

An aerial photograph of a large estate. In the center, a long, white building with a green roof is visible, surrounded by a long driveway lined with tall, thin trees. To the left, there is a smaller, two-story house. The estate is set in a valley with rolling hills in the background, some of which are covered in dense green forest. The foreground shows a large, open field with scattered trees.

# The Times

WM

The McLeod Russel  
House Journal

July 2014



## Editorial



“We want you to bring out a house journal,” we were told in mid-2007.

With internet connections being very poor, Vidya Kaul and I bounced ideas for the contents back and forth over the phone from opposite banks of the Brahmaputra. We were joined by Sakina Hussain who added her inputs while Gautam Bhuyan, as Coordinator, helped us collect material from Kolkata office and liaised with the printer.

And so, with no prior experience whatsoever in bringing out a magazine, three ladies went forth to write for, edit, compile and design the January 2008 issue of The WM Times.

Enrique Poncela once said, “When something can be read without effort, great effort has gone into its writing.” The same could be said of Editing!

Vidya wrote and re-wrote her own articles until she was satisfied but till the magazine went for print, she still felt that perhaps a little more ‘spit and polish’ could’ve been done! She meticulously read and re-read every page at every stage of editing and agonized over any little mistake which may have gone undetected by her eagle eye, even though it went unnoticed by everyone else but us. She wanted each issue of the magazine to be perfect because it was, after all, ‘our baby’.

The January 2014 issue was the last that Vidya worked on, as her husband, Pavan, retired from the services of the

Company in March. In this, my first Editorial, I would like to acknowledge the excellent work done by Vidya in consistently maintaining the standards set with the January 2008 issue.

I bid ‘adieu’ to Gautam Bhuyan with gratitude for all his support over the last seven years and welcome onboard our new Assistant Editor, Rupa Saikia, and Coordinator, Sunny Uthup.

The January 2014 issue was a special one, to acknowledge and celebrate Mr B.M. Khaitan’s 50 years’ tenure as Chairman of the Company. May he continue at the helm for many more years.

In this issue, we bring back those ‘old, familiar faces’...and places – our usual features.

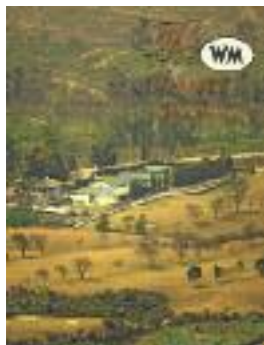
We are midway through the Season already...may the rest of it be bountiful.

Best wishes,



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Photograph: Mr Anand Wats, Paneery T.E.

## HONOURS

### ICC Lifetime Achievement Award



#### CITATION

*His achievements make us proud. He is the Visionary Industrialist with legendary contributions to the Indian Industry. He has set an example for innumerable aspiring entrepreneurs of this country. A passionate Leader par excellence, he has broken barriers and challenged challenges. And won.*

#### Brij Mohan Khaitan

*Tea Industry Patriarch of India. He has great contributions in the Tea Industry with which he has been associated for over four decades. One of the most respected Industry Leaders of Kolkata and the entire nation, whose life and times continue to inspire many.*

*He is the Chairman of Williamson Magor group, which also comprises Eveready Industries India Ltd. & McLeod Russel Ltd. Today, McLeod Russel is the world's largest tea plantation company which directly employs over 1 lakh people, a large number of whom are women. Eveready Industries India Limited is one of India's most reputed FMCG companies, which has a portfolio comprising dry cell batteries, flashlights, and packet tea.*

*He is a self-made man who literally came up from nothing. In 1963, he got his first break. That was tea and from that day onwards, he has grown his group to the size where it is today. He virtually turned Williamson Magor around single-handedly and soon established a reputation for total integrity and reliability. His foresight, passion and love towards his work have created wealth for the nation.*

*He has been a Sports enthusiast and a keen Golfer. He has played a significant role in the Education sector.*

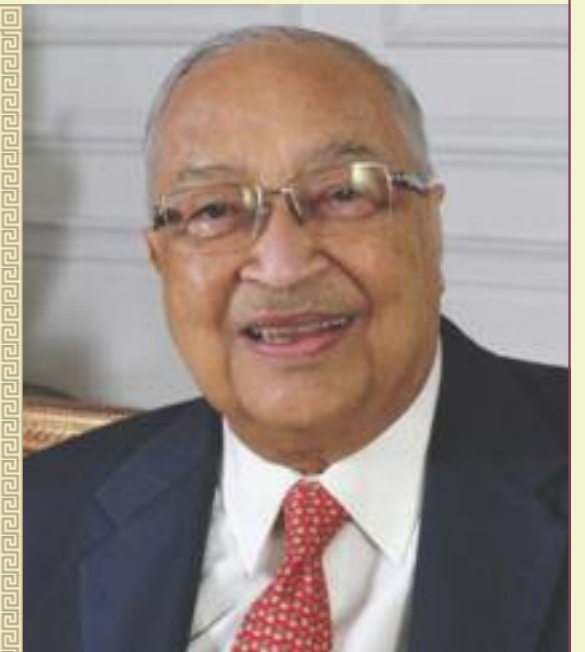
*In recognition of his unique contribution to our Nation, and his deep commitment towards putting India firmly on the global economic map The Indian Chamber of Commerce Is honoured & happy to confer the*

ICC Lifetime Achievement Award 2013 on

#### Brij Mohan Khaitan

*Our heartiest congratulations! We know you will continue to serve Indian Industry like a true dynamic Leader  
And our best wishes will always be with you.*

KOLKATA, DECEMBER 17, 2013



Mr Khaitan being Felicitated by His Excellency the Governor of West Bengal

### Banga Bibhushan

Mr B. M. Khaitan was conferred the state's highest civilian honour, the Banga Bibhushan, on 20 May 2014, for his outstanding contribution to Industry. “We try to dedicate this day to individuals for their contribution to the world of Culture, Arts, Music, Sports and Industry. We will continue this award to showcase Bengal's talents to the world,” said Chief Minister, Smti Mamata Banerjee, at the ceremony.

Sustainable Standard-Setter Award, 2014



“Our mission to foster environmental stewardship, social responsibility and mindful consumption is bolstered by new and ongoing collaborations with companies that are leading the way to a more sustainable future.” ~ Tensie Whelan, President of the Rainforest Alliance



Mr Azam Monem with Mr Daniel R. Katz - Chairman & Ms Tensie Whelan - President, Rainforest Alliance

This year, the theme for the Annual Spring Gala held at the American Museum of Natural History, New York, on 7 May, was Celebrate Sustainability. The Rainforest Alliance presented their Sustainable Standard-Setter Awards for 2014 to ten businesses and individuals that make a difference by championing sustainability efforts, protecting the environment and supporting local communities worldwide. McLeod Russel was the only Indian company among the ten Sustainable Standard-Setter Honorees.

Mr Rajeev Takru and Mr Azam Monem attended the Gala, and the latter received the Award on behalf of McLeod Russel in the presence of global leaders in sustainability.

This great honour and recognition for the Company on a global platform would not have been possible without the untiring efforts and commitment of the entire McLeod Russel team on the tea estates.



Mr A. Monem (2nd from left) & Mr R. Takru (3rd from right) with Guests of McLeod Russel at the Gala

“Thanks to its 87,000 employees in India, Vietnam, Uganda and Rwanda, McLeod Russel – the world’s largest private sector tea plantation company – produces 253 million pounds (115 million kilograms) of tea across 63 estates and 62 factories. These impressive numbers parallel the Company’s similarly impressive commitment to ensuring social and economic development that sustains and improves its employees’ quality of life.

In 2009, McLeod Russel achieved Rainforest Alliance certification on ten of its estates; four more were certified in 2010 and twenty more followed in 2013

in India. In addition, five tea estates in Uganda, one in Rwanda and three in Vietnam achieved certification over the past two years. The Company’s support has been instrumental in helping its smallholder farmers in Rwanda

and Uganda achieve Rainforest Alliance Certified status in 2012 and early 2014 respectively. In the coming years, McLeod Russel hopes to achieve certification on all of its plantations in order to reach standards set through the Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) guidelines.

The Company’s commitment to promoting the welfare of its employees has been particularly important in India’s Assam region. There, McLeod Russel has pursued a number of health and education initiatives that cater to employees, and, since 1995, the Company has worked to improve local standards of living by promoting traditional woven textiles made by women belonging to the Bodo ethnic community.”

*(Achievements of the 2014 Gala Honorees, RA)*



Mr Rajeev Takru at the Panel Discussion



At the second Tea Festival of Vietnam, held from 8 to 11 November 2013, in Thai Nguyen Province, participating companies from various countries like Japan, Korea, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and India were requested to send samples for tasting by a panel of judges to choose the best tea entered in the festival.

Phu Ben Tea Company was awarded the ‘Golden Leaf Trophy’.



# Tree Oasary

*Namdang is a beautiful estate in the Margherita area of Upper Assam. Those who have been posted there will revisit it and those who haven't will get acquainted. . .*

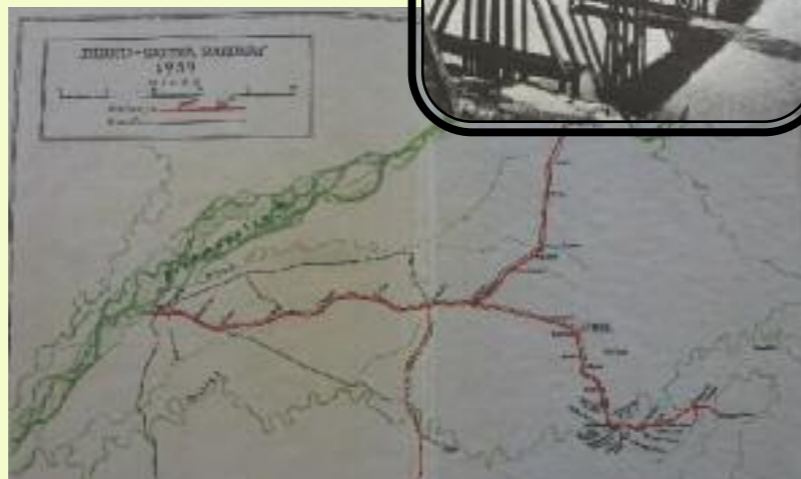


– Sarita Dasgupta

The Assam Railways & Trading Company Limited, or AR&T as it was called, was incorporated in 1881 to construct a railway, develop coalfields and establish a steamer service in Upper Assam. The railway and steamer service were essential for transporting coal, and later, timber, oil and tea.

Large tracts of jungle had to be cleared to make way for the railway tracks. Since vegetation grows very quickly in Assam, the problem was keeping the cleared land free of undergrowth thereafter. It was decided that planting tea by the sides of the tracks would be the best solution. Thus, in September 1891, tea was planted on 78 acres of the estate christened 'Margherita'. The next year, AR&T incorporated the Makum (Assam) Tea Company to look after 'Margherita Garden' and later, Dehing and Dirok estates. Interestingly, 'Makum Bagaan' is what Margherita T.E. is still locally called.

In 1908, 2000 acres of land were obtained at Namdang. The area was cleared and planted out the next year under the supervision of Mr D. J. Mackintosh of AR&T. William Warren took charge in 1912 and planted out another 500 acres.



In 1916, the estate was handed over to another new company formed by AR&T, called the Namdang Tea Company Ltd, whose first Chairman was Mr Walter Butler. Mr Warren continued to manage the estate until 1934, and was a pillar of the Company.

Head Tea House, Sri Ashok Bordoloi, recounts that his father, Sri Surendra Nath Bordoloi, joined the estate in 1935. He was promoted to 'Garden Babu in Charge' in December 1942 and made responsible for all the 'garden work' with a monthly salary of Rs 80/-!

*Bidding Farewell to Burra Sabab*



Bounded by Margherita town on the north, Tirap District of Arunachal Pradesh on the south, the Patkai forest on the east and Margherita T.E. on the west, Namdang T.E. has a total Grant Area of 1405 hectares with 756.13 hectares currently under tea. The estate has three Divisions – East Side, West Side and Namtok. With 165 of Namtok Division's total area of 262 hectares located in the Changlang District of Arunachal Pradesh, Namdang is the Company's only estate which pays taxes to two different states!



East Side and West Side are demarcated by the main road running through the estate, with the main office, factory and some of the bungalows being located in West Side.



The workers are housed in Lines which take their name from various sources – Girja Line is close to the church or 'girja'; Basti Line is next to a settlement or 'basti'; Club Line is situated near Margherita Club; Digboi Line probably took its name



*Clean Environment - Workers' Lines*



Old Oil Well

from the old oil well located on the estate; Pilkhana Line is located in the place which was formerly a training camp for elephants. In addition to these, there are eight other Lines in East and West Side Divisions, and another five in Namtok Division, including one called Ranchi Line.



Site of the Namtok Bungalow

In the past, one of the Assistant Managers was accommodated in Namtok, says Garden Mohorer of the Division, Sri Biman Hazarika, whose father and grandfather had also worked in Namtok. According to him, the last inhabitant was a Mr Phillips and presently, nothing remains of the bungalow but some ruins.

