

GIRL SKATE INDIA TOUR



Chloé Bernard, Sweeper at Marathi
Photo: Norma Ibarra

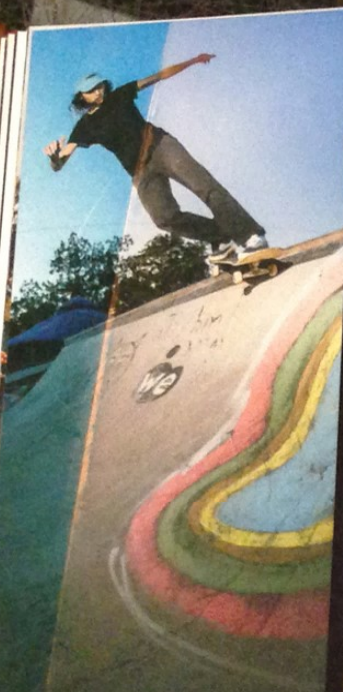
WORDS BY LISA JACOB • PHOTOS BY NORMA IBARRA, MARIE DABBADIE & ARIANE KAISER

It was the second time I embarked on the *Girl Skate India* tour and each time was pretty unique in its own way. The GSI is a self funded (except for the build that was sponsored by Vans) skate trip around India organised by Atita Verghese to show how skateboarding can help empower girls in order to raise gender equality in a patriarchal society. It's my friend Atita's fight and as long as the world will need a change she will never give up. Skateboarding must mean everything to her. I mean, to me too, but to dedicate her whole life to spread the stoke around her, to so many little girls from many little villages in India, skateboarding must have been the little miracle she needed to be able to survive in this mad world. So she made it happen one more time, gathered skater girls from everywhere around the world to meet up for two weeks in India for another crazy trip.

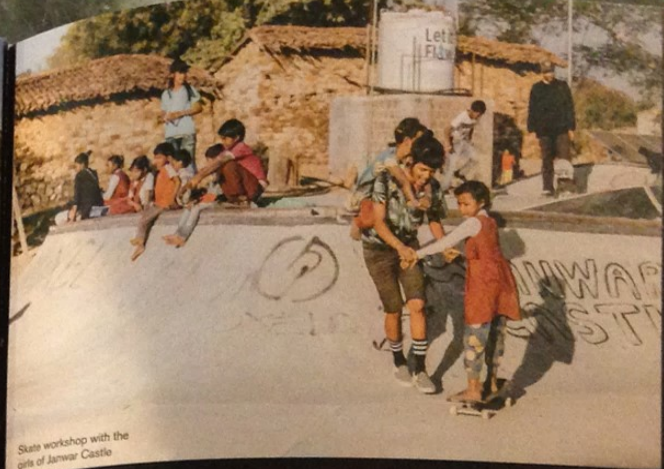
This time we started the tour in Janwaar, a small village that doesn't even have a grocery store but has one of the few skateparks that has been built in India. I was excited to go there as I heard many stories from people who were building this park, included Atita, and how crazy things went there. So I knew a little bit about what to expect and was quite excited to leave our civilized world behind. Nothing

better to start a tour than to be in the middle of nowhere without phone signal and any way to find booze. Nobody's on their phone while you're trying to have a conversation and everybody is sober enough to listen. We were split up into groups of two girls with each of the local families that were hosting. It was quite relaxing to have nowhere else to go than home or the park and not have to stress about what time it is because it doesn't matter. You wake up, have breakfast, milk the buffalo, walk around with the locals, have lunch, go skate, have dinner, hang out around a bonfire at night and go to sleep and so on the next day. The concept of FOMO doesn't exist there because there's nothing to miss out. Finally, you can really live in the moment. These places where you don't have so many distractions are such a gift in our 2018 crazy world, always running after who the fuck knows what.

This is one way to look at it but for the locals it's not that easy. We planned to do a workshop for the girls so they could all have a go at skateboarding. But as we were knocking on the village's doors to ask the girls to come to the park, we had to take many "no" as an answer. Not the usual one meaning sorry, not interested but the sad one saying I wish I could but I would never be allowed. While we were there we



Roxi Boklas. Speedy standup frontside grind at Janwar



Skate workshop with the girls of Janwar Castle

day but it's not that easy to make a change in those places where nothing ever changes or takes decades to occur. Sometimes all it takes is one step, one time, one day. There will be more. You would never think that a skatepark is what is the most needed in those kind of places but having a free space where absolutely everyone is welcome to hang out and express themselves is actually the most important thing in a community to link people together.

We left Janwar ready to bounce back to civilization and its liquor stores. Our next destination was



Atita Verghese. Transfer at the Cave



Marie Dabbadie Layback to fakie at the Cave

Bangalore, no actually the next one was the bus itself as we spent as much time on it getting to Bangalore as in Bangalore itself. So yeah the next forty hours were on the road. When you have to spend that much time sitting in between mobile walls you tend to go a little bit crazy. So to not completely lose our minds we had to make up a few games to distract us from claustrophobia. I highly recommend to download - Charades - on your phone, it's a game where everyone has to mimic something that someone else has to guess which involved quite a lot of fun even just watching people acting like weirdos. Also you should get yourself a slingshot before getting on the bus so you can play with your friends at this game called: let's shoot whoever looks boring on the streets. But we came up with the best game ever at the restaurant in Mahabs. While waiting for food, we started rolling dice, choosing numbers and what would happen if those numbers came up. As they are pretty slow in making food there, we had to get creative with the dares. I laughed my ass off when Kesh had to go to the owner of a nepali restaurant, pointing out all the photos

hanging on his wall, saying that she was there and how it was - okay - and also claimed she'd been on Mount Everest. She was too good at it. This dice game also made us play musical chairs in the middle of the restaurant. Fifteen fully grown up kids running around the table waiting for the music to stop, imagine the scene. Lucky us, we escaped Mikkjel's human piano dare in which we would have to lay in the middle of the restaurant while one of us would have to walk on the others one by one so we would sing: Do Ré Mi Fa Sol as a piano... I told you it got pretty creative...

