



IFS 2024 Batch

Indira Gandhi National Forest Academy

Sylvan Sojourns

...the OJT Memoir



अरण्यं ते पृथिवी स्योनमस्तु ।

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Message from the Director



The OJT is the cornerstone of the IFS training curriculum. It is during these months, a probationer transition from academic learners into field-ready professionals. This attachment provides them with invaluable insight into practical forestry operations alongside seasoned officers and dedicated frontline staff.

The 56th RR batch has been fortunate to walk through the forest diversity across different cadres. Each cadre presented its own distinct environmental complexities, community needs, and administrative strengths and challenges. What you have witnessed and experienced is not simply training material. It is living knowledge, the kind that will quietly guide your decisions for years to come.

I am happy to note that this journal captures that journey with honesty and heart. These are not standard field reports; they are reflections of transformation. These articles cover a wide range of experiences, showing how firsthand encounters shape an officer's perspective. The pieces vary in tone, featuring elements of wonder, grit, and strong purpose.

At IGNFA, we have always believed that great forest officers are not just made in lecture halls, they are shaped by the land itself. The OJT is where that shaping happens. It builds patience, deepens instinct, and most importantly, it reminds you why this work matters.

As you return to your cadres to take on greater responsibilities, carry forward the defining spirit of your training; curiosity and service. Step into these larger roles with the curiosity that compels you to ask questions, and the humility that allows you to listen. The forests, and the people who depend on them, will need both.

My very best wishes to each member of the 56th RR batch.

Bharati IFS
Sikkim, 1992

From the CD's Desk



In a cadre that takes pride in the dutiful and steadfast service it renders to nature and to the nation, OJT is perhaps the only time one comes across the word 'job'. Perhaps we owe it to the structured and intensive regimen of these four months, a period that focuses more on learning than on delivering.

And learning was in store from the very beginning. The first lessons arrived even before the opening act. The manner in which the OJT knocked on the door much earlier than anticipated was perhaps the first piece of wisdom it had for the young recruits: preparedness is strength.

Soon, photographs of the young officers-in-the-making, dressed in polished formals; their faces alight with promise as they met dignitaries across their respective states, began appearing on WhatsApp. The reports from both the probationers and their mentors suggested a smooth transition into the state cadre. It was comforting to see that the structured pattern of the OJT, into which the Academy had invested considerable thought and effort, had brought a welcome degree of uniformity and consistency to this important facet of training.

As the probationers moved from the State and district headquarters to their respective divisions, I could sense the swift and enthusiastic 'meet and discover' spirit gradually giving way to a more reflective and gently paced 'process and absorb' mindset. In a service that caters to everything that lives—and everything that supports life—there is an abundance of lessons beyond the four-walled classroom. Sooner rather than later, those lessons began turning into headlines. I remember opening the PDFs of newspaper clippings and social media posts featuring the probationers' exploits in the field with great anticipation, followed invariably by a sense of delight and contentment. Going by the joy these stories brought, I can certainly get used to reading about the initiatives and transformations brought about by this bunch over the next three decades.

Meeting about twenty probationers at their respective places of posting was another memorable experience during this period. Touring as part of the OJT Review initiative, I found each one of them deeply engaged in understanding the finer nuances of field functioning. The experience was much the same for the faculty members from the Academy and CASFoS who travelled to visit the probationers at their places of posting.

Like a Satyajit Ray film or an A. R. Rahman composition, the campus; one of the finest examples of a man-made forest, along with the unique atmosphere it creates, grows on you with time. The spell only gets thicker in separation. Watching the same happen to the pupil brought a quiet sense of joy (and a discreet fist-pump). In time, one's affection for the campus becomes both the starting point and a subset of a much larger belief in, and calling to, the Service.

I feel elated to note that this four-month 'job' has greatly enriched and prepared the group for the much longer journey in 'service'. I remain indebted to the efforts of all the faculty members at the Academy, as well as the department heads, mentors, training officers, and staff in the State cadres. It is equally heartening to know that these efforts were reciprocated with warmth, diligence, and sincerity by the budding officers.

The field is the final examination hall for us as forest officers. Going by your response to these first tests, as an excited Course Director, I carry a quiet certainty that time will only give me more reasons to be proud.

Job well done!

Kunal Angrish IFS
Himachal Pradesh, 2014



ARUNACHAL PRADESH

MEHNAT, MASTI AUR... PEPSI

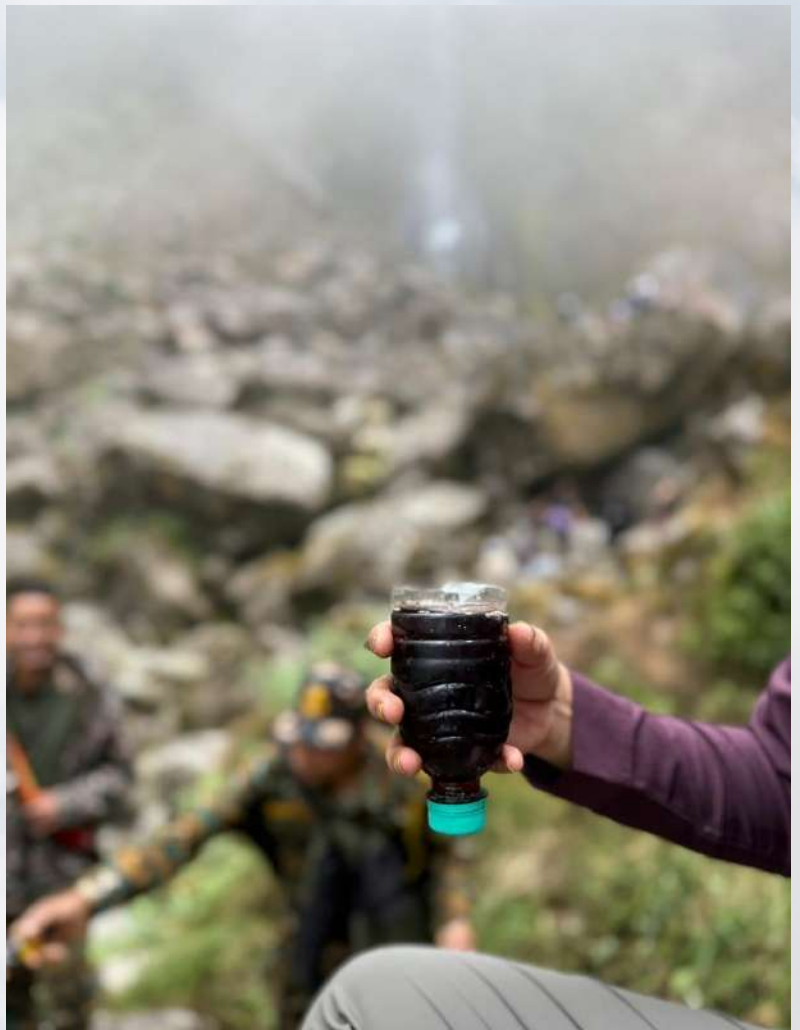
Haobijam Devshree

The people of Arunachal Pradesh, in general, embody a “happy-go-lucky” spirit-simple at heart, sincere in their duties, yet firm when it comes to standing against any form of injustice.

Since the day I arrived, I consciously took time to understand their way of life, culture, and social fabric, just as our Director, Bharati Ma'am, had advised us before we left the Academy for our On-the-Job Training.

Like many others from different parts of India, I too carried a preconceived notion that all Northeastern states share similar social, cultural, and political characteristics. Coming from Manipur, I assumed that adapting to Arunachal Pradesh would be relatively easy. However, Arunachal proved me completely wrong, in the best possible way. Its uniqueness stems from a remarkable interplay of diverse geography, distinct history, and multiple tribes coexisting peacefully for centuries.

Among its many unique features, one rather unexpected observation caught me completely by surprise was its unmistakable fondness for Pepsi!



The first instance occurred during a forest fire operation. It was an exhausting exercise, physically draining and mentally taxing. We battled the flames using green branches, created fire lines manually, and endured heat, dehydration, and smoke inhalation. By the time the fire was brought under control, everyone was visibly fatigued and thirsty. Naturally, I was craving a bottle of water.

As we emerged from the forest, one of the staff members came rushing towards us carrying large bottles. To my surprise, they were not water bottles, but bottles of Pepsi! What followed was even more surprising, the sheer joy and excitement on everyone's faces as they drank it, almost like a celebration of the successful operation. Thankfully, there were a few bottles of water as well but interestingly, I seemed to be the only one reaching for them. I couldn't quite process what I had just witnessed. 5

The second incident made things clearer.

During a trek to a waterfall inside the Sessa Orchid Sanctuary, we navigated a challenging trail, rocky, steep, slippery, and narrow. After nearly two hours of trekking (and a few inevitable slips on my part), we finally reached the top. The view was breathtaking, and the waterfall, absolutely mesmerizing. Exhausted, asked the staff to take out the refreshments they had carried. I was expecting something like bananas or light snacks for quick energy.

Instead, with great enthusiasm, they pulled out a 2-litre bottle of Pepsi.

At that moment, I couldn't help but laugh. That's when it truly struck me, Pepsi wasn't just a beverage here; it was almost an emotion.

Gradually, I began to understand this small yet fascinating aspect of local life. So, the next time we conducted a field patrolling and successfully carried out a timber seizure operation during my independent charge, I decided to do things their way. I asked the Forester to arrange bottles of Pepsi to mark the effort and teamwork involved.

The result? Pure joy!

Their happiness was not just about the successful operation, but also about that shared moment of celebration made complete with Pepsi, even in a remote forest setting. It was a simple gesture, yet very meaningful.

And that's when I realised, In Arunachal, sometimes motivation, celebration, and camaraderie come in a bottle.

"Pepsi ho toh... yeh dil maange more!"

And with that spirit - Sab ho ga!





KUNAL MISHRA

CHHATTISGARH

Sprint to the Seizure Memo

..... 200metres

The afternoons during my OJT range training had slowly developed a rhythm of their own. Mornings were usually spent inside the range office dealing with permissions and the routine administrative work that quietly keeps a forest range functional. After lunch, however, the office table gave way to dusty roads, forest tracks and field patrols. That transition from paperwork to patrolling became an important part of my learning.

One such afternoon in early April turned out to be far more eventful than I had anticipated.

At around 2 PM, my driver and I left the range office for routine patrolling towards the Bargarh area of Kharsiya Range(my OJT range) in Raigarh Forest Division. The summer had already started setting in. Streams in many areas had begun drying up,

leaving behind wide sandy beds cutting through the forest landscape.

While driving along the main road, I noticed some movement in one such dry stream, nearly 700 to 800 metres away from where we were.

सूचना मिलते ही प्रशिक्षु आईएफएस अधिकारी कुणाल मिश्रा के नेतृत्व में वन विभाग की पेट्रोलिंग टीम ने तत्काल दबिश दी। टीम में वनपाल अरुण सोनवानी, वन रक्षक नंदकुमार राठिया और वनपाल दिनेश इनसेना शामिल थे। मौके पर पहुंचते ही दो ट्रैक्टर दिखाई दिए, जिनके चालक भागने की कोशिश करने लगे।

स्थिति की गंभीरता को देखते हुए स्वयं कुणाल मिश्रा करीब 200 मीटर तक दौड़कर आरोपियों का पीछा करते रहे। टीम की समन्वित कार्यवाही से दोनों वाहनों को ज़प्त कर लिया गया और आरोपियों को पकड़ना संभव हुआ।

From a distance, I could make out two tractors and several labourers loading sand into them. The activity immediately appeared suspicious.

Before proceeding further, I called the concerned beat guard to confirm whether the area fell within forest boundaries.

Simultaneously, I asked another beat guard from a nearby beat to reach the location so that we had adequate support on the ground.

Within ten to fifteen minutes, both beat guards arrived on motorcycles. By then, I had already planned in my mind how the situation would likely unfold. I thought we would approach the labourers, question them regarding the extraction, verify permissions if any existed, and proceed accordingly.

What happened next was something I had not expected.

Geographically, the road where our vehicle halted was at a higher elevation while the riverbed lay considerably below.



Our Bolero could not directly descend into the stream. The tractors, however, had entered through another route running deeper inside the forest.

The moment our vehicle stopped near the site, the drivers spotted us. Almost instantly, both tractors turned around and began fleeing through the riverbed.

Instinctively, I started running.

Along with one of the beat guards, I jumped first over a small check dam and then directly into the dry stream bed. The terrain was uneven and difficult, full of loose sand, stones and sharp undulations. Running there was exhausting, but the tractors too were struggling to gain speed over the rugged surface.

At the same time, I instructed my driver and the second beat guard to take the alternate route and intercept the tractors from the front.

For nearly 200 metres, we continued the chase through the riverbed. Eventually, the rough terrain slowed the tractors enough for us to catch up. Almost simultaneously, our Bolero and motorcycle emerged from the opposite side, effectively blocking their escape route.

