

## **Saturday, March 19 High Wycombe**

I make final preparations on a beautiful sunny spring day which starts with frost. I visit Audrey for coffee and go walking in the afternoon. I call on David and Marie-Claude but they are setting off for their walk.

Panic one:

When checking in on line I find my name is Barry DavidMartin; does it matter? SD is closed for the weekend

Panic two:

After getting to bed I realise that I haven't packed the rail tickets which are in the holiday file.

During the evening Clive and David Keyse phone. The latter offers to take me to Heathrow but I agree to phone him if anything goes wrong with the Carousel A40 bus. Get to bed at about 10 but get little sleep, especially with the worry about the name.

## **Sunday, March 20 High Wycombe**

At least getting up at 5:30 means that there is plenty of time for a leisurely breakfast and last minute jobs, checks and a shower.

I leave the house at eight which gives me plenty of time to walk to the bus station for the 9am A40 to Heathrow. It leaves on time with plenty of passengers but there are just four of us when we get to the airport. The Emirates check in desk is open with no wait and there is no problem with the name. So I have 3 1/2 hours before departure. After sitting reading and snacking I go through security for more of the same. There are virtually no queues.

The gate opens a little late and the departure is about half an hour late. The plane is large; an A380 on two floors and is not full. I have an aisle seat near the front with the cockpit door a few metres away. The middle seat is unoccupied the first class is upstairs and our departure is at 215. I have a gin and tonic with red wine for the meal which is late and I'm glad that I brought some food from home to eat at the airport. The food is good when it arrives. I had ordered eastern vegetarian and the meal arrives before the general service and is accompanied with rice pudding, processed cheese and biscuits.

The information system on the seatback is good with programmes such as an interview with Michael Palin about Bangladesh and camera views front rear and below. The time passes reasonably with a little dozing. We arrive at 1:15 Dubai time which with the four hour time difference gives a flight time of seven hours. We are late arriving but there are a lot of people for the Dhaka plane and so it is held and that in turn is late by about half an hour. The plane is much smaller and cramped with economy full. The flight time is 4 1/4 hours arriving at 8:30 Dhaka time. Breakfast is served soon after take off at 5 am Dhaka time and again is decent East Asian food. My neighbours aren't too considerate but not objectionable and the information and sound system don't work so well.

On landing there is a mad scramble to get off but the first class are allowed off first which is good for the slow immigration system. They ask for a hotel booking letter but seem happy with the email. I get 10,000 Dhaka from ATM but my bag takes a long time and is next to the last bag and so I finally leave the terminal at 10:30 for a slow drive into town in the AC car I had booked for \$15.

I arrive at the hotel at about noon for my single super deluxe room which is okay with a shower but no outside window and costs \$30 plus tax with breakfast. There is time for a shower before lunch at one. The buffet is mainly non-vegetarian and so I take some mixed vegetables, dhal and rice and naan for 180- but it's tepid and not too good.

Then it's an out to face Dhaka which is humid with a breeze and about 30°. It's not easy to find the way to the station. The booking to Calcutta is easy for the right day and quick and costs 1900/- for an AC cabin which is the top class but the reporting time is 615 for a 715 departure at the Cantonment station. The queue for Chittagong is longer and it turns out that there are no tickets available in spite of a kind lady's help in searching for the stationmaster. The walk back to the hotel is confusing and longer than it need be.

The hotel blocks me my room for next Monday ready for the departure to Calcutta and find a bus ticket for me to Chittagong which costs 825/- in the Deluxe coach at 8am with a reporting time of 745. They even find a rickshaw for me to take me to the bus station to collect the ticket and back. The driver a cheery soul and weaves his way through the traffic for his 60/- with a tip of 10. I go to the GPO for stamps and I'm directed to the philatelic department where they have postcards for 10 and stamps for 35.

I watch some TV in my room but am very tired and in bed by 6pm for quite a lot of sleep and the AC has got the temperature down to 24°. It's a pity that there is no Fan. I listen to podcasts between 230 and 330 but then get back to sleep.

## **Tuesday, March 22 Dhaka**

I finally awake at 8:30 to a grey but dry morning. The sun comes out mid-morning and it gets hotter then. I have breakfast at nine and it is rather better than lunch with veg, breads, fruit juice omelette and a cup of coffee. There is a paper waiting for me outside the room and I have a shower before leaving at 10:30.

I go for a long walk through old Dhaka with the the guide book's map being reliable and the people are generally helpful with a few nuisance children. I visit the Armenian Church and a boy helps by ringing the bell for entry. At the Star Mosque the guardian is helpful and there is much representative mosaic work. a donation is requested and I gave 50. I then head for the waterfront and the museum in the Nawab's Palace which costs 75 and would be five for locals. There is a power cut so it is very gloomy inside but the grounds are good with fine views over the Bara Ganga river. I make my way through another maze of streets to Saint Thomas's church where again a key has to be brought. Back at the hotel I have coffee and cake for 50. After a rest I have a shower and do laundry and at about 4.30 order food from room service with veg palao, dahl and a pot of tea which will arrive in about 20 Minutes. There is lots of rice with a small dahl which is tasty and 2 cups of tea. The Internet is not working so I do some puzzles, watch BBC world and go to bed for a reasonable night at 9:30.

## **Wednesday, March 23 Dhaka**

I wake at about 5am and listen to podcasts until 645 when I have a shower and go to breakfast at 740. The Bangladeshi breakfast takes about 20 minutes. Banana and water arrive as do plenty of businessmen who are suited apart from one who looks boorish. There is also one loan western female German whom I speak to later. Breakfast arrives as before but with a pot of water and instant coffee plus milk and sugar. I go back to the room where the paper and water have arrived and I get ready for the off with my rucksack. The Internet is available and so I send some emails.

