

Feedback notes from 7th std students of Sahyadri School, KFI

Megha:

Hmmm... a week with strangers in a forest, with no cosmetics and shampoo and the other stuff. I wasn't too sure about all that. Would I like it? Would I adjust to the animals? All these thoughts were pushed aside by my love of forests and treks. Definitely, I would not let myself be negative about this trip. I somehow knew at that time that there was no way anyone could not like Wyanad.

"Come on! Hurry up! Pick your bags up! Go fill your water bottle! Eek! The food carton has something leaking out! It's chaos! The food's spoilt! Oh no! What do we do now?" A perfect babble of voices disturbs the usually quiet and normal atmosphere outside the dining hall. This day which has taken so much time to come, is unbelievably here. And all at once, everyone seems to remember that they haven't done this and that. And I stand there, being bumped by one person after another. I muse that every single trip is incomplete without what surrounds me—chaos. I try to imagine quiet and peace in Wyanad. Not something very easy to accomplish when surrounded by people who have quite happily forgotten that they were even sane.

No amount of shouting can quieten people down. They just refuse to listen. This is all that happens in the next half an hour. After what seems like an eternity, we leave. The next two days are filled with hectic traveling. In spite of that, we reach the sanctuary in high spirits. As we get out of the jeeps, the sound of barking dogs greets us. Since I'm not too fond of strange dogs, I hide behind a few people who I later find are equally afraid of dogs. A lady with short grey hair and a Dalmatian greets us.

Chaitanya:

Mist rising from the valley, into the skies. I couldn't make much of it then, after all it was just mist.

But now I realize, that mist, which I only thought was all the more reason not to go bird watching in the heavenly underbushes of the forest, was a brick in the wall of the serene atmosphere that made every second I stayed there an experience that cannot be described in mere words.

Whether it was the cool wind of the night, the blazing midday sun, the trees and unusually big leaves dancing to the wind, or even the people there who merge with the silence of the forest and the music of the birds, they are all beats in the rhythm of harmony.

Swimming in the cool water or sitting on the high tower, everything took me through all the phases of emotion. All the emotions, except the emotion of...well, rather a feeling, a feeling that comes when you close your doors and stop absorbing the things around you, a feeling which the magnificent forest will never allow in it, the restless feeling of boredom!

A mere four days were so thick...so rich with an indescribable feeling! That experience will keep me dreaming forever of having it again!

Ankita:

We, the sevenths, went to a Botanical Sanctuary for our camp. It's called the Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary at Wyanad, in Kerala. It was started by a person called Wolfgang 23 years ago, in 1981. The purpose of this place is to conserve plants and work on particular kinds of plants like orchids. It's a wet, evergreen forest. Wolfgang, a German, came to India and was very interested in plants. He is an interesting man with a kind nature. I was very deeply connected during the talk he gave us. He told us that everything is interconnected.

We went there to learn different things, and got to know that people all over the world are interested in plants, birds and so on. We learnt to adjust to another kind of environment.

When I went there I got interested in many things that I didn't do earlier, like bird watching. I loved bird watching. I just enjoyed every bit of my trip. There is so much to learn, so many things to do...I can't describe it in words. I can feel the beauty of this place which is endless.

As I am sitting in the jeep thinking of the sanctuary, a cool breeze blows across my face and I see fresh green plants and trees which tell me, "Look at the beauty and live every part of it. Don't think about anything, sadness or happiness. Live it!" I start laughing with my friends and start enjoying every bit of it. Soon I reach a place like paradise and I realize this is the place. I am hearing dogs barking and birds chirping. Though I don't know how paradise is, I can say this place is paradise.

Here, I am sitting with my friends and teachers on the dining table, relishing every bite of the food. I said yummm.... This food is my kind of food. I hog and hog.

Now we are walking quietly in the forest. I am starting to get the real taste of life. I see stuff and I hear stuff but I am alone to feel it. We walk in the calm river and I slip. We all start laughing and suddenly Sandy says, "Go back!" and we hear elephants trumpeting. We all slip and my sweater is drenched.

After such an exciting and fast experience we reach an open place with trees on all sides. We meet a man with a bow and arrows. We ask him to let us use it. As I am pulling the arrow to release it, I think of a target, of something I would like to be and then I release the arrow. It is very close and I say to myself: if you want something you have to work hard. I am concentrating on what I am observing. I am living it. As I am here in this place I am coming to know myself. I am playing the tower, I am swimming, I am singing and doing so much. Soon comes the time for us to go. At first I can't believe it. But my last day I spend gathering everything I have felt. Soon there are tears in my eyes when I have to say good-bye. But I console myself. I say: when you cry it means this is over, it won't happen again, but I know I will always have this trip as one of my best trips in my heart and mind, and I start smiling.

