

GREAT HIMALAYAN NATIONAL PARK ADVENTURE SERIES

EcoTOURISM



A Guide for Trekkers



The Great Himalayan National Park was created to preserve the unique, pristine beauty of Nature in the Western Himalayan region. Located in the Kullu Valley, the Park offers numerous opportunities to celebrate, conserve, protect, and preserve Nature.

EcoTourism: A Guide for Trekkers is a part of an effort to inform and educate people, and involve them in maintaining the ecological balance of one of India's most spectacular natural environments.



Trekking through Sainj Forest



Tirthan Valley: Rakhundi Top (3,500m)

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Foreword

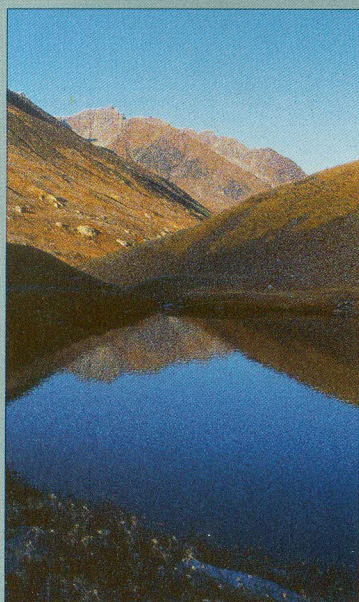
The core asset of Himachal Pradesh is its natural environment – its mountains, streams, forests, the immense biodiversity of its flora and fauna, the unique and distinctive culture and traditions of its peoples. This provides unlimited potential for nature-based tourism, but it is only recently that the State has realized where the true thrust of its tourism policies should lie. However, basing tourism on Nature alone is not enough: if this tourism is not to devour the Nature that sustains it [a ubiquitous process that has already begun] it must be made sustainable and environment friendly. It is precisely these concerns and values that the concept of EcoTourism incorporates as its goal and objective. The essence of EcoTourism is that it preserves and adds value to the environment and ecology, that it promotes indigenous cultures and traditions, and that it creates livelihood opportunities for local peoples. Recognizing these imperatives, the Himachal Pradesh Government in the Forest Department has formulated and notified a comprehensive EcoTourism policy in May 2001 which is being implemented through grass-level EcoTourism Societies. Five Societies have already been constituted at prime ecological destinations in the State – Great Himalayan National Park Kullu, Renuka Wildlife Sanctuary Sirmour, Kufri Nature Park and Potter's Hill in Shimla, and Khajjiar Wildlife Sanctuary in Chamba. With these initiatives we hope to impart an entirely new direction and flavour to tourism in Himachal.

In consonance with this policy, EcoTourism has been adopted by the villagers living close to the Great Himalayan National Park and Sainj and Tirthan Wildlife Sanctuaries as one of the alternative sources of income generation from the forests. This has the full and active support of the Park administration, as its success will certainly ensure the success and sustainability of the GHNP and its Ecozone. This is an initiative that cannot be allowed to fail.

This booklet contains a wealth of valuable information for the prospective EcoTourist visiting GHNP: trekking, wildlife and biodiversity, local customs, facilities offered by the Park, etc. Not only would it be of immense utility to the visitor, it would also make his visit that much more instructive and rewarding. GHNP is hallowed ground for the true nature lover, and for us every satisfied visitor is a permanent convert to the cause.

Avay Shukla

Financial Commissioner-cum-Secretary [Forests]
Govt. of Himachal Pradesh
Shimla



Sartoo Glacial Pond, Khandedhar (3,500m)

Introduction

Be it EcoTourism, eco-development, or participatory forest management, ecologically sustained activities are of supreme importance to the local communities. This booklet is an overview of trekking, an EcoTourism activity developing in the Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP). EcoTourism is nature friendly, sustainable, involves environmental education, and provides an alternative source of income for communities living close to the Park. Visitors coming to GHNP have the rare opportunity to experience the Park's pristine beauty and at the same time help villagers to improve their livelihood options.

The Great Himalayan National Park offers the casual hiker and serious trekker a wide range of experiences in the natural wonders of the Park. Trails range from relatively easy day walks in the Ecozone to challenging week or longer treks through arduous and spectacular terrain. GHNP ranks as one of the best national parks in the world and reveals its beauty, diversity, and depth through time spent in exploration.

The Ecozone is an area adjacent to the Park which contains villages that have historically had some economic dependence on the resources of the land incorporated into the Park. The formal designation of the Park boundaries and the resulting loss of these resources has economically impacted these villages. In recognition of this adverse economic impact, various programmes have, and are being, developed by the state government of Himachal Pradesh, NGOs (non-government organizations), and the villagers themselves to create alternative sources of economic well-being. EcoTourism, one such program, offers rewards to both the visitor and the villagers and helps protect GHNP.

At GHNP, there are numerous habitats for exploration: from lush forests of oak, conifer and bamboo, to gentle alpine meadows; from swift flowing rivers to high elevation glaciers. The terrain and geology are diverse. If one is lucky there are opportunities to observe endangered species of the Western Himalayas in their natural habitat.

Climate

The general climate of the Park is quite temperate and the best time for visiting is in Spring (April-May) and Fall (September-October). Summer brings monsoon rains and winter brings colder temperatures and the possibility of dangerous snow storms, especially at higher elevations. Being remote and insulated within the Kullu valley, the Park has its own microclimate. At higher elevations, unexpected thunderstorms can soak the unprepared trekker. Just as quickly, the storm can pass, leaving the sky saturated with azure blue.

The Seasons

Spring

April-May. Temperate weather and a good time to visit.

Summer (Rainy Season)

June to August. Sunny mornings, possible afternoon thunderstorms and cool nights. Rains are mostly confined to this period. Heavy downpours can cause landslides

and soil erosion. GHNP receives moderate (1,100-1,500mm) precipitation over most of the year and heavily during monsoon season in June-August. These factors can complicate trekking.

Fall

September to mid-November. The weather is temperate and, like Spring, is an optimal time to visit.

Winter

Mid-November to March. Cool to blizzard conditions with extreme low temperatures. Snowfall in winter occurs throughout the Park. Snow persists above 3,000 m from November to March with profound effects on the distribution of fauna and flora. Like Summer, these weather factors prohibit trekking.

Note: Weather conditions change quickly in mountainous areas and snow is possible year-round.

Gear

Wear appropriate dress for each season and dress in layers for maximum comfort. Your trekking will be as comfortable as your boots. Make sure they are sturdy (with good ankle support and sturdy soles) and broken-in (new

boots can often cause hot spots or blisters). Rain gear and sunscreen are essential. A warm hat, scarf, and gloves must also be part of your dress. Additional clothing items should include: (1) down or insulated vest/jacket, (2) rain-proof parka, (3) socks and sock liners, (4) sun hat, (5) T-shirts, (6) slippers or sandals for inside tent, (7) thermal underwear, (8) sunglasses.

