

Wednesday, October 31

Clive comes over in the afternoon and joins Eva and Audrey for their Halloween party. Helen is also visiting and the Baileys flows freely. I do the inline check in 24 hours before the flight. Clive and I attempt to finish the bits and pieces at home the rest go into the freezer. Helen comes round and offers a lift to Heathrow; I say that she can take me to the bus station in her hire car.

Most of the packing is done and I have a poor night and an upset stomach.

Thursday, November 1

Clive rings at 6:30 to wish a happy holiday it could only be CC at that time and there is an email from Peter Gibson wishing bon voyage. I make the last preparations and ask Helen if the lift to the airport is still possible it becomes more attractive! At 11 AM we meet with Eva coming for the ride and to visit Marks and Spencers food shop. Helen begins to panic as she can't start the car but eventually she does and it takes just 30 minutes to Heathrow. So I arrive at 11:30 for the 1515 flight. But the stories of huge queues are unfounded; it takes 20 minutes for bag drop and just 10 minutes for security. There is therefore lots of time for a newspaper and my book. We board on time but it's an hour before we take off for a smooth flight. My pre-ordered Asian Veg meal arrives as predicted before the standard meals with sag paneer, Gin and tonic and red wine.

Again I get not much sleep but decent radio programs are available on the sound system.

Friday, November 2

Breakfast is served at 4:30 local time and landing at about 530 instead of 455. It is easy to get off and get through immigration but it is a long time for my rucksack to be offloaded. I have no luck at the cash machine so change £80 in cash. I think about a bus which is due in half an hour but get a taxi for Rs.230 to the hotel. Luckily the room is available so I have a bath and breakfast in the hotel with juice, paratha, coffee and yoghurt.

Another attempt with the cash machine is not successful so I leave about 930 heading towards Hamujan's Tomb on foot. It is a warm humid and hazy morning. I pass the centrepont hotel which is now closed where I stayed the last time I was in Delhi by my self. After India gate I eventually divert to Purana Qila (the old fort) which is Rs.100 with lots to see and is fairly peaceful. There are plenty of courting couples.

Hi then head back towards Hanuman s Tomb. I tried to phone the hotel in Dalhousie without success. Hanuman's Tomb Rs.250 and probably worth it. It has been beautifully restored, kept and landscaped. I take about an hour to see everything and then sit and admire it. The gardens even have water in the channels; Char Bargh, four gardens in quarters. I get the bus back to

Conaught Circus for eight rupees. I try the debit card several times and eventually it is barred. I find a machine which takes my MasterCard credit card and hope the rate isn't too high. I go back to the hotel for a bath and then to the Kwaliti restaurant which has decent food and draught beer. There are several Westerners and some Indians in the restaurant. I go back to the hotel and am in bed soon after eight. The room is windowless but with plenty of mirrors and quite pleasant.

Saturday, November 3

I woke up twice but got plenty of sleep in spite of the apparent building work in the next room. It is after eight when I get up! After a bath I have breakfast with scrambled egg, toast and coffee. I pack and leave my large bag in the luggage room and then go to the Metro. I go to the end of the line for Rs.11 and then back to the Civil Lines for eight rupees and walk through the well to do suburbs, park and onto the ridge. There are lots of people walking and sitting and I head south and pass various monuments on my way to the Asoka column which has been broken and re erected. I then go to the Victory Monument now redesignated to commemorate Indians who suffered in 1857. I am watched by policeman who advise me to move on as it is a dangerous area. After the peace of the parkland and scrub land it was quite a shock to get back into the typical Indian street and walk back via Christ Church which turns out to be an active Methodist church.

Then there is more walking through the streets. There are many schoolchildren and Saturday morning school still seems to be the order. I then go to the Maidens hotel for lunch by myself. I have soup, appetiser, buffet with lots of sweets, beer, coffee and a tip for Rs.1300. It is leisurely and cool but there are too many waiters and too much attention. From the Civil Lines Metro I spend eight rupees to get to Chandni Chowk. I walk around there accompanied by a teacher and then to the spice market and through streets to New Delhi station where I confirm all the tickets at the international bureau. I must complain to Shankar as my age is recorded as 65! I then go back to the Hotel Alka along Chelmsford Road for hot chocolate before retrieving my bag and walk back to the station. To newly arrived Westerners were lost and wanted the Janpath. I arrive at New Delhi station in plenty of time. The train from Mumbai is half an hour late and it is easy to find the coach which is not full. An ex steam engine driver is travelling part of the way; he is 68 but looks 10 years younger. I have the veg meal for Rs.45 not change is not forthcoming for the Rs.50 note. I get not much sleep as there are lots of comings and goings and lots of stops. An MP3 player would be very welcome!

Sunday, November 4

The attendant much wanted tips! The train arrives 1 1/2 hours late at about 745. The car and driver was waiting as arranged. I have breakfast in garden with fresh fruit, coffee, toast and a cheese omelette. I make phone calls to Dalhousie and Dharamsala about accommodation and

do laundry and take a shower.

After some reading in the garden I set out to explore. About 30 minutes walk gets me to the station and then through the confusing city centre. I get to a temple which is similar to the layout of the Golden Temple but not quite right and is certainly not as impressive as expected. I eventually find that it isn't. Nevertheless it is worth exploring and then I find the real Golden Temple after many enquiries; I was way out. I eventually get to the Jallianwallah Bagh where the memorials to the massacre are much in evidence with lots of school parties. Hi then go to the Golden Temple taking my shoes and socks off but my sun hat is good enough to cover my head. It is much more impressive and there are many more people though with very few westerners. It seems very friendly and I take lots of photographs with the sun almost setting with good reflections of the gold covering. I sit and watch for a while and then back to retrieve my shoes, buy postcards and head back to the hotel which takes exactly an hour by the direct route stopping only to buy water. I find when I arrive back that there is another person, Gloria, who wants to go to the flag ceremony tomorrow so we can share expenses. After a shower I go to dinner which is soup, two curries, dal, rice, roti, beer and Guava and cream; far too much! Gloria arrives and joins me; she snacks, and is from Chiswick although originally from Colombia.

