

Thursday 10th October; Flight

Derek arrives at 2.15 for a cup of tea and biscuits and we leave at 3.45 for the drive to the Toby Carvery, where Derek treats me to the last meat for a month. At 5.45 he takes me to terminal three where I walk to the underground station in a heavy cold shower and get the Heathrow Express train to terminal four to the check in desks where Iain phones to say that he is running a little late. But we soon have checked in with seats near to each other. Security is easy and we have hot chocolate at Costa before going to the gate for the efficient boarding on time for the take off at 9.30.

There is no gin, but a vodka and tonic, red wine X 2 and a reasonable veg dinner. The plane is comfortable, but with limited space. A man changes his seat so that we are together and he is sitting nearer to his group. I watch some TV on the iPad, and get a little sleep.

Friday, 11th; Mumbai, Hotel Residency, Fort

After a modest breakfast of a muffin, juice and coffee we land early at 10.30. Immigration is efficient, but the bags take a long time and are almost the last of the band.

I get cash at the airport ATM, and a taxi to the city costs 600/- plus 50/- for the toll for the new bridge which saves many traffic lights. The Hotel Residency in the Fort area is welcoming with good if rather small rooms with excellent air conditioning.

After a shower we go across the road to the Lalit restaurant for Dhosas, idli fries and juice for 125/- each. Then it's rest time from 1.30 to three when go out for a walk to VT. The monsoon is persisting with humid weather and some very sharp showers. From the station we go to the maidan and back to the hotel to get ready for the evening. We walk via the Horniman Circle and various lanes to eventually find the Trishna restaurant and arrive shortly after seven. We have two Hydrabadi fish dishes (pomfret, white salmon), fried rice, seafood biryani, two beers, two FLS for a total of 3400/-. Iain is very impressed by the quality of the food.

We walk back via the Gateway to India, the bookshop in the Taj Hotel and the splendid washroom, which is complete with attendant to turn on the taps and dispense the liquid soap.

I have a good night from 10 to 7.

Saturday 12th; Mumbai and train to Jaipur

I shower and go to breakfast at 7.30 as arranged, but Iain doesn't appear; it transpires that he has overslept. I have the South Indian option with juice, coffee and fruit and it's not bad. At 8.30 I

know on Iain's door to waken him. He rapidly dresses and has breakfast as I sit in the lounge.

Then we arrange the bags - one left at the hotel and one for use during the day. The hotel is happy to look after the bags and agrees to check on our booking while we're out. There are a couple of efficient computers in the lobby for emails whilst wifi is chargeable.

We leave at ten to a humid morning which is mostly overcast with some sunny periods. We go via the Horniman Circle to the Gateway to India and find a boat leaving in 'ten minutes'. It turns out to be twenty, and costs 150/- return. The journey takes 75 minutes and we arrive soon after twelve to the hoardes of guides, stalls and dhoolies. We pay our 5/- tax and 250/- entry, and have about 90 minute to look around the temples but no time to go to the top of the hill.

Back at the jetty the boat again will leave in ten minutes. Bothe journeys are very pleasant with a breeze off the ocean and views of the islands, the Mumbai skyline, boats and the oil terminal.

It's a brisk twenty minutes walk to the Britannia restaurant for a late lunch before the close at four. The waiters are very attentive and we are soon tucking in to veg berry pullao a s recommended in the guide, with berries imported from Iran. Rick Stein had been filming here for his series 'The Perfect Curry'. The elderly owner is circulating and stops to talk to us with his photographs of the royal family. He is Parsi as is the restaurant, and is very pro British. He asks us to pass on his best wishes to the Queen. We finish the meal with Mishti Doi any FLSS.

It's a short walk back to the hotel which we reach at four and spend twent minutes sorting out luggage and find that our bookins are unchanged. We all for an hour towards the station and finish with a 50/- taxi ride, and have tea and coffee in the food court. The train arrives at the platform half an hour before departure and we get our seats. Two students are seeing a third off and an officious man organises folk to suit his family. We leave at six in the dark.

After a while we order and get dinner but I think we are overcharged at 100/-. Some ge out at Surat at 10.45, and then we can get to bed on the top bunks, but I get little sleep.

Sunday 13th; train to Jaipur Hotel Jumaid Mahal

I get up and sit across the corridor at 6.30. The train is running half an hour late but makes up the time as we travel through unremarkable countryside with some sun but largely cloudy. Iain joins me and a breakfast arrives for 75/- but it's poor with rice and sandwiches and we leave most of it. There is plenty of coming and going before we reach Jaipur on time at 12.50.

The hotel is reasonably easy to find and about twenty minutes walk from the station through an area that has been substantially developed and busier than when I was last here, including a flyover near to what was the Sheridan.

The hotel is welcoming any we are soon installed in our comfortable rooms and the. To lunch in

the rooftop restaurant. We have decent veg food and a very expensive glass of wine.

We get a 90/- auto into the town centre at four pm and are dropped at the Jantar Mantar but they close at 4.30. So we wander around past the Hawa Mahal to the Govinda Dev temple and gardens and walk through the old town streets and leave through the Chand Pol and walk back to the hotel through the dark streets with some difficulty; I think that Iain has had had enough.

Iain has dinner and I have a HC. Back in the room I download the Archers and get organised, send in laundry. The room is cool but I have a poor night, with a sore throat.

Monday 14th; Jaipur

I finally awake and after a quick shower I go down to breakfast at 7.30. Iain joins me at eight and we enjoy a decent breakfast with coffee and fruit.

We're out by nine to a sunny morning and find an auto which will take us to Amber for 300/- (one quoted 800/- last night). He takes us round the back of the old town and along the road past the lake palace to a drop by the lake below the Amber Palace. After photos we walk up to the palace, first visiting the Hindu temple where there are plenty of bells and drums.

