

Indian women in harsh desert expedition

Braving blisters, body aches and harsh weather conditions, an all-women expedition has completed half of its 2,000 odyssey through the Great Indian Desert.

Lead by Bachendri Pal, the first Indian woman to climb Mt. Everest, the First Thar Desert Expedition-2007 is aimed at infusing in women the spirit of adventure and enterprise and ushering in the centenary celebration of Tata Steel, the expedition's sponsors, a communique by the company said here Tuesday.

The 12-member all women team has covered most of the 1,000 km distance on camels and is now heading towards Punjab. The team is expected to enter Punjab Feb 11 and has set a target of reaching the Wagah border Feb 18, to successfully complete the 2,000 km expedition. The team had started out from Bhuj Jan 18.

Sharing her experiences from Rajasthan, Bachendri Pal said: 'It is a journey into the unknown for us. It began with learning to ride camels... It was as if we were sitting on a moving mountain. Falling off, blisters in the hand from holding the saddle tightly, blisters on the thigh, back pain, body aches et al, but we are mentally prepared to face the various challenges and discomforts, aches, pains, blisters. All are being taken on our stride.'

'The Border Security Force (BSF) people are amazed at our 60 km a day journey on camels, which even they have found difficult to do. The shifting sand dunes (like snow-capped mountains) has been an ordeal for us especially on the descent,' said Pal.

Bachendri Pal, chief of Adventure Programmes, Tata Steel, is leading an all women team of 12 members from different parts of the country. The Thar Desert region is one of the most difficult landscapes on earth and also known for its unpredictable environment.

This one month long expedition is not only Indian Women's First Thar Desert Expedition but also the maiden expedition covering 2,000 km over the Great Indian Desert by any male or female team.

The team participating in this adventurous expedition is led by Bachendri Pal and includes Premlata Agarwal, Priyansha Agarwal, Anita Soren, Binita Soren, Sushila Mardi and L. Annapurna from Jharkhand; Vasumathi Srinivasan and Kokila Sudha from Karnataka; Sushma Bissa from Rajasthan; Chaula Jagirdar from Gujarat and Arpita Chatterjee from West Bengal.

The Director General of BSF and his team are providing logistical support to the Indian women's team during their voyage across the desert.

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