I am out by 930 and the sun comes earlier than yesterday but it is not too hot although the temperature steadily rises. I go first to the Supreme Court which is a 19th century Raj building in extensive grounds which are open for me to walk through with many lawyers milling around. When it's via the Sukrawadi Uddyam park with its golf course course and several cricket matches to the sculptures and Dhaka university where again it's possible to walk around but not through. The cows are tethered and not wandering around. Next I go to the National Museum, which again is 75/- instead of 5/- There is an extensive collection on several floors including lots of photos of the liberation war - the Libyan fighting must resonate. After this I go along the New Elephant Road to the Khoshba restaurant. I locate it but its Chinese now and closed. So it's further to Dhamondi to eat at the Dhaba, a fast food place in the Rifle Square Mall. It is recommended in the book and I have Phuchka and a paper masala dosa which are good. The supermarket supplies insect repellent and snacks. A long walk takes me along the shopping streets and eventually after overshooting and asking I find the second of two Coffee Worlds. It's a cool haven of peace for a decent coffee and a reasonable strawberry waffle for 375/-

Back to the hotel is a long but interesting hike with a man wishing me 'welcome to Bangladesh' amid the busy traffic, fumes and heat. I arrive at 5.30 to the relief of a shower and a drink. after laundry I take cards to the GPO, buying water. I settle my bill with 217/- returned From the bill it looks as though the VAT was included in the room rate which is 2100/-. After TV, reading and packing I'm in bed by 9.30 but it's a long time before sleep arrives and then not much. The coffee?

### **Thursday March 24 Dhaka to Chittagong**

I am up at 6.15 for a shower and packing and out by 6.40: overcast and a reasonable temperature. There is much less traffic with the sweepers out; even crossing the road is easier. I retrace the rickshaw route to the bus stand, arriving at 7.15 for the 8am departure. The lounge is comfortable and AC. The announcements are in Bangla and so various questions. Eventually I'm onto the coach with my rucksack underneath. I have a comfortable single seat and I turn off the icy blast The departure through the streets of Dhaka takes an hour or so and then there is more progress picking up twice. The driving is really bad. It seems a big problem with very slow trucks and rickshaws share the same carrigeway as the many coaches and a few private cars. The windscreen has several cracks. In some places the road has two carrigeways but mostly single with one lane in each direction, and sometimes the surface is smooth.

There is one comfort stop and then twenty minutes for lunch, There is plenty to see alongside the road, and plenty of nodding off. Towards Chittagong there are some low hills to the east and the traffic builds up. We end up at a bus station on the edge of the city and a CNG (rickshaw) to the railway station asks 100/- and gets 90. The old boking office is closed but the new one is down the platform where there are huge queues. I'm directed to a shorter one where I get issued with a ticket to Srimagol for Saturday, 250/- no AC leaving at 8.15.

The hotel Asia SR is a few hundred metres away and they are expecting me with a large AC room for 2180/- without breakfast and I pay for two nights by card. The staff are very helpful and friendly and the room is on the seventh floor with noisy AC. After a shower I order some food (special veg curry, dal, nan and a pot of tea for 240/-) in the room. After supper I use the internet in reception including an email to the Tea Resort in Srimangol. I go out for a walk through the bazaar in the dark but there are lots of lights and photos. Then it's back to the hotel for puzzles and bed at 9.30 for another poor night with the hard pillows and bed.

## **Friday March 25 Chittagong**

Eventually I get some sleep and wake up at 5.30 and rise at 6.30 for a shower and breakfast (toast, omelette and a pot of coffee). There is no email from Srimangol.

I'm out at 8.30 to a grey morning which soon turns into a sunny day. I go via the station to check the entrance and then eastwards to Patharghata. It is an interesting and apparently middle class area with a Portuguese church. The grounds are open but the church only from 17.30. I talk to men in the ground about Bangladesh, corruption and emigration. There are plenty of photos to take of cooking, children playing, painted lorries and rickshaws. I then head for Saddarghat and an increasingly industrial and port area with again plenty to see. It's quite a hike to Agrabad firstly through a maze of small streets visiting what appears to be a temple but the fractured English suggests a mosque. As ever, very friendly and hordes of children.

Eventually I overshoot Agrabad, but the map finds the way. Some restaurants are closed but the Silver Spoon on the first floor of the eponymous building is there. I have a pleasant if rather bland meal in comfortable surroundings with half pad thai, half thai veg, fresh fruit salad, water, papaya juice for 710/- including service.

Then there is lots more walking - back along Sheikh Mujib road, over the railway along Tiger pass road with its tiger models (seen yesterday from the CNG). Then I take a diversion along Batali Hill Road to see one of Chitta's 'hills'. It's made of earth and liable to erode with lots of steps up and a gentle road down with courting couples and views over the city. Back on the bustle of CDA Avenue to the King's Confectionery for a reviving green tea with refill and a chocolate brownie in the AC saloon where a couple are celebrating with a cake. Next stop is the Commonwealth War Graves cemetery which is beautifully kept. I meet a couple from Nepal who are studying Engineering in Bangladesh, and a man who follows me in and out, who has to be spoken to 'sharply'. Then I go to the Hindu Kali Temple on Chattiswari Road. The guardian has time to spend with me, talking to me and showing me around; an advantage of so few tourists.

I walk back to the hotel for a shower, laundry and a pot of tea. There is still no email from the tea resort but reception kindly phone them to confirm a room at 2300/-, AC, credit card. Not sure about meals. I have a quiet evening, with bed at 9.30 for better but not brilliant night

## **Saturday March 26 Chittagong to Srimangol.**

I am up at 6.15 for a shower and order a breakfast of omlette, paratha, veg fry and coffee which proves to be too much for the time available. I go to check out at 7.20 in case of delay but it's speedy and I leave for the station across the road at 7.30. The 8.15 metre gauge train is already in. The first class is shabby but roomy; two tier with six seats for daytime use and not AC. The compartment fills up with several young men and an older man and woman. Most are going to Srimangol so it should be easy to know where to get out. The scenery is pleasant but not exciting, with a lot of rice paddy. Progress is steady to Feni where one of the students gets out, and Comilla, but after that we get slower, perhaps because of engineering. We eventually reach Srimangol at 4.30 which is two hours late. There are plenty of opportunities for buying tea and snacks.

The bad news is that there are no tickets on the Monday morning train to Dhaka (the afternoon train is OK but that is due to get in at 10pm), and so it is to the bus office which yields a 250/- AC bus at 10.30 promising a journey time of 3.5 h. A CNG driver offers a ride for 100/- to the Tea Resort but doesn't know the way and heads off in the wrong direction, visiting two other resorts before going back to town and the correct road.

Then the hotel problem: there is a mess up over the booking and the room is still occupied. I'm offered a suite for 4000/- which I decline and **eventually** a bungalow for 2300/- including taxes but not breakfast. I order dinner for eight and breakfast at 7.30. There is certainly plenty of room with beds for four, very efficient AC but also plenty of flies. After several power cuts and a shower I head off to a decent supper of tasty fried rice, good bread and butter, veg curry, ice cream offered, tea and 1.5l water. Back to the bungalow where a man comes with a large insect spray and I fix up my electric mozzie device and spend the evening with reading and diary. Bed is at 9.30 and a rather better night.

