

DEORIA TAL- CHOPTA-
TUNGNATH AND CHANDRASHILA PEAK WINTER
TREK

INTERESTING FACTS/INFORMATION ABOUT THE PLACE

Deoria Tal

Deoria(Also spelled as **Devaria** or **Deoriya**) lies in the Rudraprayag district of the Garhwal region, Uttarakhand. It is a beautiful oval lake that lies in the midst of tree fringed meadows that gives a rare 300° panorama of some of the highest and most famous peaks of the Garhwal Himalaya such as the massive Chaukhamba, Bandarpunch, Kedar Dome and Kalanag.

The trek upto the lake can be undertaken from either Sari or Mastura villages, both of which are accessible from Ukhimath.

Mythology

The lake has been mentioned on various occasions in the Mahabharata and has been named due to the belief that the Devas (Gods) bathe in the lake. Legend says that while the Pandavas were wandering through the forests on their journey of penance after the Mahabharata war, they arrived at this lake tired and thirsty. The lake was guarded by a Yaksha, who allowed them to drink water on the condition that they answer his questions. All of them ignored his philosophical questions out of thirst and drank the water, and subsequently fell dead. The only exception was the eldest, Yudhishtira(famed for his wisdom), who patiently listened to the question and answered it correctly. The lake is also considered as being the "Indra Sarovar" mentioned in the Puranic texts.

Tungnath

The western Garhwal region is synonymous with Lord Shiva and is also known as the Kedar Kshetra (Kedar being the local name for Lord Shiva). Within the region lies the famed Panch Kedar, the five holiest temples dedicated to Lord Shiva. Among the five temples, the Tungnath temple located at an altitude of 12,070 feet is the highest (even higher than the famed Kedarnath temple)

It is a beautiful temple built in the traditional stone architecture of the region and has withstood the elements to retain its beauty amid seclusion through more than 1000 years! It commands an uninterrupted view of the surrounding mountains and is a fantastic location to view the sunrise and sunsets.

The priest at Tungnath is a local Brahmin from Maku village, unlike the other Panch Kedar temples where the priests are from South India, a tradition set by the eighth century Hindu seer Adi Shankaracharya. During winter, the temple is largely inaccessible due to heavy snow. During this season, the representational idol is worshipped at the Mokumath temple, lower down in altitude, close to Ukhimath.

Legend

The Tungnath temple is one of the Panch Kedar temples and its myth is linked with the Pandavas in their search for forgiveness after the end of the Mahabharata war, where they committed the crime of slaying their cousins (The Kauravas) who were also Brahmins. On the advice of Rishi Ved Vyas, they went to Kasha in search of Lord Shiva, who knowing their guilt, did not wish to forgive them since he was convinced of their guilt, and instead chose to evade them by changing his form to that of a bull and hiding among the pastures of Guptkashi (literally translated as the Secret or Hidden kasha) in the Garhwal mountains. Realizing that Lord Shiva might be in the mountains, the Pandavas went in search of him, and they finally spotted him in the guise of a bull. When Bheema caught hold of him, Shiva disappeared into the ground and materialized in five different locations as different body parts of the bull. Knowing that they would only attain forgiveness by penance and meditation in all five sites, the Pandavas went to all the locations and built the famed "Panch Kedar" shrines where they meditated and prayed, and eventually earned the right to ascend to heaven.

The temple of Tungnath is where the "bahu" or the hands of the bull materialized.

Architecture

The temple is constructed in the typical North Indian architecture style prevalent in the region, and seen at the Madhyamaheshwar and Kedarnath shrines. The entire temple is constructed of stone blocks with decorations depicting tall towers, with even the domed roof made of stone slabs. The top of the dome is crowned by a square cornice that has a total of sixteen arched openings, four in each direction. The roof is crowned with a tall golden shikhar and kalash. Tungnath temple is smaller in size as compared to the Kedarnath temple and can barely hold upto 10 devotees at a time. The main temple is surrounded by smaller shrines devoted to a number of other Gods.

The inner sanctum of the temple has the "swayambhu" (self manifested) Shivlinga, a black rock that rose out of the ground by itself. The credit for construction of the temple goes to Arjuna of the Pandavas.

Geography

Tungnath is at the top of the ridge dividing the waters of the Mandakini River from those of the Alaknanda.

The topography of the Chopta/Tungnath valley is a gentle slope with speckled green terrace farming, tall alpine trees and bright crimson and pink rhododendrons (they only bloom during summers; during winters they look like a dense forest of tall scraggly shrubs)

The region is also famous for its Musk Deer and is designated as the Kedarnath Musk Deer Sanctuary. If time permits, you can also visit Kharchula Kharak near Chopta where you will find the musk deer Breeding centre.

Chandrashila Peak

About a kilometer above the Tungnath temple, after a steep trek, lies the Chandrashila (literal meaning – Moon-Rock) Peak. It has a lot of legends associated with it, and was thus named because the Moon God (Chandra) is said to have done his penance here. The peak is also unique in the Ramayana as curiously, not only did Lord Rama meditate here, but his adversary, Ravana, also did penance here to gain Lord Shiva's blessings!

For modern day trekkers and lovers of nature, it is no wonder, as the peak has an uninterrupted 360 degrees vista as far as the eye can see, of the great Himalayan peaks of Nandadevi, Trisul, Kedar Peak, Bandarpunch and Chaukhamba.

Curiously, owing to it being open on all sides, the winter snow here melts faster than the Tungnath temple, which lies in the shadow of the mountain and retains its snow accumulation for a longer period of time.

Chopta

Chopta is also known as the "**Mini Switzerland of Uttarakhand**" due to its varied flora and fauna, with plenty of Rhododendron and Deodar trees all around. It is a sleepy hamlet at approximately 2700 metres and is not yet as crowded as compared to the other tourist spots. It is becoming quite popular of late due to the possibility of summer and winter weekend treks upto 4000 metres, with uninterrupted views of the Himalayan ranges.