Vidita:

Here I am, now, thinking about the wonderful time I had in Wyanad. We were sent to this place in Kerala to be away from manmade things and too much of technology, to live with nature and only with the things we need, and not all that we want. This place was made by a man called Wolfgang, a German who wanted to stay alone in a silent place. He was traveling in India when he came across this place in Wyanad. He started to save forests, planting more and more trees which would attract people to that place, hoping these people would be encouraged to save forests too. He has built a house there, enlarging it as more and more people join him in this act.

I can still imagine myself walking through the forests and can hear the unusual crrrr...of the cicadas. I can see the rays of the sun passing between the leaves. It felt so different. As I turn around I see Salim sir busy in his own world, shooting the birds and the trees with the video camera.

When I think of the river where we went for a swim every day, I can feel the pebbles, the stones and the rocks under my feet. I can also feel the sunshine on my face as I walk through the freezing cold water. Then, I suddenly start thinking about the tree, and I find myself on the top, feeling the cool breeze against my face. I hear someone shout from below, "Hey, how's it going up there?" And I reply, "It feels nice."

I can also remember the morning birdwatching sessions, how we walked through the forests and tried to spot the birds which we could hear chirping. And the joy of seeing one of them is something very special. Oh! I can smell the stink that Humphrey let out. He was a very friendly dog, though. And the puppies, my hand starts feeling ticklish as I think of me holding one of their paws.

I also imagine Supi akka giving the sanctuary call to the little village children living in the neighbourhood.

Thinking of Wyanad I can spend hours and hours together. The people, place and its originality will always be remembered. The place has its very own beauty. I will always cherish my memories of Wyanad as it has been a very unique experience.

Staying in Wyanad has made me think more about the betterment of forests and other natural resources that are there in this world.

Akanksha:

It was a different place. It had a different feeling, as though preserving and caring for things is the most important thing. The smallest of things matter so much over there. Every single thing is taken care of like a baby by its mother. It was amazing to learn how a young man was going around the world looking for a calling, and to see how interests can really get you going.

That young gentleman found a place 25 years ago or so and found it in the worst of conditions, completely abandoned. But this man really thought about it and made the most of it with all that he had. He had friends who didn't mind helping him through this and so they helped. With this little help and his own mind he worked through it. He traveled around, got different kinds of plants, carried them all the way back to India and planted them here, taking good care of them. And this process really worked so he carried on with this project. It was really like clearing out the whole land and then replanting it all again just like a forest. It sure was hard work. And now that it works there have been different species of birds and insects also.

This whole trip made an impact on me. I now think a lot many times before plucking a leaf or a flower. It all makes such a big difference to me now, thanks to a place called Wyanad.

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Sitting on a seat made of logs high up in the midst of trees and birds I can feel the power of the wind against my sweat. It feels cool on my face as I hear the sweet chirping of the extraordinary birds and the rustle of the leaves giving their best to the vivid sounds of life up here in this unknown place.

The laughter of my friends makes me feel more secure in this unknown place. They sit beside me, holding my hand like a guide through a mysterious world.

There is a sweet smell in the air. For a moment it was familiar but now it has become a mere remembrance. Far away I can see the world taking a new step into a new day...it is so different from this day in my life that has half gone but still leaves so much to be discovered by accident.

I suddenly think to myself, turning my head away from the bitter reality, how different it may be to live in a place like this wherever you go...but it is just a dream. How wonderful it would be to have the feeling of home wherever you go, even in the middle of a jungle! Just like this...home in the middle of a jungle! Maybe it is possible, if I just hold onto a thought and then make it an aim and then go ahead and achieve it!

I have been awakened by a soft voice calling my name and telling me to think of today because *today is my story*. And now I can see just another, simple end of a day far away in the horizon clearly in my view.

Flavia:

A spot in a vast range of green hills spotted with civilization. A place called wyanad. A place called paradise, situated in the north of Kerala. Wyanad is an isolated world of its own. Situated on one of the peaks in Wyanad is the Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary.

Wolfgang, a lonely wanderer from Germany came upon Wyanad and started the sanctuary in 1981. The sanctuary is now 23 years old. It is a sanctuary for different types of orchids. It also has carnivorous plants such as the sundew, pitcher and Venus flytrap. The aim of the sanctuary is to conserve the various endangered species of plants and trees that are being cut down to plant tea and build houses. Not all the plants in the sanctuary are from South India.

The people staying there are very friendly. The residents are Wolfgang uncle, Lila aunty, their son Sandy and Supi akka. They do have frequent visitors and friends. Many other people work there as domestic workers and helping hands.

My visit to the GBS was truly an experience. Every single flower, leaf, even a mosquito is treated as a living being there. Nothing goes unnoticed. Sitting on a step there is so much going on around you...only you are just sitting on a step. The leaves are making food, a bug is killing its prey, a racket tailed drongo is feeding its children. So many things happen around you and you don't have a clue about it. Maybe if we all had minds like the people of the sanctuary we would still be able to see the real dodo.

“Slippers and sandals off!” yelled Supi akka

Showered back was she

With no's and why's from the dainty folk of mumbaiya

“You'll see”, was all she replied.

