

Tirupati, India, February 2004

The parts in italics are comments at the time of writing, which may be some time after the indicated date.

I am writing this on Tuesday night at 11.30, waiting for Imran to return from delivering his motorbike to its owner in Tirupati because his brother has just fallen off a roof and cut his head and the bike is needed as an ambulance. I have just walked to the STD booth to buy biscuits and to try to phone home. Failed to hit the right time on the Tuesday evening but had a brief chat with Leigh - now resting in Lichfield after printing off his thesis.

Saturday 31st January. I will start this diary with what occupied my mind during the last few days at home, which were taken up with preparing this visit and with meeting a few important deadlines. Three days earlier I had finished the review (2 days early), promised to Victor Davidson for his special edition of Archives of Biochemistry. This was completed in an irritable flourish as I found that it had to be submitted online and the system would not accept my WordPerfect files [they had claimed earlier that these are acceptable]. So I sent an email in response to their suggestion that I should rewrite in some way and told them they could have a Word copy and edit it themselves or they could miss me out. They then agreed to solve it themselves. They pretend that online submissions help the author but I find they only annoy the author while saving the publishers money. Next deadline was THE deadline of Leigh's PhD thesis. The writing was finished and so really he had achieved his goal - of finishing writing by the end of January - but the thought of having it actually out of the way completely by the weekend, and the increasing possibility that this might be feasible, led to a feverish last dash to get everything printed, including new figures to replace a couple with (tiny) mistakes, then photocopying, followed by a stressed fumble in the library to get everything collated and back to Lynn to soft-bind, and to Boldrewood for a proud exhibition of the great work before submitting it to the Faculty office by 3.30. [Note added later: the external examiners were very impressed and Leigh is now Dr Felton]. After a celebratory, relaxed (at last) coffee in my office, Leigh went off to celebrate with his lab and I managed to finish another deadline; Raveendra's thesis report for Tirupati Department of Biochemistry. That left 20 minutes to dig out my lectures for Tirupati and home to finish packing.

Imran has now returned - at midnight- his friend needed 7 stitches but nothing serious.

English Rose collection took me to Terminal 1 where there was a special big welcoming sign for Executive Club passengers' rapid transit lounge where my exhilaration was turned to humiliation as I was politely and gently told that I needed Terminal 4. My fault. Had too much time anyway, so passed it going by train to terminal 4 where there was a special check-in desk with no queue. No problem with camera bag plus laptop. Then stupidly I stuffed myself with a big fried breakfast - real comfort food. The flight was all good. Leg-room was only 31 inches so I felt a bit cramped. I should have chosen the seat Leigh advised - by the emergency exit with enough space to lie down. Watched 2 films and had good food. Chennai airport is cleaner than ever with smooth marble floors that feel like a 5 star hotel. I changed my cash to rupees in the most efficient friendly office in India then fought for my suitcase. Trying to be efficient, the gang of helpers had heaved off suitcases as soon as they appeared through the hatch and had formed a solid mass of them, preventing access to them and to new ones appearing. This confusion was compounded by the insistence of most of the 400 passengers on putting their trolleys right up against the carousel. I joined up with some very lively Australians to form a chain to heave all the log jammed cases out beyond the crowds which led to a different confusion and delay as grateful old ladies thanked us for our help. I captured my case on its 3rd time round. Surya was the first person I saw as I came out; he had been waiting for nearly two hours to ensure that he did not repeat last years' problem when he did not turn up at all. Temperature was a cool 75 degrees - at one am. He had hired the usual lumbering Ambassador car in Tirupati so that we could drive the 50 km to the sea town of Mahabalipuram which is famous for its carved shore temples (8th century) and the stone carving that continues there. This is a good start to my visit as it ignores Chennai (old Madras) and provides a couple of days to relax and acclimatise. The road out to Mahabalipuram has been improved yet again with bright orange catseyes much of the way. This slowed our driver who was apparently nervous of them as if they were traffic lights that might go red at any minute. We had our usual room by the pool surrounded by bougainvillea flowers and lulled by the sound of the sea. Surya was delighted with his camera (from Argos) which is very good but only able to take pictures in good light (or by flash) as its has a relatively poor lens.

Sunday 1st February. After a wonderful puri masala breakfast with mango juice in the open-air restaurant looking out over the gardens we played with our new toys which this year includes a Canon digicam. I have my usual inhibitions about pointing the camera at people but am helped by the camcorder's 18x optical zoom. My first movie is of the fishermen using a sort of net I have not seen before. All that I saw to start with was a dozen men

apparently having a tug-of-war with an invisible sea monster. As they heaved up and along the beach it turned out to be one end of a huge net, the other end being part of a second tug-of-war further along the beach. They only caught tiny fish but lots of them. As always they were very friendly and wanted me to film them. Surya was very pleased that I did not want to walk to Mahabalipuram along the very hot beach; he played with his camera while I swam in the pool all the rest of the morning.

In the afternoon we had a rather frustrating drive of 90 minutes out to the bird sanctuary at Vendantangel, the frustration being caused by roadworks and removal of road signs; it should have taken 60 minutes. A great contrast to my first visit. The sanctuary is a large lake full of wooded islands covered in nesting and roosting storks, ibis, spoonbills, cormorants, herons.... Instead of the remembered peaceful place, the car park is now a mass of food stalls and the usual fairground stalls selling junk to 3 coach loads of schoolkids. The rest of them filled up the raised dyke along the side of the sanctuary. Filming was difficult as I had not mastered the manual focussing system but the results were quite impressive; this was inevitable as the birds were so impressive. I was planning to produce great panoramas of green paddy fields in the setting sun with the flocks of ibis and storks all converging on their evening roosting place. All the ingredients were there except for the setting sun which was partially obscured by thin cloud, but finding the approaching flocks in the viewfinder was difficult, the tiny specks suddenly becoming a noisy throng of honking birds immediately overhead; it was more like manning an anti-aircraft battery against low flying bombers (from my experience). I hope that I will be able to edit out the expletives and my pathetic little mutterings about stupid bloody birds. It was worth going but not the magical experience of our previous visit. For dinner we had kingfisher beer and grilled fish, hanging over the edge of my plate, with French fires (according to the menu). Mahabalipuram is a good entry into India but with an in-transit feel about it, with French and Dutch tourists filling the place for its annual dance festival.

Monday 2nd February. After breakfast of coffee and toast (real; with butter and jam) we drove the nearly five hours journey to Tirupati. The roads were fairly clear even in the usually-congested towns of Kanchipuram and Tiruttani, and it was not unbearably hot as we rumbled along at 60km/hour through very attractive rural Tamil Nadu's paddy fields and coconut palms, swooshing over great piles of paddy straw laid out in the road for us to do our bit of threshing. I wish now that I had taken the trouble to stop and take photos but I never do. About half way we acquired a phantom drummer (a mixture of Murali's Mrdingam drum and a bass Gadam - the water pot drum). We stopped a few times to investigate which part of the car was decomposing (composing?) and eventually discovered it was the retread peeling off the rear tyre, the flapping rubber doing its musical job. No problem sir. We stopped at a little wayside tyre repairer and with three energetic slashes of a very sharp knife the offending bits were excised and flung into the ditch allowing us to set off home on the thin smooth vulnerable remains of the tyre - "so we can go much faster now sir". I think that all this was the result of the workings of a small delivery truck we were following which advertised on its back: "All sorts of Devilry for all your Needs".

We arrived at the University Guest house at exactly 2pm as planned and moved in immediately to my usual ground floor room where we were amazed to find that Sai Gopal (lecturer now head of department) had succeeded in getting the useless single speed ceiling fan replaced with a new silent variable joy of a fan. To balance this the lighting system is down to zero light bulbs (should be five) and only 1/3 fluorescent tubes, no water supply to the handbasin and a disconnected shower (electricity and water). Never mind, I still have a hole in the floor and a working cistern, and one tap and 2 buckets.

[Writing this early Thursday morning. It is tempting to give up this diary but I would later regret this; I will produce a brief version up till now then try to be more thorough later]

I phoned Imran as soon as we arrived. He had come the 200km from Kadappa early in the morning by motorbike, to celebrate a Muslim festival here - it was a holiday, hence his being able to come. We met up at the nearby restaurant (Athidhi). Surya had gone on a few errands, leaving me to stand on the outside 'corridor' on the first floor leading to the restaurant and facing out over the Balaji colony crossroads, looking for Imran, who evaded my searching eyes and came up behind me: "Welcome to India my dear Professor, you are looking as important and beautiful as always sir". That's my Imran! In the very dark cool restaurant we were ushered into a cosy corner seat where Imran sat staring at me, stroking my arm "thank you for coming, please do you remember me"? This, after I had been talking on the phone every day last week - to say YES imran I AM coming don't worry. Surya soon joined us for a really happy re-union. The staff at the restaurant have all changed so I did not get last year's special welcome of cold pineapple juice from the grinning waiter. Back at the guest house the lecturer Sai Gopal arrived to check that everything was ok and to arrange for me to come next morning etc. Surya arranged a local mobile phone for me using Hugh's old phone - to be passed on to Imran when I leave. I took ages to incompetently unpack, having first washed a year's grease off the shelves of the cupboard. Last year I got the sliding doors to work but they had been wrecked again so we had another go - with the aid of my leatherman tools. I seemed to spend the rest of the day keeping a nosy Imran out of my biscuit boxes of electrical things and gifts, and reminding him to save nothing on my computer.

The evening was a typical Imran farce. We had arranged to eat first and then go to Surya's house to meet the family. But first we had to drive on the (motor)bike to town to visit Imran's friend. I would have preferred a first visit into the town on foot to enjoy the warm evening air and the crowded happy feeling in the streets but we had to batter our way, honking and weaving through the little side streets up to Giripuram. We met him in his home but could not talk because they were noisily drilling a well next door. So we (Imran) arranged to meet up with his friend plus one other elsewhere. I assumed this would be at a restaurant but as usual he did not mention his plans, and he drove us all the way out to the boating lake where we sat on a bench, with Imran being sentimental about how he Gopi and Surya were there with me last year etc. It was almost completely dark and the friends did not appear. We found them in the adjacent park, where we stood about while I was interrogated by the more aggressive friend (Shekram?) While I tried to chat with the calmer nice Yogi (his name - not a joke). I cannot remember the details but it turned out that Surya's family were away and eventually we all went to a new 'Garden restaurant' nearby and sat in the dark with a load of rabbits hopping round our feet having a nice gobi masala (cauliflowers are in season again).

Tuesday 2nd February. Last night was very disturbed, Imran insisting on having the fan on full to keep cool but that was not enough to keep the mosquitos at bay (I had my electric zapper but no pads for it). A servant brought us tea and asked what I would like for breakfast but then told me that the old cook was unwell so it would have to be collected from town; I declined and had a piece of chocolate. I was collected by Sai Gopal on his scooter at 9.20 and went off to arrange the work. I felt really at home as I walked into the light airy entrance past the single white flop-eared immunological rabbit in his hutch on the floor (no Home Office regulations here), being greeted like a long-lost relative by the research scholars and teaching assistants (especially Sateesh). I will be lecturing final year students on aspects of industrial microbiology (this will need a few new lectures to be prepared) and bioenergetics etc with the 'Previous year' students (the first year is called the PreviousYear, the second year being the final year). While I was at the department I had sent Imran off on a challenge to get stuff for my 4 weeks here and he came back with change from £5 with a bag containing toothpaste, two small towels, two floor mats, soap, 6 clothes hangers, 40 mosquito pads for my electric zapper, a large can of anti mosquito spray and a 5 metre extension cable with three 2-pin sockets. So I can now have phone charger + camcorder charger, battery charger and computer all safely loaded up together. I gave my first lecture in the afternoon. We went to Surya's for dinner - cooked by Surya - rice pancakes covered like a pizza with onions, other veggies and fine sliced chillies. Followed by a drive around town to find a monkey hat (balaclava helmet) for Imran's early morning drive home.

Wednesday 3rd February. I had a good night with mosquitos absent, but kept waking anyway every hour. I got up as asked at 5.30 to pack Imran off home but had to fight to get him going for an hour before leaving. No breakfast as the cook was still unwell. I had my first lecture on bioenergetics with the 'Previous year' students, but starting with a biographical chat. They seem more lively than last year's batch, so it was very enjoyable. I was whisked back by motorbike to the guest house by Sateesh where I hurriedly prepared the afternoon lecture on fermentation etc. Prof Srinivasulu had arranged for one of his minions to cycle down town to Athidhi restaurant to get my lunch which came promptly at 1pm; good but very spicy gobi masala and fried rice. I seem to have had very little sleep and after the big lunch I could hardly keep awake in my own lecture with the fan gently swooshing me to sleep. It was 88 degrees and after the lecture I stayed in my fanned cool room and tried to do something with the programme Pinnacle - to make my camcorder tapes into movies. I am impressed at how quickly Hugh sorted it out, as I seemed to take ages to do it. It will take a lot more experimentation to know what I am doing. The colours of my movies seem rather dull on the computer; I hope they are more alive on TV. Exactly as planned, Madhu arrived at 5 pm by bus (a 3 hour journey) from his college town near Kadappa. He seems unchanged and is a good contrast to Imran, being very relaxed and gentle with his husky voice asking about my family members etc. I met him 3 years ago when he was Imran's friend in Chittoor but they fell out in some childish thing of Imran's and so I have to remember not to mention him to Imran.

