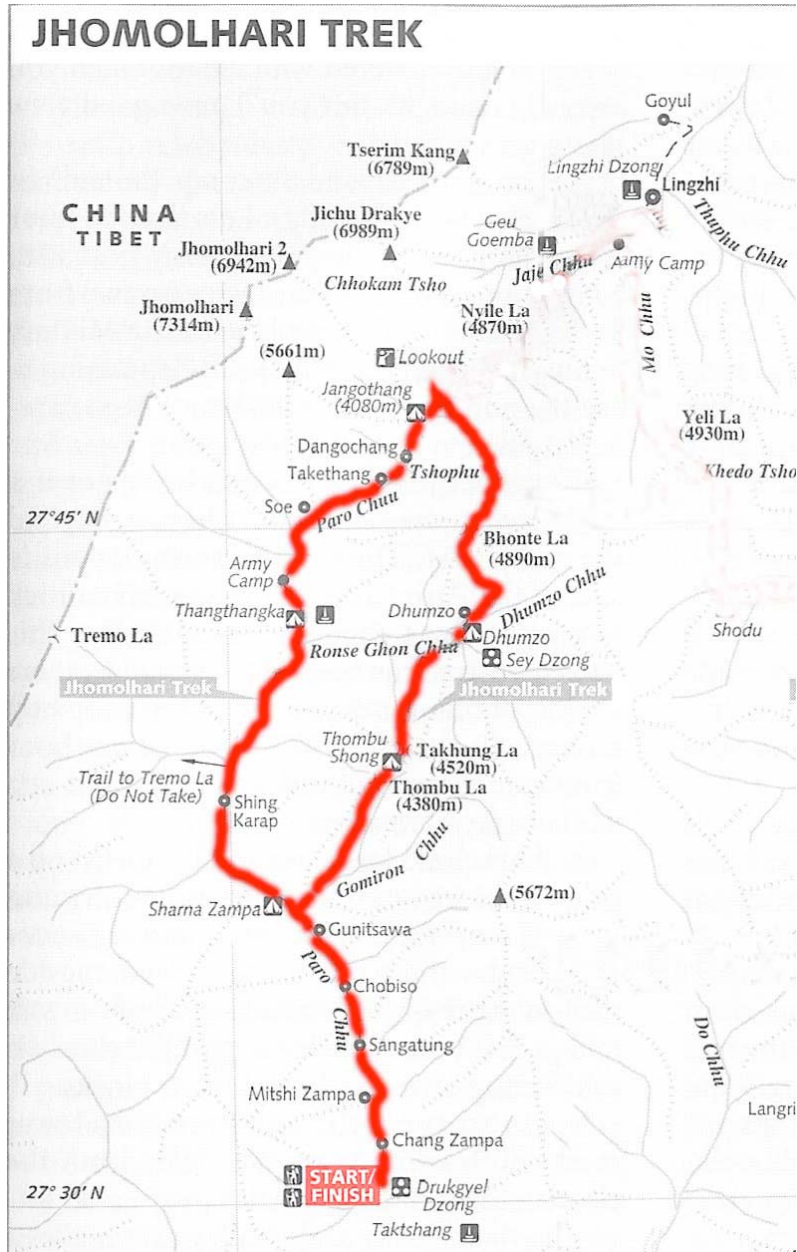


## JUMOLHARI TREK

Cost per person : US\$ 1,840

The Jomolhari trek takes you from 2,600m up to 4,000m, or even 5,224m if you choose, and is the most popular trek in Bhutan. This is because the duration of the trek is ideal for most visitors and that the itinerary is flexible. This trek takes you to the base of the impressive Jomolhari mountain(7,314m) and offers spectacular views of Jichu Drakey(6,794m), Tshering Gang(6,789m) and Masa Gang(7,194m). Visitors also get to see a variety of high altitude flora and fauna such as the Blue sheep(*Pseudois nayaur*), Himalayan marmot(*Arctomys himalayanus*) and a wide variety of pheasants and partridges.



