

AN AMERICAN RAILWAY ENTHUSIAST'S INTRO TO INDIA (KOLKATA AND MORE)

Preface

While my travels have taken me to most continents (Antarctica excepted), I had never been to the Indian sub-continent. Having passed up a few opportunities in the past couple of decades, I wanted to add this part of the world to my world traveler, j.g., C.V. Accordingly when my friend Lars Richter, tramway enthusiast *extraordinaire* from Hamburg, advised by email that he was seeking expressions of interest for a tram outing in the Indian city of Kolkata (Calcutta), the only city on the sub-continent still having a tramway system, I seized the opportunity and told Lars that I would definitely be interested. Enough additional enthusiasts felt as I did to make it viable for Lars to arrange the charters and access permits in Kolkata. The fact that the Kolkata program was share the expense with no organizer fee made it an attractive proposition financially. However, since my interests, while including trams, go beyond them, I wanted to see some of the “main line” railway operations in India. I knew that I was at least a decade too late to see or ride behind any main line steam-hauled trains, but nonetheless Indian railways would surely be something different from those in the Americas and Europe! With this in mind I put together an itinerary which would start with Lars' Kolkata tram bash and include as much train riding as I could fit into the days of vacation I had available, including a few of the “toy trains”-- the narrow gauge “hill railways”-- for variety. The tenth of February 2011 found me off on my adventure.

Days 1-2 (10-11 Feb)—Angola to Kolkata

The beginning of my Great Indian Adventure was humble enough—the very familiar trek up Delaware Rt. 1 and I-95 to Philadelphia International Airport (PHL). Robyn had been kind enough to offer to drive me to the airport (and pick me up on the way home—more on that later!) and I took her up on it. This saved me the extra time involved in the usual method of attaining PHL (driving to the New Castle County Airport (ILG), parking in their free lot, taking a DART Rt. 22 or 25 bus to the Wilmington railway station, a SEPTA train to University City, and another SEPTA train to the airport). The later departure was very welcome as I had worked until the night before and still had a number of things to do before the trip. In any event, we got away within fifteen minutes of my planned departure and arrived at PHL in good time.

I had carefully exhumed my Lufthansa E-ticket from my gear and placed it on the console of Robyn's car. In gathering up my gear and bidding Robyn goodbye, I neglected to retrieve it. No big deal, I thought, and as far as Lufthansa was concerned, I was right. Later this was to be a minor problem-----

The Shoe and Toothgel police posed no obstacles and did not even challenge or inspect my eyewash, as they often do. I caught up on some reading during the wait for Lufthansa to load for the 18:10 departure for Frankfurt. We were out of the gate on time and with only a minor ground hold, were making good time on the transAtlantic flight (LH 427). Dinner was to the usual Lufthansa standard—a cut above our domestic airlines' fare, but definitely not gourmet. Adult beverages were included at no extra charge—good on you, Lufthansa. Doss soon came and very soon, it seemed, I awoke as cabin lights were lit for the continental (shouldn't that be inter-continental?) breakfast serving.

Day 2 (11 Feb.)--en route Frankfurt, Frankfurt, and en route Kolkata

We were early into the Frankfurt control area but had to go around in circles for a while and then landed out in airplane purgatory, with a connecting bus trip to the terminal. Even with all that, I was into the terminal fairly close to the advertised. This left me with over three hours to kill until boarding for the Lufthansa flight to Kolkata.

Lufthansa's Senator Lounge beckoned, and was glad to welcome me through the medium of my Star Gold card. I spent a pleasant two hours or so there, enjoying the complimentary food and drink. About an hour before flight (LH 750) time I headed for the departure gate, and well that I did leave early, as to my surprise being a resident of the transit area was not sufficient—I had to traverse the Deutsch Shoe and Toothpaste Police blockade, which was much more thorough than that at PHL, although they did not confiscate anything. With fifteen minutes or so before boarding began, I arrived at the gate to find Lars, Dan Joseph of Chicago (my roommate for the Kolkata doings), and about eight others for our Kolkata venture awaiting. We had scant time for chit-chat before boarding; again my Star Gold card got me almost to the head of the line and I got settled in for another long airplane ride. In a few moments the others boarded; Dan took a seat across the aisle from me and we engaged in some discussion before I drifted off to alternately reading and dozing. Lufthansa again provided meal service above US standard, but certainly not exceptional.



Lufthansa's Finest

Courtesy Dan Joseph

Day 3 (12 Feb.)--Kolkata

LH 750 must have arrived more or less on time at Kolkata (scheduled for 00:50), as I don't recall any chatter about late or earliness. Bag delivery was another matter—it seemed a bit slow, but perhaps it was the hour! In any event all did arrive, and our small group made our way through immigration and customs with no glitches. Lars had arranged with the Oberoi Grand Hotel to send a micro-bus to fetch us, so we hastened out to the bus loading area without taking time to purchase any rupees, an omission that would be remedied later at the Oberoi. The bus ride into Kolkata took rather longer than I would have expected, over mostly local roads and streets which paralleled or

crossed several tram lines—an encouraging welcome to the city! Check in at the Oberoi was painless and the immediate order of business was for some much needed doss—derancing could wait til later.

Lars had nominated a 10:30 meeting time in the Oberoi lobby for those wishing to partake of a group exploration of some of the Kolkata tram lines (the chartered trams not being available until Monday), so with allowance for derance, getting organized for a day of fotting, and partaking of the extensive breakfast buffet included in the price of staying at the Oberoi, it was a short night (or I should say morning) in the horizontal position. However, at least most of us were up for it, and shortly after the appointed hour (and with time to obtain a small supply of rupees from the hotel), we braved the sidewalks and streets of Kolkata on foot. Immediately after exiting the tranquil gated grounds of the Oberoi, we encountered a multitude of sidewalk vendors selling all manner of items, all of which required haggling to purchase, and most of which were very vocal in promoting their wares. It was quite congested and made keeping up with the group difficult. Our immediate destination was the Esplanade, purported to be a central park, only a block or so from the Oberoi. It was the principal tram terminus in center city Kolkata. Reference to the older tram track map of the Calcutta Tramways Co. (owned by the city since 1967, but still using the old name and CTC initials) showed a complex network of loops, sidings, and the like. After braving the very busy major thoroughfare between the hotel and the Esplanade, we attained the “park.” It showed definite signs of having been both a park and a major tram terminus in days of yore, but not today! It was quite run down, very dirty and dusty, with the pungent odor of urine pervading the air from all the open air *pissoirs*, official and otherwise. Much of the former layout of tram trackage was either gone or covered with dirt, some with or without overhead.



Typical Esplanade scene. Note tram overhead in right background.

Obviously less busy than in its glory days, Esplanade still was a good place to get an introduction to Kolkata trams. That intro was spiced by spotting works car RS 3, a sprinkler, on spot in the “park.” A number of the members of the group took the opportunity not only to fot the sprinkler, but to have themselves fotted hanging out in or on it!



RS-3 in the Esplanade

After soaking up the ambiance (?) of Esplanade for a goodly while, we decided to walk the few city blocks to the other major center city tram terminus, BBD Bagh. This was not quite as perilous a trip as crossing the major thoroughfares to reach Esplanade, and as we followed the tram line, there were opportunities for fotting en route. BBD Bagh has also been scaled down from yesteryear, with the large turning circle shown on older maps replaced by a smaller, but still functional, version. We again spent some time exploring this facility, which fronts a lake and has some neat old (presumably government) buildings across it as backdrop.



BBD Bagh Scene—Note tram in background on turning loop

Having had our fill of investigating BBD Bagh, we boarded an outbound Rt. 2 car for our first actual Kolkata tram ride! The line out to Belgatchia is all street running, some of it through very congested, narrow streets. It is certainly not a candidate for Steffee's Speed Survey! On its outer end it does have some less congested streets in which to run, Belgatchia loop is actually around a small carbarn, but unlike some loops which we encountered later in our Kolkata travels, one may not ride it, all pax being required to alight at the outbound entrance to the loop. Lars made an attempt to gain entrance to the facility by brandishing the charter agreement, which granted access to all depots and workshops. Unfortunately, the ever-alert security guard noticed that the dates on the agreement were Monday-Tuesday-Wednesday, and forthwith barred our entry. The whole depot area was festooned with Communist flags and banners, a harbinger of tomorrow's doings.

After consoling ourselves with soft drinks and fots from outside the carbarn, we boarded a return car to BBD Bagh, then retraced our walk back to Esplanade. Lars knew that buses left from the bus terminal at Esplanade for Behala (through tram service thereto having been axed a few years earlier). Our goal was to see if the isolated Behala-Joka tram, which is the outer end of the former through route, was still in operation. Rumours had spread that it was on its last legs, with only two operational trams. We hoped for the best, but feared this trip might be in vain. Having found a lane with signage for Behala, we boarded a coach and headed south. Along the way we saw numerous remnants of the former tram line, but it was quite clear that it was gone for good, as much had been removed or paved over. As the coach proceeded south, what had been a reasonably comfortably filled vehicle became totally wedged with normals. I wound up with a young (very young) Indian lass on my lap for a good bit of the journey. Finally we reached Behala, and were happy to see both center of the road track and overhead. We alit (thanks, Jack May, for that term!!)

and walked back to where the track left the main street for a loop in very narrow and quite congested local streets. Behold! There was a tram in the loop. A quick fot and I and one other from the group were on the car, only to discover after we got under way that we were the only ones of the group on board. We reasoned the rest would be along soon, and rode on out to Joka. Along the way we crossed four inbound trams, so reckoned there were at least five operable on this shuttle, contrary to previous pessimistic news.



Behala Loop

At Joka we discovered a sixth tram laid up in the cripple track, which is a section of never-implemented double track presumably originally intended to go further south. This tram was presumably well-suited for the cripple track, as it was minus some truck (bogie) bearing covers and did not appear to have run for a while. Adjacent to the loop itself were two older, shorter trams, one of which was derelict and the other used as the office (residence?) of the security guard of the premises. Coming off the loop is a trailing point switch leading to a short spur with a totally open to the elements pit, which appeared to be the only maintenance facility of any sort on this orphan route. Having completed our investigations we went back out to the street as dusk was descending and were rewarded with the approach of an outbound tram, which contained the remainder of the cranks whom we had left behind at Behala. Near the entrance to the loop we noticed a large billboard-type sign announcing the planned extension of the Metro to (or through?) Joka.



Joka Loop with two dumped trams in its center

After allowing the balance of the group time to explore the wonders (?) of Joka, we all boarded the next inbound tram and returned to Behala under cover of darkness. Getting a coach back to Esplanade proved to be a bit more difficult than the process on our way down. Coach stops were not marked, and it was difficult to tell which ones were destined to Esplanade, or by it. Finally we surmounted this puzzle and boarded an only moderately wedged coach—only moderately inasmuch as we were all able to board, but none of us could sit. The ride back seemed a bit faster, though, and soon enough we were back at Esplanade and into the palatial Oberoi Grand.

Following a quick derance and change of clothes I joined Lars and the group in the lobby. Dan declined to join us for dinner, a declination which I found would be his almost universal custom throughout our stay in Kolkata. I'm not sure what he survived on, beyond the bountiful breakfasts at the Oberoi! I was up for exploring local Indian restaurants, but Lars was set on sampling the Thai restaurant in the Oberoi. Thai food I can get in profusion at home, so this was not my first choice, but I must admit it was very, very good, albeit with a price tag to match the general opulence of the Oberoi (especially after the price of after dinner Courvoisier was added to it!) Sleep came easily this night.