Other Items

(1) adjustable walking stick, (2) water bottle, (3) high-grade water filter, (4) multi-blade knife. Overnight stays have additional requirements, including, tents, sleeping bags, insulated mats, cooking utensils, food, etc. GHNP requires entry permits for treks. Society for Scientific Advancement of Hill and Rural Areas (SAHARA) is a non-governmental group organized by local village people and provides full logistic trek support. SAHARA offers guides, porters, tents, cooks, and coordinates different trek tours with GHNP staff.

This is not a fully comprehensive gear list and you should consult with knowledgeable individuals or appropriate trekking books (e.g.,

Trekking in the Indian Himalayas, Lonely Planet) if you are planning a multi-day trek to ensure you are properly equipped and informed.

Reaching GHNP

The starting point for any trekking or visit to GHNP is the Kullu Valley region in the state of Himachal Pradesh. This region is best accessible by road and air. A pre-trek meeting at GHNP headquarters in Shamshi (near Kullu) is recommended.

By Road from Delhi

Approximately 500 kms by road (14+ hour trip). Take Delhi to Chandigarh by National Highway 1, then to Aut in Mandi district by NH 21. The towns of Chandigarh and Swarghat can be targeted to stay for staging the trip. Road journey in the mountain terrain of Himachal provides good views of Gobindsagar Lake near Bilaspur, followed by lush and wide Bahl Valley. The drive continues through the outskirts of Mandi which leads into the Pandoh gorge. After Pandoh comes the small town of Aut from where a link road goes across the bridge over Beas River into the

Banjar valley, where the Park is located. This trip can be made by private vehicle. Private and state run buses to the region are also available. Check with tour guides and books for details from major Indian cities to Bhuntar and Kullu.

By Air

Airline service is available from Delhi and Chandigarh to Bhuntar.

Approximate distances from GHNP

Air Port : Bhuntar (Kullu), 50 kms.
Railhead : Joginder Nagar (Mandi), 100 kms.
Town : Kullu (District HQ), 60 kms.

Four Valleys

The Four Valleys of the Great Himalayan National Park are :

Tirthan Valley

The motorable, all-weather road from Aut to Gushaini is about 52 kms. Gushaini is the roadhead for trekking in this valley.

Sainj Valley

Starting from Aut, the 46 kms road in Sainj valley ends at Neuli where the trekking trail starts. About 5 kms short of Neuli, is the village

Ropa. Here, a gravel road climbs up to Shangarh which is famous for its large meadow surrounded by the cedar trees. Only four-wheel-drive vehicles can use this gravel road which is very narrow and not generally advised for travel by car. Check with GHNP officials about access to Neuli by road. There is a bus service to Neuli.

Jiwa Nal Valley

On the Sainj valley road, about 35 kms. from Aut, is the Siund village where the Jiwa river meets Sainj. Siund is the starting point for treks in Jiwanal Valley.

Parvati Valley

Beyond Aut follow NH 21 up to Bhuntar then take the link road to Manikaran and up to Barshaini. Start the trek from Barshaini or the more popular village of Pulga (with an old Forest Rest House). This is the starting point of very popular treks up to Mantalai and further up to cross the Pin-Parvati Pass (5,319 m altitude).

From Kullu, Bhuntar (Airport connection from New Delhi), and Aut, there are regular taxi and bus services to the Sainj and Tirthan valleys. Consult a guide book for places to stay in the Kullu or

Bhuntar area while you stage your trek.

Trek Preparation

A trekker to the GHNP should be in good physical condition and the choice of the trekking route should match the levels of one's physical fitness. A trekker in good health can easily go up to 4,000 m. Some trekking routes are strenuous to very strenuous and are indicated as such. For example, crossing of the Pin Parvati Pass (5,319 m.) demands excellent physical health and stamina, basic mountaineering skills, serious trekking experience, snow-walking, and orientation (see personal impressions, Dr. G.S. Rawat).

The trekker is expected to respect both the mountain environment and local village customs. As you trek, it is important to do one thing at a time. When you're going up and down the steep trails, your attention has to be on the next step (see personal impressions, Arnold Lippin). Periodic rest stops provide opportunities to appreciate the environment. It is essential to

find the next overnight camping site well before the sun sets.

There are a few designated camping sites in high altitude pastures. Your local guide will be of help in selecting a place to camp, which is close to water and safe for the night rest.

Failure to set careful limits for oneself can result in tragedy. Know your limits—don't endanger yourself or others!

Communication Facilities

To ensure effective Park management, a wireless communication system covering all important points within and around the Park was established in 1993. At present the communication network is comprised of nine base stations at Shamshi, Sairopa, Kharoncha/Dingcha, Banjar, Sainj, Lapah, Diar, Panjain and Kullu. This system will usually be available to multi-day trekkers, as the accompaniment of a Park Ranger is a requirement for such treks.

Insurance

All multi-day foreign visitors must provide evidence of insurance

GHNP RULES

- Access to GHNP is limited due to the fragile ecosystem.
- All entry to the Park requires prior permission.
- All multi-day trekkers must be accompanied by certified guides and porters.
- Check in and consult at an interpretation facility (e.g., Sai Ropa) for tourist guides, literature, brochures etc., before entering the Park/Sanctuary.
- Obtain necessary permission from the Park official and pay Park entry fees.
- Pay fees for personal photography and/or video and filming.
- Commercial filming and videos require additional permits and fees.
- Do not disturb the animals.
- No harvesting, picking of plants, flowers, pinecones, etc.
- Whenever possible move silently through the forest.
- Keep silent or talk in a low voice during outings to view wildlife.
- Report the death or injury of any wild animal that you may encounter to the nearest Forest Officer.
- Report any incident of forest fire to the nearest Forest Officer.
- Pack out your non-degradable litter and deposit it at the appropriate place when exiting the Park.
- No open fires are allowed.
- Cooking fires must remain under trek leader control.
- Use pits for personal elimination. Depth should be two feet. Burn toilet paper if used.
- Elimination pits should ideally be 100 meters from any water source.
- No green (live) wood to be used for fires.
- All fires must be extinguished before leaving camp with water and by smothering the ashes.
- Leave campsite cleaner than you found it.
- Respect the Ecozone villagers privacy. Ask permission before taking photos or entering property.
- Respect religious sites, temples, outdoor shrines. Remove shoes if requested.
- Dress modestly.

