What Makes Mad Honey “Mad”? An Investigation into the Obsession of the Himalayan Wild Cliff Honey

Codi Farmer

SIT Study Abroad

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection

Part of the Apiculture Commons, Asian History Commons, Asian Studies Commons, Food Studies Commons, Human Ecology Commons, and the Other Pharmacology, Toxicology and Environmental Health Commons

Recommended Citation

This Unpublished Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Study Abroad at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact digitalcollections@sit.edu.
WHAT MAKES MAD HONEY "MAD"?

An Investigation into the Obsession of the Himalayan Wild Cliff Honey

CODI FARMER

SIT NPT // FALL 2022
CODI FARMER

Research Partner: PEMA TSHCHECHI SHERPA
Project Advisor: ERIC VALLI
Academic Director: ISABELLE ONIANS

University of Oregon
Psychology
Asia, Nepal, Lamjung

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Nepal: Tibetan and Himalayan Peoples, SIT Study Abroad, Fall 2022
Table of Contents

04  Acknowledgements
05  Abstract
06  Setting the Ladder
16  Facing the Swarm
28  Yield of the Hunt
35  Rolling Up the Ladder
37  Appendix
40  Bibliography
42  Closing Statement
I have so many wonderful people I have to thank for this passion project of mine, and how lucky is that? First and foremost, the staff at SIT – Patty, Nazneen, Rinzi, Isabelle, Dechen, and Jigme. Thank you for giving me unwavering support to see where this project could take me and for never shutting down my ideas but instead helping me to grow them. To my parents for trusting me enough to go to the other side of the planet to chase my entheogenic dream of learning more about this topic (though I don't think you knew that's a big reason I wanted to come here). To the wonderful and kind villagers I was lucky enough to meet in Bhujung. Your hospitality and help to the random blonde girl who showed up in your village with far too little Nepali language skills is something I will be forever grateful for. To all my friends who have put up with my constant and obsessive talk about mad honey and have helped me edit this paper. Your patience and support are massively appreciated. To Éric Valli and Ben Ayers for being so gracious and helpful to me. I am infinitely grateful for your expertise and the new rabbit holes you both allowed me to discover. To my grandpa who is always in the back of my mind when I write anything, this is for you. Lastly and possibly most importantly, to my wonderful research partner, translator, and friend Pema. I don't think this project would exist in its entirety without you. Thank you for navigating the transportation systems, translating conversations for many hours, for lots of laughs, for endless help, and for being so alright with not knowing what was going to happen the next day at any given point. I truly don't know what I would have done without you and your kind heart. To know you is to love you. Also, thank you to the bees, of course. There really would be no project without them.

"Appreciation is a wonderful thing. It makes what is excellent in others belong to us as well." - Voltaire
Abstract

Mad honey is a rare variety of cliff honey found in the mountainous regions of Turkey and Nepal and has been harvested by Indigenous groups for centuries. In Nepal, it is found on high-hanging cliffs that people risk their lives to face, but what makes this honey so special to cause generations of Nepalis to brave the formidable heights? Through a series of reading primary and secondary sources, watching first-hand accounts of honey hunting, and interviewing honey hunters, filmmakers, authors, and laypeople alike, I work to find the answer to the puzzling question – what makes mad honey "mad"? In this paper, I explore this idea from a few different perspectives in an attempt to get to the bottom of the global craze that surrounds the alluring nectar of the Himalayas. From the toxicology perspective, mad honey has unique properties from a neurotoxin, grayanotoxin 1 and 3 that cause the honey to be a deliriant. From a cultural perspective, mad honey is "mad" because of the extreme methods of harvesting or "hunting" that Indigenous groups partake in to get the honey which is sometimes used as medicine. Finally, from a more humanistic perspective, perhaps the only thing that makes mad honey "mad" is the Shangri-la idea that foreigners place on a country that has been a victim of orientalism for centuries.
Obsession is a strange thing. I think it’s one of those things that you never quite see coming. Perhaps it starts with a quick glance or an off-handed comment about something you’ve never thought of before. For me, it started with a YouTube search.

A good friend of mine had been telling me bits and pieces of the incredible and oftentimes misunderstood country that is Nepal since the beginning of my freshman year of college. He would tell me stories of when he visited his family there a few years prior. I, being the hopeless adventurer that I am, became quickly enamored by these tales. Fast forward about a year and I was sitting at my little grey dining table in my university apartment between classes and I decided to look up Nepal on YouTube. That was the entire search: “Nepal.” One of the first videos that came up from the search was the 35-minute documentary, *The Last Honey Hunter*. I had never heard of the term “honey hunter” before, so my curiosity was naturally piqued. I watched it and immediately became wildly enthralled. That was where my obsession began.

I spent the next few months figuring out how I could feasibly fly across the globe and get to Nepal before graduating college because I simply couldn’t wait. Every gyrus of my brain seemed to be dripping with the yellow nectar I saw on my screen that day.

My desire was insatiable – I had to see it, taste it, and experience it in the most authentic way I could muster. Now about 10 months later, I’m exploring the lovely country that has occupied quite a bit of my conscious thoughts, fully indulging myself in my obsessive fascination – mad honey.

This name, “mad honey,” is rather tantalizing, but what does it actually mean? It goes by many names like wild honey, bitter honey, red honey, Himalayan honey, *bhir mauri*; or cliff honey. As the plethora of names for this wonder of nature may suggest, it’s a form of wild honey that is produced on cliff-sides in Nepal and Turkey. The unique properties of the honey produced in both countries are roughly the same, but the harvesting methods and parameters of production tend to vary. For the sake of this paper, I will be focusing

---

1 Romanized Nepali term for “cliff honey.” *Bhir* meaning cliff and *mauri* meaning honey.
on the Nepali version. Before getting into the modern collections of this potentially dangerous delicacy, though, it’s important to first establish a foundational understanding of honey harvesting in the past.

Honey has been harvested by people for over 40,000 years. It’s an incredible source of glucose that aids in brain development and is easy to digest. Wild honey in particular is speculated to have been an important superfood for our ancestors as it contains traces of bee larvae, which adds protein, fat, vitamins, and minerals. It’s been used all over the world for centuries with actual records of the harvesting being seen in rock and cave art in Africa, Europe, Asia, and Australia (Wayman, 2011). Some of these paintings range in age from 40,000 years ago to around 5,000 years ago. In the Western Cape of Southern Africa, there have been a handful of paintings that depict wild honeybee nests and the bees themselves with red bodies and white wings (Tribe, 2015). Depictions of men climbing up handmade ladders and ropes can be seen in Eastern Spain from approximately 7,500 years ago (fig. 2), and there have even been paintings that seem to show nests being smoked out by burning leaves for a safer harvest in parts of Africa and Asia (fig. 1). (Pager, 2015).

This sets the tone for the global significance of honey, but Nepalese cliff honey and mad honey in general are a bit different. The earliest known record of mad honey ingestion was in 401 BC by Greek historian and philosopher, Xenophon. Written in his chronicle, ‘The Anabasis,’ was an account of the Greek army traveling along the shores of the Black Sea back in 401 BCE. They found bee nests and decided to eat the honey, assuming that it was ‘normal’ honey. After a few hours, they became disoriented, ill, and intoxicated. In his depiction of the honey, it was said to make people seem “exceedingly drunk,” “crazy,” or in the more extreme cases like “dying men” (Jansen, 2012). This is the first written record of the effects of mad honey, but it should be noted that most wild honey produced in Turkey and Nepal alike isn’t actually “mad.” Mad honey can only be produced by a very specific set of parameters. It’s produced in Turkey around the Black Sea, as Xenophon taught us, and in Nepal in the Himalayan foothills. In the case of Nepalese mad honey, it depends on the species of bee, the elevation at which the nests are built, and most importantly the flowers that are pollinated. The *apis laboriosa*, or Himalayan giant honey bee, is the largest species of honey bee in the world and is responsible for the Nepalese version of this uni-
-que product. Found in the mountainous regions of Bhutan, the Yunnan province of China, India, and Nepal, they are recorded to be able to fly up to 4500 meters in altitude, but will typically build their nests between 2500 and 3200 meters (Shrestha, et. al, 2018). Though they may pollinate any species of flower in their inhabited areas, the flower of rhododendron trees contains the pollen believed to be responsible for mad honey. Rhododendrons are used medicinally in many cultures all over the world. They contain a voltage-gated sodium channel molecular toxin called grayanotoxin or rhodotoxin. There are 18 different variations of this neurotoxin, but the variations denoted as grayanotoxin 1 and 3 are believed to be the ones that give this honey its odd properties. The toxin itself interferes “with the transmission of the action potential by blocking sodium channels in cell membranes,” which means that the excitable cells in the body are maintained in a depolarized state (Jansen, 2012). It’s this abnormal combination of neurochemical features that gives this honey allegedly entheogenic properties.

Information surrounding the psychological effects of mad honey is extremely sparse. However, there is an abundance of information on the physical and physiological changes people may experience after ingestion. It is believed to promote general well-being, which includes but may not be limited to, the treatment of gastric and coronary artery diseases, treating colds and viral infections, providing pain relief for anything from sore throats to arthritis, and acting as a sexual stimulant (Kurdziel et. al, 2011). Regardless of these beneficial effects that the honey is believed to have, this aspect of the mad honey’s effects hasn’t been researched nearly as much as the negative ailments that it has.

