

India/Bhutan November-December 2007 - Part 3



December 7, 2007 - We continue through the rural countryside to Ranthambhore National Park, part of the India national tiger conservation program and home of about 34 tigers. The bus could not take us up the mountain to the cabins where we would stay so we headed off in our Beverly Hillbilly vehicle.



On our way we stop at Chand Baori, a mathematical miracle, considering it was built in 700 A.D. This well was used not only to draw water but as a meeting place. The photo on the right shows the steps that go down, each set on a plane closer.

India is filled with parakeets (no parrots, they are bigger) and pigs, hogs and boars (I'm not sure what is the distinction.) We also stopped at a local farm and met a typical rural household, including the father and his four adult sons. They explained to our guide how they farmed the fields and that they had a tractor they used and operated for the neighbors for hire. The man was very proud that his sons and their wives lived with him and that his daughter was married to a nice man up the street.





We arrive
at our
"palace."



December 8, 2007 - Ranthambhore National Park We arose at 5:30, had tea at 6 and prepared for our departure at 6:30. The park opens at 7 a.m. and you want to be the first one there so you get the choice of zones. They send the caravans to different zones so that you are not on top of one another and everyone has a chance to see the various animals. Even though we are considerably south of

Florida, the weather is quite cool in the morning before sun up.

The peacock is the national bird of India. Though it is 50/50 whether we see a Royal Bengal Tiger, we were greatly blessed to see these two tiger cubs, almost full grown, about two years old. Tigers are territorial so that one will not see two together, except when mating. This was very unusual as these two are right next to the road, within 20 feet of our vehicle!

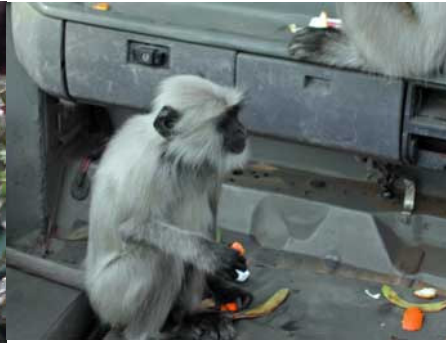


The reflection in the early morning sun of the summer palace. The upper left is a deer print; the center right, the tiger. The wild boar each the underwater vegetation.



Not only did we see the two cubs above, but here is a third tiger. The two pictures are, in fact, the same animal.



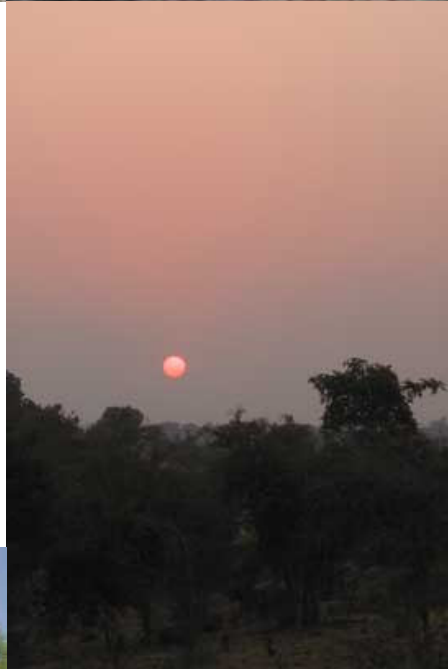


Our guide "accidentally" left a bag with our orange and banana peelings in the car, when we returned to the entry point, the monkeys were all over the car, grabbing the guide by the arm, not anxious to let go. They quickly spotted the bag with the peels and opened it forthright. Soon all the monkeys were eating the peels and having a great time.

In the afternoon, we went out again and saw various deer, very close to our vehicle. We also saw lot of birds including the baby owls below.







December 9, 2007 - On the road we see overloaded trucks like this. Once we saw the overhead bag broken and the grain all over the road.



We also visited this roadside pepper processing "plant." The ladies are removing the stems from the peppers before they are left in the sun to dehydrate.

