Chapter 5
Exploration as Knowledge Transfer: Exhibiting Hidden Histories

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This paper is concerned with two things that depend, essentially, on the spatial mobility of knowledge.[1] First there is geographical exploration, a process of knowledge-making involving the translation of ideas, people, and things across space in a two-way movement between known and unknown territory. This is, as is clear from much historical and contemporary research, an uneven process in which certain things get translated more readily than others. There is, so to speak, a politics, as well as a physics, of knowledge transfer. The second is public exhibition, a project designed to disseminate knowledge (in the case I will discuss, knowledge of exploration) to a wider audience, a process sometimes described in higher education under the bureaucratic rubric of "knowledge transfer." The idea linking these two things is simple enough, but deserving of further elaboration in many different ways, as the contributions to this volume attest. The thing transferred—the knowledge explorers brought home, the knowledge imparted through an exhibition—is transformed in the course of its translation. Space, like language, is not a neutral surface over which knowledge travels, or an empty container into which we can pour our learning; it enters into and shapes that knowledge in significant ways (Livingstone, 2003; Meusburger, Livingstone, & Jöns, 2010; Naylor, 2005).

The *Hidden Histories of Exploration* exhibition took place in London at the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers (RGS-IBG) in 2009, and its life extended well beyond that in electronic form.[2] The exhibition was part of a wider project designed to question—and to disturb—a dominant narrative in the history of exploration that privileges the actions of heroic individuals in

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[2] The exhibition displays and other resources are available online at www.rgs.org/hiddenhistories

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extraordinary circumstances and presents exploration as an individual drama, with the explorer the principal character, usually the hero, occasionally the villain (Driver, 2005). Such has been the dominant view of explorers and exploration, and it has proved remarkably enduring. For all the weight of decades of research scholarship and postcolonial critique, much is still to be learned about the culture, practices, and institutions that made geographical exploration possible.[3] The *Hidden Histories of Exploration* exhibition was designed in particular to portray the business of exploration as a collective experience of work involving many different people in many different kinds of relationship.[4] It highlighted the contributions of a large number of people who were rarely center stage—including the carriers, cooks, soldiers, porters, guides, and interpreters recruited and paid off *en route*. The exhibition provided an opportunity to present some of the outcomes of research on the collections of the RGS-IBG (Driver & Jones, 2009; Jones, 2010). However, the relationship between research and display was by no means all one-way, as the language of "dissemination" tends to suggest. The process of bringing the exhibition into being—conceptually, discursively, and practically—also helped to reshape research questions and perspectives in ways that were productive of new insights about the subject of the research, and the process of public engagement.

I begin this paper by outlining the institutional setting of the exhibition, explaining its wider significance in the context of the history of the RGS-IBG and the methodological challenge of using the Society's historical collections to tell new stories about exploration. The second section outlines the form and content of the exhibition, explaining how it highlighted the agency of indigenous peoples and intermediaries in the conduct of expeditions. By highlighting and, to an extent, celebrating the role of intermediaries such as guides, interpreters, porters, and pilots, the exhibition prompted questions about what was made visible and what was obscured in standard narratives of exploration, especially when seen from a British perspective; specifically, whose labors come to be recognized as indispensable to the process of exploration and whose are marginalized? In turn, these questions prompted further reflection on the biographical mode in which the work of recovery is often conceived within the heritage sector, suggesting in particular the possibility of a more explicitly spatial perspective on the networks and infrastructure of exploration. The third section considers the relationship between the ethos of the *Hidden Histories* exhibition and three design strategies involved in its realization, referred to here as "role reversal," "juxtaposition," and "rescaling," respectively. The knowledge presented within this exhibition, as in any other, was significantly shaped by its spatial form and context (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Moser, 2010).

[3] For recent overviews, see Kennedy, 2007; Naylor & Ryan, 2010; and Thomas, 2015; more specialist studies include Cavell, 2008; Dritsas, 2010; and Safier, 2008.

[4] Studies of the expedition as an economic institution are surprisingly rare: see Thomas (2015).

Institutional Context

Questions about the role of indigenous people in the history of exploration may be approached in a variety of ways, via, for example, oral history, archival research, or anthropological fieldwork. The remit of the *Hidden Histories* exhibition project was specifically focused on the potential of archival investigation within major European or North American collections to yield evidence that might qualify or undermine the "heroic" view of exploration. In methodological terms, this was not an unfamiliar challenge, given the recent direction of research in the history of geography and imperial history concerned with the extent to which such archives, established during the colonial era, can be read "against the grain" (Burton, 2011; Pandey, 2000) or, in Ann Stoler's formulation, "along the grain" (Stoler, 2009). In these terms, the RGS-IBG was a good site to conduct such research, not least because of the extraordinary depth and range of its collections. The idea of acquiring, storing, and circulating geographical information was itself one of the main rationales for the foundation of the Royal Geographical Society in 1830 (Driver, 2001; Jones, 2005). Today, the Society's collections are said to contain more than two million individual items, including books, manuscripts, maps, photographs, artworks, artifacts, and film, reflecting the wide reach of geographical interest across the world but also extending well beyond the limits of the British Empire.

