

**ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE:  
THE HIMALAYA ECOSYSTEMS PROJECT**

**Meeting Place: Los Angeles, CA  
(Time & location determined later)**

**September 12 – October 23, 2010**

**12 semester system units (equivalent to 18 quarter system units)**

**Program Fee \$ 2695 plus \$150 Application Fee**

Thank you for your interest in our Himalaya Program. Wildlands Studies has led expeditions into the Himalayan backcountry since 1991. We are very proud of our work in this spectacular part of the world.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Himalaya is Earth's tallest and most dynamic mountain system. This fall, our team plans to return to journey into Kumaon, a region of the Indian Himalaya that lies near Tibet and the western part of Nepal. Kumaon is ideally suited to our program because landscapes here exhibit a dramatic transition from subtropical pine forests to alpine valleys enclosed by some of India's tallest summits, including the revered peak, Nanda Devi. In the course of our journey, we will investigate warm river valleys, complex agricultural landscapes, moss-laden cloud forests, and spectacular alpine habitats. Throughout Kumaon, at all elevations, the local people practice subsistence lifestyles that are remarkably well-evolved to local ecological conditions.

Fall is a good time to come to the Himalaya. In the months that follow the summer rainy season, the air is clear and crops are coming into harvest. Village communities in the foothills enjoy a season of festivals and fresh produce. Nights at high elevation are cold, but the days are most often sunny and bright. All in all, it's an excellent season for exploration and field studies.

In the framework of an extended, backcountry trekking fieldstudy, Wildlands Studies team members work hard to understand the ecology of the Himalaya and the cultural adaptations of the people who subsist here. We also will discuss – and struggle with – strategies to combine biological conservation with human needs.

We'll divide our fieldwork among different elevations and ecological zones as we move upward, into the mountains from the south. River valleys are warm and dry with scattered monsoon forest and many tropical birds and mammals. With luck we may spot a jackal, leopard, or barking deer. In the morning it may be warm enough to swim. Somewhat higher, steep hillsides are farmed with orchards and terraces of hemp and maize. Adjoining patches of protected forest, under local control, conserve the watershed and provide fodder for domestic animals that fertilize the fields. Villages are inhabited by communities of Kumaoni farmers with distinctive customs and subsistence strategies.

The mid-elevation forests support a high diversity of plant and animal species. Pines and deodar cedar grow on grassy hillsides, broad-leaved forests are cloaked with mosses and ferns. Higher still, the forests give way to alpine pastures. If the weather cooperates, we may investigate the high alpine zone to the foot of the glaciers, with the awe-inspiring Himalayan summits as our backdrop.

Unlike wilderness landscapes in North America, the Himalayan backcountry has been peopled for centuries. Those of us who come from places saturated with consumables tend to be awestruck by the skill of the farmers and pastoralists who manage to subsist in the Himalaya with so little – their livelihoods seem both fragile and highly evolved. During the program we'll have numerous opportunities to meet with these people, to exchange ideas, and to learn about how they live.

The people of the Kumaon Himalaya face life with a spirit refined by centuries of self-reliance and acclimation to a demanding environment. Despite limited access to goods and services, they retain a deep cultural heritage and a finely-honed sense of place. Time spent among them should provide some of the richest, most enlightening moments of the program.

## **TEAM ACTIVITIES**

### **Hiking and Camping in Kumaon**

The format of our class program is an extended foot journey through the varied landscapes of the Kumaon Himalaya. Most of the hiking trails that we'll use are narrow mountain footpaths, sometimes quite steep. A few sections at low elevation are wide enough for a jeep. As we trek, we'll take time to study various aspects of the local ecology and relate local patterns to more general themes. Most nights, we'll camp in the backcountry, at remote, breathtakingly spectacular sites. Some nights, we'll stay in established camps near small towns or villages. Occasionally we may stay in a lodge with electricity and hot water.

During the low elevation part of the program (the first-third), there is a well-developed network of small roads, so we may use jeeps or porters to shuttle our gear among the campsites. During the middle and high elevation part (about two-thirds) we'll hire horses to carry the gear.

Our camping setup includes tents big enough for two people each, as well as a larger tent we use as a classroom and a place to hang out when the weather is wet or cold. We will travel on this journey with a small cook crew who will prepare our meals: breakfast, dinner and a picnic lunch. This may seem indulgent, but it makes good sense: it frees up time for class, and enables us to eat much more local food, cooked by local experts in the local style – good for us, good for the environment, and good for the village economy.