The old bridge over the creek between the main division and Namtok was built in 1939 by the Manager, another Mr Warren, at great expense, and proved to be a boon when Namtok Division was planted out. For many years, it was known as 'Blewnose Warren's Bridge' in honour of its creator who was known for blowing his nose frequently, and probably in stentorian tenor too!!



Namtok Bridge

One could cross the bridge and go into NEFA (North East Frontier Province, the erstwhile name for Arunachal Pradesh) over rope bridges and farther into Burmese villages. The bridge was recently built over with concrete to make it sturdier, and inaugurated in June 2013.



L-R: Sumi Dirok, Shyam Sutradhar, Zakaria Chouhan, Patey Duga

Patey Duga and Zakaria Chouhan worked in the factory as 'chung boys', spreading the leaf out on the tiers of the 'chung ghar' to dry. They fondly remember how they enjoyed sliding down the 'chungs'. They were also part of the planting squad who were taken to Namtok to clear the land and plant tea and shade 'pulis' (saplings). Sumi Dirok was a member of that squad too. The saplings were all grown from seed collected from the 'guti bari' (seed nursery) at Namtok.

All three retired workers remember when there were only two types of pruning done – 1" and 'hatu kalam'. In the latter practice, the bushes were pruned at knee height; hence the name. They marvel at the different kinds of pruning done now, and especially how certain Sections of the estate are pruned with the help of a machine! Machine pruning was introduced on the estate in 2010 while mechanical plucking was started on a small scale in 2011.

Sri Shyam Sutradhar joined the Namdang factory as a carpenter in 1952, aged 24, when Mr J.E. Maltby was managing the estate. By the time he retired in 1991, he had seen many changes take place. Although he does not remember this himself, an erstwhile 'mistry sahab', Larry Brown, remembers the carpenter and fitter at Namdang assembling a guitar for him! Mr Brown fondly recalls his



A Machine Pruned Section

Burra Sahab's many faux pas due to his atrocious Hindi! He was universally known as 'Hum Hukum – Tum Kaam' – his pet phrase to the workers, meaning, "I give the orders and you do the work!" Mr Brown also recalls his own faux pas – eating the 'jungli murgis' (wild fowl) that his Burra Memsahab had been fondly feeding!



Central Crèche

The estate has three Lower Primary schools where eight teachers impart education to four hundred students and a bus is provided to transport students to high schools outside the estate for further studies. There is a central crèche where trained attendants take care of toddlers while mobile crèches ensure that mothers have their babies close to their work place and can check in on them from time to time.



Amrit & Sri Krishna Prasad Upadhyay

'Teela Bungalow', has recently obtained his MBA degree.

Bonifor Hembrun, grandson of Magdala who has just retired from her employment as 'Ward Girl' in the hospital, is a virtuoso on the guitar and keyboards. Presently studying Science at Margherita College, this 'all-rounder' obtained above 80% in five subjects in the Matriculation examinations.

The Management believes in acknowledging the achievements of staff and workers' children and encouraging them towards obtaining further laurels. Recently, the Management sponsored two talented



Molina & Mayna Kachua

young girls, Molina and Mayna Kachua, who had been invited to audition for the 'Dance India Dance' competition in Kolkata.

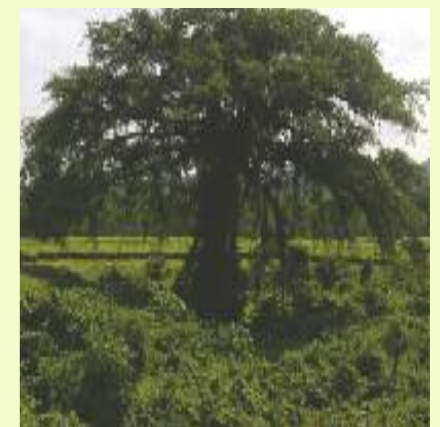
Sports are also encouraged among the young generation of boys and girls. The girls' football team has fared quite well in their very first year. The 'jhumur' troupe has taken part in various competitions and has also been invited to perform at local functions.



The estate's residents worship at the old and new church and the temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. There is also an old tree which is venerated by the populace, who believe that if one ties a red thread around its trunk and makes a wish, it comes true.

A Complete Eco-system

Another very old 'peepul' tree plays host to various forms of life, such as insects and birds, and is an eco-system by itself! The estate ensures that such natural eco-systems are preserved.





Preserved Rain Forest



Bamboo Grove



Afforestation

In addition to this ancient tree, there is a small rain forest near the Burra Bungalow and large groves of bamboos also abound all over the estate. Endangered species of plants, if identified as such, are conserved and protected. The practice of afforestation ensures

that many more trees are planted which will not only provide shelter to birds but also prevent soil erosion.

Natural Water Bodies



No alteration is done on the natural water bodies to change their course and the available buffer zones are protected. A natural water body which plays host to tiny fish and insects remains unpolluted and pristine as it is located in an area not easily accessible to man or beast.

The occasional visit from wild animals and snakes, and more frequent ones from different species of birds, are testimony to the estate's policy of protecting wildlife.

Creating Awareness on Environmental Protection



Health Awareness Camps & First Aid Training

The health and hygiene of the workers and their families is of paramount importance. The estate's Senior Medical Officer and his team organize camps to spread awareness on several health and hygiene issues while the Welfare Officer ensures that cleanliness is maintained in the Lines. All safety protocols are followed in the factory as well as in the field, and proper training is imparted to the Sardars overseeing various field practices.



Health & Hygiene



Training Programme for STGs

Training in field practices is also shared with the STGs or Small Tea Growers in the neighbourhood.

Some old machines and tools are preserved in the factory compound and the present Superintendent, Sandeep Nagalia, has a personal collection of antique tools himself.



Old Machines: L - R: Power Hacksaw, Milling Machine & Stone Crusher  
Inset : Antique Tools & Instruments



Burra Bungalow



The Burra Bungalow has an old cannon at the entrance, and a statue of the Buddha graces the front lawn. The antecedents and antiquity of both are shrouded in mystery! Margherita Club, located in Namdang T.E., is arguably the most picturesquely situated tea club in Upper Assam. The swimming pool and golf course both have a spectacular view of the Patkai hills.



Margherita Club



The Perch

A hill-top 'machaan' christened The Perch is a popular place for the executives to get together and relax in during holidays, and enjoy a bird's eye view of the estate, club and nearby town.

View from The Perch



Happy to be Certified!

With ISO 22000 and RA certification, this century old estate keeps in step with the developments in the industry and continues to do the Company proud.



The Team (L -R): S.P. Sahi, D. Nath, S. Choudhary, S. M. Rahman, S. Nagalia (Supdt.), Dr S. B. De, M. Thakur & K. Kumar



*Vidya Kaul is one of Tea's ideal Burra Memsahabs – admired, looked up to, and an inspiration to our younger generation of Tea ladies.*

## Vidya Kaul – a profile

– Rupa Saikia



L - R: Sakina Hussain, Vidya Kaul & Sarita Dasgupta

**E**legant, warm and soft-spoken, Vidya is the quintessential Burra Memsahab who needs no introduction after a long innings of thirty-six years in Tea. She has also been the Editor of The WM Times for seven long years since its inception and together with Sarita Dasgupta and Sakina Hussain, has turned a

fledgling magazine into a classy one.

Vidya was born in Delhi and went to school for five years at Brussels, Belgium, after which she completed her final years of education from La Martiniere and Loreto College, Kolkata. She worked as a trainee at Hotel Hindustan International, Kolkata, for two years and while on the verge of taking up a job at the Taj Man Singh, New Delhi, she decided to get married to Pavan whom she had known for some time and whose sister was her best friend as well. Pavan was categorical that they would tie the knot only if she was absolutely sure that she could spend her life in the tea gardens, as this was the only profession he was interested in. And so Vidya stepped into Tea life and fell in love with it. She chuckles when she reminisces that she believed Pavan when he told her that the tea grew on the shade trees and the bushes were ornamental! And she, who had never drunk tea before, and had consumed her first cup with five teaspoons of sugar, was soon hooked on to this brew.

A particular incident which has her in gales of laughter while recounting it, is when she was welcomed as a new bride at Itakhooli, by the then Superintendent, Late Chris Allen and Manager, Late Peter Swer. On reaching their bungalow, Vidya was horrified to see that the main bedroom had but a soaking wet mattress on the floor and a baby cot next to it with a bleating goat!!! Needless to say, after an initial shocked reaction, she caught on to the humour of the situation much to Pavan's relief, I suppose, who wouldn't have wanted a runaway bride on his hands!



Over the years, they have moved to various gardens in Assam, with a stint at Chuapara in the Dooars. As she says, the best way to be happy in Tea is to immerse oneself in various activities. Being a voracious reader, she would devour seven books a week from the club libraries. Also, a self-taught guitar player, there would be a lot of impromptu sing-song sessions in their bungalow and stage shows

at the clubs. Vidya mischievously adds that Pavan would join in only after drinking about half a bottle of liquor! Later when their two lovely daughters, Pavani and Rohini, were born, they too would join their parents and sing lilting melodies from the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies. Vidya loves dancing too and has learnt Ballet, Bharat Natyam and Kathak dance styles. Her father having taught her various styles of Western dancing, one would see this graceful couple hit the floor in style with some lively tango, foxtrot or ballroom dancing during social gatherings at the clubs. Knitting is another hobby she is fond of and she loves doing up her bungalow compounds as well. However, she has never been competitive, preferring to showcase just a few exhibits, though she enjoys the flower shows thoroughly. For her it has always been a case of 'Jo hai so hai'.



Vidya's love for Tea life is evident when she says that there's a rhythm to life here. There's a time for everything – from wearing one's silk and woollen garments in winter, to the chiffons and cottons in summer, from making the seasonal preserves to planning and planting out the 'malibari' and the flowers. That apart, she has enjoyed doing welfare work and has gone regularly to the Lines at Majulighur T.E. to promote cleanliness among the workers. At Romai T.E., the workers' children were found to have an inherent eye problem, so children under five years of age were administered special eyedrops to ensure they had better eyesight as they matured. She has taught embroidery and knitting to the female workers on plantations and planted fruit trees for their benefit. Both Pavan and Vidya have always been extremely compassionate towards the workers.

Life has come full circle with the marriage of Pavani to Wendell in 2009



The Doting Grandmother

followed by the birth of their adorable daughters, Thea and Zoe, and that of Rohini to Som in 2011. Both Pavan and Vidya make doting grandparents and their days are full with their family. And as they look forward to a retired life, Vidya is confident that they will adjust to city life since life in Tea has already taught her to make so many adjustments. We wish them the very best as they move on to 'pastures new'.



Becky, wife of Fred Ssegujja, Chief Factory Manager, Mwenge Central Head Office, Uganda, shares details about a memorable excursion.

## Managers' Meeting & Enchanting Lake Bunyonyi



— Becky Bridget Birungi  
Mwenge Central, MRUL

Located in Kabale District, Western Uganda, close to the Rwanda border, Lake Bunyonyi is 1960m above sea level. The Lake is surrounded by steep-sided, heavily cultivated, beautiful mountainous scenery. For a long time I had wanted to take a trip to Lake Bunyonyi. Even as a child, Lake Bunyonyi held a strange fascination for me and my siblings. Akampene Island, the steep hills, the people and the legends served as an enticement. My husband, Mr Fred Ssegujja, had told me about the Managers' meeting organized by the Company at White Horse Inn in Kabale but I had no idea that spouses were to be invited. I received the communication with surprise and apprehension wondering what we, the ladies, had to do at a Managers' meeting. However, my anxiety quickly gave way to excitement and my



The Ladies Enjoying Their Day Out



sense of adventure was awakened. This was a great opportunity to take a break out of a busy and hectic routine. On 20 November, I rose up with renewed enthusiasm to catch the early morning bus to Kabale. The journey to Kabale, the closest town to Lake Bunyonyi, is apparently six hours from Kampala by bus, but I doubt the claim. We made it in nine hours, our speed slowed down by the creaking condition of the bus, road construction trucks, potholes and police officers. The staff at White Horse Inn were brilliant and really welcoming, and made me feel at home immediately. Fred, Julius and Cissy Byentaka arrived an hour later looking cheerful and I wondered at the cause until I learned that they had stopped over at one of Kabale Town's suburbs, Muhanga, for a bottle of beer, though it seemed like gallons of beer!



Lake Bunyonyi



The dinner at the restaurant was outstanding, with a few drinks thereafter. One of the traditions of Kigezi region, where Kabale is located, is that extended family members would gather around a fireplace for harmonious discussions after a good meal. This tradition was observed, as Senior Management of MRUL interacted like a single family before we all went to bed.

The hot, sticky weather in Kampala did not prepare me for the chill of Kabale and there was no hot water in the room despite assurances from the staff. After waiting for one hour for the hot water, one staff member came and kindly informed me, "Sorry madam, we have just started to cook the water." In most local languages, the words 'boiling' and 'cooking' are used interchangeably.