We walked and walked and walked

And all we saw was tea.

We chanced upon some rubber too

But that was all t hat we could see!

We were then given strips of cloth

To be blindfolded

We actually could see quite clearly

But I preferred to stay in the dark.

We were then told to put our hands

On each other's shoulders;
Were told to be careful so that we wouldn't
Bang into any boulders.

We walked along a barbed wire
And through grass and mud
We even came upon cowdung pat
And Chatty was the lucky one.

We walked through mush
And a lot of dead leaves
Which crunched under our feet.
We even came across the sanctuary cows
Who had come for their evening walk.
We had to get onto the hillock next to us
Which was growing wild with thorns and grass.

We finally reached our destination
After crossing a stream.
A blur was all that could be seen
Once the blindfolds were off.

This truly was an experience with a very nice beginning: "You'll see!"

Jenil:
Wyanad... Wyanad is a place where there are kind people, animals, birds and nature. Wyanad is a botanical sanctuary for orchids and other plants. Wolfgang. Who is this man? He is the person who owns the sanctuary. He has a wife named Lila and two children, Sandy and Anna. Supi took care of us. Sandy took us for birdwatching, treeclimbing and loris-watching. Supi took us for juggling. We swam in a nearby river. It was real good fun. Tree-climbing was the most amazing thing.
There were five big dogs and six pups. The eldest of all was Humphrey. The second was Gustav, the father of nine dogs. Falafal was a simple brown dog who had six little pups. Marilyn was black. Humas was the youngest, after the pups.
It was a fantastic place to visit. I would love to go and stay there forever.

Kaushal:
I was waiting to reach the beautiful place, to see loads of things like the beautiful trees. When I went I met the place with lovely people, and was delighted to see the trees. We were on the top of the hill at last. The food we had was simple enough to eat. The sanctuary was 25 years old. It was a botanical sanctuary, and the forest was filled with orchids and other endangered species of plants. Wolfgang started this sanctuary.
Deeba akka first showed us about the cottage where we were to stay and then took us to the dining hall. It was huge and looked wonderful. The place was very beautiful. We were happy to eat the food. We had lots of fun with Sandy. We swam with Deeba akka. They had a fish tank with lots of fish. They had dogs with six puppies that were so cute! But they generally slept.
We did lots of activities like blindfolded walking, bamboo crossing, forest walk, river-walk and so on. I liked all the activities which we did. The group in Wyanad was very friendly to me. I wanted to stay over there longer. After a day we went to a tower from which you could see all the green forest. The birds came up to the sky and started chirping. There were amazing birds like the Indian Pitta and the golden oriole, the greatest birds I have ever seen. I started loving birds and bird watching more than ever.
After some time we started to move ahead to see more things. The river which we swam in had lovely fishes and tadpoles. We swam in the water for a long time.

When we were leaving I was sad because I was leaving such a beautiful place. The Valley School was also beautiful.

Suyash:

It was a very good experience going there. On the first day, as we left from school, we were all very excited. I was very excited first of all because my mom was going to come to the station, and secondly because we were going to see new birds and plants and meet people.

There were very cute dogs and puppies. There was one thing that was cool: the shit pit. It was just a dug up place with two planks of wood to keep your feet on. It was a lovely experience. We swam in a small area where there was some water and there was a tree from which we dived.

I enjoyed myself a lot. I read Asterix, did tree climbing, bird watching, swimming, drew, sang, and did many other things. We did an activity in which we had to walk blindfolded from one spot, barefoot. I was last but some cows came in front of us so we had to get aside. Then I became first and I was leading. I could not see anything. I was very scared. If I did something wrong the whole group would be in danger. When we passed through the stream and I could feel the water on my leg. I could feel the pebbles touching my feet. We reached a place full of grass and then Supi akka told us to open our eyes and I could see everything a little blurred. We had to walk on two bamboos without support, to cross the stream. It was amazing.

The food was just too good and after a meal we had to wash our own plates and it was a good experience.

Around two days before we left, we got to know that there was an all-India strike, so we had to go to Valley School. I wanted to stay in Wyanad and didn't want to go to Valley but after I went to Valley School I found it was amazing fun. We met other 7ths of that school and played together, and when we had to leave Valley School my mind would not agree to leave that place. Then we sat in the train and left for Pune. As we reached Pune, I met my sister. I was very happy to meet her and then we sat in the school van and left for Sahyadri. That was the end of our trip.

Himay:

I felt that my group was noisy as well as enthusiastic. There was unity. The people there worked really hard to make us learn in an enjoyable way. I learned many things about plants, orchards, trees, birds and many other things. The birds we saw were excellent. I came to know about birds a lot that I didn't know.

Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary is situated in N.Wyanad District in N.Kerala. It is a place full of trees, plants, orchids and insects. There are about 200 species of birds. The birds are colourful. You will get to know many types of birds that you don't know, here.

