The Doon School Weekly’s interview with the new Headmaster, Dr Peter McLaughlin

DSW: What are the three things you would like to change in School?

PMC: The first thing that I would like to say is that I like the School as it is already. However, I would very much like to bring technology into School. I don’t really like gadgets or toys, but things like the introduction of smart classrooms is something that I feel must be done. I want students to have whatever technology you need to help you out in all activities in School. The second thing I noticed was that in this school, the child is either considered an intellectual, or he is a good sportsman. I want students to understand that they can be both, and balance both these aspects of life in School. The third change that I would like to implement concerns the buildings. I would like to see the renovation of the older buildings without changing the atmosphere and feel of the place. An example of this is the new gardens near the Main Building which look modern but still manage to maintain the School’s atmosphere.

DSW: What are the three things you would like to keep the way they are?

PMC: I would like the School to remain an all-round educational institution. I believe that other extra-curricular activities like drama, debating and so on should be given as much importance as sports and academics. Secondly, as I said before, I would like to maintain the feel of the School. I would also like to maintain the prestige of the School. Twenty years on, I wouldn’t want to hear someone saying, “Doon used to be a good school.” I want the School to always continue producing high quality alumni.

DSW: In your view, is technology an aid or a distraction in School?

PMC: I don’t want technology to be seen as a big deal in School. I mean, once upon a time a ball-point pen used to be seen as technology! Still, technology can never replace an inspiring teacher who is passionate about their subject. I want the students to have whatever technology they require at their disposal to use in any activity in School. Also, not all forms of technology are distracting. For example, you cannot describe a digital camera as distracting. I am aware of the fact that people do abuse the technology provided to them. Still, computers are not going to go back, so we must learn how to make the best and most productive use we can of them. We must learn how to use technology with the right discipline but we cannot afford to be afraid of it.

DSW: You have headed all-boys’, all-girls’ and co-educational institutions. Are single-sex institutions still relevant?

PMC: Yes, possibly even more so for an all-boys’ school. The biggest problem for boys worldwide is motivation. Even though research shows that students flourish best in single-sex institutions, this cannot take place if the institution is not one of quality and calibre. One of the advantages of an all-boys’ school is that you can be yourself. One’s friendships become stronger. In a co-educational school boys can lose friends as their attachment towards girls increases. Also, boys and girls learn very differently, and so it is difficult to teach them together.

DSW: So would you consider making Doon co-educational?

PMC: If the Board of Governors told me to turn this School into a co-educational institution, I would have to carry out their orders. Personally, I wouldn’t change the current system. If you look around the world, you would notice that the greatest schools in history have been all-boys’ schools. The other problem would be their accommodation. It would affect sports as well as friendship between the students. The financial burden would be huge and, though I do not have a grudge against co-educational schools, I wouldn’t agree with the idea.

DSW: Do you feel that it is now time for the Dosco to become more international-minded? In this respect, do you feel that Doon should exclusively affiliate itself with the IB?

( contd. on page 3)
Letter To The Editor

I have only recently read the issues of The Doon School Weekly dated April 11, 2009 as well as April 18, 2009 wherein I came across the article titled Sparing the Rod by Srijay Kishorepurana and Do we need punishments? by Arjun Badal.

At the very outset, kudos to the engineers of this outstanding initiative. I sincerely hope that we see many more idioms which express the efforts adopted by the student community towards the development of the practices followed at Doon.

Before embarking upon the ‘modes of punishment’, it is crucial to know the ‘reasons for punishment’. The act of giving a punishment is not only essential towards developing the character of the receiver but also that of the giver. Further, the motive behind giving punishments has to be accurate and the effects well comprehended. The general principles governing the cause and effect of punishments is based on four theories; namely, Deterrent, Preventive, Reformative and Retributive.

Deterrent: to make the wrong-doer an example and warning to all who are like-minded with him. According to this theory, offences are a result of a conflict between the interests of the wrong-doer and those around him. The aim of punishment is to dissolve the conflict of interests.

Preventive: to deter by fear, punishing a wrong-doer in a manner which becomes an example for other members of the community thereby discouraging them from becoming wrong-doers.

Reformative: to strengthen the character of the man so that he may not become a victim of his own temptation. The ultimate aim here is to try to bring about a change in the personality and character of the wrong-doer, so as to make him a useful member of the community.

Retributive: formerly based on theory of ‘revenge: ’tooth for tooth’ and ‘eye for eye’. One might consider this theory to be outdated and behind times. However, it still has its effects when used in consonance with the other theories.

Based on the above (and perhaps a bit more research!), the Prefectorial body may choose to decide as to which modus will prove to be the most effective system. I wish the School Captain and the Prefectorial body all the very best in their endeavours.

Shiv Sarna (ex-408 JB, ’99)
What you turn out to be once you pass out is what every student is expected to be hard-working and loyal. I would like is a school of a high reputation, where I also want to ensure the School is a happy place. What other societies and try and implement them in our lives. What we have. We must handpick the good bits of side the country and also teach us to be content with.

