

TREK 5: Dhaulagiri 1 Valley Loop

Grade Easy to Moderate.

Days: 4-5

Highest point: 2100m

Permits: none

Maps: West Dhaulagiri (& Kanjirowa) or Gurja Himal & Hidden Village

Overview

A delightful trek along the beautiful Rahughat valley with Dhaulagiri 1's dramatic south face framed between the valley walls. You will enjoy quintessential Nepali scenery of terraced fields and ochre-plastered villages such as Chim Khola perched on steep slopes. The return trail features the famous Dragon's cliff – a dramatic path cut into a marble cliff.

To start: From Beni (830m) - the cramped riverside town at the confluence of the Kali Gandaki and Myagdi - there are two options: (i) you can start walking directly from the town - ask someone to direct you to the footpath – it is a moderate but steady climb of 1000m passing through the villages of Jamunakharka, Neptechaur, Githani, Patlikhet and Hila. **Jhi** (1800m) is reached in 5-6 hours. (ii) you can catch a local bus from Beni bus station which takes 1-2 hours to reach Jhi.

Jhi is a traditional Nepali village with a mixture of ethnic groups. A few old style oval houses still remain. There are 7-8 homestays of which two are: Dek Prasad Gharbuja Ph 9847731847; and Chu Maya Magar Ph 9847624221. In the morning, it is worthwhile rising early to walk up to **Todke Danda** (2883m), from where there are phenomenal views of Dhaulagiri's great south face, and surrounding peaks. The climb takes approximately 3 hours; allow 2 hours to return.

Since there are many villages along this route, the description has been divided into stages rather than days, each section ending in a village where an overnight stay is possible.

Stage 1: Jhi to Kotgaon (1842m) 2.30 hrs

From Jhi, the trail heads north-west, contouring gently to **Jikru**. From there a stone staircase climbs steeply up to the village of **Pakhapani** (tr: good water), There is a teashop at Pakhapani which will serve local food. The trail then turns west and drops down to cross two small side tributaries before climbing steeply on the far bank via stone steps to the village of **Kotgaon** (Note: there are two villages named Kotgaon on the map: this is the eastern one). Here there are several shops which will serve food if requested (e.g. Negita Pun 9805466766). It is an attractive compact Magar village, with stone roofs and facades decorated with red and white mud.

Stage 2: Kotgaon to Rayakhor (2100m) 3 hrs

After departing Kotgaon, cross a small stream and take the upper path which avoids a landslide and climbs steadily up through light forest to **Ulleri** (2000m) in 1.30 hours. Just before the village take the upper (left) path. There is a small teashop. The trail then contours around to reach the village

of **Rayakhor** in just over an hour. There is a good viewpoint of Dhaulagiri (and Annapurnas) near the school. Several houses will provide accommodation and food if asked (Gha Bahadur Sherpujha Magar; Nu Maya Magar). This is a good place to spend the night because it offers good views in the morning.

Dhaulagiri 1

Its name derives from the Sanskrit word *dhawala* meaning dazzling, white, beautiful, and *giri* meaning mountain. But locals call it Dhaulaghar, *ghar* meaning house. When you view the mountain from the west, it clearly resembles a Nepali house with a steeply pitched roof rising to an apex. At 8,167 metres (26,795 feet), it is the seventh highest mountain in the world. Standing in isolation from its siblings, its elevation rise from its base is almost unequalled.

Herzog, who was the first person to climb Annapurna 1, originally planned to climb Dhaulagiri but was unable to find a route to its base. So he turned his attention to Annapurna. Dhaulagiri 1 was eventually climbed by a Swiss-Austrian-Nepali expedition in 1960.

Despite many attempts, its stupendous south face – 4000 metres of near vertical rock and ice – has yet to be successfully climbed. It has been described as the greatest remaining challenge in alpinism.

Section 3: Rayakhor to Dhar (2000m) 3.5 hrs

From Rayakhor the trail descends crossing a landslide (if going in the opposite direction, make sure you take the upper path, not the lower steps) and reaches the river in about 1.20 hours. There is a bridge here but the trail remains on the right bank. After a further 30 minutes the settlement of **Chaurkhani** [[LINK: Trek 7](#)] is reached with a teashop and if desired you can cross the river and spend a night on the left bank at Kharibot (Dek Bahadur and Yo Maya Chantyal). The route, however, continues upstream on the right bank, passing through the small hamlet of **Ghyasikharka** (teashop) and further on a micro hydro-electric plant. After an hour you pass – but do not cross - a bridge. The village of **Dhar** with food and accommodation is perched some 15 minutes uphill from the bridge. Dhar is a good option to stay overnight because of the views in the morning.

