

が遂行されていた。現地に滞在すると、日本との相違を感じる場面に多々遭遇する。本稿での私の経験はその一片にすぎず、異郷でのさまざまな新発見こそがフィールドワークの醍醐味である。

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A Tale of Three Feral Dogs in the Annapurna Base Camp Trail, Nepal

Sese MA*

Annapurna Base Camp Trail

The Annapurna Conservation Area is the largest protected area in the Annapurna mountain range of the Himalayas. It covers 7,629 sq mi and ranges in altitude from 790 m to 8,091 m. Its rich topography results in a complex landscape. Inside the conservation area, the Annapurna Base Camp Trail represents one of the most popular trekking routes in Nepal. It takes 7–12 days to complete, with the Annapurna Base Camp (4,130 m) as the final destination. The trail is spectacularly regarded as it is surrounded by four major Himalayan peaks, namely Annapurna I (8,091 m), Annapurna South (7,219 m), Machapuchare (6,993 m) and Hiunchuli (6,441 m). It is relatively easy to

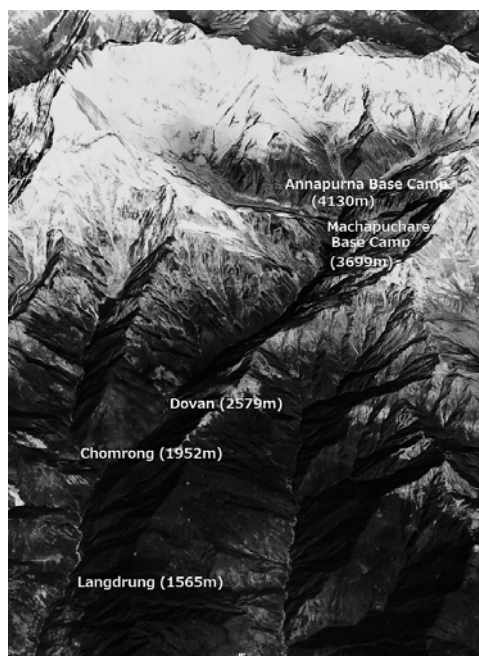


Fig. 1. Annapurna Base Camp Trail

* Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto University

reach when compared with other camps with a similar proximity to the glacier. Therefore, both new and experienced trekkers as well as photographers frequently choose this route.

Depending on the amount of time available to the trekker and the scenery one wants to see, there are a range of routes to be taken. I undertook the trail in October 2018 at the very end of my fieldwork in India and Nepal. I chose the fastest route, which took seven days to complete, three days to climb up and four days to come down. The route went from the city of Pokhara to the town of Langdrung, from Langdrung to Chomrong, Chomrong to Dovan, and finally the Annapurna Base Camp passing Machapuchare Base Camp along the way. The route is planned in order to reduce the risk of high altitude sickness, as symptoms can occur if one increases their elevation by 300 m or more within a day.

I went to these mountains in search of feral dogs, to learn about animals that come in and out of man-made spaces. Unlike the city stray dogs that form packs between narrow living compounds, dogs from the hills are not targeted by spaying and neutering campaigns funded by the government and international NGOs due to their sparsity and high mobility. Perhaps for the same reasons, they are not mentioned in stray dog studies conducted in Nepal, which are concerned primarily with public health issues. A friend from India first

brought the existence of mountain dogs to my attention, as twenty years prior on a hiking trip in Nepal she had heard tales of mountain dogs guiding lost trekkers. Today, the trail is highly commercialized and crowded with many signs and camps, populated by hundreds of trekkers, guides, and porters on their way to their destinations. As such, it is unlikely that dogs are still living in this region, and if they are, it is doubtful whether they are willing to be seen?

However, on the trail from Dovan to Annapurna Base Camp, I encountered approximately 15 feral dogs. Most of them were solitary, while some appeared in pairs and always looked identical to each other. They were always on the move, regardless of time of day. For food, they hunt sheep or smaller animals, such as porcupines. Some of them receive food from the trekkers if they happen to pass a camp at mealtime. However, this is always initiated by trekkers who offer food. These feral dogs do not seem to see humans as a potential food source, as is often assumed in the case of city dogs. No attempts to interact with humans have been observed from the dog's side in either camps or on trails. From my observations of these 15 feral dogs, I would like to share stories with you about three individuals.

The Dog I Encountered in Machapuchare Base Camp

Located at an altitude of 3,699 m above sea level, is Machapuchare Base Camp, which is located on a riverbed in the windy valley. In order to reach the Annapurna Base Camp, it is necessary to pass by Machapuchare Base Camp, as such most people use it as a resting spot during a day with a six hour long climb up a steep trail. Mornings on the trail are generally characterized by clear skies, however, the weather frequently becomes foggy and rainy, accompanied by a strong, cold wind in the late afternoon. As a result, most trekkers grab a quick bite, and often leave their food unfinished. This may be why I met a female dog next to a table at this camp.

