

GREAT ESCAPE

In blue & green

For adventure seekers, **KAVITHA REDDY** recommends a good trek up the Himalayas to Dokrani Glacier amidst the green landscape and blue mountains to get away from it all this summer.

Need a Break? my heart cried, I called my friends and we decided to go on a trek. We gathered at Delhi, travelled to Rishikesh where we took an auto to check into a hotel, refresh and leave for Utrakashi late in the evening. Just a few minutes ahead, the auto driver stopped in front of a TempoTrax and suggested that we should go Utrakashi right away. Plans changed and we loaded our rucksack.

Rishikesh is at an altitude of 356 mts, it is the base for most of the trekking activities in the beautiful Garhwal Himalayas. The city is surrounded by hills on three sides and the holy river Ganga flowing through. Rishikesh also offers the best of rafting, with some excellent rapids, we planned to splash some water on return.

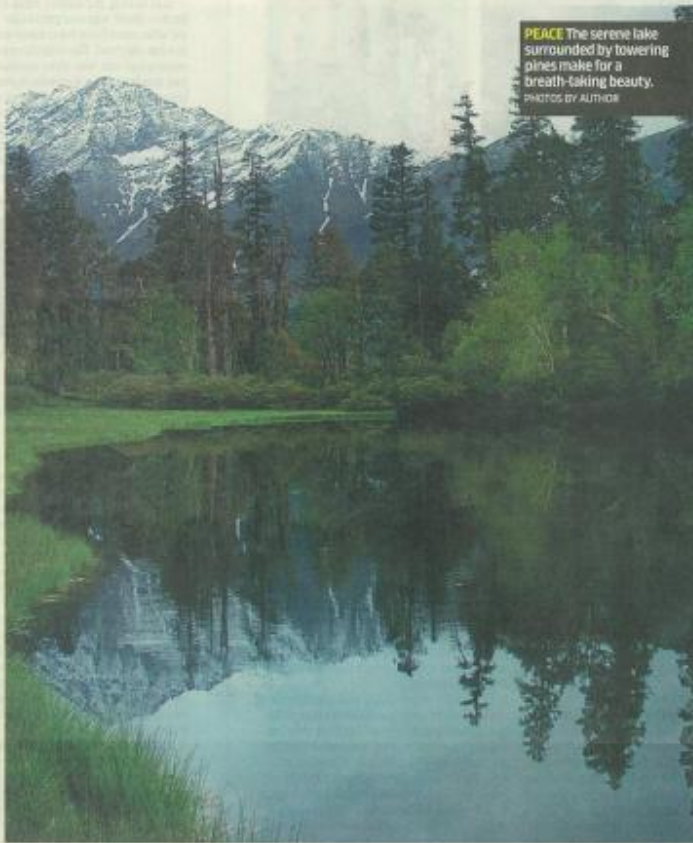
However physically uncomfortable the drive was, the beauty of the mountains kept me occupied. My camera was a little excited looking at the river, clouds and the mountains literally in that order, and by noon we were at Utrakashi.

First stop was the prestigious Nehru Institute of Mountaineering (NIM), an institute that has trained several mountaineers. It was very emotional as I was trained at NIM. The training team includes Everest'ers, army depuses and technically superior mountaineers, and it is definitely one of the best mountaineering institutes in the world. One would simply fall in love with the well-maintained campus, greenery all over, surrounded by mountains all the four sides, the sound of Bhagirathi River and several species of birds, specially the Paradise Flycatchers.

Next morning we arrived at Bhuldi by road, a dusty terrain with several land slides, construction of roads, and to top it NTPC plan to build a power station—there was action all around. It was a long trek, which would mean a steep walk and gaining height more quickly.

Our first camp, Teta gave the first sight of snow-covered mountains on one side and a green terrain on the other three sides. As our cooks were getting the dinner ready, we started to pitch tents. We had our first chai on the mountains and went up for a walk. It is important to gain height and come back and sleep at a lower altitude. We were introduced to various kinds of trees and plants species, trees like Silver Oak, Pine, Maple and the wild Orchids were in abundance. It was one of the relaxed nights.

We follow the 'No Trace' policy and are highly environmental conscious. We ensure the entire place been left intact and



PEACE The serene lake surrounded by towering pines make for a breath-taking beauty. PHOTOS BY AUTHOR

reached Jungle Camp just in time, happy to beat the rain god. The stay at Jungle Camp was a bit scary, I tried to get as much sleep as I could and waited for morning to break.

The next day was more relaxed, I guess we got used to the terrain. The day was bright and as we gained more height the tall trees were replaced by the shrubs and later the carpet of flowers. It felt as if it was laid out just for us, Marsh Meery Gold, Lilies, Orchids, Rhododendron and many more, the lichens hanging from the trees, the clear vast blue sky, the snow covered mountains around. 'Is this Heaven?' I wish we could preserve this for generations to come, for our kids to enjoy the nature as much as we do.

I was captivated by the beauty of the land, pride of been born in the land of Himalayas. I had read only in books and now it was in front of my eyes and I could see, feel and experience it all by myself for the next few glorious days.

Gujjar Hut is a tiny settlement of local tribes, mostly shepherds. We walked to sacred Kheratal (serpent lake) that has water all year round and never dries. Night was very pleasant, and we slept with the excitement of reaching base camp the next day. We were at basecamp by late noon, a flat land on top of a hill, drop zone with water gushing down the valley on one side and peak Mechha Dhar. Jeeoll, Drausadi-Ka-

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BLISS IS THIS It is easy to get lost here.

towards Dokrani Bamak, trekking across the moraine, we had an opportunity to gain more height and experience some good snowfall. Dokrani Bamak is also the training area for NIM.

The following day we started early to Mechha Dhar, even though it was not technical, it was an opportunity to be on top of a 5000 mts peak. Rocky walk, plain land, green grass, carpet of flowers and the snow, that's how the landscape changed as we climbed up. There was enthusiasm, we reached the top of the peak, felt a sense of achievement and congratulated each other, it was time to capture every moment on the trek.