700 Steps to an Epic Legend

Posted on



As we caught a glimpse of the gaping entrance to the cave from below, we heaved a sigh of relief

The air smelled different as we drove along the Ella–Wellawaya road in search of the intriguing Ravana Falls and the Ravana Cave around which many a tale has been woven. The early morning breeze rushed at us with unparalleled ardour, tugging at our hair, playfully but quite adamantly, filling our lungs with a freshness that is quite unique to the place.

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The road wound its way quite sharply around the imposing hills, knocking the breath off our chests with the surreal views that each turn held. At the signboard announcing Maha Ravana Viharaya and Ravana Cave just 1km away, we were forced to park our vehicle and trudge up the steep path that led towards our destination.

Although tiring, the walk upwards was definitely rewarding. From amidst the tall grasses and other plants that grew in wild clumps, glimpses of misty mountain wonder can be witnessed from time to time. The quest was to locate the Ravana Cave, the path to which we found amidst the wilderness thanks to a local who was passing us by. We were told that 700 steps are to be climbed in order to reach the cave, which we brushed aside as child’s play. We were soon to be proved wrong.

There were steps of course, along which we could climb, but the climb upwards proved to be quite a strain for our unprepared legs. The steps got narrower as we climbed and overgrown grass covered the path partially and sometimes completely, proving to us that this path is indeed a path less travelled. Huffing and puffing we climbed as there was no place to stop and rest and without so much as a gulp of water. The dried leaves which carpeted the ground lay undisturbed and made our ascent a slippery one. But just when we thought that the climb would never end, lo and behold, there stood the jutting roof of the cave into which we crawled along the uneven rocks for the steps had already ended somewhere below.

It Is Said That This Cave Is Where Ravana Kept Seetha Hidden After He Had

Abducted Her From Ayodhya

This cave is linked with the legendary Rama-Ravana tale and it is said that this cave is where Ravana kept Seetha hidden after he had abducted her from Ayodhya. A mighty king well versed in the art of alchemy, military tactics and many other exquisite talents once upon a time, it is said that King Ravana had abducted Seetha on his Dandumonaraya (Flying machine in shape of a peacock), seeking revenge from Rama who had disfigured Shoorpanakha, Ravana's only sister. We were told by the Head Monk of the nearby Ravana Raja Maha Viharaya that there had also been a replica of this machine made in gold buried within the cave along with old gold and silver manuscripts recording the details of a glorious past. However, we were told that these items had been ravaged by treasure hunters in the recent times because of which evidence of an opulent heritage had tragically been erased from the chronicles of our history itself.

The cave was large and it was very easy to imagine the place as the safe hiding place it once was. There had been many tunnels leading to various places around the area which are now, of course, buried within the sands of time quite literally. These tunnels served as a quick and safe means of travelling through the hills away from enemy eyes, networking all the important cities and places of significance. They were tunnels once excavated by the archaeologists during which remnants of the archaeological brilliance of the Ravana age were discovered, along with some prehistoric remains dating back to 1-2 BC.

Although the ascent had turned our legs to jelly by this time, the descent proved to be much easier. Along the way, we were once again treated to magnificent views of the luscious green of the vast rolling hills from amongst the wilderness. By the time we reached our vehicle, our faces were lined with beads of perspiration as well as happy smiles, radiant from the discoveries of our climb. A morning well spent and we were sure that during our pre-breakfast climb, we had burnt two days' worth of calories in just two hours.

Rain Was Scarce During This Time Of The Year, So The Waterfall, Otherwise Gushing Down In Violent Torrents, Made Its Way Down Timidly Today Like The Thin, Flimsy Netting Of A Bridal Veil.

We rolled down the shutters of the vehicle once again convinced that the gushing mountain air would wipe the exhaustion right off our faces. And we were right. A few bends later we found what we were looking for right at the side of the road,

pouring down in all its glory.

The Ravana Falls are quite easy to locate as one cannot miss this cascading beauty while travelling along the Ella-Wellawaya road. Rain was scarce during this time of the year, so the waterfall, otherwise gushing down in violent torrents, made its way down timidly today like the thin, flimsy netting of a bridal veil. A newly wed couple had decided to make the Ravana Falls the backdrop to their wedding portrait and this sight made us realise that the Falls are indeed the ideal studio setting that would encapsulate the romance of the moment perfectly within its frame. We decided to be brave and jumped over from one rock to the other to get to the rock pool where the water from the waterfall accumulated. The rocks were quite slippery and we had to tread carefully so as not to slip and fall flat on our faces right onto the rocks below. Legend has it that this is the rock pool where Seetha bathed while some say that King Ravana himself had used this pool as his bathing spot. It was easy to see why as we dipped our toes in the rock pool. The water was cool and refreshing despite the day being quite sunny and it was with much effort that we controlled our urge to get in and get soaked then and there.

We did not feel the time passing as we sat there revelling in the austere beauty of the surroundings. The experience was indeed a feast for the senses. The sparkling water flowed down, laughing in musical notes as it went and the cool wind that brushed against our skin also appeased our sense of smell with the inexplicable fragrance that these hills alone carried. If it weren’t for our rumbling tummies reminding us of a breakfast that was to be had, we would not even have realised that it was time for us to leave. It was with a note of sadness that we left the falls, bidding a final goodbye to the elegantly flowing Ravana Falls, singing proudly of the many mysteries that these surroundings held within them.

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