

Heat and Dust - XL Club's First Tour to India, 2001

A party of twenty eight arrived in Delhi in the early hours of the morning of February 7 to greet the heat and clamour of the Orient. The tour travelled 900 kms by coach from Delhi to Agra, Jaipur, Ajmer and Udaipur together with a flight to Mumbai. The highlights were the Taj Mahal, the Red and Amber Forts and the illuminated Lake Palace Hotel in Udaipur seen from the balcony of the Palace of His Highness Arvind Singh Mewar.

Eleven matches were played of which two resulted in XL Club victories. In the majority of matches the batting and fielding was good but our lack of penetration in the bowling department let us down. Ron Helyar batted and fielded well throughout the tour with individual performances from Barry Peay, Ron Hart, Robbie Barker and Albert Van Nierop.

Devray (known to us as Tiger) Jadeja and his wife Jay undertook all the arrangements, giving the party a real taste of India.

Thursday 8 February. A day of sight seeing. First was the Red Fort, the largest of Old Delhi's monuments, and then on to a Sikh Temple. After lunch it was a tour of New Delhi and India Gate designed by Lutyens.

Friday 9 February. A 40-over match against the Delhi Blues, a boy's team. The XL Club made 170-5 mainly due to a solid 54 by Robbie Barker and 34 from Ron Hart. The boys passed our score with ease, with an 11 year old, no taller than 4ft 2in, making 63 not out. A name to remember in the future, Anshul Gupta.

Saturday 10 February. Playing at the University ground in New Delhi, the Old Boys were held to 179-7 at the end of the 35th over. The next five overs went for 69 and 248 was too high and the XL Club finished with 203-5. After an opening partnership of 66 by Ron Helyar and Albert Van Nierop, Gordon Patter, with 45 and John Widgery, 47 then took the score to 154 and the chase petered out.

Sunday 11 February. An early morning departure for Agra and a visit to the imposing red sandstone ramparts of the Agra Fort. From here we travelled the short distance to the magnificent Taj Mahal, one of the world's greatest attractions.

Monday 12 February. Travelled to Jaipur, making a short stop to view the Buland Darwaza, the huge gateway to the deserted city of Fatehpur Sikri. It is now derelict due to its meagre water supply.

Tuesday 13 February. Derek Semmence, batting for the Rajasthan Wanderers, scored an elegant 50 before retiring. The Club fielded well but were unable to keep the Wanderers score below 220-5 at the end of their forty overs. After a steady start, some accurate spin bowling slowed the scoring and we finished on 153-8.

Wednesday 14 February. Playing on a matting pitch on a small ground the Club was invited to bat first by The Rambagh Palace Hotel staff. Ron Helyar made an excellent 94 with valuable contributions from Jap Vogelaar and Simon Klimcke. Just prior to lunch we had a visit from The Maharani of Jaipur. The Hotel staff batted steadily until the last five overs when they made a late onslaught and came within five runs of the Club's 246-7.

Thursday 15 February. A sightseeing day. A trip to the foot of the Amber Fort, then a ride on the back of elephants up to the entrance to the Fort and a guided tour. After lunch a visit to the City Palace museum, the Hawa Mahal or "Palace of Winds" and a walk in one of the busy streets of the Pink City of Jaipur.

Friday 16 February. An early start and a rapid drive to Ajmer for a 25-over match against the staff of Mayo College. On a ground set in beautiful surroundings the staff scored 164-5 after an opening stand of 126. The Club had an opening partnership of 50 and a third wicket stand of 63 but ended seven runs short.

Saturday 17 February. Mayo College, with 1000 students, the Eton of India, set in the countryside on the outskirts of Ajmer. Playing a match of unlimited overs, the College batted first and scored rapidly with their captain scoring 109 before being stumped by Robbie Barker. There was some excellent fielding by the Club, however, and the College declared at lunch with 238-7. The College bowling was too good for the Club who were all out for 64 with only two of our batsmen making double figures.

