

Nostalgia

– a trip down memory lane

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It was a hot sultry day in August 1991, when I first set my eyes on the hallowed portals of Presidency College. I was there to pick up the admission forms for the undergraduate courses in Geology and Chemistry. In those days, the criteria for selection was a combination of performance in an admission test and marks secured in the board exams. Little did I know that a month later I would be joining the prestigious institution.

We were a part of history, the centenary batch in Geology at Presidency, the first undergraduate program for Geology in India commencing way back in 1892. The standout memories of the first few weeks, were the induction by the seniors, the freshers' welcome and the impressive Geological Museum in our department. The best part was the atmosphere of the college, where we first tasted freedom from the regimentation of schooling. It was like a breath of fresh air. For me personally, the college held a special place in my heart,

as my father too had graduated from here in Physics way back in 1956.

The best part of being in Geology, we were told in the very first month of the course, were the field trips held during the winter months. The first trip was to Jasidih and Rajgir in Bihar in early 1992. The field trips were our first experience of being away from home for weeks and it meant planning and being equipped to handle the winter. It also meant hard work in the sun, walking for miles in search of 'tourmaline' and the occasional faux pas when one of our batch-mates picked up goat droppings hardened in the sun, by mistake. The evenings were spent in chatting, singing and pulling a fast one on our friends. The climb up the Trikhut Pahar by ropeway, with majestic views of the hills and valley beneath, was a thrilling experience. The descent was even more fascinating, as we made it on foot through scrub jungle as dusk fell. We were told there could be sloth bears around, and that made it even more exciting. The trip

also revealed the photographic talents in the batch. We also made a trip to the ruins of the Nalanda University which dates back to the heyday of the teachings Buddha. The impressive façade and layout left an indelible impression on our minds.

Back in the city, we experienced our first college festival, Milieu, which was followed by the 175th year celebrations of the college. It was a momentous time and an honour to be a part of a great institution of modern India that has produced eminent alumni in almost every field of human endeavor, from the first President of India to Nobel Prize and Oscar winners. The Canteen was the place to hang about and make friends in other departments, and pass classes were a lot of fun. During one of the physics pass classes, there was a short circuit which caused a few sparks and one of the old fans caught fire resulting in a huge uproar and people disappeared before the shocked professor could respond.

The second and third year field trips were equally memorable. The Second year trip was to Udaipur, Rajasthan, and we travelled a lot over three weeks. Our team was based near Jhamar Kotra near Udaipur which has the biggest mines of rock phosphate in India. Traversing the rock phosphate mines in extremely dry terrain, we often ran out of water and had to

depend on the hand tube wells in the mines. The water was often mixed with sand particles and we had to wait for 10-15 minutes to allow the sand to settle to the bottom of our flasks or bottles, before we could drink. The trip included memorable journeys to Chittorgarh, Ranakpur and Udaipur. The trip to Udaipur on a truck top with the wind and sand

blowing on our faces, was truly unforgettable. Climbing up to the Jain temple at Ranakpur was another memorable experience, where about five of us reached the top. We were young, fit and fearless. Our return trip via Delhi included a stop-over at Agra to see the Taj Mahal.

Three wonderful years went by

and we parted to go our separate ways. We realize over time that these field trips were not only extremely enjoyable as we got to bond with batch-mates and trouble our professors, but also helped to foster friendships that last a lifetime. It has now been more than twenty years since we left college, but we still find ways to keep in touch.