

**2005 A Magnificent Trek combining  
Singalila Ridge and Gocha La - Western Bengal India and Sikkim**

23 days moderate track with a maximum altitude of 4900 metres

Spectacular views of Kangchenjunga, Makalu and Everest

Visited ancient monasteries

Enjoyed the charms and character of old-world hotels in Darjeeling and Kalimpong

**The diary 30th of October 2005**

Dreadful start to the trek. KLM double booked our seats from Schiphol which meant we were 1 day late arriving in Delhi and missed a day's sight-seeing tour.

With 3 hours sleep we set off for our trek!

Many arguments and compensation later of £816 and we were off.

**Let's start at the beginning**

**29th of October 2005**

Taxi from Cumbria 3:00 AM arrived Manchester Airport 4:30 am to stand in a checking in queue for an hour and a half. The slowest women you have ever seen were on duty!

**31st of October 2005**

Well, the airport arrival would have been worse large passport queued three quarters of an hour for bags, 1 missing found after a thorough search somebody must have taken it off the carousel and dumped it. Whilst we were waiting, I found a free phone to be told our reception was waiting. Arrival and out into the open air, not quite as bad as Kathmandu. Half an hour trip to the hotel not much

to see in the dark, lorries galore - these are only allowed into the city between 10:00 PM and 5:00 AM. All sorts of battered and bumped vehicles and overcrowded green, yellow and black tuc tucs.

Hotel Connaught was okayish, not much welcome, small room, incredibly hard beds, broken shower and miniscule amount of water available!

Repacked for morning breakfast at 6:30 am, we left at 7:30 for yet another airport. We managed only 3 hours sleep between arrival and departure again.

Travelled to the domestic airport to fly Jet Airways for a 2-hour flight to

Great Expectations because we were to fly over part of the Himalayas and should have magnificent views. Our fixer fixed it for us all to be on the left-hand side of the plane all separate with window seats, splendid except just got on and we were all on the right!

### **1st of November 2005**

Left at 7:30 AM, no views on the plane, 4 hours not 2 hours, calling somewhere else 1st and then a gruelling journey by comfortable Jeep 5 hours to Hotel Cedar Inn, Darjeeling. We arrived at 7:30 PM after travelling 12 hours.

The hotel is delightful at the top of one of the very many Queen Hills which surround Darjeeling. You understand now why the British said it was a hill station. Darjeeling appears to be a mass of tenanted hills with 600,000 people I met 500,000 just this morning!

The hotel had been owned by the McKenzie family for many years. The owner was an artist, and he had many fine pencil drawings scattered about. I asked if there were any for sale and was told that there were possibly some prints on sale in the town. Next day I

went hunting and eventually found an old man who understood what I wanted and found me some prints of dancers. **Footnote** - These now lie resplendent in our home in 2021.

The locals - 3 levels of pay:

₹6000 per month, Level 3 ₹15,000 level 2 and 30,000 plus Level 1.

The first a labourer, the second don't know, the third government worker/soldier. A policeman is properly middle but probably Level 3 with backhanders. Dress - men mostly western, women in saris. and eastern dress. Lots of different races here Indian, plus 40% Tibetan mostly small and sturdy but with surprising few wobbly heads.

The roads are a series of joined up potholes which only the brave, foolhardy and Jeep drivers use. The road from the airport started crowded, busy, and rural but at least had some tarmac. We climbed up to 6500 feet to Darjeeling, the road deteriorated so badly it took us five hours to do 35 miles. The road actually follows beside the Darjeeling railway, crossing it at least two hundred times, the views were fine and very interesting. Village after village, with perhaps only a mile between clung to the side of the very steep and in some cases falling away hillsides. Houses on stilts, shacks, wood, corrugated iron and for the more affluent, brick.

The people seem more affluent here, still subsistence for some but nevertheless houses/shacks appear to be of a better standard.

