

Exploring Lapti Valley near Burma. 2011

One can approach the Burmese border through the Lapti valley. We did this in October-November 2011.

The trail is located in newly formed Anjaw District (on the Lohit river), Arunachal Pradesh. It is near the Rima-Kahao border with China on the Lohit river. Hawaii is the new District Headquarters. If the sea and local dances grace the well known Hawaii (USA) in the Pacific, here at Hawaii, mountain scenery matched the beauty of the sea and traditional people and their dances were no less attractive.

This area, along with the plateau opposite Walong, is the 'Burma Hump'. During the World War II several planes crashed on this plateau as old aircrafts could not gain height and malfunctioned at the altitude. Remains of many planes lie scattered in the upper Lapti valley too, but now most parts are taken out by search parties and locals.

Ours was a beautiful exploratory trek. We descended steeply to the Lati river valley to reach the village Kamlat. After arranging porters we turned north to its tributary, the Lapti from village Kamlat. Trek was strenuous and the route climbed steeply- and as a result we had to descend steeply on the way back, on wet – slippery ground. But the forest and being on a remote trail to Burma was an inspiration. Beauty of forest in autumn colours made camping grounds of Tafam and Kushok almost a paradise. The trail led us to Hoot pass which crosses into Burma and in few days would have lead us to Fort Hertz (Putao) in the Myanmar (Burma). F. Kingdon-Ward has written about the Lohit valley and the book *The Icy Mountains of Burma*, cover these mountains on the border. A few of these peaks we observed on our way back. We came across two villages and they were almost a generation behind and what we call 'progress' had not reached them as yet. No trekkers seems to have come here though we heard some rumours of a party trekking here before. People of the Burmese origin cross the Hoot Pass (3570 m) into India to collect herbal plants every year. Overall communities across the borders interact peacefully even today.

On the way back I fell almost 50 m (150 feet), on loose wet gravel covered by shrubs/bushes. I just could not hold on to the bushes falling head first, and gathered speed, passed over one slab after the other- all were downward sloping luckily. Then came to a halt on a small grassy patch and finally rolled over gently on a crop of huge rocks. It would have been a different ending if I had reached these rocks even at a little speed! Though I was bleeding profusely through my nose and was covered with many scratches all over the body, except for one sharp hit on my right hip I was saved. Dinesh Purandare reached me in a flash with other porters, and I could get up on my feet in about half an hour. I climbed up the steep slope to reach the main trail and then with the help of sturdy Mishmi porters walked down to the camp in a painful four hour trek. Medicines reduced the pain and next day I walked

down to the roadhead from where a taxi took me to the Hawai rest house. A day of rest, two days of rough car journey, a night in the train and a five hour flight followed and I was home !

These areas are wonderful, not visited by trekkers and have some of the finest virgin rain forest, leading to the Alpine forest full with pines in the upper reaches. The high altitudes lakes are an attraction. It offers a most exhilarating experience and— not everyone has to have a fall.

Treks to pass on the India-Burma border. Hoot pass (3570 m).

Members: 2011: Dinesh, Nandini and Uttara Purandare, Atul Rawal and Harish Kapadia.

Period: 25 October to 6 November 2011