

Jeff Frew 1957-2026

It is with great sadness that we need to inform our supporters that Jeff Frew, CAN Trustee and Director of Community Action Treks (CAT) for many years, has recently died. Jeff was an extraordinary person who lived a rich and kaleidoscopic life and touched the lives of many people. By profession he was a community worker in Edinburgh working in the fields of social welfare, disability and community advocacy, and it was his extensive knowledge, expertise and grounding in community development which aligned with Doug's thinking and had a significant impact on the development of the charity. Like Doug, Jeff was passionate about Nepal and about improving the standards of living in remote mountain communities, and believed in community self determination, bottom-up 'grass roots' development and sustainability. Like Doug, he eschewed approaches which promoted donor dependency.

Jeff was born and bred in Scotland and from an early age his escape and sanctuary was on the moors and mountains. He was inspired by the mountain environment and it was there he learned much of his wide-ranging knowledge of Scotland's fauna, flora and history. Jeff trekked extensively throughout Britain and Europe, and it was in 1984 that he met Doug in Coire an t-Sneachda in the Cairngorms – the beginning of their long personal and professional relationship. According to Doug's biographer Catherine Moorhead, Doug asked Jeff to lead one of the first CAT reconnaissance treks in 1989 with a view to establishing a sustainable tourist model for the new trekking business. CAT was launched and the rest is history! Jeff was a Co-Director of CAT for 12 years and during its heyday when Jeff was involved it attracted 500-600 clients a year with some of the profits ploughed back to help sustain CAN projects. On account of the symbiotic relationship between CAT and CAN, trekkers over the years have visited the charity's health posts, schools and livelihood projects across Nepal, with many returning home and fundraising for CAN and in so doing sustaining our work in Nepal.

As well as having a role in the governance and direction of CAT, Jeff was a qualified mountain guide and very popular trek leader. He would lead treks to Nepal two or three times a year. Jeff loved Nepal and had an exceptional knowledge of the country and her people. He described it as his second home. Aside from CAT, he led treks with big charity groups and his sense of humour coupled with his professionalism and mountain awareness made for enjoyable and memorable experiences. His great enthusiasm for CAN projects undoubtedly helped to recruit many new supporters. During the civil war in Nepal Jeff continued to lead treks and used his excellent communication skills to negotiate unrestricted passage for his clients when contributions for the Maoist cause were demanded. Many will be indebted to Jeff for these life changing experiences.

Jeff was a Trustee with CAN for 24 years. He was very wise and had a very sound judgement. When there was a difference of opinion he was skilful in defusing tension and lightening the mood with his quickfire sense of humour. He made wonderful connections for the charity and was an exponent of networking before the term was even coined! He and his wife Jenny were also highly supportive of CAN's fundraising lectures, for example by hosting key speakers like Tom Hornbein and Peter Habeler. Doug once wrote that Jeff was 'invaluable as a Trustee with CAN'.

Jeff was the Scottish contact for the International Porter Protection Group, improving standards and conditions for porters for many years. Environmental issues were also a high priority for him and he undertook a major piece of work on sustainability and environmental issues in the Everest region.

Jeff had a wonderful energy and enthusiasm. He was effervescent, even cheeky, and he had

tremendous engagement skills, kindness, compassion and altruism. He was a brilliant raconteur and his story telling was legendary.

He loved mountaineering and the great outdoors. Wearing shorts at all times seemed to be his signature fashion statement and put many of us to shame.

In the latter years of his life Jeff worked for Cycling UK and continued to have a burning passion for social justice, fairness and equality in spite of major health challenges which he faced with great stoicism. He was a great humanitarian, and this will be Jeff's legacy. Doug used to say that Jeff was close to finding the meaning of life, and perhaps because he was such a multidimensional person he did discover it. The last word should go to Doug, who wrote that Jeff's motto was an old Confucian text circa 478BC: "To know what is right and not to do it is the worst cowardice". Wise and challenging words for us all.

