

SOCIETY TO SAVE ROCKS

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Oravakal Rock Park



Belum Caves

Photos : Sessa Sai / Uma Maheshwari

AMIDST ROCK MARVELS

The sky was clear and the cool morning breeze was refreshing as we started on 14.11.2009 on the much-awaited, two-day excursion to Oravakal and Belum Caves. We embarked early in the day on our exciting sojourn. The drive by bus was pleasant with the members chit chatting all the way. After a brief stop for breakfast, we proceeded in earnest to the first destination - Alampur temple. The road from Kurnool town to Alampur was a little trying but we survived !

Perched on the banks of the Tungabhadra river, one could see the effects of the recent floods. The temple and its surrounding complexes with beautiful carvings on the pillars and the gopurams were a delight to the eyes. The architecture of these temples is a mixture of the north and



Alampur Temple

south Indian styles. Red sand stone is the material used for construction. A lovely 'potluck' lunch followed with everyone tucking in with gay abandon.

On the way from the temple to Kurnool we stopped at the Rock Garden at Oravakal which was quite a breath-taking place. This sedimentary stretch in the arid terrain is a geographical marvel. The rocks, unlike their granite counterparts which we see around Hyderabad are more intricate and ornamental in formation.

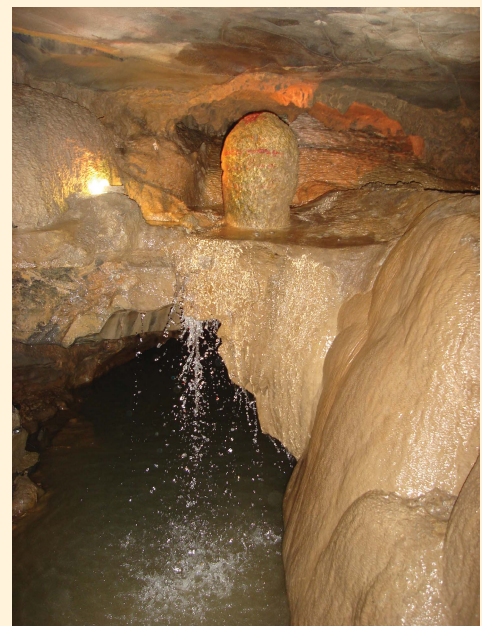
A placid lake separates two small hillocks and

enhances the beauty of the whole landscape. The evening sun pouring its golden rays over the stony hills made the sight really spectacular. Hot tea and onion pakoras at the tourism restaurant at the entrance was a treat before heading to Kurnool.

After the overnight halt at APTDC's Haritha Hotel we proceeded early morning to Belum caves, 130 km away. As we followed our guide towards the entrance to the caves, we soon realised the caves were below ground level with a natural opening of about 20 feet wide in diameter. The caves are ancient and were used by Buddhist monks; they were discovered some hundred years ago but excavated and made tourist-friendly only in 1999. These caves were formed by the Padmavathy river that once flowed here and when the ground water receded, the river bed formed underground cavities. The water rich in calcium and other minerals seeped through the ceiling to form stalactites. Similar structures rise from the ground where the water falls, called stalagmites. Belum caves are largely made up of stalactites and few very large stalagmites. The lighting arrangements inside the caves create a wonderful world of imaginary sculptures. You just need to let your imagination go wild and you will find a skeleton hanging there or an "Airawat" the divine elephant of Lord Indra standing here...no wonder this place has been named Mayamandir. Somewhere a devotee can find Shirdi Saibaba, while another sees Ganesha! At one point stalactite and stalagmite meet to form a beautiful Banyan tree and or a huge pillar supporting the cave!! As we were slowly going deeper inside the earth, we soon found ourselves at 120 feet. Here a natural stream flows over a stalagmite that looks like a Shiv Ling... and what else could be the name of this underground river but "Patal Ganga". People of all ages and walks of life come and visit the caves, some to look at the natural wonder and some to offer prayers at the Shiva temple. From here we made our return journey upwards. This time taking some "short cut" through narrow low crevices. Being underground the humidity was extremely high and we were all drenched from head to toe. But when our guide mentioned that each one of us must have lost a kilo due to the profuse sweating, it felt doubly good!!!

Although the drive back to Hyderabad was long and the muscles stiff, it was all well worth it!

