

KEDARNATH

Kedarnath is on the bank of the Mandakini River between Gangotri and Badrinath. As the bird flies, Kedarnath is just 42 km from Badrinath thru sky but far apart through road and walk. Over 100,000 pilgrims come here each year. It is believed that Sankaracharya passed away here about 820 AD. Kedareshwar Shiva is the presiding deity. Behind the Kedarnath temple is an impressive mountain range, with the beautiful Kedarnath Mountain (6,970m).

Kedarnath Temple

This Lord Shiva temple at Kedarnath is said to have been built by the Pandavas to atone for their sins

procured during the Kurukshetra war. It is believed that this temple was originally constructed by the Pandavas, and the present temple was reconstructed by Sankaracharya in the 8th century. One of the 12 **Shiva-Jyotirlingas** is in this temple. The temple is dedicated to Lord Sada Shiva and is considered to be one of the major Shiva temples in India.

The temple is situated at the end of a lane, which is surrounded by small hotels and restaurants. Along the



lane is a barely decorated doorway amidst all the other shacks that shows the place where Sankaracharya once stayed while visiting this temple. They will not let you into the room itself but you can look in through the window. Inside are a few items and prints of Sankaracharya.

Inside the temple there is an irregular, three-faced *linga*, representing the hump of Lord Shiva when he took the form of a bull. It is about 3m (9 ft) long, 1m (3 ft) wide, and 1.3m (4 ft) high. Pilgrims are allowed to touch the *linga*, perform *worship*, *abhishek* (bathe), and massage the *linga* with ghee. There are deities of goddess Parvati and Ganesh in front of the main altar door. Outside the second door are Lord Krishna, the five Pandavas, their wife, Draupadi, and their mother, Kunti. In the temple is a Lakshmi-Narayana Deity, which was installed by Adi Sankaracharya. The temple faces south, which is a unique feature, as most temples face east. This temple is very solidly built.

Time

The temple opens the first week of May and closes either the last week of October- or the first week of November. May/June is the busiest time of the year. Worship is continued in the village of Okhimath in the winter by the priest from the Kedarnath Temple.

The waiting time to enter the temple in the afternoon is about 15 minutes, otherwise if you go at 7 am the waiting time may be two hours or more. The main *pujas* are at 6 am and 6 pm.

Temple Story

After the Battle of Kuruksetra, the Pandavas went to see Lord Shiva in Kashi to atone for killing so many of their kinsmen in battle. When Lord Shiva learned that the Pandavas were coming, he fled and playfully hid from them. The Pandavas discovered Shiva in the Himalayas, in a place called Gupta Kashi ("Hidden Kashi"), where he had disguised himself as a brahmana. Having been found out, Lord Shiva ran away to a valley and disguised himself as a bull, but Bhima recognized him. Bhima stretched his big legs from one end of the valley to the other and caught the bull by its tail. Lord Shiva, still trying to hide, began to bury himself in the ground. But the determination of the Pandavas won him over, and before the bull's hump had disappeared, he decided to give them his audience.

Lord Shiva instructed the Pandavas to worship the hump of the bull, and this worship is still going on in the temple they established. Other parts of Lord Shiva's body appeared in other mountains, and the Pandavas also built temples there. They are known as PanchKedars (five Kedars): (1) Kedarnath—hump, (2) Tunganath—arm, (3) Rudranath—face, (4) Kalpeshwar—hair, and (5) Madhyamaheswar—navel.



Other Places

There is a marble staff behind the temple that commemorates the emblem of Sankaracharya. It is believed that Sri Sankaracharya passed away in Kedarnath. There is another school of thought that says he passed away in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu.

Just behind the Kedarnath Temple is the **Mahapanth Trail** (Gate of Heaven). It is said that from this place there is a path that goes north up to Swarga-rohini (path to heaven). It is said that the five Pandavas took this path after performing a huge *yajna* (sacrifice). Other people said that

the Pandavas ascended from Badrinath.



A path to the east of the village, to the right of the temple, leads to the **Bhairava temple**, the guardian deity over the temple. Bhairava is the furious form of Lord Shiva. It is a 20-minute walk.

