



Marshalls

Transforming Britain's Landscapes

Chris Harrop Blog 2007

Part Two

Trip to Jaipur & Kota: 19th to 21st February 2007

This blog records my recent visit to India to further investigate the issues surrounding the production and subsequent importing of Indian natural sandstone in to the UK.

My visits to India are a key part of the *Marshalls for Sustainable Landscapes* programme that I am championing – the heart of which is a very simple but effective definition of sustainability:

- Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone
- Effective protection of the environment
- Maintenance of stable levels of economic growth

Only when there is a balance of these three areas, can a company's activities be called sustainable. Enough of the soap box and on with this trip.

The trip had four key objectives:

1. To visit different areas of the region to assess the issues. This trip, I have extended the area covered into the neighbouring district of Bhilwara.
2. Spot checks at a different set of Stoneshippers India sites, the process, the practices, and on the ground activities. The more we visit the sites, the more the staff there will see that we believe in these activities – supporting the factory managers in making the cultural changes is really important.
3. To meet with the Acting Principle of the School in the quarrying village of Garrda that Marshalls and Stoneshippers India are starting to help.
4. To add to my understanding of the extent of the environmental impact of the quarrying activities. At present, there are no remediation activities carried out in any of the quarries. The main issue is not the filling in of the used quarry pits with spoil but how to make the land productive once this is done – top soil, fertile top soil is at a premium.

Whenever I visit the quarrying areas in India, I am struck by the huge scale of the social and environmental issues. The work that we have begun with Stoneshippers India is just scratching the surface but unless someone starts then nothing will every change.

If we can show that by doing business in an ethically and environmentally responsible manner and still meet the economic objectives our shareholders require, then the case for change will become undeniable.

Also we must always remember that exports account for just 5% of the total production and that the UK represents 1% of production.

20th February 2007

This trip begins with an Emirates flight from Manchester to Dubai, a plane change and then Dubai to Mumbai. Manchester to Dubai (flight EK18) departs at 1.15pm and arrives at 12.10am. Dubai Airport is absolutely jam packed!

Dubai to Mumbai (flight EK 504) departs 4.00am and arrives at 8.15am. When I land, it is a quick zip through immigration and then out into the throng to meet up with Rajiv Bazaz, the Managing Director of Stoneshippers India.

To transfer to the Domestic Terminal at Mumbai Airport involves a 30 minute drive around the outside of the airport – the airport offers a transfer service, basically a bus that drives out of the domestic terminal into the Mumbai traffic and then drives to the other terminal. There must be a good reason why they don't travel through the airport grounds instead of hitting the streets along with 5 million other vehicles!

Anyway we get to the terminal in good time and take a Kingfisher flight to Jaipur. The company that owns this airline is the same one that makes the famous Kingfisher beer.

Mumbai to Jaipur departs at 10.40am and arrives at 12.25pm. The flight is on time and we leave the terminal and meet up with our driver, Maveram. The drive from Jaipur to Kota is about 4½ hours, and we stop at Maveram's favourite truck stop in Tonk for a leg stretch and cold drink.

We get to Kota at just after 4.30pm and head for the main Stoneshippers site to meet with the managers and talk through the site operations. I want to look through the accident book to check on the last entry – there was an accident on 13th February where an operative had reported a fall. This was a minor incident requiring only on-site first aid.

I examined the accident report which clearly showed what had happened, the cause of the accident (the operative did not follow the safe working procedure) and the resulting action (re-training). The report also contained a confirmation that this had been carried out.

This is the same procedure that we would follow in all of our UK factories but is not common practice in the quarrying industry in India and again shows how far ahead of the market Stoneshippers India are.

From here, we walk to the calibration factory to check on progress, especially the water treatment plant which is now fully up and running. Talking to the team in the factory they have just received the results of tests on the solid waste from the water treatment process that shows that the fine waste can be used to make bricks by a nearby factory.

This is in stark contrast to the practice of all other factories in this area that simply pour out their waste into the street or waste areas.

The next photo not only shows the waste from the production processes, the white powder which is the residue from cutting and polishing Kota Blue stone, but also the waste sandstone that is simply dumped on any spare ground.



