

TREK 11: Dhaulagiri 1 South Face Sanctuary

Grade Challenging (until trail improved)

Permits: none

Days: 8

Highest point: 4000-4300m

Map: West Dhaulagiri & Kanjirowa or Gurja Himal

Cautions: Local guide essential. Snow possible Oct-April

Overview

This is a continuation of Trek 6 up the Rahughat river to its source – the sheer south face of Dhaulagiri 1 and its trio of glaciers. On the way you will pass splendid waterfalls, deep canyons, and precipitous cliffs. The views of Dhaulagiri are glittering, though the scale of its tremendous south face is fore-shortened when you are standing directly below it. On the return, there is the option to cross an extremely steep 4500m pass, with awe-inspiring views of Dhaulagiri and Annapurna from, into the Kali Gandaki valley.

Alert: This trek is graded Challenging because of the precarious nature of the path and the canyon sides. When we did the trek in October 2014, the path was exposed, steep, and poorly defined, obliterated by landslides or hidden by dense wet canes. At times there was nothing but a toe-hold and a handful of grass between us and the chasm. Since then, the villagers of Chim Khola assure us that they have improved the path. However, we publish its description with a **warning and disclaimer:** check the conditions of the path before embarking, consider the safety of a heavily-laden porter who may be with you. In the afternoons clouds and mist can obscure visibility, and snow is an ever-present risk at high altitude. A local guide is essential, and all food and camping gear must be carried, including stove and gas cylinders for use above the treeline.

To start: From Beni, catch a bus or share-jeep to Jhi (1-2 hrs) or to Dagam (2 hrs)

Days 1 & 2 Jhi to Chhari (2100m).

Same as Stages 1-3 of Trek 6. Chhari can also be accessed from Dagnam via the Chim Khola side of the Rahughat valley (Trek7)

Chhari is the most northerly permanent habitation in the valley, about an hour's walk north of Dhar. There are just two homes in Chhari, both Chantyls. They offer basic but friendly homestay with a gushing cold water supply from a nearby waterfall. Local food supplies (rice, maize, flour, tea and sugar) can usually be bought here, but guides/porters are best hired from the Dalit community on the river near Dhar.

Day 3 Chhari to Sunguri Chaur (2600m) 4-5 hrs

From Chhari, cross to the left bank and continue upstream through forest. After 3-4 hours a major tributary is reached at a place called Phedi. This river must be crossed either by a log-plank bridge (slippery in wet weather) or by leaping boulders if river water is low. **Sunguri Chaur/Sangur Thala** (tr: pasture of the wild boar) - a sunny pasture, is a short climb above and between the two rivers. A spectacular

waterfall is visible from this spot, but views of Dhaulagiri are limited by the narrow valley sides.

Day 4 Sunguri Chaur to Riverside Orar (3100m) 3-4 hrs

For the first hour the path is broad, climbing gently through mature forest trees and clumps of canes. As the gradient steepens the canes thicken. The path narrows, and at times you have to bend double to make your way through the low tunnel of canes. In the early morning they drop their heavy dew onto your clothes which quickly become soaked.

A fresh landslide requires a 500m detour climb before the trail descends to rejoin the river (there may be a new trail at this point). Half an hour beyond lies a rock overhang (Orar) beside the river, with just enough flat ground to pitch a tent (or two). Firewood can be gathered.

Day 5. Riverside Orar to Base Camp (4000m) 4-5 hrs

The first three hours are the most challenging. The sides of the valley close in dramatically creating a narrow gorge with precipitous sides. To avoid this, the trail climbs up high above (negotiating several dramatic waterfalls that gush down the rocky walls). The trail is hard to find, so a local guide is essential. In places it is very exposed, and very steep. This is possibly where a new trail has been constructed, or at least the steps may have been improved to provide a foot-rest rather than a mere toe-rest. The long grass is surprisingly strong and useful for handholds, though it would be unwise to rely entirely on the strength of its roots.

After about three hours the canyon ends and the gradient eases so that the path can descend to the river. A side tributary flows in from the east and visible between the two, is a grassy flat-topped hill. Head for this by way of the side tributary. There is no defined path as such but it is easy to negotiate. From the hilltop (3800m), Dhaulagiri south face is visible, as well as the three glaciers which merge near this point leaving marked ridges of moraine between them. South face base camp lies just north of this spot at about 4000m, near the confluence of the outflow from two glaciers. If you have carried a gas stove you can camp here. If not you must retrace your route back to Riverside Orar (8 hrs total)

Days 6-8: Re-trace the same route back.

Alternative return route: It is possible to cut up and over the south-east ridge of Dhaulagiri to Kalopani in the Kali Gandaki valley, and from there catch a bus to Beni (or continue on to Jomosom). The climb starts from a spot called **Phedi** (below Sunguri Chaur and upstream of Chhari) and crosses a notch labelled Pairo kharka (c. 4500m) on the map. The route is extremely steep. It is best to camp before the Pass in order to be sure of the absolutely fabulous views of Dhaulagiri and Annapurna.

Box: Wild Himalayan herbs and spices

If you forget to carry tea (as we did!), no problem. The tall plant with rhubarb-like leaves has roots which make a good substitute. It is known as *odar padamchalno*, and you can also eat its stems (it is indeed related to rhubarb and tastes somewhat similar). Locals also serve a salted tea brewed from a small dried fruit husk called *Siltimur* which they gather from forest trees. A related fruit husk - *timur* - is widely used as a spice in curries and chutneys. Various wild fungi are also gathered and cooked by villagers, and if you visit in the autumn you will likely be offered some.