After a light breakfast the following morning, the Managers

left to start their meeting at the Conference Hall, to chart out Company strategies.

The plan was for all of us ladies to meet in the hotel lobby at 9:00am. As we gingerly gathered one by one, Mrs Alka Singh had already made arrangements for a visit to Lake Bunyonyi. The drive there was memorable, with its breathtakingly beautiful countryside, the rolling hills along the way and the usual – you know – ladies' gossip.

In the Bakiga's language the word Bunyonyi means 'the place of many little birds' and the place boasts of over 200 species of birds. No wonder Alka appeared very much at home, bird-watching. After soaking in the pristine natural grandeur of the surroundings, we boarded the motor boat.

For many of the ladies it was the first time taking a boat ride and you could see the anxiety on their faces whenever the boat swayed. Some silently started praying to the Almighty to save them from what seemed like just a 'storm in a tea cup' to the rest. Ultimately, Alka's composed demeanor was very reassuring and calm eventually ensued.

Lake Bunyonyi is dotted with many small islands, the most infamous of which is Akampene or Punishment Island. The Bakiga used to leave unmarried pregnant girls on this small island with a lone tree - to die of hunger or while trying to swim to the mainland. This was to educate the rest not to do the same.

A man without cows to pay dowry could go to the Island and pick up a girl.

Lake Bunyonyi is truly gifted with amazing natural beauty. It was made even more attractive by its inhabitants who created space for agriculture and, as a result, the lake is surrounded by terraced and neatly cultivated hillsides that have made the area known as the 'little Switzerland of Africa'. Lake Bunyonyi, with its enchanting nature, its legends and fascinating stories is a place worth a thousand visits.

On behalf of the Managers' spouses, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Management of MRUL for affording us this once-in-a-lifetime experience. Special thanks to Mrs Alka Singh for the wonderful arrangements. My thanks also to all the ladies – you were great company.





## The Memsahab's Guide to Gracious Living

Having grown up in Tea, Namita (Mimi) Ahmed is very well acquainted with its 'dastooors'. Here, she guides us in laying out a perfect breakfast table and serving a standard Tea breakfast.



— Namita Ahmed  
Dirok T.E.

## A 'Tea' Breakfast

“E at a good breakfast - there's no better meal to help fuel a great day,” is the advice from Matt Bean, a senior editor with a leading health publication and no one appreciates this more than planters whose day begins at the crack of dawn. While this first meal of the day is often consumed 'on the go' in most parts of our country where people commute to work, on the tea plantations it continues to remain a sit-down meal in keeping with the traditions established by British expatriates.

Breakfast on a tea estate is a refined and elegant experience that epitomises the Planter's tradition of hospitality, so here are a few tips to enhance your guests' enjoyment – one of our best loved customs.

The table setting helps to show off a meal and makes the food taste better, so it is important to get this right. Conventionally, a checked tablecloth is used to cover the breakfast table and it is appropriate to have a small fresh flower or fruit arrangement as a centrepiece.



A Setting for Two

Accompaniments like jam and marmalade should be placed on the table in small pots or bowls and not in their bottles. Butter is served in a butter dish and cheese should be removed from its tin onto a plate.



Butter Dish

Individual Place Setting



For individual place settings, a matching checked napkin is placed on a side plate on the left. It can be neatly folded, shaped creatively or placed in a napkin ring. Confusion regarding the placement of cutlery is easily dispelled if one keeps two simple rules in mind. It is important to remember that the large fork is the only dining implement placed on the left hand side of the large plate and the cutlery on the right is always placed in the order in which the food is to be served. Therefore, the fruit knife goes on the extreme right, followed by the cereal spoon and two dinner knives on the inside. The fruit fork and spoon go above the large plate. The water glass goes above the cutlery on the right and the juice glass is normally placed on its outside.

Placing individual salt and pepper cellars for each place setting eliminates the need to constantly pass these back and forth across the table.



L-R: Jam Spoon, Cheese Knife & Butter Knife

A traditional breakfast menu consists of freshly squeezed fruit juice, two types of fruit, cereal in the form of oats, cornflakes or muesli, a choice of eggs, a couple of side dishes and toast with accompaniments like butter, jam, cheese and marmalade. It is customary to ask guests how they would like their eggs cooked. A boiled egg, even one that is hard-boiled, is traditionally served in an egg cup. If someone requests eggs 'sunny side up' they are simply asking for the egg to be fried only on one side with an unbroken yolk. A poached egg, on the other hand, is gently slid into a pan of simmering water and cooked until the egg white has just solidified, but the yolk remains soft. For 'oefs en cocotte' or baked eggs, carefully break a couple of eggs, keeping the yolk intact, into a buttered ramekin or small baking dish, season with salt



and pepper, spoon a tablespoon of milk or cream over them, sprinkle with either chopped chives, shredded cheese or chopped cooked chicken, ham or bacon bits and bake at 160°C for approximately 12-14 minutes until the whites are completely set and the yolks just beginning to thicken.

Eggs are usually accompanied by side dishes and a selection of two from traditional breakfast favourites like sausages, bacon, grilled tomatoes, sautéed mushrooms, potato chips, vegetable cutlets and chops with a savoury vegetable, meat or chicken filling adds a nice balance to the meal. A pot of freshly brewed tea from your estate factory, or coffee if your guests prefer, is the perfect way to top off a meal served with the Tea Memsahab's unique flair for hospitality in 'pucca' tea garden style.



*Pavan Kaul, Ghanshyam Singh, Prabhakar Choudhury and Ranvijai Singh all retired from the Company's services in March 2014, each after a long and distinguished innings. While Pavan and Ghanshyam reminisce, Rupa Saikia writes about Prabhakar's career and Ramanuj Dasgupta recounts his experiences while sharing a bungalow with Ranvijai.*

## A Salute to the Not Too Distant Past... – Pavan Kaul



**I remember...** the basha bungalow of Rungaghur Division wherein the mosquitoes, like MIG squadrons, dived on the 'apprentice' of 1974. Even the Second World War veteran, my Burra Sahab, could not swipe them despite having been in the Gorkha regiment.

**I remember...** the somewhat tilted (owing to the great earthquake of 1950) chota chung bungalow at Seajuli. No record players, as my residence tripped and swayed to the beat of the Ruston Hornsby slow speed engine which was just a handshake away. The kindness extended by Mr and Mrs Maini in welcoming a permanent hand.

**I remember...** my Dufflaghur days with a great deal of pride and deep affection for the Late B. N. Baruah who, though fond of me, never showed any mercy! Many years later, post retirement, we met and he informed me that I would be perhaps only the second individual confirmed by him during his professional tenure.

**I remember...** Itakhooli, where Vidya joined me. The frosty welcome received from Denny Pariat (aged three) who thought her position had been usurped! Factory duty hours were shortened by an hour per kind courtesy Late W.P. Swer.

**I remember...** Bordubi, where many of us perfected the art of 'duckworth lewis'. Late Zufi Sahab, with 'shades' in the early hours, prompted many of us to immediately hit

the ground. The motherly nature of Lutfa memsahab evened the balance, though.

**I remember...** the happiest time as a family in Corramore under Mr K.K. Bhuyan and the Late S.I. Pariat. Both gentlemen were very understanding; however the job of an Assistant was to ensure that the weekly pay, TDO and rations arrived on time despite the Ghagra river being in spate. On being transferred, the staff and workers accompanied my car on foot to Shantipur with a local brass band in attendance!

**I remember...** Majulighur. A seven year stint, the majority with Mr Ranjit Singh whose meticulous and systematic methodology drove even his wife up the gum tree! A learning and satisfying experience. Majulighur was the sole recipient of Mr Mandhata Singh's unchallenged ways of giving guatemala slips in exchange for clonal plants! At the squash court too Superintendent Majuli Tea Co. rules were simple. For every point his opponent won Mr Singh would allot two to himself! However the team thrived under his spirited and innovative leadership.

**I remember...** taking over Romai with a great deal of sadness and under trying circumstances. Much tension prevailed but the Assistants, mainly SN, would enliven us with his unconventional ways.

**I remember...** my stint at Dehing which was inherently blessed with the most efficient and dedicated workforce ever seen. Two young Assistants drove me batty. One of them I accompanied (at his insistence) for a matrimonial alliance to Duliajan; the gentleman took me to the wrong house and then, fortunately, corrected himself! The other, instead of being on the tennis courts, was carousing with his lady love! The farewell here too was a heartwarming one.



*The Evergreen Sportsman*

**I remember...** 'returning' to Chuapara after many decades. As a child, the Late F.H. Stroud OBE, Visiting Agent - Dooars, would take me cycling around the property. A short and happy stint during which the first polypack unit was established.

**I remember...** Nya Gogra for the immense social service rendered by both the staff and workers during the floods of 1998 in the neighbouring 'bastis'. Food grains, medicines and clothes were 'ferried' across to many in need of urgent assistance. The estate was the first to donate handsomely to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund during the Kargil War.

We ensured that Mr & Mrs Saxena witnessed the dawn of 2000 at East Boro Club, pre-retirement.

**I remember...** Bogapani, for its splendid tea bearing areas, the impressive factory layout, the avenue of Nahor trees, the majestic chung bungalow and the workforce - truly a special place.

**And, lastly...** Keyhung. A few highs, many overseas visitors of different hues and views too! The nail biting targets of ERP, ISO 2000 and Rainforest Alliance.

As we taxied off on 1 December 2013 from the Dirial airstrip, a final 'eyes right' to the families of Tingri Circle and Baghjan who had assembled for a last chin-wag.

## My Tenure in Tea

– Ghanshyam Singh

Joining 'Tea' was mere chance. While doing my B.Com from St Xavier's College, Kolkata, I had joined the Royal Calcutta Turf Club as an Assistant Starter, having inherited a love for horses.

This job gave me an opportunity to meet Mr M.L. Rome very often. One day Mr Rome asked me if I was happy continuing at the Race Course or would I welcome a change. Presuming that the proposal was for Calcutta office, I eagerly agreed and asked if I could also continue at the Race Course on weekends. That did not happen as there was no vacancy in Calcutta office. Mr Rome very kindly offered me a job in the gardens instead. Having heard of Tea life – sports and the outdoor life – I promptly accepted the offer. Then and there I filled in the application form, and needless to say, there was no looking back.

I joined Keyhung T.E. on 10 April 1978 under Acting Manager, Late S.I. Pariat and Supdt, Mr C.G. Allen. After a short stay at Keyhung, I was transferred to Itakhooli where I got my first pet – a Labrador pup.

That generation had its own modus operandi. When I was going on my annual leave to get married, Mr Allen was most concerned about the pup being left in the bungalow by itself. One day, in all seriousness, he told me I should go and request Mrs Allen to get the pup to their bungalow without her knowing it was his idea. Such was the greatness.

At Itakhooli I worked under Mr W.P. Swer and Mr R.N. Banerjee. I have been very fortunate to have worked under stalwarts who were tough task masters but with hearts of gold, and under whom I learnt the finer points of tea making and Tea life – work hard, play hard, drink harder! I learnt this here and this is what I would tell the youngster to do.

It was in Itakhooli that Nidhi joined me after our wedding on 8 February 1980. She gladly enjoyed every bit of being a Tea lady. Itakhooli was never short of activities – games followed by table tennis, then wound up with a few drinks and food. The 'gang' comprised Dr R.Bhuyan, Purnima, Lizy, Jacob and us. Sundays and club days were, of course, dedicated to Golf.

I moved to Baghjan T.E. in 1981 where we were blessed with our elder daughter, Geetika. From Baghjan, I moved to Moran and then on to Attareekhat, where we were blessed with our younger daughter, Shivambika.

Our Attareekhat stay had its own charm – crossing the rivers on elephant back transported us back to the 18th century! From Attareekhat I went to Margherita and then, in 1993, I got my billet at Pabhoi T.E. I can very proudly say that the garden progressed well during my tenure. After four years, I moved to Baghjan T.E. Going there as Manager was like coming home.

Visual encounters with leopards at least once a week during a walk – it is a memory to cherish. From Baghjan, and a very short stint at Tezapore & Gogra T.E., I moved to Dehing T.E. and then to Pertabghur T.E. in 2004. This was a turning point for me. That same year, Geetika got married. In the year 2009, I became General Manager.

Nine years in Pertabghur were full of experiences like meeting with VIPs, foreign company guests and buyers. It is always a pleasure to hear Pertabghur being referred to as the 'Role Model Estate' in the Group. Pertabghur continues its steady progress and also boasts of having received the Performance Award twice.



Today, it stands as one of the highest yielding estates in the Group, and to add a feather to its cap, it has the finest Young Tea in all its glory!

Last, but definitely not the least, it gives me immense pleasure to mention the unstinted support and guidance received from all the Advisory Staff and Head Office executives throughout my career, without which I would not have achieved what I have.

Tea is a way of life and especially when you are working for the best company – McLeod Russel. Just live it, savour it and enjoy it. Nidhi and I wish you all the very best. God bless the McLeod Russel family.

