



Planters Welfare Association

(AN ASSOCIATION OF MUTUAL BENEFITS)

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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President: V.Lall

Vice - President: Ashok Batra

Ex- Officio: Mrs. Dipika Nanjappa

Secretary : R.K.Patney

Treasurer: B.Chhabra

Members : Capt. V.K.Mehra and A.K.Saxena

Members Meeting (Socials): Mrs. Nirmla Lall, Mrs. Rani Patney, Mrs. Sunanda Chhabra

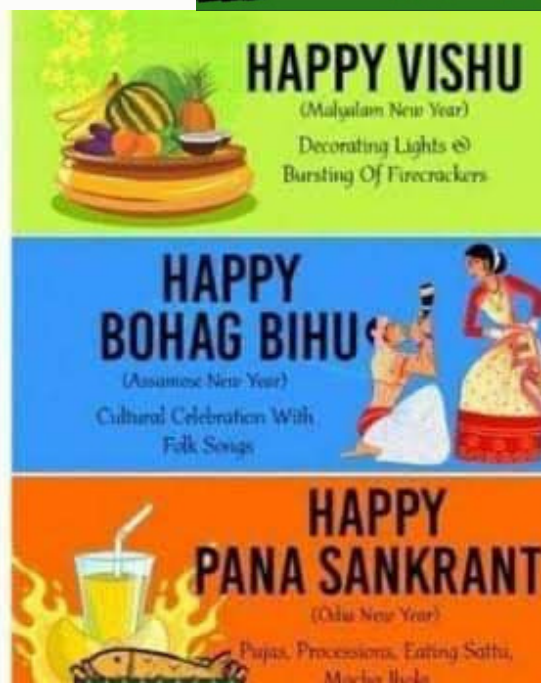
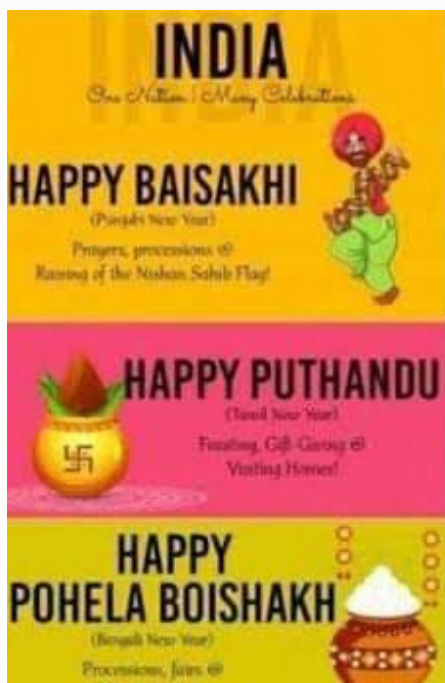
Member Mailing: Mrs. Rani Patney

Editor: Ashok Batra

Period 1 - April 2022

IN THIS ISSUE:

- MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT
- NEW MEMBERS
- CHAMPAGNE & ROSES
- CHANGE OF ADDRESS
- COMMUNICATION
- MEMBERS MEETING
- WEBSITE
- SUBSCRIPTION
- OBITUARY
- ACHIEVEMENTS
- DONATIONS
- ARTICLES & ANECDOTES
- LETTERS TO/FROM THE EDITOR



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

I am delighted and thank all members for electing me as President of the Association with effect from April, 2022.

We have been through a difficult period for the last two years and hopefully with the decline of the Covid epidemic, we will be able to resume our functions during the year.

Our first function was the A.G.M. which was held at the Delhi Gymkhana Club, on Sunday 27th. March. and was a runaway success. We had a great turn out and members/wives were very happy to meet & interact with each other.

The event was sponsored by Mr. Avijit Ganguly & Mr. Sanjay Choudhary, in memory of their late Parents.

We hope the Covid stays away so that we can enjoy more gatherings.

With Best Wishes,

- Vishnu Lall

President



RESIGNATION

We would like to announce that our Senior Committee member, **Mr. Hari N Chopra** has tendered his resignation from the Committee soon after the AGM, which has been accepted by the President and Committee with deep regret. Mr. Chopra joined the Committee in 2000, and has served unstintingly for 21 years continuously. His service has been greatly appreciated and we wish him all the very best.

AGM – 2021:

After, PWA – Golf which was held on 23rd February 2020 at the Air Force Sports Complex, New – Delhi, no events were held, due to the Pandemic.

The 33rd AGM, was the first event during the year to have been held and was a delightful affair, The venue was the Party Cottage at the renowned Delhi Gymkhana Club at 12 noon. Though the weather Gods were a bit unkind, as the meeting and allied events took place in the lawn, under the Shamiyana cover, with water -cooled blowers and fans around. It was a merry afternoon, meeting friends and colleagues after two years of the pandemic and attended by a little over 100 members and their wives

And a new feature was that instead of the AGM being financially supported by our usual Kolkata Tea Corporates (McLeod Russel, Goodricke's, Rossell & Apeejay group, who have been more than generous over the years, this one was sponsored by individuals – new members who joined the association in 2019 being the first generation of Tea planters who came forward to offer their

sponsorship – **Mr. Avijit Ganguly** and **Mr. Sanjay Choudhary**. They have sponsored the event in memory of their late parents – Late Jiten and Sabita Ganguly and Late Mr. K.K. Choudhury respectively, who were Senior Planters.

We would like to thank them for their generous sponsorship towards the Association which has been deeply appreciated by the Committee and all members and their wives present.

After the official proceedings, most went in to the Cottage which was nicely air conditioned and of course closer to the Bar, which was as usual the centre of attraction as it has been for Tea Planters, and more so due to the afternoon temperature hitting just over 38 C.

A sumptuous and well laid out Lunch followed and the afternoon wound down at 3.30 PM



Ronnie Das, with the Ganguly and Choudhary families, at the AGM lunch

Heartiest Congratulations to Mr V Lall, on his being appointed as President of this august Association for the third time.

CHAMPAGNE & ROSES

BIRTHS: Nothing to report

WEDDINGS: Nothing to report

Note: Members are once again requested to inform us by email or by post regarding Births, & Marriages. This helps us to include the announcements in the Newsletter.

NEW MEMBERS

1. **Mrs. Seema Bhasin Singh, S - 369, (FF), Greater Kailash - 1, New Delhi - 110048**
Tel: 011 4903155, Mobile: 9711522115, E-mail: seemabsingh@hotmail.com
2. **Mr. Harpreet Singh Grewal, C - 595, New - Friends Colony, New Delhi - 110065,**
Mobile: 9650220140, E-mail: gary.garri@gmail.com
3. **Mr. Suresh Mehta, D- 15 (FF), Greater Kailash Enclave, Part 2, New Delhi - 110048,**
Mobile: 9871604847, 9810069950, E-mail: mehtasuresh47@yahoo.com
4. **Mr. Naveen Chand Mehta, D 275, Defence Colony, New Delhi - 110024, Mobile:**
9886301906. E-mail: Meeranaveen1949@yahoo.com

CHANGE OF ADDRESS / E MAIL/ MOBILE NO

Have been incorporated in the up – dated Members Directory circulated by e-mail to all the members recently, and also available on the PWA Website.

COMMUNICATION

We are happy to report that we have 285 members which includes NCR / Out Station / Hony Members.

E-mail - **As communicated earlier all our communications are forwarded by e - mails only.**

By virtue of this we have been saving paper, Photostat expenses, Courier expenses and labour.

We earnestly request those members who have not yet forwarded their e - mail ID. to forward the same to the

Hony. Secretary at rkpatney@gmail.com., to enable to update our records and forward communication by e mail. All those members who do not use PC's, may still generate the e mail ID and receive our communication on their smart phones.

WhatsApp Messages - Has been newly introduced, since the Bulk SMS facility has been withdrawn. Many members who do not have WhatsApp features, are requested to install the same so that they could be added to this group. The information may be forwarded to the Hony. Secretary at Mobile no 9810020533.



WEBSITE

Has been up – dated regularly. It has on high definition format with hoards of new Features. You are requested to view on and give your comments to enable us to improve further.

