



## IN THE SHADOW OF NANDA DEVI

A classic trek that retraces the pioneering steps of Shipton and Tilman through the Garwhal Himalaya.

### Introduction

The Nanda Devi basin must surely be one of the most legendary regions in the entire Himalayan chain. The mountain itself, revered since time immemorial by all those who live in its shadow, has long attracted the attention of the pioneering mountaineers and explorers, mystics and spiritualists, writers and everyday travellers who have visited the area. Everest may well be the highest peak in the world but the beautiful peak of Nanda Devi must surely be the most fascinating.

The area first came to the attention of the Western world as a result of the 19th century explorations by Traill, Graham and Longstaff but shot to fame in the 1930's when Shipton and Tilman forced a route into the Inner Sanctuary. Nanda Devi is the highest mountain situated completely within India and is surrounded by a ridge wall of nearly 6000m. The only break in this wall is the Rishi Ganga, a wild and seemingly impenetrable gorge. This amazing feat of endurance and determination was capped when Tilman later returned to conquer the peak itself. Sadly, the mystic of the area led to an excess of expeditions and ecological damage and the Sanctuary was closed in the 1980's. Investigations are currently underway to assess the recovery.

Understandably, the country that surrounds the Sanctuary now has its own attractions for walkers and pilgrims alike. The immediate landscape has been beautifully tamed by centuries of low-key habitation and cultivation but the constant backdrop of the mighty Himalayan peaks makes for a magnificence unrivalled elsewhere in the region.

## Route Profile

This classic trek takes us across the picturesque meadows and valleys that border the western edge of the Nanda Devi Sanctuary. Sometimes known as the Curzon Trail after the British Viceroy that enjoyed this area, the route we follow was used by Shipton and Tilman on their amazing journey to the Nanda Devi basin. During the trek there are many views of the surrounding peaks and the Kuari Pass (3658m) itself has an unrivalled panorama of the Great Himalayan peaks including Nanda Devi (7816m), Changabang (6864m), Dunagiri (7066m) and Kamet (7756m). The trails are generally good, being in regular use by local villagers and traders. The trek is not technically difficult but the ascents and descents can be long and feel relentless, especially in hot weather. You should, therefore, have some experience of long distance walking. Surprisingly, this area is not over-trekking and indeed it is uncommon to meet other groups on this route. In keeping with this lack of outside influence, the villagers are still inherently traditional in habit and revere the landscape and nature that surrounds them, a timely reminder to us all. A classic trek, and a must for the keen Himalayan walker.

**Day 1** Arrive in New Delhi and transfer to our hotel. The morning is yours to relax and explore this vibrant city, with its many colourful bazaars, splendid colonial architecture and wonderful restaurants. In the afternoon there is a guided tour of Old and New Delhi. Those who have made their own flight arrangements will join us at the hotel during the day.  
**Hotel**

**Day 2** We take the early morning train to Haridwar, one of the seven holy towns of Hinduism and site of the 12 yearly Kumbh Mela. The town is situated on the edge of the Shivalik foothills, where the Ganges leaves its last rocky gorge and begins a 2000km journey across the plains to the Bay of Bengal. We then transfer to private vehicles to drive along the River Ganges, past Rishikesh to Deo Prayag, stopping for lunch along the way. An enjoyable drive takes us through the forested Shivalik foothills to the junction of the Bhagirathi and Alaknanda rivers at

Deo Prayag (618m), where the Ganges proper begins. We then continue on to the bustling little town of Shinigar on the banks of the Ganges. **Hotel**

**Day 3** A full day of driving as we continue through the heart of Garhwal. From Srinagar the road gradually ascends as it follows the Alaknanda Valley through a timeless agricultural landscape. We pass through Rudraprayag (610m), where in the 1920's Jim Corbett shot the "Rudraprayag leopard", a man-eater who allegedly consumed some 125 persons over the years. A commemorative stone marks the spot. The "prayags" are the sacred confluences on the rivers that drain into the Ganges; there are five in all and further along the valley is Karanprayag (832m), situated on the junction of the lovely Pinder River and the Alaknanda. Shortly before Gwaldam we turn off the main road to Debal (1218m) and drive up a switchback track to the road head near Mundoli village (2134m). **Camping**

