



From Nargol to Udvada: A Walk on the Beach

The following is a write-up by Homiar Hathiram and Farhad Choksi; good friends and regular readers of Parsi Khabar. They walked all the way from Nargol to Udvada following the coastline. Here is their account in their own words.

Nargol-Udwada Beach Hike – 27th August 2010

By Farhad Choksi and Homiar Hathiram

The genesis of the idea to walk to Udwada came from a rather envious observation of people, from various religions, who would walk long distances to pay their respect to various divine beings that they followed. We wondered why one never heard of Parsis walking from Mumbai to Udwada.

We spoke to a few faithful Parsis who visited Udwada regularly, and asked them why they never walked to Udwada? “Why the hell would I do that – only mad dogs and Englishmen would walk in the sun” was a strong retort. They preferred AC cars, AC rooms and gastronomical lunches with fried Boi (Mullet fish) & beer. So we deduced that most Parsis are sensible (debatable) and were not interested in any kind of discomfort to reach Udwada.

When one of us heard that a few Parsis (one known rather well to us) walked a whopping 234 kms to a temple in Maharashtra, we were astounded. What caused them to walk this distance? Clearly the answer was faith. If it was faith, why wouldn't they walk to Udwada (which is only 195 kms). Is our faith in Ahura Mazda not strong enough to make one walk from Mumbai to Udwada? Surely, it was our faith that brought us from Iran to India. Have we become so complacent and lazy that we have forgotten the sacrifices made by our forefathers, who withstood years of oppression and hardship to ensure that the Iranshah remain safe and ever glowing? We don't expect that one has to endure the same suffering, but atleast get out of our armchairs to get a sense of what our prior generations faced to ensure that we have a cozy life now.

That question sowed the idea of walking to Udwada – we asked a few of our friends and there were a few who said they would walk but inquired about the logistics, time line and safety of walking on the national highway. With the concerns of personal safety and time, we decided to make the starting point as Nargol, where Parsis first landed and were given shelter by King Jadi Rana. To compensate for the distance



from Mumbai, we decided to walk to Udawada via the coast and not on the paved road. After making initial inquiries and checking satellite images on Google Earth of the coast line between the two places we found the route rather tough but doable. The distance was 32 km on straight-line approximately 40 km in total (due to curves in the coastline). The

more we researched the more determined we became though were apprehensive of the many rivulets and creeks that dotted the coast and of course the rains. We decided to rough it out and face the obstacles head on. We also knew that our scouting knowledge would also help us traverse the unknown terrain.

It was prudent to start the walk in the early morning and hence we had to spend the night in Nargol. We contacted the Nargol Agiary and Pathanky Saheb Darabshaw Govadia was happy to hear of our visit and offered us a night stay at Nargol.

We embarked, with a prayer on our lips, and took a crowded Valsad express at 6 pm from Mumbai Central and disembarked at Sanjan at around 9.30 pm. The trip from Sanjan to Nargol was supposed to be via a ST bus which literally waits for the Valsad Express to arrive. However, we missed the bus since our train was delayed and the time taken to walk from our compartment which was at the end of the train. We were told that the ST bus would make another trip at 10.30 pm. Knowing that Darabshaw would be waiting for us, we promptly took an Auto Rickshaw and reached Nargol. Darabshaw was the perfect host, waiting for us at the bus stop as there were no street lights and path to the agiary was full of potholes.

Nargol – Agiary

After a quick wash, we had a sumptuous dinner consisting of Chicken, Bhida (lady finger) and Titori (lentils). The dinner was tasty and Darabshaw gave us general information on Nargol, the Parsis in the nearby towns. He lamented that Parsis were leaving Nargol, Saronda, Davier and moving toward Mumbai leaving their parents and selling the houses when they died. We told Darabshaw about our walk and he advised us to walk via the ‘coastal highway’ and that it was impossible to walk via the beach as there were a lot of creeks and first one around 4 kms away. We listened patiently and stated that we would walk on the coast – come hell or high water (pun intended)

We were allotted a 2 BHK to stay with adequate furniture where we spent the night after discussing the plans for the next morning.

After a visit to the Agiary, which is very well maintained and a pora pao breakfast our walk to Udavada started at 7.00 am. We were well equipped with GPS and a pedometer application switched on. It gave us useful updates on distance traveled and speed maintained. The Nargol beach is pretty with good green cover at the



edges. A visible effort has been made for afforestation to keep the sea out was observed throughout our entire walk. The chirping of birds and sighting of a peacock made our walk rather enjoyable. Walking in sand, is easier said than done – one needs to constantly concentrate on the terrain and figure out the path of least resistance.

Nargol – Afforestation

We had been informed of rivulets / creeks meeting the sea where the water level would be waist/ chest level. We were prepared to take diversions to the coastal highway which at times was over 1-2 km inland. However, with low tide, we could avoid high waters by walking towards the sea and crossing over as the water subsided over large tracts of beach/marshland. At best, we waded through water upto our

ankles – which was not a problem though it ensured that we had wet feet for the entire journey.

