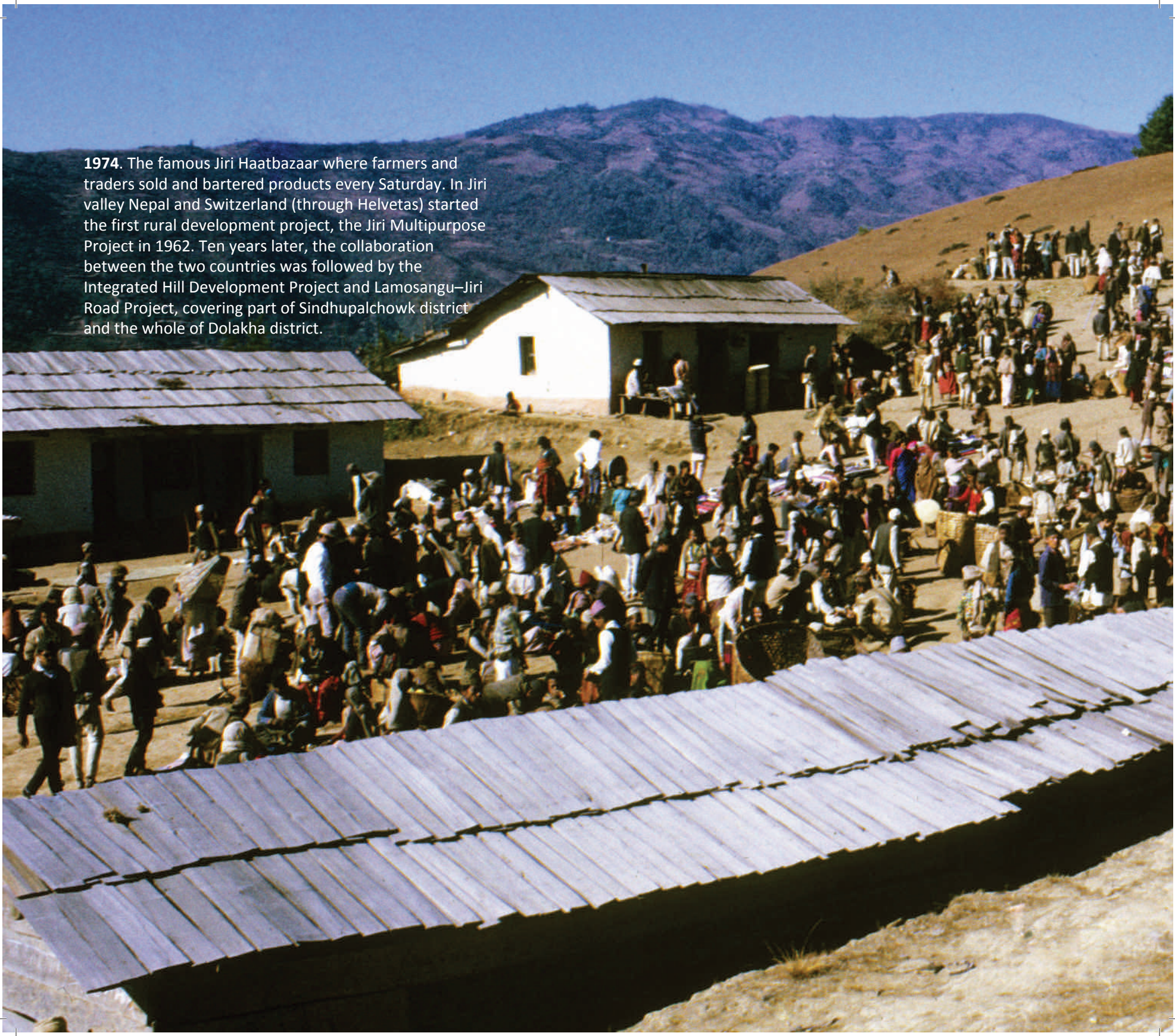


JIRI

From Cheese to Tea

1974. The famous Jiri Haatbazaar where farmers and traders sold and bartered products every Saturday. In Jiri valley Nepal and Switzerland (through Helvetas) started the first rural development project, the Jiri Multipurpose Project in 1962. Ten years later, the collaboration between the two countries was followed by the Integrated Hill Development Project and Lamosangu–Jiri Road Project, covering part of Sindhupalchowk district and the whole of Dolakha district.







1996. Students of the Jiri High School play volleyball. This game is very popular throughout the district as it does not need big playground like football does.



1974. A Twin Otter aircraft after landing on the airstrip at Jiri. The airstrip was built by the Swiss in the early 1960s and used for over 20 years until the new road reached Jiri.



1996. *Chhurpi*, a traditional dried fatless cheese, displayed at the Jiri Haatbazaar. *Chhurpi* is produced during the summer on high altitude pastures, and consists mostly of protein. The fat removed from the milk is made into butter and then converted to ghee to be sold in the cities.

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1996. A woman milks a *chauri* (a cross between the yak and low altitude cattle) on a summer pasture at Hanumante. She sells the milk to a cheese factory started by the Swiss for the Nepal Dairy Corporation or she produces ghee and *chhurpi* for the market.