We had a good old fashioned stroll in the evening down to the auto stand at the University entrance and to his favourite non-veg restaurant near Surya's Kalyan residency hotel. The restaurant was typically almost dark. Perhaps this was so that we do not see the waiters (one per customer) preparing our plates; these are steel plates with a banana leaf cut to the same shape lining the plate, cleaned by flinging a bit of water on it then rubbing it hard with their fingers then flinging the water onto the floor. Anyway the mutton byriani was very good. Then had my first stroll down Ghandi road where I found the shop where I first met SasiKumar, when appropriately enough I was buying jeans for Mahdu. They gave me Sasi's number and also called him. His response was "Hello Chris, hello Chris, hello chris, I will come to the guest house now OK?? I put him off until tomorrow. Then called in to the tiny sari shop of Gogula, Surya's Esperanto tutor. I suppose I should feel guilty about judging from appearances but I was surprised, as previously, by his enormous knowledge of British current affairs, pouring out of this old man (Help, I think he is my age!), sitting on his little stool in the street by his shop in his rather dirty shirt and Lungi and 4 day silver beard. He was fascinated by the battle between Blair and the BBC. After a nice long

peaceful 'chit chat' (his name for it) with Mahdu, I had another disturbed night because Mahdu couldn't sleep and woke me regularly to ask if I was asleep. Then he was up at 5.30 to get the coach back home in time for his lectures.

Thursday 5th February [*I have caught up with myself as I am writing this on the night of 5th itself*]. This is a special Indian use of this word; rather like the use of 'only'. I am studying engineering itself; I am going into Tirupati only. I like the perfectly logical use of 'straightly'. If you are quick you go quickly, so why not go straightly when you are going direct? The old lady cook is back smiling happily but I still got no breakfast to go with my two cups of tea. I did my morning duty at about 88 degrees then walked back by way of Biochemistry. Parthasarathy was 'out of station sir', Thyagaraju was on duty at their convocation (graduation) and Appaji Rao and Murthy were guarding an exam. They came out to chat and complain that I had not planned to visit them, but was going yet again to Virology/microbiology. It is now 3 years since I transferred from Biochemistry to Virology at the request of Srinivasulu who had been a young lecturer when I first lectured there in the Botany department. After prof Venkaiah left Biochemistry the Dept became very poorly organised. I had intended to be domestic and do washing after my hot walk back but there was no water. Another guest had left his tap running and gone out, leaving the huge water tank on the roof to empty itself. So they had to turn off the main water supply to avoid it all pouring down his sink. It confirmed that they do not have duplicate keys to the rooms. So, no water no washing. I spent a gentle productive session working out how best to use the camcorder, setting it up on Hugh's Christmas tripod and going through all the many menus. This turned out to be invaluable this evening. Surya kindly brought a take away gobi masala (it is the cauliflower season) which was excellent. Once again I nearly fell asleep in my own lecture - on industrial microbiology.

At 4.30 I set out on my first long walk down town with my camcorder tucked in my new (brilliant, Samsonite) bag so it is not too conspicuous. After the cricket ground I went in for the first time to check my email. I have arranged for Spam to be deleted so it is easier than last year. The main spam was from the orchestra with Zena still bitching about our agreed payment to John Traill. There was also a message from the editor of the journal where I sent my review. They have still not sorted out the formatting so one of the referees was complaining. There is nothing I can do from here without too much trouble so I will email them and insist they solve it. One of the referees had the cheek to comment on my very unusual use of commas and other punctuation!!!!!!; this must be the influence of Leigh, and Eats, shoots and leaves. I will check that there is no truth in it and then compose a comma-rich response for them. I then set the camcorder to night mode and did the Ghandi road. As I wandered down the narrow busy entrance to the Govindarajaswami temple the noise level shot up and the perfect film subject came through the entrance; it is the occasion of a special outing of Govindarajaswami's wife. This particular holiday happens twice a year. She is paraded on a platform supported on long poles carried by staggering devotees, illuminated by glaring kerosene lamps and flaming pitch torches, accompanied by wild drums and saxophone (!), preceded by the two temple elephants and followed by hordes of other devotees. I captured it all, then followed them to the big temple tank; this is a square lake with an ornate gazebo thing in the middle and many shallow steps all around the edges. This was packed with worshippers and the curious and the bored. The god is placed in a highly decorated roofed raft with her priests and musicians, which is then towed around the lake for us to worship or photograph. This is all accompanied by the drums, saxophone etc with the roaring chatter of hundreds of spectators, supported by the never-ending hoots and squeals and shrieks from the background traffic.

Needing dinner, I gave myself the luxury of lime soda and navrotan kurma in the air-conditioned Sundiri Park hotel. A nice change, being able to eat without talking or entertaining, reading the Pullman book about dust and ghosts and spectres and other edifying stuff. Had an odd encounter in the gents (don't panic). There was room for only one and after I finished, I turned to wash my hands and found a teenage boy standing anxiously waiting to talk to me. He is David: "I am a born again Christian sir and my father is a pastor so I want to ask you about the church in your country". So we swapped phone numbers so that I can illuminate him at some later date. My auto got me back to the guest house just in time for Sasi to arrive. He has hardly changed, still tall and handsome and keen to be either a model or a racing bike driver. He was the most scary of all the bikers who gave me lifts. He no longer has a bike having crashed it and broken his leg earlier this year, going too fast on a sandy corner. He said he thought of me in hospital as I had predicted exactly this. We had a nice long slow struggling chat, his English language being more enthusiastic than accurate.

Imran just called to fix up this weekend when I am supposed to be visiting him in Kadappa. It will go ahead, but made more tolerable I hope, by Surya arranging sensible travel times.

Friday 6th February [*I am struggling to keep my diary going; I am writing this at six in the morning after Madhu has left to catch his bus back to Rajampet near Kadappa*].

As always I relied on Surya to deal with transport. All express trains have 3 classes of sleeper and he booked me on the lowest of these as I would hardly need to sleep anyway. I had stupidly fallen asleep in the sun in the garden and although it was beneath the shade of a sparsely-leaved tree and under light cloud I felt a bit sun stroked. I got to the station too soon, having stepped straight into an auto outside the guest house. I waved as one

was passing and he stopped. I told him I wanted the train station and he nodded to get in and I found I was gate-crashing a journey with two girls from the agriculture college. I don't know if they had to pay as well as me. Surya came to put me on the train. This sounds feeble but it is the tradition to go to the station with friends. A good one in this case as the platform was over the tracks. There is a bridge about 70 metres down the platform but everyone wanders about the tracks carting their bags like hopeless displaced persons. We found my coach with my name conspicuous on the typed list glued to the door. I was sharing the compartment with 2 little noisy girls, parents and granny. Later the ticket collector moved me to the next compartment with 2 engineering reps from Hyderabad; the younger one had just graduated and was good company, telling me enthusiastically about his work while the older rep listened with a sneer.

The very hot compartment was soon air-conditioned down to uncomfortably cool and I sat there with a huge thick blanket wrapped around me like an old squaw chatting to the young braves. I was the only person within earshot planning to get out at Kadappa and the huge long station platforms have the name only once in English (if that). I was told at 3 stations that "this is not the station you want sir, please wait, it is the next station". Eventually this was true and there was no problem anyway as there was a long wait, giving me time to fight my way out. And there was a smiling Imran waving in the distance, in pale blue jeans with pale blue top "selected after much careful consideration sir for your visual convenience", being conspicuous against the browns, greens and reds of the station staff; I was cooled down further by the ten minute bike ride to the Blue Diamond hotel. Tariff was 300 rupees / night plus an undeserved luxury tax. It did have 2 beds, one light (4 others without bulbs), a basic bathroom, dirty pillows, 3 cockroaches and the essential TV with its 50 channels, many obscured by snowstorms. I found that I was rather feverish so wrapped myself in my grubby blanket and watched the end of Ice age (appropriate film). We went out too late to find anywhere to eat but had a Kingfisher beer in a little garden restaurant then back to our room for milk bikkies and Bisleri water. I then half slept, alternately shivering and steaming while Imran did his usual TV channel hopping, drawing my attention to some special program then, as I focussed on it, immediately skipping off elsewhere. I exhibited the characteristic sickness behaviour described in Leigh's thesis; my temperature was high, I did not feel like wandering around, I hardly ever reared up, I lost interest in TV and most clearly, I found my burrowing behaviour almost completely stopped. After drinking a litre of water with 3 aspirins I had a good sleep and was ok in the morning.

Saturday 7th February. Started the day by accepting Imran's suggestion of a nice peaceful breakfast which of course was in a hot noisy standup place where I had pakora (?) - savoury doughnuts dipped in curry (chosen because no utensils are available) while my companions slurped, splashed and splattered their way through rice and curds etc. I was then taken to view two Christian churches which, on the outside, were architecturally slightly disneyish with no relationship to any other sort of religious architecture. Inside they were beautiful, with uncluttered cool marble floors and elegant cooling fans and modern stained glass windows. "Are you a missionary from the London Mission Sir?" Afraid not. Had lunch at Imran's house. From previous phone calls it had sounded as if it was in the middle of a noisy town but it is in a small village on the edge of Kadappa; being on the main road provides plenty of noise. Lunch was excellent mutton and chicken, eaten by myself with a little help from Imran. His mother is shy and hides behind a curtain most of the time. His father, ex-police chief, is only (!) 56 but acts more like 76. He expects everyone to wait on him while he slowly pontificates on everything. I asked what he did with his time and he said he watches television and sometimes, even daily, goes to the village shop by walking; "those are my hobbies sir". Things to come. We went to view Imran's Engineering college, set away from the main road in an open rural area. I had stupidly forgotten to bring my binoculars so went for a stroll with a protesting Imran through fields of sunflowers etc taking a few films of birds. I have still not sorted out how to do things with my films so am accumulating tapes full of random bits and pieces. In the evening we had pizza and ice-cream in a small open air restaurant where I was exhibited to Imran's friends. I am not sure if I would be treated in the same way if I did not have the title of professor which Imran loves. His college friends included Moiz, who was relaxed and chatty and Bukhari, the son of the owner of the engineering college, who was incompetently aggressive, firing off questions in an accent I could not follow and in English that Imran could not understand. He looked like a sort of ugly thin version of Sylvester Stallone. From Imran: "thank you sir that you did not show Bukari that you did not like him; I think I am correct, I think I know your body language; no problem 50% is good yield". We were joined by Moiz's older cousin, a special friend and adviser to them all, very gentle and frustrated that he could not speak English well enough to chat.

Our table was then invaded by a 35 year old friend of one of them who made Bukari appear elegant, relaxed and positively good company. He was unshaven with a droopy moustache and, according to Imran, always wanting to show off his wonderful English. "Hello sir, now I have this heaven sent opportunity to enquire of your good self about the country of UK; basically how is it". Very well thank you all things considered, including my absence. After more of this drivel he told me he is involved in the marketing of barium sulphate, used as a pure white pigment. "Please tell me the opportunities of developing this in the UK; is there a big demand?" I told him the potential was enormous if only the right person would come along and exploit it. Imran told everyone: "you

see isn't my professor a wise man he knows everything", then whispered in my ear "please mind your body language sir, we all think he is a stupid man with his showing off but you are doing very well". After making arrangements for the next day (as usual without consulting me) we went off to wander down a few back streets to see a peaceful little mosque in a garden where I had the usual interrogation by cheeky charming kids (I struggled to define 'cheeky' to Imran).

Sunday 8th February. After the same breakfast as yesterday we waited in the heat outside the hotel for Moiz and Bukhari to drive, on two bikes, to a ruined fort/palace of the emperor Tippu Sultan (18th C) about 15km away. This would have been a pleasant drive except for Bukhari who liked to show off on his bike, weaving about, hooting viciously every few seconds. The fort was quiet and hot and nice to visit. I have no energy to describe it so please refer to pictures. It was by a huge dried up lake. This was the real reason for going - to film waterbirds, but Imran forgot that summer is coming. No problem. On the way back we stopped at a delightful hotel for lunch in a quiet shaded garden with good food, followed by a swim in the small outdoor pool. Imran had done the usual Indian thing of planning a really thoughtful trip but not telling me about it so I hadn't brought my swimming shorts. Still enjoyable. Imran and Moiz played like children on the water shoot. It took me a long time to appreciate why it was so different from a French pool for example. It is usual for the little children to be playing about and any older kids are very good, and adults are layabouts like me who can struggle along, or highly competent. In this pool there were few swimmers but most people there were in the 25-40 age group showing off how well they could flounder and getting very noisy and excited when they could keep going for a few strokes buoyed up by a rubber tyre. It was a rather nice way of bringing down a peg some of the rather pompous noisy men we had seen at lunch time. Of course there were no women. As the lovely gold-lit cool evening came we trundled happily back to Imran's house where I had to work hard to persuade him to let me stroll into the surrounding fields through the small village. His father later said he didn't like dirty villages. I suppose the roads are just hard mud but they are swept every few hours and there were no mounds of litter as were scattered about on the main road next to his house.

