

Patsy Bansropan's Solidarity Holiday in India

In August, Patsy Bansropan, from Newcastle Works visited the state of Rajasthan in India where she spent part of her annual leave volunteering in the ArcelorMittal Solidarity Holidays programme.

Johann Fouché

"A fulfilled life is about serving others..." Those were the first words we heard when asking Patsy Bansropan about her Solidarity Holiday in India. "Although the team in India worked 60 hours in the week spent in Bombora, it was a very rewarding experience."

Patsy left OR Tambo Airport on 4 August 2012. She arrived at Dubai Airport at 00:30 the next morning. Being the first to arrive in Dubai, Patsy was very anxious to meet her other colleagues and with the aid of photographs she managed to find Olga Marukhno from the Ukraine. "There was no stopping of tears of relief at that moment" Patsy says. Soon afterwards they met Janine van

den Heever from Saldanha (SA). Nervously they waited for Muoad Hassina from Morocco because the time was getting closer to departure and there was still no sign of him. Just before boarding for India Muoad appeared adding to the excitement.

The group reached the Indira Ghandi Airport (Delhi) on 5 August 2012 at 09:30, India time. On arrival a taxi driver was already waiting, waving a board carrying the ArcelorMittal logo around to draw their attention. James Borlay from Liberia had already landed in India and was waiting for the group of four to join. They were taken to the Hotel in Delhi where all the other volunteers were waiting with their host Rajendran Mandamparambil, Regional Manager Asia, CIS & Eastern Europe ArcelorMittal Foundation.

"It was as though we had met at a family reunion; it was screams, joys, and hugs, all in different languages! The air was full of happiness," Patsy says.

After freshening up they had lunch at a local restaurant and after a drive to the Delhi Railway Station, they boarded for Udaipur on an overnight trip, arriving there at seven o'clock in the morning. Then it was a taxi drive to Bombora their newfound home for the next week.

Accommodation for the group was arranged at the Karni Fort, a 360 years old building. The group was warmly received by the Rajasthan people who work at the Fort. Treated in great Indian style they were ushered into the Dining Hall, and spoilt to a delightful lunch before getting into working gear and leaving for a village in Bombora.

ArcelorMittal India is partnering with the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India and Centre for Environment Education for Paryavaran Mitra (Friends of environment) on a Sustainability and Climate Change Education Programme in 200,000 schools across the India. ArcelorMittal contributes towards building assets for augmenting natural resources namely watershed development in community pastures through plantations and small conservation measures like water channels and trenches.

The rest of the week was spent planting 20,000 saplings inclusive of trees starting at 8am and leaving for home at 5pm. Patsy says they were amazed at how much support and assistance they received from the local communities in this endeavour.

The group also visited schools and did paintings on the school walls to raise awareness of Health and Safety among the school children.

At the end of their stay in Bombora they were given a cocktail party by their hosts from the India team and were very fortunate to have Mr Vijay Bhatnagar CEO of China and India grace the function. The group was presented with a certificate of appreciation from the Government of Rajasthan for the work that they had done. The group was entertained by the Rajasthan folk singers and dancers. The evening ended at 11pm with a fireworks display. Their mission had been fulfilled.

The next day was sightseeing in Udaipur and then boarding the train to Mathura followed by a bus trip to Agra and the Taj Mahal. After midday they drove to Delhi

for shopping and then it was time for goodbyes.

Patsy says she considers herself as extremely lucky to be chosen to be a part of the Solidarity Holiday Project. Although their working days were both long and hard, she truly and thoroughly enjoyed every bit of the time she spent with the working group.

"For me this was a life changing experience and I feel so good knowing that I have been blessed to share my experience with the people of India and my team members".

Patsy would like to convey her appreciation the ArcelorMittal Foundation and the Indian Team for this wonderful experience.



Welcomed by the village people. The red dots on the group members' foreheads ... a sign of welcome to the Village Family



The village chief planting the first tree



School children also helped



At the Taj Mahal ... Patsy with some of the volunteers.



Ladies from the village who worked with the group. They would carry big pots of tea (chai) from home and made sure we were served at all times ... very hospitable ... simple, humble.



School children who came along to help with the planting ... absolutely humble, loving, caring and respectful children



Patsy planting a tree



Ready, steady, go.. Off to collect the sapplings. Patsy showing off her motorbike skills



Karni fort ... where the group stayed ... treated like royalty



Patsy and other volunteers from nine different countries together with Rajendran at the Taj Mahal