The Indian Outings – July and August 1968

These two short documents record the trips to Simla[1] (July) and Meerut (August) of Alan Clark (ASC) and John Waterfield (JPW), with various accompanying women and drivers.

They exist in faded typescript foolscap documents, and were found in JPW's papers after he died.

They are recounted and typed by ASC, a civil servant working in Delhi with JPW (Counsellor and Head of Chancery 1966-68). I do not know what ASC's job was, but I recall dark references to him being in intelligence, possibly borne out by the giggles at the car-game 'Password'. He was immensely clever.

Alan's typing is not very good. I've cleaned it up, more or less, while trying to preserve some idiosyncrasies: 'busses', 'verandah' – that, at least, was a generally-accepted spelling from the period – and most of the impetuous but winding grammar. I've added the odd comma. And apostrophe [it's] for [it is], although universally given without the apostrophe. And of course, the capital letters, which were almost always mistimed to be half-missing superscript:

samiti (translation supplied on request). Like Spring, James and Muriel were not far behind and before you could say "Ochterlony" (which a lot of us did during the day but which only Nairn could pronounce with the right oesophogal twist) the Convoy was on the road with the General Sahib in the lead as we streaked for the Jumna Bridge. (God knows we left a lot in this country, but why did we instil into Indian painters the idea still perpetrated on the staircases of Lond on busses, of putting the date on all their handiwork- whether Road Bridge or Office Furniture- as if they were Picasso in his Blue Period?). There8s not much to be said about the outskirtsof Delhi except that after the inner circle of Truck epots and garages and half finished (which, when you come to think about

That's 'Truck Depots', there in the last line...

Some of the Indian names date more from the Raj than modern styles. Where newer versions, or other specific places described but not named, have been identified, I've put the info in a footnote.

MLW's *Letters to Delhi* overlap with these trips:

"What a good idea for you and Alan to go to Kulu - what girls are you going to take with you?" – Aug 8.

"I do hope that you got off to Kulu and/or Simla all right, and that you are having a good trip out of Delhi. Wonder if you are beating up the night life in Simla right now, but pretty off-season I guess!" – Aug 17.

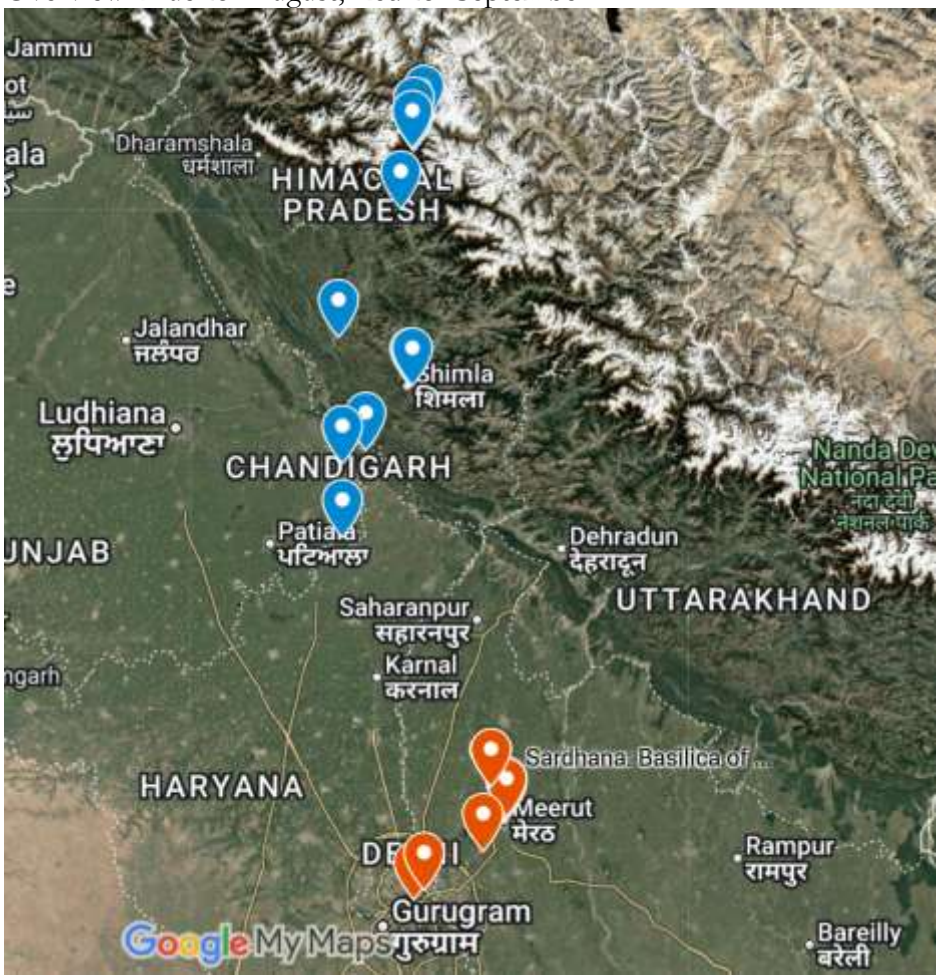
"Tell Alan I liked his account of Kulu, and am glad to see his sense of humour is surviving in spite of Delhi heat, or perhaps it was revived by the trip. Very good account." – Aug 27.

"Tell Alan I liked his account of Meerut." – Sept 19.

