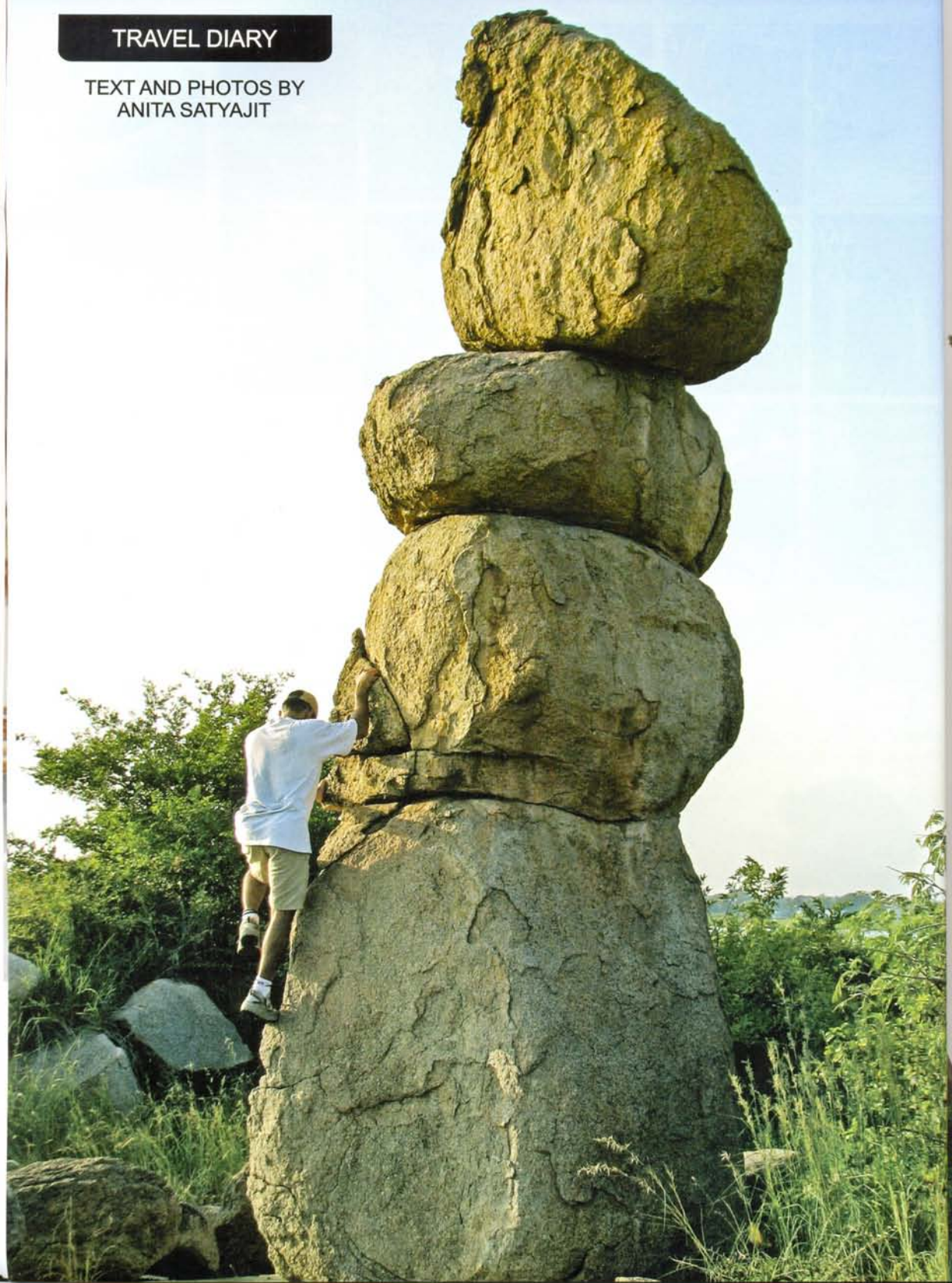


TRAVEL DIARY

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY
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Rocky Moments in Hyderabad...

A day with nature's sculptures

As you approach Hyderabad from air, you will be impressed to view the vastness of the city. Architecturally beautiful structures, long spacious roads and glistening water-bodies nestle alongside chaotic gullies, crawling traffic and crowded buildings. But what is sure to captivate you, even from that height, is the seemingly large number of rocky hills that dot the city's exterior.

These are the rocks of Hyderabad; granite monoliths that are older than the Himalayas; rocks that geologists say dates back to 2.5 billion years. When I moved to Hyderabad three years ago, I was fascinated by them.

