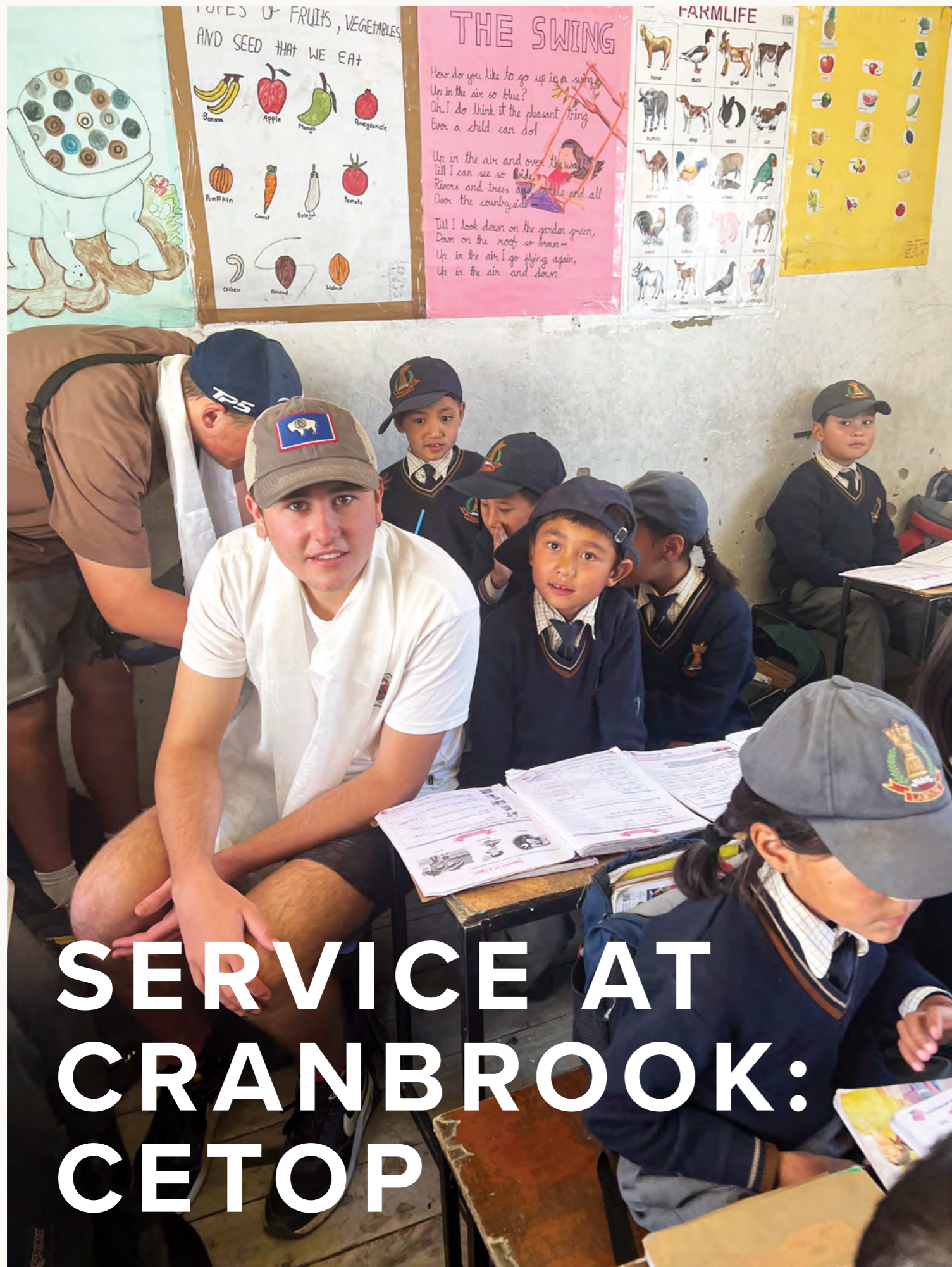


Senior School



SERVICE AT CRANBROOK: CETOP

The Cranbrook Travellers and Overseas Partnership (CETOP) aims to provide students, and the broader community, a chance to offer international aid and support to disadvantaged communities.