Absolute Prohibitions within GHNP

- No firearms, weapons, bows and arrows, or fire crackers.
- No pets allowed.
- No kindling fires (except cooking fires) or smoking.
- No shouting, teasing, or chasing wild animals.
- No molesting or feeding animals
- No electronic radios, tape-recorders, CD players (unless confined to personal earphones) or musical instruments (except within a rest house and only at a low pitch).
- No parties.
- No fishing or hunting.
- No damaging or removal of any wildlife, tree, display signs, or the boundary marks of the Park/Sanctuary.

Trekkers must show their trekking route to a GHNP Range Officer before entering the Park.

coverage in the event that emergency medical or evacuation procedures are needed.

Disruption of Trekking Routes and Trails

Main Park trails are commonly impacted by floods and landslides. They are often impassable and/or re-routed. In the Sainj Valley, the trail beyond Shakti and the section between Neuli and Bah, are in quite poor condition and require care while trekking. Trails and bridges are constructed and maintained by the Park staff. They should be contacted for trail status when planning a trek in these areas.

Trekking Routes

All four valleys of GHNP offer moderate to strenuous treks. Serious, multi-day trekking in the Park requires adequate preparation, physical training, good health, and stamina as all routes contain serious up and down terrain. The potential for unexpected cold weather also demands proper outfitting.

There are two main options for visiting GHNP:

- the Ecozone, and
- the Park itself.

Entrance Fees

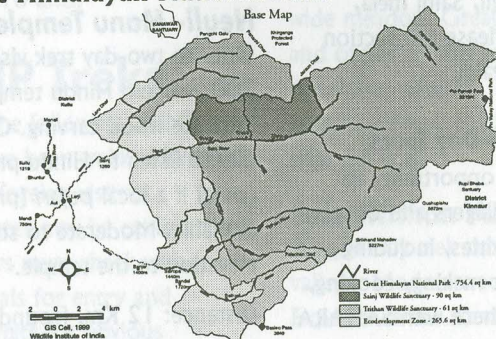
There are fees for entering the Park and additional fees for cameras, video and filming. Rates for Indian nationals are lower than foreigners. Check with Park officials for the latest entrance fees and requirements.

Entry Ticket

Current Rates for the entry into the Great Himalayan National Park:

Category	Indian	Foreigner
Per person for the first five days (four nights)	Rs. 10 per day	Rs. 500 per day
Student Charges	Rs. 5 per day	Rs. 250 per day
For every additional day	Rs. 10	Rs. 300
Still Camera	Rs. 50	Rs. 150
Video Camera	Rs. 2,500	Rs. 5,000
Feature Film	Rs. 20,000	Rs. 20,000
Security money per feature film	Rs. 25,000	Rs. 40,000
Documentary Film	Rs. 2,500	Rs. 5,000
Security per documentary	Rs. 15,000	Rs. 40,000

Great Himalayan National Park



Ecozone Tours

The Ecozone areas are adjacent to the Park and provide a combination of natural and cultural experiences. The trails go through villages and are generally easy to moderate. The best time to visit is during the Dushera Festival (usually in October). This is a major Hindu cultural and religious event celebrating the victory of good over evil in the Ramayana. Hundreds of local village deities are brought to Kullu from the surrounding villages. An exciting display of people, music, costumes, special exhibitions, foods, etc., fill the mountain roads and towns. Not to be missed!

The Spring festivals (generally in April) also offer opportunities to watch and participate in important, local cultural events.

Holidays include: Basant Panchami, Phagli, Sainj mela, Banjar mela. (Please see section below on festivals).

Half- and One-Day Tours

These offer an opportunity to interact with villagers and observe their daily activities, including weaving, basket-making, cooking, farming, etc. Check with SAHARA for options and availability.

Multi-day Tours

These combine trekking in the Ecozone countryside and through villages. They offer a glimpse into the general habitat of the Park but have easier trails and often include sleeping in Rest Houses rather than tents.

Neuli-Shangarh Loop

A three day trek traversing mountain trails and the villages of Shangarh and Lapah. Includes a visit to a GHNP nursery where medicinal plants and trees are cultivated. Opportunities for interactions with students, farmers, and women weavers. Hiking through traditional villages and architecture, beautiful vistas, meadows, sacred groves, and terraced fields. Moderate elevation gain.

Distance: 24 Km

Neuli- Manu Temple

One- to two-day trek visiting a 200 year old Hindu temple with intricate wood carving. Opportunity to listen to Hindu prayers (*puja*) if a local *pujari* (priest) is available. Moderate to steep elevation to the temple.

Distance: 12 Km. (round trip).

An additional side trip of 4 Km

takes you to a tower-like monument at Talyara village, built about 250 years ago.

Gushaini-Tinder Village

One or two days trek from Gushaini to Tinder village which offers an insight into the village life, its cultural aspects and a walk through forests up to Kharongcha.

Distance: 12 kms.

Siund-Saran-Ghat Seri-Pashi Villages

One- or two-days treks in Sainj river valley which includes steep climb to the ancient villages of Saran and Pashi villages with very old houses, and distinct local architecture. Ghat Seri has a 6 hectare (approx. 12 acres) sacred grove and is an example of local biological diversity conserved in the forest area.

Distance: 10 kms.

GHNP Treks

Some of the following GHNP routes have been trekked by Park staff with foreign visitors.

Other routes may be explored but visitors must check with Park officials for entry and route permits for obvious safety reasons.

Sainj Valley

A five day trek crossing through the Sainj river valley.

General Route

Day 1: Neuli (1500 m altitude) to Shakti (2100 m altitude).

Night at Park accommodation.

Moderate ascent.

Distance: 22 Km

Day 2: Shakti to campsite at Lower Meadow Bridge in Homkhani Forest (2800 m). Moderate through dense forest, walnut trees, medicinal herbs, etc.

Distance: 6 kms.

Day 3: Rest Day at lower Meadow. Day excursions.

Day 4: Return to Shakti.

Day 5: Return to Neuli.

Total Distance: 56 Km (round trip).

To Dhel (3737 m)- heavy to moderate through dense forest ascent to beautiful high and wide meadow. Great vistas and opportunities for observing wildlife.

Distance: Neuli to Dhel round-trip: 66 kms.

Sainj-Tirthan Valleys

A eight-day trek crossing two valleys. Moderate to strenuous. Experience the transitions between two magnificent valleys.

General Route

Day 1: Neuli (1,500 m) to Shakti (2,100 m).

Night at Park accommodation.

Moderate ascent.

Distance: 22 Km

Day 2: Shakti to Dhel (3,737 m) Heavy-moderate ascent through dense forest, walnut trees, medicinal herbs, etc.
Distance: 11 kms.

Day 3 and 4: Rest days at Dehl.

