11.1	3.7
Improved local guiding	27	33.3	59.3	0	7.4
Better toilets	30	80.0	20.0	0	0
Solar showers	26	34.6	23.1	38.5	3.8
Better guesthouses	28	57.1	39.3	3.6	0
Local homestays	26	19.2	65.4	7.7	7.7
Improved village visits	30	36.7	50.0	10.0	3.3
Cultural shows	29	58.6	34.5	6.9	0
More walking circuits	29	17.2	55.2	24.1	3.4
Better nature viewing	29	44.8	51.7	3.4	0
Horse riding	27	3.7	22.2	66.7	7.4
More items to buy	27	11.1	22.2	55.6	11.1
Handicrafts	28	39.3	46.4	14.3	0
Improved air service to Hongde	26	61.5	30.8	3.8	3.8
Brochures & information	28	53.6	28.6	14.3	3.6

Furthermore, the survey requested potentially sensitive information, such as the price the agencies charge their clients along with other operational statistics that many companies consider as proprietary information. Despite our emphasis upon the confidentiality of any data provided, including our commitment not to share such information with anyone outside SLC and WWF, many agencies were clearly reluctant to provide the kind of information needed for an effective market evaluation. Others may have exaggerated their annual sales as a precaution or in the belief that their competitors would somehow gain advantage from the survey's outcome. Some respondents may have undervalued their income for fear of being taxed more heavily by the government. One agency staff member even suspected us of being a "spy" to the Nepal Tourism Board or tax collection agency. A business card associating the consultant (Nagendra Budhatoki) with SLC and having the endorsement of the TAAN Executive Members would help reduce these kinds of suspicion.

Given this and the highly competitive nature of the trekking business in Nepal, the cost estimates provided by trekking agencies for additions to the basic itinerary are probably not very reliable. Small agencies, in particular, are loathe to offer add-on's or to suggest increasing a trip's cost for fear of losing the client. Such behavior is quite understandable in light of the fierce competition that trekking agencies now face in light of the significant turndown in visitation levels (as much as 60%), due to a world-wide recession resulting from the events of September 11, 2001. This downturn has been further exacerbated by the ongoing Maoist insurgency in Nepal and last

summer's cautionary travel advisories for persons visiting the Indian subcontinent which were issued by the U.S, Britain and several European countries.

The other constraints rested with the length of the questionnaire, the way some questions were worded, and the nature of the information being requested, and that required senior management staff knowledge of the agency's business and financial operations to answer accurately and effectively. June is one of the slowest trekking months, with offices being largely manned by more junior personnel, who had neither the business information nor the language skills required to complete the questionnaire. This delayed completion of the questionnaires for they had to locate or contact their manager before the form could be completed.

Travel experts have noted that companies offering "camping treks" are unlikely to make use of local lodges or a village homestay, for it would mean their trekking camp staff and equipment would stand idle, while the revenue accrued to others. In the competitive and "over-serviced" trekking market that exists in Nepal, such costs are a serious concern to the average agency. In general, the agencies do not have a good understanding of what is entailed in a homestay, making awareness raising a fundamental part of any initiative to promote these as a basis for strengthening community-based ecotourism. Such awareness raising could be part of ACAP's overall program, with villagers skills training being supported by the entrance fee levied on all visitors to the area. This would help convince both trekkers and trekking agencies that the fee is used to the benefit of the local community, the environment and the business.

Office staff and trekking guides tend to view basic services and add-on products differently. They are usually more favorably entertained by management, given the underlying interest in attracting more clients. Guides on the other hand may be inundated with requests from local women's groups to provide nightly cultural shows. Another constraint to the use of more informed and qualified guides relates to management's possibly well-fear that those guides whose English and communication skills are superior will directly solicit contacts or business from the clients. This is commonly done by contracted full- or part-time trekking guides, as well as other part time guides who are trying to impress clients and offer to arrange subsequent treks for much cheaper.