I go to bed but have a poor night having eaten too much. I eventually sleep and wake at 8:15.

Monday, November 5

I go to a breakfast of toast fruit porridge and coffee. Gloria is already there but seems piqued when her breakfast arrives after mine and she rushes off. After a leisurely interval it's off to the Ram Bagh where there is a museum and is about 3 km along the road. There is an enclosed area of neat gardens which costs Rs.10 but it is closed although the timings suggest it should be open. The museum that I find is closed for renovation. The gardens are quite extensive with some buildings but is largely neglected. I gave up on the museums and head for the post office where helpful staff weigh Christmas cards (Christmas for Margaret and birthday for Clive) at Rs.25 and I also buy postcard stamps for eight rupees. Then it's back to Mrs Bhandari's for a lunch of cheese omelette, veg pakora and tea. I spend the afternoon reading in the garden.

At 3:30 Gloria and I depart for Wagga for the flag ceremony. We have a small white air-conditioned car which costs Rs.950 between the two of us. After a slightly delay we set off for the 40 minute drive through the Cantonment and outskirts of Amritsar passing various splendid looking schools and colleges and then through the open farming country with occasional villages. There are lots of people heading our way in cars buses and rickshaws. At Wagga the stands are beginning to fill up even more than an hour before the ceremony. There are soldiers in full dress uniform, including plumes, marshalling the crowds and generally being photographed. We find a spot on the terraces with nearly all Indian families and some youth groups and just a few westerners. Various people, mostly children and students, run in twos to the border and back with Indian flags. In the meantime the regimental Sgt major leads lots of clapping and chanting including Hin du stan with Pak i stan from the other side although there

seem to be fewer people there. With the political problems, yet again, perhaps they have more important things to think of. Eventually soldiers strut in pairs to the gates to engage with their opposite numbers and then the flags come down and the gates close. There is still lots of chanting and applause and then the people begin to melt away. We find our car and, surprisingly quickly given the mass of vehicles, are on our way, this time through the dark countryside getting back at about 630. We decide to head for the Golden Temple for sunrise tomorrow and arrange a rickshaw for 615 at Rs.100. Then it's a shower and that for a small snack of stewed Guava and cream with hot chocolate. I have a reasonably early night but I am not set to IST so it is a long time before sleep comes.

Tuesday, November 6

The alarm is set for 550 and after a quick shower I am out to the auto. It's beginning to get light but there is not quite so much traffic on the road so it's a great journey. We walk around the tank and queue for the temple for lots more photographs including the rising sun over the water and eventually it lights up the gold. Then it's in search of breakfast. Most places are still closed so we walk through the old town over the railway to the Airline Hotel which does an American breakfast for Rs.415 with juice, porridge, scrambled eggs, toast and coffee. Then it's more walking to the MK hotel for coffee and an early lunch of masala dosa which is excellent and cheap. We take a cycle rickshaw back to the hotel for a leisurely afternoon and evening. There is a glass of beer and a chat to Gloria. I pay the bill with a credit card and order breakfast and a rickshaw to the bus stand for 815.

Wednesday, November 7

I'm up at 6.30 and after shower and packing get breakfast (porridge and toast). The rickshaw arrives at 8.20 for the 15 mins to the bus stand, which is rather confusing but I find the stand for the 9.15 to Dalhousie. I'm taken in hand by the staff and put in the front before the bus gets to the stand. It departs on time, but is very slow through Amritsar picking up until full. We make better progress through the countryside, using the very loud and persistent horn. We go through several towns before arriving in Pattankot where most people get out and another lot get in. There is a fifty minute stop. We negotiate a road building site and then the road starts climbing, gently at first, and then in earnest with lots of zig zags and contouring of hillsides. Apart from the boy next to me being sick (bananas) it's a pleasant journey, arriving in Dalhousie at 4.45. The bus stops very near to the hotel, the Grand View. They're expecting me and have a room for just three nights of the five that I would like. Also it's a suite at 3000/-. It has a bath and separate shower in one room, and then in the other two rooms a double bed, two TVs, three armchairs, two sofas, ... I go out to get snacks and beer and then to the dining room where a birthday party seems just to be finishing. I have a modest dinner and back to the room. After a little reading and listening I go to bed for a good night's sleep.

Thursday, November 8

I'm up at seven for a bath and breakfast at 7.45. I another single, Gillian who is India for months, to join me. It turns out that she and another (Barbro from Sweden) have booked a guide and taxi for a day walk and I agree to join them, meeting at 9.15. Breakfast is fine with porridge, eggs, toast, juice and coffee.

I hurriedly get my things together and meet at Tagore Chowk and start walking. The usual confusion - Is the taxi included? We agree 300 each for the guide and share 400 for the taxi to start at Lakhmandi. The walk is along tracks and paths through very pleasant Deodar woods to Kaladop where there is a simple resthouse and tea shop. After that it's up to the top of the hill a shrine and a pavilion being built. Unfortunately the views are very hazy. Then it's via various paths, tracks and roads back to Ghandi Chowk. Gillian needs a taxi back but Barbro and I walk back and settle the bill. I make enquiries about buses (9.15 to Chamba, 7 to Dharamsala are the convenient ones). After a bath it's time for dinner. Gillian joins me and we share mixed veg, dal, rice and bread. Then she shows me the room in Kumar's hotel which I book for Saturday and Sunday night (660). Beer and Bed.

