



# DEEP INTO THE HIMALAYAS: THE CLIMB TO POON HILL

TAHMEED CHAUDHURY

Ever since I saw the silhouettes of the Himalayan peaks during my last trip to Nepal, I've been taken over by this deep fascination for mountains and a dream of going higher and closer to the sky. It was a dream I was persistent to conquer and thus, I spent all my savings in doing so.

Despite having zero experience in trekking, a fitness level below the minimum standards, and strong opposition from my loved ones, I was determined to pursue my goal and I set off for the Himalayan Mountains during the Eid break last month.

On the 12th of September, I took a flight from Dhaka to Kathmandu and managed the remaining trekking gear that I needed. My permit was ready; thanks to my friend and travel agent, Bimal. The next day I completed the rest of my errands by that night and took a bus to Pokhara, the access town of my trek. Having taken a day to relax in Pokhara, I set off for the trek with my guide, Krishna, the following day.

September 14 began with a two hour cab ride to Nayapul (1070m), which was the entry point to the Annapurna conservation area and hence, the start of my trek. The destination for the day was Ulleri, a village located 2050 meters above sea level. I hiked for 3 hours through a dense forest, suspension bridges and over the famous Modi khola (*khola* means River in Nepalese) before stopping for lunch at a teahouse in a small village called Tikhedunga (1570m). The climb to

Ulleri from Tikhedunga was the most arduous part of the journey with the trail composing entirely of 3300 steep stone steps. I had to take several breathers along the way before reaching Ulleri (2050m) after three excruciatingly painful hours.

Having spent the night in Ulleri, I woke up to an upbeat mood the next day. The crisp air, cool breeze, and majestic views of hills and greenery were made even sweeter when the clouds cleared up and the south Annapurna peak appeared at the horizon. With a buzzing mind, I left for Ghorepani after breakfast with hopes of finding even better views by the end of the day.

Although it was not as hard as the climb to Ulleri, the steep trail towards Ghorepani exhausted me and made my thighs sore. However, the lush green forest, the waterfalls, and the pony caravans (which are used for transporting goods to the mountains) I saw along the way, dwarfed all the hardship. I reached Ghorepani (2860m) at noon after a four hour hike and checked in to the Dhaulagiri View Hotel, aptly named for being a viewpoint of the Dhaulagiri peak. Having spent the day walking around the village and chitchatting with some of the many trekkers from around the globe, I

went to bed early, eagerly anticipating the forthcoming day.

I woke up at 4 am on the next day to climb up to Poon Hill for the sunrise, which was the main purpose of the short trek. The trek to Poon Hill from Ghorepani took 45 minutes and by the eve of sunrise I was there, stunned, enthralled, swept off my feet. Mt. Dhaulagiri, Mt. Annapurna, Mt.

Machupuchhare (Fishtail), Mt. Manaslu, and others stood in all their glory, creating a panoramic view, towering above the clouds and reaching for the skies. I watched on as the sun harmonically illuminated them with a golden yellow glow, making them more prominent. As the cool breeze chilled my soul, I stood there gazing with beaming eyes and a dropped jaw, soaking in the feeling, having forgotten all the hard-

ships of life. All the pain, sweat and difficulties I had to overcome just for this view suddenly seemed so trivial and completely worth it.

After returning to my lodge in Ghorepani for breakfast, I trekked towards my stop for the day: Tadapani (2550m). The trail was completely downhill through a dense forest. The climb uphill strained my thighs but the trek downhill

was hard on the knees. Having spent the night in Tadapani, I left early in the morning for the last stop of my trek: Ghandruk (1950m). The hike downhill to Ghandruk was relatively easy and had splendid views along the way. Ghandruk is a beautiful village, home to the famous Gurung tribe. The place was surprisingly well developed despite being miles away from the city boasting western style hotels, massage parlours, and restaurants. The surroundings were quite magnificent too, with museums, Tibetan monasteries, schools and finely cut barley fields making it a must visit place for trekkers and tourists.

Having wondered about for a while after lunch, I trekked for an hour before reaching a bus stop from where local buses and jeeps take tourists to central Pokhara. One can choose to trek to the city as well, but I decided I had enough and hopped on a jeep, thus ending my adventurous, soul lifting trek.

As hard as it is, trekking is indeed rewarding: it is worth all the misery at the end. The decision to go on this adventure was a hectic and confusing one, and for the first time I ignored all the possible adversities and interventions to make this trip. I returned with no regrets and memories that will last a life time.

John Muir once quoted "The Mountains are calling and I must go." And I went. I can't wait to go again.

*Tahmeed Chaudhury is a diehard Liverpool fan and procrastinator who is finding it hard to come up with a catchy blurb. Send him ideas at tahmeed789@gmail.com*

