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## A PATRIOTIC CYCLING EXPEDITION

Specialist battalion unit of the Indian Army, Desert Hawks, has launched a cycling expedition to inspire the youth, reports AKSHITA RAWAT



The 'Desert Hawks' is a specialist battalion unit of the Indian Army for operations in the desert sector. It was formed in November 10, 1966. The formal name of the same is 17 Grenadiers (Motorized Bn). Reportedly, it is also the only regiment of Indian army which is motorised and can travel in jeeps.

The battalion has completed its Golden Jubilee and as a part of their annual outreach program, it started a cycling expedition on February 14 that will continue till the 22nd of this month. It will cover a total of 1,117 kilometres in the Rajasthan belt. Starting from Jodhpur, the expedition will pass through Nagpur, Sikar, Churu and Jhunjunu districts and will finally end at Phukram. Captain Gaurav Prashar is leading the expedition which has 24 more participants and one other officer.

The main aim of the expedition is to inspire the youth of the state in visualising the spirit of the army. This is a major reason why the expedition has planned to go through many schools. It is also going to cover vastly the rural and remote areas in order to reach out to the ex-servicemen for listening to their grievances as well as honouring them.

Captain Prashar addressed the villagers of Didwana by telling them about the glorious history of Indian Army and the Desert Hawks. He also enlightened the youth with the procedures to join the Army and how important it is to have more young people enlisted.

"It is a wonderful feeling to meet all kinds of people in the villages, where so many of them belong to the Army or have been in service in their youth" said Captain Prashar. He also talked about the village that the expedition recently went through, named Chhoti Beri. It is a village in Rajasthan which has Muslim dominated population. Every family of the village has at least two members serving in the army. Hundreds of villagers joined the Desert Hawks in cycling.

Desert Hawks has won two Vir Chakras, four Sena medals and six Medallions-in-Despatches after their important contribution to the 1971 war. Some of the other operations of which they have been a part of are Operation Pawan, Operation Vijay, Operation Parakram, Operation Rakshak and Operation Meghdoot. The unit has also been assisting the local people during natural disasters in Rajasthan or Gujarat. Many of the Desert Hawks have represented India at various international sports events throughout the years as well.

"The cycling expedition is receiving a lot of love from the villages of Rajasthan and the people are showing enthusiasm about being a part of it", Prashar added, feeling proud of leading it.



# Temi: Sikkim's own tea story

Feel the bliss of silence, writes SOMEN SENGUPTA as he takes the route to Temi that passes through the hills enveloped under the cool and dark shadows of thick pine and oak

The popular notion is that Sikkim has no great story of tea plantation like Assam or Bengal do. The colonial chronicles recorded till the middle of last century are overloaded with great stories of tea plantation on the laps of Darjeeling and Assam that glorifies great British business brains. It is all how a crop totally unknown to the natives of India, was converted into a most lucrative commercial crop of India that finally changed the culture and commerce of a region. From Kangra to Dooms and again from Assam to Darjeeling to down south in Nilgiri, the golden saga of tea plantation in India is actually the best illustration of British entrepreneurship that gave them a huge business advantage over China in international trade market. It changed the fortune of the East India Company and later the British crown directly.

If this is true, then there is another small yet important story that was completely overlooked. A king with a noble objective of State welfare, adopted tea plantation in his tiny Kingdom and achieved success no less than what the British had obtained in the mid 19th century. This is the story of Sikkim's tea saga and it all started from the Temi tea garden. Temi became popular after Sikkim became a part of India in 1975 and tourist started frequenting it ever since the Sikkim Government built up accommodations. However, its emergence was seen in a turbulent era.