### **Sunday March 27 Srimangol**

I wake at 5 and get up at 6.30 for a shower and breakfast at 7.30. Four slices of toast, water, tea, omelette, honey, jam - fine. The grounds are peaceful with a breeze and is relatively cool; the sun comes later. A man from Dhaka whose family were eating last night chats over his tea. I make my preparations in a leisurely fashion and I leave via the office at nine and try to pay. The credit card connection doesn't work and the dollars are at a bad rate. There is an ATM in town and so I opt for cash. It's an easy two to three kilometres along the quiet road. A bus would have cost 5/-.

I find two ATMs and get 6000/- from one and then use a slow Cyber Cafe for 25/- per hour to catch up with the Archers and weather and write a news email. I do a little shopping, visit the PO and station and then out along a road through tea gardens and stop of for '7 level tea' which is tasty, but 70/-? I think that there is a lot of fruit syrup in it. Then there is a lot of walking through the tea gardens and small villages. School seems to be out (Sunday?) with lots of uniformed children around, some whom prove a nuisance. The road through the gardens leads back to the main road and leads than a kilometre back to the resort.

I have a lazy afternoon on the terrace doing this diary, card, reading and a snack. About five I go out for another walk in the opposite direction through various villages and past another resort development, a large block which hopes to be open in 2011. At six I go back to the office to pay but there is no one there, so it's the bungalow for reading, shower and laundry. I 7.30 I manage to pay and have a dinner of rice, veg, lentils and tea. I have the usual evening followed by a poor night with lots of animal and bird noises.

### **Monday 28 March Srimangol to Dhaka**

Up and packing and to breakfast (omelette, toast, bananas, tea) at 7.30 in the morning freshness. There is time to sit on the terrace reading before leaving at 8.45, leaving the key in the room.. I walk to the front gate where I refuse offer of transport and walk into town along the same road as yesterday but busier (Monday?) and warmer (luggage?) via the station and the GPO to post cards. I look for a paper but they are only ones in Bangla. At the bus station there is a confusion over the date but I can ride on the first one out at instead of 10.30. The journey is scheduled for 3.5 hours, but the driver seems to want to better this time. The bus is comfortable and the scenery is much as before with rice paddy, villages and some towns, with a long toll bridge across the River

Meghna. It's only on the entry to Dhaka that we get held up and take almost an hour to get to the centre. I elect to walk to the hotel but the map is not very accurate and it's hard to find the way even with a compass, taking in a footbridge over the railway. The pedestrians' approach seems to be the same as driver; very selfish with little thought for others. I remember this from Bombay. I get to the hotel drenched in sweat but the room is ready and rather better than the previous one, and the AC is better.

I get some OK food sent up (dal, veg, nan and tea) and after a shower I begin to feel humid again. I go to find a bookshop but it's hard to find and is closed (5.30) when I get there. Back at the hotel I use the internet and pay. I have not quite enough cash but a Germany swaps \$5 for me and so I don't need to use a card. I have a pleasant evening in the room until 9pm when loud music starts 'perhaps a wedding' There is no progress in it stopping and so I move to another room ('my' old one) which is warm but soon cools. I can still hear a little but much less and earplugs are surprisingly effective. I get some sleep until 3am and podcast till 4am and then a little sleep till the alarm goes at 4.45 and I get into the taxi.

### **Tuesday March 29 Dhaka to Kolkata**

The taxi leaves at five and the clear roads mean that I am at the cantonment station at 5.25. It is dark and full of insects. Gradually it gets light and others arrive (50+) forming a queue with luggage. Officials start to arrive and start taking passengers at 6.25 (reporting time 5.45). Security is cursory and passport and tickets are checked and I'm shown to my first class compartment with a bench seat for three seated or two sleeping, with a comfortable moquette covering and I turn out to be alone. I take photos on the platform and we leave at 7.35 (TT 7.15) but come to a halt at 7.45, soon restarting. In the 'buffet car' I get a couple of veg cutlets, 4 toasts, 2 tomato ketchups and tea, and then back to my cabin.

The scenery is much the same as yesterday with paddy fields, lots of ponds and goats. The big thing is the bridge over the Jamuna, road and rail, very slowly, with three to four streams with sandbanks between them and presumably all below water in the monsoon. Then we can head SE towards the border and Kolkata. A branch of the Ganges is crossed and lunch is ordered and arrives: rice and two plastic bags of veg curry and one of dal. The coffee I ordered never arrives, but the bill for both meals is only 150/-. At about 1.30 we reach the border and we get out for Bangladeshi 'immigration' which is reasonably speedy and then we can get back on the train, after a total of an hour. Shortly we get out in India for the immigration process which is more protracted and we have to wait in the hall until everyone is processed (IST = BST - 0.5hr; departure is at 4pm, ie a total of 3.5 hrs).

Progress to Kolkata is in stops and starts and I suspect that we are behind a local train, with a final arrival time of 18.18, two minutes early. There is no taxi counter, but a local teacher advises not more than 200/- or meter. I manage to bargain 250/- to 150/- with a young man driving at breakneck speed to drop me near the Fairlawn Hotel. I have a large old fashion room, and after a tepid bath I have a beer (110/-) in the lounge. Laundry to Dhobi (back at 4pm) and bed at 10pm for a decent night.

### **Wednesday March 30 Kolkata**

Waking at 6.15 I go walking on the maidan, with the sun already up, and return for a bath but there still is no hot water and then breakfast. I sit with a mother and daughter from South Africa who warn about not walking alone in the Drakensberg. The mother was born in Germany and the daughter in Orissa. I leave camera at reception, get someone to fix the hot water and am out by 8.30 for a walk, via Eden Park to the GPO for stamps, confirm tickets at Fairlie Place. I

then visit the RC cathedral and have lunch at the Indian Coffee House, with veg cutlets and coffee, exactly the same as on my last visit. I take a tram ride for 4/- to the esplanade and three stops on the metro for 3/- and walk via Elgin Road to Kewpies, where again I have the same excellent lunch as before, this time buying their cookbook.

From there I go to the Crossword bookshop for a couple of novels and Jaywalking in Calcutta, thus sorting out my reading, and walk back with a stop Coffee Day. Here as everywhere the cricket is on (India v Pakistan) and then to Sikkim House to check the arrangements for the pass. They can issue a 15 day pass dated from arrival which is just right. They need passport, photocopies of details and visa, one photo and are open from ten tomorrow morning.

