

Sharpe's Peril : India, February - April 2008

An abbreviated report for *Sharpe* fans © 2008 Richard 'Rifleman' Moore



The author (right) and Suresh Gohil - the Indian Armourer who supplied most of the firearms used - alongside our transit vehicle '*Enterprise*'. Suresh was from Mumbai and the '*father-figure*' of the Armoury and SPFX '*family*' into which the author was adopted as we had both previously served on *Sharpe's Challenge*.

Having served on *Sharpe's Challenge*, I knew exactly what to expect from India. Leaving the aeroplane at Delhi, the 40 degrees C of heat hit me and my travelling companion (Charley, the 2nd AD on *Sharpe's Peril*) like the exhaust from a space-shuttle. The first stop - *de rigeur* - was at the Film Production Office to report our arrival, drop off the bulk of rupees and receive our local accommodation orders.



One of my particular friends - Ranj, one of the policemen sent to guard us from 'bandits' in the desert and rather disgusted when I chose as an alternative to his machine-gun a vintage 1948 Lee-Enfield rifle as 'personal defence' on location (as you should see in the ITV1 interview *The Making of Sharp's Peril*).

Down-town Khajuraho was my first stop that night to seek sustenance. I wore my Tilley hat and this became my personal identification in all future proceedings in Khajuraho. Within a week I was on first-name terms with many of the 'useful' population of Khajuraho.



Three weeks from the end of filming, we were experiencing daytime temperatures averaging 42 degrees and once or twice, 45 degrees. This photograph was taken as 'proof' - the thermometer was left out in the sun for ten minutes and the plastic casing badly warped. I took to sleeping on the roof on a *charpoy* during March as when the air-conditioning came on it nearly blew you out of bed.

To those who have never been to India, the sights - and smells - that hit your eyes and nose can be a little daunting. A *bhail*, cow or ox is sacred to

the Hindoo and wander just about anywhere they like (though they will receive a gentle push towards the door if they walk into a home or a tea-room) and the ubiquitous pigs - though their stripy youngsters are endearing - bear no comparison to European pigs and look like wild boar rooting around in village middens and dung-heaps. Dogs and cats are avoided because of rabies. In any conversation (*which crop up everywhere and anywhere even on the slightest acquaintance*) questions are asked of you which in the Western world are deemed to be intrusive and likely result in an affront - or in excess, a punch to the nose - *who are you, what are you doing here, what is your given name, do you have family, how much do you earn, where are you staying, can you get me or my relatives a job etc ?* - have to be received in India as commonplace. The street's tea-stall - it shuts between midnight and four am - is a good spot to hang-out to hear the latest news and gossip.



My ability from past experience to work with animals has been previously noted. Taking precautions about rabies I had already worked with elephants and camels in India and

had absolutely no fear of them - despite regular abuse from their *mahouts* I continued to enjoy a close relationship with them, feeding them with treats almost every day they were on-set. The result was various 'tricks' we both did together and noted by passing journalists. The elephant seen here is 'Ellie', a firm friend of the author (*seen here*) and the female of the pair used on *Sharpe's Peril* ; but the male elephant did have what was described as 'off-days' when he was singularly 'bad-tempered' and on one occasion did seem to prefer eating the author rather than the banana on offer ...

The kitchen staff, chefs and cooks on *Sharpe* deserved a gold medal for the meals they prepared, cooked and dished up in camp for over a hundred people on a daily basis on the two months location-filming of *Sharpe's Peril* and even surpassed their usual high-standard of menu (a mix of five salad bowls and a choice from ten hot meals) when they began serving chilled fruit-juice and ice-cream by request. I came to a twice-weekly arrangement with them for a small bag of banana, melon and apple to be put to one side for me to feed the elephants after lunch, which made an agreeable change to their diet of sugar-cane. I never bothered with the camels - had enough of their unpredictable and often ungrateful behaviour on *Sharpe's Challenge*.



As any *Sharpe* fan will already know, the commemorative badge worn by the author - a little-known but popular condiment brewed in Sheffield and wholly endorsed by the Sheffield United Football Club and their biggest fan - and bottles carried (jealously guarded) on all *Sharpe* episodes and liberally applied by the author to all local cooking of any nationality to offer a 'taste of home'.