When in the 1950s China invaded Tibet, the Indian Government opened its gates for the Tibetan refugees to settle down in India. However, various regions of Sikkim which then weren't a part of the Indian Republic started feeling the pressure of the refugee issue. Overnight there was a need to provide subsistence to this new influx of people from Tibet. In 1969 the last king of Sikkim, Palden Thondup

### TRAVEL LOGISTICS

- Temi Tea Estate is just 18 km from Ravangla and 119 km from Siliguri city of Bengal
- Nearest railway station is New Jalpaiguri and nearest airport is Bagdogra — both in Bengal
- Sikkim Tourism's Cherry Resort is the best option to stay
- Kangchenjunga can be enjoyed from room of tourist lodge, you do not need to go out
- Ravangla and Narnchi train can be covered from this place
- Photography not allowed at tea plant
- Carry enough winter clothing from November to March

Namgyal planned to grow tea in the southern side of his kingdom. He chose a hill top at the altitude of 5,500 metre to 7,000 metre, where many years ago Scottish missionaries had set up a bungalow for social work. The village named Lamatar where this tea plantation came up was to provide subsistence of many locals and the uprooted people were just 18 km from the famous Sikkim town Ravangla. The tea estate was named Temi and is now recognised all over the world for its tea. Slowly the name of the place changed to Temi.

Give luxury a break in Temi's green world and simply rest your exhausted soul under the hospitality of Sikkim Government's tourist guest house which is standing in the middle of the tea garden. Its one side faces the tea garden while



PHOTO: SOMEN SENGUPTA

other side faces the horizon over which Mount Kangchenjunga appears in less than 50 km. The modest accommodation of this tourist guest house is the best seat to enjoy Temi's opera of nature's beauty.

Sit in the balcony of your accommodation to feel the bliss of silence. The route to Temi passes through the hilly region of Himalayas enveloped under the cool and dark shadow of thick pine and oak. From late October the area is enveloped under blooming cherry blossoms. The pink colored flowers rule the landscape. The green tea garden that runs over an area of 440 acres is a treat to fatigued eyes. A walk through the garden towards the tea plant where organic tea of Temi is processed and packed for commercial marketing is the best stress buster. The tea plant does not

encourage tourists to visit it but if you can manage to enter with special permission, you can get an enriching and educative tour of the tea plantation.

If you luckily arrive here on a clear day, over the horizon a giant will welcome you with her family. It is the mighty Mt Kangchenjunga along with Singalla range of Himalayas. Embrace yourself to enjoy a huge mass of snow capped Himalayan range where the most beautiful peak of Indian Himalayas is burning bright. Viewing Kangchenjunga from Temi tea garden is not an ordinary event.

As soon as the first ray of the sun kisses the snow, the mountain turns orange and then golden. Finally before becoming white it turns a pale pink. In front of your eyes all these colours change in a span of

half an hour and its magic prevails all day.

A full bloom Kangchenjunga is a glorious experience and no one can overcome its impact. Nowhere in the world any mountain range has so many giant peaks appeared in one range as is found in Kangchenjunga. You have to be extremely lucky to see such an amazing amalgamation of five snow peaks in one group. The massive range comes with other famous peaks viz Kabru 1 and Kabru 2 and many more nameless ones. In fact the view of Kabru 1 and Kabru 2 is more thrilling as they appear in massive size. Kangchenjunga is now world's third highest peak.

In 1852, an Indian named Radhanath Sikdar calculated and found the height of peak no. 15 to be 8,848 metres. Soon peak 15 was named after Mr George Everest and Mt Everest officially surpassed Kangchenjunga in height. Now it is only India's highest peak. The meaning of the word Kangchenjunga is "five treasures of snow". It represents all five peaks gold, silver, games, grains and holy books. Local people of Sikkim count it as sacred as God.

The thing about Temi is that you do not have much to do there. Though there is the provision to play badminton in the tourist guest house and also of camp fire at night, it is better to submit yourself to nature. A hot cup of organic tea and eyes engrossed in the endless beauty of Himalayas is the ideal way to enjoy this small heaven of Sikkim where many years ago hundreds of refugees uprooted from their home in Tibet found a new meaning of life under the sacred shadow of Kangchenjunga. No doubt that The Dalai Lama, the supreme religious leader of Tibet, also came here once to enjoy the pristine beauty of this tea garden and mighty Himalayas which rendered support to the people who fled Tibet with him to find a new motherland in this country.