

TREK 13: Gurja Himal to Lower Dolpo

Grade: Challenging

Days: 11 to 12

Permits: Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve, TIMS permit,

Lower Dolpa Permit

Highest point: 4500m

Map: West Dhaulagiri

Cautions: Guide mandatory. Snow possible Oct-April

Overview:

Two routes are possible from Darbang (Pokhara) to Dunai (Lower Dolpo capital). The first, via Dhorpatan and Phalgune Pass, passes through more villages, requires fewer days of camping, but takes longer (14 days). The second stays at high-altitude, following the same route as Trek 12, but curtailing its time to 10-11 days, by flying out from Juphal airstrip (Dunai), in lower Dolpo. Juphal has daily flights to Nepalgunj (dependent on weather). From Nepalgunj one can fly to Kathmandu or go by bus to Pokhara or Kathmandu (14 hours or more).

To start: Bus or share-jeep from Beni to Darbang (1.30-2 hrs)

Day One: Darbang (1000 m) to Dharapani (1500m) 1:45 hours

From Darbang, cross the suspension bridge over the Myagdi Khola and follow the jeep track northwards along the right bank. Cross a side tributary after 30 mins. and follow a cement staircase which zigzags up a pine-clad spur to an important local Hindu shrine. The footpath rejoins the track and finally levels out to arrive at the attractive village of **Dharapani** [**Lodging:** Prena Guest House]. True to its name (tr: spring water) there are stone-clad water-spouts at the entrance, as well as splendid views of Dhaulagiri and Gurja Himal.

Day Two: Dharapani to Lulang 6 hours

Dharapani to Phalyagaon 1800m 2-3 hrs

Phalyagaon to Lulang 2400m 2-3 hrs

This is a scenic day, sprinkled with picturesque villages, and back-dropped by the Dhaulagiris. Continue on the jeep track which has little traffic except mule-trains. After passing through terraced fields, where villagers are busy with ploughing, planting, harvesting or threshing, you arrive an hour later at the even more picturesque village of **Takam** [**Lodging:** Rojina Hotel; Tara Hotel; Mil Kumari Bandari Homestay Ph: 9746704493] with houses of ochre and white mud plaster and a pagoda temple set amid a wide crescent of rice fields with the ever-present Gurja and Dhaulagiri peaks.

From Takam, follow the jeep track as it climbs to negotiate a landslide-prone cliff section and winds around to reach **Sibang** (1790 m) [teashop lodges] in 30 minutes. For several years the jeep-track ended here, but in 2016 the route was bull-dozed as far as Phalyagaon. From Sibang, follow the footpath and after 15 minutes take the upper fork which climbs up to pass near the lower part of **Machim** village [[LINK](#) lower fork for Trek 15 Dhaulagiri/French Pass] There are good views up the valley which leads to French Pass. From here the trail is level to the school at **Phalyagaon (Muna)** [Bishnu teashop lodge]. For those who are already tired this makes a convenient night stop.

A footpath descends gently from Phalyagaon, passing below the village of Muna, to reach a bridge across the Dar

Khola in under an hour. Upstream, the mountain ridges interlock in a fat braid. Shortly after the bridge there is a choice of trails. Either are okay. The lower (left) trail keeps closer to the river and climbs gently to **Lumsung**, via an attractive waterfall, while the upper trail climbs directly to the main village of **Lulang**, directly above Lumsung. We recommend spending the night at Lulang as this shortens the next day and allows one to reach the Pass before clouds obscure the view. The upper trail can be hot in the afternoon sun as the slope faces south and there is little shade on it. There is one respite provided by a side stream, where you might see girls resting their loads of firewood and cooling off in the water. Whichever route you take, you must negotiate a gigantic gash in the landscape carved by a landslide in 2016. It destroyed 4 homes and many fields. Fortunately no-one was killed, but the loss of fields can tip families into real deprivation, such is the shortage of cultivable land. The landslide may still be active when it rains. Check for falling debris before crossing, and when you go, do not stop until you reach the other side.

At last **Lulang** comes into view and you think you have arrived – but the final climb on stone steps up to the village is very steep.

Lodging: -

Lulang: Chadeni Homestay (Rati Maya B.K. Ph: 97420380); Ram Bahadur Rasaili 9746704177; Lali Gurans Homestay (Pabisara Ph: 9746717362).