*Ghanshyam has been one of the finest and most avid golfers in the Company, so it is hardly surprising that he made a 'hole in one' at his 'golfing out' at the Kaziranga Golf Course. We wish him many more happy and fulfilling hours on the greens. ~ Eds*



*L - R: Mr Ghanshyam Singh, Mr W.P. Swer, Mr R.N. Banerjee & Mr T.V. Jacob*

# Prabhakar Choudhury—Fond Memories of Life in Tea

— Rupa Saikia



Prabhakar joined Tea by chance, when the Employment Exchange at Dibrugarh, where he had registered, sent his biodata to McNeil & Magor. He appeared for the interview since the company was giving TA and DA, with which he was intent on travelling to Madras, to visit old friends and his sister who is settled there. Initially, he was not keen to join the tea industry but ultimately decided for it but only as a stop gap, so he could pursue studying for the Civil Service examination and quit once he got through. He had appeared for the same unsuccessfully once and said that that was his first failure in life. However, he liked his new job and as he says, it soon turned into a passion for him – a passion which remains strong to date. He follows his late elder brother's advice, of doing his best in whatever he undertakes.

His interview was taken by the then stalwarts of the company, Mr R.L. Rikhye, Mr C.G. Allen, Mr M.L. Rome, Mr B.N. Baruah and Mr Ghosh (he cannot recall the first name). Some tidbits from his interview are given below:

Mr Baruah posed the toughest question of the interview, asking him how, being an MSc. in Physics himself, he would accept being shouted at by his Manager, who might be only a Matriculate. Prabhakar's reply was that he would accept it with bowed head since his Manager would be older and wiser in Tea than he; but should he be shouted at for no fault of his, then he would not accept it even if his Manager were a doctorate holder! Mr Baruah observed that he had expected this reply! On the other hand, Mr Allen asked if he had a girlfriend, and he replied that he had had one. When probed further as to what had happened to her, Prabhakar calmly replied, "Gone with the Wind!" Mr Allen then asked if he had read the book and seen the movie, to which he replied in the affirmative, but said the movie was too slow. Mr Allen wryly commented that it would be so for someone his age!

Prabhakar had gone to school at the Delhi College, Indore; graduated from Loyola College, Madras and gone on to do his post-graduation in Physics from Delhi University. As he says, this love for Physics has stood him in good stead over the years, as he has a very analytical

mind and would go into the nitty-gritties at work.

He attributes all his success to Mitali, who uncomplainingly stood by him all these years. A perfectly calm foil to his quick temperament, she has smoothed many a ruffled feather along the way, mainly, as he says, due to the long working hours he kept. Mitali had developed warm relationships with all their colleagues, which Prabhakar claims he himself could not, since he is an introvert at heart. This stood them both in good stead when Prabhakar went to Vietnam, since acceptance plays a key role in a foreign country. Mitali was very warm towards all she met, regardless of hierarchy. It was a very big support for Prabhakar since she was held in such high esteem by all the people; so much so that soon, on their holidays in India, Mitali would be purchasing salwar-kameezes for all the ladies there, which they would love wearing. The saying, "Behind every successful man there's a woman," holds true in this case. Mitali would send his meals to the office each day when he would be late, as also for the people he would be working with. There was no nagging at all. Any disagreements they had, carried on till the next meal only, on an understanding between them. He misses her terribly. As he says, "In the storms of life you may bend but make sure you never get uprooted, as one has to be strong." Yes, a strong man with an incredibly soft heart!

Their daughters, Smita and Gargi, are two lovely, strong young ladies, taking care of their father and being a strong support system for him. Having studied at Assam Valley School, Balipara and Stella Maris, Chennai, they are now pursuing successful professional careers. Smita is working at ACTRACT, Mumbai, a research wing of Tata Cancer Institute, while Gargi is working with Fidelity Investments, Bangalore, in the legal department.

An incident which occurred in Vietnam has Prabhakar in gales of laughter. He had an interpreter named Mrs Them (TH as in 'thorn' and EM as in 'emit'), whom he would call Them. One day she confronted him, asking why he called her Them, to which Prabhakar replied that he did so because that was her name! She then told him that Them meant a greedy man in Vietnamese and that her name should be pronounced as Th'em (the apostrophe indicating a short break) which means Pearl! Prabhakar was profuse in his apologies!

As he leaves the gardens after thirty-six years of service, Prabhakar wistfully says that he will miss Tea life immensely.



Picnic with Friends



The Distinguished Trio

## In the Company of Ranvijai Singh ...



— Ramanuj Dasgupta Bordubi T.E.

Flamboyant, stylish, superb sportsman and great company... summarizes this large-hearted, battle hardened colleague.

As a Trainee, with my very first transfer order in hand, I met RV and Geeteshwari as newlyweds at Jainti T.E. I shared the bungalow with them and, I dare say, RV was not too pleased! Nevertheless, we had a blast. Shikaar and drinking 'rotgut' rum was how we spent most evenings. (The former was an accepted sport at the time.) Clueless as I was about handling a weapon, RV would relegate me to either holding the spotlight or carrying cartridges as we roamed the estate and nearby forests on cycles at night looking for small game. If we got lucky, Geeta would cook memorable meals for us which I, as a bachelor with no culinary skills whatsoever, enjoyed thoroughly.

Playing football with the workers and staff was the done thing and RV and I never missed an opportunity to play. A gifted football player himself, RV coached the team seriously and did not hesitate to keep me on the sidelines if I played badly. Come soccer season and we would be off in RV's Ambassador station wagon with the ever prominent Horse mounted on the bonnet. It was a different matter that the 'Horse' was temperamental and RV ensured that the stronger players from the workers and staff travelled with us just in case the old Horse needed pushing, which was quite often. There were times when we travelled in the old Bedford lorry – RV driving with

Perched on a Tree-Top!



me as handyman – and the rest of the team at the back.

RV, very much an outdoors man, would head to the river and we would spend most Sundays during the cold weather trying our luck at catching fish, fueled by beer chilled in the river water. The villagers, armed with rudimentary fishing gear and the local rice beer, would angle across the river and, more often than not, were much luckier than us. They would wave their catch at us while we cursed our fancy fishing gear!

Golf and Polo were sports that RV enjoyed. An accomplished golfer and polo player, RV won many trophies for both in Kolkata, the Dooars and Assam.

RV and Geeta remain generous to a fault. They would go that extra mile to help anyone in need. RV's sincerity and sense of loyalty towards his friends and colleagues remain unquestionable, and he never hesitates to speak his mind, for better or for worse.

I wish RV and Geeta all the very best in this new chapter of their lives, along with the children Radhika, Akshay and Surya.





– Sadie Lund & Adrian Allen

## A Tribute to Christopher Allen

Our father, Chris Allen, always said that the best years of his life were spent in Assam as a Tea Planter. But as we all know, 'Tea Planter' was more than just a career, it was an exceptional way of life that embraced a plethora of customs and traditions and brought together families from all over India, the UK and even the occasional Europeans.

Chris joined Williamson Magor in 1950 and uniquely he spent his whole career on the South Bank, firstly at Phillobari, then Bordubi and finally over 20 years at Keyhung.

Under his auspices, Keyhung became a legendary garden in Tea and he was renowned for keeping the thousands of acres of tea spotless and would not stand for any weeds or cows within the garden boundaries. To this end, much of his leisure time was spent either exercising his dogs around the estate or taking his daily 6am horse ride which was meticulously planned to incorporate a section of the estate he may not be visiting for the remainder of that day.

He made it his mission to make Keyhung a yardstick for other tea planters and indeed it was. His responsibility also encompassed the welfare of the workers and he can be credited for building new housing, developing the local school as well as the garden hospitals – with Dirial ultimately boasting an operating theatre. He was particularly keen to promote family planning amongst the tea workers so that future generations of families could enjoy a better standard of living.

Laipuli section of Keyhung always appeared to be particularly special and we believe that was because most of the tea bushes there had been grown from selected leaf cuttings – under his watchful eye – first of all in the nursery and Kakajan area before being replanted.

The pride in Keyhung extended to us, his children, and when we returned home for our holidays, our suitcases had barely reached our rooms when Dad would say, "Right... let's go for a 'howa kana' in the jeep around the estate." It goes without saying that Laipuli was the first port of call. We also remember he loved taking us around the factory to witness the various stages of the production process – what a privilege, because due to the over cautious health and safety measures adopted in the UK our children would never be party to such an experience.

# Rainbow

*Adrian and Sadie pay tribute to their late father, Chris Allen, who was a stalwart of this Company in his time.*

Chris Allen was also synonymous with the 'Golden Tips' strain of Keyhung tea which he developed with his team. At the time, it achieved a record price per pound in West Germany and it went on to excel throughout the world. From Manager of Keyhung he progressed to Superintendent of Keyhung, Dirial and Itakhooli and latterly General Manager of all the Macneil & Magor gardens on the South Bank.

Chris was also passionate about tennis and was Chairman of the Upper Assam Lawn Tennis Association. He firmly believed that one couldn't commit to both golf and tennis which did cause raised eyebrows in our household as our mother, Barbara, enjoyed playing both!!! In addition to this he also held leading positions on Scientific Tea Committees.

He also had his stint as Club Chairman of Tingri Club which included some fabulous 'meets', parties, cinema evenings as well as plenty of sporting activities – tennis of course, football, cricket and the like.

His talents also extended to the menagerie of working animals and pets he kept, including a small herd of dairy cattle which were always in exceptional condition, dogs, cats, countless chickens, the horses of course, as well as rabbits, monkeys, a civet cat, a jackal cub, fish and even a deer.

Behind every successful man is always a good woman, and our mother, Barbara, was certainly that. She helped him behind the scenes with many an activity – being particularly devoted to the human side of the tea garden community – schools, hospital and the wellbeing of the workers' children.

Chris Allen was renowned as being a man of integrity, as well as being respected and held in great affection by his employees, workers and friends – his name and reputation have provided an inspiration to young planters who have followed in his wake, long after he had left Tea. Deepak Rikhye, a former young planter who received his initial training from Chris, attributes the Latin phrase 'e pluribus Unum' or 'out of many, one', which just epitomises our father perfectly.



Chris & Barbara Allen



# Mélange



The second McLeod Russel Tour Championship was held at the Royal Calcutta Golf Club from 26 to 29 December 2013.

The top 60 professional golfers who play the PGTI participated, along with five special invitees who also play on the Asian and European Tours, namely Anirban Lahiri, Rahil Gangjee, Jyoti Randhawa, SSP Chowrasia and Gaganjeet Bhullar.

This edition was won by Anirban Lahiri while home favourite Rahil Gangjee finished second.



The Kiosks

## MRIL 5-a-side Football

The MRIL sponsored inter-company 5-a-side football tournament was held at Tingri Club on 4 August 2013. The keenly fought final match was won by the MRIL 'Red' team with MRIL 'White' being the runners-up.



*The Winners & Runners-up with AVA, Mr P.S. Dowerah*

## John Morice Cricket

The annual John Morice cricket match between the Company's North Bank and South Bank teams was played at Bishnauth Gymkhana Club on 21 February 2014. The 25 over match was won by hosts, North Bank. Sanjeev Eastment was adjudged Man of the Match



*The Teams with VA, Mr Anil Pandit*

## MRIL Inter-company Tennis

At the MRIL-sponsored inter-company tennis tournament held at Margherita Club on 6 April 2014, the Goodricke team emerged winners over the MRIL team.



*The Winners (Blue) & Runners-up (White)*

## Quadrangular Golf Tournament

The inaugural Quadrangular Golf Tournament, sponsored by MRIL, was held at Margherita Club on 20 March 2014. The tournament was keenly contested by four 15-member teams representing CTTA (Kolkata), Dooars & Darjeeling, North Bank and South Bank. The South Bank team won the tournament with the Kolkata team finishing as runners-up.