Another potential factor that affected the results of this survey is the tendency of most trekking agency to offer the same products from one year to the next: very few seem to concentrate on offering special interest type treks like catering to nature enthusiasts or students for example. Therefore it is necessary to follow up this survey with more focused and detailed marketing surveys in the field or cross-checking with trekkers to verify the accuracy of the data presented above.

Some questions were ambiguously worded. For example, the terms used to identify market sectors could have been simplified, and respondents presented with multiple choices rather than open-ended questions. These and some other changes would have greatly helped in how agencies characterized their clients, given the overlap between the western, trekker and other categories. We have noted necessary changes in light of the survey, and will use a modified questionnaire should additional agencies be contacted or information be sought in the future. Note that Appendix 1 shows the uncorrected version of the questionnaire.

Finally, the FIFA World Cup Football took place at the time of the survey, and staff consequently spent less time in the office, even during regular working hours. Distribution of the questionnaire was time consuming, and it was difficult to locate the office of many agencies since streets are not named nor are most buildings or houses in which they are located even numbered on the outside.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In spite of a less than expected return in the number of questionnaires, this survey provides helpful information for supporting continued planning of community-based tourism (CBT) initiatives in the Manang Area of the Annapurna Conservation Area --- which is one of Nepal's premier protected areas for snow leopard and associated mountain wildlife, plants and habitats.

The Kathmandu-based trekking agencies that we sampled reported nearly half of their trekking business accrued from the Annapurna area. According to the respondents, their clients spend an average of nearly 19 days completing the circuit, with 1-3 rest days in or near Manang village. This presents the local community with a good opportunity to develop local activities to sell to visitors either directly or indirectly through the trekking agencies. Visitors and agencies alike have expressed their willingness to pay for quality nature-guiding services at a level which would be most attractive to local residents, most of whom have few job opportunities other than those associated with farming, herding or serving as staff of a local guesthouse. In addition, these jobs are poorly or very poorly paid.

Seventy-five percent of respondents indicated an interest in hiring a trained nature guide, for which trekking agencies would charge their clients an additional \$22 (USD) per day. According to the agents we questioned, local guides could be paid an average of about \$8 per day for their services. These agencies projected being able to provide 2-160 clients each per annum, for an average of about 26 persons. However, these figures are skewed by the few very large trekking agencies sampled, so that a lower figure would be more realistic.

The results of this agency-based survey must be viewed in light of findings from last fall's visitor survey conducted in the same area: the 80-plus trekkers to Manang that we sampled indicated high levels of interest for local nature walks and guides, along with brochures, pamphlets and related interpretive materials (Snow Leopard Conservancy 2002). While most visitors traveled to Manang on their own, many hired guides or sought the services of a trekking or travel agency. About 40% traveled as part of an organized group. A number of recommendations were made, including training 8-10 local villagers in nature guiding as one means for (1) ensuring more benefit accrues to local communities; (2) helping offset economic losses to livestock depredation by snow leopard and thereby hopefully lowering the "temperature" associated with people-wildlife conflict; and (3) establishing a link between local income-generation and wildlife conservation. The first training session will be held this coming spring.

Among the other key constraints to CBT tourism is the area's poor communications, and its remoteness which necessitates a long trek. Most visitors' to Nepal allocate only 14 days or less to trekking, and thus visit more accessible areas like the Khumbu in eastern Nepal or the Annapurna Sanctuary near Pokhara. Interestingly, the agencies cited inadequate air-service as a major constraint to visitation to Manang, along with security matters arising from the current Maoist insurgency. Even after the decline in international air-travel and tourism abates, overcoming such obstacles will not be easy.

One innovative approach being undertaken is that by a local Manang entrepreneur, Mr. Tripple Gurung who is organizing a special marketing initiative under the theme "Destination Manang 2004" (see the website for details: <http://www.spinybabbler.org/snowmonkey>). This is a prime example of a local entrepreneur / travel agent with whom WWF-Nepal and ACAP should work in the future. Mr. Gurung's goal is to promote more flights to Hongde (the STOL air-strip located a half day's hours walk from Manang) and highlight Manang's unique cultural and environmental attractions through monthly "special attractions" during the two primary trekking periods (April – June and late September through November). Hopefully, he will be joined by other travel agencies

under a well-organized business consortium that commits itself to working with local communities to reduce the omnipresent leakage of tourism dollars, and to increase local benefits from trekking or cultural tourism.