As the sun finally set I called into an STD booth and had the luck to get Libby and Hugh in together and had very nice chat in what must have been a chaotic house with 16 visitors to lunch. Then I was dropped off at the hotel where I had a good chat with Clive and Karen and then even caught Leigh, in a very relaxed chatty mood telling about his new self-employed status, Do it Yourself projects, and not a word about his thesis; he has typically put all that behind him This all raised my morale to a level sufficient to tolerate our trip to an 'exhibition'; this was more like a funfair with a few scattered agricultural stalls. I stood for 30 minutes next to the weighing machine with frantic screaming Telugu film songs preventing conversation, being introduced to yet more of Imran's friends and friend of friends. I am ashamed to say that the only ride I went on was the weighing machine (68kg). Imran got very irritated because I wouldn't go on the ramshackle death rides and even his best friend Moiz confessed he was too frightened. Imran hurtled round the sky while Moiz, with propietal arm around my waist introduced me to curious friends as his special friend from UK which he explained was part of America. I was eventually driven off to collect stuff from the hotel and to the station for the 10.30 train The hotel was a total of 600 rupees (£7.50) for a double room for two nights. I was escorted by Imran, Moiz, Bukhari and one other friend to the station where we arrived 30 minutes early for a train that was 30 minutes late. As is the custom I was escorted onto the train after the usual rushing about to find the right compartment. Because I had booked late, my name was not on the list stuck to the coach but fortunately the ticket collector had a note and found my berth. This was at the bottom of a set of 3 bed shelves. The train was packed with sleepers (it was the Mumbai/ Chennai express) and it was almost completely dark. I had to stand embarrassed amongst the snores and protruding feet and shrouds, in the dark being embraced by unidentifiable friends promising to email etc etc. They only just escaped from the train before it departed, leaving me in complete darkness kneeling and lurching on the floor, laying out my sheets and blanket. The best lullaby ever must be an Indian express train as it rumbles along at about 30 mph through the sleeping villages lit by a full moon. I felt exhausted and peaceful, alone at last.

The next conscious experience was a sharp tap on my foot by the ticket collector "Renigunta junction sir". I leaped out of a deep sleep, slamming my head on the bunk above me. "No sir, sorry sir you have ten minutes". Renigunta is a main junction town 12 km from Tirupati and I was due to be met (three in morning) by our usual driver from Surya's hotel, The Kalyan Residency. As still sleeping passengers filtered out of the train I tried to guess what might be the main exit, by following the majority but it was a bit like the scene in His dark Materials, being led into the land of the dead, zombie-like and rather directionless. The groups of passengers seemed to dissipate into thin air. I then found this was because they were dropping off the platforms onto the tracks and drifting off in at least four different directions. I eventually found a bridge over to the ticket office and after wandering about the parking area rejecting auto offers I was pleased to find Rajesh staggering sleepily out of his car, to drive me back through the empty deserted film set of a sleeping Tirupati back to a supper of dry mango biscuits and mineral water, having forgotten to eat earlier..

Of course I was woken 3 hours later at 7.30 with a cup of tea and apologies that there was no breakfast. I

had got Imran to phone the department to cancel my 9.0 lecture but Sai Gopal felt he had to come and wake me up to check that I was Ok at 9.15; a nice but occasionally slightly silly man.

Monday 9th February. I spent the rest of the morning preparing a lecture, as arranged, on methanogenesis but found on my arrival that Sateesh had changed his mind and had covered the same topic that morning in a different lecture series. This precipitated a friendly review of the situation with the pleasing outcome that I will not teach the second year students after this Friday so will have a lot more free time. I can recall very little of this day except that I went off through the late hot afternoon with my 2 cameras, binoculars and bag toward the village of Thurumulagunta where I was recognised and taken off to young Venkat's house. He then distributed the photos I had taken last year, printed so carefully, and now fought over with grubby excited hands. I had a severe reprimand from some woman who did not appear on the photos although she insisted that I had taken 3 photos of her. Of course then I had to take more and have two lots of tea in the crowded little village houses. I will try to get these printed cheaply here this year.

Tuesday 10th February. After my nice morning lecture I had the irritating experience of going to the internet cafe to deal with the editors of the Davidson review (Archives of Biochem and Biophysics), but after 5 minutes the network collapsed, fortunately after I had read long interesting emails from Libby and Hugh. Madhu was supposed to come at about 7.30pm from Rajampet (near Kadappa) but his bus broke down and the replacement had a puncture so it was nearly 9.00 when he arrived, hot and worried that I would have gone. We had a gentle stroll down to the usual Athidi restaurant and the best prawn (prarn) curry (with gravy) I have ever had, supported by large butter Naans and roast mutton (mainly bone with very tasty stringy bits that are still fighting for their place in my teeth, in spite of concerted battles with batteries of toothpicks). Mahdu is such a nice relaxing friend, always asking about me and trying to make sure I am happy. I am.

Wednesday 11th February. At 5.30am Madhu was up and wildly splashing about in the bathroom before hurrying off for his bus back home. After my morning lecture I walked down through the campus to the town internet place and wasted 20 minutes trying to delete my Delete folder contents -1530 messages. Had a very polite response from the 'Davidson' editors to my slightly irritable note to them, explaining that I had no facilities for changing text on line and that they were paid to do it and I did not see why I should pay for colour illustration (as requested by one referee) etc. she pointed out that I had been invited as distinguished Foreign (!) Contributor and that of course all my illustrations could be in colour free and just leave everything till I get home and we are sorry you are having such a hot time etc. So I had to waste more time carefully writing an apologetic appreciative letter back.

Thursday 12th February. Although I am writing this early on Friday morning, I am having difficulty remembering what I did yesterday or the day before. If it is so unmemorable then I suppose it hardly deserves recording or reading. I woke feeling stiff with a headache, which seems to be usual. I fought the temptation to slump uselessly on the bed, and set off with binoculars and camcorder and felt better within 20 paces in the morning sun. As I came round the corner near the pig research area I heard a most beautiful whistling sound which took me back instantly to last year in Tuscany as we identified golden orioles. Wouldn't it have been perfect if I had looked across the rough wilderness through the thorn bushes and seen Libby sitting painting the scene. This time I saw 4 golden orioles but they are rather secretive and quietly left the area. I failed to film the hoopoes, coucals, sunbirds who came out to see me but got some very nice film of red-eared bulbuls as they moved in a group through a huge berry-laden tree. This year the trees have even fewer leaves than last year; the hotter it gets the more they are discarded so the spring, leading to summer, is more like our autumn.

Feeling better after my walk and my three poached eggs, I set myself the therapeutic discipline of washing clothes, kneeling on the stone bathroom floor, splashing about with buckets and [help my brain is going - I cannot remember the name of the blue washing liquid so nicely packaged in its little travel bottle by Libby - Stergene]. I found that I had indulged in some money laundering as I pulled ten assorted rupee notes from a shirt pocket. They soon recovered as they sat fluttering like sparrows on my line under the fan. I laid out my full range of undies over the metal spikes on my fence, providing a colourful welcome to visitors, who included Mr Prakash, the Head of Security who had solved my problem with the little thief Praveen last year. He looks rather less threatening in the sunlight without his khaki uniform. I had been wrong about the mother. I thought that she was careless as she sat with her back to her son's beating up but she was pleased that there was a chance that her son would be made to act sensibly; she had many times tried to stop him stealing. He has not had to go to the police station yet and there is apparently some hope. My second visitor was Sudarshan; he was the final year student who was a good friend last year. He has just had his head shaved completely and looks slightly Teutonic and aggressive. He has applied for over twenty jobs during the year but has failed to get anything and seems to have given in to his tendency to feel sorry for himself and to blame others (the Department's bad teaching in this case). He was one of the top 3 students.

We spent a long time in circular arguments as I tried to explain, gently at first and later getting more irritated, that I am unable to “just get me some small job to get me going in the UK”. It was all very frustrating and a bit depressing as he concluded by saying “I am sorry, sir, but I thought that you would really be able to give me some help, so I am very sad”. So am I.

I spent the afternoon at last attempting to work out how to deal with my camcorder clips. The instructions with the programme are not very good but I got some way into the problem. I am writing notes on it as I go so that I do not have the same struggle the next time.

I then had a slightly disappointing walk through the dairy farm and local area. Each year more of the fields have walls put around them preventing access from the farm, and the areas with the palm trees get smaller. What is left remains peaceful, with a feeling of competence and prosperity, due to the money available from the temple organisation (TTD; Tirupati Tirumula Devasthanams) that runs the farm. I collapsed on the bed and fell asleep as soon as I got back, to be woken by Sateesh come to collect me to go to an ex-students wedding evening. Jyothi graduated 2 years ago (same as Sateesh) and I still remember her as being more lively and confident than most of the other girls; she was also special in being the only student who ever used to tease me. The time of the wedding on the invitation is 7.44 pm. This is not a misprint. Apparently this is a specially auspicious time for a wedding. I don't know if they are allowed to use Indian time and be half an hour late; this would presumably initiate a disastrous married life. Sateesh drove us on his bike fairly safely out to the marriage hall, lit up like a fairground. The ceremonies are held on a stage at the front of an auditorium filled with plastic movable chairs. They probably started in rows but guests get up and wander about and swap seats during the noisy ceremony. I must have moved at least a dozen times so that different students could sit next to teacher. The band of temple musicians was led by two very long, screeching oboes with two drummers, a squeeze box player and a man clanging two tiny cymbals in a what appeared to be a complicated rhythm all its own. Although the noise was constant and aggressive it was much easier to shout over than recorded music and it gave a wonderfully wild atmosphere to everything.

In the middle of a particularly wild passage my phone wriggled in my pocket. It was Leigh with his first successful call to me. I remembered that this was the day he was going for a big hospital check up so this was rather frustrating; I could not hear and could not escape so had to call off after letting him experience the wild atmosphere for a few seconds. I later went outside to try to get him back but there was no signal. My surreptitious filming soon became blatant and I was directed by students up onto the crowded platform where the action was taking place. The ‘film unit’ with its extremely bright hot lights had taken over everything, leaving almost no space for the families and friends around the couple who were busy feeding each other, tipping rice over their heads and other activities I could not quite make out. I filmed some of this with great difficulty due to the bright film lights pointing directly at me. As these activities petered out I was led by Sateesh up onto the roof where there was a great buffet laid out. I had forgotten to bring a spoon so I avoided the rice and gravy items. “Sir, sir why is it that you are ignoring the gravy items, they are the best, let me get you some”. Get off and leave me alone will you (thought not said). Gradually all the guests drifted up onto the roof, giving me a very nice opportunity to catch up with past students, and final year students, and Previous year students. These are the 1st year and are a very friendly bunch. All the technicians etc from the Department were also there and I had to do a lot of filming of babies. All rather dark but they give the atmosphere well.

After getting back by auto to the guest house I collapsed on the bed to read but fell instantly asleep, waking again at about midnight. I then successfully got through to Leigh on my mobile but could hear almost nothing clearly except “rather shocking news” so I promised to ring back from the STD booth 10 minutes walk down the road. When I got there it was closed but the reception was better so at last I heard his news; he must now give himself injections every day. He was very cool about it but it must have been horrible having to face up to that. Our chat was interrupted by a jeep load of flag-waving political supporters of the chief minister who is visiting Tirupati; they wanted to know the way to the train station. By signalling and shouting straight straight straight they got the message that they had to turn around and go straight back down the road. So home to a good sleep, only to be woken at about 3.30 by my room gecko shouting in my ear. Unfortunately I almost immediately remembered Leigh's bad news which then woke me completely. I felt like writing a letter to him (like Libby's comfort letters to friends), but I would probably have been too sentimental and anyway he would have done his usual thing of accepting it and would be concerned about something else by the time the letter arrived [*it later transpired that there had been an error and that there is in fact no problem*].

Friday 13th February. I can't remember much about today. After the morning lecture I went to Prof Srinivasulu's office for my ritual hand washing to remove the clinging chalk dust, with a smiling office assistant standing by with a small towel, and then life-supporting sweet milky tea, the best drink of the day. The small energetic relatively sane professor from Biochemistry, Prof Thyagaraju, was there waiting for me. He said the mad Head of Department Prof Parthasarathy was waiting to see me. So I was scootered across the 100 metres of rough track to Biochemistry and I was delivered up to him. He is very dark skinned and has grey wild wavy hair starting nearly at the back of his head and protruding another few inches beyond and above. After a few pleasantries, how

are your two sons and how is madam, he charmingly told me that he thought I was looking rather dull: "I think it is your age". I refrained from telling him that he was looking more like the mummy returns every year. As expected I received my telling off for not visiting Biochemistry rather than the department of Virology/Microbiology. He was irritated that no-one had told him I was there. This was odd as I had dutifully called on my second day, but he was 'out of station'. I saw all the other staff. Perhaps they had kept quiet to protect me. The three of us sat drinking Thums Up from the bottles like three old winos while I was told how useful it would be for the students to be exposed to me, rather like exposing kids to mumps at an early age perhaps. Fortunately Parthasarathy had a class so I escaped - almost. We came across his research student, my friend Rajiv Dixit, in the corridor outside and the poor gentle boy (now married and with his PhD) was attacked by Parthasarathy in his gibbon mode, head tossing and flailing arms with his loose huge gold watch slithering up and down his arm. He accused Rajiv of being nothing but an opportunist for knowing that I was there, visiting me but not letting him know. This failed to take into account the fact that all the staff knew and had presumably not told him. Rajiv was rather depressed about this muttering to himself as we stood outside under the trees amongst the bikes chatting with other research scholars including Raveendra whose PhD thesis I had just posted back before leaving Southampton. It took some time and the help of two other research students to explain to him about his histology pictures that had the wrong magnifications on them (missed by me, detected by Leigh, and pompously pointed out by me in my report as being an obvious mistake).

