

THE MEADOWS OF SANASAR

By Manohar Singh Gill

Whenever and wherever we discussed the charms of the valley during our recent visit to Kashmir a new name kept cropping up. Everyone agreed about the marvellous golf at Gulmarg, the trout fishing and riding at Pahalgam, the hiking and climbing at Sonamarg, and the quiet romantic shikara rides on the Dal Lake of an evening, but they invariably ended up by asking: "Have you been to Sanasar?"

"Where is it?" I asked; for the place was unknown to me.

"It is near Patni Top, 12 miles off the main Jammu highway. If you are travelling by road, you must not miss it. Beautiful rolling meadows, set among pine trees, and a lovely little lake. A place of mystery and legend."

FAMILIAR ROAD

The idea excited me. The road to Batote was familiar. Seeing it after two decades, I noticed that it had been improved beyond recognition. Wide and comfortable, it was as good as the highway to Simla. At Batote it was inevitable that we ate in the ubiquitous Khalsa Hotel. A delicious meal of chicken curry and crisp tandoori rotis, at a price so low as to be almost beyond belief.

While we gorged ourselves the continuous playing of Shabad records took care of our spiritual needs. The owner was a refugee from Muzaffarabad. His initiative was remarkable. Starting as a penniless man, he now owned a huge building in which he had the Khalsa Hotel, alongside a Bihari one and a Kashmiri one.

Thus he monopolises all the tourists coming through Batote, and the expensive Government restaurant opposite languishes for want of customers. This earns him the restaurant's ill-will but, having survived partition, he takes all this in his stride.

After lunch we climbed to the top of the ridge and stopped a while at Patni Top. Guided by the Tourist Officer, we took the road along the ridge top for Sanasar. Patni Top is at a height of about 7,000 feet. The ridge road went to as much as 9,000 feet, often going right along the top, and thus enabling one to look down into the valleys of Jammu as well as those of the Chenab. The Jammu side was bare and so was the top of the ridge, but on the slope down towards the Chenab there were thick pine forests. The road slowly descended towards distant meadows. After half an hour we were at Sanasar.

It is a small village, still untouched by civilisation, with

poor but warm-hearted farmers living in modest houses overlooking the most fabulous meadows that I have seen. The main one must be more than a mile and a quarter long and half a mile wide. Hemmed in by pine forests and with a small snow lake in one corner, it made an enchanting sight. We reached there in the evening and found children playing about, horses grazing, and elderly people walking around the place. A few tourist huts have been built, and they provide modest but comfortable living.

GOLFERS' DREAM

I have played golf at Gulmarg, but the meadows of Sanasar are no less alluring. They are crying out to be played on. As the gentle evening sun hit the rolling grassland and gave them a golden hue, I almost shouted: "Golfers of India, where are you? The place is crying out to be played on. Nothing is needed except to stick a few flags and mark out the holes. Collect your bags, abandon your wives and head for Sanasar. The place is a golfers' dream. What is more, nobody will ever find out where you are!"

There is an interesting legend

about the place. Sir Henry Lawrence, who became the first Chief Commissioner of the then Punjab, went on a long six months' holiday in Kashmir. He described his experience in an interesting travelogue entitled "Over Hill and Dale." During that journey Sir Henry was accompanied by a young Scottish A.D.C. by the name of John Macpherson.

It is said that Sir Henry visited Sanasar. The young Scotsman was smitten by a local beauty and the possibilities of golf. He determined to marry her and settle down there. Much as Sir Henry tried to dissuade him, and even pointed out to him his Christian duty, Macpherson would not relent. He left the Army and settled down at Sanasar, leading the life of an idle retired gentleman. He gave all his time over to golf.

But Macpherson was a man of violent reactions. One day, after missing three successive birdies, he flew into a violent rage, smashed his club and jumped over a cliff in despair. In the pine forest by the side of the meadow there is a lovely little shrine which is said to be in the memory of Macpherson. The local people say that on moonlit nights he can still be

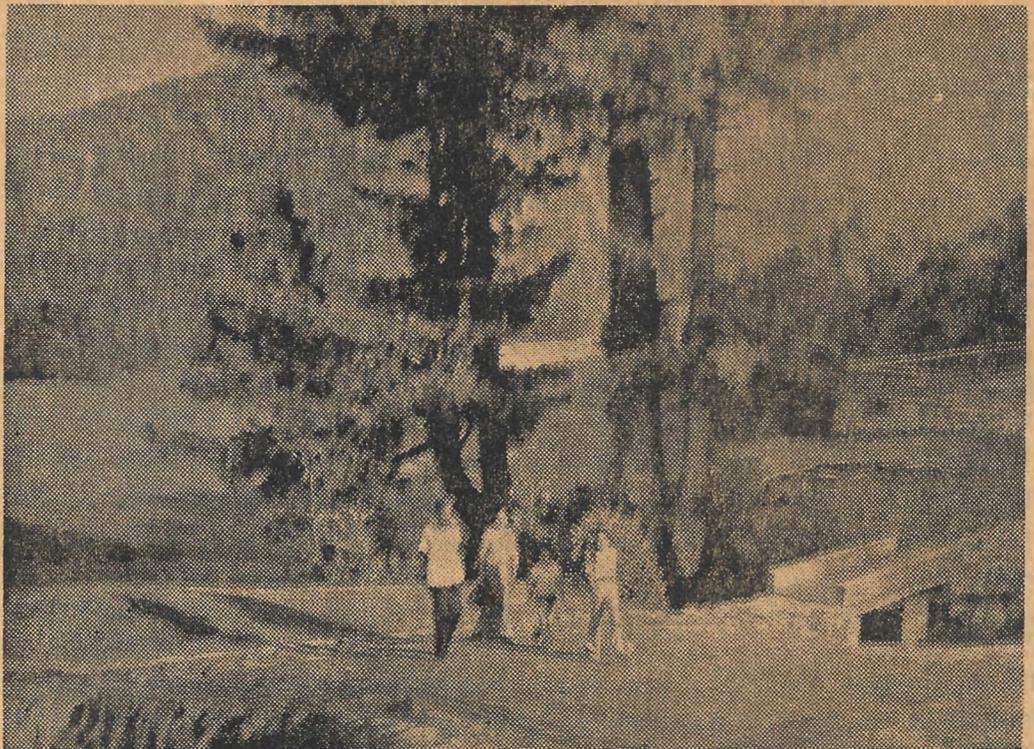
seen striding about the meadows, presumably trying to improve his handicap.

IDEAL REFUGE

Some years back the Jammu and Kashmir Government built a road to Sanasar and a few cottages, and laid out other ambitious plans to make this a tourist resort. These plans seem to have been given up and even the road is falling apart for want of repairs. I wish the State Government would do something for the place. Patni Top and Sanasar ridge is to Jammu what Simla is to Chandigarh. It is an ideal refuge from the heat of the plains and it is only 115 km from the rail head at Jammu.

Tourists can come by train from Bombay to Jammu, as they do to Kalka, and drive up within four hours to the cool heights of Sanasar. They can hike and climb, they can ride, and of course they can play golf on what must be one of the world's most marvellous natural courses. Sanasar is waiting to welcome them to its cool heights.

For the present no one knows Sanasar except for a few Jammu people who come for a cheap and quiet holiday. As for golf, John Macpherson continues to play all by himself.



A family stroll in the meadows of Sanasar. The place deserves to be better known.