Special events, itineraries and pricing schedules must be available and promoted to agents at least six months to a year in advance, in order to be incorporated into agency's brochure and their agents marketing materials. Photographs should be included in the marketing materials which agents can use for promotional purposes.

Effective and tightly targeted marketing is one of the most important components of a successful tourism venture (Boo 1990; Brandon 1996). Contributors to the Mountain Forum's discussion on practices for linking conservation with CBT enterprises (1999) highlighted the importance of holistic planning and management strategies, especially vital given the remoteness and marginalized nature of most mountain communities. For an equitable distribution of tourist benefits and other opportunities to accrue, due emphasis must be placed upon organizational and individual capacity building, skill-based training and awareness-raising. Case studies highlight the value of promoting partnerships between local village organizations, NGOs and the private business sector. Besides the need for suitable investment incentives and enabling governmental policies, the site should offer competitive and unique features (such as stunning scenery, rare wildlife), and comfortable amenities to draw visitors in and keep them there for at least 2-5 days. While Manang clearly has the potential, it will require a concerted effort to work with those qualified, responsible trekking agencies committed to ensuring equitable benefits accrue to the local people.

As part of the marketing strategy, ACAP and project sponsors should make necessary provisions for qualified trekking agents to visit Manang on a "Familiarization" tour -- partially paid for by local entrepreneurs and partly by agents. These would be offered to allow them to experience the enriched nature experience themselves, so that they can market and sell the product more effectively. Other marketing endeavors may include a video or CD-Rom.

Follow through is clearly required to sell agents on the value of adding nature walks and guided interpretative packages as a means of better serving their clients or enhancing their products. This may include running articles in the travel newsletters, announcing and promoting nature services at the annual January Eco-Trekking Workshop organized by TAAN, personal visits to more interested agencies, fliers, etc.

This survey was conducted as part of a continuing pilot-testing process for promoting wildlife-related tourism in a way that benefits the people living in snow leopard habitat. A similar initiative, centered on traditional homestays, is underway by SLC and the Mountain Institute (with support from UNESCO) in the Hemis National Park of northern India. Many lessons from that project, as well as recommendations accruing from the visitor survey conducted in Manang in 2001, are relevant here: for example, training of local nature guides, institutional capacity building and leadership on the part of KMTNC/ACAP, and the need for follow-through planning meetings with interested community members and organizations (see SLC 2001; 2002).

Specific Recommendations:

The following paragraphs highlight recommendations pertinent to forging a more effective linkage with the private sector, especially with the more responsible trekking agencies based in Kathmandu and Pokhara:

- 1) ACAP should ensure that a greater portion of the fees collected from foreign visitors is invested in skills training for local people and which moves the process beyond just lodge or tea-house

operations, as well as developing environmentally and culturally appropriate interpretive materials supported by suitably designed, scaled and constructed facilities. The latter could include a community cultural and natural history museum, trail and view-point signage, community bulletin boards and other visual aids for the visitor. The reader is referred to the planning guide published by the International Ecotourism Society for best practices guidelines and specific ideas in this regard (Lindberg and Hawkins 1999; Lindberg et al 1999)), and other examples of visitor information centers recently developed in Nepal, notably in Royal Chitwan National Park.

2) NGOs are the best intermediary for facilitating collaboration between the private sector and local interests in ecotourism development and for providing local communities and their recognized groups with the training, technical assistance, and information necessary to participate in benefit sharing and employment opportunities from ecotourism. Toward this goal, KMTNC/ACAP, with support from WWF-Nepal and SLC, should develop and implement a pilot nature guiding program in close collaboration with a few selected Kathmandu-based trekking agencies.

