

Orchids of Sikkim

An Orchids in the Wild Ecotour

April 1-15, 2025

Participants: Fred and Jan Anderson, Ross Bicknell, Rick Burian, Gary Yong Gee, Mary Gerritsen, Kay Klumb, Venk Reddy, Maryetta and Michael Sciuto, Gerald Verens and Helena Wee.

Guides: Neelam Basnett, Sameer Gurung, Sailesh Pradhan

Drivers: Sanjay Chetteri, Sanjok Rai, Sonam Bhutan, and Deepak Lepcha

The group tour began in New Delhi, with most people meeting up at a hotel near the airport. Several of us had planned a short pre-tour to Agra to see the Taj Mahal. This pre-tour was a great introduction to the geography and history of the state of Uttar Pradesh India. Known for its role as a center of Mughal rule, the region is dotted with forts, tombs, and other relics of this era. Agra is perhaps most famous for the [Taj Mahal](#), a UNESCO World Heritage site, which was built by Shah Jahan in memory of his wife, Mumtaz Mahal. After arrival in Agra and a pleasant night at a lovely hotel, we got up early the next morning to see the sunrise over the Taj Mahal. Great photo opportunity! After the Taj Mahal, we visited another famous site in Agra, the [Agra Fort](#), which was built between 1565 and 1573. At both the fort and the Taj Mahal there were lots of monkeys (*Rhesus macaque*). Agra is also a center for handicrafts, including hand-knotted carpets and marble table tops, plaques, and other items with inlaid precious stones. Several of us bought hand-knotted carpets (which were shipped to the USA), a wonderful handicraft and memory of the trip.

We left New Delhi the following day, traveling by air to Bagdogra (state of West Bengal), which has the closest functional airport to Sikkim. We were met by two of our guides (Neelam and Sameer) as well as three of the four drivers and made our way through the city (very hot, crowded, horrible traffic), finally reaching the outskirts of the city. We passed a Bengal tiger reserve and multiple signs warning of possible elephants crossing the road. However, no tigers or elephants were spotted!

We finally started climbing up a narrow, winding road that followed the Teesta River. We stopped a few times to photograph blooming plants of *Dendrobium aphyllum*. It became obvious that the river had had massive floods sometime recently. When we asked our guides what had happened, we learned of the destructive flood of 2023. On 3 October of that year, South Lhanok Lake, a glacial lake far up in the Himalayas, experienced a sudden outburst, triggering a devastating flood cascade that killed 55 people, left 74 missing, and destroyed multiple bridges, a hydropower dam, and parts of several villages adjacent to the river from Sikkim into neighboring Bengal, and even parts of Bangladesh. A thick layer (20 feet or more) of sediment covered much of the riverbank along the entire watercourse. The outcomes of the flood created multiple travel issues for much of our tour, resulting in several long detours due to the destruction of bridges and parts of the road.

We finally crossed the border into Sikkim. Interestingly, travel in Sikkim is highly regulated. We were required to have travel permits and to show and leave copies of the permits at several points along the route. At least part of this was due to the consequences of the



Ross Bicknell, Mary Gerritsen, Jan and Fred Anderson at the Taj Mahal.



Shopping for carpets



The wool that is used for the carpets



Learning how the carpets are made



Views of the Agra fort



Marble work at Agra fort



Agra fort



Agra fort



Ancient tombs viewed from the road to Agra



Incredible stone work with inlaid precious stones



View of one of Akbar Tomb of Sikandra (1605-1612 A.D)



Part of the Akbar tomb.

aforementioned flood (the government wanting to keep track of how many tourists were in these remote areas should another disaster occur). However, parts of Sikkim are also somewhat contentious politically. The region was at one time part of the Silk Road, with several trade routes through the Himalayas into China (Tibet). This region is an area of conflict between China and India. Additionally, at one time, many of the people in Sikkim were of Tibetan heritage and the Buddhist religion. There was considerable military presence along the road to the north, with several military installations and large numbers of military vehicles and personnel along the way. Historically, many of the regions (e.g. Nepal, Bhutan) at the base of the Himalayas were separate kingdoms, including Sikkim. Sikkim was annexed by India in 1975, much to the dismay of the reigning king of Sikkim and his followers.

Following a late lunch at a roadside restaurant, we finally arrived in Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim (and also home of the former king). The city was at the top of a steep hilly area, with narrow roads and horrendous traffic everywhere. Our hotel here, Hidden Forest Retreat, was probably the loveliest of the entire tour. The hotel was nestled into a steep mountainside, with beautiful gardens throughout. The gardens featured many blooming azaleas, as well as various orchid species (e.g. *Coelogyne stricta*, *Coelogyne flaccida*, *Chilochista parishii*, *Dendrobium* sp.) and many blooming and quite spectacular *hippeastrum* hybrids. Here we met up with Gary Yong Gee and Rick Burian, who had been touring in Bhutan prior to joining the group in Sikkim. The hotel had a wonderful library, featuring many different books about the flora of Sikkim. Many of the books were written by the father of our tour organizer, Mr. Saliesh Pradhan.

Our first stop the next morning was the official Sikkim Orchid Research Center, based near the top of one of the highest hills surrounding Gangtok. Interestingly, in an attempt to base an airport in Gangtok, the government “shaved off” the top of this mountain, creating an airport that was now basically non-functional. The construction of the airport created massive environmental problems in the surrounding areas, with enormous changes in the drainage. At least one village was abandoned due to landslides and continuing instability of the slopes. Even the Orchid Research Center was impacted, creating serious problems with water quality and availability. The expansive Orchid Research Center has many greenhouse and shade structures, although the majority of the plants we saw were *Cymbidium* hybrids. There is one greenhouse that has a collection of species from the region. We met the director (Dr. Sankar Das) and some of the staff and had a brief tour of some of the facilities. It was apparent that the “research” was basically directed towards creating horticulturally desirable plants, although the center also appeared to be struggling with this mission.

After the tour of the research center, we traveled to the home of our host, Saliesh Pradhan. Along the way next to the road, Rick Burian spotted several orchids, which we stopped to photograph. This included a large specimen of *Dendrobium nobile*, as well as numerous flowering plants of *Dendrolirium* (formerly *Eria*) *lasiopetalum*, and *Mycaranthes floribunda*. Salish has a fairly large estate with beautiful gardens and several shade structures, as well as his own home and a separate one for his father (who was about 90 years old). We had a delicious lunch and tour of Saliesh’s collections, featuring many different citrus varieties, various orchids, and many other flowering plants. A large specimen of *Dendrobium nobile* was near our lunch area, and there were quite a few *Coelogyne flaccida* in the trees on the grounds.

The next morning we were due to depart Gangtok but made a short visit to a local garden/flower nursery owned and managed by the owners of our hotel (Hidden Forest Retreat).



Dendrobium fimbriatum in roadside tree on the way to Gangtok



Dendrobium aphyllum in roadside tree on the way to Gangtok



Chiloschista parishii at Hidden Forest



Beautiful gardens at the Hidden Forest Retreat Gangtok



Coelogyne stricta in one of the trees at the Hidden Forest retreat.



Lovely azaleas in the garden



Coelogyne cristata in one of the trees at the Hidden Forest retreat.



Paphiopedilum venustum, a species native to Sikkim. Photographed at the Orchid Research Center, Gangtok.



Visiting the National Research Centre for Orchids, Pakyong (Gangtok). Sikkim



Touring the Orchid Research Centre



Spiranthes sp. photographed at the Orchid Research Center



Coelogyne flaccida photographed at the Orchid Research Center



Lewisia sp. photographed at the Orchid Research Center



Dendrolirium lasiopetalum photographed at the Orchid Research Center



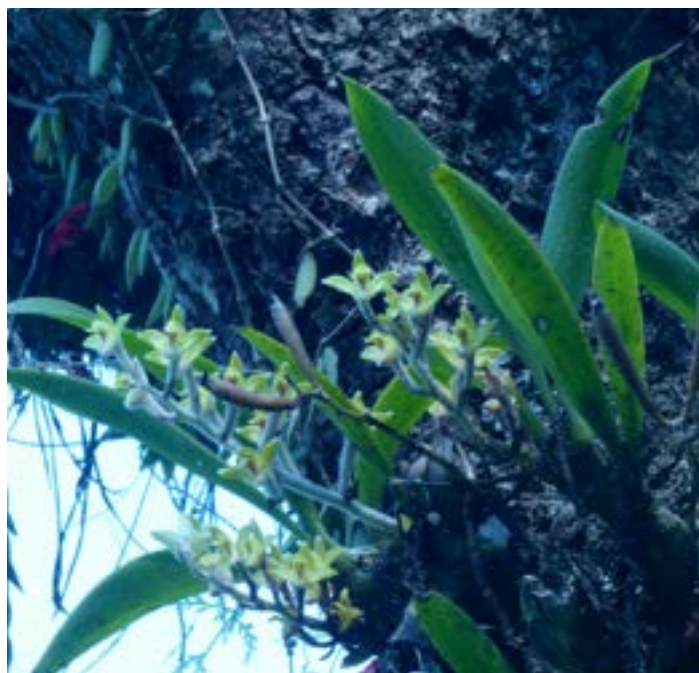
Ascocentrum miniatum, photographed at the Orchid Research Center



Dendrolirium lasiopetalum, roadside Gangtok.



