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# Recreating the Amarnath trail

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New Delhi

IN THE religious corridor of fervour, there's going to be structure. By design. The 13-kilometre stretch that connects the base-camp of Batal with the Amarnath holy caves is going to get a makeover.

Morphogenesis Architecture Studio, the people who have been designing PVR cineplexes and shopping malls all over the country, are now going to climb all of 13,000 feet above sea level and plan a new landscape *en route* to one of India's most revered shrines.

First, the formidable facts. The 13-km Amarnath *yatra* is undertaken by the devout between mid-June and mid-August; the rest of the year, the stretch is inaccessible with it being snowed under most times. Over these two months, around 10,000 people trek to the caves *every day* for their one-minute tryst with *moksha*. The road to salvation is *kachcha*, teeters dangerously along rough edges, and is not motorable. There are no medical facilities, no accommodation — no signs of modern civilisation. Every year, there are reported deaths: people die from

falls, cardiac arrests and frost bite. The Pilgrims' Progress, the palette of chaos, is an eclectic mix: glaciers, mountains, creeks, waterfalls... and the pilgrims and the ponies who thread their way across the undulating — and breathtaking — terrain.

This landscape is going to change. The broad strokes of technology will factor in waste management, collapsible structures that will "self collapse" with the onset of snow and "self-rebuild" when the avalanches pass by and, most importantly, the use of lightweight material. "We are looking at the kind of lightweight material used in the auto and aviation industries — because out there concrete, that weighs 5

tonne per square metre, cannot be ferried," explains Manit Rastogi of Morphogenesis. "The kind of technology that allows you to be airlifted 10 kms into the sky in five minutes, and dip from 40 degrees Celsius to -30, and not feel a thing." For waste management, Rastogi is looking at anorebic processes that use bacteria to convert sewerage into potable water.

At the end of it, he is looking at fire brigades, trauma centres, accommodation, food courts *et al* — along the way. The initiative was taken by the Amarnathji Yatra Shrine Board, who approached Morphogenesis to show the way. The budget is being worked out.

None of all this, feels Rastogi, would have been required if, say, chopper services were arranged or motorable tracts constructed. But that cannot be. Because when the pilgrim looks for cleansing of the soul, he would want to go the whole hog painstakingly rather than take the easier way out. So when structure emerges out of divine chaos, preservation of "culture and human dignity" is going to be top of the mind.

That's the way to progress in the Pilgrims' Progress.