Lumsung [Himalayan Lodge Ph:9746722209; Prem Kumari Pun Homestay Ph: 9746712308] the next day there is a direct path up to Lulang.

Day 3: Lulang to Gurja Khani 8 hrs

Lulang to Gurja Pass 3250m 3-4 hrs

Gurja Pass to Dar bridge 2500m 3 hrs

Dar Khola to Gurja Khani 2700m 1 hr

There is no habitation between Lulang and Gurja Khani except for a rudimentary teashop at the Pass, so it is wise to eat something before starting and carry some snacks. It is a moderately strenuous route with two ascents and one descent, but a good, easy-to-follow trail. Snow is possible in winter, but the path is rarely closed. Follow any footpath through Lulang to reach the main trail which emerges from the village on the upper left side as you look uphill. Once on the trail it is impossible to lose the way since the route is well travelled by mule trains and women with bamboo baskets heading out to gather firewood. It is a pleasant climb through oak-rhododendron forest, the tree-trunks are almost hidden by a thick cloak of moss, ferns, and orchids. In 3 hours or so Gurja Pass is reached with a rustic teashop run by a delightful Dalit family [Siddhiman & Naru B.K. 98636775111; 9741344450, food + rudimentary sleeping facilities], and stupendous views of Gurja Himal – if you arrive before noon. The best views are obtained by walking a short way above the teashop, to the east. The teashop closes for 2 months from December – check in Lulang whether it is open or not.

Follow the only path down the north slope of the ridge. A landslide in the monsoon of 2014 felled many of the Himalayan cedar trees and destroyed sections of the path. The path has been repaired and the landslide opened up views of Gurja Himal which can be enjoyed much of the way down. In December and January you may encounter snow (in 1998 our children sledged down on their bums). After descending moderately steeply, the gradient lessens as the path heads in a more westerly direction for the final hour of the descent to the bridge over the **Dhuala Khola**, 3 hours from the Pass. On the opposite side you will see fields and temporary dwellings of the Gurja people, who descend to live in these when snow falls up in the village.

The river crossing used to be a single cedar log spanning the narrowest point of the gorge, but nowadays there is a modern suspension bridge installed by the Gurkha Welfare Fund. The last leg to the village involves another climb. It is not far, but it is steep when legs are tired. Follow the main track upwards. By this hour you are likely to encounter villagers heading home with farming tools or loads of firewood and grass on their backs, so there is no risk of getting lost. The path arrives at a flattish meadow. There is a water tap and an empty building on the right, with the sheer face of Gurja Himal partially visible above this. The dense roofs of **Gurja Khani** are visible to the left and the village is reached in a gentle 15 minutes.

Homestays: Road of Life Ph.9866004340; Yesoda (Bhim Maya 9847772458); Sita (9867768412); Shristhi (9866044571; 9866044573)

Day Four: Altitude acclimatisation day in Gurja Khani. Side trip up Khegas Khola to base of Gurja Himal (around 5 hrs return)

Day Five: Gurja Khani to Phalyaghar Phedi (3300m) 5 hrs

The first challenge is to climb out of the Kali Gandaki river basin and into the Karnali river basin. The boundary between these two basins is Phaleghar pass. The pass can be reached in a long day, but because of lack of water or firewood on either side of the pass, the recommended first night campsite is at Phaleghar Phedi, some 3 hours short of the pass. Phaleghar Phedi is a herder's seasonal shelter called a goth. You will encounter many of these; they are only inhabited during the warm monsoon months (June-September). The route traverses around the upper Gurja Khani watershed, crossing 3 tributaries of the Dhuala Khola before reaching the campsite just above a ford of the Phaleghar Khola. There are good views of Gurja Himal from the campsite.

