

Kirigalpoththa Nature Trail – Horton Plains National Park

Trail Difficulty: Easy | Moderate | Strenuous | Tough

Trail Head: Horton Plains Visitor Centre

Nearest Town: Pattipola

Nearest City: Nanu-Oya

Access to Trail head:

Route to Horton Plains Visitor Centre

Route1: Colombo -> Awissawella -> Dehiowita -> Karawanella -> Kitulgala -> Ginigathhena -> Hatton -> Thalawakele -> Nanu-Oya -> Ambewela -> Pattipola -> Pattipola Entrance -> Visitor centre (approximately 210KM)

Horton Plains visitor centre is accessible by any kind of a vehicle which is not very long

Trail End: Kirigalpoththa Peak

Total Length: 5.6 km

Elevation Gain: 250m (Elevation at Trail Head: 2139m | Elevation at Trail End: 2392m)

Approximate time: 3 - 4 hours

Hiking Season: Best months are February to April. July to September is also fairly dry. Avoid monsoon months.

Permit Required: YES. Permit can be obtained from either Pattipola Entrance or Ohiya Entrance of Horton Plains National Park

Kirigalpoththa is the second highest peak in Sri Lanka after Pidurutalagala. Trail to summit of Kirigalpoththa is arguably the best nature trail in Horton Plains. It is not too tough (but not easy either) and will let you experience all aspects of the unique and fragile eco-system of Horton plains. The trail goes through areas of wet grass land, cloud forests and scrubs at the summit. A wide variety of beautiful wild flowers can also be seen during the hike.

0 to 1.63km: The trail starts off from behind the visitor centre (**waypoint: K01**). AS you set off, the trail moves in to the vast valley behind the visitor centre. As you walk about 500m, descend to the valley will be complete (**waypoint: K02**).

The trail then moves along the valley for another 500m and start a mild climb (**waypoint: K03**) towards a scrub covered hill top with few dead trees. As you reach this small mountain top with dead trees (**waypoint: K04**) you will notice the trail moving towards the small forest patch in front of you at this point. The trail then moves in to this thin forest patch (**waypoint: K05**). After a brief walk of about 150m though the trees the trail will again hit the open plain/scrub area and start to climb down (**waypoint: 06**) towards a small stream.

As you cross the stream (**waypoint: K07**) the trail moves in to a thick, dense forest patch.

1.63km to 3.58km: Continue to walk through the forest for 300m. As you walk out from the forest patch you will reach a larger stream flowing on a rock bed (**waypoint: K08**). This is part of the first segment of Belihul-Oya which feeds one of the four main rivers of Sri Lanka, the Walawe.

AS you cross the stream you will find a trail towards your left moving uphill and another moving towards your right. Walk the trail towards your right which goes along the edge of the forest. As you enter this section of the trail, you will notice a dense forest on your left hand side and the grass land on the right side. You will also notice that most of the grass land is covered by patches of dwarf bamboo trees. The trail moves between the forest and the patches of dwarf bamboo.

As you walk about 300m more, the trail gets sandwiched between the forest and the bamboo patch. It is very hard to walk through bamboo and therefore you will have to get more and closer to the forest. About 1km walk from the stream, you will reach a point where the trail moves in to a tunnel created by dwarf bamboo (**waypoint: K10**). After a somewhat difficult still very brief walk through the bamboo tunnel, trail will again follow a path between the forest and bamboo patches.

One of the specialties you would notice in this part of the plain is the presence of number of natural springs which feed Belihul-Oya. Literally what you witness is the birth of Walawe River. The grass land will also be full of all sorts of little wild flowers. Large, blue "Binara" flowers stand out from the rest.

Around 3km from the trail head, you will notice a fairly large spring on your right side (**waypoint: K11**) and you would also notice that the trail moves more towards the plain leaving the forest edge. You will also notice that grass land intrudes in to the forest on your left. The trail goes straight, crossing this intrusion (**waypoint: K12**) and again reaching the forest edge on the other side. Around 600m from the natural spring (K11) the trail will make an almost 90 degree left turn in to the forest (**waypoint: K13**).

Note that on a clear day you can see Kirigalpoththa in distance, emerging behind the forest at certain point while you walk on the plain and may get tempted to cut-across the forest. Do not move in to the forest until you reach K13.

3.58km to 4.36km: As the trail makes the sharp left turn in to the forest at K13, a new experience awaits you. This section of the trail is a walk through dense undergrowth of "Nelu", a seasonal flower bearing plant. During flowering season around April the entire area will be covered with a veil of pink/purple "Nelu" flowers. Even though it's a pretty sight from distance, walking through "Nelu" is not easy at all.

From the point of making the left turn in to the forest the trail follows pretty much a straight line heading roughly south-west. Initially it will be fairly flat and after about 200m, a mild ascend will be experienced. As you walk further ascend intensifies (**waypoint: K14**). By this point you have completed 4km in total.