*Winners (Back Row) & Runners-up (Front Row)*

# Births



1. **VANSHIKA**, daughter of Viraj & Vaishali Pradhan, Chuapara T.E. 13 April 2013.
2. **AARHI**, daughter of Debasish & Vaishali Dutta, Bordubi T.E. 7 May 2013.
3. **NICOLE AMARA**, daughter of Rhona & Polly Monday, Mwenge Central 25 August 2013.
4. **KETAV**, son of Monoj & Khusbu Thakur, Namdang T.E. 3 October 2013.
5. **ANURAG**, son of Avijit & Papia Roy, HO Kolkata 5 October 2013.
6. **BHARGAV**, son of Gautam & Lina Hazarika, Dehing T.E. 11 October 2013.
7. **URVI**, daughter of Prashant & Rohini Limboo, Chuapara T.E. 11 October 2013.
8. **ANAHITA**, daughter of Manpreet & Simmi Manhas, grandchild of Ravinder & Raman Singh, Addabarie T.E. 15 November 2013.
9. **AARAV**, son of Ashmita & Akshay Barar, grandchild of Ravinder & Raman Singh, Addabarie T.E. 25 December 2013.
- 10) **SAM AIM KEN**, son of Aikya & Suniti Thoumong, Dirok T.E. 23 February 2014

# Weddings

**Abhijit & Jonali Chetia,**  
Keyhung T.E. 1 May 2013



**Prabodh,** son of Bihari Kumar & Archana Newar  
of HO Kolkata, wed **Priyanka** on 15 July 2013

**Wasim & Benazir Haque,**  
Paneery T.E. 10 October 2013



**Somnath Sarkar** of HO Kolkata &  
**Debapriya,** 29 November 2013



**Prandeep,** son of Rajen &  
Anita Gogoi, Baghjan T.E. wed  
**Babita** on 8 November 2013

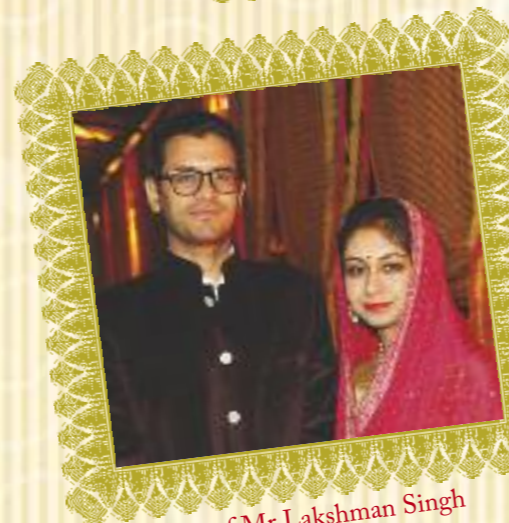
**Gurdeep & Simarr Singh,**  
Addabarie T.E.  
16 January 2014



**Issa Mugizi &  
Kulthum Kwaga,**  
Mwenge T.E.  
2 June 2013



**Shouvik Roy,**  
HO Kolkata &  
**Diana Krucia  
Biswas**  
17 January 2014



**Arjun,** son of Mr Lakshman Singh  
of HO Kolkata, wed **Neha** on  
9 February 2014



**Eriab & Maureen  
Ssemanda,** Kiko T.E.  
27 July 2013



**Allen Nambalirwa & Isaiah Kasibe,**  
Mwenge Central, 22 September 2013



**Arindam & Piuli Roy,**  
Central Dooars T.E. 1 August 2013



**Ashley,** son of George & Pearl Ambooken,  
Pertabghur T.E. wed **Cheryl** on  
15 February 2014



Mr B.M. Khaitan's Speech



Launch of Commemorative Issue - The WM Times



Felicitatation by Grandsons, Amritansbu (left) & Akbil (right)

# T-Up Cup



Address by Mr Aditya Khaitan



Sandeep Nagalia - Winner, Centenary Cup Golf



Chairman's Trophy Winners - Bisbnauth/Jorbat-Golagbat with the Directors



T-Up Cup Winners - South Bank



Tennis Winners - North Bank



Tackling or Tickling?



Catching the Bull by the Horns!





# T-Up Cup 2014

# Assam Valley Literary Award



L-R: Mr R.S. Jhavar, Sri Atulananda Goswami, Sri Damodar Mauzo & Mr P. Choudhury

The Williamson Magor Education Trust conferred the prestigious Assam Valley Literary Award for 2013 to Sri Atulananda Goswami for his significant contribution to the treasury of Assamese literature.

Sri Goswami is a renowned author with seven collections of short stories and three acclaimed novels to his credit. He has won numerous accolades over the years for his work – among them being the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2006 for his short story collection ‘Seneh Jarir

Ganthi’; two awards from the Asom Sahitya Sabha for his novel ‘Namghariya’; the Katha Award for ‘Baliala Hathi’; and the Sneha Bharati Sahitya Samman.

‘Namghariya’ has been included in the B.A. curriculum by Dibrugarh University and the National Book Trust has selected the book to be translated into twelve languages. The English translations of ‘Baliala Hathi’ and ‘Baibhav Bilap’ have been included in the Oxford University Press ‘Avenue’ series and the state’s Board of Secondary Education’s curriculum respectively.

In addition to his creative writing in Assamese, Sri Goswami has also written a collection of stories in English, and translated many books from Bengali, Oriya and English into Assamese.

The Award, comprising a trophy, citation and cheque, was presented to Sri Goswami by eminent novelist, short story writer, critic and scriptwriter from Goa – Sri Damodar Mauzo – in the presence of distinguished guests in Guwahati on 9 May 2014.



## Golden Moments

Celebrating 30 years’ service

SANDEEP NAGALIA

PRAVIR KUMAR MURARI | SANJAY BATRA

NAVORATNA SHUMSHERE THAPA

DHRUBA JYOTI BORAH



# The WM Group Ex-Planters' 6th Annual Get-together

The Gentlemen

The WM Group's Ex-Planters' 6th Annual Get-together was held at Gurgaon on 23 Feb 2014. As in previous years, Mcleod Russel India Ltd had very kindly sponsored the lunch. It was a great afternoon indeed with 50 ex-planters and their spouses coming from Jaipur, Chandigarh and the greater Delhi area, reminiscing over the ‘good old



Raising a Toast to Mr B.M. Khaitan

days’ of being part of the Williamson Magor Group. They greatly appreciated the efforts made by Mr Rajeev Takru, Director, to attend the get-together and enjoyed his company. A toast was raised for the good health of Mr B. M. Khaitan, Chairman, who has steered the Group so brilliantly for over five decades.



The Ladies

# Farewell

On 4 December 2013, friends and colleagues got together at Bishnauth Gymkhana Club to bid farewell to Pavan & Vidya Kaul, Ghanshyam & Nidhi Singh, Prabhakar Choudhury, Ranvijai & Geeteshwari Singh, and Bhaben & Meera Talukdar. We wish them a contented retirement.



Mr Pavan K. Kaul



Mr Ghanshyam Singh



Mr Prabhakar Choudhury



Mr Ranvijai Singh



Dr Bhaben Talukdar



# Tree Osury

*Paneery, situated in the Mangaldai district of lower Assam, is an interesting place, and the Central Hospital for all our estates in that area is located there.*



– Rupa Saikia

*Aerial View of Paneery T.E.*



Picturesquely nestled in the foothills of the Bhutan Himalayas, Paneery Tea Estate lies between the Nonoi river on the west and the Kalsi river on the east. The estate at

present has 438 hectares under tea and produces approximately 9.5 lakhs made tea annually.

There are two interesting theories as to how the estate got its name. The word 'Paneery' is the amalgamation of two Assamese words : 'Pan', meaning 'betel leaf' and 'Eri', which is a traditional fabric woven in Assam. In the days of yore, it is said that the Bhutanese people would come down from the hills to barter 'pan' leaves for 'eri' and hence the place where this exchange took place, came to be known as Paneery. Another story narrated by the local inhabitants states that when a war broke out between two indigenous tribes at a place called Harisinga a long time back, the soldiers of one

tribe had camped in this area. Subsequently, there was an outbreak of black fever and they had to flee (eri) from this place in order to save their lives (pran).

It is not known when exactly Paneery was planted out, but it's likely to have been in the early 1900s. The garden once had dense patches of forests and a huge bamboo 'bari', home to the wild animals found there, particularly elephants, before the management decided to undertake expansion of tea planted areas.

*Taxiing towards the Bhutan Hills*



*Visitors from the Wild*

Bishnu Tanti, a retired Sardar, recalls how in the 1950s when huge tracts of land were being cleared of thatch and jungle, a massive tusker charged at the workers. Even today, the elephants are seen foraging in the paddy fields during the harvest months, sheltering in the garden by day and venturing out for ripe paddy by night. The estate is Rainforest Alliance certified and has recently acquired the ISO 22000 certification. Conservation and preservation of natural resources and the local flora and fauna is widely encouraged. To this effect, a number of water bodies have been dug at strategic places for the benefit of the wild animals. Hunting, a favourite sport in bygone days, is now strictly banned.

*Water Body*



*Bhutia Pukhuri*



A landmark here are two huge twin ponds known as 'Bhutia Pukhuri', which were apparently dug by the Bhutanese people in honour of their king and queen. And thereby unfolds a tale narrated by Bishnu and Pradeep, both retired workers of the estate. As legend goes, anyone having a marriage ceremony in their homes would perform a 'puja' near the 'pukhuri' and make a wish for the utensils required during the celebration. A gold boat would then appear with the relevant items which the person would have to return to the boat once the ceremony was over.



Bund

Huge 'bundhs' have been constructed to the north of Paneery and on the Nonoi river itself after heavy rains caused extensive damage in the year 1988. The flooding waters got diverted towards the northern boundary embankment and breached it. Though this was repaired, the same night a herd of wild elephants damaged the embankment at the same spot while trying to cross over to Bhootechang. And along with the rising water due to incessant rainfall, several other breaches were caused, resulting in wide scale inundation of the garden.

To quote Late S. I. Pariat, then Manager of the estate, "The water pressure of the second breach became so dangerous and enormous that we were at a loss as to how to tackle the problem." The floods caused havoc, submerging vast areas of tea and the labour lines on the northern side, with water even entering the Manager's bungalow.



Mr S. I. Pariat & Mr A. Wats Inspecting the Damage



The Nonoi in Spate

The supply route from the nearest town, Tangla, was cut off with the washing away of the bridge near the factory. Mr Anand Wats, then an Assistant here, remembers sitting for hours with his Burra Sahab on the steps of the old Burra Bungalow helplessly looking towards the 'bagaan'. Every half an hour Mr Pariat would ask him whether the water level was rising, which would be met with an emphatic 'NO' from his end, to pacify his 'captain'. However, despite the trying conditions, the spirits of the workers never died down and all operations were kept running.

Once the waters receded, began the daunting task of cleaning and de-silting the Sections. It must be mentioned here that there is a meticulously maintained Rainfall Register dating back to the years 1923-1967, which has been carefully treasured in the Manager's office.



Rainfall Register 1923 to 1967

The workforce in Paneery have their roots in Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and Odisha. There is even a Munda Line here dominated by people from the Munda community, who speak Mundari.



Senior Citizens (Retired Workers)



Bisnu, Retired Planting Sardar



The workers are largely of Hindu and Christian faith, celebrating all festivals with equal fervour. A Shiv temple depicting Hindu gods and goddesses was built in the local market premises by Dr Ranjit Pal for the benefit of the people. There is a Catholic and a Baptist Church as well.

Sri Lakhya Thakuria who lives with his family in Paneery is a renowned craftsman. He sculpts in wood and sells his artefacts at various government outlets in the country and also exports them.

Sri Lakhya Thakuria with his Sculptures



L.P School



Football Team

The estate has two Lower Primary schools with 250 students. Football is very popular among the men and women, who field teams in the local tournaments, winning many a laurel for the estate. Volleyball and cricket are two other games which are keenly participated in.

Paneery is fortunate to have the Mangaldai Polo & Gymkhana Club located in the property and part of the golf course doubles up as an airstrip. The club provides excellent facilities for golf, tennis, squash, billiards and a good library.

Mangaldai Polo & Gymkhana Club





*The Old Cemetery*

On the northern end of the airstrip there is a cemetery where some planters and also some of their family members have been laid to rest. The club members pay their respects to the departed planters and their families on All Souls' Day.

Paneery is committed to excellence and hard work as the following awards testify:

In 2009-10: Overall Quality Award, North Bank

In 2010-11: Best Circle Quality Award

In 2012-13: Overall Quality Award, North Bank



It is through the hard work of the management, staff and workers that they have been able to maintain this quest for excellence.



*The Team (Seated L -R): R. Baruah, A. Wats (Superintendent), Dr J. N. Karmakar; (Standing L -R): A. P. Bordoloi, W. Haque*



## Paneery Central Hospital

The hospital was converted into a Central Hospital in 1989. Under the leadership of Dr J.N. Karmakar, a Cataract Camp was organised, and from a screening of 190 cases, 160 cases were selected from among people of the estate and the neighbouring villages for successful operations at the Sankardev Netralaya, Guwahati. A Laparoscopic Sterilization Camp too was held and 141 cases were operated upon. Awareness camps on leprosy and tuberculosis have greatly benefitted the workforce and local residents.

This well equipped hospital has a diagnostic centre catering to patients from the nearby villages as well. Awareness campaigns on health and sanitation have resulted in a reduction of mosquito-borne diseases, thus contributing to the health and welfare of the workers.

*Health & Awareness Camps*



*The Facilities*

*Dr Bhaben Talukdar, who recently retired from the Company, shares his thoughts and experiences about the welfare of our workers.*



– Dr Bhaben Talukdar

## Community Healthcare on the Tea Estates

Assam is the largest producer of tea in India. The tea industry has become the largest industry, generating livelihood, revenue and employment in the state.

One of the most crucial components of the tea estates in Assam are the people of the Tea Tribe. Historically, these are the tea garden workers who were not local people from Assam, but were brought in from nearby states like Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. Over the years, with the amalgamation of culture and tradition among them, the tea workers form a distinct community called the “Tea Tribe” representing around 22% of the total population of the state. i.e. amounting to nearly 70 lakh in number.