The symptoms vary greatly based on the dosage and the potency of the honey. A small dose – which could be anywhere from a few drops to a teaspoon – may cause dizziness, weakness, excessive perspiration, hyper-salivation, nausea, vomiting, and paresthesias. A larger dose could cause life-threatening intoxications that may range from cardiac complications to a complete atrioventricular block. These cardiac complications may include sinus bradycardia, sinus arrest, nodal rhythm depression, and varying degrees of atrioventricular block. Other symptoms may be paresthesias, cloudy vision, syncope, hypotension, and bradycardia. In a case series done on 21 patients who were admitted to an emergency department for mad honey intoxication, every patient experienced dizziness and weakness, and 85% of the patients experienced excessive perspiration and nausea/vomiting.

Low blood pressure is also a very common symptom and can be the most life-threatening aspect of mad honey in many cases (Demir, Denizbasi, and Onur, 2013). In the aforementioned case series, the mean pulse rate of the patients was 56 beats per minute (bpm). The average resting heart rate for adults according to the Mayo Clinic is between 60-100 bpm, meaning that this recorded mean heart rate displays bradycardia in about half of the patients. In another case study done by the Himalayan Rescue Association Manang Clinic, a 25-year-old man had to be resuscitated because his heart rate would vary between 35 and 40 bpm (Kurdziel et. al, 2011).
Symptoms, both positive and negative, will begin to be experienced sometime between 30 minutes and 5 hours after ingestion. The time variation is dependent on a number of aspects, such as the potency of the honey, dosage size, and the metabolic rate of the user. Though many of these symptoms seem very scary and definitely could be life-threatening, the effects of mad honey poisoning are rarely fatal and generally will always cease within 24 hours of consumption as the grayanotoxins are metabolized and excreted rapidly. The dosage size that could cause this level of intoxication could range between 5 grams (slightly less than a teaspoon of honey) and 30 grams (about 1.33 tablespoons of honey). This is such a large variation because there is no standard concentration of the grayanotoxin per gram as the potency is based on the season, weather conditions, location of the nests, as well as the processing methods, or lack thereof, of the hunters and retailers. Honey produced in the springtime tends to be more toxic than honey produced in the fall (Demir, Denizbasi, and Onur, 2013).

Most individuals who experience symptoms bad enough to warrant admittance into an emergency department rarely have to have any treatment given beyond occasionally an IV. However, in more extreme cases of poisoning, such as that of bradycardia, severe blood pressure issues, or third-degree heart block, there may be treatment necessary. For bradycardia, the treatment may be antihistamines, steroids, and atropine therapy. Severe blood pressure issues may call for vasopressor therapy, though this is extremely rare. Patients who experience third-degree heart block will be given a temporary pacemaker (Kurdziel et. al, 2011). Needless to say, everyone should exercise extreme caution when ingesting mad honey.

When I was first beginning my research on the topic, I went to a small store in Boudha, Kathmandu. I had been told that they sold mad honey from the brand Best Mad Honey, one of the most popular
commercialized mad honey exporters in Nepal. Kabir, an employee at the store, told me that all of the employees take anywhere between one teaspoon and one tablespoon most days for its medicinal benefits. It should be noted though, that they worked up to these doses and that the average person who has never ingested anything with grayanotoxin such as myself should begin with less than a teaspoon. He told me to start with practically just a taste – maybe a third of a teaspoon or so. See how I feel from that amount. If I feel okay after taking only that much once or twice, then slowly work up to taking a teaspoon. As with many drugs such as nicotine, alcohol, or caffeine, you develop a tolerance to mad honey. It’s in everyone's best interest to start slowly and be wary so you may experience the positive effects of this unique entheogen and minimize the negative effects. Even the founder of the Best Mad Honey company, Sanjay Kafle, recommends taking no more than one tablespoon in a 24-hour period, regardless of how many times you’ve taken it. He also believes that anyone who is interested in trying mad honey should try it from a more regulated supplier, like Best Mad Honey or The Mad Honey. The reason for this recommendation, besides a desire for more business, is because these companies are able to have a far more monitored grayanotoxin concentration as they will process the honey after buying it from the communities that harvest it to have the amounts be more regulated for the safety of the consumer. In the case of Best Mad Honey’s supplies, they have three different potencies of honey – gold, platinum, and rhodium. The gold version is advertised as non-hallucinogenic and strictly for nutritional value. It’s also harvested in the fall from September to November, making the grayanotoxin level far lower than the other available versions. The platinum is said to be semi-hallucinogenic with all the nutritional values of the gold version as well. This version contains a moderate amount of grayanotoxins and is harvested in the springtime from April to June and is also the version the store sold. The rhodium version is the most potent one available from the company and is far rarer to obtain. Out of the total yield that they will
get in a season, only a maximum of about 100 kg will be rhodium. The amount of extremely potent mad honey that falls into this category is all dependent on the weather and rainfall of the regions where honey is harvested.

By this point, the foundational information on the chemical properties and unique parameters of production have been established, but there’s another aspect that makes mad honey special – the hunt. In many circles, it may be rather uncommon to refer to the harvesting of honey as being a “hunt,” and some may even think it sounds a bit barbaric towards the bees. However, it’s actually a very remarkable process and marks extreme bravery among those who dare to brave the cliffs. In short, the process includes an oftentimes multi-day trek into the jungles of the lower Himalayan foothills with a group of around 9 or more men. Once arriving at the cliffside where the nests hang, there is a lot of preparation involved. A handmade bamboo ladder must be soaked in water and hung from the cliff edge up top, after a group reaches the top, of course. Leaves and shrubs from the site are collected and burned to smoke the bees out of their nests, and then a daring few men make their way down the ladder from the top, dangling sometimes hundreds of meters above solid ground with nothing more than a small rope around their waist keeping them somewhat secure on the ladder. Then, they saw away at the massive nests with a knife attached to a long bamboo piece. The nest drops into a basket and gets quickly pulled up by those who are at the top of the cliff. They remove the nest, often still riddled with large live bees, and they lower the basket back down to be repeated dozens of times.

Due to the obvious danger and extreme nature of this process, it is no longer a "harvest," it's a hunt, and a menacing one at that. In Nepal, this has been done for centuries, however, no one seems to know exactly when it started. It’s a practice that has been passed down through family lineages and village members since the beginning of their settlements. Most commonly, previous research has noted that honey hunting in this fashion is almost exclusively performed by the Gurung Indigenous groups of Nepal (Shrestha et. al, 2018), but other texts seem to say otherwise and that it’s not exclusively the Gurung people that participate in the cliff hunting (Ahmad, 2003). Regardless of the risk involved with this tradition, many villages all over Nepal still participate multiple times a year. This is due to a number of factors including attempts at economic prosperity, increasing tourism, and simply for the sake of upholding the heritage of the previous generations.

Though honey hunting originally began to gain traction in the 80s after French photographer and filmmaker Éric Valli released a photobook, *Honey Hunters of Nepal*, the interest has grown exponentially since then. His initial fascination with honey hunters began with intrigue about the actual daring act of the hunt and less so with the honey itself. In more recent years, though, the interest from most foreigners seems to primarily lie in the toxic honey as it is frequently referred to as a hallucinogenic. Because of this label, many outsiders believe that they can have a “trip” from ingesting the honey that will be similar to that of an LSD or psilocybin trip. Despite these beliefs, I have only found one source that states anything along the lines of someone actually achieving a hallucinogenic trip, and it was entirely accidental.

In a case report, Tirtha Man Shrestha and his team of researchers report on a 52-year-old Indigenous Gurung woman who experienced not only some of the common cardiovascular symptoms but also psychiatric and neurological effects from ingestion. The woman was admitted to the emergency department of the Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital. Her primary complaints upon admission were progressively worsening shortness of breath.

3Psilocybin is the active chemical component in the entheogen "magic mushrooms."
and a significant burning sensation in her chest. She had consumed four tablespoons of mad honey. Over the course of the next few hours following consumption, she had visual hallucinations, blurring vision, decreased coordination, numbness, and light-headedness. The visual hallucination that she reported was “a one-episode sighting of a female god and wild beast at her home which no one else claimed to see.” She didn’t experience any other forms of hallucinations, such as auditory, tactile, or gustatory, and the hallucinogenic episode resolved itself after sleeping that evening. Her family members said she was “muttering incomprehensibly, perhaps under the influence of her hallucinations.” It was noted that upon a mental state examination, she struck a good rapport and showed no abnormal deviations in the rate, rhythm, and quantity of speed of any vitals. Despite her discomfort, it was expressed that she was in a largely positive mood and experienced no major fluctuations in her mental state (Shrestha et. al, 2018).

To me, calling mad honey a psychedelic, hallucinogen, or entheogen is a misnomer. In my eyes, a better comparison for mad honey would be the devil’s trumpet flower or too much Benadryl – you technically can experience a hallucinogenic trip if you consume enough, as with any psychoactive substance under the sun. More on this later, though.

All of this dense background on what mad honey is and isn’t brings me to just a few weeks ago when my work truly began – my travels in Helambu.