The joint ticket for 300/- includes the Jantar Mantar, the fort above Jaipur and the Hawa Mahal, but not the fort above Amber. After about an hour in the palace we make our way up the long winding cobbled road up to the fort, which costs 85/-. The main features are the cannon, cannon foundry and views over the hills and valleys. After a half hour or so we start along the ridge top road which is initially busy but quieter after the junction with the road down to Jaipur. There are some good views, especially down th the lake palace, although it's hazy with plenty of cloud, and the vegetation is scrubby.

The fort above Jaipur has been extensively renovated since I was here last and is like the others now. The cafeteria is not impressive and after a wait we move on. Finding the path down takes a little effort, but after asking a few times, we find the steep, zigzagging, paved track that I remember, with several helpful and friendly young men on motorbikes.

At the bottom we're in the old town streets with all the usual bustle and shops and decorations, for Diwali apparently, but for this or last year? Everything is very busy and we make our way to the Jantar Mantar where I sit enjoying the gardens as Iain looks around.

The we go to the Hawa Mahal where we eventually find the way in and climb behind the facade for the views over the street. And then it's to LMB, a sweet shop, hotel and restaurant dating back to the eighteenth century. It's a quirky place where have an excellent Thaal, with refills as desired, with water, FLS an Sweet lime juice for about 700/-. After buying a box of sweets we get an auto back to the hotel at six through the rush hour with a manic driver who shouts at others and hits the sides of other vehicles.

We have a quiet night at the table outside the room with HC and the sweets, but a poor night follows with a full stomach and a sore throat.

Tuesday 15th; Jaipur to Chittorgaur, Hotel Pratap Palace

I'm up at 6.30 and we have a breakfast similar to yesterday. Outside there is clear blue sky and it's already warm.

After packing and leaving the cases in reception it's another rickshaw into town and we spend the morning in the City Palace which is in splendid condition and obviously has had money spent on it. We arrive promptly at the opening time of 9.30 before too many people have arrived, and we end with coffee in the open air cafe. Back at the hotel we pick up the luggage and return to the station for the 2pm train to Chittorgarh. It's AC CC and comfortable, but a petulant young amn won't change seats to allow us to sit together.

We arrive at about seven and walk to the hotel in the dark, along a main road and through a narrow road tunnel under the railway and are soon at the hotel which is welcoming but rather run down, with wifi in reception. The rooms overlook the garden, but beyond is a very dirty, built up area. We have a decent dinner overlooking the gardens with the French doors open.

Back to the room for a poor night with a lot of coughing and congestion and a sore throat.

Wednesday 16th; Chittorgarh to Udaipur Ram Pratap Palace

I get up to another clear blue sky and to breakfast in the garden. The review on Google has pictures of turtles in the garden but I see none although I am assured that they are there. Before breakfast I use the wifi in the garden and then have fruit juice, cornflakes, coffee, cheese omelette and TBJ - OK.

WE leave the bags at reception and walk up to the fort via the town (2 to 3km) and 1 to 2km up the winding road through the various gates to the village at the beginning of the fort

There are lots of muslims (and police) in evidence in the town; it's hot. Everything seems very friendly. We're hot and sweaty when we get up to the top of the hill; the whole way is in the sun. The entry fee is just 100/- and there is plenty to see - palaces, forts, tanks and view points but no attractive place to eat or drink. We see one of the men from the hotel; he's donned a turban and is driving a party around.

After two and a half hours or so in the baking sun, we decide to head back to the hotel, walking down the hill but getting an auto back to the hotel through the town. escaping a couple of persistent youths.

It's possible to have the car, booked for 4pm, straight away at 2.30 for the drive to Udaipur for

2100/- plus 105/- toll. It's a smarter car than I expected with AC, and the road is smoother with a newish dual carriageway for most of the way. It's a pleasant drive which is mostly flat but with some hills as we approach Udaipur. It's a slow approach through the city traffic but we're in the hotel by five instead of the ten it would have been if we had waited for the booked train.

After a rest and a shower we are out for dinner on the lawn at the lake side under the almost full moon. The food is decent enough, but nothing special. I go to bed for a slightly better night, but still congested.

Thursday 17th; Udaipur Ram Pratap Palace

I'm up and out for a short walk under a clear blue sky and it's already warm; the weather seems settled now. Breakfast is in the courtyard on the first floor, with the usual buffet.

Were out by 9.30 for a 50/- auto ride to the Jagdish temple, with very crowded lanes in the centre. Iain buys some cards with miniature paintings and we go to the temple which is very active with lots of drums, and a man going to London next week to sell his prints. Would he come to see his students?

We go to the city palace where the charge is 110/- but I decline the 250/- camera charge and there is a fuss about leaving bag and camera. The palace has had and is having a lot of work done to it and it looks smart, and I remember much of it, but not the music gallery.

We make our way back over the bridge to find the Royal Cafe in the back streets. After asking several times we find it but the door is locked. After talking to a young man about the options for eating we decide to retrace our steps. I ask a stall holder when the cafe is open; he says ring the bell and sure enough an elderly woman answers and can provide food. It's excellent and cheap. We have banana curry, pumpkin curry, ginger biryani, nan, apple fritters (called apple pie), rice pudding and FLS for 320/- each. The grandchildren arrive home from school, and the daughter who runs a cookery school tries to sell her wares, including special spice. We buy a mango confection.

The walk back to the hotel proves pleasant and not too noisy, passing the two lakes and through a residential area. Then it's a rest until five when we take a car to the Monsoon Palace (750/- + 100/- tip and 450/- entry plus toll). The driver is friendly and it takes 30mins to get there and we have an hour to look around. Back at the hotel Iain has dinner in the garden while I have a starter and a sweet and beer.

Another night of coughing and phlegm.

Friday 18th; Udaipur and the train to Delhi

I'm up at 6.30 and go for a walk along the lake side, firstly along the main road where the traffic is already developing, but then the main road leaves the lake side and it's more peaceful with people exercising.

I go back for a shower, computer and breakfast at eight as yesterday. After packing and relaxing we are out by ten. Iain has booked a car for 400/- to the station at 5.15 for the 6.15 train. We retrace our steps to the Jagdish Mandir and to the Cafe Edelweiss. We separate; Iain for shopping and I go looking for a barbers shop, which I find after getting throat tablets from a pharmacy. Rohal the barber is at the counter and takes me back to his shop and cuts my hair for 100/- with a cup of tea and I meet his mother.