Day hikes to Jogni (outdoor prayer sites). Fabulous sunrises and sunsets. Early morning hikes with opportunities to observe wildlife (Red Fox, Himalayan Tahrs)

Distance: 4 to 6 kms.

Day 5: Dehl to Guntrao (3,500 m): Strenuous. Moving to higher elevations (4,120 meters). Difficult trail for more than one hour through very narrow path with sheer drops of 200 meters. Good chance of seeing Himalayan Tahr. A long day on the trail. Must be in very good shape, but worth the effort.

Distance: 15 kms.

Day 6: Rest Day at Guntrao: Early morning opportunities for observing Himalayan Tahr and Musk deer.

Day 7: Guntrao to Shilt (3,100 m). Moderate up and down.

Lush bamboo forests, streams and waterfalls. Shilt campsite offers opportunities for evening wildlife.

Distance: 16 kms.

Day 8: Shilt to Gushaini. Steep descent through dense forests. Exiting GHNP into Ecozone.

Distance: 15 kms.

Note: A reverse route of the above trek is also popular.

Distance from Neuli to Gushaini: About 85 kms.

Gushaini to Shilt Hut

Easy to Moderate three day hike from Ecozone into Park.

Day 1: Gushaini (1,500 m) to Rolla (2,100 m). Entry into Park.

Easy day.

Distance: 9 kms.

Day 2: Rolla to Shilt Hut (3,100 m): side trip to Chhordwari waterfall and bamboo forest.

Distance: 7 kms.

Day 3: Shilt to Gushaini: Return.

Total Distance: 30 kms.

Jiwa Nala to Parvati River Valley

A seven-day, very strenuous, dramatic hike crossing the

mountain passes at Kandi Galu (3,627m), and Phangchi Galu (4,636m). Incredible vistas. Must be in excellent physical condition as very demanding with elevation ascent of 2,000 meters and 1,500 meters descent in one day (total up-down, 3,500m in one day!).

Day 1: Neuli (1,650m) - Bhagi Kashahri (2,600m).

Morning visit to Manu Temple (2,200 m). Evening at village school site. Moderate ascent.

Distance: 23 kms.

Day 2: Bhagi Kashahri to Subli (3,300m). Strenuous ascent in early morning (3,600 m). Pass through Kandi Galu notch (3,627m).

Distance 17 kms.

Day 3: Subli to Dwada (3,150m). Relatively easy hike passing through birch forests and meadows.

Distance 6 kms.

Day 4: Rest Day at Dwada: Beautiful meadow surrounded by steep mountain valleys and flowing Jiwanal River. Peaceful and good place to rest after long hike from Subli.

Day 5: Rest Day Dwada: Day hike up to Surtu Glacial Pond in Khandedhar with dramatic mountain backdrops. Opportuni-

ties for wildlife observation including Brown Bear, Snow Leopard, etc.

Distance: 20 kms. round trip.

Day 6: Dwada to Chippi (3,550m): Very strenuous day. Crossing Phangchi Galu Pass (4,636 m) below Khandedhar into Parvati Valley. Continuous steep ascent over rock scree, boulders, and very narrow paths into high alpine meadows, then higher lichen environments. Can be cold and windy. Descent from Phangchi Galu can have deep snow pack and should be done with great care as steep drops and potentially very dangerous. Sublime peace at the higher elevations. Stressful on knees coming down!

Distance: 23 kms.
Day 7: Chippi to Pulga: Easier descent back into forests and meadows, ending at village of Pulga.

Distance: 18 kms.

Total Distance: 110 kms.

Up To Tirath/Tirthan Valley

Day 1: Gushaini (1,500m) to Rolla (2,100m): Walk through Ecozone of GHNP. Gentle gradient at the beginning of trek.

Distance: 10 kms.

Day 2: Rolla to Nada (3,300m)
Thach: Moderate to strenuous climb through oak and conifer forests. A prominent tree god near Chalocha (2,450m) from where the climb starts. Possible sightings of Himalayan Tahr or Black Bear. Nada thach (meadow) very good for bird watching. Distance: 12 kms.

Day 3: Nada Thach to Majhoni (3,800m): Gradual to steep descent through forests. Distance: 12 kms.

Day 4: Majhoni to Tirath (4,000m) and back Majhoni: Moderate gradient leading into the vast meadow of Tirath Offering views of magnificent mountain panoramas. Tirath, the origin of Tirthan river has a glacial lake which is sacred to the villagers of Tirthan valley. Vegetation is stunted showing influence of extreme cold temperatures. Distance: 8 kms.

Day 5: Trek from Majhoni to Nada Thach. Distance: 12 kms.

Day 6: Rest day at Nada. Bird watching.

Day 7: Nada Thach to Rolla-descent. Distance: 12 km.

Day 8: Rolla to Gushaini. Distance: 10 km.

Raktisar in Sainj Valley

Day 1: Neuli (1,500 m) to

Shakti (2,100 m) village.
Night at Park accommodation. Moderate ascent. Distance: 22 Km

Day 2: Shakti to Parkachi (3,000m) thach. Trek along the Sainj river. Gradual ascent. Distance: 10 kms.

Day 3: Parkachi thach to Rakti Sar (4,500 m): Along the river, quite a strenuous ascent through rocky portions. Crossing of streamss along the route is tricky. Distance: 14 kms.

Day 4: Trek from Rakti Sar to Parkachi thach. Strenuous descent. Distance: 14 kms.

Day 5: Rest day at Parkachi. Bird watching. Medicinal herbs.

Day 6: Parkachi thach to Shakti village. Gradual descent. Distance: 10 kms.

Day 7: Shakti village to Neuli. Distance: 22 kms.

Total Distance: 92 kms.

Crossing the Pin Parvati Pass (5,319 meters altitude)

Main attractions: Village house architecture; tree deities; old Forest Rest House at Pulga; panoramic views; alpine and sub-alpine pastures; huge glacial structures at Man-Talai onwards; about 7 to 8 kms. long stretch of snow fields on the Pass; changing vegetation and distinct bird, mammal, butterfly life.

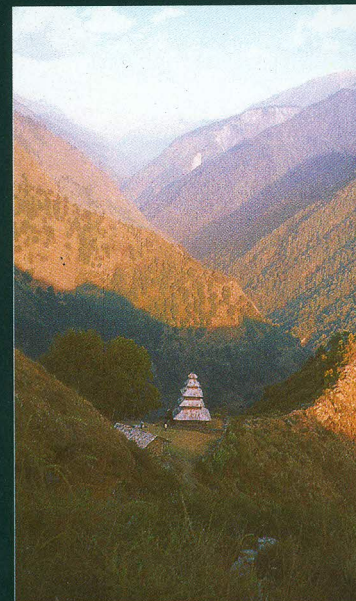


Trekking in the Great Himalayan National Park is a unique experience. From vast vistas of the mountain ranges to the small details of flowers, lichens, and granite crystals; from the morning calls of the Koklash pheasants reverberating in the forest, to the growl of a leopard's warning at night; from easy trails in the Ecozone to strenuous ascents to the high glacial passes, Nature embraces you. The Great Himalayan National Park is a never-ending source of challenge, delight, and celebration.

