

NATURE NOTES 33

Brian Davis

Out on the hills – an ageless place/ Seven thousand feet up from the plains of the world/ Seven thousand feet down from eternal space. So wrote my mother about Mukurthi Peak in the Nilgiri Hills of south India, which I climbed with my family one summer's day in 1942; I'm told that one can get frostbite and sunburn on the same day climbing this peak in winter! Mukurthi now gives its name to a National Park which forms part of the Nilgiri International Biosphere Reserve, famous for the rare Nilgiri tahr, or Ibex, and *Rhododendron arborium* – which both show an ice-age association with the Himalayas – and many threatened endemic species of birds and plants. Once every twelve years the hills turn blue with the synchronous flowering of a low shrub *Strobilanthes* known locally as Kurunji. At the beginning of December I joined a group for a 2-day trek here over some 16 miles of rolling, tussocky grassland. I was a year late for the Kurunji flower, unfortunately, but I did see Sambar deer, elephant dung, and tiger spoor in damp mud beside a stream, and three snakes. There were no leeches here, luckily, but they got me in a teak forest at the foot of these hills a few days later. To make up for this, though, I was entertained for ten minutes by a male Paradise flycatcher flaunting its long white tail feathers as it swooped from branch to branch reviving childhood memories of India, while from across the valley I could hear the weird booming call of a Nilgiri langur monkey, another of the specialities of these ancient hills.



LOST & FOUND

A gentleman's stainless steel "Swatch" watch was found shortly before Christmas, near to Ted Mills' house. If you think this may belong to you, please contact David Hindmarsh at *Trevellas* in The Lane.

VILLAGE BYSTANDER

This useful small magazine is published at the beginning of each month. If you collect a newspaper from Kath Goodwin's porch (6 The Lane) then you will probably be familiar with this already, but for those who don't, they are available free and can be picked up from the box in Kath's porch early each month. If you are passing, you may like to look and see if they have arrived. Please help yourself!

BRITISH LEGION APPEAL

Chris Nixon generously gave up his time to make a house-to-house collection selling poppies before Remembrance Sunday last November and raised £82.26p for the British Legion Poppy Appeal. A big Thank You is due to Chris and to all who contributed.

49 CLUB WINNER

The lucky winner of the 49 Club draw in November was Jeanette Charlton.

CHURCH NEWS

We would like to thank everyone who took part in the Christmas celebrations at St. Peter's, especially those who made the Church look so lovely, those who provided refreshments and those who enriched our worship by turning out in such numbers to attend the services. It would not have been the same without you...

Services during January will be:

6 th January	-	9.30 a.m.	Sunday Worship	EPHIPHANY EUCHARIST
13 th January	-	6.00 p.m.	Evensong	N.B. This Sunday celebrates "Plough Sunday"
20 th January	-	9.30 a.m.	Eucharist	
27 th January	-	8.00 a.m.	Eucharist	

The origins of Plough Sunday go back a long way, at least into medieval times. On the first Sunday after Epiphany, the parish ploughs, bedecked with ribbons, would be dragged to church to be blessed, as the ploughing season began. On Plough Monday the teams would drag the ploughs round the village, seeking contributions for an 'Ale' or night of revelling at the tavern - and woe betide the cottage garden or vegetable plot of any householder who failed to stump up! Plough Tuesday would be spent, more often than not, in recovering. As most of the cereal crops grown were sown in the spring, ploughing did not start until after the Christmas festivities in January and February, giving time for the frost to break down the soil prior to sowing in March or April. Hence Plough Sunday coming in early January was the most appropriate time to bless the plough and pray for a successful harvest to come.