Day 4 (13 Feb)--Kolkata

After another sumptuous breakfast at the Oberoi buffet, our objective was to explore the closed southern routes and make an assessment of whether reopening appeared likely; mixed conjectures on this had been received by various group members. A subsidiary goal was to see if we could access any of the carbarns en route. So, once more braving the erratic Indian traffic on the multi-

lane streets between the Oberoi and Esplanade (not to mention dodging the sidewalk vendors), we walked over to the tram loop. It being Sunday, tram traffic was rather more sparse than that which we had encountered the day before, but in good time a Rt. 25 tram appeared and we boarded. This route is also plagued with traversing congested streets whilst wending its way out of center city Kolkata. At Nonapukur workshops (which we did not try to access inasmuch as we were going there as first order of business the next day) the tracks enter the center of broad Syed Amir Ali Avenue on what must at one time have been C/R PRW, but is now paved. There are no safety islands in this stretch, which makes boarding and alighting a bit dodgy, but at least the cars do move more freely (most of the time). We rode as far as Park Circus loop and carhouse, but had no luck in entering this facility. On to Gariahat carbarn and loop, now the southern end of Rts. 25 and 26. Lars again brandished his official letter, but again to no avail. We were able to snap a few quick shots whilst this diversion was underway, but could go no further than the entrance to the facility. An observation both en route to Gariahat and whilst there which was rather ominous was the large number of trucks and other conveyances filled to capacity with Communist flag waving folks and loud loudspeakers blaring away. We were later to discover what this phenomenon was all about!



Outbound Rt 25 Tram at Esplanade



Ever-vigilant Security Guard on the job at Gariahat Carhouse, barring our entry

From Gariahat it is a short walk to the former junction with the line to Ballygunge, so we walked. The site of the junction is now under an overcrossing for Gariahat Road; we first went up on it and ascertained that the rails for the east-west line were still *in situ*. From there another short walk took us to Ballygunge Loop. Here we found the track mostly intact, but partially buried, with wire down for a good portion of it. Seemingly it could be restored to service with fairly modest effort.



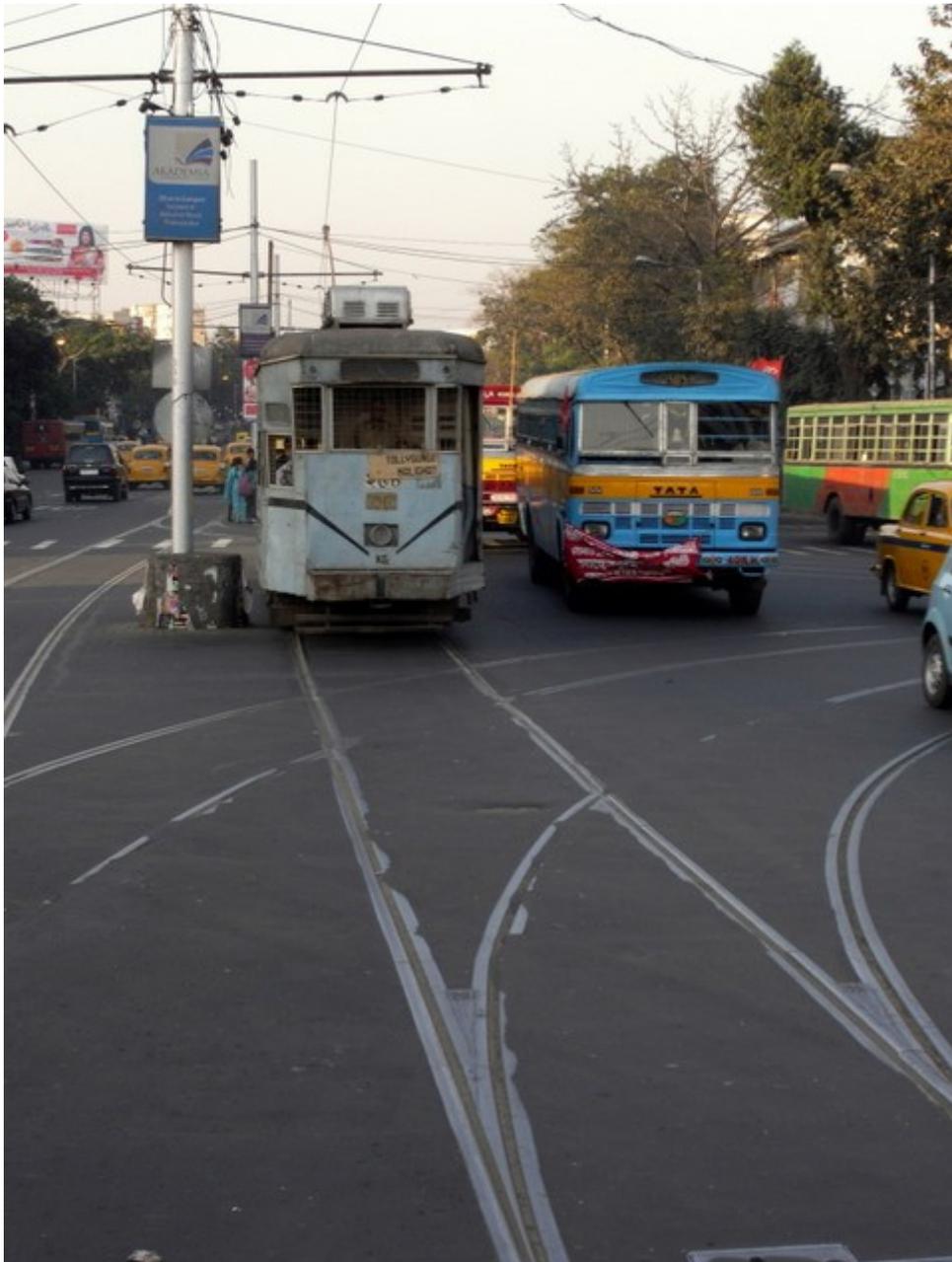
Remains of Ballygunge Loop; Intrepid Abandoned Tram Lines Explorers on the job

Next activity was a stop at an air conditioned store for gift purchases by some. Then it was on to our next destination, Kalighat carbarn. This, we assumed, would be, if still extant, a dead facility as we were under the impression that all tram activity there had ceased and that indeed it was cut off from access to the rest of the system. The distance being rather longer than those we had just hoofed, we hired a fleet of “Tok-Toks,” the ubiquitous motorized trikes that are a fixture of all Indian cities, to take us to the the Kalighat Metro station, near the former tram junction of Rash Behani Avenue (the line to Ballygunge) and S.P. Mukharji Road (the Kalighat-Tollygunge line). We fortified ourselves with soft drinks from a street vendor near the Metro entrance and walked up toward Kalighat barn. Whilst surveying it from the street, we were astonished to hear one of the group call out “tram coming!” Sure enough, a northbound tram appeared in the center of the wide street and turned into the car house loop. Presently it appeared at the south entrance to the barn. Appropriate enquiries were made and we were thrilled to discover that a shuttle operation was in effect between Kalighat and Tollygunge car houses!



Tollygunge Shuttle leaving Kalighat—note wire gone on route to north of Kalighat

With this unexpected good news, the obvious thing was to have ourselves a ride down to Tollygunge Depot and return, and that's exactly what we did. The line is another of those former C/R PRW deals where the track bed has been paved over, making the trams subject to auto traffic and causing a real hazard for intending and alighting passengers. The run down to (and returning from) Tollygunge was unlike other tram and bus lines in Kolkata—it had very sparse patronage. It parallels the Metro and that no doubt explains the absence of through passengers. Tollygunge car house appeared moribund—as well it might, being cut off from access to the rest of the system and presently needing to serve only the few cars on the shuttle to Kalighat—which no doubt claims its share of the meager number of trams and motormen needed for the shuttle. Notwithstanding this, “standard” security arrangements were in effect at Tollygunge and we could only photograph through the entry gates. We did get to ride the outbound tram through the facility; it lays over just short of the southern gate to it.



Southbound Tollygunge shuttle and competition at junction of former Ballygunge line

In due course we boarded the return tram to Kalighat and returned thence. Whilst the others in the group did some shopping I took a walk north along S.P. Mukharji Road from the car house to the point where the car line turned left (northbound) onto Hazra Road. This appeared to be but a short distance on the maps, but turned out to be quite a hike. Importantly, the overhead was down from just north of the car house to as far as I could see west on Hazra Road. There were also patches of paved over track. We had heard that this route might be reinstated “within months,” but the partial dismantling of the infrastructure plus the presence of the Metro on the south leg make this hope rather distant, I would opine.

After I rejoined the group, we walked to the Kalighat Metro Station and boarded a northbound train. In short order we found why trams had stopped running into Esplanade. The Metro was wedged. Supposedly over a million folks attended the Communist rally in the Esplanade area! As we neared Esplanade Metro station, we tried to penetrate the wedged crowd to exit. We were wholly unsuccessful in this effort as the surge of boarding patrons pushed us back into the car. We had to ride past our stop to the next one north, where we were able to alight and ride the next southbound

Metro to Esplanade and then retire to the Oberoi. Metro trains were only running every 15 minutes, which struck me as strange in view of the crowd at the rally. I wrote it off to Indian bureaucracy: “The Sunday schedule says 15 minute headways, so that is what it shall be!” Others had heard that the signalling will permit only this frequency. This, however, sounded bogus—who would design a Metro with such infrequent service? I still think it was inflexible Indian ways.

After a much-needed derance and change of clothes, I joined a number of the group for a walk down to the “High Street” of Kolkata and a fine Indian dinner at a restaurant claiming to be a “Barbeque” restaurant. The reality was that most of this place was devoted to the purveying of Chinese cuisine; only a small and cramped area on the upper floor served the national fare. However, both it and the accompanying local cereal beverages were quite good. Back to the Oberoi after dinner for a couple of large bottles of the very good local “Black Label” beer, then to the room to rest up for the big day on Monday—our first chartered tram.

Day 5—(14 Feb.) Kolkata



The group “patiently” waiting outside Gate 4 for admittance to the Hallowed Hall

Breakfast was again in the Oberoi's ample buffet, after which we made our way to Esplanade to await an outbound Rt. 25 tram. This carried us to the vicinity of the Nonapukur Workshops of the CTC. After locating the appropriate (side) entrance, gate No.4, we had a “hurry up and wait” moment whilst various functionaries peered at our credentials and passed them on “up the line.” Finally someone with sufficient authority blessed them, and we were admitted to the great inner sanctum of Nonapukur. Once in, we were given free rein to explore its innards, and a great mass of

old style technology, junk, locals doing domestic chores, and some repair work actually being carried out it was! I have never seen anything quite like it, even in the former Eastern Bloc countries nor in the railway workshops of the poorer South American countries. Kadem shops of the Hedjaz Railway outside Damascus, Syria, comes close in antiquity of equipment, but Kadem was cleaner and better organized. It truly was an experience! We did get to see the construction department, where new bodies were being hand made and fitted to old mechanicals. The new-style bodies employ a lot of glass but are not air conditioned and are said to be disliked by the locals because of the heat produced by the effect of sunlight coming through all that glass. I guess enough sun penetrates the air pollution hovering over Kolkata to have some warming effect!



Rebodying work in progress at Nonapakur Workshops



Interior of Nonapukur Workshops

A reasonable time was allotted for our shop tour, after which our chartered car made its appearance. This was car 125, a rebodied single-trucker. It is used only for charter service, and that's well, as entry and exit are difficult and capacity is low, although perfectly adequate for our small group. The exterior of the car is adorned with painted-on flying birds of some unknown species. Because of the great prevalence of crows in Kolkata, I dubbed it the "Flying Crow," which is also a play on words on one of my favorite US train names, the "Flying Crow" of the Kansas City Southern.

The Flying Crow first took us south to Park Circus car house, to which we had tried but failed to gain admittance on Sunday. On this day, however, our official magic admittance papers, carrying the current date as an access-authorized one, worked their magic and we had free range of the facility. This is a rather small station and from a tram standpoint is being made even smaller by the paving over of its eastern side, an operation being carried out entirely by hand!

Leaving Park Circus, we journeyed south on the Rt. 25 line to its end at Gariahat car house. Again the magic document's powers triumphed over the dubious security guard, and we gained access to see what we were not permitted to see the day before. Nothing really unusual here, but it was gratifying to note that trams were running, which had not been the situation on our previous day's visit to the place.