MEMBERS MEETING (SOCIAL)

We wish to commence our Activities during the year 2022. The details of events which will be held in the Month of August, October, November, December 2022 will be notified in due course

GOD TIER	
TOP TIER	 
MEH TIER	 
JUST GET A CUP OF DAMN MILK TIER	

SUBSCRIPTION:

Annual Subscription for the year 2022 is due now. There are few members who have not paid their Subscription for the year 2020 / 2021. They are requested to clear their dues ASAP. Kindly note that Subscription for NCR members is Rs 500/- per annum and Rs 200/- per annum for out station members.

Kindly note that Annual subscription is payable by all members irrespective of their Age. This is as per the resolution passed at the AGM in the year 2018. The rules under the societies Act are very stringent. As per the rules of the Association names of defaulting members (3 years and above) have to be removed from the membership of the Association.

1. Mode of Payment of Subscription

- a. **Cheque -Favouring PLANTERS WELFARE ASSOCIATION, may please be forwarded to our Registered office address given below (Residence of Mr. B. Chhabra) Mr. B. Chhabra, D - 247, (GF), Defence Colony, New - Delhi - 110024. Mobile no - 9818025579**
- b. **Bank Transfer - The required details are as under -**
 - i. **Name of Beneficiary - Planters Welfare Association**
 - ii. **Saving bank account - A/C no 004601050068**
 - iii. **IFSC Code - ICIC0000046**
 - iv. **Bank & Branch- ICICI Bank, New Friends Colony , New - Delhi - 110065**

OBITUARY (September 2021 - March 2022)

We regret to inform passing away of:

Our Members: Mr. Madan Mohan Walia, Mr Amrit Sethi, Mr. R. S Bajaj, Mrs Jasbir Singh, Mr. Sarfraz Ahmed Siddiqui, Mr. N.K. Puri, Mr. R.K. Tewari

Near & Dear ones of our members: Mother of Mr. Sanjit Singh Chadha, Mother in law of Mr. Arun Khanna, Mrs Kamal Chaurasia w/o Mr. K.N. Chaurasia, Mother in law of Mrs Alka Kapur, Brother of Mr. Arun Khanna, Mother of Mrs Raj Grewal, Sister of Mr. H.S Chimni, Mrs Lakshma Singh w/o Mr. Kamal Singh. Mr. Ashok Kaul father of Mr. Pawan Kaul., Elder Brother of Mr. Om Kaul.

Our friends: Mr. Bob Powell Jones, Mr. P.K. Nanda, Mrs Prema Ahmed, Alok Vira, Mr. Deepak Atal, Mr. Bachu Chakravarty, Mrs. Jinu (Zeenat) w/o Late Mr. M.B Singh, Mr. Sohan Vir Singh, Mr. Subir Ray, Mrs Vinod Banaik, Mr. Buddha Dev Baruah, Mr. Onkar Singh, Mr. Teddy Singh

Letter expressing our condolences were forwarded to the bereaved.

DONATIONS

During the Year 2021-22, our Association received Donations from:-

1. Mr. Ranga Bedi.....Rs.10000/-
2. Mr. C.S. Karan.....Rs.5000/-
3. Mr. S.K. Dhall.....Rs.5000/-

We wish to record our sincere thanks and appreciation to them.

ACHIEVEMENTS

BBC Wildlife magazine picks UT birder's click as photo of the day

The short-eared owl visits India during winter; when reports emerged about the owls' sighting last month, some birders observed that the flock had been disturbed

Written by Saurabh Parashar | Chandigarh | April 12, 2022 9:14:57 pm



The photograph of a short-eared owl clicked by Chandigarh birder Jasbir Singh Randhawa. Its migration pattern is very irregular, moving south in winter (Twitter @WildlifeMag)

The BBC Wildlife Magazine picked the photograph of short-eared owl clicked by Chandigarh birder, Jasbir Singh Randhawa, as the photo of the day for its Twitter handle @WildlifeMag, on Monday. The short-eared owl is a rare-sighted bird in the Tricity. Randhawa, who resides in Sector 35, captured the nocturnal owl at one of the prominent birding sites in Mohali last month.

"I captured the short-eared owl last month. The Tricity is not its habitat. It is a migratory bird in our area. This means it stays here for a brief period, to rest, while covering a long distance or migrating.

There was a flock of eight to ten birds when, I, along with another birder, clicked the picture. I put the picture on Twitter tagging many organisations including BBC Wildlife. Today, its Twitter handle picked it as the photo of the day," Randhawa said. Randhawa has been birdwatching for more than a decade. He is a retired tea planter.

It must be noted here that when reports emerged about the owls' sighting last month, some birders observed that the flock had been disturbed. To be able to photograph the birds in motion, people allegedly threw stones at the owls' nesting sites, as information about its presence spread among birders. Many thronged to the particular location to capture the owl in their cameras. The reports forced Chandigarh Bird Club (CBC) to not divulge the location its Twitter or Facebook pages.

Photo of the Day: A short-eared owl in Mohali, Punjab, India, by **@jasbirsrandhawa**

To submit an image to our Photo of the Day, use the hashtag #BBCWildlifePOTD.

Find out more on our website: <https://t.co/E48eufj7XU> pic.twitter.com/g2RFi5U2kW

— BBC Wildlife (@WildlifeMag) April 11, 2022

Matinder Pal Sekhon, President, CBC, said, “We felt that mentioning the name of location of the rare-sighted bird can be dangerous for it. Since last month, we have not been posting photos with locations. We simply mention the name of city where the photo was clicked.”

The short-eared owl visits India during winter. Its migration pattern is very irregular, moving south in winter. A medium-sized owl with rounded head, its ears are difficult to see. The wings are broad and the tips are smoothly rounded and its tail is short.



Memories of Assam: 1940s-60s



Bill Charlier

Bill worked in Assam's tea gardens for many years. He eventually retired to live in Spain. He passed away in 2012.

Editor's note: This is a slightly reformulated version of material that originally appeared at <http://www.koi-hai.com/Default.aspx?id=570017>.

1940s

A Journey into the Unknown

When the war ended in 1945, everybody was trying to find a job as most of us were going to be demobbed. Fortunately, through family connections, I heard of some jobs, which might be available. Whilst still in the RAF, I went to London to meet the Chairman of the Assam Company. He said that there was the possibility of a job in Tea in India. Other choices included openings in Africa and in America. I chose Tea.

He asked whether I could get immediate release from the Air force, but I preferred to wait a few months until my proper group number came up. He then told me that I would have to go before the Board of the Assam Company in London.

The Assam Company was situated in The City in Lawrence Putney Hill. The office was up two or three flights of stairs in a very old building. Inside, one could almost see the working methods of a hundred years previous ... tall stools, high desks, figures bent over their work. The only thing missing was the quill pens.

I was directed to sit on a hard bench outside the Boardroom door. In due course, the Secretary called me. It was a large narrow room with a long boardroom table. Sitting at the far end were four directors and the chairman. The directors were of great vintage and questioned me as to why I should want to go to Tea in Assam. Simple answer, I needed a job and it sounded suitable for me. I don't know what else I could have said because I knew nothing about growing tea – or about growing anything to be honest.

There were further shufflings and murmurings and I was sent out of the room to wait on my hard bench once more. Eventually the Secretary told me that they had accepted my application. He informed me that I should receive a three-year contract and my salary per month in the first year would be twenty-five pounds payable on my arrival in Assam. I was also to have a bungalow to live in and one or two servants. Another condition was that in the first five years, there was no question of the Board allowing an Assistant to marry.

They required me, for the next few weeks, to go to Marshalls Tea Machinery Engineers in Gainsborough. This I did at my expense. Within weeks, I received my sailing instructions – from Liverpool, on a Ministry of Transport Passage to Calcutta. The ship belonged to the Brocklebank Line. This was paid by The Assam Company.

In Liverpool, I boarded the ship and found my cabin, which was more or less a packing case, strapped to the deck. It had two bunks, a wash-hand basin and about enough space to swing a cat. When I entered the cabin, I found my cabin-mate was already there. He was seated on the lower bunk, which he had already claimed. He grunted at me and that is about all he ever did. He spent the next five or six weeks devouring gin in great quantities. In fact, I never did see him have a meal. It turned out that he had been a prisoner of war with the Japanese and was returning to Calcutta and to Burma.

