



Marshalls

Transforming Britain's Landscapes

Chris Harrop Blog 2007

Part One

Trip to Jaipur & Kota: 3rd to 7th February 2007

This blog records my recent visit to meet with representatives of the Hadoti Hast Shlip Sansthan Non Government Organisation (NGO) and my further investigation of the issues surrounding the importing of Indian Natural Sandstone in to the UK.

This trip had three key objectives:

1. To conclude an agreement with Hadoti to fund a programme of work aimed at the migrant quarry workers. This is especially important, as our actions to remove child labour and poor working practices from our supply chain have the potential to simply move the problems into neighbouring quarries. We can't work there, BUT an NGO can. Also we must always remember that exports account for just 5% of the total production, the UK represents 1% of total production and Marshalls have a share of that 1%.
2. To visit different areas of the region to assess the issues. This includes spot checks on Stoneshippers India sites, process and practices, and spending a lot more time in the Budhpura area understanding the production of sandstone setts.
3. To begin discussions on how to address the environmental impact of the quarrying activities. At present there are no remediation activities carried out in any of the quarries.

It is unrealistic for Marshalls to think that it can change the whole Indian natural stone industry – that is clearly the role of the NGOs and the Indian Government. Our role is to lead by example and to work as hard as we can to ensure that the products that we source from India are gained both ethically and sustainably.

3rd February 2007

This trip begins on a foggy and frosty Saturday in Manchester where flight delays are causing chaos and I have to hastily re-arrange my flight to London to make sure I can meet my connection to Delhi.

After a period of negotiation with the British Midland check-in staff, I manage to get onto the 1.05pm plane to London Heathrow which departs at 4pm – my original plane, the 5.05pm being

scheduled to depart about two hours after my Indian flight is due to leave Heathrow! However I make the connection and leave the UK for Delhi.

4th February 2007

I arrive in a hot and humid Delhi at 11am Sunday morning. I quickly met up with my driver Kuldip and we head off to Jaipur – a car journey that takes us about five hours.

Our destination is the Jaipur Natural Stone Show, where I am due to meet with Mrs Joshi from Hadoti, the NGO that we have chosen to work with. We meet and work through the details of the programme, agreeing priorities, targets and review dates.

I am delighted to be able to take part in the ceremonial handing over of the cheque. From left to right are:

- Rory Kendrick: Managing Director of Marshalls Natural Stone who had been at the exhibition during the previous week
- Me!
- Mrs Joshi: representing Hadoti
- Rajiv Bazaz: Managing Director of Stoneshippers India



Our funding of R860,000 will enable the provision of the following activities:

1: Medical Care – A mobile medical centre with a doctor and two nurses will visit every fortnight to screen for the main diseases that affect the quarry workers: TB, Syphilis, Malaria and Lung Cancer. Medication will be provided as will treatment for other illnesses and injuries.

2: Social Insurance – We are aiming to provide social insurance to 1,000 quarry workers during the year which will cover death and serious injury, delivering cash payments to allow their families to survive without them.

3: Government Liaison – One of the main issues of migrant workers is that they lose their rights to education, medical and food vouchers when they move states. Hadoti will work with their parent states and the state of Rajasthan to try and find a solution that allows the workers to claim their rights. This is especially important for the education of their children.

We spend much time with the Hadoti team agreeing the timing plan, the measures and the implementation plan.

With the programme agreed and dates for payment of funds in place, we head off to Kota – another five hour 250km car journey.

We reach the hotel at 10.15pm, the Umed Bhawan Palace, and manage to get some food before the restaurant closes. It feels a little like the famous Fawty Towers sketch as we have to phone ahead to the hotel and arrange for the chef to stay late!

5th February 2007

We leave the hotel early at 7.00am (so early that the chef is still in bed – obviously the exertion of making food at 10.00pm has taken it out of him!) and head off into the Bundi District.



Our first stop is the main Stoneshippers India quarry on the outskirts of Garrda. The last time I was here, the staff facilities were still being completed and I am keen to see what progress has been made and if everything is in place.

The main work to equip the changing rooms and the eating areas is now completed and the first aid box is complete – and the first aider is trained and in place. This is really important as the nearest hospital is 1½ hours away. This also means that proper health and safety practices are essential.

The quarry itself is now really benefiting from the new machinery and processes which are in stark contrast to the situation in surrounding quarries.



One of the issues in this area is the lack of demarcation of quarries, the few legal ones are surrounded by illegal ones and the spoil heaps of over-burden cover almost every spare piece of land.



In another nearby illegal quarry I see first hand why the work with Hadoti is going to be so important. At this point, it is becoming clear that we are attracting the attention of the various quarry owners (even if they are illegal) and we leave the area.

We travel to Budhpura to spend a lot more time understanding how the trade in setts is conducted and most importantly how the children involved. If we better understand how the children are in these situations, then we have a better chance of coming up with

solutions and talking to Hadoti and other NGOs with a more critical eye.

We arrive at Budhpura at about 10.30am.



The production of Sandstone setts is a new one in India. This type of smaller element paving is not used in the local market at all – they are all destined for the UK, Germany and the Netherlands.