Before you cross the bridge that crosses to the town you come to a path that leads to a glacier, 4 km away. The path here can also be reached by crossing the river over the bridge that is behind the temple and climbing up the hill. Chorabari Tal lake, an emerald green lake, is next to the

glacier. It is also known as **Gandhi Sarovar**, because some of Mahatma Gandhi's ashes were thrown here. It takes 1½ to 2 hours to walk here from Kedarnath. About a km from the lake is the source of the **Mandakini River**.

Vasuki Tal (4320m) is a tough 9 km trek from Kedarnath. The path begins near the Tourist Bungalow. Past Vasuki Tal is the **Khatling Glacier** via the Painya Tal and Maser Tal lakes. For this trek you need a good guide and proper equipment.



Travel

The road to Kedarnath ends at a town named Gaurikund (1,981m). A bus from Haridwar or Rishikesh (295 km) takes an entire day to reach Gaurikund. It is best to catch the early morning bus at 6 am. If you get a later bus you will definitely have to stop for the night on the way. The bus from Gangotri to Gaurikund (334 km) takes a day and a half. From Gaurikund the bus usually takes a full day to get to Joshimath, which is 44 km south of Badrinath; but you could reach Badrinath the same day if you get the 6 am bus and nothing goes wrong. Otherwise, from Joshimath the same bus goes the next morning to Badrinath.

From Gaurikund you should make sure you reserve early morning buses the night before. Even if you are told you can get a ticket the next morning, do not believe it.

You have to walk 14 km, at least 4 hours, up a steep incline to get to Kedarnath from Gaurikund. The trek along the Mandakini River to Kedarnath is slow and tiresome.

If the sky is clear, at the 10 km stone you can view the Kedarnath mountain peak at 6,640 m (22,113 ft). As the walk is very tough, it is advised to carry as little as possible up the hill. Even the smallest load can feel like a lead weight after a few km. If you cannot walk, you can rent a horse or be carried by four people up the hill. You should be prepared to stay the night at Kedarnath, as it is difficult to go both up and down in the same day.

Some people stop for the night halfway up at Rambara (7 km), which has several simple eating places and some basic resthouses.

Gaurikund

Gaurikund is said to be the place where Gaurimata (Parvati) took birth and did austerities for hundreds of years, in order to marry Lord Shiva. It is 210km from Rishikesh and 334km from Gangotri. Gaurikund is the last bus stop on the way to Kedarnath.



There is a hot sulfur water spring here named Gaurikund (TaptaKund), where you can bathe. It is said to mark the place where Parvati did austerities. It is a great place to bathe after returning from your walk to Kedarnath. Next to the spring is the Gauri Devi Temple, dedicated to Parvati.

There is a temple called Sirkata Ganesh, the beheaded Ganesh, about half a km from Gaurikund. The *Skanda Purana* says this was the place where Lord Shiva beheaded his son Ganesh and then gave him an elephant head. The story says that

Ganesh was guarding his mother, Parvati, who was bathing in Gaurikund. When Shiva, who had been traveling for a long time, came, Ganesh stopped him. Shiva, not recognizing his own son, then became angry and cut off the head of Ganesh. When Parvati found out this, she requested Shiva to bring him back to life and give him another head. Shiva said he would give him the head of the first creature that came by, which happened to be an elephant. So he gave Ganesh the head of an elephant.

The ashrama of Vyasadeva's father, **Parashara Muni**, is also located 40 km down from Gauri Kund in one of the villages. There is a big image of him there. You may have to ask the locals to find it if you are interested.

