

## TREK 8: Dhorpatan–Maikot Circuit

**Grade** Moderate to Difficult

**Permits:** Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve (on entry)

**Days:** 13 days

**Highest point:** 3915m

**Map:** West Dhaulagiri

**Cautions:** Snow possible Dec-Jan.

### Overview

From Dhorpatan, this trek follows a new circuit which combines panoramic mountain views with homestays in high-altitude villages of the little-known Kham Magar people. The circuit begins by crossing Phalgune Pass (3915m), descending to villages along the Ghustung and Sano Bheri kholas, before cutting over a low pass to the fascinating twin villages of Taki and Shera, returning to Dhorpatan up the Uttar Ganga river. Local teashops and homestays can be found all along this route.

### To start:

From **Beni**, catch a local bus up the Myagdi Khola to **Darbang** (2 hours; Rs 200). Buses from Darbang [Thakhali Guest House] leave from the western edge of Beni beside a road bridge over the Myagdi Khola. Share taxis are also available (1.5 hours; Rs 500 per person). This is a bumpy dusty ride, sometimes teetering on the edge of landslides. If this doesn't appeal, you can walk from Beni to Darbang (7-8 hours). It is a verdant scenic valley, strung with small hamlets and terraced rice fields beside the rushing Myagdi river. The original footpath remains in most places, but occasionally you will have to walk on the dusty motor track. If you ride to Darbang, it is recommended to walk a couple of hours the same day and

spend the night on the ridge at Dharapani or Takam. From Darbang there is a rudimentary bus service (2-3 per day) to Phalyagaon, with the plan to bulldoze a track to Lumsung. Be aware that the track is rough and hazardous in places, sometimes blocked by landslides, and buses in a dubious state of maintenance. We recommend walking in order to appreciate the stunning views of the Dhaulagiri range; it is almost as quick.

### 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 Lumsung 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. Take the lower (left) trail and keep close to the river and climbing gently to **Lumsung**, via an attractive waterfall. There are 3 homestays in Lumsung, two near the local health post and one in the middle of the village.

<b>Day 3: Lumsung to Gurjaghat</b>	<b>7 hrs</b>
Lumsung to Moreni (2275)	1hr
Moreni to Jaljala Pass (3400m)	4 hrs
Jaljala Pass to Gurjaghat (3015m)	2 hrs

It's a steep 1200 meter climb up to the Jaljala pass, with little opportunity for refreshments on the way, so a good breakfast at Lumsung is recommended! It is also necessary to carry lunch as there are no refreshment possibilities between Moreni and Gurjaghat during the trekking seasons. In less than an hour, the village of **Moreni** is reached, with a homestay and a local teashop/hotel. (Those with sufficient energy at the end of Day 2 might consider continuing up to Moreni and spending the night there, reducing today's climb a bit.) After Moreni, it is an unrelenting 4 hour climb up to the **Jaljala pass**, but as you climb, your efforts are greatly rewarded with the gradual unveiling of one of the best Himalayan panoramas anywhere in the country. From the top of Jaljala, one gets an

extraordinary view of the Dhaulagiri and Annapurna massifs. Jaljala represents the watershed between the Gandaki and Karnali river systems.

From Jaljala you begin the descent of Uttar Ganga valley, the upper reaches of which are a gentle walk through beautiful alpine scenery. After 2 hours the valley widens and the seasonal settlement of **Gurjaghat** is reached. During the monsoon, surrounding communities climb to this valley to graze their livestock and the population swells to thousands. During the regular trekking seasons, the settlement is deserted but for two small teashop/hotels – and these close from mid-December to end of February. One reliable teashop lodge is operated by Lokendra Chhantyal (Ph 9867633453). He 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).

<b>Day 4: Gurjaghat to Dhorpatan</b>	<b>3 hrs</b>
Gurjaghat to Chentung (2945m)	2 hrs
Chentung to Dhorpatan (2870m)	1 hr

This is a short day, providing a welcome rest from yesterday's exertions, and making possible an early morning departure from Dhorpatan for tomorrow' challenging itinerary. A short day also leaves time to explore the Tibetan monastery and refugee settlement at Chentung enroute. Af few minutes out of Gurjaghat, cross the wooden bridge over the Simudar river tributary and follow the Uttar Ganga valley downstream to a second tributary (Gurgad khola). You can either wade (freezing water!) or make a short detour upstream to cross by the new suspension bridge. It's a very gentle 2 hour stroll along rushing alpine streams, pine forests and mossy glades to the Dalit village of **Khalte Kulti**, followed by Chenturng. Here you can visit the Bonpo monastery, gompa, and school

of traditional Tibetan medicine. There is a small remnant of Tibetan refugees still resident and one family runs a small teashop where one can have a good lunch. Refugees were settled here in 1959 following the Chinese invasion of Tibet, but most families have moved on to the better economic opportunities of Pokhara and Kathmandu.