At the hotel they are obliging about keeping a small bag for me while I am in Sikkim, and the large one until the train time. I take a shower and my laundry is returned (120/- for two shirts, pants, socks and trousers. Then it's time for afternoon tea with a pot of tea and cucumber sandwiches in the garden while reading the paper. I go out for photos around the streets and in the south market and 45 mins in an internet cafe for my third email before being pestered to view an emporium. Then it's sorting luggage, showering and bed for a decent night.

### **Thursday March 31 Kolkatta**

I wake at five and am up at 6.15. Maidan walking and back for a bath and breakfast at 7.45 with Porridge, fruit, coffee, toast and a cheese omelette. There are plenty of people to talk to including the couple from South Africa. We talk about Sikkim permits and previous visits. I go out for photocopies and walk around until ten, have a bath and check out leaving the bags and head for Sikkim House to fill in the form for the permits. 'Come back at two' to collect it. I use the metro to the Esplanade to find a number 1 tram heading north but it's slower even than walking because of numerous traffic jams and so I leave before Sealdah station. The best bit is the argument between the driver and the conductor about the route with several passengers getting off at the junction (4/-).

I retrace my steps to Free School Lane but Dosa and More is closed so I eat at the Tung Fong chinese across the road with a lime soda, green tea and decent buffet for 350/-. Then it's time to collect the permit which is ready for me and no charge followed by beer and reading at the hotel. An English couple sit at the next table, from Derbyshire and Yorkshire and I join them for talk and more beer. Out for post cards, internet cafe and back for a not very good supper. I eventually leave at 8.30, leaving my small bag with books and Bangladesh maps and guide with the porter, for the walk to Sealdah which takes about 40 minutes through the teaming streets in 28 ° heat and 100% humidity and I arrive drenched in sweat. I find my way to platform 9B and the train, the Darjeeling Mail, pulls in at 9.45 for the 10.05 departure. My bunk is my favourite longitudinal one and I'm able to make it up before most people arrive, and the coach is not full. After the conductor checks my ticket I settle down for a decent night, gently lulled to sleep by the train.

### **Friday April 1 Karmi Farm**

I wake and doze from five to six and change the bed to seats (no one above) The countryside is coming to life, but it's very grey and hazy. After a few longish stops we get to New Japaiguri at 9.05, an hour late. I make my way along the platform and my driver finds me on the overbridge; he has mistakenly been to the airport and so has only just arrived himself. We're soon on our way after a phone call to Andrew, my host. It's been raining and it is still very grey but the area is familiar from my trip to Darjeeling on the steam train twelve years ago. After an hour or so we start climbing and the NH55 is in turns

impressive and narrow and stony, with two trucks passing with difficulty. We have a brief stop at Kurseong; tea for me and breakfast for the driver. Just before we joined the railway and followed it to Ghum. Apparently after a landslide last monsoon, the railway is suspended between NJP and Kurseong. After another brief stop at Ghum we start the descent to the Chota Rangit River. It's a long winding descent through forest, villages and tea gardens (2300m to 700m), where the plucking has started. We cross the river at Pul Bazaar and go upstream to Bijanbari Bazaar from where we reascend to Jhephi and KArmi at 1800m. The last part is up a very stony track but the 4WD manages it; no ponies needed as suggested in the guide.

There's a warm welcome from Andrew and I have tea on the terrace with two other guests from California who are on a round the world trip; tomorrow they head off for Cambodia. Lunch is reheated for me and Andrew stops and explains the routine. After that I sort out my bag and go out for a walk to the ridge and a Buddhist/Hindu holy spot - the Karmi of the name Karmi Farm. I'm back for a beer (8%) before supper and diary, rest. Supper is dal, several veg dishes, puri, rice and papad. I'm early to bed for a reasonable but episodic night.

### **Saturday April 2 Karmi**

Up at 6.45 and out after a shower. The morning is pleasant but overcast with a cool breeze and a sweater is needed, and I go up to the same spot as yesterday. When I return at 8.30 breakfast is just starting. We have home made bread, pomelo marmalade (which I must try), excellent porridge with honey and banana and tea. I go around taking some photos and the American couple leave. I sit on the veranda until Andrew and I set out for a walk at ten. It's an interesting round up through the forest and over the ridge on the old track to Bijanbari but turn off to the left about half way down. The next part is more or less contouring with lots of small farm with house often with separate kitchens. Often there is newly planted maize, sometimes interplanted with ginger, and covered with dead leaves to deter weeds. We get to a Buddhist temple, in a state of some disrepair and about 200 years old with bright original paintings inside. We have lunch outside sitting on the wall (four chapattis with cooked veg inside and then start back by a different route - first a long gentle zigzagging way but then a short sharp stretch to Karmi and the house at 1.30 for tea on the terrace.

I take a short walk before dark, about 5.45, followed by a shower. I go to supper at 7.30, but the India/Sri Lanka match is on with shrieks coming from the TV room and I eat by myself at eight, followed by bed at nine for a good night.

### **Sunday April 3 Karmi**

I am up at six for a longish walk before breakfast at 8.30. Again it is hazy and warm. A doctor from Darjeeling in connection with the clinic is staying, and he recommends hiking in April for the flowers.

I am out by ten and walk up the tracks of yesterday to a village but turn right up the ridge instead of down towards Bijanbari. I follow a set of paths along the top of the cultivated area along the ridge trying to get to the highest point. But it is in the forest and the tracks degenerate into faint trails through the undergrowth. Eventually I have to retrace my steps and drop the idea of a circuit. The views are different on the way back with slightly better visibility as the morning mist disappears. I am back for lunch at 1.30.



A little later two new clients arrive from working in Delhi with backgrounds in South Africa and England. She is very talkative, and he seems obsessed with his Iphone, and is in telecommunications. I spend a leisurely afternoon on the terrace with a beer and eventually lightning and rain which should clear the air.

Supper and bed for a reasonable but interrupted night.

### **Monday April 4 Karmi**

I wake around five and soon after there's wind and a storm with heavy rain for about two hours. I go out at seven to a much clearer morning with the clouds clearing from the north; the low pressure over southern China is apparently to blame. The views are better, with the Nepali border on the Singali ridge visible at about 3500m unusually with new snow. To the north some of the real mountains are visible 35km away. Back for breakfast and chat. The others go off with Andrew for a walk and I stay around.