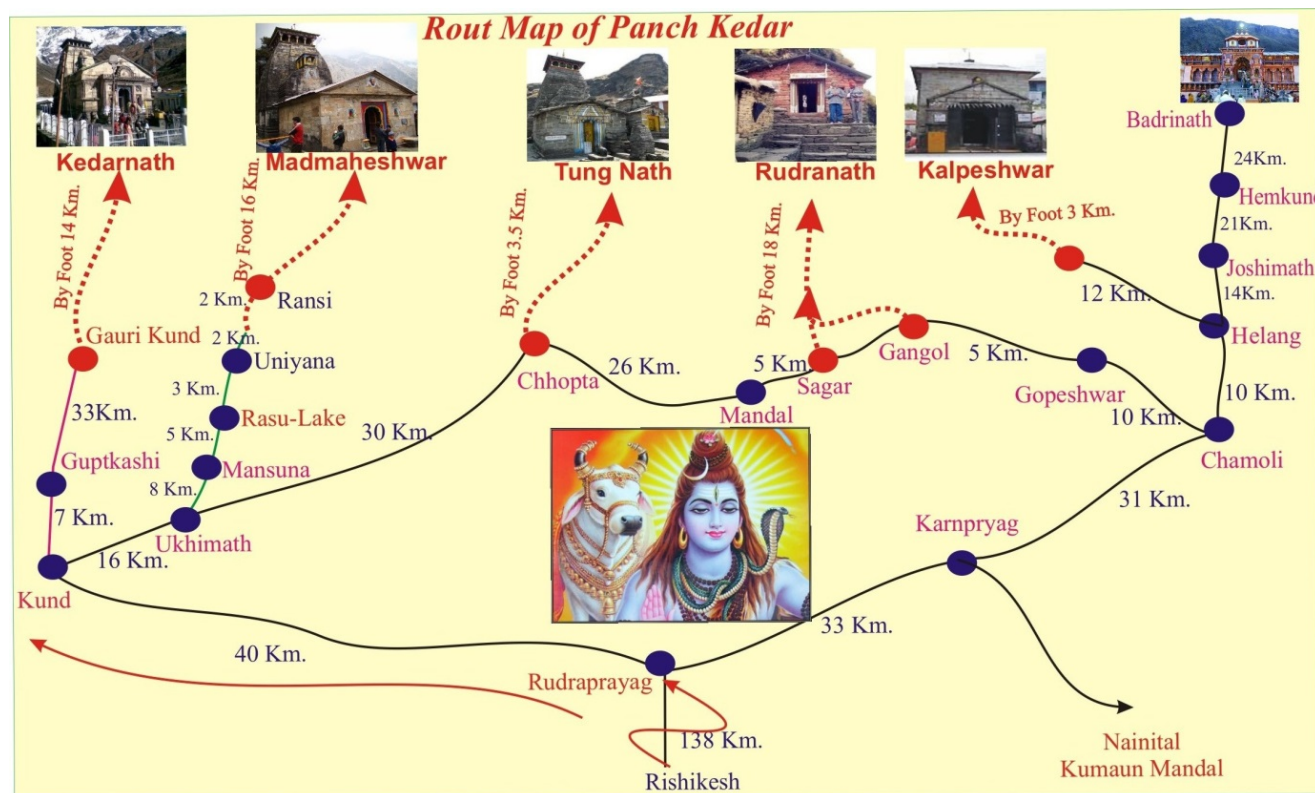
PANCH (FIVE) KEDARS

Parts of Lord Shiva's body appeared at five places in the Kedarnath area. It is said that the Pandavas built temples at each of these places—Kedarnath, Madhyamaheswar, Rudranath, Tungnath, and Kalpeswara. They are at altitudes from 1,500 to 3,680m. It takes about 14 days to go to all five places. They can all be reached by along circular trek. For the most part you have to walk from temple to temple. A bus leaves Gaurikund, near Kedarnath, every morning at 5 am and stops at access points for the Panch Kedar temples. A local bus goes between Gopeswar and Guptakashi.

You could start at Kedarnath. From there you return to Guptakashi and then go to Okhimath and continue on to Mansuna village. From Mansuna village it is a 24km trek to **Madhyamaheswar** (3,497m), which is 30km from Guptakashi. You can stop at Ransi overnight, and then you go to Gondhar (3km) and climb 10km to Madhyamaheswar. The temple here is a small stone temple dedicated to the middle (*madhya*) part of the bull-Shiva.

