

TREK 6: Dhaulagiri to Gurja Himal

Grade Moderate.

Permits: none

Days: 8 days

Highest point: 3250 m

Map: West Dhaulagiri (& Kanjirowa)

Cautions: Snow possible Dec-Jan.

Overview

Starting in the beautiful Rahughat valley with alluring views of Dhaulagiri 1 (8170m), this circular trek crosses 2 low passes to enter Myagdi valley and connect with Trek 1 or Trek 3 trails to Gurja Khani. You will gain a good understanding of the extreme topography of the area, though the trail is 'average' in its demands. Features quintessential Nepali scenery and villages, marble cliff path, views of Dhaulagiri range. The inhabitants are largely Magars, with some Chantyal and Dalits.

To start: One can choose to walk up the Rahughat valley on either side. If you opt for the western route (Dhaulagiri panorama if you divert to the viewpoint above Jhi), follow the description for Trek 6 Sections 1, and Section 2 until you reach the village of **Chaurkhani**. We recommend the eastern route with the marble cliff and Chim Khola, and there are still plenty of views of Dhaulagiri. This route is the same as sections of Trek 6 but in reverse.

From **Beni** bus park (850m), share or charter a jeep (4 wheel drive necessary) to Dagnam. It is a bone-shaking journey of 2 hours. If you prefer to walk, take any bus from Beni to Galeshwar (15 minutes). Here, on a rocky outcrop beside the Kali Gandaki river is a temple to Shiva and a famous pilgrimage site for Hindus. If you pass through in late November you will see thousands of pilgrims gathered for the annual Baikuntha Mela fair.

From Galeshwar, cross the bridge over the Rahughat and after 100m follow the Dagnam jeep track on the left. It is a hot and dusty climb of 800m to **Dagnam (1600m)** passing through Piple village with teashop, which takes 3-4 hours (not much longer than the jeep!) Fortunately, the footpath sometimes takes short-cuts which evade the dust.

Lodging: *Beni:* Yak Hotel (+ many others); *Galeshwar:* hotels + local lodges; *Dagnam:* Thapa Khaja Ghar (south end) and Hotel Riverside (north end).

Day 1: Dagnam to Chim Khola (1800m) 4 hrs

Cross the small bridge beside Hotel Riverside and head northwards towards the famous marble cliff of Ajingar bhir ("dragon's precipice"). From this direction you are treated to its most dramatic vertical views. Don't worry – when you reach the overhanging point, the path is wide, and you can hug the inside. If you cannot face this, then follow the route of Trek 5, sections 1-3 as far as Gasyikharka. From Dagnam, **Darmijha** (teashop lodge) is reached in 2 hours. **Chim Khola** lies a further 2 hours beyond. The path is well-marked and travelled. For more detailed description, see Trek 6, sections 3-5. There are fine views of Dhaulagiri 1 along the trail.

Day 2 Chim Khola to Kuinekham (2400m) 6 hrs

Chim Khola to Kharibot	1.30 hrs
Kharibot to Chaurkhani	1.00 hrs
Chaurkhani to Kuinekham	3.30 hrs

Join the path leading upstream on the left bank of the Rahughat khola. The first 90 minutes is a pleasant stroll with fine views of the Dhaulagiri massif, to **Kharibot (teashop)** on the Rahughat Khola. After crossing the Rahughat on a footbridge, it is a very steep 1 hour climb to **Chaurkhani** where views of the Annapurna range appear. This is the last settlement before the night's stop at Kuinekham, so re-fueling is advised. You may have to summon up some Nepali phrases or simply mime that you want food.

From the south side of Chaurkhani a path heads towards the tributary Jhinkhani Khola. After crossing, follow it upstream. In 2 hours you will reach the top of a ridge which divides the Jhinkhani into 2 branches, and offers magnificent views of Dhaulagiri. Ascending through cedar forest, **Kuine Pass (2800m)** is reached in a further 30 minutes. On the surrounding pastures you are likely to meet large herds of sheep and goats shepherded by lads and lasses from **Kuinekham**. The descent to the village through rhododendron and daphne forest takes 1 hour. Kuinekham is inhabited by the ethnic minority Chantyal people, who originally came for the copper mines which used to be here. The village shop offers 'homestay'.

Day 3: Kuinekham to Khibang 6-7 hrs.

