

# Adventures In Nepal

## Visual Feast Of Guilford Man's Trip

By Pam Johnson  
*Courier Staff Writer*

When Al DiMarzio took the trip of a lifetime to Nepal, he made sure he didn't miss a thing. He knew the chance to work with a documentary film crew, exploring the holy stuppas (temples) of Nepal, would give him entrée to a world few tourists could experience.

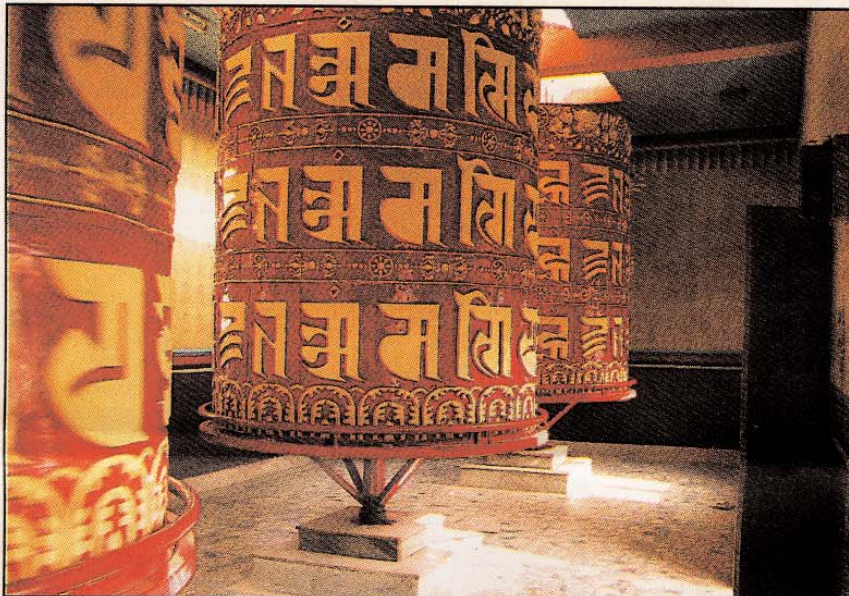
In fact, DiMarzio made sure his family and friends didn't miss a thing, either. DiMarzio took more than 2,000 digital photos to docu-

ment his journey. While in Nepal, chance to travel to Nepal after his On Oct. 31, the two left Guil-



PHOTOS BY AL DIMARZIO

The temple is lit with thousands of "butter candles," each placed along the walls by individuals celebrating a type of Buddhist Mother's Day known at Tushita Buddha Day.



These gigantic prayer wheels, with prayers carved on the outside, can be spun by pilgrims to send prayers.

he used a laptop computer, set up a website, and started uploading photos with journal entries. DiMarzio would then invest some rupees at a local Internet café and send the news to the states.

"There were more Internet cafés than bars. In fact, I don't think I saw any bars, but I saw an Internet café about every two blocks. They charged one rupee a minute. There are about 75 rupees to a dollar," said DiMarzio.

The Internet cafés are necessary, because few Nepali have electricity and even fewer have their own computers. With no house numbers or mailing addresses, many have embraced e-mail. Still, most homes have no running water; people bathe in public baths and wash their clothes alongside their bodies. Roads are a web of potholes, cows are sacred, and butchered meat (usually buffalo or chicken) is sold on tables set up in the open air.

"I didn't think of Nepali as being impoverished. They have a way of life, which is simple. They do their life very nicely," said DiMarzio.

DiMarzio, who owns HB Graphics in Guilford, got the

friend Bill Swofford won a grant to do a documentary. DiMarzio is also the president of the Guilford Chamber of Commerce.

"Bill works for me part-time as a graphic designer. He's also a UConn student. Last year, he was involved in a student program in Nepal and he produced a video, mostly of the stuppas. It was so well received, he got a grant to do a full-scale documentary. I got involved after we started joking that he would need someone to carry his tripod," said DiMarzio.

Swofford suggested DiMarzio might be the guy for the job. DiMarzio decided to pay his own way and join Swofford on the journey (although he now laughingly refers to his economy-class trip as e-cow-nomy; passengers as cattle).

"I decided this was a once in a lifetime experience, where I would be there with someone who already knew some of the people and the area. I had several projects in mind for myself, including getting panoramic views of the squares and historic sites. I was also interested in recording the types of handcrafts," said DiMarzio.

ford, arriving in Nepal a very long 48 hours later. DiMarzio remained with Swofford for three weeks, returning to Guilford in late November. Swofford, who is also a Guilford resident, will stay abroad a total of 10 weeks to complete his documentary.

"I started the journal for my wife, Roberta, and for Bill's girlfriend. The original concept of the website was to share with family back home what we'd been up to," said DiMarzio.

The journal is broken into six entries; each spans several days of the trip. DiMarzio has had so many people ask about his journey, he's printed a business card with a color photo of a stupa under the text "Adventures In Nepal." The flip side gives the website: [www.hbgraphics.com/nepal](http://www.hbgraphics.com/nepal).

The journal opens with DiMarzio's view of his first taxi ride in Nepal (it was hair-raising) and takes the reader along to explore Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Patan, and other locations. In one series of entries, DiMarzio, an extremely youthful 64-year-old, describes a

See **ADVENTURES** page A-12.

Continued from page A-10.

four-day trek up and down the mountainous Helambu area of Langtang National Park.

Much of the journal focuses on DiMarzio's time spent viewing the Baudha Stupa in Kathmandu, a focal point of Swofford's documentary. DiMarzio describes it as "the St. Peter's Cathedral of the Buddhist culture."