The first step is training for nature guides, an activity proposed for the spring of 2003. WWF-Nepal could also assist local communities and ACAP staff to collect information, and to monitor and evaluate tourism and linked community conservation initiatives. As noted, nature guide training must be accompanied by a marketing effort in which their services are offered to specific trekking agents and through TAAN and the Nepal Tourist Board.

A competitive “no-cost” bidding process could be used to attract the most interested, qualified and committed agencies willing to invest in quality training and hiring of local guides, and in developing and promoting local nature walks and guided wildlife viewing opportunities targeting snow leopard and blue sheep (which are the leopard’s most important and easily sighted ungulate prey).

Key questions to pose include the following: What would be the benefit to the investing agency? Would they get exclusive rights, priority treatment or bookings with the trained guides? Without such considerations it is hard to see why agencies would be willing invest in training that would benefit other agents as well. Clearly planning input is needed from selected agents on how to avoid some of these concerns or potential pitfalls. Such items could be explored in a workshop organized by ACAP or WWF-Nepal Programme.

3) CBT opportunities and activities should be developed according to locally endorsed criteria for ensuring equitable benefit to each partner in the consortium (trekking agency, local community and ACAP and the guide), while still ensuring viable business enterprises. For example, the key actors could consider formulating and enacting a special charter document to guide the activity, including norms for business practices and revenue distribution (for example, see the suggestions in France 1999). The importance of agencies participating in the planning process from the beginning cannot be stressed enough.

Long-term sustainability is best assured through building the capacity of carefully selected and mandated local institutions, such as the Snow Leopard Conservation Committee or the local Youth Association (see the “next step” recommendations made in the Visitor Survey report, SL 2002 for details on this and related matters).

Acknowledgements: The authors extend their appreciation to WWF-Nepal Programme for co-financing this survey as part of a partnership between KMTNC/ACAP, WWF and SLC. Special thanks are due to TAAN for their assistance in identifying a non-biased, randomized list of Kathmandu-based trekking agencies to whom the questionnaire could be submitted. We thank Ms. Tara Gurung for her comments on the draft questionnaire. We are especially appreciative to

Ms. Wendy Lama for her valuable insightful comments and recommendations on involving trekking agencies and the marketing of community-based tourism products.

REFERENCES CITED

- Ashley, C. and D. Roe. 1997. Community Involvement in Wildlife Tourism: strengths, weaknesses and challenges. Unpub. Report, Evaluating Eden Project, International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), London.
- Boo, E. 1990. Ecotourism: The Potentials and Pitfalls, Volume 1. WWF, Washington DC.
- Brandon, K. Ecotourism and Conservation: a review of key issues. Environmentally Sustainable Development, Environment Dept. Papers No. 033, The World Bank, Washington DC.
- France, L. 1999. The Earthscan reader in Sustainable Tourism. Earthscan Publications, London
- Lindberg, K. and D.E. Hawkins. 1999. Ecotourism: a guide for planners and managers, Volume 1. Natraj Press, Dehra Dun, India.
- Lindberg, K. M.E. Wood and D.Engeldrum. 1999. Ecotourism: a guide for planners and managers, Volume 2. Natraj Press, Dehra Dun, India.
- Mountain Forum and The Mountain Institute. 1999. Community-based Mountain Tourism: Practices for Linking Conservation with Enterprise. Report prepared by Mountain Forum Global Information Server Node, USA.
- Snow Leopard Conservancy (SLC). 2001 Visitor Attitude and Market Survey for Planning Community-based Tourism Initiatives in Rural Ladakh. Field Series Document No. 2, Leh, India.
- SLC. 2002. Visitor Satisfaction and Opportunity Survey, Manang, Annapurna Conservation Area: Market Opportunities for Linking Community-based Ecotourism with the Conservation of Snow Leopards. Unpub. Report submitted to WW-Nepal and KMTNC, dated July 2002.