I was surprised when the dog approached me and started to eat the omelet off my plate, as no previous dog had done this on the trek. All feral dogs appeared self-efficient and uninterested in human food. Despite this, she kept eating until the camp owner came and attempted to shove her away. She showed no signs of concern and did not relent, until after several attempts the owner gave up. I spent some time resting on the bench after returning the plates, and after 10 minutes, I saw the owner give the dog all the collected leftovers while washing the dishes outside. His eyes were full of affection—I felt that he shoved her away not because he was annoyed by her, but because he didn't want the tourist to think



Photo 1. Machapuchare Base Camp



Photo 2. A Big Herd of Sheep Grazing on the Trail between Annapurna Base Camp and Machapuchare Base Camp

of her or the camp badly.

Upon seeing me watching them, the owner gently told me that she was pregnant, and he thought that was why she had recently come to the camp. I expect that it is difficult for pregnant dogs to compete with other dogs in terms of hunting, and she came to the camp

in an attempt to secure food only during pregnancy. The owner said she would most likely leave after the delivery of her pups. It was touching to see this bond between a feral dog and a human, with no attempt to claim ownership over one another.

Two Dogs on the Trail between Annapurna Base Camp and Machapuchare Base Camp

After I left Machapuchare Base Camp, I soon encountered a big herd of sheep grazing right next to the hill. There were approximately a hundred sheep with no people to mind them. Shortly after, two small black dogs which I had previously encountered on the trail from Bagar to the Machapuchare Base Camp, caught up to and ran into the herd. A small number of the sheep closest to the dogs were disturbed but did not attempt to run away. I did not realize what they were doing until they started focusing on four or five sheep in an attempt to split them from the herd. The dogs kept preventing the sheep from moving in the direction of the herd, until eventually three sheep were separated from the herd, surprisingly the herd made no attempt to defend or rescue the separated sheep.

Once the three sheep were driven a small distance from the herd, the two dogs (which were smaller than the sheep) started chasing them downhill. In several seconds, the slowest sheep was singled out and one dog began biting one of the sheep's back legs. The

sheep was not slowed by this attack and still ran at great speed, during this time the other dog caught up and began running abreast of the sheep. Just before leaving my sight I saw the other dog bite into the neck of the still running sheep.

All the trekkers around me were shocked by the scene and no one dared to go back down to check the sheep, as we all needed to arrive at Annapurna Base Camp before 4 p.m. when it became dark and freezing. The large herd, seemed to be relatively undisturbed and stayed in the same area, with no further attempts to run away or relocate. Further I could not see any individual sheep acting anxious. This made me question if this was a regular occurrence for the herd to experience. Was the herd aware that the slowest and weakest member of their herd was likely killed that day? I arrived at the base camp just before it was completely dark, filled with a mix of emotions. There, I met trekkers from Korea who had witnessed what had occurred beyond my sightline—the sheep had



Photo 3. Three Dogs on the Trail. Among them, the two black dogs later hunted the sheep.

eventually fallen and despite attempts by a trekker to disturb the dogs with her trekking pole, the two dogs brought down the sheep and begin feeding just next to the trail.

I suppose this is a skill necessary to survive at altitudes over 3,000 m above sea level. There is very little food waste by humans, and meat consumption is not allowed out of respect to the mountain goddess. This was the first hunt I witnessed in which the prey was bigger than both dogs. I wonder, how do all the similarly sized solitary dogs survive at this altitude, do they depend only on smaller animals?

Reflection: What can We Learn from Their Lives?

After reading James Scott's *The Art of Not Being Governed*, I realized that mountain dogs in the Himalayas could be seen as beings which live in the frontiers [Scott 2009]. Their small groups and great mobility made it difficult for mass culling or neutering

campaigns to target them, furthermore their dispersal guarantees that they don't pose a threat to tourism and anthropogenic projects. The absence of empirical knowledge relating to them might correspond to the ways in which the state rarely bothers to control dissidents living in the peripheries. However, with the continuing development projects in Nepal that reconstitute borders and alter opportunities for movements, the presence of these dogs might become problematic. This is the primary reason why I am hesitant regarding the use of GPS tracking collars or other improved technologies of surveillance for the study of these dogs. I wonder what would represent an ethical and practical way to get to know them within my own physical limitations, while respecting them, and I continue to struggle with this methodology.

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