

Confluences:
An American Expedition
to Northern Burma, 1935
On View April 4–August 3, 2013



Naga basketry helmet
with crest of hair
from Upper Chindwin,
Burma. Collected by
the Vernay-Hopwood
Chindwin Expedition
in 1935. American
Museum of Natural
History 70.0/6374.

Bard
Graduate
Center: Decorative
Arts, Design
History, Material
Culture

On view

April 4–August 3, 2013

This remarkable exhibition features an assortment of rarely viewed objects carried on the expedition and collected in the field, including clothing, saddles, weapons, photographs, and film footage.

In January 1935, the Vernay-Hopwood Chindwin Expedition set out from Rangoon to explore the upper reaches of the “mighty Chindwin River” on behalf of the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH). The three-month expedition gathered the museum’s founding biological and anthropological collections from an under-researched area to the east of Burma’s border with Assam and to the south of Tibet. *Confluences: An American Expedition to Northern Burma, 1935*, on view at the Bard Graduate Center Focus Gallery from April 4 to August 3, 2013, explores the complex social life of this extraordinary enterprise through an assortment of objects that were both carried into the field and collected en route. Erin L. Hasinoff, BGC–AMNH post-doctoral fellow in museum anthropology, organized the exhibition in collaboration with BGC graduate students.



Expedition party and mule train. “Mandalay to Lonkin, Jan. 1935.” Photograph by H. C. Raven. Image VHC-D25, American Museum of Natural History Library.



Naga man's belt with attached wooden sheath (catalogued as “Chin”), from Hahti, Upper Chindwin, Burma. Collected by the Vernay-Hopwood Chindwin Expedition in 1935. American Museum of Natural History 70.0/6359.

Background

Expeditions have long been the subject of natural history and anthropology exhibitions. Although most have emphasized the biographies and activities of organizers, sponsors, and field scientists, *Confluences* focuses on the working methods of the expedition. At its heart is the idea that expeditions were cosmopolitan adventures that relied on the adroitness and cooperation of numerous local indigenous agents, as well as professionals, in order to make scientific discoveries.

The Vernay-Hopwood Chindwin expedition was financed by Arthur S. Vernay, an established New York City–based dealer in English antiques, an intrepid 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 skippers, and British party members assembled from throughout the Raj, including Major Stephen F. Hopwood, chief conservator of forests for the Indian government. The exploratory 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.

The expedition made news, not primarily for its collections and its scientific findings but for what newspapers sensationalized as the most significant episode of the journey: the first contact with the “head-hunting” Nagas of Burma. At the time, such exotic accounts of contact were an important justification for expeditions, attracting nation-wide publicity and the support of museum patrons.

The Exhibition

Structured as an itinerary, *Confluences* reveals working relations among participants of every kind, whose encounters shaped the collections that were to enter the museum. The exhibition includes a fascinating selection of the objects the expedition carried and collected, including basketry hats, a pack saddle, sandals, indigenous clothing, a pellet bow, spear, crossbow, and knives. These, along with documentation, photographs, and film footage drawn from various departments of the AMNH, are displayed here for the first time. The exhibition includes present-day interpretations of the expedition’s three-day sojourn among the Nagas



Goan Skinner and Charles S. McCann preparing bird skins. “Lonkin to Hpakan, Jan. 1935.” Photograph by H. C. Raven. Image VHC-E2, American Museum of Natural History Library.

Naga basketry helmet from Upper Chindwin, Burma. Collected by the Vernay-Hopwood Chindwin Expedition in 1935. American Museum of Natural History 70.0/6375.



as it was depicted in photographs and on film. A “sound collage” by Dr. Sentienla Toy Threadgill, a New York-based Ao Naga ethnomusicologist, made up of interviews and music, accompanies a brief segment of the silent 110-minute expedition film, *The Vernay-Hopwood Chindwin Expedition to Northern Burma, 1935*. Dr. Threadgill’s piece brings the expedition to the present, moving the film beyond its archival life to address some of the sonic sensibilities and cultural interactions of the Burma-India borderland. Overall, *Confluences* sets in motion a dialogue about the fieldwork of the various participants who were active in producing a natural history of northern Burma and, by extension, the world.

Publication

Confluences: An American Expedition to Northern Burma, 1935 is accompanied by a fully illustrated book by Erin L. Hasinoff. The first section, using primary sources from the AMNH and elsewhere, provides a sketch of the Vernay-Hopwood Chindwin Expedition in which the author discusses its planning and the activities of the participants in relation to AMNH expeditionary history and to the natural history of northern Burma. The second section highlights student contributions and the teaching potential of archived expedition materials and collections. Published with Yale University Press (March 2013, paperback, 100 color and black-and-white illustrations, 128 pages), the catalogue will be available at the BGC Gallery and through the Web site (bgc.bard.edu).



