

SAVING THE 'SECULAR' HILLOCK OF KHAJAGUDA (FAKHURDINGUTTA) OF HYDERABAD

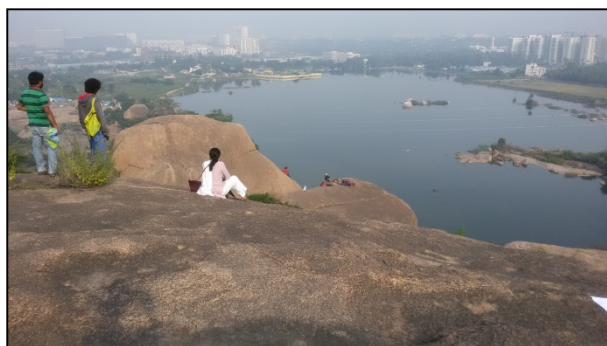
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For rock lovers and adventure enthusiasts this is both a Mecca and a Chaar Dhaam offering the tranquility that comes from moving far from the maddening crowds and enjoying challenging climbs, rappelling spots, easy trails, secret caves and the spectacular view.....The struggle to preserve and protect the beautiful granite outcrop at Kajaguda was initiated by the 'Society to Save Rocks' more than two decades ago. The initial lament over a massive quarry that ate deep into the back of the hill, was calmed when all licenced granite quarrying in Ranga Reddy District was finally stopped some years back.

Many drive to Hyderabad's happening Hitech City in winding traffic and seldom stop to visit the hillock that is Nature's fine example of what it means to be 'Secular'. The Khajaguda Hillock also known as 'Fakhruddingutta', is one that has silently allowed three shrines of different religions to thrive in harmony – two of which are over six centuries old. Three shrines sit within a few hundred meters of each other- the 650-year-old tomb of Islamic saint Hazrat Baba Fakhruddin Aulia, the ancient Anantha Padmanabha Swamy temple dedicated to the Hindu god Vishnu, and a shrine to modern-day spiritual master Avatar Meher Baba. More than 600 meter high hill also provide picturesque site of the surrounding localities.

The rock types include granites and gneisses belonging to the Proterozoic age (about 250 million years). With impressive piled-up formations and rocky ridges the massive sheet rock right on top houses the Dargah of Hazrat Baba Fakhruddin Aulia, remembered in history as the spiritual mentor of Hasan Gangu, Founder of the Bahmani Kingdom. Built in 1353 AD the modest construction has a modernized tomb that attracts several pilgrims both Muslim and Hindu specially during the annual Urs. Hidden from sight down below in the boulders was a well kept secret the Anantha Padmanabha Swamy Temple built during the Akkanna-Madanna period. In the last two years devotees have aggressively modified the simple shrine and perform daily 'pujas' besides holding a huge celebration every



February. Mid way between Dargah and Temple is the cave where the Master of the Religion of Love, the revered Meher Baba meditated as early as 1951. Considered the most significant of pilgrim sites among Meher Baba devotees, this small and serene cave attracts pilgrims from all over the world each year in October. Believed to be the cave where Baba carried out the annihilation of the mind for the benefit of all mankind, local devotees have a monthly Satsang here.



For rock lovers and adventure enthusiasts this is both a Mecca and a Chaar Dhaam offering the tranquility that comes from moving far from the maddening crowds and enjoying challenging climbs, rappelling spots, easy trails, secret caves and the spectacular view of the Golconda Fort, the Financial District, Osman Sagar, Himayat Sagar and Banjara Hills! Thankfully the citizens of the twin cities are presently making the most of Khajaguda and it is become one of the popular destinations for all age groups on weekends.



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Ranga Reddy District was finally stopped some years back. The allotment of the hill as a ‘Special Environment Zone’ and later for a housing colony for government officials was also averted. When more cutting was noticed at the back of the hill and crushers working at its foot, the Mines Department assured the Society that this was the crushing of stones brought from excavations in the city, and

that no rock cutting had taken place. Apart from speaking up again and again for the conservation of the hill for its environmental, geological and recreational importance, the Society to Save Rocks kept trying to convince the government to convert the hill into a Nature Park and protected zone. It was declared a Heritage Precinct in 2009, but the actual physical demarcation and protection never did come about.



In April this year the Society has taken a stronger step and filed a Public Interest Litigation for the Protection of Khajaguda after it was brought to notice by the Great Hyderabad Adventure Club Members that private persons were destroying the big boulders towards the Khajaguda

Cheruvu. The Hon'ble High Court issued an Order that the rocks in the Khajagud Hill must not be "disturbed or damaged or destroyed". As a result, rock cutting activities have come to a standstill. However, the Society continues it's work to bring Khajaguda into the limelight. In June they collaborated with 'The Hyderabad Runners' and organized a practice run and despite soaring summer temperatures many twin city dwellers showed their solidarity by creating an awareness for the cause of rock preservation. The online signature campaign of the Society has been intensified to protect Khajaguda as a Nature and Adventure Park, an oasis in the midst of frenzied development. Almost 7000 supporters have shown their eagerness to help by signing the petition. (You can too at <https://www.change.org/p/save-rocks-of-fakhruddingutta-hyderabad-telangana>)

SOCIETY TO SAVE ROCKS

The Society to Save Rocks work exclusively for Mother Earth! the NGO in India tirelessly working for Rock Conservation since 1996. The Society was formally registered when a group of concerned citizens of Hyderabad from different walks of life- artists, environmentalists, bureaucrats and home makers- all astounded by the sheer age, beauty and ecological impact of the rich Deccan Rocks came together. They felt the urgent need to conserve this Natural Heritage so as to maintain a balance in the environment and discourage citizens from mindlessly destroying what can never be replaced. Dialogues were initiated with the Government to earmark rocky areas well within the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad as Heritage Precincts which would not only provide the much needed lung space in a fast growing city but protect the stunning balancing granite formations that defy gravity.

In 1998, the Society was successful in getting the then Government of Andhra Pradesh to include rock areas in Regulation No. 13 of the Hyderabad Urban Development Authority (HUDA) besides Heritage Buildings, making Hyderabad the only Indian city where rocks were protected as Natural Heritage. Initially 9 Rock formations were listed and in 2009 much to the delight of rock lovers 15 more sites were included as Heritage Precincts. The Society has worked with one pointed determination over two decades educating citizens about the granite rocks of the Deccan Plateau estimated by geologists to be around 2500 million years old, amongst the oldest in the world. Besides pointing out their aesthetic value, the contribution of rocks to the water table, the habitat they provide to insects, birds and animals and the variety of lichens and medicinal plants that rocks promote is highlighted through the popular monthly rock walks, publications, films, lectures and brochures. A Scientific Survey of Rock Sites in the Districts of Medak, Rangareddy and Hyderabad was brought out for the scientific community.

Most recently, the Society to Save Rocks collaborated with The Society of Earth Scientists, India, Geoclub, Geological Survey of India, Southern Region to organize the "Save Our Geo-Heritage" Run which was flagged off on the bright Sunday morning of 21st July by Shri G. Kishan Reddy, Honorable Minister of State, Home Affairs, Government of India. For an in depth understanding of the Society and it's work kindly visit www.saverocks.org.

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