Come Discover Himachal's Wild Frontier!



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1. Dr. A.J. Gaston, Canadian Wild Life Service, assisted in the creation of GHNP.
2. Manu Temple, Shenshar Valley
3. Snow scape from Dhel (3,737m)



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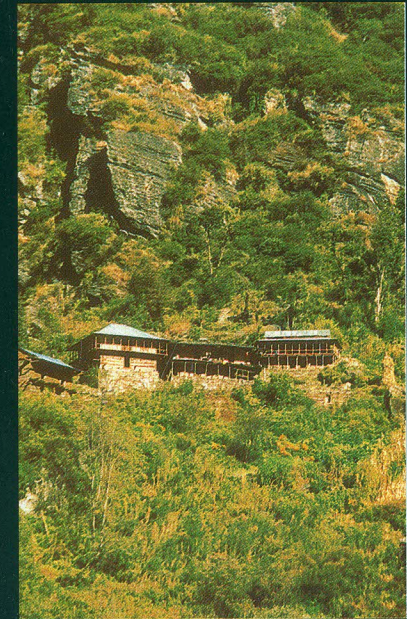
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4. Pin Parvati Pass (5,319m) trek
5. Talyara Tower, Shenshar Valley
6. Waterfall on way to Mantalai

7. Sai Ropa Tourist Centre
8. Shakti Village, Sainj WL Sanctuary
9. Paddy fields in Shenshar Valley



7



8



9

Conserving the Western Himalayan Environment



10



11



12



13

- 10. *Rhododendron arboreum*
- 11. *Jurinea* (dhoop)
- 12. *Impatiens* (violet flower)
- 13. *Pychrorhiza karoo*



GREAT HIMALAYAN NATIONAL PARK

ग्रेट हिमालयन नेशनल पार्क

SHAMSHI, KULLU, HP - 175 126, INDIA
PHONE : +91-1902-65320 - E-Mail : dirchnp@sancharnet.in

Day 1: Shamshi (1,100 m) to Barsheni (2,150 m): by road Trek from Barsheni to Khirganga (2,960 m)

Distance: 10 kms.

A busy trekking route. The sulfur springs at Khirganga are very famous in the area. A number of Sadhus (holy men, hermits) can be seen camping in the vicinity of the springs.

Day 2: Khirganga-Tunda Bhuj (3,285 m) to Thakur Kuan:

Trek is less disturbed, goes through conifer forests, open meadows and birch forests. The journey may be broken in two days, up to Tunda Bhuj (area with high altitude birch forests) in one day and then from there to Thakur Kuan, the next day.

Distance: 19 kms

Day 3: Thakur Kuan to Pandupul (3,700 m) to Mantalai (4,200 m):

This part of trek is above tree line in high altitude meadows full of medicinal herbs, alpine grasses, bees and butterflies during summer season. It should be done in two days: up to Pandupul in one day and next day to Mantalai.

Distance: 20 kms.

Day 4: Mantalai to Pin Parvati Pass (5,319 m) to base of the snow field in Pin Valley (4,075 m):

This is the most strenuous part of

the Pin Parvati Pass trek. It involves a steep ascent from Mantalai to the Pass and then a descent into the Pin valley. About six to seven kms trek is on snow fields filled with potentially dangerous crevices. Weather may change any time at the Pass.

Distance: 14 kms

Day 5: Rest day at the base of Pass in Pin Valley.

Day 6: Base of the snow field in Pin Valley to Tariya or near Mud: Trek through arid zone of the cold desert in Pin Valley. The arduous part of the trek is over, but watch out for crossing of streams on the way. This part of trek can be done in two days with a stopover in between.

Distance: 11 kms.

Day 7: Tariya/Mud to Maling road head onwards by road to Kaza (3,600 m):

Mud is the first village to come by. The trekker may hire a pony or one of the famous Chamurti bred Tibetan horses to ride up to the roadhead. Distance: 15 kms.

Total Distance: 90 kms.

Note: A trained guide is required to cross the pass.

Four Personal Impressions

Tony Gaston (Ottawa, Canada)

I first visited the upper Beas Valley in 1969, when Manali had only two guest houses and a government run tourist bungalow; when Manikaran could scarcely be reached by jeep, and before the road up the valley and across Rohtang Pass was funneling a thousand trucks a week into Lahaul and Spiti. I loved the valley then, but already it was clear that natural ecosystems were in retreat. In fact, after several visits to Himachal in the early 1970s, I began to believe that there was no such thing as an undisturbed temperate forest in the state.

Then, in 1973, inspired by Penelope Chetwode's book (*End of the Habitable World*) on Kullu, my wife, Anne-Marie and I trekked across the Bashleo Pass from Rampur to Inner Seraj and saw for the first time the wonderful forests of the Upper Tirthan. It was that trek, through luxuriant oak and rhododendron forests, beside crystal, sparkling streams, seeing signs of bears, martins and leopards, and hearing the hoarse calls of the Koklas Pheasants at dawn, that convinced me that the true ecology of the Western Himalayas still existed in these remote valleys. From those early glimpses grew the Himachal Wildlife Project, the dream and hard work of many, both in India and abroad. Through this vision, the tenacity of Forest Officers, and local enthusiasts, the great wilderness area known now as Great Himalayan National Park was created.

No one could reach the high meadows of Tirath or Dhel and be unmoved by the clearness of the air, the great vista of the peaks, and that sense of freedom that comes with leaving behind all artificial light, all mechanical transport, all trace of industrial civilization. The headwaters and high peaks of Inner Seraj have been places of pilgrimage for local people since time immemorial. Once again they can be places of veneration for a new generation of pilgrims. Those for whom wilderness and the creatures that depend upon it are symbols of a better world: a world of harmony, where nature lives out its age-old drama of life and death, unaffected by the dissonance of the modern world.

But beware! If you venture into the Himalayan wilderness, you run the risk of becoming a stranger in the common world. We who have been brushed by these places are forever changed; the goals of

ambition and desire become muted when touched by the immensity and grandeur of the great mountains. To wander alone in these high places, however briefly, is to become a prey to yearnings that can never be extinguished or denied. Even in the cities of the West, my mind returns ever and again to that beauty, that awe, that freedom, that I knew where the Sainj and Tirthan are born, among the snowy peaks. To deny such experiences to future generations by failing to protect such places now would be an act of enormous folly. The Great Himalayan National Park is a jewel in the crown of Himalaya.