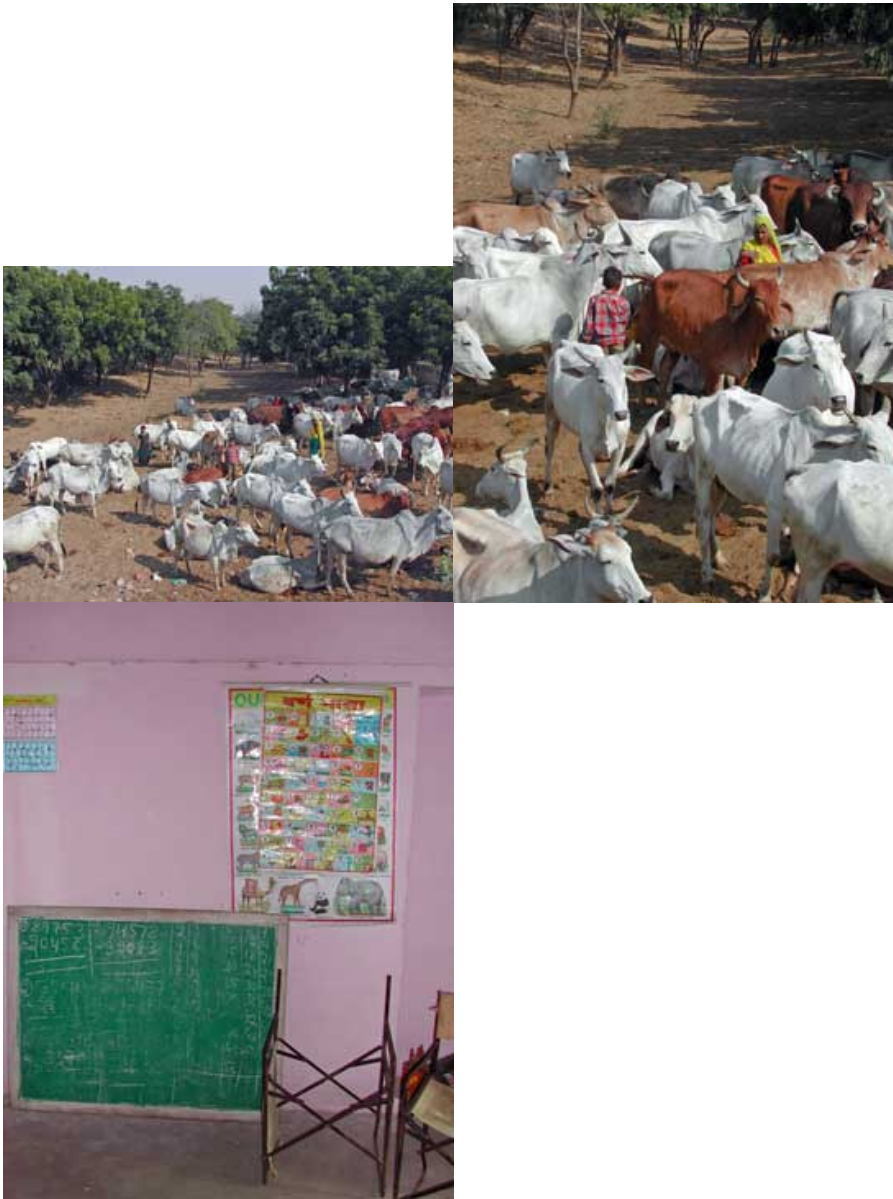
We also visited a retirement home for aged cattle. They use the dung to make incense by combining it with camphor and other spices, they then pack it in little tubes, extrude it, dry it in the sun and then package it for sale.







We also visited a farmer and a school





December 10, 2007

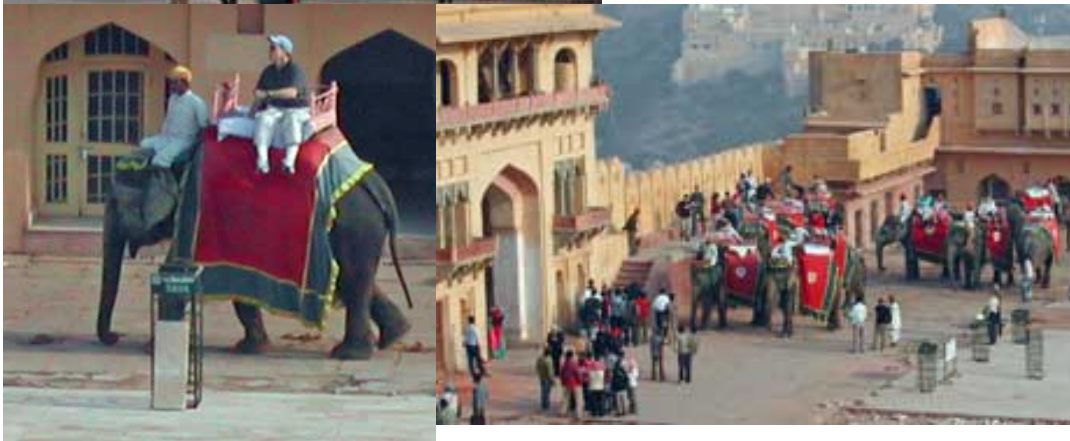
Jaipur where we saw a snake charmer [need photo] with his cobras. Raj said that the snakes follow the motion of the instrument rather than the sound, that they are de-fanged

