NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETING

The 6th General Meeting of the Society for 1987 will be held in: -

THE CONSERVATION CENTRE, 120 WAKEFIELD STREET ADELAIDE

on

MONDAY 24TH AUGUST 1987 AT 8.00 PM.

AGENDA

1. Apologies :

2. Minutes of the previous general meeting :
   Minutes of the previous general meeting, held in the Conservation Centre, 120 Wakefield Street, Adelaide on 27th July 1987, having been circulated in this journal, to be confirmed.

3. Paper and Journals :
   Papers and journals received from other societies and organisations, since the last general meeting will be tabled at the meeting.

4. Business :
   Details of the October Long Weekend Excursion to the Lakes and the Coorong, to be announced.

5. Speaker :
   Dr. Roger Leubers, Archaeologist, will address the Society Society and the subject of his address will be :

   "Cultural Diversity in the Lower Murray and Coorong. An Archaeologist's Point of View."

6. Supper will be served at the close of the meeting.

R. Allison
Hon. Secretary
120 Wakefield Street
ADELAIDE SA 5000.
THE TWO TIBETS

by

Robert Foster

Before going on to describe some of my impressions of Tibet and the Tibetans in exile, it is worth giving a brief outline of recent Tibetan history. Like many people who have recently travelled to Tibet, or hope to do so in the future, my images of that country have been inspired more by fiction than fact. One imagines scenes of Shangrila-La, of peaceful valleys occupied by a medieval civilization of meditating, if not levitating, monks. Such fantasies are by no means unhealthy, but the reality of Tibet's recent history should bring even the most creative dreamer back to earth.

In 1950 China, claiming that Tibet had fallen under the "influence of foreign imperialists" announced that the People's Liberation Army was about liberate them. The Tibetan army, though small and poorly armed, put up stern resistance in eastern Kham and Amdo provinces before being forced to capitulate. Early in 1851 a Tibetan delegation went to Peking to negotiate a peace plan. At first they were presented with a ten-point peace plan, but refused to sign it as it maintained that Tibet was a "integral" part of China, however, threats of personal violence and military retaliation eventually forced their hand and, without the consent of the Dalai Lama or his cabinet, they put their name to a modified agreement. With this agreement Tibet lost its status as an independent country. In September of that year 10,000 troops of the Red Army marched triumphantly, but unwelcome, through the streets of Lhasa.

For some time the Dalai Lama and his powerless Government tried to live with the Chinese but the situation became more and more intolerable. In March, 1959, amid rumours that the Chinese were planning to assassinate the Dalai Lama, the people of Lhasa rose up and as street battles raged in Lhasa, the Dalai Lama, along with thousands of other Tibetans fled south toward India. Violence, and violent reprisals, continued over the next six months as the Chinese regained control. It has been estimated that, in this period, 87,000 Tibetans were killed and 25,000 were imprisoned. Over 100,000 followed the Dalai Lama into exile.

The decade that followed the uprising, especially the first few years and the period of the Cultural Revolution were devastating for the Tibetan people. John Avendon, in his book In Exile from the Land of the Snows, graphically describes the excesses of that time:
In an attempt to reduce Tibet to a state of servility, the Chinese crucified, vivisected, burned and buried alive thousands of monks and nuns - forcing them to copulate and then perform miracles to save themselves. Men and women were publicly tortured to death, children forced to execute their parents and whole villages sterilised.

In 1960, The International Commission of Jurists who investigated the the situation in Tibet, accused the Chinese of nothing less than Genocide. The Chinese tried to obliterate the very culture of Tibet; almost every monastery in the country was destroyed along with religious treasures and sacred texts of immeasurable value.

Early in the 1980's China began to allow tourists, in carefully supervised groups, to visit Tibet. It was not until 1985 that individual travellers were allowed into the country, as soon as I discovered this I contacted Australian Himalayan Expeditions and they organised my travel arrangements. I flew first to Hong Kong, travelled by train to Canton and then flew to Lhasa, via Chengdu. It is a two hour bus ride from the airstrip to city of Lhasa. My first glimpse of the city was the Potala Palace, the former residence of the Dalai Lama, which, despite its magnitude, seems to float above the valley.

Lhasa is a fairly small city of perhaps 300,000 people and it seems to be divided into two sections, the Chinese quarter that lines the road from the airport and the Tibetan quarter at the foot of the Potala. The hub of the city is the market which snakes its way through the streets behind the Jo-Kang Temple, the oldest and most revered shrine in Tibet. It was in this area that I spent my first two days in Lhasa as my body adapted to the altitude. Severe headaches and sense of physical lethargy slow you down at first and it is advisable to take aspirin and drink plenty of fluids during your first few days there. After almost a fortnight in the city I became over-confident and spent a day riding a bicycle around the valley and that night being violently ill, so it is advisable to be always conscious of the altitude.

