

Po-Leo's Trip to India

The trip to India for the **National Immunisation Drive** against Polio on 8th November was the most amazing experience in my life. Before we set off for Bareilly, an industrial town east of Delhi we were given a lot of very interesting information about polio. There are two types of polio (types 1 & 3) that are still endemic in India. They have been concentrating on Type 1 which is the more dangerous. As a result, Type 3 cases began to rise again. In 2010, however, they will be using the new vaccine that will tackle both types.



The problems are exacerbated by very poor sanitation and hygiene, overcrowding extreme poverty and some suspicions still held by villagers as to the real reason for the polio drops. Many of the children have constant diarrhoea due to the hygiene and sanitation conditions which reduce, or negate, the effect of the drops and they consequently have to receive further doses.

Our journey to Bareilly took 9½ hours – a very interesting coach ride not least because of the driving habits we encountered. Once there we were made most welcome by Rotary Clubs in the town who entertained and looked after us all weekend. The Rotarians have to constantly drum up enthusiasm and produce publicity for these immunisation days which happen throughout the year and so they were delighted to have all their hard work recognised.

I visited three villages on 8th November to assist with giving the drops and publicising the need for having them. One village was quite small and many doses of drops had already been administered, but the organisers were very pleased to see us as it helped to encourage them to continue with their fight against the disease. We gave some gifts to the children.



The second larger village was busy with children when we arrived. Many under 5s were already being given drops and all were delighted to see us. Their brothers and sisters brought them along and were very curious about people from another country. We walked round the village, calling in at each home to ask if the children had had their drops and checking up by looking at their "Purple Pinkies". It was apparent that the children had never come across a bear before and, after some initial fear of touching me, they were clamouring to hold my hand or carry me as we walked through the village. When we returned, Pied Piper fashion, to the base we were given the responsibility of administering the drops. We left there feeling we had in a small way contributed to the event and raised awareness.

The third village was completely different – larger still and overflowing with excited children. I made a brief appearance but was in danger of losing an ear so I sought the safety of the car and left the Rotarians to meet the children.

The following day we walked round another village with a band of followers to give drops to some of those who had not received them the day before. Here they were much more wary about me and I think they thought I was very strange. I didn't see any other cuddly toys all the time I was in India.

We were very sorry to have to leave Bareilly as we had made many new friends and learnt a lot about the culture and

I also visited Agra and Jaipur. In Jaipur we were given a personal tour of the two limb centres by Mr Metha, the founder. The work they do there is unbelievable having helped over 1 million people. That is another story.



Po-Leo