

Six Weeks in Australia: Surveying and Scuba Diving

By Class 10, Abhaya School,
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We, the class ten students of Abhaya Waldorf School in Hyderabad, India, were invited in April/ May 2013 by Samford Valley Steiner School in Australia, for a surveying main lesson. Almost as soon as we reached Samford, we were off in buses to learn surveying in Chinchilla, Queensland. We put up our tents at the local showgrounds and slept out in the open, using the kitchen and a big hall for both dining and our classroom work. Putting up the tent itself was an interesting experience as it was the first time for us, as was staying away from our families in another country for a longer period of time. Miriam, our cook and quarter master, was quick to crack the whip if any of us slacked in our washing up duties after each meal. Anupama, a parent of Abhaya School, helped Miriam in the kitchen and we were truly grateful for the Indian curries that she made us every other day.



Peter Glasby with class 10 students

Every morning we had to make our breakfast, pack our lunches and head to the Chinchilla Fossil Reserve our surveying site. Peter Glasby, Tim Dunn and Mark Piper were the teachers who guided us and taught us the tricks of the surveying trade. We were taught various aspects of surveying during the day, such as triangulation, finding true north, tacheometry and vertical profiling, using theodolites, dumpy levels

and surveyors' bands. Using the theodolite and measuring angles was initially a challenge but eventually we mastered it. After dinner, we learnt how to apply the principles of trigonometry, optics and basic mathematics to generate numbers for use in the final map making. We also started preparing our main lesson book during these post-dinner sessions.



After a week of working at the site, we were dropped off at the beginning of a long bush walk. The two-week camp had a three-day bush walk in between, to accommodate shooting enthusiasts who used the rifle range near our site, during weekends. We were given a map and a compass and asked to figure out a way to walk to the end where the bus would pick us up. Much to our glee, on the first day we surprised our teachers, who were keeping a watchful eye on us from a distance, and found them hiding behind the bushes! After walking for a day, we found a flat piece of land to camp. We pitched our tents there, set up our stoves, made dinner, collected water from a creek and slept in our sleeping bags. It was unique experience for us Indians, though the Aussie students may have felt it was just another 'camp' though all of us seemed to enjoy our time without any of the adults snooping around.

After two days of walking with our huge packs, we reached our destination covering approximately 32 kms. At the destination, we all jumped into a pool of flowing water. A couple of our friends who were not so adept at swimming were struggling a bit, so Tim and John, two adults on opposite sides of the bank, jumped in to help them ashore. We returned to Chinchilla to fine tune our raw data, draw maps, work with GPS coordinates and obtain more tacheometry data, to make the vertical profile/map of the site. After the camp we went back to Brisbane for the weekend and gallivanted around the city, watching movies, shopping and generally having fun.

The following week, some serious work was in store for us back at school. It was time for calculations, calculations and more calculations. We made a digital version of our maps on the computer using Quantum GIS software. During four long breaks at school, we played cricket against the Samford Valley High School team. It was a thrilling nail-biting finish which required the umpire and match referee, Mark Piper, to bring out his calculator to decide who won at the end. After a tense situation with the players milling around him, he declared that the Indians had won by one run. A couple of war cries from the Indians and many hugs later, we all went back to class to work on more mundane issues of maths and maps.



On the last day of the school, we watched a popular Bollywood movie - Three idiots - with a group of Aussie host families, teachers and students of Samford Valley Steiner School. We cooked an Indian dinner which we shared with them and thanked them for their kindness and generosity in putting up with a bunch of garrulous Indian adolescents for a couple of weeks. The next day, after tearful goodbyes to all our friends and hosts, we left for Byron Bay to round off an excellent visit to Australia.



The scuba diving course was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for us. Our instructors, Giac, Liz, John and the others at Sun Dive, Byron Bay, were warm and friendly and we enjoyed learning how to dive from them. We saw placid wobbegong sharks on the ocean floor, manta rays, turtles and many more iridescent multi-coloured fish whose names we did not know during the dives. It was a fantastic experience for all of us who got to dive at Julian Rock, in the Pacific Ocean. At the end of the training, many of us got an open water dive certificate and there were happy smiling faces all round.



We spent our time at Byron Bay learning to dive, watching a few Hollywood movies, shopping, eating out and boogie boarding at the beach. Some of us cycled to the Cape Byron

Steiner School and spent an afternoon there with the high school students and teachers. The week at Byron Bay and the journey back to India taught us how to handle money and take independent decisions which affected each one of us, as well as the whole group. The weekend came much too quickly and, with our final goodbyes to Australia, we returned back home with amazing stories to treasure for the rest of our lives. ♦



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