Next in store was one of the longest tram rides possible in Kolkata, from Gariahat to Bidhan Nagar, in the northeast section of Kolkata. This was over a combination of Rts. 25 and 17. En route we stopped on an overpass for a photo shoot. Bidhan Nagar is not a car house but rather an elongated turning circle. This line, as I understand it, is the most recent tram line opened in Kolkata, being

perhaps only thirty or so years old. I did not detect any particular indices of modern tramway practice on this line. Perhaps CTC just wanted it to blend in with their older lines.



The “Flying Crow” outbound on Bidhan Nagar line



Bidhan Nagar loop

Our next stop was Rajabazaar car house, just north of Sealdah Indian Railways station, the main station for Kolkata east of the Hooghly River. We saw Sealdah from our chartered tram, but I never got the chance to visit it. Rajabazaar car house, which we had passed going north to Bidhan Nagar, seemed to me to be the largest car house we had visited so far, at least in terms of roads. It also held an item of extreme interest, a works car train, nicely lined up for photographing.



Works Car train at Rajabazaar

After mass expenditure of electrons and/or celluloid film, we left and headed north again, but this time took the straight track where Rt. 17 veers off to the northeast toward Bidhan Nagar. There had been some question as to whether this section of track, on the tongue-twistingly-named Acharya Profullya Chandra Road, was operable—both recent maps showed it out of service. But in service it was and traverse it we did, rejoining our previously-traveled Rt. 2 just north of Shyambazar. This junction, previously a four-way one, had been reduced to a three-way meeting point. The line to the north, or straight through the intersection from the way we had come, was clearly out of service, with track either pulled out or paved over. So we retraced our tracks northeast to Belgatchia car house, where again the magic document worked its powers. Following an interlude for the usual interior inspections and photography, we followed Rt. 2 back through BBD Bagh, stopping briefly for photos there, to Esplanade and the end of our tram day. Dinner was again on the “High Street” at a different restaurant with a meal almost as good as the day before's.

Day 6—(15 Feb.)--Kolkata

Tuesday was originally to have been two 3 ½ hour charters, but because of the charter fare structure, it turned out to be one full day. We started, after the now-accustomed breakfast at the Oberoi, in Esplanade, rather than having to go out to Nonapukur to board our tram. This turned out to be No. 281, one of the re-bodied “Kolkata Standard” cars with the glass extending into the roof structure. Our main objective today was the Kidderpore line, the sole survivor (save for the Behala-Joka shuttle) of several which had until recent years headed southwest from Esplanade. It is also the only Kolkata line with any appreciable private right of way, on which we made several photo stops in our outbound trek. This line (Rt. 36) ends, appropriately enough, at the Kidderpore car barn, a smallish facility a bit south of the former junction with the lines to Behala/Joka, Kalighat, Ballygunge, and Tollygunge. The track at the junction toward these points looked equally forlorn as that part of it I had observed on Sunday near Kalighat, seemingly belying the statements by CTC

employees that the line to Kalighat, Tollygunge, and Ballygunge would be reopened “in a few months.” I suppose stranger things have happened, but I doubt it! The line from Mominpore, the junction between the Behala and Kalighat lines, south to Behala is definitely gone for good, as are all other lines which once ran south from Esplanade into this territory.



Chartered tram 281 crosses service tram on Rt.36-Kidderpore



281 at the relatively small Kidderpore carhouse

Back on 281 at Kidderpore, we retraced our route along Rt. 36 to Esplanade and from there made another trip to Belgatchia. The reason for this was not and is not clear to me; we needed to be going south on Bidhan Sarani in order to access M. G. Road, but it seemed to me that we could have saved time by turning at Shyambazar loop, which we passed. Whatever, in due course we arrived southbound at M.G. Road and veered off to the west to access one of the more interesting operations on current-day CTC. This is the wye operation on route 26 in the shadow and madness of the Howrah Bridge. This is the only regularly-used wye on the system, and cars are actually expeditiously turned here by judicious use of CTC ground men to assist in the process. The wye is the surviving remnant of several other car lines which once called on this spot, including those which crossed the Hooghly River to terminate at the huge Howrah Indian Railways station, said to be the largest terminal in Asia. All signs of these are gone. Prior to the early 1970s there was also a small network of tram lines on the west side of the Hooghly as well, focused on Howrah Station.



Rt 26 tram backing through wye at Howrah bridge (background)

Once we had satiated on action at this unique layout, we proceeded toward BBD Bagh, and presumably back to Esplanade. However, Dan Joseph wanted to purchase some tea as gift items, and as there was a “tea sellers row” just before BBD Bagh, we alighted there, made Dan's purchases, and walked back to the Oberoi as the afternoon came to a close. Dinner was again at an Indian restaurant on the “High Street” called the “Kwality” but I cannot recall that it was either bad or good “kwality.” It obviously was not exceptional in either direction. Returning to the Oberoi for my last night there, I encountered the duty manager, who upon learning of my plans for departure the next day, insisted that the hotel lay on a car for me to go to Howrah Station. Feeling this might be a better way than cabbing it, I accepted the offer and retired to the lounge for a couple more Black Labels before bedtime.

Day 7 (16 Feb.)--Kolkata to Bhubaneswar

Wednesday was supposed to have been a day for visits to the Metro workshops and those of the suburban (electrified) railway network of INR. In view of my lesser interest in these activities, I had made plans to “escape” after the Metro visit. Events played out differently. Neither of these inspection visits materialized, and because of the aforementioned issue with the tram charter tariffs, Lars elected to lay on another tram charter for Wednesday. Had I known this I would have arranged my INR jaunts differently, but the die had been cast, and as I discovered, trying to change booked reservations is virtually impossible as all reserved space is normally spoken for—I did not care to ride any long distances in wedged INR second class! So I stuck to my original schedule, which called for a 13:35 departure from Howrah station.

The principal track not covered by the charters to this point was the northern end of the most western of the three remaining north-south trunks in “center city” Kolkata, along Rabindra Sarani. To Baghbazar and Galif Street loops. While trying to take a service car all the way north and back would have been dodgy on time, I figured I could use the Metro to make the trip more reliable and save considerable time. The Shyambazar Metro station appeared, on the map, to be very close to the Galif Street terminus. So, after a final and leisurely last breakfast in the Oberoi buffet, I packed so as to have everything in readiness for my return from my individual adventure, and set out for the Metro. Although it was fairly wedged at this hour, which by rights should have been off peak, I got on and made an uneventful journey to that station.

Maps can be deceiving! The distance from the Metro to the car line was VERY much greater than I had anticipated, and the east-west street which I used for the walk joined the tramway at a point much further south than Galif Street, in fact much further south than Baghbazar loop! Cheers then, cartographer! If walking is good exercise, I surely got mine that morning! Eventually I came upon Baghbazar loop, fotted #295 on Rt. 8's end point there, and hiked on to Galiff Street loop.



Rt 12/7 tram #619 taking spot time at Galiff Street Loop



Interior of Tram #619

Here I found a waiting #619, which in due course departed and took me south to Aurobinda Sarani, which was the extremity of my prior riding on Rabindra Sarani. I got off here and walked along Aurobinda Sarani until I encountered the Metro station (Sova Bazar) thereupon. This walk was much shorter than the prior east-west hike—it appears the Metro takes a big curve to the northeast between this station and Shyambazar station. A southbound Metro whisked me back to Esplanade in good time—I even had time for a quick cleanup and some reading before my arranged car was due.



Last look at Kolkata trams—Rt 8 Southbound at junction with Belgatchia line

The hotel-arranged car turned out to be an SUV, and it arrived late, but not so late as to cause me great concern nor to make transit to Howrah station a close call, as I had allowed more than ample time for the trip, and expected to explore the station before my train's departure. Things did not work out that way. After a somewhat roundabout journey, presumably to utilize less congested streets, we arrived at Howrah, where the driver advised I must pay the car entry fee. My request to be discharged right in front of the station was declined with a “not possible” remark. Howrah has a rather different arrangement where autos can drive between sets of platforms to let passengers off trackside. I was vaguely aware of this from prior reading so I did not protest too much. When we arrived at the parking place closest to where the driver had ascertained (or tried to) my train would depart, I again tried to depart his vehicle. This he insisted I not do, saying that his instructions were to see me onto the train with my baggage and that he would be fired if he did not comply. So I sat in air conditioned comfort in the SUV and waited. It got closer and closer to train time, and there were no crowds of people on the supposedly appointed platform. My “train sense” told me something was awry. I insisted he either reconfirm the platform or let me out to find out myself. At this he lurched into action and discovered that indeed he had been given the wrong information (or more likely, misinterpreted it). We had to hurry to the headhouse, find the right platform, and scurry down it to the waiting train, which was loading. I found my car and was quite glad to be rid of this well-meaning but less than competent fellow!

INR train 12073 was, as most INR intercity trains are, a long one. What surprised me was its composition. As this was a (supposedly) premier daytime express, I thought it would have a good complement of reserved coaching stock, or perhaps would be entirely composed of same. *Au contraire!* Almost all of the train was unreserved second class non-AC coaches of various types,

all wedged. My reserved seat AC coach, while not the top of the line class (none on this train), was comfortable enough with reclining seats and adequate leg room. It was, though, rather shabby inside and many windows were either cracked or fogged. Not a good first impression! It reminded me somewhat of first class coaches in the last days of Mexican passenger trains (I know, there are a handful left—they are exceptions). Notwithstanding the less than pristine nature of the conveyance, it got me to Bhubaneswar more or less on time. A tok-tok ride to my hotel cost a negotiated 20 rupees, quite a bit less than the originally demanded price of four Euros! The Arya Palace was acceptable, certainly not to Germanic standards of cleanness, but equal perhaps to a lower class American motel. A great convenience was having a restaurant in the basement, where I obtained an unmemorable supper.

Day 8 (17 Feb.)--Bhubaneswar (BBS) to Puri and en route to Koraput

Breakfast was included in the price of the Arya Palace, so I partook. It was a buffet, but a far cry from the opulent one at the Oberoi! There was a small choice of native dishes, mostly evil looking. I found something that appeared to be garbanzo beans on steroids—garbanzos writ large—and made do with them and some tea. Not my idea of a tasty breakfast, but enough to stave off hunger pangs. My main train from BBS was not scheduled out til 19:35, so I had arranged a side trip to the seaside city of Puri. Puri is on the Bay of Bengal and is a bit of a resort for Indian people.

Tok-toks at the hotel were not in such great abundance as at the railway station, so my negotiating power was more limited. Nonetheless, I bargained a fare of 30 rupees, an up charge of 50% from last night's ride—a major additional expense (of about 22 US cents). The left luggage at BBS was open and the luggage wallah assured me it would be open at my evening departure, so I stashed my large pack and went to Puri light. After a wait and some reading in the “upper class” air conditioned waiting room, I ventured out to the overbridge in good time for the Puri train, #18303. No train appeared, but soon an announcement came over the (omnipresent at Indian railway stations of any importance) loud speaker that the train would be 14 minutes late “Indian Railways regrets the inconvenience caused.” I was to hear this computer apology numerous times in the next few days! Indian railways, I discovered, do not run with the precision of the Swiss Federal Railway system! Moreover, 14 minutes tuned into a bit more than an hour. No real worries, though, as I had a three hour scheduled layover in Puri.

Train 18303 was similar to my train to BBS, mostly second class, non-AC, non-reserved, wedged coaches with a few (it may have been but one) AC first class reserved, in about the same condition as yesterday's ride from Howrah. The ride to Puri was mostly flat and uninspiring. So was Puri. I did have time for a walk to the beach, which was virtually unpopulated. There were a few hotels scattered here and there, but no open restaurants or bars. Overall, underwhelming! I started back to the station but a foot-powered (with pedals—not the feet-on-ground type I had seen in Kolkata) version of a tok-tok hove up and asked if I wanted a ride. I said “How much to the railway station?” and was given what seemed to be the standard “Four Euros” response. It was a fair distance so I offered 25 rupees and settled for 30. This was much better than the long walk in the sun, and the pedal cab took a different route, so I got to see more of “beautiful” Puri.