The product typically looks like this – I have taken these photos from various UK websites. They are used for adding details to patios, pathways and driveways.

The product is produced from the spoil heaps of the main large element paving production by the local villagers and a large number of migrant workers and children. We could assume that, as this is recycling, that it is good but even a scant look at people and processes shows that this is not acceptable.

The first place we stop at is the main collection point – these yards are the main packaging point for all of the setts that are produced in the spoil heaps in the area.

The women and children in this yard are very shy and as soon as the camera is out they hide quickly – but you can see a young girl in the truck who is filling crates. The other children behind the truck all look younger than 14.



This yard and the many like it are where all the production of the area is taken to be sorted for size and colour. I am told that there is a set of up to 20 sizes that are required by the exporters, anything else will not be accepted.

Through the Stoneshippers India guys I try to ask the adults questions about the children – why aren't they at school? The answer, it seems, is that they are sent here by their parents to earn money. This is normal in the village. Previous reports by the India Committee of the Netherlands indicate that this is due to the debts of the parents and that these children are in fact bonded to the yard owner.



It becomes clear from talking to the adults in this site that all of the production here and in all the other yards is destined for Europe and in particular the UK, Germany and the Netherlands. I am told that this area produces all of the region's setts.

This means that if UK consumers buy Indian Sandstone setts from any non-Marshalls source, they will in all likelihood have been produced using child labour.

It's a very sobering thought, given the increasing popularity of these products for UK driveways and paths. From here I want to track back to where the actual setts are produced. It doesn't take long to discover the reality.

The boy with the hammer is 11. He has templates for the sizes he has to produce and is paid by the piece – he works all day until he has a large pile ready for the local collection tractor to come around and take the setts to the sorting yards. He earns about 70 rupees a day, if he is lucky and finds the right sized waste material.



Here's a close up of one of these girls. I could not get to her to ask how old she was, but she can't be more than 10.

Across the valley I see the full scale of the spoil heap areas and the production of these products.

I could show hundreds of photos from this area all showing much the same scene.



I consider myself to be a capitalist, I have a degree in business studies, an MBA and a track record of wealth-generating business activities. But profiting from products produced in this area and in this way is a step far too far.

I strongly believe that the secret of business success is a sustainable balance of the social, the environmental and the economics – this is way out of balance. Hadoti must target this area as a priority for their work.

We leave the area and head back into Kota, where I want to see the progress at the new Stoneshippers India calibration factory.

This plant is also equipped with a sophisticated water processing and recycling system to ensure that the waste material from the calibration process is managed carefully and not just allowed to run into the local water course.



The site is still under construction but the water recycling is working.

The rainwater harvesting is not yet functional but we are a couple of months off the monsoon season so the pressure is less. The loading areas show even more how different the Stoneshippers India operation is to the rest of the industry in Kota.

All of the packaging for the Marshalls product now has a leaflet on it explaining the work that we are doing in India to help consumers understand the issues and the benefits of buying from an ethical source.

It's now time to hit the road for the 4½ hours drive back to Jaipur to catch the 8.15pm plane to Mumbai and then the plane back to the UK.

6th February 2007

I take the Jet Airways flight to London at 2.00am, collapse into the plane and try to sleep.

Just my luck, I am sitting next to the Guinness book of records' *world's loudest snorer* who is clearly in practice for a new world record attempt. The stewardesses even come over and wake him several times but after the 5th attempt, they give up and head as far away as possible. I put my headphones on, turn up the volume and try to watch a film.

They do get some revenge when they wake him abruptly to ask him if he wants breakfast *forgetting* that he had already said no he wanted to sleep as long as possible. So we get 45 minutes' peace and quiet.

We land on time at Heathrow and I dash to Terminal 1 to catch my plane to Manchester. Home! I arrive back home at 11.00pm.

Postscript

In keeping with our household's policy of being carbon neutral have offset the carbon created by this trip.

Before going to India, I set myself three objectives:

1. To conclude an agreement with Hadoti to fund a programme of work aimed at the migrant quarry workers.
2. To visit different areas of the region to assess the issues. This includes spot checks on Stoneshippers India sites, process and practices, and spending a lot more time in the Budhpura area.
3. To begin discussions on how to address the environmental impact of the quarrying activities.

The first objective has been fully met. We have an excellent programme of activities with Hadoti and payment for the first stage of the work will be transferred into their account on the 9th February.

The programme includes regular reports and reviews and I will publish these on the Marshalls sustainability web pages.

My second objective has been met. The investigation into the supply chain of Sandstone setts shows a terrible abuse of children's rights. The only way to prevent child labour in the production of Sandstone setts is to produce them in-house using Stoneshippers India's closed and controlled manufacturing and supply chain.

A simple web search of UK suppliers will find many, many companies offering these products. All I ask is that these companies ask themselves if they really know how these products are produced and if they are happy about what they find. It is then up to their own consciences. Just as long as they are truthful and don't make blind 'no child labour' statements without checking.

My third objective was only partially achieved. I have a better understanding of the scale of the problem but we now really do need expert advice and this will be one of my tasks when I get back to the office tomorrow.

Chris Harrop, 7th February 2007