In this case migrant workers are working through the spoil in search of slabs that can be made into paving that will be sold at a per piece price.

Much of this area of Kota is littered with spoil heaps and vast areas of white sludge from the production processes.

On the way back to the car, I take a quick detour into a competitor's site. No photos unfortunately, but what we see is not good. A stone saw with no guard; the operative with no gloves, ear protectors or glasses cutting stone with his hands millimetres from a blade that is cutting through 50mm of stone paving slabs like a knife through butter. Guys 'sitting' on top of grinding / polishing machines that are on top of paving slabs, the machines are apparently designed to work like this. They must also be designed to take fingers and toes with them.

Back at the car we head off to the hotel, the Umed Bhawan Palace. After a meal it's off to bed for some sleep!

21st February 2007



We leave the hotel at 8.00am and head straight to three more Stoneshippers India sites that I have not visited before. First is the Archana site where paving is graded, sorted and packaged.

The site is well laid out and looks to be well run, although at this time in the morning the only person present apart from us is the security guard!

From here we drive to the Pali site via the local job centre, an area where migrant workers collect every morning offering their services for daily hire.



“Have tractor and family to move stone – payment by the load”!!!



At the Pali yard I look at the organisation of the product and the loading practices.

Everything looks in order, the site procedures are being followed and it is a safe environment.

Our next stop was the crate making yard. All the wood used in these crates is from one of two sustainable sources. The wood used for packing the premium products is rubber wood grown in Kerala (South India).



Once the rubber has been yielded, these trees are then felled, used for timber and then new trees planted within the rubber plantation.

The wood used for standard products is made from eucalyptus and grown in Uttar Pradesh. These trees are grown for seven years before they are felled and again new trees planted.



I also look to see that the crates are properly fumigated – the last thing a builders' merchant in the UK wants is termites from non-fumigated crates infecting his timber products, which in turn will spread to their customers' projects – houses etc....

Fumigation is carried out correctly and stamped accordingly. From here the crates are distributed to all of the Stoneshippers India sites.

Our final stop in Kota is the Kediya yard where skilled stone masons split the block stone from the quarries into paving slabs. Elsewhere on the site other masons turn these large slabs into paving.



All the stonemasons in the yards are wearing protective glasses, but there is the need for the yard foreman to constantly remind them and ensure that they are being used correctly, covering the eyes not the head!

Further into the Quarries

We now leave Kota and head for the quarry areas. Just as we leave the city on National Route 76, we pass a whole area of stalls selling cricket equipment. The road may well be called National Route 76 but it quickly changes from a wide asphalt road to little more than a single track.

As we get into the quarrying area we see the environmental impact of the activities.

We continue on N76 to Sutra past many huge worked out quarries. The reason we work with Stoneshippers India is to keep the supply chain closed, from block extraction, transport to the masons yards for splitting and working into slabs, to processing (calibration to the right thickness) and packaging. If you don't control the supply chain like this, then there is no way of being certain that the stone has been produced ethically.

In the outskirts of Sutra we see that before the quarries, much of this area was farmland and potentially could be again with the right forms of rectification.

This photo shows fertile fields with spoil heaps behind them, and another showing the effect of these spoil heaps.



We next come to Dabi where we stop for a break. The Stoneshippers India guys stop at the street food vendors and have cups of Chai and samosas. I don't join in with the street food. I don't think that my constitution is strong enough to cope with Dabi street food and the thought of spending 12 hours in a car miles from 'facilities' on bumpy roads with a dodgy stomach is not one I want to risk!



But we do buy some local fruit (with thick skins) called Chikoo. They are about the size of golf balls, light brown skins with a fibrous fleshy inside that tastes like a cross between banana and dates – delicious. I have seen these in my local Tesco costing 20 times as much.

On leaving Dabi, we head towards Parana and back into quarrying country. I am very interested in the issue of legal vs. illegal quarries. I have seen many times now that unless the supply chain is tightly controlled there is no way to trace back the source of paving that is for sale in the UK to either a legal / illegal quarry or to the use of child labour. This makes any claims of 'no child labour' impossible to substantiate unless they go to the lengths we do.