Kuinekham to Malampar	3 hrs
Malampar to Khibang (1800m)	3.30 hrs

Follow the path above the hydroelectric plant penstock. After 45 minutes it crosses the Jharme Khola. Follow this upstream and in a further 45 minutes a ridge is attained, overlooking the large Chantyal village of Malkaban far below. The path then contours around the Hopa Khola for about an hour to **Lusbang** on the ridge separating the Hopa from the Dhoka Khola. Malampargau is now visible to the west on the far side of the Dhoka Khola, as well as Kuinekham to the east. Descend through rhododendron forest to cross the Dhoka Khola. **Malampar** – another Chantyal village - is reached in around 3 hours from Kuinekham. The local shop provides food and accommodation.

The path climbs steeply through the village into rhododendron forest up to a notch in a ridge (1.30 hrs). Follow the right-hand path which descends through more rhododendrons to Chari Khola. A short climb up the right bank of the Chari Khola to a low pass reveals Khibang below with a glorious display of the Dhaulagiri massif and Gurja Himal rising up behind. The first section of the descent is cut into a sheer cliff. **Khibang**, a large Magar village with several teashop lodges, is reached in 3.30 hours from Malampar.

LINK: *Trek 3: Gurja Himal & Dhuala Canyon Trek 15 Dhaulagiri French Pass.*

From Khibang there are 2 options to reach Gurja Khani: (i) To connect with Trek 1 route, described below; (ii) to follow Trek 3 route (in reverse). To do the latter, there is no need to climb up to Mudi or Sinbang – ask locals to guide you to the bridge and the path which goes more directly to Nerbang. Day 4: Khibang to Arche (1820m) Day 5: Arche to Gurja Khani 9-10 hrs. Local guide essential to find path.

Carry food; there are temporary shelters which could be used in an emergency.

Day 4: Khibang to Lulang 6-7 hrs

Khibang to Dar (1800m) 3 hrs
Dar to Lulang (2400m) 3.30 hrs

The path descends steeply for 1 hour to the Myagdi Khola bridge at Khamla (1300 m.). As you cross the bridge gaze northwards at the mysterious deep canyon which splits Dhaulagiri 1 from its siblings. Then climb steeply for an hour to **Sinbang**, where the path connects with the one coming from Mudi. You now enter the Dar valley. The lower part of **Dar** village (1800 m.) is reached in around 3 hours from Khibang. The village, inhabited by Magars and Chantyal, clings to a steep slope, and the houses appear to spill down the hillside. There are several village shops where you can get snacks or cooked food.

Beyond Dar there are no settlements and little water, so carry plenty. Continue heading west and up. After 2 hours of climb the path dips around a tributary (Narja Khola). By this point the trail from Dar has merged with the main trail from Phalyagaon (Trek 1, Day 2). The path continues to climb steadily. Finally the staggered village of Lulang hoves into view. It is still a steep climb from the start of the village to the homestays near the top (details see Trek 1, day 2).

Day 5 : Lulang to Gurja Khani 7-8 hrs

This follows the route described in Trek 1/Day 3. Accommodation in Gurja Khani is in homestays. Most trekkers take at least one rest day in Gurja Khani to enjoy a side trip to Gurja Himal's south face

Day 6: Gurja Khani to Gurjaghat 8-9 hrs

GK to Rugachaur Pass 3850m 5+ hrs
Rugachaur to Gurjaghat 3000m 3+ hrs

This is off-the-beaten path adventure. Ask your homestay to prepare some food (e.g. chapati/potatoes) to carry with you since there are no teashops or homes on the route.

The most difficult part of the climb to Rugachaur pass was greatly improved in 2018 with bridges and a totally new path, so there is less risk of getting lost. Even so, hiring a local guide for the day (cover the cost of their return the next day) is advised, since any deviation will compromise arriving at Gurjaghat before dusk. Depart early to obtain the best views from the pass. Snow is possible on the pass any time October to April.

Exit the village to the west, forking left to drop down to the Dhaura river (15 mins) which is crossed on a temporary wooden bridge built anew each year by locals. After winding up a landslide scree and ridge (20 mins), the path turns left at a stone *chautara* to cross a grazing area and enter a tributary valley. On the steep slope the trail narrows and can be wet with dew in the early morning as it passes above cliffs and waterfalls. The feeling of exposure is lessened by the dense vegetation, but the sense of safety is an illusion, and feet must be carefully placed. In rain this section becomes a treacherous mud-slide – bamboo canes make strong hand-holds if needed. There are 3 bridges plus a gigantic log to test your balance as the trail weaves from one side to the other. As altitude is gained, the Himalayan peaks appear and provide the excuse for rest stops.

