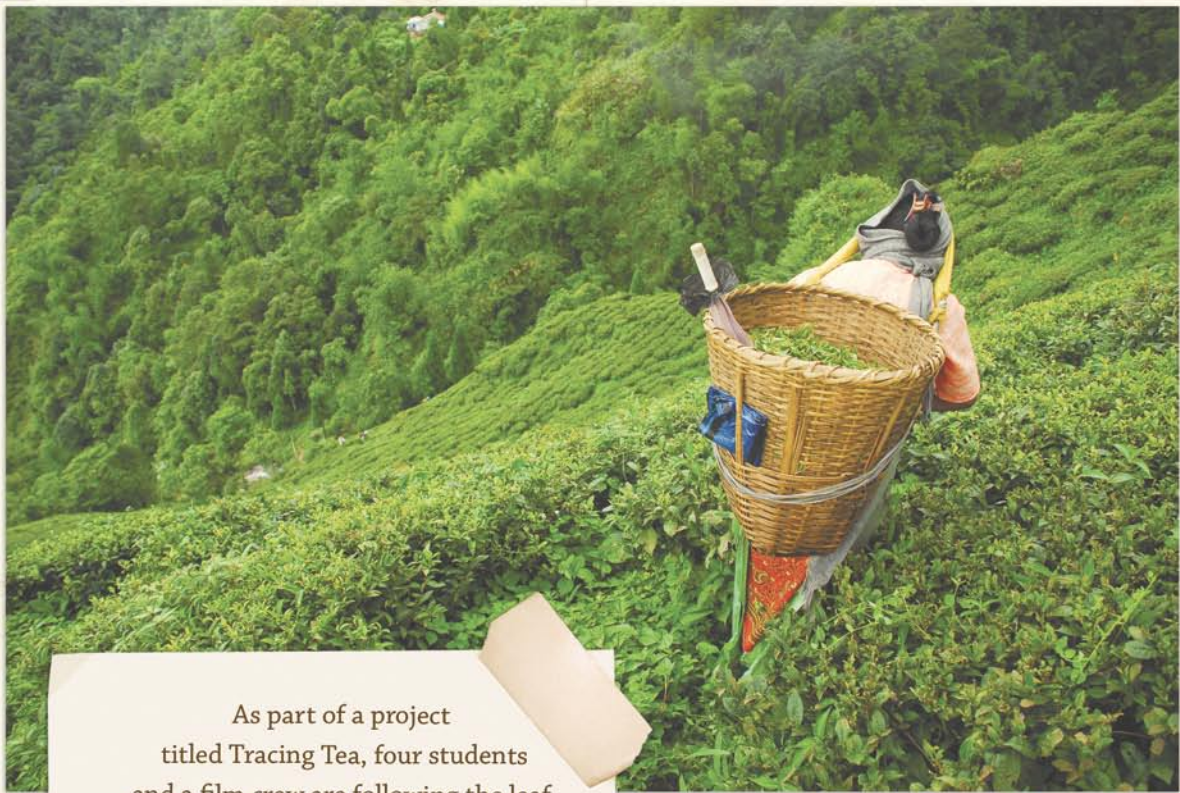


AN EPIC JOURNEY

TRACING TEA

TOURING DARJEELING

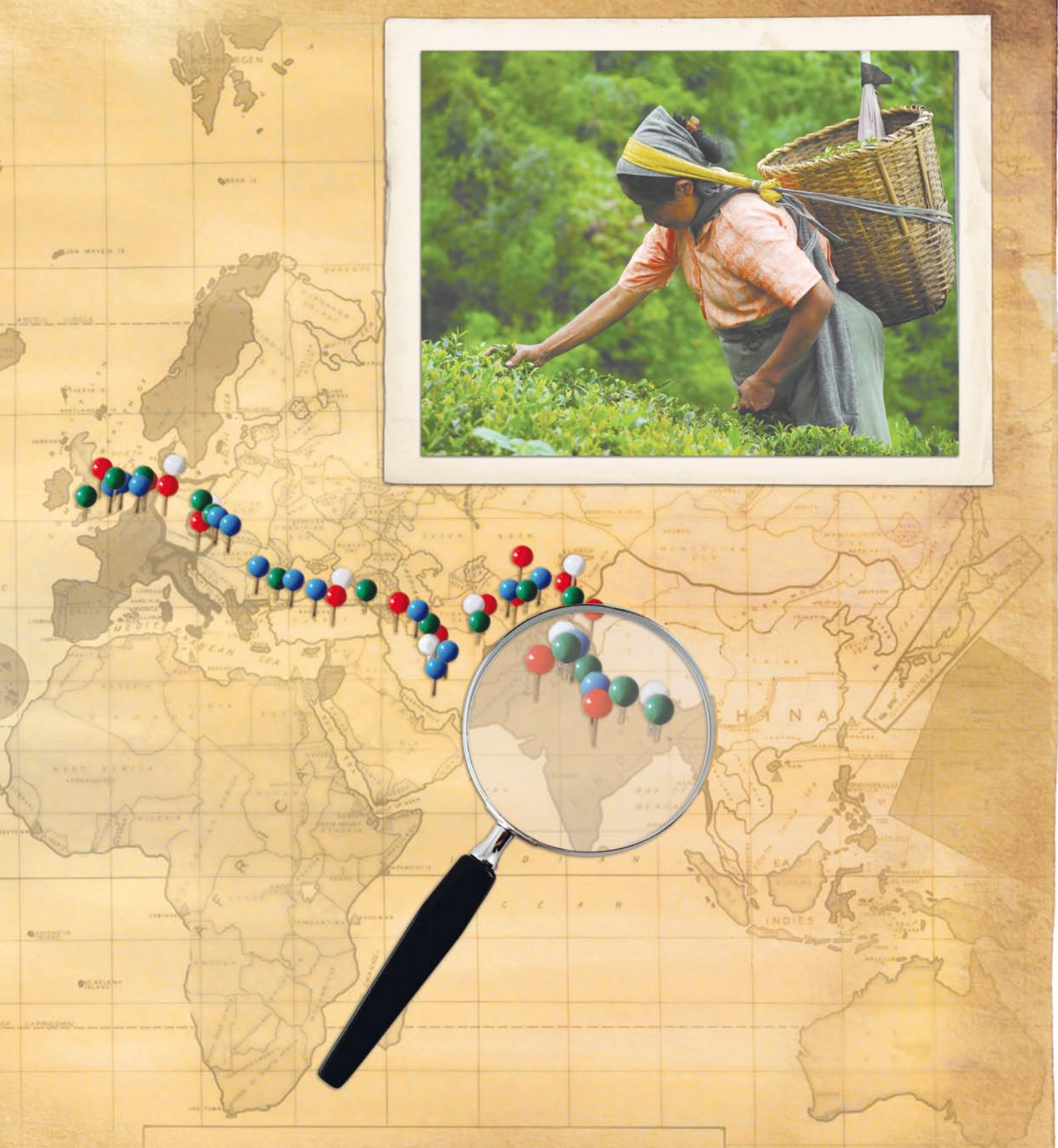
BY SOPHIE IBBOTSON *and* MAX LOVELL-HOARE



As part of a project titled Tracing Tea, four students and a film crew are following the leaf from Darjeeling's Makaibari Estate, through **18 tea-drinking nations** to Britain. In this installment of our series chronicling the journey, the Tracing Tea team focuses on the tea industry in India.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 66

photos by FAROUKH MISTRY
copyright TRACING TEA/MAXIMUM EXPOSURE PRODUCTIONS



Rise To The Occasion



with Agtron

Keep your product quality, consistency, and appearance on top. Recognized world wide as the leaders in easy to use instrumentation for both production and laboratory environments. Agtron has been setting standards for the food industry for half a century. Whatever your product: chips, extruded snacks, coffee, nuts, flour, french fries, produce, etc. Go with the experts,

Go with **AGTRON**

PH (775) 850-4600 • Fax (775) 850-4611
9395 Double "R" Blvd., Reno, NV 89511

Pounding rain on the corrugated roof deafens ears in the atrium of Darjeeling's Central Hotel. Clouds have suddenly descended, engulfing the town and driving people from the streets, but still the hotel is strangely empty. Darjeeling is known almost as much for its tourism as its tea, but in recent months both industries have practically ground to a halt. The *bandh*, a series of independence-motivated strikes organized by ethnic Nepalis in the region, has paralyzed communications, closed banks and shops, and blocked roads across West Bengal. Although its workers are not directly involved in the strikes, the local tea industry, which is normally at the height of its picking season in June and July, is suffering nonetheless: The Darjeeling Tea Traders' Association has estimated that the industry is los-