WITH THE PROGRAMME SPANNING back to the early 2000s, travellers within the partnership have traversed landscapes nothing like their own with the sole purpose of serving impoverished communities. Cranbrook students who participate in the CETOP programme are taught invaluable lessons on the hardship of disaster-struck communities and are introduced to the realities of poverty through first-hand encounters. While at first being on the ground in these communities is unfamiliar to some, it is through these experiential trips that students start truly harnessing the importance of interculturality within a world outside of their own.

At the forefront of the programme is education. CETOP is holistically dedicated to educating those who both attend the trips and those living within the rural communities. Their motto, *Local education for lifelong learning*, embodies their beliefs. Since 2007 there have been teacher-to-teacher exchanges on the ground in Ladakh, a rural village in India, while there have also been teacher-training programmes set up in Nepal. An important component of CETOP's ethos is to extend classroom learning through cross-cultural interchanges, particularly through a connectedness of interests. Many students bond with children living in these communities through creative exchanges of art, outdoor play, reading and sporting activities. Teachers contribute by offering teaching resources where access to learning materials is scarce. The relationships and support garnered through these trips are unparalleled and allow all who attend the trip to grow their emotional maturity and empathy while also allowing them to discover their introspectiveness and learn the skills needed to foster multicultural cooperation.

An interview with Elizabeth Fletcher

AHEAD OF THE 2023 RETURN OF CETOP'S trip, we spoke to Elizabeth Fletcher, Head of Year 11 College and English Teacher on the unforgettable memories from her trip to Ladakh in 2018.

The last CETOP trip was in 2018, what do you remember most from that trip? What do you think the biggest change since then will be? I remember the beauty of the landscape, whilst in the remote village of Shara, or trekking through the mountains of Ladakh - I was constantly in awe of the views around me and the incredible little villages that we would walk through. The camping and trekking experience really enhanced this as you felt fully immersed in the land and culture of the region. To then see the impact that CETOP has had on different communities over the years and being so involved in contributing further to their ability to realise their visions of education and self-sufficiency, was a very special and humbling experience.

Since the last trip, how has CETOP been supporting the remote communities of Ladakh and Nepal?

Since the pandemic restricted travel worldwide, it was nearly impossible to connect with Ladakh and make a meaningful contribution there. Despite this, our President of CETOP - Renate Carius - was able to speak to our partner on the ground several times to learn of ways in which the communities were helping protect themselves with few resources at hand.

What is your fondest memory during your time as a CETOP member?

Raising money with the students of Northcott House back in 2018 when I was a Housemaster, and we were in the run-up to the trip. We held a fantastic bake sale to raise funds that allowed us to buy a generator for The Chamshen Women's self-help group. This allowed them to continue powering their small-scale jam and juice enterprise and, the experience of seeing exactly where funds can go to help a community was incredible. I bought lots of their self-made jam home to share with the students of Northcott when we returned - such a rewarding experience.

Why do you think CETOP is an integral part of the Cranbrook Community? How has CETOP had an impact on the lives of students and families at Cranbrook?

CETOP is extremely unique and provides a very real and authentic experience of what it means to be globally minded. Students in our Junior School learn about the work of CETOP at a young age and can embark on a trip to Nepal. To continue that journey of raising funds, awareness, and connection in the Senior School, is special and, even more so, when students enjoy that experience with a parent. Having successfully supported over 135 initiatives in the last 30 years and placing

an emphasis on working with people in rural and remote communities, CETOP has built a range of special and trusted relationships in both Nepal and Ladakh, undoubtedly leaving many students and families of Cranbrook with the fondest of memories and appreciation that will last a lifetime.

Now that we have passed through a couple years without international travel, what is CETOP's biggest priority? How does the association plan on strengthening the relationship between the rural communities and the association?

Our upcoming trip represents an opportunity to reconnect with communities we have supported in the past and consider new initiatives. We will return to The Chamshen Women's self-help group (SHG) which is a small-scale income-generating enterprise run by '41 Friends' - a group of village women living in the remote Nubra Valley, Ladakh. CETOP has supported the women's group since 2009 and we spent a couple of days with them in 2018. In late summer the group harvest the local sea buckthorn berry and apricots to produce juices and jams. The products are sold locally in the Nubra Valley and transported over the high mountain passes for sale in the main township of Leh. The proceeds of the sales cycle back to local education and health care initiatives as determined by the SHG. On this trip (2023) our aim is to reconnect with the '41 friends' after COVID-19 lockdown, learn of their new visions and offer financial support to enhance their independence and well-being objectives.