- Inputs from members Uma Maheshwari, Hina Gokhale, Sathya Prakash and Seshasai



Shiv Ling, Belum Caves

A WORTHY CAUSE

The participants of the excursion to Kurnool found the APTDC Haritha Rock Park at Orvakal a very exciting place to walk and climb in. The stone type is sedimentary, layered rock, in bizarre forms. The Rock Park lies to the south of the Cudappah road and is well protected. On the other side of the road is a similar, biggish area of rocks with equally fascinating formations. This area has obviously been given for mining to private miners. The mining disturbs the Rock Park not only aesthetically, but causes much noise and dust pollution and has allegedly also caused cracks in the Haritha restaurant of the Park.

The local APTDC Divisional Manager has requested the Collector Kurnool to cancel the mining and allot the land to the APTDC. The members participating in our excursion and having had a personal experience of the areas are strongly supportive of the idea of extending the rock park to the other side of the road, so as to form one big undisturbed area. This is also in view of the fact that much rocky land with no spectacular formations is available further south where quarrying has started. The President of the Society has written to the Departments of Tourism and Mining to support the request of the Divisional Manager APTDC Kurnool.

UPDATE ON HERITAGE PRECINCT MOULALI

As we had announced in the last Newsletter, follow-up action on the issue of the Moulali Heritage Precinct which has been marred by the construction of a huge Transmission Tower was carried out:

1. Together with other NGOs, a Press Conference was conducted on 1.9.2009 in which the problem was explained to the media, and the opinion of the civil societies were made clear. Two Urdu papers, 4 Telugu papers and The Hindu reported on this in detail.
2. The Society to Save Rocks, the Forum for a Better Hyderabad and Apna Watan jointly filed a Public Interest Litigation in the Andhra Pradesh High Court in November which was admitted by the Court on 21.11.2009. The suit is to restore the Moulali Heritage Precinct to its former appearance. The tower had been put up by the Police Commissioner Cyberabad without the consent of the Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority under Heritage Regulations. The Court is still awaiting the counter of the defendants.



Transmission Tower Moulali

Photo : Frauke Quader

SPREADING THE ROCK MESSAGE

1. Uma Maheshwari of the Managing Committee addressed the 3rd and 4th standard children of Sreenidhi International school. They showed a keen interest in the presentation and photographs that were shown. The session was made interactive and the response was encouraging.
2. Zensar Technologies Ltd - A software company - invited us for a rock talk and the employees came more out of curiosity than interest! But they soon found that they were truly amazed by the rock formations and our efforts. A corporate membership would be welcome and a sure sign of Zensar supporting our mission !

ROCK WALKS IN JANUARY, FEBRUARY & MARCH 2010 :

Date :	Place :	Time / Meeting Point:
Sunday, January 17 th	Moulali Rocks	3 p.m. Opp. St. Ann's High School Secunderabad
Sunday, February 21 st	Rocks at Baatasingaram (near Ramoji Filmcity)	11 a.m. – 6 p.m., Gunpark, opp. Public Gardens (bring lunch)
Sunday March 21 st	Naya Qila (Golconda)	3 p.m. NMDC, Masab Tank

Rock walks are conducted on the third Sunday of every month. They are announced in Channel 6, WOW Hyderabad, The Hindu, Times of India, fullhyd.com and of course on our website. Everybody is welcome. Sensible shoes, a cap, long pants and a water bottle are a must. Please enrol a minimum of 2 days in advance with Frauke Quader at Tel. 23552923 or with C.J. Rao at 98490-37240.

*Wishing you a Rocking
New Year
filled with Happiness,
good Health and exciting
Rock Adventures !*

APTDC ANNOUNCES :

From Charminar to Chowmahalla Palace
Every Sunday & 2nd Saturday
7:30 am - 9 am
Breakfast at Chowmahalla Palace
Tariff: Rs. 50/-, includes breakfast and entry to all monuments.
No advance booking required.
For details, call: +91 40 2345 0444

www.aptourism.in

MEMBERSHIP FEES :

Class	Admission	Annual Subscription
Active	Rs. 100	Rs.200
Couple	Rs. 100	Rs.300
Life (Single)	Rs. 2,000 for Life	—
(Couple)	Rs. 3,000 for Life	—
Institution	Rs. 10,000	—
Corporate	Rs. 50,000	—
Student	Rs. 100	Rs. 100