इस दौरान प्रशिक्षु IFS कुणाल मिश्रा स्वयं 200 मीटर तक दौड़ते हुए आरोपियों को पकड़ने में टीम का नेतृत्व किया, जिससे उनकी रणनीति और टीम की तत्परता दोनों ही उजागर हुई।

वन विभाग ने बताया कि इस अभियान में आरोपियों को भागने नहीं दिया गया और दोनों आरोपी अंततः पकड़ लिए गए। फिलहाल दोनों को मुचलके पर छोड़ दिया गया है, और कोई भी फरार नहीं हुआ।

Both tractor drivers appeared nervous. They were young, probably in their early twenties. Neither tractor carried a number plate.

Even before I could begin questioning them properly, they repeatedly said, “Sir, please talk to my brother.”

When I asked who the brother was, they mentioned the name of a well known local journalist.

At that moment, I realised the situation was no longer just about suspected illegal sand extraction. It was also going to test whether I could remain procedurally correct under pressure.

I immediately informed my Sub Divisional Officer and thereafter my DFO about the incident. The instructions from my seniors were brief and clear: proceed according to law.

Meanwhile, the drivers kept insisting that I speak to their “bhaiya” over the phone. I deliberately refused.

I knew that once conversations and recommendations began before formal proceedings, the focus could easily shift away from procedure.

I told them calmly that we would first proceed to the range office and complete the necessary legal formalities. If they refused to drive the tractors, our staff would drive them instead. By the time, I asked my beat guard to prepare a seizure memo.

Eventually, they agreed as they had no choice at that moment.

The convoy back to the range office was unusual in its own way: a motorcycle leading in front, two seized tractors in the middle, and our Bolero following behind.

During the journey, the drivers intentionally moved very slowly, perhaps hoping that enough calls and influence would arrive before we reached the office.

And the calls did begin coming. Names of different individuals flashed repeatedly on my phone. I chose not to answer any of them until the Preliminary Offence Report(POR) was formally registered. By then, I had already informed the officers I was accountable to. That clarity helped me remain calm despite the growing pressure.

When we finally reached the range office, several people, including the journalist whose name





had earlier been mentioned, were already waiting outside.

Without engaging in any discussion, I went directly inside and instructed the concerned beat guard to prepare the Preliminary Offence Report immediately.

Only after the POR had been written and formally registered did I meet the journalist.

The conversation that followed was polite but persistent. Requests were made. References to influential people surfaced repeatedly. Different forms of persuasion were attempted. Throughout the interaction, however, my response remained the same: the POR had already been registered, the inquiry process would follow, and the matter

would proceed according to procedure.

By then, the pressure had begun affecting me less. Once the legal process had formally started, the situation became much simpler in my own mind. I was no longer taking a personal decision; I was carrying forward the institutional process.

Looking back, the incident remains significant for me not because of the chase or the seizure itself, but because it offered a glimpse into the realities of field administration. In training academies, we often discuss legality, procedure and integrity in abstract terms. In the field, however, these ideas arrive unexpectedly, usually in the middle of dusty riverbeds, phone calls, local influence and split second decisions.

The incident also left me with a few practical learnings. First, field patrolling demands constant observation. Often, important things are noticed not during planned inspections, but while simply moving through the landscape with an alert mind. Second, in cases involving illegal sand mining or similar activities, adequate manpower matters immensely. Such situations can escalate unpredictably, and having sufficient staff on the ground provides both operational support and confidence. Third, and perhaps most unexpectedly, I realised that the 200 metre sprint event at the next IGNFA Sportsmeet might actually be worth participating in after all.

THREE FOR ONE

MRUGAJA
YADAV

Before you read this story, I would like to give a disclaimer- just be patient and try to read until the end.

So, one fine afternoon I was travelling to Raipur to receive my parents. On the highway, I saw a langur sitting near the divider. By the time I realised that he was likely a victim of road accident, we had already driven far past that spot. I called Richa ji, a wildlife biologist working with Jungle Safari Zoo in Raipur. Being new to the area, I didn't know exactly in which division that location fell under. I told her the approximate location and hoped someone would rescue that poor langur.

I happily received my parents and started journey back to Dhamtari. To my surprise, I found that langur still lying there helplessly with vehicles speeding past it. This time, I knew I had to stop.

The only refuge for that langur was a few diversion cones placed by daily wage workers working for road maintenance. A fellow, supervisor of road maintenance works, came to the spot shortly after I had stopped. What he told me truly shook me. He told me that someone driving a "Fortuner" was responsible for the accident and that driver didn't even stop. I don't know what Fortune must be waiting for him/her after such inhumane act. The workers along with the supervisor had already buried one langur that had died on the spot. This other one was paralysed below the waist and couldn't cross the road. He had called veterinary doctor and nearby police station. The doctor had come and administered an injection. But how even that doctor left that injured langur in the middle of the road surprises me even now.

Traumatised, the langur hadn't touched water or food offered by some kind samaritans. He was even helplessly crawling away whenever some enthusiastic person tried to get a close shot of him.

I again called Richa ji and asked why nobody came for the rescue. She explained that the staff she sent couldn't locate the langur within the area of their jurisdiction. By then, I was sure that the area was under my division. I called Manoj ji, SDO Dhamtari and sent him GPS coordinates of the spot. He arranged for the contact number of RA Kurud, Madhukar ji. I stayed on site until Madhukar ji arrived and asked him to share photos and videos once the rescue was done. This was my first rescue attempt and yes I have chosen the word 'attempt' carefully as will be evident in upcoming paragraphs.

On 21st March, one day workshop was arranged on the occasion of International Day of Forests at Raipur. While travelling by the spot of rescue, I casually asked my driver about that langur. He told me that they couldn't save him, that langur had died within few days of the rescue. So, this makes it "Two" out of "Three" mentioned in the title.

I was told that there is a tradition of hunting to celebrate Holi. On the night before Holi, which coincided with World Wildlife Day, my team and I were patrolling through the forests of my Range. I, being a wildlife enthusiast, had put a status with caption of “protecting the voice of the voiceless” on this particular occasion of wildlife day. It was around 11pm and we were hoping to spot some wildlife. Suddenly, we saw a wild boar just in front of our vehicle. My driver, Deva bhaiya, honked and still that boar refused to give us way. After a minute or two, the boar reluctantly stood up and we could see something sticking to his hind legs. It was an arrowhead. Someone must have attempted to hunt him for next day's feast. He slowly disappeared into the jungles.

I asked my staff about possible scenarios. Rajni said we could try removing that arrowhead. But the others said, since we don't have any equipment with us, it can be dangerous. Wild animals react in unpredictable ways especially when they are injured and this one was none other than wild boar, the animal far stronger than its size. Also, the area was not in our range per se. It was the border with Dugli range. We failed even the police when it comes to ascertaining the jurisdiction.

We left that animal its own. The next morning, I woke up with a lot of regret. I called SDOs- Manoj ji & Navik ji, Deputy Ranger Sahu ji and Rajni. What Manoj ji said will remain forever in my memory. He said, “Madam hum log aise hi suar hai kehke jyada efforts nhi karte. But, hai to vo bhi scheduled animal. Hamara to kam hai bachana.” I think, consciously or subconsciously, we all see wild boars as a menace. That poor animal literally did everything it could do to ask for help and we left him there to die.

I asked my deputy ranger to arrange for search teams from both our range and Dugli range. With around 15-16 people, we went to search that wild boar at around 8:30 in the morning. Despite searching for 2 hours, we got no clue of that animal in those vast jungles. All this drama made me realise that clicking pictures of wildlife was one thing, but rescuing them needs going beyond the call of duty. It needs sensitisation, courage, presence of mind and above all few equipments. Our staff needs to be trained to handle such situations.

So, this wraps the “Three” part of the title. Let's now go for the “One” part.

It was a regular, relaxed morning. I was getting ready for the day with some music in the background. My mother frantically knocked my door telling me that Deva bhaiya had come and he told a deer was dead. My heart sank and I came out hurriedly. Fortunately there was some confusion and Bhaiya had come to inform me that a Ghital was trapped inside an open well.

We reached to the spot with nothing but our willpower. It was a healthy female. Just as we leaned to look at her, she jumped about 7-8 feet against the walls of the well. Her attempts to come out continued whenever someone peeked inside. She might have injured herself had this continued for longer. So, it was absolutely necessary to cordon off the area.

I discussed with my staff about possible options for rescue. We arranged for ladder and some ropes. By that time, people had started to gather. We had to tell each one individually not to go near the well. First, we tried to make a makeshift ramp with bamboos and wooden planks. But, the Ghital was not accustomed to such ramp and just kept looking at us helplessly.

Then, we arranged for a fishing net, layered it and tied its corners with ropes. We then lowered that net inside the well. The Ghital even walked onto that net. But as we tried to pull it up, she ran away. The only option that remained was to ask someone to climb down the well and restrain the animal.

Since Ghitals are prone to cardiac arrest from stress, we had to approach her carefully. Two of our fire watchers volunteered to climb down. After struggling for 5-10 minutes, finally they could get hold of her. They were instructed to cover her eyes with a cloth first to calm her and then to tie her legs. After restraining her in such a way, she was pulled out of the well. Preliminary assessment of visible injuries was done. She was in good condition except for minor bruises. We uncovered her eyes, untied her legs and she ran with the speed of a bullet. She found a nice tree with shade and sat there for a while- perhaps she was also bidding adieu to us just as we were to her.

That afternoon, I got calls from some news reporters. By the evening, the news was featured as “breaking news” on a local channel. I didn’t understand why simply performing my duty needed to be sensationalised.



On the day of International Day of Forests, I got to meet many senior officers. One of the senior Madam praised me for the rescue. Later that afternoon, she told me about a case. Some 2-3 years back, someone reported that carcasses of 10-12 Ghitals were lying near a lake.

Somebody with the intentions of hunting must have poisoned the water. With the help of sniffer dogs from Achanakmar Tiger Reserve, forest department could arrest the culprit and seized urea, knives and other evidence.

With this background, when I thought about the significance of that seemingly regular rescue, I understood that even a single animal matters. There are already many of their brethren who have sacrificed their lives for nothing but stupidity and greed of humans.

Hence the title, which shows the brutal reality of protecting those who are yet to apply for the voter ID. “Three” had died before we could finally save “One”!

When the Forest Comes Alive

I did not expect the nights to be the part I remembered most.

Posted to Gir West Division as ACF, Talala Sub-Division, I was thrilled to know that I was going to be working in the core tourism area. What I found out later was that the real education happened after the gates closed and the last safari vehicle had gone home. Gir is the only place on earth where the Asiatic lion still lives in the wild. And they really come alive after the sun sets. Only around 1000 of them remain in this stretch of dry deciduous forest and scrub on the Saurashtra coast. During the day you can appreciate that fact. At night, you feel it.



Driving through the jungle after dark with a spotlight is a fundamentally different experience from a daytime patrol. You are not looking for animals so much as reading the dark. Every pair of eyes in the beam of torchlight, every rustle in the leaf litter, every alarm call from a roosting peafowl carries information. Stars appear over Gir in a way that cities make you forget is possible. And every now and then, somewhere close in the dark, something very large moves.

THE LIONS

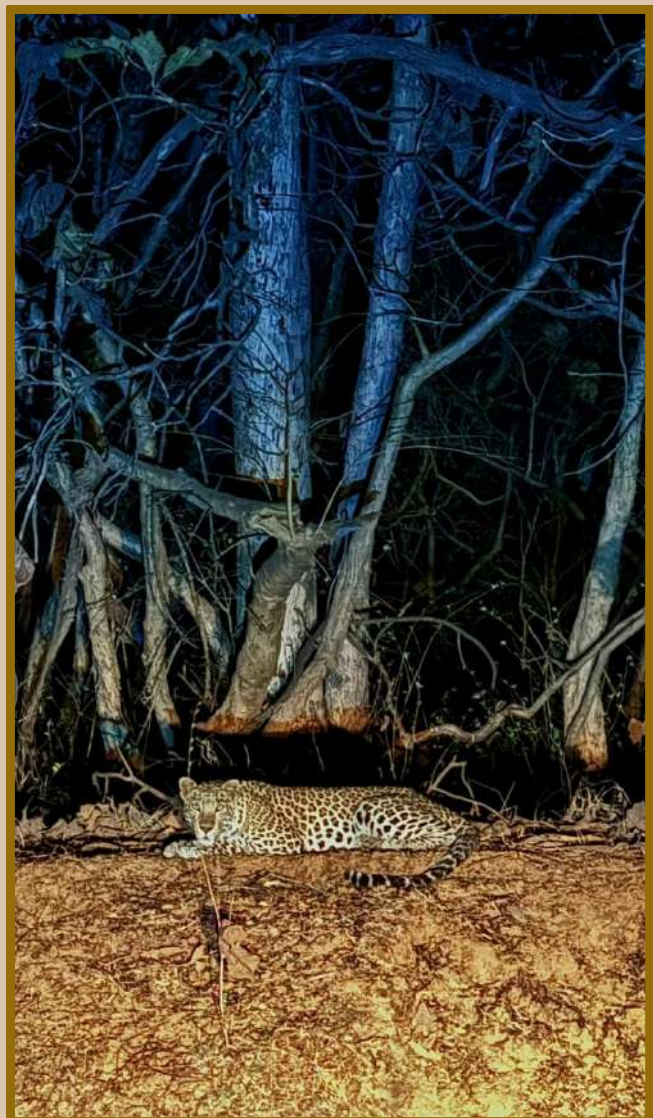
One evening in Dedakadi range I came across a lioness standing motionless at the edge of a clearing. A group of sambar were grazing in the shadows ahead of her. For thirty minutes I watched her work, placing each paw with a deliberateness calculated to avoid disturbing a single leaf, her gaze fixed on the deer the entire time. She did not make the kill that night. But watching a predator think with that quality of sustained, unhurried focus was more instructive than anything I had read in a textbook.

