

Treks in Upper Subansiri, 2013

Central Arunachal Pradesh

Report

This was my second visit to the Upper Subansiri. In 2005 I had trekked to Bidak in the northeast and to Taksing on the west. Now I returned to explore some lakes, and the famed peak of Takpa Siri which we could not see last time.

The upper Subansiri areas, Nacho and ahead, consists of many lakes. This is a rarity, in a way, in thickly forested Arunachal Pradesh as in most areas one does not find these many lakes. All these lakes are in a deep rocky bowl on high ground, which is also a unique phenomenon. A look at the Google Earth image will amplify this. Tibetans, being Buddhists, have a tradition of visiting lakes and performing a kora - circumambulation. Arunachali tribes are followers of Donyi-polo, worshippers of the sun and moon. Now most tribes have converted to Christianity. They do not visit these lakes for religious purposes anymore, hence apart from a few shikaris travelling in the area, the trails are nonexistent.

One such high altitude lake is Ghaghu Siriu (Siriu is lake), which is situated above Limeking (1220 m). The trail climbs very steeply through forest. Wooden ladders that were put in place have rotted. Moreover one has to climb from Dorjen Mempu (2020 m) on the Subansiri, to Paru (3951 m), Swa Dibin (4000 m) and Point 4781 m to descend to the lake at 3909 m. A proposition that will be challenging due to lack of water and camping places en route and problems related to acclimatisation.

Tradition of Kora

Ghaghu Siriu is in the upper Subansiri valley. The lake situated near the peak of Takpa Siri- one of the three great holy mountains in Tibetan Buddhism. There was a tradition of people performing a kora, (circumambulation) around Takpa Siri, like the kora around the well known peak of Kailash on the Tibetan plateau. The shorter Kora (Kingkor) is performed in about a day, while the Ringkor kora of Takpa Siri was longer and it took 10 days to complete. The Ringkor kora was undertaken by hundreds of Tibetans every 12 years. Unfortunately now, after the 1962 war, the 'Line of Actual Control' cuts across the route of the kora. Thus the route is divided between Chinese and Indian territories and kora is prohibited by armies on both sides. The last such kora was undertaken in 1953.

Hindus in Uttarakhand visit Nanda Devi foothills on a pilgrimage, called 'Nanda Jat' which is also performed every 12 years. This has continued regularly and has now become a huge affair with live TV coverage! This year, 2013, Nanda Jat Yatra was held as per the 12 year cycle. The Takpa Siri

Kora (Ringkor) followed the same pattern and the same years – 1953 was last kora so if it had continued, it would have been undertaken in 2013, according to the 12 year cycle. It is matter of research how Hindu and Buddhist koras in completely different regions follow the same 12 year cycle. This is possibly because both, Hindus and Buddhist follow the moon calendar, which calculates dates and years accordingly. But there are few variations which needs study.

Our treks

Reaching Dibrugarh from Mumbai, we crossed the mighty Brahmaputra by a ferry, always a pleasure. On the northern bank we passed Likabali, and travelled two days (340 km) to Limekang braving a broken bridge where vehicles had to be changed. Engaging porters was an expensive affair as they made an agreement for nine days wages even if we finish the trek earlier! Earlier there was a feeling that Arunachalis needed to earn but now it has changed to greed.

For us two short treks followed. Climbing steeply, on forested slopes to Ghaghu Siriu was almost an impossible task due to recent rain that had deposited plenty of snow on upper reaches. After three days we could see the lake but it was covered by snow. In thick fog it was not distinguishable from the surrounding areas. It was also not possible to make 800 m descent to the lake due to snow.