### **Tuesday April 5 Karmi to Kalimpong**

I'm up at 6.30 after a poor night for a shower and out for a walk. It's a glorious morning like the best sort of summer's day in the UK with a clear blue sky and warm with good visibility. I walk up the track to the 'field' where there is a glorious view of the mountains to the Tibetan border to the north and the mist above the Greater Ranjit river to the east.

Back at the house I do my packing before breakfast at 8.15, and I sit outside before the car comes and we are away by nine. There is much more detail in the view and the journey is a joy. The first half retraces the route to Ghoom. After half an hour Andre phones the driver saying that I have left my black diary behind. We make several stops for photographs including several of Kachenjunga. It's really quite warm even at Ghoom at 2300m. After that it is a long looping descent through forest and tea gardens with a stop at a view point above the river Tista. The river is down at 200m and feels it. We cross the river on a concrete bridge and begin the ascent including a loop over the road below. Kalimpong is at 1300m and we reach it at 12.45 for a quick check in to an upstairs room in a 'cottage' with inside and outside sitting areas. I have a lunch of bread and soup in the beautiful gardens overlooking the mountain.

I go to the bazaar for a walk around the town which is fairly grotty, and the connections at the internet cafe are down. I go back to the hotel for tea on the terrace after shirt washing and a shower. I take the rest of the laundry to the desk and use the dreadfully slow internet to receive emails. Dinner is at 7.30 and we are all served together in a slick operation. I have veg soup, several Indian veg dishes with pudding and tea; the non veg is 'continental'. Do I want bed tea at 7 and breakfast at 7.30 on the lawn. To bed at nine or a mixed night.

### **Wednesday April 6 Kalimpong**

I am up eventually at 6.30 for a shower and my tea and biscuits on the balcony. It is a sunny, hazy morning with a chill in the air. At 7.30 I have an excellent breakfast on the lawn with apples, bananas, mango juice, porridge, cheese omelette, toast marmalade and instant coffee.

I change and go out to the town at nine. It seems better in the morning air and the market (Wednesday and Saturday) is interesting with fish as well as the usual fruit and veg. I head up to Deolo hill at 1696 compared with the town at 1300m. The town thins out and to keep to the ridge it is a mixture of lanes and steps with well looked after houses and lots of potted (or plastic-bagged) plants. At the very edge of the town is Dr Graham's Home which has increased from 6 to 1300 children where I seem welcome to wander through the grounds. It all seems neat and orderly with lots of boarding houses ('cottages') and a large chapel. I leave the grounds at the top for the steep pull up the winding road, past the forest park (padlocked). Near the top the road joins the main one at the entrance to the 'tourist complex' (5/-, 10/- for hawkers, 50/- for foreigners) which looks less attractive than another peak that I have to myself, with good views to the north. I make my way down, initially along the same route and through the school where there are lots of children milling around at what appears to be lunchtime. I end up along a different route into town, the main road. I pass a couple that I had seen earlier at the hotel (one American, one Canadian) who live in Florida. They are on their way up to the school. Her father had been there as a child. The first internet cafe has no connection but the second is very good and I have very productive 30/- worth.

I get back to the hotel at 2.45 for a rest with the paper. There is wind and some thicker clouds; perhaps rain is on the way. At 3.45 I go out again to Durbin Danda and the Buddhist monastery of Ringkinpong. It is a walk of about an hour and a quarter mostly uphill, to 1424, with the last part through a military complex and a golf course. The last part is confusing and I am led up a short cut by two young monks. The monastery is in a stunning position with 270° views although this evening is hazy but outlines as far as Darjeeling are visible. The sun is approaching the horizon and the clouds and after a quick scout around I return quickly by a different route in the enveloping gloom.

After a beer with nuts on the balcony I go to dinner at 7.30 my laundry having been returned. It is continental veg with mashed potato, cheese, spinach, tomato spaghetti with soup and a sweet and hot chocolate. There is a large German party in for dinner. I have a long chat with the American couple and then bed at 9.45 for another mixed night.

### **Thursday April 7 Kalimpong**

Tea and breakfast as yesterday although the views are more hazy.

I book a car for 2000/- for tomorrow at 10am. At the jeep stand I find one going to Pedong for 30/- and there are just two seats left at the back and so we are soon full and leave. It takes about an hour. For much of the way I can't see much but after a couple get out I am next to the window. Pedang is a pleasant small town with farms including some rice paddy. The Gumpa and monastery are about 15 minutes away from the town; one is small and the other is more elaborate. There are ceremonies with horns and drums but no photography is allowed inside. From the monastery I can get back to the road and begin the ascent along the road that the jeep came down. It winds through villages and forestry with hazy views, climbing 300m in 6km before getting to ridge at Algarah, a rather less attractive small town. The descent to Kalimpong is 600m in 15km. Initially it's along the main road for two kilometres but even this doesn't have much traffic. Then there is a smaller parallel road which stays higher up the valley side and is initially level and is extremely pleasant. En route I meet the American couple again. They are walking up from the school to Deolo Hill. I arrange to have a beer with them at six.

By now there are plenty of children on their way home from school; a surprising number say 'give me ten rupees'. Soon I join yesterday's route and arrive in town for a brief visit to the internet cafe after which it's back to the hotel for newspaper, shave and shower. I go to the terrace but am plagued by insects. The American couple's citronella spray helps and we compare notes of the day over drinks.

Dinner at 7.30 with Chinese vegetarian, again with soup and sweet and HC. Room and bed by nine for a rather better night.

### **Friday April 8 Kalimpong to Gangtok**

Awake at five and up by 6.30 to a sunny but very hazy day. Tea arrives at seven, tips and breakfast with the Americans at 7.30 as before on the lawn, but warmer. I believe that the coffee isn't instant. I spend the rest of the time, reading, walking and paying the bill (1700/- for meals, drinks and internet. The car arrives promptly at ten and we're away.

We go back down to the valley and then right along the Tista. It doesn't seem as picturesque as the guide suggests but it is very hazy. The checkpoint at Rangpo, the border for Sikkim, takes about ten minutes and then we are underway. We leave the Tista at 350m and start ascending to Gangtok at 1800m. 11km of road works impede progress and it is about 1pm by the time we reach Gangtok and the Sonam Delek. There is a mix up about the booking - three nights in a standard room with no window which I refuse. Eventually I settle for a medium room with no balcony. I have an OK lunch of Thai veg curry, rice, banana fritters and chocolate sauce.