Focus Gallery

The Focus Gallery presents small-scale exhibitions, primarily curated by faculty, that embody ambitious research and teaching. Each exhibition is part of an academically innovative project that also includes graduate seminars, public programming, and publications both in print and on line. Graduate students and gallery staff collaborate with faculty throughout the research, planning, and presentation stages. Envisaged as a kind of laboratory, the Focus Gallery projects promote experimentation in display, interpretation, and the use of digital media, and reflect the BGC's commitment to exhibitions as integral to scholarly activity.

Gallery Programs

Lectures, study days, gallery talks, and conversations are offered in conjunction with the exhibition. *For more information, please call 212-501-3011 or e-mail programs@bgc.bard.edu.*

Exhibition Tours

Guided tours for adult and school groups are offered Tuesday through Friday between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. and on Thursdays from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Reservations are required for all group visits. *To schedule a tour, please e-mail tours@bgc.bard.edu or call 212.501.3013.*

Spear catalogued as "Naga 'Chin,'" from Upper Chindwin, Burma. Collected by the Vernay-Hopwood Chindwin Expedition in 1935. American Museum of Natural History 70.2/2207.



From left to right stand: Major Guy Rowley, Arthur S. Vernay, and Colonel Randolph C. Morris. "Singaling Hkamti to Hahti, Mar. 1935." Photograph by H. C. Raven. Image VHC-M16, American Museum of Natural History Library.

The Bard Graduate Center Gallery is located in New York City at 18 West 86th Street, between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Thursday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. The admission fee is \$7 general, \$5 senior and students (valid ID); admission is free Thursday evenings after 5 p.m. *For information about the Bard Graduate Center and upcoming exhibitions, please visit bgc.bard.edu.*

For press information and images, please e-mail barnhart@bgc.bard.edu or call 212-501-3074.

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Related Education Programs and Events

All programs take place at 38 West 86th Street, unless otherwise indicated. Unless otherwise noted, evening programs now begin at 7 pm with a reception preceding each program.

Gallery Talk and Tea Tasting

A Botanical Treasury: Plant Fibers, Forest Resources, and the Culture of Tea in Northern Burma

Thursday, May 23

Introduced by Erin Hasinoff

6 to 8 pm gallery talk and tea tasting

Even before it is brewed, a tea leaf is steeped in legend, history, geography, and politics. In this gallery talk, Charles Peters will offer his perspectives on the ethnobotany and resource management of forest resources—including bamboo, rattan, and timber—in northern Burma. Sebastian Beckwith will then discuss the rich history of tea production in this region. The program will conclude with a tea demonstration and tasting.

Charles Peters is an ethnobotanist and Kate E. Tode Curator of Botany at the New York Botanical Garden. He is also associate professor of tropical ecology at the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies of Yale University.

Sebastian Beckwith is the owner of In Pursuit of Tea and a ranking tea authority based in New York City.

Erin L. Hasinoff is curator of the *Confluences* exhibition and a recent BGC–AMNH postdoctoral fellow in museum anthropology.

\$25general/\$20 seniors and students

Family Day

A Journey through Burma

Saturday, May 4

11:30 am to 4 pm performance, exhibition tours, and art-making

Explore the music and stories of Burma (now called Myanmar) on this special family day. Hear a performance of traditional Burmese music and create a travel map for a journey through Burma's lush landscape. This program is ideal for children ages 6 through 12 and their adult companions.

\$20 per family (includes gallery admission and healthy snacks)

Burmese Dinner and Lecture

Listening as Knowing: The Significance of Sound Among the Nagas

Thursday, June 6

6 pm dinner

7:30 pm lecture

Through political transformation and cultural confluences, the sonic perception of the Nagas of northern Burma and Nagaland has also been changing. Many Nagas sense these changes particularly in the affect or the feel of the sound of their music. In this lecture, Sentienla Toy Threadgill will explain how affect is integral to understanding the sound of music. She will also discuss the sources of inspiration for the sound piece she created to accompany the *Confluences* exhibition. The lecture will be preceded by a special buffet dinner featuring traditional Burmese fare.

Sentienla Toy Threadgill is an ethnomusicologist, songwriter, and vocalist who was born in Nagaland, the smallest tribal state in the northeastern tip of India.

