INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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India: Holiday

25-A Nizamuddin West
New Delhi

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Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Executive Director
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York, New York

Dear Dick,

I used to feel that the British wife who in summer left her husband in the steaming plains of the Punjab and went with her children to the cool of a hill station was a rather heartless character--somewhat lacking in stamina or affection or both. Preconceived notions are almost always dispelled by a bit of knowledge, however: Red spent June in his sarong in Delhi while the children and I were wearing woolens and sleeping under three blankets in the Himalayas.

My original aversion to the idea of leaving Red for a month or so in search of moderate climes became weaker and weaker as the temperature rose. Non-political newspaper articles in May concentrate on the exodus from the capital of any who can to avoid the summer heat; non-political conversation centers around the controversy "Which month is the worst?" June has temperatures hovering around 112° with relatively no humidity but with constant dust storms and with little relief at night; post-monsoon July when the temperature and humidity run close together in the 90's is particularly disliked by non-Delhi-ites; August is most miserable for some people because not only is it hot and sticky but the bugs are in full force and hungry; September is the month to evacuate Delhi, say some, because by then both mind and body are so worn down that any intensity of either heat or humidity is extremely enervating. The whole subject was summed up by an English friend who has lived in Delhi for many years: "There is really no argument; four months of the year are absolute hell." After unanimity on this point, conversation then turns to cooling systems.

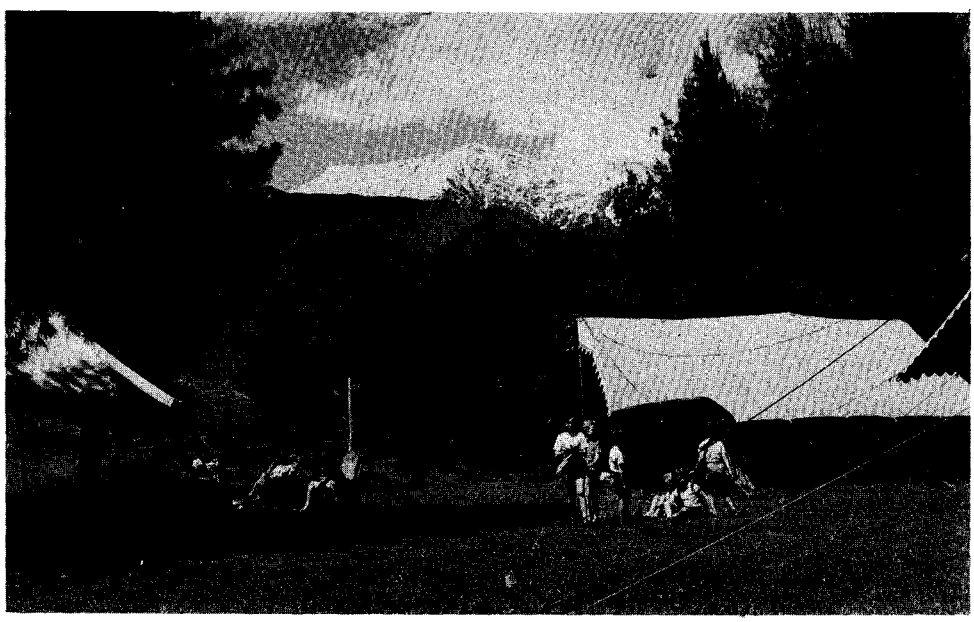
There are basically three in use in Delhi, each has its adwocates, and none seems to me particularly reliable. The ancient Indian system is to have three-dimensional box-like frames covered with matting of Khas, a pungent-smelling reed, built on the outside of the house over open doors and windows. In the old days, a small boy would be employed to throw water on the Khas every few minutes during the hottest part of the day (i.e., for 12-14 hours); now plastic piping with holes in it and constant water flowing through and out is run across the top of the Khas frame. When there is a breeze, the result is truly amazing. I have myself been in a house with a faint and delicious aroma of Khas where the thermometer ten feet from the window framed in Khas registered 80° while the temperature outside in the shade was 103°. Efficacious as this system may be, it is only useful during the hot, dry season and is completely dependent on that rarity, a breeze.

Another way of reducing the temperature of a room is to install a "desert cooler" whereby damp air is blown through matting by a fan--a modern,

mechanized, odorless version of Khas. I have never seen a desert cooler in use and have heard only lukewarm praise of its efficacy by its owners and several definite criticisms. One of the major complaints is that its effect is negligible more than four feet away, and close proximity to such concentrated damp air is apt to produce chills. My personal feeling is that if the desert cooler were particularly effective, it would be in much more widespread use--it is one-half the price of an air conditioner.

The dehumidifying air conditioner, good for the entire season, is in general use amongst the foreign population and wealthier Indians. Foreigners and their firms feel air conditioning a necessity to maintain a reasonable level of exertion. With Indians, who have lived with their heat for centuries, the growing advocacy of air conditioning is perhaps two-fold: 1) many Indians mind the heat and like comfort as much as anyone else; 2) an air conditioner is an expensive and therefore a prestige item. But the air conditioner also has its limitations. The electricity supply in Delhi is erratic, and the tremendous surges in current are extremely wearing on appliances. During the summer months the electricity supply is particularly taxed, and electricity cuts of several hours are not unusual.

The palliative to the lengthy and all-absorbing problem of heat and cooling systems becomes unavoidable--leave Delhi and go to the hills. The approach of school summer holidays (May 15 to July 15) coupled with a shadeless and therefore useless garden, a limited and ill-planned indoors, and four hyper-active children seemed to dictate action. We sent off telegrams to some easily accessible hill stations in northern India and received replies of "Fully booked for month of June." The explanation of this situation was that the instability of the political situation in Kashmir had frightened the vast majority of Kashmir's habitual tourist trade to seek refuge this summer in other hills. The solution was perhaps obvious but not feasible until a friend (who's husband is a senior official in the Government) suggested we join forces and go camping in tents near the village of Pahalgam, in the hills thirty miles east of Srinagar: to avoid the crowd we would go to Kashmir.



Camping--Pahalgam
(courtesy of Peter Jackson)

My initial reaction to Susila's suggestion was one of uncertainty mingled with pleasure. I have never been inside a tent in my life, and my camping experience consists of two nights in Appalchian Mountain Club huts as a college girl. Then Susila showed me the Tourist Office brochure listing prices for the rental of tents, wooden flooring, beds, mattresses, dining tables, dressing tables, wardrobes, easy chairs, etc. Camping in Kashmir was not analagous to camping in the Appalchians. Hopes soared: Kashmiri tents could evidently be fitted out in style--and inexpensively. We started to plan.