When we reached there we heard the dogs barking, birds chirping, and then Diba akka came and welcomed us. Sandy and Shyamal came back from their walk. The place is just amazing. You climb a flight of stairs and you see a huge house. Diba akka told us that we were staying there. We left our haversacks there. We went up to the kitchen and took some hot water and had a bath. The food was very good, much better than all our junk food.

The people there are very friendly. Sandy is a bit shy. Supi akka was very friendly with us. Wolfgang uncle too was friendly. They are truthful to us. If we made any mistake they immediately told us. There were five dogs whose names were Gustav (Gucci), Falafal, Marilyn, Homus and Humphrey. They were very friendly.

We did many activities like blindfolded walking, crossing the river on two bamboo sticks, swimming and juggling. We had gone for a forest walk and there we heard an elephant trumpet. We all ran back. Some of us got so excited that we fell in the water. Tree-climbing was great fun.

It is sad that species of plants are getting extinct at a fast rate. Wolfgang is one of the few people who is trying to conserve the forest. I would like to join him in this work.

Harshwardhan:

Well, I will never forget my first experience in Wyanad.

This place is built for a purpose—to conserve plants and animals in Kerala. This sanctuary was started by Wolfgang, a German. He got the land from an ashram and got interested in nature and conserving it. So he planted many thousands of trees and left the rest to pollination. Here small farmers grew tea and spoiled the soil so Wolfgang afforested the land he bought from the tea farmers. He collected orchids and plants and trees from the Western Ghats.

When you leave this place you feel rather lonely because in Wyanad you can feel the life of plants and animals. I have taken an oath not to harm animals or plants.

Sandy, the jungle man, didn't appeal to me at first but he is the role model of my heart now. He is so closely related to the jungle that the plants and animals seem like his family. I liked the unique characters of Supi akka and Graham. Supi akka was encouraging me every now and then to do things I wasn't familiar with.

Graham, in his sporty mood, is a rare sight because he is normally wandering near the cowshed or way down near the paddy field.

Talking about the place, I had an excellent time in the river. Bouncing off the tree in the middle of the river. The great water tower which one plays musically is a part of Wyanad.

The dogs are an excellent experience here. I fought and played with them every single day. Their pups are really adorable. The food here is as delicious as water after a long run on a hot sunny day.

But the person who cooks is amazing. She is not interacting much with anybody. Her name is Lila aunty.

The environment is so silent and cold but the cold isn't touching the artist's bone. Salim sir is busy sketching a plant. The bees capture the orchids, full of honey. And the flytraps capture their meal.

Tree climbing with the jungle man was fun. But I am shy to admit I was awfully scared of the height from the machan.

These are the things recurring in my mind at the present moment.

Jay:

Wolfgang came from Germany, to travel in India, and went to an ashram. Someone had donated some land to the ashram and it needed to be looked after. So Wolfgang went there and slowly he built a sanctuary. He planted seeds that are now trees. He is still planting more seeds and wants to save plant and animal life.

Now he has planted plants from America and other countries. He and some others are buying land and planting trees and plants. The sanctuary started in 1981. He and his family live a simple life.

People are beautiful in Wyanad.

People are helpful in Wyanad.

People are interesting in Wyanad.

People are trying to save plant and animal life in Wyanad

And in certain parts of the world.

You will have fun with the people in Wyanad.

People are hardworking in Wyanad.

You surely won't like to leave the place and people in Wyanad.

And people make tasty food in Wyanad.

You can see many kinds of birds there if you are quiet. You can see the beautiful colours on them. You can feel the cows passing by you. You will work with the cow dung from the cows. If you are lucky you will see elephants. The dogs are friendly and the puppies are very cute and naughty. But everything over there is beautiful.

Prachi:

Ah! you guys, we have reached Wyanad...it's a wonderful place. Na! The breeze is cool. Hi! Akka, what's your name?my name is Deeba. Oh, a doggy! Deeba akka, what's the dog's name? The dog's name is Goosey. I want to go up...somebody come! Deeba akka wait...let everybody come. Oh! These steps are so many, I'm too tired to climb up.Sandy, hi! How do you know my name? I heard Deeba akka calling you. Sandy said first go to have your bath. I am going. First Flavia. No, I already booked mybathroom before you. Okay fine, you go, I am after you. Quickly go. I remove my night suit and towel and Flavia says Prachi go for your bath. I said fine, I am going, and sandy said, whoever wants hot water go upstairs and fill your bucket. I was too tired, so I didn't have a bath with hot water. I had my bath with cold water and it took me only two to three minutes. And I came out and went up to have my dinner and to see the place. So before having dinner we had a meeting. We decided to give them the junk food so we wouldn't eat it at mealtimes. And we all introduced ourselves. Supi akka was away. She returned and dinner was served. I loved the dinner. We went down and went off to sleep. I slept in the verandah and it was cold. The next day we got up and went for birdwatching. We saw many birds like the hornbill, and the 'school boy'. Some bird sounds were very odd. Then we went up and had our breakfast.