So we went to Bangalore for two days to skate with the locals at the Cave, the Holystoked DIY Park where Atita brought Lizzie Amanto to build a few months earlier, then back on the bus to reach Mahabalipuram, the little fisherman's village on the east coast. There was already a little



Photographer: Mike Dabbadie



Helena. Seatbelt at Mahabs

All photos this page by Norma Ibarra except where mentioned
Above: Helena Long. Backside smith grind at Mahabs

skatepark by the beach and our plan was to extend it with a miniramp, a bank and a speed bump in a few days. The scene is pretty random out there, a few surfers and kids, and the one and only Kamali, the little eight year old girl that lives next door. She is quite the phenomenon and wouldn't leave anyone indifferent. She's not even twice the size of her board but already a ripper and doesn't intend on letting the boys weigh her down. She and some of the local kids were there everyday helping us build the park, carrying their own weight in gravel. It's not that often that girls build a spot together, I do know a few girls here and there that are into building but most of the time on construction site we're clearly not the majority. But this time, guys were the minority. Therefore, there was more space for the girls to jump in and realise they can also do it. Concrete is not a matter of muscles and dicks. Passion, will, and a bit of patience are all it takes to survive those long nights under the stars.

I've been travelling to India quite a bit these last years and it's not like there's something to skate at every street corner. There's a few skateparks here and there, you can probably count them on your fingers though. Skateboarding is still very much in its infancy stage but it's slowly and surely growing. Whenever there's a new spot to skate in the country, no matter how far it is, skateboarders will come to skate it and more will get addicted. The skateparks they already have are either NGO's (Kovalam, Janwaar), local crews (Cave, Mahabs, Shaka) or foreigner initiatives (Alis bowl in Goa, Mukesh's mini ramp). It doesn't look like the government is much help in building facilities so it's skateboarders' own duty there. It's not like DIY is only a way of expressing their anticonformism but it's just that if they don't do it themselves, who else will?

When Alita was preparing the tour, she was not only organizing our trip, she was also trying to see how she could help develop her local community. Atty knows the importance of giving back something to the scene.

As she wrote to me once in a letter she slipped into my pocket before I took a plane:
 • You build, they come. •
 And also: • I think together we have conquered and achieved a lot more than we realize sometimes. •

You got no idea how much you've done... neither will the next generations. Yet, they will be there. - Lisa Jacob



All photos this page by Ariana Kaiser
 Chloe Bernard. Backside grind at Play Area Bowl



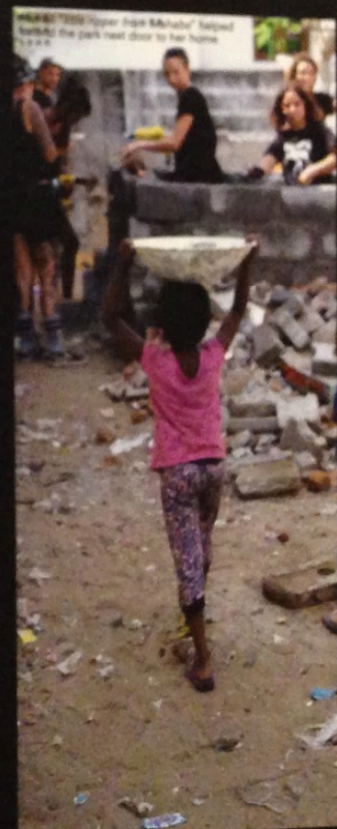
Melina and Helena



Chloe taking a break from painting the bowl



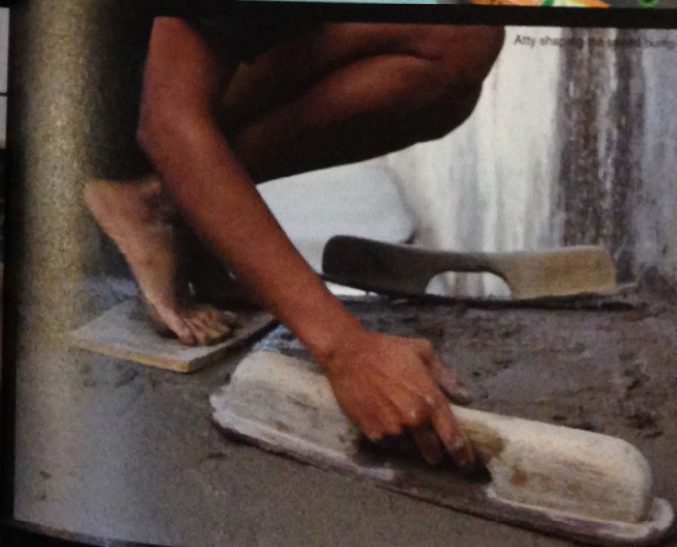
Molly getting followed by Chloe



Molly '88 ripper from Mahabs' helped building the park next door to her home



Helena Long transfers to a tall at Play Area in Bangalore



Atty shaping the second bowl