On Friday, November 9 Diwali

It is a poor night and I wake many times. I have breakfast at eight with Gillian joining me and with porridge, baked beans on toast, coffee and juice. Then I asked if I want masala dosa from the buffet which is fine, although it makes a large breakfast. It's farewell to Gillian and then I have a bit of a rest and then go out to explore: Subhash Chowk, Catholic church, Court Road circuit, The Mall, Garan Sarah, Subhash Chowk and home. I spend lots of time on the terrace sitting in the sun and reading. I have a snack for lunch consisting of pakora and tea. When the sun goes and after a panic about the keys I go for a walk back to Ghandi Chowk by the lower (Lajpat) Road and along the road to Subhash Baoli and further. There are small villages, terraced fields, with plenty of people on the road with lots of greetings. It seems that no turnings are available so it's a return in the same way. It is beautiful and the sun has got round to touch the way on the return. The views across the valley are very limited. I go back via Garam Sarah, check the bus Times and then to the hotel. Hi settle on the terrace with beer for the last of the light and then go inside for reading. I go to bed but it is noisy and my stomach is a little upset giving another poor night.

Saturday, November 10

I am up at 6:30 for a bath, start my packing and go to reception for my laundry: it will come to the dining room which it does for 110/-. I have a breakfast of apple juice, toast, porridge, cheese omelette and coffee. I finish packing and pay my bill 10,389/-!, which includes Rs.900 luxury tax.

I use a credit card but there is a delay on the telephone connection.

I take my luggage to Kumar's hotel and will check in this afternoon. I get the 930 bus to Chamba for Rs.35. It is an excellent route; the first part through the forest to Kajjjar 'little Switzerland' where a lot of people get off. This takes an hour and then it is another hour and a half zigzagging down the mountains to Chamba. More and more people get in from villages as we approach the town. The bus crosses the river Irevati or Ravi, on a new bridge alongside the old suspension bridge and zigzags up to the town which is on the north side of the valley (not the south as in guide book and I don't see it as Italianate).

It is much warmer than Dalhousie and full of sun. I find the maidan with lots of cricket games and a rather splendid promenade overlooking the river and visit two temples. I get the glue I need to stick stamps on but can't find any post cards in the town. It's up steps to another temple way above the town with excellent views and I contour round the hillside and back to the bus stand and by the Maidan. I go to the Museum which isn't really worth the 50/- and they wanted another hundred for camera which I declined. I go to the Irevati view Café for tea, and it lives up to its name. The full set turns out to be CC tea a large pot, strong and with leaves. I had to rush out for the 3.30 bus which is already full when I get on at 3.15: it costs 35/- to Baniker and then there is a connecting bus 5 to Tagore Chowk. I have to stand for half an hour but then get a seat for the other hour and a half, first on the wrong side and then overlooking the valley by an open window which is good for photos. The sun has set at Baniker, but the bus is waiting and arrives at Dalhousie at 6 PM. I get into the hotel and then back to the Grand View for dinner of Palak Paneer, Paratha, rice pudding and lime soda. Hot chocolate is 'not possible'. I go back to the room where there is a lot of noise which is a bad sign but it stops later. I watch TV with Palin's Himalaya in India and at Attenborough on climate change. At about 1030 I go to bed for a reasonable night although I wake at six finally.

Sunday, November 11

I shower and order breakfast from room service which is slow the breakfast is modest and the porridge never appears. I leave at 8:45 ready to catch the 930 bus as yesterday but this time to Kajjjar. I mosey around that meadow taking photos of the yellow footpath sign pointing to Switzerland and head back up the road. The weather is sunny as ever with rather better visibility and some snow peaks have appeared but hazily. I make good progress bettering 4 km even though some of the road is quite steeply up hill. It's about 500 m and 12 km to the pass at Lahkamund and then of course the downhill starts. I make a stop in the sun for biscuits and water and it's quite warm but the air temperature is quite low perhaps 12°. I make the same detour as we did on Friday through the woods and alongside the water pipes and back to the road. I bypass the Dhaba and continue down the road for another 10 km and get the MP3 player out. I have a quick look along the Mall at Upper Bakrota and then go down the main road to the GPO, Subhash Chowk and the hotel. I enjoy the sun in the room but it soon gets cold as it goes down and I read and watch TV with Palin again. I feel tired and perhaps hungry and so I pay the bill

1445 including one breakfast and put on more clothes for a trip to the Grand View for a one last meal. Spaghetti tomato and cheese, Gulab Jaman, lime soda and tea for 207/-.

Monday, November 12

I have virtually no sleep with an upset stomach and I worry about the bus journey although that turns out okay. After a shower I leave at 6:45 to a rather clearer atmosphere. The bus (105 rupees) leaves at 7:20, half empty but it picks up lots en route. First of all we go down the Pathankot main road and then turn off into fairly wild hilly country along a rough road with landslips and only any few villages. After a 20 minute stop we turn on to the main road for faster progress although the engine gives concern. We arrive at Dharamshala at about 1230 to see the McCloud Ganj bus leaving. So I sit down to wait; surely there are lots of buses? An hour and a half later we leave for the 7/- journey but I wish I had taken a taxi. It is another half hour journey on a packed bus. I arrive to find a much more westernised resort and find the Hotel Kareri easily; it is a small place and I have the balcony overlooking the valley. The owner seems friendly.

Next on the agenda is to find lunch but the first restaurant (Nirvana) suggested no longer exists. But the Kailash is there with a pleasant roof terrace overlooking the valley on one side and a Buddhist temple on the other. I have a veg sizzler which is in a cabbage leaf followed by banana custard and a lime soda. Then I take a look around and do some shopping in the apparently pleasant place with lots of tourists, monks, bookshops, groceries and even Nutella. There seems to be plenty of scope for walks. I get water, biscuits, chocolate, postcards and a sketch map of the area which looks very useful.

I go back to the hotel for some reading and an early night.