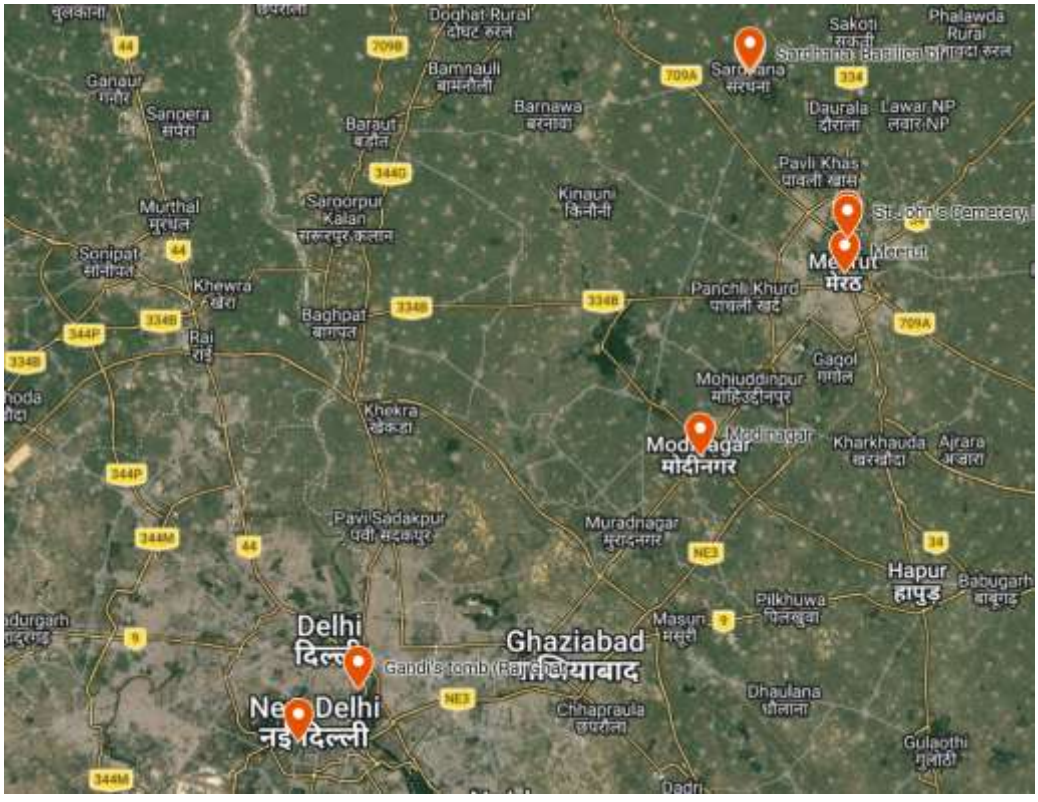
Now, for those like me who don't know one bit of India from the next, here are some maps:

[1] 'Shimla' now.

Overview: Blue for August, Red for September:



Trip to Meerut:



Going up towards Tibet:



These and their various further details may be seen at https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1OCCtj9DoQFps-2ztmlzeur75G7voWLY&usp=sharing

JTW June 2026

New Delhi,
20th August, 1968

You'd better be warned in advance that even if the literary quality of the ensuing narrative is not high it will nevertheless exceed the accuracy and style of the typing but the Author makes no apology for either in his anxiety to record before they fade his impressions of four days spent in the Himalayas at times not more than 100 miles from Tibet.

It should be explained that anyone who has the slightest interest in preserving his sanity whilst serving in New Delhi is strongly advised to get the hell out of it as often as he can. But this is not as easy as it seems for in the Monsoon season there are not only hazards in travelling but also difficulties in finding somewhere within range which is unlikely to be quite so bloody climatically as Delhi in this season of the year. In this particular case the decision to get away arose not only from the fact that I was beginning to be talked about for not having been away for over six months and for a tendency to find myself half way up the office wall but also because after a long period the Indians at last decided to have a public holiday - Independence Day - on 15th August and as a good Imperialist I thought it tactful, as had happened last year, to leave them on their own to enjoy (?) it. Even better the Day was Thursday which made for a long weekend at the expense of only one working day from one's leave quota.

As is customary in the Diplomatic Service a great deal of patient and careful planning went into the operation from the start and although it never became necessary to have a file there was sufficient paper for quite a respectable one. John Waterfield, with whom I was sharing a bungalow and a grass-bachelor existence eagerly agreed to come and as I am to sell my car and dispose of my driver in a few weeks' time I thought we might give them a last outing too. There then arose the delicate problem of Travelling Companions, for the car has room for five and it would be a waste not to fill all seats. We thought of a married couple but, frankly could not find one whose company in the narrow confines of a station waggon we could really guarantee to endure for four long days. A happy solution arrived when we bethought ourselves of two of the bachelor ladies on the staff who, being relatively new arrivals might welcome an opportunity of seeing a bit of India in the company of two boring, middle aged war veterans. We therefore spoke to (propositioned would hardly be the word) Carole and Teresa and they leapt at the chance(or at least did not have to be dragged along kicking and screaming).

John, a Kipling-phile and I, a Kipling-phobe both had a yen to see Simla before we left India and so we decided to

head first for Manali, high in the Kulu[2] Valley about 360 miles due North of Delhi, spend a couple of nights there and then indulge ourselves in the luxury of a first class hotel in Simla on the last night. And the remarkable thing is that we did precisely that. As you shall hear if you have not already laid down this manuscript in favour of the "T.V. Times" or some such.

