

A Coffee Table Book on Dhanolti Eco-Park

(A successful example of people's participation in Forest conservation)

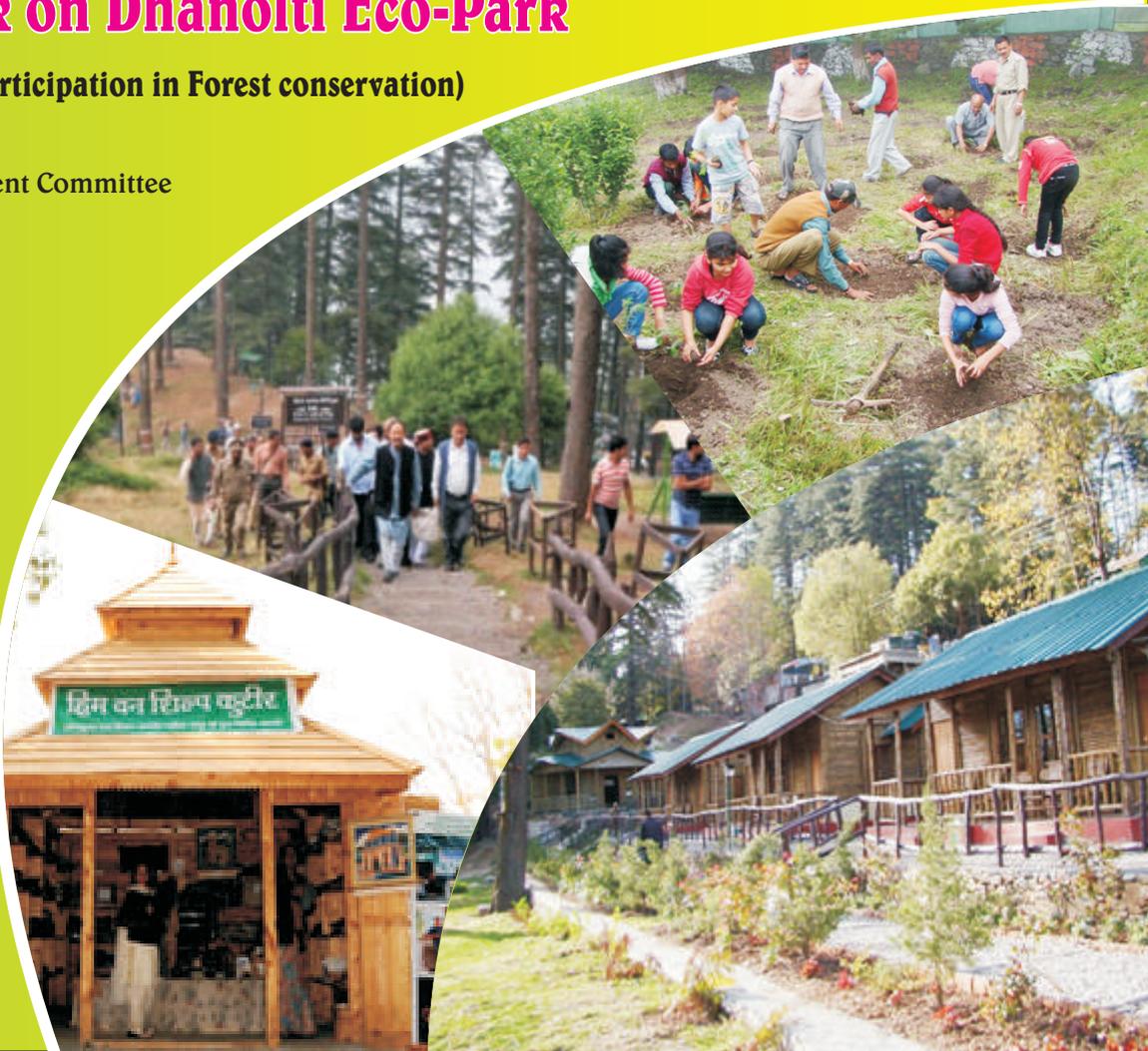
Managed by
Dhanolti Eco-tourism & Eco-development Committee
Mussoorie, Uttarakhand