The idea of mounting an exhibition in a space traditionally associated with the heroic view of exploration evidently required the active support of the Society itself. The Society's head of research and higher education, Dr. Catherine Souch, was the key point of contact in the planning for the exhibition, though many other members of the professional staff, notably those with responsibility for collections, education, outreach, and public relations, were also involved. In recent years, the RGS-IBG collections have played an important role in extensive outreach and educational initiatives, notably the *Crossing Continents* exhibitions program, led by Vandana Patel and Steve Brace, designed to reach new "publics" among Britain's black and ethnic minority communities (RGS-IBG, 2009).[5] This was part of a larger-scale initiative—the "Unlocking the archives" project supported by the United Kingdom's Heritage Lottery Fund—involving the provision of new facilities for storage, cataloguing, preservation, and visitor access to the collections at the home of the RGS-IBG, including a new display space (the Pavilion) on Exhibition Road, opened in 2004. Although the idea of a research-oriented exhibition at the Society was new, the shift of emphasis in its collections strategy toward greater engagement with more diverse public audiences—as developed in recent years by Alasdair Macleod, head of enterprise and resources—provided an essential precondition for the project discussed in this chapter.

[5] The four *Crossing Continents* exhibitions were: *Bombay Africans, 1850–1910; From Kabul to Kandahar, 1833–1933; Seeing China: Community Reflections;* and *The Punjab: Moving Journeys*. See Royal Geographical Society (2009), and http://hiddenhistories.rgs.org/index.php/research/geographical-exhibitions#4

The origins and ethos of the *Hidden Histories* exhibition were reflected in its physical manifestation at the RGS-IBG, across two distinct spaces: the Society's Pavilion Gallery at street level (where most of the panels and copy prints were on public display, along with some video and audio material) and the Foyle Reading Room at basement level (where original materials including oil paintings, books, sketches, and artifacts were housed). Although this arrangement was to some extent dictated by pragmatic considerations, including conservation requirements, it also helped to embed the links between exhibition and research in the spatial organization of the display. In principle, visitors were encouraged to move from the story to the sources. In crossing the threshold of a formerly inaccessible research facility they were invited to become active participants in the making of new knowledge rather than simply its passive spectators. In this respect, the spatial arrangement of the exhibition was reinforced by a program of associated events, from "hands on" showcases to community engagement workshops, designed to promote the use of the collections.

Form and Content

The exhibition set out to encourage a more inclusive history of exploration, in which the contributions of a wide range of people were recognized and valued. European explorers in many different parts of the world relied heavily on the physical labor of porters, pilots, guides and translators, as well as various forms of indigenous knowledge, including but not confined to oral testimony (Burnett, 2002; Camerini, 1996; Chrétien, 2005; Fogel-Chance, 2002; Hansen, 1999; Raffles, 2002; Raj, 2006; Simpson, 1975; Wisnicki, 2008). Yet in writing for a metropolitan audience, explorers often failed to acknowledge the extent of their dependence on others in print, with indigenous agency all too often "lost in translation." By looking carefully at the various different forms of evidence across the collections, the aim was to recover some aspects of these hidden histories.

The exhibition was arranged into three thematic sections: "The Work of Exploration" (highlighting the dependence of European explorers on local support, local knowledge, and key intermediaries, including guides and interpreters); "Images of Exploration and Encounter" (presenting aspects of a diverse visual archive of exploration and the presence of indigenous peoples within it); and "Recognition and Responsibility" (reflecting on the extent to which the role of locals and intermediaries was recognized during the nineteenth century). Within each section, individual items were arranged to highlight the role of indigenous people and intermediaries in the history of exploration, using various different kinds of materials from the collections, including manuscript, print, artifact, map, photograph, artwork, and film. The idea of "bringing into visibility" was enriched, and complicated, by the prominent role of visual technologies—including, for example, the sketchbook, the atlas, the lantern slide, and the documentary film—in the history of exploration. The photographic collections of scholarly societies, for example,

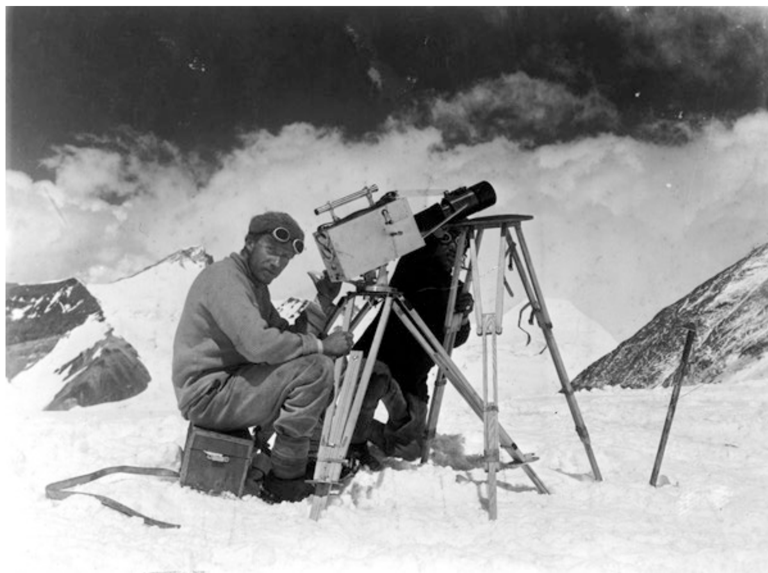

Fig. 5.1 Captain Noel and kinematograph camera with large telephoto lens established on the Chang La [North Col] at 23,000 ft. Unknown photographer. 1922. Note the partially visible Sherpa keeping camera and tripod steady (© Royal Geographical Society [with IBG]. Reprinted with permission)

have themselves been the subject of significant attention in the histories of geography and anthropology (Edwards, 1994; Loiseaux, 2006; Ryan, 1997). The exhibition's large central section devoted to images of exploration was thus intended to encourage reflection on the particular history of the various modes of visualization evident in the Society's collections. Images of image-making were especially prominent, accompanied by contextual material emphasizing the specific conditions under which images were made (Driver & Jones, 2009, pp. 25–41). Mixing the spectacular with the mundane, the exhibition as a whole was intended to inspire curiosity, a desire not just to know more about the RGS-IBG collections, but to know more about the conditions under which some things in the collections were more visible than others.

