The deadly weather conditions of 2014 highlight the dangers Nepalese porters face every day they go to work.

Dear Supporters,

“Life on the Edge” - this is the title of our November Lecture by renowned mountaineer Andy Cave. It’s very appropriate not only to describe Andy’s incredible life, but also for the work we do at PPUK. This has been a challenging year for many porters, climbers and trekkers; some have sadly lost their lives on Everest and Annapurna. These events have reminded everyone at PPUK that the mountains are both a beautiful and deadly place for porters to work, and it’s for this reason that we’re so grateful for all your support and contributions throughout 2014.

It’s also why we hope you’ll join us to hear Andy speak at the Royal Geographical Society on Thursday 6th November. Brought to you in collaboration with the Mount Everest Foundation, the evening will raise funds for what we are committed to – improving the lives of mountain porters.

Let’s not forget that a huge amount has happened during 2014 for the positive: The moving images taken by Rob Fraser during his i Porter project bring the lives of mountain porters to life here in London, so please do visit his exhibition, funded by PPUK, at the Royal Geographical Society 24th-29th November 2014

With Community Action Nepal (CAN) we have funded an outreach medical post and porter shelter at Gokyo, and with International Porters’ Protection Group (IPPG) we continue to support the medical rescue post Machermo. We believe we are more effective working together, and PPUK will continue to interact closely with CAN and IPPG in the future to facilitate projects that benefit porters.

Adequate clothing is a basic need for anyone working at altitude and our clothing bank and kit donation activities have expanded in 2014. The graphic in this newsletter (designed Zoe Olaru) shows how your support is used to provide basic comfort for porters.

Most recently we have been working to set up a clothing bank for porters in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco, and in Pakistan, where there is a desperate need for equipment.

The trekking and mountaineering industry has become a critical part of the rural economy in many mountainous regions, and helps fuel important social and economic developments. Porters remain at the bottom of this economic food chain, but with your help we can make a difference. PPUK receives no grants and relies entirely on your goodwill and generosity to help these mountain porters. For more information please enjoy reading the newsletter or visit www.portersprogressuk.org.

Namaste, Mary

Mary Morrell,
Chair Porters Progress UK

© Rob Fraser 2014
During a sleepless night at high altitude in western Nepal, experienced trekking guide and photographer Rob Fraser began to ask himself what it would really be like to be a porter. By the time the sun rose, he had resolved to find out for himself. In April 2014, Rob took on the job of a porter on the trek to Everest Base Camp, carrying two client kit bags, plus some of his own gear (weighing over 35kg). He walked, ate and slept with the porters who shared with him stories about their lives and their experiences in the hills, and the difficulties they can experience.

There were two motives behind the project. Firstly, Rob wanted to shine a light on the hard work that the porters do to support the dreams of trekkers and, secondly, he wanted to see if a relatively fit 51-year-old bloke could cope with the rigours of the work. He somehow made it and came back with a greater respect for the people who are the backbone of the mountain economy.

Rob, who has led more than 70 treks during his career as a mountain guide, thinks that it is the toughest venture that he has ever undertaken.

‘By day two I was seriously questioning my own sanity’ said Rob. ‘I was sick as a dog, feeling very weak and sorry for myself. My knees and shoulders ached and I had an annoying sore spot developing on the base of my spine’.

What spurred him on was a fear of failure and the fact that the porters had to just get on with it, even when they were unwell. ‘Many of the porters I walked alongside had legs thinner than my arms and looked like they had far less resilience than me. If they could do it, I thought, then what’s my problem!’

Rob not only finished the trek carrying the load for 18 days; he has also produced a set of porter portraits using a large format camera and a video of his time on the trail.