A week later, I had met and chosen the best fifteen of our local 'extras' and in the terrific heat, appraised them not only of Napoleonic arms-drill (due to props difficulties, we had no arms to drill with) but all the vagaries of film-work (*as is my usual they called me by my first name and I by theirs : any interim problems came to me first, of which there transpired to be many, including two punch-ups requiring a 'diplomatic' resolution*). After three days of 'fun and games' in Khajuraho, we departed for our first filming-location fifty miles to the east - Orchha, a small town surrounded by 'semi-dense jungle' (*for our map-reading fans, west of a major town named Jhansi*).



Unit Base-Camp at Bala Sagar at an evocative 17th century fortress near Orchha. After the move to Khajuraho, the unit camp occupied five acres of land to accommodate all departments, dining-tents, the required transport and all our horses and animals. This particular location involved a 'yomp' of up to 800 metres to the best filming locations, where everyone tended to 'muck-in' by carrying as much gear as possible.

'Shaking-down' is a process that goes along with the first scheduled filmed scenes along with everyone getting to know each other better. Presumably by that time the 'heads-of-department' have satisfied themselves that they are 'ready-to-go' for Day One Filming - but the Armoury Department along with Camera and Costume were still bemoaning several 'omissions' of gear and kit stuck in Customs and elsewhere - but such 'omissions' are only drawn to the attention of Director and 1st AD in the case of extreme emergency and even after Day Three we all still had some - but as usual decisions are left to heads-of-department to handle to the best of their ability in terms of 'make the best of it' as in the old showbiz adage, *'the show must go on'*.



Camera-crew awaiting 'lining up the shot' : James (operator and DOP, behind camera), Richard (focus puller, right), Sandra (loader, absent), Durga (centre, right), Andy the 'grip' (centre, leaning on the dolly) and Ramesh the 'gaffer' (left) and the rest of their gang regularly doing over thirty camera set-up's each day and lighting each one in 40+ degrees of heat was hard work for everyone concerned - but camera and lighting get little rest or respite during filming as they are required for each and every shot wherever it might be. *Sharpe's Peril* used two cameras on average - and at times, three.



In the lead-up to the final battle scene during the cavalry-charge, Andy the grip of *Sharpe's Peril* set a new 'world-record' for a tracking-shot on *Sharpe* in laying over eighty metres of track (which was duly nicknamed the '*India Grand Trunk Railway*') seen here with the horses lining-up just before the actual shot. The 'dolly-trolley' carrying the camera is seen far-left.

Our first filming location near Orchha alongside the river Betwa possessed a *ghat* with several fine temples and mausoleums (some of which you will see on tv) built in the 16th Century - the palace of the capital of the Bundela fraternity was in town a mile away and included several *senana* (areas where women were kept from prying eyes). A pilgrimage is still made to the *ghat* each November to worship a king named *Ram Vivah* - at other times only vultures, the odd tourist and a resident '*holy man*' can be seen there.



Just before dusk. My tent at Orchha is the one in the centre. It was quite comfortable apart from one evening when I had to get up to throw a jug of cold water over a fight between two jackals on the verandah and another evening where a vulture with a six-foot wing-span (which you will see flying around in the first tv episode) from the temples in the background was scratching around on my roof. As I was the only resident, all the chairs graduated to my veranda due to an open invitation to hotel staff on Sundays for *'tiffin'*.

The heat and the dust were at times oppressive - on one occasion at Orchha after a particularly hard day, I made my way back to the hotel, kicked off my sandals and walked fully-clothed straight into the swimming-pool to the astonishment of several German tourists - the barman was amused but attentive so got asked by me head-above-water (I kept my hat on) in my very best Hindoo for *'ike beer tenda, tepya'* without him batting an eyelid which I then drank whilst dripping water on the verandah.