Beach at Puri on Bay of Bengal



Puri Station



Puri Station

Train 18304, the running mate to the one on which I had traveled to Puri, left more or less on time; I had returned to the station in time to poke around a bit and blast off a few fots when the ever-vigilant (NOT!) INR anti-camera police were not watching. By the time of my 17:25 arrival, having not eaten since my consumption of the mega-garbanzos at breakfast, I was quite hungry. The Lonely Planet guide book recommended a restaurant/bar combination in the Hotel Ricchi, which was visible from the forecourt of the BBS station, so I went there forthwith. I had just launched into a Kingfisher when—oops--the power went off. Candles and flashlights came out in quick, relatively organized order, giving rise to my conclusion that this was not a one-off occurrence! Fortunately I had ordered dinner before darkness descended in the bar, and pretty quickly it arrived and was good enough—or was I just hungry? Back at the station I reclaimed my luggage and at the appointed time boarded my “2 AC” sleeper on train 18447 for Koraput. I noted with some disgust that the window in my sleeping area was broken on the outside with the result that the unit was fogged almost to opaqueness. Not good for viewing this scenic route in the morning!

Here a note on Indian sleeping cars is in order. The most expensive, but still not expensive by Western standards, is 1 AC. These are cars, or parts of cars (some cars are composites) with rooms with doors and either four beds or two beds, the latter also called a coupe. It is luck of the draw if one gets assigned a bed in a room or a coupe—one cannot choose, one takes the assignment offered. The doors have interior locks. Not all trains offer 1 AC—18447 did not.

Next down the sleeper food chain is 2 AC. These cars have two beds, over and under,

longitudinally on one wall and an area with four beds on the other. There are no walls against the aisle, only curtains (shades of an old Pullman section sleeper!)

The lowest AC form of sleeper is 3 AC, which in essence is 2 AC with a middle bed in the cross-car bed section, providing six beds across and two longitudinally per unit, but without the privacy curtains. Space is similar to a 2nd class couchette in Europe.

Non-AC sleepers (FC) are First Class, which has the same facilities (minus the AC) as 1 AC. These are rare and are now mostly used as upper class accommodations on local day trains.

Last are the cars which make up the majority of sleepers on INR trains—SL. These are set up in sections like 3 AC, but, without the AC and with a different entry door arrangement. Many INR overnight will have numbers of SL cars in the double digits!

Day 9 (18 Feb.)--En Route to Koraput; Koraput to Visakhapatnam

My deviation to Koraput had been prompted by an email posting by a British gricer who extolled the scenery and motive power on the non-electrified line from Rayagada up the stiff grade ascending the “Eastern Ghat” to Koraput. Sure enough, I could tell that there were multitudinous tunnels—but just by the change in light coming in through the almost opaque window in my compartment. Since the car was totally wedged, there was no chance of securing a spot by a more transparent glass. Cheers then, INR! On top of this disappointment, a chest ailment was beginning to kick in, which did not add to my enjoyment of the trip. I had initially blamed this on Lars, who had a bad cold even leaving Deutschland, but later I learned it was a reaction to the strong antibiotic I was taking to ward off malaria.

Our train arrived Koraput more or less on time. I had not eaten since the night before, and by mid morning was in need of food. I had assumed there would be restaurants or at least food sellers at or near the station. Wrong! Nothing. Fortunately I had an ample supply of bottled water—but no food. Lesson learned—carry some non-perishable emergency rations. The growling stomach was not appeased by the almost two hour delay of my outbound train 58502.



INR heavy freight at Koraput

This was the only train of the day—other than its opposite number-- over the also mountainous and scenic line from Koraput to Visakhapatnam—but this one electrified. Once on the train I was able to assuage my hunger by purchasing a bag of unshelled peanuts from a roving vendor on the train—whose sole offering was peanuts! I had a reservation in First Class (FC) and I had settled into a sleeper (SL) which I assumed was what was on offer for FC. But on a trip looking for a loo with western toilet, I discovered that the car behind the one I had joined was the FC car—the compartmented sleeper downgraded to day service. I scored a compartment to myself and enjoyed this solitude for about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the trip, after which it filled up with normals.



INR Train #58502 south of Koraput

Arrival into Visakhapatnam was about an hour down, indicating a substantially padded schedule. This cut into my doss at the Hotel Akshaya, to which I had repaired by tok-tok immediately after arrival. Since I had to be back at the station in advance of scheduled 04:45 departure of the Coromandel Express, the premier train on the Kolkata-Chennai (formerly known as Madras) route, an 03:45 get-up was called for. I expected to walk to the station and started on this trek but a tok-tok hove up and took me there for a reasonable price. Having thus arrived a bit earlier than I expected, I was not amused to learn that the Coromandel Exprss was reported an hour late!

The Coromandel Express trip from Visakhapatnam was a long one, with a 17:15 scheduled arrival into Chennai. I had anticipated being able to do a bit of sightseeing on this daylight run. However, my booked lower in the 1AC sleeper turned out on the posted list to be an upper and the occupants of the two lowers were not inclined to sit up, so I spent most of the voyage in the horizontal position—no scenery. Lunch was available and I availed myself of a vegetarian meal, which was adequate. I should point out at this juncture that Indian trains do not have dining cars. Those with food service have either small reheating units in the sitting/sleeping cars or else carry a “pantry car” open only to staff, in which meals are prepared and then taken to the passengers.

The late-running Coromandel Express did not pose a problem in Chennai as I had a plus 3:45 on the schedule for my outbound #12671 Nilgiri Express. I got some Chinese food (imagine that!) for dinner in the station. My booked lower in another 1AC sleeper actually appeared as booked, and I had a comfortable ride to Mettupalaiyam, except for my chest congestion, which was getting worse.

Day 11 (20 Feb)--en route Chennai to Mettupalaiyam, to Ooty and back, and en route to Bengaluru

The Nilgiri Express hove into Mettupalaiyam on time and under cover of darkness at 06:15. I ventured out into the darkness and after walking the platform, could barely make out the outlines of an engine shed a few hundred feet from the one end. I could make out wisps of smoke rising from the shed area—a good sign that one of the travel agent's claims that steam power on the Ooty train was restricted to charters was in error. As the light came up I could make out three *dampfloks* in steam at the shed! Surely we would have one for our train, and by and by we did—one pulled the Ooty consist backward into the dual gauge station area. The platforms were wedged and there was a lot of confusion. I was among the confused, and managed to board the wrong car, only to find “my” seat occupied. At some point it was made clear to me that I was in the wrong car, and so I exited and found my FC compartment—at the very end of the consist. This would become the head end upon leaving as the train is propelled by the loco up to Coonoor. Unfortunately I had to ride backward, but I thought, oh well, I will be forward-facing on the way back. The ride up the rack section was interesting but not spectacular. The rack begins a short distance out of Mettupalaiyam and continues to Coonoor. A water and much-needed leg stretching stop was made at Kallar, another just before tunnel #3, and still another at Runnymede. At Coonoor the steamer was pulled off for servicing and we crossed a local, which terminated there. A small diesel, #6399, took over for the rest of the run up to Ooty.



Water stop for Ooty train

Ooty was a colonial haven for the British administrators and others who flocked to its cooler heights back in the day. The town itself, still quite a tourist attraction, is above the railway station by a goodly distance. I had planned to venture up to the town but two things dissuaded me: the left luggage at Ooty station was closed, as had been the one at Mettupalaiyam, and my chest issue had

left me with a severely depleted energy level. I surely did not wish to tote my gear up the hill and back! I vegged out at the station for the three hour fester. During this interlude I was greatly surprised to see our train depart on a very short turn. Further investigation showed it turned as a local for Coonoor, and there was no way it could return to Ooty in time for the return. Obviously the local we had crossed in Coonoor was going to come up the hill and form our departure for Mettupalaiyam—and that's what happened.



New and old style observation cars at Coonoor

The great downside of that, however, was that the consist, at least insofar as the FC compartment was concerned, was a modernized car, and had greatly inferior arrangements. No luggage racks—and that was a space problem. One bag had to go onto the seat—no place else to put it, which made it really tight. No open view to the track—a tinted glass covered the viewing area. The window arrangement was not conducive to leaning out and fotting. It was a very unrewarding trip down the hill, even with the resumption of steam power at Coonoor (same lok as we had coming up).



End of the line—no wonder they call it “Ooty”

Arrival of #56137 at Mettupalaiyam was on time, and I was able to fortify myself with some food and tea. In order to continue on toward Bengaluru (Bangalore), I had to reboard the Nilgiri Express for a short move down to Coimbatore, the junction of the Mettupalaiyam/Ooty branch with INR main lines. This was train 12672, and it was only an unremarkable 45 minute ride in a 2AC car arranged for day service. At Coimbatore the two hour and thirty minute plus connection dragged, as my chest problem was getting worse and there really was nothing of interest at the Coimbatore railway station. At least an on time departure in train 16525 augured well for my change in transport modes at Bengaluru—I was to fly to Delhi as there simply was not sufficient time in my vacation allotment to permit a 36 hour train ride and still accomplish everything else on my plan. The 2AC sleeper was comfortable enough and on time into Bengaluru.

Day 12 (21 Feb)--En route to Bengaluru, Bengaluru to Delhi, and Delhi to Agra

The on time arrival in Bengaluru gave me confidence to try public transport from the railway station to the airport—after all, I reasoned, how much faster could a taxi be anyway, if there were traffic tie-ups? I had learned from the *Lonely Planet* that a bus service to the airport left from the central bus terminal directly across the street from the railway station, so over there I went. A circuit on foot around this rather large facility failed to disclose any airport bus—so I utilized the last resort of asking a functionary. It turned out that yes, there was an airport bus, but it did not leave from the bus terminal per se, but rather from a curb stop across another street from it. A bus was waiting and I boarded, paid the reasonable fare and settled into a narrow, but reclining, seat. After about 15 minutes the bus departed. It made about half a dozen stops to pick up additional passengers en route, none of which delayed it much nor resulted in the bus becoming totally filled. Traffic delays,

an inevitability in any major Indian city, did take their toll, but the generous plus 4 ½ hour connection left me with plenty of time at the BLR airport. I doubt that a taxi could have improved on the transit time by more than five or ten minutes at the most. At this fairly new facility I was able to purchase a decent breakfast, more or less Western style.

My flight to Delhi was on Kingfisher Airline, an unknown to me. I still do not know if it is affiliated with the brewery of the same name. At any rate, the two hour and 45 minute flight was uneventful and the proffered lunch was decent. At the relatively new Delhi airport there was no bus service to the city (at least that I could discover, and *Lonely Planet* did not mention any). The new Metro still had not opened, although I did see a test train operating on it. However, there were prepaid cabs available at a not-too-extortionate price, so I availed myself of one. This had the advantage of taking me directly to the New Delhi railway station, where I spent a bit over two hours train and people watching and reading. This station is really not a credit to the nation's capital—not well laid out nor well maintained. It is, however, convenient to the Delhi Metro, that station being right behind the railway station and accessible by an overhead walkway almost to the Metro entrance.

The train for Agra, #14212, was due to depart New Delhi station at 17:40. A few minutes before this time the track (platform) number (6) was posted on the pseudo-Solari board, and I ventured out to the assigned spot. No train was visible. A handful of people were standing around, and one enquired of me if this was the right place for the Agra train—I responded that supposedly it was. At least I would not be the only one in the wrong place if we had been misinformed! This train per the schedule was supposed to originate in Delhi but obviously the equipment, when it arrived, had come from somewhere else. When it did, I found my car and seat and deposited my traps there; since there was no one else in the car I stepped outside, but stayed near the door. Immediately the door was closed and locked behind me, which was worrisome, but I sussed that this was to permit the car cleaners--such as they are—unfettered access to the vehicle. This proved true, and eventually the handful of pax on the platform boarded. This was a sitting car, and proved to be one of the few in my Indian travels that was not wedged.

