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A Peek Into the Garo Hills

I write this piece for Doon Watch as I sit in the mystical Garo hills in Meghalaya. While Doon Watch is largely about the amazing sights of Doon, I cannot but resist the temptation of sharing a piece of Garo hills with you. I write this in a small hamlet called Dabuk Atong, miles from civilisation. The village of Dabuk Atong has only 21 houses and is surrounded by magical community owned and protected tropical forests. Above me is the open sky with the constellation of Orion staring down at the have and have-nots of the world. The stars twinkled naughtily at me. In the distance, an owl hooted. The air I breathed smelt clean and pure. Intrigued kids from the village peered over my shoulder as I punched in this article on my Blackberry. From where I sit, despite slumming it (no electricity, no toilet, no running water and a sleeping bag on a cold floor!) I think I "have it" while all the folks back home in Doon don't!

While I could go on about the splendor of the Garo hills, I will pick just one



element to elucidate its wonders. Amongst the most amazing sights in these forests is the famed Pitcher plant *Nepenthes khasiana*. The plant consists of a long tube-like structure with a flap for a lid. The plant is insectivorous-it feeds on insects! Peeping inside one of the pretty pitcher plants shows a small quantity of water mixed with some fluids. The plant traps insects that fall into its "pitcher" and it dissolves these insects for nutrition.

The pitcher plant is endemic and threatened, but fortunately, in the Balpakram Baghmara landscape where I am supporting local communities to protect their forests, it is quite common.

Dinner is on the fire. A two foot

long bamboo has been stuffed with the leaves of a *kareka* plant (a local herb). Salt, chili and dried fish have been added in for good measure. The top open end of the bamboo is stuffed with leaves to keep the steam in. No water is added, I am told. The bamboo will provide enough water to make a tasty curry. I can't wait to taste it. Don't worry this isn't turning into a cookery column! Brenga (which is how bamboo cooked meals are described in the Garo language) is waiting for me!

I've reached my word limit! That's good, because there is no way that I can do justice to the Land of A-chik Mande (A-chik=hill, Mande=people), the land of the Garos, in this column!

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Making a difference: Ever planned a holiday in rural India? Or visited home-stay based tourism in forests. If not, why don't you plan your next holiday at one such location. Not only will it give you a unique insight into the world beyond our cities, but hopefully, it will also provide an economic incentive to the local community to preserve their habitats.

Photograph caption: The Pitcher Plant

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