Eventually, we landed in South India at Vishakapatnam, north of Madras. We were told that the ship could not sail to Calcutta because of riots there. This was, of course, pre-independence. There was a great deal of unrest. We were told that we would have to travel the rest of the journey to Calcutta by train. A few days before we arrived in port, my cabin mate stopped drinking. He was, in fact, a decent chap.

The problem now was that I had no money left to buy a ticket as I was only to be paid on arrival in Assam, the princely sum in my contract of twenty-five pounds a month. Luckily, my cabin mate loaned me the fare and said that he would get it back from the Company Agents in Calcutta. We shared a coupe, and he paid for all my meals.

In Calcutta, I was met at Howrah Station by a babu from the Agents, Kilburn and Sons with a pedal rickshaw. On arriving at the office, I was taken to see the Number One. He informed me that I would be travelling to Assam in two days' time and that I should need to buy for myself, crockery, tin bath, bed linen, and a whole host of other things for my bungalow. I listened to him and at the end of his list, made the statement, 'I have no money.' This rather confused him, 'No money, Unbelievable!' He then told me that he would arrange a small loan (£25, then 325 Rupees), which would be deducted from my monthly salary, to cover these purchases.

I then went to Whiteways and Laidlaw, the General Store in Calcutta and managed to provide myself with three knives, forks, spoons and plates – the Tin bath was OUT!

I was staying at The Grand Hotel, which was still principally occupied by the Military. So I was to share a room with two other chaps. I had to provide for my journey to Assam, food for two days, the length of the journey. I could get a hamper from Firpos Restaurant on Chowringee. There were various prices and I bought the least expensive.

After two days in Calcutta, I started my journey to Assam, on a similar type of coupe, which I shared, once more, with an Army Captain. During the early part of my journey, I opened my hamper. It was filled with bananas. After a day of eating from my hamper, the Army Chap asked me if I was particularly keen on bananas. He had noticed that that seemed to be the only food I ate. I told him the story about my journey and money problems. After this, he invited me to join him in a curry in the restaurant car. This I did and enjoyed the curry and a few cold beers. He did this twice for me during the journey. There are still Good Samaritans!

The journey to Assam took one night and two full days. We had to change trains half way by crossing the Brahmaputra by ferry. There was no bridge, and the railways were of two different gauges. I arrived at Nazira Station at eight o'clock at night. There was a car to meet me, and I was taken to the Assam Company compound, to the General Manager's bungalow. This was a large compound consisting of workshops, club, polo ground, and about eight bungalows, including a hospital.

At the assigned bungalow there was no one, except the servants, because it was Monday and Club night. A meal was waiting for me, and being pretty tired I went to bed. Next morning I met the General Manager. We had a talk at breakfast and then he took me down to Headquarters Buildings to meet the Accountant.

In his office he first asked me how much money I had borrowed, which seemed to be the general practice of new arrivals. He made arrangements for me to pay off my already outstanding debts, plus another loan of One Hundred Rupees to live on for the present time. Repayment was to be made monthly from my

twenty-five pounds. He then told me that he would show me the Company Compound. This meant we went directly to the Club, and started drinking brandy and soda at eleven o'clock in the morning. The Club was quite a large building with a general bar, gent's bar, dancehall and changing rooms.

I managed to get back to the General Manager's bungalow at midday. He arrived at about twelve-thirty. We sat down to have a chat. He told me I would be going that afternoon to Towkok Tea Estate in Sonari District, about fifty miles away. This Estate, in those days, bordered on the jungle of the Naga Hills.

After lunch we went out onto the veranda and, sure enough, at the gates of his compound was an old, lease-lend, Chevy truck, piled high with cane plucking baskets, a driver, and 'handy-man' and two *jugalies*. I loaded up my tin box, mounted the cabin of the lorry, which was more or less open and started the journey. We had several stoppages for problems with the petrol. There was a lot of sucking and blowing through pipes but eventually we arrived, about four hours later, at Towkok.

The reality

My arrival in Assam was dramatic enough. Now come the real facts of life in Tea in the mid-1940s. The Japanese invasion threatened Assam. They advanced as far as Kohima in Nagaland, and Assam was almost in the front line. The younger Assistants were conscripted into the services. During that period, the Assistants who were too old for the services were required to supervise the Labour from the Tea Gardens who were conscripted to build the Dimapur to Burma Road. The majority of the Managers, therefore, were very senior, having done more than their thirty years, due to the war.

On my arrival to Tea, those who had been away were returning. There were some rather grumpy managers, overdue for retirement, and were not exactly enamoured with the new Assistants, most of whom had also been to war, but were treated as though they had just left school.

The regime was strict. All Assistants at Towkok had to assemble at the Manager's Office at six-thirty in the morning (but in winter it was delayed to eight o'clock). We stood and had to listen to the Labour complaints being handled by him. I'm sorry to say, some of them got a clip behind the ear.

I shared an Outgarden Bungalow with an Assistant who had joined just before the War, and returned after being a prisoner of war in Italy. He was slightly on the mad side. For instance, when the cook, one day provided us with a pretty shocking lunch, he suddenly got up from the table, went to his bedroom and got his Lea Enfield rifle, supplied by the Assam Valley Light Horse army unit, and opened fire on the cookhouse. The cook and the *pani wallah* were seen disappearing into the tea, not to appear near the bungalow again.

Shortly I moved to a very dilapidated *chung chota* bungalow and was almost in the Factory Compound. It had wooden floors that sloped one way or the other. It was fifty years old and looked it. It had been used to store fertilizers.

I was to be a Factory Assistant. Every morning, after Office, I had to follow the Manager through the Factory. He was negative about most things. I did, on one occasion answer back, over some oil drums which had been cleaned out with paraffin. He considered them still dirty. My reply "I can't get into the b-- things." With this, he marched me to the Office and sent me to the General Manager in Nazira Headquarters with a LETTER. By this time, I could not care less.

Nazira was the Assam Company Headquarters – a large site where the General Manager, Secretary, Engineer, Chief Medical Officer, Surveyor, and their staffs lived. Workshops, a hospital, and stores made quite an impressive centre from where the thirteen Assam Company Estates were administrated. No agents were involved except the Forwarding Agents Kilburn & Co., Fairlie Place, Calcutta, who arranged the purchase of stores for the factories and sent them by river steamer. The polo ground and Nazira Polo Club were also in the compound.

The General Manager was rather astounded at the letter. He told me not to worry and sent me back with a letter to the Manager. The contents of the letter were unknown to me, but that evening I heard the

Manager's car arrive at my compound. He came up onto the veranda with a bottle of whisky (then rationed). I did it justice!

I did have subtle revenge. There was a small nine-hole golf course hacked out of the jungle. The Manager was a keen golfer and talked a lot about his game. He always mentioned his delight in seeing *jungley* (wild) fowl around number five green. Living was pretty tight on about 350 Rupees a month. I had inherited an old Damascus-barrelled shotgun. My only transport was a bicycle, so I went on several occasions with the shotgun hidden in my trousers and went to bag myself with a few good meals. After a little while, the Manager at the Office mentioned that there must be some disease in the wild fowl because they were far fewer in number!

On the more serious side, during manufacturing, the Factory Assistant was expected to be in the factory at all times, except for short breaks for meals. This sometimes meant a period of eighteen to twenty hours, not much time for sleep. This particular Manager used to frequently sneak about during night manufacturing hours to see if I was about. But I had a good crowd of staff, who usually gave me news of his arrival in the Factory.

Steam Prime Mover

On my arrival at Towkok Tea Estate in 1946, my first posting was as Factory Assistant. The only power to drive the factory was two large steam engines, made by Marshals. These were horizontal engines, side by side. The main engine was a side-valve rated at 90 bhp, probably only fifteen years old. The stand-by was probably a much earlier piston-valved horizontal. Two Lancashire boilers were there, one as a stand-by and rated at 100lbs pressure. Both were mostly fired by wood, though some grit coal was used.

The main drives from the engine were cotton ropes, six of them, about two and a half inches in diameter. Each year the men from the Ganges Rope Company, Calcutta came to splice and repair the ropes ...an era of long ago that has never been repeated.

The Head Fitter was an old man called Jeepa, who had been at Towkok a great number of years. These engines were his life!