Let me try to describe the typical road and the surroundings. The roads are joined up potholes crisscrossed or alongside the railway, very little tarmac, mostly dry dust and deep holes. At the side of the road, either side, deep gutters sometimes bridged by wood or a concrete covering, full of debris, waste, plastic bottles, and filth. Alongside the gutter lie small open corrugated /wood shacks. Some of them are homes of the shops, typical view - dark caverns with goods on display, mostly sweets with someone usually hunkered down,

looking out. As the day passes by, he or she may have a dog asleep in the dust or a child playing next to the gutter. Is this poverty or is it a just hill village?

In the dusty streets there are crowds and crowds of people, trucks, buses and even the train twice a day. The cacophony of sound is horns, horns, and more horns! The dust, smell, intense volume of people and vehicles in the narrow streets makes you fascinated on one hand and a bit queasy on the other. You still can't be refrain from glancing into the dark caverns of the properties that line either side of the road.

### Tuesday the 1st of November 2005

Our hotel is set high up in the town with a fantastic vista of the Kangchenjunga range. It is all wooden at all different levels and has amazing gardens and flowers and outside patios. Our bedroom is two tiers with a fireplace and suite with a sitting area and huge floor to ceiling wooden windows. This morning we woke at 6:00 AM to the most fantastic panorama we have ever seen. The snowy range was in full view and was set against a beautiful azure blue sky. A tiny whisp of cloud made Kangchenjunga herself look beautiful and mysterious. And all this was from the bed!

Still the first of November and what a lot we've done in Darjeeling.

Off at 8:30am to visit our first monastery, taken to Goum where we boarded the local steam train back to Darjeeling, onto the West Bengal Himalaya Mountaineering Club Museum, quick trip to the zoo, back to the hotel for lunch, another monastery visited and finally we were left in the local pedestrian market to walk back up the hill to the hotel. Phew1. Here I tracked down my artist posters.

Impressions - the train was 150 years old and it was the local train, not the tripper train, hence it was mucky but full of character. We

opened the windows and enjoyed a very slow journey with a lot of tooting and hundreds of horns, as jeeps crisscrossed the railway line. The noise will be something I will take home from Darjeeling. Mountains and glorious views do not mix with a cacophony of horns of every hue and cry.

Some houses and shacks were so close to the rail tracks, you could have pinched the neighbour's drying washing off the hedges. That brings me to another memory: Indians are a clean race. They are forever washing clothes and sweeping their dirt path outside their homes, but they sweep up the muck and rubbish into the roads and gutters and leave it there. Consequently, there are piles of muck, rubbish, plastic, paper and general yuck everywhere. Occasionally I saw some poor poverty-stricken person clean the rubbish away. Obviously low caste and paid a pittance.

There is no local waste collection service, nowhere to put the rubbish and nowhere to burn it. This gives the streets a squalid, rat-infested perception. Put that with the dark hovels some people live in, corrugated iron sheets and bits of timber tied together always adorned with washing on a washing line - mostly rags or well-worn grey clothes

Time spent in the streets or even passing them in the 4x4 makes you want to be clean and shower in a peaceful room without noise.

It is Diwali festival of light for the Buddhist and Hindus. Everywhere was decked with Marigold garlands and people attend the gompas to be blessed by the priest. In the gompa, I took off my shoes and was called forward by the priest. Following other Hindu examples, I knelt, gave him 5 rupees whilst he chanted put tikka on my forehead and gave me a piece of coconut. I then knelt bowed to Buddha and retreated backwards. I then walked around the stupor, from the left ringing the huge bells as I went.

A nice experience I prayed for World Peace and an end to world disasters. Fireworks at night, a nice meal and my last bottle of wine Riviera India for a bit.

and early to bed. Up at 7:30 to start the track

### 2nd of November 2005 Wednesday

Fabulous sunrise on Kangchenjunga. 5:30 am watched rose peaked mountains turn slowly to white - wonderful - all again from my bed!

Two-hour jeep journey turned into three hours as we left Darjeeling and headed to the distant ridges. The road deteriorated badly, and it took one hour to do 6 miles. We arrived at a lovely hilltop settlement, one shop and many farms. People not friendly just a lot of staring.