We did many activities there like tree-climbing, bamboo-stick crossing, tower singing, tower climbing, walking blindfolded and so on. Ah! We have to go back to school! Who is coming to pack? I am so sad that I must leave Wyanad. Again the journey, the journey, the journey...

The sanctuary started in 1981. the name of the person who started this place is Wolfgang uncle. He came from Germany when he was young. He traveled from place to place until he came here and made a sanctuary. He has worked here for 23 years. I feel the place is beautiful and I am very lucky to see such a place.

Akshyeta:

I was almost in a daze when I first entered Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary. No—it wasn't only due to the tiring journey but I was awed most by the beauty of it all. There wasn't much to see—we had arrived late and it was dark—but the feeling the place gave—that was beautiful. The music of the cicadas, the delicious smells wafting in from the kitchen, the silent people living there...it felt different and odd, at first.

But then, slowly, I opened out to the place, just as it did to me. I was so used to the usual jabber of the children and the sudden silence felt eerie. But I got used to the silence and talking, well, it seemed quite pointless. I got this feeling especially while walking through the forest. It felt so good to actually listen to the sounds around me—for the first time.

There is so much to say about the place, but somehow words don't seem to describe it well enough. I discovered so much about myself and others—things which are so hard to find out in normal city life.

I enjoyed myself so much in the river—and even tree climbing—how do you get to do anything like that in a city? My days in Gurukula were so full of vigour and activity—I never even realized how quickly time flew.

The few things which made me think a lot when I came back was about how we all were made to adjust to the place, not the place to us. We weren't given any kind of service—no siree! “Eat the food, whether you like it or not—but finish it.” I liked this attitude a lot. It helped me adapt easily and I liked the rules and regulations. We weren't on a grand holiday! We had to respect the place, *we* were the visitors.

But Kanavu—the situation was different. We were given a kind of guest treatment. But it is understandable, as it's a village. I would do anything to live in Gurukula, to be back in the lush greenery, the beautiful birds and of course all the wonderful people there—the puppies, the dogs—it feels wonderful to know that a place like this exists and that I've been there.

Anuya:

When we arrived there was darkness everywhere. I could hear some insects and some barks far away. Sandy came down with a lantern, and led us to the cottage. Next morning, when I woke up, I saw this tree in front of the cottage which was surrounded with a variety of leaves. It was beautiful. There were huge and tiny leaves with many different shapes and colours. I looked all around and there were only trees and plants and flowers everywhere. It was heaven.

The Sanctuary has many species of orchids. They preserve them. They have an orchidarium where they have kept all the orchids. Wolfgang uncle is the main person who takes care of the orchidarium and the garden. He is the one who owns that land. He is a very sweet man. He spoke to us whenever he passed by. Sandy, his son, did a lot of work. He helped in the kitchen also. He was very quiet on the first few days but gradually he became very friendly and everyone liked him a lot. We had a lot of fun with him. We became very close to him. There was Suprabha akka whom we called Suppi akka. She was very sweet. I liked the way she used to dress. She is very good at juggling. And there was Diba akka who taught us some nice songs every night and also came with us for swims. She has a very good voice and so does Suppi akka. Both of them sound very nice together. Leela aunty is Wolfgang uncle's wife who works in the kitchen. She is very quiet. She hardly spoke to any of us. She likes silence.

While bird-watching, some of us saw the fairy bluebird. We also heard the red-whiskered bulbul and saw some drongoes too. We heard and saw cicadas. The food there was awesome. Leela aunty cooks amazingly well. we had hearty meals everyday. The food was amazing, tasty and very filling. I loved it. It was simply delicious. I miss it a lot.

We did many activities too, like juggling, birdwatching, tree-climbing and of course the swimming. We also played some 'sneaky' games with Suppi akka. Suppi akka used to take us for juggling. She taught us the basics first and then how to juggle. She took us near one part of the river once. She used to choose nice places for

juggling. We had fun learning how to juggle and some of us still practise the basics at school. We have fun doing it!

Sandy used to take us for birdwatching and he also took us for tree-climbing and forest walks. It was always fun with him. I enjoyed tree-climbing a lot. It was easy. The place on the tree is beautiful. The view from there was amazing. When I was there on the platform with Akshyeta and Yash, Sandy was also there. We had a nice chat with him there. It was fun coming down also. First, when I was on top, I did feel scared to come down. But it was very easy and not at all tiring like climbing up. Still, it was fun doing both. I enjoyed tree-climbing a lot.

Every alternate day Sandy took us birdwatching. It was fun getting to know new birds. I liked the path on which we walked while going and coming back from birdwatching because of the view from there and the huge trees around. It was very beautiful. Even the forest walks with Sandy were amazing. And I liked the activity which we did in the forest. It was nice making something which doesn't resemble anything and doesn't need brains. The second forest walk was also nice, when we made the 'shading of leaves'. The forest was nice and green and in some parts it was dry with some sunlight coming in. It was very beautiful.