The starting procedure was a great show, whether during the day or at night. First, he would give three long blasts on a ship's steam whistle on the roof of the engine room. We reckoned it could be heard over five miles away. In the engine room, Jeepa supervised two engine drivers with crowbars to turn the huge cast iron flywheel until the slide valves were open in the correct position. Then, with great ceremony, he began to turn the steam valve very slowly. The engine would come to life with a great hissing of steam. The revolutions would pick up. Then, when satisfied that the engine was running properly, he gave another long blast on the whistle. He then salaamed the engine and handed it over to the Engine Driver and jugali. The ceremony was completed.

He rarely failed to be there and nobody was to touch the engine or the whistle until he arrived. On the very few occasions he was not there through illness, the Engine Driver would start it without ceremony. Jeepa, on his return would seriously *puja* the engine to atone for his absence.

The Shikari Wallahs

During my days at Towkok in the late 1940's, on the outgarden Namtolla, which was right up against the Naga Hills and very dense jungle, there had been considerable trouble with wild elephants. They were coming into the rice paddies and also into the labourers' lines, causing quite a lot of disturbance. This was particular to the cold weather and the onset of the rice harvest. The labourers had been spending most nights beating empty kerosene tins and waving fire torches with very little success.

Tom Darby, who was acting manager, decided that we should go after these elephants and informed the forest department, who agreed. In Sonari District, the District Medical Officer for the Singlo Tea Company was Dr. Bill Muir. He was in possession of a twin-barrelled point five, black powder elephant gun. All I had was a 405 Winchester, and Tom Darby, a 303 rifle.

We went down to Namtolla at about nine o'clock at night. We had rigged up a jeep headlight on a board with wires to a battery. The battery was to be carried by our labour helpers. At about midnight, the first reports came in that the elephants had arrived in the paddy fields. So we proceeded, a total party of three with guns and four labourers. My rifle was being carried by one of them because I was responsible for the headlight on the board. The batteries were carried by two of the labourers.

We got off into the paddy and could hear a number of elephants pulling up the ripened rice, thrashing it on their sides and eating it. We crept slowly towards the elephants. When we got to what we thought was fairly close, Tom Darby shouted, 'Put on the light.' This I did. At about a hundred yards away was a group of elephants. Tom Darby started firing off his rifle, with every other round being a tracer. Doc. Muir got down on one knee and must have fired both barrels, at the same time. All I saw was him being thrown backwards by the force of the gun, ending up on his back about three yards away. The shots had obviously gone wild.

By this time, the elephants had become very aggressive and were trumpeting and stamping their feet on the ground – like a mini earthquake. With this, the labourers took off, dropping the battery. So out went the light. We were left in the middle of the paddy land, in pitch darkness, with a herd of very-annoyed elephants.

We decided that running was not the best action, so we stood perfectly still. Though the elephants had got our scent, they could not locate exactly where we were. After five minutes, the elephants, with a lot of trumpeting and stamping, turned tail and made off towards the jungle.

At camp, after a hasty retreat, a few stiff whiskies were needed by three very shaken Shikari Wallahs.

Enjoying life



The photo shows a collection of erstwhile planters having a cold weather Sunday lunchtime session on the veranda of the old Sonari Club. In those days, there was an ample supply of imported Amstel beer.

From left to right, the photo shows Mac (?), Margaret Lobbin, Geordie Reed, Dr. Muir and Mrs. Muir. The vacant chair was mine.

The club was rather formal. Two very senior *Memsahibs* of Sonari, who had been in tea since the early twenties, sat on the veranda to receive felicitations from assistants of a junior status. There was however a problem. One was more senior than the other was by a mere few months. To pass your greetings, in error, to the junior one first was to incur the displeasure from the husband of the senior one later, in the Men's Bar, in such a way that everybody would know about it.

Treading very carefully was the order of the day. These were *Burra Sahibs* of thirty years or more, and they were men to be aware of by Junior Assistants.

During this period, in the cold weather, polo was played at the club twice a week, Mondays and Thursdays. There were some very good players – Ginger Morris, Brough, and Worman. We could muster three teams.

After three and a half years in Towkok, I was posted to Moran District.

1950s

Flying in Assam

In the early fifties, there were a few of us who had small planes of various descriptions. Some of them were ex-US Military. Williamsons had their own flight of two Austers and at one stage, had a Dragon Rapide, an eight seater. They had a professional pilot called Johnson who unfortunately crashed not far from Mohanbarrie Airport, killing himself and the mechanic. The Austers were flown by Stew Campbell and others, whose normal duties were Garden Assistants. Stew was an ex Fleet Air Arm pilot.

There was another unfortunate accident in Golaghat District where Mackenzie managed to fly into some trees on take-off from a garden strip, killing himself. He was in an Aeronca Super Chief.

For myself I had various aircraft, from Piper Cub (L4), Stinson Sentinel (L5), and an Aeronca Super Chief. The Assam Company helped me maintain these aircraft etc. and they were used on occasions by the General Manager and Visiting Directors, and sometimes by outside companies. This continued until 1964 when the Indian Government, in its wisdom, decided that foreigners flying about in Assam was not a good thing, due to the Chinese situation and the increase of Air Force activity. My license was suspended, which was probably a good thing because the company had decided that I had enough to do as the manager of Doomur Dulling estate. They had trained a young new Assistant in England to take over the Company flying. He did arrive and I tested him and personally would not have put him in charge of a bicycle.

The pictures below were taken in the cold weather, in 1952 at Gelakey on the small strip made from a garden road.



The above picture shows me with Birdie Richmond of Lakmijan, a very keen photographer.



The above picture was taken at a height of 16,000 ft. with no oxygen. We didn't stay long at that height!

There were another couple of notable figures in flying - Joss Reynolds of Panatola, and Peter Atkins of the North Bank. They both had light aircraft.

When my middle son George was a few months old, he developed a nasty go of Whooping Cough. My Chief Medical Officer, Tom Poole, suggested that I take him up in the plane to 10,000 ft. and fly for an hour. It was a perfect cure. Within 24 hours, the cough was almost gone. The altitude allows the lungs to expel the mucous that causes the cough.

On occasions, I used to drop messages over bungalows, on little parachutes. Otherwise, without telephones it would days to communicate with neighbours.

It also came in handy at Christmas, to deliver Father Christmas to the club, to the great delight of all.

Planes in Assam in the Fifties

In the early fifties, on various wartime airstrips, there was a great deal of surplus American aircraft, from Piper Cubs to Dakotas. On one such strip, eighty miles outside Calcutta Balu Ghat, you could have bought a Dakota for as little as Rs 15,000. In fact, a lot of small airlines were started with these.

I managed to get my hands on a Piper Cub L4 in the Dooars for a pretty good price – around Rs 3,000. I had this plane when I was an assistant at Doomur Dulling and Gelakey. I used the Mackeypore wartime grass strip because there was no strip at Gelakey. The manager of Mackeypore, Cappie Davis, was instructed by the General Manager Tim Healy to construct a temporary bamboo hanger because the Company had shown some interest in the use of the aircraft to inspect estates.

Unfortunately, I had very little use of either. In a windstorm, the hanger collapsed on the plane. It was pretty badly damaged so I dismantled it and took it to Atkhel Factory Bungalow where I was living at the time. I mounted the engine on a couple of steel girders and ran it regularly, to everybody's consternation.

Not long after this a civilian Aeronca Super Chief was for sale in Upper Assam. It seemed to belong to a Marwari who had taken it in lieu of a debt! (The person concerned shall be nameless). Its condition was not very good. But as luck would have it, I had seen an advert in the Statesman that the Lucknow Flying Club were looking for Piper Cubs in any condition. I made contact with them and in a very short time a person arrived to see me. They were interested in making a deal.

It was agreed that I crate the Piper and send it by river steamer to Lucknow. In return, they would completely overhaul the Aeronca and give a free loan of a Stinson Sentinel L5. This was done and in about three weeks the Stinson arrived and the Aeronca went off to Lucknow.

The overhaul took about eight months, during which time I had the unrestricted use of their aircraft. It was a good plane, but expensive on petrol, having a 260hp engine, compared with 90hp in the Aeronca.