We left our bags at the Indian checkpoint. They were to be transported by Jeep to our first camp and there, horses were set to join us to carry our bags.

Our group leader is Butcher spelt phonetically, a small dark skinned Indian with a lovely smile. He told us it would take between 1 1/2 hours to five hours to reach camp depending on our pace. It took three hours at a slow pace - we started at 8500 feet and finished at 9500. 1000 feet does not sound much but don't forget this is Nepali flat: up down and down up.

The path was obviously the main village pony route before a road was built. It ascends and descends bamboo forest, onto ridges, circuits ridges at a reasonable slight incline. I think tomorrow will be very different.

We arrived on the ridge at a trekking hut. On the way we had searched for red panda but there was none to be found. Plenty of bamboo for them to eat but with the chattering of four particular people in the group, we were unlikely to see any.

We did see a herd of small black pigs, they were en route for Darjeeling and it would take a week for them to get there. I did shout don't worry boys you really don't want to go there!

Next to the trekkers hut it was a small holding, lots of cows with bells, 2 friendly dogs, one with a puppy, a lovely herd of goats complete with two kids and then our ponies arrived, probably about 20.

Bringing up the rear was a young pony untethered but trying to keep up with his Mum. At about 4 pm, all the animals start to appear from the scattered hillsides. They're obviously fed and settle down in shelters, safe from marauding wildlife. Tomorrow no doubt they will roam free and wake us with their bells, a nice sound.

Just watched the sun go down on Kangchenjunga. The range was just peeping through a heavy cloud base. The cloud keeps sweeping in, no ridges and mountains to be seen and the temperature has really dropped.

I'm wearing my pyjamas tracky bottoms tracky top, fleece coat, two pair of socks, headband, torch and am sat on my thermarest in the tent inside my silk inner bag and sleeping bag and guess what I've got cold feet! The pen is starting to struggle so I'll give up writing.

Peace at last after Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday travel weary days with so much noise. I hope tomorrow I can find quiet and my own space.

What a mistake to make, dogs howling outside the tents all night and a very cold night.

## **Day 2 Tonglu - Kalpokhri 3200 meters**

After having fabulous views from the campsite, we circuited a few of the many high ridges, through thick bamboo and rhododendron

forests. Good road but few views. We eventually dropped down to the Indian/ Nepalese border post at Gairibans and set off up a long climb to Kalpokhri.

Only about six hours walking but at 10,000 plus feet it is quite tiring, headache again, feet are fine.

The lake at Kalpokhri was mystical, surrounded by prayer flags, it even had lilies. A few horses grazed peacefully along the ridge. The settlement is a few subsistence farmers with lots of goats, cows and yes yaks. I now know the difference between Yaks and Joes, Yaks have a skirt Joes (cross between yaks and cows ) do not.

A few village children about: filthy dirty with a few layers of mucky clothing, sticky up hair ( I can talk ), absolutely filthy hands, green runny noses and the biggest smiles you've ever seen.

We found them playing under a tap, drenching each other, and having great fun. They greeted this with "hello my name is " no asking for pens or sweets. They were delightful but as usual, show any interest and you have them for hours. Thank goodness Sharon wasn't with us.

Missing Edwin and Sharon our trekking mates. The group are OK but there are 4 who never shut up. Edwin would not have been happy. When I look at the scenery, the mountains, and the small children, I think how Edwin would have so enjoyed it with that endearing grin he has. I think of them often and wish they were with us.

The campsite was surrounded by horses, yaks and herds of goats. The little ones were beautiful.

A typical day starts with bed tea at 6:00 am, up and pack, breakfast 6:45 to 7:00, we leave for tracking 7:30 to 8:00. We arrive at our destination anytime between 2:00 and 4:00 PM.

You only have one bowl of water to wash per day delivered at 6:00 am. I prefer to wash after the day's walking, so I always ask for a bowl after we have arrived in the afternoon.