Every day we went for swims in the river with Diba akka. It was fun jumping from the tree. Everyone was jumping from there and having lots of fun. Once Sandy had come, he showed us somersaults and after that all the boys went mad and started trying it! It was fun watching them breaking their backs. We also had singing sessions with Diba akka every night. I liked the song which she taught us.

Suppi akka taught us some nice sneaky games which we can play in school also. I liked the games a lot. It was fun hiding as well as looking for people at the same time. It was exciting playing those kind of games. I don't know how those people get such amazing ideas. They have very creative minds. Whatever Suppi did, she told us to remove our footwear and walk barefoot everywhere, even if we were walking on an uneven path. I liked it a lot. It was always fun with her.

On the last morning, some of us went for a last short walk with Sandy. We had a last chat with him. That was the last walk and talk with Sandy. I miss all of them a lot. Then we left for Kanavu. All the girls were feeling quite ill and went off to sleep. After some time we started singing songs and felt much better. It took time to reach Kanavu. We spoke about the Sanctuary and sang songs all the way to Kanavu. We enjoyed that short journey also. We enjoyed every moment of every day.

I found Kanavu a very beautiful place. In front of the cottage, in Kanavu, there was a statue which was made of clay. It was very beautiful. It was made by the students. Whenever I didn't have anything to do I would go sit on the steps of the lotus pond there. It was nice and pleasant. Their martial arts are very amazing. All the people there are very flexible. I was shocked to see them touch their foot to their hand when it was near their head. In the evening they performed for us. They sang and danced for us. After some time, everybody in that room was dancing. I danced continuously that day. For the first time I danced for so long, without bothering who was looking at me and making fun of me. One just can't resist it, one has to dance. The beats and rhythm are so fantastic, one just can't stop.

I enjoyed my stay in Kanavu as well as the Sanctuary. It was a wonderful experience in Wyanad all together. I would like to go back to Wyanad once again, and I hope our school trip goes there again. It was fun with friends around. I have really enjoyed myself during this trip and can never forget it.

Shantanu:

It was a very different place. It was all surrounded by trees. The place we stayed in was full of nature. Walking around the forest and jumping in the dirty mud was an unusual thing for me. I've never gone for such forest walks in my life.

It was a very different everyday routine. After we got up we went with Supi akka or Sandy to do activities, after which we had our breakfast. Then we went on forest walks. These were quite long. After lunch, we would go to the stream, to swim. We then went up to the dining hall to have our tea, and then we went up on the tower for an hour, before dinner. We had a lot of free time.

It was fun learning the games they taught. It was fun chatting and playing. The activities were very different from the school activities. They taught us advanced hide and seek, blindfolded walking, birdwatching and the mission game.

For breakfast they gave their special South Indian food. For dinner it was different, but very tasty. They made paratha pizzas too. For tea we shared our things, like khakhras, with them.

Swimming was great fun. The best part was when Sandy swung me from one end to the other and chucked me in the stream. Climbing up the tree and jumping into the water was fun. The stream was very deep, around 12 feet, and it was very long.

Tree climbing was also fun. It was my first time. I found I wasn't all that scared while doing tree-climbing. Playing with the dogs and puppies was fun. It was fun making the puppies jump. Goosy is the best dog of all. He was very active.

The people were very friendly and helpful. They would not like it if somebody plucked or stepped on any plants. They don't like their place littered. Keeping the place clean is a passion for them.

I liked the music sessions there. The songs which they taught us touched me. We used to make three groups and sing, so it would overlap. And we used to sing Geet Gunjan songs for them.

Alex and Aliona used to do fun things and make us laugh.

Kannavu was also fun. There was a dog named Madhu, and we played with her a lot. First I got very scared of her, but soon my fear reduced.

It was fun playing games over there with the people the forest walk was fun. All of us danced continuously for three hours there. I liked the pottery thing that Sandeep had made. I had never seen such a thing. The best song I liked was the Wyanaad song. We started dancing from that time. We also sang some Geet Gunjan songs.

Lakshmi:

The place was totally different from my imagination. We entered a small cottage. It was quite comfortable. We slept cozily in our sleeping bags.

Early next morning we went for a blindfolded walk. It was misty. Many of my friends went to see the puppies. I sat away from my friends, where there were many trees, looking around me. Suddenly I saw a small black little bird with a red beak. Near the dining hall I played with the puppies. The small bananas that we got for breakfast made my mouth water.

Then we had a talk with Wolfgang uncle. I liked the way he explained the plants to us. The most amazing thing was when he removed a huge insect from a plant. He has kept so many plants to conserve them. He has brought colourful orchids from other countries to make it more interesting for other people.

Leela akka is one of the best cooks I have ever seen, and lunch was as nice as breakfast.

The best time was climbing up the tree. Two people went up before me. I happily and easily climbed up the tree, sometimes stopping and looking around me.

