

TREK REPORT

-S.Lakshmi
B.Arch First Year,
NIT Trichy

THE ANNOUNCEMENT

On the second week of October 2009, in NIT Trichy, our EVS professor Mr. Rajendra Babu announced to an unsuspecting bunch of fifty-two first year archies (that is what the architecture students call themselves) that we were going on a trek to



Thalamalai hills. We reacted with mixed feelings. Some of us were more than ready, some unsure and the rest said they needed time to think about it. But the end result was that an overwhelming majority of us (50 out of 52) decided to “check it out”. Little did I know then, that the day of trekking would change my idea of life so dramatically.

THE PRE-REQUISITES

Before the trek, we were asked to carry four liters of water in our bag-packs along with some energy drink. We were asked to wear tracks or cargo pants with a suitable T-shirt.

Use of sunscreen was also advised. We were also told that caps are an important pre-requisite during treks in sunny areas like Thalamalai hills.



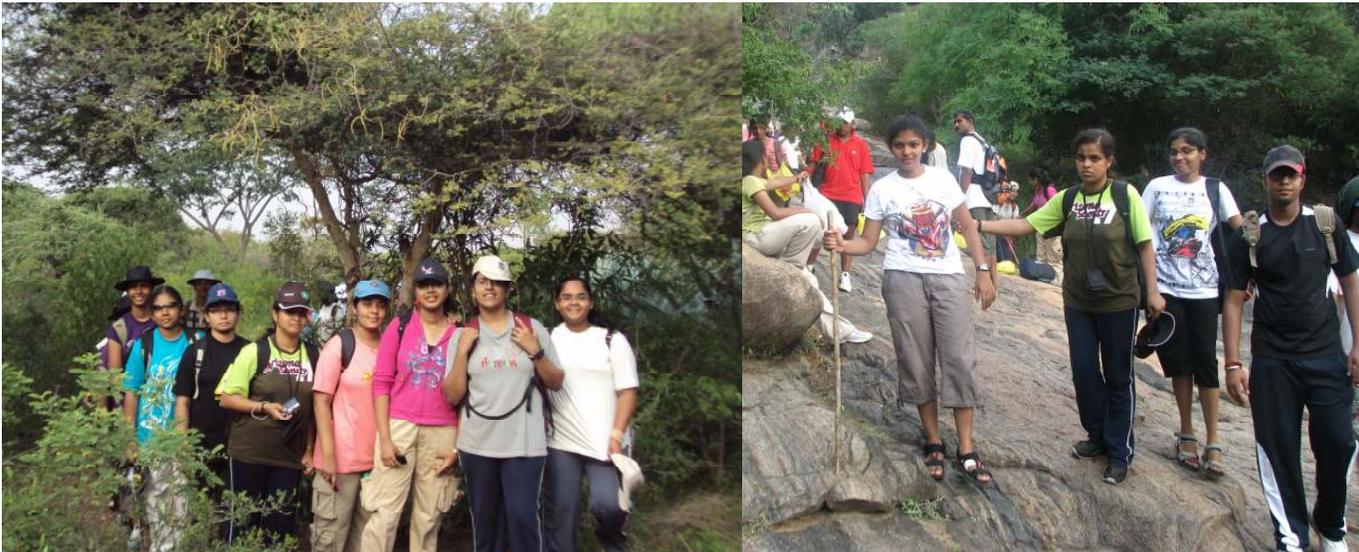
THE ASCENT

We started from our hostels around 4.15 am in the morning. Irrespective of the fact that most of us had managed to catch only 1 or 2 hours of sleep the previous day, we kept singing and partying in the bus. We reached the foothills by around 7 in the morning. We had our breakfast (four idlis and a vada) and did a small mass prayer for good weather and safety. For a trekker, weather is a very important factor. We continue trekking no matter how the weather is but an excess of rain or shine can cause major problems while trekking. I think the Gods heard our prayers because the weather was quite pleasant the entire day. After collecting our lunch packets, we set off on the trek.



We were made to move in a line during the trek. The people who generally lacked much of physical activity, were asked to move to the beginning of the line as this would prevent pressure on those people to match up to the speed of the faster ones. Initially, all of us were very excited and clicking away pictures all the time and resting occasionally, but by the time we covered two sevenths of the height, we were very tired and we still had a long way to go. Most of us felt fatigued and many were complaining. It was then, that we were taken to a viewpoint. The viewpoint is a place where a stream flows during the monsoons but is completely dry during summer. The rains had not yet begun when we went there. So, it served as a nice place for us to relax and enjoy the scenery. Our mood was further lightened when we caught sight of a couple of monkeys trying to steal some of our bags.

We then set off further up the hill. It was only then that we realized the real risks and trouble in trekking. The terrain grew harsher as we climbed higher. Our legs hurt but we couldn't quit. The hill grew steeper as we climbed up. With great difficulty, sipping water more often, we reached the top of the hill, huffing and puffing.



THE HILLTOP

The view was beautiful. It took us a while to believe what we had done. When the hill is viewed from the foot, it is just a beautiful enormous piece of scenery but only when one reaches the top, does one realize the magnificence and the real splendor of it. It gains much more importance because it is no longer just a showpiece of nature but a measure of what one can achieve through perseverance. When you look down from atop the hill, you see miniature houses, market places and a tiny city. But in ordinary life



on the ground below, these very things worry us and we spend days fussing about them. I realized then, that when you view things from a calm, detached and elevated frame of mind, things that worry us king size in daily life, are reduced to a miniature form that they worry us no more. There, on the top, one loses all sense of time; you don't know if you have been gazing down for a minute or for an entire lifetime.

We went to a temple situated atop the hill. It was very interesting to see this structure standing lonely atop the 2300 feet high hill. Probably, the silence and aesthetic feel of the place is what instigated the people to build it atop this silent hill. We had our lunch near the temple and relaxed in a nearby area after a four and a half hour ascent. Then began the riskier and trickier part, the descent.

THE DESCENT

We had been told earlier that the toughest part of the trek would be the descent. And it indeed proved to be. The ascent is the very physically tiring but the descent is the mentally challenging part. Every step you put down should be carefully placed to avoid slipping. We were asked to balance on our toes while moving up and balance on our heels while moving down. The thing that scared me most during the descent was that we had to look down at the vast expanse of land before us all the time. If a stone rolled down the hill by mistake, the fear of falling in a similar way gripped my heart. But the more I went down, the more the fear waned. In a way, I learnt to face the fear of heights.

Probably, the most important lesson I learnt during the trek was that no matter what happens, you don't quit. A trekker doesn't have the option of quitting anywhere in trek. He/ she may rest but there is no looking back once you begin.

On the way down, some of us collected non-biodegradable waste, which was later disposed off. After a two-hour journey down the hill, we set back to college with lead-like legs but feather-like thoughts. To me, this trek was more than a trip to harmonize with the surrounding; it was a trip that made me look within me, and a learning experience that taught me to face my fears.