We maintained our initial speed of 4.5km/hr until we reached Maroli beach via Dandi village. At Dandi we got on to a parallel road to the coast less than 100 m inside to pick up some water. The weather until then was pleasant with the sun rising behind the tree cover. The scenery throughout our walk alternated between the sea at low tide on one side (the gentle slope of the coast means at times the water was hundreds of meters away from our walking path) and greenery on the other side dotted with tiny fishing villages.

Maroli – Fishing Village

As the terrain become more intravelsable, our speed reduced considerably as we were literally walking in boggy terrain and sand banks. The sand banks looked beautiful but our efforts of walking on them proved futile as the sand would shifts causing a lot of mis-steps and sudden transfer of body weight on the ankles and feet caused aches and swelling.

Maroli – Terrain





By 11 am, our water breaks had increased in frequency and with the sun shining at its very best, we slowed even further and tried to compensate this by walking in straight lines across a curved coast. While this saved us considerable time but the terrain got even worse with rock formation literally creating a wall between us and the beach. We had passed the villages of Sarothwad and chatted with a young lad who gave a lot of local info and advised us to keep closer to sea in order to cross over the creeks. With the tide coming, we had to make a quick move to avoid being caught in a flooded creek due to the high tide. Our blackberry pedometer sapped out its entire battery life and shut down, so we had to depend on the villagers to give us the distances, which we learnt was a futile exercise as each one had their own idea of a kilometer.

Sarothwad

After a walk of 20 minutes, the beach curved and we could see the concrete structure of Daman, which gave us a stab of adrenaline as we walked very close to the tide and crossed a few creeks rather easily and reached the fishing village of



Phansa, where a few boys who were prancing around the beach (reminding us of Huckleberry Finn & Tom Sawyer), started following us – we told them that we were going to Daman, they gave us a dumbfounded look and said that it was impossible and the huge Kalu river has been crossed though they confirmed the legend of a boatman who would ferry us at a princely rate of Rs 2 per head.



On crossing Phansa, we encountered a strange sight of hundreds of “Bombay ducks” being strewn across the beach for drying, the smell as nasty but then that’s what Tarapori patio is made of.

Kalu River / creek

The sun was overhead, our feet were aching and the tide was forcing us to take longer detours, we strutted across the beach but

weren’t quick enough to beat the tide which had completed flooded the Kalu river / creek. We saw some fishermen swimming in neck deep waters and one look at the current was enough to tell us that the legendary boatman had to found. We were soon reminded of both “hell & “high water”. We found a few fishing boats where some fishermen were preparing for the upcoming season with the retreating SW monsoon. We inquired about the boatman and it seemed that he was on lunch break (?), we waited in the baking sand for the never ending lunch to get over. We inquired again and were told the lunch was over but he might be having a tippie (maybe toddy) to get him through the heat – guess he had never heard of don’t drink and drive (row) law. After what seemed eternity, a lanky man walked by and promptly jumped into the boat (hodi). We wondered how this thin man would ferry us across with tide flooding the creek every passing second.



The boatman used a long pole and instead of crossing the creek, he headed out toward the sea and midstream he decided that he had enough and calmly pulled in his pole and perched himself on keel of the boat. We looked around and were a bit concerned of the effect of his recent tippie. He was smiling as he had done his work – the tide was actually pushing us towards the other bank. It was

beautiful, the shining sea on one side and the lush green river bank on the other end.

The river was actually the state border between Gujarat and Daman – we had reached the tourist beach of Jampore, Daman. We could see the change in landscape and wealth, as we crossed a few orchards and witnessed a few couples

resting below the casurina trees. We crossed a few beach shacks selling beer, gutka and dhana dal (staple food for the drinking Gujju crowd) and decided sensibly to have food at a restaurant named, China Gate.

We unpacked our lunch of sukka chicken which Darabshaw had given us as “Bhatiyu” (travel friendly food). By that time the tide was fully in, the rain was pouring. We assessed our injuries and decided that it was not wise to walk further as it could compound the injuries even further, so we took a joint decision to hire a rickshaw to Udwada – in hindsight the decision was correct as the injuries took more than a week to recede.

We visited the Iranshah Atashbehram the next day, as we had requested a friend, Porus Fitter, to come to Udwada with a fresh pair of clothes for us. Porus has recently launched, Iranian Stores, a quaint shop selling Parsi Artifacts in Udwada (a must visit) and he readily volunteered to get our clothes while we completed our hike.

After bowing to Iranshah, we thanked Him for the strength given to us during the hike and promised to do the full version (or longer) in the near future.

We would like to thank the below for their help which made our hike a memorable one.

- Ervad Darabshaw Govadia for the stay & facilities at Nargol
- Nay Sayers who ended up making our resolve even stronger.
- Porus Fitter for his help and encouragement

After this hike, we propose to do a Mumbai to Udwada walk and hope our small hike will encourage more people to join us then.

Atha Jamyat Yatha Afrinami

Courtesy : Cy Bulsara