Leaving Chentung, a further 1 hour gentle walk takes you to the large settlement of **Dhorpatan**. Like Gurjaghat, the population swells greatly during the monsoon grazing season, but there are a small number of permanent residents and businesses, amongst which are two hotels targeted at tourists.

<b>Day 5: Dhorpatan to Thankur</b>	<b>8 hrs</b>
Dhorpatan to Jaulo Bisaune (3000m)	1.30 hrs
J. Bisaune to Phalgune Pass (3915m)	3.30 hrs
Phalgune to Thankur (3175m)	2.30 hrs

Today is a long, challenging day, and hiring a local guide is a good idea. Your lodge owner in Dhorpatan should be able to find you a reliable guide so that you do not waste any time following the wrong route. You must also confirm with the lodge owner that the teashop/hotels in Thankur are open. Carry lunch with you – there is a teashop/hotel at Jaulo Bisaune, but not guaranteed to be open throughout the trekking season. Pay your Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve entry fee (NRs 3390) at the headquarters of the reserve at the western end of the settlement.

From the reserve headquarters follow the motor road on the right bank of the Uttar Ganga as far as the airfield. Then strike up through the small settlement of Syal Pake. Ascend through Upper Syal Pake to **Kukur Deorali** (3000m), a small pass in the ridge reached in about 45 minutes from the reserve headquarters. Descending slightly into the Bhujekhung valley, **Jaulo Bisaune** is reached in a further 45 minutes. Tea and snacks may be available here, but can not be counted on. Now the path climbs steeply over two lateral ridges to the upper reaches of the Phalgune Khola, followed by a final steep ascent to Phalgune Pass (3915m). From the pass, one

enjoys an unobstructed view of Dogari, Pyutha Hiunchuli, Churen, and Gurja Himal. You will also be impressed with the very rugged foothill ridges of the hunting reserve spread out before you. Big game hunters come to hunt Naur (blue sheep) in this terrain, arriving at their basecamp by helicopter, and then local guides take them to where the sheep are. Our local Magar guide in November 2018 had just returned from such a hunting task and regaled us with stories of generous tips from Korean hunters.

From the pass, the trail descends slowly, contouring around to the northwest. After about 1½ hrs of contouring, the trail descends more steeply and reaches the two lodges of **Thankur** in about an hour. The lodges were open in late November 2018, and one assured us they stayed open year-round, but trekkers without camping gear should confirm this before departing Dhorpatan

<b>Day 6: Thankur to Tatopani</b>	<b>6 hrs</b>
Thankur to Kayam (3000m)	4 hrs
Kayam to Tatopani (2300m)	2 hrs

Follow the path to the northwest to descend for 45 minutes through the steep wooded hillside along the Sai Khola to the confluence with the Ghustung Khola. Follow the Gustung Khola downstream for a further 15 minutes and then cross a suspension bridge to the right bank. Ascend past the few seasonal dwellings of **Ghustung**, climbing steeply up the right bank. After 2.30 hrs the ridge is obtained and there is a final 30 minutes of gentle descent down the ridge to reach **Kayam** (3000m). There are 2 teashop/hotels here for lunch and accommodation, should it be needed. The friendly hosts will also see you on the correct route onwards to Tatopani. From Kayam head north, descending through

birch woodland for 1 hour to reach the school and dwellings of **Thulo Jharlung**. Continue descending through **Sano Jharlung** and cross the **Kali Khola** after another ½ hour. 100 meters downstream of the bridge, at the confluence of the Kali Khola and the Sano Bheri river, are the hot springs of **Tatopani**. Two cement bathing ponds have been constructed as a local spa. There is a recently constructed lodge open all year for accommodation. The winter months are the peak season for locals seeking relief in the pools from arthritis and other aches and pains. Enjoy an afternoon hot soak amid a dramatic setting of high rock gorges. It feels very good after the day's exertions!