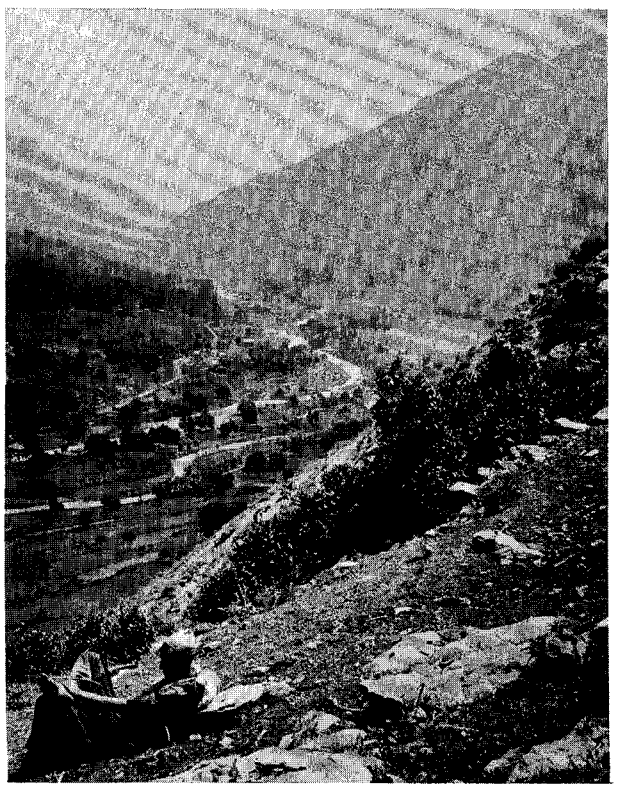
As the cost of a third-class round trip bus/rail ticket from Delhi to Srinagar (550 miles) is approximately $15, we decided to send the cook and baby ayah up. They were in charge of the transport of two trunks and a large knapsack containing our household essentials for the month. Our basic supplies included sheets, blankets, towels, napkins, cutlery, cooking pots, kitchen utensils, plastic containers, hot water bottles, an ice bucket, a wretched-to-pack bucket stove, and an assortment of canned goods ranging from powdered milk to tinned salmon to help us cater until we got established.

Susila and I then discussed "aesthetic" necessities. Our list, whittled to the bare minimum by Red's scathing looks, included a copper Mongolian Hot Pot (a soup kettle with built-in firebox), a pair of double brass candlesticks, a bronze Ganesh (the Hindu elephant god who brings good fortune to homes), two large packets of sandalwood joss-sticks, and a pepper mill. I hasten to add here that every single item proved indispensable at some time during the month.

The morning of the first of June the children and I flew from Delhi to Srinagar--a two-hour flight by Viscount. The flight was very smooth, and therefore all (excepting two-year-old introvert) were fascinated by the transition from parched plains to faintly snowcapped mountain range to magnificent jade green valley. From a cloistered nook in New Delhi, one doesn't realize just how extensive, flat, and dull the Plains of North India really are. After about an hour of them, we were suddenly flying over a range of mountains eight to ten thousand feet high. In a matter of minutes we were looking down upon the fabled Vale of Kashmir: a valley 5000' above sea level, 25 miles wide, 80 miles long, dotted with lakes, and encircled by mountains. One can fully understand why in ancient Sanskrit literature Kashmir is described as a "jewel in mountains." It is hard to judge whether it is most impressive if first seen in any one particular way--I can only vouch for its being a truly breathtaking sight by air.

This was the beginning of a series of novel experiences--always instructive, usually pleasing, often frustrating. (The fact that all three are possible at the same time is support for what Red calls a phenomenon in the framing of the Indian Constitution: i.e., that seemingly incompatible views can exist simultaneously in complete harmony.) Our entire entourage spent that first evening away from Delhi at the Tourist Reception Center in Srinagar. Any number of niwar (woven tape) beds were supplied with ease; mattresses were produced after a time; sheets and blankets were obviously going to be more of a problem, so we unpacked a trunk. I came to understand the value of the Indian "bedroll". A bedroll is exactly what it says: mattress, sheets (if desired), blankets, and bedcover rolled up and tied with a rope. It is an extremely important item of equipment for any traveller in India, and I for one will never again do anything but the most organized, de luxe travel without it. It assures one of relative cleanliness and comfort no matter the circumstances.

The next morning we set off for our ultimate destination, Pahalgam. Our party of four adults, four children, and eleven major pieces of luggage finally were able to get seats on an ordinary hill bus. These buses strongly resemble one of Geoffrey's toy "Matchbox" vans that has spent several years being pushed over an uneven flagstone floor. They are small, square, high vehicles with seats for about twenty-five people and often seem to have a slight tilt to them. As is to be expected, they serve their purpose admirably. The one we were on must have been either well-driven or well-sprung or both; our journey over a rock-sprayed, hummocky mountain road was neither jerky nor slithery. The bus was also fortunately and inexplicably well-ventilated. It quite obviously had none of the modern refinements in this respect, but, whatever the reason, the air was never stale. I was particularly sensitive to this aspect since two of the children are prone to car-sickness, the baby had started the day with an upset stomach, and a smugly-smiling American and his boatman lit up Al Capone-size cigars at the beginning of the trip. None of the windows were open (ours wouldn't stay up--others in the bus may not have gone up at all), and our only visible fresh air came from frequent but flash stops. Yet air circulated. The trip took 3½ hours--an hour, or 27 miles, of straight road through the rice paddies and willow-banked streams of the valley, 2½ hours, or 27 miles, following the rushing river, Lidder, up the mountains to Pahalgam.



Pahalgam from Ponyback

Pahalgam is described by one of our guidebooks as a small village which "stands at the head of the Lidder valley". To my mind, this description is misleading. Pahalgam is built by the Lidder in one of the few spots along the river's course where there is a gentle slope between the river and the angular rise of the hills. The village consists of a tarmac, two-lane main street about half a mile long lined with universally uninspiring two-story buildings. Without exception the ground floor is occupied by some sort of business establishment--post office, bus office, tourist office, bank, restaurants catering to Gujeratis, Maharashtrians, Punjabis, Bengalis (everyone but Kashmiris, it seemed), small shops catering to the souvenir-searchers, and a few more picturesque sellers of fruits and vegetables and tea. One is immediately struck by the shoddy, colorless town nestled in the midst of superb forests and peaks. At the northern end of the village, the Lidder River forks, and it is here that the attraction of camping in the foothills of the Himalayas begins.