and thus harmless and that because he feeds them well, they respond to his training and stay in the basket.



While waiting for our tickets we watched the monkeys jump from dome to roof and here they are picking each other's fleas.

The Amber Fort in Jaipur had elephants to take visitors from the bottom of the hill to the top.





We visited a carpet factory and bought one. Here, I am tying a stitch. The craftsman is shearing the rug with scissors.

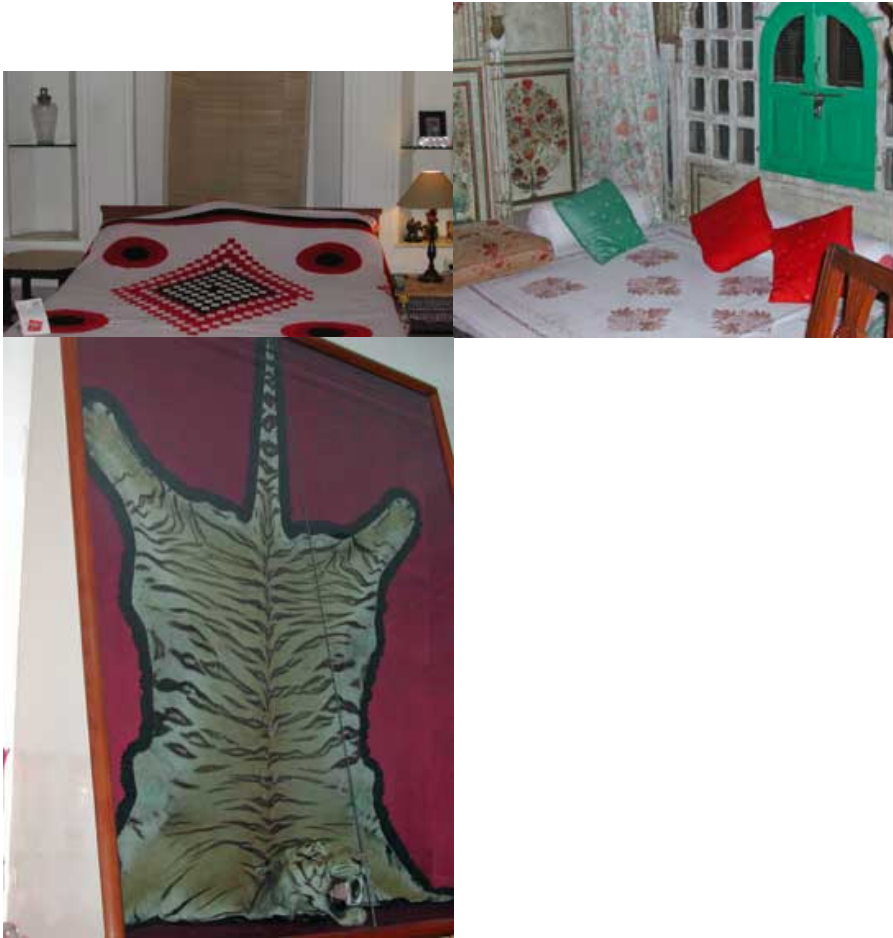




The Prince of Wales Museum is lit up at night.

We visited a very well-to-do family where the parent and four sons lived together as five households under one very large roof. They are related to the royal family.





December 11, 2007 - We visited the Palace of the Winds, not actually a palace but rather a facade of 956 delicate, honeycombed sandstone windows used by the ladies of the palace to watch the outside world without being watched. Next we saw the Jantar Mantar, a remarkable astronomical and astrological observatory built in the 18th century. The giant sundials here are still accurate to two-tenths of a second!



