

Across countries for a cause

WHEN WE love we don't count," which is perhaps why Jean-Luc Beaudet and Dominique Rolland rode all the way from France to Pondicherry by motorbike. They didn't count the 13,000-odd kilometres that they had to ride when they traversed through countries such as Germany, Hungary, Austria, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan to come to India, where they wanted to help the patients of CErTH-India (Centre for Education Rehabilitation and Treatment of The Handicapped - India) in Dubrayapet in Pondicherry.

They didn't count the time that they spent collecting money or the time that they spent travelling or the money spent on travelling, but only the money that they collected since they knew it would help some poor people here. Dominique had worked in CErTH for about three months some two years ago and impressed by its work and also its need for money, she impressed upon her husband that they should collect some money to be spent towards its activities. Having collected some one lakh rupees from family, friends and colleagues, they decided to travel by bike to India.

"It was Dominique's idea. All of a sudden one day she said we will travel to India by bike and after three days of thinking and planning I said yes, we can make the project work and she was so happy. Then I prepared a proper plan using maps and also scoured the Internet to see if other people had travelled across the continents by bike and we saw that others too had used a similar model so we came," says Jean-Luc, who works as a software engineer in



From France to Pondicherry.

Grenoble, which is to France what Bangalore is to India.

Using his computer background and her medical knowledge, the two also translated the contents of the website of CErTH-India and also most of the material on the centre into French so that more French people could know about its activities. They are also hosting the daily pictures of their landmark ride to India on their website

<http://grenoble.Pondicherry.free.fr> with some notes.

Jean-luc has been driving bikes since 1969 and the couple share a passion for travel. "Since we have a bike and also love to travel, meet people, to know how they live and show them how we lived, travelling by bike seemed the best choice. People throughout our route were friendly with us and we had no problems with those whom we met. After all the rule is that if you go to your neigh-

bours with an open mind they too will come to you. Otherwise you will remain in your own world," he says.

They left Grenoble, a town in the Alps near Lyon, on January 17 and reached India in 42 days on February 27. "Since this is also the 50th year of independence for Pondicherry from the French rule, we decided to make it an Indo-French adventure, which was supported by the French Consulate General in Pondicherry, which is why the Consulate General Michel Seguy and his wife Martine Quentric-Seguy hosted a dinner in our honour. We also have friends here from our previous visits so it was a three-in-one combination," says Dominique, who remembers some Tamil words such as 'Poittu varenga' that she learnt when she had worked in Pondicherry.

Riding a 650cc engine BMW bike that goes up to a maximum of 160 kms/hr, he rode at speeds

ranging between 60 kms and 100 kms/hr during the journey. The bike, which weighs 195 kilos without luggage and a whopping 400 when its additional fittings that include additional tanks to hold fuel, their luggage, spares and tools, looks quite imposing and rugged. The machine is seven years old now and has travelled a total of 59,000 kms. The couple also plan to go back home riding on the bike taking almost the same route with only a planned detour to Nepal. "When we entered India through Pakistan and went to Thiruvannamalai we felt at home. We felt that this is India and the India that we love."

At CErTH-India, the two were accorded a warm reception by the locals of Dubrayapet and the patients, staff of CErTH, who were led by Dr. N Balasubramanian, its director. "Since we have a lot of activities and would gladly welcome contributions from well-wishers we thanked them for their service and their kind hearts with gratitude," he says.

By Deepa H. Ramakrishnan
Photo: T. Singaravelou