During the evening of 14th August the Girls (hereinafter referred to for short as C-T) brought to our bungalow their contributions of eatables, drinkables, torches and other such essential equipment which were added to our own growing pile of sleeping bags, camp beds, hurricane lamps, stoves, Kleenex and so on. For do not kid yourself when in travel in this country you do not assume that you will reach your destination or that even if you do it will be habitable when you get there. So other items were added - a shovel for digging ourselves out of landslides, a rope for towing ourselves with, spare petrol and spare parts - plus of course a variety of pills and pharmaceuticals. Gusain, our bearer and Jagut Singh our driver were left to organise the assembly of all this impedimenta and to prepare our picnic for the following day and we retired to our several beds to fortify ourselves for the morrow. .... Which dawned only too soon- at 5a.m. C-T reported punctually and in reverent silence we consumed our breakfast as the dawn came up over the garden and looked at each other wondering what the hell we had let ourselves in for. Promptly and according to schedule at 5.45 CD 3456 rolled off the runway and we began the journey.

Even as we wound our way out of Delhi the Natives were pouring in to hear the speech of the Prime Minister and by the time we were on the Grand Trunk Road - going the opposite way to Kim - she was already at it. Northwards we sped through dreary flooded country with pathetic groups of dispossessed camping by the roadside and the wind of our slip-stream soughing through the tarpaulins on the roof rack. With military precision we stopped for 5 minutes every two hours to adjust according to our needs our liquid quota. There were other unscheduled stops - as when John, holding a map in one hand and his pipe in the other let go of the first as he lit the second and we had to race back to collect it before it was eaten by a goat... Or when our combined linguistic efforts, reinforced by the basic Hindi of Jagut Singh, were hard put to get any native to tell us where any road to anywhere was. As the miles clicked off and coffee flowed in sluggish veins spirits arose and conversation began - and the rain came but not to impede our relentless progress. By 1.30 we had reached Bilaspur, an ordered and ordered town well on our route but scarcely rating a mention in our Murray's Guide and in any

[2] now 'Kullu', town, valley and all.

case scarcely visible in sheets of rain. But we spotted a sign which said "Circuit House" and made for it.

(2)

The Circuit House, you should know lest your imagination is boggling, is for the Judge on tour but when we reached this particular one it came as no surprise to find it unoccupied. The car was drawn up meticulously to the door and we all darted into the sanctuary of a clean and newish bungalow where from nowhere a Figure which at first appeared not be wearing trousers emerged and declared himself the "incharge" (that was not a typing error – it's how they write it here). In no time at all we had fallen on our victuals visited the backside (another local expression) and powdered our noses and were fit for the next stage. Which was a roughish one with some evidence of landslides and a large number of soporific if not sick-making bends. Talking of trousers as we were just a little while ago if you remember, I evolved a theory about the small boys in the hills - it was not poverty which caused them to go round bottomless but prescience - they have an instinct for knowing when the rain is coming and therefore divest themselves in advance of their nether garments. Well, it's a theory anyway.

We had been warned of a Hideous Trap ahead - there is a stretch of one-way road about twenty miles long through a gorge in which flows the River Beas, one of the five great rivers of the Punjab and in its wisdom Higher Authority (of which more anon) has decreed that it shall be open to Northward traffic at 15 minutes past the odd hours and to southbound at 15 minutes past the even. Keen students of the calculus will rapidly conclude that if one is not careful one might have you wait as much as 2 hours. As 3.15 approached we were still some way off and then the road narrowed and twisted and we thought, "Ah! we're on it" - but not so for suddenly at no particular point we were brought to a halt by a padlocked chain across the road and our enquiries of the policeman elicited that we had about 100 minutes to wait. John repaired to a nearly teahouse only to be hastily recalled when we discovered that in parking the car Jagut Singh had put one of the back wheels into space where no road was. Lusty fellows were summoned and in a trice she was back on the road and backsheesh was politely but firmly declined. And THEN... up swept a Jeep full of extraordinary looking folks who turned out to be the acolytes of a Minister Sahib who was already further up the Valley. The chain was released as if by magic (good for our diplomatic vanity to see someone else exerting influence when we could not) and we shot through on the tail of the retinue. A spectacular drive but nerve racking to see tons of bare rock hanging out into space about six feet above the roof of the car. At the other end of the one-way which

again, unaccountably, was half way down the main street of a village, we were whistled at by a Policeman who quite rightly couldn't understand how we had got there, but since we had we sped on regardless soon to see a sign saying "Welcome to Kulu Valley"- a touching sentiment reminding some of us of signs in the good old U.S.A. but it would have been more to the point to have had other more meaningful signs visible at other points on the road at which the stranger might easily be led astray - as we were more than once.

India is a great place for Controls and I'm damned if I'll let them go on saying that they inherited it all from us - even if they did they've had 20 odd years to change things. Interstate tax controls, military ones, police check points and so on and at each hideous forms to be completed, "Sorry for the INCONVENIENCE, Sahib, but it is for Higher Authority". Anyway, at such times when we could not avoid completing these ghastly forms we devised a skill at inventing most convincing passport numbers which, if they ever converge at the level of Higher Authority will lead to a major crisis in Indian bureaucracy...

But the sun was shining again and we were rising from 4 to 5 to 6000 feet amongst cornfields and amidst willows and the purling tributaries of the Beas. The scenery was reminiscent of Kashmir but, and this was our happy conclusion at the end of the Expedition, the people -especially the children - were so much nicer - lively in manner, colourful (the men had a natty line in two toned felt hats and the women wore what looked like cufflinks in around and through their noses) and warm to the stranger. I don't think that I have anywhere had more lively conversations without a word in common.