Sunday 18 February. An early start for the long Coach journey to Udaipur with a stop to photograph two oxen pulling buckets of water from a well for irrigating the fields. Our surprise lunch stop was at the Deogarh Palace Hotel. A beautifully restored palace now open to visitors.

Monday 19 February. Our next stay was just outside Udaipur at a converted hunting lodge, with its own wild life park, cricket ground, stables and airport. Playing the Udaipur District Veterans XI on a matting wicket, Robbie Barker, 43 and Ron Helyar, 54 had an opening partnership of 103. Ron Hart weighed in with 64 not out and the innings closed on 213-5. At the end of the first over the District XI were 8-2. Twenty overs later the match ended with the District XI on 217-4.

Tuesday 20 February. Playing on the same ground against the Shikarbadi HRH XI the Club 182 in their 40 overs with Albert Van Nierop scoring 55. The Club only took two wickets before the HRHXI won easily. During the HRH innings there was an unusual event when the game was stopped due to wild deer trotting on to the ground.

Wednesday 21 February. A day of sightseeing, visiting the Old City Palace of Udaipur which overlooks a lake and the Lake Palace Hotel. In the evening we were invited to a reception at the Shambhu Niwas Palace, the home of His Royal Highness Arvind Singh Mewar. A memorable evening.

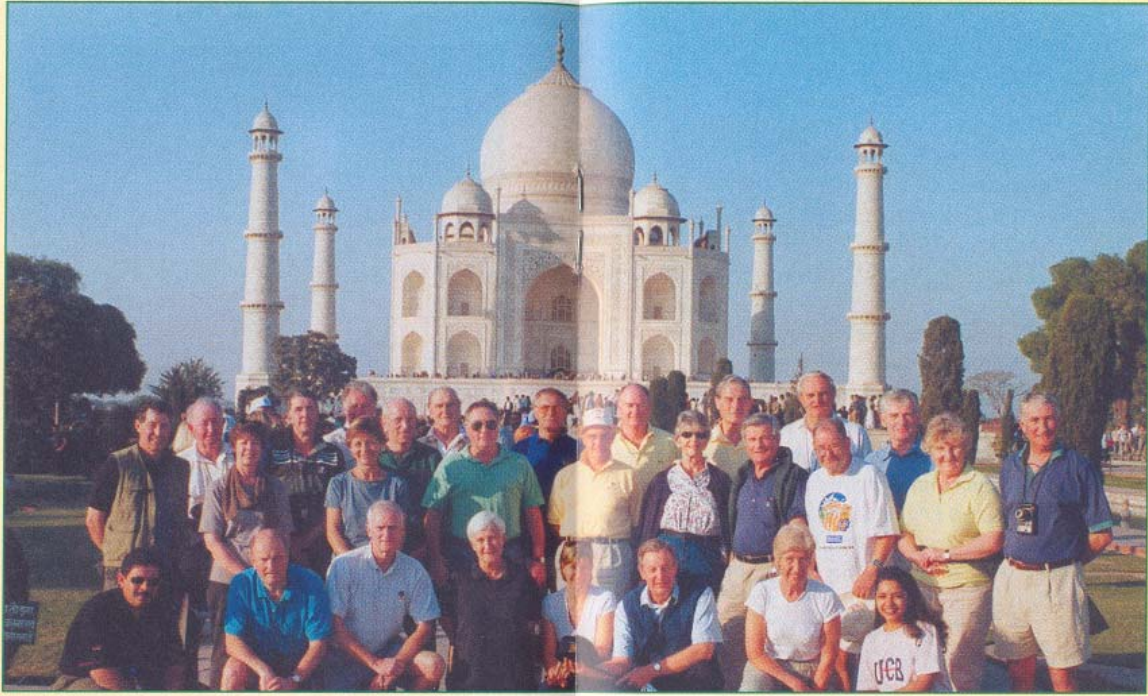
Thursday 22 February. A rest day before the evening flight to Mumbai.

Friday 23 February. With the humidity rising our next match was at the Parsee Gymkhana Club ground against an Over40 Test Players XI in which three players represented India. Norman Gray, 42, John Widgery, 32, Ron Helyar, 31, and Simon Klimcke, 28 contributed to make a total of 211. Derek Semmence scored 73 for the Test Players XI who passed the total with six wickets down.