Eventually the Aeronca was ready and flown back to Tezpur, where we exchanged aircraft. They did a very good job of the overhaul. The plane was like new. I continued to fly it until the time of the Chinese

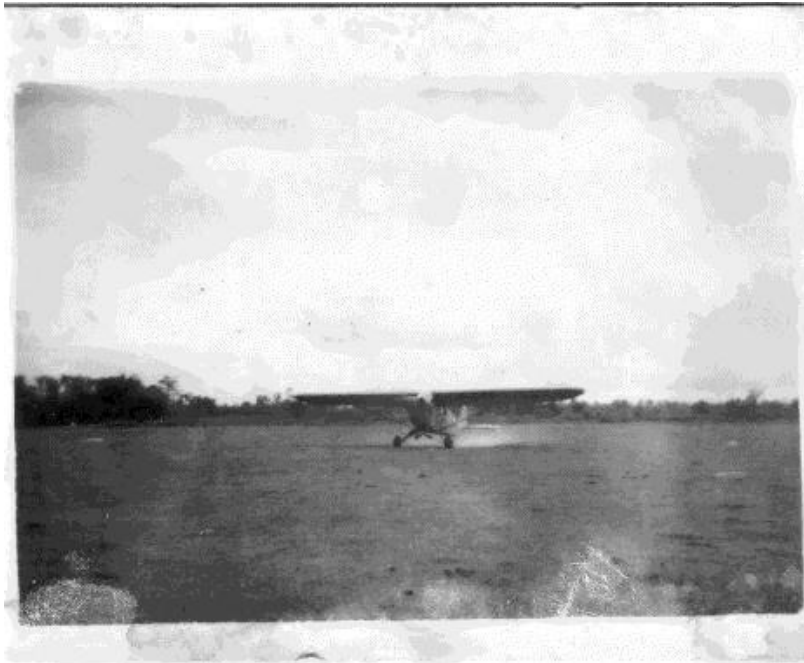
problems. Then the Indian Government decided that private flying was not to continue in Assam. The Aeronca ended up being sold to a dealer in Calcutta Airport.



Aeronca after complete overhaul



Aeronca Super Chief, before overhaul, Gelakey strip



Piper cub taking off Thowra



Aircraft on loan from Lucknow Flying Club

Polo

The Nazira polo team, mid-1950s. These were the trophies won by these players:

1st Sibsager, 2and Sibsager, Roberts Cup, Junior Sibsager and Best Player



From Left to Right: Bill Dowsing, Tom Derby, Bill Charlier, Ian Leetham



Back row from left to right

Dr Tom Poole, Ian Leetham, Roger Wiener, Tony Yates, Page, Alistair Wright, Ray Corps, John Darby

Front row from left to right

Bill Charlier, Cappie Daivis, Tom Darby, Bill Dowsing.

The cups in the picture were all won in one year: best player, 2nd Sibsagar, 1st Sibsagar, Roberts cup, Junior cup played for by low handicap players.

1960s

Football 1964 Moran Planters.



Standing L to R

LC Hazarika (Referee), SK Bakshi (Dirai), Dewan Mehra, Chatrath, Nar Singh (Thowra), Chris Morris (Dekhari), Sohan Singh (Moran,) Hardev Singh (Dekhari,) SN Khonnika (Teliojan)

Sitting L to R

Gilchrist (Bamunbarrie), Peter Clayton (Doomur Dulling), Julian Francis (Khowang), Bruno Banerjee (Captain) (Teliojan), Ray Town (Moran), Shekawat (Khowang)

Winnie the Leopard

In the very early 60's at Doomur Dulling Tea Estate, where I was manager, a *busti wallah* (local resident) arrived at the bungalow with a sack in which was a baby leopard, probably about a month old. I gave him a few rupees and took the cub. We called her Winnie.

In the past, when at Towkok, I had tried to bring up a tiger cub but it eventually died of malnutrition. This prompted me to write to the director of the London Zoo. I received an extensive reply explaining the importance that after the short period of weaning, all food should contain fur and feathers. In other words, chickens and goats should still have the skin on them. This was important as it provided a proper digestion of the food and the well-being of the animal.

From the first day, we kept her free and only caged her at night for her own protection. She stayed with us for nearly fourteen months and was still free during the day.

During the period she was with us, my visitors to the bungalow became few and far between.

One incident comes to mind. The Assam Company Tea Taster and Manufacturing Advisor, Leslie Woollett, who made periodic visits to the factory, arrived and stayed to lunch, which was the custom. During lunch, Winnie bounded in from the compound on to the dining room table, straight to Leslie's lunch. With this, he fell out of his chair in horror, and disappeared under the table while Winnie made away with his lunch. It took a good deal of effort to get him out from under the table. He then made a very rapid departure in his car, without a word or backward glance. One bonus, I didn't have to worry about visits from that department for some time.

She was about the size of a young Labrador dog. Although she never threatened anybody, we were beginning to get nocturnal visits from the local male leopard population. In fact, one evening on the way

to the club, in our driveway stood a full-grown black leopard. So at last came the sad time for her departure.

She travelled in a specially constructed crate. The design was given to me by the Colchester Zoo. We got her used to the cage by taking her out in it, on the back of the jeep. She was flown to Calcutta in a Dakota from Doomur Dulling Air Strip to meet the Pan Am Animal flight that came through each week. She was met in Calcutta by Pops, who ran the Sky Players, our private Dakota service of those days. He knew Winnie as he had stayed with me on occasions. I am told he actually walked her a little at Dum Dum near Hanger number 9. She had a collar and chain.

The area around the hanger became deserted very quickly. She arrived next day in Colchester in excellent condition. She produced two litters of cubs during her lifetime.

I did visit her on a couple of occasions. At the beginning, I could go into the cage with her, but later had to stay outside. She did still seem to remember me either by sight or by smell.

I am grateful to have had the experience of Winnie. It does show that it is possible to have a good relationship between a human being and a wild animal.

February 2005

This is the story of Bill and Lois Charlier's January 2005 visit to India.

Malaga - Frankfurt - and we were off to Delhi!

During our two days in Delhi, we were entertained by Kailash and Kumal Chaurasia, who took us to see some of the construction that was taking place in the city – the underground, the fly-overs and the new shopping malls. Imagine, a Marks and Spencer's in a beautiful mall in South Delhi.

Rested and ready for action, we flew to Guwahati, where we were met by our car and driver who would be with us for 17 days. We stayed a night at the Ashok Brahmaputra so that we could start up the Valley early the next day.

The Trunk Road was in good condition, the Asian Car Rally had started from Guwahati through Manipur, so the road had been repaired. We were heading for Jorhat, where we were to stay two nights at The Manor at Thengal, the ancestral home of the Barua family, a Heritage Building, 15 kms outside Jorhat in Jalukonibari Village.

The next morning, with a packed lunch, we started on a journey to the Nazira Area, to Cherideo Purbut, where I had worked in the 1950's when it was an Assam Company Garden. There we came to appreciate the difficulties that the Tea Industry was facing, especially with small proprietary-owned gardens. Things seemed to be in very poor shape. We were told that they were selling tea at 30% below the cost of production. Sad!

We drove past Nazira but could see nothing from the bridge. The whole area was filled with housing for the oil company. The Amguri Road was so bad that we were advised to return through Sibsagar and the terrible road we had already gone through.

The next day we set out for Moranhat and Khoomtaie Estate and were welcomed by Saurabh and Smita Shankar. We stayed with them for four days ... such hospitality!

We were toured through the gardens of Hajua, Khoomtaie and Doomur Dulling and saw tea that was planted during my time as manager. I was pleased to see that these Estates were in good order, although facing financial challenges. The managers were doing their best to cope with the situation.

The general consensus of opinion is that too much tea of a low quality has been put on the market over the past years, driving the price down. There are a good number of proprietary gardens that have closed down, not being able to pay the labour. This has caused considerable unrest and even violence and the death of a few Tea Estate managers. One occurred in Golaghat only a few days after our departure from Assam. These incidents are unsettling to the whole industry.

In honour of our friend, the late Bruno Banerjee, we visited, in Moranhat, the school for the blind which he founded. This school provides residential care and education for blind children. It is funded by voluntary donations and is helped by Tea Estates in the area. Victor Banerjee has followed in his father's footsteps to oversee the program. We were presented with prayer shawls woven by the students on looms in the workshop of the school.

