

Exploring Lapti Valley near Burma

In October-November 2011, we (Dinesh, Nandini and Uttara Purandare, Atul Rawal and myself) trekked to the eastern most part of India in the Lapti valley, the Arunachal Pradesh. We reached within 5 km of the India- Burma border when heavy snowfall stopped us. The trail is located in the Anjaw District (on the Lohit river) and is near the Rima-Kahao border with China. Hawaii is the new District Headquarters. If the sea and local dances grace the well known Hawaii (USA) in the Pacific, here at the Hawaii, mountain scenery matched the beauty of sea and traditional people and their dances were no less attractive.

This area, along with the plateau above 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 but now any parts are taken out by search parties and locals.

Ours was a beautiful exploratory trek. We turned into the Lati river valley from Hawaii and bifurcated to its tributary, the Lapti from village Kamlat. Trek was strenuous and the route always climbed steeply- and as a result was descending steeply on the way back, on wet – slippery ground. But the forest and being on an 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 the foot of Hoot pass which crosses into Burma and in few days would have lead us to Fort Hertz 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 has 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 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 different ending if I had reached these rocks even at a little speed! Though I was bleeding profusely through nose and was covered with many scratches all over the body, except 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 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 Hawaii Rest House. A day of rest, two days of rough car journey, a night in train and a five hour flight followed and I was home !

These areas are wonderful, not visited by trekkers and has 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 most exhilarating experience and—not everyone has to have a fall!

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