**Day 4** Our first day of trekking. We leave camp after breakfast and walk to Lohajung Khal (2350m), a grassy ridge with excellent views of the surrounding countryside and our first glimpse of a big peak, Nanda Ghunti (6861m). As we gain distance from the road head, the influences of the modern world quickly fade. Most rural societies still follow the ancient fertility cult of Nanda Devi and strict rituals and customs have created a lifestyle that has changed little over the centuries. After lunch, a steady ascent brings us to the old British rest-house at Wan (2450m) where we set camp on the lawns, as did Shipton and Tilman on their exploratory visit in the 1930's. Here, in the base of a massive deodar tree, is an ancient shrine devoted to Latu, one of Nanda Devi's most significant nature spirits and a living example of the Garwhalis deep belief in the power of the mountain. **Camping**

**Day 5** After a brisk descent, the morning's walk involves a long, sometimes steep ascent along a good stone path through shady forests of oak and chestnut. On reaching a col another steady climb takes us through rhododendron forest, which presents a beautiful show of white, pink and crimson when in flower. We then move above the tree-line through springy turf and rock to reach the high grazing meadow of Bedni Bugyal (3350m). It is said to be one of the most stunning alpine campsites in the Himalaya. The mountains that we glimpsed through the trees now present themselves in a massive wall of dazzling white. Most significant are Trisul (7120m) with its three prongs representing Shiva's trident and Nanda Ghunti. To the northwest are tantalising views of the giants of the Great Himalaya. **Camping**

**Day 6** We retrace our steps down from Bedni Bugyal. After the initial steep descent, we cut across through forest and open ground to a lunch spot in a small meadow some distance above Wan. A gradual ascent brings us to a minor pass, the Kukin Khal (3121m) that marks the watershed between the Kali Ganga and Nandakini rivers that drain the slopes of the Nanda Devi Sanctuary. This is remote country and as such has not suffered from overexploitation. Leopard, jungle cats, barking deer and porcupine are some of the main fauna whilst Lammergier, Himalayan Griffon, Golden Eagle and a variety of kites can be seen in the air. The afternoon walk brings us to a beautiful meadow above the village of Kanol (2900m). Here we make our camp amongst the superb rhododendron that dot the pasture, as did Shipton and Tilman some 70 years before. **Camping**

**Day 7** An excellent day of walking through classic Garhwal scenery. Beyond our campsite lies Kanol village, a traditional Garhwali settlement with stone and slate houses and excellent views of Trisul. Fields are still hand-tilled and provide the villagers with most of their staple foods and a small income from any surplus. From here, a lengthy descent takes us to the Nandakini River where we stop for lunch and a chance to sooth our feet in the cool water. A very pleasant walk in the afternoon takes us on a broad cliff path above the river to pine forest and further villages. Near Sutol village we cross the Nandakini on a solid iron bridge and stop for the night on the right bank. In Shiptons day the crossing of this river necessitated a five-mile excursion upstream. **Camping**

**Day 8** This is the heart of Nanda Devi country as the Nandakini is worshipped as the river of the mountain goddess. Our morning walk takes us up and out of the valley through delightful villages where many social rituals and annual events are still intimately linked to worship of the "mother goddess". Almost every stone, tree and hilltop seems to have some spiritual significance attached to it and a sense of timelessness prevails. After lunch an easy walk followed by steep climb takes us to our campsite above the village of Ramni. From here there are wonderful views. In one direction is the country through which we have been walking and in the other the mighty peaks of Trisul and Nanda Ghunti once more. **Camping**

**Day 9** A less demanding day due to a restricted choice of campsites after lunch. A steady climb through forest brings us to the top of a ridge known as the Ramni pass (3215m) with distant views of the Kuari Pass that we cross in a few days. This is ancient forest with splendid old specimens of gnarled oak, holly, chestnut and rhododendron emerging

from a thick carpet of white and pink flowering peonies. There may be occasional glimpses of monal and other jungle fowl. We camp near Shim Kharak, amongst the trees. The afternoon is yours to relax and enjoy the peaceful beauty of our surroundings. **Camping**