Option

From Dhar, one can continue 2 hours on the right bank, to the hamlet of **Chhari**, where a homestay is available. This is the highest permanent habitation in the valley. [[LINK: Trek 7](#)] From Chhari there is a route on the left bank to Chim Khola – no need to return to Dhar.

Stage 4: Dhar to Chim Khola (1800m) 3-4 hrs

Cross the bridge below Dhar to the left bank of the Rahu Khola. The trail follows an easy almost flat route downstream beside the river, reaching the hamlet of **Kharibot** in about 1:30 hours, and the village of **Simudanda** in a further 30 minutes. 45 minutes beyond Simudanda, follow the upper (left) fork in the path (which is now a jeepable track). Eventually the fascinating village of **Chim Khola** [Homestay: Dhruva Pajja Ph 9805 154812] comes into view, its red and white mud houses stacked in narrow

tiers on the steep slope above a side tributary (the Chim Khola river).

Chim Khola comprises some 250 houses, most of the inhabitants belonging to the Magar ethnic group with a few households of Dalits. It is an unspoiled traditional village of stone and mud houses, slate roofs, wooden verandahs and carved windows; stone-flagged paths meander up and down beside gushing water channels and taps. The village is well maintained thanks to the presence of retired British Gurkha soldiers with good pensions, and nowadays at least one from each house works overseas and sends remittances home. Beside the river you can visit the small hydro-electricity plant which supplies their electricity. There are several shops and local lodges where food and accommodation can be obtained.

The Magars

Among the most friendly and relaxed of people, Magars are the largest Tibeto-Burmese ethnic group in Nepal, numbering around 2 million. Large numbers of them were recruited into the Gurkha armies of Britain and India, where they became renowned for their bravery and loyalty, although they are gentle by nature when you meet them in the village. Among their fellow Nepalis, Magars are renowned for being honest and straight-forward.

Numerous sub-clans and families exist. Many speak their own Magar language but in Baglung district they speak only Nepali, due to the ruling long ago by the local King of Galkot who arrested people speaking a language other than Nepali, fearing they must be plotting to overthrow him. Most define themselves these days as Hindus, though their practices and beliefs relate more closely to shamanism.

While in the area make sure you sample "Magar tea" - a cuppa with a high alcohol content!

Stage 5: Chim Khola to Dagnam 4 hrs

From Chim Khola, retrace your steps a short way out of the village and then take a left fork which descends to cross the Chim Khola. Across the river, the path climbs steadily through light forest and fields. It is a well-worn route with many villagers on the footpath. In 2 hours or so the delightful Magar village of **Darmija** (Teashop lodge) is visible just below the trail.

[Option]: Descend to the Rahughat river (45 minutes steep) where there are hot springs. The villagers have constructed therapeutic pools and simple shelters and toilets for those pursuing multi-day cures for their aches and pains. There is even a small teashop selling hot and cold drinks. Lokendra Garbuja (98439 25104) will be happy to guide you there.

Depart Dharmija at the upper end of the village, heading south. The slope steepens until it becomes a precipice of white marble rising from the river bed far below. This is the Dragon's Precipice – Ajingar Bhir. The trail has been cut entirely by hand by locals, with the help of a few sticks of dynamite. If you glance back in places, you will find that you have been walking on an overhang! For those who find exposure disconcerting, the trail is reassuringly broad, and - needless to say - rock-solid! Unlike the slopes across the valley which are disfigured by landslides. Some two hours beyond Dharmija the scattered village of **Dagam** (or

Dagnam) is reached [Hotel Riverside (north end); Khaja Ghar Teashop lodge (south end)]

Stge 6: Dagam to Beni 2:30 hrs

An hour's walk south of Dagnam is a spot where share-jeps for Beni are usually waiting in the morning hours. The trip takes around 1:30 hours. Alternatively one can walk: **Galeshwor** (on the Kali Gandaki main road some 15 minutes' drive north of Beni) is reached in 3-4 hours easy downhill.