Raveendra then drove me back to the guest house on his motorbike, waving his broken, and hideously badly set arm, caused by earlier careless driving that year. He kindly helped me to explain to the guest house staff that my bed had broken. I had failed to communicate this to them previously as it is called a cot (the bed - that is the mattress- could hardly be broken). The single sheet of plywood had split and the whole lot sunk about 9 inches on one side. Remarkably, they got it inspected and finally repaired by about 6.30. They brought a completely new sheet of plywood, sawed it down to size and nailed it in place. Madhu had appeared in mid afternoon and come with me for a stroll up to see the elephants but all four had "gone off to their duty" and would not be back for a couple of days so we had a very nice stroll through the fields of the dairy farm, with the screeching green parrots, the flocks of Mynahs and the crows flying home to roost in the golden setting sun and back to my room where we had to sit around waiting for the carpentry to be finished. As soon as it was done we went down to the Kalyan Residency, Surya's hotel, for dinner in the cool clean tidy dining room. It is very nice and the North Indian thali very good but I had forgotten how irritating it is to have the waiters standing watching. Most came up just to say hello, remembering me as Surya's friend from last year but one new pompous little chap insisted on interrupting our conversation with daft questions about my native place. Etc. As soon as he had gone I told Madhu that I really disliked this treatment which got the unexpected response of an affectionate handshake and "I thought Chris sir that you liked this place because of these fellows". He was then delighted that I made the waiters give him the bill, which he paid with a 500 rupee note, slipped to him beneath the table. This almost backfired when the chief waiter came back with it to say that it was unacceptable as it had a 5mm tear on one edge. Fortunately he brought it to me so I offered my only other note, an insufficient 100 rupees. I said I had no other and they could accept either of them so the larger one was taken away and the change returned 15 minutes later by a smiling waiter who was pleased that I had beaten the management. Madhu was delighted. He likes to wander about the streets in the evening so we had a relaxed stroll down Ghandi road before shouting for an auto to go home and collapse onto my nice new firm bed and a good long night's sleep.

Saturday 14th February. Fortunately Madhu has two day's holiday so did not have to rush back and we could both enjoy the usual boiled eggs and damp toast. The eggs are done till only just hard and are much better than the bland omelettes of previous years. Madhu went off to spend the day with friends before going off to see his father in Chittoor. I went off for my Saturday morning lecture - on chemolithotrophs to the 1st year students (they told me that "we are not 1st year students sir; we are called as Previous year"). They were very responsive this morning, probably as a result of our bonding at the wedding yesterday. I had the usual reminder of the special guru/student relationship when I first came into the room; they are very sensitive in detecting when I cross the threshold into the open lecture theatre and all stand up together looking at me with big smiles waiting for my "O kurchoni (sit down) will you". I had expected a less formal atmosphere, continuing from last night but nothing had changed in the lecture room; but as soon as I walked out a couple off them quickly followed to ask the usual question: "how was it sir, how was it?". Of course "it was a wonderful experience for me, thank you; I especially enjoyed being with you all". "O thank you sir, we all love you". I returned direct from my lecture to start a relaxed day alone at the guest house. I tidied my room, got it swept for me (first time), and sat and read in the garden. I finished 'The amber spyglass'. I thought the end was a bit of a let down as I was expecting to have sorted out in my mind by then what Dust is exactly. I phoned a Valentine message to Libby which she received in the pouring rain while I stood in the sun with a strong cooling breeze; who said life is fair? At 4.30 I set out on an expedition to film Tirupati in the gilding setting sun. All very good fun as people do like to be filmed. On a corner of one of the little streets near Surya's I came across the lady I had photographed last year with her little boy, cooking snacks in oil. So after

filming I splashed out on two of these at one rupee each. I left a 5 rupee coin on the box beside her when I left and was then chased down the road by her husband a few minutes later with 3 rupees change. It was the most welcome tasty food I have had since arriving, partly I think because my slight gut ache seems to have receded.

Amazingly I managed to get lost in the final few streets before Surya's. These are too small for autos or cars so it is all very peaceful. After the 3rd time of passing one group of lads on a street corner, one of them came bounding up to shake hands, telling me that he was called Ramesh and that I took his photo last year. He has grown about a foot since then and I realised that I had seen all of them before as I shook hands, gallantly struggling to repeat their names. My practice in taking the class register each lecture has improved my speed of delivery; I even got a small cheer this morning for my Subramanianvenkateshwara Reddy. Of course I did a little film of them and one of the next door neighbour brothers took me by the hand and led me to Surya's for chapatis and veggies followed by curds and sugar; delicious. Back at the guest house Surya managed to sort out my lap top to produce sound. I have listened to very little music because it is always better to have it from the computer, but somehow its sound system had become set up wrongly. So I had an invigorating Brandenburg concerto to accompany a nice chat with Surya. I am now writing this while waiting for Sasi to arrive. Three evenings he has said he will call in but has not appeared. This time I called him at 8.30 when he said he would arrive only to find he could not borrow a bike so was not coming. I told him to get an auto and I would pay the 20 rupees. So he should have come 90 minutes ago. No problem. All I have to do now is to keep awake until Imran arrives by bus from Kadappa at midnight. I just called Leigh and was surprised and delighted to get him, as he had just finished painting his room I was especially concerned to know how he was managing his injections as he sounded rather dejected about it last night (an induced injection dejection). But he had managed his first one OK, encouraged and calmed by alcohol, and seems altogether relaxed about it. At 12.30 Imran phoned, waking me from a deep sleep to say there had been a disaster; the bus had crashed and all passengers had to go to the police station as witnesses. He suggested I should leave my door unbolted and go to sleep. So I went to the door to do this and jumped out of my skin as he came crashing through the opening door like a giggling puppy [You don't have to like everything about your friends].

Fortunately Imran seemed as tired as I was so I was asleep in a few minutes, after filling him up with water and conceding that he deserved some chocolate.

[I am writing this at 9.30 on Monday night to the manic music of Prokofiev's 2nd piano concerto; you may remember that this featured in Jilly Cooper's Appassionata - Mark's debut concert].

Sunday 15th February. This was one of my best days here. The cook lady woke me at 7.30 with a cup of tea with her mixture of a smile and scowl. Peering through the half opened door over my shoulder at Imran's shroud (he sleeps completely wrapped tightly with a blanket over his head), she handed me a spare cup of coffee and asked if I wanted tiffin for two; actually it was a scowling toss of the head and a muttered Tiffen? accompanied by a two finger salute. I smiled my charming early morning boyish smile, peering at her through my one opened eye. Breakfast was brought to our room - six boiled eggs for two. Eggs good, bread/toast disgusting damp cardboard. Gopi arrived by bus from Chittoor at about 11 so I sent them off to have some tea, buy water and leave me in peace for an hour. Gopi is as nice as ever, tolerating Imran's mild bullying without a murmur, except for a whisper in my ear 'don't worry chris it makes him feel goodly'. We went by auto, with Gopi shyly holding my hand "to guard you Chris from this bad auto fellow", out to the edge of town below the hills to the Guestline hotel to meet Surya for lunch and to go swimming.

This hotel is still the biggest but it has lost most of its custom to the big new hotels in the middle of Tirupati. There seemed to be very few guests and we were the only ones in the restaurant and had to wait 30 minutes for lunch which was average and certainly not worth the £1.50 a head (twice what I normally pay). We had the pool entirely to ourselves; that is Imran, Gopi and me. Surya spent the afternoon with his friends who run the hotel. Imran was rather mortified to be beaten easily by me in tiny little swimming races and they were astounded by my brilliant feat of floating on my back. I dutifully filmed them doing their races and competition to see how long they could stay under on one breath. Imran, being very competitive took it all very seriously. Gopi soon came up for air but then ducked under again as Imran surfaced, only to come up spluttering and apparently at his last gasp. Imran was again mortified that he was beaten by Gopi. I then had a real holiday experience, sitting in the sun reading the latest Joanne Harris novel "Holy Fools". After tea by the pool with Surya we took photos with Surya's new camera; this was a great success. Feeling slightly sunburnt and chlorinated we had a pointless wait in the red dying sun shining through the pink dust for an Auto home and finally settled for the town bus instead. These are battered monsters with a very high road clearance, often skewed on their chassis by previous crashes, open barred windows and a feeling of unstoppable power as they blast and bully everything in their paths. This one was full but not to the usual overflowing, so it was a pleasant trip home to the bus station, with me being rather confused by apparently hearing Gopi calling me through a great mass of standing swaying passengers; the thing the ticket collect shouts for his fares sounds like Chris chris.

Imran and Gopi then went off for their buses and I was taken on a nervous scooter ride across town by Prof. Srinivasulu on his old scooter for dinner. This was cool and civilised but always the irritation of being forced to eat

too much while being condemned for not eating enough. I escaped the usual banana at the end by asking to take it with me. A good trick but I was beaten anyway, as a big plastic bag was filled with oranges, bunches of bananas and two papayas as big as rugby balls. Another nervous twitchy drive back on mercifully empty streets to find Sasi and a friend waiting to see me. After a discussion about some plan for the next day the friend drove off leaving me to a quiet chat with Sasi, who eventually left me to collapse to sleep.

Monday 16th February. *[I am writing this on Wednesday evening while listening to Beethoven's greatest late quartet (op 131); a resulting tear has just washed the taste of suncream lotion into the corner of my mouth].*

I woke as usual with a stiff neck and associated headache and was later rewarded for ignoring it and getting up and setting off at 7.30 with binoculars and camcorder. I got no further than the entrance to the pig research place, the big tree there being full of birds including (once again, four golden orioles. Without moving more than 20 metres I filmed golden backed woodpeckers, hoopoes, a paradise flycatcher and magpie robins.

The plan that was hatched but not communicated to me last night was initiated at about 11.30 in the morning when Sasi and his friend (can't remember his name so will call him Sekhar) drove up smiling in a little Suzuki car, driven by a friend of the family. I was being taken to meet Sekhar's family for lunch but I only discovered this at 1.30 when I was taken in to the dining room. The family friend had lived for a year in Wembley and had only ever visited one other place in UK and that was Hounslow (you have to be Indian or Paki to qualify to live there). It was good that he was there as he spoke good English, and was interesting and most of the others did not and so could not be. The house was newly built out on the Trichanur Road. Sekhar's father (Sri Balaji) is a Brahmin priest and astrologer. I was told that he is a very good astrologer (I wonder what the test is). Anyway he looked the part with his orange lungi, bulging belly and grey beard, sitting, swivelling and swinging in a wicker basket seat suspended from the ceiling. The house was beautifully designed, with cool smooth marble floors, comfortable chairs and silent fans. It seemed to be joined to the house next door and people wandered in and out, like a stage set, with me jumping up to be introduced only to be instructed to 'sit sir'. Sasi was very protective and possessive, providing my CV (my biodata) for those who only spoke Telugu. When we first went into the two houses I was taken on a tour of their features which included huge pictures and models of various gods, a fish tank, divided into two halves, one with goldfish and the other with tiger barbs, a small aviary with little cockatiels and budjerigars (that doesn't seem right) and a room full of gods who featured dramatically after lunch.

Always moving about in the background was a very nice looking small boy wearing only an orange lunghi and with a painted red strip on his forehead and a cute little tail of red hair. Sasi told me he was very shy but wanted to say hello so he was sat down between us while I asked Sasi about him, the translated question being whispered to the boy. He is 13 years old and training to be a priest, learning the Vedas (stories of the gods). He carefully wrote his name and address in my little notebook, but all in Telugu so I still don't know his name. One rather aggressive looking guest carried an envelope containing his daughter's CV so that he could ask me what is the chance of getting her a job in the UK. She would have some hope I think as she is an experienced nurse/technician working in a cardiac surgery theatre in a big hospital in Hyderabad. Another guest who is a young priest but dressed normally, works as a priest in Mauritius and is home for his wedding to which I was invited but it is the day after I leave. Lunch was wonderful with little bowls of fruit (cut apples, oranges, bananas grapes) at each place. We ate off banana leaves with delicious fragrant rice in the middle and little dollops of veggies, pickles and indian sweets around the circumference.

After lunch we all congregated into a room about the size of our sitting room which was full of gods; there were 13 of assorted sizes, made out of black stone and decorated with marigold chains, blobs of coloured powder and smears of ghee. Each had its own little altar with flowers strewn in front of it and little greasy naphthalene lamps. I thought that we just had to pay our respects and leave but we had the whole works. The younger priest came in dressed in only his orange lunghi and changed from being a gently smiling quiet spoken man to his role as a noisy gibbering priest. That seems ruder than intended; they speak a very rapid Sanskrit (their equivalent of mediaeval church latin), with much hand waving and waving of little burning lamps over the faces of the gods. The small boy swami darted in and out filling lamps and sticking lumps of burning waxy stuff onto some of the gods. The priest then burst into an energetic patter song which culminated in Sekhar blowing enormous blasts on a conch shell accompanied by overwhelming manic drumming by someone in the overflow group outside the door. After all this had died away the priest came round to us in turn pouring blessed water from a small brass ladle into our hands which we then drank and the second time tipped over our own heads. The rest is all rather mixed in my mind but it included offerings of bananas, coconuts to and from the gods and sprinkling of coloured rice over my head. I only learned later that all this was rather special and for my benefit. I feel better already. Sasi was so delighted with it all and sat stroking my hand all the way home "Chris thank you chris you were beautiful chris". [What is it that I find so attractive about India?].

Of course I had not told the lady cook that I would be away for bojunum (lunch) so Srinivasulu phoned to see if I was alright, with a hint of a reprimand (his heart is in the right place).

I got a bit further in teaching myself about film editing in the afternoon and then off to dinner at the

Athidhi with Srinivasulu and Prof Reddy who is visiting from Hyderabad. After my great lunch I had no appetite and so had to force myself to eat my spicy spinach and plain rice. After I had prevented the waiter from ladling yet another heap of rice onto my plate Srinivasulu noisily insisted to the waiter that he must serve me some more. I am slightly ashamed to say that I actually allowed my irritation to show (you will appreciate that to hide it has been no small feat). I irritably asked “why are you trying to make me ill by forcing me to eat more than I want or need?” Srinivasulu’s nervous laugh was drowned by Reddy’s genuine laughter and his explanation that for years he had wanted to say this to Srinivasulu but had never dared to do so. This seemed to clear the air very well and we finished a nice relaxed meal with butterscotch ice cream.