PROTEST: Ethnic Nepali women congregate at the formation of Gorkhaland—a Nepali-dominated state Darjeeling.

ing \$475,000 a day as a result of the *bandh*, and that this year's exports may be down as much as 25 percent compared to previous years. Darjeeling teas make up 7 percent of India's total exports and a far larger share of the premium market, so this fall in exports will have strong repercussions across the tea industry.

The situation in Darjeeling draws attention to two of the Indian tea industry's greatest problems today: strikes and transportation. Both Darjeeling and Assam, the two greatest tea-producing areas in India, are home to strong independence movements in

addition to much-publicized labor strikes. The strikes are not a new phenomenon, but they seem to have become more frequent over the last year. Unless the protesters can reach some accommodation with the central Indian government, it appears the strikes will continue indefinitely and will impact the tea industry in a number of ways.

For one, workers are prevented from traveling to the estates for picking while the movement of trucks carrying tea leaves is restricted. And the tourists who visit Darjeeling and the neighboring region of Sikkim, who used to bring daily revenue of \$2.3 million to the tea estates and surrounding towns, are currently neither touring the estates nor buying their tea. Visiting a tea retailer on a normally bustling Darjeeling street, we were greeted



Darjeeling Gymkhana Club. They are campaigning for the within the Indian federation, the capital of which would be

with great excitement and told by the owner that we were the day's first customers; it was around 5 p.m.

Even in times of minimal unrest, the transportation problem strains the tea industry here. While India's labor costs are comparable to those of its competitors in the global market, it is the cost of transporting processed tea from the estates down to the auctions and port in Kolkata that makes Indian teas relatively expensive. This spring, Indian first-flush teas have sold for \$1.85 to \$1.96 a kilo, while a Kenyan equivalent is just \$1.66 a kilo.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 68

茶 TEA TRADE MART

GIVING VOICE TO THE TEA INDUSTRY

800 NE Tenney Rd, Suite 110-337, Vancouver, WA 98685
360.573.9199 | tea@teatrademart.com | www.teatrademart.com

Tea Speak: Tea Speaker's Bureau | Tea Master-mind: Advanced Tea Studies
Tea Marketing Representatives

Carnelian Rose
Tea Company

Wholesale Tea & Herbs
360-573-9199 | www.carnelianrosetea.com

beaming with health

Mim Beim | Wholesale Tea & Herbs
www.beamingwithhealth.com.au

Earlene Grey writes poetry that is both spiritual and saucy. Whether listening to her at your own tea or joining her tea cruise, you will be captivated by her easy to understand verse. Look for *Musings With a Cuppa - The Poetry of Tea* at your local teashop.

FRESH ROASTING PREMIUM BEANS
SINCE 1998

WWW.COFFEEHOUSEINABOX.COM

The journey from Darjeeling town in the center of the Darjeeling district down to Kolkata takes 17 hours. An accident, a broken-down truck or a landslide, all of which are regular occurrences, can double the journey's length, and only midsized trucks can make it at all; the constant potholes, hairpin bends and gradient of the hills make the roads impassable for larger vehicles. Transport from Assam, located as it is on the far side of Bangladesh, is similarly problematic. Until this logistical issue can be resolved, African estates will continue to dominate the inexpensive tea market; India can really only compete if it promotes its teas as a premium product.



EMPTY TEA SHOP: With protests almost entirely closing the Darjeeling region to both trade and tourism, next to no business can be done by small-time tea traders like this one in the town of Darjeeling.