Most nocturnal lion encounters are defined by the lion's indifference to you. I lost count of the times our vehicle sat waiting because a pride had decided to sleep in the centre of the track and saw no reason to move. On one Poonam Avlokan night, a colleague and I had stopped on a small hillock and were talking quietly when two lions walked up to within ten metres of where we sat and simply lay down. They remained there for several minutes, relaxed, as though they had come to join the conversation.

BEYOND LIONS

Gir's leopards are most reliably encountered after dark. You do not find a leopard so much as suddenly realise one is there. On one occasion in Dedakadi range an animal was resting at the base of a large tree, resting well on its throne with an elegant nonchalance. It watched us with calm patience and departed on its own terms.

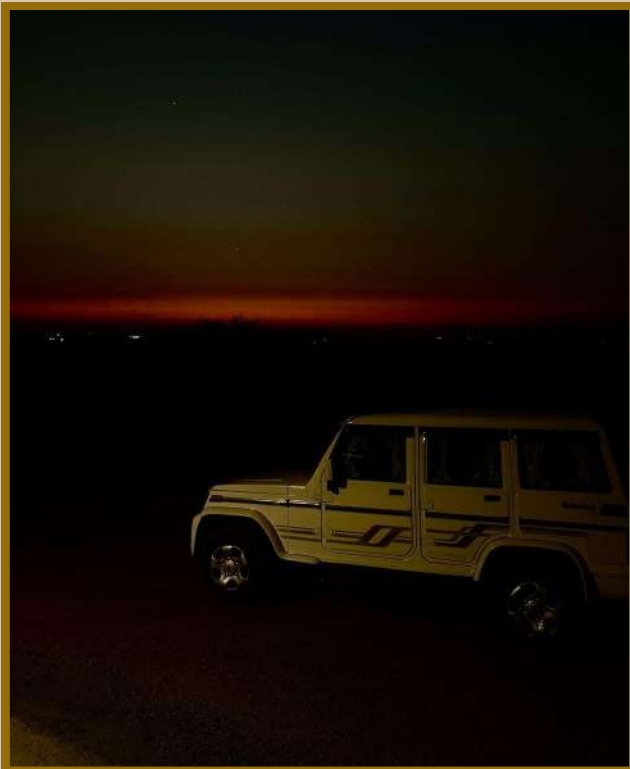
Beyond the big cats, a night patrol in Gir is a continuous encounter with a wider world. Porcupines shuffled along the track edges. Indian hares bounded off in their panicked zigzag. Jackals trotted alongside the vehicle for stretches. Owls appeared at eye level on bare branches or peered from hollow trunks. One night we found two tiny owl chicks sitting in the middle of the track, casting shadows far larger than themselves, entirely unwilling to move until they decided the moment was right.



POONAM AVLOKAN

On the night of every full moon, the entire field establishment of Gir goes out simultaneously. Beat guards, foresters, RFOs, ACFs, DCF, CF, everyone in the field from 6 PM to 7 AM, moving continuously, counting lions, monitoring the forest. The CF took hourly wireless location checks of all officers. I heard him personally reprimand an RFO who had been stationary for more than an hour. The accountability was total and it worked.

But beyond the management logic, Poonam Avlokan has the quality of a festival.



You cross other vehicles constantly in the forest at midnight. A forester from the adjacent range, a beat guard on his motorcycle, a fellow officer flashing light from a hillock. The camaraderie built in those chance encounters is something no office can replicate.

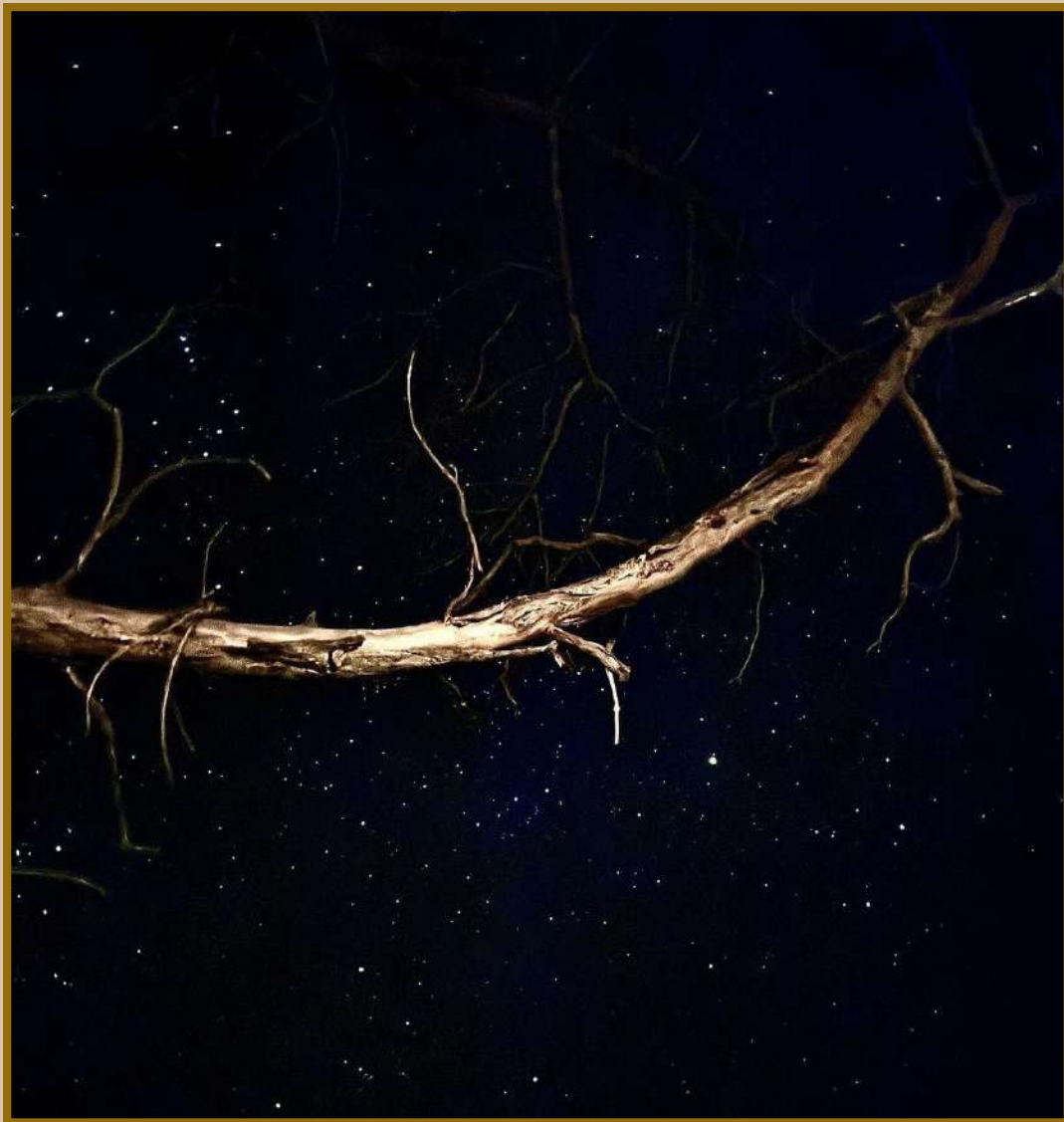
On one such patrol we drove to the coastal boundary of the division. Gir West's jurisdiction extends to the Arabian Sea, a fact easy to miss on a map but impossible to forget when you are standing at the Saurashtra coastline at two in the morning, the sea on one side, the dark coastal forest on the other, under a full moon. Lions in Gir's coastal fringe walk on the beach.

Their pugmarks have been found at the high tide line. Standing there, I understood something about this landscape that no briefing had conveyed.

WHAT THE NIGHTS TAUGHT ME

Night patrolling teaches patience. You cannot hurry a forest. The beat guards and foresters who do this every night carry a knowledge of their terrain that no outsider can fully access. My posting gave me a small taste of that and a lasting respect for the people who build it.

Most of all, Gir at night teaches you why this place is irreplaceable. When you have sat within ten metres of a lion resting under a sky full of stars, or watched a leopard materialise from the roots of a banyan as though assembled from shadow, or heard the forest settle into its 3 AM silence, you understand things at a level that goes beyond textbooks and Karmyogi sessions. You understand forest, you understand wildlife and in a beautiful unintentional way, you understand yourself.



The making of a Tiger Landscape

When there is just a single individual representing its species in a state, its administrators ought to be cautious, don't you think?

This new tiger has been identified to be a 4-year-old male. With a network of over 120 Camera traps across 3 divisions, Chhota Udepur and Devgadhi Baria Territorial Division and Vadodara Wildlife Division (Ratanmahal Sanctuary) and the hard work of more

than 200 field staff of Gujarat Forest Department, we have traced the approximate path of Tiger movement and it has been found that he traverses a geographical pattern close to 22000 ha land, across the 3 aforementioned divisions.

Little does this particular individual know that he has brought a typhoon of responsibilities for the department, especially the forest department offices in the 3 divisions. We will focus on the Chhota Udepur division, considering I had the first-hand experience here, being posted as ACF Bodeli, Chhota Udepur Division during my "On-the-job training". By the time I had joined the division, it had already been 1 year since the tiger graced the land of Gujarat. Field staff in the identified 3 forest ranges were already mobilized, patrolling teams had been formed, routes were identified and the journey began. Camera Traps, scat samples, pug marks, etc; you name it, and we were looking for it.

Tiger seen in Ratanmahal Wildlife Sanctuary in January 2025, pugmarks sighted by local forest department staff. The king of Indian jungle returns to Gujarat after a drought of over 3 decades.

Last sighted tiger in Gujarat was in Mahisagar Division in 2019, which was quite tragically found dead after a few months. As the story does and comes around, he is likely to have died out of starvation. Probably this drives the cautious approach in promoting the presence of tiger in Gujarat this time.





He hasn't been officially named yet. But I have a name in mind. Naming the only tiger of Gujarat is a duty probably much above my pay scale. This article might just be the place to launch it informally. The first Tiger of Gujarat, **Pratham** who was the first to conquer the last land of Asiatic Lions and majestically call it his home. Let's just hope this name catches on!

In the last week of my Range Attachment, a team of 3 wildlife researchers from Project Tiger team, WII arrived in Jambughoda (Sanctuary in the Vadodara Wildlife Division) to train the field staff of 10 Forest Divisions, the potential Tiger Landscape of Gujarat. This landscape is the vision of Gujarat Forest Department for accommodating the Tiger population if and when it flourishes in the state.

DCF Sir asked me to take care of all major requirements for the training, a comprehensive 3-day schedule. These 3 days took me to the crest and troughs of managing a training workshop attended by more than 80 Field Staff of the Forest Department. As the training covered Assistant Conservator of Forests as well, some of my batchmates also attended the training and it was nothing short of a mini reunion on the side.

As Pratham roams the dry deciduous jungles of Central-Western Gujarat, I wonder the impact of his existence on the future of big cats in India, will my childhood dream of seeing a tiger and a lion confront each other in wild, really come true? Or will the burden of our expectations bear down upon our beloved striped predator tragically as it did in 2019? As a quintessential middle-class Indian, I wish that our eligible bachelor finds a suitable mate and settles in the state of Gujarat, just like my parents did. Anxious, ambitious and ardent, let's proceed towards a hopeful future.

May the force be with us!!

A SEARCH FOR RED

A MEMOIR FROM THE SHIVALIKS



The Shivaliks don't really care if you're paying attention. They're just waiting for you to trip on a root or space out at the wrong time.

We were a team of four; the Avengers of the woods, though we looked a lot less cool in the heat.

There was Surrender, the rakha who could see everything; Jaswant, a forester who'd been around the block; and Vishal, the forest guard. Our job was simple: walk the woods and find where the trees had gone.