Our first sighting of *Dendrobium nobile*, Gangtok roadside



Dendrolirium lasiopetalum, quite common roadside plant



Specimen of *Dendrobium nobile*, Saliesh Pradhan



Lunch at Saliesh's estate: L-R, Jan Anderson, Venk Reddy, Gary Yong Gee, Rick Burian



L-R, Ross Bicknell, Saliesh Pradhan



L-R Gerard Veruns, Michael Scuito, Maryetta Scuito, Fred Anderson, Helena Wee, Ross Bicknell

Due to the steep terrain, the garden features various stone paths winding their way up the hill, with lots of flowering shrubs (azalea, tabebuia, brunfelsia), specimen hippeastrums and other garden flowers. There was also a large glasshouse featuring an assortment of succulents as well as many bromeliads.

For the remainder of our trip, our group traveled in a “caravan” of four small SUVs, which sometimes posed problems with parking or pulling off the highway. We traveled from the nursery to the top of the hill where the major shops of Gangtok were located. There was a nice pedestrian mall, with many different shops and restaurants. Towards the end of the street there was also a large farmers market with many different vegetables, herbs, cheeses, meats etc. We enjoyed lunch at a little Chinese restaurant, a meal similar to the “hotpot” cuisine of Yunnan.

We left Gangtok in the late afternoon, heading farther north into the higher foothills of the Himalayas. Our trip took us along a very scenic route, with steep drop offs, massive cliffs, and little to no agriculture or villages along the way. At the base of the valley was one of the tributaries of the Teesta River. We saw quite a few orchids in the trees en route, mostly *Dendrobium nobile* and *Dendrolirium (Eria) lasiopetalum*. Hours later we finally arrived in the village of Mangan and checked in to our hotel, the Planter’s Rest.

The next morning we set out to explore some of the forests near Mangan. We had an unusual start to the trip, entering an odd, multi-story parking garage on the Main Street in the village. We descended several floors, driving past all the parking stalls, and exited the parking lot about 300 feet below the roadway we had started on! From there we drove further downhill, finally reaching an area with a small farmhouse and extensive, but very old, terraces. Very large trees dominated the landscape, and a large majority of them had enormous specimens of *Dendrobium nobile* in full bloom! We also found more of the *Dendrolirium* and *Mycaranthes* that we had seen earlier, and a few plants of an unknown *Bulbophyllum*. We also saw several plants of *Coelogyne flaccida*. On the terraces themselves we found a few plants of a *Calanthe* species - not in bloom but likely to be in a month or so. We also found several large *Otochilus* species and a few *Luisia* species. Other interesting plants included some nice specimens of *Arisaema tortuosa*. When we had pretty much exhausted our search, we headed back to the farmhouse where we started. There was a large group of local ladies in the garden and on the balcony, discussing healthy foods and nutrition. We enjoyed meeting the group and getting quite a few photos. After leaving the farmhouse we continued down the hill towards the Teesta River, visiting the site of what had been a bridge across the river. This was destroyed by the catastrophic glacial flood mentioned previously, and there was only a temporary pedestrian bridge. We traveled back up the mountain on a different route, passing through an area that had been part of the hydroelectric project (also destroyed by the flood). Rick Burian, again a great spotter, saw a group of *Goodyera procera*, which we stopped to photograph. Just up the road a little farther were a few plants of a jewel orchid (*Goodyera hemsleyana*). In the same location we also found a very large *Arisaema* species and two different *Impatiens* species. Towards the top of the road we also found a large *Coelogyne elata*.

The following day entailed a long and arduous journey from Mangan to the village of Lachung. Before setting off, we made a short stop at the local police station, where Gary and Rick had spotted a few orchids the evening before. The highlight was a large, blooming *Vanda cristata*. From here we set off on the journey for the day. In earlier times this would not have been as difficult, but the 2023 flood washed out several bridges and large portions of the road on the usual route. So instead of proceeding directly up the Teesta Valley, we had to backtrack



Beautiful hippeastrum collection at Gangtok garden



Succulent and bromeliad collection, Gangtok garden



Succulent, cacti and bromeliad collection, Gangtok garden



Central shopping district, Gangtok



Spectacular specimen of *Dendrobium nobile*, Mangan



Arisaema tortuosum, Mangan



Goodyera hemsleyana, Mangan



Arisaema sp. Mangan



Curious *impatiens* species, Mangan



Impatiens puberla



Vanda cristata, near police station Mangan. Photo



Mycaranthes floribunda, Photo by Gary Yong Gee



Coelogyne flaccida, in tree at Planter's Rest, Mangan



Temporary bridge over Teesta river



Goodyera procera



Rick Burian (top) and Gary Yong Gee, roadside botanizing.

several hours down the river to reach a temporary bridge and then continue up the other side of the steep valley. The road was extremely narrow, with steep drop offs over the side. We had to contend with numerous military vehicles, overloaded trucks, and lots of slower vehicles, and it took most of the day to get to Lachung. We enjoyed a lunch at a popular “viewpoint” along the way, trying out a local delicacy - momos (a type of dumpling). In one little village, one of the locals had planted a few orchids along the road, including blooming *Cymbidium bicolor* and *Coelogyne ochracea*. We stopped for photographs, and the family invited us to see their garden, where they had a number of the local orchids mounted on trees. This included a massive *Dendrobium nobile* that was in full bloom!

The road continued to climb, and gradually the vegetation began to change as well. We began seeing blooming rhododendrons in the shrubbery next to the road, lots of cobra lilies (*Arisaema* sp.) and even a large *Edgeworthia gardneri*.

A local attraction en route was Beumak Falls, a beautiful waterfall that cascades down the steep slopes next to the road. In an effort to “appeal” to tourists, there was a fake bridge with artificial cherry blossoms and lots of small booths selling snacks, drinks and souvenirs. A little farther on, we reached an area that had really been devastated by the flood - a fairly large village with massive damage to the lower floors of some buildings and other buildings that had been swept away completely. The flood occurred at night when many people were sleeping, and in this village alone over 30 people were killed.

Perhaps the most exciting part of this portion of the journey to Lachung was the view! After days of never seeing the Himalayas due to smoke, smog and haze, we began to get glimpses of the massive mountains in front of us. As we continued to advance farther into the mountains, the temperature dropped noticeably, and when we finally arrived in Lachung, it was very cold. Our hotel “Ethos Metho” had a sort of “Nordic” flavor. The rooms were very cold, but fortunately had large electric heaters. Most of the group found the cold difficult and bundled up in layers of clothes, hats, scarves and sweaters. The restaurant had no heat at all, and we spent time trying to get some very wet wood to burn in the little stove that was supposed to heat the restaurant. We ate quickly and scurried back to our heated rooms!

The next morning was absolutely glorious. Barely a cloud in the sky, beautiful sunshine, and breathtaking views of the Himalayas. After breakfast we continued farther into the mountains, eventually reaching an elevation a little over 12,000 ft. The views were incredible the entire way, with mountains, waterfalls, and blooming rhododendrons in all directions. We passed under an overhead gateway welcoming us to the Shingba Rhododendron Sanctuary. Our guide Neelam was well versed in rhododendron taxonomy and showed us at least 12 different species (in bloom) in just one small area. Later that day we stopped to look at a large sign at the entrance of the reserve with photographs of the different rhododendrons. In this sanctuary there are 24 different species! Another beautiful feature of this area is the forest floor. It was literally covered with thousands of blooming primula (*Primula denticulata*). We passed a small settlement called Yumthang. This “tourist trap” has lots of booths selling food, drinks and warm clothes. After a bit we turned around and headed back in the direction of the hotel, stopping in a large meadow for a quick picnic lunch that had been prepared by our guides and drivers before breakfast. Returning to the hotel, we stopped multiple times for photos of rhododendrons, mountains, *Arisaema*, and even a few yaks. Although we did not see any orchids, this mountain valley has lots of cypripediums (including *Cypripedium tibeticum* and *Cypripedium himalaicum*)



View of Mangan. Typical housing with tall multistory structures perched on very steep hillsides



Cymbidium bicolor spotted in a garden next to road to Lachung.