G.S. Rawat (Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun)

September 1999, Pin-Parvati Pass Trek

September 9, 1999 happens to be one of the memorable days of my recent journey in the Himalayan mountains. I was one among the 29 members who crossed the treacherous Pin-Parvati Pass (5,319 m) in Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh (HP). My memory is vivid with the early afternoon of that day when I was alone for some time. As I stood on a large ice field near the pass, awestruck by the majesty of Great Himalayan snow peaks all around, I thanked my stars for being there. The weather had just cleared after a brief snowstorm and our prospects of crossing the pass seemed brighter. However, the mountain slopes below the ice field were still under cloud cover.

Blowing my numb fingers and wiping my running nose, I looked for Punjab Singh, our guide and relentless hero of the trek. He was nearly 20 m ahead of me, poking a bamboo stick into the ice (to look for the crevices) and gradually moving ahead. Nearly 45 years old, little over 6 feet tall with solid built, and popularly known as "Ibex" among his friends, Punjab Singh serves as a Beat Officer in Kibber Wildlife Sanctuary. Our team leader Mr. Sanjeeva Pandey, Director, Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP), Mr. A.C. Sharma (DFO Parvati Valley), their staff members and porters were waiting for our signals some 300 m below the ice field. Mr. V. Jishtu from State Forest Research Institute, Shimla and Mr. Inder Paul, a 52 year old photographer from Shimla, were the other team members.

At around 13:30 hrs, Punjab Singh had left us behind discarding an easier looking approach towards the pass, and taken a more difficult detour. This, coupled with rough weather and ill health of a few members, had caused some of us to be very concerned. Other teammates had even raised serious doubts about Punjab Singh's knowledge of the area and proposed to return back to the base camp

that was some 4 kms down the valley. I had been asked to closely follow Punjab Singh and find out from him whether he was very sure about the route, and also assess if all the party members would be able to negotiate the trail left by him. I had a walkie-talkie to maintain a constant communication with our party.

I called Punjab Singh back to the place where I was standing and expressed our concern. He came smiling, showed me location of the pass and explained that no one could be absolutely sure about the approach in such areas due to ever changing snow and ice conditions. He also told us that the easy looking approach, which he had decided against, ended at a steep ice wall that could not be climbed without proper mountaineering gear. Only then did I realize why one trekking party had returned back to Manikaran two days before, following an unsuccessful attempt at crossing the pass. From Punjab Singh's facial expressions I could clearly read his silent message: "You guys better believe and follow me without wasting time."

It was already 14 30 hrs. We feared if the party didn't cross the pass before 17 00 hrs or so, it could result in a disaster as we didn't have enough equipment to camp on the snow and the weather could change at anytime. Some of trekkers were in suffering due to insufficient clothing and bad shoes. Immediately I contacted Mr. Pandey stating that Punjab Singh had taken the best possible route and the team should advance without any further delay. After half an hour or so the team members started arriving on the ice field one by one, cheered by Mr. Pandey and Mr. Sharma. Punjab Singh continued his ice poking forays and led the group steadily towards the pass. By 16:30 hrs all of us were on the pass greeting and hugging each other! I could see the tears of joy streaking on the cheek of our team leader. Having offered our prayers for a wonderful and lucky day we quickly descended on the other side of the pass to a place called Thangpat (5,000 m) before it was dark.

That was the fourth and most crucial day of our Pin Parvati Pass trek, which started on 6th September, 1999 from Barshaini village (2,150 m) in Parvati Valley. Although several trekking parties and local shepherds have traversed through the Pin Parvati Pass, it still remains a remote trek largely due to its rugged and distant terrain. The inner area of Parvati valley has recently been included in GHNP and it adjoins Pin Valley National Park. These protected areas, flanked by Rupi-Bhaba Sanctuary on the east, form one of the richest biodiversity and contiguous conservation areas in Himachal Pradesh.

Arnold Lippin (Brooklyn, New York)

Sainj-Tirthan Trek, October 2000

At 57 years I had just been downsized after working 30 years. Payson, my closest friend of 38 years, calls with an invitation to go trekking in a new national park in the Indian Himalayas. Although I have savings to tide me over, I feel I should be looking for another job, and decline. As soon as I hang up I realize this is the wrong decision and call back to accept. I am warned to get in good physical shape and start riding my bicycle everywhere in the city to build up my stamina, breath, and strength.

We arrived at Neully the starting point of our seven-day trek through the Sainj and Tirthan river valleys. The first day is 21 km of easy walking along wide trails adjacent to the Sanij River. We pass numerous villages with corn drying on the roofs and people preparing their fields with oxen and wooden ploughs. In one of the villages we eat delicious roasted corn and our offered payment is only accepted with much insistence.

At dusk, I round a bend in the trail to see a flash of red crossing before me. Payson catches the last of its form as the large bird disappears into the forest. We have been blessed with a sighting the rare (and never photographed in the wild), Western Tragopan. This great pheasant is symbol of the Great Himalayan National Park which we are about to enter and we take it to be a very good omen.

The river is a constant rushing companion, strewn with giant boulders deposited by eons of moving water. We stop at the highest waterfall in the Park, a long slender cascade of water broken at the top by the streams feeding it. I wonder where all the water comes from. We finally arrive at the Shakti rest house. Kimi Ram, our cook, whose eyes sparkle with laughter and kind energy, has whipped up a meal of potato, dahl and chapatis (tortilla-like bread) before I can unpack my sleeping bag.

The next day is a 12 km hike to Dhel. I am warned it is a steep ascent (from 2,100 meters to 3,700 meters, or close to one mile). This is beyond my hiking experience so it is pointless to imagine what to expect. Ashish, our 24-year old crew leader, offers trekking advice: "Breathe through your nose and to determine the appropriate pace, follow your breath." I become aware that if I go too fast I start loosing my breath and with it my physical and psychological strength. So, I heed his words and follow my breath. I reflect inwardly at how

similar this is to my years of martial arts and meditation practice. Ashish continues: "When the going gets difficult *pay attention* to what you are doing. If you want to look around, stop and look, then continue." I find he's right and this enhances the experience of both walking and looking and am reminded of the admonition to *pay attention* at Zen sitting sessions. I feel I'm moving slowly and take short rest stops just sufficient to recharge. I am one of the first to arrive at Shakti and Ashish laughs.

A village dog joined our party the first day. After we set camp, he becomes very alert and points to a knoll at the forest's edge about 75 yards away. There we see a Red Fox, with its characteristic white tipped tail tip. The beautiful fox is unconcerned by our presence and watches us as we watch him. It is a pure moment in nature. The fox then nonchalantly, returns to the woods.