We stopped in Kulu itself to draw breath, buy chocolate (the only item of significance we had forgotten - or allowed our staff to forget for us), to sample the local corn roast and to look on the very pleasant village green. Then on to Manali which we reached after 13 hours on the road and 11 of driving. I have long admired the rear view of Jagut Singh at the wheel - there is something very solid and reassuring about his ears - and although he had his moments of aberration when the oncoming truck or bus was nearer than it should have been he kept going like a machine, rarely wanted and never asked to stop for food (or anything) and when asked at two hourly intervals if he was all right always answered "Yes" with such conviction that one had to believe him. Perhaps the only thing that was harder worked than J.S was the horn but even this on occasion was not sufficient. Indian trucks, mostly driven by mad Sikhs - recognisable by the brown bangled arms which occasionally - but only occasionally - they stick out of the window - are impervious to the Sound of the Horn but happily almost every one carries a spare man on the back

somewhere who, after listening for twenty minutes to the plaintive hootings from behind, leans over and scratches with his finger nail on the driving cabin and more often than not this seems to

(3) - and there'll be more...

galvanise the driver into some form of evasive action. In the main street of Manali we spotted a man who seemed to be spotting us and sure enough this was John Banon, the owner of the "Sunshine Orchards" Guest House[3] and the grandson of that first Colonel Banon who in about 1880 had left the Indian Army and discovered the medicinal properties of the Manali Springs, settled there and married a local and built himself a house on the site of the one in which we were to stay. The orchard was as English as the one at Grantchester - mellow old apple and peach trees, clover, gladioli, montbretia and a golden cocker (as well as a cow tied up to a tree and smiling native apple-picking faces peeping out of the branches). The house was two storey and as we were the only guests (for August is out of season up there) we had the whole of the top floor and verandah to ourselves with opposite suites of double bedrooms and adjacent bathrooms (the latter provided with a back door which also seemed to serve as the servants' entrance so that privacy was at a premium. The basic plumbing worked - a tremendous plus in India - and hot water was fetched by the bucketful at request, poured into a tin tub in which I found it rather more difficult to accommodate my anatomy than the last time I had been in one some 40 years ago). We unpacked and hung things out to dry.

This would be a convenient moment to record that packing and unpacking of the car were the responsibility of John and JS but not necessarily in that order - depending on which one you asked. One of the dramatic Highlights of the whole expedition was when John discovered that a well-meaning but ignorant porter who carried his brief case had snapped it shut- not realising that the key was on a watch chain back in Delhi. An Ugly Moment but redeemed by Carole who managed to slip a hand inside and retrieve the pipe tobacco which was the most precious part of the contents.

Mr Banon joined us for drinks and we talked of the apple crop (the taste for the English varieties imported long ago is going), of the bears and glaciers and foolish foreigners who got mixed up with the same and of the previous visitors from our High Commission. Then dinner which, whilst far from a gastronomic delight, was edible and even glamourous for we had arrived to find - shades of Delhi! - the whole town

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[3] For a while "John Banon's", now "Banon Resorts" – in 2024 the owner was Mr. Krishan Banon - https://www.manalionline.in/guide/banon-resort-in-manali

suffering from a power failure so we dined by candlelight. Our Bearer was a cheerful soul who spoke in the accent of a music hall comedian and gave us all the giggles every time he came through the swing door from the kitchen since it made a BOINGGGG noise just like the one in "M. Hulot's Holiday".

After supper we repaired to the verandah and to our astonishment received the BBC and Delhi loud and clear. There were spirited but amicable arguments about which programme we should listen to and some disappointment that we could only listen to one at a time. However at least on the first night I managed to get some Smetana. And then to bed as the rain began to fall.

However John Banon had promised us a fine morning and even before John and I had tossed up to see who should use the bathroom first the rain stopped, the mist cleared (we were by now at 6,300 feet) and the sun emerged about the same time as C-T. And so to breakfast where we discovered that the eggs were very flat but that the home-made apricot jam was so good that we bought a jar to bring back with us.

Above Manali is the ROHTANG[4] Pass - about 13500 feet and beyond it two more valleys and then Tibet. The military are in charge of the pass and without a permit from Higher Authority one cannot get to the top but we were advised to go to the last village, Ralla[5], at about 9,000 feet and with many scrapings of the Triumph's undercarriage (resulting eventually in the breaking of the silencer bracket - a small price to pay) and with many slitherings sideways we did precisely that.

Arrived in the village we were surrounded by shaggy people of all kinds - Himachalis as the natives of the valley are known, Tibetan refugees (of whom there are hundreds including lots of sad old folk living in damp tents), Nepalese and Sherpas (there is a Sherpa Training School at Manali). The locals, lads as well as lasses, if they have nothing better to do as they walk along the road spin wool whilst the Tibetan ladies knit like Billy-oh. We inspected the market - fruit and veg and raw sugar and salt and coarse Tibetan tea and the trains of ponies which take seven days to carry fertilizer over the pass into the next valley (to which the Minister Sahibs had gone to celebrate Independence with the natives who were probably not aware that they'd never had it). The liveliest character in Ralla was a chap in a bright blue cap who had obviously looked on the local firewater to some effect (all the men seemed to tote a bottle - the local form of central heating). I had an animated conversation with this

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[4] literally, 'pile of corpses'! - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rohtang_Pass

[5] The last village up the pass is now called 'Kothi' – at 2,500m (8,200ft). I can't find any record of it being called 'Ralla' but there's nothing further up the pass that the map shows (beyond tourist viewpoints, waterfalls and then a check-point).

bird seeking to stay out of range of his breath whilst he told me how wicked the chaps were on the opposite stall. He then, literally excused himself leaving me in charge of the vegetable marrows (I did no business) and then re-emerged from behind a rock to resume selling amidst the laughter of the citizens.

