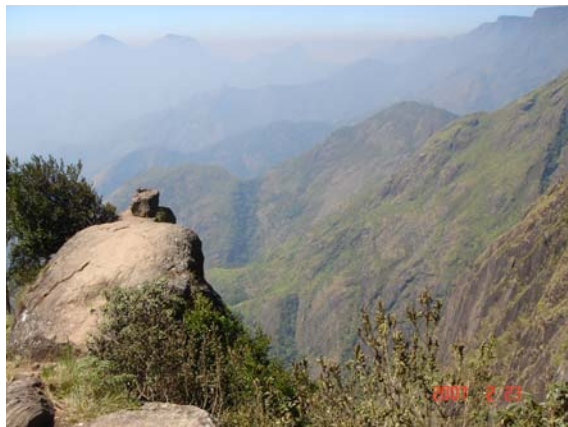


A Tryst with the Wild Ox (in Tamil “Kaattu-Maadu”) at Dolphin’s Nose, Kodaikanal

During this Chinese New Year’s holidays my family and I took a trip to Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu.. We stayed for a couple of days at The Carlton Hotel, right beside the lake, in a serene environment, enjoying those pin drop moments away, from the maddening crowds.

It was during one of those days we went on a trek to Dolphin’s nose, which is basically named after an unusual rock formation. From here one can see beautiful valley views and the distant villages (reachable only by foot over a 7 km trek), famous for their plantations of cardamom and various herbal oils.

The trek to Dolphin’s Nose point is accessible only by foot, a 2 km descent down from where the car can drop you off. As we descended the steep, stony unpaved path carefully side-stepping loose earth and rocks, a nearby shopkeeper alerted



me to the fact that there was a sighting very recently of a wild ox and that we should be careful. The pin drop silence of the mountains, the absence of many other travelers with the frightening prospect of meeting this wild ox, made the “fear factor” rise. We armed ourselves with a few sticks and stones, just in case.

As we went further, yet another local villager was seen cupping his hands to his mouth and shouting up to someone higher in the mountain, whether it was OK for him to go back up and whether that wild ox was still standing there. Furthermore, as we passed another shop, I could not resist asking that shop-keeper what danger this wild ox brings – does it attack us with his horns, or kick us with his hind legs?

Neither, he calmly replied, the wild ox just licks you with his rather abrasive tongue, which peels your skin right off, leaving your flesh sore and exposed! That certainly got our pulses going!! We then debated whether to continue further or return back. Having already covered more than half the distance and not wanting to miss the beautiful valley views, we plodded on.

The final straw was when we heard a loud “MOO” echoing through the forests. My kids started to panic and we were constantly scanning through the foliage of the forests to see if we could spot this ox. My wife reassured us, it must be a domestic cow, not to worry!

With the romance of this ‘clear and present’ danger, we completed our trek in record haste. Upon my return I could not resist to do some research into this Wild Ox.

In Hindi it is called “gaur”, this large wild ox has a hump-like ridge on the back. It is thought to be the largest of the wild cattle; the bulls may measure more than 6 ft (1.8 m) at the shoulder and weigh more than a ton. The coat in both sexes is generally dark brown, but the lower legs are white. The strongly curved horns sweep backward and inward. The gaur is native to hilly, forested districts of India, roams about in hilly country in small herds during the day, descending to the lowlands for fresh grass in the morning and evening



I saw also a bust of this “Gaur” in a museum. Its size is formidable and its head alone is half the size of an average Beijing taxi! I am glad I did not have the pleasure (or pain?) of meeting it.

Sridhar Krishnamoorthy