It will be our first visit to the Lamdon School situated in the Nubra Valley, Ladakh. The school was established in 1997 as a co-educational school catering for grades one through to eight. With a strong history of supporting schools in Ladakh, CETOP were approached by the Headmaster to support their aims to construct a kindergarten. The kindergarten will boost the opportunities for very young children to learn within their local culture. On this trip, CETOP aims to find out more about their plans for the kindergarten and then if feasible, offer our financial support.

Since 1986 the Leh Mahila Mandal (LMM) has operated as a women's welfare group. This group is dedicated to improving the lives of women in Ladakh by raising awareness of health and hygiene and, through vocational training, the group aim to destigmatise female menstruation. In 2022 the LMM received a machine from a European NGO and is now able to manufacture biodegradable feminine sanitary napkins made from local biodegradable materials in a sustainable way. With an uptake in the initiative in the Leh urban centre, the LMM is seeking financial support to increase their napkin delivery to remote regions of Ladakh. CETOP aims to offer financial assistance towards purchasing a small van so they can distribute feminine hygiene products to outlying communities.

## Senior School



### Why do you think CETOP is an important initiative?

Through CETOP, we're able to help mountainous, remote communities that sometimes lack provisions that Australians take for granted. It is an extremely valuable experience, one that is grounding and insightful beyond any other programmes that I have done, both through school and externally.

More so than other charity organisations as well, CETOP has a real focus on understanding and responding to the needs of the communities. I experienced this firsthand during my Junior School trip, where we got to visit the brick-making machine CETOP had funded. Such equipment is central to improving the village's facilities. This brick-laying machine was used to make the local school, as well as various small shops, clinics and housing.

### What valuable lessons or memories do you carry with you after going on that CETOP trip? What did it teach you?

How much CETOP's efforts improve the living conditions and opens pathways for children in Nepal and overseas. An education at Cranbrook is something that myself and the student body oftentimes take for granted, but seeing how influential learning English, maths and literature was incredible, and something that I frequently think about.

### What is favourite memory of the last CETOP trip?

My favourite memory from the hiking would be when we reached our maximum altitude. We had hiked for three days uphill (to around 4500m vertically) and finally reached the ridgeline on top of a mountain range, however, it was misty that afternoon. We woke up the following evening to clear skies and views of multiple 8000+ metre peaks, quite literary from our breakfast tent.

My favourite interaction would be when we visited one of the schools and spoke to a young boy, who was maybe only a year or two older than us who spoke English fluently. With his help as a translator, we played handball, board games and some soccer with the Nepalese students.

This year, during the September school holidays the CETOP explorers returned to the ground in Northern India to revisit the Shara Valley and the Himalayas.

**WE SPOKE WITH** Will Roberts, Year 11, Nicholas Jolly, Director of Academics / Deputy Head of Senior School and Angelique Sanders, Director of Student Wellbeing about their return to the villages and the power of cross-cultural relations.

### Will Roberts, Year 11

During the last school holidays, I was fortunate to go on the CETOP trip to Ladakh in Northern India. I knew the Himalayas would be something very special but what I didn't expect was meeting so many extraordinary people and learning all about their way of life.

Our first stop was Leh where we spent a few days climatizing to the altitude of more than 3500m. We had so much fun bargaining in the markets and exploring the winding narrow streets, busy with locals, stray dogs and even cows! The next six days we spent camping and hiking. We travelled to the beautiful Shara Valley, the site of the nursery school built by CETOP many years ago. It was so special to meet several children who had been to the nursery when they were younger. We also visited a few monasteries, one of which was so remote and where we had our prayer flags blessed by a monk.

We hiked through the most dramatic and arid mountains, reaching an altitude of more than 4100m. Then, each night, we set up camp in a new village. Without fail, the local kids would join us for a long game of cricket. Even though most did not speak English, we came together through sport. It was brilliant!

The second part of the trip we spent in the Nubra Valley, which was once part of the Silk Road. It was a real adventure travelling up and over the narrow Khardungla Pass at 5560m, the highest road in the world!

During our stay we visited the Lamdon School. It was incredible. We spent the morning with the students which was the absolute highlight of the trip for me. It was remarkable to learn that despite their remote location and limited facilities, they achieve fantastic results. One of their students is even attending Harvard University! It was interesting to see that not only is there a strong focus on academics but also on sport, particularly martial arts, and volleyball.