This was partly a matter of looking at familiar material with fresh eyes. Perhaps the single most telling example used in the exhibition was provided by an iconic portrait of the cameraman John Noel, member of the 1922 and 1924 Everest expeditions, pictured in the act of filming on the Chang La (which the British then called the North Col) at a height of around 23,000 ft (Fig. 5.1). Noel occupies an important place in the historiography of mountaineering, partly for his achievements as a climber but mostly for his enthusiastic advocacy of the uses of film in the course of adventurous exploration. His photographs and films brought Everest expeditions to life, and continue to do so. The exhibition thus included footage from his 1922 film alongside documentary evidence concerning the role of Sherpas in Everest

expeditions (discussed further below). The focus of the image reproduced in Fig. 5.1 is Noel himself, the apparently nonchalant operator of a specially adapted Newman Sinclair camera, with telephoto lens, at what was then a record altitude. This photograph was widely reproduced, appearing, for example, in the program for the 1922 expedition film (Mount Everest Committee, 1922), in contemporary advertising for the camera, and also in a fundraising exhibition of Everest photographs and paintings held at the Alpine Club in the spring of 1923. The portrait continues to be produced as an iconic portrait and is often attributed to Noel himself (Davis, 2011; Noel, 2003). This aspect of the afterlife of the image is itself highly significant and a reminder that the visual archive, far from being simply an unmediated record of experience, is often a site for the accumulation of value.

In the context of the exhibition, however, the viewer was encouraged to look more closely at the picture itself. Behind the film camera, literally in the shadows, is a partially visible Sherpa steadying the tripod, one of no less than eight men who were deputed to carry all the equipment up and down the mountain. The idea of partial visibility was here used to tell a larger story and in this case could be amplified by asking the viewer to consider how Noel actually obtained the photograph of himself apparently in the act of filming. With no sign of any remotely activated device by which he himself could have taken the picture (a theoretical possibility), further research in the Everest archive at the RGS-IBG was required. Evidence was eventually found, in the form of the catalogue to the Alpine Club exhibition (Mount Everest Committee, 1923), to support the claim that the photograph was almost certainly taken by one of the Sherpas at Noel's behest. Of all the photographs detailed in the catalogue, this was the only one without an attribution to a named photographer: every one of the others is recorded as having been the work of Noel or his British colleagues. The absence speaks volumes. It seems highly likely that the camera was operated by an unnamed Sherpa.

Identifying a presence is an important step; going further than this and naming individuals depends to a large extent on the survival of evidence, which is often difficult to locate or is suggestive rather than definitive, as the above example shows. In the case of the early Everest expeditions, the names of individual Sherpas were almost invisible in the official records, except for rare receipt books showing payments to their families and including their wives' thumbprints as signatures (an example of which was included in the exhibition). Seven of the porters died on the 1922 expedition, killed by an avalanche while attempting to reach the summit led by George Mallory (who survived on this occasion). But they were not named or even mentioned in the film, though Noel reportedly photographed the climbing party half an hour before the accident and filmed the track of the avalanche. There are various accounts of the accident in the RGS-IBG collections, including two by Mallory, who blamed himself for an error of judgment (a conclusion he was not alone in reaching).[6] But among the vast archive of paperwork there is nothing to tell us about the Sherpa community's view of the event, apart from a single document

[6] G. Mallory to G. Young, 11 June 1922, RGS-IBG Everest Expedition archives, EE/3/5/11. See also the typescript account in EE/3/5/13.

noting compensation to their families living in Darjeeling, Nepal, and Tibet. As far as I know, this is the only documentary evidence of their identities that survives. Here they are named as Thankay Sherpa, Sangay Sherpa, Temba Sherpa, Lhakpa Sherpa, Pasang Namgya Sherpa, Norbu Bhotia, and Pema Sherpa, with the report indicating that six were ethnic Sherpa and one "Bhotia" (a loose term that the British authorities used to cover a variety of ethnically Tibetan hill peoples).[7] Although the achievements of the British climbers were widely celebrated after their return to England, the deaths of the Sherpas were soon forgotten as far as public memory in Britain was concerned, in striking contrast to the lasting popular obsession with Mallory following his death on the mountain in 1924. Mallory's fate continues to inspire fascination within Britain and beyond, as witnessed in Geoffrey Archer's pseudo-documentary novel, *Paths of Glory* (2009), and the spectacular film, *The Wildest Dream* (2010), both of which drew directly on materials in the Everest collections at the RGS-IBG. In this context, the possibility of telling other stories through these collections is yet to be widely recognized.[8] An exhibition such as *Hidden Histories* swims against a powerful tide.