First-Day filming : a publicity-photo of two of the seven people who have 'done' every *Sharpe* episode screened - the author with Sean Bean (*Richard Sharpe*) seen here at *Kings' Chhatris* near Orchha. The author is growing whiskers to do with 'dancing the Waltz' in the ballroom scene at the beginning of the first episode of *Sharpe's Peril* and the polo-shirt worn here was a 'well-wishing gift' from the members of www.95thRifles.com

The filming at '*Kings' Chatteris*' near Orchha on the river Betwa saw the initial scenes completed on schedule - but with the resurgence of some of the internal ailments that manifested themselves on the cast and crew last time on *Sharpe's Challenge* : on that I was unfortunately Number One for sickness but this time it seemed to hit the people who had not been to India previously ... and without wishing any ill-feeling to anyone, I was glad of it. It was at Orchha through sharing the same hotel with them, I first struck up an association with Nandana Sen - the '*Maharani*' in the film ; a beautiful, captivating and highly intelligent Indian actress - and Amit Behl, an accomplished Indian actor from Mumbai (*whose family I later met*) playing the son of '*Obadiah Hakeswill*'. I had several conversations with both these concerning past *Sharpe* episodes and both complimented me on my grasp of '*Indian affairs*' - especially in my habit of often quoting from Rudyard Kipling. I had by this time an 'arrangement' with the hotel staff I was staying at (due to odd departing and arriving hours and the fact the location was only ten minutes walk away for me). I paid my hotel-staff friend there 1500 rupees in advance for any unpaid night-time bills for cold beers (*with the reasoning I might be called away at any time so have to disappear and*

would settle-up when I next saw him : his son worked for us so mutual trust was assumed).



Work *doesn't* stop at night. A very informal filming brief at Orchha attended by the author between Sean Bean, Tom Clegg (Director) and Michael Mallinson (1st Assistant Director) on future proceedings. Sean and Tom take a great deal of interest in the development of characters within *Sharpe* scripts 'in continuity' and to whom I have the greatest respect and in my role of *Military & Technical Adviser* I offer them support and suggestions in this which often leads to some script 're-writes'. We had at this time all known each other from previous *Sharpe* films since 1992.

Filming the scenes duly completed in and around Orchha, we all departed back to Khajuraho. I was due to go into yet another hotel, but by request amended my accommodation to a hotel in the centre of Khajuraho in which was inhabited by my Indian colleagues from Armoury and SPFX and owned by a man I had come to know personally from my previous time there so I could '*indulge in India*'. Our transport manager '*arranged things*' for me to travel to and fro with them from then on. Our '*Return to Khajuraho*' was celebrated by a party at the Production Office hotel hosted by the hotel manager - and especially marked by the arrival of our 'Russian' stuntmen : it evidently led to '*wee small hours*' proceedings that will not be wholly unknown to film-people but I cannot divulge them here as I left the party early to walk the kilometre back to Khajuraho and only heard the tales second-hand the following day when I returned from 'hunting' in the local *bazaar*. Things settled down to '*normal*' - a cup of pre-paid tea at the street-stall, early-morning departures before dawn, a brief run-down on the day's requirements, a snatched breakfast, load the truck, pick up my heavy *sleetah* (saddle-bag) and any *bundook* and off to the set to 'stand-by' for filming ... but the noon-time heat was now averaging 42 degrees in the shade - not that there was much of that - and steadily rising.



The author with a group of the Rajnagar State Park Rangers : nice people and a close relationship developed due to the author telling them old days-of-the-Raj '*shikar*' tales of Jim Corbett, Harry Levenson and Samuel White Baker and a display of his tracking-skill and game-knowledge which led to him being adopted as an '*Honorary Ranger*' and the given-nickname '*Robin Hood*'. In rare moments of spare-time in the semi-dense jungle, the author tracked *sambhar*, *langur*, *karkar*, wild pig and what was termed by the Rangers as '*jungle-cow*' (which resemble bullocks). They later told me that the nearest crocodile - named '*muggers*' in India - were twenty kilometers away. Their answer to every and any possible threat was the double-barrelled shotgun loaded with buckshot seen here - I did point out that it was unlikely to stop a charging animal but using solid-slug, the recoil from a double was judged by the Rangers to be '*uncomfortable*' ... but as the author pointed out, it is even more uncomfortable to be eaten by a leopard.



Filming in the desert for two welcome bouts of 'split-day' and night-filming as the daytime temperature had now reached 100 degrees. A hazard - albeit a slight one - was the native wildlife : *never* move or pick up a stone with your hands (*use your sheath-knife, a socket-bayonet or a stick*) as you never know what might be lying beneath it ... and a lot of these things emerge at night. This 'grandfather' scorpion spotted beneath the Armoury truck measured about six inches in length and reputedly killed an unwary dog the previous week.

