



Gokyo Lake

THE GREAT HIMALAYAN TRAIL

Shakil's story of
PERSEVERANCE

According to The Great Himalaya Trail, a Nepal-based website that works to promote GHT adventures, 32 mountaineers from all over the world had successfully conquered the GHT as of September 2019.

MD ABBAS AND SAJJAD HOSSAIN

"Throughout the journey, death knocked at my door several times, but I never lost my focus, I never gave up," said Ikramul Hasan Shakil, the intrepid conqueror of the Great Himalaya Trail (GHT), home to three of the highest peaks in the world.

He is the first Bangladeshi to successfully complete the 1,700km GHT in Nepal by the upper mountain route. It took him only 109 days to complete this mammoth task.

Robin Boustead, a Spaniard travel guru, completed the GHT between 2008 and 2009 and later he wrote a book titled "Nepal Trekking and the Great Himalaya Trail: A Route & Planning Guide" detailing the remote and challenging route.

After the publication of his book, more mountaineers started exploring the GHT.



Kanchenjunga Base Camp

concept, if completed, it would be the longest and highest alpine hiking track in the world.

Shakil's GHT dream and preparations

Before embarking on the Great Himalayan Trail, Shakil received training in India. He completed basic mountain training from India's Nehru Institute of Mountaineering in 2014, and later, in 2018, he received advanced training from the same institute.

During the Covid-19 lockdown, Shakil spent his time doing his favourite thing – researching mountains across the globe. During that period, he first came to know about the Great Himalayan Trail. The difficulty, challenges and beauty of this mega trail instantly hooked him up and set his goal of conquering it.

Over the next two years, he diligently

Kanchenjunga Base Camp.

Earlier, on July 10, 2022, Shakil left Dhaka for Nepal's capital, Kathmandu. After completing all necessary formalities, he set off for Nepalganj on July 26, taking a bus from Kathmandu. From Nepalganj, he reached Simikot and began his trekking expedition from there.

On the morning of July 28, Shakil started on a four-day trek, eventually reaching the village of Hilsa at an altitude of 3,642 meters.

During his expedition, he accidentally took the wrong routes multiple times due to the less-travelled route. It took him one or two days to get back on track.

The adverse experiences

As he recounted his extraordinary experience, he faced and overcame a myriad of challenges, including numerous landslides and other formidable obstacles along the way while completing the trek.

"I had to bypass Sherpani Col Pass (6,155 meters) and Amphu Labtsa Pass (5,845 meters) in inclement weather relying solely on the direction of locals. However, I did not change the upper route," Shakil said.

"I encountered at least 40 massive landslides and conquered 29 mountain passes, with 14 of them soaring beyond 5,000 meters, en route to my final destination", he shared in a conversation with The Daily Star on Wednesday (August 2).

Describing one of his most remarkable moments, he recollected, "While crossing Makalu National Park, I had to alter my route due to a colossal landslide. The path was severely damaged by glaciers and fierce weather."

During the landslide, he and his guide, along with their porter, sustained injuries.

After receiving first aid in Namche Bazaar, a town in Khumbu Pasanglhamu Rural



Gunsa, Kanchenjunga National Park



Shakil's belongings during the trek



Tashi Labtsa Pass



On the way to Tilman Pass



On the way to Larkey La Pass



Upper Dolpo



I encountered at least 40 massive landslides and conquered 29 mountain passes, with 14 of them soaring beyond 5,000 meters, en route to my final destination.

Ikramul Hasan Shakil



However, the successful conquerors' number shows how difficult the task is.

According to The Great Himalaya Trail, a Nepal-based website that works to promote GHT adventures, 32 mountaineers from all over the world had successfully conquered the GHT as of September 2019.

Shakil, 29, has already submitted all relevant documents, including photos and videos to this newspaper supporting his conquest of the GHT.

About Great Himalaya Trail

Since 1997, there were many attempts to traverse the Himalayas by walking, running, and biking, but all of these expedition attempts failed due to restrictions. In 2002, things changed as Nepal opened all her mountain ranges to permit-based trekking.

The first person to take advantage of this was Rosie Swale-Pope, who ran across Nepal in 2003. Her 1700km mid-hills route from Taplejung to Simikot was an early precursor to the current Great Himalaya Trail concept, according to the GHT website.

The Great Himalaya Trail spans across the Himalayas from east to west, covering a total distance of approximately 1,700 kilometres. The idea behind this route was to create a single long distance trekking trail that would stretch from the eastern end to the western end of Nepal.

However, there is a proposed trail of more than 4,500 kilometres stretching the whole length of the Greater Himalaya range from Nanga Parbat in Pakistan to Namche Barwa in Tibet, passing through, India, Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet. Although this only remains a



On the way to Lama Hotel, Syabrubesi

maintained a routine of diet and exercises for the mammoth task ahead.

His daily regimen included running 5 kilometres, cycling 22 kilometres, and dedicating an hour to free-hand exercises. He even experimented with eating less food to extend his survival capabilities.

How it began

On August 1, 2022, Shakil embarked on the main expedition from Hilsa, a village in the northwestern corner of Nepal bordering the Tibet Autonomous Region, passing through various challenging regions including Humla, Mugu, Dolpa, Manang, Gorkha, Ruby Valley, Langtang, Helambu, Gauri Sankar, Solukhumbu, Everest Base Camp, Makalu National Park, until finally reaching

Municipality, Solukhumbu District, he and his guide resumed their expedition.

After a 109-day life-changing trek, he finally reached his ultimate destination, the Kanchenjunga Base Camp.

"When I arrived there at 7:45 am on the morning of July 9, I was left speechless. I cannot possibly convey the emotions I felt at that moment," he said.

Financial distress

Throughout this journey, Shakil had to deal with financial crises while navigating through treacherous routes.

On December 6 last year, due to financial constraints, Shakil had to return to Dhaka from Sapru Base. However, after managing his finances, he resumed his journey on May 16 and

successfully completed the Great Himalayan Trail.

How it all started and accomplishments

His interest in mountain journeys grew back in 2010 when Musa Ibrahim conquered Mount Everest. In 2012, he began summiting domestic mountains, and later, his interest expanded to neighbouring countries.

In February 2013, he conquered Keokradong, the highest peak in Bangladesh, and later summited Tajingdong, another highest peak in the country.

In the same year, Shakil walked from Kolkata to Dhaka in 11 days to raise awareness against drug abuse.

Before this incredible accomplishment, Shakil, born in 1994 in Gazipur, had already conquered several mountains, including Kyajo Ri (6,186 m), Himlung Himal (7,126 m), and Dolma Khang (6,332 m).

Future plans

When asked about his future plans, he said that he is now preparing to conquer Mount Everest and is looking for sponsors. "If I get the sponsors, I will start the journey next year," he added.

Appreciating Shakil's achievement, trekker and mountaineer MA Mohit, who has previously scaled Mount Everest twice, said, "Our youths are scaling new heights. This is highly commendable."

"His accomplishment will inspire more youth in loving nature and mountains", said Muhi, also the president of the Bangla Mountaineering & Trekking Club where Shakil is also a member.