After a frustrating afternoon searching for a tent site and an unexpected night in a hotel with trunk of sheets and blankets proving ever-vital, we were finally installed in tents almost 24 hours later than planned. Our site, chosen by Susila, was excellent. In front of the tents was almost an acre of meadow where the children could wander in sight of a chaperon. Around this were sloping pine woods. Best of all, the mountain torrents on either side of our hilly peninsula were a minimum of five minutes walk away. It was fifteen minutes to the village through a pine grove and down a rocky hill covered with buttercups, daisies, and dog-roses.

We had three main tents pitched as close together as possible. In the middle tent, with wooden flooring, slept baby in playpen, one child, and baby ayah. Susila and her tent were on one side, two children and myself in a tent on the other. Off a bit on the end was the cook and his stove in an old Army tent.

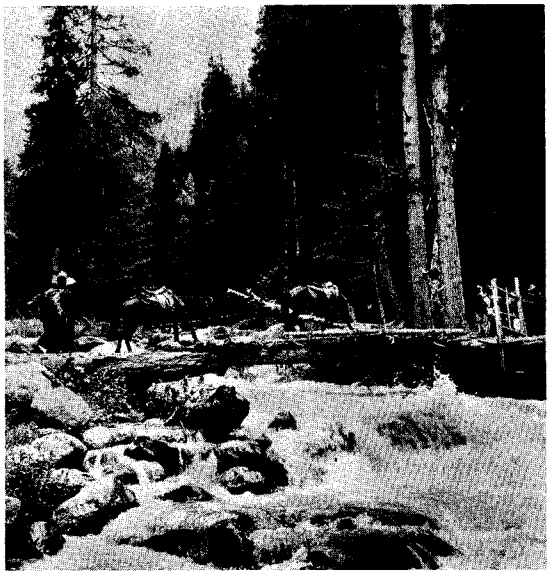
The large tents were more delightful than any expectation. They were 13' by 18'. This included a porte-cochere in front, a main portion 13' square partitioned by flaps, and a conical, curtained portion in the rear--the "attached latrine tent". There were two layers of tent: outer tent of extremely heavy tarpaulin and inner tent of heavy canvas for the main section. The inner tent and verandah over-hang were lined with heavy cotton of bright yellow speckled with modernistic flowers.

Our rented furnishings consisted of misshapen niwar beds (with disconcerting two-inch gaps between the tapes), mattresses 1½" thick and shorter and narrower than the beds, a dressing table with mirror, three tables, six straight wooden chairs, cotton rugs, commodes, basins and jugs. In the kitchen tent, along with the cook, his pots and pans and stove, were a rented niwar bed, a Primus, a "meat safe" (tiny cupboard with screen door), and a table. Beside the kitchen was our prize possession, a "hamam" or hot water heater: a tank with a funnel 4" in diameter in the center. The tank is filled with water, the funnel with fire, and within half an hour there are five gallons of near-boiling water.

To complete this Spartan tent household, we had those two mixed blessings of the East: electricity and servants. There were ceiling lights in each tent, but everytime the wind or rain blew even slightly, it was pitch black. The cook hated our camp and was a constant irritant, but the Kashmiri jack-of-all-trades supplied us with water, wood, pony rides, and unfailing good cheer.

We were soon to discover that the Himalayas are like the little girl with the little curl. When the sun is out, they and life are superb; when it rains, everything and everyone is miserable.

Morning Pony Ride
Craig, Hilary, Hassan



Suspenseful Bridge

It started to rain as we moved in and for two weeks it rained, in varying degrees of intensity, for several hours a day. We finally settled into a routine based on the skies.

Mornings were lovely, so after a lazy breakfast watching the children take pony rides, we would all go for a short walk. Pahalgam, and particularly our abode there, was a most satisfying setting for these excursions because of the variety of the environs within a few minutes walk—meadows, pine forests, rivers. We could collect flowers, pine cones, or smooth pastel stones depending on the whim. Afternoons were spent in completely mundane fashion: shopping, complaining that the electricity had failed AGAIN, renting more quilts from the tent man, etc. After these chores (any one of which could consume an hour), we would tidy our respective tents and prepare for the wet, cold evening.

Rains came every day during this period between four and six and continued with little respite until well into the night. We eventually evolved a system for the children's "bath" and bed time. The ayah took charge of the baby in their tent, while Susila and I organized the other three in mine. Our goal was to get people warm, not to rid them of insulating dirt and skin oils. Susila would start a fire in the Mongolian Hot Pot (which works on the same principle as a "hamam") and warm pajamas over it, while I hastily splashed a child standing in a basin of hot water. Then we would do "puja" (prayers) to Ganesh. Ganesh was surrounded by flowers in a lovingly-made garden in one corner of my tent. We would turn off the electric light (on the odd occasion it was working), light his candle and sandlewood joss-sticks, and think of how fine and sunny it could be.

After a few minutes the children, each equipped with a hot water bottle, would be put to bed, and Susila and I would settle down to a hot toddy made with Kashmir rum. Slightly warmed, we would have a peaceful supper, collect hot water bottles and make a dash for our tents. All tent flaps then had to be tied and checked, the sides of the tent weighted down every few feet with large rocks or chairs, and trunks and suitcases chained and padlocked to tent poles. Finally, clutching my nocturnal blackjack, the 14"-high pepper mill, I could dive into bed.

Bed did not mean sleep, however. A main street in Delhi is peaceful at midnight compared to that meadow in Pahalgam. Dogs howled, fought, and crawled into tents. Grazing cows got tangled in tent ropes. Shrilly whistling police woke us up to make sure we were sleeping undisturbed. Wind blew; rains pounded; rivers roared.

This quiet holiday away from the "maddening crowd", as one sign in the village put it, was fast making a nervous wreck of me. Daytimes I was so worn out from the previous night's excitement, or wakefulness waiting for it, and so involved in domestic minutia, that I began to wonder when my holiday would start.