They stand as silent sentinels on the outskirts of the city, striking varied poses for the admiring passer-by. I soon heard that these rocks were unique. But since then I have also witnessed vast tracts of land where these rocks made their homes fall prey to development. In place of these imposing rocks have appeared apartment complexes, commercial offices and residential townships.

Worried about their disappearance, I contacted the *Society to Save Rocks*. This organisation devoted to preserving and protecting rocks, conducts rock-walks every month for its members and other interested

people. I enrolled for the walk, eager to have an educative experience.

On that day, accompanied by my husband, my partner-in-adventure, I headed to Serilingampally to meet the rock-walkers. And what a gathering it was! About 25 of us, old and young, professionals and housewives, foreigners as well as Indians, all congregated at the base point, geared up for the sojourn. Dressed for a hike with our backpacks and water bottles, we set off to venture into the rocks bordering the Hyderabad Central

Geologists have discovered that certain rocks in Hyderabad date back to 2.5 billion years.



University. Dr. Satyaprakash, Lecturer of Communications at the University and a member of *Society to Save Rocks*, was to be our guide for the evening, announced Frauke Quader, Secretary of the society.

We walked away from our vehicles – and from astonished residents in the locality – into the open ground behind. Tall grass tickled our elbows; nearby, we could see the outline of a lake. Following a rough trail, we reached a wall. As people huffed, puffed and pulled themselves over the wall, jumping down to the ground on the other side, I felt pleased at how adventurous this was turning out to be!

The rocks were interesting to observe from close quarters. Some wore a corroded appearance, while others looked like they had been newly sliced or polished.

Thick wild brush greeted us on the other side of the wall. With the memory of monsoon still fresh in the minds of these plants, everything was dressed in its best greens. Thorny bushes scattered all around the area though threatened to have a go at us, and I soon became adept at skirting these prickly plants.

The rocky hill ahead invited me onwards for a wild experience and a lesson in geography. I soon learnt that the rocks were part of the Deccan plateau's hard crystalline rocks, spread across an area of nearly 20,000 sq. km. Called the basement complex of the Indian sub-continent, these were intrusive igneous rocks

formed when the molten lava did not reach the surface of the earth and cooled and hardened below the surface itself. But over the years, they had made their way up to reveal themselves.

High-tension electricity wires ran across the area and I realised that this place would not be safe during monsoons. But now it was autumn and in the late afternoon, both the weather and sky were perfect for this rock-walk

As we moved closer to the rocks they seemed to get larger and daunting. We clambered over rock -faces, and sensed we were in for some hard-core trekking. The rocks were interesting to observe from close quarters. Some wore a corroded appearance while

An exciting walk towards the rocky hills of Serilingampally



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others looked like they had been newly sliced or polished. Frauke filled me in. Apparently the rocks were highly resistant to erosion. But over millions of years their surface had been peeled off slowly. Wind, water and varying temperatures had got into their nooks and crannies and had crafted these stunning formations.

As she spoke, I stopped in my tracks. In front of me was a tall and imposing rock formation; a woman standing with her face to the lake, her hair blown back by the wind. That's what it looked like! Nature had perfectly moulded the rock to give it the right curves. After the group collectively gasped, sighed, photographed, and admired the rock, we walked on.

When we began, from the distance the place was very unassuming. I had presumed the entire area was a tiny hillock spread across a kilometre. But we hiked through, over and around boulders, I realised it was in fact a large area with hundreds of rocks all around. And the shapes were stunning. A fat man stretched on the ground, an hourglass, a puppy seated on its hind legs with its front legs raised in the air, a flying saucer resting on a metallic plate; the rocks inspired you to imagine, dream and interpret them as you chose.

As we walked deeper into the hill, a small pond greeted us. Plants floated on it, cranes raced each other and on a nearby shrub sat a Baya weaver bird, close to its hanging nest. When I expressed wonder at the presence of numerous ponds and lakes in the area, a fellow trekker told me that rocks formed part of the natural drainage system. Their presence resulted in the natural flow of rain water and as a result, ponds, lakes

From top to bottom: The sun bids its farewell to us; A flying saucer resting on the rocks; Is it a sliced loaf of bread? ▶



and ground water usually abounded in the areas adjoining the rock structures. Fauna and flora of varied kinds thrived in such an eco-system. And so, the destruction of such rocks usually meant loss of lakes which disturbed the ecological balance of the area.

It was to combat these very things that the *Society to Save Rocks* was set up in 1996. Their relentless work resulted in the government issuing orders for conservation of nine rock formations in and around the city as heritage structures. It was the first such occurrence in the country when natural rock formations were recognised as heritage sites that need protection.