This photo shows the license for a quarry at the side of the National Route 76 near Parana. Essentially it states:

- The location
- The licensee's name
- The area of the quarry, in this case 11,256 m²
- The start and end date of the licence: 25th September 1998 to 24th May 2018
- The annual fee: R22,512 or about 265 a year.



We are now entering the Budhpura area that I have visited several times so we continue further along the road. The same disturbing Budhpura sights greet us. There are gangs of children (top left) working on the spoil heaps making sett paving and there are also very clear signs of land slips.

These setts, used for paths and driveways, are only made for the export market, the UK and mainland Europe. Unfortunately anyone buying these setts in the UK from a non-Marshalls source will have a product that has been made using child labour. These sights just reinforce our decision to make all setts in-house. It really is the only way to guarantee that there has been non child labour involved.

Further along the road towards Dhorela, we see gang after gang of migrant worker families removing spoil and waste. The agreement we have with the Hadoti NGO is directly concerned with these migrant families and their welfare.



This should not be the responsibility of a UK company that represents such a small part of the output of the natural stone industry in India. 5% of total production is exported, of which 20% is destined for the UK, of which Marshalls have a 20% share – so we are just 0.2% of the production for the whole of India.

But someone has to look to their welfare. Small changes can make a big difference and it is simply wrong to think that the problems are too big or complicated to tackle. Anyone who advocates doing nothing or being 'slightly ethical' are deluding themselves and are complicit in the abuses that are prevalent in this region.

The School in Garrda

We now leave Bundhi district and enter Bhilwara District. The sights unfortunately remain the same, no safe working conditions, children running around, and lots of packing crates showing that the paving is destined for export (product for local markets is not crated). The area we drive through is not on the map, but is called Mata Ka Nala.

We drive through Govindpura, Bijoliya and Bhopatpura. At Bhopatpura we see local farmers taking fertile silt and top soil from the local reservoir to be used in their fields. This may hold the key to our ongoing desire to find a way to regenerate used quarries.

We continue on this road and head back into Bundhi District and to Garrda. At Garrda we head for the school to meet with the Acting Principal, Mr Somani. In the school, we discuss three things:

1. The progress on installing the new play equipment donated by Stoneshippers India
2. His staffing issues that are affecting pupil performance
3. His desire for improvements to the school buildings

The staff and pupils are very happy with the new play equipment. The children are also playing with the volleyballs that Stoneshippers have provided.

Talking to Mr Somani, we discover that out of a staff of eight, he has two vacancies – the Head Teacher being the most important.

In his office are the latest school attainment results. These show a dramatic fall off in results for the older classes – from over 80% passing the required standards down to 35% last year.

I am a Chair of Governors for a Junior School in the UK and I know that if this happened in our school, the Governors would have a very serious review with the Head and the staff. The problem here though is there is no Head Teacher and for several years there has been no Maths teacher for these children – any wonder that they have not reached their potential?

Mr Somani is working hard on recruitment and he says he should have a new Maths teacher soon. His main concern now is the state of the school buildings and the fact that they are not conducive to learning. He has plans for a refurbishment and extension of the building that he shares with us.

As we walk back to the car with Mr Somani, he shows us some work that the children are doing planting native trees and plants and charting their growth.

They have built beds for the plants and have brought soil from the river bed to plant them in. In particular he points out the Neem tree which apparently has medicinal properties and whose twigs are used as toothbrushes.

The beginnings of a plan are coming together in my mind, BUT we need expert advice. Blindly planting trees in what could be inappropriate soil on unstable filled-in quarries would be the worst type of 'Greenwashing'.

From the school, we pay an unannounced visit to one of Stoneshippers India's quarries. The first sight that meets us is a group of migrant workers clearing an area.

No children or women in the team, all ages have been checked and they are receiving decent wages. This is really excellent and shows that small changes in site processes can work and become part of the normal way of working. I contrast this to the scenes in other areas where the migrant families have children working and women carrying huge loads on their heads. Elsewhere in the quarry the mechanisation is very evident – no children standing bare footed on the jack hammers here.