Regional Centre

National Afforestation & Eco-development Board
Ministry of Environment & Forests Govt. of India, New Delhi

Agricultural Finance Corporation Ltd.
New Delhi



Foreword

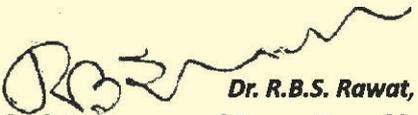


Devbhoomi Uttarakhand on account of its rich forest, cultural and spiritual wealth, has been a destination for spiritual and mental solace for tourists and pilgrims since ages. However in the recent years, there has been a great spurt in the number of visitors. This number has been increasing every passing year. On the one hand, increase in tourism is a welcome sign for economic development of the state, but on the other hand, if tourism is not handled properly, this can result into a great ecological imbalance. Development and implementation of site specific Eco Tourism plan is the only of the ways by which addressing of unemployment & livelihood issues of concern stakeholders and sustainable management of our forest wealth is possible. Truly ecotourism holds a great potential for the conservation of fragile forest ecology in the Himalayan State of Uttarakhand and it can provide a platform for the economic development of the state.

Recently, the Mussoorie Forest Division of Uttarakhand Forest Department has come up with a very novel and successful model of Eco-tourism by creation of people supported & managed Eco Parks named Amber and Dhara in Dhanolti in the areas which had been under tremendous biotic pressure due to un-regulated tourism. These twin parks Ambar & Dhara were opened for public on 13th June 2008 by the then Hon. Forest Minister of Uttarakhand. Ever since their opening both the park's popularity have been increasing leaps and bound and lakh of tourists and local people have so far visited these two parks. This has not only given tremendous boost to the local economy but it has also resulted into ecological resurrection of the area. The model is sustainable and does not put any pressure on the state exchequer.

This coffee table book on Dhanolti Eco Park which has been very well compiled by the Regional Center of NAEB, New Delhi functioning under the aegis of Agricultural Finance Corporation Ltd, presents a vivid pictorial account of the coordinated efforts carried out by Mussoorie Forest Division and Eco-development Committee, starting from its genesis, problem identification, actions taken and successful implementation of the activities, which has transformed a highly degraded site into a green and grand 'Eco-park'. Uttarakhand Forest Department's endeavor to facilitate the forest dependent communities and make use available natural and human resources successfully is a true paradigm shift from regulatory to participatory forestry. The Dhanolti Eco-tourism and Eco-development Committee has not only been providing livelihood to the locals but also supporting forest conservation. The success of the initiative is an excellent example of Joint Forest Management in the hilly areas of Uttarakhand that can be replicated in other similar areas of Uttarakhand.

I Hope, the present coffee table book would work as a catalyst and motivate other Forest Divisions for initiating such type of work in their respective areas. These efforts not only encourage and motivate the local community's involvement in conservation efforts but also provide a support for their sustainable livelihood.


Dr. R.B.S. Rawat, IFS

Principal Chief Conservator of Forest, Uttarakhand

Dhanolti Eco-Park (2636 m asl)



“We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children”.

Native American Proverb

“Dhanolti”, the mere name evokes memories of tall deodar trees dancing with the winds. The snow covered peaks, as if stretching beyond the blue skies, change their hue every hour, as the Sun moves on its journey from East to West every day.

The spring ushers in the flowering of *Rhododendron spp*, making it seem, as if the Gods above have showered the valley with bright red colors with different hues of green.

