Tracing the footprints of Himalayan Snowman: Following Legends and Landscapes



Trip Overview

The Himalayas are a land of soaring peaks, sacred valleys, and enduring mysteries. Among its most intriguing legends is that of a large, elusive hominoid-like figure often spoken of in folklore and witnessed in strange tracks high in the snowfields. Mountaineers, explorers, and scientists have debated these claims for decades.

This program does not promise mythical encounters : but instead offers a serious naturalist adventure: retracing these historic routes, studying the ecology of snow leopards, wolves, red pandas, and high-altitude fauna, while also exploring the folklore, monasteries, and stories that keep these mysteries alive. Guests will trek through Everest's iconic trails, cross remote passes into Rolwaling, and gain rare access to Sherpa oral traditions, mountaineers' archives, and on-the-ground naturalist observations.

Rather than fantasy, this is a journey of science, culture, and mystery: a chance to walk the same snowfields where explorers puzzled over footprints, and to learn how myth and mountain ecology intertwine.

Total Trip Days: 17 Nights / 18 Days

Region: Khumbu (Everest) & Rolwaling Valleys, Nepal

Activity: Hiking

Trip Highlights

- Retrace Eric Shipton’s 1951 route where mysterious footprints were photographed
- Visit Gokyo Valley, Khumjung Monastery, and Rolwaling Glacier, hotspots for folklore and mountaineer sightings
- Learn predator tracking: snow leopard, wolf, red panda, and differentiate signs from legendary interpretations
- Evening storytelling with Sherpa elders, monks, and herders who pass down unexplained encounters
- Blend of adventure, science, and myth in the two most mysterious Himalayan regions

Itinerary

Day 1:

Focus: Scientific orientation, expedition briefing

You arrive at Tribhuvan International Airport and are transferred to a boutique heritage hotel where the expedition leader and the naturalist team welcome you with a short orientation. That evening we present a tightly focused lecture titled “Mountaineers, Footprints, and Folklore,” showing authenticated reproductions of the 1951 Shipton footprint photographs and summarizing later analyses that contextualize those images within field conditions, photograph scale issues, and known instances of melt-distorted tracks; this session sets expectations for an evidence-first approach throughout the trip.

Day 2:

Route: Lukla (2,860 m) → Phakding (2,650 m)
Distance/Duration: ~8 km / 3–4 hours trekking

Focus: Introduction to field methods, birding, and small mammal tracking

An early mountain flight brings us to Lukla and a short, scenic trek along the Dudh Koshi into Phakding where the team conducts the first practical field session. In a sheltered clearing the naturalists teach photographic metadata practice, scale placement, compass bearings, and basic substrate logging so every participant can create research-grade documentation of tracks and signs; the afternoon also includes initial birding and an introduction to Himalayan small-mammal signs.

Day 3:

Route: Phakding → Namche Bazaar (3,440 m) via Monjo and Jorsale
Distance/Duration: ~10 km / 5–6 hours trekking

Focus: Comparative track workshop and wildlife observation

The ascent to Namche winds through rhododendron and pine and offers the first substantial raptor and ungulate observations. After settling into Namche Bazaar we run a comparative-track workshop where participants photograph plaster-cast replicas, study measured stride and straddle examples, and review how bear, canid, and human-like prints differ in snow and in melt conditions; the evening session examines press-era amplification of expedition anecdotes and why early mountaineering reports sometimes became global sensations

Day 4:

Route: Short acclimatization hikes to Khumjung Monastery
Distance/Duration: ~6–7 km / 3–4 hours trekking

Focus: Oral histories, footprint experiments, local folklore

A shorter day for acclimatization lets us visit Khumjung and its monastery collection where local custodians sometimes relate stories tied to large tracks seen historically in nearby basins. In a moderated and respectful session with Sherpa elders we record oral histories and compare them to mountaineers’ journals; the rest of the day is devoted to hands-on field experiments demonstrating how afternoon melt and suncups alter footprint appearance so that guests can see, in real time, how natural processes produce puzzling impressions.