Sanjeeva, the Park director, suggests we hike up to a ridge above camp for sunset. At the top, is a small Hindu shrine. Three men join us coming up from the valley below. They add some red flags to the shrine, say their prayers of thanks, and offer us some walnuts they have gathered on the way up. I wonder who they are and where they came from. We gaze across the deep valley filled with green trees and dotted with an occasional village, like a lichen on the landscape. There are mountains upon mountains in the distance changing to treeless brown at their tops. Some are peaked with snow. We sit in silence as the Sun sets in the west and simultaneously a full moon rises in the east. Sanjeeva notes that this is an auspicious moment.

We're up at 5:00am to greet the dawn and to observe any large mammals. We scatter through the woods in an area where one of the Park rangers has found Himalayan Brown Bear scat. The ground is also turned over by their digging. Earlier, this same ranger had identified leopard scat with dog hair in it on the trail. Perhaps this is as close as I want to get. I sit quietly for an hour on a ridge, waiting, watching. The birds awake nosily to greet the Sun's welcoming warmth. No animals are sighted but I feel peaceful and very much present in all this beauty.

We enjoy a full rest day ending up on the ridge for another sunset. Two foresters, Thanedar and Balakram, have come up from Tirthan Valley, where we are headed, to be our guides. They look to be my age but I am told they are ten years younger. Thanedar often scans the surroundings with eagle eyes. Balakram, is thin and wiry, and I'm told he knows these mountains like I know my neighborhood. He

looks at me with smiling eyes which also have a hint of seriousness that comes from understanding Nature.

Next morning we are off early for our descent into the Tirthan valley. We start ascending to 4,100m. I am learning not to take what is said too literally. At the top of a ridge we rest, bask in the sun, and treat our eyes to the ever-present magnificent vistas. I'm feeling good thinking the hard part is over. But then, the descent starts for real. Sanjeeva says we must stick together as it is a dangerous trail. I find myself on a very narrow path which is only as wide as my foot. On my left is a sheer rock wall and on my right an abyss into a deep canyon. Balakram, a seasoned forester, is directly behind me carrying a three-foot ice ax. As my right foot slides a little, his axe is immediately implanted between me and the abyss. My pride is stung as I consider myself athletic, sure-footed, and careful. The feeling passes immediately. I realize he is there to help and we are all responsible for each other moving on a trail above the long fall below.

We stop at a small ledge and huddle together for a rest. Payson breaks out the special milk and sugar *chapati*, his Indian sister-in-law, Harmesh, made for the trip, to give us extra energy. We share them and our porters smile with appreciation and praise. Suddenly Blue Tahr (large, mysterious mountain goats) are spotted 100 yards below us feeding on the vegetation. Payson pulls out the video camera and scrambles to the edge, seemingly oblivious to his precarious position. I know how enthusiastic and focused he can get. As I follow him, I feel an internal jolt realizing that there is precious little safety margin. I grab his ankle in a viselike grip as he strains over the ledge toward the Blue Tahr. We get our footage and the sure-footed Tahr dash away, covering the distance it took us 45 minutes to pass in five! We crawl slowly and carefully back. My eyes meet Payson's and we silently acknowledge our exhilaration.

At the bottom of the descent, my expectation that we are almost at our next camp is dashed. I must now muster additional physical and psychological resolve for trekking two more hours. It is near dark when we arrive and my usual ability to generate heat is flagging. Fortunately, the tents have just gone up and I get into my down bag for a sorely needed sleep. Payson wakes me with a bowl of miso (soy) soup that he has brought from the US. It is fortified with fresh garlic and I feel the comforting warmth return to my body. This was a

difficult and demanding day that pushed me to my limits. I would not have changed a minute of it.

The next evening after another rest day is the important Indian holiday, the Dushehra. We celebrate with a big campfire and song. A cooking pot becomes a drum. Payson joins in with his flute. The young porters and older guides all sing. They are traditional songs telling of shepherds, love, life in the mountains and the gods who protect them. Smiling eyes sparkle in the firelight and voices rise and fall with the flames. We are all happy, new friends.

During our last day's descent, Balakram spots a Ghoral deer about 50 yards away in the dense forest. I am finally able to find it with the aid of the binoculars and much prompting. I can't believe he found it with his naked eye. As we move down the trails I marvel at the change of the ecology: sparse scrubby vegetation changes to bushes. Alpine meadows transform into denser forest and bamboo groves. My book learning becomes a concrete, experiential reality.

As we wait at the trail end for our jeep, I reflect on this experience. I encountered physical and psychological challenges and found greater self-knowledge in meeting them. There was the vast variety of natural beauty: forests, water falls, rushing rivers, vistas of the infinite mountain ranges. My body, mind, and heart have expanded. These experiences, pictures, and impressions will be part of me for the rest of my life.

Payson R. Stevens (Del Mar, California)

October 2000, Jiwanal-Parvati Trek:

This trek was one of the peak Nature experiences of my life (along with trekking in Antarctica, the Grand Canyon, and the Nepal Himalaya). GHNP is a gift from the people of India to the people of the world. It is a tangible symbol of their effort to protect a dwindling and unique environment for posterity.

One moves through many zones of the forest: from lush lowlands up into the arid and cold higher elevations. Nature is constantly changing and reminding you of how life adapts at so many levels. The trek, at times, is very strenuous. If you're going to do this one, make sure you work out for three months in advance to get in shape. Your breath and stamina must be strong. Trekking Phanchi

Galu is hard work but the rewards and visions will become part of your great life memories. I could continue with superlatives but perhaps this poem, written as we ascended through the Phanchi Galu Pass (4636 meters), will provide another kind of impression.

phanchi galu pass

let the cold pure wind
empty my lungs
here under the silhouette
crags and stars.
freeze my past
and leave it behind
as one ice crystal
on the alpine grass.

let the air currents
empty my mind
as i balance each step
for i have dreamt of the
snow leopard
beckoning me onward
to a place i've studied
and now visit;
no more symbols,
no more science,
almost no more art;
silence.

let the wind stop
so i can collect my thoughts.
let the wind start
so i can let them go.
last words taken on the thermals.

let the mountain devtas*
take my breath
transform my thought
into energy;
here at the high pass
i offer my life
to the wind.

*gods

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Other Attractions

The Park and Kullu region offers excellent opportunities for bird watching, wildlife viewing, religious pilgrimages, cultural tours, and viewing local crafts and craft creation. There are options of rafting, climbing, fishing, attending a village festival, viewing local architecture, and sacred groves.