Mo-mos a traditional dumpling dish



Narrow winding road to Lachung on steep hillsides



Roadside rhododendrons, road to Lachung



Scene of destruction along Teesta river..used to be a dam and a bridge here!



A veritable nest of *Arisaema*!



Roadside *Coelogyne stricta*



Beumak Falls



Edgeworthia garneri. Pulp from this plant was used for handmade paper, used for the scriptures in the Buddhist monasteries. Photo by Rick Burian.



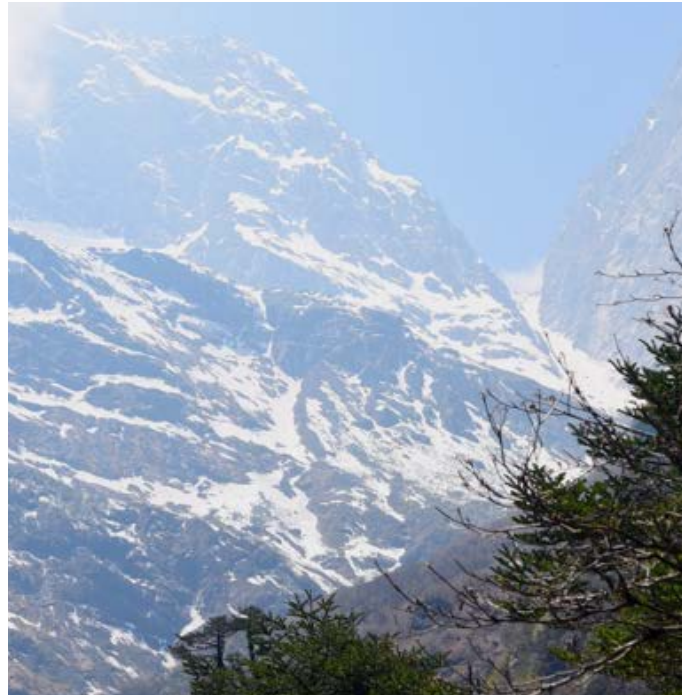
Fragaria rubicola (aka strawberry!). Photo by Rick Burian



Temperatures in the hotel in Lachung were a big brisk!



Primula denticulata



Finally, we can see the peaks of the Himalayas



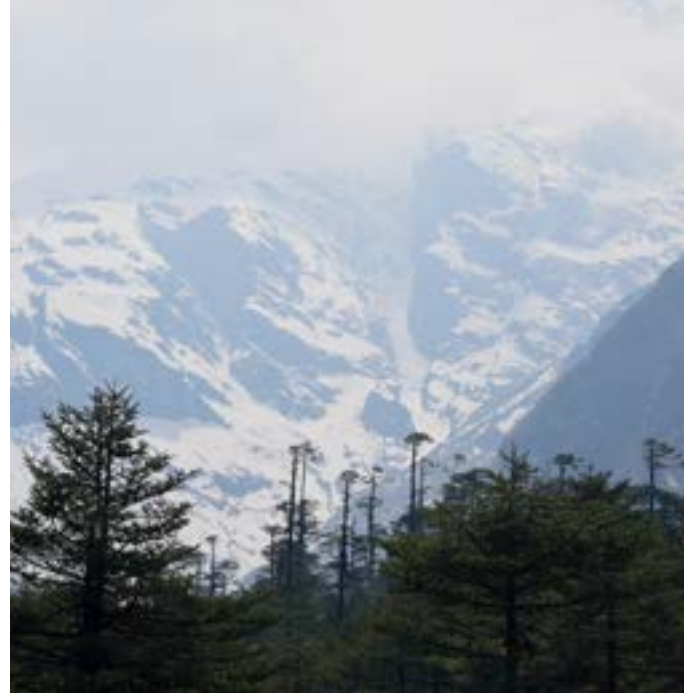
Rhododendron sp. Shingba Rhododendron sanctuary



Daphne sp. Shingba Rhododendron sanctuary



Rhododendron sp.



Backdrop, Rhododendron sanctuary



More rhodos!



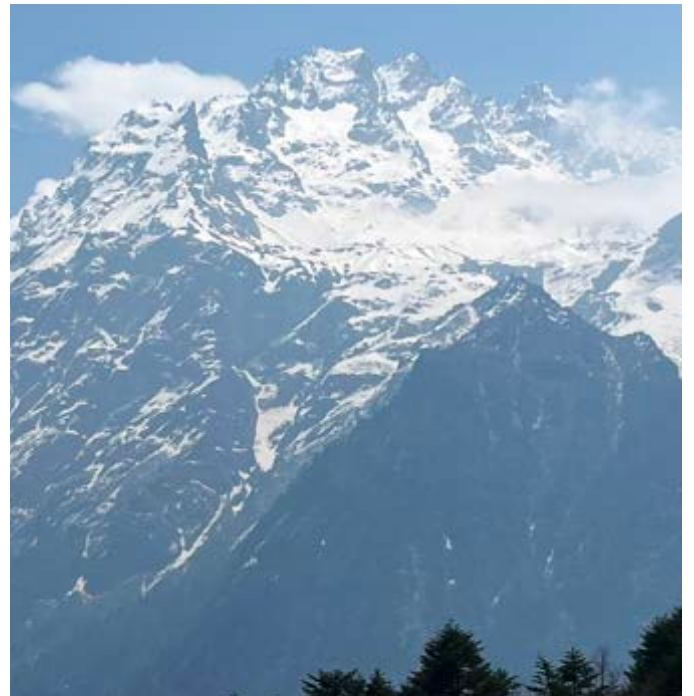
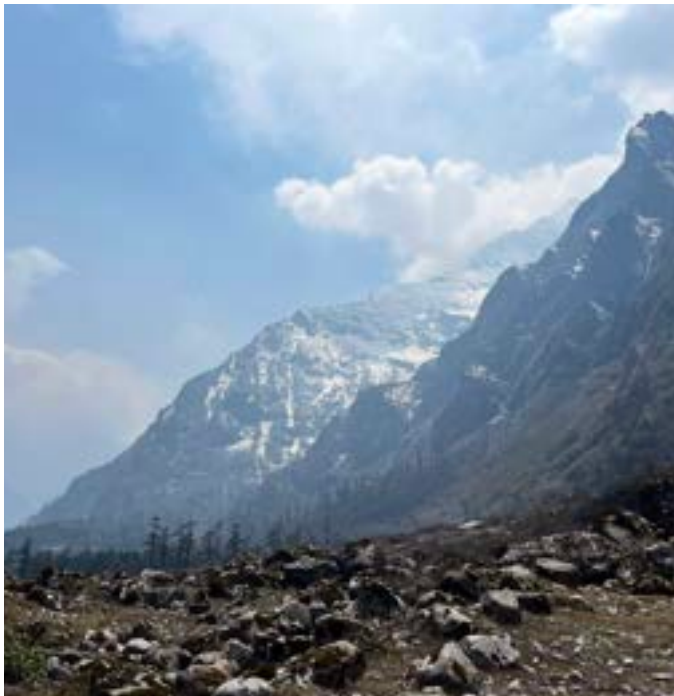
Tiny gentians on the forest floor



Yak, Lachung



Breathtaking views of the himalayas, Lachung





Group photo after lunch, Rhododendron Sanctuary Lachung

Looks a little chilly!

which bloom later (June). However, in June the road to this area is nearly impassable due to the monsoon rains and associated landslides, floods, and other issues.