As I processed all that information, I realised that this was not my first

The Shamirpet lake was formed by the presence of such rocks in that area

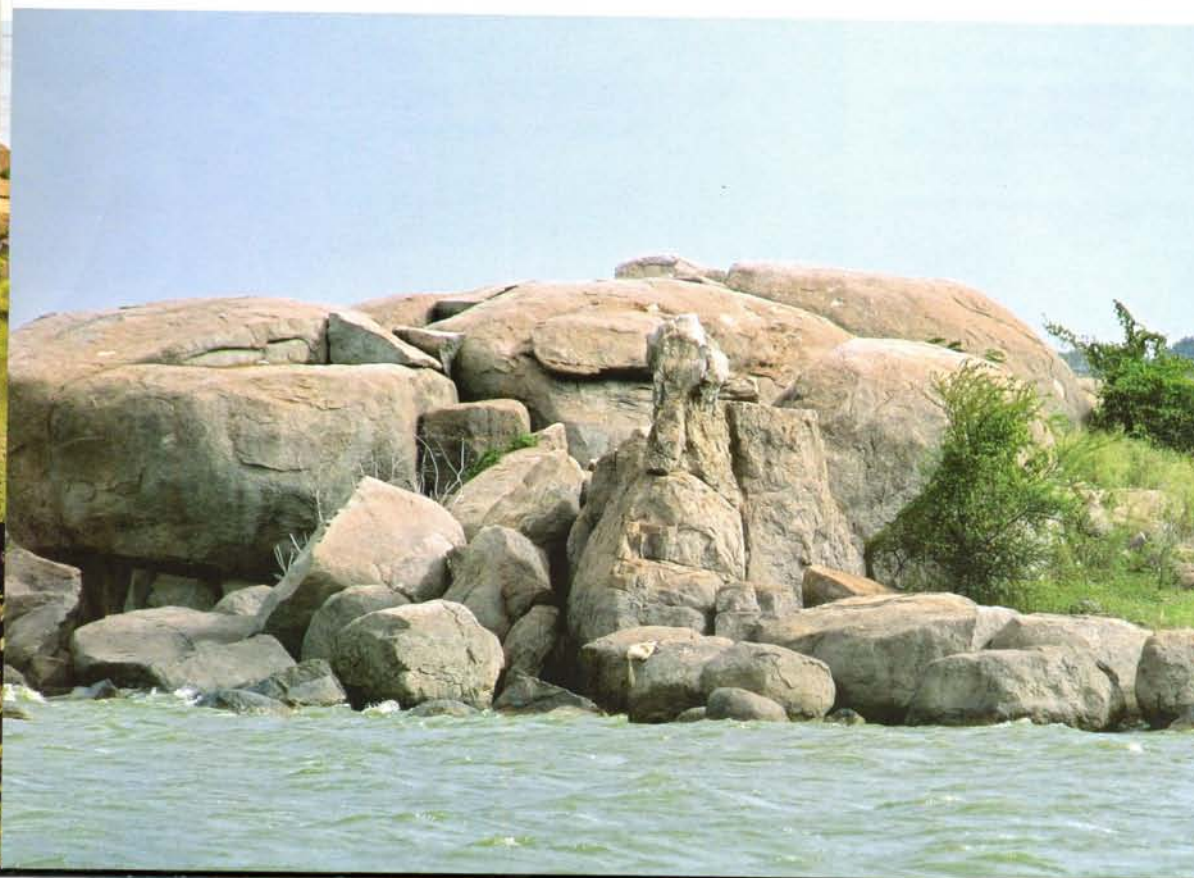
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A lonely survivor against the backdrop of quarried boulders

interaction with these rocks. All the rocky formations I had seen scattered in areas such as Banjara Hills, Jubilee hills and Gachibowli area of Hyderabad, were part of this unique ecosystem. Shamirpet, a lake on the outskirts of the city I had once visited,

was also formed by the presence of such rocks in that area. The famed Golconda too was built on these rocks, using them as bricks.



Chatting about the rocks and debating ways to preserve them, we reached a clearing. A huge rock that looked like a neatly sliced loaf of bread awaited us. Behind it, hidden between other rocks, was a deserted temple. The slabs had been piled cleverly on each other to build a simple structure. Who built it and when, no one seemed to know. I could not help but feel that the temple was a reminder to everyone of the sanctity of this region; that every stone here had a tale to tell.

By then, two hours had passed. The sun was rushing home. But it had turned its orange spotlight on the rocks which now looked bewitching in the twilight. As we headed back to our vehicles, I knew I had been converted into a die-hard rock-lover. 2500 million years of rocky magic had cast a spell on me, linking me with the past in a way I had never known before.