Could this be done safer? Yes. But it is a VERY significant improvement on other quarries and the benefits in safety, efficiency and product quality are clear and demonstrable. The main issue is cultural (and the fact that many quarries are illegal – why mechanise in an illegal quarry?)

On this trip we avoid going into these illegal quarries, avoiding the nice man who runs the nearby illegal quarry and who owns the semi automatic. He wasn't too please to see me last time and discretion is the better part of valour.



We now need to start to head back to Jaipur so we head towards the city of Bundi to join up with National Highway 12. This trip takes us through some very beautiful farming areas. As we drive through village after village I ask all sorts of questions about the rural economy and just by chance start a conversation about Dung Cakes (it is a five hour drive after all!).

It appears that there is now an emerging market for Dung Cakes. They are made, as you must have guessed, from dung, shaped when damp (nice) and left in the sun to dry. They are used as fuel.

In rural areas there are three fuel options: firewood (there isn't enough to supply every villager), kerosene (expensive) or Dung Cakes. These were at the side of the road in a small village near Kevadiya.

The current rate for a good sized Dung Cake is 1 Rupee. Apparently five years ago you could get 10 for 1 rupee! Clearly the market is developing and some villagers are stockpiling.

And I am told that there are quite often arguments over who has rights to fresh dung. This fascinating subject that would keep small boys amused for hours, brings a lighter note to what is always a very sobering trip round the quarrying areas of Kota.



We arrive in Jaipur at 6.30pm and check in for our flight to Mumbai. Jaipur to Mumbai Jet 372 departs at 8.10pm and arrives at 9.45pm.

My journey back to the UK is via Dubai: Mumbai to Dubai (EK 503) departs at 4.15am and arrives at 6.00am, then a LONG wait until my connection to Manchester. Dubai to Manchester (EK017) departs at 2.15pm and arrives 6.10pm.

I need to have a serious chat with our travel agent 'Company Travel' as there was a flight to Manchester leaving at 7.55am that I could have easily caught. Clearly they want me to experience the full Dubai airport experience of an 8 hour wait.

Postscript

In keeping with our household's policy of being carbon neutral have offset the carbon created by this trip using the Carbon Neutral Company flight calculator and purchasing trees to equate with the carbon my trip has emitted.

Conclusion

I had four objectives for this trip:

1. To visit different areas such as Bhilwara.
2. Spot checks at a different set of Stoneshippers India sites.
3. To meet with the Acting Principal of the School in Garrda.
4. To add to my understanding of the extent of the environmental impact of the quarrying.

All four objectives have been met in what was another fully packed 48 hours in India.

I will be visiting the area again in April 2007 to again check on continued compliance to the ETI base code by Stoneshippers and to start to make firm plans for site regeneration. I now have a much clearer understanding of the site rectification issues and have enough information to properly brief the relevant experts so that we can start to develop a realistic plan.

Sustainability is a never ending journey, it is a balance of the social, the environmental and the economic issues. I am sure that we will never get it 100 % right but we are totally committed to trying.

The work that Stoneshippers India is doing with our help is streets ahead of the other players in the market in India. We have addressed very many of the social problems in their supply chain and the work we are doing with Hadoti will have benefitted those outside this supply chain.

It is naïve to say (as some in the UK industry have) that by Marshalls tackling one problem, such as removing as child labour from our supply chain, we are simply pushing it somewhere else. This is where all the work we are doing with Hadoti comes in. Changes for the better can be made and unless someone does something, then nothing will ever change.

But it's a journey and it will take a lot more hard work to keep improving the situation in the quarrying areas. However if UK consumers want these products and to provide economic benefits to the region, they should demand that the producers act in a socially, environmentally and economically responsible and sustainable manner.

However, as always, they must seek INDEPENDENT 3RD PARTY PROOF of any statements. Having seen the areas with my own eyes on many occasions now, this will be a significant challenge for other suppliers.

Chris Harrop, 21st February 2007