Tuesday 17th February. I succeeded in repeating yesterday’s success with filming birds this morning. But this time I got no further than the first turning off the main road out to the engineering college. This time I managed to photograph Coucals, Tree pies and a few yet to be identified species. After the morning lecture I went to the internet, but there was very little of interest; just some bickering from Zena about some aspects of orchestra and a message from Malcolm East asking if I had arranged for anyone to do my 3 medic lectures, or should he do them. I had told the convenor and Ian Giles four months ago that I would like to re-schedule them but Ian had insisted his timetable needed them in their original place (utterly absurd) and that he would find a substitute. Three times I had checked if he wanted me to discuss it with Malcolm, but no, it had to go through the proper channels (him). So he seems to have forgotten, leaving it to Malcolm to deal with at the last minute. I walked through a hot dry Ghandi road to find a place that could sell me more miniDV tapes for my camcorder but I need to get them from Chennai or Hyderabad. I stopped off for coffee, perched on a little stool in the doorway of the little lungi/sari shop of Gogula, Surya’s Esperanto teacher. Then off home to more film editing.

Later in the afternoon I went to the places where there had been so many birds in the mornings but not a bird in sight, only an old man, leading a cow, who wanted to know the way to the eye hospital (note careful placing of commas to avoid a myopic cow). At 4.30 I had a text message from Madhu to say he was coming to visit at 6.30. I phoned to tell him I was due at Surya’s for dinner at 6.30, but he was already on the way on the train. Surya, of course said bring him along but then he didn’t arrive until 7.0. Our auto driver then decided he knew a better way to the area of Surya’s house (Venkata Reddy colony) but he took us to the correct side of the railway track but the wrong bit of town. So we stumbled along the tracks in the half darkness and out onto the Nethaji road. “Chris you are so serious, is it my fault, I am sorry sir”. “No I am just a grumpy old man”. I phoned Surya to apologise and of course he said don’t worry dinner is not yet ready. In fact when we got there we had another hour to wait as some visitors unexpectedly arrived. This was the newly married colleague of Surya at the Kalyan Residency, come to show off her husband (not much to show off about, but she was stunning); she was delighted to meet the voice who called from UK, asking for Surya. We had boiled rice (dull) and some spicy vegetable like a tiny pointed marrow. This was cooked by Surya’s father (Venkateshawara Rao) who had seen the recipe on TV the night before and decided this would make a specially nice dish for me. Of course I said it was delicious and was invited for a second experiment for the next evening. I then had a really nice long chat with quiet Madhu back at the guest house as we alternately fell asleep during the replies to our questions to each other.

Wednesday 18th February. Today is a festival and holyday celebrating some activity of Shiva so I have a mere holiday. We had a very slow getting up with Madhu taking ages to steel himself to having a ‘full bathe’ (in cold water) ‘so that I can go and visit the lord in the hills’ (Sri Venkateshwara, at Tirumula). The cook came and dragged us over to the dining hall where breakfast was boiled eggs, toast and a little dish of chickpeas. Madhu rejected the eggs as it was a holy day. But he ate all the unholy cardboard toast. He then set off to Tirumula, leaving me to have a very enjoyable film-editing day. At about 4.15 I packed up both cameras and set off for the waterfall temple at Kapilatheertham. As the auto came up in response to my bellowed “Auto auto”, I waited muttering the name until I got it fast enough to communicate successfully. This temple was the peaceful place I used to have to myself plus a few local boys who used the holy wash tank as a swimming pool, jumping off the roof of part of the temple. It has now acquired a theme park area outside it with a garden containing models of the gods and characters from the stories. The queueing pilgrims are now directed by security men through railed walkways to get to the god. It was completely packed so I could not even get to see my little courtyard at the back. The two elephants were there as were some rather special monkeys and also Rajiv Dixit with his mother and 3 year old nephew.

[It is now 11.30 and I cannot go on.]. [It is now 9.30 on Friday evening, writing while listening to 2nd act of Mozart’s Cosi fan tutte; I cannot help contrast my surroundings with the time I last saw this in the baroque palace in Potsdam just outside Berlin; Madhu told me it sounded like Telugu film music. One of us must be deaf or mad].

As I came past the heavy security man at the exit to the temple itself he stopped me aggressively with his cane: “what are you doing?” “Just looking”. “Darshan (visiting god)?” “No, just walking and looking”. “What is all this” - aimed at my bag full of cameras. “Oh sir these are just my cameras”. I took them out and showed him

pictures on both of them. “Ok Ok, I am just your security guard, thank you sir”. Then a grin and tap on the shoulder with his cane and I went off trying to look cool and relaxed, watched by the queue of devotees, but my dignified exit was ruined by treading on a sharp stone in my cute pink tender feet, the deleted expletive being apparently some international language, judging from the laughter. The main entrance to the temple area is lined by beggars, doing us a service by providing an opportunity for buying the favour of a god or two. I never know to whom to give my beggars’ coins, from my special pocketful, wondering if it is like an auto line where fights can be caused by selecting an auto that is not at the front of the queue. Rajiv appeared as if by magic to tell me about some of the beggars. These ladies (a courtesy title) sat beside little wooden trays holding neatly organised piles of 9 single rupee coins, presented in exchange for a 10 rupee note. I was tempted to clear a tray by giving a 100 rupee note but hadn’t the nerve. Rajiv went off with his mother only to appear beside me on his scooter 15 minutes later as I walked by the main road back towards town; so back to his home for a nice cup of tea and the good news that he has been given a two year post doc position in the Indian Institute of science in Bangalore, one of the most prestigious labs in India. I was then driven to the rail crossing for a nice evening stroll to Surya’s for dinner then back to the guest house for a nice chat with Surya before he went off for his night duty.

Thursday 19th February. Was up early to film more birds but had to rush back in response to a threatened attack of Tirupati tummy. You will be delighted to know that I just made it. I felt well enough and so bravely went off to my lecture, noting loo locations near the lecture theatre. Good thing, as after 5 minutes I had to rush out, only to return sheepishly to cancel my lecture. I tried to humourously indicate the problem by patting my tummy and pulling a mournful face but this caused such a unanimous sympathetic mournful sigh that I had to laugh and rush out like an idiot. I was rushed back to the guest house by Sai Gopal and spent a peaceful day, feeling perfectly well but unable to risk travel far from home. I spent most of the day making movies out of my captured film clips. I seem to have sorted out how to do the editing and cutting, and am learning the most important lesson: that I should take better pictures to start with. I missed lunch, so felt hungry by the end of the afternoon. At 8.30 Surya kindly brought me some appetising dry food from the Myura bakery. After he left I finished film stuff until about midnight, then had a frustrating time trying to raise some sympathy on my phone. Libby, Hugh, Clive were all unobtainable (the blips indicated no international dialling). Then I was successful in getting Leigh only to be very frustrated as the line was so bad that we had to give up, although I managed to hear that he is still smoke free but had just spent the day in bed with a bad cold. So I tried to dispense some broken up sympathy to him but went to bed with none myself, although the tone of his occasional isolated words sounded kind.

Friday 20th February. My Mum’s birthday (Clive’s tomorrow). I woke feeling perfectly well but with occasional threatening twinges in the nether regions so phoned Sai Gopal to cancel my lecture, then went for a successful experimental stroll before having a self-inflicted breakfast of a banana butty made from a roll left over from last night. Had a wibderfyk rekaxed das (sorry; that should have been wonderfully relaxed day but it looks better as it is), sleeping, reading in the sun, film editing, and walking to the STD phone booth/ tea shed to buy biscuits and Bisleri water to dissolve my special glucose/salts brought last night by dear Surya. No problems after a small lunch and so accepted an invitation to visit Sai Gopal’s new house. On the way through the University grounds on his scooter we were nearly forced off the road by a very embarrassed Sateesh whose driving I criticise when he takes me to work. He has improved for my benefit but always moves to the right hand side of the road in order to take a right turn - which is how he met us. As often seems to happen I left my cameras behind and subsequently regretted it. Sai Gopal’s house is on the edge of Tirupati, not far from the Kapilatheertham temple at the foot of the hills, home of the god, and we spent two hours on the roof of the four storey block of about 16 separate houses overlooking the whole of Tirupati and more locally the nearby TTD gardens which provide the main roosting place for all the town crows which flew past us across a thrilling red sunset. I cannot believe that I only have a week left here. Each day the temperature is slightly higher and it is now 33 degrees (90F).

After the sun had finally set we went for a walk around the TTD gardens and dropped in on Dr Ranga, the Principal of the aruavedic medical college and Surya’s fellow Esperanto student. He had spent 3 months in Japan last year studying their traditional methods and was curing a patient’s stiff back using that approach when we arrived. He is a remarkable hard working but relaxed and pleasant man. I think that we made an arrangement to go to the zoo park on Sunday morning but I am not sure. Madhu had phoned earlier to invite himself here tomorrow so I hope he likes zoos. Reading the last two days diary to myself I feel it must appear a very dull life to any reader of this but I have thoroughly enjoyed it. I have now finished Holy Fools by Joanne (Chocolat) Harris and have started Ian Banks’s Dead Air. The heap of empty plastic water bottles in the corner indicates that I have drunk 28 litres of water (for those who like a few hard facts). At lunch time I met my next room neighbour whose snores vibrated my bed until I moved it so that it did not touch the wall. He is a statistician at the Vellore Christian Medical College Hospital (approximation to the proper name) where Murali worked during his elective period. I have failed to get Murali on the phone although I did have a nice chat with Raff who has got a job in palliative care in Dartford. At his interview they asked why he had used such an old referee (referring to when he worked with

me, not to my age, probably). He told them that he had always got a job when I had written the reference so he was unwilling to drop a winner. This might have been the right answer but it is more likely because it gave him a chance to show off his successful research experience which they are always impressed by, especially the paper in *Biochemical Journal* and his lecture to the *Biochemical Society* in Glasgow.

[The Mozart has ended, my mood is wonderful, the snores next door are proof of our common humanity, and I miss you all. Goodnight, with love, chris.]

Saturday 21st February Today is Clive's 25th birthday. *[I am writing this early on Monday morning]*. This diary has been rather neglected by me this year, rather as my brain seems to be neglecting me. I had my usual early morning wander amongst the pig buildings which are set well back from the road and seem disused and crumbling back into the red Tirupati dust but the sound of squealing pigs comes from them occasionally so I suppose they must still be inhabited. I cannot remember why the walk was successful but every walk has been. The Veterinary college cricket ground was being used for an inter-college sports day. Having cancelled breakfast (trying to starve my bug), and having no plans at all for the day I wandered dreamily round chatting with sportsmen (Gentlemen only sir) from all around Andhra Pradesh. The set up was explained by a pair of vet students from Hyderabad, one of whom I filmed running in the 400m. I thankfully rejected the suggestion that I film discus throwing. The usual triangular throwing area was lined, not by high netting but by crowds of excited supporters. Some throwers seemed experienced but others just flung the discus like a frisbee. The whole atmosphere was shattered when one large cocky-looking member of the Tirupati team strode up to the place and did the little dance they do and with, admittedly, a massive investment of power, hurled the discus straight into the crowd of his supporters. Fortunately it was below head height. A calm voice over the loudspeaker system almost immediately appealed to the medical team to come immediately. A few seconds later we heard "please do not remain so relaxed, it is important that you come now". Then: "Now is the opportunity to practice what you have been trained for so please come please come". This last appeal must have worked and a little white van with a red cross was soon bouncing off down the track. "Sorry sir I do not know exactly what happened to that fellow because he was not a Tirupati student". So that's all Ok then. I dutifully filmed a bit of the long jump featuring the star of the Hyderabad team, mainly as a test of what the camera will do, but I have not yet looked at the results.

After another gentle day drifting about, doing some preparation, reading in the shade of the garden and the usual film stuff on the veranda during the hottest part of the day, Madhu appeared just as the day was reliably turning into the golden evening. He had to come to Tirupati from Rajampet (2.5 hours by train) on the way to Chittoor to collect his hostel fees from his father. The state pays his fees (2nd year mechanical engineering) but his family have to pay 20,000/- for hostel food and lodging. They provide nothing at all for anything else so he is genuinely poor but he never asks for anything (except my chocolate). I pay his 100 rupees fare when he comes here. Within five minutes of arriving, ten 'Previous year' students arrived to enquire how I was. I hurriedly changed out of shorts and put on a clean shirt. They all look so well-kept, I feel quite derelict beside them. I have tried harder this year to remember their names but not very successfully. There was tall skeletal Daya with his enormous attractive shy toothy smile, both Reddys, one tall confident and helpfully able to understand most of my questions, and a small very shy smiling affectionate boy who has a cold and hides his face with his hands if I speak to him; when they left he came up and gave me a hug and thanked me for being friendly. I think the boys here do miss fatherly affection even though the aloof formal relationship of father and son has been the tradition for ever. Subramanian is the short boy with the little delicate gold and jewelled earring (on top of ear). Sekhar is the boy who is very attentive but he never smiles, however witty I am, so I feel slightly intimidated by him and assume that he rather despises this buffoon [later when I told him this he was told me he was frightened of me and was so glad that I had become 'a friendly']. I cannot remember the names of the other boys or the two very attractive girls. As always, I wish I had somehow got to know them better informally earlier in my visit.