The Tea Board of India and the Darjeeling Tea Association (DTA) are charged with the task of promoting Indian teas abroad; their primary strategy for doing this is enforcing and advertising the Geographical Indicator (GI). The GI is effectively a trademark guaranteeing that a product comes from a particular region. In the same way that only wines grown in the Champagne region of France can be called champagnes, the Tea Board of India has applied for copyright and trademarks for Darjeeling, Assam and Nilgiri teas. Teas produced elsewhere in the world, or blends containing only a portion of the GI-listed teas, may not be marketed with the Darjeeling, Assam or Nilgiri names, nor use their respective logos. The intention of this strategy is that only the highest-quality teas will be associated with the GI names, and so Indian teas can be sold at a premium abroad. Darjeeling is already known as the champagne of teas, and as a result of its protected status under the Darjeeling name, particularly when used for single-estate, organic and first-flush teas, is proving to be a popular selling point in cafés and shops across the United States and Europe. All Darjeeling teas can theoretically be traced from the end buyer back to the date and location of picking and processing using Tea Board data, part of which is already published online. The project is due to expand over the next year, giving exporters and end consumers alike the opportunity to confirm that the handmade, premium product they are purchasing is exactly as described on the tin.



TRIESTE: THE ESPRESSO
COFFEE CITY



**TRIESTE
ITALY** | **13-15
NOVEMBER
2008**
— OPENING SEMINAR NOV.12 —

Triestepresso

expo

WWW.TRIESTESPRESSO.IT

THE EXHIBITION:
Espresso Coffee Industry
on show - 4th edition

THE CONFERENCE:
39th International Coffee Day
November 12th, 2008
"World Coffee Market and the Future
of Coffee Production"

THE COMPETITION:
3rd ETCC - European Team
Coffee Challenge

Fiera Trieste Spa
P.le de Gasperi, 1
34139 Trieste - Italy
Tel +39 040 9494111
Fax +39 040 393062
espresso@fiera.trieste.it

ESPRESSO COFFEE INDUSTRY

ON SHOW







Small Batch Artisan Roasted®

hands-on training
equipment packages
sustainably grown specialty coffees

www.ancoracoffee.com 1.800.260.0217

The Darjeeling Tea Association also promotes the consumption of Indian tea in the domestic market. According to a 2005 study by the Coffee Board of India, the Tea Board's sister organization, 94 percent of Indians are already regular tea drinkers, but the majority of what they drink is low-grade tea consumed in the form of masala chai (tea boiled with milk, water, sugar and a variety of spices), either at home or from roadside stalls. However, globalization is quickly bringing a Starbucks culture to students and young professionals in urban areas, and the DTA is pushing to have Darjeeling teas on the menu alongside the ever-increasing range of coffees. Despite wide publicity of Starbucks' intention to break into the Indian market and open 1,000 cafés across the country, to date the restrictions imposed by the Foreign Investment Promotion Board (most notably its requirement that overseas brands in partnership with Indian companies cannot own more than 51 percent of shares) have delayed Starbucks' entry into India.



CAFÉ COFFEE DAY: India's largest retail coffee chain offers specialty coffee and tea to its patrons, who typically range between the ages of 15 and 29. Most locations see between 500 and 800 customers daily.

In Starbucks' absence, Indian equivalents have boomed, with Café Coffee Day and Barista Coffee leading the way. Formed in 1996, Café Coffee Day now has 607 cafés across 98 cities, as well as 354 whole-bean retail outlets and 7,000 vending machines. The chain has already opened in Austria and plans to expand across the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia in the coming months. Although Barista Coffee has just over 100 cafés, it already has a presence in India, Sri Lanka and the Middle East. Three Darjeeling teas are featured on the Barista menu (a first-flush, a green first-flush and an organic tea), as are Earl Grey and Assam teas and the ubiquitous masala chai. Eighty percent of café customers are students and young professionals between the ages of 18 and 29. With a customer profile that matches the largest sector of the population as well as that with the greatest disposable income, Café Coffee Day, Barista and their competitors are predicting growth of as much as 92 percent in the next year alone. If Starbucks wishes to compete in this lucrative market, it needs to find an entry point fast, balancing the supply of tea and coffee to meet the demands of a modern and increasingly discerning urban India. ■

The Original

Be Clean and Green!

Phosphate Free! 

Biodegradable • Recyclable Containers
Highly Effective • Concentrated
More for your money

Visions ESPRESSO SERVICE 



1.800.277.7277 • www.visionsespresso.com