

## Tea garden standard headline

By IRVING NERN  
Staff Writer

Everyone knows tea originally came from China. And that was literally millennia ago—Chinese tea cultivation goes back thousands of years. Tea drinking later reached Japan, and in the West from the 1600s on.

People in England particularly liked tea. So much that by the early 1800s it was the principle export of the British East India Company. That company enjoyed a monopoly on tea importation to the West, based on a production monopoly, that of China.

In 1841 a British civil servant, Dr. Arthur Campbell, decided to try some *Camellia sinensis* in the hills surrounding the mountain town of Darjeeling. West Bengal surrounds some of the world's highest mountains, and was British colonial territory. It attracted a summer crowd of vacationers. It also proved to be a good place to cultivate tea. In fact, tea from Darjeeling became so successful that it replaced China tea in world trade to become the world's highest quality black tea.

The tea of Darjeeling actually are not grown in that city, as at 6,710 feet, it's too high. Most of it is grown downhill from Darjeeling, closer to the city of Ghum (or Ghoom). So really we should call it Ghum tea!

Today the area around Ghum and Darjeeling is carpeted with tea bushes. Some of these are very old—the Happy Valley “tea garden”, as the plantations are sometimes called, dates from the 1850s, and the bushes are between 80 and 120 years old. Happy Valley brags that they are suppliers of tea to Harrod's in London. When a friend

and I visited Darjeeling, I had a chance to see three tea plantations: Happy Valley, Glenburn and Makaibari. The last one is most famous as having the world's most expensive tea, called silver tips. These are supposedly buds—immature leaves just opening—plucked under moonbeams, described as “ideally sipped at bed time to cull one to celestial slumber.” That said, tea prices are not like wine; \$20 buys 50 grams, enough to make quite a few cups.

### A visit to Glenburn Estate.

Visiting Glenburn Estate was most difficult. It is down a steep single-laned trail studded with sharp boulders and ruts. Only a four-wheel drive or SUV could negotiate such a rough trail, and we bounced more than an hour before arriving (with only one flat tire).

The staff at Glenburn seemed really puzzled at our visit. The guide said, in English, “He's a favorite buyer of Glenburn tea,” although I told him earlier that while I'd heard of it, I wasn't actually certain I had ever bought that tea. In any case, playing along, I added, “Yes, I've come half way around the world to see this estate!”

The staff asked me to produce a business card, which I did, from East Gulch State University. (I was surprised how useful business cards were in India.) They disappeared, returned, invited me to the estate's house for—a cup of tea.

Presently an agile man of about 40 appeared, and staff became quiet. Clearly, this was the boss. “This is Sanjay Sharma, tea planter,” said the innkeeper.

“Someone who plants tea?” I asked.

“No. The tea planter is the manager of the



Tea bushes at Glenburn Estate, a high-quality producer of Darjeeling tea.

estate.” They had brought the boss to meet the tourist from half way around the world.

Sharma was clearly in a hurry, but still gracious enough to answer a few of my questions—after I had passed his lie detector test. How, he asked, did I know about Glenburn tea?

“I order it from Upton Tea Company, in the United States,” I responded.

He was familiar with that company. “Well, any fan of Glenburn is welcome here,” he said.

Sharma explained the tea operation. Tea in Darjeeling is harvested four times a year: around March, around June, in late summer, and in the fall. Winter is dormant season in Darjeeling, and begins in November. Alas, I was there on November 14, two weeks after the fall plucking season had ended.

The first harvest is called first flush. Second is called second flush. Third is during the rainy season, so called monsoon flush. Fourth is

autumnal flush.

Harvest means that only the first two leaves and a bud are plucked—the word for picking the tea leaves. “We are a quality tea operation, so our pluckers must be careful to pick only those leaves, no other,” said Sharma. “This means one plucker gets about 500 grams a day.” That's a little over a pound.

“First flush” does not necessarily mean finest quality. It simply means a tea harvested in the spring. “It is a delicate tea

color, but with a strong bite,” said Sharma. “But many of our clients, particularly in Japan, prefer second flush. That's a darker, stronger tea.” Also generally the most expensive.

In fact, it is also true in the United States that most quality Darjeeling sold is second flush. First flush is certainly easily available—but not locally. Catalog or online is the way to get quality single-estate Darjeeling. I do order from Upton Tea—so I wasn't lying to the Glenburn people!

The monsoon flush is darker and more earthy, and autumnal is darkest and most full bodied. They are stronger in flavor and so considered of lower quality, and less popular than first and second flush. Monsoon tea usually stays in India and is sold for the sweet spicy drink called masali chai. It's in the cup you usually get free for juggling at a carpet or jewelry dealer in Mumbai. “Chai” is just the word for “tea” in Hindi and many other languages.