\$65 general/\$60 seniors and students (dinner and lecture)

\$20 general/\$15 seniors and students (lecture only)

SCHOOL and EDUCATOR PROGRAMS

Evening for Educators

Thursday, April 11

4 to 6 pm exhibition tours and resource sharing (complimentary admission)

6 to 7 pm Burmese dinner (\$25 per person)

Teachers, administrators, teaching artists, and parents are invited to meet colleagues and enjoy private tours of our exhibitions. Learn about our exciting new outreach suitcases and receive complimentary lesson plans. An optional dinner, featuring traditional Burmese fare, will be offered for \$25 per person.

Registration is strongly recommended. To register, please e-mail tours@bgc.bard.edu or call 212-501-3013

School Tours

Guided exhibition tours enhance students' knowledge in the arts, history, and sciences as they encounter material culture from around the world. Up to 40 students can be accommodated at one time. One adult chaperone must accompany every 10 students.

Tuesday through Friday, 11 am to 4 pm, and Saturdays by appointment.

To schedule your visit, please e-mail tours@bgc.bard.edu or call 212-501-3013.

Free admission for New York City public schools.

\$75 (up to 25 visitors) and \$125 (26 to 40 visitors) for private schools, college groups, and public schools outside New York City.

Suitcase Outreach Program

In advance or independent of your visit to the BGC Gallery, an educator will travel to your school to present smaller versions of our exhibitions inside a traveling suitcase. During the outreach visit, students will learn about our exhibitions through a hands-on study of replica objects, an inquiry-based discussion, and an art-making experience. Each presentation lasts approximately one hour and is tailored to complement each teacher's goals and interests. Scheduling preference is offered to schools that also plan a follow-up visit to the BGC.

New Suitcase!

Marvelous Materials: Learn How Things Are Made
Grades K–8

Investigate the fascinating materials and techniques of the objects that adorned the rooms of nineteenth-century Paris. Create your own materials collage inspired by Georges Hoentschel's fabulous decorative-arts collection.

More Suitcases

These suitcases are still available by request, although the related exhibitions are no longer on view in the Gallery.

Circus in New York City Grades K–8

History through Hats Grades 3–12

Gifts from Our Ancestors: Native American Treasures Grades 2–5

Radiance of China Grades 3–11

Fees and Scheduling

Program fees include a pre-visit phone consultation with an educator, a 60- to 80-minute on-site presentation, and art materials. Payment is required no later than one week before the visit. Up to two classroom visits per day may be arranged. For more information or to schedule a visit, e-mail tours@bgc.bard.edu or call 212-501-3013.

\$90 for one class (up to 30 students)

\$160 for two classes (up to 60 students)

Please contact us to discuss payment options.

NYC Vendor ID: BAR34000

EXHIBITION TOURS

For Adults

Guided tours for adult groups are available Tuesday through Friday between 11 am and 5 pm and on Thursday from 11 am to 7 pm. Advance registration is required for all groups. To schedule a guided tour, please call Tracy Grosner at 212-501-3013 or e-mail tours@bgc.bard.edu.

\$85 (up to 25 visitors)

\$150 (26 to 40 visitors)

Self-guided groups pay individual admission (\$7 general, \$5 seniors and students with valid ID). Please call in advance to notify us if your group is larger than 10 visitors. Admission is free on Thursday evening after 5 pm.

Friday Lunchtime Gallery Talks

Complimentary guided tours of our current exhibitions are offered every Friday at noon. This program is free with gallery admission (\$7 general/\$5 seniors and students).

HOW TO REGISTER

To register online, visit bgc.bard.edu, call 212-50-3011, or e-mail programs@bgc.bard.edu

General Program Information: 212-501-3011

School Programs and Tours: 212-501-3013

Senior Programs: 212-501-3010

Registration Policies

Advance registration is required to guarantee seating for all programs. Registration confirmation with detailed program information will be e-mailed to participants. BGC reserves the right to cancel or change any program and is not responsible for providing makeup sessions or issuing refunds for absences caused by personal emergencies or circumstances beyond its control. Our programs are accessible to people with disabilities, and a hearing-assistance system is available. Please call 212-501-3011 to discuss arrangements if you have other special needs.

Location

18 West 86th Street (between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue)
New York City

Hours

Tuesday through Sunday from 11 am to 5 pm

Thursday from 11 am to 8 pm

Admission

\$7 general, \$5 seniors (65 and older) and students (with valid ID)

Admission is free on Thursday evening after 5 pm

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