The crew don't work as a team and are a disparate group, not like our Nepali's or Peru trip. The group leader tells us at breakfast what we will do that day and then stays at the front of the trek. He rarely imparts any information, the horses who carry our bags belong to a pony man. He transports, delivers, disappears, and returns next morning with the horses. He has nothing to do with anybody.

We have two Sherpas, one Rishi training guide and another who stays at the back. The group leader camps separately from the Sherpas. Finally, we have the cook plus three helpers. The cook is young and doesn't seem to have the same authority as they have in Nepal. So, they are a desperate group with not much community spirit. Friendly though very helpful and the food is excellent. Enroute to Kalpokhri we had a fabulous hot lunch, eggs and chips on butties I couldn't believe our luck.

### **Day 3 Kalpokhri - Sandakph highest point 3690 metres, our highest point**

Only a four hour climb today but it was very steep, not easy at altitude. Suffered bad headaches for the past two days but feeling better today. It comes on about lunchtime and lasts until we go to sleep.

Arriving at camp we have magic views. Makalu, Everest and Lhotse and then the Kangchunga range. Cloud blowing in so we hope for good views tomorrow.

We have decided to get up at 5 am tomorrow for the sun rise. Tea is at 6am so we will probably be in bed by 7:30 tonight. It goes dark

at 5:30 pm and the mess tent is cold and only has three candles. No incentive to stay up.

Tomorrow is the long-awaited ridge walk.

### **Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> November Sandakph - Phalut**

What a fantastic day ! The ridge walk was everything you could possibly wish for. The Everest range was on the left and the Kangchenjunga range on the right, all were set again against clear morning blue skies. Sunrise on the mountain was spectacular, the reds, purples, blues, and pinks left us speechless.

A very long day 7 hours of up and down and 23 K to walk, not easy above 13,000 feet. The weather has been typical, freezing at night minus five to minus 10, beautiful blue-sky mornings until about 12:00 ish and then the cloud blows in, the mountains disappear and we spend a cold cloudy misty evening which magically disappears about 7:00 pm to leave a carpet of stars, the like I have never seen.

Phulet was on top of yet another hill, nearly died in the mist getting there. A dump. There was a UK army Royal Signals group who had rushed past us. They expected to be fed in the one and only hut were disappointed. They went hungry and spent the night with big scary furry friends. Thank God for camping.

A spectacular day and really surprised how fit I am.

### **Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> of November Phalut - Samandar**

Down all the way today or so they say. But first a last look at the Everest range - another climb but it was worth it. We could see a full 250 miles of mountains from the Everest and Kangchenjunga ranges fairly close to Bhutan. There was a temple complete with prayer flags on the top. I left a prayer scarf, had a good cry and

prayed for the past and present family. Fabulous day, the best so far.

### **Monday the 7th of November Samandar - Rimbrick**

Another fabulous day, hot and clear as we descend, descend, and descend, from ridge to ridge, through village after village. So many crops, maize, corn, beans, peas, bananas. Cows, goats and friendly well cared for dogs. The dog from Phulet, that Godforsaken place, has followed us down to Rimbrick.

The lower you descend the less affluence you saw. Less well cared for animals and poorly dressed people. Arriving in Rimbrick, this is the trading post for many surrounding high pass villages. It was one small street, shops either side of the dirt road. The shops were open fronted displaying all sorts, complete with bed of course. To help the economy, I decided to buy a saree. Two lovely ladies helped me sit on their bed, they bought out a suitcase full of different sarees. I chose one and went into the backroom and they dressed me up. It was a bit of fun and cost £4.00.

Our hotel in Rimbrick is Hotel Sherpa. We are in lodges in the grounds surrounded by lovely flowers and gardens including huge point setters. Breakfast on the lawn after the usual 6:00 AM bed tea we leave today for 6-7 hours transfer on to our next trek in Sikkim. Our driver is called Because ????

### **Tuesday the 8th of November Rimbrick - Pelling 6200 feet**

What a journey and finally into Sikkim! 7 hours of jolting with at least three hours of off roading.