**Day 10** We continue through thick forest to the village of Jhenipani (1524 m) from where a steep descent takes us down the wild Bireh Ganga, a river that caused Shipton and Tilman much frustration during their explorations. The bridge, then a tree-trunk affair, was frequently washed away resulting in some perilous substitutions. Thankfully, the river is now spanned by an impressive suspension bridge built in the post-war period. Not surprisingly, across the bridge is a steep ascent that follows a zig-zag path up the bare and eroded hillside. As we climb we can see the remains of Gohna Lake. In 1893 a great landslip dammed the Bireh Ganga, so creating a massive lake. In the following year, monsoon rains broke the dam and caused a catastrophic flood as far downstream as Srinagar. After lunch a great walk through forest and pastures takes us towards Pana, the last village before the pass. Shortly before the village we cut up to Kaliaghat, a small bugyal or grazing meadow. **Camping**

**Day 11** A fine morning walk today as we head for the base of the Kuari, crossing the last of the bugyals as we go. A steep and sometimes slippery descent takes us to the Pal Gudhera stream and this is immediately followed by a steep climb up through wild crag and forest country. We are following an ancient trade route that linked the southern valleys of Garhwal with Tibet. Goats and sheep carried grain from here over the Kuari and Niti passes into Tibet, with salt and borax being brought on the return trip. The afternoon is spent relaxing at Dhakwani (3210m), a small grazing pasture below the base of the Kuari pass. **Camping**

**Day 12** An early start for the Kuari Pass in order to enjoy the splendours of sunrise on the Great Himalaya. The ascent, that takes less than two hours, follows a zig-zag path to the col (3658m) but the most impressive views are gained from a point further along the Kuari ridge at 4268m. Here, on the divide between the middle and the Great Himalaya the snow capped peaks stretch in a seemingly endless arc, so forming the border with Tibet. Just some of the major peaks visible are Kamet (7070m), Badrinath (7040m), Dunagiri (7066m) and Changabang (6863m), Nilkanth (6600m), the elephant shaped Hathi Parvat (6727m) and of course, Nanda Devi (7817m). After savouring this superb panorama, we descend a little from the main ridge to camp about 280m below the pass. From this

beautiful spot we can, with luck, watch the sunset on the mountains as a perfect end to the day. **Camping**

**Day 13** Our last day of this magnificent trek as we follow a long winding trail downhill to the road at Tapovan (1978m). The walk is steep but pleasant as we descend through meadows and ancient woodland with glimpses of the high Himalaya in the distance. At lower altitudes, village life returns and from here a good path brings us to Tapovan, the last hamlet before the Rishi Ganga Gorge. Tilman and his team halted here before their ascent of Nanda Devi and enjoyed a dip in the nearby sacred hot springs, by bribing the sadhu who guarded the place. From here we rejoin our vehicles and make the short drive down the splendid Dhauliganga Valley to Josimath (1875m), where we arrive for a late lunch. From here it is possible to take the modern ropeway to Auli for spectacular views of Nanda Devi and her surrounding peaks. We return to our simple accommodation in Josimath. **Rest-house**

**Day 14** A full day of driving so a prompt start after breakfast. We follow the Alaknanda River away from the high peaks back to the Shivalik foothills. At Nandprayag the Alaknanda joins with the Nandakini river that we crossed several days ago and a little further on we meet the Pinder at Rudraprayag. From here it is a pleasant drive along the main valley back to Srinigar for the night. **Rest-house**

**Day 15** A shorter drive in the morning brings us back to Haridwar, the most northerly of the holy towns on the Ganges. From here we continue to Delhi by road, arriving in the late afternoon. The remainder of the day\* is yours to enjoy in Delhi. Late evening transfer to the airport to board your return flight home.

**Day 16** Early morning flight to London.

## Trek Notes:

- A "moderate" to "moderately tough" trek at low altitude.
- Average walking time 6 hours.
- 17 day trip, London to London. 10 days trekking with full portorage.
- Maximum altitude 3658m. Average 2700m.
- 2 nights hotels,\*Day room for group use. 3 nights simple rest house, 10 nights camping.

**ACCOMMODATION: DELHI:** We use the 4 star Siddarth Hotel. Facilities include restaurant, bar, swimming pool and it is fully air-conditioned. Elsewhere we use simple guest house accommodation

**NOT INCLUDED:** Air travel\*. Alcohol, bottled water or soft drinks. Entry fees to monuments of historical importance. The Taj Mahal is closed to the public on Fridays.

**TRANSPORT:** Transport is by private car/coach with an English speaking driver.

**SPENDING MONEY:** You should allow about £4 a day for incidentals and tips, perhaps a little more if you enjoy a few beers as these are comparatively expensive in India.

