

Gangabal Lake



Gangabal Lake (Lat: 34.4333, Long: 74.925) is situated at the foot of the north-eastern glacier of Mount Harmukh, at an altitude of about 3570 Meters (Francis Brunel, the author of 'Kashmir' puts the altitude at 3657 Meters). It is said to be the true source of Kashmir Ganga and is hence known as 'Uttarganga'. It is the final goal of great 'Haramuktaganga' pilgrimage. Lake's turquoise coloured sheet of water lends a subtle charm to the valley which is known as the 'Hardwar of Kashmir'.

Water from glaciers collects into the Gangabal Lake, which subsequently flows down to another lake nearby called Nundkol (Lat: 34.4166, Long: 74.9333) and then into the Sindh River at Kangan. Gangabal is the most enchanting trekking destination in the entire Kashmir valley and can be reached from Sonamarg via Kishansar and Vishansar (about 4 days trek), from Kangan via Wangath and Narain Naag (1 day trek), and from Chattergul via Mahalish and Brahmasar (1-2 days

trek). Most difficult part of the trek, when going via Narain Naag is Buth Sher, which is very steep and difficult to climb.

Trekking routes to Gangabal are open from July to October. For rest of the year, the area is covered with very thick layer of snow, making it inaccessible. Gangabal Lake is famous for rainbow trout fishing. The fishing season is from March to October.

The trekking route from Sonamarg across Nichinai pass meanders along a number of lakes namely Kishansar, Vishansar, Yamsar, Gadasar, Satsar and Nundkol. Kishansar, Vishansar and Nundkol lakes are also stocked with trout fish.

Since ancient times, the Gangabal trek has been the most sacred pilgrimage of Hindus. An annual fair is held here in the third week of August. However post eruption of militancy in 1990, the route was closed by the government to stop infiltration and exfiltration into and out of the Valley. Kalhana Pandit has mentioned in Rajatarangini that the Gangabal trail had been used in ancient times by many Kashmiri rebels including famous King Bhoja to take shelter in the Dard area of Gurez and Tilel.

Gangabal Lake is 2.70 Kms. Long and about 1.00 Km at the widest point. It is in the shape of Shivas foot. Maximum depth of the lake is 83 Mtrs. Nundkol is 1.25 Kms long and about 400 Meters at the widest point.

There are a number of peaks atop Mount Harmukh. The ancient name of the peaks is Haramukta. Hindus believe that these peaks are the abode of Lord Shiva. A Kashmiri tradition stoutly maintains that human feet can never touch the Harmukh summit. It is said when Sir Aurel Stein scaled the peaks along with some Kashmiri Muslim coolies in 1894, he experienced great difficulty in convincing his Brahman friends, who just would not believe. The argument they offered was simple; if anybody scaled the peaks, then it cannot be Haramukta. Sir Aurel Stein says that on reaching the top, one gets confused as there are many similar summits and it is difficult to tell which one is the real top?

*References: 'Kashmir' by Francis Brunel;
'Gangabal Lake' by Mohammed Ashraf;
Archives - Project Zaan*