Tuesday, November 13

I get up after a good nights sleep which was quiet and restful. I have a rather shallow bath filled from the shower and using my own plug. I have another walk around including St Johns in the wilderness but on the way back and get caught short. I enquire about a taxi to the bus stand (Rs.140) and a ticket to Shimla. I buy the latter for Saturday the 17th at Rs.190 at 8:20 from Dharamsala. I can stay at the current hotel for Rs.660 until then which is five nights in stead of the three that I booked. I spend some time in the room reading, writing postcards et cetera and looking at the view over the valley.

I go to lunch at the Japanese veg restaurant and have the set meal at hundred rupees with green tea. One item has a lot of horseradish, otherwise the meal is very tasty. I go back to the lodge and then walk through back Bhagsu to the waterfall and Siva Cave. I enquire about the path beyond alongside the river and yes it does go up to Triund but it's difficult to find and needs a guide. The other way is okay alone. Then I go back a bit and strike along another path which contours the hillside along water pipes with open views. Then it's back via town to the guest

house for a pot of ginger tea and hobnobs, book and postcards and then out to the cybercafe. I phone Margaret and have one hour on the Internet for emails and browsing and book a hotel in Simla by phone. It is the Woodville Hotel for 3000 per night for two nights. The number for the Combermere was faulty otherwise it might have been there. I go back to the lodge but have a poor night.

Wednesday, November 14

I'm up at 7am after a lot of listening to podcasts for a bath and breakfast again at the Pema Tang (next door) again, with fruit porridge, fresh OJ, ginger tea, Tibetan bread and honey. I go back to the hotel and then out for a walk to the town, Mall Road, TCV (Tibetan Children's Village), Dal Lake (Lake Lake) and Naddi Talno. There are wonderful views of the mountains from the drive to the International School. I retrace about 0.5km onto a tack which is initially difficult to find, but continues around the hillside through lots of rhododendrons onto the Galu road and then down a steep cobbled road through the Green Forest to Dharamkot and again down through the forest to McCleod Ganj.

I have lunch at the Tibet Hotel; a very nice veg soup, rice sweet and lime soda for 95/-. The afternoon is spent reading with a trip out to the monastery and temple, noting the location of the Tibet museum. At 'The Bookworm' I get more books - a Narayan and the Mandala of Sherlock Holmes. back to start reading them with tea and biscuits and bed at ten.

Thursday, November 15

It was good night's sleep!. Up at six, bath and out at 6.40. It's pre dawn but getting light. There are not many people around but lots of rubbish in the streets. The sketch map is useful to find my way through the town and outskirts. The first part is up a steady road past the performing arts school to Dharamkot, and then along a stony road through a village and then a cobble path past farms turned into guest houses. At last the path reaches the ridge at a temple and tea house and a right turn onto the path to Triund. It's a delightful path, edging its way around the hillside, with a reasonable surface and climbing steadily but not too steeply. The forest has deodars, oak and rhododendron with the latter getting more common higher up. There is a tea shop which claims to be half way to Triund (I thought (hoped?) that I was further. Here I am adopted by a dog which accompanies me to the summit, only deterred by clapping. The path gets steeper and rockier and more like a mountain track, but always well maintained and secure. At an ad hoc tea stall I'm told that it's another forty minutes. From here the path gets steeper again and sure enough in forty minutes, at 10.30, I get to Triund, a grassy ridge. There is a rest house, more tea houses and a tent all surrounded by barbed wire. To the left the ridge continues higher and in front there is a deep valley with high snowy mountains beyond; a wonderful view.

After some sitting and exploring I start down again at 11.30 just as others are getting to the top of

the track. I saw just two going down as I was ascending. I would have liked a stick; of course it's quicker going down but one needs to be careful on the rocky path and the views are still good, if hazy. I begin to feel hungry (I've only had a few biscuits and chocolate) and I plan to have lunch at the Japanese restaurant. I take the longer, gentler tracks down although the surfaces are still stony. I get to the restaurant at 2.45 and yes, they are still happy to serve the set lunch which again is good with soup, tempura, salad etc.

I have a lazy afternoon reading in the room, a visit to the chocolate log for excellent chocolate cake and ginger tea, a walk around and then some TV and bed.

Friday, November 16

I have an early walk before breakfast, after a good night's sleep, to St John's in the Wilderness with some good lighting effects on the mountains. The usual good breakfast at the Perma Tong consists of fruit porridge, fruit pancakes, ginger tea and fresh orange juice. After some time in the hotel I take another walk, this time around the Dal Lake and the area around. I get back for lunch at the Perma Tang with Tibetan soup, with excellent dumplings. veg and fried bananas with cashew nuts and cornflakes.

After lunch I pay a visit to the museum you and the Tibetan museum them but there is not so much to see. I check they route down to Dharamsala for tomorrow and then go back to pay the bill. I ask for a receipt twice but it never arrives. I then go to the Internet cafe to check emails and get phone numbers for hotels in Moussourie and Rishikesh; they have all changed from the guidebook. I watch some TV and do the packing and then go to bed but have a poor night with the alarm set for 6 AM.

Saturday, November 17

I'm up at six and after a bath and finishing packing I leave at 6:50. There is no one around in the Hotel but plenty of people on the streets mostly with rosaries and chanting. I go past the monastery and steeply down to an old peoples home and yes there is a way through on a steep rough path to join the road. The light is good for photographs. Then the road zigzags down to Dharamasala where I get newspapers and head for the bus stand arriving just before eight. The bus arrives about 10 minutes later and leaves about 830 with not many people on board. We pick up several en route to Kanga where there is a lengthy stop and then a very slow half hour or so with a detour along a country lane to avoid roadworks; a jam where the one-way traffic doesn't seem to be working properly. Will we ever get to Shimla. But then we are on our way with first a good view of the impressive Kanga fort and then begins the very interesting drive to Shimla with several gorges. The we travel through gentler lower farming land and through several small towns and then over the BEas river to start a long 70 km largely uphill zigzagged route to Shimla. Again it is through interesting countryside with increasingly distant views but not

of the high mountains. All day we have a clear blue sky. It begins to look as though we will be early but the last 10 km through greater Shimla is slow however but we still make the destination by 5 PM instead of 530. Then it's the walk to the Woodville Palace hotel, fighting off the accommodation touts, the lift and a pleasant walk along the Mall to arrive at 5:40. Yes they can put me up for three nights and they do take credit cards and offer a welcome drink which I accept as a pot of tea. After that I watch some TV, take a good bath and am down to dinner at 7 PM. I am solitary in the dining room and have mushroom Palak, veg Pulao, kheer and beer for Rs.500. Some reading and another episode of Himalaya this time in Nepal and Tibet on BBC world and then to bed for a good night's sleep.