We arrived eventually on the valley floor and passed through a big rural tropical village. Different houses and flowers, all very friendly, animals, people and sunshine.

Arrived at the hotel 5:30 PM to a power cut - no lights, no hot water and no comfort. However we have a palatial suite on the roof - big lounge, bedroom and bathroom. Fabulous view from the roof and bedroom window - Kangchenjunga panorama.

I hosted a sunrise breakfast for the group on the roof, well I enjoyed it.

Just below our hotel there was a wooden shed something like a garden tumbledown shed. Out popped two small children, man and woman. Obviously very poor and not very clean. Amazingly there was an inscription written in chalk on the side of the shed **"If your heart is full of love, you always have something to give."** Haven't we got a lot to thank God for.

**Impressions of Sikkim compared to Western Bengal, India**  
**Note - Sikkim was the last Kingdom to join a united India in 1975**

**Ridges** - just the same as Western Bengal but sharper and rockier.  
**Fewer people** farming but still quite a few on the steep terraces.  
**Roads** infinitely better than Western Bengal, quite a few tarmac/metal roads and lots and lots and lots of road replacement schemes - format still to be explored.

There appears to a contract given for specific road and then it seems to be split up and subcontracted out to families. All the families join in Mum, Dad, Gran and children of all ages. They sit at the side of the road and quarry the stone from the land next to them. They split the stone into chunks and hammer away with the most basic hand tools making certain sizes of stone. These range from cobble size through to gravel - everybody joins in. Women sort, carry and pile the stone in square layers, men work with bamboo pick and chisels. They are really poor, poor clothes, filthy

dirty and live-in plastic shanties at side of the road where they work.

**Suspension bridges** incredible bridges mostly wooden slats high up over torrents of rivers, one vehicle at a time and the sway is impressive.

Arrived at Yuksom after another three-hour jolting journey. Same height as Pelling.

We go off from here for our most challenging trek. Met another party who had just come down they warned us it was a challenge just what you need! Film/ battery in camera has packed up now so no more pictures/ photos.

Yuksom has a lovely monastery. Before we left this morning, we visited the fabulous monastery at Pemyamytse. Fabulous views of Kangchenjunga. Had a super chat with three monks and a guide and was privileged to sit with the trainee monks whilst they chanted from their books and played their instruments. In this monastery, they start at 5:30 to 7:30 in the morning and they join the monastery at age 6 and stay until age 20 and then go to college for 9 years. At 29 they are qualified priests and join the community somewhere to perform weddings, funerals, and community service. Surprisingly they have two hours compulsory English lessons each day.

Arrived at Yuksom, ready for tomorrow now.

Campsite pretty but full with trekkers. We are feeling a bit apprehensive. A German man went up on his own and has not returned, he is presumed dead. German search dogs have been flown in and they have found his stick and rucksack. The catholic Bishop from Darjeeling has turned up and is in discussion with the police. We need to stay together tomorrow because bears have been seen.

## **Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> of November**

Yuksom 1780 metres -

The start of our 2<sup>nd</sup> and highest trek.

Today we climbed through semi tropical forests across a huge wobbly suspension bridge and ever upwards a long, long day of 4500 feet up to reach 10,000 feet. Camped at Tsakha 2950 metres

### **Tsokha - Dzongn 3990 metres**

Another mammoth day ever upwards over 3500 feet altitude. Feel sick, dizzy and have a dreadful headache. We arrived Dzongn, God forsaken place which would be cold. Our campsite was another half an hour further on, still in the wilderness but didn't appear quite as damp. Decided to take altitude pills John still not happy but he hasn't got an incredible migraine and nausea.

**Early starts** - boy is this tough! Never started so early so many times - routine 6:00 AM bed tea, 6 30 am breakfast, walking for 7:15 am. Very often is 4 30am or 5 am starts.