In the afternoon, we went to the Moran Polo Club and saw the many changes that had taken place there - a new floor and additions. We have on the mantle of our home the Assamese brass dish they gave us and with them, prayer shawls.

Back to Jorhat and The Manor at Thengal for two nights. One of the days we visited the Jorhat Club and found it all looking smart and well cared for. We found in Jorhat that the store Doss & Co. still operating and we bought some biscuits for the next stage of our journey.

Since the roads were so much improved, we decided not to spend a night in Guwahati but to travel directly to Shillong. It was a marathon trip, but eight hours later, we were in Rosaville, another of the Barua Heritage properties.

We spent a week in Shillong, and visited with the Richmond family. We couldn't help but toast Bill Richmond, the youngest of Birdie Richmond's sons, who had just been appointed Director General of Police, Meghalaya ...the top police job!

By chance, on the street, I ran into Don Papworth who was living in Shillong. Also by chance we met Iris Macfarlane, the author of the book *Black Gold*. She was staying at the Pinewood Hotel, where we happened to have lunch.

From Shillong, down the twisty mountain road to the airport in Guwahati and a flight to Calcutta where we spend our last week at The Fairlawn Hotel, our home away from home. As ever, the chaos of Calcutta is indescribable. Fly-overs are being constructed on Chowringee. Work on an underground car park in front of New Market is in progress. Everything adds to the confusion.

On our way home, we returned to Delhi where we lunched with Parki and Gulchan Jauhar, and Frank Wilson. Then another lunch with the Chaurasias. It is impressive to see the new tower blocks and office buildings that are springing up around the city.

Once again, we are home and full of memories of a wonderful holiday. We truly appreciate all that was done for us to make it such a success.❖

THE HIGHWAVYS:

He was thirsty. It was midday and he was out in the open under an overpowering sun. The sound of water, flowing beneath his giant frame, was enticing. Lowering his head, ploughing a tusk under the earth, the bull pulled at the pipe that fed the houses below. The pipe burst and water spouted like a fountain.

With a trumpet of glee, he quenched his thirst and then stood over the water. He was in ecstasy as it cooled his underbelly: the annoyed yelling of people below didn't bother him at all. Moving away, to drink some more water, he ambled off majestically after he was satiated.

As soon as he disappeared behind a few trees, estate workers rushed toward the broken pipe and expertly repaired the damage. We had just arrived at the bungalow, known as Cloud Mountain, and presently had water in our taps. The in-house staff told us all about the elephant.

"He is a killer. Two years ago, he had killed two workers and now nobody goes out when he is around." That was our introduction to the Highwavys.

Cousin Firoza, a paediatrician from Bombay, visits us here in Kodaikanal once or twice a year. Each visit involves a trip somewhere. Some are nearby and others an overnight halt en route to our destination. This time around I was fresh out of ideas.

Somehow the idea of the Highwavys popped up. Not too far and a place I had yet to visit.

The plan was to stay two nights at Cloud Mountain. Leaving on Tuesday the 22nd of March, we drove down the new Adukkam ghat after breakfast and were in Theni in short order. The drive from Theni, up the rolling hills, had been nothing short of spectacular.

The road was as smooth as it was cambered ... **and there wasn't a mote of garbage or plastic to be found by the roadside.**

After a short climb, carpets of tea bushes welcomed us. As an ex-planter, I gasped at the sheer quality of undulating landscape that surrounded us. Later, we were to discover that all two-thousand-two-hundred-and-sixteen acres of this property were as immaculately maintained as the first fields of tea bushes that greeted us. How surprising then that not even Kishore Cariappa had visited these hills before.

I couldn't help but wonder, in this era of labour shortages, how all these vast acreages could be kept at this level of excellence. Everything looked manicured! These estates, belonging to the Woodbriar Group, were formerly owned by Brooke Bond and Company. Surrounded by pristine forest and interspersed with trees used as wind-breakers, the total area comprises three-thousand-seven-hundred-and-eighty acres of veritable paradise.

The original company had plantations in Valparai and in the Munnar as well – they now belong to Shree (**an alumni of Kodaikanal International School**), who is the largest individual planter in the country. A few years ago, Shree went on to purchase a large tea estate in North India as well.

With the water restored, after the elephant's shenanigans, to all the many bungalows – some run as homestays – we settled down to a sumptuous lunch. The chef did all kinds of wizardry and the dining table was soon laden with a cornucopia of delicious platters.

The marvel of the drive, together with the delights of the dining table, called for a short lie-back. After that it was time for a walk. We circumvented the Sand River bungalow, just above Cloud Mountain, which we occupied and settled down for a brisk walk.

Kishore spotted some movement in a tiny forested area ahead. A tree swayed. Leaves fell ... and nobody had to spell it out for us. It was the elephant. We stood awhile, trying to get a glimpse of him through the thick foliage, when a worker approached us. Heading in the same direction, she said she was going to light candles in the shrine just below the patch harbouring the elephant.

Telling us not to go further, as this was the killer elephant, she went anyway. Undaunted, she lit a few candles and walked back, completely oblivious to the danger of a nearby wild elephant! There certainly is something to blind faith, especially in the immediate vicinity of a known elephant of indifferent temperament.

A few people staying in one of the lower bungalows appeared on the scene. Not sure they spoke English, I told them in Tamil, 'thus far and no farther', while going on to tell them an elephant was lurking in the tiny forest patch ahead. They were immediately agog with excitement:

"You speak Tamil?"

As I had been speaking Tamil, there was no sense in denying it but, if they thought that was of greater interest than an elephant in the immediate vicinity, I was nothing short of flabbergasted! After an amiable chat, one of them expressed his desire to see the elephant. Climbing up a steep, narrow path, made slippery with loose mud, he got into the tea bushes above. From there, a stealthy approach was all that was necessary to see the elephant and he was delighted.

Praveen Richard, a banker with UBS in Zurich, is from a family in Tirunelveli. He will have plenty of stories to tell his fellow bankers in Switzerland!

Our walk cut short we repaired to Cloud Mountain where we met up with Bob (Deviah) the Group Manager. He was accompanied by Jacob Mathew who was visiting the property from the head-office in Coimbatore. I enquired about the excellent condition of the tea fields and that got them immediately engaged in telling us about how they conjured this enchanted fairyland.

The next day we were able to see the methods they employed. Using technology from Japan, they harvested tea leaves at an incredible pace. I use the word harvest deliberately because there is no 'plucking' of the tea leaves. It is a compromise but the alternative would be to abandon fields or even entire estates.

Several workers are from the Jharkhand belt of North India. More and more plantations in the South of the country employ them and, while they are still available, plantations are still sustainable. The eagerness, energy, and innovativeness on display, by both Bob and Jacob Mathew, left me spellbound with a vast array of technology at their fingertips.

With a mere twelve-hundred-and-eighty-seven workers, two-hundred-and-six among them, coming from distant Jharkhand, they managed the entire property consisting of several estates. Tea estates require four workers per acre and more during the rapid spurt of tea leaves during the summer season. Here they were managing with just a little over half-a-worker an acre.

As incredible as it sounds, what truly astonished me was the soil. Tea estates all over have their bushes rooted in shale and in pretty much degraded land. A majority of them are over a hundred years old and the roots garner no nutrients other than what is artificially put in by way of chemical fertiliser.

When I mentioned this, Kishore scooped up a handful of earth from under the canopy of tea and ... lo and behold ... it was loam! Somehow it had composted and I have yet to learn the secret of this innovation. Even Shehzarin, my wife, who has spent decades on the plantations was taken aback at the rich quality of humous which fed the bushes. That is as astonishing as it is quite simply outstanding!

All the numerous factories have been closed, except for the Vaniar factory, which is the centralised unit for tea leaf from all over the many estates. We didn't have time to visit the factory but passing by, on the road below, we were greeted with the fine aroma of tea wafting down from the manufacturing unit.

We were all sad when it was time to leave. The bungalow staff and the few local workers we interacted with were nothing short of exemplary. Kind and simple, they were proud of their properties and it made leaving the Highway that much harder.

Two nights was all we had. We were to leave on Thursday the 24th after breakfast but had to leave early in the morning instead. There was an emergency in Bombay and Firoza had to get back a day earlier. It was dark when we left and elephants had been out on the road. Piles of steaming dung and torn branches were all the evidence we needed.