APPENDIX:

Appendix 1. Sample Questionnaire

TREKKING AGENCY QUESTIONNAIRE ANNPURNA CONSERVATION AREA

Agency Interest Survey in Promoting Nature-based Community Tourism Linkages in the Manang Area

TO: _____

FROM: Nagendra Budhathoki, Snow Leopard Conservancy (SLC) and WWF-Nepal Program.

Introduction:

The King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC), Annapurna Conservation Area (ACAP), Snow Leopard Conservancy (SLC) and WWF-Nepal request your participation in a survey aimed at enhancing ecotourism in the Manang area -- in ways that strengthen benefits to local communities while also protecting the environment and local culture. Manang supports a good snow leopard population along with its main prey species, the blue sheep. However, snow leopards also kill livestock, leading to retributive killing and other people-wildlife conflicts. In order to encourage local people to co-exist better with snow leopard and other wildlife, we are exploring how to provide more benefits to local communities. We are exploring the possibility of developing locally guided nature treks in the area, and are thus interested in assessing existing market opportunities and constraints, especially from the perspective of trekking agencies.

Can we ask you to take 30 minutes of your precious time and complete this survey form with any further comments you might have that you think will be useful for our planning.

All information in this questionnaire will be treated strictly confidential, and will NOT be shared with any trekking agency or organization outside of this project.

Many Thanks!

Respondent number: _____
(to be filled in by SLC)

Background Information on Agency (Confidential)

Date: _____/June/2002

Name of Trekking Agency: _____

Name of Person Interviewed: _____

Address and Contact Information: _____

Agency Area of Special Emphasis: (check all that apply)

Region: Annapurna Sagarmatha Langtang Other

Type of trekking: teahouse organized

Number of Employees:

Full time: _____ part-time: _____ seasonal: _____ total: _____

Other Offices (Locations): 1) _____ 2) _____

3) _____

Represented by Overseas Agencies: Yes No

If yes provide names: _____

Respondent number: _____
(to be filled in by SLC)

1. Which of the following international market segments do you cater for and approximately how many persons per year?

Pre-booked – individuals and groups:

- Western general interest nos. _____ Asian general interest nos. _____
 Trekkers/mountaineers nos. _____ Special interest groups nos. _____
 Indian groups/families/individuals nos. _____

Booked in Nepal:

- Walk-in affluent FITs nos. _____ Walk-in budget FIT nos. _____
 Resident expatriate visitor's nos. _____
 Other segments _____ nos. _____

2. Do you send clients on the "Around Annapurna Circuit"? YES NO

If yes:

a) Which market segments do you send there?

Pre-booked – individuals and groups:

- Western general interest Asian general interest
 Trekkers/mountaineers Special interest groups
 Indian groups/families/individuals

Booked in Nepal:

- Walk-in affluent FITs Walk-in budget FIT
 Resident expatriate visitors other segments _____

- b) How many clients do you send each year? _____. How many groups? _____
c) What is the average group size? _____. Smallest Group _____. Largest: _____
d) Where do members stay? In tents in local guesthouse both
e) How much time do they spend in and around Manang town? _____ (in days)
f) What activities do you provide for them? _____
g) Which areas around Manang do they visit? _____
h) How many days for rest and acclimatization before crossing Thorang La? _____
i) What does the trip cost per person? _____ (in USD)
j) What is the length of the average trip? _____ (in days)
k) Where does the group start trekking? _____
l) What percent of their total business comes from ACAP area (compared to other trekking destinations)? _____ %
m) Does a Guide accompany your groups? YES NO

If yes:

- i) How many guides does your Agency employ? _____

- ii) Are they permanent employees or short-term contract employees?
 Permanent short-term
- iii) What is the guide's proficiency in English?
 Excellent Good Fair Basic
- iv) How would you rate the guide's knowledge of Himalayan wildlife and plants?
 Excellent Good Fair Basic
- v) Do you provide your guides with skills training? YES NO
 If yes, where? _____

3. Why do you not send more clients, on the "Around Annapurna Circuit?"

4. Suggest ideas for improvements that would appeal to your clients in this area.

5. Would you be interested in sending clients on a half or full day Nature walk to see blue sheep and sign of snow leopard in the Kangshar area? YES NO