दशकूपसमा वापी, दशवापीसमोहदः । दशहृदसमः पुत्रो, दशपुत्रसमाद्गुमाः ॥

दस कुओं के बराबर एक बावड़ी है,
दस बावड़ियों के बराबर एक तालाब है,
दस तालाबों के बराबर एक पुत्र है
तथा दस पुत्रों के बराबर एक वृक्ष होता है ।

The winter brings in the snow, covering
the entire place under its blanket

***I shall never see
a poem lovely as a tree.
A tree that looks at God all day
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;
A tree that may in Summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;
Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.
Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree***

~ Joyce Kilmer



Ensnoced amongst such serenity and natural beauty, lies the Dhanolti Eco-Park, a unique model of Joint Forest Management and a process of care and share arrangement between local people and Forest Department, through only one of its kind self sustainable Eco-tourism initiatives and livelihood development.

We have heard stories of people rising from rags to riches but this is a story of a place rising from the dump-yard of garbage to become the pride of the city. It is a joint effort of the people who not only dared to dream but have brought their dream to a reality. The entire project is a unique story of passion, commitment and, the memories of which will linger for a long time. Those, who have not visited the place shall have enough of dreams and encouragement to visit here.



The Journey Begins

Dhanolti is a small tourist hill station about 30 kms from Mussoorie on Mussoorie–Chamba state highway in District Tehri Garhwal of Uttarakhand. It provides panoramic and breathe taking views of the revered Himalayas. Situated within this village of Dhanolti, are twin Eco-parks named as Dhara (the Earth) and Ambar (the Sky above), an ideal place for trekking and picnicking. Its surroundings are a paradise for bird watchers and wild-life lovers also.

As late as 2008, the forest and environment of whole Dhanolti area were under tremendous pressure due to over exploitation and un managed littering and dumping of garbage by tourists hoteliers and locals. Taking stock of the situation of the degrading forest and its surroundings, the Mussoorie Forest Division, Uttarakhand came up with the idea of a community based eco-tourism project with the twin objectives of promoting community participation in conservation of biodiversity and at the same time enhancing livelihood opportunities for the rural people. Along with this efforts were initiated to improve overall cleanliness, and the environmental status of Dhanolti and its surroundings thereby inculcating consciousness and general awareness about environmental conservation in the people. Thus, began the endeavor, which culminated in creation of two Eco-parks in the actual affected areas through active participation and support of the all the stakeholders, which were dedicated to the people in the summer of 2008.

Spread in an area of 15 ha divided into two segments: Dhara 3.5 ha (the Earth) and Ambar 12 ha (the Sky) is a unique model of Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM).



*Forget not that the earth delights to feel your bare feet
and the winds long to play with your hair*

- Kahlil Gibran

*The wending paths in the park,
the wind playing with your hair,
take your breath away.*



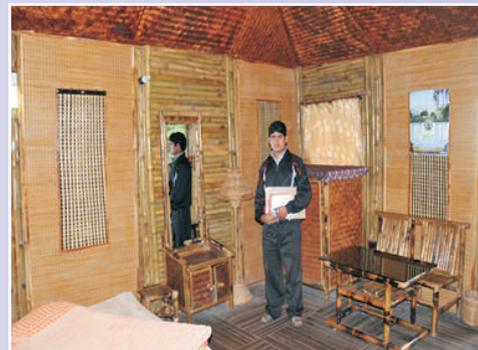
Early hours of a beautiful morning at Dhanolti Eco Park



The spring descends on the Eco Park



The snow reminds togetherness and warmth



The warm interiors of the cottage



A canteen to provide hot & local cuisine



Spend a night in the camp on a camp cot



The yoga point: ideal place for medication

For overnight stay eco-friendly accommodation is available in the form of bamboo huts (04 in numbers with two rooms each) and a restaurant. The cost of stay is Rs. 1500 per hut, inclusive of taxes.

Sh. Shiv Prasad Gairola, the Deputy Ranger, Forest Department, took us to the bamboo cottages and proudly showed the solar hot water systems and the solar lights around them.