Sunday, November 18

I am up at 6:30 and after her bath go out for a walk in the bright crisp air. It is then back to the hotel for breakfast which I eat with two English engineers working in Delhi who are in Shimla for the weekend. I have porridge bananas juice coffee and cheese omelette at toast. Then I go out walking along the Mall and to the State Museum which now costs Rs.50 instead of being free but they have some good postcards at 10 four Rs.30. I go along a quiet road like last time to Summerhill but not to the Glen. It seems that the Footprint map is wrong when I compare it with the local Map. Back to the centre where I book a ticket to Dhera Dun for Musoorie for Tuesday at 9:30 from the main bus stand and 6:30 PM arrival. Now it is time for lunch at Clarks hotel with the set meal for Rs.500 in the empty dining room as 'a large party has just left'. I get postcards and ring to book a hotel room in Musoorie and go back to the hotel with newspapers in the garden until it's too cold. I go up to the Jacko temple but it's too late for sunset and walk back through the town in the dark. I do some reading and watch TV and then go early to bed for a good night.

Monday, November 19

I awake at 6:30 and after a bath and a short walk have breakfast at 7:40 with porridge, banana, Puri masala, coffee, juice and toast. After relaxing I set out for a walk via the Mall down a long and winding road after having coffee at the Indian coffeehouse and eventually find the path into the Glen. It's a steeply descending but well made path through quiet attractive woodland with a feeling of remoteness. Then it's the long climb back but mostly it's steady and cool. At the top it's lunchtime and I head for the Cecil. It's very attractive inside and to the same restaurant as last time and again have an excellent lunch of mushroom, spinach, dal, bread, Poppadom basket and a plate of three sweets with lime soda for 950/-. I go back through town checking Maria books, which is closed again, to the hotel and take some photographs and sit outside reading with a tray of tea until it's too cold. I have another trip into town for very slow Internet with emails and to get phone numbers for hotels in Haridwar. A second visit to Maria books is successful but I don't buy anything before returning to hotel to pay the bill. After TV and reading I have a poor

night probably anticipating the journey.

Tuesday, November 20

I get up at 6:30 to find the geyser had been switched off, so there is no hot water. I finish packing and after a short walk go to breakfast at 7:30 for porridge but 'no fresh supplies of bananas', coffee, toast and a cheese omelette. I have a brief tepid bath and leave at 8:30 to the bus stand, find the bus and get installed with snacks and newspaper. Departure is at 9:40 instead of 9:30 with several empty seats which doesn't last. It's a long winding descent through the Shivaliks passing through Solan and Barog, seeing the train at several points and that tracks at more. The number of passengers ebbs and flows and sometimes the bus is jam packed. There is a delightful stretch through open countryside with a winding road and a very few small villages and then a rather long winding descent to the plains. There are two protracted stops in bus stations but then traffic jams in Dhera Dun which seems very large. The bus goes to a new stand a fair distance from the centre at 6:20. There are just a few taxis and I hire one at the standard rate of Rs.510. After two stops one for petrol we head for the hills with a long looping ascent. It takes an hour and a quarter for the 35 km and eventually we reach the taxi stand where it is cold from the air conditioning into the cool night air. The guidebook now and asking leads me quite easily to the Filigree hotel. I choose the more expensive room at Rs.600 with an extra Rs.150 for a halogen heater. I'm encouraged to choose dinner and it seems I'm the only guest and I have veg korma, dal, papads and bread which is good and ready in the dining room quarter of an hour later. I have two hot chocolate in the room and find the TV at the reception noisy but they switch it off when I ask. I go to bed with two quilts and soon get warm and sleep well waking just once.

Wednesday, November 21

I make a leisurely start; the sun shines briefly into the room but its north facing and cold. Just a corner of snowy mountains are visible. I go to breakfast but there is no porridge and the orange juice turns out to be mango. I have coffee stale cornflakes with hot milk and stuffed paratha. Hi Bill out towards Landaur and find the way fairly easy with several steep hills and through several bazaars pass the clock tower. I stop at a small enclosed green and then on to a viewpoint across to the high mountains. It is 10/- to climb the steps but it's closed but there are lots of photographs and worth resting here. Then follows about 2 km along a delightful level balcony road which has several language schools and then to the sister bazaar where I find Prakash stores mentioned in the rough guide. I buy some of their homemade cheddar cheese which is pretty good. The Cantonment church is of no particular interest and has several language teacher student pairs in residence. I go back along the balcony and this time the tower is open and afterwards I go down to Landaur and Mussourie.

Gradually I get the layout of the town and have lunch at the Green restaurant, which is recommended in the rough guide, with tasty ginger chow mien, rasgullai, juice and lime soda.

Then I take a walk along the mall stopping at the tourist office buying a sketch map, 50/-, and enquire about buses. There is nothing to Haridwar, Rishikesh but to Chamba from the Tehri bus stand at 8, 9 and 10 (they turn out to be at 7, 8.30 and 10). My walk continues via Ghandi Chowk, and beyond and back along the Camel's Back Road to the hotel. After reading I watch the sun fading and then the cold sets in.

I make a brief foray to ring Rishikesh for a hotel and get the Natraj Rs.2200 +10% with breakfast extra and I hope it's comfortable. I go back to the room for snacks, puzzles and book and bed at nine; again a good night!