I was not sure how to accommodate my visitors as Madhu was lying on the bed chatting on his cell phone with his 'girlfriend' and half my chairs were covered in wires and chargers and cameras and computer and books and cell phones and bags. I started to move things around but the students took charge, moving one chair outside above the steps as a throne, and they sat around on the steps and wall like a play school group. Of course in the end I had to get my little table out with my laptop and show pictures of family etc. After half an hour they said they must go and so I took photos, having, at last, found how to take pictures of Indians - use fill in flash (obvious innit). *[Just interrupted by call from Gopi asking when am I coming to visit him in Chittoor; too late now but he may have time to come here for a brief visit].*

I was rather boring company for Madhu as I was still feeling nervous gut-wise, so we went down to the Athidi restaurant where I had chicken byriani and he had mutton. I had a boiled egg on top of mine. "Why don't you have one Madhu?" "Sir, you may know about biochemistry but I have to teach you about chickens and eggs; Muttons do not lay eggs sir". Soon after we got back to the guesthouse Madhu caught the bus to Chittoor, leaving me to read and to try yet again to contact Clive. All my attempts to phone him throughout the day failed. At about midnight, after being woken by yet another chat call from Imran, I succeeded in getting Clive, only to find that I

could hear him well but he could not hear me. I wandered around the empty guest house garden in my sleeping shorts in the moonlight (what a romantic picture this must conjure up for you) frustratingly getting nothing but “I can’t hear anything but grunts”. Probably that was all that I was sending. So I said Happy birthday ten times in the hope that one of them would be transmitted. Clive (sensible chap) then sent a text message to say thank you but that all he got was some scary monster noises. I had also failed to get Libby half a dozen times. All the attempts at contact with family and Leigh and Murali failed except for one call to Hugh who was on the way to hear Mary play cello in Guildford; that was nice. *My wonderful morning tea has just been thrust round the door - to avoid the unacceptable sight of this early morning boring ignorant biochemist*].

While I remember I must note that during a pleasant evening chat in the Ghandi road while having tea with Gogula (Lungi/Sari shop) he told me of his plans to visit UK next year. “I shall visit some of the sights of London and then go to visit Lichfield! (Leigh’s home town)”. I wasn’t sure if this was a sublime to ridiculous example or if Lichfield is really the second best place in the UK. Apparently he has a friend there who is a UK expert on Esperanto.

Sunday 22nd February [*Writing at midday on veranda in a breeze that makes the 90 degrees pleasantly tolerable*].

I started the day as usual with a bird-filming expedition which was affected by three crucial interruptions. I was about to get the definitive photo of a coucal (crow pheasant) when my mobile blasted its silly twitchy film tune; I think it was my *****Imran that scared it away, not the ringing itself. My great film of a close up hoopoe was terminated by a well-meaning idiot who slowly came up on his motorbike to ask if I needed any help. The third was a sudden urgent call to the loo (sorry about this fixation) which provoked a successful dash home and a decision to cancel my zoo visit. Dr Ranga came earlier than planned and agreed with the cancellation. So we then had a long discussion about his view that education in English is a bad thing and was harming the Telugu language. His English is excellent but self-taught, by reading huge numbers of English novels when he was a young man. He is very hard-working, intelligent and successful as a Aurvedic doctor; he also has enough money to buy a small car which he is keen to use in my service - hence the proposed zoo visit. I told him that he was arguing from a false position, that the vast majority would have neither the intelligence nor motivation to learn English as he had and so he would deprive them of the one thing that does seem certain to confer some advantage, especially in higher education. Yes, of course he said, nothing is simple. As soon as he had gone I decided that bacteria should not damage my social life any further, so cancelled lunch, took an immodium plus antibiotics that Surya had brought two days ago, washed shirts etc, got the floor swept and sorted out my film stuff. This seems a bit obsessive. It is, but necessarily so. As I have too few tapes I have to capture my video clips, edit them, put them together into film, put back onto a tape, copy the captured clips onto my external pockey drive (in case there is a problem later), delete the clips from my main drive to free enough space to capture more pictures etc. I am pleased with some of it.

At about 4.30 Madhu appeared, as half expected, off the bus from Chittoor which stops just outside the guest house. We had our usual gentle chat. I would have preferred this to be during a walk in the cool evening but he wanted to lie down in my cool room. His bus back to Rajampet was due to leave about 6.30, so we compromised by lying chatting on the beds and walking down to the auto place at the University entrance driving to the smart clean cool Sundhiri park restaurant. The menu said that main dishes would only be available after 7.00, the waiter told us that “everything is available”. So we spent time deciding on a complicated set of dishes only to be told that these would take two hours to prepare. So we settled on the best restaurant meal I have had here (perhaps affected by my happy settled guts); fresh lime and soda, dosa masala (as in Keralai restaurant on Burgess road) and butterscotch ice cream. Then a sad stroll to the bus stand with Madhu draped sentimentally on my shoulder, to say goodbye. We passed the shop where two years ago I bought him a shirt and jeans (for £5). When I saw him looking hopefully in I told him that I would have liked to have done the same again but had let my money run down to just enough for his bus fare home, my auto fare plus a bottle of mineral water. “No problem chris, I did not like to ask”. I told him this was why I wanted to buy him a present. So after promises of phone calls, emails, photos, and a final few hugs he was off, looking back and waving every few yards until his tearful smile merged into the darkening background of pilgrims bikes autos oxcarts cows beggars and buses. We parted near the rail crossing to Venkata Reddy colony (Surya’s home) but he is in Hyderabad so feeling rather bereft I wandered down past the crowded station area, along Ghandi road and then by auto back home where I immediately got a very welcome call from Sasi asking if he could come. We then spent an enjoyable time copying my recent photos of him onto a CD so that he could use them in his Media Studies class, using Photoshop. He then wanted photos with both of us in them and also pictures with him wearing his gangster dark glasses. I really dislike these joint photos; not the sentimental idea of course, but the resulting age and beauty contrast After doing some useful experiments with the camcorder, Sasi put on his high heeled boots and marched off with a promise to come back to say goodbye before Friday and to show me his new motorbike.

Monday 23rd February. [*Written at 5.30 am Thursday, having accidentally fallen asleep at 10.30 last*

night and waking with a stiff back].

I gave my first lecture since last Thursday, having answered questions called out from the class: “How is your health sir; any more problems”? No more problems you will all be pleased to hear. Sai gopal drove me down to the Internet café after the lecture but after many futile attempts to get online I gave up and was only then told by the rather nervous girl at the desk that there would be no connection for another 30 minutes. So I strolled back in the industrial level heat (34 degrees) until I was banged into the back of my legs and scooped up onto the bonnet of a small modern car whose driver had forgotten which pedal is the brake pedal. I slithered off onto the ground hoping that he would not panic and hit the accelerator. I staggered up, mildly irritated but with no real injuries. The driver nervously crawled out of the car, expecting violence or an international incident while his load of lady passengers stared out in horror. Magnanimously, I waved him away and continued with my walk, now limping in a pitifully affected way up to the auto stand to get a ride back to the tea shack to buy water, finding as usual that it is very difficult to mime two bottles of two litres of water, one cold and one ‘normal’. The slightly older lad running it indicated that his helper could not understand because he is Tamil, rather missing the point of my brilliant acting. I asked for tea - served in tiny flimsy plastic beakers and the Tamil boy reached over and grabbed one by sticking his filthy thumb in it. My look of distaste was intercepted by the older boy who cuffed the other on the head and showed him how to remove one cleanly from the packet. The tea was delicious as was the pint of cold water back at the Guest house. Inside the main entrance next to the reception window they have installed a small electric shrine of Sri Venkateshwara with little coloured electric lights intermittently flashing around him and the pleasant drone of priests singing Om Om (etc) filling the pink tiled open corridors.

In the afternoon I was sitting outside reading and was interrupted by two smiling polite students from the Statistics Department wanting to pay their respects. I guessed they had come to visit another visiting professor and in his absence had settled on me instead. This was confirmed when a second pair appeared half an hour later. I am learning to graciously recite my bio-data after shaking hands and repeating their names as they provide them; this is usually done by offering a gentle growl with the last syllable slightly clearer: “~~~~~sekhar”. My next visitors were an odd couple; an older man who seemed to be the spokesman with one eye looking at me and the other looking slightly to one side and skywards. His two sentences, introducing his young friend were both interrupted as he leaned over the railings of the veranda to spit into the sand. His companion was a very slender nervous boy with glasses who told me he was studying Lar. When asked to repeat what he had said all I got was Lar Lar sir. I then remembered that this meant he was a Law student. So, how can I help you. “You invited me here sir by emailing, after I sent you a Christmas greeting”. I had received a Yahoo card and a greetings message from a Law student and wondered how I knew him, but had said of course he could come and see me when I was next in India in February. I then found that he had found my ‘business’ card lying in the street in Tirupati; I hope it was dropped by me and not discarded by some uncaring acquaintance. I cannot imagine why he then decided to use the email address on it without explaining. By this time the older man had faded himself into the background and I plodded through some boring questions with Revi who, getting slightly excited, offered me a clear plastic bag containing laddoo: balls of khaki paste made up of flour, nuts, sandalwood paste, sugar etc, which is only available at the temple in Tirumula and has been offered to the god there, and is given as a sign of respect. I dutifully stood up to receive this honour only to remember that I was only wearing my boxer shorts, my embarrassment being increased as two of my lady students came into sight. I used them as an excuse to send Revi on his way, feeling that I should feel slightly guilty as he had explained that he had gone especially to ‘The Lord in the hills’ to pray for me and to get the laddoo.

The girls (sorry - ladies), called conveniently Geetha and Seetha, had come so that they could see the photos I had shown the other students. They had missed this as they are day students, living nearby. So I ushered them into my room, dumped them on my Tracy Emin bed and set up the computer for them. This was interrupted by Prof Thyagaraju from Biochemistry who I deposited outside in one of my chairs on the veranda. I left the girls to get on with it. He had come to tell me that Ravi Raj from Trichy had phoned twice to him and he had informed him that I was staying at the guest house. He thoughtfully felt that I should know this. Ravi Raj is the pastor friend of John Prabakar [*that reminds me he should be coming today*] with the nice wife and daughter who visited us once and for whom I have written loads of sponsor letters including one for his son. Father and son have both been phoning to arrange a visit. Ravi raj claims there is no problem for all the family to come by car from Trichy “we only need take up 30 minutes of your precious time and it will be only a couple of hours drive, as we are quite local”. Trichy (actually Trichinipalli) is in Tamil Nadu, at least 8 hot hours drive away. I had asked the father to call back later but last night his son phoned. “Please uncle this is an opportunity for us to see you in our own country, my father and mother are especially keen”. I don’t know if he was trying to dissociate himself from the daft idea. Anyway to get rid of him I think I conceded that they could come to the airport to say goodbye. As the flight leaves at 4.40 am I hope they see sense and give up the idea. Thyagaraju resisted the temptation to insist that I give some special lectures in Biochemistry, although he is the one person who might have persuaded me. When I went back inside the ladies were very proud of themselves for kindly re-organising (are you sure that hyphen is correct, Leigh?) my 30 icons on my desktop into a neat, random useless arrangement. So while they sat watching

I ostentatiously re-scrambled them.

[I am writing this now at 10.30 pm on Wednesday, with a very aching back and uninclined to do anything. So I pulled myself together, set out to do this chore and put on the first act of Verdi's Don Carlo which has produced an instant mood change to positive but sentimental].

I had agreed to go to Surya's tonight to see Swarna and her 11 month old son. My auto driver was so unpleasantly aggressive and blasted his horn unnecessarily all down Ghandi road so I got out, paid less and dissolved into the crowd with him shouting after me. I was horrified then to find that the entrance to the railway crossing over to Venkata Reddy colony (Surya's area) appeared to be a bombsite and was completely blocked by huge heaps of long concrete girders, metal lattices, heaps of bricks and other building junk piled about 15 feet high. Through the dust and darkness I could just make out a trickle of refugees from the other side, filtering through tunnels amongst the beams or clambering over the top. I chose the lower route, waiting for a gap in the flow towards me. Crouching with my camera bag clutched tightly for its protection I started to appreciate how utterly horrible caving must be, emerging onto the track with a crushed toe, smashed head and painful back. The other side was marginally easier, being lit up grotesquely by huge arc lights providing illumination for a great earth remover and its attendant curious cows working a huge deep hole more than the width of the road. This time it was necessary to balance on beams along the edge of the hole and to skip inelegantly over deep dark holes in the paving over the open sewage system. They are building an underpass, so my excessively lengthy film of the crossing made on a few previous occasions including the last day that the crossing was open is now an invaluable historical document.

[The great 'friendship' duet in Don Carlo has just started, reminding me of Jonathan and I struggling to reproduce it during a walk in Wales more than a quarter century ago].

Swarna's little boy is very cute and has happily escaped the aggressive fierce look of his gentle father. I did the official photographer thing of filming grandad playing with grandson, followed by a slightly risky session of throwing him across the room between Surya and me; he looked like a flying cherub. Surya drove me back on his friend's motorbike to the men's hostel in Block B ['Black' B]. His friend (Male) is oddly named Maria Susay (What film had a gangster boss called Susay?). The hostels are shared rooms arranged off open corridors around a large square central courtyard filled with large trees full of strident noisy Mynahs and Crows, dimly and erratically lit. The students are put into rooms (3-8 students per room) according to their subjects so I just had to find Microbiology seniors. Shekar answered the door in his Lungi with a remarkable expression, mixing delight and horror. A chair was cleared as my throne and the other students summoned. They all sit on the beds (sheets of metal on rickety legs) grinning expectantly for me to entertain them. I seem to have an effective repertoire of questions for them to intersperse with their questions about me: are you village boys or town boys? (Half and half); Is the present chief minister corrupt? (100% yes); Was the invasion of Iraq good or bad (100% bad). In the middle of this another student came crashing in, stopping in horror as he saw me. He is Sudarna Reddy, a thin shy village boy with an almost permanently embarrassed grin which fully uses his overabundant teeth which he tries to hide with fluttering hands. He seems to be very popular and I got a cheer when I insisted that he sit in the throne beside mine. He is the student who asked me for my autograph the first morning (I want to be the first to ask sir; actually he was the only one until this evening). They were amused by my standard story of my village visit with its ritual with lines of the village men sleepily wandering in the early morning mist clutching their little pots of water down to the river bank.