As the above example indicates, research for the exhibition involved the identification of individuals whose labors had been hidden or airbrushed from history, suggesting the possibility (cheerfully exploited in the exhibition publicity) of a kind of alternative "roll of honor" in the annals in exploration. But the task of naming and individualizing those I have referred to above as "partially visible" was itself by no means simple. The vast majority of those employed by such expeditions are unidentified in most published narratives or the archives that survive. Moreover, those that are named are often identified on the basis of convenience or misinterpretation by their employers, roles frequently mistaken for names or family names for first names. There are also many examples of the use of adopted or conferred names, as for example in the case of Sidi Mubarak Bombay, the celebrated leader of many nineteenth-century expeditions in East Africa, whose names reflected his experience as a child slave taken by his Arab captor to India (Simpson, 1975). Further consideration of these conventions and practices of naming is itself an important step in the process of unsettling conventional accounts of exploration, in which "locals" are so often merely means to an end. Attempting to do more by breathing biographical life into the often fragmentary surviving evidence is a real challenge. It requires painstaking research, often against the grain of the archive, to trace the barest pattern of a life.

A further example from the archives displayed in the exhibition for the first time may help to illustrate this point. This is a delicate watercolor sketch by Catherine Frere, daughter of British colonial governor Sir Henry Bartle Frere, made in South Africa in 1877 (Fig. 5.2). It depicts a group of the female members of Henry Morton

[7] The total compensation given was 1900 Rupees, about £130. See "Committee assembled to consider compensation to be given to the dependants of the men killed on the Everest Expedition," dated 11 August 1922. RGS-IBG Everest Expedition archives, EE/18/1/98.

[8] Wade Davis has published a remarkable account of the Everest expeditions of the 1920s situating them in the aftermath of World War I (Davis, 2011).

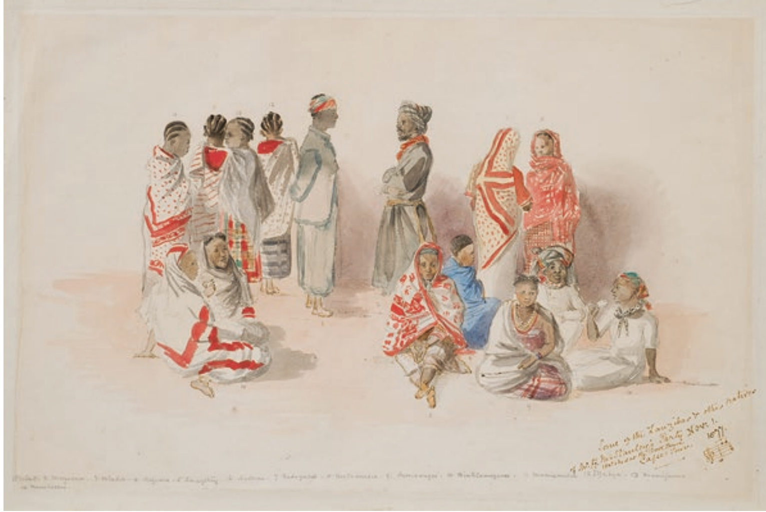

Fig. 5.2 Catherine Frere. Some of the Zanzibar and other natives of Mr. H. M. Stanley's party. 1877. Watercolor. The women's names are recorded underneath (© Royal Geographical Society [with IBG]. Reprinted with permission)

Stanley's party, who had stopped at the Cape on their return voyage from Angola to Zanzibar after crossing Africa from east to west in a marathon 3-year expedition. The women were from Zanzibar and returning there to be paid off, like the men who traveled with them, as was customary at the conclusion of a major expedition. Interestingly, their images also appeared, in photolithograph form, in Stanley's published account (Stanley, 1878, p. 371). But in this unique sketch from the RGS-IBG archives, Catherine Frere records their Swahili names, individually, carefully numbering each of the sitters—and with a youthful flourish signs her own initials, rendered as notes on a musical stave. Her portrait is a remarkable document, which serves as a reminder that large numbers of women, as well as men, were employed by major expeditions of the sort led by Stanley or Speke across Africa (which themselves followed the pattern of existing long-distance economic networks within East Africa: Rockel, 2000). The watercolor sketch also brings out the pattern and color of their *kangas*, the printed cottons worn by women throughout East Africa, providing valuable historical evidence for African historians. For this reason, it was reproduced alongside contemporary designs in a 2013 British Museum exhibition, *Social Fabric: Africa Textiles Today*, curated by Chris Spring. The survival of the very personal sketch also suggests the possibility, at least, of a more sympathetic view of the women's individuality, imagined from the perspective of the daughter of a colonial administrator and philanthropist. With further research on such images—especially in combination with photographic, oral historical, textual, and other kinds of evidence—it may be possible to say more about the experience of these women.

Research of this kind clearly faces significant evidential challenges. But it also raises wider questions about the biographical mode in which much of this kind of "salvage" work—the uncovering of "hidden histories"—is done within the heritage sector. For in seeking to excavate and celebrate the lives and achievements of individuals in the name of an explicitly revisionist history, we risk replacing one kind of hero-myth with another. In the case of exploration, for example, the figure of the "heroic indigene" has a longer history than might be imagined. In some circumstances, certain kinds of local agency were celebrated during the age of empire, and indeed mythologized. The story of the "pandit" Nain Singh, the subject of new research in recent years, provides the most telling example (Jones, 2010, pp. 58–91; Raj, 2006). Nain Singh was famously awarded the Gold Medal of the Royal Geographical Society for his contributions to the mapping of Tibet, Ladakh, and Central Asia in 1877, and his name has loomed large in the Society's recent efforts to promote a more inclusive history of geography (Driver & Jones, 2009, pp. 43–46). Yet a fully historical perspective on his celebrity requires close attention to the terms on which his exceptional contributions were recognized during the nineteenth century as well as in our own time. Almost literally a subaltern in the service of the British, Nain Singh was represented in the halls of metropolitan science—his portrait can still be seen on the walls of the RGS-IBG today—but essentially his recognition depended on his ascribed status as a faithful servant of his employers in the Survey of India.

