

Natural Heritage Centers In Coonoor - A Study

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Coonoor is the second largest of the hill stations in the Nilgiris. It is situated on the eastern side of the southern extremity of **Doddabetta range**, at the head of the grand **Hulikal ravine** at an elevation of 1850 metres.¹ It lies 17 km. southeast of Udhagamandalam and is the headquarters of the taluk. The name of the place connotes in Tamil a "hill town". This pretty little station is enriched by hills of irregular shape and elevation. Being close to the edge of the hills, it is subjected to fogs and dense mists, the variations of temperature are often sudden and great.² During summer, the maximum temperature is 24.2°C and minimum temperature falls between 8 and 9°C. The annual rainfall is about 130 cm. The place is built round a wide, broken valley. On the edge of the crest of the plateau at the head of the great ravine up which runs the ghat road to Udhagamandalam and the Nilgiris railway line from Mettupalayam.³

The beginning of the hill station dates back to 1830s, when the old steep ghat road to it from Mettupalayam was formed in 1830-32.³ The camp of the pioneers who made the road was at the place where the taluk office and the sub-jail are now located. There were about six or seven bungalows at this place then which were referred to by **Dr. Baikie** in 1833.⁴ It is evident from the records that in 1842 just four Europeans had their houses at **Coonoor** and the

coffee plantations were springing up near and around the place then. The Coonoor ghat road rapidly supplemented all other routes to the **Nilgiris** and possessed essential advantages which gained its importance.

SIM's Park - Coonoor

SIM's Park⁵, Coonoor, came into existence due to the pioneer efforts of the early European settlers. It was inaugurated in December 1874 due to the efforts of **Mr. J.D. Sim**, Secretary to Government and **Major Murray**, acting Superintendent of the Nilgiris forests,⁶ and the park was named after the former. Though this was started as a pleasure resort for the residents and visitors, the park has now developed into a Botanical garden for the purposes of introduction and trial of various exotic species of systematic and economic importance. The park is situated in a deep ravine on the northern side of Coonoor railway station at an elevation of 1768 to 1798 metres above MSL.⁷ It extends over an area of 12 hectares of undulating land and possesses a number of natural advantages. It adjoins the **Pomological Station, Pasteur Institute** and **Silk Worm Seed Station**. It occupies the slopes and base of a small ravine. The rose garden at the bottom of the slope is excellent. Many of the species of trees and shrubs which do not thrive well in Udthagamandalam, are found to flourish in Coonoor. Soon after the **annual flower show** in Udthagamandalam, the **Coonoor fruit and Vegetable show** is held in the park.⁸

Lady Canning's Seat

Lady Canning's Seat⁹ is situated about 8 km. from Coonoor and is perhaps the loveliest point in the heart of the woods. **Lady Canning**, the wife of

the viceroy, was fond of this spot which commands a panoramic view of the numerous coffee and tea estates which abound in Coonoor. From this point, **Lamb's Rock, the Droog, the Lampton's Peak**, all could be seen one above the other and even Mettupalayam is visible at a distance.

Lamb's Rock

Lamb's Rock is perhaps the most favourite place for picnic parties near **Coonoor**. It is a point on the way to **Dolphin's Nose**, and the seat was called by the then collector **Mr. E.B. Thomas**, after one **Captain Lamb** who made earnest attempt to open a path to the place.¹⁰ The rock is a sheer precipice of jagged rock drops several hundred feet to bury itself in the luxuriant jungle below.

Dolphin's Nose

Dolphin's Nose¹¹ is situated some 16 km. from Coonoor, in the Edappalli village. To the local people, it is known as **Mukkumalai**. It is a unique rock of tremendous proportions, jutting out of the face of the hill side in the formation, which its name suggests. The view here is extremely grand and well repays the exertion of getting there; on the one side is seen an excellent view of the magnificent **St. Catherine's Falls**¹² with their stream continuing several thousand metres below, while on the other side, the familiar **Coonoor stream** is seen hurrying on to meet its friend from Kothagiri. They together tribute to the great **Bhavani river**.

Kothagiri

Kothagiri which is about 30 km. east of Udhagamandalam, 23 km. from Coonoor and 33 km. from Mettupalayam is one of the oldest and the largest of the hill stations.¹³ It is situated at a height of 6511 feet above the mean sea level and it possesses an agreeable climate among the hill stations of the district. It is protected by the **Doddabetta** range from the violent southwest monsoon and is not affected by mists which are so common at Coonoor. The lower elevation of the place makes it warmer than Udhagamandalam. These advantages in the climate make the station a fine health resort.¹⁴ Kothagiri stands at the head of a fine ravine running down towards Mettupalayam.

Mukurti Peak

Situated some 27 km. from Udhagamandalam, **Mukurti Peak** is certainly the most notable peak of the **Nilgiris**. It stands 8380 feet above the mean sea level, and commands one of the most magnificent views to be seen in India.¹⁵ According to legends, the Peak's name in Kanarese means "**Cutnose**" and that it was the nose of **Ravana's sister Surpanaga** which was cut and struck up there.¹⁵ According to another version, the **Toda tribal** people believe that the souls of men, and buffaloes leap together into the other world from the dizzy summit of the peak.

END NOTES

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