

Spectrum statescan

Showcasing nature's gift

TOUCH WOOD

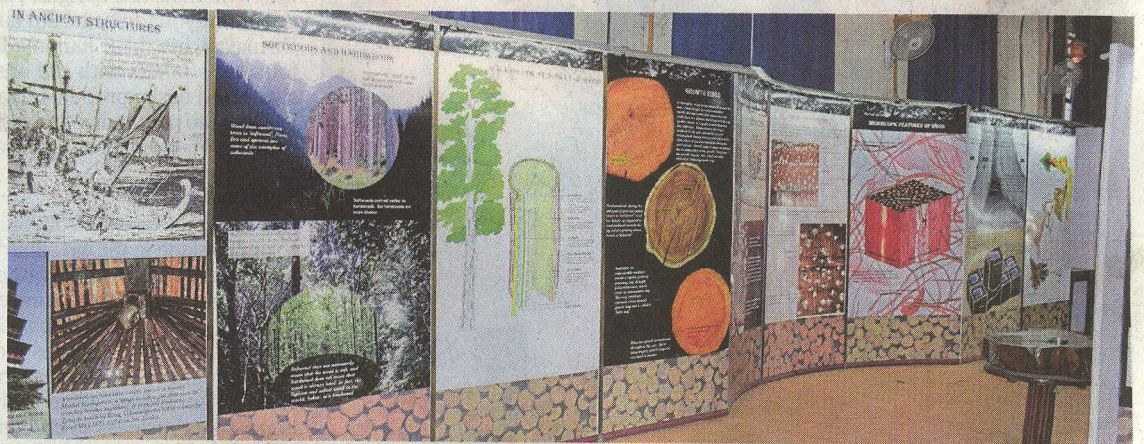
The Woods Museum cum Interpretation Centre in Bengaluru provides insights into the world of trees, writes M A Siraj

The Woods Museum cum Interpretation Centre in Malleshwaram is one of the youngest of the museums in Bengaluru. Dedicated to displaying wood, it came up quietly in the city's thickly wooded corner in 2012. Though not much is known about it among the general populace, the museum has been receiving a constant stream of student visitors. Housed in a big hall on the second floor of the building of Indian Wood Science and Technology (IWST), it remains largely obscured from the public eye.

It is said that buildings should not be separated from the landscape. It proves particularly true with the Woods Museum, which sits amidst a 27-acre sandalwood forest, assiduously grown and meticulously conserved by the institute. The visitors to the museum are welcomed by a giant hollowed out trunk of a Gulmohar tree placed at the entrance. The well-preserved trunk stands on a tripod of toes developed during its dying days.

The exhibits

Around 60 large panels placed here provide a wealth of information on human kind's interface with wood through the history. Two large discs — cross sections of teak trees — placed in a chained enclosure are the cynosure of all eyes. Plaques inform that one of them is from a 780-year old tree in Mysore. Concentric circles of growth rings visible on these cross sections reveal the saga of climatic cycles any such tree would have undergone. Magnifying lenses kept alongside the discs help the visitors minutely survey the rings. Scientist Pankaj Aggarwal, who curated the museum, says that botanists can access the climatic past of a region by studying the information encrypted in these growth rings. It has led to the evolution of a distinct discipline, dendrochronology: the science of dating events, environmental changes and archaeological artefacts by using the characteristic patterns of annual growth rings in timber and tree trunks.



INFORMATIVE Concepts related to wood displayed in the Woods Museum cum Interpretation Centre. PHOTOS BY AUTHOR

“ The museum displays plastic replicas of an array of arthropods like bugs, moths, wasps, ants and termites.

According to Pankaj, scientists can establish the pattern of floods, droughts, earthquakes, volcanic eruption, fires, etc. in a region through these rings.

The museum showcases the saga of wood and its indispensability to the development of human civilisation. Unique characteristics of several indigenous trees have been explained in great detail. It hosts 20 varieties of wood. The museum takes the visitors through the cellular structure and constituents of wood and explains the diverse use of wood in the manufacturing industry. Density, porosity, tensile strength and natural durability were the key traits that made wood suitable for making an array of products such as matchsticks, musical instruments, bows and arrows, smoking pipe and rafters.

Educating the visitors

But wood has its own enemies. The museum displays plastic replicas of an array of arthropods like bugs, moths, wasps, ants and termites that are dependent on trees. Trees with fragrant timber attract poachers as well as peddlers who can pass off spurious variants known as 'false



EPOCH (Clockwise from above) Growth rings on the trunk; cross section of a tree trunk kept for observation; a Gulmohar trunk on display.

sandalwood' (*Osyris tenuifolia*) to the gullible.

Some panels also highlight the significant innovations by the IWST in developing wood polymer composites (WPC), a new-age material used in several industries. This has been brought about by blending natural fibres like jute, bagasse, coir, bamboo and cane with plastics. The institute has also been instrumental in achieving thermal modification of wood. This imparts fungal resistance, adds dimensional stability, lends insulating properties and enhances the aesthetic appeal of wood.

The Woods Museum cum Interpretation Centre is a veritable repository of information on wood. The museum is open on all days, except Sundays. Entry is free. For more information, contact 080-23341731, 22190118.

This column features heritage museums of the State on alternate weeks. Readers can suggest unique collections, private or government.