A tipper lorry in front had to stop and wait till a belligerent tusker decided to move back into the trees abutting the road. It is a different world thriving in a different era. As magnificent as it is wild; coupled with a serenity that existed many eons ago.

From: Minoo Avari

To: Ranga Bedi



GOLF AND TEA



Golf and tea together

the rich heritage of Assam
tea culture and their ways.

GolfPlus Monthly introduces a dedicated quaterly supplement especially for golfer of NE, Upper Assam

It shall enlighten golfers all across the country, the journey of their favourite morning beverage

Every cup of tea in the world has a bit of Assam in it

Largest tea and golf district in the country

Assam, NE is more than just Elephants and one horned rinno.

One of the oldest golf course Digboi Golf Course & Misa Polo

HERITAGE OF MISA POLO GOLF COURSE – A CLOSE LOOK

The Misa Polo Club was built with the intention of re-creating a social and educational hub for the tea planting community. It is located in the Kellyden Tea Estate which is a very picturesque site located 40 kms from Nagaon and 35 kms from Tezpur. The world heritage site, “Kaziranga National Park” which is famous for its one horned rhino and its rich biodiversity, is an hour’s drive away from the club.

The club organizes weekly Tennis and social meets on Wednesdays, fortnightly suppers, two golf tournaments and annual club meets.

The Misa Polo Club was established in 1888 as a social Polo Club for the planters and British District Administration heads. British planters introduced the club culture and encouraged social interaction through sports and other celebratory occasions. Apart from the existing facilities for indoor games, Tennis and Cricket, a nine hole Golf course was added later.

The club was used by the US Army when they were temporarily stationed in Misa during World War II.

The primary aim is to revive and resuscitate this colonial heritage club and transform it into the pride of Assam. With the re-alignment of the Asian Highway, the club’s location has assumed strategic importance as a midway transit point for visitors who are on their way to upper Assam. They can lodge at the club to experience the grandeur of the colonial past. Also, the club is keen to establish itself as a modern Management Centre of Excellence where skills on the playing fields will supplement the collective exchange of ideas and learning at the



Convention Centre Hall. This revamp is not just the dressing up of a Planters Club. It is the creation of a sporting centre a management convention hub and a tourist destination on the Asian Highway across the state. The Club would also be a retail outlet for the present and proposed range of products in our retail chain. A chance to blend sales with the overall Heritage experience. The need to do this project is to fulfil our commitment to the workers, local populace and the Govt. By walling in the entire area of the Club we have securitized, protected and brought into the fold approximately 34 Ha of land which in parts was being cultivated or lying fallow and unused. This will facilitate the extension of the Golf Course with the addition of the back nine. **GP**





THE JEWEL IN TEE CROWN

Dek: Founded in 1888, the Digboi Golf Course is spread in an area of 6309 yards and is considered one of the best golf courses in the territory. The location of the golf course is ideal as the Dehing Forest Reserve is found on three sides of the golf course. On the fourth side, an amazing view of the mountain ranges situated in Arunachal Pradesh can be enjoyed.

Unlike the days gone by, the North-Eastern region of India, today has a much closer connection with the rest of the country and that can be attributed to many factors. While the much improved road, rail and air connectivity has had a major contribution in ushering in this positive trend, the aggressive promotion of the North-East through media and social media has also increased awareness and knowledge about the region in the rest of the country and abroad thus expanding the possibilities for the growth of tourism and many other sectors.

For instance, any kid who has studied geography in an Indian school will tell you that Assam, the largest state in the North-East, is world-famous for its tea production and is also home to the historic IndianOil refinery at Digboi. However, the fact that Assam is also a great golfing destination has only come to light in recent years.

Assam is blessed with a number of scenic golf courses spread across its lush tea estates which were built during the British era by tea planters. The Digboi Golf Links, now owned and maintained by the Indian Oil Corporation, is the 'jewel in the crown' among these courses. It is the top championship course of North-Eastern India as it stages one of the longest-running and most prestigious professional golf tournaments on the Indian domestic circuit, the IndianOil Servo Masters Golf.

The IndianOil Servo Masters Golf will be staging its 21st edition in December this year. It can be termed as the biggest annual sporting event held in the North-East in terms of the prize money involved (Rs. 60 lakh), number of participants, level of competition and the wide media coverage. The connection between Assam and the sport of golf may be an old one, but the man who brought

it to the fore and sparked a revival for the sport in the region just over two decades back was the legendary JP Singh.

JP Singh, an acclaimed amateur golfer and resident of Digboi for most of his life, was instrumental in the inception of the IndianOil Servo Masters Golf which brought professional golf to the state. The passionate golfer and visionary thus enjoys a rich legacy as he contributed in putting Assam and Digboi on the international golfing map.

JP Singh's hospitality is also the stuff of

legends. The man with the charming personality played the perfect host by going out of his way to help players visiting Digboi for the annual event. He made the players

feel welcome and safe all the way from Guwahati to Digboi (1000 km in distance). Most importantly, JP Singh showed us all that Assam is more than just a world of planters and oil. **GP**



Experience 145 years of Cultural Inheritance and 1000 years of



ENVIRONMENTAL HERITAGE OF THE EASTERN HIMALAYAS

Total package - Escape from everyday life, experience luxury, embrace nature, explore history and excite yourself with Adventure and Wildlife.

We operate the flagship rural and tea tourism homestay in Assam, India called Wild Mahseer. This is a destination nestled in the 22 acres of the Eastern Himalayan Botanic Ark, a social restoration project of Balipara Foundation.

They have been promoting Tea, Nature and Community Tourism in Assam since 2004, managed entirely by the local population. They have hosted over 15,000 guests from over 42 countries, showcasing the beauty and natural heritage of the North East, especially Assam with passion and ardour for the region's rich history, culture and biodiversity.

Serenely tucked in the Brahmaputra valley and nurtured by local communities of the Eastern Himalayas, the Eastern Himalayan Botanic Ark in residence at Wild Mahseer is an elusive natural and cultural paradise. Located 25kms away from India's "cleanest air" city, Tezpur, Wild Mahseer is a bio-diverse Ark of 1, 00,000+ plants, 75+ species of birds and 72+ species of butterflies and is also the gateway to the forests of Pakke, Kaziranga, Nameri and Orang.

Wild Mahseer is truly a hidden gem in the midst of Addabarie Tea Estate made up of five bungalows, comprising Burra Bungalow (Heritage Property) and four other colonial-styled tea bungalows (total 17 rooms), a common Dining Pavilion - The First Flush, Two & a Bud Conference Hall, Bhela Ghar - Our Community Kitchen and Elephant Country store for you to choose from varied, ethnic collectables and cherish a part of Northeast culture!

GolfPlus speaks with the Mr Prabir Banarjee, Group CEO of the Balipara Foundation (Wild Mahseer) who himself has been closely involved with golf and tea planters his entire life.

GP: Connect with Golf?

PB: My father was a tea planter and I grew up in a tea plantation and golf has been a part of the given lifestyle of a tea planter. So, we continued with golf as we grew up and then became a part of the Merchants Cup in Calcutta which is a corporate annual tournament.

GP: Tea for Unity Initiative?

PB: The Tea plantation workers have been underprivileged for various reasons since the inception of this plantation industry. The Tea community are here for over 170 years now and they still don't own a single brick. I am part of the team that manages a not for profit Balipara Foundation which is all to do with community empowerment, community livelihoods and creating healthier, rural features for both social and economic mobility. So, the concept of Tea for Unity and the tie-ups with golf is great for the livelihoods of the communities.

We have been a part of the whole process of the resurrection of Misa Polo Club (established in 1888) with an active 18 hole golf course. It was totally renovated in 2012 and the course has been curated by Brandon de Souza. It is looked after by Jakhir, himself a distinguished golfer having won the North East Open Tournament more than once. It is a great opportunity to create employment for the local population. People can actually come in here and stay at Wild Mahseer, a heritage homestay (www.wildmahseer.com) and a social restoration project of Balipara Foundation, and play their golf in Misa Polo Club.