“Late trains get later.” This old adage proved to be so true. #14212 was over an hour late in departing New Delhi station, and lost another hour en route. Because of the lateness, there were zero opportunities to see anything out the window of dubious cleanness. The anticipated 21:50 arrival into Agra Cantt station turned out to be a midnight drag in. By this time it was quite cold in Agra, and with my chest issue I did not want to brave an open tok-tok, so negotiated a 100 Rs taxi rate to my (supposed) hotel, the Taj Homestay. This was located in a really obscure part of the city, and although I tried to keep track of how we got there, I became totally confused. One thing was certain and that was that there would be no walking back to Agra Cantt! The Taj Homestay had a locked outer gate; there was a bell and the taxi wallah was kind enough to wait for the several minutes until Bert roused himself and came to unlock the gate. The taxi then departed. Once inside the reception area, though, more issues arose. Bert checked my credentials (this was the only hotel for which I did not have a prepaid voucher) and took the money for the rent—and then informed me that there was a “little problem” and there was no room in the inn for me! He produced some rather unplausible story about electrical problems—but whatever, it was clear I was not going to stay at the Taj Homestay that night! Bert said he had made arrangements for a room for me at another larger, “sister” hotel and that he would arrange transport to get me there. Cheers then, Taj Homestay! It took quite a while for the arranged transport to arrive, and when it did, it turned out to be a tok-tok, not a taxi, and the ride was not a short one. The new hotel, Amur, did recognize me—this was a good sign—but it was a bit after 02:00 when I finally attained my room. The whole experience from my arrival at New Delhi station on had not been a pleasant one.

Day 13 (22 Feb.)--Agra, Agra Cantt to Delhi, and en route Delhi to Chakki Bank

The original plan for Agra had been to arise before dawn, hire a car, and go to a vantage point where I could fot the Taj Mahal at sunrise. This was said to be the primo photographic experience for that grand structure. Also, my brother believed it was possible to fot a train in the foreground with the Taj in the background, and I wanted to try this as well. However, given my late bedtime and somewhat debilitated physical condition, I concluded doss was more important than sunrise at the Taj, and slept in til about 08:30. This hotel had a restaurant in its cellar and a meagre but adequate breakfasts was included, so I partook. Following that I booked a car and driver for the rest of the morning for 1200 Rs and set off for the sights of Agra. The driver obviously got commissions from some places and not others; I did take up his “offer” to visit a former British government palace which had been turned into a museum cum gift shop—run by the government with fixed prices on their wares. Robyn had wanted a sari—not to wear but with which to decorate—and this seemed as good a place as any to get one and presumably the quality would be better in such a place compared to buying one on the street. (whether this is true or not is open to debate, but it sounded plausible at the time). After pawing through a seemingly endless array of saris, I finally settled on one, fairly expensive, but it seemed nice (and Robyn seemed to like it, although I have yet to see it incorporated into any decorating scheme).

Another reason for the shopping interlude was that the Agra weather was horrible. Very overcast and smoggy—dismal! I had hoped the fog or smog would lift but it never did. This was a real downer for fotting the scenery, but I tried to make the best of it. The driver took me to locations where I could shoot the Taj, Agra Fort, and the Baby Taj.



The Taj Mahal—if one can see it through the murk!

The viewpoint for the Taj was the Moon Garden, which must have been quite a spectacle of Brit formal gardening in its day. It was rather run down in 2011—faded glory exemplified.



You have been warned!

I never did spot a place to fot a train with the Taj in the background and even if I had, who knows how long I would have had to wait? Might have done it had fotting conditions been more propituous. Instead, with no prospect of better weather (or my getting any more energetic), and being tired of fending off the cabbie's blandishments to patronize his favorite shops, I directed him to return me to the hotel, where I gathered my belongings and checked out (no attempt to charge me for the night's stay—Bert had been honest about that part of the snafu the previous night. I had decided to see if I could get onto an earlier train back to Delhi, since the connection from my booked return looked a bit shaky in view of the plethora of late- running INR trains. With this in mind, I told the cabbie to wait for my check out, which he did.



Street scene in beautiful Agra

When I got to Agra Cantt station, a train was ready to leave for Delhi, but there was no reserved space available and a waiting list for same. The next train was at 14:00 but it likewise had no reserved places. I thought about trying second class unreserved, but when I saw how wedged it was, I nixed that thought. Standing for almost four hours was not on my list of desirable activities! Nothing to do but wait for my booked space in train 18237, due at 16:10. Had a sit-down lunch—again of Chinese food!--while waiting. I also had a look at the *Palace on Wheels*, which was stabled at Agra Cantt. Could not get into it, however. It's supposed to be the Indian equivalent of trains such as the *VSOE*, *Transcantabrico*, *Dzehrlo*, etc. Frankly, the exterior was a bit garish for my tastes—none of the understated elegance of those trains. It did look *Indian*, for sure.



“Palace on Wheels” cars

18237 was reported on time at Agra Cantt, but a stopped freight train was occupying its assigned track. By the time INR figured out that the adjacent track was clear, twenty precious minutes had been lost. This train was not a day train and had no sitting cars (other than the unreserved seconds); my booked space was in a 2AC sleeper. My seatmates were a British family from East London who were of Punjabi ancestry and were visiting relatives in the Punjab. They had come down to Agra for a sightseeing day, but their tale of their inbound train being four hours late, combined with the two hour lateness of mine the evening before, was ominous. I had a lower berth booking, but again the window was not in very good condition for viewing the passing scene. The family did provide good conversation, though, and the father told me something very interesting—the Metro in Delhi to the airport would be opening later in the week. I hoped this was true—and it turned out to be accurate.

As is often the case, once our train became late, it got later. It was an hour down by arrival at the inconveniently-located Delhi station of Hazrat Nizamuddin, which is a good bit south of the main part of town and not convenient to the Metro. This left me a bit over an hour and a half to get to (old) Delhi railway station, which I assumed would be doable but had no idea of how long it would actually take. Getting a cab was the first order of business—I didn't even take time to look around this oddly-situated station and haven't a clue what it was like inside. Cabs were plentiful but not very amenable to my attempts to negotiate; at this juncture I was more concerned about getting to the next station in good time than the price, but managed a small reduction in the originally-demanded fare.

The cab ride was quite a long one, and en route we passed several of the buses which supposedly

could be used to make the trip—if one knew where to board them and had the time. I was glad I had chartered the taxi. Arrival at the grand old Delhi station was with sufficient time to spare that I could call home and also get a bite to eat—at, of all places, a McDonald's! Interestingly enough, in deference to their Hindu and Muslim patrons, a large sign proclaimed “This Restaurant Does Not Serve Products Made from Beef or Pork.” So much for Big Macs! I had a chicken version of same, which was not too bad. The train to Chakki Bank was soon available for boarding, and wonder of wonders, my 1AC space was a lower in a coupe (two-bedded compartment) and no one was in the upper! Very comfortable, but my chest was really bothering me and I kept waking up to cough. After an on time departure we stopped just outside the station and lost an hour for unknown reasons; this hour down prevailed all the way to Chakki Bank.

Day 14 (23 Feb.)--en route Chakki Bank, Chakki Bank to Joginder Nagar

Chakki Bank is a rather shabby suburb of Pathankot, but is on the INR main line to the Punjab, whereas Pathankot station requires a six kilometer branch line trip to access. Most main line trains avoid Pathankot station and stop only at Chakki Bank. Overnight train 12413 which I rode was one of these. The Kangra Valley narrow (2' 6") gauge line begins at Pathankot, so I had to find a way to get from Chakki Bank to Pathankot. There was an adequate supply of cabs outside the station (again I did not want to subject my respiratory ailment to the early morning cold in a tok-tok) so I was able to negotiate a favorable price and we set off for Pathankot. The streets of Chakki Bank are mainly dirt, with deep potholes and ruts. The hack driver negotiated these with some skill but could not miss all of them. It was a rough ride. Soon enough we were in beautiful (not!) downtown Pathankot, and the driver took me (contrary to what I had thought were clear instructions) to the BUS station. I had seen the narrow gauge tracks, which we crossed at one point, and realized we were on the wrong side of the main street for the railway. I remonstrated with the cabbie and he shook his head but took me to the RAILWAY station, probably wondering why in the world any round eye would want to go there, having just gotten off a train!



It is easy to see who has the right of way in Pathankot!

Kangra Valley train 52473 was not due out of Pathankot until 09:50, so I had plenty of time to look around the stations (one for broad gauge and one for the narrow gauge, with an overhead bridge connecting the two) and to walk around the business district near the stations. I was in search of some breakfast, but none of the eating places I observed looked as if I dared consume their offerings. So, back to the station I went, and purchased some biscuits (Brit-speak for crackers or cookies) and tea. Since the narrow gauge train was to be an all-day affair with no meal service indicated, and as I did not trust the offerings of native food vendors, should there even be any on the train or at intermediate stations, I stocked up on biscuits and packaged fruit juice. Good thing—that would be my sustenance for the day!

In due time I again trekked over the bridge to the narrow gauge station, where I watched and fotted the arrival of westbound train 52462. After it had been pulled back from the platform track, train 52473's consist was spotted. I boarded amongst the first pax and secured a window seat in the middle of the last car, thinking this would be good for shots forward along the train. The car started filling up. Soon I was told I would have to leave the car. I asked why of the woman who so informed me. "It is a ladies only car" she said politely but firmly. Cheers then, INR, for not posting any signs to this effect! Of course by now the train was well-filled, but I managed to get a window seat facing backward in a less advantageously-placed car. Better than standing, and there were standees a good bit of the way! The seats were at least upholstered, but the backs were bolt upright (arranged in facing bays) and the long ride to Joginder Nagar was not at all a luxurious one! In addition, the weather got colder and there was a drizzle for a good bit of the trip. There was no pot-bellied stove as was the case on the same gauge line in the Patagonia—in fact no heat at all. Pity, for the scenery is superb, and for a number of miles (excuse me, kilometers!) it travels along

the rim of a canyon, or on a ledge in it, very reminiscent of the Durango-Silverton narrow gauge line in Colorado. The price is right, though, 24 Rs, which is about 45 US cents for the all-day trip.

Arrival at Joginder Nagar was after dark and in a light rain. I had a general idea where the hotel was located and it was not near the railway station, so I had planned to take a cab or tok-tok. Regrettably, for the first time since I had been in the country, there were none to be seen at the station. I set off on foot in the general direction in which I thought the hotel lay. Since there were only a couple of paved main roads, this was not too confusing and when I encountered folks walking, I asked if "Hotel Uhl" was the way I was going. All indicated it was, so I trudged on. After what seemed like a damned long walk, but would not have been had I felt better, I saw a sign for the hotel. Unfortunately I misinterpreted it and went another half mile or so out of my way before finally concluding from the terrain and lack of roadside anything that I had made an error. I had, and back to the main road I went. After a reassessment of the terrain I spied a large building up a steep hill that might be the hotel. Fortunately it was. I got checked in, went to my room and deposited my traps, and immediately repaired to the dining room, which was still open but in which I was the sole patron. Dinner was acceptable if not gourmet, but no adult beverages were on offer. I could have used one!

Day 15 (24 Feb.)--Joginder Nagar

The Hotel Uhl is an attractive facility, surely a cut above the other Indian hotels in which I stayed (Oberoi Grand, of course, excepted). It is owned and operated by the province, is in a picturesque setting, and is clean and well-maintained. It does lack one useful commodity, though—heat. To make up for this omission partially, the hotel had laid on extra blankets, and I used every one of them. This freezing business was surely not doing my chest congestion any good! My plans for this day were to find and ride, if possible, the Joginder Nagar to Barot Haulage Railway, a series of inclined planes or funicular railways built to assist in the building and servicing of the local hydro-electric power plant, but supposedly open to the public. Details, even on the all-knowing internet, were quite sparse. Inquiries in Kolkata had not been encouraging. At any rate, the original plan was to arise at the crack of dawn and find the office of the District Engineer (of the power company) who, the skeletal information I had stated, would issue a permit to ride the system, if one applied before 08:30. I had carefully looked for an office in Joginder Nagar town which might house this functionary, but saw nothing at all that looked appropriate. The night before I had concluded that the state of my health required more sleep than my original plan would have permitted, and I did not even know where to look for the elusive District Engineer. I don't take defeat easily, but this time I was so tired and sick that I did give up. I went to bed without even setting the alarm clock.