I then had to do the photography thing, which of course I enjoy. I suppose that if someone wants your photo it is a little honour, hence the enthusiasm for it in the villages, even if they never see the pictures. Sudarna was a star of course, like a shy child desperate to be in the dreaded limelight. It was not permitted for me to walk home alone so I had the accustomed ritual of a walk the long way up the main deserted road to the guest house with little competitions to hold teacher's hand.

Nehru's story: Nehru was travelling with the Russian ambassador by train in the early morning through the Indian countryside: "what are those men doing walking away from the village with little pots of water in their hands?" The alternative to civilised toilets was explained to the horror of the ambassador. Next year Nehru is visiting Russia and travelling by train with the ambassador. As they pulled out of the main railway station in Moscow, Nehru asked "what is that fellow doing walking down Nevsky Prospekt with that little pot of water?" "Surely you knew that we have some Indians in Russia now?". Perhaps it's how you tell it.

Tuesday 24th February. The internet was working this morning so had a nice time reading Libby's message and the usual SPAM from orchestra and departmental junk. Have heard nothing from Leigh but had a message from Murali which was probably a joke being passed on but it had been deleted by the university anti-virus system.

[Blast; even Verdi can't do much for me after accidentally deleting a page of text]. I cannot remember much of this day. At about 4.15 as I was about to set out on a walk to the village Turumulagunta to say goodbye to Venkat and friends, Madhu phoned to say he was about to arrive, having come by bus with his class for a visit to a local battery

factory. "Would you like to come for a walk Madhu?"; (odd punctuation); "No sir, I mean no Chris, I want to lie and hear you talking". Irresistible. At about 5.15 we had another goodbye, he went off to join his friends for the three hour bus ride home and I jumped in an auto to take me most of the way to the village area. Avoiding entering to start with gave me the opportunity to wander around the fields filming oxen plowing, buffaloes, paddy fields and all the rural stuff I love here. Eventually I was spotted and dragged into the village with its mud and straw houses mixed with brick built houses, all cooking on open fires outside with the buffaloes and cows dreamily wandering around the narrow swept packed mud roads. Venkat was at tuition, for two hours after school, so I got his father to write their address so that I could send photos to him. I lost his address last year and so delivered the pictures a year late by which time he had grown about a foot. I was allowed out of the village only after the ritual photographs. It is disappointingly difficult to get the atmosphere of this, even with the camcorder, the grasping rowdy rabble of little kids and their even more grasping mothers and hags of grannies crystallise into orderly serious lines as soon as the camera is pointed. As the camera is clicked off the frenzy then really begins as they shout "open it sir open it sir" to get me to open up the screen so they can see the result. Surya called in the middle of this to ask if he could call to collect me at the guest house in 20 minutes. So I hurried home, fell asleep on the bed and was woken by an apologetic and still sleepy Surya 90 minutes later; he had also immediately fallen asleep. We went to the Pulse, a cheaper version of the Athidhii restaurant about 20 metres up the street, and had a simple meal costing 90 rupees (£1.10), followed by a walk all the way back to the guest house for old times sake.

Wednesday 25th February. *[I am continuing to write this while listening to Don Carlos, feeling very sentimental; just had a break to walk the half mile to the STD phone shack; I just made it as it shuts at midnight. Got through for a nice chat with Libby and then a very brief chat with Leigh as the phones were being rather pointedly being piled up on the desk in front of me.]*

I am now in the happy/sad mood that descends on me at the end of my visits. I think that it is partly that I am subconsciously happy to be going home and that happy mood makes me see everything in the best light and to ignore the minor negative things (mainly related to traffic noise etc). I have become engrossed in Roy Jenkins great 900 page biography of Churchill. This is my emergency book. I have finished Iain Banks 'Dead Air' which was wonderful; I have found a new author. I still have one further novel but the Churchill is so good that it is distracting me from other things like sorting out films etc. This morning started with my morning birdwalk which never seems to go anywhere except the pig research area with its mixture of trees and background of thorn bushes and scrub, and half derelict pig styes etc. The hour available between arrival of the sun and breakfast never seems long enough. My penultimate lecture was on the Krebs' TCA cycle which is enjoyable to lecture on with enough room for little anecdotes about getting stuck in a lift with Krebs etc. This group of students really is the best I have had, mainly on the measure of the proportion that laugh at my stories. This is probably a measure of their good nature rather than understanding but that is what is so enjoyable about them. I can pronounce about 80% of the names during taking of the register and the others I know by sight so just look at them to get a 'Present sir'. They find it very amusing that I take a second register at the end to include any latecomers. After the lecture Sasi phoned to invite himself to come and get copies of his photos on a CD. This led to a very enjoyable time. We usually sit and struggle to chat but today we had a project. He is studying Multimedia and brought some of his work which was impressive; this was mainly done in Photoshop and he gave me a lot of hints about this. This was one of the rare times he has been here in daylight so I took more photos which then had to be put onto his CD. After about ten minutes Sateesh, my old friend who is now a teaching assistant, arrived one hour later than arranged so I sent him away to come back later. This he did after lunch so I spent the rest of the early afternoon chatting indoors which always seems a waste of the sunshine but it was 34 degrees in the shade and the indoor fan was too attractive to ignore. *[Now in the middle of one of the great slightly corny Verdi choruses, pounding through my earphones, provoking me to actually sing along; I think I have just joined in supporting the burning of the heretics. It was almost drowned by the sighing hoot of a long goods train on its way through my room to Bangalore].*

At 3.30 I put on a clean dry shirt to be scooted off to meet the Vice-Chancellor in his office in the big pink tower at the centre of the campus. The marble floor gives way to dusty red carpet as we approach. We were shown into a special ante-room, instead of the large crowded room outside his office with its three big desks and their bureaucrats, and the armchairs laden with anxious petitioners, reading scraps of paper like last minute exam revision. Our ante-room had a bed, 3 armchairs and a small table carrying a big world globe. Prof Murali (VC) is like a quiet subdued Groucho Marx, with a more trimmed moustache. He makes no attempt to chat; that is up to me, Sai Gopal being equally silent. So I asked about his UK visit when he was supposed to have come to Southampton and got a few quiet words which faded back into silence. His response to my rather forced question about whether he had enjoyed being VC for the last 3 years was "you do not do this job for enjoyment". Desperate by now, I indicated the globe and asked if, having acquired the maximum power in SV University, he now intended taking over the world, and got the response "I don't know what I would do with it". Sai Gopal being slightly horrified at my lack of respect (as he told me later) now chipped in with some stuff half in Telugu in which

I picked up ‘eminent professor from UK’, ‘excites students’, ‘made film about birds showing how they fly’ and other bland junk. This was followed by silence, so I caused great relief by getting up and saying that before I left him to his more important duties I want to say thank you for your wonderful hospitality etc. He then got up and we filed out; but as soon as Sai Gopal was through the door the VC held me back by the sleeve, whispered “you are the first to appreciate the significance of the globe”, grinned sheepishly and quickly dived back to safety through his separate entrance into his official office.

After a short read of Churchill I went to the village, just before Turumulagunta, where one of the older farm boys who I had filmed previously wanted me to film his set of gods who lived on a trolley in a concrete shed next to his house. The hordes of children were soon clamouring for photos; they got these and then followed me and my pipes out of the village never to see their homes again. Then to Turumulagunta to say goodbye to Venkat, having a wander for the last time around the fields. There was again no sign of Venkat and his friends to say goodbye so I left a message with his dad and walked back to the main road, photographing some cooperative cattle egrets on the way. At the main road I grabbed an auto, went back to the guest house to drop my camera bag and then set off directly to the Venkata Reddy colony by the DR Mahal (cinema) to have dinner at Surya’s again. We were immediately flagged down by a large aggressive-looking man who wanted to hitch a ride into town. His is fairly usual and the hitcher pays half fare. He did the common thing when seeing a non-Indian in the back of heaving himself into the front, barging the driver half off his little seat. He wanted to go to the station but that was useless for me as my crossing place is now closed and I needed to go the long way round. I had explained this to the driver when we started. To make sure he did this I tapped his right shoulder at the cross roads at Balaji Colony, saying “Right right right”. Amongst the heavy confused traffic on the sort of roundabout the hitcher shouted “No, straight straight”. So the poor driver stopped on the roundabout, facing the wild traffic of the main Tirupati road as it came up to the roundabout, but of course facing the wrong way. Irritated, I stepped out and angrily said “OK, take it; you pay”. Surprisingly the hitcher then jumped off and disappeared into the traffic and the driver sheepishly called me back on board and we pirouetted a few times amongst the oncoming hooting autos, cars and bikes and off we spun into the correct exit. At Surya’s we had a dish of fancy nice rice called Pongal. My back was aching badly and they only have long wooden benches to sit on, with the wall to lean on. Surya didn’t arrive for 45 minutes and then food was later so it was three hours before I could get an auto home. Sitting in my comfortable armchair writing this while listening to Don Carlos seems to have cured my backache.

[Goodnight dear readers; i hope you will be as pleased to see me as I will be to be with you again].

Thursday 26th February *[I am writing the last part of this diary at 6.30 am at home in bed with 2 duvets, thick socks and a fleece. Zero degrees outside].*

My last full day in Tirupati. I rather dutifully staggered out of bed, knowing that I would be sorry later if I have missed my last chance for a morning walk. I cannot remember if I had any good photos but I was very pleased to have gone for a last sentimental stroll around my favourite area, seeing most of the birds that I had struggled to photograph including Coucals, Coils, leafbirds, sunbirds, hoopoes, bee-eaters, magpie robins, bulbuls, orioles and always the drongo flycatchers, parakeets and palm swifts filling the sky.

I had a nice breakfast of idlis (rice patties) and samba and my usual two sweet teas and then off on the back of Sai Gopal’s scooter for my last lecture, in which I finished my formal teaching with a summary of all the energetics and the relationship of energy metabolism to ecology. I then filmed the students, as a group and individually, calling out their names, so that I will have a better chance of identifying any subsequent correspondents. This year I haven’t made any special friends amongst them but have got to know a lot of them rather better than usual, including the girls (sorry, Ladies). I finished with my now traditional investigation of their views on suitable marriage partners. Contrary to what might be concluded from looking at the marriage pages in the weekend Hindu, they were not concerned about colour, caste or wealth. The girls said that age, appearance, caste, were not important but that money is useful and especially a secure job. When I offered myself as fitting perfectly their criteria there were shouts of ‘Oh no sir’. They also said that none of the boys in the class was suitable. Last year they had said the same but the boys had said that all of the girls were suitable. This year the boys said that none of them were suitable. When I said that this was very odd because the girls were all so beautiful and were very intelligent etc, one of the boys (Bahir) stood up and diplomatically explained “Sir, they are suitable but they are our sisters sir”. After my ritual hand washing and tea in Srinivasulu’s office, Sai Gopal came in and proudly presented me with an envelope containing about 11,000 rupees (£140). These were my expenses and covered most of them. He had very competently got the university to provide the cheque a day early and I had signed it over to him so he could get the money from his bank, thus avoiding my usual irritating dash around the University offices and banks with Srinivasulu on my last day. Instead I was whisked back to the guest house to sort a few things out, do some stuff for films and sitting in the garden in the shade at 34 degrees reading the life of Churchill.

At 2.30 I walked through the University to my farewell function. The chief guest was the vice-principal of the university, an unassuming and friendly physics professor. We went in a little procession up the stairs to the

lecture theatre with one of the students trying to get clever photos from a crouching position on the stairs above us; each time as he was about to take his shot we ran him over and he had to leap up and go up a few more stairs for another go. The room was packed, with all the office and lab staff and final year students. We were called to our positions at the front by the slender white-jeaned student Bahir acting as MC. Beautifully-scented garlands were hung around my head and I was presented with my little bouquet of flowers. The chief guest, then Srinivasulu and Sai gopal were similarly honoured but they grabbed the garlands before they were put around their necks and laid them, in a rather ungentlemanly way on the table in front of them. I made the most of mine and kept it on throughout. There were then speeches by the main three, all briefly summarising my previous visits to Tirupati etc. The students were invited by Sai Gopal to say a few words, starting with my old friend Sateesh, now an excellent teaching fellow. Other students followed, all very sheepishly muttering about Great scientist, interesting bioenergetics, laughable lectures (!) Etc. I then gave my usual sort of speech, telling them they were the best group of Previous students that I had previously taught.

I had a thought in the middle of this about the odd use of 'Previous Year' for 1st year students. They should really refer to the Previous year and to the Future Year, instead of final or senior year. Then no student would ever have to confess to living in the present. I was then given a wrapped present of 2 CDs of classical Telugu music (one in MP3 format). After a formal presentation of a little green cupcake with a beaker of Thums Up to the special guests, we sat at the front, munching quietly, watched by the students. The vice principal had to leave early and everything then became less formal with food distributed to everyone. I took out my camera and the function gently disintegrated with a brief formal moment as everyone stood for Sai Gopal and Srinivasulu departing.