1968. The hills towards the north of Jiri valley are extremely degraded. On the left side at the bottom of the valley the buildings of the buffalo farm and the Jiri Hospital can be seen.



2010. The once-naked slopes are now covered with forests. This is the result of the reforestation started by the Jiri Project in the 1960s, followed later by the Community Forestry Project. On the left on the valley floor is the new Jiri Bazaar, which arose after the road from Lamosangu reached the valley.

The first Swiss activities in Dolakha district began from the beautiful Jiri valley, which is also known as the Switzerland of Nepal among the Nepalis. The Jiri Multipurpose Project, started in the 1960s, was active in health, education, agriculture and forestry. The Swiss also supported the Mura buffalo breeding programme at the government farm at Jiri. The health post is still functioning and the afforestation has changed the naked hills into a dense forest. The weekly Sunday Jiri Haatbazaar has played an important role in the lives of farmers and local traders.

Other important initiatives by the Swiss project are the hard cheese factories at Chordung and Dodung. It was taken over by the Dairy Development Corporation and since has been selling the cheese with its brand name, yak cheese. Despite its brand name, the hard cheese is actually produced with milk from the *chauri* and buffalos, which have been grazed in high-altitude pastures in the summer season. Unfortunately, the yak cheese is still too expensive for the general Nepali consumer.

In the 1960s, Jiri valley could be reached only by small airplanes or by a week-long walk from Bhaktapur. The walking distance shortened with the construction of the Araniko Highway along the Sunkosi up to Kodari, and it took only three days walk from Lamosangu to reach Jiri. By the end of the Jiri project in 1970, it was realised that not much development could be achieved without roads to connect it to the capital. Before the road construction, a study was conducted by a team of experts

from Switzerland and Nepal to examine the feasibility of a new road from Lamosangu to Jiri and also of the possible development activities to be implemented in this area. This led the Swiss to establish the Nepal Swiss IHDP (Integrated Hill Development Project) in 1973 and the LJRP (Lamosangu–Jiri Road Project) in 1975.

By the late 60s and the 70s, Jiri was renowned for its high school and the Panchayat Training Centre. The Jiri Technical School (JTS), built with Swiss assistance in the 80s, further strengthened the education reputation of Jiri valley.

In 1982, the 110-km-long road from Lamosangu reached the Jiri valley, which till then had only a buffalo farm and a hospital. Soon, locals and outsiders built new houses alongside the road. All of a sudden, the new bazaar became a centre for goods to arrive from Kathmandu to be carried by porters to Solukhumbu and other eastern districts. Passengers and trekkers could reach Jiri in a day from Kathmandu and would start their next journey the following morning after a night's rest in one of the new lodges in the bazaar.

With the road connection and the new shops in Jiri Bazaar, the once-famous Jiri Haatbazaar lost its importance. While Jiri was the last stop for the road, in recent years the road has extended further and this has also affected the value of Jiri as a trading hub. Nonetheless, given the numbers of hiking and trekking possibilities Jiri is still an ideal location to start trekking to nearby hills and valleys and the many villages that are still to be explored.

Snow is history

— **Keshar Jirel**, born 1954, four children
(see his photographs on page 169)

I must say, life was easier in Jiri compared to other parts of Dolakha district. This was due to the Swiss project that employed people and started different programmes. Switzerland has really made a huge contribution to Jiri and its people. If they hadn't built the school, I couldn't have gone to school. I used to work in the mornings and evenings and go to school in the afternoon. Later, I received a scholarship from the Swiss government to study.

Although my student life was hard, later in my life I got plenty of opportunities. After my SLC (School Leaving Certificate), I worked as a teacher. In 1972, I met Fritz when I got a job with a comfortable salary in the education section of IHDP. Later, I received dairy training and worked as cheese-maker in different factories and as adviser for the Dairy Development Corporation. I even got a chance to visit Switzerland and the Philippines. For the last few years I have been running a hotel in Jiri. I consider my 60 years of life fruitful so far.

The Jiri Haatbazaar every Saturday was also very useful. It became the biggest haatbazaar in the district and was visited by people from Solu, Okhaldhunga and Ramechhap as well. In Jiri itself, Jirel, Surel, Thami, Sunuwar, Tamang, Sherpa, Bahun, Chhetri, Kami and other peoples live. So, during haatbazaar we heard songs in different languages. People danced to the mouth harmonium and the *damphu* (hand-held drum). Drinking *raksi* (alcohol) often resulted in getting drunk and fighting.

Jatras (religious festivals) like Chepte, Rambhole, Bhimeswori and Jireswori used to be important in people's lives. Once during

Chepte Jatra, when I was around nine years old, I danced in the crowd and my aunts searched for me everywhere, thinking I was lost. One of the most unforgettable moments in my life was in 1964 when I together with my friends danced in front of King Mahendra. At the end we got Rs 5 per person as a *baksis* (tip) from the king himself.