Around 09:00 I arose. The shower fortunately did have warm water! Unlike the preceding day, the sun was shining brightly. I made a substitute plan for the day. I would (1) scope out the walking time to the railway station, for tomorrow's early departure; (2) try to change some USD for rupees, as my supply was getting low; and (3) try to find the Haulage Railway. After a passable omelet breakfast, I donned my long johns, turtle neck shirt, and lined jeans. I was ready to do battle with the cold air in the foothills! But once I got under way on my walking trek I noticed folks lounging about in the bright sunlight and I was sweating! One can't win. Walking downhill without stopping for directional reckoning or to ask directions made the trip to the station seem much faster; 20 minutes would be plenty of time. But my attempt to change \$ was unavailing. Joginder Nagar had banks—at least two of them—but none would exchange US dollars. They said I would have to go to the next town to do so!

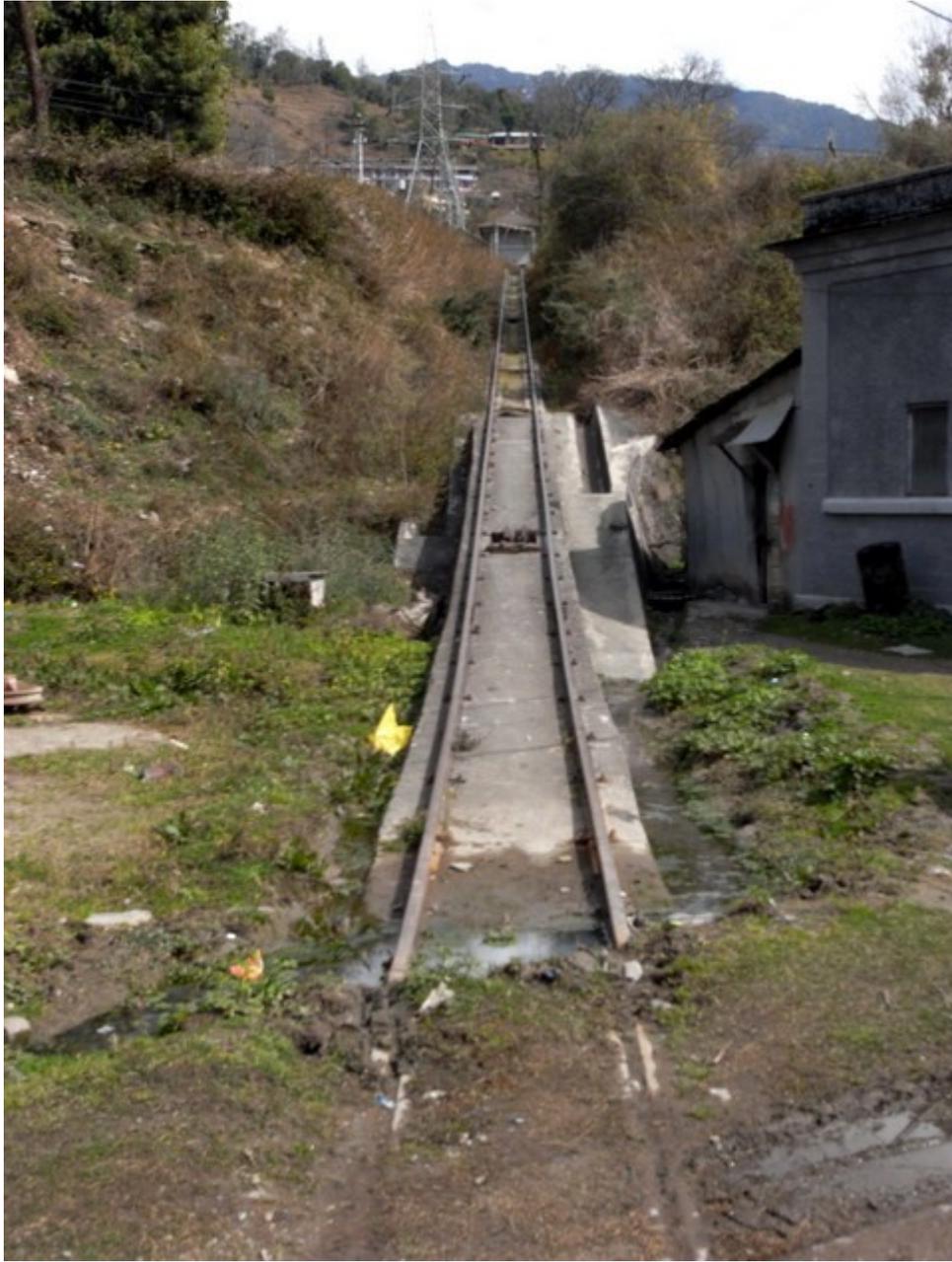
At the railway station train 52471 had just arrived and I took some pictures. Since it was not too long before its departure at 12:20 as westbound train 52474, I walked a bit west and got some shots

of it leaving town.



Kangra Valley Narrow Gauge train #52474 leaving Joginder Nagar

On the walk to the station I had noticed tracks going on east from the station, which was a surprise as the map showed the line ending there. I wondered where they went, and so with no other plan but trying to find the haulage railway, I started to follow them. Obviously from the underbrush and rust on the rails they had not been used in a long time. In the distance I could see what looked like a power plant or at least a major substation, so I thought maybe this track had at one time served it. A walk, generally uphill, of perhaps three kilometers proved me right! The track ended at the power plant. In the outer reaches of the complex I stumbled onto a disused funicular railway, but it turned out to be just a short intra-plant deal, not the Barot line.



The Haulage Railway's Baby Brother

A bit more walking about brought me to a security outpost. Several guards were sitting around taking tea and chatting. They challenged me, but more in a curious than threatening way. I explained my mission, and they seemed perplexed and un-understanding until I made some hand gestures. Then one of them got a bright look and said “trolley!” I nodded and one of them took me to another office, where I again explained my reason for visiting. This led to another office and another explanation, and then to one more before, finally, I was admitted to the throne room of the all-powerful District Engineer. Here I was treated with much respect, albeit tinged with some suspicion. The D.E. was youngish and had only occupied his post since December 2010, a mere two months. I knew this because his desk was under a giant plaque on which were encribed the names and tenures of every preceding D.E. back to the opening of the facility in the 1920s.

The D.E. bade me sit, and had his secretary bring us glasses of water. I mentally hesitated before accepting this offering, but concluded I would just have to take a chance on it as not to do so would surely be regarded as very bad manners. After much questioning the D.E. apparently concluded that (1) I was not a Pakistani terrorist who had come to destroy the hydro plant; and that (2) I was

otherwise harmless. He said that I could go to see, but not fot, the Haulage Railway or “trolley” and he summoned a junior engineer “Vijay” to escort me to it. Of course before this could happen we had to go through the whole litany of why I was there, from whence I had come, etc., etc. But go to see it we eventually did, and on the way Vijay took me through the turbine room of the power plant, a nice unanticipated benefit. It was a good bit smaller than the Russian one I had seen a few years earlier, perhaps more on a par with the one at the Connewingo Dam in Pennsylvania.

The end station of the Haulage Railway--”Buffer Stop”--was located at the end of track of the Kangra Valley line, adjacent to a swing crane which could transfer material from rail cars to the funicular car's flat platform. Vijay said,however, that the crane had not been used in years and that most replacement parts and other materials are now moved by lorry. The Haulage Railway has six stages, but only the first stage is now open to public use (if the D.E.agrees and issues a permit). One must have the permit in hand by 08:30 to ride; that is the only booked trip of the day. The other five stages are now off limits to the public “for security and safety reasons.” The six stages are:

- A. Buffer Stop to Adit Junction—32 degrees, 33 minutes, 1.45 km
- B. Adit Junction-Winch Camp—34 degrees, 30 minutes, 2.0 km
- C. Winch Camp-Head Gear—rises 300 ft in 3 km—3.2 km
- D. Head Gear-Kathyaru—42 degrees, 34 minutes, 1.0 km
- E. Kathyaru-Zero Point—48 degrees, 24 minutes, 0.75 km
- F. Zero Point-Barot—2.25 km

(Information from a sign at Buffer Stop)

The Haulage Railway does not normally operate on Sundays.



Joginder Nagar-Barot Haulage Railway

(internet photo)

When our visit and conversation were finished, Vijay said he would take me to the bus stop. Since I had entered the facility *sub rosa* on the disused railway track, I had no idea where the bus stop to return to town was, and appreciated the offer. I assumed Vijay meant he would walk me to it. Wrong! We bypassed the turbine room and soon arrived at the car park, which contained one motor car, doubtlessly belonging to the D.E. The rest of it was filled with a multitude of bicycles, motor scooters, and motorcycles. Vijay dug some keys from his pocket, jumped onto a motorcycle, and motioned for me to join him. Now, while I still have a motorcycle endorsement on my driver's license, I had not ridden since I sold my last bike in 1982! And it is much more frightening to ride as a passenger than as an operator! But again, bad form to turn down an invitation, so I hopped on, trying desperately to remember the techniques and not to look stupid, let alone fall off! It was at least a kilometer to the bus stop hard by the main entrance to the plant, so the ride was worthwhile. I exchanged goodbye pleasantries with Vijay and bought myself an orange drink from a stand by the stop. Since there were several folks waiting at the stop, I thought a bus would be along shortly. Before that could happen, though, Vijay reappeared on his bike and motioned me to get on. "I have an errand in town" he said. Away we went again, but this time at even greater speed on the main road. I was glad when I spied the Hotel Uhl, about halfway from the power plant to town, and tapped Vijay's shoulder to stop and let me alight.



Hotel Uhl

The sun was still out, so I spent most of the remainder of the afternoon sitting outside at a table in the lawn of the Uhl, catching up on my trip notes and reading. Ominous appearing clouds and the consequent decline in temperature eventually drove me inside, and it was soon dinner time. After dinner I went to reception and settled my bill, explaining to the manager that I had an early train. He was very solicitous and said although the dining room would not be open at that hour, he could have a takeaway sandwich made for me. I settled on an omelet sandwich and went to bed.

Day 16 (25 Feb.)--Joginder Nagar to Pathankot and en route to Delhi

My alarm woke me in good time for my planned 06:30 departure from the Uhl. When I got downstairs, there was nobody to be seen, not at reception nor in the dining room. So much for the omelet sandwich, I thought. I left the key at reception and walked to the railway station. Just as I was about to descend the steps to the facility, a young man approached me and handed me my sandwich, nicely wrapped in aluminum foil and still warm! Faith in the Hotel Uhl was instantly restored. I bought my 24 rupee ticket and claimed a forward-facing seat by a window. The light was coming up and it looked to be another sunny day. An on-time departure brought train 52472 into Baijnath Paprola on time, but there was an hour and 50 minute fester there during which we crossed train 52471, the overnight train from Pathankot, and acquired two of its six cars, increasing our consist to six. Obviously most of the business is west of Baijnath Paprola, and with a few more stops, the train rapidly filled above seated capacity. It was a much better day for photography, and I took quite a few out of my window.



Train # 52472—Kangra River

I was particularly intrigued by the baboons at Guler station. They were a reduced-scale version of the ones I had seen in Livingston, Zambia, in 2000, and had similar actions. One old fellow had only one arm, but he seemed to do all right. All the baboons begged shamelessly, and most got rewarded. Begging is not restricted to poor humanoids in India!