I try a cyber cafe but it's closed and there isn't really enough time to upload photos. I go back to the Edelweiss for a cappuccino and a chocolate ball, waiting for Iain who soon joins me. We go to the Badeli Haveli which is quiet and has lots to see in the museum. The restaurant in the house that is mentioned in the guide has closed and so it's back to plan A, the Jagit Niwas Hotel which is around a courtyard on several levels. We find a lovely sunny place overlooking the lake for lunch. The meal is good with a Gimlet, veg patties and paneer, cashew nut and potato curry, rice, drinks and coffee, and Iain treats me.

The weather is clouding over and the hotel is in the maze of lanes between the temple and the lake, and gives little impression of the splendour inside. We wend our way up to the city palace and around the back to get to the far end of the lake for a short stroll (noting the closed off lake shore) and the back to the hotel by auto. We pick up our bags and get the car to the station in about twenty minutes, arriving at 5.30 for the 6.15 train to Delhi.

We spend half an hour in the upper class waiting room with tea and coffee, before we get installed in the train in upper and lower bunks with a couple of business men who are more sedate than the last occasion. We need no more food!

I get little sleep with a lot of coughing.

Saturday 19th; train to Delhi, Grand Park Inn

The train arrives on time at 6.30 at H Nizamuddin. The sky is clear and the dry weather seems to have set in.

A pre paid auto (160/-) gets us to the Grand Park Inn where the rooms aren't ready and so we leave the bags and walk to Connaught Circus for an excellent breakfast at the Saravana Bhavan and walk back to the hotel where the rooms are still not ready: 'half an hour'. We use the computer and wifi in the lobby but it's slow.

At last we are out and get a rickshaw to Chandni Chowk. But firstly we're told the road is closed and then the auto is broken so we give 30/- instead of 80 and get the metro and decide to go to the Qutb Minar if the old town is so busy. The train ends at the QM station after a 19/- ride, but

it's quite difficult to find the site which is across and along a busy dual carriageway, with no direction signs. At last we get our foreigners' ticket for 250/-, but at least there is no queue compared with a long one for a Indians.

The site is very busy but as well kept as I remember it. We spend about 1.5hrs before getting the metro back to Rajiv Chowk for very good tea from Himachal Pradesh at the Coffee House with excellent apple pie and ice cream, but poor service. Afterwards we visit the book shops including the Oxford Book Store and the Jain agency.

The restaurant that we chosen, the Mosaic had closed, and so we went to the Embassy where we order rather too much including a veg tandoori platter, veg jhalfrezi, Parathas and beer. After a short walk we get an auto back to the hotel for a poor night.

Sunday 20th; Delhi and train to Kalka

I'm up at six for a shower and a short walk and the computer. We have a modest breakfast at eight, and after a rest and packing we are out at 10.30, leaving our bags at reception. We walk to the nearest metro station in the warm sunny morning for a 12/- ticket to Chandni Chowk. We stroll around visiting the Jain Temple (no bags, camera, footwear) and walk to the masjid via various lanes. The first gate wants 300/- for entry against a dubious ticket. The policeman on the gate suggest we go to a different gate. It's quite a long way around and when we get there (12.30) prayers are starting and the mosque is closed to tourists, but we find that the 300/- is for a camera. We decide to cut our losses and head for the Bengali Market, and after a misunderstanding with a cycle rickshaw we get an auto. We have a South Indian platter followed by a plate of the sweets at Nathu's.

We walk along the avenues of New Delhi to the National Museum via the Rajpath with views of India Gate and the Raj Bhawan. Iain spends 1.5 hours in the museum and I sit in the grounds enjoying a little peace. Then we go along the Janpath to the Saravana Bhawan for coffee and ice cream and then search for a restaurant. The scene seems to have changed since the guide was published and we end up at the Embassy again.

It's difficult to get an auto back to the hotel and prices have doubled. We pick up the luggage and with the help of the management get an auto to Old Delhi station, albeit at 200/- instead of the usual 120/-. Apparently Sunday evening is a very busy time for passengers and traffic. A roundabout route gets us to the station in time and the train turns out to be about half an hour late.

There are various other people on the platform to talk to, including a couple, he from Banff and she from Lancashire. They have a car but are having a train ride to Shimla, with the luggage in the car.

Again I get little sleep, and seem to have just fallen asleep when I'm woken at Kalka at 4.45.

Monday 21st; Shimla Woodville Palace

We get onto the toy train in the dark where we have a duo with an odd family across. Em leave promptly at 5.30 and are served tea as dawn breaks. The scenery is as good as ever with the sun shining but it is still hazy. As before we stop at Barog for twenty minutes or so when people parade about and we take on breakfast. The latter is served as we leave on the second part of the journey, with the usual bread, butter, veg cutlets and more tea.

We arrive on time at 10.15 to a warm and very busy Shimla and fight our way through the hotel touts and taxi drivers on the lower road and sue the lift to get to the lift to the road to the Woodville Palace. The distance and timings on some of the signs are a gross underestimate!

A warm welcome awaits us and we are soon in large rooms, in the annexe but still traditional. After showers and changing we are soon in the restaurant for a decent lunch. After a rest we set out to the mall and a pharmacy which dispenses Amoxicillin and and expectorant. Then it's slowly up Jakkhu Hill where the monkeys are as active as ever, but the views are only of the immediate hills. Dusk is falling as we descend towards the widely lighted town and we go back to the hotel, where we have hot chocolate and rather uninspiring chocolate rolls.

I take the hollow and after an early bed have a much better night to 6.30 with only one break in the early hours.

Tuesday 22nd; Shimla

I feel rather better after the decent night and get up leisurely, listening to podcasts in bed. Mistakenly I open a window for fresh air and a monkey starts to get in, but my arm waving and shouting changes its mind. We are at breakfast at eight for instant coffee, carton juice, cheese omelette, porridge with honey and TBJ. I take a walk along the road before we set out at ten.