At the City Palace the beautifully carved archways are flanked by uniformed guards. This little



fellow stands next to Raj, our tour leader, and has been employed here for many years. There are two flags, a large one and one that is 1/4 of its size to commemorate the Savoy. The term means a person with high intelligence. The flags represent a person with 1 1/4 the average intelligence, which is what the ruler was called in the past.



After the palace we had some free time so we went to the elephants for a ride ourselves. When we got there we were told that the elephants had completed their five laps up to the fort and had been put back in the stable until tomorrow. The young man saw the crestfallen expressions on our face as I pleaded, "couldn't we get a short ride?" He was able to accommodate us around a few blocks for 20 minutes. This was one of our greatest India experiences.



That evening we had a gala farewell dinner and Sandra, Judy and Joyce got all dressed up in their new Salwar Kameez outfits.



December 12, 2007 - Summer Palace of the Maharaja, Shahpura Palace



After we viewed the rooms and paintings, some of us climbed these stairs to go to the Hindu Temple. This is the end of the herd of donkeys coming down the steps. This is the old fort that is above the palace and a view of the new part of the palace that was recently completed. My friend, Ganesh, accompanied us up the mountain and around the fort. He is a painter, age 25, with a daughter aged 3.



My friend, Ganesh, painted an original fine detail painting. (PC24) He taught me how to hold the cricket bat and I had a chance to play with him and his friends.

On the road again to Delhi, we encountered a tractor who had to pull off to let our bus pass. The roadway is very narrow. We also passed this truck full of discarded clothing that would be taken and resold, like we would in a thrift shop. It is not unusual to see cattle on the road, but this was the freeway!



December 13, 2007 - Written on the wall near our houseboat departure point:

When you sail through the river of silence, that's when you'll hear your heart sing.
(Kahlil Gibran)

The face of the water is like a wonderful book for it has a new story to tell each day.
(Mark Twain)

Rolling down the river in Kerala on our house boat. The State of Kerala is much different than the India we saw in the north. They have regular rainfalls and state education, medical care and liquor stores. No smoking in public, no begging, and the government provides septic tanks for everyone and housing for homeless.



School with school waterbus on the left





December 14, 2007 - Today we visited a village on the shore and an orphanage and school. We gave out pencils at the school, it was a "feeding frenzy." The mother superior is in charge of the orphanage.





These are some of the rooms in the orphanage.

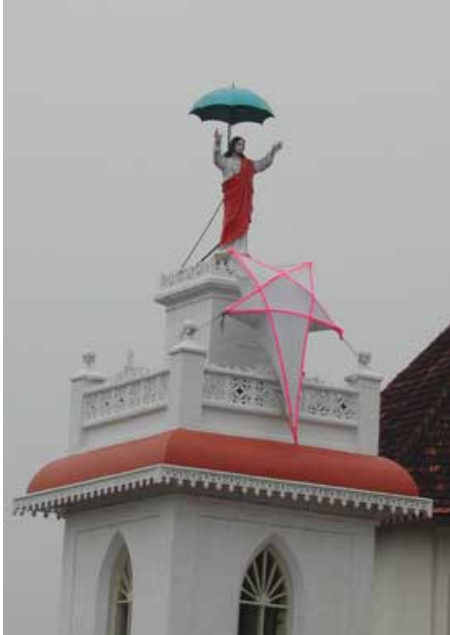




This girl, Teke, stopped Judy and asked her to pray for her. The middle picture is Teke and her sister. At the children's school next door, boys and girls study together until grade 4. Here the younger children assemble for their morning prayer and announcements.



Judy addresses the student body stating that they had a beautiful school, thanked them for allowing us to visit with them, that it was good to see that they had lots of books and that they were excited about learning. She told them that we would pray for them as they learned and grew. Everyone celebrates Christmas in Kerala. India is 2% Christian and 35% of the 2% live in the state of Kerala. These Christmas stars are on everyone's house, whether they are Hindu, Muslim or Christian.



This fancy house is on the water front. The boatman is selling house wares. Cocoa grows here. We visited this church which has an umbrella over Jesus.



Coconut dries in the sun before it is pressed for oil. Vanilla beans are also dried for use as seasoning. These long beans are served as vegetables.