The Tea Tribe is one of the most vital resources of every tea estate in Assam. To improve the standard of life of this community it is pertinent to improve the community character of the Tea Tribe.

An intervention to this effect must include education along with good health practices and community awareness building. There has to be a baseline assessment of the situation on specific parameters including physical and mental health of the children and factors affecting them. Efforts to make the community recognize the shortcomings and find ways to overcome them are very necessary.

The process of implementation of these interventions will play a pivotal role in bringing about a sustainable change in the community. A key aspect of this intervention is that it must incorporate teacher training and evaluation in giving psycho-social support and activity based learning to the Tea Tribe children.

There has to be regular monitoring on the level of learning and development in children so that an early recourse may be taken to overcome any lag. The community has to be made responsible for the improvement of the living conditions of the locality. Children’s groups, School Management Committees, Parents’ Committees, Mothers’ Club etc have to be formed with defined roles and responsibilities.

There has to be a feedback mechanism reporting on the functioning and impact of an intervention. There have to be rewards and recognition of the ‘change makers’ from the community to keep them motivated towards a sustainable impact.

Correction and improvement of community character may not be considered a contractual job. Awareness building campaigns in the community must be performed for a holistic approach involving government machineries, tea management and other stake holders of the community.

Tea is one of the major exports of the country. Its production depends on a fragile situation of a community which warrants urgent attention. A complete resolution may require substantial time and effort but a miss would result in a multiplier effect of disastrous consequence on the socio-economic condition of the entire nation.

An intervention to alleviate community health conditions depends on the community acceptance of its needs. Its impact will be sustainable only if the intervention can bring in behavioral change in the community. There are numerous attempts made to educate the community on health practices. I have initiated many of them. These efforts however could not make any significant change in the community because of their inherent belief that their health is the Company’s responsibility, not theirs.

The Angandwadi Centre, ASHA worker, Angandwadi worker, ANM and the full-fledged Medical System will not be able to make a difference to the community till they take ownership of their own lives.

*Sakina Hussain, who keeps us abreast with the happenings in our Vietnam operations, writes about The Van Linh factory, one of the Company’s new acquisitions.*



– Sakina Hussain  
Phu Ben, Vietnam

## Van Linh Factory



*The Directors at Van Linh Factory*

Just off National Highway 2, past a gate with the Indian Tricolour and the National Flag of Vietnam fluttering, is Van Linh (pronounced Vun Ling), built in 2008 by Mr Ta Xuan Thai. Unfortunately, lack of expertise in the tea business coupled with financial difficulties resulted in the shutting down of this Black CTC factory, then known as Binh Minh (Sunrise) just a few months into production. On 28 December 2009 the property was bought over by PhuBen. Manufacture was resumed after some restructuring, on 20 July 2010. Mr Thai now runs a motorcycle shop in the neighbouring town of Viet Tri.

The first pilot tea project in Vietnam was called Van Linh. At the time of the MRIL takeover, no plantation was attached to any factory and leaf was sent on an ad hoc basis causing a reasonable degree of confusion. Working on a suggestion made by Mr A Khaitan to streamline operations, it was decided to assign plantations near each factory with the same name for operational convenience and discipline. Thus the erstwhile Van Linh Plantation came to be known as Phu Tho Plantation and supplied leaf to Phu Tho factory. Not wanting to lose the use of a name so widely recognized and associated with tea throughout the country, it was decided to use the name Van Linh for the new acquisition.

*Auspicious Beginning*



The factory, with ten staff members and a workforce of eighty-five, underwent major modification and expansion in 2012-13. With the increased capacity, it is gearing up to produce 1,200,000 kg of made tea this season and hoping to increase to 1,500,000 kg, with an eventual target of 2 million. Installation of new machinery was done to set up an online system with no manual handling at any stage of manufacture from the leaf feeder to the sorting system. Glass partitions instead of brick walls between the office, tasting room, processing and drying room, not only give an open well-lit feel to the factory but also allow for better supervision. CCTV cameras were installed for both security and surveillance purposes. The factory is certified for ISO 9000:2008, ISO22000:2005, GMP and Halal. Work for RA certification is in progress.

A time-consuming exercise of drawing contracts with agencies and working closely with the farmers has ensured a steady supply of quality leaf. Tea growing villages in the area have been adopted. To organize the trade, farmers have come together to form Tea Clubs. Hands-on and regular interaction with the farmers, educating them on the benefits of good husbandry and judicious use of safe chemicals etc, is proving very fruitful. Motivated by the success of the adjoining company owned plantations, the response from the farmers has been so positive that it is hoped that in the near future these plantations will be RA certified. The yield has risen to 22 quintals per hectare since.

*Working with Chairman of Tea Club*



*Modification Work in Progress*



*Ready Factory*



*Manufacture*



Located 115 km north of Hanoi and 15 km from Head Office in Phu Tho, the 4.61 hectare compound is flanked by a pond on one side and a hill running along the back. The hilly area was initially earmarked for planting some special tea but was found too small a plot to be

*Man-Made Forest*



economically viable and was left barren. However, in 2010, the Youth Committee of PhuBen wisely undertook the responsibility of planting out Pine and Acacia trees. This man-made forest not only prevents soil erosion but also provides a lush green backdrop to the factory.

In a drive towards self-sustenance, organic vegetables are grown on one side of the compound. These and fish bred in the adjoining pond find their way to the canteen kitchen enabling the workers to procure meals at highly subsidized rates.

Like all other factories, Van Linh too is actively involved in welfare and cultural activities. An annual blood donation programme is organized by the Youth Union. The Moon Festival is celebrated each year for the workers' children. Volleyball matches are fiercely contested and on the 60th anniversary of the Cham Mong - Tram Than Victory, the team won the 2nd prize at a match organized to commemorate the occasion.

*Pond*



*Victory*



*The Team*



Though Van Linh has a fairly recent past, the area has a very large chapter of history to boast of and, in 1952, during the battle of Chan Mong - Tram Than, saw a lot of action. Vietnamese troops killed and injured more than 400 French soldiers and arrested 84. As many as 44 armoured cars and tanks were destroyed. The Lorence March failed miserably. A seized military tank kept just outside the factory campus is symbolic of Victory!



For all those who were wondering where and how the tea is stored once it reaches Guwahati, Sanjay Bajpai of our Guwahati office gives you the answer.

# ICD Amingaon — Shipment HUB for Tea Producer-Exporters of Assam

— Sanjay Bajpai  
MRIL Guwahati



Some time ago I was asked by Mrs Sarita Dasgupta to write an article on ICD – what it is, what we do there, how we manage all the shipments etc. Simple as it may appear, when I actually got down to penning this article, I realized the complexity of our operations and the pain and care that is taken by all of us in the Marketing Dept to ensure smooth ‘operations’. It is understandable that my former senior colleague, Mr S.K. Mawandia, was fondly called “Doc”.



## What is ICD and why was it established?

Inland Container Depot or ‘ICD’, as it is popularly known, is an initiative of the Ministry of Railways. Owing to the vastness of the entire country – 3000 plus kilometres from north to south and east to west, the Railways introduced ‘cheaper’ Door-To-Door Multi-Modal Transport service by moving domestic cargo in DSO containers way back in 1966. Thus, the establishment of ICDs helped movement of various types of cargo originating in a particular region to other regions at a relatively cheaper cost and in a much more focused manner.

It was not until 1981 that international shipments of ISO containers were handled by Railways.

Bangalore had the first ICD in 1980 and by 1988 seven ICDs

were built in the country, ICD Amingaon being one of them. In March 1988 the Railways set up Container Corporation of India Ltd (CONCOR) under the Companies Act and by 1989 the running of ICDs was handed over to CONCOR.

## About ICD Amingaon:

Located on the north bank of the Brahmaputra approximately 15 km from Guwahati, ICD Amingaon was established in 1986-87 and commissioned on 1 November 1989.

It is the first ICD in the eastern region and the only one in the entire Northeast. Established to facilitate export out of Assam, ICD Amingaon has been serving the tea sector since its inception. 99% of export from ICD Amingaon is tea.

History tells us that severe disruptions in Kolkata Port owing to labour problems during the late 1970s and early 1980s forced the tea industry to look for alternative ports for shipments of teas. Kandla Port on the west coast in Gujarat and some southern ports were tried without much success. With the introduction of containerized cargo and extension of the broad gauge line to Guwahati in the early 1980s, the tea industry found it appropriate to approach the Ministry of Railways and the State Govt to support the initiative of setting up an ICD at Amingaon. In the meanwhile, to test the viability of ICD, a seminar, TEXPORT, was organized in 1984 and, as a trial, 20 containers of export tea were loaded by George Williamson, now McLeod Russel, in 1985. It was flagged off by the then Chief Minister of Assam, Late Hiteswar Saikia. The first full rake of 80 containers was moved out from ICD in 1986. There has been no looking back since then.



Late Hiteswar Saikia inaugurating ICD Amingaon



L - R: Sanjay Narayan Choudhury, Sanjay Bajpai & Sujit Kakati

Mr Anil Gupta, MD, CONCOR handing over the ‘Best Shipper Award’ to the MRIL Team

The total area of ICD Amingaon is 94424 sq metres out of which 26400 sq metres have the following infrastructure and user facilities:

- Two railway spurs of 727 metres and 686 metres to handle two rakes simultaneously.
- Modern handling equipment such as Reach-stackers and gas and battery fork-lifts.
- Three bonded warehouses out of which one is owned and operated by Assam State Warehousing Corporation and the remaining two by CONCOR.
- Office of the Superintendent of Customs, Service Centre for EDI and office space for Custom Handling Agents (CHA) and Shippers, other than a full-fledged CONCOR Office with back-up power.

CONCOR has installed state-of-the-art technology ETMS/DTMS systems for tracing and tracking container movements and other operational works.

ICD Amingaon is connected to all major ports and Inland Container Depots in India and is in close proximity to Kolkata Port and Haldia Port.

With effect from 1 March 2013, ICD Amingaon established a full-fledged EDI System for electronic filing of shipping bills. This has reduced paperwork to a great extent in addition to simplifying the documentation process.

## McLeod Russel Operations:

McLeod Russel has been involved with ICD Amingaon since its inception and has the maximum tea exports out of ICD Amingaon. Due to our sheer volume we have leased warehouses from Assam State Warehousing Corporation (A Govt of Assam undertaking), Central Warehousing Corporation (A Govt of India undertaking) and CONCOR, totalling more than 1.25 lakh sq ft in and around ICD Amingaon.

In the last five years MRIL’s share of shipments out of ICD has been as given below:

Year	Total Shipment	MRIL’s Share	% Share
2013-14	2617 TEUs	1929 TEUs	74%
2012-13	2900 TEUs	2041 TEUs	70%
2011-12	2600 TEUs	1863 TEUs	72%
2010-11	2285 TEUs	1572 TEUs	69%
2009-10	2954 TEUs	2273 TEUs	77%

(TEU stands for Twenty Equivalent Unit, a 20’ container)

Shipments can be broadly segregated into two parts i.e. pre-shipment and post-shipment. Whilst most pre-shipment work is handled from Guwahati, all post-shipment work is handled from Kolkata. The Marketing Team in charge of logistics both at Kolkata and Guwahati work in tandem to ensure that our shipments are in top order starting from receiving teas in the warehouses, palletizing and strapping and loading in the containers, backed by robust ERP systems of Warehouse Management and Warehouse Control and subsequent filing of documents in the bank for realization. Our foreign buyers have often commented that ours is the Best Shipping Team in the entire tea industry and I am indeed proud to be part of such a TEAM.



Packed Container

Container loaded on Rake



2013 – 2014

**BEST CIRCLE AWARD – PERFORMANCE**

Mangaldai & Thakurbari	Corramore T.E.
Bishnauth & East Boro	Pertabghur T.E.
Jorhat/Golaghat & Moran	Lepetkatta T.E.
Tingri & Margherita	Dirial T.E.
Doom Dooma	Raidang T.E.
Dooars	Chuapara T.E.

**BEST CIRCLE AWARD – QUALITY**

Bishnauth & East Boro	Boro
Jorhat/Golaghat & Moran	Bukhial
Tingri & Margherita	Baghjan
Dooars	Jainti

**OVERALL PERFORMANCE AWARD**

North Bank	Hunwal T.E.
South Bank	Koomsong T.E.

**OVERALL QUALITY AWARD**

North Bank	Behora T.E.
South Bank	Attabarie T.E.

**AWARD – BEST QUALITY FROM OUTGROWERS' LEAF**

North Bank	Boro
South Bank	Baghjan

**BEST HOSPITAL**

North Bank	Addabarie T.E.
South Bank	Itakhooli T.E.

**CHAIRMAN'S TROPHY – BEST PERFORMING DISTRICT**

Bishnauth/Jorhat-Golaghat



*Namita Singh gets us closer acquainted with Margherita Club, one of the best located clubs in Upper Assam*



– Namita Singh  
Margherita T.E.

