

# EASTERN TIBET EXPEDITION

## Documenting Flora On The Tibetan Plateau

*For her June 2007 field season, artist Dianne Agaki carried Wings WorldQuest Flag #11 across the Tibetan plateau to discover rare wildflowers near glacial lakes, atop jagged peaks, and across large, lush meadows. This was Dianne's third expedition documenting new high-altitude botanical specimens – 108 found so far – and encouraging cultural exchange by stimulating eco-tourism opportunities to benefit Tibetan villagers.*



*Dianne holds WWQ Flag #11 above Rongbatsa in the Kham Region of China*

### FINDING RARE FLOWERS ON THE ROOFTOP OF THE WORLD

Dianne's explorations focus on the people and plants of the Kham region of Western Tibet in Sichuan Province. In 2007, she wanted to see if the lack of regional rainfall negatively affected the Kham wildflower fields and the pea, potato and barley farms. From Chengdu, her journey took her to Kangding/Dartsedo, Gansi, and on to Oh Szang Village, Manigango, Rongbatsa, and Derge.

Each morning Dianne set out from the village for higher altitudes – walking, catching a ride in local vehicles, traveling with local yak herders, or riding horses into the mountains. Dianne was often accompanied by school children, monks, nuns, and her primary guide, Aku Tsega. Before nightfall, Dianne would come back to town to sketch and paint.

### USING BOTANICAL ILLUSTRATION TO INSPIRE LEARNING

To expand the documentation of regional wildflowers, Dianne began the first botanical illustration classes in Gansi to benefit local villagers and expand the horizons of children living at the Gansi Girls' Orphanage.



*Kham wildflower illustration by Dianne Agaki*



In 2007, twelve young women accompanied Dianne on her artistic journeys near Gansi. Dianne taught her apprentices how to find, collect, preserve, and draw the wildflowers and plants in the surrounding hills. Dianne encourages these young Tibetans to pursue careers in ethnobotany, botany, or illustration and provides financial aid for them to reach their goals.

### ENCOURAGING ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Oh Szang villagers know where to find regional flora and have extensive knowledge about traditional medicinal plants. Dianne has begun a project to help these villagers capitalize on their expertise by working as guides for foreign tourists, medicinal plant researchers, and floral specialists. In developing this eco-tourism opportunity, Dianne hopes to raise visitors' awareness about regional environmental issues and provide extra income to local Tibetans who otherwise rely upon subsistence agriculture and herding for their livelihood.

Due to the population influx from China, loss of farmland, and deforestation, the ecosystem in this remote region is increasingly vulnerable. Tibetan villagers live on the thin edge of poverty. Although they grow their own peas and potatoes, other food is increasingly expensive. Dianne has planned tours, led by botany experts, to this area that will bring needed income to local Tibetan villagers and their families.

### FIELD TECHNIQUE: COLLECTING FLORAL SAMPLES AND PAINTING

In searching for rare, high-altitude wildflowers, Dianne has no guarantee that she can return to the same mountain pass or meadow so she searches, collects, and documents an area in a single day.

In 2007, Dianne relied on a team approach to document what she found. Aku Tsega, Dianne's primary field assistant, learned to measure, press and photograph the plants. Three students, who are being trained to work as botanical trekking guides, assisted.

## WHO

Dianne Aigaki

## WHAT

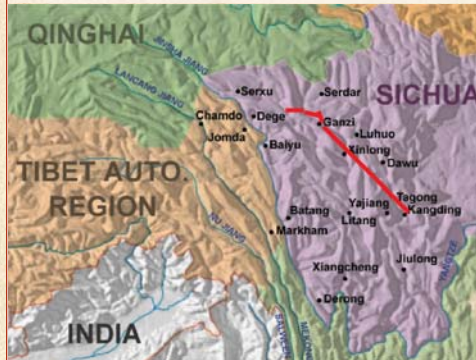
Document rare, high-altitude flora with botanical illustrations

## WHERE

Kham, Tibet/Sichuan, China

## WHY

To add to scientific knowledge about high-altitude flora of the Tibetan Plateau



*Dianne's 2007 route and study area in the Kham region of China's Sichuan Province*

View Dianne's Wildflowers and Learn About the Dream of the Turquoise Bee Tours to Tibet

www.dianneigakiart.com



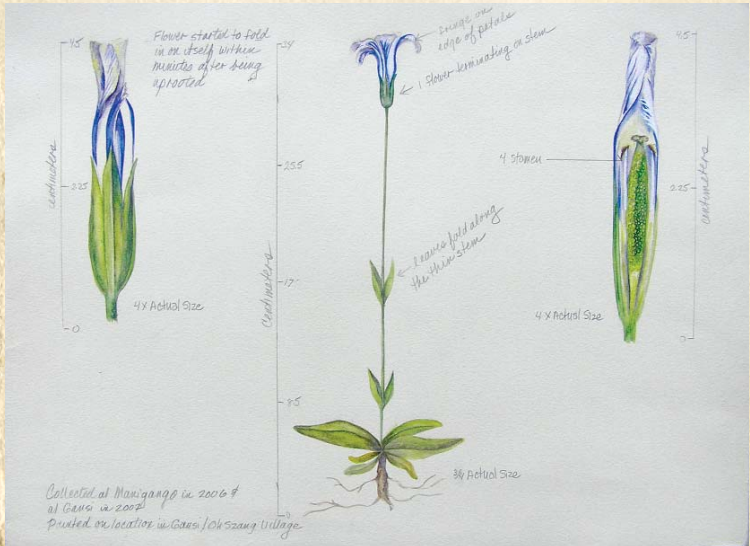
Young Tibetan holds bouquet of *Meconopsis integrifolia*

Together, they established a daily process of sketching, photographing, transporting, and dissecting the plants found. The team often carried terrariums into the field so that fragile plants could be transported safely to Dianne's painting studio in the village.

EXPEDITION RESULTS

Dianne sketched and photographed 35 wildflowers that had not been documented from her two previous expeditions and taught twelve young women from the Gansi Girls' Orphanage through her illustration program.

Dianne is arranging and promoting several eco-tours to these villages to benefit the village. Speaking Tibetan, Dianne serves as a bridge between Tibetans living in exile and those still residing in the Tibetan homeland. Through lecturing and exhibiting her illustrations, Dianne is increasing cultural understanding and awareness of the Tibetan people of Kham.



Dianne's documentation of the Gentian specimen collected during her 2007 trip to Kham

## ABOUT DIANE AIGAKI

Dianne Aigaki is a professional botanical illustrator and advocate for the Tibetan culture in exile. She divides her time between San Miguel de Allende in Mexico and Dharamsala, India, the home of the XIVth Dalai Lama.



Aku Tsega returns from the mountains with wildflower specimens

Dianne's Tibetan wildflower illustrations were awarded a Bronze medal in an exhibition at the Royal Horticultural Society of London. They have been exhibited in Thailand and The Minnesota Landscape Arboretum mounted her solo show, "The Dream of the Turquoise Bee." Beginning in 2008, this show will travel to other botanic gardens, galleries, and museums in the United States and Europe.

Dianne has published her Tibetan wildflower illustrations in botanical journals, and has lectured worldwide on how botanical art can be used as a tool in cultural diplomacy.

*"Having a central location to finalize paintings is important. Sketching and painting in the field, hauling the materials to the site, and expecting to come out with fine paintings that are not torn, tattered, bent, crumpled, and dirty from the earth, rain, and local people's fingerprints as they grab them to look is a long shot and too expensive timewise!"*

—Dianne Aigaki



View of Yi-Lhun Latso, a sacred lake near Manigango