We set off early the next morning (leaving at 6 am) so that we could make it through a checkpoint downriver from Lachung before 8 am. This checkpoint allowed us to cross a temporary bridge over the Teesta River and drive down the other side of the valley. Here the road had been severely damaged by the flood and was under construction almost the entire length. One particularly difficult part of the road was a detour over and through a village (Naga, now mostly abandoned) that had basically slid down the mountain into the river when it was undermined by the flood damage. All of us agreed that we would not want to be on that part of the road during the monsoon rains (which began about a week after we left). However, on this side of the valley we did eventually reach an area that made the journey worth it. Our driver spotted a magnificent *Cymbidium eburneum* about 20 feet above the ground in a large tree. Stopping the cars, everyone got out and began exploring. In this small area we spotted at least 10 more of the *Cymbidium* and several large plants of *Coelogyne stricta*. There were several large patches under the trees with colonies of *Arisaema costatum*. We continued farther down the road, finding quite a few large plants of *Dendrobium aphyllum* in full bloom. Gary Yong Gee and Rick Burian also spotted a large *Cymbidium bicolor* in a tree next to the road. After hours on this truly awful road, we finally encountered pavement! Soon we were back in Mangan, where we had been a few days earlier. Continuing south, we entered an area with more developed roadways, signage and villages/towns. Our destination was the town of Ravangla, which we eventually reached later in the day. However, we stopped for lunch at a large organic tea plantation, home of Temi tea. The tea here was considered by many to be the best in India, and we had a short tour of the tea processing facility. Several of us bought packets of loose tea as souvenirs.

Our hotel in Ravangla was called “Buddha’s Retreat”. It was quite nice, although still cold (the elevation was about 6900 ft). However, the rooms were large and cozy, with mattress heaters, as well as space heaters. Behind the hotel on a large hill loomed an absolutely enormous Buddha statue, lit up at night. The following morning the group walked from the hotel up to the Buddha park. Along the way we passed a rock wall that had many plants of *Pleione praecox*, not in bloom, but there were lots of plants. The Buddha park featured a nice garden and, inside the Buddha, lots of paintings depicting the life of Buddha. There were a number of signs in the gardens with some well known sayings of Buddha. One of my favorites was “If you want to be happy, have zero expectations of others”. Another “open your mind before you open your mouth”. The hill above the Buddha had apparently been botanized by Hooker, and there were still some orchids here, including more *Pleione praecox* and *Cymbidium hookerianum* (not in bloom).

We did not spend a lot of time on this hill, as it was not terribly interesting, so instead we set off for the town of Yuksom. Our first stop was an unusual Buddhist monastery, housing an “old school” sect of the religion. Here there was the Shurishing Yungdrung Dungdrakling Bon Monastic School. The inside of the monastery was very small and quite dark, and the paintings here were quite different from those we saw earlier (and later) from other schools of Buddhism. When we reached Yuksom, we stayed at a lovely hotel (Tashi Ghang Retreat) with quite extensive and well maintained grounds. In the trees there were quite a few orchids, including large blooming specimens of *Coelogyne cristata*, as well as *Epigonium rotundatum*. Someone also spotted a collared owlet on a large tree branch overhanging the garden.



Treacherous road on opposite side of the Teesta



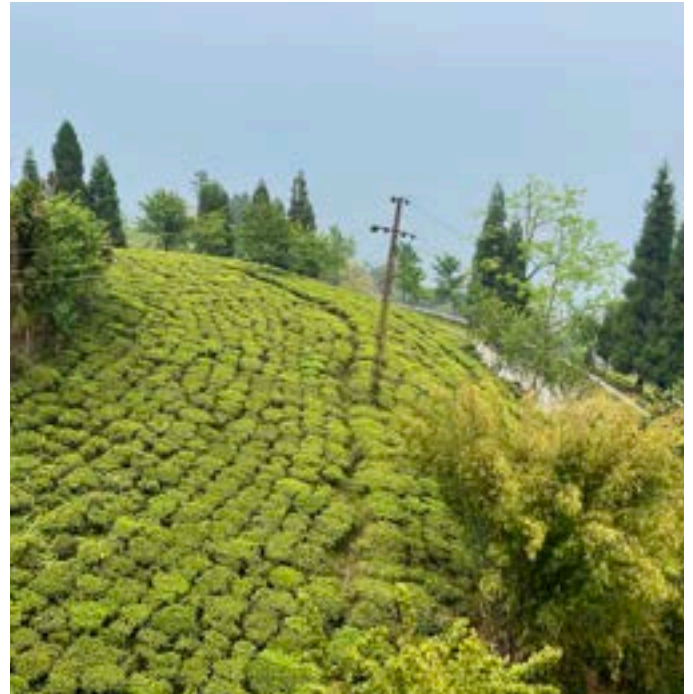
Treacherous road on opposite side of the Teesta



Site of former bridge across Teesta river



Ross Bicknell loves his tea purchase!



Temi tea plantation.



More scenes from our tea tour



Enjoying a cuppa.



Saliesh explains the tea leaf drying and fermentation process



Lavishly decorated interior, Yungdrung monastery



Yungdrung Kundraklingbon Monastery



Arisaema sp,



Coelogyne stricta, returning from Lachung



Cymbidium eburneum



Enormous plants of *Cymbidium eburneum*



Dendrobium aphyllum



Giant Buddha statue, Ravagla



Plants of *Pleione praecox* next to road on the way to the Giant Buddha, Ravagla



Giant Buddha, daytime, Ravagla



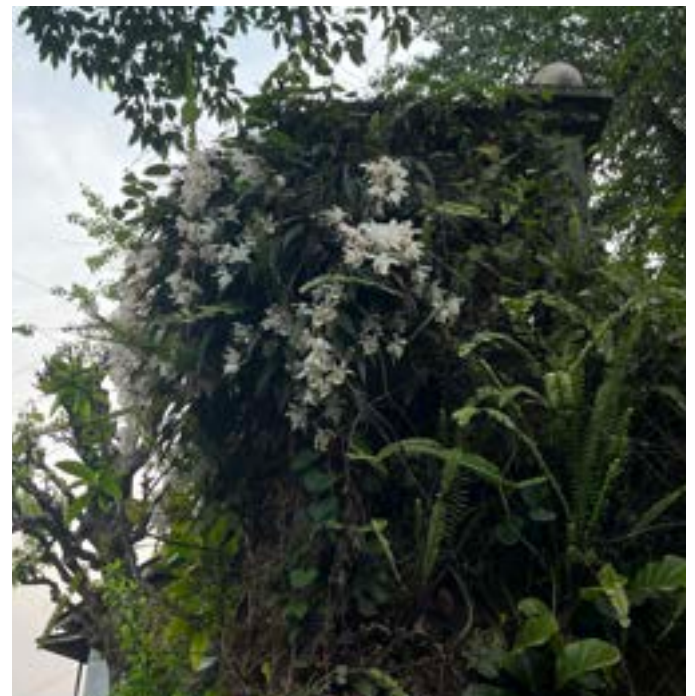
Buddhas Retreat hotel, Ravagla



No words necessary



Dendrobium heterocarpum



Cascades of *Coelogyne cristata* over cliff above the road, Yuksom

After breakfast the next morning, we went to a garden owned by a friend of our guide, Neelam. His friend had quite a few orchids that he had collected (primarily from downed trees, road construction, agricultural clearing) and positioned them on trees around his garden. There was also a collection of various orchids in pots on his patio. Blooming plants included *Epigeneium rotundatum*, *Bulbophyllum umbellatum*, and *Esmeralda cathcartii*. From there, our caravan headed out of town, passing a lovely waterfall (we would return to this later) and then climbing up a small hill to an area, had the skies been clear, that would have provided a fabulous view of the Himalayas. Here the narrow road hugged some steep cliffs above the road. After a short drive, the drivers turned around the vehicles, and the group set off on a short hike back down the road towards the waterfall. On the cliffs above, the view was absolutely breathtaking. Huge plants of *Coelogyne cristata*, in full and glorious bloom, cascaded down the cliff face. There were dozens of these spectacular plants, many of which I am sure were 40 or more years old. Interspersed with these we could also spot a few other orchid species, including more of the *Epigeneium*. We continued our hike down the road, finding more and more of these amazing plants. Rounding a corner, we finally reached the waterfall, where there were quite a few cobra lilies (*Arisaema costatum*) growing nearby. Rick and Gary stepped into the tall grass to take photos and, much to their dismay, came out with their shoes and socks covered in leeches!

We enjoyed a fairly quick lunch at a little restaurant that catered to trekkers, then walked back to our hotel. Most of the group retired for a short rest or a further tour of the gardens around the hotel. Rick Burian mentioned that he had seen a few *Dendrobium heterocarpum* on some trees farther down in the village, so I walked down the hill to see them. We did spot 2-3 of the plants in bloom, growing on some trees overhanging a somewhat swampy place with yet another cobra lily species.