With little hope of success John had brought along his fishing gear and although the water was mucky decided to have a go. So we returned some way down the valley and C-T and I set up Camp One in a lovely side valley with two streams and all the picnic things and watched John plod off in search of trout.

4) and STILL there's more!

We had two streams at our disposal and paddled in each - bone aching cold - and examined the local flora many reminiscent of those in England. From time to time fellows with wicked looking billhooks would plod up the hill in quest of firewood and old ladies would go by who offered us bitter berries rather like black currants but infinitely more spittable. An occasional sighting of Waterfield reassured us that he had not been swept away (though when he returned in time for beer and lunch he told us he almost had been) and above and beyond the pine clad slopes with dirty snow in the clefts.

We fell upon our victuals (J.S. having remained with the car back at the nearest village where local ladies mending the road were wearing VERY plunging necklines) and relaxed in the sunshine until the descending clouds as forecast by Banon brought rain so we returned to the car went down a thousand feet or so and had our coffee and chocolate at another delectable spot. After which John decided to flog the Boas a bit harder and C-T and I returned to base, deposited impedimenta and set off on one of the walks around Manali which the assiduous Mr B. had inscribed in an exercise book for the benefit of his clients.

Our goal was a Hindu Temple[6] in a pine wood and following instructions we found it - not without C-T cries of alarm as such ferocious beasts as chickens, goats and cows bestrode our path. We had been informed that the key to the temple was in the nearby village but by the time we reached the revered edifice (which like most buildings in the hills had a red painted corrugated iron roof) both the key (in the hands of a small boy) and the rain had also reached the temple. The key was like the kind of medieval surgical instrument you might see in a Swedish film and the small boy

[6] Probably Hadimba Devi Temple, which is both in woods and relatively close to the hotel.

was like his brother who was even smaller and cuter. We groped around in the dark and struck matches which did not survive long in the aura of sanctity and having established that the temple really was built into or out of the living rock we emerged to sit on the verandah till the rain stopped and to chat up three of the local lasses who had arrived with flowers for the god. The rain cleared and we descended by the alternative route to the village – in Teresa's case the descent was inclined to get out of control and we had to make her stop at the foot of the hill to wash off the mud before we re-entered Manali to begin Walk 2. This took us to the Bazaar and happily gave us from there a splendid view of the Pass and the surrounding snow. Again a lively welcome from one and all and close inspection of the merchandise ranging from phoney Tibetan antiques to false teeth.

Then back up the hill - still no sign of John - to tea and apricot jam. Dear old JS had set out to look for us when the rain started but as we had not told him where we were going he not unnaturally did not find us but returned nothing daunted to his base (he had a bed at the Guest house but ate in the bazaar).

Fortified we set forth again on Walk 3 through more pine woods (where we actually found violets growing and a real sawmill with a modern electric bandsaw). En route we passed other orchards and other houses of other Banons (in America Manali would be Banonburg). We finally emerged over a piece of very muddy ground which betrayed unmistakeable evidence of its convenience (in the other sense of the word) to the nearly bus terminus. We descended to the bridge over the Beas with a vague idea of seeing John galumphing down the riverside with trout bursting out all over. But no sign: we sat and waited by the bridge and everyone who passed by had at least a smile - tall stately Muslim priests, dumpy little porters, Tibetan ladies with red velvet all over them, small boys and a gang of six dogs which, starting at a height of about 700 feet on the other side of the bridge dashed down the mountain side in single file hotly if not lecherously following their leader over the bridge past us and down the other side of the river for all the world like a sequence from a Disney film. It must have been pay night because every one going home was carrying little packages of food and the men all seemed to have a bottle of hooch. When they crossed the bridge they did not seek a path up the mountain but just went straight as if they were flies on a mirror. Tremendous leg muscles which Carole seemed to pick out unerringly. But what a life to spend all and every day toting bundles of grass or firewood or worse on your back and head. The baskets were curiously conical in shape and looked like the more outrageous hats worn by the back row at the Folies Bergere.

And so back to the Orchard where we found a well exercised but unsuccessful fisherman already installed and full of apricot jam. Drinks and then dinner (mutton again for Banon's tame fisherman had had no more luck than our wild one and there were no trout). Afterwards back to the verandah for "Forces favourites" hot and strong from Delhi with requests for Pansy and Petal and Uncle Brian and Petula Clark and the Stones. Night caps and bed.

A slow start for we had decided to aim for the second gate at 12.15 so we did not need to leave till 10. A complicated loading and we were off with great regret because going downhill even in the topographical sense is a depressing feeling. We reached the gate in such good time that we had time to go back a mile or two and sit by the rushing cocoa-coloured Beas and have a coffee before we came under starter's orders. We got through the gorge in such good time that we had to wait at

(5) - and even this may not be the end.

the other end before we could be let out - rather like being in jail at Monopoly and waiting to through a double six. But again who should come along but another Minister Sahib and we were released ten minutes early.

Back down familiar road and as we again thought of Bilaspur it started to rain. We stopped for lunch on the banks (steepish) of a slow wide river with a backdrop of rather Apennine-like mountains and water buffalo cruising up and down looking as sinister as Polaris subs and uttering rude noises to a small boy who swam with them. Two shepherdesses with an assortment of sheep and goats and Brahmin bulls were all around us and eagerly accepted our empty Coke bottles, spare bread and butter and the can in which our (untouchable ox tongue has been). (Please adjust those brackets to taste).

On to Bilaspur again but by tea time when we got there the rain had stopped and we went down almost to the shore of the lake which we had barely glimpsed on the way up. The only shade was by a fallen tree which we shared with some boys and girls but as we Old Warriors tried to snatch forty winks C-T played a game of trying to tell the gentlemen water buffaloes from the lady ditto with none too high a ratio of success.