Tungnath(3,680m or 12,065 ft) is the highest (in altitude) temple in India. It is surrounded by striking mountains such as Neelkanth, Kedarnath, and Nanda Devi. The Shiva temple here is on a stone paved platform overlooking a cliff. Tungnath represents the arm of Lord Shiva. There are five silver faces of the Pandavas along with deities of Vyasadeva and Kalabhairava in the temple. There is also a small Parvati temple here. You get here by trekking from Chopta(7km, 4 hr), which is 37km from Ukhimath. At Chopta there is a GMVN Tourist Bungalow that has rooms with baths.

To get to **Kalpeshwara** Temple (2,100m), you first travel by bus to the village of Helang, 14km south of Joshimath. From Helang you walk 9km to the village of



Urgam, which has basic accommodation and food. From there it is a 1.5km walk to Kalpeshwara Temple, which is dedicated to the *jata* (hair) of Lord Shiva. It is a rock Temple that is entered through a cave.

Next you go to Gopeswar by road and then to Sagar. From there it is a 24km trek to **Rudranath**, dedicated to the mouth of Lord Shiva. The **Rudraganga** flows by this temple. There are good views of the Trisul, Nandadevi and Parbat peaks, and down below there are small lakes. To get to Rudranath you can also walk from Kalpeshwara.

Okhimath is just a little ways south of Guptakashi. It has a colorful temple and monastery, which has many small cells for meditation. The worship for Kedarnath is held here during the winter when it is too cold to stay in the mountains at high elevations. Okhimath has all the different forms of Lord Shiva. So if you cannot visit



PanchKedar, the five main forms of Shiva in the temples of the area, then getting darshan of the deities at Okhimath is equal to being blessed by all of the forms of the PanchKedar. This monastery is also the seat of the immortal sages, such as Parashurama and Visvamisra, as well as Varahi and Chandika, the tantrik goddesses. Okhimath also has temples of Shiva, Parvati, Usha, Mandhata, and Aniruddha.

It is said that Usha- Aniruddha marriage took place in Okhimath. Usha along with her father Banasura was staying here.

Nearby places

Guptakashi, the next important town, is where Lord Shiva had fled to live incognito and even turned himself into a bull to hide from the Pandavas who later found him there. This is why this place is called Guptakashi, which means "hidden Kashi" or "hidden light". The Pandavas pursued



Lord Shiva up to Kedarnath, where he gave up the disguise. There his bull hump became the *Lingam*. The main temples here are for Ardhanariswara (Gouri-Shankar) and Vishwanath. In front of the Viswanath temple is the ManikarnikaKund which has water flowing from the head of Ganesh (water said to be from Yamunotri) and the head of a cow (water from Gangotri). Other than this, this city is another overnight stop if you are on a late bus, since they close the road here when it gets dark.

is and where he performed meditation.

Another small town, Agastmuni, 25 km farther up the road, is where the Agastya Muni temple

Appendix

- 1) Vishnuswami pleased Shiva at Kedarnath. Shiva appeared. He asked Him for that which is most pleasing to him. Shiva gave him the diety of Lord Krsna.

2) **Marriage of Usha&Aniruddha: atOkhimath**

Of the one hundred sons of King Bali, the oldest was Bääsura. He was a great devotee of Lord Çiva, who favored Bää so much that even demigods like Indra would serve him. Bääsura once satisfied Çiva by playing musical instruments with his one thousand hands while Çiva danced his täädava-nåtya. In response, Çiva offered Bää whatever benediction he chose, and Bää asked Çiva to become the guardian of his city.

One day when Bää was feeling an urge to do battle, he told Lord Çiva: "Except for you, in the whole world there is no warrior strong enough to fight me. Therefore these thousand arms you've given me are merely a heavy burden." Angered by these words, Lord Çiva replied, "Your pride will be crushed in battle when you meet

my equal. Indeed, your chariot flag will fall to the ground, broken."