**Weather** - we have been fabulously lucky, for three weeks blue sky and sunshine during the day minus 10 - 15 C above 10,000 feet. The cloud has tended to roll up the mountains in early /late afternoon of the third week.

### **Dzongri - Thangshing 3900 metres**

Don't think this is a flat walk from A to B. No such luck, Nepali flat - down 300 metres and then up again and so on. One of the group had a bad fall on the steep descent. A shorter day but stamina starting to slip.

### **Mountain views**

We are now starting to reap fabulous rewards, views are spectacular. Pandim and the Kangchenjunga are so close you feel you can almost touch them.

Snow covered peaks and ridges, glaciers, seracs and moraine are starting to become commonplace.

### **Thangshing - Samiti Lake 4250 metres**

An easy day today lie in until 7:30 AM. Just a 2 hour walk ever upwards to Samiti Lake, a holy lake which was so peaceful and serene. Views spectacular! We tied on another prayer flag and prayed for family and friends.

### **Samiti Lake to Goecha La July 15,800**

The big day. Left at 5:30 AM bed tea at 4:30 am and we had to pack up. Just enough light to walk back up to Samiti Lake and then a steady 1500-foot climb.

Sounds easy but not at 14,000 feet altitude - 100 steps, stop deep breath, carry on et cetera et cetera.

John was claustrophobic in the tent last night - altitude sickness along with many others. Thank goodness for my altitude pills.

From the lake we followed a deep riverbed gully to some moraine debris, still climbing, we rounded a corner and wham! The complete Kanchenjunga range in all its splendour. We carefully crossed moraine debris high up and arrived at the viewpoint. There were prayer flags and a small alter for burning incense. I had brought up some juniper from Yulsom so I shared it out. Each in turn we burnt our juniper and tied on our prayer flags.

Our prayer flag was for Edwin and Sharon and I found a small stone to take home for Edwin. It should all be recorded on photos, courtesy of Cathy and Gerry from Bolton.

We sat in silence, watching the splendour of the mountains and listening to the occasional falling stone. Bright hot sunshine but with a cold breeze, caused glaciers and seracs to fire pistil shot sounds that echoed around the range. We heard a plane and then suddenly we were privileged enough to witness the unpredictable will of the mountain, as a huge avalanche cascaded 3000 feet down in front of us. Thousands of tons of falling snow, ice came to rest on the rocky moraine.

Quote from John "scale enormous, immense and awesome" my words "beauty, wedding cake, oil painting with a scalpel, wondrous, just amazing"

Makes you put things into perspective. We're not even ants compared to the scale and splendour of the mountains.

Tomorrow we start the long descent, remind me to write about dogs, camp food, our group and the trek leader.

Cloud is down, inside my down sleeping bag with a hottie at my feet and a down jacket on my shoulders and a torch on my head. Only 4:30 PM time for a nap before tea at 6 pm.

### Tuesday and Wednesday

Well, it was a long way down, and down, and down. Wednesday was a long way down then a lot of up and down. Descended a net 10,000 feet ohhhh the knees. Arrived back in Yuksam to camp. What I wouldn't have given for a night in the local posh hotel complete with hot shower and soft bed.

Our last night under canvas. Party with the porters and staff. Led 'I am the music man' and 'Ikley Moor Batat' they did their bit in music and dance.

We had a Millet beer - Millet grains in huge bamboo tumblers complete with bamboo straws. The Millet contained grains and yeast, boiling water was poured in the pot, it was left for five minutes then sipped slowly. Mmmmmm!

### Thursday

Left Yuksom and our camp and tents for the last time. Our orange home had done us proud. 13 nights under canvas, we were warm despite minus 10 - 20 degrees C, comfortable, dry and snug. The packing of the sleeping bags, big trek bags and the refilling of the water drinking platypus became second nature. My routine of arrival at camp, strip wash, dress in pyjamas with tracksuit on the top ready for 7:30 bed, worked well. All clothes had their place in the stuff bag, were easily identified and caused little frustration.

John and I were a well organised team carrying wet gear, gloves et cetera and torches in our packs during the day.