Then off again on the high and to us new road to Simla. The sort of road that you can see miles ahead but on which you can have no idea when if ever you are going to join up with to if, amidst all these prepositions, you can see what I mean. Although we could not see the distant snows the evening light was wonderful and cast deep shadows on emerald rice and prosperous farms. We whiled away the time with guessing games on the line of "You see that house over there

with the white roof? Well, how far away do you think it is?" Estimates were wild and far out but by the time we reached the outskirts of Simla the pearly light was going, the clouds were descending, heads were spinning and JS had his nearest miss of the whole trip.

We arrived at the end of the Mall along which one is not allowed to drive without a permit from H.A. - but we did ignoring police calls and whistles and cutting a gentle swathe through evening strollers clad alas in plastic macs and hoods and carrying plastic bags. I suppose the havoc which plastic has brought to the Indian landscape is only compensated for by the advent of the jeep which has made so much more of it available.

On past the Town Hall, Military Headquarters and the "Gaiety" Theatre and so many shops with the (British) former proprietors' names still visible to the second best Hotel[7] (the best is only open in the Season) where mercifully we were expected. Baths and drinks and then down to the basement which hung out into space at a height of some 8000 feet and was decorated festively with twisted swathes of crepe paper (left over from the season?).

The grub was revolting but Teresa struggled on manfully to the garishly technicolor pudding. All this accompanied by the "Combo"- three middle-aged gents equipped with a rosewood upright from which the brass candles had not long been removed, an electric guitar feeling a little queasy in its transistors and a set of drums and a fiddle (the last two being operated alternately and, I swear, at one stage simultaneously, by the same man). The numbers were all Neapolitan or nearly so and only I recognised them - a far cry from the top of the pops the night before when I could recognise nothing. Noone dared dance and the respectable middle class Indian families all round us kept their noses firmly in the trough.

We fled, collecting sweaters on the way for the night air is treacherous, and strolled back up the Mall with the Beau Monde. The shops were closed but there was a murmur of people reminiscent of Paris or Rome and looking down the hill at the terraces of lights one could think of Algiers or Naples. But not when you looked closely at the architecture for it was all the best or worst of Camberley Tudor or Municipal Park Rococo. Lashings of red and dark green paint and a Convenience about every 50 yards. No traffic but the odd rickshaw. We stopped at the top of a flight of steps leading to the Lower Bazaar and found a local feast going on with strange banners and crowds outside the food shops listening to some wild Punjabi Mussulman musicians playing interminable but

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[7] mercifully unidentifiable

catchy love songs on an assortment of strange instruments. And lots of Missions and temples - Baptist, Revisionist and Revived all over the place. John spotted the Simla Billiard hall,[8] stormed it and got himself a game of snooker whist the rest of us turned in our tracks and went with relief to bed. Except that Teresa had got in her handbag the only can opener which wasn't in the car so I had to forgo my nightcap. Extraordinary it is how often the opener is in the box or basket that you haven't got with you at the time.

Sunday morning dawned clear (at least at 7 when I first saw it) but the cloud soon descended and by the time we had all finished an indifferent breakfast and ordered our last packed lunch the drizzle had started. We knew we could not possibly follow in all the footsteps of Mrs Hauksbee or even attempt to find Kim's Antique shop so we set ourselves one task and objective - to find Stirling Castle,[9] one of the early but much rebuilt Great Houses occupied by the Save the Children Fund who were looking after Tibetan refugees.

Well... it's not easy getting round in Simla even on the roads where you don't need a permit and we were constantly involved with backing busses and trucks driven by purblind Punjabis of dread aspect but at last we found after ploughing through convoys of porters of diminutive stature carrying gigantic loads the nerve centre of Simla communications - the Victory Tunnel - and after that all we had to do was climb, climb, climb till we almost ran out of road and only just a place to turn round. C-T had practically to be strapped down for the last death-defying stretch.

(6)- this may be the last

But it's a small world for as we swept up a gradient there was my friend Mr Seth, the Assistant Collector of Customs at Delhi Airport - which shows that all the best people go to Simla. We did not spend too long at the Castle - in my case not least because the last hundred yards at nearly 9000 feet made me realise what Olympics at Mexico City are going to be like. And so we said farewell with not too much regret to the Empress of Hill Stations (I've just made that up but it must be right because Mussoorie which is like Simla divided by four is the Queen of the Stations). The rain returned but we dozed and wiped ourselves with Quickies and passed the time wondering where our colleague Len Collett was who was also "Simla side" until we found another precipice above the mini railway (Delhi- Simla in eleven hours) where we stopped for lunch - sardines, pate, cheese, beer coffee chocolate fruit - though not necessarily in that order. Then

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[8] 'Shimla Billiards' is still available – could it be the same establishment?! Est.1954 according to one source...
[9] 'Sterling Castle'

down down down (and of course around) until finally at about 3.45 we glimpsed the blue miasma of the Punjab plain - it looked like an oasis - until we got there.

A pause at Pinjore to inspect the Mogul gardens which will be very nice when they have put them together again and restored the water. There seems to be as big a technological gap between Mogul and modern India as between Roman and modern Britain. We were entertained by a white-bearded old rogue who played with an enormous snake but we declined his offers to wrap it round us.

