

My experience as a Pattanam intern

Pooja George, Delhi University

I had the opportunity to be an intern at Pattanam archaeological site. The internship was residential in nature, and the duration was for 15 days, starting from 15th June till 30th June.

The time I spent at Pattanam was a memorable one. I met such amazing people there, from the students of the Archaeology diploma programme, to the administrators and the locals, to my teachers. Everyone was warm and welcoming and made me feel at home right away. My time there was divided into the routine that was being followed by the members of the KCHR on a day to day basis.

Our mornings started at 6.00 am, when we woke up. At 6.30 we set out to the Camp Office, for meditation and the reading of the texts. Meditation consisted of a series of breathing exercises. We then had the readings of two texts- Chithalai Chathanar's *Manimekhalai* and another text on Buddha's life. This was a practice that I liked, especially with the sounds of early morning rain. Depending on whether it rained or not, there was cycling to nearby places right after this. We then returned home to get ready, and came back in time for breakfast. The breakfast timing was from 8.30 to 9.30, after which we had to go the library to read.

Pattanam is such a quaint and beautiful place that it seems like time stops here. The outside world has not yet spread its influence here, and has left this place unpolluted. One thing I love about the village is the greenery that meets one's eyes everywhere. The thick shrubs and tall trees and the occasional winds make me feel that this is truly God's own country.

One of the main reasons I wanted this internship was because archaeology was something that had always fascinated me. It seemed like a subject that opened up a whole new world- a world of the past, and the yearning to know and learn about the past is in us all. Since the excavation season for this year had ended, I was not able to participate in the digging, but staying at the excavation site, with people who had participated in the excavation, who knew so much about the findings and had a passion for archaeology, taught me a lot of things about the subject, that I wouldn't have known otherwise.

My days there were spent mainly in the library, attending the classes and watching documentaries. Oxford House provided the perfect atmosphere for academic work and reading. The vast numbers of books on archaeology were a real pleasure to read. I was introduced to new worlds, theories, concepts and techniques, when I read Susan Wise Bauer's *The History of the Ancient World*, Michael Schiffer's *Behavioral Archaeology and Formation processes of archaeological record*, Harpeet Kaur's *Archaeology-Technique and Methods*, Justin Pollard's *The Story of Archaeology in 50 Great Discoveries*, *Lost Civilizations- Ancient India, Land of Mysteries* and many other such books. But my favourite among these remain *A Brief History of Archaeology: Classical times to the 21st century* by Brian M. Fagan and *Archaeology- Theories, Methods and Practices* by Colin Renfrew and Paul Bahn.

The classes happened on alternate days, and it was something that I looked forward to. The lectures were done with the help of power point presentations and videos to help us see and understand things more clearly. The classes were very insightful and informative and dealt with famous archaeologists, methods, techniques and theories. During my time there, the module on Exploration, Excavation and Documentation methods was being taught. This included the history of archaeological excavations which included studying the excavations done by pioneers like Pitt Rivers, Flinders Petrie and Gordon Childe, the discovery of archaeological sites and features based on existing knowledge, records of previous archaeological excavations, early societies, modern technologies etc. We also studied different types of ground survey like systematic sampling and stratified, unaligned systematic sampling etc, and aerial survey. We also looked at both the natural and man-made processes which affected archaeological record and also the interpretation of the data/results.

During my time there, I was also introduced to the culture-historical approach, the Wheeler-Kenyon method, Gerhard Bersu's open area excavation and processual and post processual archaeology, and the principles of stratigraphy. During my last day there, I was also introduced to the concept of anthropology by social anthropologists (visiting faculty), who discussed the relation between archaeology and anthropology and opened up new areas to us.

I learnt much more in the 15 days that I spent at Pattanam than I thought I could. By reading up on what was taught in class and also doing extra reading during the afternoon time allotted to the library, I became even more interested and curious about learning more about

archaeology. I was also fortunate enough to be introduced to a wide range of documentaries. During my time there, we saw Werner Herzog's Cave of forgotten dreams, The Golden Road- The Ancient Incense Trail, Mohenjo Daro- The Mysterious Indus Civilization by Hans Schuller, History of Humanity, How Earth Made Us by Ian Stewart, Archaeology at work- Looking for the past by Alan McPherson, the Lost Kingdoms of Maya etc. One of my favorites among these was the 12 minute documentary that we saw on pottery making in the Pattanam region.

My time at Pattanam has come to an end. I am grateful to the members of KCHR at Pattanam for giving me such a memorable time there. The teaching I experienced was wonderful. I had to file daily reports and I used to look forward to their responses.

I read in one of the books, that archaeology is partly the discovery of treasures of the past, partly the meticulous work of the scientific analyst and partly the exercise of creative imagination. I understood this when I stayed at Pattanam, and saw the dedication and devotion with which the people there pursued their passions. I have only praise for the course that is being conducted there. I see a lot of potential for this course to be taken to greater heights and more students and interns who are passionate about archaeology, joining in the coming years. This is one course that has to be given a lot of publicity, so that more people will come to know of this.

I would like to conclude with a few lines from Shelley's Ode To Naples, which I think beautifully captures the mystery of the past:-

I stood within the city disinterred;

And heard the autumnal leaves like light footfalls,

Of spirits passing through the streets; and heard

The mountain's slumberous voice at intervals, Thrill through the roofless halls.

I wish the members of KCHR all the very best for their future endeavors. Pattanam will always be a wonderful memory that I wish to return to, soon.