Nearby Chuttapur became the city '*with a promise of much to offer*' on rest-day as an alternative to Khajuraho. I visited one 'hunting-shop' which

displayed a few hunting-rifles but a vast array of sawn-off pump-action shotguns with an intended sale for '*self-defence*'. The degree of skill exhibited in the craft-shops by workmen was remarkable - they used no power-tools - but their wages were pretty low compared to the standard of workmanship achieved.

The medical advice - along with wearing long trousers and a liberal application of insect repellent - was to drink *three* litres of cold water per day during filming (at one point the storage room at my hotel held 5000 half-litre plastic bottles of water to cover a fortnights' worth of filming and a back-up supply was stored elsewhere). Back at the hotel around 7.30pm (where the first cold beer never touched the sides) sorting-out the internet connections to past and existing *Sharpe* fans (*some of whom have now been with us for over twelve years*) and a brief report on proceedings to 'home-base'. After some e-mail disappointments and some internet upsets, things were now set for the actual recipient of our 'home-base' - Adam Paylor - to arrive to join us in Khajuraho. I left a variety of messages with various people pending the day of Adam's arrival - the only one that didn't get through was the one left at the 'modern' hotel - but we knew Adam had landed and arrived through a cell-phone call from my spy manning '*the jungle telegraph*'. As is usual with Armoury 'guests', Adam was shown his room to drop off his bag, fed and watered at the local restaurant - just across the road - before being dropped in the 'deep end' (literally) next day with a 6am start for a potential 14-hour day for scenes involving a river-crossing 'under gun-fire' and stand-by for 'underwater' to recover and retrieve any dropped and/or lost items of armoury by extras or cast. Crocodiles were the least of our problems so I thought not to mention them to Adam at the time - but I *did* mention the need to wear a hat and apply sun-bloc cream. *Adam can testify to the results of forgetting both ...*



The author - by personal example - displays to his somewhat land-lubbing team that there are no crocodiles. If you did have to submerge, due to 100 degrees of sun you were dry in ten minutes anyway.



*Part of the filming of *Sharpe's Peril* in the river at *Khudar Nala* ... at one point we had twelve principal actors, eleven extras and two stuntmen in the water on-camera and eighteen crew.*



A good example of carefully-laid explosives is when scenes involve horses - as animals aren't stupid and won't do what they are rehearsed to do if they feel threatened and in danger. This photograph of a detonation initiated by the author on-camera to simulate shell-fire looks very destructive - but is in fact relatively harmless to both rider and horse. One of the battle scene in *Sharpe's Peril* used over fifty horses ridden by stuntmen using swords and faced with thirty extras firing firearms loaded with 'blanks' and filmed from three cameras. During such scenes, the ability of Michael Mallinson (our 1st AD) to read a potentially hazardous situation - especially night-filming of 'battles' - has always been handled with awareness, great skill and applied care and as such we have never had any serious injury to man or beast or caused a halt to filming ...



There is an interesting story involving the author behind this entire scene - watch out for the Indian gunner who fires the cannon - and the full story will follow at some point.



Here Michael Mallinson (*right*) watches the approach of a 'dust-devil' in the desert as a previous 'devil' at another location completely destroyed the tents comprising part of a set and caused an injury to a principal actor. This particular 'devil' missed us by 100 metres but previously an unforeseen heavy rainstorm caused an upset on *Sharpe's Peril* through making us all take cover and afterwards created insurmountable 'continuity' problems. The tractor in this photograph (*left*) has also grounded due to carrying an excess load of materials from base-camp and completely blocked the access road to the set.

'Continuity' is important in film-making - *Sharpe* shoots scenes at different locations and in different pages in the script to be fitted into the film as and when and a scene shot last in schedule in 'real-time' *could* be the first scene seen in 'screen-time' on the television. A slip in 'continuity' results in letters from people - especially fans - who watch videos of episodes on an alarming regularity, but to whom I *do* refer to to keep us 'up to scratch'. Even the stitching I did once as a makeshift repair on Richard Sharpe's sword-belt when it snapped was noticed by one eagle-eyed fan watching *Sharpe's Company* and several others wrote in that the sword he carried in *Sharpe* Series Three was not the sword he carried at the end of Series Two or the one he carried during Series Four !