Don’t miss Rob’s amazing collection of film and photography during a week-long exhibition at the RGS 24-29 November, 10am-5pm daily. Entry free.
In 2010 PPUK carried out research in the Annapurna region of Nepal that showed medical problems are commonly encountered by trekking groups. The study also highlighted that safe trekking at high altitude relies not only on a first aid kit and appropriate clothing and footwear, but also on a sound knowledge of acclimatisation, evacuation procedures and adequate insurance. How sadly accurate this has proved to be over the last few weeks.

In Spring 2015, PPUK will build on experience gained during the 2010 project to carry out another research study in the Manaslu region of Nepal. We want to better understand the nature of any incidents that occur, and the preparedness of the expedition/trek. We hope that the findings will raise awareness of foreign nationals in their duty of care for the Nepalese staff they employ to support their expeditions and treks, particularly in remote regions.

We will once again collaborate with Medex, and Medical Expeditions to carry out the study. Our volunteer researchers will be Katie Wright, a medical student at Imperial College London and Sarah Wysling a doctor who worked in 2010 at the Machermo Medical Post. They will be assisted by our Nepalese colleagues to survey trekkers, sirdars, and porters.

PPUK HELPS PORTERS IN PAKISTAN

PPUK joined forces with Khurpa Care (KC) in 2013 to fund them to run training courses for porters working along the trekking routes in the Baltoro region of Pakistan. Khurpa Care is based in Skardu and was set up eight years ago as a much needed support organisation for the porters working along these routes. They have developed a training programme that is designed to help porters learn vital skills, covering a range of topics from health and safety at altitude to their rights and responsibilities.

PPUK already supports porter training courses in Nepal. We know from the findings of our research into porters’ needs carried out in 2012, that learning new skills – health at altitude, languages so they can interact with their clients, and first aid – is really valued by them. We wanted to enable the porters in Pakistan to have the same opportunities. Their professionally accredited instructors have been trained in Baltistan by the International Mountain Leadership Institute (USA), the Alpine Club of Pakistan and the Pakistan Red Crescent. Training courses include Basic Awareness & Information Gathering sessions, Glacier Travel & Crevasse Rescue, Medical Rescue & Evacuation, First Aid & High Altitude Illness and Environmental Awareness. The courses take place in and around Payu on the Baltoro Glacier - a regular acclimatisation spot at which porters normally spend a couple of days with trekkers. The rocky landscape and nearby glacier provides an excellent practical training ground during these breaks in between treks.

All the 2013 sessions were monitored and evaluated giving PPUK the opportunity to assess how the training was received and to make any adjustments for the 2014 season. We were really pleased to see that 1771 porters attended the training and 740 porters completed all four core training topics. This is a really great achievement giving the Khurpa Care team a strong mandate to carry out the 2014 training. At the end of the 2013 Pilot, Khurpa Care held a public exhibition of the 2013 PPUK-KC Pilot activities at the K2 Motel in Skardu that was attended by all heads of the primary government departments in Baltistan. Radio and local media outlets were also involved with publicizing these activities.

At the time of writing the 2014 summer training season has now been completed and we are waiting excitedly for the results. We know Khurpa Care would love to continue training in 2015. The training materials and curriculum are all in place now, but funds are needed to cover the salaries of the trainers. If you would like to donate towards these programmes please contact us at info@portersprogressuk.org.

Venetia Simonds, Trustee

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DATES FOR 2015

Thursday 26 March 2015
BEST OF KENDAL FESTIVAL
7.00 – 10.00 pm
Screenings of the best mountain films from one of the most prestigious mountain festivals in the world.
Tickets: £13.00 available from www.portersprogressuk.org/events from January 2015

November 2015 - Date TBC
AUTUMN LECTURE
7.00 – 9.00 pm
(Speaker to be announced Spring 2015)
Tickets £15 available from www.portersprogressuk.org/events from September 2015
Royal Geographical Society
1 Kensington Gore, London SW7 2AR

“If everybody learned these skills, we can make our lives much safer.”
Muhammad Ismail, Kuardu Village, age 32, 7 years working as a porter.