After a somewhat steep climb you will reach a hill top (**waypoint: K15**) and then in less than 100m from there a somewhat open area (less dense forest canopy/undergrowth) will be reached (**waypoint: K16**). The trail may become less apparent at this point and the continuation in to the forest from the open area can be found towards your left side. Once you move in to the forest the trail will again be visible through the dense undergrowth. After a brief walk of about 150m you will reach another open area where you will find a large pool/spring and a slab-rock (**waypoint: K17**).

4.36km to 5.6km: From K17 you have to tackle a quite steep decent to the base of the Kirigalpoththa and then climb all the way to the summit. From K17 the continuation of the trail may be hazy. Kirigalpoththa will be visible biased to your right side but the continuation of the trail is biased to your left. Walk towards the forest from the edge of the pool and look for the trail between South and West direction. As you enter the forest you will again be walking through thick undergrowth (**waypoint: K18**) and will soon experience a steep descent around 400m from the pool (**waypoint: K19**). After about 100m of steep climb down you will reach a narrow valley with a small stream and a fair size rock surface to climb in front of you (**waypoint: K20**). Its time to fill up your water bottles as this is the last water source.

The last 800m of the trail starts here and it will entirely be the climb to the summit. Climb the rock surface and look for the continuation of the trail on the left side and start walking though the undergrowth (**waypoint: K21**). As you climb, you will notice that the vegetation slowly transforms in to a less dense more scrub like pattern compared to the think forest canopy and undergrowth experienced before.

After a hard climb, you will reach a fairly flat section around 5km point from the trail head (**waypoint: K22**). As you climb further you will pass open areas at 150m (**waypoint: K23**), 250m (**waypoint: K24**) and 350m (**waypoint: K25**) form K22.

Climb further along the trail until you reach the bottom of the large slab-rock which makes up to summit of kirigalpoththa ("kirigalpoththa" in Sinhalese means "Salb-Rock") (**waypoint: K28**). This point will provide you a nice outlook in to the surrounding area.

To reach the summit point, you have to climb along the edge of the wet, moss covered slab-rock which lay at a 30-degree angle dropping into a bottomless chasm. During the September to November strong winds will also be experienced which adds to the risk of this final climb. This bit you will be reduced to crawling on all fours. To reach the summit point (**waypoint: K29**) you will have to cross a small forest patch at the very top. The summit point is covered with scrub so the best views would be the views from K28.

Tips, Notes & special remarks:

- Make sure that you carry small water bottle with you and keep it filled.
- Fairly strong winds may be experienced at the summit.

- Temperatures may get somewhat cold there fore make sure that you carry a light sweater and a rain coat.
- Some sections of the trail go through thick undergrowth/bamboo which may scratch your skin. It is recommended to ware something which covers most of your body.
- Take special care to protect your eyes when walking through thick undergrowth as most of the undergrowth will very well be taller than you.
- During rainy season the plain will turn in to a giant sponge and suddenly a foot may plunge into an unseen deep hole. Shoes and jeans may become heavy with mud. Make sure that you do not stray in to the plain. Always try to follow an established trail.
- Update (29/12/2008): from **K08** to **K20** now there is a new trail cleared by the wildlife officials which is about 750m shorter than the section of the trail descried above and much easier to walk as it avoid going through some of the difficult sections to pass in the marshy plain on the traditional trail described above.

Way Points

	N: dd° mm.mmm'	E: dd° mm.mmm'	Elevation
Pattipota Entrance	6° 50.347'	80 48.715	2170 m
K01(visitor centre)	6° 48.098'	80° 48.388'	2139 m
K02	6° 47.997'	80° 48.159'	2107 m
K03	6° 47.891'	80° 47.943'	2123 m
K04	6° 47.883'	80° 47.865'	2132 m
K05	6° 47.885'	80° 47.775'	2139 m
K06	6° 47.827'	80° 47.736'	2133 m
K07	6° 47.808'	80° 47.686'	2123 m
K08	6° 47.853'	80° 47.539'	2125 m
K09	6° 47.990'	80° 47.316'	2136 m
K10	6° 48.007'	80° 47.250'	2133 m
K11	6° 48.079'	80° 47.096'	2136 m
K12	6° 48.166'	80° 46.978'	2143 m
K13	6° 48.273'	80° 46.897'	2149 m
K14	6° 48.189'	80° 46.700'	2178 m
K15	6° 48.120'	80° 46.595'	2217 m
K16	6° 48.129'	80° 46.538'	2334 m
K17	6° 48.125'	80° 46.463'	2252 m
K18	6° 48.120'	80° 46.428'	2248 m
K19	6° 48.068'	80° 46.389'	2236 m
K20	6° 48.059'	80° 46.378'	2220 m
K21	6° 48.040'	80° 46.355'	2229 m
K22	6° 48.027'	80° 46.347'	2232 m
K23	6° 48.001'	80° 46.283'	2265 m

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K24	6° 47.978'	80° 46.215'	2284 m
K25	6° 47.964'	80° 46.168'	2308 m
K26	6° 47.935'	80° 46.110'	2345 m
K28	6° 47.962'	80° 46.075'	2357 m
K29 (summit point)	6° 47.946'	80° 45.988'	2392 m