We decided to climb on the southern side to Kechi Pass (3030 m) which was marked on the map as a village trail to lower Subansiri. This too was very steep and we had to climb holding bamboo branches. Camps were on small platforms cut out by porters and water was available only at one spot. As we reached higher, the trail became more challenging- as this route like many others is not in use now and people prefer two days of roundabout road travel instead of a trek across the pass. The pass itself is a gentle depression and we were hoping to see the famed Takpa Siri peak (5735 m). The porters pointed out three different mountains as "Takpa Siri" - as the peak is small it merges with surrounding ridges. A view of Takpa Siri from the south is not available as reference and hence it will be a matter of study to locate the peak in photographs. (The wonderful museum at Likabali Cantonment possibly has a picture of Takpa Siri which will be a good reference.)

We travelled back the same way, across the Brahmaputra to Dibrugarh. A comfortable train journey took us to Guwahati and a flight to Mumbai concluded our trip.

Dates: 20th October to 13th November 2013

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DISTANCES IN SUBANSIRI VALLEY, ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Road from Dibrugarh to Limeking

1. Dibrugarh-Likabali

Place	Kilometres	Appox. Hours
Dibrugarh/Mohanbari airport		
Dibrugarh town	15	1
Bogibeel Ghat	13	1
Across Brahmaputra by ferry boat		2
Simon Chapori Ghat		
Akajan	10	1
Sila Pathar	10	
Likabali	5	1
	53 km	6 hrs

2. Likabali- Daporijo

Siji	17	
Garu	25	
Dali	23	
Basar	22	Large village
Bame	7	Road bifurcates to Along (44 km) to Siang Valley
Sodoke	10	
Ragidoke	7	
Tirbin	8	
Tai	9	
Tashidini	5	
Tapi	13	
Bada-Rupak	25	
Daporijo	20	Town. Zero 160 km
	191 km	7 hrs

3. Daporijo to Limeking

Sippi	10	
Menga	5	
Talliha	24	
Kodak	7	
Lingram	8	
Doyum	2	Several villages passed en route. Worth noting their unique house construction and village life.
Pagi nala	13	
Siyam	7	
Aying Mori	12	
Nacho	13	
Mede	15	
Orak	8	
Limeking	18	A major road junction. Now road goes ahead few kilometres
Shere Thapa Bridge (K T Nala)	11	A memorial to war hero Shere Thapa- 1 km away from road
	149 km	7 hrs

Trekking routes in the Subansiri valley

	Limeking	1600			The main road ends here. Road being extended to Tame Chung Chung. If walking pass the memorial of Shere Thapa who fought the Chinese valiantly in 1962 war. The road passes from a little above.
	Towards Bidak along the Tsari chu.		51 km	7 days	
1	Tame Chung Chung	1835			The name translates as 'a town of snakes'!! It is on a plateau and overlooks two narrow river valleys. Tame Chung Chung, (8 km from Limeking) from on a high plateau, is above the junction of the Tsari Chu (from northeast) and the Subansiri (from northwest. Both form the traditional route of <i>kora</i> around Takpa Siri.
2	Cave Camp	1800	11	9	Very steep descent to the Tsari river. The trail goes down in a straight line at about 70 degree slopes and there are no zigzags. The trail joins the traditional pilgrim trail at bottom. Reach the holy junction of the Tsari and Subansiri rivers at Gelensinaik where a Proceed on the trail which constantly moves up and down and crossed five FSBs, some in poor condition. Stay in or camp near a huge cave en route.
3	Gelamo	1790	4	4	Gelamo is relatively easy walk from the cave. At Gelamo there is a rest house and one villager stays here.
4	Bidak	1800	8	4	Similar trail proceeds along the river with very little up and down to Bidak. A rest house here and the last camp before the border.
5	Gelemo	1790	8	4	Return to Gelemo by same trail.
6	Gelensinaik	1600	15	8	A long walk along the river, several up and down and many FSB to cross. Time permits, camp in between and make a two-day walk. The final destination is at the junction of rivers and temple.
8	Tame Chung Chung	1835	4	4	Steep climb up to a road. Follow the road to Tame Chung Chung to end the holy trail along the Tsar chu.
	Towards Taksing, along the Subansiri		96 km	9 days	
1	Tame Chung Chung	1835			The route <i>kora</i> (circumambulation) from the Tsari valley continues to northwest along the Subansiri.
2	Dajobung	1640	14	9	Descend steeply with some zigzags to the Subansiri. (a new road was being built to lead to Limikang). Cross the river twice on FSB and reach a small village settlement with a rest house.
3	Dadu/Reding	1650	18	10	A long day across a forest trail and finally walk on under construction road. Pass small settlement at Dadu and reach Reding.

