The 1929 German expedition’s goal was to establish German mountaineers on the world stage. It also brought them into contact for the first time with the multi-ethnic world of the Himalayas. The photographs in this exhibition taken by Bauer and his brother Bruno and Dr. Eugen Alleen all exhibit a strong ethnographic sensibility, sensitive to the ethnic diversity of Skikim and the region. These photographs capture the distinctive features of indigenous Skikim sexes, Sherpas, and Khapos, as well as the many Nepalese groups drawn to Darjeeling in search of work. Sherpas and Bhutas high-altitude workers are accorded special prominence, as they formed a large group photographs and individual portraits. In Bauer’s published books they frequently named high-altitude workers in photograph captions, a highly unusual practice for the time, where representations of indigenous expeditionary labour are usually limited to “types” — Sherpas, porters, Tibetan, Chinese. The albums also show group portraits of high-altitude porters with the title Tajpukh (Porters) and the image of the strongest Sherpas capable of operating at high altitude.

One remarkable photograph features the expedition cook, tenchekor, seated outside a tent, praying in the Lotus position. The subtlety of this image is underlined by the fact that, all too often, Western mountaineers ignored and belittled the indigenous religious practices of the expeditionary labour force they relied on. Bauer describes the moment the photograph was taken at Camp III in almost transcendental terms:

When one stopped out of the tent in the early morning, there was tenchekor sitting or standing on his kitchen work, performing his morning devotions. It must have been a deep impression on me to see him, amid his region of ice and frost, gazing across in rapture to the distant summit of holy Kanchenjunga lit by the first rays of the sun. It was a noble and elevating practice. A holy man whose contact power pours out, that loneliness wanderer and shepherdess in the icy valleys of high Tibet shall turn their faces to the dawn’s summit of the sacred mountain. All the rest here, and day by day, will slip off the bond that holds these folk together as a community, yet further, as a cultural body. It is true that tenchekor was not quite an ordinary man, he was a leader among his compatriots. A man of astounding religious knowledge, he wrote and spoke English, he led the religious festival of the porters of the full moon, his discourses were a mixture of poetry and wisdom, which, on the latter ground alone, would have well served as the basis of a school of physical cultural body. He was not only a good cook, but an efficient and educated ornithologist of the budhhist-cave world philosophy, and he gave us a splendid impression of this world, happy people.

Paul Bauer, Himalayan Campaign (1937), 75-76.

This was the first legislation anywhere in the world that specifically protected rhinos. Section 4(a) of the Bengal Rhinoceros Preservation Act of 1932 made it illegal to kill rhinos and trade in their body parts, securing the survival of the rhino in India.

In 1929 Sheskheere became the Chief Game Warden for Malaysia. He became both a founder and President of the Malaysian Nature Society (1940-1942) and founding editor of the Malaysian Nature Journal (1960). He established a strong working relationship with field naturalists working with Frederick Chasen, the director of the Raffles Museum in Singapore and a renowned expert on the remaining wild areas of Singapore declared a wildlife preserve. Captured by the Japanese in 1942 as part of F. Spencer Chapman’s “star-struck” party, Sheskheere was interned in the notorious Changi prison in Singapore, eventually retiring to Oxfordshire in 1967. As well as significant contributors to the scholarly literature on the flora and fauna of S.E. Asia, in his retirement he wrote Secondary Moon: The Story of an Indian Elephant (Gallamore, 1958), a book that explores non-human subjectivities and agency, providing us with evidence of Sheskheere’s deep sensibility for the natural world and the non-human lifeworlds we share it with.