

Yip! Yip! I made it - My First Trek!

Neither am I an avid sports person nor have I indulged in any adventurous activity before. But I am a nature lover and have always been interested in outdoor activities. For a long time, I have been mulling over a trek. What could be so difficult in a trek, I wondered; after all, I work out regularly in the gym for three days a week and walk quite a bit commuting to and from office. There are trekking clubs in Bangalore and Chennai, but I didn't want to risk going alone. I was confident but still didn't know if I will have the strength to make it till the end and didn't want to end up as the damsel in distress.

Finally I got a chance to check my mountaineering skills with my cousin brother Ramesh Kamak, who has been going on treks regularly for the past four years. He told about the

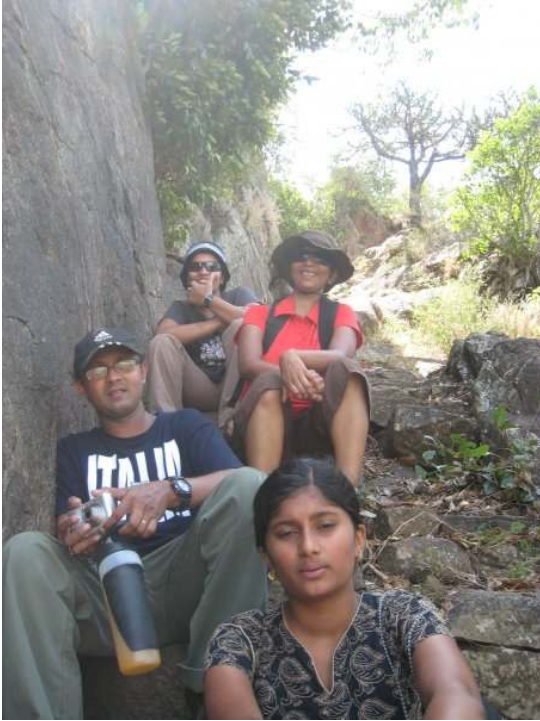


trek to Thalaimalai organized from Trichy and asserted that it was especially for beginners. So I packed my bags and left for Trichy the previous day. My brother meticulously watched all that that went into my backpack – three litres of fluids (energy drinks and water), two chocolate bars, sunglasses, camera, a wide brimmed hat, and sunscreen lotion. No towels or anything that may find place in your regular cosmetic kit, he kept telling me. Anything extra, I will be carrying it up and down unnecessarily!

A small group of wanna be trekkers and ardent trekkers of all ages left the Union Club the next morning and, after two hrs., we reached the foot hill of Thalaimalai. Our base camp was a small shed where we were served yummy south Indian breakfast. Everybody tucked in little extra for all that energy we may

need in store. The lunch packets also went into our backpacks. We were accompanied by two guides to help us through the trek – one on the front and one on the back. Our destination was a temple on the top, which was nowhere to be seen from the foothills.





Armed with the bare essentials, we started our ascent. The climb was steep with a beaten path of rocks and stones, and narrow steps in few places. Even in the first half an hr. I was getting doubts as to how long I would last. We had to be very careful as to where we keep our feet for one misstep and we may be sitting with a sprain. The first timers were gasping for breath and started taking short breaks every few minutes whereas the seasoned trekkers were unstoppable and kept going. The group broke it into smaller numbers and everyone went at their own pace. The heat was killing and soon I fell on to the silent mode, where I look up, gasp at

the stretch ahead, seek a cool place to sit for sometime and then push myself to move ahead. Now and then I was cursing my brother who talked me into it and kept telling that this was one of the easiest treks. I marvelled at the kids and a few who were chattering nonstop for I was deprived of any energy to talk other than mumbling a few words once in a while and nodding my head mostly. I kept stopping to look back to see the distance we covered and look ahead to see the distance yet to cover , and will be so perplexed as to think how I made it so far and how I am going to make it all the way up yet. I tried imagining myself like an explorer in Wilbur Smith's fiction exploring the wild, i.e., add to the trek – fighting off lions, surviving with no water, food, etc. in hostile conditions – 'Does not this trek sound easy and simple now?' Yet, it was no consolation.



'We are almost there' was what we constantly heard from our lead though the ending point was nowhere to be seen. At last we spotted the temple and we made it in four hours from the time we started.

The view was good and the breeze was so soothing in the cooler confines of the temple. When we saw the Archakar, the question in everyone's mind was how his roly-poly self does the up-and-down routine day after day. Guess, it must be the practice!



After an archana to the Perumal, we settled under the shades for lunch. We had two bovine visitors who gatecrashed into our lunch party. They didn't heed to our shooing away and merrily ended up eating all the leftovers and partially the main course too. My only regret was that the boiled egg which I had religiously carried had turned into smashed egg along with the shell inside my backpack.

After a solid lunch, ample rest, and lighter backpack, mistaken I was when I thought the descent would be easier. For I was



feeling very dizzy and my legs were trembling with each step because of the physical exertion; each step was treacherously tricky. The sun was still high making it a terribly hot day. I gulped and finished all my energy drinks and clung on to my brother for the first stretch down. The foothill was nowhere to be seen and I wondered how in the first place did we manage to climb up. Eventually, it turned a little cooler and I trotted down with more confidence. It took us

two hrs. with breaks in between to reach the base. Me, a person, who would not usually step out in the sun at all was totally in the hot sun for almost 8 hrs. When we reached the foothills, I didn't have any strength left in me and thought I would be down for the next two days. My respect for the sherpas and the other mountaineers had gone up many a notch higher.

I took the night train from Trichy and reached Chennai the next morning. Surprisingly I did not have much aches and cramps except for the pain in the feet. I was even fit enough to get back to the gym the next day. My body has taken the toll reasonably well and I was so proud of it. What I thought of as an ultimate test of physical endurance was thoroughly endurable and enjoyable too. If I had given up in the first half an hr. I would have totally missed the whole thing and the pride which came along. **WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH ONLY THE TOUGH GETS GOING!** I am ready for my next trek!