After 3.5 hours the steep part of the climb begins. **Rugachaur Pass 3850m** is reached in a further 1-2 hours

[don't be seduced by the times locals quote you; it is a formidable climb!] In fine weather the Pass makes a good picnic spot, covered with gentians. The views to the north of the Dhaulagiri range are spectacular - Pyutha, Churen, Ghustung, Gurja, Dhaulagiri 1 and 6.

The descent on the southern side is much more gentle. You are now in the Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve where blue sheep and other wild animals may be spotted. The path follows the Simudar khola downstream, mostly on the left bank, past deserted herders' huts (good for emergency bivouac!). After 30 mins cross the small stream on two beams, and a side tributary after a further 30 mins. Keep to the trail near the main stream, descending steadily into pretty alpine scenery of conifers and juniper, with sunlit glades which tempt one to lie down and fall asleep in their vivid mossy softness. Several more bridges are crossed, leaving one on the left (east) bank. After 3-4 hrs of descent the broad flat valley of the upper Uttar Ganga river comes into sight, with the seasonal settlement of **Gurjaghat** at the junction of the two rivers.

As you enter, there is a ranger's post for Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve where you may be asked to purchase an entry permit 3000Rs). We have never yet met a ranger, but make sure you have cash in case.

Lodging: there is currently one reliable teashop lodge, located the furthest on the left, close to the craggy slope: [Lokendra Chhantyal Ph 9867633453]. They can accommodate a dozen people, with a common room and a private room with 3-4 beds. The toilet is spotlessly clean and a fire constantly burning in the kitchen hearth with a warm carpet to sit on. Nights are cold at this altitude and ice/frost is likely in the morning. There is a second teashop named Samir Hotel, but it was closed when we last passed through (Oct 2018). Even Lokendra's teashop may be closed mid Dec-mid Feb.

Optional Rest day: If you have the time, we recommend spending 2 nights at Gurjaghat in order to visit the Bonpo monastery & Medicine school and the small remnant of Tibetan refugees at **Chentung** which lies 2 hours easy flat walk downstream from Gurjaghat. Some refugees were settled here in 1959 following the Chinese invasion of Tibet. [See Box under Trek 8] The town of **Dhorpatan**, with a road connection and buses to Baglung lies a further hour downstream. There is nothing particularly appealing about the town.

Day 7 Gurjaghat to Lumsung 6 hrs

Gurjaghat to Jaljala Pass (3450m) 3-4 hrs
Jaljala to Lumsung (2100m) 2-3 hrs

This is another day where it is advised to carry food and snacks with you. The lodge will prepare some. Possibly more teashops will open up on the route, as trekkers' footfall increases.

Leave early to get the best views. You are now 'out of the wild' and the path more travelled by locals and occasional trekking agency groups. Follow the Uttar Ganga upstream, heading due east. Where there are offshoot paths, always select the most tramped one. After 2-3 hours the spot called lower Jaljala (3300m) is reached. The panoramic views of the Dhaulagiri and Annapurna ranges are well worth a 5 minute diversion to the low grassy ridge north of the path. A little further on **Jaljala Pass** (3435m) is reached in around 3-4 hours from Gurjaghat.

The descent tests the knees, but the panoramic views of the Dhaulagiri and Annapurna massifs keep you smiling. The path descends steeply through what used to be moss-drenched oak-rhododendron forest but is progressively disappearing. It is hard to lose the way. After 2 hours or so, the upper houses of **Muna** hamlet come into view, followed by **Moreni**. If you are feeling tired there are a couple of homestay/lodges here, but otherwise press on to cross the river and the short climb to **Lumsung**. [**Lodging:** Himalayan Lodge Ph: 9746722209; Homestay: Prem Kumari Pun Ph: 9746712308] on the left bank of the Dar khola. Alternatively, if you arrive early and are not tired, you can continue to **Muna** or **Phalyagaon** [Bishnu Hotel] in 2 hrs, and from there you are certain to reach Pokhara the next day. You have now completed the loop, and are back on your earlier route.

Days 8 Lumsung to Darbang

6-7 hrs

Most trekkers reach Darbang in one day, and fast walkers can make it to Beni or even Pokhara for the night. It is also possible to catch a bus from Muna. The first bus leaves around 7.30 a.m.

Upper Uttar Ganga valley

In this valley you will notice hundreds of rustic herder huts, for during the summer months the valley is filled with more than 10,000 domestic animals, accompanied by herder families. Termed 'transhumance', this seasonal migration exploits the rich grazing at high altitudes during the monsoon months.

Tibetan refugees used to be the only people who remained resident through the winter, but in recent years a community of *Dalits* at **Khaltekhulte** have built permanent homes around their potato fields.