Farming potatoes, maize, millet and wheat was required for daily consumption as was animal husbandry. Before the road was opened, people had to walk to Bhaktapur and Kathmandu to sell goats and sheep in order to have money for festivals. I have also walked the old way from Jiri to Namdu, Kiratichhap, Sherabeshi, Nigale, Petku to Lamosangu where I got a bus.

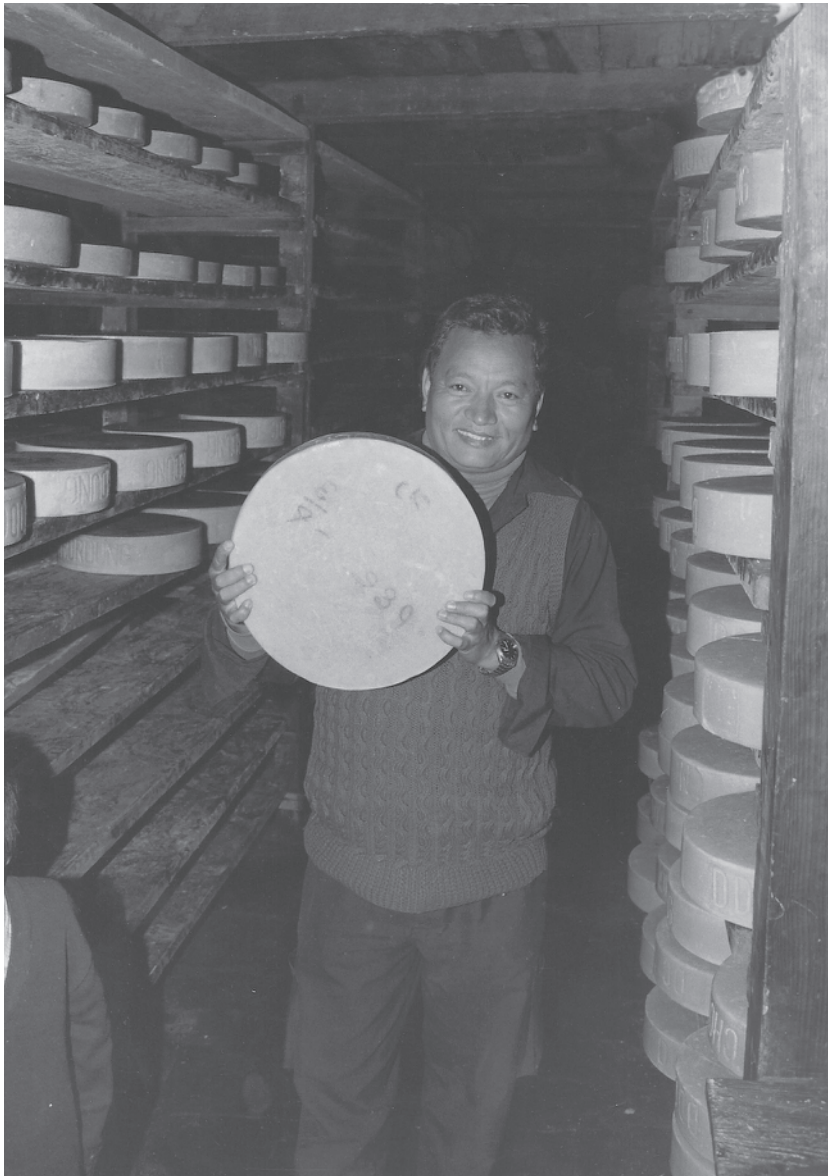
It used to snow every year in Jiri, but it doesn't happen these days. Snow is history and other things too. In my childhood, people used to think that education is worthless; nowadays people believe education is the basis for a professional life. People do not have to go to other places for higher education as there are schools in Jiri up to the bachelor's level. People from Jiri have reached high government positions as well. Now, we use computers and the internet and I think more technology will influence people's lives in future.

In Jiri, we have a good hospital and so nobody has to go to Kathmandu in case of any illness. The community forest programme has helped keep the greenery in the valley. But there is also the danger of the negative effects of quick development to traditional values.

The most unforgettable and painful memory in my life is when the Maoists killed one of my neighbours' brother, Hemanta, in the bazaar near my hotel. Just that day we had talked for a while over a cup of tea. Only around 45 minutes later, he was killed since he was politically inclined towards the Nepali Congress Party.



1989. The new compound of the Jiri Technical School (JTS). Built with Swiss assistance, JTS offers two-year courses for junior technical assistants in agriculture, sub-overseers in construction, and auxiliary nurse midwives in health.



1996. Keshar Jirel shows the hard cheese in the cellar of the factory he managed at Thokpa. Besides working as a cheese-maker he was also engaged by the Dairy Development Corporation as an adviser for other cheese factories.



2010. Keshar Jirel shows a packet of Jiri Tea, a new cash crop for farmers. Nowadays, he runs a hotel in the bazaar and helps to introduce tea cultivation (see his story on page 167).



1996. Early winter morning in Jiri Bazaar. A bus is ready to depart for Kathmandu and an empty truck is parked by the roadside. Since the Swiss came to Jiri in the early 1960s, this valley has experienced many changes and Jiri can be called the nucleus of modernisation for the whole area. The locals call Jiri the Zürich of Nepal.