The vanilla plant and the jambos fruit which is sweet and sour. This is the Beatle nut which is chewed in Bhutan for its elevating features but it makes your teeth and lips red.



This is a Beatle nut tree. Here is nutmeg on the tree. We ate lunch on banana leaves with a spread like they have at a wedding feast.



We visited a village in the afternoon. Here is a general store and a bake shop. This man is a goldsmith. Gold jewelry is critical because it plays an important part in the wedding process.



A beautiful house in the Portuguese tradition. The kind man just to the left of Bashir invited us to see his house.





In this picture, you see on the left, a coconut being processed in this food preparation room.



This device is used to remove the coconut meat from the hull. Bashir uses this lever device to break the coconut into pieces.



The coconut is inside the husk. One then uses this square sickle to open the coconut, with a move that we considered quite dangerous but which is used routinely in this area.



The same processor grates the coconut which we tasted. Back on the street, the vegetable market and the fish fresh off the boat.



The center photo is of a boat carrying goods for sail. On the right the ferry which delivers people from one island to the other.



We visited a Syrian Orthodox Church.



The sanctuary has beautiful statues. This depicts Noah's arc. This depicts the resurrection cave.



The cross has a dove, representing the Holy Spirit. Note that India is in the center of the world. Our boat now has a Christmas star.



This man follows his father in the statuary wood carving business.



The catch is displayed for purchase. We've eaten all kinds of new vegetables. This is a competitive row boat.



Before dinner, Judy catches three catfish on a cane pole and the crew ate them for dinner, along with some that they caught!



December 15, 2007 - We visited this cooperative coconut fiber factory where they make course carpets for commercial use and mats. The first photo shows the ladies spinning the coconut fiber into rope. We start with this fiber and wind up with rope.



After spinning, the rope is soaked in hydrogen peroxide solution for 24 hours to produce a white rope. Then it is boiled in vats in which color is added. The finished product has a much longer life when used in the natural color and not having to go through these chemicals. These men have short life spans due to the chemicals they inhale, the dyes which they get on their hands and the boiling liquids that splash on their sandaled feet. OSHA would have a field day! The ropes are straightened and wound on spindles.



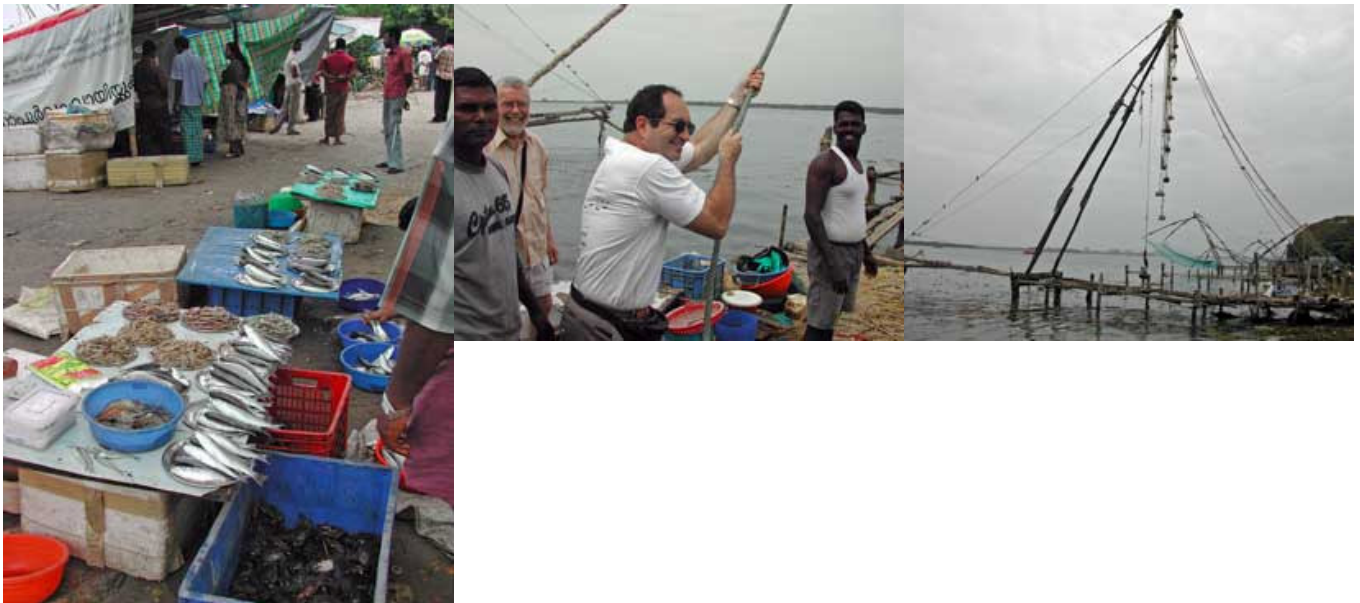
Finally the ropes are grouped into a thicker, more durable, group for weaving. These men work in pairs chucking the shuttle back and forth. The final product is the commercial mat. These were used in our house boat. We bought a smaller, similar mat for our side door.



