

It is now over 20 years since the Rainforest Information Centre started our project of reforesting the sacred mountain Arunachala in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The story of how this project began with grants from the Australian Government aid agency AusAID is appended and may also be viewed in the in the 1995 12-minute film "[Reweaving Shiva's Robes](#)"

Donations to the reforestation of Arunachala are tax-deductible in the UK, US and Australia, write [johnseed1@ozemail.com.au](mailto:johnseed1@ozemail.com.au) for details.

Last year we were able to raise \$35,000 for this project, this year it will be close to \$40,000. In the last month we have sent \$16,000 as the monsoon has begun and planting has commenced. As well as planting, we are funding the maintenance of past plantings, environmental education, and fire protection.

At present we are supporting 7 groups and last week we received these photos from one of these groups "Global Orientation Development".









## Reweaving Shiva's Robes.

According to Hindu legend, long ago the trinity of Gods were meeting. Vishnu and Brahma remonstrated with the supreme God, Shiva, that his appearance – a column of light that stretched from infinity to infinity – was dazzling them beyond endurance. In his compassion, Shiva toned it down and thenceforth appeared as a mountain. This mountain, named Arunachala, may be found near Chennai in SE India and is visited by millions of pilgrims each year. Walking clockwise around the god, especially under the full moon is said to be the fastest road to enlightenment.

Over the centuries, a steady procession of sages have made their way to the mountain. In the early 1900's, a God-intoxicated teenager named Ramana found his way there and lived there for the rest of his life. Ramana Maharshi became the most celebrated Hindu mystic of his age and people from around the world came to bask in his presence but he always claimed that it was the mountain that was enlightened and not he. In 1990, some 40 years after his death, we at the Rainforest Information Centre received an aerogram from Apeetha Arunagiri, one of the devotees living in the Ramana Ashram at the foot of the sacred mountain.

She wrote of the accelerating ecological devastation of Arunachala. Once it had been covered in a mighty jungle and even tigers could be met walking along the flanks, but now little remained but thorns and goats. She requested our assistance in regenerating natural forest cover. Now I believe that the whole world is holy and that there are thousands upon thousands of sacred mountains whose predicament is just as dire. But one has to start the regeneration of the Earth *somewhere* and a mountain that attracts millions of pilgrims who all agree as to the sacredness would seem an auspicious place to begin to blur the artificial and absurd line that we have drawn between ecology and spirituality.

So, with the help of two substantial grants from the Australian Government's development assistance bureau and the tireless work of two Aussie volunteers, John Button and Heather Bache who went to live by Arunachala for the next 7 years, the process of regenerating Arunachala began and has continued to this day with hundreds of thousands of trees being planted each year. At first the conditions made this work incredibly laborious and time-consuming. Rivers of mud would come pouring down the mountain in the monsoon sweeping away our plantings and in the summer fierce, scorching winds from the desert plains would shrivel up the little saplings. So, at first we found it necessary to erect individual rock walls around each tree seedling as we planted it to allow it to establish itself in these harsh conditions.

Some of the first plantings are now reaching tens of metres into the air and creating shade and holding water in their roots so that ancient streams have begun to flow once more. Also, some dozen new tree-planting NGO's have

sprung up around the mountain so we get the sense that not only have our trees taken root but so has the idea that caring for the ecology is an appropriate way to worship Shiva in these times.