The presence on-set and the overall accessibility of the *Sharpe* executive producers and producers on a daily basis had always been acknowledged by both cast and crew as a great support. Here, Mr Alex Sutherland (*Line Producer and long-term Sharpe crewman*) supervises at close-range the rig and explosive set-up of the very difficult 'landslide' scene in *Sharpe's Peril* involving three principal actors, explosive effects and twenty horses and riders and the camera-crew in a space the size of a tennis-court ...



Mr Malcolm Craddock (*Executive Producer*) and Mr Ray Frift (*Co-Producer*) seen here as part of the camera-crew present - and not without some potential hazard - 'standing-by' to film the very difficult 'landslide' scene in *Sharpe's Peril* ...



A photograph taken by a member of the Armoury staff of part of the *'landslide'* scene - as the author as Armourer was required to be alongside Sean Bean in the midst of the ensuing chaos - during the two-day preparation of which Mr Tony Auger of SPFX Department was *'somewhat dessicated'* by heat and sun and then spent three days on the *'sick-list'*.



Looking back on it : done in 'one-take' as usual ... it's 'in the can'

As Sunday was rest-day, Saturday night was *'late-night-out'* and often involved some form of 'fun and games' or a party or gathering somewhere. Sunday usually saw me up early and off on various excursions - as I couldn't use my driver or the interpreter (as it was their rest-day too) I accepted several invites from locals for 'outings' or 'visits'. On one occasion, I borrowed a *Royal Enfield* motorcycle - but the engine proved so unreliable I didn't get far on it (I got a lot further on a borrowed bicycle). Various 'festivals' occurred at intervals - to which I was always invited as a *sadhu* ('wise' or 'good' man) and usually accepted - which did open one's eyes to life in India in general. Street-crime rarely happens and I found you can trust your belongings (not that I had many) to even a casual acquaintance to look after. If you are invited to visit a family home, it is not considered bad manners - with the background of 'caste' - to take your own *lota* (drinking-bowl), plate and utensils (clasp-knife and spoon) and bottled water to be served though usually these only apply to 'religious ceremonies' at sacred

sites involving *Brahmin* where to avoid any complications is sometimes best to take your own food but on a 'fast-day' this problem disappears as if they didn't eat then I didn't either.

The filming of *Sharpe's Peril* wound up at a final 'wrap-party' in Khajuraho (which I didn't attend due to seeing off the Armoury and SPFX departments from Khajuraho *en route* to Mumbai at a very early hour). The final 'blast-off' for the cast and crew back to the UK was from Delhi after a transfer-flight and an overnight. I took the opportunity for one last excursion by three-wheeled motor-scooter into Delhi to see the 'Red Fort' and the 'Kashmir - Delhi Gate', the scene of the Storming by the British in 1857 during the conflict known to westerners as '*The Indian Mutiny*'. I discovered in conversations at Khajuraho it isn't every Indian you meet who knows anything about India pre-1947 - but some insist the 'Indian Mutiny' never happened, preferred named by historians in India as the '*Sepoy Revolt*' and the reasons for the revolt go a lot deeper than the grease used on the cartridges of the Enfield rifle. The Union Flag at The Residency at Lucknow remained flying throughout the revolt and afterwards stayed flying all the way to Indian Independence in 1947 - the flag flying on a permanent basis at the Residency was regarded as an 'affront' by many Indians and the flag was one of the first things to be removed by Indians during Independence. Whatever you think, we *were* the invaders and it is after all, *their* country ...



Having put the world to rights once again, Sharpe and Harper ride off into the sunset at the finale of *Sharpe's Peril*

As with all previous *Sharpe* reports, I've left a whole lot out here but Many Thanks to all the individual member-fans of *Sharpe's Company* - since 1992 - for their continuing support and forbearance (*and safe-keeping my anecdotes and photographs*). I hope you all enjoy *Sharpe's*

Peril - 'Rifleman Moore' (in disguise) can be spotted in both episodes by those with '*sharpe-eyes*'.

Sharpe's Peril is a production from Celtic Films Entertainment and Picture Palace Films directed by Tom Clegg to be broadcast on ITV1 (UK) on November 2nd and 9th 2008. There are also two documentaries on *The Making of Sharpe's Peril*

Note that the DVD can be pre-ordered from Sharpefilm.com

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