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Cover photo. Upper Kali Gandaki valley in the rain shadow of the High Himalayas (Central Nepal, 3250 m, 28°53'N/83°47'E, Sept. 2001, towards the southeast, with Tilicho Peak, 7133 m): Mountain environments of the Old World's desert belt challenge palaeoecology by superimposing and aggravating effects of climate and cultural impacts. Isolated trees in desertic pastures (here *Cupressus torulosa*) may testify to the former forest cover and a future forest potential. Photo by Georg Miehe, University of Marburg, Germany. (See the article by Miehe et al., pages 255–265, in this issue.)