Jeff will be greatly missed. Everyone at CAN express our deep condolences to Jenny, Becky and Ailsa and all his grandchildren.

Personal reflections about Jeff from Rob Lorge former Chair of CAN

I first met Jeff 27 years ago on a CAT trek he was leading which was done with his usual aplomb and sense of humour. Whilst the rest of us were kitted out given the weather, Jeff characteristically wore shorts or his kilt throughout being the proud Scot he was.

We both became Trustees of CAN at around the same time and soon became not only colleagues but friends as well.

I remember one of the early treks together on which Doug and Trish were also present. One day we decided to go up to Tragsindo La from where there was a stunning view through the Gompa's gate to the Himalaya beyond. Doug had stayed behind because of his knees and having seen the view many times before. Jeff was lying on his tummy in an attempt to get the best view and cursing a group of people who were spoiling his view, when all of a sudden he leapt up and exclaimed "[expletive] They've got guns" and promptly hid his camera. They turned out to be Maoist insurgents who were demanding a ransom. Their leader was a tough looking young woman knitting a pink jumper with ammunition belts across her torso and a firearm over one shoulder. I spent some time trying to reason with them and explaining that we were members of a charity helping local mountain people, all to no avail. Afterwards Jeff said with his sense of humour - "what were you doing, giving them our bank details?" This incident also prompted the poem below illustrating another of Jeff's skills, that of a wordsmith:

Knitting for Freedom (Jeff Frew)

Knitting for Freedom
Knitting for Thrill
Knitting with Needles
Or a revolver to kill
Teenage Warrior
Femme Fatale
Beautiful Bomber
Bleeding Nepal
A Miss World Contestant

Or a Rebel without Cause
Two extremes together
Full of Holes like a gauze

None of them right
Both of them wrong
No choice in the world
Shouldn't that be the song

Jeff was also extremely brave having been diagnosed with hepatitis C, a victim of the contaminated blood scandal. Jeff devoted a lot of his time giving evidence to the enquiries trying to get some justice, not just for himself but for other sufferers too. Even when it seemed that he himself would not be eligible for compensation, as his hospital notes were lost, he continued to work in the interests of other victims.

After they had decided to treat him with interferon and anti-retroviral drugs, Jeff had planned to go to Nepal to lead some environmental training for CAT and CAN staff but was concerned that the side effects of treatment might make it unwise for him to go. He asked if I would go in his place to which I agreed. After a few days I got another call from him saying that if he had a personal physician with him, he would come after all. I was at a low point after marital breakdown and if ever proof were needed that the aphorism 'laughter is the best medicine' was true, the three weeks we spent in Nepal together was it. We both were able to fully enjoy our time together and for a while forget our own worries in constant laughter at sometimes puerile humour.

Jeff was a devoted family man who was proud of his daughters and his "serene" wife Jenny. On a friends and family trip with Doug, Trish and family in 2010 we all got stranded in Nepal because of the Icelandic ash cloud. Jeff's "cool Dad" exterior was shattered when a young lad who had befriended Ailsa at the hotel in Kathmandu was rubbing suntan lotion onto her back. Jeff made a very poor attempt at appearing to read his book. I'm sure I spotted steam coming from his ears at the sight!

Jeff was multi-talented as a poet and a musician and shared Doug's love of organic gardening. He lived on a farm and as well as his horticultural activities there he farmed earthworms which were sold to companies to degrade waste. Jeff's practical skills were put to more good use when he received a gift from Jenny's father. Jeff then did something he had always wanted to do which was to pan for gold in Scotland. As a result of his efforts he helped pan enough gold to make a new wedding ring for himself. A true romantic!

When I last saw Jeff in Cumbria he was so obviously seriously ill, and worried that he would be ok to give the father of the bride's speech at Becky's wedding. I am so glad that when I spoke to him afterwards he was thrilled that all had gone so well.

Thank you, Jeff, for all the wonderful memories that I and so many others have of you. You truly left this earth a better place for having been in it.

Rob