"That was the place I was mainly in for three weeks. I almost felt like a part of the area. Coming back was bittersweet. I wanted to be home with my wife, and at the same time, I also missed being at the stupa," said DiMarzio.

DiMarzio would often rise at dawn to get to the stupa at first light. He would sometimes navigate the perimeter of the stupa with the crowds of pilgrims, always walking in the proper direction, clockwise. Clouds of smoke would rise up from incense pots. Prayers would be offered in chants or from the spinning prayer wheels, some of them tremendous cylinders topping out at 12 feet.

"There were magnificent prayer wheels inside. You spin the prayer wheel and inside is a prayer written on paper. You turn the wheel and the prayer is said," explained DiMarzio.

Now that DiMarzio is back in his North Street home and office, he's taken his trip documentation even further. DiMarzio has filled a compact disc with 1,700 of his digital photographs of Nepal and its surroundings. Some of the digital scenes are movies, some are movable panoramic photos (use the cursor to "walk" inside the picture). He made the CD to send back to many of the friends he made during his trip.

By taking all invitations to join in native Nepalese customs (including a meal eaten on the floor, using only the hands—"I was a mess. There was rice everywhere," he said), DiMarzio attempted to steep himself in the local culture as much as he could. He went so far as to ignore news from other areas of the world, even the U.S.

"I made a very conscious effort not to pollute the experience of Nepal by troubling my mind with news of the world. I felt the culture of Nepal was so rich, I didn't want to dilute it. I wanted to immerse myself," he said.

Some of the ways of Nepal still linger for DiMarzio. He found he enjoys the custom of drinking tea, even indulging a native's request to take black tea with yak milk and

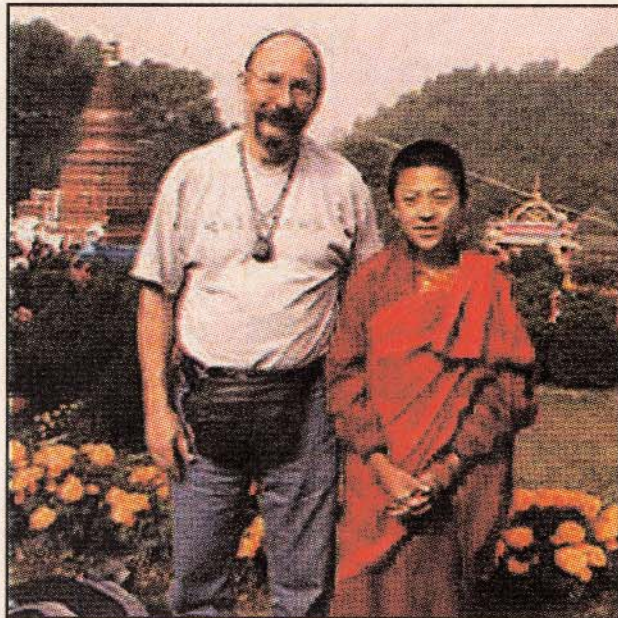


PHOTO BY AL DIMARZIO

Al DiMarzio with Sangay, a 15-year-old who is studying to be a monk.

salt.

"I used to be an avid coffee drinker. I think I've had about two cups of coffee since I've been back. Now I love to drink tea. I'm also addicted to rice and noodles, which is just about all I ate in Nepal," said DiMarzio.

DiMarzio also brought back incense and elaborately carved and gilded wooden incense boxes. He bought the boxes from a local furniture manufacturer, who agreed to show DiMarzio how the items were handcrafted and painted. DiMarzio also enjoyed haggling for a set of two brass singing bowls; the merchant would have it no other way. He even returned with compact discs of the music of Nepal signed by band members. In fact, there are no copyright laws in Nepal, and every CD is personally signed by the artists to indicate authenticity.

DiMarzio's favorite CD is of songs recorded by tabla (finger drum) player Surendra Shrestha, a member of the band Sur Sudha. The band has released eight CDs in Nepal and is a favorite of the king. DiMarzio heard the group play in a small room at Surendra Shrestha's office. That CD has a personalized autograph from Surendra Shrestha to DiMarzio beyond its "copyright" signatures.

Sur Sudha has tentative plans to perform in Boston or New York next year, and DiMarzio has already offered to put the band up in Guilford and show them his "historic" hometown—although it's hard to

consider New England as historic after returning from the truly ancient world of Nepal, he said.

"The stupa we were at was believed to have been built in 400 AD," he pointed out.

DiMarzio met another favorite of the king of Nepal; a very holy swami who is also a royal advisor.

"He was one of the many advisors to the king. He spoke for the religious community of the Sadhu. A Sadhu is a Hindu holy person who renounces money and has a holy way of life," said DiMarzio.

DiMarzio said it was very unusual to be given an audience with the swami.

"He just happened to be there, and he agreed to see us after our guide requested it," he said.

DiMarzio even convinced the swami to be photographed for his journal; of course, that photographic coupe is featured on his website.

Although anyone reading through "Adventures in Nepal" can easily navigate and absorb DiMarzio's information, DiMarzio welcomes e-mail about the trip and gives his e-mail address at the site.

"I also would be willing to visit classes and talk about the trip, if someone would like me to talk to students at their schools," he said.

DiMarzio sums up his adventures in Nepal this way: "It was my first trip to Asia and my first trip to a third-world country, and we did not take the tourist routes. It was such a rich experience, that I choose not to dismiss it," he said.