

SPRING NATURE WALK: IN THE APPLE HEARTLAND

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“Nature is the purest portal to inner peace,” said Angie Weiland-Crosby, a famous American writer. We students got the opportunity to witness this beautiful art of God called ‘Nature’.

SAGES (Shimla Amateur Garden & Environment Society) organized a Spring Nature Walk to Bangapani, Cheog located in tehsil Theog of district Shimla. This nature walk took place on 28th April 2024. Four students of Form 12 and a geography teacher from Auckland House School got an opportunity to be a part of the same. Many students from other schools including Laureate Public School, DAV Public School and Shimla Public School also accompanied us. I would like to extend our gratitude to our Principal Mrs. Smaraki Samantharoy and our Director Mrs. Sunita John for allowing us to visit the same. We boarded our bus at 9:20 a.m. and started our journey from Auckland Tunnel, Shimla. On our way, we saw some amazing views which highly fascinated us. In between the journey, few SAGES’ members also kept on joining us. The weather was quite pleasant throughout the journey. However, the weather was constantly changing because the sun was getting covered with dark clouds again and again and we could feel the chilly winds as soon as we reached the destination.

We reached Bangapani at 11:00 a.m. After a long journey of one hour and forty minutes, we got off the bus to straighten our backs and feel the cool, fresh air around us. Soon, a banana and an apple juice, free of preservatives, refreshed us and we became quite energetic to explore the wonderful flora surrounding us. After that, we started off the most awaited nature walk.

The lush surrounding and the diverse flora along the way set the stage for an unforgettable encounter nature. The path leading to the resort was adorned with a rich variety of plant species. The picture below shows flowers of marguerite daisy. Marguerite daisy flowers are a small, shrub-like perennial in the family Asteraceae, which are native to the Canary Islands. The roadside was covered with a lot of coniferous trees and deciduous trees. Towering conifers, their branches swaying gently in the breeze, formed a serene canopy overhead. Vibrant wildflowers added splash of colors, creating a beautiful landscape that felt straight out of a postcard. The walk showcased an impressive array of local flora, demonstrating the rich biodiversity.



Walking through the forest was a journey of discovery and tranquility. It offered a captivating glimpse into the natural wonders of Bangapani, Himachal Pradesh. This experience served as a reminder of the profound beauty and diversity that the natural world has to offer. The crystal-clear water mirrored the blue sky, creating enchanting reflection. One of the most adoring plant species that we could find across the path were flowers of wild strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*). The flowers of wild strawberry could be commonly seen throughout the area. Alpine strawberry or wild strawberry is a perennial herbaceous plant in the rose family that grows naturally throughout much of the Northern Hemisphere, and that produces edible fruits. The picture on the right shows the beautiful white flowers of wild strawberry. We also got the opportunity to see a number of basalt rocks. Basalt rocks are extrusive igneous or volcanic rocks that has a low silica content, dark in colour, and is very rich in iron and magnesium. We could also see few lichens on the way. Apart from that, we could get a view of block disintegration that had happened around, and we could also witness the havoc caused by the landslides in Shimla by seeing the condition of few areas around. Few temples had been built there like Shri Kalohar Naag Devta Mandir, Mata Mandir, etc. While we were walking, our geography teacher explained us how deforestation of soft wood trees had been possibly done for lumbering. It was further indicative of the fact that the place was thickly forested at some point of time. The trees occurred in pure stands and the soil in the surrounding was becoming soft. There was constant erosion that had happened due to rainfall. Ferns, weeds, hand pumps and pinecones were quite common in the area and we could also figure out that there were natural sources of water in the place. It was an entire rural environment and there was also a secluded residence of Hindu ascetics (ashram) near the temple. One of the most fascinating things that we could get a glimpse of were the man-made beehives. We got to know that apiculture was being practiced in that region. Beekeepers had kept the bees to collect honey and other products of the hive like beeswax, bee pollen and royal jelly.



I got to see anti-hail nets for the first time in my life. Thereby, I could understand the importance of anti-hail nets in protection of apple crop from storms, threats from birds and animals and other natural disasters. The picture here depicts a stretch of anti-hail nets which are being used here commonly for protection of apple orchards. We could also see a number of huge, lined wells meant for tank irrigation in the area. The members of SAGES were enjoying the nature walk immensely and they were singing while climbing up the steep slope. We walked for over two hours and finally, we reached a resort at 1:45 p.m. After reaching the resort, we had our lunch at 2:00 p.m. We rested for a while, talked amongst each other and roamed around the resort. While getting a view of the resort, we were really delighted. We were laughing and enjoying the visit to Bangapani to its fullest. At 4:45 p.m., snacks were also served that included tea and some pakoras. Our return journey began at 4:50 p.m. The ride back to home was pretty calm as we all were very tired. Overall, my experience was very good and I would love to experience it all again. I have never visited such a calm and serene place like Bangapani before and this experience will always have a special place in my heart. The pure air, free of any sort of city pollution, makes one realize that nature would be so beautiful without human existence.



WHEN I AM AMONG THE TREES

*When I am among the trees,
especially the willows and the honey locust,
equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,
they give off such hints of gladness.
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.
I am so distant from the hope of myself,
in which I have goodness, and discernment,
and never hurry through the world
but walk slowly and bow often.
Around me the trees stir in their leaves
and call out, "Stay awhile."
The light flows from their branches.
And they call again, "It's simple," they say,
"and you too have come
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled
with light, and to shine."*



by Mary Oliver