Singing was the most relaxing time of day. If I was angry or frustrated I would sing and everything would go away. We used to sing in the tank too. When you're in the tank you feel you are a real singer.

I couldn't believe how easily I learnt swimming. Every swimming time Deeba akka would teach me and I always followed her instructions.

We went for a blindfolded walk. I got scared because I was the last one in the line. Sometimes my hand would slip off my friend's shoulder and everyone had to wait till I got back on track.

The next sad thing was when we went for a river walk and my specs got lost. I realized only when we had reached the top. We didn't want to go back, so I just left them.

Kanavu was fun too. I was very free and danced for three hours.

Nishit:

The place was very good. It was clean and the plants were very beautiful and very big. None of the plants had dry leaves. The environment was very cold in the night and I liked the environment. It was not as hot as it is in Pune. The purpose of the sanctuary is to save plants which are getting extinct. The people were very good. The naughty one was Alex. All the people were very kind also. The dogs were very good, specially Goosy. He was active. Marilyn was very kind. If there were fights among the dogs she used to get sad and bark. The food was very good, especially paratha pizza and small bananas.

The activity I liked the most is swimming. I enjoyed bathing in the stream more than I do in swimming pools. Relationships among members of the group were good. Everyone was friendly and talking to everyone. I liked everything. I didn't like the last day because we were leaving.

Richa:

When I first reached the sanctuary it was all silent and there were tall trees all around which made me feel really weird. I hadn't been used to such a place at all, so this feeling caught me.

I had got very used to it soon and really liked the environment. I felt myself to be a part of everything there. This place changed me a lot.

After going there I wasn't very self-conscious and could open up with everyone. I realized that I had so many abilities which were unknown to me so far. Most of all, I became alert about the things around.

This place made me forget all the bad things that had happened before and brought me into a completely new world.

The people here were very simple and had a very different way of living. They are leading a very happy life without using all the things that we want but do not really need. They can stay with the least number of things. I learned or understood the same.

Such insects and plants I had never seen before. They were so different and rare. These living things were well protected.

Overall, this trip was a new experience which is unforgettable.

Arman:

The journey there was lots of fun. When I reached there I felt so nice. I was waiting to start interacting with the people there. I also wished my mother was there—she would fall in love with that place. Supi akka took us to the place we were supposed to stay at, and at that moment I realized that she reminded me of my aunt.

It was really a place that had a new feeling in the air. And that feeling was one of peace and I don't know what else...the birds were really amazing, the way they looked, the sounds they made. The insects, the frogs and snakes and the beautiful plants, so green so fresh. It was amazing the way they looked. I have no more words.

The people there were very interesting. There was Sandy, S

Upi, Graham, Christoff, Wolfgang, Edith, Gopal and Leela aunty. They were very friendly and I enjoyed their company. Graham was a very funny man. The activities we did were lots of fun...swimming, blindfolded walking, juggling, forest walk and so on. The tree-climbing was lots of fun. It was an experience. I think anyone would enjoy doing that. The bamboo crossing was also fun. At one point, I thought I was going to fall off. I really wish I could go back. That was what I call dreams coming true.

Radhika:

I was terrified to see the huge trees at the entrance. They were so huge. I heard the cicadas. The dogs came running down to the cottage to greet us all. They were friendly but we were all scared. We jumped and hopped when the dogs came near us.

I watched the fishes in the fishpond. I was amazed to hear that Sandy had made the pond. The people there work hard. They are all trying to save the South Indian plants. Most people in the world kill plants, and we don't know what we are doing. These people are good at carving and other work. They all live in a simple manner.

The food was good. I found the rice a bit odd, but it tempted me and I ate it.

I guess Supi, Sandy and all these people were not all that free but we would have enjoyed it better if they had been more free and if we had stayed there for a long period of time. They were frank with us.

Kanavu was loads of fun. We danced for two hours. I've never danced so much in my whole life. We were not at all shy about it.

The place was amazing, and it was loads of fun—more than I had ever expected.

Yash:

Wynad, a place which taught me how to live with the least number of needs.

The people are loving, and make sure you get all your answers when questions are asked they are people who work like a team, stay like a family and make a very good community. Their silence blends with the natural environment. They are people who can feel the slightest hurt of a plant. The environment is clean and not at all spoilt by pollution. The air is very fresh all day. The trees, plants, flowers and grass looked so lively! They don't look dull at all.

The Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary is trying to save the natural habitat of South India. The villagers are also helping them to preserve the habitat. The birds of Wynad leave me with no words. They are so colourful and their size is

also stunning but their names are hard to remember. The insects are so pretty; their sound is so different from the insects found in and around our school.

I really liked the food for a change, but I would not like it every day. The food out there is grown by them. The activities were very interesting, and were done in groups. We did so many activities that played with our senses. We did forest walks, tree climbing, juggling, river crossing blindfolded walks and many other things. I thought Wynad would be like a cottage with only forest all around, no lighting, very, very simple food, really strict people, nameboards on all the trees, wild dogs everywhere, and wild animals around. But I really found it like a home, where I was working with my family.