The Eco Park is also a Bird Watcher's Paradise. Many of the Himalayan Birds can be seen in and around the Park. Beautiful birds like Yellow billed blue magpie, Black bulbul, white crested laughing thrush, Bar tailed tree creeper, Oriental turtle dove, Oriental white eye, Perigrine falcon, Black and yellow gross beak, brown fronted wood pecker, White tail snow chat, white throated laughing thrush, Oriental White Eye, Bar tailed tree Creeper, Brown fronted Wood pecker and many more can be view.



Ashy Drongo



Black Bulbul



Black Drongo



Plum Headed Parakeet



Himalayan Bulbul



Eurasian Golden Oriole



Great Barbet



Great Tit



Great Hooded Warbler



Himalayan Bulbul



Asian Paradise Flycatcher



Asian Paradise Flycatcher



Streaked Laughingthrush



Verditer Flycatcher



Blue Rock Thrush



White Throated Kingfisher



Yellow billed blue magpie



Spotted Dove



Slaty-headed Parakeet



Ashy



Brooke's leaf Warbler



Eurasian Collared Dove



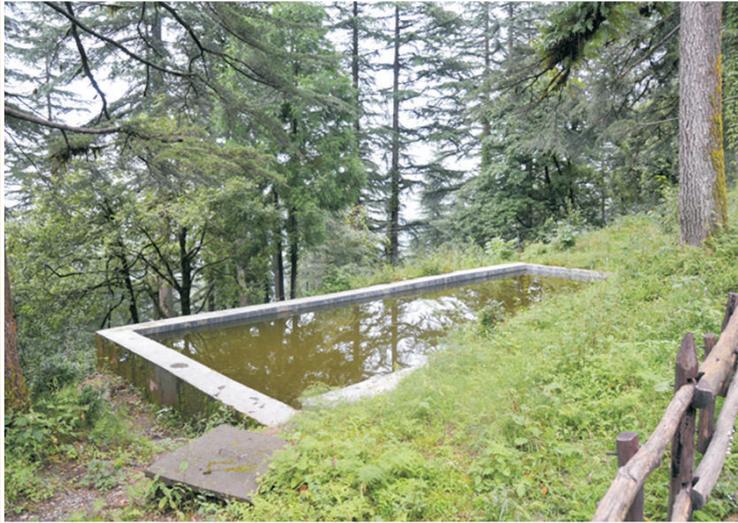
Crimson Sun Bird



Common Hoopoe

WATCH BIRDS

Water Conservation Activities



Rain water harvesting structure in the park



The rejuvenated spring

The rain water harvesting structure has been created to arrest the rain water falling in the park. The water is being used to provide watering to the plants.

Water conservation activities



The pony ride around the park



The slide



Trampoline



The Flying Fox



The Burma Bridge



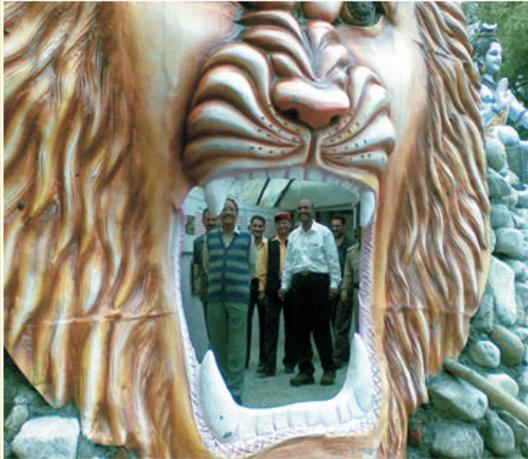
Surprise Gift for visitor on special days



The children have ample of playing facilities

The tourist especially the children have ample of playing facilities in the form of Flying fox, Burma bridge, Nature trail and Trampoline. All made from locally available materials and with the help of the local youth.

Nature Interpretation Centre & Memory Plantation



Sapling plantation in the memory of beloved one or on the occasion of anniversaries and birthday could be done at the reasonable charge of Rs. 350 per plant in the park premises. It gives an impetus to the children in particular to plant more trees.