Day 5:

Route: Namche Bazaar → Dole via Thamo
Distance/Duration: ~8 km / 5–6 hours trekking

Focus: Alpine field methods, track-aging experiments

We climb toward higher subalpine and alpine zones on the way to Dole, stopping at vantage points to look for blue sheep sign and to practice controlled, ethical track-aging experiments on small snow patches. The afternoon seminar is a forensic-style lab in the field: participants photograph test prints under varying temperatures and lighting so that everyone understands the mechanics that have led observers to report “oversized” or strangely shaped tracks at high altitude.

Day 6:

Route: Dole → Machhermo
Distance/Duration: ~6 km / 4–5 hours trekking

Focus: Wildlife acoustics, nocturnal calls

Today’s walk into the higher valleys brings us closer to the Gokyo watershed. Naturalists demonstrate passive acoustic recorder deployment and review spectral signatures of foxes, jackals, and alpine birds, explaining why nocturnal calls are often misattributed in oral reports; at dusk we place a recorder in a sheltered moraine and show how to keep metadata integrity for later analysis.

Day 7:

Route: Machhermo → Gokyo via Ngozumpa Glacier
Distance/Duration: ~8 km / 5–6 hours trekking

Focus: Historical footprints, field documentation

Arriving beside the turquoise Gokyo lakes, we run a primary-source seminar beside the water: guides reproduce Shipton-era route maps and photographs, locate the approximate basins and passes reconnoitered in the 1951 expedition, and discuss why those western approaches were natural sites for footprint observations. The afternoon is spent in careful transects along lake moraines to practice finding, measuring, and documenting any animal or human sign using the expedition’s field protocol.

Day 8:

Route: Gokyo → Gokyo Ri Summit → Gokyo
Distance/Duration: ~4 km / 4–5 hours trekking

Focus: Summit for landscape reading and photographic forensics

A pre-dawn ascent of Gokyo Ri offers wide context, showing how the Menlung and western basins drain and where snowfields preserve track lines. From the summit we discuss photographic forensics : framing, scale, sun angle, and lens distortion : and then consolidate each participant’s field dossier, uploading metadata, and double-checking that every track photo has the required scale, compass azimuth, and environment notes needed for later expert review.

Day 9:

Route: Gokyo → Thame via Phortse and Pangpema
Distance/Duration: ~10 km / 6–7 hours trekking

Focus: Landscape reading and track preservation

We descend and traverse toward Thame, stopping at ridge viewpoints that provide visual lines toward the passes and basins historically associated with the most widely circulated footprint photographs. The day focuses on landscape reading: how wind channels, sastrugi, and crevasse edges shape track preservation, and why certain moraines and cols preserve linear impressions that can be misinterpreted. Participants practice composing context photos (wide-angle plus macro with scale) for every interesting impression.

Day 10:

Route: Short hikes around Thame village
Distance/Duration: ~6 km / 3–4 hours trekking

Focus: Predator-prey observation, dossier review, local culture

Day ten centers on local natural history, with guided walks to search for marmots and pika and lectures on predator-prey relationships in these valleys. In the afternoon the guides conduct an in-field critique of each guest’s dossier entries, teaching how to tighten metadata and advising what additional notes would be needed before submitting any unusual finding to an analyst; the evening includes a respectful cultural exchange with Thame elders on historical observations in upper valleys.

Day 11:

Route: Thame → Lukla via Namche Bazaar and Jorsale
Distance/Duration: ~20 km / 7–8 hours trekking

Focus: Final wildlife observation and track documentation

We complete the Khumbu loop with a steady descent to Lukla, punctuated by last opportunities for raptor photography and final track-scanning along sheltered gullies. That evening the team compiles a Khumbu segment summary that includes species lists, track inventories, and a clear, evidence-first narrative describing what the group documented and what remains ambiguous.

Day 12:

Route: Lukla → Kathmandu (flight) → Dolakha (drive) → Simigaun (trek start, 2,000 m)
Distance/Duration: Flight + 4–5 hours driving

Focus: Orientation to Rolwaling Valley, safety briefing

A morning flight returns the team to Kathmandu where we sort gear, back up data, and then transfer overland toward the Rolwaling trailhead near Dolakha. Guides brief participants on the differences of Rolwaling's geomorphology and culture, and we review safety protocols for the more remote section ahead. Rolwaling's valleys are quieter and more secluded, a reason they have long been associated with strong local traditions regarding large tracks and nocturnal sounds.