I go out for the internet (SD, Vacation Agents in Delhi) sim card, information re bus to Siliguri, Jeep to Rumtek (7.30 tomorrow). I then go to Hidden Forest hotel which looks much better for 2 or 3 nights on my return to Gangtok. Back up in town I visit the bookshop and get a bottle of beer and opener. Back in the room there is no hot water and so I change to another room. Sleep is OK to 4am and then podcasts.

### **Saturday April 9 Gangtok**

Not the best of days! I am out of bed at 5.45 and ready for the 6.30 breakfast order which arrives at 6.40 after prompting. It's good when it arrives: banana porridge, TBJ, cheese omelette and a pot of coffee. I leave at 7.05 but at the jeep stand there is jeep before 10am, and so I hire a taxi for 1000/- (on the high side?) to include 3 hours waiting time. It's a very pleasant ride to the Rumteck monastery; down the main road, down to the river and up the other side. Some of the road is very rough with loose cobbles.

At the monastery my passport and permit are checked by armed guards. The monastery is splendid and colourful and there are ceremonies in progress with drums, chanting and rice thrown in the sumptuous hall, but no photos inside. After looking around I go back down the drive and walk along the road away from Gangtok. It is a good level road with reasonable views apart from the haze and another monastery, seeing the taxi driver en route. I go back to the car for the return at 11.30. There is another man in the car, a cousin. We have to take a longer route back 'because of road works' but I think it is to drop the cousin home. Do I want to inside? but I'm wanting to get back. We then pick up three girls and eventually get back at 12.40.

At the tourist office 'it's a holiday today and tomorrow, and must book for Yucom for tomorrow for 170/- at 7am. I try for lunch at Masala, South Indian but it's only open from 4 to 7pm (I'll go back) and some shopping before I go back to the hotel for a rest.

I go out for a walk, but rain threatens. I go up to a flower display (10/-) with lots of orchids, and then up many steps to Enchey monastery. The rain comes heavily for about a quarter of an hour, and then I walk back by another route to MG Marg and the Masala but they have no S Indian. I go to the Mandarin for a fairly dire meal, and then to an internet cafe and the hotel to pay the bill and retrieve my laundry.

I'm in bed by nine for a reasonable sleep until four. There's a substantial storm with plenty of rain, lightning and thunder.

### **Sunday April 10 Gangtok to Yuksom**

I take a shower and out by six to the jeep stand by the long steps. The jeep, as identified by the registration mark, is there and others gather until it is driven around to the departure area, the luggage is loaded onto the roof and nine passengers are installed, and we leave at 7.20 instead of 7am. I have the prime seat number one, by the window at the front. There is a strong smell which turns out to be kerosene leaking from a can on the roof. The route starts out down the main road as far as Singtam, through the town instead of crossing the river and across another bridge by the works for a new hydro electric scheme. After a little along the river we do long looping curves up the mountain side and gently across to Ravang La at 2040m.

It's a beautiful morning, pleasantly warm with better visibility after the heavy rain. Just after the pass we stop for 20 mins at a cafe for tea and huge views including some of snowy mountains, although they are partially covered by clouds. The journey continues to be spectacular, winding down the wooded hill sideturning right before reaching Legship. It's a deep gorge with a long suspension bridge which has loosish metal plates, The river is at 598m and many zig zags take us up Tashiding at 1470m but almost looking down at the bridge. Some passengers leave and the jeep becomes more comfortable. For quite a while the way contours around the hillside and only in the last 10km do we zig zag up to Yuksom at 1800m. There are various guesthouses catering for trekkers starting or finishing trecks and two hotels, one of which is the Tashigang where I have a room reserved. The large room with a balcony is 1320/- for single occupancy. The dining room is empty but I get lunch with wild fern curry, local cheese in a red sauce with a rice beer. These Sikkim specialities are OK but not very special.

After a spell on the balcony I go out for a walk around the village and environs but it is overcast and rains intermittently. Back at the the hotel there is a power cut after last night's storm. After several false starts the power is returned and I have a pot of tea with biscuits in the room. After a quiet evening I go to bed at nine. It is quite cold and I have a quilt for the decent night, spoiled only by barking dogs.

### **Monday April 11 Yuksom**

I listen to podcasts from five to six and then I go out for a walk. It is much clearer after yesterday's rain, and half the sky is clear and two snow peaks can be seen from my balcony. I go up the road and left to the throne in the woods where the first king was crowned in 1641, the beginning of the kingdom of Sikkim. It's very peaceful at this time of day before I go back to the hotel for a shower and laundry.

I go to breakfast at 7.30 in the garden to find the three Canadian ladies that I last saw in Calcutta. We have a pleasant breakfast together, comparing notes as to where we've been and are going. Breakfast is Juice, instant coffee, porridge and a very tasty puri bhaji. I leave the laundry to dry on the balcony and head off to the tourist info where there is a friendly soul with a Swiss godson - he shows me the photos and a book about Swiss mountain huts - who draws me a map of how to walk to the Dhubdi monastery. It is up a cobbled path with several 'rest sheds'. The Canadian ladies are just in front of me with their guide, and on the way up a procession of monks and their followers passes with their drums and horns.

The monastery is small, old and at a lovely spot at the end of a low ridge. Beyond it is a faint path along the ridge to a farm and a better path up the hill. But it peters out and I realise that I'm just making my way through the forest and I reluctantly turn back. Eventually I find another path to an alp and then to the road which crosses the monastery path higher up. I take the road in a long looping descent to the village that I visited yesterday, and then back to the hotel for tea, where the ladies are just finishing and going to throne. I find that I missed orchids on the trees along the road and so after a time on the balcony, where the laundry is dry, I head back up the road and see the orchids on several trees, and indeed on the way back I notice that there are about four such trees on the cobble path.

Reading on the balcony, shower, supper with the ladies (Chinese veg, chow mien, HC). Bed at nine, reasonable.

## **Tuesday April 12 Yucsom**

Wake at four and then five and out at 6.45 for a short walk before a leisurely breakfast in the garden at 7.25 with the ladies: juice tea, porridge, puri bhaji. Then more attempts to get a room in Pelling. The hotel that they were at doesn't have a room. Eventually I get a room at a hotel owned by the same people as the present one, and two nights in Rabang La, and so that's all the nights accounted for.

