

CYCLING FOR THE TIGER 2008 REPORT

I arrived in Bandhavgarh on November 26th at around 9.30 am, my cycle and equipment all arrived with me safely, I built up the bike later that day after the afternoon safari , where we observed some Tigers though they where at a distance.

November 27th, took the morning safari where we also observed a Tigress stalking prey.

In the afternoon we visited a family that had their uncle taken by a Tiger outside the National Park. He was looking after his herd of cattle and the Tiger had killed him and dragged him a couple of hundred yards or more. The family when realising he had not returned had gone to look for him and found the Tiger eating his bodyparts, they tried to scare the Tiger to leave but it snarled at them.They retrieved the bodyparts next morning ,of which there was not a lot left.(This is not a daily occurrence of Tigers taking people, though it is a situation that villagers live with on a daily basis, the Tiger will be monitored).

We moved onto the Khitauli region which is a forest area adjoining the Bandhavgarh National Park, this is where we will be helping with some compensation to villagers who have lost cattle to Tigers in the area, later in the visit. The forest is good Tiger habitat. We did some tracking to find the Tigers and are wild Tigers not used humans and vehicles, so you have to give them that more respect.We did this for about 20 minutes and then returned to our vehicle.

November 28th,we prepared ourselves for the start of the cycle ride which was to start the next day.

November 29th, we assembled at the Tala gate barrier and the Bandhavgarh Field Director flagged of the ride at 9.15 am, he and his son also took part until Umaria which is 24kms away. On the way to Umaria,I had a spill on the bike and my front

wheel got buckled of which I rode and we had the spokes fixed in Umaria. We had a short lunch break then continued on the route which the roads were under repair and more like tracks. We stopped for the day at 17.00 hrs at Shahpura, a distance cycled of 90kms.

November 30th, We departed at 08.30 and visited a local school to give some prizes for their drawings on conservation, we also met the local NCC unit (which is equivalent to our T.A unit.).

We started cycling and there were some good hill climbs including one that went on for 3kms. We were taking on lots of bananas and water to keep hydrated and our energy levels up.

The roads were better on this leg and we stopped short of Mandela to visit a temple for Durga (The Tiger god) at 15.00 hrs. We also explained to a local reporter about the purpose behind the cycle ride. We had covered 100 kms on this leg.

December 1st, we departed Mandela at 08.00, so we could get to Kanha as soon as possible. We arrived at the Eco – Tourism centre at 11am, where we waited for all to close up and we could ride and have the support vehicles all go together and arrive at the Khatia gate, which is the outside entrance to Kanha National Park, we arrived there at 12.00hrs. We had covered a distance of 70 kms, on arrival we were met by the Field Director of Kanha who gave us a garland and congratulated us. He talked with us, and the members of Vunraksha explained about our work.

In the afternoon we took the afternoon safari, we observed elephants, nilgai, jackals, chital and various other animals though no Tigers, this was a good opportunity to visit another national park. It has good grasslands and ideal terrain for Tigers. After the safari we were driven back to Bandhavgarh and this took 8 hours.

December 2nd, we arrived back from Kanha at 02.30, I was to go on the morning safari at 06.00hrs. There were no sightings of the Tiger this morning, just fresh pugmarks, this was the first time I had not had a sighting in over 30 + visits to the park.

On the afternoon safari, there were no sightings we heard Tiger calls but did not find them in the time we had left.

December 3rd, in the afternoon we visited the Khitauli area, we visited a friend of Aqeels, he is a landowner in the area. He showed us the forest in the afternoon, the forest is good habitat for all animals, we observed sambar, nilgai, wild boar and chinkara. This is an area where we are also looking to set up some forest committee projects in 2009.

December 4th, I took the morning safari, we observed 2 sub adult males playing and stalking for about 20 minutes. Then after a further 20 minutes later we heard a Tiger's roar, it was believed to be B2, the dominant male Tiger of the area. He appeared through the grasses, we watched him calling, patrolling, scent marking for about an hour and a half. At the end of our safari we left him cooling in a pool. (This was a great honour for me as I have always found him to be a very special Tiger).

December 5th, I went on morning safari, though there were no sightings.

In the afternoon we had the cattle compensation function, we compensated 21 villagers for loss of cattle to Tigers in Khitauli. We have left some funds behind and are looking to increase the amount given in the future. Once the function finished, I had a car waiting to take me to Katni and get my train back to Delhi later that day.

This trip was a full programme, the work and the cycle ride could not have happened without the organisation and support of Vunraksha and M.P Organisation, both local charities.

We are looking to raise funds to continue support in Bandhavgarh of HELPING PEOPLE AND CONSERVING THE TIGER IN THE WILD.