After the better half of a day in a Land Cruiser that seated eight of my fellow explorers on assignment, we were greeted with the dense forestry of Helambu, a region of highland villages and towering mountains in the Nepalese Himalayas. The first village we visited was a brief stop, but it ended up being an extremely valuable place for my research endeavors. Nakote village is nestled at the bottom of the sparsely populated valley, and it’s home to less than 250 Hyolmo locals. After such a long time flying around in the backseat of the Toyota, I was beyond excited to get to the next village a few hundred meters up in the valley where we planned to stay that evening. The group I was traveling with, about 14 people at this point,
began a light stroll along the roaring river that cut the valley in two. I was talking to a friend about who-knows-what when someone started shouting my name. It was exclaimed with such urgency that a rush of fear ran through me – what did I do? I was sure I was in trouble for something. Then, someone ran up to grab my shoulder and he turned me to the left to face the river and cliffs opposite us. “Look!” He pointed across the way through the sparse trees to a dark carve about 30 meters away from us, just on the other side of this icy-blue river. I squinted my eyes, trying to figure out what everyone was trying to show me when my jaw dropped. It was mad honey. Liters upon liters laced up in these dark honeycombs that were larger than just about every single person I was traveling with. They were all a dark golden brown color dangling from the underbelly of a massive cave. I knew the sight instantly.

The next few minutes were a blur of excitement for me, so I can’t recall all the immediate details. I was perplexed. How could this be? There was no honey in this part of Nepal, I had been sure of it. In all my preliminary research that had been done so far in my Nepalese journey, Helambu had never come up as a place where honey was hunted. Yolmo, Hyolmo, none of the pseudonyms that I know for this incredible place I had just arrived in had the topic of honey ever come up.

I took a few dozen out-of-focus photos of this incredible spot in the rock, most definitely shaking with excitement and adrenaline. The feelings that were rushing through me are what I would imagine I would feel like if I had crossed paths with a unicorn – seeing that something that I had understood and accepted just didn’t exist here, really does. My cheeks were sore from the larger-than-life smile that was glued to my face for the next 20 minutes or so. I had been talking about mad honey with this group since the day I arrived. It’s my Everest, the massive and looming reason I had flown across the world to this wonderful country. After I took my last glance, for the time being, at the decorated cliffs across the river, we began walking towards our destination for the night – Melanmchi-Ghyang. As we were traveling there, I was getting asked about a dozen absolutely wonderful questions about the honey, a lot of which I didn’t yet have proper answers to. The question that stood out to me the most, that stumped me more than any other, was how did I not know that there was mad honey here?

The next day, I knew the first thing I needed to do...
was talk to someone from Nakote who would be willing to speak with me about it. I got the phone number of the man who led us from Nakote to the car that took my group up the valley the previous night, Tenjin Sherpa. I asked about its uses in Helambu and if there were any honey hunters in Nakote. How is it used in the village? Are the hunting techniques the same as what I read? From this conversation, I regret to say that I didn’t learn as much as I had hoped, and what I did learn turned out to be rather discouraging. First and foremost, he briefly mentioned the Melamchi flood of 2021 which was devastating for villages all along the Helambu valley. It also had a great impact on the low-hanging caves that are packed full of honey along the riverside. He said that many of the cliffs that held nests had been hit by the raging water and as a result, many of the nests had been washed away. I thought that this would be the most prominent feature of mad honey that I could research while being in the valley, but that was about all I heard regarding the floods’ impact on honey in the area.

As with any place in Nepal where honey is hunted from large trees, caves, or cliffsides, Tenjin said that the honey in the cave I saw is incredibly dangerous. However, this is not just because of the raging river beneath it or the tall cliffside that went up hundreds of meters above, it was because the villagers believed that the honey in that specific cave is likely extremely potent to the point of it not being wise for anyone to try it, even if they have a tolerance to mad honey already. As far as honey hunters in the village go, Tenjin informed me that there were none anymore. There used to be quite a few, he said, but all of them have passed away and not a single person alive in the village had wanted to try and be a new-age honey hunter. When he was a child, he would go and watch the hunts occur. The hunters would dangle from clifftops on long hand-woven ladders, gently sawing away at the mammoth-sized nests while braving the searing bee stings and the smoke entering their lungs. Despite the disconnect between the different regions where mad honey is harvested, the hunting techniques are incredibly consistent for the cliff honey. Local plants are bundled and burned in masses to divert the bees away from the nests and disorient them so the hunters would have an easier time harvesting. This would only occur one to two times a year as the bees would need time to rebuild their nests after each harvesting session. On top of that, this is an incredibly dangerous endeavor, so oftentimes the hunts would only occur on auspicious days when the astrology aligned in the favor of the hunt and the hunters received a blessing from a local shaman. Though most regions in Nepal that harvest honey will primarily use the honey for its...
medicinal benefits, Tenjin explained that in Helambu he only ever knew of it being used for “big prayer,” or religious rituals. Laypeople in the village were never technically allowed to eat it. Only high Lamas or Rinpoches in the area ever had the authority to actually consume any of the honey, which was still extremely uncommon. Its primary use was to be an offering to the gods during large religious ceremonies and it was believed to bring prosperity to the village. In current times, he said that hunters would need permission to gather any honey, but even that doesn’t really happen anymore. Helambu has an abundance of honey, but it belongs to the bees and to the beyul.

A few days passed, and I was nearing the end of my time in Helambu. No one I had been able to ask in Melamchi-Gyhang had given me any substantial information, simply just saying that there was no honey in the village. I felt like I was hitting dead end after dead end and couldn't understand why. There had to be more about Helambu honey that I just wasn’t being told. I couldn’t understand why no one was able to answer my questions. I mean, I had seen the nests with my own eyes. What could I have possibly been missing?

Well, the fourth and last village we went to illuminated this for me and it was far more simple than I had expected.

There are two main things that I was told prior to departing for the hills of Helambu – it’s a national park and it’s a beyul. On my final day there while I was in Sermathang village, I spoke with a man who used to work as game commissioner for the Langtang National Park that encompasses much of the valley. His position was to manage and protect the wildlife in the park. He told me in the brief interview I was able to have with him that this was the reason that there’s no more honey hunting in Helambu. 45 years ago when the Langtang National Park was established, there was a ban placed on the region for hunting, he explained. It’s not just uncommon for people to hunt honey in Helambu now, but it’s illegal. Though it's a rather small-scale crime in comparison to hunting an animal like the endangered red panda where you would be imprisoned for 20 years, honey hunting will still land you 15 days in prison and a fine if you’re caught.

Of course, this doesn’t mean that honey hunting doesn’t still happen occasionally. He said that there are some people, “honey thieves,” that risk their lives and some jail time to saw off a chunk of the nest. I hoped to find out something from this about a mad honey black market of sorts, but he told me that to his knowledge, I wouldn’t be able to find anything in Sermathang about this. “People here don’t really care about the honey,” he stated. It’s illegal and it’s dangerous, so by his philosophy it’s not worth it. If someone brings mad honey into Sermathang, people will buy it and eat some for its benefits, but from my interviews, I learned that people in Nakote, Melamchi-Ghyang, Tharkeghyang, and Sermathang aren’t willing to face the dangers of honey hunting.

Seeing the honey in person fueled the fire within me even more. I needed to find the hunters myself and I needed them to teach me anything and everything they were willing to.

---

4 A beyul is a hidden valley within the Himalayas that is said to protect the faithful during times of crisis.
be the only answer.

Initially, I had speculated that the molecular structure of grayanotoxin 1 or 3 must bode some sort of similarity to that of the molecular structure of psilocybin or salvia. The line of reasoning for this was all based on the word-of-mouth information I had heard about mad honey — I was told that you feel high, your vision may be affected, and most notably, it’s oftentimes described as a naturally occurring hallucinogen. Additionally, some people had told me that they heard down a chain of communication that ingesting mad honey feels similar to when you micro-dose psilocybin. To me, this sounded like an interesting crossbreed between some different hallucinogens that I’ve studied previously, so there had to be a chemical connection.

Despite the buzz surrounding mad honey that seems to be growing globally, actually finding a place where I could meet hunters and have even a slight possibility to go on a hunt was proving to be more difficult than I had anticipated. A week and a half before I was due to set out into the Himalayan foothills to hunt for the hunters, I had no idea where to go. My internet searches were endless, I was rewatching documentaries and YouTube clips about mad honey with desperation. Nowhere seemed right.

In a very fitting fashion, however, I received a text from a friend with a two-minute video about honey hunting. It took place in a Gurung village within a region that I had heard next to nothing about except that it’s one of the many regions where honey hunting occurs – Lamjung. I fell into a rabbit hole of research on this village, finding some sparse information here and there that alluded to honey hunting and the truly toxic mad honey that I was hoping for. It was settled, I had to go to Bhujung, a village in Lamjung.

My next week was packed with a frenzy of booking bus tickets, getting permits, and haphazardly attempting to piec together an adventure when I had no idea what I was doing. I knew next to nothing except my end destination, my travel companion Pema Tshchechi Sherpa, and that I had a hundred and one questions that desperately begged for answers. Most notably, what is it about this honey and the craft behind hunting it that makes so many people risk their lives for it? In my eyes, there had to be something about the honey itself that was so potent, so powerful, so prodigious. For the difficulty that people go through for it, and have gone through repeatedly for centuries, it must cause you to see God or something. That had to
studied, they speak on the plethora of dangers that may come with ingestion, and occasionally they will note something about the extremities of the hunting process. The lack of variation in the research had me stumped – if it’s really that good for you, why aren’t there people studying its positive effects? Surely there should be clinical trials with patients getting fMRI scans taken after ingestion. Perhaps attempts at using it for therapy like what’s being done with MDMA and psilocybin. There has to be something there, and I couldn’t find a single hint. So I set out to go and ask for myself what makes this honey so important.

After getting my plans as organized as possible, Pema and I set out to take our first of many night buses between Kathmandu to Pokhara as the first step of our journey. The ride was bumpy and long, but I was ecstatic nonetheless. I was on my way to the hunters, fulfilling my year-long fantasy of finding out just what makes this honey so special.

