

DISCOVER **BANGLADESH: THE BIGGEST DELTA ON THE PLANET**

Star **HOLIDAY**

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Part-1

Biking to Kewkradong



It all started that evening, Imran bhai told us about our next adventure. The idea was to reach Kewkradong peak on our bicycles. Most people would think of you as a fool if you propose something like that as your next adventure plan. But in our case, we take such shocking ideas in high spirits.

We were split in two teams -- a cycling team and a backup and supply team. The cycling team will ride their bikes and the backup team will follow. In case of any trouble, the cyclists would get help from the backup team.

No matter how good anyone is in biking, mountain biking requires a lot of nerves and stamina. The bicycles got to be light because you will have to carry them on your shoulders on steep slopes or across streams. They also have to be rugged enough to withstand bodyweight and backpack weight on rough surface at high speed. Other critical adjustments to brakes, gears, suspensions and pedals have to be made with great perception. Last but not the least, you've to know the mechanism of your bike very well in order to repair them in the wilderness. No one knows cycles better than the street side mechanics. We learnt to repair and adjust our cycles from them. Mountain biking is a new concept in Bangladesh. We took up all the challenges for a new experience.

January 1: The very beginning of a new year. Also that same day was EID. While the Dhakaites were preparing to go to bed after a joyful Eid day, we, the adventure alcoholics, were heading for the Kamalapur bus stand to catch a bus to Bandarban. We loaded our cycles on the roof of the bus. Our journey started with great apprehension, we didn't know what was in wait for us. That very night, the temperature fell a couple of degrees. It was a smooth trip except one single interruption. When we reached Kalurghat bridge, one of our cycles got stuck with one of the cross pitches of the bridge. So, it had to be untied, re-arranged and then tied again.



Early morning; 2 January: The Kewkradong expedition team reaches Bandarban. After unloading our bicycles, we found that Salman's cycle had lost one of its brakes. The cycles were drenched in dew. We brought all the repairing tools and spare parts with us. After repairing the brake, we started for the Chander Gari stand to catch a ride to Koikhongjhiri. It was almost noon when we were at the bank of the Sangu River. Wasting no time, our backup team and one of the cyclists, Moon, took a boat to Ruma Bazar. Others decided to cycle on.

This was the best part of our entire trip. All the elements necessary for mountain biking were there. We had to ride south-east, through the lush green riverbank. The terrain was really rough. We had to drag our bicycles at times. Ridding the narrow riverbank was hazardous: if you loose control slightly you will end up 10-12 feet down on the rock beds. At one part, the ridge ended without giving us a clue. So we had to grab our cycles, put them on our shoulders and cross the strong water stream. It was a good 60 meters of crossing. But the ridge ended shortly on this side also. This time the water was too deep for us to cross with the cycles. So we boarded an uncomfortably long boat. Holding the cycles tightly, we steadied ourselves with difficulty as the boat rolled violently to our slightest of movements. We had to stand almost like statues for almost an hour. After the excruciating boat trip, we had to ride through the ups and downs of the riverbank. We made the most out of this short run and gained confidence. We reached Ruma bazar shortly after the backup team. We were soon to become the objects of curiosity of the locals. They thought we are some crazy souls trying to do even crazier things with bikes. Disregarding them, we had lunch in the bazaar and prepared ourselves for the next part -- destination Boga Lake.



CATEGORY
ADVENTURETRIP

Tourists suffering from heart, respiratory, rheumatic and altitude problems are not advised to participate in this trip. Age limit may be between 18-50 years.

Orientation: The spot is situated to the southwest part of the country and is about 450-km from the Dhaka city.

THINGS TO CARRY

- A bicycle with spare parts and fixing tools.
- Sleeping bag and mattress.
- Flash light and headlamp.
- Light-soled shoe.
- Insect repellant.
- Sufficient nutrient food and drinking water.
- Map, GPS and a good backpack.
- Tent and fixing gears.
- Items of personal use.

The usual trekking route to Boga Lake wasn't a good choice for us to ride. So we took the other way there. It was late afternoon and we were on our way to Boga Lake. Both teams started simultaneously, the cycling team a little ahead of the supply team. As time went by, the slopes became steeper. The uneven surface provided no grip. Several times we stopped and took dry food mostly dried dates. We took plenty of water. The day faded away. The moon kept smiling over us providing sufficient light to keep us going. The slopes were now almost 200-220 meters. The deadly downfalls gave us so little chance to control speed. We were simply fighting our way up.



It was 8:00pm when we took our last snack and the very last bottle of water. A single liter of water for eight thirsty souls wasn't enough in any sense. There was no source of water or food anywhere within at least 8 square kilometers of unforgiving terrain. We were now dehydrated and our energy level was down. Yet we had to move.

Two and a half hours passed without water or food. Almost every one of us was now fatigued. But there was no way to stop. And then we witnessed something that took the last bit of energy out of us. There stood this tremendously steep slope. At least an 80 degree slope stretching over 600 meters. Our only hope of survival was to reach Boga Lake by scaling this immense slope at any cost. With the very last bit of energy, we started going upward. Practically we were hanging from the slope and pulling ourselves a few inches up at a time. Yet we had to pull the cycles along with us. It felt like dragging up a 5 ton hippo on an almost straight surface. This surface we were on was mostly loose dirt. It gave us no grip at all. It wasn't possible to pause for a single moment to catch a breath because of the treacherous surface. We also realised that the slope was much longer than we had anticipated. Progress was slow. It took us an agonising one and a half hours to reach the top of the slope. We started almost immediately again and saw some light in the distant valley. It was Boga Lake at last. Suddenly, we found new energy to keep us going. You can never imagine how we felt when we entered Boga Lake.

Our fellow trekkers welcomed us to Boga Lake. After drinking gallons of water we took dinner and pitched our tents. It was then night for us at last. A night we all deserved rightfully.



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Photo & Story: **Saad Bin Hossain**
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Bird watching with Dr Reza Khan

Common or Fantail Snipe

Gallinago gallinago



Used to be one of the most sought after quarry for the bird hunters in the country. The trend has gone down due to severe decline in population of this snipe and its relatives. It's a bird of the wetlands of freshwater and coastal areas of the country. A very secretive and wonderfully well camouflaged bird. It could freeze at the approach of a predator and fly off in a matter of second before we step over it. It has an erratic flight that attracts the attention of the intruder giving the first clue to its presence nearby. Snipe is a small wader with a very long and straight bill, used for probing food from soggy soil. Feeds mostly on worms and subterranean insects and their larvae. A migratory bird. Actual size ±27 cm.