

Tibetan Children's Education Foundation Helena, Montana

Sand Mandala Tour 2010



TCEF's cultural tours with various Tibetan artists is a major part of our work. TCEF is committed to helping preserve the endangered Tibetan culture. As a US non-profit one of the ways we contribute towards that is by raising awareness of Tibet and Tibetan culture here in the West. The cultural tours do exactly that and they also provide excellent platforms to discuss all things Tibetan and talk about the work that we do with Tibetan children's education in exile.

This year's tour started with the excitement of participation in the National Folk Festival at Butte, Montana. It was a novel experience for the Ven. Ngawang Chojor to be working in a tent! One afternoon we had a fairly strong storm and it really did not seem like a good idea at all to be doing a sand mandala in a tent - but we did survive it and although there were many

interesting attractions at the festival, we had a really good amount of people visit our tent.

Our next event was in Helena at the Feathered Pipe ranch. Tibetan communities in India seek special places - high places, clean places, places with special energy to hang their prayer flags and offer sangsol or incense offerings. From our settlement at Clement Town, we would make an annual sangsol trip to the nearby hills at Mussorie to do that. In Montana, the Feathered Pipe Ranch has been



that special place for us. So the sand mandala construction at the ranch was a special and sacred event.

We had a great venue in the Pilgrim Congregational Church in Bozeman. In terms of attendance, it was really good and we had a steady stream of visitors on all three days. For me, the most memorable part of this event was sharing the

sand mandala with the Sunday School. I gave an overview of the mandala under construction there and fielded some really interesting questions from the children. The class instructors had prepared wonderful yantras (Indian mandalas), Tibetan auspicious symbols and other Tibetan patterns for the children to paint. Both Ven. Ngawang Chojor and I enjoyed explaining their meanings.

We were excited to do our first event in Wyoming. Ven. Ngawang Chojor thoroughly enjoyed the drive through the Yellowstone and Grand Teton parks. TCEF board member and event coordinator Roy Andes was resourceful in finding hosts at multiple locations for the tour party and volunteers. It was peak summer and perhaps not the ideal time for a sand mandala at Jackson Hole. We enjoyed the great venue at St. John's Episcopal Church and the visits of the children from Camp Nino - but felt that over all attendance could have been much higher had we not been competing with all the exciting outdoor activities of Jackson at this time and the teachings of Choekyi Nyima Rinpoche!

I'll always remember our next event at the Zootown Community Art Center because of little Sophia. She is a beautiful child - blond with blue eyes. She first visited our sand mandala tent at Butte with her mom and was immediately drawn towards Ven. Ngawang and the sand mandala. They stayed for many hours - little Sophia clearly fascinated and wanting to stay. She brought hand picked flowers for her 'sand man' and a beautiful connection was made. Karen, her mom instantly recognized this special connection. She very kindly offered a wonderful suite at the Wilma Lofts in Missoula for the whole tour party when she knew that we were coming there.



Of course little Sophia and family came to our event at Missoula. Again she brought hand picked flowers for Ven. Ngawang and I was as surprised as anyone when she had tears streaking down her beautiful face at the time of saying good bye. Ven. Ngawang is

going to make a Tibetan 'chupa' for Sophia and thinks that there must be some imprint of past life connections!



We had one of our most interesting and well attended events at Great Falls, MT, thanks to the hard work put in by our event coordinators there - Dr. Vicki Chapman and Dugan Coburn. Dugan is a native Blackfeet Indian and realizing the remarkable cultural similarities between native Indians and Tibetans, we decided to use this event to highlight it. We set up a modest collection of Indian and Tibetan artifacts for an exhibition and then did a presentation to

explore commonalities. Ven. Ngawang Chojor spoke on the Tibetan sand mandala art and Nathaniel Bread, a Navajo sand painter, gave a presentation on his art. The whole presentation was very well received and the Lewis and Clark Center even awarded Ven. Ngawang and myself their Peace and Friendship Medals as a token of their appreciation for event there