At around 4:45 AM, we got off the bus in Pokhara. It was pitch-black and shockingly cold. We mounted our backpacks on our shoulders and set out into the early morning darkness in search of yet another bus station. After a 40-minute stroll through this unfamiliar city and asking a lot of directional questions to the few locals who were walking the streets at that hour, we found our next bus.

I got charged extra since I’m very clearly a foreigner here, which I learned would be a common experience for me throughout the next week or so, but I got settled in my seat. We were packed in like sardines with about 20 other people in the four rows of this oversized van, but the sunrise views of the Annapurna massif and the emerald-green rivers we drove by made the ride more than tolerable. Five and a half hours later, we were in Besisahar, Lamjung. This was our next vehicle change on our trip up to Bhujung. Pema and I fueled with the necessary serving of vegetable dal bhat and went to go find a jeep that would take us closer to Bhujung.

This country never ceases to amaze me. In the "jeep" that wasn’t actually a jeep, we climbed the Lamjung hills, having views of the endless dark green valley and towering Himalayan mountains. After a few hours in the car, we arrived in Ghalegaun, a Gurung village on the top of a very large hill, overlooking the valley. Pema, myself, and three other local travelers bunked up in a homestay with a kind family in the village for the night before we would go to Bhujung the following day.

Pema asked nearly everyone we encountered about the honey, and it seemed like we just kept hitting a wall. We were told that we were too early for the hunting, we would be able to see it in about two weeks, and we would have to pay a rather tremendous fee to join them on the hunt if we wanted to go to Bhujung and see the harvesting first-hand.

GHALEGAUN VILLAGE. FROM CODI FARMER

A “hill” in the Himalayas is pretty much a mountain in American standards. In Nepal, though, they only call peaks that have snow year-round mountains, the rest are hills.
As far as we could tell, there were no honey hunters living among us in Ghalegaun. I thought that maybe it just wasn’t really a tradition in this specific village despite it being extremely rich with Gurung heritage and in one of the regions where the honey is produced. However, that night we were wandering around the village trying to find the four or five highlights of the town such as the viewpoint and the tea garden. We ended our evening of exploration with the village museum that focused on Gurung traditions and culture.

It was in a round building made up of just one room that was reminiscent of a yurt. Near the door on the right-hand side gave me my first true glimpse of the hunting – a jar labeled "bhir mauri" that looked blackened like tar, and a small-scale replica of the ladders and baskets they use for hunting. Even if there was no hunting in Ghalegaun, it was still ingrained in the Gurung culture so deeply that it ended up in their museum.
The following morning, we packed up our things, said our farewells, and set out for Bhujung. It was a two-hour walk in the beating sun along the side of the hill that Ghalegaun sat atop to reach our final destination. It was extremely hot, my breakfast was sitting terribly in my stomach, and my bags were far heavier than I had initially let myself believe, but there was nothing that could keep me from getting to Bhujung.

When we arrived at the gate of the village, a large yellow lab ran up to greet us immediately and we soon realized that he wanted to be our guide down the hill to where we would be staying. He ran about 50 feet ahead of us along the winding dirt and gravel path that was framed by beautiful meadows and tall trees before stopping, waiting patiently for us to catch up. He led us until we finally encountered other people whom we could ask for directions and how to find a home to stay in for a few days. It was a rather bewitching experience, honestly. It felt like a clear indication to me that I had reached the right place. I could find some answers here.

After about an hour of wandering through the steep village and sitting outside of random small shops, a beautiful woman appeared with a doko and a scarf tied around her hair. She beckoned us to follow her and Pema explained that she offered to let us stay with her for our time in Bhujung. Her name is Bi Kumari Gurung. She is kind, strong, and makes the best tea I’ve ever had in my life. We were escorted to her home and were given a beautiful bedroom in essentially the attic of the house to stay in. My aforementioned breakfast from Ghalegaun had left me mostly incapacitated for a few hours after the treacherous trek, so I spent quite a bit of that first day in my twin bed and sleeping bag until I would get called for meals. I spent most of the time in the room that day trying to figure out how I could find honey hunters. Bi may know, or the neighbors maybe. I assumed we could just ask around until we were pointed the right way and hope they’d be willing to talk to me.

Once I was feeling better, I sat in the kitchen on a woven bamboo mat on the floor. The walls were made of tan clay and were lined with dark wooden shelves and dozens of sets of brass dishes. There was a small pit against the wall on the left side of this large room where there was an open

---

*A doko is a large conical-shaped bamboo basket that people use to carry items. There is a head strap attached to it that they place over the crown of their head.*
flame and a single small cylinder above the flame to act as a burner. It was on this single flame that Bi would cook everything – dal, meats, tea, vegetables, eggs, and whatever else. The only exception was the rice, which was cooked in one of the four rice cookers she owned.

As I was fully engrossed in Bi’s cooking process, I didn’t realize that a man I hadn’t seen before had walked into the kitchen. Nanda Bhadun Gurung sat down by us and Pema immediately began speaking with him, asking him if he knew anything about bhir mauri or knew any hunters. She turned to me with her mouth agape to inform me that he’s been on hunts before. I felt like I was meeting a celebrity. Pema said he would be willing to do an interview, so I began to overflow with questions for him.

As it turns out, he’s not a honey hunter in what I had thought to be the true sense of the word. This just means he doesn’t climb the ladder, though. He still very much has been a member of the hunt which is quite integral. He does the other jobs that are needed, such as securing the ropes, pulling up the basket, smoking out the bees, squeezing the honey out of the nests, and anything else of necessity. Though it was enthralling for me to be in the presence of someone who has gone on real honey hunts as a participant, he was mostly telling me about features of the hunt that I already knew all about. But then, he mentioned something that piqued my interest massively – the reason he goes hunting.

There are a few hunts that occur every year in the wintertime and springtime, but he doesn’t go on all of them. Instead, the village functions in rotations. They have what Pema explained to me as “wards,” which are divisions of different families into groups within the village like castes. There are nine wards, but only 1-8 participate in the hunt because the ninth is the lowest caste and traditionally is not allowed to partake in the hunt. Every season, two wards will participate. Each family within the two wards that are up in rotation has to send one member to hunt as an extra helper. If a family doesn’t send a member, then they have to pay a fine. If they do send a member, then the family gets a share of the honey that’s harvested.

This is a system I hadn’t heard of before and haven’t heard of since. I couldn’t say for sure if this is a unique method that Bhujung does or if it’s a common practice, but from my attempts to learn more about it in other places or in published literature since, there’s been no information. But it doesn’t end there. There’s an entire hierarchy to the hunting done in Bhujung. First, there are the members from wards 1-8 that go as helpers. Then, there are the hunters themselves who are actively harvesting the nests and honey from the cliffside. Having helpers and hunters are both extremely normal groupings in the hunting process, but in Bhujung they also have gurus.

The gurus are the old hunters who no longer can climb the ladders safely, so instead, they’re the teachers for the new generation of hunters. They also oftentimes are the ones who will perform a ritual at the cliff. These rituals are done upon arrival before setting up for the hunting. The ritual includes prayers to the gods of the forest and cliff to grant protection to those involved in the hunt and not take their lives. At some cliffs, they will also perform an animal sacrifice. If the guru says that a big sacrifice is necessary, then they will kill a sheep or goat. If a smaller one is needed, then it
will be a chicken. Then, there are a few cliffs that don’t require a sacrifice at all, just prayer. The sacrifice is always done for the cliff, not any god or deity. They believe that if they spill the blood of another living being on the cliff, then the cliff won’t want any blood from the hunt itself. During the ritual, which only typically lasts a few minutes, the villagers present can’t wear their shoes or use tobacco until the ritual ceases.

After learning this new information, one thing was very clear – I needed to talk to a guru. We asked Bi and she set up a meeting for us with the guru for the next morning. When the time came around, Pema and I walked to his home. It was a quaint white and tin house with a generous patio and an incredible view of the valley off the cliffside it sits on. We sat outside on some small woven mats across from the guru, Ravilal Gurung. He began hunting when he was around 18 years old and is now 79, so his knowledge of the topic was incredible.

Firstly, he explained where the four cliffs that Bhujung hunts at are located. They’re all near a river or waterfall and is quite a steep hike up into the jungle that usually takes between 2-7 days to reach the site and be able to begin the hunt, depending on the cliff. There are cliffs roughly placed in each of the four cardinal directions from the fields at the base of the valley. In late November and early December 2022, they will go on four hunts, with the first one planned for November 20. This will be one of the shorter trips as it’s only a two-day trek to the cliff and then one day planned for the hunt itself because it’s a smaller cliff, so there likely won’t be as much honey to hunt. There’s quite a lot of planning that goes into the hunt and they run on a tight schedule, he explained, as they only harvest honey on Tuesdays or Saturdays traditionally.

He told us that we were too early to hunt, we were in the “black month.” To fully understand what this entails, there’s some background that is needed. Nepal functions on a calendar system different from the Gregorian calendar I’m used to. Presently in the Nepalese calendar, it’s the year 2079, so the date is 57 years ahead. This, however, isn’t the only difference in the calendars. We’re also only in the same month about half the time. So, November for us begins on the 15th of their month Kartik, which is what they consider to be the “black month.” This means that based on the belief of the black month, you shouldn’t start big things or do anything very dangerous during the month. It’s a bad month to get married, build a house, hunt honey, and much more.
So, the 20th of November for us is the fourth of their next month, Mangsir, which is no longer the black month. Their plan was to leave on the fourth of Mangsir and walk for two days to the cliff. Then, on Tuesday the sixth, they would hunt. The entire ordeal of honey hunting is rather superstition-prone. But, this has all worked out in their favor as there hasn’t been the death of a hunter in such a long time that Ravilal doesn’t even remember when the last death was.

