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PHOTO COURTESY MOLLY LOOMIS TYSON

Nomads file through a monastery on the Tibetan Plateau. Jackson Hole resident Molly Loomis Tyson will talk Thursday at Teton County Library about her journey to the headwaters of the Yellow River.

Writer retraces trip to Tibetan Plateau

Who: Molly Loomis Tyson

What: Slide show presentation of her journey to the headwaters of the Yellow River

When: 7-8 p.m. Thursday

Where: Teton County Library Ordway Auditorium
How much: Free, thanks to the Teton County Library Foundation

By Lucy Flood

After hearing a blurb on National Public Radio about the relocation of Tibetan nomads on the Tibetan Plateau in what is now the Qinghai province of China, freelance writer and mountain guide Molly Loomis Tyson headed out to the source of the Yellow River.

She wanted to research how the Chinese government was executing

River, and the wildlife and high peaks that characterize the region.

Tyson witnessed tensions between the Chinese and Tibetan populations and was stopped at police checkpoints. Nevertheless, she saw wolves, wild asses, gazelles and many birds and had the opportunity to observe the daily routines of nomadic life.

"Nomad' conjures up the image of the romantic nomad wandering where the wind blows, but it's actually more accurate to call them semipastoralists, because they do have sophisticated grazing rotations, and a lot of researchers feel the Chinese have failed to recognize these traditional agricultural techniques that have developed for thousands of years," Tyson said.

The Chinese government claims

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pollen that include widespread fencing in the area and relocation of nomads.

What Tyson found was a vast, harshly beautiful landscape with a rich history of a vital nomadic culture. The area is nearly 965,000 square miles, most of which is at or above 9,840 feet.

For more than 4,000 years, Tibetan nomads have inhabited the plateau, and today approximately 2 million nomads still reside in the region, though the Chinese government is relocating many to camps.

"The plateau and the nomads living there are embroiled in a complicated battle between ecological and cultural conservation, made all the more complex by the tensions that persist between the Chinese and Tibetan people," Tyson said.

At 7 p.m. on Thursday at Teton County Library, Tyson will give a free slide show presentation of her journey.

Her slides document colorfully dressed nomads in monasteries, prayer flags lining a bridge over the Yellow

that by implementing Western ranch models on the plateau, they can modernize nomads, create a new source of food production, prevent degradation of the plateau's grassland and thereby protect the water supply of the billions of people living downstream.

While Tyson acknowledges that some of these goals have merit, she says many international scientists are skeptical and feel there is insufficient evidence that these drastic policies are necessary. One researcher told Tyson that in five to 10 years there could be no nomads pursuing their traditional lifestyle because of these policies.

Tyson also researched what is happening to nomads who are relocated to camps. No one she spoke with denied their rights to education or to modernize, but the stories she heard of nomads transported to relocation camps are not so very different from stories of Native Americans when they were first forced onto reservations.

"The nomads are often at loose ends, not knowing what to do without their traditional lifestyle," Tyson said.



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