"Is this one khair?" I asked Surrender for the millionth time, pointing at a stump. I kept asking until I finally got the hang of it. Most of them were indeed khair. It wasn't the end of the world, just the job we were there to do.



Like a budget version of Sherlock Holmes, I started looking for "red cuttings"; those bright wood chips that act like breadcrumbs leading you to where a tree used to stand. "It's been marked, sir," Surrender said, pointing at the trees still standing. "They'll be back for these later."

The forest has a funny way of reminding you that you aren't the only one walking around. Since it was the dry season, the teak leaves had dropped everywhere, making a thick, crunchy carpet that hid the ground. "Sir, watchout," Jaswant whispered.

Right there, blending perfectly with the brown leaves, was a cobra. It was shy, just watching us with those still eyes. We all froze, having a quiet staring contest, until the snake decided we were boring and zipped away, disappearing up a hill faster than I could blink.

The climbing got pretty intense. At one point, I almost slid 20 meters down into a valley while trying to get up a steep slope. I managed to grab onto something just in time, but it definitely got my heart racing. We spent the rest of the afternoon walking through the khalas—deep, rocky gullies that look like big cracks in the earth.

To keep things light, Jaswant told us stories. He told us about a guy named Mr. Dangi who wasn't a big fan of hard work.

During a forest fire, Dangi gave a big "go team" speech to get everyone else moving, then wandered off to a quiet spot, rolled out a blanket, and took a nap.

He only woke up because the fire was literally knocking on his door. A guard had to run in and save him, and people still laugh about that nap today.

Even with the missing trees and the old, broken stone dams, the forest was still amazing to look at. From far away, the Indian coral trees were blooming with such bright red flowers that you'd swear they were Bombax trees.

Every day, when the sun got too hot, we'd find a nice, shady spot in a khala to sit down. We'd sip our tea and coffee, feeling the cool air, and just talk. In the Shivaliks, some trees might go missing, but the beauty and the stories aren't going anywhere.



THE ART OF LEARNING MALAYALAM

The Language I Never Had to Learn

I hadn't closely seen anyone learning Malayalam, until Shivani - a batchmate and friend from Rajasthan was allotted the Kerala Cadre. Way before the classes began for Malayalam, she started to learn Malayalam with the help of 5 of her friends who were also her batchmates. It was fun for us to see a non-Malayali learn Malayalam. We slowly realized that even we had no idea on how to explain a language we had spoken since before we could remember.

First hurdle for learning Malayalam is the pronunciation of different letters which is very unique to the language. ഴ(zha), ള(la), റ(ra) - these are so difficult that it needs to be pronounced 1000-2000 times to master it. You have to talk to a Malayali to get to know the real pronunciation of these letters. But the fun part is that these letters appear in almost every couple of sentences we speak.

"One day, Shivani wanted to ask our friend Aquib 'What was wrong?' a simple question - Enthu Patti? (എന്തുപറ്റി). But instead of the soft 't,' she used the hard 'tt.' To our horror and amusement, she ended up asking him, 'What dog?' (Enthu Patti?)(എന്തു പട്ടി). It's these tiny shifts in tongue placement that make Malayalam a minefield for the

uninitiated."

Being said that understanding the differences isn't simple here. There are words like കൊല്ലം (Kollam) which is used for mentioning a place name and also the word used for "year". While വേണ്ട (Venda - with a long e) is used for saying "no" വെണ്ട (Venda with a shorter e) is used for saying ladies' finger. Along with these she was getting troubled with ഇല്ല (illa) and അല്ല (alla). Both being used to negate a sentence, but each belongs to a different grammatical world. She spent weeks getting these things right.

Although there are similar letters in all Indian languages, the way of pronunciation and few new invented letters in each language differs. This makes learning a new language an art. To really learn a language the only shortcut is to talk. Once we land in the cadre and start talking, it becomes much simpler. There was an old lady whom she called "amma" (ma), a way of showing love. She used to sweetly ask each question like "molu Kazhicho?" ("Beti appne khana khaya kya?") The way they were conversing was a conversation developed from love and affection. This helped her through the journey of learning Malayalam.

The classroom that couldn't explain itself

In IGNFA, our formal language teacher was the one struggling to teach Malayalam to Shivani. Often, she used to confuse the teacher by questioning different things. Why is this suffix used here and not there? What is the rule? When does the exception apply? She used to ask how this was taught in school for which Ma'am used to reply: We were not taught.... We just learned it... from home. There is an entire philosophy buried in that answer. Languages that are absorbed rather than studied carry rules that their own speakers cannot articulate. But finally, this helped the entire class to think about different science behind the evolution of the language.

The single 'na' that contains multitudes

One thing she told me has stayed with me. Malayalam has a sound - roughly transliterated as "na" - that is actually four different letters: ന, ണ, ന്, ന്ന. Four. Each pronounced from a subtly different position in the mouth, each carrying its own spelling, each capable of changing a word's meaning entirely. And none of the differences, she said, could truly be captured in writing. You simply had to hear them, over and over, until your tongue found its way.

Hindi interference, and the doctor who kills

Learning a language while you're fluent in another is its own particular comedy. The funniest thing would happen when she confused

Malayalam words with Hindi ones. One day Ma'am introduced a new word - "doctormaar" (ഡോക്ടർമാർ), she suddenly grew doubtful about why they were learning such a word. On discussing it, we understood she was interpreting it through its Hindi meaning - "Doctor - maar" (Kill Doctor). The original Malayalam meaning just conveys "more than one doctor".

The -yude and the -nte, and the month of confusion

There is no hard and fast rule while learning a language. The funniest part I saw during the learning was addition of suffixes -yude and -nte with the nouns. To say sentences containing possessions (e.g. Ramesh ka Pencil) we have to add -yude or -nte (Rameshinte Pencil). The most confusing part is that in most cases we use -yude with feminine gender words and -nte with male gender words. But sometimes when it comes to nouns like Raja we use Raja-yude. The confusion will continue for at least a month before getting some clarification on such things. Even I took another few days to realize that it's actually about how the words end (vowels and consonants) in order to add the suffixes.

Fourteen districts, fourteen Malayalams

Kerala has fourteen districts. It has, roughly speaking, fourteen different ways to speak the language. Dialects are not a curiosity here - they are a daily reality. Even the words in different parts of the state differ in relatable ways. For e.g. "ni" (meaning

you) is commonly used as "eey", "ijj", "inj" and other forms that exist nowhere in any textbook. One of the hardest is being in Malappuram. They speak very fast and cut short most of the words. This is where she was posted to. But I would appreciate her struggle to learn things along with language even in such situations.

She also, at some point, told her teacher she was running late to class because she had a pig. Shivani was late in a class and the Malayalam teacher was asking why she was late. She replied in Malayalam that she was having fever. (പനി ആണ് - "Pani aanu"). Instead she said പന്നി - Panni (pig). Which made the teacher confused about what a pig had to do with this. Forget the grammar - these words themselves will make anyone feel lost at sea.



What the journey taught

She initially learned writing each letter which made it easy to pick up the pace, even before the formal classes started. Then she started reading the words and small sentences. Later, words and their meanings became her target, which she slowly achieved. There were confusing moments in which she asked friends and her teacher for help. She took small steps and made each moment an opportunity. Learning the language is the biggest strength when moving to another cadre. To get included in the culture, with the people around etc. the language becomes the first step. Though it's difficult, a long journey with the language - through speaking, writing, and reading - helps a lot. I am just adding a few books which she used for learning, which are apparently for kids but can help in easy learning. Happy learning.



RING OF FIRE

It began with a plume of smoke rising quietly above a hill. In the forests of Betul, that is often all it takes; a single spark, and an entire hillside can turn into a line of fire.

These forests are of the tropical dry deciduous type, dominated by teak, mahua and tendu. In summer, the forest floor is layered with dry leaves, and the vegetation becomes highly combustible. This is why NDMA has labelled forest fires in the region as a “disaster.”

But fire has never been alien to me. Even in Guna, I had tackled patches of forest fire successfully. So I was fairly confident that I could handle this one too. The one I was about to encounter.

On April 1, 2026, I was in Shahpur range, on my way to assess the marking done for felling in a coupe, which was also part of my project. The concerned Forester and Forest Guard accompanied me in my vehicle, along with the driver. En route, I was gathering general information about the range when I noticed clouds of smoke rising from a hill.

The fire had started about an hour ago and was spreading rapidly. Supporting staff had been called, but would take another half hour to arrive. Given the situation, I took the only practical option and turned the vehicle towards the site.

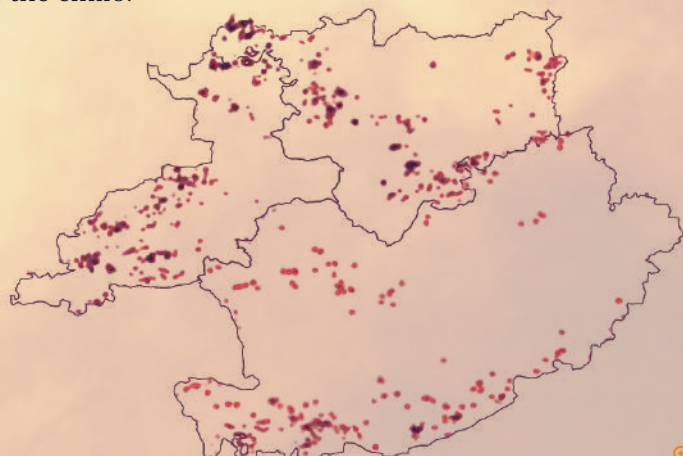
The pucca road ended soon, and the kutchra track did not last much longer. We were now driving through cleared fields. Finally, we reached the foot of the hill, where we got down and gathered more people, including fire watchers and suraksha shramiks, many of whom were over 50 years of age. Grey hair, bulging bellies, and worn-out clothes. For a moment, I wondered if they would be able to make the climb.



The trek was not easy. Steep slopes, loose soil, and temperatures above 40°C, with the sun glaring down at us. But then, how can a situation be demanding if it is not challenging enough?

We assessed our resources: three leaf blowers, partially consumed water bottles, and the ever-reliable ‘jhapas’ made of green branches. By now, the fire had crossed one hill and spread to adjacent ones. So we split into three teams and began the climb.

In the beginning, the slope was gentler and our pace was good. But that lasted only a few minutes. Soon came the treacherous stretch, where the slope steepened and the soil crumbled beneath our feet. Every step had to be placed carefully. We climbed by holding onto trees, shrubs, rocks, or even each other, whichever was within reach.



Fire Hotspots, Betul District, 2025



We assessed our resources: three leaf blowers, partially consumed water bottles, and the ever-reliable 'jhapas' made of green branches. By now, the fire had crossed one hill and spread to adjacent ones. So we split into three teams and began the climb.

At that moment, I realised the extent of effort each forest personnel puts in, day in and day out. No one flinched. Across ages and physical conditions, everyone moved forward with a single resolve, to douse the fire.

But the fire was not flinching either.



Use of leaf blower to douse fire

It had already started moving down towards us. So we began beating the flames with our jhapas, while fire watchers created temporary fire lines by clearing fallen leaves and dry twigs. We pushed upwards, containing the fire along the boundaries while trying to control it within.

It was hot as hell. The ground and the air felt equally heated. I could feel the heat through my shoes, and ash settling over my body.

The forest had turned reddish yellow and greyish blue, with a few patches of green still resisting the flames. It looked like a horrific painting, something that could evoke your worst nightmares.

After three hours of continuous effort and covering all loose ends, all our teams regrouped. This time, it was a heartening moment, but also a sombre one. We had only half won the battle. A significant amount of natural wealth, built over millions of years, had been lost in a matter of hours. The work done by everyone was commendable, but it was not enough.

I could not help but think about the ease and casualness with which we exploit nature.

The Forest Guard spoke about his regular meetings with villagers, where he repeatedly tells them not to do this. Yet they still do it. Why?



Ground clearing under Mahua tree, with fire

Is it because we have failed to communicate effectively?

Is it because the message does not carry enough weight?

Or is it because of a deeper and growing disconnect between people and nature?

While we continue strengthening our efforts for fire prevention and control, it is equally important to ensure that people understand the consequences of such actions. In Betul, steps are being taken through community inclusion in fire safety plans, organising sports meets and nukkad nataks, and identifying and engaging mahua collectors.

I also worked on a project involving compartment and beat level analysis for identifying fire hotspots.

But this is only the beginning.

What this incident made clear is that forest fires are not only a question of management, but of behaviour.



Use of mahua net, to prevent fire incidence



Consultation and awareness campaign with villagers

We can deploy more staff, create better fire lines, and improve response systems. But as long as small acts of convenience continue to outweigh collective responsibility, the fires will keep returning. The challenge, therefore, is not just to control fire, but to change how it begins.

This requires more than awareness. It requires trust, continuous engagement, and a sense of shared ownership of forests. When people begin to see the forest not as a resource to be used, but as something to be protected, the nature of this problem will begin to change.

Until then, every summer will bring the same test.