Based on his explanations of the hunts, it seems like quite an exclusive process. For starters, gurus pick the hunters, and it’s usually around six men. If you’re a hunter, you will remain a hunter for as long as you can. He picks men whom he feels are strong-hearted and brave that can handle the fear and danger of the hunt. If one is sick, he won’t be replaced, they will just hunt without him. Even if four of them are sick, he says, then only the two who are healthy will go. No exceptions. Not just anyone can go hunting. In addition to this exclusivity, apparently, the only women who ever go on the hunts are foreigners. He said that women are allowed to go on the hunt, but they can’t really participate and probably shouldn’t even go to the top of the cliff, they should just watch from the bottom and so few women will actually ever go. His own wife has never even gone. She said that her “role” in the hunting process is to pray for her husband. All the wives of the hunters, according to her, pray and worship the gods on their husbands’ behalf when they go on the hunts. They will sometimes even tie hay into something like a sigil and use rice, salt, and alcohol as offerings to call for the protection of the hunters.

Hunting is relatively exclusive to the villagers themselves, but not to foreigners. Bhujung has now become famous for honey hunting thanks to the foreigners who come and go on hunts. They take photos and videos and post them online citing where they went and it’s drawn quite a bit of attention to the village in recent years. Being that I’m a foreigner here, I was curious to hear what he thought of the influx of outsiders coming to gawk at their traditions. He likes it and believes that many other people in the village do as well. It also helps their economy tremendously.
In Bhujung there are no hotels or guest houses, only homes. Visitors have to stay with a local family and eat the local's food. When someone needs a place to stay, the villagers volunteer to house them and feed them, and in return, the visitors pay the families directly which helps them a lot. On top of that, Ravilal said that if outsiders want to come on the hunts, they have to pay around 20,000 rupees (about $150 USD) to participate. Sometimes it may even cost more than that depending on where they go, how long the hunt takes, and if they want to buy some of the honey from the cliffs as well.

One observation that I found very interesting was that despite the very prominent honey hunting culture in Bhujung, most houses still had their own house honey hives. House honey is pretty much what it sounds like – small man-made hive boxes on the side of houses so people can have easy and cheap access to honey. This was also something that many people in Helambu had as well, but I had assumed that this was because there was no additional honey hunting. I was especially confused because not all cliff honey has toxic features to it, so in my mind, they could just be substituted for one another. Even the guru had house honey.

This begged the question from me of why they have both. This is a man who has spent the past 60 years of his life honey hunting or instructing hunters, so why would he do that and have house honey? It just didn’t fully make sense to me. I think that the practice of honey hunting is one of the most incredible things, but I just couldn’t wrap my head around what made it worth putting yourself in such extreme danger eight times a year when you have a substitute literally on the side of your house.

Pema and I asked Ravilal why he was a honey hunter when he has honey being made on the side of his house. His answer was simply that they are two totally different kinds of honey. Now, this is a rather obvious answer since house honey very clearly isn’t cliff honey or mad honey, but what made them different from each other? If you think back to the very beginning of this exploration into mad honey, I stated a few important parameters that are the physiological aspects that make bhir mauri different from other honey. The type of bees, the type of flowers, and the location are three very integral factors. So, Ravilal explained to us that house honey is produced by a different kind of bee, one that’s much smaller than the Himalayan honey bee that makes cliff honey.

It’s very clearly not being produced on a cliff in the half-dome-shaped nests, which is another major difference. Lastly, and probably most importantly, the flowers are different.

The villagers believe that what makes mad honey toxic is the pollen collected from the rhododendron flower that contains the grayanotoxin. Well, in the village there aren’t as many rhododendrons or wildflowers in general as there are in the jungle and forest. The flowers that do exist in the village
vary far less than those out in the wild, too, so this impacts the flavor, effects, and color of the honey. Ravilal says that the two kinds of honey taste and look dramatically different from one another with the cliff honey being darker and redder. On top of this, he said that many of the villagers use cliff honey as medicine, especially when it’s more “mad.” House honey is exclusively used as a sweetener and cliff honey is used in other scenarios.

The next day, Pema and I set out to go explore the village after breakfast. We were walking down a set of stone stairs built into the slope of the hill when we saw a large crowd. Most of the people were in a small plot of dirt on a cliff terrace, pulling up weeds and plowing the soil to prepare it for planting. We stopped to observe their swift motions while a few men around us began chopping and splitting bamboo to form stakes for the garden. Beside us was a man sitting down, observing the scene too. Pema struck up a conversation with him, asking if he knew anything about honey hunting. We were in luck, he said. Not only was he a hunter, but so was another man on the terrace, standing beside a cliff owner. We struck gold.

The man sitting by us beckoned Takta Bahadur Gurung, one of the primary hunters in the village. Takta began hunting when he was 28 years old and has been doing it for 19 years since. He used to go on the hunts as a helper when he was younger if it was his wards’ turn to send men, but one day he said he felt ready and knew it was his time to be a hunter. So, with the guru’s instruction, he climbed the ladder for the first time.

When he first began hunting, he was terrified. The ladder is so tall and he had never done anything like this before, putting his life in the hands of the cliffside. Although now, he can’t even count the number of times that he has hunted. He is no longer afraid because he knows all the techniques from how to climb the ladder efficiently to withstanding the bee stings to sawing maneuvers. Takta now considers hunting to be an honor. He says that since it’s such an old tradition in Bhujung that not many people are able to uphold, it should be viewed as a blessing to be a hunter. None of the hunters, in his opinion, ever feel forced to do it. It’s what their ancestors would have wanted.

Just because he’s no longer afraid, though, doesn’t mean he doesn’t deal with a number of struggles when he hunts. Takta often has to take a recovery period after hunting that may last for over two weeks because of the bee stings. The hunters cover their arms, legs, abdomens, and heads as best as they can, but their hands, feet, and oftentimes faces are still exposed to the bees. He explained that it’s impossible to hunt and not get stung, and sometimes they get swarmed while on the ladder. By his estimate, he gets surrounded by massive swarms that can have more than 200 bees...
stinging his face and body through his suit. At this point in his hunting career, he doesn’t even flinch. He just continues sawing away, sometimes obtaining up to 300 nests from the cliffs in a season all by himself.

The details he was feeding us were incredible and consuming my imagination, but one thing stood out to me more than any other thing he mentioned – he hates the honey. Maybe hate is a harsh summary of his feelings towards it, but he said he never eats the honey. It doesn’t “sit well” with him. Even just the smell of it makes him feel nauseous. He said that some hunters will immediately eat some on-site, but he can’t stand it. This begs the question, of course, why in the world would he risk his life multiple times a year for this honey. What makes it worth all this effort?

Just the same as me, Takta is still trying to figure out why everyone is so infatuated with it. He genuinely doesn’t understand the craze surrounding it. He only does it because it’s village tradition, he’s able to do it and has found himself to be very skilled at it. He cares about the actual craft and heritage behind the act of honey hunting, not the honey. His father and grandfather had told him that the honey is good for people. It helps with bone diseases and gives people enough strength to be able to work all day doing hard labor, like working in the fields at the base of the valley. Takta, however unconvinced of this he may be, just hunts for the sake of hunting. It’s his art.

After being fully thrilled with Takta’s tales and thoughts, he called over Khem Bahadur Gurung, a cliff owner. Now, I haven’t heard about this in any other honey hunting villages that I’ve read about, but in Bhujung, 3 of the 4 cliffs that the villagers hunt at are privately owned. Khem was unsure about how this ownership came to be, but his family has owned the Khangehyu cliff for his family’s entire lineage and it gets passed down to the eldest son in each generation. In Bhujung, only the 3 smaller cliffs are private, which helps ensure that there’s no overharvesting done at the cliffs. It also provides economic prosperity for his family as they get ⅓ of the honey collected and payment for hunting. In particular, if tourists come they have to directly pay him a large sum of money upfront to come on a hunt.

In some villages where honey hunting occurs, like ones in the Kaski region, cliffs are named after people who have died at the cliff (Ahmad, 2003), but this isn’t the case in Bhujung, Khem explained. The four cliffs receive their names from the rivers and waterfalls that flow near them since they serve as markers for where the cliffs are. Another reason for this could be that there just aren’t very many accidents on the cliffs. As far as he knew, no hunter has died at a cliff in the entire time he’s been alive. There have been a few villagers who have fallen from the top, but even that is extremely rare. What I find to be extremely fascinating is that he said the rituals at private cliffs don’t even include sacrifices. Only the large public cliff that’s a 7-day trek away requires a sacrifice, and that will be the killing of a sheep, typically.
That evening was our last night in Bhujung. We were planning on exploring villages in Kaski or Myagdi next to see if there were different opinions on honey hunting there. We were back in the kitchen of our homestay after spending the rest of our day post-interviews exploring in the fields with Bi. It had been a beautiful day and I couldn’t fathom a way it could have possibly gotten better.

Enter: Lobsang Gurung.

I’m not sure what stroke of luck came about in my life that day to have just been able to randomly encounter 3 vitally important members of Bhujung honey hunting, but I’m grateful. Lobsang walked right into the kitchen and sat with us. Immediately receptive to my questions, his love and passion for hunting brightly shone through his face.

