

The path that led to the waterfall

Photos: Supriya Kantak, Anand Halankar, Anupam Sehgal

Elementary School!

The four elements of Nature —
earth, water, air, fire — teach
Supriya Kantak a few lessons



The spacious tent I stayed in

Brigadier Sushil Bhasin, Chairman and MD of **Empower Activity Camps**, invited MĒ to experience a weekend of adventure, a chance to enrich and empower oneself. Not one to let an exciting opportunity go by, I drove down along with a few friends to Sutarwadi, near Kolad in the Raigad district, where the camp is set up over 45 acres. There, we had the option of spending the next two days and nights in an air conditioned cottage or a Swiss tent. On seeing the attached bathroom, the choice was unanimous: the tent it would be! But there was no time to get comfortable; we had to get ready for our first adventure — waterfall rappelling!



Earth

Rappelling is also known as abseiling. The word is derived from *abseilen*, which is German for 'to rope down'. It is also a German slang expression, meaning 'to avoid doing something'. I didn't know this then, but that is exactly what I thought when I looked over the edge — I don't have to do this!

Not only did I have to make my way down 45 feet holding on to a rope, I had to do it with a waterfall for company. Okay, it was no Niagara. Barely a sliver actually, but enough to make me want to hug the dry rock nearby like a long-lost friend. When it was my turn to take the plunge, I put on my gear, which included a harness, a helmet, a pair of gloves and knee pads.

Lesson learnt

When one step separated hard earth from elusive air, I realised that it is not life, but I, who gave myself my options. And I decided to not give myself the option to quit. My options were: Take a step backwards and regret it. Or take a step backwards and boast about it later on.

However, don't let this realisation that you decide your options make you believe, like I did, that you are in control. I say this because, as I rappelled down, no matter how hard I tried to follow the instructions to 'keep the feet flat against the rock' and 'do not bend the knees', the slippery earth didn't miss a chance to mock my belief. I just opted to laugh along.

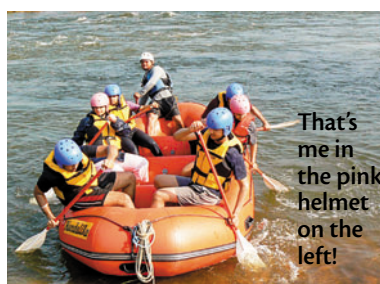
Water

Two things bring out the same level of uneasiness in me: exams and water. Not a glass of water, but vast amounts of it. Like the river Kundalika that was flowing before me the next morning. We were there for whitewater rafting. I stood beside one of the three red inflated rafts lined up alongside each other on the bank. And tightened the straps on my life jacket even more so, hoping that it would stifle the nervous groans in my tummy.

Deepak, our Nepali guide, taught us the commands that we would have to follow while rowing. While he coached us on the safety measures, he also assured us that the chances of the raft flipping over were negligible. Even so, those who didn't know how to swim were told to get into the shallow water to practise how to float the right way.

Lesson learnt

Lift your legs straight up and lie on your back to float. As easy as this lesson was to understand, it was hard to follow. For someone used to solid ground beneath the feet, it was hard to lift both my legs at the same time. I tried lifting one leg but only managed to tilt to the side. My hand instinctively reached out



That's me in the pink helmet on the left!

for balance, but it went through the water like a ghost through a door. I only managed to float once I let go of my belief that one needs to be grounded to be balanced. This experience also taught me that you learn to swim when you are thrown into the deep end. This is as much a philosophical lesson as it is literal. You see, once the angry rapids had calmed down, everyone jumped into the water for a swim. And when I refused to do so, the raft was simply flipped over.

All you need for the water adventures mentioned here is a pair of cotton shorts/ capris and a T-shirt. Avoid jeans as they get heavy when wet and take longer to dry. You can wear a pair of old sneakers without socks, but floaters (strap-on sandals) are preferred. Life jackets and other safety gear should be provided by the organisers.

The Himalayas cradle some of the best river rafting experiences.

In India, the rivers Beas in Himachal Pradesh, Tons and Sutlej in Uttaranchal, and the Ganga and its tributaries in Uttar Pradesh offer exhilarating river expeditions.

For more on rafting trips, visit www.himalayanadventure.com/rafting.htm



Fire

The first night a bonfire was lit just before dinner, and we gathered around it, in (and with) good spirits.

Lesson learnt

As children we are taught that fire represents danger, and that one should run away as quickly as possible. But as we chatted away about lives in the cool night, I realised that fire also has the ability to bring people together.



Man has worshipped fire since ancient times. It is one of the sacred elements for Hindus and the Chinese.

Zoroastrians revere fire, and their place of prayer is known as an agiary or Fire Temple. In Judaism, candles are lit to usher in holidays and to separate Sabbath from the rest of the week, as well as to remember the dead.

Air

Our final activity was shooting with air guns that looked more like rifles. Strangely, that didn't make me feel nervous. Beginner's luck evaded me, but I got lucky the second time, and every alternate shot after that. I guess the odds were against me.



Lesson learnt

Even if you have never done it before, you can still take a shot at it. And success doesn't come when you aim high; all you need to have is a steady focus on your goal.

Snapshots of Nature at the campsite



Empower is spearheaded by **Brigadier Sushil Bhasin**, who took a premature retirement after 34 years in the Army. Armed with training, development and management skills as well as a passion for the outdoors and adventure, Brig Bhasin set up Empower Activity Camps with a vision to enrich an individual's personality and provide opportunities to grow. Programmes that incorporate learning with fun are conducted for schools, corporate organisations and families.

Those looking for adventure are welcome too. Some of the activities on offer are:

- **Trekking** ■ **Rappelling**
- **Rafting** ■ **River Crossing**
- **Obstacle courses**
- **Horse Riding**
- **Rock Climbing**
- **Parasailing** ■ **Shooting**
- **Yoga** ■ **Theatre**
- **Nature Study**

For more information visit:

www.empowercamp.com
e-mail: info@empowercamp.com
Ph: 02194.255105/ 194
(campsite);
5576.0528/ 2631.9005 (Mumbai)

Have you had an adventure? We would love to hear about it!
Write to us (in 300 words) at me@dnaindia.net with 'My Adventure' in the subject line.