**Day 7: Tatopani to Maikot 6-7 hrs**

Tato Pani to Pelma (2600m)	1.30 hrs
Pelma to Yamakhar (2750m)	1 hr
Yamakhar to Puccha (2800m)	3 hrs
Puccha to Maikot (2300m)	1 hr

From Tatopani, cross the Sano Bheri on a hanging bridge and immediately climb steeply 150m up the right bank of the Sano Bheri to get over the gorge cliffs blocking your way to Pelma. Skirt the top of the cliffs for 5 minutes and then descend steeply down a gully back to the river and a wooden bridge. (There are plans to construct an additional bridge on the Sano Bheri in the gorge to avoid the cliff climbing and reduce the time between Tatopani and Pelma from 1.30 hrs to just 20 minutes!) Cross the wooden bridge to the left bank and contour up and downstream to **Pelma**, with its large houses with elegant wood balconies. You will find good standard accommodation in 3 teashops including one styling itself as a "tourist hotel". **Yamakhar** lies west across the Sano Bheri valley from Pelma. A hanging bridge connects the two settlements and **Yamakhar** is reached in about an hour. From here, the trail ascends southwest through bare hillsides, climbing a ridge above high cliffs in an hour. Contour

## Kham Magars

Due to their oral mythology and distinctive shamanistic practices, Kham Magars are believed to have migrated from Siberia. Some anthropologists believe that the Kham Magars are a separate ethnic group who adopted the Magar name.

As the prevailing culture here, their distinctive traditions remain largely undiluted and other ethnic groups have even learned their Kham language. Their homes are built in tiers up a hillside, the houses typically having flat roofs which are inter-connected and serve as courtyards for the house above where grain is dried and people socialize.

Kham Magar women are renowned in Nepal for their strength and independence; they are the only women in Nepal whom you will see ploughing – a task forbidden to women of other ethnic groups. During the Maoist insurgency, they were among the first women to enlist as fighters.

In the mid 1990s, the Maoists began their movement among Kham Magar communities such as these, because they were known to be disadvantaged and discriminated. Historically, this area had been neglected by government services and development infrastructure, mostly due to its remoteness from Kathmandu and distance from the road network.

around the steep hillside for another 30 minutes and one attains another ridge (2730m) with a single hut and sheepfold. Crossing into the next valley, you contour high above the village of Puccha before climbing to yet another ridge crest in about 2 hours. From this ridgetop, the village of Maikot is visible. Descend steeply through forest to reach **Maikot** with many accommodation options including a reinforced concrete structure styling itself as "Mount Pyutha Homestay". Despite this and other modern constructions,

Maikot retains its charm, perched on a steep ridge with many traditional flatroofs and woven bamboo rooftop grain stores. A temple to a shamanistic deity or “masta” dominates the highest point in the village.

**Day 8: Maikot to Okhma** **5.30 hrs**  
 Maikot to Mayang (2050m) 3 hrs  
 Mayang to Okhma (1700m) 2.30 hrs

Descend the southwest side of the Maikot ridge for about 1 hour to reach the Sano Bheri river (1770m). Cross the hanging bridge to the left bank and follow the path downstream, gently rising until reaching the village of **Ghara** after 1 hr. There are two teashops for refreshments. Continue contouring and gradually climbing around the wooded hillside, until after an additional 1 hr, you reach **Mayang**. Here you will find 3 local teashops for lunch.

From Mayang, it is 1 hr to the village of **Adheri Khola** and a further 30 minutes to **Dimurgaira** (2015m) along an almost flat trail that has been upgraded for mule caravans. Adheri Khola and Dimurgaira both have village teashops for refreshments as required. From Dimurgaira, continue to contour on the wide mule trail through pine forest with steep drop-offs before the scars of motor road construction ahead indicate that you are nearing Okhma. This is the current roadhead for the road that is planned to reach Maikot in the next couple of years. The trail descends into a tributary valley to the southeast to cross the Okhma Khola, reached in 1 hour or less from Dimurgaira. Ascend a further 15 minutes to **Okhma**, with good accommodation options in 2 local teashop/hotels. Jeeps are available to Taka, one leaving early each morning roadhead, where one might get a jeep for Taka or continue on ahead on foot.