First of all we go to Christchurch, and then to the Indian Coffee House for 'tray coffee'. Then it's back to the mall for the familiar walk to the Vice Regal Lodge. We stop at the Cecil to inquire about lunch, look at the menu and book a table for 1.30. From there it's twenty minutes to the lodge, or Indian Institute for Advanced Studies as it now is. I have a 10/- ticket for the grounds, Iain 65/- for the interior tour. It's nice and sunny in the grounds with good views although they are rather limited by the haze. Iain has the twenty minute tour of the few rooms open to the public.

We make the twent minute walk back to the Cecil arriving just a little late and are shown to the comfortable restaurant. We have the veg Tali and Fresh Lime Soda, but served with some style, amuse bouche, soup and the usual.

We stroll back to the hotel via the mall and the Indian Coffee house for more coffee to the hotel four a couple of hour's rest, partly the garden with a pot of tea. About six we go back to the twin

for a look at the bazaar and more shopping for Iain. We walk back in the dark for another decent night; the peace is wonderful!

Wednesday 23rd; Shimla to Delhi, Grand Park Inn

I'm up and out for a walk away from town; there is a clear blue sky and a fresh feel to the air and I pass an open air class at the nursery school. We have breakfast at eight as yesterday.

We have a leisurely start, which include sitting in the garden. A car to the station costs 500/- and takes a roundabout route to avoid the town centre traffic. It's an ordinary second class coach with plenty of space and we're opposite a couple we met previously. They're going to Solan on the train where their car (they're on a VJV extension) will take them the rest of the way to Kalka. They are envious of us going all the way on the train; their driver say that they would be bored if they go all the way on the train. We certainly aren't; it's a fascinating journey. After Barog there is a series of loops which we didn't see (or appreciate) in the dark on the way up, and we arrive in Kalka on time at 16.15.

I go into town to try to find an Internet cafe for Iain's on line check in. It always seems to. E another five minutes away but I eventually find it above the Canara Bank. But 'booking in order but you can't check in online', and I go back to the station through the dull looking town, although it does have a Baptist Church.

The train is ready for boarding when I get back and is wonderfully cool and largely empty (it fills up later). We're soon served with tea and a delicious samosa, and after Ambala supper comes with bread, rice, paneer and yogurt, more tea and water. We have a comfortable ride and arrive on time at 9.55 at platform one of New Delhi station which is very convenient getting a rickshaw to the Grand Park Inn. We're soon installed and I'm in bed by 10.45 for a good night's sleep.

Thursday 24th; Delhi, Grand Park Inn

Up and to the computer in the reception and this time I can check Iain in, and print his boarding pass. We have breakfast at eight: toast, omelette and coffee.

We're out at nine and walk to New Delhi metro station. Google maps says that it will take 41mins and they are precisely right. The fare has gone up to 150/-, and the trains are virtually empty with their AC comfort. At the airport we have one last coffee together at 'Baker Street' and I say goodbye at the gates to the departure hall.

I get the metro back to New Delhi and walk to the Connaught Place branch of Saravana Bhavan for a Ghee Roasted Paper Masala Dosa, SL juice, coffee and ice cream accompanied by the laughs and shrieks of a very jolly party of ladies. I walk back to the hotel for a rest, emails and jobs. I get the password for wifi in the room which is much more convenient, and book a room in Bhaktapur. Downstairs I check in for my flight to Kathmandu, with a LH window seat, and print

out boarding card.

After a rest I walk and take the metro to Bengali Market but remember when I get there that they serve no hot drinks so I go along Tolstoy Marg to the other SB for jice, ice cream and bournvita, not exactly healthy! On the way back to the hotel I find the tie man and get an elephant tie for lain, and do more emails when I get back, and have a good night from 8.30 to 5.30.

Friday 25th; Delhi to Kathmandu, Norbu Lingka Hotel

I have a somewhat earlier breakfast and am underway by 8.45, and walk to the Airport Express station. All the formalities go well, and there's plenty of waiting time for the 13.45 flight with Jet Airways but on a smaller plane. They supply a can of beer and a full meal. We land on time and I get through immigration quickly having bought my visa in advance. The luggage comes through quickly and the hotel car is waiting but we have to wait for other clients, a group from Ireland. We get. To the hotel in 30mins and check in is rapid, and I find an email saying that my transfer is still waiting at the airport. The staff are friendly, I hand in laundry and go out for a stroll and first impressions are not brilliant with a lot of tourist tat and traffic. It's difficult to get oriented. I use an ATM but can get only 10000/-, about £65.

I'm early to bed for a reasonably good night.

Saturday 26th; Kathmandu, Norbu Lingka Hotel

I finally get up at 6.15 for a shower and go to breakfast, which is available from five, at seven. It's good and I have porridge with honey and banana, fruit sala, juice, cheese omelette and instant coffee.

I arrange a bus ticket from the travel service for \$25 with Green Line (I could have travelled much cheaper). The bus station is 'five minutes away', reporting time is seven for 7.30, and arrival time is 2 to 3. I send an email to the Sacred Valley with this timing.

I go out for sight seeing and it's much clearer with daylight and maps, and the streets make more sense. I head through Thamel to see where I was last night and to see the Green Aline bus stand for tomorrow. I then go back into the maze of streets for which the map is pretty good, and I get lots of photos.

And so to the Durbar Square, where the entry fee is now 750/-, but includes entry to the old Royal Palace. It's quite a place, but heaving with people. There is plenty to see, and more of the Royal Palace is available for visitors than the guide suggests. The map shop has some good cards for 10/- and a mini flag for CC (I see larger ones later) and an 'om' for future biscuits. I head to the GPO but it's closed (I find later that official buildings are closed on Saturday with

Sunday an open day).

Then I go back to the small Indian cafe Nandan for a Thali, which is good with refills, several different breads, FLS and water for less than 500/-. I go wandering again to the south to the Panchali Bhairav Temple which is peaceful in a rather bleak area. The stinking, shrunken river Bagmati is nearby with various ghats which are now high and dry and largely occupied by squatters. Some of the hills are visible.