The final insult was 48 hours of heavy, monsoon-type rain. The main tents proved themselves waterproof. The kitchen tent dripped in only one or two places. The ground became a muddy pool, so all children, ayah and I slept in the middle tent on beloved wooden floor. The road between Srinagar and Pahalgam was closed because of landslide, and supplies in the village were becoming exhausted. Desperation was beginning to get a firm hold when the rain started to abate.

As Susila pointed out, no one had as yet come to any harm, so we gave Ganesh extra attention, and our Kashmiri fortunes changed. On June 16th the rains stopped, the sun came out to stay, and the Jacksons arrived. Adrienne and Peter Jackson are the Reuters correspondents in Delhi. They are exceptionally nice, intelligent, fun people with four delightful children almost the same ages as ours.

The children were happily occupied for hours with their contemporary companions. The six older ones (ranging from four to eight years in age) were given extensive boundaries including meadow, pine woods, rivulet, and slopes. They would trundle off on picnics equipped with small knapsack, canteen, roll of toilet paper, and pencil and paper for writing notes back to the base camp. The front section of our middle tent became a clubhouse. The two eldest children started a journalistic venture.

Adrienne and I attempted to institute morning riding school (ponies could be hired for the equivalent of $.20 an hour) but were soon convinced that not a single principle of equitation, as we knew it, could be applied to these hill ponies; so we reverted to laissez-faire morning pony rides and long treks. We had joint-family occasions with bonfires of pine cones; the omnipresent wild strawberries began to ripen; birds came out of hiding and trilled happily; walks were aimless and unhurried. In short, Jacksons and sun had combined to make our holiday a great success.

Dudes in Kashmir

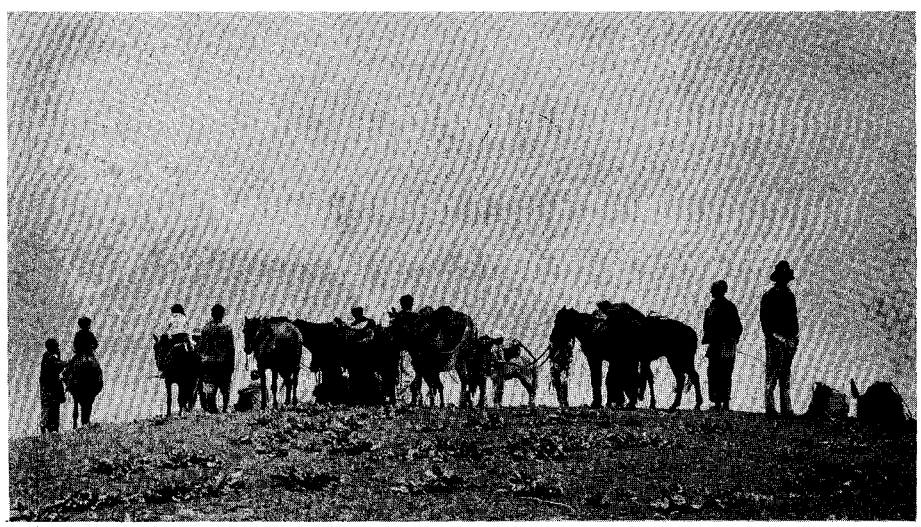
Psychologically liberated, Susila and I went off by ourselves on pony treks. One led up through magnificent pine forests, past the occasional pasture dotted with wild iris, to a large, flat meadow where the rushing mountain river suddenly became a still, shallow pool. There we washed our hair, unsuccessfully tried to poach a trout, and were a world removed from the mangey dogs, jumping children, and salaaming inefficiency of camp life.

Another trek we took followed the other river up a narrow gorge to a high mountain village. The pony track went up the canyon wall. It was both magnificent and terrifying. Two inches to the left and 2000 rocky feet below was the dangerous glacial torrent—a low-quality turquoise studded with boulders. To the right, like a blinder, rose the rocky precipice sprinkled with mountain goats and cattle. Eyes glued to the pony's searching, slipping hoofs, the refrain ran through my head: This is the way to Ladakh...an army is being maintained 200 miles further on up these beautiful, treacherous peaks...small wonder few people in India could believe China would ever launch an attack in the Himalayas. Warfare in the Himalayas in inconceivable—but experience has proved it is not impossible.

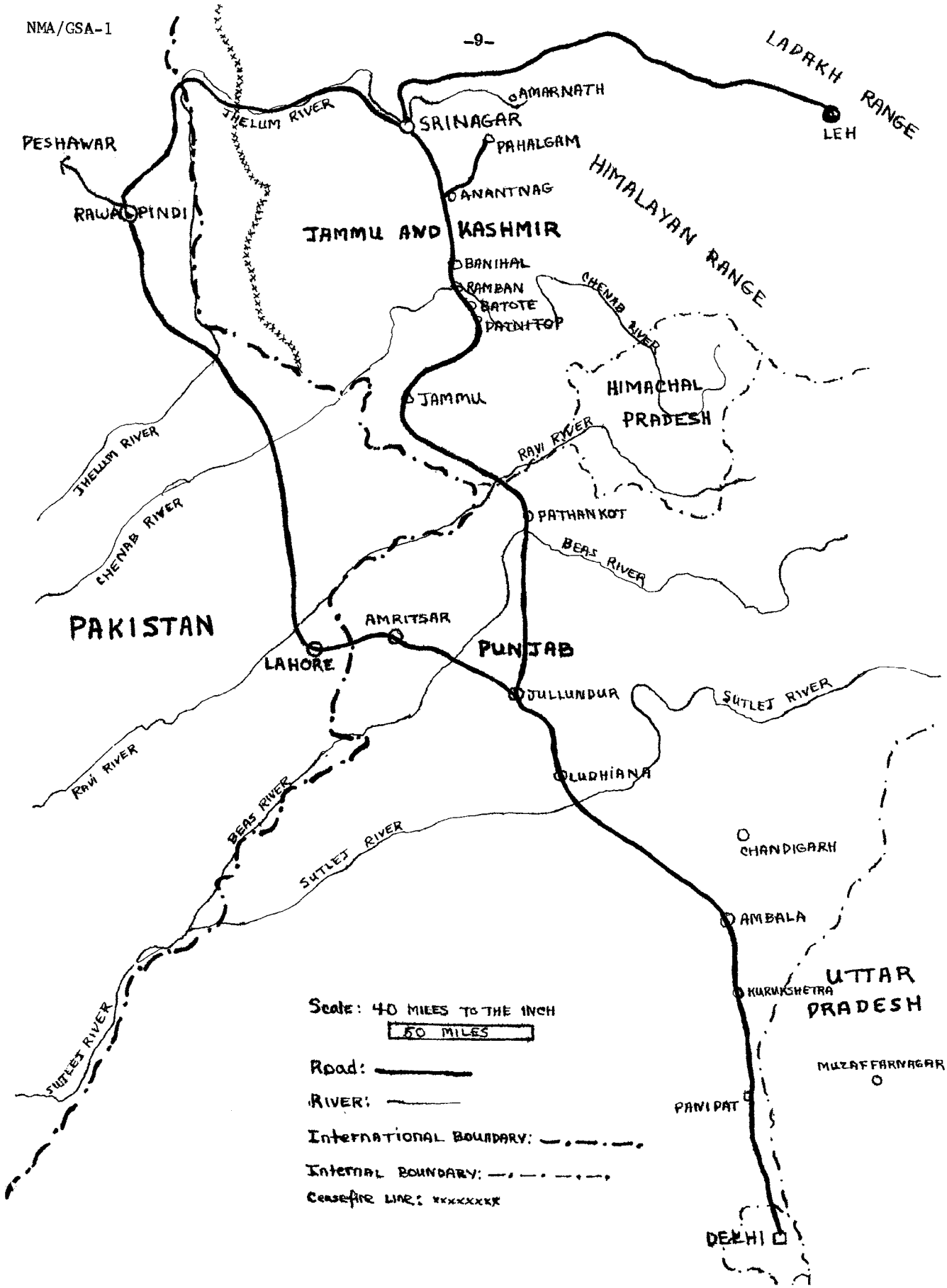
Personal experience had given me a slight insight into India's problem in defending her northern border. It also helped me understand Nehru's love for the area and his perceptive words:

> "Like some supremely beautiful women, whose beauty is almost impersonal and above human desire, such is Kashmir in all its feminine beauty of river and valley and lakes and graceful trees. And then another aspect of this magic beauty would come to view, a masculine one, of hard mountains and precipices and snow-capped peaks and glaciers and fierce torrents rushing down the valley below. It has a hundred faces and innumerable aspects, changing, sometimes smiling, sometimes sad and full of sorrow."

One evening, when one of the happier faces was showing a good aspect, the peak to the east touched with the pink of a clear sunset, Red and Atmar (Susila's husband) appeared. We were overjoyed to see them, relieved that they had made it, and delighted that the most unpredictable member of our Himalayan family, the Himalayas, was behaving. Ganesh had served us well.



The Edge of the World


LADAKH RANGE
LEH
AMARNATH
SRINAGAR
JHELUM RIVER
PESHAWAR
PAHALGAM
HIMALAYAN RANGE
ANANTNAG
RAWALPINDI
JAMMU AND KASHMIR
BANIHAL
RAMBAN
BATOTE
PATNITOP
CHENAB RIVER
JAMMU
HIMACHAL PRADESH
RAVI RIVER
JHELUM RIVER
CHENAB RIVER
PATHANKOT
BEAS RIVER
PAKISTAN
AMRITSAR
LAHORE
PUNJAB
JULLUNDUR
SUTLEJ RIVER
RAVI RIVER
LUDHIANA
BEAS RIVER
SUTLEJ RIVER
CHANDIGARH
AMBALA
UTTAR PRADESH
KURUKSHETRA
SUTLEJ RIVER
MUZAFFARNAGAR
PANIPAT
DELHI
Scale: 40 MILES TO THE INCH
50 MILES
Road:
River:
International Boundary:
Internal Boundary:
Ceasefire Line: xxxxxxx

From Nizamuddin West to Pahalgam is 550 miles and eighteen hours driving time. And from Nancy's tent, the tip of the trunk of his elephant head grasped in one of his four hands, the rat, which he usually rides, seated by his side, Ganesh, all the brass two inches of him, in his capacity of Lord of Obstacles, watched over us. Atmar and I surmounted all obstacles, and we didn't even have a flat tire.

Our driving time to Pahalgam divided neatly into two nine-hour periods. During the first we crossed the 370 miles of plains between Delhi and Jammu, and during the second we wended our way 180 miles through and over the mountains. From Delhi to Jullundur we followed the Grand Trunk Road, familiar to devotees of Kipling, passing fields as famous for their history as for their produce, fields stained by blood and exalted in epic. At Panipat, for example, just fifty miles from Delhi, were fought three crucial battles. In April 1526 Babur's 12,000 men defeated the 100,000 of Ibrahim Lodi, toppling the Afghan dynasty and opening the Mogul era. Thirty years later, Akbar, Babur's grandson, defeated a Hindu general, Hemu, who had momentarily recaptured Delhi for the Pathans, thus firmly establishing the Moguls as the rulers of North India. Yet in 200 years, the third battle of Panipat set the stage for the coming of the British to Delhi and subsequently to the remainder of North India. By 1761 the Moguls had lost Delhi to the Afghans and had enlisted the aid of the powerful Marathas to get it back again. But in January that year, on a tableland that in 1964 grew green with winter wheat, the Afghans routed the Maratha horde, eliminating them and the Moguls as contenders for power. Unstable conditions in their home beyond the Indus prevented the Afghans from consolidating their victory, however, and 42 years later the British entered Delhi.

More familiar to Indians, as common as the food they eat and the air they breathe, is the battlefield of Kurukshetra where, between the opposing lines of the Kaurava and Pandava armies, the Pandava commander, Arjuna, and the god Krishna conversed about man's place in the universe. Their conversation forms the best known part of the Hindu epic the Mahabaratta and is called the Bhagavad Gita. Gandhi derived his inspiration from 'the Gita' perhaps more than from any other work, as do countless Indians today. Sir Edwin Arnold, its most famous translator, described the Gita as unfolding "a philosophical system which remains to this day as the prevailing Brahamanic (one may read 'Hindu') belief." To Arjuna, who is loathe to attack the Kauravas because he has relations among them, Krishna says "Mourn not for those that live, nor those that die,/ Nor I, nor thou, nor any one of these." Only the spirit matters: "Never the spirit was born; the spirit shall cease to be never." Because he is a Kshatriya, by birth a warrior, Arjuna must fight. "Therefore," Krishna preaches,

> Thy task prescribed
> With spirit unattached gladly perform
> Since in performance of plain duty man
> Mounts to his highest bliss.

