

THE MELLOW MEADOW

When was the last time you had a picnic by a lake? Well, then stop by Chiklihole on

your way to Madikeri, and find yourself happily refreshed, says **Hema Narayanan**

The first impression is a lasting impression; and when I saw Chiklihole for the first time, it instantaneously reminded me of the Periyar Lake in Kerala, a sunken ground for trees whose putrefying trunks rise out of the water.

A place, we chanced upon unintentionally on our trip to Coorg as our taxi driver drove through it, has made a memorable mark on me. Offering immense peace and tranquility amidst the chaos, Chiklihole got me immersed in its surroundings for hours – a truly underrated place.

For visitors going to Coorg, this place definitely calls for a stop-over; sit down by

the lake, and experience the chirping of the birds in the pin-drop silent environment. It seemed so perfect for holidaymakers and nature lovers, who go as far as Coorg to escape from the daily stresses.

As I sat on the sandy hillock which was naturally formed by the sides of the lake, I spoke to a few people passing by. Chiklihole, in fact, is a large reservoir situated on the tributary of river Cauvery. It is located in northern Kodagu (Coorg) between Madikeri and Kushalnagar, approximately 15 km from Kushalnagar. Local people have their cattle and sheep grazing here – adding to the elemental and serene surroundings here. Acres of lush-

green meadow on one side and the verdant forest on the other side of the dam, got me entirely engrossed in its beauty.

One among the people I spoke to was a farmer, who said that the water from the Chiklihole and Harangi dams is supplied to the farmers in the villages who wait each year to get a good yield. These are their only sources of faith, especially when the rain Gods decide against pouring. Like many of us, I am an ardent fan of the Coorg coffee estates. The estates here are filled with varieties of coffee plantations, but it was interesting to know that farmers sometimes take up crops like *jowar*, tobacco, ginger and paddy too, when the waters

from Chiklihole is in good supply.

Not wanting to get up from the sandy hillock, I was thinking about how the Chiklihole irrigation catchment area would look when it is brimming with water. The trees would have been further submerged and the birds perched on them would be closer to water and their prey. Usually the water is let out into the rivers when the lake gets fuller. If one wants to see more water in the dam, then the best time to visit this place is during monsoon (June to March). Consider packing up some food so you can have a small picnic in this serene spot.

Chiklihole is merely three kilometres from the well-known Dubare elephant

NAVIGATOR

GETTING THERE

Location: Chiklihole is located eight kilometres from Nanjarayapattana

Distance: 45 km from Madikeri or 18 km from Kushalnagar

Transport: Take a taxi from Kushalnagar, Suntikoppa or Siddapur since Chiklihole is not connected by public transport system yet

Precautions: The water is not well-suited for swimming. Carry your own food if you plan to stay here longer. You can try fishing, but only with permission from the Coorg Wildlife Society in Madikeri

camp – a bonus for visitors. One can spend enough time at the Dubare forest and come here during the later part of the day. Sunset at Chiklihole over the River Cauvery is a dream-like setting and can be mesmerising and mystical. It gets extremely picturesque, giving shutterbugs a great opportunity for capturing frames to remember.

As I walked back, I thought about how there is a little bit of magic in everything and everywhere. Chiklihole certainly had a magical effect on me. It is said that magic becomes art when it has nothing to hide – and to me Chiklihole has become a piece of art after having absorbed it for a day.