And each time, we may reach the fire in time. But the real question is, will we ever reach the cause in time?



THE FIRST TIGER

Beyond the Adrenaline



S H A S H A N K
B H A R D W A J

It was a cold January morning in the dense forests of the Sontalai Beat. Fog drifted lazily over narrow jungle streams, setting a quiet, almost mystical stage for a young IFS probationer. This was my first field training, my first jungle assignment, and as I was about to discover, my first real lesson of the wild.

The Real University of Jungle

The previous evening at the Forest Rest House felt a world away. I had sat at a dinner table surrounded by senior officials, the CF sirs and mam and DFO sir; who discussed the forests with the strategic intensity of battlefield commanders. Amidst the wealth of experience shared that night, one particular piece of advice embedded itself in my mind: *"Beat guard aur chowkidaar se seekhna... Jungle ki asli university wahi hain"* (Learn from the beat guard and chowkidars... they are the real university of the jungle). Taking those words to heart, I made a silent promise to myself for the following day. I would only listen. I would only learn.

At 6:00 AM on January 21st, the All India Tiger Census operation officially began. With the MSTRIPES app loaded, GPS ready, and the forest staff mobilized, I found myself riding pillion on a beat guard's old motorcycle. Two chowkidars had already gone ahead. As we rode into the forest before sunrise, the jungle was wrapped in a silence that felt heavy, almost expectant.

A Frozen Moment in the Mist

Just 200m before reaching our destination, the beat guard suddenly slowed the bike. Following his gaze toward a small water stream, my heartbeat stopped.

There it was.

A tiger.



Not in a zoo, not in a documentary, and not frozen in a photograph. A real, wild tiger, sleeping quietly beside the pool. It was barely seconds away from reaching us if it chose to. For a moment, my brain entirely froze. *"Yeh sach mein tiger hai?"* I thought. A wild rush of excitement shot through my veins, but the fear hit even harder.

Sensing my apprehension, the beat guard leaned back and calmly whispered, *"Sir, dararna mat... khana kha ke so raha hai"* (Sir, don't fear... it's sleeping after eating). Inside my head, I could only marvel at the sheer, unfazed confidence of a man who had spent ten years walking these woods.

We carefully bypassed the sleeping predator and reached the census point where the chowkidars were waiting. There, without a classroom or a projector, the real training began.

The beat guard opened the MSTRIPES app and began sharing his years of wisdom as we walked deeper into the forest to estimate tiger populations. *"Sir, generally group mein tiger attack nahi karta..."* he advised, instructing me to keep talking as we walked. Slowly, my paralyzing fear subsided. The image of the sleeping tiger faded to the back of my mind, replaced by the thrill of observing pugmarks, sloth bear scat, and the subtle signs of animal movement. For the first time, I genuinely felt like a forest officer

The Weight of the Badge

By 9:00 AM, our work was complete. As we began our return journey, the beat guard suggested, *"Sir, ek baar tiger ki movement aur dekh lete hain"*

We crept back toward the stream. The tiger was still there. It hadn't moved an inch; it was in the exact same position.

The beat guard's calm demeanor vanished, replaced by a sudden, creeping seriousness. He had been whispering, but now he spoke in a normal volume. No response. He called out loudly. Still nothing. He even threw stones into the nearby stream. Absolute silence.

The jungle suddenly felt suffocatingly heavy. For the first time all morning, I saw genuine worry etched on the face of a veteran wildlife guard. And then came the twist worthy of a film script. He turned to me, his eyes searching mine, and asked, *"Sir... ab kya kiya jaye?"*

My internal monologue panicked. Why are you asking me?! I just started my training yesterday! Up until that exact second, I had been the student, safely hiding behind his expertise. Suddenly, I was expected to respond like an officer.

It was a jarring realization that one day, I would actually be the senior in charge of these men. Silence was no longer an option. From somewhere deep within, an authoritative answer surfaced: *"Seniors ko inform karo"*.

The Final Lesson

Messages flew across the radio network to the Deputy

Ranger, the Range Officer, and higher authorities. By 11:00 AM, the senior officers arrived on the scene. It only took one look from their experienced eyes to confirm our worst fears. Something was terribly wrong. Soon after, the dog squad, veterinarians, and additional forest staff arrived.

The confirmation was given: the tiger was dead.

As the area was secured, I followed the seniors down from the bridge, walking toward the body. With every step, the tiger seemed to grow larger and larger.



Standing that close to it for the first time in my life, I was awestruck. Even in death, its presence was overwhelmingly powerful. Its massive paws, its broad face, its sheer size—everything about it screamed "King." Strangely, a complex mix of excitement, wonder, adventure, and fear washed over me all at once.

Then came the postmortem. Watching the veterinarians examine the magnificent creature, a single sentence from one of the vets changed the entire atmosphere for me: "Bahut healthy tiger tha... abhi jeena tha isko..." (It was a very healthy tiger... it still had life ahead).

In an instant, the sense of adventure evaporated. The proud "officer" inside me fell silent, leaving behind only a profound sense of compassion. Just hours prior, I had been thrilled simply to see a tiger. Now, I was standing vigil over its lifeless body.

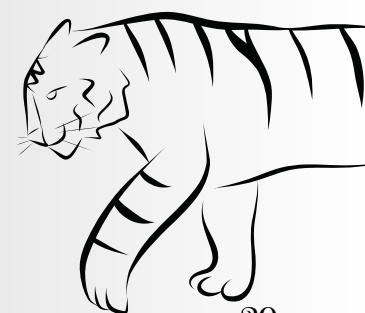
The jungle had just delivered its most crucial lesson: wildlife management is not just about the thrill of the wild.

It is about deep responsibility, raw emotion, and the delicate balance of life and death.

By evening, after all the Standard Operating Procedures were completed, I returned to the forest rest house. I realized I had barely eaten since morning, yet I felt no hunger. Perhaps it was the shock of witnessing my first wildlife postmortem. Or perhaps it was because those words; "Bahut healthy tiger tha...;" kept echoing in the quiet of my room.

That night, as the cold January air settled over the Sontalai Beat, I understood something profound. In just one single day, the jungle had forced me to run the entire gamut of human emotion. Excitement. Fear. Curiosity. Adventure. Authority. Compassion. Sadness. And all of it was because of one animal.

My first tiger.





M e g h a l a y a

Towards Purpose

Vennam Anusha

The first memory I distinctly remember from my OJT is the feeling of nervousness and uncertainty. Sitting before my mentor, I was handed a letter (As I was directly in front of him)—our posting proposal. My hands were shivering with fear. I refused to look at it. After a good 5 seconds pause, I heard Gaugin say, “You’re going to Nongpoh.” First time, I heard of this town called Nongpoh.



I as a protocol officer, welcoming the chief guest to the Green Livelihoods Conference on behalf of the Megh forest dept.

Meanwhile, the time to finally leave for Range posting in Nongpoh had arrived. In a heartwarming conversation with HOFF Sir, before leaving for Nongpoh, he emphasized upon the importance of creating benefits to the community, working with tact, biding for the time, consistent hard work and more importantly never allowing oneself to become a scapegoat in the system. Eternally thankful to his kindness. His words became powerful guiding principles to me, whenever I was confronted with uncomfortable realities of governance on the field.

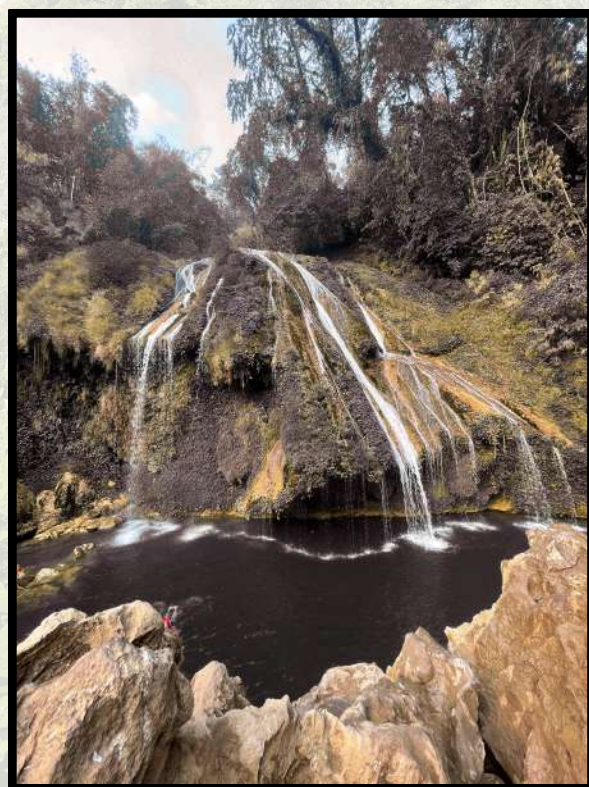


Being welcomed in the Meghalaya Forest Department

After taking charge as Range officer, the art I practiced almost daily or strove to practice was achieving the delicate balance between softness and toughness. Leadership, I realized, is not about authority alone. It is also about tone, empathy, and timing. Even the decibel level of one's voice matters. Speaking too harshly alienates, while being too lenient dilutes effectiveness. Striking that balance, especially while interacting with ranger and other frontline staff, became one of my everyday goals. Yet beneath the surface, there were days when I had to motivate my ranger and other staff when I myself was under immense uncertainty; The role demands absolute consistency, despite your internal struggles.

One of the most profound realizations during my OJT was understanding the social fabric of Meghalaya. For the first time, I felt how advantageous it was to be a woman in this role especially in my interactions with villagers. In a society where much of the rural economy and daily life is driven by women, there was an immediate, natural connection. I could stop by anywhere and talk to a woman working on the field without hesitation. I took advantage of this fully to hone my Khasi language skills.

And then there were the smiles; the warm, wide smiles on the faces of my staff whenever I spoke even a few words in Khasi. When you try to take a step, they take ten steps for you.





OPERATION KHAIR

VYANKATESH SHEWALE



SV

inter of Punjab carries a deceptive calm. Forests stand still, the air is crisp, and everything appears in order until, sometimes, it isn't. On January 4th, that calm was broken by a phone call received by Shri. Kanwar Deep Singh (IFS 2014), Divisional Forest Officer of Rupnagar. The information was precise yet unsettling. Illegal felling of khair trees had taken place under the guise of authorized operations by the Forest Development Corporation of Punjab. What initially appeared to be a routine discrepancy soon hinted at something far more serious.

The first assessment suggested that around 150 trees had been felled illegally. It was alarming, but not unprecedented. However, DFO Kanwar Deep Singh understood that forests rarely reveal the full extent of damage at first glance. Acting swiftly, he constituted a team comprising forest guards, block officers, and range officers from adjoining areas to conduct a meticulous ground verification. What followed was less an inspection and more a forensic reading of the forest. Each stump was examined, each marking cross-verified, each gap accounted for. As the days progressed, the numbers kept rising, and with them, the gravity of the crime. When the final estimate emerged, it stood at nearly 450 illegally felled trees. This was no longer a lapse, it was a well-orchestrated operation.

As the investigation deepened, the plot thickened. The very forest guard responsible for overseeing the area disappeared, along with the contractor engaged in the felling work. It was a betrayal that cut deeper than the trees themselves. DFO Kanwar Deep Singh responded without delay, placing the forest guard under suspension and tightening the administrative grip. But more importantly, he shifted focus from discovery to pursuit.

A specialized team of seven officers was formed, and I was entrusted with the responsibility of leading the mission to track down the offenders and recover the stolen timber.

The search began across various depots in the Rupnagar region. Day after day, we combed through stockyards, checked records, and followed faint leads that often led nowhere. Then, in one depot owned by the same contractor, we stumbled upon what seemed like insignificant debris, torn pieces of paper scattered on the floor. It is often said that investigations turn on the smallest of details, and this proved true. When we carefully pieced together those fragments, they revealed a crucial lead: two truckloads of khair logs had been transported to a Katha factory in the Chintapurni area of Himachal Pradesh. The operation had quietly crossed state borders.

Before making a move, DFO Kanwar Deep Singh chose verification over haste. Two forest guards were sent undercover, posing as traders dealing in khair wood. Their task was to confirm whether the suspected timber had indeed reached the factory. They returned with the confirmation we needed. The logs bore enumeration markings linking them unmistakably to the forests of Rupnagar. The evidence was now concrete, and the response had to be decisive.

Legal action was initiated simultaneously. Offence reports were filed, relevant sections of the Indian Forest Act were invoked, and an FIR was registered for theft and damage to government property. With the groundwork in place, we prepared for the next phase. On January 31st, a team of 25 forest personnel, supported by contractual labour and accompanied by three police constables, set out for Chintapurni. Trucks moved with us, not as transport, but as a statement of intent. We were not going merely to investigate, we were going to bring the forest back.