Our event at the University of Mary, Bismarck, ND, was filled with interest, warmth and friendliness of everyone on campus. Students, faculty and members of the community took a keen interest and all our events were very well attended - we had the best attended openin



g ceremony ever! Audiences sat on the floor (once all the seating was taken) and spilled into the corridors of the Hesket Hall for my convocation address on the Challenges of Tibetan Cultural Preservation. On all the evenings, the tour group was whisked away to different dinner invitations. Above all, the Bismarck event was memorable because of the friendship and hard work put in by Prof. Kathy Henjum our coordinator. Months before the event during one of our many telephone conversations about the event, I had mentioned in passing that the event should be visible on campus with signs pointing to the venue. When we arrived, we were gratified to see beautiful 'Tibetan Sand Mandala' signs printed and lamented all over campus!

SAND MANDALA
VENERABLE NGAWANG CHOJOR

BARJON'S BOOKS
SEPT 30 thru Oct 2

BARJON'S BOOKS MUSIC GIFTS
223 N 29th Street, Billings

Thursday Sept 30 - 10am **OPENING CEREMONY** 10:15 - 5pm construction
INDO-TIBETAN DINNER 7 - 9 pm @ **GOOD EARTH MARKET** \$20 suggested donation rsvp 252-4398
3024 2nd Ave North, Billings

Friday Oct 1 - 10a - 5p Construction continues **FRIDAY ART WALK** 5pm - 9pm
Saturday 10 - 3 followed by Dissolution Ceremony 3pm

TIBETAN CHILDREN'S EDUCATION FOUNDATION
www.tibetanchildrenseducation.org

The event at Billings, MT, was another success. From the first morning itself, we had a steady stream of really interested visitors. It was the very first time that a sand mandala was being constructed at Billings and there was much interest. In terms of space, Barjons Books was a much smaller venue than say Bismarck, but the whole shop had a wonderful atmosphere with Tibetan prayer flags, singing bowls, thangkas (to which we added our own collection) and various other Tibetan artifacts. Within the constraints of the space available, Jim (event coordinator and owner of Barjons) was extremely kind to accede to all our requests.

The core group of people that evinced the greatest genuine interest was from the Billings Dharma Center. The Center hosted our stay and they felt privileged to host Ven. Ngawang Chojor. We got to briefly take part in a morning inter faith discussion and an evening of satsang at the center. Khenpo Yogadhatta was kind enough to cook us breakfast on more than one occasion.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The success of TCEF's cultural tours is built on the kindness, time and hard work of many people: staff, volunteers, TCEF friends and sponsors in different places - too many for us to list. But local event coordinators and hosts really make the tours possible. For our 2010 Sand Mandala Tour we would like to gratefully acknowledge the following:

George Everett - Event Coordinator, National Folk Festival, Butte, MT

India Supera - Event Coordinator and host, Feathered Pipe Ranch, Helena, MT

Roy Andes - Event Coordinator and host, Jackson, WY

Tom Larcher - Host, Jackson, WY

Dr. Bruce Hayse - Host, Jackson, WY

The Episcopal Church at Jackson, WY - Event Venue

Hanna Hannan - Event Coordinator, Missoula, MT

Zootown Art Community Center, Missoula, MT - Event Venue

Karen Marsolek and Wilma Lofts, Missoula, MT - Hosts

Wayne Gorski - Event Coordinator, Bozeman, MT

Steve Hamner and Jane Dubitzky - Hosts, Bozeman, MT

Pilgrims Congregational Church, Bozeman, MT - Event Venue

Dugan Coburn and Vicki Chapman - Event Coordinators and hosts, Great Falls, MT

Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center, Great Falls, MT - Event Venue

Professor Katherine Henjum - Event Coordinator and host, Bismarck, ND

University of Mary, Bismarck, ND - Event Venue and Co- sponsor of event

North Dakota Humanities Council - Co - sponsor