Thursday, November 22

I get up at 5:30 for a brief wash and then I am out through the quiet dark streets to climb Gunhill for the sunrise. It's relatively easy to find the way up a series of sharp steep concrete zig zags. The first hint of light is in the sky as I approach the top which is a real mess with lots of concrete, stalls and small restaurants. It is also very top of the ropeway but at this time it is all quiet. I find a relatively pleasant place and watch the colours and mountains appearing. Then just before the sun appears, I go back down and through the town to the Landaur Bazaar and beyond to find the Tehri bus stand. It is right on the edge of the town and of course the buses aren't at the times given by the tourist information. The next is at 8:30 after a three-quarter hour wait. But I can sit on the bus and write this diary after getting a ticket from the office for Rs.35 in spite of it saying 25 on the ticket.

The bus leaves more or less on time and not quite full, but of course that soon changes. It's a wonderful ride almost all the crest of the ridge; sometimes on one side and sometimes on the other. It takes an hour and a half for the 33 km and I get off at Khadakhal which is just a group of stalls for prasad and snacks at the foot of the trail. There is a concrete path steeply up the mountain which takes about 45 minutes. There's a fine view at the top with a lot of snowy mountains but also quite a lot of haze still around. The temple isn't anything very special but a donation is still requested. I head back down as all the visitors start arriving and I no longer have the mountain to my self. One family group wants a photo with me and another has one man from Brazil returning home for the visit.

Various people have told the different times for buses for the return and so it's just a matter of sitting and waiting. I decide to take the first to arrive which means either a trip to Chamba and back or straight to Mussourie. As it happens it's the latter after an hour and a quarter at 1:15. It's crowded when it arrives but I manage a very small space on the back seat. The fare is 25/- and we make our way slow way back in an hour and a half. I then make a speedy walk to get something to eat. I don't fancy the Madras cafe and so I go to the Rice Bowl for fried veg moos, veg thupka, lime soda and jasmine tea for 104/-. I try the bank but it's closed and then walk along the Mall and back via the Camels Back road with the setting sun. I go to the bus stand to check the times of buses to Dehra Dun, but the offer of a car straight to Rishikesh at 1100 rupees is

tempting.

Then it's back to the hotel for reading and bed at nine for a decent night.

Friday, November 23

I awake at five but listen to podcasts for a while getting up at 6:30 to 10° even after the fire has been on. I shower in hot water cold air. I shave and get ready for breakfast which takes a long time to arrive but that gives me time to write this. Afterwards I go out for a walk before the bank opens at 10 am. I go along the Camels Back road again in the morning air with views across the valley and some high mountains. I go to Ghandi Chowk and then along the mall sitting a while and then go to the bank, but they only exchange cash not Travellers' cheques and so I use a credit card in the ATM. I go back to the hotel, settle the bill being encouraged to tip the staff, and go to the taxi stand. I get the ride to Rishikesh for 1000/- and it takes about two hours for the 77 km. En route the taxi driver fills up and asks for Rs.500 in advance. We go back down to The outskirts of Dehra Dun, along the bypass and along with the Haridwar road to Rishikesh with the hotel Natraj before the centre. I settle in and have a dull lunch in the hotel, and then go out to explore aiming for the suspension bridges across the Ganga. It is the usual dusty Indian town. The first suspension bridge for pedestrians is crowded with motorbikes and even a cow on it. I go along the river banks with ashrams, temples, trinket sellers et cetera along the way. Eventually I get to a rather more peaceful place looking down to beaches by the river beyond the second bridge. The river is hemmed in by low hills covered with forest but there are lots of new developments. I retrace my steps to the first bridge and look around including at some bathing ghats. I recross the bridge and then go back to the hotel via different streets, but seems nothing particular to see. At the hotel I gave in laundry and order a snack: pakora and hot chocolate, and after reading puzzles and TV I am in bed at nine.

Saturday, November 24

I get up leisurely but the shower is only tepid even after waiting a while. I go to breakfast at eight and have coffee, porridge with banana and apple, a tasty cheese toast and juice.

I am asked for Rs.3000 advance on the bill and then go out. I walk to the station but trains for tomorrow are really inconvenient (805 1420 etc and take 'at least an hour'). As there is a train at the platform at 9:45 'running late', I'm not encouraged; perhaps a taxi...

I head down Railway Road to Triveni Ghat which is all very colourful with some good photo opportunities. Then it's back along the road back to run Ram Jhula! and I stop at the madras cafe for an early (1115) lunch of masala paper dosa and ginger lemon tea. I go over the bridge to try to find the Rasoi garden for an 'excellent coffee' but to no avail. Still it's an interesting walk visiting the Parmath Niketa Ashram, gardens, the beaches and to the Internet cafe for one hour with emails from 'wheezy', ASC re the new website launch on the 30th. Back over the bridge at

the madras cafe I have a Himalayan health pancake and tea.

I walk back to the hotel along the road and quite a long way on the river bank and dried river bed. The usual reading TV hot chocolate and an episode of Himalaya.

Sunday, November 25

I've had a good night but there is no hot water for a shower. It's a leisurely start and the breakfast as yesterday. After a brief walk around I find no taxis but there are plenty of autos. I go back for packing and leave about nine having paid the bill and engage an auto to Haridwar for Rs.250. It's a pleasant ride largely through the countryside with several 'level crossings' and small towns. Haridwar is a busy and dusty town which of course is surprise! The station confirms the train and I try for a retiring room but none is available. So I leave my large rucksack in the left luggage and go to explore: the ghats Bridges, temples and bazaars.