Proceeding onward we passed through Amballa. And as we drove by the orderly quarters and tents and neatly lined trucks of the cantonment area I remembered that here Kim delivered the pedigree of the white stallion to Creighton. It was hard to imagine as we cruised toward the sunset that 17 years ago in this area, in the time of Partition, Sikhs and Hindus had

butchered Muslims indiscriminately, while the Muslims were doing the same to Sikhs and Hindus farther westward. Nor was it easy to conjure up a picture of the bazar of Ludhiana in wreckage from the communal riots of 1947 or as it must have been early in the 19th century when Shah Shuja lived there in exile from Afghanistan and Colonel Ochterlony occupied it as political agent for the Sikh states of the area. I remember Ludhiana now for an old woman. She was evidently blind and she squatted where the road narrowed for a railway crossing. Trucks, buses, cars, pushcarts and bullock carts, the occasional camel, cycle rickshaws, scooters, and pedestrians all went by within inches of her nose. Through the din she wailed her beggars cry and unceasingly beat the side of a tin bowl. I watched her while we waited for a train to pass. I did not see anyone give her anything.

The Grand Trunk Road has been built up from a few to ten or fifteen feet above the plain, and through the trunks of the spreading neem trees that lined the shoulders we could see the rich Punjab fields, mostly newly ploughed after the harvest of winter wheat, waiting for the rains to push up the summer crops of grain, gram, lentils, and other beans. The Punjab near Delhi and westwards is dependent on uncertain winter rains and the July to October monsoon for its water. The water-table is too low for tube wells (artesian wells) to provide certain or large-scale irrigation and the patient fields under the slow plough must wait for what the sky brings. Beyond Amballa, however, tube wells are more effective and become increasingly so as one travels northwestwards. Above Amballa, too, irrigation with river water begins, and we crossed major irrigation canals, the Sirhind, the Bakra, and so on, running to the top of their banks although the bare bones of a major river like the Sutlej lay shining in the sun. As we drove on we passed green fields and even rice paddies. This was on 27 June. On the family's and my return ten days later, fields everywhere were soaked with water, frogs sounded from full ditches like peepers in a Vermont spring, and the Sutlej at Phillaur was full and beginning to flood. So sudden is the force of the monsoon when it strikes full force as it has this year--three inches of rain a day is not unusual.

The countryside of the Punjab is, to me, both restful and exciting. Not so the towns, which are, with few exceptions, industrially unlovely and belie the music of their names. They are crowded, filthy, unkempt, and the noise is near to bedlam. The importance, both economic and sociological, of their industry as a catalyst in a traditional society presumably outweighs the ugliness of the factories and junkheaps and slums. But these cities are no fun to look at and they must be less so to live in.

Atmar and I left the Grand Trunk road at Jullundur--where it turns to Amritsar--and headed north. We arrived at Pathankot late that night and drove through the shuttered bazar to the railway station where he had reserved one of the "retiring rooms" for the night. The room was airconditioned--not all in the station were--and a relief from the hundred-degree heat. The long hairs in the twin beds indicated either Sikhs or women as the previous occupants, but turned over the sheets were more presentable and we went to sleep. Except in the big cities or in the major tourist centers of India, hotels are not overly attractive propositions. Instead, travellers stop at the retiring rooms in railways towns or in the "dak bungalows" and other government rest houses found along most roads. Dak bungalows are an old institution in India and are for all travellers. Many of them have cooks who

will, for a few rupees, kill a chicken in the backyard and whip up a meal. The other types of resthouses are the inspection bungalows of government departments such as public works, forests, and canals, and there are also the "circuit houses" used by circuit judges on tour. Few of these have cooks and it is best to bring one's own food. Technically, permission should be obtained from the relative government department before using them, but, according to our well-travelled friends, a tip to the watchman usually opens the door.

After a decent breakfast in the station restaurant the next morning, Atmar and I set off for Jammu and the hills. Soon after leaving Pathankot we crossed the Ravi river--the third of the Punjab's five rivers; we had crossed the Sutlej before Ludhiana and the Beas before Pathankot--and entered the state of Jammu and Kashmir. I paid a road toll at a checkpost and was asked to produce my passport. When I told the police that it was locked up in Delhi, they allowed me to sign the car and myself into the state. On the way home I signed out again. Within a few miles of the state border the countryside changed abruptly; we were out of the plains. The road undulated across the alternating rises and gullies of a fifty-mile-wide run-off slope where the rivers of the hills fan out onto the plains. The soil was gravelly and poor and full of round, water-washed boulders of all sizes. Three dry river beds were bridged, but generally the road dipped into the bottom of the gullies, or nullahs, where in the wet season the water runs across it. Going to Kashmir the nullahs were dry. The day of our return, however, local storms had filled them, and after fording several successfully, we stalled out in a deeper one. The torrent was rattling stones across the road and against the car and water was creeping into the back seat before a group of men, urged on by an army officer, pushed us out of danger. We waited on the rise, drinking tea and eating cookies in the officer's house, until the rain stopped and the floods subsided, and then we resumed the trip home.

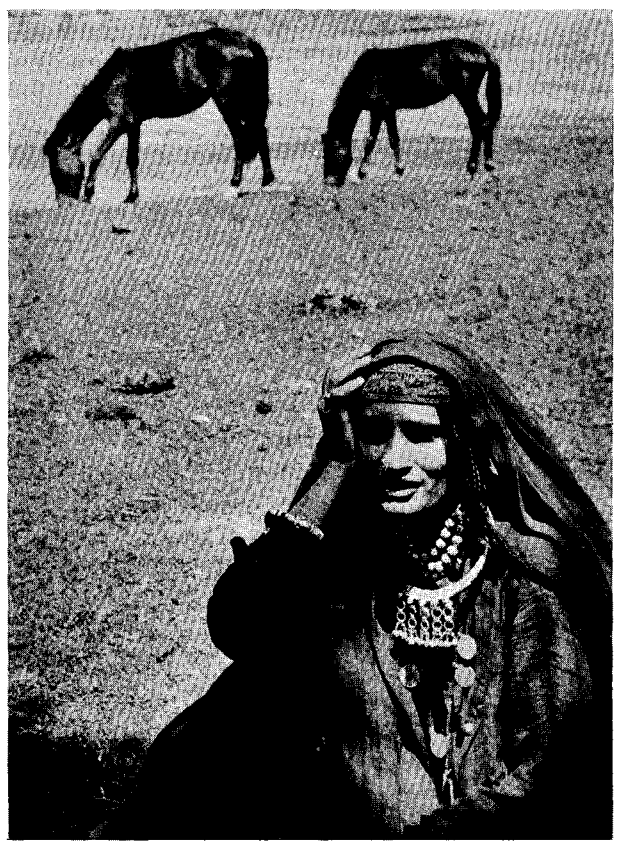
The skyline of Jammu is prickly with the spires of Hindu temples. The people of the city and the district are predominantly of the Dogra caste, and it was a line of Dogra Maharajas who ruled--or better, misruled--the state until after its accession to India in the autumn of 1947. Few Muslims live in Jammu now and many of those who do, we were told, have uneasy memories of friends and relations killed at the time of Partition. They fear that such may happen again if the Kashmir dispute grows too intense.