In the city of Cochin, we visited this, the oldest Christian church established by the Portuguese, then remodeled by the Dutch.



These "Chinese fishing nets" use a counterbalance system of suspended rocks to assist in raising the nets. One pulls on the lines cascading down to the right. Not our catch but similar. Later you will see these boats pictured on our sunset cruise of the harbor.





That evening we went to the theatre and saw a Kathakali Dance event. Kathakali is the theatrical dance of Kerala, known for elaborate performances and staged only for the rulers of Kerala. Women participate in modern performances, breaking the tradition of an all-male cast, as they enact an episode from the Ramayana and Mahabharata epics. Complex costumes and elaborate facial paint (heroes have green faces; villains have red or black and holy men and women have yellow) enhance the moods, emotions, and inner sensibilities that are shown by expression, gesture and action. Drama is added with the narrative verse, sung with an accompaniment of drums, cymbals and other instruments. The show we saw had only men performing.





December 16, 2007 - In Cochin we see the sites of the city.

The Jew Town cemetery, there are 14 reserved sites for the 14 remaining Jews living in Cochin. The synagogue.



Teak wood is used and exported. It takes 12 years before harvest. We went on a sunset harbor cruise and saw various vessels and a beautiful sunset. We were blessed by good weather throughout the trip.



We met some of the passengers on this cruise in Jew Town. As we passed we waved and they waved back. Due to the large amount of silt carried into the harbor by the river, the dredging operation continues daily. Note the big screw drill on the rear. Sunset over the harbor at the Chinese Fishing Nets.



The river ferry takes cars for 5 rupees, about \$.15 and people for Rs 1 (\$.03) Fishing vessels docked as it is Sunday. This fighting vessel was traveling up the harbor.



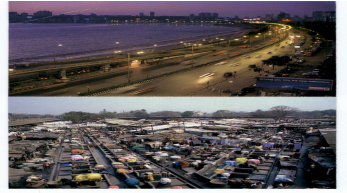


December 17, 2007 - Bombay/Mumbai. We flew from Cochin to Bombay and took a city tour for an overview of the city. That evening the nine of us had our farewell dinner together. Bombay, being a large city has its share of slums however there are very few homeless as there are jobs for everyone, even the uneducated who are willing to work as housekeepers, goods carriers and other menial jobs. The flower market wholesales to vendors around the town. These deplorable conditions are, in part, due to rent controls that do not give the landlord enough money to maintain the building.



In the Ghat the workers pickup, clean, dry and press the clothes before returning them. They are gradually being replaced by home, automatic washing machines. The Gandhi museum was a complete review of the life of the founder of this country.

Ghandi stayed here while he lived in Bombay, though he didn't own the house. The upper balcony is just outside his room.



The Victoria station for the railway, patterned on the London version. The very famous, Taj Mahal Hotel and across the street, the Gateway to India.



To prevent people from falling into each other's wells, the city developed a municipal water system and a ground level tank holding a large volume of water. To avoid contamination of this water, the city covered it and built a park on top of it. The topiary trees are within this park. The Bombay skyline and public beach.



December 18,
2007 - We leave
the hotel at
10:30 p.m. (on
December 17th)
for our 2:40
a.m. flight,
which does not

leave until 3:30 a.m.. We arrive four hours before
our flight, not the best planning by OAT, but we deal
with it. We are very tired upon boarding and forego the lamb chops and movie for sleep.
One must keep priorities in focus. We transfer in London and New York and look
forward to spaghetti, steak and yellow cake with chocolate icing. It may be a long time
before I eat Indian food again.