**Day 9: Okhma to Taka** **5 hrs**  
 Okhma to Pipaldhunga (2005m) 1 hr  
 Pipaldhunga to Birgum (2400m) 2.30 hrs  
 Birgum to Taka (2185m) 1.30 hrs

From Okhma there it is a steady incline up to the few houses of **Pipaldhunga** (2005m) reached in about 1 hour. 2 local teahouses can provide refreshment.

From Pipaldhunga climb a further 20 minutes up to a point on the ridge (2100m) where you join the Okhma to Taka motor road for the 2 hour walk to Birgum. The motor road descends gently around the hill side for the first hour and then climbs steeply to **Birgum**, a ridge-top village with panoramic views of Sisne Himal (5849m) and views down to Taka. Given its situation on a steep ridge top, you will be surprised to find a fairly large pond in the centre of the village.

After Birgum, follow the motor road on a gradual 1 hr descent to **Bachigaon** and, in a further 15 minutes, **Taka**. Both Bachigaon and Taka have been greatly impacted by the coming of the motor road and the inevitable accompanying bags of cement. Much traditional architecture has given way to reinforced concrete construction, but one can still find traditional homes lining some of the narrow side streets. Taka has 2 substantial reinforced concrete local hotels as well as other traditional teahouses for accommodation.

**Day 10: Taka to Niseldhor** **6 hrs**

Taka to Damchan (2320m) 2 hrs  
 Damchan to Niseldhor (2620m) 4 hrs

From Taka, the route now follows the Uttar Ganga upstream for the next 3 days. You will need to carry lunch, as there are no reliable refreshment points today after Upper and Lower Sera, which are only ½ hr from Taka. 20 minutes from Taka, cross the tower suspension bridge to the left bank of the Uttar Gangaga and reach the twin Kham Magar villages of Upper and Lower Shera. During our first visit in 1978, the villages were amazing conglomerations of flat-roofed homes, built one on top of each other in steps up the steep hillside. The roof of one served as the front

terrace of the house immediately above it. Unfortunately, pitched roofs covered with corrugated steel now dominates, and little remains of the traditional Kham architecture in Upper and Lower Sera. But the residents are still as friendly and welcoming as that first time 40 years ago, and the new style roofing no doubt leaks less than the old mud flat roofs.

From the Seras, it is approximately 2 hours via the newly constructed jeep road on the left bank of the Uttar Ganga to the settlement of **Damchan**. There are no teashops, but one of the local households might be convinced to produce lunch.

Past Damchan, the motor road continues for about 1 hour and then comes to an abrupt end on a hillside, with the old walking road now reappearing in its stead. You are unlikely to meet many people on this trail during the trekking seasons. It feels like true wilderness, walking through virgin pine forest, with the Uttar Ganga whitewater always not far below. Look out for white tailed deer. The trail climbs gradually, with frequent contours around incoming tributary valleys. After 3 hrs or so, civilization reappears in the form of the settlement of **Niseldhor**. The village is spread out over both sides of the Uttar Ganga, and there are two teahouse/hotels, one on either side of the river.

**Days 11: Niseldhor to Gurjaghat  
6.30 hrs**

Niseldhor to Gaukhet (2700m)	2 hrs
Gaukhet to Dhorpatan (2870m)	1½ hrs
Dhorpatan to Gurjaghat (3015m)	3 hrs

At **Niseldhor**, cross to the right bank of the Uttar Ganga and proceed upstream, gradually climbing through **Masa** (after 30 minutes) and **Kanga** (after a further 1 hr). From Kanga it is another 30 minutes to **Gaukhet**, with a local teashop for refreshments. Continue along the right bank crossing the Phalgune Khola (remember the other end of this Khola below Phalgune Pass?) and reaching **Dhorpatan**

town in about 1 hour from Gaukhet. **Gurjaghat** is approximately 3 hours upstream from Dhorpatan, as per route description on Day 4.

**Days 12-13: Gurjaghat to Darbang (1070m)**

The walking route is described (in reverse) in Day 3 of this trek and Days 1-2 of Trek 1. It is possible to reach Muna (via Morani and Lumsung) from Gurjaghat in about 6 hrs on Day 12. The following morning, you can reach Darbang by bus from Muna in 2 hrs or on foot in 4 hrs. Both ways get you to Darbang in time to catch road transport onward to Beni and Pokhara on Day 13.