Day 13:

Route: Simigaun → Dongang
Distance/Duration: ~8 km / 4–5 hours trekking

Focus: Terrace and moraine studies, local folklore

On the first day into Rolwaling we move through bamboo and conifer zones and stop frequently to study river terraces and lateral moraines that can preserve linear impressions. The naturalists lead a geomorphology primer explaining why some terraces and wind-sheltered benches preserve extended track lines; in the evening local guides give accounts of historical observations and we record them with permissions for cultural research.

Day 14:

Route: Dongang → Beding
Distance/Duration: ~7 km / 5–6 hours trekking

Focus: Local oral histories, acoustic and thermal monitoring

Arriving at Beding, a cultural center of Rolwaling, we meet village elders in a moderated session to document oral testimonies about footprints and

nocturnal calls. That afternoon the team sets up two or three passive acoustic recorders and positions a thermal observation post at a safe distance for non-invasive night observation; all deployments follow explicit metadata protocols so any audio or thermal traces can be analyzed scientifically rather than sensationally

Day 15:

Route: Beding → Na (4,180 m)
Distance/Duration: ~6–7 km / 4–5 hours trekking

Focus: High-altitude track experiments, snow and substrate analysis

From Beding, participants begin a gradual ascent toward Na, moving through bamboo and conifer zones that give way to alpine moraines. Along the way, the naturalist team demonstrates controlled experiments comparing track impressions in different snow types, analyzing how temperature, sunlight, and substrate alter footprints. Flora and small fauna observations are incorporated, highlighting species adapted to extreme altitudes. In the evening, participants establish a high camp at Na, allowing for safe overnight acclimatization while continuing field experiments. This overnight stay at 4,180 m preserves the high-alpine adventure experience and prepares participants for Tsho Rolpa exploration the next day.

Day 16:

Route: Na → Tsho Rolpa → Beding
Distance/Duration: ~10–12 km round trip / 6–7 hours trekking

Focus: High moraine and glacial foreland forensics, data consolidation

From Na, the group treks higher into the Tsho Rolpa glacial forelands, ascending to approximately 4,580 m. This region offers panoramic views of moraines, ice cliffs, and glacial lakes. Participants conduct detailed snow and substrate experiments, documenting impressions and testing how natural processes produce unusual footprints. Photographic techniques, scale placement, and field notes are emphasized to produce research-grade records. By late afternoon, the team descends back to Beding (~3,690 m) for overnight rest, consolidating observations and preparing preliminary field dossiers. This ensures the high-altitude work is completed safely while maintaining the scientific focus.

Day 17:

Route: Beding → Simigaun → Transfer to Dolakha
Distance/Duration: ~5 km trekking / 2–3 hours + 4–5 hours’ drive

Focus: Gentle descent, wildlife observation, scenic photography

Participants begin the day with a gentle descent from Beding to Simigaun, moving through subalpine forests and river terraces while keeping an eye out for marmots, Himalayan pika, and alpine birds. The descent is deliberately moderate to allow recovery from high-altitude exertion. After reaching Simigaun, the group boards 4WD vehicles for the scenic drive to Dolakha, observing local villages, rivers, and forests along the way. The afternoon and evening provide opportunities for photography and discussion of alpine ecology, preparing participants for the final Kathmandu debrief.

Day 18:

Route: Dolakha → Kathmandu
Distance/Duration: ~7–8 hours' drive

Focus: Consolidated expedition report, ethical handover, field documentation

The final day is devoted to the drive back to Kathmandu. During the journey, guides facilitate discussions reflecting on the entire expedition, reviewing GPS-tagged photos, acoustic recordings, species lists, and snow/substrate field experiments. In the evening, participants attend a final debrief session at the hotel, where guides present the consolidated expedition dossier. Emphasis is placed on evidence-first interpretation, distinguishing probable natural tracks from unresolved anomalies, and reinforcing best practices for ethical scientific observation. Participants leave with professional-grade documentation, field skills, and a complete understanding of the interplay between Himalayan ecology and folklore.