4	Taksing	2450	15	2	A motor road links Reding to Taksing. If vehicle not available a pleasant walk along the river bank. The pilgrim <i>kora</i> route proceeds to Yume river junction with the Subansiri and follows north along the Yume to Takpa Siri in the Chinese territory.
5	Reding village	2120	12	5	Return by motor road to Reding. The road may have been constructed from Taksing-Reding to Tame Chung Chung making the trek/trail redundant.
6	Cave	1800	13	7	To break a long trek stay in between in a huge cave on the right bank.
7	Dajobung	1640	10	5	Some ascents/descents and a final very steep descent to reach Dajobung.
8	Bridge Camp	1500	6	4	Stay at a vast open ground near the Subansiri after a short walk. It will help in the climb the next day.
9	Tame Chung Chung	1835	8	6	Cross a bridge and follow the road climbing all through to Tame Chung Chung.
	Limeking	1600			Return by road.
	Towards Ghaghu Siriu Lake		30 km (Return)	5 days (One way)	(All camps are steep climbs, no names for camps. The final descent to the lake is through a steep rocky slab which if wet would be very tricky to go.)
	Paru	3951	5	2 days	Climb from Muri-Dorjen Mempu village. Paru
	Swa Dibin	4000	3	1 day	Several up-down to proceed along the ridge
	Raghu peak	4781	3	1 day	Steep climb and traverse on rocky terrain
	Ghaghu Siriu Lake	3909	3	1 day	A steep descent on rocky slabs to the lake. Ropes essential. Climb back to same point will be tough too.
	Towards Kechi Pass		30 km (Return)	3 days (one way)	First camps are after steep climbs, no names for camps and very little camping place. Trail is almost 60 degrees all through and steep. Not used for many years. After two camps follow the river and little better terrain to the pass, which leads to lower Subansiri valleys of Kurung and Kamala rivers.

Books About Central Arunachal Pradesh

Title	Author
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Enticing Frontiers	Bannerjee, T.K.
Alluring Frontiers	Bannerjee, T.K.
Forgotten Frontier	Tyson, Geoffrey
Frontier Trail (The)	Bannerjee, T.K.
India's China War	Neville Maxwell
No Passport to Tibet	Bailey, F M
Tsangpo Gorges	Cox, Kenneth
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Encyclopaedia of North East India	Bareh, HM
Glimpses of the Early History of Arunachal	Chakravarty, L N
Mystery Rivers of Tibet (The)	Kingdon-Ward, Frank
Lost Horizon	Hilton, James
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Unsung Battles of 1962	Kler, Lt. Col. Gurdip Singh
Fantastic Fifth (The)	Shorey, Col. Anil
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History of The Assam Rifles	Shakespear, L. W.
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Heart of the World (The)	Baker, Ian
Himalayan Frontiers	Woodman, Dorothy
In Abor Jungles of North East India	Hamilton A.
Gazetteer of Bengal and North-East India	Allen BC, Gait EA, Howard HF, Allen CGH
Secrets of Ahbor Valley (The)	Mundy, Talbot
Brief History of Arunachal Pradesh (A)	Osik, N. N.
Salween- and Lohit valley	Kaulback, Ronald
Born in Tibet- Refugees to Tuting and Tsangpo	Trungpa, Chogyam
Arunachal Pradesh The Hidden Land	Dai, Mamang
India-China Boundary Problem	Noorani, A.G.
Northeast Trilogy (Three Books)	Kunal Verma, Dipti Bhalla
1962 and The McMahon Line Saga	Arpi, Claude
The McMahon Line	Alastair Lamb