On to Chandigarh, the Silver City built in the 1950sby Le Corbusier and others still not completed and now a bone of urban contention between two States who each want it as their Capital. The lake looked good and John who tried it said the water was soft and soupy. We looked at a few of the better buildings which, however, are beginning to succumb to instant obsolescence but were deterred from further exploration by JS suddenly slowing down because he had spotted Collett Sahib. We assured him that we could well wait till office on Monday morning to renew acquaintance with Collett and sped on only to pass and repass him all the way to Delhi. There was one glorious vignette of Len, in his vintage Willingdon shorts striding off into the bush with a determined expression and, we assumed, but one object in mind.

We paused to consume the last of the chocolate and coffee near Ambala and then sped on down the straight road with an interval of vocal renditions from me - primarily to keep up my own spirits against the incubus of Delhi which lay ahead. The rest did not join in either because they couldn't sing or because they didn't know the words. Then we turned to "Ghosts" and "Password" (much giggling from C-T) and soon found ourselves as darkness fell at the toll barrier outside Delhi. We had also picked up on our radar another colleague returning from depositing his family in the Hills and who acted as Pathfinder to our target - the High Commission Compound. He was glad of our company for in no time at all he had a puncture and we rallied round to help. And so at 8.30 we swept back into Sanctuary to find staff waiting to unload the car fill us with whiskey and delicious supper and relieve us of mounds of filthy clothes. A quick round of accounting and so to bed.

You've been awfully good those of you who have struggled on to this point and you owe me a deep debt of gratitude for wasting so much of the Queen's time to write all this turgid stuff. If the circle of those who read all this is as wide as it damn well ought to be then I apologise for any obscurities in reference or language. Photographs will be

available later[10] and subscriptions for a leather bound set of the author's works should be sent in hard currency please to his dear absent wife who not only ordered me to go on this trip but actually left me all the right clothes to take with me. It's been fun having you-all along, folks.

[10] MLW Sept 5: "thank you for sending Alan's Kulu and other photos - I will put them in the book." Book mislaid since, sadly.

A S Clarke's account of visit to Meerut & Sardhana on 8 Sept 1968 - JPW – A S Clark – Nan Weir – Carole Burgess[11]

Which way to the Tomb?

"Get out of Delhi", they all say and one does one's best to oblige. The latest and, in the case of the Author, the last sortie was conducted on Sunday 8 September and came about thus. The High Commission contains a number of military Pundits amongst whom naturally ranks the General - but there are others who recall the Khaki Drill shorts and the tip of the foresight sometimes being in line with the shoulders of the backsight and who consciously or not remember famous family figures who fought and sometimes rather inconsiderately died in what is still a Commonwealth and not a Foreign Field. Accordingly we thought of Meerut where the Mutiny all began. And besides it's only 40 miles away.

That meticulous attention to administrative detail which invariably attends any enterprise in which Waterfield and Clark are associated naturally came into play on this occasion accompanied by a softening up period of subtle psychological pressure on the General and his Lady which not only persuaded us that we would be Well Advised to have them in attendance but also convinced them that they couldn't bear to be left out. In our capacity as Temporary Bachelors (and aspirant all-time Gentlemen) John and I continued our policy of offsetting the acerbities of our own personalities with the charm of the Gentler Sex (to which we are not ashamed to be addicted) by inviting along as Fellow Travellers the Misses Weir and Burgess that well known dactylographical double-act whose high-speed rendering of "The Quick Brown Fox" has to be heard to be believed - and then only just. The Ladies were pleased to accept.

In the interests of security it was decided not to commit to paper the delicate details of the operational Plan (which was just as well because I read in the newspapers the day after the Expedition that 4 Dacoits had been captured – on the night of our Sally – in the very Centre of our Operational Area). Another reason for not producing a Staff College piece was that the Army, which has always had a Language of its own, has since John and I ceased to be attached developed a style of communication which plays hell with anybody's normal style. So everything was done by Word of Mouth. With that firmness of Spirit which has so long been manifested in unpronounceable Latin mottoes, the General decided to supply his technical services free but not to rely on a bunch of civvies (and Diplomats at that) to look after the needs of his Inner Man

[11] JPW's m.s. annotation of the typescript.

(or of his Lady's Inner Lady) - which meant that he provided his own picnic.

To set the right spirit from the start it was agreed to meet at Gandhi's Tomb and promptly at the appointed hour W and C with their Chaperones arrived at the samiti (translation supplied on request). Like Spring, James and Muriel were not far behind and before you could say "Ochterlony"[12] (which a lot of us did during the day but which only Nan could pronounce with the right oesophagal twist) the Convoy was on the road with the General Sahib right in the lead as we streaked for the Jumna Bridge[13]. (God knows we left a lot in this country, but why did we instil into Indian painters the idea still perpetrated on the staircases of London busses, of putting the date on all their handiwork - whether Road Bridge or Office Furniture - as if they were Picasso in his Blue Period?).

There's not much to be said about the outskirts of Delhi except that after the inner circle of Truck Depots and garages and half finished (which, when you come to think about it is such an accurate and at the same time ambiguous term as to completely applicable to so many things Indian) cinemas it's all the same for a radius of about 150 miles. Nevertheless the Spirit soars and the corpuscles pulsate as mile of bullock dung wall follows m.o.b.d.w. and by the time we had reached the turn off for Meerut the General was hull down and miles ahead and we were beginning to talk to each other and my driver was getting the feel of John's car (a process which was accelerated by the presence at his side of the Owner). Paddy-birds and bright green rice were an improvement on Modi Nagar, a hideous town which makes everything (and noticeably smells) and by midday we were circling the bungalows of Meerut Cantonment and closing in on the Church[14] an elegant and not ill preserved structure with a spire like a slice off St Brides, Fleet Street and that sort of crumbling plaster (un-stucco?) which always figures in Hollywood films about the deep South.