## Trek itinerary

|                            |                         |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Day 1</b>               | Drukgyel Dzong to Shana |
| <b>Total altitude gain</b> | 320m                    |
| <b>Duration</b>            | 5 hrs.                  |
| <b>Distance</b>            | 15 km                   |
| <b>Level of difficulty</b> | Easy                    |

Starting from Drukgyel Dzong, the fortress that once guarded the Paro valley against Tibetan invaders, the first day is a pleasant walk following the left side of the Pachu river. The farm road serves as the trek route and passes through a number of very small villages with traditional houses, rice and vegetable fields to the left and right of the trail. After about an hour's walk, the farm road ends at Mitsizampa. Crossing the river to the right side of the river, the trail climbs gradually for another hour through the trees to Zakhapang(2,600m). This is usually where trekkers take their lunch break. After lunch the trek continues through blue pine (*Pinus wallichiana*) forests, following the river closely. Gunyitsawa Royal Bhutan Army outpost appears not long before the end of the first day's trek. The campsite at Shana, just beyond, is situated at an altitude of 2,820m in a beautiful open space surrounded by forest. A couple of traditional houses on the other side of the river make up Shana village.

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Day 2</b>               | Shana to Soi Thangthangka                     |
| <b>Total altitude gain</b> | 760m  |
| <b>Duration</b>            | 8 hrs.  |
| <b>Distance</b>            | 16 km   |
| <b>Level of difficulty</b> | Long but not difficult. Muddy and Bumpy path. |



This is the longest trekking day, taking eight hours to reach the campsite. The trail continues to follow the river gradually ascending through a mixed forest of blue pine and oak and, later in the afternoon, tall rhododendron, birch, fir and maple trees. The trail is rocky and bumpy and, in rainy conditions, can be quite muddy. There are several simple wooden bridges to cross and sometimes the river reaches right up to the trail. The lunch break usually comes after about 4 hours of walking through an ever-narrowing valley. Shing Karap or Thombuzam(3,305m) are popular spots.

Several trails lead in other directions, such as the trail to Tremo la, which was the old salt trading route to Tibet. Not long before reaching the campsite the trail leads you up a ridge with a chhorten. Beyond, in the distance at the end of the valley, the Jumolhari mountain comes into view. The campsite is located in a spacious clearing and directly faces Mount Jumolhari. Jumolhari is one of the world's tallest peaks at 7,326m.

|                            |                                |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Day 3</b>               | Soi Thangthangka to Jangothang |
| <b>Total altitude gain</b> | 420m                           |
| <b>Duration</b>            | 4 hrs.                         |
| <b>Distance</b>            | 11 km                          |
| <b>Level of difficulty</b> | Short and easy                 |

The third day's trek is a short one so it is possible to set off a little later and progress at a leisurely pace. When you reach the Royal Bhutan Army outpost you are required to stop and register your entry permits. These permits and procedure will be taken care of by your guide.



The Pachu river is again to the right of the trail and passes through some very small villages made up of two to three houses each, called Jomphu, Tegithang and, a little further on, Dotabithang. By now, at an altitude of 3,860m, the path has reached above the tree line. In less than 4 hours it is possible to reach Jangothang, the Jumolhari base camp, just in time for lunch. The altitude at the base camp is 4,000m. the imposing, rounded bulk of Jumolhari fills the view to the north-east and, in the evening, the ruin of the Jangothang Dzong, populated by huge ravens, creates a mystical atmosphere.

Apparently, a proud king once ruled this area from the Dzong. Myth has it that the king had instructed his subjects to raze one of the mountains to the ground because it was blocking out the sunlight. In a meeting as to how this Herculean task was to be achieved, an old lady suggested it would be simpler to chop off the head of the king rather than the top of the mountain. Thus, the deed was carried out!



This area is rich in bird life. Birds sighted en route include the Fire-tailed Sunbird(*Aethopyga ignicauda*), Isisbill(*Ibidorhyncha struthersii*), White-throated Dipper(*Cinclus cinclus*), Yellow-billed Chough(*Pyrrhocorax graculus*), Rosy Pipit(*Anthus roseatus*), Snow Pigeon(*Columba leuconota*), Blue-fronted Redstart (*Phoenicurus frontalis*), Plumbeous Water Redstart, Blood pheasant(*Ithaginis cruentus*), Snow partridge(*Lerwa lerwa*) and many more.

|              |                       |
|--------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Day 4</b> | Jangothang - day halt |
|--------------|-----------------------|



Today is a day to rest and acclimatize to the altitude. The body also needs time to adjust to the falling temperatures, especially during the night.

