

# FROM PLAINS TO MOUNTAINS: MY FIRST MONTH INTERNING WITH HRP IN CHAMBA

## Introduction

I had never been to the Himalaya before. The image I had in my mind was just of mountains around me and normal houses. But the day I arrived in Himachal Pradesh, everything changed. While travelling by bus to the field station, my eyes were fixed outside the window the entire time. What I was seeing was hard to believe for someone witnessing the Himalaya for the first time. Huge mountains surrounded from all the sides. The roads were so narrow that it seemed difficult for two buses to pass each other at the same time. I could see small clusters of houses scattered across the valleys. People in the bus were talking in Himachali. I didn't understand the language, but I kept listening. And then, for the first time, I saw a snow-covered peak. My heart was pounding with excitement and wonder. The views I had only seen in movies were now right in front of my eyes. It felt unreal. Throughout the journey, I found myself smiling continuously. The air felt so fresh that I just wanted to take deep breaths again and again.

Cloud covered Himalayan hills wrapped in drifting mist.  
© Shreya Yadav.

# HRP-Anecdotes

At the same time, I was a little nervous, as I had no idea how working here was going to be. But in that moment looking at the landslide area I realised how beautiful our planet is and how often we ignore and destroy it without thinking about the consequences.

## First day Experience

The day before, I was very excited to go into the field and start work. I slept early so that I could wake up on time. The room I was staying in had two windows, one in front and the other on the right side of my bed.

When I woke up in the morning, I looked outside and saw that the valley in front of my room was completely covered with clouds. It was extremely cold that day. As I got out of bed, I noticed it was raining. Soon, I got to know that there would be no fieldwork because of the rain.

My co-workers told me that this is one of the common difficulties they face while working in Chamba. Whenever it rains, they have to stay at the base and work from home due to the risk of landslides. That day, I didn't work. I just wandered around the field station and kept looking out of the window, experiencing the rain in the Himalaya for the first time. The valley in front of my window looked incredibly beautiful. I spent the whole day simply admiring the beauty of the Himalaya.

The next morning, I saw snow on the distant mountain, and it looked absolutely stunning. However, for the next few days, it continued to rain. During that time, I experienced the intense cold and kept admiring the raw beauty of nature around me.

Collecting grass specimen.  
© K. Gokul.



Seed sowing of *Punica granatum*.  
© K. Gokul.



Recording the co-ordinates of new land.  
© Lakshay Tyagi.

## About the Internship

My internship in Chamba is based on ecological restoration. It includes doing different types of work every day - visiting restoration sites, collecting monitoring data, measuring new lands and recording co-ordinates for





Talking to community during outreach program.  
© K. Gokul.

restoration, collecting herbs, shrubs, and grass specimens, seed collection, filling polybags, sowing seeds, and conducting outreach programs with communities and schools. This one month was full of learning and getting new experiences. Every day witnessing new sights was thrilling.

## My Daily Work

My daily routine mainly involves monitoring previously restored lands. I monitor 28 restored sites. During monitoring, I record how many saplings have died, how many tree guards have fallen or are missing, and how many are in good condition. This data helps in understanding the survival rate and planning replantation. I also work on measuring new land areas. Using Geo Tracker, I record the latitude and longitude, and then using QGIS to calculate the total area. This helps in identifying the exact land area that needs restoration.

Additionally, I go for seed collection, fill polybags, and sow seeds properly. I also learn plant propagation through cuttings, taking cuttings from trees, removing excess leaves, dipping them in root-enhancing hormones, and planting them in polybags.

## Challenges I Faced

Working in the Himalaya is physically demanding. Walking long distances on uneven and steep slopes is very difficult. For someone coming from the plains, working in mountainous terrain is not easy. I faced many difficulties in my initial days. During monitoring, I had to take long routes and climb mountains filled with thorns and stones. Sometimes I had to use my hands for support while climbing, which left thorns stuck in my palms. In some areas, loose pebbles, stones, and dry leaves made the ground very slippery and risky. These challenges built my endurance. At the end of the day, it feels worth it when you realize you are contributing to restoration and doing something good for the planet.



Some members of the HRP team taking a selfie break while monitoring.  
© Lakshay Tyagi.

## What I Learned

This internship helped me understand the complexities of restoration in the Himalaya. Before coming here, I thought it would be easy but in the field I realized it requires a lot of effort, courage, and dedication.

Working here improved my field skills, patience, and adaptability to mountainous terrain. I learned real fieldwork techniques, time management, and how to endure physical challenges. Most importantly, I developed a deeper understanding of the Himalayan ecosystem.

## Special Experiences / Moments

One special experience was connecting with locals. It was lovely to talk to them even without fully understanding their language, we could still understand each other's emotions.

Another memorable moment was my first land measurement. It was extremely difficult, and I had severe leg pain that day, yet I went for monitoring the next day. Later, I realized how rewarding it felt to work in this region.

One of our nursery workers invited us for 'Dham' (feast). Trying local food was also a great experience. There is a Chambyali dish named 'Madra', which is made using Rajma, Ghee and curd and that was very delicious. During treks and fieldwork, the beautiful landscapes often made all the tiredness disappear. Those moments truly felt worth living.

When our team went to document plants, one of my team members saw the Himalayan Yellow-throated Marten and showed everyone.



Flowering of *Pyrus pashia*.  
© Shreya Yadav.



Tree of *Pyrus pashia* in full bloom.  
© Shreya Yadav.

I was so happy to see the first wild animal of the Himalaya. That sighting made my day. In greed I waited and looked around to sight again but I failed.



Witnessing *Rhododendron arboreum* for the first time.

© Lakshay Tyagi.

## My first Encounter with Himalayan Flora

The most eye-catching plant I saw for the first time was *Prunus cerasoides*, also known as the Himalayan Cherry. As someone who admires cherry blossoms, seeing the Himalayan Cherry felt truly amazing. The petals and the overall structure of the flower closely resemble cherry blossoms, which left me fascinated.

Another plant that caught my attention was *Rhododendron arboreum*, locally known as Burans. Its deep red, vibrant flowers were truly mesmerizing. In Chamba, chutney and juice are prepared from the *Rhododendron* petals. I also tried it, and it was really tasty. I also observed *Pyrus pashia*, locally known as Kainth, whose flowering was equally beautiful.

Apart from these, I learned about many other plant species found in Chamba, such as *Berberis lycium*, *Juglans regia*, *Punica granatum*, *Quercus leucotrichophora*, *Morus serrata*, and *Albizia chinensis*.

## Conclusion

Overall, the experience has been wonderful. I have learned many new things and gained valuable exposure. Working here is helping me to grow professionally, daily movement in mountainous terrain has helped me develop personally. It has built my confidence and stamina. What initially felt difficult now feels manageable. This one month has been an amazing and unforgettable experience.

What looks like a quiet mountain landscape is actually a place where restoration, resilience, and real fieldwork come to life. This one month has given me experience in many different types of work. It has been exciting to learn about so many aspects within such a short time. I have a great team of colleagues who have helped me along in my initial days and I look forward to an exciting year of restoration, community outreach, and associated works.

**Shreya Yadav, Himalayan Restoration Project, Zoo Outreach Organisation**

**Citation:** Yadav, S. (2026). From Plains to Mountains: my first month interning with HRP in Chamba. *Zoo's Print* 41(4): 01–05.