



Travels on a Marwari Horse in

# Rajasthan

*by Henry Dallal*

There are many holidays and trips to take where you are treated in first class style. There are very few however where you are immersed in cultural splendours and treated as if you are royalty. Such was the overall theme of my visit to Rajasthan, on a horse safari with Kanwar Raghuvendra Singh Dundlod from the house of Dundlod, also known as Bonnie...



that almost meet at the ends, these beautiful horses, throughout an almost forgotten history, were bred as the ultimate power warhorse, displaying agility, endurance and good character to swiftly cover long distances in the hot desert.

**ROYAL WELCOME**

On our arrival to Dundlod, we were overcome with the splendour of a royal welcome, being showered with flower petals.

Two fully decorated camels, and dancing horses, drummers, musicians, garlands, and the Hindu ritual of rice pressed on our foreheads by Bonnie's team welcomed us newcomers to the fort which has been owned by his family for generations, set in a village which has not changed much through time.

**HORSEMANSHIP**

Home to some 50 horses, the Royal Equestrian and Polo Centre and Marwari Bloodlines Stables at Dundlod is where Bonnie keeps his Marwaris.

An exciting and riveting display of horsemanship and tent pegging by him and his team was played out on his grounds, which hosted the world Tent Pegging Championships in 2000. Having been on numerous expeditions by horseback this was by far the most colourful and to learn that it had been voted as best riding outfit by Equitour USA was no surprise.

**PROUD TRADITIONS**

On our horse riding travels through the different territories we were led by Bonnie and accompanied throughout by the saffron and orange coloured standard of Dundlod, which, together with the flowing turban of Mehboob, waved in the wind as Bonnie and his mount proudly displayed this symbol of Dundlod. On our Marwaris we travelled through villages and farms and encountered a wedding party, fellow travellers on camels and beautiful open country. We were the beneficiaries of Bonnie's many years of experience in taking teams of visiting riders and travellers



**THE UNIQUE MARWARI**

As a visionary, Bonnie spends his life finding ways to regenerate his local countryside, its peoples, cultures and traditions.

In doing so, he has created the Royal Polo and Equestrian Centre from where he takes visitors like myself on

safari through Rajasthan on the wonderful horses he breeds. Together with Francesca Kelly he shares an ongoing passion to breed the Marwari horse, a line of unique horses adept at covering long distances with great stamina. Characterised by inwardly curved ears







on safari across the desert and open countryside of Rajasthan and more recently Sri Lanka.

The team of supporters were all smartly uniformed in flaring jodhpurs symbolizing the 'army' of Dundlod and they attended to every detail and whim of the guests.

#### CAMPSITE LUXURY

On these beautifully bred horses we felt as if we were floating across the countryside. When Bonnie said, "trot" he actually meant full-on gallop. And gallop we did, often: sometimes even in the dusk, to arrive at a campsite meticulously set up.

Here we were greeted with roaring fires, the dancing flames of torches and comfortable tents equipped even with postcard-sized mirrors.

Water was heated on the open fire, symbolizing the ultimate mark of luxury in creature comfort in the outdoors - a hot shower after a long day's ride.

A colourful shamiana (tent) served as the travelling kitchen for the cook and his helpers who created gastronomic delights at every mealtime.

In the heat of the day, we would



arrive at a small oasis-like setting, and dismount. Lunch and ice cold beer were presented with six different curries, vegetable dishes and slowly cooked rice. A wonderful unhurried siesta followed while we waited for cooler temperatures before we continued to canter into the sunset.

#### MAGICAL MEMORIES

As we retired each evening to our colourful tents, I often lay listening to the singing of thousands of night birds, and the odd neighing of our horses nearby.

The memory of another wonderful day would play over in my mind: the feeling of sand warmed by the camp fire slipping through my bare toes and fingers as we sat around listening to Bonnie's stories or the wonderful memory of a magical lakeside camp after a full day's riding in open country.

My imagination wandered to the time 350 years ago when our very campsite and surrounding areas were the theatre of fierce battles fought between the Mughals and the defending Shekawati Rajputs whose descendants live in this territory. After many a battle the Mughal ruler,

Aurangzeb could not defeat the local Shekawati tribe. As a mark of respect for the bravery shown by the tribesmen and their Marwari horses, he left a pair of drums, which still beats today in a nearby temple.

#### Fact file

For information on Dundlod's exciting horse safaris (some of which coincide with different colourful horse festivals in Rajasthan) visit [www.dundlod.com](http://www.dundlod.com) and [www.horsemarwari.com](http://www.horsemarwari.com)

#### Accommodation:

In Jaipur: Narain Niwas Palace Hotel, a family-run Heritage Hotel  
[www.hotelnarainniwas.com](http://www.hotelnarainniwas.com)

#### Travel:

Western & Oriental Travel, specialist holidays.  
Tel +44 0207 313 6600  
[www.westernoriental.com](http://www.westernoriental.com)

#### All photos by Henry Dallal.

[www.henrydallalphotography.com](http://www.henrydallalphotography.com)