Most Darjeeling tea is black tea. This means it's “fermented.” Not exactly—more like it's oxidized. The tea leaves are first dried on long wire racks overnight, with blowers, cool in the daytime, warm at night. They are then scooped up and curled—usually by machine. This bruises the leaves. The curling machine in the Happy Valley plantation dated from the 1850s, from London. The fermentation is actually a second drying process. The curled leaf produces moisture that oxidizes. How long to ferment is dependent on the nose and judgment of the tea planter. Black tea is 90 percent oxidized, after which it is dried to stop the process and preserve

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## Cambridge standard bed



Visitors may need to pack an umbrella for the city's frequent drizzles, but the many of the best sights require only a short walk.

The Other Place is famous in America, thanks in part to President Bill Clinton's stay there. But it was known before that, based on to Cecil Rhodes' scholarship for Americans.

The Other Place is what Cambridge University students in England call Oxford University. And vice versa. But in Britain the two universities are considered equivalent. Both are among Europe's half dozen oldest. Architecturally, while both are jewels of Renaissance brilliance, American tourists seem to prefer Oxford.

This ironically may be a relief to many Cantabridgians who must deal with narrow streets already choked with traffic, much of it speeding bicycles.

Oxford is three times as large as Cambridge, industrialized, and sprawling. The colleges constituting the university are somewhat spread out. Cambridge, on the

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## Let's make Washington, D.C. clever standard headline fit here

By ERMA NERN  
A Washington-area city magazine lately advised readers to avoid those same old touristy areas—the Smithsonian, the Capitol, the White House—and followed with a list of obscure museums and interest spots in the area. Reasonable perhaps for bored Washingtonians, but for most of the rest of us, it seems irrelevant: why would you want to visit Washington to view things you can see in most other major cities?

Tourist icons they may be, but Washington's famous monuments and buildings form part of our American identity. They form part of our legacy, part of who we are as Americans.

Even if we feel jaded about the corruption of the people who run the place (which is normal, and historic), a trip to Washington is an American pilgrimage.

Most tourists' principle destination is the National Mall. The grassy mall sweeps about a mile be-

tween Capitol Hill and the Washington Monument. Flanking the mall stands a complex of 9 imposing buildings composing the Smithsonian Institution.

The name “Smithsonian Museum” today is misleading. The original museum established in 1846 with funds from English scientist James Smithson has expanded to 15 separate museums, 13 in Washington and two in New York City. Each of the largest can easily take more than one day of sight-seeing, if you want to see everything. Admission is free at most of them.

The hub of the Smithsonian is the original building, nicknamed “the castle” for its liberally turreted and peaked sprawls of stone. Enter in anticipation of wonders, though, and your in for a surprise: all the exhibits have gone to other sites. Left at the old building are administrative offices and study facilities, plus an information center for tourists.

For tourists, the rest of the Smithsonian is

not created equal: the National Air and Space Museum is awash with kids on school trips, as is the more cramped National Museum of American History, while the lesser-known stops, such as the Hirshhorn Museum for Modern Art, is almost peaceful.

Inevitably, though, if you want to see the big sites in Washington, you have to wade through other tourists. The Capitol is a case in point. This great symbol of the United States has undergone a fascinating history of rebuilding and renovation through more than 200 years and today likely houses some of the finest frescoes, gold leaf, scrollwork and painting of any building in the country. Here, you can stand where John Adams sat, or imagine a debate between Clay and Webster in the old Senate chambers. Guided tours are well organized. During busy months tours begin every two minutes.

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Second-flush Darjeeling tea leaves ready for brewing.

corner. No one had much respect for fannings.

Graded tea is poured into sacks, and shipped to the tea auction in Kolkata—Calcutta, south of Darjeeling. There the price is set, and it is shipped around the world.

No tea outside of this geographical area can sell as Darjeeling—just as no wine outside of Burgundy in France can sell as Burgundy. Of course, it's hard to police such a guarantee outside India, and tea sold as "Darjeeling" often isn't.

Most tea grown outside of Darjeeling is sold in the West as blends, and the cheaper Darjeeling also often is a blend. This doesn't necessarily mean low quality, although in my experience the Darjeeling blends I've tried just haven't measured up to the single-estate teas.

Teabag tea infuses fast—one minute may be too long. Whole leaf Darjeeling, on the other hand, usually needs about three to four minutes. Water just off the boil should cover about one rounded teaspoon of tea per cup. Just place the leaves in the teapot. Strain with a tea filter to drink. Black tea keeps a long time—2 years is not unreason-

able, except for first flush, which should be used more quickly.

Tea is supposedly healthy, based on its polyphenols in the tannins. But the research on health benefits of tea, green or black, is still inconclusive. Tea does contain more caffeine by weight than coffee, but because it's so light, you use less in a cup.