Further to playing golf, the golfer can experience the wonders of the neighbouring 5 National Parks including Kaziranga which is an UNESCO World Heritage site the home to the Big 5. One can get to experience true outdoor wildlife adventures including River Rafting, Bird Watching, Dolphin viewing, and Jungle Safaris in pristine natural surroundings.

GP: How will this benefit the Eco Tourism?


PB: We have about 7 diverse ethnic communities in this area. We, at Balipara Foundation have facilitated the opening of 5 home stays among these ethnic community villages. So far, we have

trained 500 members and have invested time to support these ethnic communities in developing and marketing community homestays offering the best of Assam through experiences of traditional agroforestry, cuisine, beverages, culture and tradition. These homestays have played a vital role in augmenting employment and family & village livelihoods for these communities. For the traveller this would be a truly differentiated experience in the areas of natural and eco therapies and the aspects of ethnobotany and medicinal plants.

GP: Brand Image of Assam Tea?

PB: Assam is famous for a couple of things but it is the most famous for Tea. Assam Tea produces 50% of the India's Tea and 25% in the world with many varieties while supporting thousands of homestead family managed small tea growers. Assam is positioned to combine this mystique of tea, its inherited biodiversity, and its diverse cultural heritage with a golfing experience which in turn will uplift local incomes and generate employment through the multiplier effects of this industry segment.

GP: Your thoughts on Golf Culture meets Tea Culture?

PB: Well Tea Culture and more. Assam has the highest number of golf courses in any state of the country as Tea Planters, the Oil Industry and Defence personnel play golf. Connectivity from outside the state is not the issue anymore- Assam also has the highest number of operational airports in any state in the country. If a golfer wants a complete and unique experience, the golf package comes combined with fresh air, fresh tea, natural beauty, cultural heritage, and wildlife, and the unique opportunity to experience the lifestyles of the colonial tea planters in facilities like Wild Mahseer. 

GOLF CULTURE MEETS TEA CULTURE

GOLDEN GREENS GOLF COURSE

Golden Greens Golf Course is the only links design course of the country. It took shape under the leadership of Mr Gulli Juneja. His vision was to give the youngsters a taste of some 'hard' golf to toughen them up. Himself being a member of the Royal and Ancient Club of Saint Andrews he was seen proudly quoting "people need not go to Scotland".

With the Aravali Hills on one side, elephant grass lining the course it was a heavenly walk for an average golfer. The course has since evolved to being home for the Asian industrialists and executives for a homely golf experience.

One can see regular golf activities of the expatriate community namely the Japanese, Taiwan, and Korean golfers. The unique driving range run by Pritam Saikia who incidentally is also a Tea Planters son has been known by everyone. His efforts keeps the best golfer on the various tours of the country, fit and sharp in their skills. Jyoti Randhawa, Digvijay Singh, SSP Chowrasia, etc. are just some of the big names.

With such common connection between golfers and planters, golden greens is the perfect spot for the initiative 'Golf Culture meets Tea Culture'. The most welcoming course of the country, a homely and efficient staff always a 'yes' to finicky needs of Golfers.

Golf + Polo + Tea + Haryana + Assam makes this a unique partnership engaging in cultural exchange and a new beginning for golf tourism.

THE TEA STUDIO

Located in the heart of Tea country in the Nilgiris, the Tea Studio is a unique concept for Tea manufactures. Producing plantation-fresh stand-alone teas, each with its own unique character. Our raw material, the finest possible leaf, emanates from marginal tribal farmers who tend their tiny family land holdings in the vicinity of the Studio. Cultivated organically for decades and Naturally Organic, this leaf is delivered to the Studio fresh off the bush still glistening with the morning dew.



Environmental Friendly


100% Non-Polluting
Staunchly adhering to sustainable green practices, the Studio has pioneered the use of LPG in manufacture. Unlike Tea factories anywhere else in the world, we use no coal nor firewood and are

proud of the fact that we are 100% non-polluting so that while the air in and around the Studio is noticeably cleaner, the beautiful surrounding valley is also under no risk from contaminants.

From Tee to Tea

Did you know?

- Assam has the largest number of golf course in the country
- Golf courses are an integral part of tea gardens and an important working culture of the planters
- Games day is a serious affair the planting community adheres to
- Golf course in Assam are divided by districts as per the Sports Authority requirements. A unique achievement true only for Assam. **GP**

DECEMBER					Tea Scenario					JANUARY - DECEMBER				
Crop (m.kgs.)										Crop (m.kgs.)				
			Difference	Difference								Difference	Difference	
2021	2020	2019	2021-2020	2021-2019						2021	2020	2019	2021-2020	2021-2019
49.7	53.6	48.2	-4.0	1.5	NORTH INDIA					1093.4	1035.5	1171.1	57.9	-77.7
14.9	20.5	18.1	-5.6	-3.3	SOUTH INDIA					235.7	222.1	219.0	13.6	16.7
64.5	74.1	66.3	-9.6	-1.8	ALL INDIA					1329.0	1257.5	1390.1	71.5	-61.0
Auction Sale Quantity (m. kgs.)					Auction Sale Quantity (m. kgs.)					Auction Sale Quantity (m. kgs.)				
68.9	73.3	48.8	-4.4	20.1	NORTH INDIA					489.2	470.5	495.3	18.7	-6.1
11.5	11.8	9.3	-0.3	2.2	SOUTH INDIA					145.4	126.5	124.3	18.9	21.1
80.4	85.2	58.1	-4.8	22.3	ALL INDIA					634.6	596.9	619.6	37.7	15.0
Auction Average (Rs.)					Auction Average (Rs.)					Auction Average (Rs.)				
183.48	174.77	146.74	8.71	36.74	NORTH INDIA					190.78	206.76	151.89	-15.98	38.89
110.31	134.40	98.94	-24.09	11.37	SOUTH INDIA					118.41	132.21	103.35	-13.80	15.06
173.01	169.16	139.11	3.85	33.90	ALL INDIA					174.20	190.97	142.15	-16.77	32.05
Exports (m. kgs.)					Exports (m. kgs.)					Exports (m. kgs.)				
11.2	11.4	13.3	-0.18	-2.12	NORTH INDIA (Nov.)					99.7	111.9	137.8	-12.22	-38.09
7.0	6.3	7.8	0.73	-0.82	SOUTH INDIA (Nov.)					75.7	78.0	92.1	-2.22	-16.32
18.2	17.6	21.1	0.55	-2.94	ALL INDIA (Nov.)					175.4	189.8	229.8	-14.44	-54.41
World Auction Average					CENTRE					World Auction Average				
638.14	644.95	577.70	-6.81	60.44	COLOMBO (SL Rs.)					617.83	631.60	545.05	-13.77	72.78
238.13	184.90	209.76	53.23	28.37	MOMBASA (US Cents)					197.61	193.01	204.06	4.60	-6.45
131.42	153.73	128.14	-22.31	3.28	LIMBE (US Cents)					137.59	144.23	145.85	-6.64	-8.26
185.45	191.68	167.87	-6.23	17.58	CHITTAGONG (Taka)					197.38	173.92	194.49	23.46	2.89
World Crop (m. kgs.)					World Crop (m. kgs.)					World Crop (m. kgs.)				
20.4	28.6	21.9	-8.2	-1.5	SRI LANKA					299.3	278.8	300.1	20.5	-0.8
49.0	48.3	46.3	0.7	2.7	KENYA (Oct.)					434.6	467.4	363.1	-32.9	71.5
1.4	1.4	1.1	0.0	0.3	MALAWI (Nov.)					46.7	39.9	43.2	6.8	3.5
6.9	7.0	6.4	0.0	0.5	BANGLADESH					96.5	86.4	96.1	10.2	0.5
Auction Sale Qty. -April'21 / December'21(m. kgs.) 2021/22					Auction Average. -April'21/December'21 (Rs.) 2021/22					Auction Average. -April'21/December'21 (Rs.) 2021/22				
408.8	325.4	377.3	83.4	31.5	NORTH INDIA					195.60	229.17	157.66	-33.56	37.95
113.3	99.1	93.3	14.1	19.9	SOUTH INDIA					110.59	141.53	100.09	-30.94	10.50
522.0	424.5	470.6	97.6	51.4	ALL INDIA					177.16	208.71	146.24	-31.54	30.92

PROVISIONAL FIGURES AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE

J. Thomas & Co., Private Limited