Trekking : More Than A Summit

By Diti Kalantri

I was sure I would not be able to reach my target for the trek—until I discovered I wasn't running 5 km, but 5 mi!

Hi! I am Diti Kalantri. I am 12 years old. This May, I went to Uttarakhand for a trek named Kuari Pass, my third.

To qualify for the trek, we had to run 5km in under 35 minutes. Everyday, I used to run for at least 50 minutes but I failed to make it each time. I felt low, thinking I would not be able to do the trek, until a week before the trek, my parents pointed at Strava's statistics that showed that I had achievements piled

under my name.

What?

"But how?" I asked. They told me that my watch was calculating the distance in miles, not kilometers. Phew!

The last week flashed by in a blur. I saw myself saying good-bye to my parents and boarding the plane to go to Dehradun. I climbed aboard the tempo traveller with my best friend Rhea– and a bunch of strangers who would soon be my friends– to go to Karchi, our base camp.

I reached the base camp and looked around. Mountains everywhere. I felt homesick, but I carefully stamped out that feeling. The boys were next door, and they kept banging on the wall. I went to their room and gave them a piece of my mind. It was quiet when we finally slept.

The entire team moved out and started to trek, laughing and talking. "How much more time?", "Come on! I see the campsite!" or "Did you know-" echoed through the team. I enjoyed it immensely, exploring trees and picking up pebbles. I panted along, sometimes full of energy and talking "Hey, do you like dogs?" "Yes!" "Me too!" And sometimes completely drained (my backpack was very heavy).

We reached our campsite (Akhrotgetta). We were sweating, panting and feeling quite pleased with ourselves. We cooled down. Suddenly, I felt a stronger wave of homesickness that couldn't be ignored.

I shared a tent with Rhea and a trek-mate. We played Truth & Dare, which was followed by a thorough discussion of "Really?" "You never told me!" and giggles.

The trek leaders had a lot of activities planned for us. We headed off to the forest to do something called a 'nature walk'.

What?

I was confused too. Turns out it is a walk through nature, barefoot and blindfolded. There are ropes to guide you. This way, you can feel a lot of things that otherwise you might avoid. The forest smelt of fresh rain. Wet mud squelched between my toes. The rough rope slithered across my palm.

We got another assignment— to make a rocket out of natural materials. Did I mention that an egg was to be put inside the rocket? The mission: The egg should not break from a height of 10 ft.

Huh?

"How?" was the only word we spoke. Then a plan hatched. We coated the egg with mud, which was wrapped with wet and dry moss. Finally, wooden planks were placed on the 'rocket'. Soft stems held the rocket together.

We proudly presented our rocket, with a story and name for it -"The Modern Anthill". And, with a name so amazing, it was only fitting that our egg broke.

On our next trek day, it was a steep ascent. We were happy that we only had to do 2.5 km. Then, our worst fear came true. It started to rain. Water poured just enough to make us all wet despite the rain ponchos. We all shivered, grumbling, "The rain couldn't wait." Water seeped into our shoes. On top of that, this campsite was the coldest one, our trek leaders informed us. We stumbled into the campsite (Khullara), all drained, and saw the sun peeking out.

The smugness of the sun!

We were supposed to reach the summit the next day. We all were told that we would only be able to do the summit if the weather was good. We kept our fingers crossed and drifted off, dreaming of the peak we were going to scale.

In the morning we woke up with bleary eyes. When she opened the zip, she gave a little yelp and said "Guys! Look at this!" We glanced over and saw that there was a dog sleeping in our tent. It was probably inside for the whole night!

We packed our things while being bombarded with thoughts. When we came out, it was dark, with the horizon lighting up. We finished our breakfast. The trek leaders called out "Gather in a circle!" The trek leaders taught us some games. When the games ended, it was 7.

Wait...

It was 7! We were supposed to start by 6! Then the trek leaders told us "Remember that you all promised that in case of an emergency, you would follow us blindly."

Oh no. My fear started mounting.

Then they broke the news. "We cannot summit. The base camp has called. We're sorry. Trust us, we're disappointed too." Half of the team started sobbing, boys and girls alike. Tears welled up in my eyes. We had all worked so hard! All of us started asking one question -"Why?" A trek leader said "There's a serious problem on the border of our country, and it's not safe for us to remain here."

In an attempt to make us all feel better, we went to a point in our campsite from where we could see the mountains. We clicked some pictures with a "Done Kuari Pass!" banner.

Coming down was easy because we were descending.

We reached the base camp and I asked one of the trek leaders to let me call my parents. We spoke for 30 minutes. I felt much better. We were given certificates, a magnet and a badge that I will always treasure.

A 10 hour road trip back to Dehradun! We woke up at 2 am, and said our goodbyes. We drove swiftly through the winding roads. It was serene when only I was awake at daybreak. I felt happy and sad, looking at the mountains as we drove by. The tempo traveller stopped near 6 a.m. in front of a small shop. We swarmed the store and all of us bought an iced frappe coffee can. We mostly slept after that.

When I met my parents, I felt very happy. I will still trek for many years, but for now, I was happy and content. I regret not being able to do the summit and I miss my trek leaders and trek mates, but hey! At least I got to do something, right?

(The author, from Wardha, is a seventh grader who loves trekking as much as she loves getting lost in a good book.)