The climb to the Vale of Kashmir begins in the streets of Jammu and the route is steady climb and descent and climb again and ceaseless corkscrew turns. From 1000 feet elevation in Jammu, the road ascends to 2350 feet at Tikri and then goes down to Udampur, first through tortured limestone outcrops and then heavily eroded valleys. At Udampur starts the two-hour, thirty-mile, four-thousand-foot climb to Patnitop. Leaving scrub timber for grass at about the half-way point, the road ascends the western wall of the valley, which is so steep that the road is gouged out of it. Just before crossing the ridge, the road enters a forest of spruce and deodar pine--a five-needled variety somewhat like New England white pine. Stately, tall, and cool, the forest is immediate balm to tired senses and one wants to lie on the brown-cushioned floor forever, listening to the wind in the tops and watching the white clouds drift by.

Descending, the forest ends below Batote, and the road winds down to 2200 feet where it crosses the gorge of the Chenab—the fourth of the Punjab's five rivers—at Ramban. From Batote downwards, Atmar and I saw our first Muslim Kashmiri faces, long and slender with hooked noses and determined eyes. From Ramban bridge, the road climbs more than 30 miles to 7200 feet and the tunnel under the Banihal Pass.

This was the most amazing mountain road that I'd ever seen. Frequently only one car wide, it was whittled and sliced into slopes of consistently more than 45 degrees. It snaked its way across the middle of thousand-foot cliffs and ducked into every side valley as it followed the contour line. All this might not be so remarkable except for the geology of the mountains: the soil is loose and the rock is rotten. Atmar and I were stopped for nearly an hour by a slide of dry soil that blocked the road. We waited in the dust while two bulldozers purred and grumbled the earth over the edge of the road into the gorge. We were constantly dodging loose rocks lying in the road that had rolled down from above. In some places, the buttresses holding up the road began two hundred feet down in the valley, and in other places washouts from heavy rains the week before had cut notches half the width of the road. The previous portion of the route is almost equally susceptible to blocking. From Babote to Ramban we drove through the debris remaining from twelve slides brought down by the same storm. These slides had closed the road for two days.

This is the road on which India depends to supply its army in Kashmir, on which it depends to supply the troops facing the Chinese in Ladakh. This is the road that convoys have to grind over now that the once common route (100 miles longer but infinitely easier) through Amritsar, Lahore, and Rawalpindi to Srinagar has been closed by Partition and the existence of Pakistan. This road became passable to jeeps in the Forties; in the Twenties it was considered the Maharaja's private path; and during the Thirties it was widened to a cart road. Only after the Pakistan-inspired attack on Kashmir in 1947—when Srinagar was saved from the attackers by air-lifted troops—did India begin to pour money and men into the task of making the road a major access route to Kashmir. Even so, the road was not open the year round in all weather until December 1956 when the Jawahar Tunnel (after Nehru) was completed. Today this road remains usable through the expenditure of large sums of money and through the constant attention of battalions of



Goatherd's Wife

semi-military workers of the Border Roads Force of the Border Roads Commission--an autonomous organization under the direct command of the Cabinet Secretariat. Since 1960, the capacity of the Banihal road has been nearly doubled, observers here believe. And in addition, the Indian Government is increasingly using aircraft to supply forward areas such as Leh, for supply by aircraft is both faster and cheaper--at least for compact cargoes. A Member of Parliament told me the other day that a bag of cement takes from four days to three weeks to go from Delhi to Leh by truck and costs about $13 per bag. In contrast, the flight takes only several hours and the cost of a bag of cement when flown is about $11.

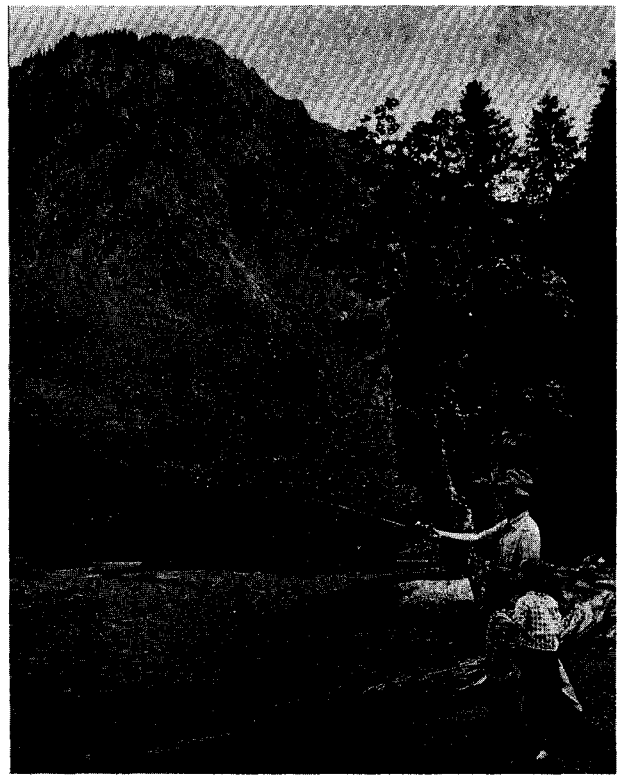
An American road engineer characterized India's border road situation--the Banihal road, the road from Srinagar to Leh, and the roads in the North East Frontier Agency--as "the most difficult and expensive road construction in the world, bar none." Not only does nature daily threaten the road and normal civil commerce as well as military transport, but in time of hostilities the road would also be very vulnerable to air attack, according to military authorities here. A few bombs high above the road could cause landslides that would take days to clear away. The Banihal road is not a bad road, and, considering the terrain it negotiates, it is a remarkably good road. Yet one must realize that this link between India and Kashmir is uncomfortably frail.