I asked the Glenburn tea garden staff about that—why not plant coffee? It's pretty much the same growing conditions, after all. "We do grow, in the south," the innkeeper answered. "Actually, we could grow coffee right here, instead of tea! But why have one harvest per year when you can have four?"

The manager returned to usher me to the waiting Tata 4X4. "Well, thanks for coming, he said. "We do have a web site. You can buy directly from us."

The Glenburn visit took about two hours. On the way back up the road, Dawi the guide mused, "I've never had a tourist so interested in tea." But he didn't realize that, for someone from Fargo, this really was a once-in-a-lifetime trip.

ture.

Most breathtaking is King's College chapel, a soaring thicket of spires begun by Henry VI in the mid-1400s, and finished by Henry VIII a century later. Most of us know King's by its boys' choir broadcast on Christmas Eve, and you can hear the boys daily in the chapel during term time. The chapel is a fan-vaulted Renaissance masterpiece, encrusted with the ever-modest Henry VIII's initials.

King's is the first stop in a visit to many walled colleges, some brilliant (St. John's bridge recalls the Bridge of Sighs in Venice), some quirky (Jesus College is sur-

rounded by depictions of roosters, symbol of its founder), some gaudy (Queens' College dining hall, dated 1450, was painted wild red and green by Victorians who thought it matched medieval decorating schemes).

You can also visit Trinity College (of "Chariots of Fire" movie fame) to see the bust of its illustrious fellows (faculty) and graduates, including Isaac Newton. Tour guides will point out the window to Prince Charles' old room.

All of this is an easy walk, after an hour-long train trip from London.

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You can beat some of the crowds by arranging a private tour through one of your congressional delegation. They make take you to places the general tours don't go, and they'll be able to point out some facts of local interest, such as that the entire height of Bismarck's Capitol building would fit under the U.S. Capitol dome.

You may sit in on House or Senate debates, but you need a letter from your congressman or senator for admission. Contact their offices for that, too, and for hard-to-get tickets to a White House tour.

Some tourists get to "Congress watch." It's a little like bird-watching,

that runs between the Senate and House sides of the Capitol. Anybody can take the train—but you'll have to go through a metal detector to get into the congressional office buildings.

At the opposite end of the mall from the Capitol, past the Washington Monument and in wooded Constitution Gardens on the way to the Lincoln Memorial is the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Not grandiose and proud, it is simply a set of black stone tablets running about 100 yards, listing 58,183 Americans killed or missing in the war.

All of these museums and memorials are in central Washington,



The U.S. Capitol rotunda is world famous for its size and architectural details

and Congressional staff themselves are known to indulge, looking for famous senators or representatives around the Capitol and its office buildings. Theirs a hierarchy here: while someone like Minnesota's Collin Peterson is hardly worth a murmur, John McCain is a real find.

The best place to watch is in the hallways of the Capitol or office buildings, especially around the little underground train

within reasonable walking distance of each other. Unfortunately, the efficient Washington subway does not stop near the monuments opposite the Capitol, including the Vietnam Memorial and Lincoln Memorial. However you get around; Washington offers tourists a compact selection of some of America's most famous people and places. Every believer in democracy should make the pilgrimage at least once.

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the tea leaves from spoilage.

Green tea, on the other hand, is not oxidized at all. Oolong tea is oxidized a bit, about 10 percent. Sharma said most Darjeeling tea gardens produce black tea because it commands higher prices at auction.

After fermentation and

drying, the now black tea is worked through a machine to grade. Tea is graded by size. Large leaf is generally higher quality. The dust, or fannings, are sold for teabags. As I was walking around in stocking feet—no one wears shows in the plants—the fannings collected in a five-foot high pile in the

## Cambridge from page 1

other hand, crams a third of its thirty-one oldest colleges on a single street near the Cam river.

Difficult for traffic, but so much better for strollers. In fact, the city of Cambridge is a gem for tourists on foot, offering stylish boutiques, antiquarian bookshops, a year-round open air market, and some of the world's finest architecture all within a half mile.

To understand Cambridge University, like Oxford, is to learn about medieval education. At least two centuries before Columbus, scholars established tutorials in the two cities, both about 50 miles from London. Oxford came first, by a

few decades. Colleges were set up by royalty, wealthy patrons and religious orders to house and instruct students in theology, canon law and medicine. Cambridge colleges developed closer associations as the centuries passed and new colleges were built. They agreed together to award degrees, to provide specialized lectures and to regulate tripos—Cambridge terminology for degree course exams taken after one or two years of study.

Prestigious patrons endowed colleges for prestige and academic advancement, and tourists can see the result in seven centuries of archi-

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