

Far from the madding crowd

Captain Ravee and friends found a relaxing quaint town to experience the thrill of the wild



I DIDN'T EXPECT that my shot in the dark would hit the bull's eye. I just knew that I had to run away from routine and take a much-needed break. I dialled a few numbers and learnt that a friend's friend owned a hotel in Ketlighthat. Not a hot destination for most, but I decided Ketlighthat it would be. I asked a few mates if they would join my family and me. They agreed, which was a relief, for in an unlikely holiday place, one needed numbers to swell company.

Six adults and five kids in two cars set out on a road much travelled — the Chandigarh to Shimla highway — to a destination not much visited. Three-and-a-half hours from Chandigarh and half-an-hour short of Shimla is Ketlighthat, an idyllic little place, far from the

Thank God for the mobile phone — we were never out of touch with the hotel staff, and finally arrived at the little hamlet of Ketlighthat. A collective sigh of relief was quickly followed by another sigh, of despair, as we realised there was a steep climb off the highway staring us in the face. It was midnight and there was no going back. The drive uphill was what was once upon a time just a mule track. It was still one, but only slightly wider — unpaved and full of stones. We were courage personified. We reasoned: How could a bad road deter a group of determined holiday-makers in a Vitara! The spirits got a jolt when, guided by my navigation skills, the Vitara hit a two-foot deep hole bang in the middle of the road with a loud thud and got stuck. Talk of the existence of God? The

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the right track.

The hotel was a villa still under construction and enveloped in darkness. The only light available came with day-break.

We were the kings of the place, as not a soul, other than

breath. By the time our little excursion to the hilltop was over, dark monstrous clouds had gathered over our heads.

We quickly headed down but were caught up in a thunderstorm and rain. But we did manage to find a shelter — it was the Ketlighthat railway station. By now we were all hungry and gave ourselves a royal treat of hot bread pakoras.

The Kalka to Shimla toy train chugged in. As it stopped, we got in. The ticket checker just winked as the train steamed off. In our hurry, we forgot to buy tickets. We reached the next station, Kandaghat, where we got off the train. We were still wet and cold. There was no point in waiting for the return train. So we took a bus to get back to Ketlighthat. Then it dawned on us

no gas; so there was no food. But by now, we were convinced that our luck would hold, as the morning had proved. We had enough foresight to bring a stove with us. We bought it out of the packing; but there was no kerosene. Another visitor gave us good advice: take out some diesel from the car tank, put some salt into it and use it as fuel for the stove. Wonder of wonders, it worked.

In less than an hour, we had a grand meal of vegetable pulao, raita, salad, pickle and lots of natural mineral water direct from a mountain stream.

Repeat performances followed in the next two days that we spent there, with a little alteration, money in the pocket, camera at the ready, water-bottles, umbrellas and mobiles.