Having encountered very little traffic (fortunately, the only military convoy had pulled off the road near Banihal village), Atmar and I reached the tunnel, drove through it, and saw Kashmir proper below us. The Vale of Kashmir, celebrated by just about everybody, stretched northwestwards under a flank of jagged mountains--a sight comparable only to the wonder of looking down on the Bekaa valley after having crossed the arid Lebanon. Young rice painted the Vale brilliant green and Lombardy poplars marched through it, slim as marble columns. As we came closer to the valley floor, we could see the mountains reflected in the water of the paddy fields. We could hear the water rushing in the irrigation canals beside the road. Because it was evening, men were coming from the fields to the road, although some continued bent-backed over their transplanting. The women we passed had earrings made of clusters of tiny silver bells, and some of them smiled at us. The children saluted and shouted "Salaam." On dry mounds above the paddies, villages clustered under the deep shade of plane trees. And in the villages close beside the road we could see shopkeepers seated cross-legged among their wares puffing the ever-present hookah and men with whisks keeping the flies off hanging haunches of meat.

Home

At Khanabal, where the road forked left to Srinagar, we turned right up the Lidder Valley toward Pahalgam, passing on the way Ganesh's rock, which flowed blood when Alexander the Great smote it with his sword. This so impressed Alexander that he turned back from his journey to Amarnath where he intended to desecrate the cave of Shiva, Ganesh's father. We reached Pahalgam at sunset. Nancy, the

Jacksons, and Susila had their tents in a meadow from which timbered slopes led to rock peaks and pale pink snowfields. It was like a tiny Jackson's Hole with the Tetons hanging above. And against the chill wind sliding down the valley they gave us greetings and hot toddies.



Rainbow or Brown?

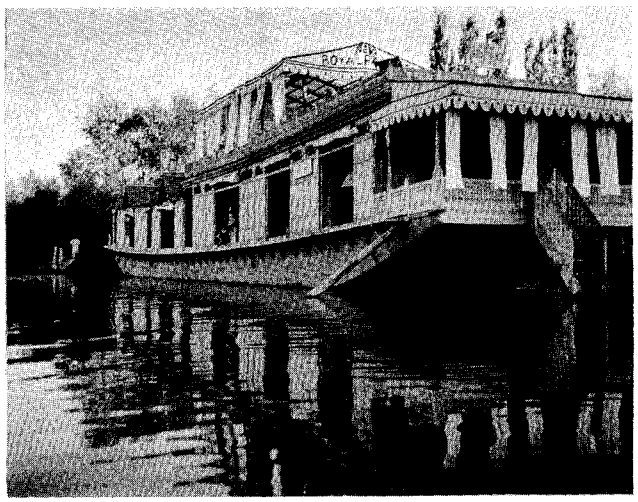
There are distinct advantages to sending one's wife on holiday early. By the time Atmar and I joined the group, camp life was well organized, the best treks had been scouted, and the most reliable pony-men lined up. All we had to do was follow along. One day we walked through woods and pastures and watched gray wagtails catch bugs along a glacial river. One day we (baby, ayah, and all) went fishing. The fish were there, but I only caught three; two we fried for lunch. Another day the whole encampment (minus Jackson and Austin babies) rode five hours to a high alp for a picnic. The ponies managed the steep climb with amazing stamina, even considering that we walked the worst pitches. One afternoon I drove sixty miles for repairs to tire punctures made by nails from the shoes of Gujar herdsmen--hawk-faced nomads who take their sheep and goats from valley to high pastures for the summer. The reason for the trip: Hindustan Motors equip their cars with tubeless tires even though few garages can fix them. So I had to find a place where I could buy tubes and have them put in the tires. That evening and another time, Nancy and I went to a goatherds' bistro to eat with our fingers Kashmiri spinach and mutton curry--delicious sauce, leathery meat--on heaps of rice. Dessert was local greengages and plums and spiced tea.

Gujar Herdsmen's Hut

Our greatest adventure came at night. Speaking urgently at our tent flap, Peter Jackson roused us from our blankets to say they'd been robbed. Had we lost anything? We hadn't except, we later found, for Nancy's purse, inadvertently left at the Jackson's during dinner that evening. Peter went to the village and routed out the police who soon arrived,

noisily, bearing lanterns. The affair turned out better than we could have hoped. Because Peter had discovered the thieves and yelled at them, they ran, jettisoning most of the loot in flight. The next morning, thanks largely to the sharp eyes of the kids, everything was recovered barring Nancy's cash and Peter's transistor radio. Indicative of local sentiment, the pony-men and many villagers said that they thought the police had had a hand in the robbery.

Several days later the Rams and the Jacksons had to leave for home. Then came our turn, and we packed up and drove to Srinagar. On the way we noticed for the first time the unique architecture of the Vale's mosques. There were no onion-domes, or minarets, or triple arches. The lower story of the mosques was a simple square or rectangle with ordinary doors. The roofs had two or three steps, like Buddhist pagodas, and rising from each roof-peak was a spire like that on a New England Congregational Church.



The New Royal Palace

The contrast between the ruggedness of Pahalgam's scenery and the serenity of Negean Lake was as great as that between our tents—by no means crude—and our houseboat. Panelled in pine and spruce, Persian carpets on the floors, with living room, dining room and two bedrooms, with fully equipped bathrooms, and with cutlery shining on a white tablecloth, it was ease itself. Cost for six Austins, plus ayah, food included, $16 a day—plus a dollar extra for the shikara, or water-taxi to ferry us to shore.

We stayed on the lake a day and a half, resting and swimming and spending some time in the byways of Srinagar—result: copper pots. On 9 July we left for home, arriving here late the next night. Ganesh now sits, surrounded by hibiscus, on a piece of Pahalgam driftwood. And we hope that in his second aspect he will help us here. For in addition to being Lord of Obstacles, he is very interested in literary and educational activities and he is the patron of grammarians, of manuscripts, and of books.

Yours sincerely,

Nancy and Red Austin

Nancy and Granville Austin

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