### **Our Approach to Learning in the Field**

Traditional classroom learning encourages the idea different fields of knowledge are somehow discrete, and isolated from one another. In the field, the boundaries that separate the natural sciences, conservation politics, and cultural anthropology tend to fade. With some guidance, all this information can be interpreted as a richly integrated text. Teaching team members to read this text in a critical and meaningful way is a primary goal of this Wildlands Studies program. **Please note that previous field experience is not required to participate in our program. All necessary skills to conduct our ecological fieldwork will be taught onsite on the slopes of the Himalaya, enabling all of us to participate fully.**

As we teach, we also try to engage the group in field work that can make some small but significant contribution to the region's future. In this spirit, we bolster our lessons about wild nature and the ecology of mountain peoples with practical instruction, including some biological work (collecting data about species diversity, and ecosystem structure), cultural studies (interviewing local people about resource needs), and field

research examining scenarios for climate change in this mountain region. Team members learn to use sampling equipment like a global positioning system and more traditional implements like altimeter and compass. We will also meet with and learn from local residents of the Himalaya.

Team members interested in bird, insect, or plant identification can contribute to what is known about these groups in the Himalayan region. Expect to learn how to identify a tree covered with moss and orchids on a steep hillside thick with bamboo; or how habitat differences affect the architecture of a forest. Opportunities also exist to explore topics such as medicinal plant use, gender roles in mountain societies, agriculture ecology, and human-wildlife interactions.

Team members take part in both group and individual field research efforts. Participants are expected to take two or three written exams, give one oral presentation to the group, and develop a simple, thematic map of the study site. Bilingual staff members enable students to interview local people as part of their project if they wish. Wild plants and animal groups we'll interact with include trees, epiphytes (plants that grow on other plants), birds, and mammals. Through participation in the group research effort, team members learn how to use a variety of field study techniques to gather data accurately and efficiently.

By the end of the program, each of us will have gained a new appreciation for the mountain peoples of the Himalaya and some direct experience conducting ecological field studies in a part of Asia that holds great conservation significance.

### **ACADEMIC CREDIT**

Students will receive 12 semester units (18 quarter units) awarded through California State University Monterey Bay Extended Education. While students usually encounter no difficulties in transferring credit to their home campus, applicants should check with their advisors prior to enrolling. Our staff will be happy to explain the program in further detail to the applicant's advisor, if necessary. The Himalaya field studies program gives credit in three courses:

- ENVS 370, Environmental Wildlands Studies (4 semester system units)
- ENVS 371, Environmental Field Survey (4 units)
- ENVS 372, Wildlands Environment and Culture (4 units)

Letter grades (or pass/no pass, on request) are based upon the breadth of our endeavors. Grades are determined by: (1) examinations, (2) an oral presentation based on guided independent field work, (3) participation in class and field activities, (4) a simple thematic map of the project area, and 5) maintenance of standards for group safety and conduct.

Team members are expected to conduct themselves in a mature and responsible manner. Wildlands Studies reserves the right to require any student to withdraw from the program if their conduct is detrimental to or incompatible with the interests, safety, or welfare of any course participants.

## **PROGRAM FORMAT**

The spirit of our Himalaya program is good-natured, flexible and very accommodating to team members' diverse interests. At the same time, we approach our fieldwork seriously, not only because it is important work, but because we want to provide a solid experience base for team members who think they might want to make mountain science a part of their future. Throughout the program, we work closely with local support staff who help teach and who take responsibility for many of the logistical aspects of our class. As a small international community we have a great deal to share and to learn from each other.

Team members will also become acquainted with the local residents of Kumaon – their culture, social customs, food, folk songs and games. We will endeavor to understand as best we can the singular relationship that exists between these people and the Himalayan environment.

A firsthand investigation of the Himalaya involves much walking. Access to our backcountry field sites requires successive days of leisurely to moderate hiking through a stunningly scenic mountain landscape of river valleys, forests, and terraced hillside villages. During our days in the field, we eat together, camp in tents, and travel on mountain paths that range from centuries-old trading routes to meager hunting trails. In Kumaon, the trekking segments are divided once or twice by visits to small towns like Almora and Munsiriya, where we may sleep in a lodge and check email. A small amount of jeep travel will supplement the backcountry trekking.

Along the way, we plan to spend two or three nights at each of several locations that are of special interest. We allocate much time to teaching and research, which for us means practicing ecological survey methods, discussing local natural history, interviewing villagers, and collecting other information useful to local conservation workers. In the early evening, we hold class outdoors or in a large community tent. These evening class activities may include a lecture or a student presentation, or a chance to discuss park management issues with our local colleagues.

The program is scheduled to begin in Delhi where we'll stay long enough to overcome jetlag and get a fleeting introduction to contemporary India. Then we'll board the train for an overnight journey to the incomparably more tranquil villages of Sattal, in the Kumaon foothills. After three nights at an established campsite on a ridge top overlooking the Sattal Lake Basin, we'll set forth on foot toward the high mountains, crossing ridges and traversing river valleys along the way.