Nearby is a branch of the Himalyan Java Coffee House which does an excellent cappuccino and oatmeal cookie and a read of the New York Times. The staff are friendly, but there are only two customers. I walk back to the Durbar Square and then by a rather roundabout way back to the hotel. Two groups, one from New Zealand, arrive, and I hope that they are not too noisy. I have a pot of tea and banana fritters in the outside cafe, where I had breakfast, and head to my room for a shower, diary and TV on the tablet.

I have not such a good night with the cough returned: dust and pollution?

Sunday 27th; Kathmandu to Pokhara Sacred Valley Inn

I have an early start, up at five for a shower and packing and down to breakfast. There is no porridge on display but the chef makes me some but otherwise the breakfast is as yesterday. The wifi connection is intact, but there is no internet. The reception computer however yields emails.

I'm out by 6.45 for the ten minute walk to the bus stand to check in for bus B, seat 15 by the window. It's by a Russian, one of a small group. Indeed the nationalities are very varied. The bus is comfortable but the roads are not particularly over the pass west from Kathmandu. It's a slow ride with many hills, zigzags, broken down lorries and unsurfaced roads. After the pass it gets better, but still bumpy. It's sunny and warm but still with plenty of clouds hiding all but the immediate hills.

After a comfort stop where I buy biscuits there is a lunch stop, with the recently refreshed buffet lunch included. I have rice, veg curry, dal and a cup of instant coffee.

Back on the road it's very scenic with the river far below with precarious looking suspension footbridges. We gradually descend until we cross the river and gradually go up the valley of a tributary. After another comfort stop we arrive at a cloudy Pokhara at 3.15 where there is a tax waiting to ferry me to the Sacred Valley Inn where there is a warm and informal welcome. The room is simple with a balcony, windows on two sides, with insect gauzes, a single and a double bed and a simple shower room.

After unpacking, I have tea and brownie with ice cream on the first floor terrace as it gets dark, and then I go out for a walk along the street which has any clothes shops, food and drink shops and dozens of inns and restaurants. I temporarily lose the Sacred Valley, but after emails and

reading I get an early bed for a reasonable night to five.

Monday 28th; Pokhara

I am up at six and out for a walk along the lakeside. There's a good paved path with plenty of people around. There is some sun but also clouds. It's pleasantly mild.

I'm back for breakfast on the upstairs balcony at seven: set breakfast with porridge, omelette, potatoes, beans, hot chocolate, with an extra pot of strong black local coffee. Very good.

I then make a leisurely start along the lakeside in the warm sun with local views but it's too hazy for the high mountains. It's good walking with, eventually, a road which isn't too busy with the lake on one side and Sarangkot on the other. There are a host of guest houses and restaurants, but they are more spread out as the road progresses between the Lakeland on side and the rice paddy and the slopes up to Sarangkot on the other. Towards the far end the lake merges into paddy which appears to be where the lake has silted up. At one point there is a cable operated car across the river which is in much demand.

Further along there is a Bhuddist monastery school on one side of the road and a children's home on the other. The latter has a cafe attached where I have a sprite resting in the shade. Up the valley there are a further two villages before I turn back to enjoy the return along the same road, but with different views. The weather gets warmer and more humid, before clouding over with some spots of rain. I find the 'Newari Kitchen' for future reference, and then 'Himalayan Encounters' which the book recommends as an agency. I book two nights (2nd to 4th) in Bandipur (the Old Inn for the first and possibly a different one for the second) and the bus from Pokhara. It's a visit to the ATM to avoid the 4% on the credit card.

Back to lodge for a rest, shower and hand in laundry. As it gets dark I go back to the Newari Kitchen for a meal - the Newari set, kheer, FLS and HC. The former has several distinct items including spicy toasted soya beans (good) and spinach pickle (not so sure!). The kheer is uninspiring.

Back to the inn for another decent night.

Tuesday 29th; Pokhara

Up for the morning shower and walk along the lakeside. It's a little cleared with a hint of the high mountains showing through the haze, but as the sun gets up, the temperature also climbs and the air already feels humid.

Breakfast on the terrace at seven, with banana porridge, apple juice, toast and honey, and a cafetiere of coffee. After some reading and packing, I'm away at nine to the lake for the boat

across (700/- return plus 10/- for 'life jacket') to the start of the steps up to the World Peace Stupa (pagoda). There are warnings about walking alone, but there are plenty of other walkers around, and I become an honorary member of one of the groups (Japanese, Korean?). The 300m climb up stone steps is tiring with what seems to be 100% humidity and increasing temperature. There is obviously not going to be the proverbial view, but there is a hint of it. The climb takes about 50mins and is worth it for the immediate views and the gleaming white stupa. It was built by the Japanese in the same scheme as the one near Leh. By now there is quite a crowd around, and after twenty minutes or so, I start the descent, with groups coming up all the time, including one from Germany.

Towards the bottom I take a wrong turn and end up walking down to the wrong bay, but there is a rudimentary path along the lakeside, and I'm just ten minutes late for my agreed meeting time with the boatman, who rows me back with a friend/colleague. After a while at reception sorting out plans for the next few days, I have my light lunch of quiche (not bad, not up to my standard), chips and a beer.

I spent much of the afternoon sitting on the terrace, reading and talking to some of the other guests, including a couple from Konstanz. He had climbed Kilimanjaro last year. After a shower I go out to the Punjabi restaurant for a dosa and FLS. It's OK but nothing special.

TV on the iPad until nine and then sleep till three, but only a little after that.

Wednesday 30th; Pokhara

The usual shower and walk along the lakeside as the sun comes up over the town. At breakfast I order breakfast; coffee, orange juice, fruit salad and banana porridge. I take my time on the balcony as the sun comes up and the weather turns out to be the same as the last few days, warm and humid.