So far total 5,132 plants have been planted by tourist and community members. However, more than 6,500 plants were planted by school children. The total area being looked after by the Committee members are 200 ha. This is only possible with the sense of ownership and commitment which seems to be prevailing all over Dhanolti.

Memory Plantations



Pre-Project Condition: It All Began Here.....

Not a very long time ago, a government forest official walked this path, alongside which used to be a dumping ground of garbage, with the flies squirting all around, sick monkeys scavenging through the garbage and.... saw a dream emanating out of this.

The garbage from the hotels, guest houses, shops, the picnic parties all found this place as a dumping ground of their refuse. The vegetation was polluted and so was the atmosphere. It was December 2007, when the idea was conceived, which was followed by series of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) meetings. The unemployed youth of five neighboring villages, namely Jhandukhil, Nakuchi, Dabali, Danda Ki Beli and Khuneri got involved in the process and thus the outline of the dream started taking shape.

By April 2008, the officials of Forest Department under the leadership of the then Divisional Forest Officer, Mussoorie with the participation of other stakeholders decided to develop Dhanolti and its surroundings on the Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) model. A subcommittee named Dhanolti Eco Tourism and Eco development Committee (DEEDC) under the Forest Development Agency (FDA) Mussoorie was formed at Division level with the participation of all the stakeholders and existing local bodies with mandatory involvement of the local Range Officer/ Dy. Range Officer and the S.D.O. of Mussoorie Forest Division. The unemployed local youth were involved in various activities of the DEEDC. They were provided 15 days training course in the State Hotel Management Institute, Dehradun. Presently there are 25 active members including 3 women members who daily work in these park on the basis of honoraria. The secretary is unanimously elected from local community. The Dy. Range Officer/Forester is the ex-officio chairperson and local Forest Guards its co-secretary. Other General members are local hoteliers, restaurant and shop owners numbering more than 70. The 55 local horse owners have formed a DEEDC's subcommittee consisting of 07 members.

It all began here

Amber & Dhara Eco Park

Soon after, the twin parks developed with the help and hard work of the local village youth has come up as a destination for the tourists, the dream of the then DFO, Mussoorie Forest Division having been realized.



The Tourists Enjoying in the Park



Collection of Garbage



Collection and sorting of Garbage



Innovative use of non-biodegradable waste



Toys Bear made up from waste

Proper Garbage Disposal System

Earlier, due to neglect and unplanned/unmanaged tourism, Dhanaulti had virtually turned into a stinking and stingy garbage bin. There were no systems of garbage disposal, the whole forest area on both the sides of the main road had been laden with non biodegradable garbage. Tourists had a free access to the nearby forest area, where they not only used to spoil and litter the forest floor but also uprooted the plants and the vegetation.

Now there exists is a perfect garbage disposal system manned and looked after by the DEEDC members. More than 1,00,000 bags of non bio-degradable material has been collected from Dhanaulti area at a collection cost of Rs. 5-7 per bag, of which 6,000 bags of bio-degradable waste have been sold at Rs. 10-12 per bag. The non bio-degradable waste is being utilized by the DEEDC in making of toys and bins within the Parks.

Work Opportunity For All

Earlier, there was no systematic operational approach amongst mule owners and the mule dung used to be strewn around all over the road and forest areas where these mules used to go with the tourist. For systematic operation of mule/horse riding, the 55 local horse owners have been organized by forming a DEEDC's subcommittee consisting of 07 members. The subcommittee is taking care that each one gets a uniform price of a ride and the entire track remains free from mule dung.



