



Keshar Singh on his first professional trek guiding tour to Dyara Bugyal

Meet Keshar Singh, our community member trained as a responsible trek guide

Keshar Singh hails from Thandi village, 47km away from the district headquarters in Uttarkashi. A very active young man, Keshar holds a high school degree from Uttarkashi. Being a *pahaadi*, since childhood he has been trekking in the Himalayas, and loves to explore untrodden paths and peaks.

He has prior experience of trek guiding in unorganised setups during the *Chardham Yatra* season. However, Keshar has been unsuccessful in finding good employment opportunities due to limited trek guiding skills and lack of professional experience. On expressing interest, he was identified as a trainee for 'Basic Trek Guiding Skills' organised by Development Alternatives, along with Hidden Himalayan Paths, a local organisation in Uttarkashi.

A four day training programme was designed with the objective to make the participants responsible and aware guides. 10 members from the community were introduced to trek guiding as a livelihood opportunity, which some of the participants had already been practicing in the past with no professional guidance. The programme trained them on conducting basic hikes in the Himalayas, with guidance from experts in this field. They also learnt about site selection, tent-pitching, leadership and expedition behaviour, cleanliness and hygiene, communication skills, bird watching, equipment maintenance, Himalayan history and topography, physical attributes of Himalayan peaks, and basic first-aid skills. There was also special emphasis on culture and heritage communication, since trek guides play an important role in linking clients to the local culture, providing unique insights into the Garhwali way of life.

Even after completing the training, Keshar was actively seeking opportunities to further enhance his skills. He enrolled himself into a 10 day workshop conducted by the Uttarkashi Tourism Department. Seeing his calibre during the first training, the trainer identified Keshar as a promising candidate and on-boarded him for his first professional experience as a trek guide.

Keshar guided two families (eight people) on the trek to Dyara Bugyal from 30 December 2019 to 2 January 2020. This experience helped him in enhancing his communication and client management skills, even while facing difficult weather conditions such as heavy snowfall. The clients from Delhi also appreciated his overall expedition behaviour. He was forthcoming during the entire trekking tour, and showed warm hospitality to clients.

Keshar now dreams of starting his own trekking company, which would run firmly on eco-tourism principles, with special trainings for guides on responsible travel, first aid and high altitude sickness. He plans to develop the Kamad-Thandi region into an eco-tourist spot, offering specialised, professional and experiential trips focusing on natural and cultural heritage. He will also be offering specialised experience trips, such as wildlife sighting treks or cultural heritage treks, which aim at extending support to the local economy and environment conservation, whilst maintaining our commitment to travel, discovery, and sustainability. Today, Keshar is inspiring other young people from the village to see the potential of the responsible trekking sector as an alternative livelihood.