

Ranvirbhai had returned from Uganda and some tennis was arranged for Saturday.

I was ready on time and gave him a call but his maid said that he had already left. Boo-hooo! Plan B was invoked.

Made a few butties, some fruit and a flask of cold drink and shoved it all into my back pack and went to see wifey who was asleep after a hard week. 'Morning sweetie, I'm off'. She gestured bikeriding by twisting her wrists as though she was accelerating. 'Yes' but omitted where I was off to! Lonavla!

Not wanting precious to worry, waved bye-bye to her, the maids and m-in-law and said have lunch without me.

My riding mentor Hemang had warned me of a treacherous journey through mountain passes where truck drivers dont take any prisoners. He didnt remind me of taxis, cars, buses, putt-putts and other commuter-bikers. They all observe the Indian Highway Code rule number 1! 'Every man for himself, women & children last'.

It seemed to take ages to wade through the Bombay traffic and reach Vashi bridge 23 km from home. Kalambori a further 10km from Vashi is where I met my first obstacle.

Bikes are not allowed on Indian 'Express Highways', dont know why, traffic doesnt move any faster. The authorities are clever and dont sign post very well, particularly for foreign travellers. Within 100 metres of being on the 'Express Highway', I knew something was not right and there was no way off it either.

No 2nd chances in India. Everyman for....

1 km down, you have guessed it, trapped by mama (*means uncle and slang for highway robber, I mean policeman*) who was waiting for his catch and waved me down.

My apologies didnt work but I could see rupees in his eyes as he flagged down another rider. Seems even locals get netted.

Gave us a lecturing and said letter of the law was 2000Rs fine but he would do us a favour and let us off with 500Rs crossing his palm. We paid and he showed us a convenient gap in the carriageway to make a U turn and get on the right road, the NH4.

The other bike as it happens was going to Lonavla and I asked the rider and his pillion if they fancied a drink before hitting the main stretch. The rider said that they need to get to their destination 'Very fast'. So off they want.

Once I got past Panvel, the ride was a breeze.

Stopped to send a text to wifey (still in Mumbai district so no response – she was probably having her Sunday pedicure).

Next stop, Khandala, 10k from Lonavla. A fag, drink, stretch, rub my numb buttocks,



text and mms the above pic to Preeti and held my breathe! Immediate reply 'OMG'.

The winding roads took me back onto the proverbial Express Highway. I thought FFS not again! I slowed down to find a way out and saw other bikers wizz past me. Quick follow them – safety in numbers, I thought! I caught up and realised it was an 'official detour' and sighed with relief.

Once in Lonavla, it was bewildering without any signposts. Rode for about 4 km in the direction I thought the lake was before turning back. Asked a shop keeper in pigeon hindi and explained about an expanse of water. Her customer chirps in and says Bushi Dam? I said that will do! 5-8 kms back the way I had just come from! So past the chickens and boars again, (hello!) before reaching a spot for a picnic.



Menu: cheese sandwiches, Ushabens chilli pickles, banana, and satsuma washed down with my cocktail of orange sherbet, honey and squeeze of lemon. Eat your heart out, yum, yum. Food rarely tasted so good. Next time I think I will squeeze in a Subway butty. To cap it all, a Rothmans International smoked at leisure and in tranquility. Almost heaven.

I set off from here through an eerie gorge and the lack of people or traffic was amazing, alarming and bothering. A

complete contrast to Mumbai life, quite blissful but wished I had some company.



Eventually reached the dam at 2.45pm and turned round to come home. Stopped at Lonavla for a drink before high tailing it.



Reached Vashi bridge at 5.30ish. Another stop to finish my flask, some weed and call the lovely one. She says 'We are leaving for a school meeting at 7.00pm', 'Thought you couldnt get a ticket for me', 'I managed to pull a few strings!' Thanks for letting me know. *Told you, one has to be telepathic and a mindreader!* I will be there as soon as I can, I am in Vashi at the moment'.

Trip: Worli, Mumbai to Lonavla
Reason: Visit lake and enjoy the ride
Depart time: 9.00am 21st November 2009
Return: Sameday, 6.45pm

This was part of training, prelude to a trip planned end of December. Wait for the riot!

On googlemaps, search Mumbai, then Lonavla to see the route taken if interested.

Wishing you compliments of the season