

Naviga

Ganga darsh

By Suchita Malik

RAFTING, popularly called water surfing these days, has caught up in a big way in India as have adventure sports like water-skiing, hot air ballooning, para-sailing, paragliding, canoeing,

miss the virginal white sand banks alongside the river. It is not unusual to come across neatly pitched tents of sight-seers who camp on the banks overnight and do rafting during the day. The rich vegetation all around the crystal-clear waters with colourful rafts and the blue sky above, all make for a picturesque

ners.

The group planned to start from Kaudiala at 8 am and it was decided that the women and children would join the rafters from Shivpuri, some two hours away from Kaudiala. The mood in the morning was upbeat and the temptation of being in the gurgling and gushing waters of the Ganga could not be resisted for long. Even the briefing session, which bluntly pointed out the dangers involved in the venture, failed to dampen spirits.

Amid cries of *Jai Ganga Maiyya*, the rafts were set out on the cool and apparently calm waters of the holy Ganga. Hardly had they travelled a furlong, when the water started gurgling into foam. Arjun, the raft guide, who was steering the main oars, called out that this 'rapid' was called 'Daniel Dip', apparently named after a great British rafter.

A rapid is a part of the river where the water moves swift-

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Getaway

bungee jumping and rock climbing. Not only teenagers and youngsters but many die-hard traditionalists are also taking to these games.

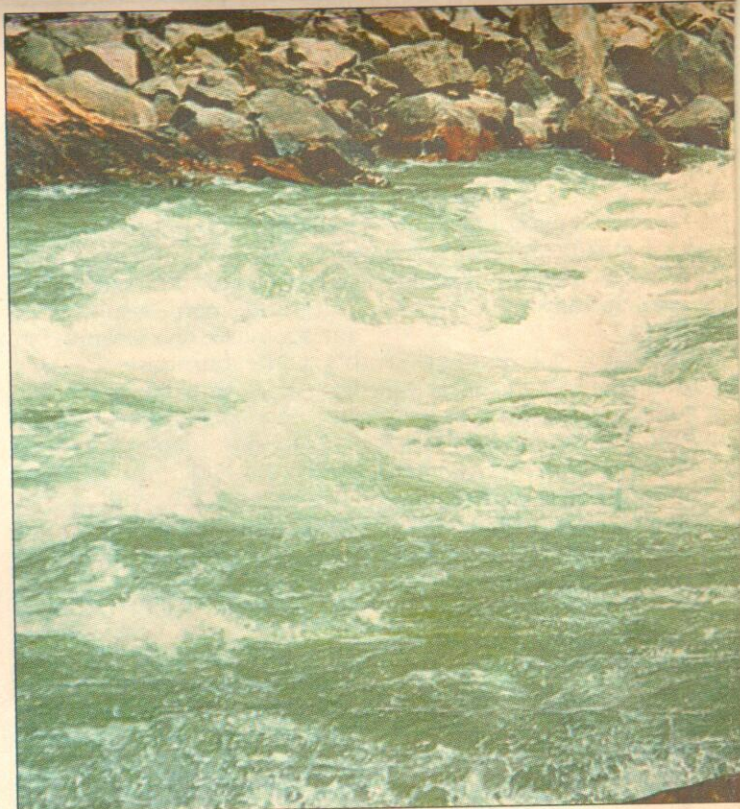
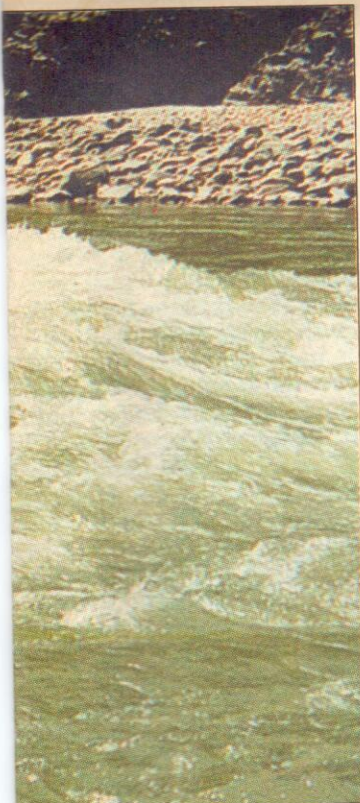
The National Adventure Club of India recently organised a four-day trekking/rafting expedition to Chakrata, Deoban and Kaudiala. A group of about 40 members, including young children, participated in it.

The road from Rishikesh to Kaudiala runs almost parallel to the Ganga and you cannot

sight. A lot of private companies have tapped the tourist market here and are even attracting foreign tourists.

India has numerous rivers like the Sutlej, Beas and the Brahmaputra that offer this sport to tourists. Rafting in Brahmaputra or the Lohit river in Assam can be an experience of a lifetime.