The case of Nain Singh prompts further reflection on some of the key assumptions behind the idea of hidden histories itself. In the course of selecting suitable case studies for the exhibition, it became clear that certain kinds of non-European agency, such as those of the "pandits," were recognized even in the nineteenth century and, moreover, that the knowledge of many of the identifiable guides, interpreters, and field assistants encountered in the RGS-IBG collections in many different contexts, from the Arctic to Amazonia, could hardly be characterized as "local" or "indigenous" in any straightforward sense. Nain Singh, for example, originated in the Kumaon Himalaya in Northern India and was clearly not "indigenous" to the vast territory in Tibet through which he traveled, often *incognito*, covertly collecting the geographical information so precious to the British authorities, and indeed relying heavily on local informants and intermediaries. And his experience in working for successive European travelers in the trans-Himalayan region, beginning with his employment by the Schlagintweit brothers on an expedition across the region sponsored by The East India Company and the king of Prussia in the mid-1850s (Finkelstein, 2000), suggests that his personal knowledge was far from merely "local." Indeed, seen in the broader context of late-Victorian ideas about race and culture, the presentation of locally created knowledge as "indigenous" or "native" could be considered from a postcolonial perspective as a deeply colonial move. After all, at the same time as they were airbrushing the role of non-Europeans out of their narratives, colonial travelers were also constructing visions of indigeneity and of local knowledge designed, in a sense, to keep the others in their place.

In this context, the figure of the intermediary, or the "go-between," as discussed in recent literature on the history of science and empire (Metcalf, 2005; Schaffer, Roberts, Delbourgo, & Raj, 2009; Jones, 2010; Kennedy, 2013), offers a way of approaching the role of non-European guides, pilots, interpreters, and proxy-explorers in the history of exploration that is not so obviously reliant on colonial or neocolonial stereotypes. Such a perspective also prompts further questions about the role of these individuals within larger economic, social, and political networks. Indeed, it draws our attention to exploration as involving a process of exchange of resources—often an unequal exchange, to be sure, but still a set of relationships in which the agency was not all on one side. Portraying geographical exploration as a collective project of work also invites greater recognition of the spatial infrastructure and logistics of expedition-making—notably, the significance of ports of call and supply routes, sites of recruitment and pay-off. To highlight the significance of such networks and practices encourages a shift of perspective away from the most celebrated scenes in the history of exploration. The single most important site in the British exploration of East Africa after 1850, for example, was surely not the source of the Nile, but the town of Zanzibar, a key node in the Indian Ocean trading system and a recruiting station for men and women working as porters on the major African expeditions of Speke, Stanley, and others (Prestholdt, 2008; Simpson, 1975). A similar point could be made about the relationship between the Everest expeditions of the interwar period and the hill settlement of Darjeeling, where the British recruited their Sherpas (Ortner, 1999). At these sites were crystallized sets of historical and geographical relationships involving regional and interregional employment practices, trading networks, political histories, family structures, large-scale migrations, and religious change. It is by considering what was happening at these sites—the bases from which expeditions were planned—that a richer and more inclusive history of exploration can emerge.

Design Strategies

As with any large-scale exhibition project, the process of designing the *Hidden Histories* displays required an extended series of discussions involving many people, from the initial formulation of the brief, through the tendering stage to the process of drafting and redrafting based on feedback and commentary, both within the project team and in consultation with panels of community representatives and external experts from the heritage sector and the academy. In this context, the intellectual challenges posed by the research had to be translated into the language of design—format, scale, color, proportion, and arrangement. It is important in this context to emphasize the iterative nature of the design process, with successive drafts being subject to scrutiny and discussion over an extended period of time, and among a wider variety of constituencies than is conventional in the case of academic publication, for example. These included academic reviewers, heritage consultants, and consultative groups convened by a specialist consultant, Cliff Pereira,

with members from a variety of ethnic communities, notably but not exclusively from within South Asia, whose perspectives were included by means of audio clips within the space of the exhibition and on the accompanying website.[9] As well as practical questions such as the accessibility of font sizes, the height of the panels, or the location of the video screen, these discussions involved engagement, in various registers, with the core ideas of the project less as static "givens" dictating the form of the display than as dynamic ideas subject to revision in the course of discussion. The various parties—including the designers, the exhibition team at the RGS-IBG, the head of research, the researchers, heritage experts, and community consultants—all brought particular skills and experience to this process, and the eventual result reflected inputs from them all. In what follows, I shall identify three core principles discernible in the final format of the exhibition. It is important to emphasize that these were not articulated in these terms at the outset. Rather, they emerged as the exhibition planning process developed, and indeed their full significance only became clear once the exhibition was open to public view.