At 8.45 I set out through the town to the local bus station. Initially the way is along the lake side with good views and then through the town which is spread out. The bus stand at Prithvi Chowk is spread out but a few inquiries locate the bus to Begnas, which leaves straight away, but stops awhile after a few yards. The journey takes half an hour and costs 35/- and takes me to the bazaar. From there to the dam of the lake is only five minutes and from there there is a lakeside path past the fisheries and a village, with children who ask for money. There are lots of herons by the fish ponds, and the views must be good but today are limited to the lake and the immediately surrounding hills.

I go back to the bazaar and set up the road which climbs steadily for about two km to the ridge between the Begnas and Rupa lakes. It's very warm and humid and I'm sweating lavishly. At the pass there is a path to the Rupa View Guest House, where there are not offering the local food but I get a breakfast of omelette, pancakes with their own honey and coffee.

I go for another half hour along the road where there is a village with views of the two lakes, and then return along the road to Begnas, strolling gently. Immediately there is a bus, but it goes via various villages and takes longer to get to Pokhara. There is a bus to lakeside waiting, but it's quite a while before it's very full and departs for the 20/- ride. I end up by walking along the path back to the hotel as the sun sets and I have a beer on the balcony. After a shower the management helps me sort out the remaining couple of nights.

Reasonable night till four.

Thursday 31st; Pokhara

Slightly disturbed stomach. Weather as before.

Out for a walk and breakfast at seven: coffee, juice, banana porridge and cheese toast.

A leisurely start and a walk around the lake, but little energy. Most of the rest of the day at the Inn, fix bus ticket from Bandari to Kathmandu, hand in laundry and have tea and cake on the balcony. Out to get more cash and another book to read by Orhan Pamuk.

There's a power cut in the evening so it's reading by the one light powered by the generator. The power eventually comes back on and I can charge things up.

Bed at nine for reasonable night till 4.30

Friday 1st November; Pokhara

Up and ready for breakfast at seven; again it's been raining in the night and there is low cloud.

I'm out by 8.15 to a pleasantly cool morning. A taxi almost to the top of Sarangkot costs 1000/- plus 30/- entry fee and before nine I'm walking up the steps towards the summit, passing many guest houses and restaurants and a few farms. At the summit only the nearest hills and a hint of the valley are visible, with a touch of blue sky from time to time.

After talking to other visitors for a while, I head down to pick up the track along the hillside. Initially it's a rough way through the forest, but it later joins various villages, and although it is never surfaced, it gets more organised with even one bus to be seen. There are several schools and a hospital. As the day progresses, the temperature rises and again it gets humid. It's a very pleasant walk with attractive farmhouses.

After almost three hours I get to the main road, and after just five minutes, a minibus stops on its way to Pokhara, and I get a comfortable ride back for 100/-. I'm dropped in the middle of town from where a half an hour walk gets me back to the Sacred Valley, in time for tea and

cheesecake.

I'm stopped from having a shower by the lack of hot water but that's soon fixed (they've had the plumber in), and I feel more comfortable. I pay my bill and go out for a meal - back to the Newari Kitchen for a Nepali veg set, FLS, and yoghurt. The later has flakes of ice in it; I trust that won't be trouble.

Back to the Inn for reading, podcasts and an early night.

Saturday 2nd; Pokhara to Bandipur

I'm up and packing at six, and leave at 6.0 for the walk to the tourist bus park. Reporting time is seven for the 7.30 departure. The bus is comfortable and fills up and departs on time, firstly going around to the travel agents where I booked, and picks up there. The journey out of time takes a long time, stopping several times to pick up packages, and the ribbon development goes on for miles. At last we are into open country but the road surface is poor and there are plenty of slow trucks. About eleven kilometres short of Dumre we stop for twenty minutes for 'breakfast', and get to Dumre at about ten.

The minibus up the hill is waiting with plenty of sacks in it and by the time we leave it is full of close packed humanity. Being Saturday, there are plenty of schoolboys, who get out half way up the hill but it seems a miracle that the bus has enough power for the journey. I think of my sixtieth in Switzerland; there the bus had a strict limit to the number of passengers and returned for another load. On board with me were a couple from Weymouth, Val and Derek, on a long round the world trip including volunteering. He had taught at the school in Bandipur last year and knew the ropes. They were also staying at the Old Inn, and I had a light lunch with them.

The rooms are simple, without facilities, but with views across the valley when the haze dissipates. However the local views compensate. A walk around the village shows charming scenes with an immaculately tiled bazaar and several interesting temples and many facades of old buildings of which the Inn is one. I take some time reading on the terrace before having a beer at the neighbouring cafe with wifi.

There is time for the rest before having dinner at 6:30. Tonight's western and there are tasty vegetables and instead of roast chicken I get an omelette, and I eat with Val and Derek. We end with hot chocolate and I'm off to bed before too long to my little cell. I get off to sleep pretty well but have to get up twice during the night; perhaps the beer and HC were too much.

Sunday 3rd; Bandipur

I manage a shower and a little walk around the village before breakfast at seven, which turns out to be good with mango and lemon juice, excellent porridge, cheese omelette with fried potatoes, toast and homemade marmalade and jam, but instant coffee. A real set up for the day. I leave

my bags ready to move to another room and hand in laundry.

By eight thirty I'm out walking, initially with a sweater as it's foggy and quite cool. The sun soon comes out and it's another humid and hazy day. The beginning of the path, to Ramcot, is sign posted from the top of the road out of the valley, and goes diagonally up to a coll between two of the peaks on view from the village, and then slightly down on the other side. What started as a rather rough, slashed track becomes amuch pleasanter path and so it continues all the way to Ramcot. It takes about two hours and is very fine, up and down but basically contouring around the steep hillside, largely in the forest. for the first hour there are few folk, and no villages, but then there are quite a few hikers and a village or two.

The Magar village of Ramcot is delightfully unspoilt with no shop, music and lots of children playing, including on the ubiquitous bamboo swing. A little past the village is a col with a view down to the main valley, but still no views of the mountains. The walk back is just as good with more people out. The round trip takes around five hours.