A 4½ hour excursion to the viewpoint at 5,244m, a climb of more than 1,000m, can be conducted. This viewpoint, located between the two glacier tongues of the Jumolhari massif affords spectacular views of the Jumolhari and Kungphu(6,789m) peaks to the North, as well as Masa Gang(7,194m)

and other peaks over 5,000m to the East.

|                            |                                 |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Day 5</b>               | Jangothang to Dhumzo/Soi Yaktsa |
| <b>Total altitude loss</b> | 270m                            |
| <b>Duration</b>            | 7 hrs.                          |
| <b>Distance</b>            | 16 km                           |
| <b>Level of difficulty</b> | Strenuous                       |

This day's trek is most difficult of the entire trek. It starts by having to make a continuous one hour climb to the twin lakes of Tshopu located at an altitude of 4,310m. These two beautiful lakes are surrounded on both sides by rocky cliffs and they reflect the two peaks of Jumolhari to the left and Jichu Drakey to the right. Ruddy Shelducks (*Tadorna ferruginea*) and Common Mergansers (*Mergus merganser*) can be sighted swimming these lakes that are said to be full of trout. From this point you can expect to see the black yak's hair tents belonging to the nomadic yak-herders that live in this area.



Following the left side of the lakes, the steep climb continues, taking you to the top of the ridge. This is the territory of the Blue sheep (*Pseudois nayaur*) with massive horns who graze in large groups of 70 or more. Many sightings of the elusive snow leopard have been reported from this area. Almost 4 hours of steady climbing brings you to the top of Bontey la at an altitude of 4,760m. From here you are once again provided splendid views of the mighty

Himalayan peaks. Another hour of downhill trekking brings you to Laptsa, a good place to stop for lunch.

From here the trek is downhill all the way with beautiful mountain scenery to enjoy. The rocky face of the cliffs rise almost 1,000m. Seven hours after the trek began you will arrive at the campsite which is located beyond the delightful village of Soi Yaksa at an altitude of 3,730m. The ladies of the village usually visit the campsite to sell local handicrafts, milk, dried Yak meat and vegetables.

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|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Day 6</b>               | Dhumzo/Soi Yaktsa to Thombu Shong |
| <b>Total altitude gain</b> | 340m                              |
| <b>Duration</b>            | 6 hrs.                            |
| <b>Distance</b>            | 11 km                             |
| <b>Level of difficulty</b> | Difficult                         |



The route today is through a nice wooded area. For a while, only a gentle ascent is made through alpine meadows. Once the climb to the Thombu la begins, the climb tends to get more strenuous. The pass is reached about 5 hours later. The altitude here is 4,410m. Lunch is usually partaken at a yak herders camp before the pass at an altitude of 4,240m.

One hour downhill from Thombu la is the campsite oat Thombu Shong(4,070m). The

campsite is situated in a beautiful valley where you will see two yak herders' dwellings made of stone and wood shingle roofs. Thombu la peak can be seen to the rear of the camp. Yaks graze in this valley that stretches endlessly into the mountains beyond the campsite. The Jho Drakey mountain is located to the left and can be seen if you trek up the mountain ridge to the left and right of the campsite.



|                            |                                 |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Day 7</b>               | Thombu Shong to Shana/Zakhapang |
| <b>Total altitude loss</b> | 1,470m                          |
| <b>Duration</b>            | 7 hrs.                          |
| <b>Distance</b>            | 12 km                           |
| <b>Level of difficulty</b> | Difficult                       |



Other than a short 45 minute climb at the beginning, the day's trek is downhill all the way. The trail follows a ridge affording great views of the valley on either side and a wonderful view of Jho Drakey. A steep descent of 2-3 hours then follows.

The trek route then reaches a full circle at the Royal Bhutan Army outpost of Gunyitsawa after about 5-6 hours from camp. The days walk sees a dramatic drop in altitude of 1,270m.

You can either make camp at the same site as on the first night at Shana or proceed a further two hours to Zakhapang at 2,600m. This would make the final days' walk a short one.

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Day 8</b>               | Shana/Zakhapang to Drukgyel Dzong, Paro |
| <b>Total altitude loss</b> | 100m                                    |
| <b>Duration</b>            | 2½ - 3 hrs.                             |
| <b>Distance</b>            | 10 km                                   |
| <b>Level of difficulty</b> | Easy                                    |

On the final day you will trace your footsteps back from Shana , or Zakhapang, along the Pachu river to Drukgyel Dzong. You will spend the night in Paro and catch your flight the next day.

**Note :**

*Photographs were taken by me on a trip in February, 2006. Brrrr!*