Yuksom had an unusual number of destitute dogs. I wished Paul, Sheryl, Keith and Clare could spend a week here and sort them out. Around half needed to be put down, it upset me to see open bleeding wounds and hear the constant fighting for food and territory.

We had a comfortable drive to Kalingpong, we were surprised we were told it was only two hours, but that was Nepali time so it was 4  $\frac{1}{2}$  hours.

We stayed at the border town of Sikkim for lunch as before and I telephoned Gill, my first opportunity since coming down. 5 1/2 hours Indian time difference always made it difficult. When we were near a phone which was seldom, it was the middle of the night for Gill. On the two occasions I managed to phone it only cost me 35 rupees

which was 50P for three minutes. It was a good system - you went into a shop (loose turn for a broken-down wooden shed) complete with plastic stool to sit on, you dialled direct, had reasonable reception and when you had finished a printout came with a cost. Fabulous service run by people who also did the Internet. Gill told us the news about Don my brother in intensive care. I said Christian prayers, Buddhist and Hindu prayers, lit candles prayed on my knees and even bought White Tara, the Hindu goddess of healing. Not that I was worshiping idols!

### Friday - Kalinpong

Another hill station town similar to Darjeeling. We stayed at the Himalaya hotel, good hotel, comfortable, old colonial with the usual cold or negligible amount of hot water. I liked it here and preferred it to Darjeeling. Visited another monastery and travelled along the Army road.

Quite an education, boy did they look after themselves: schools, special school buses, special hospitals, very posh officers mess, posh house for the Brigadier, lovely gardens everywhere, and even a 9-hole golf course, completely underutilised but with a viewing platform for visitors /spectators like us.

Just behind the army road, which had a commanding view of the town and surrounding ridges was the monastery. We met a well-spoken monk aged 24 who had been there since he was six. He had another 4/5 years study and then he would be released into the community or allowed to meditate somewhere.

Visited an orchid farm which had the biggest poshest houses attached we have ever seen in India. There must be money in plants.

The most memorable occurrence here was the arrival of 'Shiri.' A local white robed, tall, majestic, ancient faced, lined man: the hotel

masseur, who had been there for 26 years. Standing to attention and saluting, he asked if we wanted a masseur after our trek, well it was more sign language. He was equipped with an old off-white plastic bag and a pint of cooking oil. After checking his credentials with reception, I booked a 1/2 hour neck back and shoulders massage.

To cut a very long story short, I ended up starkers on a less than white sheet on the floor being massage with cooking oil from a squeeze bottle, in places where I have never been massaged before! It was the best message I have ever had.

Six others in the group all went through the same experience. He was good, perhaps a little unorthodox and it was an excellent end to a real fun holiday.

### Footnote

Another memorable event was visiting a Sally Army School for the Blind. Here we met Captain John who was the head of the school. I could write a book on Captain John and here now at 2021 I can update and tell you, after meeting him for the first time in Kalingpong on this trek, I have travelled and stayed with him and his family many times, in many different places all over India and even Bangladesh, as he has worked his magic on very many projects of being a disciple and saving souls.

### Saturday

Saturday and so to home. How about this for a journey:

8 am depart 4x4 Kalingpong

11:00 AM arrive Bogdogra airport

4:45 PM arrive in Delhi

9:00 PM depart hotel Connaught

9:45 PM check in, what a palaver! No problem with seats and being checked straight through.

Happy in the exec lounge with our priority pass.

Went to phone Gill, 3 minutes cost 178 rupees not 35  
Was approached by ground staff who said queue now for security  
otherwise you could stand in a queue for hours.  
Queued for an hour to clear security, body search et cetera, six  
times that day! Eventually got through the other side which had no  
facilities  
The plane left 20 minutes late  
Goodbye Delhi  
KLM redeemed themselves landed on time and caught the 7:05 AM  
plane to Manchester

A lot of miles, a lot of travel and pretty tiring to boot!

Home in Blighty. Wonderful trek.