The end of these events is always slightly anti-climactic. We drifted around downstairs outside the department, taking photos of me with Seekar, me with Deborah and friend, me with Sudarshan Reddy, etc. One change this year is the increased number of students with cameras, about six this year. All are passed around the students who have little experience, so each camera has a little group of noisy advisers to go with it. I was pulled from group to group and eventually the girls achieved their sensible aim to stick me in a chair with them grouped around as my harem. "Oh no sir, it is not like that". I would have liked a few more intimate farewells with the students I knew best, but had to go round holding hands with one after the other, signing autographs, smiling to photographers' orders. We then drifted about with lots of waving and promises to come back and I was finally scooted back to the Guesthouse by Sai Gopal. This is my usual final irritation. I had wanted to walk back, which would have also allowed me to have a more personal farewell with Daya and Sudusharna Reddy who had loitered round the corner. Instead, I just had a backward sad wave as we bumped across the garden through the narrow gate. As a result of all this I soon found myself feeling rather bereft in the most beautiful evening time at 5.30 sitting mournfully alone on my veranda, wishing that I had made some arrangement for some students to have come back; this is always difficult as I mustn't offend others. My wish came true when three of the girls appeared at the gate to get my autograph and to have a nice quiet chat. They included Deborah and another girl with a Christian name.

They left at mosquito time, for me to go for a final dinner at Surya's. He was there alone preparing a special dish of tamarind rice which was good but left me looking forward to something more English. Sasi phoned to arrange to come to say goodbye that evening and Surya took me by some back route to find an auto home. I rather missed my wander through the friendly back alleys to the rail crossing route and the town auto ride home. Having arranged to meet Sasi at 9.00 he had been waiting for an hour when I arrived at 8.50. He had come with 4 new shirts and a pair of trousers for me to photograph him, with and without his dark film stars glasses; he also brought a CD for me to make him a copy of Photoshop elements. So the veranda, lit by one fluorescent tube became a studio. This went on until 11.30. After a last gentle "goodbye chris, don't forget me chris, please come soon chris" he strode off into the warm night, leaving me to half-heartedly pack my suitcase while waiting for Imran who had caught a later train than expected from Kadappa. He arrived so late that I had almost finished packing, so slept well, having been lulled to sleep by Imran's endless chatter.

Friday 29th February. Imran was useful in the morning in explaining to the cook that I was leaving and needed the final settlement of my bill. I had given her 1000 rupees on account at the beginning; the final bill came to 780 rupees (£10) for 4 weeks breakfasts and lunches. After idlis for breakfast and final packing we waited around for an hour for the car to come to take us to Mahabalipuram. It had to wait for Surya to finish night duty but we eventually got away by 9.20, Srinivasulu and Sai Gopal coming a little earlier to present a formal request for me to come next year. Surya was unable to take two days leave, hence the arrangement that Imran would come with me, and Surya join us on Saturday afternoon. The start to the drive missed the centre of Tirupati, going the back route, avoiding the level crossing, going past Venkatareddy colony near Surya's where we dropped him off, then starting our 5 hours driving through rural Andhra Pradesh and then Tamil Nadu. It was very hot and of course Imran fussed to have the air conditioning on. As this would mean me shivering and coughing and peering through dark glass windows and missing the smells of winnowing rice and the passing glimpses of interesting little villages and other travellers, I was hard hearted and made him put his window down further and to stop worrying about his hair. We stopped for tea and were feeling very good as we came into the last big temple town of Kanchipuram;

we left it feeling very hot and irritated as the driver got lost but would not admit it until we pointed out that we had passed a particularly obvious temple entrance twice. This added 30 minutes to the journey and the effect was only repaired by a fifteen minute stop while Imran had coconut milk from newly dropped coconuts, slashed open with a fearsome hatchet. I then conceded that he could have the rest of the journey air-conditioned only to find that this has to be arranged and paid for extra with the car owner before leaving. We arrived at 2.20, in time to have nice simple sandwiches and beer (me only) in the open air restaurant of the Golden Sun beach resort, in our usual place with its door opening onto a little courtyard covered with red/purple bougainvillea, overlooking the small pool, and leading direct onto the wonderful beach. It was only the second time that Imran had seen the sea and he was like a little boy; "Chris CHRIS look at the crabs; Chris chris look at the waves". His enthusiasm was delightful and led me in the next couple of days to help with digging holes in the sand, swimming in the sea and spending ages in the pool.

After a couple of hours exploring we set off on the 3km walk along the beach to Mahabalipuram itself, dodging the waves and pointlessly trying to dig out the crabs from their holes into which they rush as we approach. There seemed to be more foreigners walking about than usual and this was confirmed when we eventually arrived in the town in the evening. Imran had no interest in seeing the shore temple, being more interested in talking to the foreigners sitting on the beach painting it. Inevitably we found ourselves at sunset having tea in the little beach restaurant called Luna Magica, a place full of happy memories for me - of seafood lunches with Surya and eating during rain storms which were hardly kept at bay by the coconut mat roof. At about 6.30 I had a call from John Prabakar who had come exactly on time (arranged for 6.00) to the hotel. So we hurried back only to find that he had gone off elsewhere leaving us to wait until 7.30 for him. I first met John when he was 18 yrs old, introducing himself to me in 1984 in Madras. He is now nearly 40, heavier and with a thicker moustache but as charming and entertaining as ever. We went in his car back to Mahabalipuram for dinner in an upstairs restaurant next to the popular crowded Moonrakers. Ours was more run down but ok. I had very good calamari soup and fried fish and little chips with Kingfisher beer. John has settled down from his work in "import/export uncle" (not far removed from smuggling which he had never really denied). He has an excellent memory, going back through all his previous visits to the UK, remembering Cicely, my mum, "the reverend Dr Canon Eric James, Chaplain to the Queen" and Sue and Douglas, although I could not think how he had met them. He is now President of the Poland/South Indian Chamber of commerce, and showed heaps of pictures of himself in a white suit chatting to the Presidents of Poland and Mauritius. I asked if he had any political ambitions, remembering his friendship with the criminal Chief minister of Tamil Nadu, Jayalalitha, who had somehow avoided imprisonment for huge frauds. He then did a brilliant description of politicians; they think they are popular because 5000 attend a rally, where they are bribed with chicken biryani, but find the same supporters go next night to their rival's rally where they have mutton biryani with beer; they then hide in shame under their Hindu newspapers. All with extravagant hand waving and whining politicians voices. I asked what he wanted to achieve and he said he had achieved it already "VIP status only uncle".

At the end of a great evening when Imran left the room I dared ask if he remembered that 6 years ago he had borrowed £300 from me "for a few months". "Of course uncle but it was 8 years ago". When I asked if he could pay it back he said "yes of course uncle; I do not want to pay out £300 of course, but of course uncle if you ask I will immediately pay, I have plenty of money, of course, no problem just ask". So if I need any for payments in India (Imran's college fees if needed next year would be covered by this) I just email him and it will be paid. When we got back to the hotel he tried very hard to get me to go to Chennai the next day to see his office etc and to give me presents for the family. I persuaded him that I would certainly not go as I had promised Imran that I would spend all day swimming etc. We drove back to the hotel, John continuing on to Chennai, leaving me to go on the promised a walk in the moonlight with Imran on the beach which was remarkably cool. As a result of watching so much of the National Geographic TV channel his brain is filled with confused inaccurate snippets of information on how whales breathe, where sand comes from, how the earth was formed, why stars are so far away, why the dinosaurs died out ("were they really bigger than elephants"; "yes and they used them in the same way at the temple entrances"; "ok Chris but did cavemen have temples?"). In so many things Imran is like a little pestering curious boy. I even found myself giving the same sort of answer as I gave earlier to why we were walking to Mahabalipuram "because I said so, so get your things ready NOW". I later fell asleep to more of the Nat Geog channel, about nearly extinct parrots.

Saturday 28th February. Today was as nice a day as I have ever spent at Mahabalipuram. Usually Surya is catching up on sleep from his month of night duties, followed by days when he wakes up early in order to do little errands for me. So he has often spent most of the day doing things on the computer or sleeping. This year Imran was up wanting breakfast at 8.00 and desperate to go swimming in the sea or walking up the beach or making sandcastles. Fortunately I could spend as much time as I wanted just sitting relaxing and reading because he soon found alternative company, chatting to anyone who would listen. He pointed out a Dutchman in the pool who he told me was very important and a captain of a ship. His wife told me later as we drifted in the pool that he

was in fact the captain of one of the 20-seater canal boats in Amsterdam, taking tourists around. She was a physicist working now for the publisher Elsevier, and thought she knew Pat Crowley my publisher in Amsterdam. Imran was keen to learn to swim better and, under my authoritative guidance, shouted from my seat by the pool under the bougainvillea, he actually improved from his slow splashing gasping style to a relatively relaxed sleek swimmer. Of course it was still achieved with constant shouts of “did you see that Chris, I did it”. I hope his quick intelligence and enthusiasm are eventually harnessed to something worthwhile. Just before lunch a party of about 70 engineering students from Chennai arrived to use the thatched covered area on the beach for some kind of function with dancing on the stage, quizzes etc. Imran of course infiltrated them to find this out.

Surya was supposed to have arrived in the mid afternoon; but his single bus direct from Tirupati to Mahabalipuram was in fact 4 separate buses, the first of which started late, the journey taking more than 6 hours, arriving finally at 8.00. As vaguely arranged, John came again at 6.30 and joined us in the garden for tea, lit by candles. The cold he had acquired on his recent trip to frozen Poland had worsened, with coughing and a high temperature so he was relieved when I sent him straight back to Chennai. He had come to bring presents: a heavy framed picture painted on sand for Libby, shirts for us boys and a bottle of Polish vodka. During tea he told me more about Ravi Raj the pastor for whom I have written sponsorship letters (and for his family). I will not be writing any more as it seems his trips to UK were related somehow to mildly criminal activity; his son Santosh had stayed on after the allocated 6 month visa time for 2 years and had left in a hurry as the police were catching him. I feel I have been rather naive, but John could have warned me. Apparently the visa applications of Ravi Raj himself have all been rejected recently. His wife and daughter, who were very nice, are quite innocent but even they have the problem that the family they are visiting had pretended to be political refugees from Sri Lanka, by changing their names, and had thus become illegal immigrants in the UK.

After arriving at 8.00, very tired and frustrated, Surya was still enthusiastic to go into Mahabalipuram for dinner, so we went to the same restaurant as last night, thus getting a 15% discount. What with power cuts and very slow service we didn't finish until 11.00 and all the shops were shut, so no presents this year (often agreed but never kept to). The evening finished with the rather depressing business of packing, with the unnecessary worry of whether I would be overweight and whether I would be allowed the laptop plus my bag. We then had 2 hours to pass before leaving for the airport. I tried to get some sleep but merely lay on the bed hearing the snores of Surya and little grunts from Imran wrapped in his shroud beside me. It had previously been decided that Imran would go on to Chennai station to get a train back direct to Kadappa; this would mean staying in the station retirement rooms and then hanging around until his midday train. I was pleased that he changed his mind and now planned to return in the car with Surya and get the morning bus from Tirupati. The sad car ride to the airport was uneventful, just the long clean road into the outskirts of Chennai with its dirty diesel lorries and never ending wide roads still populated by little groups of blanket-wrapped ghosts, depressed cows and oxcarts. I always feel slightly ghost-like myself, as if I have left already; nothing seems important enough to say, yet we all are filled with unsaid sad messages in the hot dusty night, holding hands by the Departure entrance. I am then sucked into the cool brightly lit crowded check-in area leaving my two sad friends waving rather pathetically in the distant crowd.

The check-in queues for British Airways were enormous and ill-defined, milling crowds of high stacked trolleys and worried families. I went to the First Class desk and asked where should I go as I had already checked-in online (thanks to Leigh who had stayed up very late to do this for me); “come here sir, no problem”. So I queued behind 3 others and was checked in within five minutes. Even with this good start it was still an hour going through immigration, customs and security before I was slumped in the new comfortable gate area. I was disciplined enough to say sitting there until the long queues to board had all passed and was almost the last on. I had the seat originally planned with Leigh, next to the emergency door with plenty of space to stretch and perfect for getting up and walking about. This was a good thing because I had failed to learn from a previous lesson, that the bulkhead rows in the middle beside me are allocated to mothers with babies so I had 3 one-year olds screaming most of the night. I did get about 2 hours sleep but the rest of the nearly nine hours was spent irritated by their angry screams with stupid mothers trying to calm them down by banging tin drums and shaking rattles at them.

We arrived at Heathrow during a brief snow storm which meant that we had to wait on the tarmac for nearly half an hour to get to our stand after landing, but the resulting feelings frustration were completely wiped out by Leigh's welcoming (but slightly hung over) smile lighting up the crowd, providing a wonderful relief. This was followed by a restful drive home by the A3, hearing his 4 weeks news, almost all of which was good, with me gratefully wrapped up in my fleece, which Libby had thoughtfully got him to bring to the airport.

So home to a balloon welcome followed by lunch of roast lamb, in pure unspiced slices with mashed potatoes and claret, shared with Libby, Hugh, Clive, Karen and Leigh, with Clive being especially entertaining and lively, making me feel that I had really arrived back to my real home, confirmed by the unexpected arrival of Murali. All these specially dear people, mixed with the ghosts of Surya, Imran, Madhu and Sasi, swirled around in my mind with the smiling students against the backdrop of the hills of Sri Venkateshwara.