Lobsang has been hunting for 30 years, having started when he was 26. It was immediately obvious how much the craft meant to him. He quite literally had a smile on his face the entire time he was speaking, eyes lighting up when he described the details. Similarly to Takta, he enjoys being a hunter because he has the chance to uphold the tradition of it for the village. In his opinion, Bhujung is the most famous village in Nepal for honey hunting because of all the publicity they have gotten from tourists, mainly American, Japanese, and Korean visitors.

One prominent issue that I’ve learned about from my readings and from documentaries regarding hunting is that there aren’t really many younger people who are interested in learning how to hunt because it’s so dangerous. Lobsang was the first person to mention this issue to me in person that they’re facing the problem of honey hunting becoming a dying craft. He believes that Bhujung will be the last village with honey hunters left in the future, that it will be the one place to withstand the odds and carry on the tradition. This is because the art of honey hunting is so deeply ingrained in their culture that he can’t foresee a Bhujung without hunting. He won’t let that happen and neither will the other hunters, at least as much as they can control it.

Despite this confidence, he still recognizes a declining interest from younger people nationwide in honey hunting. It’s speculated that the reason for this is because of the dangers involved and the lack of job security. So, Lobsang believes that honey hunters should be granted insurance from the government in the same way that mountaineers have insurance since both groups do tremendously dangerous activities and put their lives at risk. He thinks it’s especially important to push for this insurance because not only will it become an incentive for younger people to become hunters, but it will also be beneficial for other regions of Nepal that hunt as well. The hunters of Bhujung are incredibly skilled at what they do and rarely have any accidents, but other villages even in the Lamjung region aren’t as lucky to have such a fine-tuned system of teaching the techniques of hunting. In other areas of Nepal, there are more risks taken simply because many hunters haven’t been taught as thoroughly as he feels hunters in Bhujung are taught.

It was really clear to me that Lobsang cares about all aspects of honey hunting from safety to tradition. We tried to ask what his favorite aspect of honey hunting was and he genuinely doesn’t feel as though he has one. He loves the preparation because of the excited anticipation. He loves the trek there and the setup. He loves the thrill of the ladder and the act of hunting. He loves going home and distributing the honey. And he really loves the honey.

Immediately after finishing hunting, he said he always makes sure to get a little taste of the honey, but never too much since he has to lead people still and he doesn’t want them to follow suit and take too much. When he gets back, though, it’s a different story.
Mad honey seems to affect everyone differently. Ravilal described it as being similar to being drunk, but you feel a bit more sick. Lobsang thinks it’s very different from being drunk. He said that when you’ve drunk too much alcohol, you can usually still walk and stand, and you are pretty conscious. With mad honey, though, he can’t really walk, he has no strength and can’t even grip onto things around him. He doesn’t know what’s going on around him and feels intense pressure in his body. If he takes a lot and then stays still, he just feels confused and has trouble focusing his eyes on things. It’s not until he tries to stand up or move around that he realizes how much of an effect it has on his motor skills. This all sounds rather intense to me, but he swears he loves it. Sometimes he will even mix the honey in his rice or tea if he doesn’t really have an appetite because that makes him want to eat it.

I found it really incredible to hear about how much the hunters in Bhujung cared for their craft, and they were so happy to share aspects of it with me. Takta even made a point to visit our homestay again before we left the next morning to show us photos and videos he took while hunting, some of which can be seen throughout this paper. Their passion and love were extremely moving. They even urged me to come back and visit sometime in the future so I could get a chance to go on an actual hunt myself.
Yield of the Hunt

At 7 AM the following morning, Pema and I began our journey back to Pokhara so we could determine where we would go next. After many hours on buses and cars, we got back to the city for the night. I had no idea where to go next or what I was still looking for. On a whim the next morning, I decided to call Éric Valli, a french photographer and filmmaker who wrote two books on honey hunting, *Honey Hunters of Nepal* and *Hunting for Honey*, and had just gotten to Kathmandu that day. He answered. We spoke on the phone for a few minutes so I could explain my project to him and ask if he would be willing to sit down with me for an interview. He obliged but didn’t know how long he would be in Kathmandu so he told me to get there as soon as I could.

I struggled to believe my luck with obtaining important interviews in that 24-hour period, so I decided to continue testing my luck and reached out to Ben Ayers, a writer, filmmaker, and humanitarian that had worked on the documentary that started my obsessive fascination with mad honey, *The Last Honey Hunter*. He answered and agreed to an interview as well. Immediately Pema and I came to a conclusion about what we would be doing that day. It was time to go back to Kathmandu.

I told Éric I would be back in Kathmandu the following day and we scheduled the interview for 9 AM at his hotel. Now all I needed to do was get there. I went to a travel agency a few hours later and got the last bus ticket for the night bus back to Kathmandu that evening which meant Pema and I had to part ways for a few days. We got her a hotel room, and then it was time for me to leave. About 9 hours later, I was back.

It was 4:30 in the morning when I arrived back in the city. It was cold and dark and I was extremely tired, but I knew it would all be worth it. I got a cab to Boudha and sat at the Boudhanath Stupa with my two bags of necessities and a pack of street dogs laying at my feet that were trying to stay warm just like me. At 7 AM, cafes began to open, so I was able to go and sit somewhere to warm up and get the necessary breakfast and excessive amount of caffeine before what I had expected to be the most intimidating interview of my life.

I arrived at Éric’s hotel 15 minutes early and stood outside until it was time and he met me at the front. I was beyond nervous, but he was incredibly kind and receptive. Being that he published the first book on honey hunting in Nepal, I was enamored with his work and merit in the field. My first inquiry had to be how he found the hunters. The story goes something like this:

Éric was looking for musk deers in the lower Himalayan valleys with Lakpa, his travel partner. One day, he ended up in the forest with no idea where Lakpa was when it began pouring rain. He had nothing but a rucksack on him and was stuck in the rain. He was tired, cold, and with no idea of what to do when a herder found him. The herder brought Éric back to his isolated hut and they shared the tea and biscuits he had in his rucksack before Éric quickly fell asleep. The next morning, he woke up to find himself alone at the home with a thick blanket covering him. Laying in the bed, he looked up into the beams of the bamboo roofing and saw a massive coil of wood and bamboo woven together resting on the rafters. He was trying to make sense of what it could be for quite some time but had no idea. He had never seen anything like it.
When the herder returned, Éric immediately asked him what the coil was and he was told it was a ladder about 50 meters long. Éric couldn’t understand why he needed a ladder that size when all the buildings in the village were so small, so the herder asked him to come into the forest and see for himself. The herder took him to a cliff and pointed up at the massive semicircles decorating the cliff – they were bee nests. Éric spent the next few years obsessing over these nests and the process of honey hunting. He spent about two years searching as much of Nepal as he could with his ex-wife, Diane, before they found a village that he would end up spending over a year in and that would be the subject of his first book on honey hunters.

Self-admittedly, his mind was consumed with thoughts about these hunters until he found the perfect story to share – Mani Lal. “I wanted the man who was a tradition in himself. I wanted the man who knew all the traditions with the gods and the cliffs. I wanted the man who knew everything. Not the young kid who would go there to try and get the girl or something. I wanted the real thing.” It took him a year and a half to find Mani Lal and convince him to show Éric the hunt, to teach him about the cliffs and the gods and the bees and the forest, so he could share the wonders with the world.

In my interview with him, he seemed particularly struck by the rituals before the hunt commenced. When they arrived at the cliffside they would sacrifice a chicken. They would say a prayer in their local dialect and kill the chicken. Then, they pray to the god of the forest and cliff, Pholo, and thank him for giving them the life of the animal and pray for their safety during the hunt. The first cut of the animal would be placed on a large leaf that they used as a plate and this would be placed on a large rock at the riverside where they would then pray more to Pholo. Éric wasn’t sure what the contents of the second prayer consisted of since he doesn’t speak their local dialect, but it was what the hunters of this village had been doing since the beginning. The true tradition.
To this day, he still has a deep love for honey hunting and the hunters themselves, but similar to Takta, he doesn’t enjoy the honey very much. Éric told me the story of the one time he tried mad honey. It was springtime after going on a hunt with the villagers, which meant that the honey was incredibly potent as there were more wildflowers everywhere. They were starving and the only food they had was some curd, muesli Éric brought from France, and the mad honey they had harvested that day. He and two others, Diane and a friend Addison, looked at each other and decided to try some. Éric ended up finding Addison outside the hut they were staying in, crawling on all fours screaming that he was blind, with other villagers scattered around him fully incapacitated and sleeping outside after they ate the honey as well. Éric grabbed Addison and took him inside to put him in his sleeping bag. Then Diane said she was beginning to feel the effects, so he placed her in her sleeping bag as well. Finally, Éric began to feel the effects so he crawled into his own sleeping bag. “I saw everything in black and white. Anything light became bright white and any shadows became very black. It’s not really a trip, though. It’s not a fun thing to try. You don’t get mad, you get blind.” He said that being inebriated with mad honey isn’t a pleasant experience. It’s not like smoking a joint of marijuana or taking MDMA, in his opinion, “it’s not a funny thing.”

A few hours later, I found myself going to Ben’s home in Kathmandu. He was incredibly hospitable, allowing me into his beautiful house and offering me a cold beer before we went to his couches to have the most honest discussion on the mad honey craze that I would have. Similarly to what Éric had told me, he doesn’t think of mad honey to be like a recreational drug. He gets a headache and is put in a bad mood when he takes it, it’s never been something he enjoyed. In that case, what’s the point of all the hassle?