In general, on our program, the hiking days begin early with ample time to cover the distance to camp at a leisurely pace. Some days are physically demanding, but we try to set a pace that allows time to study ecology, chat over tea with the local people, and discuss interesting features of the local environment. Our pace is well-suited to those who hike at different speeds. When necessary, our staff can translate, assist with the loads, and help keep us moving throughout the hiking day.

Staff includes Chris Carpenter, Manoj Chaudhry (a Kumaoni environmental educator), and several local guides who will join us for different parts of the program. In addition to these staff, we will also hire a cook crew to prepare meals and some horsemen to manage the ponies that will help transport our gear from one camp to the next.

The fall program begins near the end of the summer rainy season. The air is generally clear at this time, the landscape is lush and green, and crops are near harvest. Local fruits and vegetables are available in abundance and butterflies abound. Summer solstice has long passed, so days are shorter during the fall with sunset about 6:00 PM. Days are warm at low elevation, cool at mid-elevation, and cold in the alpine zone with nighttime temperatures below freezing at the highest elevations. Fall weather tends to be clear and sunny most of the time, although we can expect some lingering summer rain showers during early October. The Kumaon people have important festivals during fall to coincide with the harvest and the onset of cool, clear weather. These festivals add an important cultural dimension to the program.

### **TRANSPORTATION**

Arrangements will be available for participants to fly from Los Angeles International Airport to Delhi, India. Individual team members can decide whether they want to follow this schedule, or whether they want to come to Asia on their own. The important thing is that you meet us in Delhi at the correct time. Since both program instructors live in Asia, they will meet the group on arrival in Delhi. At the end of the program, you can choose to fly home on the scheduled date or you can remain on your own in Asia and fly home at a later date if you want to.

In the Kumaon Himalaya we will spend most of our time trekking and conducting ecological field research in areas that are roadless. Please realize that in the Himalayan region, travel arrangements can remain slightly uncertain until the traveling actually occurs. Weather conditions, road closures, political and bureaucratic considerations may affect our plans. Wildlands Studies has put together a unique and innovative program, so team members need to be flexible, patient and prepared to adapt to unexpected situations.

### **PROJECT COSTS**

Program Fee:	\$2695 plus \$150 Application Fee. Program fee due August 1, 2010 Enrollment on a space-available basis after the fee due date until the program is full.
Estimated in-country Expenses:	\$1950 per person includes practically all group-related expenses in India, including meals, lodging, transportation, trekking and logistical support costs, instructor travel, group supplies and research costs.  Other expenses not covered by the Program Expense Fee include a few meals during the first two days and the last two days of the program, your Indian visa cost (paid for prior to departure), a gratuity for our local staff, airport taxes, meals en route to/from Asia, and personal items like beverages, snacks, phone and internet.
Personal Spending Money:	\$400 - \$450 (this varies according to taste - but don't be caught short)
Airfare:	\$1500 (estimated)

Students should inquire at the financial aid office of their home campus regarding the use of their loans or grants for this course. CSU Monterey Bay Extended Education/ Wildlands Studies are not responsible for non-refundable airline or other tickets or payments or any similar penalties that may be incurred as a result of any course cancellation or changes.

### **NECESSARY DOCUMENTS**

Before leaving the United States (or your country of citizenship if you are not a US citizen), you will need to obtain a passport that expires no earlier than April 2011. You also need to obtain a tourist visa for India. These are available from an Indian Embassy in the United States (or in most any country except India). **Indian visas are not issued on arrival in India – you must obtain your Indian visa in advance.** We will provide full instructions about getting your Indian visa later this summer after you are enrolled in the program.

### **PRE-PROGRAM MAILINGS**

Detailed information regarding gear/food, meeting plans, group expenses payment, medical recommendations and academic preparations will be sent to all team members in a subsequent logistics letter about 8-10 weeks before the project initiates.

### **PROJECT LEADERS**

**CHRIS CARPENTER** is an ecologist and conservation scientist for Wildlands Studies. Chris has conducted field studies and led natural history programs in Asia and North America for many years. Currently he teaches the Wildlands Studies programs in the Himalaya, Thailand and Mekong River basin.

**MANOJ CHAUDHURY**, ecologist and conservation activist. Manoj is originally from the city of Nainital in the Himalayan foothill region of Kumaon. He received a degree in law, then developed Wildrift, an outdoor education program. In addition to running Wildrift, Manoj also works to develop policy to conserve ecologically sensitive areas in Kumaon.