

The inaugural ride of the VGC Bikers Club in February to Karla Caves was attended by Hemang/Rajesh, team leader Sunil/Sai and Kanti the lone rider.

Absentees were from the creative department, Sidd still waiting for delivery of a Classic. The up standing (Mr X) from finance had been dead keen but his wife pooh poohed the notion. (Breaking news is Mr X' had his trousers pulled down by a raging Mrs X and got his bottom spanked. Some say, lucky Mr X!)

Mr X and Sidd declined my offer to ride pillion with me which is understandable.

The fact that I kept talking about how the bike may take a tumble and they really should come prepared with full body protection cant have inspired confidence. The icing in the cake were the lessons I was giving on how to roll if thrown off the bike which didnt go to soothe their already stressed and frayed nerves.

The first to the 7.30am Vashi meeting point under the flyover on Palm Beach Road was Kanti, (he seemed damn eager and its one of the few locations that he was familiar with in Mumbai). The rest of the gang rolled in at 8.15 blaming traffic and that Rajesh had slept in (this he denied) making them 45 minutes late.

We rode for about 90 minutes before stopping for a break to do our payte puja at an aptly named dhabha, 'Hotel New Preeti Palace'. We really hadnt become acquainted with the old one!

Having sated our bellies we moved into the hot sun which will be a bug bear throughout our day out. The indians call these outings picnic!

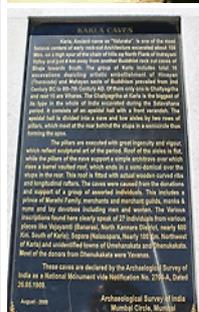
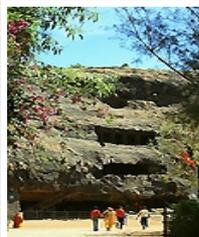
We were forced to make an unscheduled stop just before our destination.

Witnessing an accident, we checked the scene and saw that everything was under control. The driver typically came out scot free but there was an injury to a pedestrian - probably jaywalking with his headphones on over his ears expecting the HGV to give way. Not this time buddy!



Arrived at Karla Caves around 11.30pm. Nice ride so far. Parked up and paid the fee of Rs5 and looked at the hill that had to be climbed..

Gulp. And then another gulp! I realised just how unfit one was! The mound had me panting, wheezing and sweating my bataka vadas off. The



sun's heat was deadly but the rest of the party seemed to scale the heights like mountain goats.

Luckily for me the party stopped half way for a breather. It certainly some embarrassment on my part. I think

they were being sympathetic to my needs but truth to be told, the climb up the cobbled steps wasnt a picnic!

Along the steps are a variety of stall holders who sell essentials to visitors. Talk, about commercialism. The rubbish left by stall holders and visitors such as plastic bags, bottles, food wrappers, graffiti (best one being Mahesh loves Annand), darsan items and throw sways are everywhere which spoils the beauty spot. The up keepers do their best to keep walkways clean and tidy.

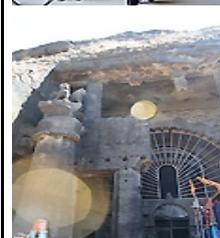
The Karla Caves are a protected archeological site which originate from the early centuries AD. They are carved into the mountain face and quite an awesome piece of work. To learn more about them read the signs but in my view it must have taken a lot of indians to build them only spoiled by modern day visitors but the littering is a problem anywhere man goes.

We found a man sleeping off his afternoon booze and a brought back a sexy piccy for Mr X the Scooty Man.

We spent a good 2 to 3 hours exploring an awesome site that reflects mans dedication and labour which may stand the test of time.

We looked over the edge and saw how miniscule our bikes appeared. made our way back down. Stopping at some of the stalls to get cold drinks, souvenirs and goodies to take back home.

In Lonavla we bought Chikkis apparently they are what the town is famous for



along with its lakes and hill stations.

We had a slight mishap on the way back when team leader Sunil who was at the time holding tail, missed a turning whilst Hemang and I zoomed off.

Like in any team ride, the leading riders pulled over and waited for the tail enders to catch up only to find that his brakes were failing. We were lucky, as it happened, there was a mechanic who just tightened up a loose nut and we were back on our way home with a sigh of relief.

Lunchtime tummy puja was taken at Sai Darbar and Family Restaurant just outside Panvel. It unusually has tame geese guarding the establishment. At the time of our arrival they were being quenched from the hot sun by a water hose. The party were prepared to join them to wash the dust and sweat off their bodies but relented

Lunch was a good feed and I learned that a Maharastrian bhakri is a bread of steamed rice flour apposed to the Gujarati version which is a shallow fried chappatti. The food was OK but nothing to write home about. Would have been better if one of those geese had been BBQ

over spit. I dream! Anyway it wasnt Christmas.

Then the riders bid farewells and went their separate ways before landing simultaneously at our homes. Back to the office on Monday

Til the nest ride!