

DALAI LAMA the TIBETANS and McLeod

The universality of Macleod influence here is an abridged story which I found by Lynne O'Donnell in The Australian - Magazine June 16 2001

Refugees are leaving Tibet for India, making the gruelling trek across the Himalayas to Nepal and eventually to the North India hill station of Dharamsala, seat of the Tibetan government-in-exile. Here they can be close to the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan spiritual and secular leader, the centre of an international cause since he fled Tibet's capital Lhasa with 85,000 followers in 1959.

Each year up to 3500 Tibetans make the trip risking death in the mountains at the hands of the Chinese police. What drives them is the oppressive Chinese regime and its attempt to obliterate Tibetan culture, and people.

Many end up at the Refugee Reception Centre in **McLeod Ganj**, a village in the Himalayan foothills above Dharamsala. It was named after its founder, the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab State Donald McLeod, who established it as a British garrison in the mid-1850's. It became a haven for the men and women of the British India Company and government representatives, escaping the searing summer heat of the North India plain. A century later the hill station became home to the Dalai Lama.

With his (*Dalai Lama*) Nobel Peace Prize celebrity status, have come the crowds, and as a result McLeod Ganj is reaching the limit of its capacity to cope with the enormous numbers of people who flock here every year. Up to 50 reugees settle here every week. The schools are full, as are the training centres, monasteries and nunneries.

The village is near breaking point as Tibetans and Indians race to throw up hotels, apartments, restaurants, and internet cafes to cater for the tide of tourists and India's nouveau rich on summer holidays. The Indians join the backpackers who throng the narrow, increasingly filthy streets of McLeod Ganj, hanging out with monks, trading snippets on the latest meditation and espresso bars, getting stoned and hoping to get a glimpse of the Dalai Lama. Also among them are the wealthy middle-aged westerners, sharing their karmic experiences and eating apple pie and ice cream.

McLeod Ganj is being buried beneath the weight of it all. From the sunny verandahs of a dozen cafes tourists gaze out, not over a verdant valley but onto hillsides covered with garbage, dumped there because there is no landfill or collection system. Ten years ago this area was rice paddies.

Many Tibetans believe they owe much to the kindness and tolerance the Dalai Lama has of the Indian government, but the Tibetans exist in parallel, with no role in the decision making process and no power to get things done. They believe they will soon return to their country It is a dream upheld by the leaders of the community - a privileged elite living in genteel poverty. sought to create a broadly representative political infrastructure by embracing democracy and shifting powers from the Buddhist clergy to the civilians. As the wait for the end of exile stretches on, 53 settlements in Nepal and Bhutan are home to third and fourth generation Tibetans with no memory or experience of life in Tibet. "The new refugees still don't know what is Tibetan," said Lobsang Tsering 37, who came from Lhasa in 1993 and now runs a CD shop in McLeod Ganj. "We are Buddhists, this is the heart of our Tibetanism, and the most important thing that people who come here can learn is what it means to be Tibetan.

(There is perhaps an interesting parallel in history, where the MacLeods, along with hundreds of thousands of fellow Scots were exiled, only to rediscover their Scottish heritage in foreign places. I wonder what Lt. Gov. David Mcleod would make of his hill station now.)

Further reading:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McLeod_Ganj

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_Friell_McLeod

Lake, Major-General Edward John. Sir Donald McLeod, C.B., K.C.S.I: A record of forty-two years' service in India. London: The Religious Tract Society, 1873.

https://archive.org/download/sirdonaldmcleod00lake/sirdonaldmcleod00lake_bw.pdf