What I would like to bring is a perspective from out-side the country and also teach us to be content with. As children are going to reside in this school, every thing for which you should be prepared by the school itself. DSW: Do you feel that cultural differences could be a problem while heading the School? PMC: I am not someone who suffers from culture-shock. A school is a school, no matter where you go in the world. Schoolboys will always be the same. But one of the biggest challenges in any society is language. I am learning Hindi, but, at the moment, I speak like a baby. Also, parts of Dehradun, like Suicide Alley, resemble Cairo.

DSW: In a press article, you had said that you do not want Doon to be the ‘Eton of India’. What do you want it to be? PMC: I am sure that the best decisions are made after consulting the people whom they really affect. In Cairo, the students as young as six years of age were discussing the design for the buildings along with the archi-tects. As children are going to reside in this school, every thing should be modified to suit them. Also, children have a different perspective on things and often observe things that we adults don’t.

DSW: Do you thing students should have a say in making school decisions? PMC: I am sure that the best decisions are made after consulting the people whom they really affect. In Cairo, the students as young as six years of age were discussing the design for the buildings along with the archi-tects. As children are going to reside in this school, every thing should be modified to suit them. Also, children have a different perspective on things and often observe things that we adults don’t.

DSW: What would be your mission as Headmas-ter? PMC: I would like to review the entire curriculum. I would like to bring forward an international approach to the curriculum. I am learning Hindi, but, at the moment, I speak like a baby. Also, parts of Dehradun, like Suicide Alley, resemble Cairo.

DSW: What are your views on the traditions of Doon that are frowned upon? PMC: I was quite shocked to hear what Vikram Seth said in his Founder’s Day Speech. As far as bullying is concerned, what with the way the world is changing with the anti-ragging policy, we will certainly have to look into the matter. Still, boys will be boys and we cannot classify every second thing as bullying. Yet, we cannot have people persecuting others in our School.

DSW: Do you see yourself teaching again? PMC: Teaching is the most enjoyable part of this re-sponsibility. I usually teach the Board classes, but with all of the hectic meetings and adjusting to the new envi-ronment, I haven’t been able to get down to that task yet. Even though the Board of Governors have been really understanding and tried to let me stay in school for as long as possible, I haven’t found time as of now. When I find my feet though, I am sure to give it a shot.
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Kilimanjaro, Conquered!

_Shirvan Pal_ recounts the expedition to Mt. Kilimanjaro during the summer holidays

Kilimanjaro is an extinct volcano and is the highest mountain in Africa. It is also the highest free-standing mountain in the world at 5895 metres above sea level. Kilimanjaro is among the ‘Seven Summits’ of the world, the others being Mt Everest, Elbrus, McKinley, Aconcagua and Kosciusko. The two volcanic masses of Kilimanjaro are Kibo and Mawensi, which stand about 11 km apart, connected by a broad saddle at a height of about 4600 metres. Although Kilimanjaro lies just three degrees south of the equator, it is covered by ice all year round. There are seven conventional routes to climb to the highest point of Kilimanjaro, which is called Uhuru.

We chose the Marangu route. This route has diverse vegetation, ranging from a rainforest region, moorland and alpine desert to the ice-capped summit.

The members of the Doon team were: Jaiveer Jhakhar, Prahlad Singh, Sachit Taneja, Rohan Nath Behl, Devashish Singal, Shivam Katyal, Vinayak Aggarwal, Priyanshu Kshorepuria, Rajit Garg (Student Co-ordinator), Mr. Pankaj Joshi, the team leader Dr. Aravindanabha Shukla and myself.

The preparations for this expedition were as grand as the expedition itself. The team got on with the physical fitness training about six weeks before the trip. We, under the guidance of Dr. Shukla, a veteran mountaineer, made ample effort daily to increase our chances of reaching the summit. Dr. Shukla made us take rounds of the Main Field followed by sprints, stair-climbs and brisk walks. What he wanted us to do was to change our attitude towards life. To put it in Thomas Fuller’s words, he wanted to make us realize that ‘all things are difficult before they are easy’. By the end of May, a rough and tough team was prepared for this historic expedition.

On May 31 we all met at Indira Gandhi International Airport. We had to fly to Bombay from here, followed by the flight to Nairobi and then a short flight to Kilimanjaro International Airport. There were two huge Land Cruisers waiting for us at the airport. They soon loaded our bags and we were off to Ilboru Safari Lodge, our base for the next few days. At night, after a light dinner, an equipment check was conducted and missing equipment was provided to us.

The first destination, Mandara at an altitude of 2700 m was 12 km from the Marangi gate and it took the team a good 3 hours 20 minutes to complete it. The trek was through a rain forest. We saw lush vegetation and peculiar insects on our way. On arrival at the first level, we were served tea and dinner that comprised a diet rich in proteins and carbohydrates. This really helped us to recover from our fatigue.

The next morning after having a hearty breakfast we left for our next destination, Horombo, at an altitude of 3720 m. The trek was long but quite enjoyable. We had to cross the rainforest and enter the moorland. The moorland was an area where there were small trees and small shrubs. As the altitude increased we started seeing less vegetation.