It seems to be too late to go to the Hongri Monastery (closing time) and so I hike up the valley along the beginning of the trekking route. It is mostly a good path, but with some scree sections and two suspension bridges. The weather has clouded over with a few spots but it is very pleasant in the deep, wild valley. I make my way back and spend time chatting to a man from California, Darren, who is on his way back from a very wet trek. The rain gets heavier and I shelter when I can, We have thunder and lightning; various people shelter but go off in the pouring rain. I wait for a lull and with my umbrella manage to get back without getting too wet. I'm back at the hotel at 2.30 for laundry, shower and a beer in the lobby and Darren joins me for conversation about books and American politics. A party of Japanese arrive and I'm determined to get supper before them, soon after six. A very hot Veg Jalfrezi, dal, chapattis.

Back to the room for a mixed night - somewhere I have picked up a lot of insect bites.

## **Wednesday April 13 Yucsom**

I wake early and am up by 6.15 - shower and out and to breakfast by 7.20 on the lawn. The Japanese are already eating inside and so service is slow. - tea, TBJ, juice and cheese omelette. The porridge never appears. Darren joins me and we have leisurely breakfast until almost 8.30. I get ready and first to the tourist office for another hand drawn map (with rubber stamp) and I'm on the trail by nine. With a warning about leeches I set off from the TO on a boggy

short cut through the forest. The main track is paved and I hit the first bridge over a river. After this the route is a delight, mostly gently rising but with some short sharp ascents and descents. There is always someone to help when the direction is unclear. There are forest stretches, villages and another suspension bridge with attractive pools and suitable picnic places.

Mostly the route is clear, but at one junction I have to wait until someone arrives as both possibilities look equally likely. A family arrives with a guide and two dzos. They are staying at the guest house of the monastery and think that my walk is ambitious. Their parents are from Colorado, living in Bangkok. The children look Thai. I end up following them, including a short cut across the fields as the animals continue on the track. The monastery is similar to the others but in a stunning position overlooking the valley. The clouds have arrived and there is a rumble of thunder, and so I decide to return more or less straight away, with thoughts of yesterday (arrival 11.40, departure 12.00) following the main track all the way back. Soon children are asking for 10/-, the views are good and the sun returns. The difference in temperature from sun to clouds is significant, but I don't need the sweater and jacket that I've brought. I'm back at the hotel by 2.30 for a lunch of Tibetan Noodles and beer. The clouds come and go and it's pleasant eating on the lawn.

After a relaxing afternoon on the balcony I go to the Coronation site where the room with the giant prayer wheel is open. From there there is a path to the main bazar and along the road to the school and up the hill opposite where the children are playing cricket. The view again is huge and there is just a hint of sunset in the clouds.

Back at the hotel I have supper at seven with Darren and plates of Veg Chow Mein, Sweet and sour Veg and HC. I settle my bill (7250/-) pack and bed.

### **Thursday April 14 Yucsom to Pelling**

After a mixed night I'm up at 5.30 for a shower and out by 6.15 for the jeep which arrives as planned at 6.30 for the 70/- ride. There are various pick ups and waits before an interesting journey in the morning sun with the front seat again. I'm dropped in front of the Hotel Phamrong at 8.30 for check in and a breakfast of juice, coffee, masala omelette, TBJ.

After unpacking I go out for a wander with 10000/- from a cash machine and then towards the monastery at the eastern end of the ridge as the clouds gather. It is about 3km along the road through the forest towards Gezing. I pass stupas and the Mount Pandin hotel which is in a superb position but doesn't look anything special from the outside. The monastery is special, not from the outside but very elaborate on the inside on three levels with plenty of artefacts on top. There are lots of murals some of which are covered for preservation. There is a school with the young monks running around. Apparently there is a puja on Saturday at 8am I'm recognised by a guide with a couple I last met at Rumtek monastery. Back down the road filter coffee is offered but they don't have any. In the town a tourist office offers a jeep to Ravangla at 8.30 so I book a seat for Sunday (number 1 again). The internet cafe has no connection. I check out the shops but there isn't much although I get some post cards and a beer (50/- instead of 41/-). I return to the hotel in a heavy shower to drink the beer as the clouds clear and the mountains gradually appear until everything is clear.

I go out for a walk up to the helipad where several people are watching the sunset and the effect on the mountains, but the angle means that there isn't much colour. Back in town the second internet cafe has room for me with a good connection but 50/- per hour. There are plenty of emails after four days, including one from the solicitors with provisional sale details.

I have supper back at the hotel, where there is a party in about to go trekking and so only veg fried rice and dal are available. I later join them for a chat and a beer. Not a bad night.

### **Friday April 15 Pelling**

At first light the mountains are clearly visible and gradually the sun lights them up. I am in and out of bed taking photos. I get up finally at 6.30; there is a hiatus with hot water but I shower and get breakfast at 7am, as before. I am out by 8.30 to a warm sunny morning and I head up to Sanga Choelling monastery along a steep zig zag track and pass the trekking party coming back from a sunrise trip. There's a big bulldozing job with concrete blocks and I manage to miss the monastery, but it is a good walk along the ridge through the forest. There are rhododendrons but I see none in flower. The path is narrow but quite clear with a good surface. After a couple of kilometres or so there is an area which someone has tidied up, and from there there is a gentle descent on a wide path to a pass with several paths. I choose one to the right so that at the bottom I can take the road up to Pelling. The path descend through the wood with twists and turns and some steep muddy sections (I slip only once) and about half way down I reach an alp with six or seven cows and two men on a little muddy shelf. They make sure that I get onto the right path which is still muddy but improving. At the bottom there is another hut with cows but no herder, and path crosses the river and more or less contours along a disused drainage channel, through small farms to a village (Darap?). It has several small resorts, shops, jeeps and is on the road.

The road rises gently but steadily around the hillside all the way back to Pelling, climbing about 500 to 600m. After a few spots of rain it is now again sunny and humid and there are few rest sheds. There is a little traffic and a few road workers; after about an hour I reach Pelling at 1pm. I take a a modest (scale and quality) lunch in the dungeon with veg sweet corn soup, mutter panir and roti.

I spend an hour or so in the room and out again at about four, when it starts to rain. The first internet has no connection and the second fails after five minutes. Apparently it fails when it rains. Back in the hotel there is a gloomy outlook and no power. Eventually the power returns and after that the TV signal. There is heavy rain, lightning and thunder, but towards dark the clouds start to clear over the mountains. I go early to bed for a decent night.

### **Saturday April 16 Pelling**

I wake by four, start to watch the dawn with a cloudless sky at 4.45 and at 5.30 am out to a beautiful, clear sunny morning. I wander up to the helipad where boys are playing football. I take several photos with plenty of people around looking at the view. Back at the hotel I have a shower and breakfast at 6.30 as before.