The following morning we left Yuksom and drove towards Pelling and our next hotel. We stopped at a few locations where we saw more blooming plants of *Dendrobium heterocarpum* as well as some very large plants of *Dendrobium nobile*. One of the group spotted an *Arundina graminifolia* on the road bank, so we stopped and tried to climb up to get some good photos. We came to an old bridge that crossed the Rathong Chu River, and made a short stop just before the bridge. In some tall trees overhanging the river there were quite a few *Dendrobium nobile*, as well as a large blooming plant of the leafless orchid *Chilochista parishii*. We passed another “tourist trap,” the Kanchenjunga waterfall, complete with many souvenir and snack booths, and a ticketed area that allowed access to climb stairs next to the waterfall to get better photos.

Rain was in the forecast, and it soon became apparent that there was going to be a downpour. We drove a little farther up the road to stop at a roadside restaurant/tea room and wait out the storm.

A few hours later, we drove to the town of Pelling, stopping at a monastery located at the top of what was probably the highest hill in town. The monastery housed a “yellow hat” sect with a building style of many monasteries in Tibet. The paintings inside the monastery were lovely. After our monastery tour we arrived at our hotel (Norbu Ghang Hotel). We only stayed in this hotel one evening, setting out the next day for Kalimpong.

Our first stop in the morning was yet another Tibetan-style monastery. Interestingly, it was the new moon, and the monastery was full of monks (and lots of “junior monks”) performing the traditional chants for this occasion. This particular monastery was built in the 1600s. The top



Coelogyne cristata, hotel grounds, Yuksom



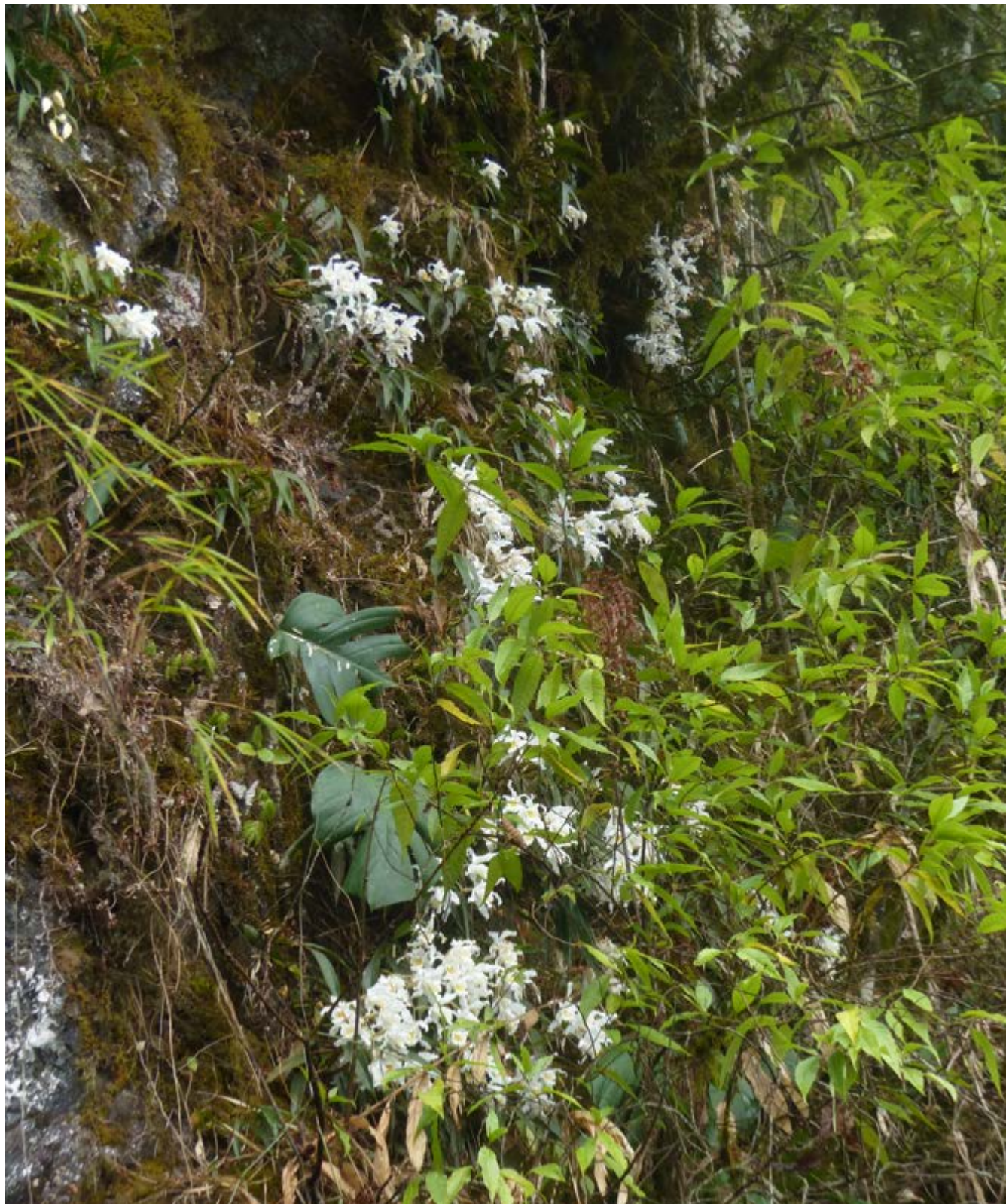
Epigeneium rotundatum



Collared owlet, Yuksom



Coelogyne cristata





Bulbophyllum umbellatum



Epigeneium rotundata



Esmeralda cathcartii



Coelogyne cristata.



Visiting the site of the first chogyal (king) of Sikkim



Commemorative site of the coronation



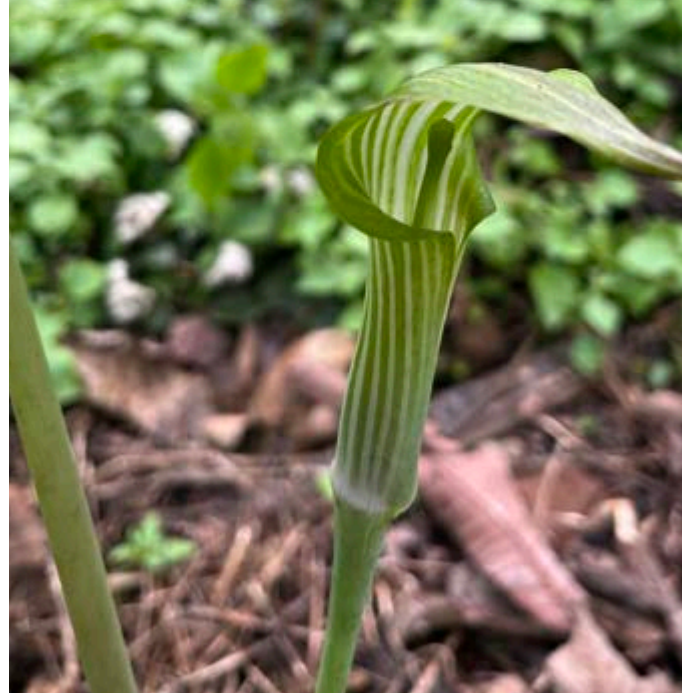
More cascades of *Coelogyne cristata*



Arisaema at base of waterfall, Yuksom



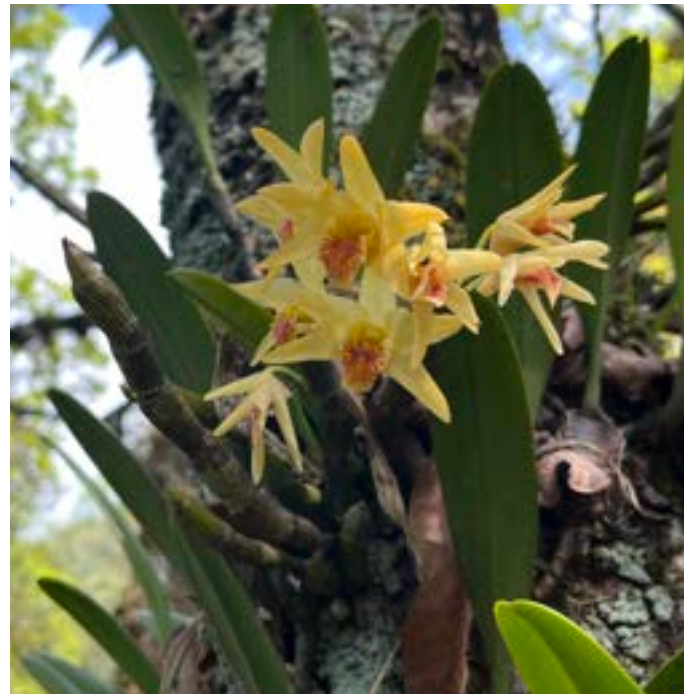
Waterfall, Yuksom



Arisaema sp. found below the *Dendrobium heterocarpum*, Yuksom



Dendrobium heterocarpum



Dendrobium heterocarpum



Rick and Venk climbing a hillside to photograph *Arundinia graminifolia*



Arundinia graminifolia



Sang Ngag Choling Buddhist monastery in the Lhasa style. Built in 1714.