The Tea Point



The Horse owners

As we reached the Dhara park on a cold December morning, the local tea point manned by Sh. Harish Uniyal, doing his 2nd year graduation from Chamba, serving hot tea lured us. His hospitality, the hot cup of ginger tea and his enthusiasm was magnetic. After serving us tea he started managing the ticket counter for the visitors. He proudly narrated the tales of the place being a stinking garbage dump once, which today is "see for yourself sir"

Sh. Ranbeer of Jhandukhil is a contented and a happy horse owner and feels the Eco Park has brought new life for the local people. There has been a considerable improvement in the income of 55 horse owners.

Work Opportunity for All

Van Shilp Kuteer : An outlet of handmade products made by villagers

There is a shopper stop where the handmade products manufactured by the members of various SHGs and NGOs working in the hills are available. This outlet provides a selling point for the products manufactured by more than 10 NGOs and 12 Women Self Help Groups from the entire Uttarakhand.



The Shilp Kuteer selling the local crafts



Jyoti of Danda ki Beli village at her job

Total Sales from the outlet

2008-09 (05 months) : Rs. 22,536

2009-10 (12 months):Rs. 42,440

2010-11 (12 months):Rs. 97,500

*The DEEDC gets 10% on the amount as their handling and service charges.
The shop is looked after by the local women from the nearby villages.*

Ms. Jyoti Belwal, the dusky lady from the village Danda Ki Beli behind the counter of Shilp Kuteer having done her B.Sc. from Chamba, has been associated with the project from the beginning. Her dedication and enthusiasm can be seen from the sparkle of her eyes and when she fondly narrates the stories of various visitors who have tried in vain to offer her jobs and better placement in Delhi. She loves her job, the place and her village. What if we all dress up in our traditional attire and come for our work. Will it not make the atmosphere more colorful? She said with a smile on her lips.

Perpetrators Become Protector

It is worth mentioning that the entire show is being managed by the committee members who are now well aware of the local fauna, flora, conservation practices and have been conducting the activities in the park in a professional manner. Earlier these vary people were engaged in encroaching on government land for cultivation of off-season vegetables and illicit felling of trees. But now they have become the protector of this precious asset.



Mule owners sharing experience with Dr. R.B. S. Rawat, PCCF Uttarakhand



Secretary DEEDS delivering lecture to school children on the occasion of World Forestry day



Inauguration of the outlet by PCCF Uttarakhand

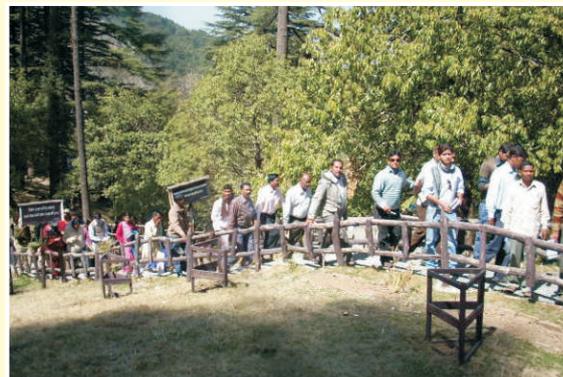
Impact of the work

A successful economic venture

The parks, were opened for public on June 13, 2008 by Hon. Forest Minister of Uttarakhand. Ever since, the parks popularity has been constantly increasing in leaps and bounds with more than 3.60 lakh tourists (within 39 months) have visited. In this period, around Rs. 71.82 lakh revenue has been collected from tourist by the committee. The year wise details of tourist inflow and total earnings are given below:

		2008-09
1.	Total number of visitors (from June 13, 2008-March, 31, 2009)	43,281
2.	Average visitor per month	4,809
3.	Total earning in nine months	5,38,660
4.	Average earning per month	59,851.11
		2009-10
1	Total number of visitors	1,14,154
2	Average visitor per month	9,512
3	Total earning in 12 months	17,02,916
4	Average earning per month	1,41,909
		2010-11
1	Total number of visitors	1,17,450
2	Average visitor per month	9,787
3	Total earning in 12 months (including bamboo huts)	27,34,560
4	Average earning per month	2,27,880
		2011-12
1	Total number of visitors (First six months)	84,681
2	Average visitor per month	14,113
3	Total earning (including bamboo huts- First six months)	22,05,980
4	Average earning per month	3,67,663

