

Journey takes teen to Nepal, India

By Gordon B. Seavey
Staff Correspondent

When Westford Academy doors swing open next week for its 17th academic year, Robert O'Brien will have many a good story to tell about his experiences this summer in two countries half way around the world.

A senior, Rob spent six weeks seeing sights and living with local families in India and Nepal. He travelled with a small group of six students and its leader, a 24-year-old teacher, Lauri Hovell of the Experience in Living at Brattleboro, Vt. The three boys were of high school age, the girls were college students, one from Canada.

His earliest impression of the journey was realizing after a 20 hour flight by air, that it is a long way to Bombay.

Living the first two weeks with a Moslem family, Rob noted that most East Indians are of the Hindu faith. He billeted with the Bismillah family for the first two weeks. The father is a floral designer whose designs intrigued Rob. Great wall panels of flowers would decorate homes for special occasions, and he was shown a photo of a bride and groom sitting in a boat made entirely of flowers.

"The cities seemed overcrowded," Rob said and told of a small family sleeping in the vestibule of the Bismillahs home.

Notwithstanding that the native cooks used a lot of curry for seasoning, Rob enjoyed the local diet of chicken, goat and vegetables. He stayed shy of local water whenever possible.

He was told that only a small percentage, perhaps 25% of the natives can read and write, but they pass on their culture by word of mouth. Sightseeing a must.

A plan for the students to visit some of the most outstanding tourist attractions meant long trips by bus and staying at hostels and



Photo courtesy of Gordon Seavey

Home from a summer in India and Nepal, Academy senior Robert O'Brien traces his exotic route for Suzette Jefferson, reference library assistant at the Fletcher Library

when they were not available, hotels.

Leaving the capital, Delhi, where the temperature often stood above 100, they visited the Taj Mahal, considered by many as the most beautiful building in the world. Seeing it at daybreak, with the usual lighting from the rising sun, is an experience not to be forgotten, said Rob. The marble turns pink in color.

The Hindu temples intrigued many in his group and it seemed the figures and statues of the Hindu God Siva were everywhere. The Hall of Heroes, a Hindu temple near Jodhpur, contained 16 statues of great size, representing gods and men.

In their travels the group began to realize that India, a giant triangular land mass which dips between the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal,

is a third of the size of the United States and couldn't be covered in the comparatively short time the travellers were allowed.

They stopped off at Rajistan where safaries take off using elephants to hunt tigers. The hunt was not on their itinerary. They settled for a cruise on the Ganges.

The final two weeks of Rob's trip was to be spent in the capital city of Katmandu in the Kingdom of Nepal. This mountainous country, about the size of North Carolina, is squeezed between India and the great expanse of China. Rob pointed out that the people are of a mix and speak a mixture of Indo-Chinese called Nepali. They look toward India, not China, for most of their goods. Farming is their way of life, with the women doing the work in the fields.

Mountain climbing

Rob is active in the Cirrus Club

at Westford Academy whose members do lots of hiking, mountain climbing and scaling cliffs. Mt. Everest whose peak of 29,028 feet lies on the border with Tibet is the highest mountain in the world.

Rob's group was content to do hiking in the foothills. Even so, they climbed up to the 8,000 foot elevation, nearly 2,000 feet above our Mt. Washington.

The Adhikari family, Hindus, was the host for the Westford student. The father is a professor of English at the local university. The mother did not speak English, but the two boys, 9 and 17, and a daughter, 6, did very well with our language, Rob said.

They were very friendly, anxious to learn more about the USA, and encouraged their guest to learn more about Nepal. It was a good exchange of nationalities.

One of the little experiences Rob had was to participate in a special feast on a Moslem holiday. The family sacrificed a goat on the rooftop of their modest home and prepared the meal. Rob said he had part of the brain, which wasn't too bad, just different.

Now back in Westford, the young adventurer admits his "own bed feels pretty good." The O'Briens moved to Westford from Chelmsford 14 years ago and now live on Cold Spring Road.

His parents are both educators. Arnold is a professor at the University of Lowell, where as a geologist he heads the earth/science department. Joan O'Brien is well known in town, having served on the school committee for six years. She is associated with the Sylvan Learning Center in Chelmsford. A daughter, Susan, enters Abbot Middle School this September.

Rob worked hard to help pay for his experience in international living and said he doesn't regret the many hours he did baby sitting and mowing lawns for neighbors to earn a portion of his expenses.