Apparently, at least in the Everest region where he had done The Last Honey Hunter documentary, the honey was always discarded until about 20 years ago or so. They harvested cliff honey for the

---

7 Eric explained the hunters would eat the honey when they were starving, except in springtime as they knew it is incredibly potent.
8 More content from this interview can be found in the appendix that doesn’t have to do with mad honey, simply just quotes that stuck out to me.
beeswax, because it was far more valuable to people. The honey would usually be given to the local cattle, though it usually made the yaks throw up. As honey hunting gained popularity and people realized that mad honey has psychoactive properties, the honey has become a more valuable aspect than the beeswax.

“It’s funny, the place that [the honey] occupies in the imagination,” Ben said. He’s used it as an antiseptic for cuts since it helps cuts heal and disinfect the wound like other forms of honey, but that’s about the extent of it. This just further digs the hole deeper – if those who have actually tried mad honey generally don’t like it, why are there so many tourists who come to Nepal to spend hundreds of dollars on the honey? The working theory that we discussed primarily has to do with the Shangri-la effect – a perfect utopia that is completely imaginary.

The entire idea of Shangri-la ties in with orientalism. It’s all based on an outsider’s fetishization of Asia, typically from westerners who project their own ideas on places like Nepal and Tibet. Foreigners have this tendency to believe that there’s something that lies out in the Himalayas that’s magical, like the fountain of youth or the secret of alchemy, and it will appear in a rural village somewhere. Admittedly, Ben and I both were in the same boat when we first decided to come to Nepal 20 years apart from each other.

In all fairness, Nepal is a very special country. It’s unbelievably beautiful and has such a rich culture that shouldn’t be overlooked, but to think it’s a perfect place where all the secrets to life lie is simply an ignorant perspective. “I’ve learned so much about myself, my life, spirituality, and Buddhism from the people here, and to me, that’s truly been a miracle. Living here has been eye-opening and enlightening for me, but it’s taken about 20 years of my being here to understand the outline of how our fetishization of Nepal and of Buddhism can cloud your ability to see what’s actually happening. It’s the same thing with mad honey, it clouds your ability to see that it’s really just mildly poisonous honey. It’s just an idea being sold.”

In reality, eating mad honey is really similar to a dog eating chocolate. It’s something toxic to the body. Sure, you can have some and be okay, but it can speed up your heart rate, incapacitate you, and sometimes land you in the emergency department of a hospital. All the experience truly is is the body's reaction to ingesting poison. The product isn’t what makes mad honey so incredible, it’s the process and history behind it. Of course, the process and history don’t sell quite as well as something tangible in a jar.

We both agreed that ultimately, the excitement around mad honey as an actual product is just capitalism at work. It’s promoted as a health food, as a hallucinogen, and as an aphrodisiac. In some places, it goes even further than that. A large portion of the mad honey sales used to go to Korean men because they believed it would cure erectile dysfunction. The spoiler is that it doesn’t cure their sexual ailments. Instead, it caused dozens of men to wind up in the hospital and a few wound up dead. The saddest part about that, in my opinion, is that some men are still trying to use it as a cure for something that has no correlation with the honey. Now it has become illegal in South Korea because of all the issues, but people will still try and buy it on the black market for incredibly high prices all based on a speculatory idea that has no facts backing it up.

Some of the peer-reviewed papers I had read when I was first beginning my research on the topic stated that mad honey is believed to be an aphrodisiac, which is kind of the entire capitalistic foundation that mad honey is sold on. That’s all the advertising of mad honey as a product is.
You target someone’s insecurities and give them a product that will allegedly fix them, even if there’s no proof behind it. But, what are some things that a lot of people are deeply insecure about? Health and sexuality. So, what do companies that sell mad honey target the honey to be a cure for? Those same exact things. Consumerism as a whole exists to prey on people’s insecurities.

Ben compared this idea to the hunting of tigers for their bones, eyes, and penises. In Chinese medicine, it’s apparently said that tiger penises are a very potent aphrodisiac and cure for erectile dysfunction. Neither Ben nor myself are particularly in the scientific position to be able to say whether this is truly fact or fiction, but I find it extremely interesting that something so hard to come by and so hard to obtain, this making it extremely expensive, is actually a great aphrodisiac.

In short, no one really knows anything about mad honey as a product itself. Ben told me that there’s even some massive speculation about if mad honey is even produced from rhododendron flowers. Every piece of literature I’ve read about mad honey has said definitively that it gets these effects from the grayanotoxin of the rhododendron flower. However, when Ben was working on The Last Honey Hunter documentary, he worked with Mark Watson who is the head of floras at the Royal Botanic Garden of Edinburgh. Mark, as Ben explained to me, is essentially the world expert on Himalayan botany, especially rhododendrons. He says that rhododendrons in Nepal don’t contain grayanotoxins.

When he told me this, I found it to be shocking. It countered every piece of information I had found thus far. Now, this doesn’t mean that anything I had learned was untrue excluding the Nepali rhododendrons toxicity. Mark did a microscopic analysis of mad honey from a few different regions of Nepal and did find that grayanotoxins were present, just not from the rhododendron. When Ben was in Saddhi, the locals there told him that the toxicity of the honey comes from bhulu flowers. These flowers from the daphne bholua plant are extremely abundant in Nepal and contain grayanotoxins and, according to Mark, are actually the plants that create the infamous mad honey.

The belief that mad honey is toxic from the rhododendron isn’t entirely off-base, though. In Turkey, it’s been confirmed that the pollen from rhododendrons is what causes the toxicity, but this is because rhododendrons in Turkey do contain grayanotoxins. Considering that mad honey in Turkey has been studied more extensively than mad honey in Nepal, this begins to make sense. Nepal has lots of rhododendrons and lots of mad honey, so if the same kind of honey from Turkey has these specific characteristics then it would make sense to just write it off that Nepal is the same without looking too much into it.
In the interest of full transparency, I’ll divulge a personal anecdote. I’ve tried the honey myself multiple times. I purchased a jar of platinum version honey from Himgiri Organic Hub in Kathmandu distributed by Best Mad Honey and sampled it seven times over the course of about two weeks. In addition to this, I was given a small sample of potent honey that was harvested during the making of a YouTube documentary earlier in 2022 around April, meaning the grayanotoxin level was higher.

In my eight tests of honey, I only enjoyed one and I attribute this almost exclusively to a speculated placebo effect. Five of my samples with the commercialized honey were microdosing where I either mixed a small amount into my morning tea or ate it plain. The dosages would range between about half a teaspoon to a full teaspoon. The first day I tried it, I felt incredible. I was energetic, felt a slight head high for about 30 minutes, and I was convinced that my hearing was more acute than it normally would be. I was convinced that I had just discovered the best thing in the world.

In the following few days, I would increase the amount I ingested to see how the effects would vary. I never had another experience with it that I enjoyed. I either wouldn’t feel the effects at all, or I would have a headache, be grumpy, or feel very lightheaded for a few hours. The latter would occur more frequently the more I increased my dosage. Mad honey lost its alluring hold on me.

In the following few days, I would increase the amount I ingested to see how the effects would vary. I never had another experience with it that I enjoyed. I either wouldn’t feel the effects at all, or I would have a headache, be grumpy, or feel very lightheaded for a few hours. The latter would occur more frequently the more I increased my dosage. Mad honey lost its alluring hold on me.

Despite these experiences, I still was determined to know more about the effects as I had initially speculated that mad honey would have an impact on the mind. At no point did I find proof of this aside from the occasional bad mood I would be in about an hour after taking a dose. However, one thing that was fascinating to me was the effects it had on my friends and how malleable their experiences were. Three of my friends had samples while I was doing my microdosing regime and they all had about half a teaspoon. The first one who tried it, I told about my positive experience the first day. At this point, I didn’t know if it was a placebo considering my excitement of trying it or if the effects were genuine. He described to me a very grand experience, which he coined to be the “best high of [his] life.” He explained heightened senses, specifically his hearing, and being “extremely in touch with nature.” This is very interesting to me considering that all the mentioned effects were just a more extreme version of what I had described my initial experience to be. Thus leading to my theory that the effects of small doses of mad honey are a placebo.

I furthered this by giving samples to two more of my friends on separate days. I explained both experiences I have had but said that either not feeling anything or just feeling a bit ill and grumpy for a few hours was the more common experience for me. They both reported back saying they didn’t feel anything. Of course, it’s entirely plausible that perhaps it just has a different effect on different people as this is something I can’t gauge from the small amount of research I’ve been able to do thus far.

Another thing that should be noted is the method of ingestion. I’ve tried the honey two ways – in tea and right off the spoon. The first two friends of mine who sampled it had it in tea and the third sampled it on its own. The reason I find this to be an important aspect to mention is that it’s unclear if heat has the ability to neutralize the toxicity of the grayanotoxins in the honey. If it does have neutralizing effects, then this may further support the idea of the two positive experiences reported by myself and the first friend who sampled the honey having been entirely placebo.
My other experience with mad honey was with the unprocessed honey directly from a cliffside that I was given. I only sampled it once and had roughly one teaspoon. I honestly didn’t feel much. I was extremely cautious given the horror stories I’ve been told up to the day I tried it, so perhaps the small dose was the reason for the minimal effect. I didn’t feel particularly energized or high, and I definitely didn’t get some crazy visual or auditory hallucinations. However, I didn’t feel particularly bad, either. Within about 10 minutes of ingestion, I began to feel a little weak, but that shortly went away. Roughly an hour later, I felt an extremely mild headache form. I was completely cognizant and aware the entire time and didn’t feel particularly disoriented or like I was in a state of delirium. The most extreme effect that I encountered was a head rush upon standing up, however, I still had full motor control and grip strength. I believe that this lack of “mad” effects is likely attributed to one of two things: either I just didn’t take enough to feel the effects, or the honey lost some of its potency over time.