I have an early lunch at Chotiawallah's with a special masala dosa, Linma and coffee. I walk up the hill to the temple the Mansa Devi. There are excellent news over the town, river and surrounding countryside. I take a gentle walk back down and through the bazaars to Hari Ki Pairi, the main bathing site. There is a huge statue of Vishnu near to the place where the canal leaves the Ganga in a small peaceful park. I go back that the bathing to have tea and veg cutlets at the Hotel Teerth. Back at the ghats the sun is setting and the crowds are gathering and 'boats' of flowers and lamps are set to drift down the river, and there are lots of requests for donations.

Back through the Bazaar to buy food for the journey and to find my way through a power cut. I find 'cyber point' for an hour's internet for 30/- which helps to pass the time before I go to the station. I have two hours to organise my luggage, buy a timetable and find my platform. The train comes in on time and leaves just 10 minutes late.

Monday, November 26

'I'm on the train'.

I have a fitful sleep on in my favourite position of Lower bunk, longitudinal. By morning the train is about an hour and a half late, which later becomes two hours and then 2 1/2 hours by Howrah.

The day passes pleasantly with only a mix up over lunch with two competing salesman and I eventually get my tepid vegetables for 30/- and have plenty of chai and coffee.

Tuesday, November 27

The train arrives 2 1/2 hours late, that is 930, into Kolkata, with no breakfast. I walk to the 4/- ferry across the Hugli and then upstream and it's about half an hour to Sudder Street and my hotel, the Lytton. The only difficulty is crossing the roads! I'm just in time for breakfast which

ends at 10:30 and enjoy cornflakes, fresh fruit, sweet lime juice, coffee, Vadhas and extras.

My room is very pleasant with air conditioning, fan, TV with BBC world and have a welcome soak in the bath. After an hour or so I visit a tailor's but they can't guarantee trousers in time so I buy ready-made 795/- which is expensive here that they're fine: made from cotton and I get a free length change which takes half an hour. My hair cut costs Rs.30. I go round to Park Street and find the map sales department but it is closed for lunch. Back at the hotel I hand in laundry including my jacket, and then watch TV and read the newspaper. Back at the map sales there is classic Indian bureaucracy with multiple forms for two copies or pieces each of Shimla and Darjeeling. I hope CC enjoys the Christmas present and that I can get them home relatively unscathed.

I call at Jet Airways office in Park Street. The flight Kolkata to Mumbai is now 650 instead of 6 o'clock (good) with one to one of the half hour check in time. But the Mumbai to Kochi flight is brought forward giving not enough connectional time. So I am booked on a flight four hours later from Mumbai; a good job I called to reconfirm!

I visit the park street cemetery with cheerful attendants and a booklet, but I can't find 'died from a surfeit of pineapple'. Back along Park Street, I get to Flurry's for hot chocolate and cake. Visiting the Oxford bookstore I escape with just two books and some nice bags for Margaret. Again I go to the hotel and am surrounded by staff turning down the bed and replacing the towels in the bathroom and cleaning, and then go out for dinner at Jimmy's Chinese restaurant. I have fried momos, Black Monk (mixed vegetable in soy sauce) and a gimlet. But the smoking is Chinese in style and quantity. I go back to the hotel via the market which even has a small American-style mini market. I get chocolate biscuits.

Back at the hotel I finish Middlemarch, watch TV and get to bed at nine listening to podcasts. It's a pretty good night, wakening just once and finally at 6:30.

Wednesday, November 28

I'm up at seven for a walk across the Maidan where there are various exercisers and then I go back to the hotel crossing the road at Park Street Metro Station. I have a bath and a more leisurely good breakfast but there is no porridge. However I have cornflakes with hot milk, papaya, pineapple veg samosas etc with toast and coffee and sweet lime juice and marmalade.

At around 10 I get the Metro from Park Street to MG Road. I have a long walk around North and Central Calcutta with lamb markets, cathedral, churches and various raj buildings which are mostly decaying and lunch at the Amber. It's okay but not as good as the guidebook suggests. I go to American express to change travellers checks but they don't cash their own! I make representations and then there is more walking including a visit to St John's church with Job Charnock's mausoleum. Back at the hotel I have a relaxing bath.

About 530 I go for another walk to change the Travelers checks at a currency exchange booth

and pay another visit to the Oxford book shop and get the Jaywalkers Guide to Calcutta and one the bags for Margaret.

Back at the hotel I get an early night but have poor sleep.

Thursday, November 29

I'm up at six for another walk across the Maidan in the morning mist. There are lots of people exercising, rolling cricket pitches and playing football and cricket. I visit the gardens around the Victoria monument, □4, which are well-kept and then back to the hotel for the bath breakfast and out again at nine.

My walk self to St Pauls Cathedral and the gardens and the interior of the Victoria monument which costs □150+□150 for a book. There are interesting displays including Beijing with an advert for the Olympics, the Raj and landscape paintings and so on. My search for lunch takes me to Elgin Road and Elgin Lane for Kewpie's for a brilliant Bengali Thalla, with sweet salt drink made from green mango but poor coffee. The excellent lunch costs □415. I return using the Metro for two stops to Park Street and go to the hotel for a rest.

I make just a brief foray around 6 to post postcards and Christmas card to Margaret and birthday card to CC. After that to me cybercafe one way chain for 60 minutes at □30 for emails and then back to room, ask staff for quietness, watch TV and finish the Narayan book.

Friday, November 30

Up at six after a better night and then out for a walk across the Maidan taking photographs of the morning mists, horses and the sun rising over the Victoria Memorial gardens. There are plenty of powerwalkers, yoga fanatics and so on. The building looks even better than yesterday when it was in the full sun. Then I head back to the hotel for a bath and breakfast, accompanied by a man from Varanasi who studied telecoms, came to Calcutta for a job. He's now a 'big shot' but still asks for money for a coffee.

