In January 1935, the Vernay-Hopwood Chindwin Expedition left Rangoon to explore the upper reaches of the Chindwin River on behalf of the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH). For three months, the party traversed northern Burma, gathering key biological specimens and ethnographic artifacts. The expedition was financed by Arthur S. Vernay, a New York City-based dealer in English antiques, a field associate in the AMNH’s Department of Mammalogy, and a museum trustee. Vernay assembled a diverse party of natural scientists and shikari (big-game hunters). Henry C. Raven, a comparative anatomist at the museum, joined as the lead scientist, principal filmmaker, and photographer. The caravan was a confluence of Yunnanese muleteers, Burmese guides, Goan skinners, American scientists, and British party members assembled from throughout the Raj, including Major Stephen F. Hopwood, chief conservator of forests for the Indian government. Its journey brought the caravan in touch with various residents of northern Burma—Burmese, Kachin, Shan, and Naga peoples—who provisioned the enterprise and procured specimens for the museum.

Featuring documentation and photographs made during the journey, as well as biographical narratives of its organizers, sponsors, and field scientists, this book focuses on the collected items, personal belongings, provisions, tools, and exchange goods carried by the expedition party. Erin Hasinoff provides fascinating details of the expedition’s itinerary, cross-cultural interactions, and exchanges. She describes the complex social life of this extraordinary enterprise through the array of objects carried in the field and collected en route, taking account of the contributions of all concerned—visitors and residents—as even-handedly as possible.

CONFLUENCES AN AMERICAN EXPEDITION TO NORTHERN BURMA, 1935

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Confluences: An American Expedition to Northern Burma, 1935 is curated by Erin L. Hasinoff, a BGC-AMNH postdoctoral fellow in museum anthropology (2010–12) and an AMNH research associate (2012–15). Her publications focus on the history of collecting, expeditions, cultural heritage, and the anthropology of religion and include her book Faith in Objects: American Missionary Expositions in the Early Twentieth Century. She is co-editor of Anthropology of Expeditions: Travel, Visualities, After-lives, which draws together contributions from North American and British anthropologists and historians of science working on the anthropology of expeditions from the perspective of their collected natural and cultural materials.