Back at the Inn I'm not too late for lunch; what I thought was going to be a bowl of soup with bread turns out to be more substantial, with a second course of rice, potatoes and veg pakora. It's good but more than I really want. I still don't know whether I've paid for the food in my room rate.

Most of the afternoon passes with a bottle of beer and a book. Towards sunset I take a walk around the village and get back as it gets dark around five thirty.

Dinner is local food tonight with papads, rice, various veg curries, dal, pickle, followed by banana fritters with honey and HC. V and D treat me to a glass of wine.

The new room is another dark cell (power cuts) but this time with a double bed (instead of two singles) with damp sheets. Reasonable night till five.

Monday 4th; Bandipur to Kathmandu

Again it's damp and foggy as dawn breaks. I manage a shower; the facilities are at least on the same floor this time. I take the same breakfast as yesterday except for tea, and on the terrace. I take a stroll down the street and say goodbye to V and D. At nine I get a lift down to Dumre with another group and a member of staff helps me to get the bus to Kathmandu. I have a ticket with Swiss, and th time is supposed to be 9.15, but it's nearer to 10.15 when the bus arrives. It's comfortable and the seat is waiting for me. We make decent progress before a half hour halt for lunch (I don't eat), and then on the approach to Kathmandu progress slows with the long winding ascent to the pass just above the Kathmandu valley. We drop people at a couple of stops and finally everyone gets off short of the Kantipath I was expecting. But it's not far to Thamel, and the map is helpful

I soon find the Sacred Valley and there is a warm welcome, and I'm soon settling in on the fourth floor. Above is the roof top restaurant with just the same menu as in Pokhara. I have my tea and

cheesecake while updating emails, diary and the Archers.

After a shower I go out for a meal and end up sitting cross legged on the floor in the Korean Kitchen which is very close. The soup/stew is tasty, but some of the other dishes are rather odd. I change £140 to pay for the next four nights.

Back for a reasonable night, but the beer means several trips to the bathroom.

Tuesday 5th; Kathmandu to Dhulikhel

Up to the roof at seven for a breakfast like those in Pokhara; the menu is exactly the same. After packing and paying I'm underway soon after eight for the 15 min walk to the city bus park. Almost immediately I find a bus to Dhulikhel which initially has plenty of room, but soon my rucksack is taken to the front and then to the roof as more customers turn up. Indeed as we leave town on the main road past the airport the bus gets very crowded, but the young conductor continues to trade for trade. Before too long we pass the outskirts of Bhaktapur, and soon after start the 400m ascent through various villages and past 'the tallest statue of Shiva in Nepal'.

After just under two hours we get to Dhulikhel and I get off at the dusty bus park and am glad to find that my rucksack is still safe. Just before I had seen an advert/sign for the High View Resort. After a quick orientation in the town, I head back along the road and side road to find the long flight of steps up to the hotel, where they are expecting me, 'from Pokhara'. I'm soon settled in the room- a rather grubby but large lower floor of a house in the grounds overlooking the valley.

Lunch proves to be difficult; it's the day of the holiday when everyone's to be at home with the family, but the chef is persuaded to come to work at two. I have a decent veg pakoda and beer followed by a yoghurt sweet. There is wifi of sort; they say it's only available in the house but it turns out to work in my cottage. There is a vague hint of a view of the mountains.

After a restful afternoon, I head down the hill to a neighbouring village and back as the light begins to fade soon after four. A foray to get a bottle of water fails as several shops have the shutters closed, presumably for the holiday.

At six I go to the restaurant for supper. There are various small groups in. I have a veg Tali, water and HC. soon to bed with lots of bedclothes on as it's got cold after sunset (1500m). After podcasts, a pretty good night.

Wednesday 6th; Dhulikhel

I'm awake before five and see the sky lightening and eventually the mountains appear. A knock on the door alerts me to the fact. It's cold and I'm in and out of bed several times to see the views and get warm. Eventually I get up and take some photos. About seven I go to find

breakfast. The groups are in the restaurant, but I elect to have mine on the roof top. Porridge, coffee, masala omelette, juice and toast. Good apart from the instant coffee.

There is no hurry so I take my time and go back to the room for a shower, and then get ready for the day. After a while looking at the view, I head down all those steps, back along the road and on another side road before the main highway. This goes upwards through farm land and a village before circling through the forest to the bottom of steps. These lead up to a viewing tower with an excellent view of the mountains, valleys and Dhulikhel. Apart from a couple on a motorbike, there is no one around and hence peaceful. A little bit below the summit is a rest shelter where I can sit and overlook the valley. Then I make my way down through the houses and onto the main road. After a quarter of an hour, I am in the centre and spend quite a while looking around at the temples and gently decaying old houses. One temple is on top of the hill and has views towards the mountains and old men are playing cards in the yard. Also, as with many places around the town, rice is drying on the ground.

Then I find the one remaining guest house from traveller days. It feels like another age, but supplies me with a cafetiere of local coffee and a very thick pancake with honey and banana. That sets me up for the rest of the day. I head for the route up to the sunset views getting mixed up between the Shiva and Kali temples. Some rather loud youths are rather a nuisance, but I think they are trying to help. I use a mix of steps and track, and eventually reach the top rather sweaty. But from the top of the tower is an excellent view all around, including down to the old town.

I return via the 'road' which is in general more peaceful with only a few motorbikes, and one bus struggling with the rocky track. Back near the bottom a football match is just finishing, and there are hoardes of motorbikes. I take my time and get back to the hotel just before it gets dark. Before too long I have a snack in the dining room (veg pakoda, lemon soda and HC) and find that I am the only guest tonight. Back in the room, I watch a program about Congo on the tablet before going to bed at nine. Not such a good night.

Thursday 7th; Dhulikhel to Bhaktapur

Again I watch the sunrise and the mountains appear, with more clarity than yesterday. There's no hurry and so I take my time showering (good hot water, but a cold room), and go for breakfast at 7.30. I have the same breakfast as yesterday, but with a cheese omelette. The bill is much as I expect, and there is no problem with paying in rupees in spite of the notice saying that foreigners have to use a convertible currency.