The epicentre of the social life of tea planters and their families in and around Margherita circle, is our very own Margherita Club. With a scenic backdrop of coalfields and the Patkai hills in the east and south, it is the property of Namdang T. E.; however, it is named after the original club which was situated in Margherita T. E. bordering the town by that very name.

The original club was established some time in the 1890s by the erstwhile Assam Railways & Trading Company for its executives, both in coal and tea, based in the area, the purpose being general social interaction and to partake in sporting and recreational activities. Its close proximity to the Company church ensured good attendance post Sunday church service. It was equipped with grass and clay



Margherita Club

Polo Shield



tennis courts, a billiards table, an extremely well-stocked library and an officers' store. Polo was very popular then, taking precedence over golf, and a reminder of that is a polo shield which is prominently displayed in the bar at the new club. Bridge and Mah-jong were popular amongst both men and ladies. Not an opportunity was missed to hit the dance floor, which unquestionably required formal attire. The Ladies' Association was extremely active and met monthly over morning coffee. It is worth mentioning



Old Clubhouse

here that the club holds the distinction of holding the first flower show in the year 1954-55.

Where the new club exists today, was the Golf Hut, built in 1949 at the initiative of Superintendent, John Moran. The hut was later demolished to make way for a swimming pool in the early 70s. A tubewell was dug for this purpose, but was unable to provide the water required. Later, piped water was brought in from Namdang colliery and the pool finally became functional. The new club was built in 1977 and the squash court in 1981, courtesy Mr R. N. Chakravorty, the proprietor of Woodlands, Digboi.

Swimming Pool



Tennis was played every day after working hours. Surprisingly, there was no system of high teas at the club, unlike now. Sunday tennis was played at the Burra Bungalows (except Dirok, which was not equipped with its own courts) and followed by a sumptuous tea provided by the hostess.

It is interesting to note that, before the club started its own weekly cinema, many men in formal attire were spotted cycling down and hitching rides to make it to the nearby clubs on movie nights.

### Present Day Club Scenario



Today, the golf course prides itself on being considered the best in Assam for its landscape, scenic view and undulating fairways. The short but tricky course tests and assures the fitness of the golfers. Besides, the club boasts four tennis courts, a squash court, an indoor badminton court, billiards and table tennis facilities,

every member transferred out of the district adds to the engravings on the bar. Golf, tennis and squash tournaments are frequent fixtures on the club's annual calendar, keeping



Undulating Fairways

5-a-side football grounds and a library. To add testimony to its history, the bar from the old club had been carefully removed and shifted to its new premises in bits and pieces and engraved with names of the people responsible for its successful relocation. The tradition followed now is that



Bar Engravings

the ladies busy in showcasing their exceptional culinary and hosting skills, which, no doubt makes Margherita Club stand apart from the rest. Events like Men's Night, Swimming Gala and monthly suppers amongst others, keep everyone socially occupied throughout the year. One cannot forget to mention



The Bar



Time-keeper at the Bar

Old Stalwart Raghu Bearer

here the annual flower show, which encourages a healthy competition among the ladies, pushing them to hone and display their gardening and culinary skills and develop overall creativity.



The children too have their own line up of events during the Annual Meet, Christmas, Diwali and Bihu celebrations along with competitions and other fun games. The club provides an increased sense of camaraderie and belonging to all its members. This is the place they come to relax in, relieve stress and worries, communicate and share information. Every member leaving the district carries fond memories of times spent at Margherita Club.





– Anku Baruah Mahakali T.E.

## Planters – A Very Special Breed!

As a young horticulturist brimming with confidence and armed with a year's hardcore marketing experience in the mechanical megacity of Mumbai, I landed up to join Tea one cold December day. Since then, each and every day of my life has been an adventurous one full of surprises, bitter and sweet, albeit a bit monotonous at times. Certain phrases have become part and parcel of our vocabulary, like, "We planters are a different breed," "Tea is not a job but a way of life," "Be honest and truthful even if you commit a murder" and so on and so forth. One must not forget the most important one - "WORK HARD, PLAY HARD AND DRINK HARD"- although presently the last two 'hards' are seldom practised.

The first job I was entrusted with was decorating the club for the forthcoming Annual Meet and I was told to ensure that everything was immaculately placed as this was my first test. I was thrilled and thought to myself, "This is the kind of job I can do day in and day out throughout my life." The first bombshell hit me the day after the Meet when the 'bossman' summoned me and enquired about my snazzy new bike which I had bought just a day before joining. I proudly described the technical nitty-gritty of the bike and after giving me a patient hearing he told me, "Young man, you are not supposed to ride a motorbike during kamjari. Get onto a bicycle and do your routine work till the time you are confirmed." I accepted my fate and took to cycling during kamjari, half the time fantasizing about my new

bike. Come nightfall I would put on my biking gear and be out, tearing the night apart on my bike visualizing myself as Rex Smith of STREET HAWK fame, always careful to take the back road so that nobody had an inkling of my biking frenzies, more so the boss, as one had to take permission to go across the LOC i.e. the estate boundary.

An integral part of garden life is the tea garden lingo. A couple of weeks after joining, I was informed that the water pump in the nursery had broken down. I immediately cycled down to inform the Factory Assistant. After a quick breakfast I zipped back to the nursery for the latest update and was informed by the nursery Sardar that the 'mistry sahab' had come to inspect the pump. I was zapped and asked the Sardar why he was referring to the mistry as 'mistry sahab'. It took the poor fellow quite a while to explain the identity of the person. I decided then and there to get a crash course in garden lingo.

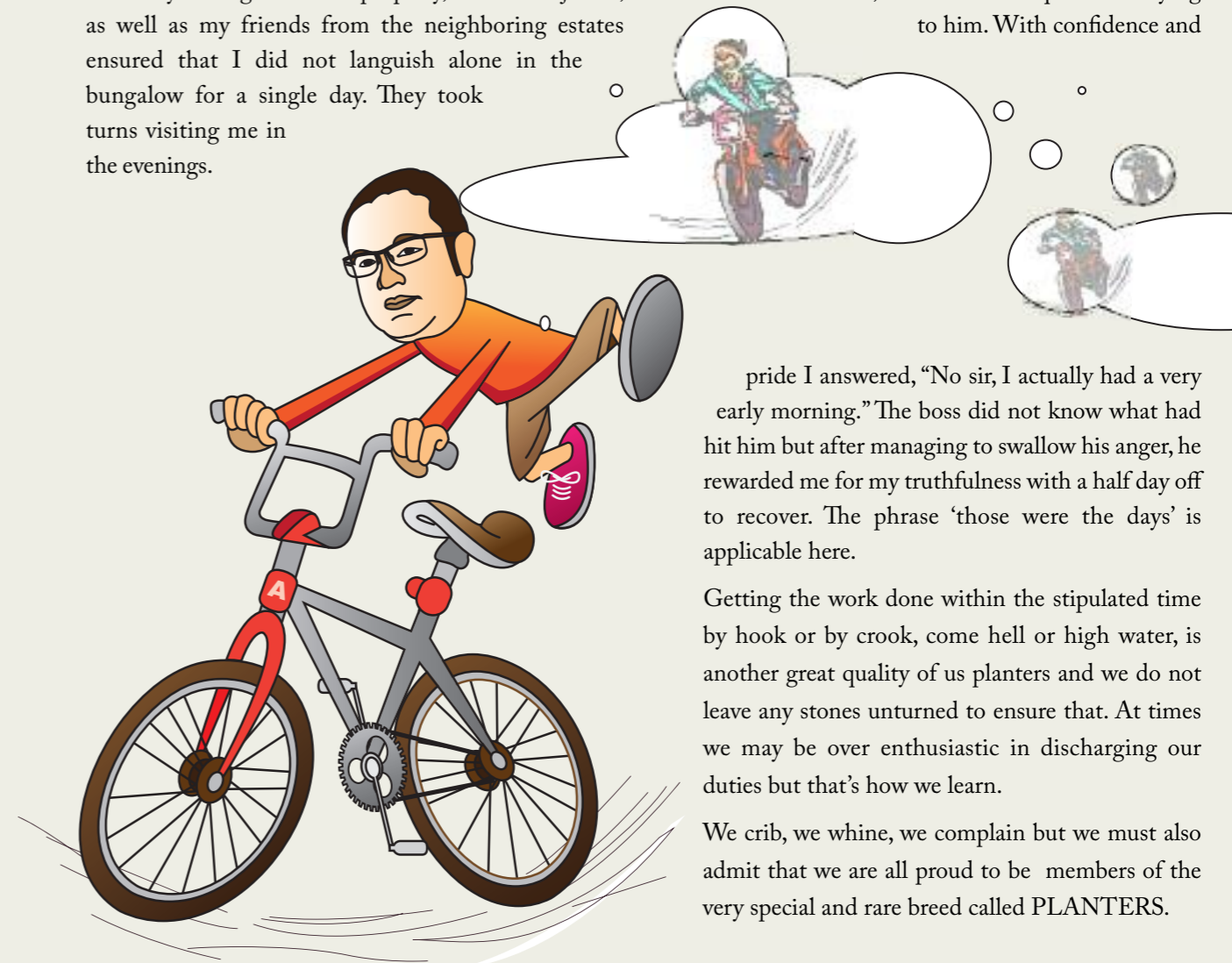
Sport is another integral part of most planters' lives as it is a fantastic stress buster. For a trainee assistant, it is also a chance to escape the vagaries of the job and get out of the property on a working day. Many a planter like me started playing soccer not only for the love of the sport but also because you are out on most Mondays during the soccer season which coincides with the peak cropping season, as the inter-club 11-a-side matches in the South Bank are played on that day. What a great way to beat the Monday blues...meet like-minded souls

and drown homesickness, or rather 'city-sickness', at the club bar followed by a dhaba dinner. But one had to be cautious not to get injured as per the diktat from my Burra Sahab, who told me categorically that I would be sent home if I broke a leg!

Camaraderie is one thing we planters are very proud of and which is also very essential as just a handful of us live in an estate, sharing the good as well as the hard times, always lending a shoulder to the one in need. As a young bachelor I had a near fatal bike crash and was out of commission for more than a month with a busted knee. My colleagues on the property, senior and junior, as well as my friends from the neighboring estates ensured that I did not languish alone in the bungalow for a single day. They took turns visiting me in the evenings.

It is a different matter that everyone preferred visiting me on a Saturday so that all could have good time in the name of giving me company. But, I must say, they really helped me overcome the boredom and loneliness - I am indebted to them.

With seniority came more responsibility as well as confidence. After having a blast at a friend's place I somehow managed to reach office on time in the morning. The Burra Sahab gave me a dirty look and asked, "So, young man, it seems you had a pretty late night." There is no alternative to being truthful, we were told, so there was no question of lying to him. With confidence and



pride I answered, "No sir, I actually had a very early morning." The boss did not know what had hit him but after managing to swallow his anger, he rewarded me for my truthfulness with a half day off to recover. The phrase 'those were the days' is applicable here.

Getting the work done within the stipulated time by hook or by crook, come hell or high water, is another great quality of us planters and we do not leave any stones unturned to ensure that. At times we may be over enthusiastic in discharging our duties but that's how we learn.

We crib, we whine, we complain but we must also admit that we are all proud to be members of the very special and rare breed called PLANTERS.



*Believe in oneself, seize opportunities, hone one's talents and attain one's goals...that's what achievers do. We are proud of these enterprising young men who were born and nurtured on our estates.*

## Sri D. K. Chauhan



DK with his Parents at Humayun's Tomb, New Delhi

Sri Dinesh K. Chauhan, the eldest child of Sri Bindu Ram & Smt. Ranjani of Bhooteachang T.E., is scaling frontiers and winning laurels that others from his lineage have rarely earned. While in the Final Year of Humanities studies at Delhi University, "DK", as he is fondly known as in his associate circle, had set his sights upon an agenda different from what is usually aimed for and achieved by simple students of the Tea Tribes.



DK

His outgoing nature and ability to initiate a dialogue for social causes, be it with the Prime Minister or an urchin, with the same unabashed frankness, endears him to everyone. After obtaining a Diploma in

Journalism in 2009 he joined the TV channel DY 365 as an Assistant Correspondent, Delhi Bureau. He received the 'Best Journalism' award in 2013 from the Jharkhand Govt for his 'Travelogue'. Today, aged 26, he is the Founder-Editor of 'Adhunik India', a fortnightly newsletter published from New Delhi in Hindi since 2010.



Receiving the Award from Jharkhand CM Sri Hemant Soren

His pursuit of uplifting the causes inherent to the educational and social spheres of the Tea Tribes is closest to his heart. At this young age, he routinely shares platforms with citizens of prominence from the Administration as well as the Politburo, never missing an opportunity to pave paths directed at achieving success in ventures planned. With guidance and mentorship, shouldered with a conscience, this youth from the



With Assam Governor, His Excellency J. B. Patnaik



With Sri Tarun Gogoi With Mr R.S. Jharwar



Interview with Popular Actor Prosenjit Chatterjee

centurion clan is poised to go miles. We wish him the very best towards the achievement of laurels envisioned in the future.