The revenue also gets generated from the membership fee and the rides. Out of the total income 20% goes to Government, 40% for salary of the members, 30% maintenance and 10% as corpus fund of the committee



Ecological Impact

The concerned Range Officer proudly states that since the initiation of all these eco-tourism activities by the Forest Department, in and around the parks, not a single case of forest fire, encroachment or illegal felling has taken place. Rather, the Forest Department has been able to get back 15 Hect. of prime forest land without use of any force or legal action.

The committee is also taking care of more than 12,000 plants which have been planted by the school children, committee members and tourists in memory of their near and dear ones. The details are given hereunder:

Total no. of memory plantation inside the park by the tourist and community members	5132
Total trees planted by committee and school children (inside and in the neighboring areas of the park)	6500
Total forest area being looked after directly by the committee	200 ha
Total effective forest area which is getting protection by the active help of villagers and women groups	> 500 ha
No of fire incidence in the past three years	NIL
No of encroachment/illicit felling cases	NIL
Voluntary encroachment removal	22 ha

Future Plans

The Canteen shall soon be serving the local *Garhwali* cuisine which will be an added attraction.

Conducting cultural festivals with Uttarakhand folk dancers is also in the list of activities to be added.

The proposed initiative of introducing Mountain biking in the area shall be of great interest for the tourists.

With more than a 3.50 lakh tourists, having visited this Eco-park since 2008 shows the growing popularity of the park. We wish more such parks come up in the state of Uttarakhand involving the local community and the government for a better future.

Acknowledgements

The help and the support accorded in compiling this beautiful work by the Forest Department Mussoorie and the members of the DEEDC, managing the park is gratefully acknowledged. Photographs provided by Shri Arup Banerjee, DFO and Shri Komal Singh, SDO, Mussoorie is gratefully acknowledged. The compilation would not have been possible without the Mr. Arup Banerjee's the then DFO, Mussoorie encouragement help and support.

पार्क अत्यन्त सुन्दर बना रहा है। इस पार्क को सुव्यवस्थित करने में यहां की जनता, कर्मचारी, समिति बधाई के पात्र हैं। उन्होंने इस जंगल को पार्क में बदलकर न केवल पर्यटकों को बढ़ाने के लिये सराहनीय कोशिश की है। Beautiful concept, Government of India should encourage these type of projects all over the India.

धनोल्ती नामक इस रमणीय स्थल पर वन विभाग द्वारा स्थापित किया गया “ईको पार्क” जिसका नाम अम्बर है, अन्यन्त सुन्दर एवं मन-मोहक है। इस पार्क को स्थापित कराने का श्रेय यहां के प्रभागीय वनाधिकारी को जाता है। ध्यान मात्र यह रखा जाना है कि पार्क की सुन्दरता में उत्तरेत्तर वृद्धि हो।

मदन मोहन पाण्डे बनारस

It is a beautiful place that I will like coming back here with my family. I will also recommend this place to my friends that they should not miss visiting this Eco Park. The park staff are also very helpful and sincere.

I have been told that there are plans to build some huts for tourists to stay, down below some space. I think it is a great idea and I would definitely like to stay in the hut rather than in a hotel. Again Congratulations and keep up the good work.

Melwyn Rodrigues, S.D.R Fernandes chawl, P.N. Kotnis, Road, Mumbai 400016 E mail – melwin1965@yahoo.co.in

Visitor's Remarks



**General body members of DEEDC
(Dhanolti Eco-tourism and Eco-development Committee)**



**Jubilant executive committee members of
DEEDC with DFO Mussoorie**

Study Team

Dr. Narendra Baduni : Coordinator
Dr. Gayatri Mahar : Young Professional
Shri Manoj Sharma : Team member

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