Day Six: Phaleghar Phedi to Nauri 7 hrs

Phedi to Phalyaghar Pass (4075m) 3 hrs
Phalya Pass to Munsung (3650m) 2 hrs
Munsung to Nauri Kharka (4080m) 2hrs

A steady 3 hours' climb up the Phaleghar Khola and the pass is attained. In contrast to the steep ascent, the pass itself is a large level grazing area. From here there are fine views of Dhaulagiri massif to the east and, to the west, the astoundingly severe topography of the Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve DHR, which you now enter. The Ghasdung (Ghustung) Khola gorge dominates the scene. At the western edge of the grazing area, the path descends steeply down a dry river course and after 1-2 hours the collection of huts that is called Munsung (3650m) is reached. This is a good spot for lunch, as you will need extra energy for the afternoon climb to Nauri. The path from Munsung follows the Kape Khola north on the east bank until a bridge is reached in a little over an hour. Cross the bridge, the route climbs very steeply for 1½ hours to reach Nauri campsite. Nauri is a sheep herders' camp with water available, but no firewood – the camp will be abandoned during the normal trekking seasons.

Day Seven: Nauri to Dokari Khola (3600m) 7-9 hrs via 4 passes (4350m, 4460m, 4540m, 4660m)

This is an exhausting day, combining 4 passes (minor descents between each) and a long descent to the campsite on the banks of the Dokari Khola. The first 3 passes are high ridges separating the upper end of 3 tributaries of the Ghasustang Khola, a major river draining the Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve. The Ghustung Khola gorge is the major feature spied from the top of Phalyaghar Bhangyang the previous day. Each of the 3 tributaries ends

in a high lake basin, whose drainage plunges precipitously into the Gustang gorge. During the day, good views of Churen Himal and Pyutha Hiunchuli are obtained.

The first pass, Nauri Deorali (4350m) is reached after about an hour's climb. Then it is a short descent to a small lake and up the next pass (4460m), a further descent to a lake and climb to the third pass (4550m) followed by a descent to the final lake and climb to the highest pass, Asare Lekh, at 4660m. These lakes are shallow and dry up in the winter, otherwise they would make a good campsite. The view over the rugged terrain of DHR is worthy of some photo-shoots. We had a lot of cloud cover, but we believe the Dhaulagiri range should be clearly visible from these passes.

Descending from the pass a bridge across Dogari Khola is reached in just over an hour. Crossing to the north bank, the final 2-3 hours is spent following a path on the north bank of the Dogari Khola. While the gradient is gentle, the path is poor and progress slow. If the day is getting long, there are many camp spots along the Dogari. We chose to keep going to Thado Dogari near the confluence with the Sangling Khola.

Day Eight: Thado Dogari to Gurghat (4010m) 6 hrs via 2 passes (4020m, 4500m)

Cross the Sangling Khola on a log bridge (good views of Pyutha to the east) and climb steeply for 1½ hours to a ridge at 3900m. The route then traverses around two side valleys on somewhat exposed trails to a second ridge point at 4020m. After a steep descent a good lunch spot on the Lamsar Khola is reached in an hour or so. From there it is a steady climb of 2+ hours to Lamsar Pass at 4500m. The final hour's descent to Gurghat camp (4010m) on the Sen Khola is very steep. It might be preferable to descend lower to Phuphal Phedi where there is firewood.

Day Nine: Gurhat to Purbang (4010m) 5 hrs via Panidal Pass 4520m

From Gurghat camp it is a 1.45 hr steep climb to Phuphal lake at 4350m. If you visit in the yarsa gumpa season, you will see the vast tented camp set up by the treasure seekers of "Himalayan gold". (see box below). A gentle climb of an hour from Phuphal takes one to Panidal Pass (4520m). This is followed by 2¼ hours of descent, gentle at first and steepening before reaching the Purbang Khola at 3900m. Purbang is reached after a short 20 minute climb up the north bank of the Purbang Khola. Purbang, at 4020m, is the site of another yarsa gumpa camp during the mid-May to mid-June hunting season, and if you are here during that time, you will be able to enjoy the only food and accommodation available on this route.

Day Ten: Purbang to Kamkot 8 hrs.

After crossing the Janga La Pass, take the left fork which descends gradually to Dunai, the capital of Dolpo district on the Thuli Bheri river. It will be necessary either to camp or to homestay at Kamkot village 2 hrs short of Dunai.

Day Eleven: Kamkot to Juphal airstrip 2.5 hrs

A further 2 hrs descent and Dunai, the Dolpa District centre, is reached. After 6 days you can again visit a shop and/or have a meal in a hotel! The Juphal airstrip is another ½ hr from Dunai bazaar. Flights depart 3 times a week to Nepalganj, from where one can get a further flight or an overnight bus (12 hrs) to Kathmandu.