I spend time sitting on my balcony and organising my bag before leaving at ten for the walk up to the bus park. Straight away I get into a bus which is moderately full and sit besides the drive, first on the gears and then on the side seat. The bus is soon very full for the hour's ride to Bhaktapur, which costs 35/-. I'm dropped on the main road, but it's a short walk to the heart of the old town, stopping only to pay my entrance fee of 1100/-. I'm soon settled into the Pagoda

Guest House, have a light lunch of bamboo soup and lemon soda. I'm not really convinced about the bamboo soup; very fatty.

I have a peaceful afternoon, with some reading and then a stroll around the town, which is very fine with lots of old red brick buildings and pagoda type temples. It's good for a change to observe without taking photos.

Later I have the fixed Nepali Teli followed by HC. It's, but nothing special. I go to bed reasonably early, but a Chinese group arrives, noisily, and start smoking in the corridor. I get off to sleep, but after a few false starts am awoken by the group at 4.30 as they noisily leave for their sightseeing.

Friday 8th; Bhaktapur

Breakfast on the terrace (immediately above my room) of omelette, porridge, juice and tea.

Then it's out for some serious sightseeing. First of all immediately around the centre, taking lots of photos before too many visitors arrive, and in the morning light. After reassembling luggage, I head for the bus stop to Changu Naryan. A bus arrives after about half an hour, but then I sit in it for about a quarter. I decide that I ought to head for the Brass Museum as it's approaching ten. I get off the bus, and go to the museum; but it's closed for one of the many holidays. Reading the paper later it seems as though government offices were given the day off at the last moment. 'I Come back tomorrow at ten.'

So I go back to the bus stop and after ten minutes or so another bus turns up and leaves more or less straight away. We're fully laden including many on the roof and it's a surprise that the bus makes it up the steep hill. The entry to the village is 100/-. The Main Street would be attractive if it weren't for all the trinket stalls. The museum here is also closed, even though it's supposed to be private. But the temples are worth the journey even if it's not the peaceful place that the guide book describes; there are lots of groups.

I find the steps down to the beginning of the way back to Bhaktapur which takes down a steep path through the trees and then along country lanes through villages. It's a pleasant walk of about ninety minutes back to the guest house. I sit with the proprietor, and explain why I feel I shall be unlikely to return to Nepal. She agrees with the points I make.

I take a late lunch of tomato spaghetti, beer and apple pie. My stomach is not a hundred percent, and I have only eaten at the guest house

After another walk around the town, back for a reasonably early, and somewhat better, night.

Saturday 9th; Bhaktapur to Kathmandu

Up and to breakfast at seven and start talking to a young American who spends a lot of time

travelling. Toasted cheese and tomato sandwich, pot of filter coffee, juice and banana porridge.

I pack my bag and leave it at the guest house as I go off to do the rest. Of my sightseeing. Initially it's the royal palace, which is rather disappointing, and then to the museums. They are open at ten, and a ticket for all three costs 100/- plus 50/- for camera. There's plenty to see in the Brass and Bronze museum and I take lots of photos for Vanda. But a lot of the pieces are behind dirty glass and there is no printed material available. The Woodwork Museum across the road is similar, and I got to the National Art Museum as I have the ticket but I find little to interest me.

So it's back to the Guest House to pick up my bag, and then to the bus park to pick up the 'Bhaktapur Express' to get me to Kathmandu in half an hour for 25/- in relative comfort. In twenty minutes from the us drop I am back at thy Norbu Linka, and soon in my room which is a little smaller but on the second floor, so not so much climbing.

After unpacking and dropping some laundry, I start out to do some shopping for a few little items. Whilst in a bookshop, I come upon Derek and Val, and even more of a coincidence there appears Beate, whom D and V had met, also in Bandipur. We resort to a nearby cafe for a drink together.

Back in the room after some reading and listening, I go to bed. But my stomach is uneasy and there is some noise and so it's a poor night.

Sunday 10th; Kathmandu

It's a lazy start; there's no hurry. I get porridge specially made, and have fruit, coffee, juice and cheese.

At 8.45 I do my on line check in, and get a right hand window seat show I should see more mountains. The receptionist prints out the boarding card for me and arranges a taxi for me at 6.30 which should cost 550/- but might be more on a strike day.

By mid morning I'm ready to go out and start walking to the 'monkey temple', the Swayambhu Stupa. As I walk along, who should I meet, but Derek and Val again, who are going to the same place. We go along together, eventually climbing the steep steps passing lots of shrines and monkeys. At the top there is a 200/- entry fee, and plenty to see around the stupa and towards the hills. We have a drink together and say goodbye again.

I make my down to the north and around the bottom passing a huge number of prayer wheels, many small but a few huge ones. The walk through the city is very busy and I avoid the Dhurbar Square to get the to shops where I saw a flag before and got one for Clive, the vexillophile. Then I go to Nanan's, the Indian restaurant I went to a fortnight ago. But my hunger isn't really up to the Thali. From there I head back to the hotel, and rest in the room, with only a short foray.

As before the laundry is late, but eventually comes and i can pack and get to bed.

Monday 11th; Kathmandu to Delhi

After little sleep, I'm up at five, still worrying about the strike ins spite of the management saying that everything will be fine. I have a modest breakfast and am waiting for my taxi when it arrives at 6.20. The charge is 750/- instead of 500/- and we are at the airport within a quarter of an hour through quiet streets with lots of armed policemen. There are plenty of people queing but the process is reasonably efficient and I change my remaining Nepali rupees into sterling.

The flight is smooth with better views of the mountain than from the flight in, and a reasonable meal is served. We arrive in Delhi on time and I'm soon through the formalities with little luggage on the carousel; a lot of people are apparently checked through to Heathrow. The Airport Express is as quiet as ever and I am at the Grand Park Inn before 12.30 to a personal welcome and a ready room.

After a little recovery time, I walk via the parkland, Laxmi Naryan Temple to Janpath and the Oxford Bookstore for another bundle of books and to Savarana Bhavan for an early supper, before going back to the hotel for an early and fairly successful night.