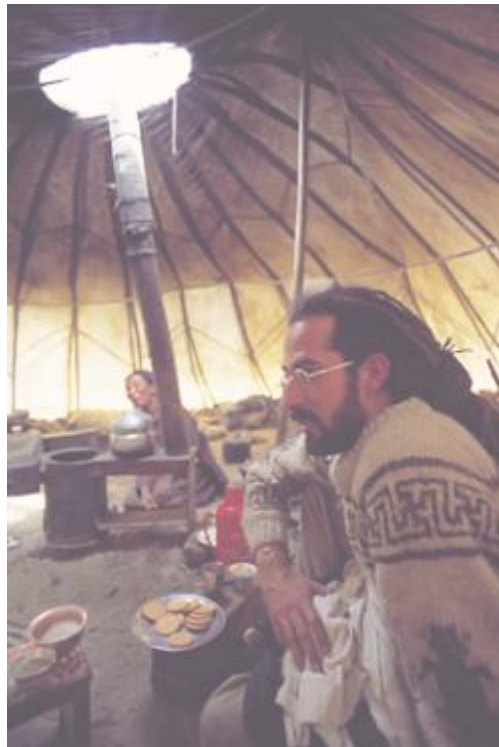


Visionaries make a difference

What, some could ask, do watchmaking and an awards programme supporting science, technology, exploration, the environment and cultural heritage have in common? The answer is enterprise

Laurent Pordié



The Rolex Awards for Enterprise are presented every two years to provide visionary men and women worldwide who often do not have access to traditional funding sources with the financial support and recognition needed to carry out innovative working projects involving Science and Medicine, Technology and Innovation, Exploration and Discovery, Environment and Cultural Heritage

Amchi traditional medicine was once practised throughout the Himalayas and beyond. In Ladakh, northern India, the Amchis, doctors trained in traditional Tibetan medicine, pass their knowledge from father to son - although a small number of women also qualify. In the past, Amchis provided their skills free of charge, with villagers shouldering their farming chores in return. But the introduction of conventional modern medicine and a growth in social mobility have seen that barter system fall from favour. With it, Amchi skills themselves have begun to disappear. Laurent Pordié, a young French anthropologist and ethnopharmacologist, wanted to re-establish these skills and improve healthcare in the region.

In 1998, he set up a programme called 'Traditional Medicine for Survival'. When he launched an education programme hopefuls came from all over the region to take the entrance exam - some walking for up to five days to get there.

Thirteen Amchis were eventually chosen to take part in the course, including four women, as well as six students with no prior knowledge of the traditional techniques. If all goes according to plan, they will qualify with official diplomas in April 2002.