Later in the day the sky darkened, but no rain fell. During the trip to Pathankot, we crossed all the other trains on the line, the last of which we met at Pathankot itself. Although there were some spare coaches at Pathankot, it seemed clear that our consist would go out in the night as eastbound train 52471 and the cycle would repeat. There are seven trains each way over some part of the line, but only two in each direction serve Joginder Nagar. A sidelight—I was not gripped in either direction on the Kangra Valley trains, the only line on which this omission occurred.

Since I had already scoped out the restaurant situation in Pathankot—at least that part of town in reasonable walking distance from the station for one with bags and baggage—and found it wanting, I settled in at the station for my gourmet evening meal of biscuits and juice. Around the appointed hour of 19:05, train 14034, the up Jammu Express, hove in with a diesel in charge (the branch into Pathankot is being electrified—the masts for it are already up). There was some confusion as the booking chart did not show my name—it turned out the one posted was only for pax from Jammu. I had to backtrack along the platform to find the station chart (as opposed to the one pasted to the side of my car). Hooray! I had once again been allotted a bed in a coupe, albeit this time with a cell mate in the upper. Back to AC1 car H1 and by now the gripper had the revised chart and agreed with my interpretation of the space assigned. I boarded and settled in, but my joy in being in the coupe was short-lived. Soon the gripper appeared and begged my cellmate and me to change places

with a young couple who were on their honeymoon and had been assigned to a standard 4-bed room. How could we refuse this? Nothing to do but move the traps and self to compartment F. At least I kept my lower berth. The roommates were chatty but I was too tired to care; I almost immediately dozed out and remember almost nothing except that that damn train had an awfully early arrival into Delhi!

Day 17—26 Feb.)--en route to Delhi, Delhi, en route to Kalka

With a 05:45 booked arrival into Old Delhi station, I set my travel alarm for 05:15. It went off, I arose and prepared to meet Delhi as best I could. Around the appointed hour the train stopped, but a glance out the window showed that whilst I had no idea where we were, I was sure it was not Delhi. En route to the facilities I encountered the sleeping car Bert, and asked him about our progress. He responded “Delhi about 7,” and his prognostication was pretty accurate. I had no problem with that as I had no plans for the day, but I could have used the extra hour of doss. Looked around the station a bit—lots of renovation work in progress—and hunted for a place to eat, but McDonald's was closed and nothing else looked promising, but I did get a tea (chai), which helped a bit. It was too early to expect businesses to be open, so I retired to the Upper Class waiting room and finished another paperback (I'd brought a good stock with me). Having left it in the waiting room, I wonder what the local that picked it up will think of a book about Germans who resisted the Nazi regime?

About ten I assumed exchange shops might be open; there had been none in Joginder Nagar, Pathankot, nor Old Delhi station. There was supposed to be one in New Delhi station, but I could not figure out where the Metro station was located—signage very lacking! I was down to about 100 Rs, not enough for a cab ride, and there were no tok-toks in sight at the waiting area. There were plenty of voracious hack wallahs, though, and I negotiated a 250 Rs fare if he would take me to an exchange shop en route to New Delhi railway station. The deal was made, and the ride was quite interesting, through back streets and main streets of old Delhi. I'm sure there was an exchange place much closer, but it was obvious that the proprietor of the one to which the cabbie took me was a relative or friend. In addition to the rupees, I got a cup of tea and a good 15 minutes or so of listening, but not comprehending, the chatter between the cabbie and the exchange wallah. The rate was OK, so I obtained what I reckoned would be what I would need for the three remaining days in India. Eventually we resumed our circuitous path to New Delhi station.

The original plan was to check my traps at the New Delhi station left luggage and explore the Metro system. I found the office, but there was a line before it at least a city block long, and moving very slowly. I did not fancy standing in this line in my debilitated condition, and was also worried about how long it might take to retrieve my “stuff,” so nixed that idea. At this point I still had about five hours until my day train to Kalka was due to depart. I had noticed a large, modern appearing hotel called “Ginger” on the back (Metro) side of New Delhi station, so decided that ingestion of food, since I had not had any breakfast, might be a good way to while away some of the time. I had no energy at this point for a touristic exploration of Delhi beyond what the hack driver had provided.

The Ginger Hotel is in some way affiliated with the INR—exactly how I don't know. At any rate I wandered over to it, which was not as easy a task as its proximity to the station would have led one to believe. The necessary path was labyrinthine and fraught with the usual Indian traffic. My traverse of it was not made easier by being encumbered with my roller bag and two back packs, but I made it unscathed. The hotel's restaurant was in the lower (basement) level, and I discovered that it was not an order from menu type but rather a cross between that and a cafeteria. One ordered at the counter; if the food was already prepared one got it then and there and if not, one waited. I had an uninspiring lunch; no adult beverages were on offer (and are not available nor allowed on any train regardless of class of travel—the *Palace on Wheels* is likely an exception).

After lunch I retraced my steps to the station, wandered around it a bit, and amused myself by watching people, trains, and monkeys. The monkeys were the most interesting. Eventually I needed to sit, and found a reasonably cool spot on a bench between tracks 14 and 15, and used it as a base of operations until train time. Close by I found an interesting track inspection car that looked a lot like an EMD gas-electric “doodlebug” from the 1920s or 30s. As departure time came nearer, I was frotting the making up of the Kalka train when a uniformed security officer approached me and made it clear that photography was forbidden—at least by him! I meekly complied—but I had already got the shot I wanted.

Train 12005 was one of the INR deluxe express day trains. The seating car was comfortable and the window reasonably clear. I settled in and after our on-time departure checked junctions in the Delhi area against the Indian railway atlas until well out of the suburban area, after which I lost the light. The fare on these trains includes a bottle of water and a tray meal, which was pretty poor although edible. Arrival into Kalka was on time. I spent some time sussing out the narrow gauge portion of the station so that I could go right to it in the early morning and then hired a tok-tok to my hotel, the Kumar Plaza. This low-budget hostelry was on Railway Road, and Google's map showed it as being fairly close to the station. I could not see it from the outside of the station, however, and although closeness is a relative thing, this place was not close. I was glad I used the tok-tok, but figured I could walk it in 15 minutes or so in the morning. My reservation was in order and my voucher accepted. One concern was a folding metal gate across the entrance. If that were closed in the morning and locked, my 04:30 planned departure from the hotel could be compromised. I expressed this concern to Bert and he showed me an electric bell in my room and told me to ring it. He demonstrated it and it made a satisfyingly loud noise, so off to bed I went.

Day 18 (Feb. 27)--Kalka-Shimla-Kalka and en route Kalka-New Delhi

Although I had set the alarm for 04:00, it was really not necessary as Bert showed up outside my door ringing the bell and bringing me a towel, which I had not noticed missing the night before. I guess I was just “plumb tuckered out.” It had been a restless sleep as my coughing and congestion were really annoying. Into the shower I went, but in spite of an ominously dangerous looking electric water heater above the shower head, all the head produced was cold water. It was a very fast shower! I quickly packed and was out the front door by the planned 04:30. The metal gate was open—but I don't know if Bert opened it for me or if it never got closed. The walk to the station seemed to go more rapidly than I had thought it would during my tok-tok ride to the hotel the previous night, and I got to the station in good time.

The ride up the highly-scenic narrow gauge line from Kalka to Shimla had been a source of some concern throughout the trip and even before I left. I had learned of an obscure service called the “Rail Motor” offered—at least some times—on the route. This appeared from its description to be a sort of RGS “Gallopig Goose” sort of conveyance and if so, would offer much better views of the line than a conventional loco-hauled train. However, it was not possible to book a seat on the Rail Motor through the Clear Trip booking site, which had successfully worked for me for all except the unreserved Kangra Valley trains. The Rail Motor was shown as operable and reservable on the INR web site, but one cannot book on line on that site unless one has a credit card issued by an Indian Bank. I had planned to visit one of the INR reservation centers in the major cities once I arrived in India. The need to do so was obviated when I prevailed upon Lars' Indian tour arranger to, for a fee, make the Rail Motor reservation for me. This accomplished, as long as it was going to run on the 27th, I seemed to be OK for this experience. Nonetheless, I had a backup reservation in the daily tourist train, which was scheduled out a few minutes after the Rail Motor's departure.

The departure board at Kalka station showed the Rail Motor (train 72451) as operating and leaving from track (platform) 7. There was no platform signed as 7, but there was a short stretch of

pavement along a track next to track 6, which I deduced must be platform 7, since it was just about long enough for a rail car. But, there was no Rail Motor nor anything else on this track. The other scheduled trains for Shimla were on their assigned departure tracks, but no Rail Motor. Very worrisome. I made a few enquiries of INR staff and was assured it would in fact run. But its lack of physical presence, combined with all the uncertainty about it, still bothered me. I wanted to be sure that if it did not operate today, I could join the backup train in time for its departure. At length I found a bench from which I could see both track 7 and the track upon which my backup train was stabled. With some tea and biscuits to fortify the inner man, I waited. And waited. And waited. My solace was that the conventional train was not moving, either, nor were pax rushing to get on it, although it was now an hour after the Rail Motor was supposed to depart. At last I heard a guttural sound that was quite unlike any diesellok, and the Rail Motor pulled up along the short Platform 7.

Now quite happy, I dragged my traps over to this strange vehicle and boarded. I was not amused to learn that my assigned seat was in the middle of the rearmost row of seats, which spanned the entire rear of the creature. On the other hand, there were only a few other pax who boarded, and they were occupying seats in the middle of the car, whose total seating capacity was about 16, arranged in a 2-1 configuration with the double seats behind the motorman and the singles with an unobstructed view forward out the front windshield over the long hood to the track ahead. I stashed my bags in the rear but occupied the primo "railfan" seat. Rather than departing, we sat for another 15 minutes or so. Then I discovered the reason for all the delay. The *Howrah-Kalka Mail* was late in arriving from its very long trip all the way from Kolkata, and there was a handful of connecting pax onto the Rail Motor and a larger number for the Express. Unfortunately a group of three traveling together had reservations for the first row of seats and claimed them, displacing me. I did not blame them at all! I was lucky and found the second single seat unoccupied, so made it my home for the trip. The occupant of the #1 single in front of me was an Indian woman of short stature, so seeing over her was not a problem. As soon as these pax had boarded, a blast from the raspy air horn announced our departure, with about a $\frac{3}{4}$ full load.



Rail Motor at Barog

There's an old adage about saving the best for last. While I did not intentionally do this, it worked out that way—at least with respect to my railway travels. The Kalka-Shimla (also spelled Simla) line is a fantastic bit of engineering packing 864 bridges and 102 tunnels into its short route of only 96 km. Add to this a twisting ascending grade (maximum ca. 3%) with plenty of horseshoe curves and other delights, and it is one really great ride. Of course, riding in the Rail Motor with a view out the front window almost as good as the motorman's helps to appreciate all the wonders. The line is single track with passing loops and is worked by a staff or token system of control, with the token attached to a large wire ring which is about two feet in diameter. The motorman throws out the ring with the token for the block he is leaving and crooks his arm to catch the one for the block to be entered; it is held up at the appropriate height by the station operator. The Rail Motor does not need to stop. It did stop, however, at the intermediate town of Barog. The motorman's assistant “oiled around” and the pax could avail themselves of rest rooms (none on the Rail Motor) and food sellers. Arrival at Shimla was 10:26, only 36 minutes down, indicating either some faster than normal running or a padded schedule or both.

At Shimla I was able to check my bags without delay, after gaining assurance the left luggage office would be open in good time before my return trip in the afternoon. Having shed the encumbrances I positioned myself on an overbridge just south of the station to photographically record the departure of local southbound passenger No. 52456 and the arrival of No. 52451, *Shivlak Express*, the luxury train on the route (and my ticketed backup should the Rail Motor not have run). It was hauled by a larger and more modern-appearing diesellok, #700. The local had #186, a smaller loco similar to those on the Kangra Valley line. I also fotted the turning of the Rail Motor on a short turntable at the north end of the station.



