

## Visit to India and China

by John M. Wallace

In February 2008 Susie and I were invited on a 2-week tour of India organized by my long term friend and research colleague, J. Shukla, along with Tim Palmer and his wife Jill, Peter Webster, and Ken Mooney. The highlight of the tour was an overnight stay in Mirdha in the state of Uttar Pradesh (UP), the village in which Shukla was born and brought up and in which his family has lived for six generations. We stayed in what is now known as the Ken Mooney Guest House and we were hosted by Shukla's remarkable extended family. We were also warmly greeted by the faculty and students at Gandhi College (<http://www.iges.org/gandhicollege/>), which was founded by Shukla in 2000 for the primary purpose of raising the educational level and status of young women in Mirdha and the neighboring villages. This intimate snapshot of life in Shukla's village made a deep impression on us and on Susie in particular, who recognized that her 25 years of experience in directing programs to teach English to speakers of other languages could be of use there. With Shukla's moral support and encouragement, we started planning for a return trip to the village. Susie enrolled in the beginning Hindi course in the Department of Asian Languages and Literature at UW and I applied for sabbatical leave.

We returned to the village January 20 of this year accompanied by Shukla and his daughter, Sonia, and our neighbor, Marylynn Evans, who volunteered to work with Susie on the teaching project. It was cold (13°C) and foggy the afternoon we arrived: several hundred people died of the cold that week in UP. Through the damp, chilly weeks that followed, Susie and Marylynn (referred to as "elderly ladies" in a front page article in the *Times of India*) were sustained by the warm hospitality of Shukla's family, the long underwear that they'd had the foresight to buy at REI, and the countless cups of hot tea that were offered to them by the Shukla family and many of the other villagers. Sonia remained with them for about 10 days and helped out with the classes while she was getting reacquainted with her extended family. The number of students in the English classes ranged up to 60, not including the monkeys who occasionally dropped in. About 15 of the Gandhi College students attended the classes faithfully and made substantial progress in improving their English comprehension and speaking. (In contrast to the language-oriented teaching that Susie and Marylynn offered, the regular English courses offered at the College, which prepare students for national examinations, tend to focus on English literature).

The village is on the brink of major changes. Electric power is available 4 hours a day now. The power is usually available only at night, but the community center has batteries capable of storing enough electricity to keep a few laptops



Arrival in Mirdha in late January. Left to right: Susie Wallace, K. Shukla, Sonia Shukla, Mike Wallace and Marylynn Evans.

running during the daytime. Cell phone service is widely available and the road that passes through the village has finally been paved. Not all the changes are for the good. Once or twice an hour a truck careens down the paved road at 50 mph, terrifying pedestrians, bicyclists, and cows. Sometimes during the late night hours, loudspeakers broadcasting holiday and wedding celebrations from nearby villages drown out the howls of hyenas and the barking of the village dogs. So far, the values and customs of the villagers don't seem to be very much affected by the encroachment of modern civilization.

While Susie and Marylynn were struggling to stay warm and communicate with their hosts in the old India, Shukla and I were venturing about in the new India, in comfortable aircraft flying between modern domestic airports in which all announcements are repeated in the most polite English. Stops included research institutes in the high-tech centers in Bangalore (IISc) and Pune (IITM) and extended stays at the Indian International Center in Delhi adjacent to Lodi Garden and the India Met. Department. We gave numerous lectures and we had the opportunity to meet with many students and faculty members to discuss their research. We also participated in workshops on the current state of the Himalayan glaciers and in prediction of the Indian summer monsoon. Traveling with Shukla, there were days when I felt like a foreign dignitary, meeting high level government officials and getting to go behind the scenes. Especially memorable was the foggy afternoon at the airport at Delhi when, faced with the prospect of spending 3 hours in the waiting room listening to the announcer ex-

press her deep regret for the inconvenience caused by each and every one of the dozens of delayed flights, including our own, Shukla took out his cell phone and quickly arranged for us to be whisked away to the local weather forecast office, where we became so engrossed in discussions about fog forecasting that we nearly missed our flight.

I was impressed with the quality of much of the research that I was briefed on, and I was fascinated with problems relating to weather forecasting and the characterization of climate change over India. I am especially intrigued with winter air pollution and fog, which has been increasing in recent decades. I came away from the experience regretting that I hadn't come to India earlier in my career and hoping that it might nonetheless lead to some productive research collaborations with Indian students and scientists. I also came away impressed with the gravity and immediacy of the environmental issues that countries like India will be facing in the next few decades with the depletion of ground water and topsoil. Witnessing these problems first hand prompted me to write an op ed piece in the *Seattle Times* ([http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/opinion/2011453141\\_guest28wallace.html](http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/opinion/2011453141_guest28wallace.html)) and to resolve to make sustainability of life on this planet (including climate-related issues) the focus of my future outreach efforts, rather than climate change in and of itself.

On the way home I stopped in China while Susie and Marylynn and her friend, Catlin Goss, traveled to Dharamsala, in the shadow of the Himalayas. My China visit began with a day

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