After breakfast I take the Metro to Dum Dum and then back to MG Road for College Street where there are lots of bookstalls and trams and then to the Indian coffee house. More walking and then take the Metro to Tollygunge and back to Netaji Bhavan station, which is not the most convenient for the restaurant even though Elgin Lane is that next NB. I have a similar lunch to yesterday and it is still excellent. I take the Metro back to Park Street and the hotel for a brief rest and then go to the India Museum. □150+□15 for the camera but it is a great disappointment with poor presentation, gloom, several galleries closed and little interpretation. I leave early and visit the Asiatic society which is much more interesting. A friendly gent shows me some of the maps and documents they have and then I go back to the hotel for packing and an early night.

Saturday, December 1

The alarms are set for 430 and I leave at 4:50 with a 300/- taxi to the airport. I check him through to Kochi, very smooth, and the plane leaves just about on time at 6:55. A decent breakfast is served and it is a comfortable flight which arrives 40 minutes late into Mumbai making me glad that I'm not on the 10 AM flight to Kochi.

The terminal in Mumbai is comfortable and I head for the bookshop getting two books and sit reading before going through security but there are no departure screens there. I eventually ask at the Jetairways desk to be told that the flight is 20 minutes late which it turns out to be. I eventually get on board and have a another smooth flight with decent food. Arrival is at 4:45 to a warm humid Kochi. I am pleased to see my rucksack almost first on the carousel and get an advance pay taxi for 635/- and I'm soon heading to Fort Kochi. It takes about 1.5 hours and I dump my bag and go out for a walk to see the sun set and the Chinese Fishing Nets. I head back for a welcome bath. There is TV but no BBCworld, fans and AC. I go early to bed for a decent night wake early.

Sunday, December 2

I go out for a walk to see the sun rise; it is still warm but rather fresher. I check the taxi to Ernakulam: ₹300, and go back to the hotel for a bath and a pleasant breakfast of fresh juice, coffee, fruit, cornflakes, cheese omelette and toast. After a little reading I set out to Matacherri. By now it's a warm, sunny 30deg day. The walk to Santa Cruz cathedral is about two miles and there is a service in progress. I go to the palace, remembering the outside and to the the synagogue where there are hordes inside. There is no peace but it is attractive. I look around Jew Town, and go back to the hotel to cool down with a last bath. I finish packing and leave the bath at reception. They haven't managed to contact BA for reconfirmation. I go to Kashmir for lunch, which is a good cafe style set meal: three bean salad, garlic toast, glass bottle of water and chai. I walk through fort Kochi, eventually finding the jetty and board a crowded boat to Ernakulum. It's enjoyable sitting in the park watching the world go by. The ferry takes me back to a walk along the front and sitting in the garden reading until sunset. There is a session in the cyber cafes or emails and to check the booking on the BA website. There is no change and check in is between four and one hour before the 4am flight. Dinner is at the hotel with fish curry, rice, bread, fruit salad and lime soda for ₹281. The taxi arrives at 8.50 for the 40 minutes drive to Ernakulum Town station. The train is expected on time and so I sit to wait and it arrives at about midnight.

Monday, December 3

It is a reasonably comfortable journey with the train running just about 15 minutes late. We start

at all sorts of stations including Bekal Fort, and I wonder if I should get off. But I follow Shankar's instructions and get down at Kasaragod at 9am. The taxi driver says he knows Chandralayam, but doesn't and we end up driving too far and there's an argument over the fare. The owner of the house hopes to settle it and agrees that it's not too late for breakfast after a shower. I have juice, coffee, masala scrambled eggs, bananas and very lightly toasted bread.

I have some relaxation time and then go out walking, back to the main road and then to the sea and along the beach southwards. There are various fishing villages before the fort appears on the headland. It is massive and made from laterite and is apparently heavily restored. I get a Limco at a stall and walk back along the main road for about 3 km. There is a detour along a wrong road but eventually get back to the house for tea, a shower and change, and out for dinner. This is salad, fried fish, two veg dishes and a mountain of rice before some reading and an early night.

Tuesday, December 4

I get very little sleep in the hot, humid light night. After an early night and walk in the cool air before sunrise, a shower and shave I begin to feel better. Breakfast is leisurely with dhosa, curry, mango juice coffee and papaya and very good.

I set out about nine and walk to the main road and catch a bus for 3 1/2 rupees to be Bekal fort. It is heavily restored but there is lots to see including a temple. There are plenty of workmen renovating and gardening and the hundred rupees seems worthwhile as it does seem to be used. There are few other visitors and I find a shady spot to sit and read with a good outlook in both directions along the coast. I sit until about 12 when more visitors arrive and I walk back to the main road and down to Bekal beach.

There is a road bridge over the railway which looks to have been partly completed a while ago and left. A new Beach resort has been started but has virtually no visitors and only one shack. I have biscuits and seven up and the crows seem very interested in the biscuits. It's a walk along the beach to the head land and back to the main road for a bus back to the junction and walk to the hotel. Dinner is black Pomfret with veg followed by reading and bed.

Wednesday, December 5

It's another poor night's sleep bought a relaxing day to follow. I have my morning walk followed by shower and a breakfast and then sit reading followed by a walk north along the road and set out towards the coast. It is a pleasant walk through lanes but I see no sea and then head back to the main road and get a bus to Palakunnu and the hotel.

After relaxing I have a similar supper to yesterday followed by reading and bed at nine for a better

night.

Thursday, December 6

I am up at six for a morning walk followed by breakfast including Appams. The host arrives - he was busy yesterday with a wedding at the Rotary club. I pay the bill Rs.1000 for food water and hundred rupees for the staff. He breaks in the news; today is the 50th anniversary of the Ayodhya riots and there is a hirtal. Only the government buses are on the road with no taxis or rickshaws on the main road as they are likely to be stoned as are even the buses. So there is a train at 9:30 and his brother in law will take me to the station by auto for Rs.20. I pack quickly and am ready. The train turns out to be at 9:08 but luckily it's late. The ticket costs three rupees for the two stops and the train is of course crowded. At Kasaragod, there are no retiring rooms available.

Over night train to Chennai, one night in hotel followed by early morning departure back to London.