Walking “bush” along the roadside!



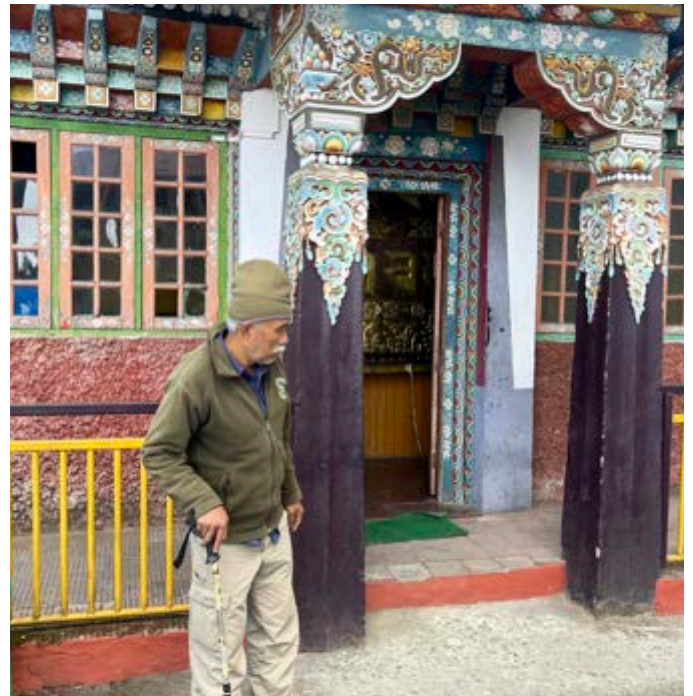
We glimpse Mt. Kangchendzonga, at 8598m the 3rd highest mountain in the world!



Mt. Kangchendzonga and adjacent peak of Kabru (7338 m)



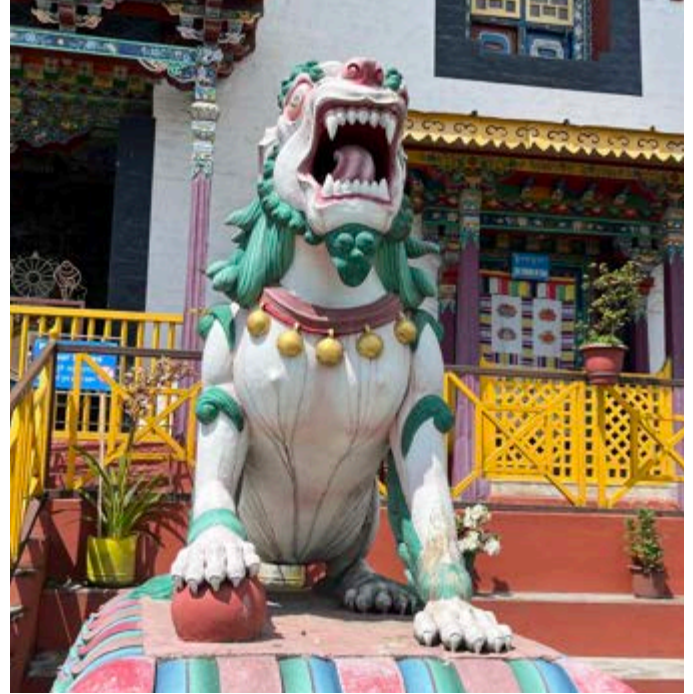
Ceologyne nitida, growing in cracks of a wall, roadside



Our intrepid guide, Neelam, in front of Buddhist monastery



Buddhist monastery “Sangchen Pedmayangtse”, one of six major monasteries of the Nyingma in Sikkim. Founded 1647 AD. Home to over 300 monks.



Statue in front of the monastery



Plants of *Cymbidium longifolium* along trail to ancient rabdentse capital of Sikkim



Ruins of the ancient capital of Sikkim.



Incredible plant of *Chiloschista parishii*, on a high tree above a river.

floor was a sort of museum, with an assortment of artifacts from different centuries displayed somewhat haphazardly in various cabinets and shelves.

After the monastery, we continued down the mountain to an area advertising a bird park, and a trail to the ruins of the 2nd capital of Sikkim. In the forests along the trail we found dozens of *Cymbidium lancifolium* (not in bloom), as well as a curious looking plant in the ginger family. The ruins were impressive and well worth a visit.

The rest of the day included a long drive, descending down the mountain into the state of West Bengal. We stopped on a few occasions to photograph some impressive plants of *Dendrobium aphyllum*. On one corner we stopped to photograph a large specimen of *Dendrobium fimbriatum* var. *oculatum*. We also saw quite a few monkeys along the side of the highway.

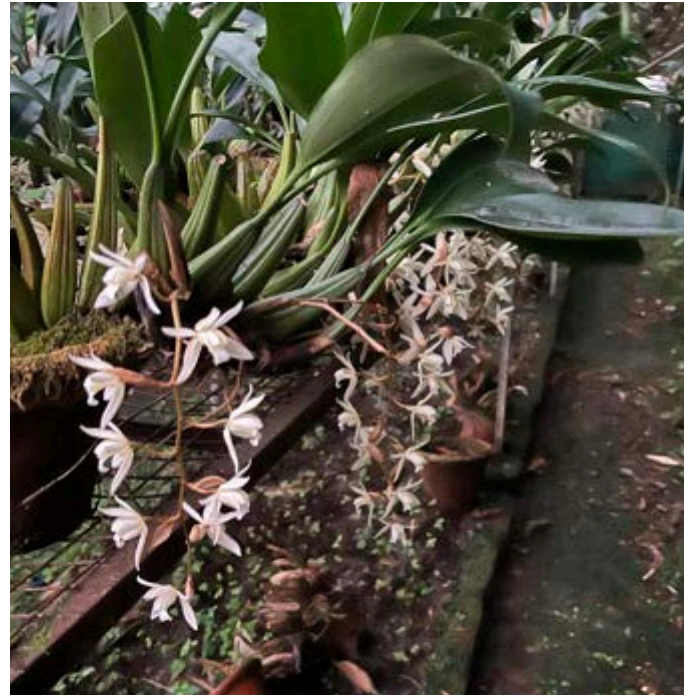
Finally we reached Kalimpong, well noted as a cool hill station from the British occupation, as well as for its rich nursery culture. We stayed at a lodge (Holumba Haven Homestay) with beautiful gardens, including lots of orchids in the trees and shade houses. Dinners were family style, with delicious freshly prepared food. Most notable were the papadams, crispy delicious crackers prepared fresh by our hosts. We visited Nursery International, the orchid nursery of Mr. Pradhan, which included a nice selection of species orchids. Hopefully, we will place a group order for a later shipment.

We visited another Buddhist monastery, Lhasa style, then enjoyed lunch at a Nepali style restaurant. After lunch, many in the group enjoyed a shopping spree in Kalimpong.

April 14 was our last day in India. We made an early start to avoid construction and headed back into Bagdogra. We spent about an hour in a shopping mall, then most of the group went to the airport to fly back to New Delhi, where they would overnight and depart the next day for home. I departed by land to go to Nepal, where I visited the far eastern region, then flew to Kathmandu, scoping out some sites and possibilities for the 2026 tour.