The spellbinding Golconda fort, built from granite rocks

FACT FILE

Where to Find Them

These rocks can be found on the outskirts of Hyderabad. They are also found in the surrounding districts of Medak, Warangal and Mahbubnagar.

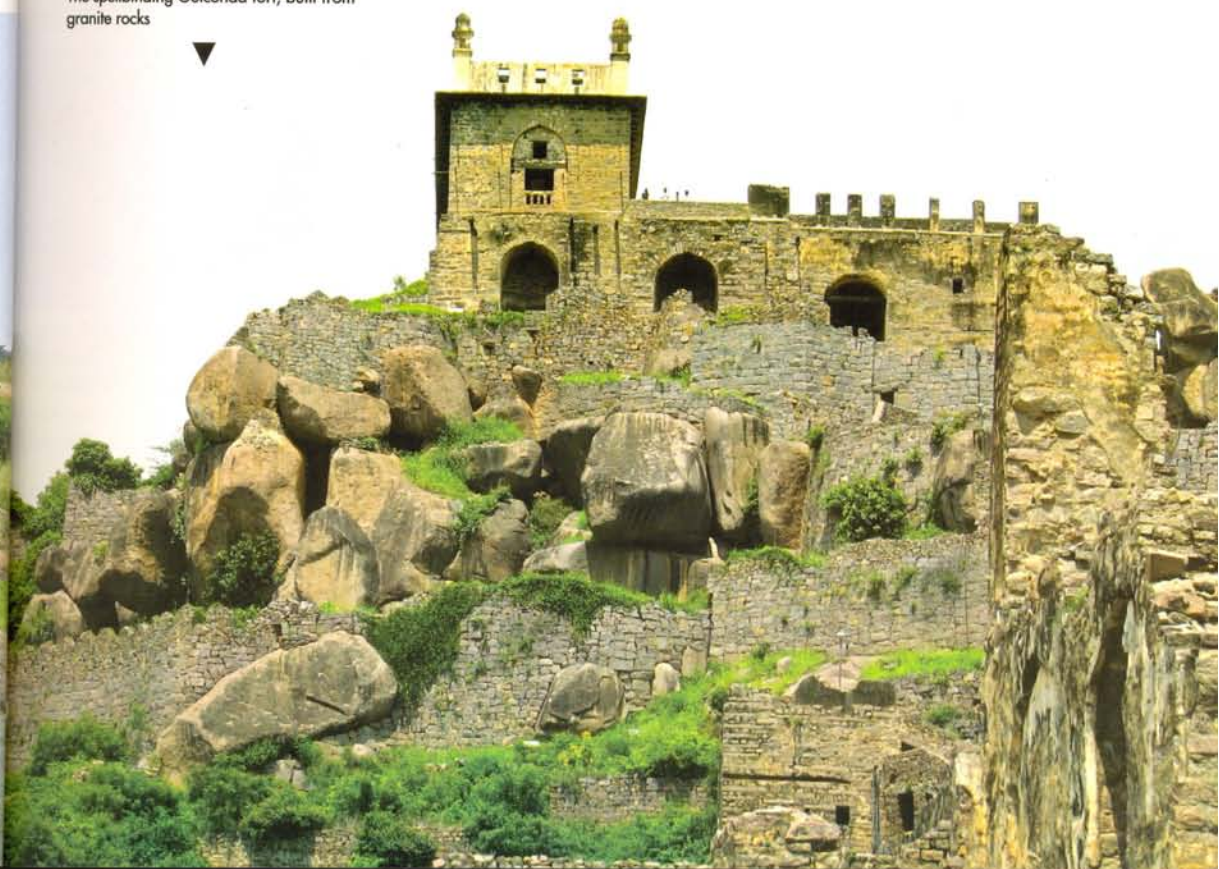
How to Get There

Paramount Airways operates daily flight services to Hyderabad from Chennai, Bangalore, Coimbatore and Visakhapatnam. Convenient connections are also available from Kochi Trivandrum and Madurai.

Buses and private taxis can easily take you to places like Golconda, Shamirpet or Durgam Cheruvu, if you want to trek on your own. The Municipal Corporation of Hyderabad too has started to develop rock parks if all you want is a mild stroll among these rocks. But if you like being part of a group, then contact *Society to Save Rocks* at 040-23552923.

Additional Information

Large scale construction and illegal quarrying have managed to destroy much of these rocks. Help preserve and conserve this ecosystem by ensuring that you do not litter or damage the site on your visit. Spread the word about these rocks. It is only too easy to injure yourself if you are not careful while trekking. Do not venture alone to such places. Always ensure you dress right, have company and carry plenty of water along.



Backdrop of
the famed fort
on these