With shared inputs from:



— Mr Ajay Pal Singh & Dr S. Bisswall Bhooteachang T.E.

## Sri Dayalu Tanti



At the Venue

Network of Asia Pacific Producers (NAPP), registered in Hong Kong, represents all Fairtrade Certified Producers from the Asia Pacific Region. The General Assembly of the network is held every two years at different locations in the Asia Pacific Region and the 5th General Assembly held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on 22 & 23 February 2014, was attended by Fairtrade Producers, Fairtrade International Officials and National Fairtrade Organisations.

McLeod Russel India Limited, having four Fairtrade Certified estates in Assam, was invited to the General Assembly and one of the two participants, Shri Dayalu Tanti, represented the Company from the Workers' Joint Body. Sri Tanti was born and brought up in Borengajuli T.E. and is presently working in the factory as a Sub-staff member.

Sri Tanti is an office-bearer of the Borengajuli Joint Body and his sheer dedication, sincerity and knowledge of the Fairtrade systems are instrumental in successful implementation of the Fairtrade Certification programme in Borengajuli. Under his leadership, the essence of Fairtrade has been able to penetrate to the grassroots level successfully. In recognition of his effective leadership, Sri Tanti was selected to represent the Company at the General Assembly and share his experiences there amongst his peers and workforce back home. The Company believes that this will serve as motivation for others to imbibe his qualities and develop themselves for

the benefit of the workers and the Company.

With Fellow Delegates



It is indeed a great honour for us that Sri Tanti represented McLeod Russel India Limited in a global forum of this magnitude. We look forward to developing more such promising personnel who would be able to represent McLeod Russel at such global forums.

With shared inputs from:



— Mr Kaushik Saikia, HO Kolkata



## Siddarth Baruah

Siddarth Baruah, aged 20, is the son of Sri Anjan Baruah, a staff member at Addabarie T.E. Siddharth, who had won the Junior Badminton Championship of Odisha and also been runner-up in the All India National Badminton Qualifiers in 2013, has been selected to represent India for tournaments in Malaysia and Dubai later this year.

Over the years, Bipasha Duarah has learned how to get the maximum out of her kitchen garden in summer, and shares her knowledge and experience with us here.



– Bipasha Duarah  
Phillobari T.E.

Bottle Gourd    Ash Gourd    Teasel Gourd    Sponge Gourd



## Growing Summer Vegetables

It is a great pleasure and blessing to have a vegetable garden throughout the year. The charm of freshly plucked vegetables from one's garden is very familiar to all of us in Tea.

Summer vegetables need more attention and care than winter vegetables, for proper growth and production. Heavy rain and pests are the two main hindrances. With a little care and proper planning, however, one can have a successful garden during the summer also.

- Water-logging should be taken care of, with proper shallow drainage, wherever necessary.
- Organic manures like cow dung and compost can be used for healthy growth and more productivity.
- Pesticide is a big 'No No'. Instead of pesticide, wood ash can be used to get rid of pest and disease.
- Weeds are to be removed from time to time to ensure exposure of the root zone to sun, air and water which will help get rid of fungal and other diseases.

The summer season is blessed with a myriad of vegetables, and one should not miss eating these fresh, seasonal greens. One should start planting them by the end of January just after the heavy winter fog is over.

Some of the vegetables grown in Assam during summer are:

1) **CUCUMBER:** Cucumber does not withstand the slightest frost, so it should be planted just after the heavy cold. It can be grown in all types of soil, from sandy to heavy. Loam, silt loam and clay loam soils are considered

best for getting a higher yield. It is cultivated both as a summer and rainy season crop. Since it is a creeper it is necessary to support the plant with twigs or bamboos.

2) **RUNNER BEAN:** The runner bean is sown directly in a well fertilised bed. It is a hardy climber and can resist rain and pest, so grows well during spring and summer. It needs support, like any other creeper. Seeds germinate after 6-10 days of sowing.

3) **SQUASH:** Squash needs to be planted in a sunny place. The soil should be fertile and well drained. Spots that were previously occupied by compost piles are especially desirable. The plant should not be watered directly; instead a shallow circle should be made around the plant so that the water does not directly touch the roots.

4) **LADY'S FINGER:** Highly sensitive to frost, it requires a long, warm growing period. It does well in all kinds of soil. It can be sown in February for early cropping. Weeding and earthing up are the most important operations for the lady's finger. Flowering begins 35-40 days after sowing, and fruits are ready for harvest after 5-6 days of flowering.

5) **SNAKE GOURD:** The outer shells of the snake gourd seeds are usually hard, making them difficult to germinate. Soaked seeds take almost 10-20 days for germination. The saplings need to be watered regularly and fed with compost manure as the plants start trailing. The snake gourd plants require a large trellis to support their long fruits.



6) **BITTER GOURD:** The bitter gourd requires loamy soil rich in organic matter and moderate warm temperature. Germination takes place after almost 20-25 days of sowing. It takes about one and a half months for the harvest to be ready.

7) **RIDGE GOURD:** The ridge gourd grows well in clay, loam and silt soils. The seeds have to be sown in small pits, with 2-3 seeds in each pit. As the plant is a climber it should be provided with suitable support, either of bamboos or twigs. The fruit becomes ready for harvest two months after sowing.

8) **OTHER GOURDS:** Gourds such as Bottle, Ash, Teasel and Sponge/Silk also grow well in summer.

9) **PUMPKIN:** It is best grown in a sunny place where there is no water-logging. Once the seedlings sprout, add compost around the plant. This will help keep weeds down and retain moisture. Daily watering is not

necessary; deep but infrequent watering results in a healthier plant. Watering in the morning helps to get rid of fungal diseases.

10) **CORN:** Corn grows well in loamy soil. A long frost-free season is necessary after planting of the seed. Corn is wind-pollinated, so it should be planted in blocks rather than in single rows. It should be well watered during planting time. When the plants are 4-5 inches tall, thinning them is necessary. Weeding and earthing up should be done very carefully without damaging the roots.

The advantage of having a vegetable garden throughout the year is that one is assured of consuming pesticide-free, organically grown, freshly plucked vegetables. If the 'mali bari' is planned properly, it can help reduce one's expenditure on vegetables too.

I hope these little tips of mine will help people plan a successful summer garden.

**I WISH YOU ALL 'HAPPY GARDENING'**



— H. S. Grewal  
Gisovu, Rwanda

*The Beginning...*

## A Walk in the Wild

Gorillas in the mist.

Rwanda, the land of a thousand hills, and mountain gorillas too.

These magnificent animals somehow survive in Congo (Democratic Republic of Congo) avoiding the insurgents, poachers and the local armed forces. They sometimes prefer to drift across the border to Uganda and Rwanda. Uganda has a healthy population some of whom, led by curiosity, try out the lodges and venture into them – an experience as surprising for them as for the residents of these lodges!

Rwanda – Volcanoes – the National Park nestling in the forests surrounding the extinct volcanoes Karisimbi, Mekenso, Bisoke, Sabyinyo, Gahinga, and Mahabura. This park adjoins the Gahinga National Park in Uganda and the Virunga National Park in DRC – both home to these magnificent creatures.

Visits are well organised, though extremely well charged!

A 7 am collection at the park headquarters in the Musanze district, an allocation of guides, and groups of no more than ten people. A drive over moon surface like non-existent roads to the take-off point and the journey begins.

As usual, the ladies are the most enthusiastic and start up the hill at a pace of the inexperienced, to the amusement of the experienced guides. After half a kilometre, they are clutching their sides and insisting on a rest.



*Enthusiastic Girls!*

Up, up and up a sheer 70% gradient, on non-existent paths with the guide and the porters helping the stumbling visitors up. Ants up our pants, thorns on our clothes but onward marches the troupe. Steep and slippery, over logs and bracken, tread the visitors. Nettle plants are used by the ignorant as hand holds, much to their discomfort and the guide's delight.

The slowest member sets the pace, assisted by porters hired for the job, or the guide if he takes a fancy to the poor soul, especially if it is a nice looking lady!



*A Welcome Rest*

Like rickety old steam engines, huffing and puffing, climbing over boulders and fallen tree trunks, slipping and sliding in the slush with numerous stops and starts, the weary tread on. The stops are times for stories and recounting events by the guides. A lesson on the flora and fauna in the forest too is welcome as one gets time to rest. The bottle of water which felt very heavy en route is a welcome relief when tired and thirsty. One hardly gets one's breath back when the climb starts once again.

The gorillas are only 10 minutes away, we are reassured. We move on again only to be reminded after 10 minutes that they have moved another 10 minutes farther up.

The spotter is already near the group so a regular update on their vicinity is given to the weary tourists.

A grunt, and we are there, seeing one larger than life silverback walking down with his girlfriend pushing all away from the path, an experience terrifying for some and giving an adrenal kick to most. In the hurry of getting out of his way most forget their cameras. We are there and the rest of the family are in the vicinity.

The tracker meets the guide and points everybody to the main gorilla group. The family head looks at the visitors unconcerned and carries on with what he is doing – eating, picking lice, resting... Not to be fooled he has his eyes on the

family whom he will protect with all his might.

It is the juveniles and the babies who have to be kept away from the visitors as they are curious and inquisitive. At times they put up a show for the rest by tumbling down thin branches not able to hold their weight, always discouraged to come near the tourists who actually sit about 10 feet away observing them.

Shutterbugs click hundreds of photographs, get tired and then watch the group patiently. Time flies and an hour later it is time to leave. To move out is depressing, nonetheless. Many a time one could find a few gorillas sitting on the path, who are not disturbed and everybody skirts them passing very close.

*Tales of the magnificent beasts:*

*One group of tourists was accosted on their way up and had to walk intermingled with the group up the path herded by the silverback.*

*Another time a silverback moved the group away from an area and also insisted with signs that the visiting tourists move away with the group. It was later discovered that he had seen an old rusted trap and was shepherding everyone away.*

The descent is worse for the fainthearted, slipping and sliding away; what was an effort climbing up is now a nightmare for the unfit. Knees hurting and thighs burdened, helped along by the guides and guards, the group finally makes it down to the starting point.

Tired and exhilarated, one departs happy and wanting to be back another day, a wildlife experience like no other, sitting in front of wild gorillas over a long period and seeing these magnificent creatures in their natural environment.

It is the fortunate who have the experience.



*Guardian of the Family*

# Beneficence

*The welfare and development of the people living on our estates and surrounding areas has always been of paramount importance to the Company. Among the diverse social responsibilities that MRIL has taken on is the school for visually impaired children, in Moran town of Dibrugarh District, Upper Assam.*



The Main Building



The Girls' Hostel



The Dining Hall



The Kitchen

## Janamangal Adarsh Andha Bidyalaya, Moran

– Sarita Dasgupta

In July 1972, Major S.N. Banerjee of Ouphulia T.E. founded the Janamangal Adarsh Andha Bidyalaya (JAAB) in Moran township for children with impaired eyesight. Starting with four students in the first year, the number rose to twenty by 1980. Eighty-two children from neighbouring tea estates and villages, as well as from Arunachal Pradesh, are currently studying there.

In 1981, when the founder's son, actor Victor Banerjee, approached Mr B.M. Khaitan for the Company's support in running the school, it was given wholeheartedly. According to the school's Principal, McLeod Russel's has been the biggest contribution since then, and continues to be so.

All the Company's estates belonging to the Moran circle donate generously towards providing the food, clothes and other necessities of the students for the entire year. In addition, the Management at Moran T.E. is always ready to provide logistical support whenever required.



Weaving



Tabla Lessons



Music Lessons

# poStScript



When the blistering heat of summer is past, winter slowly makes an appearance with cool mists blanketing the countryside in the evenings and perky wagtails hopping around on

the lawn in the mornings. It's a busy time for Tea ladies and their 'maalis' as they start preparing their garden for the cold season flowers and vegetables – from sowing seeds to nurturing tender seedlings, to planting them out in carefully nourished beds and then tending them religiously till such time that the garden is transformed into a riot of colours with flowers of every hue and variety adorning one's compound and fresh vegetables aplenty on one's table. Methinks even the weather gods step gingerly around so as not to incur the ladies' wrath!

During this season, Flower Shows are held in every Tea club, this event holding the utmost importance for all the ladies, when prized exhibits are displayed to

perfection, cookery talents showcased in the Home Produce Section and beautiful arrangements crafted in the Flower Arrangement Section.

So it is, that flower buds are coaxed into blooming, whilst vegetables are pampered, pot plants tended lovingly and fruit trees watched over with an eagle eye, all in preparation for the Big Day. It is not so much about winning, as it is about the satisfaction of having a well kept garden and enjoying Nature's beauty, which we, in the tea gardens, are so lucky to have around us.

As the cold season draws to a close, it's time to once again plant out the summer seedlings in keeping with Mother Nature's cycle of life, for, as they say, "Each moment of the year has its own beauty... a picture which was never before and shall never be seen again." (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

*Rupa Saikia*



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*Flame Backs at Paneery T.E.*



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*Believe in tea*

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