The Park itself has two facilities for tourists: a tourist center at Sai Ropa and an Information Center at Larjee.

The Sai Ropa Tourist Center

Sai Ropa located five kms away from Banjar and 5 kms before the Gushaini entrance to the Park. Nestled in the pine forest, the Tourist Center spreads over 3 hac. (six acres) area. It is also the headquarters of Tirthan Wildlife Range Office from where entrance ticket to the Park can be obtained.

The Center has a Forest Rest House, a building housing two dormitories (20 beds in all), a photo exhibition, a conference/training room with projection facilities, and a hall with photo exhibition about the Park. Outside, there is a 520 m long

“Biodiversity Trail” which has trees and medicinal plant species transplanted from the Park; a pergola (gazebo) with Tirthan river view; a demonstration site for vermicomposting; a butterfly enclosure, and a solar energy demonstration site.

The Larji Information Center

Larji caters to the tourists coming to GHNP. It has a hall with training and projection facility for tourists, school children, and the village community. It is well located for orientation from Neuli or Gushaini. A small hall has Park educational displays. Park brochures, posters and entry ticket to the Park can be obtained here. The headquarters of Jiwanal Range Officer is also located here. In the open area of the Center, there is a pergola (gazebo), and information displays.

Local Architecture

The majority of the buildings in the Ecozone of GHNP are made of wood, stone, and mud in the traditional hill style and blend in well with the environment. They typically have expansive upstairs verandahs with arched facades and slate roofs. Many also have

intricate external carvings. This is one of the few places left in the region where the majority of buildings are made in the traditional style.

Places of Religious Importance

The GHNP region has a distinct cultural mystique. The remote villages still have Devta or deity institutions which local people respect. The Ecozone villages of Lapah and Ghat Seri have sacred tree groves. Almost every village has a temple and community ground. Some of the old temples are of great architectural interest to the tourist. These include: the Pagoda style temple of Manu Rishi; Thakur's tower in Shenshar valley; the temples of Gushaini and Galiard with their wooden carvings in Tirthan valley. However, modern television culture and market forces are now visible in the villages and are affecting the ancient institutions of Devta and village councils.

Pilgrimage Sites

These sites are located at high altitudes accessible only in Summer and Fall months. Leather articles are not allowed in the

immediate vicinity. Three important sites include:

- Raktisar, at the headwaters of the Sainj river,
- Hanskund, at the headwaters of the Tirthan,
- Sirikhand Mahadev, a lake on the southern border of the Park.

Festivals

Village *melas* (fairs or festivals) occur year-round. They are colourful, multiple-day celebrations where the village gods are brought together for a consultation. One can watch the human spokesperson for the god (*gur*) go into a trance and tell local stories, answer questions, and interact with the village community. Local songs and dances are also performed and villagers dress in the best traditional costumes. Respectful observation by outsiders is welcomed. The following are popular seasons for *melas*.

Late Winter

In February, the four-day festival of Fagli is celebrated in the villages near edge of Park (Pekri, Nahi, Tinder, and Phredi). This is a secular, joyous festival with masked dances. There is also a one-month festival from mid-

January onwards in which families visit their relatives and special food is eaten.

Spring-Fall

April village fairs are held in Tinder, Bathad, and Chipni; in May at Banjar; in June at Shangarh; in August at Galiard and Mashiar, and in September at Goshaini and Nahi. They offer excellent shopping opportunities for local craft and other items.

Fall

In October the Dushera Festival is a unique event when approximately three hundred villages bring their local deities (*devtas*) by road to camp at the fairground of the city of Kullu. This provides an opportunity for observing the variety of local deities, rituals associated with the festival and shopping for various local handicraft as well as other items of interest.

Information

Important Note

The information provided for trekking is intended as a general guide and may not be fully accurate for trek planning. Please consult GHNP officials or SAHARA for more detailed information.

Visitors intending to stay overnight in the National Park will need to carry their own tents, sleeping bags, rations and other overnight trekking supplies. Organized treks can be arranged through SAHARA. Necessary permits should be obtained in advance from above mentioned officials. There are 14 patrolling huts (rain/snow shelters without any furniture, or other facilities) inside the Park for the use of Park officials and visitors.

Rest Houses/Transit Accommodation

Other Rest houses/transit accommodation are available in the vicinity of the Park and include:

Forest Rest House,

Aut. c/o Divisional Forest Officer, Mandi, Himachal Pradesh

Public Works Department Rest House

(PWD RH), Larji. c/o Executive Engineer, Kullu Division No II, Kullu, Himachal Pradesh.

PWD RH

Banjar - Larji. c/o Executive Engineer, Kullu Division No II, Kullu, Himachal Pradesh.

Forest Rest House,

Sainj c/o Divisional Forest Officer, Seraj, Banjar, Dist. Kullu, Himachal Pradesh.

Forest Rest House,

Bandal c/o Divisional Forest Officer, Seraj, Banjar, Dist. Kullu, Himachal Pradesh.

Transit Accommodation,

Sairopa c/o Director, GHNP, Shamshi, Distt. Kullu, Himachal Pradesh.

One room accommodation at Lapah village in Sainj valley

c/o Director, GHNP, Shamshi, Dist. Kullu, Himachal Pradesh.

PWD Rest House

Bathad. - Assistant Engineer, Banjar (Kullu), Himachal Pradesh.

Village level private guest houses are being developed at Shangarh and Gushaini. Gushaini presently has one good private guest house run by Mr. Rajiv Bharti.

Reservations

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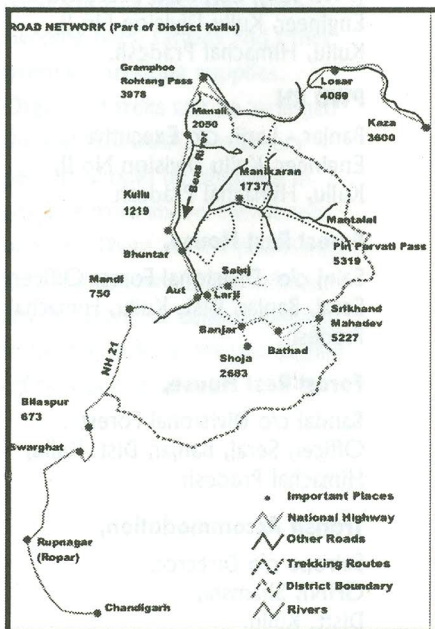
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Koklash



A woman from Shakti village



Pin Parvati Pass: a crevasse (5,200m)



A wild flower in Tirthan Valley

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Front Cover: Trekkers near Phanchi Galu (4,636m)

Back Cover : Western Tragopan, mascot of GHNP.
Courtesy : World Pheasant Association International