There is no laundry. I go out to the Permayangste monastery for the supposed Puja at 8am but it never materialises' On the way I call in at Mount Pandin hotel to see about lunch (yes, at one). It looks a lovely place; I should have treated myself and stayed there. The monastery is peaceful and with better views than Thursday with all the peaks visible. At 8.30 with no Puja I go back to and down the road and along the winding, paved path with amusingly encouraging notices, to the ruined palace of Rabdantse, which is a little difficult to find. The ruins are heavily restored but beautifully kept and landscaped. Again the location is 'heavenly'. My walk back to the hotel is leisurely, and again there is no laundry; it's still dirty under the counter. I have a long discussion with the manager and it is promised for three hours (no), and then eight hours.

I have another try for the Sanga Choelling. This time I see it in advance and take the correct, unsigned, turning, for more delights. I go to the Mount Pandin, via my hotel, where Mr and Mrs Squire, the manages, he from Reading and she from Darjeeling are very welcoming. The buffet for 700/- with fresh Lime Soda and mineral water is decent. I take a walk around the garden and am shown a room and a suite which are very good (they could have offered me a deal if I had phoned directly, with Indians given the valley views). I take an email address and promise (Oh dear) photographs of Salisbury Road in Reading where he was born. I'm offered more tea but I return to Pelling where there is no power and therefore no internet. I read and write postcards, and go out twice to check internet; OK at five with the generator on. The laundry boy 1km away will bring the laundry. The power comes on and so I can watch the TV. Packing, laundry, pay bill, and a reasonable night.

### **Sunday April 17 Pelling to Ravang La**

I am awake by five to the view of the mountains, but rather more hazy with no rain last night. I am out at six to a beautiful morning, and then to breakfast at 6.30 but it is a slow start at seven and after finishing packing I'm at the jeep stand at eight, and leave at 8.30.

We start with few people but do a lot of picking p and setting down. At Geyzing the driver has to make a delivery and I have to leave the jeep and see my luggage disappearing; I check the registration number. In the twenty minutes I have a look around the Gomba and even shake the hand of the chief Lama. Back on the jeep we make long loops down to the valley at Ranjit at 500m. The climate and the vegetation are very different; it is hot and humid with Jacaranda and Poinsettia in evidence near Ligship. We go over a colourful bridge and start the long zigzag back up via Keozing to Rabangla at 2040m, along the route of last Sunday. I arrive in Rabangla at 10.45 and am dropped outside the hotel, the Maenemla. I check in and confirm the price of 1500/- without breakfast for a decent large room with a small balcony. A do a little food shopping and then order a lunch of Sweetcorn soup, Bengal Veg Khichuri (Thali) with popadom, a risotto-like rice dish and veg curry. It's very good.

I go out for a walk around, including a visit to the giant Buddha being constructed. I find the trail to the MAenan Ph. They say that I must have a guide (500/-) from seven. Back in the bazar I take a walk along a quiet country road, but the views are very hazy and then to a slow cyber cafe. In the hotel I have a snack of tea and pakora, and find that the geysir is leaking and so I change to the room next door which is a corner room which is better. In reception I speak to a man from Calcutta who is here with his family. He is interesting and friendly and has restaurant recommendations for Calcutta. He is Mr Bhowmik with IBM and is taking a short holiday with his parents and family.

I have a quiet evening in the room, go to bed before nine with several awakenings. The ceiling is surreal with luminous stars, etc.



## **Monday April 18 Rabangla**

It's raining early and later there is a lot of clouds and mist, and I decide to forget Maenen Peak. At 6.30 I have my breakfast of tea, omelette and TBJ and at 7.30 go for a walk along the road towards Damthang and Namchi with a detour to the Tibetan community. The road is pleasant, with new rhododendrons planted on the verge. The weather is cool and mostly overcast with none of the promised views. There's a small village but no other habitation, and I return back along the same road for a total of about 16km.

I order breakfast for 12 (Kashmiri potato curry, dal fry and roti, small but tasty with fruit juice and biscuits. At two there is heavy rain and thunder and lightning. Afterwards I walk in the opposite direction but again there is rain and I return in about an hour for a pot of tea, a shower and a quiet evening. At sunset the weather clears and the mountains are visible. I pay the bill (3550/-, which I feel is OK) and have a reasonable night.

## **Tuesday April 19 Rabangla to Gangtok**

I am up to a bright morning and breakfast arrives at 7.05, with the rest of the carton of juice from yesterday, Cheese omelette, TBJ and a pot of milky coffee. I am out by eight as my jeep arrives and I have seat #3, and my rucksack is on the roof with a cupboard. We retrace the route to Gangtok, starting at 8.30 with a twenty minute stop en route. It gets warmer and the route is familiar. When we climb back to Gangtok it doesn't seem cooler, and it's about 25 in Gangtok.

I head to the tourist office, but they don't book tours. One of the agents in the guide book says he may be able to book a jeep to Changgu Lake, but lots are in use for the election, and it would cost 3000 to 3500/-. He says that he will ring later (I ring him and there is no news so I cancel). After buying another novel and a paper and then go to the hotel via the GPO having to ask directions several times.

A visit to the bus station tells me that there is no bus to NJP and Siliguri sounds a bit iffy. I arrive at the hotel at about twelve where I have a very good room with a terrace and have an excellent lunch for 250/-, followed by tea on the terrace. Clouds are gathering and there are a spots of rain. After handing in laundry I walk to the jeep station for NJP where they tell me that there is one about 12, taking about four hours for 160/-. I'm tempted to look into the price of a taxi.

By the time I get to the ropeway the last car has left (70/-) and so I get a shared taxi to MG Marg (10/-). I buy some Sikkim tea, and go to the internet cafe as the rain starts. It doesn't do much and I walk back to the hotel, having to ask only once. I am in time for a shower before dinner at 7pm, another excellent meal followed by HC. I talk extensively with a couple from Western Australia who spend six months a year travelling. They have been to China, on the train to Lhasa and then by road to Nepal. Next they go to Bhutan. Also there is an English couple with teenage boys, and an American family.

The room with TV followed by a mixed night.

## **Wednesday April 20 Gangtok**

Rest Day  
Excellent breakfast  
Reading on terrace  
Trip into town, shared taxi  
Cash machine  
Bookshops  
Hotel (share taxi)  
Lunch  
Hand in laundry  
Reading, beer  
Dinner with plenty of company  
Changg

**Thursday April 21** Gangtok to NJP (car), overnight train to Calcutta

Overnight at Fairlawn, flight to LHR