

LEVEL OF DESCRIPTION:

Fonds

No.:

AU008

TITLE:

Miroslav Hruska fonds

CREATOR:

Hruska, Miroslav

DATE RANGE:

1930-1967; predominant 1950-1952

EXTENT:

0.51m textual records. – 150 photographs. – 9 cinefilms

ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY/ BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH:

Miroslav Hruska was born in Buchlov, Moravia area, Czechoslovakia on July 28, 1913. His father's name was Kristian Hruska and his mother was Antonie (nee) Samankova. As a young man, he spent time skiing and trekking the High and Low Tatra Mountains on the Czech-Polish border. He was a champion downhill and cross country skier and a ski jumper for his country. On May 9, 1936, he married Marta Krobathova in Zlin, Czechoslovakia.

In 1939, he moved with his family to Calcutta, India as an employee of the Bata Shoe Company. The company had a colony and factory at Batanagar, located twenty kilometers north-west of Calcutta. After a short time, he left Bata to establish his own business, Universal Lamp Manufacturing Company. Miroslav was active in local mountaineering circles and became equipment officer for the Himalayan Mountaineering Club. He provided storage facilities at his factory, where he maintained the club's equipment and loaned it out to major mountaineering groups when they undertook expeditions to the Himalayas.

Although Miroslav made several treks into the lower Himalayas during his time in India, he suffered from altitude sickness and could not venture into the higher peaks.

During his 1950 trek into the northern region of Sikkim, India, Miroslav tested two unique ideas. In November 1949 he left Gangtok, Nepal with K.S. Balia, the 1949 Honorary Secretary of *The Himalayan Journal* and legendary Sherpa Ang Tharkay. Miroslav took his skis and after several frustrating short bursts of skiing, he finally got a chance to glide down miles of the Khangkyou plateau and glacier region. This was noted in *Discovering Himalaya* by K.S. Gulia and may be the first recorded account of alpine skiing in the Himalayan region. Also on this trip, Miroslav hired two female Sherpanis,

Dikki and Dachu as part of his team. This decision to hire women was believed to be a first for a trekking expedition into the Himalayas and Miroslav never regretted his choice. They could carry the same loads as the men, had better sewing and cooking skills and were better negotiators for food and supplies with the Tibetan yak herders.

He recorded his 1950 expedition into Northern Sikkim through photographs and his 1952 trip to the Kangchenjunga region of Nepal on both photographs and 16 mm film. At that time, many of the regions were not known to cartographers and the available maps contained large gaps and incomplete information. By photographing the mountains and terrain and documenting his travels, Miroslav helped cartographers complete their knowledge of the area. His documentation of the 1952 trip was particularly helpful to many Himalayan Club and foreign climbers who at that time were planning their climb of Kangchenjunga, the third highest mountain in the world.

As his family grew and his business prospered, demands on his time increased and he could not find time for extended expeditions. However, he continued to trek the Himalayas on shorter, less risky and strenuous expeditions throughout the 1950s.

He left India for Australia in the early 1980s and passed away in Sydney on June 15, 1986.

CUSTODIAL HISTORY:

The records in this fonds were donated by Mike Hruska, a son of Miroslav Hruska.

SCOPE AND CONTENT:

Fonds consists of photographs relating to Hruska's expeditions to northern Sikkim, India in 1950 and the Kangchenjunga region of Nepal in 1952. They were taken with a Zeiss Ikon Super Ikonta camera. Several groups of photographs form panoramic views: Photos 34, 35, and 36 display the west side of the Northern Sikkim region; 43 and 44 create a view from the Sebo La Pass, northern Sikkim; 70 to 73 and photographs 93 to 96 form large panoramic views of the area around Kangchenjunga Mountain. Several of the photographs are marked with names of the mountains, ranges or glaciers that are in the images.

The two black and white films of the 1952 expedition to the Kangchenjunga region of Nepal were taken with a 16mm Paillard Bolex movie camera. He filmed Dikka and Dacha and the male Sherpas loading packs, trekking, setting up camps and preparing meals. There is also footage of their stops at mountain villages and some of the people and herds of yak and sheep they tended. This film has views of the mountains and valleys and gives a good perspective of the enormous extent of the Himalayas.

The two black and white films titled *Nepal* (1954) show Miroslav and his wife sightseeing in a town along a coastline, with views of ornate buildings and temples. There is footage of a festival or religious ceremony, of people at work, and of a street marketplace. There are views of the mountains and of a train moving along the steep mountain cliffs.

The two color films titled *Kashmir* show excerpts of a religious ceremony or a festival where animals' heads are chopped off. The film then moves to a trekking expedition with Sherpas carrying packs, footage of a small village with the local people posing for the camera and vistas of swift mountain streams and views of passes and large mountains.

The two color films titled *Deli Holiday (1961)* show the Hruska family on holiday with other families. There are large canoes and house boats on a river, temples, formal gardens and landscaping. The family enjoyed outdoor meals, paddling canoes, water skiing, horseback riding and fishing. There are also views of crowded streets, musicians and a marketplace.

The two color films titled *South India, 1965* show the Hruska family sightseeing in several locations including Jaipur City Palace, Amber Fort, New Delhi, Delhi Fort, Agra Fort and Fatehpur Sikri. There are views of very large buildings, temples, formal landscaping and the family posing with elephants and camels.

Fonds also includes twenty-two issues of *The Himalayan Journal*, a periodical from the Himalayan Club that publishes articles about the Himalayas and reports of expeditions. The journal was first published in Calcutta by Thacker, Spink & Co., and then in London by Oxford University Press. Dates of the journals range between 1930 and 1967.

SOURCE OF TITLE:

Title taken from the contents of the fonds.

PHYSICAL CONDITION:

The cinefilms have some dust and mould damage as well as over/under exposure. One film is warped and deteriorating and another is in a brittle condition.

CONSERVATION:

The film was cleaned, spliced and transferred to a digital format. Two films were too damaged to digitize. The photographs have been removed from a photo album and stored between sheets of acid free tissue paper.

ARRANGEMENT NOTE:

The photographs were annotated by the donor and are arranged in the same order as they were received. The films were not received in any discernible order.

LANGUAGE NOTE:

The material is in English.

ACCESS CONDITIONS:

None.

USE CONDITIONS:

Permission for use required. Subject to *The Copyright Act*.

FINDING AIDS:

File list available. Digitized material is also available here:

<http://digiport.athabasca.ca/hruska/>

INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING ACCESSIONS:

2010.001, 2019.002

Further accruals are not expected.

GENERAL NOTE:

Information for the biographical sketch was obtained from the donor.

Fonds description created by Joan Chrusch in 2011, updated by Marissa Fraser in 2018, and by Jesse Carson in 2021.

SUBJECT HEADINGS:

Mountains

Explorers

Skis and skiing

Buildings - - India