Bääsura's daughter, Üñä, once had an encounter with a lover in her sleep. Several nights in a row this occurred, until one night she failed to see Him in her dreams. She suddenly awoke, speaking aloud to Him in a state of agitation, but when she noticed her maidservants around her, she felt embarrassed. Üñä's companion Citralekhä asked her who she had been addressing, and Üñä told her everything. Hearing of Üñä's dreamlover, Citralekhä tried to relieve her friend's distress by drawing pictures of Gandharvas and other celestial personalities, as well as various men of the Vãñëi dynasty. Citralekhä asked Üñä to pick out the man she had seen in her dreams, and Üñä pointed to the picture of Aniruddha. Citralekhä, who had mystic powers, knew at once that the young man her friend had pointed out was Lord Kãñëa's grandson Aniruddha. Then, using her mystic powers, Citralekhä flew through the sky to Dvarakä, found Aniruddha and brought Him back with her to Çoëitapura, Bääsura's capital. There she presented Him to Üñä. Having obtained the man of her desires, Üñä began serving Him very affectionately within her private quarters, which were supposed to be strictly off limits to men. After some time the female guards of the inner palace noticed symptoms of sexual activity on Üñä's person, and they went to Bääsura to inform him. Greatly disturbed, Bääsura rushed to his daughter's apartments with many armed guards and, to his great surprise, saw Aniruddha there. As the guards attacked Him, Aniruddha took up His club and succeeded in killing a few before the powerful Bääsura could capture Him with his mystic näga-päça ropes, filling Üñä with lamentation. When Aniruddha did not return from Çoëitapura, His family and friends passed the four months of the rainy season in extreme distress. When they finally heard from Nãrada Muni how Aniruddha had been captured, a large army of the best Yãdava warriors, under Kãñëa's protection, set off for Bääsura's capital and laid siege to it. Bääsura fiercely opposed them with his own army of equal size. To help Bääsura, Lord Çiva, accompanied by Kãrtikeya and a horde of mystic sages, took up arms against Balarãma and Kãñëa. Bääsura began fighting against Sãtyaki, and Bääsura's son fought against Sãmba. All the demigods assembled in the sky to witness the battle. With His arrows Lord Kãñëa harassed the followers of Lord Çiva, and by putting Lord Çiva into a state of confusion He was able to destroy Bääsura's army. Kãrtikeya was so



strongly beaten by Pradyumna that he fled the battlefield, while the remnants of Bääsura's army, harried by the blows of Lord Balarãma's club, scattered in all directions.

Enraged to see his army's destruction, Bääsura rushed Kãñëa to attack Him. But the Lord immediately killed Bääsura's chariot driver

and broke his chariot and bow, and then He sounded His Pāicajanyaconchshell. Next Bāēāsura's mother, trying to save her son, appeared naked in front of Lord Kāñēa, who averted His face to avoid looking at her. Seeing his chance, Bāēa fled into his city. After Lord Kāñēa had thoroughly defeated the ghosts and hobgoblins fighting under Lord Çiva, the Çiva-jvara weapon-a personification of fever with three heads and three legs-approached Lord Kāñēa to fight Him. Seeing the Çiva-jvara, Kāñēa released His Viñēu-jvara. The Çiva-jvara was overwhelmed by the Viñēu-jvara; having nowhere else to turn for shelter, the Çiva-jvara began to address Lord Kāñēa, glorifying Him and asking for mercy. Lord Kāñēa was pleased with the Çiva-jvara, and after the Lord had promised him freedom from fear, the Çiva-jvara bowed down to Him and departed. Next Bāēāsura returned and attacked Lord ÇréKāñēa again, wielding all kinds of weapons in his thousand hands. But Lord Kāñēa took His Sudarçana disc and began cutting off all the demon's arms Lord Çiva approached Kāñēa to pray for Bāēāsura's life, and when the Lord agreed to spare him, He spoke as follows to Çiva: "Bāēāsura does not deserve to die, since he was born in the family of PrahlādaMahārāja. I have severed all but four of Bāēa's arms just to destroy his false pride, and I have annihilated his army because they were a burden to the earth. Henceforward he will be free from old age and death, and remaining fearless in all circumstances, he will be one of your principal attendants." Assured he had nothing to fear, Bāēāsura then offered his obeisances to Lord Kāñēa and had Ūñā and Aniruddha seated on their wedding chariot and brought before the Lord. Kāñēa then set off for Dvārakā with Aniruddha and His bride leading the procession. When the newlyweds arrived at the Lord's capital, they were honored by the citizens, the Lord's relatives and the brāhmaēas.