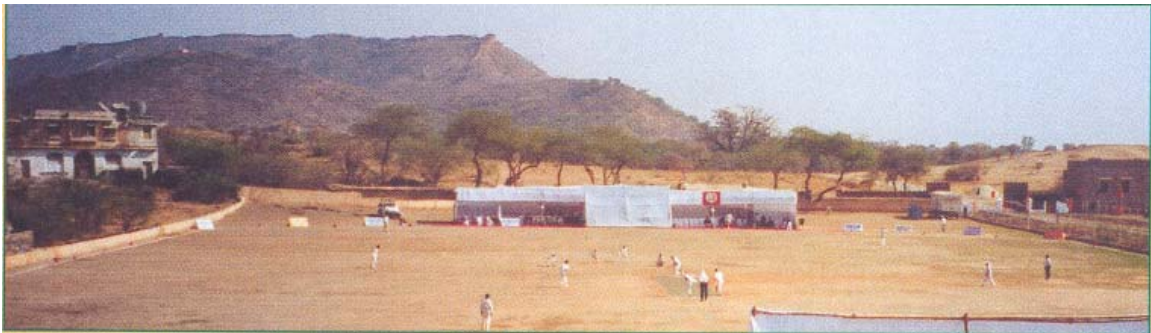
Saturday 24 February. On the hottest day of the tour, playing at the Oval Maiden in the centre of Mumbai against 10 boys and Tiger. The boys with Tiger rattled up 200-5 before declaring. The Club innings was held together by Barry Peay scoring an excellent 85 in only his fourth match after returning from injury. Colin Oliver-Redgate batted well for 49 with the Club winning by two wickets.

Sunday 25 February. The last match was played at the Bombay Gymkhana ground where the first Test Match between England and India was played in 1933. Batting for the Club, Derek Semmence scored an elegant 65, Robbie Barker 32, and extras being the next highest score with 22 wides. The much younger Gymkhana team had few difficulties before making the winning total of 173-2. An unforgettable sight was the mass of twenty or more matches being played on the adjacent park.

Monday 26 February. A day of last minute shopping, lounging by the hotel pool, golf or attending the first international hockey match played in Mumbai for over 30 years. Germany beat India 1-0. After the tour dinner it was off to the airport in the coach which broke down 100 yards from the Departure Entrance!



Party at the Taj Mahal



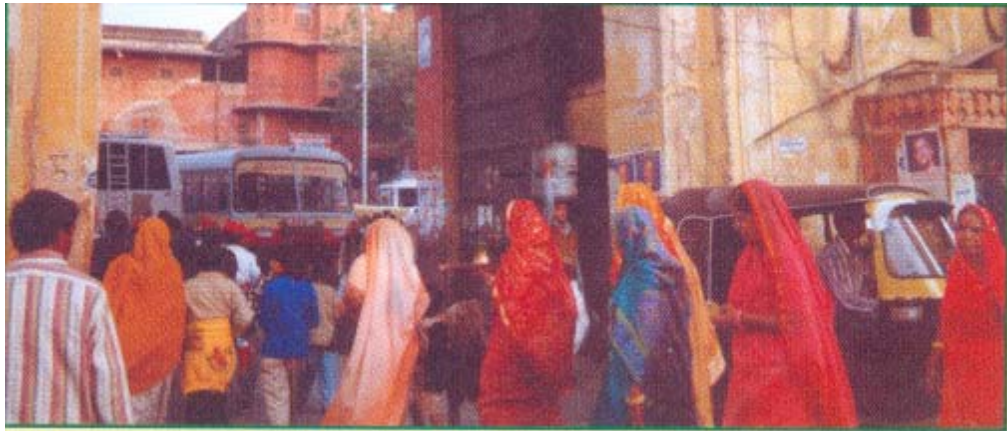
Not quite the Eden Gardens at Calcutta! It's in Udaipur



The wife's camel Ghia!



Mayo College Grandstand



The crowd flocking to a XL Club match