Shimla station—note Rail Motor on turntable

With that small flurry of rail action over, I decided to walk up to the city of Shimla; the station is quite a bit below it and perhaps two or three kilometers away from “center city.” The tracks went on beyond the station, and I followed them on a sidewalk beside a road which paralleled the tracks but was perhaps 50 feet above them. Just beyond the station was a loco shed to which the 700 had gone for servicing. Surprisingly, the tracks continued on, although it was apparent that they had not been run over for some time. They went below the central motor bus station, which was central only in the sense of centralizing various bus routes—it was not in “central city.” A bit further on the tracks ended in a building which had a sign advertising itself as a railway museum. I could see a few pieces of equipment from the outside, but the museum was not open, and there was no sign indicating when it might be. It was a pretty small facility. I wondered if perhaps this had been the original station; it was certainly closer to the city but still well below it.

All of the things to see in Shimla other than the railway facilities were in the town on top of the ridge. I had a map of the town and started up what appeared to be the shortest way to the business district. I guess it was, but it was quite a climb and because of my chest congestion and coughing, I had to stop several times to rest and catch my breath. I really felt like an old, dilapidated man! At one of my rest stops I spied the only two cats I saw in India, two jet black, handsome ones who appeared well-fed and not in the least intimidated by humanoids in their presence. Shimla was a summer capital in the days of the Raj, when the Brits desired to escape the heat and humidity of the lowlands. It's in the foothills of the Himalayas, and sports a fair assortment of British-style colonial architecture, as well as a plethora of latter day more typical Indian blah structures. The “high street” on top of the ridge was pleasant for walking and people watching, and a goodly number of folks, both locals and obvious tourists, were taking advantage of the reasonable weather

to enjoy the city. I found a recommended eatery and enjoyed a very good Indian meal, washed down with several Kingfisher beers.



Shimla's "High Street"

Following lunch, I pushed further toward the other end of town, where there was located a two-stage lift which took foot pax back down to the level of the road above the railway tracks, albeit several km from their end and even more from the station. I reckoned there would be taxis or tok-toks at the bottom station of the lifts, and taxis there were. A not-too-aggressively negotiated fare took me back to the railway station—even though the return trip would have been mainly downhill, I was much too exhausted to think of walking. Back at the station I had about an hour's wait for the departure of the downhill *Shivlak Express* No. 52542, during which I reclaimed my gear and watched the train being made up. About 15 minutes before advertised departure the doors were opened and I found my assigned seat.

Seats in this "luxury train" were well spaced and had the appearance of lounge chairs. They looked comfortable but were not. The train left at 17:40 and it got dark soon after, so there was not much opportunity for more views of this superlative bit of track. I slept a bit; dinner—another pre-cooked tray arrangement, was served and was better than that served on the way to Kalka, but nothing about which to brag. At Kalka there was a plus hour and a half connection to the *Kalka-Howrah Mail*, train 12312, and as we were essentially on time, this was not even close. In any event, I suspect that the *Mail* would have been held for the hill train if need be. Certainly the reverse had been true in the morning! I found my lower berth in the 1AC class sleeper and turned in for the overnight trip back to Delhi.

Day 19 (28 Feb.)--en route Kalka to Delhi and Delhi to Newark

Train 12312 arrived at old Delhi station more or less on time at 06:30, which was a pity, as I could well have used another hour or two of sleep or at least rest in the horizontal position! I was moderately hungry, the dinner being skeletal. McDonald's did not open til 08:00 and there was no other eatery that seemed suitable in the station, so I hung out on a bench in one of the quieter areas of the station and read some more. Shortly after 08:00 I made my appearance at the golden arches and acquired an omelet and toast—and of course tea. After this I faced a dilemma. I had planned a day of sightseeing, but I just did not feel up to it. A plan to visit the national railway museum was dashed when I read the fine print and discovered it was closed on Mondays—fortunately I made this revolting discovery prior to attempting to find the place, as it is located quite a ways out of center city. I just did not have an appetite for anything—except perhaps more bed rest and going home.

Devoid of any useful ideas to occupy myself for the day, I decided to head for the airport, even though my flight was not til almost midnight. But first I had to find the elusive Metro station. At great peril to my body I crossed the very busy street of about six lanes separating the railway station and the area where I thought the Metro station would be located. I walked about a block in each direction and could not spot it. Finally I saw a uniformed person and asked where it was. He gestured down the street so I walked that way. In about a block and a half I found it. The entrance was well concealed in a store front—no separate building as at New Delhi station, and no kiosk.

Inside the Metro station there was a variety of maps of the system. One showed the connection to the new Metro line to the airport connecting at New Delhi railway station, contrary to the information in both the Indian railway atlas and the *Lonely Planet*. The route was also different than that shown in the atlas. I presumed the sign, being of more recent vintage than either of the other sources, would be the most accurate, and bought a token to New Delhi station, having been advised by the token seller that no through tokens or tickets to the airport were available. The Metro uses a largish plastic token; I don't know how it accommodates their zone fare system, although there were different colors in use. A color sensing turnstile? The first train to come was far too wedged to attempt to join. The next one had enough room to allow me to force my way in and stand very close to the door, since my travel time was short and I wanted to be sure to be able to exit!

New Delhi railway station Metro station is much larger and more complex than the equivalent at old Delhi station. Signage is inadequate insofar as directions to the Metro for the airport is concerned. I had to ask twice but finally found the area for ticket selling for this line. The airline baggage checking facilities were not yet open, nor were check in for flight desks. Fare to the airport is much higher than to local stations—80 Rs—but still a bargain in Western terms at less than USD 2. It is also a bargain and faster and more comfortable than the competing taxis. In spite of this, the train was very sparsely patronized—perhaps because of its very recent inauguration. It has comfortable transverse seating and adequate racks for luggage. It will be the Taxi Union's worst nightmare when the word gets out!

At the airport, it was a bit of a walk from the Metro station to the international terminal. It would have been less to the domestic facility, and perhaps less if I had known exactly where I was going. As I had plenty of time, to master understatement, the walk was not a time problem. At the international terminal I was refused entrance because I could not produce any evidence of possessing a ticket. I explained that it was an E-ticket, but the guardians of the doorways said I would have to have an E-ticket receipt, which rather defeats the whole thing, I thought. At least their stories were consistent as I tried three separate entrances. I was directed to the visitor's waiting room. Here Ada would be glad to print out a copy of my E-ticket receipt for a fee of 30 RS. With that assurance that I could get to the check in counters, I stayed in the reasonably comfortable

visitor lounge and read until a couple of hours before the flight. Ada's document did enable my entry to the main portion of the international terminal, and it was scrutinized by the doorway guardians.

My Star Gold status enabled me to use a separate check in line with no waiting, but was of no influence in passing through the shoe and toothpaste police, who checked neither but did pat me down. It was also of no help in running the gauntlet of officious inspectors of boarding pass and passport—I must have been gripped at least four times after clearing security before entering the plane. Before boarding, however, because of my reduced sight-seeing activity and correspondingly increased reading time, I was almost out of reading matter and I was faced with a fifteen hour flight back to the States. A stop at a convenience stall produced a paperback history of Mittal Steel's takeover of Arcelor Steel—quite an epic for a former steel man to enjoy! This plus a plastic bottle of orange drink quite exhausted my remaining supply of rupees—how convenient! The remaining time before boarding of CO 83 was spent in the well-equipped multi-airline lounge for higher-echelon frequent flyers. Here the recent amalgamation between CO and UA helped (and also at the check in) as CO now honors Star Alliance cards. The food selection in the lounge was varied and I even obtained a Kingfisher beer!

CO's food was, as anticipated, edible but nowhere in the same league with LH, let alone Singapore Airlines! But the flight was uneventful and on time into EWR, a little before 0500. This unsociable arrival hour, even after a painless transiting of US Immigration and collecting my traps, meant a fester of about three hours until AMTK train 185 (on which I held a CO code share ticket) was due to depart EWR rail station. I just wanted to keep moving, so went to the station and bought a through NJT-SEPTA ticket to 30th Street and took the first NJT Trenton train to appear. A cross-platform connection to SEPTA was a fairly close connection but NJT was on time. All was well til 30th Street. I had to call Robyn, who was staying overnight at her sister's house in Aston, to tell her of my revised and earlier arrival at Marcus Hook or else fester there for a couple of hours! I had not taken my cell phone with me, but no problem, I thought—I'll just use a pay phone, surely there will still be some at 30th Street. Sure enough there were—but they were of no help to me as Robyn's sister had thoughtfully put a block on her telephone against any caller not supplying a caller ID, which pay phones do not do. Cheers then, Lenneigh! I had visions of walking from Hook to her house, which I absolutely did not feel up for doing.

As I suspected, there were no taxis at Hook and no facility that I could see for summoning them. Nothing to do but start walking toward Aston and hope I would come across a diner or tavern that would let me use a non-pay phone. None were open at that hour, but after about a half hour walk, I came across a small strip shopping center which contained a butcher shop. They were kind enough to let me use their phone and even refused my offer to pay. There are still a few Good Samaritans left in this world! Robyn was there in about ten minutes, and we repaired to her sister's house, where I availed myself of a much-needed derance and changed into my working clothes, as I was scheduled for the swing shift that day. We had an unhurried drive to Dover and time for lunch and a bit of shopping in the Dover Mall before it was time for me to show up at work. I'm sure Robyn must have rethought her kindness in chauffeuring me to and from Pennsylvania when she had to come back to Dover at the end of my shift to take me home to Slower Delaware, but if so, she said nothing about it!

Epilogue

It took me a good month to get completely recovered from my Indian chest ailment, variously diagnosed as “walking pneumonia” or as a fungal infection. I had two relapses just as I felt I was on the verge of recovery, the second of which I believe was something different from the prime issue. My physician opined that what I had was neither bacteriological (and I am sure he is right on

this, given the amount of strong antibiotics I took before leaving and whilst in India) nor viral, but rather a fungal infection brought on by changes in my body chemistry caused by all the antibiotics I took as a prophylactic against malaria. I'm not sure I totally buy into this theory, but don't have a better one at the moment. I was fortunate that at no time was I in any pain—just subject to aggravating congestion and cough, and depletion of energy.

Train travel, indeed any form of travel, in India is HARD WORK. It is not for the faint-hearted or the weak in either body or mind. It's quite a contrast not only from both train travel in very well-to-do countries such as Germany or Switzerland, but also from the same in poorer countries in the Western Hemisphere. Both are (or were, in the case of, say, Guatemala or El Salvador) easier and more enjoyable than Indian trains. Indian trains fulfill a very useful transport function for the locals, but without much of what enthusiasts would consider an enjoyment factor.

Another concern about Indian trains is connectivity. With the vast network of lines offering pax service, most city pairs are connected with trains that do not require connecting to another train at an intermediate point (obviously connecting from broad to narrow gauge trains is an exception, but opportunities for that are minimal). Anyone planning an itinerary without very long plus times is courting disaster. While I left far, far more connecting time in my plans than I would have dreamed of doing in Europe, I had some “nail-biting” moments. The Swiss Federal Railway System INR is not!

On the good side, I never felt unsafe or threatened whilst in India. Besieged by hucksters of all types, yes. They were more of an issue than the warned-about beggars, but neither were actually threatening, just annoying. I found most folks there polite, perhaps to extremes, if not overtly friendly. Most folks speak at least some English, although much of it is so heavily accented as to be less than useful—one hates to ask for repetition after maybe three tries! In at least major facilities, there is at least perfunctory English translation of whatever the local language is (Hindi is not universal), which is good, because the Indian alphabet, consisting of a multitude of squiggles, is unintelligible.

I am glad I went. I wish I had gone a couple of decades ago when both steam flourished on the broad gauge and the Kolkata trams were in full flower, but late is better than not at all. I doubt, however, that I would go back.

On the other hand, if someone were to organize an enthusiast tour that would cover the entire Joginder Nagar-Barot Haulage Railway-----