The moment we entered the factory premises, tension was palpable. The manager attempted to flee but was quickly apprehended by the police personnel. Inside, stacks of khair wood stood as silent testimony to the crime. We demanded records, documents proving the legal origin of the timber but none were produced. Under sustained questioning, and confronted with the inevitability of evidence, the manager conceded. On video, he admitted that the wood had come from Rupnagar. At that moment, the operation reached its turning point.

A critical decision stood before us, whether to take the manager into custody. While the situation warranted it, the broader implications had to be considered. Detaining him could escalate into an interstate legal complication, potentially delaying the recovery process. We chose restraint over reaction. The priority remained clear: secure the timber and return without escalation.

What followed was a coordinated effort of precision and purpose. Forest guards and labourers worked methodically, loading each log onto our trucks. Every piece of timber was accounted for, documented, and secured. As the convoy moved back towards Punjab, it carried more than just wood. It carried proof of vigilance, the weight of accountability, and the quiet assertion that forests are not as defenseless as they may seem.

The legal process unfolded in due course. Though the accused later secured bail, administrative action remained firm. DFO Kanwar Deep Singh submitted his final report recommending the dismissal of the forest guard under Rule 8 of the Punjab Civil Services Rules, reinforcing that dereliction of duty within the system would not go unanswered.

Looking back, the entire episode felt like a carefully unfolding thriller, one where the stakes were real, the decisions immediate, and the consequences lasting. Yet beyond the narrative of pursuit and recovery, the operation underscored enduring lessons. A strong informer network can illuminate what is otherwise invisible. Leadership, when decisive and grounded, can steer complex situations with clarity. And in the field, the courage to take timely decisions often defines the thin line between failure and success.

Operation Khair was not just about recovering stolen timber. It was about reaffirming a simple but powerful truth that the guardians of the forest are always watching, and when required, they will act swiftly, intelligently, and without hesitation.



EXPLOSIVE TRAIL



Imagine having 27 fire alerts in your Range on a single Day. How would you respond? In a hilly area with high amount of dry bamboo, eupatorium and lantana, controlling fire is very difficult with limited staff. So I thought to do my best on the same day and check on the remaining spots the next day to stop any fire revival. The next morning we went to a fire hotspot with my staff. Inside the reserve forest we spotted 3 people smoking so we asked them to show their belongings. During this we found that one of the accused had considerable countrymade explosives in his possession.

Imagine coming for forest fire patrol and catching country made explosives. Then on spot confessional statements were taken, H form was filled by Guard regarding detection of crime and gps tagged photos were clicked. The accused were then taken by me in my vehicle to the range office in humane manner and hospital report was sought to show that no harm was done to them when they were in our custody. Proper food was given and their family was informed about their situation. Meanwhile documentation was created like their personal details, offence report, Map of crime scene, proof of area in reserve forest, their Arrest memo, arrest warrant, remand report and remand warrant. After all the documental formalities while in consultation with the JM we remanded the accused to District Jail. After this day we soon got Bail petitions from accused. I processed it accordingly without any delay on my side. We also created a bomb storage request and bomb disposal request to the JM. Finally after the whole investigation, Chargesheet form was filled. During this whole procedure, I realised that documentation in Tamilnadu was done purely in Tamil so you must trust your staff and Google Lens. You will also face certain pressure as this was happening during the election period. But you must endure and go on with the mandate given to you as an Indian Forest Service officer.

Kehta bhi Deewana, Sunta bhi Deewana

The Deewanas of Uncertainty

Working in government is such fun, provided you do not take everything too much to heart. The more detached you become, the better the results often seem to be. Nobody is entirely clear about what needs to be done, yet everything somehow gets done in a perfectly imperfect way. Perhaps that is because the system runs on the collective wisdom of Deewanas. Who are Deewans? A Deewana, in a government service, is someone who keeps working even when nobody is sure what exactly needs to be done. He not only does his own task but has to confidently guide others in doing uncertain task as well.,

When I landed as a New Deewana in Pegadapally Range of Bhupalpally District of Telangana, like all Range officers, I was entrusted with the task of doing ground verification of Forest Rights during various phases and preparing KML files of all such areas. The challenge was that I was not entirely sure how it had to be done. To be fair, many others were not sure either. Instructions came from above, suggestions came from all directions, and interpretations multiplied at every level. Yet the deewanas of the system got to work. Someone knew a little about creating Kmls, someone knew a little about Excel, and someone knew whom to call and ask for help.. Piece by piece, the puzzle came together. The survey was completed, the KML files were prepared, and the reports were submitted. That is the beauty of the system: no single deewana has all the answers, but collectively the deewanas somehow find a way.

The Great chase for Performas

If there is one thing more abundant than trees in the forest, it is performas. Many mornings I would plan field visits, only to receive a WhatsApp message saying, "Urgent information required. Please send immediately." Instantly, the deewanas would mobilise. Calls would be made, records would be searched, data would be compiled, and information would be dispatched. And all of a sudden file becomes more important than the field and data becomes more crucial than the ground reality. Just when everyone was ready to take a sigh of relief, another message would arrive seeking even more urgent information.

One set of deewanas would ask for information, another set would provide it, and countless performas would be created in between. This cycle never comes to halt.

The Sacred Trinity: Chai, Samosa and Dry Fruits

Amidst all this, one institution remains unwavering: chai, samosa, and occasionally dry fruits. Whether in the office, the field, a guest house,





Whether in the office, the field, a guest house, or a watch tower, refreshments somehow find their way to the deewanas. Meetings may begin late, instructions may remain unclear, but tea arrives with remarkable reliability. Perhaps it is chai that keeps the deewanas sane and samosas that keep the system running.

The Deewanas Keep the System Moving

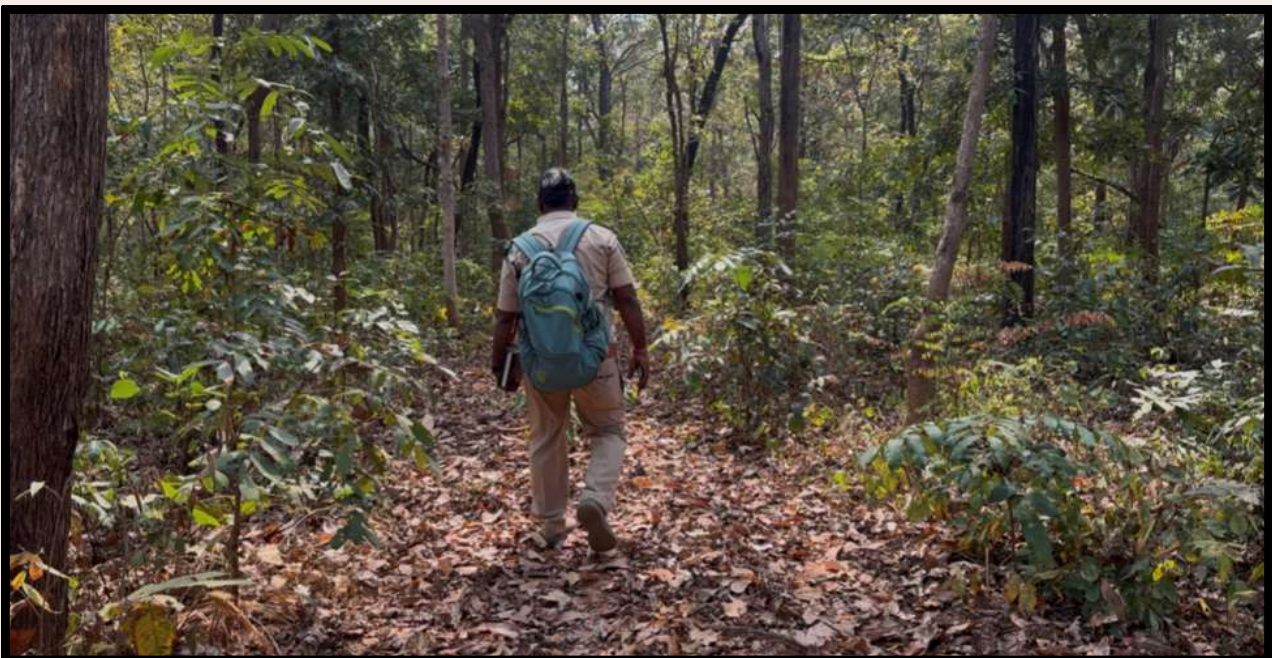
Over time, one realises that government service is not about eliminating

uncertainty but about functioning despite it. Complete information is rare, practical difficulties are common, and clarity is often a luxury. Yet forests are protected, surveys are completed, reports are submitted, and work gets done. The deewanas keep moving, and so does the system.

In the end...

Government service often feels like a grand conversation between deewanas. One deewana says something, another deewana hears something slightly different, a third deewana interprets it in his own way, and somehow the task gets completed. Nobody is completely sure how everything works, but somehow everything works.

Keha bhi deewana, sunta bhi deewana...!!





Leafy Days

ANAND JUSTIN

When I announced Tripura as my cadre to near and dear, most often I was asked, where is it? For many, the state was an afterthought, even in the Northeast. And when Ann and myself landed in Agartala we have resolved to find how Tripura is actually. To our surprise we found a state boundless in beauty, endless in green shades and a society truly diverse. We travelled across the state and stayed three months in the beautiful Teliamura. Tripura seems a mini India to me.

Princely state, colonialism, Partition, war, boundaries, insurgency- everything big in Indian history had a sizeable influence in this small state. A multi racial, multi ethnic, multi lingual, rainbow state, Tripura may not be easy to understand but its culture is as vibrant as the colorful threads of the Risha shawls. The state of Tripura stands at the intersection of nature and culture.

I found the forests of Tripura as a riddle. The land undulates from Tilas to Lungas like a never ending wave.'

'Cherras' the seasonal streams can jut out from anywhere. Green bamboo poles arch its back on hill slopes like a crayon sketch. The forests are surrounded by people and people surrounded by forests. Khowai river swells at Chakmaghat, meanders around Teliamura and beyond. In a state where aspirations are sky high, Forest Department has long transformed from the Protection-centric to Provider-centric role. Foresters are the tip of the spear of many livelihood initiatives on ground.

When we started roaming around, flowers of Mandar and Rangi has already lit up the valleys. In the fresh cut faces of tilas, Chestnut-headed Bee Eaters made housing holes and made thousand stylish landings. During night patrols the dark forest twinkled by a blanket of 'junaki' the fireflies.



Meanwhile, we were fed with the delicious Awang Bangui- the scented rice cakes covered in lairu leaf cones. Everywhere i tried to taste the liquor cha- the dense black tea with a tinge of lemon leaves. But when i was first asked that question in office- What will you have, liquor?- I was shocked!



At dusk comes the last of Tripura's elephants. Giant, silent and hungry, they will pass through virtually any route or anywhere with no route at all. Moti the tusker, is the stuff of a living legend. People have died. houses has been broken, Elephants have declined.

At close distance, we saw the survival struggle of both elephants and peoples. We saw elephants skidding down the hills, the chewed Papaya stems and unripe jackfruits marked for a near certain comeback. If the elephants walk for five minutes, they have to encounter a kutchha home. Therefore life and livelihoods of many are in perennial fear. In this mosaic landscape shaped by culture, agriculture, migration and politics, elephants and humans are living in a highly contested land. The hard working field foresters and volunteers has the tough task of protecting booth sides.

Tripura gradually changed the tone and tenor of our life. Our late evenings became quite and was blessed often with rides into the most beautiful countrysides. More than once we watched the pink sun setting over the pygmy hills of Brahmocheria. It was a delight when Ann photographed the rare 'Chashma Banor', the Spectacled Monkey on a lush canopy. Our extra cool driver Dabindra blocked the national highway with bare hands for us to photo capture a Hornbill on roadside green.



Malayalis often joke that their kind are so enterprising that one can be found even in Moon. And, in Tripura, we found a Keralite, married from Tripura and settled here for years. Justin Jospeh sir, a stalwart officer of Tripura Police Service, has literally became the son of Tripura. When we visited his residence the happy host Olivia Ma'am, also a ranking officer of State Police surprised us by serving as Parippu Vada. Justin sir christened it as "Parippuvada by Debbarma"!.



As usual, trees attracted me. Naked branches of Chamal, looked like hundred raised hands praying to God. The bright green foliage and furrowed bark of Sal kept reminding me of Dehradun. Every week i travelled to the hilly Bileham village to see the buds, flowers and fruits of the Maandai tree. Gradually i started identifying Moroi, Koroi and Boro, many of those trees needing high priority of attention.

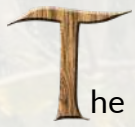
We became more humble, peaceful and got our mind full of green and gratitude, while departing from Agartala. I already knew that small is beautiful. Today i understand that a small state can teach big lessons. We both are looking forward to the leafy days of Tripura.