The first serious discussion of design principles took place at the tendering stage, when four professional design teams responded to the brief (a summary of the project based on the initial proposal) with ideas, images, and models. The team eventually awarded the brief—Sally Stiff and Joe Madeira of the Old Sweetshop design consultancy—presented a series of visually appealing designs for exhibition panels, publicity, and publications based on a single image from the RGS-IBG collections—Thomas Baines's oil painting entitled *A Malay native from Batavia at Coepang*—exploiting the colors in the painting to create an attractive palette for the design (Fig. 5.3). In describing his approach, designer Joe Madeira referred to this portrait as the "hero image," a term taken from the branding and marketing literature to refer to the focal point of a design, especially in the web environment, usually a strong image reinforcing the brand message. In the context of the *Hidden Histories* exhibition, the term had added resonance. Its purpose was now to celebrate the achievements of individuals whose labors had been hidden from history. Ironically, at this point, the identity of the "Malay native" was not actually known. It was only later, in the course of research on the Baines diaries, that researcher Lowri Jones was able to identify the sitter for Baines's portrait in Coepang (modern-day Kupang) as Mohammed Jen Jamain, a former *djakse* or local magistrate. The crucial link was made by triangulating between the diary, the portrait, and a watercolor sketch of the same individual, held in the RGS-IBG collections (Driver & Jones, 2009, p. 33; Jones, 2010, pp. 126–128).

In seeking to present a sympathetic and in some respects "heroic" view of local informants, guides, interpreters, and other go-betweens, the design teams were encouraged to deploy a strategy of *role reversal*. The initial brief thus put the emphasis on the vulnerability of European explorers, reliant upon local knowledge and guidance for their survival in unfamiliar environments. Seen in this perspective, the exhibition suggested that the true heroes of exploration—those to whom the real credit should be given—had for too long remained in the shadows. The familiar roll

[9] See http://hiddenhistories.rgs.org/index.php/about/community-consultation

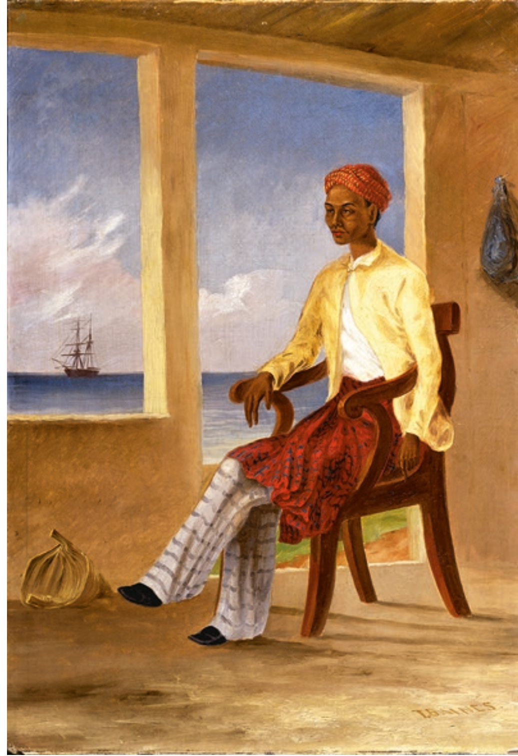

Fig. 5.3 Thomas Baines. *A Malay native from Batavia at Coepang*. (1856). Oil on canvas (© Royal Geographical Society [with IBG]. Reprinted with permission)

call of heroic British explorers—Cook and Burton, Livingstone and Scott—would now give way to an alternative pantheon including figures such as Sidi Mubarak Bombay and Nain Singh, whose contributions to exploration are increasingly recognized even in popular histories (Hanbury-Tenison, 2010, pp. 87–92; Hugon, 1993, pp. 122–123), and less well-known figures, such as the Amerindian guide Pedro Caripoco, who traveled in Amazonia with Jean Chaffanjon in 1886 and again with Alexander Hamilton Rice in 1919–1920 (Martins, 2012), or the Tibetan interpreter Karma Paul, who worked for every British expedition to Everest between 1922 and 1938 (Driver & Jones, 2009, p. 41). The acts of naming and picturing these remarkable individuals and to some extent celebrating their achievements were strategic decisions in this context. In this show, it was the agency of the headman, the indigenous surveyor, the guide, and the interpreter that took center stage.

Although there was undeniably an element of celebration at work in this exhibition, willfully accentuated by the designers' use of attractive colors and banners, it was also important to move beyond the heroic mode. In the first section of the exhibition, headed "The Work of Exploration," a panel on the dependence of European explorers was thus followed by another entitled "Uneasy Partnerships," a portmanteau phrase intended to capture the fraught relationships between European explorers and those knowledgeable intermediaries on whom the co-production of

Fig. 5.4 Stone foundations of canoe-shaped house. Katherine Routledge with field assistant. Unknown photographer. 1915. Rapa Nui (Easter Island) (© Royal Geographical Society [with IBG]. Reprinted with permission)

knowledge depended. Some of these individuals—especially collectors, translators, and guides—acquired far more experience of exploration than even the most experienced European explorers could attain. A very few, such as Nain Singh, as we have seen, were celebrities in their own lifetime. Many others were virtually airbrushed from the accounts subsequently published in journals and books by the leaders of the expeditions. In order to present such relationships as "partnerships," the exhibition therefore relied on a second strategy of *juxtaposition*, the designer creating panels in which pairs of images were placed alongside one another. Here, for example, there were twinned portraits of Alfred Russel Wallace and Ali, his field assistant, whom Wallace recalled serving as his "eyes, ears and hands" during his extended field researches in the Malay archipelago (Camerini, 1996, p. 56); or Katherine Routledge with her field assistant on the Pacific island of Rapa Nui in 1914, each on either end of a measuring tape (Fig. 5.4). And, turning to a very different moment, the exhibition also presented an iconic image of Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay sharing a cup of tea on the slopes of Mount Everest in 1953. By this time, colonial attitudes were being increasingly challenged, both by the Sherpas themselves and by some European climbers. From being coolies or porters, Sherpas were increasingly claiming the right to be treated as climbing partners on an equal basis (Hansen, 2000). In the space of the exhibition, superimposed on the portrait of Tenzing on the summit, was an extract from his famous account of the final moments

of the 1953 ascent, in which he gently disputed common assumptions about Hillary's precedence: "All the way up and down we helped, and were helped, by each other—and that was the way it should be. But we were not leader and led. We were partners" (Norgay & Ullman, 1955, pp. 265–266).