The General was discovered making good use of dead ground and natural camouflage in a shady avenue nearby and when we were all assembled we began, accompanied inevitably by toothless elders and children to whom the word Kleenex is as remote as the word gnomon - and that's pretty remote) our inspection. It was perhaps unfortunate - for us - that our two Ladies had not seen fit to bring their shorthand notebooks for there was on the walls a wealth of corny Victorian poetry in

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[12] Probably Major-General Sir David Ochterlony: 1st Baronet, GCB (12 February 1758 – 14 July 1825), he was a Bengal Army officer who served as the British resident to the Mughal court at Delhi; buried at St John's Church, Meerut.

[13] possibly the Yamuna Bridge; it's the right side of Delhi and the main road (NE3) runs north-east – ie in the direction of Meerut runs from it.

[14] St John's Church – https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._John%27s_Church,_Meerut

the form of tear jerking epitaphs (fair enough that everyone is a paragon when he's dead - but what abaht the bleedin' privates? not a sign!).

The organ commended itself to the eye of the discerning tourist for its intricate arrangement of beams and balances and a bellows which looked capable of producing enough, if you forgive the expression, wind to keep the Concorde airborne. The gallery (that's where the b.p. sat – there was even one pew left with the right kind of holes in the rack for keeping the Firearm at the ready) was broad and spacious but the floor left more to the imagination than the imagination really wanted. But, like those who had trod it one hundred and some years ago, when it came to the Test, it Stood and we all descended safely to take a last look at the plaque bemoaning the demise of a military figure in the vibrant words, "Alas! poor Maxwell!" Then others had died while parting company from their ponies on the Polo field or whilst Taking a Bath in a Tank – but there were many actions and encounters from Cabool to Bhurtpore and even deaths at sea aboard the "Hermione" off the Cape.

What in England would have been a short walk but what in Meerut in September was a short drive took us to the Cemetery started on the site of the Race Course in 1807 and still in use. The grass was tall and the Girls thought about snakes – not unreasonably – as we wandered down avenues past sections full of "Died of Cholera" and crumbling tombs with flaking plaster and the inside falling out. The tombs came in all shapes and sizes up to and including a tall Funereal Pillar for a General whom our General rapidly placed in his historico-military context.

There wasn't time - or indeed inclination – to do it all for the pre-prandial Wambling begun in at least one Tum and dehydration was spreading. There was a moment of pure Pavlov before we left - as he gazed on the resting place of some long departed Lieutenant of Infantry the General suffered a frisson - and froze on the spot. There was no cause for alarm for, as Muriel immediately explained, he had heard a distant Bugle and what can a feller do when he hears a bugle? And so we re-bussed and took the road to Sardhana some 15 miles further into Uttar Pradesh – almost the most evocative of all the names of Indian States.

There followed a short period of Democracy in Action whilst All Ranks cast anxious eyes for a likely picnic place and the palm eventually went to Ragut Singh who espied an Umbrageous Grove which met even the high criteria of Waterfield Sahib (not the one whom we had left behind his

brass plate by the West door of the Church[15], but the one who was with us and who is well known from Santiago to Tokyo for his keen topographical eye when it comes to spotting a place which provides both reclining and necessary physiological facilities). Luncheon was soon spread and after a few moments of comparison of the Lunt victulas with our own we soon fell to. There was nearly an ugly scene when the beer ran out slightly ahead of the Waterfield thirst but Muriel was at hand with a bottle labelled Gilbey which had a salutary effect on JPW's metabolism.

By 3 we were on the road again and shortly made landfall at the village of Sardhana where we had little difficulty in spotting the church we had come to see[16] for its twin bell towers (of a Hindu rather than Baroque aspect) had dominated the scene for some time. It really was quite an edifice – built by and to accommodate in a Mausoleum the remains of the Begum Samru who in her early days of struggle had been a Kashmiri Dancing Girl but who found and married a Walloon Adventurer and Soldier of Fortune (if our General will concede that there can be such an animal) and founded a dynasty which for years dominated this little corner of the State. All this in the late 18th and continued well into the 19th century but if you are expecting the full Historical treatment you're reading the wrong author and in any case James Lunt has got the only copy of the guide book at the moment and is thought to be trying to work out how the Dynasty got mixed up with the Ochterlonys (there's fair reason to believe that they did although it is not easy to reconcile the data on different tombstones and as we have noted earlier everyone sounds so good in epitaph).

Anyway, we also saw the old Lady's palace nearby which is now a seminary and which reminded one spectator of Spanish Mission colonies in California. And it was very hot (even after Cokes in Meerut) on the way back but Nan and I sang everything from "Eternal Father" to "Rigoletto" and there were even moments when we were sufficiently unsquare for Carole to join in and many other moments when we had to restrain John from doing so.

The Lunts, who again led our line of March, had kindly invited us all to tea and Muriel commanded a scummy chocolate cake so even at a latish hour more suitable for the Scotch and soda – which our generous hosts provided – we first went through the agreeable motions of the "five o'clock". It was a good, or as one of us is wont to say, a "Happy Day" and once

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[15] "I visited Meerut when we served in India 1966-69, and I found the grave of a Waterfield there. He was John Edward, one of Major General Henry Gordan's large family, who died as a Lieutenant in the 31st Bengal Infantry, on 17 April 1891." – JPW, *Some Memories...*

[16] Basilica of Our Lady of Grace – the 'only Basilica and the largest church of North India' https://www.tourmyindia.com/states/uttarpradesh/begum-palace-sardhana.html

more a Trend has been set. You'll see - Sardhana is now the "in" Place and if you haven't dallied in Meerut cemetery then you just haven't dallied at all.