We also visited the small village of Chamshen where CETOP support a successful women's jam and juice cooperative. We were welcomed with a traditional greeting ceremony and were dressed in their local clothing before enjoying afternoon tea and dancing with these special women.

CETOP has really made a difference to these communities over the last 16 years. I look forward to continuing my involvement and would highly recommend anyone going on this trip in the future. It was a life changing experience.



### Angelique Sanders, Director of Student Wellbeing

We had the privilege of engaging with local women's groups and schools which allowed us to learn about their incredible work. We began with a visit to Leh Mahila Mandal (LMM), a women's welfare group that is dedicated to improving the lives of women in Ladakh by promoting health and hygiene awareness. They also provide vocational training, with the aim of destigmatising female menstruation. They were eager to exchange with our students as to how to enhance their educational efforts, with a focus on a broad range of topics impacting young people.

Our second women's group visit took us to The Chamshen Women's Self-Help Group, a small-scale income-generating enterprise run by the '41 Friends' in the Nubra Valley. This incredible group harvests local sea buckthorn

berries and apricots to produce juices and jams, selling locally in the Nubra Valley and Leh. The proceeds from these sales cycle back into local education and healthcare initiatives. We enjoyed tasting the local produce, donning traditional Ladakhi attire, and dancing with the wonderful ladies who are making a difference in their community.

Our two school visits included the Shara Valley High School and the Lamdon School, in the Nubra Valley. The welcome for us at the Lamdon School was a highlight with the entire school lining the driveway as we entered. Our visits included a chance to visit classrooms as well as an opportunity for all students to come together and share songs and dances.

Our interactions with these phenomenal women's groups and schools have left us with unforgettable memories. The connections we made and the experiences we had were truly remarkable and we look forward to CETOP maintaining the connections.

### Nicholas Jolly, Director of Academics / Deputy Head of Senior School

The September 2023 tour to Ladakh marked a significant milestone as it represented the first CETOP trip since the pandemic. Anticipation ran high among the 26 participants, comprising staff, students, and parents, all looking forward to reuniting with our friends in Northern India.

The journey began in Leh, Ladakh's captivating capital, perched at an altitude of 3500 metres. Acclimatising to the high elevation was a gradual process, so the initial days were spent taking it easy, soaking in the scenery of the Himalayan town. The group's next destination was Thiksey, a place steeped in history. The town boasts a 15th Century monastery as one of the most impressive in the Indus Valley. The travelling party enjoyed its first taste of the outdoors, camping in the quaint hamlet of Shara, home to the nursery school previously constructed with the support of CETOP. Here, the group immersed themselves in the beauty of the valley, indulging in walks, trying Ladakhi archery, participating in a Puja ceremony at the remote village monastery, and engaging with students, teachers, and parents at the Shara Nursery School. Following this interlude, the group embarked on a four-day mountain trekking expedition, navigating through the majestic 6000-metre peaks of the western Himalayas. The ascent of the Meptek Pass, standing at 4070 metres, proved to be a particularly rewarding challenge. The stark beauty of Ladakh's arid landscapes left an indelible mark on all participants. The group then embarked upon the journey to the incredible Nubra Valley. This trip takes in the drive over the Khardongla Pass, which, at 5560 meters, is the world's highest road. In the Nubra Valley, students and parents had the opportunity to experience a glimpse of the ancient Silk Road while riding on the back of two-humped Bactrian Camels. A trip back to New Delhi and then on to Agra for a visit to the iconic Taj Mahal rounded out this most memorable service-learning experiences for all. ■



## An Interview with Jackson Parker, Year 11

**WHEN HE WAS IN YEAR 5** Jackson Parker travelled to Nepal. He tells us it was one of the most memorable experiences he's ever been on.

### What was your last trip with CETOP? What do you remember and how old were you?

My last CETOP trip was in 2017, and I was 10 at the time. I remember most of the trip quite well, it was like nothing I had previously done and remains one of the most memorable experiences I've ever been on.

### What part of that trip had the biggest impact on you?

The three days we spent hiking the mountains had the most profound impact. Aside from the spectacular views and campsites, we came across some of the schools and villages that CETOP supported and were able to speak to some of the kids who have learnt English at the local schools we've helped build or support.