Dendrobium fimbriatum



A pure white form of *Coelogyne flaccida*, cultivated by our host at Holumba, Kalimpong. Described as *Coelogyne pempahisheyana* Chowdhery



Waterfall on road to Kalimpong



Coelogyne pempahisheyana



Chiloschista parishii



Enormous plant of *Dendrobium fimbriatum* high on tree over river



Visiting the orchid nursery (Nursery International) in Kalimpong



Phalaenopsis taenialis in bushes around lodge at Kalimpong

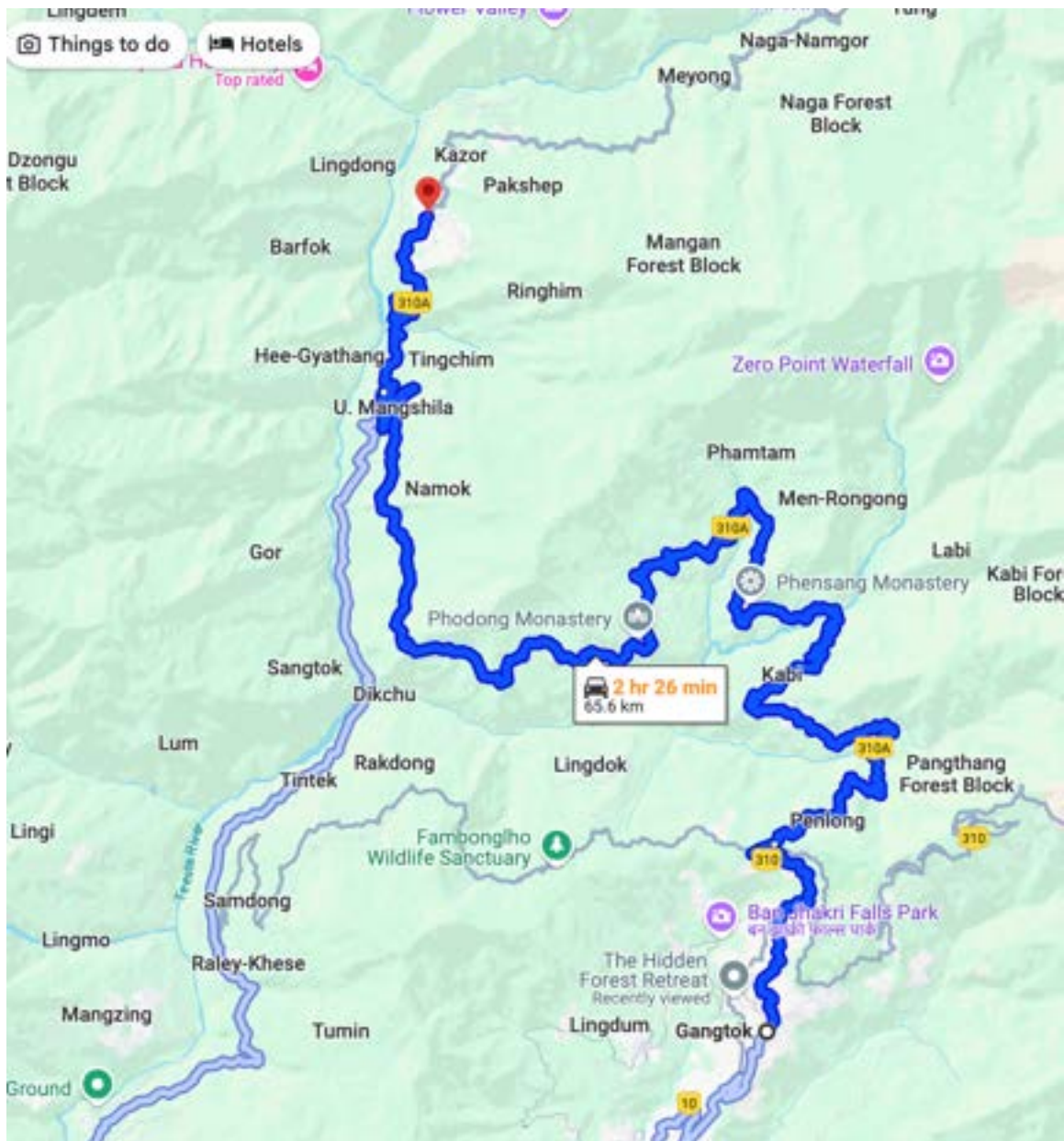


Phalaenopsis taenialis

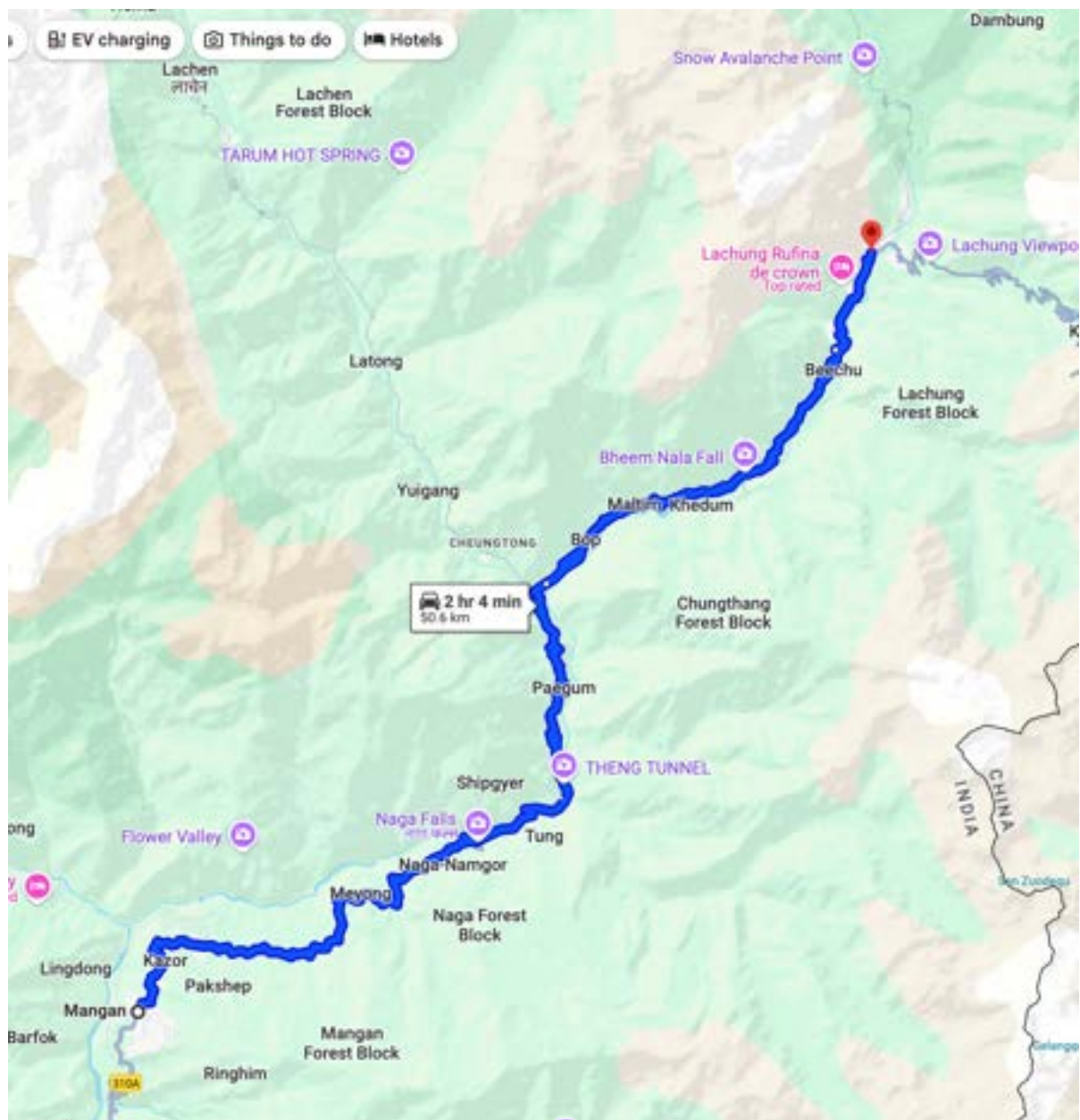




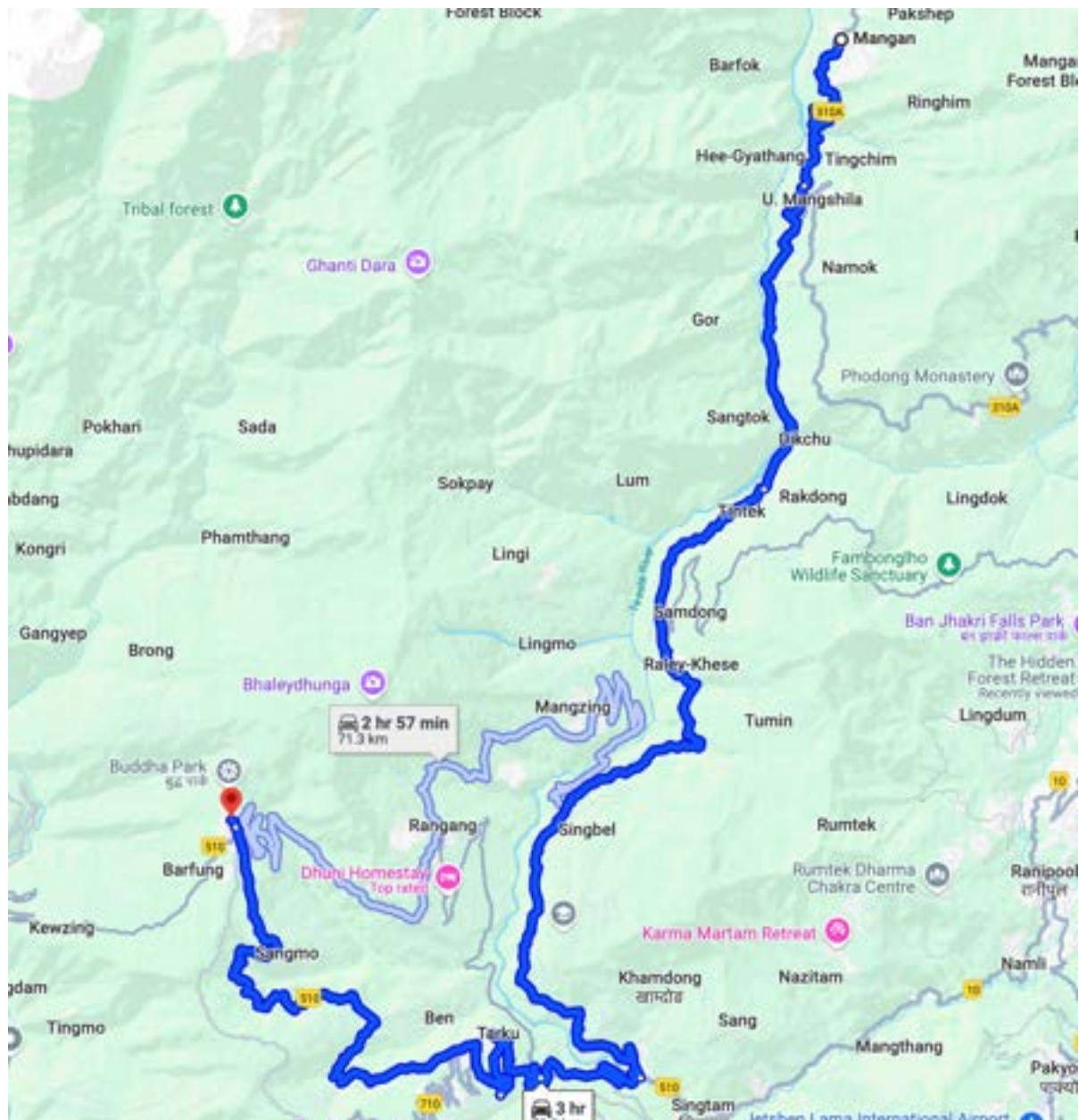
Bagdogra (West Bengal) to Gangtok (Sikkim)



Gangtok to Mangan (dark blue)



Lachung to Mangan on partially destroyed road



Mangan to Ravagla via Temi tea plantation (dark blue route)



Ravangla to Yuksom



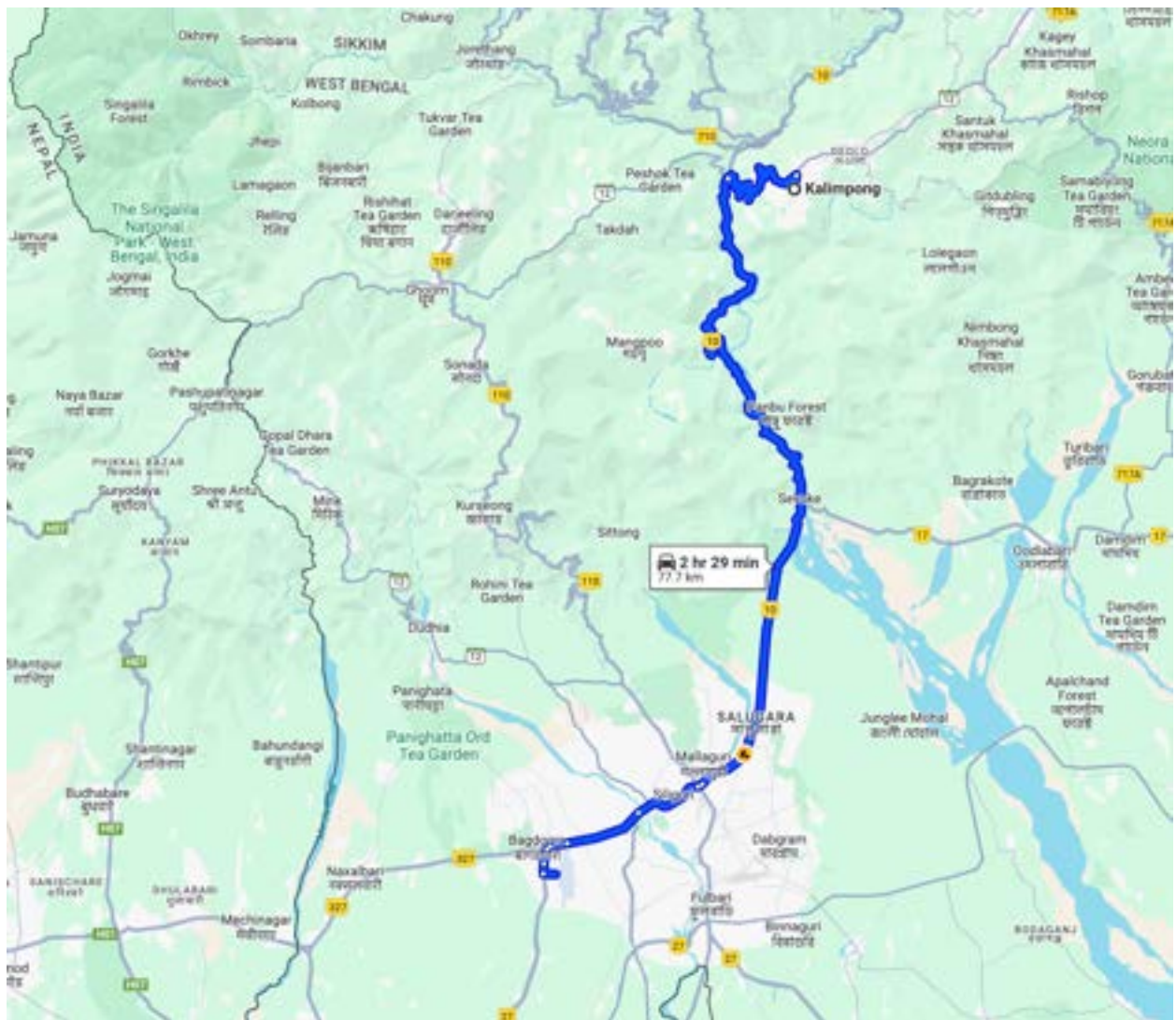
Yuksom to Pelling (dark blue line)



Yuksom to Pelling (dark blue line)



Pelling to Kalimpong (dark blue line)



Kalimpong to Bagdogra Airport (West Bengal)

Glacier lake outburst floods: Loss of life and infrastructure

April 9, 2024

The pre-dawn hours of October 4, 2023, were forever etched in the memories of Sikkim's residents. Rasila's* desperate attempt to wake her family was thwarted by a torrent of water that swallowed their home whole. Nirma's* last glimpse of his family was their cries for help, lost in the churning darkness, as the flood ripped them away. These are just two of the countless heartbreaking stories from survivors of the recent deluge in the Teesta River basin, Sikkim, and downstream areas across India and Bangladesh. (*Names changed for anonymity)

The cause: A glacier lake outburst flood

The culprit behind this disaster was a glacier lake outburst flood (GLOF), a sudden release of water from the South Lhonak glacial lake that inundated the Teesta River. Water levels were observed to rise by 15 to 20 feet in affected districts in Sikkim and West Bengal States. Additionally, the impacts of this flood were compounded by the sudden release of 5 million cubic meters (2,000 Olympic swimming pools) of water from Sikkim's largest hydroelectric dam at Chungthang, which failed catastrophically (Fig. 1). The flood also affected hundreds of villages further downstream in Northern Bangladesh and destroyed bridges, highways, and many utilities.



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source: <https://iee.psu.edu/news/blog/glacier-lake-outburst-floods-loss-life-and-infrastructure>



Kalimpong to Bagdogra Airport (West Bengal)