PC : Ann Maria





KHAT...KHAT...KHAT...!!



he humid air of the Gorakhpur division has a way of clinging to you, a heavy reminder of the vast, living breathing entity that is the Terai landscape. It was a day that began with the deceptive lull of routine. As a forest officer, "routine" is a word we use lightly; the jungle never truly sleeps, and it certainly never follows a schedule. I was out on a random patrol within the Campierganj range, the kind that is intended to keep the pulse of the beat

and ensure that the green corridors remained inviolate.

Accompanied by a single staff member, we moved through the undergrowth. The sun was high, dappling the forest floor with shifting patterns of light and shadow.

We weren't hunting for trouble-at least, not actively-but in this line of work, your senses are always tuned to a different frequency. We were walking in silence, the rhythmic crunch of dry leaves under our boots the only soundtrack to our mid-day stroll, when the atmosphere suddenly shifted.

My colleague stopped dead. He didn't say a word, but his posture stiffened, his hand rising slowly to point toward a dense cluster of Sal trees a few hundred yards ahead.

I held my breath. And then I heard it. **Khat.Khat.Khat.**

The sound was rhythmic, metallic and unmistakable. It was the sharp, biting ring of steel meeting wood. In the stillness of the afternoon, it sounded like a heartbeat, only this was a heartbeat that signaled the slow death of the forest.

A flash of white-hot fury surged through me.



It wasn't just the act itself; it was the sheer, unadulterated audacity of it. To hear the echoes of illegal felling in broad daylight, under the very canopy we were sworn to protect, felt like a personal affront. It was a brazen challenge to our authority and the laws of the land. I signaled for silence, and we began to creep forward, our movements fueled by a mix of adrenaline and indignation.

We closed the distance with the stealth of predators, weaving through the thickets until we were close enough to see the flickers of movement through the foliage.

But as we crouched behind a broad trunk, the fury was suddenly tempered by a cold, hard dose of reality. I looked at my hands. Then I looked at my staff member. We had nothing. No sidearms, no rifles-not even a sturdy bamboo

"lathi" to bridge the gap between us and the offenders. A few yards away, the perpetrators were swinging heavy, sharpened axes with practiced ease. The math was simple and unforgiving: two unarmed men against an unknown number of intruders wielding lethal tools. It was a moment of profound realization, a sharp departure from the idealism of the morning. In the forest, authority is only as strong as your ability to enforce it. To charge in now wasn't bravery; it was tactical mistake. I realized then that a forest officer without a means of defense is a guardian with his hands tied behind his back.

"Stay low," I whispered.

I pulled out my phone, shielding the glow of the screen, and placed a quiet, urgent call for reinforcements. We became shadows, forced to play the role of silent witnesses to the desecration of our jurisdiction. We waited, the minutes stretching like hours, as the 'Khat-Khat' continued to echo, mocking our temporary helplessness.

Finally, the distant, muffled sounds of my team approaching from the flank reached my ears. The reinforcements had arrived, fanning out to create a semi-circle. It was time.

"Now!" I yelled, my voice breaking the canopy's silence like a gunshot. We burst from our cover, shouting commands to surrender, challenging the intruders with the full weight of the department's presence behind us. The scene was chaotic. The offenders, caught in the middle of their work, looked up with eyes wide with terror. For a split second, time froze. They saw the uniforms, realized they were being surrounded, and in an instant, the "fight or flight" instinct kicked in.

They chose flight.

One should have seen the way they moved -it was like watching shadows dissolve into the darkness. They didn't just run; they bolted with a desperation born of the fear of life behind bars. My staff and I gave chase, our boots pounding against the earth, leaping over fallen logs and pushing through thorny vines that clawed at our clothes. But the forest is a generous host to those who wish to disappear. They knew the secret trails, the hidden dips in the terrain, and the densest thickets where a human can vanish in seconds. Within minutes, the sound of crashing brush faded into nothingness. They were gone.



We returned to the site of the crime, our chests heaving, the air thick with the scent of freshly cut wood—a smell that is usually sweet but now felt like an accusation. Upon inspection, the evidence of their presence was scattered across the forest

floor. A few discarded pieces of clothing, a plastic water bottle half-filled with water, and the fruit of their labor: several piles of small firewood. They hadn't been after the ancient, towering timber that brings in high black-market prices. These were petty offenders, harvesting small wood, likely for local sale or personal use. To an outsider, it might have seemed minor. But in the eyes of the law, and in the heart of a forester, a wound is a wound. A forest offence is a forest offence, whether it involves a hundred-year-old teak or a bundle of firewood. It is the cumulative effect of these "minor" thefts that thins the lungs of our planet.

We gathered the abandoned items and the wood as evidence, the adrenaline finally beginning to ebb, replaced by a deep, reflective quiet. We hadn't apprehended the suspects that day, and while the sting of their escape lingered, the experience gave me something far more valuable than a successful arrest: it gave me a blueprint for the future.

I stood there, looking at the chopped wood, and ran through the mental checklist of lessons learned.

I realized that patrolling is not a walk in

the woods; it is a tactical operation.

1. Strength in Numbers: Never patrol with fewer than three or four people. A duo is easily overwhelmed; a squad is a deterrent. 2. The Necessity of Arms: We are the thin green line. Carrying arms isn't about aggression; it's about the safety of the staff and the credibility of our presence. You cannot protect the resource if you cannot protect yourself.

3. The Perimeter: We learned the vital importance of setting a wider, more coordinated perimeter. To catch a shadow,

you must light up the entire room.

That day in the Campierganj range was my "baptism by fire." It was a unique, jarring, and ultimately transformative experience. It stripped away the abstractions of my training and replaced them with the raw reality of field work. I understood then, more clearly than ever before, the nature of the work we do. We aren't just bureaucrats in olive green; we are the guardians of an immense, silent, and vulnerable resource. The forest cannot speak for itself, so we must be its voice, its shield, and—when necessary—its sword.

As we moved back to the range office, the forest seemed to close in behind us, reclaiming its silence. I walked a little differently then—more alert, more prepared, and with a renewed vow that the next time the 'Khat-Khat' echoed through the trees, the ending would be very different.

FROM
TO



KAULAGARH
KALAGARH

Yash Dhoble

Lessons from The Land of Roar, Trumpet, and Song

I still remember the moment when my OJT posting was announced. When I saw Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR) next to my name, there was an immediate surge of excitement. But almost as quickly, another thought set in - I was about to disappoint a long list of people. I knew that the name "Corbett" would come with expectations of safaris, Dhikala bookings, and tiger sightings, and I also knew that I would have to turn most of those requests down.

After completion of my Headquarter and ATI attachments, I finally got to know that I was being assigned to the Sonandi Range, Kalagarh Tiger Reserve (KTR) Division, and not the Ramganga Tiger Reserve Division (RTR, but commonly referred to as CTR). For everyone's reference, the CTR is divided into two divisions - KTR and RTR, with RTR being the main tourist zone. I grimly thought to myself, "Mai to Kaulagarh Gate se Kalagarh Gate chala gaya".



The famous Dikhala landscape

The transition from Kaulagarh to Kalagarh did not begin with excitement - I had imagined my OJT unfolding in the well-known zones of CTR - Dhikala, Bijrani, Jhirna; the postcard landscapes where tiger sighting is a guarantee. Instead, I was posted to Kalagarh, the less glamorous, lesser-known side of Corbett.

At first glance, it felt like a quiet disappointment. Kalagarh, unlike the more popular zones of Corbett, does not feature prominently on tourist itineraries. There are no queues of gypsies, no eager lenses chasing tigers, no dramatic "sightings" to recount. What it offers instead is something far more elemental - an unfiltered interface with the forest. Things got worse when requests started pouring in - from friends, family, batchmates, and faculty. Everyone wanted a safari at Dhikala. And every time, I found myself giving the same explanation, almost apologetically: "Mai Kalagarh me hu yaar, main Corbett side nahi hu. Yaha safari to karwa dunga but sightings nahi hogi. Dhikala to nahi ho payega. Mai khud hi nahi gaya hu Dhikala abhi tak." Topping the list of people I disappointed was my wife, who had very excitedly accompanied me for my OJT, but I was not able to get a spotting of a tiger.

There would be a pause, a slight dip in enthusiasm, and then reluctant acceptance. The disappointment on the other end of the call was palpable. In those moments, I realized how deeply the idea of Corbett is tied to tourism, and how invisible its sister division, the KTR, remains even to those within the system.

Ironically, I too carried that expectation. Days passed, then weeks, and not a single tiger sighting. At some point, I voiced this frustration to the field staff. One of them, with a knowing smile, responded: “Sahib humare paas udhar se zyada tigers hai, but shy hai... humare tiger bhaag jaate hai gaadi dekh ke.”

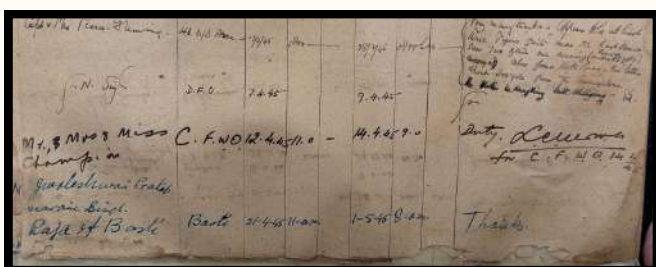
It was a simple statement, but it stayed with me. The absence of sightings was not a failure of the forest - it was a sign of its integrity. These were not habituated animals performing for vehicles; they were truly wild. Gradually, the disappointment gave way to something quieter, more enduring. I began to notice the forest as a whole - the alarm calls at dusk, the movement of elephants through thick sal, the layered silence that carries more meaning than any sighting ever could. I had arrived looking for tigers; I ended up discovering the forest.



An inquisitive tiger posing for Camera Trap

Later on, when we inspected the camera traps installed for the All India Tiger Estimation, I realised the forest guard was correct. KTR had an immense number of tigers, only that the sightings were very rare.

I would later realize I had great shoes to fill in. KTR is not peripheral to Corbett. The legendary F. W. Champion served here as DFO, pioneering early wildlife photography techniques. It was in this very landscape, near the Pine Bungalow in Lansdowne, that one of the first camera trap photographs of a tiger was captured, an episode documented in *Tripwire for a Tiger*.



FW Champion's entry in Morghatti Forest Rest House

The Sonanadi Range is one of the most sensitive areas of CTR. The UP-Uttarakhand border is the range itself. Much of my field experience was concentrated along this boundary. It is a boundary that is porous with a contested interface. Human-wildlife conflict, illegal entry, grazing pressure, and poaching threats coexist in a fragile balance.

Patrolling this boundary was perhaps the most defining aspect of my OJT. These were not scenic drives but deliberate, often tense movements through sensitive terrain. The forest guards, with their deep familiarity of the landscape, led the way. Walking alongside them, one begins to understand that conservation is less about dramatic interventions and more about consistent presence.

The volatility of this interface became evident in a police case where a forest guard was assaulted by local villagers. The reasons were layered with livelihood pressures, access restrictions, and accumulated resentment. The very individuals tasked with protecting the forest often operate with minimal protection themselves. It was a sobering reminder that conservation, especially in such landscapes, is as much about managing human relationships as it is about protecting wildlife.



Chaur grasslands amidst Ramganga reservoir

Beyond patrols, there were structured interventions that offered a sense of tangible contribution. Lantana removal drives were physically demanding but essential, aimed at restoring native vegetation choked by invasive species. We also installed AI-enabled camera systems in conflict-prone areas, designed to provide early warnings to nearby villages. Area control operations in villages with dog squads and confidence building meetings in villages along the Uttar Pradesh border added another dimension



Apprehending a person collecting firewood illegally and confidence building meeting in Bijnor, UP



Food web

The range also taught some philosophical life lessons. On one patrol, we came across a python that had swallowed a chital but died after getting wedged between two trees. By the time we found it, tortoises were feeding on the carcass. It was a stark, almost unsettling illustration of the food web that intricately ties various strands of nature.

Night patrols offered perhaps the deepest insight into the life of the forest staff. Moving through the forest in darkness, guided only by torchlight and instinct, one begins to understand the scale of their commitment. These men operate in isolation, often under threat, with limited resources and little recognition. Their knowledge is experiential, their resilience quiet but unwavering. Observing them was a lesson no classroom could offer. Another risky encounter was boat patrolling in the Ramganga reservoir on a visibly dilapidated motorboat.

Amidst these intense experiences, there were moments of levity. Vineet, never missing an opportunity, often remarked that my OJT seemed more like a grand tour of Forest Rest Houses than actual fieldwork. Kalagarh's rest houses, scattered across the landscape, are not just places of stay but markers of an administrative legacy, each offering a unique window into the forest.

One particularly memorable incident involved a herd of elephants. We spotted them from a distance, moving steadily through the forest. The forester, with complete confidence, stepped down and gestured for me to follow. "Dariye mat sahab, aap IFS hai... aaiye paas se dekhiye." I paused and replied, "Elephants ko thodi pata hai main IFS hu."

As my time in Kalagarh came to an end, the initial disappointment had completely transformed. What had once seemed like an underwhelming posting revealed itself to be an unfiltered, deeply instructive experience.