If yes:

- a) Approximately how many clients would you be able to send each year? _____
- b) What would the additional cost for per person be? _____ (USD)
- c) Would you use the services of a local nature guide? YES NO
- d) Would you be willing to include the cost of local guides in the fee charged to trekkers?
 YES NO
- f) Please indicate the maximum charge per person you would be willing to pay for a day's guided nature walk by a local guide: _____

6. Would you be interested in sending clients on special 1-3 day Trek to Tilicho Lake?

- YES NO

If yes:

a) Which market segments?

Pre-booked – individuals and groups:

- Western general interest Asian general interest Trekkers/mountaineers
- Special interest groups Indian groups/families/individuals

Booked in Nepal:

- Walk-in affluent FITs Walk-in budget FIT
- Resident expatriate visitors Other segments _____

b) Approximately how many trips would you expect to send each year?

c) What would the side-trip cost per person? _____(in USD)

7. Would any of your markets be interested in local house home stays in this area? YES NO

8. Number the following product and facilities improvements in terms of importance with regard to current and future demand from your markets.

(1 = very important; 2 = important; 3 = not important; 4 = not at all important)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> on-site interpretation | <input type="checkbox"/> improved local guiding |
| <input type="checkbox"/> better toilets | <input type="checkbox"/> solar showers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> better quality guesthouses | <input type="checkbox"/> local home stays |
| <input type="checkbox"/> improved village visits | <input type="checkbox"/> cultural shows |
| <input type="checkbox"/> more walking circuits | <input type="checkbox"/> better wildlife/bird watching/plant viewing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Horse riding | <input type="checkbox"/> more things to buy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> handicrafts making | <input type="checkbox"/> improved air service to Hongde |
| <input type="checkbox"/> more brochures & information on local attractions | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other ideas _____ | |

9. Any other comments or recommendations?

Please provide us with an example of the promotional material used to market your "Around Annapurna Trek." We are especially interested in your itinerary for the sections from Chami to Muktinath.

Thank-you for your cooperation!

Appendix 2: Alphabetical Listing Trekking Agencies Requested to Complete Survey Questionnaire

Adventure Makalu Barun Travel & Tour
Adventure Panorama Treks & Expedition, Thamel
Alpine Trekking & Expedition Service, Thamel
Asian Trekking (P) Ltd., Thamel-Tridevimag, 442424, 428532
Cho-Oyu Trekking, Gairidhara, 429097, 428890
Different Treks Service (P) Ltd., Thamel, 422757
Discover Himalayan Treks, Thamel, 258975
Eco Treks, Nepal, Thamel, 424112, 424113
Equator Treks, Thamel
Exotic Treks & Expedition (P) Ltd., Chettrapiti, 246563
Explore Himalaya Travel & Adventure, Durbar Marg, 252990, 227863
First Environmental Trekking (P) Ltd. Thamel, 417343, 424346
Galaxy Trekking & Expedition, Durbar Marg, 231170
Glacier Safari Treks, Thamel, 412116
Great Himalayan Adventure (P) Ltd. Kantipath
Green Peace Trekking, Lazimpat, 412899
Hard Rock Trekking, Thamel, 259067
Heritage Trekking (P) Ltd., Kantipath, 249476
Highlander Trekking & Expedition, Thamel, 424563
Himalayan Ecological Trekking (P) Ltd., Thamel, 417517
Himalayan Guides Nepal Treks & Expedition (P) Ltd., Thamel, 260205
Himalayan High Camp Trekking, Thamel, 268275
Himalayan Journey (P) Ltd., Kantipath, 226138
Himalayan Waves Trekking, Thamel, 416831
Jai Himal Trekking (P) Ltd., Durbar Marg, 221707
Karyang Kurung Treks & Expedition, Inc. Thamel, 425785
Langtang Ri Trekking (P) Ltd., Thamel, 424268
Lukla Treks & Expedition (P) Ltd., Lazimpat
Makalu Adventure Treks, Thamel
Mandala Trekking Agency, Lazimpat
Marron Treks (P) Ltd.
Nepal Sanctuary Treks (P) Ltd., Baluwatar
Nepal Trekking & Expedition, Thamel
Nirvana Treks & Expedition, Thamel
Nomad Expeditions, Thamel
Nomad Nepal Treks & Mountaineering (P) Ltd., Thamel
Peak Promotion (P) Ltd., Thamel
President Treks & Expeditions, Durbar Marg
Ramdung "GO" Treks & Expedition (P) Ltd., Thamel
Sakura Treks, Lazimpat
Shangri-La Asia Excursion (P) Ltd. Thamel
Sherpa Expedition & Trekking, Durbar Marg
Splendour Treks Expedition (P) Ltd., Lazimpat
Summit Treks & Adventure, Chhetrapati
Tin Tin Treks, Thamel
Trans Himalayan Trekking (P) Ltd., Durbar Marg
Trek of Enchantment (P) Ltd. Lazimpat

