

### **Pema Tshiri Sherpa's visit includes Jan. 18 presentation in Blowing Rock**

LINVILLE, N.C. — When hiking Grandfather Mountain, it's fairly common to encounter one of the park's many rangers.

Less common are Nepalese sherpas. Actually, much less common — but not unheard of.

This January, Grandfather Mountain will welcome Pema Tshiri Sherpa back to the park. Pema, a Nepalese sherpa, leads mountaineering and trekking excursions in the Himalayas and is the only trek leader who has personally walked every mile of the roughly 960-mile Great Himalaya Trail.

He visited Grandfather Mountain in 2014 to deliver a presentation on the nature and people of Nepal, and will return Wednesday, Jan. 18, before delivering a presentation that evening at the Blowing Rock Art & History Museum in Blowing Rock.

The event will take place from 6 to 7 p.m. and is free to attend, although registration is required, as the guest list is limited to 80 attendees. Pema's presentation, however, will be markedly different from 2014's.

"Pema visited Grandfather Mountain and loved everything about it," said Jesse Pope, executive director of the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation, the nonprofit organization that operates the Linville, N.C., nature preserve and travel attraction. "He was so excited to see and learn about Grandfather. His eyes lit up when he learned about the lush vegetation that encompasses the mountain. In Nepal, most of the mountain range is above the tree line, providing a very different ecosystem and a different aesthetic experience, as well."

But the very next spring, on April 25, 2015, Nepal was devastated by a 7.8-magnitude earthquake. Pema's village suffered major damage and is still recovering from the disaster.

"We have stayed in touch over the last two years, and recently, Pema reached out to us about visiting Grandfather Mountain again," Pope said.

In the earthquake's aftermath, Pema established a non-government organization, the Sherpa Welfare Nepal Foundation (SWNF), to aid in earthquake relief, recovery and rebuilding.

"He is asking his friends from across the globe to help get the word out about what is happening in his part of the world," Pope said. "We have been working with other businesses, groups and organizations to help arrange audiences for Pema to share his story of growing up in Nepal and reaching the summit of Mt. Everest — which he has summited, at least, eight times — but also about the recent earthquake tragedy his village has endured."

As such, Pema will not only discuss Nepal, but also the foundation's efforts in relief and recovery. To help raise funding, he'll also be selling Nepalese shawls, handcrafted with yak fur.

"This is a rare opportunity to meet a real sherpa from Nepal right here in the High Country," Pope said. "Pema's stories about his adventures in Nepal, growing up in the world's largest mountain range and his work in disaster relief following the 2015 earthquake — from someone who lived through it all — is an experience we will not soon forget."

Pema hails from the lower Solu Khumbu village of Hill in Nepal, where he was born the fourth of 10 children.

“My village is a non-tourist area in the Himalayas,” Pema said. “We have around 85 houses and 60 to 65 children in the school. Normally, I lead treks in the Everest and Annapurna round — the most famous trekking area in Nepal.”

But his beginnings in the trade were much more humble.

“When I was 16 years old, I saw trekkers,” he said. “I went to the marketplace to ask for a job as a porter. I had no trekking equipment, no boots and no warm clothes. I was paid in chocolate, a T-shirt and a few pencils given to me by the trekkers.”

He soon moved to Kathmandu, where he spent two years working as a porter, then advancing to the position of kitchen assistant. A year later, he was promoted to camping sherpa, and two years after that, he became a trekking cook. This afforded him the opportunity to obtain the training necessary to become a climbing guide. The six years that followed found Pema leading private trekking groups, and he started his own expedition business — Pema Treks & Expedition — in 2008.

“Pema has a great passion and love for the outdoors,” Pope said. “In Nepal, people are connected to the natural resources in a more intimate way than people in the United States. Every family relies directly on the nature around them to provide fresh water and food to survive.

“Pema is a very humble man, with a youthful curiosity about the natural world. He is such a bright and positive human being. I’m very proud to know him and call him a friend.”

In addition to his event at BRAHM, Pema will present to social studies students at Avery County High School, before delivering a presentation Jan. 14 at REI in Asheville. On Jan. 19, he’ll visit with the Rotary Club of Avery County.

To RSVP for the Jan. 18 event at BRAHM, located at 159 Chestnut St. in downtown Blowing Rock, contact Lesley Platek with the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation at [volunteer@grandfather.com](mailto:volunteer@grandfather.com) or (828) 733-2013.

For more information on Pema and the Sherpa Welfare Nepal Foundation, or to make a contribution, visit [swefnepal.org](http://swefnepal.org).

The not-for-profit Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation strives to inspire conservation of the natural world by helping guests explore, understand and value the wonders of Grandfather Mountain. For more information, call (800) 468-7325, or visit [www.grandfather.com](http://www.grandfather.com) to plan a trip,

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