However, experts consider the Ganga as the safest river for rafting and the stretch between Kaudiala and Rishikesh is ideal for begin-



Navigating through rapids can be an exhilarating experience

han, the rafters

ly or through cross-currents on account of a sudden drop in the riverbed. We crossed 'Daniel Dip' with our eyes practically closed and with a prayer on our lips. In about

The skill and effort lay in going along with the main current. A slight error can take the raft into a whirlpool and can result in a major disaster. Crossing the 'Wall' is,

in the face, making it impossible to breathe for a few seconds. After an ordeal of about a minute, the guide successfully steered us through the 'Wall'. Relief was

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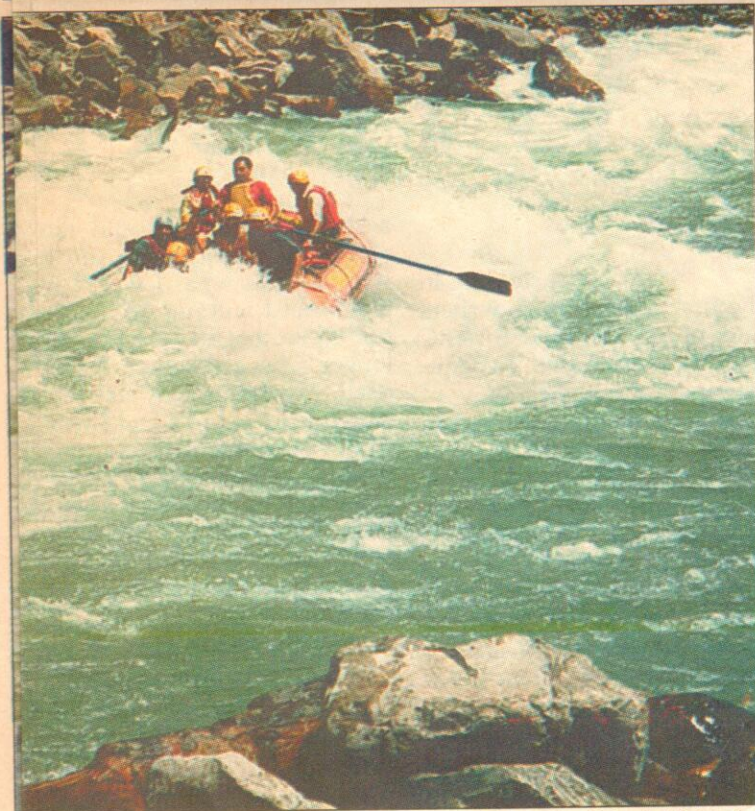
half a minute, the rapid was crossed. But this was just the beginning.

'Wall' was the next major rapid which one encountered. Since it is considered to be a dangerous one, children were asked to walk on the river bank. The adults crossed the 'Wall' on rafts.

indeed, a mind-boggling experience. The raft rocked violently by the high waves and the men had to 'paddle hard forward' to steer through. The women clutched the 'lifeline'(rope) by one hand and held the raft with the other. The high waves hit the party straight

writ large on every face.

The stretch from Kaudiala to Rishikesh alternates between rapids and the calm zones and is extremely interesting. We had by now got used to the commands 'forward' and 'backwards' which are used for paddle movement. The word 'hard' would



Photos by Rakesh Mahindra

2' way

be added while shooting the rapid. The command 'high-side' would prompt the kids to lie in the front portion of the raft and hold the lifeline.

'Marine Drive' and 'Black Money' rapids were followed by 'Three Blind Mice'. These were three rapids in a row, all blind in the sense that their behaviour is quite unpredictable. Moreover, one hardly has the time to assess the current before one is confronted with the next rapid. The guide was responsible for boosting morale and had a knack of gauging the cross currents and steering the raft with great dexterity to ensure an accident-free ride. His expertise was evident while negotiating the next rapid that is appropriately named 'Roller-coaster.' It was indeed a roller-coaster ride on the high waves and the secret of shooting it lies in steering the raft along the main current.

The 'Golf Course' is another difficult and dangerous

rapid. The children are kept off it. Negotiating 'Golf Course' is an experience in itself. It baffles you completely. Any attempt to hard-paddle forward on the instructions of the guide seems to be a futile exercise. One is completely at the mercy of the waves. 'Club-House' and 'Double-Trouble' were the next two rapids to follow in the 36-km stretch from Kaudiala to Rishikesh. As one approaches Rishikesh the gradient of the river bed becomes gentle and the Ganga turns benign.

Rafting as a sport has come a long way since the days of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. The modern raft is made of a synthetic fibre and costs around \$ 6000. It comes in all shapes and colours. Rafting on the Ganga is like coming together of the old and the new in many ways and is indeed an unforgettable experience.