Appendix 3: List of travel agencies according to completeness of response

Group 1:

Cho-Oyu Trekking, Gairidhara, 429097, 428890
Discover Himalayan Treks, Thamel, 258975
First Environmental Trekking (P) Ltd. Thamel, 417343, 424346
Green Peace Trekking, Lazimpat, 412899
Karyang Kurung Treks & Expedition, Inc. Thamel, 425785
Langtang Ri Trekking (P) Ltd., Thamel, 424268
Lukla Treks & Expedition (P) Ltd., Lazimpat
Mandala Trekking Agency, Lazimpat
Marron Treks (P) Ltd.
Nomad Expeditions, Thamel
Nomad Nepal Treks & Mountaineering (P) Ltd., Thamel
President Treks & Expeditions, Durbar Marg
Sherpa Expedition & Trekking, Durbar Marg
Summit Treks & Adventure, Chhetrapati
Trek of Enchantment (P) Ltd. Lazimpat

Group II:

Adventure Makalu Barun Travel & Tour
Adventure Panorama Treks & Expedition, Thamel
Alpine Trekking & Expedition Service, Thamel
Different Treks Service (P) Ltd., Thamel, 422757
Eco Treks, Nepal, Thamel, 424112, 424113
Equator Treks, Thamel
Himalayan Guides Nepal Treks & Expedition (P) Ltd., Thamel, 260205
Himalayan Journey (P) Ltd., Kantipath, 226138
Himalayan Waves Trekking, Thamel, 416831
Nepal Trekking & Expedition, Thamel
Nirvana Treks & Expedition, Thamel
Peak Promotion (P) Ltd., Thamel
Shangri-La Asia Excursion (P) Ltd. Thamel
Tin Tin Treks, Thamel
Trans Himalayan Trekking (P) Ltd., Durbar Marg

Group III:

Asian Trekking (P) Ltd., Thamel-Tridevimag, 442424, 428532
Exotic Treks & Expedition (P) Ltd., Chhetrapiti, 246563
Galaxy Trekking & Expedition, Durbar Marg, 231170
Great Himalayan Adventure (P) Ltd. Kantipath
Heritage Trekking (P) Ltd., Kantipath, 249476
Himalayan Ecological Trekking (P) Ltd., Thamel, 417517
Jai Himal Trekking (P) Ltd., Durbar Marg, 221707

Group IV:

Explore Himalaya Travel & Adventure, Durbar Marg, 252990, 227863
Glacier Safari Treks, Thamel, 412116
Hard Rock Trekking, Thamel, 259067
Highlander Trekking & Expedition, Thamel, 424563
Himalayan High Camp Trekking, Thamel, 268275
Makalu Adventure Treks, Thamel

Nepal Sanctuary Treks (P) Ltd., Baluwatar
Ramdung "GO" Treks & Expedition (P) Ltd., Thamel
Sakura Treks, Lazimpat
Splendour Treks Expedition (P) Ltd., Lazimpat