The Everest collection at the RGS-IBG, which includes materials from expeditions from the 1920s up to the 1950s, is a substantial and precious archival resource. In seeking to project a different version of the Everest story, making visible the vital contributions of interpreters, climbers and porters, a third design strategy—that of *re-scaling*—proved particularly effective. The wall of the RGS-IBG pavilion, immediately above the Everest section of the exhibition, was covered with a greatly enlarged image of a sheet of passport-style photographs from the archives of the 1936 Everest expedition, so that each individual portrait was approximately life-size. At first sight, in their archival box, these photographic portraits had appeared to belong to a genre of administrative and anthropometric photography deployed by the British in India since the 1860s (Falconer, 1984), the numbering and arrangement of each print suggesting, to my eyes at least, principles of surveillance and regimentation (Fig. 5.5). But this was certainly not the whole story. Alongside the Sherpa portraits, taken at the moment of their recruitment at the Planters' Club in Darjeeling, were those of some of the British members of the expedition, as well as images of the recruitment scene itself. Furthermore, the projection of these portraits onto the wall transformed an archival fragment into something far more personal and indeed more ambivalent (Fig. 5.6). The young Sherpa recruits wore identity tags around their necks, issued at the point of recruitment. At an enlarged scale, however, these badges appeared less as mechanisms of surveillance and more as marks of worth, almost like the medals these Sherpas were never awarded.[10] At this scale too, the individuality of the portraits became much more evident. Here visitors to the exhibition could spot the stylish though now middle-aged interpreter Karma Paul, who had by 1936 become something of a celebrity on Everest expeditions, resplendent in Tibetan costume, as if to confirm his elevated status. Karma Paul—or Palden, to use his Tibetan name—appears directly alongside expedition leader Hugh Ruttledge. Neither has an identity tag. Also among the Sherpas identified in the exhibition display was the young Tenzing Norgay, an enthusiastic member of the 1936 climbing team, 17 years before his successful ascent with Hillary. At this scale, then, the personal and social histories of labor usually hidden from view in conventional histories of exploration and mountaineering came more clearly into view.

At a meeting in the autumn of 1936 held to celebrate the achievements of the Everest expedition earlier that year, the president of the Royal Geographical Society, Henry Balfour, concluded the evening with a tribute to the porters, whom he

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[10] The British climbers on Everest in 1922 were awarded medals in Alpinism at the 1924 Winter Olympics; subsequently, the names of two Indian members of the team were added to the list of medal-winners, though these did not include the Sherpas who died on the mountain (Correspondence with the International Olympic Committee concerning the award of medals, RGS-IBG Everest Expedition Archives, EE 30/3).