Dr. Shukla and our head guide, Paul, had decided to acclimatize us the next day. We stayed in the camp that day and the next day went for a hike to a nearby place called Zebra Rocks. They were at an altitude of 4100 m.

If one wants to acclimatize, one has to walk at a slow pace so that all the systems of the body get used to the atmosphere. This was the main aim of the walk and all the members abided by this simple principle. On reaching the destination, some members of the team walked further on and reached the top of a ridge, from where the Kilimanjaro Massif was visible. It was undoubtedly a very beautiful sight.

We then hiked back to Horombo. We were free for the rest of the day and this time was adequately utilized by the team. Some were busy talking to their parents, while some others enjoyed a game of cards.

The next morning we left for Kibo. It is at an altitude of 4700 m. We had to cross the moorland and enter the alpine desert. This trek was 15 kms long and took us around 6 hours and 30 minutes to finish. On our way we noticed that the vegetation had reduced to mere grass and some cacti!

We were served a packed lunch on the way. On our way we saw a sign which read ‘Last Water Point!’ Most of us thought that this was to scare the public but to our horror that was truly the last water point! Our guides assured us that there was nothing to fear as the porters were carrying water for us. From then on the stretch was a bit tough as the gradient had increased and the terrain had become more rocky and sandy.

We had scarce time on our hands to rest, as we had to push for the summit at 11:00pm. Our main aim was to reach the summit before dawn so that we could see the sun rise.

(continues overleaf)
At around 6:00 pm we were woken up for dinner by the guides. The guide then briefed us about the trek. Dr. Shukla spoke to us about the probable problems and difficulties while trekking at that elevation in the night and their solutions.

We had three hours to rest and everyone ‘tired’ to sleep. But the thought of attempting this Herculean task kept us awake! At 10:00 pm we were woken up and told to get ready. The head guide informed us that at night there were sub-zero temperatures and as the altitude increased the air would become thinner and could lead to altitude sickness. Everyone wore several layers of clothes. All the physical and mental strength gained in the past two months was about to be tested in the next 14 hours.

The trek finally began at 11:00 pm. The moon light shone over the barren and beautiful landscape.

We walked slowly and steadily, following our head guide. The temperature was constantly falling and the water in our bottles started freezing. The trek became even more difficult when our toes and finger tips became numb. At 3:00 am we crossed the 5000 meter mark. The whole team managed to accomplish this feat. It was now that some people started feeling the discomfort and were in a dilemma whether to go forward and scale the summit or to turn around and go back to Kibo. Paul insisted on walking together. Some of us were terribly tired and slow and reluctant to continue. We realised that at this pace no one would be able to reach the summit.

At this point, Dr. Shukla took a leader’s call and instructed Paul to divide the team into three groups. These divisions were made on the basis of the speed, stamina and performance of the people. Some fast walkers proceeded with Dr. Shukla and Mr. Joshi for the summit. The second group, which consisted of slow walkers, proceeded for the summit with two guides. Some boys who did not want to continue were sent back to Kibo with one assistant guide.

It was already 4:30 am by now and only seven out of twelve people continued towards the summit. At 5:50 am five people reached Gillman’s Point (5685m). They were Dr. Shukla, Mr. Joshi, Sriyash, Devashish and I, along with Paul. After resting for 10 minutes we left for the summit. Only 200m had to be gained but the last stretch seemed unending.

Dead tired, I finally reached the summit (5895 m) with Sriyash, Devashish and Paul at 8:00 am. Reaching the summit was a big achievement and Dr. Shukla with Mr. Joshi, who were waiting for us, watching our progress since 7:00 am congratulated us. After a successful climb the group of seven, triumphant and exuberant climbers reached the Kibo huts and were greeted by everyone.

The Doon School is one of the first schools in India to organize an expedition to Kilimanjaro. This itself is a great achievement for the school and has made us Doscos proud. Thank you Doon for giving us this magnificent opportunity!

** Midnight **

Abhishek Choudhary

Waking up at midnight,
To a different world come alive.
The sky a deeper colour, a darker blue.
The moon out in its full glory.
The stars pinpointing the sky.
I hear an owl in the distance,
Hear its mournful cry.
He shall go to sleep in a while.
All is peaceful on this night.
As the world sleeps.
One soul listening.
As even the night has a couple of sounds.
Wondering what’s in the surrounding dark.
Wishing someone else was awake as well.
Yet glad for it’s all yours to cherish.
Just for a while, for morning is to come.
As the sky starts to lighten.
The shadows melt away.
Yet you have a lasting memory,
A memory of waking up at midnight.

| Poetry |

Wishing someone else was awake as well, yet glad for it’s all yours to cherish.
Just for a while, for morning is to come.
As the sky starts to lighten.
The shadows melt away.
Yet you have a lasting memory,
A memory of waking up at midnight.

** CAREER CALL **

This week, the Careers’ noticeboard will post information on what career options one can explore with a degree in Economics. All those interested should look it up.