In some of the conversations that I’ve had about the honey thus far, a few people have expressed to me that they “don’t trust” the commercialized versions sold in stores. I think that this is a valid concern, but I’d like to shed some light on my experiences with both. I tried the version from Best Mad Honey first and was shocked by the smell and taste of it. It was sickly sweet and had almost a fruity aroma to it and tasted exactly how it smelled. The honey itself is a slightly dark golden color and is very liquidy. It moves far faster than any honey I’ve ever seen and separates very quickly into a section of liquid honey and crystalized sugar. After seeing this, I was very skeptical of the honey, however, whenever I was given a small sample of honey from the cliff itself with no middleman, I now believe in the authenticity of the store-bought version I got. The only differences I noticed were more bits of crystalized sugar in the sample I was given and a slightly more subdued taste, but the smell was the same.

Based on these experiences, I find the honey itself to be more of a fad. Honey hunting to me is a wildly incredible tradition in Nepal that I believe will always hold a fraction of my attention, but that’s where the endearing aspects of mad honey seem to end for me now. I’m also somewhat bothered by the labeling of mad honey as a hallucinogen. In my opinion, it should be specified as a deliriant. Though deliriants are a subcategory of hallucinogens, the effects are very different from the entheogens that people are most familiar with like LSD and magic mushrooms.

The Mayo Clinic defines delirium to be “a serious change in mental abilities that result in confused thinking and a lack of awareness of someone’s surroundings.” From what I’ve seen of the lore online surrounding mad honey, people who want to try it believe it will be like a psychedelic, which are drugs that allow the brain to process every aspect of someone’s environment instead of filtering things out. Examples of these are peyote, LSD, and mescaline. I believe that this assumption is due to psychedelics being the most well-known category of hallucinogens. Examples of deliriants are the devil’s trumpet or nightshade, which both contain toxic substances, meaning that it’s essentially just self-inflicted poisoning.

Perhaps based on this analysis, the classification of mad honey as a hallucinogen could very well be the most accurate generalized depiction, but it does still produce issues because many people may not know about these distinctions. I feel as though it would be both far safer and more accurate to specify mad honey as a deliriant when describing it to people so they don’t assume that they’ll have a psychedelic experience with it.
The future of mad honey to me is somewhat harrowing. Honey hunting is decreasing all over Nepal despite the interest in mad honey having a seemingly steady increase among the general public due to the accumulating content about it coming out every year on social media, podcasts, and YouTube. On top of all of this, Himalayan honey bees are at great risk from climate change. This is because they are the largest species of bee and larger bees have a lower heat tolerance, which makes them more susceptible to the steady increase in global temperature (Open Access Government, 2022).

As Lobsang said to me in Bhujung, his village very well could be the last one still honey hunting in a few decades from now. But this, in tandem with the growing tourism that Bhujung is receiving from foreigners who want to go honey hunting, could pose a few issues. The most prominent looming problem at hand is that, with the bee population declining but tourism increasing, then villages such as Bhujung run the risk of overharvesting honey. This has the potential to impact bee migratory patterns and the cost of mad honey globally. Going even further, more suppliers are trying to sell mad honey, which further increases demand for it. That also adds risks for the hunters as more villages may begin to send inexperienced hunters to collect cliff honey to sell to suppliers and boost their own economic status, which could result in more deaths of hunters. If the demand for mad honey continues to increase and there aren’t more hunters who are willing to collect enough to satisfy the demand, then there’s the possibility of commercial mad honey sellers beginning to cut the product with other substances in order to boost the economic prosperity of their company.

A lot of these issues are fairly intangible and unquantifiable, but they do pose very real issues. So, the question now is what can be done about all of this? In my eyes, the most important thing is education on the topic for those who are interested in buying mad honey or going on hunts. First and foremost, using the blanket statement of mad honey being a hallucinogen with no further explanation is extremely problematic. Individuals in the public eye should stop using this term without expanding on the actual effects. For example, on Joe Rogan’s podcast in 2021, he had an episode saying that he wanted to “trip balls” on mad honey, which is a massive issue. This caused some of his listeners to follow suit and believe the same thing, thinking that they were going to have a psychedelic experience on mad honey as opposed to having a deliriant--esque experience on it.

Another thing that should be done is genuine clinical research on the benefits of mad honey. Without having quantifiable data about how it may or may not help with certain ailments such as arthritis, it’s entirely
There are many routes for future research that could and should be done on this topic. One idea is based on the work that Mark and Ben did. Samples of mad honey from different regions, as well as from different companies, should be obtained and studied for molecular makeup as well as toxicology to have a definitive answer about what plant is actually responsible for the toxic properties of the honey. Another idea is a cross-comparison done between other deliriants, dissociatives, and psychedelics to be able to have certainty on the classification of mad honey from a pharmacological perspective.

Some other potential topics of study could be based on loosely related topics, such as the supply chain of mad honey for companies and who is behind that, Ben told me that from his experience, many of the people who sell mad honey to companies are also usually involved in darker aspects of the Nepali underground trade of things like the drug trade, animal smuggling, and human trafficking. Additionally, drug usage and addiction in rural Indigenous villages of Nepal would be a massively important thing to look into based on previous research I’ve done on addiction in Indigenous communities in North America.

After many weeks of reading and exhausting every single person around me with my honey-soaked thoughts, I think I finally discovered what makes mad honey “mad.” It doesn’t seem to have much to do with the neurotoxins or the alleged trip that you probably won’t have after ingesting it. It’s not some neurological phenomenon or wonderful health food that provides you with a fountain of youth. What makes it mad is exactly the reason that this paper exists, and probably also the same reason that dozens of others exist. We are what make mad honey “mad,” the foreigners who are obsessed with some fabled aspect of it. Those who believe so deeply in the Shangri-la of anything and everything produced out of the Himalayas. Those who believe that the answers to all of their problems lie in the mountains or dense forests of Nepal. What makes mad honey “mad” isn’t nausea, it’s not some “I saw God today” experience – it’s the allure of the unknown and fetishization of Nepali culture.
Appendix

Lamjung Maps:

- Besisahar
- Ghalegaun
- Ghanpokhara
- Bhujung
- Nakote
- Melanmchi-Ghyang
- Tharkeghyang
- Sermathang
- Pokhara
- Jomsom
- Kagbeni
- Boudha
- Thamel
Methodology:

This paper holds a combination of content from primary and secondary sources. I first indulged in quite a bit of reading and videos on the subject. The readings I gathered ideas and content from include peer-reviewed journals, Éric Valli’s books, articles on honey hunting and mad honey from various news sources and magazines, and Reddit forums. The video content was all from YouTube but included *The Last Honey Hunter*, *The Nepalese Honey That Makes People Hallucinate*, and *Hallucinogen Honey Hunters*. The rest of my content comes primarily from interviews and casual conversations and I almost exclusively got my content from people who have actually been on honey hunts. I had long lists of questions to ask in the interviews, but for the most part, I would just let the individuals I spoke with share the information they felt was important first and this usually would end up encompassing the questions I had prepared.
Limitations:
There are a number of things I believe could have been improved upon during my time in the field that would have provided me with a more impactful paper. First and foremost, one of the biggest limitations in my eyes is the fact that I was unaware of the black month in the Nepali calendar which prevented me from being able to go honey hunting. Had I known about this, I would have pushed my arrival date into Bhujung back about a week so I could have had an opportunity to go on a honey hunting excursion myself. I also should have interviewed more laypeople in the village about the topic, specifically women. I did speak to about 9 different women about the topic and a few men, but none of the conversations yielded substantial information, most individuals just seem rather indifferent towards the honey, but I should have asked more people and more questions. Additionally, I wish I had interviewed someone at a company that sold mad honey. Being more educated on the topic of deliriants probably would have also been beneficial foundational knowledge for me to have as I didn't research much on this topic until after conducting a majority of my fieldwork. This could have been useful as I may have been able to have conversations with people who have tried substances such as nightshade and devil's trumpet to find if there were more similarities. Lastly, I also wish I had done more trials on the effects of mad honey on myself with more varying dosage sizes.

Quotes I liked:
"Who can do better than you when you give so much passion and love?" – Éric Valli
"My drug was my story, I didn't need anything else." – Éric Valli
"My life has been a great series of love stories. As love stories go, they cannot last. I'm a cabinet maker, I've never studied anything in my life besides that... I just followed my dreams as they came to me. It's nothing more than that. I just went from one love story to another." – Éric Valli
"I've never studied photography or writing or filmmaking. I'm just like everybody. I'm just a guy who went for his dreams and maybe I went deeper into them than other people. I was completely sucked in by my ideas. I never did anything to succeed." – Éric Valli
"Love and do whatever you want. That's all that should matter." – Éric Valli
"You can't go to a small town in America and see it in this sort of socialist enclave the same way you can [as a foreigner in Nepal]. America doesn't allow for that. But, you come here and our ignorance allows us to make up what we want and ignore what we don't." – Ben Ayers
"Mad honey has never given me a boner." – Ben Ayers
"I want to read your honey bible." – Claudia Santino
Bibliography


Thank you for reading. Thank you for supporting. Thank you for everything.