**INSURANCE:** It is a condition of joining any of our tours that you hold adequate insurance cover. This must include medical and personal accident insurance.

**TRAIN TRAVEL.** Train travel is by air-conditioned carriage. Bedding is normally provided free of charge on the train (sheets, pillows and blankets)

**TRAVEL ADVICE:** Essential India is constantly in touch with the UK foreign Office and their advice is followed instantly and to the letter. Our base for many of our workshops is in the State of Himachal Pradesh in Northern India. With friends and family still living there we are kept well informed of any local political developments. Himachal Pradesh has continued to remain unaffected by events in Kashmir. Essential India will travel whenever possible, provided it's safe, enjoyable and in our clients best interests.

**RECOMMENDED READING:** The Lonely Planet India Travel Guide and Rough Guides Travel To India.

## Timings given are approximate

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Whilst every effort is made to keep to the above itinerary, clients will hopefully appreciate that this is adventure travel. Weather conditions, road conditions and vehicle breakdowns can contribute to the need for changes. Your driver/guide will do everything in his power to see that you are inconvenienced as little as possible in such events.

**EQUIPMENT PROVIDED.** We provide 'A' frame or dome tents which have room for two people plus all of your equipment. There is also a dining tent, a toilet tent exclusively for our group use, and a kitchen and staff tent. There are camp chairs or stools, a kerosene/gas lamp or candles for reading in the dining tent at night, stainless steel crockery and tableware and \*foam sleeping mats. (\*subject to

availability) **We strongly recommend you bring your own karrimat or therma-a-rest as well.** The staff complement of cooks and assistants are always in attendance. They put up and take down the tents, make the tea, cook the food, wash the dishes, load the porters and carry a load of their own. They work extremely hard and are always willing to help. If you want to join in putting up tents and taking them down, you are free to do so, but it is not expected.

## A TYPICAL DAY ON TREK

Soon after dawn you are served tea or coffee while still in your sleeping bag. A few minutes later a washing bowl of hot water is placed outside your tent. You can wash inside or outside the tent. Once dressed you can pack your kit-bag/duffel bag and day-pack in preparation for the day's hike, and place these outside the tent. The camp staff will take down the tents. While this is happening, breakfast is served. In the Himalaya breakfast usually consists of cereals and/or porridge with milk, eggs, usually served with chapatis, (unleavened bread that is cooked on a hot iron plate) or pancakes with honey or jam. There is always plenty of tea and coffee. **The camp will be being struck while you are eating, and you will need to be packed and out of your tents before breakfast.**

You can take a leisurely breakfast breakfast will the staff prepare loads for the porters or pack animals. If you have not filled up your water bottle the night before ask the cook to fill your bottle with boiled water. You may also collect a packed lunch, although usually you may have a cooked meal at the lunch stop. Departure from camp could be from any time between dawn and 9.00am, depending on the days itinerary, but generally you will start walking at around 8.00am.

Depending on the length of the day's walk, you will walk for three or four hours before stopping for lunch. The lunch stop will last for about an hour.

You usually arrive at the next camp site by 4:00pm. Camp may already set up by the time you get there, and tea/juice and biscuits will be ready to welcome you. Supper will be ready soon after dark, and will be served in the dining tent or in some instances, around the camp fire. Camp fires will only be made if dead wood is available. The standard of cooking on trek is usually surprisingly good, with the style of cooking being a compromise between local and western food. Menus vary, but typically we start with soup. The main course is often a rice based meal with meat stew or mild curry, plus separate vegetable and salad dishes. A sweet dish is provided after the meal. Our meal is finished with tea, coffee or hot

chocolate. Sometimes a bottle of local spirit is provided by the camp staff, but we advise clients to buy plastic half bottles from duty free. However, you should only drink alcohol when you feel acclimatised. After dinner, the usual practise is for your water bottle to be filled with hot water and used as a hot water bottle for your sleeping bag and for drinking water the next day.

We would like you to enjoy the serenity of the unhurried atmosphere that exists in these wilderness regions. Our day to day camp routine on your trekking adventure is geared to allow you to make the most of your holiday.

**Important:** Before you travel please check your **Tour Voucher** and **Arrival Information** for the latest joining instructions. This will be sent to you upon receipt of final payment.

**All itineraries are subject to change without prior notice.**