I actually started talking less after the Wynad trip. I have overcome the fear of talking to Kappu akka. I remember when I first saw those foreigners, I got really scared. I found it difficult to talk to some girls also. But I felt really comfortable with Deeba, Supi and Sandy.

Suraj:

It was the first time I was going to Kerala, and I was very excited. The journey was fun. I was really happy and excited to see the place. From our jeep we had seen monkeys, peacocks, elephants, deer and so on. When we reached the sanctuary the first thing I heard was dogs barking. I got scared because I am not familiar with dogs. Then Supi came down the stairs and took us to our cottage, and showed us the jungle loops. Then I sat there for two minutes and felt that this was different from what I had imagined. We went to the dining room; it was beautiful. We had food and went to sleep.

The next morning we went with Supi for a blindfolded walk. I felt scared when I walked blindfolded, and thought I would fall down but it was safe. Then we juggled; I did it quite well. As I was roaming around I always felt that the dogs would bite me. Wolfgang uncle took us for a walk and then we went for a swim. I was just jumping from the tree.

It was all so much fun! I really miss that place and wish to go again.

Jenil:

There were five big dogs and six pups. The eldest of all was Humphrey. The second was Gustav, the father of nine dogs. Falafal was a simple brown dog who had six little pups. Marilyn was black. Humas was the youngest, after the pups.

Kaushal:

After a day we went to a tower from which you could see all the green forest. The birds came up to the sky and started chirping. There were amazing birds like the Indian Pitta and the golden oriole, the greatest birds I have ever seen. I started loving birds and bird watching more than ever.

The river which we swam in had lovely fishes and tadpoles. We swam in the water for a long time.

Suyash:

There was one thing that was cool: the shit pit. It was just a dug up place with two planks of wood to keep your feet on. It was a lovely experience.

We did an activity in which we had to walk blindfolded from one spot, barefoot. I was last but some cows came in front of us so we had to get aside. Then I became first and I was leading. I could not see anything. I was very scared. If I did something wrong the whole group would be in danger. When we passed through the stream and I could feel the water on my leg. I could feel the pebbles touching my feet. We reached a place full of grass and then [we were told] to open our eyes and I could see everything was a little blurred. We had to walk on two bamboos without support, to cross the stream. It was amazing.

Himay:

We had gone for a forest walk and there we heard an elephant trumpet. We all ran back. Some of us got so excited that we fell in the water. Tree-climbing was great fun.

It is sad that species of plants are getting extinct at a fast rate. I would like to join [Wolfgang] in this work.

Harshwardhan:

When you leave this place you feel rather lonely because in Wyanad you can feel the life of plants and animals. I have taken an oath not to harm animals or plants.

The great water tower which one plays musically is a part of Wyanad.

The food here is as delicious as water after a long run on a hot sunny day.

Tree climbing with the jungle man [Sandy] was fun. But I am shy to admit I was awfully scared of the height from the machan.

Jay:

You can see many kinds of birds there if you are quiet. You can see the beautiful colours on them. You can feel the cows passing by you. You will work with the cow dung from the cows. If you are lucky you will see elephants. The dogs are friendly and the puppies are very cute and naughty. But everything over there is beautiful.

Akshyeta

The few things which made me think a lot when I came back was about how we all were made to adjust to the place, not the place to us. We weren't given any kind of service—no siree! "Eat the food, whether you like it or not—but finish it." I liked this attitude a lot. It helped me adapt easily and I liked the rules and regulations. We weren't on a grand holiday! We had to respect the place.

Anuya:

The food there was awesome. We had hearty meals everyday. Leela aunty cooks amazingly well. The food was amazing, tasty and very filling. I loved it. It was simply delicious. I miss it a lot.

We did many activities too, like juggling, birdwatching, tree-climbing and of course the swimming. Suppi akka used to take us for juggling. She taught us the basics first and then how to juggle. She took us near one part of the river once. She used to choose nice places for juggling. We had fun learning how to juggle and some of us still practise the basics at school. We have fun doing it!

Even the forest walks with Sandy were amazing. And I liked the activity which we did in the forest. It was nice making something which doesn't resemble anything and doesn't need brains. The second forest walk was also nice, when we made the 'shading of leaves'. The forest was nice and green and in some parts it was dry with some sunlight coming in. it was very beautiful.

Every day we went for swims in the river with Diba akka. It was fun jumping from the tree. Everyone was jumping from there and having lots of fun. Once Sandy had come, he showed us somersaults and after that all the boys went mad and; started trying it! We also had singing sessions with Diba akka every night. Suppi akka taught us some nice sneaky games which we can play in school also. I liked the games a lot. It was fun hiding as well as looking for people at the same time. It was exciting playing those kind of games. I don't know how those people get such amazing ideas. Whatever Suppi did, she told us to remove our footwear and walk barefoot everywhere, even if we were walking on an uneven path. I liked it a lot.