The elephant herd which, as per the forester, wouldn't have done anything since I am an IFS

From Kaulagarh to Kalagarh, the journey was about moving from expectation to understanding. In KTR, I learned that the forest does not owe us sightings or spectacle. It offers something far more profound, an opportunity to witness, to engage, and to understand a system that is as resilient as it is fragile. And in that understanding, Kalagarh ceased to be the "other side" of Corbett for me. It became, in every sense, its truest form.

In the land of roar, trumpet, and song, I learned that the loudest lessons are often found in the quietest corners.



Tiger sighting (finally)

GULDAR IN THE GADERA



he transition from Dehradun to the rugged terrains of Pauri has been nothing short of a cosmic joke. My batchmates, in their infinite wisdom bestowed upon me titles like "Leopard Mishra" and "Guldar". These names now feel like a cruel misnomer. Honestly, I would have preferred failing in departmental exams over the professional embarrassment of failing to sight a single leopard in a place where they are supposedly more common than stray dogs.

The "Reign of Terror" and the Domestic Monster

I was dispatched to an area gripped by a collective fever-dream of leopard infestation. To the locals, the leopard isn't a majestic predator; it's a pest with a PR problem. The prevailing conspiracy theory is that the Forest Department plays a high-stakes game of "catch and release," bringing in leopards from other regions to release in the wild who later become habituated to cages and humans that they've basically become sentient, spotted roommates and learn to avoid any trap .

VINEET MISHRA





The paranoia reached such a level that villagers would send us blurry photos of domestic house cats, sitting in the field at some distance, trembling with the conviction that these tabbies were actually monstrous, man-eating beasts waiting to devour human flesh. Yet, paradoxically, the actual leopards were reportedly behaving like reckless teenagers—strolling through open fields and sunbathing on rock outcrops in broad daylight, seemingly unfettered by the presence of humans around.

The Symphony of the Panchayat Bhawan

Hardly had I shaken off the dust of a five-hour "roller coaster" ride from Dehradun—a journey that was less of a commute and more of a violent test of spinal integrity—than I was treated like a world-renowned big cat expert. I was handed camera trap images and pugmarks to analyze with the gravity of a forensic scientist, despite feeling more like a bewildered intern. My very first night in Pauri, I found myself stationed in the Bara gaon Panchayat Bhawan, where a leopard had recently killed a person as if I was announcing my arrival to the leopard that a new "Don" was in town. My accommodations consisted of a hard floor shared with a thriving colony of rats. Just as I managed to quiet my mind for sleep, a staff member began snoring at a decibel level that could have triggered a landslide. I looked at his peaceful, protruding belly and found the grace to forgive him.

However, at 4:00 AM, I was jolted awake by a sound I can only describe as thunderous. As I scrambled to decipher the source of this terrifying noise, I realized it wasn't a leopard attack or a natural disaster. It was the four or five staff members in the room, performing a coordinated gastric symphony.



High-Tech Ghost Hunting

For the next few months, I played a high-stakes game of hide-and-seek in which only the leopard knew the rules—and the leopard, apparently, was cheating. I had every gadget imaginable: thermal monoculars, drones, and high-end cameras. I trekked dozens of times through "infested" forests at ungodly hours, hoping for a glimpse of those beautiful rosettes and that agile, unforgiving grace of a guldar.

Instead, what I got was the Kalij Pheasant. The locals dismissively call it the "Jungle Murga", though to be fair, it's a far more elegant bird than its name suggests. But elegant pheasants weren't what I came here for. I was here for Guldars hiding in the gaderas, but to see them, I had to resort to looking at camera trap footage or visiting one that had already been caged. It turns out that when you actually want to see them for science, they become ghosts; when you're a tourist, they practically pose for selfies.

The "Tourist" Survival Strategy

The atmosphere in Pauri was not just biologically tense, but politically volatile. With assembly elections on the horizon, every leopard attack became a weapon for the opposition to put tough questions before the government.

To the grieving and angry villagers, the leopards weren't wild animals; they were the "Department's pets," people would point out- "aapka guldar " , " aapka janwar" and any failure to keep them on a leash was seen as a personal affront,

The protests often spiraled into chaotic gheraos. I witnessed a mob physically assault a Tehsildar and lock the Range Officer in a room. While they were scouting for any Forest Department staff—including drivers and contractual staff of forest department –to "detain," a villager approached me with a suspicious squint and asked me the department where I worked ?

I didn't hesitate. I summoned the conviction of a Method actor and replied: " Nahi Ji, koi department nahi , main to tourist Hun aur bheed aur Tamasha dekh Ke yaha aagya "



The Somber Reality

Beneath the satire, beneath the farting orchestras and the pheasant encounters and my Oscar-worthy performance as a tourist, lies a grim truth that deserves acknowledgment. The sanctity of human life is supreme. When a leopard takes a life, it leaves behind a wound in a family that no government compensation can truly heal. No amount of money brings back a father, a mother, a child. The grief is real. The anger is justified.

But in the theater of political opportunism and mob fury, the genuine questions—the ones that actually matter—get buried. How do we really mitigate human-wildlife conflict? How do we provide swift, meaningful support to bereaved families instead of just symbolic gestures? How do we protect both human lives and the animals we're supposed to be conserving? These questions remain largely unanswered, lost in the noise of upcoming elections, political point-scoring, and the never-ending blame game. And somewhere out there, the leopards continue their invisible existence—ghost cats in a land that fears them, hates them, and yet can't seem to find them when it actually matters.

KUNAL MISHRA

knock knock...!!

During my OJT, one morning we received credible information that illegal teak wood was being stored at the house of a Sarpanch in a nearby village, and that the local Beat Guard was also suspected to be involved in the matter.

Considering the seriousness of the information, a joint team of forest staff was immediately constituted for conducting a search operation. A formal search warrant was obtained from the SDO before proceeding further.

As the case involved influential local persons and possible resistance during the operation, assistance from the local police was sought to ensure smooth conduct of the search and seizure proceedings. The team then proceeded to the village and carried out a detailed search of the premises. During the operation, 116 teak logs amounting to 4.35 cubic metres of timber were recovered from the site. The total value of the seized timber was estimated to be approximately ₹2 lakh.

The seized material was properly measured, documented and taken into custody following the prescribed legal procedure.

वन विभाग की बड़ी कार्रवाई: अवैध लकड़ी परिवहन करते युवक पकड़ा, पिकअप जब्त

पूजा जायसवाल

अवरक्तिया। वन परिक्षेत्र वन परिक्षेत्र अंतर्गत वन परिक्षेत्र ने अवैध लकड़े पकड़ने सख्त कार्रवाई के खिलाफ सख्त कार्रवाई करते हुए एक आरोपी को पकड़ा है। वन अपराध प्रकरण क्रमांक 4492/05 के तहत को गैर हथ कार्रवाई ने एक पकड़ो के गाई इस

जानकारी के अनुसार, वन विभाग की टीम ने सुबह लगभग 4:15 बजे कार्रवाई करते हुए संदिग्ध पिकअप वाहन का रोका और जान की। ललाओं के सोपान संलग्न 2 वन मोटर लकड़ी अवाह लपते हुए पाई से पाई गई।

जानकारी के अनुसार, वन विभाग की टीम ने सुबह वन क्षेत्रपाल, वीजय प्रगरी उमाएधेकर वीहान ने हुए संदिग्ध पिकअप कब्जे हुए, पाई गई। मेक पर मेकद आरोपी की पहचान संलिद वन विना छुके लेट कर ही गई।



वन विभाग ने आरोपी के खिलाफ वन अधिनियम के तहत मालता द्रव्य कर वाहन को जब्त कर लिया है। हालांकि प्राथमिक कार्रवाई के बाद आरोपी को मुक्त कर दिया गया।

वन विभाग ने स्पष्ट कहा है कि क्षेत्र में अवैध लकड़ी वट्टे और तस्करी

इस कार्रवाई में प्रभारी कृष्ण मिश्रा, सहायक वन क्षेत्रपाल, चौकी प्रभारी उमाश शर्करा चौहन एवं परिसर रवक लर्नसि मिहलर रही पाई।

वन विभाग ने आरोपी के खिलाफ वन अधिनियम के तहत मालता द्रव्य कर वाहन को जब्त कर लिया है। इन प्रारोपके पर तदर्थ पर ही कर दिया है।

वन विभाग ने स्पष्ट कहा है कि क्षेत्र में अवैध लकड़े वट्टे और तस्करी के खिलाफ अभियान लगातार जारी रेंगा। दार्क सको रहेगा।

वन विभाग और पुलिस की संयुक्त कार्रवाई, अवैध सागौन लकड़ी सहित आरोपी पकड़ाया

दरभंग दुनिया खबरसिया

वन विभाग ने पुलिस के साथ संयुक्त कार्रवाई करते हुए अवैध रूप से रखी गई सागौन और साल की लकड़ी जब्त की है। इस कार्रवाई में करीब 2 लाख रुपये मूल्य की लकड़ी बरामद की गई।

वन विभाग की टीम ने सच वारंट के

साथ चीताकठरा पंचायत फरकानारा, तहसील खरसिया निवासी कमल यादव के यहां छापेमारी कार्रवाई की। तलाशी के दौरान टीम को बड़ी मात्रा में अवैध लकड़ी मिली, जिसे मौके पर ही जब्त कर लिया गया। जल्दी में 116 नग सागौन के लट्टे

(कुल 4.350 घन मीटर), सागौन के 2 नग दीवान सेट, साल की 3 खिड़की-चौखट तथा साल का 1 दरवाजा-चौखट शामिल है। जब्त सामग्री की अनुमानित कीमत करीब 2 लाख रुपये बताई जा रही है।

यह कार्रवाई प्रशिक्षु आईएफएस एवं

वन परिक्षेत्र अधिकारी खरसिया कुणाल मिश्रा के नेतृत्व में की गई। टीम में सर्किल प्रभारी मानसिंह राठिया (जोबी), वनपाल गोवर्धन राठौर, विजय दीक्षित, दिनेश राजपूत, वन रक्षक राकेश कुमार नेताम, प्रमेश्वरी राठिया, सदानंद रात्रे, लखेश्वर सिदार और नीरज देव वर्मा शामिल रहे।

कार्रवाई के दौरान जोबी पुलिस



प्रहलाद बंसल

चौकी की टीम ने भी सहयोग किया। पुलिस टीम में चौकी प्रभारी लक्ष्मी प्रसाद राठौर, आरक्षक घनश्याम सिदार और राजाराम राठिया शामिल थे। वन विभाग द्वारा जब्त लकड़ी को कब्जे में लेकर आरोपी के खिलाफ वन अधिनियम के तहत आगे की कार्रवाई की जा रही है।

Necessary seizure documents and records were prepared on the spot, and the timber was transported safely to departmental custody.

A detailed report of the entire operation was subsequently submitted to the DFO for further action.

Based on the preliminary findings and suspected involvement in the illegal activity, the concerned Beat Guard was placed under suspension pending further inquiry.

The operation provided valuable practical learning regarding the importance of strictly following all legal procedures and prescribed rules during search and seizure operations, including obtaining proper warrants, ensuring the presence of female staff wherever required, and carefully preparing all necessary documentation. It also highlighted the importance of effective inter-departmental coordination, particularly between the Forest Department and Police Department, in conducting sensitive enforcement operations smoothly, lawfully and effectively.



Arunachali Hindi-English *field* Dictionary

01 Namgaya / Namega

Meaning: Got down / alighted

Usage : "Sir gaadi se namgaya." (Sir got down from the vehicle.)

02 Chaati

Meaning: Umbrella

Usage : "Chaati gaadi mein rakh diya ma'am." (I kept the umbrella in the vehicle, ma'am.)

03 Milega kya?

TWIST

Meaning: It will definitely be available (not a doubt!)

Explanation:

In most places, adding "kya" at the end suggests uncertainty.

But here—it's the opposite. It's almost a confident assurance.

Usage

You: "Bhalukpong market mein yeh saman milega?"

Reply: "Milega kya ma'am." (Definitely ma'am)



04 Aya!!

Meaning: An exclamation—like "Oh!", "Ah!",

Usage : "Aya! Esa nei karna chahiye na ye log!" (Oh! They shouldn't have done this)

05 Sir pakarna

Meaning: Headache

Usage : "Ye hawa sir pakrega ma'am." (This wind will give you a headache, ma'am.)

06 Chul

Meaning: Hair

Usage : "Madhuri Dixit ne Koyla movie mein chul banaya wala jaga hai ye." (This is the place where Madhuri Dixit did her hair in Koyla movie.)

07 Tala

Meaning: Floor

Usage : "Yaha ke logon ke pass do-tin tala ka ghar hota hai." (People here have houses with 2-3 floors – indirectly showing how well-off people are here).



PRATIKSHA NANASAHEB KALE



RAJASTHAN



Aman Gupta