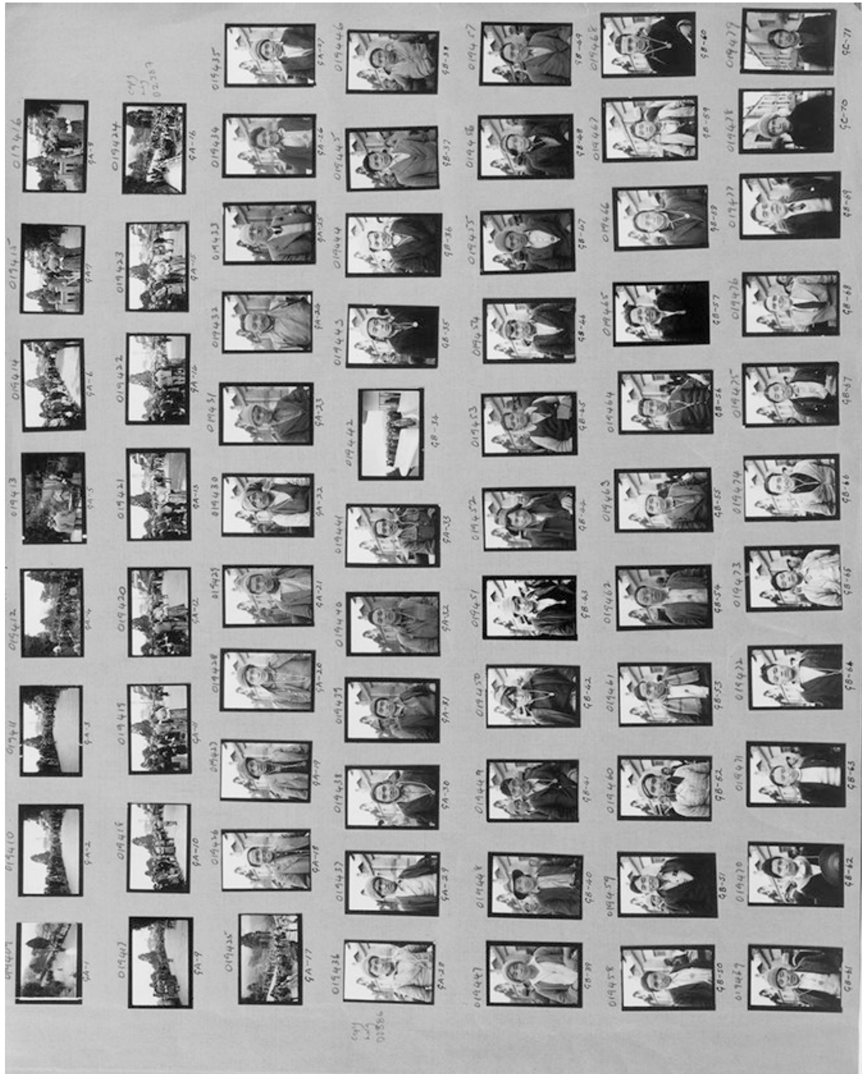

Fig. 5.5 J. M. L. Gavin, Everest album. 1936 (© Royal Geographical Society [with IBG]. Reprinted with permission)

Fig. 5.6 Everest album on display, *Hidden Histories of Exploration* exhibition, Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers), October–December 2009. The young Tensing Norgay is the portrait in the *top left* (Photographer: Philip Hatfield. Reprinted with permission of the RGS-IBG)

described almost in passing as "absent heroes" (Balfour et al., 1936, p. 523). The re-scaling of their portraits in the 2009 *Hidden Histories* exhibition effectively brought these men into presence in a way that many visitors to our exhibition found particularly powerful, perhaps because it enabled them to recognize these self-conscious, half-smiling young men as historical agents in all the senses of the term.

Conclusion

In the context of academic funding, exhibitions are an increasingly common means of presenting geographical research, a more or less accessible form of public output. In this paper, I have reflected on the experience of producing an exhibition in order to consider the ways in which the format of display can in some circumstances extend, illuminate, clarify, or problematize aspects of the research process itself. In retrospect, it became clear that the exhibition team had been juggling two rather different approaches to the uses of historical materials in the display space. The first approach gave priority to principles of archival authenticity, the need to display materials in or near their original form, either as objects or as faithful reproductions. The second sought to align the spatial form of display with the intended message, or ethos, of the exhibition. On the one hand, we wanted as researchers to be as true as

possible to the materiality of the collections. Rather than airbrushing the imperfections or downplaying the contingency of the archives, we sought to highlight their material qualities as objects. After all, these pieces of paper, books, pictures, and artifacts—these raw materials—were not in themselves stories or even fragments of stories. They were part of an institutionally embedded archive with its own history and geography. On the other hand, we worked with exhibition specialists who used their expertise in design and education to transform the material so that it could serve a strong and accessible narrative, in the interests of effective communication.

However well-meaning its claims to archival authenticity, any exhibition is inevitably a work of transformation. The *Hidden Histories of Exploration* exhibition was no exception to this rule. In particular, the process of design helped to shape, and indeed transform, the meanings of the archive as they were presented in the spaces of the exhibition. In this process, the designers themselves performed the role of intermediaries, though their work was itself modified in a process of discussion, revision, and reformulation that reflected a number of different interests. Furthermore, as I have emphasized, the need for understanding the significance of image-making in the context of exploration and its history was itself a major theme running throughout the exhibition. Here too, the emphasis was on artists, engravers, photographers, or filmmakers as intermediaries, engaged in a collective work of knowledge production. The story conveyed about their role was not one of agency in any simple sense. These image-makers were not doing their work in a vacuum. They were, precisely, the bearers of larger traditions. Their sketches, maps, engravings, photographs, and films were not treated simply as transparent records of individual authorship or experience. In a sense, these artifacts too had their own biographies and larger family histories. Here is another reason to think of "knowledge transfer" as always and inevitably a mediated process.

As with many contemporary exhibitions designed with multiple audiences in mind, the work presented by the *Hidden Histories of Exploration* project was re-presented in several different sites: the physical spaces of the gallery and the reading room, the diverse locations in which a traveling version of the displays have circulated (including, for example, the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew and the Royal Engineers Museum in Gillingham, Kent), the various institutional and educational spaces where talks and lectures have been given (from academic conferences to prison education programs), the physical pages of the companion book, and the virtual spaces of an online exhibit, accompanied by online research and teaching resources. Through these various channels, the exhibition was encountered by a significantly greater number of people than the few thousands who originally saw it in South Kensington in 2009. Since its launch the online exhibition, for example, has had well over 100,000 page views from 133 countries. In each of these venues, whether physical or virtual, the exhibition narrative was reordered, the images redisplayed—on more portable display boards, in lesson plans for teachers, or within PowerPoint presentations for researchers. In each case, the exhibition was not merely reproduced, it was given a new form, its contents freshly curated within a new setting. Here perhaps is an echo of the idea of the museum as a "distributive institution" discussed by Clare Harris in the context of her digital *Tibet Album*, a

website devoted to the photographic collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum (Harris, 2013).[11] In the process, however, meanings do not merely "transfer" or diffuse outwards, as if they were little parcels of data disseminated from the hub of knowledge-generating machines like the Pitt Rivers Museum or the Royal Geographical Society; rather, they multiply and diversify, being reworked in new contexts. This is another way of saying that making an exhibition is a process, not an event; and especially in the context of the mobility of knowledge through the web, there is little that is immutable (Srinivasan et al., 2013).

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