Apart from the Jo-Kang Temple and the magnificent Potala Palace, which is little more than a museum now, the main sites in and around Lhasa are the Norbulingka, the Dalai Lama's summer residence, the Drepung Monastery and the Sera Monastery. It is near the Sera Monastery that the famous Jhator, or 'Sky-Burial', is held. The Drepung Monastery, which nestles in a fold of the mountains, lies about ten kilometres from the city. It once housed 10,000 monks, but is now home for just a few hundred. Not far from the Drepung is the small Nechung Monastery, it is here that the State Oracle once lived. The Oracle was one of the Governments most important advisors. The small monastery seems to have suffered badly during the excesses of the Chinese and is currently being repaired.

Perhaps the most satisfying aspect of my stay in Tibet was the warmth and friendliness of the people. It was not uncommon to
be invited into someone's house and plied with tea, or be asked to picnic with a family on the lawns of the Norbulingka. One only hopes that this sort of openness survives the tourist offensive. Some cynics have suggested that tourism is the most subtle, and potentially the most destructive, weapon yet employed by the Chinese to breakdown the Tibetan spirit.

I decided to leave Tibet by the southern highway leading to Nepal. Along with twenty other foreigners we travelled five days on a hired bus to the border, passing through the towns of Xigatse and Gyantse. Xigatse is the second largest town in Tibet and the home of the Panchen Lama, the most important religious leader in Tibetan Buddhism after the Dalai Lama. Since the invasion he has spent most of his time in China, but he was in residence at the Tashilhunpo Monastery when we arrived in Xigatse. At this time Tibet was 'celebrating' 35 years as an Autonomous Region and the Panchen Lama was touring Tibet as part of those celebrations. The attitude toward the Panchen Lama is somewhat ambiguous, while he is respected as a religious leader, he is also seen as having 'sold out' to the Chinese.

In February of this year I travelled to India, interested to find out something about the Tibetans in exile. In 1963, the Dalai Lama and his Government in Exile, took up residence in Dharamsala - a small town in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh, lying in the foothills of the Himalayas. Most of the Tibetans actually live in a small hamlet known as McLeod Ganj, several kilometres up a steeply winding road from Dharamsala.

An American anthropologist I met there described Dharamsala as a 'Tibetan Canberra', and that doesn't seem to be too far from the mark. Halfway up the hill on the way to Mcleod Ganj are the Tibetan parliament and administrative buildings, Tibetans all over the world look to the administration in Dharamsala for guidance and leadership. Dharamsala is also an important intellectual centre, the home of the Tibetan Library of Works and Archives which houses one of the world's most important collections of Tibetan literature. A number of important monasteries are scattered throughout the hills of Mcleod Ganj, such as the Buddhist School of Dialectics and a new monastery to house the Nanchung oracle.

During their short time in exile the Tibetans, largely through the influence of the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, have organised a thriving and seemingly cohesive community. It is as though the seeds of the most important ideas and institutions from Tibet have been saved and sown throughout the world. The most important schools of Tibetan Buddhism have been re-established in exile, a new Drepung monastery has been established in India to carry on its traditions, as well as a new Sera Monastery. While I was at Dharamsala, moves were underway to raise money to rebuild a traditional wood-block printing press that had been destroyed by the Chinese. The Government has also established a number of enterprises to provide employment and income for the communities, the most important of these being the carpet-making
workshops operating in India and Nepal.

One usually imagines refugees to be a dispersed people, gradually losing their cultural identity, their customs and language. Thus far, this does not seem to be the case with the Tibetan exiles, perhaps because of the cultural and religious focus provided by the Dalai Lama. Sadly, it seems that the Tibetans in Tibet are being made refugees in their own country. Though things seem a little more liberal now, for over twenty years the Chinese discouraged the practise of religion, the wearing of traditional dress, even the use of the Tibetan language. What's more, a policy of forced migration is making the Tibetans a minority within their own borders.

Despite numerous overtures from the Chinese, the Dalai Lama refuses to return to Tibet without the re-establishment of its independence. The tens of thousands of exiles refuse to take out citizenship in their countries of residence, even though it would make their lives considerably easier, as this could be interpreted as a weakening of their claims for Tibetan independence. Indeed, many Tibetan 'refugees' have been born outside of Tibet, yet they still look to the day they will return to a homeland they have never seen.